

New Perspectives on the Qur'ān

In this book, which continues the work of *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, an international group of scholars address an expanded range of topics on the Qur'ān and its origins, looking beyond medieval Islamic traditions to present the Qur'ān's own conversation with the religions and literatures of its day.

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- method in Qur'ān Studies;
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- how our knowledge of the religious groups at the time of the Qur'ān's emergence might contribute to a better understanding of the text;
- the Qur'ān's conversation with Biblical literature and traditions that challenge the standard understanding of the holy book.

This debate of recent controversial proposals for new interpretations of the Qur'ān will shed new light on the Qur'ānic passages that have been shrouded in mystery and debate. As such, it will be a valuable reference for scholars of Islam, the Qur'ān, Christian–Muslim relations and the Middle East.

Gabriel Said Reynolds is Associate Professor of Islamic Studies and Theology at the University of Notre Dame (USA). He is the author of *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (Routledge 2010), the editor of *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* (Routledge 2008), and the translator of 'Abd al-Jabbār's *A Critique of Christian Origins* (Brigham Young University 2010).

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2011
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

New perspectives on the Qur'ān : the Qur'ān in its historical
context 2 / edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds.

p. cm. — (Routledge studies in the Qur'ān ; 12)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-415-61548-8 (hardback) — ISBN 978-0-203-81353-9

(ebook) 1. Koran—Commentaries—History and criticism. 2. Koran—
Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Reynolds, Gabriel Said.

BP130.45.N49 2011

297.1'226—dc22

2010053380

ISBN: 978-0-415-61548-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-81353-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

In memory of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943–2010)
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Printed and bound in the USA by
Edwards Brothers, Inc, Lillington NC

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Acknowledgements

The present book, and the larger initiative in Qur'ānic studies of which it is a part, have been made possible by the generous support of the University of Notre Dame. The University sponsored the first Notre Dame Qur'ān conference in 2005, which led to the publication of *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* (Routledge 2008). Subsequently the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at Notre Dame awarded us a Small Research and Creative Work grant to support the translation of that work into Arabic. The second Notre Dame Qur'ān conference (19–21 April 2009), which lies behind the present work, was supported by a Henkels Lecture grant, also from the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at Notre Dame. The University's regular financial support is an expression of confidence which I do not take lightly. I am particularly grateful for Notre Dame's vision that the strengthening of its commitment to the Catholic tradition should coincide with the meaningful study of another.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Theology at Notre Dame. They have supported my work on the Qur'ānic studies initiative and offered numerous insights on how to approach religious texts, and how to think about the intersection of critical scholarship and belief. I am particularly grateful to John Cavadini, former chair of the Department of Theology, who never failed to help me when I needed it most, and who set an example for me and many others with his wisdom and his generosity.

Joshua Robinson was my assistant during the 2008–9 academic year and worked with great efficiency and professionalism throughout our preparations for the 2009 Qur'ān conference and during the conference itself. Hannah Hemphill was my assistant during the 2009–10 academic year, during which time she carefully read and edited the papers in the present volume, while offering valuable suggestions for its improvement. I am also grateful to Joseph Khalil, who compiled the two indices of this book in a precise and professional manner. Cheron Price, administrative assistant in the Department of Theology, has helped me with numerous matters over the past several years in her infallibly patient and diligent manner.

My doctoral advisor at Yale University was Gerhard Böwering, and he has continued to be an important source of support and insight since I have joined the faculty at Notre Dame. I have also benefited from the support of David Bertaina

of the University of Illinois (Springfield), who has helped me improve this and other publications with his judicious comments. I am grateful to Prof. Abdolkarim Soroush, who led an extraordinary roundtable at the conclusion of the 2009 Qur'ān conference, during which he made the wise proposal that we translate the works of the Notre Dame Qur'ān initiative into Arabic.

I must add that the work of Routledge Press and its affiliates has been excellent. I am grateful to Joe Whiting, the editor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Routledge, to Prof. Andrew Rippin, the director of the Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān series (who has been a faithful source of guidance throughout this project), and to the talented team of editors and typesetters who have dedicated themselves to this work. The two anonymous outside reviewers of this work both submitted detailed reports which allowed us to improve it substantially, and to them I am likewise grateful.

Finally I would like to thank my family for their love and support: my parents and step-parents, my lovely wife Lourdes, and my children Luke, Emmanuel, and Theresa.

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Foreword

I was given the opportunity to address the scholarly conference on "The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context" at the University of Notre Dame as a guest speaker, and to contribute a rejoinder and a postscript to Dr Nasr Abu Zayd's opening speech. He spoke about the possibility of a Qur'ānic worldview. I highlighted the fact that ambiguity is intrinsic to language, including the language of the Qur'ān, and said that there is a need for constantly ridding the Qur'ānic worldview of its ambiguities.

Over the course of the three-day conference, the speakers, who were all senior researchers in their own fields, opened up before us the record of Qur'ānic studies to date and placed the Qur'ān "in its historical context." There was a discussion about the way in which "a" or "aleph" was written in the earliest manuscripts of the Qur'ān (nearly 1,200 years ago) and the problems that this creates in reading some of the Verses (e.g., *lā uqsimu* ["I do not swear"] versus *la-uqsimu* ["I do swear"], and *lā a'bad* ["I do not worship"] versus *la-a'bad* ["I do worship"]). The Qur'ān's similarities and dissimilarities with the Torah and the Gospel in terms of discourse, the narration of stories, and the way in which they chastise disbelievers were also discussed, as was the importance of diacritics, opening letters of some Sūras, and the dots above and below various letters that would lead to new readings (following Lüling, the German scholar).

Some of the conference participants were Muslims, like myself; such as Nasr Abū Zayd, Munther Younes, Suleiman Mourad, Hani Hayajneh, Waleed Ahmed, Emran Bedawi and Shawkat Toorawa. I thought to myself what a shame it is that conferences of this kind are not held in Islamic countries, and are unlikely to be for the foreseeable future, because they would not be welcomed by Muslims. I recalled a seminar that I attended many years ago in Istanbul, Turkey, which was convened to examine the ideas and works of Professor Fazlur Rahman, the Pakistani Islamologist who taught at the University of Chicago. The seminar's director highlighted a noteworthy point: that it would be impossible to hold a seminar of this kind in any Islamic country other than Turkey. And this is despite the fact that Fazlur Rahman had not said anything particularly "blasphemous" about the Qur'ān. It occurred to me at the time that not even one of his books had been translated into Persian. But I did not lose hope, because some of Dr Nasr Abu Zayd's works have been translated and published in Persian. As I reflected on the causes (or reasons) for this, I

realized that political systems are less to blame than religious systems. Even if politicians authorized conferences of this kind, believers would not tolerate them, because they find it difficult to accept that discussions of this kind can benefit their creed. Regrettably, the level of intolerance is still very high in Islamic countries and their religious leaders are more to blame than their political leaders.

A few years ago, thanks to UNESCO's efforts, a seminar on Al-Ghazālī was held in Iran. At first, it was meant to be held in Khorasan, in north-east Iran, where Al-Ghazālī was born and where he was laid to rest. But believers and religious leaders in Khorasan were outraged and did not allow the seminar to go ahead, because they considered Al-Ghazālī, a Sunni, to be anti-Shi'ite. In the end, the seminar had to be moved to Tehran.

The Qur'ān is more important than Fazlur Rahman, Al-Ghazālī, and other scholars and thinkers of course. And it goes without saying that believers do not like to hear and are not prepared to allow any discussion of the Qur'ān's whys and wherefores. It is not difficult to see the reason for this. Fred Donner, too, touched on this subject at the Notre Dame conference. He tried to explain the relationship between "the believer" and "the historian," and to rid believers of any apprehensions they may have about historians of the Qur'ān and religion.

It is not that believers (and, here, I mean learned believers) consider Orientalists and non-Muslims who study the Qur'ān to be malicious or ignorant; but they think that Orientalists' approach averts faith or, at least, is unacquainted with it.

In order to remove all ambiguity, let us replace "approach" with "presuppositions," which is effectively what it means. Believers are of the view that, because of the presuppositions that Orientalists have (or do not have), they ultimately arrive at conclusions that conflict with believers' "beliefs." Moreover, they think that this outcome was foreseen by the Qur'ān, which states that God guides a people with the Qur'ān and leads another people astray. ("Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many" *al-Baqara* [2] 26). And that the Qur'ān is healing for some and a loss to others. ("And We send down, of the Qur'ān, that which is healing and a mercy to the believers; and the unbelievers it increases not, except in loss" *al-Isrā'* [17] 82). The Orientalists are – in the eyes of believers – the people who go astray, who lose out, and who have not been apportioned anything but a repudiation of the Qur'ān. ("What, do you hold this discourse in disdain, and do you make it your living to cry lies?" *al-Wāqī'a* [56] 81–82]).

Jalaleddin Rumi conveys this same notion in a beautiful, poetic form by likening the Qur'ān to a rope (an analogy derived from the Qur'ān itself): "Many are they who have been misled by the Qur'ān / Many are they who followed this rope to the bottom of the well / But the rope is not to blame, O misguided one! / It is you who lacked the aspiration to ascend" (*Mathnawī*, Book III).

Rumi argued that the "aspiration to ascend" precedes and is superior to exegesis, and that the exegete's understanding follows from his intention and purpose. Rumi asks, what can the Book possibly do for an exegete who does not have the intention and the aspiration to be guided and to emerge from the well?

Of course non-Muslims who study the Qur'ān believe that their work is objective, impartial and scientific, and they do not accept any of the charges that are

leveled at them. They can even appeal to modern epistemology's findings, which hold that knowledge is fundamentally a collective and ongoing affair that cannot be summed up in this or that individual's opinion, and that although any researcher may have his or her own particular predispositions and myopias, the convoy of learning, as a whole, is led by rational argumentation; so, the strongest arguments always win the day. All the same, this defensive statement does not convince Muslim believers. They argue, for their part, that objectiveness and impartiality are little more than myths and that no researcher is immune to interference by non-epistemic factors. Researchers are not angels who are totally devoid of desires and dogmas and abide unswervingly by rational argumentation and abstract reasoning. In other words, the adherence to dogma, of which believers stand accused, also exists in different ways among non-Muslim scholars who boast of impartiality. And this is precisely why the goods that the "Orientalists" have to offer seem so suspect (and even abhorrent) to believers.

In short – the argument goes – what we have here is one set of dogmas versus another set of dogmas, and one faith versus another faith; not dogma versus objectivity, not attachment versus detachment, not obscurantism versus science. And this being the case, why should we abide by non-believers' dogmas and undervalue and abandon our own religious attachments and dogmas?

Simply saying that "the Qur'ān is far too important to be left to lovers alone" will not lead us to the conclusion that the analysis should be left to non-lovers (with their claims of impartiality), since, although these "non-lovers" are not in love with the Qur'ān, they are in love with other ideas and schools of thought. And this is enough to undermine their robustness and impartiality.

Thomas Kuhn, through his theory of paradigms, and Michel Foucault, through his idea of Epistemes, have shown that "empirical science" is itself an ideology, with all the dimensions and corollaries that this entails. So, what grounds can there be for any claims of impartiality, especially in areas, such as Qur'ānic studies, where it is not at all a question of the mathematical precision of the natural sciences, but a question of tentative historical conjectures?

Bear in mind, too, that Orientalists – like biologists who dissect a dead corpse – seek to unravel the genesis of the Qur'ān, its relationship with pre-Islamic times and the Arabian environment, and the means whereby it was compiled, and to study the different manuscripts, examine in excruciating detail some of its unusual terms, expose any contradictions, compare it with other holy books, discover what it derived from earlier sources and authorities, and so on and so forth. Meanwhile believers – who are more like the guests of a friend who is very much alive – seek to discover the meaning of the Friend's talk and to enjoy it, to act on the Friend's prescriptions and proscriptions, to delve deep into the secrets and beauties of His discourse, to read it, to share in the Prophet's transcendental experience, and so on and so forth. Does this not make it clear that these two sets of people, with their two differing approaches, are seeking two different goals? Does it not make it clear that not viewing the Qur'ān as revelation opens the way to conclusions that viewing it as revelation forecloses, and vice versa? And if the first approach bars the way to the second, why should we not sacrifice the second?

If we were to leave things here, we could conclude that Muslim researchers' disregard for Orientalists' achievements is justified and thus feel no urge to esteem Orientalists' endeavors. But the truth of the matter is that the stand-off between the two sides' arguments hides something from view which we must now bring to light and explain.

The tale of the impact of presuppositions on understanding and interpreting empirical findings is a well-known and well-supported one. And, of course, there is no disputing it. But the thing that remains hidden and unsaid in all this is the tale of the impact that empirical findings can have on presuppositions. The dialectic between facts and presuppositions is what we should bear in mind and heed here. We must not remain endlessly confident and complacent that, thanks to our presuppositions, everything will always succumb to our views and fall in line with our intentions. For how, in the midst of such complacency, would we critically assess our presuppositions? Are they immune to criticism and change? This is undoubtedly not the case. Presuppositions (which are generally non-empirical) can be subjected to critical assessment by two means: first, with other presuppositions and, secondly, with findings and facts. And this is exactly how the achievements of the two groups of scholars – believers and non-believers – can come to one another's assistance. A critically-assessed active understanding is much more mature than a simple, passive understanding. And a critically-assessed understanding becomes possible in the light of a critical assessment of presuppositions. We must value the critical assessment of presuppositions and borrow things from "the others." If we accept this, then, we must amend the earlier phrase in the following way: "The Qur'ān is far too important to leave its critical assessment to lovers alone," because lovers do not criticize and revise; they worship. The lovers must be told that the beloved Book may well appear more beautiful and authentic to them after being revised. But let it also be added that the Qur'ān is not a book that can be understood via critical assessments alone. The eyes of believers can see beauty and perfection therein that are invisible to non-believers' eyes. And this is a ruling that holds true for all the classical works of religion, mysticism and literature. The two different ways of looking at them are complementary.

What I have proposed esteems both the work of non-Muslim researchers and their fair-minded, "non-believing" explorations; and the work of Muslim exegetes who seek guidance in the Qur'ān, see it as a gift from God that contains transcendental secrets, and turn to it in order to find felicity, not to dissect it.

Far from forcing each other off the road, these two approaches can open up new avenues for each other, as long as they do not fall into the trap of pious dogmatism or academic exclusivity and snobbery. Perhaps the following verses (*al-Raḥmān* [55], 19–22) are the ideal words with which to conclude this foreword: "He let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a barrier they do not overpass . . . From them come forth the pearl and the coral."

Abdolkarim Soroush

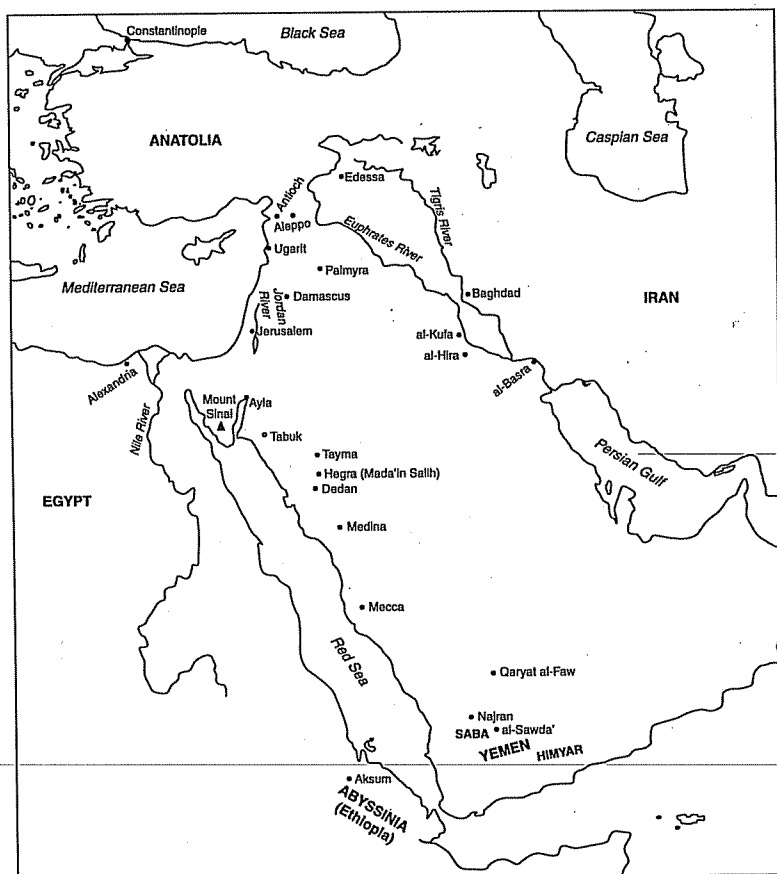
Abbreviations

BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
EP	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , Second Edition, Leiden: Brill, 1954–present
EQ	<i>The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān</i> , ed. J. McAuliffe, Leiden: Brill, 2001–present
FV	A. Jeffery, <i>The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān</i> , Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938. Reprint: Leiden: Brill, 2007
GAL	C. Brockelmann, <i>Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur</i> , Leiden: Brill, 1937–49
GAS	F. Sezgin, <i>Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums</i> , Leiden: Brill, 1967–2000
GCAL	G. Graf, <i>Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur</i> , Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947
GdQ1, 2, 3	<i>Geschichte des Qorāns</i> , 2nd edition, including T. Nöldeke <i>Über den Ursprung des Qorāns</i> (volume 1) and F. Schwally, <i>Die Sammlung des Qorāns</i> (volume 2), Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1909, 1919; Reprinted with G. Bergsträsser and O. Pretzl, <i>Die Geschichte des Koran-texts</i> (volume 3), Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1938; reprint: 3 vols in 1, Hildesheim: Olms, 1970. (1st edition, including only volume 1: T. Nöldeke, <i>Geschichte des Qorāns</i> , Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860)
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQS	<i>Journal of Qur'anic Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSAI	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
MIDEO	<i>Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales du Caire</i>
MUSJ	<i>Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph</i>
OC	<i>Oriens Christianus</i> (serial)
QHC	<i>The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context</i> , ed. G.S. Reynolds, London: Routledge, 2008
SI	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

Introduction

The golden age of Qur'ānic studies?¹

Gabriel Said Reynolds



Locations cited in the present volume.

On the afternoon of Monday July 5, 2010, as I was working on a draft of the present introduction, I received the terrible news that Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd had died earlier that day in Cairo. Professor Abu Zayd, the keynote speaker of the 2009 Notre Dame Qur'an conference on which this book is based, was a revered teacher of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. His Arabic works on Islamic thought were translated into Turkish, Persian, Indonesian, and many European languages. His "humanistic hermeneutic" (see his contribution to the present volume), a method of Qur'an interpretation developed during his work in exile towards the end of his life, garnered significant interest in the West and in the Islamic world.² Accordingly Prof. Abu Zayd was often asked to give major speeches, and to him the keynote speech at our conference could hardly have been an extraordinary event. Yet to the community of students and scholars of the Qur'an who gathered at Notre Dame it certainly was. And so the present book is dedicated to his memory, in gratitude for his presence among us in April 2009, and in gratitude for the wisdom he has shared with many throughout the years.

The April 2009 Notre Dame Qur'an conference was preceded by a conference in 2005, the papers of which were published under the title *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (Routledge, 2008). In that book's introduction, subtitled "Qur'anic Studies and Its Controversies," I describe the mysteries surrounding the supposed destruction of the Qur'an manuscript films collected by Gotthelf Bergsträsser (d. 1933) and Otto Pretzl (d. 1941) and the early Qur'an manuscripts discovered in 1972 in the Great Mosque of Ṣan'a', Yemen. I focus, however, on the works of those authors who have challenged traditional ideas about the Qur'an in recent decades. The works of these authors, I argue, have fomented methodological confusion in Qur'anic studies: "Their theories, besides their basic precept, actually have very little in common. This sub-culture, therefore, has not developed a methodology, much less a school, that poses an organized challenge to the current paradigm."³

- 1 In preparing the present introduction I benefited greatly from the process of reading and editing the works of the contributors to this volume. I would like to express my gratitude to them, and to Prof. Michael Pregill, who offered constructive observations on an earlier version of this introduction.
- 2 To this end see the PhD dissertation of Yusuf Rahman (McGill University, 2001): *The Hermeneutical Theory of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: An Analytical Study of His Method of Interpretation*.
- 3 G.S. Reynolds, "Introduction: Qur'anic Studies and Its Controversies," *QHC*, (1–25) 8.

In the introduction to the present book I will focus not on particular controversies, but rather on the remarkable increase of work in Qur'ānic studies generally. Indeed if such things were to be evaluated by the level of activity alone, then it would seem that the golden age of Qur'ānic studies has arrived. In order to illustrate this scholarly activity I will present the state of Qur'ānic studies today in the light of earlier assessments of the field. Thereafter I will ask whether this activity is indeed the sign of a golden age.

Three assessments of Qur'ānic studies

In the "Present Status of Qur'ānic Studies," published in 1957, Arthur Jeffery emphasizes the failure of scholars to produce critical work on the text of the Qur'ān.⁴ While noting numerous studies (including his own) on non-canonical (*muṣḥaf*)⁵ and canonical (*qir'ā'āt*) variants to the Qur'ān,⁶ Jeffery laments the failure of the project that he had begun with Bergsträsser and Pretzl to produce a critical edition of the Qur'ān.⁷ He notes that the 1342/1924 edition of Cairo had increasingly become something approaching the *textus receptus* of the Qur'ān, even among western scholars. Yet this edition, he adds, is an imperfect reproduction of the Ḥaṣṣ (d. 180/796) 'an 'Aṣim (d. 127/745) tradition and hardly a critical text.⁸ As for the ever increasing number of translations of the Qur'ān in his day, Jeffery finds them largely redundant: "Translations, however, in both European and Oriental languages, continue to appear, but with few exceptions, they make no real contribution to Qur'ānic studies."⁹

4 See A. Jeffery, "The present status of Qur'ānic studies," *Middle East Institute: Report of Current Research*, Spring 1957, 1–16.

5 G. Bergsträsser, "Die Koranlesung des Ḥasan von Baṣra," *Islamica* 2, 1926, 11–57; idem, *Nichtkanonische Koranlesarten im Muḥtasab des Ibn Gīmi*, Munich: Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1933; *Ibn Ḥalawaih Sammlung nichtkanonischer Koranlesarten*, Istanbul: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1934; A. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices*, Leiden: Brill, 1937; idem, "The Qur'ān readings of Zaid b. 'Alī," *Revista degli Studi Orientali* 16, 1936, 49–89; idem, "The Qur'ān readings of Ibn Miqṣam," *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, Budapest: n.p., 1948, 1–38.

6 A. Jeffery, *Two Muqaddimas to Qur'ānic Sciences: The Muqaddima to the 'Kitāb al-Mabānī' and the Muqaddima of Ibn 'Atīyya to His Tafṣīr*, Cairo: Brothers Khaniji, 1954; O. Pretzl, "Die Wissenschaft der Koranlesung," *Islamica* 6, 1934, 1–47, 230–46, 290–331; E. Beck, "Der 'uṭmānische Kodex in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts," *Orientalia* 14, 1945, 355–73; idem, "Die Kodizesvarianten der Amṣār," *Orientalia* 16, 1947, 353–76; idem, "Studien zur Geschichte der Kūfischen Koranlesung in den beiden ersten Jahrhunderten I," *Orientalia* 17, 1948, 326–54; idem, "Studien zur Geschichte der Kūfischen Koranlesung in den beiden ersten Jahrhunderten II," *Orientalia* 19, 1950, 328–50; idem, "Studien zur Geschichte der Kūfischen Koranlesung in den beiden ersten Jahrhunderten III," *Orientalia* 20, 1951, 316–28; idem, "Studien zur Geschichte der Kūfischen Koranlesung in den beiden ersten Jahrhunderten IV," *Orientalia* 22, 1953, 59–78; idem, "Die Zuverlässigkeit der Überlieferung von ausser 'uṭmānischen Varianten bei al-Farrā'," *Orientalia* 23, 1954, 412–35.

7 On which see G.S. Reynolds, "Introduction: Qur'ānic studies and its controversies," 3–7.

8 "As Bergsträsser pointed out in his 'Koranlesung in Kairo,' in *Der Islam* 20, 1932 this edition does not succeed in giving an entirely satisfactory text of the Ḥaṣṣ tradition, largely because its editors relied on relatively modern writers instead of going back to the older and more reliable sources." Jeffery, "The present status of Qur'ānic studies," 2.

9 Ibid., 3–4.

Regarding "higher (or literary)" studies of the Qur'ān, Jeffery is hardly more enthusiastic. He notes with appreciation the appearance of Régis Blachère's *Introduction au Coran*,¹⁰ and the posthumous publication of Richard Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'ān*,¹¹ but he concludes that neither surpasses Nöldeke (et al.)'s *Geschichte des Qorāns*. To this Jeffery adds: "There has been no recent systematic investigation" of the grammar and syntax of the Qur'ān, and "we still have no comprehensive work on the theology of the Qur'ān."¹² He similarly laments the absence of a comprehensive work on the literary and religious sources of the Qur'ān (commenting, "we are still using the rather antiquated works of Geiger . . . and St. Clair Tisdall"¹³). He does, however, acknowledge the appearance of a considerable number of studies focused on either Jewish or Christian antecedents to the Qur'ān. To this end Jeffery recognizes in particular the exceptional value of Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran*.¹⁴

Angelika Neuwirth opens her 1983 analysis of Qur'ānic studies with the remark, "Die westliche Koranforschung . . . steckt – gemessen an vergleichbaren Forschungsgebieten – noch immer in den Kinderschuhen."¹⁵ Like Jeffery twenty-six years earlier, Neuwirth finds that the field of Qur'ānic studies still lacked the sort of resources that are taken for granted in other fields, such as a dictionary of Qur'ānic Arabic, a comprehensive evaluation of Qur'ānic grammar, and a commentary arranged by subject.¹⁶ Neuwirth describes most recent works in the field as studies of minor, isolated matters, achieved "ohne besonderes Methodenbewußtsein."¹⁷ Otherwise Neuwirth objects to the manner in which certain scholars (namely Bell, Blachère, and Wansbrough) had argued against the conventional notion that the Sūra was the original organizing unit of the Qur'ān.¹⁸ In a similar tone she notes how John Burton and John Wansbrough both challenged the notion of the 'Uṭmānic

10 Paris: Maisonneuve, 1947. NB: Also *The Qur'ān: An Encyclopedia*, ed. O. Leaman, London: Routledge, 2006.

11 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953.

12 Jeffery, "The present status of Qur'ānic studies," 6.

13 Ibid., 8.

14 After noting his wish that the articles of David Künstlinger would be gathered together and republished, Jeffery adds that it would be "a still greater service if there could be issued in this country [i.e. the United States] Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran* (Breslau 1937), all but a few copies of which were destroyed during the anti-Jewish troubles in central Europe." Ibid., 9. Speyer's work was in fact later republished in Germany: Hildesheim: Olms, 1961.

15 "Qur'ānic studies in the West, when measured against comparable fields of study, is still in its infancy." A. Neuwirth, "Zum neueren Stand der Koranforschung," in F. Steppat (ed.), *XXI. Deutscher Orientalistentag, vom 24 bis 29 März 1980 in Berlin*, Supplement 5, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983, (183–89) 183. For a second assessment of the field from roughly the same period see A.T. Welch, "Qur'ānic studies – problems and prospects," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies* 47:4S, 1979, 620–34.

16 Neuwirth, "Zum neueren Stand der Koranforschung," 183.

17 "with no particular consciousness of methodology." Ibid.

18 Ibid., 183–84.

codex, although in quite different (and indeed contradictory) ways.¹⁹ Neuwith dedicates most of her survey to a refutation of their works.²⁰

Fred Donner's 2008 assessment of Qur'ānic studies in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* is notably different.²¹ Donner is not concerned by a lack of scholarly work on the Qur'ān, but rather by conflicts among scholars working on the Qur'ān. Donner opens his article with the remark, "Qur'ānic studies, as a field of academic research, appears today to be in a state of disarray."²² Thereafter he identifies five questions regarding the Qur'ān on which no scholarly consensus exists:

- 1 The existence of an "Ur-Qur'ān."
- 2 The character of the "Ur-Qur'ān" (among those who accept its existence).
- 3 The original language and script of the Qur'ān.
- 4 The transmission of the "Ur-Qur'ān".
- 5 The codification and canonization of the Qur'ān.

Donner illustrates how recent critical studies of the Qur'ān have addressed these matters, but in such different ways that no clear picture of the Qur'ān's origins has emerged. Lüling, for example, argues that behind the Qur'ān lies the hymnal of an Arabic Christian community, while Wansbrough proposes that the Qur'ān is the product of scattered "prophetic logia." In a more recent publication Christoph Luxenberg contends that the original language of the Qur'ān was heavily influenced by the vocabulary and syntax of Syriac (a language that the Muslim scholars who later established the *scriptio plena* of the Qur'ān did not understand).²³ On the question of the transmission of the Qur'ān, Donner notes the conventional view that an ancient oral tradition accompanied the transmission of the *scriptio defectiva* text, and recent research that seems to contradict this view. On the problem of the codification of the Qur'ān, he comments: "The available evidence

19 J. Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 (reprint: Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004). See A. Neuwith, "Zum neueren Stand der Koranforschung," 184–87.

20 "Es scheint daran festzuhalten zu sein, daß nicht nur der Koran bei der frühen Gemeinde ein 'wohlbewahrtes Buch' war, sondern auch die Nachrichten über seine Sammlung ein wohlbewahrtes Kapitel in der Geschichte ihres Selbstverständnisses." Ibid., 189

21 F. Donner, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship: Challenges and desiderata," *QHC*, 29–50. Donner addresses a larger range of scholarship than Neuwith, in part because Neuwith's article is intentionally focused on certain questions, and in part due to the works that had appeared in the intervening years (or, in the case of Lüling, works that were available to Neuwith but which she does not discuss). See G. Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur'ān*, Erlangen: Lüling, 1974; translated and expanded as *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, Delhi: Molital Banarsidass, 2003; idem, *Der christliche Kult an der vorislamischen Kaaba*, Erlangen: Lüling, 1977; idem, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad: eine Kritik am "christlichen" Abendland*, Erlangen: Lüling, 1981.

22 Donner, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship," 29.

23 C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*, Berlin: Das arabische Buch, 2000 (2nd edition: Berlin: Schiler, 2002; 3rd edition, 2007; English trans.: Berlin, Schiler, 2007).

on the Qur'ān's codification, similarly, seems to provide support for both the early-codification and the late-codification hypotheses."²⁴

By the end of Donner's article readers might expect a gloomy assessment of Qur'ānic studies. Instead, Donner finds the field to be markedly improved: "I do not want to imply, however, that this current disarray is necessarily a bad thing. Quite the contrary, it is far preferable to the earlier stage of 'false consensus,' which really concealed a failure or refusal to address some burning questions in a critical way (perhaps for fear of antagonizing believers)."²⁵

Current developments in Qur'ānic studies

But the rise of interest in the critical questions of Islamic origins is not the only positive development in Qur'ānic studies. Research on the Qur'ān generally has continued to increase, and today many of the desiderata named by Jeffery and Neuwith have been achieved. The following brief survey of recent critical work in Qur'ānic studies might illustrate this trend, although it hardly represents a comprehensive catalog of such work.

Perhaps the most significant development in Qur'ānic studies is the appearance of new scholarly reference works. Two Arabic–English dictionaries of the Qur'ān have recently been published: *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (2004) by Arne A. Ambros and Stephan Procházka (supplemented in 2006 by *The Nouns of Koranic Arabic Arranged by Topics: A Companion Volume to the Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*),²⁶ and *The Arabic–English Dictionary of Qur'ānic Usage* by Elsaid Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (2008).²⁷ Moreover, another lexical resource can now be found in Martin Zammit's *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic* (2002),²⁸ a work that provides cognate terms in a number of Semitic languages (although not, unfortunately, Christian Palestinian Aramaic) for Qur'ānic vocabulary.

The most significant new publication in terms of breadth is the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (2001–6), which covers a wide range of topics, including many of those which Jeffery felt were in need of scholarly treatment, such as the grammar, syntax, and theology of the Qur'ān. The 2007 publication of the *Dictionnaire du Coran* (not a lexicon but a one-volume reference work), a dense volume with

24 Donner, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship," 42.

25 Ibid., 43.

26 Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004, 2006.

27 Leiden: Brill, 2008. However this work, it seems to me, does not substantially surpass the 1873 dictionary of John Penrice: *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-ān with Copious Grammatical References and Explanation of the Text*, London: King and Co., 1873. For a more detailed consideration of these and other dictionaries of the Qur'ān see Andrew Rippin's contribution to the present volume: "Studies in Qur'ānic vocabulary: The problem of the dictionary."

28 Leiden: Brill, 2002.

contributions from a wide range of francophone scholars, is likewise a noteworthy development in Qur'anic studies.²⁹

Whereas Jeffery noted the absence of a critical edition of the Qur'ān, this task has now been taken up by a research team of the Freie Universität in Berlin.³⁰ The significance of this task, however, is still unclear. The defective script of the early Qur'ān manuscripts renders the very definition of a critical edition problematic. If the goal of such an edition is to represent the earliest pronunciation of the Qur'ān, the ancient manuscripts themselves will hardly be sufficient, since they represent only a shorthand of the consonantal text. Scholars might then turn to the reports found in later Islamic literature on the readings (*qirā'āt*) of the Qur'ān to infer the shape of the complete text. But in that case the task achieved would not be fundamentally different from the work of the committee, led by Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥaddād, that established the Cairo version of the Qur'ān on the basis of literary reports of the Ḥafṣ (d. 180/796) 'an 'Āṣim (d. 127/745) reading.³¹ Of course, a critical edition could provide a wider range of *qirā'āt* in some sort of apparatus – or perhaps with a digitalized hypertext – and scholars could attempt methodically to decide in each case which reading is more ancient. But then individual scholars can already use a work such as *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt al-qur'āniyya* (1983) to make their own decisions on these matters.³² In any case scholars might remember that Otto Pretzl himself apparently gave up the task of a critical edition of the Qur'ān towards the end of his life, having grown convinced that the Islamic tradition of *qirā'āt* was essentially exegetical.³³ With similar logic Donner himself

29 Ed. M.A. Amir-Moezzi, Paris: Laffont, 2007.

30 The research project *Corpus Coranicum: Edition und Kommentar des Korans* (the name *corpus coranicum* coming from Pretzl's description of the initial project; see: O. Pretzl, *Die Fortführung des Apparatus Criticus zum Koran. Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 1934 (Heft 5), Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1934, 12) is described by M. Marx, "Ein Koran-Forschungsprojekt in der Tradition der Wissenschaft des Judentums: Zur Programmatik des Akademienvorhabens *Corpus Coranicum*," in D. Hartwig, W. Homolka, M. Marx, and A. Neuwirth (eds), *Im vollen Licht der Geschichte: Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung*, Würzburg: Ergon, 2008, 41–53.

31 G. Bergsträsser, "Koranlesung in Kairo," *Der Islam* 20, 1932, (1–42), 3–4.

32 *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt al-qur'āniyya*, ed. 'Abd al-'Āl Mukarram and Aḥmad 'Umar, Kuwait: Dhāt al-Salāsil, 1403/1983.

33 In 1948 August Fischer wrote: "Von den 'Koran-Lesarten,' die m.E. größtenteils weiter nichts sind als Emendationsexperimente philologisch geschulter Koran-Forscher an schwierigeren Stellen des 'ojmānischen Koran-Textes, ist in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten unter dem Einflusse Bergsträssers, seines Schülers und Mitarbeiters Pretzl und Jeffery's wohl zu viel Aufhebens gemacht worden. Pretzl war, wie ich in wiederholten mit ihm in Kairo über diese Dinge geführten Gesprächen feststellen konnte, in den letzten Jahren seines – leider wie das seines Lehrers zu früh tragisch abgeschlossenen – Lebens von der generellen hohen Bewertung der Koran-Handschriften und Koran-Lesarten, wie er sie zunächst von seinem Lehrer übernommen hatte, stark zurückgekommen." A. Fischer, "Grammatisch schwierige Schwur- und Beschwörungsformeln," *Der Islam* 28, 1948, (1–105) 5, n. 4. Anton Spitaler, Pretzl's successor, testifies to the same in his obituary for Pretzl, *ZDMG* 96, 1942, 163–4. Whether Spitaler himself chose not to work on a critical edition on the same grounds is unknown to me.

argues that, in light of our current state of knowledge, any project to establish a critical edition of the Qur'ān will likely be flawed.³⁴

Alternatively, of course, the goal of a critical edition could be to represent the most ancient orthography of the text. But in this case a critical edition of the Qur'ān would be effectively illegible, since it would not include the diacritical marks that appear in later manuscripts to fill out the skeletal script of the early manuscripts. Such a critical edition would not be much more useful than the facsimile reproduction of the early manuscripts themselves. And indeed the most ancient manuscripts are increasingly available to scholars. Sergio Noja Nosedá and François Déroche have in recent years published clear and large-scale facsimiles of Ms. arabe 328 from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (1998),³⁵ and the first half of Ms. Or. 2165 of the British Library (2001).³⁶ Moreover, an increasing number of *hiǧāzī* manuscripts are available through digital representations online, including Mingana-Islamic Arabic 1572,³⁷ and twenty-seven of the Qur'ān fragments discovered in 1972 in the Great Mosque of Ṣan'a', Yemen.³⁸

In general the increase in online resources for the study of the Qur'ān is notable.³⁹ Mehdi Azaiez manages an extremely useful website (<<http://mehdi-azaiez.org>>; in French) with information on conferences and publications in Qur'anic studies. Meanwhile, the number of websites that offer a variety of Qur'ān translations for

34 "There can be no doubt that the most cherished dream of everyone who works with the Qur'ān – whether academic specialist or believing Muslim (not, of course, exclusive categories) – would be the preparation of a truly critical edition of the text: that is, an edition that, working from the evidence provided by the earliest manuscript sources, comes as close as scientifically possible to the exact wording and vocalization of the original text – the Ur-Qur'ān. But no sooner do we make this statement than, in light of what we have just discussed, we realize how problematic it is. For, the implication of many of the preceding reflections on recent scholarship on the Qur'ān is that we face daunting problems of analysis and interpretation – orthographic, linguistic, and historical – that must be resolved before we could prepare such an 'Urtext' edition with any confidence. To attempt such an undertaking before we have attained greater clarity on at least the more pressing of these problems, it seems to me, would be to risk making many false starts and possibly calamitous failure of the enterprise, as laboriously-edited parts of the text were shown to be incorrect by new discoveries." Donner, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship: Challenges and desiderata," 43–44.

35 *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique, I. Les manuscrits de style hiǧāzī, le manuscrit arabe 328*, ed. F. Déroche and S.N. Nosedá, Lesa, Italy: Fondazione F. Noja Nosedá, 1998. Regarding this manuscript scholars might also now benefit from the exceptionally detailed study of F. Déroche: *La transmission écrite du coran dans les débuts de l'islam: Le codex parisino-petropolitanus*, Leiden: Brill, 2009.

36 *Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte coranique, I. Les manuscrits de style hiǧāzī, Le manuscrit Or. 2165 (f. 1 à 61)*, ed. F. Déroche and S.N. Nosedá, Lesa, Italy: Fondazione F. Noja Nosedá, 2001.

37 See <http://vnr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Islamic_Arabic_1572/table/>. As of January 28, 2011 the website incorrectly labels the script "kufic."

38 See <<http://www.unesco-ci.org/photos/showgallery.php/cat/837>> (accessed May 17, 2011).

39 On this topic generally see A. Rippin, "Tools for the scholarly study of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 5:294–300.

comparison continues to increase,⁴⁰ while the site "Project Root List" (<<http://www.studyquran.co.uk/PRLonline.htm>>) allows students to search through a virtually complete list of Arabic consonantal roots in the Qur'ān. Each entry includes a list of the various lexemes in the Qur'ān from that root with an English translation, Qur'ānic chapter/verse references, and relevant grammatical information, along with a link to a PDF of the corresponding entry in Lane's *Lexicon*. The site <http://cl.haifa.ac.il/projects/quran/> allows users to search a transliterated text of the Qur'ān on the level of morphemes. No less impressive among online resources is "The Qur'ān Arabic Corpus" (<<http://corpus.quran.com>>), a site based at the University of Leeds that provides students with a detailed word by word analysis of the Cairo Qur'ān's vocabulary, morphology, and syntax, along with various syntactical charts (similar to those commonly used in grammars of New Testament Greek), and a detailed dictionary of the Qur'ān.⁴¹

In addition, a remarkable number of new critical scholarly studies of the Qur'ān have appeared since the publication of *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*. In 2010 the Qur'ān research team centered at the Freie Universität Berlin (led by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michel Marx) published *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations in the Qur'ānic Milieu*,⁴² a diverse work with twenty-eight contributions that emerged from a 2004 symposium.⁴³ A second center of critical Qur'ānic Studies in Germany has also appeared in recent years with the title: *Inārah: Institut zur Erforschung der frühen Islamgeschichte und des Koran*. Led by scholars at Die Universität des Saarlandes (including Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin), the *Inārah* Institute published four collected volumes of critical studies on the Qur'ān and Islamic origins – volumes in part marked by radical historical revisionism – between 2005 and 2009 (and subsequently published two additional volumes).⁴⁴

40 The website <<http://www.quranbrowser.com>> includes ten Qur'ān translations (divided by orthodox Muslim, non-Muslim, and heterodox Muslim translators) into English that can be compared in an interlinear fashion. The page <<http://www.altafsir.com/Languages.asp?LanguageID=2>> includes (as of February 5, 2011) links to translations of the Qur'ān in 25 languages (including eight English translations). The "Online Quran Project" at <<http://al-quran.info>> aims at producing a comprehensive online library of Quran translations (all websites accessed February 5, 2011).

41 Also of note is <www.altafsir.com> (accessed January 28, 2011), run by the "Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought," a center founded by the Jordanian government that is also connected with the Common Word project. In addition to a selection of classical commentaries (in Arabic and English translation), their website includes a searchable database of *qirā'āt*.

42 Brill: Leiden, 2010.

43 "Historische Sondierung und methodische Reflexionen zur Koranexegese – Wege zur Rekonstruktion des vor-kanonischen Koran." Berlin, January 21–25, 2004.

44 *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, Ed. K.-H. Ohlig and G.-R. Puin, Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2005; English trans.: *The Hidden Origins of Islam*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010; *Der frühe Islam*, ed. K.-H. Ohlig, Berlin: Schiler, 2007; *Schlaglichter: Die bieten ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, ed. K.-H. Ohlig and M. Groß, Berlin: Schiler, 2008; *Vom Koran zum Islam*, ed. M. Groß and K.-H. Ohlig, Berlin: Schiler, 2009. The theme of illumination is apparent in two of these titles, and in the name *inārah* itself ("enlightenment").

Of particular note in these contributions is the two-part article of Elizabeth Puin: "Ein früher Koranpalimpsest aus Šan'a" (DAM 01–27.1), *Schlaglichter*, 461–93, and *Vom Koran zum Islam*,

Similarly a substantial number of individual critical studies of the Qur'ān have appeared in recent years,⁴⁵ some of which are marked by idiosyncratic theories. In *Le messie et son prophète: Aux origines de l'islam* (2005),⁴⁶ Edouard Gallez argues that Judaeo-Christianity (i.e. the ideas of Jewish Christians) lies behind much of the Qur'ān. A similar, though more sober, argument is found in the work of Joachim Nilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran, Eine Spurensuche* (2007).⁴⁷ These two works might be contrasted with the rhetorical study of Michel Cuypers in his *Le festin: Une lecture de la sourate al-Mā'ida* (2007). Cuypers analyzes closely the Qur'ān's fifth chapter in order to uncover the logic of its rhetorical strategies and its use of Biblical traditions.⁴⁸

523–81. Puin analyzes several folios of a palimpsest Qur'ān manuscript found in the great mosque of Šan'a in 1972. In her analysis she details the orthographic variations between the *rasm* of the *scriptio inferior* and the *scriptio superior* and compares both texts to the standard ("King Fu'ād") 1924 Cairo edition. The implication, evidently, is that an appreciation of the Šan'a manuscript can help produce a more ancient Qur'ānic *rasm* than that achieved through the *qirā'āt* traditions that shape the *textus receptus*.

A telling comparison can be made between her article and that of Behnam Sadeghi (assisted by Uwe Bergmann): "The codex of the companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," *Arabica* 57, 2010, 343–436. Sadeghi seems to have worked with a folio of the same manuscript. Whereas Puin identifies her manuscript as 01–27.1 of Dār al-Makhtūfāt in Šan'a, Sadeghi names the folio he examined only as "Stanford [20]07" and the manuscript to which it belongs only as "Šan'a' 1." However, he reports (p. 355) that his folio, which was purchased at auction at Sotheby's in 1993, belongs to the same manuscript of a folio purchased on auction at Christie's in 2008. For her part Puin comments (p. 461, n. 1) that this latter folio seems to have been taken from the same manuscript with which she worked. Unfortunately Sadeghi seems to have been unaware of Puin's work and makes no mention of it.

In his article Sadeghi similarly analyzes the variants found between the *scriptio inferior* and the *scriptio superior* of the palimpsest. However, his principal concern is to compare both layers with medieval Islamic traditions on the *maṣāḥif*. Ultimately he argues that the *scriptio superior* (which Sadeghi labels "Uthmānic" and argues is a reflection of the Prophet's own reading) of his manuscript is more ancient than the *scriptio inferior*, which he attributes to a "companion" (although it does not match the traditional descriptions of any one companion *muṣṣaf*). Thus Sadeghi concludes that the traditional account of the Qur'ān's codification is vindicated by his analysis. This conclusion, he explains, was predictable: "If anybody had the resources to ensure that a reliable version be chosen, it would have been the caliph; and if anybody had more to lose by botching up the task, again that would have been 'Uthmān." (Sadeghi, 414).

45 In the following section I describe only scholarly monographs, in deference to space. Still it behooves me to mention, at least, the rigorous articles published in recent years by F. de Blois and P. Crone, both of whom approach the Qur'ān in its historical context. See F. de Blois, "Naṣrānī and Ḥanīf: Studies on the religious vocabulary of Christianity and Islam," *BSOAS* 65, 2002, 1–30; idem, "Elchasai – Manes – Muhammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischen Vergleichs," *Der Islam* 81, 2004, 31–48; P. Crone, "How did the Qur'ānic pagans make a living?" *BSOAS* 68, 2005, 87–99; and most recently eadem, "The religion of the Qur'ānic pagans," *Arabica* 57, 2010, 151–200.

46 Versailles: Éditions de Paris, 2005.

47 Freiburg: Herder, 2007.

48 Paris: Lethellieux, 2007; English trans.: *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'ān*, Miami: Convivium Press, 2009. Also noteworthy is the work of M. Cuypers and G. Gobillet, *Le Coran: Idées reçues*, Paris: Le cavalier blue, 2007.

A different approach is taken by David Powers in *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (2009).⁴⁹ Powers, who presents physical evidence that the consonantal skeleton of Q. 4:12b was revised, argues that the stories of Muhammad's biological son Ibrāhīm and his adopted son Zayd b. Ḥāritha are narrative tropes more than recorded history.⁵⁰ In *Muhammad and the Believers* (2010) Fred Donner looks to the Qur'ān in order better to understand early Islamic history (the reverse of how things are conventionally done in western scholarship).⁵¹ The Qur'ān, Donner argues (in a manner much more subtle and sophisticated than can be summarized briefly), reflects an interconfessional movement of monotheistic believers; the definitive demarcation of Islam from Judaism and Christianity is a later development.⁵²

For his part Tilman Nagel, in his introduction to *Der Koran und sein religiöses und kulturelles Umfeld* (2010),⁵³ notes the remarkably intimate correspondence between the Qur'ān and Syriac literature of the time. In my own work, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (2010),⁵⁴ I likewise emphasize this point, arguing that what seems to be idiosyncratic Biblical material in the Qur'ān (often a cause for scholars to speculate that Muhammad was influenced by a heterodox Jewish or Christian sect) can be better understood when the Qur'ān's relationship with the tradition of Syriac homilies is appreciated. Furthermore I contend that Islamic exegetical literature (including accounts of *asbāb al-nuzūl*) is best appreciated when read as the creative product of later Islamic intellectual culture, and not as an imperfect record of historical events.

These sorts of arguments are based on a reasoned analysis of the Qur'ān's relationship to earlier literature. In this they differ profoundly from the old tradition of Orientalism, by which research usually begins not with the Qur'ān but rather with a reading (often polemical or hyperbolic) of the Prophet's biography. In this regard it is noteworthy that Michel Cuypers' work, in its English translation, won the 2009 "World Prize for Book of the Year," awarded by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of the Republic of Iran. This award helps to undermine the fallacy that believing Muslims will neither welcome nor tolerate serious critical research on the Qur'ān. Indeed it would be ironic if scholars in the West today would refrain from such research – concerned that they might offend Muslims thereby – when Muslims in the Islamic world are increasingly interested in it.

49 Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

50 Powers argues (pp. 155ff.) that *kalāla* (in Q 4:12b) is a later correction of *kalla* in the ms. Bibliothèque nationale 328a, and that the second appearance in the Qur'ān of *kalāla* (in Q 4:176) is a later addition meant to explain the new meaning of Q 4:12b. This redaction, Powers contends, reflects changes in inheritance law related to the abolition of adoption in Q 33:4–5.

51 Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010.

52 In this regard Todd Lawson's *The Crucifixion in the Qur'ān: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009) is noteworthy. After a detailed examination of the material relevant to the death of Jesus in the Qur'ān, Lawson shows how the traditional Islamic teaching on this question reflects later doctrinal and historical developments.

53 ed. T. Nagel, Oldenbourg: Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, 2010. This work is a collection of papers from a 2006 colloquium on the Qur'ān.

54 London: Routledge, 2010.

Qur'ānic studies and the translation of the Qur'ān

Yet the principal question at hand is not whether critical research in Qur'ānic studies is increasingly prevalent, but whether this research is contributing to a more precise understanding of the Qur'ān. In order to address this latter question we might look briefly at recent translations of the Qur'ān. Translators, after all, must deal with what the Qur'ān means, and their work might be thought of as the place where advances in our understanding of the Qur'ān first become evident.

A growing number of translations of the Qur'ān into European languages have appeared in recent years, no doubt due in part to the increased market for all things Islamic since September 11, 2001. Here I will examine briefly six recent translations of the Qur'ān, four of them English: Abdel Haleem, Jones, Khalidi, and the Monotheist Group; one French: Abu-Sahli; and one German: Bobzin.⁵⁵ With one exception (the Monotheist Group), all of these translations are meant to be grounded in sober academic principles and unaffected by religious commitments. Still, and as we will see, they form a diverse group.

In the introduction to his translation (published 2004), Abdel Haleem explains that in translating he always takes into account the occasion in the Prophet's life when individual passages of the Qur'ān were revealed.⁵⁶ Tarif Khalidi (translation published 2008), on the contrary, contends that by emphasizing traditions on the "occasions of revelation" translators risk limiting the meaning of the text: "But the very allusiveness of the text, its impersonality, its meta-historical tone, seem almost deliberately to de-emphasize context, and to address its audience or readers in a grammatical tense that I have elsewhere called 'the eternal present tense.'"⁵⁷

55 The list of recently published translations of the Qur'ān is in fact much longer. Translations into English since 2005 include as well: *The Koran Handbook: An Annotated Translation*, trans. Nicholas Starkovsky, New York: Algora, 2005; *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, trans. Ali Ünal, Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2006; *The Korana of Mother Goddess: A Women's Feminist Koran*, trans. JoAnne Marie, n.c.: Lulu, 2007; *The Qur'an: A Reformist Translation*, trans. Edip Yüksel, Layth Saleh Al-Shaiban, and Martha Schulte-Nafeh, no city: Brainbow, 2007; *The Sublime Quran*, trans. Laleh Bakhtiar, Chicago: Kazi, 2007; *The Qur'ān*, trans. Wahiduddin Khan, New Delhi: Goodword, 2009. Uri Rubin's scholarly recent scholarly translation of the Qur'ān into modern Hebrew is also noteworthy: *Ha-Kor'an. Targum me-'Aravit ye-hosif he 'arot, nispaḥim u-mafteah*, Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv Press, 2005.

56 *The Qur'ān*, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, xxx. Abdel Haleem introduces his translation with traditional accounts of the biography of Muhammad, the revelation of the Qur'ān, and the compilation of the Qur'ān. He continues with an account of the Qur'ān's structure (Sūras and verses), and of the traditional division of the Qur'ān into Meccan and Medinan periods. Thereafter Abdel Haleem discusses the style of the Qur'ān, Islamic interpretation (here he is concerned almost exclusively with a defense of the Qur'ān's material on war and the status of women), and the history of English translations of the Qur'ān. Generally his account reflects a concern with religious apology: "By the end of the Prophet's life (632 CE) the entire Qur'ān was written down in the form of uncollated pieces" (p. xvi); "[the companions of the Prophet who collated the Qur'ān] belonged to a cultural background that had a long-standing tradition of memorizing literature, history, and genealogy" (p. xvi).

57 *The Qur'ān: A New Translation*. London: Penguin Classics, 2008, xii. The reference is to T. Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001, 10. Khalidi

For his part Jones (translation published 2007) contends that Islamic traditions on pre-Islamic Arabia might help the translator better understand the Qur'ān's rhetoric, which he explains as an integration of "the clipped, gnomic style" of soothsayers, the "admonitory, exhortative and argumentative style" of scribes, the "narrative techniques" of the story-tellers and the "dramatic style" of some poetry.⁵⁸ Different concerns are raised in the introduction to the translation (published 2008) of the Monotheist Group.⁵⁹ The anonymous translators (affiliated with the site <<http://free-minds.org>>) are "Quranists" (Ar. *qur'āniyyūn*) and focus therein on the importance of understanding the Qur'ān independently from Islamic tradition and exegesis (which they contend is a sectarian distortion of the scripture) and structures of Islamic authority today.⁶⁰

The French translation of Sami Awad Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh (published 2008),⁶¹ which includes the Arabic text of the Qur'ān in a separate column,⁶² is unusual even

divides his translation into paragraphs, in light of his conviction (which he shares with Suyūfī) that the Qur'ān is ordered according to "bursts" of revelation; he marks verse numbers only with a marginal note at the end of each paragraph. Khalidi also distinguishes between genres of Qur'ānic material in his formatting so that the reader might make better sense of the Qur'ān as a literary work ("Where it is in any sense 'dramatic', I have arranged the lines in a vertical 'poetic' fashion." Ibid., xxi.). In his introduction Khalidi also emphasizes the challenges a translator of the Qur'ān is faced with: "But here too I cannot claim to have done anything other than to highlight a problem of translation and offer a tentative solution to it." Ibid., xxi.

58 Alan Jones begins his translation with an introduction to the Prophet's life, including a brief introduction to the geography and demography of pre-Islamic Arabia, along with a traditional account of the religion and culture of pre-Islamic Arabs. When it comes to introducing the structure of the Qur'ān, Jones warns the reader that traditions dating individual passages to certain moments in the Prophet's life are unreliable: "But while it is true that with some of the Medinan *sūras* there is quite a good case for relating material they contain to historical events, there is a large number of *sūras* whose dating remains highly doubtful." *The Qur'ān*, trans. Alan Jones, Exeter: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007, 11–12. He adds that the western chronology of the *Sūras* established by Nöldeke is no less so: "Yet it must be said that it is no real advance on the traditional Muslim dating." Ibid., 11. Jones accordingly rejects the traditional notion that Qur'ānic material moved from "terse and abrupt" to "diffuse" during the career of the Prophet, maintaining that a proper evaluation of the text shows that "there is relatively little change of style during the period of the Qur'ān's revelation." Ibid., 16.

59 *The Message: A Pure and Literal Translation of the Qur'ān*, no city: Brainbow Press, 2008.

60 To this end they include, in the introduction, images of early Qur'ān manuscripts meant to show that the *basmallah* should be understood as part of the revelation (whereas later Islamic tradition made it an introductory formula). So too on the basis of manuscript evidence they do not include any titles of the *Sūras* in their translation. In the opinion of the translators their independence from Islamic tradition and authority has allowed them to achieve, as the subtitle of their volume puts it, "a pure and literal Translation of the Qur'ān." However, in order to maintain a connection with the conventional chapter:verse numbering, they do not number the *basmallah* as a verse in their translation.

The translators conclude the introduction with the admonition: "You now should have the necessary tools to educate yourself to the Scripture's system and method for deriving meanings and laws . . . Try to make it a habit of seeking the answers for yourself through the guidance of God . . . Do not be quick to ask 'others' what God says regarding this or that." *The Message*, xix.

61 Vivey: L'Aire, 2008.

62 In the first edition of his translation (*Le Coran*, trans. R. Blachère, Paris: Mouton, 1949), Régis Blachère similarly arranges the Qur'ān according to a chronological ordering of its *Sūras*. Whereas Blachère, however, develops his own chronology, Abu-Sahlieh relies on that established by al-Azhar.

in its form. Abu-Sahlieh arranges the *Sūras* according to a supposed chronological order, beginning with *al-'Alaq* (Q 96) and ending with *al-Naṣr* (Q 110).⁶³ For his part Harmut Bobzin does not rearrange the *Sūras* in his German translation (published 2010), but he does include the traditional Islamic header which makes certain *Sūras* Meccan and others Medinan.⁶⁴ Regarding the translation itself, Bobzin explains that he has attempted to preserve the abrupt quality, and even the rhyme, of terse material in the Qur'ān, and something of the rhythmic nature of the entire text.

Evidently the translations presented here differ both in regard to the formal representation of the text and the usefulness of Islamic tradition in interpreting it. Our concern, however, is to what extent these translations have benefited from recent critical scholarship on the Qur'ān. In order to address this question I turn now to their rendering of two passages which have presented difficulties to earlier interpreters. The first, *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 3–4, is concerned with Biblical material:

*Nazzala 'alayka al-kitāba bi-l-ḥaqqi muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi wa-anzala l-tawrāta wa-injīl * min qablu hudan li-l-nāsi wa-anzala l-furqāna inna lladhīna kafarū bi-āyāti Llāhi lahum 'adhābun shadīdun wa-Llāhu 'azīzun dhū intiqām*

Abdel Haleem – Step by step, He has sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel * earlier as a guide for people and he has sent down the distinction [between right and wrong]. Those who deny God's revelations will suffer severe torment. God is almighty and capable of retribution.

Jones – He has sent down to you^s [the superscript "s"=singular] the Scripture in truth, confirming what came before it. And He sent down the *Torah* and the *Gospel*, * Previously, as a guidance for the people; and He sent down the Salvation. * [4a] Those who do not believe in the signs of God will have painful torment. God is Mighty and Able to take revenge.

Khalidi – He sent down to you the Book with the Truth, Confirming His previous Scriptures.

63 Abu-Sahlieh also includes extensive footnotes with indications of variants (*qir'āt*), relevant Biblical (or Talmudic/midrashic) references, notes on verses considered abrogated by traditional Islamic jurisprudence, and citations of earlier French translations that differ from his own rendering.

64 *Der Koran*. Munich: Beck, 2010. At the end of the volume Bobzin includes 170 pages of comments, made up above all of brief explanations of the Arabic that underlies the words, syntax, and punctuation he has chosen in the translation. The comments are arranged with chapter/verse references, i.e. they are not endnotes. In other words, readers will find no mark in the translation itself to indicate that a comment exists at the end of the volume. Thereby Bobzin no doubt meant to preserve something of the visual simplicity that is found in the standard Arabic Qur'ān. Yet the very length of his explanatory comments illustrates how much of the Qur'ān's meaning is uncertain, and the format of his text might give readers precisely the opposite impression.

And He sent down the Torah and the Evangel, beforehand:

A guidance to mankind.

And He sent down the Criterion.

Those who blaspheme against the revelations of God shall meet with terrible torment.

God is Almighty, Vengeful.

Monotheist Group – He sent down to you the Scripture with truth, authenticating what is present with it; and He sent down the Torah and the Injeel. * From before as a guidance for the people, and He sent down the Criterion. Those who rejected God's revelations, they will have a painful retribution, and God is Noble, extracting in Revenge.

Abu-Sahlieh – Il a fait descendre sur toi le livre avec la vérité, confirmant ce qui est devant lui. Il a fait descendre la Torah et l'Évangile * auparavant, comme direction pour les humains. Et il a fait descendre la délivrance. Ceux qui ont mécréu aux signes de Dieu auront un châtement fort! Dieu est fier et vengeur.

Bobzin – Herabgesandt hat er auf dich das Buch mit der Wahrheit, bestätigend, was vor ihm war. Herabgesandt hat er Tora und Evangelium * schon vorher – für die Menschen als Geleit. Und die Entscheidung hat er herabgesandt. Siehe denen die nicht an Gottes Zeichen glauben, ist strenge Strafe bestimmt. Gott ist mächtig, Herr der Vergeltung.

In analysing these translations one might first notice certain peculiar features. Abdel Haleem adds the phrase "step by step" to his description of revelation. This may reflect his notion of "occasions of revelation," but it does not seem to correspond with any phrase in the verse. He also indicates between brackets that the pronoun (which in Arabic has no precedent) "you" (i.e. the recipient of revelation) is the Prophet. His translation "capable of retribution" seems to soften considerably the Arabic *dhū l-intiqām*; others translate: "Able to take revenge;" "Vengeful;" "extracting in Revenge" (I assume "exacting" is meant here); "vengeur" or "Herr der Vergeltung" (in a comment Bobzin suggests "Herr der Rache" as another rendering). *Kafarū* is rendered with different terms and different tenses but (with the exception of Khalidi, who translates "blaspheme") all of the translators seem to agree that it means something like "deny" or "disbelieve."

All of the translators likewise agree that the term *kitāb* in the opening line means "book" or "scripture." They all capitalize their translation of *kitāb* – except for Abu-Sahlieh (in German, of course, nouns are anyway capitalized) – suggesting that they have a specific book in mind. They are less clear about the phrase *li-mā bayna yadayhi*, which some translate as "that which is before him" (Abu-Sahlieh, Bobzin) or "before it" (Monotheist Group), and others as "what went before" (Abdel Haleem) or "what came before it" (Jones) or "beforehand" (Khalidi). These latter translators may mean thereby that the *kitāb* is the Qur'ān itself (which confirms earlier books),

but then Bobzin at least suggests in a comment that the Qur'ān is intended instead by a term in the next verse: *furqān* (regarding which see below).⁶⁵

All of the translators simply render *tawrāt* as Torah, but with *injīl* confusion appears. The Monotheist Group transliterates the Arabic word into English letters (Injeel); Abdel Haleem, Jones, Abu-Sahlieh, and Bobzin translate the term as "Gospel" (Jones puts Gospel in italics). Khalidi uses "Evangel" (perhaps because it means "gospel" but sounds like *injīl*). All of the translators capitalize this term, suggesting that the Qur'ān means a specific book. But none of them explains what *injīl* refers to (The Christian New Testament? Only one of the Gospels? An oral message? A Muslim book?).

Perhaps the most salient difference between the translations is the rendering of *furqān*, a term understood in Islamic exegetical tradition in light of the Arabic root *f.r.q.* (≈"to differ"), but which in western scholarship is often connected to the Aramaic root *p.r.q.* (≈"to redeem").⁶⁶ Abdel Haleem follows tradition, translating, "the distinction [between right and wrong];" Jones translates "the Salvation", but then adds in a footnote: "or 'the Criterion;'" Khalidi translates, "the Criterion;" as does the Monotheist Group. The capital "C" in these translations implies that the translators think the Criterion is nothing other than the Qur'ān. Abu-Sahlieh translates "la délivrance," while Bobzin opts for the traditional meaning: "die Entscheidung" (although in a comment he adds, "oder: 'die Rettung'").

Similar confusion is found in the translations of *al-tīn* (95), a passage concerned in part with eschatology:

*Wa-l-tīn wa-l-zaytūn * wa-ṭūri sīnīn * wa-hādhā l-baladi l-amīn * la-qad khalaqnā l-insāna fī aḥsani taqwīm * thummā radadnāhu asfala sāfilīn * illā lladhīna āmanū wa-'amilū l-ṣāliḥāti fa-lahum ajrun ghayru mamnūn * fa-mā yukadhdhibuka ba'du bi-l-dīn * a-laysa Llāhu bi-aḥkami l-ḥakīmīn*

Abdel Haleem – By the fig, by the olive, * by Mount Sinai, * by this safe town, * We create man in the finest state * then reduce him to the lowest of the low, * except those who believe and do good deeds – * they will have an unfailing reward. After this, what makes you [man] deny the Judgement? * Is God not the most decisive of judges?

Jones – By the figs and olives, * By Mount Sinai, * By this secure territory, * We have created man in the fairest stature; * When We have rendered him the lowest of the low, * Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds – they will have an unbroken reward. * What will henceforth declare you false concerning the judgement? * Is not God the most discerning of judges?

65 Bobzin, 629, ad Q 3:4.

66 Thus Jeffery (*FV* [2007], 225–29); cf. the theory of F. Donner that in certain cases *furqān* corresponds instead to Syriac *puqdānā* ("command" or "commandment"): "Qur'ānic *furqān*," *JSS* 52, 2007, 279–300.

Khalidi – By the fig and the olive,
And by Mount Sinai,
And this city, secure!

We created man in fairest proportion,
Then reduced him to the lowest of the low,
Save them who believe and do righteous deeds –
To them belongs a wage, unstinted.

What then can lead you to deny the Judgement?
Is God not the fairest of judges?

Monotheist Group – By the fig and the olive. * And the mount of ages. * And this town of peace. * We have created mankind in the best form. * Then We returned him to the lowest of the low. * Except those who have believed and done good work, they will have a reward of thanks. * So what would make you deny the system after that? * Is God not the wisest of the wise?

Abu-Sahlieh – Par le figuier et l'olivier! * Par le Mont Sinaï! * Par cette contrée sûre! * Nous avons créé l'humain dans la meilleure forme. * Ensuite, nous l'avons ramené au plus bas des plus bas. * Sauf ceux qui ont cru et ont fait les œuvres vertueuses. Ils auront un salaire non reproché. * Après [cela], qui te fait démentir le [jour du] jugement? * Dieu n'est-il pas le plus sage des juges?

Bobzin – Bei den Feigenbäumen! Bei den Olivenbäumen! * Beim Berge Sinai! * Bei diesem sichern Ort! * Wir erschufen den Menschen in vollendeter Gestalt, * alsdann machten wir ihn zum Niedrigsten der Niedrigen – * außer denen, die glauben und gute Werke tun, denen wird Lohn zuteil, nicht unverdient – * was last dich also das Gericht noch leugnen? * Ist Gott denn nicht der weiseste der Richter?

The translators agree that the opening verse of this chapter is a type of oath on fig(s) and olive(s) (or fig and olive trees). They likewise agree that the second verse is an oath on *tūr sīnīn*, which five of the translations render as Mount Sinai. The Monotheist Group, however, translates *tūr sīnīn* as “the mount of ages.” Now elsewhere (Q 23:20) the Qur’ān refers to Mount Sinai as *tūr saynā*’ (although *sīnā*’ might better reflect the ancient pronunciation), but Islamic tradition generally (and with good reason)⁶⁷ considers *sīnīn* to be a secondary form of the same term.⁶⁸ The Monotheist Group rejects this tradition, understanding *sīnīn* as the plural of *sanna*, “year,” (although *sinīn* is the typical Qur’ānic plural) and translating “mount of ages.”

67 As Jeffery (*FV* [2007], 183–84) notes, the form *sīnīn* responds to the *ūn/in* rhyme of this Sūra.

68 Abu-Sahlieh in fact notes *saynā*’ (and *sīnā*’) as a traditional variant reading for Q 95:2.

The difference among the translations in the third verse is more subtle but still significant. Jones and Abu-Sahlieh understand *balad* to be a reference to a region (“territory,” “contrée”) but the other translations understand it to be a town or a city. Behind this lies the traditional idea (no doubt encouraged by the demonstrative article *hādhā*, “this”) that the Qur’ān intends here “Mecca.” Abdel Haleem says as much in a footnote; in his commentary Bobzin explains that by *balad* the Qur’ān means more specifically the Ka’ba, which even the pre-Islamic pagans considered an inviolable site.

Finally it is worth noting the differences to be found in the penultimate verse (*fa-mā yukadhdhibuka ba’dū fī-l-dīn*). Five of the translators understand *mā* to refer to a thing (e.g. Abdel Haleem: “what makes you [man] deny . . .”) but Abu-Sahlieh understands it as a person (“qui te fait démentir. . .”). The translators also disagree over the meaning and object of *yukadhdhibuka*. Five of the translations suggest that God is here speaking to “man” (n.b. Abdel Haleem’s insertion) in a general sense, and asking what (or who) could make him (i.e. anyone) deny the *dīn* (which, according to the Monotheist Group, means “system,” but according to the others is short for *yawm al-dīn* [n.b. Abu-Sahlieh’s insertion] and means “the Day of Judgement”). Jones, however, understands that God is speaking to Muḥammad, and asking rhetorically how anyone could now reject his teaching on God’s power to judge all humans and send them to heaven or hell.⁶⁹

Evidently, there is no little disagreement among translators over the meaning of these two passages, which are not among those (such as, say, *al-Nisā*’ [4] 157–9 or *al-Kawthar* [108]) traditionally considered to be especially opaque. If critical scholarship had provided a convincing explanation of their meaning we would have found, presumably, less confusion among the translators.

Tellingly, all of the translators – even the Monotheist Group – turn frequently to traditional Islamic lexicography and exegesis for solutions. For this reason they all seem to believe that *al-tawrāt* and *al-injīl* were books; they understand (with two exceptions) *furqān* to mean something like Criterion; and they suggest (with two exceptions) that *balad* is a reference to Mecca. Now the Islamic lexicographical and exegetical tradition, of course, cannot be dismissed lightly. By relying on it the translators presumably do arrive quite often at the ancient meaning of the Qur’ān.

For other problems, however, help is found outside of this tradition. Only by turning to Syro-Aramaic, for example, do Jones and Abu-Sahlieh arrive at the compelling translation of *furqān* as “salvation” or “la délivrance.”⁷⁰ And for still other problems, such as the meaning and object of *yukadhdhibuka*, Syro-Aramaic is of no help. The problem for such cases is that the Qur’ān is short on proper

69 Abdel Haleem mentions this latter interpretation, acknowledging that it is found with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

70 Muslim exegetes and lexicographers were of course extremely interested in the question of foreign words (*al-kalimāt al-dakhīla*) in the Qur’ān. Such interest, however, did not regularly lead to the study and application of foreign languages in their exegesis. On the idiosyncratic nature of reports on non-Arabic languages in traditional Islamic exegesis see A. Jeffery, *FV* (2007), 1–42; A. Rippin, “Syriac in the Qur’ān,” *QHC*, 249–61.

names and details of context and long on allusions and references. And since translators have no contemporaneous or earlier Arabic literature to work with,⁷¹ the only place to find explicit explanations of these allusions and references is medieval Muslim literature. But this literature itself is filled with debates over the Qur'ān's meaning (along with occasional confessions of complete uncertainty). Thus we arrive at the curious yet common phenomenon whereby the differences in modern translations of the Qur'ān are often distant – and yet evident – reflections of the very same differences to be found centuries earlier among traditional Islamic authorities.

In this light it would hardly seem correct to describe the current moment as a golden age of Qur'ānic studies. Scholars of the Qur'ān have not yet approached, let alone agreed upon, a basic understanding of the ancient meaning of the text. Thus the recent multiplication of translations of the Qur'ān seems more ironic than *à propos*.

Now the recourse of translators of the Qur'ān to medieval Islamic literature is understandable. Their task might be compared to the translation of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. For their part, translators of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible do not look to traditional literature such as Philo, Origen, the Babylonian Talmud, the *Midrash Rabbah*, or Martin Luther to discover the ancient meaning of the text. Instead they look to the study of Akkadian and North-West Semitic languages and literature, of paleography, of archaeology/epigraphy, etc. to do so. But this is only possible because of the immense archeological, epigraphical, and philological work that has been done in the fields of Assyriology and Judaic Studies, work that allows translators to understand their text in the light of the historical context in which it was composed.

In comparison, scholars of the Qur'ān still have a lot of work to do, and it is to this work that the Notre Dame conferences on the Qur'ān are dedicated. The studies presented here are dedicated to furthering our understanding of the Qur'ān's place in its historical context; in other words, they are meant to help students follow the Qur'ān's own references to the religion, literature, and society of the Late Antique Near East. This work alone will hardly resolve all of the methodological problems that are evident in recent studies and translations of the Qur'ān. However, it offers further resources for students of the Qur'ān to discover the surprisingly profound ways in which the Qur'ān is in conversation with its context. Moreover, it offers an example of how Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike can express their appreciation for the Qur'ān through the critical study of its contents.

Regarding the contributions to the present volume

New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context 2 is divided into five parts, the first of which is "Method in Qur'ānic studies." Therein Fred

Donner, in "The historian, the believer, and the Qur'ān," argues that critical scholarship on the Qur'ān, properly understood, can neither prove nor disprove Islamic claims of faith. Accordingly he concludes that scholars have no need to shape their research according to Islamic apology, and no warrant to frame their research in polemical terms. Thereafter Andrew Rippin examines in detail the efforts of western scholars to develop a useful dictionary of the Qur'ān, and notes the importance of etymological research to that task. Finally, Nasr Abu Zayd introduces the reader to the principal methodologies for the interpretation of the Qur'ān associated with different Islamic sciences, and to the compelling story of his lifetime of engagement with the Qur'ān and Islamic studies. Ultimately he argues that critical studies of the Qur'ān's ancient meaning can help Muslims contemplate the Qur'ān's meaning (or better, significance) today: "The contextual socio-cultural meaning, that which was addressed to the first Arab recipients, should not be ignored or simplified. This meaning is a vital indication of the direction of the Qur'ān's message, i.e. its significance for the future generations of Muslims."⁷²

The second part of the present book, "The Qur'ān and material evidence," opens with Robert Hoyland's examination of those early Arabic inscriptions in the Hijaz which seem to have been written by Jews, or which seem to refer to Jews or Judaism. Thereby he illustrates how an appreciation of epigraphy can play an important role in our study of the Qur'ān's historical context. Hoyland's chapter is complemented by that of Hani Hayajneh, who analyzes in detail Ancient South Arabian inscriptions that anticipate Qur'ānic vocabulary. Through this analysis Hayajneh develops compelling new interpretations of ten Qur'ānic passages. The final article in this section is that of Gerd Puin, who offers an exacting examination of the Qur'ānic *rasm* based on the evidence of the earliest manuscripts. Puin illustrates the substantial changes that have been made to Qur'ānic orthography in the medieval and modern period (including with the 1924 Cairo Qur'ān), and offers critical insights into the ancient shape of the Qur'ānic text.

The articles of the third part of the present volume, "Qur'ānic vocabulary," are focused on the nature of the Qur'ān's lexicon and the meaning of poorly understood Qur'ānic terms. Shawkat Toorawa offers an exhaustive presentation and careful categorization of Qur'ānic *hapax legomena*, and uses the results to caution scholars who hasten to emend such terms to match more common vocabulary. Manfred Kropp focuses in particular on *al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q 112). He both proposes an emendation of this Sūra and argues that a proper understanding of its development allows us to identify three phases in the development of the entire text of the Qur'ān. Munther Younes, for his part, makes a compelling argument for an emended reading of *al-Nāzi'āt* (Q 79), in his chapter, "Angels, stars, death, the soul, horses, bows – or women? The opening verses of Qur'ān 79." Finally, Christoph Luxenberg, applying the insights of Syriac vocabulary and grammar, offers a profoundly new reading of *al-Najm* (Q 53).

71 On the troubles with using Jāhili poetry in this manner see Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, 30–33.

72 Abū Zayd, "Towards understanding the Qur'ān's worldview: An autobiographical reflection," this volume, p. 47–87.

In the fourth part, "The Qur'ān and its religious context," the authors illustrate how a careful appreciation of the religious context of the Late Antique Near East can help us understand aspects of the Qur'ān that have long troubled interpreters. In the first chapter therein Sidney Griffith presents an exhaustive study of the Qur'ānic term *naṣārā* in the light of the use of cognate Greek and Syriac terms in earlier Christian literature. Through this presentation the Qur'ān's logic for using an unusual term for Christians becomes evident, and the idea that this term reflects the influence of a heterodox sect is refuted. Devin Stewart reviews both traditional Islamic and western scholarship on poorly understood Qur'ānic formulae (such as *mā adrāka*, *qul*, and *rabb* [+definite noun]) and the disconnected (or "mysterious") letters that open twenty-nine Sūras. He then shows how an appreciation of earlier oracular texts, both Babylonian and Greek, can help us better to understand both features of the Qur'ān.

For his part Suleiman Mourad, by calling attention to various Qur'ānic passages that are often read in isolation, argues persuasively that the Qur'ān does not deny the death of Jesus. His chapter is followed by that of Clare Wilde, who examines quotations of the Qur'ān in early Christian Arabic literature, and investigates whether these quotations (many of which date to the early 'Abbāsid period) might indicate something of a pre-orthodox Islamic approach to the Qur'ān, if not a pre-canonical form of the Qur'ān. Thereafter Gerald Hawting addresses the ambiguity between human and angelic messengers in the Qur'ān. Noting that later Islamic exegesis attempted to draw distinct boundaries between the two, Hawting argues that this ambiguity reflects earlier Judaeo-Christian prophethood and angelology.

The fifth and final part of the present volume is "The Qur'ān and Biblical literature," by which is meant the Qur'ān's conversation not only with the canonical Bible, but also apocryphal and exegetical literature, including Talmudic, midrashic, and homiletic works. Therein Reuven Firestone first introduces the reader to the idea of the divine election of a people or a community in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. He then shows how the Qur'ān both insists that only individuals, not communities, merit election (usually in the context of anti-Jewish or Christian polemic), and also emphasizes that merit is to be won by obeying the Prophet and being included in God's chosen community. Waleed Ahmed addresses the Qur'ānic passages (Q 11:78–79; 15:71) on Lot's offer of his daughters to his hostile townspeople (cf. Genesis 19), illuminating both the intertextual nature of this material and its interpretation in traditional Islamic exegesis.

Joseph Witztum, in "Joseph among the Ishmaelites: Q 12 in light of Syriac sources," provides a detailed analysis of the Qur'ān's place in the larger exegetical tradition on the Joseph tale of Genesis. While western scholars have generally assumed that the Qur'ānic Joseph account is related to Jewish midrash, Witztum illustrates the Qur'ān's close conversation on this point with a largely neglected corpus of Syriac literature. Emran El-Badawi also provides new insight on the Qur'ān in the light of Syriac, with a case study on the language of condemnation. Through this study he argues that the Qur'ān is better compared to the Syriac, and not the Greek, New Testament. Finally Adam Silverstein analyzes the term *ṣarh*,

the name given to the structure that the Qur'ānic Pharaoh orders to be constructed, and examines the distinctive characteristics of the Pharaoh of the Bible, the Qur'ān, and later Islamic tradition. Thereby he uncovers the close relationship of the Pharaoh of the Qur'ān and the Pharaoh of Islamic tradition with (different currents of) Mesopotamian traditions. Thus the Qur'ān's intimate relationship with its Near Eastern religious context emerges.

The present volume, of course, is not the only work in Qur'ānic studies that explores this relationship. Indeed, much of this introduction is devoted to the general increase in scholarly activity on the Qur'ān. This introduction has also shown that recent scholarly activity has not succeeded in illuminating the ancient meaning of the Qur'ān. Still it seems to me that recent research in Qur'ānic studies is marked by two auspicious trends. First, an increasing number of Muslim scholars – in the West and the Islamic world – are becoming involved in critical research on the Qur'ān; many of these scholars have made a persuasive case that such research can play a positive role in religious reflection on the text. Second, and certain exceptions notwithstanding, recent critical scholarship on the Qur'ān has been largely shaped by a sympathetic response to the text of the Qur'ān itself. Instead of polemic, scholars involved in this movement are generally motivated by intellectual appreciation, even fascination, with the Qur'ān. If the present work might contribute positively to either of these trends, then – in my estimation at least – it might be judged a success.

Part I

Method in Qur'ānic studies

1 The historian, the believer, and the Qur'ān¹

Fred M. Donner

Can we understand the Qur'ān without knowing its historical context? The answer is, probably, no – but we have to try, because so far there is no alternative: the Qur'ān, at least from the perspective of Western historians, has yet be placed convincingly in a secure historical context. There is still no definite consensus on what the text originally was, what its original social setting and role may have been, how and when and where it came together, or even whether the Qur'ān that has existed for at least twelve centuries originated as a unitary document or whether it is, rather, a compilation of once separate materials coming, perhaps, from different communities.

Given this grave uncertainty over the Qur'ān's context, scholars must reverse the usual procedure when studying a text: rather than using the context to illuminate the meaning of the text, we must start with the Qur'ān text itself, and try to deduce from hints inside it what a plausible historical context (or several contexts, in case it is not a unitary text) might be.

The Qur'ān, unfortunately, offers few decisive clues that suggest anything precise about its original context. The very fact that it is written in Arabic – or at least, mostly in Arabic – gives us only a general idea of where and when the text may have emerged. (When, because we know that Arabic was barely written before the sixth century CE and only emerged as a literary idiom in the seventh.) There may be a more meaningful set of clues to be found in the Qur'ān's frequent references to "Biblical" material – that is, to characters and stories well known from the older Judaeo-Christian literary traditions of the Near East. But, given this obvious fact, what historical setting could have produced such a text? The Qur'ān's "Biblical" materials have attracted the attention of scholars since the beginning of serious studies of the Qur'ān in the West, and the hope remains strong that close study of these passages may help us to establish at least the Qur'ān's *literary* context, that is, its affiliation with other texts of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. We shall have more to say about this below, but for the moment we can note that efforts to pin down just which earlier literary materials may have the closest relationship to the Qur'ān have so far been inconclusive. In any case, even if we were

¹ I am grateful to Carel Bertram for helpful comments on the draft of this article.

able to determine more clearly the Qur'ān's literary context, doing so would not necessarily tell us exactly what its historical context was.

Muslim tradition, of course, provides great detail on the presumed historical context in which the Qur'ān appeared: the now-familiar story of the prophet Muḥammad, Meccan paganism, God's revelations to the prophet, Muḥammad's founding of a community in Medina, his struggles with his opponents, and the codification of the Qur'ān during the era of conquests that followed Muḥammad's death. This traditional Islamic "origins story," as I like to call it, has the virtue of a compelling plot-line, but it is deemed wanting by most Western scholars for at least two reasons. One is because it is a literary tradition of later – sometimes much later – date, and hence likely contains much anachronistic and idealizing material. This is a problem now familiar to almost everyone and I need not belabor it further here. The second reason the traditional origins story has been problematic for Western scholars is because of the way it presents Muḥammad's, and the Qur'ān's, relationship to Judaism and Christianity. For, in the traditional origins narrative, Jews are presented as hostile to Muḥammad, certainly not a source of inspiration to him, and Christians are entirely absent from the context in which Muḥammad lived and worked. One gets the sense that the tradition is not presenting us with an accurate picture of Muḥammad's relations with the earlier monotheisms, a feeling that is very strong today, when numerous recent studies have brought convincing evidence that Syriac Christianity and the Syriac language were in some still undefined way an important part of the Qur'ān's *Sitz im Leben* and had a significant influence on the text, or at least on parts of it.

It is striking, then, that despite the manifest inadequacies of the traditional Islamic origins narrative as a contextualization for the Qur'ān, most Western scholars have nonetheless based their understanding of the Qur'ān's context on that very origins narrative, accepting with lesser or greater modifications the framework provided by the *Sīra*. In particular, they have generally followed the classification of the Qur'ān's contents into Meccan and Medinan passages. This basic division, and the identification of three phases in the Meccan revelations, was a system first advanced in the West by Gustav Weil in 1844, and has been generally adopted by later scholars, albeit with many attempts to further refine the system (e.g. by Nöldeke and Schwally, Bell, Blachère, Nagel).

Perhaps most Western scholars adopted the basic framework provided by the *Sīra* simply because there is no real alternative: we lack almost entirely documents and contemporary sources for Islam's origins. Whatever the reason, we find that much Western scholarship – even as it pours criticism on the reliability of the traditions it broadly designates as the *Sīra* literature – tacitly or explicitly accepts at least the basic outlines of the traditional origins narrative when attempting to analyze the Qur'ān. This includes those many scholars who were particularly interested in establishing the nature of the relationship between Muḥammad and the Jews (and, possibly, Christians) of Arabia, such as Abraham Geiger, Charles C. Torrey, and Richard Bell. It includes also those who portrayed the life of the prophet Muḥammad in a relatively conservative or traditional way, such as Aloys Sprenger, William Muir, Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, William M. Watt,

Maxime Rodinson, and, relatively recently, Francis E. Peters. It includes some who have attempted a more radical re-evaluation of the traditional material in some way, such as Günter Lüling and Jacqueline Chabbi. It also underlies some studies devoted to the form of the Qur'ān text, such as that of Angelika Neuwirth.

We might say, then, that the mainstream of Western scholarship has historically been much more willing to challenge or reject the Islamic tradition's views on the nature of the Qur'ān itself, than it has been to criticize the tradition's view of the Qur'ān's historical context.

In recent years, several scholars have broken from this mould and have attempted to study the Qur'ān, or to depict the origins of Islam, in a manner that dispenses entirely with the contextual framework provided by the *Sīra*. John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* (1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978) seem to have begun the process;² in both works Wansbrough adopted a frankly agnostic attitude toward the origins period, refusing to speculate about the history of the prophet on the grounds that the reports about him in Muslim tradition tell us only about his later image, not about the historical Muḥammad. Wansbrough further asserted that the Qur'ān actually came together not in Arabia but rather in a monotheistic "sectarian milieu" somewhere in Mesopotamia or Syria, although he remained vague on exactly where. He also argued that the Qur'ān text crystallized as scripture gradually and much later than Muslim tradition says, claiming that it did not attain the status of scriptural canon until as much as 200 years after the time of Muḥammad. Wansbrough's hypothesis that the Qur'ān originated in an extra-Arabian monotheistic environment was further developed by Gerald Hawting.³ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook had also proposed, at the same time Wansbrough was publishing his ideas (1977), that the Qur'ān may have been a product of a north-Arabian or southern Syrian environment rather than of Mecca.⁴

Even more radical are those scholars who argue that the Prophet did not even exist, but is merely a literary construct assembled by Muslims of the eighth and later centuries CE in order to provide a heroic founder-figure for their new religion and state. The archaeologist Yehuda Nevo, inspired by Wansbrough's work and his own archaeological findings in the Negev, argued that a Byzantine withdrawal from Syria in the seventh century resulted in the rise of local Arab chieftains who consolidated their power to form the Umayyad state. In Nevo's view, both what is usually termed the "Islamic conquest" or "Arab conquest" and the figure of the Prophet Muḥammad (as well as Muḥammad's supposedly pagan

2 J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; idem., *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

3 G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

4 P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

environment in Mecca) were literary fictions.⁵ Volker Popp, in a long essay relying in part on numismatic evidence, also alleged that the Prophet never existed except as a literary fiction.⁶ In his view, the Byzantines were forced out of Syria by resurgent Nestorian Christian tribesmen from Iraq, formerly part of the Sasanian army, who made common cause with the Monophysites of Syria, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Near East to drive out the hated Orthodox. Having done so, these Iraqi Nestorians (according to Popp) established themselves as rulers in Syria – we know them as the Umayyads. Popp's theory is supported by an essay by Christoph Luxenberg in the same volume, in which he analyzes 'Abd al-Malik's inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, arguing that they represent a non-Trinitarian form of Christianity (the references to Muḥammad *rasūl Allāh*, Luxenberg claims, are allusions to Jesus, "God's highly-praised messenger").⁷

While independence of thought is certainly a virtue, I must admit that I find unconvincing these efforts to reconstruct Islam's origins and to explain the historical context of the Qur'ān in a manner that rejects completely the framework provided by Muslim tradition. To list quickly some of the obvious objections to the main skeptical hypotheses.

Non-existence of Prophet theory This willfully chooses to ignore early non-Muslim sources like the *Doctrina Jacobi* and the fragment from Matthew the Presbyter, as well as relatively early chronicles like those of Sebeos and John Bar Penkaye, all sources known for many years (and used by more responsible revisionist authors like Crone and Cook). And, to go a bit beyond the time of the Prophet, the assertion of Nevo and Popp, for example, that the early caliphs are also fictions, ignores the evidence of Chinese annals (which mention the murder of 'Uthmān)⁸ and the recent discovery of an inscription/graffito that mentions 'Umar.⁹ Nevo's assertion that the Byzantines withdrew from Syria intentionally (and even, in his view, encouraged the emergence of sectarian forms of Christianity as they did so) strikes one as, shall we say, out of character for the emperors in Constantinople. Popp's and Luxenberg's assertion that the Umayyads were Christians is also hard to accept. Popp's claim that the Nestorian tribesmen whom we later come to know as the Umayyads would have found such ready support among the Monophysites of Syria and elsewhere seems

far-fetched, in view of the fact that Monophysites and Nestorians had spent the previous century or so pouring polemical vitriol on each other (and not only on the Chalcedonians) for heresy. One also does not understand how these supposedly Nestorian tribesmen, formerly of the Sasanian army, made the theological shift to a non-trinitarian outlook on their way to becoming the Umayyads, as Luxenberg suggests, since the Nestorians certainly did not reject the notion of the Trinity.

Late crystallization theory This is demonstrably wrong; for one thing, the Qur'ān lacks the kinds of anachronisms that would have been inescapable had the text not stabilized before the first civil war (*fitna*) in 34/656 to 40/661.¹⁰ Moreover, recent work with some of the oldest extant Qur'ān manuscripts seems to confirm that the text was already established as scripture no later than the end of the first century AH.¹¹ On the other hand, the traditional view that the whole Qur'ān was the subject of secure oral recitation from the time of the Prophet must also be wrong, because recent work has shown that some parts of the text, at least, could only have been transmitted in written form, without the benefit of a controlling tradition of recitation.¹² So, while the basic *rasm* text must have been written down fairly early, its antecedents may have included both oral materials and written materials, some of which may go back to the Prophet or may even antedate the Prophet. And they may (or may not) be diverse in origin.

Sectarian milieu theory (That the Qur'ān crystallized in an environment of monotheistic debate, not in a pagan environment) This seems to be true.¹³ But the location of this monotheistic sectarian milieu is still far from clear; which brings us to the:

Extra-Arabian origins theory

This seems unlikely; there are some hints in the Qur'ān that the text, or parts of it, may indeed have coalesced in Arabia,¹⁴ and there is little, if any, positive evidence pointing to a likely venue outside Arabia.¹⁵ But we still don't know exactly where in Arabia, and it would have to have been in a monotheistic setting in Arabia

5 Y. D. Nevo and J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam. The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.

6 V. Popp, "Die frühe Islamgeschichte nach inschriftlichen und numismatischen Zeugnissen," in Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin (eds), *Die dunklen Anfänge. Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, n.p.: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2005, 16–123.

7 C. Luxenberg, "Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem," in K.-H. Ohlig and G.-R. Puin (eds), *Die dunklen Anfänge*, 124–47.

8 This and several other of the early sources mentioned above are collected in R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997.

9 M. Kawatoko, "Archaeological Survey of Najrān and Madīnah 2002," *Ajlāl* 18, 1426/2005 (45–59) 52, and Plate 8.12.C.

10 F.M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998, ch. 1, "The Date of the Qur'ānic Text," 35–63.

11 F. Déroche, "Manuscripts of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 3:255–73.

12 On this, see J.A. Bellamy, "Some proposed emendations to the text of the Koran," *JAOS* 113, 1993, 562–73; idem, "More proposed emendations to the text of the Koran," *JAOS* 116, 1996, 196–204; F.M. Donner, "Qur'ānic *furqān*," *JSS* 52, 2007, 279–300.

13 Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, has made a convincing case for this, although his insistence that the location of this sectarian milieu must be outside Arabia is not convincing.

14 Donner, *Narratives*, ch. 1.

15 Hawting's failure to provide any evidence for an extra-Arabian venue for the Qur'ān in his *The Idea of Idolatry* is quite striking, since this assertion is one of the main points of his book; evidently the evidence does not exist.

about which the tradition is silent; here perhaps the views of Lüling, who argued that the Qur'ān contained reworked liturgical materials of a hypothesized Meccan or Hijāzī Christian community, may bear further consideration.¹⁶ So even if Arabia does turn out to have been the historical context of the Qur'ān, as seems likely to this author, it may be an Arabian environment vastly different from anything with which we are familiar from the *Sīra*'s picture of Muḥammad's Mecca and Medina. As sheer speculation, for example, we might propose that different parts of the text hailed from different monotheistic communities in different parts of Arabia, and were pieced together in the early decades of the seventh century; but other possible speculative reconstructions might prove just as fruitful in explaining the limited evidence available.

Clearly, the *Sīra*'s vision, as a historical reconstruction of Islam's origins, has grave weaknesses. Moreover, a recent study of the fall of the Sasanians by Parvaneh Pourshariati on the basis of coins, seals, and a re-analysis of the Arabic sources suggests that there may be serious problems with the chronology of the traditional Muslim conquest narratives and, consequently, of the prophetic biography that is usually placed immediately before the conquest.¹⁷ But at this point, it seems likely that some aspects of the traditional *Sīra* framework may, in the end, emerge as historically sound. My own sense is that the tradition's presentation of the period following the *hijra* is more credible than it is for the period before the *hijra*, reports about which seem overwhelmingly legendary in character. Furthermore, in the process of reworking and redaction, to which early reports may have been subjected, the elements that would most likely have been subjected to the greatest modification (in order to bring them in line with later realities and needs) would be matters relating to theological doctrines and communal orientations – precisely those dimensions of the historical record that would be most crucial to understanding the historical context of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān between historians and believers

There is another issue to be addressed, however, when considering revisionist work on Islam's origins, besides its impact on the work of scholars who wish to understand the Qur'ān for scientific reasons. That other issue is, of course, the impact such work has on believing Muslims, and on the way they view the work of historians. Even the most heedless of historians among us must know that our investigations into Islam's origins, in particular into the context, origins, and history of the Qur'ān text, will be of the greatest interest to believers. Many believers may turn to the work of historians in the hope of securing a better

understanding of the Qur'ān and of the life of the Prophet who was, in their view, the vehicle of the Qur'ān's delivery to humankind. Although revisionist theories may be unsettling even to some historians – those who are loath to abandon the comfortable sense of mastery they long enjoyed over the traditional narrative material, or who have staked their reputations closely on a more traditional vision of Islam's origins – they are sure to be even more disturbing to believers, for whom the Qur'ān is nothing less than God's eternal word as revealed to His Prophet Muḥammad, their wellspring of guidance in this life, and their roadmap to eternal salvation in the life to come.

It may seem inappropriate even to raise this issue in a piece addressed to historians and critically-minded students of the Qur'ān as text. My goal in doing so, however, is twofold. On the one hand, I want to make clear that as historians and scholars we must pursue our researches wherever they lead us, even if the results of our explorations seem unsettling to some – whether they be fellow scholars or believing Muslims. On the other hand, I hope to show that the apparent clash between historians and believers over fundamentals of Muslims' faith is just that: apparent, and not real.

Most of you, I am sure, have already noted my allusion to the title of the classic book by Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, published in 1966.¹⁸ In this work Harvey, a historian of religion who before his retirement taught at Stanford University, made the point that a true believer in the doctrines of a revealed religion cannot also claim to be a historian of the crucial events of that religion, because the nature of the historian's craft requires that he or she remain intellectually free to challenge, to doubt, and if necessary to reject, the validity of any historical source, without exception. Harvey was concerned particularly with those professing Christians who have attempted to write the history of the origins of Christianity, as the subtitle of his book makes clear: *The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief*. He therefore focuses on showing that someone who is a sincere Christian, which involves a pre-commitment to certain gospel narratives as absolutely true, cannot also claim to be a historian studying those same gospel narratives, because his religious pre-commitments prevent him or her from subjecting those sources to the critical scrutiny that is the first obligation of the historian. But Harvey's analysis and his conclusions are just as relevant to those of us who wish to study Islam's origins, or, for that matter, the sensitive foundation-stories of any revealed religion. The most obvious implications for us would be that no believing Muslim – that is, someone who accepts Muḥammad as Prophet and the Qur'ān as God's revealed word – can also truly be a historian of Islam's origins. We might rephrase Harvey's insight in the following way: the believer in a revealed religion cannot also act as a historian of that religion's origins because the discipline of history is itself a kind of faith-system – a rival faith-system, if you will – in that history also requires absolute fidelity to certain basic assumptions. The historian's assumptions, however, are rooted in the use of reason rather than in reliance on received knowledge.

16 G. Lüling, *Der christliche Kult an der vorislamischen Kaaba*, Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1977; idem, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur'ān*, Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1974.

17 P. Pourshariati, *The Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008, 166–73 and 281–85.

18 V. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief*, New York: Macmillan, 1966.

We could, with Harvey, stop here and simply acknowledge the stark reality of an unbridgeable gulf separating the historian and the believer. But I think there is some benefit in following this line of thought a step or two further. To do so, however, requires us to consider a bit more fully the nature of the science or craft of historical study.

As we just noted, the historian, no less than the believer in a revealed religion, operates within a kind of faith-system – a system of assumptions that he or she takes as binding and absolute. I see in particular three such assumptions on the part of historians. The first is a belief in the power of human reason and logical analysis, and a commitment to using logic and reasoning to solve intellectual problems – including the problems inherent in reconstructing and interpreting the past, which is what historians normally do. Historians base their explorations of the past on reasoned analysis, even when they recognize that there are limits to what reasoned analysis can achieve in the reconstruction of the past. If, for example, the evidence for a particular historical phenomenon is very limited, the historian may only be able to make educated guesses based on such parallels as exist from other historical phenomena that seem comparable. The result of such an operation is not historical certainty, but rather a kind of approximation or, better, a tentative hypothesis about what *might* have happened in this particular case. Indeed, the historian's deductions about the past are *always* in some measure hypotheses, subject to amendment or even total rejection if new, contrary evidence comes to light. As a general rule, of course, deductions about historical phenomena for which very rich and diverse evidence exists are likely to be more "solid," that is, more or less unassailable in their main lines and only subject to revision in matters of detail or nuance. But even in the best-documented eras of history, the historian encounters gaps in the evidence that leave him or her essentially unable to interpret it. We know, for example, a great deal about the events of the end of World War II and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but historians are not agreed on why President Truman decided to bomb Japan with these weapons. Was it to make the cost of continued resistance clear to the Japanese and so to persuade them to surrender, thus saving thousands of lives (American and Japanese) that would have been lost had American forces needed to fight their way through the Japanese islands in pursuit of victory? Or was it to demonstrate that America already had the bomb and would use it if necessary, thus signaling to Josef Stalin not to advance his Soviet troops too far westward in Europe? Or were both considerations at play in Truman's mind, along possibly with others? Despite all we know about this era in history, we do not have the decisive evidence that could provide the historian with an unequivocal conclusion on Truman's motivations.

It is this fact – the almost inevitable contingency of all historical deductions – that makes the pursuit of history profoundly different from the "truths" embraced by a believer, even though both the historian and the believer might be said to be adherents of faith-systems. We now see that the faith-systems of believers and historians are of different kinds. Whereas the believer accepts without question a certain vision of the past, the historian accepts without question *nothing* about the past; his "faith" is an absolute faith in his *methods*, not in the *results*

of his analysis, even though he may be able to defend his deductions with compelling logical argument, for he realizes that his results remain contingent pending the discovery of new relevant evidence, or the cogent re-evaluation of existing evidence.

The second tenet of faith of the historian is a belief in what we might call the essential humanness of humanity across time and space. In other words, the historian believes that people of other times, other places, and even other cultures share with those of us alive today essential human qualities – emotions, needs, desires; for if they did not, we could not hope to understand them and their motivations. In the faith-system of the historian, people of past times are *not* an alien breed; they are human like us and so can be understood by us. The historian must, of course, make great efforts to understand the different cultural systems in which people of the past lived, because cultures shape profoundly how people act or react in a given situation. But it is generally agreed that this is possible, so that the actions of people in the past can be understood and evaluated by a process akin to metaphor linking "us" with "them." And, indeed, it is often this quasi-metaphorical connection between "us" and "them" that makes their past relevant and meaningful to us, the very reason we wish to study their past in the first place and make it part of our own history.

Historians also make a third assumption, or have a third article of faith, if you will, beyond their belief in reason and in the innate humanness of peoples of all eras: and that is a belief in the immutability of the laws of nature. It is not merely the *people* of earlier eras that resemble people today; the *physical world* in which those earlier people lived also operated according to the same principles we can see in operation around us. Since the historian explains events of the past by a kind of metaphor with the present, his efforts would be futile if the universe or physical environment did not always operate according to the same rules – for example, if the laws of gravity did not apply always and everywhere, or if a single physical object (or person) could be in two different places at the same time.

It is precisely here that the historian and the believer in a revealed religion come most acutely into the conflict described by Harvey. For revealed religions always involve the supernatural. That is, they describe events in which the divine, which transcends nature, interferes in some way with the normal processes of the natural world, whether it is God parting the Red Sea to save Moses and the Children of Israel, or God resurrecting the crucified Jesus from the dead, or God downloading installments of His word into the prostrate, perspiring person of the Prophet Muhammad. Such events are outside the realm of the natural, beyond the normal functioning of the physical world as we know it. That is, indeed, precisely *why* they are remembered and celebrated by believers: it is their supernatural character that makes them special, miraculous, and the focus of commemoration and faith.

The supernatural, however, is by definition beyond the competence of the historian. For the historian, as we have seen, can only evaluate reports on the assumption that the normal laws of nature apply at all times. Events of a supernatural kind exist on a different plane, so to speak, than historical events, a plane that the

historian cannot access. Confronted with a report that describes a supernatural event, the historian can evaluate the validity of the report only as far as what we might call the external trappings of that supernatural event. So, for instance, if he had sufficient other sources, he might be able to confirm that Moses and the Israelites marched from the Nile valley on a certain day, that Pharaoh's army left in pursuit some time thereafter, and that somehow the Israelites show up at a later time in the Sinai, and that Pharaoh's army never returns. He could say something like, "The story seems to be true to this extent, that it fits other known facts of who was where and when, etc." But the parting of the waters – the actual supernatural event that, according to the story, was God's act of salvation for the Israelites – this the historian simply cannot evaluate. He might be tempted to say that the parting of the waters is a pious legend, that is a fabrication, inserted into an otherwise plausible scenario ("historicized" as I like to say);¹⁹ but as a historian, he simply cannot affirm that it is true. By the same token, however, the historian also cannot prove that the parting of the waters as reported in the narrative is false; as a secular-minded person, that is, as a historian, he can say that he doesn't believe the story, but because it involves an event that is explicitly represented as supernatural, it is simply beyond his competence as a historian to evaluate its supernatural content.

The implications of this fact are, I think, far from trivial. Since the faith-claims of revealed religions reside above all in supernatural events, and since the historian and historical analysis are unable to evaluate these supernatural events, the work of the historian cannot threaten, or call into question, the faith-claims of such religions. By examining the traditional narratives that describe the circumstances in which the supernatural events occur, the historian may be able to debunk (or confirm) many aspects of those stories, but by doing so he does not, and cannot, discredit the faith-claims themselves. This fact should be of some comfort to believers in revealed religions who find the work of historians on their sacred traditions unsettling.

The fact that the work of historical analysis and the faith-claims of revealed religions exist on different planes that do not intersect has another important implication – in a sense, the inverse of the first just noted. Just as historical analysis is incapable of invalidating supernaturally-based faith-claims, we can say also that historical narrations cannot validate faith-claims, either. This realization will not bother the historian at all, but it may come as a surprise to many believers who have come to revere the origins narratives that revealed religions use to explain the supernatural events surrounding their beginnings – whether these stories be the gospel narratives of Jesus's resurrection, or the Hebrew Bible's account of Moses receiving the law, or the *Sīra*'s depiction of how Muḥammad received the Qur'ān. The basic fact, however, is that the purveyors of these stories were attempting to do that which cannot be done by implying, or asserting outright, that the narratives they related confirmed the validity of the supernatural events and the faith-claim rooted in them. They may well have believed that this was possible

for them. But, as we have seen, the supernatural is simply beyond the capacity of historical discourse to engage. Believers must believe what they believe, in short, *on faith* (as we say), not because a story "proves" the truth of their religious beliefs – for no narrative that can be historically verified can actually do this. Those believers who are convinced of the truth of a religion's faith-claims merely because of the cogency of its origins narratives – and they are many – are leaning on a weak reed indeed; and if their faith cannot survive without the crutch of such narratives, then we might say that they are not endowed with a very robust faith. But, by the same token, no historian can pretend to be able to disprove such faith-claims themselves.

Where, then, does all this leave us in relation to the study of the Qur'ān and its historical context? Islamic tradition presents the revelation of the Qur'ān as resembling what might be called a "nervous crisis" on the part of the Prophet: that is, when he was receiving the divine word, Muḥammad is said to have fallen to the ground, oblivious to the world around him, trembling and perspiring heavily; then, after he recovered, he found that a new piece of revelation was burned indelibly into his memory so that he could recite it.²⁰ There are also numerous reports about how the revelation assumed written form, and how it was edited together to form the *muṣḥaf* or Qur'ānic vulgate, the uniformity of which is in any case unclear given the existence of numerous widely-accepted "canonical variants."²¹ Let us suppose that serious historical research proves that these accounts about the manner of revelation cannot be true; does that prove that the Qur'ān is not divine word? Or let us take matters a step further, and imagine, for the sake of our discussion, that somehow we discovered a videotape of Muḥammad working privately in his study, composing passages of the Qur'ān while referring to older religious texts from his personal library, such as the Hebrew Bible, various Syriac lectionaries, and other writings from the late antique Judaeo-Christian tradition. Would this discovery prove that the Qur'ān was not divine revelation, but merely Muḥammad's own creation? The answer, of course, even in this preposterous case, is no – for the simple reason that no one can claim with any certainty or authority to know how a transcendent God would choose to communicate with a prophet. Perhaps God's chosen method, at least in this case, was to select a person to be His prophet, then to put in the path of that person a variety of suggestive

20 A selection of reports on this is found in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt* (ed. Sachau), I/1, 131–32.

21 On the traditional reports about the collection of the Qur'ān, see *EP*, "al-Kur'ān," section 3.a, "The 'collection' of the Qur'ān" (A.T. Welch); *GdQ2*, Zweiter Teil: *Die Sammlung des Qurāns* by F. Schwally; J. Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 117–240; H. Motzki, "The collection of the Qur'ān. A reconsideration of Western views in light of recent methodological developments," *Der Islam* 78, 2001, 1–34; J. Burton, "The Collection of the Qur'ān," *EQ* 1:351–61. On the canonical variants, see for an introduction *EP*, "al-Kur'ān," section 3.b, "Variant readings and Companion codices" (A.T. Welch); also E. Beck, "Der uthmānische Kodex in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts," *Orientalia* 14, 1945, 355–73; idem, "Arabiyya, Sunna und 'amma in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts," *Orientalia* 15, 1946, 180–224; idem, "Die Kodizesvarianten der Amṣār," *Orientalia* 16, 1947, 353–76.

19 On "historicization" in this sense, see Donner, *Narratives*, 209–14.

texts, and finally to inspire the prophet to assemble the revelation from them. Such an assumption is no less plausible than the idea that prophecy takes the form of a "nervous crisis." Even if the historian were to discover that the Qur'ān, or some other "revealed" text, was actually a pastiche of phrases taken from earlier texts, that discovery would say nothing about the status of the text itself as divine word. The fact that long-standing tradition in the Near East viewed prophecy as a process that resembled a nervous crisis is really irrelevant to the question of the Qur'ān's status as divine word, which is a matter of faith for the believer to decide for him or herself. A convincing story in this genre does not confirm the divine status of the text, nor does proving such a story false disconfirm the divine status of the text.

I raise these points because, as I survey recent scholarly discussion about the Qur'ān, I sometimes see evidence of two trends that threaten to interfere with the scientific pursuit of the historical truth, and therefore do not belong in our discourse. The first trend is a tendency of some conservative and doctrinaire Muslims to criticize those historians who engage in critical scrutiny of the traditions of Islam's origins on the grounds that, by doing so, they undermine the faith of Muslims. Such critics sometimes also imply or state explicitly, as a corollary, that the historians who are engaged in this nefarious work must be motivated by religious polemic or personal animus against Islam. As we have seen, however, the first part of this accusation is simply unfounded: historical research cannot touch the faith-claims of believers, which exist independent of the realm and tools of the historian. It is true that the historian's discoveries may require believers to change their view of cherished origins narratives, requiring them to see them now as symbolic or allegorical stories used to articulate their faith-claims, rather than as literal records of the past, but the transcendent theological propositions attached to those narratives carry the same potency either way. The implication for those of us who wish to engage in such historical research is that we should go full speed ahead and not trim our sails to placate irate believers. We should, to be sure, try to explain to believers (and to everyone else) exactly why our work is not in any way a threat to their faith, perhaps along the lines suggested above, and make it clear to them that we do not dispute their right to believe as they wish; ideally, we should have believers as allies in our researches, not as adversaries. But since this cannot always be, we should not allow ourselves to be deterred from our work by the misguided ire of those who fail to understand the radical discontinuity that separates belief from history.

The second trend that seems to me sometimes manifest in studies of the Qur'ān and its historical context is almost the direct opposite of the preceding one, but it is nonetheless relevant to the question of the historian and the believer. Many early Western studies of Islam's origins were polemical, carried out by scholars who did, in fact, have a religious agenda. Even some highly learned works, such as C.C. Torrey's *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*²² or R. Bell's *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*,²³ seem to me to fall in this category. Often

such works used crass reductionism in an effort, or with the hope, to demonstrate that, in some way, Islam was derivative and therefore inauthentic, "false," because some key components of it could be traced to another (usually their favored) tradition, notably Judaism or Christianity.

The reductionist strategem, however, although often satisfying as polemic, is superficial as a tool in the history of ideas. The bare fact that some story, concept, phrase, or concern was "borrowed" from another, older tradition does tell us something, maybe even something of interest, but such borrowing qualifies as a routine fact of history, not the foundation for a far-reaching value judgment. For the polemicist who engages in reductionist argument usually fails to ask other questions that are equally important, or even more important, than the question of what was borrowed. One must also ask, for example, what was *not* borrowed from the older tradition. And why were some things borrowed and others not? What purpose did the thing borrowed serve in the original tradition, and what role did it play in the new one? Does the borrowed item undergo a transformation of meaning in its passage into the new tradition? These and other questions make it clear that an act of borrowing, far from merely showing the dependence of one tradition on another, actually qualifies as a creative act, for the setting in which the "borrowed" item appears is often entirely different from its old setting, and is sometimes imbued with completely new meaning.

I have made this little detour into earlier studies of the Qur'ān and the problem of reductionism because I think that the problem persists even today. I am convinced that most of the scholars who work on the Qur'ān and its historical context today are motivated by a desire to discover the historical truth about how the text came to be and how it assumed the form in which we now have it. But I sometimes get the uneasy feeling, as I read recent work on the Qur'ān, that some of it is a little too enthusiastic about finding simplistic textual parallels, without bothering to ask about all the other dimensions of cultural transmission: the omissions, selectivity, transformations, etc.²⁴ This satisfaction with superficial "borrowings" smacks of the kind of reductionist approach described above (now focused more on Christian parallels, rather than the Jewish parallels that were more popular in the early twentieth century), and the unseemly enthusiasm that is sometimes palpable in such writings suggests that these authors are motivated on some deep, personal level not so much by the historian's desire to understand Islam and the Qur'ān, as by the polemicist's desire to diminish, discredit, or refute Islam. As historians, we must continue our critical work, all the while being careful to hold at arm's length both Muslim apologists who would have us blunt our critical weapons, and scholars who would abuse those same critical weapons for polemical purposes. For the historian – including the historian who wishes to know the Qur'ān's historical context – must always strive to *understand* the past, an undertaking for which polemical critique, no less than apologetic advocacy, can only stand as an obstacle.

22 C.C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1933.

23 R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, London: Macmillan, 1926.

24 As an example, one might cite the work by G. Sawma, *The Qur'an Misinterpreted, Mistranslated, and Misread. The Aramaic Language of the Qur'an*, Plainsboro, N.J.: G. Sawma, 2006.

2 Studies in Qur'ānic vocabulary

The problem of the dictionary

Andrew Rippin

The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen a flurry of publications which have significantly enriched lexicographical resources for the study of the Qur'ān. These include *The Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'ānic Usage* by Elsaid Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem published in 2008, a book that emerged shortly after the publication of Arne A. Ambros and Stephan Procházka's *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, which arrived in 2004, and their *The Nouns of Koranic Arabic Arranged by Topics: A Companion Volume to the "Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic,"* from 2006. In 2002 Martin R. Zammit's *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic* appeared. Over the years a quantity of works has also appeared from India and Pakistan, and, more recently, from the Arab world; a Google search under "dictionary Holy Quran" reveals several impressive works available for immediate download as well as a significant number available for purchase.¹ These works do not have the scholarly "cachet" of the newly produced works, are frequently directly derived from translations, and are commonly mediated through a number of languages (Arabic to Urdu to English being a common pattern). Overall, however, it would be accurate to say that it appears that we are enjoying an embarrassment of riches when it comes to the development of lexicographical resources on the Qur'ān. This exciting development of the availability of so many research tools, something I have long felt that the field needed,² has, however, led me to reflect critically upon the nature of dictionaries and our goals in constructing them.

European-language dictionaries of Qur'ānic Arabic first appeared in the late nineteenth century with names of significant scholars attached to some early efforts

– F.H. Dieterici in 1881³ and C.A. Nallino in 1893,⁴ for example. The otherwise unknown John Penrice produced the most lasting and often reprinted work, *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-ān with copious grammatical references and explanation of the text* in 1873.⁵ Based primarily on the commentary of al-Bayḍāwī (d. c. 1291), Penrice's work is terse but certainly not unhelpful. There have been no major non-English dictionaries specifically on the Qur'ān to appear in recent years, as far as I am aware. But, overall, there remains the question of what has really been accomplished by the new works that have appeared in the past decade.

Badawi and Abdel Haleem's work provides an example of a fully developed dictionary that serves as a suitable basis for consideration of the genre. The work highlights contextual meaning within the Qur'ān, conveyed by the quotation (in Arabic script and with English translation) of illustrative passages from the Qur'ānic source text. The definitions of the words are derived from classical commentaries on the Qur'ān and standard classical dictionaries, although no indication is given of the source of any specific meaning. Entries are structured by root, with the general Arabic meaning of the stem provided (i.e. they are not limited to Qur'ānic meaning), followed by a list of the derivatives of the root and the frequency with which each derivative is used in the Qur'ān. The body of the entry then provides an explanation of the grammatical category of each derivative and its meaning, followed by one illustration (more when idioms are involved) from the Qur'ān of each sense of the word. The order in which the derivatives are presented follows that of 'Abd al-Bāqī's standard concordance.⁶ The translations of the Qur'ānic passages are primarily derived from Abdel Haleem's recent version,⁷ modified as needed by the demands of the dictionary; however, a recent review of the work by Michel Lagarde⁸ points out the inconsistencies within the work, focusing on where the translation of a proof text varies under different head words, suggesting that the authors divided up their work but seemingly did not correlate their results.

Bilingual dictionaries exist for different reasons and have different goals in mind, all of them quite appropriate. A dictionary can be constructed for translation (and learning) purposes where connotations of target language at the current time – in our case, the twenty-first century – must be taken into account as a primary factor. This can apply to monolingual dictionaries as well, in the sense of "updating" the language of a classical text. A dictionary can also be constructed on a historical basis, trying to put the meaning of individual words into the context of its time and place to the extent that is possible. Of course, that too must be done with attention to how the

1 For example: A.K. Parekh, *Complete Easy Dictionary Of The Qur'ān*, Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, 2003 (follows the order of the text and provides single-word glosses; similar versions are available on the Internet); A.M. Omar, *The Dictionary Of The Holy Qur'ān*, Hockessin, DE: Noor Foundation, 2005 (3rd ed.); M.G. Farid, *Dictionary of the Holy Qur'ān with References and Explanation of the Text*, London: Islam International Publications, 2006, under the auspices of the Ahmadiyya (available online: <http://www.alislam.org/quran/dictionary/dictionary_quran.pdf>). See also online <http://www.quran-st.net/index_of_the_vocabulary_of_the_holy_quran-1.htm>? Far more sophisticated and functional is <<http://corpus.quran.com>> (all websites accessed January 31, 2011).

2 See my entry "Tools for the scholarly study of the Qur'ān", *EQ*, 5:294–300.

3 F.H. Dieterici, *Arabisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch zum Koran und Tier und Mensch vor dem König der Genien*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1881.

4 C.A. Nallino, *Chrestomathia Qorani Arabica*, Leipzig: Sumptibus W. Gerhard, 1893.

5 London: Henry S. King and Co, 1873. The work has been reprinted many times and is available at Google Books in full.

6 *Al-Mu'jam al-mufaḥras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1945.

7 *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

8 Review of E. Badawi, M. Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'ānic Usage*, in *Islamochristiana* 24, 2008, 296–98.

proposed meanings of the source words are used today, so the difference between these two goals is certainly not an absolute one and is probably more one of emphasis rather than absolutes. The historical dictionary may be felt to be more attuned to scholarly purposes but the functionality of basic dictionaries cannot be denied either.

There are many complexities that go into making a dictionary, which compilers must consider. By reflecting upon the choices that recent compilers have made, I hope to provide some insights into the merits of individual works, as well as thoughts about the direction of future work that will meet scholarly needs and goals.

It must be observed at the outset that Qur'ānic vocabulary is quite limited in scope and a high proportion of words are used only occasionally.⁹ Robert Brunschvig's 1956 article on the scope of common Arabic words that are not found in the Qur'ān remains a significant reminder of this fact.¹⁰ In a similar manner, other resources such as word frequency lists and thematically organized analyses of vocabulary such as those compiled by Ambros¹¹ and, before him, Allard¹² can be helpful. Such semantic classifications allow insight into the character of the vocabulary that is employed (and not employed) in the Qur'ān. The extent to which a dictionary can engage in such reflections is open to debate but it certainly can (and must) provide the basic source material for such investigations.

Dictionaries are conveyers of ideological information as well, and compilers as well as users need to be aware of such positioning.¹³ To illustrate this one may usefully look at the way a controversial word is treated. In Badawi and Abdel Haleem the entry under the root *ḡ-r-b*, for example, cites the oft-disputed Q 4:34, dealing with discipline of wives, as an illustration of the meaning "to hit/strike" for *ḡaraba*. Another ten senses of the root are provided: to beat; to make a clanging sound, to stamp; to travel about, to hit the road; to cut through; to set forth (a parable); to compare, contrast; to secure, tighten; to seal; to raise, to erect; to brand, to stamp. A modernist apologetic sense is omitted here but certainly may be found in other works of a popular character, where meanings such as "chastise"¹⁴ are to be found.

9 See Shawkat Toorawa's contribution to this volume.

10 R. Brunschvig, "Simples remarques negatives sur le vocabulaire du Coran," *Studia Islamica*, 5, 1956, 19–32; English trans.: "Simple negative remarks on the vocabulary of the Qur'ān," in A. Rippin (ed.) *The Qur'an: style and contents*, Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2001, 285–96; G.U. Yule, *The Statistics of Literary Style*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944, 45–47 (cited in F.E. Greenspan, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew. A Study of the Phenomenon and Its Treatment since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms*, Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984, 31, n. 3) points out that frequency tables of vocabulary usage are misleading because they ignore the largest group, words not used at all.

11 A.A. Ambros, "Eine Lexikostatistik des Verbs im Koran," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 77, 1987, 9–36; idem, "Gestaltung und Funktionen der Biosphäre im Koran," *ZDMG* 140, 1990, 290–325. A development of this work is, of course, A.A. Ambros, S. Procházka, *The Nouns of Koranic Arabic Arranged by Topics: A Companion Volume to the "Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic"*, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2006.

12 M. Allard, *Analyse conceptuelle du Coran sur cartes perforées*, Paris: Mouton, 1963.

13 Debates over the inclusion of "slang" or "swear" words illustrate the basic point.

14 See, e.g., <http://www.alislam.org/quran/dictionary/dictionary_quran.pdf>, 503.

The treatment of *ḡ-r-b* provides an interesting instance with which to compare the work of Ambros in terms of the general goals of a dictionary. For the root, Ambros lists four main senses – to strike or beat; to make (a way); to coin (a parable); to describe or characterize allegorically – with attention paid to the way the meanings are formed with prepositions, and with an extensive analysis of how the verb is used with the word *mathal*, "parable." This difference between the two dictionaries suggests some differentiation in goals: Badawi and Abdel Haleem's emphasis falls on semantics, while Ambros combines that with grammatical analysis. Ambros's approach has provoked the objection from a reviewer that it is "more like a philologist's collection of words as curiosities than an attempt to explain their meaning or connect them together in any way" and "cryptic, condensed and difficult to read."¹⁵ The lack of clarity of what any given dictionary is supposed to accomplish and how it should go about its task is thereby well illustrated.

The place of contemporary scholarly reflection is also of some interest, especially given the proliferation of works which emerge from outside scholarly circles. For example, in Badawi and Abdel Haleem's work the word *al-ṣamad*, which has been considered extensively in scholarly literature,¹⁶ is simply glossed as the divine attribute "Eternal, Dependable." Ambros provides the traditional gloss but adds "more prob. 'compact, massive', hence 'undivided' " with reference to his own article on the topic.

How foreign words, proper names and other words that do not fit the root structure are to be treated is another critical question that every author of a dictionary must face. Badawi and Abdel Haleem make note of words that are considered to be foreign loans (it is hard for a lexicographer not to, given the problem of integrating some of the words into a root-based structure), but they quote approvingly¹⁷ C.H.M. Versteegh's statement, "It is much more difficult to understand how the assumption of a foreign origin for obscure Qur'ānic words can contribute to their understanding" (although Versteegh was referring to classical Arab treatments of the subject¹⁸ and not to the contemporary lexicographer's task). Proper names always prove problematic in this respect. In Badawi and Abdel Haleem most names are placed alphabetically and not analysed by root, although 'Isā, for example, is found under the root 'y-s, "camels of good stock." While that entry acknowledges that most philologists do understand Jesus's name as a borrowing from "Hebrew or Syriac," the authors also affirm that some wish to see it as derived from the meaning of the root. The criterion used to establish which words should be entertained as

15 H.B. Haleem, Review of A.A. Ambros, S. Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic and The Nouns of Koranic Arabic Arranged by Topics: A Companion Volume to the "Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic"*, in *The Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, 2008, 400–02. Haleem is thanked in the preface to Badawi and Abdel Haleem's dictionary for assistance in "undertaking numerous revisions" (along with several other people) as well as in Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, xxxvi.

16 E.g., A.A. Ambros, "Die Analyse von Sure 112 – Kritiken, Synthesen, neue Ansätze," *Der Islam*, 63, 1986, 219–47.

17 Badawi and Abdel Haleem, xxi.

18 The quote is from his *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 1993, 89.

foreign is not clear: no mention is made of a foreign influence on the meaning of the words *furqān* or *dīn*, for example. Ambros, it should be noted, solves the lexicographical problem of proper names by placing them in a separate section of the dictionary (as he also does with pronouns and particles – items which are given extensive treatment in their alphabetic position in Badawi and Abdel Haleem).

Such observations lead us immediately to consideration of the controversial role of etymology in establishing meaning. Walid Saleh has recently written very critically about the use of etymology by scholars dealing with the Qur'ān.¹⁹ At times Saleh seems to go so far as to wish to reject all notions of etymology, or at least those that are outside the realm of Arabic usage. However, if we understand etymology to be the history of a word's usage and not the determination (and the implied limitation) of its meaning, it certainly is of some historical interest. Etymology cannot determine, dictate or limit meaning, but it is a tool. In this regard it must be commented that Zammit's *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic* is not a dictionary as such, nor even a resource for etymological investigation (although it may be useful that way) but an attempt to define the relationship of a defined corpus of Arabic in relationship to other Semitic languages and thus to determine the historical stability of cognate words. The results show that one-third of roots have no parallel across languages. Words are also analysed according to semantic category versus other languages, with the result that commonalities are found extending across the range of semantic categories. The final result indicates a close link between Arabic and both North-West and South Arabian Semitic languages while at the same time recognizing the extensive independence of Arabic itself (given the one-third of words that have no parallel).

While the above comments by no means cover all of the complexities that compilers of dictionaries face (and may indeed be thought to be a rather random collection of reflections), they do provide some ideas that may help refine what it is that dictionaries could helpfully accomplish in order to meet scholarly needs. In order to clarify this further, two sample instances of minor but problematic words from the Qur'ān will be of some assistance.

The first example deals with an instance in which contextual usage in the text of the Qur'ān does not provide sufficient data to determine a meaning beyond something extremely general. The question then becomes one of where else to turn for information. One place is in later usage of a word, often even in a modern context, because of an underlying suggestion that vocabulary in the Qur'ān preserves and maintains a deep sense of continuity and is not just a usage that is reflective of an isolated Qur'ānic usage. The exegetical tradition is also drawn upon as a reserve of medieval understandings.

Talh is commonly defined in dictionaries as either acacia or banana, two meanings that certainly have a common element (trees providing shade) but are clearly

quite different.²⁰ The debate between these two meanings is, on one level, clear. *Talh* today means a specific kind of Acacia tree found in Africa and Arabia. But to what extent can we extrapolate backwards in this way? To what extent has the modern usage been affected by the tradition of lexicography connected to the Qur'ān?²¹ Would it ever be possible to determine so specifically what Muḥammad and his compatriots might have meant by this word? While modern meanings cannot simply be declared to be irrelevant, the pitfalls must be acknowledged.

What can history tell us? The word *could* be bananas; that fruit was known and cultivated in the Mediterranean around the time of the rise of Islam. Even if one thought this a good meaning, it is worthy of note that Penrice says the meaning is "bananas or plantain", which draws attention to the fact that we still might wish to determine what *kind* of banana *talh* is.²²

These meanings are deduced from the context of the Qur'ānic passage in which the word is used through a speculative method.

The Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right!), mid thornless lote-trees (*sidr makhḍūd*) and serried acacias (*talh mandūd*) and spreading shade (*zill mamdūd*).

(Q 56:27–30, Arberry translation)

Heaven is the reward for the "companions of the right" and the surroundings are conceived to be appropriate. The word *mandūd* which comes after *talh* is understood as a description meaning "neatly stacked or piled on top of one another" (although that word itself is hardly transparent, given its only other usage is in Qur'ān 11:82, where it follows the much-discussed term *siḥl*, often understood as a reference to clay tablets), taken to refer to the leaves of what is understood to be a tree in conjunction with the preceding *sidr*, lote-tree, that is described as being "without thorns," *makhḍūd*. Heaven being a place with shade that is provided by trees seems to be confirmed by the final phrase *zill mamdūd*, "spreading shade." Here we face contextual meaning derived through an imaginative rendering combined with a notion of the historical usage of Arabic that is muddled with contemporary usage.

Some of these sorts of issues might be solved by drawing on a greater range of lexicographical resources. F. Quinsat²³ has drawn attention to the need to draw

19 "The etymological fallacy and Qur'ānic studies: Muhammad, paradise, and late antiquity," in A. Neuwirth et al. (eds), *The Qur'ān in Context*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 649–98. Available online at: <http://www.safarmer.com/Indo-Eurasian/Walid_Saleh.pdf> (accessed January 31, 2011)

20 See M.I.H. Farooqi, *Plants of the Qur'ān*, Lucknow: Sidrah Publishers, 1992, 124–27, on "Acacia or banana;" also see L.J. Musselman, *Figs, Dates, Laurel, and Myrrh. Plants of the Bible and the Qur'ān*, Portland, OR: Timber Press, 2007, 38–41, on Acacia.

21 See L. Kopf, *Studies in Arabic and Hebrew Lexicography*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1976, esp. 19–45.

22 See Andrew M. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the early Islamic World. The Diffusion of Crops and Farming Techniques, 700–1100*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, Chapter 8 on the banana and plantain.

23 F. Quinsat, "Le Coran et la lexicographie historique de l'arabe," in M.S. Kropp (ed.), *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'ān. The Question of a Historico-critical Text of the Qur'ān*, Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2007, 175–91, and "Le fichier historique du lexique arabe (FHILA)," *Fondation Max van Berchem Bulletin* 22, December 2008, 1–3.

upon the inventory of poetry, inscriptions, papyri, coins (obviously a limited range of vocabulary but potentially still significant) and Epigraphical South Arabian in producing a true resource for the study of Qur'ānic vocabulary. Additionally, however, it could be that looking to a Jewish and/or Christian background for some words and images might be helpful.

The second example I wish to draw attention to suggests that even then such an approach does not answer all the questions by any means. The example is that of *abraṣ*, leprosy, used in Qur'ān 3:49 and 5:110.

And He will teach him the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Gospel, to be a Messenger to the Children of Israel saying, "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. I will create for you out of clay as the likeness of a bird; then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the leave of God. I will also heal the blind and the leper, and bring to life the dead, by the leave of God. I will inform you too of what things you eat, and what you treasure up in your houses. Surely in that is a sign for you, if you are believers."

(Q 3:48–49, Arberry translation)

When God said, "Jesus Son of Mary, remember My blessing upon thee and upon thy mother, when I confirmed thee with the Holy Spirit, to speak to men in the cradle, and of age; and when I taught thee the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Gospel; and when thou createst out of clay, by My leave, as the likeness of a bird, and thou breathest into it, and it is a bird, by My leave; and thou healest the blind and the leper by My leave, and thou bringest the dead forth by My leave; and when restrained from thee the Children of Israel when thou camest unto them with the clear signs, and the unbelievers among them said, 'This is nothing but sorcery manifest.'"

(Q 5:110, Arberry translation)

The English word "leprosy" is used to translate Hebrew *šāra'at* in the Hebrew Bible (esp. Leviticus 13–14) and Greek *lepra* in the New Testament (Matthew 8:2–4; Luke 17:13–17), although those original words are generally thought not to correspond to what we call today "leprosy" in its technical sense, that is, Hansen's disease caused by the bacillus *Mycobacterium leprae*.²⁴ Certainly all the words refer to skin diseases of some sort. In the New Testament, the word that is translated as "leprosy" refers to what was understood to be a ritually unclean skin disease; contagion and isolation are associated with it. Such senses continue in Muslim texts. In *ḥadīth* literature, for example, Muḥammad is quoted as saying, "A Muslim should flee from the leper as he would flee from the lion."²⁵ Usually

24 For a good summary see D.P. Wright, R.N. Jones, "Leprosy," in D.N. Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 4:277–82.

25 E.g. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 76, "Kitāb al-Ṭibb," ("Book of Medicine") 19, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1420/1999, 4:20.

the word *judhām* is used in such passages, that word having a root sense of being cut off or mutilated. What that usage does suggest is that a notion of leprosy (understood as a curse resulting from immorality) did exist in pre-Islamic times (a fact verified by modern medical examination upon bodies found with evidence of it). It appears that both *abraṣ* and *judhām* are used to refer to same affliction,²⁶ in the sense that the connotations are the same – contagion, isolation, disfigurement – and both are understood to be ritually impure skin diseases.

In Badawi and Abdel Haleem's dictionary under *b-r-ṣ* it is stated that the word means "one who is afflicted with vitiligo (disorder causing loss of skin pigmentation), the word is also taken, against good evidence to the contrary, to mean leper." Now, both of the Qur'ānic instances occur in the context of Jesus's healing. It is clear that previous translators have taken the New Testament context as their guide to how the word should be rendered in English, with "heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, cure lepers, raise the dead" being virtually an idiom in English with reference to Jesus. The root of the problem may well be that the underlying Greek word is rendered by the English cognate "leper" while the technical meaning of the word has shifted in English, because it is now thought that what is described in the Bible is not what we mean today by leprosy. We are faced here with a difficult situation for a translator or dictionary maker. However that may be, it is also clear that to translate the Arabic word as "vitiligo" is to lose the resonances of the English Bible translation tradition.

It would be reasonable in this situation to ask about how the word has been understood in post-Qur'ānic times and what word is used in post-Islamic times to refer to leprosy. This may clarify whether this is a particular issue of translation into English (and other European languages?) or if, in fact, the word in Arabic has come to mean leprosy in the technical sense. If the latter, then the issue becomes a historical one: did the word mean leprosy at the time of Muḥammad or not? Or, is this an issue of the difficulty of translation: to what extent does the translator (or the bilingual dictionary maker – the two are clearly accomplishing the same goal) take into account the culture of the target language and its associations? Or should the source language drive all meaning? Intelligibility versus accuracy may be one way of framing this dilemma.

The example of *abraṣ* takes us back to the issue of the necessity of defining the goals of a dictionary. What does it mean for Badawi and Abdel Haleem to suggest a rejection of "leprosy" as a meaning? On one level, this may be thought to be a (misguided) attempt at "scientific" accuracy. As Michael Dols suggests, this is "a too rigorous application . . . of the modern medical and archaeological understandings of leprosy to the ancient and medieval literary evidence."²⁷ The fact is that the disease referred to in the New Testament by the words now rendered in English as "leper" is unclear in medical terms. Thus Badawi and Abdel Haleem's

26 M.W. Dols, "The Leper in Medieval Islamic Society," *Speculum*, 54, 1983, 893–94.

27 M.W. Dols, "Leprosy in medieval Arabic medicine," *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 36, 1979, 318.

suggestion could also be taken to be an assertion of the Qur'ān's independence from the New Testament tradition and thus those English resonances of Jesus healing the blind, deaf and the leprous are eliminated, once again likely in a "scientific" mode, reflecting popular currents of Muslim thinking regarding the value of "scientific" information in the Qur'ān.

One might object that such very specific meanings of words do not really matter. That is, we may be setting ourselves an impossible goal if we wish to define words too closely on the basis of little evidence. But more importantly, it does seem, as illustrated by the case of *ṭalḥ*, that we cannot escape from some sense of the Muslim tradition in determining meaning in some, if not many, instances. That then means that the role of scholarly investigation and etymology has to be a check on that heritage in order to understand where dogma or pure speculation comes into play. We may not be able to clarify every meaning on the basis of the resources available to us from outside the tradition of exegesis but we can become much clearer about which meanings are secure and which are not. To accomplish this goal would require a different dictionary than those we currently have. We would need specific studies of each word, considering the basis upon which the meaning is established.²⁸ As both of the case studies suggest here, there can be complex structures behind some of the most innocent words, which remain buried within the tradition of interpretation. And it is certainly true that there would be no way, nor any reason, to escape from that storehouse of knowledge. What we would know, however, is the basis upon which such meanings were established. Of course, a dictionary such as that would not be the final word of Qur'ānic studies: individual words have contextual connotations well beyond what a dictionary can reasonably record, but it would be a major resource that we do not currently have available, even given the current influx of lexicographical resources.

28 Shawkat Toorawa's list of hapax legomena in the present volume (he notes that there about 300, with a third of them in rhyme position) is a place to start with a series of "studies." Also see Orhan Elmaz, "Die Interpretationsgeschichte der koranischen Hapaxleogomena", PhD thesis, Vienna, 2008 (my thanks to S. Toorawa for drawing my attention to this work).

3 Towards understanding the Qur'ān's worldview

An autobiographical reflection

Nasr Abu Zayd¹

Introduction

I have been wondering for some time now why the companions of Muḥammad, upon producing the official *muṣṣḥaf* known as the 'Uthmān codex, decided to have the *muṣṣḥaf* arranged by the chapter-length order rather than the historical chronological order, an order that would have saved Qur'ān scholars a lot of trouble. The question is still valid even when we accept the traditional claim that Gabriel authored this arrangement during Muḥammad's lifetime. Trying to figure out the impression which the chronological order would have created, I imagine that the Qur'ān would have been very much similar to the Old Testament narrative form of "history of salvation." The Qur'ān, however, presents itself as a continuation of earlier scripture, beginning with "the sheets" of Abraham and Moses (*ṣuḥuf Ibrāhīm wa-Mūsā*; Q 87:19). It distinguishes itself from earlier scriptures as the dominant (*muḥaymin*), and the most accurate (*al-ḥaqq*; Q 5:48). Such a distinction must have consequences for both form and content. If arranged according to its chronological order (*tartīb al-nuzūl*), the Qur'ān would have been a book of the history of Muḥammad's mission and of the early Muslim community; it might have appeared like a historical document rather than a divine message.

I suppose that the companions were aware of this possibility, so they emphasized the distinction by making such a choice. A similar distinction on which they insisted is that of naming the volume which contained the Qur'ān. Although it took the form of a book after being codified, the companions chose to call the Qur'ān a *muṣṣḥaf* instead of a "book" (*kitāb*), the name that the Qur'ān uses often to identify itself. It never refers to itself as *muṣṣḥaf*, which is, in fact, a borrowed word of

1 Editor's note: Dr Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd passed away on July 5, 2010, in his native Egypt. The present article thus represents one of the last products of his intellectual career. Dr Abu Zayd submitted it to me soon after his keynote lecture at the April 2009 Notre Dame Qur'ān conference. I read the paper and consulted with him on revisions through the following year, and sent the latest version to him on June 5, 2010. Due to the illness that led to his tragic passing, Dr Abu Zayd was not able to review this version. Thus the present paper is shaped substantially by my own editing, and any errors therein are my responsibility.

Ethiopian origin.² Şuyūṭī quotes Ibn Ashta's *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*, in which it is related that the companions had to make a choice between two names, *sifr* or *muṣḥaf*, and they preferred the second.³ Such a choice suggests the companions' intention to draw a line of demarcation between their scripture and the earlier scriptures of the people of the book, *ahl al-kitāb*, which were known as *asfār* (pl. of *sifr*).⁴

Whatever the reason, the *muṣḥaf*'s order became the *textus receptus*, the source of all kinds of knowledge for Muslims. Whatever issue emerges in the life of Muslim communities, the Qur'ān is the first source to be consulted for a solution. This might explain the difference in Qur'ānic studies between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars: Muslim scholars pay all their attention to the issue of "meaning" while non-Muslim scholars focus more on issues concerning its genesis, order, form, or structure.⁵ This does not mean that Muslim scholars disregard the issues of form and structure or that the non-Muslim scholars disregard the issue of meaning. Still, this latter group focuses more on content than on the meaning of the content, especially in their assessments of the chronological order of the Qur'ān's chapters. As for Muslim scholars, meaning is the focal concern of scholarship. The classical Western approach was to concentrate on the "genesis" of the Qur'ān, especially its connection to the Bible and the post-Biblical tradition. This approach has recently become broader and now includes the pre-Biblical tradition. But a literary approach has triumphed over the philological approach, meaning that "intertextuality" has become an important analytical device. In contrast with Western scholars, Muslim scholars are concerned with the historical context for the purpose of situating the Qur'ān's message within the context of its emergence in the seventh century, in order to facilitate the decoding of its meaning in the modern context.⁶

The question of whether the Qur'ān contains a specific worldview – the topic of the present chapter – calls for research that navigates beyond the existing approaches, East and West. It must take the present order of the *muṣḥaf* as a given fact without undermining the importance of the chronological order. I mean the question is not "either/or." The present order of the Qur'ān has been realized through the history of exegesis. This history shows that the *muṣḥaf* order, starting from Chapter 1 (*al-Fātiḥa*) and ending with Chapter 114 (*al-Nās*), was emphasized, but the chronological order was not neglected. Especially in the everyday life of Muslims the Qur'ān functions according to the *muṣḥaf* order rather than the chronological order.⁷ It seems that the chronological order served only in the field of legal investigation (*fiqh*) in order to decide between conflicting legal rulings by

identifying which one is earlier and which is later, and thus to apply the legal apparatus of abrogation (*naskh*).

In regard to issues of conflict, contradiction, and/or tension, it should be pointed out that such phenomena presented a real critical dilemma to classical scholars and still do to modern Muslim scholars. The dilemma is not limited to the domain of legal rules, but it encompasses almost all the constitutive elements of the Qur'ān's worldview, such as the nature of God, His attributes, the nature of humans, their pitfalls and their positive possibilities, including issues like free will, predestination and determination, and eschatological issues, such as resurrection, reward and punishment, etc.

Such contradictions are caused by and reflected in the *muṣḥaf* order. The chronological order might help explain them partially, if not solve them. It could explain, for example, the turn in the attitude of the Qur'ān concerning the "others," namely the people of Mecca, the Jews of Medina, and the Christians. But it is not likely to explain and solve the more serious theological issues which the theologians of the classical era tried painfully to tackle.

The tremendous scholarly material offered in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, which presents variable explanations and a diversity of approaches for almost every Qur'ānic topic, makes it evident that neither the historical approach based on the chronological order nor the holistic approach are able to provide a satisfactory explanation for this contradiction, conflict, or, better, "tension."

This problem of conflict/contradiction was further complicated by the way each discipline of classical Islamic culture interpreted the Qur'ān's worldview: the philosophers took over the ontological/epistemological or metaphysical dimension; the theologians took over the questions pertaining to God's existence, His attributes, His actions, human duties and responsibilities, etc.; the jurists took over the legal dimension, while the mystics occupied themselves with the spiritual and ethical dimensions. The Qur'ānic worldview was thus fragmented and never fully articulated, despite the fact that all the above-mentioned dimensions are interwoven in every passage of the Qur'ān, regardless of the explicit theme of the passage.

So far, we have pointed out a certain degree of tension between the chronological order of the Qur'ān and that of the *muṣḥaf* order, a tension which has long been the subject of scholarly attention. In the present chapter I will propose a middle way between the *muṣḥaf* order and the chronological order, namely to deal with the Qur'ān as a collection of discourses, each with a certain degree of independence. Together collected in the *muṣḥaf*, these discourses became interdependent, and through them the Qur'ān formulated its worldview. Is it possible to uncover the interwoven dimensions of this worldview by re-emphasizing the Qur'ān's unity? This chapter does claim that this end is achievable, and I hope to make a contribution toward achieving this end in a future study. This chapter's aim is to present the worlds of the Qur'ān as suggested by the classical disciplines: the legal, the theological, the philosophical and the mystical. This attempt is, however, presented through the academic-personal experience of the author, which entails different phases of encounter with the Qur'ān. I will try to follow the chronological development of my career, but every episode will be presented

2 J. Burton, "Muṣḥaf," *EA*, 7:968–69.

3 *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Sa'īd al-Mandūb, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1996, genre 17.

4 *Ibid.*, genre 18.

5 See, for example, *The Qur'ān as Text*, ed. S. Wild, Leiden: Brill, 1996; *The Cambridge Companion of the Qur'ān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān*, ed. S. Wild, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006; *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, ed. G.S. Reynolds, London: Routledge, 2008.

6 Cf. R. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Early, modern and contemporary," *EQ*, 2:124–40.

7 See the author's "Everyday life: Qur'ān in", *EQ*, 2:80–97.

from the perspective of later developments. In other words, hermeneutics is working on what the memory grasps from the past. To start with, the early personal encounter with the Qur'ān is characterized as an encounter with ambiguity, uncertainty and questioning.

Life experience: ambiguity and uncertainty

As a child in the *kuttāb* (the traditional elementary school) the curricula included, besides reading, writing and reckoning, training in Qur'ānic recitation with a professional recognized *qārī*. In order to help children attain a minimum understanding of what they recite, the simple theological dogma of *tawhīd* was taught: Allah is not begotten, neither does He beget (Q 112); He does not sleep, neither does He eat; His Throne encompasses the heavens and the earth all together (Q 2:255).

As far as I can remember, this was puzzling not only for me but for some other children as well. When the inspector of the ministry of education visited the *kuttāb* for evaluation, i.e. to decide whether the ministry would continue its financial subsidiary to the *kuttāb*, he asked this tricky question: What does Allah eat? Children answered without hesitation: He eats the best food (some specific kinds of food, considered the best from the villager's perspective, were mentioned, such as kebab, chicken, rice and pasta in addition to baklava as dessert.)

Even more puzzling to me was the phrase "neither begets nor begotten." Later on, as a scholar, the theological claim of God as *al-'illat al-ūlā* (the First Cause) to avoid an endless series of reasoning was not convincing at all. My child-mind could not stop searching for the genesis (the father and the mother) of Allah.

Later I came to understand why the people of Mecca insisted on considering the angels as Allah's daughters and further insisted on keeping Allah far away from their daily affairs; He is the creator of heaven and earth. He administers the daily affairs to the angels, His daughters. Although the Qur'ān rebukes the Meccans' belief in angels as the daughters of Allah, it still teaches that the angels act as Allah's agents who bring His *amr*, command, from heaven to earth (Q 16:2, 97:4). The Qur'ān's protest over the idea of Allah's daughters was because the Arabs considered female children inferior to male children, to the extent of committing female infanticide (Q 17:31). Thus the Qur'ān exclaims, *a-lakumu l-dhakaru wa-lahu al-unthā, tilka idhan qismatun dīzā* (Q 53:21–22). Shall I infer now that the Qur'ānic worldview is, as Muslims think, absolutely independent of the pre-Qur'ānic worldview of the pagan Arab?

I was able to memorize the entire Qur'ān with the capacity of reciting it according to the norms of *tajwīd* when I was eight years old, an event celebrated in the grand mosque of my village where I had to be tested by the well-known shaykhs of the village with the attendance of my family and relatives. It was a very harsh test: one shaykh would recite a verse of the Qur'ān and order me to continue; some minutes later, another shaykh would interrupt and recite another verse from another chapter and so on. Hours passed before I was addressed as *shaykh qārī* by my own *kuttāb*, Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Namīsī. My father was ready

to present a gift of wool *quṣṭān* to each shaykh and my mother was ready at home preparing a big feast.⁸

As the Qur'ān was easily memorized, it was easily forgotten when I was transferred from the *kuttāb* to a secular school. But forgetting did not affect the intimate personal connection with the Qur'ān which became an essential component of my identity; my memory could easily recall a passage of the Qur'ān when evoked by a single word. Later on, as a scholar, this intimacy became problematic to the extent I had to consult an English translation of the Qur'ān in order to establish a space of 'otherness' and proceed with a scholarly analysis.⁹

My father's dream was that I would become an *imām 'ālim* like Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), but he realized later that this was a long path, so, because of his sickness and fear of early death – which happened shortly afterward – he decided that I would take the shortcut of secular-school education. My father's dream never escaped my attention, although it went in another direction later on. This shortcut route allowed me to get a high school diploma as a technician which secured a job that allowed me to earn money and support my family after the death of my father. After eight years, I embarked for the university after attaining the high school certificate necessary for university admission. In the department of Arabic language and literature of the faculty of letters (Cairo University) there were two courses in Islamic Studies: *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* and *tafsīr* in the second year and *ulūm al-ḥadīth* in the third year. I decided after graduation to continue my postgraduate study in Qur'ānic Studies, returning to my father's dream, but my model example was not Muḥammad 'Abduh, or Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn (d. 1973), but a combination of the two, Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967), the champion of the literary approach to the Qur'ān.

I should mention here that during the years between graduation from technical school in 1960 and matriculation to university in 1968, I was able to read a lot; reading was my favorite, indeed my only, hobby. Driven by a dream to be a poet, a romance writer, a philosopher and a man of letters, I ended up in academia in Islamic Studies. My early readings turned out to be crucial in determining my destination. Among the many writers/thinkers who influenced my mode of thought, I only mention here the most influential names, the late well-known 1988 Nobel Laureate Najīb Maḥfūz (d. 2006), Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn, Amīn al-Khūlī, and Sayyid Quṭb (executed 1966).

8 "Shaykh Nasr" became my epithet in the village. As I was so proud of myself, my father feared that this pride would lead to arrogance and decided to teach me by several direct and indirect means to be modest; he used to ask me every morning to recite for him Qur'ān 25:63–67, which describes the pious habits of the believers, in addition to the wise sage Luqmān's admonition to his son in Qur'ān 31:17–19, which begins: *yā bunayya aqimi l-ṣalāta wa-'amur bi-l-ma'rūfi w-anha 'an al-munkari w-aṣbir 'alā mā aṣābaka* ("O my young son, establish what is right and forbid what is wrong. Be patient with the things that afflict you!").

9 An awareness of the distance between the text and interpreter is, among other requirements, a prerequisite for a hermeneutical approach. See, F. Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology, Rethinking Islam*, Würzburg: Ergon, 2005, 33.

Mahfūz's writings introduced me to the world of literature very early in my life when he was not yet the well-known Mahfūz. Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's critical approach to the study of literature and history attracted my budding critical mind. It was, in fact, my father who first planted the seeds of criticism in my head. My relation with Amīn al-Khūlī was more intimate though I never met him. He was the chief editor of the monthly *Majalat al-Adab* (1956–67). I was surprised when I sent an article to him to find it published in the first issue afterward (vol. 9, issue 7, December 1964); this was my first published article, which was followed by many. As I was no one of importance, Amīn al-Khūlī represented for me the scholar who values the content of an article and not the name of its author. I became an unregistered member of his intellectual group called *al-umanā'*. Reading his books I encountered the real *mujaddid* in almost all fields of Arabic studies. His literary approach to the Qur'an fascinated me long before matriculation to university.

I was first attracted to the literary critic Sayyid Quṭb, who was the first to discover Mahfūz and introduced his writings. His literary treatment of certain Qur'anic topics such as *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* fascinated me, as well as his early writing about Social Justice in Islam. It should be mentioned here that my childhood was influenced by the mottos of the Muslim Brothers; indeed every child in the village was. It was only in the late sixties when I started to realize the development of Quṭb's discourse into radicalism and began to dissociate myself from their discourse.

Learning about the crisis which surrounded the publication of Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn's book, *Fi al-shi'r al-jāhili* (1926), and that of the PhD thesis of al-Khūlī's student Khalfallah al-Fann al-qaṣaṣi fi l-Qur'an al-Karīm (1947), I became aware of the problems inherent in any historical-critical and literary study of the Qur'an.¹⁰ This, however, did not discourage me from pursuing my scholarly objective.

My objective was to investigate how and why the Qur'an's worldview could dramatically differ according to the many different methods of interpretation applied to the Qur'an. This objective was, in fact, motivated by the diversity of claims concerning Islam's worldview in the public debate in Egypt, and elsewhere in the Arab and the Muslim world, since the abolishment of the Caliphate in the 1924. The claim of the traditional paradigm of *sharī'a* as the most authentic Islamic worldview was held by the Muslim Brothers and voiced in the writings of Sayyid Quṭb.¹¹ Others claimed an open paradigm of Islam that encompassed

secular ideologies, such as rationalism, nationalism and socialism.¹² These two claims, which peacefully existed for decades in Egypt, turned into a violent clash in the nineteen sixties and seventies.

As a child of the 1952 military coup (called a revolution) and its claims of fighting corruption, of liberating Egypt from British occupation, and of establishing socio-economic justice, it was not difficult for me to identify all of these objectives with the Islamic worldview. As I matured, however, this identification became difficult to sustain without further investigation and self-reflection. And so my scholarship began as self-reflection; it continued in this way and hopefully will always be so. There was no one particular question at stake. The issue was instead the larger question of Islam's encounter with the entire worldview of modernity. The debate that started two centuries ago, and is still going on, is a question of worldview.¹³

I was attracted to Qur'anic studies, regardless of the problems I expected to encounter, because I was motivated by the puzzling question presented in the debate I have just mentioned. I believe academic scholarship ought to be the outcome of a genuine critical and dialectical communication with reality. Isolated from real life, academics could be isolated in an ivory tower of utopianism. Involvement in daily affairs, without critical insight, could pull academics into the other extreme of ideology. It has been my concern since I started my career to avoid being either a utopian or an ideologist. Real life provides us with the questions; academic scholarship teaches us how to examine these questions and seek answers.

The theologians' approach to the Qur'an

In 1972 I received my BA with excellence (*imtiyāz*) and was appointed lecturer's assistant, *mu'id*, in the department. During the four years of my undergraduate

(*al-ijābiyya*) and; 6. realism (*al-wāqi'iyya*), as opposed to idealism or utopianism; 7. a system of unification (*tawḥīd*), not only on a theological level but in all aspects of existence: metaphysical, physical, natural, and human. Quṭb claims this conception is basically and entirely Qur'anic, by which he means it is based on the immediate meaning of the Qur'an, not the meaning that depends on the corrupting influence of theology and philosophy, sciences that depend on Greek philosophy. For Quṭb's concept of the immediacy of his hermeneutics, see the second part of *Khaṣa* is published after his death and entitled *Muqawwimāt al-taṣawwūr al-Islāmī*, ed. and introduced by his brother, Muḥammad Quṭb, Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1986 (English trans.: *Basic Principles of the Islamic Worldview*, trans. R. David, North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 2006). From this perspective, Quṭb laments the efforts made by such reformers as Abduh and Muḥammad Iqbāl of India (1877–1938) to reform Islam by reinterpreting the Qur'an in the light of modern rational values.

12 Ironically, Quṭb could not help exclude himself from the heated debate in the Arab world about social justice in the 1940s. He contributed his *al-Adala al-ijtimā'iyya fi l-Islām* ("Social Justice in Islam"), Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1949, in which he avoided using the term *ishtirākīyya*, socialism, in favour of *'adāla Islāmīyya*. In doing so, however, he applied a certain non-immediate interpretation of the Qur'anic passages. The word *ishtirākīyya* was later used by the Muslim Brothers' leader in Syria, Muṣṭafa al-Sibā'i, in the title of his *Ishtirākīyyat al-Islām* ("The Socialism of Islam"), Cairo.

13 See my monograph, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*, WRR-Verkenning 10, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. Available online at <<http://www.wrr.nl/english/content.jsp?objectid=3672>> (accessed January 31, 2011).

10 For the details of both crises, see my "The dilemma of the literary approach to the Qur'an," *Alif, Journal of Comparative Poetics*, The American University in Cairo, 23, 2003, 8–47.

11 As in his *Khaṣa'is al-taṣawwūr al-Islāmī* ("The Characteristics of the Islamic Worldview"), first published in Cairo in 1962, where the Islamic *taṣawwūr* ("worldview") is: 1. divine (*rabbānī*); 2. fixed (*thābit*). Contrary to human conceptions, it is not subject to development but humanity is to be developed by adhering to it, because the founder of it is the same creator of humanity who knows what is best for its development by His omniscience. Although it is fixed (*thābit*), it allows for movement around the fixed axis, which is not as the same as the human concept of evolution responsible for all the human pitfalls; 3. marked by comprehensiveness (*al-shumūl*), exclusiveness, i.e. it is a system that governs all aspects of human life; 4. marked by equilibrium (*al-tawāzun*), meaning that Islam always adopts the middle position between any two extremes; 5. characterized by optimism

study (1968–72), Egypt went through difficult political, economic and social difficulties due to the consequences of the 1967 war with Israel. Such an unexpected defeat, with more Arab territories occupied by Israel – the Golan Heights of Syria, the West Bank from Jordan, Gaza and Sinai from Egypt – created a cultural trauma which provoked all of Arab society into questioning and rethinking, especially the notion of the Arabic and Islamic heritage (*al-turāth*).¹⁴ President Muḥammad Anwar al-Sādāt (1970–81), who followed Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir (1952–70), initiated in October 1970 what he claimed to be the corrective revolution, *thawrat al-taṣhīh*. This revolution entailed releasing political prisoners, mainly Muslim Brothers, abolishing press censorship, abolishing the one-party political system and establishing a multi-party system. Along with this new era of liberty and democracy, an open-door economic policy was adopted, but at odds with it was an amendment to Article Two of the Constitution, which made “the principles of the *sharī‘a* the main source of legislation” instead of *one* of the sources. Such an amendment was interpreted as a signal for the beginning of a policy of Islamization demanded since the thirties by the Muslim Brothers. It is very significant that Sādāt acted and behaved publicly in a way that presented him to the eyes of the Egyptian people as the true believing president, *al-raʾīs al-muʾmin*. It was his usual way to start his public speeches by the first part of the basmala, *bismi Llah*, and end by reciting the last verse of chapter two of the Qurʾān, asking God’s forgiveness for any fault or forgetfulness.

As every new ruler in the Third World tries at the beginning of his presidential career to create a different image of himself than that of his predecessor, Sādāt was eager to combat Nāṣir’s charismatic image by claiming this new corrective revolution of liberty, democracy and free-market economy versus Nāṣir’s regime of socialism, a one-party political system and constraints on freedom of expression. The image of Sādāt was, however, a contradictory image; on the one hand, he used to present himself to the Western media as the follower of the great pharaohs of Egypt, hardly a positive image from the Islamic perspective. As for the domestic media, he sought to present the image of a pious leader whose inspiration comes directly from Islam, very much like the stereotype image of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.

The proponents of Islamization supported this free-market policy, and the discourse of social justice in Islam, or *ishtrākiyyat al-Islām*, was replaced by a discourse critical of Nāṣir’s regime, which had introduced the laws of land reformation, *al-iṣlāḥ al-zirāʿī*, in 1954 and nationalization, *al-taʾmīm*, beginning with the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in 1956. Such laws were deemed to be against the *sharī‘a*, and there was a strong demand to abolish them.

14 See for example, Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd, *Tajdīd al-fikr al-ʿarabī* (“Innovation of Arabic Thought”), Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1971; Adunis (Alī Ahmad Saʿīd), *Al-Thābit wa-l-mutaḥawwil: baḥṭh fī l-ittibāʾ wa-l-ibdāʾ ʿind al-ʿArab* (“The Fixed and the Changeable: A Study of Imitation and Innovation in Arabic Thought”), Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, in 3 volumes: 1. *Al-Uṣūl* (1974); 2. *Taʾṣīṣ al-uṣūl* (1977); 3. *Ṣadmat al-ḥadātha* (1979); in the early eighties, Muḥammad ʿAbid al-Jābirī, *Naḥnu wa-l-turāth*, (“Our People and Heritage”), Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1980, followed by a plethora of publications by Tayyib Tizīnī, Ḥasan Ḥanafī, and others.

In this context of political and economical change, of cultural questioning and rethinking, as well as increasing ritualistic religiosity in Egyptian society, I started my academic career. I was searching for answers to the existent debated issues regarding freedom, justice, equality, Islamic values, Arabic culture, and the meaning of religiosity in Islam. As the Qurʾān and its meaning was always at the heart of debate about every issue, it was to my mind very important to carry these questions back to the roots, the history of Islamic culture and the history of Qurʾānic exegesis. For my MA thesis, I decided to study the Muʾtazilites’ seemingly rational approach to the Qurʾān, focusing on their concept of metaphor, which emerged as an instrumental linguistic tool of interpretation at the beginning of the ninth century.¹⁵ My choice was not free of bias; I was, and I think I still am, one of the Arab and Muslim adherents of “rationalism,” a “rationalism” which does not exclude or despise religion as a mere psychological phantom.

In addition to my rational tendency, it was also my aim to reconnect Qurʾānic studies with literary studies, returning to Amīn al-Khūlī’s method, which was abandoned after the university decided, in 1947, following the scandal of his student’s PhD thesis, that al-Khūlī should not be allowed to teach or supervise Qurʾānic studies any more. “The decision was based on the reason that al-Khūlī was appointed to the chair of Egyptian Literature on October 6, 1946, and thus he was not supposed to teach or supervise Qurʾānic studies.”¹⁶ Following this decision, Islamic studies in general, and Qurʾānic studies in particular, was left to whomever was willing to teach it; teaching Islamic and Qurʾānic studies became a source for attaining *baraka*, divine blessing, rather than an academic field of research. By choosing the concept of *majāz*, figurative expressions, as applied to Qurʾānic exegesis by the Muʾtazilites, I took a step in the other direction, towards the literary study of the Qurʾān.

The Muʾtazilites are well known for their five principles, which are summarized in the two basic comprehensive pillars, namely Divine Justice and Divine Unity, *al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd*, to the extent that they call themselves *ahl al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd*, regardless of the different views each group holds concerning the details. My basic source was the writings of al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Asadābādī (d. 415/1025), especially his magnum opus *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl*.¹⁷ To summarize the Muʾtazilite worldview constructed from the Qurʾān, one has to present a brief account of their ontology, epistemology, and their theory of language, including their metaphoric interpretation. As for their ontology, the world is, for the Muʾtazilites, a compound constructed of bodies; the bodies in their turn are

15 The title of the thesis is *Qaḍīyyat al-majāz fī l-Qurʾān ʿind al-Muʾtazila*; accepted in 1977 the grade of “excellent”. It was later published with minor changes as *Al-Itijāh al-ʿaqlī fī l-tafsīr: dirāsa fī qaḍīyyat al-majāz ʿinda al-Muʾtazila* (“The Rational Trend in Exegesis: A Study of the Concept of Metaphor in the Muʾtazilites’ Thought”), Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1982, followed by several reprints.

16 See N. Abū-Zayd, “The Dilemma of the Literary Approach,” *Alif*, 23, 2003, p. 32.

17 Edited and published under the supervision of Tāḥā Ḥusayn and Ibrāhīm Madkūr, Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1960–65.

small compounds constructed of atoms. The physical structure of the world presents for the human reason a series of signs, *'alāmāt*, which gradually lead to the conclusion that such a perfect, well-organized world should have been created by a wise artisan, *ṣāni' ḥakīm*. This conclusion is based on investigating the physical evidence by intellectual procedure, syllogism or *qiyās mantiqī*, which runs as follows:

- 1 Every created action refers to an actor who created it, *kullu fi'l muḥdath yadullu 'alā wujūd fā'il ahdathahu*.
- 2 The perfect action refers to a wise knowledgeable actor, *al-fi'l al-muḥkam yadullu 'alā fā'il 'ālim ḥakīm*.
- 3 The perfect structure of this seen physical world refers to a wise, knowledgeable creator.

Clearly this ontological theo-physics is not separate from the Qur'ānic presentation of the entire universe as a series of signs, *āyāt*, which refer to the Creator and indicate His omniscience and omnipotence. Reaching the conclusion of the existence of the wise artisan who created this physical world, it is logically deduced that the Creator does not belong to this world. Neither does He resemble wise human creators. This deduction is reached by way of analogy between this physical world and the unseen world, *qiyās al-ghā'ib 'alā al-shāhid*.

By this method of *qiyās*, the human reason is able to attain knowledge of the divine attributes of God's Essence such as life, power, knowledge and wisdom, as well as His attributes of action, such as hearing, seeing, speaking, etc. In order to establish the different intellectual methods to reach the basic two pillars of *tawḥīd* and *'adl*, al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār distinguishes between three types of evidences (*adilla*; sing. *dalīl*) the first type of which produces a sound and necessary conclusion, *mā yadullu bi-l-siḥa wa-l-wujūb*, by which *tawḥīd* is established. The second type is that which concerns the intention of the actors, *mā yadullu bi-l-dawā' wa-l-ikhtiyār*, through which *'adl* is established; God is in no need of acting unjustly, *ẓulm*, or of willing unseemly acts, *irādāt al-qabīḥ*, because He is in no way dependent on the world (*ghanīy 'an al-'ālam*). The third type of evidence is the linguistic evidence of *sharī'a*, as will be explained soon. Such purely intellectual knowledge of God's blessings establishes the human obligation to express gratitude to Him, *wujūb shukr al-mun'im*. As this knowledge is attainable by reason alone, every human is obliged to develop his power of inference (*naẓar*),¹⁸ and the attainment thereof is the intellectual expression of worship (*'ibāda*).

What is the position and the function of "revelation" in this system? Here al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, quoting the early Mu'tazilites, advocates the concept of

God's attention to humanity's best welfare *ri'āyat al-aṣlah*, which God obliges Himself to do. So, He sends messengers with revelations, *sharā'i* (sing. *sharī'a*), to help humans attain the ways of lawful worship (*al-'ibādāt al-shar'iyya*) that are not attainable by reason alone.

So, *sharī'a* is the divine grace, *lutf*, revealed for the advantage of humans. This *sharī'a* is expressed in language; this is the first proposition. The second proposition is about the way linguistic expressions produce knowledge as evidence. Linguistic expressions do not directly indicate their meanings; they refer through two conditions: the first is *muwāḍa'a*, the socio-cultural convention (*ittifāq*) which assigns certain significance to the vocabulary within the language; the relationship between the signifier and the signified (*al-dāll wa-l-madlūl*) is not direct as in the intellectual evidence, *al-'aqliyyāt* versus *al-sam'iyyāt*. The second condition for the productivity of the linguistic evidence is the priority to know the intention (*qaṣd*) of the speech's producer (*al-mutakallim*). This second condition is to justify the Mu'tazilites' view of the priority of intellectual knowledge before revealed knowledge of God's attributes of justice and unity. In other words, the Qur'ān, the foundational source of *sharī'a*, is not independent; it does not automatically produce sound knowledge. It has to be, first and most of all, checked by human reason to verify its divine source; it has, secondly, to be analysed according to the linguistic norms of the Arabic language.

Responding to an imaginative opponent who claimed that the Qur'ān provides all the needed knowledge about God and His attributes, 'Abd al-Jabbār would raise the rhetorical question, "Since linguistic expressions cannot verify the honesty or veracity of a speaker, how do we know that the speaker of the Qur'ān is the almighty God, a God who does not trick or lie, unless we establish such knowledge by reason?" The notion that language is the domain of meaning-possibilities is a very important concept in Islamic hermeneutics – not only in Mu'tazilite hermeneutics. An essential distinction between intellectual rational evidence and linguistic evidence is that the latter contains figurative expressions (*maḥāz*) as well as direct expressions (*ḥaqīqa*) while the former is free of such features.¹⁹

The issue of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, the clear and the ambiguous, which is attested in the Qur'ān (3:7), plays the key element in the Mu'tazilites' hermeneutics. Besides dealing intensively with the issue in his *magnum opus*, 'Abd al-Jabbār devotes a book of two volumes to analysing and explaining all the pertinent aspects of the issue.²⁰ Firstly, the Mu'tazilites naturally support the reading of the verse which does not make a stop after *wa-mā ya'lamu ta'wīlaha illā Allah* ("none knows 'the ambiguous' interpretation but God"); they make *al-rasikhūn fi-'ilm* ("those who are firmly grounded in knowledge") also know the interpretation of the ambiguous by considering the *wāw* after Allah a conjunction (*'atf*), not

18 Translating the Arabic *naẓar* into the English "inference" is to show the strong connectivity between the physical and the metaphysical in the Islamic worldview in general and that of the Mu'tazilites in particular. It is through "seeing" the physical evidence that its meaning is uncovered, leading to contemplation, *tafakkur* or *i'tibār*. The Qur'ān employs these terms constantly to persuade humans to believe.

19 This is a very brief account of the first chapter, *al-ma'rifa wa-l-dalāla al-lughawiyya* ("Knowledge and Linguistic Significance") in *al-Ittijāh al-'aqlī fi-l-tafsīr*, 45–90.

20 *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Adnān Muḥammad Marzūq, Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1966.

the commencement (*isti'nāf*) of a new sentence.²¹ Secondly, to explain the very existence of ambiguous passages, 'Abd al-Jabbār invokes the concept of God's providing humans with their best welfare (*al-aṣḥāḥ*), explaining that the ambiguous is intended to stimulate human reason into action.

This declaration of the Qur'ān – that it contains clear verses (*ayāt muḥkamāt*) that form the backbone of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*), as well as ambiguous verses (*ayāt mutashābihāt*) – is taken by 'Abd al-Jabbār to support the Mu'tazilites' worldview briefly presented in this section. This worldview also has to be supported by the Qur'ānic discourse. To this end, 'Abd al-Jabbār differentiates between three levels of the Qur'ānic discourse:

- 1 That which the discourse conveys by itself, independent from intellectual inference. These are the legal regulations, *al-aḥkam al-shar'iyya*, which reason alone cannot attain; they are known only through the Qur'ānic discourse, *naḥs al-khiṭāb*.
- 2 That which both the Qur'ānic discourse and the intellectual inference both equally convey. This is the level of signification related to the domain of promise and threat, *al-wa'd wa-l-wa'id*. 'Abd al-Jabbār includes in this level the issue of seeing God (*ru'yat Allah*) in the afterlife with the human eye, which the opponents of the Mu'tazilites sustain as one of God's promises to the pious believers. The Mu'tazilites maintain that both the Qur'ānic discourse and rational evidence reject their opponents' claim.²²
- 3 The third level is the domain of the rational level where the Qur'ānic discourse alone cannot be properly understood. This is the domain of *'adl* and *tawḥīd*, in which rational inference alone reaches this knowledge.

So, dependent on rational inference and their explanation of the different aspects of the Qur'ānic declaration in 3:7, the Mu'tazilites are able to tackle any apparent contradiction in the Qur'ānic discourse. It suffices now to present their solution of two seemingly contradictory cases in the Qur'ān: one related to *tawḥīd* and the other related to *'adl*.

One, the presentation of God in the Qur'ān: some passages of the Qur'ān state that there is no resemblance between God and his creation/man, such as Chapter 112 called *al-Ikhlāṣ* ("The True Devotion"). This idea is also emphasized in Q 2:255, known as the "Chair Verse." But there are other passages in which God is presented with corporal features such as hands (38:10) and eyes (20:39), and even human qualities like hatred (9:47), love (5:54) and deception (8:30).

Two, the issue of free will or, to be precise, the issue of *khalq al-aḥ'āl*, i.e. whether human actions are created by human power and free choice or by God:

again, the Qur'ān provides two conflicting answers. The first is that God is the creator of all human actions (Q 22:14; 37:96), the creator of *ḍalāl* ("leading astray") and *hudā* ("guidance") (Q 4:88; 6:125; 12:27; 14:4, 27; 16:93; 30:29; 35:8; 74:31); the second is that humans are responsible for their choice of *ḍalāl* or *hudā* (Q 5:105; 10:108; 17:15; 27:92).

The Mu'tazilites first identified the Qur'ānic passages expressing God's transcendence as clear (*muḥkam*) and the passages that express His anthropomorphic features as ambiguous (*mutashābih*). Likewise, the passages that underline free will are identified as clear and those that suggest predestination as ambiguous. Second, they employ the concept of figurative speech, *majāz*, to interpret the ambiguous verses in conformity with the clear verses; *majāz* provided a powerful instrument of *ta'wīl*, i.e. to interpret the text of the Qur'ān beyond the immediate meaning according to the Mu'tazilites' transcendental theology.²³ The opponents of the Mu'tazilites, the Ḥanbalites and later the Ash'arites, made use of the same method; they acknowledged the existence of *muḥkam-mutshābih*, but they identified them differently. What the Mu'tazilites considered as clear they considered ambiguous, and vice versa. Thus the Qur'ān became the battlefield of a fierce intellectual and political conflict. The dispute was not only about meaning but also entailed the structure of the text of the Qur'ān, i.e. the identification of the parts which are clear and those which are ambiguous. Both the Mu'tazilites and their opponents agree on the principle, but they disagree about its implementation.

In conclusion, one might infer that the Mutazilites' worldview, although shaped by theological concerns, is more humanistic than that of their opponents. God acts in accordance with certain ethical values He obliged Himself to follow. According to the Mu'tazilites' worldview, God is not a tyrant. The opponents of the Mu'tazilites emphasize the image of God as a king who forces his subjects to act this or that way and then judges and punishes whomever He wants and rewards whomever He likes. The image of God in the Mu'tazilite worldview is also that of king, but of a king who rules in accordance with the ethical constitution of a republic.

The Sūfis' approach to the Qur'ān

Since this intellectual dispute concerning the structure and the meaning of the Qur'ān between the Mu'tazilites and their opponents is, in fact, foremost an expression of socio-political conflict, I carried the question of the hermeneutics of the Qur'ān to the context of Sūfism, or mysticism – a movement supposedly void of political interests. This was the topic of my PhD thesis, on the Qur'ānic

21 For the different opinions about the two possible articulations of the verse and the different interpretation for each articulation, see al-Tabarī, Abu Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr, *Jamī' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Mahmūd Muḥammad Shākir, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2000, 6:200–6.

22 For more details on the Mu'tazilite position, see *al-Itijāh al-'aqlī fi-l-tafsīr*, 190–215.

23 For a detailed analysis of the concept of *ta'wīl* vis-a-vis *tafsīr*, see my *Mafhūm an-Naṣṣ: Dirasat fi 'ulūm 'l-Qur'ān* ("The Concept of the Text: study in the sciences of the Qur'ān"), Beirut and Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī 'l-'Arabi, 1st edition 1990, followed by many reprints, chapter five, 219–41.

hermeneutics of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240).²⁴ This was in 1977, the year of *intifādat al-khubz* ("the bread revolt"), or *al-intifāda al-shaʿbiyya* ("the people's revolt"), in Egypt (January 18–19), the riot which choked the political regime and terrified its leaders. This was caused by the consequences of the open-door economic policy, which made life difficult for the majority of the Egyptians, especially government civil servants, including university professors. Corruption became obvious and expressions like *al-qīṭaṭ al-simān* ("fat cats") formed the headlines of the daily press. This free-market economic policy, *infītāḥ*, was criticized as *sadāḥ madāḥ infītāḥ* ("uncontrolled by any legal norms"). On the personal level, I suffered like the majority of the Egyptians from the consequences of this economic policy; I was unable to have a private place, and I lived with my family in a tiny apartment in Giza.²⁵

In 1978 I was fortunate to obtain a scholarship at the University of Pennsylvania, USA, at the Department of Folklore; my aim was to become trained in fieldwork and folkloric studies methodologies. This was a way to find time to read Ibn al-ʿArabī's books. I kept reading and rereading the *muqaddima* of the *Futūḥāt* without being able to make any progress. In Philadelphia I found time to proceed in reading Ibn al-ʿArabī besides my regular classes. I have to admit that the two years I spent in Pennsylvania were very productive. At that time structuralism was at its peak in sociology and anthropology, as well as in linguistics and literary theory.

More important for Qurʾānic studies was learning hermeneutics, which I discovered to be the closest English word for Arabic *taʾwīl*.²⁶ It was through English translations that I was able to read Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and others. It was Ibn al-ʿArabī, however, who provided me with the fundamental questions that opened my mind to hermeneutics. This was a great debt that I expressed in the defense-ceremony of my thesis in 1981 in the auditorium of the Faculty of Letters in Cairo University. I wrote the first Arabic article about hermeneutics in which I Arabized hermeneutics as *al-hirminyūtiqā*; it was published in 1981.²⁷

24 This became my second book, *Falsafat al-taʾwīl, dirāsa fī taʾwīl al-Qurʾān ʿinda Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī* ("Philosophy of Hermeneutics, a Study of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī's Hermeneutics of the Qurʾān"), Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-ʿArabī, 1983, followed by several reprints. For an early review of the book, see Michel Chossudovsky (untitled), *Studia Islamica* 60, 1984, 177–80.

25 If someone, a university assistant teacher at the age of 34, is unable to afford a rented apartment, the question of establishing a family is meaningless. A movie named *intabihū ayyuha al-sāda* ("Attention Gentlemen!") illustrated this situation. A garbage collector and a university professor proposes marriage to a beautiful educated lady – through the parents, as Arabic cultural norms dictate. The garbage collector wins the family support and the lady's heart because of his very high income compared to the professor's fixed salary.

26 My mentor and professor Ḥasan Ḥanafī was the one who immediately gave me the term after having been confused by the diversity of suggestions provided by teachers in the department.

27 *Al-Hirminyūtiqā wa-muʿdilat taḥsīr al-naṣṣ* ("Hermeneutics and the Problem of Text Interpretation"), in *Fuṣūl*, Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb 1 (April 1981) 3, 141–60. It was later included in my *Ishkālīyyat al-qirāʾa wa-ālīyyāt al-taʾwīl* ("The Problem of Reading and the Dynamics of Hermeneutics"), Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-ʿArabī, 2001, 13–49.

Hermeneutics deepened my understanding of Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought as much as Ibn al-ʿArabī's thought fashioned my engagement with hermeneutics.

Born in Spain, Ibn al-ʿArabī wrote his greatest treatise, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* ("The Meccan Revelations")²⁸ in Mecca, and died in Syria. This Ṣūfī encyclopedia, along with his other books, is presented not as his own work but rather as revelations given to him in different places and in different modes of divine visions. The *Futūḥāt*, for example, is the outcome of what God revealed to him during his circumambulation around the *kaʿba*. He claims that the arrangement of the book's chapters and sections is also not his. He explains that the section on "The Science of Legal Principles" in the second volume of the *Futūḥāt* should have logically and thematically been included in section 66 of the first volume (On "The Knowledge of Apparent and Hidden Meanings of *Sharʿiʾa*"). God inspired it this way.²⁹ No wonder – the Qurʾān is structured similarly.

His other important book is his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ("Bezels of Wisdoms"),³⁰ which Ibn al-ʿArabī claims was not written by him but handed to him in a vision (*mabshara*) by the Prophet in order to publish it for the benefit of the people, so "I did," Ibn al-ʿArabī, says, "accomplish the prophetic wish with all sincerity and with all good intention as it was delivered without any interference."³¹ It was not until 1992 that I realized the significance of this claim by Ibn al-ʿArabī. The context was a conference in Seville, Spain, sponsored by the Egyptian Islamic Institute in Madrid, entitled "Andalusia: The Crossroad of Three Worlds," in which I presented a paper on "The Role of Andalusia in Formulating Ibn Arabī's Mystical Philosophy." In this context, my paper focused on two phenomena in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings.

The first phenomenon is the strong, intricate presence of Qurʾānic quotations on every page of his books, to the extent that it is almost impossible to decide whether the Qurʾānic quotations serve the theme or the theme explicates the meaning of the quoted verses. Sometimes, there exist interpretive efforts; most of the time, the Qurʾānic quotations simply support the theme. That explains why Ibn al-ʿArabī is reluctant to apply the terms *taʾwīl* or *tafsīr* to his Qurʾānic explanation and instead prefers to use the Ṣūfī's long-established concept of allusions (*ishārāt*).³²

28 Printed in four volumes under the auspices of Prince ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya al-Kubrā, Cairo, 1329/1911.

29 Ibid., 2:181.

30 Ed. Abū l-ʿAlā ʿAfīfī, Cairo: ʿIsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1946.

31 Ibid., 47.

32 So, W.C. Chittick is right in realizing that Ibn al-ʿArabī avoids employing the term *taʾwīl*, but he is not right in criticizing others, such as H. Corbin and the author of this paper, for applying the term *taʾwīl* in describing Ibn al-ʿArabī's method in dealing with the Qurʾān. See *Ṣūfī Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's, Metaphysics of Imagination*, State University of New York Press, 1989, 199. Chittick makes such criticism without consulting the book, where there is a detailed discussion of Ibn al-ʿArabī's terminologies; the author depended on M. Chossudovsky's review of the book. A distinction is to be made, however, between doing *taʾwīl* and denying doing it in the context of the development of the negative connotation ascribed to the term long before Ibn al-ʿArabī's time. Ibn al-ʿArabī is certainly deeply involved in doing *taʾwīl*.

The second phenomenon is a similarity between the structure of his writings and the structure of the Qur'ān. First, as the Qur'ān includes *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* (3:7), Ṣūfī writings in general, and his writings in particular, also play on the duality of veiling (*al-satr wa-l-ikhfā'*) on the one hand, and unveiling (*al-kashf*), on the other. "God could have made explicit (*tanqīṣ*) what the people of God have interpreted (*ta'awwulahu*); He did not do so, He inserted (*adrajā*) these divine words, revealed in the language of the common people (*lisān al-āmma*) the kind of knowledge that is only accessible to His chosen servants by the capacity of understanding (*ayn al-fahm*) given to them by Him."³³ But Ibn al-'Arabī does not reveal all that he has received; he follows the divine wisdom of unveiling what ought to be unveiled and veiling what ought to be veiled, as "Neither a book nor the universe as it exists now can contain this."³⁴ Secondly, as the arrangement of the Qur'ānic verses, passages and chapters does not follow a thematic order, the arrangement of passages and chapters in Ibn al-'Arabī's books matches the Qur'ān's structure; they are divine revelation and Ibn al-'Arabī is only a transmitter.

Ibn al-'Arabī never fails to emphasize the parallelism between three manifestations of the divine *kalām*: 1. divine cosmological words (*kalimāt Allāh*) inscribed in the universe; 2. The word of God (*kalām Allāh*) in the *muṣṣhaf* (i.e. the Qur'ān); and 3. The word of God inspired in the hearts of his chosen servants: "God dictates to hearts by inspiration (*bi-l-ilhām*) all that is inscribed in the entire universe (*al-ālam*); the universe is a divine, inscribed book (*kitāb maṣṣūr ilāhī*)."³⁵ Such a universe of wonders and allusions is a text, a cosmological text, the domain of God's words, which cannot be recorded even if all the oceans were ink and all the trees of the world pens (Q 18:109; 31:27).

Here Ibn al-'Arabī establishes a parallelism between the cosmological text (*kalimāt Allāh al-maṣṣūr fī l-wujūd*) and the speech of God, the Qur'ān, (*kalām Allāh al-maṣṣūr fī l-kitāb*) which, though limited in size, is unlimited in meaning. Only chosen servants of God can decipher the cosmological meaning of the Qur'ān; they can encode that meaning in their own discourse, which is nothing but a divine, inspired discourse parallel to the divine, inscribed discourse in both the world and the book. At the very beginning of the *Futūḥāt*, he explicitly, though poetically, claims that he is the "Qur'ān and *al-sab' al-mathānī*,"³⁶ a claim which caused him trouble during his lifetime and his reputation trouble for centuries after his death.³⁷

All of this makes the study of Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics a difficult task. The greatest difficulty is not only his ambiguous language and circular style, of which

all scholars of Ibn al-'Arabī complain, but rather the impossibility of distinguishing between Ibn al-'Arabī's thought and his *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān. It was not easy for me to distinguish his *ta'wīl* from his ontology and his epistemology. In other words, Ibn al-'Arabī's system of thought is circular; in fact he is fond of constructing his thought in the form of "circles."³⁸

After my thesis had been approved by the defense committee, I became aware of the problem of the intricate relationship between Qur'ānic *ta'wīl* and Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophical worldview. I approached my supervisor suggesting I should rewrite the thesis, moving all the details of his philosophical worldview to the footnotes, keeping in the body of the text that which is related to his hermeneutics. My professor's comment was, "Ibn al-'Arabī is an ocean and I am very glad that you were able to swim back. No way, you have your life ahead of you; return to the ocean later but definitely not now." How far did I fulfill my early dream of discerning Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics? I still think it is impossible due to the complication as well as the ambiguity of the Ṣūfī worldview of Ibn al-'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd*, for which the term "pantheism" is not the appropriate translation.

Now, I find it reasonable to present Ibn al-'Arabī as the greatest defender of ambiguity or uncertainty as the true knowledge. In the *Futūḥāt*, he narrates three mysterious encounters with Ibn Rushd (or Averroes; d. 595/1198), the first of which occurred when Ibn al-'Arabī was a teenager while Ibn Rushd was at the top of his career and his fame. The second encounter seems to have happened in Ibn al-'Arabī's imagination, in a vision according to which the philosophers are busy with worldly affairs, i.e. with themselves and their own thought. The third encounter was not with the living philosopher but after Ibn Rushd's death. It was an encounter with his coffin when his remains were transferred from Morocco to Granada.³⁹ It is within the first encounter, which is explained and interpreted in different ways by different scholars of Ibn al-'Arabī, that I would like to present Ibn al-'Arabī's view of uncertainty, in opposition to what he thought to be the philosophical certainty of Ibn Rushd.

This first meeting occurred when the philosopher heard that the young Ibn al-'Arabī had attained the highest spiritual knowledge without training or education but through seclusion (*khalwa*), and expressed his desire to meet him. Through the mediation of Ibn al-'Arabī's father, who was a friend of the philosopher, the meeting was arranged. When Ibn al-'Arabī arrived he was welcomed by the philosopher with a shining, joyful face. The philosopher said "Yes?" and Ibn al-'Arabī immediately answered "Yes." Realizing the joy on the face of the

33 Tanazzul al-amlāk min 'ālam al-arwāḥ ilā 'ālam al-aflāk, ed. Tāhā Abd al-Bāqī Surūr & Zakī 'Atīyya, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1961, 116.

34 *Fuṣūṣ*, idem, p. 56.

35 *Futūḥāt*, idem, 2:182.

36 Ibid, 1:9.

37 The Egyptian parliament decreed in 1979, under heavy pressure exerted by the representatives of the Muslim Brothers, that the publications of his writings in Egypt should be cancelled, and that what had been published should be burned because it reflected deviation from Islam.

38 See the circular presentation of Ibn al-'Arabī's astrology in T. Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. from French by Bulent Rauf, Cheltenham: Beshara, 1977, pp. 13, 19 and 32-33. An important small treatise by Ibn al-'Arabī called *Inshā' al-dawā'ir*, (ed. H.S. Nyberg, with two other small treatises, Leiden: Brill, 1339/1919) shows clearly the circular structure of Ibn 'Arabi's thought.

39 *Futūḥāt*, 1:153-54.

philosopher, he continued, "and no." The philosopher's mode changed from joy to sadness to the extent that his body was trembling. Then Ibn Rushd raised the question, "How did you find the affair in divine unveiling and illumination? Is it (the same as) what we are given by reflection?" Ibn al-'Arabī elaborated, "It is 'yes' and 'no'; and between 'yes' and 'no' heads are cut off their necks."

Many efforts have been made to decode this enigmatic answer.⁴⁰ For our interest it suffices to acknowledge the uncertainty expressed; it is not a definite, clear "yes;" neither is it a clear "no." This is an in-between position of the mysterious ambiguity of Truth.

Ibn al-'Arabī's ontology

Ibn al-'Arabī developed an Islamic pantheistic system of thought, according to which the existence of this world is an imaginative one, parallel to dream-images; this world does exist in the Divine Imagination (*al-khayāl al-mutlaq*; sometimes called *al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*, *al-barzakh al-kabīr*, *al-barzakh al-ḥaqīqī* or *barzakh al-barāzikh*).⁴¹ Here we find an ontological interpretation of Q 55:19–20; the image of the two merged seas separated by a *barzakh* alludes to the impossibility of distinguishing between existence and non-existence as well as distinguishing between the absolute existence, *al-wujūd al-mutlaq*, and conditional existence, *al-wujūd al-muqayyad*. To our human perception the existence of the world is real. Only the Sūfī, the 'arīf, is aware of this ambiguous duality of *ḥaqq* ("real") and *khalq* ("unreal").

Ibn al-'Arabī thus aims to bypass both the theological concept of *khalq min 'adam* (creation *ex nihilo*) and the Neo-Platonic philosophical concept of *ḥayd* or *ṣudūr* ("emanation"); he applies the Qur'ānic concept of *tajallī* ("theophany;" Q 7:143), by which he tries to solve the theological conflict between the transcendental and the immanent image of God. He also bypasses the three grades of existence propagated by the philosophers (excepting Ibn Rushd), namely: *wājib al-wujūd* ("the necessary"), *mumkin al-wujūd* ("the possible") and *muḥāl al-wujūd* ("the impossible").⁴² Ibn al-'Arabī explains the process of *tajallī* as a process of unveiling the veiled divine essence in a process of theophanies (*tajalliyyāt*). These theophanies are not subject to space or time, nor do they have any causal relationship.⁴³

40 See, for example S. Stelzer, "Decisive meeting: Ibn Rushd, Ibn 'Arabī, and the matter of knowledge" in *Alif* 16, 1996, 19–55; 'Alī Mabruk, *Al-Inkīsār al-murawwigh li-l-'aḡaliyya: min Ibn Rushd ilā Ibn Khaldūn* ("The Evasive Defeat of Rationalism: From Ibn Rushd to Ibn Khaldūn"), *Alif* 16, 1996, 89–115. I offer a detailed treatment of this question in *Hakadhā takallama Ibn 'Arabī* ("Thus Spoke Ibn Arabī"), Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī 2004, 163–73.

41 See *Futūḥāt*, 1:304; 2:129, 311–12; 3:518.

42 He differentiates between three categories of existence within the Divine Imagination: 1. Conditioned existence (*al-wujūd bi-sharṭ shay*); 2. Unconditioned existence (*al-wujūd bi-sharṭ lā shay*); and 3. Absolute unconditioned existence (*al-wujūd lā bi-sharṭ shay*). On this, see 'Uthmān Yahyā, "Nuṣūṣ tārikhiyya khaṣṣa bi-naẓariyyat al-tawḥīd fi l-fikr al-islāmī" ("Historical Texts Concerning the Theory of Unicity in Islamic Thought"), in Ibrāhīm Bayyūmī Madkūr (ed.), *al-Kitāb al-tidhkār li-Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī*, Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1969, 238.

43 See *Futūḥāt*, 1:291.

In explaining this very ambiguous process, Ibn al-'Arabī employs symbols such as the lightning flash⁴⁴ and a mirror's reflection.⁴⁵

Ibn al-'Arabī frequently quotes a divine (*qudsī*) *ḥadīth*, not to be found in any of the canonical collections, to support his claim of theophanies: "I was a hidden treasure and I wanted [or desired], to be known. I therefore created humans so they knew Me through Me." According to this divine *ḥadīth* (i.e. a *ḥadīth* in the voice of God), the ontological process has an epistemological end; the divine hidden essence wanted, desired to be known by knowledge other than the hidden self-knowledge. This desire is explained by Ibn al-'Arabī as an expression of the divine love, the divine passion, which brought created order into appearance.⁴⁶ And because these theophanies are an ontological process, they have no end.

Human perplexity (*labs*) is caused by the fact that the entire universe from top to bottom is a shadowy existence, a reflective appearance, of Reality. This makes "uncertainty" the true knowledge. Does the universe exist? The answer is "yes" and "no." It is "yes" if reality is perceived through its outer images, but it is "no" if the optic of the viewer is the human heart, the human inner self-reflection. Again, the dream images exemplify the cosmological/ontological theophany; for the dreamer, the images he envisions are real; when awakened, they are images in need of translation, decoding, interpretation; or better, *ta'wīl*. Both the visual dream-images and the visual world are in need of *ta'wīl*.

With this ontology Ibn al-'Arabī solves various theological and philosophical problems, such as the pre-eternity of the world versus its creation in time, the multiple divine attributes versus the unity of the divine essence, and causality versus the divine free-will. He also applies his worldview to the Qur'ān. According to the theory of theophanies, the meaning of the Qur'ānic verse, *huwa al-awwalu wa-l-ākhiru wa-l-zāhiru wa-l-bāṭin* (57:3), becomes an expression of the divine breath: *huwa* is phonetically explained as *hawā'*, the divine passion to be known, from which all of the theophanies emanate. And since the theophanies have no beginning and no end, this passion is the beginning (*al-awwal*) and the end (*al-ākhir*), the apparent (*al-zāhir*) and the hidden (*al-bāṭin*).

Ibn al-'Arabī's epistemology

Does the above explanation of the process of unfolding the latent imagery of the cosmos have an objective? Yes: it is the human being in whose formation the whole universe from top to bottom is reflected and presented. Though man is the last manifested being, he is the first to be, because the first divine manifestation is an expression of the Divine's desire to be known by a knower other than itself, which is the very aim of theophany. Manifestations of different grades and levels

44 Ibid, 1:703.

45 Ibid, 2:468; see also, *Fuṣūṣ*, 49.

46 See *Futūḥāt*, idem, 2:310, 329; 3:420.

are intended to reach that end which is man. In other words, the Real reflects His own image partially in different mirrors, but the perfect mirror which reflects the Divine Image in its totality is man. Man thus represents the whole universe, on the one hand, and is the perfect mirror to reflect the image of the Real, on the other hand.⁴⁷ His spirit reflects Godhead; his intellect reflects the First Intellect; his soul reflects the Universal Soul; his heart represents the Throne; and his body represents the Universal Nature. Thus, the above-mentioned Qur'ānic verse (57:3) alludes also to the human being as the first – in the divine intention – and the last – in appearance; he is apparent physically and hidden spiritually.

Being the microcosm, the essential mission of man is to know God by knowing himself. When the Qur'ān has God relate, "*wa-ma khalaqtu l-jinna wa-l-insa illā li ya 'budūn* (lit., "We created Jinn and man that they might worship,") it means "We created Jinn and man that they might know" (Q 5:56).

Muhammad and mystical epistemology

An essential idea in the pantheistic system of Ibn al-'Arabī is *al-haqīqa al-muhammadiyya* (the "Muhammadan Reality") which is other than the historical Muhammad born in Mecca around 570. The Muhammadan Reality is the inward hidden reality which is manifested in all the prophets from Adam until its final and complete manifestation in the historical Muhammad of Mecca. The Muhammadan Reality is the ontological parallel of Godhead; it is the ontological agent between Pure Absoluteness and the world of multiplicity. This image of Muhammad is the light from which creation emanates. Muhammad is thus the light of God manifested in all existing things, as well as the light of knowledge revealed to the hearts of the believers. The Muhammadan Reality is the *logos*, both ontologically and epistemologically.

Muhammad is also a model of the mystical experience. His ascent to heaven (*al-mi'raj*) became to the Sūfī the example of how cosmological elements are stripped away until only the real divine image is apparent. Only the believer who successfully accomplishes the ascent is able to decode the real meaning of revelation through *ta'wīl*. To uncover the meaning of the Qur'ān one must first uncover the meaning of the cosmological text.

This ambiguity/uncertainty in the cosmological text as well as in the Qur'ān does not lead to agnosticism; on the contrary, it leads to an open space of belief, a space which accommodates all forms of creed as valid; thus Ibn al-'Arabī makes a clear distinction between "religion" (*dīn*) and "creeds" (*'aqā'id*). Religion is one because the Truth is one; creeds are many because they are related to communities in histories. But in Ibn al-'Arabī's "*waḥdat al-wujūd*" worldview, unity and multiplicity are the two sides of the same coin. Hence, his spirit/heart is able to accommodate all '*aqā'id* with no conflict:

La qad kuntu qabla al-yawmi unkiru ṣaḥibī, idhā lam yakun dīnī ilā dīnīhī danī
("Before today, I used to disregard my companion, if my religion was not like his")

Fa-qad ṣāra qalbī qabīlan kulla ṣūratin fa-mar'un li-ghizlān wa-dayrun li-ruhbānī

("My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a monastery for monks")

wa-baytun li-awthānin wa-ka'batu ṭā'fin wa-alwāḥu tawrātīn wa-muṣḥafu qur'ānī

("And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and the tables of Torah and the book of the Koran.")

adīnu bi-dīnī al-ḥubbi annā tawajjahat rakā'ibuhu fa-l-ḥubbu dīnī wa-īmānī

("I follow the religion of love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.")⁴⁸

One cannot but recall the twelfth-century Andalusian context of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual society where adherents to all the above-mentioned systems of faith lived together. Ibn al-'Arabī's project presents an attempt to integrate into the Qur'ān all the knowledge that had occurred up to his time in order to formulate an Islamic open-ended worldview, one that can reconcile itself to, and at the same time contain, Christianity, Judaism and all other religions. It was to be "a religion of comprehensive love." According to my view in 1980, this was a utopian project; Ibn al-'Arabī himself could not survive the trauma of the Reconquista. He fled to the Eastern part of the Muslim world when he was 27 years old and never returned to Andalusia. Although parts of the East were in the control of the Crusaders, it seems that Ibn al-'Arabī felt more at home there.

But in my book *Hākadhā takallama Ibn 'Arabī*, which was finished in June 2001, I present a less critical view of him. The context of writing this book was the debate about Huntington's theory of a "clash of civilizations." Ibn 'Arabī, I argue in this book, is a great witness, with Ibn Rushd and other Muslim thinkers, against this theory; they all present examples of intercultural and inter-civilization communication.

The critique of religious discourse

After returning to Egypt from the United States and obtaining the title of "Doctor" in July 1981, I become one of more than sixty university teachers and professors

47 cf. *Fuṣūṣ*, 48–49.

48 *The Tarjamān al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, trans. R.A. Nicholson, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911, 67.

transferred to non-teaching positions in different ministries, in my case in the ministry of Social Affairs.⁴⁹ More than 1,500 others – intellectuals, writers, activists and politicians – were imprisoned with no legal indictment. The situation reversed the earlier policy of President Muḥammad Anwar al-Sādāt, and affected even his allies of the early seventies, the Muslim Brothers. One of the consequences of his decrees of arrest and imprisonment (well known as *qarārāt September*) was his own assassination on October 6, 1981, by members of a Jihādī group.

During this time I taught a course on *'ulūm al-Qur'ān wa-l-tafsīr* ("The Sciences of the Qur'ān and Its Exegesis"), in which I was engaged with students in weekly discussions. Because I was also teaching the course *al-balāgha al-'Arabiyya* ("Arabic Rhetoric") I returned to the idea of the literary study of the Qur'ān in the al-Khulī tradition, which had been almost forgotten after the scandal of the PhD thesis of his student Khalafallah in 1947. Through the productive discussions in classes both in Cairo and al-Khartoum, Sudan, the basic idea of my book *Maḥmūd al-naṣṣ* developed. The students, Egyptian as well as Sudanese, were generally influenced by the claim of the Islamists that the implantation of *sharī'a*, the divine law of God, would bring prosperity, justice and peace to Muslim societies. The slogan *al-Islām huwa l-ḥal* ("Islam is the solution") was the conviction of the majority of the students. They reacted furiously to my critical approach to *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, bringing to the class all the arguments propagated in the mosques and the Islamist media against mine. This gave me a golden opportunity to react and to engage in free discussion with the Islamist claims; and free discussion in the classroom in Arab universities, especially in matters religious, is not the norm. The students enjoyed this space of freedom, and this interaction enabled me to develop arguments against the spread of Islamist ideas.

Meanwhile, the official religious discourse combated the Islamist's weapon of *taḥfīr* (charging Muslims with apostasy because their deeds violate Islamic norms) by *taḥfīr*. Soon *taḥfīr* became the weapon of the state against any opposition. Accordingly I became critical of the Muslim Brothers' discourse, the discourse of the religious official institutions, and the discourse of the regime.

In 1985 I was invited to take up a position as visiting professor for a couple of years at Osaka University of Foreign Studies (Osaka Gaidai) in Japan. I accepted the offer with no hesitation. My colleagues counseled me to go instead to a Gulf country, but I felt it was time to learn about the Asian world. In fact, I stayed more than four years, during which time I made only one visit to Egypt. I was more at home in Japan than in the United States; Japanese culture in general has a lot of similarities with my countryside upbringing and never did I feel homesickness as I did in the United States.

During the midterms and summer vacations, I was able to make tourist visits to South Korea, Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. I was

49 The presidential decree of September 1981 justified the decision by the allegation that these professors were involved in incidents of sectarian conflict in al-Zāwiya al-Ḥamrā' (a district in Cairo) in June 1981.

planning to go to the Soviet Union, India and Indonesia, but could not for lack of time. I confess that exposure to these cultures made me what I am, for better or for worse. I wonder what I would have been without such travel experiences.⁵⁰

Japanese religious tradition, which is a complex structure of Indian Buddhism, Chinese Confucianism and traditional Japanese Shinto, attracted my attention due to its tolerance, tranquility, spirituality, and its carnival rituality. I was tempted to contrast it with my native dry, formalistic, politicized and spiritually void dominant religiosity. In my introduction to the book *Bushido: the Spirit of Japan*, written in English by Inazo Nitobe (1862–1933),⁵¹ I compare the Japanese traditional culture and the dominant Arabic and Islamic Culture of Egypt and identify some reasons behind the failure of modernity and the dominance of the radical religious discourse in the Arab world in general and in Egypt in particular.⁵² Most of the insights expressed in this introduction have been elaborated in my later writing, especially in *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī* and *Maḥmūd al-naṣṣ*. Both were written in Japan.

The first two chapters of *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī* ("The Critique of Religious Discourse") were written and published separately. The first, *al-Khiṭāb al-dīnī, āliyatuhu wa-munṭaliqātuhu al-fikriyyah* ("The Religious Discourse: Its Tools and Its Basic Propositions"), was published in 1989.⁵³ The second, *al-Turāth bayna al-ta'wīl wa-l-talwīn: qirā'a fī mashrū' al-yasār al-Islāmī* ("Heritage between Interpretation and Ideology: A Reading of the Project of the Islamic Left"), was published in 1990.⁵⁴ Upon my return to Egypt, I delivered the Memorial Lecture of 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ahwānī, Faculty of Letters, Cairo University, in March 1990. Entitled *Qirā'at al-nuṣūṣ al-dīniyya: dirāsa istikshāfiyya li-anmā' al-dalala* ("Reading Religious Texts: An Exploratory Study of Types of Significance"), it was included in the book as the third chapter.⁵⁵

The first chapter of the book is a critical analytical study of the Islamic discourse in its three basic manifestations in Egypt: the extremist, the official considered as moderate, and the political discourse of absolutism. Applying discourse analysis, the

50 I also enjoyed teaching Japanese students and cooperating with Japanese colleagues of Arabic and Islamic Studies, including Professor Ogasawara, who was my classmate in Cairo University, and I had plenty of time to do research and publish, including three papers published in the *Journal of Osaka University for Foreign Studies*: "Al-Sīra al-nabawiyya sīra sha'biyya" ("The Prophet's biography as a folk epic"), 71, 1986, 1–24; "Al-Ghazali's theory of interpretation," 72, 1986, 1–24; and "The perfect man in the Qur'ān: Textual analysis," 73, 1988, 111–33.

51 See Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: the Spirit of Japan*, New York: Puntam Sons, 1908. *Al-Būshidū, Rūh al-Yabān: al-mukawwīnāt al-taqlīdiyya li-l-thaqāfa al-yabāniyya* ("Bushido, the Spirit of Japan: The Traditional Constituents of the Japanese Culture") Baghdad: Dār 'irat al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyya al-'Āmma, 1990 (2nd edition, Cairo: Dār Su'ād al-Ṣabbāh, 1993).

52 For a detailed review of this introduction, see A. Roussillon, *Identité et modernité: Les voyageurs égyptiens au Japon (XIX^e–XX^e)*, Paris: Actes Sud Sindbad, 2005, 204–15.

53 In *Al-Islām al-siyāsī: al-uṣūl al-fikriyya wa-l-ahdāf al-siyāsīyya* (Political Islam: Intellectual Foundations and Practical Objectives), ed. Maḥmūd Amīn al-'Ālim, Qaḍāya Fikriyya (Intellectual issues) series, book 8, Cairo 1989, 45–78.

54 In *Alif*, 10, 1990, 54–109.

55 1st edition Cairo: Dār Sīna, 1992; 2nd edition enlarged with a longer introduction, Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1996; 3rd edition: Beirut and Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi 'l-'Arabi, 2007.

chapter shows that the difference between these three discourses is in the language employed rather than in the content; the three adhere to certain essential convictions: 1. Islam as a comprehensive system that leaves nothing for human reason to add (human reason's function is to implement God's law); 2. Glorification of *al-salaf al-sāliḥ* ("pious ancestors"), who are above any criticism. The *imāms*, the *mufasssīrūn*, and the *fuqahā* have explained everything. *Ijtihād* ("independent reasoning") is limited to finding the suitable solution already provided by *al-salaf al-sāliḥ*. As for the Qur'ān, no *ijtihād* is allowed. The traditional statement *lā ijtihāda fī mā fihī nāṣṣ* – which means properly "No independent reasoning is allowed when there is a very obvious clear statement" – is applied to the entire Qur'ān.

The second chapter is focused on an analysis of the writings of Ḥasan Ḥanafī, especially his five volumes of *Min al-'aqīda ilā l-thawra: I'ādat binā' ilm al-'aqā'id* ("From Creed to Revolution: A Reconstruction of the Science of Creeds").⁵⁶ Ḥanafī is the main representative of the Islamic left; in fact, he is the only one. He always connects himself to the reformist Islamic movement, starting from Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī through Muḥammad 'Abduh, and surprisingly Ḥanafī includes among the reformists Ḥasan al-Banna and Sayyid Quṭb (always with the epithet *al-shahīd*, "the martyr"). He positions his thought between the two extremes, the radical Islamists and the radical secularists, a position which makes him a target of attack by both. The radical Islamists condemn him as an apostate, *murtad*; the radical secularists consider him an Islamist.

I critique his approach to phenomenological hermeneutics, by which the reader is king. The ideology of the reader overshadows critical historical analysis, and *ta'wīl* turns to ideology (*talwīn*, lit. "coloring"). When I was his student, Ḥanafī, in a 1969–70 "Islamic Philosophy" course, encouraged me to be critical, not to take ideas for granted just because they are the ideas of the teachers. In fact, my critique of Ḥanafī's ideas did not adversely affect our friendship. This was a great lesson I always try to transmit to my students.

The third chapter offers a hermeneutical approach that avoids "semantic manipulation," as presented in the first chapter, and the "ideological interpretation," as presented in the second chapter. It is based on three propositions on three semantic domains of meaning in the Qur'ān, as follows.

One, the distinction between religious thought and foundational religious texts is essential; religious thought is the outcome of the human endeavor to understand, explain and interpret the foundational text in accordance with socio-political and cultural horizons. The sacredness which the community of believers attaches to the foundational text should not be attached to the human endeavor, which is to be subjected to criticism in order to develop further understanding of the foundational text.

Two, the belief in the sacredness of the foundational texts should not prevent the believer from realizing the socio-political, historical and cultural context of these texts. This was realized and taken into consideration in classical Islamic

culture, e.g. issues such as *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, which clearly indicate the historicity of the religious texts, are to be elaborated in light of our modern scholarship without fear for one's faith.

Three, the fact that the Qur'ān is in Arabic clearly situates its semantic domain in the cultural context of its emergence in the seventh century. At the same time it produces and reproduces multiple levels of meaning dependent on the questions raised by different generations of believers. Modern linguistics teaches us that every speech act, and definitely every unique text, though encoded in a certain language, develops its own parole, which is a sub-code within the language code, to communicate its own message.⁵⁷ Such textual characteristics were realized by classical Muslim thinkers in the Qur'ān and by such an approach they developed the doctrine of *i'jāz*, inimitability. Modern hermeneutics, on the other hand, explains that this new meaning generated by the new question addressed to the text is not entirely explicit in the text (otherwise the previous generations would have found it); neither does it entirely exist in the reader's mind; it is the outcome of the text–reader encounter. The term *shūrā* (Q 42:38), for example, could not be understood to allude to democracy before the nineteenth century.

According to the above three propositions, I suggested three domains of meanings to be investigated in the Qur'ān in our modern horizon.

One: the domain of meaning related to the existence of certain supernatural beings and their power in affecting human life, such as angels, Jinn and demons. This is the domain of historical meaning which has no significance in our modern life. In this domain the Qur'ān is addressing the Arab mentality of the seventh century. To take the Qur'ānic mention of these beings as actual physical beings that are really and actually able to affect and influence humans is to imprison the Qur'ān in the seventh-century cultural domain. To this historical domain of meaning belong the images of the divine kingdom, such as the divine throne (*al-'arsh*) and the divine chair (*al-kursī*).

Two: the domain of meaning subject to metaphorical understanding; this is the domain of anthropomorphic features ascribed to God's attributes, such as face, hand, eye and leg as well as human emotions such as love and hate. Metaphorical interpretation is justified, following the classical *ta'wīl* theory of *majāz* but without adhering to the classical concept which opposes *majāz* to *ḥaqīqa* categorically.

Third, the domain of meaning of *ijtihād* ("independent reasoning"), which should not be limited to the classical concept of *qiyās* ("analogical reasoning"). This domain is to be applied to legal stipulations addressed to the seventh-century context of the nascent Muslim community, which needed certain regulations after moving from Mecca, where Muslims were the minority group, to Medina, where they became the ruling group. Such contextualization goes far beyond the classical legal theory.

An illustrative case of these ideas is the female inheritance share in the Qur'ān. One of the objectives of Islam, deduced from the contextual reading, is "equality,"

which is alluded to as a goal to be pursued. Now the Qur'ān, in the middle of its detailed exposition of inheritance, states "your fathers and your sons; you are not aware of whom is closer to your benefit" (Q 4:11). Regarding this we might observe, first, that the inheritance system in the Qur'ān's milieu is obviously based on blood kinship (*'aṣabiyya*), a system the Qur'ān means to contradict. Second, we might note that the Qur'ānic system of giving a female half of a man's inheritance was a great forward step in a context in which inheritance was for males who are able to fight; male children and females were excluded. Third, the early community did appreciate the possibility of having children and women share in the deceased's wealth.⁵⁸ In this light it seems that the Qur'ān here is pointing to an ultimate goal of replacing the blood-kinship inheritance system with a system sustained by the objective of equality in the Islamic worldview.

In this way an appreciation of the context of seventh-century Arabia leads to the unearthing of the Qur'ān's original historical meaning, i.e. the meaning addressed to the early community. At this point we can discern the significance of the uncovered meaning in the context of our contemporary milieu, remembering that this significance might differ according to the particular socio-political and cultural context of various societies.

The jurists' approach to the Qur'ān

So far, this chapter has presented the theological and the Sūfī worldviews deduced from the Qur'ān through different modes of hermeneutics. I mean thereby to connect the classical worldviews with the present dispute about the Islamic meaning of life in the modern world. The question of whether or not the principles of *sharī'a* should be the main source of legislation – an idea affirmed by most Muslim countries' constitutions – is at the heart of the dispute between the Islamists and the modernists. Usually, however, it is only in the domain of family law that *sharī'a* is applied. The Islamists seek to apply *sharī'a* to the entire legal code. The use of other laws, according to the Pakistani Abū al-A'īn al-Mawdūdī and the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, is tantamount to regression to *jāhiliyya*, the pre-Islamic pagan way of life.

There are three major issues through which the Qur'ānic worldview according to the jurists (*fuqahā'*) can be scrutinized. The first is the theory of abrogation, according to which the Qur'ān's legal regulations changed during the lifetime of Muḥammad. The second issue is Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and the minor role that the Qur'ān plays therein. The third issue is theory of the *sharī'a*'s objectives (*maqāṣid*).

Abrogation

The *fuqahā'* dealt with conflicting legal rules by applying the doctrine of abrogation (*naskh*), according to which the ruling revealed latest to Muḥammad should be considered to replace earlier rulings. This doctrine reflects the idea that a divinely revealed text has no contradictions (cf. Q 4:82), and is based on two

58 For these two points, see al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:30–31.

Qur'ānic passages, namely 2:106 and 16:101. Needless to say, the application of such a method means investigating the chronological order of the Qur'ānic passages – a dimension not considered in either theology or Sūfism. It has been argued recently that the basic motivation behind producing the 'Uthmanic codex, *muṣḥaf*, was the need to articulate the legal impetus of the Qur'ān. The theory of abrogation was, accordingly, the earliest Qur'ānic science to be developed.⁵⁹ Such argumentation is reasonable since the early issues that emerged within the Muslim community, immediately after the death of the Prophet, were legalistic in nature. Theological issues emerged later.

According to the theory of abrogation, the Qur'ān is divided into four categories:

One, passages that are now entirely absent from the Qur'ān, i.e. what was caused to be forgotten (Q 87:6–7) or what has been omitted by God's decree (Q 13:39; 17:68). According to this category, the *muṣḥaf* which Muslims have since the production of 'Uthmān's codex does not contain all of what was revealed to Muḥammad.

Two, passages that no longer have legal force, but that still exist in the Qur'ān to be recited (*naskh al-ḥukm dūna l-tilāwa*). This is the most prominent category of *naskh*.

Three, passages that still have legal force but do not appear in the present text (*naskh al-tilāwa dūna l-ḥukm*). To this category belongs the stoning penalty for adultery, which is believed to have been in the recited Qur'ān during the Prophet's lifetime but was not included in the *muṣḥaf*. This category means that the prophetic tradition (*sunna*) can act as evidence for the legal authority (*hujja*) of the Qur'ān when that authority is not in the text of the Qur'ān itself.

Four, passages not subject to abrogation.⁶⁰

One might argue, and many Muslim thinkers now do, that if the legal rulings of the Qur'ān changed through the two decades of Muḥammad's mission, Muslims might now apply similar methods to update the rulings of *sharī'a* in accordance with the changing socio-political and cultural context. The immediate response the traditional '*ulamā'*' provides for such argument is that only God and His Prophet might update the *sharī'a*. They further maintain, since Islam is the last religion and the only accepted one, and since both the Qur'ān and the *sunna* are the last revealed message, that any human interference is deviation from the path of Islam.

The legal theory of Islam

The process by which the *fuqahā'* were able to build a legal system, *sharī'a*, out of the limited legal issues addressed in the Qur'ān is known as *uṣūl al-fiqh*.⁶¹ Early

59 Cf. W. Hallaq, "Law and the Qur'ān" in *EQ*, 3:153–54.

60 For a more detailed explanation of the history, the development and the types of *naskh*, see J. Burton, "Naskh," *EP*, 7:109–12; idem, "Abrogation," *EQ*, 1:11–19.

61 According to al-Ghazālī only 500 verses have legal material; others count only 150. Al-Suyūfī explains, "If they mean the explicit rules, the Qur'ānic verses are limited in number; however, many rules are deduced from the Qur'ānic narratives and parables." *Itqān*, genre 65. Wael Hallaq

Muslim jurists, *fuqahā*, tried their best to deduce the implicit out of the explicit in the Qur'ān by developing certain concepts, such as *maslaḥa* (pl. *maṣāliḥ*; "the community interest"), *istiḥsān* and *istiṣlāḥ* ("preference" or "advantage").⁶² But to build a legal theory they also turned to other legal sources, e.g. the prophetic tradition (*sunna*), *ijmā'* (consensus of the first Muslim generation, the *ṣaḥāba*, and the scholars of the following generations, the *ulamā'*), as well as *ijtihād* ("independent reasoning"). The first construction of the Islamic legal theory was accomplished by al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) in his *Risāla* and *Kitāb al-Umm*.⁶³ Al-Shāfi'ī is believed to be the first jurist who systematically established *qiyās* ("analogical reasoning") as the only methodological means by which *ijtihād* is to be performed; thus he limited the scope of *ijtihād* by excluding *istiḥsān*, *istiṣlāḥ* and *ra'y* ("sound opinion").⁶⁴

Hence the sources of the legal theory are of two types: the Qur'ān and the *sunna* are the main textual sources, while *ijmā'* and *ijtihād* are auxiliary, explanatory sources. Being the main textual sources, the Qur'ān and the *sunna* are not immediately comprehended; linguistically, they are in need of explanation, elucidation and interpretation, which causes diverse conclusions (*ikhtilāf*). Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), with whose philosophical hermeneutics the next section deals, summarizes the structure of *sharī'a* before indicating the cause of the legal diversity in his introduction to *Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa-nihāyat al-muqtaṣid*.⁶⁵ His summary, freely quoted and restructured, runs as follows:

The rules of *sharī'a*, *aḥkām*, are of five types in relation to the human subject, *al-mukallaf*: one, obligatory (*wājib*), wherein the command is decisive and an omission (to do the act) invokes punishment; two, recommended (*mandūb*), wherein there is reward (*thawāb*) for the act and no punishment for its omission; three, prohibited (*ḥarām*), wherein the prohibition is decisive and the commission of the act invokes punishment; four, disapproved (*makrūh*), wherein there is a recommendation to abstain from the act and no punishment for its commission; and five, permitted (*mubāḥ* or *muhkayyar*), where a choice is given between commission and omission.

argues, however, that if we consider the repetitive character of the Qur'ān outside the legal domain, and if we, further, consider the average length of the legal verse which "is twice or even thrice that of the average non-legal verse, it is not difficult to argue that the Qur'ān contains no less legal material than does the Torah which is commonly known as 'The Law.' Therefore, while Qur'ānic law constitutes a relatively minor part of the *sharī'a*, the Qur'ān is no less legalistic than the Torah." "Law and the Qur'ān" in *EQ*, 3:150. The argument is obviously apologetical; the fact remains that the legal role of the Qur'ān in *sharī'a* is limited.

62 See for the development of this concept, R. Paret, "Istiḥsān and Istiṣlāḥ," in *EI*², 4:255–95.

63 *Al-Risāla*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d. References will be made in the text as (R, p.). As for *al-Umm*, Cairo: Dār al-Sha'b, 1321/1903. The same method will be followed (U, p.).

64 Cf. my *Al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī wa-ta'sīs al-aydīyūlūgiyyā al-waṣāṭiyya* ("Imam al-Shāfi'ī and the Establishment of the Middle Position Ideology"), 2nd edition: Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1996, 129–46.

65 Translated into English as *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, trans. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, Reading, UK: Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, Garnet Publishing Limited, 1994.

Sharī'a has reached us through different channels: one, textual channels, the Qur'ān and the verbal *sunna*, the *ḥadīth*, or the reported sayings of the prophet; two, the practical *sunna* based on the Prophet's actions and approvals/disapprovals (*al-af'āl wa-l-iqrārāt*); three, *ijmā'* ("consensus"); and, four, *ijtihād* by applying *qiyās*.

As for the first channel, the textual sources, i.e. the Qur'ān and the verbal *sunna*, Ibn Rushd divides its linguistic structure as follows: one, the form of wording (*ṣiyāghat al-alfāz*); two, the type of wording (*aṣnāf al-alfāz*); and three, the levels of meaning and their relative ruling (*a'yān al-aḥkām*).

As for the second channel, the Prophet's actions and approvals/disapprovals, some jurists maintain that the reports of the Prophet's actions do not indicate *aḥkām*, as they do not have linguistic forms. Ibn Rushd is of the opinion that if the actions occur as an explication of an obligatory Qur'ānic enjoinder (*mujmal*), they indicate an obligation, and if they occur as an explication of a recommended enjoinder, they indicate recommendation. If they belong to the classification of permissible acts (*mubāḥ*), they indicate permissibility. The approvals/disapprovals, however, can only indicate permissibility.

As for the third channel, *ijmā'*, it has no independent authority; its authority is derived from one or more of the textual sources. Its role is, therefore, limited to strengthening the type of a ruling from *ẓannī* ("unclear" or "non-decisive") to *qaṭ'ī* ("definitive" and "decisive").

Fourth, and last, is *ijtihād* by applying *qiyās*, the domain in which *sharī'a* is silent. Legitimate *qiyās* involves assigning an existing ruling to a legal issue about which the sources are silent. As the incidents of life are unlimited while the sources, both textual and non-verbal (e.g. the Prophet's acts and approvals/disapprovals) are limited, *ijtihād* by applying *qiyās* is the only legitimate method to address our unlimited legal questions. *Qiyās*, therefore, has to be based either on the resemblance between the issue waiting for a ruling and that for which the law has provided the ruling (i.e. *qiyās shabah*) or on the existence of explicit or implicit cause in both the *sharī'a* ruling and the issue under consideration (i.e. *qiyās ʿilla*).

After providing this concise summary of the structure of *sharī'a*, Ibn Rushd briefly but adequately explains that the reason behind difference (*ikhtilāf*) in legal matters is the linguistic structure of the textual sources. *Ikhtilāf* is even greater in *ḥadīth* because of the way they have been transmitted and the greater possibility of conflict (*ta'arud*) between them. Moreover, conflict may also exist between reported acts (*af'āl*) or approvals/disapprovals (*iqrārāt*).

Lastly, conflict may occur *between* any one of the four channels of law and another.

The objectives of *sharī'a*

The third issue is the concept of the utmost objectives of *sharī'a* (*al-maqāṣid al-kullīyya li-l-sharī'a*), proposed by Ghazālī in the fifth/eleventh century and later developed and sophisticated by al-Shāfi'ī (d. 790/1388). It is rightfully stated that

The doctrine of *maḳāṣid al-sharī'a* has its roots in early Muslim attempts to rationalize both theology and law. In terms of theology, the ideas of the Mu'tazila undoubtedly influenced the emergence of the *maḳāṣid* doctrine. The Mu'tazilī doctrine that God's decrees are subject to, rather than the origin of, the ideas of good and evil (*al-taḥṣīn wa-l-taḳbīḥ*) ultimately resulted in an assertion that God is compelled to act in the interests (perhaps the best interests) of humankind. His law must be of benefit to his creation, for if it was not, his qualities of justice and goodness would be compromised.⁶⁶

Al-Shātibī declares, uncompromisingly, that the whole *sharī'a* exists to promote the welfare of the believers. The benefits which are promoted and preserved when the *sharī'a* is instituted are of three basic types: necessary (*darūriyyāt*), needed (*ḥājīyyāt*) and improvement (*taḥṣīniyyāt*).

The five necessary objectives (*al-darūriyyāt*) are: one, the preservation of life; two, the preservation of property; three, the preservation of progeny; four, the preservation of sanity; and five, the preservation of religion. The needed objectives (*ḥājīyyāt*) make obedience to the *sharī'a* less demanding, such as relieving the sick person from the obligatory fast if he provides one meal daily during the month of Ramaḍān for a poor person as compensation (Q 2:184). The improvement (*taḥṣīniyyāt*) objectives relate to benefits already enjoyed by the believers, such as granting compensation for many sins in return for the freeing of a slave (see Q 4:92; 5:89; and 58:3).

This legal worldview of *sharī'a* has been celebrated by modern reformers all over the Muslim world. Because it is based on *maṣlaḥa* ("advantage") and preservation, it provides them with a traditional basis to reform classical *sharī'a* rules, especially in the domain of personal and family code, to be less discriminative, and to be closer to legal norms. But a deeper insight would reveal that these five objectives are deduced from the penal code of *sharī'a*, called *ḥudūd*, without taking into consideration the moral, ethical and spiritual components of the Qur'ān's worldview. The first objective, preservation of life, is deduced from the penalty for illegal killing; retaliation (*al-qasās*), according to the Qur'an, is done to maintain life itself (Q 2:178–79). The second objective, preservation of progeny, is based on the penalty for committing adultery, whether it is the 100 lashes mentioned in the Qur'an (24:2) (explained later to be applied only for the unmarried) or the stoning penalty, which has no Qur'ānic ground.⁶⁷ As for the third objective, preservation of property, it is obviously deduced from the theft penalty, cutting off the hands of a thief (Q 5:38). The fourth objective, preservation of sanity, is deduced from the prohibition on consuming alcohol, for which there is no penalty in the Qur'an (the penalty of 80 lashes was introduced by a companion – copying

66 R.M. Gleave, "Maḳāṣid al-sharī'a," in EI², 12:569.

67 This is an example, perhaps the only one, of abrogating the text but keeping its rule enact. The supposedly abrogated verse is "*wa-l-shayḥu wa-l-shaykhatu idhā zanayā fa-irjūmūhumā albat-ta nikālan min Allāh.*" The style does not seem to me, Qur'ānic.

the penalty for false accusation of fornication, *qadhf*; Q 24:4). The fifth objective, preservation of religion, is the later developed death penalty for apostasy (*ridḍa*).⁶⁸

To conclude, the legal worldview has concentrated on a very limited portion of the Qur'ān, as has the theological worldview. In the modern Muslim world, where theology, philosophy and mysticism have been marginalized for centuries, the *sharī'a* paradigm has become the only representative of Islam. Thus two different terms, *sharī'a* and Islam, have become synonymous.

The philosopher's approach to the Qur'ān

Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) is well known as the Muslim philosopher who propagated the Aristotelian philosophical worldview against the Neo-Platonism that was imported and expounded by al-Farābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (370/980–428/1037). He is also well known as the strongest opponent of the Ash'arī theology presented by al-Ghazālī, who severely attacked the philosophers as infidels in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, to which Ibn Rushd responded with the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*. In the West he is known as the great commentator on Aristotle. Not much is known about Ibn Rushd's hermeneutics of the Qur'ān except his support of the metaphoric interpretation for any Qur'ānic statement in which the literal meaning contradicts philosophical evidence, something that was suggested before him by the Mu'tazilites.

Yet a closer reading of his trilogy *Faṣl al-maḳāl fī taqrīri mā bayna al-sharī'ati wa-al-ḥikmāti min al-tiṣāl*,⁶⁹ *al-Kaṣf 'an manāḥij al-adilla fī 'aḳā'id al-milla*, and the *Ḍamīma*, in addition to his legal treatise on legal diversion, *Fiqh al-ikhtilāf*, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa-nihāyat al-muqtaṣid*, reveals that Ibn Rushd has developed a more sophisticated detailed theory of interpretation than that introduced by the theologians, whether Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite. Within this hermeneutic, Ibn Rushd was able to indicate a direction towards a Qur'ānic worldview.

In *Faṣl al-maḳāl*, he starts by establishing through legal arguments that the study of philosophy is obligatory for those who are capable of attaining it and its prohibition is tantamount to disobedience of *sharī'a*.⁷⁰ By this introduction, he paves the ground for his hermeneutics via a philosophical syllogism, *burhān*. The first premise is that the Islamic message is meant for all humans with no discrimination: "The Prophet, peace be on him, was sent with a special mission to 'the white man and the black man' alike."⁷¹ The second premise is that humans are not on the same educational/intellectual level in attaining knowledge and reaching assent.

68 No worldly punishment is mentioned in the Qur'ān for those who turn their back on Islam after accepting it. What is mentioned is a punishment in the afterlife (Q 3:90 and 4:137).

69 English translation: *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. G. Hourani, London: Luzac, 1967.

70 Ibid., 45, 48.

71 Ibid., 49.

For the natures of humans are on different levels with respect to [their paths to] assent. One comes to assent through demonstration; another comes to assent through dialectical arguments, just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstration, since his nature does not contain any greater capacity; while another comes to assent through rhetorical arguments, again just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstrative arguments.⁷²

The conclusion is that the Qur'ān provides every human with "the method of assent which his temperament and nature require."⁷³ The Qur'ān itself, Ibn Rushd explains, supports this philosophical syllogism; it "embraces all the methods of summons to God the Exalted. This is clearly expressed in the saying of God most Exalted (Q 16:125), 'Summon to the way of your Lord by wisdom (the philosophical demonstration) and by good preaching (rhetorical discourse) and debate (dialectical argumentative discourse) with them in the most effective manner'.⁷⁴

Here, Ibn Rushd argues that the Qur'ānic modes of discourse are the same as the Aristotelian modes of argument, namely demonstrative, dialectical and rhetorical. He even goes further, insisting that the Qur'ān's worldview by no means contradicts the universal rational worldview known to him through philosophy. In case of any apparent contradiction the Qur'ānic discourse is to be interpreted beyond its immediate literal meaning with metaphorical/allegorical interpretation.

So we affirm definitely that whenever the conclusion of a demonstration is in conflict with the apparent meaning of Scripture, that apparent meaning admits of allegorical interpretation according to the rules for such interpretation in Arabic. This proposition is questioned by no Muslim and doubted by no believer. But its certainty is immensely increased for those who have had close dealings with this idea and put it to the test, and have made it their aim to reconcile the assertions of intellect and tradition.⁷⁵

Ibn Rushd argues that philosophical demonstration leads to certainty.⁷⁶ Legal syllogism (*qiyās shar'ī*) is based on opinion and leads to uncertainty. But this does not mean that those whose capacity is limited to apprehend either argumentatively or rhetorically are misled. The three modes of discourse, Ibn Rushd argues, complement and support each other. Therefore, metaphorical/allegorical interpretation, in Ibn Rushd's view, is to be executed through careful consideration of the entire body of the scripture. In other words, contrary to the theological exegesis (where metaphor is applied only according to need), Ibn Rushd emphasizes a

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 49.

75 Ibid., 51.

76 Ibid.

holistic approach. He sustains the validity of metaphorical interpretation of a certain statement by finding another statement whose immediate meaning supports the demonstrative (or rational) evidence:

Indeed we may say that whenever a statement in Scripture conflicts in its apparent meaning with a conclusion of demonstration, if Scripture is considered carefully, and the rest of its contents searched page by page, there will invariably be found among the expressions of Scripture something which in its apparent meaning bears witness to that allegorical interpretation or comes close to bearing witness.⁷⁷

The remarkable characteristics of Ibn Rushd's application of his hermeneutics is that in every issue he embarks upon in discussing and debating, he quotes the Qur'ān and the prophetic tradition, which corroborate demonstrative evidence by their immediate apparent meaning. He starts *Faṣl al-maqāl*, for example, by providing a wide range of Qur'ānic quotations that encourage humans to observe, contemplate and think. He comments:

Since reflection is nothing more than inference and drawing out of the unknown from the known, and since this is reasoning or at any rate done by reasoning, therefore we are under an obligation to carry on our study of beings by intellectual reasoning. It is further evident that this manner of study, to which the Qur'ān summons and urges, is the most perfect kind of study using the most perfect kind of reasoning; and this is the kind called demonstration.⁷⁸

Debating against al-Ghazālī's charge that philosophers are apostates for holding that the world is pre-eternal, Ibn Rushd argues that the immediate meaning of the Qur'ānic passages (*ẓāhir*) accommodates the philosophical view:

Thus the words of God the Exalted, "He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was on the water" (Q 11:7), taken in their apparent meaning imply that there was a being before this present being, namely the throne and the water, and a time before this time, i.e. the one which is joined to the form of this being, namely the number of the movement of the celestial sphere. And the words of the Exalted, "On the day when the earth shall be changed into other than earth, and the heavens as well" (Q 14:48), also in their apparent meaning imply that there will be a second being after this being. And the words of the Exalted, "Then He directed Himself towards the sky, and it was smoke" (Q 41:11), in their apparent meaning imply that the heavens were created from something. Thus the theologians

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid., 45.

too in their statements about the world do not conform to the apparent meaning of Scripture but interpret it allegorically.⁷⁹

Here Ibn Rushd defends the immediate, apparent meaning against the theologians' *ta'wīl*. By the theologian's view the opinion of the lay people, the *'amma*, is false, even if it is Qur'ānic. By Ibn Rushd's view, the apparent meaning is valid, as long as it is does not contradict demonstrative evidence. When there is a contradiction, *ta'wīl* by metaphoric or allegorical interpretation is not only permissible but obligatory. Of course, there are certain issues about which scripture is silent, a point that is accounted for in Ibn Rushd's hermeneutics and which also distinguishes his approach from that of the theologians.

The Rushdian principles of hermeneutics thus transcend the limits of the textual-interpretation theory in which precepts that developed outside of the text dominate the text. His hermeneutics reflect the complex structure of the Qur'ānic discourse and they seem to approach the Qur'ān's explicit worldview, which, generally speaking, is in harmony with the philosophical worldview.

The principles of the Rushdian's hermeneutics are to be summarized as follows:

One, when scripture is silent concerning any element there is no problem whatsoever. This view sustains explicitly that scriptures are not inclusive; there are areas of knowledge which fall entirely under the authority of reason.

Two, when the explicit meaning of the scripture (*zāhir*) is in harmony with the philosophical view neither metaphorical nor allegorical interpretation is allowed; *ta'wīl* in such case is a grave error. This is the area of the fundamental elements of the creed,

knowledge of which is provided by all the different methods of indication, so that knowledge of the matter in question is in this way possible for everyone. Examples are acknowledgement of God, Blessed and Exalted, of the prophetic missions, and of happiness and misery in the next life; for these three principles are attainable by the three classes of indication, by which everyone without exception can come to assent to what he is obliged to know: I mean the rhetorical, dialectical and demonstrative.⁸⁰

Here the immediate meaning of scripture is as true as the philosophical.

Three, when there is an apparent contradiction between the immediate meaning and philosophical understanding, *ta'wīl* is unavoidable. This category has two subdivisions:

- a Texts ascribing corporal attributes to God, for which *ta'wīl* is only attainable through demonstration, and regarding which diverse meanings are possible. Such *ta'wīl* is not to be available for the common people, who attain assent

⁷⁹ Ibid., 56–57.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 58.

only through rhetorical evidences; "Of this class are the verse about God's directing Himself and the Tradition about His descent. That is why the Prophet, peace on him, said in the case of the black woman, when she told him that God was in the sky, 'Free her; for she is a believer.' This was because she was not of the demonstrative class."⁸¹

- b Uncertain texts concerning resurrection, punishment and reward in the after-life, about which there is disagreement.⁸² For this class of texts, the apparent meaning is the only meaning to be taught to the common people. Philosophical interpretation of such texts has to be confined to books of philosophy accessible only to the learned.

It is possible to summarize Ibn Rushd's hermeneutics by using the metaphor of colors. First, there is the *white* area of issues about which the Qur'ān is silent; these issues are left for rational investigation. It is obvious here that Ibn Rushd does not take the Qur'ānic statement expressing the "inclusiveness" of the Qur'ān, *ma farraqnā fi l-kitābi min shay'* (6:38; 16:89) to the letter, as the majority of Muslims do. Second, there is the *green* area, where the apparent meaning of the text accommodates the rationally demonstrative evidence; this is the area of the fundamental creeds. Third, there is the *gray* area, where there is a conflict either between the apparent and the demonstrative or a conflict within the Qur'ān itself. Fourth, there is the *red* area, involving issues pertinent to eschatology such as resurrection, reckoning, reward and punishment. Ibn Rushd distinguishes between the general belief of happiness and misery in the life after, which is part of the green area, and the detailed knowledge of whether or not resurrection is physical or only spiritual and whether or not reward and punishment are physical or spiritual. This latter discussion is to be carried out only by the philosophers and should not, by any means, be exposed to the public.

So the area where the Qur'ān is clearly explicit is very limited compared to the areas of uncertainty and ambiguity. The Qur'ān's worldview, therefore, is to be explicated by philosophy and rational investigation; thus the uncertain becomes certain and the ambiguous is disambiguated.⁸³

In conclusion, it could be inferred that Ibn Rushd considers the philosophical worldview, as presented by demonstrative evidence, as absolutely clear and

⁸¹ Ibid., 59–60.

⁸² Ibid., 60.

⁸³ It might be mentioned here that Ibn Rushd devoted *Manāhij al-adilla* to clarifying the essential issue of the Islamic creed against the Ash'arites' articulations as presented by al-Ghazālī. He follows the same line of argumentation we referred to earlier by citing the Qur'ān and the prophetic tradition before debating with the theological interpretation. He concludes by indicating that he, against his conviction that *ta'wīl* should not be publicized, confined himself to dealing with the issues made public by the theologian. *Manāhij al-adilla fi 'aqā'id ahl al-milla*, ed. Muhammad 'Abid al-Jābirī, Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahda al-'Arabiyya, 1998, 142–44. He also expresses his intention to produce in the future a comprehensive *tafsīr* in which he hoped to be able to apply his hermeneutics. See *ibid.*, 208.

certain, whereas the Qur'ān's worldview is loaded with uncertainty because it addresses all levels of understanding. There is, therefore, a certain tension between the philosophical worldview and the Qur'ānic worldview, a tension that can only be solved by *ta'wīl*. But again, if *ta'wīl* is not to be available for everyone, how can those who are deprived of such privilege attain appropriate knowledge of the Qur'ān's worldview? The solution for Ibn Rushd is that the conflict between the immediately apparent meaning and the demonstrative meaning is not intrinsic. When "scripture is considered carefully, and the rest of its contents searched page by page, there will invariably be found among the expressions of Scripture something which in its apparent meaning bears witness to that allegorical interpretation or comes close to bearing witness."⁸⁴ *Sharī'a* and philosophy are, after all, breastfeeding sisters; there is no contradiction between the two modes of truth. Still, Ibn Rushd's advice to search the content of Scripture page by page is waiting to be executed thoroughly.

The Qur'ān as text

My first direct encounter with Qur'ānic studies, after my study of Mu'tazilite hermeneutics in my MA and Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics in my PhD, is presented in *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ: dirāsa fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* ("The Concept of the Text: A Study in the Sciences of the Qur'ān"), which I wrote while in Japan in 1987. At that time I was concerned about the ideological manipulative hermeneutics of the Qur'ān practiced by the classical theologians as well as by the contemporary 'ulamā', whether they belong to the official religious institutions or belong to the political Islamist movement. So, the question of the very concept of the Qur'ān – what is the Qur'ān? – directed me to investigate the classical 'ulūm al-Qur'ān. It will suffice here to present a very brief account of the basic argument of the book.

The classical Qur'ānic sciences, when read in the light of modern theories about textual analysis, reveal that the Qur'ān, although recognized as a holy text, is a historically and culturally determined text. This historical text is the subject of understanding and interpretation, whereas God's words exist in a sphere beyond any human knowledge. Therefore, socio-historical analysis is needed for its understanding and a modern linguistic methodology should be applied for its interpretation. The Qur'ān is a message revealed from God to man through the Prophet Muḥammad, the Messenger of God and a human. The Qur'ān is very clear about that. A message represents a communicative link between a sender and a recipient through a code or a linguistic system. Because the sender in the case of the Qur'ān cannot be the object of scientific study, the scientific introduction to the analysis of the text of the Qur'ān can only take place through the study of the contextual reality and the cultural milieu of seventh-century Arabia.

The contextual reality refers to the totality of the socio-political conditions that formed the background for the actions of those who were addressed by the text. The cultural milieu refers to the world of conceptions that is embodied in the language, the same language in which the Qur'ān is embodied. Therefore, the historicity of the Qur'ān must be the starting point of interpretation. The question of historicity makes it impossible to isolate the Qur'ānic message, i.e. its worldview, from pre-Qur'ānic cultures and traditions. Thus the Qur'ān is *naṣṣ tārīkhī wa-muntaj thaqāfī* ("a historical text and a cultural product,"). But the Qur'ān is not only a *muntaj thaqāfī* ("cultural product"). It has become a *muntij thaqāfī*, a producer of a new culture. In other words, the Qur'ān emerged as a text from within a specific socio-cultural reality embodied in a specific linguistic system, Arabic, and a new culture gradually emerged out of it.

Although embodied in the Arabic linguistic system, the text of the Qur'ān has its own peculiarities. Being a unique text, the Qur'ān employs special linguistic encoding dynamics in order to convey its specific message. The Arabic linguistic system is for the Qur'ān the language (*al-lisān*) while the Qur'ān is the speech. These peculiarities of Qur'ānic speech are connected to the development of the doctrine of *i'jāz* ("inimitability").

It will always be necessary, however, to analyze and to interpret the Qur'ān within the contextual background from which it originated. In other words: the message of the Qur'ān could not have had any effect if the people who received it first could not have understood it; they must have understood it within their socio-cultural context; and by their understanding and application of it their society changed. The understanding of the first Muslim generation and the generations that followed should not by any means be considered final or absolute. The particular linguistic encoding dynamics of Qur'ānic speech allow for an endless process of decoding.

It was later, in the third chapter of *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*, presented earlier in this chapter, that I explained the difference between the originally intended meaning (*al-ma'nā*) of the Qur'ān addressing the Arabs in the seventh century and the significance (*al-maghzā*) implied in the intended original meaning. This is comparable but not similar to the distinction made by the jurists between the *manṭūq*, the immediate explicit meaning, and the *mafḥūm*, the implicit meaning. It is also comparable to the distinction made between the explicit apparent meaning of the discourse (*ma'nā al-khiṭāb*) and its significance (*fahwā al-khiṭāb*). The comparability between the concepts developed in modern hermeneutics and those produced in classical Qur'ānic hermeneutics is intended to show the Muslim reader that modern concepts have certain roots in the classical theory.

Modern hermeneutics, however, applies its concepts to the entire structure of the text; classical hermeneutics is satisfied with the sentence or the passage as an independent speech unit. Thus in applying the distinction between "meaning" and "significance" to modern Qur'ānic hermeneutics, the contextual socio-cultural meaning, that which was addressed to the first Arab recipients, should not be ignored or simplified. This meaning is a vital indication of the direction of the Qur'ān's message, i.e. its significance for the future generations of Muslims. The

84 *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, 50.

identification of the direction of the Qur'ān will enable the interpreter to extract the historical or temporal aspects of the text that no longer carry any significance in the present context.

Once the Qur'ān is decoded in the light of its original historical, cultural and linguistic context, it has to be re-encoded into the code of the cultural and linguistic context of the interpreter. In other words, the deeper structure of the Qur'ān must be reconstructed from the surface structure. Subsequently, the deep structure must be rewritten in another surface structure, which is that of today. This entails an interpretative openness because the endless process of interpretation and re-interpretation cannot but differ in time. If the interpreter does not remain open, the Qur'ān will always remain – as it is now – subject to political manipulation. Furthermore, if the message of the Qur'ān is believed by Muslims to be valid for all mankind regardless of time and space, an open interpretation is necessary.

To keep the resulting diversity of interpretations from developing into ideological manipulations of the Qur'ān's meaning, an awareness of the difference between the original contextual "meaning," which is almost fixed because of its historicity, and the deduced "significance" of that meaning, which is changeable, is a necessary methodological prerequisite. Secondly, the deduced significance should be rationally connected to the meaning. It must be remembered that interpretations are only valid as long as they do not violate the methodological rules mentioned above. Otherwise interpretations may in fact be predetermined ideological conclusions for which absolute claims are made. Because the text is historical, though originally divine, its interpretation is absolutely human.⁸⁵

From text to discourse(s)

A few years ago, I started to realize that the tension surrounding many issues in the text cannot be solved by dealing with the Qur'ān as only a text. The Qur'ān maintains that, as a text authored by God, it has no contradictions (Q 4:82). Yet the phenomenon of contradiction does exist; it was realized by the theologians who tried painfully to solve it by adhering to the duality of clarity–ambiguity. It was also realized by the jurists who tried to solve it by adhering to the doctrine of abrogation. In modern Qur'ānic studies in the Muslim world, the phenomenon is also realized and the solution proposed is to distinguish between two dimensions in the Qur'ānic worldview, the "universal" and the "historical." In all these efforts,

85 See the recently published paper by Sukidi Mulyadi, "Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd and the quest for a humanistic hermeneutics of the Qur'ān," *Die Welt des Islams*, 49, 2009, 181–211, in which the author depicts the "humanistic hermeneutics" in my early book *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ*, although the first time I specifically articulated a "humanistic hermeneutic" approach was in my inaugural lecture after accepting the position of "Ibn Rushd Chair for Islam and Humanism" at the University of Humanistics in Utrecht. See, *Rethinking the Qur'ān: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutic of the Qur'ān*, Amsterdam: The Humanistics University Press, 2004.

the phenomenon is realized but not fully acknowledged.⁸⁶ My assessment is that the concept of textuality with its underlying assumption of the author is the cause of this paradox between historicity and divinity, or between the chronological order and the *muṣḥaf* order.

Realizing the fact that the Qur'ān was originally a series of discourses, each of which has a certain historical context and a certain degree of independence, I suggested a redefinition of the Qur'ān as discourse(s). These discourses reflect polyphony rather than monophony and reflect not only different situations but also different addressees. A humanistic hermeneutics, I suggest, is to consider in every discourse-unit, first, who the speaker is and who the addressees are; and second, the mode of discourse under investigation, whether argumentative, persuasive, polemical, proscriptive, prescriptive, descriptive, inclusive or exclusive, etc. Thus I do not deal with the *sūra* or with the *āya* as independent units; the unit is the identified discourse according to the norms suggested. From such a perspective, the chronological arrangement of Qur'ānic chapters presents only an introductory step towards a chronological arrangement of discourse, a project that needs to be accomplished in the future.

For now, I propose dividing the Qur'ān's worlds – not exactly worldview – into five interdependent domains, each of which reflects one level that has been taken away and disconnected from the other levels in one of the Islamic disciplines, namely *fiqh*, theology, philosophy and mysticism. These worlds could be summarized as follows:

One, cosmology. Here the Qur'ānic view of the cosmos, the universe, nature, creation and recreation, the creator, death, and resurrection are presented.

Two, the divine–human relationship. Here immanence and distinction are both emphasized. Despite this emphasized immanence, mediation between the divine and the human is presented; angels fill the space between heaven and earth and bring down God's command. The fact that God always sends guidance to humans via the mediation of angels is a token of His care for them. Humans in return are expected to be grateful. In the covenant narrative all human beings acknowledge their obligation to obey God's dictates because of His status as their sovereign: "When your lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins (*zuhūrihim*) their seed and called them to testify of themselves: 'Am I not

86 Fazlur Rahman's "double movement" is a representative example of this effort. First, the Qur'ān is recognized as "the divine response through the Prophet's mind to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia, particularly to the problems of the commercial Meccan society." In order to bring its meaning to our modern situation, the process of the "double movement" is suggested, first to move "from the present situation to Qur'ānic times, then back to the present. . . . The first step of the first movement, then, consists of understanding the meaning of the Qur'ān as a whole as well as in terms of the specific tenets that constitute responses to specific answers. The second step is to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be 'distilled' from specific texts. . . . The second movement is to be from the general view to the specific view that is to be formulated and realized now." *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 5–7.

your lord?' They said, 'Indeed yes! We testify'; 'lest you should say on the day of resurrection, We were unaware of this!' " (Q 7:172) The last sentence of the verse makes it clear that what is at issue here is whether humans are innately morally responsible. The answer is yes, they have committed themselves primordially to obedience.

Three, the ethical and moral dimension. Here the Qur'ān maintains a certain tension between the possibility of human perfection and the reality of human moral deficiency. The complex divine image of God as merciful and mighty could be understood as a parallel or reflection of human nature. Thus, the human nature and the divine nature are not in tension; they are rather interwoven.

Four, society. Here the Qur'ān deals with specific societal practical issues like marriage, divorce and inheritance. On this level we find legal rulings interwoven with ethics, as with divorce: "Divorce twice, then take back with *ma'rūf* or release with *ihsān*" (Q 2:229). Divorce as a dramatic event of separation between husband and wife should be conducted with ethical common sense (*ma'rūf*; an important ethical ingredient in Qur'ānic ethics), and with benevolence (*ihsān*). It is also connected to matters of worship. For the *ḥajj* the blood and flesh of the sacrificed animal (i.e. the ritual in itself) is not as important as its inner intended significance of piety (*taqwā*; Q 22:37).

Five, punishment (*ḥudūd*). This level exists in the Qur'ān but it does not belong to the worldview of the Qur'ān. It does not even belong to the category of "rules" (level 4). Cutting off the hands of the thief, flogging an adulterer and those who falsely accuse others of adultery (*qadhf*) – not to mention stoning, *rajm* (which, as mentioned above, is not even found in the *muṣḥaf*) – are not genuine Qur'ānic rulings. These forms of punishment existed before the Qur'ān, and the Qur'ān borrowed them in order to protect society against crimes.

These levels – and there may be more – are all intrinsically interwoven in the Qur'an and the Qur'ānic worldview could not be reconstructed without them.

Conclusion

It could be inferred that the Qur'ān either has no coherent worldview, or that the Qur'ān's worldview includes an "uncertainty" that keeps it open to Muslim communities in different historical, socio-political and cultural contexts who are free to converse, communicate and interact with the text, developing a worldview that fits their reality. If the second choice is valid, as I have maintained, what keeps the developed worldview of different Muslim communities Qur'ānic? From this question emerges another: what is the role of the shared traditions of Muslims in determining such a worldview? As Islamic tradition is not monolithic, who decides what part of this tradition is to be adopted? Would this mission be confined to the '*ulamā*'? What kind of '*ulamā*' or which class of intellectuals are to be identified in our modern world of pluralism, power-sharing, democracy, mass media and communication? These questions and many others reflect the complex of reality, a complex for which no scripture can alone provide a satisfactory and comprehensive worldview. Scriptures provide only certain constituents of a

worldview. These constituents are constructed and reconstructed, resulting in contradictions, conflicts and tensions.

But it could also be said that scriptures survive beyond their historical context only because of such contradictions, conflicts and tensions. If scriptures were as clear and certain as the majority of the believers consider them to be, their meaning would not carry any significance beyond the historical moment of their emergence. *Wa-Allāhu a'lam!*

Part II

**The Qur'ān and material
evidence**

4 The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'ān and in their inscriptions¹

Robert G. Hoyland

Jews are mentioned numerous times in the Qur'ān, whether via the root *hwd* (23 times), as "Children of Israel" (43 times), or subsumed under the category of "People of the Book" (32 times). This ensured that their history and place in Muḥammad's Arabia would receive substantial attention in biographies of the Prophet and in commentaries on the Qur'ān. And this in turn has filtered through into a steady stream of secondary scholarship on the subject of "Muḥammad and the Jews." Yet outside of the blazing limelight of the Prophet's lifetime we know almost nothing about the Jewish communities of northwest Arabia. The question of how the Jews came to be in this region did interest early Muslim historians to some extent, and many of them took the time to sketch out some ideas on this subject. Usually they speak of waves of Jewish refugees coming from the Levant or the Persian realm in the wake of Babylonian, Roman and Iranian conquests or persecutions. Sometimes they even attribute a priestly pedigree to the Jews of the Hijaz, going back to Aaron, brother of Moses, though more often they are said to descend from ancient Arab clans who converted to Judaism a long time ago. However, one has a sense that they are mostly speculating and do not have any real information about the Jews of those distant times, and they are certainly not able to bridge the gap between the Hijazi Jews' putative origins and their sudden rise to prominence in the early seventh century.²

1. I am immensely grateful to Michael Macdonald, who, with characteristic generosity, allowed me the full use of his wonderful library and patiently answered my numerous queries. In the transliteration system of the present article š and ḥ (which correspond to sh and kh elsewhere in this volume) are used for the sake of the precision necessary for discussing inscriptions.

2. There is quite a large literature on Muslim writings on the Jews of Muḥammad's Arabia, as one would expect given their prominence in the Qur'ān. For older material see the references cited in D.S. Margoliouth, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam*, London: British Academy, 1924, and S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* 3, New York: Columbia University Press, 1957 (esp. 60–74 and the notes thereto). More recently, see M. Gil, "The Origin of the Jews of Yathrib," *JSAI* 4, 1984, 203–34; G. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988; M. Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina*, Leiden: Brill, 1995; idem, *Jews and Arabs in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1998; U. Rubin, "Jews and Judaism," in *EQ*, 3.21–34, which provide a good bibliography.

Is there any evidence external to the Muslim tradition that we can use? The only classical reference we have, in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* (15:9:3), mentions that Herod dispatched 500 chosen men from his personal bodyguard to go with Aelius Gallus on his march through western Arabia to conquer the Yemen in 26–24 BCE, but we know nothing of their fate or even if they were necessarily Jews (Herod had non-Jews among his bodyguard). The Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud make occasional allusions to Arabia. For example, there are a number of occasions when rabbis note that “in Arabia they call x y”, that is, instead of the usual Hebrew word they use a different term. As has reasonably been argued, this is best explained by supposing “the settlement of a colony of Jews in Arabia”.³ Oddly, however, the proponent of this solution never for a moment considered where exactly might be meant by “Arabia.” Since these statements mostly originate with Palestinian authorities (*tannaim* and *amoraim*) of the first to fourth centuries CE, we might suppose that they chiefly intend southern Palestine and the Transjordan, that is, the Nabataean heartlands and subsequently, after their annexation in 105/106 CE, the Roman province of Arabia. Thus when one sees that in support of Rabbi Levi's assertion, “in Arabia they call a lamb *yōblā*” (Berakot 9:1), the saying of Rabbi Aqiba of Jerusalem is quoted, “when I went to Arabia, they were calling a lamb *yōblā*” (Rosh ha-shanah 26a), one suspects that that part of Arabia just across the Jordan from Jerusalem is meant rather than faraway Hijaz.⁴ Yet it cannot be doubted that occasionally the southernmost reaches of Nabataea/Roman Arabia are intended. For example, in the third century CE the Galilean rabbis Hiyya the Great and Simeon ben Halafta considered it worth their while making the journey to “Hegra of Arabia” (Mada'in Salih) in order to “learn again” the meaning of some Aramaic words that they had forgotten.⁵

There are also some scraps of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry composed by northwest Arabian Jews in the sixth and early seventh century. The most famous of these Jewish poets was Samuel b. 'Ādiyā, a resident of the oasis of Tayma, to whom a whole corpus of poems is attributed and who helped the heroic Imru' al-Qays (d. c. 550 CE), a prince of the ruling clan of Kinda, on his journey to Constantinople in pursuit of justice for his murdered father. But these, like those of more minor Jewish poets such as al-Rabī' b. Abī l-Ḥuqayq, Shurayḥ b. 'Imrān, Shu'ba b. Gharīd, Abū Qays b. Rifā'a, Dirham b. Zayd and

Abū l-Dhayyāl, are comparable in sentiment and style to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry in general, and lack any specific historical detail or concrete religious expression.⁶

Lastly there is the epigraphic record. This has produced quite rich and informative results for the land of South Arabia during the fourth to sixth centuries, as has been ably demonstrated by Christian Robin.⁷ Here I will try to do the same for the Jews of northwest Arabia. The inscriptions from this region have not received much attention. Only two are mentioned by Gordon Newby in his *History of the Jews of Arabia*,⁸ and only three are cited in J-B. Frey's *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* (nos. 1421–23 = nos. 1–3 below). The record is somewhat meagre, it is true, but in a situation where any evidence at all is hard to come by, it seems worth making the best of what we have got. I will first review the texts themselves, and then consider at the end what conclusions we might draw from them: Only no. 1 is by a self-confessed Jew; the rest rely on indicators that are regarded to be typical of Jewish identity: Jewish names, Jewish expressions and the Hebrew script; these are valuable indicators, but it goes without saying that they are not infallible.⁹

Texts by self-confessed Jews

No. 1

Place: Mada'in Salih (= ancient Hegra / al-Hijr)

Type: Tomb inscription

Date: 42/43 CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: Euting 1885, 64; CIS 2.219; JS Nab4; Healey 1994, H4; Noja 1979, I

Text: “This is the tomb which Shubaytu son of 'Ali'u, the Jew (*yhwdy*),¹⁰ made for himself and for his children and for 'Amirat, his wife. They may be buried in

3 A. Cohen, “Arabisms in Rabbinic literature,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 1912/13, 224. See further S. Krauss, “Talmudische Nachrichten über Arabien,” *ZDMG* 70, 1916, 321–53, and J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*, London: Routledge, 2003, 526–32, which do consider the geographical implications.

4 Certainly Josephus uses the term “Arabians” when he is talking about Herod's battles with his Nabataean neighbours, and it seems sure that St Paul had in mind the Nabataean kingdom when he wrote “I went off to Arabia and later I came back to Damascus” (Galatians 1:17).

5 *Midrash Rabbah* 79.7, re: Genesis 33.19; ed. J. Theodor (revised edition by Ch. Albeck; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965), 946; trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino, 1951), 732–33 (who mistranslates Egra as Agora / “market”). I am grateful to Dr Oded Irshai for this reference.

6 H.Gh. Mustafa, *Religious Trends in Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry*, Bombay: Aligarh Muslim University, 1968, 119–24; Jawād. 'Alī, *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī ta'rīkh al-'arab qabl al-islām*, Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm, 1976–78, 9:768–91; Newby, *History*, 55–57.

7 For example, see his “Le judaïsme de Ḥimyar,” *Arabia. Revue de Sabéologie* 1, 2003, 97–172, and his “Ḥimyar et Israël,” *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendus* 2004, 831–906.

8 Newby, *History*, 40.

9 For some useful general discussion on the problem of using names for historical reconstruction see M.C.A. Macdonald, “Some reflections on epigraphy and ethnicity in the Roman Near East,” *Mediterranean Archaeology* 11, 1998, 177–90. As regards script, what is today called the “Hebrew script” is in fact the Aramaic script, which replaced the old Hebrew script as the main script of the Jews, but since common usage identifies the script in which Hebrew has been written since the fourth/third century BCE as “Hebrew script” I will adhere to that for the sake of clarity.

10 Professor Christian Robin has suggested to me that this term may, at this time, have signified Judaeae, i.e. native of Judaea, rather than member of a community sharing the same religious convictions.

it by hereditary title. And no stranger has the right to be buried in it, and if any of the children of Shubaytu mentioned above or their legal heirs seeks to write for this tomb a deed of gift or any document, he will have no share in this tomb. And this was on the first day of Ab, the third year of King Maliku, King of the Nabataeans. 'Abd 'Obodat son of Wahballahi made it" (*dnh kfr' dy 'bd . . .*)

Possessors of two plausibly Jewish names

No. 2

Place: Mada'in Salih
Type: Construction, on the base of a sundial
Date: c. 1st century CE¹¹
Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic
Bibl.: JS Nab172bis; Noja 1979, II

Text: "Manasse son of Natan,¹² greetings/farewell" (*mns' br ntn slm*)

No. 3

Place: al-Ula (= ancient Dedan)
Type: Tomb inscription
Date: 307 CE
Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic
Bibl.: JS Nab386; Cantineau, *Nabatéen*, 2.41; Noja 1979, IV; Gruendler 1993, N18

Text: "This is the stele which Yaḥyā son of Simon has built for his father Simon who died in the month of Sīwan of the year 201" (*dnh npš' dy bn' yhy' br šm 'wn 'l šm 'wn 'byh dy myt b-yrh sywn šnt m'tyn w-'hdy*).

No. 4

Place: Mada'in Salih
Type: Graffito
Date: c. 3rd to 5th century CE

11 Thus J. Healey, "A Nabataean sundial from Mada'in Salih," *Syria* 66, 1989, 333, though principally because this is the floruit for Nabataean settlement at the site, which is of course not cogent (cf. text no. 6, dated 356 CE).

12 The root *ntn* is common in names from quite different pre-Islamic Arabian backgrounds, and certainly need not be Jewish, but Manasse is very rare, and the two together make it likely that this is the name of a Jew. Note that he is probably the owner or commissioner of the sundial rather than the designer, astronomer or stonemason.

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic
Bibl.: unedited¹³

Text: "May Jacob son of Samuel be remembered well" (*dkyr y'qwb br šmw 'l b-ṭb*).

No. 5

Place: Tayma
Type: Tomb inscription
Date: 203 CE
Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic
Bibl.: M. al-Najem and M.C.A. Macdonald, 2009¹⁴

Text: "This is the memorial of Isaiah Neballaṭa son of Joseph, the headman of Tayma, which 'Imram and 'Ašmw, his brothers, erected for him in the month of Iyar of the year 98 of the province" (*d' npš 'š 'yh nblṭ' br ywsp r'š tymy dy 'qym 'lhwy [sic] 'mrm w 'šmw 'hwhy b-yrh 'yr šnt 20+20+20+20+10+5+3 l-hprky*).

Possessors of one plausibly Jewish name

This is perhaps the most uncertain category, since it is possible for names to circulate outside of their original community. At the beginning of his entry on the Jewish inscriptions of Palmyra, Frey observes that "it is important to note that, for a long time, there was an excessive propensity to regard as Jews all the Palmyrenes who bore the names of Simon, Zebedee and the like . . . But these names were common at Palmyra and they were certainly borne by non-Jews."¹⁵ Having said that, we do not have any evidence that in northwest Arabia Biblical Jewish names had broken outside of the Jewish community, since, as can be seen from the small number of this corpus, they remained extremely rare in this region.

No. 6

Place: Mada'in Salih
Type: Tomb inscription
Date: 356/7 CE
Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic
Bibl.: Altheim and Stiehl 1968, 305–9; Stiehl 1970, 87–90; Noja 1979, III

13 Found in the course of the Saudi-French survey of Mada'in Salih (on which see L. Nehmé, "Mission archéologique de Madā'in Šālīḥ," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 17, 2006, 41–124). The script is late Nabataean (hence the date given of third to fifth century CE).

14 This text was recently discovered during building work in the centre of the oasis of Tayma.

15 J.-B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum II Asie-Afrique*, Rome: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1952, 67.

Text: "This is the stele and tomb, which 'Adyon son of Haniy son of Samuel, the headman of Hegra, built for his wife Mawiyah, daughter of the headman of Tayma, 'Amr son of 'Adyon son of Samuel, who died in the month of Ab in the year 251, aged 38 years" (*dnh [npš] w]-qbr' dy ['bd] l-h / 'dy[wn] br hny br šmw l'ry[š] / hgr' l'mwyh 'th-h brt / 'amrw br dywn br šmw l' / ryš tym' dy mytt b-yrh / 'b šnt m'tyn w-ħmšn / w-'hdy brt šnyn tlytn / w-tmny*).¹⁶

It would seem plausible to take the Samuel mentioned here to be a Jew, and even more so the Isaiah son of Joseph in no. 5. In this case, numbers 5 and 6 are very important texts for north Arabian Jewry, for they imply that some of them at least were members of the elite of this society. Since the texts are separated by more than 150 years, we can also assume some stability for this office. In their discussion of number 6, Altheim and Stiehl go further, linking the title of *ryš*¹⁷ here with that found in a bilingual Aramaic/Greek inscription, dated 252 CE, designating the leader there as *rš tdmwr / exa[rchos tōn Palmyrē]nōn*. They conclude from this that the two inscriptions relate to the same phenomenon, part "of the same movement in Arab city states, which did not yet correspond to full independence from Rome, but advertised that intention." However, it is perhaps more reasonable to equate the term *ryš* here to ethnarch, meaning the head of a particular ethnic group under Roman authority, or simply to headman (*primus*), as appears in a recently discovered Latin inscription from Hegra.¹⁸ This latter suggestion would mean that the office did not necessarily relate to a specific ethnic group, but that Samuel was the headman and just happened to be a Jew. Nevertheless, the role of Jews in the government of these West Arabian communities is noteworthy, and they would seem to have continued to play an important role in this sphere into the sixth century CE if we are to believe the Islamic reports of Samuel b. 'Adiyā' possessing a fortress (*qaṣr al-ablaq*) and of his relations with the ruling families of the powerful tribes of Kinda and Ghassān.¹⁹ Sadly, though, we have insufficient information about the intervening two centuries to postulate a direct link.

16 At a workshop in Paris (January 2005, including Michael Macdonald and Laila Nehmé) on pre-Islamic Nabataean Aramaic/Arabic texts we reread the names 'Adnon ('Adnān) and Monah as 'Adyon ('Adyān) and Mawiyah.

17 I translate this as "headman," but it has quite a broad semantic range, comprising head, leader, chief, principal etc., though it might have a more specific sense in this particular case. Note that in no. 5 it is written in the normal Nabataean Aramaic form of *r'š* rather than the variant form of *ryš* used here.

18 The inscription records (Dh. al-Talhi and M. al-Daire, "Roman presence in the desert: a new inscription from Hegra," *Chiron* 35, 2005, 205–17) how "the community of the Hegreni" (*civitas Hegrenorum*) restored the Nabataean covered market in the time of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (so 170s CE) under the supervision of 'Amr son of Haian, "the headman of the community (*primus civitatis*)".

19 In particular see the account of Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, Būlāq: al-Maṭba'a al-Amīriyya, 1288/1868, 19:98–102.

No. 7

Place: Mada'in Salih

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st to 3rd century CE²⁰

Script: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: CIS 2.258; Noja 1979, VII

Text: "Daniel" (*dny 'l*).²¹

No. 8

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st to 3rd century CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: JS Nab387; Noja 1979, VIII

Text: "Abīyu son of Salmu" (*'byw bn slmw*)

No. 9

Place: Mada'in Salih

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st to 3rd century CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: JS Nab137; Noja 1979, IX

Text: "May 'Ezer be remembered well" (*dkyr 'zr b-tb*).

No. 10

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 3rd to 1st century BCE

20 It is difficult to give any narrow date range to these very short undated graffiti, which constitute the majority of these alleged Jewish texts. If a date is given by modern scholars, it is usually based on the period when the script in question is known to have flourished; e.g. dated Nabataean Aramaic texts in this region mostly belong to the first to third century CE.

21 Michael Macdonald urges caution here as the name *dn 'l* occurs once each in Safaitic and Thamudic B and once, in the form *dn 'lh*, in Himaic, and in these scripts a [i:], corresponding to the 'y' in Aramaic *dny 'l*, would not be shown (personal communication).

Script/Lang.: Lihyanite (Dedanitic)²²

Bibl.: JS Lih107; Noja 1979, XVI

Text: "‘Azaryah son of Asyah" (‘zryh br asyh)

No. 11

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 3rd to 1st century BCE

Script/Lang.: Lihyanite (Dedanitic)

Bibl.: JS Lih12; W. Caskel, *Lihyan und Lihyanisch*, Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1954, 103 (no. 58); Noja 1979, XVIIText: "By Ah'ab son of Simak the one buried [here]" or "By/for Ah'ab son of Simak is the tomb" (l- 'h' b bn smk hmqbr / hmqbr).²³**No. 12**

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st to 3rd century CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: JS Nab262; Altheim and Stiehl 1968, 308

Text: "Greetings/Farewell Joseph son of 'Awiyu" (šlm ywsf bn 'wyw).²⁴**No. 13**

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st to 3rd century CE

22 An exact floruit for the kingdom of Lihyan, whose name has traditionally been used to designate their script (a version of the South Arabian script), has not been determined, but they were influenced in their art by the Ptolemies of Egypt (305–31 BCE) and were ousted by the Nabataeans in the course of the first century BCE (see R.G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, London: Routledge, 2001, 66–68, for further discussion and references).

23 These are the different readings of JS Lih12 and Noja 1979, XVII (following Caskel) respectively. Caskel considers Ah'ab a Jewish name, but one would of course expect it to be written with a h rather than a ḥ. Smk and Smk'l are relatively common in Safaitic. All in all, then, the Jewish nature of this inscription is dubious.

24 Jaussen and Savignac note regarding no. 12 (JS Nab262): "It is possible that the use of bn, attested in many other graffiti of the region, is due to the influence of the Jewish colony installed there" (cf. JS Nab240 and Nab 261).

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: Altheim and Stiehl 1968, p. 310; Noja 1979, XXII

Text: "Levi" (lwy)

No. 14

Place: Umm Judhayidh (near Tabuk)

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st century BCE to 1st century CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: al-Theeb 2002, no. 159

Text: "May Ghanam son of Yehūdā be remembered" (dkyr ghnmw br yhw'd' . . .)²⁵**No. 15**

Place: Umm Judhayidh

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st century BCE to 1st century CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: al-Theeb 2002, no. 84

Text: "May Joseph son of Ghanam be remembered well. Peace" (dkyr ywsf br ghnmw b-ṭb w-šlm)

No. 16

Place: Mada'in Salih

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 3rd to 5th century CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: unedited²⁶

Text: "Indeed, may Simon son of 'Adiyu be remembered" (bly dkyr šm'wn br 'dyw).

No. 17

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

25 Al-Theeb notes yhw'd as an option, but favours njwd. However, the kink in the initial letter makes it pretty certain that it is a 'y' rather than an 'n'. The final word in this text is uncertain.

26 Found in the course of the Saudi–French survey of Mada'in Salih (see n. 13 above).

Date: c. 3rd to 5th century CE
 Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic
 Bibl.: Nehmé 2010, fig. 34.²⁷

Text: "May Laḥmu son of Yehūdā be remembered well" (*dkyr lḥmw br yḥwd' b-ṭb*).

No. 18

Place: al-Mabiyyat (= ancient Qurḥ/Wadi l-Qura)
 Type: Tomb inscription
 Date: 280 CE
 Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic
 Bibl.: Nehmé 2010, fig. 8.

Text: "... Peace on the tomb of R{mn}h his wife, daughter of Joseph, son of 'Rr, who is from Qurayyā, who died on the twenty-sixth day of April, year one hundred and seventy-five" (... *šlm 'l q[b]r r{mn}h 'ntth brt ywsp br 'rr dy mn qry' dy mytt ywm 'šryn w-šth b'yr šnt m'h w-šb 'yn w-ḥmš*).

The stone on which this inscription was incised was found reused in the course of the second season of excavations at the site of al-Mabiyyat, which is about 40 kilometres south of al-Ula. The exact provenance of the stone is unknown, but if it is originally from al-Mabiyyat, and was not brought there from another location, then al-Mabiyyat is not an early Islamic foundation as had been thought (e.g. D. Whitcomb, "Urbanism in Arabia," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 7, 1996, 40), but much older.

Texts in Hebrew script

No. 19

Place: al-Ula
 Type: Graffito
 Date: uncertain²⁸
 Script/Lang.: Hebrew/Aramaic (note *br* rather than *bn* for son of)
 Bibl.: JS Nab223; Winnet and Reed *ARNA*, 163 (by J. Milik); Noja 1979, XIX

Text: "This is Abisalo(m?) son of Susannah" (*dh 'byšlw[m?] br šwšnh*).

²⁷ As for previous note.

²⁸ JS Nab223 (which only transcribes the second line) says the characters "are very close to the Hebrew square script and belongs to the Aramaic alphabet of the second century before our era," but if we take it simply to be Hebrew script then it could be later than this.

No. 20

Place: al-Ula
 Type: Graffito
 Date: uncertain
 Script/Lang.: Hebrew/Aramaic²⁹
 Bibl.: Winnet and Reed *ARNA*, 163 (by J. Milik); Noja 1979, XVIII

Text: "Blessing to 'Aṭūr son of Menaḥem and rabbi Jeremiah" (*brkh l-'ṭwr br mḥm w-rb yrmh*).

No. 21

Place: Wadi Haggag (E. Sinai)
 Type: Graffito
 Date: c. 2nd to 4th centuries CE
 Script/Lang.: Hebrew
 Bibl.: B. Rothenberg, "An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai", *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 1970, VIII (20); Noja 1979, XIV (+ X–XIII)³⁰

Text: "May Samuel son of Hillel be blessed and protected" (*bryk w-mntr šmw' l bn hll*).

Nos 22 and 23

Place: Jubbah (near Ha'il, north Arabia)
 Type: Graffiti
 Date: uncertain
 Script/Lang.: Hebrew
 Bibl.: Euting 1885, "Gjebbe 3–4", 6; Noja 1979, XX–XXI³¹

Text: "...³² and "Blessed be the name of my Lord ..." (*mbrk h-šm 'dwny ...*)

²⁹ Note *br* rather than *bn* for "son of", though one could argue that *brkh* with a '-h' rather than '-ā' reflects the Arabic feminine ending. Milik simply states "ces deux inscriptions [= nos. 19 and 20 here] sont en araméen et datent de l'époque byzantine" without explanation; R. Contini, "Il Ḥawran preislamico – ipotesi di storia linguistica," *Felix Ravenna* 133–34, 1987, 65 n. 237, agrees ("aramaico giudaico").

³⁰ Noja 1979, X–XIII, are drawings of candelabras from the same area of Sinai, site 387 of the map and list of Rothenberg 1970, 8, 28.

³¹ Noja 1979, XXIII, is from much further north, namely eastern Jordan, and is in any case only three or four letters (*šbr[h?]*); see F.V. Winnett and G. Lankester Harding, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978, 542 and pl. 71.

³² This is just four letters, which Euting does not attempt to decipher and for which Noja 1979, 306, suggests *hdyh* "il giudice"; the final two letters could plausibly be 'y' and 'n', but the first two are unclear.

No. 24

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: uncertain

Script/Lang.: Hebrew/Arabic

Bibl.: JS Heb1; Noja 1979, XXVIII; Hopkins 2007/8

Text: "Na'im/Nu'aym son of Isaac trusts in God. He has written (this)." (*n'ym bn 'shq b 'ld/h ytq ktb*).³³

This and the following five texts (nos 25–29) appear together in Jaussen and Savignac's famous volumes on the archaeology of northwest Arabia in a short section on Hebrew inscriptions. In his review of these volumes Halper ("Recent Orientalia and Judaica", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 15, 1924/5, 243) makes the very short, but very significant, observation that the inscriptions categorized as Hebrew by Jaussen and Savignac "are Hebrew only in script, the language being Arabic". This explains why the name Isaac is written as it is (*ishāq*) rather than in its usual Hebrew form (*yitzhaq*), and it allows us to give a reading of the graffito (the simple Arabic expression "he trusts in God"), whereas trying to read it as an Aramaic or Hebrew text yields no intelligible interpretation. The last letter of God either should be a 'h' – Jaussen and Savignac may have missed a faint downward stroke (no photograph is provided) – or it is intentionally a 'd', a device to disguise the divine name.

Nos 25 and 26

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: uncertain

Script/Lang.: Hebrew/Arabic³⁴

Bibl.: JS Heb3 + 5; Noja 1979, XXIV–XXV; Hopkins 2007/8

Text: "This is what has written . . ." (*hd mh ktb*) and "this is what . . ." (*hd mh*)

Jaussen and Savignac wondered whether these texts might be an allusion to the Aramaean god of thunder Hadad, but, again using Halper's insight that these graffiti are in Arabic, we can read, more simply, "this is what has written" and "this is what". Since the two texts "are right next to each other and engraved in the same

way", A.F.L. Beeston reasoned, very sensibly, that they "are both unfinished experiments in Arabic by one and the same person".³⁵

No. 27

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: uncertain

Script/Lang.: Hebrew/Arabic

Bibl.: JS Heb8; Noja 1979, XXVII; Hopkins 2007/8

Text: "And Isma'il son of Šdq has written" (*w-ktb 'sm 'yl bn šdq*)

Again, it makes good sense to read this as Arabic, since the first name Isma'il follows the Arabic form rather than the Hebrew one (*yšm 'l*). The second name might be Arabic too (i.e. Šadīq rather than Šadōq), but since the long vowel is not written we cannot tell.

No. 28

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: uncertain

Script/Lang.: Hebrew/Arabic

Bibl.: JS Heb4; Noja 1979, XXIX; Hopkins 2007/8

This is a three-line inscription of which all parts are contested. Jaussen and Savignac only made an attempt at the first line, which they read as: "God is eternal, [Abī] Samuel". Halper ("Recent", 243) rejected this interpretation (*'l 'lm*), preferring again to read it as Arabic, namely "the scholar (*'l- 'lm*) [Abū] Samuel"; the next two lines he understood as a prayer for a dead father: "his children hope that he went on high" (*rjw' bnyh 'n 'lh 'ly*). Noja, on the other hand, chose to keep Jaussen and Savignac's first line, but then, like Halper, assumed the rest was Arabic, though he came up with a very different reading: "I have constructed a repulsive thing, it is my fault" (*rjz' bnyh 'n 'lh 'ly*).³⁶ Given the bad state of preservation of the graffito, no sure reading can be given.

No. 29

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

33 In personal communication to Noja (Noja 1979, n. 71).

36 He suggests that the reference might be to idol worship; presumably he takes the Arabic to be *ana illa 'alayya* – as Noja says, "trascurando grammatica e sintassi dell'arabo classico!"

33 Noja 1979, 313–14, suggests reading "he wrote with the chisel" (*ktb bi-l-rytq*), which seems less plausible.

34 Winnet and Reed *ARNA*, 163, says these "are in Aramaic" without explanation; Hopkins 2007/8 replies to this as follows: "Aramaic may be possible as far as the [demonstrative] pronoun is concerned, but the syntax of the text to my mind reads better as Arabic."

Date: uncertain

Script/Lang.: Hebrew/?

Bibl. JS Heb2; Noja 1979, XXVI; Hopkins 2007/8

Text: "God be blessed/Bless God" (*brk 'lhym*)

One might read the verbal element in this text as either a passive participle ("blessed") or an imperative ("bless!"). Hopkins has also suggested that we read it as a noun ("blessing"), to which would belong the *aliph* of the following word, representing Hebrew/Aramaic *brk* (and not Arabic *brkh*); the letter after that, the 'l', would then be understood as the preposition "for" and the remaining part of the text as a personal name (*Hym*). The graffito would therefore be of the same structure as no. 20 above.

Texts containing allegedly Jewish expressions

It is striking that we have only two northwest Arabian texts in this category and in both cases the reading is extremely tenuous. This is in marked contrast to the epigraphic record of south Arabia, where we have a number of texts that use such overtly Jewish expressions as "lord of the Jews," "tribe of Israel" and even a full prayer: "may bless and be blessed the name of Raḥmān who is in heaven, Israel and their god, the lord of the Jews, who has helped his servant."³⁷

No. 30

Place: al-Ula

Type: Tomb inscription

Date: fourth century CE?³⁸

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: CIS 2.333; Euting 1885, 71; Noja 1979, V; Gruendler 1993, N17

Text: "This is the tomb which 'Abday son of Tayma built for PN who [died?] on the twenty-seventh of š[ebaʿ?] . . . two hundred years ten/twenty . . ." (*dnh npš' dy bn' 'bdy br tym' 'l . . . dy . . . šryn w-šb 'h š[bt?]' . . . m'tyn d-šnyn 'šr . . .*).

37 See C. Robin, "Ḥimyar et Israël" for the texts. One could possibly put forward a couple more contenders in this category, but not with any degree of certainty; e.g. Winnet and Reed *ARNA*, 145 (no. 17, a Nabataean Aramaic text from the region of al-Jawf, apparently dated to year 120 [of the era of Arabia = 225/6 CE]), calls for one "Šulaym son of 'Awjūdū the priest" to be remembered, and one might wonder whether "priest" (*khm*) here could refer to a Levite, but the word is commonly used in pagan texts of this region to signify some sort of diviner (see Hoyland, *Arabia*, 159, for examples).

38 This date is based on the assumption that the 210/220 is part of the date and refers to the era of Arabia (beginning in 105/106 CE); certainly this would suit the script, which, as Laila Nehmé has recently confirmed to me, "looks late and a date in the fourth century would not be surprising" (personal communication, 5/12/06); Cantineau, *Nabatéen*, 1.22, no. 6, says "this text is dated to 201 of the eparchy, 306 of our era".

Noja 1979, 294 n. 31, reports the following personal communication from Abbé Starcky on the subject of this text: "Monsieur Milik, regarding CIS 2.333, specifies that at the end (lines 9 and 10) one should probably read . . . *šlm f' šlḥ mškbh*, which brings to mind the Jewish phrase 'in peace and happiness (may be) his repose.' He has not published his reading." Except for the *šlm*, this does not seem a particularly plausible reading, but unfortunately we have no photograph of this inscription, so we cannot be sure.

No. 31

Place: Tayma

Type: commemorative in some way (note the clear line division, i.e. not a graffito)

Date: uncertain

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic/Jewish Aramaic (?)³⁹

Bibl.: Altheim and Stiehl 1968, 310; Noja 1979, VI

Text: . . . *bn . . . bn ḥb[r'] . . . ytpṭh y . . . klhw . . . w'n . . .*

It is difficult to make any sense of this, but Altheim and Stiehl point to the use of *bn* instead of *br* twice as "speaking for a Jewish origin," and they say that line 3 can plausibly be restored as *bn ḥbr*, indicating a Jewish *ḥābēr*. This point is taken up by Noja 1979, p. 296, who comments: "as very faint evidence of it belonging to Judaism one can adduce the phrase 'member of the community,' maybe 'rabbi' or maybe not, because *ḥbr* is a very common word in the whole of that area."

Texts misclassified (?) as Jewish

JS Heb 6

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 1st to 3rd century CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic (?)

Bibl.: Noja 1979, n. 70; Hopkins 2007/8

Text: "By Arus son of Nagal" (*l-'rs bn ngl*)

39 Though they do not mention the language of the inscription in the discussion, Altheim and Stiehl 1968, 501 (abb. 56), label the plate of it as "jüdisch-aramäische Inschrift." Assuming this to mean that the authors consider it to be in the Jewish Aramaic language, A. Livingstone et al., "Taima': recent soundings and new inscribed material," *Atlat* 7, 1983, 111, and J. Teixidor, "Bulletin d'épigraphie sémitique," *Syria* 48, 1971, 482, have refuted this, favouring Nabataean Aramaic. Teixidor says the second *bn* is really a *br*, which is possible.

Though classed among their Hebrew inscriptions, Jaussen and Savignac do observe that the words are "barely incised," "difficult to read," and "very badly formed," so the reading is by no means sure. Hopkins, in his recent review, points to "a certain Nabataean appearance" of the letters, and joins Noja in arguing that there is no good reason to see this as a Jewish text.

JS Heb 7

Place: al-Ula

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 2nd century BC⁴⁰

Script/Lang: Nabataean Aramaic/Aramaic or Arabic

Bibl.: Euting 1885, p. 13; CIS 2.121; Hopkins 2007/8

Text: "Al-Nafiyu son of 'Abdu" ('lnpyw bn/br 'bdw)

Jaussen and Savignac listed this among their Hebrew inscriptions, though they did note that only the initial aliph "belonged very clearly to the Hebrew alphabet," and so mused that it might be better "to set this graffito among the Aramaic graffiti of which the script was quite close to the Hebrew square script," and this view has generally been favoured by subsequent writers.⁴¹ As regards the language of the script, the *al-* at the beginning of the first word, assuming it is correctly read, inevitably recalls the definite article of Arabic, and on this and other grounds the person named has been designated as an "Aramaized Arab."⁴² The form *bn* for "son" would support this, though could also reflect Hebrew usage and may not be correctly read in any case.⁴³ But of course, it is risky to infer too much just from a name.

Noja 1979, XV

Place: Wadi Hajjaj, E. Sinai

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 4th to 5th century CE

Script/Lang: Greek

Bibl.: Negev 1977, 62–67

40 Thus K. Beyer and A. Livingstone, "Die neuesten aramäischen Inschriften aus Taima," *ZDMG* 137, 1987, 290, though it is difficult to be certain with such a short text.

41 And this had already been the opinion of Euting 1885, p. 13; most recently see Hopkins 2007/8, who gives further bibliography.

42 This was suggested as likely by F.M. Cross, "An Aramaic Inscription from Daskyleion," *Bulletin of the American School for Oriental Research* 184, 1966, 9 n. 17, à propos the name 'lnp; R. Degen, "Die aramäischen Inschriften aus Taimā' und Umgebung," *Neue Ephemeris für Semitische Epigraphik* 2, 1974, 97, endorses his interpretation and adds: "that also holds good for 'lnpyw br 'bdw."

43 Euting, CIS and Degen prefer to read Aramaic *br*.

Text: "One God who helps, Valerius son of Antigonos, strategos, third indiction" (*eis theos Y1θ ho boēthōn oualerios antigounou stratēgos Γ' indikt*)

Negev wants to say that the author of this text was a Jew because around the text are two drawing of palm branches, which he thinks could symbolize menorahs, and three letters of uncertain significance, one of which looks like the Hebrew letter *dalet*, and also because the expression *eis theos ho boēthōn* is "rather rare in Palestine". None of these arguments is particularly cogent, and the phrase *eis theos ho boēthōn* is actually quite widespread (especially in its shorter form *eis theos*) and is now attested near the Wadi Hajjaj with the publication of I.E. Meimarīs and K.I. Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions from Palaestina Tertia 1a: Ghor es-Safī*, Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2005, 27–28.

Rothenberg 1961

Place: Wadi Umm Sideira (E. Sinai)

Type: Graffito

Date: c. 2nd to 4th centuries CE

Script/Lang.: Nabataean Aramaic

Bibl.: B. Rothenberg, *Tagliyat Sinay*, Tel Aviv: Masadah, 1958, 189 and pl. 92; idem, *God's Wilderness. Discoveries in Sinai*, London: Nelson, 1961, 181 and pl. 84; idem, "Survey", 23 (site 312); R. Wenning, *Die Nabatäer: Denkmäler und Geschichte: Eine Bestandesaufnahme des archäologischen Befundes*, Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987, 192 no. 2; O. Keel and M. Küchler, *Orte und Landschaften der Bibel*, Zurich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982, 288.

Text: "[Line 1] 'Ašimu son of Sa'adallahi [Line 2] p'y(?) Sa'adallahi son of Barī'u (*šmw br s'd'lhy p'y s'd'lhy br bry'w*).⁴⁴

B. Shapir (in Rothenberg, *Tagliyat* and *God's Wilderness*) reads: "[Line 1] Akrabos son of Samuel [Line 2] of Maqna, of son-of-Sadia of Iotabe"). And he declares: "This inscription is the first objective proof of the existence of Jews, loyal to their tradition and their nationality, on the island of Iotabe, the Jewish 'Gibraltar' of the Red Sea" (only in Rothenberg, *Tagliyat*). This is followed by Axel Knauf ("The Nabataean Connection of the Benei Ḥezir," in H. Cotton et al. (eds), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, n. 12), who refers to

44 The two words translated here as Sa'adallahi are slightly differently written, but the differences are small enough to be explained by the problems of writing on rough stone. The first word of the second line, *p'y*, seems relatively sure, but its meaning is unclear (one expects a word that would explain a relationship between 'Ašimu son of Sa'adallahi and Sa'adallahi son of Barī'u). I am grateful to Michael Macdonald for discussing the reading of this text with me.

"Akrabos ben Samuel from Maqna" as an Arabian Jew. Negev (1977, 73–74) says that this reading is implausible, but does not offer an alternative.⁴⁵ It is hard to see how the two letters between the 's' and the *aliph* in the word read by Rothenberg/Shapir as Samuel could be read as 'm' and 'w', and with this falls the whole case for this being a Jewish inscription.

Conclusions

Reviewing these texts, there are a number of things that strike one straight away:

- 1 They span quite a large period of time, at the very least the first century BCE to the fourth century CE.
- 2 They are relatively few in number (only around thirty even if we accepted all of them as Jewish).
- 3 They are written in different languages and scripts, though there is a predominance of Nabataean Aramaic.
- 4 They are mostly very brief and of very limited content; there is just one (possibly two) commemorative text (no. 2, on the sundial, and no. 31?), only six or seven tomb inscriptions (nos. 1, 3, 5–6, 11, 18 and 30; 31?); the rest are simple graffiti.
- 5 They are not geographically very widespread, principally hailing only from al-Ula and Mada'in Salih.

It is perhaps the limited nature of this epigraphic crop – in terms of number, quality and spread (points 2 and 4–5 above) – that most surprises, particularly in the light of the very frequent reference to Jews in the Qur'an. This latter fact prompted Charles Torrey, in one of his well-known lectures on "The Jewish Foundations of Islam", to wax lyrical about our solid knowledge of the Jews of the Hijaz: "The Israelite tribes with their rabbis, their books, sacred and secular, their community of faith and action, and their living contact with the past, are there; they are no phantom. All through the Qur'an there is evidence of a Jewish culture, which Muhammad greatly admired, and of Jewish learning, which he very imperfectly assimilated". In the view of Torrey, and those who would follow him, we can speak of "an ancient and extensive movement of colonization, a Hebrew migration southward into the Hijaz in the sixth century B.C., an ethnic transplanting which rooted deep and for many generations obeyed the injunction to be fruitful and multiply . . . It implies a genuine Hebrew stock, and an authentic religious and literary tradition always kept alive and in continuous connection with the learned centres in the greater world outside Arabia. While presenting no historical

45 He does refer to J. Naveh, "He'arot Sinaiyot," in *Sefer Shmuel Yevin: Studies in the Bible, Archaeology, Language and the History of the people of Israel*, Jerusalem: Qiryat Sefer, 1970, 371–74, who reads: "[Line1] –w br s' d' l'hy [Line2] d'kyr s' d' l'hy br bry'w." This fits well with the proposed reading above, except for the *d'kyr* at the beginning of line 2.

difficulty, it can fully account for the relatively high civilization in the Jewish communities of Mecca, Yathrib, Tayma, Khaybar, and other cities of that region."⁴⁶ And yet not a single clearly Jewish inscription has yet been found at Mecca, Yathrib or Khaybar despite quite a number of epigraphic surveys conducted at all three sites.

What are we to make of this apparent discrepancy? Should we think in terms of, as Torrey puts it, "a genuine Hebrew stock"⁴⁷ linked "with the learned centres in the greater world outside Arabia" and possessing a "relatively high civilization," or rather of a community mostly made up of Arab converts (with probably a number of Jews who migrated there for various reasons – trade, refuge, etc. – and stayed on) substantially integrated within Arabian society and barely in touch with non-Arabian Jewish communities, and possessing a relatively low level of Jewish education? The latter of these two models would patently better suit the epigraphic evidence that we have. It would also make it easier to account for the almost total dearth of information about these north Arabian Jewish communities in Jewish sources of the Levant and Iraq if we assume that they had little contact with the wider Jewish world and participated minimally in the Jewish religious debates of their age.⁴⁸ If substantially integrated within Arabian society, the Jews of northwest Arabia (whether Arab converts to Judaism or heavily Arabized Jews) would have been more likely to sport Arabian names rather than classic Jewish/Hebrew ones, and so it is not surprising that such classic Jewish/Hebrew names are rare in the epigraphic record of the Hijaz (point no. 2 above). And it may well be that some of the thousands of graffiti found in that region, written in Ancient North Arabian dialects (often labelled "Thamudic"), could be by Jews, hidden from our view by their adoption of Arabian names and their decision not to deploy distinctively Jewish expressions.⁴⁹ Moreover, as well-integrated members of

46 C.C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1933, 26–27.

47 Cf. the discussion in A.J. Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Arabia*, trans. W. Behn, Freiburg: Schwarz, 1975, 30–32, where it is asserted that at least some of the Jews of Medina must have been of "a stock who originated in Palestine," and in H.Z. Hirschberg, *Yisrael be-Arav*, Tel Aviv: Bialik Foundation, 1946, 192: "The documents and the sources testify that Arabian Jewry did not differ from that of all other lands . . . They lived in accordance with accepted Jewish tradition."

48 The only contender for a rabbi from the north Arabian Peninsula (as opposed to the Roman province of Arabia and Iranian province of Beth Arabaye) is a certain Simeon the Temanite/Taymanite (championed by Torrey, *Jewish Foundation*, "lecture 2"), though even this is unsure inasmuch as the adjective could refer to the Edomite city (or district) of Teman (Petra area).

49 Certainly, the vast majority of the Jews who are mentioned in the various Muslim biographies of the Prophet Muhammad bear names that are also held by pagan, Christian and Muslim Arabs. Moreover, the persons who feature in the Jewish inscriptions of south Arabia very rarely bear a Jewish name. Of course, it was very common for Jews in the Near East to follow local naming patterns, and also names and trends in names (e.g. Greek versus Biblical) went in and out of fashion, so names are by no means infallible indicators of cultural assimilation or identity.

Arabian society, one would expect the Jews resident there to employ whatever was the most prevalent/prestigious language of their day, as they generally did wherever they lived, and indeed that would seem to be the practice of the authors of the above texts (point no. 3 above). The Nabataean Aramaic script and language predominate, as is fitting for the Hijaz, for a long time part of the Nabataean kingdom, the language and script of which exerted a very strong influence centuries after its kings had passed away.

This brings us to an intriguing problem: does the presence of Arabic inscriptions in the group above (nos 24–28 and possibly JS Heb 7), albeit in Hebrew script, mean that Arabic replaced Nabataean Aramaic in northwest Arabia, and if so when? The present consensus is that they are pre-Islamic,⁵⁰ which makes them highly significant, for they would then antedate the presently earliest known Judaeo-Arabic material by at least a couple of centuries.⁵¹ Certainly, we have evidence that (Old) Arabic was beginning to be written down from the second century CE onwards: witness the inscriptions of 'Ayn Abada (c. second century CE), Hegra (267 CE), Nemara (328 AD), Jabal Says (528 CE) and Harran (568 CE), all located within the territory of the former Nabataean kingdom.⁵² In addition, a considerable number of late Nabataean graffiti (c. third to fifth century CE) have been discovered in northwest Arabia in recent years that seem to exhibit features of the later Arabic script and to contain some Arabic words,⁵³ such as that shown in Figure 4.2:

- 50 Hirschberg, *Yisrael*, 46, 281 n. 65; Caskel, *Lihyan*, 44 ("kurz nach 300"). It is implicit in the title of Sergio Noja's book *I primi arabi/L'Arabie avant l'Islam* (Milan: Jaca, 1994), where a number of these texts are reproduced with the caption: "some inscriptions that document the presence of Jews in pre-Islamic Arabia" (*ibid.*, 196). Hopkins 2007/8 favours a pre-Islamic date for circumstantial reasons: 1. there are few Jews in Islamic Arabia; 2. some of JS Heb 1–8 "are engraved immediately adjacent to texts which are undoubtedly of pre-Islamic age"; 3. "Jaussen and Sagnac themselves . . . never doubted the antiquity of their finds" – but none of these arguments is cogent.
- 51 S. Hopkins, "The Earliest Texts in Judaeo-Middle Arabic," in J. Lentin and J. Grand'Henry (eds), *Moyen arabe et variétés mixtes de l'arabe à travers l'histoire*, Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 2008, 231–50 (late eighth/early ninth century). Y. Tobi, "The Orthography of pre-Saadianic Judaeo-Arabic compared with the Orthography of the Inscriptions of pre-Islamic Arabia," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 34, 2004, 343–49, accepts the pre-Islamic dating of these texts and argues that they are the ultimate source for the pre-Saadianic Judaeo-Arabic Bible translations found in the Genizah.
- 52 There is also JS Lih384 and there are features of pre-Islamic Arabic (or "Old Arabic") in a few other texts; most recently see M.C.A. Macdonald, "Old Arabic," in K. Versteegh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, and for discussion of the context of its spread see R.G. Hoyland, "The Linguistic Background to the Qur'ān," *QHC*, 51–69.
- 53 These have not yet been published, but for some discussion see *ibid.*, 60–65, which also treats the inscription in Fig. 4.2 (= al-Theeb 2002, nos. 132–33), and L. Nehmé, "A glimpse of the development of the Nabataean script into Arabic based on old and new epigraphic material," *Supplement to Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 40, 2010 (see Fig. 19, corresponding to my Fig. 4.2, where she reads the last (Arabic) words as *adkhalū 'Amr al-malik* "[in the year 350] they introduced 'Amr the king" as opposed to my suggestion of *idh jlw 'Amr al-malik* "[in the year 350] when 'Amr al-Malik flourished or departed.")

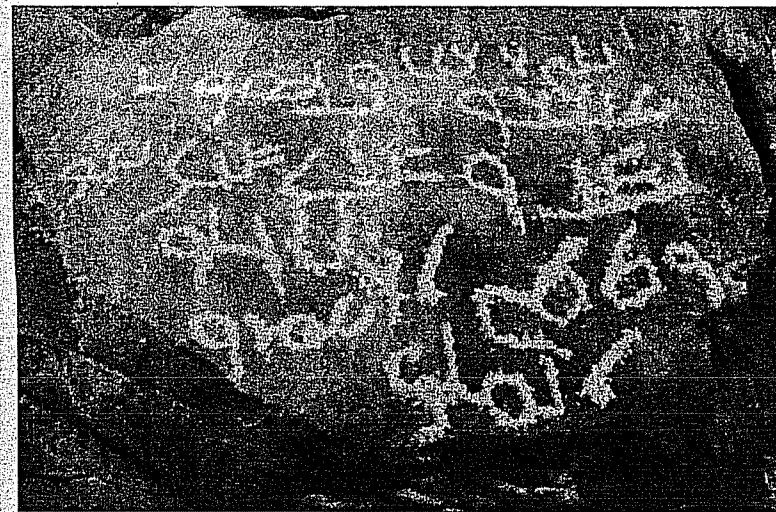


Figure 4.2 Graffiti, Umm Jadhayidh (NW Arabia), ca. 455 CE.

Source: Bly dkyr Fhmw br 'Ubaydw b-ṭb w-slm snt 2 × 100 100 20 20 10 idh jlw 'Amrw al-mlk

And one can find some corroboration from literary sources for pre-Islamic Judaeo-Arabic:

Writing in Arabic (*al-kitāb bi-l-'arabiyya*) among the [tribes of] Aws and Khazraj was rare. But one of the Jews was instructed in the writing of Arabic and he taught it to the boys in Medina so that when Islam came there were a number among the Aws and Khazraj who could write, such as Sa'd b. 'Ubāda b. Dulaym, al-Mundhir b. 'Amr, Ubayy b. Ka'b, and Zayd b. Thābit, who could write both Arabic and Hebrew.⁵⁴

Ubayy b. Ka'b said: I recited the Qur'ān while this Zayd [b. Thābit] was still a boy with two sidelocks (*dhū dhu'ābatayni*) playing among the Jewish children at school (*fi l-maktab*).⁵⁵

- 54 Aḥmad b. Yahyā al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden: Brill, 1863–66, 473; my translation is given in the light of the version in al-Qalqashandī's *al-Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* quoted and discussed in M. Lecker "Zayd b. Thābit, 'a Jew with two sidelocks': Judaism and literacy in pre-Islamic Medina," *JNES* 56, 1997, 265.
- 55 Cited in *ibid.*, 259–60, along with other versions; see also A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammed*, Berlin: Nicolai'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1869, 128–33, and C. Gilliot, "Die Schreib- und/oder Lesekundigkeit in Mekka und Yathrib/Medina zur Zeit Mohammeds," in M. Gross and K.-H. Ohlig (eds), *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, Berlin: Schiler, 2008, 293–319.

The only problem with a pre-Islamic dating for these Judaeo-Arabic inscriptions is that it does give them a unique status: the earliest Judaeo-Arabic texts by far (leaving us with a gap of two or three centuries to account for before the first dateable evidence for Judaeo-Arabic) and the only Judaeo-Arabic texts from the Hijaz. Before endorsing this, it seems to me that we should first explore better the less startling option of an Islamic date. The continuing presence of Jews in north Arabia in Islamic times is quite well attested. For example, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) refers to Jews still living in Medina in his time and Ibn Kathīr notes that in the tenth century (shortly after the year 300 AH), the Jews of Khaybar claimed that they had in their possession a document allegedly given them by the Prophet which exempted them from the poll tax.⁵⁶ Moreover, JS Heb1–3 and 5–8 are not necessarily by Jews; they do not contain overtly Jewish names or formulae. It is said that quite a number of Jews of Arabia converted to Islam in the early Islamic period and it could be that our texts are the work of some of these converts, who would plausibly have still known how to write Hebrew. It is difficult to analyse the texts, because they are so brief, but it is worth saying that the expression in JS Heb1, "He trusts in God" (*bi-llāh yathīq* or *yathīq bi-llāh*), is a very popular Muslim expression, used in innumerable seals and graffiti, in the Abbasid period, but is not attested before this. In the end, though, no matter which option we go for, these Judaeo-Arabic fragments will remain something of an oddity.

The significance of the small corpus of texts listed above depends on how one interprets them. It is very much in vogue in current studies of the origins of Islam to take absence of evidence as evidence of absence, and so one could take the diminutive size, spread and quality of the corpus above to write a revisionist history of Islam, arguing, for example, that we must relocate the rise of Islam to Iraq or Palestine, where Jews are more numerous, more widespread and more educated.⁵⁷ However, one could also use it to tell a different story, of small communities of Jews who were very well integrated into the life of the Arab tribes of the Hijaz, 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.

There is also perhaps another story being told by these texts, though very obliquely. As noted in point 5 above, it is the old oasis settlements of Hegra (Mada'in Salih) and Dedan (al-Ula) that yield the most Jewish texts. After them come the similarly ancient settlements of Tayma (nos. 5 and 31; and see no. 6),

⁵⁶ Both cited by W.N. Arafat, "New Light on the Story of Banū Qurayza and the Jews of Medina" *JRAS* 1976, 105. See also Newby, *History*, ch. 7, and C.A. Nallino, *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti*, Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1939–48, 3:121. At the First Oxford Arabic Epigraphy Workshop (12/06) Dr Ali Ghabban showed a graffito from near al-Ula, dated 83 AH, by one 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Gharīd, member of a once distinguished Jewish family which included the poet Samuel b. 'Ādiyā, but himself now apparently a convert to Islam.

⁵⁷ This has been suggested by G. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, and Y. Nevo and J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: the Origins of the Arab religion and the Arab state*, New York: Prometheus, 2003.

Qurḥ (al-Mabīyyat, no. 18) and Tabuk (nearby Umm Jadhayidh, nos. 14–15). These places have a very ancient history. Tayma hosted the Babylonian king Nabonidus in the sixth century BCE. Dedan is noted in the Bible for its "caravans" and merchandise of "saddlescloths" (Isaiah 21.13; Ezekiel 27.20) and its Minaean trading colony expedited cargos of incense from south Arabia to the markets of the Mediterranean. Hegra served as the southern capital of the Nabataean kingdom, based at Petra, and enjoyed the status of a *civitas* in the Roman province of Arabia (see n. 16 above). The last inscriptions from this region are dated 356 CE (no. 6 above) and 455 CE (the Umm Jadhayidh text above). Thereafter the epigraphic record falls silent (unless nos 24–28 are from the fifth and sixth centuries). Possibly this is connected with "the disruption of settlement over much of Arabia ... by the fifth century AD" that has been identified by some archaeologists.⁵⁸ This may itself be a result of economic decline due to the contortions suffered by the Roman Empire in the wake of the loss of its western provinces and/or sundry natural disasters.⁵⁹ Or else it may be a consequence of the demise of paganism and ascendancy of monotheism, which would have led to a collapse in the status and power of the pagans who were responsible for inscribing most of the inscriptions of Arabia up until this time, and perhaps also of the Jewish communities who lived in symbiosis with them. Did this then somehow advantage sites further south, such as Mecca, Medina and Ta'if, as the Islamic sources would have us believe? No epigraphic finds confirm this, but unfortunately the archaeological exploration that might tell us is not currently possible at these places.

I should perhaps conclude by remarking that it would also be possible to argue that this small group of texts does not constitute a meaningful group, but is rather just the writings of a few quirky Jewish characters who went against the norm and chose a Biblical rather than an Arabian name and/or who wrote in Hebrew script rather than in Nabataean Aramaic, Lihyanite or Arabic script. In this case, they would not be at all representative of the Jews of the Hijaz or give us any sort of realistic picture of the size or nature of their community. A solution to these questions will only come, however, once these texts have become better known and studied by scholars well versed in this wider Jewish world of late antiquity.

Abbreviations for collections of inscriptions

Altheim, F. and Stiehl, R. *Die Araber in der alten Welt V.1*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968.

Cantineau, J. *Le Nabatéen I/II*, Paris: E. Leroux, 1930/1932.

CIS = *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, Paris: e Reipublicae Typographeo, 1881–.

Euting, J. *Nabatäische Inschriften aus Arabien*, Berlin: Reimer, 1885.

⁵⁸ D. Kennett, "On the eve of Islam: archaeological evidence from eastern Arabia," *Antiquity* 79, 2005, 115.

⁵⁹ As postulated by A. Korotayev, V. Klimenko & D. Proussakov, "Origins of Islam: Political-Anthropological and Environmental Context," *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 52, 1999, 243–76.

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5 The usage of Ancient South Arabian and other Arabian languages as an etymological source for Qur'ānic vocabulary

Hani Hayajneh

This contribution will shed light on the possibility of using Ancient South Arabian (hereafter ASA)¹ lexical material to elucidate words and expressions occurring in the Qur'ān. Although the words handled in the second part of this chapter are known to scholars from various studies (see below), in the present contribution I will attempt to establish guidelines and develop an explanatory methodology of interpreting Qur'ānic words through Semitic languages in general, and the South Semitic branch in particular. The study will address Qur'ānic words and expressions that have cognates and parallels attested in ASA and are derived from the same homonymic root morphemes. Although the root might have a different meaning from what is attested in the traditional Arabic lexica or suggested by Muslim exegetes and commentators, the meaning deduced from ASA could explain the Qur'ānic word and offer it a new semantic sphere.

This chapter constitutes the first part of a project devoted to an etymological and lexical study of the Qur'ānic lexicon based on the Semitic languages. The lexemes and expressions treated here are selected samples of a large word inventory with which I am currently working.² It is not the intention of the present study to reconstruct an ASA reading of the Qur'ānic text.

Before proceeding to the core of the paper, I will present an overview of the attempts of medieval Arab philologists and modern scholars in this domain and offer some remarks on the Qur'ānic exegetical methodologies and the problematic issues that hamper our understanding of the Qur'ānic lexicon.

1 The abbreviation ASA stands for "Ancient South Arabian," for both a linguistic and cultural designation. For the Epigraphic sigla of Ancient South Arabian inscriptions, and translations thereof, see the Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions <<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/all/alphabetical.html>>. Authorization is required to access the CSAI website. To obtain the password, and for information, questions, and comments about CSAI please see <<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/contacts.html>> or write to <csai@humnet.unipi.it>.

2 In this context, I would like to draw attention to a short notice published by M. al-Ghūl (= M. Ghul), "Makānat nuqūsh al-yaman al-qadīma fī turāth al-lughā al-'arabiyya al-fuṣṣā," *Al-Hikma* 38, 1975, 34–49, who gives some hints with examples on the importance of the ASA dialects for elucidating Qur'ānic words and expressions. Some of his arguments regarding certain Qur'ānic words are included in the second part of this chapter.

Scattered hints are attested in the Arabic tradition of lexicographers from the first centuries of Islam who used some Semitic languages, especially Hebrew ('*ibrī*), Syriac (*suryanī*), Nabataean (*nabaṭī*) and Abyssinian (*ḥabashī*), in order to explain some lexical items occurring in Arabic.³ Among these is Zayd b. Thābit, the companion of the Prophet Muḥammad, who allegedly knew Syriac, and 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbās (d. 67/687), to whom two treatises on the language of Qur'ān are ascribed. Among the statements associated with Ibn 'Abbās are those in which he describes Qur'ānic terms as Syriac, Hebrew, Abyssinian or Yemenite. According to tradition Ibn 'Abbās was an apprentice of Zayd b. Thābit, which might explain his interest in Hebrew and Syriac. A further relevant name is Wahb b. Munabbih al-Abnāwī al-Ṣan'ānī al-Dhamārī (d. 114/733), to whom the work *Al-Mulūk al-mutawwaja min ḥimyar wa-akḥbārihim wa-qīṣāṣihim wa-qubūrihim wa-ash'ārihim* is attributed. Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833) quotes from this work in the introduction of *Kitāb al-Tījān*. Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 103/722), a client of the tribe b. Makhzūm, also seems to have had recourse to Syriac in his interpretations, along with the Yemenite Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 204/820). In his book *al-Iklīl al-Hamdānī* (d. 334/945) quotes al-Kalbī's reports on Himyarite gravestones and poetry in the dialect of the Yemenite town Zabīd. The differences between Classical Arabic in central Arabia and Himyarite in Southern Arabia, according to the account of Ibn Sallām al-Jumāḥiyy (d. 232/847), seems to have been known to some Arab linguists like Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā' (d. 154/771), to whom the sentence "*mā lisān Ḥimyar wa-aqāṣī al-yaman al-yawma bi-lisanina wa-lā 'arabiyyatuhum bi-'arabiyyatinā*" is imputed. The famous Arab grammarian Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 173/789), in his book *al-'Ayn*, provides some indications of the languages of Yemen and the Ḥimyarites. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995 or 388/998) was aware of the affinity between the Abyssinian and Ḥimyaritic script.

Jewish scholars also showed an interest in Semitic languages. Sa'īd b. Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī (d. 330/942; known as Sa'diyyā Gā'ūn),⁴ who lived in Iraq, was very well acquainted with Hebrew and translated the Old Testament into Arabic. Other Jewish scholars from Andalusia and Morocco are mentioned by the Arab historians, such as Manāḥīm b. Sarrūq (d. 349/960), who compiled a fascicle on Hebrew grammar, Dunāsh b. Labarṭ (d. 380/990) and Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Dāwūd b. Ḥayyūj (d. 390/1000).⁵

Scholarly interest in foreign words in Arabic in general and the Qur'ān in particular led to a genre of compilations under the rubrics, *al-gharīb*, *dakhīl al-Qur'ān*, or *mu'arrab*.⁶ This linguistic domain drew the attention of Arab philologists such as the Baṣran grammarian al-Mubarrad (d. 254/898), and the Baṣran Ibrāhīm b. al-Sariyy b. Sahl al-Zajjāj (d. 310/923), to whom some opinions on the origins of foreign vocabulary are ascribed. Even in an earlier period, some exegetical commentaries on the Qur'ān quote Sa'd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714; of Abyssinian origin) and 'Ikrima Abū 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd Allāh al-Barbarī al-Madanī (d. 103/722) on Abyssinian words. Al-Süyūfī (d. 911/1505) devotes some studies to the foreign vocabulary in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*.⁷ For example, he lists words extracted from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* alleged to be of Abyssinian origin.⁸ Such attempts evidently confirm the interest of philologists in reaching a better understanding of the etymology of words occurring in the Qur'ān and in Classical Arabic. Lothar Kopf notes that classical Muslim scholars came to recognize,

not only foreign words which more or less preserved their morphological forms but also some loan words which either fitted perfectly into the morphological structure of Arabic or were so well adapted to it that their foreign origin was not recognizable at first sight. Arab philologists realized that such words, on their adoption, are liable to assume new meanings and to become employed in varying forms.⁹

6 Dvořák provides an extensive study on their method: R. Dvořák, "Über die Fremdwörter im Korān," *Sitzungsberichte der Phil.-hist. Klasse der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 109:1, 1885, 481–562.

7 See Jalāl al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūfī, *Azhār al-'urūsh fī akḥbār al-ḥubūsh*. ed. Yaḥyā 'Abāna and Hānī Hayājna, Irbid: Dār al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfi, 2006, 59ff. and 62ff.

8 On the subject of foreign vocabulary in the Qur'ān, see A. Rippin, "Foreign Vocabulary," *EQ*, 2:226–37.

9 L. Kopf, "The treatment of foreign words in Mediaeval Arabic lexicography," in U. Heyd (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization. Scripta Hierosolymitana: Publications of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1961, 191–205. He adds that Muslim scholars were aware that "loanwords may be, or may become, entirely identical in form with native words and so increase the number of homonyms in the language that absorbed them." 192–93. Kopf also summarizes (pp. 197ff.) the criteria followed by Arab philologists in determining foreign words despite their lack of knowledge of foreign languages. Anton Spitaler illustrates how foreign words are harmonized into Arabic and its Semitic morphological system, and how the phonemes, and the syllabic structure, of the loanwords constitute major factors that determined the circumstances of borrowing. A. Spitaler, "Materialien zur Erklärung von Fremdwörtern im Arabischen durch retrograde Ableitung," in H. Krahe (ed.), *Corolla linguistica. Festschrift Ferdinand Sommer zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Mai 1955, dargebracht von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1955, 211–20.

3 For a comprehensive survey, see R. Baalbaki, "Early Arab lexicographers and the use of Semitic languages," *Berytus* 22, 1983, 117–27.

4 See D.M. Friedenreich, "The case of Islamic sources in Saadia Gaon's Tafsir of the Torah," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 93 (2003) No 3/4 353–95.

5 For further details see Ḥāshim al-Ta'ān, *Musāhamat al-'arab fī dirāsāt al-lughāt al-sāmiyya*, al-Jumhūriyya al-'Irāqiyya: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1978 and A. Maman, *Comparative Semitic Philology in the Middle Ages from Sa'diah Gaon to Ibn Barūn (10th–12th C.)*, trans. David Lyons. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Some general and introductory remarks on exegesis of the Qur'ān¹⁰

The lexicon of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* have been a focal point for exegetes and commentators since the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. Medieval Muslim scholars generally understood that language is one of the main sciences that one should master before starting any endeavors of Qur'ānic exegesis, as it is deemed to be the repository of the collective memory of the community members through which interpretation takes place. Language, as a holistic system, absorbs the experience of the predecessors who utilized it and made it productive morphologically and semantically.¹¹

Exegetes were of different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and dialectal spheres, a fact which sometimes influenced their methods of interpretation.¹² Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/899) states that not all Arabs are equal in identifying foreign (*gharīb*) and ambiguous (*mutashābih*) passages. Certain exegetes have knowledge of languages or dialects that others lack.¹³ I believe that an increased knowledge of the Arabian and Semitic languages dialects can yield a better understanding of the etymology of certain words in the Qur'ān.

Qur'ānic science is an extremely specialized field of Islamic scholarship. It requires mastery and profound knowledge of multiple disciplines and tributary sciences, like exegesis, recitation, script, inimitability, circumstances of revelation, abrogation, Qur'ānic grammar, unusual terminology, religious rulings and Arabic language and literature. Scholars of Qur'ānic exegesis tried to define some general methodological approaches for explaining the verses of the Qur'ān. One of them is the exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān, followed by the *sunna* of the Prophet, reports of his companions, Arabic language and, finally, "opinion," if this does not contradict the other four sources. Other exegetes have taken different approaches, like al-Ṭabarī for instance, who argued that the Qur'ān must first be interpreted according to *ḥadīths* of the Prophet. He takes a subtly different position on the reliability of the Prophet's companions, disapproving of some of them and doubting their trustworthiness. In addition, he opposes the use of personal opinion; although he applies his own interpretation in his *tafsīr*, he would not call it "opinion."¹⁴

10 For a rich and compact survey of exegetical efforts, see C. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and medieval," *EQ*, 2:99–124. and R. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Early modern and contemporary," *EQ*, 2:124–42.

11 See Sizā Qāsim-Dirzār, "Tawālud al-nuṣūṣ wa-ishbā' al-dilāla: Taḥqīqāt 'alā tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. Nr 8: Interpretation and Hermeneutics (*al-herminūtiqā wa-l-ta'wīl*), 1988, (30–81) 37.

12 See Muḥammad Zinjīr, "Al-Tajdīd fī manḥajīyyat al-tafsīr bayna al-Zamakhsharī wa-Sayyid Quṭb (*dirāsa taḥlīliyya taḥqīqiyya muqārīna*)," *Majallat al-sharī'a wa-l-dirāsāt al-islāmiyya* 45, 2001, (21–88) 26.

13 See 'Abd al-'Alī Salīm Mukarram, *Gharīb al-Qur'ān fī 'aṣr al-rasūl wa-l-ṣaḥāba wa-l-tābi'īn*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1996.

14 A kind remark by an anonymous reviewer of the present paper.

In Islamic tradition, Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) is distinguished for his study of expressions and words in a wide range of Arabian languages. But one should keep in mind that most of the lexical and linguistic stock of Arabic has not been documented. What narrators (*ruwāt*) have conveyed of the poetic and prose texts was not sufficient to represent the whole linguistic and cultural knowledge of the predecessors; i.e. the lexica of Classical Arabic in the medieval literature are incomplete.¹⁵

The usage of the available Arabic lexica in the exegetical attempts has its own drawbacks. We have to bear in mind that the vast Arabic lexical inventory contains, in addition to the normal linguistic applications and usages attested in different morphological forms, a further category of isolated lexical items that were morphologically unproductive and became secondary. Rippin has rightly stated that in the exegetical literature the latter category is cited but without any critical analysis of its application in interpreting a certain Qur'ānic verse or word.¹⁶ Our continued lack of a historical etymological dictionary of Arabic makes it difficult to determine the relevance of the lexica of medieval literature.¹⁷

The problem of defining certain words in the Qur'ān paved the way for a wide range of variant explanations and judgments by Qur'ān commentators. With the passage of time, exegetical texts generated further texts and thus in some cases readers find themselves at some distance from the original meaning of certain words.¹⁸ The task of interpretation thus becomes complicated. A commentator, as Richard Martin states, "must necessarily preconceive (*vorverstehen*) according to the information he assembles about it and understand it in terms of his own horizon of understanding."¹⁹ The problem, however, is that this horizon is not present for commentators in all historical stages to be adopted in their exegetical attempts, especially in a case in which Allāh is the revealer (speaker) (*al-mūḥī*) of this sacred text and humankind is the addressee. According to Martin, sacred speech presents generic symbolic figures (God, prophet, believers, unbelievers

15. Scholars must also be aware of the question of *qirā'āt* ("readings"), which require us to consider the morphology of words, and can lead us to different meanings of Qur'ānic terminology. On this see, Sa'd al-Kurdī, "Budhūr al-dirāsāt al-dilāliyya al-ūlā li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm," *Al-Turāth al-'arabī* 66, 1997, 16–34.

16 A. Rippin, "Qur'ān 78/24: A study in Arabic lexicography," *JSS*, 28:2, 1983, 311–20.

17 On this subject see F. Quinsat, "Le Coran et la lexicographie historique de l'Arabie," in M. Kropp (ed.), *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'ān: The Question of a Historical Critical Text of the Qur'ān*. Würzburg: Ergon, 2007, (175–91) 178ff., and M. Kropp, "Äthiopische Arabesken im Koran: Afroasiatische Perlen auf Band gereiht, einzeln oder zu Paaren, diffuse verteilt oder an Glanzpunkten konzentriert," in M. Gross and K.-H. Ohlig (eds), *Schlaglichter: die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, Berlin: H. Schiller, 2008, (384–410) 387.

18 S. Qāsim ("Tawālud al-nuṣūṣ," 37) stresses the importance of the collective memory as a dynamic mechanism, which produced intertextuality, where one text is apt to generate an infinite number of texts that are variations on it. In her opinion, each added text is an accumulation to the culture and can change a view which preceded it.

19 See R.C. Martin, "Understanding the Qur'ān in text and context," *History of Religions* 21:4, 1982, (361–84) 363ff.

and the situations it narrates) that must be interpreted to mean something for someone in the particular contexts in which it is interpreted.²⁰

Some commentators on the Qur'ān understand the text from their own social and linguistic context. Certain scholars argue that these commentators have laden the Qur'ān with meanings that became part of a symbolic system of Islamic literature. This symbolic knowledge is restricted to the insiders of this culture; for alien interpreters it still needs explanation. Martin argues that by referring to exegetical literature in order to achieve an understanding of the Qur'ān, we have not yet transformed its symbolic language into a language of explanation.²¹ I think that the historical and cultural horizon of the interpreter's understanding should not influence the meaning of the texts, especially if we are dealing with a sacred text such as the Qur'ān. A universal understanding of the Qur'ān means that it must be valid to scholars from different social and cultural backgrounds. This is especially important for a sacred text such as the Qur'ān.

Arabian and other semitic languages and Qur'ānic lexicography

The lexical study conducted in the present chapter will show that some Qur'ānic words, if interpreted in the light of Arabian epigraphical languages, are seen to have a meaning that might better clarify the context of the respective Qur'ānic verse. My conclusions regarding the meaning of the words are the result of linguistic etymological analysis based on existing contemporary knowledge of Semitic languages in general and ASA in particular. Such an endeavor might yield results that are, sometimes, not harmonious with the exegetical tradition. Still the exegetical sources, including *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature, have value. Firstly, in light of their historical proximity to the period of the Qur'ān's proclamation these sources can help us understand how the first people who heard the Qur'ān from the Prophet Muḥammad understood the ideas spread in it.²² Consulting related commentaries that contain direct statements and comments of the Prophet, if available, as well as his companions on a particular verse or word, and not only relying upon what the commentators understand from the text, might help elucidate some passages of the Qur'ān. Secondly, citing and using the exegetical works while treating the respected Qur'ānic words will show that these reports preserved in those sources constitute an element of tradition. Furthermore, it is necessary to see the position of the explanations proposed as a result of linguistic analysis against the meanings suggested by the exegetes. Therefore, it should be understood that the results of my etymological analysis as demonstrated in the second part are not mainly dependent on the narratives that are maintained in the reports of *asbāb al-nuzūl*. In other words, taking *tafsir* and *sabab* literature into account

20 Ibid., 363.

21 Ibid.

22 Cf. Martin, "Understanding the Qur'ān in text and context," 363, for an opposite argument.

does not necessary mean that I wholly build on the arguments presented in these sources, as we cannot ascertain whether such reports are historically accurate records to be used as a basis for establishing a historical context.

For some time now scholars of epigraphy have sought to awaken scholars in the field of Qur'ānic studies to the importance of Ancient South Arabian epigraphy, including Himyarite and other Semitic languages. A number of critical studies that include this topic have been published, e.g. Dvořák's "Über die Fremdwörter im Korān,"²³ H. Grimme's "Über einige Klassen südarabischer Lehnwörter im Koran"²⁴ and A. Jeffery's *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*.²⁵ More recent works on this topic include A. Rippin's "Epigraphical South Arabian and Qur'ānic exegesis"²⁶ and C. Rabin's "On the probability of South-Arabian influence on the Arabic vocabulary."²⁷ In his dissertation, "Early Southern Arabian Languages and Classical Arabic Sources,"²⁸ the late Mahmud Ghul addresses certain Arabic words designated in the Arabic sources as Yemeni or Himyarite. In his article "*Makānat nuqūsh al-Yaman al-qadīma fī turāth al-lughat al-'arabiyya al-fuṣṣḥā*,"²⁹ he analyzes some Qur'ānic words in the light of Ancient South Arabian languages. R. Serjeant discusses the word *mihrāb* in relation to ASA *mḥrb*.³⁰ Christian Robin analyses some loanwords with religious connotations in ASA and the Qur'ān.³¹ He shows that Aramaic was one of the main sources of this category of words.

An extreme method toward studying the Qur'ānic text was presented by Christoph Luxenberg (*pseudonym*) in his book entitled *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*.³² He argues that the Qur'ān has Syro-Aramaic origins. This argument has been widely discredited by the academic community.³³ He tries to identify an underlying

23 Dvořák, op. cit.

24 H. Grimme, "Über einige Klassen südarabischer Lehnwörter im Koran," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 26, 1912, 158–68.

25 Jeffery, *FF*.

26 A. Rippin, "Epigraphical South Arabian and Qur'ānic exegesis," *JSAI* 13, 1990, 153–74.

27 C. Rabin, "On the probability of South-Arabian influence on the Arabic vocabulary," *JSAI* 4, 1984, 125–34.

28 M.A. Ghul, *Early Southern Arabian Languages and Classical Arabic Sources: A Critical Examination of Literary and Lexicographical Sources by Comparison with the Inscriptions* Omar al-Ghul (ed.). Irbid: Yarmouk University Press, 1993.

29 Al-Ghul, "*Makānat nuqūsh al-yaman al-qadīma fī turāth al-lughat al-'arabiyyat al-fuṣṣḥā*," *Al-ḥikma* 38, 1975, 34–49.

30 R. Serjeant, "Mihrāb," *BSOAS* 22, 1975, 439–53.

31 E.g., C. Robin, "À propos de la prière: Emprunts lexicaux à l'hébreu et l'araméen relevés dans les inscriptions préislamiques de l'Arabie méridionale et dans le Coran," in G. Dorival and D. Pralon (eds), *Prières méditerranéennes hier et aujourd'hui*, Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2000, 45–69.

32 C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000.

33 See A. Neuwirth, "Qur'an and History – A Disputed Relationship. Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 2003, 5/1, 1–18, F. de Blois, Review of C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*, *JQS* 5, 2003, 92–97; R. Hoyland, "Epigraphy and the linguistic background of the Qur'ān," in *QHC*, 51–69.

Syriac reading of the Qur'ān and argues that the Qur'ānic text in its current form is originally based on Syriac Christian documents that reached the current textual form of the Qur'ān through editing. According to his assumption, Syriac words in the Qur'ān were arabicized through the development of the Arabic orthography. The proposed Syriac reading of the Qur'ān allows us, according to him, to reconsider the original meanings of the words. The Arab exegetes were not able to understand the original language of the Qur'ān and were forced to resort to the later developed Arabic etymology for their analysis.

Against Luxenberg, we have to bear in mind that oral transmission played an important role in preserving the integrity of the Qur'ān, a fact that he totally ignores. He tries to convince his readers that a hybrid language (Arabic and Syriac) existed in Mecca at that time. Yet there is no epigraphical or textual evidence from Mecca or its vicinity to support this argument. In addition, we have no Syriac works from Mecca from that time. He is constantly struggling to re-interpret single words by using corresponding Syriac cognates, without taking into consideration the context of the verse and its structure. His method, as Angelika Neuwirth states, "presupposes its very results: the facticity of a Syriac layer underlying the Arabic text."³⁴ Neuwirth adds that "Much of his material relies on obvious circular argument. One has to keep in mind that principally Syriac, which is linguistically closely related to Arabic, will offer innumerable cases of etymological parallels for individual words or expressions of the Qur'ān; particularly since religious vocabulary is abounding in Syriac. These parallels in many cases are simply due to the close linguistic relation between the two Semitic languages and do not necessarily reflect a cultural contact."

Arabs in Arabia borrowed heavily from Aramaic and other surrounding languages, e.g. Old Ethiopic, Ancient South Arabian etc. Such lexical material became an integral part of the dialects that dominated in Arabia. Therefore, we cannot consider the process of borrowing from other languages and cultures as a major factor that makes Arabic a mixed language. It is the phonology, morphology and syntax that establish the basic elements of linguistic clustering and grouping and that lead, at the end, to a recognition of the affiliation of a certain language to other language(s). The lexicon comes at the end of this chain. It is clear from Luxenberg's method that he mixes the structural elements of two different languages, Syriac and Arabic, which leads him to the wrong results.

In his work "A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic"³⁵ Martin R. Zammit intended to carry out a quantitative analysis of a substantial corpus of the Qur'ānic lexicon with a view to investigating the lexical relationship between Arabic and the major variants of Semitic. He tried to interpret the common lexical features, rather than pointing towards particular genetic affinities, as indicators of different levels of socio-cultural links in general and linguistic exchange in

particular, which characterized the various areas of Semitic. As a result, he considered the distribution of lexical items in nine Semitic languages on the basis of a lexical corpus collated from Qur'ānic inventory. This study, however, lacks the contextual and critical study of the roots and their derivatives in both the Qur'ānic corpus as well as in the Semitic cognates. The study was restricted to listing the homonymic roots and derivatives without any discussion or analysis. They are not divided according to their semantic fields. For example, listing the Qur'ānic word *maṣānī* in this work under the root *ṣ-n-* "to do, make"³⁶ is not helpful for a better understanding of the Qur'ānic word, as this root in Semitic languages has produced two basic meanings, the first "to do, make", and the second "to fortify, consolidate" (see discussion below under the entry *maṣānī*). The same is applicable to the Qur'ānic word *ḥabl*, which should be interpreted as "covenant" instead of "rope". Both meanings are attested in Semitic languages as derivatives from the same root-morphemes. A further example is the root *sh-r-h*, which is known in Semitic languages with two meanings, "to protect" and "to open; explain, expand". This semantic dichotomy should have been critically examined on the basis of the Qur'ānic passage in which the word occurs.

J. Tropper and Hani Hayajneh³⁷ address the Ugaritic sentence *lṭpn il d pid* and its relationship to Qur'ānic vocabulary and translate it as "der scharfsinnige, der verständige Gott." This translation is based on the conformity of certain etymological thoughts, as both terms *lṭp* and *pid* occur in Arabic and, in particular, the Qur'ānic text.

Manfred Kropp's various lexical contributions on the Qur'ānic texts in the light of Ethiopic represent milestones in this field, for example, in his study on the Old Ethiopic origins of the Arabic word *shayṭān*,³⁸ and his attempts to trace Old Ethiopic loanwords in the Qur'ān.³⁹ In the latter article Kropp discusses problems surrounding lexical borrowing from Old Ethiopic. He analyzes when such words entered into the Qur'ānic corpus, whether they were part of the spoken Arabic language before Islam, and thus whether they could be classified as innovations or neologisms. Such studies suggest that further research is needed to investigate a wide category of Qur'ānic words in the Ancient Semitic context, especially those that have not been labeled by Arab philologists as "foreign" or "loanwords" due to their assimilation into an Arabic morphology.⁴⁰ So too the Qur'ān should be seen as a very important source of linguistic and cultural knowledge

³⁴ Neuwirth, "Qur'ān and History – A Disputed Relationship", 9.

³⁵ Martin R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, *Handbook of Oriental Studies* 2, 61. Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002.

³⁶ Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, 258.

³⁷ J. Tropper and H. Hayajneh "El, der scharfsinnige und verständige Gott: Ugaritic *lṭpn il d pid* im Lichte der arabischen Lexeme *laṭṭif* und *fu'ād*," *Orientalia* 72, 2003, 159–82.

³⁸ M. Kropp, "Der äthiopische Satan = Shayṭān und seine koranische Ausläufer," *Oriens Christianus* 89, 2005, 93–102.

³⁹ M. Kropp, "Äthiopische Arabesken im Koran."

⁴⁰ Some modern scholars are trying to draw attention to the study of the tense system of the Qur'ān in the light of Semitic languages. See Muḥammad 'Azab, "*Ḥawla maḥitūm al-zaman fi l-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa-fi l-'Ahd al-Qadīm: Mudkhal lughawī*," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 9, 1989, 138–54.

that can elucidate vague cultural and linguistic references in ancient Arabian inscriptions.⁴¹

The Arabian languages and dialects⁴² of Arabia before Islam

In the last five decades, the documentation of Ancient South Arabian language and culture has significantly improved. Pre-Islamic South Arabia is one of the oldest centers of civilization in the Near East, as it enjoyed a fertile soil and a wet climate, which was of great importance for the stability of the population. Archaeological work in this part of Arabia has shown that it witnessed a sophisticated civilization starting from the last centuries of the Late Bronze Age. The earliest epigraphical documentation can be roughly dated back to the tenth or eleventh century BC.

ASA consists of four dialects⁴³ – Sabaic, Minaic, Qatabanic and Hadramitic – all of which are written in a distinctive script called *al-musnad*.⁴⁴ ASA is affiliated

41 One might trace historical, religious or cultural aspects of the epigraphical sources of Pre-Islamic Arabia through the Qur'an. For example, the references in South Arabian epigraphical sources to "daughters of Il" might be better understood in light of the Qur'an references to the pre-Islamic Arabian goddesses *Allāt*, *Minā* and *al-'Uzza*. Some temple decorations seem to offer a representation of the "Daughters of Il," namely images of young women in a hieratic attitude, duplicated a great number of times. The Qur'an constantly denies that God ever begot daughters ("Daughters of God"), which shows that in Western Arabia, too, some people venerated deities similar to the South Arabian "Daughters of Il." See C. Robin, "Les 'Filles de Dieu' de Saba' à la Mecque: Réflexions sur l'agencement des panthéons dans l'Arabie ancienne," *Semitica* 50, 2001, 104–92.

42 The identification of the linguistic affiliation of a certain language and its relationship to other adjacent or remote languages or dialects is morphologically based; i.e. it is the morphology which is taken as a basis for linguistic clustering. Due to the vowelless script of ASA and ANA and other known epigraphical groups in Arabia, our knowledge of the morphological situation of these branches is still restricted and vague. Therefore, it is for the meantime impossible to decide whether the ASA epigraphical groups (Sabaic, Qatabanic, Hadramitic and Minaic) are distinct languages to which the generic name ASA can be given. Although there are linguistic differences between them, i.e. with regard to the verbal system, e.g. the existence of the short and long prefix conjugation in Sabaic particularly, etc., the current situation as can be gleaned from the ASA inscriptions does not grant us the right to designate these epigraphical groups as discrete "languages". Therefore, I prefer here the designation "dialect" rather than "language". The same is also applicable to the ANA epigraphical variants. There, the situation is more complicated, not only because of the vowelless script used, but also because of the lack of sufficient morphological and syntactical evidence; the texts are very short which prevents us from drawing sufficient and reliable conclusions in this regard. The generic designations of ANA mentioned above are mainly based on geographical considerations. Other Arabian epigraphical groups, i.e. the texts discovered in Qaryat al-Faw written in ASA script, are difficult to classify, as they contain linguistic features that are familiar in both ASA as well as Arabic.

43 There are no strong distinctive linguistic features that lead us to consider these linguistic variants as different languages, as the morphological scope of these linguistic unities is not clear due to the vowelless script used.

44 A. Beeston, "Pre-Islamic South Arabian," in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 4:223–26.

with the western branch of the South Semitic linguistic group.⁴⁵ The aforementioned linguistic designations refer to political entities. After the advent of Islam, the southern parts of Arabia (modern Yemen) became part of the Islamic realm. Arabic replaced Sabaic, which was used in the later stages as a prestigious language, while Himyaritic seems to have been used colloquially (see below).⁴⁶ We possess thousands of published ASA inscriptions of different lengths composed in the above dialects. The ASA texts cover a wide range of subjects that shed light on this civilization from different perspectives, i.e. religion, history, agriculture, death, trade, language, warfare, pacts and confessions. In addition, a new genre of ASA texts started to appear during the 1980s and began to change the classical views on the culture of Ancient South Arabia.⁴⁷ A collection of this epigraphical type, which is written on wood in cursive script (*zabūr*), provided us for the first time in ASA studies with unprecedented information on the daily life of Ancient South Arabia, in addition to new lexemes and morphological forms.⁴⁸ Moreover, the recent publication of dictionaries and glossaries of these epigraphically attested languages, especially of ASA, had made this source more accessible to contemporary philologists, even for non-specialists.

We should mention here that ASA lexical and linguistic traits remained in use among the Arabs in later periods; therefore, plenty of originally ASA lexical items had the chance to penetrate into the lexicon of the sister language, Arabic, and to remain an integral part of it for a long time.⁴⁹ Accordingly we find some Muslim exegetes describing some Qur'ānic words as *himyarī* "Himyaritic"; *yamanī* or *yamānī*, "Yemenite" and *bi-lughati ahli l-yaman* "in the language of the people of Yemen" in origin. They use this same phrase to refer to all South Arabian dialects

45 See A. Faber, "Genetic subgrouping of the Semitic languages," in R. Hetzron (ed.), *The Semitic Languages*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 3–24, for the problem of genetic classification of the Semitic languages in general.

46 On the definition of Arabic among the variant Arabian languages, see M.C. Macdonald, "Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 11, 2000, 28–79.

47 For a historical overview of the cultural history of Pre-Islamic Arabia, see R. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001, 36ff., and for a linguistic survey of the ASA dialects, see L. Kogan and A. Korotayev, "Sayhadic (Epigraphic South Arabian)," in R. Hetzron (ed.), *The Semitic Languages*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 220–41. For a recent summary on religion and cult in ASA, a reference can be made to W.W. Müller, "Religion und Kult im antiken Südarabien," in M. Krebernik and J. von Oorschot (eds), *Polytheismus und Monotheismus in den Religionen des Vorderen Orients*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002, 175–95.

48 J. Ryckmans, W. Müller, and Y. Abdallah, *Textes du Yémen antique inscrits sur bois*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1994.

49 A. Rippin ("Epigraphical South Arabian") has already discussed the question of whether ASA continued to be used in Islamic times or not, and whether a mutual infiltration from Arabic into the linguistic traits of South Arabia and vice versa was prevalent. He concludes that the knowledge of ASA did not carry over into Islam and the historical memory of Muslim scholars on ASA cannot be relied on to draw firm conclusions, unless no external information verifying this memory is discovered.

that existed in South Arabia, without differentiation between Himyaritic proper and other dialects, i.e. Sabaic, Qatabanic, Minaic, Hadramaitic, and possibly other internal South Arabian dialectal variants.

Of these dialects only Himyaritic, which survived in the mountains of Yemen, continued as a distinct colloquial spoken dialect during the first centuries of Islam.⁵⁰ Proper Himyaritic can be identified by a number of specific morphological and lexical features that distinguish it from the ASA epigraphical dialects (i.e. Sabaic, Qatabanic and Minaic) as well as from contemporary Arabic dialects of South Arabia (dating back to the period of al-Hamdānī).⁵¹ The Himyarites probably used Sabaic as an official language while keeping Himyaritic as a vernacular.

Old Arabic,⁵² called also Pre-Classical Arabic, seems to have co-existed with the mentioned groups. Epigraphical evidence for it is attested in ASA, Nabataean and Dadanitic scripts. Evidence of Old Arabic is found in ASA inscriptions in the city of Haram from an early date (the third century BC). Its inhabitants were evidently caravan traders who spoke a variant of Classical Arabic, as reflected in their usage of certain linguistic features widespread in Sabaic inscriptions of Haram. Moreover, in the first century BC Arabs are listed in the service of South Arabian kings.⁵³ In addition, Arabs in central Arabia and the inhabitants of Southern Arabia seem to have been involved in trading.⁵⁴ Such evidence shows that there was constant contact between Central and Southern Arabia. It is to be assumed that such contacts would influence the lexicon of both groups in earlier stages.⁵⁵

The Northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula witnessed a different epigraphical heritage, known among scholars as Ancient North Arabian (ANA), represented in thousands of graffiti and monumental inscriptions (Safaitic, Himaic [= Thamudic

E], Taymanitic [= Thamudic A], Dadanitic [= Lihyanitic/Dadanitic], Dumatic, Thamudic B, C, D, and Hasaitic) spread over its northern parts, covering an epoch extending roughly from the sixth century BC to the fourth century AD.⁵⁶

A further type of Arabian epigraphy are the inscriptions discovered in Qaryat al-Fāw (ancient *Qryt dht Khl*), of which few have been published. They show a sort of linguistic mixture of ASA and Old Arabic such as the usage of both definite articles, *-n* as determinative suffix as well as *al-* in the same inscription. In comparison to the ASA epigraphical corpus, which includes diverse subjects from a wide range in time and space, the ANA corpus seems limited.⁵⁷

Despite the cessation of the usage of ASA by the inhabitants in the Southern parts of Arabia, lexical items were liable to survive among them up to modern times.⁵⁸ After the first discovery of the ASA inscriptions, scholars were able to look into the linguistic history of Arabia through different eyes and to trace the lexical, morphological and syntactical affinities of the Arabic variants and the ASA dialects.

Qur'ānic lexical items and expressions

On the methodology of the current study

As previously mentioned, our endeavor aims at examining the possibility of using the ASA lexicon to disclose the basic and original meaning of certain Qur'ānic words. I have stated already that a comprehensive knowledge of the language is a major aspect of responsible interpretation of the Qur'ān. Although this chapter intends to study critically the root of each Qur'ānic word and its semantic field as explained by the Qur'ān commentators, this does not imply that these *ḥadīths*

50 See C. Robin, "Himyaritic," in K. Versteegh et al. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, (256–61) 256.

51 A.G. Belova, "The position of Himyaritic within the South Semitic group of Semitic languages (Yemenite–Ethiopian isoglosses)," *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies* (Moscow, 26–29 August 1986), Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988, (28–34) 29.

52 See Macdonald, "Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia."

53 "Arabs in the mountainous country," are listed as subjects of certain kings. See C. Rabin, "On the probability of South-Arabian influence on the Arabic vocabulary," 124ff.

54 See, for example, C. Robin, "La caravane Yemenite et Syrienne" dans une inscription de l'Arabie Meridionale antique," in F. Sanagustin (ed.), *L'Orient au cœur: en l'honneur d'André Miquel*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001, 207–16, who published an ASA inscription in which the Yemenite Syrian caravan is mentioned (1) *ḥrthm bn lgnm ḥdṛmyn h 2) dy 'rn ymnytn w-s' mytn b-gys' bn ḥdṛm(t)* "1) ḥārithum fils de Lgnm Hadramawtique a 2) conduit la caravane yéménite et syrienne avec une troupe du Ḥadramawt" (Robin, op. cit., 211). This caravan merchandise activity is attested in the Qur'ān (106:2) as *riḥlat al-shitā' wa-l-ṣayf*.

55 Linguistic contacts, including lexical borrowing, were very common among Semitic languages of Arabia and the Levant, and are reflected in the lexica of the various languages. On this see Fränkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im arabischen*, and A. Beeston, "Foreign loanwords in Sabaic," in N. Nebes (ed.), *Arabia Felix. Beiträge zur Sprache und Kultur des vorislamischen Arabien*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994, 39–45. Beeston tries to isolate loanwords in Sabaic from languages such as Geez, Akkadian, Nabataean, Palmyrene and Aramaic.

56 For a detailed survey of the Ancient North Arabian epigraphical groups see W.W. Müller, "Das Altarabische und Klassisch Arabisch. Das Frühnordarabische," in W. Fischer (ed.), *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie, Sprachwissenschaft*, vol.1, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1982, 17–29; M. Macdonald, "Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia," and M. Macdonald, "Ancient North Arabian," in R.D. Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 488–533.

57 For the ASA dialects there are some lexical references that can be used, e.g. A. Beeston, M.A. Ghul, W.W. Müller, and J. Ryckmans, *Sabaic Dictionary (English–French–Arabic)*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, 1982; S.D. Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian*, Studia Pohl 14, Roma: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1989; M. Arbach, *Lexique madhābién, comparé aux lexiques sabéen, qatabanite et ḥadramawtique*, Aix-en-Provence, PhD dissertation, 1993; and other dispersed lexical studies published in articles. On the other hand, such lexical works for Ancient North Arabian do not exist.

58 Scholars of ASA epigraphy have realized that plenty of lexical items occurring in ASA inscriptions are not encountered in any Semitic language but the Yemeni dialects. These dialects are therefore an important source for the establishment of the meaning of many ASA words. For example Muṭahhar 'Alī al-Iryānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-yamanī (alif): Ft l-lugha wa-l-turāth: Ḥawla mufradāt khāṣṣa min al-lahajāt al-yamaniyya*, Dimashq: Dār al-Fikr, 1996. Iryānī defines various ASA words by finding their cognates in the modern Yemeni dialects.

preserved in the commentary literature are essentially taken as a fundamental component while establishing a historical context. Considering certain opinions of commentators is essential, not for the sake of demonstrating their reliability (or not), but to show how the commentators apprehended a certain word on the basis of their linguistic backgrounds. As mentioned previously, some of them have approached the meaning on the basis of the context of the Qur'anic verse; this, however, does not mean that our conclusions are altered by or drawn from their understanding of the respected verse. Our study is based on linguistic and etymological data.

It is true that commentators were so far removed from the time of the Qur'an that they did not record what the first commentators said about the verse and the meaning of the word contained in it, but we have to be aware that their explanations or definitions could have been trans-generational and reached later commentators. Therefore, I find it significant to be aware of this tradition while establishing the historical context. An attempt has been made to consult the *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature, as I find this source of great importance because, although not always verifiable, it contains stories related to the respected verse and could illuminate some of its semantic aspects. For example, under the entry *amānāt* below, I believe it is not possible to ignore the story of the Prophet entering the Ka'ba in light of the conclusion presented regarding the meaning of this word as a result of our linguistic analysis. The mentioned story can therefore be considered as a supportive evidence for our argument.

However, in certain cases it will still prove illuminating to examine the root of a Qur'anic word in ASA, especially when that root has productive nominal and verbal derivatives. ASA lexical counterparts or cognates of the same respected word or expression will be brought into comparison with the Qur'anic word. If the Qur'anic word has the same meaning in ASA and Arabic it will be excluded as the meaning is already established. I will also refer to Old Ethiopic and other Arabian dialects. The Ancient Ethiopic culture is adjacent to the ASA cultural area, and it is possible that homonyms in both linguistic areas go back to the same origins. Regarding the inscriptional evidence, only the respective passage from the inscription will be quoted. In many of the studies below I will offer a new English translation of the passage at hand, working from the basis of Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation.⁵⁹

1. *amānāt*

Qur'an 4:58: *inna Allāha ya'murukum an tu'addū l-amānāti ilā ahlihā wa-idhā ḥakamtum bayna al-nāsi an taḥkumū bi-l-'adli inna Allāha ni'imma ya'izukum bi-hi inna Allāha kāna samī'an baṣīra.*

The word *amānāt* occurs in this verse, which asks the Prophet Muḥammad to restore rights to their original owners. In the *asbāb al-nuzūl* tradition,⁶⁰ this verse is connected

to the story when the Prophet entered Mecca upon its conquest. 'Uthmān b. Ṭalḥa al-Ḥajabi, from the b. 'Abd al-Dār, was the caretaker of the Ka'ba and rushed to lock the door of the Sacred House and climbed up to its roof. When the Prophet asked for the key, he was told that 'Uthmān had it. When he asked him for it, 'Uthmān refused to give him the key, saying: "If I knew that he was the Messenger of Allah, I would not refuse to give him the key." 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib then twisted the hand of 'Uthmān and took the key from him and opened the door of the Ka'ba. The Prophet entered the House and performed inside it two units of prayers. When he came out, al-'Abbās asked for the key of the Ka'ba, so that he could combine the duty of giving water (*siqāya*) to the pilgrims and that of caretaker of the Sacred House. But God revealed this verse, and the Prophet commanded 'Alī to give the key back to 'Uthmān and apologize to him, and so he did. 'Uthmān said to him: "O 'Alī, you assaulted me and hurt me, and now you come to apologize." 'Alī said to him: "Allah, exalted is He, has revealed this verse about you," and he recited it to him. Upon hearing this, 'Uthmān said: "I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah." Gabriel then came and said: "As long as this House stands, its key and the duty of taking care of it will stay in the progeny of 'Uthman," and so it is up to this day.

English translations of this verse, and this word in particular, do not exceed the conventional understanding known also in the Arabic exegetical works, namely that the word *amāna* means "trust, deposit, etc." For example, Pickthall translates: "Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye restore *deposits* to their owners . . ." Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates similarly: "God doth command you to render back your *trusts* to those to whom they are due . . ."

In Qur'an 8:27: *yā ayyuha alladhīna āmanū lā takhūnū Allāha wa-l-rasūla wa-takhūnū amānātikum wa-antum ta'lamūn.* The word *amāna* here is generally translated in the same way. Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates: "O ye that believe! betray not the trust of God and the Apostle, nor misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you." Rudi Paret is not sure about the meaning of the word *amānā*. He suggests the translation "Güter" or "anvertraute Güter" in Qur'an 8:27 but does not exclude the interpretation "deposits."⁶¹

In the ASA inscriptions, we encounter the word *'mn* built in a nominal form *'mnhtn*, as a plural form suffixed with a definite article *-n* (= Arabic *al-*), i.e. in a legal inscription composed in the Minaic dialect from the site al-Sawdā' (al-Sawdā' 37) in Yemen, which is stored in the British Museum (BM 125157) 1): *ldkh w-b-b-m(') qth slwtw w-yn(l)w 'nht w-qdmy-'y 'hl 'mnhtn w-'s'd s't 2) rs' 'm-s'mn bn 'hl 'mn(h)tn . . .* The passage has been translated as 1) [. . .] e in esecuzione del documento allora consegnino (le offerte) le donne e i due capi del gruppo dei servi del tempio e coloro 2) del gruppo dei servi del tempio."⁶² The expression *'hl 'mnhtn* is translated as "servi del tempio" ("servants of the temple"), thus the holding of an administrative position, which in this particular inscription

59 Ali, Abdullah Yusuf (n.d.) *The Holy Qur'an*. Beirut: Dar Al-Arabia.

60 See for example Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān*, Riyadh: Dār Al-Maymūn, 2005, 294.

61 R. Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, Stuttgart, Berlin, and Köln: Kohlhammer, 1977, 186.

62 <<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/index.html>>

is the administration of the sanctuary. In another ASA Minaic legal inscription from al-Sawdā' (al-Sawdā' 35/2) deposited in the British Museum (BM 125123) the expression 'hl' *mnhtn* is encountered in a similar context and understood as "servants of the temple."⁶³ Mahmud Ghul⁶⁴ came across this passage while treating the ASA word 'mn, and referred to the fact that holding the key was one of five or six public dignities associated with the leadership of the community and the cult.

Sidney Smith dedicated to this root and its derivatives in Hadramitic a detailed study and connected it to Babylonian *ummānu* and concluded that it denotes an "administrative official in the great temples, who was a subordinate of *shatammu* who dealt with all the temple's business."⁶⁵ The word 'mn is also attested in a Hadramitic inscription as a function related to the market *s'rm bn n'my 'mn yhwq'* "PN + PN the (market?) inspector . . ."⁶⁶ In a Qatabanic construction inscription (MQ-HK 7) from Timna' the word 'mnt was preceded by the particle *dhw* as an equivalent application of the word 'hl and has been translated as "those in charge of —": 1) 'ls²rh bn qb'm w-zyd'l bn hwkn bnw hzbr 2) *dhw 'mnt mb'l 'm dh-rymtm w-aslmm bnyw w-gn(')* 3) *hgm dh-s'lmm* 1) 'ls²rh son of qb'm and zyd'l son of hwkn both of the family hzbr 2) those in charge of the property of 'm dh-rymtm and those of s'lmm built and walled 3) the town dh-s'lmm.⁶⁷

In Arabic *amāna* means "trust, deposit," but *amāna* in the Qur'ān should instead be interpreted as referring to the "administrative dignity or right given by (or sanctioned by) God" as noted by Ghul.⁶⁸ Ghul suggests that 'mn in the Minaic inscriptions and ASA in general means "administrator," and 'hl/'mnhtn should be understood as "the class (or group) of (public) administrators." According to Ghul, this post in South Arabia was usually inherited by the Minaeans and included religious and civil responsibilities related to the public life of the people at that time. From the Minaic expression we know that 'hl/'mnhtn had "two leaders or heads" (= Arabic *hijāba*) who had the right of keeping the keys of the Ka'ba. W.W. Müller⁶⁹ translates this passage as "(Tempel)wächter," by relating it to Hebrew 'ōmēn "Wärter." The Qur'ānic *ahl al-amānāt* (4:58) should be understood in this direction as well, i.e. "God does command you to render back posts (i.e., *hijāba* posts) to those to whom they are due, . . ." In the other Sūras *amāna* (eg. in Qur'ān 23:8) could be understood also as "post, office, etc." At any rate,

63 "Sevitori del tempio." <<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/index.html>>.

64 M. Ghul, "Makānat nuqūsh al-Yaman," 38ff. and Ghul, *Early Southern Arabian Languages*, 169ff.

65 Quoted in H. Hayajneh, "Ein Prozess über Zuteilung von Datteln in einer hadramitischen Inschrift," in B. Burtea, J. Tropper, and H. Younansardaroud (eds), *Studia Semitica et Semitohamitica*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005, (109–24) 113.

66 Ibid.

67 <<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/index.html>>

68 M. Ghul, "Makānat nuqūsh al-Yaman," 38ff., and idem, *Early Southern Arabian Languages*, 169ff.

69 W.W. Müller, "Altsüdarabische Rituale und Beschwörungen," in O. Kaiser (ed.), *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Religiöse Texte*, 2:3, Gütersloh: Mohn, 1988, (438–52), 445.

the word is a designation for an office and the question of understanding its nature is defined by the work or position assigned. The occasion of revelation mentioned above could enhance the interpretation of the expression *ahl + al-amānāt* in the Qur'ān as "those who own the right of holding an office."

2. ḥabl

Nominal derivatives of the root ḥ-b-l in the Qur'ān are known in six passages in the form *ḥabl*. Two of them are attested in Qur'ān 3:103 and 112, passages that encourage the followers of the Islamic belief to be united: *wa-taṣimū bi-ḥabli Allāhi jamī'an wa-lā tafarraquū* (Q 3:103a). Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates "And hold fast, all together, by the rope which God (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves," while Rudi Paret gives the translation "und haltet allesamt fest an der Verbindung (?) mit Gott und teilt euch nicht (in verschiedenen Gruppen)! . . ." Paret questions the meaning of the word *ḥabl* in the context of this Sūra.

In Qur'ān 3:112: *ḍaribat 'alayhim al-dhillatu ayna mā thuqifū illā bi-ḥabli mina Allāhi wa-ḥablin min al-nāsi wa-bā'ū bi-ghaḍabin min Allāhi*. This is translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali as "Shame is pitched over them (like a tent) wherever they are found, except when under a covenant (of protection) from God and from men; they draw on themselves wrath from God." Most translators translate *ḥabl* from context as "covenant;" other translate the term as "rope, cable, bond." In other verses (Q 20:66; 26:44; 50:16; 111:5), all of the translators understand *ḥabl* as "rope, cable," and not as "covenant."

Al-Qurṭubī, in *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*,⁷⁰ arrives at the meaning "covenant, pact." He concludes that *ḥabl* refers to "the Qur'ān," by citing the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet *inna ḥādḥā al-Qur'āna huwa ḥablu Allāh* "This very Qur'ān is the *ḥabl* of Allāh." Other commentators define the word as *ahd*, which is known in Classical Arabic under the meaning of "covenant." A survey of the Arabic lexical item shows that the most conventional meaning of the word *ḥabl* is "rope." The idea that *ḥabl* could mean *ribāt*, "bond;" *ahd*, "pact, covenant, promise;" *dhimma*, "liability"⁷¹ seems to be based on the context of the Qur'ānic verse. In fact etymological support for this latter definition is found in the root ḥbl in ASA, which produces verbal and nominal derivatives: *hbl*, "conclude a pact," *hbl* "alliance, pact,"⁷² The word *ḥabl* in 3:103 and 112 underlies the concept of the covenant which is concluded between God and the Muslims. It could be understood as a formal alliance or agreement made by God with that religious community or with humanity in general.

70 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. Hisham Samīr al-Bukhārī, Riyad: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 2003, 1:5 and 4:156, 174.

71 See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d., 140ff.

72 Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, 65.

3. al-Ukhdūd

Qur'an 85:4-8: *qutla aṣḥābu al-ukhdūd * al-nāri dhāti al-waqūd * idh hum 'alayhā qu 'ūd * wa-hum 'alā mā yaf' alūna bi-al-mu 'minīna shuhūd * wa-mā naqimū minhum illā an yu 'minū bi-Allāhi al- 'azīz al-ḥamīd*

According to the Muslim exegetes, the believers (*mu 'minūn*) referred to in this verse were those persecuted by the Himyarite king Dhū Nuwās in 523 AD, as described in Syriac, Ethiopic and Greek sources. The persecution was a response to the refusal of Christians in South Arabia to convert to Judaism. The Christians of Najrān and the city itself seem to have had a special position in South Arabia before and at the beginning of Islam; the city was home to an oligarchy of Christian merchants. In revenge for Dhū Nuwās's attack on the Christians, and because they had good contacts with the Byzantine and Abyssinian ecclesiastical authorities, the Abyssinians waged an invasion in South Arabia and deposed Dhū Nuwās. For the next few decades, the area was under Abyssinian rule.⁷³ However, there is no direct evidence in Qur'an 85 that the Qur'an is referring to this incident.

The word *al-ukhdūd* occurs in Qur'an 85:4: *qutla aṣḥābu al-ukhdūd*. The verb *qutla* is passive and means "killed, slain, etc." *Aṣḥāb* is understood as "the owners," "companions," or "men." Most commentators understand *ukhdūd* as "ditch" (sometimes "trench" or "groove"). It is hard to decide here whether the verb with its subject (*aṣḥābu al-ukhdūd*) refers to those who persecuted or those who were persecuted and the commentators are themselves divided on this point. Their division influences the English translations: "(Self-) destroyed were the owners of the ditch" (Pickthall); "Woe to the makers of the pit (of fire)" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali); "slain were the Men of the Pit" (Arberry); and "They destroy [but] themselves, they who would ready a pit" (Asad). Yet the independent pronoun *hum*, "they," in the verse *idh hum 'alayhā qu 'ūd*, "When they sat by it," seems to refer to the persecutors, not the persecuted. This is supported by the following verse, *hum 'alā mā yaf' alūn bi-al-mu 'minīna shuhūd* ("And they witnessed what they are doing against the believers").

One may mention here that some scholars doubt the identification of *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* with the incident of Najrān and understand the verses as a general description of hell.⁷⁴ I agree with this position, but will argue that *al-ukhdūd* is still connected with the South Arabian cultural sphere.

Certain Muslim scholars (like al-Bakrī, *Mu 'jam mā ista 'jam* and Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifāt jazīrat al-'arab*) consider *al-Ukhdūd* to be a place name, while others

understand it to mean "ditch," "trench," "furrow," etc.⁷⁵ *Al-ukhdūd* is derived from the root *kh-d-d*, which produces verbal and nominal forms in Arabic: *khadda al-arḍa*, "he furrowed, or trenched or claved the ground;" *ukhdūd*, "a furrow, trench, or channel, in the ground."⁷⁶ The root with its semantic sphere can be compared with Akkadian *khadādum*, "tief einschneiden," and *khuddudu*, "tief eingeschnitten."⁷⁷ The etymological and semantic affinity between both roots in Arabic and Akkadian is evident and leaves no doubt that we are dealing here with an original Semitic root.⁷⁸ Accordingly, the semantic field of the word as "ditch, pit" cannot be considered secondary, i.e. as if it developed on the basis of the Qur'ānic word *al-ukhdūd*.

The morphological form of the word *al-Ukhdūd* is unusual and strange for Classical Arabic nominal morphology; nouns built after the form *uf'ūl* are barely known in Arabic,⁷⁹ and not attested in any other passage of the Qur'ānic corpus. I would argue here that it is a morphological variant of the form *af'ūl*, which can be traced back to the South Arabian linguistic sphere. In Ancient South Arabian epigraphy, group and tribal designations are usually built after the plural form *'l(n)*. Compare the following examples extracted from the ASA inscriptions:

'hbs²-n (CIH 621/8) (= **al-Aḥbūsh* "the Abyssinians")

'hmr (CIH 541/75) (= *(al)-Aḥmūr* "(the) Himyarites")

'ks¹m-n (Ist 7608bis/3) (= **al-Aksūm* "the Aksumites")

'yhd-n (MAFRAY-Ḥaṣī 1) (= **al-Ayhūd* "the Jews")

's²r'-n (J 1028/3) (= **al-Ashrū*)

It is noteworthy that the suffix *-n* attached to these forms functions as a definite article, which is also applicable to all ASA nominal forms.⁸⁰ The tradition of forming such a nominal form continued through the history of South Arabia and reaches contemporary Yemen. We have plenty of examples in which the form *al-'af'ūl* is used to denote tribes,⁸¹ place names, or a totality of people living in a region or area:⁸²

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ AEL, 1877, 705ff.

⁷⁷ W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch. Unter Benutzung des lexikalischen Nachlasses von Bruno Meissner*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–81, 306, 352.

⁷⁸ The personal name *khdd* in Ugaritic could also be derived from the same root as well. See: G. Del Olmo Lete, J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, trans. W.G.E. Watson, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 386.

⁷⁹ See also Ibn 'Uṣfūr Al-Ishbīlī, *Al-Mumtā' fī l-taṣrīf*, ed. Fakhr al-Dīn Qabāwa, Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1996, 87ff. The same examples are cited as evidence for the morphological form.

⁸⁰ See A. Beeston, "Pre-Islamic South Arabian," in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, (223–26) 224.

⁸¹ In fact, the word "tribe" is used here figuratively. It is not the appropriate word for the names built in the *'l(n)* (= *al-af'ūl*) form, as it refers to the Bedouin tribal division known in central and north Arabia, but not in South Arabia.

⁸² Cited from Ibrāhīm Aḥmad Maqḥafī, *Mu 'jam al-buldān wa-l-qabā'il al-yamaniyya*, Ṣan 'ā': Dār al-Kalima, 1988; Ismā'īl Al-Akwa', "Af'ūl," *Al-Ikhlāl* 1k, 1980, 9–20, has devoted a long study to the names built in this form.

⁷³ On this historical incident see Y. Shitomi, "Le persecution de Najrān: Reexamen des dates figurant dans le Martyrium Arethae," *Orient* 24, 1988, 71–83; Müller, "Religion und Kult im antiken Südarabien;" C. Robin, "Himyar et Israël," *Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres, Comptes Rendus des Séances*, Avril-June, 2004, 831–906; and idem, "Joseph, dernier roi de Himyar, ou une des années suivantes," *JSAI* 34, 2008, 1–124.

⁷⁴ See C. Robin, "Al-Ukhdūd," *EQ*, 5:397–98.

- Al-Ab 'ūs* (tribal name from Yāfi' al-'Uliā)
Al-Abqūr (tribal name descendant of Khawlān)
Al-Ajrūm (Name of a village at al-Hujariyya)
Al-Aḥṭūb (tribal and place name in the region of ṣabra)
Al-A 'dūn (tribal name and village name)
Al-A 'rūsh (tribal name)
Al-A 'dūd (tribal name)
Al-A 'rūq (name of an 'Uzla)
Al-Afi'ū (tribal name)
Al-Akhdūd (as a mountain name in the of Shar'ab region)

Such plural forms indicating members of ethnic or tribal groups (or other general plurals) are also known in the Old Ethiopic (Ge'ez) tradition. See for example the words *ayhūd* "Jews;"⁸³ *ahgūr*, "cities;" *aḥqūl*, "fields;" etc.⁸⁴ The presence of place names in Yemen in the *al-af'ūl* form would not contradict the fact that the form was originally used for tribal names. Tribes or groups, or a totality of people or families, that continue to reside for a long time in a certain place may give their name to the area. It is evident that the ASA form is preserved in the form *al-af'ūl*. The ASA determinative suffix *-n* seems to have been converted into the Arabic definite article *al-*. In a *ḥadīth* passage the Prophet uses the form. According to the report, Qays b. Namaṭ al-Hamdānī was one of the first people to come to the Prophet in Mecca and to convert to the new faith. Accordingly, the Prophet wrote him a pact in which he stated: . . . *fa-innī ista 'maltuka 'alā qawmika 'arabihim*⁸⁵ *wa-aḥmūrihim wa-mawālīhim*: "I used (employed) you over your people, the Arabs, the Himyarites, and their associates." Muṭahhar al-Iryānī⁸⁶ cites this interesting passage as evidence of the form *al-af'ūl*.

As a result of the preceding discussion, I would like to propose that the word *al-ukhdūd* is a variant of an ASA form **al-akhdūd*, which could have appeared in the ASA vowelless script as **'khdd(n)*. It might be understood as a designation of the affiliates of a group or tribe, or as a place/region in which the members of such a tribe had settled. Among Yemenite place names is the toponyme *al-Akhdūd* for a mountain in the Shar'ab region. Thus such a name, although not necessarily related to the Qur'ānic word *al-ukhdūd*, existed. Hence, the following interpretations of the syntax of the verse and the word *al-ukhdūd* are possible:

- Al-Ukhdūd* as a variant of **al-Akhdūd* can be understood as a place/area name to which certain people, described as *aṣḥāb*, are attached. The verse then can be roughly interpreted as "Killed are the people of (the place/area named) *al-Ukhdūd*."
- Al-Ukhdūd* as a variant of **al-Akhdūd* could indicate a totality of people or the members of a group to whom the digging of the ditch (or ditches) is ascribed; as if the Qur'ān intended to say figuratively **qutila al-akhdūd*, "killed are the Akhdūdites." In this case, one may assume that *ukhdūd*, in itself, could have led to this meaning without the usage of the word *aṣḥāb* before it. Nevertheless, as the form **al-Akhdūd* could not be understood for the Arabic-speaking area with its South Arabian connotations, if used solely in an Arabic sentence, the word *'aṣḥāb* had to be added to clarify the following *al-ukhdūd*.
- Al-Ukhdūd* as a variant of **al-Akhdūd* could indicate a name of a totality of people/large group of people who lived in an area and, consequently, the place in later stages bore their name.

To conclude, an attempt has been presented to see in *al-ukhdūd* a variant of an assumed South Arabian form **al-Akhdūd*. As the latter form belongs to the linguistic domain of South Arabia, this might give a clue that the incident of burning the believers could be associated with the events surrounding the persecution of Christians by Dhū Nuwās.

A number of modern scholars have doubted the correlation of the toponyme *al-'Ukhdūd* near Najrān with the Qur'ānic *al-Ukhdūd*, arguing that the name was given to the place because of the Qur'ānic narrative.⁸⁷ Still, if we were in a position to accept this correlation, one might argue that the killing conveyed by the verb *qutila* in Qur'ān 85:4, according to my understanding of the verse, could refer to the invasion of South Arabia by the Abyssinians as a counter against the persecution of the Christians by the Jewish king.

4. sh-r-ḥ

The interpretation of the verbal derivatives of the root *sh-r-ḥ*: *sharaḥa* (Qur'ān 16:106), *nashraḥ* (Qur'ān 94:1), *yashraḥ* (Qur'ān 6:125), *ishraḥ* (Qur'ān 20:25) in the Qur'ān by exegetes and commentators does not exceed the meaning "expand, open, make wide."⁸⁸ The root has a further connotation in Arabic usage as "explain, interpret."

Ibn Manzūr, however, defines the word *shāriḥ* as "a guardian of seed produce from birds and other (creatures)" and explains it as a Yemenite word (*fī kalāmi ahli l-yaman*).⁸⁹ In ASA, several verbal and nominal forms are attested: *s'rḥ*,

⁸⁷ See, e.g., C. Robin, "Al-Ukhdūd."

⁸⁸ See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Shākīr, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2000, 21:277, 24:493.

⁸⁹ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 2228

⁸³ W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991, 626.

⁸⁴ See C. Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen, Laut- und Formenlehre*, I, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1966, 432ff., § 234.

⁸⁵ Al-Iryānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-yamanī (alif)*, 269ff., understands this word, which is usually read *gharbihim*, as *'arabihim* and argues that the Prophet meant those tribes that were characterized by a sort of Bedouin way of life and lived to the East of Hamdān, not to the West of Hamdān, i.e. *Arḥab*, *Nihm*, *Shākīr*, *Wāda'a*, *Yām*, *Khārīf*, *Dālān*, *Marhaba*, *'Udhr* and *Ḥajūr*.

⁸⁶ Al-Iryānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-yamanī (alif)*, 271ff.

"deliver, preserve; act on the defensive;" *s²trh*, "be saved, preserved in safely," *s²rh*, "safety, deliverance" in Sabaic;⁹⁰ *s²rh*, "safety; prosperity" in Qatabanic;⁹¹ and *s's²rh* "deliver, preserve" in Minaic.⁹² In Modern Arabic dialects of Yemen the root remains productive: cf. *sharaḥa*, "to watch an enemy; to deposit;" *sharraḥa*, "to nominate a custodian;" *shāraḥa*, "to guard;" *shirḥa*, "deposit of money;" *shirraḥa*, "protection of date-palm against a fee;" *mashrūḥ*, "guarded;" *musharraḥ*, "deposited; entrusted, charged with; custodian."⁹³

Notably, in all Qur'ānic verses where a form derived from the root *shrḥ* occurs, God is the subject and the word *ṣadr* in the figurative sense of "heart" is the object, i.e. *sharaḥa/yashraḥu* + God (*Allāh*) + *li-l-Islām* "by/with/for Islam + *ṣadran* "heart" (Q 93:22, 6:125). In Qur'ān 16:106, *wa-man sharaḥa bi-l-kufri ṣadran*, the word *kufri*, instead of *Islam*, is used to designate the disbelievers, and the preposition *bi-* instead of *li-* is used. The subject is not mentioned but is indicated by the third person; i.e. the disbelievers. In Qur'ān 94:1, *a-lam nashraḥ laka ṣadrak*, the verb is used in an interrogative form with an indicative connotation. In Qur'ān 20:25, *ishraḥ lī ṣadrī*, an imperative verb is used.

In the light of the preceding etymological and lexical study of the root *sh-r-ḥ*, we may conclude that its meaning is of two types: the first is related to the concept of protection, deliverance, guarding, safety, and the second to expanding, opening, dilation, displaying, exposing, widening, etc. The latter is derived from Classical Arabic, as the Arabic lexicon might have shown. The first, however, is a South Arabian/Yemenite usage, which continued to be used to modern days. We also have seen how the Arab lexicographers discern the word *al-shāriḥ*, "guardian," by considering it as a Yemenite word, which shows that they were aware of this semantic duality of the root *sh-r-ḥ*. For the Qur'ānic passages, I think that the first semantic group applies; the Qur'ān uses this root to express how God consolidates and protects faith in the bosom, i.e. in the heart, of believers and guarantees it against any superstition or deviation.

Therefore, the verse (Q 39:22) *a-fa-man sharaḥa Allāhu ṣadrahu li-l-Islām fa-huwa 'alā nūrin min rabbihi, fa-waylun li-l-qāsiyati qulūbuhum min dhikri Allāhi ulā 'ika fī ḍalālin mubīn* could be interpreted as "Is he whose heart God has guaranteed/fortified for Islam [by true faith], so that he follows a light from his Lord. So woe to those whose hearts have been hardened against the remembrance of God. Such are in manifest error."⁹⁴ One might read Qur'ān 6:125 in the same way: *fa-man yurīdi Allāhu an yahdiyahu yashraḥ ṣadrahu li-l-Islām* as "Whomever God desires to guide, He guarantees/fortifies his heart for Islam

[by true faith]." Qur'ān 16:106 is different: *man kafara bi-Allāhi min ba'di imānihi illā man ukriha wa-qalbuḥu muṭma'innun bi-l-imān wa-lākin man sharaḥa bi-l-kufri ṣadran fa-'alayhim ghaḍabun min Allāhi wa-lahum 'adhābun 'azīm*. Here the verb *sharaḥa* is followed by *bi-l-kufri*. The subject of the verbal clause is not mentioned, but according to the traditional account it refers to a group of disbelievers who tried to force the believers to abandon their belief after converting to it, i.e. Islam. The object is evidently represented by the word *ṣadr* "heart." I can postulate here that the word *kufri* is implemented in this verse in the presupposed position of *imān*, "faith," in the two verses discussed above. Moreover, the pronominal suffix in *'alayhim* refers to those disbelievers who persecuted the Muslims. This lexical, morphological and syntactical analysis can lead us to the following interpretation of the verse: "As for those who disbelieved in God after he accepted faith in God (except for he who was compelled but kept his heart confident in belief), those who fortified a heart with disbelief, upon them shall be the wrath of God and for them there will be a great chastisement."

In Qur'ān 94:1, *a-lam nashraḥ la-ka ṣadraka*, the Qur'ān has God address the Prophet Muhammad. The verse can be translated as follows: "Have we not fortified/protected/consolidated/kept safe your heart [by faith]?" Qur'ān 20:25, in which Moses speaks to God saying *ishraḥ lī ṣadrī*, can similarly be translated: "Fortify/protect/consolidate my heart [with faith]."

5. *shurakā'*

Qur'ān 6:136: *wa-ja'alū li-Allāhi mimma dhara'a mina l-ḥarthi wa-l-an'āmi naṣībān fa-qālū hādhā li-Allāhi bi-za'mihim wa-hādhā li-shurakā'inā fa-mā kāna li-shurakā'ihim fa-lā yaṣīlu ilā Allāhi wa-mā kāna li-Allāhi fa-huwa yaṣīlu ilā shurakā'ihim sā'a mā yaḥkumūn*.

In the exegetical tradition, e.g. Al-Qurṭubī,⁹⁵ this verse was explained as a condemnation of unfair crop sharing. Al-Ṭabarī gathered most of the narratives regarding the interpretation of it.⁹⁶ Commentators usually understand the word *shurakā'* as a plural form of *sharīk*, "partners, associates." In the verses where the root *sh-r-k* is used, the Qur'ān is usually referring to polytheism, the association of other gods with God.⁹⁷ This meaning of the word *shurakā'* in 6:136, however, seems

90 Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, 134.

91 Ricks, *Lexicon of Inscriptional Qatabanian*, 171.

92 Arbach, *Lexique madhābīen, comparé aux lexiques sabéen, qatabanite et ḥaḍramawtique*, 87.

93 See M. Piamenta, *Dictionary of Post-Classical Yemeni Arabic*, Leiden: Brill, 1990–91, 2:250ff., and al-Iryānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-yamanī (alif)*, 474ff.

94 According to al-Wāḥidī (*Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān*, 586) this was revealed about Ḥamza, 'Alī, Abū Lahab and his sons. Ḥamza and 'Alī are of those whose bosoms Allah had expanded for the religion of Islam while Abū Lahab and his sons were of those whose hearts were hardened against the remembrance of Allah.

95 Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 7:89f.

96 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 12:130.

97 See G.R. Hawting, "Two citations of the Qur'ān in 'historical' sources for early Islam," in G.R. Hawting and A.A. Shareef (eds), *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, London: Routledge, 1993, (260–68) 261. On the general concept of *shirk* in the Qur'ān and the difference between its meaning as "association" and "polytheism," see G. R. Hawting, "Shirk and 'idolatry' in monotheist polemic," *Israel Oriental Studies*, 17, 1997, 107–26; P. Pavlovitch, "Early origins of the term *shirk*: About an equalitarian conception during the Jāhiliyya," in A. Fodor (ed.), *Proceedings of the Arabic and Islamic Sections of the 35th International Congress of Asian and North African Studies*, Budapest: Csoma de Kőrös Society, 1999, 3–11.

to be different. Because of this Rudi Paret describes the verse here as not fully clear.⁹⁸

In some Arabic sources this verse is connected to the tribe of Khawlān in Yemen, who used to worship an idol called 'Umyānis.⁹⁹ This tribe used to divide part of their cattle and crops between 'Umyānis and God. If the share they assigned for God came into that for 'Umyānis they would leave it for the latter, but if any of the share of 'Umyānis came into that which had been assigned to God, they would retain it for the idol.¹⁰⁰ This kind of crop-sharing contract was known among the Yemenites before Islam and was allowed by Mu'adh b. Jabal, the prophet Muḥammad's governor of Yemen.¹⁰¹ The concept of *shirk* is also known in modern Yemen with a meaning of share cropping, *shirk al-nisf*, i.e., a share-cropping agreement stipulating that the crop is divided into equal shares between landlord and tenant (made where water is scarce).¹⁰² M. Ghul compares this verse with the ASA text RES 3951/3 in which the word *s'r*k occurs: *khrš w-s'r k w-rzm b'mhmw wrqm wd'tm*, "assessing, crop sharing and commandeering from them greenstuffs and fodder," and 4-5: *kl khrš wshrk wmnsh . . . bhmw shrk w khrš*, "all assessments, crop-shares and demands whereby they apportion and assess (the food stuffs)."¹⁰³

English translations of Qur'ān 6:136 vary according to the understanding of the word *shurakā'*. Usually this word is translated "associates" or "partners." In the light of the preceding discussion, however, I would roughly translate the verse as follows: "They assign to God, of the tillage and the cattle which He sprouts, a portion, saying, 'This is for God' – so they assert – 'and this is for our (crop)-sharers.' So that which is intended for their (crop)-sharers does not reach God, and that which is intended for God does reach their (crop)-sharers. Evil is that which they judged!" The gods are designated in this verse as *shurakā'* because in that pagan period people considered the agricultural land as the property of the gods and they cultivated it in partnership. Of course, the share of the gods was taken by the priests. The tribe, even if it worshipped more than one god, offers shares to one god who is its partner, but what they pay for the other gods – in this case, Allāh – is voluntary almsgiving. In this verse the Qur'ān condemns this practice.

98 Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, 152ff.

99 For a rich discussion on this god and his connection to the Yemenite tribe, see I. Goldfeld, 'Umyānis the idol of Khawlān,' *Israel Oriental Studies* 3, 1973 (108–19).

100 Hawting, "Shirk and 'idolatry' in monotheist polemic," 110.

101 See Ghul, *Early Southern Arabian Languages*, 102. The passage is also quoted by Nashwān al-Ḥimyari in *Shams al-'ulūm* and other Arabic sources. On this see I. al-Selwi, *Jemenitische Wörter in den Werken von al-Ḥamdānī und Nashwān und ihre Parallelen in den semitischen Sprachen*, Berlin: Reimer, 1987, 120.

102 Pimenta, *Dictionary of Post-Classical Yemeni Arabic*, 245.

103 M. Ghul, "Makānat nuqūsh al-Yaman," 39ff. and Ghul, *Early Southern Arabian Languages*, 102. See also J.C. Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic, Sabaean Dialect*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1982, 526; this is a modified translation in the light of the meaning given by the Sabaic Dictionary (see Beeston et. al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, 134).

6. sha'b

Qur'ān 49:13: *yā ayyuha al-nāsu innā khalaqnākum min dhakarīn wa-unthā wa-ja'alnākum shu'ubān wa-qabā'ila li-ta'arāfū inna akramakum 'inda Allāhi atqākum inna Allāha 'alīmun khabīr*.

Different accounts of the reason for revelation of this verse are found in the exegetical literature. Most of them focus on warning the Muslims against boasting about their lineages and abundance of wealth and against looking down on the poor.¹⁰⁴ Commentators do not agree on the meaning of the word *shu'ub*, which they usually try to approach on the basis of comparison with other designations of tribal categories, e.g. *qabīla*. Medieval Arab historians and genealogists differ over the hierarchy of tribal designations. Some say that the word *shu'ub* is the plural of *sha'b* ("nation"), which is the broadest category of lineage; tribes, *qabā'il*, are smaller than nations, and smaller still are *'amā'ir* (sing. *'imārah*), "tribal districts," then *buṭūn*, "tribal sub-districts," then *aqshādih*, "sub-tribes," and finally *faṣā'il*, "clans."¹⁰⁵ Translators tend to render *shu'ub* in this verse as "nations," or "races."

In fact the word *sha'b* is used in the Qur'ān with the typical South Arabian usage, in contrast to the North Arabian term *qabīla*. This is the reason why the Qur'ān has differentiated between the two terms by mentioning them contiguously. In ASA, the word *s' b* occurs often to denote a system of entities. I believe that it had penetrated to Central and North Arabia from the Yemenite cultural sphere to designate a certain social division. Christian Robin and Andrey Korotayev provide a good foundation for a better understanding of this.¹⁰⁶ Korotayev summarizes the major categories under which this word is used in the ASA epigraphical sources: "*s' b* from the first order which is more amorphous ethno-cultural entities lacking any political centralization if they were not identical with *s' bs* of the second order. Each of such communities cohered because of

104 See for example: Al-Fīrūzābādī, *Tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr ibn 'Abbās*, 437.

105 See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 2270 for this and other orders suggested by Arab historians and genealogists. Danial Varisco devotes an extensive study of the tribal divisions used in the Arabic sources, taking the genealogy of the Prophet Muḥammad as a case study. D.M. Varisco, "Metaphors and sacred history: The genealogy of Muhammad and the Arab 'tribe,'" *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68, 1995, 139–56. Some Muslim sources conclude that *sha'b* refers to a major Arab genealogical grouping in the distant past, such as the basic distinction between 'Adnān, for the northern Arabs, and Qaḥḥān, for the southern Arabs.

106 C. Robin, "La cité et l'organisation sociale à Ma'in : l'exemple de Yihl (aujourd'hui Barāqish)," *Studies in the History of Arabia*, vol. II, *Pre-Islamic Arabia*, Riyadh: King Saud University Press, 1404 AH/1984, 157–62; idem, *Les hautes terres du Nord-Yémen avant l'Islam*, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1982, 1:71ff.; idem, "Esquisse d'une histoire de l'organisation tribale en Arabie du Sud antique," in P. Bonnenfant (ed.), *La Péninsule arabique d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982, (2:17–30) 22ff.; A. Korotayev, "Middle Sabaean cultural-political area: *Qayls* and their tribesmen, clients and *maqṭawīs*," *Acta Orientalia*, 1995, 62–77.

its common tribal name, common tribal deity, and other common cultural features like 'tribal' calendar, eponym, etc. Such ethno-cultural entities occupied territories of several thousand square kilometers each."¹⁰⁷ Thus Korotayev sees a first order *s²'b* as an ethnic unit, a "tribe-nation."

S²'bs of the second order "were considerably more politically centralized entities occupying territories of several hundred square kilometers and headed by the *gayls*.¹⁰⁸ Finally each *s²'b* 2 usually included several *s²'bs* of the third, lowest, order occupying territories of several dozens of square kilometers. *S²'b* of this order were quite compact autonomous territorial entities with a marked central settlement (*hgr*) which gave its name to a whole *s²'b* of the third order. The latter could be designated as "local community," but it also may be considered as a "section" of a tribe or a "sub-tribe."

Concerning the interpretation of the word *shū'ūb* in the verse, I would apply to it the translation of Christian Robin of the ASA term:¹⁰⁹ *s²'b* as "community," cf. Ja 1028/7: *b-s²'b dh-Hmdn . . . hgrn w-'rbn*, "avec la commune de dhu-Hamdān . . . villageois et nomads."

Hence, the translation of the verse could be modified to: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into communities and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)."

7. *maṣāni'*

Qur'ān 26:129: *wa-tattakhidhūna maṣāni'a la'allakum takhludūn*.

From the root *ṣn'* different forms are attested in the Qur'ān (e.g. 11:16). In all cases, except in the quoted passage (Qur'ān 26:129), the meaning "to produce, build, manufacture" is clearly meant.¹¹⁰ The word *maṣāni'* has been subject to different explanations by commentators and exegetes, as "cistern of waters, palaces and immortal buildings, etc".¹¹¹ According to al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), *al-maṣāni'* in the language of Yemen means "the lofty palaces."¹¹² The word in its morphological form and meaning is labeled by some Arabic sources as a Yemenite word, and in fact, it continues to be used in Yemen with the same meaning.¹¹³ The modern word can be traced back to ASA *ṣn'* "fortify," *ṭṣn'* "fortify oneself," and

¹⁰⁷ Korotayev, "Middle Sabaeen cultural-political area," 62ff.

¹⁰⁸ The term *qy/wl* is usually defined as "member of the leading clan in a *s²'b*," Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ Robin, "Joseph, dernier roi de Himyar," e.g. 27.

¹¹⁰ I believe that in three further Qur'ānic passages, i.e., Qur'ān 7:137; 20:41; and 21:80; the meaning "to fortify, etc." for the root can be applied.

¹¹¹ See for example Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 19:373ff.

¹¹² Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 13:122f.

¹¹³ Al-Selwi, *Jemenitische Wörter*, 135.

as a nominal form, *mṣn't* "fortress, castle."¹¹⁴ The word appears in the Late Sabaic passage *w-mṣn' s²mr w rkbn w-rm' w- m[khwn*, "and the fortress of *shmr*, *Rkbn*, *Rm'*, *M[khwn*" (Ry 507/5).¹¹⁵ *Ṣan'a* means to "be strong, strengthened" etc. in Old Ethiopic.¹¹⁶ Therefore, I would strongly advocate translating the respected verse as "And do ye get for yourselves strongholds in the hope of living therein (for ever)?"

8. *'arim*

Qur'ān 34:16: *fa-a'raḏū fa-arsalnā 'alayhim sayla al-'arimi . . .*

In *Saba'* (Qur'ān 34) the story of the flooding disaster which destroyed the plantation of Saba' is described. The context here is clear enough for the exegetes and lexicographers to interpret the word *'arim* as a semantic parallel of the Arabic word *sadd*, "dam," and *musannāh*, "dam with sluices." Other interpretations here are (1) "heavy rain," or (2) the name of the rat or mole which, according to the legend of the break of the dam of Ma'rib well known in Arabic sources, was instrumental in weakening the dam; or (3) a specific designation of the *wādī* in which the torrent flowed.¹¹⁷ Ghul considers the association of the word with ASA antiquity self-evident.¹¹⁸ ASA inscriptions show that it is a technical term related to irrigation in ancient Yemen, and the word in the Qur'ān should be considered an ASA loanword.¹¹⁹ The consensus among commentators that this word is affiliated with the Yemenite cultural sphere does not originate only from the subject of the Sūra itself, i.e. because it relates to Saba', but also from knowledge which has been inherited and accumulated from earlier generations that the word is a typical Yemenite word. Al-Ṭabarī quotes also a poetry passage attributed to al-A' shā, *fa-fi dhāka li-l-mu'tasī uswatun wa-Ma'ribu 'affā 'alayhi al-'arim*, which describes the disaster that affected the city of Mā'rib.¹²⁰ The word *'arim* is used here to indicate the flood itself, not the dam. The word *sayl*, "flood," in the Qur'ānic verse can be treated as a *nomen rectum* while the following *'arim*, "dam," is a *nomen regens*, i.e. "the flood (caused by) of the dam," as suggested in some English translations. Thus, I would suggest the translation for the

¹¹⁴ Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, 143, and see W.W. Müller, "Äthiopische Marginalglossen zum sabäischen Wörterbuch," in S. Segert and A.J.E. Bodrogligeti (eds), *Ethiopian Studies dedicated to Wolf Leslau*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983, (275–83) 283.

¹¹⁵ *Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions*, available at <<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it>> (accessed February 2, 2011).

¹¹⁶ Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)*, 559. A detailed study of the root *ṣn'* and its derivatives in the ASA, Classical Arabic sources, as well as in the Yemeni dialects is found in al-Iryānī, *Al-Mu'jam al-yamaniyy (alif)*, 560.

¹¹⁷ See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 20:376ff.; Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 14:285ff.

¹¹⁸ Ghul, *Early Southern Arabian Languages*, 189ff.

¹¹⁹ See Rippin, "Epigraphical South Arabian and Qur'ānic exegesis" for discussion.

¹²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 20:378.

above-mentioned passage as "But they were forward, so we sent on them the flood of the dam (or caused by the dam) . . ."

9. f-t-ḥ

From the root *fṭḥ* several nominal and verbal derivatives are attested in the Qur'ān (e.g. *fath*: Qur'ān 4:141; 5:52; 8:19; 26:118 etc.).¹²¹ A review of the Sūras where the derivatives are used shows that the meaning "open" does not apply. Rudi Paret and Manfred Kropp both suggest interpreting certain occurrences in the light of ASA and/or the Old Ethiopic meaning of the root and its derivatives.¹²² In Sabaic *fṭḥ* means "juridical order, lawsuit, litigation."¹²³ Some Arabic works indicate that *fataḥa* has the specific meaning "to decide, to attribute, to act as a judge between litigants." According to Ghul,¹²⁴ this meaning is attested in Qur'ān 7:89, *rabbana ifṭaḥ baynanā wa-bayna qawminā bi-l-ḥaqq wa-anta khayru al-fāṭihīn*, "Our Lord, judge between us and our people in truth, for You are the best of judges." Arabic lexicographers were aware of *fath* meaning *naṣr*, "victory; giving support;" *qaḍā*, "attribution, administering justice;" *ḥukm*, "decision, ruling;" and other derivatives, like *fattāḥ*, "judge."¹²⁵ *Fataḥa bayanahum* in the dialect of Ḥimyar means, "he judged between them or the men, or the litigates" and *iftaḥ bayananā*, "judge thou between us."¹²⁶

10. mawadda

The word *mawadda* occurs in the Qur'ān eight times (4:73; 5:82; 29:25; 30:21; 42:23; 60:1²,7). I will address two verses here, beginning with Qur'ān 60:1:

yā ayyuha alladhīna āmanū lā tattakhidhū 'aduwwī wa-'aduwwakum awliyā'a tulqūna ilayhim bi-l-mawaddati wa-qad kafarū bi-mā jā'akum mina l-ḥaqqi yukhrījūna al-rasūla wa-īyyākum an tu'minū bi-Allāhi rabbikum in kuntum kharajtum jihādan fī sabīlī wa-btighā'a marḍātī tusirrūna ilayhim bi-l-mawaddati wa-anā a'lamu bi-mā akhfaytum wa-mā-a'lantum wa-man yaf'alhu minkum faqad ḍalla sawā'a al-sabīl.

¹²¹ See Kropp, "Äthiopische Arabesken im Koran," 395 for full listing of the derivatives in the Qur'ān.

¹²² Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, 167. Kropp, "Äthiopische Arabesken im Koran," 295. See also R. Paret, "Die Bedeutungsentwicklung von Arabisch *fath*," in J.M. Barral, *Orientalia Hispanica sive studia F. M. Pareja octogenarian dicata*. Leiden: Brill, 1974, 1:537-41.

¹²³ Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, 47.

¹²⁴ Ghul, *Early Southern Arabian Languages and Classical Arabic Sources*, 198ff.

¹²⁵ AEL, 2329.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Islamic exegetes understood this verse as a warning to the Prophet of the betrayal of a man named Ḥatīb b. Balṭa'a, who sent with a woman a letter to the people of Mecca warning them that the Prophet was planning an attack.¹²⁷

It is apparent from the context that the word *mawadda* means "friendship." This is the understanding of Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

O ye who believe! Take not my enemies and yours as friends (or protectors), offering them (your) love, even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you, and have (on the contrary) driven out the Prophet and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because ye believe in God your Lord! If ye have come out to strive in My Way and to seek My Good Pleasure, (take them not as friends), holding secret converse of love (and friendship) with them: for I know full well all that ye conceal and all that ye reveal. And any of you that do this has strayed from the Straight Path.

However, this word in this context and other contexts in the Qur'ān can be understood as "alliance" rather than "love" or "friendship." In ASA inscriptions the word *mwd(d(t))* occurs several times in the following scheme:

Personal name(s) ± tribal designations/names + *mwd(dt)* + Personal name

For example compare the Minaic dedicatory inscription M 190–M 194¹²⁸ from Barāqish (ancient *Ythl*):

1) . . . w-Lhy'tht w-'m'ns' ['Jhl Blḥ 'hl Gb'n mwddt 'byd' Yth 's'l' 'thtr dh-qbd kl mbny . . .

" . . .

"Lhy'tht and 'mns people of Blḥ of the people of Gb'n, allies of 'byd' Yth', dedicated to 'thtr dh-qbd all the construction of the tower Lb'n."

A further example is a Sabaic inscription from the Bar'ān temple in Ma'rib (fifth to fourth centuries BC):¹²⁹

1) 'mkrb/bn/r's'hm 2) w/dhs²qr/mwdd/s'mh' 3) ly/wyth 'mr/hqnyl' 4) l mqh . . .

¹²⁷ Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān*, 663ff.

¹²⁸ <<http://csai.humnet.unipi.it/csai/html/index.html>>

¹²⁹ See Jemen: *Kunst und Archäologie im Land der Königin von Saba*, Wien Künstlerhaus, 9 November 1998 bis. 21. Februar 1999, ed. Wilfried Seipel. Milano: Skira; Wien (A): Kunsthistorisches Museum, 322, Ktal. Nr 237.

"1) 'mkrb son of r's'hm 2) w of the clan s'qr the ally of s'mh' 3) ly has dedicated to ' 4) lmqh . . ."

The word *mwdd* in the latter inscription is translated in *Jemen Katalog* as "Beauftragter" although the translation of the word *mwd* in the Sabaic dictionary and the respected texts is "friend."¹³⁰ I would say that the interpretation of this particular word as "ally" would fit both the ASA and the Qur'ānic contexts.

In accordance with the discussion above, I would suggest modifying the previous translation of the verse in *al-Mumtaḥina* as follows:

O ye who believe! Take not my enemies and yours as allies, offering them (your) alliance, . . . If ye have come out to strive in My Way and to seek My Good Pleasure, (take them not as friends), holding secret converse of alliance with them . . .

The second verse to be considered is Qur'ān 5.82:

la-tajidanna ashadda al-nāsi 'adāwatan li-alladhīna āmanū al-yahūda wa-alladhīna ashrakū wa-la-tajidanna aqrabahum mawaddatan li-alladhīna āmanū alladhīna qālū innā naṣārā dhālika bi-anna minhum qissīsīna wa-ruhbanān wa-annahum lā yastakbirūn

According to the traditional narratives, this verse is related to the excellent relationship between the Prophet and his followers and the King of Abyssinia.¹³¹ Accordingly, the verse can be interpreted as follows: "Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in alliance to the believers wilt thou find those who say, 'We are Christians': because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud." The translation of *mawadda* as "alliance" can be applied to the rest of the occurrences thereof in the Qur'ān.

6 Vowel letters and ortho-epic writing in the Qur'ān

Gerd-R. Puin

The problem

For textual research it is not wise to take the phonetic face of the Egyptian Fu'ād Muṣḥaf as a basis, because there a meticulous system of signs has been strewn over the skeleton text proper, which, more often than not, can totally level the underlying variants of the "*rasm*" (i.e. the skeleton text). Viewed from the accepted Standard Text of 1924 (and later until the Saudi Muṣḥafs from Medina) the variants are mainly ascribed to a lack of precision in script or a lack of orthographical competence on the part of the scribes. Thus deviations from the orthography of Classical Arabic (CA) are usually seen to be "defective" writings, which can be "healed" by the application of a swarm of Masoretic vocalization signs. Two examples may suffice to illustrate the distance between the letters of the *rasm* and the word with a full vocalization and its transcription, i.e. how this skeleton script is expected to be pronounced:

(1) *أَلَيْ* in the Standard Text (StT) Sūra 33:4; 58:2 and 65:2 is to be read *ألَيْ*, phonetically as /l:a:ʔi:/. Although the skeleton script consists of three letters only a narrow one-to-one transliteration of the Standard Text would need three full "letters" on the line *plus* seven vocalization signs: 'll'a~iy.¹

(2) *بُرَا* in the Standard Text 60:4 is to be read *بُرَا*, phonetically as /buraʔa:ʔu/; its *rasm* consists of four letters on the line, only; however, a one-to-one transliteration would need nine additional vocalization signs, in Arabic as well as in transcription: bura'a'wul!

¹³⁰ See *ibid.*, and Beeston et al., *Sabaic Dictionary*, 55ff.

¹³¹ Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān*, 353ff.

¹ An explicit transliteration is used in this chapter as the equivalent of the Arabic rendering in the Standard Text; it is explained on a chart at the end of the chapter (the Transcription table). Here we mention only that the *alif* and the *ayn* are transcribed by letters on the line and not as apostrophes, <'> and <ʔ>. No digraphs (dh, sh, kh, gh) will be used. The vocalization is transcribed as <> for *wasla*, <> for *shadda*, <> for *Dagger alif*, <> for *madda*. <> for *hamza* without *kursī*, <> for a "superfluous" letter. For the sake of an easier pronunciation the three vowels *fatha*, *kasra* and *ḍamma* are transcribed on the line; the tilde on a vowel <ā> transliterates the defectively written but long vowel. A bibliography of Qur'ān manuscripts and printed editions is also found at the end of this article.

The orthography of the Standard Text is full of inconsistencies, as if they became petrified at a time when an orthographic reform had started but had not yet become effective in the whole Qur'ān. Of course, Muslim scholars like Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/928), al-Dānī (d. 444/1052), and later Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) and al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505), or even modern scholars like Al Imam, were aware of this situation, and they wrote down eclectic observations on the Qur'ānic orthography of this or that word in this or that verse. Although the intention of those old authorities might have been to limit the extent of variant writings (and readings) they were not able to realize the dynamic development of Arabic orthography as a process of accumulation and growing precision in the scriptural rendering. Their theory about the defective writing of words was to see the phenomenon as a convention of the scribes in order to make the script "shorter" – to take away something "superfluous (*zā'id*)," to write it "defectively / *ḥadhf*" – which tacitly implies that the *plene* writing according to the rules of Classical Arabic were the original "mother of the book / *umm al-kitāb*" (Q 13:39; 43:4) in heaven, on the "preserved tablet / *lawḥ maḥfūz*" (Q 85:22).

However, the orthographic variants in a corpus which has treasured up so many pre-classical elements enable us to discover many details of their orthographic history – all the more so if we take the early manuscripts of the Qur'ān into account, because, for lack of a critical edition of the Qur'ān, we cannot rightly be sure that the Standard Text is really the "*rasm 'Uthmānī*", i.e. the earliest possible shape of the text.

Therefore, the idea of this chapter is not to look back from the orthography of Classical (or modern) Arabic which has become (mostly) explicit or *plene*, but on the contrary to follow up the steady enrichment of the Arabic script (as encountered in the earliest manuscripts) by the invention or application of new signs and devices.

Generally and until today there has been no need for a differentiation in the *rasm* between the vocalizations of the *alif* at the outset of a word: أَكْ *'akḥun*, اِكْ *'ukḥtun*, اِخْ *'ikḥwatun*. This is the normal or evident case for those who are familiar with the vocabulary and the grammar of Arabic. Yet the Qur'ān is not an "ordinary" text! Naturally, and in spite of its complicated structure, the text had to be represented in script on the one hand, but disambiguated on the other, if the written shape was – or became in the course of time – misleading.

An important instrument for the definition of a vowel's quality was the insertion of *matres lectionis*, i.e. (mainly) of the vowel letters *wāw* and *yā'*, next to the *alif*, in order to specify the *alif*'s phonetic quality. Of course, their use was already common for the definition of the long vowels <u + w> = /u:/ and <i + y> = /i:/. But the Qur'ānic Standard Text, as well as the early manuscripts, teach us that a reform was taking place which went far beyond that, making use of the *matres lectionis* on a much larger scale than before. In contrast to any other kind of Arabic texts – poetry, history, geography, to name only a few – the early Qur'ānic orthography has not only been preserved in the oldest Arabic manuscripts, but even in the modern editions of the text, by reason of religious respect for the oldest testimonies of the revelation. Therefore, in addition to more or less normative treatises on how the Qur'ān was or should be written, and in addition to the reports on how

the script was "read" by the early authorities, we can use the early manuscripts to help us understand the steps of a reform process which eventually led to the "Standard Text" as printed in Cairo 1924, and now also in Medina.

Methodologically, a comparison can be made between those words which are written in two or even three different ways in the same old manuscript or in the Standard Text. Mostly, the letter *alif* is involved which, in those cases, originally did not express a long /a:/ sound but either a glottal stop – "vocalized" by a (later) "zero-vowel" (*sukūn*) or by any short vowel – or a diphthong (if we prefer the theory that the glottal stop had widely died out in early Arabic) – or generally a short vowel. The old manuscripts show that "any short vowel" could not only be written with an *alif* at the outset of a word, but also in the middle, or even at the end. This older "defective" orthography has also been preserved in many words of the Standard Text, although not as frequently as in the manuscripts. However, in both kinds of text we find the orthography of these words "enriched" by an additional *wāw* or *yā'* as *matres lectionis*, or we find that the same words even appear in a different orthographic shape. If these observations take the historical aspect into account, it should be possible to discern the relative age of the orthographic solutions – at least in some cases.

The introduction of the *matres lectionis* makes sense only if the pronunciation of an existing *alif* can be made more evident as a (short) /u/ or /i/ sound. However, if an /a/ sound was involved – like in the accusative of nouns, for example – the *alif* could remain and need not be removed or substituted. But once the meaning of the *alif* had undergone that change and been narrowed down to designate a short or long /a/ sound only, it could no longer symbolize any other vowel. In that case, the insertion of a *mater lectionis* was necessary. We still encounter the differentiation by *matres lectionis* in the Standard Text, where both orthographies coexist:

- (3) أَلَمَلْ mala'lu (e.g. 7:60) and أَلَمَلْوْ mala'wū' (e.g. 23:24),
 (4) أَلَمَلْ mala'li (e.g. 2:246) and مَلَلْ يَهِي mala'li'yhi' (e.g. 7:103),
 (5) مَلَلْ mala'lahu' (e.g. 10:88), with no alternative writing in the Standard Text.

Finally, and in the perception of the later exegetes, the *alif* became generally associated with an /a/ sound – except in the position at the outset of a word, which is still valid today. This development or reform was a gradual one: in Classical Arabic it ended up in the *alif*'s almost complete similarity with the nature of the *wāw* and the *yā'* as *matres lectionis*, which are now common to indicate the long /a:/ sound.

Even beyond the introduction of the *matres lectionis* in order to gain more transparency for understanding or reading, the Qur'ānic orthography still retains a few features which can only be explained as the remnants of an early effort to ensure the proper recitation of the text. These variants will be called ortho-epic. Although this category concerns mainly the *alif*, analogous observations can be made with the *wāw* or the *yā'*. However, while the ortho-epic treatment of the *fatha-alif* issue will be in the foreground, the ortho-epic writing of the *wāw* or *yā'* is mentioned only briefly.

The orthography of the Standard Text is full of inconsistencies, as if they became petrified at a time when an orthographic reform had started but had not yet become effective in the whole Qur'ān. Of course, Muslim scholars like Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/928), al-Dānī (d. 444/1052), and later Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), or even modern scholars like Al Imam, were aware of this situation, and they wrote down eclectic observations on the Qur'ānic orthography of this or that word in this or that verse. Although the intention of those old authorities might have been to limit the extent of variant writings (and readings) they were not able to realize the dynamic development of Arabic orthography as a process of accumulation and growing precision in the scriptural rendering. Their theory about the defective writing of words was to see the phenomenon as a convention of the scribes in order to make the script "shorter" – to take away something "superfluous (*zā'id*)", to write it "defectively / *ḥadhīf*" – which tacitly implies that the *plene* writing according to the rules of Classical Arabic were the original "mother of the book / *umm al-kitāb*" (Q 13:39; 43:4) in heaven, on the "preserved tablet / *lawḥ mahfūz*" (Q 85:22).

However, the orthographic variants in a corpus which has treasured up so many pre-classical elements enable us to discover many details of their orthographic history – all the more so if we take the early manuscripts of the Qur'ān into account, because, for lack of a critical edition of the Qur'ān, we cannot rightly be sure that the Standard Text is really the "*rasm 'Uthmānī*", i.e. the earliest possible shape of the text.

Therefore, the idea of this chapter is not to look back from the orthography of Classical (or modern) Arabic which has become (mostly) explicit or *plene*, but on the contrary to follow up the steady enrichment of the Arabic script (as encountered in the earliest manuscripts) by the invention or application of new signs and devices.

Generally and until today there has been no need for a differentiation in the *rasm* between the vocalizations of the *alif* at the outset of a word: أَكْ أَكْهُ أَكْهُ أَكْهُ 'akḥun, أَكْهُ أَكْهُ أَكْهُ 'ikhwatun. This is the normal or evident case for those who are familiar with the vocabulary and the grammar of Arabic. Yet the Qur'ān is not an "ordinary" text! Naturally, and in spite of its complicated structure, the text had to be represented in script on the one hand, but disambiguated on the other, if the written shape was – or became in the course of time – misleading.

An important instrument for the definition of a vowel's quality was the insertion of *matres lectionis*, i.e. (mainly) of the vowel letters *wāw* and *yā'*, next to the *alif*, in order to specify the *alif*'s phonetic quality. Of course, their use was already common for the definition of the long vowels <u> + w> = /u:/ and <i> + y> = /i:/. But the Qur'ānic Standard Text, as well as the early manuscripts, teach us that a reform was taking place which went far beyond that, making use of the *matres lectionis* on a much larger scale than before. In contrast to any other kind of Arabic texts – poetry, history, geography, to name only a few – the early Qur'ānic orthography has not only been preserved in the oldest Arabic manuscripts, but even in the modern editions of the text, by reason of religious respect for the oldest testimonies of the revelation. Therefore, in addition to more or less normative treatises on how the Qur'ān was or should be written, and in addition to the reports on how

the script was "read" by the early authorities, we can use the early manuscripts to help us understand the steps of a reform process which eventually led to the "Standard Text" as printed in Cairo 1924, and now also in Medina.

Methodologically, a comparison can be made between those words which are written in two or even three different ways in the same old manuscript or in the Standard Text. Mostly, the letter *alif* is involved which, in those cases, originally did not express a long /a:/ sound but either a glottal stop – "vocalized" by a (later) "zero-vowel" (*sukūn*) or by any short vowel – or a diphthong (if we prefer the theory that the glottal stop had widely died out in early Arabic) – or generally a short vowel. The old manuscripts show that "any short vowel" could not only be written with an *alif* at the outset of a word, but also in the middle, or even at the end. This older "defective" orthography has also been preserved in many words of the Standard Text, although not as frequently as in the manuscripts. However, in both kinds of text we find the orthography of these words "enriched" by an additional *wāw* or *yā'* as *matres lectionis*, or we find that the same words even appear in a different orthographic shape. If these observations take the historical aspect into account, it should be possible to discern the relative age of the orthographic solutions – at least in some cases.

The introduction of the *matres lectionis* makes sense only if the pronunciation of an existing *alif* can be made more evident as a (short) /u/ or /i/ sound. However, if an /a/ sound was involved – like in the accusative of nouns, for example – the *alif* could remain and need not be removed or substituted. But once the meaning of the *alif* had undergone that change and been narrowed down to designate a short or long /a/ sound only, it could no longer symbolize any other vowel. In that case, the insertion of a *mater lectionis* was necessary. We still encounter the differentiation by *matres lectionis* in the Standard Text, where both orthographies coexist:

- (3) الْمَلَأُوا mala'ū (e.g. 7:60) and الْمَلَأُوا mala'ū (e.g. 23:24),
 (4) الْمَلَأُوا mala'ī (e.g. 2:246) and الْمَلَأُوا mala'īyhi' (e.g. 7:103),
 (5) الْمَلَأُوا mala'ahu' (e.g. 10:88), with no alternative writing in the Standard Text.

Finally, and in the perception of the later exegetes, the *alif* became generally associated with an /a/ sound – except in the position at the outset of a word, which is still valid today. This development or reform was a gradual one: in Classical Arabic it ended up in the *alif*'s almost complete similarity with the nature of the *wāw* and the *yā'* as *matres lectionis*, which are now common to indicate the long /a:/ sound.

Even beyond the introduction of the *matres lectionis* in order to gain more transparency for understanding or *reading*, the Qur'ānic orthography still retains a few features which can only be explained as the remnants of an early effort to ensure the proper recitation of the text. These variants will be called ortho-epic. Although this category concerns mainly the *alif*, analogous observations can be made with the *wāw* or the *yā'*. However, while the ortho-epic treatment of the *fatha-alif* issue will be in the foreground, the ortho-epic writing of the *wāw* or *yā'* is mentioned only briefly.

The *hā'* is the fourth *mater lectionis*, but it is relatively rare and will be treated separately.

1 The *wāw*

1.1 The additional *wāw* at the beginning of a word

In old manuscripts, and before vocalization by red dots or other means had been invented, the only way to gain more precision for the vocalization of the first *alif* was by the *mater lectionis*. The task consisted mainly in the differentiation between homographs. Thus, we find

- (6) (قَالَيْكَ) fa_ḵula'yika (ms. D²) for قَالَيْكَ in StT (Q 7:9), or
 (7) (أَلِي) ḵuliy (mss. DH) for أَلِي in StT (Q 35:1), or
 (8) (أُولَا) ḵuwlul (mss. CDF³) for أُولَا in StT (e.g. 3:7).

The Arabic version in parenthesis is the vocalized interpretation of the *rasm* as found in the manuscript. The more common writing in the Standard Text as well as in the manuscripts has the *mater lectionis wāw* in the first syllable, numbers (6) and (7). As for (8) I have not found a manuscript version in which أُولَا is written without the *wāw* in the first syllable, but this could be due to the fact that such a writing of the word would result in a highly ambiguous لَا, to be read as لَأُ ḵulu'l' (For the second *mater lectionis* in this word see below, 1.2.1 (31).)

Another kind of differentiation concerns the more exact definition of the verbal stem. A prominent example is

- (9) سَأُورِيكُمْ sa_ḵuwrīkum, in Standard Text 7:145 and 21:37, but also in mss. CFH. – The possible reason for the addition of the *wāw* is to define the causative (IV.) stem and to prevent the reading sa_ḵaraykum / "I shall see you."

Bergsträsser has proposed for this and other examples that the "superfluous *alifs*" possibly represent a long /a:/ in front of a following *hamza*,⁴ so that the pronunciation might have been

- سَأُورِيكُمْ sā-urīkum instead of سَأُورِيكُمْ in the StT, or
 لَأُورِيكُمْ lā-urīkum instead of لَأُورِيكُمْ in StT 7:124, 20:71, 26:49, or
 لَأُبَاهِنَاهُ lā-'aḵbahannah instead of لَأُبَاهِنَاهُ in StT 27:21.

As we can see, the phonetic interpretation of the script in the Standard Text is a short /a/ in the prepositions sa- or la-, and not a long one, because of its position

² For details on the manuscripts used see the bibliography of manuscripts at the end of this chapter.

³ Precisely 3:7, 18 in ms. C; 8:75, 38:29, 39:9 in ms. D; 13:19 in mss. CDF.

⁴ GdQ3, 48ff.

before the *hamza*, as Bergsträsser suggests. This implies that the *alif* originally represented the *hamza*, and the additional *wāw* in the first two examples is a *mater lectionis* to ensure the reading of an initial /u/.

However, the case of his third example is quite different. Although Bergsträsser does not take the historical orthography into account (why the writing of two *alifs*?) he is right to propose the pronunciation لَأُورِيكُمْ with a long /a:/, but for a different reason: the *alif* is the ortho-epical *plene* writing of a *fatha* before a *hamza* (cf. below 3.4.3). Similar readings are proposed by Bergsträsser for أَفَافِينَ cf. below (50) and for لَأَلِ cf. below 3.4.3.

In another verse, however, the word 'urīkum is written less explicitly, i.e. without a *mater lectionis*:

- (10) مَأُورِيكُمْ ma_ḵuriyukum, in StT 40:29 (as well as in mss. like K).

One should expect to find more examples of this kind of *matres lectionis*, since the text of the Standard Edition contains many verbal forms parallel to this constellation.⁵ However, to my knowledge, there is only

- (11) لَأُشَالِبَانَاهُمْ la_ḵušalībanāhum in 7:124; 20:71 and 26:49, which have a *wāw* as a *mater lectionis* after – although this *wāw* is neither realized in the Standard Text nor in the few early manuscripts which I could consult (CFGHK), but – amazingly enough – is in a few recently printed Muṣḥafs, mainly in the Indian tradition, and also in a Libyan-Yemeni edition in the Qālūn 'an Nāfī' tradition (see below 3.4.3, in editions # 1–4, 6–8; see Bibliography 4.2).

A parallel example is possibly

- (12) لَوْدُوا ḵuḵudwul in StT 6:34, contrary to لَوَا in ms. D.

In this case, the Standard Text shows the "correct" (Classical) orthography with the *wāw*, while it is written in manuscript D – erroneously or not? – with an *alif* only.

Finally, the Standard Text has

- (13 a) تَوُزُّهُمْ taḵwuzūhum (Q 19:83)

while ms. A and F show

⁵ Other examples without an initial *mater lectionis* in the Standard Text are: wa_li_ḵutim'a (Q 2:150), la_ḵukafīran'a (Q 3:195, 5:12), la_ḵudḵilan'ahum (Q 3:195, 5:12), la_ḵuḵilīpan'ahum (Q 4:119), la_ḵuman'īyan'ahum (Q 4:119), sa_ḵunzilu (Q 6:93), la_ḵuḵaḵīḵan'a (Q 7:124, 26:49), sa_ḵulqiy (Q 8:12), la_ḵuzay'īnan'a (Q 15:39), la_ḵuḵwīyan'ahum (Q 15:39, 38:82), sa_ḵunab'īyuka (Q 18:78), la_ḵuḵaḵīban'ahu (Q 27:21), sa_ḵurḵiquhu (Q 74:17), sa_ḵuḵliyihi (Q 74:26).

(13 b) تاوژم ta'juwz^uuhum

which in turn is likely to contain the *wāw* as a *mater lectionis*, so that an original *ta'juwz^uuhum has to be assumed, although this could not be documented so far. But we may take the historical sequence from

تاوژم * → تاوژم in mss. AF → تَوُزْم in the Standard Text

for granted, especially if we take into account the well-documented sequence of

(14 a) دَا (دَا) du'l in ms. G, e.g. 57:21, 29;

دَا (دَا) dī'l in ms. A (Q 4:36) and H (Q 40:3), cf. below *ad* (90);

(14 b) دُوا (دُوا) duw'l in mss. ACDGF, e.g. 13:6, and

(14 c) دُو duw throughout in the Standard Text

The three stages a, b, and c show the development of the orthography: in a period when the *alif* had become mainly associated with the /a/ sound, the addition of the *wāw* was felt to define more precisely the vocalization of the *alif* with a /u/ sound. In the next stage, however, the *alif* was felt to be irritating; it was considered to be a scribal error and taken out of the *rasm*. As a proof for the oldest concept of an *alif*'s value in (13b) and (14a) we may adduce a word from the *scriptio inferior* in the Hījāzī palimpsest DAM⁶ 01–27.1,

(15) تَامِرُون (Q 15:64)

which has to be read definitely as tu'lmarūna; see Figure 6.1, center. As the context of the passage does not allow for a different reading, i.e. an active voice تَامِرُونَ, we can be sure that the scribe was aware to write the passive voice تَامِرُون tu'l marūna in this way! However, the Standard Text has تَوُزْمُون which would imply a change in the orthographical concept.

1.2 The additional wāw at the end of a word

1.2.1 Plene writing of the short vowel /u/

If the last syllable of a word ends on a short /u/, this vocalization is expressed in the Fu'ād Muṣḥaf in two different ways. As for the writing of nouns we have:

(16) نَابَا (نَابَا) naba'l u (Q 9:70) and نَبُوْا (Q 14:9),

(17) مَالَا (مَالَا) mala'l u (Q 7:60) and أَلْعَلُّوا (Q 23:24),

(18) دُفَا (دُفَا) duṣafa'l u (Q 2:266) and أَلْضَعَفَتُوا (Q 14:21),

6 = Abbreviation for Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, Ṣan'ā', cf. Bibliography 4.1.

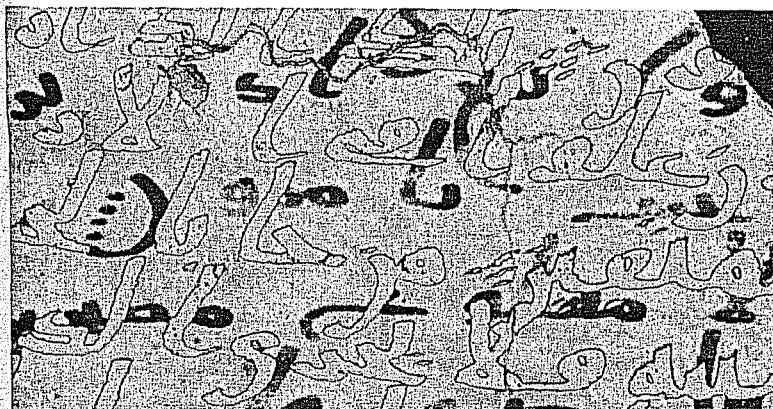


Figure 6.1

(19) نَشَأَ (Q 6:83) and فَتَوَّأَ (Q 11:87),

(20) دُعَا (Q 13:14) and دُعَتُوا (Q 40:50).

This double orthography proves that the process of reform has not yet taken possession of the whole text. The disambiguation by the regular application of the vowel letters *wāw* and *yā* as *matres lectionis* certainly would have led to a more homogeneous orthography. However, before this homogeneity was achieved a far more effective device had been found, which did not necessitate a revision of the whole *rasm* any more: the words in question could remain as they were at a certain moment, as if petrified, but the new vocalization systems of red dots (or the later system of miniature oblique *alifs*, *yā*'s and *wāws*) could be laid over any previous orthography in order to maintain (or achieve or pretend) the 'phonetic' identity of the words.

Although we cannot prove so far that the word 'imru'un belongs to this category of an inserted *mater lectionis* *wāw*, we notice that

(21) اَمْرُوْا in StT 4:176 is like it in ms. C (امرو), but (امرو) in ms. G.

The accusative اَمْرًا in StT 19:28, however, shows that an original nominative اَمْرًا* would not seem to be far-fetched, especially if we look at the writing of its feminine counterpart امرت and its extensions (Q 2:282; 3:35; 3:40; 27:57).

It seems that the insertion of the *wāw* as a *mater lectionis* had reached the verbal forms more completely than the nouns, because we do not find alternative writings (i.e. without the *wāw*) in the Standard Text in these cases:

(22) تَفَتَّوْا taftawu'l (Q 12:85)

(23) يَتَبَوَّوْا yafba'wu'l (Q 25:77)

- (24) يَنْشُؤُا yunaš'awu'l (Q 43:18)
 (25) يَنْتَبُؤُا yunab'awu'l (Q 75:13)
 (26) يَنْتَفَيْؤُا yatafay'awu'l (Q 16:48)

So far, the older orthography without the vowel letter *wāw* has been observed only in one case:

- (27) أَتَوَكَّا 'atawak'a'lu (ms. H), instead of أَتَوَكُّوْا (Q 20:18) in StT.

If we consult the old manuscripts we can find many more examples of the old orthography among nouns, as compared with the (relatively) more advanced orthography of the Standard Text:

- (28) مَاؤُكُم ma'lukum (ms. D) instead of مَاؤُكُمْ (Q 67:30),
 (29) غَزَاؤُهُم ġaza'luhum (ms. AC) instead of غَزَاؤُهُمْ (Q 3:136),
 (30) سُورَاكَا ūsuraka'lu (ms. A) instead of سُورَاكُمَا (Q 6:94).

Of course, the original script in the manuscripts (left side) does not show vocalization signs. I have equipped it here with the dagger *alif*, the *hamza* and the *damma* in examples (27) to (30) in order to visualize the function of the *alifs* in the manuscripts.

We observe that the *wāws* are inserted *behind* the *alif* (28, 29) because that way the *alif* could now be interpreted as representing the long /a:/ sound. In examples (27) and (30) the *wāws* were placed *before* the final *alifs*, which in turn lost their quality as glottal stops but were retained in script, though now considered to be "superfluous (*zā'ida*)".

Although أَتَوَكُّوْا occurs in the Standard Text 17 times with two *wāws* as *matres lectionis*, the second *wāw* is absent in a few manuscripts:

- (31) أَتَوَكَّا 'luwlu' in mss. CDF⁷ for أَتَوَكُّوْا 'luwluw' in StT.

The evidence of this "defective" writing at the end of the word in the manuscripts is a strong argument against the primordial existence of a long /u:/ vowel in the second syllable: if the word's ending was in fact the vowel /u/ and not /a/ – which I do not doubt because of the later writing with a *mater lectionis* *wāw* as أَتَوَكَّا – then it must have been a short /u/, originally expressed by the *alif* only. Such a final *alif* would then have had the quality to express any short vowel, the /a/ like in مَلَاة, the /u/ in this example or in أَتَوَكَّا, and as an /i/ in examples like كَيْبَا or مِنْوَر below. The *alif* at the end of a word, without a *mater lectionis*, will be treated later in section 3.3.

⁷ Precisely 3:7, 18 in ms. C; 8:75, 38:29, 39:9 in ms. D; 13:19 in mss. CDF.

This also concerns the question about the function of the final *alif* in words like كَيْبَا, 'idhā, or أَتَوَكَّا, 'anā, or the negation لَا, lā. Evidently, these *alifs* are not meant to designate long /a/ sounds, but the short vowel /a/. If we combine this observation with the fact that all of the three Arabic vowels could be expressed by a simple *alif* at the end, then we come to the conclusion that the leading idea of this orthography was its quality as a glottal stop, so that its function in a modern rendering of the Arabic script could be illustrated like this: كَيْبَا/كَيْبَا/كَيْبَا/كَيْبَا/كَيْبَا.

1.2.2 Plene writing of the (long?) vowel /u:/

In the Standard Text the masculine plural of the perfect verbs

- (32) بَنَؤُوا in 2:61, 90; 3:112; (from بَنَ * plus *mater lectionis*?),
 (33) جَاءُوا e.g. in 3:184; 7:116 (from جَاء * plus *mater lectionis*?),
 (34) قَامُوا in 2:226 (from قَام * plus *mater lectionis*?)

is regularly written with a final *wāw*; this is found also in manuscripts C and G, and even in the Ottoman/Turkish tradition.⁸ Only the orthography of modern Arabic would add the "usual" ending so that the words would appear as بَنَؤُوا, جَاءُوا, قَامُوا, in analogy to endings like حَضَرُوا. Perhaps the Standard Text

- (35) عَاوَا in 8:72, 74

was brought into harmony with the modern expectations by adding the final *alif*, because the *rasm* of mss. DFK has only عَاو although the following word وَكَضَرُوا shows the "normal" plural ending with an *alif*.

If we understand the *wāw* in the words in question as a *mater lectionis*, this would mean that the /u/ ending of the plural was originally short. If, however, the plural ending was a long /u:/, one would have to regard the *wāw* as the "normal" *plene* writing of the long /u:/, the *alif* not being disambiguated by a *mater lectionis*. In either case – and this is important – there is no final *alif*!

This leads to the question: where does the "superfluous *alif*" at the end of the masculine plural come from? It is certainly part of the cultural tradition, because the Jews who write Arabic with their Hebrew alphabet do not observe that rule, and neither do Jews who write Yiddish observe orthographical rules valid for German. There have been theories about the meaning of the "superfluous *alif*, *alif* otiosum." The most plausible of these is that it served as a "marker" in script to designate the verbal plural as in حَضَرُوا. However, this is a weak argument in view of the history of writing: Even if the *alif* is "otiose" in the phonetical sense it has

⁸ E.g. in the Qur'ān edition # 18 = <Ar 16/3- Özçay 15.1> (see Bibliography 4.2) where the *rasm* is the same as in the Standard Text, but the concept of vocalization is different: تَاو, جَاو, بَاو – underneath every *wāw* the word "mudd" or "mudda" ("lengthen!") is written.

to be explained as a fact of historical orthography. We have already seen (cf. above, no. 14) that the *wāw* in, e.g. *فُوا*, has been an insertion in order to clarify the quality of the *alif* as a /u/ vowel. In the development of the Arabic orthography it seems that as little as possible of the *rasm* has been excluded or was substituted by another letter. This implies, as in the case of *فُوا*, that the *alif* in *فَرَبُوا* was there even before the *wāw* was, so that the original concept of the word was in fact *فَرَبُوا**, with a short final /u/. So far, we cannot prove this orthography in the manuscripts – although we should be aware that there are “dual” forms in the Qur’ān like *فَرَبُوا* which are possible candidates for the interpretation of plurals. But such an investigation has to take the context into account, which cannot be done here.

Another example of the use of a “superfluous” *alif* is the masculine plural of some nouns, like

(36) *بَنُوا* 10:90 in the Standard Text, instead of *بَنُو* in Classical Arabic.

Maybe it can be qualified to be a “wrong” analogy to the verbal plural *بَنُوا*, e.g. in 9:110. Thus, the orthography of *بَنُوا* in CA could have been the starting point for the addition of an *alif*, in analogy to the verbal plural forms like *فَرَبُوا*. In a text other than the Qur’ān, Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb’s (d. 245/860) *K. al-Muḥabbar*⁹ even verbal forms of the singular with a weak third radical are written with a *wāw* plus *alif* at the end, although Classical Arabic would only allow for a *wāw*, such as:

يَشْرُوا instead of يَشْرُو (p. 243)	تَنْزُوا instead of تَنْزُو (p. 200)
تَدْنُوا instead of تَدْنُو (p. 210)	اَرْجُوا instead of اَرْجُو (p. 241, 261)
يَغْرُوا instead of يَغْرُو (p. 197, 369)	اَنْجُوا instead of اَنْجُو (p. 498)

In this orthography any ending of a long /u:/ has an *alif* added. Although the orthographic peculiarities of the manuscript¹⁰ used by the editor Ilse Lichtenstädter go back to the third century of the Hijra,¹¹ the writing of any long /u:/ with a final *alif* seems to be a relatively late orthographical development. It is plausible that the writing of *بَنُوا* without an *alif* is an earlier phase, corresponding to the orthography of Classical Arabic.

However, it remains a matter of speculation so far whether the writing with the *alif* is related to orthographies like *بَنُوا** or its parallel *فَرَبُوا* etc.: If the *alif* was written originally in order to secure any final vowel, this would mean that the nominal

9 Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb (d. 245/860): *K. al-Muḥabbar*, ed. I. Lichtenstädter, Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif 1942 (reprint Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Naṣh wa-l-Tawzī’, no year [ca 1980]).

10 London, British Museum, 2807.

11 The editor remarks on p. 512 that the names of “Khālid, Ibrāhīm, al-Nu’mān, Mālik, al-Ḥārith, Sufyān and sometimes of Ṣālih” were written defectively, i.e. without an *alif*. This feature is (still?) common in other manuscripts of the third century. Names which would contain a *madda* in modern writing are written with two *alifs*, like *أَمَل* instead of *أَمَل* for *Āmul* (350). Perhaps this is the beginning of the *madda* sign in the history of the Arabic script?

plural ending was originally a short /u/, not a long one, as the orthography of Classical Arabic and of today might suggest.

1.3 Ortho-epic variants of the *wāw*

1.3.1 Omission of the *wāw* before the article *al-* in the Standard Text

Usually, orthography is a simplified method to represent the phonetical features of a language; in the case of Arabic the words generally keep their shape as if they would occur alone, in isolation. The proper phonetical interpretation is then an additional “art” which follows other rules. A good example for this is the Arabic article <’al->, which is always written in this way, although the ortho-epic rules say that

- the *lām* has to be assimilated to the following “sun”-letter;
- while the *alif* takes the preceding vowel, this vowel becomes short if it was long before.

Thus, the correct pronunciation of *Sūra* 17:11 *وَيَذْعُو الْإِنْسَنُ* would shorten the written long /u:/ (or /i:/ or /a:/) under the influence of the following article. So, there is an orthographical rule to write a long vowel, but a contradicting rule to read this vowel as a short one. However, there are a few exceptions to the orthographic rules in the Standard Text, which can only be explained by the application of the ortho-epic rule of shortening a long vowel due to the following article:

(37) *يَذْعُو* (Q 17:11, 23:117, 54:6, 96:18) instead of *يَذْعُو* *ال* and
(38) *يَمْنَعُو* (Q 42:24) instead of *يَمْنَعُو* *ال* in Classical Arabic.

There is even one exception in 42:34, where the “defective” version *يَمْنَعُ* occurs in a position which could not be explained by an ortho-epic argument.

(39) *صَلِّحُوا* (Q 66:4) instead of *صَلِّحُوا* *ال* in CA.

This writing of an active participle is in contrast to *كَاذِبُوا* (Q 44:15) or *كُذِّبُوا* (Q 2:249) where even a final *alif* is added – perhaps in analogy to the frequent plural ending of nouns as in *بَنُوا*.

1.3.2 Lengthening of a *wāw*

“Normally,” this feature occurs in the final position of suffixes (-*hu**, -*humu**, -*kumu**); this lengthening is even enforced if the following word starts with a *hamza*: -*hu**, -*humu**, -*kumu**. Although this is expressed by a small additional *wāw* (or *yā*’ in similar cases), in the modern editions of the Qur’ān this ortho-epic modification is not part of the *rasm*. In this respect the small *wāw* or *yā*’ are

comparable to the “dagger *alif*.” More interesting is the occurrence of these small vowel letters within the words, which are sometimes hardly distinguished from the bigger normal letters.

(40) دَاوُدَ Dalwu^wd thus in StT 16 times (e.g. 34:10).

In old manuscripts the writing is usually دَوَاد, which makes sense, since one could not necessarily expect, in old manuscripts, a *plene* writing of the /a:/ in the first syllable. But the only two early bearers of the name “دَاوُدَ / Du’ād” were presumably Christians¹² whose names were certainly “David”! Thus, the *alif* can be explained by indicating either a glottal stop *plus* a short vowel or a short vowel after the mute preceding letter: دَوَاد or دَوَاد. This is not a unique case. In a very similar configuration we find that دَاوُدَ of the Standard Text (Q 14:37) is written as دَوَاد in manuscripts D and H. It would have been natural to expect that in Arabic the name of David is written دَوِيد / Da’wiyd (Dāwīd), according to its Hebrew/Syriac origin, but this orthography would have immediately been associated with دَوِيد, which is “a poor little mite” and thus not really appropriate for a revered prophet!

The next examples from the Standard Text are not related to the *alif*. They have more in common with similar problems which occur in writing two *yā*’s (cf. below 2.3.2). However, they raise the question whether the insertion of the small *wāw* or *yā*’ is due only to (later) grammatical consciousness and not based on the actual pronunciation /jalu:na, jasu:/ at the time when the *rasm* was fixed.

(41) يَلُودُ yalwu^wna in StT, e.g. 3:78,

(42) وُرِيَا wu^wriya in StT 7:20,

(43) لِيَسْمَعُوا li_yasu^w-‘uw’l in StT 17:7.

In this final case the different orthographic solutions in some recent Qur’ān editions seem worth citing:¹³

17:7	لِيَسْمَعُوا	لِيَسْمَعُوا	لِيَسْمَعُوا	لِيَسْمَعُوا	لِيَسْمَعُوا	لِيَسْمَعُوا	لِيَسْمَعُوا
	StT	# 8	# 7	# 9	# 10	# 1	# 18

12 Abū Du’ād Jāriya b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Iyādī, al-Ḥīra, ca. 480–540 or 550 AD, cf. Sezgin, *GAS II*, 167 seq., and Abū Du’ād Yazīd b. Mu’āwiya b. ‘Umar al-Ru’āṣī, al-Ḥijāz, cf. Sezgin, *GAS II*, 414.

13 The numbers used here are abbreviations for Qur’ān editions whose full bibliography is found below in section 4.2. – StT is the Standard Text Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim; # 8 and # 7 are Qālūn ‘an Nāfi’ versions; # 9 and # 10 are Warsh ‘an Nāfi’ versions; # 1 is the Indian; and # 18 is the Ottoman tradition.

1.3.3 Correcting the pronunciation of the wāw

The orthography of a couple of nouns shows the influence of Syriac, with a *wāw* where the Arabic language would prefer the pronunciation with an /a/ sound.

(44) الصَّلَاةُ ṣalaw^wta in Standard Text e.g. 2:83,

(45) الزَّكَاةُ zakaw^wta in StT e.g. 2:83,

(46) الرِّبَا ribaw^wl in StT e.g. 2:276,

(47) الْحَيَاةُ ḥayaw^wta in StT e.g. 2:86,

(48) الْغَدَاةُ ḡadaw^wti in StT 6:52; 18:28.

The old “Syriac” writing preserved in the *rasm* was “Arabized” later by the addition of a small (ortho-epic) *alif* on top of the *wāw*. A similar feature is the writing of a small *alif* on top of the *yā*’ (cf. below 2.3.3). Generally, the small letter on top indicated the “correct” pronunciation of the vowel letter underneath, according to Classical Arabic.

The application of this method is not limited to the re-definition of vowel letters but occurs – in the Standard Text at least – with the *Ṣād* also: بَصَّطَ in 7:69; بَصَّطَ in 2:245; the opposite pronunciation is expressed in الْمَصِيطَرُونَ in 52:37, and similarly 88:22. In both cases the alternative spelling with a *sīn* is a variant observed in the Standard Text as well as in other transmissions and manuscripts.

2 The yā’

Like the addition of a *wāw*, the *yā*’ was used to disambiguate the phonetical value of the *alif*.

2.1 The additional yā’ at the beginning of a word

(49) لِيَلْفِي li_‘liyla’fi and لِيَلْفِيهِمْ li_‘li’la’fihim in StT 106:1, 2.

If li_‘liyla’fi is considered to be a direct derivation of the root ‘-l-f the verbal noun of the fourth stem would be, in Classical Arabic, لِفْلَاف, whence لِيَلْف by assimilation; its *yā*’ would be written “plene”, exactly as in Sūra 106:1. Then the problem is with the second occurrence of the word in the next verse: li_‘li’la’fihim. Here the *yā*’ is not part of the *rasm*; it is added separately between the initial *alif* and the following *lām*: لِيَلْفِيهِمْ.

There are two possible explanations for the different orthography. Either the second *rasm* (without the *yā*’) is the older one – and the *scriptio difficilior* – in that case the first *rasm* is an example of a *mater lectionis* in order to ensure the vocalization of the *alif* as a short /i/ sound. This implies that the word is not derived from the root ‘-l-f, but it had to be protected from misreading, say, of لَفَاف / “thousands of.” Or the first *rasm* is the correct one, and the second one was

made identical with the first one by adding the small *yā'*, and by that correcting an old erroneous writing, without interfering with the inherited *rasm* of the text. Nevertheless, it is strange that a second *rasm* could preserve its wrong orthography side by side with the "correct" one. Regardless, the double appearance of this *hapax legomenon* raises the suspicion that its real meaning has been forgotten.

If we take the writing of

(50) أَكَيْنِ 'Ja_fa_liy'n in the Standard Text (Q 3:144, 21:34)

as a model for the use of the *yā'* as a *mater lectionis*, it is interesting that its *rasm* is not different from the other printed editions of the Qur'ān which are listed in the following tables – although this is not the case if we consider manuscripts, cf. below (59). The pronunciation does not differ either between the "readings." However, we observe a concept of vocalization of the (same) *rasm* that differs between the Standard Text and editions # 8, 9, 13, 14 and 17 (cf. Bibliography 4.2) on the one side, with أَكَيْنِ and the Indian and Ottoman editions represented by # 1, 2, and 19 on the other side, with أَكَيْنِ. In the first case the *yā'* of the *rasm* is considered to be "superfluous (*zā'ida*)," whereas in the second the *alif* is marked as such by the small circle. Bergsträsser proposes that the pronunciation of أَكَيْنِ is possibly أَكَيْنِ ('a-fā-'in),¹⁴ the stress being on the second syllable because of the following *hamza*. However, if the *yā'* is considered to be a *mater lectionis* for an /i/ sound before, this interpretation has certainly to be abandoned, cf. also above section 1.1 (9).

Usually small particles like 'in, 'inna, etc. are "below the radar" of concordances, to use Thomas Milo's expression. However, they are listed in Flügel's and in the Iranian Qur'ān concordance edited by Rowḥānī (see Bibliography 4.3). The following list contains a choice of particles in the Standard Text which are now interpreted as contextually valid compositions of the interrogative particle 'a- at the outset. Their orthography is compared with their equivalents in a few recently printed editions of the Qur'ān:

Standard Text	Sūra: Verse	Modern editions, numbers according to Bibliography, 4.2						
			Indian	Q.	W.	B.	D.	Kh. Ot.
(51) a	أَيْنِ	36:19	= Standard T.	1	2	8	9	13 14 17 19
	أَيْنِ	26:41	= Standard T.	1	2	8	9	13 14 17 19

No variant writing of the *rasm* in all editions consulted.

¹⁴ GdQ3, 48ff.

(51) b	أَيْنِ	37:52	= Standard T.	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
			أَيْنِ	-	-	8	9	13	14	17	19
		12:90	أَيْنِ	①	②	8	9	-	14	17	①9
	أَيْنِ			-	-	-	-	13	-	-	-

Only the Indian tradition (# 1, 2) is in conformity with the *rasm* of the Standard Text; in the other editions (# 8, 9, 13, 14, 17, 19) one "tooth" is lacking.

(51) c	أَيْنِ	6:19	= Standard T.	①	②	8	9	13	14	17	①9
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The same writing of the word occurs in 27:55, 29:29 and 41:9. No variant writing of the *rasm* in all editions consulted.

(52)	أَيْنِ ... أَيْنِ	79:10 f.	= Standard T.	①	②	-	-	13	14	17	①9
				أَيْنِ	أَيْنِ	-	-	8	9	-	-

Although the *rasm* is the same in all editions consulted, # 8 (Qālūn) and # 9 (Warsh) read the indicative in Q 79:11.

(53)	أَيْنِ ... أَيْنِ	37:35 f.	= Standard T.	①	②	8	9	13	14	17	①9
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No variant writing of the *rasm* in all editions consulted.

(54)	أَيْنِ ... أَيْنِ	13:5	= Standard T.	①	②	8	9	13	14	17	①9
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The same writing of the word occurs in 17:49, 98; 23:82; 32:10; 37:16, 53. No variant writing of the *rasm* in all editions consulted.

(55)	أَيْنِ ... أَيْنِ	27:67	= Standard T.	①	②	-	-	13	14	17	①9
				أَيْنِ	أَيْنِ	-	-	8	9	-	-

Although the *rasm* is the same in all editions consulted, # 8 (Qālūn) and # 9 (Warsh) read it as a clause of statement, not of question.

(56)	أَيْنِ ... أَيْنِ	56:47	= Standard T.	①	②	-	-	13	14	17	①9
				أَيْنِ	أَيْنِ ...	-	-	8	9	-	-

Although the *rasm* is the same in all editions consulted, # 8 (Qālūn) and # 9 (Warsh) read 'innā as a clause of statement.

Except for (51b) in all cases listed above the *rasm* is the same, although the pronunciation differs according to whether the text is interpreted to be interrogative or indicative. The instrument to define the *rasm* as a question is the insertion of the *hamza*. On the level of the script in the Standard Text and in most of the other editions, the *hamza* is added after the *alif*, as shown in the tables. However, in the Indian as well as in the Ottoman tradition – in the tables above marked by numbers in a circle ①, ②, ⑨ – the sequence is inverted: first the *hamza* without *kursī*, and then the *alif*, as in عَائِلًا or عَائِلًا or عَائِلًا.

However, the *yā* ' of اَيْن could well be an old *mater lectionis* to ensure the reading اَيْن instead of اِن, especially if we take the orthographical variants in the old manuscripts into account (57, 58, 59). By a later interpretation of this orthography the *yā* ' tooth could be reinterpreted to be the carrier of a *hamza*, thereby producing an unequivocal question instead of a statement, e.g. اَيْنَا instead of simply اَيْنَا/اَيْنَا. It would need some research to decide whether the context allows for an indicative reading rather than for a question, but this is outside of the scope of this chapter. It seems, moreover, that the issue is not restricted to the Arabic language only, but that Syriac also needs consideration – which is beyond the competence of the author. Therefore, only a list is presented of the different spellings found in important old codices; their abbreviations A, B, etc., are unravelled in the Bibliography 4.1. A dash signals that the Qur'ānic passage is not part of the manuscript fragment in question.

(57) لَيْن la_yīn in Standard Text, but different in manuscripts:

Sūra: Verse	ms. A	ms. B	ms. C	ms. D	ms. E1	ms. F	ms. G	ms. H	ms. K
6:109	–	–	لَيْن	لَايِن	لَيْن	–	–	لَيْن	لَيْن
10:22	–	–	لَيْن	–	–	لَايِن	لَيْن	–	لَيْن
17:62	–	–	–	–	–	لَايِن	–	–	لَيْن
35:42	–	–	–	لَيْن	–	–	لَان	–	لَيْن

(58) وَايِن wa_layīn in Standard Text, but different in manuscripts:

Sūra: Verse	ms. A	ms. B	ms. C	ms. D	ms. E1	ms. F	ms. G	ms. H	ms. K
13:37	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن	–	–	وَلَيْن
16:126	–	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَايِن	وَلَيْن
18:36	–	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	–	وَلَيْن
29:10	–	–	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن

29:61	–	–	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن
29:63	–	–	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن
30:51	–	وَلَيْن	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن
30:58	–	–	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن
31:25	–	وَلَيْن	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن
35:41	–	–	–	–	–	–	وَلَايِن	–	وَلَيْن

(59) اَفَايِن 'a_fa_ʾiṣn in Standard Text, but different in manuscripts:

Sūra: Verse	ms. A	ms. B	ms. C	ms. D	ms. E1	ms. F	ms. G	ms. H	ms. K
3:144	اَفَايِن	–	اَفَايِن	–	–	–	–	–	اَفَايِن
21:34	–	–	–	–	–	اَفَايِن	–	اَفَايِن	اَفَايِن

2.2 The additional yā ' at the end of a word

Although the word

(60) naba'li (e.g. Q 6:67; 27:22) and naba'liṣ (Q 6:34)

occurs in two different orthographies in the Standard Text, the "older" version is certainly the one with an *alif* only, the *yā* ' being a *mater lectionis*:

(61) yuhay'iy' in StT 18:16, but in ms. A confirmed by this and other examples by al-Dānī;¹⁵ the same is true for

(62) 'liyta'yi in StT 16:90, but in ms. H 'liyta'li, or

(63) 'lanba'liha in StT 7:101, but in ms. D: 'lanba'liha.

The next examples taken from the Standard Text are comparable only in principle because the second orthography has a suffix –hi at the end of the word:

(64) mala'li (Q 2:246; 38:69) and mala'li (e.g. 7:103; 10:75),

(65) liqa'li (e.g. 6:31, 154) and liqa'li (e.g. 18:105; 29:23).

Additionally, in the early Qur'ānic manuscripts we find e.g.:

15 K. al-Muḥṣi 'fī rasm maṣāḥif al-amṣār, ma'a Kitāb al-Naḥṣ / Orthographie und Punktierung des Koran. Zwei Schriften von Abū 'Amr 'Uṣman ibn Sa'īd ad-Dānī, ed. Otto Pretzl, Leipzig, Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası 1932, 54.

- (66) وراكم (وَرَاكُمْ) wara'likum (ms. G), in StT وَرَاكُمْ (Q 4:102),
 (67) من ورا min wara'li (ms. D), in StT مِنْ وَرَائِي (Q 42:51),
 (68) سايل (سَائِلٌ) su liyla (mss. A, D), in StT سَائِلٌ suyla (Q 2:108),
 (69) ساي (سَائِي) si la'y (ms. A), in StT سَيِّءٌ siy'a (Q 11:77).

These examples may illuminate a few other odd writings in the Standard Text, too: It has preserved the passive voice of جا (= جَا * jā'a), "to come," in a way which is in line with the previous examples from the manuscripts:

- (70) جَى جَى in StT written as جَى جَى y'a (Q 39:69; 89:23).

The circle on the *alif* indicates that the *alif* has to be disregarded for pronunciation, as if only جَى جَى were written.

In addition, all of the plentiful occurrences of the word shay', "thing," are written uniformly as شَى in the Standard Text, except in 18:23, where we find

- (71) لِي شَأْنِي li_ša'ly'i" written with an *alif*, which is the normal orthography in most of the early manuscripts.

Thus, if we recognize the writing with an *alif* to be the original letter – before the *yā'* was added as a *mater lectionis* – we come to the conclusion that the primordial vowel involved was a short vowel or two short vowels expressed by an *alif* alone. The Arabic script would have to be interpreted as شَأْنِي/شَأْنِي/شَأْنِي. Only after the *alif* had lost its old quality and become associated with a long /a:/ was the addition of a *yā'* necessary. The pronunciation of the first word was certainly /suʔila/, whereas the other words were probably pronounced with a short /i/ as /siʔa/, /dʒiʔa/, and /ʃiʔu/.

2.3 Ortho-epic variants of the *yā'*

The phenomenon of ortho-epic writing is not restricted to the *yā'* but has its parallels in the occasional omission of a *wāw*, as we have seen, or of an *alif*, too.

2.3.1. Omission of the *yā'* before the article *al-* in the Standard Text

- (72) يُؤْتِ الد (Q 4:146),
 (73) الْجَوَارِ الد (Q 81:16),
 (74) صَالِ الد (Q 37:163),
 (75) لَهَا الد (Q 22:54),
 (76) بَهَا الد (Q 30:53),
 (77) بِالْوَادِ الد (Q 20:12, 27:18, 28:30, 79:16),
 (78) يُرْفَعُ الد (Q 36:23).

The same observation has been made with the omission of the *wāw* (cf. above 1.3.1). However, manuscripts have not been looked at in regard to this aspect. The opposite of the omission occurs also, but it has no bearing on the conservative *rasm*. It is a later amendment in order to achieve ortho-epical "correctness" against the *rasm*, as in اِنْبِرْهُمْ (e.g. StT 2:124), or in the reading of Warsh 'an Nāfiع اَلْكَاعِ instead of اِنَّا دَعَانِ in the Standard Text 2:186. In this way grammatical correctness can also be reconstructed, as in al-Dūrī's reading اِنَّا هُنْدَانِ instead of اِنَّا هُنْدَانِ in the Standard Text 20:63.

2.3.2 Lengthening of a *yā'* before the hamza in the Standard Text

The lengthening (*madd*, before the *hamza*) or the doubling (*tashdīd*) of the *yā'* depends on the concept of reading certain words like nabiyy'u" or nabiyy'u":

Sūra 2:247	نَبِيِّهُمْ	نَبِيِّهُمْ	نَبِيِّهُمْ	نَبِيِّهُمْ	نَبِيِّهُمْ	نَبِيِّهُمْ
StT	# 8	# 7	# 9	# 10	# 1	# 18

The Qur'ān editions quoted here are the same as above (1.3.2).

Parallel to يَلُومُونَ and the like (cf. above 1.3.2) are those cases where an additional *yā'* or a *hamza* was added in superscript, certainly in view of the grammatical rules of Classical Arabic, but possibly not representing the actual pronunciation at the time when the *rasm* was fixed, e.g.:

- (79) اَلْخَوَارِصِ in StT 5:111; 61:14,
 (80) لَنُخْطِئَن in StT 12:91.

2.3.3 Correcting the pronunciation of the *yā'*

Similar to the "correction" of the *wāw* by a superscript *alif* (above 1.3.3) we encounter the same feature of vocalization with the *yā'*:

- (81) اَلْقَوْرَنَةِ tawrayṭa e.g. StT 3:3.

Much has been speculated about this orthography (cf. Diem, *Unters.* 1:248–50). We may add that the *rasm* of the word would even allow for the interpretation of the Syriac name of the Torah, and that there is an affinity between the letter *rā'* and a following *imāla* vowel, as in

- (82) مَغْرَيْهَا maḡreyḥal (= maḡrēhā) in StT 11:41.

Generally, the *alif* Maqṣūra as in كُبْرَى kubrā or رَمَى ramā or مَوْلَى mawlā is written with a small *alif* on top of the *yā'*, as in

- (83) لَيْلَى līlay e.g. in StT 11:36.

However, in some transmissions (like Warsh 'an Nāfi' in North Africa) of the Qur'ān every *alif* Maqṣūra is indicated by a special sign like the diamond in (82) or by a thick dot under the preceding letter. This implies the *imāla* pronunciation /ile:/ or, with the extensions by personal suffixes, /ile:ka, ile:hu, ile:hum/, etc. Again, this kind of pronunciation (/ile:hu, ile:hum/, etc.) is part of the system(s) observed in the early texts which have been vocalized by red dots.

In many old manuscripts (e.g. AGK), and in contrast to *إلى*, the prepositions *على* and *حتى* are written with an *alif* *علا* and *حتا*. Although the reason for this variant is not clear, it seems that it has nothing to do with the relative age of the manuscripts.

2.4 *yā' instead of alif = Writing the imāla?*

Normally, in early texts neither the short /a/ nor long /a:/ were part of the script. Consequently, in more cases than not the question remained open whether the vocalization was thought to be a *fatha* or a superscript *alif*, viz. a "dagger *alif*." In transcription the uncertain vowel length can be expressed by the letter <ā>, combining the short vowel <ā> with the long vowel <ā>, which is only expressed later by the dagger *alif*, or which became substituted by the addition of an *alif* which was thus integrated into the *rasm*.

It seems, however, that in a few cases the former ambiguous <ā> vocalization was not disambiguated by the insertion of an *alif* into the text, but by a *yā'* instead. I propose to see this phenomenon not as a singular case for the name of Abraham, but in the context of the *imāla*¹⁶ in general, because of a few similar examples.

(84) *libra'hiym* ('ibrāhīm)

is written thus 54 times in the Standard Text, except in the second Sūra, where the name is always written without a *yā'* as *ابراهيم*. This latter writing would allow for a reading 'Abrāhām, being completely in line with the Hebrew or Syriac name. However, in order to ensure the uniform pronunciation of /ibra:hi:m/, a superscript *yā'* is inserted in this Sūra throughout: *إبراهيم*. Whereas the Standard Text is consistent in spelling the name in Sūra 2 differently from the other Sūras, no such clear-cut difference is made in the early manuscripts.

As for the second Sūra, ms. K writes *ابراهيم* in 2:140. As for the other Sūras where the Standard Text has *ابراهيم* throughout, we find in the manuscripts *ابراهيم* in 3:33 (ms. C), 4:125; 19:41; 19:58 (ms. A), 53:37 (ms. D), 16:42 (ms. F). Thus it can be safely said that the Standard Text has undergone at least one orthographic revision in which either the second Sūra became harmonized with *ابراهيم* while all other Sūras

continued to write *ابراهيم* – or vice versa. Werner Diem¹⁷ proposes that *ابراهيم* was used by the Arabs as a historical Aramaic writing, whereas the writing with a *yā'* represents the actual pronunciation of the name by the Arabs. This idea does not contradict the following argument for an influence of the *imāla* on the orthography.

It is unclear when the specifically Arabic form of the name – in which the spelling of the vowel in the last syllable with a *yā'*, indicating a pronunciation different from the Hebrew and Aramaic – first occurs; it is doubtful that the spelling *ابراهيم* is pre-Islamic,¹⁸ since it has been preserved only in early Islamic (and not pre-Islamic) inscriptions.¹⁹ Anyway, we propose to see this orthography as the representation of an extreme *imāla* in early Arabic pronunciation, which tended to be written with the letter *yā'* rather than with an "alif" for the long /a:/ sound, which was not expressed in script in any case. This would mean that the original spelling of the name was *أبراهيم* /abraha:m/, although its pronunciation could well have been *ابراهيم* /abrahe:m/.

Probably only an *imāla* pronunciation of a long /a:/ – which exists in the other Semitic languages – could lead to the new orthography with a *yā'* in Arabic, because this letter was felt to be closer to the actual pronunciation. In a way, this alteration symbolizes the emancipation of Arabic from the scribal traditions of akin and/or superior languages, and possibly the "invention" of the Arabic alphabet as opposed to the old *abjad* fell into this early period. In some modern Qur'ān editions the *imāla* is written as a thick round dot instead of or in addition to a *kasra*; this cannot be reproduced by the available Arabic character sets, except in transliteration: instead of the <i> for the normal *kasra* an <e> is used here, and the "digraph" combination of the <e> with the following *yā'* is marked additionally by an arch <ey>: 'libra'heym = 'Ibrāhēm.

Sūra 2:258	إِبْرَاهِيمَ	إِبْرَاهِيمَ	إِبْرَاهِيمَ	إِبْرَاهِيمَ	إِبْرَاهِيمَ	إِبْرَاهِيمَ	إِبْرَاهِيمَ
StT	# 8	# 7	# 9	# 10	# 1	# 18	

As can be seen in this table, the unified writing of *إِبْرَاهِيمَ* without a *yā'* in the second Sūra is not observed in most of the other Qur'ān editions, which are quoted here as above in 1.3.2.

In the Standard Text there are still a few other graphic traces of the *imāla* writing:

(85) *bi_lay'eymi* (bi-'ayyēmi), only once in StT written as *بَيِّنِم* (Q 14:5), while the usual orthography has *أَيَّامًا* (Q 3:24) or *الْأَيَّامُ* (Q 3:140). In the early manuscripts C and K both words are written defectively as *ايما* and *الايم*.

(86) *bi_lay'eydi* (bi-'āyēdi) is vocalized differently in StT as *بَيِّنِد* *bi_layyidi*

17. W. Diem, "Untersuchungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie I," *Orientalia* 48, 1979, (207–57) 227.

18. J. Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, Leipzig: de Gruyter 1926, 86ff.

19. M.A. al-'Ushsh, "*Kitābāt 'arabiyya*," 227–346. The four inscriptions are either undated (viz. # 75/97 and 85/107), or are datable to the time of the Umayyad reign of al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik, # 10/21 and 36/55. In all inscriptions the name is written *ابراهيم*.

16. For the question of Qur'ānic orthography and the *imāla* see Bergsträsser/Pretzl in *GdQ* 3, 37 fn. 3. A chapter on the Arabic *imāla* is found in M.S. Howell, *A Grammar of the Classical Arabic Language*, Delhi: Gian Publishing House 1986, 4:738–71.

(Q 51:47). Here, it is likely that the orthography has a different plural in mind which would match with the (existing) secondary plural أَيْدٍ (cf. the dictionaries).

Although there is no longer any trace of it in the Standard Text, the old manuscripts have preserved almost totally the orthography of 'āyātū" (sg.) or 'āyātū" (pl.) written with two yā's instead of one. We propose to interpret the conventional word أَيْدٍ as أَيْدٍ; the regular plural would then be أَيْدٍ, its modern vocalization in the Standard Text being أَيْدٍ and أَيْدٍ.

In the early manuscripts, however, the singular أَيْدٍ is – according to our sources – always written as أَيْدٍ, which is possibly the clue for understanding that the first yā' represents the *imāla*, and so we assume:

(87) أَيْدٍ 'āyāfi ('ēya), singular, as in 3:49, 20:47 (ms. A), 3:50 (ms. A), 7:106 (ms. J), 13:38 (mss. CDF).

Theoretically, the reading أَيْدٍ 'āyāfi ('ēya) seems to be also possible, but in that case we would rather expect a writing with one yā' only, أَيْدٍ, like in the Standard Text today.

The plural in the manuscripts is generally أَيْدٍ or أَيْدٍ or أَيْدٍ, which I should interpret, in the light of the singular, as أَيْدٍ or أَيْدٍ or أَيْدٍ, as 'ēyātin, 'ēyātihi, 'ēyātī, 'ēyātinā, in the more conventional transcription.

(88) رَجُلٍ riḡeylu" (riḡēlu), instead of رَجُلٍ in the StT (Q 72:6) occurs in manuscript D;

(89) طَيْبٌ tēyba (tēba), instead of طَيْبٌ in the StT (Q 4:3) in ms. A.²⁰

A frequent variant without parallels in the Standard Text is

(90) أَيْدٍ 'ilēyhu" ('ilēhu), instead of أَيْدٍ 'ilāhu" in the Standard Text. The variant occurs in 6:19; 6:46; 6:102; 7:65; 10:90; 23:91 (ms. D), 7:85 (ms. J), 20:14; 40:3 (ms. H).

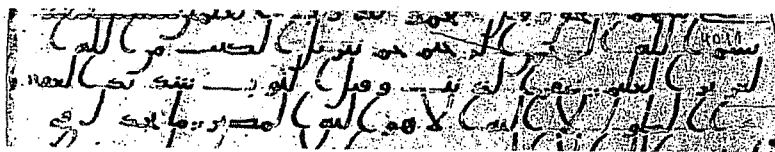
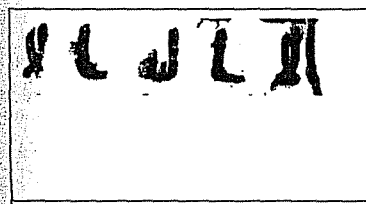
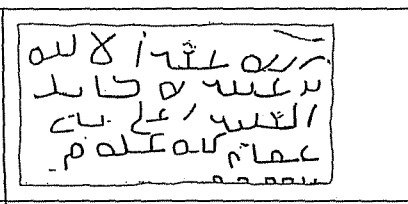


Figure 6.2

Ms. H (= DAM 01-29.1), first verses of Sūra 40; 'ilēha (instead of 'ilāha) is written in the third line, it looks like the following 'ilayhi: (الطولا الندالاهو اليه المصير)

20 On this cf. al-Dānī, *Al-Muqni'*, 71.

	
<p>Ms. D (= DAM 01-28'1), Sūra 10:90; again the word 'ilēha, in the center.</p>	<p>Pre-Islamic rock inscription from Umm iğ-ğimāl published by E. Littmann, drawing from Grohmann, <i>Paläographie II</i>, 17. The name in the first line has been read as 'Abd al-Ulayh, "Servant of the little God". In fact, it is certainly 'Abd al-Ilēh.</p>

In a more general sense it seems worthwhile to investigate the extent of the *imāla* pronunciation in the different "readings," not only in the center of a word, as in the name of Abraham, but also at the end, as in the prepositions إلى or غل, or any other yā'-alif, as in الهدى or موسى or نهي or النَصْرَى (e.g. see the *riwāya* of Warsh 'an Nāfi').

(91) لي ليعيد li l_ībeyd (li-l-'ibēd) in ms. H, instead of للمعاد in StT 40:31.

In this case, there can be no doubt about the intention of the scribe to write the normal plural للمعاد with an *imāla* because the word is in the middle of the rhyme sequence *al-rashād* (verse 29), *al-aḡzāb* (verse 30), *lil-'ibād* (verse 31), *al-tanād* (verse 32), and *hād* (verse 33).

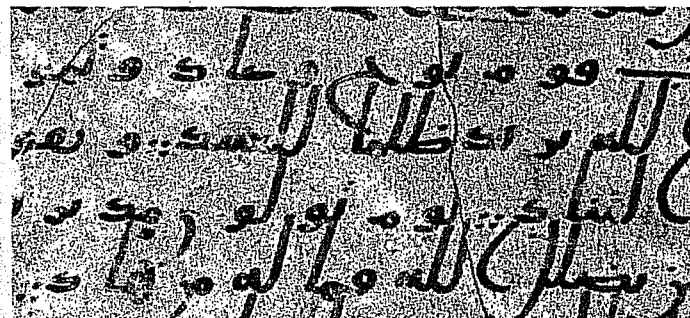


Figure 6.3 Ms. H (= DAM 01-29.1), Sūra 40:31; in the second line you see للمعيد, in the third line the rhyme word *al-tanād*, and at the end *hād*.

3. The *alif*

The basic concept of the letter *alif* is sometimes visible in the orthography of the Standard Text in comparison with old manuscripts, although one cannot be sure which of the two preserves the older orthography, e.g.:

- (92) يَا كَلُوا in StT 36:35, as opposed to لِيَكُلُوا in ms. D,
 (93) تَسْتَأْذِنُوا in StT 24:27, as opposed to تَسْتَنَسُوا in A and Lewis' Pal.,²¹
 (94) يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ in StT 6:42; 7:94, instead of يَا أَيُّهَا in mss. J and Berlin 314,²²
 (95) أَخْطَأْتُمْ in StT 33:5, instead of أَخْطَمْتُمْ in ms. Berlin 349,²³
 (96) سَأَلْتُمُوهُ in StT 13:34, instead of سَأَلْتُمُوهُ in ms. H.

The dilemma is evident if we observe in the same manuscript H that the distribution of the *alif* is opposite:

- (97) يَسْأَلُونَ in ms. H, instead of يُسْأَلُونَ in StT 43:19, or
 (98) يَسْتَأْذِنُ in ms. Berlin 349, instead of يُسْتَأْذِنُ in StT 33:13, or
 (99) يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ in ms. A instead of يُسْتَأْخِرُونَ in StT 16:61.

A glimpse at this problem must be sufficient for now, with a more thorough investigation reserved for the future.

3.1 At the beginning

3.1.1 The preposition 'a- for questions

In the early manuscripts it was not possible to indicate a question by the preposition 'a- if the following word already had an *alif* at the outset. Thus, it became an exegetical choice to define a sentence as a question or not, e.g.

- (100) أَوَلَمْ نَكُنْ نُبَيِّنْ لَكَ آيَاتِنَا... يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ in the Standard Text 13:5, or
 (101) أَسْأَلْتُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ... يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ in StT 3:20.

3.1.2 *alif-waṣla*

As a general rule in Classical Arabic the words are written as if they were isolated. Any assimilation, lengthening or shortening which happens regularly in the spoken language is part of extra reading rules but not part of the *rasm*. In early manuscripts, however, we observe exceptions to this rule, especially if the *alif* at the outset of a word is considered to be an *alif-waṣla*.

²¹ GdQ3, 33, fn. 1.

²² GdQ3, 33.

²³ Ibid.

3.1.2.1 NOUNS

In manuscripts as well as in the orthography of Classical Arabic there are no variants concerning the writing of the one-letter particle *li-* with the elision of the *alif* in a following definite article, as in *li-l'ahi*. Thus, in manuscripts (as in D, 5:96 e.g.) the writing of لِلْأَحْيَاءِ corresponds perfectly with the writing of لِلْأَحْيَاءِ in the Standard Text, in this respect. Perhaps the treatment of *li- plus* article served as the model for the orthography of other one-letter particles.

Other than this case it seems that in manuscripts the feature of leaving out of the *alif-waṣla* only occurs with *qamari*-letters to follow, i.e. when the *lām* of the article is not assimilated phonetically to the first letter of the next noun. In this respect it probably represents an early orthographic reform – perhaps a regional one only – in favor of a more phonetic writing system,²⁴ but the idea was evidently given up again. If we look at the examples below we notice that the *alif-waṣla* was left out mainly after the one-letter particles of *li-*, *bi-* and *ka-*. However, of these three only the particle *li-* has never been in dispute. The particle *bi-* has survived in the Standard Text without the ensuing *alif* in all of the *basmalas*²⁵ (بِسْمِ اللَّهِ) of the Qur'ān, as well as in بِسْمِ in Sūras 11:41; 27:30 and 31. On the other hand, the *alif-waṣla* is written بِاسْمِ in Sūra 56:96; 69:51 and 96:1. In the manuscripts the dropping of the *alif-waṣla* following the particle *bi-* is quite common, e.g.:

Standard Text, Sūra: Verse			Variant writing in early manuscripts	
بِالْحُسْنَى	bi_'al_ḥusnay	53:31	53:31 D =	بلحسنى
بِالْحَقِّ	bi_'al_ḥaq'i	6:73	6:73 D =	بلحق
		7:89	7:89 D =	
		16:102	16:102 DH	
		34:48	34:48 D =	
		43:86	43:86 D ²⁶ =	
		45:6	45:6 D ²⁷ =	

²⁴ In this regard it is worth noting that in private letters written by Yemenis it is typical to find *alif-waṣla* for the particle *bi-*. This is a question of competence and not a rule, of course.

²⁵ The *bā* ' of the *Basmala* is usually written slightly elevated over the ensuing *sm*; teachers of Arabic explain this feature by saying that the higher *bā* ' includes the *alif* graphically (although left out in script!) of the following word "ism / name." In reality the story of the elevated *bā* ' is much simpler and has its foundation in the writing rules observed in the pre-Kufic and Kufic scripts. Even if there were no differentiation between consonants by diacritical dots, there was still a differentiation by height between letters, which meant different phonemes. In our case the *bā* ' had (and has) to be written higher (i.e. different) than the following *sm*, because the three elements of the *sm* are either written equally low, so that it is evident that they belong together and mean one letter – or the three elements are written in a regularly descending sequence, so that it is equally evident that they constitute one letter only.

²⁶ Originally the *alif* was written, but erased later.

²⁷ Originally the *alif* was written, but erased later.

بِالْحَلْقِ	bi_ʾl_ḥalqi	50:15	50:15 H =	بِالْحَلْقِ
بِالسَّحْلِ	bi_ʾl_sahlī	20:39	20:39 H =	بِالسَّحْلِ
بِالسَّحْلِ	bi_ʾl_ṣadli	16:69	16:69 D =	بِالسَّحْلِ
		16:90	16:90 DH =	

Not in the Standard Text at all, but in manuscripts the *alif-waṣla* following the particle ka- is left out, though rarely, e.g.:

كَالْعَلَمِ	ka_ʾl_ʾalʿla'mi	42:32	42:32 D =	كَالْعَلَمِ
كَاتِي	ka_ʾl_ʾatiy	16:92	16:92 DH =	كَاتِي
كَالْحِجْرَةِ	ka_ʾl_ḥiḡarati	2:74	2:74 D =	كَالْحِجْرَةِ

3.1.2.2 VERBS

In the Standard Text it is normal to find that the verbs of the eighth stem are introduced by the *alif-waṣla*, e.g.:

(102) لَیْنِی لَیْنِی la_ʾyini l_ʾaḡaḡḡta in StT 26:29;

however, if the verb is connected with a preposition, the Alif-Waṣla can be dropped, as in

(103) لَیْنِی لَیْنِی la_ʾaḡaḡḡta in StT 18:77,

but this feature is not unusual in the manuscripts, as in 13:16:

(104) اَفْتَحْذِمِ ʾla_fa_ʾaḡaḡḡtum in mss. CF, instead of
اَفْتَحْذِمِ ʾla_fa_ʾl_ʾaḡaḡḡtum in the Standard Text (Q 13:16).

3.2 In the middle of a word

3.2.1 Plene or defective writing of the alif

There is a group of nouns which evidently always have been written with an *alif*, both in manuscripts and in the Standard Text, viz. words like الناس or الناس. Perhaps these words were the starting point for the growing notion of the *alif* as a *mater lectionis* for the long /a:/.

In many cases there is no difference in meaning if the word is written defectively or *plene*, since in many passages the correct interpretation of the *rasm* is evident from the context (as well as the grammar of Arabic). This is true for the frequent double orthographies encountered in the Standard Text (as well as in the manuscripts): شَبَحَ or اعْتَابَ or اعْتَابَ, بَنَاتَ or بَنَاتَ, تَبَارَكَ or تَبَارَكَ, or شَبَحَ or شَبَحَ.

etc. It is not necessary to quote all of these variants in detail.

Sometimes, however, the insertion of an *alif* seems to have been an early attempt to dissociate two words which, in defective writing, look alike but whose meanings are different, like قَاهِر qāhīr and قَاهَر qāhhār or أَذْن uḡn and أَذْن āḡān.

In many cases, due to the absence of the appropriate context, the text can be read in several different ways according to exegetical needs or other concepts favored by the reading authority. Two examples may suffice to illustrate the variant readings of this kind.

While the *rasm* in the early manuscripts makes no difference between the singular or plural of أَبُوم in Sūra 12:68 and 12:94, but to read the plural أَبَاءُوم in StT 2:170; 5:104; 11:109; 36:6. Of course, the StT writing goes back to a defective version without the second *alif*, and thus was identical with the singular in the first orthographical stage. In the same way the context as well as the exegesis has to decide whether the singular or the plural is to be read in those early manuscripts which do not differentiate in script between إِنْش or مَنْزَل or مَنْزَل, كَيْل or كَيْل, صِفَاضِع or صِفَاضِع, رَجَال or رَجُل, الْجَبَل or الْجَبَل, أَنْاس or أَنْ.

The other example concerns the defective writing of the verb قَالَ as قَل, which is almost the normal orthography in the early manuscripts. Without going into the details, the decision to read the indicative “he said” or the imperative “say” has a bearing on the concept of the Qurʾān as the verbatim word of Allah: if most of the many passages introduced by the imperative “say” were originally reports that “he (who?) said,” this would foster the idea that the Qurʾān is in wide parts the collection of “logia,” of the sayings and deeds of certain but unnamed authorities.

3.2.2 Substitution of the alif by a yāʾ

When the *alif* had become solely associated with the /a/ sound it had to be changed into the adequate yāʾ; thus we find

(105) اَفْتَحْذِمِ ʾla_fa_ʾaḡaḡḡtum in mss. H instead of اَفْتَحْذِمِ ʾla_fa_ʾaḡaḡḡtum in StT 43:24, or

(106) اَفْتَحْذِمِ ʾla_fa_ʾaḡaḡḡtum in mss. DH instead of اَفْتَحْذِمِ ʾla_fa_ʾaḡaḡḡtum in StT 14:37.

In the next case, the word ʾulāʾi, the same change of concept has also taken place, but it is not visible in the *rasm*, which remains the same. Unlike in the Standard Text, in the manuscripts the final *alif* marks the short vowel:

(107) اُولَا ʾulwlaʾi in mss. CG, and اُولَا ʾulwlaʾi in StT 3:119.

However, more evidence is needed to clear up the relation between اُولَا and its extension اُولَا in view of the alternatives اُولَا or اُولَا mentioned by Wright/de Goeje in their grammar of Arabic.²⁸

²⁸ W. Wright/de Goeje, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. 2 vols., London: Cambridge University Press, re-issued 1962, 1:266ff.

3.3 At the end of a word

3.3.1 Final vowels

If, in early manuscripts, an *alif* was written at the end of a word, it was usually given up in the later orthography in favor of a *yā'* if the preceding vowel was an /i/, e.g.:

(108) يُحْيَا yuhay^al' (mss. AFK) instead of يُحْيِ in StT 18:16.

However, if the vowel before the *hamza* was a short /a/, no difference can be observed between the old manuscripts and the Standard Text:

- (109) يُنَاب yunab^al' (mss. DGK) and StT 53:36,
 (110) يُتَاهَا yustahza^alu (mss. CEGK) and StT 4:140,
 (111) يَتَاب yatabaw^alu (mss. FK) and StT 12:56,
 (112) نَتَاب natabaw^alu in StT 39:74,
 (113) زَامَا zama^aluⁿ (ms. K) and StT 9:120.

The same is true if the vowel before the final *alif* is a long /u:/, as in

- (114) تَانُو tanuw^ulu (mss. GK) and StT 28:76, or
 (115) تَابُو tabuw^ula (mss. CGK) and StT 5:29.

The exception to this rule is an *alif* which could remain as part of the *rasm* because it was possible to define it as the symbol for the indefinite accusative. As an example we take

- (116) سَوَا in the early mss. ACDFH; in the Standard Text we have either
 سُوْء in 2:49 or سُوْء in 20:22 on the one hand, or
 سُوْءَا in 13:11 on the other. Similar is
 (117) سَوَاه in ms. H, which became سُوْءَا in the Standard Text.

It is very likely that سُوْءَا is the same as the word سُوْء with a feminine ending, but not an altogether different word.

The substitution of an archaic *alif* by a *yā'* (to become the bearer of a *hamza* later on) can also be observed in

- (118) سِيَاه ms. A (Q 17:38), qualified by Jeffery/Mendelsohn as "probably by scribal error"²⁹ – which it certainly is not! In the Standard Text it is interpreted as

سَيِّئَةً in 42:48, or, by a different concept, as
 سَيِّئُهُ in 17:38.

Here, the interpretation of the *rasm* even after the *alif* had been changed into the second *yā'* went in two different directions in the Standard Text. Since the diacritic dots upon the final *hā'* are a later innovation both readings emanate from an identical *rasm*, visible in mss. K and D: while in one version (Q 42:48) the final *hā'* was read as the feminine ending of *tā' marbūṭa*, in the other reading (Q 17:38) the possessive suffix of the third person singular was preferred. The situation is reflected in the readings of the word by the old authorities: in Sūra 42:48 the context does not allow the reading with a suffix, and thus no variant reading is reported. However, in 17:38 the reading سَيِّئُهُ is the one favored in the Standard Text according to Ḥafṣ 'an 'Aṣim, while سَيِّئَةً sayyi'atan is read by Ibn Kathīr, Nāfi', Abū 'Amr and Abū Ja'far.³⁰

3.3.2 Final vowel or accusative ending?

An earlier final *alif* was given up altogether in the Standard Text:

- (119) لَوْلُوْا luwluw^ulu or luwluw^u in mss. DGK, for
 لَوْلُو luwluw^u in StT 52:24 and
 (120) لِلْوَلُو 'l_iluwluw^uli or 'l_iluwluw^uli in mss. GK, for
 لِلْوَلُو 'l_iluwluw^ui in StT 56:23.

Evidently the *alif* was understood to be a scribal error when its old value of a glottal stop had ceased to be normal, and thus it could be taken out of the *rasm*. However, in the two verses 22:23 and 35:33 the primordial final *alif* was not substituted by a *hamza*, but it remained unchanged in the Standard Text:

- (121) $\text{أَسَاوِرٌ مِّنْ ذَّهَبٍ وَلَوْلَا}$ asāwira min dhahabīn wa-lu'lu'an

This *alif* was retained because it could be interpreted as a "*tamyīz*" accusative, although this interpretation hardly matches the evident statement of the sentence. Thus, some translators ignore this accusative (rightly!) such as Ūnal, Hilālī or Abdullah Yusuf Ali: "(The believers in paradise will be) adorned therein with armbands/bracelets of gold and pearls . . .". In order to indicate the putative refinement of the Arabic construction other translators helped themselves by putting a comma or inserting "with" before mentioning the pearls. Thus, the translation of Sheikh says ". . . bracelets of gold, and pearls . . ."; Bell has ". . . bracelets of gold and with pearls . . .", and Pickthall ". . . armlets of gold, and pearls . . .". Of course, and in the light of the preceding remarks, the *alif* is not an

29 A. Jeffery and I. Mendelsohn, "The Orthography of the Samarqand Qur'ān Codex," *JAOS* 62, 1942, (175–95) 191.

30 *Mu'jam al-qir'āt al-Qur'āniyya* (henceforth *MQQ*), ed. 'Abd al-'Āl Mukarram and Aḥmad 'Umar, Kuwait: Dhāt al-Salāsīl, 1402/1982–1405/1985, # 4539.

accusative, but has the function of the (later) *hamza*, and is to be read as *lu'lu'in*, parallel to *dhababin!*

This case is not unique, as we learn from variant readings of the same *rasm* by different readers. While the Standard Text (Q 7:190) in the reading of Ḥafṣ has

(122) شُرَكَاءُ šurakaJ'a "partners",

Nāfi', Shu'ba and Abū Ja'far³¹ read

شِرْكًا širkaJ'a "idolatry";

and while the StT in Sūra 8:66 has

(123) ضَعْفًا ḍaḥfaJ'a "weakness",

Abū Ja'far reads

دُفُفًا ḍuḥfaJ'a "weak (people)."

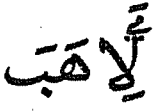
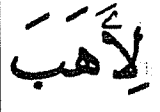

3.3.3 Correcting the pronunciation of the alif

Until the present I have traced only one example of this kind of substitution as a parallel to the common phenomena mentioned above in sections 1.3.3 and 2.3.3. While the Standard Text writes

(124) لَأَهَبَ in 19:19,

the *riwāyas* of Warsh 'an Nāfi' as well as of al-Dūrī 'an Abī 'Amr do not show a different *rasm*, but by placing a superscript little *yā* on top of the *alif* they change the subject from the first person (*li-ahaba*) into the third person, reading *li-yahaba*.

The philological difference is small, but the theological implication seems to have induced the variant reading: instead of "He [i.e. Our spirit (Gabriel), GRP] said: 'I am the messenger of thy Lord, that I may give thee a boy, pure.'" [Bell], now the meaning is theologically correct "... (announcing) that He will give thee ..."

Warsh 'an Nāfi', Q 19:19		al-Dūrī 'an Abī 'Amr, Q 19:18
		
Maghribī version, # 9 in Bibliography 4.2.	Naskhī version, # 11 in Bibliography 4.2	Naskhī, # 14 in Bibliography 4.2

31 Cf. *MQQ* and Khārūf; see Bibliography 4.3.

In contrast to the Naskhī script, in the Maghribī script tradition the right arm of the *lām-alif* is the *alif*, bearing the superscript *yā*.

3.3.4 "Amphibious" alif

The Arabic script does not mark the end of a word by a blank space or otherwise by a word divider. Therefore a variant interpretation concerning the word borders cannot be gained from the *rasm* of an old manuscript but only by discovering different readings which presuppose an identical *rasm*. In the case of the *alif* the different interpretation of the word border can be observed in these examples:

(125) عِنْدَ اللَّهِ šinda 'llahi "before Allah" in StT 33:69 is also read
عَبْدًا لِّهِ šabdaJ'a li-l'ahi "as a servant of Allāh,"³² or
عَبْدُ اللَّهِ šabdu 'll'ahi "the servant of Allāh."³³

(126) أَنْصَارَ آيَةٍ JanṣaJ'a li-l'ahi "helpers of Allah" in StT 61:14 is also read
أَنْصَارًا لِّهِ JanṣaJ'a li-l'ahi "as helpers of Allāh."³⁴

(127) وَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا lidaJ'adbara "when it withdraws" in StT 74:33 is also read
إِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا lidaJ'adbara "when it withdraws,"³⁵ or
إِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا lidaJ'adbara "when it withdraws."³⁶

Although the content of the verse remains practically the same, there is an uncertainty whether the first or the fourth verbal stem is meant. This is underlined by the fact that, in the Standard Text, the following verse 74:34 is spelled differently, with two *alifs* following each other: وَالصَّبْحُ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ.

3.4 Ortho-epic variants of the alif

3.4.1 Omission of an alif before the article al-

There are 150 occurrences of *alif* in the Qur'ān which are normally followed by the article *al-*. In this situation any vowel preceding the article has to be shortened in order to produce a closed syllable, together with the article to follow, as in *yā-ayyuhā 'l-nāsu*, which is to be read as /ja: ʔaj:uħa n'a:su/. As there are only three verses in which the ending -hā is written defectively, it is doubtful whether these belong to the group of ortho-epic variants (cf. above the shortening of the *wāw* and the *yā* in the same constellation, 1.3.1 and 2.3.1), but for the moment there is no better explanation to hand:

32 See *MQQ*, # 7032/1.

33 See *MQQ* # 7032/2.

34 See *MQQ* # 9224.

35 See *MQQ* # 9640/1.

36 See *MQQ* # 9640/2.

- (128 a) أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ 'lay^uha 'lī_ in StT 24:31 and in mss. GK;
 (128 b) يَتَأْتِيهِ السَّاجِدُ ya'~_lay^uha 'lī_ in StT 43:49 and in mss. DHJK;
 (128 c) أَيُّهُ الْفُقَرَاءُ 'lay^uha 'lī_ in StT 55:31 and in mss. BGK.

Moreover, it is amazing that in all of the old manuscripts consulted the *rasm* of the three words is written exactly like the Standard Text, without any *plene* variant.

3.4.2 Plene writing of a short /a/ fatha to ensure (a long?) vocalic rhyme

Two different cases can be observed. On the one hand a group in Sūra 33 and 76, where the /a/ of the accusative is written *plene* because the word is in a sequence of vocalic rhymes at the end of or within a verse:

- (129 a) اَلطُّنُونُ 'lī_~unuwnal in Standard Text 33:10,
 (129 b) اَلرَّشْوَلُ 'lī_~asuwlal in StT 33:66,
 (129 c) اَلسَّيْلُ 'lī_~abiylal in StT 33:67,
 (129 d) سَلِيلًا salā'silal in StT 76:4,
 (129 e) قَوَارِيرًا qawa'lriyral in StT 76:15, 16.

In (129 d) and (129 e) the final *alif* can also be understood to be the accusative ending of a normal triptote noun in pausal pronunciation – which would contradict the later grammar of Classical Arabic, where broken plurals are considered to be diptote nouns.

On the other hand, the name of the ancient tribal group of the Thamūd is diptote according to the grammar of CA, but there can be no doubt that the name is triptote in the Qur'ān, not different from the ancient tribal group of 'Ād:

- (130 a) وَعَاثَا وَثَمُونَا in StT 25:38,
 (130 b) وَعَاثَا وَثَمُونَا in StT 29:38 and
 (130 c) أَهْلَكَ عَاثَا الْأَوَّلَى (50) وَثَمُونَا in StT 53:50–51,
 (130 d) إِذْ تَعُوذُونَ كَفَرُوا in StT 11:68.

With the small circle above the *alif* of تَعُوذُونَ, the editors of the Standard Text indicate that this letter is “superfluous”, like the *alif* in كَفَرُوا.

3.4.3 Plene writing of a short /a/ before a Hamza in the Standard Text

Among the recitation rules of the Qur'ān is the lengthening of any vowel before a glottal stop. When the idea as well as its sign “*hamza*” was not yet invented, the *alif* alone could be used to carry out the function of the later *hamza*.

The most prominent group of examples for the *plene* writing of a short /a/ are the verses which start with “I swear . . . / lā 'uqsimu / la 'juqsimu / لَا أُقْسِمُ . . .” (Q 56:75; 69:38; 70:40; 81:15; 84:16; 90:1). Although there can be no doubt that

the formula introduces a positive oath, there has been much irritation about the explanation of the negation lā, and even Arne Ambros in his *Dictionary* (p. 329) qualifies the lā as a “particle of un(certain) function before 'uqsimu ‘I swear’”. In my view the لā is simply the *plene* writing of the assertive particle لā-. One additional argument in favor of this view is the resumption of the particle la- in some of the verses which follow after the passage of لَا أُقْسِمُ:

- (131) 56:75, 76: ... وَإِنَّ لَقَسْمٌ فَلَا أُقْسِمُ
 69:38, 40: ... إِنَّ لَقَوْلٌ فَلَا أُقْسِمُ
 81:15, 19: ... إِنَّ لَقَوْلٌ فَلَا أُقْسِمُ
 84:16, 19: ... لَنَرَكُمُ فَلَا أُقْسِمُ
 90:1, 4: ... لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا فَلَا أُقْسِمُ

None of the manuscripts consulted shows a variant without the second *alif* like لَا أُقْسِمُ, nor do any of the printed editions consulted (# 1–19, see Bibliography 4.2), which are basically manuscripts.

Sūra	فَلَا أُقْسِمُ	فَلَا أُقْسِمُ	فَلَا أُقْسِمُ	فَلَا أُقْسِمُ	فَلَا أُقْسِمُ	فَلَا أُقْسِمُ
81:15	StT	# 8	# 7	# 9	# 10	# 1
						# 18

Bergsträsser and Pretzl have already observed that there are two more examples of this kind in the Qur'ān,³⁷ viz.

Standard Text		= <i>rasm</i> like Standard Text		variant writing		
Sūra: Verse	Hafṣ 'an 'Aṣim	in the old manuscripts	in the printed editions #	(Arabic)	in the old manuscripts	in the printed editions #

10:16	لَا أَزْنَعُكُمْ	= CFGK	= 1–11, 14–19	لَا ذَرِيْعَكُمْ		= 12, 13
27:21	لَا أَذْبَحُكُمْ	= K	= 1–19	لَا ذَبْحَهُ		none

At the same place Bergsträsser quotes al-Naysābūrī that he saw, with an additional *alif*,

2:221	وَلَا مَنَّةُ	= K	= 1–19	وَلَا مَامِد	in a Damascene ms.
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³⁷ GdQ3, 48, n. 2.

However, neither the manuscripts consulted nor the printed editions confirm this, although the orthography would not be "wrong" in the light of the cases listed below.

I propose to look at the phenomenon of a *plene* writing before a following *hamza* on a larger scale, because there are similar cases of allegedly "otiose" *alifs* in early manuscripts or in actual Qur'ān editions other than the Standard Text from Cairo/Medina, apart from the *lā 'uqsimu* verses mentioned above.

Standard Text		= <i>rasm</i> like Standard Text		variant writing		
Sūra: Verse	Hafṣ 'an 'Aṣim	in the old manuscripts	in the printed editions	(Arabic)	in the old manuscripts	in the printed editions
3:158	لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ		= 5, 9–13, 15–19	... لا إله = ACK		= 1–4, 6–8, 14
3:167	لَا تَقْسِمُ	= K	= 5, 7–19	لا تقيسكم = ACG		= 1–4, 6
4:119	لَا مَرِيئَ لَهُمْ	= CK	= 1–19	لا امرئهم = G		none
4:119	لَا مَرِيئَ لَهُمْ	= CK	= 1–19	لا امرئهم = G		none
4:119	لَا مَرِيئَ لَهُمْ	= CK	= 1–19	لا امرئهم = G		none
5:12	لَا تَدْخُلَنَّهُمْ	= GK	= 1–19	لا ادخلنهم = C		none
5:27	لَا تَقْتُلَنَّكَ	= GHK	= 1–19	لا اقتلنك = C		none
9:47	لَا وَضِعُوا		= 5, 9–13, 15–17	لا اوضعوا = FK		= 1–4, 6–8, 14, 18, 19
11:87	لَا نَتَّ	= FK	= 1–19	لا انت = A ³⁸		none
14:7	لَا زِيْدَنَّكُمْ	= CFK	= 1–19	لا زيدنكم = D ³⁹		none
20:71	لَا مَوْلِيَكُمْ	= FHK	= 5, 9–11, 14, 18, 19	لا مولىكم		= 1–4, 6–8

38 Jeffery/Mendelsohn write erroneously: "... لا انت is mistakenly written لا انت. Doubtless a scribal error." "Orthography", 190.

39 The additional *alif* was inserted later. As the variant is not common, but rather seems to be a singular amendment, it is legitimate to speculate that the one who made this "correction" did it because he had another standard in his mind ("ortho-epical"), or because he inserted the *alif* because of a different manuscript original which he copied and believed to be more authentic.

26:49	لَا مَوْلِيَكُمْ	= GK	= 2 ⁴⁰ , 5, 9–11, 14, 18, 19	لا مولىكم		= 1, 3, 4, 6–8
28:38	لَا طَائِفَةَ	= K	= 1–19	لا طائفه	= G	none
37:68	لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الْيَقِينُ		= 5, 9–13, 15–19	... لا إله = AGK		= 1–4, 6–8, 14
59:13	لَا نَنْتَهِمُ		= 7–13, 15–19	لا انتهم = K		= 1, 2, 3 ⁴¹ , 4, 5 ⁴² , 6 ⁴³ , 14

3.4.4 Conclusions drawn from the ortho-epic lengthening of the short /a/

It has always been clear to the Muslim exegetes that the *لَا* in these verses does not mean a negation but an affirmation of the following oath. Although they qualify the *alif*, rightly, to be "superfluous/*zā'ida*" they nevertheless retained it in script because it also evokes the prohibition "no!" In line with this association an invisible question has been imagined to introduce the verse, such as, "Would you perhaps think that I forget my promises?" which could then be answered by an emphatic "Nay! I swear..." Evidently, in order to allow for this secondary exegesis of the wording, the original orthography has not been "modernized" as have the cases of *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ*, etc. (see above). Of course, this second interpretation is not a philological one but an additional exegesis of the graphical appearance. However, the correct argument that the *alif* is superfluous in these cases is not explained by the grammarians; it is, in fact, ortho-epic or purely phonetic!

Most of the German translations follow this path ("Nein doch! Ich schwöre bei..." in Paret's translation, which follows Bergsträsser's 1914 *Verneinungs- und Fragepartikeln*). In his English translation Bell even adheres to the negation ("I swear not by the Lord of...") although verses 56:75–76 make it evident that an oath is intended: "So I swear by the setting of the stars. * And verily that is indeed a great oath, if you but know" (in the translation of al-Hilālī).

It is likely that a careful examination of the Qur'ānic text will show that there are more examples of the ortho-epic *alif* than are listed above. This different interpretation would not always produce a totally different meaning, but it could help to achieve a better understanding of the text, as in the case of Sūra 36:22:

وَمَا يَلَاغِيكَ أَغْيَدُ الَّذِي فُطِّرَنِي وَآلَيْتَنِي جَمُودًا

40 *Wāw* erased later.

41 The second *alif* has been deleted; however, the space left is still visible.

42 The second *alif* has been deleted; however, the space left is still visible.

43 The second *alif* has been deleted; however, the space left is still visible.

In the traditional interpretation the لا is turned positively by formulating a rhetorical question: "And why should I *not* worship Him (Allāh alone) Who has created me . . ." (transl. Hilālī). In his commentary *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr* al-Shawkānī explains: "That means: Which obstacle from my side prevents me from worshipping the One who created me?"⁴⁴

On the other hand, if we regard the لا to be the affirmative preposition la- written *plene* before the *hamza* of اَعْبُدُ, the sentence could mean: "How then! I *do* worship Him Who has created me . . ." As a proof of the possibility of a different interpretation we can adduce that in the Samarqand *muṣḥaf* (A) in this verse the "لا" is mistakenly written لا, as Jeffery comments.⁴⁵ But, since Jeffery's judgments ("mistakenly," "erroneously," etc.) are not always substantiated – since the same "errors" are found in comparable manuscripts – we are entitled to rather ask ourselves whether the concept of the scribe makes sense, too, and what may have induced him to write "his" variant, even if no other traditional variant of this kind is reported. In our case, i.e. by the use of لا instead of لا, the translation would be: "I have no choice *but* to worship Him Who has created me . . ." Thus, the meaning of the sentence is quite the same, although the concept is different.

However, the ortho-epic *alif* may open the way for an altogether new interpretation in other passages. An example of this kind is *al-Kāfirūn* (109) which is usually understood in a negative way:

- (1) Say: O ye that reject Faith! (2) I worship not that which ye worship, (3) Nor will ye worship that which I worship. (4) And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship, (5) Nor will ye worship that which I worship. (6) To you be your Way, and to me mine.

[Trans. Yusuf Ali]

According to Islamic tradition this Sūra is one of the earliest revelations in Mecca, which would mean that the addressee ("Say [Muḥammad?]:") is ordered to give up any hope of gaining the unbelievers to his cause. Later on, when the new religion had been well established and had taken the offensive, the last verse would have seemed to be an appeal for co-existence, so that it was claimed to be "abrogated" by the so-called "sword verse" (Q 9:5).⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the actual *sitz im leben* of this Sūra is explained in an anonymous semi-official Shi'ite Qur'ān commentary in this way: "This is a good example for all Muslims that under no conditions should they collude with the enemies of Islam against the basis of the religion, and if it happens that

disbelievers ask them to follow such suggestions they should make them totally hopeless."⁴⁷

A modern Sunni commentator in the USA claims that "This Sūra was not revealed to preach religious tolerance as some people of today seem to think, but it was revealed in order to exonerate the Muslims from the disbelievers' religion . . .; to express their total disgust and unconcern with them; to tell them that Islam and Kufr (unbelief) had nothing in common . . . Although it was initially addressed to the disbelieving Quraysh in response to their proposals of compromise, it is not confined to them only. Having made it a part of the Qur'ān, Allah gave the Muslims the eternal teaching, stating that they should exonerate themselves by word and deed from the creed of Kufr (disbelief), wherever and in whatever form it may be . . ."⁴⁸

الكافرون

- قُلْ يَتَّبِعُوا آلَ الْكَافِرِينَ (1) لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (2) وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ (3)
وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ لِّمَا تَعْبُدُونَ (4) لَكُمْ يَسْأَلُكُمْ فِي دِينِكُمْ (5) وَلَكُمْ يَسْأَلُكُمْ فِي دِينِكُمْ (6)

In view of the fact that all four *alifs* of the negation لا can be understood as ortho-epic before the following words which begin with a *hamza*, a much more conciliatory interpretation of the text becomes possible by redefining the negation into a positive assertion:

- (1) Say: O you ungrateful!⁴⁹ (2) I do worship that which you worship, (3) and you do worship what I worship, (4) and I shall verily worship that which you are worshipping, (5) and you will verily worship that which I worship! (6) (However,) yours is your Dīn, and my Dīn is mine!

The positive turn of Sūra 109 is backed by verse 46 of Sūra 29, which is also from Meccan times, according to Muslim tradition. In it the adherents of Muḥammad are admonished that their god and the god of the People of the Book is the same:

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَىٰ آخِرَتِهِمْ هِيَ أَخْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَهُنَا وَإِلَهُكُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

44 Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr*, Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1421/2000, 1466.

45 Jeffery & Mendelsohn, "Orthography," 193a.

46 D.S. Powers, "The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa-mansūkhuhu*," in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, (117–38), see appendix A and B (p. 137f).

47 *An Enlightening Commentary into The Light of the Holy Qur'an*, by a group of Muslim scholars, ed. Somaiyah Berrigan, tran. Abbas Sadr-'Āmelī, Isfahan: Amir-al-Mo'mineen Ali Library, 1994 AD / 1373 / 1415 AH, 2:266.

48 *English Translation of the Meaning of al-Qur'an. The Guidance for Mankind*, by Muḥammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik. Houston, Texas: The Institute of Islamic Knowledge, 2006, 887.

49 The meaning of *kāfir* in the Qur'ān is either "infidel" or "ungrateful" – with lethal consequences for those who are accused to be "infidels."

In M.F. Malik's translation the verse reads: "Do not argue with the People of the Book except in good manner – except with those who are wicked among them – and say: 'We believe in that which is sent down to us and that which is sent down to you; our God and your God is the same one God (*Allah*), to him we submit as Muslims.'"

There is even a parallel expression in Sūra 42:15, equating the Dīn of Sūra 109:6 with "a 'māl ([religious] deeds)":

وَأَمْرٌ تُلَاَعْدِلُ بَيْنَكُمْ اللَّهُمَّ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ لَنَا أَعْمَالٌ وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالٌ
لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ اللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

In the translation of Hilālī/Khān it reads: "... and I am commanded to do justice to you. Allāh is our Lord and your Lord. For us our deeds and for you your deeds. There is no dispute between us and you. Allāh will assemble us (all), and to Him is the final return." Similar, though less explicit verses that "our God and your God is the same one God" are 23:32, 37:4, 41:6, 43:84, 52:43 and 114:3.

However, I have to add that my argument is that of a non-Muslim orientalist; I feel no obligation to the strata of medieval exegesis which have been laid over the Qur'ānic text. Against innovation ("*bid'a*") in the interpretation of the Qur'ān the scholars have erected the unsurmountable wall of a general "consensus (*ijmā'*)" (of Muslim scholars), founded on Sūra 4:115 and on the Prophet's saying that his community will not unite in an error. Thus, the well-established negative interpretation of Sūra 109:1–5 stresses the incompatibility of the Muslims' religion with that of the People of the Book. Consequently, as the last verse (Q 109:6) sounds conciliatory it had therefore to be regarded as abrogated by the "sword verse" (Q 9:5). And again, unfortunately, both of the (conciliatory) verses 29:46 or 42:15 are considered to be abrogated by the belligerent verse 9:29.⁵⁰

Fight those people of the Book (Jews and Christians) who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, do not refrain from what has been prohibited by Allah and his Rasool and do not embrace the religion of truth (Al-Islam), until they pay Jizyah (protection tax) with their own hands and feel themselves subdued.

(trans. M.F. Malik)

50 According to Ibn Salāma (d. 410/1020), see D.S. Powers, "The Exegetical Genre," 137. Cf. the edition and French translation of the Qur'ān by Sami Awad Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh: *al-Qur'ān al-karīm / Le Coran: Texte arabe et traduction française par ordre chronologique selon l'Azhar avec renvoi aux variantes, aux abrogations et aux écrits juifs et chrétiens*. Vevey: L'Aire 2008. On pages 21–23 ("Abrogation dans le Coran") Abu-Sahlieh describes the problem and the sources he uses for the identification of abrogated verses and abrogating verses.

4 Bibliography

4.1 Manuscripts

Early manuscripts

The capital letters A to K are abbreviations for the manuscripts which have been used in order to set up the tables in sections 2.1, 3.1.2 and 3.4.3.

A = Samarqand [Kūfī style]

(I use a small photocopy of the facsimile edition made by Pissareff, but due to the many wrong emendations in it the information concerning the orthographic variants are gained only from the article of A. Jefferey and I. Mendelsohn, see Bibliography 4.3)

C = Paris, BN 328 (a) [Hijāzī style]

Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte Qoranique. I. Les manuscrits de style ḥiǧāzī. Éd. François Déroche et Sergio Noja Nosedá. Volume 1. Le manuscrit arabe 328 (a) de la Bibliothèque nationale de France. Les 1998. (ISBN 88-87281-00-9)

D = Ṣan'a', DAM 01-28.1 [Hijāzī style]

Black and white microfilm.

E1 = Birmingham, Mingana Collection, Cat. 2 = # 1572 [Hijāzī style]

(Since July 8, 2009 the "Virtual Manuscript Room" at the University of Birmingham has put some 70 manuscripts from the Mingana collection online, with excellent quality. This manuscript can be seen at <http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Islamic_Arabic_1572> (accessed February 3, 2011).

F = London, BL Or. 2165 [Hijāzī style]

Sources de la transmission manuscrite du texte Qoranique. I. Les manuscrits de style ḥiǧāzī. Éd. F. Déroche and S.M. Nosedá. Volume 2, tome I. Le manuscrit Or. 2165 (f. 1 à 61) de la British Library. Les 2001 (ISBN 88-87281-01-7)

G = St. Petersburg, E 20 [Hijāzī style]

The Qur'ān of 'Uthmān (St. Petersburg, Katta-Langar, Bukhara, Tashkent). Vol. I. Ed. Ed. Rezvan. St. Petersburg: Russian Academy of Sciences / Centre for

Oriental Studies, 2004. [Weak black and white "facsimile" edition together with useful CD in colour]

H = **Şan 'ā', DAM 01–29.1** [Hijāzī style]

Black and white microfilm.

J = **Şan 'ā', DAM 01–25.1** [Hijāzī style]

Black and white microfilm.

K = **İstanbul, Topkapı "Muşhaf 'Uthmān"** [Kūfī style]

Al-Muşhaf al-Sharif. Attributed to 'Uthmān bin 'Affān (The copy at the Topkapı Palace Museum). Prepared for publication by Dr. T. Altikulaç. Istanbul: IRCICA Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture 1428 / 2007.

4.2 Recently printed Qur'ān editions

The numbers 1 to 19 are abbreviations for the editions used for setting up the tables in sections 1.3.2, 2.3.2, 2.4, and 3.4.3. Catalogue numbers such as <Ar+En 40– Yusuf Ali 01.1> are my own abbreviations for the edition in question.

As the Standard Text (StT = "reading" of Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim) for reference and for comparison we take the official "King Fahd" or "Medina" Muşhaf which contains the same orthography as the "Cairo" or "Fu'ād" Muşhafs. It is written in a clear Naskhī script by the calligrapher 'Uthmān Ṭaha:

<Ar 16/2– Fahd 15.1> al-Madīna 1415/1994–5

al-Qur'ān al-karīm, Muşhaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya. Madīna: Mujamma' al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā'at al-Muşhaf al-Sharīf, 1415/1994–5.

Indian tradition

1 = <Ar+En 40– Yusuf Ali 01.1> **Lahore** ³1938

The Holy Quran. Text, Translation and Commentary. Trans. A.Y. Ali. Cambridge, MA: Hafner Publishing Company, 1946.

2 = <Ar+Ge 40– Ahmadiyya 01.1> **Frankfurt** ⁷2006

Der Heilige Qurān. Hrsg. unter der Leitung von Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Imam und Oberhaupt der Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat. Frankfurt: Verlag Der Islam 2006.

3 = <Ar+Ge 40– Denffer 01.1> **München** ⁴1997

Der Koran. Die heilige Schrift des Islam in deutscher Übertragung, mit Erläuterungen nach den Kommentaren von Dschalalain, Tabari und anderen hervorragenden klassischen Koranalegeern. Munich: Islamisches Zentrum München, 1997.

4 = <Ar+En 40– Sheikh 01.1> **Lahore** ³2004

Jamal-ul-Qur'an. [Translation from Arabic into Urdu] By Justice Pir Muhammad Karam Shah Al-Azhari (R.A.). English translation [from Urdu!] by Prof. Anis Ahmad Sheikh. Lahore, Karachi: Zia-ul-Qur'an Publications.

5 = <Ar 40– Ma'rifa 13.1> **Damascus** ¹2004

al-Qur'ān al-karīm / Holly [sic] Qur'an, Color coded. *Muşhaf al-tajwīd* / Tajweed Qur'an. Ed. Subhi Taha. Damascus: Dar-Al-Ma'rifa, 2004, (see <www.easyquran.com>, accessed February 3, 2011).

6 = <Ar 40– Idara 13.1> **New Delhi** 2004

Al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm / Colour Coded Tajweed Rules With Colour Coded Manzils. New Delhi: Idara Isha'at-e-Diniyat (P) Ltd., 2004, see <www.islamic-books.com>.

riwāyat *Qālūn 'an Nāfi'*

7 <Ar 2– Libiyā 15.1> **Tripoli/Şan 'ā'** 1392⁵¹/1983

Muşhaf sharīf bi-riwāyat al-imām Qālūn bi-l-rasm al-'Uthmānī. Şan 'ā' (Ṭarābulus?): Maktabat al-Yaman al-Kubrā, 1392/1983 [The remark about the Maktabat al-Yaman al-Kubrā is misleading because the Muşhaf is definitely a Libyan one and was sanctioned by Colonel Mu'ammār al-Qadhafī]

8 <Ar 2– Ma'rifa 15.1> **Damascus** 1427

Al-Qur'ān al-karīm, riwāyat Qālūn 'an Nāfi', khaṭṭa ḥurūf kalimātihi bi-l-rasm al-'Uthmānī al-khaṭṭāt 'Uthmān Ṭaha, jawwada ḥurūfahu ... Şubḥī Ṭaha. Damascus: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1427.

riwāyat *Warsh 'an Nāfi'*

9 <Ar 3– Maghribī 11.1> **Tūnis n.y.** (ca 2000)

51 "... of the year 1392 after the death of the Prophet ..." which is the Libyan dating, initiated by Colonel Mu'ammār al-Qadhafī, not "after the Hijrah"!

Al-rub' al-awwal min al-Qur'an al-'azim 'alā riwāyat al-imām Warsh. Tūnis: Maktabat al-Manār, n.y. (c. 2000).

10 <Ar 3- Maghribī 15.1> Cairo 1383 / 1964

al-Qur'an al-karīm . . . ṭubi'a bi-l-rasm al-'Uthmānī 'alā riwāyat al-imām Warsh, bi-l-khaṭṭ al-maghribī al-tūnisī al-jazā'irī al-ifriqī al-muwahḥad, wiṣṣan li-l-taṣmīm alladhī waḍa'ahu Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥman Muḥammad, wa-aqarra ṣiḥḥatahu Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah bi-l-Azhar / al-rub' al-awwal . . . [four fourths with extra page counting; in one vol.]. Cairo: Dār al-Muṣḥaf, 1383/1964.

11 <Ar 3- Ma'rifa 15.1> Damascus 1425

al-Qur'an al-karīm bi-l-rasm al-'Uthmānī, nāla sharaf kitābatihī al-khaṭṭā' 'Uthmān Ṭaha, riwāyat Warsh 'an Nāfi'. Damascus: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1425.

riwāyat al-Bazzī / Qunbul 'an Ibn Kathīr

12 <Ar 5- Alqeraat 15.1> Bonn 1429/2008

Al-Qur'an al-karīm, riwāyat al-Bazzī 'an al-imām Ibn Kathīr al-Makkī. Bonn: Dar-Qeraat, 1429/2008.

13 <Ar 7- Alqeraat 15.1> Bonn 1429/2008

Al-Qur'an al-karīm, riwāyat Qunbul 'an al-imām Ibn Kathīr al-Makkī. Bonn: Dar-Qeraat 1429, 2008.

riwāyat al-Dūrī 'an Abū 'Amr

14 <Ar 9- Ma'rifa 15.1> Damascus 1420

al-Qur'an al-karīm, riwāyat al-Dūrī 'an Abī 'Amr. al-Khaṭṭā' 'Uthmān Ṭaha. Damascus: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1420.

riwāyat Ḥaṣṣ 'an 'Āṣim

15 <Ar 16/4- Bayḍūn 15.1> Beirut 1977

Muṣḥaf al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharīfayn bi-l-rasm al-'Uthmānī ṭubi'a bi-mūjab qarār min Dār al-Fatwā al-Lubnāniyya raqm 22 li-sanat 1977 m . . . i'tanā bi-ṭab'ihī wa-nashrihi Muḥammad 'Alī Bayḍūn. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya 1977.

16 <Ar 16/4- Muṣḥaf 15.1> Damascus 1979

Qur'an karīm riwāyat Ḥaṣṣ 'an 'Āṣim bi-l-rasm al-'Uthmānī. Damascus: Dār al-Muṣḥaf, 1979.

riwāyat Khalaf 'an Ḥamzah

17 <Ar 18- Ma'rifa 15.1> Damascus 1428/2008

al-Qur'an al-karīm wa-rattili l-Qur'āna tartīlan riwāyat Khalaf 'an Ḥamza, min tarīq al-Shāṭibiyya. Damascus: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1428/2008.

Ottoman

18 <Ar 16/3- 15.1 Özçay 15.1> İstanbul / 1998

al-Qur'an al-karīm. İstanbul: Tenvir Neşriyat, Seçil Ofset, 1998.

19 <Ar 16/3- Āmidī 15.2> İstanbul 1394/1974

(Qur'an) -İstanbul: Maṭba'at Renkler, 1394/1974 [Original calligraphy by Ḥamid al-Āmidī (1891-1982 AD)].

Transcription table

x = any letter of the *rasm*, as well as short vowels are written on the line; all other vocalization signs are transcribed in superscript.

	shadda	madda	any alif	alif-waṣla	hamza alone	hamza on carrier			sukūn and short vowel			
Arabic	◌ّ	◌ّ◌	ا	آ	ء	أ	إ	و	ئ	◌◌◌◌	◌◌◌◌	◌◌◌◌
graphemic	x [*]	-	l	l	']	w	y	x'	a	u	i
phonemic	xx	no sign	- / ' /	'	'	'	'	'	no sign	a	u	i
traditional	xx	no sign	no sign	- / ' /	' / ' / or no sign in initial position				no sign	a	u	i

	Writing long vowels									alif zā'ida; short vowels <i>plene</i> , i.e. graphic only; <i>mater lectionis</i>		
	<i>plene</i>			defectively			defectively and orthoepical length					
Arabic	اَ	وُ	يَ	أَ	وُ	يُ	آَ	ؤُ	يَ	إِ	وِ	يِ
graphemic	a]	uw	iy	a'	u'	iy	a''	u''	iy]	w	y
phonemic	ā	ū	ī	ā	ū	ī	ā	ū	ī	ˈ	w	y
traditional	ā, â	ū, û	ī, î	ā, â	ū, û	ī, î	ā, â	ū, û	ī, î	a, â, â	u	i

	alif-madda (Class. Ar.)	/a:/ in the Standard Text: alif-madda, dagger alif, alif-wāw, or alif-yā'				tanwīn				
						fem.	masc.			
Arabic	آ=أ	آء	أَ	وْ	يْ	أَ	إِ	أَء	أُ	ِ
graphemic	'a'	'a'	a'	aw	ay	-ā ⁿ	-al ⁿ	-al'a ⁿ	-u ⁿ	-i ⁿ
phonemic	'ā	'ā	ā / ā	ā	ā	-ta ⁿ	-a ⁿ	-ā'a ⁿ	-u ⁿ	-i ⁿ
traditional	ā / 'ā	ā			ā / ā	-tan	-an	-un	-in	

	Assimilation if expressed in Arabic script	'ayn	defective nūn	tā' marbūṭa		qamari-article	shamsi-article
Arabic		ع	نْ	هَ	ةَ	القَمَرُ	الشَّمْسُ
graphemic	x ⁿ	ʿ	x ⁿ	-ah	-ah = -at	al-qamaru	al-šamsu
phonemic		'	n̄	-ah	-ah, -at	'al-qamaru	'al-šamsu
traditional		ʿ, 'a	- / n	-a / -ah	-a / -ah/t	al-qamaru	al-shamsu

If the *imāla* is indicated by a special sign in the Arabic original, the transcription will use an <e> instead of an <a>. The graphemic version <ey> is then equivalent with the phonemic transcription <ē>.

Part III

Qur'ānic vocabulary

7 Hapaxes in the Qur'ān: identifying and cataloguing lone words (and loanwords)¹

Shawkat M. Toorawa

New readings are generated not simply by analysis, that is, by breaking down the text. Rather they result from catalysis, that is, by establishing new links and relations among the elements of the text itself and with the context in which it is read.²

(Daniel Madigan, 2004)

In spite of the attention devoted by classical and medieval Muslim exegetes and modern scholars to the rare, unusual, difficult, and loan (or so-called “foreign”) words in the Qur'ān, there has been very little discussion of these within the larger contexts of Sūra structure, Qur'ānic literary structure, and Qur'ānic poetics. One item in particular that has not excited any substantial interest but which can contribute in important ways to analyses of these issues is the frequency of *hapax legomena* in the Qur'ān. A *hapax legomenon* (often just hapax, pl. hapaxes, for short), literally something “said only once,” is a word or form, sometimes even a phrase or expression, that appears only once in a text, author, or corpus.³ Hapax legomena are, to be sure, occasionally signaled by modern scholars of the Qur'ān but such mention is usually incidental to discussions of loanwords and emendations.⁴ I am not aware, however, of any sustained discussion or analysis of hapaxes individually or as a group in classical or medieval scholarship, and only aware of two works dedicated to them in modern scholarship – a hard-to-find catalog produced by a religious scholar in Cairo in 2002,⁵ and a 2008 University of Vienna

1 I am grateful to Andrew Rippin and Walid Saleh for important references; and to Maryam Toorawa and Munther Younes for technical help with the hapax lists. I am especially grateful to Gabriel Reynolds for inviting me to present this material at Notre Dame, for subsequently soliciting this article, and for his feedback; to Hannah Hemphill for her close reading; and to Devin Stewart for his comments.

2 D.A. Madigan, “Foreword,” in *QHC*, xiii.

3 The use of the term originates with early Homeric scholars in Alexandria, notably Zenodotus of Ephesus (c. 325–234 BCE) and Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 200–145 BCE) (see F. Martinazzoli, *Hapax Legomenon* 1/2, Rome: Gismondi, 1957). Some scholars prefer *hapax eirēmenon* to *hapax legomenon*.

4 One recent study of a single hapax, if motivated by interest in exegetical silence rather than in Qur'ānic poetics, is R. Tottoli, “The Qur'an, Qur'anic exegesis and Muslim traditions: The case of *zāharīr* (Q 76:13) among Hell's punishments,” *JQS* 10:1, 2008, 142–52.

5 I am extremely grateful to Walid Saleh for sending me, and thus alerting me to the existence of, 'Āli al-Malījī, *al-Alfāz al-wahīda fi-l-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-sirr i'jāzihā*, Cairo: Horus li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2002.

dissertation.⁶ And whereas the 1905 *Jewish Encyclopedia* has an article on hapaxes in the Hebrew Bible,⁷ there is no article on hapaxes in either the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* or the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, though the latter does – in keeping with both Muslim and Western scholarly interests – include a comprehensive article on “Foreign Vocabulary.”⁸

And yet, the identification, cataloguing, and study of hapaxes is an important aspect of the study of major texts, authors, and corpora.⁹ The studies that have been possible thanks to the existence of hapax lists for other works – the Hebrew Bible, the epistles of Paul, and the works of Boccaccio, for instance – suggest strongly that once such a listing is available for the Qur'ān, a great deal might be learned about the Qur'ān, linguistically, literarily, and rhetorically.¹⁰ When a word or root occurs in several places or in several contexts in the Qur'ān, its meaning can usually be established with some degree of certainty; when a word or root occurs only once or in only one context, meaning is far more difficult to establish, in particular if the word has no cognates. A list of hapaxes can be a valuable guide to the cruxes of the Qur'ān. A listing of hapaxes can also help put scholars in a better position to answer a number of important questions about the Qur'ānic lexicon and Qur'ānic rhetoric, among them (but evidently not limited to): Why do certain words appear only once? Is the list of hapaxes larger or smaller than elsewhere? Is their distribution random? Do they appear in particular places and contexts, e.g. exhortation versus description, beginning versus middle, Mecca Sūras versus Medinan, and so on?

In the opening lines of his 1983 study of hapax legomena in Biblical Hebrew, Frederick Greenspahn notes:¹¹

When discussing the meaning of a rare word in the Bible, modern scholars often note that it is hapax legomenon. Rarely, however, has an effort been made to examine the meaning of this assertion systematically.

6 I regretably had access too late to O. Elmaz, “Die Interpretationsgeschichte der koranischen Hapaxlegomena,” PhD dissertation, University of Vienna, 2008, to include its detailed findings here.

7 I. M. Casanowicz, “Hapax legomena,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901–05, 6:226–28.

8 Rippin, “Foreign vocabulary,” *EQ*, 2:226–37.

9 E.g. L.G. Zelson, “Les hapax legomena du pentateuque hébraïque,” *Revue biblique* 36, 1927, 243–48; M.M. Kumpf, *Four Indices of the Homeric Hapax Legomena: Together with the Statistical Data*, Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1984; R. Doctor, *The Avestā: A Lexico-Statistical Analysis*, Leuven: Peeters for Acta Iranica, 2004.

10 See e.g. P.N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles*, London: Oxford University Press, 1921; F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of the Phenomenon and its Treatment since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms*, Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983; “Hapax legomenon in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and its relation to Dante's *Commedia*,” in R. Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, after 184. See also e.g. S. Pinker, *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, 127–28; and P. Indefrey and R. Harald Baayen, “Estimating word frequencies from dispersion data,” *Statistica Neerlandica* 48, 1994, 259–70.

11 Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, vii.

Greenspahn's characterization of modern Bible scholars applies to students of the Qur'ān too. I myself have been guilty of this, when I referred in an article to *falaq*, *naḥḥāṭ*, *waqab*, *ghāsiq*, *hāsīd* and *ḥasad* in *al-Falaq* (Q 113) as hapaxes.¹² *Falaq*, *ghāsiq*, *hāsīd* and *ḥasad* are indeed words that occur only once in the Qur'ān, but they are also words the roots (properly, the root-consonant combinations) of which are attested elsewhere in the text (namely *fāliq*, *ghasaq* and *yahsudūn*). *Naḥḥāṭ* and *waqab*, on the other hand, are unique words from unique roots. This illustrates the need not only for a list of hapax legomena in the Qur'ān, but in particular a need for one based on explicit criteria.

Cataloguing Qur'ānic hapaxes

wa-lam yakun lahu kufu 'an aḥad (Q 112:4)

“without a single partner, peerless”¹³

There are many resources available to assist in creating a catalog of Qur'ānic hapaxes.¹⁴ First and foremost is the Qur'ān itself, of course. It is desirable to have a list of hapaxes based on the entire Qur'ānic corpus (i.e. including variant canonical readings), but since the text circulates mainly in the standard version produced in Egypt in the 1930s, based on the canonical *Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim* reading, that is the version on which I base the lists presented here.¹⁵

Premodern inventories

The Masoretes used a marginal notation to signal forms and constructions that did not recur in the Hebrew Bible. This notation extended to words uniquely spelled or to unique juxtapositions, even when the words do occur elsewhere in the text.¹⁶ Such a practice appears not to have existed for the Qur'ān, but attempts to single out and explain rare or unusual words were quite common. Of use, therefore, are

12 S.M. Toorawa, “Seeking refuge from evil: The power and portent of the closing chapters of the Qur'ān,” *JQS* 4:2, 2002, 54–60.

13 S.M. Toorawa, “‘The Inimitable Rose’, being Qur'ānic *saj'* from *al-Duḥā* to *al-Nās* (Q. 93–114) in English rhyming prose,” *JQS* 8:2, 2006, 153. Translations throughout are mine.

14 See A. Rippin, “Lexicographical texts and the Qur'ān,” in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 158–74; idem, “Tools for the scholarly study of the Qur'ān,” *EQ*, 5:294–300; M. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, 617–27.

15 According to Muḥammad Ismā'īl Ibrāhīm, *Mu'jam al-alfāz wa-l-a'lām al-Qur'āniyya*, rev. ed., Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1418/1998, 10, there are 77,437 words in the standard edition of the Qur'ān, made up of 340,740 letters and distributed over the 6,236 āyats that make up the 114 Sūras (roughly 91 Meccan and 23 Medinan).

16 Modern scholars of the Bible have shown that the Masoretes missed up to twenty-four absolute hapaxes. This is not surprising since the Masoretes were not interested in cataloging hapaxes but rather in flagging those forms and expressions that might have confused scribes, precisely because they were rare or unusual. See Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 4–6.

the works of Muslim linguists, grammarians and exegetes of the classical and medieval periods.¹⁷ The most important of these are the *gharīb* works, about the Qur'ān's difficult words; *mu'arrab* works, about the Qur'ān's "Arabized" loan and so-called "foreign" words; and *mufradāt* works, about the Qur'ān's lexicon generally. Some general works, such as the comprehensive *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* ("Thorough mastery in the Qur'ānic sciences") by al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505), also include extended discussion of Qur'ānic vocabulary.¹⁸

As essential as they are for a study of the Qur'ānic lexicon, no pre-modern work includes a complete word list, much less a list of hapaxes. Two medieval sources of particular value, however, are the *Nuzhat al-qulūb fī tafsīr gharīb al-Qur'ān al-azīz* ("The soothing of the hearts on the Qur'ān's difficult words") of al-Sijistānī (d. 339/942),¹⁹ and the *Mu'jam mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'ān* ("Lexicon of Qur'ānic vocabulary") of al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. 502/1108).²⁰ Al-Sijistānī's organizational principle is unusual. He lists words and expressions alphabetically by the first letter of the first word but subdivides the words listed for each letter of the alphabet by differentiating the vowel on the first letter in the order *fatha* (-a-), *damma* (-u-), *kasra* (-i-). These are listed in the sequence in which they appear in the Qur'ān and are also simply defined. Thus, for the letter *thā'*, we have:²¹ *thawāb*, *thaqīfūmū-hum*, *Thamūd*, *thaqulat*, *al-tharā*, *thāniya* 'ifī-hi, *thalāthu* 'awrāt, *thāwiyā*, *thāqib*, *thajjājā*, *thamma*; *thulāth*, *thubāt*, *thu* 'bān, *thumur*, *thubūrā*, *thuqīfū*, *thulla*, *thuwwiba*; *thiqālā*, *thiyābi-ka fa-tahhir*. Al-Sijistānī covers a great deal of Qur'ānic vocabulary, viz. some 2,800 words and expressions encompassing 1,446 *gharīb* ("difficult, rare, unusual") roots, and thus inevitably discusses a large number of rare words. For instance, for the list of twenty-one *thā'* words above, al-Sijistānī includes three out of a total of six *thā'* Qur'ānic hapaxes.²² Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī's coverage is not as extensive, though he does discuss a large number of hapaxes. For instance, three of the six hapaxes that begin with the root letter *tā'* are glossed by him, and twelve of the fifteen that begin with the root letter *Kāf*.

Modern inventories

Arabic works

Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī's *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān*

17 See Rippin, "Lexicographical texts."

18 al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 2nd ed., ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, Cairo: Dār al-Hay'at al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1974–75.

19 Muḥammad b. 'Uzayr al-Sijistānī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb fī tafsīr gharīb al-Qur'ān al-azīz*, ed. Yūsuf al-Mar'ashlī, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1990.

20 Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *Mu'jam mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Nadīm al-Mar'ashlī, Beirut: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1972.

21 al-Sijistānī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 184–88.

22 My computation, based on al-Sijistānī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 526–76.

al-karīm ("Concordance of Qur'ānic words"), completed in 1945, remains the standard work of reference.²³ This is in large part because of its sensible, systematic organization: alphabetically by root, then by verb form and conjugation, then by noun, and so on, in all cases indicating number of occurrences and providing the verse and Qur'ānic reference. To take a simple example, the following are the entries listed for the root *L-'B:*²⁴ *nal* 'abu, *yal* 'ab, *yal* 'abū (x 2), *yal* 'abūna (x 5), *la* 'ib^m (x 4), *la* 'ib^m (x 4), *lā* 'ibīna (x 3). This allows us to see that there are twenty words formed from the root *L-'B*, two of which are unique. For roots generating many more words, or even when there are just two or three words, one can easily scan the entry for information about frequency and location within the Qur'ānic text. Because 'Abd al-Bāqī also provides the traditional attribution of Meccan or Medinan, one can also draw conclusions, however provisional, about the use of certain roots, words, forms, and so on.

In 1990 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Abū al-Futūḥ published a *Qā'ima majmū'iyya bi-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-darajāt takrārihā* ("Comprehensive listing of Qur'ānic words and their frequency of repetition"), divided into two parts.²⁵ The first part lists the words alphabetically and indicates their frequency of occurrence (with vowelings and meanings provided on rare occasions). Here is a selection of ten words from the letter *Qāf:*²⁶ *qā* 'id-7, *qāla*-1618, *qālī*-1, *qāma*-33, *qāni*^m-1, *qāni*^m-12, *qāni* -1, *qāhir*-1, *qā* 'il (*qaylūla*)-1, *qā* 'il (*qāla*)-5. Note that whereas most scholars of Qur'ānic vocabulary are interested in the roots of words – in order to organize words of the same root together, to separate homonymous roots, to determine whether there are Semitic cognates, to distinguish between trilaterals and quadrilaterals, and so on – Abū al-Futūḥ has chosen alphabetical order.²⁷ Although the frequency of words can be determined from such concordances as 'Abd al-Bāqī's – which is how I myself first set about compiling the two hapax lists below – Abū al-Futūḥ's work goes some way toward making easier the task of the researcher interested in word frequency in general. In the second part of his work, Abū al-Futūḥ lists words in descending order of frequency; the first eight items are:²⁸ *hum*-3738, *min*-3221, *Allāh*-2702, *mā*-2530, *inna*-1779, *lā*-1723, *fī*-1692, *qāla*-1618. One can therefore look up a word alphabetically in the first part to determine how many times it occurs in the Qur'ān; alternatively one can look up a

23 Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988. 'Abd al-Bāqī has gone through numerous printings and effectively has supplanted Flügel's concordance of a century earlier: G. Flügel, *Concordantiae Corani Arabicae* (= *Nujūm al-furqān fī atrāf al-Qur'ān*), Leipzig, 1842; repr. Ridgewood, N.J., Gregg Press, 1965. In 1999 a revised and indexed corrected edition of 'Abd al-Bāqī appeared.

24 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 647.

25 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Abū al-Futūḥ, *Qā'ima majmū'iyya bi-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-darajāt takrārihā*, Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1990.

26 Abū al-Futūḥ, *Qā'ima majmū'iyya*, 91.

27 He explains his reasoning in the introduction: Abū al-Futūḥ, *Qā'ima majmū'iyya*, z-k.

28 Abū al-Futūḥ, *Qā'ima majmū'iyya*, 133.

particular frequency in the second part and determine what words occur that many times.²⁹

Muḥammad Ismā'īl Ibrāhīm's 1998 *Mu'jam al-alfāz wa-l-a'lām al-Qur'āniyya* ("Dictionary of Qur'ānic words and proper names") attempts to surpass its predecessors by providing definitions for each root or word,³⁰ but his definitions are sometimes imprecise. For *ṭalh*, for example, Ibrāhīm has "banana tree" but makes no reference to the acacia tree, a definition routinely supplied in exegetical works.³¹ The verses (*āyas*) in which the various words appear follow the definitions, but as these appear in a continuous paragraph, rather than as a list, this makes the work very user-unfriendly. There are several other problems too. 'Abd al-Bāqī lists occurrences after every lexeme, whereas Ibrāhīm does so only for each root. Thus, for the root *Ḥ-Ṣ-B*, for instance, Ibrāhīm's heading is "Ḥ-Ṣ-B (5)", whereas 'Abd al-Bāqī has "Ḥaṣab" and "Ḥaṣiban (4)", which helpfully isolates the word *ḥaṣab*.³²

In 2002 'Āṭif al-Malījī published *al-Ālfāz al-wahīda fī al-Qur'ān al-karīm* ("Single-occurring words in the Qur'ān").³³ This slim book is, to the best of my knowledge, the only Arabic work specifically devoted to the topic of hapaxes in the Qur'ān, but it offers no linguistic or rhetorical analysis of these. It is divided into four parts: (1) single-occurring words deriving from a trilateral root, listed by Sūra; (2) single-occurring words deriving from a non-trilateral root, alphabetically; (3) single-occurring names of persons, peoples and places, alphabetically; and (4) single-occurring trilateral roots, alphabetically. The first three parts include the verses in which the hapaxes appear and brief definitions of the words. Al-Malījī's book is a largely error-free catalog of 410 lexemes deriving from single-occurring roots, 371 from trilateral roots, 19 from quadrilateral roots, and 20 proper names. He concedes that non-hapax roots account for the majority of

the Qur'ān's words – which he reckons at 51,884, excluding most particles – but convincingly advances that 371 hapax trilateral roots out of 1,620 Qur'ānic roots (again, his reckoning), i.e. nearly a quarter, is a rhetorically significant proportion.³⁴ Al-Malījī does not explain his criteria of inclusion, but these can be inferred. The word *abārīq* (ewers or goblets), for instance – in my estimation a hapax – does not appear in his catalog; al-Malījī appears to have excluded it because for him it shares roots with *barq* ("lightning, dazzle") and *istabraḡ* ("silk brocade"). On occasion, the decision to exclude words "sharing" roots leads him astray: the hapaxes *yadussuhu* and *dassāhā*, for example, have both been excluded, but their roots are different, *D-S-S* and *D-S-Y*, respectively. And as we shall see below, there are good reasons for regarding proper nouns as a separate category.

Western-language works

For a long time, one of the most widely cited and most widely used sources on Qur'ānic vocabulary was Arthur Jeffery's 1938 *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, recently reissued.³⁵ Jeffery analyzes 322 loanwords, including 66 proper names, which he divides into (a) words of non-Arabic origin (e.g. *namāriq*) or with no attested Arabic root (e.g. *jibt*), (b) Semitic words, which in the Qur'ān have a different meaning (e.g. *bāraka*), and (c) genuine Arabic words used as calques of cognate words in other languages (e.g. *nūr*).³⁶ As might be expected, his inventory includes numerous hapaxes. There has been work on loanwords since Jeffery but, as Rippin shows, the preoccupation with "foreignness" has very different motivations³⁷ – I dare say agendas – and "current contributions tend to focus on individual words, providing some refinement and clarification on smaller points. For the most part, however, the enterprise remains as contentious within modern scholarship as it was for medieval Muslims."³⁸

29 In looking up words that occur twenty-three times, for instance, we learn that they are: *ḥadīth*, *baddala*, *awlād*, *anjā*, *dhikrā*, *fulk*, *fitan*, *zulūmāt*, *la'ana* (Abū al-Futūḥ, *Qā'ima majmū'iyya*, 143). In the case of nouns, this encompasses instances with attached pronouns, and in the case of verbs, all conjugations and verbal noun (*maṣdar*). This makes the final listing in part 2 – namely words occurring only once – quite unwieldy; and since Abū al-Futūḥ does not identify the verse in which the item occurs, the usefulness of part 2 is further severely curtailed. (Alas, there are also typographical errors, e.g. *tabāba'a*, which is a misprint for *tabāya'a* [properly, *tabāya'a* 'um (Q 2:282)] [Abū al-Futūḥ, *Qā'ima majmū'iyya*, 207]. Such cases would be mitigated by a listing of words by root.)

30 Ibrāhīm, *Mu'jam al-alfāz*. Cf. Rūḥī Ba'albakī, *al-Mawrid al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li-l-Malayīn, 1999.

31 Ibrāhīm, *Mu'jam al-alfāz*, 313.

32 Ibrāhīm, *Mu'jam al-alfāz*, 126; 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 205. Also, not all the verses are quoted. For *Ḥ-Ṣ-B*, there being only five citations, all are included; but in connection with the 319 instances of *K-T-B*, Ibrāhīm identifies the root's first occurrence (*dhālika l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi* [al-Baqara 2]) but then only notes, *wa l-lafẓ fī 230 āyat* ("the word appears in 230 verses"); 'Abd al-Bāqī lists and quotes every single occurrence and verse (Ibrāhīm, *Mu'jam al-alfāz*, 447–48; 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 591–95).

33 'Āṭif al-Malījī, *al-Ālfāz al-wahīda fī l-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-sirr i'jāzihā*, Cairo: Horus li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2002.

34 al-Malījī, *al-Ālfāz al-wahīda*, 7.

35 *FV*; repr. A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Leiden: Brill, 2007.

36 See *FV*, 39–41. Zammit notes that of the 256 loanwords (i.e. excluding the names) treated by Jeffery, 235 are technical, almost half of which in turn treat religious matters. Zammit, *Comparative Lexical Study*, 57.

37 Rippin, "Foreign vocabulary," 235–36. For two excellent recent articles on foreign vocabulary, see A. Rippin, "The designation of 'foreign' languages in the exegesis of the Qur'ān," in J.D. McAuliffe, B.D. Walfish and J.W. Goering (eds), *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 437–44, and M. Carter, "Foreign vocabulary," in A. Rippin (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 120–39.

38 Rippin, "Foreign vocabulary," 236. For the early philologists and exegetes, e.g. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās (d. 68/687), non-Arabic words enhanced the Qur'ān (both linguistically and rhetorically), but as time went on, Muslim scholarship advanced a theology of complete purity for the language of the Qur'ān, with the exception of a handful of scholars such as al-Jawālīqī (d. 539/1144), al-Suyūṭī (911/1505) and al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1658). Al-Jawālīqī distinguished between *mu'arrab* (Arabized) and *a'jamī* (non-Arab, foreign) loans. Some authors, such as al-Khafājī, used the term *dakhlī* (adopted, "foreign"), but as Kopf has noted, "Arab philologists made no fundamental distinction between foreign words and loanwords, the terms *mu'arrab* and *dakhlī* being applied to both categories. Yet they were very well

In his 1966 *Le verbe dans le Coran*, Moustapha Chouémi alphabetically lists the 1,200 Qur'ānic roots that generate verbal forms.³⁹ Since he indicates the frequency of occurrence, e.g. "BTK: fender (les oreilles d'une bête consacrée). (II., 1 ex.)." Chouémi thus effectively lists all verbal-root hapaxes.⁴⁰ Mustansir Mir's 1989 *Verbal Idioms of the Qur'ān*,⁴¹ by virtue of its focus on 420 of the Qur'ān's roots,⁴² has a more limited purview than Chouémi. One cannot, for instance, find in it *waqab* from Qur'ān 113, since there is no verb-related use of *W-Q-B* in the Qur'ān,⁴³ but there is – from the same Sūra – an entry on *N-F-TH* (#385), to explain the expression *al-naḥḥāṭi fī l-'uqad*.⁴⁴ Both Chouémi's and Mir's works thus need close attention when thinking about hapaxes.

Martin Zammit's 2002 *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic* treats 1,717 lexical items belonging to 1,504 roots, thus "ca. 40% of the postulated root-inventory of Arabic."⁴⁵ Zammit's interest is "a quantitative analysis of a substantial corpus of the Arabic lexicon with a view to investigating the lexical relationship between Arabic and the major varieties of Semitic."⁴⁶ Though Zammit is not interested in hapaxes per se, his analysis yields pertinent data: of the 1,504 roots, 1,383 roots yield one lexeme only;⁴⁷ for 535 of the lexical items (roughly 31.1 percent of the total corpus of 1,717 lexemes), he found no cognates in other Semitic languages.⁴⁸ What is more, 38 percent of these 535 lexemes, that is, 201 of them,

aware that not all the foreign elements aroused the same feeling of strangeness" (L. Kopf, "The treatment of foreign words in medieval Arabic lexicology," in M.H. Goshen-Gottstein (ed.), *Studies in Arabic and Hebrew Lexicography*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1976, 248). Several of al-Suyūṭī's works preserve extensive lists of foreign words (108 in *al-Mutawakkilī*, 118 in *al-Muḥadḍḥab* and 124 in *al-Itqān*). As Rippin, "The designation of 'foreign' languages," 438, has noted, "Hapax legomena and other infrequently used words were also among the likely candidates for the lists of foreign words." See also R. Hamzaoui, "Idéologie et langue ou l'emprunt linguistique d'après les exégètes du Coran et les théologiens: Interprétation socio-linguistique," *Quaderni di Semistica* 5, 1978, 162.

39 M. Chouémi, *Le verbe dans le Coran. Racines et formes*, Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1966. He first lists trilaterals (subdivided into ten categories), then quadrilaterals (divided into reduplicative and non-reduplicative). Of the 1,200 roots, 1,185 are trilateral and (only) 15 are quadrilateral; of the latter, 8 are reduplicative (e.g. *Z-Ḥ-Z-Ḥ*) and seven consist of discrete roots (e.g. *Q-N-T-R*). Chouémi, *Le verbe*, 4–5.

40 Chouémi, *Le verbe*, 6–38.

41 M. Mir, *Verbal Idioms of the Qur'ān*, Ann Arbor: Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, University of Michigan, 1989.

42 Mir, *Verbal Idioms*, 1, n. 1 (citing a computation attributed to Dawūd al-Tauhidī).

43 *W-Q-B* would have appeared between *W-F-Y* (root #412) and *W-Q-D* (#413) (Mir, *Verbal Idioms*, 366).

44 Mir, *Verbal Idioms*, 350.

45 Zammit, *Comparative Lexical Study*, 2. A complete lexical analysis of the Qur'ān remains a desideratum; cf. Doctor, *The Avestā*, which includes a list of hapax legomena (429–75). According to Doctor, the Avestā has a total of 12,920 unique words, of which 5,206 (nearly 40%) are hapax legomena.

46 Zammit, *Comparative Lexical Study*, 1. The Semitic languages with which he compares Arabic are Ge'ez, Epigraphic South Arabian, Syriac, Aramaic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Ugaritic, and Akkadian.

47 Ibid., 561.

48 Ibid., 576.

are attested only once in the Qur'ān, 142 of them in Meccan Sūras. For Zammit, this is "undoubtedly" because "a number of the lexical items not attested in other Semitic languages belonged exclusively to the various dialects of the Arabian peninsula." Zammit does mention hapaxes as a group, noting that of "the 386 lexical items which occur only once in the Qur'ān ... 69% are found in the Meccan Sūras;" but he does not explain how he arrives at the number 386.⁴⁹ He also notes that few of these hapaxes are rare words.⁵⁰

There are several works in Western languages that cover the entire corpus of Qur'ānic vocabulary. Hanna A. Kassis's 1983 *A Concordance of the Qur'ān*, intended primarily for English users, is a massive work organized much like 'Abd al-Bāqī, providing the verse reference and the Arberry translation of the verses.⁵¹ An unusual feature of the work is its separate treatment of "the divine name" of "Allāh." Although Kassis does not specifically point out hapaxes, this information can be gleaned by going carefully, if laboriously, through the work.

With 'Abd al-Bāqī in Arabic and Kassis in English, both reputedly and reliably in place, few scholars have produced new concordances, preferring instead to produce dictionaries.⁵² *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* by Arne Ambros and Stephen Procházka appeared in 2004.⁵³ This is one of the most useful works for the student of Qur'ānic vocabulary, principally because of the care with which the material has been divided: a "Lexicon of Roots," "Proper Names," "Pronouns and Particles," and twelve appendices.⁵⁴ Difficult words are identified as such and reference is often made to suggested emendations, e.g.⁵⁵

49 Ibid., 571.

50 Ibid., citing J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 118.

51 H.A. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'ān*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Renderings by translators other than Arberry are cited for certain words, e.g. *ṣamad* at 1194. The concordance is now available electronically at <www.oxfordislamicstudies.com> (accessed February 3, 2011).

52 See e.g. A.M. Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Qur'ān: Arabic Words–English Meanings*, Hockessin, Delaware and Rheinfelden, Germany: Noor Foundation International, Inc., 2003, which "presents the complete vocabulary and the phraseology of the Holy Qur'ān. All root-words ... with their derivatives have been included in it" (iii). Although it uses slightly unusual transliteration, its three constituent parts are extremely useful. "Index 1" lists all Qur'ānic words in alphabetical order, with cross-reference to basic root-words, and "Index 2" lists Qur'ānic root-words in alphabetical order (past tense, masculine singular), though neither indicates frequency of occurrence. The "Dictionary" proper, which makes up the bulk of the work and includes definitions that are often pious and idiosyncratic (e.g. *ṣamad* on 321–22), is comprehensive. Therefore one can, in theory, glean hapaxes from it, although it is far easier to do so using 'Abd al-Bāqī or Kassis. See also S.A. Parekh, *Complete Easy Dictionary of the Qur'an*, Kuala Lumpur: Noordeen, 2003.

53 A.A. Ambros, with the collaboration of S. Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004.

54 See also A.A. Ambros, with the collaboration of S. Procházka, *The Nouns of Koranic Arabic Arranged by Topics: A Companion Volume to the "Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic"*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2006.

55 Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 225.

Q-S-W-R: *qaswara(t)* "powerful", a name for the lion (74/51), emended by J. A. Bellamy, in *JAOS* 116/1996, 198 ff., to [*fantūra(t)*] (which is unattested in CA) < Syriac *pantōrā* < Greek *panthēr*, see the remark in 'abb.⁵⁶

The appendices are also of considerable interest, covering such hapax-relevant matters as "Additions to the lexicon from the canonical readings," and certain expressions, such as "*dūh*-phrases," "*nī*'ma-clauses," relative phrases, and adjective pairs. Ambros also includes an appendix of 320 items in an "Index of selected lexical problems."⁵⁷ Although he is not explicit about hapaxes, these usually can be inferred whenever Ambros cites only one Qur'ānic reference (as with *qaswara* above).

In 2008 Elsaid Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem and their team of scholars produced an *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*.⁵⁸ This dictionary attempts to fill the gap of its predecessors, including John Penrice's pioneering and still very useful 1873 *Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran* (revised in 2006 to include traditional verse numbering) and Ambros's *Concise Dictionary*.⁵⁹ It does so by being less telegraphic in its definitions and in the information it provides, and it is consequently bulkier.⁶⁰ In connection with hapaxes, this work has an advantage over most other Western-language works because it indicates frequency of occurrence for every root and lexeme. Thus, for the hapax *B-S-Q*, for example, the entry opens as follows: "*b-s-q* tall, lofty, towering, to surpass. Of this root, *bāsiqāt* occurs once in the Qur'an."⁶¹ For the root *B-R-H-N*, its frequency is recorded as follows: "Of this root, two forms occur eight times in the Qur'an: *burhān* seven times and *burhānān* once."⁶² This attention to frequency means that one can also glean from the dictionary occurrences of unique words.

The hapax lists

The definition of a hapax as a word or form which occurs only once in an author or corpus is straightforward enough, but determining precisely what constitutes a hapax in the Qur'ān, as in any corpus, is a more complicated matter. This is clear

56 Ambros remarks that he "feels unable to follow [Bellamy] in any of these emendations and considers the entire approach and method . . . as misguided." To Ambros's credit, he includes references to "all of Bellamy's emendations" because "other scholars may think differently" (Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 19).

57 Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 338–44, 351, 352, 372–79.

58 E.M. Badawi and M. Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, Leiden: Brill, 2008.

59 J. Penrice, *Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-ān* (*Silk al-bayān fī manāqib al-Qur'ān*), London: King, 1873. Cf. K. Versteegh, "Foreword," in Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, xi.

60 See Andrew Rippin's article in this volume for a discussion of the merits of Badawi and Abdel Haleem vis-à-vis its predecessors, including Penrice. Penrice is a 167-page paperback, Ambros a 384-page hardback, and Badawi and Abdel Haleem a 1,069-page hardback.

61 Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 92.

62 Ibid., 90.

from Biblical studies, where hapax lists by different compilers have been shown to differ significantly.⁶³ There is virtue in creating a list of all single-occurring lexical items, i.e. every unique word,⁶⁴ but more analytically and rhetorically meaningful as a starting place is a list of all words from single-occurring roots. Such a list still needs parameters, however. Fortunately, Qur'ānic studies can benefit from the work that has been done in Biblical studies, where there have been several studies of hapaxes in the Hebrew Bible. This is helpful notably because both Arabic and Hebrew are root-based languages and therefore face many of the same issues when it comes to compiling a list of hapaxes.

In 1903, Abraham Shalom Yahuda defined a hapax legomenon as any word fulfilling any one of the following criteria:⁶⁵

- (a) single occurrence of the root;
- (b) single occurrence of the form;
- (c) only two occurrences of the root in the same form with the same meaning;
- (d) only two occurrences of the root in different forms but with the same meaning;
- (e) frequently occurring root and form, but with a unique meaning.

Shortly thereafter, in an article for the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Casanowicz distinguished between:⁶⁶

- (a) "absolute" or "strict" hapaxes: words that are either absolutely new coinages of roots or ones that cannot be derived in their formation or in their specific meaning from other occurring stems [e.g. *jibt* in the Qur'ān];
- (b) unique forms: words that appear only once as a form but can easily be connected with other existing words [e.g. *majālis* in the Qur'ān].

L.G. Zelson discounted (b) above in a 1924 dissertation, but added a new category, namely "words that are repeated in parallel passages, generally in identical phrases . . . and words used more than once but that are limited to single passages."⁶⁷ In his 1978 dissertation, Harald Cohen argued that: "The key to a proper definition of the term hapax legomenon in biblical research is the identification of the 'functional uniqueness' of these words with the single context in which the root of each word occurs."⁶⁸ For Cohen, then, a hapax legomenon is

63 Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 17–19.

64 According to Abū al-Futūḥ, 1,819 words. (*Qā'ima majmū'iyya*, 199–242.)

65 A.S. Yahuda, "Hapax legomena im Alten Testament," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 15, 1903, 698–714; cf. H.R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic*, Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978, 4.

66 Casanowicz, "Hapax legomena;" cf. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena*, 4–5.

67 L.G. Zelson, "A Study of Hapax Legomena in the Hebrew Pentateuch," dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1924; cf. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena*, 5.

68 Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena*, 7.

"any biblical word whose root occurs in but one context."⁶⁹ Greenspahn narrows the definition further, arguing that "words which occur only once and seem unrelated to otherwise attested roots" qualify as "absolute" hapax legomena.⁷⁰

That we should include all words from uniquely occurring roots in a list of Qur'ānic hapaxes is easy to justify.⁷¹ In compiling the list below, I have excluded unique morphological forms from otherwise occurring roots, such as *ghāsiq* (*al-Falaq* [113] 5), though Yehuda regarded this category as significant. And it is indeed a significant category inasmuch as the deployment of given words and forms is part of the fabric of Qur'ānic narrative and a function of Qur'ānic rhetoric and poetics (*humaza*, for instance in Qur'ān 104:1). Closely linked to uniquely occurring forms is the question of what to make of words or morphological forms (whether from a known or unknown root) occurring more than once in only one context, such as *jubb*, which occurs twice in *Yūsuf* (12) and only in *Yūsuf*,⁷² or *taqiyya*, which occurs thrice in *Maryam* (19) and only in *Maryam* (and is used as a rhyme word too). Indeed, in the list below of what I am calling "basic hapaxes," almost one-third are rhyme words, and of the strict hapaxes, fully a third are rhyme words. This suggests strongly that rhyme played a part in their selection and deployment (or coinage, as some would have it). One solution is to have (more) precise terminology.⁷³ The term *hapax dis legomenon* does exist for a word occurring twice (e.g. *thāqib* [Q 37:10; 86:3]); so too *hapax tris legomenon* for a word occurring thrice (e.g. *al-mashhūn* [Q 26:119; 36:41; 37:140]). Note that the latter is a candidate for what we might term a "hapax phrase" or "hapax expression," since *al-fulk* appears frequently in the Qur'ān, but the three times *mashhūn* appears, it only does so in the phrase *al-fulk al-mashhūn*.⁷⁴ Scholars also use *hapax tetrakis legomenon* for a word occurring four times (e.g. *'aqīm* [Q 22:55; 42:50; 51:29, 41]). For ease of reference (especially since the Greek is unwieldy), I suggest the following terminology:

Hapax	General term, describing all types below
Unique words	Any word in a non-recurring form [e.g. <i>qulna</i>]
Rarity	Words recurring between two and four times (i.e. hapax dis, tris and tetrakis legomena) [e.g. <i>thāqib</i>]
Isolates	Words or forms (any number) occurring in only one Sūra or stylistic cluster [e.g. <i>taqiyya</i>]

69 Ibid.

70 Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 23.

71 Cf. Ibid., 22: "There is no intention here to enter the debate concerning the reality and significance of roots. The Semitic root may well be a hypostatization or theoretical construct."

72 See J. Witztum, "Syriac dialogue poems and Yūsuf," unpublished paper, 2009, 8. I am grateful to Joseph Witztum for sharing his paper with me.

73 There are 121 rhyme words out of 415 hapaxes (29.1%). If we include proper names and the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* (the so-called "mysterious letters"), the proportion drops slightly, 132 out of 459 (28.7%). If we count only strict hapaxes, the proportion is 78 out of 328 (23.7%), or, including the *fawātiḥ*, 83 out of 333 (24.9%).

74 There are also numerous longer Qur'ānic phrases that recur, e.g. *wa-tarā l-fulka mawākhira fihī wa-li-tabtaghū min faḍlihi wa-la 'allakum tashkurūn* (Qur'ān 16:14; 35:12).

Hapax root	Any non-recurring root [e.g. <i>J-B-T</i>]
Basic hapax	A word formed from a non-recurring root [e.g. <i>infiṣām</i>], or from a root occurring in only one context
Strict hapax	A basic hapax occurring in a solitary instance and fulfilling at least one of the following conditions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> No cognate in another Semitic language⁷⁵ (including quotidian words) [e.g. <i>fāqi'</i>] From a recurring root but with a different Qur'ānic meaning [e.g. <i>hafada</i>] Candidate for emendation (including ghost words) [e.g. <i>al-raqīm</i>]

There are still numerous considerations as we define parameters for a list of Qur'ānic hapaxes. What, for example, is to be done with a word like *salsabīl* (*al-Insān* [76] 18)? If it is related to the roots *S-L-S-L* and/or *S-L-L*,⁷⁶ it does not belong in a hapax list. If, on the other hand, we deem its root to be *S-L-S-B-L*,⁷⁷ then it does belong there. What is more, if it is a new coinage, then maybe it is a nonce word rather than a hapax; a nonce word is one created to meet a particular, non-recurring need, usually by combining an existing word with an existing prefix or suffix.⁷⁸ I believe that such words – that is, ones about which there is no scholarly consensus – should remain on a list of Qur'ānic hapaxes.

Hapax lists in classical and Biblical studies typically exclude proper nouns, because, as Cohen puts it, they "are philologically independent of their context."⁷⁹ Thus a name like "Badr" (*Āl Imrān* [3] 123), though it might have once meant something related to the root *B-D-R*, is in its Qur'ānic usage philologically independent of the root meaning. Similarly, for non-Arabic names such as Hārūt or Mikāl the meaning in the lending language typically does not carry over into Arabic. Nevertheless, having a sub-list (or separate list) of uniquely occurring names is desirable. As Greenspahn concedes, even as he excludes them from consideration, "to ignore such words would lead to the loss of useful data . . ."⁸⁰ There is the difficulty, however, of accurately identifying proper nouns when they are not marked as such. Does one count *'arim* (*Saba'* [34] 16) as a common noun meaning "dam," or as a proper noun?⁸¹ This applies also to *salsabīl* mentioned above, and even to words that are not necessarily hapaxes, such as *kawthar* (*al-Kawthar* [108] 1).

75 For this data, I rely on Zammit, *Comparative Lexical Study*.

76 Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 447.

77 Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 136.

78 *Oxford English Dictionary* online. We might postulate that in a root-based language such as Arabic, a nonce word could also be created by taking an existing root and imposing on it an erstwhile unattested morphological form.

79 Cohen, *Biblical Hapax*, 7; cf. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 20.

80 Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 21.

81 Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 615.

Another important consideration is whether to restrict the list to single lexemes or to include expressions. However desirable it might be to include the whole gamut of expressions available in the Qur'ān, a practical and practicable list of hapaxes will perforce have to confine itself to single lexical items as a starting place, if nothing else. There are, however, several important related issues, such as what is to be done with constructions such as *idhā rujjati l-arḍu rajjā* (*al-Wāqī'a* [56] 4) or *al-rifd al-marfūd* at (*Hūd* [11] 99), where items within the expressions are cognate, but are otherwise (or together) a hapax; indeed, the former is a result of a specific Arabic verbal construction, the cognate accusative (*maf'ūl muṭlaq*), that all but requires the use of a cognate noun together with the verb. As for *al-rifd al-marfūd*, it mirrors the preceding line (*al-wird al-mawrūd*), again raising the question of the rhetorical motives behind the deployment of hapaxes in the Qur'ān, especially in the rhyme position. Do we, then, admit such constructions as hapaxes? I do in the lists below.

With respect to items occurring in similar contexts, for the Qur'ān at least, one has to take stock of at least two types of repeats. The first are expressions that appear in parallel verses, which I exclude from the list below, as Cohen and Greenspahn would have it, but not Zelson, for whom an expression such as *uswa ḥasana* (Q 33:21; 60:4 and 60:6) is worth noting because it is deployed in parallel contexts. The second type of repeats is of words that occur more than once in a single context, such as *rafath* in *al-Baqara* (2) 187 and 197, which I have elected not to include.

In the Qur'ān many names of animals or foodstuffs or everyday items occur only once, and it is justifiable to exclude them from a list of hapaxes by virtue of the fact that they are mentioned only because of the (quotidian) context, *na' layk* "your [m.s.] shoes" (*Ṭā-Hā* [20] 12), for example. One would similarly exclude *al-bighāl* "donkeys" (*al-Nahl* [16] 8); *bā' ūḍatan* "gnat" (*al-Baqara* [2] 26), on the other hand, is used metaphorically, and is thus unique, not only lexically but also rhetorically, which argues for its inclusion on a list of hapaxes.

The Qur'ān also has a unique set of lexical terms, the *fawātiḥ al-suwar*, or so-called "mysterious letters," to be found at the beginning of some Sūras. Although the meaning of these letters continues to elude scholars, the fact that they are letters (symbolic or otherwise) argues for their categorization as lexical items, and therefore argues for their inclusion in a basic hapax list.

I produce below two lists of Qur'ānic hapaxes. Table 7.1 lists basic hapaxes alphabetically by root, Table 7.2 by Sūra. In Table 7.1, column 1 lists the Qur'ān's hapax roots; bona fide homonymous roots are retained (e.g. *J-L-B*), although it is conceivable that research may subsequently show these to be one and the same root. Words from the same root, but in unrelated usage (e.g., *al-irba*, "intelligence, cunning," and *ma'ārib*, "purposes") are also included, but do not, evidently, classify as strict hapaxes (in column 6). For the sake of hapax inclusiveness, words such as *hayta*, "come hither," and *lāta*, "not," are listed, but no root is proposed. Column 2 lists the hapaxes in transliteration. Nouns are listed pausally, e.g. *samm* and *zahra*, except for masculine accusatives, e.g. *fulānā*. The definite article is included for words that appear that way in the text, e.g. *al-ṣamad*.

Table 7.1 Basic hapaxes in the Qur'ān, listed alphabetically by root

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogni. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
Hamza						
-B-B	abbā ⁿ	'Abasa 80:31	§	أَبَا	X	✓
-B-B-L	abābīl	Fil 105:3	§	أَبَابِيل	—	✓
-B-R-Q	abārīq	Wāqī'a 56:18		أَبَارِيق	—	✓
-B-Q	abaq	Šaffāt 37:140		أَبَق		
-TH-L	athl	Saba' 34:16		أَثَل		
-D-D	iddā ⁿ	Maryam 19:89	§	إِدَا	X	✓
-R-B	al-irba	Nūr 24:31		الْأَرْبَةِ	X	✓
-Z-Z	ta'uzzu-hum azzā ⁿ	Maryam 19:83		تَوَزَّعْهُمْ أَزَا		
-S-S	ussisa/assasa (2)	Tawba 9:108, 109(2)	§	أَسَّسَ	—	
-S-N	āsin	Muḥammad 47:15		أَسَنَ	X	✓
-SH-R	ashir al-ashir	Qamar 54:25, 26	§	أَشَرَ الْأَشِيرَ		
-F-L	afala (2), afalat	An'ām 6:76, 77, 78		أَفَلَ ، أَفَلَتْ		
-L-T	al-āfilīn	6:76	§	الْأَفْلِينَ		
-L-L	alatnā-hum ill ^{en} (2)	Ṭūr 52:21 Tawba 9:8, 10		الْتَنَاهُمْ الْأَ	X X	✓ ✓
-L-W/Y	ya'tali	Nūr 24:22		يَأْتَلِ	X	✓
-M-T	amtā ⁿ	Ṭā-Hā 20:107	§	أَمْتَا	X	✓
-M-M	āmmūn	Mā'ida 5:2		أَمِين	X	✓
-N-F	ānif ^{an}	Muḥammad 47:16		ءَانِفَا	—	✓
-N-M	al-anām	Raḥmān 55:10	§	الْأَنَامَ	X	✓
-N-Y	āniya	Insān 76:15		أَنِية	X	✓
-W-D	ya'ūdu-hu	Baqara 2:255		يُنَوِّدُهُ		
-Y-M	al-ayāmā	Nūr 24:32		الْأَيَامَى	X	✓
Bā'						
-B'-R	bi'r	Ḥajj 22:45		بَرَّ		
-B-T-R	al-abtar	Kawthar 108:3	§	الْأَبْتَرُ		
-B-T-K	fa-l-yubattikanna	Nisā' 4:119		فَالْيُبَاتِّكَنَّ		✓
-B-T-L	tabattal ilayhi tabtīlā ⁿ	Muzzammil 73:8	§	تَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا		
-B-J-S	inbajasat	A'rāf 7:160		انْبَجَسَتْ	X	✓
-B-H-TH	yabḥathu	Mā'ida 5:31		يَبْحَثُ		
-B-D-R	bidār	Nisā' 4:6		بِدَارٍ		✓
-B-D-N	badani-ka	Yūnus 10:92		بَدَنِكَ		
-B-DH-R	lā tubadhdhir tabdhirā ⁿ	Isrā' 17:26	§	لَا تُبَذِّرْ تَبْذِيرًا		

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.1 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogn. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
	inna	17:27		إِنَّ الْمُبْتَدِينَ		
B-R-M	l-mubbaddhirīn abramū amrā ⁿ fa-innā mubrimūn	Zukhruf 43:79	§	أَبْرَمُوا أَمْرًا فَإِنَّا مَبْرُمُونَ		
B-Z-GH	bāzigh ^{an} bāzighat ^{an}	An'am 6:77 6:78		بَارِغًا بَارِغَةً		
B-S-M	tabassama	Naml 27:19		تَبَسَّمَ	X	✓
B-S-S	bussati l-jibālu bassā ⁿ	Wāqī'a 56:5	§	بُسَّتِ الْجِبَالُ بُسًّا		
B-S-L	an tubsala nafsun ... alladhīna ubsilū	An'am 6:70		أَنْ تَبْسُلَ نَفْسٌ ... الَّذِينَ أُبْسِلُوا	X	
B-S-L	baṣali-hā	Baqara 2:61		بَصَلَهَا		
B-T'	la-yubatti'anna	Nisā' 4:72		لِيُبَطِّنَ	X	
B-D	bā'ūda	Baqara 2:26		بَعُوضَةً	X	✓
B-GH-L	al-bighāl	Nahl 16:8		الْبِغَالِ	—	
B-Q'	al-buq'a	Qaṣaṣ 28:30		الْبُقْعَةِ		
B-Q-L	baqli-hā	Baqara 2:61		بَقْلَهَا		
B-L'	ibla'ī	Hūd 11:44		إِبْلَعِي		
B-H-L	nabtahil	Āl 'Imrān 3:61		نَبْتِهْلِ		✓
B-Y-D	tabīd	Kahf 18:35		تَبِيدَ	X	✓
B-Y-D	bayḍ	Şaffāt 37:49		بَيضَ		
	Ta'			ت		
T-R-B	al-tarā'ib	Tāriq 86:7	§	الْتَرَائِبِ	—	✓
T-S	ta's ^{an}	Muḥammad 47:8		تَعْصَا		
T-F-TH	tafatha-hum	Hajj 22:29		تَفْتَهُمَ		
T-Q-N	atqana	Naml 27:88		اتَّقَنَ		
T-L-L	talla-hu	Şaffāt 37:103		تَلَّهَ		✓
T-Y-N	al-tīn	Tīn 95:1		التِّينِ	—	
T-Y-H	yatīhūn	Mā'ida 5:26		يَتَيَهُونَ		
	Thā'			ث		
TH-B-T	thabbaṭa-hum	Tawba 9:46		ثَبَّطَهُمَ	X	✓
TH-B[-W/Y]	thubāt	Nisā' 4:71		ثُبَاتٍ	X	✓
TH-J-J	thajjājā ⁿ	Naba' 78:14	§	ثَجَّاجًا	X	✓
TH-R-B	tathrīb	Yūsuf 12:92		تَثْرِيْبٍ	X	✓
TH-R-Y	al-tharā	Tā-Hā 20:6	§	الثَّرَى		
TH-Y-B	thayyibāt	Tahrim 66:5		ثَيِّبَاتٍ		✓
	Jīm			ج		
J-B-T	al-jibt	Nisā' 4:51		الْجِبْتِ	—	✓
J-B-N	al-jabīn	Şaffāt 37:107	§	الْجَبِينِ	—	✓
J-B-H	jibāhu-hum	Tawba 9:35		جِبَاهَهُمَ		
J-TH-TH	ujtuththtat	Ibrāhīm 14:26		اجْتَثَّتْ		✓
J-DH-W	jadhwa	Qaṣaṣ 28:29		جَذْوَةً		

J-R-R	yajurru-hu	A'raf 7:150	يَجُرُّهُ		
J-R'	yatajarra'u-hu	Ibrāhīm 14:17	يَتَجَرَّرُ عَنْهُ		
J-R-F	juruf	Tawba 9:109	جُرُفٍ		
J-S-S	tajassasū	Hujurat 49:12	تَجَسَّسُوا		
J-F	jufā' ^{an}	Ra'd 13:17	جَفَاءَ	X	✓
J-F-N	jifān	Saba' 34:13	جِفَانٍ	X	✓
J-F-W	tatajāfā	Sajda 32:16	تَتَجَافَى	X	✓
J-L-B	ajlib	Isrā' 17:64	أَجْلِبْ	X	✓
J-L-B	jalābībi-hinna	Aḥzāb 33:59	جَلَابِيْبِهِنَّ	—	
J-L-S	al-majālis	Mujādila 58:11	الْمَجَالِسِ		
J-M-H	yajmahūn	Tawba 9:57	يَجْمَحُونَ	X	✓
J-M-D	jāmidata ⁿ	Naml 27:88	جَامِدَةً		
J-M-M	jammā ⁿ	Fajr 89:20	جَمًّا	§	
J-W-S	jāsū	Isrā' 17:5	جَاسُوا	X	✓
J-W-F	jawfi-hi	Aḥzāb 33:4	جَوْفِهِ		
J-W-W	jaww	Nahl 16:79	جَوَّ		
J-W-D	al-jiyād	Şād 38:31	الْجِيَادِ	§	
J-Y-D	jīdi-hā	Masad 111:5	جِدِيهَا		
	Ḥā'		ح		
H-B-K	al-ḥubuk	Dhāriyāt 51:7	الْحُبُكِ	§	✓
H-T-M	ḥatm ^{an}	Maryam 19:71	حَتْمًا		
H-TH-TH	ḥathīth ^{an}	A'raf 7:54	حَثِيثًا		
H-D-B	ḥadab	Anbiyā' 21:96	حَدَبٍ	X	✓
H-R-D	ḥard	Qalam 68:25	حَرْدٍ	X	✓
H-R-S	ḥaras ^{an}	Jinn 72:8	حَرَسًا	X	✓
H-R-K	tuḥarrik	Qiyāma 75:16	تُحَرِّكُ		
H-R-Y	taḥarraw	Jinn 72:14	تَحَرَّوْا	X	✓
H-S-M	ḥusūma ⁿ	Hāqqa 69:7	حُسُومًا	X	✓
H-S-H-S	ḥaṣḥaṣa	Yūsuf 12:51	حَصَصَ	X	✓
H-S-L	ḥuṣṣila	'Adiyāt 100:10	حَصَّلَ	X	✓
H-F-D	ḥafadat ^{an}	Nahl 16:72	حَفْدَةً		✓
H-F-R	al-ḥāfira	Nāzi'āt 79:10	الْحَافِرَةِ	§	X
H-Q-F	al-aḥqāf	Aḥqāf 46:21	الْأَحْقَافِ	X	✓
H-L-Q-M	al-hulqūm	Wāqī'a 56:83	الْحُلُقُومِ	§	✓
H-N-DH	ḥanīdh	Hūd 11:69	حَنِيذٍ	X	✓
H-N-K	la-aḥtanikanna	Isrā' 17:62	لَا أَهْتَنِكَنَّ		
H-W-B	ḥūb ^{an}	Nisā' 4:2	حُوبًا	—	✓
H-W-Z	mutaḥayyiz ^{an}	Anfāl 8:16	مُتَحَيِّزًا	X	
H-Y-D	taḥīdu	Qāf 50:19	تَحِيدَ	X	✓
H-Y-R	ḥayrān	An'am 6:71	حَيْرَانَ	X	✓
H-Y-K	yahīfa	Nūr 24:50	يَحِيفُ		
	Khā'		خ		
KH-B'	al-khab'	Naml 27:25	الْخَبَاءِ		
KH-B-Z	khubz ⁿ	Yūsuf 12:36	خُبْزًا	—	✓
KH-B-T	yatakhabbata-hu	Baqara 2:275	يَتَخَبَّطُهُ		
KH-B-W	khabat	Isrā' 17:97	خَبَتْ	X	✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.1 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogn. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
KH-T-R	khattār	Luqmān 31:32		خَتَّار		
KH-D-D	khadda-ka	Luqmān 31:18		خَذَكَ	X	✓
KH-D-D	al-ukhdūd	Burūj 85:4	§	الأخدود		✓
KH-R-T-M	al-khurṭūm	Qalam 68:16	§	الخرطوم		✓
KH-SH-B	khushub	Munāfiqūn 63:4		خشب		✓
KH-D-D	makhḍūd	Wāqī'a 56:28	§	مخضود	X	✓
KH-T-T	takhuṭṭu-hu	'Ankabūt 29:48	§	تخطه		
KH-L-	ikhla'	Tā-Hā 20:12		اخلع		
KH-M-T	khamṭ	Saba' 34:16		خمط		✓
KH-N-Q	al-munkhaniqa	Mā'ida 5:3		المنخقة		✓
KH-Y-M	al-khiyām	Raḥmān 55:72	§	الخيام	—	
Dāl						
D-TH-R	al-muddaththir	Muddaththir 74:1	§	المثثر		
D-Ḥ-W	dahā-hā	Nāzi'āt 79:30	§	دحاهما		
D-R-H-M	darāhim	Yūsuf 12:20		دراهم	—	
D-S-R	dusur	Qamar 54:13	§	دسر	X	✓
D-S-S	yadussu-hu	Nahl 16:59		يدسه		
D-S-Y	dassā-hā	Shams 91:10	§	دسأها	X	✓
D-F-	dif	Nahl 16:5		دفع	X	✓
D-F-Q	dāfiq	Ṭāriq 86:6	§	دافق		
D-L-K	dulūk	Isrā' 17:78		دلوک	X	✓
D-M-D-M	damdama	Shams 91:14		دمدم		✓
D-M-GH	yadmaghu-hu	Anbiyā' 21:18		يذمغه	X	✓
D-N-R	dīnār	Āl 'Imrān 3:75		دينار	—	
D-H-Q	dihāqā'	Naba' 78:34	§	دهاقاً	—	✓
D-H-M	mudhāmmatān	Raḥmān 55:64	§	مدهامتان		✓
D-H-Y	adhā	Qamar 54:46		أدهى		
Dhāl						
DH-'-M	madh'ūm ^{an}	A'rāf 7:18		مذعوماً	X	✓
DH-B-B	dhubāb ^{an}	Hajj 22:73		ذباباً	X	
	al-dhubāb			الذباب		
DH-B-DH-B	mudhabdhabīn	Nisā' 4:143		منذبين		
DH-'-N	mudh'inīn	Nūr 24:49	§	مذعنين	X	✓
DH-K-R	taddakhirūna	Āl 'Imrān 3:49		تذخرون		
DH-K-Y	dhakkaytum	Mā'ida 5:3		نكيتم	—	
DH-H-L	tadhhalu	Hajj 22:2		تذهل		
DH-W-D	tadhūdāni	Qaṣaṣ 28:23		تذودان		
DH-Y-	adhā'ū	Nisā' 4:83		أذاعوا	X	✓
Rā'						
R-B-Ḥ	rabiḥat	Baqara 2:16		ربحت	—	✓
R-T-	yarta'	Yūsuf 12:12		يرتع		

R-T-Q	ratq ^{an}	Anbiyā' 21:30		رتقا		
R-J-J	rujjati	Wāqī'a 56:4	§	رجت الأرض	X	
	l-arḍu rajjā'			رجأ		
R-H-Q	raḥīq	Muṭaffifin 83:25		رحيق		✓
R-KH-W	rukḥā' ^{an}	Ṣad 38:36		رخاء		
R-D-	rid' ^{an}	Qaṣaṣ 28:34		ردأ		
R-D-M	radmā'	Kahf 18:95	§	ردماً	X	✓
R-S-S	marṣūṣ	Ṣad 61:4	§	مرصوص	X	✓
R-GH-M	murāgham ^{an}	Nisā' 4:100		مراغماً	X	✓
R-F-D	al-rifd	Hūd 11:99		الرفد		
	al-marfūd		§	المرفود		
R-F-R-F	rafrāf	Raḥmān 55:76		رفرف	X	✓
R-Q-Q	raqq	Ṭūr 52:3		رقق	—	✓
R-Q-M	al-raqūm	Kahf 18:95		الرقيم		✓
R-K-D	rawākid	Shūrā 42:33		رواك	X	✓
R-K-Z	rikzā'	Maryam 19:98	§	ركزاً	X	✓
R-M-H	rimāḥu-kum	Mā'ida 5:94		رماحكم		
R-M-D	ramād	Ibrāhīm 14:18		رماد	X	✓
R-M-Z	ramz ^{an}	Āl 'Imrān 3:41		رمزاً		
R-H-W	rahw ^{an}	Dukḥān 44:24		رهواً	X	✓
R-W-	al-raw'	Hūd 11:74		الروع		
R-Y-SH	rīsh ^{an}	A'rāf 7:26		ريشاً	X	✓
R-Y-	rī'	Shu'ara' 26:128		ريع	X	✓
R-Y-N	rāna	Muṭaffifin 83:1		ران		
Zā'						
Z-B-N	al-zabāniya	'Alaq 96:18	§	الزبانية	—	✓
Z-J-J	zujāja	Nūr 24:35		زجاجة	—	
	al-zujāja			الزجاجة		
Z-H-F	zaḥf ^{an}	Anfāl 8:15		زحفاً		
Z-R-B	zarābiyy	Ghāshiya 88:16		زرابي	—	✓
Z-R-Q	zurq ^{an}	Tā-Hā 20:102	§	زرقاً		
Z-R-Y	tazdarī	Hūd 11:31		تزدري	X	✓
Z-F-F	yaziffūn	Ṣāffāt 37:94	§	يزفون		
Z-M-L	al-muzzammil	Muzzammil 73:1		المزمل	X	✓
Z-M-H-R	zamharirā'	Insān 76:13	§	زمهريراً	X	✓
Z-N-J-B-L	zanjabilā'	Insān 76:17	§	زنجبيلاً	—	✓
Z-N-M	zanīm	Qalam 68:13	§	زنيماً	X	✓
Z-H-D	al-zāhidīn	Yūsuf 12:20	§	الزاهدين	X	✓
Z-H-R	zahra	Tā-Hā 20:131		زهرة		
Z-W-D	tazawwadū fa-inna	Baqara 2:197		تزدودوا	—	
	khayr al-zād			فان خير الزاد		
Z-Y-T	zaytu-hā	Nūr 24:35		زيتهما	—	
Ṣīn						
S-J-W	sajā	Ḍuḥā 93:2	§	سجى	X	✓
S-H-L	al-sāhil	Tā-Hā 20:39		الساحل		
S-D-Y	suda'	Qiyāma 75:36	§	سدئ	X	✓
S-R-D	sard	Saba' 34:11		سرد	—	✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.1 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogn. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
S-R-D-Q	surādiqū-hā	Kahf 18:29		سرادقها	—	✓
S-T-H	suṭiḥat	Ghāshiyā 88:20	§	سطحت		
S-T-W	yaṣṭūna	Hajj 22:72		يسطون	X	✓
S-GH-B	masghaba	Balad 90:14	§	مسغبة	X	✓
S-F-	la-nasfa 'ā	'Alaq 96:15		لنصفأ	X	✓
S-K-B	maskūb	Wāqī'a 56:31	§	مسكوب	X	✓
S-K-T	sakata	A'raf 7:154		سكت		
S-L-B	yaslubu-hum	Hajj 22:73		يسلبهم		
S-L-S-B-L	salsabīlā	Insān 76:18	§	سلسبيلأ	—	✓
S-L-Q	salaqū-kum	Aḥzāb 33:19		سلقوكم		
S-M-D	sāmidūn	Najm 53: 61	§	سامدون		✓
S-M-R	sāmīr ^m	Mu'minūn 23:67		سامرا		✓
S-M-K	samka-hā	Nāzi'at 79:28		سمكها		
S-M-M	samm	A'raf 7:40		سم		✓
S-N-D	musannada	Munāfiqūn 63:4		مسندة		✓
S-N-H	yatasannah	Baqara 2:259		يتسنه	X	✓
S-H-R	al-sāhira	Nāzi'at 79:14	§	الساهرة	X	✓
S-H-L	suhūli-hā	A'raf 7:74		سهولها		
S-H-M	sāhama	Šaffāt 37:141		ساهم		
S-W-B	sā'iba	Mā'ida 5:103		سائبة		
S-W-H	sāḥati-him	Šaffāt 37:177		ساحتهم	X	✓
S-W-T	sawṭ	Fajr 89:13		سوط	—	
	Shūn			ش		
SH-T-W	al-shitā'	Quraysh 106:2		الشتاء		
SH-H-M	shuḥūma-humā	An'am 6:146		شحومها	X	✓
SH-R-D	sharrid	Anfāl 8:57		شرّد		
SH-R-DH-M	shirdhima	Shu'arā' 26:54		شردمة	X	✓
SH-R-T	ashrāṭu-hā	Muḥammad 47:18		أشراطها		
SH-L	ishta'ala	Maryam 19:4		اشتعل	X	✓
SH-GH-F	shaghafa-hā	Yūsuf 12:30		شغفها		
SH-F-H	shafatayn	Balad 90:9	§	شفتين		
SH-K-S	mutashākisūn	Zumar 39:29		متشاكسون		
SH-K-W	mishkāt	Nūr 24:35		مشكوة	—	
SH-M-T	tushmit	A'raf 7:150		تشتت		
SH-M-KH	shāmikhāt	Mursalāt 77:27		شامخات	X	✓
SH-M-'Z	ishma'azzat	Zumar 39:45		اشمازت	X	✓
SH-W-B	shawbā	Šaffāt 37:67		شوبأ		
SH-W-Z	shuwāz	Raḥmān 55:35		شواط		✓
SH-W-K	al-shawka	Anfāl 8:7		الشوكة		
	Šad			ص		
Š-KH-KH	al-šākhkha	'Abasa 80:33	§	الصاخة	—	✓
Š-R-	šar'ā	Hāqqa 69:7		صرعى	X	✓

S-'R	tuṣa'ir	Luqmān 31:18		تصغر	X	✓
S-F-Š-F	ṣafṣafā	Ṭā-Hā 20:106	§	صفصفا	X	✓
S-F-N	al-ṣāfināt	Šād 38:31		الصالقات	X	✓
S-K-K	ṣakkat	Dhāriyāt 51:29		صكت	X	✓
S-L-D	ṣald ^m	Baqara 2:264		صلدا		✓
S-M-T	ṣāmītūn	A'raf 7:193	§	صامتون		
S-M-D	al-ṣamad	Ikhlās 112:2	§	الصمد	X	✓
S-N-W	ṣinwān wa-ghayr	Ra'd 13:4		صنوان وغير		
	ṣinwān			صنوان		
S-W-R	ṣur-hunna	Baqara 2:260		صرهن	X	✓
S-W-	ṣuwā'	Yūsuf 12:72		صواع	—	
S-W-F	aṣwāfi-hā	Naḥl 16:80		أصوافها		
S-W-M-	ṣawāmi'	Hajj 22:40		صوامع	—	
S-Y-Š-Y	ṣayāṣī-him	Aḥzāb 33:26		صياصيهيم	X	✓
S-Y-F	al-ṣayf	Quraysh 106:2	§	الصيف	X	✓
	Ḍad			ض		
D-'N	al-da'n	An'am 6:143		الضبان		
D-B-H	ḍabḥā	'Ādiyāt 100:1	§	ضبحأ	X	✓
D-D-D	ḍiddā	Maryam 19:82	§	ضدأ	X	✓
D-F-D-	al-ḍafādi'	A'raf 7:133		الضفادع		
D-M-R	ḍāmir	Hajj 22:27		ضامر	X	✓
D-N-K	ḍankān	Ṭā-Hā 20:124		ضنكأ	X	✓
D-N-N	ḍanī	Takwīr 81:24	§	ضنين	X	✓
D-H-	yuḍāhi'ūna	Tawba 9:30		يضاھنون	X	✓
D-Y-R	ḍayr	Shu'arā' 26:50		ضير		
D-Y-Z	ḍizā	Najm 53:22	§	ضيزى	X	✓
	Ṭā'			ط		
T-H-W	ṭaḥā-hā	Shams 91:6	§	طحاها		
T-R-H	uṭraḥū-hu	Yūsuf 12:9		اطرحوه	X	✓
T-F-F	al-muṭaffifīn	Muṭaffifīn 83:1	§	المطففين		
T-L-H	ṭalḥ	Wāqī'a 56:29		طلح	X	✓
T-L-L	ṭall	Baqara 2:265		طلل		
T-M-M	al-ṭamma	Nāzi'at 79:34		الطامة		
T-W-D	al-ṭawd	Shu'arā' 26:64		الطود		✓
	Zā'			ظ		
Z-'N	za'ni-kum	Naḥl 16:80		ظنكم		
	'Ayn			ع		
B-	ya'ba'ū	Furqān 25:77		يابوا	X	✓
B-Q-R	'abqariyy	Raḥmān 55:76		عبري	—	✓
J-F	'ijaf (2)	Yūsuf 12:43, 46		عجاف	X	
D-S	'adasi-hā	Baqara 2:61		عديها		
R-J-N	al-'urjūn	Yā-Sīn 36:39		العرجون	X	✓
R-M	al-'arim	Saba' 34:16		العرم	—	✓

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Table 7.1 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogn. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
'-Z-W	'izīn	Ma'ārij 70:37	§	عزین	X	✓
'-S-'-S	'as'as	Takwīr 81:17	§	عسس		✓
'-S-L	'asal	Muḥammad 47:15		عسل	X	✓
'-D-W	'idīn	Hijr 15:91	§	عضین		✓
'-T-F	'itfi-hi	Ḥajj 22:9		عطفه		
'-F-R[-T]	'ifit	Naml 27:39		عفريت	—	✓
'-M-Q	'amīq	Ḥajj 22:27	§	عمیق		
'-N-T	'anat	Ṭā-Hā 20:111		عنات		✓
'-N-K-B	'ankabūt	'Ankabūt 29:41		عنكبوت		
'-W-D	al-'ādiyāt	'Ādiyāt 100:1		العادیات		✓
'-W-Q	al-mu'awwiqīn	Aḥzāb 33:18		المعوقین		
'-W/Y-L	ta'ulū	Nisā' 4:3		تعولوا		✓
'-Y-B	a'iba-hā	Kahf 18:79		أعيبها		
Ghayn						
GH-B-N	al-taghābun	Taghābun 64:9		غ	X	✓
GH-D-Q	ghadaqān	Jinn 72:16	§	غداقاً		
GH-Z-L	ghazla-hā	Nahl 16:92		غزلا		
GH-Z-W	ghuzz ^m	Āl 'Imrān 3:156		غزى		
GH-Ş-B	ghaṣbān	Kahf 18:79	§	غصباً		
GH-Ş-S	ghuṣṣa	Muzzammil 73:13		غصة	X	✓
GH-T-SH	aghtash	Nāzi'āt 79:29		اغطش	X	✓
GH-L-Q	ghallaqat	Yūsuf 12:23		غلقت	X	✓
GH-L-Y	yaghlī fi l-buṭūn,	Dukhān 44:45,		يغلي في البطون	X	
	ka-ghalyi l-ḥamīm	44:46	§	كغلي الحميم		
GH-M-Z	yataghāmazūn	Muṭaffifīn 83:30	§	يتغامزون	X	✓
GH-M-D	tughmiḍū	Baqara 2:268		تغمضوا		
GH-W-B	al-mughīrāt	'Ādiyāt 100:3		المغيرات		✓
GH-W-L	ghawl	Şāffāt 37:47		غول	X	✓
Fā'						
F-T-'	tafta'ū	Yūsuf 12:85		فتتوا	X	✓
F-T-Q	fataqnā-humā	Anbiyā' 21:30		فتقناهما		
F-J-W	fajwa	Kahf 18:17		فجرة	X	✓
F-R-TH	farth	Nahl 16:66		فرث		✓
F-R-T	furuṭān	Kahf 18:28	§	فرطاً	X	✓
F-R-'	far'u-hā	Yūsuf 12:24		فرعها		
F-R-H	fārihīn	Shu'arā' 26:149	§	فارحين		✓
F-S-Ḥ	tafassahū . . .	Mujādila 58:11		تفسسوا		
	fa-fsahū yafsaḥ			فافسحوا يفسح		
F-S-R	tafsīrān	Furqān 25:33	§	تفسيراً		
F-Ş-Ḥ	aṣṣaḥ	Qaṣaṣ 28:34		أفصح		

F-S-M	infīṣām	Baqara 2:256		الفصام		
F-D-H	tafḍāhūn	Hijr 15:68	§	تفضحون	X	✓
F-D-W	aḥḍā	Nisā' 4:21		أفضى	X	✓
F-Z-Z	fazz ^m	Āl 'Imrān 3:159		فطاً	X	✓
F-Q-'	fāqi'	Baqara 2:69		فالق	X	✓
F-L-N	fulānān	Furqān 25:28		فلاناً		
F-N-D	tufannidūn	Yūsuf 12:94	§	تفندون	X	✓
F-N-N	afnān	Raḥmān 55:48	§	أفتان		✓
F-N-Y	fān	Raḥmān 55:26	§	فان		
F-H-M	fahhamnā-hā	Anbiyā' 21:79		فهمناها	X	✓
F-W-D	ufawwiḍ	Ghāfir 40:44		أفوض	X	✓
F-W-M	fūmi-hā	Baqara 2:61		فومها	X	✓
F-Y-L	al-fil	Fil 105:1	§	الفيل	—	
Qāf						
Q-B-H	al-maqbūhūn	Qaṣaṣ 28:42	§	المقبوحين	X	✓
Q-TH-'	qiththā'i-hā	Baqara 2:61		قثانها		
Q-D-H	qadhān	'Ādiyāt 100:2	§	قدحاً		
Q-S-W-R	qaswara	Muddaththir 74:51	§	قسورة	X	✓
Q-S-S	qissīsīn	Mā'ida 5:82		قسيسين	—	
Q-SH-'R	taqsha'irru	'Ankabūt 29:23		تقتشرون		
Q-S-F	qāṣif ^m	Isrā' 17:69		قاصفاً		
Q-S-M	qaṣamnā	Anbiyā' 21:11		قصمنا	X	✓
Q-D-B	qaḍabān	'Abasa 80:28	§	قضباً		✓
Q-D-D	yanqaḍḍa	Kahf 18:77		ينقض	X	✓
Q-T-T	qiṭṭa-nā	Şād 38:16		قطناً		✓
Q-T-M-R	qiṭmīr	Fāṭir 35:13	§	قطمير	X	✓
Q-'R	munqa'ir	Qamar 54:20	§	منقعر		
Q-F-L	aqḥālu-hā	Muḥammad 47:24	§	أقفالها	—	✓
Q-L'	aqli't	Hūd 11:44		أقلعي		
Q-M-H	muqmaḥūn	Yā-Sīn 36:8	§	مقمحون	X	✓
Q-M-T-R	qamṭarīrān	Insān 76:10	§	قمطريراً	X	✓
Q-M'	maqāmi'	Ḥajj 22:21		مقامع		
Q-M-L	al-qummal	A'rāf 7:133		القتل		
Q-N-W	qinwān	An'ām 6:99		قنوان	X	✓
Q-N-W	aqnā	Najm 53:48	§	أقنى		
Q-W-B	qāba	Najm 53:9		قاب	X	✓
Q-W-S	qawsayn	Najm 53:9		قوسين		
Kāf						
K-B-D	kabad	Balad 90:4	§	كبد		
K-B-K	kubkibū	Shu'ara' 26:94	§	ككبوا		

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Table 7.1 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogn. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
K-TH-B	kathība	Muzzammil 73:14		كثيبة	X	✓
K-D-H	kādihun ilā rabbika kādhā ⁿ	Inshiqāq 84:6	§	كادح إلى ربك كحكا	X	
K-D-R	inkadarat	Takwīr 81:2	§	انكدرت		✓
K-D-Y	akdā	Najm 53:34	§	أكدي		
K-S-D	kasāda-hā	Tawba 9:24		كسادها	X	✓
K-SH-T	kushiṭat	Takwīr 81:11	§	كشطت		
K-F-'	kufuw ^{an}	Ikhlas 112:4		كفوا	X	✓
K-F-T	kifātā ⁿ	Mursalāt 77:25	§	كفأتا		✓
K-F-R	kāfurā ⁿ	Insān 76:5	§	كافورا	—	✓
K-L-'	yakla'u-kum	Anbiyā' 21:42		يكلوكم		
K-L-H	kālīhūn	Mu'minūn 23:104	§	كالهون		✓
K-L-L	kall	Nahl 16:76		كل	X	✓
K-N-D	kanūd	'Ādiyāt 100:6	§	كنود	X	✓
K-N-S	al-kunnas	Takwīr 81:16	§	الكنس		✓
K-W-Y	tukwā	Tawba 9:35		تکوی		
Lām						
L-H-TH	yalhath aw tatrūk- hu yalhath	A'raf 7:176	§	يلثت أو تتركه يلثت		
L-H-F	ilhāf ^{an}	Baqara 2:273		إلحاقا	X	✓
L-H-N	lahn	Muhammad 47:30		لحن	X	✓
L-H-Y	lihyat-ī	Tā-Hā 20:94		لحيثي		
L-Z-B	lāzib	Šaffāt 37:11	§	لازيب	X	✓
L-F-H	talfahū	Mu'minūn 23:104		تلفح	X	✓
L-F-Z	yalfizu	Qāf 50:18		يلفظ	X	✓
L-Q-B	al-alqāb	Hujurāt 49:11		الألقاب	X	✓
L-Q-H	lawāqih	Hijr 15:22		لواقح		
L-Q-M	iltaqama-hu	Šaffāt 37:42		التقمه		
L-M-M	lammā ⁿ	Fajr 89:19	§	لما	X	✓
L-M-M	al-lamam	Najm 53:32		اللم	X	✓
L-H-M	alhama-hā	Shams 91:8		الهمها	X	✓
—	lāta	Šād 38:3		لات		✓
L-W-DH	liwādh ^{an}	Nūr 24:63		لواذا		
Mīm						
M-H-L	al-mihāl	Ra'd 13:13	§	المحال	X	✓
M-KH-D	al-makhād	Maryam 19:23		المخاض		
M-Z-N	al-muzn	Wāqī'a 56:69		المزن		
M-S-KH	masakhnā-hum	Yā-Sīn 36:67		مسخنهم	X	✓
M-S-D	masad	Masad 111:5	§	مسد		

M-S-Y	tumsūna	Rūm 30:17		تمسون		
M-SH-J	amshāj	Insān 76:2		أمشاج	—	✓
M-T-Y	yatamaṭṭā	Qiyāma 75:33	§	يتمطى		
M-Z	al-ma'z	An'am 6:143		المعز		
M-N	al-mā'ūn	Mā'ūn 107:7	§	الماعون	X	✓
M-Y	am'ā'a-hum	Muhammad 47:15	§	أمعاءهم		
M-K-W	mukā' ^{an}	Anfāl 8:35		مكاء	X	✓
	mahmā	A'raf 7:132		مهما		
M-Y-R	namīru	Yūsuf 12:65		نمير		
Nūn						
N-B-Z	tanābazū	Hujurāt 49:11		ن تبازوا	X	✓
N-B-T	yastanbiṭūna-hu	Nisā' 4:83		يستنبطونه		
N-T-Q	nataqnā	A'raf 7:171		نتقنا		
N-J-D	al-najdayn	Balad 90:10	§	النجدين		
N-J-S	najas	Tawba 9:28		نجس		
N-H-B	naḥba-hu	Aḥzāb 33:23		نحبه	X	✓
N-H-R	anḥar	Kawthar 108:2	§	انحر		✓
N-KH-R	nakhira	Nāzi'āt 79:11	§	نخرة		
N-SH-T	wa l-nāshiṭati	Nāzi'āt 79:2	§	والناشطات	X	✓
	nashṭā ⁿ		§	نشطا		
N-D-J	naḍijāt	Nisā' 4:56		نضجت		✓
N-D-KH	naḍḍakhatān	Rahmān 55:66	§	نضاختان		
N-T-H	al-naṭṭha	Mā'ida 5:3		النطيحة		
N-Q	yan'iqu	Baqara 2:181		ينعق	X	✓
N-L	na'lay-ka	Tā-Hā 20:12		نعليك		
N-GH-D	yunghidūna	Isrā' 17:51		ينغضون		✓
N-F-H	al-naḥṭhāt	Falaq 113:4		النفاثات		
N-F-H	naḥṭa	Anbiyā' 21:46		نفحة	X	✓
N-F-DH	an tanfudhū ... fa-nfudhū wa-lā tanfudhūna	Rahmān 55:33		... أن تنفخوا فانفخوا ولا تنفخون		
N-F-Y	yunfaw	Mā'ida 5:33		ينفوا		
N-Q	naq'ā ⁿ	'Ādiyāt 100:4	§	نقعا	X	✓
N-K-D	nakid ^{an}	A'raf 7:58		نكدا	X	✓
N-K-F	yastankif (2) istankafū	Nisā' 4:172, 173		يستنكف استنكفوا		
N-M-R-Q	namāriq	Ghāshiya 88:15	§	نمارق	—	✓
N-M-M	namīm	Qalam 68:11	§	نميم		
N-H-J	minhāj ^{an}	Mā'ida 5:48		منهاجا		✓
N-W	tanū'u	Qaṣaṣ 28:76		تنوء	X	✓
N-W-SH	al-tanāwush	Saba' 34:52		التناوش	X	
N-W-S	manāṣ	Šād 38:3	§	مناص		✓
N-W-Y	al-nawā	An'am 6:95		النوى		
Hā'						
	hā'umu	Hāqqa 69:19		هاؤم		

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.1 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogn. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
H-J-D	tahajjad	Isrā' 17:79		تَهَجَّد	X	✓
H-J-'	yahja' ūn	Dhāriyāt 51:17	§	يَهْجَعُونَ	X	✓
H-D-D	haddān	Maryam 19:90	§	هَذَا	X	✓
H-D-M	huddimat	Ḥajj 22:40		هَضَمَت		
H-D-H-D	al-hudhud	Naml 27:20		الْهُدُود		
H-R-B	harabān	Jinn 72:12	§	هَرَبَا		
H-Z-L	al-hazl	Ṭāriq 86:14	§	الْهَزْل	X	✓
H-SH-SH	ahushshu	Ṭā-Hā 20:18		أَهْشَ	X	✓
H-L-'	halū ^{an}	Ma'ārij 70:19	§	هَلُوعَا	X	✓
H-M-D	hāmida	Ḥajj 22:5		هَامِدَةٌ	X	✓
H-M-R	munhamir	Qamar 54:11	§	مَنْهَمِر		
H-M-S	hamsān	Ṭā-Hā 20:108	§	هَمْسَا		
—	hayta	Yūsuf 12:23		هَيْت		
—	hayhāt (2)	Mu'minūn 23:36		هَيْهَات		
H-Y-L	mahlā	Muzzammil 73:14	§	مَهْلَةٌ	X	✓
—	hiyah	Qārī'a 101:10	§	هِيَه		
	Wāw			و		
W-'-D	al-maw'ūda	Takwīr 81:8		المَوْعُودَة	X	✓
W-'-L	maw'ilān	Kahf 18:58	§	مَوَيْلَا	X	✓
W-B-R	awbāri-hā	Nahl 16:80		أَوْبَارِهَا	X	✓
W-T-N	al-watīn	Hāqqa 69:46	§	الْوَتِينَ		
W-J-B	wajabat	Ḥajj 22:36		وَجِبَتْ	X	✓
W-H-SH	al-wuḥūsh	Takwīr 81:5		الْوَحُوش	X	✓
W-S-N	sina	Baqara 2:255		سِنَةٌ		
W-SH-Y	shiya	Baqara 2:71		شِيَةٌ	X	✓
W-D-N	mawḍūna	Wāqī'a 56:15	§	مَوْضُونَةٌ		
W-T-R	waṭar ^{an} (2)	Aḥzāb 33:37		وَطَرَا	X	
W-T-N	mawāṭīn	Tawba 9:25		مَوَاطِنَ		
W-F-D	wafdān	Maryam 19:85	§	وَفَدَا		✓
W-F-R	mawfūrān	Isrā' 17:63	§	مَوْفُورَا	X	✓
W-F-D	yūfūdūn	Ma'ārij 70:43	§	يُوفِدُونَ	X	
W-Q-B	waqab	Falaq 113:3	§	وَقَبَ		✓
W-Q-D	al-mawqūdha	Mā'ida 5:3		المَوْقُودَةُ	X	✓
W-K-D	tawkīdi-hā	Nahl 16:91		تَوَكَّدَهَا	X	✓
W-K-Z	wakaza-hu	Qaṣaṣ 28:15		وَكَّزَهُ	X	✓
W-N-Y	taniyā	Ṭā-Hā 20:42		تَنْيَا		
W-H-J	wahhājān	Naba' 78:13	§	وَهَّاجَا	X	✓
W-H-Y	wāhiya	Hāqqa 69:16	§	وَاهِيَةٌ	X	✓
—	wayka-anna	Qaṣaṣ 28:82		وَيَكَاَنَّ		
—	wayka-anna-hu			وَيَكَاَنَّهُ		

Y-Q-T	al-yāqūt	Rahmān 55:58	§	يَاقُوتَ	—	✓
Y-Q-T-N	yaqūṭīn	Ṣāffāt 37:146	§	يَقُطِّينَ	—	✓
Y-Q-Z	ayqāz ^{an}	Kahf 18:18		أَيْقَازًا		
Y-N-	yan 'i-hi	An'ām 6:99		يَنْعَهُ	X	✓
Total	452		153			249
Proper Nouns				أَسْمَاء		
	Abī Lahab	Masad 111:1		أَبِي لَهَبٍ		
	Āzar	An'ām 6:74		أَزَرَ		
	Iram	Fajr 89:7		إِرَمَ		
	Il-yāsīn	Ṣāffāt 37:130	§	إِلْ يَاسِينَ		
	Bābil	Baqara 2:102		بَابِلَ		
	Badr	Āl 'Imrān 3:23		بَدْرَ		
	Bakka	Āl 'Imrān 3:96		بَكَّةَ		
	ibnat ('Imrān)	Tahrim 66:12		ابْنَتِ		
	al-Jumu'a	Jumu'a 62:9		الْجُمُعَةِ		
	al-Jūdiyy	Hūd 11:44		الْجُودِيِّ		
	Aḥmad	Ṣaff 61:6		أَحْمَدَ		
	Dhā al-Nūn	Anbiyā' 21:87		ذَا النُّونِ		
	Ramaḍān	Baqara 2:185		رَمَضَانَ		
	al-Rūm	Rūm 30:2		الرُّومَ		
	Zayd	Aḥzāb 33:37		زَيْدَ		
	tasnīm	Muṭaffifīn 83:27	§	تَسْنِيمَ		
	Suwā'	Nūḥ 71:23		سَوَاعَا		
	[Ṭūr] Saynā'	Mu'minūn 23:20		طُورَ (سَيْنَاءَ)		
	[Ṭūr] Sīnīna	Tīn 95:2	§	طُورَ (سَيْنِينَ)		
	al-Ṣafā	Baqara 2:158		الصَّفَا		
	'Arafāt	Baqara 2:198		عَرَفَاتَ		
	'Uzayr	Tawba 9:30		عَزِيرَ		
	al-'Uzzā	Najm 53:19	§	الْعَزَى		
	Quraysh	Quraysh 106:1		قُرَيْشَ		
	al-Lāt	Najm 53:19		اللَّاتِ		
	Laylat al-Qadr	Qadr 97:1, 2, 3		لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ		
	(3)					
	al-Majūs	Ḥajj 22:17		الْمَجُوسَ		
	Mārūt	Baqara 2:102		مَارُوتَ		
	al-Marwa	Baqara 2:158		الْمَرْوَةَ		
	Makka	Faṭḥ 48:24		مَكَّةَ		
	Mikāl	Baqara 2:98		مِيكَالَ		
	Nasr	Nūḥ 71:23	§	نَسْرًا		
	Hārūt	Baqara 2:102		هَارُوتَ		
	Wadd	Nūḥ 71:23		وَدًّا		
	Yathrib	Aḥzāb 33:13		يَثْرِبَ		
	Ya'ūq	Nūḥ 71:23		يَعُوقَ		
	Yaghūth	Nūḥ 71:23		يَغُوثَ		
Total	37		5		0	0

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.1 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Cogn. (MZ)	Strict Hapax
	"Mysterious letters"			فواتح السور		
	Alif-Lām-Mīm-Rā	Ra'd 13:1		المر		✓
	Alif-Lām-Mīm-Ṣād	A'raf 7:1		المص		✓
	Ṣād	Ṣād 38:1	§	ص		✓
	Ṭā-Sīn	Naml 27:1	§	طس		✓
	Ṭā-Hā	Ṭā-Hā 20:1	§	طه		✓
	Qāf	Qāf 50:1		ق		✓
	Kāf-Hā-Yā-'Ayn-Ṣād	Maryam 19:1		كهيعص		✓
	Nūn	Hāqqa 69:1	§	ن		✓
	'Ayn-Sīn-Qāf	Shūrā 42:2		عسق		✓
	Yā-Sīn	Yā-Sīn 36:1	§	يس		✓
Total	10		5			10
TOTAL	499		163			259

Table 7.2 Hapaxes in the Qur'ān, listed by Sūra

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
		Fātiha (1)			
		Baqara (2)			
R-B-H	rabiḥat	2:16		ربحت	✓
B-'D	bā'ūḍa	2:26		بعوضة	✓
B-Q-L	baqli-hā	2:61		بقلها	
Q-TH-'	qiththā'i-hā	2:61		قثانها	
F-W-M	fūmi-hā	2:61		فومها	✓
'-D-S	'adasi-hā	2:61		عدها	
B-Ṣ-L	baṣali-hā	2:61		بصلها	
F-Q-'	fāqi'	2:69		فاقع	✓
W-SH-Y	shiya	2:71		شبة	✓
[pn]	Mikāl	2:98		ميكال	
[pn]	Bābil	2:102		بابل	
[pn]	Hārūt	2:102		هاروت	
[pn]	Mārūt	2:102		ماروت	
[pn]	al-Ṣafā	2:158		الصفا	
[pn]	al-Marwa	2:158		المروة	

N-'Q	yan'iqu	2:181	ينعق	✓
[pn]	Ramaḍān	2:185	رمضان	
Z-W-D	tazawwadū fa-inna khayr al-zād	2:197	تزودوا فال خير الزاد	
[pn]	'Arafāt	2:198	عرفات	
W-S-N	sina	2:255	سنة	✓
-W-D	ya'ūdu-hu	2:255	يؤده	
F-Ṣ-M	infiṣām	2:256	انفصام	
S-N-H	yatasannah	2:259	يتسنه	✓
S-W-R	ṣur-hunna	2:260	صرهن	✓
S-L-D	ṣald ^{an}	2:264	صلدا	✓
T-L-L	ṭall	2:265	طلن	
GH-M-D	tughmiḍū	2:268	تغمضوا	
L-H-F	ilhāf ^{an}	2:273	إلحافاً	✓
KH-B-T	yatakhhabṭa-hu	2:275	يتخبطه	
	Āl 'Imrān (3)			
[pn]	Badr	3:23	بدر	
R-M-Z	ramz ^{an}	3:41	رمزاً	
DH-K-R	taddakhirūna	3:49	تخرون	
B-H-L	nabtahil	3:61	نتهل	✓
D-N-R	dīnār	3:75	دينار	
[pn]	Bakka	3:96	بكة	
GH-Z-W	ghuzz ^{an}	3:156	غزى	
F-Z-Z	fazz ^{an}	3:159	فظاً	✓
	Nisā' (4)			
H-W-B	hūb ^{an}	4:2	حوباً	✓
-W/Y-L	ta'ulū	4:3	تعولوا	✓
B-D-R	bidār	4:6	بدار	✓
F-D-W	aḥḍā	4:21	أفضى	✓
J-B-T	al-jibt	4:51	الجبت	✓
N-D-J	naḍijāt	4:56	نضجت	✓
TH-B[-W/Y]	thubāt	4:71	ثبات	✓
B-T-'	la-yubaṭṭi'anna	4:72	ليبطئن	
DH-Y-'	adhā'ū	4:83	أذاعوا	✓
N-B-T	yastanbiṭūna-hu	4:83	يستنبطونه	
R-GH-M	murāgham ^{an}	4:100	مراغماً	✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
B-T-K	fa-l-yubattikanna	4:119		قالبتيكن	✓
DH-B-DH-B	mudhabdhabīn	4:143		مذبذبين	
N-K-F	yastankif (2) istankafū	4:172, 173		يستتكف استتكفوا	
Mā'ida (5)					
'-M-M	āmūn	5:2		آمين	✓
KH-N-Q	al-munkhaniqa	5:3		المنخقة	✓
W-Q-D	al-mawqūdhā	5:3		الموقودة	✓
N-T-H	al-naṭīḥa	5:3		الناطحة	
DH-K-Y	dhakkaytum	5:3		ذكيتم	
T-Y-H	yatīhūna	5:26		يتهيون	
N-F-Y	yunfaw	5:33		ينفوا	
N-H-J	minhāj ^{an}	5:48		منهاجاً	✓
Q-S-S	qissīsīn	5:82		قسيسين	
R-M-H	rimāḥu-kum	5:94		رماحكم	
S-W-B	sā'iba	5:103		سائبة	
An'ām (6)					
B-S-L	an tubsala nafsun . . . alladhīna uḥsilū	6:70		أن تبسل نفس... الذين أبسلوا	
H-Y-R	ḥayrān	6:71		حيران	✓
[pn]	Āzar	6:74		آزر	
'-F-L	afala (2), afalat	6:76, 77, 78		أفل ، أفلت	
	al-āflīn	6:76	§	الآفلين	
B-Z-GH	bāzighā ^{an}	6:77		بازغاً	
	bāzighat ^{an}	6:78		بازغة	
N-W-Y	al-nawā	6:95		النوى	
Q-N-W	qinwān (2)	6:99		قنوان	✓
Y-N-'	yan 'i-hi	6:99		ينعه	✓
D-'-N	al-ḍa'n	6:143		الضنان	
M-'-Z	al-ma'z	6:143		المعز	
SH-H-M	shuḥūma-humā	6:146		شحومهما	✓
A'rāf (7)					
[fs]	Alif-Lām-Mīm-Ṣād	7:1		المص	✓
DH-'-M	madh'ūm ^{an}	7:18		مذموماً	✓

R-Y-SH	rīsh ^{an}	7:26		ريشاً	✓
S-M-M	samm	7:40		سم	✓
H-TH-TH	ḥathīth ^{an}	7:54		حثيثاً	
N-K-D	nakid ^{an}	7:58		نكداً	✓
S-H-L	suhūli-hā	7:74		سهولها	
	mahmā	7:132		مهما	
Q-M-L	al-qummāl	7:133		القتل	
D-F-D-'	al-ḍafādi'	7:133		الضفادع	
J-R-R	yajurru-hu	7:150		يجزه	
SH-M-T	tushmit	7:150		تثمت	
S-K-T	sakata	7:154		سكت	
B-J-S	inbajasat	7:160		انبجست	✓
N-T-Q	nataqnā	7:171		نتقنا	
L-H-TH	yalhath aw tatruk-hu yalhath	7:176	§	يلث أو تتركه يلث	
S-M-T	ṣāmītūn	7:193	§	صامتون	
Anfāl (8)					
SH-W-K	al-shawka	8:7		الشوكة	
Z-H-F	zaḥf ^{an}	8:15		زحفاً	
H-W-Z	mutaḥayyiz ^{an}	8:16		متحيزاً	
M-K-W	mukā' ^{an}	8:35		مكاء	✓
SH-R-D	sharid	8:57		شرد	
Tawba (9)					
'-L-	ill ^{an} (2)	9:8, 10		إلاً	✓
K-S-D	kasāda-hā	9:24		كسادها	✓
W-T-N	mawāṭīn	9:25		مواطن	
N-J-S	najas	9:28		نجس	
[pn]	'Uzayr	9:30		عزير	
D-H-'	yuḍāhi'ūna	9:30		يضاهنون	✓
K-W-Y	tukwā	9:35		تكوى	
J-B-H	jibāhu-hum	9:35		جباههم	
TH-B-T	thabbata-hum	9:46		تبطهم	✓
J-M-H	yajmaḥūn	9:57	§	يجمحن	✓
J-R-F	juruf	9:109		جرف	
S-S	ussisa/assasa (2)	9:108, 109 (2)		أسس	—
Yūnus (10)					
B-D-N	badani-ka	10:92		بدنك	

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
Hūd (11)					
Z-R-Y	tazdarī	11:31		تزدري	✓
B-L-'	ibla'ī	11:44		ابلي	
Q-L-'	aqli'ī	11:44		أقلي	
[pn]	al-Jūdiyy	11:44		الجودي	
H-N-DH	ḥanīdh	11:69	§	حنيد	✓
R-W-'	al-raw'	11:74		الروع	
R-F-D	al-rifd	11:99	§	الرفد	
	al-marfūd			المرفود	
Yūsuf (12)					
T-R-H	uṭraḥū-hu	12:9		اطرحوه	✓
R-T-'	yarta'	12:12		يرتع	
D-R-H-M	darāhim	12:20		دراهم	
Z-H-D	al-zāhidīn	12:20	§	الزاهدين	✓
GH-L-Q	ghallaqat	12:23		غلقت	✓
	hayta	12:23		هيت	
F-R-'	far'u-hā	12:24		فرعها	
SH-GH-F	shaghafa-hā	12:30		شغفها	
KH-B-Z	khubz ^{an}	12:36		خبزاً	✓
'J-F	'ijāf (2)	12:43, 46		عجاف	
H-S-H-S	ḥaṣḥaṣa	12:51		حصحص	✓
M-Y-R	namīru	12:65		نمير	
S-W-'	ṣuwā'	12:72		صواع	
F-T-'	tafta'ū	12:85		تفتوا	✓
TH-R-B	tathrīb	12:92		تثريب	✓
F-N-D	tufannidūn	12:94	§	تفنون	✓
Ra'd (13)					
[fš]	Alif-Lām-Mīm-Rā	13:1		الر	✓
S-N-W	ṣinwān	13:4		صنوان وغير	
	wa-ghayr ṣinwān			صنوان	
M-H-L	al-miḥāl	13:13	§	المحال	✓
J-F-'	jufa' ^{an}	13:17		جفاء	✓
Ibrāhīm (14)					
J-R-'	yatajarra'u-hu	14:17		يتجرعه	

R-M-D	ramād	14:18		رماد	✓
J-TH-TH	ujtuththtat	14:26		اجتثت	✓
Hijr (15)					
L-Q-H	lawāqih	15:22		لواقح	
F-D-H	tafḍaḥūna	15:68	§	تفضحون	✓
'D[-W]	'iḍīn	15:91	§	عضين	✓
Nahl (16)					
D-F-'	dif'	16:5		دفعه	✓
B-GH-L	al-bighāl	16:8		البغال	
D-S-S	yadussu-hu	16:59		يدسه	
F-R-TH	farth	16:66		فرث	✓
H-F-D	ḥafadat ^{an}	16:72		حفدة	
K-L-L	kall	16:76		كل	✓
J-W-W	jaww	16:79		جو	
Z-'N	za'ni-kum	16:80		ظعنكم	
S-W-F	aṣwāfi-hā	16:80		أصوافها	
W-B-R	awbāri-hā	16:80		أوبارها	✓
W-K-D	tawkidī-hā	16:91		توكيدها	✓
GH-Z-L	ghazla-hā	16:92		غزلها	
Isrā' (17)					
J-W-S	jāsū	17:5		جاسوا	✓
B-DH-R	lā tubaddhir	17:26		لا تبذر	
	tabdhīrā ⁿ		§	تبذيراً	
	inna l-mubaddhirīna	17:27		إن المبدرين	
N-GH-D	yunghiḍūna	17:51		ينغضون	✓
H-N-K	la-aḥtanikanna	17:62		لاحتكن	
W-F-R	mawfūr ^{an}	17:63	§	موفوراً	✓
J-L-B	ajlib	17:64		أجلب	✓
Q-S-F	qāṣif ^{an}	17:69		قاصفاً	
D-L-K	dulūk	17:78		دلوك	✓
H-J-D	tahajjad	17:79		تهجد	✓
KH-B-W	khbat	17:97		خبت	✓
Kahf (18)					
F-J-W	fajwa	18:17		فجوة	✓
Y-Q-Z	ayqāz ^{an}	18:18		أيقاظاً	
F-R-T	furuṭā ⁿ	18:28	§	فرطاً	✓
S-R-D-Q	surādiqū-hā	18:29		سرادقها	✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
B-Y-D	tabīd	18:35		تَبِيد	✓
W-'L	maw'ilā ⁿ	18:58	§	مَوَيْلًا	✓
Q-D-D	yanqaḍḍa	18:77		يَنْقَضُّ	✓
'Y-B	a'ṭba-hā	18:79		أَعْيَبَهَا	
GH-Ṣ-B	ghaṣbā ⁿ	18:79	§	غَصَبًا	
R-Q-M	al-raqīm	18:95		الرَّقِيم	✓
R-D-M	radmā ⁿ	18:95	§	رَدْمًا	✓
Maryam (19)					
[fṣ]	Kāf-Hā-Yā-' Ayn-Ṣād	19:1		كَهَيَّعَص	✓
SH-'L	ishta'ala	19:4		اشْتَاعَلَ	✓
M-KH-D	al-makhāḍ	19:23		الْمَخَاضِ	
H-T-M	ḥatm ⁿ	19:71		حَتْمًا	
D-D-D	ḍiddā ⁿ	19:82	§	ضِدًّا	✓
'Z-Z	ta'uzzu-hum azzā ⁿ	19:83	§	تَوَزَّعُوا	
W-F-D	wafḍā ⁿ	19:85	§	وَفْدًا	✓
'D-D	iddā ⁿ	19:89	§	إِدًّا	✓
H-D-D	haddā ⁿ	19:90	§	هَدًّا	✓
R-K-Z	rikzā	19:98	§	رِكْزًا	✓
Ṭā-Hā (20)					
[fṣ]	Ṭā-Hā	20:1	§	طَه	✓
TH-R-Y	al-tharā	20:6	§	الْثَرَى	
KH-L-'	ikhla'	20:12		اِخْلَعْ	
N-'L	na'lay-ka	20:12		نَعْلَيْكَ	
H-SH-SH	ahushshu	20:18		أَهْشْ	✓
'R-B	ma'ārib	20:18		مَنَارِبَ	
S-H-L	al-sāhil	20:39		السَّاحِلِ	
W-N-Y	taniyā	20:42		تَنْبِيَا	
L-H-Y	lihyat-i	20:94		لِحْيَتِي	
Z-R-Q	zurqā ⁿ	20:102	§	زُرْقًا	
Ṣ-F-Ṣ-F	ṣafṣafā ⁿ	20:106	§	صَفْصَفًا	✓
'M-T	amtā ⁿ	20:107	§	أَمْتًا	✓
H-M-S	hamsā ⁿ	20:108	§	هَمْسًا	
'N-T	'anat	20:111		عَنْتَ	✓

D-N-K	ḍank ⁿ	20:124	ضَنْكًا	✓
Z-H-R	zahra	20:131	زَهْرَةً	
Anbiyā' (21)				
Q-S-M	qaṣamnā	21:11	قَصَمْنَا	✓
D-M-GH	yadmaghu-hu	21:18	يَدْمَغُهُ	✓
R-T-Q	ratq ⁿ	21:30	رَتَقًا	
F-T-Q	fataqnā-humā	21:30	فَتَقْنَاهُمَا	
K-L-'	yakla'u-kum	21:42	يَكْلُوكُمْ	
N-F-H	naḥḥa	21:46	نَفَحَ	✓
F-H-M	fahhamnā-hā	21:79	فَهَّمْنَاهَا	✓
[pn]	Dhā al-Nūn	21:87	ذَا النُّونِ	
H-D-B	ḥadab	21:96	حَدَبَ	✓
Hajj (22)				
DH-H-L	tadhhalu	22:2	تَذَهَّلْ	
H-M-D	hāmida	22:5	هَامِدَةً	✓
'T-F	'itfi-hi	22:9	عُطِفْهُ	
[pn]	al-Majūs	22:17	الْمَجُوسِ	
Q-M-'	maqāmi'	22:21	مَقَامِعَ	
D-M-R	ḍāmir	22:27	ضَامِرَ	✓
'M-Q	'amīq	22:27	عَمِيقَ	§
T-F-TH	tafatha-hum	22:29	تَفَثَهُمْ	
W-J-B	wajabat	22:36	وَجِبَتْ	✓
H-D-M	huddimat	22:40	هُدِّمَتْ	
S-W-M-'	ṣawāmi'	22:40	صَوَامِعَ	
B-'R	bi'r	22:45	بِنَرٍ	
S-T-W	yaṣṭūna	22:72	يَسْطُونُ	✓
S-L-B	yaṣlubu-hum	22:73	يَسْلُبُهُمْ	
DH-B-B	dhubāb ⁿ al-dhubāb	22:73	ذُبَابًا الذُّبَابِ	
Mu'minūn (23)				
[pn]	[Ṭūr] Saynā'	23:20	(طُور) سَيْنَاءَ	
	hayhāt (2)	23:36	هَيْهَاتَ	
S-M-R	sāmira ⁿ	23:67	سَامِرًا	✓
L-F-H	talfahu	23:104	تَلْفَحَ	✓
K-L-H	kālīhūn	23:104	كَالْحُونِ	✓
Nūr (24)				
'L-W/Y	ya'tali	24:22	يَأْتِلُ	✓
-R-B	al-irba	24:31	الْأَرْبَةِ	✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
'-Y-M	al-ayāmā	24:32		الأيامى	✓
SH-K-W	mishkāṭ	24:35		مشكوة	
Z-J-J	zujāja	24:35		زجاجة	
	al-zujāja			الزجاجة	
Z-Y-T	zaytu-hā	24:35		زيتها	
DH-'-N	mudh'inīn	24:49	§	مذعنين	✓
H-Y-K	yahīfa	24:50		يحيف	
L-W-DH	liwādh ^{an}	24:63		لواذا	
Furqān (25)					
F-L-N	fulān ^{an}	25:28		فلاناً	
F-S-R	tafsīrā ⁿ	25:33	§	تفسيراً	
'-B-'	ya'ba'ū	25:77		ياأبا	✓
Shu'arā' (26)					
D-Y-R	ḍayr	26:50		ضير	
SH-R-	shirdhima	26:54		شردمة	✓
DH-M					
T-W-D	al-tawd	26:64		الطود	✓
K-B-K	kubkibū	26:94	§	ككبوا	
R-Y-'	ri'	26:128		ريع	✓
F-R-H	fārihīn	26:149	§	فارهين	✓
Naml (27)					
[/s]	Tā-Sīn	27:1	§	طس	✓
B-S-M	tabassama	27:19		تبسم	✓
H-D-H-D	al-hudhud	27:20		الهدهد	
KH-B-'	al-khab'	27:25		الخبء	
'-F-R[-T]	'ifrit	27:39		عفريت	✓
J-M-D	jāmidatan	27:88		جامدة	
T-Q-N	atqana	27:88		أتقن	
Qaṣaṣ (28)					
W-K-Z	wakaza-hu	28:15		وكره	✓
DH-W-D	tadhūdāni	28:23		تذودان	
J-DH-W	jadhwa	28:29		جنوة	
B-Q-'	al-buq'a	28:30		البقعة	
F-S-H	afṣaḥ	28:34		أفصح	
R-D-'	rid' ^{an}	28:34		ردءاً	

Q-B-H	al-maqbūḥīn	28:42	§	المقبوحين	✓
N-W-'	tanū'u	28:76		تنوء	✓
—	wayka-anna	28:82		ويكأن	
—	wayka-anna-hu			ويكأنه	
'Ankabūt (29)					
Q-SH-'-R	taqsha'irru	29:23		تقشعر	
'-N-K-B	'ankabūt	29:41		العنكبوت	
KH-T-T	takhuṭṭu-hu	29:48	§	تخطئه	
Rūm (30)					
[pn]	al-Rūm	30:2		الروم	
M-S-Y	tumsūna	30:17		تمسون	
Luqmān (31)					
S-'-R	tuṣa'ir	31:18		تصغر	✓
KH-D-D	khadda-ka	31:18		خذك	
KH-T-R	khattār	31:32		ختار	
Sajda (32)					
J-F-W	tatajāfa	32:16		تتجافى	✓
Aḥzāb (33)					
J-W-F	jawfi-hi	33:4		جوفه	
[pn]	Yathrib	33:13		يثرب	
'-W-Q	al-mu'awwiqīn	33:18		المعوقين	
S-L-Q	salaqū-kum	33:19		سلقوكم	
N-H-B	naḥba-hu	33:23		نحبه	✓
S-Y-S-Y	ṣayāṣī-him	33:26		صياصيمهم	✓
[pn]	Zayd	33:37		زيد	
W-T-R	waṭar ^m (2)	33:37		وطراً	
J-L-B	jalābībi-hinna	33:59		جلابيبهن	
Saba' (34)					
S-R-D	sard	34:11		سرد	✓
J-F-N	jifān	34:13		جفان	✓
'-R-M	al-'arim	34:16		العرم	✓
KH-M-T	khamṭ	34:16		خمت	✓
'-TH-L	athl	34:16		أثل	
N-W-SH	al-tanāwush	34:52		التناوش	
Fāṭir (35)					
Q-T-M-R	qitmīr	35:13	§	قطمير	✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
Yā-Sīn (36)					
[fʃ]	Yā-Sīn	36:1	§	يس	✓
Q-M-H	muqmaḥūn	36:8	§	مقّمون	✓
'R-J-N	al-'urjūn	36:39		العرجون	✓
M-S-KH	masakhnā-hum	36:67		مسخناهم	✓
Šaffat (37)					
L-Z-B	lāzib	37:11	§	لازب	✓
L-Q-M	iltaqama-hu	37:42		التقّمه	
GH-W-L	ghawl	37:47		غول	✓
B-Y-D	bayḍ	37:49		بيض	
SH-W-B	shawb ^{an}	37:67		شوباً	
Z-F-F	yaziffūn	37:94	§	يزفرون	
T-L-L	talla-hu	37:103		تلّه	✓
J-B-N	al-jabīn	37:107	§	الجبين	✓
[pn]	Il-yāsīn	37:130	§	إل ياسين	
'B-Q	abaq	37:140		أبق	
S-H-M	sāhama	37:141		ساهم	
Y-Q-Ṭ-N	yaqṭīn	37:146	§	يقتلين	✓
S-W-Ḥ	sāḥati-him	37:177		ساحتهم	✓
Šād (38)					
[fʃ]	Šād	38:1	§	ص	✓
—	lāta	38:3		لات	✓
N-W-Ṣ	manāṣ	38:3	§	مناص	✓
Q-Ṭ-Ṭ	qiṭṭa-nā	38:16		قطنا	✓
Ṣ-F-N	al-ṣāfināt	38:31		الصفائف	✓
J-W-D	al-jīyād	38:31	§	الجياد	
R-KH-W	rukḥā' ^{an}	38:36		رخاء	
Zumar (39)					
SH-K-S	mutashākisūn	39:29		متشاكسون	
SH-M-'Z	ishma'azzat	39:45		اشمازت	✓
Ghāfir (40)					
F-W-D	ufawwiḍ	40:44		أفوض	✓
[Fuṣṣilat (41)]					
—					

		Shūrā (42)	
[fʃ]	'Ayn-Sīn-Qāf	42:2	عسق ✓
R-K-D	rawākīd	42:33	رواكد ✓
		Zukhruf (43)	
B-R-M	abramū amrān	43:79	أبرموا أمراً
	fa-innā mubrimūn	§	فإنّا مبرمون
		Dukhān (44)	
R-H-W	rahw ^{an}	44:24	رهوأ ✓
GH-L-Y	yaghli fī l-buṭūn	44:45	يغلي في البطون
	ka-ghalyi l-ḥamīm	44:46	كغلي الحميم
		[Jāthiya (45)]	
		—	
		Aḥqāf (46)	
H-Q-F	al-aḥqāf	46:21	الأحقاف ✓
		Muḥammad (47)	
T-'S	ta's ^{an}	47:8	تصأ
'S-N	āsin	47:15	أسن ✓
'S-L	'asal	47:15	عسل ✓
M-'Y	am'a'a-hum	47:15	أمعاءهم
'N-F	ānif ^{an}	47:16	ءانفا ✓
SH-R-Ṭ	ashrāṭu-hā	47:18	أشراطها
Q-F-L	aqfālu-hā	47:24	أقفالها ✓
L-H-N	lahn	47:30	لحن ✓
		Faṭḥ (48)	
[pn]	Makka	48:24	مكة
		Ḥujurāt (49)	
N-B-Z	tanābazū	49:11	تنابزوا ✓
L-Q-B	al-alqāb	49:11	الألقاب ✓
J-S-S	tajassasū	49:12	تجسسوا
		Qāf (50)	
[fʃ]	Qāf	50:1	ق ✓
B-S-Q	bāsiqāt	50:10	باسقات ✓
L-F-Ṣ	yalfiṣu	50:18	يلفظ ✓
H-Y-D	taḥīdu	50:19	تحيد ✓
		Dhāriyāt (51)	
H-B-K	al-ḥubuk	51:7	الحبك ✓
H-J'	yahja'ūn	51:17	يهجعون ✓
Ṣ-K-K	ṣakkat	51:29	صكت ✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
Tūr (52)					
R-Q-Q	raqq	52:3		رَقَّ	✓
'L-T	alatnā-hum	52:21		النتاهم	✓
Najm (53)					
Q-W-B	qāba	53:9		قاب	✓
Q-W-S	qawsayn	53:9		قوسين	
[pn]	al-Lāt	53:19		اللات	
[pn]	al-'Uzzā	53:19	§	العزى	
D-Y-Z	qīzā	53:22	§	ضيضى	✓
L-M-M	al-lamam	53:32		اللمم	✓
K-D-Y	akdā	53:34	§	أكدى	
Q-N-W	aqnā	53:48	§	أقنى	
S-M-D	sāmidūn	53:61	§	سامدون	✓
Qamar (54)					
H-M-R	munhamir	54:11	§	منهمر	
D-S-R	dusur	54:13	§	دسر	✓
Q-'R	munqa'ir	54:20	§	منقعر	
'SH-R	ashir	54:25, 26	§	أشهر	
D-H-Y	adhā	54:46		أدهى	
Rahmān (55)					
'N-M	al-anām	55:10	§	الأنام	✓
F-N-Y	fān	55:26	§	فان	
N-F-DH	an tanfudhū ... fa-nfudhū	55:33		... أن تنفدوا فانفدوا	
SH-W-Z	shuwāz	55:35		ولا تنفدون شواظ	
F-N-N	afnān	55:48	§	أفنان	✓
Y-Q-T	al-yāqūt	55:58	§	الياقوت	✓
D-H-M	mudhāmmatān	55:64	§	مدهامتان	✓
N-D-KH	naḍḍakhatān	55:66	§	نضاختان	
KH-Y-M	al-khiyām	55:72	§	الخيام	
R-F-R-F	rafrāf	55:76		رفرف	✓
'B-Q-R	'abqariyy	55:76		عبقري	✓
Wāqī'a (56)					
R-J-J	rujjati l-arḍu rajjā	56:4	§	رجت الأرض رجأ	

B-S-S	bussati l-jibālu bassā	56:5	§	بست الجبال بسا	
W-D-N	mawḍūna	56:15	§	موضونة	✓
'B-R-Q	abārīq	56:18		أباريق	✓
KH-D-D	makhḍūd	56:28	§	مخضود	✓
T-L-H	ṭalḥ	56:29		طلح	✓
S-K-B	maskūb	56:31	§	مسكوب	✓
M-Z-N	al-muzn	56:69		المزن	
H-L-Q-M	al-ḥulqūm	56:83	§	الحلقوم	✓
[Ḥadīd (57)]					
Mujādila (58)					
J-L-S	al-majālis	58:11		المجالس	
F-S-H	tafassaḥū ... fa-fsaḥū yafsaḥ	58:11		... تفسحوا فافسحوا يفسح	
[Ḥashr (59)]					
[Mumtaḥina (60)]					
Ṣaff (61)					
R-Ṣ-Ṣ	marṣūṣ	61:4	§	مرصوص	✓
[pn]	Aḥmad	61:6		أحمد	
Jumu'a (62)					
[pn]	al-Jumu'a	62:9		الجمعة	
Munāfiqūn (63)					
KH-SH-B	khushub	63:4		خشب	✓
S-N-D	musannada	63:4		مسندة	✓
Taghābun (64)					
GH-B-N	al-taghābun	64:9		التغابن	✓
[Ṭalāq (65)]					
Taḥrīm (66)					
TH-Y-B	thayyibāt	66:5		ثيبات	✓
[pn]	ibnat ('Imrān)	66:12		ابنت	
[Mulq (67)]					
Qalam (68)					
N-M-M	namīm	68:11	§	نميم	
Z-N-M	zanīm	68:13	§	زئيم	✓

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
<i>KH-R-T-M</i>	al-khurṭūm	68:16	§	الخرطوم	✓
<i>H-R-D</i>	ḥard	68:25		حرد	✓
Ḥāqqa (69)					
[fs]	Nūn	69:1	§	ن	✓
<i>H-S-M</i>	ḥusūm ^{an}	69:7		حسوماً	✓
<i>Ṣ-R-'</i>	ṣar'ā	69:7		صرعى	✓
<i>W-H-Y</i>	wāhiya	69:16	§	واهيّة	✓
—	hā'umu	69:19		هائم	
<i>W-T-N</i>	al-watīn	69:46	§	الوتين	
Ma'ārij (70)					
<i>H-L-'</i>	halū'an	70:19	§	هلوعاً	✓
<i>'Z-W</i>	'izīn	70:37	§	عزين	✓
<i>W-F-D</i>	yūfiḍūna	70:43	§	يوفضون	
Nūḥ (71)					
[pn]	Wadd	71:23		وداً	
[pn]	Suwā'	71:23		سواعاً	
[pn]	Yaghūth	71:23		يغوث	
[pn]	Ya'ūq	71:23		يعوق	
[pn]	Nasr	71:23	§	نسراً	
Jinn (72)					
<i>H-R-S</i>	ḥaras ^{an}	72:8		حرساً	✓
<i>H-R-B</i>	harabā ⁿ	72:12	§	هرباً	
<i>H-R-Y</i>	taḥarraw	72:14		تحزوا	✓
<i>GH-D-Q</i>	ghadaqā ⁿ	72:16	§	غدقاً	
Muzzammil (73)					
<i>Z-M-L</i>	al-muzzammil	73:1		المزمل	✓
<i>B-T-L</i>	tabattal ilayhi	73:8		تبتل إليه	
	tabtīlā ⁿ		§	تبتيلاً	
<i>GH-Ṣ-Ṣ</i>	ghuṣṣa	73:13		غصّة	✓
<i>K-TH-B</i>	kathība	73:14		كثيبة	✓
<i>H-Y-L</i>	mahīlā	73:14	§	مهيلة	✓
Muddaththir (74)					
<i>D-TH-R</i>	al-muddaththir	74:1	§	المثتر	
<i>Q-S-W-R</i>	qaswara	74:51	§	قسورة	✓

<i>H-R-K</i>	tuḥarrik	75:16		تحرك	
<i>M-T-Y</i>	yatamaṭṭā	75:33	§	يتمطى	
<i>S-D-Y</i>	suda ⁿ	75:36	§	سدى	✓
Insān (76)					
<i>M-SH-J</i>	amshāj	76:2		أمشاج	✓
<i>K-F-R</i>	kāfurā ⁿ	76:5	§	كافوراً	✓
<i>Q-M-T-R</i>	qamṭarīrā ⁿ	76:10	§	قمطيراً	✓
<i>Z-M-H-R</i>	zamharīrā ⁿ	76:13	§	زمهيراً	✓
<i>'N-Y</i>	āniya	76:15		آنية	
<i>Z-N-J-B-L</i>	zanjabīlā ⁿ	76:17	§	زنجبيلاً	✓
<i>S-L-S-B-L</i>	salsabīlā ⁿ	76:18	§	سلسبيلاً	✓
Mursalāt (77)					
<i>K-F-T</i>	kifātā ⁿ	77:25	§	كفاتاً	✓
<i>SH-M-KH</i>	shāmikhāt	77:27		شامخات	✓
Naba' (78)					
<i>W-H-J</i>	wahhājā ⁿ	78:13	§	وهاجاً	✓
<i>TH-J-J</i>	thajjājā ⁿ	78:14	§	ثجاجاً	✓
<i>D-H-Q</i>	dihāqā ⁿ	78:34	§	دهاقاً	✓
Nāzi'āt (79)					
<i>N-SH-T</i>	wa l-nāshiṭāti	79:2		والناشطات	✓
	nashṭā ⁿ		§	نشطاً	
<i>H-F-R</i>	al-ḥāfira	79:10	§	الحافرة	
<i>N-KH-R</i>	nakhira	79:11	§	نخرة	
<i>S-H-R</i>	al-sāhira	79:14	§	الساهرة	✓
<i>S-M-K</i>	samka-hā	79:28		سمكها	
<i>GH-T-SH</i>	aghtash	79:29		أغطش	✓
<i>D-H-W</i>	daḥā-hā	79:30	§	دحاهما	
<i>T-M-M</i>	al-tāmma	79:34		الطامة	
'Abasa (80)					
<i>Q-D-B</i>	qaḍabā ⁿ	80:28	§	قضباً	✓
<i>'B-B</i>	abbā ⁿ	80:31	§	أبناً	✓
<i>Ṣ-KH-KH</i>	al-ṣākhkha	80:33	§	الصاخّة	✓
Takwīr (81)					
<i>K-D-R</i>	inkadarat	81:2	§	انكدرت	✓
<i>W-H-SH</i>	al-wuḥūsh	81:5		الوحوش	✓
<i>W-'D</i>	al-maw'ūda	81:8		الموءودة	✓
<i>K-SH-T</i>	kushiṭat	81:11	§	كشطت	

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	Qur'ānic reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
<i>K-N-S</i>	al-kunnas	81:16	§	الكنس	✓
<i>'S-'-S</i>	'as'as	81:17	§	عسس	✓
<i>D-N-N</i>	ḍanīn	81:24	§	ضنين	✓
[Infiṭār (82)]					
—					
Muṭaffifin (83)					
<i>R-Y-N</i>	rāna	83:1		ران	
<i>T-F-F</i>	al-muṭaffifin	83:1	§	المطففين	
<i>R-Ḥ-Q</i>	raḥīq	83:25		رحيق	✓
[pn]	tasnīm	83:27	§	تسنيم	
<i>GH-M-Z</i>	yataghāmazūn	83:30	§	يتغامزون	✓
Inshiqāq (84)					
<i>K-D-Ḥ</i>	kādihū ^a ilā rabbika kādhā ^a	84:6	§	كادح إلى ربك كذحاً	
Burūj (85)					
<i>KH-D-D</i>	al-ukhdūd	85:4	§	الأخود	✓
Ṭāriq (86)					
<i>D-F-Q</i>	dāfiq	86:6	§	دافق	
<i>T-R-B</i>	al-tarā'ib	86:7	§	الترائب	✓
<i>H-Z-L</i>	al-hazl	86:14	§	الهزل	✓
[A'lā (87)]					
—					
Ghāshiya (88)					
<i>N-M-R-Q</i>	namāriq	88:15	§	نمارق	✓
<i>Z-R-B</i>	zarābiyy	88:16		زرايبي	✓
<i>S-Ṭ-Ḥ</i>	suṭḥat	88:20	§	سطحت	
Fajr (89)					
[pn]	Iram	89:7		إرم	
<i>S-W-T</i>	sawṭ	89:13		سوط	
<i>L-M-M</i>	lammā ^a	89:19	§	لماً	✓
<i>J-M-M</i>	jammā ^a	89:20	§	جماً	
Balad (90)					
<i>K-B-D</i>	kabad	90:4	§	كبد	
<i>SH-F-H</i>	shafatayn	90:9	§	شفتين	

<i>N-J-D</i>	al-najdayn	90:10	§	النجدين	
<i>S-GH-B</i>	masghaba	90:14	§	مسغبة	✓
Shams (91)					
<i>T-Ḥ-W</i>	ṭaḥā-hā	91:6	§	طحاما	
<i>L-H-M</i>	alhama-hā	91:8		ألهما	✓
<i>D-S-Y</i>	dassā-hā	91:10	§	دسأها	✓
<i>D-M-D-M</i>	damdama	91:14		دمدم	✓
[Layl (92)]					
—					
Ḍuḥā (93)					
<i>S-J-W</i>	sajā	93:2	§	سجى	✓
[Sharḥ (94)]					
—					
Tīn (95)					
<i>T-Y-N</i>	al-tīn	95:1		التين	
[pn]	[Ṭūr] Sīnīna	95:2	§	(طور) سينين	
'Alaq (96)					
<i>S-F-'</i>	la-nasfa'ān	96:15		لنسفعاً	✓
<i>Z-B-N</i>	al-zabāniya	96:18	§	الزبانية	✓
Qadr (97)					
[pn]	Laylat al-Qadr (3)	97:1, 2, 3		ليلة القدر	
[Bayyina (98)]					
—					
[Zalzala (99)]					
—					
'Ādiyāt (100)					
<i>'W-D</i>	al-'ādiyāt	100:1		العادييات	✓
<i>D-B-Ḥ</i>	ḍabḥā ^a	100:1	§	ضبحاً	✓
<i>Q-D-Ḥ</i>	qadhā ^a	100:2	§	قذحاً	
<i>GH-W-B</i>	al-mughhīrāt	100:3		المغويرات	✓
<i>N-Q-'</i>	naq'ā ^a	100:4	§	نقعاً	✓
<i>K-N-D</i>	kanūd	100:6	§	كنود	✓
<i>H-Ṣ-L</i>	ḥuṣṣila	100:10		حصل	✓
Qāri'a (101)					
—	hiyah	101:10	§	هيه	
[Takāthur (102)]					
—					

(Continued overleaf)

Table 7.2 Continued

Root letters	Hapax in transliteration	<i>Qur'ānic</i> reference	Rhyme	Hapax in Arabic	Strict Hapax
		['Aṣr (103)]			
		[Humaza (104)]			
		Fil (105)			
F-Y-L	al-fil	105:1	§	الفيل	
'-B-B-L	abābīl	105:3	§	ابابيل	✓
		Quraysh (106)			
[pn]	<i>Quraysh</i>	106:1		قريش	
SH-T-W	al-shitā'	106:2		الشتاء	
S-Y-F	al-ṣayf	106:2	§	الصيف	✓
		Mā'ūn (107)			
M-'-N	al-mā'ūn	107:7	§	الماعون	✓
		Kawthar (108)			
N-H-R	anḥar	108:2	§	انحر	✓
B-T-R	al-abtar	108:3	§	الابتتر	
		[Kāfirūn (109)]			
		[Naṣr (110)]			
		Masad (111)			
[pn]	<i>Abī Lahab</i>	111:1		أبي لهب	
J-Y-D	jīdi-hā	111:5		جذها	
M-S-D	masad	111:5	§	مسد	
		Ikhlāṣ (112)			
S-M-D	al-ṣamad	112:2	§	الصمد	✓
K-F-'	kufuw ^{an}	112:4		كفوا	✓
		Falaq (113)			
W-Q-B	waqab	113:3	§	وقب	✓
N-F-TH	al-naffāthāt	113:4		النفاثات	
		[Nās (114)]			
TOTALS	499	94		499	259 (in 81 Sūras)

When nouns have pronouns attached, this is shown (with full inflection), and the same goes for verbs and object pronouns; for clarity, these are separated by a hyphen. Column 3 lists the verse reference for each hapax. If the symbol § appears in column 4, this indicates that the hapax in question is a rhyme-word. Column 5 lists the hapaxes in (unvoweled) Arabic. As with the English transliteration in column 2, pronouns are retained. An X in column 5 means that there is no cognate for the root listed in Zammit's *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, and no mark means there is a cognate; a dash – means that Zammit does not list the root. A check mark ✓ in column 6 indicates a strict hapax. A strict hapax, as we saw above, is a basic hapax that fulfills at least one of the following conditions:

- It has no cognate in another Semitic language (according to Zammit), and it extends to include quotidian words (e.g. *fāqī*).
- It is from a recurring root, but with a different Qur'ānic meaning (e.g. *ḥafada*).
- It is a candidate for emendation (including ghost words) (e.g. *al-raqīm*).

For lexical information about a non-Semitic word or root, I rely on Ambros's *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*. In Table 7.1, words in the main list that are possibly proper nouns are italicized in transliteration. Proper nouns and the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* ("mysterious letters") are listed in two separate sub-lists in Table 7.1 but are incorporated into the larger list in Table 7.2.

In Table 7.2, root letters are listed in column 1 when applicable. The italicized designations [pn] and [fs] in column 1 correspond to proper nouns and the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* ("mysterious letters"), respectively.

A note on emendations (and ghost words)⁸²

"A word means what it means in its own language, not in another"
(Robert Hoyland, 2009)

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it"

(Bert Lance, 1977)

The tables above include 452 basic hapaxes, 37 proper names and 10 *fawātiḥ* distributed over 95 Sūras, and 259 strict hapaxes distributed over 81 Sūras. The number of hapax roots is a shade lower because of some pairs of lexemes formed

⁸² For the use of this term to describe the Hebrew Bible's hapaxes that are the result of scribal error, see Cohen, *Biblical Hapax*, 5. See also Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, viii: "In particular, we can hope to be able to assess the relative validity of two opposing attitudes discernible in modern scholarship regarding rare forms. The first treats unique forms as most likely the result of error in the course of transmission. On the other hand, the precept *lectio difficilior praeferenda est* assumes leveling rather than the creation of strange forms to be the direction of corruption."

from a shared root (e.g. *qinwān* and *aqnā*). Of the Qur'ān's 1,504 roots then, only 33 percent are basic hapax roots and 17 percent are strict hapax roots. Even if we use al-Malījī's figures, the figure is 25 percent. Greenspahn has shown that 1,501 (289 absolute, 1,179 non-absolute, and 33 ambiguous) hapaxes out of a total Biblical vocabulary of between 5,000 and 8,000 words is a far lower proportion than in other material, where the percentage is usually upwards of 35 percent (see Figure 7.1). The figures for the Qur'ān are evidently lower.

These figures put into perspective the issues of "foreign" words and emendation, the two principal contexts in which modern Western scholars have hitherto invoked hapaxes. Emendation, in particular, has major implications for hapaxes, and vice versa.⁸³ In the opening lines of the article "Textual Criticism of the Qur'ān," James Bellamy writes:⁸⁴

Anyone who writes on textual criticism should begin with definitions. So let it be said from the outset that textual criticism has nothing to do with the criticism of music, art or literature. In simplest terms, textual criticism is the correction of errors.

Many of the errors Bellamy (and others) proposes to correct are hapaxes which, when "corrected," often cease to be hapaxes. In Bellamy's aforementioned article, he cites inter alia the following erstwhile hapaxes: *ḥaṣab* (which he changes to the ersatz *ḥaṭab*), *abb* (> *lubb*), *sijill* (> *musjil*, *musajjil*), *ḥiṭṭa* (> *khiṭat*), *ṣur-hunna* (> *jazzi-hinna*), *qaswara* (> *fantūra*, pronounced *bamtūra*), *jibt* (> *jinna*), *raqīm* (> *ruqūd*), many of which are conjectural emendations, not supported by known variants in the tradition. In other papers and articles, he has dealt with such words as *ṣamad* and *ʿIsā*. There are, to be sure, instances where hapaxes appear to betray an underlying problem. But careful attention to where hapaxes are used and how they are rhetorically deployed can potentially mitigate the urge to "correct."

For Christoph Luxenberg, *rikzā*, the final word in *Maryam* (19) 98, is one such crux. He takes *rikzā* to be a mistaken transcription from Syriac, in the light of which he proposes an emendation to *dhikrā*.⁸⁵ With the "original reading . . . restored," Luxenberg proposes that the reading "Dost thou perceive of them a single one or hear of them any mention?" is superior to "Dost thou perceive of them a single one or hear of them a [single] whisper?" But given that this requires us to jettison a strict hapax,⁸⁶ the question deserves special attention. It is true that *dhikr* would nicely echo the opening of the Sūra (*dhikru rahmati rabbika*), but there are reasons to prefer *rikzā*, such as the paronomasia between *rikzā* in the final verse and Zakariyyā in the opening verse possibly intimating a play on Zakariyyā (and later

Maryam) being asked to hold their tongue,⁸⁷ and the symmetry – the rhetorical symmetry, that is – of having the Sūra open with a strict hapax, *Kāf-Hā'-Yā'-ʾAyn-Ṣād*, and close with a strict hapax, *rikzā*. This example illustrates the need to pay attention to rhetorical reasons for the presence of a particular hapax.

SAMPLE PROPORTIONS OF HAPAX LEGOMENA

	Sample Size		Hapax Legomena		
	Occurrences (words used)	Vocabulary	Numb.	Percent of Vocab.	Occur.
Plautus	33,871	8,437	5,439	64.3	16.0
Peking Chinese	13,248	3,332	2,046	61.4	15.4
<i>As You Like It</i>	3,609	1,231	729	59.2	20.2
"A Polybe" (Seneca)	5,688	1,430	822	57.5	14.5
"A Helvia" (Seneca)	6,755	1,856	1,046	56.4	15.4
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	2,919	965	534	55.3	18.3
<i>Captain's Daughter</i> (Pushkin)	28,591	4,783	2,384	49.8	8.3
Newspaper English	43,990	6,001	2,976	49.6	6.8
Gospel of Mark (Greek)	11,229	1,345	634	47.1	5.6
"Aucassin et Nicolette" (Old French)	9,870	1,073	483	45.0	4.9
<i>L'illusion Comique</i> (Pierre Corneille)	16,586	1,906	845	44.3	5.1
Paul's Epistles (Greek)	32,303	2,648	1,140	43.1	3.5
English telephone conversations	80,000	2,240	819	36.6	1.0
Basic French conversations	312,135	7,995	2,700	33.8	0.9

Figure 7.1 Hapax distribution in various corpora.

83 I adumbrate some of the issues discussed below in S.M. Toorawa, "Hapless Hapaxes and Luckless Rhymes: The Qur'an as Literature," *Religion & Literature*, 41, 2, 2009, 221–27.

84 J.A. Bellamy, "Textual criticism of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 5:237.

85 C. Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007, 81–82.

86 Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic Reading*, 82.

87 N. Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed., Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003, 147–48.

Rhetorical considerations appear to play a part in Luxenberg's proposal regarding *wa-tallahu li-l-jabīn* "and he had laid him down on his forehead" (*al-Ṣāffāt* [37] 103), describing Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son.⁸⁸ He proposes that *jabīn* be emended to *ḥabbīn* (which effectively results in the substitution of one hapax for another.) Of the new reading, Gabriel Reynolds says, "A much more satisfying phrase emerges," namely, "He tied him to the firewood."⁸⁹ According to Reynolds, "the awkwardness of the [original] reading" – what I prefer to think of as the rhetorical productivity of the original – is what suggests the new reading, and it is certainly a plausible scenario. I do not, however, share Reynolds' conviction that the new reading is "intellectually compelling." I do see how it makes philological sense, but surely it contradicts the narrative's point in the Qur'ānic account, namely the son's unquestioning compliance. The full passage (Q 37:102–3) reads as follows:

... qāla yā abati f'al mā tu'maru sa-tajidunī in shā'a llāhu min al-ṣābirīn/
fa-lammā aslamā wa-tallahu li-l-jabīn

... he said, "Father, do as you are commanded and you will, God willing, discover me to be one of the steadfast." And when they had both submitted to God and he had laid him down on his forehead

Luxenberg writes:⁹⁰

But the real problem does not lie in the etymologically correct explanation of this expression, but in its misreading. In fact, the concrete guidelines of the Biblical account (Gen. 22:9) provide us with an indication of the real sense of this passage. There it says that Abraham has "bound [his son] and laid (him) over the (fire)wood."

Having Abraham tie his son to the firewood, as the new reading has it, undermines the son's submissiveness. To put it differently, *tallahu li-l-jabīn* allows the story to retain its rhetorical point, one that is different from the Biblical one. Emendation of this passage thus completely ignores the Qur'ānic account in favor of the putative Biblical origin-account.

In attempting to resolve the issue of the hapax *al-raqīm* (*al-Kahf* [18] 9) – which some think is a proper name – Luxenberg proposes emending it to *al-ruqūd* (contra Bellamy, who proposes *al-ruqūd*),⁹¹ arguing that "the principle of *lectio*

88 Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic Reading*, 166–77.

89 G.S. Reynolds, "Introduction: Qur'ānic studies and its controversies," in *QHC*, 17.

90 Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic Reading*, 171. Cf. Jeffery, *FV*, 101, who notes that "The exegetes got the meaning right ..."

91 Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic Reading*, 80–85.

difficilior would be better served if we had to change only one letter."⁹² Of course, if we followed that principle, then it would be even better served if we changed no letter at all; indeed, both Sidney Griffith and Devin Stewart have cogently argued that *raqīm* is in all likelihood correct, thus maintaining not only the *lectio difficilior* but also retaining a strict hapax.⁹³ What is more, this hapax describes something wondrous: the verse in which *al-raqīm* appears appositely reads, *am ḥasibta anna aṣḥāb al-kaḥf wa-l-raqīm kānū min āyātīnā 'ajabā* ("Do you find the Companions of the Cave and al-Raqīm so wondrous, among all Our signs?").

Indeed, I would like to suggest that one motivation for the stylistic deployment of hapaxes (and non-triliterals) is the signaling of matters inspiring wonder, awe or dread. To take another example, if we think of the mountain-like mass created by Moses when parting the Red Sea with his rod as something wondrous and terrible, then the suggestion that *ṭawd* (*al-Shu'arā'* [26] 63) be emended to *ṭūr* becomes unnecessary.⁹⁴ That particular "mountain," because it is part of a miracle, would in every way be wondrous and dreadful – hence the deployment here of a hapax. The passage reads:

Wa-awḥaynā ilā Mūsā an iḍrib bi-'aṣāka l-baḥr fa 'nfalaqa fa-kāna kullu firqin ka l-ṭawd al-'aẓīm

Then We inspired Moses (as follows): "Strike the sea with your rod," and it divided, and each separate part became like the mighty peak.

In an article in which he proposes emending several words (and consequently the overall import) of *al-'Ādiyāt* (100), Munther Younes writes, "Of the twelve words in the five verses under discussion, six are *hapax legomena*: *al-'ādiyāt*, *ḍabḥā*, *qadhā*, *al-mūghirāt*, *naq'ā*, and *wasatnā*, a disproportionately high number. In at least one case, i.e. *naq'ā*, a word is used with a meaning in the language not found outside of this *Sūra*."⁹⁵ Five (or four⁹⁶) is indeed a lot of hapaxes, but, as Table 7.2 shows, not rhetorically high, especially for the beginning of a *Sūra*. *al-Mā'ida*, for instance, has five hapaxes in its first three verses. *al-Quraysh* (106) has three hapaxes in the space of six words, and if we count *ilāf*, a word that appears in only one context and is thus either a hapax or a rarity, then we have five hapaxes out of

92 Ibid., 81.

93 S. Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: the 'Companions of the Cave' in al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition," in *QHC*, 125–27; D.J. Stewart, "Notes on medieval and modern emendations of the Qur'ān," in *ibid.*, 240–41.

94 See D.J. Stewart, "Conjectural Emendations and Anomalies in the Qur'ānic Text," paper delivered at the "Colloquium on the History of the Text of the Qur'ān," Stanford Humanities Center, July 30–31, 2009, though the author has since revised his position on this.

95 M. Younes, "Charging steeds or maidens doing good deeds? A re-interpretation of Qur'ān 100 (al-'ādiyāt)," *Arabica* 55:3–4, 2008, 370.

96 I do not count *wasatnā* as a hapax: the root is attested elsewhere in the Qur'ān and the root meaning in Qur'ān 100 is similar.

six. And in *al-Fil*, four of the five rhyme words are hapaxes: *fil* and *abābīl* are strict hapaxes, *taḍlīl* and *ma'kūl* are hapax forms, and *sijjīl* is a rarity and likely a loanword. Of the ten words in the Qur'ān's shortest Sūra, 108, three are rhyme words and all three are hapaxes, one a basic hapax (*abtar*), one a strict hapax (*anḥar*) and one a rarity (*kawthar*). Indeed, as Table 7.2 above shows, strict hapaxes within Sūras have a tendency to cluster together. Frequency of hapaxes aside, it should be noted that the Sūras at issue all involve remarkable phenomena. Qur'ān 100 describes flaring steeds charging, striking hooves sparking, sparks of fire, dustclouds thundering, enemy crowds thundering; Qur'ān 106 describes God's remarkable protection of the Quraysh; and Qur'ān 105 marvels at the war elephant, at the wondrous and dreadful celestial flock, the hellish baked rock, and the fields laid waste.

The argument that hapaxes are used with matters remarkable can be made for many hapaxes, especially when they are connected to heaven and hell and their denizens. Many scholars are eager to emend the hapax *ṭalḥ* (acacia, plantain, banana . . .) in *al-Wāqī'a* (56) 29, for example, to *ṭal'* (date clusters):⁹⁷

fi sidrin makhḍūd/wa-ṭalḥin mandūd/wa-ḡillin mamdūd/wa-mā'in maskūb . . .

among lote-trees thornless/and clustered acacias/in shade endless/and flowing water, ceaseless . . .

Stewart remarks of this passage, "It seems odd that bananas are mentioned here, for they do not occur elsewhere in the Qur'ān,"⁹⁸ and adds, "A reference to date clusters would make more sense, because dates and date-palms appear fairly often in the Qur'ānic text and would have been an important feature of the environment in which the Qur'ān was revealed. This is confirmed by the parallel passage *wa-l-nakhla bāsiqātin lahā ṭal'un naḍīd*, 'And we have sent down lofty date-palms that have ranged clusters (50:10).'⁹⁹ Stewart goes on to say that this emendation has "a high probability of being correct" because it fits the existing script closely and produces "a superior reading more in keeping with the immediate context and with Qur'ānic style."¹⁰⁰ Of interest is the fact that the parallel passage cited by Stewart includes the word *bāsiqāt*, a strict hapax (and given this fact, there is nothing to prevent us from emending *ṭal'* to *ṭalḥ* rather than vice versa . . .). Alternatively, if we take into account the fact that the trees described by *ṭalḥ mandūd* are unambiguously trees found in Heaven (*fi jannāti l-na'im* [56:12]), and the fact that the trees described as having *ṭal' naḍīd* are definitely on earth (*wa-l-arḍa madadnāhā* [50:7]), then I would argue that we can *rhetorically* expect a hapax in

97 See e.g. Bellamy, "Some proposed emendations to the text of the Koran," *JAOS* 113, 1993, 563; Stewart, "Notes," 232–33.

98 Stewart, "Notes," p. 233.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

the former. Furthermore, the number of hapaxes in the passage (and in the Sūra, for that matter) is high, providing a hapax context for *ṭalḥ: sidr* is a rarity, *makhḍūd* is a hapax and rhyme word, *mandūd* is a rarity and rhyme word, and *maskūb* is a hapax and rhyme word.¹⁰¹

Concluding remarks

In the conclusion to his study of hapaxes in the Bible, Greenspahn sounds a word of caution that seems to apply equally to analysis of the Qur'ān:

The variety of interpretations offered for a large number of these words demonstrates adequately that the assumption of textual error is without warrant. Though emendations have been proposed for virtually all, in most cases there are also interpretations which leave the attested forms intact, meeting the needs of context while benefiting from the support of the received text. Many such interpretations have achieved a modicum of consensus, although there are words for which no agreement exists. The fact that a word is rare cannot itself, therefore, support the assertion that it is corrupt.¹⁰²

And in their discussion of conjectural emendations in the New Testament, Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman note, also pertinent to the Qur'ān:

A typical emendation involves the removal of an anomaly. It must not be overlooked, however, that though some anomalies are the result of corruption in the transmission of the text, others may have been either intended or tolerated by the author himself. Before resorting to conjectural emendation, therefore, the critic must be so thoroughly acquainted with the style and thought of the author that a certain anomaly must be judged to be foreign to the author's intention.¹⁰³

The foregoing pages will, I trust, have made it even more apparent that it is extremely important to have a solid understanding of how the words, expressions and locutions in the Qur'ān work together. Important also is the need

101 For adumbrations about the Form II verb as a rhyme word and as quasi-quadriliteral, see S.M. Toorawa, "Referencing the Qur'ān: A proposal with illustrative translations and discussion," *JQS* 9:1, 2007, 141. Cf. Henri Loucel, "Signification du nombre et de la fréquence des racines verbales quadri-consonantiques dans 'Ana Ahya' de Laylā Ba'albakī," *SI* 35, 1972, 121–67, in which he compares Ba'albakī's quadriliterals to the Qur'ān's. I am grateful to Devin Stewart for this reference.

102 Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena*, 172.

103 B.M. Metzger and B.D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 227; cf. 226–31. See also Stewart, "Anomalies."

to understand better how meaning inheres in the Qur'ān's lexical, linguistic, and rhetorical choices before deciding whether a particular lexical item is "foreign" or whether a particular reading, pointing, or vocalization is faulty.¹⁰⁴ It is my hope that the hapax lists above will contribute to the deepening of that understanding.¹⁰⁵

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

Manfred Kropp

Introduction to method and results

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

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

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

104 See W. Saleh, "The Etymological fallacy and Qur'ānic studies: Muḥammad, paradise and Late Antiquity," in A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai and M. Marx (eds), *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, 649–98.

105 Since completing this article, I learned of the following online resource, which lists 395 hapaxes by root and Sūra: <www.islamnoon.com/Derasat/Moajam/moajam_index.htm> (accessed February 3, 2011). The list was compiled by Bāsim Sa'īd al-Bassūmī in 2001.

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

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

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

The text, its variants and problems

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Cf., e.g., "The Arabic Islamic inscriptions on the Dome of The Rock in Jerusalem, 72 AH / 692 CE," *Islamic Awareness* website, available at: <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/DoTR.html>> (with relevant bibliography; accessed February 4, 2011) based on C. Kessler,

"'Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A reconsideration," *JRAS*, 1970, 2–14; E. Whelan, "Forgotten witness: Evidence for the early codification of the Qur'ān," *JAOS* 118, 1998, 1–14.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11 A.A. Ambros, "Analyse von Sure 113," 227.

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

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

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

Verse 2: the Lord or unified in the Trinity?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20 Thus "eternally" in M. Pickthall's translation

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

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

23 See *ibid.*, 373.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

38 Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 22.

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

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

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

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

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

wa-annahu ta'ālā jaddu rabbīnā mā ittakhadha ṣāhibatan wa-lā waladan.

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

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

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

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

43 *ta'ālā jaddu rabbīnā* "be exalted the majesty/the fortune of our Lord."
ta'ālā jaddu rabbīnā, *ta'ālā jiddu rabbīnā*, (dialectal) variants of the word *jadd*.
ta'ālā jaddun, *rabbūnā*, "be exalted the Grandeur (in general), our Lord" *jadd* and *rabbūnā* in apposition.

ta'ālā, jadda rabbūnā, "be He exalted, our Lord is magnificent."

ta'ālā jaddan rabbūnā, "be He exalted, seriously (!) our Lord."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

lā sharīka lak
illā sharīkan huwa lak
tamlīkuhu wa-mā malak

Thou hast no partner
Except such partner as thou hast
Thou possessest him and all that is his!

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

lā sharīka lak
inna l-ḥamda wa-l-ni'mata laka wa-l-mulk

Thou hast no partner
The grace and the praise
are thine and the empire
Thou hast no partner

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

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

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

٢٧. وَلَكِنْ، فِي قَوْلِهِ إِنَّ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ قَدْ أَخْضَعَ، فَمِنْ الْوَاضِحِ أَنَّهُ يَسْتَثْنِي اللَّهَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَاضِعاً لِإِلَهِهِ
٢٨. وَعِنْدَمَا يَتِمُّ اخْتِصَافُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لِإِلَهِهِ، فَإِنَّ الْإِبْنَ نَفْسَهُ سَيَخْضَعُ لِلَّذِي أَخْضَعَ لَهُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ، لِكَيْ يَكُونَ اللَّهُ هُوَ كُلُّ
إِشْيَاءٍ فِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

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

Nu'min bi-llāh al-wāhid, al-āb, mālik kull shay' wa-sāni' mā yurā wa-mā lā yurā – wa-bi-l-ibn al-wāhid, Ishū' al-masīh, ibn Allāh al-wāhid, bīk' al-khalā'iq kullihā, mawlūd wa-laysa bi-mas'nū', ilāh haqq min ilāh haqq, min jawhari abīhi alladhī bi-yadīhi utqinat al-'awālim wa-kull shay'...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 Angels, stars, death, the soul, horses, bows – or women?

The opening verses of Qur'ān 79

Munther Younes

Introduction

In a previous publication, building on the work of Günter Lüling¹ and Christoph Luxenberg,² I proposed a reconstruction of the first five verses of Qur'ān 100 (*wa-l-ādīyāt*) as follows:³

Standard form			*Reconstructed form		
By the runners snorting,	<i>wa-l-ādīyāti ḍabḥā</i>	والعاديات ضبحا	Those going out early in the morning,	<i>wa-l-ghādiyāti ṣubḥā</i>	والغاديات صباحا
And lighting a spark,	<i>fa-l-mūriyāti qadhā</i>	فالموريات قححا	And kindling a flame,	<i>fa-l-mūriyāti qadhā</i>	فالموريات قححا
And raiding in the morning,	<i>fa-l-mughūrāti ṣubḥā</i>	فالمغيرات صباحا	Addition		
And they stirred up dust in it,	<i>fa-atharna bi-hi naq'ā</i>	فأثرن به نقعا	By which they chose to render a good deed,	<i>fa-atharna bi-hi naf'ā</i>	فأثرن به نفعا
And they went with it into the middle of a gathering.	<i>fa-wasaṭna bi-hi jam'ā</i>	فوسطن به جمعا	Which they extended to the multitudes.	<i>fa-wasaṭna bi-hi jam'ā</i>	فوسطن به جمعا

As can be seen from the above table, the reconstructed version appears to be a hymn about women doing good deeds, rather than a description of horses charging into battle or camels running during the pilgrimage, as the standard Muslim interpretations assert.

1 G. Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003 (translated from the 2nd [1993] German edition of the author's book *Über den Ur-Koran*, 1st edition 1974).

2 C. Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 2nd edition, Berlin: H. Schiler, 2007.

3 M. Younes, "Charging steeds or maidens doing good deeds? A reinterpretation of Qur'ān 100 (*al-ādīyāt*)," *Arabica* 55, 2008, 362–86.

In this essay, I examine the introductory verses of Qur'an 79 (*wa-l-nāzi 'āt*) and suggest a new interpretation using the same method as the one used in the reconstruction of Qur'an 100.

First, I present the verses according to the standard interpretation, as detailed in Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), whose account is the earliest comprehensive and systematic *tafsīr* available.⁴

1	<i>wa-l-nāzi 'āti gharqā</i>	والنازعات غرقا
2	<i>wa-l-nāshītātī nashṭā</i>	والناشطات نشطا
3	<i>wa-l-sābiḥātī sabḥā</i>	والسابحات سبحا
4	<i>fa-l-sābiqātī sabqā</i>	فالسابقات سبقا
5	<i>fa-l-mudabbirātī amrā</i>	فالمديرات أمرا

Ṭabarī cites differences among the Qur'an commentators in the first four verses, but not the fifth. The five verses contain two words each, an active participle and a verbal noun. The ten words are derived from seven different roots. In the first and fifth verses, the two words are derived from two different roots, but in the remaining three, the active participle and the verbal noun share the same root and basic meaning, with the active participle referring to an attribute of an actor and the verbal noun to the action itself. The disagreements among the commentators revolve around the reference of the active participles, particularly the active participle of the first verse *al-nāzi 'āt*. Ṭabarī's account, which presents the views of earlier commentators, is summarized in the following table:

1	<i>al-nāzi 'āt</i>	angels, death, stars, bows, the soul
	<i>gharqā</i>	drowning
2	<i>al-nāshītāt</i>	angels, death, stars, lassos, the oryx
	<i>nashṭā</i>	removing, untying quickly, moving swiftly
3	<i>al-sābiḥāt</i>	death, angels, stars, ships
	<i>sabḥā</i>	swimming
4	<i>al-sābiqāt</i>	angels, death, horses, stars
	<i>sabqā</i>	racing, overcoming in a race
5	<i>al-mudabbirāt</i>	angels (managing)
	<i>amrā</i>	command, affair

Problems with the traditional account

General problem: the reference of the active participles

The fact that there is so much uncertainty about the reference or references of the five active participles is sufficient to raise questions about the value of the

4 Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī al-musammā Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl 'āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Bayḍūn, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2005, 12, 420–24.

traditional interpretation. The reference to angels seems to make the most sense and is the only one with any consistency among the five verses, since none of the other possible references (i.e. death, stars, etc.) can be understood to be *pulling* or *drawing*, *drowning*, *moving* or *removing swiftly*, *swimming*, *racing*, and *managing affairs*.⁵ However, there is strong evidence in the Qur'an itself for excluding even angels from being the reference of these participles, since the Qur'an associates naming angels with unbelief: *inna alladhīna lā yu'minūna bi-l-ākhirati la-yusammūna al-malā'ikata tasmiyat al-unthā* ("Lo! it is those who disbelieve in the Hereafter who name the angels with the names of females" [Q 53:27]).⁶

wa-l-nāzi 'āt gharqā

The root *n-z-* 'is found twenty times in the Qur'an, with several meanings ranging from "pulling" to "desire" to "controversy."⁷ The Form I verb *naza*, the source of the active participle *nāzi 'a*, is used with seven meanings all revolving around the theme of pulling or taking away: 1) to pull out, take out; 2) to remove; 3) to withdraw, take away; 4) to sweep away; 5) to peel off; 6) to select; 7) to pluck out.⁸

The word *nāzi 'āt*, which occurs only once in the Qur'an, is translated as "those who strive," "those who pull out," "those who discard."⁹ The meanings of "striving" and "discarding" are clearly tied to the context of the verse as traditionally understood, and not to the usage of the word outside of this verse. The root *gh-r-q* occurs twenty-three times.¹⁰ It is found in two verbal nouns (*gharq* and *gharaq*), in the Form IV verb *aghraqa*, and the passive participle of the latter, *mughraq*. Following are the meanings provided by Badawi and Abdel Haleem for these four words:¹¹

<i>gharq</i> :	going to the extreme, all the way, violently, strongly, energetically
<i>gharaq</i> :	drowning
<i>aghraq</i> :	to cause to drown
<i>mughraq</i> :	drowned

5 Bint al-Shāṭi' suggests "raiding horses" (*al-khayl al-mughīra*) rather than angels as the reference of these participles (*al-Tafsīr al-bayān li-l-Qur'ān al-karīm*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1977, 1:124). However, an interpretation in which horses would be "managing the affair" (Q 79:5) is highly problematic. Bell offers yet another possibility. After stating that the meaning of Q 79:1–5 is "quite uncertain," he writes: "If they must be interpreted, it seems best to take them as referring to the eager business life of Mecca." R. Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'an*, C.E. Bosworth and M.E.J. Richardson (eds), Manchester: University of Manchester, 1991, 2:485.

6 See also Qur'an 6:9 and 37:150–52. The English translations of Qur'ānic verses cited in this essay are taken from Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New York: New American Library, 1972.

7 E.M. Badawi and M. Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008, 926–27.

8 Ibid., 927.

9 Ibid., 927–28.

10 Ibid., 663–64.

11 Ibid.

The word *gharq* violates a basic morphological rule of the language. According to Ibn Manẓūr, who quotes al-Azhari, it is "a noun built in place of the true verbal noun."¹² The word does not seem to have an independent existence in the language outside of this verse. In addition, an examination of the meanings of the four words listed above shows that, as in the case of *nāzi'āt*, a new and quite different meaning is assigned to *gharq*, which is not related to drowning, the basic meaning of the root.

Leaving aside the elaborations created by the interpreters on extra-linguistic grounds (the angels pulling out the souls from the chests of the unbelievers ... like the puller goes deep in [pulling] the bow),¹³ we simply have a combination of two words, one meaning "those that pull" and the other "drowning". In terms of its syntactic structure, the verse consists of an active participle and a verbal noun in the accusative case. The accusative case assignment does not follow the standard rules of Arabic syntax: *gharqā* is not the object of a verb, the predicate of *kāna* and its sisters, the subject of *inna* and its sisters, *tamyiz* (accusative of specification), *hāl* (circumstantial accusative), or *maf'ūl muṭlaq* (accusative of the absolute). Rather, the case assignment is typically explained as the result of *gharqā* being a verbal noun (*maṣdar*).

In explaining the case assignment, Al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950) writes: "The souls are pulled out, drowned, burned, and then thrown into the fire ... and the meaning is the souls are drowned so they drown [a drowning]" (*tunza ' nufūsihum thumma tughraq thumma tuḥraq thumma yulqā bihā fī al-nār ... wa-l-ma' nā fa-tughraq al-nufūs fa-taḥraq gharqā*).¹⁴ He cites Qur'ān 71:17 *wa-allāhu anbatakum min al-arḍ nabātan* as a comparable case.

Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181) simply states that *gharqā* is accusative by virtue of being a verbal noun: *manṣūb 'ala al-maṣdar*.¹⁵ Al-'Ukbarī (d. 616/1219) gives a more elaborate account, but with the same conclusion. He writes: *gharqā: maṣdar 'alā al-ma' nā li-anna al-nāzi' al-mughriq fī naz ' al-sahm aw fī jadhb al-rūh, wa-huwa maṣdar maḥdhūf al-ziyāda ay iḥrāqan (gharqā: a verbal noun on the basis of the meaning, because the puller is drowning [or going deep into] the pulling of the arrow, or extracting the soul. It is a verbal noun, with the addition deleted, i.e. gharqā instead of iḥrāqā)*.¹⁶ In the last part of his statement, 'Ukbarī is making the claim that *gharq*, a Form I verbal noun, is taking the place of *iḥrāq*, the verbal noun of Form IV.

12 *Al-gharq ism uqīm maqām al-maṣdar al-ḥaqīqī min aḥraqtu iḥrāqan*. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, ed. 'Abd Allah al-Kabīr, Muḥammad Ḥasaballah and Ḥāshim al-Shādhilī, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif (not dated), 3245.

13 Yahyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Shalabī (ed.), Cairo: Markaz Taḥqīq al-Turāth, 2002, 3:230.

14 Abū Ja'far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Naḥḥās, *I'rāb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Zuhayr Zāhid, Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1985, 5:139.

15 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Anbārī, *Al-Bayān fī gharīb i'rāb al-Qur'ān*, ed. Tāhā 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Tāhā and Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1970, 2:492.

16 Abī al-Baqā' 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-'Ukbarī, *Al-Tibyān fī i'rāb al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1976, 2:1269.

The three grammarians attempt to explain the case assignment as an instance of the absolute accusative. There are at least two problems with this explanation. First, the absolute accusative requires a verb as the source of the verbal noun to be present in the sentence, as in the example given by al-Naḥḥās: *anbatakum nabātan*. No such verb exists in Qur'ān 79:1 or in any of the following verses. Second, there is no basis for the claim that *gharq* can be a substitute for *iḥrāq*. It is simply brought in because the context requires a verbal noun derived from the root *gh-r-q* but with a transitive meaning: the angels have to be drowning an object, not themselves.

wa-l-sābiḥāti sabḥā

The root *s-b-ḥ* occurs eighty-nine times in the Qur'ān in seven different forms.¹⁷ Three of these are the Form II verb (*sabbah-yusabbih*), its verbal noun *tasbiḥ*, or its active participle *musabbih*. The meaning of Form II and its derivatives generally revolves around glorifying God. The other four forms are the Form I verb *sabah-yasbah* and three forms related to it: the two nouns *sabḥā* and *subḥān*, and the active participle *sābiḥ*. These derivatives have the following meanings:¹⁸

<i>sabah-yasbah</i> :	trail, pass along, trail in space
<i>sabḥā</i> :	range, scope; opportunity for action, toiling, work; the act of swimming, floating, sailing, gliding, fast running, sweeping ahead
<i>sābiḥ(āt)</i> :	swimmers, floaters, gliders, fast-running horses
<i>subḥān</i> :	praise and glory be to ...

The word *sabḥā* is found in the Qur'ān twice, in 73:7 and the one occurrence in this verse. In 73:7, its meaning seems to have been unclear to the commentators. Ṭabarī lists *free time*, *sleep*, and *enjoyment*.¹⁹ He adds that Yahyā b. Ya'mar (d. 129/747) read it with a *khā* in place of the *h*, with the same meaning.²⁰

This absence of clarity in the meaning of *sabḥā* is reflected in Ibn Manẓūr's explanation of the word. Citing a number of authorities, all commenting on the usage of the word *sabḥā* in Qur'ān 73:7 (al-Layth, Abū 'Ubayda, al-Mu'arriḥ, Abū al-Duqaysh, al-Farrā', Abū Ishāq and Ibn al-'Arābī), Ibn Manẓūr lists the following meanings: *free time to do things*, *free time to sleep*, *scope for action*, *free time*, *coming and going*, *free time at night*, and *the opportunity to do what needs to be done during the day*.²¹ Ibn Manẓūr adds that, according to Abū Ishāq, for those who read *sabḥā*, the meaning is close to that of *sabḥā*; according to Ibn al-'Arābī, for those who read *sabḥā* the meaning is *confusion* or *life's activities*, while for those who read *sabḥā* the meaning is *rest and relief of the body (from toil)*.

17 Badawi and Abdel-Haleem, *Dictionary*, 415–16.

18 Ibid., 416.

19 Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 12:285–86.

20 Ibid., 286.

21 Ibn Manẓūr, 1914.

It is clear that these meanings, contradictory at times, are determined by the context of the word *sabḥā* in Qur'ān 73:7 and not by its basic or general usage in the language. The confusion is further deepened by the reports that the word was also read as *sabkhā*. In Qur'ān 79:3 *sabḥā* is explained simply as "swimming," with no hint at a relationship to its meaning in 73:7.

The peculiarities of *fa-l-mudabbirāti amrā*

Qur'ān 79:5 has no grammatical problems: the active participle *al-mudabbirāt* acts as the verb and subject of the sentence, i.e. those who manage, and *amrā* is the direct object. However, in addition to the uncertainty about the reference of the active participle *al-mudabbirāt*, which is a problem in all five verses, there is a striking peculiarity about this particular verse.

The root *d-b-r* is used in the Qur'ān with three basic meanings, according to the traditional interpretation: (1) back, behind, or end; (2) to manage (an affair); 3) to contemplate.²²

The meaning of "to manage (an affair)" is expressed by the Form II verb *dabbar*, the source verb of the active participle *mudabbir*, and is found in the following five verses: 10:3, 31; 13:2; 32:5; and 79:5. The meaning "to contemplate" is expressed by the Form V verb *tadabbar* (sometimes assimilated to *dabbar*) and is found in the following four verses: 4:82; 23:68; 38:29; and 47:24.

The root *'-m-r* is common, with 248 occurrences.²³ It has the following meanings: (1) to order; (2) to appoint as ruler; (3) to consult; (4) one who gives a lot of orders; (5) affair, matter; (6) strange and evil (deed).

One striking feature characterizing the occurrences of the Form II verb *dabbar* and the Form V verb *tadabbar* in the Qur'ān is the exclusive association of the former with the noun *amr* and of the latter with something that is said or recited (Qur'ān, *āyāt*, *qawl*).

dabbar:

- 10:3 Then He sat on the Throne, managing the affair(s) (*yudabbiru al-amr*)
 10:31 And who manages the affair (*yudabbiru al-amr*)
 13:2 He manages the affair (*yudabbiru al-amr*)
 32:5 He manages the affair(s) from the heaven and the earth (*yudabbiru al-amr*)
 79:5 And those managing affairs (*fa-l-mudabbirāti amrā*)

²² Badawi and Abdel-Haleem, *Dictionary*, 297.

²³ Ibid., 44.

tadabbar:

- 4:82 Do they not contemplate the Qur'ān (*yatadabbarūna al-Qur'ān*)
 23:68 Do they not ponder what is said (*yaddabbarū al-qawl*)
 38:29 A blessed book that we sent down so that they contemplate its verses/signs (*li-yaddabbarū āyātih*)
 47:24 Do they not contemplate the Qur'ān (*yatadabbarūna al-Qur'ān*)

Problems with the traditional understanding of the verb *dabbar* and its derivatives, such as the active participle *mudabbir*, are highlighted by an examination of its relationship to its Form V counterpart *tadabbar* as used in the Qur'ān. In general, Form II verbs are semantically related to Form V verbs. The relationship is that of reflexivity or transitivity: Form V verbs are the reflexive or intransitive counterparts of Form II verbs. In some cases, where a verb is clearly based on a noun, no such relationship exists in spite of a shared stem, as in *ṣaddaq* ("to believe the truth of") and *taṣaddaq* ("to give to charity"). The absence of a relationship in this case is due to the fact that *taṣaddaq* has its origins in the noun *ṣadaqa* ("charity"). The case of *ṣaddaq/taṣaddaq* is the exception; in other occurrences of Form II verbs and their Form V counterparts in the Qur'ān, the reflexive/transitive relationship can be clearly discerned, as in *baddal/tabaddal* ("change/exchange"),²⁴ *bayyan/tabayyan* ("to show/be shown"),²⁵ and *dhakkar/tadhakkar* ("to remind/remember").²⁶ The case of *dabbar/tadabbar* seems to be unique. On the one hand, neither can be described as a denominative verb, like *taṣaddaq*, and, on the other hand, there are no traces of a reflexive/transitive relationship between the two verb forms: *dabbar* ("to manage") and *tadabbar* ("to ponder").

Alternative interpretation

The preceding discussion strongly suggests that the verses in which problems or peculiarities were shown to exist (Q 79:1, 3, 5) may have been misread or misunderstood by the early Muslim exegetes. A reading in which these problems are avoided should be preferable to the traditional one. Such a rereading will be attempted in the following paragraphs.

wa-l-nāzi'āt gharqā

As I have pointed out elsewhere,²⁷ there was a period in which the written text of the Qur'ān was represented by a consonantal skeleton where certain letters, which

²⁴ Badawi and Abdel-Haleem, *Dictionary*, 80–81.

²⁵ Ibid., 123–24.

²⁶ Ibid., 329–30.

²⁷ Younes, "Charging steeds," 373.

later came to be distinguished by dots, were written identically. It is possible that some of the words in Qur'ān 79:1–5, including those in the first verse, were misunderstood and misinterpreted because they were assigned the wrong dots when dots were introduced (or reintroduced).²⁸

There is also evidence which demonstrates that the early commentators were dealing with a written text and that errors were made in its reading.²⁹ If we accept that Qur'ān 79:1 was misread, then a number of possibilities present themselves. For *nāzi'āt*, possibilities include *bāri'āt*, *bāzighāt*, *tāri'āt*, *nāzighāt* and *yāri'āt*; and for *gharqā*, possibilities include *'arqā*, *'azfā*, *'urfā*, *'azqā* and *gharfā*, among others. However, there is evidence for selecting one reading in each case.

naza' and the stars

Three of the earliest commentators, namely Mujāhid (d. 104/720),³⁰ Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210/824)³¹ and 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827/), explain the reference of *nāzi'āt* as the stars.³² It is difficult to imagine any of the meanings associated with the Form I verb *naza'*, cited above, being associated with stars. What could the stars be pulling out or taking out? In addition, how would *gharqā* ("drowning") fit with *nāzi'āt*? The verb *naza'* simply does not work in this context no matter how hard one tries to stretch the meanings of *naza'* and *gharq*. Changing the dotting from نَزَعَ to نَزَغَ results in the verb *bazagh* ("to break through, rise, shine"). This fits perfectly with the word "stars."

One piece of evidence provided by Abū 'Ubayda supports this conclusion. He writes: "The stars 'pull,' that is, rise then set in it (*al-mujūm tanza' taṭla' thumma taghīb fih*)."³³ Abū 'Ubayda is interpreting *tanza'* as *taṭla'* ("to rise"). *Tabzugh* – not *tanza'* – clearly fits better with this interpretation.

The root *b-z-gh* occurs twice in the Qur'ān (6:77–78; 14:64), with the meaning of the sun and the moon rising. Elaborating on the meaning of the verb *bazagh*, Ibn Manzūr states: *bazaghat al-shams . . . bada'a minhā ṭulū'u aw ṭala'at wa sharaqat . . . ka'annanhā tushaqqu bi-nūrihi al-dhulmatu shaqqan* ("The sun

appeared: it started to rise or it rose and shone . . . derived from *al-bazgh* . . . as if darkness was broken by its light").³⁴

gharqā vs. 'urfā

One word that fits well semantically and syntactically with *bāzighāt*, and which has the same consonantal skeleton and syllable structure as *gharqā* is *'urfā*. It is found in the Qur'ān twice,³⁵ in one instance in the opening verse of Qur'ān 77, which is structurally similar to *wa-l-nāzi'āti gharqā*. Regarding the meaning of *'urf*, Ibn Manzūr writes: it is the opposite of evil (*nukr*), *'urf* and *ma'rūf* mean generosity (*jūd*).³⁶ Hence *wa-al-bāzighāti 'urfā* would mean, "Those (f.) who rise [or shine] through generosity and good works."

wa-l-sābiḥāti sabḥā

The key to a clear and consistent account of *sabḥā* and to understanding its meaning in both Qur'ān 79:3 and 73:7 may lie in a quotation by Ibn Manzūr attributed to Tha'lab, who states that *subḥān* is not the *maṣdar* of the Form II verb *sabbah*, but of the Form I verb *sabah*.³⁷ The verbal noun of the verb *sabah* ("to swim") is typically *sibāḥa*. According to the traditional interpretation, *sabḥā*, in the sense of "swimming," is found only in 79:3. It is quite possible, that, as in the case of *gharqā* above, this meaning was introduced by the commentators on the basis of the context and a shared root, while the original meaning may have been based on the verb *sabaha* "to glorify".

The difficulty of reconciling the different meanings of *sabḥā* in Qur'ān 79:3 and 73:7, as well as the contradiction involved in the different meanings assigned to *sabḥā* by different commentators in the latter verse, is eliminated if the word is understood to mean "glorifying." So 79:3 would mean "those [women] glorifying" and 73:7 as "there are many opportunities for you to glorify (Allah) during the day."³⁸

fa-l-mudabbirāti amrā

It is highly unlikely that the exclusive occurrence of the Form II verb *dabbar* and its derivatives with the word *amr*, and of the Form V verb *tadabbar* with

28 Al-Munajjid claims that the first copies of the Qur'ān had dots which were removed by the Prophet's companions after his death, and then reintroduced towards the end of the first century AH. Salāh al-Dīn al-Munajjid, *Dirāsāt fī tārikh al-khaṭ al-'Arabī mundhu bidāyatih ilā nihāyah al-'aṣr al-'umawī*, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1972, 127.)

29 M. Younes, "Ungrateful or honorable: A re-examination of the word *kanūd* in Qur'ān 100 (*al-'ādiyāt*)," *Arabica* 56, 2009, 274–85.

30 Abū l-Ḥajjāj Mujāhid b. Jabr al-Qurashī al-Makhzūmī, *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, ed. Abū Muḥammad al-Asyūṭī, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2005, 320.

31 Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā al-Taymī Abū 'Ubaydah, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād Sazgin, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1981, 2:284.

32 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ḥimyarī al-San'ānī, *Tafsīr 'Abd al-Razzāq*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad 'Abduh, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999, 3:387.

33 Abū 'Ubaydah, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, 2:284.

34 Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, 275.

35 Badawi and Abdel-Haleem, *Dictionary*, 613.

36 Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān*, 289.

37 *Wa-'indī anna subḥān laysa bi-maṣdar sabbaha innamā huwa maṣdar sabaha*. Ibid., 1914–15.

38 A different dotting scheme would produce *wa-l-sāyihāti sayḥā*. The root *s-y-ḥ* is found three times in the Qur'ān in the words *fa-sīḥū*, *sā'ihūn*, and *sā'ihāt*, all of which share the meaning of "traveling freely from one place to another, devoting oneself to the worship of God, particularly through fasting" (Badawi and Abdel-Haleem, *Dictionary*, 470). This is also a possibility that should be considered in proposing an alternative interpretation of Qur'ān 79:1–5:

a. And those (f.) who glorify Allah

b. And those (f.) who wander the earth devoting themselves to the worship of God

something that is read or recited, is a coincidence. In my judgment, it is a strong indication that *dabbar* and its reflexive counterpart carry meanings that are different from the traditional interpretation of "manage" and "ponder." If the meaning of *dabbar* is "manage," why is it then associated exclusively with *amr* "affair"? Are there not other phenomena that are managed, besides "affair"? And are there not things to ponder besides the Qur'ān, speech and verses? Consider, for example, the usage of another verb with the meaning of "ponder," namely *tafakkar*, which occurs thirteen times in the Qur'ān.³⁹ It is used in association with "the madness of their companion" (Q 7:184), "themselves" (30:8), "Allah's creation" (3:191), "stories" (7:176), "verses, signs" (10:24, 13:3, 16:11, 16:69, 30:21, 39:42, 45:13), remembrance (16:44), and examples (59:21).

The meanings that I would like to propose for the words *al-mudabbirātī amrā* derive from their old Arabic usage as well as from a comparison with their cognates in Hebrew and Aramaic, two languages which are not only closely related to Arabic, but also are known to have had a direct influence on the language of the Qur'ān.⁴⁰

dabbar

In Hebrew the primary meaning of the *Pi'el* verb form (the equivalent of Arabic Form II) derived from the root *d-b-r* is "to speak."⁴¹ There is evidence that Arabic *dabbar* was used in a sense close to that of Hebrew. Although such usage seems to have escaped the Qur'ān commentators, there are indications that it existed in the language before the advent of Islam and for some time afterwards. For example, Ibn Manẓūr lists one of the meanings of the verb as "to tell, narrate." He writes,

wa-dabbar al-ḥadīth 'anhu rawāhu . . . wa-dabbartu al-ḥadīth ay ḥaddathu bih 'an ghayrī . . . wa rawā al-Azharī bi-sanadih ilā Sallām b. Miskīn qāl: sami 'tu Qatāda yuhaddithu 'an fulān yarwīh 'an Abī al-Dardā' yudabbiruhu 'an rasūli llāh . . .

(And "*dabbar* the *ḥadīth* (saying) from him" [means] "he narrated it." And "*dabbartu ḥadīth*" means "I narrated it from others" . . . Al-Azharī narrated in his own *isnād* (chain of transmission) to Sallām b. Miskīn, "I heard Qatāda

39 Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988, 525.

40 See A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938, 19–26.

41 F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, 180.

relate from so and so, narrating from Abī al-Dardā', narrating (*yudabbir*) from the Prophet . . .),"⁴²

amr

In both Hebrew and Syriac, one of the primary meanings of the root '*-m-r*' is "to say."⁴³ In Hebrew, the primary meaning of the two nouns derived from the root '*-m-r*', namely *emer* and *imra*, is "utterance, speech, word."⁴⁴ In discussing the word *amr* as used in the Qur'ān, A. Jeffery writes: "In its use in connection with the Qur'ānic doctrine of revelation, however, it would seem to represent the Aramaic *memra* . . . The whole conception seems to have been strongly influenced by the Christian Logos doctrine, though the word would seem to have arisen from the Targumic use of *memra*."⁴⁵

Finally, there is evidence that *amr* has a similar history to that of *dabbar* in Arabic. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) cites "speech, saying" (*al-qawl*) as one of its meanings.⁴⁶ Assigning *mudabbirāt* and *amrā* the meanings suggested above yields the following alternative translation for Qur'ān 79:5:⁴⁷ "And those (f.) who speak the Word."

wa-l-nāshīqātī nashīqā; fa-l-sābiqātī sabqā

The proposed reinterpretation of Qur'ān 79:1, 3, and 5 establishes the theme of females doing good deeds in the same way that the reconstruction proposed for 100:1–5, referred to above, does. While there are other possible ways to redot the consonantal skeleton of vv. 2 and 4 such as *wa-l-bāsiqāt basīqā*⁴⁸ for *wa-l-nāshīqāt nashīqā*, these two verses fit with the proposed interpretation as they are and the way their general usage in the language suggests.

42 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 1321. Lüling argues for a meaning of the Arabic verb *dabar* as "to speak", which, he states, "occurs very seldom in old Arabic so it therefore seems to be a loan from Hebrew" (*Chalenge*, 499). He adds that the Form V verb *tadabbar* in the Qur'ān is used in the sense of "to discuss again and again and without aim and success" (*Ibid.*, 502).

43 Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Lexicon*, 55–56; R. Payne-Smith, *A compendious Syriac dictionary founded upon the Thesaurus syriacus of R. Payne-Smith*, J. Payne-Smith (ed.), Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999, 20.

44 Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Lexicon*, 56–57.

45 Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 69.

46 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl mushkil al-Qur'ān*, Al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr (ed.), Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1973, 514.

47 As I have pointed out elsewhere (Younes, "Charging steeds", 379), it is quite possible that forms like *dabbar* and *amr*, in the sense of "to speak" and "word" or "utterance," respectively, are not foreign borrowings but old Arabic usages that have died out. In this case Hebrew usage helps identify the old Arabic usage. I will comment further on *dabbar* below.

48 A case could be made for replacing *wa-l-nāshīqātī nashīqā* by *wa-l-bāsiqāt basīqā*, since the only occurrences of the root *n-sh-ḥ* in the Qur'ān are in this verse, while the root *b-s-ḥ*, with the meaning of "giving," "giving plentifully," "spreading," occurs 25 times (Badawi and Abdel-Haleem, *Dictionary*, 91). A reading with "giving" would work well with the previous verse, in which the word '*urf*' involves generosity and giving.

The verb *nashit*, its active participle *nāshit*, and verbal noun *nashṭ* have the general meaning of "activity" as opposed to "laziness."⁴⁹ Another meaning reported for the root *n-sh-ṭ* by Ibn Manẓūr is related to "pleasant" as opposed to "unpleasant" or "hateful." He writes: *wa-fi ḥadīth 'Ubāda bāya 'tu rasūl allah 'alā al-manshaṭ wa-l-makrah* ("The *ḥadīth* of 'Ubāda has: 'I pledged allegiance to the Prophet for pleasant and unpleasant situations.'")⁵⁰

The verb *sabaq* means "to go past, go before,"⁵¹ "to surpass in generosity."⁵² Ibn Manẓūr cites the *ḥadīth*: "I (the Prophet) am first (*sābiq*) among the Arabs (i.e. to become Muslim), ṣuhayb is the first among the Byzantines (*Rūm*), Bilāl is the first among the Ethiopians, and Salmān is the first among the Persians." If considered with the basic meaning of the verb *sabaq*, Qur'an 79:4 can be understood as: "Those who are first, surpass others (particularly in doing good)."

On the basis of the above discussion, the following table shows the reinterpretation of 79:1–5 proposed here, side-by-side with the traditional interpretation, as presented in Ṭabarī:

Traditional interpretation			*Reconstructed version		
By the angels (death, stars, bows, or the soul) drowning	<i>wa-l-nāzi 'āti gharqā</i>	والنازعات غرقا	By those who rise/shine through good works	<i>wa-l-bāzighāti 'urfā</i>	والبازغات عرفا
By the angels (death, stars, lassos, or the oryx) moving fast	<i>wa-l-nāshitāti nashṭā</i>	والناشطات نشطا	And those who are lively/spirited	<i>wa-l-nāshitāti nashṭā</i>	والناشطات نشطا
By death (angels, stars, or ships) swimming	<i>wa-l-sābiḥāti sabḥā</i>	والسابحات سبحا	And those who glorify (God)	<i>wa-l-sābiḥāti sabḥā</i>	والسابحات سبحا
By the angels (death, horses, or stars) racing	<i>fa-l-sābiqāti sabqā</i>	فالسابقات سيقا	And those who surpass others (in doing good)	<i>fa-l-sābiqāti sabqā</i>	فالسابقات سيقا
By the angels managing the affair	<i>fa-l-mudabbirāti amrā</i>	فالمديرات امرا	And those speaking the Word (of God)	<i>fa-l-mudabbirāti amrā</i>	فالمديرات امرا

49 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 4428.

50 Ibid., 4428.

51 Badawi and Abdel-Haleem, *Dictionary*, 418.

52 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 1928–29.

Conclusion

Qur'an 79:1–5, along with the opening verses of Qur'an 37, 51, 77 and 100, are often viewed as particularly difficult to understand because they were meant to be deliberately vague. R. Bell describes them as "suggestive of the utterances of soothsayers", which the Prophet's listeners did not attach a definite meaning to.⁵³ A. Neuwirth describes them as particularly enigmatic.⁵⁴

A logical conclusion that follows from such a view is that there is no point in attempting to understand these verses fully. I would like to suggest that this view is in direct conflict with the Qur'an's emphasis on its comprehensibility by Muḥammad's Arabic-speaking audience. It is a clear Arabic Qur'an (Q 12:2; 20:13; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3) revealed in a clear Arabic tongue (16:103; 26:195). Qur'an 14:4 declares: *wa-mā arsalnā min rasūlin illā bi-lisāni qawmihi li-yubayyina lahum* ("And we never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make [the message] clear for them"). Muḥammad's many enemies in Mecca would undoubtedly have ridiculed him if he recited verses that his followers could not understand. A more likely scenario is that the people who heard him understood what he said, but later generations, working with a defective script, did not successfully reconstruct what he said.

I understand that the type of reconstruction undertaken here may seem speculative and that alternative reconstructions are possible. I also understand that the exact character of the verses that I am trying to reconstruct may never be known in their original form. However, the present attempt is no more speculative than the traditional interpretation. Considering the level of uncertainty about the reference of the active participles in Qur'an 79:1–5, the number of linguistic problems in these verses, and our knowledge of other misreadings of the Qur'an's defective script, the idea of rereading this Sūra based on the available linguistic material is hardly inappropriate. There is no reason to exclude the proposal that these verses refer to women, while at the same time contemplating the traditional proposals that they refer to angels, death, stars, bows, the soul, lassos, the oryx, ships or horses.

The strongest argument in support of my reconstruction is that, as they stand now, the verses of Qur'an 79:1–5 are highly problematic, and all the interpretations and commentaries that have been proposed have failed to address their problems. In the absence of an account that addresses these problems in a convincing manner, I believe that my proposed reconstruction brings us closer to an understanding of the original structure, meaning and character of these verses.

53 W.M. Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, 78.

54 A. Neuwirth, "Images and metaphors in the introductory sections of the Makkan sūras," in Colin Turner (ed.), *The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004, (244–73) 246.

The real question is not the legitimacy of such reconstructions, but an assessment of the reconstructed version in terms of logic, coherence and meaning, an assessment that also takes into consideration the circumstances in which the Qur'ānic text emerged. It is clear that the traditional commentators failed to provide a satisfactory interpretation of the verses discussed here. This failure is a strong argument in favor of a new way of thinking.

10 *Al-Najm* (Q 53), Chapter of the Star

A new Syro-Aramaic reading of Verses 1 to 18

Christoph Luxenberg

Introduction

Philological analysis has shown that the three terms that form the framework of the sacred scripture of Islam have a Syriac etymology, namely: 1. Qur'ān (a modified reading of *qeryān* = lectionary);¹ 2. Sūra (from Syriac *šūrat kīāh*; lit.: *text of the book* = [holy] scripture); 3. āya (a false reading of Syriac *āthā* = sign [among other meanings]: a. a heavenly sign = miracle; b. each *sign* that makes up the scripture, i.e. each letter of the alphabet).² Thus it appears increasingly clear that the text of the Qur'ān, the first foundational book in the literary language of Arabic, cannot be understood in its historical context except when the dominant literary language of the period and milieu in which the Qur'ān emerged is also taken into consideration. In his work *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (1938),³ a work that represents the synthesis of earlier Western Qur'ān research, Arthur Jeffery describes (pp. 19–23) the central place of Syriac in the foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ān in the following terms:

Syriac – This is undoubtedly the most copious source of Qur'ānic borrowings. Syriac, which still survives to-day as a liturgical language and as the dialect of a few communities of Oriental Christians in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia, was at that time the spoken language of those Christian communities best known to the Arabs. [n. 1]

n. 1: For the purposes of this essay, Syriac = Christian Aramaic, and thus includes the Christian-Palestinian dialect and the Aramaic dialect of the Christian population of N. Syria as well as the Classical Syriac dialect of

¹ See. C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000, 54–59; 2nd revised and augmented ed.: Berlin: Schiler, 2004, 81–86; 3rd ed.: Berlin: Schiler, 2007, 83–88; English trans.: *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran*, Berlin: Schiler, 2007, 70–74.

² C. Luxenberg, *Die syrische Liturgie und die "geheimnisvollen Buchstaben" im Koran: Eine liturgievergleichende Studie*, in M. Gross and K.-H. Ohlig (eds), *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, Berlin: Schiler, 2008, 411–56; for Sūra and āya: 418–435.

³ Jeffery, *FV*.

Edessa, which is the one best known to us from the literature and commonly usurps to itself the title of Syriac.

How widely Syriac was spoken at the time of Muḥammad in the area now known as Syria is difficult to determine, but it seems fairly certain that, while Greek was the dominant literary language in the region at that period, the common people of native origin generally spoke Syriac.⁴

In this light the controversies stirred by the present author's work, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qur'ān*, in certain scholarly circles are surprising. They could be explained by the fact that many Arabists do not know Aramaic. Putting their faith in post-Qur'ānic, so-called Classical, Arabic, they are not capable of making an objective assessment of such a historical-philological work. Yet the language of the Qur'ān is not identical with some fictional Old Arabic, neither with the language of so-called pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, nor with so-called Classical Arabic, which is based on the post-Qur'ānic grammar created by the Persian Sībawayh (d. c. 180/796). Those scholars who maintain that the Syro-Aramaic hermeneutical approach to the language of the Qur'ān is nothing but a contestable thesis apparently have difficulty separating themselves from what might be properly called a linguistic ideology.

The proposed historical critical method is designed to be above all empirical, since it is founded on concrete cases in given Qur'ānic contexts. At the same time it is directed at the restitution of the Qur'ānic text on the basis of verifiable linguistic references. This philological restitution of the Qur'ānic text will involve as an indirect consequence a reconsideration of traditional Qur'ānic exegesis, which will appear erroneous on both linguistic and historical grounds.

In order to offer a new proof of these matters we will attempt in what follows to give a plausible response to the questions raised by certain contributors to the acts of the first conference at the University of Notre Dame in 2005.⁵ To this end we will offer a new Syro-Aramaic reading of the Sūra 53 (*al-Najm*; "The Star"), verses 1 to 18, which form a coherent unit. Through a philological analysis of these verses we hope to demonstrate to what extent: 1. the passage in fact contains Syro-Aramaic expressions or words; and 2. whether, consequently, and seen from the angle of traditional – or so-called Classical – Arabic, one might justifiably describe the language of the Qur'ān as a "Mischsprache" ("mixed language"), if not a diglossic language.

Traditional reading of *al-Najm* (Q 53) 1–18

By way of introduction to this Sūra we will provide the translation of Richard Bell, which encapsulates the basic understanding of the traditional Arab commentators to whom Ṭabarī refers.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵ QHC.

⁶ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968, 27:40–57.

- 1 By the star when it falls,
- 2 Your comrade [n.1: Muḥammad] has not gone astray, nor has he erred;
- 3 Nor does he speak of (his own) inclination.
- 4 It [n.2: The prophet's speaking, or message] is nothing but a suggestion suggested,
- 5 Taught (him) by One strong in power,
- 6 Forceful [n.3: Either in body or in intellect, according to two accepted explanations. This is usually taken to be Gabriel, but cf. li. 58 where similar epithets are applied to Allah]; he stood straight,
- 7 Upon the high horizon,
- 8 Then he drew near, and let himself down,
- 9 Till he was two bow-lengths off or nearer [n.4: Or "two bow-lengths or nearly," referring to the apparent height of the figure seen against the sky],
- 10 And suggested to his servant [n.5: Muḥammad, who was Allah's servant] what he suggested.
- 11 The heart did not falsify what he saw.
- 12 Do ye debate with it as to what he sees?
- 13 He saw him, too, at a second descent,
- 14 By the sidra-tree at the boundary,
- 15 Near which is the garden of the abode [n.6: This must refer to some dwelling near Mecca, unless the verse be a later insertion, and refer to heavenly places. The whole vision is often taken, but this robs it of force],
- 16 When the sidra-tree was strangely enveloped.
- 17 The eye turned not aside, nor passed its limits.
- 18 Verily, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord [n.7: Or, he saw of the signs of his Lord, the greatest].

The words, expressions, and phrases underlined in the translation of Richard Bell, which represent the Arabic understanding of this Sūra, will be discussed and reinterpreted according to a Syro-Aramaic understanding.

Preliminary remarks

A philological analysis of *al-Najm* will demonstrate that the central theme of this Sūra is the polemic disseminated in the entourage of the Messenger (whose name is not cited), who is suspected of being "possessed" (by an evil spirit). Accordingly, in two passages (Q 23:25 and 34:8) he is accused of being possessed by *jinn* (spirits) and in five other passages he is described as *majnūn* (not "crazy," according to the modern sense of the term, but rather in the sense of "possessed"). The Qur'ān refutes the first accusation on three occasions (Q 7:184; 23:70; 24:46) and the second in as many passages (Q 52:29; 68:2; 81:22). This Sūra addresses the cause of certain symptoms of the Prophet which his opponents had observed. The question is whether they were the product of demonic possession or of a divine revelation.

The Qur'ān maintains the latter position, and indeed it imputes this same "holy illness" to other messengers who preceded the messenger of the Qur'ān. For this reason it is declared in Q 51:52: *ka-dhālik(a) mā atā lladhīn(a) jā 'ū min qablihim min rasūl(in) illā qālū sāḥir(un) aw majnūn*. "Thus there came not to those before them any messenger, but they said, 'A magician or a madman'" (Bell). The same reproach is made to Noah in Q 54:9: *kadhhabat qablahum qawm(u) Nūh(in) fa-kadhhabū 'abdanā w-qālū majnūn(un) wa-zdujir*. "The people of Noah counted (it) false before them; they counted Our servant false, and said: 'A madman, and he was deterred'" (Bell).

Having now elucidated the context in which we must address *al-Najm*, we can hence proceed to a detailed analysis of the text, taking into account at once Arabic and Syro-Aramaic.

Philological analysis of each verse

1. *wa-l-najm idhā hawā*

The Qur'ān uses the oath quite often as a means of persuasion. One might think that with "By the star when it falls" (as this first verse has been heretofore understood) the Qur'ān is only making use of a simple rhetorical device. It is true that Q 56:75–76 emphasizes the importance of this oath ("by the position of the stars"), but here the Arab commentators, and the Western translations, incorrectly believed that *al-najm* ("the star") is the subject of the verb *hawā* ("to fall"). Elsewhere Ṭabarī reports two contradictory opinions attributed to Mujāhid: 1. by "this star" the Pleiades is intended, and by "fall" their disappearance at dawn; 2. that the expression means "the Qur'ān, when it descends (from the sky)."ṭ Ṭabarī expresses his preference for the first opinion, according to which this phrase relates to the Pleiades, ignoring, however, the meaning of the verb "to fall," which here is central for the understanding of that which follows. Consequently, Blachère, Bell, and Paret (the last of these interprets this phrase as a reference to a shooting star) translate:

Blachère: Par l'étoile quand elle s'abîme!

Bell: By the star when it falls

Paret: Beim Stern, wenn er (als Sternschnuppe vom Himmel?) fällt! [n. 1:

Oder: Beim Gestirn (der Plejaden) (*an-najm*) wenn es untergeht (? *hawā*) !]

It is appropriate, especially for the sake of Arabists, to mention here a note of Nöldeke in his Syriac grammar regarding word order in Syriac:

Die Stellung der Haupttheile des Satzes zu einander ist sehr frei. Das Subj(ekt) steht im Verbal- wie im Nominalsatz bald vor, bald nach, bald

werden seine Theile gar durch Theile des Präd(ikats) gesprengt oder umgekehrt. [n. 1]

n.1: Wie frei die Wortstellung des Syr(ers) ist, zeigt sich besonders, wenn man syr(ische) Stücke mit daraus gemachten arab(ischen) Übersetzungen vergleicht. Der Araber *muss* da unaufhörlich die Wortstellung ändern, während der Syrer fast überall auch die für den Araber nothwendige Wortstellung hätte wählen können.⁸

A Qur'ānic example, where the subject of a verbal phrase is not indicated before the second complementary phrase, will illustrate Nöldeke's description. In Q 84:14–15 it is said regarding an unbeliever on the day of judgment:

14 *innahu ḡanna an lan yahūr(a)*

15 *bal inna rabbahu kāna bihi baṣīrā*

Our translators pick up the arbitrary interpretation of Ṭabarī, who explains the verb *yahūr(a)* in the sense of "return" (to God on the Day of Judgment):

Blachère:

14 il aura pensé qu'il ne reviendrait pas.

15 Mais son Seigneur était clairvoyant à son sujet.

Bell:

14 And [*he*] thought that he would not be set back [n. 2: *I.e.* that his prosperity would continue [the phrase is usually interpreted to mean "would not be brought back to Allah"].]

15 Yea, but his Lord was of him observant.

It is surprising that our eminent translators did not note that the Syriac verb in v. 14, "*yahūr*", is a synonym of Arabic *baṣīra* in Verse 15. They would have certainly recognized thereby that the subject of the Syriac word is not the unbeliever, but his Lord who observes him (while he is in this world). These two verses are therefore to be understood:

⁸ "The respective word order of the principal parts of the sentence is characterized by a great margin of liberty. In a verbal or a nominal sentence the subject may be placed either at the beginning or the end. Alternatively the unity of the word order could be interrupted by elements of the predicate, or the other way around. [n. 1]: The degree to which Syriac syntax is free is perhaps best illustrated by comparing Syriac pieces with the Arabic translations thereof. The Arabic translator is compelled repeatedly to change the word order, the Syriac author would have the possibility to choose in almost every case the order of the words that corresponds to Arabic syntax." T. Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik*, 2nd edition, Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1898 (reprint: Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1977), p. 248.

- 14 He had believed that (God) did not observe him;
15 But his Lord saw him (well indeed)

That which Nöldeke described regarding syntax in Syriac, which is frequently puzzling to Arabists, is equally evident in the phrase that introduces the Sūra that concerns us here. The unity of the phrase, which has been broken by the false insertion of a verse division (after *hawā*), was not recognized by the commentators and translators. In fact, the opening two verses comprise one phrase composed of a protasis (Verse 1) and an apodosis (Verse 2). Thus the syntax of the phrase is as follows:

- a The first word (*wa-l-najm*) is not the subject of Verse 1 but an oath phrase that has no role other than to introduce the following phrase. Thus it should be translated, “By the star!” and not “By the star when it falls!”
- b The temporal phrase that follows (*idhā hawā*; “when it falls”) is a protasis, the subject of which is named in the apodosis of Verse 2: *ṣāhibukum*; “your companion”. One should understand then: “When he (= your companion) falls.”
- c The apodosis follows logically in Verse 2:

2. mā ḡalla ṣāhibukum wa-mā ḡhawā

In translating this verse as “Your comrade has not gone astray, nor has he erred” Bell does not see clearly enough the reference this verse makes to demonic possession, in which the possessed is thought to go astray, and become delirious. For this reason the Qur’ān affirms: “Your companion has not gone astray, nor has he become delirious.”

3. wa-mā yanṭuqu ‘an al-hawā

Bell does not appreciate the nuance of this phrase in interpreting, “Nor does he speak of (his own) inclination,” since the Qur’ān adds in line with the above, “It is not under the effect of the fall [considered as a sign of possession] that he speaks.”

The term *hawā* does not mean here “inclination.” It must be seen in parallel to the verb “to fall” of the first verse, of which it is the nominal form. *Hawā* is thus to be taken as a synonym of *wuḡū* ‘= *ṣara* ‘ (= “a fall” or “an attack”). As concerns the preposition ‘an in the sense of “under the effect of” we find a parallel to it in Q 56:19, where it is said regarding the wine of paradise that the blessed “will

9 From Syriac *hwā* (“to be, to exist”), *ahwī* (“to create, to invent”), from which comes the Arabic noun *hawā* (that which one invents: “fantasy,” “imagination”); see J.E. Manna, *Vocabulaire Chaldéen-Arabe*, Mossoul: n.p., 1900; reprinted with a new appendix by R.J. Bidawid, Beirut: n.p., 1975, 171a.

not suffer under its effect (‘*anhā*), neither from headaches nor from languor (*lā yusadda ‘ūna ‘anhā wa-lā yataraffawn*).”¹⁰

4. In huwa illā waḡy(un) yūḡā

To the contrary of what might appear to onlookers as a fall caused by demonic possession, the Qur’ān replies, “It is rather a revelation given to him (at this moment)!” Bell does not appreciate that revelation is at stake in translating, “It is nothing but a suggestion suggested.”

5. ‘allamahu shadīd al-quwā

As the Arabic verb *awḡā* (v. 4) is a metathesis of Syriac *hawwī*¹¹ and seeing that this latter term can mean not only “to reveal” but also “to teach,”¹² the Qur’ān

10 The traditional reading *yunzifūn* is false. The proposed emendation finds its justification in the Syriac verb *etrappī* (“to relax, to become soft, to become languid”), the Qur’ānic form of which is simply a transliteration. See R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879; vol. 2, 1901, 2:3960ff., for example, under *rappīūtā* and *m-rappīūtā* (3963): *laxitas, laxatio, dissolutio*, and in Arabic according to Bar ‘Alī et Bar Bahlūl: *rakhāwa, irtikhā, istirkhā* (“laxity, slackness, lassitude”). That the Syriac root *rḡā* is itself a secondary form of *rḡah*, through the elision of the final *h*, is demonstrated by the semantics of this word which Manna (750b) renders in Arabic with *rakhafa* (metathesis of *rafaha*, the Arabic *kh* being a secondary Aramaic phoneme for *h*, something attested in numerous Aramaic-Babylonian dialects, including the Neo-Aramaic dialects, known as Assyrian, in Mesopotamia) and *istarkha* (“to become soft”) in the physical sense (for example regarding dough that is no longer consistent).

This latter citation shows us that the Arabic root *rakhā* (“to relax”) is for its part a secondary evolution through elision of the final *f* of *rakhafa* (e.g. in the contemporary dialect of Aleppo, whereby *b-a’ref* [“I know”] is pronounced: *b-a’rē*). This latter term for its part is a secondary pronunciation of the Syro-Aramaic root *rḡef*, which for its part produced, through the attenuation of medial *h*, the secondary Arabic verb *ra’af/ra’ufa* (“to have pity, to be kind.”), whence the Syriac *rāḡōfā* > Arabic *ra’ūf* (“merciful, kind, gracious”). This can be compared with the root *rḡem* > Arabic *rahima* > *ra’ima* (“to love tenderly”). We note finally that *Lisān al-‘arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1955, 2:451a) cites under the root *r-f-h* a saying of ‘Umar who, on the occasion of his marriage to Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of ‘Alī, is to have said *raffihūnī*, by which he meant, “Tell me that which is to be said to the newlywed,” i.e. (according to the practice still current in our day in advance of or at the occasion of a marriage), “say *tefrāḡ* (‘may you be happy!’)” (thus the appellation *faraḡ* for the wedding ceremony in Egypt, for example). This explains for us the secondary form of the Arabic verb *fariḡa* (“to rejoice, to be merry”), which is a metathesis of the Syro-Aramaic root *r-f-h* (n.b. The Arabic variant *r-q-h* cited in the same sense by the *Lisān* is manifestly the result of a false pointing which produced *q* instead of *f*). We would draw attention also to a final secondary Arabic variant of this same root, due to the attenuation of the final *h* to *h*, which produced: *rafah/rafuḡa*, *ta-raffaha* (“to relax, to live in comfort, to be pleasant”) and derived nouns such as *rafāḡa* and *rafāḡiyya* (“relaxation, ease, comfortable life”) etc.

11 A point already recognized by Brockelmann, *Lexicon syriacum*, Halis Saxonum: Max Niemeyer, 1928, 220a.

12 See Manna, 223b, under *hawwī* (5): ‘*allama*.

connects this verse to it by adding, as a synonym, the verb 'allama:¹³ "It is the strongly Powerful [i.e. the Almighty] who has taught him."

This latter expression has been the object of controversy among both Arab and Western commentators, who have not realized that we are dealing here with a Syriac calque, one of innumerable examples thereof in the Qur'ān. For *shadid al-quwwa* (in the singular, and not *al-quwa*, in the plural, as the Cairo version has it), the Qur'ān is translating literally the Syriac expression *taqīf 'ushnā*, which means literally (someone) "strong in force."¹⁴ With the Syriac expression

13 'Allama for its part is derived from Syro-Aramaic 'lem / 'lam, 'allem, meaning literally "to reinforce, to strengthen" and metaphorically, "to render (intellectually) strong" = "to teach," in the same way that the Syriac synonym *taqqef* ("to reinforce, to strengthen") produced the Arabic *thaqqafa* (in the metaphorical sense): "to form, to instruct," whence in modern Arabic: *wazīr at-ta'lim wa-l-thaqāfa* ("Minister of Instruction and Culture"). Otherwise the Arabic 'allama (in the metaphorical sense, "an intellectual," faithfully renders the morphology of a Syriac *nomen agentis* ("agent noun"), which means literally "strong (intellectually)." Likewise it is through the etymology of the Syriac word 'laymā ("child" – in the state of growth, or gaining strength) that one can elucidate the primary meaning of the derived secondary Arabic term *ghulām* (boy), along with other derived terms. The Syriac verbal root 'lam being itself a secondary variant of the root *hlam* (through the sonorization of *h* to 'ayn), *hlam* meaning originally "to be strong" and by extension "to be in good health, to be sound" (either in body or mind), "to heal." Hence we can elucidate the etymology of the Qur'ānic term *hlīm* / *hulm* in Q 24:58, 59, adequately rendered as "age of puberty," nothing other than the logical completion of the age of "gaining strength" = "growth" (Syriac 'laymā > Arabic *ghulām*), to be compared with Q 12:22; 28:14; 46:15, where *balagha ashuddahu* (Bell: "he reached his full strength") is the Arabic synonym.

The Syro-Aramaic root *hlam* ("to be strong, sound") thus enables us to explore the semantic field of a number of variants, such as the Syriac metathesis *lahmā*, which is "meat" in Arabic, but for which the Qur'ān has preserved for us the primordial Arabic meaning of "food" in the following four passages: Q 16:14; 35:12; 52:22; 56:21. In the context of these passages the word *lahm* means "food" and not "meat," as according to the current Arabic understanding. Even in Q 56:21 the word does not imply "chair d'oiseaux," "birds' flesh," "Fleisch von Geflügel," as translated by Blachère, Bell and Paret, but rather "fresh food." Instead of *lahm(i) layr (in)* one should read (with metathesis) *lahm(un) tar(yun)*. This reading is doubly attested, by Q 16:14 and 35:12, which speaks of "fresh food" and not "fresh meat." As regards Q 56:21, it is rather difficult to imagine that there is "roast bird" in paradise. A consequential analysis of the etymology of a number of other Aramaic and Arabic words would lead us to identify the historical connection and the semantic ramifications of this, as for example the Syro-Aramaic root *hlam* ("to be strong, sound"), which becomes by metathesis *lhem* ("to adhere, to be coherent"), hence the Arabic *lahama* ("to weld, to heal"), and by the alteration of the *h* to *hamza* ('), *la'ama* / *lā'ama* (with the same meaning + "to agree with, be appropriate, be convenient"). Other current Arabic words such as *malīh* / *mlīh* / *mnīh* ("convenient, good, well") and even *milh* ("salt"), which meant originally "good taste," turn out to be derived from Aramaic. By examining this more closely, we note occasionally the consonantal mutation *b > v > m* as with also *b > v > f*; for example: Syro-Aramaic *halbā* > Arabic *ḥalīb* ("milk" – as a food); through the sonorization of *h* as 'ayn and the spirantization of Aramaic *b* (= *v > f*) results in the secondary Arabic form 'alaf ("forage," "pasture") and its derivatives. "Food" being synonymous with "force," the Aramaic root *hlab* ("to milk" – in order to nourish) becomes through the vocalization of *h > 'lab* ("to defeat"), from which is derived the Arabic verb *ghalaba* (with the same meaning). These few examples should suffice to demonstrate the work necessary for the development of an etymological dictionary of the Arabic language, which we still lack.

14 This expression (*taqīf 'ushnā*) is well known in the Syriac liturgy. We find it in the Gloria (*teshbuhtā*) hymn which precedes the reading of the Gospel on the vespers of Christmas and Easter. Cf. *Breviarium iuxta ritum Ecclesiae Antiochenae Syrorum*. Pars autumnalis. Volumen secundum. Mausili: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1886, 470a, ll. 10–11. (Christmas vespers): *teshbuhtā w-hedrā w-rumrāmā m-dashmīnan l-gayyā w-gabbārā w-taqīf 'ushnā 'al zākūtā d-'ammāk Isrā'ēl* ("Glory, honor, and praise we offer to the Glorious, the Powerful and [the one who is] strong in force, for the victory of your people Israel.").

taqīf 'ushnā, the "Almighty," God (or His Spirit) is intended. This contradicts the interpretation of the commentators cited by Ṭabarī,¹⁵ who see in this expression a designation of (the angel) Gabriel. In contrast to Blachère, who sees here an allusion to "un [Ange] redoutable, fort," Bell, with reference to Q 51:58, sees in it an epithet that should rather be applied to God. This opinion is confirmed elsewhere in a *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn 'Abbās and cited by the *Lisān al-'arab* according to which the Prophet, in a supplication, is to have said, *allah(u)m(a) dhā [al-khayl] = al-ḥayl al-shadīd* ("O God, [you who are] of strong force = almighty").¹⁶

6. *dhū mirra(tin) fa-stawū*

Bell translates *dhū mirra(tin)* as "forceful," Blachère: "doué de sagacité;" Paret: "dem Festigkeit eigen ist." The differences among Western translators augment those cited by Ṭabarī, who offers the following interpretations (all attributed to Gabriel):

- a "of beautiful stature"
- b "of a beautiful appearance"
- c "of a large and beautiful stature"
- d "endowed with force"
- e "of the force of Gabriel"
- f (again) "endowed with force"

Ṭabarī's interpretation, however, is: "a healthy body, exempt from sicknesses and infirmities." In these conditions, he explains, the body of a man can be considered "strong." He cites as proof for this a saying of the Prophet, but which has no relation to this verse. In fact *dhū* has here the function of a relative pronoun that introduces a relative phrase, an insight that can only be perceived by analyzing its origin.

The Aramaic Origin of "dhū"

Arabic grammar lists five nouns that are exceptions to the classical rule of declination, namely: *ab(un)* ("father"), *akh(un)* ("brother"), *ham(un)* ("father-in-law"), *fū* ("mouth"), and *dhū* (possessive pronoun: "possessor of," "endowed with"). All of these nouns, in fact, have an Aramaic origin. While the first three are still found in modern Arabic dialects, the latter two are only found in the literary language.

As concerns *fū*, it is most likely an apocope of Babylonian Aramaic from the Syro-Aramaic word *pūmmā/pumā* ("mouth"),¹⁷ of which we find a number of

15 Ṭabarī, 42.

16 *Lisān al-'arab*, 11:196.

17 Cf. Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriß der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1966, I, § 115d, p.333, who cites as Assyrian forms: *pū*, *pī*, *pā*, pl. *pīāte* (which is certainly the plural of the secondary form *p(i)ātā*), which explains also the Babylonian origin of the Hebrew forms *pē*, *pī*, which would seem anyway to be rather apocopes of Syro-Aramaic *appē* / *appīn*.

variants in modern Arabic dialects (*fumm*, *fūm*, *fəmm*, *thəmm*, *təmm*),¹⁸ which demonstrate that the vocalization of literary Arabic *fam* does not correspond to linguistic reality.

But unlike *fū*, the origin of which is an Aramaic noun, *dhū* is a particle made up of two Syro-Aramaic elements: a. the demonstrative *də* and b. the enclitic form of the personal pronoun of the third person masculine singular (acting as a *copula*): (*h*)*ū*, which gives the composite form: *də*-(*h*)*ū* = *dhū*.¹⁹ As the Syro-Aramaic demonstrative *də*- (*dī*, *dā*) also has a correlative function, *dhū* (<*də*-*hū*), in this context has the meaning of: "that which is," "who is."

This use of *dhū* as a relative pronoun, much to the surprise of Arabists, is confirmed by *Lisān al-ʿarab*, which cites al-Farrā' (who refers to Shammār) as follows: *bi-l-faḍl dhū faḍḍalakum allāhu bi-hi* ("by the favor *which* [*dhū*] God has lavished upon you."). The *Lisān* explains:

In doing this, they place *dhū* instead of *alladhī*. There are others who say, *hādihā dhū ya 'rif* ("This is the one [*dhū*] who knows."). Al-Farrā' relates: *wa-inna al-mā'a mā'u abī wa-jaddī wa-bi'rī dhū ḥafartu wa-dhū tawaytu* ("this water-point (is) that of my father and my grandfather, and my well which [*dhū*] I dug, and which [*dhū*] I filled in"). As for the line of the poet, "As for those of the house [= family] of Tamīm, of whom (*dhū*) I have heard," here *dhū* has the meaning of *alladhī* ("which"). This particle does not have nominative, accusative, or genitive; rather it remains phonetically invariable because it does not act as an adjective that can be declined, as [for example] when you say, "I met a man [lit.: I have passed by a man – which requires the genitive, *dhī*] who (was) rich," and "this is a man [nominative: *dhū*] who (was) rich," and "I saw a man [accusative: *dhā*] who (was) rich." Thus he said. And you say [= further example], "I saw the one who (*dhū*) came to you;" or in one of the sayings of the Arabs, "That which (*dhū*) came to others [lit.: to people] has come to him," in other words [in current Arabic]: *alladhī* [= *dhū*] *atā*: that which came. Regarding this Abū Maṣṣūr has explained, "this [is used] in the dialect of (*banī*) Ṭayy."²⁰

As regards *dhū mirra* the latter word is a false reading. The Arab philologists took the final *h* of this Aramaic word, which alternates with the final *alif* and marks the masculine *status emphaticus*, as the Arabic feminine ending. For this reason they added two diacritical points in order to produce a *tā' marbūṭa*, although even thereby they were still not able to give a precise meaning to this enigmatic word. But according to Aramaic orthography, this word can be read: *mārā*, which means,

18 See also Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (NBsS), Strassburg: Trübner, 1910, 175 ff.

19 This enclitic form of *d*-(*h*)*ū* is current in Judeo-Aramaic; see for example M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002, 156b, 3: *hēn d-ū dras*, which Sokoloff translates: wherever he treads (= reads?), but which in fact means: *if he treads*.

20 *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 15:460 a/b.

"the Lord," and appears to be an emphatic identification of the one who is *shadīd al-quwwa* (v. 5). Preceded by the relative particle *dhū* (<*d*-*hu*), which includes the copula (*hū* = is), a relative phrase with the meaning "who is the Lord" is produced.

As regards *fa-stawā*, this reflexive Arabic verb renders the Syriac *eshtwī*, the root of which is *shwā*, Arabic *sawīya*, the primary meaning of which, according to Manna, is "to be on a level," or "to level, to smooth, to simplify." It also has the figurative meaning "to humble oneself, to deign."²¹ It is this latter meaning that appears to have the closest correspondence to the verse at hand. Without taking into consideration the Qur'ānic context the translators simply follow Ṭabarī in translating "he stood straight" (Bell), and [this angel] "se tint en majesté" (Blachère), "Er stand aufrecht da" (Paret). Paret, however, intimates his uncertainty of this translation by adding *fa-stawā* in parentheses. In fact the Arabic verb *istawā* can be interpreted in two ways: a. to put oneself on a vertical level – that is "to stand up straight;" or b. on a horizontal level.

Ṭabarī (putting his trust in earlier traditions) thought of the first, thereby also leading our translators into error. It is rather in the second way that this verb should be taken – but figuratively: so put oneself on a horizontal level, to simplify oneself, that is "to humble oneself," and all the more so since, in our context, it is the Lord in person who humbled himself to come down to his Messenger. Thus *fa-stawā* means here: "he humbled himself."

7. *wa-huwa fī al-ufuq(i) al-a'lā*

This verse does not present any particular problem. However, the translators do not appreciate the semantic nuance here when they translate this phrase as a simple declaration: "Upon the high horizon" (Bell), "alors qu'il était à l'horizon supérieur" (Blachère), "(in der Ferne) ganz oben am Horizont" (Paret). In fact this is a concessive proposition that is meant to emphasize the contrast with the idea expressed in the main clause. Indeed, it is not a minor matter that the Lord – He who lives in the highest heaven – humbles Himself to descend upon his Messenger. This is what is meant by the expression *fī al-ufuq(i) al-a'lā* – in the highest horizon – that is the heaven in contrast to the earth, but in particular in regard to the lowering of the Lord to the level of his servant! Thus we propose the following interpretation of this verse: "He who resides [lit. who is] at the highest horizon [i.e. in the highest heaven]!"

8. *thumma danā fa-tadallā*

The traditional Qur'ānic reading *thumma* of the Syro-Aramaic (Syriac) *tūb* > (Mandaean) *tūm* ("again," "anew"), from which is derived the so-called classical Arabic form, does not correspond with the Qur'ānic orthography *tm*, which suggests rather a pronunciation identical to dialectal Arabic *təmm*/*thəmm* ("double lips" = mouth), which reveals the origin of the Aramaic adverb *tūbh*, derived from

21 Manna, 772a.

the verb *twab* > *tāb* ("to return," and figuratively, "to repent," whence the Arabic *tāb*). Yet as *tamm* (*thsmm*) does not occur as an adverb in contemporary Arabic dialects, the defective Qur'ānic orthography, even while it privileges this pronunciation, could also correspond to a vocalization identical to the Mandaean (Babylonian) *tūm*, from which it is most likely derived.²² The pronunciation *thum*(*mā*) with the doubling of the *m* and a final *a* is improbable, as the Qur'ān regularly marks *ammā*, for example, or *lammā* with a final *alif*.

The verb *danā* has the same meaning in Arabic and Syro-Aramaic (*dnā*), namely "to approach," and in Arabic, furthermore "to come down, descend." The reflexive *tadallā* (Syro-Aramaic *etdallā*) likewise has a shared etymology, but in this context it has the Arabic meaning of "to hang = to persist, to remain in suspense," which the Syriac verb does not share.

The Qur'ānic editor, who seems indeed to have been familiar with the Old and New Testament, makes here a clear reference to Isaiah 11:2 and 42:1, as well as to Matthew 3:16 and John 1:32–33. These Biblical passages help provide an elucidation of this succinct Qur'ānic text that alludes to the Spirit of God which descends and remains suspended above His messenger.

Blachère was right to contradict Ṭabarī by translating logically,²³ and in light of the Biblical references: "Puis il s'*approcha* et demeura *suspendu*." As for the one who approached in this way, Ṭabarī reports two opinions: the first, supported with three chains of transmission (based on the authority of al-Ḥasan, Qatāda, and al-Rabī'), is that the referent is (the angel) Gabriel; the other, with reference to Ibn 'Abbās and Anas Ibn Mālik, is that the reference is to the Lord in person.

9. *fa-kāna qāba qawsayn aw adnā*

As regards the verb *kāna* ("he was"), Ṭabarī believes that the implied subject is (the angel) Gabriel. As for the locution *qāba qawsayn*, he explains: "Gabriel was at the distance of two *arcs* ('*alā qadri qawsayn*'), or less, that is to say, closer to him."²⁴ In order to explain this locution, which he understands as an adverb of place, he lists the following variants and synonyms: "One says, 'He is in respect to him: *qāba qawsayn* and *qība qawsayn* and *qīda qawsayn* and *qāda qawsayn*.' All of these have the meaning of 'at a distance of two arcs.'"

Others interpret *fa-kāna qāba qawsayn* with the meaning of, "He was the same distance from him as the cord is from the arc." Ṭabarī presents five chains of transmission, some of which understand this locution similarly. Others understand *qāba qawsayn* with the meaning of "by one or two cubits," and still others that *qāb* means a measure, according to one opinion half of a finger's length.²⁵

22 Cf. Theodor Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik*, Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1875, 204, 14.

23 Ṭabarī is followed by Bell and Paret, who translate: "Then he drew near and left himself down." "Hierauf näherte er sich und kam (immer weiter) *nach unten* (*fa-tadallā*)."

24 Ṭabarī, 27:54.

25 Ibid.

The locution *qāba qawsayn*, evidently taken as ancient, or so-called Classical Arabic, is recorded in Arabic dictionaries according to this imagined meaning.²⁶ *Qāb* is supposed to mean "a short distance" and '*alā qābi qawsayn*' is taken as a locution meaning "extremely close," "at the distance of two finger lengths." Still all of these attempts at interpretation, each less probable than the last, clearly demonstrate that Ṭabarī and the cited commentators, convinced that they were working with clear Arabic, never suspected that the locution is Syro-Aramaic, as we will here explain.

In the context of this verse the subject of *kāna* is not Gabriel, regarding whom Ṭabarī cites a *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet saw him with his six hundred wings. Neither is the subject the same as that of the previous phrase, namely "the Spirit of God." It is rather the Messenger himself. The logic of the context will effectively demonstrate that the subject changed here without any explicit transition, a change that is confusing to a typical reader but is a common feature of Qur'ānic style. Finally the word *kāna* here does not have the simple Arabic meaning of "he was" but rather, under the influence of Syriac, "he remained."

Qāb(a) is not an Arabic word, and it is neither an adverb of place nor of measure, but rather a false reading of a Syro-Aramaic active participle. Instead of *qāb*, *qāēth* should be read, which is a Syro-Aramaic verb meaning "to freeze, to remain still, to remain immobile."²⁷ However, the Qur'ānic grapheme *qāt* corresponds with the Syriac present participle, and thus one should read *qāēth* (cf. *qāēm* = Arabic *qāyim/qā'im*), which means "immobilized, immobile, still." Preceded by the Arabic verb *kāna* the phrase signifies "He became" or "he remained still."

The traditional reading *qawsayn* is erroneous and has nothing to do with one or two "arcs." This word not being Arabic, one of the two diacritical points of the *q* should be removed to form a Syriac *f* (or *p*) and three diacritical points should be added to the *sīn* to form a *shīn*, which leads to the Syriac reading, with a dual Arabic suffix, *pawshayn/fawshayn*, which means, according to Manna under *pawshā*, "a stop, pause, interruption."²⁸ The word therefore means "two pauses = two instants." Thus instead of the traditional Arabic reading, *fa-kāna qāba qawsayn aw adnā*, "he was two arcs or less," we should read *fa-kāna qāēth fawshayn aw adnā*, which means "He [i.e. the servant] remained thereupon dumb-founded for two instants, or even less."

10. *fa-awḥa ilā 'abdihi(i) mā awḥā*

This verse is clear in itself and its meaning conforms with the translation of Blachère: "Il révéla alors à son Serviteur ce qu'il révéla." ("He then revealed to His servant what He revealed").

26 E.g. H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 4th edition, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979, 930a.

27 Manna, 712b. Brockelmann, *Lexicon syriacum* (704a): (Ar. *waqt* tempus definitum): *haesit* ("to remain still, to freeze"); *Thesaurus* (2:3774): *qat*: *immotus mansit* ("to remain immobile"); *qat*: *pāsh d-lā zaw' akh . . . aynā d-metḥed b-gāhrūtā* (*qat*: "to remain immobile, as one who is stupefied").

28 Manna, 581a.

11. *mā kadhaba al-fu'ādu mā ra'ā*

Blachère and Bell understand this verse according to the interpretation of Ṭabarī:

Blachère: Son imagination n'a pas abusé sa vue.

Bell: The heart did not falsify what it saw.

However, and according to the explanation of this phrase below, the verb *kadhaba* ("to lie") should be read *kadhhaba* ("to refute"). As for the traditional reading of *al-fu'ādu*, the *hamza* inserted by the later Arab readers suggests the meaning "heart" according to the Arabic meaning of the term,²⁹ but this reading is false. Without the *hamza*, the Qur'ānic grapheme is to be read *fawād*. Manna gives the Arabic meaning of the Syriac verbal root *pādīfād* as follows: *zāgha*, *ḍalla* ("to deviate, to err, to rave"),³⁰ *sahā*, *dhahala* ("to be distracted, absent-minded"). It is this latter meaning that should be retained for the Qur'ānic nominal form *fawād*, of which Manna gives the following equivalents in Syriac: *pawdā*, *pyādā*, *pyādūthā*, which should be rendered by "absence." This term thus logically corresponds with the Syriac synonym *qāt* ("to be inert, immobile") of Verse 9, along with the two preceding synonymous verbs in Verse 2, *mā dallā ṣāhibukum wa-mā ghawā* ("gone astray," "become delirious"). Thus, instead of the traditional reading, *mā kadhaba al-fu'ādu mā ra'ā* ("The heart did not falsify what it saw"), we should read *mā kadhhaba al-fawād(u) mā ra'ā*, which corresponds to "The absence does not refute in any way what he saw" (i.e.: The absence does not mean that what he saw was false).

12. *a-fa tumārūnahu 'alā mā yarā*

The traditional reading *a-fa* presumes an interrogative Arabic particle 'a followed by the Arabic conjunction *fa*. Instead we have here the Syro-Aramaic particle *āp/āf*, which expresses the logical conclusion to a question (which here does not need an interrogative particle).

The verb *mārā* is a borrowing from the Syriac *marrī*, which means in Arabic, according to Manna, *khāṣama* ("to dispute, to contest").³¹ Unlike Blachère, who renders it approximately with *chicaner* ("to quibble"), Ṭabarī explains it correctly as *jaḥada* and *jādala* ("to deny, to contest").³² This verse is thus to be read *āf tumārūnahu 'alā mā yarā*, "Do you then contest what he sees [as vision]?"

13. *wa-laqaḍ ra('ā)hu nazla(tan) 'ukhrā*

The only term to elucidate in this verse is the word *nazla*, which Ṭabarī explains in the sense of *marra* ("one time"),³³ followed by Blachère, while Bell sees here a

"second descent" (of God and His Spirit): "He saw him, too, at a second descent." Paret sees the same: "Er hat ihn ja auch ein anderes Mal herabkommen sehen." Yet this term should not be understood here according to the ordinary sense of "descent," attributed to God or His Spirit, but rather to the fit which comes "down" upon the Messenger.³⁴ Unlike Blachère and Bell, who render Verse 13 with "Certes, il l'a vu une autre fois," and "He saw him, too, at a second descent," this brief philological analysis leads us to the following understanding: "He saw him [too], when he had another fit [or another vision]."

Ṭabarī, for whom the term *nazla* does not pose any problem, is interested for his part in that which the Messenger could have seen in a second vision. For the majority of commentators (13 chains of transmission) it is (the angel) Gabriel whom saw the messenger. One central witness is attributed to Aisha, who is said to have reported to this effect that following the declaration of the Messenger, "I only saw Gabriel according to his true appearance these two times, when he descended from heaven. His great size obscured the space between heaven and earth."³⁵ Only Ibn 'Abbās, to whom are attributed two chains of transmission, believes that the Messenger of God saw his Lord in his heart.

We could understand that the commentators here could only posture conjectures regarding the one whom the Messenger had seen, as they themselves were not witnesses. Yet one would expect that they would know a bit more regarding that which follows.

14. *'inda sidrat(i) al-muntahā*

However, the commentators cited by Ṭabarī are no less perplexed regarding the meaning of the two terms *sidra* and *muntahā*. As for *sidra*, all agree with Ibn 'Abbās, who sees in this a jujube tree. As for its description as *sidrat al-muntahā*, Ṭabarī provides three opinions:

- According to certain qualified commentators (including Ka'b al-Aḥbār), this epithet (*al-muntahā* = "the end") means that this jujube constitutes the end, the limit, of the knowledge of every learned person.
- Others report that it is the "end" for those who descend from above, or ascend from below, by the order of God.
- Still others report that it is the end, the goal, of all who follow the law of the Messenger of God and his path.

Ṭabarī justifies these three opinions, and reports thereafter the descriptions of the tree passed down by the Messenger of God to the people of knowledge

29 Blachère notes in this regard (560, n.11): "le foie (= le cœur) n'a pas abusé ce qu'il (= Mahomet) a vu. — On sait que chez les Sémites le cœur est souvent considéré comme le siège de la pensée."

30 Manna, 578a.

31 Ibid., 415b.

32 Ṭabarī, 27: 49ff.

33 Ibid., 27:50.

34 We find an adequate Arabic explanation of this meaning with Manna (p. 59) under the Syriac noun *ghārūtā*, which he explains as *nazla tuṣīb al-a'yūn* ("a descent" = "an attack that touches the eyes"). But since the Qur'ān employs *nuzūl* in the sense of "revelation," *nazla ukhra* can also mean "another revelation."

35 Ṭabarī, 27:50ff.

(ahl al- 'ilm). Anas b. Mālik cites the Messengers as follows: "Upon arriving at the *sidra*, [I saw] here that its fruits were each the size of a jar and its leaves like the ears of elephants. Touched by the command of God, its fruit and its leaves are transformed into hyacinths, emeralds and other (precious stones)." To this Ṭabarī adds other legends according to which this fantastic *sidra* is clothed in an indescribable appearance.³⁶

Hardly persuaded by the legendary comments of Ṭabarī, our translators attempt to find a solution according to their understanding, and translate:

Blachère: près du jujubier d'al-Montahā.

Bell: By the *sidra*-tree at the boundary.

In fact *sidra* is neither a jujube nor any kind of magic tree. This Syriac word means quite simply, according to Manna, under *sedrā*: *sitr*, *hijābi* ("curtain, veil").³⁷ The precise curtain or veil is specified by the following word. *Al-muntahā* is neither the end where all knowledge finds its limit, as Ṭabarī believes, nor a certain place, near Mecca, as Blachère believed (following Caetani).³⁸ By boundary Bell approaches the closest to the exact meaning. *Al-muntahā* is in fact an exact synonym here of *al-ākhirā* ("the next world").³⁹ It is Ephrem the Syrian, in his description of paradise, who indicates the true meaning of the Qur'ānic term *sidra*, from which the phonetic Syriac variant *setrā* or *settārā* ("curtain, veil"), which separates the world here below from the other world, that is, paradise. Thus Nicolas Séd comments:

D'autre part, *setrō* peut signifier également "voile". Selon la topographie du Paradis le lieu appelé *setrō* correspond aux tentures et au rideau extérieur du sanctuaire. Dans la tradition rabbinique la description des cieus et de la *Merkābāh* mentionne deux "rideaux" ou "voiles". Le premier appelé *wilōn*, est tendu sous le premier ciel et désigne l'atmosphère qui sépare les terres et les cieus, le second, appelé *pargōd*, se trouve à l'autre extrémité de l'échelle céleste, au-dessus du septième ciel, immédiatement devant le trône de la Gloire. Ces deux voiles célestes correspondent exactement aux deux rideaux du sanctuaire, et selon la disposition du Paradis de l'auteur syrien au *setrō* et l'arbre de la Science.⁴⁰

36 Ibid., 27:52ff.

37 Manna, 479b.

38 Cf. Blachère (p. 560, n. 14): "*Sidrati l-Muntahā* = le jujubier d'al-Montahā. Les commt., suivis par les traducteurs, posent qu'il s'agit d'un jujubier merveilleux croissant à la limite du Septième Ciel. Caetani suggère avec infiniment de raison qu'al-Montahā représente un lieu-dit, près de la Mekke. Psychologiquement ce détail est destiné à faire impression sur les incrédules. Il est donc beaucoup plus "en situation" que l'interprétation proposée par les commt. qui ne peut rien évoquer pour les Infidèles."

39 Thus the *Thesaurus Syriacus* (1:129), under *ḥartā*, which also offers the Arabic synonyms: *ākhirā*, *muntahā*, and thereafter: *finis*, de tempore ; *b-khartā d-yawmātā*: in fine dierum, h.e. tempore futuro ; *b-ḥarteh d-zabnā*: ultimo tempore ; *b-ḥartā dh-zavnē*: postero tempore ; *b-ḥarat zabnē*: in fine temporum ; *al ḥartā*: de fine mundi.

40 N. Séd, "Les hymnes du Paradis de saint Ephrem et les traditions juives," *Le Muséon* 81, 1968, (455-501) 471.

Unlike Blachère (près du jujubier d'al-Montahā) and Bell (by the *sidra*-tree at the boundary), this study leads us to understand Verse 14 as: "near the veil of the other world."

15. *indahā jannat al-ma'wā*

Although Ṭabarī explains the term *ma'wā* rather correctly with the meaning of "the domain of the martyrs,"⁴¹ that is the heavenly dwelling, Blachère, Bell, and Paret all have difficulty in recognizing this quite evident meaning. Blachère makes a place name of it and translates: "près duquel est le jardin d'al-Ma'wā." He adds the following note:

Le jardin d'al-Ma'wā. Ce dernier terme signifie: la retraite. Selon les commt., suivis encore ici par presque tous les traducteurs, il s'agirait d'un jardin du Paradis. Toutefois Sprenger pense avec beaucoup de raison qu'il s'agit simplement d'une villa entourée d'un jardin, dans la banlieue de la Mekke.⁴²

For once our translators exceed the imagination of the Arab commentators. Bell translates, at first, quite correctly – "Near which is the garden of the abode" – but in the following note his explanation is in line with that of Blachère: "This must refer to some dwelling near Mecca, unless the verse be a later insertion, and refers to heavenly places. The whole vision is often so taken, but this robs it of force."⁴³

However, the *Thesaurus* gives, under *awwānā* ("habitation, residence"), the Arab equivalent *ma'wā*, and explains its meaning as a celestial habitation in the following locutions: *awwānē tūbtānē*: "mansiones beatae" ("residences of the blessed"), *awwānē d-lā 'ābrīn*: "mansiones permanentes" ("eternal residences"), *awwānē da-l'el*: i.e. "caeli" ("celestial residences").⁴⁴ This meaning emerges clearly from the Qur'ānic context. Verse 15 is thus to be understood as: "near to which [is] the garden of the [heavenly] domain."

16. *idh yaghshā al-sidra(ta) mā yaghshā*

This poorly understood verse suffers from an erroneous reading which our translators render as follows:

Blachère: quand couvrait le jujubier ce qui [le] couvrait

Bell: When the *sidra*-tree was *strangely enveloped*

The Qur'ānic particle *idh* often represents the Syriac particle *kadh*. Accordingly it may contain certain semantic nuances that are not found in the typical Arabic

41 Ṭabarī, 27:55.

42 Blachère, 561, n. 15.

43 Bell, 2:540, n. 6.

44 *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 1:50.

application of *idh*. Manna lists under *kad* the following concessive Arabic nuances: *wa-in*, *wa-law* ("although").⁴⁵ Having demonstrated that *sidra* means neither "jujube" nor "sidra-tree", it goes without saying that this verse is not referring to fruits that cover this imaginary tree, but rather "the veil" which covers what it covers, namely the (direct) vision into the other world, the celestial domain. This brief philological analysis is sufficient to correct the reading of this verse to: *idh taghsha al-sidra(tu) mā taghshā*. This leads logically to the understanding of this verse as a sort of protasis – "Although the veil covered what it covered" – which is followed by the apodosis of Verse 17.

17. *mā zāgha al-baṣar(u) wa mā ṭaghā*

It should be noted here that *ṭaghā* should be read here according to the Syriac verb *ṭā* from which it is derived, *ṭa'ā*. It does not mean "pass its limits" (Bell); rather it is a synonym of its Arabic equivalent *ḍalla* ("to go astray") in Verse 2, to which it is in any case parallel. Read with this small correction as *mā zāgha al-baṣar(u) wa-mā ṭa'ā*, this verse is to be understood as an apodosis as follows: "the (eye) sight had neither illusion nor error [as to the vision]."

18. *la-qad ra'ā min āyāt(i) rabbih(i) al-kubrā*

"He truly saw great signs of his Lord!"

The Syro-Aramaic⁴⁶ reading of Qur'ān 53:1–18

- 1 By the star!
- 2 When he falls, [2.] your companion has not gone astray, nor has he become delirious.
- 3 And it is not under the effect of the fall [regarded as a sign of possession] that he speaks.
- 4 It is rather a revelation given to him [at this moment]!
- 5 It is the *strongly Powerful* [i.e. the *Almighty*] who has taught him,
- 6 That is the Lord;

⁴⁵ Manna, 326b.

⁴⁶ By "Syro-Aramaic," the Syro-Aramaic elements of the "Arabic" language of the Qur'ān is intended. The philological analysis of the Qur'ān's language has thus far led us to the following conclusion: the language of the Qur'ān is composed, apart from Arabic, in part of Aramaic elements of different eras, some of which stem from ancient Aramaic (Altaramäisch), imperial Aramaic (Reichsaramäisch) – like Biblical Aramaic (Biblich-Aramäisch) – and others (the great majority) from the Aramaic of the Christian era, above all Syriac, but also Judaeo-Aramaic and late Babylonian Aramaic dialects such as Mandaean and other Neo-Aramaic dialects (including vernacular Eastern Syriac). Consequently we designate those linguistic elements of the Qur'ān that have references in Syriac literature "Syro-Arab," and those elements that we find among other Aramaic speakers or literatures "Arabo-Aramaic." Hence the term, the "Syro-Aramaic" Reading of the Qur'ān.

- 7 He who resides at the highest horizon, [6b.] humbled himself,
- 8 He then approached [or: *came down*] and remained hovering [*upon His servant*].
- 9 He [i.e. *the servant*] remained thereupon dumbfounded for two instants, or even less.
- 10 He then revealed to His servant what He revealed.
- 11 The absence does not refute in any way what he saw.
- 12 Do you therefore contest what he sees [*as vision*]?
- 13 He saw him [*too*], when he had another fit [or another vision],
- 14 near the veil of the other world,
- 15 near to which [*is*] the garden of the [*heavenly*] domain.
- 16 Although the veil covered what it covered,
- 17 the sight had neither illusion nor error [as to the vision].
- 18 He truly saw great signs of his Lord!

Part IV

**The Qur'ān and its
religious context**

11 *Al-Naṣārā* in the Qur'ān

A hermeneutical reflection

Sidney Griffith

The appellation "Christians" (*al-masīhiyyūn*),¹ used to designate the followers of Jesus the Messiah (*Christos*), never appears in the Arabic Qur'ān. But Christians are clearly referred to in the text of the Islamic scripture under a number of other names and titles.² Some fifty-four times the Qur'ān speaks of "Scripture People" (*ahl al-kitāb*), and in many instances the Christians are obviously included among them. Once in the Qur'ān Christians are called "Gospel People" (*ahl al-injīl*). Fourteen times the Qur'ān uses the term *al-naṣārā* (once in the sing., *al-naṣrānī*), as the most community-specific of the names and titles it employs to refer to the historical followers of 'Īsā, the Messiah, Mary's son, as the Qur'ān regularly speaks of Jesus of Nazareth, who, in the Islamic view, was the last Messenger God sent to the "Scripture People" prior to the mission of Muḥammad, "the seal of the prophets" (*al-Aḥzāb* [33] 40). The immediate suggestion of this difference in nomenclature is that the reader should not too hastily assume that the Christians included among the "Scripture People," or those designated as "Gospel People," or those called *al-naṣārā* in the Qur'ān, are in fact the same communities of people, a point to which we shall return in due course.

In non-Arabic interpretations of the Qur'ān, the name *al-naṣārā* is almost always translated "Christians," albeit that the translation is not exact and, as we shall see, it may even camouflage what the Arabic scripture actually means to say in the passages in which the term is used. So the purpose of the present essay is to explore the sense of the term *al-naṣārā* in the Qur'ān from a number of perspectives, paying close attention to the frames of reference and the interpretive presumptions that determine the point of view in each instance. These include philological and lexical considerations, a study of the historical and cultural circumstances of the texts and the contexts in which the term is used in Qur'ānic passages, and an inquiry into the likely historical identity of the "Christians" to

¹ In the New Testament, the term "Christian" appears only three times, ostensibly as an appellation used by outsiders to designate the followers of Jesus Christ: Acts 11:26 *Christianos*; 26:28 *Christianōn*; 1 Peter 4:16 *Christianos*.

² Quotations from the Qur'ān, unless otherwise noted, are herein normally adapted by the author from M. Fakhry, trans., *An Interpretation of the Qur'ān: English Translation of the Meanings; a Bilingual Edition*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, 2004.

whose beliefs and practices the Qur'ān alludes in the passages in which the Christians concerned are called *al-naṣārā*.

The philology and lexicography of the name *al-Naṣārā*

In early Islamic tradition there is already considerable discussion of the basic meaning, the etymology and the grammatical typology of the term *al-naṣārā*, the most commonly attested, plural form of the word, and its singular *an-naṣrānī*.³ Earlier commentators, such as Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), were inclined to consider it to be a geographical term referring to the village of *Nāṣira*, where, they said Jesus, son of Mary, and his mother had lived.⁴ However, as time went on, it became more common in the Islamic commentary tradition to derive the term from the Arabic root *n-s-r*, in the form of the participle *nāṣir* (pl. *anṣār*) in the sense of "helper/s" or "supporter/s," and to assign a scriptural meaning to the term by referring to the passage in the Qur'ān that speaks of Jesus's disciples (*al-ḥawārīyyūn*) as declaring themselves to be "God's helpers" (*anṣār Allāh*): "Jesus said, 'Who will be my helpers (*anṣārī*) toward God?' The disciples said, 'We are God's helpers'" (*Āl 'Imrān* [3] 52).⁵ So one might on this basis assume that the *Naṣārā* of the Qur'ān are thought to be the spiritual descendants of Jesus's first disciples. This interpretation is widespread in the Islamic community, with some commentators saying that it excludes those who both yesterday and today call themselves *al-Masīhiyyūn*.

Muslim commentators have all approached the term *naṣrānī/naṣārā* with the assumption that it functions as an Arabic word, and that its grammatical and lexical states are to be, and can be adequately explained in reference to the principles of classical Arabic grammar and lexicography. Contrariwise, non-Muslim, mostly Western scholars have considered the term to be part of the "foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ān," to borrow a phrase from Arthur Jeffery. Specifically, the common scholarly opinion is that the Arabic term is a reprise of the Greek adjective, *Haζωπαίος/οι*, perhaps by way of the Syriac equivalent *Nāsrāyā/Nāsrāyē*,⁶ and that in the Qur'ān and elsewhere its literal meaning is "Nazarene/s."⁷ This adjective is

used in the singular in the New Testament to describe Jesus as the man from Nazareth (Mt. 2:23; John 19:19). In the Acts of the Apostles, Tertullus, the attorney for the Jewish accusers of Paul before the Roman governor, Felix, describes Paul as "the ringleader of the sect of the Nazoreans" (Acts 24:5), presumably meaning the followers of the man from Nazareth. In this sense, the non-Muslim scholars of the Qur'ān and the early Muslim commentators, albeit from different perspectives, are agreed that the literal meaning of the term *naṣrānī/naṣārā* is Nazarene/s and that it refers to the followers of Jesus, the Messiah. The later Islamic scriptural exegesis that connects *naṣārā* with the phrase *anṣār Allāh* on the basis of consonantal harmony, as explained above, does not negate the term's basic geographical meaning. In the early Islamic period, Arabic-speaking Christians and Muslims alike regularly used the Qur'ān's term *naṣārā* as the functional equivalent of the name "Christians" (Χριστιανοί, *masīḥīyyūn*) for the several ecclesial communities of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 11:26), who lived in the world of Islam.⁸

While the common name "Christian" quickly prevailed in general parlance in the Greek, Syriac, Coptic and Latin-speaking milieu of Late Antiquity and early Islam, as the general designation for the several communities of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the term "Nazarene/s"/"Nazorean/s" nevertheless also persisted both in Christian and Jewish usage.⁹ In his *Onomasticon*, the church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea (d. c. 340) remarked in connection with his entry on the name of the village of Nazareth that "From it, Christ was called a 'Nazorean', and we too early on [were called] 'Nazarenes', who are now Christians."¹⁰ In his Latin translation of this passage, St Jerome (c.342–420) added the note that "we were called Nazarenes *quasi pro obprobrio*,"¹¹ signifying the contemptuous sense the term "Nazarene" was understood to have by his time.

Among the Christians, it seems that it was in the Syriac-speaking communities that, along with the much more popular terms *mshīḥāyā/ē* and the transliterated Greek term *kristyānā/ē*, one could also find the term *nāsrāyā/ē* applied generally to followers of Jesus of Nazareth, especially in texts written by Christians, but reporting the usage of non-Christians, and particularly that of Persian authorities, well into the fifth century.¹² But, as François de Blois has pointed out, "It is not

3 See the discussion of selected classical and modern Muslim exegetes of the Qur'ān on the subject in J.D. McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, esp. 93–128.

4 See Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fi taḥṣīr al-Qur'ān*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Miṣriyya, 1321, 1:242.

5 See, e.g., the commentary of Zamakhshārī (d. 538/1144) in W. Nassau Lees, *The Qoran; with the Commentary of the Imam Aboo al-Qasim Mahmood bin 'Omar al-Zamakhshari, Entitled "The Kashshaf 'an Haqaiq al-Tanzil*, Calcutta: Lees, 1856, 1:80.

6 See H.H. Schaefer, "Ναζωραῖος, Ναζωπαίος," in G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964–76, 874–79; S. Goranson, "Nazarenes," in D. N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 4:1049–50.

7 See A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938, 280–81; A.A. Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2004, 311. See now, F. de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωπαίος) and Ḥanīf (εθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *BSOAS* 65, 2002, 1–30; J. Gnllka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche*, Freiburg: Herder, 2007. See also F. de Blois, "Elchasaī – Manes – Muḥammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischen Vergleich," *Der Islam* 81, 2004, 31–48, esp. 41ff.

8 See J.M. Fiey, "Naṣārā," *EF*, 7:970–73; S.H. Griffith, "Christians and Christianity," *EQ*, 1:307–16.

9 See, e.g., the entry under *Noṣrī* in M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, London: Luzac, 1903, 2:889–90.

10 The passage is cited here from its quotation in de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωπαίος)," 2, n. 6.

11 Quoted from de Blois' citation, *ibid*.

12 See S.P. Brock, "From antagonism to assimilation: Syriac attitudes to Greek learning," in N. Garsoïan et al. (eds), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982, 91–95; *idem*, "Christians in the Sasanid Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties," in S. Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity, Studies in Church History XVIII*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, 1–19. It is interesting to note in passing that Joachim Gnllka, who does not seem to know the studies of Sebastian Brock or François de Blois, envisions a more general use of the term. He says, "Der Name Naṣrāḡa ist aber im Orient längst zur Bezeichnung aller 'Christen' geworden, nicht mehr nur bezeichnet er eine jüdischen Religionsparteien wie in Jerusalem/Palästina vor dem Jahr 70. Aus dem Syrischen übernimmt das Arabische und der Koran den Namen in dem umfassenden Sinn." Gnllka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, 35.

only Persian pagans whom the Syriac authors depict as calling the Christians 'Nazoraean', but also the pagans of Syria."¹³ And what is more, de Blois goes on to say, "I would suggest that when Syriac authors depict their non-Christian opponents as calling the Christians 'Nazoreans', they are in fact using a literary topos, that is to say consciously alluding to Acts 24:5. . . . They [i.e. the non-Christian opponents] are depicted as aping the words of Paul's persecutors."¹⁴ So, according to the logic of de Blois' suggestion, Syriac-speaking Christians did not in fact normally refer to themselves as "Nazoreans" because, for him, perhaps inspired by St Jerome, the term carried a negative connotation for the Syriac writers, suitable to express an adversary's demeaning attitude to Christians, as was the case with St Paul's Jewish adversaries in the events reported in Acts 24:5, and as the cognate Hebrew term *Nōšrīm* was used by later Jewish writers, with a similar, demeaning intent.

In this connection, as de Blois also goes on to point out, the terms "Nazoreans"/"Nazarenes" were used in the works of the Christian heresiographers of the fourth century to designate an older Jewish Christian group that they regarded as heretical. Epiphanius of Salamis (d. c. 403) gives the fullest account of their usages and teachings in his *Panarion*, a work that had as its purpose to offer refutations of all the heresies that had afflicted the church from its origins.¹⁵ François de Blois, like some earlier commentators,¹⁶ finds in what Epiphanius says about the "Nazarenes" an account that in his view matches fairly exactly the Christology of the Qur'ān, composed some two hundred and more years later. What is more, de Blois goes on to posit a debt on the Qur'ān's part to the doctrines of these Nazarenes, considered to have been heretics by the later, mainline Christian churches. Admitting that "the possibility that the *našārā* of the Qur'ān were Nazoraean, pure and simple, has not seemed a very attractive one," de Blois nevertheless reaches the following conclusion. He says,

I suggest, in short, that one should seriously consider the possibility that the *našārā* of the Qur'ān were indeed Nazoraean and that it is consequently

13 De Blois, "*Našrānī* (Ναζωραῖος)," 9.

14 Ibid., 10.

15 See most recently R. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity from the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University & Leiden: Brill, 1988. See also T. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit: eine Einführung*, Eastern Christian Studies, 7, Leuven: Peeters, 2007, 54–56.

16 This idea had been adumbrated already by J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentumes*, Berlin: G. Reimer, 1897, 232. It was explicitly put forward by H.J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1949, 334–42, where, just prior to his section on *Ebionitische Elemente im Islam*, Schoeps speaks of "ein sektierisches Christentum teilweise jüdenchristlichen Charakters war es, das Muhammad am Beginn seiner Laufbahn unter dem Namen *N a š a r ā* – einer Sammelbezeichnung der Sekten Ostsyriens-Arabiens – kennenlernte," (334). It has been widely popularized by Hans Küng, most recently in his *Der Islam: Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft*, Munich: Piper, 2004, esp. 75–78 & 595–99.

likely that there was a community of Nazoraean Christians in central Arabia, in the seventh century, unnoticed by the outside world. But this is a suggestion which would require reopening and re-evaluating the question of specifically "Jewish Christian" influences on the original formulation of Islam.¹⁷

Similarly, and as if taking his cue from de Blois' last point, Joachim Gnilka, in his well-researched study of parallel doctrines, scriptural motifs, legendary lore and even verbal expression between the Qur'ān and Christian texts, with reference to works such as the Diatessaron, several apocryphal scriptures and the Pseudo-Clementine Epistles, comes to the precise conclusion that the Qur'ān is indeed indebted in its origins to Jewish Christianity. He says that such texts as the ones just mentioned readily circulated among Jewish Christians and that many of them found their origins in that milieu. Gnilka does not propose that the Qur'ān, or Muhammad, had direct contact with these texts. Rather, he proposes that in the Arabian milieu the language and lore of the texts circulated orally and that Arabic-speaking Christians and others would have encountered them in Jewish Christian liturgical celebrations.¹⁸ As for the Qur'ān itself, Gnilka avers that while "der primäre Wurzelboden des Koran ist das Judentum,"¹⁹ it is not the product of a reformed or Christianized Judaism. Rather, he concludes: "So ist der im Koran sich dokumentierende Islam weder ein Reformjudentum noch ein Reformchristentum, sondern etwas Neues, geprägt auf dem Boden Arabiens durch einen kraftvollen Propheten."²⁰

Nevertheless, for Gnilka, hermeneutically speaking, as for de Blois, the Qur'ān's practice of naming the Christians *al-našārā* and the tenor of its Christology is to be explained not by any inherent, religious logic or rhetorical intent on the Qur'ān's own part, but rather in reference to earlier Jewish Christian, or "Nazoraean," texts, the idiom and contents of which are postulated by them to have circulated orally in the Arabic-speaking milieu by the time of the rise of Islam. For Gnilka and de Blois, then, the evidence for postulating the oral presence of the Jewish Christian or "Nazoraean" language and lore in the environs from which the Qur'ān emerged does not consist of any external historical evidence of the presence of such groups and their texts in the Arabic-speaking milieu beyond that of the appearance of comparable ideas and linguistic expressions in the Arabic Qur'ān itself. In other words, hermeneutically speaking, Gnilka and de Blois presume, on the basis of comparability and parallelism, that the Qur'ān got what it says about Christians and their doctrines from pre-existing sources, not from the logic of its own religious and rhetorical purposes, based on its own awareness of the doctrines and practices of the Christian communities actually known from other sources to be contemporary with it.

17 De Blois, "*Našrānī*," 16.

18 See Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, 96, 103.

19 Ibid., 130.

20 Ibid., 131.

It is precisely this matter of the hermeneutical presuppositions assumed in the process of looking for earlier Jewish, Jewish Christian or Christian influences on the formulation of Islam and on the language and vocabulary of the Qur'ān that is the concern of the present chapter, particularly in connection with the Qur'ān's use of the term *al-naṣārā* generally to designate Christians. But there is one more piece of lexical information to consider before we get to the heart of the matter, and this time it comes from an Arabic text, composed well after the rise of Islam. In his work on the *History of the Councils*, the Coptic writer, Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa', who flourished in Egypt in the second half of the tenth century, wrote of the traditional reports available to him of the conversion of the emperor Constantine I (d.337) to Christianity. Sāwīrus reports of Constantine:

One night as he was standing by, he saw a cross in the heavens, and angels were hovering about it. He became wary and alarmed. His attendants and companions asked him about the vision. They told him, "These are the marvels of the cross, according to the history and present state of the people of Syria who are called *naṣārā*." He then, intending to go out to a certain battle, made a promise to God that when he would gain the victory over his enemy, he would give thanks for it by adopting the practice of *an-naṣrāniyyah* and the public practice of the Christian religion (*al-diyāna al-masīhiyya*).²¹

In this remarkable passage, Sāwīrus quotes his sources to the effect that before his conversion, Emperor Constantine I was informed that there were people in Syria who were called "Nazoreans," at least some of whom were presumably Syriac-speakers. Sāwīrus then explains that *naṣrāniyya* is actually another name for Christianity. One may take it that in this Christian Arabic text Sāwīrus is reporting an instance of the usage in pre-Islamic Syria, according to which non-Christians are reported by Christians to have habitually called "Christians" "Nazoreans." One may speculate that he intended herewith also to explain how it came about that the Qur'ān and the Muslims call the Christians "Nazoreans"; it had already been the practice in the Syriac-speaking milieu for non-Christians to call Christians by this name. It would also already have been obvious to Sāwīrus's readers that Christians living in the world of Islam had themselves by this time adopted this Qur'ānic term in their own Arabic discourse in the Islamic milieu, especially in contexts in which Christians and Muslims were addressing one another, or were addressing mutual challenges.

The occurrences of the name *al-Naṣārā* in the Qur'ān

It is striking that in every verse in the Arabic Qur'ān, in which the term *naṣrāni/naṣārā* appears, other faith communities are also named. In every instance except

one, mention is also made of Jews; and even in the case of the exceptional verse (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 14), it is in narrative continuity with a previous verse (v.12) that speaks of the "Children of Israel." In a number of verses, in addition to "the believers" (*al-mu'minūn*), i.e. the Muslims,²² the Jews and the *naṣārā* are mentioned together with members of other religious communities: *ḥanīf*, *muslim*, *mushrikūn* (*Āl 'Imrān* [3] 67); the Sabians (*al-Baqara* [2] 62); *ḥanīf* and *mushrikūn* (*al-Baqara* [2] 135); the Sabians (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 69); the Sabians, the *Majūs*, and the *mushrikūn* (*al-Hajj* [22] 17). In each of these verses, the Qur'ān's manifest purpose is to make the necessary distinctions by name between the several communities in its audience, most comprehensively in *al-Hajj* (22) 17: "Those who believe, those who practice Judaism, the Sabians, *al-naṣārā*, the *Majūs*, and the *mushrikūn*, God will decide between them on the day of the resurrection." In two of these verses, the Qur'ān makes the point that Abraham was neither a Jew, nor a *naṣrāni*; but a *ḥanīf*, a *muslim* (*Āl 'Imrān* [3] 67), nor was he one of the *mushrikūn* (*Āl 'Imrān* [3] 67 & *al-Baqara* [2] 135). Two other verses speak of the good fortune of several of the communities: "The believers, the Jews, *al-naṣārā* and the Sabians – whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is good, shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve" (*al-Baqara* [2] 62; cf. Q 5.69).

In most of the passages in the Qur'ān in which *al-naṣārā* are mentioned by name, predominantly in the Medinan Sūras 2 (*al-Baqara*) and 5 (*al-Mā'ida*), it is a question of the Qur'ān's critique of the behavior of the Jews and *al-naṣārā*. The Qur'ān says of the "Scripture People", "They say, 'None will enter the Garden save those who practice Judaism or are *naṣārā*'" (*al-Baqara* [2] 111). A little further on the Qur'ān says, "The Jews say, '*al-naṣārā* are not onto anything' and *al-naṣārā* say, 'The Jews are not onto anything', while both recite the scripture" (*al-Baqara* [2] 113). Further, "Neither the Jews nor *al-naṣārā* will be pleased with you until you follow their *millah*." (*al-Baqara* [2] 120) And finally in this Sūra, there is the question, "Do you say Abraham, Ismā'īl, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes were Jews or *naṣārā*? Do you know best or does God?" (*al-Baqara* [2] 140).

In at least one passage, the Qur'ān seems clearly to refer to the church-dividing, doctrinal controversies that roiled the Christian communities in its time: "With those who say, 'We are *naṣārā*', We made a covenant. But they forgot some of what had been mentioned to them. So We brought about enmity and hatred among them to the day of the resurrection. God will put them on notice about what they have been doing" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 14). Just a few verses further along, the text says, "The Jews and *al-naṣārā* say, 'We are God's children and His beloved'. Say: 'Why then does He punish you for your sins?'" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 18) And then further on the Qur'ān offers this advice, "You who believe, do not take the Jews

21 L. Leroy (ed. & trans.), *Sévère ibn al-Moqaffa', évêque d'Aschmounaïn: Histoire des Conciles, second livre, Patrologia Orientalis* 6, fasc. IV, Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1911, 484 [20].

22 See in this connection the interesting article of F.M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath: Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, American University of Beirut* 50–51, 2002–03, 9–53; and his more recent book, *Muhammad and the Believers*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010.

and *al-naṣārā* as allies;²³ they are allies of one another. Whoever of you allies himself with them, becomes one of them" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 51). It is also in this Sūra that we find the following, much commented verses:

You will surely find that the most hostile of men to the believers are the Jews and those who ascribe partners to God. And you will surely find that the nearest in amity towards the believers are those who say: "We are *naṣārā*" and that is because among them are priests and monks, and they do not grow proud. (83) When they listen to what has been revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears from the truth they recognize. They say: "Our Lord, we believe, so inscribe us among those who witness. (84) Why should we not believe in God and what has come down to us of the truth? We yearn for our Lord to lead us in among the righteous community." (85) God shall reward them for their speech – gardens beneath which rivers flow, abiding there forever. This is the reward of the righteous. (86) But those who blaspheme and cry lies to Our revelations – those are the denizens of hell (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 82–86).²⁴

Finally, there is the statement about the most significant wrong belief and an indictment of the wrong behavior of those explicitly called *al-naṣārā*. The Qur'ān says:

The Jews say, "Ezra is the son of God," while *al-naṣārā* say, "The Messiah is the son of God." This is what they say, from their very mouths, thereby imitating the parlance of those who disbelieved of yore; may God fight them, how deceived they are. (31) They take their rabbis and monks as lords besides God, as well as the Messiah, son of Mary, although they are commanded to worship none but one God. There is no God but He; exalted He is above what they associate with Him (*al-Tawba* [9] 30–31).

It remains to say a word about the Qur'ānic scenarios in which most of the instances of the name *al-naṣārā* we have mentioned occur. Of the fourteen times it appears, seven of them occur in *al-Baqara* (2), in a scenario that offers a glimpse into the early Islamic community's process of assuming its distinctive cultural and religious identity. Religiously speaking, attaining that identity involved dealing especially with the Jews and Christians, whose scriptural heritage the Muslims shared and with whom at the time of the Sūra's revelation they were living in the same space, presumably in Yathrib/Medina. In this milieu, the text suggests that a lively exchange took place between the members of the three

23 Traditionally, the Arabic term *awliyā'* has been translated "friends." Here, and in vs. 59, the connotations of the English term "ally" seem more apt. This suggestion comes from T. Khalidi, *The Qur'ān: A New Translation*, New York: Viking, 2008, 90.

24 The translation is from Khalidi, *The Qur'ān*, 93–94. For a review of selected Muslim commentaries on these verses, see McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 204–39.

communities, to judge by the timely prophetic interventions in their communal interactions that comprise most of the first 157 verses of the Sūra. It is clear that it was a question of defining Islamic identity vis-à-vis that of the Jews and the Christians. The heart of the matter is expressed in a remarkable sequence of verses extending from 124 to 141 that address a singularly important theme in the definition of Islamic religious identity. Edmund Beck long ago put it this way: "Das Thema der ganzen Versgruppe kann man mit dem programmatischen Ausdruck angeben: *millatu Ibrāhīma*. Dieses Thema wird durchgeführt 1) positive historisch in Vers 118 (124) – 128 (134) und 2) polemisch gegen Juden und Christen in Vers 129 (135) – 135 (141)."²⁵

With respect to the two parts of this distinctive "Versgruppe," one might also call attention to the fact that the last verse of each part (i.e. vv. 134–41) is identical, offering the following divine assurance to the Muslims: "That community has passed away; to it belongs what it has acquired and to you belongs what you have acquired. You will not be asked about what they were doing" (*al-Baqara* [2] 134 & 141). In the context, it is clear that the phrase "that community" (*tilka ummatun*) of non-Muslims includes both Jews and Christians, both of whom according to the Qur'ān want to claim "Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes" as their own (v. 140) and they argue about God with the "believers" (v. 139), who are instructed how to reply to those who say, "Become Jews or *naṣārā*; you will be rightly guided." Say, "Rather, the 'religion (*milla*) of Abraham', a *ḥanīf*, not one of the *mushrikūn*" (v. 135; cf. also *Āl 'Imrān* [3] 67). In his study of this group of verses, Beck masterfully shows how they express the culmination of the development of the distinctively Islamic concept of the *millatu Ibrāhīma* as a religious identity marker against the specific challenges of the Jews and the Christians.

While seven of the occurrences of the name *naṣārā* thus appear in *al-Baqara* (2), as we have just seen, five others that we have mentioned occur in *al-Mā'ida* (5), once again reflecting a surrounding, Medinan context of religious critique of the beliefs and practices of the Jews and Christians. Here too we find two of the most pointed of the Qur'ān's critiques of Christian faith: "They have disbelieved who say that God is the Messiah, the son of Mary" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 72) and "They have disbelieved who say that God is *thālithu thalāthin*" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 73); two passages that will be discussed below.

Clearly, the Qur'ānic scenarios in which the preponderant number of times (12) the name *al-naṣārā* appears bespeak the sort of apologetic and polemical campaign characteristic of interreligious controversy and they feature the distinctive idiom of religious self-definition over against the challenges of others, specifically Jews and Christians. The question now arises, after listing all the places in the Qur'ān where it occurs, why does the Islamic scripture use the relatively rare name *al-naṣārā* to designate Christians, and what does it mean to imply? Which Christians was it meant to indicate?

25 E. Beck, "Die Gestalt des Abraham am Wendepunkt der Entwicklung Muhammeds: Analyse von Sure 2, 118 (124)–135 (141)," *Le Muséon* 65, 1952, (73–94) 73.

Interreligious controversy in the Qur'ān: hermeneutical assumptions

While in instances of interreligious controversy the name *al-naṣārā* is used fourteen times in the Qur'ān as a community designation, like the name Jews, with which it always occurs, or the name Sabians, or the Majūs, it is not the only designation for Christians in such controversial contexts in the Islamic scripture. Perhaps even more frequently the Qur'ān criticizes Christian doctrine or practice by addressing them as "Scripture People" (*ahl al-kitāb*), a phrase that appears fifty-nine times all told, or some more general phrase, such as, "They have disbelieved who say . . ." (e.g., *al-Mā'ida* [5] 72, 73), and one then identifies the disbelievers or the intended particular, errant "Scripture People" by what the Qur'ān criticizes about them. In the Qur'ān, *al-naṣārā* is simply the general communal name for those who in other contemporary texts in other languages, like Syriac or Greek, are normally called "Christians." So one wonders, why this choice of names on the Qur'ān's part? And to propose an answer to the question one must first engage in some reflection on one's hermeneutical assumptions.

From the hermeneutical perspective, there are, broadly speaking, two trajectories along which interpreters customarily approach the Qur'ān. They are not mutually exclusive. One approach, most common in Western, non-Muslim scholarship, might be described as operating according to a diachronic, historical-critical method.²⁶ It typically looks for origins, sources and influences; it asks questions like, from where did the Qur'ān get this term, this usage, this narrative, this expression? Can one isolate portions of the text and discern a pre-Islamic milieu in which it may have functioned before it was taken up into the Qur'ān? Another approach, most common among Muslim commentators over the centuries, but not absent from Western, non-Muslim scholarship, takes the Arabic scripture as an integral, canonical composition and searches for its meanings in the text as we have it, taken integrally, but not without reference to circum-ambient, historical factors. Traditionally, Muslim scholars have searched for the so-called *aṣbāb al-nuzūl*, or the occasions in the life of Muḥammad on which a given passage was revealed. Alternatively, a scholar might look for the circumstances attendant upon particular passages of the canonical Qur'ān in its own most likely cultural milieu, looking for the socio-historical background against which its usages and literary strategies find their immediate pertinence. The latter is the approach adopted in the present inquiry; one might call it a synchronic, contextual method of Qur'ān interpretation that nevertheless does not eschew what can be learned from historical criticism.

This contextual method is not without its presuppositions. In the present instance, in regard to the Qur'ān's reaction to the Christians in its milieu, the presumption is that the Islamic scripture's posture is one of apologetic and polemical critique of the doctrines and practices of Christians who are actually in

its purview and that it features literary and discursive strategies suitable to its controversy with them. On this view, the Qur'ān, whatever its origins, including the possibility that in its integral form it may well be rightly seen to include earlier, even Christian compositions, is actually criticizing both the behavior and the beliefs of the Christians and other "People of the Book" within its immediate ken who take issue with its teachings. The evidence for this assumption is, first of all, the manifest sense of the pertinent passages, beginning with those in which the name *al-naṣārā* appears, which we have already reviewed. Secondly, in other passages that obviously reprove Christian beliefs or practice, e.g. *al-Nisā'* (4) 171 and *al-Mā'ida* (5) 77, one finds obvious polemical admonitions: "O Scripture People, do not exceed the bounds in your religion, nor say about God aught but the truth" (*al-Nisā'* [4] 171); or: "Say, O Scripture People, do not exceed the bounds in your religion untruthfully, and do not follow the fancies of a people who went astray in the past and led others astray and strayed from the even path" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 77). Even more obviously polemical are the passages that declare "They have disbelieved who say God is the Messiah, son of Mary," (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 72), and "They have disbelieved who say God is *thālithu thalāthin*." (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 73)

Hermeneutically speaking, an important corollary of the recognition of the Qur'ān's intention polemically to criticize Christian belief and practice is the further recognition that in the service of this purpose the Qur'ān rhetorically does not simply report or repeat what Christians say; it reproves what they say, corrects it, or caricatures it. For example, Christians in the Qur'ān's time did not normally say that "God is the Messiah, son of Mary" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 72). They did affirm that the Messiah, son of Mary, is the son of God and God in person. The Qur'ān's seeming misstatement, rhetorically speaking, should therefore not be thought to be a mistake, but rather a polemically inspired caricature, the purpose of which is to highlight in Islamic terms the absurdity, and therefore the wrongness, of the Christian belief, from an Islamic perspective.

A further presumption of the contextual method of interpreting the Qur'ān's critique of Christians and Christianity is that the Qur'ān actually knows how the presumably mostly Arabic-speaking (and Syriac-speaking) Christians in its milieu phrased the confessional formulae with which the Qur'ān disagrees. What is more, the Islamic scripture actually provides its own evidence of its familiarity not only with the scriptural narratives of the Scripture People, i.e. Jews and Christians in particular, a familiarity often documented by scholars, but also of much of their non-scriptural religious lore. Here the Qur'ān typically does not simply repeat these narratives; it comments on them, alludes to them, adds different readings and interpretations, and even corrects them from its own point of view.²⁷ In

26 See the very interesting collection of essays on this theme in D. Hartwig et al. (eds), "Im vollen Licht der Geschichte": Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung, *Ex Oriente Lux* 8; Würzburg: Ergon, 2008.

27 The present writer has attempted to display this aspect of the Qur'ān's approach to earlier Christian lore in two instances: S.H. Griffith, "Syriacisms in the Arabic-Qur'ān: Who were 'those who said "Allāh is third of three,"' according to *al-Mā'ida* 73?" in M.M. Bar-Asher et al. (eds), *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān; presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, Jerusalem: The Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007, 83–110; and idem, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: the 'Companions of the Cave' in *al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition," *QHC*, 109–38.

this manner the Qur'ān appropriates and re-contextualizes earlier narratives. Many studies have highlighted this phenomenon, as they have examined how the Qur'ān has appropriated earlier Jewish or Christian narratives. But, ignoring the Qur'ān's own polemically-inspired, commentarial, critical and corrective posture toward the narratives it appropriates, many of the scholars who have produced these studies, themselves usually following only the historical-critical method, have concluded that the Qur'ān had misunderstood, misconstrued or otherwise mistaken Jewish and Christian narratives. They have often missed the Qur'ān's judgmental posture and have then looked for earlier "sources" for the language they actually find in the Qur'ān, a process which sometimes then leads to the postulation of the presence in the Qur'ān's milieu of some otherwise historically unattested text or community known to feature the belief, turn of phrase or practice in question.

Finally, given the Qur'ān's critical posture towards Jews, Christians and others, its polemical strategies, and the presumption of its more or less accurate knowledge of the beliefs, the creedal formulae, and even the ecclesiastical lore it criticizes or rhetorically caricatures, the contextual method employed here assumes the presence of contemporary, even Arabic-speaking communities of "Scripture People" in its milieu and even in its audience and that these presumably Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians are therefore within the active purview of the Qur'ān. The further implications of this assumption are developed as this chapter proceeds, addressing the questions: who were the Christians whom the historical record attests to have actually been in the Arabic-speaking world, and why did the Qur'ān choose to call them "Nazoreans"?

Who are the Qur'ān's Nazoreans?

Heretofore researchers have identified a number of different Christian communities as the likely Christians whose views they have found reflected in the Qur'ān. For the most part, their methodology has been first to articulate what they take to be the Qur'ān's own Christology, and consequent theology, and then to match it with the creedal formulae and reports of the beliefs of some historically attested earlier Christian community, usually much earlier than the seventh century and usually not otherwise known to have been in the Arabic-speaking milieu of the Qur'ān's own day. The problem for these scholars has then been to advance a rationale for how the chosen community could have been present to the nascent Islamic community, whose scripture then, on the usual hypothesis, adopted the chosen Christian community's Christological and theological position. Currently, the two most frequently proposed groups are the Jewish-Christians, represented by the Nazarenes described in Epiphanius of Salamis's *Panarion*,²⁸ and a more

recently postulated group of Arabized, Syriac-speaking upholders of a supposed, pre-Nicene, Syrian theology.²⁹

From the historical point of view, a significant problem for the suggestion that the Qur'ān's Christology derives from a group of Jewish Christians, and specifically the Nazarenes in its milieu is, as Rémi Brague has pointed out most succinctly, "Nous n'avons pas de traces d'un lien direct entre le groupe judéo-chrétien expulsé de Jérusalem vers 66 et les événements situés six siècles plus tard."³⁰ It is a problem that caused François de Blois to be somewhat circumspect in phrasing his conclusion that "There was a community of Nazorean Christians in central Arabia, in the seventh century, unnoticed by the outside world."³¹ As for Joachim Gnilka's hypothesis that Jewish Christianity more broadly speaking was the point of contact between Christianity and the Qur'ān, the well-marshaled evidence he puts forward to support the hypothesis consists mainly of the "interesting parallels between the Koran and Jewish Christianity,"³² which parallels he finds in texts, many of which, he says, "are of Jewish Christian origin."³³ But the problem here is that many if not most of these texts, and especially the Diatessaron, along with motifs otherwise found in apocryphal Gospels, had a long life in the Syriac literature of the decidedly non-Jewish Christian churches, mostly "Jacobite" and "Nestorian," actually known to have been actively present in the Arabic-speaking milieu in the seventh century. There is a similar problem with Karl-Heinz Ohlig's suggestion that there was some sort of pre-Nicene, Syrian theology current among some Arabized, Syriac-speaking communities in the Qur'ān's immediate milieu. As we shall see, all the actual traces of Syriac-speaking Christianity among the Arabic-speaking peoples reflect language and lore otherwise found only in texts by resolutely Nicene Syriac writers, such as Ephraem the Syrian or Jacob of Sarug.

In addition to their inability to find immediate historical evidence for stipulating the presence of Jewish Christians, Nazarenes or pre-Nicene, Syriac-speaking Christians, be it in Arabia or elsewhere in the seventh or eighth centuries, a further problem with these hypotheses, articulated solely on the basis of the historical-critical method's search for sources, is that their proponents ignore the contextual method's complementary attention to the canonical Qur'ān's own rhetorical strategy to engage in a polemical characterization of the positions of its religious adversaries. It is the burden of the present undertaking to argue that taking the controversial intent and the polemical cast of the Qur'ān's language into account supports the hypothesis that the Christians and their doctrines that are in the Islamic scripture's purview, and which the Qur'ān criticizes, are none other

29 See K.H. Ohlig, "Das syrische und arabische Christentum und der Koran," in K.H. Ohlig & G.R. Puin (eds), *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, Berlin: Schöner, 2007, 366–404.

30 R. Brague, "Le Coran: sortir du cercle?" *Critique* 671, April 2003, (232–52) 251.

31 See de Blois' conclusion cited in full at n. 17 above.

32 Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, 110.

33 Ibid., 97.

28 See the studies cited in nn. 7, 15 & 16 above, particularly and most seriously, the studies by François de Blois and Joachim Gnilka.

than those of the mainline "Melkites," "Jacobites" and "Nestorians" of the seventh and eighth centuries, whose presence and whose language and lore can actually be shown to have been present both in Arabia and in the greater Syro-Palestinian-Mesopotamian milieu from at least the sixth century onward, well into early Islamic times.

The Nazoreans

According to the Qur'ān, *al-naṣārā* say, "The Messiah is the son of God," a statement, the text goes on to say, in which "they emulate the language of the unbelievers of yore" (*al-Tawba* [9] 30). This Qur'ānic critique is at variance with what is reported of either the *Panarion*'s Nazarenes or most other Jewish Christian groups,³⁴ none of whom explicitly confess that the Messiah is the Son of God.³⁵ Contrariwise, that Jesus, the Messiah, is the Son of God, and therefore God in person, is a basic creedal affirmation of each of the mainline, Nicene Christian communities actually contemporary with the Qur'ān, albeit that their differing Christologies prevented their ecclesial communion with one another. The Qur'ān not only does not affirm what these Qur'ānic *al-naṣārā* affirm; it explicitly rejects their common creed and engages in polemical attacks against it!

So why would the Qur'ān call the mostly "Jacobite" and "Nestorian," Syriac and Arabic-speaking Christians in its environs *al-naṣārā*? Perhaps because, as the Qur'ān itself says, the Christians say, "We are *naṣārā*" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 14 & 82). But given the whiff of ancient heresy attached to the name, and its limited usage in Christian parlance, why would the Christians in the Qur'ān's milieu have called themselves by this name? Perhaps they did so just because the Muslims of Yathrib/Medina called them *naṣārā*, the name for Christians that their own texts reported as being not infrequently applied to them by other non-Christians, most notably, in Syriac texts, by Persian officials.

As we have seen above, the Arabic name *naṣārā*, as we have it in the Qur'ān, is etymologically in all probability a calque on the Syriac name *nasrāyē*, which in Syriac texts, as in Greek in Acts 24:5 and elsewhere, occurs mainly as a name used for Christians by non-Christian adversaries. And as Jerome said, the others called Christians "Nazoreans" "quasi pro obprobrio."³⁶ In other words, the name has an anti-Christian ring to it. So why would Arabic-speaking Christians have said, "We are *naṣārā*," as the Qur'ān reports? Or did they? One can only speculate in reply. Whereas in general the Qur'ān displays a high quotient of awareness of

contemporary Christian language and lore, and a considerable amount of biblical savvy that allows it to comment on, critique and amplify earlier scriptural narratives, the composer of the Qur'ān was probably also well aware of the connotations of the name *al-naṣārā* among Christians and for this very reason uses the name in its text, even putting it into the mouths of the Christian interlocutors themselves, rhetorically precisely because of its potential for suggesting disapproval. The use of the name immediately sets the non-Christian Muslims, who speak of *al-naṣārā* "quasi pro obprobrio," over against the Christians, with whom they are in inter-religious controversy in Yathrib/Medina.

Alternatively, and even more speculatively, should one credit the Qur'ān's report as it stands and conclude that Christians in its milieu were in fact wont to say, "We are *naṣārā*," perhaps, for their part in the local inter-religious controversy, apologetically? Perhaps from the beginning there were those Arabic-speaking Christians of Yathrib/Medina who, like many later Muslim commentators, associated the name *naṣārā* with the root consonants *n-s-r* and immediately thought of that place in the Islamic revelation, then circulating orally, where Jesus's disciples are reported to have declared themselves to be "God's helpers (*anṣār Allāh*)" (*Āl 'Imrān* [3] 52), and so, in their own way, they too would be "Muslims," as the verse goes on to say. On this scenario, being considered the descendants of God's helpers would rhetorically put the Christians in the environs of Yathrib/Medina on a somewhat higher plane than the other *anṣār* in the community, who welcomed and offered their assistance to the *muhājirūn* from Mecca.

Whatever plausible reason one finds for the Qur'ān's use of the name *al-naṣārā* for the Christians, or for the Arabic-speaking Christians to use it for themselves, it seems historically highly unlikely that the usage was due to the presence in Arabia in the seventh century of a long-forgotten group of Nazorean Jewish Christians. The only evidence so far adduced for their presence there is based on an interpretation of certain Qur'ānic passages, for which the interpreters were looking for sources. However, rhetorically speaking, and taking the Qur'ān on its own terms, these same passages, which after all reject the claims of *al-naṣārā*, can just as well be understood as rejecting the teachings and critiquing the behavior of the "Melkite," "Jacobite" and "Nestorian" Christians, whose presence in Arabia in the requisite timeframe is amply documented.

Against the verisimilitude of this conclusion, François de Blois has cited the passage from the Qur'ān that says, "The food of the Scripture people is lawful to you, and your food is lawful to them" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 5). He argues, "If *naṣārā* means 'catholic Christians,' then it is very difficult to see how their food should be 'permitted to you,' seeing that the catholic canon contains statements to the effect that Jesus 'declared all food clean' (Mark 7:19) and that catholic Christians are notorious for their porcophagy."³⁷ This would certainly be a weighty objection if the text specified *al-naṣārā* instead of "Scripture People." With this phrase the Qur'ān clearly speaks only of the Jews here and not of the Christians. In other

34 R. Pritz actually argued, on the basis of passages quoted from the works of Jerome and Augustine, that while Epiphanius neglected to mention it in the *Panarion*, the Nazarenes were in point of fact willing to confess that Jesus, the Messiah, is the Son of God. See Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 35 & n.8, 54–55, 78, 90.

35 One notices the ingenious but tortuous line of reasoning de Blois employs to show that the Judeo-Christian groups might actually have espoused the Qur'ān's Christology. See de Blois, "*Naṣrānī* and *Ḥanīfī*," esp. 14–15. So, according to him, the Christology of the Qur'ān is supposed to be congruent with that of *al-naṣārā*!

36 See the text quoted at n. 11 above.

37 De Blois, "*Naṣrānī* and *Ḥanīfī*," 16.

passages that equally clearly speak of Christians, and not Jews, one also finds only the address "Scripture People," e.g., *al-Nisā'* (4) 171 and *al-Mā'ida* (5) 77.

Nazorean doctrines in the Qur'ān

Christology is without a doubt at the heart of the Qur'ān's doctrinal objection to Christianity; it is the Christians' affirmation that Jesus, the Messiah, Mary's son, is the Son of God that elicited the Qur'ān's stark imperative, "Believe in God and His messengers and do not say, 'three'. Stop it; it is better for you. God is but a single God. Glory be to Him, that He should have as a son anything in the heavens or on the earth" (*al-Nisā'* [4] 171).³⁸ This passage, in fact, is the only one in the Qur'ān that seems directly and explicitly to refer to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, unless, following the suggestions of some commentators, one would think that the affirmation, "He did not beget and is not begotten, and none is His equal" (*al-Ikhlās* [112] 3–4) is to be so interpreted.³⁹ As for the enigmatic phrase in the Qur'ān's dictum, "They have disbelieved who say, 'God is *thālithu thalāthatin*'" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 73), in its context it is most reasonably understood as primarily an epithet of Jesus, the Messiah, as we explain below, which evokes a scriptural typology that in turn refers to the doctrine of the Trinity.

The phrase, "They have disbelieved who say that God is . . ." – used three times in the same Sūra (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 17, 72, 73), and twice directly reproving those who say, "God is the Messiah," (vv. 17, 72) – obviously intends rhetorically, and polemically, to emphasize the incompatibility of the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God with the main premise of Qur'ānic monotheism. In the first instance, the text says, "They have disbelieved who say, 'God is the Messiah, son of Mary.' Say, 'Who could prevent God, if He wished, from destroying the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother too, together with all those on the face of the earth?'" (v. 17). In the second instance, the Qur'ān says, "They have disbelieved who say, 'God is the Messiah, son of Mary.' The Messiah said, 'O Children of Israel worship God, my Lord and your Lord. Surely, he who associates other gods with God, God forbids him access to the Garden and his dwelling is the fire. Evil-doers have no supporters'" (v. 72). The polemical intent here is obvious. The conundrum is in the third instance of the formula: "They have disbelieved who say, 'God is *thālithu thalāthatin*.' For there is no god except one God; if they do not stop saying what they say, those who have disbelieved will be severely punished" (v. 73).

In another place, the present writer has argued at some length that the Arabic phrase, *thālithu thalāthatin* in *al-Mā'ida* (5) 73 can most reasonably be construed

38 Interestingly, Arabic-speaking Christian apologists in Islamic times, beginning with the earliest of their texts, regularly cited the Qur'ān's verse *al-Nisā'* (4) 171 in their defenses of the reasonableness of the doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that in fact in this verse the Qur'ān itself posits the three divine persons: God, His Word and His Spirit.

39 Regarding the Qur'ān's position on the Trinity in this Sūra and elsewhere see the contribution of Manfred Kropp to the present volume.

as an Arabic rendering of the Syriac epithet for Christ, *līthāyā*,⁴⁰ thereby positing a symmetry in the opening phrases of verses 72 and 73. In texts written by the definitely Nicene, Syriac writers, Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306–373) and Jacob of Sarug (c. 451–521), this adjective, in the sense of "trine," "treble" or "threefold," describes Jesus the Messiah as "the threefold one" in reference to a series of moments in the biblical narratives that speak of "three days;" Christian interpreters read them typologically to refer to Jesus's three days in the tomb, and also, of course, if somewhat obliquely, in reference to Jesus as one of the three persons of the three-personed, triune God. In connection with the present discussion of the Qur'ān's polemics against the doctrines of those it calls Nazoreans, the recognition of this sense of the enigmatic phrase, *thālithu thalāthatin*, removes the reason many commentators, ancient and modern, Muslim and non-Muslim, have used in reference to another passage in the same Sūra, *al-Mā'ida* (5) 116, to claim that the Qur'ān's conception of the Christian Trinity is that it consists of three persons: God, Mary and Jesus. This misconception then sent those researchers exclusively following the historical-critical method off on a search for early Christian groups that espoused such a trinity; François de Blois, for example, very ingeniously found them among the same Judeo-Christians, Mandaeans and others, whom he had associated with the early Christian Nazarenes.

For their part classical Muslim commentators reached something of a consensus that the Arabic phrase *thālithu thalāthatin* in *al-Mā'ida* (5) 73, understood as "third of three," actually means "one of three" and that it is Jesus the Messiah who is so described. While some of them then took the Qur'ānic verse to be a rejection of what they perceived to be Christian tritheism, others rejected this idea as inaccurate, rightly pointing out that the Christians did not in fact profess a belief in three gods. Rather, these latter commentators offered two alternate explanations. Some said that the phrase refers to one of the three *aqānīm* (i.e. hypostases) that the Christians perceive in the one God. Others proposed that, as applied to Christ, the epithet named him the third member of the Trinity: God, Mary and Christ. They cited as confirmation the verse referred to above: "When God said, 'O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to the people: "Take me and my mother as two gods, apart from God?"'" (*al-Mā'ida* [5] 116). Referring to this verse, they proposed that it suggests that the epithet "third of three" in verse 73 means that Jesus was the third in the Christians' Trinitarian triad.⁴¹ Subsequently, many

40 See Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'ān'." In this article, the author failed to call attention to the phrase *thāniya thnayni* in *al-Tawba* (9) 40, which is grammatically parallel to *thālithu thalāthatin* in *al-Mā'ida* (5) 116, "one of two" // "one of three." He is grateful to Prof. Manfred Kropp and to Joseph Witztum for bringing it to his attention. But this parallel sense of the phrase *thālith thalāthatin* to mean "one of three" does not, in his opinion, preclude its selection to reflect the Syriac epithet for Jesus, *līthāyā*, for in both Syriac and Arabic the ordinal number evokes a triad, and the Syriac epithet does describe Jesus as one of the three "persons"/"hypostases" (*qnômē* in Syriac, *aqānīm* in Arabic).

41 See the summaries of the traditional interpretations in Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Umayra, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998, 4:53–58; See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 10, 481–83; vol. 11, 233–37; Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-mashhūr bi-l-Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981, 4:63–65.

Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, including François de Blois, have argued that in the Qur'ān's view the Christian Trinity is God, as Father; Mary, as Spirit and Mother; and Jesus, Mary's son, as their Son, and so the "third of three."⁴²

With the recognition that the phrase *thālithu thalāthin* is best explained as an Arabic rendition of a Syriac epithet for Jesus, the mystery of its meaning is resolved. The Qur'ān is reflecting a genuine usage of Christians in its audience in its polemic against their belief that Jesus, the Messiah, the son of Mary, and "the threefold one," is the Son of God. Similarly, the Qur'ān's polemical rhetoric is also evident in its suggestion in *al-Mā'ida* (5) 116 that in its view the absurd logic of the Christians should lead to the manifestly unacceptable conclusion that if Jesus is the Son of God and God, so too should his mother Mary be God – two Gods, apart from God.

The Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation that the Qur'ān polemically rejects are most reasonably seen as the doctrines of the mainline Christian communities known to be in its milieu; there is no need to postulate the presence of other communities, for which there is no historical evidence at all of their presence, save in what the present writer takes to be a scholarly misreading of the Qur'ān itself. The misreading consists in the failure to recognize that in the pertinent passages, the Qur'ān is not reporting the views of those it calls Nazoreans; it is knowledgeably and rhetorically suggesting their absurdity from its own point of view and polemically rejecting them as wrong. The fact that the Qur'ān's Christology is then a theological match for the earlier Jewish Christian Christology in its substance is not a convincing argument for the Qur'ān's dependence on the Jewish Christians, nor is it evidence for a Jewish Christian presence in its milieu. This is especially the case when there is no historical evidence for the presence of Jewish Christians in its milieu, yet there is a convincing, rhetorical argument in favor of the Qur'ān's polemic against the doctrine of the Christians known to be in its environs. There is no need for the Qur'ān to have a source for this polemic beyond the logic of its own basic tenet of *al-tawhīd*, "Your God is one God; there is no God but He." (*al-Baqara* [2] 163).

There is a similar case in the passage in the Qur'ān that has often been taken by both Muslims and non-Muslims to deny the reality of the crucifixion of Jesus, *al-Nisā'* (4) 157–59.⁴³ In the immediate context, the Jews are the "Scripture People" whose reported boasts the Qur'ān rejects in this matter.⁴⁴ And within this context, the seemingly docetist or phantasiast Christian views that many commentators have seen reflected in the enigmatic phrase *shubbiha lahum* (vs. 157), understood to mean something on the order of "it only seemed so to them," have

42 See de Blois, "Naṣrānī and Ḥanīf," 13–15.

43 See G.S. Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or alive?" *BSOAS* 72, 2009, 237–58; T. Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'ān: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.

44 There seems to be some Rabbinic evidence for this boast. See P. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, esp. 73–74.

prompted some scholars to posit the presence of an ancient, Gnostic and docetist Christian community in the Qur'ān's milieu.⁴⁵ In this instance too, there is no need to go beyond the contemporary "Melkites," "Jacobites" and "Nestorians" to account for the Qur'ān's awareness of this line of thinking. The so-called "Julianists," the followers of Julian of Halicarnassus (d. after 518), were a constant target for the theologians of the "Jacobite" community, who called them "Aphthartodocetists" and "Phantasiasts," accusing them of detracting from the concrete reality of Jesus's death on the cross because of their teachings about the incorruptibility of Christ's body.⁴⁶ These polemics can be found alluded to in a very general way even in Syriac texts that address the historical circumstances of Christians in Arabia in the century before the time of Muḥammad, e.g. in Jacob of Sarug's so-called "Letter to the Himyarites,"⁴⁷ and in Simeon of Beth Arsham's (d. before 548) "Letter on the Himyarite Martyrs."⁴⁸ There are even reports of "Julianists" in Najrān, with whose Christians, according to the traditions, Muḥammad himself is alleged to have had relations.⁴⁹

The Arabic Qur'ān in its inter-communal environment

The discussion of the sense of the term *al-naṣārā* in the Qur'ān and of the identity of the Christians it designated has sought to discern its intended meaning within the context of the Islamic scripture's own horizons, both in reference to the text's rhetorical purposes and within the context of its communal frames of reference. The discernment of the Qur'ān's intention to offer a critique of Christian belief and practice is grounded in a reading of the canonical text in the form in which we presently have it, without prejudice to any effort to discover earlier stages in the evolution of the text. The recognition of the polemical element in the Qur'ān's rhetorical style suggests that Arabic-speaking Christians were in all likelihood in its audience, and certainly within its purview. The determination of the probable identity of these Christians is based on the historical evidence for actual Christian presence in the Qur'ān's milieu.

The Qur'ān itself, with its obvious debt to the canonical and apocryphal scriptures of the Jews and Christians, along with its reflection of much Jewish and Christian lore, provides most of the evidence for its origins in an environment that

45 See e.g., Küng, *Der Islam*, 598.

46 See R. Draguet, *Julien d'Halicarnasse et sa controverse avec Sévère d'Antioche sur l'incorruptibilité du corps du Christ: Étude d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale suivie des fragments dogmatiques de Julien*, Louvain: Imprimerie P. Smeesters, 1924; A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)*, vol. II, part 2, "The Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century," P. Allen and J. Cawte, (trans.), London: Mowbray & Westminster, 1995, 79–111. See also Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 105–6, 133–34.

47 See G. Olinger, *Iacobi Sarugensis Epistolae Quotquot Supersunt*, CSCO 110, Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1937, 87–102.

48 See I. Guidi, "La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Bêth-Arshām sopra i Martiri Omeriti," *Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 278, 1880–1881, 3–32.

49 See Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 133–34.

included Jews and Christians. This evidence is supplemented by what can be learned from non-Qur'ānic and non-Islamic sources about the presence of Christianity in Arabia in the seventh century. Hermeneutical considerations come into play in the course of determining what construction to put upon the evidence provided. It is the contention of this chapter that the historical record amply demonstrates that mainline Christian communities had been pressing into Arabia from all sides from at least the beginnings of the sixth century and even earlier.⁵⁰ Furthermore, as has been said repeatedly, there is scarcely any evidence of the actual presence in Arabia of other Christian groups in any significant way, such as Judeo-Christians or other groups such as Elkasaites or Mandaeans. The Arabic-speaking peoples of central Arabia were highly mobile, and while documentary evidence of the substantial presence of Christianity among them is, by the nature of the case, not abundant, it is also not totally unavailable;⁵¹ their very mobility would inevitably have brought them into contact with most of the religious communities of their world.

From the hermeneutical point of view, the biggest problem in discerning the identity of the Christianity reflected in the Qur'ān has been the construction scholars have put upon those passages that either give a name to the Christians, i.e. calling them *al-naṣārā*, or reflect their beliefs and practices. For the most part these passages, even when they report the Qur'ān's own Christology, have been interpreted as reflecting or reporting the actual idiom of local Christians and even their creedal formulae, as if the Qur'ān were incapable of composing its own views of Christian doctrine. On that assumption, the hunt was then on to discover somewhere in Christian sources some report of a Christian community that had voiced such convictions as those found in the Qur'ān. When it was found, as in the instance of the Nazarenes of Epiphanius's *Panarion*, scholars scrambled to hypothesize a way to postulate their presence in the Qur'ān's milieu in spite of the fact that on the one hand there is otherwise scant or no evidence to support the hypothesis and on the other hand there is ample evidence for the actual presence of other Christian groups.

The underlying problem here, in my view, is to have mistaken the Qur'ān's religious critique of Christian beliefs and practices, and the polemical rhetoric in which it is expressed, for historical reports or accounts of these same beliefs and practices. In some instances it seems that a wrong construction has been put upon the language of the Qur'ān, due to a previous assumption that it does not really know much about Jews or Christians or their scriptures and that what it does know is wrong or incomplete. The recognition that the Qur'ān normally only alludes to,

comments on, approves of or disapproves of this or that Jewish or Christian narrative, belief or practice seems often not to have entered the interpreter's mind. It is almost a presumption that the Qur'ān does not know what it is talking about. In short, no due attention is paid to the Qur'ān's own apologetic or polemical rhetoric as it establishes its place among the religious communities in its world.

In the present chapter, the focus has been on the *textus receptus* of the Qur'ān as we actually have it, bracketing for the sake of the inquiry the question of when the text came into the form in which we presently have it, whether it be in the first third of the seventh century in the Hijāz, or in the first third of the eighth century in Syria and Mesopotamia. On either scenario, it has been the burden of this study to substantiate credibly the hypothesis that the mainline, Syriac-speaking Christian communities of Syria/Palestine and Mesopotamia, i.e. the so-called "Melkites," "Jacobites" and "Nestorians", as the later Muslims regularly called them, were in fact the principal communities from whom the Arabic-speaking Christians in the Qur'ān's milieu learned their faith and with whom they were in continuous communication from the mid to the late sixth century onward. The hypothesis further proposes that the Qur'ān's critique of the beliefs and practices of the Arabic-speaking Christians in its audience is best and most coherently understood as a critique rhetorically devised to highlight, from the point of view of the Qur'ān's own principles, the falsity and inadequacy of the customary creedal formulae and religious practices of the Arabic-speaking Christians among the "Scripture People" in its audience, whose patristic and liturgical heritage was for the most part in continuous colloquy with the Syriac-speaking, "mainline" communities, whose presence in the Arabic-speaking domain is demonstrable from the sixth century onward.

The crucial hermeneutic stance adopted in this inquiry involves the assumption of the literary, or scriptural, integrity of the Qur'ān, however it came about. It further assumes that the Qur'ān, in accordance with a number of its own asseverations, conceives itself to be a scripture in dialogue with preceding scriptures and traditions, and the lore of mainly Jewish and Christian communities in its midst, to which it alludes and on which it offers an often exegetical commentary. The Qur'ān presumes that its audience is aware of the narratives of the earlier prophetic figures and other aspects of the religious lore of Jews and Christians to which and to whom it often alludes by name. The Qur'ān then often critiques the beliefs and practices of the communities whose creedal formulae it evokes, often with a seemingly ironic or even a satirically polemical intent, conveyed in the very wording of its allusions and echoes, which might be slightly askew when compared with the actual diction of the community whose formulae the text is critiquing. The Qur'ān offers a corrective here and there, or, by the very cast of the language it uses to recall them, it rhetorically suggests the absurdity of certain beliefs and practices espoused by the communities it accuses of going to excess in their religion.

This hermeneutical stance will go a long way toward removing the textual basis for the postulation of the Qur'ān's presumed indebtedness to the teachings and practices of particular Christian or Judeo-Christian groups otherwise historically

50 See Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, *passim*. See also the numerous studies of Irfan Shahid, and in particular his *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, vol. 1, parts 1 & 2, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995 & 2002.

51 See Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 137–42.

unknown or untraceable to the milieu of the Arabic Qur'ān. In the process, it also opens the way for an appreciation of the Qur'ān's integrity as an inter-textual scripture, responding to, critiquing and reprising the scriptural tradition which it claims to present in its final form as willed by the one God.

Since the Qur'ān insists that it is an Arabic Qur'ān, addressing the prophetic messages of the past anew, in good, clear Arabic to a new, Arabic-speaking community, one would expect to find in it allusions to previous scriptures and even echoes of the liturgies in which the previous scriptures had come to Arabic-speaking Jews, Christians and others, prior to the rise of Islam. The Qur'ān would be presumed to have addressed the new community in an idiom in which they were already accustomed to hear the message, albeit from the Qur'ān's point of view in a distorted or skewed way, in need of correction.

The hermeneutic reflections regarding the use of name *al-naṣārā* in the Qur'ān as they are explored in this chapter, along with the several hypotheses it suggests for studying the Christians in the Qur'ān, will hopefully help us to keep our often unexpressed and unreflected historical-critical assumptions about origins, meanings and redactions to the forefront of our thinking in our study of the Qur'ān.

12 The mysterious letters and other formal features of the Qur'ān in light of Greek and Babylonian oracular texts

Devin J. Stewart

While Western scholarship on the Qur'ān has focused considerable attention on the Jewish and Christian background of the text, the influence of pre-Islamic Arabian religious traditions has received relatively little attention, despite the many signs of their importance. Traces of such influence include the accounts of the prophets Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu'ayb; the place of the Ka'ba and the adoption of the pre-Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca; the prevalence of *saj'*, the standard medium of the pre-Islamic soothsayers (*kuhhān*), in many individual Sūras; and the many passages reminiscent of the genres the *kuhhān* are known to have performed. Some neglect resulted from deep-seated prejudices in Islamic literature towards the pagan religious culture of the Jāhiliyya. Western scholars' expertise in Biblical studies, the field out of which Islamic studies developed, also made them disposed to stress Jewish and Christian material. Furthermore, the lack of the pagan equivalent of the Bible, a sacred text that would serve as an extant record of the religion or mythology of the pre-Islamic Arabs, made it much more difficult to learn about the pagan tradition. Pre-Islamic Arabia had produced no *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, nor even the equivalent of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Extant Islamic sources provide some relevant information in focused studies such as al-Kalbī's (d. 204/819) *Book of Idols* and Hamdānī's (d. 334/945) *Book of the Crown*, and scattered in other works such as Tabarī's (d. 310/923) *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* and Mas'ūdī's (d. 356/945) *Murūj al-dhahab*. Drawing on such texts, Julius Wellhausen published in 1897 *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, a seminal investigation of the religion of the pre-Islamic Arabs, yet few scholars followed his lead. To date, perhaps the most important work on this facet of the cultural background that preceded the Prophet Muḥammad's mission is Toufic Fahd's 1966 study of Arab divination, which includes a number of forays into explaining aspects of the Qur'ānic text.¹

¹ L. Krehl, *Über die Religion der Vorislamischen Araber*, Leipzig: Serig'sche Buchhandlung, 1863; J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin: Reimer, 1897; H. Lammens, *Le culte des bétyles et les processions religieuses chez les Arabes préislamiques*, Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1919; C. Brockelmann, "Allah und die Götzen: Der Ursprung des vorislamischen Monotheismus," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 21, 1922, 99–121; G. Ryckmans, *Les Religions arabes préislamiques*, Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1951; T. Fahd, *La divination arabe*, Leiden: Brill, 1966; idem, "al-Kihāna," *EP*; idem, "Sadj'," *EP*; idem, "De l'Oracle à la Prophétie en Arabie," 231–41 in J.-G. Heintz (ed.), *Oracles et Prophéties dans l'Antiquité*, Paris: De Boccard, 1997.

More recently, Jaroslav Stetkevych has written a work that looks at the myth of Šālih and Thamūd as it can be partially reconstructed from Islamic sources.² Perhaps less successful, but nevertheless suggestive, are broad comparative studies of Islamic and earlier Semitic material that claim a more or less direct connection between Islamic and primordial Semitic forms, particularly David Heinrich Müller's study of strophic poetry, which in his view is a prophetic form that connects the Qur'ān, the Hebrew Bible, cuneiform literature, and even the choruses of Greek tragedy.³

Such studies are counter-balanced by the recent work of Hawting, who argues that the "pagan" material in the Qur'ān is not actually pagan. He points out, correctly, that monotheists often call each other pagan when arguing amongst themselves, as an insult or in order to score points in debate, without reference to actual pagans. It is thus unlikely, in his view, that the Qur'ān reflects pagan religious texts or cultural practices that were common in Arabia, usually held to be the original setting of the Qur'ān's revelation. He does this in part to support Wansbrough's thesis that the Qur'ān was produced outside the Arabian Peninsula, mainly on the grounds that it shows too deep an awareness of Jewish and Christian traditions and is engaged in complex debates over polemical issues with representatives of these traditions.⁴ In my view, both Hawting and Wansbrough are wrong in this instance. Significant evidence shows that the pre-Islamic Arabs were thoroughly familiar with Judaism and Christianity, which had each established a strong presence in Arabia and neighboring territories long before the advent of Islam. The Qur'ānic material that appears to derive from pre-Islamic pagan religious tradition in Arabia is probably just that, and is too extensive, too detailed, and too inscrutable to be written off as the product of polemical barbs hurled by monotheists at their fellows.

Form criticism may prove to be a fruitful approach to the material in the Qur'ān that is related to pre-Islamic, pagan religious traditions.⁵ Knowledge of the conventions of pre-Islamic genres of religious speech may help to explain many passages in the Qur'ān, including some that are on the face of it quite puzzling, and also help to define the relationship of the Qur'ān and Islam to pre-Islamic religious traditions. In this case, however, form criticism is a difficult undertaking.

- 2 J. Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- 3 Müller investigated strophic poetic forms in the Bible, cuneiform texts, the Qur'ān, and Greek choruses. D.H. Müller, *Die Propheten in ihrer ursprünglichen Form. Die Grundgesetze der ursemitischen Poesie, erschlossen und nachgewiesen in Bibel, Keilschriften und Koran, und in ihren Wirkungen erkannt in den Chören der griechischen Tragödie*, Vienna: Holder, 1896. Pedersen studies a more limited and linguistically focused topic, oaths primarily in the Hebrew Bible, and to some extent in Islam. J. Pedersen, *Der Eid bei den Semiten in seinem Verhältnis zu verwandten Erscheinungen sowie die Stellung des Eides im Islam*, Strassburg: Trübner, 1914.
- 4 G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- 5 A. Neuirth has called for the application of literary critical methods, including form criticism, to the Qur'ān. "Einige Bemerkungen zum besonderen sprachlichen und literarischen Charakter des Koran," *ZDMG* Suppl. 3, 1977, 736–39.

Like Hermann Gunkel in his analysis of the Psalms, the aspiring form critic of the Qur'ān risks making circular arguments.⁶ In the absence of a large corpus of texts for comparison, the equivalent of, say, the *Iliad* for pre-Islamic Arabia, the investigator must examine texts in the Qur'ān in order to figure out the conventions of pre-Islamic genres of religious utterance. Then he or she may use this derived understanding of the relevant formal conventions to explain those same Qur'ānic texts. This is in fact what Gunkel did with the psalms, for he did not have an independent corpus of ancient Hebrew poetry. What allows the investigator some hope of success notwithstanding this difficulty is that the corpus includes several texts – sometimes many – that fit into the various forms or genres under examination. The number of examples makes it more likely that the regularities discovered are not idiosyncratic flukes but instead regular literary conventions. The possibility still remains that these are conventions characteristic of the Qur'ān and not, in fact, characteristic of an underlying pre-Islamic genre. An element of probability is thus involved in judging which elements can be identified with an earlier genre and which are modifications that have been introduced into the Qur'ānic adaptation of that genre.

Limited form-critical attention has been focused on the Qur'ān, including a few studies that draw on religious traditions other than Judaism and Christianity. Anton Baumstark wrote about forms of prayer in the Qur'ān as they relate to Jewish and Christian models.⁷ Angelika Neuirth has published several important studies that apply form-critical methods, in particular to the series of oaths that introduce a number of Sūras.⁸ Alford Welch has discussed many formal features of the Qur'ān.⁹ In addition, medieval Muslim authors themselves often engaged in what was essentially form criticism. A fitting example is Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (d. 751/1350) work *al-Tibyan fi aqsām al-Qur'ān*, which treats the oaths in the Qur'ān as a formal category connected with a well-known speech genre, and he interprets them in light of the conventions that can be deduced from the corpus as a whole.¹⁰ Even the traditional method of *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān* "exegesis of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān" may involve form-critical insights rather than engaging simply in the examination of multiple appearances of the same exact vocabulary items. In addition, the genre of *asbab al-nuzūl* ("the occasions of revelation"), exemplified most notably by the work of 'Alī b. Aḥmad

- 6 Neuirth points out the circularity inherent in Wellhausen's argument that the best evidence for the actual style of pre-Islamic soothsaying is actually the Qur'ān itself. Neuirth, "Images and metaphors in the introductory sections of the Makkan Sūras," in G.R. Hawting and A.-K.A. Shareef (eds), *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, London: Routledge, 1993, (3–36) 3, 32 n. 5.
- 7 A. Baumstark, "Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus im Koran," *Der Islam* 16, 1927, 229–48.
- 8 Neuirth, "Der Horizont der Offenbarung: Zur Relevanz der einleitenden Schwurserien für die Suren der frühmakkanischen Zeit," in U. Tworuschka (ed.), *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident. Festschrift für Abdoljavad Falaturi*, Köln: Böhlau, 1991; eadem, "Images and metaphors in the introductory sections of the Makkan Sūras"; eadem, "Form and structure of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 2:245–66.
- 9 A.T. Welch, "al-Kur'ān," *EL* 5:400–29, esp. "Literary forms and major themes," 421–25.
- 10 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Tibyan fi aqsām al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1994.

al-Wāḥidī al-Nīsābūrī (d. 468/1076), often engages in form criticism and may be more useful to modern scholars in that mode than it is in historical criticism.¹¹ While modern scholars often place little confidence in the veracity of the historical incident to which a particular passage is attached in such works, the analysis there often correctly identifies the form or genre to which the passage belongs and uses some of the relevant conventions of the genre in question in an attempt to interpret its meaning.

Examination of other oracular traditions may provide some help in identifying and understanding the features and functions of these generic conventions, but one will in any case depend heavily on the Qur'ān itself. Typological parallels from other cultures with strong oracular traditions and religious specialists who performed functions similar to those of the *kuhḥān* may provide comparative insights that assiduous investigation of the Qur'ān in isolation or in conversation with the pre-Islamic Arabian oracular material may not. Examination of the oracles of ancient Greece and other cultures and the literary genres and conventions associated with them may throw light on oracular passages of the Qur'ān and make new interpretations or broader understandings of such passages possible. Stefan Sperl has adopted a similar approach by comparing the *Fātiḥa* not only to the Lord's Prayer but also to a Babylonian prayer to Sin, the moon-god.¹² Further studies of this kind may help reveal, explain, and bring into focus or relief the conventions of the genres belonging to the repertory of pre-Islamic Arabian religious utterances which form the background of many passages in the Qur'ān.

A simple demonstration of the value of form criticism, particularly with regard to the pre-Islamic pagan material in the Qur'ān, is the following. The opening verse of *al-ʿAṣr* (Sūra 103) is an oath, *wa-l-ʿaṣrī* (103:1), meaning, "(I swear) by the *ʿaṣr*." The Arabic word *ʿaṣr* has two distinct senses, and it is not clear from the immediate context which one is intended: it can mean either "age, epoch" or "late afternoon." These two meanings have both influenced translations of the sacred text into English and other languages. On the one hand, some translators, including Abdullah Yusuf Ali, have adopted the first meaning of *ʿaṣr* noted above, translating the verse "By (the token of) Time through the Ages." Likewise, Shakir translates, "I swear by the time." Muhammad Asad, dispensing with the oath altogether, a modernist move he makes regularly, renders the verse, "Consider the flight of time!" On the other hand, other translators adhere to the second sense of *ʿaṣr*, "the late afternoon." Pickthall translates, "By the declining day." Arberry renders the verse, "By the afternoon." Abdel Haleem has, "I swear by the declining day." In this case, form-critical considerations help decide the issue: *ʿaṣr* here does not mean "age" or "epoch" but rather "late afternoon," and the translations of

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Shakir, and Muhammad Asad are simply wrong. The oaths that begin many Sūras in the Qur'ān clearly belong to an oracular genre that has roots in the pre-Islamic soothsaying tradition.¹³ It is common for these oaths to invoke not only the Sun, moon, stars, and planets, but also night and day, as well as particular times of day. The planets and stars so invoked may originally have represented deities. The Sun had been worshipped by members of the Quraysh tribe in the not-too-remote past before the Prophet, because one of his ancestors was named 'Abd Shams (a brother of Hāshim, after whom the Prophet's clan was named, and supposedly the great-great-grandfather of 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, son-in-law of the Prophet and the third Caliph after his death). As portrayed in the Qur'ān, the people of Sheba worshipped the Sun during the time of Solomon (Q 27:24). The moon and the morning star – Venus – had probably been worshipped as well in the recent past. However, the Qur'ān emphasizes the regular, predictable movements of the planets. They will always be there (until the end of the world, that is,) and will always behave according to a regular pattern; this is one of the signs of God's unified control over the universe. Similarly, the invocation of day, night, and specific times of day serves to emphasize the theme of regularity. These times of day appear because they can be trusted to appear indefatigably, in their regular order. The following passage swears by night and day: *wa-l-layli idhā yaghshā * wa-l-nahāri idhā tajallā **, "By the night when it covers, and the day when it is clear" (Q 92:1–2). Specific times of day occur in the following oaths: *kallā wa-l-qamar * wa-l-layli idhā adbar * wa-l-ṣubḥi idhā asfar*, "Nay! By the moon, and the night when it withdraws, and the morning when it shines forth" (Q 74:32–34); *wa-ṣ-ṣubḥi idhā tanaffas*, "By the morning when it breathes" (Q 81:18); *fa-lā uqsimu bi-l-shafaq*, "Nay! I swear by the twilight" (Q 84:15); *wa-l-fajri*, "by the dawn" (Q 89:1); and *wa-l-ḍuḥā* "by the mid-morning" (Q 93:1). These examples suggest that oaths by specific hours or times of day were already a regular feature of oracular texts in pre-Islamic soothsaying and that this particular formal convention was followed in oracular passages of the Qur'ān. The word *ʿaṣr* here evidently refers to a specific time of day, and not to an "age" or to "time" in general, as that would not be in keeping with the formal conventions of the genre.

Another formal convention of oracular texts that has been misinterpreted in studies on the Qur'ān is the *wa-mā adrāka* – literally, "And what made you know . . . ?" – construction. Richard Bell has claimed that the phrase *wa-mā adrāka* is often used to introduce a later interpolation into the text of the Qur'ān, glossing a puzzling term. Thus, for example, he argues that in the passage at the end of *al-Qāri'a*, *fa-ummuhu hāwiyah * wa-mā adrāka mā-hiyah * nārūn ḥāmīyah*

11 Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1991; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, Cairo: Maktabat Nuṣayr, 1983; A. Rippin, "The exegetical genre *asbāb al-nuzūl*: a bibliographical and terminological survey," *BSOAS* 48, 1985, 1–15.

12 S. Sperl, "The literary form of prayer: Qur'ān Sūra one, the Lord's Prayer and a Babylonian prayer to the moon God," *BSOAS* 57, 1994, 213–27. See also H. Winkler, "Fātiḥa und Vaterunser," *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 6, 1928, 238–46.

13 G.R. Smith, "Oaths in the Qur'ān," *Semitics* 1, 1970, 126–56; A.T. Welch, "al-Kur'ān," *EP* 5:(400–29) 421–22; A. Neuwirth, "Der Horizont," eadem, "Images and metaphors," eadem, "Form and structure of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 2:(245–66) 255–57; L. Kandil, "Die Schwüre in den Makkanischen Suren," in S. Wild (ed.), *The Qur'ān as Text*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, 41–57; G.R. Hawting, "Oaths," *EQ*, 3:561–66.

(Q 101:9–11), the last two verses have been added as a gloss in order to explain the meaning of the obscure word *hāwiyah*.¹⁴ I would argue, to the contrary, that one of the conventional structures of pre-Islamic oracular texts, which was then adopted in the Qur'ān, involved (1) presentation of an ambiguous term followed by (2) the *mā adrāka* question about the term and then (3) an explanation of the word.¹⁵ A parodic, patently falsified oracular pronouncement attributed to the prophet Maslamah b. Ḥabīb – known in Islamic tradition as “Musaylimah the Liar” – includes this conventional structure:

*al-fīl * mā l-fīl * wa-mā adrāka mā l-fīl * lahu mishfarun ṭawīl * wa-dhanabun athīl * wa-mā dhāka min khalqī rabbīnā bi-qatīl*

The elephant, * What is the elephant? * And how do you know what the elephant is? * It has a long trunk, * And a noble tail, * And that is not a trifling example of our Lord's creation.¹⁶

This text is intended to ridicule Musaylimah and provide evidence for rejection of his prophetic status, so it cannot be accepted as authentic. However, the form of the piece probably represents legitimate awareness of the literary conventions of such oracular statements. Generally, in order for parody to be successful, it must conform closely in formal terms to the target genre but be distorted in some way. This oracle is distorted by rendering the enigmatic event that looms in the future as something concrete, an animal with its well-known, characteristic physical features, but the *mā adrāka* construction may be taken to be an authentic part of the pre-Islamic soothsaying repertoire.

The *mā adrāka* construction occurs many times in the Qur'ān, sometimes in the full form, as is the case in Qur'ān 99:1–3, where the ambiguous term is *al-qārī'a*, which means, literally, “the thing that knocks” (also Q 69:1–3; 82:14–19) and sometimes in truncated form (Q 74:26–27; 83:7–8; 83:18–19; 86:1–2; 90:11–12; 97:1–2; 104:4–5). Many of these ambiguous words are feminine adjectives acting as nouns, and many take the form of active participles, especially of the form *fā'ila*: *al-wāqī'a* “that which befalls” (Q 56:1), *al-hāqqa* “that which will inevitably befall” (Q 69:1–3),¹⁷ and, as previously mentioned, *al-qārī'a* (Q 91:1–3). From the Arabic lexicon, and from other texts such as *ḥadīth*, it is evident that similar feminine participial forms came to mean “misfortune, affliction, disaster,” particularly *muṣība*, literally, “that which hits the mark,” the most common term

for “disaster” in Arabic. However, there are many others, such as *hāmma* “that which befalls, disaster,” which occurs in a protective charm attributed to the Prophet: *u'ḏhuhu min al-hāmma wa-l-sāmma, wa-kulli 'aynin lāmma*, “I ask protection for him from the disaster, from that which poisons, and from every calamitous eye.”¹⁸ These adjectival terms are meant to be ambiguous – that is already a convention of the genre. The *mā adrāka* structure that follows them is conventional as well; it is in all likelihood original to the text and was not added at a later date. The whole structure functions to present something mysterious and then explain what it is after a delay, often with some ambiguity or mystery remaining. The much-discussed form *hāwiya* (Q 101:9), which is intentionally ambiguous, may be understood as a cognate substitution for the form *huwwah* or *mahwāh*, meaning “an abyss” in general and referring here to Hell. The word's form is determined by the rhyme-context in which it occurs, and it may be compared with other ambiguous Qur'ānic terms for Hell such as *saqar*, *laḏā*, and *al-ḥuṭama*.¹⁹

One aspect of the Qur'ānic text that seems odd in comparison with the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is the frequent use of the introductory *qul*, the singular imperative “say,” an intrusive sign that the text has been related to the Prophet by a third party. The speech is neither the direct address of a divine source, nor an unmediated narrative told by the Prophet himself.²⁰ This literary feature of the Qur'ān is likely connected with the pre-Islamic convention, among both poets and soothsayers, of relaying texts and literary inspirations supposedly received from genies or familiar spirits, which would then have been presented in this manner. These imperatives addressed to the Prophet are among many features of the Qur'ān that convey a claim to mantic authority, for they suggest that the text of the revelations is not the Prophet's own speech. In the standard interpretation, the inspiration of the Prophet occurs through the angel Gabriel and not through a *jinnī* or *daemon*, but the formal feature may be seen as the remaining vestige of a pagan mode of transmission for extraordinary messages.²¹

God's “Beauteous Names” (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*) also reveal a connection with pre-Islamic religious tradition. These names are understood by many to be unique to Islam. They appear on decorative posters and plaques, and they have even been incorporated into popular devotional music, but they derive most notably from tag-phrases at the ends of many verses of the Qur'ān. A broader perspective reveals that *al-asmā' al-ḥusnā* are divine epithets similar to those found in many other religious traditions, including the mythology of the Greeks, ancient Near Eastern religions, Hinduism, and others – Athena the Victorious, Apollo the Destroyer, and so on. The phrase *al-asmā' al-ḥusnā* is a technical term already in

14 R. Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'ān*, ed. C.E. Bosworth and M.E.J. Richardson, Manchester: University of Manchester, 1991, 2:577.

15 See Welch, “al-Kur'ān,” 5:422.

16 Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998), *Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, 9–72, in *Thalāth rasā'il fi i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh Aḥmad and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām (eds), Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1976, 55.

17 Pickthall's rendition, “The Reality,” seems obviously wrong, as it does not denote an event that is going to occur or a disaster that is going to strike.

18 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-sā'ir*, 1:210–11.

19 D.J. Stewart, “Pit,” *EQ*, 4:100–04; idem, “Poetic License in the Qur'an: Ibn al-Šā'igh al-Ḥanafī's *Iḥkām al-Rāy fi Aḥkām al-Āy*,” *JQS* 11.1, 2009, 1–56, esp. p. 21.

20 Welch, “al-Kur'ān,” 5:422; D.A. Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 64–65.

21 D.J. Stewart, “Soothsayer,” *EQ*, 5:78–80.

the Qur'ān, and refers in all likelihood to a pre-Islamic concept that applied to other gods as well as Allāh (Q 7:180; 17:110; 20:8; 59:24). This is suggested especially by the verse *wa-li-llāhi l-asmā' u l-ḥusnā fa-d'ūhu bihā wa-dharū l-ladhīna yulḥidūna bi-asmā' ihi sa-yujzawna mā kānū ya'malūn*, "God has the most beautiful names. So pray to Him by them, and shun those who desecrate His names. They will be requited for what they have done" (Q 7:180). The Beauteous Names, it is evident here, were already used in the context of prayer in particular. The term that Pickthall and others translate as "desecrate" here, *yulḥidūna*, means literally "to miss the mark" and only later comes to mean "to be atheist, godless." The verse suggests that the Prophet's pagan contemporaries commit blasphemy by applying God's epithets to the wrong targets – that is, to other gods of the pre-Islamic pantheon rather than to the Biblical God exclusively. The use of the epithets in the Qur'ān shows that they play an especially important role in prayer, as do divine epithets in other religious traditions. They often occur in pairs at the end of supplications or implied prayers, in verse-final position. In addition, they are often cognate echoes of the main verb or term that occurs in the supplication itself, as in: *fa-hab lanā min ladunka rahmatan innaka anta l-wahhāb*, "So grant to us mercy from that which is with You, for You are the Grantor" (Q 3:8). This type of construction occurs frequently in the Qur'ān, and also in later Islamic prayers, such as, *allāhumma shfihi innaka anta l-shāfi wa-l-mu'āfi wa-l-qādiru 'alā kulli shay'* "O God! Cure him, for You are the Curer and the One Who Gives health, and the One who is Capable of everything."²² Not only the divine epithets but also the conventions of their use in prayer, including cognate paronomasia, may be traceable to the conventions of pre-Islamic pagan prayers.

The use of the term *rabb* "lord, master" in the Qur'ān may reveal vestiges of pagan, polytheistic usage. It stands to reason that the pre-Islamic pantheon of Arabia included many deities that were "lords" over particular domains, as is the case in other traditions. Just as Neptune is lord of the Sea, so were particular pre-Islamic gods and goddesses lords of the various planets, seas, mountains, districts, temples, shrines, and so on. While references to God's lordship over a particular, restricted domain may be justified within a Biblical, monotheist framework by arguing that God is in fact lord of everything in the universe, it in some cases seems odd or unnecessary to mention a restricted domain, thereby giving the impression that God is somehow arbitrarily limited. These oddities may be explained as hold-overs from an earlier usage, in which the restricted domain was understood to be actually restricted, and the deities multiple. Some instances of *rabb* "lord" in the Qur'ān may be viewed as universal:

rabb al-'ālamīn "Lord of the generations" (1:2; 2:131; 5:28; etc.)

rabb kulli shay' "Lord of everything" (6:164)

rabb al-samāwātī wa-l-arḍ "Lord of the heavens and the earth" (13:16; 17:102; etc.)

rabb al-samāwāt al-sab' "Lord of the seven heavens" (23:86)

wa-li-llāhi l-ḥamdu rabbi l-samāwātī wa-rabbi l-arḍi rabbi l-'ālamīn "Praise be to God, the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the earth, Lord of the worlds/peoples" (45:36)

rabb al-mashriqi wa-l-maghribi wa-mā baynahumā "Lord of the East and the West and what is in between them" (26:28)

rabb al-samāwātī wa-l-arḍi wa-mā baynahumā "Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is in between them" (78:37)

rabb al-'arshi al-'azīm "Lord of the Tremendous Throne" (9:129; 23:86)

rabb al-'arsh al-karīm "Lord of the Noble Throne" (23:116)

rabb al-'arsh "Lord of the Throne" (21:22; etc.)

In all these cases, the phrases involving "Lord" refer in some sense to the entire world or Universe, or to some part thereof which may be said to represent the whole. This is true of God's throne as well, which is said to encompass the heavens and the earth (Q 2:255). In addition, several uses of the term "Lord" are tied specifically with Biblical tradition, such as *rabb Mūsā wa-Hārūn* "the Lord of Moses and Aaron" (Q 7:122; 26:48). However, in a number of passages, the term "lord" applies to a restricted domain, and it is difficult to argue that this represents all of creation, even by metonymy. Such passages include the following:

rabba hādhihi l-baldati l-ladhī ḥarramahā "the lord of this town, who made it sacred" (27:91)

baldah ṭayyibah wa-rabb ghafūr "a pleasant town and a forgiving lord" (34:15)

fa l-ya'budū rabba hādha l-bayt "So let them worship the lord of this House" (106:3)

In each of these verses, the "lord" in question seems localized. In Qur'ān 27:91, the lord is associated with Mecca, which he has made sacred ground, and in 106:3 he is associated with the shrine or temple of the Ka'ba specifically. In 34:15, the town in question is not Mecca but rather the main city of the people of Sheba. In all these cases, there is little suggestion that this lord is in fact not restricted to the town or temple in question; the immediate context leaves open the possibility that each town or shrine has its characteristic deity, and that a multiplicity of such gods exists. Perhaps the oddest use of the term "lord" in the Qur'ān from a monotheist perspective is *rabb shi'rā* "the lord of Sirius" (Q 53:49). Why would the one God of the entire universe be described not as the lord of the sun, the moon, and all the stars, but rather as the lord of Sirius in particular? The specificity seems gratuitous if not blasphemous, and may point to pre-Islamic pagan usage. In this and other cases, the Qur'ān may be unconsciously perpetuating a pre-Islamic convention of religious discourse. Alternatively, this may be a conscious and polemical deployment of an established discourse, using the pagans' terminology to argue against them. The Biblical God is Lord of all of the domains in the universe that the

22 D.J. Stewart, "Cognate Paronomasia in the Qur'ān," paper presented at "The Qur'ān: Text, Interpretation and Translation," Centre of Islamic Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, November 10–12, 2005.

pagans assign to the control of a plethora of lesser lords. They are mistaken – the lords of Sirius, the moon, the sun, the sea, the mountains, and so on, are in fact one and the same deity.

The term *rabb*, *arbāb* is parallel in a sense to the term *ba'al*, *ba'alim* used in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Ugaritic and Canaanite religion, for *ba'al*, like *rabb*, originally meant “lord,” “possessor,” “owner,” or “master.” It apparently referred not only to the most popular god of the Canaanite pantheon, storm god and son or grandson of El, the high god, but also to a multitude of disparate, local or specialized deities, often using the term in construct, as occurs with Arabic *rabb*: the *ba'al* of Tyre, the *ba'al* of Harran, the *ba'al* of dance, the *ba'al* of heaven, and so on.²³ Traces of this polytheistic usage appear in a number of Biblical passages, which mention that the Israelites forsook Yahweh to worship “the *ba'als* and *ashtartes*” (Judges 2:13), for example.

The term *rabb* occurs prominently in the *mu'awwidhatān* “the two protective incantations,” *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās* (Q 113, 114). The formal similarities between these two Sūras suggests not only that they are closely related but also that they derive from a common pre-Islamic Arabic speech genre. Such protective charms have the following formal elements, including the statements: 1) “I seek protection/take refuge”; (2) “in the lord of X” – a reference to the deity whose help is sought, emphasizing his or her power over the specific domain X; “from the evil of Y” – referring to the specific type or types of danger to be warded off. In these cases, the lords invoked are *rabb al-falaq* “Lord of the Dawn” (Q 113:1) and *rabb al-nās* “Lord of people” (Q 114:1). One imagines, though, that in pre-Islamic pagan usage, the lords invoked would be gods or goddesses whose powers were closely associated with the specific domains and dangers named in the incantations.

The Qur'ān and the conventions of Greek oracles and Babylonian omens

The features discussed above suggest possible traces of pre-Islamic Arabian religious traditions in the text of the Qur'ān. Examination of other oracular traditions, including those of the Greeks and Babylonians, provide a number of further comparative insights. This is particularly useful since the body of oracles that have been preserved from pre-Islamic tradition is quite small in comparison. Some of the same difficulties occur in the study of Greek oracles, however, such as the existence of forged and parodic examples. Nevertheless, Greek oracles have been more assiduously collected and studied, so that a list of the types of questions posed in quasi-historical oracles has been compiled:²⁴

- 1 Shall I do X?
- 2 How shall I do X?
- 3 How may I become a parent?
- 4 What shall I do?
- 5 What can I do or say to please the gods?
- 6 Who or what caused X?
- 7 Who were the parents?
- 8 Whom or what shall we choose?
- 9 Where shall I go or find or settle?
- 10 Shall I succeed?
- 11 What is the truth about X?
- 12 Is it better to do X?
- 13 To what god shall I sacrifice?

These may not correspond exactly to the types of questions put to *kāhins* in pre-Islamic Arabia, but such a list may provide a guideline for future investigation. Babylonian omen texts have also been preserved in large numbers, so that a large corpus exists for comparison.

There are a number of striking formal differences between the Greek oracles and the oracular texts of the Qur'ān. Oracles in both contexts have a conventional, characteristic prosodic form. The Greek oracles are couched in quantitative hexameter verse, which is quite different from *saj'*, usually termed “rhymed prose” but essentially a type of accent poetry, in which Qur'ānic and pre-Islamic oracular statements are couched.²⁵ The Greek oracles often use acrostics, which do not appear either in the pre-Islamic oracular tradition or in the Qur'ān. Such acrostics may have served to enable the rearrangement of individual verses that had been intentionally shuffled or scattered by the officiating seer, adding to the mystery of the oracular consultation.

Despite such differences, comparative examination of the structure of Greek oracles is useful for the interpretation of Qur'ānic texts. Given that the functions the Greek seers and the pre-Islamic *kāhins* performed were quite similar, their statements share certain formal features, and the determination of shared, overlapping features, as well as notable discrepancies between the two corpora, provides insights into oracular texts in the Qur'ān. Greek oracles comprised six principal parts, usually in the following order, though not every oracle contained all six:

Structure of Greek Oracles²⁶

- A. Salutation to questioner.
- B. Restatement of question.

23 Daniel Isaac Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in the Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (Jackson, Mississippi: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988), 44–47.

24 J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, 52.

25 On the prosody of *saj'*, see D.J. Stewart, “*Saj'* in the Qur'ān: Prosody and Structure,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, 1990, 101–39.

26 Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 166–95.

- C. Assertion of mantic authority.
- D. Condition precedent.
- E. Message.
- F. Explication.

Close examination of the oracular texts in the Qur'ān in light of this formal structure provides definite comparative conclusions. The first two sections, salutation of the questioner (A) and restatement of the question (B), are for the most part missing in the Qur'ān. A similar sort of question occurs in *al-Naba'*, which begins: '*amma yatasā' alīn * 'an il-naba' i l-'azīm*', "About what are they wondering? * About the awful tidings . . ." (Q 78:1-2). However, this is exceptional.

A close formal parallel can be seen in the condition precedent (D), which immediately precedes the message proper (E), the two forming together a conditional sentence. Such conditions precedent have been pointed out as a significant characteristic feature of Qur'ānic style; Bell and Watt, and also Welch, term them "when passages," while Neuwirth terms them "clusters of *idhā*-phrases."²⁷ Perhaps a better term would be "series of conditions precedent." They generally take the form *idhā . . . yawma 'idhin* "when . . . then . . ." or "when . . . on that day . . .", although *yawma . . .* "on the day when . . ." also occurs. They often occur in a series, where multiple protases beginning with *idhā* lead up to one apodosis that states a message or reports a future event. The opening of *al-Takwīr* (Q 81:1-14) is the Qur'ān's most striking instance of this structure:

idhā l-shamsu kuwwirat
wa-idhā l-mujūmu 'nkadarat
wa-idhā l-jibālu suyirāt
wa-idhā l-'ishāru 'uṭṭilat
wa-idhā l-wuḥūshu ḥushirat
wa-idhā l-bihāru sujirāt
wa-idhā l-nufūsu zuwwijāt
wa-idhā l-maw 'ūdatu su 'ilat
bi-ayyi dhanbin qutilāt
wa-idhā l-ṣuḥufu nushirat
wa-idhā l-samā 'u kushīṭāt
wa-idhā l-jaḥīmu su 'irat

27 R. Bell and W.M. Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, 79-80; Welch, "al-Kur'ān," 5:422; A. Neuwirth, "Form and structure in the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 2:257-58. Neuwirth notes the probably intimate connection of these eschatological passages with pre-Islamic *saḥ* pronouncements. I am not sure why Neuwirth uses the term "clusters" in her English writings on this and related topics rather than "series," which is a more accurate description of the Qur'ānic texts in question and would be the obvious translation of the term she herself uses in her writings in German: *Serie*. Perhaps the word cluster was chosen because of the ambiguity of the word "series" in English, which does not distinguish between the singular and the plural, as opposed to *Serie* and *Serien* in German. In any case, "series" is preferable to "cluster" because sequence is an important consideration in these texts.

wa-idhā l-jannatu uzlifāt
'alimat naḥsun mā aḥḍarāt (81:1-14)

When the sun is overthrown,
 And when the stars fall,
 And when the hills are moved,
 And when the camels big with young are abandoned
 And when the wild beasts are herded together,
 And when the seas rise,
 And when souls are reunited,
 And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked,
 For what sin she was slain,
 And when the pages are laid open,
 And when the sky is torn away,
 And when Hell is ignited,
 And when the Garden is brought nigh,
 Then every soul will know what it has made ready.

In Greek oracles, similar passages regularly begin the protases with the phrases *all' hopotan* or *all' hotan*, meaning "but when . . .," which present the condition precedent. The message proper begins with the phrase *kai tote*, *tote de*, or *kai tote de* "and then," "and at that time." Examples include the following:

But when (*All' hopotan*) the Cynic of many names leaps into a great flame, stirred in spirit by the Erinyes of glory, then (*de tote*) all the dog-foxes who follow him should imitate the fate of the departed wolf.²⁸

But when (*All' hotan*) a mule becomes king of the Medes, then (*kai tote*) flee to the Hermos; don't stay and don't be ashamed to be a coward.²⁹

But when (*All' hopotan*) Proteus, best of all Cynics, having kindled a fire in Zeus's temenos, leaps into the flame and goes to high Olympus, then (*de tote*) do I command all men alike who eat earth's fruit to honor the greatest hero, night-roamer, enthroned beside Hephaistos and Lord Herakles.³⁰

The striking parallels between these phrases in the Greek oracular texts and the Qur'ānic phrases suggest that the Qur'ānic phrases might draw on the formal conventions of an earlier oracular tradition. Of course, the condition precedent is found in other traditions too, showing up, for instance, in the famous condition-precedent of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Birnam Wood's reaching high Dunsinane Hill.

28 Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 168.

29 Ibid., 185, 302.

30 Ibid., 167-68.

Omen texts were a highly developed genre in the Ancient Near East, one of the most prevalent and important. The Babylonians and their successors devoted a great deal of energy and ingenuity to the science of omens, astrological and otherwise. They compiled large catalogues or collections of omens, such as the widely-used series of astrological omens *Enuma Anu Enlil*, which was discovered in the library of the neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal (c. 685–627 BCE) on 56 clay tablets but dates back to the first Babylonian dynasty (c. 1800–1500 BCE), and they were copied and transmitted for many centuries, and even millennia.³¹ Another famous collection which was transmitted for centuries and exists in scores of fragmentary copies is devoted to terrestrial omens: *Šumma Alu ina Mele Šakin* “If a City is Set on a Height,” which contains at least 1,600 omens.³² Other specialized collections were devoted to omens taken from entrails, particularly livers, but also lungs and other organs.³³ Others had to do with births of anomalous creatures, both human and animal.³⁴ In general, these omens all took the form of conditional sentences, similar to the Greek and Qur’ānic omens discussed above: *If X happens/is observed, Y will happen*. The same structure is found in legal texts such as Hammurabi’s code, where many individual laws begin *šumma awilum* . . . “If a nobleman . . .,” and the omens have been observed to use legal language.³⁵

These great catalogues of omens are often organized systematically by the subject of the protasis: in the astrological works, the omens having to do with the Moon, the Sun, Venus, and so on appear in separate sections. In *If a City is Set on a Height*, all the omens involving snakes appear in one section, those having to do with lizards in another section, those having to do with ants in another section, and so on. The following lunar omen is included in the *Enuma Anu Enlil*: “If the moon makes an eclipse in Month VII on the twenty-first day and sets eclipsed – they will take the crowned prince from his palace in fetters.”³⁶ Examples from the collection entitled “If a City is Set on a Height” include the following:

- 31 E. Reiner and D.E. Pingree, *Babylonian Planetary Omens. 1: Enuma Anu Enlil, tablet 63: The Venus Tablet Ammisaduga*, Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1975; idem, *Babylonian Planetary Omens. 2: Enuma Anu Enlil, tablets 50–51*, 1981; idem, *Babylonian Planetary Omens. 3: Enuma Anu Enlil, tablets 50–51*, Groningen: Styx, 1998; F. Rochberg-Halton, *Aspects of Celestial Divination: The Lunar Eclipse Tablets of Enuma Anu Enlil*. *Archiv für Orientforschung*, Horn, Austria: Ferdinand Berger, 1988; W.H. van Soldt, *Solar Omens of Enuma Anu Enlil: tablets 23(24)–29(30)*, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1995; L. Verderame, *Le tavole I–VI della serie astrologica Enuma Anu Enlil*, Messina: University of Messina, 2003.
- 32 S.M. Freedman, *If a City Is Set on a Height: The Akkadian Omen Series Šumma alu ina mēlê šakin*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1998, 2006.
- 33 U.S. Koch, *Babylonian Liver Omens: The Chapters Manzazu, Padanu, and Pan takalti of the Babylonian Extipicy Series Mainly from Aššurbanipal’s Library*, Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2000; eadem, *Secrets of Extipicy: The Chapter Multābiltu of the Babylonian Extipicy Series and Niširti bārūti Texts mainly from Aššurbanipal’s Library*, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005.
- 34 E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu*, Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1970.
- 35 Scott Noegel, “Dreams and Dream Interpretation in Mesopotamia and in the Hebrew Bible,” in Kelly Bulkeley (ed.), *Dreams: A Reader on Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), (45–72) 52.
- 36 M. van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 BC*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003, 245–46.

If a snake dies in front of a man, he will see the downfall of his adversary.
 If a snake flops around in front of a man, he will kill his adversary.
 If a snake stands erect in front of a man – victory and booty.
 If a snake goes about in front of a man – flood for the land.
 If a snake runs in front of a man – attaining of a wish.
 If a snake stands in front of a man – booty for the king.
 If a snake wriggles in front of a man – confusion.
 If snakes cross over in front of a man, strife will persistently follow him.
 If snakes entwine in front of a man, he will have trouble.³⁷

The Babylonian oracles generally mark the protasis with “if” (*šumma*) but do not mark the apodosis with a specific particle. This is a distinction between them and both the Greek and the Qur’ānic omens, which mark the apodosis with particles. Long lists of omens in the Babylonian collections are reminiscent of Qur’ānic usage to some degree, where many conditions precedent occur in series. Most Babylonian omens, however, consist of one protasis and one apodosis, in contrast to several protases leading up to one apodosis, as in the opening of *al-Takwīr* (Q 81:1–14) cited above. Some Babylonian omens have combined protases, introducing a single apodosis with several conditions precedent, as in the following liver omen: “If there is a Weapon in the Honour of the left side of the Lungs and it points upwards, the Lungs are low and split on the left, the base of the Well-being forms a Weapon and it points downwards. For going on a campaign and seizing a city it is favourable/the patient will die.”³⁸ In such examples, however, the initial particle *šumma* is not repeated, in contrast to the repetition of *idhā* in the Qur’ānic texts.

The frequent references to celestial bodies and to animals in Babylonian omens brings up an important point. The oaths to the sun, moon, and stars which appear so frequently in the oaths of pre-Islamic and Qur’ānic oracles, as well as the oaths to animals in pre-Islamic oracles, may have developed out of the signs used for divination. For example, the Yemeni soothsayer Saṭṭḥ (Rabī’ b. Rabī’ a b. Mas’ūd) supposedly made the following prediction explaining a dream of the Yemeni king Rabī’ a b. Naṣr:

*ahlifu bi-mā bayna l-ḥarratayni min ḥanash
 la-tahbiṭanna ardakum ul-ḥabash
 fa-la-yamlikumna mā bayna Abyana ilā Jurash*

I swear by the snakes in between the two lava fields,
 that the Ethiopians will descend on your land,
 and conquer all the territory between Abyan and Jurash.³⁹

37. Freedman, *If a City is Set on a Height*, 2:17.

38. See Koch, *Secrets of Extipicy*, 48–52, 313–80, esp. 340.

39. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmuri, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1998, 1:33.

One might understand that the oath in this and other cases developed out of a tradition of augury or omen-taking, rather than simply being an asseveration made to establish the sincerity of the speaker or the veracity of the message. In this case, observing snakes on part of the coastal plain may have been a sign to the soothsayer, by a logic of analogy, that the land would be overrun by an invading Ethiopian force. Similarly, oaths swearing by a wolf or a crow may have originally referred to the animal or bird sighted by the oracle and taken as the basis for the prediction.⁴⁰ The oaths that characterize the speech of soothsayers and that begin many oracular texts in the Qur'ān may have evolved out of ritualized references to the signs observed by *kāhin* diviners taking omens from natural phenomena.

Greek and Qur'ānic oracles are similar in their gnomic aspect; they use similar strategies to create ambiguity or mystery. Chief among these are the use of obscure words or words with unclear referents. In the Greek oracles, these are often animals representing certain human actors whose identities are not revealed directly: "But when the Cynic of many names leaps into a great flame, stirred in spirit by the Erinyes of glory, then all the dog-foxes who follow him should imitate the fate of the departed wolf."⁴¹ Pre-Islamic oracles frequently swore by or referred to animals, as Saḥīḥ's oracle for Rabi'a b. Naṣr mentioned above refers to snakes. Similarly, the pronouncements attributed to Musaylima refer to the wolf, frog, and elephant.⁴² This feature of pre-Islamic oracles that resembles Greek usage was for the most part abandoned in the Qur'ān. The opening oaths in *al-Ādiyāt* (Q 100) appear to be an exception, referring most likely to horses. The opening oath passages in several Sūras which each feature a series of feminine plural participles (Q 37:1–3; 51:1–4; 77:1–4; 79:1–5; 100:1–5) lead one to think that this was a conventional type of oath in pre-Islamic oracular pronouncements.⁴³ This particular convention remains poorly understood, but such oaths may have originally referred to animals or spirits.

As with Biblical narratives in the Qur'ān, pre-Islamic material, including the oracles, has gone through an ideological filter, and it is worth considering what may have been changed. The relative absence of animals in comparison with the purported pre-Islamic oaths is striking. Moreover, looking at the Greek oracles and also at other pre-Islamic ones, one notices that a clear apocalyptic shift has occurred. Almost all the oracular texts in the Qur'ān have to do with predicting and describing the cataclysmic end of the world, the Day of Resurrection and the Day of Judgment. *Al-Rūm* (Q 30) is one of the few exceptions, in that it predicts a future Byzantine victory, "within a few years." As is the case with the Biblical narratives that occur

in the Qur'ān, in the oracular texts, proper nouns, references to specific places and people, as well as specific dates or periods are usually omitted. Both Greek and pre-Islamic oracles such as those of Shiqq and Saḥīḥ include proper nouns, specific numbers of years, and similar details that are lacking in Qur'ānic oracles.

The assertion of mantic authority, C, the third of Fontenrose's six principal elements of the Greek oracles, is also important in Qur'ānic oracular passages. While the general function is similar to those of the Greek oracles, the specific conventions attendant thereto are less so. The conventional Greek assertions of mantic authority are references to the god who is speaking, his temple, or other items associated with the temple or the seer. An example is the following, in which the god Apollo, the *adyton* or space in the temple reserved for the oracle, and the tripods involved in the oracular ritual are invoked: "Observe, Athenian, the path of oracles which Apollo has proclaimed from the *adyton* through his esteemed tripods . . ." Sibylline oracles sometimes give the seer's name and paternity as a claim to authority; they generally suggest that the Sibyl was born in a primordial era and is extremely long-lived.⁴⁴ Several distinct conventional features of oracular texts that function to assert mantic authority may be identified in the Qur'ān. The oaths that occur at the beginnings of such passages are perhaps the most obvious category. Others include the *mā adrāka* construction mentioned above, the mysterious letters, and references to the scripture that is presented as the source of the messages. It is worth noting that all of these occur at the openings of oracular texts, most often at the beginnings of Sūras. Notable exceptions are Qur'ān 69:38–39; 81:15–18; 84:16–18; and 86:11–12, where series of oaths occur in the middle of Sūras, and *Al-Qārī'a* (101), where the *mā adrāka* construction occurs a second time towards the end of the passage, but these are relatively infrequent. The placement of these features is also related to the fact that neither a salutation nor an initial question appears – the assertion of mantic authority usually appears first.

In addition, these four types of assertion of mantic authority appear in combination. It has been observed that the mysterious letters are often followed by references to the scripture. Mysterious letters and references to scripture are sometimes combined with an oath, as in *Qāf* * *wa-l-Qur'āni l-majīd* *, "Q. By the Glorious Qur'ān" (Q 50:1); *Nūn wa-l-qalami wa-mā yasturūn*, "N. By the pen and what they record" (Q 68:1); *Hā mīm wa-l-kitābi l-mubīn*, "H. M. By the clear Book" (43:1–2; 44:1–2). Such combinations suggest that the functions of these formal features are related and overlap.

The mysterious letters

While the oaths clearly belong to the tradition of pre-Islamic soothsaying, the mysterious letters apparently do not, and it is possible that they originated with the Qur'ān itself and the Prophet Muḥammad's mission. Perhaps the best critical summary of research on this topic to date is that of Welch in the article on the

40 See the oracular pronouncements presented in Dale F. Eickelman, "Musaylima: An Approach to the Social Anthropology of Seventh-C. Arabia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 10, 1963, 17–52, esp., 42; 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Rummānī, *Nukat fi i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, in *Thalāth rasā'il fi i'jāz al-Qur'ān*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968, 97.

41 Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 168.

42 D.F. Eickelmann, "Musaylima: An approach to the social anthropology of seventh century Arabia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 10, 1967, 17–52; M.J. Kister, "The struggle against Musaylima and the conquest of Yamāma," *JSAT* 27, 2002, 1–56.

43 See Neuwirth, "Form and structure," 256.

44 H.W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, London: Routledge, 1988, 7–10.

Qur'an in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. He concludes that the mysterious letters are part of the original text, that they in some fashion represent the Arabic alphabet rather than provide initials or abbreviations of other names or words, that they are associated with the Book or Scripture, which is in most cases mentioned in the text immediately following them, and that they are intended to rhyme or provide assonance with the following verses.⁴⁵

One may corroborate and flesh out Welch's view, emphasizing that the letters are assertions of mantic authority. The mysterious letters are meant to be enigmatic. They establish mantic authority in the text by representing writing or an alphabet rather than specific words, and thus refer to a sacred text from which the revelations are drawn that exists on another plane. While Welch emphasizes rhyme in his discussion of the mysterious letters, I would add to this considerations of rhythm as well.⁴⁶ In most cases, the mysterious letters not only rhyme with the verses following them but also establish a rhythm that will be maintained or modified gradually thereafter. This connection with rhyme and rhythm is also seen in one of the reported watchwords or battle cries of the Muslims that Alan Jones has discussed in connection with the mysterious letters: *ḥā-mīm lā yunṣarūn*, "H. M. They will not be made victorious!"⁴⁷ Something that Jones does not emphasize is that the phrase *ḥā-mīm* rhymes with *lā yunṣarūn*, and that the two phrases are rhythmically parallel according to the accent-based meter of *saj'*, each colon containing two beats provided by the word accents.⁴⁸

In a 1996 article Kevin Massey has shown that the order in which the letters appear within the combinations is not random. There appears to be an overall order of the letters from which particular combinations are chosen; each letter precedes certain letters but not others, and vice versa. However, I believe that Massey has interpreted the consequences of this insightful observation incorrectly. He entertains the possibility that the letters represent words or sentences, then rejects this view, taking up one of the older suggestions regarding the mysterious letters, going back to Nöldeke's 1860 *Geschichte des Qorans*: that they are initials or monograms of early Companions who owned the copies from which the 'Uthmānic Codex was created. In Massey's view, the ordered letters represent something like the critical apparatus of each Sūra, denoting the copies on which the text was based; the order would have been seen as necessary because some copies were evaluated as more reliable than others.⁴⁹ Like Welch, I would argue that the letters are meant instead to represent the alphabet. The fact that they appear in a particular order, as Massey discovered, tends to corroborate this hypothesis. The order defined by the series of letters bears some resemblance to the *abjad* alphabet, though it does not match it exactly, and the choice of particular

letters seems also to be related directly to the structure of the *abjad* alphabet. It is interesting to note that none of the six final letters of the Arabic alphabet, termed *rawāḍif* – *th*, *kh*, *dh*, *ḍ*, *z*, *gh* or *thakhidh ḍaḍaḡh* according to the *abjad* system – occur among the mysterious letters. The probability of this happening by chance is $22/28 = 11/14 = 0.786$ to the 76th power, where 76 is the total number of individual *muqatta'āt*. The result is 1.1×10^{-8} , i.e. a chance of 11 in one billion.

Such a regular series of omissions may have occurred for three possible reasons. It may be the consequence of a seemingly arbitrary physical rule – the mysterious letters include no letters with dots. There is an apparent exception to this rule, the occurrences of *yā'* in Q 19:1: *kāf hā yā 'ayn ṣād* and Q 36:1: *yā sīn*. Welch has suggested a similar rule as follows: "Another striking fact that must be more than coincidental is that the mysterious letters represent every consonantal form in Arabic, while no form occurs for more than one letter."⁵⁰ Alternatively, the letters may be intended to represent an archaic version of the Arabic alphabet that did not distinguish the six extra letters that appear at the end of the *abjad* alphabet (the *rawāḍif*). This would be consonant with an aspect of Qur'ānic style that is often overlooked – its language already sounded archaic to the original audience, something that may be implied by the reported characterization of the Qur'an as *asāḥir al-awwālīn* "myths/stories of the ancients/forefathers" (Q 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13). It is also possible that the letters are meant to represent the Hebrew or Aramaic alphabet, which follow the *abjad* order but do not contain the six *rawāḍif*, rather than the Arabic alphabet per se.⁵¹ The use of other languages occurs frequently in the assertion of mantic or magical authority in other texts and traditions, as is the case with the Greek verses of the Sibylline books of the Romans, the Chaldean oracles of later times, the Aramaic phrases in Islamic magical texts, or the Latin spells of witches and wizards in medieval Europe. The magical phrase *Abracadabra*, for example, is held to derive from the Aramaic *'avra ke davra* "there has come to pass what was spoken." Similarly, *hocus pocus* most likely is a parody of the Roman Catholic liturgy of the eucharist, which contains the phrase *Hoc est corpus* "this is the body" or *Hoc est enim corpus meum*, "this is my very body," which occurs at the exact point of transubstantiation. In any case, 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'an.

Out of 44 letters added to one letter or more (that is, omitting the single letters *n*, *s*, and *q*, and only considering those letters added after the first letter has been

45 Welch, "al-Kur'ān," 5:412–14.

46 Welch, "al-Kur'ān," 5:414.

47 A. Jones, "The mystical letters of the Qur'ān," *SJ* 16, 1962, (5–11) 6–7.

48 See D.J. Stewart, "Saj' in the Qur'ān: Prosody and Structure."

49 K. Massey, "A new investigation into the 'mystery letters' of the Quran," *Arabica* 43, 1996, 497–501.

50 Welch, "al-Kur'ān," 5:414.

51 Otto Loth suggested a connection between the mysterious letters and Jewish models already in 1881, but he seems to have had in mind the mystical and numerological uses of the letters in Jewish Kabbalism and not, as suggested here, that the alphabet was itself meant to represent Hebrew letters. O. Loth, "Tabaris Korankommentar," *ZDMG* 35, 1888, (588–628) 603–4. The other main difference between the Hebrew alphabet and the Arabic *abjad* alphabet has to do with the placement of *sīn* (s). It occurs in the Arabic *abjad* sequence in the place corresponding in the Hebrew sequence to that of *samech*, a Hebrew letter that has no immediate Arabic counterpart; and the place of Arabic *shīn* is occupied in the Hebrew sequence by one sign that represents both *sīn* and *shīn*.

Table 12.1 The mysterious letters compared with the *Abjad* alphabet⁵²

	a	b	j	d	h	w	z	ḥ	ṭ	y	k	l	m	n	s	'	f	ṣ	q	r	sh	t	th	kh	dh	ḍ	z	gh
	a																											
	a																											(6 times)
	a																											(5 times)
	a																											(once)
	a																											(once)
																												(6 times)
																												(once)
																												(once)
Exceptions:																												
ḥm 'sq:																												[s out of place]
ṣm:																												[s out of place (twice)]
th:																												[t out of place]
khy 's:																												[k out of place]

52 An alternative *abjad* order – *abjd ḥty klmn ṣ' fā qrat thkhdh zghsh* – is used in North Africa and may be archaic, but the differences that it presents are minor and do not affect the conclusions drawn here.

set, in order to form a sequence of two or more letters), only five are misplaced according to the *abjad* order of the alphabet, or 11.4 percent of the cases. One might design a different arrangement of the letters in order to produce fewer exceptions – by placing *k* and *t* earlier in the alphabet, for example. However, *s* would remain a problem, as *s* occurs before *m* in *ṣm* and after *m* in *ḥm 'sq*. As Massey suggests, one might get out of this predicament by treating *ḥm 'sq* as two separate sequences. There is some reason to suggest this, as they are written in the Qur'ān as two separate “words,” in contrast to *khy 's*, which is written as one. If one separates the sequences, then an order can be devised that gets rid of all exceptions, such as the following:

abjd ṭk ḥwz ḥy 'sq lmn fṣ rsh t

It is also worth looking at the letters that occur as mysterious letters in relation to the *abjad* sequence.

Letters of *Abjad* that occur as mysterious letters (in bold)

a [b j d] h [w z] ḥ ṭ y k l m n s' [f] ṣ q r [sh t] [th kh dh] [d z gh]

This distribution suggests that the choice of letters for use as the mysterious letters is not random and that it may have something to do with the *abjad* alphabet. The omission of the last six letters, the fact that all the letters in *ḥty* and *klmn* appear, while only the initial letters of *abjd* and *ḥwz* appear, seems too orderly to be a coincidence and suggests that the placement of the letters in this alphabet has something to do with their being chosen. Even though the overall sequence of letters that the various combinations of mysterious letters determine does not match the *abjad* order exactly, it suggests that these letters are meant to represent the alphabet, just as *abjad* does in Arabic or Hebrew, and just as *ABC* does in English, but in a more complex and, yes, mysterious fashion.

The repeated occurrence of the mysterious letters in conjunction with references to the scripture corroborates and adds to the idea that they represent the alphabet: they also represent sacred writing in general and therefore symbolize Scripture. While many investigators have observed that the mysterious letters are followed immediately by references to the scripture, only a few have argued that the letters represent the alphabet per se and so symbolize sacred writing.⁵³ If their insights are valid, one may thus see in the Qur'ān a transition from oral, oracular forms to the written form of a sacred book. Whereas the oaths do not in general imply a connection with a sacred text, the mysterious letters do.

53 See e.g. Bell and Watt, *Introduction*, 64–65; Welch, “al-Kur'ān,” 5:412–14. In a later work, Nöldeke departed from his early view that they were initials of scribes of the texts used to produce an edition of the Qur'ān, and expressed the view maintained here, that they were mystical symbols that alluded to writing of the heavenly book. Nöldeke, *Orientalische Skizzen*, Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1892, 50–51.

This idea may throw light on another puzzling feature of the Qur'ānic text. It is well known that the Qur'ān refers to itself as a book or scripture, when, according to Islamic tradition, it was revealed in short sections, not set in writing immediately, and not fixed in a written corpus until after the Prophet's death. The terms "the Book" and "the Qur'ān" cannot refer to a physical, tangible codex, but rather to a text that is not tangible or immediately accessible and exists on another plane. The revelations related to the Prophet are quotations or messages from this inaccessible book, while the whole remains out of the reach of the audience and even the Prophet himself. This supposition is corroborated by references in the Qur'ān to a "preserved tablet" (*lawḥ mahfūz*) or "the Mother" – (perhaps "Ultimate Source") – of the Book" (*umm al-kitāb*) ostensibly existing in the celestial realm and not on Earth (Q 85:22; 43:3). It also helps explain the puzzling references to the text of the Qur'ān that use the far demonstratives *dhālika* (m.s.) "that" and *tilka* (f.s.) "those" in addition to the near demonstratives *hādhā* "this" and *hādhihi* "these."⁵⁴ In many of the passages in which the far demonstratives occur, they are preceded immediately by the mysterious letters as well.

*alifū lām mīm * dhālika l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi hudan li-l-muttaqīn* (2:1–2)

"A.L.M. * "That is the Book of which there is no doubt, a guidance for the God-fearing."

alif lām rā tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-ḥakīm (10:1)

"A.L.R. Those are the verses of the wise Book."

alif lām rā tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn (12:1)

"A.L.R. Those are the verses of the clear Book."

alif lām mīm rā tilka āyātu l-kitāb . . . (13:1)

"A.L.R. Those are the verses of the Book . . ."

alif lām rā tilka āyātu l-kitābi wa-qur'ānun mubīn (15:1)

"A.L.R. Those are the verses of the Book and a clear Qur'ān."

*tā sīn mīm * tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn* (26:1–2)

"T.S.M. * Those are the verses of the clear Book."

tā sīn tilka āyātu l-qur'āni wa-kitābun mubīn (27:1)

"T.S. Those are the verses of the Qur'ān and a clear Book."

*tā sīn mīm * tilka āyātu l-kitābu l-mubīn* (28:1–2)

"T.S.M. * Those are the verses of the clear Book."

*alif lām mīm * tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-ḥakīm* (31:2)

"A.L.M. * Those are the verses of the wise Book."

In the early twentieth century, Pedersen had made the comparison between the Qur'ān as a heavenly book and the Babylonian *Tablets of Destiny*, and Widengren developed the idea that the Qur'ān or the Book was a heavenly book further in the 1950s.⁵⁵ The Qur'ān mentions "that Book" or refers to "those verses/signs" precisely because it refers to the supernatural text that exists on another plane and not to a physical codex that is within reach of the audience. The Qur'ān exists on an alternative or supernatural plane which is only accessible through revelation, and the mysterious letters are signs that represent sacred writing and therefore symbolize the scripture and its content. Madigan criticizes Widengren and others on this and similar points, showing that the Qur'ān's self-portrayal is much more complex and not univalent.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the particular understanding of the Qur'ān as a Heavenly Book that may be accessed only through revelation captures one of the fundamental ideas found in the Qur'ānic revelations. Furthermore, this view fits with and is corroborated by the interpretation of the mysterious letters' representative function just presented above. Madigan did not make the connection between the mysterious letters and the concept of the heavenly book, for he endorsed Bellamy's proposal that the mysterious letters are corrupt versions of the *basmalah*, seeing in them instead evidence of the limitations of early transcripts of the text.⁵⁷ One of the main traditional characterizations of the letters in Islamic exegesis, stressing that they are signs the meaning of which is known only to God, is essentially correct, though one might state it differently. The mysterious letters are statements of mantic authority indicating that the messages that follow them are veracious revelations from a supernatural source. They do this by symbolizing sacred writing that derives from a heavenly book and by extension the divine knowledge that is contained in that book and is accessible only through revelation.

Parallels may be found in many oracular traditions for the intangible or inaccessible sacred book; they, like the Qur'ān, seem to embody a transition from an oral tradition to a written scripture. The Sibylline books of Rome, by legend, were three volumes that the King Tarquinius Superbus had purchased from the Sibyl of Cumae. She had first offered nine volumes for an exorbitant price, and burned three when he refused, offering the remaining six for the same price. When he refused once again, she burned three more volumes and offered the remaining three, still for the original price. Superbus finally gave in and purchased the remaining three volumes. They were written in Greek and not Latin verse, only

55 J. Pedersen, review of E. Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen: mit Exkursen über die Anfänge des Islams und des Christentums*, *Der Islam* 5, 1914, 110–15; G. Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book (King and Saviour III)*, Uppsala: A.B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1950; idem, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension (King and Saviour V)*, Uppsala: A.B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1955, 115–61.

56 Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 6–8.

57 Ibid., 40–43.

54 See, e.g., Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 62.

consulted in cases of pressing need, and kept in the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill under the control of a committee of two and later ten and then fifteen men – the only ones allowed to see them. Legend had it that one of the early overseers committed the error of copying parts of the books, and was therefore subject to the ultimate punishment, being sown into a leather sack and thrown into the sea.⁵⁸ In Sibylline and other Greek oracular traditions, individual poetic announcements were scratched verse by verse on oak, palm, or other leaves. Legends report that wind scattered the leaves so that the petitioners would then be at a loss as to the correct order of the verses and consequently the content of the message.⁵⁹ Later, individual oracles were gathered into collections from which oracles were meted out by traveling chresmologues or oracle-mongers, often known as Bakis if male and Sibyl if female – originally the given names of specific ancient seers that later came to serve as generic labels. Many Greek city-states, including Athens and Sparta, came to keep books of oracles in their archives, and the Spartan kings also kept a collection of Delphic oracles.⁶⁰ In all cases, the difficult access to these oracular texts served to enhance their authority.

Perhaps most suggestive as a case for comparison with the Qur'ān as an intangible scripture accessed through oracular revelation is provided by the Ifa divination system of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. In this complex system of divination under the auspices of Ifa, the god of wisdom, an Ifa priest manipulates 16 palm nuts, or casts a divination chain with four half-nuts of the opele tree attached to each side, in order to indicate one of 256 possible numerical combinations (16×16). The combination arrived at indicates to the priest which of 256 books, termed *Odu*, including 16 principal *Odu* and 240 secondary *Odu*, to consult. The priests do not have copies of any of these *Odu*, but know them by memory, and there is in fact strong resistance to writing them down at all. The *Odu* are divided into chapters or poetic segments termed *Eses*, which range from four to 600 lines in length. The number of *Eses* in each *Odu* is not fixed and depends on the knowledge and experience of the individual priest. The priest recites to the petitioner the *Ese* he sees as most appropriate from the *Odu* indicated as the basis of his divination.⁶¹ These “books” are in a sense parallel to the Qur'ān before it was collected between two covers, and the *Eses* are parallel to individual Sūras. While the priest refers to the books as such, and recites parts of them in the course of the divination session, the books are never produced as tangible objects, and their texts are generally not written down.

The idea of a sacred text that is inaccessible as a publicly circulated codex continued to be upheld in various genres of Islamic literature long after the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad. In the Shi'ite tradition a number of sacred texts held to be in the possession of the Imams supposedly contain esoteric, oracular

knowledge that cannot be revealed, or is only rarely revealed, to ordinary believers. Imami Shi'ite sources refer to as many as seven books revealed by God to one of the Imams, or to the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima, and preserved by successive Imams as part of their inheritance. It is not clear how many distinct books are envisaged in the tradition, as the titles are confused and several may refer to one and the same work. Perhaps the best known of these is the *Jafr* of 'Alī, which supposedly had two volumes, one white and one red, and, like the other similar books, is held to have contained divine wisdom, including knowledge of past prophets, religious law, and future trials and events.⁶²

Conclusion

This investigation calls attention to a number of the textual features of the Qur'ān, some noted in literature to date and others not, that potentially resemble the conventions of literary forms belonging to pre-Islamic pagan Arabian religious tradition. Identifying these forms and explaining their conventions may help provide a more profound understanding of many Qur'ānic passages that are puzzling when approached from the point of view of Jewish and Christian tradition. Form-critical methods are particularly useful for addressing this material, since it is in many cases precisely these texts' formal conventions that seem at the outset so odd, unfamiliar, and resistant to interpretation. While some scholars investigating this material have claimed to find in the Ur-poetry of the Semites the common source from which many disparate traditions arose,⁶³ the point here is not that there was a genetic link between pre-Islamic and earlier forms, whether Greek or ancient Near Eastern, although many common features of texts may indeed have been assimilated from other sources through cultural borrowing.⁶⁴ Rather, examining parallel oracular traditions may throw light on conventional aspects of oracular passages in the Qur'ān and explain features of the text that have puzzled scholars to date. Just as the pre-Islamic pilgrimage and the myths of Hūd and 'Ād, Šāliḥ and Thamūd, and Shu'ayb and Midian have been integrated into the Qur'ān by reinterpretation within a monotheist, Biblical framework, so too has the pre-Islamic oracular material been integrated into the Qur'ān by passing through a monotheistic, Biblical filter. The pre-Islamic divine with a familiar *daemon* is recast as a prophet to whom the angel Gabriel relays divine revelations. Omens that in the pagan tradition would have referred to trade, travel, warfare, alliances,

58 Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy*, 76–78, 190–215.

59 Ibid., 82–83.

60 Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle*, 158–65.

61 W.R. Bascom, *Ifá Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1969; W. Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976.

62 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, trans. D. Streight, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, 73–75.

63 D. H. Müller, *Die Propheten in ihrer ursprünglichen Form*.

64 Parke makes the following comment regarding the possibility of connecting Sibylline oracles with the Ancient Near East: “The conclusion to be drawn is that though ecstatic prophecy in the Near East exhibits some interesting features which can be compared with the Sibylline oracles, there is no overall likeness at any period or place which would impel a belief in the Sibyl's derivation from the Orient.” Parke, *Sibyls*, 219–20. One might make a similar statement regarding the Qur'ānic material's relationship to both Greek and Ancient Near Eastern material.

and so on, are replaced with predictions of the Day of Resurrection and the Day of Judgment. While the soothsayer's pronouncements derived from the Unseen directly by inspiration, or through the mediation of a familiar spirit, the Prophet's revelations derived from a celestial book, a scripture that was intangible and existed on a higher plane. A broad, comparative perspective suggests that the Qur'ān, and the Prophet Muḥammad's mission itself, may be profitably viewed as representing a particular stage in religious development, that of transition between an oracular and a prophetic moment.

13 Does the Qur'ān deny or assert Jesus's crucifixion and death?¹

Suleiman A. Mourad

The issue of Jesus's crucifixion and death in the Qur'ān has been extensively examined in modern scholarship, primarily by scholars concerned with religious dialogue or polemics.² One reason for this interest is the perception that the Qur'ān refutes the crucifixion and death of Jesus; this perception, which is often tied to a pair of verses (Q 4:157–58), places Islam's scripture in direct opposition to the foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. Yet although Muslim scholars have overwhelmingly rejected the crucifixion of Jesus, they are divided regarding the reality of his death. The possibility that Jesus actually died and was resurrected from death was argued by a number of leading early Muslim exegetes, and became an essential view within the tradition.³ This shows that, on the one hand, the way the Qur'ān addresses the crucifixion/death narrative allows for conflicting interpretations, and, on the other hand, that what is perceived as the standard position in Islam is favored in some modern Muslim and non-Muslim circles because it is rooted in Christian-Muslim polemics; this position is often used in an attempt to legitimize one's own religion or prove the other religion wrong.⁴ In this chapter, I offer some reflections on the

¹ This paper was presented at *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* conference, held at the University of Notre Dame (April 19–21, 2009). I want to thank my friend Gabriel S. Reynolds for his generous invitation for me to take part in this conference. An earlier draft was presented at a symposium held at Middlebury College (January 17–19, 2008), entitled *Engaging Passions: The Death of Jesus and Its Legacies*; I want to thank my former colleague and friend Oliver Larry Yarbrough for his generous invitation for me to take part in the symposium.

² Gabriel S. Reynolds covers some of the same material in his recent article "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or alive?" *BSOAS* 72, 2009, 237–58. For examples, see E.E. Elder, "The crucifixion in the Koran," *Muslim World* 13, 1923, 242–58; H. Michaud, *Jésus selon le Coran*, Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1960, 59–71; G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 105–21; M.M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology, 2: The death of Jesus – reality or illusion?" *The Muslim World* 70, 1980, 91–121; G. Rizzardi, *Il problema della cristologia coranica*, Milano: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1982, 141–43; N. Geagea, *Mary in the Koran: A Meeting Point between Christianity and Islam*, trans. L.T. Fares, New York: Philosophical Library, 1984, 107–8; and A.H. Mathias Zahniser, "The forms of Tawaffa in the Qur'an: A contribution to Christian-Muslim dialogue," *Muslim World* 79, 1989, 14–24.

³ See, for example, the discussion in N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1991, 117–26.

⁴ I am not arguing here that the Qur'ān is not a polemical text.

crucifixion/death narrative in an attempt to show that the denial in the Qur'ān is not directed to its reality, but rather to its theological implications. My investigation focuses principally on Qur'ānic textual evidence, with the conviction that the study and understanding of the Qur'ān must assume the unity of the text.⁵

It is well known that the Qur'ān is a very complicated text in terms of its language, a fact attested by the degree of disagreement among exegetes as to the proper interpretation of most of its verses. At times the ambiguity of the language has left the exegete utterly helpless, as when the notorious Egyptian Islamic fundamentalist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) addresses the death and resurrection of Jesus:

As for how his death occurred and how he was raised to Paradise, these are incomprehensible issues; they pertain to the category of the ambiguous Qur'ānic verses whose proper meaning is known only to God. There is no benefit from pursuing them, be it for dogmatic or legal purposes. Those who pursue them and turn them into a controversy end up in hypocrisy, confusion and complication, without ever getting to the absolute truth or satisfaction about something that should after all be deferred to God's knowledge.⁶

Qutb adds in another instance that "the Qur'an does not offer details regarding the raising up" of Jesus, "whether it occurred in body and soul while still alive, or only in soul after his death."⁷ He also comments that "God brought upon Jesus' death, and then lifted him up to Himself; some say that he is alive with God, which, as I see, should not be a cause of confusion, for God could have brought death upon him in earthly life, but he is alive with God, like the martyrs who die on earth but are alive with God. As for their way of life with Him, we have no knowledge about it, and likewise the way of life of Jesus."⁸

It is clear that the complexity of the Qur'ānic language and syntax, as well as the theological implications of taking sides in this debate, given the diversity of Muslim opinions on the issue, convinced Qutb to caution the Muslims against making any speculations about the details of Jesus's death. He makes these comments in connection with verses 3:55, 4:157–58, and 5:117:

Remember when God said: "O Jesus, I shall cause you to die (*mutawaffika*) and make you ascend to Me. I shall purify you from those who blasphemed . . ." (Q 3:55).

[A]nd their saying: "It is we who killed the Christ Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God" – they killed him not, nor did they crucify him, but so it

5 See W. Saleh, "The etymological fallacy and Quranic Studies: Muhammad, paradise, and Late Antiquity," in A. Neuwirth et al. (eds), *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 649–98.

6 Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilāl al-qur'ān*, Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1992, 1:403.

7 Qutb, *Fi zilāl al-qur'ān*, 2:802.

8 Ibid., 2:1001.

was made to appear to them (*shubbiha la-hum*). Those who disputed concerning him (*fihi*) are in doubt over the matter; they have no knowledge thereof but only follow conjecture. Assuredly (*yaqīnan*) they killed him not, but God raised him up to Him; and God is Almighty, All-Wise (Q 4:157–58).

I was a witness to them while I lived among them. But when You caused me to die (*tawaffaytani*), it was You Who kept watch over them. You are a witness over all things (Q 5:117).⁹

In verse 3:55, the difficulty is the combination of the phrases "*mutawaffika*" and "make you ascend to Me," as witnessed by the debate in Islamic scholarship regarding their meaning.¹⁰ The exegetes offer various explanations for them; according to some, the Qur'ān means that God caused sleep to overcome Jesus and then raised him up to Himself – hence *mutawaffika* means "overcome by sleep." Others argue that both phrases refer to removing Jesus from this world to the next world without death. According to a third view, *mutawaffika* implies the future death of Jesus, and the words in verse 3:55 and their implications should not be understood to follow a proper chronological sequence; hence, God will first raise Jesus up to Paradise, and then He will bring him down to earth in the future, when he will die. According to a fourth view, however, the expressions refer to the physical death of Jesus and his subsequent resurrection from death by God, both events having occurred in the past.¹¹

The promoters of the first three positions articulated them in light of their belief that God would not or could not have let Jesus be killed by his enemies; the context of verses 4:157–58 indicates that the claim to have crucified and killed Jesus was made by a Jewish group (although it is not certain whether this refers to the time of Jesus or to a Jewish group making those claims at the time of Muhammad).¹² Therefore, in their efforts to explain away any possibility that God

9 Translation of the Qur'ān is based on T. Khalidi, *The Qur'an*, New York: Penguin Group, 2008. I have inserted the Arabic text in order to point to problematic language or important issues.

10 See the survey of Muslim exegetical sources in B.T. Lawson, "The crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an and Quranic commentary: A historical survey," *Bulletin of Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 10, 1991, 2, 34–62, and 10, 1991, 3, 6–40; and idem, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2009.

11 For these views and their promoters, see, for example: Ṭabarī (d. 310/922), *Jāmi' al-bayān fi ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Baydūn, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992, 3:288–90; Jishumī (d. 494/1101), *al-Taḥdhīb fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Ms. Ambrosiana Library/Milan, F184), f. 40a; and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn and Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992, 8:59–63.

12 It is possible, of course, that this could be a simple rhetorical statement, and that no group at the time of Muhammad actually made such a claim. It could also be the case, however, that the Qur'ān is engaging claims such as the one found in the *Talmud* (*Sanhedrin* 43a). See G. Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977, 171; and G.S. Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus," 257.

did not come to the rescue of Jesus, some Muslim exegetes maintained that God indeed prevented Jesus's death by interfering and lifting him up to Paradise. Moreover, the view that Jesus was removed from this world without physical death was justified on the basis of a prophetic *ḥadīth* that speaks of the return of Jesus at the End of Days to kill the Antichrist, after which he will die and be buried by the Muslims.¹³ Thus, there could not have been a past death, for no human can die twice (since God creates humans, causes them to die, then resurrects them; see Q 19:33). Jesus can die once, and his death is in the future.

But the *ḥadīth* in question belongs to anti-Christian polemical literature; it was supposedly uttered by Muḥammad when a Christian delegation from Najrān had an argument with him over the crucifixion of Jesus.¹⁴ The Prophet refuted them by pointing to the future return of Jesus. But clearly the alleged circumstances of this *ḥadīth* do not match the language of verses 4:157–58, the only place in the Qur'ān where the issue of Jesus's crucifixion is raised. Again, it is evident in these verses, as well as in the preceding ones, that the group which boasts about crucifying and killing Jesus is Jewish; at least the Qur'ānic reference is made to a Jewish group.¹⁵ It is impossible, therefore, to connect verses 4:157–58 with a discussion between Muḥammad and a Christian group; that would necessitate that such a Christian group identify themselves as "the killers of Jesus."

The adherents of the fourth view also maintain that God only rescued Jesus from crucifixion. Jesus died, but he did not die on the cross. Their interpretation is based on the common meaning of the expression "*mutawaffika*" (cause to die) and they hold that Jesus could only have ascended to heaven if he had first died and been resurrected. Yet they disagreed as to the nature of that resurrection: whether only in soul or both in soul and body.

There is, however, complete agreement in the denial of the crucifixion as occurring to Jesus, although Muslim exegetes have offered differing explanations of what actually happened. The most popular view is that God made someone else look like Jesus, and it was that person who was crucified (again, there is disagreement on the person's identity). Another, less popular explanation is that one of Jesus's disciples volunteered to be crucified in his place (and was transformed to look like Jesus).¹⁶ But even the most popular view had its share of problems, because according to some exegetes its theological implications were not tenable.

13 Examples of this eschatological *ḥadīth* as well as other narratives, attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions, about Jesus's career at the End of Days are listed by Ibn 'Asākir in his biography of Jesus. See S.A. Mourad, *Sīrat al-sayid al-masīḥ li-Ibn 'Asākir*, Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 1996, 230–84 (nos. 282–364).

14 See, for example, Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3:290. This episode is also reported on the authority of Ibn Ishāq in Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Saqqā et al., Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1990, 2:162–70; idem, *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. A. Guillaume, Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1967, 270–77.

15 The Qur'ānic term used is *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book), which in the context of the verses could only mean the Israelites/Jews.

16 For a range of these views, see Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 4:351–55; and Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:79–81.

The philosopher al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), for example, in his exegesis of the Qur'ān rejects the possibility that God could have made someone else look like Jesus, for that would inevitably lead to doubting the certainty of everything, including faith, for how can we be certain of anything if its reality can be different from its apparent manifestation?¹⁷

Returning to verses 4:157–58, it is notable that the emphasis throughout is on denying the claim that Jesus was killed, which is restated at the outset: "*and their saying: 'It is we who killed the Christ Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God.'*" This is followed by the denial of both the killing and the crucifying of Jesus: "*they killed him not, nor did they crucify him.*" The pair "kill/crucify" (*qatl/ṣalb*) occurs twice together in the Qur'ān: the first instance is here in verse 4:157; the second in verse 5:33, where it describes the fates of those who fight the Prophet Muḥammad, which include being killed or crucified. Clearly, then, Qur'ānic crucifixion (*ṣalb*) means "death by crucifixion."

Following the denial that Jesus was killed comes the explanation "*shubbiha la-hum.*" This expression means that something was made to appear to them that essentially was not true. It does not necessarily mean that someone was made to look like someone else, as it is commonly understood. The Qur'ān uses derivatives of the same root, *sh-b-h*, to indicate confusion and ambiguity, as in verse 3:7:

It is He Who sent down the Book upon you. In it are verses precise in meaning: these are the very heart of the Book. Others are ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*). Those in whose heart is waywardness pursue what is ambiguous therein (*mā tashābaha minhu*), seeking discord and seeking to unravel its interpretation. But none knows its interpretation save God.

It is obvious from Qur'ānic usage that the meaning of "*shubbiha la-hum*" is not restricted to visual confusion. It can also be applied to something that, if accepted in its literal aspect as true or correct, leads one into confusion and error. My view, then, is that *shubbiha la-hum* in verse 4:157 makes sense only if it refers either to the act (killing/crucifying) or to Jesus. It is absurd to assume that the expression indicates someone else who was made to look like Jesus and was crucified, for it clearly refers to someone or something that has already been mentioned in the verse, and here only the act (killing/crucifying) and Jesus are mentioned. And it is equally absurd to argue that Jesus was made to look like someone else. So we are left with two possible interpretations of *shubbiha la-hum* in this verse: the expression either denies the actuality of the act or denies that Jesus died as a consequence of his crucifixion.

Verse 4:157 continues: "*Those who disputed concerning him (fīhi) are in doubt over the matter; they have no knowledge thereof but only follow conjecture.*" Here too "*fīhi*" cannot be a reference to a person who was crucified in lieu of Jesus, for that actually makes the Qur'ān deny that someone else was crucified in place of

17 See Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:79.

Jesus. The only way that the rest of this part of verse 4:157 can be understood is as an added emphasis, namely that what appeared to them (those who claimed to have killed/crucified Jesus or those who believe that Jesus was killed/crucified) is a matter of false perception. This is all the more clear given what comes next: "Assuredly (yaqīnan) they killed him not, but God raised him up to Him; and God is Almighty, All-Wise." The Qur'ān is questioning the certainty (yaqīnan) of Jesus's death; there is no denial of the act of crucifixion here. This certainty is argued for on the basis of Jesus's resurrection: "God raised him up to Him." In other words, the import is that one might think Jesus was killed, but he was not, because he was resurrected from death, and he is alive with God. That is, for someone to be considered killed he must remain dead! Thus those who asserted that Jesus was killed by crucifixion, on the basis of what they saw, are indeed mistaken.

So I suggest the following translation for verses 4:157–58:

For their saying: "It is we who killed the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God." Nay, they did not kill him by crucifying him. They thought they did, and those who affirm that are uncertain; they have no knowledge about it except by speculation. In certainty they did not kill him because God raised him from death up to Him.

Further supporting this interpretation is the fact that the contrast of perception and certainty regarding someone being dead or alive is a theme that is raised several times in the Qur'ān. In addition to verses 4:157–58, it can be found in verse 3:169:

Do not imagine those killed in the path of God to be dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, enjoying his bounty.

It cannot be argued that the Qur'ān is saying that those who were killed fighting in the path of God did not die; the same case is also raised in verse 2:154. They did indeed die. But once they have been resurrected, it is no longer proper to refer to them as dead. Clearly the Qur'ān is cautioning against judging on the basis of apparent perceptions, which can be completely misleading; the misleading perception in this case is that someone is dead when he or she is alive in Paradise. It is evident, therefore, that verses 4:157–58 refute issues of apparent perception that are in reality false: those who think Jesus was killed by crucifixion are wrong, because he is alive in Paradise.

It is worth noting that the Qur'ānic expression *shubbiha la-hum* in relation to the crucifixion of Jesus cannot be a reference to the Docetic theology, as has been argued by some scholars.¹⁸ Docetism holds that Jesus was made to appear to his

18 See, for example, Michaud, *Jésus selon le Coran*, 68–71; Rizzardi, *Il problema della cristologia coranica*, 143; and C. Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus: die christologisch relevanten Texte des Korans*, Vienna: Herder, 1978, 435–36. See also the discussion in Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, 118–19; and Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus," 252–53.

followers in a human form but in reality was an illusion; the Qur'ānic Jesus is human in every form, however. References in Qur'ānic exegesis to explanations identifying the person who was crucified in place of Jesus are nothing more than attempts by Muslim scholars to explain verse 4:157 by drawing on Christian sources that were known to them. They do not reflect the Qur'ān's adoption of Docetic or Gnostic theology regarding the nature of Jesus.

The issue of Jesus's death is raised in two other verses in the Qur'ān. Besides verse 5:117, quoted earlier, it is referred to in verse 19:33, which reads,

Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die (*amūtu*), and the day I am resurrected, alive!

Unlike the earlier verses, 19:33 does not draw the attention of Muslim exegetes, even though it raises the issue of Jesus's death; most do not make the connection between the expression "*the day I die*" and the future coming of Jesus, although they tend to discuss the latter issue at length in connection with verse 3:55.¹⁹ But according to the early Muslim authority on monotheistic traditions Wāḥb b. Munabbih (d. ca. 110/728), here the Qur'ān is quoting Jesus informing his disciples that he is about to die and be resurrected.²⁰ Moreover, if one were to accept that the reference to Jesus's death is intended as a reference to its future occurrence, then this should similarly apply to the case of John the Baptist, about whom the Qur'ān similarly says in verse 19:15,

Peace be upon him the day he was born, the day he dies (*yamūtu*), and the day he is resurrected, alive!

Both verses use the imperfect tense with respect to the issue of death (*amūtu/yamūtu*); the first person singular in the verse referring to Jesus, and the third person singular in the verse referring to John. If the Qur'ān means that Jesus did not yet die, then John too did not die and is likewise waiting to die sometime in the future. But this is absurd. If John died in the past, then the imperfect tense does not refer to a future death; this is one of the many distinctive characteristics of Qur'ānic parlance.

One final point to add here is that verses 4:157–58 must be understood in their own context. After all, one of the principal issues raised in the preceding verses, which are the direct context for the two verses in question, is the Qur'ānic accusation in verse 4:155 against the Israelites/Jews for "*renouncing their covenant*," and "*killing prophets unjustly*." If Jesus did not die on the cross, then this accusation, which is presented as one of several transgressions against God actually committed by the Israelites/Jews, is oddly placed, especially given that the example of Jesus's death is the only death of a prophet discussed following the

19 See, for example, Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:340.

20 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:340.

accusation. The context of verses 4:157–58 therefore shows that the Qur'ān is not denying the actuality of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, but rather engaging their implications.

Conclusion

Reading verses 4:157–58 in light of their immediate context as well as verses 3:55, 5:117 and 19:33 leads us to the conclusion that the Qur'ān affirms Jesus's death on the cross, followed by his resurrection. Indeed, stories about and references to Jesus's physical death as an event that occurred in the past are found throughout Islamic scholarship, even in works by authors who affirmed otherwise. For instance, the chronicler and exegete Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) relates in his *History* that a group of people from Medina say that Jesus's grave is located on top of al-Jammā' mountain, south of Medina; strangely, this story dates Jesus's time on earth to the period when the Persians ruled western Arabia (fourth century BCE) since, as the story indicates, Jesus's tomb inscriptions were in old Persian.²¹ But irrespective of its apparent anachronicity, it is clear that 1) Ṭabarī obviously believes that Jesus did not die, as is attested in his exegesis of the Qur'ān,²² and 2) the report is not related on the authority of Christians or converts from Christianity, or for that matter the authority of Jews, but rather on the authority of a Muslim – a certain Ibn Sulaym al-Anṣārī al-Zuraqī – who must have lived in Medina shortly after the time of Muḥammad. In another instance, the Syrian mystic al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), contrasting *al-mawt al-ikhtiyārī* (facing death willingly) and *al-mawt al-iqṭirārī* (being taken by death), uses the example of Jesus as someone who readily gave himself to death.²³

I am not, however, arguing that most Muslims, especially exegetes, were incompetent, and that they could not determine the meaning of verses 4:157–58. I am not suggesting either that the text is simple. In my view, the reason this text has been misconstrued, despite the best efforts of scholars, is that the set of assumptions that were brought to bear on such issues in the Qur'ān made it inevitable that the meaning would be missed. The Qur'ān reflects the insistence of the early Muḥammad movement that the crucifixion of Jesus does not represent a defeat of God. In other words, this movement could not accept, as a matter of basic belief, that Jesus's career ended on the cross, with God unable to intervene. For what would that mean about God's commitment to protecting them? Thus they argue that God was the ultimate victor because He could do something those who crucified Jesus could not: He could annul Jesus's death by resurrecting him.

21 The tomb inscriptions read: "This is the grave of Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God to the people of this land." See Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M.J. De Goeje et al., Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901, 1:738–39; trans.: *The History of al-Tabarī*, vol. 4, trans. M. Perlmann, Albany: SUNY Press, 1987, 4:123–24. There is no doubt that, given what we know, this story is to be treated as a complete myth, with no historical basis whatsoever.

22 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3:289.

23 Al-Nābulusī, *Risālat al-tawḥīd*, ed. Muḥammad Shīkhānī, Damascus: Dār Qutayba, 1999, 111.

But the issue was so complicated that it was left at that level without further speculation or explanation. It was later Muslim exegetes who developed the theology of God's obligation to protect his prophets to the extent that there was no room in it for the acceptance of Jesus's dying on the cross. Hence God must have intervened to rescue him prior to that. The stories that describe God's intervention in the plot of the Israelites to kill Jesus, and describe who was made to be crucified in Jesus's place, merely reflect efforts on the part of these exegetes to come up with acceptable responses to a challenging issue. The stories that later exegetes and traditionalists report are theological speculations that make use of a large variety of known and conflicting narratives within the Christian tradition that deny the crucifixion of Jesus. After all, the Muslims were not the first, or the only, group to be puzzled by the theological implications of Jesus's crucifixion and death. That several early Christian groups (e.g. Gnostics) could not tolerate the reality of Jesus's crucifixion is a case in point: their belief could not stand if his crucifixion were not absolutely rejected. Indeed, one cannot emphasize enough that Christianity ultimately emerged out of the attempts to make sense of the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

Finally it is important to note that the use of verses 4:157–58 in anti-Christian polemics constrained the way Muslim scholars could interpret them. Once these verses were situated in polemic, their function became essentially to point to the error of Christian belief regarding the crucifixion of Jesus, and thus Muslim exegetes, operating within the parameters of the polemical contextualization of these verses, were simply unable to come to a different reading.

14 Early Christian Arabic texts

Evidence for non-'Uthmānic Qur'ān codices, or early approaches to the Qur'ān?¹

Clare Wilde

According to normative Islamic tradition, even though God's speech – God's word – is not constrained to the *muṣḥaf* (the ink and paper of the individual Qur'ān codices), or even to the discrete revelations to Muḥammad, the text of the Arabic Qur'ān – as opposed to earlier scriptures – is understood to preserve an uncorrupted form of revelation. This claim, however, has a number of nuances: it is not the vocalized (i.e. the consonantal Arabic containing the distinguishing "a", "i" or "u" vowel markers), nor even the fully elaborated consonantal script (in which, for example, "b", "t", "th", "n" and "y" are distinguished by the placement and number of dots above or below the basic letter form), but the base form of the Arabic script (*rasm*), with an accepted variety of reading traditions (*qirā'āt*), as collected, codified and distributed by the third caliph, 'Uthmān, that preserves the message revealed to Muḥammad through the agency of the angel Gabriel. While the orthography of, and discrepancies in, early Qur'ān manuscripts have been the subject of scholarly examination,² Alan Jones (among others) has argued convincingly³ that the earliest written forms of the Qur'ān served as an *aide memoire* for reciters of an already-memorized text; it was only when non-Arabic speakers came under Arab rule, and began to adopt Islam, that the highly elaborated form of the text (with all vowels and consonants clearly delineated) became necessary.

Although the so-called "'Uthmānic codex" is now understood to preserve the inimitable Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, should contemporary approaches to the Qur'ān be taken as representative of those of the early Muslim community? As, for much of the first five centuries after the death of the Prophet, Christians were a significant demographic in much of the Arabic-speaking,

Muslim-ruled world, and as Christian Arabic texts would not have been subject to the dictates of "normative" Islam, what might the various "approaches" to the Qur'ān found in Christian Arabic texts tell us of the variety and nature of such trends within contemporaneous Muslim communities?⁴

The Christian Arabic texts under examination here

Two Christian Arabic texts from the early Abbasid period are the focus of the current examination: a unique manuscript (Sinai Ar. 434) from the second/eighth to fourth/tenth centuries, attributed to an anonymous monk in Jerusalem,⁵ and Ignace Dick's edition of Theodore Abū Qurra's debate with Muslim notables in the *majlis* of al-Ma'mūn (r. 198/813–218/833).⁶ Despite the discrepancy in their tones and their estimations of "Islam," they each have as a premise communication between Christians and Muslims, and they each demonstrate an intimate knowledge of, and interest in, Christianity and Islam, on the part of the interlocutors, both Christian and Muslim.

Approaching the Qur'ān⁷

As with many pre-modern cultures, priority was given in Islamic tradition to memorization and recitation, rather than the "reading" of a written text – a trend that continues today, in "Qur'ān recitation contests" from the Arab heartlands of Islamic civilization to Southeast Asia. The Qur'ānic allusions to *dhikr* may reflect awareness of this emphasis on recitation and recollection of sacred texts in

1 My thanks to Gabriel Said Reynolds and the participants at the 2009 Notre Dame Qur'ān conference for their helpful comments on my paper. They are not, however, responsible for any mistakes contained herein.

2 For example, G. Puin's work on the Qur'ān manuscript cache uncovered in Ṣan'a', and D. Power's discussion of the term "*kalāla*" in Q 4:12, 176. See the *EQ* article of F. Déroche, "Manuscripts of the Qur'ān," 3:254–75, and D. Powers' "Inheritance," 2:518–26, for an introductory overview of these themes.

3 See his *EQ* article "Orality and writing in Arabia," 3:587–93.

4 For one example of the early interaction between Christian and Muslim theologians, see M. Cook, "The origins of *kalām*," *BSOAS* 43, 1980, 32–43, in whose opening sentence he asserts that it is "no secret" that "the dialectical technique of Muslim *kalām* is a borrowing from Christian theology." Cook purports to bring to "the notice of Islamicists a Syriac theological text which provides a sustained and close parallel to the dialectical style" of an anti-Qadarite tract ascribed to al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Ḥanafīyya.

5 R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes 750–1050*, Paris: Beauchesne, 1985, 38, dates the text to 780 CE (cf. R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it: A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997, 504–5). A ninth-century date is suggested by M. Swanson, "Beyond prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'ān in some early Arabic Christian apologies," *The Muslim World* 88, 1988, (297–319) 301, n. 25.

6 I. Dick (ed.), *La discussion d'Abū Qurra avec les ulémas musulmans devant le calife al-Ma'mūn*, Aleppo: n.p., 1999. Twenty-six manuscripts of the text, dating from the eighth/fourteenth to the thirteenth/nineteenth centuries, and in two recensions (Melkite and Jacobite), are known. For the manuscript history of the text and the larger genre of debate literature, see S. Griffith, "The monk in the emir's majlis: Reflections on a popular genre of Christian literary apologetics in Arabic in the early Islamic period," in H. Lazarus-Yafeh et al. (eds), *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999, (13–65) 38–39. On the historicity of the encounter between Abū Qurra and al-Ma'mūn, see idem, "Reflections on the biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, (143–70) 156–58.

7 See M. Sells' book of this title: *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999) for an overview of understandings of the Qur'ān in Islamic tradition.

Judeo-Christian communities,⁸ as does the following quotation from the anonymous monk of Sinai Ar. 434: "whoever does not read the revealed books of God will put forth out of ignorance what he does not know; but, for the intelligent, reasonable, cultured *ḥāfiẓ*, he will understand because I did not bring anything from my own intellect (*'aql*), but rather from the books of God (*kutub allāh*), my lord."⁹ Here, "*ḥāfiẓ*" indicates one who not only reads, but who has memorized – "preserved" – the sacred texts. While sources describe how, in the early Islamic period, both 'Alī and Mu'āwīya ordered troops to go into battle with Qur'āns on their spears to avert defeat¹⁰ (akin to Christian fighting under the sign of the cross since at least the time of Constantine), eventually the doctrines of the Qur'ān's inimitability and its "uncreated" nature would be elaborated, and upheld – even by caliphal edict.¹¹ And, much like classical Christian ceremony surrounding the consecrated host, the Eucharist, the Qur'ānic *muṣḥaf* – as the Word of God – would come to be handled with deep respect (for example, the Qur'ān should always be placed above, not below, other texts, and should be handled only by those in a state of ritual purity).¹²

While the normative Islamic understandings of the inimitability of the Arabic Qur'ān, and the "uncreatedness" of the Word of God, would generally accord a degree of respect both to the Qur'ān and to those who handled it (reading, memorizing, reciting, transcribing, interpreting, etc.), Islamic tradition would also permit flexibility in interpretive categories. The Qur'ān alludes to "clear" and "ambiguous" verses (e.g. Q 3:7), and "abrogated," "forgotten" or "substituted" verses (e.g. Q 2:106; 16:101), but it is up to the Qur'ānic reader to identify them.¹³

8 My thanks to S. Griffith for this distinction between later, Islamic usages of "*dhikr*" as "remembrance" of the names of God, for example, and the possible Qur'ānic use of the term as that which God sends down to Muhammad (Q 15:6, 9) – but also Q 16:43 and 21:7 as referencing Christians and Jews who were charged with "preserving" their sacred texts; for a recent discussion of this concept, see K. Mohammed, "The identity of the Qur'an's ahl al-dhikr," in A. Rippin and Kh. Mohammed (eds), *Coming to Terms with the Qur'an*, Islamic Publications International, 2008, 39–54.

9 Sinai Ar. 434, ff. 174v–175r.

10 'Alī at the Battle of the Camel; Mu'āwīya at Ṣiffin; see M. Dakake, "Ṣiffin," *EQ*, 5:1–2.

11 As with the caliph al-Qādir bi-llāh's edict, proclaimed by his son, the caliph al-Qā'im bi-Amr Allāh in 430/1039. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam fī ta'rikh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*. English translation in N. Calder, J. Mojaddedi and A. Rippin (eds and trans.), *Classical Islam: A sourcebook of religious literature*, London: Routledge, 2003, 159–62. "Know that the word of God is not created. He has spoken and revealed it to His messenger through the voice of Gabriel after Gabriel had heard it from Him and then repeated it to Muhammad. Muhammad then repeated it to his companions and his companions repeated it to the community. The repetition of the word of God by created beings does not make it created because that speech is in its essence still the speech of God and it is uncreated. So, in every situation, repeated or memorized or written or heard, it remains that way. Anybody who says it is created in any way is an unbeliever whose blood may be shed after he has been called on to repent [and refused]." Ibid., 160–61.

12 For further discussion, see W. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; idem and N. Kerami, "Recitation and aesthetic reception", in J. McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 115–43. See also K. O'Connor, "Popular and talismanic uses of the Qur'an," *EQ*, 4:163–82; N. Abū Zayd, "Everyday life, Qur'an in," *EQ*, 2:80–98.

13 On these themes, see Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's article in this collection.

The Qur'ān also affirms that God's eternal word is not to be understood as limited to the Arabic revelation to the prophet Muḥammad. Rather, this Qur'ān – the Arabic "recitation" or "reading" (a literal translation of "*qur'ān*") – confirms (and corrects) that which had come before, handed down by various communities (in the Qur'ān itself, particularly mentioned in this context are the Jews and the Christians of the Children of Israel).¹⁴ And, while the Arabic Qur'ān came to be deemed inimitable (*i'jāz*), uncreated (*qadīm*) and free from corruption (*tahrīf*, *tabdīl*, *taghyīr*), Islamic tradition would preserve accounts of the historical context¹⁵ of the revelation of this Arabic "recitation" (in the "occasions of revelation" *asbāb al-nuzūl*), as well as its later preservation by the early community, particularly in the accounts of the collection and codification of the *muṣḥaf* in the 'Uthmānic *rasm*. And, even with the eventual diffusion of the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, a variety of accepted reading variants (*qirā'āt*) thereof circulated.

"Codices" of the Qur'ān

With the widespread printing of the Cairo Edition of 1924 (based on a single reading tradition), it is fairly easy today to find a "standard" Arabic Qur'ān in any part of the world.¹⁶ But in what form was this text preserved in the early Islamic centuries, particularly before the solidification of the doctrines of its inimitability and uncreatedness, and by those familiar with Arabic? What were the understandings of the text that would be recited and venerated – and interpreted?

The "purity" of the preservation of the record of the revelation in the 'Uthmānic *rasm* has not been uncontested, even in Islamic tradition¹⁷ (accusations of omissions from, but not additions to, the original revelation received by Muḥammad include the account of a domesticated animal eating the preserved text of the "stoning verse" in 'Ā'isha's house).¹⁸ Christian texts from the Islamic world, as well as early Islamic historical narratives, have retained alternative accounts to that which became the normative Islamic tradition of the revelation (e.g. the Christian

14 On the Qur'ānic notion of "scripture", see D. Madigan, *The Qur'an's self-image: Writing and authority in Islam's scripture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

15 Distinctions akin to that in Christian tradition between God the Son – the Word of God – as the second person of the Trinity and its incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth – and, eventually, the Christian memories of Jesus and their understandings of the Son of God and the Word of God in Christological and Trinitarian language. See, e.g. R. Bauckman's *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999; J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

16 See M. Albin, "Printing of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 4:264–76; H. Bobzin, "Translations of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 5:340–58; F. Leemhuis, "Readings of the Qur'ān," *EQ*, 4:353–63.

17 Cf. e.g. H. Modarressi, "Early debates on the integrity of the Qur'ān," *SI* 77, 1993, 5–39.

18 See M. Cook, *The Koran. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 125. J. Burton (see his "Abrogation," *EQ*, 1:11–19), argues that the collection of the normative text actually occurred during the life of the Prophet, unlike J. Wansbrough (*Qur'anic Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), who places the text and its accompanying traditions in the "sectarian milieu" of second/eighth-century Abbasid Baghdad.

Bahīrā accounts),¹⁹ as well as of the collection and codification of the 'Uthmānic codex. And although there are, to date, no confirmed extant copies of non-'Uthmānic codices,²⁰ the memory of 'Uthmān's suppression of alternative codices is preserved in the historical record,²¹ perhaps as a precaution against the dangers of the "absolute" truth claims already inherent in monotheistic systems.²² Much like the details of many Christian heresies known to us only from the listings of heresiarchs (such as the *Panarion* of Epiphanius, c. 310–403 CE), the contents of the non-'Uthmānic codices are known through reports of later Islamic literature. As they would not have been subject to the dictates of normative Islam, might Christian Arabic texts provide a heretofore under-explored source of information about approaches to the Qur'ān, possibly including the continued circulation of non-'Uthmānic codices (or alternative "readings" of the 'Uthmānic *rasm*), well into the Abbasid period?

Early Christian Arabic texts and the Qur'ān

Christian Arabic texts that trace their provenance to al-Ma'mūn's reign (such as those of 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī²³ and Theodore Abū Qurra²⁴) are striking for the seemingly casual manner in which they deal with the Qur'ān. Al-Ma'mūn's reign is notable both for inter-confessional communications,²⁵ including the translation of Greek (and other) works into Arabic, as well as the institution of the *miḥna*, in which he required all public officials to profess the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān. Ultimately Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's position against the createdness of the Qur'ān would prevail in "normative" Islamic thought,²⁶ as would the idea that the Qur'ān and the prophetic *sunna* (rather than human logic alone) should suffice as guidance for the lives of later generations of Muslims. Still the position of the Mu'tazila, on the "createdness" of the Qur'ān, as well as the use of human logic in discerning God's will, would continue to inform later generations of Muslim scholars – as evidenced by

19 See the recent comprehensive study of B. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Leiden: Brill, 2009.

20 But cf. the argument of A. Mingana, "An ancient Syrian translation of the Qur'ān exhibiting new verses and variants," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9, 1925, 188–235.

21 Most famously the third/ninth-century account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, known in English translation as "The apology of al-Kindi." See N.A. Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim dialogue: A collection of documents from the first three Islamic centuries (632–900 AD)*, Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993, 355–545. On alternative accounts from Islamic tradition, see in particular C. Gilliot, "Creation of a fixed text," *EQ*, 41–57.

22 On "universalism" and monotheism, see the comments and note of J. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 7–8.

23 See above, n. 21.

24 Whose debate with Muslim notables in the *majlis* of al-Ma'mūn (in Dick's edition) is one of the texts discussed here. For bibliographic details see n. 6 above.

25 On the significance of this theme, see S.H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, ch. 4.

26 See e.g. al-Tabarī's accounts of the "trial" of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, C.E. Bosworth (trans.), *The History of al-Tabarī, XXXII*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987, 199–221.

caliphal edicts outlawing these very positions.²⁷ Similarly, laws would emerge banning Christians from "teaching the Qur'ān to their children" (although the exact time of the establishment of these laws is unclear).²⁸ Might early Christian Arabic texts shed light on the reasons behind either or both of these prohibitions?

In particular, might Christian Arab debate literature from al-Ma'mūn's reign provide evidence that the Mu'tazilite-influenced discussions "encouraged" by the *miḥna* influenced the interpretation of (and approaches to) the Qur'ān, not only on the question of its createdness, but also on the question of its transmission? 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, for example, provides a detailed and highly critical account of the formation of the 'Uthmānic *muṣṣhaf*, concluding: "You have read the Qur'ān and know how the material has been put together and the text corrupted, a sure sign that many hands had been busy on it, and that it has suffered additions and losses."²⁹ To what extent might other Christian Arab texts provide evidence to support such claims? For, alongside phrases that do match the codex known to us, and in addition to explicit polemics, appear paraphrasing of, or even misquotations from, the "Uthmānic codex" known today. What might we deduce/infer from these seemingly casual (or erroneous?) Christian Arabic handlings of the Qur'ān? Are they indicative of either textual or reading variations on the 'Uthmānic codex itself, or evidence for the persistent circulation of non-'Uthmānic codices? Or, as is argued here, does the primary significance of these seeming variant textual attestations lie in what they might tell us of the attitude towards the Qur'ān (in the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, or other codices) in the milieu in which Christians came to express themselves in Arabic? In particular, as evidenced by Christian Arabic discussions of the "books" of God, and their inclusion in this category of the Qur'ān itself, might the very concept of "scripture" in early Arabophone Islamic society have been more flexible than in later Christian or Muslim circles? Rather than assuming that Christians selectively read the sacred text of Islam to satisfy their own polemics, might Muslims themselves have been understanding the Qur'ān in a fashion more akin to traditional Christian approaches to the Bible (i.e. acknowledging the human element in the preservation of the Word of God) that lent itself to a charitable Christian approach to the text – even deeming it, albeit in a "corrupted" form, "of God"? But, before delving into Christian Arabic handling of the sacred text of Islam, some discussion of their uses of, and approaches to, their own scripture (the Bible) is in order.

Biblical variants?

One oft-repeated contrast between Christianity and Islam is the fixed – Arabic – "canon" of the Qur'ānic revelation, as compared to the widespread acceptance not only of numerous translations of the Bible, but the multiple forms in which the

27 See n. 11 above.

28 Cf. e.g. B. Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, NY: Harper Row, 1974, 1:235–6; 2:217–19.

29 Newman (ed.), "The Apology of al-Kindi," 458; see 455–60 for al-Kindi's discussion of the various versions of the Qur'ān.

Bible was recognized to have circulated. For Christian sects have not agreed as to the contents of their sacred text and have accepted multiple translations of the Bible into the languages of every nation as equally sacred representations of the Word of God. As noted above, the normative Islamic understanding of the Qur'ān is that one codex (the 'Uthmānic) preserves the revelation to Muḥammad – and, while translations are permissible for accessing the meaning of the text, devotional recitation should only be done in Arabic, the language of the revelation.³⁰ But, despite this traditional contrast of Christian and Muslim approaches to scripture, the seeming conflation of biblical passages with no clear attribution in our two Christian Arabic texts is still surprising.

For example, Abū Qurra relates that Christ had no need to pray because "the Prophet says that 'all the angels and the kings of the earth and its governors will bow down to him, and obey him, for he rules over all and his rule will neither end nor will it pass away.'"³¹ This resonates with Isaiah 9:6–7, Daniel 7:13–14, 1 Peter 3:21–22, and Psalm 72:10–11, but it is not an exact Biblical quotation. Similarly, Abū Qurra's discussion of the hardships of life under Islam appears to be a conflation of Hebrews 12:6 and Proverbs 3:11–12: "We, the people of the religion of Christianity, He put the lash of punishment upon us. That is a benefit for us, according to the reckoning of Solomon b. David: 'Whom the lord loves, he puts to the test; He disciplines the men with whom He is well pleased.'"³² Likewise, the anonymous monk states that "Isaiah the prophet said that 'the world will know God when the Messiah comes and the nations will be confused, believing in his coming'" – a paraphrase of Isaiah 9:6–7.³³

These few passages are put forth merely as a caution that an inability precisely to locate a passage identified as Qur'ānic by Christian Arab authors should not be taken as certain proof of (a) a careless quotation (intentional or otherwise) of the 'Uthmānic *rasm*, or (b) the existence of alternative readings not preserved in the normative Islamic tradition, or even (c) a non-'Uthmānic codex (if the testimony, for example, of Theodore's near contemporary, 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, is an accurate indication of the continued circulation of non-'Uthmānic codices). Thus, when there are similar difficulties in precisely locating Biblical and Qur'ānic passages (especially those whose supposed provenance is clearly indicated) found in Christian Arabic texts, might not we do well to focus on the seeming attitude, or approach, to "scripture" ("Word" and/or "book[s]" of God) on the part of Christians (and Muslims) as they came to write in Arabic, rather than, or in addition to, the possible form(s) in which the Qur'ān (or Bible) may have been circulating?

30 Discussions of linguistic excellence have, of course, not been absent from Christian discourse, from Isidore of Seville (d. 636 CE) to the *Apocalypse* of Samuel of Qalamun. See my "*Lingua sacra*?" Some reflections on Christian discussions of *faḍā'il al-suryāniyya* and *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*," in J.P. Monferrer Sala (ed.), *Eastern Crossroads: Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007, 61–82.

31 Abū Qurra, 121.

32 Ibid., 123.

33 Sinai Ar. 434, f. 175r.

For, had these Christian authors been fastidious in their citation of the Bible, their seemingly "loose" handling of the Qur'ān would likely indicate (a) disrespect for the Islamic text or (b) citation from an alternative version to the one transmitted to us today. As, however, the Christian authors (and/or their scribes) are seemingly as lax in their citations of the Bible as in their citations of the Qur'ān, speculations as to the form in which the sacred texts (Bible or Qur'ān) were known to our authors seem unlikely to yield certain results; these early Christian Arabic texts may, however, shed light on the approaches to "scripture." In other words, if early Arabophone Christians handled the Qur'ān with the same freedom with which they handled the Bible, might their writings suggest that the approach to scripture among both Christians and Muslims at the time was more flexible than is commonly understood?

Qur'ānic variants?

While many of the scriptural references in these works are easily located, a few examples will give a sense of the types of "discrepancies" from the received 'Uthmānic *rasm* that can be found in Christian Arabic usage of the Qur'ān.

- a. Sinai Ar. 434, f. 177r, ll. 3–5 cites the Qur'ānic report of the announcement to Zechariah of the glad tidings of a son with a conflated citation of Q 3:39 and 19:7, 13: *wa-qāla l-Qur'ān yā Zakariyyā inna Allāha mubashirruka bi-nabiyyin muṣaddiqin bi-kalimati llāhi wa-huwa fī baṭini ummihi taqīyyin wa-mīna l-ṣāliḥīn*³⁴ "And the Qur'ān says: 'O Zechariah, God is giving you the good news of a prophet [who will] confirm the Word of God while in his mother's womb, pious, and among the righteous;'" Q 3:39 has instead "God gives you good news [with a verb, not an active participle], of John, confirming a word from [min] God, noble, pure, a prophet, from among the righteous"; Q 19:7 has: "O Zechariah, Verily We give you good news of a youth whose name will be John . . ."; The description above of John as "pious" is connected to Q 19:13.
- b. Sinai Ar. 434, f. 176v, ll. 3–7 references the Qur'ānic allusions (Q 51:24; 15:51; 11:69–83) to Abraham's guests as proof of the Triune nature of God – changing the twofold Qur'ānic *salām* to *salām salām salām* thus using the Qur'ān to elaborate upon Christian usage of Genesis 18:2 as proof from the Torah of the Triune nature of God.
- c. Theodore and the anonymous monk include Qur'ānic attestations to Jesus's miracles, but paraphrase the Qur'ānic wording: "and in the Qur'ān is [mention of] reviving the dead, exorcising demons, curing the sick with a decisive command, without question . . . flight from a bird by blowing on it by power of

34 See the discussion of the variant Islamic readings of these verses in R. Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1993, 66–67.

his divinity.”³⁵ Abū Qurra: “Were he a man, one of Adam’s sons, he would not have worked the signs and wonders that he worked, enlivening the dead and other such things that it would take too long to put forth, with no helper nor assistant. Rather, it was by way of an effective command and a resolute statement. But he came to us as perfect man and perfect God”; cf. Q 5:110; 3:49).³⁶ Rather than contesting the details of the miracles ascribed to Jesus by the Qur’ān (e.g. the enlivening of a clay bird, which is not found in the – canonical – Christian accounts of Christ’s miracles), both Theodore and the anonymous monk, evoking the Qur’ānic description of God’s creation of Jesus (God need only say “*kun*” – be – and things “become”; cf. e.g. Q 3:47), insist that it was not by the permission of God (cf. Q 5:110) that Jesus performed his miracles, but because he was the incarnation of the divine, creative, word (especially cited in support of this claim is Q 4:171), that Christ was able to perform his miracles.

- d. Theodore cites Q 108 and 111 almost as if they had been read together: “If you knew the certain truth, you would know that your scripture is the one that is corrupted. . . . Tell me, O Muslim, whether you speak a lie against your Lord in that He says, ‘We have given you abundance [1], so pray to your Lord and slaughter [a sacrifice] [2]. The one who hates you is the one without offspring. [3]’ (Q 108:1–3) Tell me, O Muslim, who is this enemy, the one without offspring (*al-abtar*)? Also, where it says, ‘Perish the hands of Abū Lahab, and may he perish too. [1] May neither what he has nor what he has acquired enrich him. [2] . . . [3] His wife will be a carrier of firewood. [4] A rope of palm fiber will be upon her foot (*riḥl*), instead of the ‘Uthmānic “neck,” *jīd*). [5]’ (Q 111:1–5, with a variation in verse 5, and verse 3 omitted). This is something bearing no resemblance to inspiration and revelation. It is not true that your messenger said any of this. Rather, he said, ‘I was sent the Qur’ān confirming what came in the Gospel and the Torah.’ (cf. Q 3:3) And he also spoke of Muslim men and women, and of men and women believers (cf. Q 33:35). So tell me, O Muslim, who are the Muslims and who are the believers?”³⁷
- e. Throughout the account of the *majlis* session, Theodore uses Q 4:171’s designation of Jesus as a “word” and “spirit” from God to gloss Qur’ānic discussions of God’s creative “word” as “word and spirit.” E.g., seemingly referencing Q 10:82 and 8:7, Theodore states “Your own scripture says, ‘God

verifies the truth with His Word and His Spirit.’”³⁸ Is this an attempt to garner Qur’ānic testimony in support of Trinitarian theology, in response to Q 4:171’s exhortation to the “People of the Book” not to say “Three,” nor to “exceed the limits” in their religion?

- f. Abū Qurra relates, “He was before all creation. Creatures will perish; He will not perish” (cf. Q 55:26–27; 28:88).³⁹ Again, the sense parallels Qur’ānic sentiment, but the wording does not (Theodore’s text uses *tabīd*/*yabīd* – rather than the ‘Uthmānic *fānin* of Q 55:26 or *hālik* of Q 28:88 – for “perish”).

None of these citations matches any of the recorded variants to the ‘Uthmānic codex. Are they mis-wordings, conflations or paraphrases of passages known from the ‘Uthmānic codex or quotations of an alternative Qur’ān codex known to our Christian authors? If the former, is the mis-wording (or re-wording, as verse-conflation or paraphrasing) intentional or unintentional? In some cases (as posited in ‘e’ above) the author means to make a “Qur’ānic” argument for the veracity of Christianity (a tactic seen later in the letter of Paul of Antioch).⁴⁰ But could these citations reflect only the works of individuals well-versed in both Bible and Qur’ān, living in a time and place in which Qur’ānic diction, phraseology and theology permeated and shaped the larger environment?

For one who has not committed the text to memory (i.e. is not a “*ḥāfiẓ* / *a*”), such “mis-wordings” – seeming conflations of verses, or word substitutions – are not surprising, especially when one is paraphrasing from memory – and/or attempting to convey the gist of a text, rather than to focus on the exact letters and wording of a given passage – particularly if Arabic is not the native language. Such a “loose” handling of the Arabic Qur’ān would be of particular interest in the light of the eventual Islamic insistence on precise Qur’ānic citations – out of respect for the eternal and inimitable Word of God.

Now we might imagine that the temptation to “correct” the Qur’ān to accord with Christian theological understandings often proved too strong to resist and accordingly mistrust Christian readings of Qur’ānic passages dealing with Trinitarian or Incarnational themes. This concern, however, would not apply to Christian citations of Qur’ānic verses (e.g. Q 108 and 111, above, and the “mysterious letters,” below) that do not touch on Christian themes; such citations may provide hints on the nature or contents of the Qur’ān known to early Arabophone Christians. Yet any comprehensive evaluation of such “discrepancies” would necessitate thorough perusal of all available manuscripts with this matter in mind, a task yet to be achieved.

35 Sinai Ar. 434, f. 177v, ll 6–9.

36 Abū Qurra, 82–83.

37 Abū Qurra, 108. On this see, C. Wilde, “The Qur’ān: Kalām Allāh or words of man? A case of tafsīr transcending Muslim-Christian communal borders,” *Parole de l’Orient* 32 (2007), 1–17.

38 Abū Qurra, 85. cf. Sinai Ar. 434, f. 179r, ll 4–6: *wa-qāla anna Allāha yuḥaqiqqu bi-kalimatī l-ḥaqq ay af’āl al-masīḥ kalimat Allāh hiya ḥaqqun muḥiqqun fa-lā yukadhdhibūna bi-hā wa-fi l-Qur’ān min hādha kathīr mā bi-ḥāja ilayhi idh anta ta’arrifuhu* – “and God verifies with the word of the truth – that is, the deeds of the Messiah, the Word of God. It [the Word] is the verifying truth, and he does not lie with it, and in the Qur’ān are many such proofs if you only knew.”

39 Abū Qurra, 102.

40 P. Khoury (ed. and trans.), *Paul d’Antioche: Évêque melkite de Sidon (XIIe s.)*, Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique Beyrouth, 1965, par. 45. See also D. Thomas and R. Ebied’s recent publication of a parallel text: *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The letter from the people of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī’s response*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Recitation or codex – Qur'ān or Kitāb?

It should be noted that these scriptural allusions are found in texts whose Christian authors seem willing to term the Qur'ān as "word/speech of God" (*kalimat Allāh*) or among the books of God (*kutub Allāh*),⁴¹ or even "heavenly books" (*al-kutub al-samawiyya*) – as in Theodore's phrase, "the Torah, *Injīl* and other heavenly books."⁴² What is to be understood by this designation is difficult, however, to make precise: the anonymous monk of Sinai Ar. 434 appears willing to include the Qur'ān among the books of God. But, while he speaks of the *Injīl*⁴³ (or the Messiah's book),⁴⁴ *Tawrā*⁴⁵ ("Torah"), *Zabūr*⁴⁶ ("Psalms"), or even the *Anbiyā*⁴⁷ ("Prophets") without any further qualification, he also terms the Qur'ān "your book" or "your Qur'ān."⁴⁸ For his part Theodore does not speak of the Qur'ān among the "books of God;" rather, he vigorously defends the Christian Bible against charges of corruption (*tabdīl* or *tahrīf*)⁴⁹ by accusing the Muslim community of falsely attributing to Muḥammad, even in the revelation, deeds and words that were not his. When Theodore does not speak of simply "the Qur'ān,"⁵⁰ he refers to it as "your book,"⁵¹ "your Qur'ān,"⁵² or "your saying,"⁵³ and Muḥammad as "your messenger/prophet"⁵⁴ – and, once, "the messenger."⁵⁵ (He also speaks of "your religion."⁵⁶) Additionally, he explains that Muḥammad, not God, wrote or proclaimed the Qur'ān.⁵⁷ But Theodore attributes to God Qur'ānic phrases which he argues have a Christian meaning.⁵⁸

The mysterious letters

Certain discussions of the Islamic understanding of the Qur'ān's revelation (in Islamic and more recent western scholarship) center on the so-called "mysterious"

or "disconnected" letters that begin a number of Sūras – such as *a.l.m.* at the beginning of *al-Baqara* (Q 2, "The Cow"). They have prompted a number of questions for Muslims: Were these part of the original revelation? The original recitation? Were they later (scribal?) additions? Are they to be included in the recitation of the Qur'ān?

Christians too entered into this discussion. After a detailed discussion of Jesus's miracles, the anonymous monk of Jerusalem writes:

And the book of the *Injīl* mentions some of his miracles (*āyāt*) out of very many. And the Qur'ān testifies to that, when it says, *Al-mīm*. That book in which there is no doubt, a guide to the pious. And *al-mīm* is the beginning of the name "the (al-) Messiah"; the ancient book which he had is that Christian book (*al-kitāb al-qadīm la-qad lahu dhālika l-kitāb al-masīhī*), and his book, in which there is no doubt, is a guidance for the pious, his *umma* and whosoever obeys him – and it said that God would verify with his Word the truth [cf. Q 10:82; 8:7], that is, the deeds of the Messiah, the Word of God – [the Word] is the verifying truth, so do not deny [the Word].⁵⁹

In the received Qur'ānic codex, the three Arabic letters, *alif*, *lām*, *mīm* are written separately. Muslim reciters generally pronounce the names (not the sounds) of the letters. The monk, however, connects the letters *alif* and *lām* to the *mīm*, and writes out the name of this last letter. He reads the *alif-lām* combination as the definite article, *al*. Thus, in the reading of the monk, *alif*, *lām*, *mīm* is rendered *al-mīm* (the *mīm*). Does this indicate that he knew of a recitation (tradition?) in which the so-called "disconnected" letters were pronounced as a word of sorts? Does it indicate knowledge of a scribal tradition, in which the "mysterious" beginning letters were written in a connected fashion (but, presumably, recited as separate entities)? Or is he simply relating (and emphasizing) a Christian interpretive tradition:⁶⁰ that these three letters are merely an abbreviation for the Qur'ānic (and Christian) title of Jesus, "*al-Masīh*" (the Messiah)?

Concluding remarks

Although Muslim approaches to the Qur'ān are often considered more analogous to Christian approaches to the Eucharist than to the Bible, has this always been the case? In scholarly or apologetic or polemical works, how would the Bible or Qur'ān have been used? Would an author (or the scribe) of a given text consistently have taken the time to copy the sacred text verbatim, or would he have been content to rely on his memory – or would he have presumed sufficient familiarity with the text or its message on the part of his audience (as well as a certain level

41 Sinai Ar. 434, ff. 171r; 181v; 174r: *kutub Allāh ta'ālā*; 175r: *kutub Allāh al-munazzala*, *kutub Allāh rabbi*. Theodore's only reference to "books of God" (Abū Qurra, 98) seems to include only the Gospels.

42 Abū Qurra (ed. Dick), *Discussion*, 102.

43 e.g. *ibid.*, 177r, 178v, 181r.

44 e.g. *ibid.*, 178v.

45 e.g. *ibid.*, 172v, 173r, 173v.

46 Sinai Ar. 434, ff. 173r.

47 *Ibid.*, 173r, 176v, 181r.

48 *Ibid.*, 174v, 178v: "your Qur'ān"; 177r, 177v, 181r.

49 *Ibid.*, 91, 109.

50 *Ibid.*, 80, 96.

51 *Ibid.*, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 93, 96, 97, 99, 101, 107, 108, 111, 114, 115.

52 *Ibid.*, 96, 121.

53 *Ibid.*, 83, 84, 98.

54 *Ibid.*, 74, 77, 79, 80, 84, 85, 87, 91, 93, 101, 107, 108, 115, 117.

55 *Ibid.*, 109.

56 *Ibid.*, 91.

57 *Ibid.*, 79, 80, 87; cf. 91.

58 *Ibid.*, 90, 101.

59 Sinai Ar. 434 ff. 178v–79r.

60 Known also to Paul of Antioch (par. 16).

of comfort with scriptural shorthand), that paraphrase or allusion would suffice? Christian Arabic uses of the Qur'ān may be seen not merely as Christian re-readings or testimonies to alternative Qur'ānic codices, but rather as indicative of the pluralistic milieu in which the doctrine of the Qur'ān as inimitable and *qadīm* was coming to be articulated. The accusations of alteration, and the familiarity – and comfort – with which Christians handle both the Bible and the Qur'ān indicate an environment in which the Qur'ān as the inimitable and uncreated Word of God – as preserved in the 'Uthmānic *rasm* known to us – may not have been the only accepted understanding.

An argument may very well be made that Christians would have handled Islamic texts as Christian texts, so the loose handling of Bible and Qur'ān by Arabophone Christians would be irrelevant for Muslim approaches to scripture. But, today, many non-Muslim scholars of the Qur'ān, aware of the widespread acceptance of the inimitability (and uncreatedness) of the Arabic Qur'ān, only venture to discuss the sacred text of Islam in public if they have a solid grasp of the Arabic text, fully vocalized – and, oftentimes, memorized. Rather than anachronistically reading back in time the details of the attitudes of today, might we safely assume that, just as today's non-Muslim scholarship often reflects contemporary Muslim sensibilities, so, too, would early Arabophone Christian authors have been aware of – and reflected – their Muslim contemporaries' approaches to the Qur'ān?

The Qur'ān, according to the traditional understanding, alludes to its inimitable style (famously cited is Q 17:88; cf. also Q 2:23; 10:37–38; 11:13; 12:111; 52:33–34) and Muslims and non-Muslims have debated these claims at length.⁶¹ And it would only be when the doctrine of Qur'ānic inimitability was fully voiced that attention would need to be devoted to the text *qua* text. At that point, discrepancies in codices (and readings) would merit close attention: without a single, uniform text on hand, how could an argument for its inimitable style be maintained? As, within Muslim circles, given the state monopoly on the scribal profession,⁶² uniformity of officially produced and commissioned written texts would likely have been fairly easy to assure, might Christian texts, even those not dedicated to the preservation of the text of the Qur'ān, contain hints of a more flexible scribal approach to the Qur'ān than that which a doctrine of its inimitability would come to necessitate?

The (accepted) variant readings have been considered evidence for ancient, local traditions of Qur'ān transmission (oral traditions likely proving more difficult to outlaw, suppress or purge than written ones) – traditions that, with the increased modern reliance on the printing press, and the widespread diffusion of the Cairo edition of 1924, are slowly fading from memory. Might Christian Arabic

texts shed light not only on scribal traditions (including the circulation of codices other than the 'Uthmānic), but also, perhaps, no-longer-extant "readings" of the 'Uthmānic codex?

In conclusion, therefore, when considering these possibilities it is important to remember that Christian Arabic texts were written by professing Christians conscious of the Arabic-speaking, Muslim-ruled world around them. They wrote in a historical context where the *majlis*, or *ḍiḥwān*, brought different believers together. Accordingly Christian Arab texts may tell us much of the approaches to Christian and Islamic scripture in that context.

61 S. Stroumsa, "Signs of prophecy: the emergence and early development of a theme in Arabic theological literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 78, 1985, 101–14.

62 Cf. P. Heck, *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization: Qudāma b. Ja'far and His Kitāb al-Kharāj wa-Ṣinā'at al-Kitāba*, Leiden: Brill, 2002.

15 "Has God sent a mortal as a messenger?" (Q 17:95)

Messengers and angels in the Qur'ān

Gerald Hawting

Introduction

In several passages the Qur'ān tells us that God's messengers or apostles (*rusul Allāh*) were frequently rejected on the grounds that they were merely men or human beings (occasionally *rijāl* but more commonly *bashar*). Many of those Qur'ānic passages refer to messengers sent by God to earlier communities, but they clearly relate to the predicament of the messenger of the Qur'ān himself since some passages indicate that he was faced with the same argument. In response, God's messengers are presented as disavowing any claim to a superhuman status, sometimes expressed as a denial that they were angels (*malak*, pl. *malā'ika*).

In accordance with the idea behind the conference "The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context," this chapter attempts to relate this Qur'ānic material to ideas and speculations among monotheists before the rise of Islam about the relationship between messengers of God, angels, and other spiritual entities. My argument is that this Qur'ānic material is better understood in the context of those ideas and speculations than if it is read in the light of traditional Muslim commentaries.¹

According to traditional commentaries, the arguments of the Qur'ānic messenger were directed against idolaters and polytheists of a rather crude kind. The Qur'ān itself often refers to those people as *mushrikūn*, and traditional Muslim literature (*sīra*, *tafsīr* and other genres) presents them as the Arabs of Mecca and the surrounding regions, who worshipped numerous deities (including sometimes Allāh) in the form of statues, trees, stones and other objects, at a variety of places and sanctuaries (including the Ka'ba at Mecca).

I have argued elsewhere that what the Qur'ān actually says about the *mushrikūn* can only with difficulty be reconciled with the image of them presented in Muslim

tradition, and I suggested that their religion should be regarded as a form of monotheism that is criticized in the Qur'ān as indeed no better than idolatry, but should not be understood as idolatry in a literal sense. Rather, to the extent that terms associated with idolatry are used to attack their religion, the accusation should be understood as a polemical ploy, as it often has been in the history of monotheism.² To understand the Qur'ānic material in the milieu from which it originated it seems more profitable to relate it to the evidence we have for forms of the monotheistic tradition in the period of Late Antiquity preceding the rise of Islam.

This raises the question of where we should be focusing our attention. The Muslim traditional literature directs our gaze to the Hijāz, while our evidence for monotheism largely pertains to regions outside the Hijāz, and what we have that does appear to concern the Hijāz is difficult to verify or interpret. I shall not be concerned with that issue here, paying attention only to the question of the possible religious and intellectual background for what the Qur'ān presents as a dispute about whether a messenger must be an angel.

As will become evident, although it is not my intention directly to link the Qur'ānic material with any one particular sect, the evidence leads us in the direction of Gnostic-influenced Jewish-Christian groups. The expression Jewish Christianity (or Judaeo-Christianity)³ has been understood in various ways and applied to a number of different groups with variant ideas and practices. Here it is used loosely to refer to those combining some sort of acceptance of Jesus with adherence to some of the precepts of the Jewish law, or customs, like circumcision, considered by others to be Jewish. Gnostic is also a term used here in a rather general way. The aspects of Gnostic thought focused on here are ideas about representations of, or substitutes for, the supreme God as the active force in the creation of the material world and its functioning, and about prophets as embodiments of one of those representations or substitutes (not as human beings prophetically inspired merely from time to time). The route to salvation lies in the absolute acceptance of the truth of the prophet whose knowledge is unattainable by human effort. In the groups we shall refer to, those representations or substitutes are envisaged as spiritual entities of various sorts and often as angels.

The idea that Muḥammad, Islam and the Qur'ān may have been "influenced by" or "borrowed" ideas and material from such groups is, of course, not new. Following Wellhausen's discussion of reports that the earliest Muslims were called "Baptists" (*ṣābi'ūn*) by their enemies, Adolf von Harnack, Adolf Schlatter and Hans-Joachim Schoeps are probably the best known among those who have pointed out similarities between Jewish-Christian and Qur'ānic ideas relating to such things as Christology and prophetology. Arent J. Wensinck, although not referring specifically to Jewish Christianity, discussed several relevant concepts and the Jewish and Christian texts relating to them, while Martiniano P. Roncaglia

¹ I am grateful to Patricia Crone for the opportunity to discuss with her the text of her article, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the lesser Deities." *Arabica* 57, 2010, 151–200, which treats in detail the background to the religion of the *mushrikūn* in various types of paganism and monotheism in Late Antiquity, and includes a substantial discussion of the background to their imputed veneration of angels. While writing the article submitted here, I learned that she has also prepared an article on the same theme as mine ("Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God: the view of the Qur'ānic Pagans, in P. Townsend and M. Vidas (eds), *Revelation, Literature and Community in Late Antiquity*. Tübingen: Mohr and Siebeck, forthcoming 2011).

² G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

³ I use "Jewish-Christian" in preference to "Judaeo-Christian" since the latter expression often refers to ideas, beliefs, institutions, etc. that are common to Jews and Christians.

has discussed a number of elements in the Qur'ān that possibly reflect a Jewish Christian background.⁴

There are also two scholars who have referred in some detail to some of the material to be touched on in this chapter. In his *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glaube*, Tor Andrae discusses "Mohammed's doctrine of revelation," specifically the idea that the various scriptures are essentially the same although delivered in different forms to various peoples by the prophets sent to them. He argues that it owed much to Jewish-Christian ideas about prophets and Christ. In the relevant part of his book, Andrae adduces Ebion, Elxai, Mani and their ideas as the background from which Muḥammad developed his own about revelation and scripture. Andrae is concerned with tracing the origins and development of Muḥammad's ideas, and he does not refer specifically to the Qur'ānic verses that this chapter tries to explain.⁵ Furthermore, in this chapter I prefer a more uncommitted position regarding the identity of the Qur'ānic messenger and a view of the origins of the Qur'ān that is less dependent upon traditional ideas.

Günter Lüling, another scholar whose ideas closely relate to those of this paper, has considered some of the Qur'ānic material to be discussed here and has sought to relate it to Jewish-Christian ideas about Christ, prophets, messengers and angels as part of a much wider theory about the origins of Islam. With regard specifically to his treatment of the idea of messengers of God and angels in the Qur'ān, there is one important point of disagreement between Lüling's understanding and that proposed here, but in many other ways his suggestions seem to me productive and valuable.⁶

The Qur'ānic material pertaining to angels and messengers

It is immediately notable that the relevant Qur'ānic passages consistently refer to messengers of God (*rusul Allāh*) and not to prophets (*anbiyā'*, *nabiyyīn*). Although

4 J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1897, 236–38; A. Schlatter, "Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam," *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin* 62, 1918, 251–64; A. von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmen-schichte*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1909, 529–38; H.-J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1949, 334–42; A.J. Wensinck, "Muhammad und die Propheten," *Acta Orientalia* 2, 1924, 168–98 (Eng. tr. in Uri Rubin (ed.), *The Life of Muḥammad*, Aldershot: Ashgate 1998, 319–43); M.P. Roncaglia, "Éléments Ébionites et Elksaïtes dans le Coran," *Proche Orient Chrétien*, 1971, 101–26.

5 T. Andrae, *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glauben*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1932; cited here from the English translation of T. Menzel: *Mohammed, the Man and His Faith*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1936, 94–113. Andrae's comparison of Jewish-Christian and Qur'ānic ideas about the essential similarity of the message of the various prophets and the presence in all of the prophets of the same prophetic spirit has been stressed also by G. Lüling (see the following note) and more recently by F. de Blois, "Elchasai – Manes – Muḥammad," *Der Islam* 81, 2004, 31–48.

6 G. Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad. Ein Kritik am christlichen Abendland*, Erlangen: Lüling, 1981, esp. 23–89. I question, however, Lüling's acceptance of Mecca as the site of a significant Jewish-Christian community.

Muslim traditional and modern academic scholarship have frequently been concerned to suggest fine distinctions between the two concepts, messenger and prophet, it is clear that in Islamic discourse and in the Qur'ān there is a considerable area of overlap between them. Often the two terms are understood as virtual synonyms, and many prophets, including Muḥammad himself, are now called *rasūl Allāh*, now *nabī*. In the debate with which we are concerned, however, in the Qur'ān at least the issue is whether a messenger/apostle (of God) must be an angel, not whether a prophet must be one. We will return to this point.

Most passages that report the rejection of a messenger on the grounds that he was merely a human being refer to earlier generations to whom God had sent one: to the people of Noah, to those of 'Ād and Thamūd, to "the people of the thicket" (*aṣḥāb al-ayka*), and to those of the unnamed settlement (*qarya*) to whom God sent two messengers and then strengthened them with a third. Frequently we are told that those peoples rejected the messengers sent to them, saying, "You are only a human (*bashar*) like us." It seems obvious that those passages must reflect the situation of the Qur'ānic messenger himself.⁷

As for passages which make direct reference to him, the most notable is Qur'ān 17:90–95. This alludes to the demand, made by those to whom he had been sent, for a series of miraculous signs as proof of his claims to be God's messenger, and says that the only thing that prevented the people from believing when the guidance was sent to them was that they said, "Has God sent a human being as a messenger (*basharan rasūlan*)?" The passage implies that they expected a messenger to be an angel since the messenger of the Qur'ān is instructed to reply to them with God's words, "If there were angels walking peacefully on earth, We would indeed have sent down to them from heaven an angel as a messenger (*malakan rasūlan*)."

Sometimes the human nature of the messengers is graphically, and apparently distastefully, indicated by reference to their bodily needs: "What is it with this messenger who eats food and walks in the markets!" his opponents say of the Qur'ānic messenger (Q 25:7). The people to whom God sent a messenger following His destruction of Noah's generation rejected him because "He eats what you eat and drinks what you drink" (Q 23:33–34).

The mortality of the messenger is also an issue. At Qur'ān 21:8 God asserts the human nature of those He has sent as messengers by stressing that He has made them in a body that needed food and that they were not eternal (*mā kānū khālīdīna*). In another passage of the same Sūra (Q 21:34–5) He seems again concerned to refute the expectation that His messengers are immortal. He tells the Qur'ānic messenger that He had not granted any previous human being (*bashar*) immortality (*al-khuld*): "Should you die and they live for ever (*fa-hum al-khālīdīna*)? Every soul shall taste death (*kullu nafsīn dhā'iqatu l-mawt*)."⁸

7 See Qur'ān 11:27; 14:10; 23:24; 23:33–34; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 54: 24–25; 64:5–6.

8 This last phrase also occurs at Q 3:185, following a verse in which God reassures His messenger that, like him, previous messengers had been rejected.

It was indicated above that the opponents' contemptuous reference in Q 17:94 to the fact that the messenger was merely a human being elicited a response that implied that they expected a messenger to be an angel. There are several other passages where the same contrast is set up. At Q 6:50, following a verse that assures him that "those who deny Our signs" will be punished, the messenger of the Qur'ān is commanded to say, "I do not tell you that I have the treasures of God with me, that I know the unknown, or that I am an angel. I merely follow what has been revealed to me (*yūhā ilayya*)."⁹ The implication is that his opponents have rejected him because, as a mere human, he is unable to meet their demands for miraculous signs to support his claims to be a messenger of God, and that they expected God's messengers to be angels. Elsewhere, Noah responds to the objection made by the council (*al-mala'*) of the unbelievers among his people that "we do not consider you anything but a human like us" (Q 11:27) with exactly the same formula: "I do not tell you that I have the treasures of God with me, that I know the unknown, or that I am an angel." (Q 11:31)

It is notable that the phrase, "I do not tell you that I am an angel," never seems to be a direct response to an explicit statement, "You are not an angel." That latter phrase is never attributed to the opponents, but that they do in fact think God's messengers must be angels is implied in three verses that use related but slightly variant formulations. At Q 11:12, they are reported as saying, "If only a treasure had been sent down upon him or an angel had come with him (*jā'a ma'ahu malak*)."⁹ Again at Q 25:7, following their assertion of the Qur'ānic messenger's merely human status ("he eats food and walks in the markets"), the opponents say, "If only an angel had been sent down to him (*unzila ilayhi malak*) and he (the self-proclaimed Qur'ānic messenger) would be a warner with him (the angel)." At Q 6:8 we are told that they said, "If only an angel had been sent down upon him (*unzila 'alayhi malak*)."¹⁰

Sometimes God or His messenger responds by explaining why an angel has not been sent. In response to the just cited words of the opponents at Q 6:8 God says, "If We had sent down an angel, the matter would be decided and then no delay would be granted them, and if We had made him an angel, We would have made him a man and We would have confused them even more (*law anzalnā malakan la-quḍiya l-amru thumma lā yunẓarūna wa-law ja'alnāhu malakan la-ja'alnāhu rajulan wa-la-labasnā 'alayhim mā yalbisūna*)."¹¹ That appears to mean that the

sending down of angels indicates the imminence of the Last Judgment, and that if angels were to walk on earth they would be indistinguishable from men. Similar ideas and phrases occur in other places. At Q 2:210 it is asked if the unbelievers will wait (*yanẓurūna*) until God comes to them in dark clouds with angels (*wa-quḍiya l-amr*); at Q 15:8, responding to the opponents' demand that the messenger should bring them angels as proof of his authenticity, God says that He does not send the angels unless with the truth (*illā bi-l-ḥaqq*) and in that case the unbelievers would have no respite (*wa-mā kānū idhan munẓarīna*).¹¹

At Q 17:95, however, in response to the demand of the unbelievers that he bring them God and the angels as proof of his claims (*aw ta'tiya billāhi wa-l-malā'ika qabīlan*), the Qur'ānic messenger is commanded by God to say, "If there were angels walking on earth in security, then We should have sent down upon them from the heavens an angel as a messenger (*law kāna fī l-arḍi malā'ikatun yamshūna muṭma'imīna la-nazzalnā 'alayhim mina l-samā'i malakan rasūlan*)."¹² In other words, God has sent a human being as His messenger and not an angel because angels do not routinely inhabit this world.

In such passages referring to the words of the opponents it seems possible to distinguish two different, although related, motives for their demand for angels to come down. In some cases they are saying that the self-proclaimed messenger of God should produce angels (together with God himself according to Q 17:92) as one of the miraculous signs that would convince them that his claims to be a messenger (and for them, therefore, also to be an angel) were authentic (although, of course, the Qur'ān insists that nothing would in fact convince them of that).¹² In others they are stipulating that an angel should come down with, to or upon him and without that he is merely an ordinary man. The sense is not obvious, but what seems to be implied is that the coming of the angel to him would transform him.

On the face of it, then, the passages referred to reflect a situation in which the Qur'ānic messenger is rejected by his opponents because of his merely human status: he cannot be a messenger of God because he is clearly only a human being. His replies both indicate a positive assertion of his humanity – that being a human is not merely no obstacle to being a messenger of God, but it is a necessary condition¹³ – and imply that the opponents expect a messenger to be an angel.

Before discussing the sort of historical and intellectual context in which such an argument would make sense we need to consider further the Qur'ānic material pertaining to angels, including the ideas of the opponents of its messenger. Much of what we are told about angels in the Qur'ān seems familiar and traditional.

9 The verse continues with the phrase, "You are only a warner (*nadhīr*)."⁹ This is generally understood as God addressing the Prophet rather than as a continuation of the words of the opponents. The change of person in the pronoun might support that understanding, but comparison with Q 25:7 would support the view that it is a continuation of the words of the opponents, perhaps suggesting that they would be prepared to accept a human as a warner but not as a messenger.

10 It is worth pointing out that the Qur'ānic messenger does not respond by saying that an angel had indeed come down to him. In view of the common understanding that Q 2:97 identifies Gabriel as the one who brought the revelation, and of the prominence in Muslim tradition of the idea of Gabriel as the intermediary who brought the Qur'ān to Muḥammad, it is remarkable that he does not do so.

11 Cf. also Q 25:22–25: "The day when they see the angels . . . the day when the heavens shall be torn asunder and the angels shall be sent down."

12 E.g., Qur'ān 15:14–15: "Even if We were to open for them a gate of the heavens and they would not cease to go up through it, they would say, 'Our eyes have been intoxicated – indeed we are a people bewitched.'"

13 The explanations given of why God had not sent an angel as His messenger (e.g. that the coming down of angels portends the end of the world) suggest that the Qur'ānic argument is that a messenger *must* be a human.

Angels act as messengers of God, they support the divine throne and praise God without cease, they protect nations and individuals, they guard hell, call the soul from the body when the time arrives, they record God's decrees, etc. Other ideas relating to them, however, appear less usual.

As well as expecting messengers of God to be angels, the Qur'ān tells us that those opponents whom it consistently calls *mushrikūn* thought that angels could intercede for them with God, that they regarded angels as God's offspring, and in effect that they worshipped angels as gods. The Qur'ān tells us in some passages that the opponents regarded the angels as daughters of God and gave them female names. The Qur'ānic messenger's accusation that the opponents were no better than idolaters is based at least in part on the idea that their veneration of angels was incompatible with pure monotheism (*ikhlas*), even if Qur'ānic cosmology also grants a prominent place and extensive sphere of activity to angels.¹⁴

Furthermore, any discussion of angels in the Qur'ān needs to take into account also other spiritual entities, prominent among them the spirit (*rūh*) and the holy spirit (*rūh al-qudus*). These are mentioned in the Qur'ān in ways that suggest a connection with angels, a connection that is evident too in some Jewish and Christian texts from before Islam. As O'Shaughnessy in particular has shown, the pneumatology of the Qur'ān is not consistent and is often obscure.¹⁵ Sometimes the spirit is mentioned in tandem with the angels in a way that suggests that it is different from them but related to them, perhaps a superior type of angel. In other places the spirit seems almost to be assimilated to the idea of an angel. The most obvious example of that is when one compares Q 2:97 and 16:102, which, in broadly parallel words, seem to be concerned with the source of the revelation: the former refers to Gabriel as the one who "brings it down", the latter to the holy spirit.

In allusions to Jesus and to Mary's conception of him, the idea of the spirit again appears in a variety of ways that suggest a connection with or even assimilation to that of an angel. In what must be a reference to the story of Gabriel being sent to Mary by God to announce her pregnancy, Gabriel is unnamed but described as God's spirit in the form of a man (Q 19:16–33). Elsewhere in the Qur'ān the conception of Jesus is described as resulting from the infusion of God's spirit into Mary in a way similar to that in which it had been breathed into Adam, and Jesus, the second Adam, is himself referred to as a spirit from God (Q 21:91; 66:12; 4:171). At Qur'ān 3:45 Jesus is identified as one of those "drawn close" (*al-muqarrabūn*; scil. to the throne of God) while Q 4:172 tells us that both Jesus

(*al-masīh*) and the angels drawn close (*al-malā'ika al-muqarrabūna*) are servants of God.¹⁶

Another Qur'ānic concept that needs to be mentioned in this connection is that of the *amr*, which is often referred to in tandem with the spirit. Again, as O'Shaughnessy has demonstrated, the idea of the *amr* is often vague, but it seems on occasion to represent a personified spiritual power through which God works in the world. O'Shaughnessy himself suggests that we could understand the *amr*, in some passages at least, as an Arabic form of the Aramaic *memra*, an expression frequently used in the Targums and Rabbinic texts as a substitute for terms referring to God, or for a messenger of God.¹⁷

The context of the Qur'ānic argument: angels as God's substitutes and hypostases

In the Qur'ānic view, therefore, other spiritual entities are associated with angels, and sometimes referred to in ways that suggest they were envisaged as a sort of superior angel. As O'Shaughnessy has suggested in his investigation of the concept of spirit in the Qur'ān, while one cannot usually show a direct contact or influence, it is nevertheless possible to point to a number of pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian texts and ideas that provide similarities and parallels.

We are faced here with notions that were developed significantly among Jews and Christians in the late pre-Christian and early Christian periods as a partial answer to the problem of how God operates in the world. These notions have been referred to as divine agency speculation, and they have been investigated especially with regard to how Christians came to venerate Jesus as divine.¹⁸ God was often understood to have worked through non-physical entities envisaged as subordinate to Him but at the same time regarded as representations of, or substitutes for, God. They were called by a variety of designations (word, wisdom, spirit, power, etc.), envisaged as spiritual or non-material entities, and frequently talked of in terms appropriate to angels. Some scholars have adopted the term "angelomorphic" as a way of talking of this phenomenon.¹⁹ In early Christian formulations of the Trinity both the second person (Christ, the Logos) and the

14 For general surveys of Qur'ānic angelology, see *El2* s.v. "Malā'ika" (D.B. MacDonald and W. Madelung), and *EQ* s.v. "Angel" (G. Webb). For the ideas of the *mushrikūn* about the angels' powers of intercession and their identification of them as female offspring of God, see Hawting, *Idolatry*, index, s.v. "angels, angel worship". Cf. too the article of Cronie referred to above.

15 T. O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1953.

16 The idea of "those drawn close" (to the throne or presence of God or a secular ruler) occurs in a number of Qur'ānic passages, the majority of which do not relate to the angels. For a discussion of them, and of the link made by some of the Muslim commentators between the *muqarrabūn* and the Biblical cherubim, see J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, London: Oxford University Press, 1977, 30–31.

17 O'Shaughnessy, *Spirit in the Koran*, 33–42.

18 L.W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, London: T&T Clark, 1998.

19 The term (théologie angélormorphique) appears to have been first used by J. Daniélou, *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme*, Tournai: Desclée, 1958, e.g. 179, and is now common currency in scholarly writing on Christology. B.B. Bucur uses the expression angelomorphic pneumatology in a number of articles and in the title of his *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, Leiden: Brill, 2009.

third person (the Holy Spirit) were often talked of using the language appropriate to angels, and in some Jewish groups a particular, named angel (Metatron, Yahael, etc.) came to be understood as God's equivalent or doppelganger. Among Jewish and Christian groups often described as Gnostic, the creation of the world is sometimes ascribed to one or more of these angels and thus God was removed from the creation of matter, which they regarded as evil.

It is in the context of these types of ideas, then, that Qur'anic material pertaining to angels should be placed. Specifically here, when the opponents of the messenger reject him because he is merely a human being, and bemoan the fact that an angel has not come with, to, or upon him, we should be aware not only of the extended concept of an angel but also of the application of the idea of angel to other spiritual entities such as the spirit and holy spirit, traditionally understood to be the entity that inspires the Prophet.²⁰

It is in the surviving evidence for Jewish Christianity that we find the strongest linking of the ideas of prophet, spirit and angel. That evidence naturally presents considerable problems of evaluation and interpretation. A large part of our information derives from heresiographers and historians of the Church who reflect "orthodox" viewpoints, the best known probably being the *Ecclesiastical History* (Panarion, "medicine chest"), or *Adversus Haereses* of Epiphanius (d. 403). Such sources sometimes supply quotations from texts attributed to the sect or sects under discussion, for example the so-called *Gospel of the Ebionites*. Anyone familiar with Islamic heresiography will be aware of the problems posed by such sources: not merely the hostile viewpoint, but also the copying of information from one author to another, the difficulty of ascertaining the sources of some crucial details, and the tendency among writers to reconcile, by various stratagems, inconsistent information from the texts available to them and sometimes from personal knowledge.²¹

There are, however, a few surviving texts that appear to reflect, in places at least, ideas accepted as those of Jewish-Christian circles. The most substantial are the so-called Pseudo-Clementine Literature (the *Homilies* and *Recognitions* attributed to Peter's successor as bishop of Rome), although the dating and composition history of such works, and the relationship between them, present further difficulties. Both the *Homilies* and the *Recognitions* are probably fourth-century elaborations of a third-century core text (often called the

Grundchrift and described as a romance or novel) that may itself have been compiled from earlier Jewish-Christian sources.²²

We are not concerned here with whether what we are told about the ideas of any particular sect is or is not accurate or true. The information provided by the heresiographers and other writers is significant for us as a body of concepts and beliefs known in the first four Christian centuries. Some of them may have been falsely ascribed to a particular group but there is evidence that they were common currency in Jewish-Christian and Gnostic circles and some are attested in the literature that comes from them.

It is chiefly in ideas about Jesus, prophecy and revelation that material relevant to the notions of the opponents of the messenger of the Qur'an appears. It is impossible to generalize about Jewish-Christian Christology, but Christ, called frequently the True Prophet in the *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, often is referred to as an angel or spirit.

The attribution by Epiphanius of three understandings of Christ among the Ebionites is perhaps not to be taken literally but will be a convenient starting point for the following discussion.

- a. Some identified him with Adam, created when God blew his breath (*epinoias*, not *pneuma*) into him.²³
- b. Others said he is from above, created first, a spirit (*pneuma*) above all the angels, lord of all [scil. of the angels], called Christ and chosen for all eternity; he entered into Adam (*en tōi Adam ēlithe*), has appeared in human form (clothed in a body: *endoumenos to sōma*) to various patriarchs, and finally came at the end of time clothed with the body of Adam to be crucified, raised up and to return on high.
- c. The third opinion is that the spirit who is Christ descended on Jesus.²⁴

The sources of this information are not obvious, but Epiphanius had access to some Jewish-Christian literature (all of which he assumed to be Ebionite) as well as the works of some of his predecessors.²⁵

The second position among the Ebionites recorded by Epiphanius identifies Christ as a spirit who rules the angels, a sort of archangel but greater: "He was not begotten by God the Father, but created like one of the archangels, being greater

20 In the work generally known as the *Ascension of Isaiah*, probably compiled in the form in which we know it in the second century and including material of both Jewish and Christian origin, the holy spirit is assimilated to Gabriel and referred to as the angel of the holy spirit (Daniélou, *Théologie*, 177–80). At one point (9:32) the text speaks of "the angel of the holy spirit who speaks in you (i.e. in Isaiah) and the other righteous men." Another second-century text, the Christian *Shepherd of Hermas*, refers – apparently uniquely in early Christian texts – to "the angel of the spirit of prophecy" (mandate 11, verse 9).

21 For an analysis of the evidence about Jewish Christianity to be found in Patristic writings, and a presentation of the relevant passages in their original languages and in English translation, see A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish Christian Sects*, Leiden: Brill 1973.

22 On the Pseudo-Clementines, see F.S. Jones, "Clementines, Pseudo-," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:1061–62, and idem, "The Pseudo-Clementines" in Jackson-McCabe (ed.), *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, 285–304. How far the *Homilies* and the *Recognitions* in the form in which we have them are Jewish-Christian documents is a disputed issue, but Jones argues that the *Grundchrift*, the so-called *Periodoi Petrou*, uses Jewish-Christian sources and reflects Jewish-Christian doctrines.

23 Cf. Q 3:59, which explicitly compares Jesus and Adam but refers to the creation of the latter from dust and the utterance of the divine fiat. Q 15:29 and 38:72, however, do allude to the creation of Adam when God breathed His spirit into him, while 21:91 and 66:12 talk of the conception of Jesus when God breathed His spirit into Mary, and 4:171 refers to Jesus as a spirit from God.

24 See the excerpt from the *Panarion* at Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 176–79.

25 Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 30–33.

than they. He rules over the angels and the beings created by God . . ." This relates to a slightly earlier passage where it is reported that the Ebionites denied that Christ was a man on the basis of the passage in Mark's gospel where Jesus refuses to respond to the pleas of his mother and brothers that he should come out to them: "Who are my mother and my brothers? Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother." The view of Christ as an archangel may also be documented in the *Recognitions*.²⁶

This likening of Christ to an angel, as already noted, was not confined to Jewish-Christian groups. Philo had developed the idea of the Logos as a sort of archangel, and we have already referred to the angelomorphic Christology of early Christians. One of the most striking expressions of the idea occurs in the anti-Gnostic apocryphal *Epistle of the Apostles*, which talks of Christ descending through the heavens in the form of an angel (in order to avoid recognition). In the *Epistle*, Christ himself takes the form of the angel Gabriel in the scene of the Annunciation to Mary and enters her womb: "I, the Word, went into her and became flesh." The Qur'ānic references to God sending His spirit to Mary in the form of a man and breathing His spirit into her to cause her to conceive (Q 19:16–33, 21:91 and 66:12) may have some relationship to this idea.²⁷

In the fourteenth chapter of his anti-Gnostic *De Carne Christi*, Tertullian (d. c. 220) refers to the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 9:5, "the angel of great counsel", and applies it, as is common in Christian exegesis, to Jesus.²⁸ Tertullian, however, is opposed to the teaching of anonymous opponents who apparently used that translation to support their view that Christ had put on the nature of an angel (*angelum gestavit Christus*),²⁹ and he insists that "angel" in the Greek version of Isaiah refers not to an angelic being but simply has its basic meaning (common to Greek *aggelos* and Hebrew *mal'āk*) of messenger. Jesus, argues Tertullian, could be called an angel in the sense that he was the messenger of God's salvation to mankind, but not an angel in form like Gabriel or Michael.

He then comments, "This view of the matter could have suited Ebion (*poterit haec opinio Ebioni convenire*),"³⁰ who determines that Jesus is a bare man

(*nudum hominem*), merely of the seed of David, and therefore not also the Son of God – though clearly more glorious than the prophets – so as to state that an angel was in him in the same way as in Zechariah, for example." Tertullian seems to imply here that Ebion supported his view that Christ was a man who had been possessed by, or vested as, an angel, by referring to the words of another prophet, Zechariah. In the Latin translation of the book of Zechariah used by Tertullian, that prophet talks of the "angel that spoke within me" (*dixit ad me angelus qui loquebatur in me*).³¹ Tertullian objects that those words were never used by Christ, nor was the more traditional prophetic formula, "Thus says the Lord." Instead Christ used the expression, "But I say unto you."³²

The view of Christ that Epiphanius attributed to the third group among the Ebionites is that Jesus was an ordinary man who was possessed by the spirit of Christ. This idea appears in various ways in different texts. It is associated with the baptism of Jesus when, according to the canonical Gospel of Matthew, the spirit of God was seen descending like a dove upon Jesus.³³ In some Gnostic and Jewish-Christian understandings this was the equivalent of the possession of Jesus by the spirit Christ. Irenaeus (d. 202) had already reported that Cerinthus (c. 100) regarded Jesus as an ordinary man, although more righteous, upon whom Christ descended in the form of a dove after his baptism. Only then did Jesus proclaim the "unknown Father" and perform miracles. But finally Christ "flew away again" from Jesus, who suffered and rose from the dead, while Christ did not suffer since he is a spiritual entity.³⁴

According to Epiphanius, the report of the baptism of Jesus in the so-called *Gospel of the Ebionites* conveys the same idea. He quotes that text to the effect that when Jesus was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and entered into Jesus. A voice from heaven was then heard to say, "You are my beloved son, and in you I am well pleased," and "This day have I begotten you."³⁵

26 Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30:14, 16, cited by J.K. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 15, and by Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 180–83. The passage from Mark is 3:31–35. For the *Recognitions*, see B. Rehm (ed.), *Die Pseudoklementinen II: Recognitionen in Rufins Übersetzung*, Berlin: Akademie, 1953, 5:42.5 (if "uni vero qui in archangelis erat maximus" refers to Christ).

27 For Philo's description of the Logos as "he who holds the eldership among the angels (*ton aggelōn presbytaton*), their ruler (*arkhaggelon*) as it were", see Philo, *De Confusione Linguarum*, Loeb 4:88–89. For the *Epistle of the Apostles*, see J.K. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, §14, 564–65. The translation here is from column b (the Ethiopic version), but it mirrors closely that in column a (the Coptic version).

28 Tertullian: *De Carne Christi*, ed. and trans. E. Evans, London: SPCK, 1956, 49–53.

29 Note that Islamic theology has the expression *taqmīṣ* (lit. "to dress, to wear") as an alternative to *tanāsukh* ("metempsychosis").

30 Tertullian seems to be the first to use the name Ebion for a person – previous sources talk only of Ebionites (*Ebiōnaioi*). It looks as if this is an example of the generation of an individual from the name of a sect, "the poor ones."

31 Zechariah 1:9, 14 (Tertullian and the Vulgate). The Hebrew *wa-yo'mer elay ha-mal'akh ha-dober bi* is generally translated "the angel who talked with me said to me," but the Septuagint has *eipen pros me ho aggelos ho lalōn en emoi*. Cf. the expression quoted from the *Ascension of Isaiah* in note 20 above.

32 Tertullian, *De Carne*, 49–53. Cf. the excerpt in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 108–09. Klijn and Reinink dispute that this passage means that Tertullian thought that Ebion considered Jesus to be an angel and think it merely indicates that, according to him, Ebion wanted to prove that Jesus was a prophet. The text is admittedly rather convoluted, but it seems to me that the understanding of Klijn and Reinink does not do justice to the full context. For us, though, the important point is not to decide exactly what Tertullian knew about the Ebionites but that he thought that some groups at least had the idea of Jesus as an ordinary man whose nature became changed when he was vested by an angel.

33 See, e.g., Matthew 3:16.

34 Irenaeus, *Contra omnes haereses libri quinque*, text and translation in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 102–05. The attribution of Irenaeus to Cerinthus is repeated by Hippolytus and Epiphanius, who in several places attributes the same idea to the Ebionites.

35 Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 15, citing Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.13. (See also Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 181.)

Inherent in all of the beliefs alluded to by Epiphanius is the idea, already mentioned, of a single spirit, Christ, that appeared in both Adam and Jesus and did not die. Hippolytus of Rome (d. c. 236) ascribes that understanding of Christ to a certain Alcibiades who had appeared in Rome, coming from Apamea in Syria with a book revealed by an angel of gigantic proportions.³⁶ That angel, according to Hippolytus, Alcibiades identified as the son of God who was accompanied by a female of similar dimensions whom he called the holy spirit. The book had been transmitted to Alcibiades from Elxai, the eponym of the Elkesaites, and the teaching of Alcibiades (presumably following the ideas of the book) was that "[Christ] was not at this time born for the first time of a virgin, but . . . having been previously born and being re-born, he thus appeared and exists, undergoing alterations of birth and moving from body to body." Unsurprisingly, Hippolytus labels the doctrine Pythagorean.³⁷

The idea is also attested in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*: "He (the man fashioned by the hands of God) alone has it (i.e. the holy spirit of Christ), who has changed his forms and his names from the beginning of the world, and so reappeared again and again in the world, until coming upon his own times, and being anointed with mercy for the works of God, he shall enjoy rest for ever."³⁸

To sum up, the evidence adduced here shows that ideas linking Jesus, prophecy, the spirit and angels were attributed to groups associated with Gnostic and Jewish-Christian views by the heresiographers and other "orthodox" writers. Those ideas are attested too in the pseudo-Clementine literature. Our argument is that the Qur'ānic evidence that its messenger was rejected because he was merely a human being, and that his opponents expected him either to be, or to be associated with, an angel, suggests that similar ideas about prophets, angels and spirits existed in the group or groups from which the relevant Qur'ānic passages come. Specifically, it suggests that the opponents of the Qur'ānic messenger held the idea that a messenger of God could not be a mere human being but must have been penetrated or possessed by a spirit of prophecy, envisaged like an angel, that had appeared in previous messengers. Against them, the Qur'ānic messenger asserts that not only he but those previous messengers also were merely human, even though the revelation had been brought by the spirit or angel named in Q 2:97 as Gabriel.

36 Cf. the details about the huge size of Gabriel in the accounts of Muḥammad's first revelation (e.g., Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1955, 1:237).

37 Hippolytus, *Refutatio* IX, 14.1 (= Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 116–17). Cf. the Muslim tradition according to which Muḥammad was already created while Adam was still between spirit and body (cited by Wensinck, "Muhammad und die Propheten," 185, from Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt*, Leiden: Brill, 1904–40, 1:95–96; English translation in U. Rubin (ed.), *Life of Muhammad*, 332; and by T. Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, 313 ff.

38 Pseudo-Clementine, *Homilies*, no. 3, ch. 20, cited from A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, American Reprint Revised by A. Cleveland Coxe, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951, reprint 1981 (originally printed, 1886). For the Greek text, see Rehm, *Die Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien*.

Messenger/apostle and prophet

We have noted that the Qur'ān always uses the word "messenger" or "apostle" (*rasūl*), and never "prophet" (*nabī*) in those passages that contrast *bashar* with *malak*. How far is that significant? Wensinck discussed the possible distinctions between the concept of messenger/apostle and that of prophet in the Qur'ān and Muslim tradition, and he traced the idea of the superiority of the apostle to the prophet (while maintaining a certain degree of content common to the two notions) to some early Christian literature. He noted the occurrence of the expression Messenger of God (*shlīḥā d-alāhā*) in Syriac and the application of the word *apostolos* to (for Christians) major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist, by Christian writers such as Origen and John Chrysostom. Furthermore, in the context of another discussion, Wensinck noted the conceptual overlap between both the Greek and Hebrew words for "angel" (*aggelos*, *mal'āk*), which have the more fundamental sense of messenger (the angel is a messenger of God), and the idea of the prophet as God's messenger (*rasūl*, *shlīḥā*, etc.).³⁹

How far this last point is relevant to the unwillingness of the Qur'ānic opponents to accept a mere human as a messenger is not clear. There are a few instances in the Qur'ān of words connected with the root *r-s-l* being used to refer to angels,⁴⁰ but the word *malak* always seems to indicate an angel (and never simply a human messenger).⁴¹ Apart from the expectation of the *mushrikūn* that a messenger of God must be an angel (*malak*), one does not get much sense of a confusion of the words for angel and messenger/apostle in the Qur'ān or in Arabic generally.

In the passages we are concerned with, therefore, messengers or apostles seem to be more prominent than prophets, and it may be significant that this was also a characteristic of Mani's ideas. Apparently echoing the elevation of the messenger/apostle above the prophet found in some early Christian texts,⁴² it seems that Mani did not refer to himself as a prophet but as a messenger/apostle. In Manichaeism the word prophet is usually applied to the elect of the community, the *electi*, rather than to Mani himself. That is part of Stroumsa's argument that the widely accepted

39 Wensinck, "Muhammad and the prophets," in U. Rubin (ed.), *Life of Muḥammad*, 321–24, 331–32.

40 Q 15:57; 51:31: Abraham's "guests", traditionally viewed as angels, are addressed as *ayyuhā l-mursalūna*. At Q 11:69 God refers to them as *rusulunā*, and again at 11:77. At Q 15:61 the same *mursalūna* who visited Abraham go to the people of Lot.

41 Cf. the ambiguity, e.g., of the citation in Matthew 11:10 of Malachi 3:1. In the gospel passage Jesus first refers to John the Baptist as a prophet and much more than a prophet, and then applies to him the passage from Malachi where God announces that He will send his messenger/angel (*mal'āk*) to clear the way before Him. In the gospel passage *mal'āk* is rendered by *aggelos*, but translations waver between words indicating "angel" and those indicating "messenger".

42 The best known is probably 1 Corinthians 12:28 ("first apostles, secondly prophets"). D. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983, 202, notes that "in many respects the NT apostle was the functional equivalent of the OT prophet." For a discussion that includes both texts where there is considerable overlap between the notions of *apostolos* and *prophētēs*, and those that place the former higher in the hierarchy, see G. Stroumsa, "Seal of the prophets," *JSAI* 7, 1986, (61–74) 72–73.

idea that Mani referred to himself as the "seal of the prophets" is likely to be relatively late and influenced by Islam rather than reflecting a title really used by Mani.⁴³ Mani grew up in a Jewish-Christian community and his ideas must to a large extent have been influenced by, positively or negatively, that community. We might envisage a similar formation for the Qur'ānic messenger.⁴⁴

Did the Qur'ānic messenger regard himself as an angel?

Lüling argued that Muḥammad lived in a Jewish-Christian community in Mecca and that his ideas about prophets and prophecy reflected those of his community. Lüling stressed, for example, what he understood as the occurrence of the concept of Jesus as an angel in certain Qur'ānic passages (sometimes amending the text or interpreting it in a way necessary to find that concept), and he linked the idea of a prophetic spirit locating itself in a succession of individual prophets in different generations with the *tanāsukh* belief of some of the *ghulāt* movements of early Islam. I shall not discuss here his readiness to locate this Jewish-Christian community in Mecca or his broader thesis that the understanding of Jesus within this community reflected the historical self-understanding of Jesus himself. One detail of Lüling's argument that does directly pertain to the Qur'ānic material discussed in this chapter, however, is his view that Muḥammad shared the ideas of his opponents and saw himself as an angel.

Expressions of the form "I do not tell you that I am an angel," according to Lüling, should be understood in a way opposite to their apparent sense, as in fact a statement of a claim to an angelic status. Lüling considers the words comparable with those of Jesus before the High Priest in Matthew 26:63 when asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" In some translations the answer Jesus gives is rendered, "It is as you say," whereas others interpret the Greek (understood to be reflecting an originally Aramaic formula) to mean, "It is you who say it (not I)." Lüling wishes to understand the Qur'ānic messenger's "I do not tell you that I am an angel" in the same vein: *I do not tell you that I am an angel, but it is the case. In spite of my apparent humanity, I am a messenger of a special essence, an angel-like being who journeys through the spheres of heaven. I concede that I cannot prove that, since angels do not wander around on earth on a daily basis unambiguously recognizable as angels.*⁴⁵

Lüling's understanding of the formula does not seem persuasive to me, and it is out of keeping with other material which, as has been shown, does not merely

43 Stroumsa, "Seal of the prophets," 70–74.

44 Mani's revelatory experience was associated with the appearance of his heavenly twin or *syzygos*, understood, according to the *De Fide* attributed to the friend and companion of Augustine, Bishop Evodius, as the Holy Spirit. Quispel has argued that this *syzygos* is a development of the angel of the holy spirit/spirit of prophecy that was referred to above. See G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy. The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999, 290 with references. For a comparative discussion of Manichaeism and Islam, see de Blois, "Elchasaï – Manes – Muḥammad."

45 Lüling, *Wiederentdeckung*, 82–83.

stress the humanity of the Qur'ānic messenger but appears to insist that a messenger of God must be a human being since angels, for one reason or another, are not ordinarily sent by God as messengers (in the sense that *rasūl Allāh* has in the Qur'ān) to mankind. Rather, the Qur'ān displays a messenger who in this, as in many other things, is opposed to the views and practices of the people he is concerned to win over. Again, it may be possible to envisage him, like Mani, dissatisfied with the religion of the community to which he belongs while at the same time accepting and sharing some of its ideas and beliefs.

Did Gnostic Jewish Christianity survive?

As stated at the beginning, it has not been my intention to relate the dispute alluded to in the Qur'ān about whether God's messengers must be angels or men to any one particular sect or group. I have had the more limited aim of arguing that the Qur'ānic material can be better understood if it is situated in the context of the sort of speculations and ideas referred to above. Nevertheless, the predominance of Gnostic-type ideas and of Jewish-Christian groups in the comparative material that has been adduced naturally raises the question of whether such groups continued to exist around the time when Islam began to emerge.

The survival of Jewish Christianity into Islamic times was the focus of a well-known, intense and at times polemical argument between Samuel Stern and Shlomo Pines in connection with the interpretation of material presented as a refutation of orthodox Christian beliefs in the *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa* of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025). Pines argued that 'Abd al-Jabbār used material derived from Jewish Christian sources and that a group or groups of them survived into Islamic times. Stern vehemently denied that and argued that 'Abd al-Jabbār's material against orthodox Christianity could mostly be accounted for as derived from Muslim sources with perhaps some influence from Jewish ones.⁴⁶

In subsequent scholarship the issue of 'Abd al-Jabbār's sources has continued to be discussed in connection with the question of the survival of Jewish Christianity into Islamic times or, to put the latter proposition somewhat differently, of how far Islam itself can be analyzed as a development that took place in a Jewish-Christian context. As Reynolds (who is critical of the views of Pines) has pointed out, even if some of 'Abd al-Jabbār's "Jewish-Christian" critique of Christianity echoes the Qur'ān and the works of other Muslim scholars, that merely raises the question of how the ideas involved came into the Qur'ān and Muslim tradition in the first place.⁴⁷ Another point at issue is whether we should envisage a survival of one or more of the pre-Islamic Jewish-Christian groups or rather the revival of Jewish-Christian ideas from time to time in different places. The development of forms of

46 On this debate see the discussion in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 1–17, where references are provided to the relevant literature.

47 Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 15.

Christianity that emphasize such things as the importance of Jerusalem, the Sabbath (whether Saturday or Sunday) and the shunning of icons can be spontaneous, as Patricia Crone has pointed out in connection with her suggestion that iconoclastic impulses could have been mediated between Islam and Byzantium by a Jewish-Christian group.⁴⁸

Pines argued that there is indeed evidence for the existence of Jewish-Christian groups in the Arab-Islamic world of the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴⁹ That type of evidence is, however, not overwhelming, and any argument that early Islam was influenced by such groups, or emerged in a setting where Jewish Christianity was important, must depend equally on an analysis of ideas and practices. The argument about whether messengers of God must be angels or men adds to the material that suggests a connection between a Gnostic-inspired Jewish Christianity and some of the Qur'ānic material, albeit that in this case the "Jewish-Christian" arguments are refuted by the Qur'ānic messenger.

There is at least one other text that suggests that such arguments were still topical among Jews in the ninth century CE. Sa'adyā Gaon (d. 331/942), in his *Kitāb al-Āmanāt wa-l-i'tiqādāt*, also argues strongly that prophets must be human beings and that for God to send an angel would not be effective. Angels can perform all sorts of wonders and their miracles would not, therefore, be a sign of the authenticity of their claims. It is only when a miracle is performed by someone known to be human that it can help to persuade those to whom the prophet has been sent.⁵⁰

Although Sa'adyā's arguments have some points in common with those of the Qur'ānic messenger, it does not seem to me that they derive from the Qur'ān. His language is different even though, like the Qur'ān, he refers to the bodily needs and weaknesses of the prophets sent by God. His explanation of why God does not send angels but rather ordinary men – because otherwise the prophet's miracles would be meaningless – is also rather different from the Qur'ānic stress on angels as signs of the end and the fact that angels do not normally inhabit the earth. But against whom were Sa'adyā's arguments directed? Might they point to the existence of a Gnostic type sect of the sorts we have referred to here among the Jews of his time?

Several scholars, seeking the target of his polemic, have sought to relate it to a rather obscure and mysterious Jewish sect called the Maghāriyya, often understood to have originated before Christianity and, according to Wolfson, at one stage to have adopted Christianity. Reports about this sect in medieval Arabic

sources refer to a belief in an angel responsible for the creation and operation of the world. According to Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) the Maghāriyya (he has them as al-Maqāribā) held that it is normally possible that "[God] sends a single angel from all of the elite ones (*al-khawāṣṣ*, i.e. the archangels?),⁵¹ assigns his name to him (*yulqī 'alayhi ismahu*), and proclaims: 'This is My messenger (*rasūl*). His place among you is My place, his words and commands among you are My words and commands, and his appearance (*ẓuhūr*) among you is My appearance.' This was the state of that angel."⁵²

I am inclined to share Wasserstrom's doubts about using the text of Shahrastānī as a straightforward source of historical facts about the sects that he treated, and to heed his warnings about the chronological information given for the Maghāriyya. Furthermore, there is no real evidence that Sa'adyā was indeed directing his argument against that sect in particular. That the Gaon felt called upon to reject the idea that prophets were in fact angels, however, suggests that Gnostic type ideas persisted in early Islamic times among groups associated with Judaism as well as among the *ghulāt* sects more associated with Islam.

48 Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm", *JSAI* 2, 1980, 59–95.

49 See especially his "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity," where he draws attention to an account stemming from the Christian pilgrim Arculf, who visited Jerusalem in the time of Mu'āwiya, referring to *Judaei Christiani* in Jerusalem. S. Pines, "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4, 1984, (136–52) 145–47.

50 See Sa'adyā Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, translated and abridged by A. Altmann, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002, 107–08.

51 The translation provided by Wasserstrom (see following note), based on the edition of Shahrastānī by Badrān (3 vols, Cairo 1968), differs here.

52 *Al-Milal wa-l-nihāl*, ed. W. Cureton, London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1842–46, 92. See too Harry A. Wolfson, "The pre-existent angel of the Magharians and al-Nahawandi," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 51, 1969, 89–106; N. Golb, "Who were the Magāriyya?" *JAOS* 80, 1960, 347–59; G. Stroumsa, "Le couple de l'ange et de l'esprit: traditions juives et chrétiennes," *Revue Biblique* 88, 1981, (42–61) 50; J. Fossum, "The Magharians: A pre-Christian Jewish sect and its significance for the study of Gnosticism and Christianity," *Henoch* 9, 1987, 303–44; and Steven M. Wasserstrom, "Shahrastānī on the Magāriyya," *Israel Oriental Studies* 17, 1997, 127–54.

Part V

**The Qur'ān and Biblical
literature**

16 Is there a notion of “divine election” in the Qur’ān?

Reuven Firestone

The Hebrew Bible articulates a notion of unique and inimitable relationship between God and the Children of Israel though the institution of covenant, a formal contractual bond. A similar notion is found in the New Testament, which expands the pool of the elect beyond the Israelites but restricts it to those belonging to the new dispensation it brings. The Qur’ān takes up the issue as well, and like the previous scriptures, appears to do so in a polemical manner. However, the Qur’ānic expression differs from previous scriptures in important ways. This chapter explores the meaning of divine election in the Qur’ān and in relation to previous scriptures, and considers to whom that notion applies.

The problematic of divine election in prior scripture

The Hebrew Bible contains dozens of texts that establish a notion of a unique, inimitable and eternal relationship between the People of Israel (*benê yisrā’el*) and God. This relationship is often described as “divine election,” and Israel as having been “chosen” by God. “For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God; of all the peoples of the earth the Lord your God chose you (*bekâ bâḥar* – בָּחַר בָּךְ) to be His treasured people” (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2). “Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen to be His own (*hā’ām bâḥar lenaḥalâh lô* – הָעָם בָּחַר לְנַחֲלָה לוֹ)” (Psalms 33:12). The operative Hebrew term here is “to choose,” also in an adjectival form *bāḥîr* (בָּחִיר, בְּחִיר), though other terms such as “consecrated (or sacred/holy) people” *‘am qādōš* (עַם קָדוֹשׁ) or “treasured people” *‘am segullâh* (עַם סְגֻלָּה) are not uncommon. “But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, seed of Abraham My friend – You whom I drew from the ends of the earth and called from its far corners, to whom I said, “You are My servant; I chose you (*beḥartîka* – בְּחַרְתִּיךָ), I have not rejected you” (Isaiah 41:8–9).

The term “Israel” here, in the Hebrew Bible in general and in post-Biblical Jewish tradition, refers to the “Children of Israel,” defined as the descendants of the patriarch Jacob whose name was changed by God to Israel (Genesis 32:29; 35:10).¹ This is not merely a kinship designation, however, since individuals and

¹ The term “Israel” refers to a people rather than a land. In Biblical and post-Biblical Jewish discourse, the full peoplehood is either *yisrā’el* or *‘am yisrā’el* – the “people of Israel.” The land promised by

even peoples who did not trace their kinship from the tribes of Jacob/Israel were included within the full populace or nation called "Israel" (Exodus 12:38; Deuteronomy 23:8–9). Despite its origin as a label of kinship, the term became the standard way in Jewish traditional discourse to refer to a religious community made up of people from a variety of genealogical or religious histories.²

Divine election and covenant

While divine election is articulated through the use of technical vocabulary of "chosenness" or "sanctity," the Hebrew Bible also expresses the notion through the use of metaphors and symbolic institutions. Perhaps the most ubiquitous and important is "covenant" (*berît*), which although found in relation to a variety of mundane relationships in the Bible,³ became a symbolic institution defining the unique relationship between God and Israel. It is based on Israel's trust in God and obedience to God's word and law (Exodus 19:4–6; 20:1–23, 24:7; Deuteronomy 5:23; 28:1–69). In its sacred manifestation in late Biblical and post-Biblical Judaism, it represents a formal, contractual bond between God and Israel that is everlasting and indissoluble.⁴ That is, according to the Bible and to the later Rabbinic tradition of the Talmud and Midrash, even when Israel sins or does not

God in the Torah (Genesis 13:15; 28:13; 35:12; Exodus 6:8, etc.) to Abraham and his descendants is referred to as *erets yisrā'el* – the "land of Israel" (Ezekiel 45:8; 47:18; 2 Chronicles 22:2, etc.) and in its own declaration of independence, the modern state commonly called Israel is referred to as *medīnat yisrā'el* – the "State of Israel."

2 In the world of the Hebrew Bible, peoples (or nations) are identified as distinct ethno-linguistic communities and defined by kinship, and each had its own god who was in a special relationship with it. The deity of the Moabites was Kemōsh (Numbers 21:29), and that of the Ammonites was Milkōm (1 Kings 11:6). The Philistines' god was Dagōn (1 Samuel 5), those living in Tyre had a goddess named Aštōret (2 Kings 23:13), etc. Kinship or *ethnos* was the standard means for identifying communities or polities in the ancient Near East, but they were distinct in all the ways just mentioned. Today we might refer to them as polities or "nations," but each had a religious/ethnic association with a particular deity which, as the notion of religious identity developed over the centuries and other ancient Near Eastern religious peoples lost their distinctive identities, came to identify Israel among some as a religious community. The following studies treat this from a variety of perspectives: J. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; D. Edwards, *Religion and Power: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greek East*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; S. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999; S. Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005; A. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity*, Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2005.

3 Joshua 9:15; 1 Samuel 18:3; 1 Kings 5:26; 2 Kings 11:4, etc.

4 Genesis 17 (especially verses 2 and 7); Exodus 19:1–5; 24:3–8; Leviticus 26:41–45; Deuteronomy 7:9–11; Isaiah 42:1–6; 49:8, etc. See also, J.A. Thomson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament*, London: Tyndale Press, 1964; R. Smend, *Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation: Reflections on Israel's Earliest History*, trans. M. Rogers, Nashville/NY: Abingdon Press, 1970; D. McCarthy, *Old Testament: Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions*, Richmond: John Knox, 1972; E. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

live up to God's demands, the covenantal relationship is eternal and without end. Individuals or even the community as a whole may be punished, but the covenant marking the special relationship between God and Israel endures.⁵

A sign of the unique covenantal relationship between God and Israel is often given through blood, the blood of circumcision, for example (Genesis 17), and the blood of sacrifice at the foot of Mount Sinai when the entire community of Israel agreed publicly to accept the Torah of commandments required of Israel (Exodus 24). In the latter case, as Moses renews the covenant at Sinai he declares, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord now makes with you concerning all these commands" (Exodus 24:8).⁶ In the Sinaitic rendering of covenant relationship, a book appears in association with covenant (the "Book of the Covenant" *sēfer* or *sēfer ha-berît* in Exodus 24:7), as well as commandments (*mišvōt*) (Exodus 24:4).

Another symbolic metaphor is that of light, through which Isaiah refers to Israel as unique among the nations and a light of hope in a dark world. "I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you, and I have grasped you by the hand. I created you, and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations – opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (Isaiah 42:6–7). Israel is not only chosen by God, but is understood by Rabbinic tradition also to have deliberately "chosen God" by their willingness to observe the divine commandments.⁷

In all Hebrew Bible references, God's chosen are restricted to Israel. Non-Israelites cannot be a part of this covenant unless they assimilate into the community and lose their independent ethno-religious identity. In the Hebrew Bible, the advantage to belonging to Israel seems to have been limited to being an elite member of a people protected by the one great God of the universe. No Biblical references suggest that belonging to Israel resulted in an eternal reward, since the Hebrew Bible has virtually nothing to say about reward or punishment in an afterlife. Judgment occurs in this life only, and there is no divine pronouncement determining an individual's fate after death.⁸ The notion of a heaven and hell as places of reward and punishment in the next world seems to have entered the worldview of Jews only during the late Second Temple Period when the books that would be known as the Hebrew Bible had become virtually fixed.

5 Exodus 31:16; Leviticus 26:14–45; Deuteronomy 7:9–10; Jeremiah 50:4–5; Psalms 105:7–10 (repeated in 1 Chronicles 16:14–18). Cf. S. Mason, "Eternal Covenant" in the Pentateuch: The Contours of an Elusive Phrase, New York: T & T Clark, 2008.

6 See also the enigmatic reference of Exodus 4:24–26.

7 Mekhilta *baḥōdeš*, *parshāh A* (on Exodus 19:2); Babylonian Talmud *Ḥagigāh* 3a-b; 'Avōdāh *Zārāh* 2b. See also, E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, 527–34.

8 H. Voss-Altman, *Sheol: A Study of the Afterlife in the Bible and Rabbinic Literature*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Rabbinic Thesis, 1999; P. Johnston, *Shade of Sheol: Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament*, Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002; L. Rabinowitz, "Reward and Punishment," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter, 1972, 14:134–35.

The New Testament, on the other hand, emerged into history at a time when reward and punishment in an afterlife had become well known and popular in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and it is infused with the notion. It also contains a notion of covenant with many parallels to that of the Hebrew Bible, and it utilizes some of the same metaphors to demonstrate the authenticity of its own articulation. When Jesus eats his last meal with the disciples and discusses the symbolism of bread and wine, he instructs them, "Take this and eat; this is my body. Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words: Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26–28).⁹ And in Acts 13:47, Paul and Barnabas declare, "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

The New Testament parallels with the Hebrew Bible are many, but its notion of covenant is fundamentally different, and different in a variety of ways. For example, it is defined in terms of faith rather than law, and centers more on belief than on behavior.¹⁰ Those included in the covenant as articulated in the New Testament benefit from forgiveness of sin, which then results in the reward of salvation.¹¹ In fact, the very name for Christian scripture is the New Testament, a "testament" or witness to a new covenant that will supersede the old: "And therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant (or testament), under which, now that there has been a death to bring deliverance from sins committed under the former covenant, those whom God has called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance . . ." (Hebrews 9:15).¹² Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant (Heb. 7:22). "By speaking of a new covenant, he has pronounced the first one old; and anything that is growing old and aging will shortly disappear" (Hebrews 8:13).

The new covenant applies to a new chosen people, those who have chosen Christ, who are redeemed by their acceptance of Jesus as savior.¹³ The classic criterion for defining membership in this new covenant is faith rather than kinship, and it would appear to open up the membership because all who have faith in Christ may be counted within it. According to this position, what Israel believed to be an eternal covenant, therefore, has in fact expired – according to standard readings of the New Testament. Those who have rejected Christ have been rejected from God's grace. The old Israel has been replaced by the "true Israel,"

9 Cf. Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:19–21.

10 See, for example, Romans 4:1–5, 13–22; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; 2 Timothy 2:8–9; Titus 1:1–4, Hebrews 9:1–22. A counter position also expects works to be necessary (James 2:18–24), but represents the exception that proves the rule.

11 Matthew 26:28; 2 Corinthians 3:6.

12 The Greek term here (*diathēkē*) can mean both covenant and will or testament, and the continuation of the passage develops this extended meaning. In a personal examination of a dozen English translations of this verse, both translations were common. Note again the importance of blood in this covenant reference. See also 1 Corinthians 11:25; Romans 3:21–25.

13 Ephesians 1:3–12; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; 1 Thessalonians 1:1–5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14; 2 Timothy 2:8–10.

for "not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants" (Romans 9:6–7). "For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and not literal" (Romans 2:28–29).

This articulation is highly polemical. In fact, however, it only represents a somewhat more strident articulation of a common trend found in the New Testament. The new dispensation represented by Jesus as Christ replaces the old dispensation of the Hebrew Bible. A new "chosen" replaces the old. Divine election has passed from the Jews to a "new" or, more accurately, "true" Israel, and the "true Israel" is those who have faith in the saving power of Christ.¹⁴ These are the new "chosen," and although a minority position requires good works along with faith (e.g. James 2:18–24), the major thrust of the New Testament is that faith in Christ is the bottom-line criterion for belonging to the new covenant with God.

The New Testament representation seems to be far more inclusive than the Hebrew Bible by expanding the pool of the elected beyond Israel. All nations may be a part of this new "chosen" (Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 10:34–36, 44–47).¹⁵ This extended the pool of the chosen considerably. However, membership in the new elect community was restricted only to those who believed in the new dispensation that it brings. No longer restricted to a community defined through kinship (though other boundaries such as circumcision and dietary restrictions were much more preventive of non-Israelites joining the community than kinship), the faith requirement articulated in the New Testament limited the divinely elected to those who could believe in an acceptable Christology.

The New Testament clearly responds to and extends many of the paradigms known from the Hebrew Bible. The attempt of some early leaders of the Church to remove the "Old Testament" from the canon of Christian scripture met with failure because of its foundational role for the theology of fulfillment in the New Testament. In fact, the Christian theologian Marcion (d. c. 160) was excommunicated in part for this heretical position.¹⁶ The New Testament seems to assume, as does the Hebrew Bible, that God can only be in a covenantal relationship with one religious community. The articulation of that view in the Hebrew Bible reflects a world in which only one religious community had come to the conclusion that a single God is the creator of the world and the only force that powers the universe. Because in the context of the Hebrew Bible only one community realized the notion of monotheism, it conveys the position that only that one community could

14 M. Simon, *Verus Israel*, London: Littman Library, 1996, 65–97.

15 This argument identifies Jewish identity as purely a matter of kinship. We noted above how Israelite identity was articulated in terms of kinship as was the norm of the ancient Near East, but that it defined an increasingly religious character. As is well known, many Gentiles assimilated into the community of Israel and thus became part of the "chosen people" as well (see, e.g., Gager, *Origins of Anti-Semitism*, esp. 39–88; J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak (eds), *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians*, London: Routledge, 1992; S. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

16 "Marcion," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967, 9:193–94.

exist in a special relationship with the one great God. The New Testament seems to represent the first moment in history when two communities, mutually identified as separate and discrete, argued significantly conflicting visions of monotheism (or messianism, revelation, incarnation, etc.).¹⁷

While the Hebrew Bible posits that God can be in a covenantal relationship with only one religious community, the New Testament posits that God can be in a covenantal relationship with only one community at a time. First it was with the Jews. Later it was with Christians. This represents a "zero-sum" equation, reflecting what seems to have been a view common to both Christians and to Jews: only one religious community could be covenanted with God at one time.

Divine election in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān takes up the issue of divine election as well. In fact, it is doubtful whether it could have avoided it, given the importance of the notion in prior scripture, the negative response of Jewish and Christian religious leaders to the threat of the new movement and its scripture, and the prior history of polemics between Jews and Christians revolving around covenant and divine election. And indeed, the Qur'ānic references to covenant are often polemical and demonstrate both direct and indirect parallels with the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. But the literary and theological relationship between the Qur'ān and prior scriptures differs significantly from that between the New Testament and Hebrew Bible, as we shall observe in relation to the topic at hand. The overall Qur'ānic expression of divine election seems to diverge rather significantly from both prior articulations. This will be examined below, but we must first explore the lexical and metaphorical range of divine election found in the Qur'ān.

Lexical range of "chosenness"

Seven Arabic roots may be found in the Qur'ān that have been rendered in English (and other) translations to convey a sense of preferring, choosing or singling out. They overlap in meaning, and it would be an error to assume absolute precision or consistency in their usage within the Qur'ān. It is not helpful to try to define these terms narrowly or precisely. Their English translations vary significantly, and I make no attempt here to restrict any specific English term to any specific Arabic term, since the range of meaning varies not only between the synonymic choices in both languages, but also in relation to the specific Qur'ānic contexts. The seven roots are *kh.y.r.* خير, *j.b.y.* جَبَى, *s.f.y.* صَفَى, *r.d.y.* رَضِيَ, *k.m.l.* كَمَلَ, *kh.l.f.* خَلَفَ, and *kh.l.s.* خَلَصَ. The limitations for this essay preclude an in-depth linguistic and lexical analysis of these roots. I therefore outline the sense of each and provide their immediate context in the following paragraphs, as space permits.¹⁸

17 That is, this represents a different quality of competition than, say, between Sadducees and Pharisees.

18 In the following I mark these roots and their translations in **bold font**.

1. *kh.y.r.* خَارِ خَيْر

The root meaning is to be good or do good. The root occurs in the eighth form in the sense of choosing, selecting or preferring. The noun constructed from this root is that which is good, useful or desired, such as prosperity or well-being. It is also commonly used in a comparative sense, as "better than" (خَيْرٌ مِنْ),¹⁹ or superlative sense, as in "the best of schemers" = خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ (Q 3:54), "the best of helpers" = خَيْرُ النَّاصِرِينَ (Q 3:150).

One of the best-known verses in the Qur'ān treating something akin to divine election is Qur'ān 3:110: "You are the **best community** that has been brought forth for humanity (كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ), commanding the reputable and forbidding the disreputable, and believing in God. If the People of the Book had believed it would have been better for them. Some of them are believers, but most are iniquitous." This verse is particularly interesting because it is placed in comparative relationship with the People of the Book (أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ), who represent religious communities that had received divine revelation prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān.

Those whom the Qur'ān "prefers" or refers to as "best" can be entire monotheist communities, such as the followers of Muḥammad,²⁰ who are **better** than the People of the Book (Q 3:110), or, in another context, Israel, whom God chose knowingly above all others (Q 44:30–32). They can also be singled out as named individuals; in all the latter references the individuals are known prophets such as Moses, Abraham etc. Moses can also single out certain members of his own community for a special role (Q 7:155), even if they are unable to take it on, and God can choose whomever he wishes (Q 28:68).

The term is found in the comparative or superlative form also in parallel with another term used to convey preference in the Qur'ān. "And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, endowed with ability and vision. We purified them with a pure quality, remembrance of the Abode.²¹ They were to Us among **the elect, the best** (الْمُصْطَفَيْنِ الْأَحْيَاءِ). And remember Ishmael and Elisha (Al-Yasa') "and Dhū l-Kifl, all among **the best**" (وَكُلٌّ مِّنَ الْأَخْيَارِ) (Q 38:45–48). Here, as in a number of other references that will be examined below, Biblical prophets, or at least prophets who are referenced in a way that assumes they were known figures among the cultures out of which the Qur'ān emerged, are singled out as special or unique.

In Qur'ān 7:155, Moses singles out seventy men of his community to meet with God after the incident with the calf: (وَاخْتَارَ مُوسَىٰ قَوْمَهُ سَبْعِينَ رَجُلًا) But when they are overcome with fear, he refers to God as their protector (or patron – وَلِيٌّ) and the "most forgiving" (خَيْرُ الْغَافِرِينَ), through the same form of the word discussed in the previous paragraph. In one of a number of renderings of Moses experiencing God

19 Qur'ān 2:221, 263.

20 That is, those who are addressed here positively by the Qur'ān.

21 "Paradise" or "heaven" seems to be the intent here.

through a fire or flame in the holy *wādi tuwa* (وَادِي الْمَقْدَسِ طُوًى),²² Moses is informed that God singled him out (اخْتَرْتِكَ) to go to Pharaoh on behalf of his people (Q 20:9–13). In Qur'an 44:30–32 in reference to God delivering the Children of Israel from Pharaoh's punishment, God chose them "knowingly above all peoples" (اخْتَرْنَاَهُمْ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عَلَىٰ الْعَالَمِينَ), but they invalidate themselves through their lack of faith in God.²³ Lastly with regard to this root, and in the context of the day of resurrection in which is found a discussion about those who worshipped idols and either led others astray or were led astray themselves, the term looks as if it is found in parallel with "wish" in order to contrast the power of God over the weakness of humanity and is usually translated this way: "Your Lord creates what He wishes and **chooses** (يَخْتَارُ) ما يَشَاءُ وَيَخْتَارُ); they [i.e. humans] have no choice (مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ). Praised is God the Most High over what they associate [with Him]" (Q 28:68). It is possible, however, that the verse should be read in such a way that the two verbs are not in parallel: "Your Lord creates what He wishes, and chooses what is best for them" (وَرَبُّكَ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيَخْتَارُ مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ).²⁴

2. j.b.y. اجْتَبَى جَبَى

The root meaning is to collect or gather tribute. It can also mean to appropriate something to oneself or take something in preference, and it is from this meaning that the term conveys the sense of choosing, selecting or preferring in the eighth form, اجْتَبَى.²⁵ In Qur'an 22:77–78, believers (الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا) or submitters (مُسْلِمُونَ) are told to engage in certain ritual and ethical acts and are informed that God chose them (اجْتَبَاهُمْ) and did not make their responsibilities a hardship for them. Their religion is the religion of their ancestor, Abraham (إِبْرَاهِيمَ). In Qur'an 16:120–23, Abraham is humble or obedient (قَابِلًا لِلَّهِ), a non-idolatrous *hanīf* (خَنِيفًا),²⁶ and grateful for God's bounties (شَاكِرًا لِّأَنْعَامِهِ). God chose him and guided him (اجْتَبَاهُ وَهَدَاهُ). In Qur'an 20:115–23, after Adam's disobedience in the Garden through the temptation of Satan, God chose him and relented towards him (اجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَى).²⁷ Qur'an 19:58 refers to Biblical prophets descending

22 See also Qur'an 28:29ff (in which *wādi tuwa* is not mentioned), 79:15ff (in which the fire or flame is not mentioned).

23 The section continues by suggesting that the ungrateful Children of Israel are like ancient peoples whom God destroyed for their sins.

24 See M. Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar: Al-Andalus, 1984, s.v. Qur'an 28:68.

25 AEL, 378b.

26 Or more commonly, وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ. This phrase occurs repeatedly in the Qur'an in relation to Abraham (Q 2:135; 3:67, 95; 6:79; 16:120, 16:123). In 4:125 Abraham is *hanīf* but the mention of him not being an idolater is missing. In 22:31 the idiom occurs as a general reference to those who are *hanīfs* to God rather than idolaters. The idiom is virtually a trope in reference to Abraham and is a positive appellation, though there remains controversy over the contextual meaning of *hanīf*. (See U. Rubin, "Hanafiyya and ka'ba," *JSAI* 13, 1990, 85–112; A. Rippin, "Rahamān and the hanīfs," in W.B. Hallaq and D.P. Little (eds), *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, Leiden: Brill, 1991; G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 36–39.)

27 The term seems to be in parallel with تَابَ but not with هَدَى, which is included to retain the rhyme.

from Adam, Abraham and Israel, and the family of Noah. God "favored" all of these (وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا), including those whom God guided and chose (وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا). Qur'an 6:98 is part of a larger section in which many prophets are mentioned by name.²⁸ God favored (فَضَّلْنَا) Ishmael, Elisha (al-Yasa'), Jonah and Lot, and their ancestors, descendants and brethren, and chose and guided them (وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ هُدًى وَاجْتَبَيْنَاهُمْ وَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ), also closely associated

with earlier prophets. In a reference to skeptics or non-believers, Qur'an 3:179 may be rendered, "God does not abandon the believers to your state, but will differentiate the bad from the good. And God does not bring out for you the unseen. Rather, God **chooses** (اللَّهُ يَخْتَارُ) whom He wishes from His messengers, so believe in God and His messengers. If you believe and are pious, there is for you a great reward." In Qur'an 42:13, after associating the divine injunctions of the Qur'an with what God had previously enjoined upon Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, "God **chooses** for Himself (اللَّهُ يَخْتَارُ إِلَيْهِ) whom He wishes and guides to Himself whomever turns." And in Qur'an 12:4–6, after Joseph informs his father Jacob of the dream in which the heavenly bodies prostrate themselves to him, Jacob answers, "This is how your Lord **chooses** you (وَكَذَلِكَ يَخْتَارُكَ رَبُّكَ) and teaches you the interpretation of events/stories, fulfills His favor on you and on the family of Jacob, just as He fulfilled it on your ancestors before, Abraham and Isaac."

The use of this term is always associated with the special status of God's earlier messengers and prophets. They were favored, selected above their fellows, and guided. This appears to reflect the basic meaning of the root. God sifted out and preferred the best individuals among earlier peoples. So, too, will those new followers of the message of the Qur'an be sifted out from the non-believers and favored, chosen and guided.

3. اِصْطَفَى صَفَى

The basic meaning of this root is to become clear or pure, as in pure water. The eighth form can mean to choose, select or prefer,²⁹ and occurs in the Qur'an in the sense of choosing a select few among the people (اِصْطَفَى مِنْ) or choosing in preference to (or over and above) other people (اِصْطَفَى عَلَى). As with the previous root (*j.b.y.*), this term is closely associated with prior prophets: Abraham (Q 2:130), Adam and Noah (Q 3:33), Maryam (Q 3:42), Saul (Q 2:247), Moses (Q 7:144), Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Q 38:45–47).³⁰

The word is used in general terms in Q 35:32–33 to refer to those whom God chose to bequeath the book (*al-kitāb*) (أَوْزَنَّا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اِصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا). These include a variety of types, including those deserving of entering the Garden and

28 Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Aaron, Zakariah and John, Jesus and Elias.

29 AEL, 1703a–c.

30 In the verse that follows, "Ishmael, Elisha and Dhū l-Kifl are all among the best" (مَنْ الْأَخْيَارِ). This is possibly a narrative parallel with the set of Biblical figures described as chosen (مُصْطَفَيْنَ).

those who presumably are not deserving of such an end. While not absolutely specific, these verses likely refer to the Israelites or all prior receivers of earlier scripture. In Qur'ān 27:59, the Prophet is instructed to say, "Praise be to God, and peace on His servants whom **He has chosen**" (عَلَىٰ عِبَادِهِ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَىٰ), and in Q.22:75, "God **chooses** messengers from the angels and from humanity" (اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ).

In some cases, however, the word is used in contexts outside any reference to earlier individuals or communities presumed to have once been divinely elected. The following occurs within a polemic against the Christian notion of God having sent a son: "If God had wished to take a son, **He could have chosen** whatever he wanted among what He created" (لَأَصْطَفِيَ مِمَّا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ) (Q 39:4). And in Qur'ān 37:153, the rhetorical question is asked, "Does [God] **prefer** girls over boys?" (أَصْطَفَى الْبَنَاتِ عَلَى الْبَنِينَ).

4. *r.d.y.* رَضِيَ رَضِيَ

The root meaning is to be pleased or satisfied with, to approve, to regard with good favor. A common Qur'ānic idiom is "God is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him" (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ).³¹ In only two cases can the term be associated with something approaching divine election. We observe a frightening discussion in Qur'ān 20:109 about the future day in which people will be assembled for divine judgment: "On that day, no intercession will avail, except those whom the Merciful has permitted and whose word **He has been pleased with** (لَا مَنَ أَدْنَىٰ لَهُ الرُّخْصَنَ وَرَضِيَ لَهُ قَوْلًا). A more important reference is one in which the root is found in parallel with *k.m.l.*, the next term on our list.

5. *k.m.l.* اكْمَلَ اكْمَلَ

The root meaning is to become perfect or complete, or to become whole; in the fourth form, to complete something, to perfect. This root is infrequent in the Qur'ān, appearing a total of five times. In Qur'ān 5:3 it can be understood in the sense of singling out. After listing forbidden foods, the verse continues with "This day **I have perfected** your religion for you (الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ), completed My favor upon you (وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي), and **have approved** Islam as a religion for you" (وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا) (Q.5:3).

6. *kh.l.f.* اسْتَخْلَفَ خَلَفَ

The root meaning is to follow or succeed, to come after. The tenth form conveys the sense of substituting, replacing or exchanging something or someone in place of another. The verb is used in the Qur'ān in a number of contexts to convey the sense that God decides what human collective will be dominant or will succeed in relation

to one or more other communities. In Qur'ān 6:133, God warns that he can remove those who are being addressed and replace them with others (إِن يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفْ مِن بَعْدِكُم مَّا يَشَاءُ). In Qur'ān 11:57, the prophet Hūd warns his people that God will replace them with a different people if they turn away (remove the *fatḥa* over the final *yā*) (يَسْتَخْلِفُ رَبِّي قَوْمًا غَيْرَكُمْ). And in Sūra 7, Moses is confronted by his people who complain that they suffered from Pharaoh's cruelty no less after Moses was sent to release them. Moses responds, "Perhaps your Lord will destroy your enemy and **make you successors** on earth, so he will see how you will do" (Q 7:129).

Qur'ān 24:55 juxtaposes the new believers with those of old. "God has promised those of you who believe and do good works that **He will make them successors** on earth (لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ), just as **He made successors** those before them (كَذَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ), and He will surely establish for them their religion that **He has preferred** for them (وَلَيُكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ), exchanging security for them in place of fear. They shall worship Me and not associate anything with me. Those who disbelieve after that are the degenerate."

7. *kh.l.s.* اخْلَصَ خَلَصَ

Related semantically to term #3 above (*s.f.y.* صَفَى), the root conveys the sense of being pure or clear, free from admixture, genuine.³² The tenth form can mean to appropriate a person exclusively to oneself, as in Qur'ān 12:54, when the king of Egypt says, "Bring him to me. **I will make him purely** for me" (اسْتَخْلِصْنِي لِنَفْسِي).

The fourth form can be purely causal: to clarify or purify a thing. In 38:45–48, God purifies his prophetic servants (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), "**We purified them with a pure quality**" (إِنَّا أَخْلَصْنَاهُم بِخَالِصَةٍ), and they are among **the elect, the best** (لَمِنَ الْمُصْطَفَيْنِ الْأَخْيَارِ). As noted above, these prophets are listed in parallel with Ishmael, Elisha and Dhū l-Kifl, who are also "among **the best**" (وَكُلٌّ مِّنَ الْأَخْيَارِ). The reward for their pure sincerity toward God is the eternal gardens (or "Gardens of Eden" – جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ) whose doors are open to them. Elsewhere, those who are **pure** or **sincere** servants of God (عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ) will receive the well-known reward of fruits in gardens of delight (Q 37:40–42).

As may be readily observed from the range of lexical options and the varied contexts, the sense of chosenness in the Qur'ān seems to have a broader meaning than in either the Hebrew Bible or New Testament. Many of the terms are associated with prophets of old who are named specifically (*kh.y.r.* خَيْر, *j.b.y.* جَبِي, *s.f.y.* صَفَى, *kh.l.f.* خَلَفَ). Singling out ancient prophets is a recurring theme in the Qur'ān in general, and they are distinguished through the use of these terms in the verses cited above. Abraham especially, but also other prophets, are endowed with special ability and vision (Q 2:247, 38:45), purified by God (Q 38:46), divinely guided (Q 6:86, 16:121, 19:58), and will be among those in the hereafter (Q 2:130, 16:122, 38:49–50).

³¹ Qur'ān 5:119; 9:100; 58:22; 98:8.

³² AEL, 785, middle column.

Most of the terms also refer to entire peoples or religious communities singled out by God and living in God's favor.³³ These include the audience of believers sometimes addressed by the Qur'ān (Q 2:77, 3:110, 5:3), the Children of Israel over all others (Q 44:32), and the family of Abraham and 'Imrān over all others (Q 3:33). In the case of the root *خلف*, which is used to denote replacing one dominant people with another, a variety of communities are distinguished. In some cases it is only the *religion* of the ancients that is singled out (Q 2:132; 5:3; 24:55).

Overall, the Qur'ān articulates a less exclusive view of divine election than previous scriptures. It allows the possibility of more than one community to be in a special relationship with God simultaneously and there seems to be no obvious intent to decommission the chosen status of prior communities by virtue of a new Qur'ānic dispensation. The underlying message in most references is that if the Qur'ānic audience believes in God and engages in proper acts, it can and should be among those peoples already favored by God. Like those of old, they will be rewarded in this world and in the hereafter. The comparison between the Qur'ānic audience and other communities favored or chosen by God is more complex than this, however. It can be illuminated by examining verses treating covenant.

Divine election and covenant in the Qur'ān

As in the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'ānic notion of covenant carries both a mundane and a sacred sense.³⁴ The two most common terms that convey the meaning of agreement, contract or covenant are *mithāq* and *'ahd*. A third term, *isr*, is used once in thematic parallel with *mithāq* (Q 3:81), and *ḥabl*, the common word for rope (cf. Q 111:5), is found in one verse in which the meaning may be one of covenant, though it is by no means certain.³⁵ The roots for the two common terms are used verbally as well as in their noun forms, but space does not permit a full lexical analysis in this chapter. We must be content here to consider the possible Qur'ānic parallels with the institution of covenant conveyed in the Hebrew Bible through the noun, *berit* (which has no verbal form in the Hebrew Bible³⁶), and which finds a semantic parallel in the New Testament through the Greek, *diathēkē*.

33 Qur'ān 3:110, Q. 44:32; جبي Q. 22:77; صفى Q. 3:33; رضى Q. 5:33; خلف all references.

34 G. Bowering, "Covenant," *EQ*, 1:464–67.

35 Qur'ān 3:112. This verse follows a reference to iniquitous opponents of the *umma*. In v. 112, they "are stricken with abasement wherever they are found, except by a compact/covenant with God and a compact/covenant with people (لَا يَخْلِي مِنْ اللَّهِ وَخَلِيلِ مَنْ النَّاسِ). They bring anger from God and are stricken with destitution. This is because they reject the signs of God and kill their prophets unjustly."

36 The actual orthographic base may be *b.r.w.*, derived from a different original root that was conflated lexically and can mean "to eat" (2 Samuel 12:17). It has also been suggested that the root for *berit* may be related to Assyrian *barû*, to bind (Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Lexicon* 136, col.1).

The meanings of covenant

The parallel terms *mithāq* and *'ahd* are found in the same sentence on three occasions and may be synonymous in these syntactic parallels. Two of the three occur in doublet sentences (Q 2:27 and 13:25): "Those who break the covenant (*'ahd*) of God after *covenanting* it (*mithāqihī*) and sever what God has commanded through it to sow dissension on the earth" (الَّذِينَ يَنْفُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا) (أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْضَلُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ). The third is in Qur'ān 13:19: "those who fulfill the *'ahd* of God and do not violate the *mithāq* (الَّذِينَ يَوْفُونَ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَنْفُضُونَ الْمِيثَاقَ)).

More often, however, they are used in different contextual settings. *Mithāq* nearly always occurs in reference to ancient days and represents a covenant with ancient prophets (Q 3:81; 33:7) or the *Banū Isrā'īl* or, later, contemporary Jews who are conflated for didactic or polemical reasons with their ancient forbears (Q 2:83–84, 93; 3:187; 4:154–55; 5:7, 12–13, 70; 7:169). Only one verse refers explicitly to a *mithāq* with contemporaries of Muḥammad. *'Ahd*, on the other hand, may occasionally refer to the *Banū Isrā'īl* (Q 2:40; 20:86, 2:80) or prophets of old (Q 2:124), but is found nearly always in relation to the Qur'ānic audience (Q 2:80, 100; 3:76–77; 6:152; 7:102?; 9:111; 16:90, 95; 17:34; 19:77, 87). God "takes" or "enjoins" a *mithāq* (أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ) but never an *'ahd*.³⁷ Other idioms are associated only with *'ahd* and never with *mithāq*, such as "fulfilling an *'ahd*" (وَأَوْفُوا بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ) (Q 2:40; 3:76; 6:152; 9:111; 16:90; 17:34) or "bartering the *'ahd* of God for a petty price" (تَشْتَرُوا بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا) (Q 3:76; 16:95).³⁸ However, people can "break" either an *'ahd* or *mithāq* (Q 2:27 – يَنْفُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ – Q 4:155 – فِيمَا نَقُضِيهِمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ; Q 5:13; 13:19, 25; 16:91 [here with *aymān* in parallel with *'ahd*]).

Despite these distinctions, which may reflect differences in idiomatic or dialectic usage, these two most common terms for covenant convey virtually the same meaning of agreement, pact or promise. And both are symbols around which allegorical legends or references are made that draw the attention of the audience to their own relationship to the demands made on them through the Qur'ānic revelations. As with the Biblical notion of *berit*, the Qur'ānic notion defines the relationship identified with covenant as one of obligation, and like the Hebrew Bible, the references may occur independently of terms for chosenness or election.

With *mithāq*, the covenant is most clearly associated with legends of ancient peoples and prophets. It is a concrete symbol of relationship requiring certain behaviors that vary among the verses (monotheist worship, Sabbath observance, ethical behaviors, community obligations, etc.). God always initiates this covenant. In some references to God establishing a *mithāq* with the Israelites, no response is recorded from the second party (Q 2:83; 3:187; 5:12, 70). In others,

37 The Qur'ān asks rhetorically, however, whether a person can "take" an *'ahd* with God (Q 2:80; 19:78). The answer is that it is impossible (Q19:87).

38 The idiom, "bartering . . . for a petty price" is also found in verses associated with *'ahd*, but where *'ahd* is not the object of the bartering (Q 2:41; 9:111).

Israel accepts (Q 2:84;³⁹ 3:81; 5:7), while in one reference Israel refuses outright (Q 2:93).⁴⁰ In virtually all cases, Israel breaks the covenant or in some way invalidates its part of the commitment.⁴¹ The covenant itself is not invalidated, however. Those who break the covenant may be punished, though it is not always clear whether the threat of punishment is directed against the ancient people situated in the allegorical legend or the Qur'ānic audience that is listening to the discourse (Q 2:85–86; 3:188; 5:13). At least in some cases God is clement toward the ancient Israelite protagonists despite their unacceptable behaviors (Q 5:71), and the fact of the existence of Jews among the Qur'ānic audience testifies that despite the repeated trope of their having failed to live up to the divine covenant in a variety of ways, they are not all destroyed by God as were the vanished communities of 'Ād and Thāmūd. Note that these extinct communities are associated with prophets but not with covenants. Unlike the New Testament, the Qur'ān does not consider prior covenants to have been annulled or abrogated (but, as will be elucidated below, individuals cannot benefit from membership in a covenanted community if they do not live up to their covenantal responsibilities).

As noted above, the Qur'ānic audience is more directly addressed in the verses among which covenant is expressed through the word *'ahd*, though the context may yet be one that references covenants of old. References to *'ahd* tend to be less specific and even more abstract. "Isn't it always so that whenever they covenant a covenant,⁴² a group of them rejects it? Actually, most of them do not believe" (Q 2:100). "Whoever keeps his covenant and is conscientious, surely God loves the conscientious" (Q 3:76). "And We did not find most of them in a covenant. Indeed, We found most of them deviants" (Q 7:102). With both terms, the Qur'ānic audience is to draw the lesson from the allegorical references that it too is being offered a divine covenant through the Qur'ān. An opportunity is made available to the listeners, but they must draw the necessary lesson from the sins and misbehaviors of the ancients who failed to keep the covenant and were thus punished.

In the traditional Jewish literature called Midrash,⁴³ a distinction is made between the *mathāl* (Arabic linguistic equivalent: *mathal*) and the *nimshāl*. The *mathāl* frames the lesson within a narrative or within a reference to a known narrative. The *nimshāl* then spells out the application of what the story has taught for the present context. When this category is applied to our case, the lessons to be derived from stories depicting the failures of ancient peoples is to be applied to the

context of the emergence of the Qur'ān and the demands that it makes on its audience. While the *nimshāl* in Midrash sometimes does this clearly and distinctly, in other cases the audience must draw the conclusion without an obvious explanation. This is the method of the Qur'ān in its references to the covenants of ancient peoples. Those who failed to live up to the divine demands symbolized by the covenant were punished. Some communities that failed to respond to the divine imperative were destroyed outright. The listeners to the message of the Qur'ān must therefore draw the lesson to obey the teachings of God's revelation as articulated by the latest and the last prophet, Muḥammad.

The data derived from the Qur'ānic use of *mīthāq* and *'ahd* to characterize a relationship between God and community conforms to the results of our examination of the words used in the Qur'ān for divine choosing. Covenant and election are not exclusive. God can be in relationship with a number of different peoples and communities. God can also replace one people, who are in special relationship, with another. Having been chosen or having been a party to a covenant with God does not automatically grant the community privileges without the community itself (or individuals with it) demonstrating that it is loyal to God's demands. Belonging to a community with a history of chosenness or covenant is not enough to enjoy the rewards of a chosen or covenanted relationship with God. Listeners to the Qur'ānic message are themselves individually responsible for their own fate.⁴⁴

Divine election in polemic

Although inclusion in special relationship with God is broadened in the Qur'ān beyond most articulations in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, its inclusiveness is more theoretical than practical. That is, despite occasional inclusive references, and some extremely so, such as Qur'ān 2:62,⁴⁵ the Qur'ān expresses unambiguous hostility toward monotheists who believe in God and the last day but do not accept its revelation as authentic. This sentiment reflects a problem that is common to all new religious movements.

Newly emerging religions always represent a threat to the religious establishment because they are an alternative to the status quo. New religions therefore inevitably find themselves in conflict with establishment religions.⁴⁶ Like the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the Qur'ān is the earliest source for information about the genesis

39 Qur'ān 2:83 and 2:84 appear to be a case where two separate traditions are joined together consecutively.

40 On the contextual and bilingual meaning of the idiom, "We hear and disobey" (سَمِعْنَا وَغَضَبْنَا), see R. Firestone, "The failure of a Jewish program of public satire in the squares of Medina," *Judaism*, Fall 1997, 438–52.

41 Qur'ān 2:84–85, 93; 3:187; 4:154–55; 5:12–13; 5:14 (with Christians – نصارى), 70; 7:163–69.

42 غَاثِرًا عَهْدًا. This is different from God establishing a covenant, in which case the Qur'ān uses the word *akhadha*.

43 See D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994; J. Neusner, *The Midrash: An Introduction*, Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson, 1994; D. Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998.

44 A *locus classicus* for this is Qur'ān 2:124: "And remember when his Lord tested Abraham with commands, and he fulfilled them. He said: I have made you a leader of humankind. [Abraham] said: And of my offspring? He answered, "My covenant does not include wrongdoers" (لَا يَنْتَلِي غُيُوبِي الظَّالِمِينَ).

45 "Those who believe, and who are Jews, and Christians and Sabaeans – whoever believes in God and the Last Day and who works righteousness: they have their reward with their Lord, they shall not fear nor should they grieve." (Cf. Q 5:69; 22:17.)

46 R. Stark, "How new religions succeed: A theoretical model," in D. Bromley and P. Hammond (eds), *The Future of New Religious Movements*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987, 11–29; B. Wilson, "Factors in the failure of the new religious movements," in *ibid.*, 30–45; J. Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements*, 2nd ed., Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2003, 203–07; J. Lewis, *Legitimizing New Religions*, New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2003, 155–230.

of the religious community that it represents. All three scriptures contain material that reflects that inevitable conflict. And like the other scriptures, the Qur'an contains a significant amount of polemic directed against other religions and oppositional communities (religious, social and political) that existed at the time of its emergence.⁴⁷

By the assumed period of the emergence of the Qur'an in the seventh century, the notion of divine election had become institutionalized in monotheism.⁴⁸ Divine election was a rhetorical weapon in the Hebrew Bible, a means of defending Israel amidst the multiple challenges that established religions and competing cultures represented to it.⁴⁹ The New Testament accepted the notion of divine election *a priori*, but applied it to the new community of Christians by claiming that Israel had lost that status to them.

Because of the importance of divine election in prior scripture, the history of interreligious polemic between Jews and Christians, and the natural polemical relationship between newly emerging and establishment religions, it should be no surprise that the notion of chosenness arose in the argument between early Muslims and those Jews and Christians who believed that they belonged to religious communities in exclusive relationship with God. The Qur'an notes the classic argument between Jews and Christians and reduces it to triviality: "The Jews say: 'The Christians have no ground to stand on,' and the Christians say: 'The Jews have no ground to stand on,' though they both recite the Book . . ."⁵⁰ Elsewhere, it notes how both Jews and Christians argued against the new revelation, each by referring to Abraham as its own monotheist progenitor (Q 2:135, 3:65–67).⁵¹ While the Qur'an often claims that the religion it brings is better than that *practiced* by Jews and Christians (not to mention idolaters), its general thrust is to refrain from arguing that it is better than the actual revealed religion of Judaism (and perhaps less so of Christianity). The problem with prior religion, rather, is that it is not practiced properly by those who claim to be following it. Many examples can be found to support this. Jews and Christians, for example, worship various entities they call the son of God, but they are deceived by falsehood (بُفُكُونٌ) because they were commanded to worship only God (Q 9:30–31). Some verses seem to present a counter-position of superiority of Islam over all religion, as we have observed from 3:110,⁵² but these appear to be uncommon and it is unlikely that they represent a position of superiority articulated through an exclusive notion of divine election.⁵³

47 K. Zebiri, "Polemic and polemical language," *EQ*, 4:114–24.

48 R. Firestone, *Who are the Real Chosen People: The Meaning of Chosenness in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2008, 21–52.

49 Deuteronomy 7:6–9; 10:14–22; Isaiah 41:8–10; 49:6–8; Psalms 33:12, etc.

50 Qur'an 2:113. See also 5:18: "The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are sons of God and His favorites.' Say, 'Then why does he punish you for your sins?'"

51 See also Qur'an 2:140.

52 See also Qur'an 9:33, 58:22.

53 For example, Qur'an 9:33 is a continuation of the argument presented in Qur'an 9:30–32 as a counter to the theological/ritual errors of competing monotheists (not their original monotheism). The "party of God" in Qur'an 58:22 is compared with opponents who are the "party of Satan" in previous verses as a rhetorical device, suggesting a comparative rather than superlative relationship.

As noted above, however, the Qur'an repeats the view that once-dominant communities may be replaced through God's will with others who are better practitioners of religion. The reward seems to relate to physical or political power over enemies and oppression. For example, when the Israelites are oppressed by the chiefs of Pharaoh's people, Moses tells them that if they are adequately pious and seek help in God, they may become successors on earth (وَيَسْتَخْلِفُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ) and their enemies may be destroyed by God (Q 7:127). And in a general reference the Qur'an relates, "God has promised those of you who believe and do good works that He will **make them heirs/successors on earth**, just as He made those before them to be heirs/successors, and He will surely establish for them their religion that He has **preferred/chosen** for them, exchanging security for them in place of fear" (Q 24:55). The exchange can also be negative, as God warns genies and humans that he can remove them and replace them with whomever he wishes (Q 6:130–33). Hūd warns his own people that they can easily be replaced (Q 11:57).

This sense is different from the eternal covenantal relationship articulated in the Hebrew Bible. While it is true that the Hebrew Bible warns that Israel will be oppressed and brutally punished through natural means or even military conquest for not living up to the terms of the covenant, they will never lose their prime status with God and remain forever covenanted with him (Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalms 105:8–10 [repeated in 1 Chronicles 16:14–18], etc.). Conversely, the notion conveyed by the Qur'an is that no special relationship with God is by definition eternal. Perhaps the covenant will remain eternal, but those who do not live up to it will not be a part of it. Covenant is thus separated from kinship. This is consistent with the general move to transcend the powerful force of kinship relations in the Qur'an (cf. Q 33:5),⁵⁴ and it opens up the possibility for a covenanted relationship with God among Arabs and all other peoples who are loyal to God. When Abraham asks whether his descendants will retain his special status with God, he is answered, "My covenant does not include wrong-doers" (لَا يَتَّالِ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ).⁵⁵ One errant community can easily be replaced by God with another.

There is some tension between the community nature of these references and verses elsewhere that stress how every individual will be judged according to one's own merit. "Whatever misfortune befalls you is for what your own hands have earned, and for many He grants forgiveness."⁵⁶ One notable and repeated Qur'anic phrase is that God will forgive whomever he wills and punish whomever he wills (اللَّهُ يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَاءُ).⁵⁷ Belonging, even to the "right" community (as in loyal followers of the Prophet), is not enough to merit divine rewards in this world or the hereafter. On the contrary, the Qur'an stresses

54 See also Qur'an 11:45–46, where God insists to Noah that his sinful son is no longer his kinsman. I am grateful to Gabriel Reynolds for bringing this section to my attention.

55 Qur'an 2:124. See also 5:12–14; 13:25; 14:35–36 (which may echo a Pauline critique in Romans and Galatians of the kinship association with the Hebrew covenant); 58:22.

56 Qur'an 42:30. See also 39:41.

57 Qur'an 2:284. See also 3:129; 5:18; 29:21; 48:14.

throughout how every individual is rewarded or punished according to his own behaviors and beliefs, and that there is no intercession aside from God (Q 10:3). It should not be surprising, therefore, that the Qur'ān does not refer to the zero-sum equation that is expressed by the supersessionary references to covenant in the New Testament. Members of any and all communities who believe in God and the Day of Judgment and do the good need not fear, presumably either punishment in this world or the hereafter (Q 2:62; 5:69; 22:17). The special relationship is indicative of the distinctive bond between any and all true monotheists and God. Rather than stressing that Islam is better than previous monotheisms or supersedes them, the Qur'ān seems to be making the case that Islam can be counted among them and is equal to them. This is stated explicitly, for example, in Q 2:136.

The tension between communities and individuals in the Qur'ānic articulation of divine favor can most likely be explained by paying attention to the tension between the *ideal* of theology and the *real* of politics and social relations. Much of the Qur'ān seems to serve as a corrective to the perceived faults or weaknesses in the way in which prior monotheists were practicing their religions. We have observed, for example, that the arguments of Jews and Christians that they merit divine reward by virtue of their belonging to a favored or "chosen" religious community is countered in the Qur'ān by the position that only those with individual merit are rewarded. One must not feel smug simply because one is a member of a "chosen" religious community or even a member of the community that follows the new prophet. This is a theological position.

In tension with this position is that of *realpolitik*. At the same time that this individual-based view is articulated, the new religious community of believers is beleaguered by powerful groups that are bent on discrediting it and destroying it. There is therefore a need to demonstrate that loyalty to the new religious community brings its own divine merits, thus the repeated references to divine reward for loyal support for God's prophet. "You will not find people who believe in God and the last day loving anyone who opposes God and God's messenger . . . God will cause them to enter gardens with rivers flowing under them to abide therein. God will be pleased with them and they will be pleased with God. They are partisans (or the party) of God. Are not the partisans of God those who succeed?"⁵⁸

17 Lot's daughters in the Qur'ān

An investigation through the lens of intertextuality¹

Waleed Ahmed

Although, on the whole, the Qur'ānic story of the destruction of Sodom has the same skeleton as its Biblical antecedent, it is nonetheless a different story; for one thing, in the Qur'ān Lot is considered a messenger of God (*rasūl*). In this study, however, we are concerned with examining a shared narrative element between the two stories, namely the episode in which Lot offers his daughters to the Sodomites in order to persuade them not to sexually abuse his male guests.² The Qur'ān recounts this episode in only three verses: Qur'ān 15:71 and Qur'ān 11:78–79. In the next few pages, I intend to apply intertextual analysis to these verses.³ The principal purpose is to explore the discourse between the Qur'ān and its cultural milieu in a way that best describes the successive emergence of these verses in the text as well as their significance.⁴ Near the end of the chapter, I will

1 I am thankful to Dr Laliv Clenman, who read earlier versions of this article and provided helpful comments. I would like also to thank Professor Amira Mittermaier for having read the first abstract of this project and provided helpful guidance. The conference on the Qur'ān in its Historical Context was an enriching experience. I am grateful to Professor Gabriel S. Reynolds for having made my participation in this conference possible and for the valuable corrections and suggestions he offered on the manuscript of this chapter. Also thanks are due to Ms Hannah Hemphill for her valuable efforts in proofreading the manuscript. Professor Shawkat M. Toorawa has drawn my attention to the importance of discussing my topic from the perspective of speech act theory and for that I am thankful. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the constant support and mentoring I continue to receive from Professor Sebastian Günther.

2 Unlike the Biblical story, where Lot's daughters take part in events subsequent to the destruction of Sodom, their mention in the Qur'ān is limited to the incident mentioned above.

3 For a comprehensive introduction to intertextuality consult T. Morgan, "Is there an intertext to this text?: Literary and interdisciplinary approaches to intertextuality," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 3/4, 1985, 1–40; G. Allen, *Intertextuality*, London New York: Routledge, 2000. On some recent methodological developments in intertextuality, of relevance to the topic of this article, see H. Plett, "Intertextualities," in H.F. Plett (ed.), *Intertextuality*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991, 3–29; W.G. Müller, "Interfiguralität," in *ibid.*, 101–21.

4 The idea for this study was inspired in part by Angelika Neuwirth's call for "a systematic literary investigation of the microstructure of the Qur'ān." See A. Neuwirth, "Referentiality and textuality in *al-Hijr*: some observations on the Qur'ānic 'canonical process' and the emergence of a community" in I.J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000, (143–172) 145.

assess the early Muslim exegetical material pertaining to these verses and compare it to the intertextual readings I presented.

Framework

Despite the considerable attention that Qur'anic narratives have received in modern scholarship, until recently many scholars mainly focused on the similarities and/or the differences between these narratives and their Jewish and Christian antecedents. A popular approach has been to isolate the various story elements pertaining to a given figure in the Qur'ān and merge them into a synthesis, which was then compared with that figure's story in Jewish and Christian sources. In forming such syntheses, little or no regard has been paid to the successive and gradual emergence of these story elements within the Qur'ān. In addition, once these story elements were extracted from their original textual units, they, at least partially, acquired new significance that was influenced by their new *Sitz im Leben* in the synthesis. Therefore, in effect such studies have largely detached the analysis of Qur'anic narratives from the textual history of the Qur'ān and, moreover, have, in essence, decontextualized the story elements of these narratives.⁵

We will be examining the Qur'anic representation of the episode of Lot's daughters within the framework of the traditional Islamic account concerning the textual history of the Qur'ān.⁶ Within this framework we are mainly concerned

5 See, for example the synthesis of Lot's story in F. Leemhuis, "Lūṭ and his people in the Koran and its early commentary," in E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar (eds), *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18–19 and its Interpretations*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 97–113. See also H. Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen Im Koran*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961, 151–58. Although Speyer adopted Theodor Nöldeke's chronology as a framework of inquiry, he only considered the broad periods of Nöldeke's classification; within each period Speyer did not follow Nöldeke's order of the revelation of individual Sūras. Cf. *ibid.*, xi.

6 H. Motzki offers an insightful critique of the different modern views concerning the canonization of the Qur'ān, particularly those of Friedrich Schwally, Alphonse Mingana, John Wansbrough and John Burton. See H. Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'ān: a reconsideration of Western views in light of recent methodological developments," *Der Islam* 78, 2001, (1–34) 1–15. Motzki also argues, based on modern techniques of *isnād* (chain of narration) and *matn* (content) criticism, that the Muslim traditions concerning the codification of the Qur'ān "were already in circulation towards the end of the first Islamic century." See *Ibid.*, 31. Furthermore, E. Whelan argues that an examination of the surviving historical evidence such as the inscriptions from the Dome of the Rock will "lead to the conclusion that the Muslim tradition [concerning the collection of the Qur'ān] is reliable, at least in broad outline, in attributing the first codification of the Qur'anic text to 'Uthmān and his appointed commission." See Whelan, "Forgotten witness: evidence for the early codification of the Qur'ān," *JAOS*, 118/1, 1998, (1–14) 13. As Neuwirth contends, "the presentation of the events [of the 'Uthmānic collection (*jam'*) of the Qur'anic texts] as tradition reports them is not offbeat at all; at least, it fits well into the findings offered by the text itself, since the new codex, which does not claim any chronological or theological justification for the sequence of the single texts (sūras and parts of sūras) which it encompasses, but which it arranges at least apparently according to merely technical, exterior criteria, does display inextinguishable traces of its compilation as a *collection* . . ." See Neuwirth, "Referentiality and textuality," 144. In my view, these studies push the date of the canonization of the Qur'ān back to the last quarter of the first Islamic century and they also corroborate the broad outline of the textual history of the Qur'ān as Muslim traditions report it and as adopted here.

with the chronological order of the two Qur'anic narrative units in which the three verses relevant to the episode of Lot's daughters appear: namely, *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 and *Hūd* (11) 69–83. In view of the absence of reliable historical evidence thereof, I shall argue the chronological order of these two narrative units on a textual basis.

Both *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 and *Hūd* (11) 69–83 recount the story of the angels' visit to Abraham and Lot. Moreover, each of these two narrative units is a cohesive text by itself. Given these features, it is possible to think of the sequence of these two narrative units in the Qur'anic revelations with respect to each other.

Overall, *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 can be considered a concise summary of the parallel Biblical story in Genesis 18:1–19:29.⁷ Yet this narrative unit, even while it maintains the skeleton of its Biblical antecedent, ignores several elements from it. For example, it does not recount that Abraham had prepared a meal for God's messengers, i.e. the angels, or that he pleaded with God on behalf of the Sodomites. There are also a few differences between *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 and Genesis 18:1–19:29. For instance, *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 asserts that Abraham initially feared God's messengers (Q 15:52); it also states that he was informed in advance about the fate of Lot's wife (Q 15:60). Compared to *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 the narrative in *Hūd* (11) 69–83 is a fairly comprehensive version. Not only does it supplement its counterpart in *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 with more details that have parallels in the Biblical story but it also introduces new story elements that do not exist in *al-Hijr* or in the Jewish versions of the story. Let me point to some examples.

While in *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 there is no mention of Abraham preparing a banquet for God's messengers, in *Hūd* (11) 69 Abraham is said to have prepared a meal for them, specifically a roasted calf. Also, while *al-Hijr* (15) 52 mentions briefly Abraham's initial suspicion towards those messengers, *Hūd* (11) 70 justifies this by asserting that Abraham grew suspicious of his guests when he saw that they did not extend their hands to eat from the roasted calf he had prepared for them, a detail which is absent from the Jewish sources. Moreover, while verse 53 of *al-Hijr* mentions the good tidings of a newborn son to Abraham without naming him, verse 71 of *Hūd* names this son, another detail not found in the Jewish versions of the story. Another addition to the narrative communicated in *al-Hijr* is the mention of Abraham's intercession in favor of the Sodomites in *Hūd* (11) 74–76. Lastly, verse 79 of *Hūd* recounts the response of the Sodomites to Lot when he offered them his daughters – also an elaboration over the representation of the episode of Lot's daughters in verse 71 of *al-Hijr*.

If we then take into consideration the literary context in which *Hūd* (11) 69–83 appears, namely in a cohesive and polemical chapter (Sūra) which argues that Muḥammad is not fabricating revelations, the elaborations in the story of the angels' visit to Abraham and Lot in *Hūd* (11) 69–83 could amply be

7 The choice to compare *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 and *Hūd* (11) 69–83 to Genesis 18:1–19:29 is not meant to suggest that only Jewish traditions had a bearing on Qur'anic narratives. It is only a means to show how *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 and *Hūd* (11) 69–83 compare to each other.

characterized as later amendments to the version communicated earlier in *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77.⁸

As for the sources (pre-texts) against which the Qur'ānic representation of the incident of Lot's daughters took shape, we have two cases to consider in our analysis. In the first case study, we will presume that the Qur'ānic representation of the incident took shape against a cultural context (predominantly oral) that agreed with the representation of the incident in the Jewish and Christian sources. In the second case study, we will consider the case whether an oral narrative that differed from these sources, particularly with regard to the nature of Lot's offer to the Sodomites, was the backdrop of the Qur'ānic representation of the incident.

A thorough review of the Jewish and Christian sources dating prior to the eighth century reveals that the Christian sources seem to have had no interest in (re) narrating the episode.⁹ On the other hand, all the Jewish sources reviewed agree, and

8 Besides *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 and *Hūd* (11) 69–83, the angels' visit to Abraham and Lot is recounted in the Qur'ān in *al-Dhāriyāt* (51) 24–37 and very concisely in *al-'Ankabūt* (29) 28–35. Both the accounts in *al-Dhāriyāt* and *al-'Ankabūt* are also significantly less comprehensive compared to their counterpart in *Hūd* (11) 69–83. For example, *al-Dhāriyāt* (51) 24–37 and *al-'Ankabūt* (29) 28–35 do not mention Abraham's intercession in favor of the Sodomites. They also do not mention the incident of Lot's daughters. Moreover, in the instances where *al-Dhāriyāt* and *al-'Ankabūt* relate the same story elements as *Hūd* they are fairly concise; the delivery of the good tidings of a newborn to Abraham and the reaction of his wife Sarah is a good example (see *al-Dhāriyāt* [51] 28–30 and *al-'Ankabūt* [29] 31 in comparison to *Hūd* [11] 71–73). Neuirth has already proven the tripartite structure-scheme of the middle and late Meccan Sūras, to which *Hūd* belongs. See A. Neuirth, *Sudien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981. *Hūd* is one of the main illustrative examples in a paper I am currently writing with the tentative title "Coherence and Intertextuality in the Qur'ān." A close intertextual reading of this Sūra demonstrates that it is not only a cohesive text in terms of its formal characteristics, e.g. its structural markers and transition devices. It also exhibits topical unity that unifies its three structural units. I will point here to some observations from the paper mentioned above which should serve the purpose of establishing the chronology of *al-Hijr* (15) 51–77 and *Hūd* (11) 69–83 with respect to each other. The three passages which make up the composition of *Hūd* are as follows: vv. 1–24 (the introductory part of the Sūra), vv. 25–104 (narratives from salvation history pertaining to Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Lot, Shu'ayb, and Moses), and vv. 105–123 (the concluding part of the Sūra). The refutation of the accusations of fabricating the revelations levelled against Muḥammad is undoubtedly the idea which gives *Hūd* its topical unity. This idea is affirmed directly and indirectly in the three sections of the Sūra: namely in *Hūd* (11) 12–14, 17–18, 28, 35, 49, 63, 88, 110, and 120. Among the tools the Sūra employs in order to refute the accusations against Muḥammad are the narratives from salvation history in its middle section. The Sūra presents most of the prophets in these narratives, to use Michael Zwettler's expression, as "typological prefigurement[s]" of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. See M. Zwettler, "A Mantic Manifesto: the Sūra of 'The Poets' and the Qur'ānic foundations of prophetic authority," in J.L. Kugel (ed.), *Poetry and Prophecy: the Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, (75–119) 97.

9 Besides the New Testament books I have examined a comprehensive group of Christian sources. These include, but are not limited to, Justin Martyr, *First Apology of St. Justin for the Christians to Antoninus Pius*, in J. Kaye, *The First Apology of Justin Martyr: Addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius*, Edinburgh: John Grant, 1912, 1:1–99; Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, in Rev. W. Wilson, *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867–69, 1:349–469, 2:1–542; Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Roland E. Heine, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982; Ephrem the Syrian, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian*, trans. E.G. Mathews, Leuven: Peeters, 1998; Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. D.S. Wiesen, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

in fact the Biblical narrative directly suggests, that Lot, through his offer, exposed his daughters to the sexual desires of the Sodomites in order to protect his male guests from sexual abuse.¹⁰ In view of this unified interpretation of the incident in Jewish traditions, it is not necessary to consider all the Jewish sources reviewed as pre-texts in our analysis. Intertextuality here, and in fact generally, is to be differentiated from source-influence criticism. Our concern is not to speculate on the source the Qur'ān is most closely related to. We are primarily interested in meaning. Therefore I will use Genesis 18:1–19:29, the narrative upon which all other Jewish traditions concerning the episode were supposedly developed, as the pre-text.

The first case study

Verse 71 of *al-Hijr* reads: "He said: Here are my daughters, if ye must be doing (so)" (*Qāla hā'ulā'ī banātī in kuntum fā'ilīm*).¹¹ Even through a cursory reading, it is quite clear that this verse, on its own, does not convey definite meaning. It does not explain what Lot meant when he offered his daughters to the Sodomites, i.e. the nature of his offer. On the textual level, the narrative before and after this verse does not either.¹²

Although Arab grammarians insisted that the first segment of the verse, i.e. the phrase *hā'ulā'ī banātī* ("here are my daughters"), is grammatically a complete sentence composed of a subject and a predicate, they also acknowledged that it does not communicate specific meaning on its own. For example, in his book *al-Durr al-maṣūn fī 'ulūm al-kitāb al-maknūn*, Al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī (d. 596/1199–1200) insisted that it is imperative to supplement the verse with an additional element in order for it to convey definite meaning (*lā-budda min shay' in maḥdhūf tatimmū bihī al-fā'ida*).¹³ Arab grammarians suggested that this element, although

10 See for example *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th ed., ed. K. Elliger, R. Kittel, W. Rudolph, H.P. Rüger, A. Schenker and G.E. Weil, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997, 24–27; Flavius Josephus, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, ed. W. Whiston and P.L. Maier, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999, 64–65; *Targum Neofiti I*, *Genesis*, ed. M. McNamara, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992, 1A:103–10; *Targum Onkelos*, ed. J.W. Etheridge, New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1968, 71. I have also examined works which represent comprehensive anthologies of Biblical and apocryphal traditions. See L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1909, 1:240–57; James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: a Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, 331.

11 All English translations of Qur'ānic verses are according to Muḥammad M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New York: New American Library, 1953.

12 The Qur'ān relates Lot's story, or hints at it, in the following instances: Qur'ān 53:53–54; 69:9–10; 54:33–39; 37:133–138; 50:12–14; 26:160–175; 15:51–77; 38:12–14; 21:71–75; 27:54–58; 11:69–83; 11:89; 29:26–35; 7:80–84; 6:86–88; 22:42–44; 66:10–11 and 9:70. On the textual level, none of these texts specifies the nature of Lot's offer.

13 Shihāb al-Dīn Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-ma'rūf bi-l-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, *al-Durr al-maṣūn fī 'ulūm al-kitāb al-maknūn*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Kharāṭī, Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1986–91, 7:173. A similar opinion is expressed in Muḥyī al-Dīn Darwish, *I'rāb al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-bayānuhu*, Damascus and Beirut: al-Yamāma and Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1999, 14:206. Abū Ja'far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950) implicitly expresses this opinion as well. He added

absent (*maḥdhūf*, literally omitted or left out), is implied. They presented two suggestions to solve this issue. In one solution, the meaning of the *maḥdhūf* element was speculated to be *fa-tazawajūhunna* or, equally, *fa-inkahūhunna* (i.e. marry them).¹⁴ Hence the first segment of verse 71 would mean "here are my daughters, marry them." In the second solution, the *maḥdhūf* was considered to be an imperative verb, *tazawwajū* or *inkahū* (i.e. marry), at the beginning of the verse, where *hā'ulā'i* was considered the direct object of this verb and *banātī* a substitute noun for *hā'ulā'i* (i.e. *badal*). So, in this case, the first segment of verse 71 would mean "Marry! Here are my daughters."¹⁵

The verse's second segment, i.e. *in kuntum fā'ilīn* ("if ye must be doing"), is also problematic. It is a conditional sentence that lacks its apodosis (*jawāb al-shart*). Arab grammarians again solved this problem by compensating for the missing apodosis with an implied sentence element, the very element which they proposed earlier to solve the problem in the verse's first segment (*fa-inkahūhunna* ["marry them"] or *inkahū* ["marry"]).¹⁶ Now, what are we to make of this syntactical analysis of verse 71?

Undoubtedly, the verse must refer to some external element(s) in order to convey definite meaning to its audience. Indeed, it demands an intertextual reading. Bear in mind that except for verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr* and *Hūd* (11) 78–79 there are no other references to Lot's daughters in the Qur'ān and that, according to the chronological order we have adopted, *Hūd* (11) 78–79 was revealed after verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr*. If verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr* was to be understood when it was communicated, it had to be comprehended intertextually with reference to a pre-text external to the Qur'ān.

Genesis 19:8 reads: "Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men for they have come under the shelter of my roof."¹⁷ Comparing verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr* to Genesis 19:8, one notices the following. In the former, the phrase "here are my daughters," although it does not specify the number of Lot's daughters or point to their virginity, clearly alludes to the segment, "Look, I have two daughters that have not known a man; let me bring them out to you" in the latter. Also, the segment of Genesis 19:8 in which Lot says "do to them" has permuted to "if ye must be doing" in verse 71. Lastly, the segment of Genesis 19:8 in which Lot specifies the terms of his offer, i.e. "as you please" (literally, as is good in your eyes [*ka-tōb bi- 'ēnēkem*]), is not echoed in verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr*, at least not explicitly. The rest of Genesis 19:8 is echoed in *al-Ḥijr* in verse 68 before verse 71. On the whole, then, verse 71 references Lot's offer in Genesis 19:8 and an action that

the phrase *fa tazawajū* ("marry") after *hā'ulā'i banātī* when he interpreted the verse. Cf. Abū Ja'far Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, Mecca: Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā, 1988, 4:33.

14 Respectively, cf. Ḥalabī, 7:173; Darwīsh, 14:206.

15 See also Ḥalabī, 7:173; Darwīsh, 14:206.

16 See Darwīsh, 14:206; Bahjat 'Abd al-Wāhid 'Alī, *Al-I'rāb al-mufaṣṣal li-kitāb Allāh al-murattal*. 'Ammān: Dār al-Fikr li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1993, 5:100.

17 The English translations of Bible verses are from the Revised Standard Version.

is attributed to the Sodomites. In particular, the verse should be recognized as an allusion to Genesis 19:8.¹⁸ There is an unmistakable allusion-marker in verse 71: the explicit reference to Lot's offer, i.e. "here are my daughters."

However, in order to make full sense of this allusion, it is not sufficient to correctly identify the referent of its markers, for this segment does not specify the nature of Lot's offer (relating only, "let me bring them out to you"). The meaning of the allusion is not its referent, but rather it is the attributes and the connotations attached to this referent in the pre-text.¹⁹

Before we proceed with resolving this, let me first point to the impact of the narrative before the allusion-marker on the episode's meaning. Verse 67 of *al-Ḥijr* reads: "And the people of the city [i.e. Sodom] came, rejoicing at the news (of new arrivals) [i.e. God's messengers]." Certainly, this verse does not by itself state why the Sodomites rejoiced at the news of the arrival of Lot's male guests. Nonetheless, Genesis 19:5 ("and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them [i.e. sexually]'"²⁰) ensures that the audiences have understood that the reason of the Sodomites' excitement was because they anticipated abusing Lot's male guests sexually.²¹ Verse 68 of *al-Ḥijr* confirms this. It relates that Lot begged the Sodomites not to disgrace him in the person of his guests ("He said: Lo! they are my guests. Affront me not!").

So, not only the "insufficiency of sense"²² in the allusion-marker, and its "particular formulation"²³ impel the audience to recall the connotations attached to Lot's offer in the Biblical story, but also "the meaning of the alluding text previous to the marker's occurrence, suggest the property(ies) of the source text's intention necessary to complete the sense of the allusion-marker."²⁴ Lot's offer in verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr* is hence presented as a solution which Lot devised in order to avoid the sexual abuse of his guests. By merely recalling what follows in Genesis 19:8, i.e. "do to them as you please," the audience realizes that Lot's offer to the

18 My approach to allusion is informed by Camela Perri's speech act model of alluding. See C. Perri, "On alluding," *Poetics* 7, 1978, 289–307.

19 Ibid., 291–92.

20 See for instance Josephus's interpretation of the Sodomites' intentions toward Lot's male guests in Josephus, *The New Complete Works*, 64–65. The expression "know (someone)" is used several times in Genesis in this sense. See, e.g., Genesis 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16 and 38:26. Genesis 19:8 refers to Lot's daughters' virginity by indicating that they have not "known" man.

21 Also, there is no ambiguity regarding the Sodomites' sin in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān states clearly that the Sodomites practiced homosexual sex. See for example Qur'ān 54:37, 26:165, 27:55, 29:29 and 7:81. Qur'ān 54:37 ("They even asked of him his guests for an ill purpose. Then We blinded their eyes (and said): Taste now My punishment after My warnings!") seems to have been communicated prior to *al-Ḥijr*. See Nöldeke's chronology in Robinson, 69–78; Neuwirth, "Referentiality and textuality," 158. Qur'ān 54:37 clearly alludes to Genesis 19:5 (mentioned above) and 19:11 ("And they struck with blindness the men [i.e. the Sodomites] who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door"). Therefore, the "ill purpose" mentioned in Qur'ān 54:37 denotes the Sodomites' intention of abusing Lot's guests sexually.

22 Perri, "On alluding," 300.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

Sodomites was open-ended. If initially the Sodomites' intention was to abuse Lot's guests sexually, and Lot had offered them his daughters as a substitute, with no restrictions whatsoever, Lot, through such an offer, has undoubtedly exposed his daughters to the sexual desires of the Sodomites.

This understanding is emphasized by the segment "if ye must be doing," immediately following the allusion-marker in verse 71. This segment echoes the phrase "do to them" in Genesis 19:8 and would, in light of Genesis 19:1–29, mean: if you insist on your intention to abuse my guests sexually.

Certainly, understanding the incident in the fashion described in this case study does not coincide with the Islamic moral code. The Qur'an had early on asserted that Lot is a messenger of God. Furthermore, it is also possible that some of the verses prohibiting fornication were communicated around the same time of *al-Hijr*.²⁵ There may have been an oral narrative which complemented the Qur'anic representation of the incident and which resolved this apparent contradiction; we will discuss this possibility later on. For now, let us turn our attention to the representation of the episode of Lot's daughters in *Hud*.

Verses 78 and 79 of Hud

Verse 78 reads, "And his people came unto him, running towards him – and before then they used to commit abominations – He said: O my people! Here are my daughters! They are purer for you. Beware of Allah, and degrade me not in (the person of) my guests. Is there not among you any upright man?" The verse unambiguously alludes to the incident of Lot's daughters, in Genesis 19 and/or in *al-Hijr* (the Biblical connotations of the incident have already been shown to be present in the latter). The segment "Here are my daughters" is again an unmistakable allusion-marker.

Syntactically, the phrase "they are purer [*aṭhar*] for you" in verse 78 qualifies the allusion-marker as its predicate. This phrase, however, could function in one of two ways. If the word *aṭhar* is understood in an immaterial sense, e.g. purity of the heart from sin, then the phrase "they are purer for you" would seem not to align with the Biblical connotations of Lot's offer.²⁶ We will consider this possibility shortly in the second case study. The second possibility is that to the Qur'an's early audience the word *aṭhar* in this verse meant "cleaner" in a material sense (as in physical cleanness).²⁷ In this case, the phrase "they are purer for you"

does not contradict the Biblical connotations of Lot's offer. Lot would simply be telling the Sodomites that having sexual intercourse with his daughters is "cleaner" than having sexual intercourse with his male guests.²⁸

Verse 79 in *Hud* continues the narration. The verse reads: "They [i.e. the Sodomites] said: Well thou knowest that we have no right [*ḥaqq*] to thy daughters, and well thou knowest what we want."²⁹ The question here is: if Lot were offering the Sodomites his daughters under no restrictions, as in the Biblical story, why would they answer in this fashion? The Qur'anic texts are silent with regard to this question. But in light of the Jewish traditions, this response would indicate that Lot's offer was not in accordance with the Sodomites' customary law. In their customary law, the Sodomites established their right to abuse strangers and Lot, as a sojourner in Sodom, was not in a position to change this rule by offering them his daughters.³⁰ The Sodomites' response to Lot hence would mean: you know we have no right to your daughters because, as per our customary law, we have rights only to your guests.

The second case study

Given the composition of verse 71 of *al-Hijr* and verses 78 to 79 of *Hud*, it seems plausible to suppose that an external oral narrative which complements the representation of the episode in these verses and differs from the Biblical connotations of Lot's offer should assign a specific nature to this offer. This oral narrative has to present Lot's offer as an alternative to the Sodomites' intended sexual abuse of Lot's guests, but it also has to make this offer bounded by terms set by Lot himself, not dependent on the Sodomites' desires, or else its interpretation would eventually coincide with its Biblical connotations. We can only resort here to Muslim exegetical literature for it is the only source that offers us a hypothesis as to the nature of Lot's offer in this case scenario.

Many Muslim exegetes suggest that Lot offered the Sodomites his daughters in marriage. This seems to fit the criterion mentioned above. Furthermore, it is consistent with the meaning of the word *aṭhar* in verse 78 of *Hud* in its immaterial sense. Had this been the interpretation ascribed to Lot's offer in the oral narrative against which the Qur'anic episode of Lot's daughters took shape, the allusion-marker "here are my daughters" in verse 71 of *al-Hijr* and verse 78 of *Hud* would be referring to Lot asking the Sodomites to marry his daughters (i.e. "here are my daughters, marry them").³¹

25 Qur'an 17:32; 25:68 and 24:2 are some of the verses where the prohibition of fornication is mentioned in the Qur'an.

26 The derivatives of the root *ṭ.h.r.* in this sense are used in the Qur'an to point to purity of the heart, purity related to sacredness etc. See Qur'an 80:14; 98:2; 3:55; 33:53; 58:12; 22:26; 5:6; and 5:41. According to Nöldeke, only Qur'an 80:14 was revealed before *Hud*. See Robinson, 77–78. For a comprehensive concordance of the root's occurrence in the Qur'an, consult Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'an al-karīm*, Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1996, 527.

27 As in the use of the derivative of the root *ṭ.h.r.* in Qur'an 2:222 ("They question thee [O Muḥammad] concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness, so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed [*yathurna*]. And when they have purified themselves [*taṭhharṇa*], then go in unto them . . .").

28 The rest of verse 78, i.e. "Beware of Allah, and degrade me not in (the person of) my guests. Is there not among you any upright man?", could support either reading of the word *aṭhar*.

29 Given the usage of the derivatives from the root *ḥ.q.q.* in the Qur'an and the syntax of verse 78 of *Hud*, the word *ḥaqq* could be understood to mean "right" or "fair claim". See *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 255–60.

30 See for example Genesis 19:9 and Josephus, *The New Complete Works*, 64–65.

31 The majority of Muslim exegetes interpret the segment "if ye must be doing" (*in kuntum fā'ilin*) in verse 71 of *al-Hijr* to mean: if you must be doing what I asked of you, i.e. to marry my daughters. See for example, Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd al-Farā' al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl fi al-tafsīr wa-l-ta'wīl*,

The main problem with the marriage hypothesis, however, is that it is not congruent with the Sodomites' response to Lot's offer in verse 79 of *Hūd*. Muslim exegetes present several interpretations of this verse. The first is that the meaning of the Sodomites' response is: you know well that we have no right to your daughters because they are not wives to us.³² But this is illogical if Lot were indeed offering the Sodomites his daughters in marriage. In Al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1209) *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* we are told that a second possible explanation is that the Sodomites' response resulted from Lot's insistence that they become believers, i.e. follow his message, before they could marry his daughters. And since, hypothetically, Lot knew that they would not, their response was worded in this fashion: we have no right to your daughters because we will not be believers (and you already know that).³³ Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) transmits a third interpretation, on the authority of an anonymous source, according to which Lot's people had asked to marry his daughters earlier and Lot had declined their request. Al-Qurṭubī relates that in the Sodomites' customary law, of which Lot was aware, if someone were to ask to marry a woman and were turned down, he would have no right to marry her afterward; hence the phrase "you know we have no right to your daughters."³⁴

Muslim exegetes suggest yet another explanation of the Sodomites' response. Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) suggests that the phrase "we have no right [*ḥaqq*] to thy daughters" actually means we have no "need for" or "desire for" your daughters.³⁵ Some later exegetes provide justification for this view. Rāzī states that when one needs something it is as if he has a right to it. In Rāzī's view, denying the right is an indirect expression, metonymy (*kināya*), for denying the need (*al-taqdīr anna man ihtāja ilā shay' fa-ka-annahū ḥaṣala lahū fihī naw' min-al-ḥaqq, fa li-hādḥā al-sabab jū 'ila nafyu l-ḥaqq kināya 'an nafyi al-ḥāja*).³⁶ However, this is a significant deviation which does not seem warranted by the

text. The word *ḥaqq* in the Qur'ān is virtually always used to mean "just", "fair claim" or "truth."³⁷ Rāzī acknowledges this when he says that this interpretation is not the apparent or literal (*al-zāhir*) meaning, but is derived from the meaning one should identify from the verse (*maḥmūl 'alā al-ma'nā*). But this is a circular argument, for once the theological justification of the verse is devised, the text is explicated so that it fits the justification.

All the Muslim exegetical interpretations of the Sodomites' response to Lot's offer do not seem plausible. They are all derived from the theological justification of Lot's offer, i.e. the marriage offer, and hence they either contrive more story elements to explain this response or they deviate significantly from its apparent meaning. Ultimately, these interpretations contribute to disproving the marriage explanation of Lot's offer.

A detailed discussion of the exegetical material related to the episode is now necessary in order to assess the intertextual readings I have presented in this chapter in light of the available historical evidence.

Lot's daughters in Qur'ān commentaries

There are significant differences among the Muslim exegetes who endorse the marriage interpretation of Lot's offer. One group of exegetes assert that Lot offered the Sodomites his own daughters in marriage. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Al-Ṭabrisī (d. 565/1169–70) relate that Qatāda b. Di'āma al-Sadūsī (d. 118/736) – an exegete from the generation of the learned men who succeeded the companions of the Prophet (known in Muslim sources as *al-tābi'ūn*) – embraced this view.³⁸ Muqātil b. Sulaymān also articulates this opinion.³⁹ There are other exegetes, however, who doubted the sensibility of this rendering of the marriage hypothesis. They argued that, considering the substantial number of Sodomites compared to the limited number of Lot's daughters, the offer is simply unrealistic. Verse 36 of *al-Aḥzāb* (Q 33) played an important role in this argument. The verse reads, "The prophet is closer to the believers than their selves, and his wives are (as) their mothers . . ." (Q 33:6) By relying on an unofficial reading of this verse, attributed to 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd (d. 32/652–53), which adds the phrase "and he [i.e. the prophet] is a father to them" after the phrase "and his wives are (as) their mothers," these exegetes became convinced that "my daughters" in verse 71 of *al-Hijr* and in verse 78 of *Hūd* should not be understood in a literal sense. Being the prophet of his people, Lot is also the father of all the women of his nation. Thus, Lot was offering the Sodomites all the women of his nation in marriage, not only his own daughters. This view seems also to have originated with some

Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1985, 14:407; al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 14:37. This interpretation, however, is untenable. Construing the segment "if ye must be doing" in this way ignores the narrative before verse 71 in *al-Hijr* and in other Sūras where, as I demonstrated above, there are compelling indications that the referent of this segment is the Sodomites' intentions towards Lot's guests. In this scenario, a more reasonable interpretation would be that verse 71 means: here are my daughters, marry them, if you are serious in following through on your intentions to abuse my guests sexually.

32 Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) endorses this opinion and transmits that Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768) did as well. See Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Zuhārī al-Ghamrāwī, Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Maymaniyya, 1903, 12:49. Also, al-Ṭabrisī transmits that Ibn Ishāq endorsed this view. See al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 12:197.

33 See Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1970, 1:34.

34 See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ansārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Iṭfīsh, Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1967, 9:77.

35 See Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Shihāta, Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyya li-l-Kitāb, 1983, 2:292. The same opinion is also transmitted in al-Baghwi's *Ma'ālim al-ianzīl fi al-tafsīr wa-l-ta'wīl* without justification. See al-Ḥusnī b. Mas'ūd al-Farā' al-Baghwi, *Ma'ālim al-ianzīl fi l-tafsīr wa-l-ta'wīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1985, 12:230.

36 See Rāzī, 18:34. See also Ṭabrisī, 12:197.

37 See *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras*, 255–60.

38 See Ṭabrisī, 14:36; Rāzī, 18:32. In Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, Qatāda is said to have embraced another view, namely, that Lot offered all the women of his nation in marriage to the Sodomites. See Ṭabarī, 12:48.

39 See Muqātil b. Sulaymān, 2:292.

exegetes from the generation of the *tābi'ūn*, namely Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722) and Sa'īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/712).⁴⁰ It was to gain wide approval among Muslim exegetes.⁴¹

A third position, which seems to have appeared in response to the two previous views, is attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687–8). Qurṭubī transmits, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, that the chiefs of the Sodomites (*ru'asā'uhum*) had asked Lot repeatedly to give them his daughters in marriage, but Lot had not given them an answer, or he had always refused (*fa-lam yujibhum*).⁴² According to this view, when the Sodomites attacked Lot's house he offered their chiefs his daughters in marriage, hoping that this act would diffuse the confrontation and save his guests.⁴³

Although the marriage hypothesis is, by far, the most popular interpretation of Lot's offer among Muslim exegetes, there have been other interpretations of this offer which are also attributed to exegetes from the *tābi'ūn* generation. Ibn Abī Najīh (d. 131/748–9) – a student of Mujāhid – is recorded in Ṭabarī's commentary to have asserted that the Qur'ān did not state whether Lot offered the Sodomites fornication or marriage.⁴⁴ We find another example in the commentary of Qurṭubī, who relates that 'Ikrima (d. 105/723–4), the client of Ibn 'Abbās, asserted that Lot did not truly offer the Sodomites his own daughters nor the women of his nation, but simply put forth this offer hoping that the Sodomites would leave (*lam ya'riḍ 'alayhim banātihi wa-lā banāti ummatihī, wa-innamā qāla lahum hādḥā li-yanṣarifū*).⁴⁵ Qurṭubī transmits also that Abū 'Ubayda (presumably Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā al-Taymī, who died between 207/822 and 213/828) expressed a considerably similar view to that of 'Ikrima. According to Qurṭubī, this view was endorsed by a group (*ṭā'ifa*) of the early exegetes. Abū 'Ubayda asserts that Lot's offer was a means of "defense" and he did not intend to follow through on it (*innamā kāna al-kalām mudāfa 'a wa-lam yurid imḍā'hu*).⁴⁶ According to this view, Lot presented his offer as a way of shaming the Sodomites before themselves and expressing his disgust at their behavior.⁴⁷ In al-Qurṭubī's

40 Mujāhid b. Jabr and Sa'īd b. Jubayr are consistently mentioned in the sources to have endorsed this view. See for example Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 12:48; Razi, 18:32; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ansārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Iṭfīsh, Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1967, 9:76.

41 See for example, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī, *Tafsīr Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammam a-Ṣan'ānī*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya, 1999, 2:306; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās, *Ma'āni al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, Makka al-Mukarrama: Jāmi' at Umm al-Qurā, 1988, 4:33; Rāzī, 18:32; 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī: al-musammā anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ṭa'wīl*, Cairo: Matba'a Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣubayḥ, 1926, 3:115; Ismā'il b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, ed. Sāmī b. Muḥammad Salāma, Riyadh: Dār Ṭība, 1997, 4:337.

42 See Qurṭubī, 9:76.

43 Ibid.

44 See Ṭabarī, 12:48.

45 See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ansārī al-Qurṭubī, 76.

46 Ibid.

47 See ibid.

words, "this is as when one who cheats other people of their money is told: eating swine is more lawful to you than doing this" (*kama yuqālū li-man yunḥā 'an akli mā al-ghayr: al-khanzīr aḥallū laka min hādḥā*).⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that none of the exegetes who discussed the interpretation of Lot's offer cited the Prophet or one of his companions in order to authenticate his point of view, except for the tradition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, who was himself a companion of the Prophet. In addition, the considerable differences exhibited in the several versions of the marriage hypothesis seem to be attributed solely to the efforts of the Muslim exegetes to develop an interpretation of the Lot's daughters episode in the Qur'ān.

Thus it seems that the marriage hypothesis is not relevant to the understanding of the incident within the context of the emergence of the Qur'ān – a contention which is corroborated by the intertextual analysis I presented in both case studies of this study. These significant differences also suggest that there was a conscious attempt on the part of the majority of Muslim exegetes to shift the interpretation of the incident away from its Biblical connotations. The unpopularity of opinions such as those attributed to Ibn Abī Najīh and 'Ikrima in the exegetical literature supports this contention.⁴⁹

If one reads the representation of the episode of Lot's daughters in the Qur'ān in isolation from the pre-text(s), then Ibn Abī Najīh is correct: the Qur'ān does not state whether Lot offered the Sodomites fornication or marriage. The views attributed to 'Ikrima and Abū 'Ubayda, however, are interesting. They reflect a keen knowledge of both the Biblical (and/or apocryphal) traditions and the Qur'ānic representation of the episode. Whether these views are authentically attributed to these figures is not the question here. If these attributions are authentic, one could, at best, date these views to the early years of the second half of the first Islamic century, more than forty years after the Prophet's death. What is surprising is that these views do not contradict the contention that early Muslims comprehended the episode of Lot's daughters in *al-Hijr* and *Hūd* against the backdrop of its Jewish antecedents. In fact, the views attributed to 'Ikrima and Abū 'Ubayda and al-Qurṭubī's justification of these views provide an insight into oral information that may have been concomitant to the Qur'ānic representation of the incident in the context of the emergence of the Qur'ān. We might bear in mind that the Islamic dogma concerning the prophets' infallibility (*iṣmāt al-anbiyā'*) is a development subsequent to the emergence of the Qur'ān. Thus for early Muslims it would be reasonable to conclude that Lot was being intentionally misleading. He was not serious when he offered his daughters to the Sodomites in the manner demonstrated in the first case study.

48 See ibid.

49 Baghawī points to the view attributed to Abū 'Ubayda and states that: "they [i.e. The majority of exegetes] did not accept this interpretation." See Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl*, 1985, 12:230.

Conclusion

The analysis I have presented in this study calls for a rigorous examination of the Qur'ānic narratives through the lens of Intertextuality and within the formative cultural milieu of the Qur'ān. It suggests that an emphasis on discourse and meaning as opposed to source-influence criticism could be exceptionally informative, particularly if the gradual emergence of the corpus of Qur'ānic texts is taken into account. A comparison between the analysis I have presented and the representation of the Qur'ānic account of Lot's story in Fred Leemhuis's article "Lūṭ and His People in the Koran and its Early Commentaries" shows that Leemhuis's method did not enable him to discover the intertextual meaning embedded in verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr* and verses 78–79 of *Hūd*. In fact, the synthesis of Lot's story in Leemhuis's article disregards verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr*, which suggests that Leemhuis thought that verse 78 of *Hūd* encapsulates its meaning.⁵⁰ As I have demonstrated in the first case study, the significance of the Lot's daughters episode is equally shared between verse 71 of *al-Ḥijr* and verses 78 and 79 of *Hūd*. It is not only imparted by these verses but is also produced as a result of the audiences' "interaction" with the parallel Biblical story earlier Qur'ānic texts, and, possibly, a concomitant oral discourse.

Thus far, the focus in modern scholarship has mainly been on delineating the development of narrative-text exegesis in Muslim exegetical literature or on identifying later additions to the Qur'ānic narratives in this literature. This work is certainly worth pursuing. However, as this study demonstrates, Muslim exegetical literature, even if it is largely posterior to the emergence of the Qur'ān, is important in assessing the significance of the Qur'ānic narratives within the context of the Qur'ān's initial cultural milieu, perhaps as important as the Biblical and apocryphal sources which influenced this context. Recourse to material from Qur'ānic exegesis should, however, be explicit and should not take precedence over the contextual analysis of the Qur'ānic texts themselves. Bearing this in mind, an appreciation of Muslim exegetical literature can contribute positively to an intertextual analysis of the stories of the prophets in the Qur'ān.

50 See Leemhuis, "Lūṭ and his people," 101–2.

18 Joseph among the Ishmaelites

Q 12 in light of Syriac sources¹

Joseph Witztum

Introduction

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the study of the Qur'ān in light of the Syriac literary tradition. Examples of fine studies are those of Sidney Griffith and Kevin van Bladel dedicated to the "Companions of the Cave" story and to the Dhū l-Qarnayn narrative respectively.² In this chapter I follow their lead, with one major difference: I examine a Qur'ānic retelling of a narrative from the Hebrew Bible. Such retellings are often assumed to reflect Jewish traditions, and thus Western scholarship tends to ignore Christian sources. Syriac texts are cited now and then but are not covered systematically in any manner comparable to the way the Jewish texts are treated.³

- 1 This chapter is a slightly enhanced version of an oral presentation. A fuller study will be set out in a chapter of my dissertation and published elsewhere. I thank my advisor Michael Cook, Patricia Crone, Judith Loebenstein-Witztum, Manolis Papoutsakis and Gabriel Reynolds for their comments on earlier drafts. I am also grateful to Kristian Heal for generously sharing his work before publication. Quotations from the Qur'ān are usually adapted versions of Arberry. Biblical verses are cited from the NRSV.
- 2 S. Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian tradition," in *QHC*, 109–37; K. van Bladel, "The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur'ān 18:83–102," *ibid.*, 175–203.
- 3 See N.A. Stillman, "The story of Cain and Abel in the Qur'ān and the Muslim commentators: Some observations," *JSS* 19, 1974, (231–39) 231–32. Even scholars who argue for a strong Christian impact on the Qur'ān are often content with a general observation that Christians too transmitted narratives from the Hebrew Bible. Textual parallels from Christian sources are usually not pursued. One attempt to balance scholarship on this point will be found in my dissertation, the title of which is *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives*. It includes a survey of the studies which did take into account oriental Christian literature. See for now, S. Lee, *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism*, Cambridge: Smith, 1824, 124–38 (I am indebted to Krisztina Szilágyi for this reference); T. Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955, 201–2; and the occasional comments in H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Quran*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1961. A more recent example is G.S. Reynolds, "Redeeming the Adam of the Qur'ān," in D. Kreikenbom et al. (eds), *Arabische Christen – Christen in Arabien*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007, 71–83.

In several instances, however, the Qur'ān shows a strong affinity to Syriac poems which expand on Biblical themes. These poems range from formal dialogues in alternating stanzas to dramatized narratives which include dialogue and homiletic material.⁴ They were used in liturgy, had a wide audience and therefore could easily have served as a channel of transmission for Biblical traditions.⁵ Indeed the Qur'ānic retellings and the Syriac poems display similarities with regard to elements of the plot, literary form, lexical use, and typological function.

Here I will examine the Joseph story and argue that the Qur'ānic version is closely related to the Syriac tradition. By contrast, previous scholarship has tended to emphasize the rabbinic background, generally ignoring the Syriac sources.⁶

Two aspects of the Joseph story render it particularly suited for a study of this kind. One is its sheer length: this is the longest narrative in the Qur'ān;⁷ the other is the existence of several Syriac works devoted to Joseph, which furnish us with enough material to work with.⁸

4 S. Brock, "Dramatic dialogue poems," in H.J.W. Drijvers et al. (eds), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984*, Rome: Pontificum Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987, 135–47. See also S. Brock, "Syriac dialogue poems: Marginalia to a recent edition," *Le Muséon* 97, 1984, 29–58.

5 For the wide diffusion of these homilies, see L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac tradition of interpretation," in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation I/1: Antiquity*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996, (612–41) 641. See also K. Upson-Saia, "Caught in a compromising position: The Biblical exegesis and characterization of Biblical protagonists in the Syriac dialogue hymns," *Hugoye* 9:2, 2006.

6 For studies of Q 12 which completely ignore Christian traditions, see, e.g., A. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press, 1898, 111–18; D. Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes*, Paris: Geuthner, 1933, 55–68; M.S. Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph: A study of Koranic narrative," *JNES* 44, 1985, (193–204) 193–94; R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, Richmond: Curzon, 2002, 31 and 56–57; B. Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran: An Intertextual Study of Common Narrative Materials*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2006, 99–117 (Hebrew). Two scholars refer to Syriac sources sporadically: I. Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente im erzählenden Teil des Korans*, Leipzig: Fock, 1907; H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 187–224. Schapiro examined many of the Syriac texts on Joseph (see his survey of Christian sources on p.12), but cites them mainly as parallels to Muslim exegetical traditions. Even when similarities with the Qur'ān are noted it is always assumed that the source is Jewish; see, e.g., Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 20, 49, 58, 64. Not a single example is given where the Qur'ān is closer to the Syriac sources. Speyer largely follows Schapiro, though he does entertain the possibility that some elements of the narrative might have been taken from Christians; see especially Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 199–200 and 210–11.

7 See C. Gilliot, "Narratives," *EQ*, 3:(516–28) 518.

8 Overviews of the Syriac works are found in H. Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, Zürich: Schwarzenbach, 1923, 9–52; S. Brock, "Dinah in a Syriac poem on Joseph," in G. Khan (ed.), *Semitic Studies in Honour of Edward Ullendorff*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, (222–35) 222–24; and K.S. Heal, *Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources*, University of Birmingham (unpublished dissertation), 2008, 14–80.

The main Syriac works devoted to Joseph date from the fourth and fifth centuries and consist of one narrative in prose, *The Syriac History of Joseph*, falsely attributed to Basil of Caesarea (hereafter PsB),⁹ and three works of metrical homilies. These include a cycle of twelve homilies attributed to Ephrem (d. 373) or Balai (fl. early fifth century) (hereafter Balai),¹⁰ four homilies falsely attributed to Narsai (d. 503) or Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) (hereafter PsN),¹¹ and one authentic

9 Edited in two parts based on one manuscript written in an East Syriac hand, Berlin Syriac 74 (1695 CE): M. Weinberg, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Cäsarea, Teil 1*, Berlin: Itzkowski, 1893, and S.W. Link, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Cäsarea, Teil 2*, Berlin: Itzkowski, 1895. As Heal notes, the work is preserved in another four manuscripts, dated to the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. There are also versions in Arabic, Latin (translated from Arabic in 1336) and Ethiopic (preserved in a late fourteenth/early fifteenth-century manuscript and translated by E. Isaac, "The Ethiopic History of Joseph: Translation with introduction and notes," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 6, 1990, 2–125); Heal, *Tradition*, 16–20; idem, "Identifying the Syriac Vorlage of the Ethiopic History of Joseph," in G.A. Kiraz (ed.), *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008, 205–10; idem, "The Syriac History of Joseph: A new translation and introduction," in R. Bauckham, J. Davila, and A. Panayotov (eds), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Non-canonical Scriptures* (vol. 1) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, forthcoming). Based on the haggadic elements contained in it, Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 11–12, suggests a mid-fourth-century date for the work. Brock, "Dinah," 222–23, prefers a fifth-century date based on the occurrence of the Greek loanword *ara*. Weinberg, Baumstark (A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn: Marcus u. Weber, 1922, 79) and Brock agree that the work was originally written in Syriac and is not a translation of a work of Basil. Cf. Näf, *Josef*, 12.

10 Edited by P. Bedjan, *Histoire complète de Joseph par Saint Ephrem: Poème en douze livres*, Paris: Harrassowitz, 1891. The earliest manuscript (dated to the sixth century) attributes the work to Balai, whereas later manuscripts attribute it to Ephrem; see the survey of the manuscripts and editions in R.R. Phenix, *The Sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qenneshrin: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Fifth Century Syriac Literature*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 1–11. Most scholars follow Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 62–63, in preferring the attribution to Balai. Cf. A. Palmer, "The influence of Ephraim the Syrian," *Hugoye* 2:1, 1999, in his introduction to the fourth text in his anthology and in note 3. Heal, *Tradition*, 71, simply refers to an anonymous author and grants the text an early date. Recently Phenix, *Sermons on Joseph*, 14–31, has argued for Balai's authorship, though the evidence is not entirely conclusive.

11 The edition used here is that of Bedjan, *Homiliae Mar-Narsetis in Joseph*, in P. Bedjan, *Liber Superiorum*, Paris: Harrassowitz, 1901, 521–629. For other editions, see Heal, *Tradition*, 58–60. These homilies survive in twelve manuscripts, not all of which include all four homilies; see A.S. Rodrigues Pereira, "Two Syriac homilies on Joseph," *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 31, 1989–90, (95–120) 96–97, and a fuller and more detailed list in Heal, *Tradition*, 42–58. Homilies 1 and 2 form the original work and have been dated approximately to the fifth century. The other two are later additions, homily 3 consisting of excerpts from the tenth homily of Balai; Rodrigues Pereira, "Two," 99–100; Brock, "Dinah," 223; and Heal, *Tradition*, 63–67. Brock rejects the attribution to Narsai on the basis of differences in style and usage. Likewise, the existence of a genuine collection of homilies on Joseph by Jacob of Serugh as well as an authentic homily by Narsai on Joseph make both attributions unlikely; Heal, *Tradition*, 62–63. Heal (ibid., 33 note 1), supports a fifth-century date since the homilies are preserved in both West and East Syriac manuscripts. A shorter recension of the first three homilies is preserved in a West Syriac manuscript, Berlin 166, the beginning of which was edited by M. Engel, *Die Geschichte Josefs nach einer syrischen Handschrift der königl. Bibliothek in Berlin 1*, Berlin: Itzkowski, 1895.

homily by Narsai.¹² The ten unpublished homilies by Jacob of Serugh were not incorporated into this study.¹³

Other works worthy of mention are Ephrem's commentary on Genesis and the sermon on Joseph, which belongs to the corpus of Greek texts attributed to Ephrem (hereafter Ephraem Graecus). Preserved in a single manuscript, dated to 523, the commentary is usually accepted as a genuine work of Ephrem. It retells the Biblical story in its own words and contains quite a few narrative expansions.¹⁴ Itself in Greek, the sermon is closely related to the Syriac homilies and seems to stem from the same world.¹⁵ Also relevant are the two *kontakia* on Joseph by Romanos the Melodist (fl. sixth century), especially the first one.¹⁶

The precise relationship between all these sources is yet to be determined conclusively.¹⁷ But, as will be seen, the Qur'an seems closest to the first two homilies of PsN which in turn likely used PsB.

Links in the plot

We may now turn to the similarities between the Syriac and Qur'anic accounts. Starting with the plot, we find that they frequently depart from the Biblical text in similar ways. Heinrich Näf's dissertation from 1923, devoted to Joseph in the Syriac tradition, briefly noted some of these instances,¹⁸ but his work was largely

overlooked by subsequent scholars of the Qur'an. Moreover, Näf was convinced that Muḥammad received all his Biblical knowledge from oral instruction by Jews.¹⁹

The departures from the Biblical account include omissions, expansions, and other transformations. For my argument the most relevant instances are those not shared by Jewish sources, either at all or at least not in the same exact form.²⁰

As for omissions, an interesting example concerns the very beginning of the story. Whereas the Biblical narrative opens by mentioning Joseph's bad report about his brothers, Jacob's preference for him, and his brothers' subsequent hatred towards him (Genesis 37:2–4), PsN and the Qur'an both omit these embarrassing elements which portray Joseph and Jacob in a negative manner. They start the actual story with Joseph's dream(s),²¹ which come only later in the Bible (Genesis 37:5).²²

But the attempt to defend the character of Jacob and Joseph does not stop here. The Biblical Joseph, in what might seem to be arrogance, recounts his dreams first to his brothers and only then relates the second dream to his father. Jacob then rebukes him for it, acting in what might be construed as ignorance (Genesis 37:5–10). In PsN and the Qur'an, however, Joseph first seeks the meaning of the dream(s) from his father.²³

- 12 The edition used here is that of A. Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina*, Mosul: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1905, 2:265–88. The homily is found in five manuscripts from the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century; Heal, *Tradition*, 77–78.
- 13 For a summary of their content as well as a brief study, see Näf, *Josef*, 42–52. In addition there are three short anonymous dialogue poems which focus on one Biblical scene: two about Joseph and Potiphar's wife and one concerning Joseph and Benjamin's meeting; see S. Brock, *Soghyatha Mgabbyatha*, Glane: Monastery of St. Ephrem, 1982, 13–17, and idem, "Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39): Two anonymous dispute poems," in W.J. van Bakkum et al. (eds), *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, Leuven: Peeters, 2007, 41–57.
- 14 R.M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*, Louvain: Durbecq, 1955; English translation in E.G. Mathews Jr. and J.P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1994.
- 15 See J.S. Assemani, *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia* (Greek and Latin) 2, Rome: Typographia Vaticana, 1743, 21–41. For other editions and a preliminary English translation, see E. Lash, "Sermon on Joseph the most virtuous," available online at: <<http://www.anastasis.org.uk/Joseph.pdf>> (accessed February 10, 2011). See also P.-H. Poirier, "Le sermon pseudo-éphrémien *In pulcherrimum Joseph*: Typologie et midrash," in *Figures de l'Ancien Testament chez les pères*, Strasbourg: Centre d'Analyse et de Documentation Patristiques, 1989, 107–22.
- 16 For the Greek text and French translation, see J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymns I*, Paris: Cerf, 1964, 202–45 ("de Joseph"), 260–93 ("Tentation de Joseph"). For a brief introduction to Romanos, see R.J. Schork, *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit: Romanos the Melodist*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995, 3–39. It now seems evident that Romanos was indebted to Syriac poetry; see M. Papoutsakis, "The making of a Syriac fable: From Ephrem to Romanos," *Le Muséon* 120, 2007, 29–75 (references to earlier work by Brock are found on p. 46, note 44).
- 17 Compare Näf, *Josef*, 84–88, with Heal, *Tradition*, 259, and Phenix, *Sermons on Joseph*, 72–112.
- 18 See Näf, *Josef*, 58 (Jacob's belief in the dreams and his warning not to repeat them), 60 (revelation in the pit), 66–67 (Jacob unconvinced by the bloody garment), 69 (Jacob's damaged eyesight as a

result of his grief), 70 (Potiphar doubting his wife's story), 72 (Joseph's remaining in prison longer as punishment for his request that the cup-bearer help him), 78 (Joseph's statement that he will be as, or in fact is, Benjamin's brother), 83 (the brothers insulting Benjamin and his family after the cup is found). In some of these examples Näf notes rabbinic parallels, but even when none are to be found he assumes that the Qur'an must reflect a lost Jewish tradition. See also *ibid.*, 85.

- 19 *Ibid.*, 87. Interestingly, a century earlier, Samuel Lee commented on the "manifest similarity of style and sentiment" between Ephraem Graecus and Q 12. After noting that in both texts Jacob is suspicious of the brothers and Potiphar's wife confesses her crime, Lee concludes: "These coincidences are, I think, sufficient to show that the one must have been the genuine offspring of the other; and that Syria was the soil from which the Pseudo-Prophet must have obtained his," Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 127–28. Like other early scholars Lee considered the Greek corpus attributed to Ephrem to be authentic, even though this is most often not the case.
- 20 I ignore parallels from *Sefer ha-Yashar*, since this late work (see H.L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, 339) is evidently indebted to the Islamic tradition; see M. Grünbaum, "Zu 'Jussuf und Suleicha,'" *ZDMG* 43, 1889, (1–29) 8ff. (cf. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 112–14 and 116, and his comment in the preface, viii). A Jewish work which follows the Islamic tradition in an even closer fashion is the Judeo-Arabic version of the Joseph story translated and studied in M.S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006.
- 21 The Qur'an omits Joseph's first dream. A similar phenomenon is found later in the Sūra when Pharaoh's two dreams (Genesis 41:1–7) are conflated (Q 12:43); see S. Goldman, "Joseph," *EQ*, 3:(55–57) 56, and A. Afshar, "Plot motifs in Joseph/Yūsuf story: A comparative study of Biblical and Qur'anic narrative," *Islamic Studies* 45, 2006, (167–90) 171. In later works Joseph's first dream resurfaces in a somewhat garbled form; see, e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Bahīyya al-Miṣriyya, 1938, 18:87 (citing Wahb). Cf. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alamī, *Mu'tamar tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf*, Damascus: Maṭābi' Dār al-Fikr, 1961, 1:197–98.
- 22 PsN, 522–23; Q 12:4–6. In Q 12:8 mention is made of Jacob's preference for Joseph and Benjamin, but this is presented as an accusation made by the brothers, not as fact. Moreover, this accusation comes only after Jacob's reaction to the dream and could be understood as its result.
- 23 Possibly related as well is the reading of the Septuagint. As opposed to the text of the Masora which has Joseph relate his second dream twice, once to his brothers (v. 9) and a second time to his father and brothers (v. 10), the Septuagint mentions in v. 9 that Joseph related the dream to his

Jacob then warns Joseph not to relate his dreams to his brothers and proceeds to interpret their true meaning, thus indicating his belief in them.²⁴ Thus neither is Joseph arrogant nor Jacob ignorant. Although their specific solution is unique, PsN and the Qur'an develop tendencies found in other post-Biblical treatments of the Joseph story which tried to read away embarrassing features of the narrative.²⁵

Näf had already noticed the similarity between PsN and the Qur'an on this point. Interestingly, assuming that Muḥammad could only have received the Joseph story from Jews, Näf inferred that a parallel tradition must have existed in Jewish circles, even though this is unattested.²⁶

A striking instance of a shared expansion concerns Potiphar's wife. In the Bible she appears last in Genesis 39:17–19, where she accuses Joseph and thus brings about his imprisonment. Nothing more is said of her. By contrast, in the Qur'an she resurfaces later in the story, confesses her evil-doing and exonerates Joseph. After Joseph solves the king's dream (while still in prison), the latter sends for him:

(50) The king said: "Bring him to me!" but when the messenger came to him, he [=Joseph] said: "Return to your lord and ask him: 'What of the women who cut their hands?' Surely my Lord has knowledge of their guile." (51)

father and brothers and omits any such mention in v. 10. Thus, according to the Septuagint, one could possibly understand that Joseph related his second dream first to his father and only then to his brothers. Interestingly, PsB seems to be following the Septuagint when it has Joseph relate the second dream to his brothers only when they are at their father's side; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 17. It is possible that PsN was influenced by PsB on this point against the Peshitta tradition.

24 That Jacob believed in the dream (and even said so to Joseph's brothers) is found also in Balai, 14–16. According to PsB, Jacob rebukes Joseph in front of his brothers, warning him not to repeat the dreams, but in truth he believes them to be true; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 18. See also Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 20, and Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 194, where Jacob's belief in the dreams in Balai and PsN is noted.

25 The following references are not exhaustive by any means. Their purpose is merely to illustrate the sensibilities that guided PsN and consequently the Qur'an. For attempts to defuse the embarrassment caused by Joseph's bad report, see J.W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993, 613, and H.W. Hollander, "The portrayal of Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian literature," in M.E. Stone and T.A. Berggren (eds), *Biblical Figures outside the Bible*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998, (237–63) 257. Philo, Josephus and Jubilees simply omit the bad report (Jubilees, in fact, leaves out the gift of the coat and the dreams as well). Jacob's apparent favoritism is justified by Balai and Narsai, whereas Ephrem in his commentary glosses over Jacob's preference for Joseph and the gift of the coat; Heal, *Tradition*, 111–22. Joseph's choice to relate his dreams to his brothers is defended by Philo (*On Joseph* 6) and Josephus (*Judean Antiquities* 2.11). The notion that Jacob believed in his son's dreams could find support in the Biblical text itself, where in the course of rebuking Joseph Jacob interprets the dream (Genesis 37:10). Moreover, the jealous reaction of the brothers in the following verse as well as the note that Jacob "kept the matter in mind" both seem to indicate that Jacob did not consider the dream quite so ludicrous after all; see Philo, *On Joseph* 8–9, and *Genesis Rabba* 84.12. Josephus (*Judean Antiquities* 2.15–17) presents Jacob as rejoicing in his son's dream and interpreting it without rebuke.

26 Näf, *Josef*, 57–58. See also Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph," 194. Stern adduces Jacob's reaction to the dreams as an example for the Qur'anic version bearing "the clear markings of the rabbinic tradition."

"What was your business, women," he said, "when you solicited Joseph?" "How free is God from every imperfection! (*hāsha li-llāhi*)," they said, "We know no evil against him." The wife of the mighty man said: "Now the truth is at last discovered; I solicited him; he is a truthful man." (52) "That, so that he may know that I betrayed him not secretly (*lam akhunhu bi-l-ghaybi*),"²⁷ and that God guides not the guile of the treacherous. (53) Yet I claim not that my soul was innocent – surely the soul of man incites to evil – except inasmuch as my Lord had mercy; truly my Lord is All-forgiving, All-compassionate." (54) The king said: "Bring him to me and I will choose him for myself." Then, when he had spoken with him, he said: "Today you are established firmly in our favor and in our trust."

The extent of Potiphar's wife's change of heart depends on whether vv. 52–53 belong to her speech. If so, she repented fully and believed in God, but even if not, as several exegetes suggest, v. 51 includes an admission of guilt on her part.²⁸

Potiphar's wife appears again in many of the Syriac sources as well. Ephrem, PsB, PsN, Balai, and Ephraem Graecus all include a scene in which she confesses, though they differ in details.²⁹ According to PsN, for example, Potiphar hears the messengers announcing in the streets that Joseph has risen to power. When he learns that this is the very same Joseph whom he had imprisoned, he rushes to meet him, bows down before him fearing for his life, and pleads that his folly be forgotten. Joseph calms him, telling him that he is not to blame. Potiphar then returns home, informs his wife of Joseph's new status, and expresses his fear, apparently not pacified by Joseph's words. His wife assures him that Joseph is just and will not harass him. She confesses that it was she who assaulted Joseph. Later she herself grows fearful and has a scribe write a petition to Joseph begging his mercy. Finally she comes before Joseph, who reads her petition and dismisses her in peace, setting her mind at rest.³⁰

Several factors might have brought about this narrative expansion: simple curiosity as to what happened to Potiphar and his wife, the fact that other characters

27 This last phrase could also be rendered: "that I betrayed him not in [his] absence".

28 The exegetes suggest three speakers for these verses: Potiphar's wife, Joseph and even Potiphar; see Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2006, 11:375–77.

29 According to Ephrem, Potiphar is present when Pharaoh's dreams are interpreted. When he realizes Joseph's new status, he rushes home to consult his wife, who calms him and confesses her sin, stressing that if Joseph is to punish anyone it is her. She adds, however, that he would not since his imprisonment led ultimately to his new high status. Potiphar then joins the crowds following Joseph's chariot through the streets, and Joseph does him no harm, knowing that it was all part of God's plan; Mathews and Amar, *Ephrem*, 187–88. Similar is Ephraem Gaecus; see Lash, "Sermon," 29–30. In Balai's version Potiphar's wife observes Joseph in his greatness and imagines what she would say were he to bring up her false accusation, without actually speaking to him; Balai, 133–38. Only in PsB and PsN does the woman confess both to her husband and to Joseph; see Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 34 (there is a lacuna there which is filled in Heal, *Tradition*, 26–32), and PsN, 550–55.

30 Ibid.

in the story keep on reappearing, and perhaps the desire to create a neat chiasmic pattern of events.³¹ A reading of the Joseph narrative in light of a parallel scene in Esther 6:7–13 most likely contributed to this expansion as well.³²

Be that as it may, the Qur'ān is akin to the Syriac sources in this scene, but with two main differences.³³ In the Qur'ān the confession occurs not after Joseph's public elevation to office, but rather right before he leaves prison to assume power.³⁴ Moreover, whereas the Syriac sources use this scene to establish Joseph's

31 See K. Heal, "Reworking the Biblical text in the dramatic dialogue poems on the Old Testament patriarch Joseph," in B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *The Peshitta: Its Use in Literature and Liturgy*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, (87–98) 96–97. Compare with the structural explanation for the Qur'ānic expansion found in M. Cuypers, "Structures rhétoriques dans le Coran: Une analyse structurelle de la sourate 'Joseph' et de quelques sourates brèves," *MIDEO* 22, 1995, (107–95) 177–79. Another possible incentive for a reconciliation scene might be found in the tradition that identifies Joseph's Egyptian master with his father-in-law, distinct in the Hebrew text (Potiphar and Potiphara), but conflated in later tradition; see the Second Temple literature and rabbinic sources cited by V. Aptowitzer, "Asenath, the wife of Joseph: A haggadic literary-historical study," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1, 1924, (239–306) 262. If Joseph is to marry the daughter of the man who unjustly threw him in prison, one might expect first a reconciliation scene. It is not, however, clear whether this conflation occurred in the Syriac tradition as well. PsB refers to Joseph's wife as the daughter of Potiphar the priest, but this does not necessarily indicate that he meant to merge the two figures; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 34.

32 Similarities between the Joseph story and that of Esther have been noted by ancient readers and modern scholars alike; see *Esther Rabbah* 7:7, and S.B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure*, Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979, 123–42. These include both thematic parallels and linguistic correspondences. One striking correspondence is found in the descriptions of the elevation of Joseph (Genesis 41:41–43) and Mordecai (Esther 6:7–11). In both texts the hero is robed in special garb, rides a royal horse/carriage, and his special status is proclaimed. Indeed in Genesis Joseph is also given Pharaoh's signet ring, but Mordecai too will receive the king's ring later on in Esther 8:2. As a result of these similarities the two texts were conflated in various ways. Under the influence of Genesis, in *Judean Antiquities* 11.254, Haman suggests that a gold chain (not mentioned in Esther) be placed around Mordecai's neck, while the Septuagint for Esther 6:8 reads "a robe made of linen" instead of "a royal garment"; see C.A. Moore, *The Anchor Bible: Esther*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1971, 65 (but cf. H. Kahana, *Esther: Juxtaposition of the Septuagint Translation with the Hebrew Text*, Leuven: Peeters, 2005, 254–55). In PsN, on the other hand, the conflation goes in the other direction. There the fine linen garments of Genesis 41:42 are described as "garments of kings, fine linens and silks," possibly a reflection of "the royal garments worn by the king" mentioned in Esther 6:8. Likewise, PsB mentions "royal garments"; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 34. Seeing that the two texts were conflated, it would be quite natural for some readers to import the scene which follows this semi-coronation in Esther to the Joseph story. In Esther the public coronation causes Mordecai's arch-enemy Haman to worry about his own future and consult with his wife. This is the same motif which appears in Syriac versions of the Joseph story. However, the outcome of this consultation is quite different. While Haman and his wife realize that they are lost, Potiphar and his wife repent and are forgiven by Joseph, forgiveness being a major theme of the Joseph narrative.

33 Surprisingly, the Qur'ān is not mentioned in the discussion of this motif in Nāf, *Josef*, 73–75. Cf. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 210–11, where the parallels in Ephrem and Ephraem Graecus lead Speyer to consider Christian informants as the source of this tradition. See also Brock, "Joseph and Potiphar's wife," 57.

34 Although the Qur'ān mentions Joseph's ascension to power (Q 12:54–56), it does so in general terms and does not refer at all to the semi-coronation with all its pomp. Q 12:57, which downplays the importance of reward in this world ("Indeed the reward of the world to come is better for those who believe and are God-fearing"), suggests that this is an intentional omission.

generosity and forgiveness, in the Qur'ān it serves to underline his utter innocence and perhaps also to emphasize the sincere repentance of Potiphar's wife.

One might list and discuss at length other shared expansions, but for the sake of brevity I leave that for another occasion and turn to two examples of minor adaptations of the Biblical text.

The first involves a shared specification of a general term in the Biblical account. In Genesis Jacob is fooled into believing that "a wild animal" had devoured Joseph (Genesis 37:20, 33). We are not told what kind of animal was involved. The Qur'ān, however, states several times that this was a wolf. Thus Jacob is reluctant to send Joseph with his brothers for fear that a wolf (*al-dhi'b*) or wolves (reading the word generically) devour him (Q 12:13–14), and later, after Joseph has been sold off, the brothers indeed attribute his alleged death to wolves (Q 12:17).³⁵

The rabbinic sources which specify the wild animal in question usually identify it with Judah, the lion's whelp (see Genesis 49:9),³⁶ or Potiphar's wife, the bear,³⁷ and thus give Jacob's words an ironic semi-prophetic meaning. To the best of my knowledge, no rabbinic source mentions a wolf in this context.³⁸ This is to be

35 The identification of the animal as a wolf (as opposed to a larger, more menacing animal) is possibly related to Joseph's young age in the Qur'ān. Whereas Genesis 37:2 states that Joseph was 17 years old, Q 12 seems to assume that he was much younger. This explains why he is to "enjoy himself and play" (v. 12), why Jacob fears for him and thinks he needs to be watched over (vv. 11–13), his description as a *ghulām* (v. 19), a term often used in the Qur'ān to denote young children, his owners' plan to adopt him (v. 21, compare Q 28:9 regarding Moses the infant), and the reference later on to his reaching maturity (v. 22). As Patricia Crone pointed out to me, the notion that Joseph was a mere child at the time of his sale was not unique to the Qur'ān; see the ivory carvings from the so-called Chair of Maximianus (made in Antioch or Alexandria in the first half of the sixth century). Figures of these carvings and further references are found in P. Crone, "Barefoot and naked": What did the Bedouin of the Arab conquests look like?" *Muqarnas* 25, 2008, (1–10) 2–3. In the Islamic exegetical tradition both approaches are found: Joseph is either a small boy or a seventeen-year-old; see, e.g., 'Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib. b. 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wafīz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām 'Abd al-Shāfi Muḥammad, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001, 3:228. The latter opinion (attributed in other sources to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī) reflects knowledge of the Biblical account. It might have been adopted in order to make sense of the reference in v. 15 to Joseph receiving revelation (*wa-awḥaynā ilayhi*), deemed unfitting for a young child.

36 See, e.g., *Genesis Rabba* 95.2 (this section is a later addition from the *Tanḥuma*). For parallels in other rabbinic sources, see M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelema*, 6:7, New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1948, 1434.

37 See *Genesis Rabba* 84.7.19; 87.3–4. An interesting explanation for the source of this image is found in Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph*, 244. This image is found also in Balai, 88–89; 111–12. I hope to return to this elsewhere.

38 Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph*, 245, suggests that "Perhaps it was the similarity of the Hebrew word for 'bear,' *dov*, unknown in Middle Eastern climes, with the Arabic for 'wolf,' *dhi'b* [...] that gave rise to the Muslim tradition . . ." Wolves do occur (describing the Egyptians) in Enoch's second dream in 1 Enoch, though this is most probably irrelevant for the Qur'ān. In 1 Enoch Joseph's sale is summarized thus: "When those twelve sheep had grown up, they handed over one of themselves to the wild asses, and those wild asses, in turn, handed that sheep over to the wolves, and that sheep grew up in the midst of the wolves" (1 Enoch 89:13); G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 365. Interestingly, the Qumran Aramaic fragments of this work seem to read דבא which could be interpreted as bears rather than wolves; *ibid.*, 378.

expected, seeing that the one brother who would not harm Joseph, his beloved Benjamin, is likened to a wolf in Genesis 49:27.³⁹

We do, however, find wolves in Christian retellings of the Joseph story. As part of the Joseph-Jesus typology, Joseph is referred to as the lamb. Hence his brothers are wolves.⁴⁰ Thus we read in PsN, for example: "The wolves (*dēbē*) rose, grabbed the lamb, and dragged him, / saying to him: 'relate to us the dreams you saw,'"⁴¹ and later "The wolves grabbed the rational lamb and behold they threw him down."⁴² The use of close cognates is noteworthy: compare Arabic *dhi 'b* (sg.) and Syriac *dēbē* (pl.).

It is worthy of mention that whereas PsN called the brothers "wolves," in the Qur'ān wolves are mentioned without an explicit link with the brothers.⁴³ Interestingly, this link is made in the Islamic exegetical tradition. The exegetes wonder why, of all possible dangers, was Jacob specifically afraid of wolves? Several answers are given, one being that by the "wolves" Jacob was actually alluding to the brothers themselves.⁴⁴

In my second example, the Syriac sources and the Qur'ān both tighten the chiasmic structure of the Biblical narrative by assigning garments a role in announcing the good news to Jacob. In Genesis, after Joseph reveals himself to his brothers he gives them garments and then sends them with various gifts to fetch his father. Initially Jacob does not believe that Joseph is alive, but after hearing Joseph's words and seeing the wagons, he does. Thus we read in Genesis 45:

39 Cf. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 196, where the Qur'ānic wolf is said to be the result of confusion with Genesis 49:27.

40 For the pairing of wolves and lambs, see, e.g., Isaiah 11:6; 65:25; Luke 10:3. See also P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, Paris: Harrassowitz, 1905–10, 4:18 (regarding Noah).

41 PsN, 524.

42 Ibid., 527. See also Lash, "Sermon," 11 ("As he approached / they saw him / and like wild beasts / wanted to destroy / Joseph; while he / like an innocent lamb / went to fall / into the hands of the most ferocious wolves"), 14 ("and see they have become like most savage wolves") and 26. Similarly, in Romanos' *kontakion*, Jacob addresses his son as "my lamb" and tells him to go and search for his sheep before the wolves devour him; Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 1:208 (but see 210 where the brothers are more ferocious than lions). Balai alternates between different images: Joseph as a "lamb among murderers" (21); the merchants state that had they not saved Joseph from his brothers they would have torn him to pieces like wolves (48); Joseph describes his brothers as lions and as wolves (79: "Mercy stood round me / when the lions surrounded me / From the mouth of ten wolves / his compassion snatched me and I was saved"); the brothers as lions and Potiphar's wife as a bear (110–12). In PsB the sons of the handmaidens attack Joseph like wild beasts; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 20.

43 The reference to actual wolves in a de-allegorized fashion is reminiscent of the sleepers' dog in Q 18:18. According to Griffith, this is a result of the pastoral metaphors evoked in the Syriac tradition, where the sleepers are likened to lambs, whereas the Lord is their shepherd; Griffith, "Christian Lore", 127–28.

44 See, for example, al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*, 11:275. A similar solution cited by al-Qurṭubī is that Jacob had dreamt of ten wolves surrounding Joseph wishing to devour him. One of the wolves, however, protects Joseph. Then the earth is split open and Joseph hides in it for three days. See also Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 3:224–25. An elaborate argument in favor of Simeon as the intended wolf is found in al-'Alamī, *Mu'tamar*, 1:398–409. In this twentieth-century text Biblical verses are adduced to establish that wolves might be a metaphor for evil men.

(26) And they told him: "Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt." He was stunned; he could not believe them. (27) But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. (28) Israel said: "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."

The garments play no part in announcing the news to Jacob. This is reserved for the wagons.

In the Qur'ān, there is no mention of wagons, and a garment has acquired an important, perhaps miraculous role. Here Joseph orders his brothers:

(93) "Go with this shirt of mine and cast it on my father's face, and he shall recover his sight; then bring me your family all together." (94) So, when the caravan set forth, their father said: "Surely [I would say that] I perceive Joseph's scent,"⁴⁵ were it not that you might consider me senile." (95) They said: "By God, you are certainly in your ancient error." (96) But when the bearer of good tidings came to him, and laid it on his face, forthwith he saw once again. He said: "Did I not tell you I know from God what you know not?"⁴⁶

Three departures from the Biblical account are of interest here: Joseph sends a garment to his father; it plays a part in delivering the good news to Jacob, and it causes him to regain his eyesight.⁴⁷ Again Syriac sources seem to supply the background to these events.

Regarding the loss and regaining of eyesight, Geiger comments that "[Muḥammad] was perhaps thinking of Jacob's loss of sight later on,"⁴⁸ or possibly the idea is based on some legend unknown to me.⁴⁹ In fact it seems to stem from a figure of speech found in the Bible in other contexts and used repeatedly in several Syriac sources to emphasize Jacob's grief.⁵⁰ Thus according to PsB, for

45 Compare Brock, *Soghyatha*, 16.

46 The identity of Jacob's interlocutors in vv. 94–96 is unclear. The natural candidates would be the brothers (compare vv. 85–86), but they were sent to Egypt in v. 87 and seem to return only in v. 96 or v. 97. See discussion in al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*, 11:447 and 450.

47 See Q 12:84, where after being informed that Benjamin had been imprisoned for stealing, it is said that Jacob "turned away from them and said: 'Ah, woe is me for Joseph!' And his eyes turned white because of the sorrow (*wa-byadḍat 'aynahu mina l-huzni*) . . ."

48 In Genesis 48:10, just before Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh towards the end of his life, it is said that his eyes "were dim with age."

49 Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 117. The closest parallel in rabbinic sources is the tradition according to which the revival of Jacob's spirit in Genesis 45:27 alludes to the divine spirit returning to him and his regaining prophetic power; see the sources listed in Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 72–74 (especially *Genesis Rabba* 91.6). See also Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 219–20, where an interesting parallel in Tobit 11:7–15 is noted. In J. Walker, *Bible Characters in the Koran*, Paisley: Gardner, 1931, 74–75, it is suggested that the blindness is the result of "some confusion" between Jacob and his father Isaac.

50 See especially Psalms 13:4; 19:9; 38:11; Proverbs 15:30. See also Tobit 10:5; 11:14.

example, when Jacob sees Joseph's bloodstained garment it is said that "the light of his eyes dimmed (*hšek nūhrā d- 'aynaw*)."⁵¹ Both Joseph and Benjamin are described as the light of their father's eyes,⁵² and when Jacob is reunited with Joseph he says: "my eyes were enlightened by seeing you (*nhar 'aynay ba-hzātāk*)."⁵³ Similar phrases are found in PsN, Balai, the dialogue poem between Joseph and Benjamin, Ephraem Graecus, and Romanos.⁵⁴

As for Joseph sending a garment to his father, this may reflect the Syriac tradition which follows the reading of the Peshitta to Genesis 45:23. In contrast to the Masora, where Joseph only sends his father donkeys loaded with food and other good things, in the Peshitta he also sends him garments and silver.⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, this is picked up in later Syriac sources.⁵⁶

51 Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 24. See also *ibid.*, 23, 25, 26. Similarly, Joseph laments over Jacob saying: "[your sons] darkened the light of your eyes;" Link, *Geschichte*, 11. See already Nāf, *Josef*, 69. Nāf notes that unlike the Qur'ān, PsB does not refer to full blindness. The exegetes on Q 12:84, however, argue over whether it refers to excessive crying, to complete blindness or impaired eyesight; see al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, 18:195–96, and cf. Q 5:83 and 9:92.

52 Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 24; Link, *Geschichte*, 20.

53 Link, *Geschichte*, 26.

54 PsN, 573 ("On account of mourning for Joseph my eyesight has diminished / and for Simeon too I mourn with my own sorrow"); Balai, 285 (where Jacob says to Benjamin: "Come in peace, light of my eyes, / for seeing you has strengthened your father"); Brock, *Soghyatha*, 15–16 ("light of my eyes, Joseph"); Lash, "Sermon," 13 ("May Jacob's eyes / not be darkened again / as he waits to see / my return to him") and 23 ("I shall die, Joseph, / my light and my support"); Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 228 (Joseph and Benjamin as Jacob's two eyes), and 240 (the night of discouragement is driven away from Jacob's eyes; the light of his children is like the twelve hours of daylight). In PsB Joseph is described also as "the staff of his father's old age" (Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 23 and 25). Compare Tobit 5:18, where Tobiah's mother calls him "the staff of our hands." The similarity is even more pronounced in the Vulgate version of Tobit 5:18 ("the staff of our old age") and 10:5 ("the light of our eyes, the staff of our old age"). Since the Book of Tobit draws on the Joseph narrative extensively (see the studies cited in J.A. Fitzmayer, *Tobit*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003, 35), it is possible that it later influenced retellings of the Joseph story. Interestingly, Jerome claims to have based his translation of Tobit on an Aramaic source; *ibid.*, 19–21. For a history of the phrase "a staff of old age" (though not including PsB), see D.A. Bertrand, "Un bâton de vieillesse", à propos de *Tobit* 5,23 et 10,4 (*Vulgate*)," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 71, 1991, 33–37.

55 A similar reading is found in the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Jubilees 43:22 ("and he also sent to his father clothing and money and ten asses which were carrying wheat. And he sent them off"). The two readings differ in one letter (*wāw*), which affects the relationship between Genesis 45:22 and 23 as well as the meaning of Hebrew *ke-zōt*. The text of the Masora is translated in the NRSV thus: "(22) To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. (23) To his father he sent the following (*ke-zōt*): ten donkeys (*asarā ḥamorīm*) loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey." The Peshitta, on the other hand, might be rendered along the lines of: "(22) And he gave to each man a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. (23) And to his father he sent such things (*hākānā*) as well as ten donkeys (*w- 'esrā ḥmārīn*) loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, wine, and provision for his father on the journey."

56 In PsB (Link, *Geschichte*, 24) Joseph sends his father ten suits of clothing. Later Benjamin dresses Jacob in these clothes. In Brock, *Soghyatha*, 16, Joseph tells Benjamin to bring his clothes to Jacob and inform him that he is alive (compare Balai, 274). In Balai, 278, Joseph sends his father three hundred pieces of silver.

As for the delivery of the news, according to PsB, when the brothers give Jacob the good news about Joseph, Benjamin shows his father the royal garments in which Joseph has dressed him.⁵⁷ In Balai's account the brothers first use the garments to break the good news to Jacob. They wear their fancy new attire to arouse his curiosity, and when he inquires where they obtained garments fit for kings, they tell him the good news concerning Joseph. Initially, Jacob does not believe them, but he is gradually convinced by the wagons and the memory of the dreams. What fully persuades him, however, are the garments which Benjamin shows him:

Afterwards they brought before him / the three hundred pieces of silver that he [=Joseph] had sent him, and the five sets of garments / that his brother Benjamin gave him [=Jacob],⁵⁸ and then Jacob believed and was convinced / that Joseph the son of Rachel is alive. His spirit which had suffered came to rest / and he gave thanks and glorified God. The old man rose as a mighty one / the ancient one as a youth.⁵⁹

By having the garments convince Jacob that Joseph is alive, these Syriac sources create a nice symmetry with the beginning of the story where a garment played a central part in the attempt to persuade Jacob that his son was dead. The Qur'ān then sharpens this symmetry in three ways: it refers only to one garment with no mention of wagons, it is said to belong to Joseph, and the word used to denote it (*qamīṣ*) is the very same one which describes the garment used in the attempt to deceive Jacob at the beginning of the story (Q 12:18).⁶⁰ Scholars have noted the enhanced symmetry in the Qur'ānic version, but have not been aware that in this the Qur'ān develops a trend found in the Syriac tradition.⁶¹

Shared departures from the Biblical version constitute the strongest argument for the Syriac background of Q 12. Other such examples could be adduced, but I leave that for another study and proceed now to examine the supporting evidence in order to illustrate the range of similarities between the Qur'ān and the Syriac sources.

57 Link, *Geschichte*, 24.

58 Following Bedjan's text. In a note he considers an emendation which would result in: "that his brother [=Joseph] gave Benjamin." The Peshitta's reading of Genesis 45:23, however, makes such an emendation unnecessary.

59 Balai, 287–91. The second homily of PsN ends abruptly before we are told what exactly convinced Jacob.

60 Both Genesis and the Syriac texts use different words in the two instances. The word *qamīṣ*, which occurs only in Q 12, is used also for Joseph's garment which is torn by his master's wife from behind and eventually proves his innocence (Q 12:25–28). In this way the Qur'ān leads its audience to compare the roles that garments play in the story. A discussion of the clothing motif in Q 12 is found in Afsar, "Plot motifs," 179–85.

61 For the chiasmic structure of Q 12 generally, see M. Mir, "The Qur'ānic story of Joseph: Plot, themes, and characters," *The Muslim World* 76, 1986, (1–15) 1–3; J. Hāmeen-Anttila, "We will tell you the best of stories": A study on surah XII," *Studia Orientalia* 67, 1991, (7–32) 26–28; and especially Cuypers, "Structures rhétoriques," 134–95. For the structural importance of the garment, see Afsar, "Plot motifs," 185. Another example of enhanced chiasm in the Syriac texts and the Qur'ān was noted above regarding the reconciliation scene between Joseph and Potiphar's wife.

Literary form

Taken together, two features of Q 12 suggest an affinity with the Syriac poems: the presentation of the Biblical material in a continuous narrative and the repeated use of dialogue.

Whereas rabbinic midrash usually presents its exegesis in the form of discrete comments on the Biblical verses, the Syriac poems and Q 12 both offer an uninterrupted retelling of the story (the former in verse, the latter in rhymed prose). This comparison can only be taken so far and moreover it touches upon questions of genre that lie beyond the scope of the present study. I will therefore limit my observations here to the second feature, the use of dialogue.

Dialogue is an important stylistic feature of the Qur'ān. Pre-Islamic poetry, on the other hand, makes little use of this literary device.⁶² In this the Qur'ān is akin not only to the Bible, as Mustansir Mir points out,⁶³ but perhaps more so to later religious poetry and homiletic literature which employ dialogue quite often.⁶⁴ Although the use of dialogue as a literary device is, of course, not limited to the Syriac tradition, my argument is based on the similarity of specific extra-Biblical dialogues in the Qur'ān and the Syriac poems.

As Mir notes, in Q 12 dialogue serves "almost as an organizing principle."⁶⁵ A comparison of the Biblical and Qur'ānic accounts demonstrates that the Qur'ān expands simple Biblical dialogues into more elaborate ones and even adds dialogue to episodes where the Bible had none. Often a similar dialogue is found in the Syriac sources. Two examples should suffice.

The first is an expansion of a Biblical dialogue. When the steward accuses the brothers of stealing the cup we read in Genesis 44:4–10 as follows:

(4) When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward: "Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them: 'Why have you returned evil for good? (5) Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'"

(6) When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them.

62 For an overview of dialogue in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, see R.C. McKinney, *The Case of Rhyme versus Reason: Ibn al-Rūmī and his Poetics in Context*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 313–15.

63 See M. Mir, "Dialogue in the Qur'an," *Religion and Literature* 24, 1992, 1–22 and idem, "Dialogues," *EQ*, 1:(531–35) 534.

64 For dialogue as a characteristic feature of fourth- to sixth-century poetry and prose homilies in Syriac and Greek, see S. Brock, "From Ephrem to Romanos," *Studia Patristica* 20, 1989, (139–51) 141–43. Whereas Brock is inclined to accept the possibility of Syriac influence on the Greek sources, Cameron is hesitant; A. Cameron, "Disputations, polemical literature and the formation of opinion in the early Byzantine period," in G.J. Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout (eds), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East*, Luven: Peeters, 1991, 91–108. For dialogue in early *piyyutim* and midrash, see E. Hachohen, "Studies in the dialogue-format of early Eretz-Israel *piyyutim* and their sources, in light of Purim expansion-*piyyutim*," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 20, 2006, (97–171) 131–62 (Hebrew).

65 Mir, "Dialogues," 532. See also Hämeen-Anttila, "We will tell you the best of stories," 19–21.

(7) They said to him: "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! (8) Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? (9) Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover, the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

(10) He said: "Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free."

Thus the steward speaks twice, the brothers only once. In Q 12:70–75, on the other hand, the dialogue is broken down so that each side speaks three times:

(70) [. . .] Then a herald proclaimed: "O, [people of] the caravan, you are indeed thieves!"

(71) They said, turning to them: "What is it that you are missing?"

(72) They said: "We are missing the king's goblet. Whoever brings it shall receive a beast's⁶⁶ load; that I guarantee."

(73) "By God," they said, "you know well that we neither came to work corruption in the land nor are we thieves."

(74) They said: "And what shall be its recompense if you are lying?"

(75) They said: "This shall be its recompense – in whoever's saddlebag the goblet is found, he shall be its recompense."⁶⁷ So we recompense the evildoers."

A comparison of these verses to their Biblical counterparts has led one scholar to comment on the eloquence of the Qur'ānic dialogue and its superiority over the Biblical one.⁶⁸ Again there is a Syriac precedent. A similar, though not identical, developed dialogue is found in PsN:

[. . .] he [i.e. the steward] shouted, saying: "In return for good you have repaid evil . . . you stole the king's cup by which he divines . . ."

The men answered: "Listen O steward and we shall say before you / that we trust God that we shall not be ashamed . . . Approach and search as you please and behold you will learn / and you will not find the cup by us as you said."

He said to them: "And if I do find it what shall happen?" /

They all said: "We shall all be slaves to your lord."

66 For the translation "beast" rather than "camel," see discussion below regarding the word *ba'ir*.

67 Though the language is somewhat vague, it seems that the exegetes are correct in understanding the brothers' answer as referring to slavery. Joseph and the Egyptians do not reject the proposed punishment and Benjamin is indeed detained by Joseph, presumably as a slave (Q 12:76–79).

68 Hämeen-Anttila, "We will tell you the best of stories," 20 ("This is a fine piece of dialogue, perhaps the best and most lively in the Qur'ān: all lines depend heavily on the previous ones and bring the action forward . . ."). In note 62 he adds that the dialogue in the Bible is "clearly inferior.".

And again they said to him: "What shall happen to you if you do not find [it]?" /

[He replied:] "... and as for me stone me and I shall die here. Come let you and I observe and see the truth."⁶⁹

Not only do PsN and the Qur'ān add more stages to the dialogue,⁷⁰ they also include a question to the brothers regarding the suitable punishment for the thief. Interestingly, the brothers' reply in both texts contradicts the Bible; whereas in Genesis the brothers suggest death for the thief and slavery for the rest, in PsN and the Qur'ān it is slavery (for all, or only for the thief, respectively).⁷¹

What follows is an example of a dialogue not found in the Bible. In Genesis, after Jacob is convinced that Joseph is alive he sets out to Egypt. The brothers do not confess their evil deeds, nor do they beg his forgiveness. In Q 12, on the other hand, one reads:

(97) They said: "Our father, ask forgiveness of our crimes for us; for certainly we have been sinful." (98) He said: "Assuredly I will ask my Lord to forgive you; He is the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate."

A similar scene is found in Ephrem's commentary on Genesis,⁷² but an even closer exchange is reported by Balai. The brothers report that Joseph has forgiven them and ask that his father follow his example. Jacob agrees and adds:

69 PsN, 589–90. I have translated only enough of each response to demonstrate that the simple Biblical dialogue has been elaborated into a multi-stage one.

70 The same is true to a lesser degree of Balai, 216–19, where the steward and Judah (representing the brothers) both speak twice.

71 See also Balai, 219 ("We shall place the loads before you / and you will examine them equally. If your cup is with us / we shall be slaves on its account"). The omission of the death penalty from the brothers' response is perhaps an attempt to alleviate the tension between the brothers' statement in v. 9 and the steward's reaction in v. 10 of the Biblical account. The steward begins by seemingly accepting the brothers' judgment, only then to contradict himself by stating that the guilty party will be made a slave and the rest will be set free. Ancient and modern readers alike have been troubled by this; one approach is to understand the verse as follows: "He replied: 'Even though what you propose is just, only he who is found to have it shall become my slave, and the rest of you will be exonerated.'" E.A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1964, 331. For a collection of Jewish responses to this problem, see Kasher, *Torah Shelema*, 6:7, 1621–22. Whereas Balai and PsN omit mention of death but preserve the idea that all the brothers be slaves, the Qur'ān brings the brothers' suggestion even closer to the steward's conclusion. Thus the Qur'ān offers a more extreme version of the solution found in the Syriac sources. A partial parallel is found in J. Yahalom, *Liturgical Poems of Šim'on Bar Megas: Critical Edition with Commentary and Introduction*, Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1984, 142 (text) and 42 (discussion) (Hebrew). In this sixth/seventh-century poem from Byzantine Palestine Joseph accuses the brothers of stealing the silver cup and they respond by saying that whoever stole it will become a slave.

72 Tonneau, *Ephraem*, 108–09. Here Jacob asks the brothers how Joseph ended up in Egypt. Judah responds by admitting their sin while adding mitigating explanations and begging forgiveness which Jacob then grants.

But I also call my God / not to judge you according to what you did. Let him not avenge through you / the afflictions that my old age endured.⁷³

The motivation for this scene might be Genesis 50:15–17, where after Jacob's death the brothers beg Joseph's forgiveness, saying: "Your father gave this instruction before he died: 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.'"

Jacob's instruction was not recorded previously in the Biblical text. As a matter of fact, the Bible never tells us that Jacob ever learned the true circumstances of Joseph's descent to Egypt. It is possible that the brothers are envisaged as having invented this instruction in order to save themselves.⁷⁴ Alternatively, if they are to be believed, one needs to assume that Jacob and his children had such a discussion without it being mentioned in Genesis. The exchange found in Balai and the Qur'ān might be an attempt to supply the background for such a scene.⁷⁵ Be that as it may, a Qur'ānic departure from the Biblical text in the form of dialogue yet again has a precedent in the Syriac tradition.

Lexical links

I proceed now to the thorny issue of vocabulary. Q 12 displays linguistic similarities to the Syriac sources on several levels; it includes cognates of words found in the Syriac texts, Syriac loanwords, and expressions that seem to have a Syriac substratum. It should be stressed, however, that these correspondences are often the natural result of conveying the same story in two closely related Semitic languages. Therefore they cannot serve as the sole basis for an argument of literary dependence.

Cognates shared with Syriac are found throughout Q 12, but since many of them exist in other forms of Aramaic (and at times in Hebrew) as well, and since most of them are quite common in Arabic, they are not particularly significant for my argument.⁷⁶ At most they might suggest an Aramaic/Syriac background rather than a Hebrew one. The following are some of the more interesting examples:

73 Balai, 295–96.

74 This is the approach of several rabbinic sources as well as medieval Jewish exegetes; see N. Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit (Genesis)*, Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, Department for Torah Education and Culture, 1976, 563–66.

75 Cf. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 220; H. Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations*, Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1998, 90. Note that in the Bible the brothers refer to the instruction taking place before Jacob's death, whereas the scenes in Balai and the Qur'ān take place immediately after Jacob receives the news that Joseph is alive. See also Balai, 325–26 and 333–34.

76 Compare, for example, Joseph's account of his dream in the Qur'ān and PsN. In Q 12:4 Joseph reports that he saw "*aḥada 'ashara kawkabān wa-l-shamsa wa-l-qamara ra'aytuhum li sājīdīna*." In PsN, 522 (which is no more than a paraphrase of the Peshitta to Genesis 37:9) he sees "*d-šmšā w-sahrā w-kawkbē ḥda 'sar sāgdīn qūdmay*" (*qūdmay* replaces the *li* of the Peshitta for the sake of meter). The Qur'ān and PsN present virtually two versions of the same sentence. But the same is true of the Hebrew of Genesis 37:9. The only word which might suggest a specifically Syriac or Aramaic

al-sayyāra, “[a group of] travelers,” (Q 12:10, 19);⁷⁷ *a‘šīru*, “pressing [wine],” (Q 12:36);⁷⁸ *simān*, “fat,” (Q 12:43, 46);⁷⁹ and *namīru*,⁸⁰ “we shall bring food,” (only in Q 12:65).⁸¹

Perhaps more relevant are words which have been identified as borrowings from Aramaic or Syriac. Generally, words of Aramaic/Syriac origin form the largest group of loanwords in the Qur’ān and Q 12 is no exception.⁸² Many of these words occur, however, frequently in the Qur’ān and are probably pre-Islamic borrowings. Here I would like to focus on three words in Q 12 which may suggest

background is *sājīdīn/sāgdīn* replacing the Hebrew *mištaḥawīm* (Targum Onkelos also uses *sāgdīn* here). The form of the word is also of interest since grammar would require *sājīda* to describe several irrational or inanimate objects (see Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Sa‘īd ‘Alī, Muṣṭafā al-Saqqa et al., Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954–68, 12:151). Obviously motivated by the rhyme, this might also reflect the Syriac or Aramaic form.

77 Whereas Biblical Hebrew has no cognate for *al-sayyāra*, various dialects of Aramaic do; see references in E.M. Cook, *A Glossary of Targum Onkelos: According to Alexander Sperber’s Edition*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 282. Genesis 37:25 uses another noun here, but Targum Onkelos, the Peshitta, PsB (Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 21) and Balai, 98, all have *šyārīā* (“caravan”). The word *sayyāra* occurs once more in Q 5:96, where the meaning seems to be “travelers” generally with no connotation of a group.

78 The root *-š-r* does not denote “pressing” in Hebrew, but does in various dialects of Aramaic (Cook, *Glossary*, 216) as well as Classical Ethiopic (W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge‘ez [Classical Ethiopic]*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987, 75). Genesis 40:11 employs a different verb here, but the Jewish Targums, the Samaritan Targum, Peshitta and later Syriac works (PsB [Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 31]; PsN, 545; Balai, 108) all have *‘esrēt*. The verb appears only once more in Q 12:49 (*ya‘šīrīna*), though there are several indications that this refers not to pressing fruit and extracting liquids, but rather to deliverance or rain; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘*, 12:232–34; al-Rāzī, *al-Taṣīr*, 18:151; E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984, 1:2061.

79 Although the root *š-m-n* exists in Hebrew and Jewish (Palestinian and Babylonian) Aramaic, the Masora and the Targums employ other words to describe the first group of cows in Pharaoh’s dream. The Qur’ānic *simān* is reminiscent of *šammīnān/šammīnātā* found in the Peshitta (Genesis 41:2, 4, 18, 20) and later Syriac works (PsB [Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 32–33]; PsN, 546–49; Balai, 120, 126–27; Mingana, *Narsai*, 2:280–81), but also in some manuscripts of the Samaritan Targum (see A. Tal, *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch: A Critical Edition*, Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1980, 166–71). The only other Qur’ānic occurrence of this adjective, *samīn*, in Q 51:26 also seems to reflect a Syriac background; compare Genesis 18:7 where the Hebrew and most Targums refer to a tender and good calf, whereas the Peshitta has a fat and good calf. The late Pseudo-Jonathan Targum has a tender and fat calf, so the argument is not conclusive.

80 Variant readings of this verb are *tamīru* in the second person and *numīru* in the fourth form; ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Mu‘jam al-qir’āt*, Damascus: Dār Sa‘d al-Dīn, 2002, 4:300–01.

81 The root *m-w-r* denotes the supplying of food and provisions in Syriac and Samaritan Aramaic (A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, 2:457), but not in Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic. Words from this root render the derivatives of Hebrew *š-b-r* throughout Genesis 41–44 in the Peshitta (and the Samaritan Targum) as well as in Balai, 215.

82 See *FV* throughout. For a statistical breakdown of the loanwords documented in *FV*, see M.R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’ānic Arabic*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, 57–60. It should be noted that Q 12 includes also a few Ethiopic loanwords and as a result Carter assumes that the Qur’ānic Joseph story is probably derived from an Ethiopian source; M. Carter, “Foreign vocabulary,” in A. Rippin (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, (120–39) 131 and 135. Pre-Islamic Ethiopic traditions concerning Joseph, insofar as they exist, have, as far as I know, yet to be studied in this context.

an Aramaic/Syriac literary background. They have been noted in the literature as loanwords, but it has not been pointed out that they occur in the Syriac texts on Joseph as well. They include the word for pit, *jubb*, the word for the animals which the brothers rode, *ba‘īr*, and the word for measure, *kayl*.

Jubb occurs only twice in the Qur’ān and only in the Joseph story (Q 12:10, 15). It does not have a plausible Arabic etymology and is most likely a loan from Aramaic/Syriac *gūbbā*,⁸³ used in the Jewish Targums, Samaritan Targum, and Peshitta to Genesis 37 and throughout the Syriac texts on Joseph.⁸⁴

Ba‘īr occurs only twice in the Qur’ān and only in the Joseph story (Q 12:65, 72). The use of Hebrew and Aramaic/Syriac words from the same root, both meaning beasts of burden, in the Joseph story, might suggest that the Qur’ānic word is a loanword, the meaning of which is perhaps not limited to camels as it usually is in Arabic.⁸⁵ Although Hebrew *be‘īr* appears in the Biblical text (and in the Targums) it does so only once (Genesis 45:17). All seven other references to the brothers’ riding animals are to donkeys. In the Syriac works, however, donkeys are not mentioned at all and only the word *b‘īrā* is used.⁸⁶ This makes the connection with the Syriac sources more probable.

Another possible loanword is *kayl*, “measure,” from Syriac *kaylā*,⁸⁷ found in Balai.⁸⁸ It occurs ten times in the Qur’ān, six of which are in Q 12.⁸⁹ Interestingly, the other Qur’ānic occurrences of this word concern the commandment to weigh and measure fairly and may also be related to the Syriac (or Aramaic) renditions of Biblical verses.⁹⁰

My argument, however, is not dependent upon these words being indeed directly loaned from Syriac. They could have originated from another Aramaic

83 *FV*, 98–99. See, however, Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge‘ez*, 176.

84 *Gūbbā* is attested in several Aramaic dialects; Cook, *Glossary*, 46.

85 See R. Dvořák, “Ueber die Fremdwörter im Korān,” *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 109, 1885, (481–562) 521–25 (refers only to the Hebrew); *FV*, 82 (adds Syriac). Muslim tradition was also aware that the word might have a different meaning in the Qur’ān; Mujāhid glosses it with “donkey” (*himār*), claiming that this is a dialectal usage of the word; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘*, 13:12, 20.

86 See Tonneau, *Ephraem*, 103; PsB (Link, *Geschichte*, 17–19, 23); Balai, 197, 224, 278 and 284 (where *ḥaywātā* is used); PsN, 588 (Joseph tells his steward: “Fill their loads according to the strength of their beasts of burden”). In the Peshitta the word *b‘īrē* replaces the donkeys in Genesis 43:24 and (according to one manuscript) 44:3, in addition to its use in Genesis 45:17. For *b‘īrā* in various Aramaic dialects, see Cook, *Glossary*, 37.

87 *FV*, 252, citing S. Fraenkel, *Die Aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, Leiden: Brill, 1886, 204. Fraenkel adduces examples of early use of the word in Arabic poetry and notes that it is seldom used in Jewish Aramaic (cf. M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*, Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002, 575). For the apparently rare *kayil* in Hebrew *piyyut*, see E. Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, Jerusalem: Ben-Yehuda Hozaa-La’Or, 1948–59, 5:2342.

88 See, Balai, 138 and 155.

89 Q 12:59, 60, 63, 65 (twice) and 88. To this should be added the verb *naktal* in Q 12:63.

90 Compare Q 6:152; 7:85; 17:35; and 26:181 with the Peshitta on Leviticus 19:36 and Deuteronomy 25:14–15.

dialect and might have been transmitted via an intermediate language.⁹¹ It is more important to recognize that the Syriac sources and the Qur'ān relate the Joseph story using similar vocabulary. This in itself is not conclusive, but could support other stronger evidence such as the motifs discussed above.

Also worthy of mention are two Arabic phrases which might reflect phrases used in the Syriac sources. In the Qur'ān the brothers refer to themselves twice as a *'uṣba*, i.e. a band or group of men (Q 12:8, 14). There is no such description in the Biblical text; neither have I found an exact equivalent in rabbinic sources.⁹² In the Syriac tradition, on the other hand, it is quite common for texts to refer to the brothers as a *gūddā*, that is, a band, company, or troop.⁹³ Interestingly, one of the Arabic words used by the tenth-century lexicographer Bar Bahlūl to gloss Syriac *gūddā* is *'uṣba*.⁹⁴ Likewise, in the Qur'ān and PsN, Joseph is thrown to the bottom of the pit, *ghayābat*⁹⁵ *al-jubb* in Arabic (Q 12:15) and *eṣṭēh d-gūbbā* in Syriac.⁹⁶ In the Bible only the pit is mentioned.

These last examples might seem trivial, but I believe that it can be shown in both cases that the Syriac usage reflects an interpretive conflation of the Joseph story with other Biblical texts (Genesis 49:23 in the case of *gūddā*,⁹⁷ and Daniel

91 Note, for example, the existence of *ba'ar* ("ox, bull, horned cattle") and *gabb* in classical Ethiopic as well as *b'r* and a derivative of the root *k-y-l* meaning "measurement" in Old South Arabian; see Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez*, 84, 176; J.C. Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1982, 51 and 245.

92 The closest parallels I found are *Genesis Rabba* 98.18 (*ba'alē meḥṣatō*) and Targum Onqelos on Genesis 49:23 (*ba'alē palgūtēh*), the meaning of which is far from clear. In any case, both sources do not refer to the brothers as a band separate from Joseph. Moreover, this description did not make its way into the retelling of the story itself.

93 See PsN, 524; 585. Balai uses both *gūddā* (see, e.g., 12, 54, 168, 305) and its synonym *si'ā* (see, e.g., 6, 50, 186, 285) throughout. Another term used is *kenšā*; PsN, 578, 583, 602. See also Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 208 and 230, where *choros* is used.

94 R. Duval, *Lexicon Syriacum auctore Hassano Bar Bahlule*, Paris: E Reipublicæ typographæo, 1888–1901, 1:460. The root *'-ṣ-b* appears also in the Syriac of PsN, 529, describing the love between brothers (*hūbbā 'ṣibā d-baynāt aḥē*), but *nṣibā* might be a better reading there.

95 This word appears only in Q 12:10 and 15. Derived from the root *gh-y-b* (being distant or concealed), its meaning is fairly clear from the context. Nonetheless, several variants are found: *ghayābat* (pl.), *ghayyābāt* (pl. of intensified form), *ghayabat* or *ghaybat* (the *nomen verbi*); see al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qir'āt*, 4:186–88.

96 PsN, 526.

97 The Hebrew text of this verse referring to Joseph is not entirely clear, though it is often translated along the lines of: "The archers (*ba'alē ḥiṣṣim*) fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard." Instead of "archers" (literally: "masters of arrows"), the Peshitta reads "masters of troops (*māray gūddē*)," which is glossed by Ephrem as "the heads of the tribes;" Tonneau, *Ephraem*, 116, English translation in Mathews and Amar, *Ephrem*, 207. The origin of this Peshitta reading is debated. Weitzman suggests that *gūddē* (ܩܘܕܕܐ) is an ancient corruption of the Syriac for "arrows," *gērē* (ܩܝܪܐ). Maori, on the other hand, takes *gūddē* to mean "partitions" (based on a different meaning of the word and assuming that the translator understood *ḥiṣṣim* as *meḥṣōt*); see M.P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 137; Y. Maori, *The Peshitta Version of the Pentateuch and Early Jewish Exegesis*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995, 135 (Hebrew). Alternatively, the Peshitta might have in

6:24 and perhaps Lamentations 3:55 in the case of *eṣṭēh d-gūbbā*⁹⁸). That the Qur'ān shares the same terminology is suggestive.

The story's typological function

Many Qur'ānic stories concerning Biblical figures serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they are meant to encourage Muḥammad and let him know that final triumph will be his. On the other hand, his people are to take warning from the fate of earlier unbelievers. On yet another level, these stories serve to establish Muḥammad as the heir of the Biblical tradition.⁹⁹

That the story of Joseph was told with Muḥammad and his enemies in mind is evident not only in the explicit comments which follow the story at the very end of the Sūra,¹⁰⁰ but also in the way the parallel to Muḥammad's experiences affected the presentation. The most striking example is the theological speech upon which Joseph embarks before interpreting his fellow inmates' dreams,¹⁰¹ and

mind verses where the root *h-ṣ-ṣ* seems to denote military divisions. For Proverbs 30:27, see D.W. Thomas, "Notes on some passages in the book of Proverbs," *Vetus Testamentum* 15, 1965, (271–79) 276–77. More debated is Judges 5:11; see C.F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes*, London: Rivingtons, 1918, 126, and M.L. Chaney, "HDL-II and the Song of Deborah: Textual, Philological, and Sociological Studies in Judges 5, with Special Reference to the Verbal Occurrences of HDL in Biblical Hebrew," Cambridge: Harvard University (unpublished dissertation), 1976, 169–73. It is also possible that the Peshitta was aware of a Targum tradition similar to that of Onqelos (*ba'alē palgūtēh*) or the Samaritan (*ms ny plgym*) and that it understood *palgūtāplg* as a faction or division of men. In any case, it appears likely that this occurrence of *gūddā* (in the pl.) in a verse which describes Joseph's enemies, traditionally understood as his brothers, caused later Syriac authors to refer to them as a *gūddā*. It is noteworthy that this is the only occurrence of *gūddā* in the Peshitta on Genesis.

98 Note that the text where *eṣṭēh d-gūbbā* occurs (PsN, 526–27) also shares with Daniel 6 the theme of a heavenly visitation in the pit. That Daniel may have influenced the retelling of the Joseph story is likely when one considers the many parallels between Joseph and Daniel; both are taken captive, become courtiers of foreign kings, interpret dreams, and rise to prominence. The two narratives share many phrases and expressions as well; J.J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993, 39–40; see also Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 82. That PsN, 527, had Lamentations 3:57 in mind is suggested by their sharing God's message: "Do not fear." Interestingly, *Lamentations Rabba* identifies the speaker in Lamentations 3:53, 55 as Joseph, Jeremiah, or Daniel (all known to have been thrown into a pit). I will examine these sources as the background for Q 12:15 elsewhere.

99 See Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 3–16.

100 Q 12:109–11. That these verses refer specifically to the Joseph story is suggested both by their occurrence immediately after it and by the phrasing v. 111 shares with vv. 3 and 7 which introduce the Joseph narrative; see A. Neuwirth, "Zur Struktur der Yūsuf-Sūra," in W. Diem and S. Wild (eds), *Studien aus Arabistik und Semistik*, Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1980, (123–52) 139. According to a non-canonical variant of v. 7 which reads "lesson" (*'ibra*) instead of "signs" (*āyāt*), the wording is even closer to that of v. 111; see al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qir'āt*, 4:183.

101 Q 12:37–40. Unparalleled in Genesis, not relevant to the prisoners' question (see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 12:217–18; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, 18:136), and odd coming from Joseph ("I have forsaken the creed of a people who believe not in God . . ."; see *ibid.*, 18:137), who never adhered to another religion, these words seem very fitting for Muḥammad; see Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph,"

which, according to some scholars, is the thematic and structural central point of the Sūra.¹⁰²

Classical exegetes and Western scholars have noted the parallels between the Prophet's tribulations and those of Joseph. They understood Joseph as an intended role model for Muḥammad and have attempted to flesh out the comparisons in more detail.¹⁰³ What is less often noted is that this kind of use of the story is well known from the Christian typological reading, where Joseph stands for Christ while the brothers stand for the Jews. This was a common theme among Christian authors,¹⁰⁴ including PsN, Balai and Narsai, where one finds explicit remarks on the typological character of the story¹⁰⁵ as well as a list of comparisons between Joseph and Jesus.¹⁰⁶ More importantly one can see, as Kristian Heal notes, how this typology affected the reshaping of the Joseph story.¹⁰⁷

Thus it seems likely that in applying the Joseph story to Muḥammad and his enemies, the Qur'ān was following in the path of the Christian tradition which read it as prefiguring Jesus and the Jews.¹⁰⁸ To be sure, typological readings of the Hebrew Bible were not limited to the Syriac tradition or – for that matter – to Christians.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, in light of the other links examined in this chapter, I

suggest that the typological reading of the Joseph story is yet another instance in which the Qur'ān follows the Syriac tradition.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

I have argued that a combined examination of motifs, literary form, lexical issues, and typological function suggests that the Qur'ānic Joseph story is closely related to the Syriac tradition. Taken alone, some of the parallels may not be fully compelling, but in conjunction they lend each other the power of persuasion.¹¹¹ In this my approach is analogous to that employed by Syriacists in the tracing of other (Greek) offshoots from the Syriac literary tradition.¹¹²

Although this chapter has only dealt with a few examples, some tentative conclusions are in order. First, the evidence suggests that the Qur'ān was aware of Christian Syriac traditions concerning Joseph. This seems a simpler explanation for the extent of the parallels than to assume, as Nāf did, that the Qur'ān reflects lost Jewish sources which included similar material. There are of course elements in Q 12 which are not found in the Syriac sources.¹¹³ My argument, therefore, is

Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich, Leiden: Brill, 2006, 261–78. For a rabbinic list of comparisons between the fates of Joseph and Zion, see S.A. Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu: An English Translation of Genesis and Exodus from the Printed Version of Tanhuma-Yelammedenu with an Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, Hoboken: KTAV, 1996, 278–80; J.T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma: Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes (S. Buber Recension)*, Hoboken: KTAV, 1989, 1:281–83 (“Everything which happened to Joseph happened to Zion . . .”).

204, and Hämeen-Anttila, “‘We will tell you the best of stories,’” 32. Indeed several elements of this speech find parallels in other verses addressed to Muḥammad's contemporaries; compare with Q 27:59; 53:23; 7:71 (though here Hūd is admonishing 'Ad); 17:23; 9:36; 30:30. See also Hämeen-Anttila, “‘We will tell you the best of stories,’” 15–16.

102 Neuwirth, “Zur Struktur,” 141; Hämeen-Anttila, “‘We will tell you the best of stories,’” 27–28; Cuypers, “Structures rhétoriques,” 181–85.

103 See, e.g., al-Tabarī, *Jāmi'*, 13:89–90. For Western scholars, see especially, A.H. Jones, “Joseph in the Qur'ān: Dramatic dialogue, human emotion and prophetic wisdom,” *Islamochristiana* 7, 1981, (29–51) 41–44 (where both Jacob and Joseph are treated as role models for the Prophet), and Stern, “Muhammad and Joseph.” The affinity between Muḥammad and Joseph is further emphasized in the *ḥadīth* and *sīra* where after the conquest of Mecca, Muḥammad sets the hearts of Quraysh at ease by citing to them the words of his brother Joseph: “No reproach shall be on you today; God will forgive you; He is the most merciful of the merciful” (Q 12:92); see, e.g., Jones, “Joseph,” 42. An extreme and, at times, excessive attempt to link the Joseph story with the *sīra* is A.-L. de Prémare, *Joseph et Muhammad: le chapitre 12 du Coran (Etude textuelle)*, Aix-en-Provence: Publications de L'Université de Provence, 1989.

104 For a survey see M. Dulaey, “Joseph le patriarche, figure du Christ,” in *Figures de l'Ancien Testament chez les Pères*, Strasbourg: Centre d'Analyse et de Documentation Patristiques, 1989, 83–105.

105 Thus, for example, the story of Joseph is said to be “full of symbols and types of the Son of God”; PsN, 560.

106 PsN, 561–62.

107 See K.S. Heal, “Joseph as a type of Christ in Syriac literature,” *BYU Studies* 41, 2002, 29–49; idem, *Tradition*, 81–110.

108 In the Qur'ān though, the intended enemies are usually understood as the Meccans, not the Jews. See, however, al-'Alamī, *Mu'amar*, 1:31–40, where as a result of an anti-Zionist/anti-Jewish agenda, Joseph's brothers are compared in detail to both the Meccans and the Jews of Medina.

109 For an unpersuasive attempt to demonstrate that Joseph was envisioned as an archetype of the Qumranic community, see R.A. Kugler, “Joseph at Qumran: the importance of 4Q372 fig. 1 in extending a tradition,” in P.W. Flint et al. (eds), *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the*

110 An important study of typology in the Qur'ān is found in M. Zwettler, “A mantic manifesto: The Sūra of ‘The Poets’ and the Qur'ānic foundations of prophetic authority,” in J.L. Kugel (ed.), *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, (75–119) 95–109. Zwettler emphasizes that the Qur'ānic typology should not be construed simplistically as Christian, Jewish, or Gnostic influence, but rather as a reflection of a shared mode of discourse among the monotheistic milieu of the sixth- and seventh-century Near East; *ibid.*, 100. Moreover, he notes that it “is not so much like that of the New Testament and early Christian Church . . . rather, much more like the sort of ‘apocalyptic exegesis’ that was carried on among the Essenes of the Qumrān community . . .”; *ibid.*, 102. At least as far as Q 12 is concerned, I am not sure that this second point is true.

111 Cf. F. Leemhuis, “A Koranic contest poem in *Sūrat as-Ṣaffāt*?” in G.J. Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout (eds), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East*, Leuven: Peeters, 1991, 165–77. Leemhuis identifies a fragment of debate literature in Q 37 and suggests that this reflects familiarity with Syriac Christianity. His argument is based on form alone.

112 See, e.g., Brock, “From Ephrem to Romanos,” 139–51, where Brock attempts to establish Romanos' dependence on Syriac sources based not only on similarities in metrical and literary form, but also in literary motifs.

113 Noteworthy elements known from rabbinic literature but not found in the Syriac sources include Joseph's initial desire for his master's wife and his change of heart following his Lord's intervention (Q 12:24), the assembly of ladies struck by Joseph's beauty (Q 12:30–34), and Jacob warning his children not to enter the town by one gate (Q 12:67–68). The first two motifs have been dealt with extensively in J.L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, 28–65 (the assembly of ladies) and 94–124 (Joseph's change of heart). For the third motif, see Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 115.

not that the Syriac tradition provides the entire background for the Qur'ānic Joseph story, only that it played a major role in its formation. In light of this it would seem worthwhile to examine the retellings of other Hebrew Bible narratives in the Qur'ān.¹¹⁴

Second, the tendency of earlier scholarship to envision the Qur'ānic retellings as mainly derivative has recently been challenged. Now the literary qualities of these retellings, the ways in which they appropriated earlier material, and their meaning for the Prophet and his followers are often stressed, and rightly so.¹¹⁵ Yet the excessive suspicion towards the tracing of sources and origins which often accompanies studies of this sort seems unjustified.¹¹⁶ A recent comment of Sarah Stroumsa regarding Maimonides is fitting here: "The identification of influences is critical in our attempt to gauge the depth of a thinker's attachment to his milieu. It enables us to transform this milieu from a scenic background into the pulsating world in which the thinker lived."¹¹⁷ Moreover, we cannot truly appreciate what is new and unique in the Qur'ānic retellings before we have a clear idea of the traditions current at the time. This study suggests that existing scholarship with its focus on Jewish sources does not provide this background adequately.

Once the Qur'ān's sources are better understood, the study of the mechanisms of appropriation may be advanced. Here I have touched only briefly on the ways in which the Qur'ān adapted and reshaped its materials. Many factors influenced this process, but this requires a larger study which will examine Q 12 in its entirety in light of the Syriac and Jewish sources.¹¹⁸ The omission of Christological materials, the use of formulaic language, the impact of inner-Qur'ānic parallels, and the tendency to further develop post-Biblical exegetical readings – to name but a few factors – all deserve a separate treatment elsewhere.

19 Condemnation in the Qur'ān and the Syriac Gospel of Matthew

Emran El-Badawi

Introduction¹

One could say that a comparative approach towards the Qur'ānic text and earlier scriptures and sacred traditions first emerges within the Qur'ān itself.² In addition, the scarcity of documentary evidence, and the problematic nature of the traditional Islamic literary sources,³ which render complicated the study of the Qur'ān, makes a comparative approach a scholarly obligation. The Biblical, Midrashic and Apocryphal background of the Qur'ān⁴ has been a matter of critical scholarly examination for the better part of two centuries. However, to my knowledge no direct comparative examination between the Qur'ān and Syriac Gospels has been undertaken. This absence is peculiar given that the late antique Arabian milieu in which the Qur'ān was revealed served as a point of contact between Arabian communities and the sacred literature and theological expression of Syriac Christian speaking groups. The lives of Arabic speaking Christians were diglossic, as they used Arabic for common everyday matters and Syriac for liturgical, religious purposes.⁵

¹¹⁴ My dissertation explores the Syriac background of other such retellings. In a study of the Cain and Abel story in the Qur'ān, for example, similar arguments lead to much the same conclusions.

¹¹⁵ For this shift in scholarship, see W.A. Saleh, "What if you refuse, when ordered to fight? King Saul (Tālūt) in the Qur'ān and post-quranic literature," in C.S. Ehrlich (ed.), *Saul in Story and Tradition*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006, 261–83; M.E. Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The problem of the Jewish 'influence' on Islam," *Religion Compass* 1, 2007, 643–59. Interestingly, the new approach has focused most of its attention on Q 12; see Saleh, "Saul," 267, note 11. These studies include, among others, several of the articles cited in this chapter as well as M.R. Waldman, "New approaches to 'Biblical' material in the Qur'ān," in W.M. Brinner and S.D. Ricks (eds), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986, 47–64; and M. Mir, "Irony in the Qur'ān: A study of the story of Joseph," in I.J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, Richmond: Curzon, 2000, 173–87. I hope to examine these studies in light of the Syriac sources elsewhere.

¹¹⁶ For a critique of this trend, see Reynolds, "Redeeming," 80–81.

¹¹⁷ S. Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, xiii.

¹¹⁸ I hope to supply this elsewhere.

¹ The research undertaken to write this paper also informs a chapter of my dissertation entitled "Sectarian scripture: The Qur'ān's dogmatic re-articulation of the Aramaic Gospel Traditions in the context of the Late Antique Near East."

² "If you are in doubt as to what we have revealed, ask those who have read the scripture (*kitāb*) before [you]" (Q 10:94). Note, unless otherwise indicated, translations of Qur'ānic verses are my own.

³ F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origin: the Beginnings of Islamic historical Writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998, 4–5, especially points out that many of the Islamic sources "reveal internal complexities, . . . chronological discrepancies, . . . absurdities, . . . contradictions in the meaning of events, . . . information that seems clearly anachronistic, . . . evidence of embellishment or outright invention to serve the purpose of political or religious apologetic." Donner (*ibid.*, 49, 60–61) also holds that the Qur'ān as a closed canon was likely an early text dated c. 13/610–35/656 CE.

⁴ S. Griffith, "The Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the presentation of Jesus in al-Ya'qubi's *Tarikh*," in J. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003, (133–60) 135.

⁵ J. Tringham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, Beirut: Longman, 1979, 19; S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 8–9, 12.

To appreciate the need for a study on the Qur'ān and the Syriac Gospels, it is first necessary to outline briefly the place of Syriac in earlier Qur'ānic Studies.

With his 1833 landmark work, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*,⁶ Abraham Geiger drew attention to the large role that Hebrew Scripture and rabbinical sources played in shaping the Qur'ān's religious worldview. The important role that language played in Qur'ānic revelation obtained greater value with Theodor Nöldeke and Karl Vollers. Following the traditional theory, Nöldeke argued that classical Arabic or *fushā* existed as a spoken language among Arab tribes even prior to the rise of Islam.⁷ Vollers refuted this claim by arguing that, before the rise of Islam, Arab tribes spoke various dialects of Arabic *koiné* and that *fushā* developed with later Islamic civilization.⁸ Broader comparative studies with Judaism and Christianity gave rise to Wilhelm Rudolph's *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, published in 1922,⁹ and the investigative approach to extracting the sources of the Qur'ān were fully under way by 1926 when Joseph Horowitz wrote his *Koranische Untersuchungen*.¹⁰ In that same year Richard Bell's *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* was published. In it Bell describes the general influence of the Syrian, Mesopotamian and especially Abyssinian church on Late Antique Arabia, emphasizing in particular the remnants of such influences found in the Qur'ān. Bell also acknowledged that some Qur'ānic terms "indicate penetration of Aramaic culture into Arabia."¹¹ The linguistic inquiry into Qur'ānic origins eventually expanded into a discourse that integrated a diversity of Late Antique languages. Arthur Jeffery's *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* underscores the vital theological and literary function of Qur'ānic terms originating from other languages such as Aramaic (especially Syriac), Hebrew, Ethiopic, Greek, and Persian.¹² Jeffery followed this book with other works on the Qur'ān such as *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, which situates the Qur'ān within the diverse genre of scripture in the continuously intermingling religious context of the ancient (before c. 300 CE) and Late Antique (c. 300–700 CE) Near East (Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, and Arabia).¹³

6 A. Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, Bonn: Baaden, 1833.

7 T. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Strassburg: 1904; see also *Geschichte des Qorans*, Göttingen, 1860.

8 K. Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien*, Strassburg: K.J. Trübner, 1906, 185–95.

9 W. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922.

10 J. Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Walter De Gruyter: Berlin & Leipzig, 1926.

11 R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, London: Macmillan, 1926, 18–39, 43. See also his discussion therein on Q 105.

12 A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Baroda, India: Oriental Institute, 1938. See also A. Rippin, *EQ*, "Foreign Vocabulary," 2:226.

13 A. Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, New York: R.F. Moore, 1952.

The study of the Qur'ān in relation to Syriac came into being, albeit under the radar, in 1926 with Tor Andrae's *Der Ursprung der Islams und das Christentum*.¹⁴ After portraying an image of Late Antique Arabia similar to that of Bell's, in which the Persian Nestorian and Abyssinian Monophysite churches exercised much influence along Arabian trade routes, Andrae's insightful analysis compares verses of the Qur'ān with various Syriac works, most notably the hymns of Ephrem (d. 373).¹⁵ However, it was the following year that Alphonse Mingana set the foundation for research on the Qur'ān within the context of Syriac in an article entitled "Syriac Influence on the Style of the Qur'ān," in which he provides a brief typology and some examples of Syriac words used in the Qur'ān, while asserting that 70 percent of the Qur'ān's foreign vocabulary was Syriac in origin.¹⁶ Still, Mingana's article did not have a profound impact on Qur'ānic Studies – and with the exception of Andrae and Mingana's works, which still do not address the Syriac Gospels directly but rather Syriac literature generally, the study of the Qur'ān within the context of Syriac was relatively uncommon.

Subsequent studies on the Qur'ān include Karl Ahrens' "Christliches im Qoran,"¹⁷ Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, which frequently cites Syriac sources, and on occasion the Syriac Gospels,¹⁸ Denise Masson's *Le Coran et la révélation judéo-chrétienne*,¹⁹ Johann-Dietrich Thyen's *Bibel und Koran*,²⁰ Ugo Bonanate's *Bibbia e Corano*,²¹ and similar works. During this time, scholars of Qur'ānic Studies continued to overlook the impact of the Syriac context, even if they focused with renewed attention on Christian influences. Günter Lüling's *Über den Ur-Qur'ān*, published in 1971, perceived the Qur'ān as part of a strictly pre-Islamic Arabian Christian discourse. Lüling argues that the Qur'ān was originally composed of ancient Arabian Christian strophic hymns that went through progressive stages of Islamization by the exegetes. He does not discuss the role of Syriac language or literature.²²

14 Andrae's work was originally published in a little-known journal in Uppsala, Sweden called *Kyrkshistorisk årsskrift* between the years 1923 and 1925; furthermore, the book's title made no direct claim to be a comparative work of Qur'ān and Syriac literature. See T. Andrae, *Der Ursprung der Islams und das Christentum*, Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1926; Fr. trans. *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955.

15 Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, 151–61.

16 A. Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Qur'ān," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 2, 1927, 80.

17 K. Ahrens, "Christliches im Qoran," *ZDMG* 84, 1930, 148–90.

18 H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Gräfenhainichen: Schulze, 1931. Republished, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961.

19 Denise Masson, *Le Coran et la révélation judéo-chrétienne*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1958.

20 J.-D. Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, Köln: Böhlau, 1989.

21 U. Bonanate, *Bibbia e Corano*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995.

22 G. Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān*, Erlangen, 1971. Eng. trans. *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003, 423.

Other scholars re-situated the Qur'ān amidst Jewish literary influences.²³ John Wansbrough investigated the Qur'ān in the context of earlier *topoi* and through the lens of the rabbinical principles of exegesis.²⁴ The attention of Qur'ānic Studies experts was finally reawakened to the importance of Syriac in 2000 with the publication of Christoph Luxenberg's *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*. Seeing the Qur'ān as an originally Syriac Christian lectionary (Syriac *qeryānā*; Arabic *qur'ān*) that was misinterpreted by classical Muslim exegetes, Luxenberg emends the meaning and orthography of dozens of Qur'ānic verses to fit what he deems to be a suitable Syro-Aramaic reading.²⁵ Oddly enough, Luxenberg does not identify any specific genre or corpus of Syriac literature to compare with the Qur'ān – Gospels or otherwise. In fact, while Luxenberg's book provides some solutions to previously problematic passages, his work is methodologically problematic as it maintains an exclusive focus on philology, with little regard for the Qur'ān "as a literary text . . . that has to be de-coded and evaluated historically."²⁶

Recently, a number of insightful publications concerning the relationship of certain Qur'ānic passages to their earlier Syriac antecedents have appeared,²⁷ but a direct comparative study between the Arabic text of the Qur'ān and the Syriac text of the Gospels remains much needed. The Qur'ān echoes passages common to all four canonical Gospels, but it is most in harmony with the theological understanding and religious phrasing present in the Syriac Gospel of Matthew, as will become evident throughout our examination. At other times the Qur'ān replicates the striking language and imagery exclusive to Matthew's Gospel. This chapter will argue that integral passages and scenes of condemnation present in the Qur'ān were informed, likely via the oral tradition of the Qur'ān's milieu, by a familiarity with the Syriac Gospel of Matthew. For the purposes of this examination, we shall avoid the use of classical Muslim exegeses and limit the use of our sources to the Qur'ān and the Syriac Gospels, which we contextualize next.

- 23 Among other scholars, see A. Katsh, *Judaism in Islam: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and Its Commentaries*, New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1980; G. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to their Eclipse under Islam*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.
- 24 J. Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Republished, *Qur'ānic Studies*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004.
- 25 C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, Berlin, Das Arabische Book, 2000.
- 26 A. Neuwirth, "Qur'ān and history – a disputed relationship. Some reflections on Qur'ānic history and history in the Qur'ān," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies/Majallat al-dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyya* 5.1, 2003, (1–18) 8–9.
- 27 E.g. S. Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition," in *QHC*, 109–38; S. Griffith, "Syriacisms in the Arabic Qur'ān: Who were those who said 'Allāh is third of three'," in M. Bar-Asher, S. Hopkins, S. Stroumsa, and B. Chiesa (eds), *A Word Fittingly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegeses of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān*, Jerusalem: The Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007, 83–110.

Sources

The earliest extant canonical Gospels are not in Syriac, but rather in Greek. How the Gospels were translated into Syriac is a matter about which Syriacists and Biblical scholars are yet to reach a consensus. Scholars do, nonetheless, agree on one key point. It is generally accepted that the earliest official Syriac Gospel, used for liturgy and worship by the early Syriac church, was the *Diatesseron* of Tatian (d. 185).²⁸ The existence of a Syriac Gospel text earlier than this is a matter of debate, which principally revolves around the issue of whether the Syriac Gospels in general reflect a Palestinian Aramaic substratum or not.²⁹

Most scholars agree that the *Old Syriac Gospels*, the subsequent official Gospel texts of the Syriac church, were heavily influenced by the *Diatesseron*.³⁰ The two extant *Old Syriac Gospel* manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Curetonius, are translations of the Greek, albeit highly Syriac in style. In due course, this text was supplanted in the fifth century by the Peshittā (Syriac *pšittā*, "simple, vulgar"), which is an edited and revised version of the *Old Syriac Gospels* that mimicks the Greek style and syntax more closely.³¹ Furthermore, the *Peshittā* is comprised of the entire Biblical canon of both Old and New Testament books. It was the basis of Syriac religious life³² and remains to this day the standard Syriac Bible text. In 616, a final revision of the Syriac Bible called the Harklean version was commissioned under the auspices of Thomas of Harkel (d. 627), which endeavored to follow the Greek text still more closely.³³

- 28 S. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006, 31. Nevertheless, the *Diatesseron* is a Gospel-harmony; it combines the four canonical Gospels into a single narrative. And while it is a faithful rendition of the four Gospels, it omits major problem passages and harmonizes conflicting statements. The *Diatesseron* in its Syriac form is unfortunately lost, leaving us with the Arabic translation of Abū l-Faraj 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 434/1043), *The Earliest Life of Christ Ever Compiled from the Four Gospels, Being the Diatessaron of Tatian*, trans. J.H. Hill, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910. Other parts of the *Diatesseron* can be reconstructed from sections of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, ed. W. Wright, London: Williams and Norgate, 1869, and Ephrem's *Commentary on the Diatesseron: Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant*, ed. and trans. L. Leloir. Dublin: Figgis, 1963.
- 29 Despite the assertions of some Greek church fathers such as Hegesippus (d. 180), Irenaeus (d. c. 202), Origen (d. 254), Eusebius of Caesaria (d. 399), Epiphaneus of Salamis (d. 403), and Jerome (d. 420) regarding the alleged existence of the *Hebrew* (i.e. Aramaic) *Gospel of Matthew* (see W. Schoemaker, "The Gospel according to the Hebrews," *The Biblical World* 20.3, 1902, 196–203), no extant original Palestinian Aramaic Gospel text exists that emerged from the milieu of Jesus. On this see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1975, esp. 193–94; Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 34, 108.
- 30 M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967, 265–66; J. Joosten, *The Syriac Language of Peshitta and Old Syriac Versions of Matthew*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, 16–17.
- 31 Joosten, *The Syriac Language of Peshitta*, 21.
- 32 Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 99–102.
- 33 For a comparative study of the four Syriac Gospel translations – Sinaiticus, Curetonius, *Peshitta* and Harklean – see G.A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshittā and Harklean Versions*, 1, Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Irrespective of the scholarly debates over the origins of the Syriac Gospels and over the existence, or non-existence, of philological evidence for a Palestinian Aramaic substratum underlying the Syriac Gospels, Syriacists can recognize various linguistic features, phonological word plays, or rhyme schemes in the Syriac Gospels which suggest some level of integrity and antiquity and not mere translation. These features are altogether absent in the corresponding Greek verses. It is also taken for granted that the Late Antique Christian discourse of the Near East and the contact of the Arabian peoples with Christianity, principally involved the Syriac traditions – not Greek.³⁴

Of all the Gospels Matthew's is unique, because as Bart Ehrman notes, "Matthew used [his] sources to create a distinctive portrayal of Jesus as a new Moses who provides the authoritative interpretation of the Jewish Law."³⁵ The author's Mosaic, Jewish-Christian worldview is discernible in various parts of his Gospel. This includes the opening of his account with an Old Testament-like genealogy of Jesus, his restraint from stating "God" and substituting it with "Lord," placing Jesus's sermon on a "mount" analogous to that of Moses, his insistence that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, and his emphasis on divine judgment (Matthew 1; 5–7; 10–12).³⁶ Matthew's Gospel was also likely the most widely read Gospel in the Late Antique Near East. So widespread was the Syriac Gospel of Matthew (hereafter called "Matthew") that much of its Mosaic, Jewish-Christian expression was echoed later on in the Arabic idiom of the next major scripture – the Qur'ān.

The origins of the Qur'ān, and its relationship to Islam and classical Arabic, are not entirely clear either. While there are early non-Muslim sources from nearby lands that mention Islam in some respect,³⁷ the earliest known documentary evidence of the Qur'ān dates to c. 72/692.³⁸ The earliest extant classical Muslim literary source on Muḥammad's life (d. 10/632) and the revelation of the Qur'ān is Ibn Ishāq's (d. ca. 151/768) *Sīra*, as preserved by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833). Furthermore, the manner and extent to which the Qur'ān was part of a diverse religious discourse, involving *kuffār*, *ḥunafā'*, Jews, Christians, Sabaeans, and other groups, is a matter of ongoing research and continual discovery. The sheer dearth of factual knowledge on the Qur'ān's origins and the multiplicity

of its contexts is a problem scholars will likely continue to grapple with for some time.

However, that the textual history of Muslim scripture is problematic is common to the phenomenon of scripture and revelation rather than an aberration.³⁹ Likewise, that scriptures of the ancient and Late Antique Near East (including the Hebrew Bible and New Testament) should allude to, reference, quote or in some way incorporate the sacred language and religious expression of earlier confessional traditions or civilizations is also common to the phenomenon of scripture. Furthermore, the complexity of studying Qur'ānic origins has at times been compounded as a result of reductionist tendencies in studying the Qur'ān.⁴⁰ The Qur'ān is part of several contexts and is not reducible to any one of them.⁴¹ Yet, some scholars have searched for an ancient Qur'ānic *ur-text*, i.e. preceding the first/seventh-century milieu of Muḥammad; while others argue for a later context. The resulting controversies and "chaos"⁴² cannot sufficiently serve as a foundation for our inquiry. Instead, concerning ourselves with the Arabic text of the Qur'ān as it has come to us, separating it from later traditional Islamic literature, and respecting the Qur'ān's integrity as a unique scripture in the diverse context of Late Antique Near Eastern revelation generally and seventh-century Arabia specifically, will prove a more fruitful foundation with which to begin our investigation. The premise of this chapter follows that of Griffith as he states,

The Qur'ān [is] a scripture in its own right, in dialogue with previous scriptures through the oral reports of them that circulated among the Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians in the Qur'ān's own milieu.⁴³

Keeping Griffith's words in mind, along with a basic understanding that the religious, cultural, and linguistic landscape of seventh-century Arabia was for centuries inextricably tied to communities in greater Syria, Mesopotamia, Abyssinia, and other locales not only compels one to avoid simplistic, reductionist theories of direct or linear "influences" but reveals the reality of complex, diffuse, diverse, and organic free-flowing ideas present in the Qur'ān's "thematic context."⁴⁴

34 The Qur'ān's milieu was connected to the Syriac Christian sphere of influence which was diffuse and popular among Arabs. The Greek sphere of influence in the Near East and Arabia was limited to select classes of urban centers like Antioch, Jerusalem, and coastal cities of Palestine. For more see D. Cook, "The beginnings of Islam in Syria during the Umayyad Period," PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2002; W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971.

35 B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: Other Early Writings*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 92.

36 Except for specific instances where I have translated Syriac Biblical words or phrases into English, general English Bible quotations are from the NRSV.

37 See R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997.

38 C. Kessler, "'Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A reconsideration," *JRAS*, 1970, 2–14.

39 Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 89.

40 One may explain the periodical re-emergence of reductionist Qur'ānic studies in modern times as the continued legacy of Geiger's scientific and reductionist methodology. See V. Robbins and G. Newby, "A prolegomenon to the relation of the Qur'ān and the Bible," in idem (ed.), *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, 24–25. Though empowered with an encyclopedic knowledge of Hebrew Scripture and Jewish commentary, Geiger's study does not take into account the complexity of interaction between Jewish and Arabian elements but is concerned rather with "tracing origins," and infers a direct Jewish influence upon the Qur'ān. Jeffery notes this problem in Western scholarship. Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 69.

41 Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'ān," 116.

42 Reynolds, "Qur'ānic studies and its controversies," in *QHC*, 18, quotes Neuwirth.

43 Griffith, "Syriacisms in the Arabic Qur'ān," 89.

44 Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qur'ān," 111.

Centuries of Aramaean–Arabian intermingling⁴⁵ evolved into the intimate relationship between Syriac-speaking Christian groups and the urban and nomadic spheres of Arabia, like the Hijaz. This interaction allowed early on for the adoption of pagan Arab cults by Syro-Aramaean, the introduction of Judaism into Arabia,⁴⁷ and later the adoption of Christianity by some Arabs.⁴⁸ Educated in the liturgical and confessional Syriac literature of their churches, early Arab Christians would have integrated such wisdom as that of the Syriac Gospels into the long-standing Arabian custom of oral tradition. The Qur'ān, functioning as the scriptural and cultural repository of the Arabs, was the next step in development beyond oral tradition. Nonetheless, the Qur'ān's own self-image makes explicit the claim that it is the first Arabic book. While seeing itself as the scriptural continuation of Hebrew and Christian Scripture,⁴⁹ it implies that it is a unique, linguistic, Arabic novelty (Q 16:103; 42:7).⁵⁰ Mingana notes, therefore, that "the author" of the first Arabic book did not risk coining new terminology:

The best policy was to use for [its] new idea of Islam the words which were understood by his hearers and found in a language akin to his that had become an ecclesiastical and religious language centuries before his birth and the adherents of which were surrounding him in all directions in highly organized communities, bishoprics, and monasteries.⁵¹

The language to which Mingana is referring, of course, is Syriac. It is not beyond our expectation, therefore, that the Qur'ān should reflect various thematic and linguistic features from the Syriac Gospels. One such feature is the language of condemnation, which we turn to next.

The context of condemnation

The shared self-image of the Qur'ān and Matthew as champion of the spirit of the Jewish law and critic of Jewish authority, which is perceived as knowing only the

letter of the law and its abuse of authority, is the context in which their common language of condemnation is manifested. This language can take a direct form, as in curses, warnings of impending doom, or an indirect form, as in hostile, critical, or unflattering portrayals of certain persons or groups. By reproaching Jewish groups, the Qur'ān merely participated in the larger sectarian polemical discourse of its day. Such is evident in Syriac homiletic works like Aphrahat's (d. c. 345) *Demonstration against the Sabbath* and various homilies against the Jews by Isaac of Antioch (d. c. 460) and Jacob of Sarug (d. 521).⁵²

The Qur'ān accuses the Jews and especially figures of Jewish authority of various offenses. This may also be the result of the tendentious relationship that developed between Muhammad and the Jewish groups during his lifetime. Thus, where some passages acknowledge the legacy of the Israelites (*banū isrā'īl*) or Jews (*al-ladhīna hādū*) for being God's chosen nation or being blessed with scripture (Q 2:47, 62),⁵³ others exhibit expressions of condemnation directed towards them, sometimes along with Christians (*al-nasārā*) (Q 2:120; 5:18, 31, 64, 82; etc).

The Qur'ān frequently illustrates the insubordination and rebelliousness of the Israelites in association with the prophet Moses (Q 2:54, 61, 71, 92; 5:20; etc). However, one verse in *al-Mā'ida* exhibits an intriguing, uncharacteristic break from this pattern: "Cursed (*lu'ina*) were those who rebelled (*kafarū*) from *banū isrā'īl* on the tongue of David and Jesus the son of Mary, because they disobeyed and continued to cause offense" (Q 5:78).⁵⁴ Aside from oblique parallels with Psalm 10:3, 7, this verse is very much in the spirit of the Gospels, where Jesus is identified so closely with David and provides scathing invectives against the Jewish authorities – namely the Pharisees and Sadducees.⁵⁵ Jesus the Messiah is descended of David (Luke 1; John 7:41; etc); he is born in the village of David (Luke 2); he is called "son of David;" and he refers to parables citing the authority of David (Matthew 9:27; Mark 2:25; Luke 6:3). Matthew finds the relationship between Jesus and David so significant that he opens with "an account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).

The place of David is magnified by Syriac Christians of Late Antiquity. The role of David as a symbol of great prophecy and humble repentance in the Syriac-speaking

45 Ibid., 116. For more on the ancient Aramaean–Arabian relationship see Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 7–20, 41; J. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, Leiden: Brill, 1979, 13–14, 40, 82; J. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001, 32; J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*, London; New York: Routledge, 2003, 129–32, 174–77, 218, 286. See also Q 106:2.

46 Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, 17–24, 64; H. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, Leiden: Brill, 1980, 146–76.

47 Katsh, *Judaism in Islam*, xxi–xxii.

48 Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 243–55. See also Galatians 1:17.

49 Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 67–68; Q 3:3.

50 Furthermore, Q 42:12 states, "and before it [i.e. the Qur'ān] was the book of Moses as a guide and mercy, however this is a book confirming [it] in an Arabic language, to warn those oppressive ones and to give good tidings to the doers of good." See also Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 221; C. Gilliot and P. Larcher, *EQ*, "Language and style of the Qur'ān," 3:109.

51 Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Qur'ān," 78

52 Aphrahat, *Demonstration* no. 13; On Isaac of Antioch, see S. Kazan, "Isaac of Antioch's *Homily against the Jews*," *Oriens Christianus* 45, 1961, 30–53; Jacob of Sarug, *Homélies contre les juifs*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 174, ed. and trans. M. Albert, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1976.

53 It is worthy of mention that *al-yahūd* in the Qur'ān is never used in a positive light. See Q 2:113, 120; 5:18, 51, 64, 82; 9:30.

54 For more on Qur'ānic curses with *la'ana* and earlier uses in Nabataean Aramaic see J. Healey, "The realities behind tomb inscriptions: Imagining Nabataean law," in Z. al-Salameen (ed.), *Proceedings of the First Nabataean Symposium*, forthcoming; idem, "Fines and curses: Law and religion among the Nabataeans and their neighbours," in R.G. Kratz and A. Hagedorn (eds), *Law and Religion in the Eastern Mediterranean*, forthcoming.

55 We even find elsewhere in the Qur'ān a clear perception of Jewish sectarianism in Jesus's day: "When Jesus came with the proofs, he said, 'I have come with wisdom and to clarify some of that which you are disputing over. So fear God and obey me.' " (Q 43:63)

churches probably had an active role in keeping his symbolic potency alive in the Qur'ānic milieu. Not only do Syriac lectionaries begin with a reading from the Psalms (i.e. David's book), but some Syriac authors like Jacob of Sarug held David in exceptionally high regard.⁵⁶ It is likely that the mention of Jesus's Davidic lineage, which is frequently found in the Gospels, was kept alive among Syriac-speaking Christian communities, reached Arabia, and was in turn afforded a terse literary reference in *al-Mā'ida* in connection with condemning *banū isrā'īl*.

Against hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is the salient crime of the Pharisees in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew, their hypocrisy is manifested most sharply in the public performance of charitable acts. The Syriac text of Matthew states about the Pharisees, *wa kūlhūn 'abdayhūn 'abdīn dnēthazūn labnay anāšā*, "and all of their deeds they do so that they might be seen by people" (Matthew 23:5).⁵⁷ As a result Jesus warns his followers, *hūrū dēyn bzēdqātkūn dlā tē'bdūnēh qdām bnay anāšā ak dtēthazūn lhūn*, "therefore, be wary concerning your acts of piety, that you do not perform them before people in order that you be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1). The Syriac word *'abdayhūn* from the first quotation is from *'bādē* meaning "deeds."⁵⁸ It is a cognate with the Arabic *'ibādāt*, which is the normative word for "religious deeds" or "acts of worship" in the Qur'ān and subsequent Islamic tradition (Q 7:206; 10:29; etc). One such deed is mentioned in the second quotation, *zēdqātkūn*, which is from *zēdqātā*, "righteous acts;" and like the Qur'ānic phrase *sadaqa* or *sadaqāt* (Q 2:263, 276, etc.) it can mean "alms."⁵⁹ In Matthew, religious deeds, acts of piety, and charitable works like giving alms or even prayer should be done sincerely, i.e. in private.⁶⁰ Could the Qur'ānic reference that the doctors of law and monks "do not spend in the way of God" (Q 9:31, 34) reflect the knowledge that the Pharisees gave alms publicly, not in the way of God, but out of pretentiousness and hypocrisy? This prospect is made more likely given the verse from the Qur'ān in *al-Nisā'* which states, *wa-lladhīna yunfiqūn amwālahum ri'ā' al-nās wa-lā yu'minūn bi-llāh wa-lā bi-l-yawm al-ākhir . . .*, "and those who give out their riches to show off to people and who do not believe in God nor the last day . . . (Q 4:38)" The phrase *ri'ā' al-nās*, "to show off to people," is a calque of *dnēthazūn labnay anāšā*, "in order to be seen by people," where the accusative case of *ri'ā'(a)* communicates the subjunctive sense of purpose in the *d* of

56 See the meaning and context of epithets like *dawīd gābyā*, "David the chosen one," in Jacob of Sarug, "Homélies contre les Juifs," 136–81. Such a usage probably stemmed from the Syriac Gospels, as in Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 27. This also parallels the Arabic usage of words derived from the root *jbā* in Q 3:179; 6:87; 68:50; etc.

57 All Syriac translations are my own.

58 J. Payne-Smith, *A Compendius Syriac Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, 397.

59 Ibid., 110.

60 N. Khouri, "Selected ethical themes in the Qur'ān and the Gospel of Matthew," unpublished PhD dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 199, 108, 212–15.

dnēthazūn. Furthermore, Rudolph rightly sees an echo of Matthew 6's opening words in Q 107:4–7:

Have you seen the one who denies judgment (*al-dīn*)? For he is the one who forsakes the orphan, and does not encourage the feeding of the poor. So, woe unto the worshipper (*al-muṣallīn*); those who are mindless (*sāhūn*) of their prayers. Those who show off (*yurā'ūn*), and withhold kindness."⁶¹

Despite the difference in sentence structure and vocabulary, these Qur'ānic verses reflect a keen awareness of Jesus's advice in Matthew.

Against scribes

In the Gospels, hypocrisy also unites Pharisees and scribes, who are a pair worthy of repeated condemnation. Jesus curses them, *wāy lkūn sāfrē waprīšē nāsbay bapē*, "woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (see Matthew 23; Luke 6; 11).⁶² Although the Syriac word *sāfrē*, "scribes," does not occur in the Qur'ān, the Jews are mentioned therein and likened to "a donkey carrying books (*asfār*)" (Q 62:5). Two matters are of concern here. One is that this appears to be a polemic against Jewish scribes, as they are the ones who would be carrying books. The second concern is that, although Jeffrey does not mention it, the two words *sāfrē* and *asfār* are of Syriac origin; the latter was Arabized early on, since by the time it appears in the Qur'ān it occurs in the Arabic broken plural form. Thus, Matthew's condemnation of scribes (*sāfrē*), who were ostensibly of Jewish Pharisaic background, and the Qur'ān's association of books (*asfār*) with polemicizing the Jewish scribes, are part of a single discourse of condemnation.

What supports this claim further is the Qur'ān's derisive attitude towards scribes. It states concerning the Jews,

fa wayl li-lladhīn yaktubūn alkitāb bi-aydihim thumma yaqūlūn hādha min 'ind illāh li-yashtarū bih thamanan qalīlan, fa wayl lahum min mā katabat aydihim, wa wayl lahum min mā yaksibūn! (Q 2:79).

Thus, woe unto those who write the scripture with their hands and then say, "This is from God," in order to earn by it a meager gain. Thus, woe unto them for what their hands have written, and woe unto them for what they earn!

The Qur'ān's disapproval of those who "write the scripture with their hands" not only reflects the awareness of emendation, translation, redaction, and editing of earlier Hebrew and Christian Scripture, but is more directly a condemnation of

61 Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans*, 13. See also Ahrens, "Christliches im Qoran," 162; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 450–51, 458; Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 193.

62 Cf. Mark 12:38–40.

Jewish scribes.⁶³ In addition, the Qur'ānic condemnation formula, *wayl li* + pronoun, "woe unto," reflects the Syriac of Matthew, *wāy li* + pronoun, "woe unto."⁶⁴

Another relationship can be drawn between the distinctive, intentional, repetitive use of this condemnation formula. Jesus's curse against the Pharisees, *wāy llkūn sāfrē waḥrīšē nās bay bapē* is repeated seven times almost consecutively in Matthew 23 alone (see earlier). Similarly, the Qur'ān repeats the following curse ten times in *al-Mursalāt* alone, *wayl yawma 'idh li-l-mukadhdhibīn*, "woe unto the rejecters on that day (Q 77)!" Irrespective of this verse's interpretation or who *al-mukadhdhibīn* were, such a cursing formula was probably well understood in the Qur'ān's sectarian milieu. Based on content, i.e. condemning scribes of a Pharisaic rabbinical or even masoretic background, on style, i.e. the identical usage of *wayl li* and its almost rhythmic repetition, the common language of condemnation between both texts is again demonstrated.

Against killing the prophets

Jesus's outburst against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 brings about another reason why they are condemned. It states,

Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets (*msahdīn antūn 'al nafškūn dabnayā antūn daḡṭalū lanbīyē*) . . . How can you escape being sentenced to hell (Matthew 23:31)?⁶⁵

The Sinaiticus manuscript has *mawdīn antūn 'al nafškūn*, "you confess against yourselves."⁶⁶ Moreover, Matthew 23:34–37 is a passage unique to Matthew's Gospel, with only oblique references in Mark and Luke.⁶⁷ The killing of prophets

63 Other verses show that the Qur'ān's distrust for scribes and Jewish men of letters is a clear motif. Qur'ān 4:46 explains, "of those who professed Judaism (*al-ladhīna hādū*) are those who change words from their places, and say, 'we heard and disobeyed,' and 'hear that which is not heard,' and 'look after us (*rā'ina*)' as a twist of their tongues and a slander to religion." For more on the use of *rā'ina* see Jeffery, *FV*, 136.

64 Smith, *A Compendius Syriac Dictionary*, 107. Arabic possesses *way* as a rarer alternative to *wayl*. While suspecting a possible origin from Syriac-Aramaic, Zammit proposes that this form is an abbreviation. M. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, 443, 616. The Matthean–Qur'ānic context of the phrase's usage suggests that the Syriac phrase *wāy li* over an extended period of oral transmission merged into the Arabic *wayl*, leaving traces of the original Syriac *wāy* in *way*.

65 See in relation the reference in Luke 11:47–48, which does not match the Qur'ānic text as closely.

66 Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels*, 1:361.

67 See also Mark 12:1–5, and especially Luke 11:49, which states, "Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute"; and 13:34, which states, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" See also Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 123.

and rejection of their message is a frequent lament and indictment in the Qur'ān of which scholars have taken notice for some time⁶⁸ and which Speyer generally traces back to Matthew.⁶⁹ More specifically, two phrases in the Qur'ān appear to reflect the language of condemnation against those who killed the prophets in the manner of Matthew. One of these occurs as follows: "and so they testified against themselves (*shahidū 'alā 'anfusihi*) that they were rejecters (*kāfirīn*)" (Q 6:130; 7:37). The other phrase occurs in the following verse:

Verily, as for those who deny the signs of God, and kill the prophets (*yaqtulūn al-nabiyyīn*) without just cause, and kill those who command good, announce unto them an excruciating punishment (Q 3:21).⁷⁰

Although it is from Hebrew Scripture that "testifying against oneself" and "killing the prophets" first arises,⁷¹ there is reason to argue for a close relationship between the language of the Qur'ān and Matthew here. The Arabic phrase *shahidū 'alā anfusihi* together with *yaqtulūn al-nabiyyīn* closely reflects the Syriac *mashdīn antūn 'al nafškūn dabnayā antūn daḡṭalū lanbīyē*. Another attribute that indicates some sort of Qur'ānic dependence on traditions going back to Matthew is the parallel between the Qur'ān's "announce unto them an excruciating punishment [i.e. in hell]" and Matthew's "How can you escape being sentenced to hell?"

Against the deaf, blind, and hard-hearted

The Qur'ān describes the inhabitants of hell more than once, for example in *al-a'rāf*. "And We have condemned to hell many spirits (*jinn*) and people. They have hearts by which they do not understand. And they have eyes by which they do not see. And they have ears by which they do not hear . . ." (Q 7:179). The failing eyes and ears of those condemned is also a motif repeated in *fuṣṣilat*: ". . . and for those who do not believe, there is deafness in their ears and it is a blindness over them (*fi ādhānīhim waqr wa-huwa 'alayhim 'amā*)" (Q 41:44). Similarly, in Matthew we read:

For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing and they have shut their eyes (*ēt 'bay lēh gēr lbēh d'ammē hānā wa bēdnayhūn yaqīrāyūt šam 'ū wa 'aynayhūn 'amšū*); so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them.

(Matthew 13:15)

68 The condemnation in Q 4:155 is multi-faceted and ultimately goes back to Leviticus 26: 41. Concerning this, see Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* 186. See also Q 2:98; 3:184; 36:18; etc.

69 On Q 3:112 See Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran*, 365, 417–19.

70 See also Q 3:181; 4:155.

71 Deuteronomy 31:19; Nehemiah 9:26; Amos 2:12; 7:12–16. Jeremiah 2:26–35, however, provides the full context and narrative of condemning those who killed the prophets. See also the discussion in Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 26.

This verse is ultimately a quotation from Isaiah,⁷² which would leave the possibility open that the Qur'ānic verse could reflect the Syriac language of Matthew or the Hebrew of Isaiah. However, the similarity in vocabulary and syntax is much stronger between the Syriac and Arabic text, making a Hebrew antecedent unlikely.⁷³ The Qur'ānic phrase *fī ādhānihim waqr*, "there is deafness in their ears" is a calque of Syriac *bidnayhūn yaqrāyūt šam 'ū*, lit. "their ears hear heavily." The word *waqr*, "heaviness," is an Arabic noun that reflects the Syriac adverb *yaqrāyūt*, "heavily." Similarly, the Arabic noun *'amā*, "blindness," approximates the verbal use of Syriac *maš*, "to shut the eyes."⁷⁴

Both Matthew and the Qur'ān also inherit from Hebrew Scripture the frequently occurring motif of hardened hearts, which is originally an attribute of the stubborn Pharaoh who will not let Moses' people go. Jesus attacks the Pharisees with this motif as well: "it was because of the hardness of your hearts (*qašyūt labkūn*) that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives . . ." (Matthew 19:8). Similarly, after recounting an old episode in which the Israelites were rebellious, in *al-baqara* the Qur'ān narrates, "then your hearts were hardened (*qasat/qasā' qulūbukum*) after that; so it is as stone or even harder . . ."⁷⁵ Despite the sheer frequency of this motif in the Hebrew Bible, once again it is the Syriac language of Matthew that is reflected in the Qur'ān, and not the Hebrew.⁷⁷ Thus, notwithstanding the Syriac nominal *qašyūt*, "hardness," and the Arabic verbal *qasat*, "hardened," the virtually identical phrasing once again demonstrates the shared language of condemnation between both Matthew and the Qur'ān.

Condemnation in the final judgment

The final arena in which the language of condemnation is manifested in both scriptures is the final judgment. Much like other religious motifs, that of final judgment is inherited from Hebrew scripture (Psalms 81:4–5; Isaiah 66:15–17; Malachi 4:1–2). Certain distinct images of the final judgment are unique to Matthew's Gospel. The scene depicting the final judgment in Matthew 25 typifies the importance of perfect divine justice, which Andrae maintains was a critical

doctrine of the early Syriac Church.⁷⁸ As Qur'ān specialists have recognized, this passage is echoed in the Qur'ān's vivid eschatological imagery.⁷⁹

The passage in Matthew begins: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory" (Matthew 25:31).⁸⁰ The place of the Son of Man, a reference to Jesus as judge, is filled in the Qur'ān by God himself. Thus, it states, "The angels will be at the ends [of the heavens], and on that day eight [angels] will bear above them the throne of your Lord" (Q 69:17). Matthew adds, "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32). Similarly the Qur'ān states, "and on the day when We shall demolish the mountains and you shall see the earth open, and We would have gathered them and not forgotten anyone of them . . ." (Q 18:47).⁸¹ Elsewhere the Qur'ān adds, "God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning that which you disputed" (Q 22:69). Matthew continues, "and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left" (Matthew 25:33).⁸² In *al-wāqī'a* the Qur'ān has God group people into camps of good (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) and evil (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*), analogous to Matthew's sheep and goats respectively. Qur'ān specialists generally associate this verse along with the Qur'ān's mention in *al-Balad* 90:18 of *aṣḥāb al-maymana* and *aṣḥāb al-mash'ama* to Matthew 25⁸³ where it explains, "Then the king (Syr. *malkā*) will say to those at his right hand (Syr. *ymīnēh*), 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom (Syr. *malkūtā*) prepared for you from the foundation of the world ('*ālmā*)' (Syr. Matthew 25:34)."⁸⁴ In the Qur'ān, God too is called the king (*al-malik*) (Q 20:114; 23:116), and He similarly invites the righteous to "enter paradise" (Q 43:70).

Matthew's Gospel goes on to enumerate the good actions for which the righteous are rewarded, namely for giving the poor to eat and drink, welcoming the

72 Compare Isaiah 6:10 with Q 10:88.

73 The Hebrew language of Isaiah 6:10 is quite different from that of Matthew and the Qur'ān. It states, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy (*hakkēd*), and shut (*hāṣē*) their eyes; lest they, seeing with their eyes, and hearing with their ears, and understanding with their heart, return, and be healed" (Jewish Publication Society 1917 edition).

74 Smith, *A Compendius Syriac Dictionary*, 418.

75 Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān*, 27, 118, offers the second spelling from a different *muṣḥaf*.

76 Q 2:74. See in relation to it Q 4:155, where *qulūbunā ghulf*, "our hearts are enveloped," is used, which is a phrase reproducing Jeremiah 9:25's imagery of the "uncircumcised heart." See discussion in Geiger, *Was hat Muhammed*, 8; Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 203.

77 Exodus 4:21 has *aḥazēq et-lēboy*, "I will harden his heart." See also Joshua 11:20; 1 Samuel 6:6; etc. and further Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, 339.

78 Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, 105–6.

79 Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans* 15, 17; R. Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur'ān*, ed. C.E. Bosworth and M.E.J. Richardson, Manchester: University of Manchester, 1991, 2:539; R. Paret, "Sure 107," in idem. (ed.), *Der Koran*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975, 192–96.

80 Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 197, thinks this verse influenced Q 3:55: "Behold! God said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute'" (translated by Yusuf Ali).

81 See also Q 17:71: "On the day when we summon every people with their *imām* . . ."

82 This scene is not to be confused with references to the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Lord in Mark 12:36, Luke 22:69, which depicts Jesus's divine authority, rather than the separation of people on the Day of Judgment.

83 Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans*, 17; J. Horowitz, "Das Koranische Paradies," in Paret (ed.) *Der Koran*, 62–63; Ahrens, "Christliches im Quran," 55, 165; Thyen, *Bibel und Koran*, 240–43.

84 Furthermore, this scene from Matthew should not be confused with the general imagery and narrative of that of Mark 10:37–40; 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42; or 22:69, which is quite different.

stranger, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting those in prison (Matthew 25:35–39). To Jesus, these actions embody true sacrifice, as the physical recipient of such charitable acts is human, but the true recipient is God (Matthew 25:40).

This is not so for evildoers. Matthew states, "Then he will say to those at his left hand (Syr. *sēmālēh*), 'You that are cursed, depart from me into the eternal fire (Syr. *nūhrā d'ālmā*) that is prepared (Syr. *hāy damfībā*) for the devil and his angels'" (Matthew 25:41). The different elements of this verse, namely the "left hand," "eternal fire," and the fact that it is "prepared" are expressed in different passages of the Qur'ān. In *al-wāqī'a*, the companions of the left hand (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*) are condemned to a scorching doom (Q 56:42). Elsewhere in the Qur'ān we read about the evildoer, "... verily he will have in the fire (*nār*) of *jahannam* to dwell in for eternity (*khālidan fihi*)..." (Q 4:14; 9:63). Additionally, in *al-Baqara*, the fire (*nār*) is "prepared for the rejecters" (*u'iddat li-l-kāfirīn*) (Q 2:24). In addition to the parallels in content, *sēmālēh* and *aṣḥāb al-shimāl*, *nūhrā d'ālmā* and *nār*... *khālidan fihi*, and *hāy damfībā* and *u'iddat li*... are calques, which further establishes the connection between the Syriac of Matthew and the Arabic of the Qur'ān.

Matthew then enumerates the crimes of the evildoers in the same way as the good actions of the righteous:

"I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, I was naked and you did not give me clothing, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

(Matthew 25:42–43)⁸⁵

Similarly, in the Qur'ān those condemned to hell enumerate their misdeeds to the righteous: "'We were not from those who prayed; nor did we feed the needy; and we used to sin with the sinners; and we used to disbelieve in the Day of Judgment'" (Q 74:43–46). Although the list of misdeeds in the two texts are not the same, save for not feeding the needy, a relationship is likely given the common sequence of parallels on final judgment and the occurrence of the Qur'ānic list of misdeeds in the same place (i.e. after being cast into hell fire) and style (i.e. the evildoers "did not do" X) as in Matthew.

Matthew 25:46 concludes, "They will enter into eternal punishment (*taṣnīqā dal'ālmā*) and the righteous into eternal life." In a similar fashion, the Qur'ān states, "He who set up another god besides *Allah*, cast him into the severe punishment (*al-'adhāb al-shadīd*)" (Q 50:26). Their torment is elsewhere described, "They will dwell in it for eternity (*khālidīn fihā*); their punishment will not be lessened; nor will they rest" (Q 2:162). Again in this passage we notice calques of Syriac terms: *'adhāb* for *taṣnīqā*, and *khālidīn fihā* for *dal'ālmā*.

The Qur'ān's many elaborate accounts of the final judgment and the apocalyptic events surrounding it, many of which especially reference the language of Matthew or the Hebrew Bible,⁸⁶ are too numerous to examine here exhaustively. Some of these verses emphasize the common scene of God gathering the people, personally conversing with the evildoers and condemning them to hell fire (Q 6:128), much as the Son of Man does in Matthew (see earlier). Others reinforce common Matthean–Qur'ānic themes, most of which Khouri mentions in his study,⁸⁷ such as the strong relationship of prophetology to divine majesty, judgment and condemnation (Q 39:56–61, 67–75). However, the examples cited should be sufficient to suggest a relationship between the language of condemnation in the Syriac Gospel of Matthew and the Arabic text of the Qur'ān.

Conclusion

The rejection of Jesus's renewed interpretation of the law by Pharisees, Sadducees, and the scribal class was recorded in Matthew's Gospel in a distinct language of condemnation, modeled after the Hebrew Bible. As a consequence of similar experiences, like Muḥammad's rejection by the Jews of Medina, Khaybar, other Hijazi locales, and even by the Qurayshis of Mecca, this language manifested itself also in the Qur'ān. Sharing the Gospels' image of Jesus as the son of David, preserver and reviser of Mosaic law, the Qur'ān's condemnation of rabbinical and ecclesiastical authority for various abuses often replicates the caustic language of Jesus against the religious authorities of his day. Aside from several thematic parallels which likely come from Syriac Matthew and which ultimately evoke the spirit of Hebrew Scripture, like the loosening of dietary laws, and the emphasis of internal sacrifice, close linguistic relationships exist as well. These include: general Arabic calques for the Syriac text – *ri'ā' al-nās* for *dnēthazūn labnay anāšā*, nominal *'amā* for verbal *'maṣ*, *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* for *ymīnēh*, *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* for *sēmālēh*, *nār khālidan fihi* for *nūhrā dāl'ālmā*, *u'iddat li-l-kāfirīn* for *hāy damfībā*, *'adhāb* for *taṣnīqā*; general cognates like *'ibādāt* for *'bādē*, *zēdqātā* for *ṣadaqāt*; cognate phrases like *wayl li* for *wāy li*, *shahidū 'alā 'anfusihi* (third person plural) for *msahdīn antūn 'al naṣṣkūn* (second person plural), *yaqtulūn al-nabiyīn* (present tense) for *daqṭalū lanbiyē* (perfect tense), *fī ādhānihim waqr* for *bidnayhūn yaqṭirayūt sham'ū*, verbal *qasat qulūbukum* for nominal *qaṣyūt labkūn*; and the use of etymologically related words in an identical context of condemnation like *aṣḥāb* and *sāfrē* (against scribes).

The disjointed presentation of occasionally unconnected Qur'ānic verses has been less than ideal. But this too is telling. The distribution of Syriac Matthean phrases throughout the different Sūras of the Qur'ān proves that such material was diffuse in the Arabian oral tradition of the Qur'ān's milieu and not acquired via a single piece of text. This is because Syriac wisdom was disseminated into the

85 This passage resurfaces within later Islamic tradition in the form of a *ḥadīth qudsī* in Muslim 32:6232.

86 For more on this see I. Hasson, *EQ*, "Last Judgment," 3, 136.

87 Khouri, "Selected ethical themes," 13–43.

pre-Islamic Arabian milieu of the Qur'ān by Syriac-speaking Christian groups like Christian Arabs, perhaps even *jāhili* poets such as 'Adī b. Zayd (sixth to seventh century), al-A'shā (d. c. 625), and others. However, what course did the actual imagery and words of Matthew's Gospel in Syriac take in order to get there? One should generally note, as Mingana and Griffith have, that the majority of Syriac scripture, lore, or "Syriacisms" (or collectively "Syriac wisdom") that became replicated in the Qur'ān are *not* verbatim, but rather an elaboration, response to, or paraphrasing of the original text.⁸⁸ This has been evident throughout our present investigation. A word or phrase is scarcely reproduced in the Qur'ān precisely as it is in Syriac Matthew, but has rather gone through a process of "morphological change" which suggests a long period of transmission and linguistic development.

Furthermore, the staunch monotheistic and iconoclastic language of the Qur'ān and its vivid imagery does not allow for Jesus to play the role of savior and divine being as he does in the Gospels. Instead, where the Qur'ān saw fit it replaced "the Son of Man" with the "Lord" (*rabb*) as a theological corrective measure. This suggests a level of intense sectarianism and "theological debate" ambient in the milieu of the Qur'ān.

This exposes another phenomenon at play. It is likely that certain bodies of Syriac Christian wisdom that impacted the theological outlook of the Qur'ān, like verses from the Hebrew Bible or Gospels,⁸⁹ became popularly consumed by Christian Arabs and later Arab oral tradition via intermediary channels. Such intermediaries include religious poetry, Biblical commentaries, and Syriac homiletic works by famous authors like Aphrahat, Ephrem, Isaac of Antioch, Jacob of Sarug, and others.⁹⁰ It is plausible that the Syriac language of Matthew gradually entered into the Qur'ān's milieu through the agency of the liturgical chants, prayers, and preaching based on popular Syriac Christian literature.

It seems, therefore, that the incorporation of Syriac Gospel wisdom into the milieu of the Qur'ān took place long before the existence of Muḥammad or his revelation – through centuries of oral exchange, transformations in language, and confessional discussion. And out of this milieu, the Qur'ān proved to be a potent force of both preservation and innovation.

In the present chapter I focused on Syriac Matthew, but in future studies I hope to extend my research to the remaining Syriac Gospels. I also plan to examine the shared language of the Qur'ān and the Syriac Gospels on topics other than condemnation, such as spiritual and ritual matters. For its part the present study suggests that an appreciation of the Syriac Gospels might help bring the murky origins of the Qur'ān to light.

88 Mingana, "Syriac influence on the style of the Qur'ān," 80; Griffith, "The Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the presentation of Jesus in al-Ya'qubi's *Tarikh*," 136–37.

89 S.K. Samir, "A reconsideration of the Qur'ān and its relationship to Christianity," *QHC*, 145–61.

90 Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, 132–89, lists numerous Syriac authors; Griffith, "Syriacisms in the Arabic Qur'ān," 104–05.

20 The Qur'ānic Pharaoh¹

Adam Silverstein

Pharaoh is one of the few characters who figures equally prominently in both the Qur'ān and the Bible; and it is reasonable – and in my view correct – to assume that there is a close relationship between the Biblical and Qur'ānic Pharaohs. After all, the term "Pharaoh," or *par'o*, means "Great Palace" in ancient Egyptian. It is an idiosyncratic Biblical usage to refer to the ruler of Egypt by this term – just as one nowadays might say that "the White House" has issued a statement when referring to the US president.² The fact that this quirky usage of the term "Pharaoh" recurs in the Qur'ān suggests that the Qur'ānic Pharaoh is to be interpreted with reference to an originally *Biblical* context rather than an ancient Egyptian one. (I leave the question as to the relationship between the Bible's Pharaoh and ancient Egypt to the Egyptologists). And yet, it would be misguided to assume that the Qur'ānic Pharaoh is no more than an Arabic version of his Biblical namesake. In fact, we shall see that there are significant differences between the two Pharaohs.

For the sake of convenience, I will refer to the Biblical and post-Biblical character as "Pharaoh", and to the Qur'ānic Pharaoh as "Fir'awn". There are two important ways in which Pharaoh and Fir'awn differ. One difference is that there are many Pharaohs in the Pentateuch but only one Fir'awn in the Qur'ān. The Pharaoh with whom Moses deals is not the same Pharaoh with whom Joseph deals. In fact, the Bible states explicitly that there were at least *two* Pharaohs who reigned during Joseph's career.³ In the Qur'ān Fir'awn is a single ruler, who deals with Moses and Aaron. The Joseph story, to be sure, is recounted in detail in *Yūsuf* but not once in that context is the ruler of Egypt called "Fir'awn"; instead he is known simply as *al-malik*, "the king." Similarly, Pharaoh is sometimes referred to as "the king" (*ha-melek*) in the Bible, just as he is – on occasion – called *miṣrayyim* or

1 This article is a sort of appendix to my previous article on "Hāmān's transition from the Jāhiliyya to Islam" *JSAI* 34, 2008, 285–308. In that article I discussed the identity of Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* in passing; here that issue is the main topic of discussion. I would like to thank John Baines for his comments on an early draft of this chapter.

2 On this, see "Pharaoh" (D.B. Redford) in D.N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 5:288–89.

3 Exodus 1:8.

"Egypt."⁴ But in the Qur'ān there is a definite distinction between the Egyptian ruler in the time of Joseph and that in the time of Moses and it is only the latter who is called "Fir'awn." Thus, the Bible understands "Pharaoh" to be a regnal title while the Qur'ān takes Fir'awn to be a more sharply defined historical character.

A second difference between Pharaoh and Fir'awn is that Pharaoh basically acts alone whereas Fir'awn has "helpers," both named and anonymous. This difference may be explained away easily: already in Late Antique monotheistic circles Pharaoh was widely believed to have had henchmen. James Kugel provides sources from Syria, Palestine, and Egypt that describe Pharaoh's helpers, and the Babylonian Talmud also refers to these helpers, who are identified as Balaam, Job, and Jethro.⁵ The substitution of Balaam, Job, and Jethro with Hāmān and Qārūn in the Qur'ān has received scholarly attention.⁶

In exploring Fir'awn's unique identity and biographical details, I would like to focus on a single case study, namely the *ṣarḥ* that Fir'awn ordered Hāmān to build. The nature and purpose of this *ṣarḥ* have confounded scholars for centuries. The episode is described in two verses as follows:

- 1 Qur'ān 28:38: "Fir'awn said: 'O Haman! Light me a (kiln to bake bricks) out of clay, and build me a lofty *ṣarḥ*, that I may ascend to the god of Moses: though I think (Moses) is a liar!'"
- 2 Qur'ān 40:36–7: "Fir'awn said: 'O Haman! Build me a lofty *ṣarḥ*, that I may reach the *asbāb* – the *asbāb* of the heavens, so that I may ascend to the god of Moses: though I think (Moses) is a liar!'"

There is nothing quite like this episode in the Bible's account of the Pharaohs. We are told that Pharaoh built storage cities called Pithom and Ramses (Exodus 1:11), but lofty buildings that reach the heavens are not associated with any of the Bible's Pharaohs. However, a possible Biblical parallel occurs in Genesis 11:1–9, where the Tower of Babel is described. The relevant passage is as follows (with my emphasis):

Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar [= Iraq] and settled there. They said to one another, "Come let us make bricks and burn them hard" – Brick served them as stone and bitumen served them as mortar. – And they said, "Come let us build us a city and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves: else we shall be scattered all over the world." The Lord came down to look at the city and tower that man had

⁴ Exodus 1:13.

⁵ J. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1997, 290–95, where the helpers are identified as "Jannes and Jambres;" and Babylonian Talmud, *Sota* 11a, and *Sanhedrin* 106a.

⁶ M. Schwarzbaum, *Mi-maqor yisrael we yishmael*, Tel Aviv: Don Press, 1975, 187; A. Silverstein, "Hāmān's transition from the Jāhiliyya to Islam," *JSAI* 34 (2008), 285–308.

built, and the Lord said, "If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech." Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth: and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

The link between Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* and the Tower of Babel has been highlighted by anti-Islamic polemicists for centuries. The first scholar to draw attention to the issue was Father Marraccio, confessor to Pope Innocent XI, who published his annotated translation of the Qur'ān (into Latin) in the late seventeenth century. In commenting on the *ṣarḥ*, Marraccio states:

Mahumet has mixed up Sacred Stories. He took Haman as an adviser of Pharaoh whereas in reality he was adviser of Ahasuerus, King of Persia. He also thought that the Pharaoh ordered construction for him of a lofty tower from the top of which he could see the God of Moses which if true would be inferior to him. There is no doubt that he borrowed the story of this tower from the story of the Tower of Babel. It is certain that in the Sacred Scriptures there is no such story of the Pharaoh. Be that as it may, [Mahumet] has related a most incredible story.⁷

The identification of the *ṣarḥ* with the Tower of Babel has – with a few exceptions – been generally accepted by modern Western scholars, and is taken for granted in the *EF*,⁸ the *EQ*,⁹ and in recent works by Wheeler,¹⁰ Rubin,¹¹ and others. The implication that the Qur'ān (or "Mahumet") has "mixed up Sacred Stories" has understandably vexed modern Muslims and the internet is buzzing with websites where it is argued against the identification of the *ṣarḥ* with the Tower of Babel.¹²

⁷ *Alcorani textus universus ex correctioribus Arabum exemplaribus summa fide, atque pulcherrimis characteribus descriptus . . . eademque fide . . . ex Arabico idiomate in Latinum translatus; appositis unicuique capiti notis atque refutatione: his omnibus praemissus est Prodomus . . . auctore Ludovico Marraccio*, Padua: 1698, 526 n. 1. The English translation is taken from S.M. Syed, "Historicity of Haman as mentioned in the Quran", *Islamic Quarterly* 24, 1980, (48–59) 51, where similar remarks by other Western scholars are quoted in full.

⁸ G. Vajda and A. Wensinck, "Fir'awn," *EF*, 2:917.

⁹ N. Robinson, "Clay," *EQ*, 1: 340–41.

¹⁰ B.M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*, London: Continuum, 2002, 188–89; idem., "Mūsā" in O. Leaman (ed.), *The Qur'ān: An Encyclopedia*, London: Routledge, 2006, 432.

¹¹ U. Rubin, *Ha-Qur'ān*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2005, 316 (note ad 28:38).

¹² E.g. <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Contrad/External/burntbrick.html>>. For an online rebuttal, see: <<http://www.answering-islam.org/Responses/Saifullah/bricks2.htm>> (both websites accessed February 10, 2011).

What, then, is the answer? And what might it tell us about Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ*? Let us examine the evidence. In favour of the identification of the *ṣarḥ* with the Tower of Babel three points can be made. The first concerns the reference to baked bricks in both contexts. Baked bricks are as typical of Mesopotamia as they are atypical of Egypt and the use of the root *l.b.n.* in both the Biblical Hebrew and the Qur'ānic Arabic hints at a connection between the two buildings. The second point is the form and significance of the buildings in both contexts: the *ṣarḥ*, like the Tower of Babel, was an edifice stretching between the earth and the heavens, whose declared intention was to challenge God or Allāh. In the Bible, God had promised the post-diluvian peoples that he would scatter them across the face of the earth (Genesis 11:7–9); hence, the attempt to unite, “else we be scattered all over the world” is a clear rejection of God's will. In the Qur'ān, Fir'awn openly doubts the existence of Moses' God and wants to reach Him to prove that Moses is lying about Him.

The third point in support of the comparison is the fact that Muslim commentators frequently seem to imply that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* was – or was related to – the Tower of Babel. The evidence for this is scattered widely throughout the sources, but the two main points that emerge from the early historians and exegetes are as follows:

- 1 The Tower of Babel was built by Nimrod. This is in conformity with Jewish and Christian interpretations of the episode, where Nimrod's name – which is derived from the Semitic root meaning “to rebel” – is adduced as proof that he was the ruler at the time of this rebellion against God.¹³
- 2 Nimrod and Pharaoh were routinely compared and even interchangeable in Islamic sources. According to Ibn Ḥawqal, “Babel was the city of the Nimrods and the Fir'awns”;¹⁴ Ḥimyarī states that “[Nimrod] built the *ṣarḥ* after the confusion of tongues. It is this building that was called the *mijdal* (Tower) . . . They said: when he conceived the idea to raise the *ṣarḥ* up to heaven and climbed on top of it to watch, as he claimed, the God of Ibrāhīm, God brought his building off its foundations . . . (Q 16:26–27)”.¹⁵ According to Yāqūt, Nimrod was “the Fir'awn of Ibrāhīm's day” and built the *ṣarḥ*¹⁶ – a statement that also appears in Bakrī and other sources.¹⁷ These authors refer to the *mijdal*¹⁸ in *sūra* 16, in which Nimrod is not mentioned explicitly, and seem to be aware of the intertextual relationship between Nimrod's *mijdal* and Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* to

13 Cf. Babylonian Talmud, *Hullin*, 89a.

14 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Masālik wa-mamālik*, ed. J.H. Kramers, Leiden: Brill, 1938, 244.

15 Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Ḥimyarī, *al-Rawḍ al-mi'fār fī khabar al-aqtār*, Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1985, 357.

16 *Mu'jam al-buldān*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866–73, 1:146, 447–50.

17 E.g. Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. C. Pellat, Beirut: al-Jāmi'a al-Lubnāniyya, 1965, 1:51; 2:260–61.

18 Note that although *mijdal* is directly borrowed from the Hebrew *migdal*, which is the term used for the ‘tower [of Babel]’, the connotations of the root *j.d.l.* are different in Hebrew and Arabic: *migdal* obviously refers to the large size of the tower (cf. Heb. *gadol*, large), but it surely implied rebellion in Arabic, where the same root refers to “being contentious.”

such an extent that some authors place them together in Babel,¹⁹ or explain that Nimrod was “a Fir'awn.” In fact, in numerous sources Nimrod's biography is filled with details from Pharaoh's and Fir'awn's lives, and vice versa.²⁰ In other words, both Nimrod and Fir'awn built a tower by which to reach Allāh; their intentions in doing so were rebellious and Allāh foiled them accordingly; both were tyrannical rulers who claimed to be gods; Nimrod is thus sometimes described as being a “Fir'awn” and his *mijdal* is sometimes called a *ṣarḥ*.²¹ These writers may also have been aware of the baked-brick motif in both stories but I have found no evidence for this in the sources. The point is that the early Muslim exegetical tradition was often on the verge of stating outright that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* was the Tower of Babel (or was comparable to it), but on every occasion stopped short of making such a statement.

The question as to the identity of the Tower of Babel's builders also occupied the rabbis on the eve of Islam. It should be remembered that the Bible only states: “They said to one another ‘Come let us make bricks and burn them hard’”. Who said this to whom? In answering this question, a fifth-century Jewish source hints at Pharaoh's and Nimrod's cooperation in this regard. The midrash *Genesis Rabbah* (38) explains that “They said to one another” means that “*Miṣrayyim*” said to “*Kūsh*”. As mentioned above, “*miṣrayyim*” is one of the synonyms for Pharaoh in the Bible, though it usually means “Egypt.” Similarly, while “*Kūsh*” ordinarily denotes a geographical location in Africa, it is also the name given in the Bible for Nimrod's father. Thus, “*Miṣrayyim* said to *Kūsh*” could have been interpreted by Muslim exegetes as being a reference to Pharaoh speaking to Nimrod or his father. Whatever the case may be, it would seem that Muslim scholars were not alone in conflating Nimrod's and Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ*-building activities and on the basis of the foregoing arguments the case could be made that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* refers to – or at the very least evokes – the Tower of Babel.

Since there is no reason to dissociate Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* from the Tower of Babel except in response to accusations that they were to be equated, the evidence against associating the two buildings is by nature reactionary: accordingly, the counter-argument has mostly taken the form of refutations of the arguments for equating the two buildings. Because the most commonly repeated argument in favour of the comparison is the fact that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* involved baked bricks (which are associated with Mesopotamia but not ancient Egypt), modern Muslim writers have expended an enormous amount of effort in attempting to prove that baked bricks were used in ancient Egypt too. The lengths to which they go in arguing this point and the urgency of their tone are truly remarkable. Their efforts,

19 According to Mas'ūdī, five kings of Babylon were also rulers of Egypt (*Murūj* 2:95).

20 For a discussion of the parallels, see: Schwarzbaum, *Mi-maqor yisrael we yishmael*, 188ff; and C. Janssen, *Bābil: The City of Witchcraft and Wine*, Ghent: University of Ghent, 1995, 145–87.

21 In conformity with the theme of “*ṣarḥ*-building tyrants,” Yāqūt relates an account according to which Nebuchadnezzar also built a *ṣarḥ*! (*Mu'jam al-buldān*, 3:380).

however, are largely unnecessary since the Bible itself refers to baked bricks with reference to Pharaoh's Egypt on more than one occasion.²² If, as we assume, Fir'awn is not entirely independent of Pharaoh, then the reference to baked bricks in the context of Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* may easily be attributed to Pharaoh's Egypt rather than to the Tower of Babel, without needing to rewrite the history of ancient Egypt. Thus, the language of Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* cannot be taken as proof that the Qur'ān had the Tower of Babel in mind.

In a similar vein, the same writers have turned to ancient Egyptian history, arguing that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* was simply a pyramid. Pyramids, they argue, were a means of communication between this world and the heavenly afterlife for a recently deceased Egyptian ruler. Importantly, pyramids are associated with Egypt rather than Mesopotamia. In addition to the usual internet forums where these arguments are usually fought out, this possibility was recently suggested in a very scholarly article by Kevin van Bladel, who attributes the idea to Shawkat Toorawa.²³ There are, however, three problems with the pyramid option. First, Fir'awn is not attempting to create a building through which he will reach the heavens in the afterlife; rather he endeavours to reach the God of Moses in the present, while he is still alive.

Second, it is surely significant that although the great pyramids of Giza were there for pre-modern Muslim scholars to see, not a single classical exegete felt that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* was worth comparing to the pyramids. This is an argument from silence but the silence is deafening. Third, although they are ascendable nowadays, pyramids at the time were not "stepped" in the way that Babylonian ziggurats are; they were smooth and could not be climbed. In fact, Babylonian ziggurats are a much more likely candidate for being the inspiration behind both the Tower of Babel and – indirectly – the *ṣarḥ*. The ancient Babylonians called their temples "*bīl(u) temen šamē u eršētim*", a translation of the Sumerian *eteme-nanki*, which itself means "the foundation platform of heaven and earth"; as such, the ziggurat was the link between the heavens and the earth.²⁴

The association of Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* with a Mesopotamian ziggurat is, of course, difficult to reconcile with the fact that Fir'awn was supposedly an Egyptian.²⁵ It is thus worth pointing out that classical Qur'ānic exegetes did not necessarily identify him as having been an Egyptian. In fact, a surprising number of Late Antique Jews and early Muslims held that Pharaoh/Fir'awn hailed from "the east."

22 Exodus 5:6, 7, 8, 14, 16, 18. It is also in Exodus 5 that Pharaoh denies the existence of the God of Moses, when he says "Who is the Lord that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go" (verse 2).

23 K. van Bladel, "Heavenly cords, and prophetic authority in the Qur'ān and its Late Antique context", *BSOAS* 70, 2007, 223–46 at 228 n. 30.

24 On ziggurats in general, see A.R. George, *House Most High: the Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993.

25 For a more detailed treatment of Fir'awn's (and Hāmān's) connections with "the East," see my "Hāmān's transition from the Jāhiliyya to Islam," on which the following section is based.

Al-Maqdisī related that "... Fir'awn was a native of Balkh,"²⁶ al-Ṭabarī suggests that he was from Iṣfahān,²⁷ al-Qurṭubī suggests that he was a native of Iṣṭakhr,²⁸ and, according to Ibn 'Adī al-Qaṭṭān, "Fir'awn was a lout from Hamadhān."²⁹ The idea that such a quintessentially Egyptian figure as Pharaoh/Fir'awn was actually Iranian is also reflected in the Babylonian Talmud, where Avitūl the scribe said in the name of Rav: "the Pharaoh who lived in the time of Moses was a Magian."³⁰ Add this to the references mentioned above that place Fir'awn and Nimrod in Babel, and the idea that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* was a ziggurat begins to make sense.

For all the sense that it makes, I do not think that the *ṣarḥ* was a ziggurat; nor do I accept that it was a pyramid. This would appear to leave only the Tower of Babel, but – for reasons that will now be discussed – I do not think that it was that either. What was it, then? To answer this question we must return to the verses in which Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* appears. In both verses, Fir'awn commissions Hāmān to build the *ṣarḥ*; and in one of the two verses, it is commissioned in order to allow Fir'awn to reach the *asbāb*. Two questions emerge from this: the first question is, why mention Hāmān at all? Surely Fir'awn in the Qur'ān and Pharaoh in the Bible did not physically undertake every action that is credited to them. When Pharaoh expelled the Israelites from Egypt he did not personally poke each one in the ribs with his staff; his unnamed servants and soldiers did this for him. With specific reference to building projects, we are told that Pharaoh built the storage cities of Pithom and Ramses, but we can be certain that unnamed labourers actually did the work. Why then does it not just say that Fir'awn built a *ṣarḥ*? The second question is: what are the *asbāb*?

I will turn to the second question first as it has recently been answered convincingly.³¹ Amongst other things, it has been shown that reaching the *asbāb* was a special privilege that was afforded only to those chosen by God to do so. The stress is on the fact that God *himself* controlled access to the *asbāb* and, thus, to heaven; God in the Qur'ān repeatedly *challenges* those not chosen to reach the heavens by means of the *asbāb*, with the knowledge that they will fail to do so. Dhū al-Qarnayn was allowed by God to travel by means of the *asbāb*; Fir'awn was not. The important point of all this for our purposes is that in the Qur'ān reaching the *asbāb* is presented as a *challenge*. This leads us to the question of Hāmān's appearance in the verses.

It may be deemed overly pilpulistic to pursue the issue of Hāmān's role in the building of Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ*. In my view, however, the repeated references to

26 Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad' wa al-ta'rīkh li al-muṭaḥhar ibn ṭāhir al-maqdisī al-mansūb ta'līfuḥu li-abī zayd aḥmad ibn sahl al-balkhī*, ed. Cl. Huart, Paris: Leroux, 1903, 3:81–82.

27 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'ān*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Maymaniyya, 1321, 20:28.

28 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1987, 1:426 ad. Q 2:49.

29 Ibn 'Adī al-Qaṭṭān, *al-Kāmil fī du'āfa' al-rijāl*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984, 3:917.

30 *Mo'ed Qaṭan* 18a. Obviously, in specifying that this was the Pharaoh of Moses' era the rabbis cannot have thought that he was anything other than an Egyptian. But the idea that he was a Magian (*angūshī*) may have become known to early Muslims, who constructed a suitably Iranian biography for him.

31 See above, note 23.

Hāmān in this context, coupled with the idea that reaching the *asbāb* was a type of challenge, hold the crucial clues to the identity of Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ*. In brief, the idea that Pharaoh asked Hāmān to build a tower that would reach the heavens was widely known from a pre-Islamic Near Eastern story. The story is that of Aḥīqar the Sage, a tale that was extremely influential and widespread in the Near East, from the Achaemenid period³² until the Middle Ages, leaving its mark on Jewish, Christian and Muslim scriptures and cultures along the way.³³ The episode of this tale that is pivotal for our purposes concerns a challenge that the Egyptian Pharaoh presented to the Assyrian ruler. Having received an untrue letter from Aḥīqar's treacherous nephew Nādān³⁴ saying that the famous sage had died, Pharaoh challenged the Assyrian Esarhaddon to send him a man who could build for him a tower between the heavens and the earth, confident that they would no longer be able to find a suitable person. As even the Assyrian ruler believed Aḥīqar to be dead, he nominated Nādān to undertake the challenge. Eventually, it emerged that Aḥīqar actually was alive and well; he was sent to Egypt, where he successfully passed the Pharaoh's tests, and his villainous nephew was rebuked.³⁵

The story of Aḥīqar is alluded to in the *Book of Tobit* (second century BCE), where Tobit tells his son: "Remember my son how [H]aman treated Achiacharus³⁶ who exalted him – how out of light he brought him into darkness, and how he rewarded him again; yet Achiacharus was saved but the other had his reward, for he went down into darkness" (Tobit 14:10).³⁷ That Aḥīqar "exalted" his nephew recalls the language of the *Book of Esther*, where Ahasuerus "exalted" Hāmān (Esther 3:1), and the fact that a few verses later Ahasuerus himself is mentioned (Tobit 14:15) suggests that *Tobit's* author has *Esther's* Hāmān in mind. The problem is that in most versions of the Aḥīqar story, his nephew is called "Nādān," not "Hāmān." This "mistake" on the part of *Tobit's* author is an understandable

one; the C1āC2āC3 pattern of "Nādān" easily lends itself to a corruption in the form of "Hāmān" and the other similarities between Aḥīqar's nephew and Ahasuerus's vizier, as discussed above, explain the confusion.

Thus, in the pre-Islamic Near East, certain versions of the Aḥīqar story substituted Hāmān for Nādān. As Aḥīqar's nephew is the one who was initially summoned by Pharaoh to build a tower between the heavens and the earth, we can begin to understand why in the Qur'ān Hāmān is ordered to build Pharaoh's *ṣarḥ*.³⁸ Moreover, the method by which Aḥīqar managed to build the tower is a compelling detail for our purposes: Aḥīqar commissioned rope-weavers to produce two ropes of cotton, each two thousand cubits long, that would lift boys borne by eagles high into the air, from where the summit of the tower could be built. The role played in the Aḥīqar story by these overlong ropes strikingly prefigures that which is played in Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* by the *asbāb*. Presumably, the version of the Aḥīqar story that was familiar in seventh-century Arabia is the version known to *Tobit's* author. That Aḥīqar was known in Muḥammad's Arabia is indicated by the parallels between some of his maxims and those that are attributed to Luqmān in the Qur'ān.³⁹ What Aḥīqar and Luqmān have in common, of course, is that they are both paradigmatic "sages" in the Near East, the adjective *ḥakīm* being applied to both of them.

Aḥīqar was fabled for his wisdom in Late Antique monotheistic circles more than any other person – with one possible exception: Solomon. Interestingly, Solomon (or Sulaymān) is the only other person in the Qur'ān to build a *ṣarḥ*, and he does so in a context that closely parallels the Aḥīqar and Fir'awn episodes. In the Qur'ānic description of their meeting (Q 27:23–44), Sulaymān hosts the Queen of Sheba and invites her to embrace Allāh's religion. They challenge each other with various tests, and when she arrives at his court, he tricks her into lifting her dress by building a *ṣarḥ* that creates the illusion that she was about to step on water. Upon realising that Solomon outsmarted her, she immediately submits to Allāh, the *ṣarḥ* playing a direct and pivotal role in her decision to convert.

This Qur'ānic episode loudly echoes both the Biblical account of Solomon's meeting with the Queen of Sheba,⁴⁰ as well as midrashic elaborations on the story related in the Targum Sheni to the *Book of Esther*.⁴¹ What concerns us here, however, is the relationship between the Qur'ānic version of this story and Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ*. Even a superficial comparison between the two episodes reveals that they are inverted parallels of each other: Both Fir'awn and Sulaymān attempt

32 An Aramaic version of the Aḥīqar story was found in documents from Elephantine dating from the fifth century BCE (A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, 204–48; and J.M. Lindenberg, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Aḥīqar*, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 1983 – which is limited to a study and bilingual edition of Aḥīqar's maxims).

33 See: T. Nöldeke, *Untersuchungen Zum Achiqar-Romans*, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1913; F. Nau, *Histoire et sagesse d'Ahiqar l'Assyrien*, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1909; and A. Frayha, *Aḥīqar: ḥakīm min al-sharq al-adnā al-qadīm*, Beirut: Jāmi'at Bayrūt al-Amīrikiyah, 1962, 149–61.

34 Other common versions of the name include "Nadin" and "Nādāb." The Aramaic text from Elephantine, the English translations of which render the name "Nadin," actually spells this name *n.d.n*. The vocalization appears random and, crucially for our purposes, the Syriac and Arabic versions have "Nādān" (with "Nathan" in Armenian, and "Anadan" in Slavonic).

35 The following paragraph is based on my "Hāmān's transition from the Jāhiliyya to Islam", 301–03.

36 "Achiacharus" is the Greek version of Aḥīqar.

37 *The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, ed. B.M. Metzger, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965, 75, note 'f' (on Tobit 14:10); and J.R. Kohlenberger III (ed.), *The Parallel Apocrypha: Greek Text, King James Version*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 72, where the King James version has "Aman." Compare also Tobit 1:21ff., where Aḥīqar's status at the court is described in terms reminiscent of Hāmān/Mordecai's status *vis-à-vis* Ahasuerus.

38 Admittedly, in the Aḥīqar version of the story, it is not Nādān but Aḥīqar who eventually builds the tower. It should be remembered, however, that the Qur'ān does not mention whether or not Hāmān actually did build the *ṣarḥ*; as with Nādān, we only know that he was requested by Pharaoh to do so.

39 Some of Aḥīqar's sayings have been identified as those of Luqmān in Islamic tradition (on Aḥīqar in Islam see: F.C. Conybeare, J.R. Harris and A. Smith Lewis, *The Story of Ahiqar: From the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913, lxxiv–lxxxiii).

40 *1 Kings* 10:1–13 and *2 Chronicles* 9:1–12.

41 B. Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991, 114–16.

to build a *ṣarḥ*; Sulaymān succeeds whereas Fir'awn fails; Solomon's *ṣarḥ* is the means by which the Queen of Sheba embraces Allāh; Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* is the means by which Pharaoh expresses his rejection of Allāh.⁴²

Thus, Sulaymān and Aḥīqar successfully complete challenges that involve building an edifice that reaches the heavens, whereas Fir'awn fails to meet God's challenge to reach the *asbāb* by building a *ṣarḥ*. Unexpectedly, in a Mesopotamian context these successes and failures may be explained in terms of the three characters' respective levels of intelligence. Sulaymān and Aḥīqar are synonymous with Wisdom; Fir'awn is not. In fact, in questioning the existence of the God of Moses (and in thinking that he himself is divine) Fir'awn displays what in Islamic terms may be deemed to be obtuse stupidity. The relationship between Wisdom and building towers – or craftsmanship more generally – is a feature of ancient Near Eastern culture. The Akkadian term *ummānu* refers equally to a master-craftsman and to a Sage.⁴³ The term entered the lexicon of monotheists through the Hebrew Bible where in Proverbs 8:22 "Mother Wisdom" is referred to as a master craftsman, using the cognate term *amon*, and in the *Book of Esther* 2:7 where the term *omen* is applied to the wise Mordecai beneath whose character lurks the Babylonian Marduk, creator of the world.⁴⁴

The story of Aḥīqar, of course, emanates from and is set in the ancient Near East, which would explain why Pharaoh's intellectual challenge to Hāmān entails building a tower between the heavens and the earth in both the story of Aḥīqar and in the Qur'ān. This ancient Near Eastern idea passed through various stages of development before reaching the Qur'ān. In fact, Jesus – who is distinctly referred to as "wise" in both Romans 16:27 and in Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*⁴⁵ – is also described in Late Antique Syriac sources as *ardēkhlā*,⁴⁶ "the architect." Similarly, in Manichaean Psalms from this period the equivalent term *Bān rabbā* (meaning "great builder") is used for God.⁴⁷ We should not be surprised, then, that in Ephrem the Syrian's hymn *De Nativitate*, we find that Jesus is expected to descend to earth and erect a tower reaching up into heaven.⁴⁸

Having explored the *ṣarḥ* in some detail, we may return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter and ask: what does this case study teach us about

the relationship between the Qur'ān's Fir'awn and the Bible's Pharaoh? Aside from the obvious fact that Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* and association with Hāmān have no equivalent in Pharaoh's biblical career, the most interesting answer in my view comes from the exegetical materials that support both the Bible and the Qur'ān. It is striking that the classical Qur'ānic exegetes, in describing Fir'awn and Nimrod in similar terms and in conflating their respective *ṣarḥs*, followed the pre-Islamic commentaries on the Bible more closely than they followed the evidence of the Qur'ān itself. Had they stuck to the Qur'ān, they would surely have revealed layers of intertextuality that connect Fir'awn's *ṣarḥ* with that of Sulaymān rather than the old midrashic connection between Pharaoh and Nimrod. On this basis, I would even suggest that Fir'awn, or "the Qur'ānic Pharaoh," may be distinguished from "the Muslim Pharaoh." What they have in common, though, is that both Fir'awn and the Muslim Pharaoh owe their existence to Mesopotamia: the latter is the product of cross-pollination and scholarly interaction between Muslims and other monotheists in Late Antique and early Islamic Iraq; the former is the product of an earlier Mesopotamian tradition in which wisdom and tower-building were intertwined with divine favour, ever since the days of ziggurats and Aḥīqar the sage. Thus, what unites the Qur'ānic and Muslim Pharaohs, and what distinguishes both characters from the Biblical Pharaoh, is that they are less "Egyptian" than we might have thought.

42 Cf. EQ III: 487, s.v. "myths and legends" (A. Neuwirth).

43 Thus, in the *Epic of Atrahasis*, Mami, the creator of mankind, is repeatedly referred to as "wise" (e.g. 1: 250 in W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atrahasis*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, 61), likening "wisdom" with the act of creation.

44 Cf. A. Silverstein, "The Book of Esther and the *Enūma Elish*," *BSOAS* 69, 2006, 209–23, esp. 222.

45 F. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, ed. and trans. W. Whiston, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987, XVIII: 63.

46 The term, which occurs even in Modern Hebrew as *ardīkhāl* ("architect"), is itself a vestige of the ancient Near East: it derives from the Akkadian *'arad ekallī* meaning "servant of the palace" and by the New Babylonian period it specifically referred to a builder (cf. *CAD*, A2:210–11).

47 In R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2004 (1st edition 1975), (219–28) 223–24.

48 Cf. T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian*, Lund, Gleerup, 1978, 211–12.

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