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Jacob

Biblical patriarch, son of Isaac (q.v.), mentioned sixteen times by name in the Qur'ān and probably referred to by the name Isrā'il another two times (see Israel). The form of the name in Arabic, Ya'qūb, may have come directly from the Hebrew or may have been filtered through Syriac (Jeffery, For. vocab., 291; see foreign vocabulary); the name was apparently used in pre-Islamic times in Arabia (Horovitz, Jewish proper names, 152; id., ku, 152-3; see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur'ān). Most frequently, Jacob is mentioned simply within the list of patriarchs along with Abraham (q.v.) and Isaac, following Jewish tradition (q 6:84; 11:71; 12:38; 19:49; 21:72; 29:27; 38:45), with Ishmael (q.v.) added on occasion (q 2:136, 140; 3:84; 4:163; and perhaps 2:132). The narrative of the life of Jacob in the Qur'ān is primarily limited to his role in the Joseph (q.v.) story in which he orders his sons not to all go through a single gate into the city (q 12:67; see Shapiro, Haggadischen Elemente, i, 55-6) and in which he becomes blind due to his sorrow (over Joseph, cf. q 12:84). His sight, however, is restored when his face (q.v.) is touched by the shirt of Joseph (q 12:93, 96; see vision and blindness; clothing). Jacob’s last words (Gen 49) are also echoed in q 2:133, “… when he said to his sons, ‘What will you serve after me?’ They said, ‘We will serve your God and the God of your fathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, one God; to him we surrender’” (see polytheism and atheism; monotheism).

The observation that the Qur'ān appears to consider Jacob a brother of Isaac rather than his son (although on other occasions, it is clear that this type of confusion has not taken place, e.g. q 2:132, “Abraham charged his sons with this and Jacob likewise”) has become a motif in polemical literature. Based on passages “We gave him Isaac and Jacob” (q 6:84; 19:49; 21:72; 29:27) and “We gave her the glad tidings of Isaac and, after Isaac, Jacob” (q 11:71), the charge has been laid that there was a misunderstanding of the relationship between Jacob and Isaac. It is clear, however, that later Muslims were not the least bit confused on the issue, all recognizing that the relationship between the two as related in the Bible was accurate (Geiger, Judaism and Islam, 108-9; Speyer, Erzählungen, 170-1).

The biblical renaming of Jacob as Israel (thus providing the personal dimension of the idea of the “Children of Israel” [q.v.] as well as the territorial and tribal; see Gen
Jerusalem

32:28 is likely reflected in the use of “Israel” in q 3:93, “All food was lawful to the Children of Israel save what Israel for-bade for himself (see forbidden; lawful and unlawful)” — which probably refers to the account of Genesis 32:33 — and in q 19:58, “of those we bore with Noah (q.v.), and of the seed of Abraham and Israel.” No further elaboration of this name change and its significance in genealogical terms can be noted in the Qurʿān.

When the story of Jacob is retold in the “stories of the prophets” literature (qisas al-anbiyāʾ), the account of Jacob and Esau receives a good deal of attention even though it is unmentioned in the Qurʿān itself (e.g. Tabari, Taʾrikh, i, 354-60). The etymology of the name of Jacob is retold in these accounts as an etiological narrative that works as well in Arabic as it does in Hebrew; Jacob held on to Esau’s heel (aqb in Arabic) when the twins were being born, although the etymology of Esau as derived from “refusing,” aṣā, does not produce a fully meaningful narrative within the picture of their birth (cf. Gen 25:25-6; Ginzberg, Legends, i, 315; v, 274).

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Bibliography


Jahannam see Hell and Hellfire

Jāḥiliyya see Age of Ignorance

Jail see Prisoners

Jālūt see Goliath

Jealousy see Envy

Jerusalem

The holy city sacred to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Jerusalem (Iliyāʾ, bayt al-maqdis, Uršílayim, al-Quds) is not mentioned by name in the Qurʿān. As Islam is, however, deeply rooted in Judaism and Christianity (see Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity), many stories with a biblical background are undoubtedly situated in Jerusalem and some of these stories have been included in the holy book of the Muslims (see narratives). Further, one must bear in mind that the designation bayt al-maqdis (lit. “house of the holy,” from Heb. Bêt ha-miqdāsh, the Temple), has three meanings: first, the Jewish Temple and its successor, the Temple Mount (al-haram al-sharif) with the Dome of the Rock and the Aqṣā Mosque (q.v.); second, the city of Jerusalem; third, the holy land (al-ard al-muqaddasa) as a whole.

Based on relevant passages in the Qurʿān, Muslim tradition created an image of Jerusalem that combined Jewish and Christian elements with specifically Islamic ones. The main sources to be consulted in presenting this image are the vast corpus of Qurʿān commentaries (tafsīr, see exegesis of the Qurʿān: classical and medieval; exegesis of the Qurʿān: early modern and contemporary) and the ḥadīth al-Quds (“Virtues of Jerusalem”) literature. By its very nature, the literary genre of ḥadīth al-Quds is an expression of local pride, which explains why the authors active in
this field found more material in the Qur'an in favor of Jerusalem than did the Qur'anic commentators (mufassirūn). Likewise, they claimed exclusiveness for Jerusalem in passages for which the mufassirūn offered a variety of interpretations.

There are a number of instances in which there is general agreement — in both commentary (tafsīr) and faḍā'il literature — that certain Qur'ānic passages allude to Jerusalem, rather than other places. This applies, for instance, to the identification of “the farthest mosque” (al-masjid al-aqṣā) in q 17:1 with al-Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, which is said to have been the destination of Muḥammad’s “night journey” (isrā) and the scene of his ascension (q.v.; mi'rāj). It is the site of the Jewish Temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 C.E. and reconstructed by the Muslims during the caliphate of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13-23/634-44). There is, however, disagreement as to whether Muḥammad prayed in the sanctuary or not. Had he done so, it would have been incumbent on Muslims also to visit Jerusalem when on the pilgrimage (q.v.; ḥajj) to Mecca (q.v.). Therefore, some theologians denied the idea of Muḥammad’s praying in the sanctuary. According to others, however, confirmation of the belief in one God (tawḥīd) was revealed in Jerusalem when Muḥammad prayed with the prophets, his predecessors in office, in the sanctuary (see Prophets and Prophethood). General agreement likewise exists regarding the interpretation of q 2:142-50, where the change of the direction of prayer (gibla, q.v.) is discussed. It has been accepted that the direction of prayer was Jerusalem before it was changed to the Ka’ba (q.v.) in Mecca.

The setting of many biblical stories incorporated in the Qur'an is Jerusalem or the holy land, although the name is not explicitly mentioned. Jewish and Christian traditions — both apocryphal and canonical — such as those about the location of the last judgment (q.v.) in Jerusalem, have been adopted by Muslims. Q 50:44, “And listen for the day when the caller will call out from a place quite near (min makānim qarībin),” is said to refer to Jerusalem, the “place quite near” being the holy rock (al-sakhrā) in the al-Haram al-Sharif. The angel Isrāfīl, standing on the holy rock, will call the dead to rise from their graves (see Death and the Dead; Resurrection). It is a place appropriate for the purpose because it is next to heaven (see Heaven and Sky). There is, on the other hand, an interpretation offered by al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144; Kashf, ad loc.) according to which “a place quite near” means the feet of the dead or the roots of their hair.

Many other identifications of places are not as unequivocal as those just mentioned. There are numerous cases in which, in accordance with the generally accepted exegetical tendency to amass traditional interpretations, one or more sites in addition to Jerusalem have been proposed; in other words, these places compete with Jerusalem. Sometimes such competing sites are situated in the holy land, including Syria (q.v.) and Jordan. A rivalry on a higher level, however, is that between Jerusalem and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (q.v.) or between the holy land and the rest of the world (see Cosmology). The latter is present in the interpretation of Q 7:137, “And we made a people, considered weak, inheritors of land (ard) in both east and west — land whereupon we sent down our blessings (see Blessing; Oppressed on Earth, the).” The blessed land is Syria or, according to another interpretation, the whole world, because God conferred the kingdom of the world upon
David (q.v.) and Solomon (q.v.). Q 21:105, “Before this we wrote in the Psalms (q.v.; al-zabūr) after the message (al-dhīka): My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth,” is, according to Speyer (Erzählungen, 285), the only word-for-word citation of the Bible (Ps 37:19; Matt 5:5; see Scripture and the Qur’ān). Although it undoubtedly refers to the holy land, other interpretations have been offered: It means paradise (q.v.), which is to be granted to the believers (see belief and unbelief), but also this world, the universal kingdom of Islam (q.v.). The inheritance will come at the end of times, when Jesus (q.v.) descends from heaven to fight the unbelievers, subjecting the whole world to Islamic rule. The decisive battle will be fought in Jerusalem (see apocalypse).

More often, Jerusalem competes with Mecca, as both are cities, and the holy land with the Ḥijāz. Q 17:60, “We granted the vision which we showed you,” has been explained in two ways: It is the vision Muhammad had after his return from the night journey (isrā’). When the Quraysh (q.v.) called him a liar (see lie; opposition to Muhammad; insanity), the Prophet had a vision of bayt al-maqdis, which enabled him to answer questions that the Meccans were asking in order to examine the veracity of his story. Another interpretation is that Muhammad had a vision of the forthcoming conquest of Mecca at al-Ḥudaybiya (q.v.), when the Quraysh prevented him from entering Mecca to offer sacrifices at the Ka’ba (see expeditions and battles). Q 2:214, “And who is more unjust (see justice and injustice) than he who forbids that in places for the worship of God, God’s name should be celebrated, whose zeal is to ruin them?” possibly refers to the destruction of the Temple either by Nebuchadnezzar or Titus. It has been interpreted, however, as referring to Mecca and the Ka’ba, when the heathens, before Muḥammad’s emigration (q.v.; hijār), prevented him from worshiping at the Ka’ba. Another interpretation says that this happened at al-Ḥudaybiya. The olive tree (zeytūn) mentioned in Q 95:1, by which an oath (see oath) is sworn, has been explained both as meaning what it is, a valuable plant, and as denoting the hill on which bayt al-maqdis stands.

The rivalry between Jerusalem and Mecca is also apparent in the question about whether it was Isaac (q.v.) or Ishmael (q.v.) whom Abraham (q.v.) was ordered to slaughter as a sacrifice (q.v.). The story is recounted in Q 37:90–111, but the narrative leaves open the identity of the potential victim. If it was Isaac, Jerusalem would be the place of the sacrifice; otherwise, it would be Mecca or nearby Minā. Conversely, the account of the building of the Ka’ba in Q 2:125 is in favor of Ishmael, for he assisted his father, which proves his presence in Mecca.

Another example of Jerusalem’s rivalry with Mecca may be found with the interpretation of the parable of the divine light (q.v.) in Q 24:35–6. It could be an allusion to candles lit in churches and monasteries (Paret, Kommentar, 360; see church; monasticism and monks), but another interpretation exists: the houses (buyūţ) mentioned in Q 24:36, in which the light is lit, are four structures, all erected by prophets. These four are: the Ka’ba, built by Abraham and Ishmael, bayt al-maqdis built by David and Solomon, masjid al-Madīna, and masjid qubā, each built by Muḥammad; each can be deemed to be a “mosque (q.v.) founded on piety” (q 9:108). Here, Jerusalem is put on a par with the holy places in the Hijāz. Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210; Tafsīr, xxiv, 3, ad Q 24:36), however, cites another interpretation in the name of al-Ḥasan al-Ṭaḥṣīr, who identifies the houses, without explaining the plural, with bayt al-maqdis because it is illuminated by ten thousand candles.

Jerusalem competes not only with Mecca,
but also with the other world: al-sāhira mentioned in q 79:14 is said to be the surface of the earth to which the dead will ascend on the day of resurrection. Some commentators define it geographically as the plain to the north of Jerusalem on which humankind will gather during the day of judgment. According to others, it is a plain destined for the gathering of the unbelievers, causing such fright as to prevent people from slumbering. Another eschatological tradition explains al-sāhira as the new earth (al-ard al-jadida), which will replace this earth when the world comes to an end; and, finally, according to yet another understanding, it is hell (jahannam, see hell and hellfire).

Also understood to have both eschatological and this-worldly connotations is the wall mentioned in q 57:13: “A wall will be put up between them, with a gate therein, within it will be mercy (q.v.), and without it, all alongside, will be punishment (see reward and punishment).” The wall is understood to be the eastern wall of the al-Haram al-Sharif, above Wādī Jahannam (the Kidron Valley), the gate is Bāb al-Rahma, the Gate of Mercy, one of the two entrances of the Golden Gate. According to some commentators, though, it is the partition between paradise and hell, a kind of purgatory, the gate where the elect will enter paradise (see barzakh; barrier).

On the day of resurrection those raised from the dead will rush to a goal-post (nusub), mentioned in q 70:43. This is understood by some to be the holy rock in Jerusalem, but by others to be a signpost (alam) to which the believers — or an idol to which the polytheists (see idols and images; polytheism and atheism) — will rush on the day of judgment.

Rivalry exists on the local level between Jerusalem and other towns of Palestine and Syria. The town (al-qarya) mentioned in q 2:58, whose gate the Israelites were ordered to enter with humility, is identified in the exegetical literature as Jerusalem or Jericho. When Jericho is mentioned, the remark is added that it is located not far from Jerusalem. But according to some commentators, it is the gate of Cairo or Egypt (Miṣr). Another example: “The one who passed by a town, all in ruins to its roofs” (q 2:259) was either ‘Uzayr (identified with Ezra, q.v.) or Jeremiah (who bewailed the destruction of Jerusalem) or the legendary al-Khūdīr (see khādir/khīdīr). There are three proposals about the name of the town: first, Sābūr on the Tigris, situated between Wāṣīṭ and al-Madā’in; second, Jerusalem; and third, the town of “those who abandoned their homes, though they were thousands, for fear of death,” mentioned in q 2:243. There are various explanations of the holy land (al-ard al-muqaddasa) mentioned in q 5:21: It is said to be Jericho, Jordan (al-Urdunn), and Palestine, or Tūr (Mt. Sinai; see Sinai) and its surroundings. According to others it is al-Shām (Syria or Damascus), or simply Jericho. Equally various are the locations given for the rabwa (lit. great or high place) in q 23:50, where Mary (q.v.), the mother of Jesus, found shelter with her son: the Ghūṭa (plain) of Damascus, Jerusalem, Ramla, or Egypt, the latter apparently a reminiscence of the flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Egypt (q.v.) as told in the Gospels (q.v.).

The Shi‘ī viewpoint (see Shi‘ism and the Qur‘ān) is especially evident in the various interpretations, found in both Sunni and Shi‘ī authors, of Muḥammad’s vision mentioned in q 17:60. Al-Mawardi (d. 450/1058; Nukat, iii, 253) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 548/1154; Majma‘, xv, 66–7), following al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Tafsīr, xv, 110–3), give three interpretations of this vision: the first explains it as Muḥammad’s vision during the isrā‘; the second, as a vision while Muḥammad was sleeping (according to Ibn ‘Abbās, Muḥammad sees himself entering Mecca; see dreams and sleep;
foretelling; visions); and the third, also as a vision while sleeping [according to Sahl b. Sa’d, the vision is of people like donkeys climbing on the pulpits [manābir]]. While al-Ṭabarî expresses a preference for the first explanation, al-Mawardi gives no such opinion. Shīṭ exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarî and al-Ṭabāṭaba’ī (d. 1982; Mukhtasar al-Miẓān), stress that this passage has nothing to do with Jerusalem, nor with Mecca, but maintain that it refers to future events, the misdeeds of the Umayyads who deprived the ‘AIDS of their legitimate claim to the caliphate (see caliph; politics and the Qur’ān); Muhammad saw them climbing on his pulpit, behaving like apes.

Modern commentators such as Rashīd Riḍā (Manār), al-Mawdūdī (Taḥfīm), al-Zuḥaylī (Tafsīr) and Tu’aylib (Faṭḥ), present the traditional interpretations on many of the verses already discussed. After making their own positions clear, however, they provide events and places in the context of the life of Muhammad and the history of early Islam in Arabia rather than locating these in Jerusalem. To mention but a few examples: Those who, according to Q 2:114, prevented the pious from visiting the sanctuaries, and even tried to ruin them, were not Nebuchadnezzar or Titus, but the heathens in Mecca before the emigration (hijra). Rashīd Riḍā derives the protection of synagogues and churches as practiced in Islam from Q 2:114 (see religious pluralism and the Qur’ān). That Muhammad prayed inside the sanctuary of bayt al-maqdis during his night journey is not contested in principle in modern tafsīr; it is no longer considered an issue of heated debate. The land promised to the pious in Q 21:105 is paradise, the wall with the gate in Q 57:13 will be put up in the other world, and al-sāhira in Q 79:14 belongs to the world to come or remains geographically undefined. Generally moder-

ern tafsīr prefers theological interpretation and the discussion of problems pertaining to the religious law (shari‘a) to a consideration of problems in the history of the holy places and their basis in biblical lore (see law and the Qur’ān; history and the Qur’ān).

Finally, the close relation between Jerusalem and the Qur’ān found expression in the enumeration of merits earned by those who recite certain sūras (see recitation of the Qur’ān): The person who recites Q 29 “The Spider” (Sūrat al-Ankabūt) will receive for each verse the same compensation as those who conquered Jerusalem, and those who recite Q 5 “The Romans” (Sūrat al-Rūm; see byzantines) will be compensated for each verse as those who visit Jerusalem (Firūzābādī, Bayāʿir, i, 364, 369). See also sacred precincts.

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performed by divine permission (see MIRACLE); and states that God raised him into his presence. It probably also alludes to his future return. It denies, however, that he was divine (as noted, one of his qur’ānic identifications is as the “son of Mary”; see below for further discussion of this title) and attaches no significance to the cross. As traditionally interpreted by Muslims, it also denies that he was crucified (see CRUCIFIXION).

Inventory of the qur’ānic Jesus material
The relevant passages are listed here in chronological order in accordance with Nöldeke’s classification (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). For the sake of comparision, the order implied by the headings of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur’ān is also given (see Robinson, Discovering, 72-96). For example N 58/E 44 indicates that according to Nöldeke the stra in question was the fifty-eighth revealed but that it was the forty-fourth according to the standard Egyptian edition: q 19:16-40, 88-95 (N 58/E 44); q 43:37-65, 81-2 (N 61/E 109); q 23:50 (N 64/E 74); q 21:91-93 (N 65/E 73); q 42:13-14 (N 83/E 86); q 6:83-90 (N 89/E 55); q 2:87, 135-141, 232-233 (N 91/E 87); q 3:42-64, 81-85 (N 97/E 89); q 33:7-8 (N 103/E 90); q 4:116-159, 165-165, 171-172 (N 109/E 92); q 37:26-27 (N 99/E 94); q 66:10-12 (N 109/E 107); q 61:6, 14 (N 98/E 109); q 5:17-18, 46-47, 72-78, 109-118 (N 114/E 112); q 9:30-31 (N 115/E 113).

Jest see LAUGHTER; MOCKERY

Jesus
The first-century Jewish teacher and wonder worker believed by Christians to be the Son of God, he is named in the Qur’ān as one of the prophets before Muhammad who came with a scripture (see BOOK; CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY; PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). The qur’ānic form of Jesus’ name is Īsā. It is attested twenty-five times, often in the form Īsā b. Maryam, Jesus son of Mary. The Qur’ān asserts that he was a prophet and gives him the unique title “the Messiah” (see ANOINTING). It affirms his virginal conception (see MARY; HOLY SPIRIT); cites miracles which he
Abyssinia (q.v.) recited part of this sūra to the Negus (Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 150-3) which would make it quite early (see Emigration). In any case, the reference in Q 19:17 to an angel (q.v.), ‘our spirit,’ appearing in visible form strongly suggests that the sūra is Meccan. Moreover, Q 43:57 implies that the Prophet’s audience had already heard an extensive revelation about “the son of Mary” and Q 23:50 probably alludes to a specific element in this particular version of his story (cf. Q 19:22-6). Q 19:34-40, however, which has a different rhyme from the rest of the sūra (see Form and Structure of the Qurʾān), was almost certainly added later and the references to “the book” (Q 19:12, 16, 30, etc.) are probably late Meccan or early Medinan.

The name Ɛsā, its origin and significance

The name “Jesus” (Ɛsā) occurs twenty-five times: nine times by itself (Q 2:136; 3:52, 55, 59, 84; 4:163; 6:85; 42:13; 43:69) and sixteen times in conjunction with one or more other names or titles (Q 2:87, 253: 3:45; 4:177, 171; 5:46, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116; 19:34; 33:7; 57:27; 61:6, 14). It was probably absent from the original version of Q 19:16-40 and it is not found in sūras 23 or 61, but it is attested in the other twelve sūras listed above.

The Qurʾānic spelling of Jesus’ name is strikingly different from any currently used by Christians. The English form “Jesus” is derived from the Latin Iēsous which in turn is based on the Greek Ιησοῦς. It is generally held, however, that because Jesus was a Palestinian Jew, his original name must have been Hebrew and that the Greek Iēsous represents the Hebrew Yēshūa which is an abbreviated form of Y’hōshūa (or Y’hōshua’). The original meaning of Y’hō-shūa’ was “Yahweh helps” but it was popularly understood to mean, “Yahweh saves.” When the New Testament was translated from Greek into Syriac, Ιησους was rendered Yēshū’, although Syriac-speaking Nestorian Christians called him Is互助’. After the rise of Islam, the gospels (q.v.) were eventually translated from Syriac into Arabic and Yēshū’ was rendered Yasū’, which is what Arab Christians call Jesus to this day.

The grounds for thinking that Jesus’ original name was Yēshūa’ are: 1) The Hebrew scriptures mention several people called Y’hōshūa’, Y’hōshua’ or Yēshūa’, including Moses’ successor Joshua son of Nūn whose name is spelled in all three ways. In the Septuagint, these names are almost invariably rendered as Iēsous (Brown et al., Hebrew and English lexicon, 221). 2) By the first century, only the short form Yēshūa’ was in use. 3) The New Testament refers to Moses’ successor, Joshua, in Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8, and in both instances it gives his name in Greek as Ιησους. 4) According to Matthew 1:21, an angel told Joseph in a dream that Mary would have a son, and added “Thou shalt call his name Jesus for it is he who shall save his people from their sins.” As there is no play-on-words in the Greek, Matthew’s readers were presumably familiar with the original Hebrew name and its etymology.

Western scholars, because of their conviction that Jesus’ authentic Hebrew name is Yēshūa’, have been puzzled by the Qurʾān’s reference to him as Ɛsā. They have offered a number of explanations for this apparent anomaly. One suggestion is that y-sh‘-, the Hebrew consonants of Yēshūa’, have been reversed for some cryptic reason to give Ɛsā, the Arabic consonants of Ɛsā. Those who favor this view note that in ancient Mesopotamia certain divine names were written in one way and pronounced in another; for example EN-ZU was read ZU-EN (Michaud, Jēsus, 15). Scarcely more plausible is the suggestion that the Jews called Jesus “Esau” (Hebrew ‘Esau) out of hatred and that
Muḥammad learned this name from them not realizing that it was an insult (see Jews and Judaism; Polemic and Polemical Language). Admittedly, in Arabic Esau is usually written Isā and this might have been changed into Isā in order to assimilate it to other Qur’ānic names ending in -ā. There is no evidence, however, that the Jews have ever called Jesus Esau. Moreover, the Qur’ān criticizes them for insulting Jesus’ mother (Q 4:156), and Muḥammad’s many Christian acquaintances would surely have corrected him if he had unwittingly adopted a Jewish insult against Jesus himself. A third suggestion is that Jesus’ name has been altered deliberately to assimilate it to Mūsā (Moses, q.v.), with whom he is sometimes paired. There may be other examples of this phenomenon in the Qur’ān, for instance, Saul (q.v.) and Goliath (q.v.) are called Ṭālūt and Jālūt, Aaron (q.v.) and Korah (q.v.) are called Hārūn and Qārūn. A fourth suggestion is that Jesus’ name has been altered deliberately to assimilate it to his people. Thus, far from supporting the derivation of Iesous from Yēshūa’, this biblical verse militates against it.

3) Josephus used the Greek name Ἰσοῦς to denote three people mentioned in the Bible whose Hebrew names were not Yēshūa’, Y’hōshūa’ or Y’hōshua’. They were Saul’s son Yishvi (Anglicized as “Ishvi” in the RSV of I Samuel 14:49), the Levite Abishā’ (mentioned in I Chronicles 6:4, etc.) and Yish-wah the son of Asher (Anglicized as “Ishva” in the RSV of Genesis 46:17).

4) Around the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr penned his famous Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Justin, a Christian who wrote in Greek and knew no Hebrew, argued at length that the Old Testament story of Joshua should be interpreted typologically as referring to Jesus. Under his influence, most Christians subsequently assumed that Jesus’ Hebrew name must have been the same as Joshua’s.

5) Jesus’ name should be derived ultimately from the Hebrew verb āsā, “to do,” which also means “to bring about” in the sense of effecting a deliverance. This etymology would make better sense of Matthew 1:21 than the assumption that his Hebrew name was Yēshūa’. Moreover, in the first centuries of the Christian era, Nabatean pilgrims inscribed the name ‘s on rocks in the region of Sinai, and the name is also found in inscriptions in southern Arabia and the region between Syria.
None of al-Assiouty’s arguments is decisive and some of them are unsound. The Talmudic Yēshō or Yēshu’a may be a deliberate deformation of Jesus’ name to ensure that his memory would be blotted out. Matthew 1:21 should be read in conjunction with Matthew 1:23, where Jesus is identified as Emmanuel, “God with us”; from the evangelist’s viewpoint, therefore, it would have been entirely appropriate for his name to mean “Yahweh saves.” Although Josephus furnishes important evidence for the wide variety of Hebrew names represented in Greek by Ισά, it is noteworthy that none of these names begins with an ‘ayin. Justin Martyr elaborated the Joshua/Jesus typology but he did not invent it; it was already implicit in Hebrews 4:8. It is true that the Hebrew verb ḥāṣā, “to do,” can mean “to bring about” in the sense of effecting a deliverance. In biblical passages where it has this latter meaning, however, the subject is invariably Yahweh (Brown et al., Hebrew and English lexicon, 795). Moreover, as the verb is not Aramaic and is not certainly found in other Semitic languages (ibid., 793), it is not relevant to the interpretation of the pre-Islamic inscriptions which the author mentions.

According to al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (fl. fifth/eleventh cent.), some authorities took ḫāṣ to be an Arabic name and derived it from ‘ayas, “a stallion’s urine” (Jeffery, For. vocab., 219). As urine was used to bleach clothes, this bizarre suggestion probably arose among interpreters who were familiar with the tradition that Jesus’ disciples were fullers. The Līsān al-‘Arab mentions two other Arabic derivations: from ‘ayas, “reddish whiteness,” or from āwasa, the verbal noun of āwasa, “to roam about.” The former should perhaps be explained in the light of the hadith (see hadīth and the Qur’ān) in which the Prophet describes Jesus as “ruddy (ahmar) as if he had just come from the bath.” The latter is probably linked with attempts to derive Jesus’ title al-Masīḥ from masaba, “to pace” or “to survey.” Ṭabāṭabā’ī (d. 1982) favors a tradition which derives ḫāṣ from yaṭūḥ, “he lives,” because the name of Zechariah’s (q.v.) son, Yahyā (John; see John the Baptist), likewise has this meaning, and because in q 3 the two births are announced in similar fashion. Nevertheless, several classical philologists thought that ḫāṣ was a Hebrew or Syriac name that had been Arabicized and this view was endorsed by a number of classical commentators (for a recent analysis in which a misreading of the unpointed Arabic is suggested, see Bellamy, Textual criticism, 6; see Arabic language; Arabic script; collection of the Qur’ān).

By way of conclusion, it is worth summarizing the salient features of the debate about the origins of the Qur’ānic form of Jesus’ name. It is not certain that Jesus’ original name was Yēshu’a. The view that it was, and that it connoted that he was the Savior, cannot be traced back to earlier than around 80 C.E., the time when Hebrews and Matthew were written. In any case, ḫāṣ, the Qur’ānic form of his name, has no such connotations. The attempts to derive that form from an Arabic root are, however, far-fetched and show, if anything, that it had no obvious associations for the native speaker of Arabic. It is just possible that ḫāṣ was actually Jesus’ original name, although it seems more likely that it is an Arabicized form of the name current among Syriac-speaking Christians as was recognized by a number of classical authorities. This Arabicized form may be pre-Islamic but there is no compelling evidence that it is. Nor are there grounds for thinking that its purpose is polemical.
References to Jesus as “the son of Mary” and “the Messiah”

The expression “the son of Mary” is attested twenty-three times. By itself, it occurs in only two Meccan verses: q 43:57 and q 23:50. In the other instances, which are all Medinan, it is invariably preceded by “Jesus,” “the Messiah” or “the Messiah Jesus.”

An Arabic name (ism) is often followed by a familial attribution (nasab), “the son of X.” Moreover, the nasab may also be employed in isolation. Thus as regards its position, form and employment, “the son of Mary” resembles a nasab. In a nasab, however, X is normally the name of the person’s father. Very occasionally, one encounters a nasab in which X denotes the person’s mother; for example, “the son of the Byzantine woman,” “the son of the blue-eyed woman,” or “the son of the daughter of al-A’azz” (Schimmel, Islamic names, 9). Note, however, that in these examples X is not the mother’s name but a nasab indicating her place of origin, a nickname drawing attention to one of her distinguishing features or her own nasab. This last type of nasab is employed when the maternal family is more distinguished than the paternal line: for instance the A’azz in the above-mentioned example was a vizier.

Because there is no exact parallel to the expression “the son of Mary,” its origin and significance are disputed. It is attested only once in the New Testament, in Mark 6:3, where Jesus’ townsfolk say, “Is not this the carpenter the son of Mary?” Some interpreters think this biblical passage merely implies that Mary was a widow whereas others detect an insult: a hint that Jesus was perhaps illegitimate. Neither explanation suits the Qur’ānic context because Joseph is not mentioned in the Qur’ān, and among the Arabs an illegitimate child was called Ibn Abīhi, “son of his father.” Nor need it be supposed that the Qur’ān imitated the usage of the Ethiopic church (pace Bishop, The son of Mary) for it is unlikely that Ethiopian Christians called Jesus “the son of Mary” (Parrinder, Jesus, 25-6) and although the Qur’ān contains a number of Ethiopic loan words they occur mostly in Medinan sūras. In the opinion of the present writer, during the Meccan period the expression was used merely for ease of reference. Bearing in mind that in the earliest reference to Jesus (q 19:16-33) the principal character was Mary, with Jesus figuring as her unnamed child, the brief allusions to Jesus as Mary’s son in the subsequent revelations concerning Jesus (those in q 43 and 23) are entirely understandable. In the Medinan period, however, many of the revelations about Jesus were concerned with countering Christian claims about him. Hence, the expression “the son of Mary” took on polemical overtones; it was an implicit reminder that Jesus is not the son of God as the Christians allege (also, some suggest implausibly a reflection of Trinitarian doctrines with Mary as the mother of God; see TRINITY). The classical commentators do not distinguish between the Meccan and Medinan usage. They interpret the expression as a counter-thrust to Christian claims but also regard it as an honorific title because of the high status that the Qur’ān ascribes to Mary (see WOMEN AND THE QUR’ĀN; GENDER).

The term “the Messiah” (al-Masīḥ) is attested eleven times and is found only in Medinan revelations. It occurs by itself three times; followed by “the son of Mary” five times; and followed by “Jesus the son of Mary” three times. There can be little doubt that it is derived ultimately from the Hebrew Māshiāḥ, which means “anointed” or “Messiah.” In ancient Israel, kings and priests were consecrated by anointing their
heads with oil. After the Babylonian exile, there arose in some circles expectations of a future ideal Davidic ruler, God’s anointed par excellence, an eschatological figure who would usher in an age of peace. Whereas the Jews maintain that this Messiah is yet to come, Christians claim that Jesus had this God-given role and that he was wrongly killed but will return in glory.

In the Greek New Testament, Messiah, the Hellenized transliteration of the Hebrew word, occurs only twice (John 1:41; 4:25). The New Testament writers showed a marked preference for the literal Greek translation Christos, “Christ.” According to one tradition, Jesus was instituted as the Messiah when God anointed (echrisen) him with the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Acts 10:38; cf. Luke 1:15-22; 4:17-21). He is, however, frequently referred to as Iēsou̱s Christos, “Jesus Christ,” or Christos Iēsous, “Christ Jesus,” almost as if Christos were an additional name rather than a title.

Arabic lexicographers regarded al-Masîḣ as a laqab, or nickname, and attempted to give it an Arabic etymology. Al-Fīrūzabādī (d. 817/1415) claimed to have heard no less than fifty-six explanations of this sort (Lane, 2714). Only those most frequently encountered in the classical commentaries will be mentioned here. It was widely held that it was derived from the verb masaḣa, which occurs five times in the Qur’ān: four times in instructions on performing ablutions by “wiping” various parts of the body with water (Q 5:6) or clean earth (Q 4:43: 5:6; see cleanliness and ablution; ritual purity) and once in a reference to Solomon’s (q.v.) “stroking” his horses (Q 38:33). Most of those who took this line thought that masîḣ was an adjective with the force of a passive participle and meant “touched” or “anointed.” They variously suggested that Jesus was given this nickname because he was touched by Gabriel’s (q.v.) wing at birth to protect him from Satan (see devil); because he was anointed with oil, as were all the prophets; or because he was anointed with God’s blessing (q.v.; cf. Q 19:31). Others held that masîḣ was an adjective with the force of an active participle. They claimed that he was given the nickname because he laid hands on the sick and healed them (see illness and health); or because he washed men from their faults and sins (see sin, major and minor). This last explanation was generally frowned on because the Qur’ān insists on individual responsibility and denies that a person can count on anyone but God to save him (Q 2:286; 6:70; see forgiveness; intercession; freedom and predestination; salvation). Finally, there were those who maintained that although masîḣ had the force of an active participle it was derived not from masaha but from sāḣa, a verb meaning to travel about in the cause of religion (Q 9:2; see journey) and hence to be devout (Q 9:112; 66:5; see also fasting). They alleged that Jesus received this nickname because of his itinerant lifestyle (see further Arnaldez, Jésus fils de Marie, 84-7).

The explanation why the lexicographers exercised such ingenuity in trying to account for the Qur’ānic term, and why they put forward such diverse explanations, is that a laqab may be bestowed for a whole range of reasons. There are laqabs that are honorific titles but there are others that merely indicate a person’s trade or physical characteristics so as to help identify him. Despite the prima facie plausibility of the etymologies mentioned above, however, it should be noted that those which seem to indicate qualities that Jesus shared with other prophets do not do justice to the fact that he alone is called al-Masîṡ in the Qur’ān. It seems likely that the first hearers of the revelations would have been aware that al-Masîṡ was a dignified title which the Christians held was uniquely applica-
ble to Jesus. Nevertheless, the Qur’anic title does not have precisely the same connotations as “Messiah” or “Christ” in the New Testament. Several of the New Testament writers stressed that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah, and two of them furnished genealogies tracing his “descent” from David through Joseph, although the fact that they apparently believed in the virginal conception of Jesus is followed immediately by Matthew’s report of how Mary was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. The miracle of the palm tree and the stream is mentioned in the Latin Gospel of pseudo-Matthew; and, according to the Arabic infancy gospel Jesus spoke while still a child in the cradle. Although these two apocryphal writings post-date the rise of Islam, Christians in Muhammad’s audience were probably familiar with the episodes to which they refer. The Qur’anic reference to Mary’s labor pains, on the other hand, may have been intended to counter the Christian belief in Jesus’ divinity and Mary’s perpetual virginity.

Most commentators identify the spirit who was sent to Mary as Gabriel, on the grounds that both designations appear to be used interchangeably elsewhere for the revelatory angel (Q 2:97; 16:102; 26:193; see revelation and inspiration). Gerock (Versuch, 36-46) claims that the Qur’ān regards Gabriel as Jesus’ father. This interpretation can be ruled out because the Qur’ān defends Mary against the charge of unchastity (Q 4:156; see chastity), although some of the classical commentators suggest that the effect of Gabriel’s sudden appearance in human form was to arouse Mary’s desire, as in an erotic dream, and thereby facilitate the descent of the maternal fluid into her womb (Robinson, Christ, 161, 187).

In Q 23:50, God states that he set the son of Mary and his mother as a sign (see signs) and that he sheltered them on a hilltop “where there was both a cool place and a spring” (dhāti garārin wa-ma’ānin). The suggestion made by some Christian authors that this is an allusion to the assumption of Mary which allegedly took place on a hill in Ephesus, is wide of the mark. The verse seems rather to refer back to the circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth, which were mentioned in Q 19 where Mary was...
instructed to drink from a stream that appeared miraculously (Q 19:24-6; see springs and fountains). There is even a verbal echo of the infant Jesus’ words to her, “refresh yourself,” literally “cool your eye” (garrī ‘yanan, Q 19:26). Other verses in Q 23 deny that God has taken a son (Q 23:91) and warn against appealing to another deity beside him (Q 23:117). It is clear therefore that neither Jesus nor Mary is to be regarded as a divine being. Together, however, they constitute a “sign:” probably a reference to the virginal conception, which, like the miraculous creation (q.v.) of the first man, points to God’s power to raise the dead (compare Q 23:12-6; see death and the dead; biology as the creation and stages of life).

Q 21:91-3 alludes to Mary and her son without naming them. Here, too, they are said to constitute a sign. The only new element is God’s statement that she “guarded her chastity” (farjāhā, literally, her opening) so we breathed into her (fīhā) of our spirit” (Q 21:91). An almost identical statement occurs in Q 66:12, the only difference being that there God says that he breathed “into it” (fīhi), “it” presumably being Mary’s farj. In both instances, the probable reference is to God’s creating life in her womb without her having sexual intercourse. Similar language is used elsewhere to describe how he gave life to the first man (Q 15:29; 32:9; 38:72). Some of the classical commentators, however, assumed that “our spirit” in Q 21:91 and 66:12 denoted Gabriel, as in Q 19:17. They therefore reasoned that Mary literally “guarded her opening” from Gabriel on the specific occasion of the annunciation and debated whether the reference was to her vulva (the usual meaning of farj) or to an aperture in her clothing. They cited reports alleging that she conceived after he blew up her skirt, down the neck of her chemise, into her sleeve or into her mouth (Robinson, Fakhı al-Dīn, 15).

There are two Medinan verses which clearly state that Jesus is God’s word (see word of God), namely Q 3:45 and Q 4:171. Moreover, it is sometimes held that Q 3:39 and 19:34 (a Medinan passage in Q 19) also imply this. As the context of these verses is Jesus’ conception, birth and infancy, it is appropriate to discuss them at this point. Christian apologists often argue that they echo the teaching of John’s Gospel, which states that God’s divine Word (logos), which was with him in the beginning and through whom he created all things, became flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:1-18). We shall see, however, that although the Qur’an calls Jesus “a word from God” it does not endorse the orthodox Christian view that he was the incarnation of a pre-existent divine hypostasis.

Q 3:39 recalls that the angels announced to Zechariah the good news (q.v.) of the forthcoming birth of John, who would “confirm the truth of a word from God.” Arabic does not distinguish between upper and lower case letters, but as kalima lacks the definite article it should probably be rendered “word” rather than “Word.” The classical commentators generally assumed that the “word” in question was Jesus. They cited a number of traditions in support of this, including one from Ibn ‘Abbās, which relates how John bowed down in reverence before Jesus when they were both babes in their mothers’ wombs. Although some of the early philologists argued that in this context kalima denotes a “book” or “scripture,” the traditional interpretation is preferable in view of Q 3:45, which recalls how the angels told Mary: “God announces to you good news of a word from him; his name will be the Messiah Jesus son of Mary…. ” Here kalima clearly refers to Jesus and, as the annuncia-
tion to Mary is the structural homologue of the earlier annunciation to Zechariah, it seems likely that kalima refers to Jesus there as well. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, whereas kalima is a feminine noun, the pronominal suffix attached to “name” is masculine. Thus the name “the Messiah Jesus son of Mary” is attributed to the male person indicated by the word, rather than to the word itself. Elsewhere in the Qur’an kalima usually denotes a divine decree, and this seems also to be the case here. The classical commentators argued convincingly that Jesus is called a “word” primarily because, as was also the case with Adam, God brought him into existence merely by uttering the command “Be!” as is stated a few verses later in Q 3:59 (see cosmology).

Q 4:171 is more overtly polemical. The People of the Book (q.v.) are ordered not to exaggerate in their religion and to speak nothing except the truth about God. The Messiah Jesus son of Mary was only God’s envoy (see messenger) and “his word which he cast unto Mary” and a spirit from him. Here, Jesus and the “word” are even more closely associated because the verb “cast” is followed by the redundant feminine object pronoun. Nevertheless, as there is no suggestion that Jesus was God’s sole envoy and, as “spirit” is indefinite, “his word” should probably be construed as “a word of his,” without any implication of uniqueness. In any case, the polemical context and the insistence that Jesus is only an envoy, word and spirit, should caution Christian apologists from interpreting kalima in the light of orthodox Christian logos theology.

Q 19:34 contains the word qawl, which can mean either “word” or “statement.” Two of the seven readers (see readings of the Qur’an), ʿĀṣim in Kūfa and Ibn ʿĀmir in Damascus, vocalized the crucial expression as qawla l-haqqi, giving qwel an accusative ending. This is the reading found in Flügel’s text and in the standard Egyptian edition of the Qur’an, which are the basis of most English translations. If it is accepted, the expression introduces an exclamation and the verse should be rendered: “That is Jesus son of Mary — statement of the truth concerning which they are in doubt!” In which case, “statement of the truth” simply refers to the previous story and has no bearing on the Qur’anic teaching about Jesus as a word from God.

The other five readers, however, favored qawlu l-haqqi, with qwel in the nominative. This reading, which may well be the more original, can be construed in two ways: either as the predicate of a sentence whose subject has been omitted, namely “[It is] a statement of the truth” or as a nominal phrase in apposition to Jesus, namely “Word of Truth.” In view of the fact that this verse is part of a highly polemical Medinan addition to the sūra and that the next verse denies that God has taken a son, the former interpretation seems the more probable.

The understanding of Jesus as God’s word in the minimalist sense that he was brought into existence by God’s command is in line with the teaching of the Nestorian Christians (O’Shaughnessy, Word, 24) as is the Qur’an’s stress on the similarity of the virginal conception and the creation of Adam (Robinson, Christ, 156-7). The statement that he was both a word and a “spirit” (rūḥ) from God (Q 4:171) is more difficult to interpret in view of the range of meanings ascribed to spirit in the Qur’an. It may, however, reflect a thought-world akin to that of Psalm 33:6, where God’s creative word and breath (Hebrew rūach) are treated as synonyms because an utterance is invariably accompanied by out-breathing.
His status and mission

The Qur’an emphatically denies that Jesus was God, a subsidiary deity or the son of God (e.g. Q 5:17, 72, 116; 9:30; see polytheism and atheism). He was merely a “servant” (q.v.) of God (Q 4:172; 19:30; 43:59) and was required to pray and to pay alms (zakāt, Q 19:31; see almsgiving; prayer). He and his mother needed to eat food (Q 5:75; see food and drink) and God could destroy them both if he wished (Q 5:17). He was nonetheless a “mercy” (q.v.) from God” (Q 19:21), a “prophet” (nabī, Q 19:30) and an “envoy” (rasūl, Q 3:49, 53; 4:171; 5:75; 61:6), “eminent” in this world and the hereafter (see eschatology) and “one of those brought near” (Q 3:45).

Although Jesus was a sign for humanity as a whole (Q 19:21), his specific mission was to the Children of Israel (q.v.; e.g. Q 3:49; 43:59). God taught him the Torah (q.v.) and the Gospel (Q 3:48; 5:110) and supported him with the Holy Spirit (Q 2:87; 253; 5:110) — possibly an allusion to his baptism (q.v.) but most commentators assume that the reference is to Gabriel. Jesus attested the truth of what was in the Torah (Q 3:50; 5:46; 61:6); made lawful some of the things that were forbidden to the Children of Israel in his day (Q 3:50; see lawful and unlawful; forbidden); clarified some of the things that they disagreed about (Q 43:63); and urged them to worship God alone (e.g. Q 5:117). Like David before him, he cursed those of his people who disbelieved (Q 5:78).

He is credited with a number of miracles including creating birds from clay; healing a blind person and a leper; raising the dead; and telling the Children of Israel what they ate and what they stored in their houses (Q 3:49; 5:110). The miracle of the birds is mentioned in the apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas, and the healings and resuscitations correspond to those narrated in the canonical gospels. From the Qur’anic perspective, however, none of these miracles implies that he possessed divine status or supernatural power; they were simply God-given signs of the authenticity of his mission, “clear proofs” which the unbelievers nevertheless dismissed as sorcery (Q 5:110; 61:6; see proof; belief and unbelief).

A further miracle attributed to Jesus is that, at the request of his disciples, he asked God to send down “a table (q.v.) spread with food” (Q 5:112-5). The Arabic word translated by this phrase is māʿīda. The lexicographers derived it from the verb māda, “to feed,” but it is probably an Ethiopic loanword for it resembles the term used by Abyssinian Christians to denote the eucharistic table. Moreover, as Jesus speaks of the table as a “festival” for his disciples, there can be little doubt that the episode describes the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper; but, in accordance with traditional Christian typology, it appears to have conflated the Last Supper with the gospel feeding miracles and the Hebrew Bible story of how God sent down manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. Although the Qur’an seems at this point to acknowledge the legitimacy of a specifically Christian ritual that originated with Jesus, the next verse makes clear that Jesus did not instruct people to worship him and his mother (Q 5:116). Moreover, the ritual is not linked with Jesus’ atoning death. On the contrary, as God punishes whom he wills and forgives whom he wills, there can be no question of the participants enjoying a special status or gaining immunity from punishment (Q 5:18, 115; see reward and punishment).

The Qur’an recognizes that God granted special favors to some of the envoys who preceded Muhammad, in the case of Jesus by supporting him with the Holy Spirit and enabling him to perform miracles.
Moreover, it singles out Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus as prophets with whom God established a strong covenant (q.v.; Q 33:7; compare 42:13). It urges the Muslims, however, to believe in all of God’s envoys and not make a distinction between them (Q 2:136, 285; 3:84; 4:152) because they all taught essentially the same religion. Thus Jesus’ name also figures in more extensive lists of messengers (Q 4:163; 6:84-6).

From the Qur’anic perspective, like the other envoys, Jesus was a precursor of Muhammad. This is underscored in three ways. First, Jesus and Muhammad are depicted as having had similar experiences. For instance, both were sent as a “reminder,” both needed to eat food, both had “helpers” (ansār, see Apostle; Emigrants and Helpers) and both were suspected of sorcery (Robinson, Christ, 36-8; see Insanity; Soothsayers; Magic). Second, God informs Muhammad that he has inspired him in the same way as he inspired his predecessors including Jesus (Q 4:163; 42:13). Third, Jesus is said to have foretold the coming of an envoy called Aḥmad (Q 61:6), the heavenly name of Muhammad.

The plot to kill him, his exaltation and future descent

According to Islamic tradition, when the Jews sought to kill Jesus, God outwitted them by projecting his likeness onto someone else whom they mistakenly crucified. Meanwhile, he caused Jesus to ascend to the second or third heaven (see Heaven and Sky), where he is still alive. Jesus will return to kill the Antichrist (q.v.), and after a forty-year reign of peace he will eventually die and be buried in Medina (see Apocalypse). On the day of resurrection (q.v.), he will be a witness against the unbelieving People of the Book. It is questionable whether the Qur’ānic data provides sufficiently solid foundations to bear the weight of this construction.

In Q 19 the child Jesus speaks of the day of his birth, the day he will die, and the day he will be raised alive (Q 19:33). From the similar statement about John (Q 19:15), and from subsequent verses that deal with eschatology (Q 19:37-9, 66), it has been inferred that Jesus will be raised alive at the general resurrection. There is not the slightest hint, however, that his death also lies in the future. On the contrary, given only this sūrah, the assumption would be that it already lay in the past like John’s.

Q 43 includes the cryptic assertion that “he” or “it” (the pronominal suffix -hu could mean either) is “knowledge for the hour” (Q 43:61). The classical commentators mention three traditional interpretations: (i) Jesus’ future descent is a portent which will signal that the hour is approaching, (ii) the Qur’ān imparts knowledge concerning the resurrection and judgment (see Last Judgment), and (iii) Jesus’ raising of the dead by divine permission brings knowledge that God has the power to raise the dead (Robinson, Christ, 90-3). Instead of ‘ilm, “knowledge,” Ibn ‘Abbās (d. ca. 67/686), Qatāda (d. ca. 117/735), and al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 115/732) allegedly read ‘alam, “sign, distinguishing mark,” which would strengthen the case for the first interpretation, whereas Ubayy (see Companions of the Prophet) allegedly read dhikr, “reminder,” which would seem to lend weight to the second (see Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval). As Jesus is the subject of verse 59 and verse 63, it is probably he, rather than the Qur’ān, who is the subject of verse 61. Additionally, in view of the predominant concern with eschatology in verses 65-78, it seems likely that verse 61 alludes to Jesus’ future descent rather than to his miraculous raising of the dead. Nevertheless, there is nothing to indicate that his future
descent requires him to have been spared death on the cross.

Q 3 contains two consecutive verses which have a bearing on this topic. First there is a reference to Jesus’ unbelieving opponents, “And they plotted and God plotted, and God is the best of plotters” (q 3:54). This is followed by a statement about what God said to him, “When God said, ‘Jesus, I am going to receive you and raise you to myself...’” (q 3:55). Muslim commentators usually assume that both verses refer to the same incident, namely the Jews’ plot against Jesus’ life and God’s counter-plot to rescue him by having them crucify a look-alike substitute. Although there may be a close link between the two verses, the staccato nature of much Qur’anic narrative should be a caution against supposing that this is necessarily the case. Therefore each verse will be considered in turn.

The verb makara, “to plot, plan or scheme,” and its derivatives, occur in thirteen sūras spanning Nöldeke’s second and third Meccan periods, and in q 8 and 3 which are Medinan. When human beings are the subject of this verb, they are usually unbelievers who plot against specific envoys of God including Noah (q 71:22), Sālih (q.v.; q 27:50), Moses (q 40:45), and Muhammad (q 8:30; 13:42), or against God’s signs (q 10:21) thereby hindering others from believing (q 34:33). When God is the subject of the verb, the reference is invariably to his counter-plot, but the emphasis may be on his rescue of the envoy (q 8:30; see PROTECTION), the immediate punishment of the unbelievers (q 7:99, 27:50 ; see CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT; PUNISHMENT STORIES), the recording of their misdeeds (q 10:21; see RECORD OF HUMAN ACTIONS) or their eventual punishment in the hereafter (q 13:42). Hence, in q 3:54 the unbelievers’ plot could have been an attempt on Jesus’ life — either the final plot to kill him or one which took place earlier in his ministry (see q 5:110, compare Luke 4:30 and John 8:59) — or an attempt to subvert his message. God’s counter-plot could have entailed his rescue of Jesus, but it might equally well have been his punishment of the Jews by destroying Jerusalem (q.v.), or his preservation of Jesus’ monotheistic teaching. It is true that Noah, Sālih and Moses were all rescued by God and that the Qur’ān warns against thinking that he would fail his envoys (q 14:47), which seems to strengthen the case for thinking that q 3:54 implies that Jesus was delivered from death. On the other hand, the same sūra explicitly mentions the possibility of Muhammad dying or being killed (q 3:144) and states that the Muslims who were killed at Uhud (see EXPEDITIONS AND BATTLES; FIGHTING; JIHĀD) are not dead but “alive with their lord” (q 3:169). Thus Jesus’ death, ostensibly at the hands of his enemies, cannot be ruled out on the basis of q 3:54.

The interpretation of q 3:55 hinges on the meaning of the present participle of the verb tawaffā (Robinson, Christ, 117-26), which was rendered above as “going to receive.” The finite verb is attested twenty-two times and the imperative three times. When God is the subject it can mean to receive souls in their sleep (q.v.; q 6:60; 39:42) but it more frequently means “cause to die.” As this latter meaning is attested in q 3:193 and as the Qur’ān uses the verb in other sūras when speaking about Muhammad’s death (q 10:46; 13:40; 40:77), there is a PRIMA FACIE case for construing God’s words to Jesus to mean that he was going to cause him to die and raise him into his presence. Most of the classical commentators, however, took them to mean that he would cause Jesus to sleep and to ascend in that condition or that he would snatch him
alive from the earth. The minority, who conceded that the participle does mean “cause to die,” nevertheless denied that Jesus was crucified. Some of them argued that the order of the verbs is inverted for stylistic reasons and that, although God has already caused Jesus to ascend, his death still lies in the future. Others held that God caused him to die a normal death, while his substitute was being crucified, and that he then caused him to ascend.

In q. 4, the Jews are criticized for boasting that they killed Jesus (q. 4:157-9). The interpretation of this passage poses a number of problems (Robinson, Christ, 78-89, 106-11, 127-41). First, there is the statement, “They did not kill him or crucify him.” Traditionally, Muslim interpreters have held that this is a categorical denial of Jesus’ death by crucifixion. It may simply mean, however, that although the Jews thought that they had killed Jesus, Muslims should not think of him as dead because, from the Qur’anic perspective, he is alive with God like the martyrs of Uhud (q. 3:169; see above; see martyr).

The second problem centers on the clause wa-lākin shubbiha lahum (q. 4:157). Most of the classical commentators understood it to mean “but he [i.e. the person whom they killed] was made to resemble [Jesus] for them.” In support of this they cited traditional accounts of how God projected Jesus’ likeness (Arabic shibh) onto someone else. These accounts, however, are unreliable for they differ over the identity of the person in question, some saying that he was a loyal disciple of Jesus who volunteered to die in his place, others that he was Judas Iscariot or one of the men sent to arrest Jesus. The non-standard interpretation that regards the verb as impersonal and construes the clause as “but it was made to seem like that to them” avoids the need to identify any person onto whom Jesus’ identity was projected.

A third problem is posed by the words “God raised him to himself” (q. 4:138). The verb is rafa’a (compare the use of the participle rāfi’ in the similar context in q. 3:55). The classical commentators invariably took it to mean that God caused Jesus to ascend bodily into the second or third heaven where Muhammad allegedly saw him on the night of the mi’raj (see ascension). It is arguable, however, that it is simply a graphic way of saying that God honored him, for elsewhere the same verb is used to denote God’s raising envoys in rank (e.g. q. 2:253), his exalting Muhammad’s reputation (q. 94:4) and the ascent of good works into his presence (q. 35:10; see good deeds).

The final problem is the ambiguity of the words “his death” in q. 4:159. The classical commentators mentioned two principal interpretations: either it refers to the death of each individual Jew and Christian, because immediately before their death they will recognize the truth about Jesus, or it refers to Jesus’ death, because he is still alive and all the People of the Book will believe in him when he descends to kill the Antichrist. A good case can be made for the former interpretation on syntactical grounds, for the whole sentence constitutes an oath used as a threat (see language and style of the Qur’an). Moreover, the reading “their death,” which is attributed to Ubayy, supports this interpretation. Owing to the influence of the hadiths about Jesus’ future descent, however, the view that the verse referred to Jesus’ death gained widespread support.

The assertion that Jesus will be a witness against the People of the Book (q. 4:159) is unproblematic and accords with the Qur’anic teaching that God will raise a witness against every community (q. 16:89).
In q 5:117, Jesus says to God, “I was a witness over them while I dwelt among them, and when you received me you were the watcher over them.” The word rendered ‘you received’ is the first person plural perfect of tawaffū, a verb whose meaning was discussed earlier in connection with q 3:55. It most probably refers here to Jesus’ death or rapture before his exaltation, which already lies in the past. As the statement occurs, however, in a conversation that will take place on the last day, it is just conceivable that it refers to Jesus’ future death after his descent to kill the Antichrist.

From the above analysis, it should be obvious that the Qur’ānic teaching about Jesus’ death is not entirely clear-cut. Three things, however, may be said with certainty. Firstly, the Qur’ān attaches no salvific importance to his death. Second, it does not mention his resurrection on the third day and has no need of it as proof of God’s power to raise the dead. Third, although the Jews thought that they had killed Jesus, from God’s viewpoint they did not kill or crucify him. Beyond this is the realm of speculation. The classical commentators generally began with the questionable premise that q 4:157-9 contains an unambiguous denial of Jesus’ death by crucifixion. They found confirmation of this in the existence of traditional reports about a look-alike substitute and hadiths about Jesus’ future descent. Then they interpreted the other Qur’ānic references to Jesus’ death in the light of their understanding of this one passage. If, however, the other passages are examined without presupposition and q 4:157-9 is then interpreted in the light of them, it can be read as a denial of the ultimate reality of Jesus’ death rather than a categorical denial that he died. The traditional reports about the crucifixion of a look-alike substitute probably originated in circles in contact with Gnostic Christians. They may also owe something to early Shi‘ī speculation about the fate of the Imāms (see Imām; Shi‘ism and the Qur‘ān).

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Bibliography
Primary (in addition to the classical commentaries on the verses mentioned above): Ibn Isḥāq-Guillaume.


Jews and Judaism

Jewels and Gems see metals and minerals

Jews and Judaism

Terminology

The Arabic term denoting “Jews” is yahūd, which occurs seven times in the Qur’ān. The form hūd also denotes the same and appears in this sense three times. The singular, yahūdī, occurs once. From yahūd/hūd was derived the secondary verb hūdā, which means “to be a Jew/Jewish.” “Those who were Jews” (hīdā) is mentioned ten times. This verb appears once with the complementary iḍā (q 7:156), in which case it denotes “to return to.” It is put into the mouth of Moses (q.v.), who says to God: “We have returned (hūdā) to you.” Obviously, this is a play on yahūd, on behalf of whom Moses is speaking here (see Paret, Kommentar, ad q 7:156). Outside the Qur’ān the transitive hawwāda is used in the sense of “he made him a Jew.” The form yahūdīyya, which denotes “Judaism,” or “the Jewish religion,” is also non-Qur’ānic (cf. Lane, s.v. hawwadī). In addition to yahūd and its derivatives, the Qur’ān addresses the Jews as “Children of Israel” (q.v.), which alludes to their ancestral origin. Sometimes the Christians (see Christians and Christianity), too, are included in this designation. The Jews are called by this appellation to imply that the fate of the old Children of Israel is continued through their descendants. Apart from the ethnic designations, the Qur’ān addresses the Jews as “People of the Book” (q.v.). This is a religious evaluation of them, and refers to the fact that they had prophets sent to them with revealed scriptures (see book; prophets and prophethood). The Jews are not the only community with a revealed book. q 6:156 mentions two par-
ties to whom the book was revealed before the Muslims, and they stand for the Jews and the Christians respectively.

Jews as believers

The image of the Qur’ānic Jews is far from uniform (which, as an aside, is true concerning almost any other Qur’ānic theme), and the attitude towards them is ambivalent. On the one hand, they are recognized as true believers, while on the other, they are rejected as infidels (see belief and unbelief; faith). As for their image as believers, the passage stating this in the most explicit way is 2:62: “Those who have believed and those who have been Jews, and the Christians and the Sabians (q.v.; Sābī‘ūn), whoever believes in God and in the last day (see last judgment) and does good (see good deeds), their reward (see reward and punishment) awaits them with their lord (q.v.), and no fear (q.v.) shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow.” A divine reward is promised here to the Jews as well as to the other monotheistic communities, provided they remain monotheists believing in God and the last judgment. The same statement is repeated almost verbatim in 5:69, but in 2:17 a significant change is noticeable. The monotheistic communities are not alone, the Persians (maqūṣ, lit. Magians) and the Arab polytheists (mushrikūn, see polytheism and atheism; idolatry and idolaters) being mentioned, too. Concerning all of them it is stated that “God will decide between them on the day of resurrection (q.v.)…” No automatic reward is mentioned here, which renders the message to the non-Muslim monotheists more reserved in comparison with the former passages.

Other passages, however, recognize Jews as believers only on the condition that they believe in the concrete Islamic message as represented in the Qur’ān. Jews who did accept the Islamic message are mentioned in several Qur’ānic passages, in which, however, they are always an exceptional minority among a majority of sinful Jews. 4:162, for instance, refers to “those (of the Jews) who are ‘firmly rooted in knowledge (see knowledge and learning),’” and identifies them as those who believe in the Qur’ān as well as in the scriptures revealed to previous prophets. They are mentioned in contrast to the evil-doing Jews who take usury (q.v.), whom the Qur’ān denounces in the previous verse (see evil deeds). The same applies to 4:46, in which a minority of believers is mentioned among a majority of Jews refusing to obey the Qur’ānic Prophet.

Passages employing the appellation “People of the Book” reveal similar nuances. In some verses, the People of the Book are recognized as believers on the mere basis of their monotheism. Most explicit is 3:64: “Say: O People of the Book, come to a word (which is) fair between us and you, (to wit) that we serve no one but God, that we associate nothing with him, and that none of us take others as lords beside God.” As observed by W.M. Watt (Muhammad at Medina, 201), this passage offers the People of the Book a common framework of faith on the basis of monotheism. Most explicit is 16:43 as the people of the “reminder” (dhikr, another term for a revealed scripture) and, in this case, they are treated as authoritative experts on prophetic matters. The skeptic listeners of the Qur’ānic Prophet are invited to consult them and learn that God indeed may send a mortal messenger (q.v.) as he did in the past. Even the Qur’ānic Prophet himself is requested in 10:94 to consult “those who have read the book” before him, if he is in doubt concerning his own prophetic revelation. As potential partners in a common
system of monotheistic faith, the dietary laws of the People of the Book were proclaimed acceptable (see food and drink; lawful and unlawful; forbidden), and in one Qur’anic passage (Q 5:5), the Muslims were given permission to eat their food as well as to marry women from among them (see marriage and divorce). The Islamic fasting (Q.v.) days were also introduced with reference to the fast of the previous communities (Q 2:183). Their places of worship (Q.v.), too, are treated favorably in Q 2:40, which seems to refer to synagogues and churches, as well as to mosques (see church; mosque; sacred precincts). The verse states that God has protected them from being pulled down.

But other Qur’anic passages using the label “People of the Book” distinguish between the believers and non-believers among them, the believers being those accepting the Qur’anic message. For example, in Q 3:199 it is stated that “Among the People of the Book are some who believe in God and in what has been sent down to you (i.e. to the Qur’anic Prophet), and in what has been sent down to them, humbling themselves to God…”. These believers are again an exceptional minority. This is indicated in Q 3:110, which says that some of the People of the Book are believers, “but most of them are ungodly” (al-fasiqūn, see hypocrites and hypocrisy). The believers among the People of the Book are described in Q 5:66 as a “just nation” (umma muqta’idah) among a majority of evil-doers.

Other passages provide vivid descriptions of the piety (Q.v.) of the believers among the People of the Book and of their admiration for the Qur’anic revelation. In Q 3:113-4 they are described as an “upright community, reciting the signs of God (i.e. the Qur’an; see recitation of the Qur’an) at the drawing on of night, prostrating themselves (see bowing and prostration), believing in God and the last day… and strive with one another in hastening to good deeds.” In Q 17:107-9 we read: “Those who were given the knowledge before it (i.e. before the Qur’an), when it (i.e. the Qur’an) is recited to them, fall down upon their faces prostrating… and they fall down upon their faces weeping, and it increases them in humility” (see virtues and vices). Elsewhere it is asserted that these believers will be rewarded twice over, thanks to their belief in their own revealed scriptures as well as in the Qur’an (Q 28:52-4).

Jews as sinners

But the Qur’an is engaged mainly in dealing with the sinners among the Jews and the attack on them is shaped according to models that one encounters in the New Testament. In the latter, the Jews are already accused of having persecuted and murdered their own prophets (Matthew 5:12, 23:30-1; Luke 11:47). The prophets whom they killed are said to have foretold the coming of Jesus (Acts 7:52) and the Jews are said to have persecuted Jesus himself, plotting to kill him (John 7:1; 18:12; Acts 9:29). They are also described as stirring up the gentiles against Jesus’ apostles (see apostle) and as conspiring to kill them, too (Acts 13:50; 14:2; 20:3; 26:2). The Jews are further accused of not keeping the Torah (Q.v.), which had been given to them (Acts 7:53). The conviction of the Jews that they were God’s chosen people is also refuted and it is stressed that God is not only of the Jews but also of the gentiles (Romans 3:29). On the other hand, a group of Jews who believed in the message of the apostles is also mentioned (Acts 14:1).

All these elements recur in the Qur’anic attack on the Jews. To begin with, the Jewish arrogance (Q.v.) stemming from the conviction that the people of Israel (Q.v.)
were God’s chosen nation, is reproved in various ways. In Q 2:111, the Jews, as well as the Christians, are challenged to prove their claim that only they will enter paradise (q.v.). In Q 5:18 the Qur’anic Prophet is requested to refute the idea that the Jews and the Christians were no less than “the sons of God and his beloved ones.” The Qur’anic Prophet is requested to tell them that if this were so, God would not have punished them as he did. The arrogant Jews seem also to be referred to in Q 4:49, which speaks about people who consider themselves pure, while only God decides whom to purify. Elsewhere (Q 62:6) it is maintained that if the Jews are really God’s favorites, to the exclusion of other people, then they had better die soon. This is a sarcastic response to their unfounded conviction that paradise is in store for them (see also Q 2:94). The same arrogance is attributed to them in verses dubbing them “People of the Book.” In these verses they are said to have believed that they would only spend a few days in hell (Q 2:79-80; 3:23-4; see HELL AND HELLFIRE). The Qur’ân replies that they have no monopoly on God’s mercy (q.v.) and that God extends it to whom he wills (Q 57:29).

The Jews have lost their right to be considered a chosen people mainly because of their insubordination (see DISOBEDIENCE) and disbelief. The Qur’ân imputes to them the blame of persecuting and killing their own prophets (Q 3:181, 183), a sin that is usually mentioned with allusion to the Children of Israel (Q 2:61, 87, 91; 4:155; 5:70). The Christians, too, share some of the blame because they have rejected the prophets sent to the Jews. This is implied in Q 2:113 where the Jews and the Christians reject each other’s religion as a false one. This they do in spite of the fact that they read “the book” which testifies to the relevance of all prophets sent by God. Likewise, in Q 4:151, the Qur’ân condemns unbelievers (kāfirān) who have only believed in some prophets while rejecting others. It seems that the rift between Jews and Christians is also referred to in Q 23:53 (cf. Q 15:90-1), which condemns those who divide their religion into sects (zubūh; see RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE QUR’ÂN; PARTIES AND Factions). Apart from persecuting the prophets, the Jews are blamed for failing to keep the laws of their own Torah. In Q 62:3, those who have been given the Torah but do not act upon its stipulations are likened to an ass carrying books. The Torah, it is said elsewhere, contains guidance and light (q.v.) by which the prophets and the rabbis judged the Jews, but those who do not judge by what God has revealed are unbelievers (Q 5:44; see JUDGMENT; SCHOLAR). Elsewhere they are said to have believed only in parts of the book and to have disbelieved in its other parts (Q 2:85). The Christians, too, are suspected of ignoring their own law as is implied in Q 5:68, in which the People of the Book are warned against failing to observe the Torah and the Gospel (q.v.; Injīl). In fact, a party of the People of the Book is accused of deliberate rejection of the scriptures given to them by their prophets. They have cast them behind their backs, yet they expect to be praised for their assumed devotion to the Torah (Q 2:101; 3:187-8). But the Jews, or rather the People of the Book, were also offered a chance to be forgiven, on condition that they started observing the Torah and the Gospel and all of God’s revealed scriptures. If they had, God would have blessed them with an abundance of food (Q 5:65-6).

The Qur’ân is also aware of the wrath of God, which resulted in various hardships that the Jews suffered in the course of their history (see TRIAL; PUNISHMENT STORIES). Their rigid dietary laws, for example, which the Qur’ân adopts in a passage
mentioned above, are interpreted elsewhere in the Qur’an as a punishment from God inflicted on the Jews for oppressing the poor and for taking usury (q 4:160-1; cf. 6:146; 16:118). The Qur’an further claims that these restrictions were not yet prescribed in the Torah, in which all kinds of food were still permitted except for that which Israel (see Jacob) prohibited (q 3:93). Apart from the dietary restrictions, the state of internal friction and discord, which divided the Jews into sects, was also seen as a sign of God’s vengeance (q 5:64; see corruption; anger). The key term conveying the idea of God’s anger with the Jews is ghaddah, “wrath.” It occurs in a passage (q 2:59) dealing with the Children of Israel, in which it is stated that they “were laden with wrath upon wrath” for their disbelief. In another verse (q 5:60), which is addressed to the People of the Book, allusion is made to those whom God has cursed and with whom he has been angry (ghadiba) and turned into apes and pigs. Transformation into apes recurs elsewhere in the Qur’an as a punishment inflicted on the Children of Israel for violating the Sabbath (q.v.; q 2:65; cf. 7:166; see chatisement and punishment).

The Jewish anti-Islamic sins

In the Qur’anic purview, the sins committed by the Jews with respect to their own scriptures continued into Islamic times, bearing grave anti-Islamic implications. These come out in passages imputing to the Jews the distortion (tabrîf) of the original text of their own sacred scriptures (q 4:46; 5:13, 41-3; cf. q 2:75; see Scripture and the Qur’an). This seems to be treated indirectly also in q 2:79, which denounces those “who write the book with their own hands and then they say, This is of God,” in order to sell it at a small price…” (see selling and buying). It is probably implied here that the Jews sold the believers forged copies of their scriptures (see forgery). In one verse (q 3:78), the act of perversion is oral, performed by people who “twist” the book with their tongues, making the false claim that this is the true form of the book. In this context, the Jews are also accused of playing with (Hebrew?) words that bear a mischievous sense (q 4:46; cf. q 2:104). All this is designed to mislead and offend the Muslims and their Prophet. The distortion of the Torah goes hand in hand with the Jewish sin of rejecting those rulings of the Qur’anic Prophet that corresponded to their own laws. After having made him a judge, they refuse to follow his verdict, and the Qur’an blames them for preferring the legal advice of others (q 5:41-3; see Law and the Qur’an). The Jews are also said to have plotted to conceal from the Muslim believers what God revealed to them, so as not to give the believers arguments which they might use against them (q 2:76; cf. q 4:37; 2:42; see debate and disputation). The sin of concealment is imputed mainly to the People of the Book (q 2:146; 3:71). They are said to have made their scriptures into separate writings (qarâﬁs), much of which they concealed (q 6:91). The message of the Qur’anic Prophet reintroduces those parts of the previous scriptures that the People of the Book attempted to conceal (q 5:15). The Qur’an promises the sinners guilty of concealment a severe curse (q.v.) from God (q 2:159), which is the fire (q.v.) of hell (q 2:174). When accusing the Jews of concealing the Torah, the Qur’an apparently refers to those parts in their scriptures that foretold the emergence of Muhammad (q.v.). This is supported by Qur’anic verses asserting that the description of the Islamic Prophet was recorded in the Torah and the Gospel as the “gentile” (ummi, see illiteracy) Prophet (q 7:157) and that Jesus (q.v.) knew him as Ahmad (q 61:6).
The Jews, or rather the People of the Book, are also accused of rejecting the authenticity of the Qur’an as the true Word of God (q.v.). On one occasion, they demand that the Prophet produce a book from heaven (Q 4:153; see Heavenly Book) and they seem to have in mind the written Torah of Moses. Their demand seems to be designed to annoy the Prophet who only receives sporadic oral revelations (see Revelation and Inspiration; Orality; Orality and Writing in Arabia). It implies that the People of the Book do not believe him to be a true prophet. In some other passages, their conduct is the result of sheer envy (q.v.). They are jealous of the believers who have been blessed with God’s bounty as this emanates from the Qur’an that has been given to them (see blessing; grace). Their rejection of the Islamic scripture out of jealousy has turned them into unbelievers (kāfrūn) in the eyes of the Qur’an (Q 2:89-90, 105). Their frustration is described most vividly in Q 3:119, according to which, whenever the People of the Book meet the believers, they pretend to believe in the Qur’an, but when they are alone they bite their nails in rage at the believers. Moreover, the jealous People of the Book are said to have tried to make the believers revert to disbelief (Q 2:109; see also Q 3:69, 99-100; 4:54; 5:59). They conspire to achieve this by pretending to believe in the Qur’an in the morning and by disbelieving in it in the evening (Q 3:72), i.e., they attempt to convey the impression that they only stopped believing in the Qur’an after having examined it carefully, and not out of spite. The rejection of the Qur’an by the Jews seems also to be treated in Q 2:97-8. Here, the “enemies of Gabriel” (q.v.) are attacked and tagged as unbelievers (khafīrfūn). Implicit here is the idea that the Jews rejected the Qur’an because it was brought to Muḥammad by the angel Gabriel, whom the Jews considered their enemy. The Qur’an asserts that Gabriel brought down the Qur’an by God’s will and that whoever is an enemy to any of God’s angels (see angel) will be punished by God as an unbeliever. The main polemical argument used in response to the Jewish rejection of the Qur’an revolves around the idea that this scripture confirms the message of the previous scriptures. This means that the People of the Book must believe in it as well as in their own scriptures. They cannot believe only in some of God’s holy books and reject the others (e.g. Q 2:89-91).

The Jews are not just unbelievers but also idolaters. In Q 9:30-1 they are accused of believing that Ezra (q.v.; ‘Uzayr) was the son of God, just as the Christians held that the Messiah was the son of God. The Qur’an reacts to both tenets by asserting that one must associate nothing with God. This implies that the Jews and the Christians are associators (mushrikūn), i.e., they associate idols with God in a polytheistic form of worship. Moreover, in Q 4:51, “those who have been given part of the book,” who are probably the Jews, are said to have believed in the Jiht and the Ṭaghūt (cf. Q 5:60), which may imply a kind of idol worship (see Idols and Images).

The gravest aspect of the Jewish anti-Islamic sin is the hostility towards the Muslim believers. In this respect, the Qur’an differentiates between them and the Christians. This comes out in Q 5:82, which states that the Jews as well as the associators (alladhīna ashralū) are the strongest in enmity against the believers, while the Christians, particularly priests and monks, are the closest in love to the believers (see Monasticism and Monks). But in Q 3:186, the enemies of the Muslims are identified by the more comprehensive label “People of the Book” and here again they are coupled with the mushrikūn. Together they cause the believers to “hear much annoy-
ing talk” (la-tasman unna). Another aspect of the hostility attributed to the People of the Book is revealed in q 3:75 in which some of them claim that they have no moral obligations with respect to the “gentiles” (ummiyyīn), and therefore do not pay their financial debts (see debt) back to them. (See also polemical language.)

The dissociation from the Jews
Another aspect of the image of the Jews as enemies of the believers is revealed in passages in which a tendency to dissociate from them, as well as from the Christians, is noticed. To begin with, in q 5:54, the believers are warned against taking the Jews and the Christians for friends (awliyā, see clients and clientage; friends and friendship). It is stressed that the Jews and the Christians are each other’s friends, and whoever associates with them becomes one of them. In q 5:57, a similar injunction is given concerning the People of the Book. It is added that they, as well as the unbelievers (kaffār), have taken the religion of the believers for a mockery (q.v.) and a joke, and this is why the believers should not be friendly with them. The People of the Book are dealt with also in q 42:15, where the Qur’ānic Prophet is warned against following their evil inclinations (ahwā, see good and evil). Instead of following them, he is directed elsewhere to adhere to the law (sharī’ā) that God has given him (q 45:18). The law is based on what God has revealed to him, i.e. the Qur’ān, and since it confirms the scriptures revealed previously to the Jews and the Christians, the Qur’ānic Prophet is requested to judge between the People of the Book according to it. But in so doing he must beware of their evil inclinations and be cautious of them, lest they seduce him from part of what God has revealed to him (q 5:49).

Other passages draw a sharper distinction between the alternative recommended law and what is defined as the “evil inclination” of the People of the Book. Some of these passages deal with the issue of the direction of prayer (qibla, q.v.). In q 2:145 it is stated that the People of the Book and the Muslims reject each other’s qibla, and the Qur’ānic Prophet is warned not to follow the evil inclinations of the former. Another verse, q 2:142, indicates that the conflict over the qibla started when the Muslims abandoned their original qibla, i.e. the one to which the People of the Book were accustomed, and adopted another one, which caused the “foolish people” to wonder what made the believers change their former qibla. The final qibla sanctioned by the Qur’ān is the one directed towards the sacred mosque (in Mecca). Thus, the alternative qibla is Mecca (q.v.), which most probably was designed to replace the Jewish qibla of Jerusalem (q.v.), although the latter is never mentioned explicitly in the Qur’ān.

A more dogmatic definition of the recommended substitute for the “evil inclinations” of the Jews and the Christians is provided in q 2:120. Here, the Jews and the Christians wish for the Qur’ānic Prophet to embrace their respective religions, but God tells him to proclaim instead his adherence to the “right course” or “guidance” (hudā) of God. The same is repeated in q 2:135 but the recommended substitute is defined here more concretely as the religion (milāta) of Abraham (q.v.). The latter is said to have been a hānīf (q.v.), i.e. a non-Jewish and a non-Christian monotheist. The particularistic insistence on Abraham’s non-Jewish and non-Christian identity comes out in explicit statements as, for example, in q 2:140, where Abraham as well as Ishmael (q.v.), Isaac (q.v.), Jacob and the Tribes (i.e. Jacob’s sons) are said to have been neither Jews nor Christians (q 2:140).
Elsewhere, the non-Jewish/non-Christian identity is linked to Abraham through the assertion that the Torah and the Gospel were only revealed after him (Q 3:65). This statement is addressed to the People of the Book, most likely with the intention of refuting their own aspirations concerning Abraham, whose religious heritage they were probably claiming to have preserved. In other words, the image of Abraham has been appropriated from the Jews and the Christians and was turned into the proto-type of the non-Jewish and non-Christian model of Islam. This is also the context of Q 3:67-8, which asserts that the people nearest to Abraham are the Muslim believers.

The punishment of the Jews

The response to the Jewish rejection of the Islamic message as described in the Qur’an consists not only in various dogmatic maneuvers but also in military pressure (see jihad; fighting). The latter course is hinted at in Q 29:46, in which the qur’anic Prophet is advised to dispute with the People of the Book in a fair manner, “except those of them who act unjustly.” This implies that the evildoers among the People of the Book deserve harsh measures, perhaps even war (q.v.). Other passages give up the hope of ever convincing the Jews and elaborate on the punishment that they deserve for their unbelief. According to some verses, the punishment awaits the Jews in the indefinite future. This is implied, for example, in Q 3:20, which says that if the People of the Book turn their backs on the qur’anic Prophet, he can do nothing but deliver his message, a verse which is taken to mean that it is God’s business to deal with such people in his own time. This idea is even clearer in Q 2:109, in which the believers are urged to pardon and forgive (see forgiveness) the People of the Book until God brings his command (concerning them).

But the Jewish-Muslim relationship as described in yet other verses is explicitly warlike. In one passage (Q 5:64), the military option seems to have been taken up by the Jews themselves. It is stated here that whenever they light the fire of war, God puts it out. In Q 2:85, which is addressed to the Children of Israel, allusion is made to certain hostile acts they carry out against some unidentified groups. Yet in other passages, the Jews are the party that comes under the Islamic military pressure and their military weaknesses are exposed. In Q 59:14, for example, it is observed that the People of the Book never fight the believers in one solid formation but only in sporadic groups, hiding behind the walls of their fortresses. They are divided among themselves and fight each other strongly. The People of the Book have suffered actual defeat, which is mentioned in Q 59:1-4. Here, they are described as being driven out of their houses, although they thought that their fortresses would defend them against God. In Q 59:11-12, the expulsion of the unbelieving People of the Book is mentioned yet again, this time with reference to the hypocrites (munāfiqīn), who have not kept their promise to help the People of the Book. A similar pattern of military defeat recurs in Q 33:26-7, which says that God has brought down the People of the Book from their fortresses and cast fear into their hearts (see heart). The believers have slain some of them and taken others captive (see captives). God bequeathed upon the believers their lands and possessions (see booty; expeditions and battles).

Apart from the military defeat of the People of the Book, the Qur’an also refers very briefly to their social status under Islamic domination (see social rela-
tions; social interactions; community and society in the Qur’ān). They must be killed unless they pay tribute (the jizya, see taxation; poll tax) but even then, they remain socially inferior to the believers (q 9:29).

The Qur’ānic Jews and the life of Muḥammad

The concrete relationship between the Qur’ānic Jews and the life of Muḥammad is provided in the realm of the biography of Muḥammad (the sīra, see sīra and the Qur’ān). One of the earliest biographies of Muḥammad is that of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768), of which the best-known version is that of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833). Ibn Isḥāq’s compilation served as a model to later historiographers who quoted large portions of his accounts. His compilation contains numerous allusions to Qur’ānic verses about the Jews. Most of them appear in the chapters about Muḥammad’s stay in Medina (q.v.) and are associated with the history of the Jewish tribes of that city, namely, Qaynuqā’ (q.v.), Naḍīr (q.v.) and Qurayza (q.v.). These tribes based their military power on fortresses built of stone, within which they lived, and thanks to which they retained predominance over their Arab neighbors. The arrival of the Jews in Medina is described in the sources as a prolonged process containing waves of refugees from Syria (q.v.) following the Babylonian and the Roman conquests of that area. Some traditions provide the Jews with a priestly pedigree originating in Moses’ brother, Aaron (q.v.), but other traditions trace their origins to certain ancient Arab clans who are said to have converted to Judaism (see tribes and clans).

Ibn Isḥāq incorporates q 2:83 within a description of some pre-Islamic alliances formed between the Jewish tribes and the Arab inhabitants of Medina, the Aws and the Khazraj. The Qur’ānic verse is addressed to the Children of Israel, accusing them of slaying their people and of turning a party from among them out of their homes, unlawfully going against their own. Ibn Isḥāq has associated this verse with the military clashes that broke out between the various Jewish/Arab alliances in pre-Islamic Medina (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 188-q). The first Jewish tribe defeated by Muḥammad was Qaynuqā’. Ibn Isḥāq adduces Q 3:12, which addresses “those who disbelieve,” in reference to the fate of this tribe: they are told that they shall be vanquished and driven to hell together. Although this verse does not mention the Jews in particular, Ibn Isḥāq has nevertheless applied it to them, to illustrate God’s wrath with the arrogant Jews of Qaynuqā’ (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 201). Q 5:51, which does mention the Jews and warns the believers against taking them as friends, appears in Ibn Isḥāq (Sīra, iii, 52-3) within an account about a Muslim who dissolved his alliance with the Qaynuqā’ out of fidelity to Muḥammad. The story implies that the Qur’ān encourages believers to sever their former pacts with the Jews. The tribe of Naḍīr was next to be attacked by the Muslim warriors and Ibn Isḥāq associates large portions of q 59 (Sūrat al-Hashr, “The Gathering”) with them. He asserts that most of this sūra was revealed in connection with the defeat of this Jewish tribe (Sīra, iii, 202-4; see occasions of revelation). Another Qur’ānic passage, Q 5:11, was connected with Naḍīr’s plot to assassinate Muḥammad when he came to their premises in order to discuss a problem of blood money (q.v.; Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 211-12). The verse itself bears no direct relation to the Jews, merely stating that God stopped some people from “stretching forth their hands” against the believers. By applying the verse to the Jews, Ibn Isḥāq betrays yet again his desire to illustrate
God’s dismay with the Jewish anti-Islamic hostility by recourse to as many Qur’anic verses as possible. For the massacre of the tribe of Quraisy (q.v.), Ibn Ishâq alludes to 33:26, which mentions the People of the Book whom God drove down from their fortresses. The Qur’ân says that they backed the unbelievers and that the believers killed some of them and took another part captive. The Qur’ân goes on to say that God made the believers heirs to the land and dwellings of the defeated People of the Book as well as to “a land that you have not yet trodden” (33:27). The latter is taken by Ibn Ishâq to be a forecast of the Islamic conquest of the Jewish settlement in Khaybar (Ibn Ishâq, Ṣîra, iii, 261-2). In other exegetical compilations (tafsîr, see exegesis of the Qur’ân: classical and medieval), additional verses have been connected to the affair of Quraisy. Most noteworthy is 8:55-8, in which instructions are given for treating “those with whom you make an agreement, then they break their agreement every time” (see breaking trusts and contracts; contracts and alliances).

Apart from the military clash between Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina, Ibn Ishâq (Ṣîra, ii, 160-221) dedicates a lengthy chapter to the polemical discourse between the two parties, and here, too, numerous Qur’ânic allusions are provided. In his introduction to this chapter, Ibn Ishâq observes that the Jewish rabbis showed hostility to Muḥammad because God chose his apostle from the Arabs (q.v.). The rabbis were joined by hypocrites (munâfiqûn) from the Aws and the Khazraj who clung to the polytheism of their fathers. The Jewish rabbis used to annoy the Prophet with questions and introduced confusion so as to confound the truth (q.v.) with falsity (see lie). The Qur’ân was revealed with reference to these questions of theirs. Further on, Ibn Ishâq provides specific accounts with names of hostile Jews, about whom the various Qur’ânic passages were allegedly revealed. These accounts impute to them the stereotyped Qur’ânic sins of arrogance, jealousy, mockery, distortion of scriptures, etc. (see sin, major and minor).

In connection with the sin of concealing parts of scripture, as imputed to the Jews in 2:76, Ibn Ishâq’s traditions (see Hadîth and the Qur’ân) assert that the Jews concealed God’s command to believe in Muhammad’s prophethood (Ṣîra, ii, 185; see prophets and prophethood). As for the Qur’ânic allegation that the Jews did not judge “by what God revealed,” i.e. that they falsified the laws of the revealed Torah (5:41-3), Ibn Ishâq has recorded a tradition dealing with the issue of the penalty of death by stoning (q.v.; rajm), which adulterers must incur (see adultery and fornication; boundaries and precepts). The Jews reportedly rejected this law while Muḥammad endorsed it. They also concealed the fact that this law was written in their own Torah. They did so out of jealousy so as not to admit that Muḥammad was a genuine prophet, well guided in the divine laws (Ibn Ishâq, Ṣîra, ii, 213-14). The sin of ignoring the evidence of their own Torah is imputed to the Jews also in Ibn Ishâq’s report about the religion of Abraham. The report alludes to 3:23, which mentions the invitation to the book of God given to those who have received a portion of the scripture (a-lam yad ilâ iladhina yud naṣīban mina l-kitâb yud auna ilâ kitâbi lâh), that it might judge between them. The verse goes on to say that a party of them turned down the offer. Tradition relates that the verse was revealed following a debate that took place in a Jewish school (bayt al-midrâs) between a number of Jews and Muḥammad. Muḥammad announced that his religion was that of Abraham but the Jews claimed that Abraham
was Jewish. When, however, Muḥammad asked them to let the Torah judge between them, they refused (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 201). The Jewish conviction that they were genuine holders of Abraham’s religious legacy comes out also in a tradition about the changing of the qibla from Jerusalem to Mecca, which alludes to Q 2:142. The tradition identifies the “fools” of this verse (see ignorance) with a delegation of Jews who came to Muhammad claiming that following the true religion of Abraham means reverting to the qibla of Jerusalem (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 198-9). Another tradition makes it even clearer that both parties, Muslims and Jews, claimed to be holding the true religion of Abraham and accused each other of distorting it. The tradition says that in this context, Q 5:68 was revealed. It tells the People of the Book that they follow no good until they keep the Torah and the gospel (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 217). Thus it is clear that in Ibn Isḥāq’s presentation, the idea of the religion of Abraham is not regarded as a newly introduced concept but merely as an old Jewish idea that acquired a new non-Jewish Islamic interpretation. This interpretation was considered closer to the genuine message of the Torah than the Jewish one.

Among the passages quoted in Ibn Isḥāq’s reports about the Jewish-Islamic polemics, some make no direct reference to Jews. For example, Q 3:7 mentions “those in whose hearts there is perversity (ṣawāqib),” equating them with those who follow those parts of the Qurʾān that are ambiguous (q.v.; mutashābihāt). They do so in order to mislead, and impose (their own) interpretation upon, the Muslims. Ibn Isḥāq identifies the perverts with some Jews of Medina and says that they used to examine the mysterious letters that open some of the Qurʾānic chapters, trying to figure out what their numerical value meant (see mysterious letters; numerology). When they failed, they expressed their doubts concerning Muhammad’s prophethood (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 194-5). Another similar case is that of Q 2:6-7, in which anonymous unbelievers (alladhīna kafarū) are condemned. It is said about them that “God has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes (q.v.), and there is a great punishment for them” (see hearing and deafness; seeing and hearing; vision and blindness). Ibn Isḥāq (Sīra, ii, 178) identifies these doomed unbelievers as the Jewish rabbis. He says that these rabbis are also referred to in Q 2:14, which speaks about devils (shayātīn, see devil), with whom some unbelievers conspire against the Muslims. While the “devils” are the Jews, the unbelievers, according to Ibn Isḥāq (Sīra, ii, 179), are the hypocrites (munağīqūn). Q 2:170 refers to some stubborn people who refuse to become Muslims and insist on following the faith of their fathers. Here, too, according to Ibn Isḥāq (Sīra, ii, 200-1), the Qurʾān alludes to certain Jews whose names he specifies. Q 7:187 mentions some anonymous people inquiring when the “hour” shall come (see apocalypse) and, again, Ibn Isḥāq (Sīra, ii, 218) says that they were the Jews and provides a list of their names. Even Q 112, which declares the undefined unity of God, without reference to any unbelievers, was revealed, according to Ibn Isḥāq (Sīra, ii, 220-1), in response to irritating questions posed to Muhammad by certain Jews.

In various exegetical sources, other verses have been associated with the Jewish-Islamic conflict. For example, Q 3:8 condemns people who “hold secret counsels for sin” and greet the Qurʾānic Prophet in a depraved manner. This was interpreted as referring to the Jews who reportedly greeted Muhammad by saying al-sām ‘alayka (“destruction be upon you”), instead of al-salām ‘alayka (“peace be upon you”).
On the other hand, Ibn Isḥāq is also aware of some Medinan Jews who converted to Islam and his report about them alludes to Q 3:113, which mentions an “upright” party among the People of the Book. He provides a list of their names — the best known of which being that of ‘Abdallāh b. Salām — and describes the dismay of the rabbis at their conversion to Islam (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 206). Ibn Salām’s name recurs in later exegetical compilations (tafsīr) in association with other verses mentioning believers among the Jews or the People of the Book (Q 4:166; 5:66; 10:94; 28:52-4).

Ibn Salām is occasionally contrasted with Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf, a Jewish archenemy of the Prophet (of the tribe of Nāḍir), who was assassinated at the behest of Muḥammad. Ibn al-Ashraf’s name, too, was read into the Qurʿān and it occurs, for example, in the commentaries on Q 3:75. That verse speaks of two types of people belonging to the People of the Book: those who pay back their debts to the believers in full and those who do not. Ibn Salām is mentioned as one of the former and Ibn al-Ashraf as one of the latter. Ibn al-Ashraf also figures in the exegesis of Q 3:86, in which the believers are said to have been hearing “much annoying talk” from the People of the Book. The commentators say that the verse refers to Ibn al-Ashraf who used to compose satirical anti-Islamic poetry (see poetry and poets). His name is also included in the exegesis of Q 3:78, which speaks about those who “twist” the book, i.e. the Qurʿān, with their tongues. Q 4:51-2 mentions people whom God has cursed because they told the unbelievers that the latter’s faith was better than the Islamic one. The exegetes say that the passage refers to Ibn al-Ashraf, who supported the Quraysh and their idols and reviled Muḥammad’s religion (q.v.). The Prophet’s doomed “enemy” (ibnā) of Q 168:3 is also identified with him (see enemies; opposition to Muḥammad).

It may be noted in passing that some of the Qurʿānic verses that refer to believers among the People of the Book did not remain confined to the Jewish sphere and appear also in a specific Christian context. For example, Q 28:54, which states that the believers among the People of the Book shall be granted their reward twice, was interpreted as referring to Ibn Salām as well as to Salmān al-Fārisī. The latter changed his faith from Christianity to Islam and became a celebrated Companion of the Prophet (see companions of the Prophet). The verse is also said to refer to believers among the Christians of Abyssinia (q.v.) who joined Muḥammad’s warriors in Medina (Ṣuyūṭī, Durr, v, 131-3; see emigrants and helpers). This verse also inspired a ḥadith that is attributed to the Prophet, which says that whoever embraces Islam from among the “people of the two books,” will be rewarded twice and whoever embraces Islam from among the associators (mushrikūn), will be rewarded once (Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, v, 259). The same verse was eventually worked into the Prophet’s letter to the Byzantine emperor (see byzantines). The letter promises him a double reward in return for his conversion to Islam. The same letter contains also the verbatim wording of Q 3:64, which extends an invitation to the People of the Book to join the Muslims in a common monotheistic faith (e.g. Buhārī, Sahīh, iv, 57 [56:102]).

Qurʿānic Jews and the Islamic community

The sinful Jews of the Qurʿān were eventually turned into a model of evil of which the entire Islamic community must beware. This emerges from the exegesis of Qurʿānic passages that denounce people who became divided by inner conflicts and disension (e.g. Q 3:105; 6:159). The verses instruct the Qurʿānic Prophet to dissociate
from them and the commentators have identified them with the Jews, as well as the Christians. It was thus implied that the Islamic community should be cautious not to follow the Jewish and Christian precedent of discord. Such warning was intended mainly against heretical groups, like the Kharijīs (q.v.) and the Qudarīs who were accused of introducing Jewish models of schism into Islamic society, although the introduction of Jewish ideas is most commonly associated with the Shi‘īs, especially ‘Abdallāh b. Saba’ and al-Mukhtar (d. 67/687; see SHI‘ISM AND THE QUR‘ĀN). Verses dealing with the fate of unbelievers in hell (e.g. Qur‘ān 18:103-6) were likewise interpreted as referring to the Jews with the same anti-heretical aim in mind (for details see Rubin, Between Bible and Qur‘ān, 160-3, 208-12). In addition to those verses about the wrath (ghadab) of God in which the Jews are mentioned explicitly, various Qur‘ānic allusions to anonymous groups who have come under God’s wrath were also interpreted as referring to the Jews (e.g. Qur‘ān 1:17; 60:13). The punishment of transformation into apes and pigs, which the Qur‘ānic People of the Book incurred as a result of God’s wrath, reappears in traditions about Jews of Islamic times. In some of these traditions, the Prophet himself is involved and he is said to have addressed them as “brothers of apes and pigs.” Some traditions have applied the same punishment to certain heretical Islamic groups such as the Qudarīs (Rubin, Between Bible and Qur‘ān, 213-32; see HERESY).

Numerous Qur‘ānic passages associated with the Jews emerge also in the discussions of their status as ahl al-dhimma, “people under protection” (i.e. of the Islamic community, the umma, see PROTECTION). Especially noteworthy is the Qur‘ānic passage that contains the term dhimma (Qur‘ān 9:7-15). It deals with associators (mushrikūn), concerning whom the Qur‘ān says that their protection remains valid as long as they remain loyal to the believers (see LOYALTY). If they break their oaths (see OATHS AND PROMISES) and revile the Islamic religion, then the believers must fight them. Muslim scholars applied this passage to the obligation of loyalty with which the Jewish and Christian dhimmīs must treat their Muslim protectors (Ibn Qayyim, Dhimma, iii, 1379 f.). Qur‘ān 9:28 is also noteworthy. It proclaims that the mushrikūn are impure (najas, see PURITY AND IMPURITY) and therefore they should not approach the “sacred mosque.” Muslim scholars took this statement as the scriptural basis for the injunction (usually attributed to the Prophet himself) to prevent Jews and Christians from entering the Arabian peninsula (Ibn Qayyim, Dhimma, i, 370-408).

Qur‘ānic Jews and modern scholarship

Modern scholars have usually taken the Qur‘ānic treatment of the Jews as a point of departure for their historical analysis of Muḥammad’s relations with the Jews of Medina. In so doing, they have followed the traditional Islamic approach, which sees in the Qur‘ān an authentic collection of Muḥammad’s prophecies. The scholars have adopted a historiographical narrative (see HISTORY AND THE QUR‘ĀN) about a so-called “break” between Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina, usually dated to shortly before the battle of Badr (q.v.) in March 624 C.E. The scholars defined Muḥammad’s policy until the break as dedicated to attempts at gaining the support of the Jews. An extra-Qur‘ānic document known as the Constitution of Medina (recorded in Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra, ii, 147-50), which is relatively favorable to the Jews, was dated to this stage. The reason for the “break” with the Jews, according to the scholars, was the Jewish reluctance to
respond to Muhammad’s appeal. Consequently, the Prophet changed his attitude towards them and embarked on a military offensive against them. This narrative runs parallel to the supposed evolution of the idea of holy war (jihad, q.v.). The scholars have built into this narrative of escalating conflict the various Qur’anic verses about the Jews. Broadly speaking, verses relatively tolerant of the Jews were marked by the scholars as early Medinan (see chronology and the Qur’ān), assuming that they were revealed before the break. The break is reflected in Qur’anic passages about the military clash with the People of the Book, as well as in the verses about the new ghibla and the non-Jewish/non-Christian identity of Abraham. In view of doubts raised more recently by some scholars, however, who suggested that the Qur’ān gained its final shape much later than in the days of Muhammad and perhaps not even in Arabia (cf. Wansbrough, QS; see post-enlightenment academic study of the Qur’ān), the historicity of the supposed relations between Muhammad and the Jews is no longer self-evident. One cannot rule out the possibility that at least some components of the narrative of the “break” with the Jews stem from post-conquest conditions that were projected back into Muhammad’s time.

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Bibliography

Jibrīl see Gabriel.

Jibt

A word of uncertain etymology, the noun jibt occurs only once in the Qur’ān, but is also used in poetry and prophetic traditions from the early Islamic centuries (see poetry and poets; Ḥadīth and the
qu'rān). Generally, jibt has three possible meanings: it is used to describe any false object of belief or worship (see idols and images), an individual who exceeds all bounds of propriety (see moderation) or a state of oppression (q.v.) and injustice (Lisān al-ʿArab, ii, 164; Tāj al-ʿarūs, iii, 32; see justice and injustice). It was mentioned in q. 4:51 in the context of condemning those People of the Book (q.v.) who gave credence to the unbelievers (see belief and unbelief) and attempted to incite them against Muslims.

Some early authorities asserted that the word passed into Arabic from the language of the Ḥabasha (i.e. Ethiopian: that of the former inhabitants of today’s Sudan and Ethiopia; see abyssinia; foreign vocabulary; cf. Jeffery, For. vocab., 99-100; Suyūṭī, Mahāammad, 204), where, reportedly, it meant “sorcery” or “a demon” (see magic; devil). Other authorities maintained that the word was derived from the Arabic term jibsun, meaning “a person of ill repute and character” (Māwardī, Nakat, i, 494-5; ʿAbd al-Rahīm, Tafsīr, i, 284). In the qu'ran and in numerous theological works, jibt is most often correlated with the word tāghūt (al-jiḥt wa-l-tāghūt), an expression that means divination (q.v.), sorcery or idol worship (see idolatry and idolaters). Some commentators on the qu'ran (see exegesis of the qu'ran: classical and medieval) claimed that jibt and tāghūt were the names of two idols worshipped by the Quraysh (q.v.) in Mecca (q.v.; Qurṭubī, Jāmi’, vi, 248-9; Qāsimī, Tafsīr, iii, 172).

Others claimed that jibt referred to a specific person named Ḥuyayy b. Akhtāb while tāghūt referred to Ka’b b. al-ʿAshraf, two Jewish leaders who, after the battle of Uḥd (see expeditions and battles), went to Mecca in order to conspire with the Quraṣh to destroy the Muslims in Medina (q.v.; Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, viii, esp. 461-5, 469-70 [ad q. 4:51]; Ibn Katḥūr, Tafsīr; ad loc.; see Jews and Judaism; opposition to Muḥammad). Still other authorities maintained that jibt means sorcery or divination while tāghūt means a sorcerer or diviner (Zamakhshārī, Kashfāf, i, 274; Ibn ʿĀdīl, Lūḥāb, vi, 420-2). The influential premodern jurist and theologian, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rūzī (d. 666/1210; Tafsīr, v, 103-4), asserted that the expression has come to describe any condition of extreme evil (see good and evil) and corruption (q.v.).

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Bibliography


Jihād

Struggle, or striving, but often understood both within the Muslim tradition and beyond it as warfare against infidels (see fighting; war; belief and unbelief). The term jihād derives from the root j-h-d, denoting effort, exhaustion, exertion, strain. Derivatives of this root occur in forty-one qu’ranic verses. Five of these contain the phrase jahd aynānīhum, meaning “[to swear] the strongest oath,” which is irrelevant to the present discussion (see oasis), and not all the remaining verses refer to warfare.
Since the concept of jihād is related to warfare, discussions of the subject often contain explicit or implicit value-judgments and apologetics. In fact, the subjects of jihād and warfare in Islam are always treated as one. There are, however, two reasons to discuss them separately. First, jihād is a concept much broader than warfare. Secondly, the doctrine of warfare can be derived from the Qurʾān without resorting to the term jihād at all. Therefore, in this article the derivatives of the root *j-h-d* in the Qurʾān will be discussed first, followed by a survey of the doctrine of warfare as expressed in the Qurʾān.

The root *j-h-d* and its derivatives in the Qurʾān

The root *j-h-d* does not have bellicose connotations in pre-Islamic usage (see PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QU'RĀN). Judging by linguistic criteria alone (see LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QU'RĀN), without having recourse to Qurʾānic exegesis (see EXEGESIS OF THE QU'RĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL), only ten out of the thirty-six relevant Qurʾānic references can be unequivocally interpreted as signifying warfare. The rest are unspecified, some of them clearly denoting efforts or struggles other than fighting. The following guidelines help determine whether or not the term *j-h-d* in a given verse refers to warfare:

(a) when the term is juxtaposed with a military idiom, such as “shirkers” (*mukhālaṭān*, *gāʾidān*, Q 4:95; 9:31, 86) or “go on raids” (*infrār*, Q 9:41; see EXPEDITIONS AND BATTLES). Verses in which *j-h-d* is connected to “asking leave/finding excuses” (*istīḍāḥān*) also seem to be dealing with warfare (Q 9:44; cf. 9:86, which combines both “ask leave” and “shirkers”);

(b) when the content of the verse discloses its military significance (Q 5:54, where there is a linkage between harshness towards unbelievers, fearlessness and *j-h-d*; Q 60:1, where “enemies” [Q.v.] and departing for jihād are mentioned);

(c) when the context of the verse indicates a military significance. Textual context is difficult to use because of the methods of assembling the text to which the history of the collection of the Qurʾān (q.v.) attests. As indicated in this history, verses that were revealed on different occasions (see OCCASIONS OF REVELATION; CHRONOLOGY AND THE QU'RĀN) were placed in sequence. Sometimes, fully contradictory verses were placed together, apparently because they deal with the same topic (e.g. Q 2:190-3; 8:72-5). Occasionally, however, the continuity between sequential verses is clear and the textual context may be used to clarify the warlike intention of a verse (Q 9:41, the context being 9:38-41; Q 9:44, the context being 9:44-6; these two verses also fall under category (a) above; Q 9:88, the context being 9:87-92);

(d) when *j-h-d* in the third form is followed by a direct object. It denotes, literally, two parties, each trying to exhaust the other, hence the notion of combat (Q 9:73 = 66:9; but cf. Q 25:52, *wa-jāhidhum bihi jihādan kabīrān*, where the Prophet is instructed to combat by peaceful means, namely, by the Qurʾān; see DEBATE AND DISPUTATION).

In sum, there are only ten places in the Qurʾān where *j-h-d* definitely denotes warfare. To these may be added four verses that establish the status of “those who believed, emigrated (see EMIGRATION) and exerted themselves” (*inna lladhīna āmanā wa-hājirū wa-jāhidūn*, Q 8:72, 74; 9:20; cf. 8:75). Since warfare is strongly advocated in the Qurʾān, it stands to reason that references to the high status of the “strugglers” (*mujāhidūn*) are, in fact, references to warriors. It is clear, however, that in these verses the reference is to the Emigrants
(muhājirūn, see emigrants and helpers). It may be pointed out that sometimes j-h-d occurs as the counterpart of hijra, “emigration,” presumably the Muslims’ emigration to Medina (q.v.; Q 2:218; 8:72-5; 9:20; 16:110, cf. 9:24). Strangely, there is no Qur’ānic reference to the military contribution or warlike attributes of the Helpers (ansān, i.e. those Medinans who helped the émigrés; such references do, however, abound in the historical and hadith literature; see jādīth and the Qur’ān).

There is one case where j-h-d is applied to an impius struggle, namely, the struggle of disbelieving parents (q.v.) to prevent their offspring (see children; family) from adhering to the true religion (q.v.; Q 29:8).

But in many verses it is not possible to determine the kind of effort indicated by j-h-d. There are many commentators who leave the terms unspecified in these instances, whereas others interpret also these ambiguous cases as warfare against infidels (see commentaries to Q 2:218; 3:142; 5:35; 9:16, 19, 20, 24; 16:110; 29:6, 69; 47:31; 61:11). Still others understand the doubtful cases in one or more of the following ways: (a) combat against one’s own desires and weaknesses (see sin, major and minor), (b) perseverance in observing the religious law (see law and the Qur’ān), (c) seeking religious knowledge (talab al-’ilm, see knowledge and learning), (d) observance of the sunna (q.v.), (e) obedience (q.v.) to God and summoning people to worship him, and so on (see e.g. Khāzīn, Lubāh, v. 200; Ibn Abī Hātim, Tafsīr, ix, 3084). All these meanings, however, are never explicit in the Qur’ān. Also, the phrases denoting the “greater” jihād (i.e. one’s personal struggle to be a better Muslim) that are common in later literature, namely, “struggle of the self” (jihād al-nafs) or “struggle with the devil” (jihād al-shayṭān, see devil), do not occur in the Qur’ān (see theology and the Qur’ān; ethics and the Qur’ān; good and evil).

The Qur’ānic concept of jihād was not originally connected with antagonism between the believers and other people. The semantic field of the root j-h-d as well as its use in the Qur’ān suggest another provenance. It may be an expression of the ancient and ubiquitous notion that the believers must prove to the deity their worthiness for divine reward (see reward and punishment; martyrs). This proof is achieved by enduring various kinds of hardships and self-mortification. Fasting and pilgrimage belong to this category as do celibacy and poverty. Conversely, hardships that befall the believers are understood as divine tests designed to provide the believers with opportunities to prove themselves worthy (see trial). These ancient religious ideas found expression in the Qur’ān. God announces many times that he subjects the believers to tests and he reprimands those who are not able, or not willing, to endure (e.g. Q 2:135-6, 214; 3:142; 4:48; 47:4; see trust and patience; joy and misery; punishment stories). In Islam, in addition to giving the believers the opportunity to prove themselves, the tests also help establish the distinction between the true believers on the one hand, and the pretenders and the unbelievers on the other (see hypocrites and hypocrisy). The tests also help determine the relative status of the members of the community (see community and society in the Qur’ān). One of the means of testing is jihād. In this capacity jihād may mean participation in warfare, but also any other effort made in connection with adherence to the true religion (see Q 3:142; 9:16; 47:31; cf. Q 9:24, 44, 88. Only Q 9:44 and 9:88 certainly refer to warfare, judging by the context. See also Q 4:76-7, 95-6; 9:90-4; 29:10-1; 47:20; 49:14-5; 57:10, 25.).
Sometimes not jihād but death (see death and the dead) or battle (qitāl) “in the way of God” are explicitly mentioned as a test (q. 3:166-7; 47:4; cf. 3:154-5; 4:66; 33:11, 23-4).

Very little of the peaceful sense of j-h-d remained in Muslim culture and the understanding of jihād as war became predominant. Nevertheless, there are verses in the Qur’ān that attest to other significations. The best example is q. 22:78. By linguistic and contextual criteria, the phrase “exert yourself in the way of God as is his right” (wa-jihādī fi lālihi haqqa jihādī) clearly does not refer to warfare, but to other forms of effort made by way of obedience to God. The verse is part of the doctrine of the “religion of Abraham” (millat Ibrāhīm), which regards the patriarch as the first, original Muslim (see q. 2:125-36; see Abraham; Hanīfī). Q. 22:76 instructs Muslims to perform the religious duties originally prescribed to Abraham. While asking the believers to exert themselves and to do their utmost to this end (jihād), the verse points out that the requirement should not be deemed too much to ask, since God “has laid no hardship on you in your religion.” The theme of war is not touched upon at all in this verse. In the same vein, q. 49:15 deals with definitions of belief and the phrase “those who strive” (alladhīna… jihādī) apparently refers not to warriors but to those who perform all the divine ordinances (cf. Baydāwī, Anwārī, ii, 277). Yet many commentators (including al-Ṭabarī, d. 310/923) insist that in these two cases the term refers to participation in warfare.

The warlike meaning of jihād thus predominates, to the extent that q-t-l, “kill,” was sometimes glossed by j-h-d (e.g. Baydāwī, Anwārī, i, 105, ad q. 2:190). This predominance is perhaps to be explained by the fact that in this sense of “war,” jihād was given a legal definition, legal catego-

ries and regulations, aspects which were discussed at length by the jurists (who often, however, used the term ayyār instead of jihād). Also the parallelism between the Qur’ānic phrases jihād “in the way of God” (fi sabīl lālih) and qitāl “in the way of God” may have contributed to the equation of j-h-d with terms of warfare. In fact the phrase “in the way of God” itself came to mean “warfare against infidels,” although it is not necessarily so in the Qur’ān (see e.g. “emigration in the way of God” in q. 4:100; 16:41; 22:58; 24:23).

The doctrine of warfare in the Qur’ān

Islam is a system of beliefs, ritual and law (see faith; ritual and the Qur’ān) and its legal system covers all spheres of life, including warfare. Many rulings and attitudes relating to warfare are scattered throughout the Qur’ān, mainly in the Medinan sūras. Yet, derivatives of the root j-h-d are absent from the majority of these verses. Forms of the root q-t-l are used forty-four times in relation to warfare (although derivatives of this root are also used in other contexts). In addition, there are many verses relating to this subject in which neither j-h-d nor q-t-l occur.

The Qur’ānic rulings and attitudes regarding warfare are often ambiguous and contradictory so that there is no one coherent doctrine of warfare in the Qur’ān, especially when the text is read without reference to its exegetical tradition. These contradictions and ambiguities resulted from historical developments and were later amplified by differences of opinion among exegetes. The Prophet led a dynamic career, having been at war for years with various enemies and under changing circumstances. Such variations and developments are doubtlessly reflected in Qur’ānic verses and account for some of the contradictions. The course of these developments, however, is not clear, for
the same reasons that obstruct a decisive reconstruction of the Prophet’s biography (see ṣīra and the qur’ān; Muhammad). In addition, differences of opinion eventually arose due to the various possibilities of interpretations. The language of the Qur’ān is often obscure and, even when not so, many terms, phrases and sentences have more than one possible meaning or implication. For example, the sentence “we have our endeavors (a’māl), you have yours” (q 2:139; 42:15; cf. 10:41; 109:6) may be interpreted in several ways: (a) it enjoins tolerance towards other religions (see religious pluralism and the Qur’ān), (b) it merely states a fact, (c) it constitutes a threat, or (d) it employs “endeavors” but means “reward for the endeavors,” in which case it is also merely a statement of a fact, not an implied imperative. The first of these interpretations contradicts the qur’ānic order to initiate war against the infidels (q 2:191, 193, 244: 8:39; 9:5, 29, 36 etc.; see e.g. Ibn al-Jawzī, Nawāṣṣkh, 175–6, 440; Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xi, 118–9). Another example is q 2:190 (cf. 2:194). It contains the seemingly clear phrase “fight in the way of God those who fight you and do not trespass” (see boundaries and precepts). This may be taken either as prescribing defensive war or as an instruction to refrain from harming non-combatants (see e.g. Jaṣṣāṣ, Akhām, i, 257). The former contradicts the above-mentioned qur’ānic order to initiate war. These are only two of a multitude of examples.

Commentators developed special techniques to deal with qur’ānic contradictions, chief among them abrogation (q.v.; naskh) and specification (āmm wa-khāṣṣ, literally “general versus specific”). Abrogation seeks to replace the rulings of certain verses by others, on the grounds that the latter were revealed to the Prophet later than the former. Specification is designed to restrict or ban certain injunctions and prohibitions. This is done by establishing that the verse in question only applies to a definite group or to a specific event in the past. In contrast to abrogation, specification often occurs without the use of the technical terms āmm and khāṣṣ.

A rarely applied, but very significant device, is the assignment of differing qur’ānic rules to different situations. Whereas the techniques of abrogation and specification aim at distilling one absolutely binding rule out of a number of possibilities, the technique of assignment leaves open a number of options and allows the authorities the power to decide which of the mutually-exclusive qur’ānic rules applies in a given situation. There are other exegetical devices used in order to resolve contradictions, such as denying linguistically possible implications (e.g. for q 2:62), “supplementing” verses (būqūf, e.g. for q 10:41) and assigning appropriate contents to qur’ānic words (e.g. equating the term silm/salām, “peace,” with Islam, for q 2:208 and 8:61, see Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, ii, 322–5; x, 34).

The verses relating to warfare may be classified under the following headings: (a) the order to fight, (b) exhortations (q.v.), (c) the purpose of warfare, (d) conscription, (e) permission to retreat, (f) the treatment of prisoners (q.v.; see also hostages; captives), and (g) booty (q.v.). There are also miscellaneous practical and tactical instructions. The first topic is covered by a large number of verses, whereas the rest are confined to a few verses each.

The order to fight involves the issue of attitudes towards the other. Muslim scholars considered more than one hundred verses as relevant to this topic. Even an address to the Prophet such as “you are merely a warner” (q.v.; q 11:12) was sometimes understood as an implicit instruction to leave the infidels alone. Thus the verses expressing attitudes towards the infidels include explicit or implicit instructions to
the Prophet, or to the Muslims, which may be defined as follows: (a) to be patient and to stay aloof from the infidels (q 2:139; 3:20, 111; 4:80-1; 5:99, 103; 6:66, 69, 70, 104; 7:180, 199; 10:99, 108-9; 11:121-2; 13:40; 15:3; 94-5; 16:82; 17:34; 19:84; 20:130; 22:68; 23:54; 24:54; 25:43; 27:92; 29:56; 30:60; 31:23; 32:30; 33:48; 34:25; 35:23; 37:174; 38:70; 39:15; 40:35; 77; 42:6, 48; 43:83; 44:39; 46:35; 50:45; 51:54; 52:31; 45:48; 53:29; 54:6; 68:44, 48; 70:3, 42; 73:10-1; 74:11; 76:24; 88:22), (b) to tolerate them or to treat them kindly (q 2:140; 5:13; 15:8; 43:80; 45:14; 60:8-9; 64:14; see forgiveness; mercy), (c) to preserve their property and their lives (q 2:62, 256; 5:69, but cf. 3:19; 5:82; see tolerance and compulsion), (d) to preach or argue with them peaceably (q 3:64; 4:63; 16:64, 125; 29:46; 41:34; see invitation), and (e) to forgive them or to forgive them under certain restrictions (q 2:190, 191-4, 217; 4:61; 9:36, 123; 16:126; 22:39-40). There are also qur’anic references to the treatment of the infidels and to peace (q 2:208; 4:90; 8:61; cf. q 3:28; 47:35; see contracts and alliances). All these are in conflict with the clear orders to fight, expressed in q 9:5 and 9:29 (cf. q 2:244). Q 9:5 instructs the Muslims to fight the idolaters (mushrikin) until they are converted to Islam and is known as “the sword verse” (āyat al-sawf; see polytheism and atheism). Q 9:29 orders Muslims to fight the People of the Book (q.v.) until they consent to pay tribute (jizya, see poll tax), thereby recognizing the superiority of Islam. It is known as “the jizya verse” (āyat al-jizya, occasionally also as “the sword verse”). The Qur’ān does not lay down rules for cases of Muslim defeat, although there is a long passage discussing such an occurrence (q 3:139-75, see also 4:104; see victory).

A broad consensus among medieval exegetes and jurists exists on the issue of waging war. The simplest and earliest solution of the problem of contradictions in the Qur’ān was to consider q 9:5 and 9:29 abrogating all the other statements. Scholars seem sometimes to have deliberately expanded the list of the abrogated verses, including in it material that is irrelevant to the issue of waging war (e.g. q 2:83, see Ibn al-Bārzī, Näṣihā, 23; Ibn al-Jawzī, Musaffā, 14; id., Nawāsīkh, 156-8; Baydawī, Anwār i, 70; Tabarī, Taṣfī, i, 311; other examples: q 3:111; 4:63; 16:126; 23:96; 25:63; 28:35; 38:88; 39:3). The number of verses abrogated by q 9:5 and 9:29 is sometimes said to exceed 120 (Ibn al-Bārzī, Näṣihā, 22-3 and passim; also Powers, Exegetical genre, 138). Several verses are considered as both abrogating and abrogated, in turn, by others. The Muslim tradition, followed by modern scholars (see post-enlightenment academic study of the Qur’ān), associated various verses with developments in the career of the Prophet. It is related that, in the beginning, God instructed the Prophet to avoid the infidels and to forgive them. The Prophet was actually forbidden to wage war while in Mecca (q.v.). After the emigration to Medina (hijra) the Muslims were first permitted to fight in retaliation for the injustice (see justice and injustice) done them by the Meccans (q 22:39-40). Then came the order to fight the infidels generally, yet certain restrictions were prescribed. Eventually all restrictions were removed and all treaties with infidels were repudiated by q 9:1-14, and the ultimate divine orders were expressed in q 9:5 and 9:29. (There are many versions of this scheme, see ‘Abdallāh b. Wahb, Jami’, fol. 15b; Abū ‘Ubayd, Nāsār, 190-7; Baydawī, Anwār, i, 634; Khāzin, Lābāb, i, 168; Shāhī, Taṣfī, 166-73; Jaṣṣās, Aḥkām, i, 256-63; cf. Ibn al-Jawzī, Nawāsīkh, 230.) This evolutionary explanation relies on the technique of abrogation to account for the contradic-
tory statements in the Qur’ān. Although details are disputed, this explanation is not a post-qur’ānic development constructed retrospectively (see Firestone, Jihād, esp. chaps. 3-4). In addition to its obvious rationality, this evolution is attested in the Qur’ān itself (Q 4:77). Many exegetes, however, avoided the technique of abrogation for theological and methodological reasons, but achieved the same result by other means (e.g. Ibn al-Jawzī, Nawaṣīkh). Thus, in spite of differences of opinions regarding the interpretation of the verses and the relations between them, the broad consensus on the main issue remained: whether by abrogation, specification or other techniques, the order to fight unconditionally (Q 9:5 and 9:29) prevailed. Some commentators, however, argued that the verses allowing peace (Q 4:90; 8:61) were neither abrogated nor specified, but remained in force. By the assignation technique, peace is allowed when it is in the best interest of the Muslims (e.g. in times of Muslim weakness, see e.g. Jaṣṣāṣ, Abkām, ii, 220; iii, 69-70). In fact this was the position adopted by the four major schools of law (see Peters, Jihād, 32-7).

Exhortations to battle occur many times in the Qur’ān and the Prophet is told to urge his followers to fight (Q 4:84; 8:65). In addition to the verses that contain various instructions, there are those that promise reward to warriors and reprimand shirkers, threatening them with God’s wrath (Q 2:154; 3:195; 4:74, 104; 9:38-9, 88-9, 111; 22:58-9; 33:23-4; 61:10-3; see also Q 3:139-75, which encourages the Muslims after a defeat). The verses that establish the distinction between true believers and hypocrites (see above) may also serve the same end.

In a few verses, the cause or purpose of Muslim warfare is mentioned as self-defense, and retaliation for aggression, for the expulsion from Mecca and for the violation of treaties (Q 2:217; 4:84, 91; 5:33; 9:12-3; 22:39-40; 60:9, cf. 4:89). In one case, defense of weak brethren is adduced (Q 4:75; see Brother and Brotherhood). On the basis of the “sword verse” (Q 9:5) and the “jūza’ verse” (Q 9:29) it is clear that the purpose of fighting the idolaters is to convert them to Islam, whereas the purpose of fighting the People of the Book is to dominate them. Many commentators interpret Q 2:193 and 8:39 (“fight them until there is no fitna”) as an instruction to convert all the polytheists to Islam by force if need be (e.g. Khāzin, Lubābī, ii, 183; Jaṣṣāṣ, Abkām, i, 260). It appears, however, that fitna (see Dissension; Parties and factions) originally did not mean polytheism, but referred to attempts by infidels to entice Muslims away from Islam. Such attempts are mentioned in many Qur’ānic verses (e.g. Q 3:149; 14:30; 17:73-4; for Q 2:193 see e.g. Tabari, Tafsīr, ii, 254; see Apostasy). Thus the purpose of war in Q 2:193 and 8:39 would not be conversion of infidels, but the preservation of the Muslim community. Conversion as the purpose of Muslim warfare is also implied by some interpretations of Q 2:192 and 48:16. In later literature the formulation of the purpose of war is “that God’s word reign supreme” (li-takūna kalimatu llahī hiya l-‘ulā), but in the Qur’ān this phrase is not associated with warfare (Q 9:40; cf. 9:33 = 61:9; 48:28).

The verses relevant to conscription are Q 2:216; 4:71; 9:39-41, 90-3, 120, 122; cf. Q 48:17. The verses implying that only a part of the community is required to participate in warfare prevail over those that stipulate or imply general conscription (see ‘Abdallāh b. Wahhāb, Jāmi’, fol. 16a-b; Ibn al-Jawzī, Nawaṣīkh, 438; Baydāwī, Anwaār, i, 405; Shāhī, Tafsīr, 140-1, 145, 148; Zuhrī, Nāṣīkh, 28-9; see also Paret, Kommentar, Jihād.)
Permission to retreat occurs three times. In Q 8:15-6 retreat is forbidden unless it is intended to be temporary and is done for tactical reasons. These verses are considered by some scholars to have been abrogated by Q 8:65, which permits retreat only if the enemies outnumber the Muslims by more than ten times. This rule was, in turn, replaced by Q 8:66, which reduces the proportion to two to one (Baydawi, Anwa'r, i, 361; Tabari, Tafsir, ix, 200-3; Ibn al-Jawzi, Nawasikh, 415-8; Abu 'Ubayd, Nasik, 192-3; H. Busse, The Arab conquest in revelation jihād). This issue is sometimes discussed in relation to Q 2:193 as well.

The taking of prisoners is forbidden in Q 6:7 (see also Q 8:70-1). This verse is considered as abrogated by Q 47:4, which allows the Muslims to take prisoners, to free them for no compensation at all or to do so in exchange for ransom (Qurtubi, Abkām, iv, 2884-7; vii, 6047-9; Jassās, Abkām, iii, 71-4; Abu 'Ubayd, Nasik, 209-16; Tabari, Tafsir, x, 42-4). Nowhere in the Qur'ān is there a reference to the permissibility (or otherwise) of executing prisoners.

There is, however, disagreement among commentators regarding the apparent contradiction between Q 47:4 and the categorical order to kill the idolaters in Q 9:5 (Ibn al-Jawzi, Nawasikh, 425-7; Tabari, Tafsir, x, 80-1; xxvi, 40-3; Qurtubi, Abkām, vii, 6047-8; Jassās, Abkām, iii, 390-2). Booty is discussed in Q 4:194: 81, 41, 68-9; 59:6-8 and other practical matters relating to war occur in Q 2:239: 4:101-3; 8:56-8, 60; 61:4.

In the legal literature Qur'ānic verses are sometimes cited which appear to be irrelevant to the discussions. Thus Q 48:24-5 were adduced in the discussion of non-discriminating weapons (ballista, manjaniq, e.g. Ibn Abī Zayyad, Kitāb al-Jihād, 70-1).

Q 59:5 was used in the discussion of the permissibility to destroy the enemy's property (e.g. Tabari, Tafsir, xxviii, 32). Q 6:137 was adduced as proof that no enemy-children should be killed (e.g. Shāfi'i, Tafsir, 121).

Finally, the origins of the notion of the sacredness of Islamic warfare should be mentioned. Although jihād and warfare are disparate concepts, only partly overlapping, both are endowed with sanctity. The sanctity of jihād was discussed above. The sacredness of warfare derives, first, from the causative link between warfare on the one hand, and divine command and divine decree on the other. Another source is the association of warfare with divine reward and punishment. The roles of warring as a divine test and as a pledge that the believers give to God (Q 33:15, 23) add another dimension to the sacredness of warfare.

Finally, God’s direct intervention in the military exploits of his community sanctifies these exploits (Q 3:13, 123-7; 8:7-12, 17-19, 26; 9:14, 25-6, 40; 33:9-10, 25-7; 48:20-4; see BADR).

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Bibliography


Jinn

A category of created beings believed to possess powers for evil and good. Although their existence is never doubted, the jinn (Eng. “genie”) are presented in the Qurʾān as figures whose effective role has been considerably curtailed in comparison to that accorded to them by various forms of pre-Islamic religion.

Unlike their rivals, the rabb and the rabba, the “lords” and “ladies,” supernatural protectors and “allies” (awliyāʾ) of the tribes (see tribes and clans) that God, in the fullness of his lordship, succeeds in making disappear (Q 53:23, “They are but names which you have named”), the jinn survive at the heart of the new religion. The Qurʾān limits itself to denying them the greater part of their powers — those, at any rate, that they could have claimed from the lord of the Qurʾān. In particular, they are shorn of their primordial function relative to humankind, that of uncovering the secrets (q.v.) of destiny (ghayb), thereby possessing knowledge of the future and of the world of the invisible (see hidden and the hidden; destiny; fate). In the account of the death of Solomon (Q.v.; Q 34:14), the jinn, having failed to grasp that the king is dead, continue to serve him in humility and abasement — thus demonstrating their ignorance of the ghayb. But the very fact that the Qurʾān dispensaries them, allows, at the same time, for recognition of their former role as mediators between the invisible world and humankind.

The Qurʾān finds itself in the surprising position of having to come to terms with the jinn, i.e. subjecting them to its God, so powerful is the image they conjure up in popular imagination and local beliefs. In doing this, the text of the Qurʾān permits us to confirm part of what has been suggested concerning the way in which the desert Arabs (see Arabs; bedouin; pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān) of the sixth century c.e. viewed their relationship to the jinn.

Regarded as having lost their faculty of familiarity with the invisible, the jinn were also seen as having lost their “power” or “faculty of action” (sultān, e.g. Q 55:33). Sultān is the exclusive preserve of the God of the Qurʾān, who dispenses it to whomever he wishes (Q 14:11; 59:6; etc.; see power and impotence). He never delegates complete mastery to anyone, however, since omnipotence remains one of...
his exclusive properties (see God and his attributes). One should consider this assertion about the reduction of the jinn’s powers in the light of the Qur’anic denial of the powers attributed to magic (q.v.; sihr). The Qur’anic allusions to magic seem to demand the presence of an initiator (himself human and dependent on a supernatural being) who “teaches” (yu’allimu) it, that is — in this context — gives “guidelines” (al-lām; cf. Q 2:102; 20:71). The people of Mecca called Muhammad the “lying sorcerer” (ṣāhīr kadhīlāb, Q 38:4); he is denounced as “bewitched” (mashāh, Q 17:47); he is said to be “possessed by jinn” (mujnūn, Q 15:6; see insanity; lie). In another passage it is the “satans, devils” (shayṭān, the equivalent of the jinn in the Qur’ān — see below) who “teach magic to men” (yu’allimmāna l-nās l-sīhar, Q 2:102). Nonetheless, a pervasive sentiment that the jinn still need to be appeased can be seen in the persistent ritual sacrifices to the jinn, which have been more or less openly admitted until very recently among the desert shepherds. This demonstrates that the powers denied the jinn are nevertheless understood to remain vital despite the passage of centuries (e.g. the sacrifice of the tent reported by Jaussen, Coutumes, 339; Wellhausen, Reste, 151 also quotes the slightly earlier observations made by Doughty in Travels, ii, 629).

Ethnographic research indicates that, despite the Qur’ānic statements to the contrary, people continue to believe in the quietly disconcerting presence of these beings, who haunt the spaces to which people do not belong but through which they are nevertheless constrained to pass whenever going from place to place. Their vague hordes appear to be contained, rather than reduced to impotence, in those territories which belong to them and where humans are at constant risk of encountering them. An acknowledgment of divine omnipotence coexists in uneasy tension, within the minds of many Muslims, with the fear that the jinn remain as dangerous and as unpredictable to access as ever.

The jinn most often figure in the Qur’ān in the form of a collectivity. The other name applied to them is shayṭān, “satans, devils” (associated with the Eng. “demons”), a name whose semantic evolution from classical Greek is worthy of particular attention (see foreign vocabulary). The equivalence between the terms jinn and shayṭān, already familiar in pre-Islamic Arabia, is confirmed in the Qur’ān with reference to the supernatural beings who are said to be in Solomon’s service. They are indicated — indiscriminately — by both these terms: in Q 27:17, 39 and 34:12, 14 it is the jinn who serve Solomon; but in Q 21:82 and 38:37 they are called shayṭān. Parallel to the use of their designation in the plural, the “satans” come to acquire the status of a proper name, “the Satan” (al-shayṭān), a rebel against God (Q 17:27; 19:44) and an enemy (’adaww) of people (e.g. Q 17:33, and numerous other places in the Qur’ān; see devil).

As regards Iblīs, the Qur’ānic diabolos (lit. the Gk. term means “he who divides [by calumny]”; this is the Septuagint’s translation of the Heb. sāṭān [derived from Job 1, “the adversary” or “the accuser” — in fact, he who proposes to put the just person to “the test”]), his Qur’ānic attestations are far less significant than either the singular or the plural occurrences of shayṭān. Iblīs is of immediate interest in the context of the jinn, however, because he is identified as one of them in Q 18:50. Iblīs enters the Qur’ānic discourse in the context of a particular narrative, that of his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam (see BOWING AND PROSTRATION; ADAM AND EVE). A.J. Wensinck [Iblīs] sees an origin of this account in the Life of Adam and Eve (Kautsch, Apokryphen, § 15; also in Riessler, Altjüdisches Schrifttum). It should be noted, though, that the more ancient “Vie Grecque d’Adam et
Ève,” presented in Dupont-Sommer and Philonenko (La Bible), does not contain the passage in question; in the Latin version, however, the “devil” (der Teufel) does reject any obligation to prostrate himself before Adam and refuses to obey the command of the archangel Michael (q.v.). The incident is placed after the account of the fall of man from the garden of Eden. In the account contained in the Qur’ān, the order to prostrate comes directly from God without the archangel’s (see angel) intervention. Iblīs incurs divine wrath (see anger) upon his refusal and sees, at his own request, his punishment “deferred” (inzār or ta’khir). He is appointed the “great tempter” (mughawwā or mughawī; see trial) of humankind until the resurrection (q.v.). In several passages in the Qur’ān this sequence is placed before the account of the fall (hubūt) of Adam, which is told only subsequently (see fall of man; garden). This is a reversal of the order of the pseudo-epigraphical texts noted above, in which the fall precedes the devil’s confrontation with God. Finally, it should be noted that the qur’ānic tempter of Adam in the garden of paradise (q.v.) is always called shayṭān and never Iblīs.

Does the juxtaposition of the two texts (that of the refusal on the part of Iblīs and that of the fall of Adam) imply a continuity of the account or its re-working in the canonical text? The question should at least be asked. In several cases, passages dealing with Iblīs are followed by the account of the fall (Q 2:34; 7:11; 15:31, 32; 17:61; 20:116; 26:95; 34:20; 38:74, 75). It is only in the single verse of Q 18:50 that Iblīs is designated expressly as a jinn. In the other passages he is depicted as a rebellious angel without, however, any explicit mention of his angelic nature; in fact, the text essentially states the following: the angels (malāʾikā) prostrated themselves except Iblīs (ṣīlā Iblīs) who refused. In Q 38:76, Iblīs, of whom it has just been said (Q 38:73:4) that he alone among the angels refused, justifies his disobedience (q.v.) saying that he was created from nār (the usual translation, but not necessarily appropriate here, is “fire”), and therefore he should not have to prostrate himself before a creature “of clay” (q.v.; ūṯīn). Does this mean that it justifies his status as a jinn? According to local traditions, the nār from which the jinn are created (see below) most certainly does not correspond to “fire” (q.v.), while in the ancient tradition of the Near East — and, a fortiori, in the Bible — angelic nature is clearly “igneous” (cf. the Seraphim, etc.; if this meaning prevails, then Iblīs could well be identified as an “angel,” in the Near Eastern sense of the term).

The Qur’ān says nothing about the material from which the angels are created. The Islamic tradition regards them as being made from nār; the “cold light of the night,” that of the moon (q.v.), which is also the light of guidance and of knowledge (see knowledge and learning), precisely the opposite of nār; which is diurnal and solar. As opposed to the jinn, who are incontestably figures from local beliefs, angels (malak, pl. malāʾıkā, lit. “envoys,” from the root l-ʾ-k) are not a local construct: they are attested in Ethiopic and Hebrew, as well as in inscriptions from northeastern Arabia. Although there may have been particular, local understandings of “angels,” the qur’ānic discourse on the subject is highly polemical. Perhaps, therefore, the qur’ānic “angels” should not be taken as referring to a local religion, as has sometimes been said in connection with a cult of the “daughters of Allāh” — alleged to be the angels (see below).

Despite the single occurrence in which Iblīs, the “devil” of the Qur’ān, is designated a jinn — could this be an interpolation? — he would seem, thanks to his specific narrative insertion (i.e. his refusal to prostrate to Adam; his corrupting mission is also biblical), to have origins clearly
distinct from those of the local jinn/shayṭān. It is only at a later date, in the post-Qurʾānic Islamic tradition, that he is finally completely assimilated into al-shayṭān, the “Satan” of the Qurʾān as the prototype of all beings hostile to humankind. The two diabolical representations live on in Islamic tradition, enacting a complex destiny often in combination, or encounter, with other negative figures such as various sorts of dragons derived from the ancient Near Eastern traditions. The adventures ascribed to them subsequently have little to do with their itinerary as stated in the Qurʾān.

Even if the jinn of the Qurʾān are shown as deprived of part of their powers because they no longer manage to uncover the secrets of heaven, they can nonetheless raise themselves up to heaven’s gates (cf. Q 15:16; 37:10; 72:8-9; see HEAVEN AND SKY). The account of the heavenly ascension of the jinn is obviously not commanded by God — unlike the routes taken by the angels, which, just like those taken by men, must be marked with signposts (e.g. Q 15:14; see also the term sabāḥ, pl. asbāḥ, used to designate the obligatory routes for both men and angels at Q 18:84-5, 89, 92; 40:36-7; it should be noted that, for the angels, the ʿurūj is specifically a movement of “descending and re-ascending” at Q 15:14; 32:5; 34:2; 57:4; 70:4). But Islamic tradition has continued to recognize the jinn’s ability to move in all spaces without needing to follow a trail. This mobility probably corresponds to an ancient local belief that has remained deeply embedded, namely that of the notion — vital in the society of sixth and seventh century Arabia — of movement from place to place and the concept of a route.

Can it therefore be said that the representation of the jinn contained in the Qurʾān is essentially defensive and, in some ways, in continuity with the past? The Qurʾān confirms the division of the earth into two territories — that of humankind and that of the jinn. The formula contained in the Qurʾān, al-ins wa-l-jinn, “the humans and the jinn” (also, al-jinn wa-l-ins), is clearly dominant in the statements the Qurʾān makes concerning the jinn for there are twenty examples of this conjunction of jinn and humanity (using the collective noun  jinn; q 6:112, 128, 130; 7:38, 179; 17:88; 27:17; 41:25, 29; 46:18; 51:56; 55:33; 72:5, 6; using the singular jinn employed as a collective noun: Q 55:39, 56, 74; using the plural form al-jinna wa-l-nās, “jinn and people [or tribes]”: q 1:119; 32:13; 114:6). The God of the Qurʾān is presented as master of the two spaces. But the ancient representation of the co-existence of this fundamentally bipartite division of the earth (q.v.) remains intact.

With regard to shayṭān al-ins wa-l-jinni at Q 6:112, “satanic men and jinn,” it could be asked to what the “sataniization” here evoked corresponds. Since the verse probably belongs to the Medinan period (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QURʾĀN) it can doubtless be compared to the various passages denouncing an “alliance” (wālia) between humans and the “demons” (shayṭān), a designation that should be regarded as another name for the jinn: the infidels adopt these “demons” as allies (q 7:27, 30; cf. 17:27), but the alliance will in no case benefit them (q 2:16; see CONTRACTS AND ALLIANCES; CLIENTS AND CLIENTAGE).

There is also a series of occurrences where the alliance is with “the Satan,” the term being used as a proper name. He is as much a betrayer of the cause of humankind as are the “demons,” and will lead people to their damnation (see REWARD AND PUNISHMENT); Q 25:29 reflects this theme, that of khadhūl, the “abandonment.”
of humanity by its pseudo-ally, the Satan (see enemies). The same theme is to be found in q 25:18 with the earlier deities designated peripherally as “that which is adored apart from God” (see polytheism and atheism). These passages correspond to the evolution of the demonology proper to the Qur′ān, which ends up individualizing the satanic figure in a symbolic role that seems to condense together all the negative aspects of the “demons,” variously named. Like an unavoidable figure of the anti-god he seems to remain capable of trapping humans (e.g. q 27:124 or 58:19).

The theme of demonization and the accusation of pacts with the jinn apply specifically to the Medinan enemies of Muḥammad (see Medina; opposition to Muhammad), the “impious” (kāfirūn, the ancient “ingrates” of tribal Arabia, “those who fail to recognize a benefit received”; see belief and unbelief; gratitude and ingratitude; blessing), the “hypocrites” (munāfiqūn, formerly used of “cowards,” and, as noted by Watt, also the term used to designate Muhammad’s political enemies in Medina; see hypocrites and hypocrisy), or however they are named. It is a technique of Qur′ānic polemical discourse (see polemic and polemical language) typical of the Medinan era, corresponding to conflict situations in which the religious argument often comes to the aid of the political (see politics and the Qur′ān; language and style of the Qur′ān). This is in contrast to the Meccan period, in which Muḥammad is accused by his own of being “possessed by the jinn.”

The antithetical relationship between the jinn as negative allies and God as the only positive ally (wālī, e.g. q 4:45) lends itself to conjecture about a “cult” alleged to be devoted to the jinn. In particular, some Qur′ānic passages that discuss the jinn utilize terminology similar to that concerning the “service” rendered to God: i.e. ‘ibādat al-jinn (there is also a passage on the “service” devoted to Satan, q 36:60). But, just like people, the jinn must adore God alone (q 51:56). Just like humans they are subjected to the last judgment (q.v.; Q 37:158). Like the “people of the tribes” (nās), a number of them are destined for hell (q.v.; q 11:119; for further references to the infernal destiny of the jinn, see Q 6:128; 7:38, 179; 32:13; 55:39).

In the Qur′ān, the theme of the nations that were destroyed because of their rebellion is also applied to the jinn (see punishment stories). One passage (q 6:130) attributes to the jinn, after the fashion of humans, “envoys from among you (minumam)… who warned you” (see messenger; Warner), but this passage seems to have its origins in a form of rhetorical symmetry and nothing more is known about it (see form and structure of the Qur′ān; rhetoric of the Qur′ān). The disappearance of the “nations” (umam) of the jinn is also associated — without providing any further detail — with that of the human “nations” that have disappeared (q 41:25; 46:18; cf. q 7:38, where disappearance is associated with “hell” (nār); see generations). This is probably an extrapolation of the Qur′ān’s discourse, bringing the punishment of the impious, of the deniers and of those who fail to recognize the “signs” (q.v.; āyāt) of God to its logical conclusion. The jinn of the Qur′ān again lose ground with reference to their previous status. They are reduced to sharing the eschatological destiny of humankind (see eschatology).

In this type of passage it is impossible to distinguish that which has its origins in beliefs and practices evident in seventh-century Arabia from that which belongs to the Qur′ān’s polemical discourse and the
controversy pursued with enemies in an attempt to confuse them by the force of words (cf. Q 2:14, where the hypocrites are with their “demons”; in Q 6:121, it is these demons who push “their minions”, i.e. Muhammad’s adversaries, to “controversy” or “disputation,” mujādala, see DEBATE AND DISPUTATION).

It is also no easy task to uncover the reality of the belief that is being fought over in the tangled Meccan passages about a “cult of angels” (‘ibādat al-malā‘īka) — which seems to become confused with a cult of the jinn (Q 34:41; cf. also the “invocation,” ‘awdlh, addressed to the jinn in Q 72:6) — and about the representation of angels as “daughters” (banāt) of God (Q 6:100; 16:57; 37:149, 153; 43:16; 52:39). In Q 37:150-2 it is a question of a belief in the fact that the lord is said to have procreated angels of the female gender (q.v.), while in verse 158 of the same sūra, a form of “kinship” (tasab) is alleged between God and the jinn. In Q 6:100, the jinn are said to be “associates” (shurakā) of God while the “daughters of God” are once again evoked. It appears that in this polemic, pseudo-angelized figures are being reduced to jinn, the pseudo-angelized figures who, in the final analysis, would seem to be the tribes’ local protecting goddesses who are to disappear slowly but surely under a variety of disguises (see the remarks made by Wellhausen [Reste, 24] regarding the term “daughter of God,” which he compares to the representation of the Beney Elohim). In all likelihood it is also a way of reducing them to a minor, subordinate role by declaring that, just like humans, they are “created beings.” And yet their nature is stated to be different from that of humankind. The Qur’ān says that they are made from nār. The usual translation, “fire,” probably makes no sense in the context.

The image conjured up is that of a representation of wreaths of smoke and mirages of “the burning air of the solar day” and not that of flames. This metaphorical transposition could also be recognized in the numerous Qur’ānic uses of the concept of nār (regarding the nature of the jinn, see Q 15:27, “created from the fire of al-samā‘īn”; and Q 55:15, min mārijin min nārin, a difficult formulation which would make the jinn “uniformed beings created from the reverberated heat” and not, as in some translations — such as that of Kazimiński — beings created from a “pure fire without smoke”; see, for an attempt at a more precise explanation of the two passages, Chabbi, Seigneur, 190 f.).

But this difference in nature that the Qur’ān is constrained to admit, can only permit the jinn to retain powers that enable them to outclass humans. Thus, although the jinn are no longer able to hear what heaven says about destiny, they are nonetheless still represented as being perfectly capable of rising up to heaven without divine assistance. The divine guard at the gates of heaven requires all of its powers, launching against them “fiery traces” (shihāb), to throw them back to earth and prevent them from collecting the secrets of the future (Q 37:10, 72:8-9). A further valiant deed could have been credited to a jinn of Solomon’s court who is said to be ‘īfrīt (q.v.), “very skillful and crafty.” He suggested to his master that, in an instant, he could bring him the throne of the queen of Sheba (see BILQĪS); but the jinn does not have the time to demonstrate his powers (which are manifestly seen as effective) since his place is taken by a more suitable member of the king’s retinue — one who “knew the scripture” — who accomplished the mission “in the twinkling of an eye” (Q 27:39-40).

In fact, therefore, the approach taken by the Qur’ān to the jinn seems to be para-
doxical. A final quotation will demonstrate another way in which the Qur’ān treats them: their persistent power can be perceived as a constant theme when the Qur’ān itself appeals to their testimony (see WITNESSING AND TESTIFYING) in order to convince men who refuse to believe. These are the “believing jinn,” called to aid in testifying to the pre-eminence of a qur’ān (a verbal noun designating “the message faithfully transmitted” and not yet Qur’ān as a proper noun) that they have heard by chance and that they call “marvelous” (‘ajah, q. 72:1; see MARVELS; MIRACLE). If the jinn themselves are convinced, how could humans not be convinced? The reasoning must have been seen as incontestable.

A non-Arabic origin of the word jinn is not immediately traceable, even though it is cognate to the root j-n-n, present in most of the ancient Semitic languages, albeit as a designation of a garden or a cultivated place with trees (the Hebrew gān; this latter meaning is retained in Arabic, wherein the triliteral root j-n-n is used to designate a “cover” of vegetation). On the other hand, the Ethiopic gānēn has the meaning of “demon, evil spirit.” Sometimes this Ethiopic term is said to be of Syriac origin (Leslau, Dictionary, 198), from the root g-n-n, “recover, reside in, descend upon” (this is used of the Holy Ghost, see Payne Smith, Dictionary, 73; see HOLY SPIRIT). But Syriac (see SYRIAC AND THE QUR’ĀN) does not appear to provide the negative meaning “possessed,” a meaning well-attested in Arabic and Ethiopic. It is probable, therefore, that this latter meaning of jinn is a development specific to Arabic, which passed into Ethiopic. At any rate, the term jinn, with its derivatives jānīn, jinnā, jinnī (in the masculine, the feminine and the collective, respectively), is fully attested in the Arabic of the era of the Qur’ān. The representation and perception of the permanent encounter with, and the otherness of, these metamorphic beings lend support to their imaginary existence in the minds of people. The Qur’ān strives to turn to its God’s advantage the fear inspired by the jinn and to annihilate the powers attributed to them by the pastoral and nomadic societies of western Arabia. Nevertheless, these strange creatures have continued to exist in a particularly intense manner in a wide variety of disguises in the collective imaginings of Islamic societies. They encountered and merged with other supernatural beings already long resident in the territories conquered by Islam. Some of these retained their original names such as, for instance, the die in Iran. Others would lose their identity, at least in appearance, and be assimilated with the figures, most surely negative, that can be definitively identified as jinn.

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Bibliography
Job

One of the prophetic figures preceding Muhammad common to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions (see prophets and prophethood). Job (Ayyūb) is mentioned in only four pericopes: q 6:83-7 and 4:163 set him in the company of the prophets while q 38:41-2 and q 21:83-4 allude to his distinctive vocation and charisma.

In q 6:83-90, together with Abraham (q.v.), Isaac (q.v.), Jacob (q.v.), Noah (q.v.), David (q.v.), Solomon (q.v.), Joseph (q.v.), Moses (q.v.) and Aaron (q.v.), Zechariah (q.v.), John (see john the baptist), Jesus (q.v.), Elias (see elijah), Ishmael (q.v.), Elisha (q.v.), Jonah (q.v.) and Lot (q.v.), he is included among those God has guided, chosen and preferred to ordinary human-kind (see election), to whom he has given scripture (see book; scripture and the Qurān), authority (q.v.), prophethood and whose example is to be followed. In q 4:163, Job is named among those to whom a revelation (see revelation and inspiration) has been given so that humans will not be able to claim ignorance (q.v.) of God’s will. The names given include those mentioned in the pericope cited above — omitting Joseph, Zechariah, John, Elias, Elisha and Lot, but adding “the tribes” (al-ashāb, see children of israel; tribes and clans), and two general categories subsuming all the other prophets, those mentioned to Muhammad, and those not mentioned to him.

As for Job’s special character, q 38:41-2 presents Job calling to his lord, “Satan (see devil) has indeed touched me with hardship and pain (see trial).” God responds to his cry, “Scuff [the earth] with your foot. Here is [water] a place to cleanse yourself, [it is] cooling, it is drink.” Job obeys. A spring appears in which he bathes and from which he drinks. His kin and “the like of them with them” are restored to him as an act of divine mercy (q.v.). God then (q 38:44) commands him to strike “her” (the ellipsed pronoun in fa-ḏrib bihi has no explicit referent) with a sprig of leaves in order to keep an oath he has made (see oaths). The pericope ends with a formula of praise — “How excellent a servant! Constantly was he turned [to God] (ni/lefthalfmoon l-lefthalfmoon abdu innahu awwāb) — which, in q 38:30, celebrates the virtues of Solomon, the only other prophet to be honored with this formula. q 21:83-4 likewise tells of Job’s call to his lord, God’s hearing of him, removal of the hurt upon him, restoration of what he had lost, and his praise of God as “most merciful of the merciful.”

Both of the pericopes that indicate Job’s special character are allusive, but the exegetical tradition (see exegesis of the Qurān: classical and medieval), as summarized by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Tafsīr, ad loc.), supplies an inter-text in the light of which they may be understood. Job cried out because God had allowed Satan to put him to the test by destroying his livestock, slaying his kin, and afflicting him with a painful disease (see illness and health). Because he remained faithful while put to the test, God heard his cry, healed him with a miraculous spring, and restored to him two-fold both his kin, and the property taken from him. The person to be struck with a sprig in q 38:44 refers to his wife. She alone, during his illness, had not deserted him. But she was tempted by Satan, to whom she had urged Job to sacri-
face a kid in order to be healed. Job swore an oath (see oaths) that if cured, he would punish her with a hundred lashes. Because of her faithfulness, God alleviated this punishment, telling Job to strike her once with a sprig of one hundred leaves.

In the light of this inter-text, the status and role of Job in the divine economy of prophetic guidance is clear. These two pericopes present Job’s distinctive charisma, that of patience in enduring undeserved suffering without challenging God to explain his wisdom (q.v.) in putting him to the test (see trust and patience). The story of Job in the Qur’an then is understood primarily as a reward narrative (see blessing), with an emphasis different from that of the story of Job in the Bible.

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John the Baptist

The New Testament herald of Jesus (q.v.) who also figures in the Qur’an (see scripture and the Qur’an). John the Baptist, son of Zechariah (q.v.), called in Arabic Yâhû b. Zakariyyâ, is mentioned by name five times in the Qur’an. In q 3:39, John is described as noble, chaste and a prophet who will “witness the truth (q.v.) of a word from God,” that is, Jesus (see prophets and prophethood; word of god; witnessing and testifying). Q 6:85 speaks of John along with Zechariah, Jesus and Elias (see elijah) as being of the “righteous.” Q 19:7 announces the forthcoming birth of John to Zechariah (see good news) with the remark that this name was being used for the first time (or that this was the first prophet by that name; cf. Luke 1:59-63). Q 19:12 conveys the command to John to be a prophet with a book (q.v.; usually taken by Muslim exegetes [see exegetis of the Qur’an: classical and medieval] to mean that John confirms the Torah [q.v.], not that he brought a new scripture). Q 21:90 explains that John’s birth was a response to Zechariah’s prayer, and the curing of his wife’s barrenness. The spelling of the name Yâhû for Yohanan is known from pre-Islamic times and is probably derived from Christian Arabic usage (see christians and christianity). Muslim exegetes frequently trace the name to a root sense of “to quicken” or “to make alive” and connect this to the barrenness of John’s mother and to his people’s absence of faith, themes that are present in the Qur’an.

Although the qur’ânic details of the story of John are few, extended discussions concerning him have arisen throughout Muslim history. For example, the idea that John was “chaste” (ḥâṣûr) provoked a good deal of debate [see abstinence; asceticism].
In their discussions of q 3:39, some exegetes understood this word to be intended in its sexual sense of being incapable of coitus (‘he had a penis no bigger than this piece of straw,’ Tabari, Tafsir, vi, 377, a prophetic hadith on the authority of Sa’id b. al-Musayyab) or of abstaining from it. Other exegetes rejected that view, and argued that the word means only that John was free from impure actions and thoughts, and that it does not preclude John’s having been married (see marriage and divorce) and fathering children (q.v.).

The Muslim rendering of the birth, life and death of John have, in general, been elaborated on the basis of the Christian accounts. John, it is said, was born six months prior to Jesus. He became a prophet, traveled to Palestine, met and baptized Jesus in the Jordan river and departed with twelve disciples to teach the people (see apostle; baptism). At the instigation of Salome, Herod had John put to death prior to Jesus’ death and ascension. Many of the accounts, however, have become confused and place John’s life in the era of Nebuchadnezzar. This is especially evident in stories related to John’s death (which is not mentioned in the Qur’an). The Israelite king Josiah, it is said, killed John, the son of Zechariah, and Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem (q.v.) as a result. In these accounts, the king’s action is motivated by his desire to marry his own niece, an action of which John disapproved. The conspiracy of the girl’s mother then led to the death of John (cf. the story of Salome, Matt 14:1-11; Mark 6:16-29). Nebuchadnezzar invaded in order to solve problems that arose as a result of John’s death (or God simply inspired him to do so). The source of this chronological confusion is likely found in the name Zechariah (a name which had already occasioned confusion within the biblical tradition) with a conflation taking place of the author of the biblical book of Zechariah, the Zechariah of Isaiah 8, the prophet Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:22 (who was killed by King Joash), and Zakariyya, the father of John. Al-Tabari (d. 310/923), in recounting these traditions, indicates that he is well aware that many regard these stories as false and based on a historical error, there being 461 years between the lives of Nebuchadnezzar and John the Baptist.

Andrew Rippin

Bibliography

Jonah

One of the prophets mentioned in both the Bible and the Qur’ān (see prophets and prophethood). Jonah (Yūnus b. Mittai, Heb. Jōnā ben Amittai) is named
five times in the Qur’ān: q 4:163 lists him together with Abraham (q.v.), Jesus (q.v.) and other prophets who have received revelations (see Revelation and Inspiration); as rightly-guided he is cited together with Zechariah (q.v.), Jesus and other prophets in q 6:85-86; his people (qawm Yūnūs) were, according to q 10:98, the only ones who escaped divine punishment because they had repented (see Punishment Stories; Repentance and Penance).

As told in the Qur’ān, the story of Jonah resembles in many details the account narrated in the biblical book of Jonah. Jonah, also called Dhū l-Nūn (“the man of the whale”), rebelled against God’s mission, ran away in wrath, was swallowed by the fish, praised God, confessed his sin in the belly of the fish, and was thrown ashore (q 21:87-8). This and the rest of the story is told in q 37:139-48: When he was saved, he found shade under a tree, and was sent “to a hundred thousand or more.” In q 68:48-50, Muḥammad is admonished to wait with patience (see Trust and Patience) for the command of the lord, and not to behave like “the man of the fish” (sāḥib al-ḥūt), who went away without God’s permission.

Muslim tradition as expressed in Qur’ānic commentary (tafsīr, see Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval) and the “tales of the prophets” (qisas al-anbiyā) embellished the short account given in the Qur’ān with many details, continuing Jewish and Christian teachings (see Scripture and the Qur’ān; Myths and Legends in the Qur’ān). There are two different versions of the story, one following in broad lines the biblical account, while the other has a somewhat different sequence of events. The first relates that Jonah delivered his message in Nineveh and went away in wrath when people did not follow him and divine punishment did not arrive promptly. He went on board a ship, was swallowed by the fish, cast ashore, and returned to Nineveh. Upon his arrival, he found that in his absence the inhabitants had repented and punishment had been suspended. So he settled there. According to other accounts, he took to wandering about as an ascetic, accompanied by the king of Nineveh who had renounced the throne, ceding it to a shepherd who had assisted Jonah on his way back to the city.

A full account of Jonah’s biography has been provided by al-Kisā (Qisas, 296-301; Eng. trans. in id., Tales, 321-6). Jonah was born when his mother Ṣaḏqa was far beyond the age of childbearing. In his early life he practiced asceticism (q.v.); then he married Anak, the daughter of Zaka-riyyā b. Yūḥānā, a rich merchant of Ramla. When he was called to prophethood he went to Nineveh, accompanied by his wife and two sons. He lost them as he crossed the Tigris. Jonah was rebuked while preaching in Nineveh and he left the city because of imminent punishment, watched the city from a nearby hill, went on board a ship, was swallowed by the fish and cast ashore, and was reunited with his family on his way back to Nineveh. Finding the inhabitants in a state of happiness he spent the rest of his life there.

The story of Jonah posed theological problems for Muslims, as it had for Jews and Christians. Jews took offence at the sending of an Israelite prophet to the pagans, whereas Christians saw in him the model of evangelization to the heathens. This is mirrored in Muslim tradition in a story with an obviously Jewish or Judeo-Christian background (see Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity): King Hezekiah, on the advice of Isaiah (q.v.), ordered Jonah to bring back the tribes in exile who had been abducted by the king of Nineveh. Angry at the king,
Jonah went away, was swallowed by the fish, repented of his disobedience (q.v.), was cast ashore and then went to Nineveh to accomplish his mission. The inhabitants first rebuked him, but finally they let the Israelites go.

Another problem was Jonah’s anger. He was angry because God had postponed punishment for Nineveh (Jon 4:1). This is likewise told in Q 21:87: “When he departed in wrath (idh dhahaba mughādhīban).” Yet, this is rather vague, leaving open the reason for Jonah’s emotional reaction (cf. e.g. Schwarzbaum, Biblical and extra-biblical legends, 112). As Muslims did not consider it acceptable for a prophet to show such an attitude toward God’s orders (see obedience), they offered alternative explanations: He was enraged at King Hezekiah who had ordered him to go to Nineveh on the advice of a prophet but, evidently, without any divine instruction. Another solution was to declare the obstinacy of the people of Nineveh as the cause of Jonah’s wrath (see insolence and obstinacy). A third explanation was his being angry at the urgency of his mission: The angel Gabriel (q.v.), who brought the orders, did not allow him any time for preparation, not even to put on his sandals. Jonah therefore went away in anger, seeking refuge on board a ship. His refusal to transmit the message was a grave offence, indeed. Another offence was his departure — without God’s permission — from Nineveh because the punishment of its inhabitants was not forthcoming. In Q 68:48, Muhammad is cautioned against making such an emigration (q.v.; hijra) without waiting for divine permission. Jonah repented in the belly of the fish, confessing that he was a sinner: “I was indeed wrong (innā kantu mina l-zālihim, q 21:87).”

Another question with theological implications is the doubt (see uncertainty) Jonah had about God’s omnipotence (see power and impotence; freedom and predestination). Q 21:87, fa-zonna an lan naqdira ’alayhi, may be translated “He imagined that we had no power over him.” Two answers were found to avoid the accusation of unbelief (see Belief and unbelief): One was that Jonah did not expect imprisonment in the narrow belly of the fish, qadara meaning “to measure the size,” not only “to have power.” Another solution was to provide the phrase with a question mark. On the other hand, being swallowed by a fish was not the proper punishment of one who questioned God’s omnipotence. God, however, granted Jonah a loan (salaq) because he had displayed piety (q.v.) and devotion before he was disobedient. God, therefore, was not ready to leave him to the devil (q.v.), and instead punished him by locking him up in the belly of the fish for some time. “Had it not been that he glorified God” (fa-lau lā annahu kāna min al-musabbihin) before he refused to obey God’s orders “he would certainly have remained inside the fish till the day of resurrection” (q.v.; Q 37:143 f.). His imprisonment in the belly of the fish was not a punishment (‘aqība), but a correction (ta’dib, see chastisement and punishment; reward and punishment).

Because Jonah was impatient, he does not belong to the prophets of “inflexible purpose” (ūlū l-‘azm, Q 46:35) praised for their patience. He was saved because he prayed when he was in distress (see prayer). Therefore, he is a model for the pious Muslim in case of need. He is likewise a model for the penitent. His mother conceived him, according to al-Kisā’ī (Qisā’s, 296; Tales, 321), on the eve, i.e. the day before ‘Ashūrā, the Jewish Day of Atonement. This means that Jonah was destined for atonement. In Jewish life, the eve of the Day of Atonement had taken on the character of a festival (see fasting; festivals and commemorative days). It was a Friday, as al-Kisā’ī adds, and it was on that day that the punishment of Nineveh was
cancelled (cf. Rāzī, Taṣfīṣ, ad q. 10:98). It can parenthetically be remarked that the book of Jonah is read in synagogues during the Day of Atonement afternoon service.

The church fathers explained Jonah’s sojourn in the belly of the fish and his salvation as a prefiguration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The length of his sojourn in the fish is, however, not mentioned in the Qur’an. Muslim tradition narrates three days, though other figures have also been proposed, ranging from one day to one month or forty days.

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Bibliography


Joseph

The son of Jacob (q.v.; Ya‘qūb), whose story is told in Sūrat Yūsūf (“Joseph”), the twelfth sūra of the Qur’ān. This sūra is devoted to the story of Joseph (Yūsūf) and, as such, it is the Qur’ān’s longest sustained narrative of one character’s life. The sūra’s 111 verses (āyāt) relate events in Joseph’s life ranging from his youthful conversations with his father Jacob and his brothers (see Benjamin; Brother and Brotherhood), conversations that lead to Joseph’s exile and imprisonment, to the resolution of the family’s conflicts through divine guidance and inspiration (see Revelation and Inspiration). Q. 12:3 announces that “the best of stories” (aḥsan al-qasas), is to be related (see Narratives). Qur’ān commentaries differ as to whether this is a direct reference to the story at hand or a more general statement on the nature of Qur’ānic narrative. Those commentators who see Joseph’s as the best of all stories give a multiplicity of reasons for its superiority (see Myths and Legends in the Qur’ān). “It is the most beautiful because of the lessons concealed in it, on account of Joseph’s generosity, and its wealth of matter — in which prophets (see Prophets and Prophethood), angels (see Angel), devils (see Devil), jinn (q.v.), men, animals, birds (see Cosmology; Animal Life), rulers (see Kings and Rulers; Community and Society in the Qur’ān), and subjects play a part” (Tha‘labī, Ḥaqīqat, ad loc.).

Throughout the sūra, there are interjections that exhort the believers to see the hand of God in human affairs and to recognize the power of true prophecy (Q. 12:7, 56-7). Joseph can thus be seen as exemplifying the basic paradigm of the Qur’ān: he is a prophet (nābi) who is derided and exiled, but is eventually vindicated and rises to prominence. As such, he serves as a model for the life of Muhammad and many of the Qur’ānic commentaries (taṣfīṣ, see Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval) see this as a central theme and function of the sūra (see also Opposition to Muhammad). This interpretation is strengthened by the “occasions of revelation” (q.v.; asḥāb al-nuẓūl) tradition, which places the circumstance of Sūrat Yūsūf’s
revelation at the point where Muhammad is challenged by skeptics who doubt his knowledge of the narratives of the Children of Israel (q.v.; banū Isrāʾīl, Bayḍawī, Anwār). The sura is one response to this challenge, and is thus greatly detailed and includes information not known from earlier tellings of the stories of Jacob’s family.

In his commentary on the opening of the sura, “These are the signs of the manifest book” (Q 12:1), al-Bayḍawī offers an alternative reading to the simple meaning of the text. He explains it thus: “This is the sura which makes plain to the Jews that which they asked… it is recorded that their learned men said to the chiefs of the polytheists, ‘Ask Muhammad why Jacob’s family moved from Syria (q.v.) to Egypt (q.v.), and about the story of Joseph,’ whereupon this sura was revealed.” On one occasion Muhammad is asked for even greater detail, whereupon he reveals the names of the stars (see planets and stars) that Joseph saw in his dream (cf. Zamakhshārī, Kashshāf; see Jews and Judaism).

Dreams (see dreams and sleep) are central to this narrative. Joseph’s dream of ascension to power, an ambition so bitterly resented by his brothers, is featured in Q 12:4-7. The king of Egypt’s (see pharaoh) dreams trouble him, they are “a jumble of dreams” (adghāthu ahlāmin), and only Joseph can offer the true interpretation (Q 12:43-9). Here one can see the compression of narrative at work in the sura. While in the Joseph narratives of the Hebrew Bible, both dream episodes — those of Joseph and those of the Pharaoh — have two dreams each, the Qurʾān tells of only one dream for each figure. The essence of their messages is conveyed through the manner in which these dreams are written and their expressed interpretations (see scripture and the Qurʾān).

The two dream episodes are separated by that section of the narrative that has received the most exegetical and literary attention (both in Islamic and Western culture): the episode in which his master’s wife attempts to seduce Joseph (Q 12:23-31). The reasons for Joseph’s rejection of the unnamed older woman are not directly stated. Rather, it is related that he was led away from temptation when he saw the “proof of his lord” (burḥān rabbihī, Q 12:24), variously interpreted as an image of the master of the house or as an image of his father Jacob. Other interpretations understand the interruption as a “call” of divine origin telling Joseph not to sin or as the actual appearance on the wall of Qurʾānic verses warning against sin (see sin, major and minor; adultery and fornication; sex and sexuality).

Joseph’s adventure with his master’s wife and his subsequent encounter with “the women of the city” lead him to prison, a prison from which he is freed after he interprets the king’s dream. The Qurʾān here emphasizes Joseph’s innocence and sets the stage for the second half of the narrative to unfold. This latter half of Sūrat Yūsuf is focused on the dramatic encounters between Joseph and his family. Shuttling between their father Jacob and their brother Joseph, the brothers (who remain unnamed), seek a resolution of the family conflict. Before the brothers and their father enter Egypt together (Q 12:100) the conflict is resolved, Joseph assures his brothers that they will not be blamed and Jacob is told that his children are forgiven. As the narrative closes, the sura exhorts the reader/listener to see the actions of God at work in this story, actions which are made manifest only through God’s messengers (see messenger).

Joseph’s name appears in two suras other than Sūrat Yūsuf. In a list of earlier prophetic figures, Joseph’s name appears
between those of Job (Ayyūb) and Moses (Mūsā; q 6:84). On this same theme of Joseph as one of the earlier messengers — and thus a predecessor of, and model for, Muhammad — see q 40:34, where it is stated that "Joseph brought you the clear signs (q.v.) before, yet you continued in doubt (q.v.) concerning what you said ‘God will never send forth a messenger after him.’"

Neither Joseph’s death nor burial is mentioned in the Qur’ān, but they do figure in Islamic legends. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) relates a tradition that Joseph lived to the age of 120. He also cites the biblical tradition that tells of Joseph’s death at an earlier age, “In the Torah (q.v.) it is said that he lived one hundred and ten years, and that Ephraim and Manasseh were born to him.” The use of Joseph’s coffin to ensure Egypt’s fertility also appears in Islamic folklore. In his commentary on Sūrat Yūsuf, al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 685/1286) says, “… the Egyptians disputed about Joseph’s burial place until they were on the verge of fighting, so they decided to place him in a marble sarcophagus and bury him in the Nile in such a way that the water would pass over him and thereafter reach all of Egypt. Then the Egyptians would all be on an equal footing in regard to him.” From Egypt, Joseph’s bones are carried to Syria (al-Shām). There are contending Islamic traditions as to Joseph’s final burial place. One tradition places it in the Haram al-Khalīl in Hebron (cf. Yāqūt, Buldān, ii, 498-9). Another situates it in the village of Balata (Yāqūt, Buldān, i, 710; al-Harawi, Guide, 61), near Nablus. As this brief overview demonstrates, the commentarial and folkloric traditions concerning Sūrat Yūsuf are particularly rich. While earlier Western scholarship focused on comparisons between this sūra and the Hebrew Bible’s Joseph narratives, the more recent scholarship focuses on the literary qualities of the sūra and on the relevance of this narrative to the life of Muḥammad.

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Journey

Voyage, usually of some length, from one place to another. Terms to be translated as “journey, trip, travel,” occur throughout the Qur’ān. Perhaps the most obvious, and most frequent, are derivatives of s-f-r, s-y-r, and ġ-r-h (fi). Of this set, eight (Q 2:184, 185, 283; 4:433; 5:6 [s-f-r]; 4:101; 5:106; 73:20 [ď-r-h/]) concern legal prescriptions brought into play by the act of travel (see LAW AND THE QU R’ĀN). For example, Q 2:184-5, “[fast; see fasting] for a given number of

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days, but if any among you is ill (see ILLNESS AND HEALTH) or on a journey (‘ulā safarin), [fast] on an equal number of other days.” (Commentary on this passage appears limited; see Ayoub, Qur‘ān, 193-5.) Q 2:283 addresses pledges of trust (see OATHS; CONTRACTS AND ALLIANCES); Q 5:106 finding sound witnesses (in executing bequests; see INHERITANCE; WITNESSING AND TESTIFYING); and Q 4:43 and 5:6 allowing travelers alternate forms of ritual cleansing (see CLEANLINESS AND ABLUTION) prior to prayer (q.v.). Q 4:101, “when you travel through the world (isra‘-īdā ḍārabhum fi l-ard), you occur no sin (see sin, major and minor) if you shorten the prayer,” speaks to risks for the traveler in hostile territory. The last of the set, Q 73:20, recognizes the traveler’s need to curtail reading of the Qur‘ān (see RECITATION OF THE QUR‘ĀN: RITUAL AND THE QUR‘ĀN) when circumstances require it.

A second category reflects, more generally, movement in the name of God or, more properly, “upon the path of God” (fi sabīlī lāhī, cf. Q 2:190, 218, 262, 273; 5:54; 229; 24:22; see PATH OR WAY). Q 9:41, on the arduous nature of service to God, is an example; so, too, is Q 4:94, in which the believer is told to display vigilance and humility when venturing into the world. Q 9:111 refers to those who “wander” in such manner; the term sā‘āb, here used in the plural, is understood by Arabic lexicographers to refer to ascetics (see ASCETICISM), specifically those devoted to fasting (see Lisān al-‘Arab). A final category appears to denote simply instances of movement from place to place: i.e. Q 3:156 (d-r-h), which refers to the travel of unbelievers (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF). Nearly all of the derivatives of ‘ay-y-r fall into this category, such as Q 12:109, “do they not travel through the world?” Two references to Moses (q.v.), Q 18:62 and Q 28:29, speak of his travel; and Q 34:18 (al-sayr) and Q 34:19 (asfārinā), in reference to the people of Saba’ (see SHEBA), treat distances or stages of journey.

A further term, riḥla, in Q 106:2, proved unsettling to the exegetes. It is one of four uses of derivatives of r-h-l; the remaining three, Q 12:62, 70, 75, treat the saddle-bags (raḥl, pl. riḥāl) of Joseph’s (q.v.) brothers (see BROTHER AND BROTHERHOOD). The term riḥla occurs in Q 106 (Sūrat Quraysh — known also as Sūrat Ḥāf) ostensibly in reference to the pair of journeys taken by the Quraysh (q.v.) at set points of the year, one in the cold, the second in the hot season (see SEASONS). Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Tafsīr, ad loc) indicates that many of the early commentators (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR‘ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL) understood that the Quraysh, for reasons of commerce (“they were merchants”; see SELLING AND BUYING; CARAVAN), underwent a winter riḥla to Yemen (q.v.; usually, the view is, because of the favorable weather) and a summer riḥla to Syria (q.v.). While his apparent preference lies with this reading, al-Ṭabarī cites an alternate view, that both journeys were confined to the Hijāz (see GEOGRAPHY; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR‘ĀN). Later commentators would occasionally relate these journeys to the performance of the lesser and greater pilgrimages (‘umra and ḥajj, respectively; see PILGRIMAGE). In sum, and particularly in later commentaries, the exegetes are uncertain as to the meaning of the term other than as a reference to journeys of some kind undertaken by the Quraysh. Further questions surrounding riḥla are treated by, among others, P. Crone (Meccan trade, 204-14) and F.E. Peters (Muhammad, 88-92). The first such problem concerns the relationship of Sūrat Quraysh to Sūrat al-Fil (“The Elephant”; Q 106 and Q 105 respectively). Some early exegetes treat the two as a single sūra; al-Ṭabarī (Tafsīr, xxx, 197-8),
however, weighs in against this view (see I. Shahid, Two suras, for a modern counterview). Closely related problems arise in reference to ilāf, about which the commentaries are in frequent disagreement — both with regard to the reading (see readings of the Qurʾān; orthography; Arabic script) and the interpretation. If the frequently expressed view is correct, that it refers to arrangements permitted by God and executed by the Quraysh in order to create the proper conditions for safe passage, or, simply, the order created by God that allowed the Quraysh to survive, even thrive (see blessing; grace; mercy), one is still left with the question regarding the nature of these journeys.

Rihla takes on, beginning with the early Islamic tradition, the notion of travel as an act of piety (q.v.) and scholarship (see knowledge and learning). In a well-known hadith (see Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān), the Prophet urges believers to seek “knowledge, wisdom” (ilm) even as far as China, if need be. Drawing, if indirectly, on this impulse, and joining it frequently to participation in the pilgrimage (hajj), Muslim authors crafted a genre of travel literature (see trips and voyages). Premier examples of the genre are the works of Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) and Ibn Baṭṭūta (d. 770/1377). I.R. Netton (Rihla) provides a useful initial bibliography.

Joy and Misery

The state of happiness and that of wretchedness, respectively. References to joy and misery are frequent in the Qurʾān, are expressed either directly or by implication, and pertain both to this world and the next (see eschatology). Pleasures of this world are neither condemned nor forbidden (q.v.; see also asceticism; abstinance; wealth; poverty and the poor; lawful and unlawful), but believers are to be mindful about the source of these pleasures (see gratitude and ingratitude). Current wretchedness is not a sure sign of divine favor or disfavor (see blessing; grace; curse; reward and punishment; trial); the true believer, however, is to assist those who are less fortunate (see ethics and the Qurʾān; community and society in the Qurʾān). While the joys and miseries of the present life are not absent from the Qurʾānic discourse, it is the states of joy and misery experienced in the next life upon which the Qurʾān places its strongest emphasis (see reward and punishment).

Among the most recurrent themes is the relative worthlessness of the joys of this world in comparison with those of the hereafter, as in q 57:20, “The present life is but the joy of delusion.” The word rendered here as “joy” is matā’, which also occurs in the following passages: “Surely, this present life is but a passing enjoyment (matā’) and the hereafter is the abode [in which] to settle” (q 40:39); “And those things you have been given are only a provision (matā’) of this life and its adornment, and whatever is with God is better and more lasting” (q 28:60; also 13:26 and 42:36); and “The enjoyment (matā’) of this world is but little, and the hereafter is better for the one who is pious” (q 4:77; cf. 9:38). Equally significant is the contrast between the pleasures, delights, and enjoy-

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ments of this world and the punishment to be visited upon those who do not submit to God (see reward and punishment; hell and hellfire; fire). The forgers of lies against God are promised “a little enjoyment (matā’), and for them is a painful chastisement” (Q 16:117; see chastisement and punishment) or “A brief enjoyment. Then their abode is hell” (Q 3:197). Of like import are passages that emphasize accountability to God at the end of life. People who become rebellious after God has rescued them from the terrors of the sea are told, “O people, your rebellion (q.v.) is against yourselves — only a matā’ of this world’s life. Then to us is your return” (Q 10:29).

For the most part, words from the root m-t- have reference to material things rather than to the spiritual joys of the hereafter: they designate things that are useful, of benefit, that bring satisfaction, that meet needs or that inspire delight and pleasure. Such is the meaning of those verses that speak of a provision (matā’) for this world, as in Q 3:14: “Fair seeming to people is made the love of desires, of women, of sons (see children), of hoarded treasures of gold (q.v.) and silver and branded horses and cattle and tilth (see animal life; agriculture and vegetation). This is the provision (matā’) of the life of this world.” More basically, matā’ indicates the necessities of life, those things which are required to sustain existence and which afford pleasure. There is mention of a “‘goodly provision’ for you for a certain time” (Q 11:3), also of an “abode and provision for you for a time” (Q 7:24) and of “an enjoyment (matā’) for you and your cattle” (Q 79:33; 80:32). Firewood is both a reminder of God as provider of all things and a boon (matā’) to wayfarers in the desert (q.v.; Q 56:73) and the produce of the sea is characterized as a “provision for you and for the travelers” (Q 5:96; see hunting and fishing). Muslims are also warned of the desire of the unbelievers (see belief and unbelief) that they be heedless of their weapons and their possessions (Q 4:102; see instruments; fighting; expeditions and battles).

The material meaning is clear in such passages as that in which Muslims are commanded: “When you ask them [the Prophet’s wives; see wives of the prophet] for something (matā’) ask them from behind a veil” (q.v.; Q 33:33).

The concept of matā’ as material goods or possessions also appears in the story of Joseph (q.v.). Joseph’s brothers fabricate an explanation for the disappearance of their young sibling by telling their father that they had left Joseph behind to mind their baggage (matā’) while they ran races and that he had been eaten by a wolf (Q 12:17). Later, when Joseph’s brothers return to their father from their trip to buy corn in Egypt and open their things (amtā’), they find that their money has been returned to them (Q 12:65). In the same story, again, Joseph asserts (in reference to the king’s missing drinking cup; see cups and vessels) that he will hold responsible only him in whose possession the goods (matā’) are found (Q 12:79).

The essentially material nature of matā’ is underlined also by the commands to make honorable provision for divorced women (Q 2:241; see marriage and divorce). The affluent man should do so according to his means and the person in more straitened circumstances according to his, in agreement with established custom (Q 2:236). Those who die should also leave a bequest to surviving wives that will offer provision for a period of one year without their being turned out (Q 2:240; see inheritance).

Another set of meanings relating to joy is expressed in forms of the root f-r-ḥ which means “to be happy, delighted, cheerful,”
etc. The noun farḥa, signifying “joy,” does not appear as such in the Qurʾān, but there are frequent occurrences of other words from this root that point to the experience of joy. One such is the verb “to rejoice.”

Uses of this verb may be divided into those which indicate positive causes for rejoicing and those which refer to negative causes. One affirmative reason to rejoice is the mercy (q.v.) of God: “and when we cause men to taste mercy they rejoice in it” (q 30:36; 42:48); also “Say: let them rejoice in the grace and mercy of God. It is better than what they hoard” (q 10:58). A major source of joy is the revelation (see Revelation and Inspiration): “Rejoice in what was sent down to you” (q 13:36) and “on that day the faithful will rejoice in God’s help” (q 30:4; 5). God, indeed, controls all things for both good and ill “so that you do not grieve for what has escaped you nor rejoice in what he has given you” (q 57:23; see Freedom and Predestination). God both amplifies and diminishes the provision for men, and “they rejoice in this present life” (q 13:26). Addressing those who refused to participate with the Muslims in battle, the Qurʾān says that those lost are not killed or dead, but are alive and have sustenance “rejoicing in the grace God has bestowed on them” (q 3:170). Even mundane physical events are reason to rejoice as sailors do when they encounter a fair wind (q 10:22; see Air and Wind).

Rejoicing can occur, however, for reasons that are not in themselves good. When this happens, the joy expressed is often equivalent to boasting (see Boast), pride (q.v.), haughtiness, arrogance (q.v.) or ingratitude (see Gratitude and Ingratitude). For instance, at the time of the emigration (q.v.; hijra) to Medina (q.v.), “those who were left behind rejoiced in tarrying” (q 9:81). The present sent by the Queen of Sheba (see Bilqis) to King Solomon (q.v.) earned him a rebuke, as he exulted in the gift instead of recognizing that what God had given was better (q 27:36). Pride and arrogance were also involved in the case of Qārūn, biblical Korah (q.v.), the wealthy Jew whose people warned him: “Do not boast (lā tafrāḥ), God does not love boasters (farḥīn)” (q 28:76). The fate of previous peoples shows their haughtiness and its consequences; when messengers came to them with clear arguments “they exulted in the knowledge they already had” (q 40:83; see Proof; Knowledge and Learning) and what they had formerly mocked came to pass (see Mockery). When the unbelievers rejected what had been said to them but, nonetheless, experienced much good, “they rejoiced in what had been given them” (q 6:44), but God seized them suddenly. When the fortunes of a man change for the good after his having suffered, he may become ungrateful: “Certainly, he is exultant, boastful” (q 11:10). As for the unbelievers, “If something good happens to you, it grieves them, and if something bad happens to you, they take joy in it” (q 3:120; see Good and Evil). In a nearly identical verse the unbelievers also take credit for the hardship that may afflict the believers, “and they turn away rejoicing” (q 9:50). Pride in what they have is likewise characteristic of the various groups into which the Muslim community is divided, “each party rejoicing in what it has” (q 23:53; 30:32; see Parties and Factions). Finally, it is made clear that rejoicing or exulting in the wrong things has serious consequences: “And do not think that those who exult in what they have done . . . are free from punishment” (q 3:188). They will, indeed, endure the torments of hell because they “exulted in the land unjustly” (q 40:75).

Quite similar in usage and meaning are some words from the root b-sh-r, meaning “to be joyous or to rejoice in good tidings.” The Prophet is described in the Qurʾān as
a bashīr or bearer of good news (q.v.). Q 3:169 and 170 show that faraḣ and b-sh-r are synonymous terms in their meaning of rejoicing. Those who were killed in battle are joyous (farāḥ) in what God has given them of his grace and rejoice (yastabshirūna) for those who have not yet joined them that they have neither fear (q.v.) nor grief. They rejoice (yastabshirūna) in God’s favor and his grace (q 3:171). Physical events are also a source of joy as, for example, when the rain falls (q 30:48; see water; nature as signs). Of more spiritual import is revelation, which, as it comes, strengthens the faith (q.v.) of the believers, “and they are joyful” (yastabshirūna, q 9:124). There is none more faithful to a promise than God (see oaths; contracts and alliances; breaking trusts and contracts); the believers are commanded “rejoice, therefore, in the bargain you have made” (q 9:111). In the story of Lot (q.v.) there is an example of rejoicing in evil (q 15:67) when the townspeople come to him demanding the messengers whom Lot has accepted as his guests. On the last and terrible day of judgment (see last judgment) there will be some faces that are bright, “laughing, joyous” (q 80:39), while others will be covered with dust in gloom and darkness (q.v.). The unbelievers seek intercession (q.v.) with other than God though it is useless for them to do so. “When God alone is mentioned, the hearts (see heart) of those who believe not in the hereafter shrink (ashma’azzat), and when those besides him are mentioned, lo! they are joyful” (q 39:45).

Joy is also indicated by the word naʿīm from the root, n-‘-m, which means “to be happy, to be glad, to delight, to take pleasure in something, or to enjoy something.” Naʿīm may be translated as “bliss,” for it points to a particularly intense sense of joy, in fact, to the very pinnacle of delight and pleasurable feeling that humans may experience. In all seventeen of its occurrences in the Qurʾān, naʿīm is associated either with paradise (q.v.) or with the fate of the righteous on the day of judgment, as in Q 102:8: “On that day you will certainly be questioned about true bliss.” There shall be judgment for the evildoers (see evil deeds) and rewards for the righteous of whom “you know in their faces the radiance of bliss” (q 83:24); “Surely, the righteous are in bliss” (q 82:13; 83:22). The concept figures most often in descriptions of paradise which refer to gardens of bliss or gardens of delight (e.g. q 10:95; 22:56; see garden) where the righteous may dwell eternally (see eternity). “And when you look there, you see bliss and a great kingdom” (q 76:20). There are closely related words from the same root that also point to things which give joy. Niʿma, meaning “blessing (q.v.), favor, or grace (q.v.)” and used in connection with God’s beneficence to man, is found fifty times in the Qurʾān. There are also eighteen occurrences of verbs from the same root, all conveying the idea of blessing.

Another set of words that refers to joy comes from the root s-r-r, “to make happy, to gladden,” yielding also the nouns happiness and gladness. For example, when Moses (q.v.) commanded his people to sacrifice a cow, he replied to their request for a description of it, saying that it was “a golden cow, bright in color, gladdening the beholders” (q 2:66; see calf of gold). More significant is the use of the passive participle (masāʿuran) in connection with the judgment day. One who is given his book behind his back, although “he used to live among his people joyfully” will taste perdition and enter into burning fire (q 84:10-3). In contrast, he who is judged righteous “will return to his people joyfully” (q 84:9). God “will ward off the evil of that day from them and give them radiance and
gladness” (q 76:11). Again the theme of judgment day is the context for the use of another term signifying joy, namely āfākh (of the root f-k-h). The word is evidenced twice in predictions of the coming judgment, “The inhabitants of paradise today are busy in their rejoicing” (q 36:35) and “The dutiful will surely be in gardens and in bliss, rejoicing because of what their lord has given them” (q 52:17, 18). In q 11:105 another term for happiness, ṣād, is used in an eschatological context (cf. also q 11:108); the state of contentment of those assigned a heavenly reward is explicitly contrasted with the misery of those who are consigned to the fire of hell (q 11:106).

The Qurʾān speaks with great frequency of the reward, recompense or wage prepared for those who believe and are righteous (see justice and injustice). The references are far too numerous to be detailed here, but they may be explored by reference to terms from such roots as ‘dh-h, ‘q-h, th-w-h, j-z-y, and kh-r-j. Reward and punishment are, indeed, among the very central themes of the Qurʾānic message. As one of its consequences reward surely brings joy to those who receive it, since that reward is nothing less than an eternity in paradise, the ultimate joy to which the Qurʾānic revelation urges humankind to aspire.

As with the understanding of joy, the concept of misery also has a double aspect, one related to worldly life and the other to the hereafter. In mundane terms, misery is a consequence of poverty and deprivation (see poverty and the poor; despair; oppressed on earth, the). The pursuit of righteousness requires choosing the uphill road, one element of which is to feed “the poor man (miskin) lying in the dust” (q 90:16). In addition to the eschatological sense that is found in q 11:105-6 (mentioned above), derivatives of ṣh-q-y carry the sense of unprosperous (q 20:2, 123; 19:48 and others), of adversity (q 23:106), and of wretchedness (q 87:11). The Qurʾān exhibits a humanitarian concern for the deprived, especially in the chapters generally held to belong to the first parts of the revelation. Among the actions that define a pious Muslim is the giving of wealth (q.v.) to “the near of kin (see kinship), and the orphans (q.v.) and the needy and the wayfarer” (q 2:177; see hospitality and courtesy; journey). In short, it takes notice of the misery of poverty and distress. Endurance in times of distress and affliction are another mark of the pious believer. In accord with its broad insistence upon God’s sovereignty the Qurʾān underlines that it is he who delivered Noah (q.v.) and his people from their great distress and, indeed, is the deliverer from every distress (q 6:64; 21:76; 37:76, 115). There is also mention of God’s seizing people with misery and hardship (q 2:214; 6:42; 7:94; see trial; punishment stories). All of these references have to do with poverty and the pain that accompanies it.

Undoubtedly, however, the greatest misery is otherworldly, that of hell, the place for which all are destined who do not heed the message of God. Some of the most graphic passages of the Qurʾān are devoted to descriptions of the miseries to be endured in hell. Its inhabitants will be roasted (q 38:56), and will be made to suffer a blazing fire in which they must dwell forever. They will be paraded about Jannaham (hell) hobbled on their knees (q 19:68). As for the unbeliever, “Hell is before him, and he is given oozing pus to drink (see food and drink); he drinks it little by little and is not able to swallow it; and death comes to him from every side; yet he does not die” (q 14:16-7). “And whenever they try to escape from it, from anguish, they are turned back” (q 22:22). The torments of hell are a recompense, wage or reward for
the evil of the evildoers and for the denials of those who disbelieved. By their deeds they have earned a mighty chastisement, a painful punishment. The promise of eternal misery to come is one of the most persistent and compelling of all Qur'ānic themes.

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Judgment

Opinion or decision; pronouncement of such. Judgment is an integral part of the whole Qur'ānic ethos and is intrinsically linked to creation (q.v.) itself, which is not just a random act but teleological and divinely ordained (see cosmology; fate; freedom and predestination). God, who is the sole source of creation and sustenance (q.v.; see also blessing; food and drink), is also the lord (q.v.) of the day of judgment (see last judgment). Consequently, the concept of God’s final “judgment,” which eventually became one of the tenets of faith (q.v.; agā‘id, see also creeds), is found throughout the Qur`ān, with subsequent expansion and refinement by the exegetical tradition (see exegesis of the Qur`ān: classical and medieval). But judgment is not the prerogative of God alone. The Qur`ān, which acknowledges that in the course of their daily lives, humans, too, pass judgment, sets forth general (and, in certain cases, specific) guidelines by which humans should judge (see arbitration).

The Qur`ān contains no unique term for judgment, human or divine. Rather, a range of vocabulary is employed to convey the concept: ḥukm, qadā‘, din, hisāh, ra‘); rashād/rushd and others. Among these, ḥukm — a verbal noun of the verb ḥakama (from the triliteral root ḥ-k-m) meaning “to judge, give verdict or provide decision” — and its cognates occurs most comprehensively. One derivative, ḥakam (pl. ḥukkām), was historically associated with pre-Islamic judges or, rather, arbitrators (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur`ān), a meaning apparent in the Qur`ān in the prescription of appointing an arbitrator (ḥakam) from each family in case of domestic disputes between husband and wife (Q 4:35; see family; marriage and divorce; law and the Qur`ān). Wisdom (q.v.; ḥikma) and authority (q.v.; ḥukm) are also derived from the root letters ḥ-k-m. The correlation between judgment and wisdom is demonstrated in the description of God as both “the judge” (al-ḥākim and al-ḥakam) and “the wise” (al-ḥakim; cf. Gimaret, Noms divins, 74: 347-9; see God and His Attributes). God is also described in the Qur`ān as “the best of judges” (khāyir al-ḥākimīn, Q 7:87; 10:109; 12:80; cf. Gimaret, Noms divins, 74: 347-9) and “the most just of judges” (ḥaḵm al-ḥākimīn, Q 11:45 and 95:8; see justice and injustice).

The term ḥukm occurs in the early Meccan verses (see chronology and the Qur`ān) where human judgment of the pagans is contrasted to the divine judgment (Q 5:50; see polytheism and atheism; idolatry and idolaters). Ḥukm is also mentioned in the Qur`ān with regard to Muhammad’s prophetic authority to judge individuals (see prophets and
prophethood). Moses (q.v.), David (q.v.), Jesus (q.v.) and others are mentioned in this context, together with the Torah (q.v.; Q 5:44) and the Gospel (q.v.; Q 5:47). In this respect, though, special emphasis is placed upon Muḥammad, and the Qurān is called the “Arabic code/judgment” (hukm 'arabī, Q 13:37). Muḥammad was, in fact, invited to Medina (q.v.) because of his personal authority as a judge or arbiter in tribal disputes (see emigration; politics and the Qurān; tribes and clans).

Derivatives of another triliteral root, q-ḍ-ṣ, are also employed for judgment or decision in the Qurān; the verb (qādā) occurs frequently, referring primarily to an act of God, indicating his absolute power (cf. Q 6:58; 39:75; see Dāmghānī, Wujūḥ, ii, 138; cf. Abū l-Baqā', al-Kulliyāth, 7054; see power and impotence). The judicial decision (qāda) is generally considered as part of judgment (ḥukm), since whenever someone gives a verdict or a decree, judgment is invariably passed (cf. Tāj al-ʿarūs, s.v.). But in the Qurān, the verb ḥakama and its cognates usually relate to the Prophet’s judicial activities (e.g. Q 4:105), while the verb qadā, from which the word for “judge” (qādī) is derived, mainly refers (with the exception of Q 10:71 and 20:72) not to the judgment of a judge, but to a sovereign ordinance of either God or the Prophet. Both verbs occur simultaneously in Q 4:65: “But no, by your lord, they can have no real faith until they make you a judge (yuhakkimūka) in all disputes between them and thereafter find no resistance within their souls of what you decide (qadayta), but accept them with total conviction.” The first verb (yuhakkimūka) refers to the arbitrating aspect of the Prophet’s activity, while the second (qadayta) emphasizes the authoritative character of his decision, raising it to a level of belief (imān, see belief and unbelief). While al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538/1144; Kashshāf, ad loc.) and al-Bayḍāwī (d. prob. 716/1316-7; Taḥfīṣ, ad loc.) only stress the emphatic lām in the verse, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Taḥfīṣ, ad loc.) includes a reference to peoples’ sincerity of belief as dependent upon whether God or the Prophet were appointed as judges in their affairs and their not feeling any uneasiness about the ensuing decisions. Al-Qummī (d. 328/939; Taḥfīṣ, ad loc.), on the other hand, designates yuhakkimūka as referring to ‘Alī (see ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib) and the second verb (qadayta) to the Prophet’s decision regarding ‘Alī’s imāmāte (wakāya; see clients and clientage; friends and friendship).

Muḥammad had been sent by God to teach humans how to act, what to do and what to avoid in order to be judged favorably in the reckoning on the day of judgment (see good deeds; evil deeds; lawful and unlawful). In Islām, therefore, law is an all-embracing body of religious commandments (q.v.) and prohibitions (see forbidden; prohibited degrees); it consists not only of a legal system, but also of rules governing worship (q.v.) and ritual (see ritual and the Qurān). There is a recurrent insistence on the merits of forgiveness (q.v.) in the Qurān, with words such as ‘a′fā, sāhiba, gharāʾi (Arabic: ) in Q 2:109; 3:134; 23:96; 42:37, 40, 43; 64:14, etc. (see also mercy). Although a life (q.v.) for a life and an eye (q.v.) for an eye is ordained in the Qurān (see retaliation; blood money), there is a qualification pertaining to the action of those who voluntarily overlook the injustice done to them, a response which is regarded as atonement (q.v.) for their own actions.

Ethics (see ethics and the Qurān) is an integral part of law, and the Qurān includes many ethical injunctions such as to judge with justice (Q 4:58; 5:42; 6:152), not to offer bribes (Q 2:88), to give true evidence (Q 4:135; 5:8; see lie; witnessing and testifying) and to give full weight...
and measure (q. 17:35; 55:7-9; 83:1-3; see weights and measures). Transactions and contracts are to be committed to writing and fulfilled, especially in relation to returning a trust or deposit (amāna) to its owner (e.g. q. 2:283; see breaking trusts and contracts; contracts and alliances; selling and buying). Judging others wrongly is abhorred in the Qurān as is judging others on the basis of suspicions (q.v.; ẓanna). A different aspect of judgment is portrayed in q. 49:11-12, where believers are asked not to laugh (see laughter), label, defame or be sarcastic to others (see mockery) as, in God’s view, it is possible that those whom they judge are actually better than themselves. Explicit warning is given not to enquire curiously into the affairs of others as well as not to blame, set up one against the other, talk about each other or backbite (see gossip), the last-mentioned of which is equated with eating the flesh of one’s dead brother (see brother and brotherhood).

Dīn is another expression for judgment in the Qurān, although its etymology lends itself to two additional meanings: custom (see sunna) and religion (q.v.). Whatever their differences in origin and meaning, these meanings are conceptually related. Thus, dīya, which means debt (q.v.) due at a fixed time, semantically connects to dīn as custom or usage, which, in its turn, gives the idea of God-given direction (see astray; path or way). Judging involves guiding someone in the right direction, often through rebuke and retribution. Arabic philologists often derive dīn from dāna lubu meaning to submit to the obligations imposed by God (for dīn in the sense of obedience [q.v.], see Jeffery, Fox vocab., 131-3; Izutsu, God, 219-29). “The judge” (al-dāyyān) is one of God’s names, which people also applied to ‘Āli b. Abī Ṭālīb as the sage of the community (cf. Līsān al-Arab, s.v.; for al-dāyyān as an attribute of God, cf. also Gimaret, Noms divins, 350-1).

Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013; Kitāb al-Tanbih, 345) distinguishes several possible meanings of dīn, including judgment in the sense of retribution, in the sense of decision (ḥukm), as well as of doctrine (maddhab) and the religion of truth (q.v.; dīn al-ḥaqīq). The sense of judgment and retribution occurs frequently in the early stūras of the Meccan period: four times independently, and twelve as part of the expression “the day of judgment” (yawm al-dīn). This is synonymous with “the day of reckoning” (yawm al-hisāb, q. 40:27; 14:41; cf. 37:20, 26, 53), “the day of resurrection” (yawm al-qiyāma), the “return” (ma‘ād) and “the hour” (al-sā‘a, see eschatology; apocalypse).

Many other names are given in the Qurān; as many as 1,700 verses refer to the resurrection (q.v.; cf. Rasā‘il Ḥikmān al-Safā‘i, iii, 286-7, which cites numerous names for the final day, such as yawm al-faṣl, yawm al-tanādi, yawm al-āzīfa).

Eschatological judgment in the Qurān is inevitable (q. 39:10) and God is swift in dealing with the account (hisāb). In q. 75:26-8 there is reference to an initial judgment occurring immediately after death, while other passages in q. 56 (Sūrat al-Wāqī‘a, “The Event”), speak of the inevitable event, alluding to the hour of judgment (al-sā‘a), when each soul will be evaluated according to what it has earned (see good and evil; record of human actions). At the final resurrection the whole present order gives way to a new one as portrayed in q. 14:48 (see death and the dead). The rendering of accounts — required from all people — is to be given to God alone (q. 13:40; 26:113). God is “prompt in demanding an account” (q. 2:202, 3:19 and 196) of each person’s actions, which will have been inscribed on a “roll.” The day of judgment is described as the day when the
world will be rolled up like a scroll and nothing on the scales of God’s judgment will be overlooked: an atom’s weight of good will be manifest and so will an atom’s weight of evil. If the good deeds outweigh the bad, people will receive their accounts in their right hands and receive their reward, while those whose deeds are unfavorable will receive them in their left hands and be punished (see REWARD AND PUNISHMENT).

“The Heights” (Q 7, Sūrat al-A’rāf) mentions those on the heights who hear and address the people of paradise (q.v.; Q 7:46-7; see PEOPLE OF THE HEIGHTS). It is only the sanctified, who, having perfected themselves, will enter paradise. Those who are not perfect will enter an intermediary state as they undergo final purification.

“The Event” (Q 56, Sūrat al-Wāqī’a) seeks to judge three types of souls: the companions of the left, the companions of the right and those that are foremost (al-sābiqūn), to be equated with those who are brought close to God’s throne (al-muqarrabūn, see THRONE OF GOD). Clearly, there seems to be a fundamental difference of degree, between which some Shī‘a and the Sūfis did not hesitate to distinguish (see ŞÛFISM AND THE QUR’ĀN): those who achieve salvation (q.v.) and those who attain beatitude. In their view, salvation is the reward for the exoteric religion, while the aim of the esoteric path is the beatific vision (see FACE OF GOD; SEEING AND HEARING; VISION AND BLINDNESS; VISIONS).

Judgment invariably involves an evaluation of right or wrong, true or false and good or bad (see PAIRS AND PAIRING). Philosophically, it involves the rational faculty as observed by the authors of the Rasūl Ikhwān al-Ṣafā‘, who regard “judgment on things as a product of the intellect (q.v.).” In the Qur’ān, this meaning is apparent in the word ṭarīkh, used in numerous verses (e.g. Q 6:40) in which God asks people about their thoughts at the time when the wrath (see ANGER) of God will befall them and when the hour of judgment is near. Ṭayy can be used in a variety of ways: seeing physically with one’s eyes, considering or perceiving things with one’s heart (q.v.) and even sensing things through one’s beliefs (cf. Lisān al-‘Arab, s.v.; see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING). It can also connote a belief about something or someone and for wrong belief, God’s judgment falls upon people as punishment (cf. Ṭaj al-‘arūs, s.v.; see CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT). In the debates of the fourth/tenth century among the various legal schools, the ahl al-ra‘a‘ were those who were accused by the ahl al-hadith of practicing analogical deduction (qiyyūs) by giving judgments according to their opinions, as they could not find an appropriate prophetic tradition to support their arguments (see HADITH AND THE QUR’ĀN; TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINES OF QUR’ĀNIC STUDY).

Another Qur’ānic lexeme used in connection with judgment is rashad/rushd. In Q 4:6, God speaks of giving orphans (q.v.) their wealth when they attain “sound judgment” (rashd, see MATURITY). People differ with regard to the meaning of rashd among the interpretations of the passage that he discusses, al-Ṭabarī (Tafsīr, iv, 252) relates that some consider it to be soundness of intellect and righteousness in religion. Al-Zamakhsharī (Kashf, i, 501) also mentions several traditions: Abū Hanīfa (d. 150/767) explained that rashd was informed guidance on all aspects of good actions, while Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/686-8) maintained that it was righteousness in using intellect and preserving wealth (q.v.), whereas Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) and al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) held that it was righteousness in religion.

The notion of judgment raises the issue
of intercessory disputation on behalf of the soul (q.v.; Q 4:109), which invariably involves matters of repentance (taubah, see Repentance and Penance), intercession (q.v.; shafā‘a) and compassion (rahma). Not all Sunnī scholars accept the possibility of prophetic intercession (shafā‘a), and those who do argue about whether it applies only to Muhammad or to all prophets. The Shi‘a, on the other hand, accept this doctrine without question and also extend it to the Imāms (see iImām; shī‘ism and the Qur‘ān). Although Q 4:64 elucidates the concept of intercession (shafā‘a), mentioning the Prophet’s role, other verses, such as Q 16:111, speak of the “day that every soul shall come debating on its own behalf.”

In conclusion, it may be said that although the final, eschatological judgment dominates the Qur‘ānic discourse, the concept is not absent from discussions of the present world, in which humans are called to judge fairly, and by what is best.

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Bibliography


Jūdī

Mount (Jabal) Jūdī, also written Djūđī (modern Turkish, Cudi), the name of a mountain mass and its highest point in SE Turkey, near the borders of Iraq (q.v.) and Syria (q.v.). Mount Jūdī is attested once in the Qur‘ān, at Q 11:44, as al-Jūdī, the site where Noah’s (q.v.) ark (q.v.) rested on dry land after the flood (see Myths and Legends in the Qur‘ān; Scripture and the Qur‘ān; Geography). There has been considerable disagreement about the actual site to which this story refers. Largely due to western Christian misinterpretation of the Hebrew “hārē Arūrā,” literally “mountains of Ararat” (Gen 8:4), as Mount Ararat (q.v.), the passage has been interpreted as referring to a single mountain since about the tenth century. Thus, the tallest mountain near the present-day border of Turkey with Armenia, once known as Masik, came to be named Mount Ararat and is generally identified today as the site of the ark’s landing. In the Hebrew scriptures the name Ararat was actually the Hebrew rendition of Uraštū, the name of the ancient kingdom that covered the territory of eastern Turkey, and included both mountains, today’s Ararat and Jabal Jūdī. This extensive mountainous area has been known variously as Qardū in Aramaic and Syriac texts; Gordyene by Greek, Roman, and later Christian writers; and Kordukh in Armenian. The Jewish-Aramaic Targum Onkelos, possibly based on an earlier Babylonian tradition, translates the Hebrew of Genesis 8:4 as “ṭūrē Qardū” (“mountains of Qardū”) and later rabbinic sources have generally described Qardū as the mountains where the ark rested (cf. Tabarî, History 366 n. 1137). The variant forms of this name led some scholars to connect Qardū wrongly with Kurd and Kurdistan, despite the difference between K and Q.

According to Yāqūt (Mujām, ii, 144-5),
Jūdī in the Qurʾān seems to have denoted a mountain in Arabia, a designation possibly based on earlier Arabian traditions (see PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QURʾĀN). The transfer of the designated locale from Arabia to upper Mesopotamia and the territory of Urartu must have taken place early during the Arab invasion of that region. Today, the areas around both Mount Ararat and Jabal Jūdī are filled with memorials and legends referring to the flood and the life of Noah (q.v.) and his family after they left the ark. This holds true about a particular structure, once a monastery, on the supposed site of Noah’s worship of God after the flood. According to Le Strange, from the village of Jazīrat Ibn ʿUmar, Jūdī was visible to the east, with the “Mosque of Noah” on its summit and Qaryat Thamānīn (“the village of eighty”) at the mountain’s foot (Lands, 94). The village’s name refers to one of several traditions about how many humans survived the flood in the ark, which vary between seven survivors (Noah, his three sons and their spouses) and eighty, including seventy-three descendants of Seth, son of Adam. This village is supposedly where Noah himself settled after the flood and although all the survivors except for Noah and his immediate descendants perished, all of today’s humanity is descended from those seven or eight. Because of the Qurʾānic reference to al-Jūdī and to its early identification with Noah, the mountain and its surrounding area became a pilgrimage site for Muslims, Jews and eastern Christians.

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Jug see CUPS AND VESSELS

Jugular Vein see ARTERY AND VEIN

Justice and Injustice

Equitable action according to God’s will; action that transgresses God’s bounds. One of the key dichotomies in the Qurʾān, it separates divine from human action, moral from immoral behavior (see ETHICS AND THE QURʾĀN). The Qurʾān uses several different words and metaphors to convey this moral balance. ʿAdl and qisṭ can be used to speak of justice as equitable action but justice can also be defined as correct or truthful action, in which case ʿaḍāl or ḥaqq may be used. Metaphors (see METAPHOR) such as the balance (mīzān, see WEIGHTS AND MEASURES; INSTRUMENTS), inheritance (q.v.) shares (nasīb) and even brotherhood (see BROTHER AND BROTHERHOOD) can describe the underlying principles of justice. The usual word for injustice in the Qurʾān is zulm, which has the sense of stepping beyond the boundaries of right action (see BOUNDARIES AND PRECEPTS), specifically, a zālim is one who does wrong to others or to himself. But human injustice can also be expressed in the larger sense of sinning, opposing God, or ascribing partners to God, for which there are many terms, such as faḥshā and baghy (see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM; DISOBEDIENCE).

In post-Qurʾānic Arabic, ʿadl became the technical term for justice and the Muʾtaẓīl theologians were known as aḫlu lʿ-ʿadl.
wa-l-tawḥīd, “the people of justice and unity,” for their defense of the doctrine of God’s essential justice (see muʿṭazilīs; theology and the Qurʾān). The Qurʾān also uses the term ʿadl but relatively rarely (only fourteen times in the sense of justice or equity) and in a much broader fashion. While God’s words are described as ʿadl in Q 6:115, more common is the use of ʿadl or its verbal derivatives to mean equal treatment of wives or disputants (Q 4:3, 58, 129; 5:8; 42:15; 49:9; see women and the Qurʾān; family; debate and dispute; social interactions). The Qurʾānic range is demonstrated by the use of three synonyms for ʿadl: qist, “equity,” in the case of just witnesses (Q 5:8; cf. 4:135), siyy, “truthfulness,” in Q 6:115 and ʿhsān, “good deeds” (q.v.), in Q 16:60. Nowhere in the Qurʾān is God called al-ʿadl, although this is often listed as one of his most beautiful names (see God and His attributes).

As for the many other Qurʾānic terms that may denote justice, most continue the metaphor of symmetry and balance such as the māzān (pl. mawāżin), the “scales of justice,” in which good deeds are weighed on the last day (Q 7:8-9; 23:102-3; 101:6-7; see last judgment). But scholars have argued that the idea of justice must be extended to include other metaphors; for instance, Khadduri (Islamic conception, 7) sees an abstract principle of equal rights in the declaration that the believers are brothers (Q 49:10). Further, Rahbar (God of justice, 231-2) points out that ḥaqq, “truth or reality,” may also be translated as “justice.” So, Q 16:3 (khalaqa l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa bi-l-ḥaqqa) should be interpreted as “He created the heavens and the earth with justice.”

Two of these metaphors are connected in Q 7:8, which reads, “The weighing on that day is just (wa-l-waznu yawma ʿidhīn al-ḥaqqa).” But here Arberry and Rahbar both translate ḥaqq as “true” even though al-Bayḍāwī (Anwār) and the Jalālayn gloss it as ʿadl; al-Qurtubī (Jaʿāni) regards the whole phrase as a metaphor for justice.

The fact that the Arabic could support both readings indicates that the technical differentiation of ʿadl and ḥaqq is a post-Qurʾānic development. Wagner (La justice, 13-4) has argued that the absence of a technical term for justice in the Qurʾān allows for a conception of justice which transcends human language.

A similar semantic range is found for injustice. Jauw, the technical word for injustice in classical theology, is not found in the Qurʾān; rather, several words are used to convey the sense of injustice. For example, Q 16:90 lists three terms as having a meaning opposite to ʿadl: “Surely God bids to justice (ʿadl), good deeds and giving to relatives; and he forbids indecency (al-fahshā), disobedience (al-munkar) and insolence (al-baghṭy).” Of these words, the first two are mentioned in dozens of other places in the Qurʾān. The last, while less common, is also listed as an antonym to ʿadl in Q 49:9. Another word indicative of injustice is tāḥīt (in fourteen places this word, as well as other derivatives of t-gḥ-y, are connected with unbelief, kufr; see e.g. Q 2:257; 5:64; see belief and unbelief; insolence and obstinacy; idols and images; ḥadīm is also placed in apposition to ḵulm in Q 20:112.

Ḵulm is most usually a general word for sin or transgression and so is found as a synonym for zūr, “falsehood” (see lie), in Q 25:3 and for muṣrim, “sinner,” in Q 7:40-1 (see also Q 11:116). The transgressor (zālim, pl. zālimūn) is referred to over one hundred times. For example, in Q 2:35 Adam and Eve (q.v.) are warned that they will be among the zālimūn if they transgress God’s command not to touch the tree; theft (q.v.; Q 5:38-9; 12:75) and lying (e.g. Q 6:21) also make one a zālim (Izutsu, Concepts, 164-72). But while ʿadl is never used in explicit reference to God, ḵulm is; in fact, Q 20:112 dem-
onstrates a technical usage of *zulm* to refer to God’s actions, which are explicitly not unjust (also Q 3:108; 6:131; 11:117). Furthermore, the emphatic form *zalām* is only used as a negative description of God; it is found in five exhortations that declare that God is not unjust (e.g. Q 3:182). The common Qur’ānic phrase “those who wronged themselves” (*anfusahum yazlimūn* in Q 2:57 and nine other places; *zalāmū anfusahum* in Q 3:117 and five other places; see also *zālimun li-nafsihi* in Q 18:33; 35:32; 37:113) almost always refers to ancient peoples who were punished, or will be damned to hell, because they did not recognize God’s prophets (see generations; prophets and prophethood; punishment stories; hell and hellfire). *Zalama nafsahū* in Q 2:231 and 65:1, however, refers to those who do not follow proper divorce proceedings (see marriage and divorce). In terms of God, therefore, injustice may be seen as the diametrical opposite of justice but in terms of human behavior, injustice is not a lack of justice as much as it is an active resistance of God’s guidance. Q 65:1 specifies: “the one who transgresses the bounds of God has wronged himself” (*wa-man yata’adda lūdūda llāhi fa-qad zalama nafsahu*).

Interestingly, the very words for just actions also share Arabic roots with metaphors for injustice. So Q 6:150 defines the unbelievers as those who make something else equivalent to their lord (*wa-hum bi-rabbhīm ya’dīlūn*, see also Q 6:1, 70). Adala ‘an means “to deviate from the right course,” and so Lane (v, 1972) understands Q 27:60 as “they are a people who deviate” (*qaumun ya’dīlūn*). Attempts to reconcile these divergent usages in the Qur’ān are attributed to very early sources (see, for instance, the explanation of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān [d. 86/705] in *Lisān al-ʿArab*, xi, 431-2; partial trans. in Khadduri, *Islamic conception*, 7-8). The *qāṣītūn* also deviate from the right course in Q 72:14-5, where they are placed in opposition to the *muslimūn*.

Moving from semantics to the broad teachings of the Qur’ān, one can isolate three fields of moral action in terms of justice and injustice: human-human relations; human-divine relations; and God’s own activity. As for the first category, specific areas addressed by the Qur’ān include both public and private affairs, such as fair measures in the market (Q 6:152; see markets), fair testimony (Q 4:135; 5:8, 95, 106; 65:2; see witnessing and testifying; contracts and alliances), just recording of debts (Q 2:282; see debt), impartial judgments (Q 4:38; see judgment) and just treatment of co-wives (Q 4:3, 129; see concubines) and orphans (q.v.; Q 4:3; 10; 6:152). There are also general injunctions to act and speak in a just manner (Q 5:8; 6:152; 16:90; 49:9). These injunctions are cited extensively in books of Islamic law and works on ethics (see law and the Qur’ān). The existence of these exhortations is itself Qur’ānic recognition that human beings are unjust to one another, particularly when they are in positions of power (see power and impotence; oppression), Q 4:110 specifically refers to those who consume the assets of orphans unjustly (*zulman*) and Q 4:129 simply states: “You will not be able to be equitable (li dīlīh) among [your] wives.”

God’s justice in relationship to his creatures has already been mentioned in metaphors of the scales of justice and the many Qur’ānic references to his judgment on the last day. But God also created the heavens (see heaven and sky) and the earth (q.v.) with justice (Q 6:73 and eleven other places; see creation; cosmology), and his words of revelation continue that work of justice (Q 6:115; see revelation and inspiration; word of God). In fact, God is intimately involved in all human actions
“for God in the Qur’anic conception interferes in the minutest details of human affairs” (Izutsu, Concepts, 166; see Freedom and Predestination). Acts among humans, therefore, are not merely in terms of human justice but rather they are to occur within God’s bounds (ḥudūd ilāh). Further, when speaking of divorce in Q 2:231 and 65:1, the Qur’ān uses language otherwise reserved for judgment day (“he wronged himself,” ḏalāma nafsah) to describe those who would transgress God’s rules.

The third category, God’s own characterization as just, is dealt with primarily in terms of his right to judge humankind. The defense of this right is expressed in an account of history repeated throughout the Qur’ān. Not only did God create the heavens and the earth, he asked the souls (see soul) of all humankind to testify: “Am I not your lord?” (Q 7:172), thereby establishing his right to judge them, should they begin worshipping idols (see idols and images). According to the Qur’ān, human beings forgot that covenant (q.v.) and went astray (q.v.), despite the many prophets and warners (see Warner) sent to remind them. In going astray, of course, they wronged themselves (ẓalāmū anfusahum, see above). And as for the many peoples whom God destroyed for their wickedness, he would never have done so unjustly (bi-zulm, Q 6:131 and 11:117). As mentioned above, God’s scales for weighing good deeds are just and he will not begrudge anyone (lā yaẓīmū) the weight of an ant (Q 4:40). The Qur’ān specifically complains about those who prefer the judgment (ḥukm) of the Age of Ignorance (q.v.) to the judgment of God (Q 5:50). The Qur’ānic exhortation that believers render justice and be just in their actions, therefore, is part of their acceptance of this cosmology of justice.

Although, as noted above, the Qur’ān does not call God al-adīl, this epithet is found in lists of God’s most beautiful names. In his treatise on these names, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) finds an elegant connection among the various Qur’ānic images of justice and God’s creative act. In allusion to Q 82:6-7 which reads: “your generous lord who created you and shaped you and wrought you in symmetry (ʾada-laka, see Biology as the Creation and Stages of Life),” he writes: “By creating these [bodily] members he is generous, and by placing them in their particular placement he is just…. He suspended the hands and arms from the shoulders, and he had suspended them from the head or the loins or the knees, the imbalance resulting from that would be evident…. What you should know, in short, is that nothing has been created except in the placement intended for it” (Ghazālī, Names, 93-4). By focusing on God’s intended placement as evidence of his justice, al-Ghazālī both displays his orthodox theology (God’s actions define justice, not the reverse) and also the lexical opposition of justice to injustice (ẓulm), literally “that which is out of place.”

Al-Ghazālī’s attempt to reconcile Qur’ānic conceptions of justice and injustice is the product of centuries of theological speculation. Already in the years immediately following Muhammad’s death, Muslims witnessed vast examples of human injustice during the civil wars (fiṭan) that tore apart the early Muslim community. Questions naturally arose as to God’s role in acts of human injustice. The Khārijīs (q.v.) argued that the grave sinner (fāsiq) was no longer a Muslim and must be combated with the sword in this world, while others said that God alone would punish the grave sinner at judgment day. These debates continued to ask whether human and divine acts are separate from one another. Mu’tazilīs began to argue that God was essentially just and therefore bound to do the better, while human
beings could commit injustices by acting against God’s will. Others understood God’s action and human action to be intimately connected, with nothing occurring outside of God’s will. As a result, Qur’anic interpreters derived two distinctive notions of justice from the Qur’an: Mu’tazilis like al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144) found that “God’s justice implies ‘human free will’” and their opponents, like al-Baydawi (d. 716/1316), maintained “that God’s justice lies in his dealing as possessor and Lord, and in making decisions according to his will” (Ibrahim, Concept, 14). Al-Baydawi’s position thus closely mirrors that of the Ash’arīs, who held that God’s actions were by definition just.

Islamic law also offers interpretations of Qur’anic justice but does so largely by maintaining a separation between divine and human justice. The classical legal handbooks were organized into two major categories, beginning with duties owed to God (‘ibādāt), followed by duties owed to other human beings (mu‘āmalāt). Such a categorization may have developed from a pseudo-Aristotelian conception of justice (Heffening, Aufbau, 107). Books of legal theory dealt primarily with questions of procedure and interpretation and only rarely with the relationship between divine and human justice. The Qur’anic conception of divine justice as invading all aspects of human interaction played, however, a key role in defining court procedure. At least in theory, the Islamic judge was only to render justice on the basis of the apparent evidence, and was not responsible for the actual truth of a case, since ultimately the plaintiffs were responsible to God (Heffening, Aufbau, 107). This also explains the wide use of oaths (q.v.) in the Islamic court to ascertain the truth of a matter (following the Qur’anic precedent in Q 2:4:4-9; see BREAKING TRUSTS AND CONTRACTS; CHASTITY). Yet unlike court function in Judaism, court punishments in Islam are not in lieu of eternal punishment. Rather, God reserves the right to exact further justice on the last day (see Q 5:37; 24:19). The legal principles of istihsans and maṣlaḥa have been used by medieval and modern reformers to argue that general Qur’anic injunctions to promote justice may override specific Qur’anic laws. The principle of istihsan is sometimes based on Q 39:55, “follow the best (ahsana) of that which has been sent down to you” (see also Q 39:18). Likewise, the virtue of equity (insāf), a word not found in the Qur’an in Islamic ethical treatises may be seen as a continuation of principles of equity and justice in the Qur’an.

The movement from the injustice of the Age of Ignorance (jāhiliyya) to the justice of the Muslim community, described in the Qur’an, has become one of the central teachings of the Islamic religion. This movement is not merely a historical event, played out in the revelation of the Qur’an to the Prophet but it is also the practical theology of the Qaḍi’s court, the motivating force of proselytizers (see INVITATION) and the explanation of God’s continued action in this world. This movement will be complete on the last day, when each soul will be rewarded for what it has earned, and there will be no injustice (Q 40:17).

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Ka’ba

A cube shaped building situated inside the Great Mosque (al-masjid al-ḥarām) at Mecca. Although the term ka’ba is attested only twice in the Qur’ān (Q 5:95, 97), there are other Qur’ānic expressions that have traditionally been understood as designations for this structure (i.e. certain instances of al-bayt [lit. “the house,” see house, domestic and divine]; as well as of masjid [see mosque]). In Islamic tradition, it is often referred to as “the house (or sanctuary) of God” (bayt Allāh), and for the vast majority of Muslims it is the most sacred spot on earth. The name Ka’ba is generally explained as indicating its “cubic” or “quadrangular” (murabba’) form.

Description

Its ground plan is an irregular oblong, the size of which has been variously stated: a reliable approximation is 40 feet (12 meters) long, 33 feet (10 m.) wide and 50 feet (15 m.) high. Its four corners are aligned approximately north (the “Iraqi” corner), east, south (the “Yemeni” corner) and west. Built into its eastern corner is a large black stone, known as al-ḥajar al-aswad or al-rubah, which is the object of special veneration when worshippers make the ritual sevenfold circumambulation (tawāf) around the outside of the Ka’ba (see worship).

The building has one door, situated towards the eastern end of the northeastern wall and raised about six feet (2 m.) above ground level. It is accessible from steps that are wheeled into place but worship takes place around and outside the Ka’ba. Entry inside, although highly prized, is not a required act, and access to the interior is limited. Adjacent to the northwestern wall is a semi-circular area known as al-ḥijr, demarcated by a low wall (sometimes referred to as al-ḥaṭīm) that does not quite touch the wall of the Ka’ba. The building is normally enclosed in an ornately decorated covering cloth known as the kiswa, which is renewed annually.

The Ka’ba in Islamic practice

The Ka’ba is the focus of the ḥajj (major pilgrimage) and the ’umra (minor pilgrimage), in that each begins and ends with the ceremony of circumambulation (see pilgrimage). The ḥajj, however, involves the performance of rituals at a distance from the Ka’ba, outside Mecca itself, and the law places a greater importance on some of those rituals — such as the “standing” (wuqūf) at ’Arafā (see ’arafāt) and the
slaughtering of animals at Minā — than it does upon the circumambulation of the Ka’ba. To miss the ṣawāqif is usually counted as invalidating the ḥajj, while the day of slaughtering (10th of Dhū l-Hijja; see CALENDAR) is often identified with “the great day of the ḥajj” (Q 9:3; see SLAUGHTER). Wellhausen proposed that Muḥammad linked pre-Islamic ḥajj ceremonies that had nothing to do with Mecca (q.v.) and the Ka’ba, with those of the ‘umra, which were performed in Mecca around the Ka’ba, in order to give the Islamic ḥajj a greater association with Mecca.

Muslims must face towards the Ka’ba when performing the obligatory prayers (salāt, see PRAYER) and certain other rituals such as the slaughter of animals for consumption or as religious offerings (see CONSECRATION OF ANIMALS; SACRIFICE). The dead are buried facing towards it (see DEATH AND THE DEAD). In other words, the Ka’ba marks the qibla (q.v.), the sacred direction that distinguishes Islam from other monotheistic religions. It figures large in traditions about pre-Islamic Arabia (the jāhilyya, see AGE OF IGNORANCE) and the life of the Prophet (see SĪRA AND THE QUR’ĀN), and ʿAlī (see ʿALI B. ʿABĪ TĀLĪB) is sometimes reported to have been inside it. It features only to a limited extent in Muslim eschatology (q.v.), which centers much more on Jerusalem (q.v.).

The Ka’ba and the Qur’ān

The expression al-ka’ba occurs only twice in the Qur’ān (Q 5:95, 97) and commentators naturally identify each as references to the Ka’ba at Mecca. In addition there are many other passages which are understood as alluding to it, using the term al-bayt (house or sanctuary), sometimes qualified by an adjective such as “sacred” (ḥarām), “ancient” (ʿāṯiq) or “visited” (? ma’mūr, Q 52:4).

Q 5:95 occurs in regulations which prohibit the muḥrīm (a person who has entered the sacral state of ḥārām that is obligatory for anyone making ḥajj or ‘umra) from killing game (see RITUAL PURITY; HUNTING AND FISHING). It lays down that, if a muḥrīm does intentionally kill a wild animal, he must provide as compensation (jazā), from among the animals of the pasture (al-naʾam), an equivalent to the animal killed, “as an offering to reach the Ka’ba” (ḥadīyan bīlīgha l-ka’batī). Q 5:97 tells us that God has made the Ka’ba, the sacred house (al-ka’ba al-bayt al-ḥarām), a support (? qiyyām; commentators debate the precise meaning) for the people, together with the sacred month (see MONTHS), the (animal) offerings (al-hady) and the garlands (al-qalāʾid; which are placed on the necks of the offerings).

Some of the passages in which “the house” (al-bayt) is understood to mean the Ka’ba associate it with Abraham (q.v.) and, slightly less consistently, Ishmael (q.v.). Q 2:125 alludes to God’s making “the house” a place of meeting (? matbāba) and sanctuary (amn), and commanding that Abraham’s “standing place” (maqām Ibrāhīm) should be a place of prayer. It goes on to refer to God’s ordering Abraham and Ishmael, “Purify my house for those who circumambulate, make retreat, bow and prostrate [there]” (an ṭahhirā baytiya bīl-tāʿifāna wa-l-ʿāksifāna wa-l-rukkāʾi l-sujūdī, see BOWING AND PROSTRATION). That list of those for whom it is to be purified is repeated with a slight variant in Q 22:26 which recalls that God “prepared”(? bāw-waʾa) for Abraham the place of the house and commanded him to purify “my house for those who circumambulate, stand, bow and prostrate [there].” Q 2:127 alludes to Abraham and Ishmael “raising the foundations” of the house (wa-tham l-yaḍaʿa wa-l-maʾmūn l-bayti wa-l-Ismāʿīlī). These verses are understood as referring to the building or rebuilding of the Ka’ba by
Abraham and Ishmael at God’s command (see further below) and q 3:96, which says that the first house established for humankind was that at Bakka (inna awwala baytin sudi’a lil-nasi’ la-lladhi bi-Bakkata), is also frequently interpreted as a reference to the origins of the Ka’ba.

Other Qur’anic references to the house associate it with hajj, ‘umra and animal offerings. Q 3:97 (following the immediately preceding mention of the “first house” at Bakka) states that in it are clear signs — the standing place of Abraham, that those who enter it have security, and that those of humankind who are able have the duty to God of the hajj of the house (hajju l-bayti). Q 2:158 assures those who make the hajj of the house, or ‘umra, that there is no harm if they circumambulate al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa (see ṣafā and marwa), which are among the signs (q.v.) of God (inna l-Ṣafā wa-l-Marwata min sha’āri in ilāhi). Al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa are the names given to two small hills outside the “sacred mosque” (al-masjid al-harām) in Mecca. Circumambulation of them, or rather passage between them (usually called sa’y), is part of the ritual required both for the hajj and the ‘umra, and the commentators explain in various ways why it might have been thought that making tawaf of them involved “harm.”

Q 5:2 includes among a number of things which must not be profaned “those going to the sacred house, seeking merit and pleasure from their lord” (yabtaghāna fadlan min rabbikum wa-rhidwānan). Q 2:29, following a brief setting out of the duty of hajj in connection with the slaughter and consumption of animals, says that after the food has been eaten those taking part should end their (ritual) dishhevelment, fulfil their vows and make circumambulation of the ancient house (bi-l-bayti l-‘aṭīqī). Q 2:233 indicates that the animals which are to be offered may be used until a certain time, after which they are to be brought to the ancient house (for slaughter).

Q 8:33 makes it clear that those who “disbelieve” also worship at the house, although their prayer (salāt) is merely whistling and handclapping (mukā’ar wa-taṣdiyatan, see belief and unbelief; mockery). Q 106:3 urges that Quraysh (q.v.) should worship “the lord of this house” in gratitude for what he has done for them. In Q 52:4 there is an oath, “by the visited (?) house!” (wa-l-bayti l-ma’mūri, see oaths). Sometimes this is understood not as referring to the Ka’ba itself but to its prototype in the highest heaven (see heaven and sky), constantly circumambulated by angels (see angel) beneath the throne of God (q.v.).

The frequent Qur’anic expression al-masjid al-harām (Q 2:144, 149, 150, 191, 196, 217; 5:2; 8:34; 9:7, 19, 26; 17:1; 22:23; 46:25, 27) also sometimes seems to have the general sense of “sanctuary,” just like bayt, and in commentary is occasionally equated with the Ka’ba. The most obvious example concerns the so-called qibla verses (Q 2:144, 149, 150) in which God orders the believers to turn their faces towards al-masjid al-harām. These verses are understood as the revelation that specifies the qibla for Muslims. Some commentators argue that the precise direction of the qibla is the Ka’ba, or even a particular point of the Ka’ba, and this leads them to read al-masjid al-harām here as equivalent to the Ka’ba.

Historically, the mosque containing the Ka’ba in Mecca, known as al-masjid al-harām, is reported to have been built only after the death of the Prophet. The traditional scholars assert, however, that in pre-Islamic times the area around the Ka’ba was known as al-masjid al-harām even though there was no building so-called. In this way they avoid the apparent anachronism involved in accepting that all of the Qur’ān had been revealed before the death
of the Prophet and that its references to al-
masjid al-ḣarām apply to the same entity that 
bears that name in Islam, while yet agree-
ing that the mosque in Mecca post-dates 
the death of the Prophet.

The Ka’ba in Muslim tradition
Commentary on the above verses is con-
cerned to relate them on the one hand to a 
large number of traditional stories con-
cerned with the origins of the Meccan 
Ka’ba and the activity of Abraham in con-
nection with it; and on the other with legal 
discussions of the ḥajj, the ‘umra and the 
rites associated with them (see Law and 
The Qur’ān). Thus, the discussions in 
works of commentary draw on, and are 
themselves reflected in, many other genres 
of Islamic literature — stories of the 
prophets (see Prophets and Prophet-
hood), law books, local histories of 
Mecca, traditional biographical material 
on Muhammad, and others.

As for its origins and pre-Islamic history, 
several reports say that the Ka’ba existed 
before the creation of the world as a sort of 
froth on the primordial waters from which 
God made the world. It was the place of 
worship for Adam (see Adam and Eve) 
after his expulsion from paradise (q.v.; see 
also Fall of Man; Garden), compensating 
him for his loss and allowing him to imitate 
on earth the circumambulation of the 
angels around the divine throne in heaven. 
Bakka in q 3:96 is interpreted as a name of 
Mecca, various explanations of it being 
adduced. This “first house” was destroyed 
in the flood God had sent to punish the 
people of Noah (q.v.), although its “founda-
tions” (qawā’id, q 2:127) remained.

Subsequently, in the time of Abraham, 
God commanded him to go to Mecca to 
rebuid it. Ishmael was already in Mecca, 
having previously been taken and left there 
together with his mother Hagar by Abra-
ham. The father and son then fulfilled 
God’s command. The black stone was re-
vealed to them by an angel and placed in 
the wall where it is today. It was, say some 
reports, originally white but it became 
black because of the sins of the people of 
the Age of Ignorance (jāhiliyya) or, alterna-
tively, as a consequence of the many fires 
which afflicted the Ka’ba. When the walls 
became too high for Abraham to reach, he 
stood on a stone which is often identified as 
the maqām Ibrāhīm (“standing place of 
Abraham”) referred to in q 2:125. After the 
building was finished that stone was placed 
outside the Ka’ba and, although it was 
 subsequently moved around, it is still there 
near the Ka’ba today. Having completed 
the work, Abraham then summoned all of 
humankind, including the generations still 
unborn, to come to fulfill there the rituals 
which he himself had been shown by the 
angel Gabriel (q.v.). Some see the maqām 
Ibrāhīm as a stone on which Abraham stood 
to deliver this summons.

Prominent in these and other reports 
about the Ka’ba is the idea of the navel of 
the earth. The Ka’ba or bayt is described as 
the central point from which the earth was 
spread out. It is the point of the earth that 
is directly beneath the divine throne in the 
highest heaven, and each of the seven 
heavens has its analogue. Similarly, it 
stands above the center of the seven 
spheres beneath the earth. If any one of 
these bayts were to fall, they would all fall 
one upon another down to the lowest earth 
(ilā tukhām al-ard al-suflā). In reports of this 
type the distinction between the bayt and 
the town of Mecca is often blurred so that 
Mecca, which is situated in fact in a valley, 
is sometimes referred to as a hill or moun-
tain (jabal Makka), in accordance with the 
concept of the navel as a protrusion above 
the surrounding area. (For further material 
on this concept, see the article of Wensinck 
given in the bibliography.)

Having been instituted by Abraham as a
center of monotheism, the Ka'ba was then, over time, corrupted and it came to be the center of the polytheism (see POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM) and idolatry (shirk, see IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS), which dominated central Arabia in the centuries before the sending of the prophet Muhammad (see PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR'ĀN). Some remnants of Abrahamic monotheism survived but idols (see IDOLS AND IMAGES) were installed and worshipped in and around the Ka'ba. Muhammad's preaching and activities eventually achieved the defeat of Arab paganism and the restoration of the Ka'ba as the sanctuary of the one, true God. It is against this background that the references to the Meccan Ka'ba at Mecca.

Issues involving the law discussed in connection with the Qur'ānic verses cited above include whether 'umra has the same obligatory status as hajj (Q 2:158; 3:97), the nature of the compensation to be offered by the muhrim who has intentionally killed a wild animal (Q 5:95), the precise point of the qibla (Q 2:144) and the status of the tawaf or sa'y between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa (Q 2:158):

A non-traditional perspective

The unanimous traditional view is that the Qur'ānic passages discussed above all originated with reference to the Ka'ba at Mecca and that the Meccan Ka'ba before Islam had the same central importance that it afterwards received in Islam.

Qur’ānic commentary reflects those two presuppositions (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL). The Qur'ānic text itself seems neither to substantiate nor disprove them. It may be noted, however, that the expression al-masjid al-ḥarām as the name of the place of worship in contention between the believers and unbelievers is much more common and more prominent in the Qur'ān than is al-ka'ba, and the traditional identification of al-masjid al-ḥarām as a pre-Islamic name for the area around the Meccan Ka'ba may be an attempt at harmonization. It is notable, too, that the sanctuary (bayt) associated in the text with Abraham is not explicitly identified there as al-ka'ba, apart from the reference in Q 5:97 to al-ka'ba al-bayt al-ḥarām, which could incorporate a gloss. The identification of the bayt with the Meccan Ka'ba is mainly a product of the literary tradition rather than of the Qur'ān itself. Muslim tradition itself suggests that there were other ka'bas besides the Meccan one and some evidence from outside Muslim tradition suggests a link between the word ka'ba and a stele or bethel connected with the worship of Dusares in Nabatean Petra (Ryckmans, Dhu 'l-Sharā; see GEOGRAPHY). There are some grounds, therefore, for hesitation in face of the traditional understandings of the Qur'ānic passages. How far one is prepared to question them will largely depend on one's views about the origins of the Qur'ānic text and of the Muslim sanctuary at Mecca.

Gerald R. Hawting

Bibliography


Khadīja

Khadīja bint al-Khuwaylid of the clan of Asad of the tribe of Quraysh (q.v.) was the Prophet’s first wife, mother of all his children except one, and the first to believe in his mission. Inasmuch as she died three years before the emigration (q.v.; hijra) to Medina, and the revelations specifically addressed to the members of the Prophet’s household (see family of the prophet; people of the house; revelation and inspiration; occasions of revelation) were vouchsafed in Medina (q.v.), Khadīja’s name appears rarely in the exegetical literature (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval). Her role in the genre of biographies of Muhammad (ṣīra, see sīra and the Qurʾān) and “stories of the prophets’” (qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ, see prophets and prophethood) works, as well as in popular piety, however, has been immense.

Khadīja was an aristocratic, wealthy Meccan merchant woman who in two previous marriages had given birth to two sons and a daughter. As a widow, she obtained Muḥammad’s services as steward of her merchandise in a Syrian trading venture, during which a young boy of her household named Maysara is said to have witnessed several miracles that foretold Muḥammad’s rise to prophethood. The venture was a commercial success and, impressed by Muḥammad’s good character and trustworthiness, Khadīja offered him marriage. Traditional sources indicate that the marriage proposal was extended by Muḥammad and his uncle Hamza b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (q.v.) to Khadīja’s father Khuwaylid b. Asad (Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 82-3) or it was her uncle ‘Amr b. Asad who married her to the Prophet (Ibn Sa’d, i, 132-3). Most traditions place Muḥammad’s age at that time at twenty-five and Khadīja’s at forty. She bore her husband at least five children: four daughters (Zaynab, Umm Kulthūm, Fāṭima, Ruqayya) and one or possibly two sons (al-Qāsim, ‘Abdallāh; who, however, may be the same, while al-Tāhir and al-Tayyib are generally taken to be epithets of ‘Abdallāh; Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 82-3). Khadīja’s material, emotional, and spiritual support were crucial to the success of Muḥammad’s mission. The exegetical literature on the Qurʾān generally links q. 93:8, “did he not find you needy and enrich you” with their marriage (see poverty and the poor). Khadīja reported Muḥammad’s first miraculou experiences and especially his call to prophethood to her Christian cousin Waraqā b. Nawfal who likened the event to Moses’ (q.v.) receiving of the law (Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 83, 107; see torah; commandments; there is also speculation.
that this Waraqa may have furnished Muḥammad with details of Christian belief; cf. Sprenger, Leben, i, 124-34; see informants; Christians and Christianity). According to many traditions (see Ḥadīth and the Qur’ān), she was the first to believe in God, his apostle (see messenger), and the truth of the message, meaning that she was the Prophet’s first follower and, after Muhammad himself, the second Muslim. According to others his cousin ‘Alī b. Ṭālib (q.v.) was the second Muslim and Khadija the third (see faith; belief and unbelief; companions of the Prophet). During her lifetime, she remained the Prophet’s only wife (see wives of the prophet; marriage and divorce) and his mainstay in the battles against his Meccan enemies (Ibn Ṣa`d, Khadija-tul-Kubra, 111-14; see opposition to Muḥammad).

Khadija’s rank among God’s chosen women, indeed her cosmological importance, is established in the exegetical literature on Q 66:11-2 and 3:42 (see women and the Qur’ān). In the context of Q 66:11-2, she is placed in association with Pharaoh’s (q.v.) wife (Āsya) and Mary (q.v.) the daughter of ‘Imrān (q.v.; the mother of Jesus, q.v.), both examples to those who believe, because of her great service to the Prophet’s mission. Regarding Q 3:42, the angels’ words to Mary that God had chosen her above the women of the worlds, Khadija’s name appears prominently in the exegetical debate on Mary’s ranking both among the Qur’ānic women figures and also in relation to three selected elite women of the Prophet’s household, i.e. Khadija herself, Muḥammad’s later wife ‘Āisha (see ‘Āisha bint Abī Bakr), and his and Khadija’s daughter Fāṭima (q.v.). Here, the larger number of traditions recorded in exegetical (tafsīr) and qīyas al-anbiyā’ literature establish on the author-

Bibliography

Khādhir/Khiḍr

Islamic tradition identifies as al-Khādhir (or Khiḍr), an otherwise unnamed “servant (q.v.) of God” who appears in Sūrat al-Kahf (“The Cave”; q. 18:60-82), in connection with Moses’ (q.v.) quest for the “confluence of the two seas” (see barrier; nature as signs). Interpretations run a wide gamut. Al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538/1144; Kashshāf, ii, 703) asserts that Khiḍr lived from the time of Dhū l-Qarnayn (see Alexander) to that of Moses; Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966; Ḥudūd, iv, 2276-82) sets that tradition aside, calling him only “the
righteous servant.” Moses and an unnamed companion (traditionally, Joshua son of Nūn) set out carrying a fish for food; mysteriously coming to life, the fish escapes into the sea. According to a hadith cited by many exegesis (e.g. Ibn al-Jawzī, Ẓād, v, 119; see Ḥadīth and the Qur’ān) to explain the context of the journey, Moses rises to address the Children of Israel (q.v.) and someone asks him who is the most learned among them. When Moses answers that he himself is, God reveals that one yet more learned awaits Moses at the confluence of the two seas. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Ṭafsīr, viii, 251) adds that Khiḍr is also the most beloved and most firmly decisive.

The Qur’ānic account, enhanced with certain exegetical details, continues as follows: God then tells Moses that he will meet this most learned servant at the place where his fish escapes. But Joshua fails to tell Moses that he has lost the fish so the two must retrace their steps to the spot where Khiḍr awaits. Moses asks Khiḍr to teach him what he knows, but Khiḍr warns that Moses will not have the patience to bear with him. Moses insists he will be a good student, agreeing not to question Khiḍr’s actions. The travelers embark on a ship, which Khiḍr proceeds to scuttle (see ships). Moses inquires how he could do such a thing, and Khiḍr warns the Prophet. Later as they walk along the shore, Khiḍr spots some boys playing and kills one of them summarily. Moses again confronts Khiḍr. Further along they come to a town whose inhabitants refuse to feed the hungry travelers. Nevertheless, Khiḍr repairs a portion of a wall on the point of collapsing. Again Moses takes exception, and that is the last straw: Khiḍr decides to explain his actions, but from then on Moses is on his own. Khiḍr had scuttled the boat to prevent a wicked king from commandeering it for evil purposes; he had killed the boy lest the child grieve his good parents by a wayward life; and he had rebuilt the wall so that the treasure that lay beneath would be safe until the two orphaned sons of the wall’s owner could reach their majority and thus claim their inheritance (see orphans; guardianship; inheritance).

Exegesis discuss such questions as the origin of the guide’s name, the identity of the seas, the nature of Khiḍr’s learning, and his spiritual status. He got the name Khiḍr, “green,” because, according to a hadith cited by many exegesis (e.g. Qurṭubī, Ṣāmī’, xi, 12; Ibn Kathīr, Ṭafsīr, iii, 105), whenever he prayed, everything around him waxed verdant. Exegesis generally agree that Khiḍr’s divinely infused knowledge was esoteric, whereas that of Moses was more exoteric (e.g. Abū Ḥayyān, Baḥr, vi, 139; see knowledge and learning). Al-Ṭabarī (Ṭafsīr, viii, 251) among others suggests the two seas were the Persian in the east and the Greek in the west (see geography). But of equal importance is the metaphorical view that Moses and Khiḍr were themselves the two “seas” since they both possessed oceans of knowledge, albeit of different kinds (Abū Ḥāyyān, Baḥr, vi, 156; Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, ii, 703; see metaphor). Many interpreters call Khiḍr a prophet, arguing that only prophetic revelation (waḥy) could account for his bizarre actions and that a ranking prophet like Moses would surely follow only a figure of greater stature (see prophets and prophethood; revelation and inspiration). Various exegesis gloss “mercy” (q.v.; Q 18:65) as waḥy or nubūqaww (Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf, ii, 705; Nasafi, Ṭafsīr, iii, 34). Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148; Aḥkām, iii, 241) notes that the conditions Khiḍr imposed on Moses are understandable in that all Muslims must accept certain conditions in following the prophets. Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240;


Fuṣūṣ, 202-5) parallels Khiḍr’s actions with events in Moses’ life: the scuttling of the ship with the infant Moses’ rescue from the Nile, Khiḍr’s murder of the boy with Moses’ killing the Copt, and Khiḍr’s not asking recompense for rebuilding the crumbling wall with Moses’ drawing water at Midian (q.v.) without remuneration.

Khiḍr also appears in the various major versions of the “stories of the prophets” (qiṣṣaṣ al-anbiyā’) genre. These accounts have a sort of “midrashic” quality, spinning a narrative to fill in the gaps in the scriptural text (Kisāʾ), sometimes speculating on such details as the precise location of events and identities of individuals in the stories (Tha’labī). An extra-qur’ānic aspect of the Khiḍr legend is the story of his search for greater knowledge than Moses, etymologically. As the one person with knowledge was “expansive, all inclusive,” which Muqātil claims is from the same root (see Arabic language) as the name Ilyās. Muqātil has Moses find Khiḍr dressed in wool, whereupon Khiḍr recognizes Moses as prophet of Israel (q.v.). According to Muqātil, Khiḍr’s knowledge exceeds that of Moses because God has given diverse gifts to various prophets — not, as others have said, because Khiḍr was a saint and therefore superior to a prophet in esoteric knowledge (Muqātil, Taṣfīṣ, ii, 592-9). An editor later attached a ḥadīth to Muqātil’s commen-

Khadir / Khiḍr

tary, according to which Khiḍr is a wali (saint) whose knowledge comes through virtue (see Shi‘ism and the Qur’an). Moses asks Khiḍr how he came to be gifted with immortality (see Death and the Dead; Eternity), endowed with the ability to read hearts (see Heart) and see with God’s eye (see Anthropomorphism). Khiḍr responds that it is because he has obeyed God perfectly and neither fears nor hopes in any but God (Nwyia, Exégèse, 88-90; see Fear; Obedience; Hope). Al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988; Lama’, 422-4) corrects the mistaken notion that Wilāya (sainthood) is superior to risāla (being a messenger of God), a misinterpretation of Q 18:64 f. Moses’ illumination far outstrips any that Khiḍr could have sustained.

Khiḍr’s ongoing spiritual function becomes an important issue for certain Shi‘i orders in particular, who regarded Khiḍr as an initiating shaykh. Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-‘Arabī says he first met Khiḍr in Seville and received the Shi‘i patched frock (khīqa) from him and calls him the fourth pillar along with Jesus, ʾIdrīs, and Ilyās in the celestial hierarchy of initiation (Addas, Red Sulphur, 62-5, 116-7, 144-5). Muḥammad b. ʾAbdallāh b. al-‘Arabī (d. 543/1148) observes that “anyone who wants to know without doubt that power and aid belong only to God must sail the sea,” taking the ship Khiḍr scuttled as a symbol of spiritual poverty (Ākhām, iii, 242; see Poverty and the Poor). Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 1273; Divān, poems 2521:10, 408:1-2) takes the metaphor further, identifying the ship as the body of the Shi‘i that must be broken and purified by Khiḍr’s love. Finally, Abū Hayyān (d. 745/1344; Bahr, vi, 139) suggests the purpose of the whole story is guidance and incentive to travel on the search for knowledge (see Journey), and instruction on the etiquette of the quest.

John Renard
The strongest opposition party in early Islam, their name (Ar. khārījī, pl. khawwārijī) is derived from the Arabic triliteral root kh-r-j, which has as its basic meaning “to go out,” “to take the field against someone” and “to rise in revolt” (Ṭabari, Taʾrikh, ii, 32; trans. Morony, 37; see FIGHTING; JIHĀD). In the case in point, it means “to secede from the community.” Although forms of kh-r-j appear numerous times in the Qur’ān with varied meanings, the group in question took its name from the usage in Q 9:46, where the root kh-r-j, denoting “to go out to combat,” is opposed to the verb qaʿada, which denotes people who held back from the war (q.v.; see EXPEDITIONS AND BATTLES). The earliest Khārījīs were those who withdrew from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb’s (q.v.) army when he agreed to the arbitration (q.v.) at the battle of Sīfīn in 37/657 (see POLITICS AND THE QUR’ĀN). Another name given to these first Khārījīs is al-Shurāt (lit. “the vendors”) — meaning those who have sold their soul for the cause of God. This appears to have been the name they themselves used, and it has also been extended to their descendants (cf. Levi Della Vida, Khāridjites; Higgins, Qur’ānic exchange).

Early traditions state that a breeding-ground for the Khārījīs could be found among the Qur’ān readers (see REGISTERS OF THE QUR’ĀN), who displayed extreme piety (q.v.) and asceticism (q.v.). The earliest Khārījīs, just like the Arabs (q.v.) of Kufa and Baṣra, were all bedouins (see BEDOUIN), who had migrated to the garrison cities (see CITY). In this respect there is little distinguishing information to provide other than that they were much less concerned with the system of genealogy based on kinship (q.v.). As a consequence of this stance, their doctrines had enormous appeal for minority groups within the newly emerging Islamic community (see HERESY; THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN).

The earliest of ‘Alī’s opponents were called Ḥarūrīs, from Ḥarūrā, the place in which some twelve thousand men had gathered, those who, in protest against the arbitration, had seceded as ‘Alī entered Kufa in Rabī’I 37/Aug.-Sept. 658, after the conclusion of the arbitration agreement. Also among them were many who had initially accepted the arbitration but now acknowledged their mistake and no longer recognized ‘Alī as their leader. Their oath of allegiance was to God on the basis of “ordering what is good and prohibiting what is reprehensible” (on this concept, see M. Cook, Commanding right; see also GOOD AND EVIL; LAWFUL AND UNLAW-
FUL; ETHICS AND THE QUR'ĀN; VIRTUES AND VICES, COMMANDING AND FORBIDDING). The Ḥarrūrīs were initially secessionists, not rebels. They wished to secede from the community to protect their principles. They were also called Muḥakkāma from their motto "No judgment (q.v.) but God's" (lā ḥukma illā li-llāh). They accused those who supported the arbitration of having acted contemptibly toward God by appointing human arbitrators. People who shouted "lā ḥukma illā li-llāh" at the battle of Ǧīfl in most likely meant that 'Uthmān (q.v.) had broken God’s law as revealed in the Qur’ān (see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN) and was therefore worthy of death, and not that the question between ‘Alī and Muʿāwiyah should be left to the “arbitra-
ment of war” (Watt, Kharijite thought, 217-8). They also held that Muʿāwiyah was a rebel and that according to q. 49:3, rebels are outlaws who should be fought until they repent (see REBELLION; REPENTANCE AND Penance). Arbitration was thus a mis-
take because no one had the right to substi-
tute a human decision for God’s clear pronouncement (Barradī, Jawāḥir, 120).

The rupture among ‘Alī’s followers proved serious since it brought a wider dogmatic schism to the fore. The Khārijīs objected to the concept of personal alli-
ance to the imām (q.v.). In their view, alle-
giance should be bound not to a particular person (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’ĀN), but to the Qur’ān and the sunna (q.v.) of the Prophet, Abū Bakr (q.v.) and ‘Umar (q.v.). They denied that the right to the imāmate should be based on close kinship with Muhammad (see Shi‘ism and the Qur’ān), for that was irrelevant in their eyes. These differences found military expression when the Khārijīs from Kūfah and Baṣrah assembled in Nahrawān. After calling for a resumption of the war with Muʿāwiyah, who had been acknowledged by some as caliph (q.v.) before the end of Dhū l-Qa’dā 37/April-May 658 (Hinds, Muʿāwiyah, 265), ‘Alī invited them to join him and to fight their common enemy. Faced with their refusal, ‘Alī decided to deal with it before carrying out his cam-
paign to Syria (q.v.). The Khārijīs fought desperatly but they were outnumbered by ‘Alī’s followers and the battle turned into a one-sided massacre. The battle of Nahra-
wān (9 Saʿrāf 38/17 July 658) set the seal on the division between Shi‘a (q.v.) and Khārijīs, and made the Khārijīs’ split with the community irreparable.

Khārijī revolts
During the Umayyad period, several Khā-
rijī revolts broke out in various Muslim
lands, causing the caliphate to suffer mate-
rial damage as well as a blow to its pride.
Large sections of territory were removed from its administration. The Azāriq, one
of the main branches of the Khārijīs, threatened Baṣra, while other Khārijī
groups who emerged from the region of Mawṣil (i.e. the high Tigris country be-
tween Mārdīn and Niṣibīn) endangered Kūfah (cf. Levi Della Vida, Khārijīdites, 1075-6). The chief persecutors of the Khārijīs were the governors of Iraq, Ziyād b. Abīhī (d. 53/673) and his son ‘Ubayd Allāh, who became governor there in the year 55/674. They proceeded against the Khārijīs with harsh measures and killed and imprisoned many of them. As the Umayyad caliphate began to collapse, the Khārijīs turned into a revolutionary move-
ment. The small numbers of troops, which had previously characterized the Khārijī armies, swelled to powerful masses. During this late Umayyad period, the revolts of the Ibāḍīs, a moderate branch of the Khārijīs (who spread to the Maghrib, the Ḥaḍramawt and ‘Umān) constituted a greater menace to the caliphate than did the Azāriq uprisings (cf. Lewicki, al-
Ibāḍīyya, 650). After occupying the Ḥaḍramawt and Ṣan‘ā’, the capital of southern Arabia, in 129/746-47, the Ibāḍī
army, under the command of Abū Ḥamza, took Mecca (q.v.) and Medina (q.v.). Abū Ḥamza was a skilled soldier, but also a scholar and a preacher who gave sermons from the Prophet’s pulpit (see mosque) that have been preserved in the Arabic chronicles (Darjīnī, Ṭabaqāt, ii, 266-72). The Ibāḍīs were defeated and, for the most part, massacred in the middle of Jumādā I 130/January 748. The Umayyad army reconquered Medina and then Mecca but were forced to conclude a peace treaty with the Ibāḍīs of the Ḥadramawt.

The Khārijī revolts continued after the ascension of the ‘Abbāsids. The Ibāḍīs and the Ṣufrites, another moderate branch of Khārijīsm, succeeded in establishing their rule in the Maghrib. Again in ‘Umān, the Ibāḍīs had some success in a revolt about 132/750. Towards the second half of the second/eighth century they rose up again and recommenced their activities in the region creating an imāmāte, which continued to exist almost without interruption for over 1200 years. There were revolts in other regions that were successful for some years and then died down. In various districts around Mawṣil, in northern Iraq, sixteen revolts have been recorded in the years between the middle of the second/eighth and the middle of the fourth/tenth century; Šijstån and southern Khurāsān also witnessed Khārijī revolts.

Khārijī sects

The weakness of the Khārijī movement lay in its incapacity to preserve both religious and political unity. A number of schisms (išřāq) resulting from dogmatic disputes as well as from political crises culminated in the formation of several theological and political subdivisions (firqa). Some of the Khārijīs adopted political quietism and moderation, while others took to activism and extremism. The extremists followed Nāfī b. al-Azraq or Ḥanẓala b. Bayhas. The Azāriqa (who met a violent end in Ṭabarīstan in 78-9/698-9) upheld the istiţārāf (the indiscriminate killing of the non-Khārijī Muslims, including their children), submitted new recruits to a severe inquisition, disregarded the practice of the dissimulation (q.v.; taqīyya) of one’s real belief, considered unbelief a grave sin and insisted on the eternal punishment for the grave sinner (see belief and unbelief; sin, major and minor; eternity). The Bayhasiyya were as fierce as the Azāriqa in that they approved of the killing of non-Khārijī Muslims and the taking of their goods (see booty). The followers of Najda b. ‘Amīr represented a milder tendency. The Najadāt permitted dissimulation (taqīyya) and quietism, as they did not expect everyone to join with them in the fight against the unbelievers. Another branch of the Khārijīs were the ‘Ajārīda, who stem from ‘Abd al-Karīm b. ‘Ajar-rad. They insisted on the supremacy of divine law and on the upright conduct of individuals.

The most moderate branch of the Khārijīs — and today the only survivors — were the Ibāḍīs. They appeared in Ṭabṣra in 65/684-5, when ‘Abdallāh b. Ibād broke away from the Khārijī extremists over which attitude was to be adopted towards other Muslims and joined a group of quietists who had gathered around Abū ‘Ubayd Mirdās b. Udayya al-Ṭamīnī. During the first half of the second/eighth century, Ibāḍism began to undergo a profound change: from being part of the Khārijī sect, it became an autonomous movement with a defined membership, doctrine and organized missionary activities. At present, Ibāḍīs form the main part of the population in the oases of Mzāb in Algeria, of Zawārā and Jebel Naffūsā in Tripolitania, on the island of Jerba in Tunisia and in
Khārijī doctrine

The Khārijīs made important contributions to Islamic thought, and to the formation of Islamic culture. A considerable amount of historical and theological material has been preserved by the Ibaḍīs (for a discussion of Ibaḍī exegesis of the Qur’ān, see Gilliot, Le commentaire coranique de Hûd b. Muhakkam), but apart from this Ibaḍī material, the only source for the Khārijī thought is the Sunnī historical and heresiographical tradition. The religion of the Khārijīs had as its aim paradise (q.v.). They did not think of victory (q.v.) on earth (q.v.). They wished to save their souls (see SOUL) by fighting the impious with a total lack of consideration for themselves and others (see SALVATION). The core of the theological teaching of the Khārijīs was the conception of a righteous God who demands righteousness from his subjects (see JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE). Indeed, the earliest Khārijite propositions attempted to place the believer in a direct relationship to God. Khārijism attached great importance to religious principles that stressed the responsibility of the individual, such as the obligation of “promoting good and preventing evil” and the conception of the relationship between works and faith (q.v.). Anyone who committed a capital sin, failed to obey the divine law (see OBEDIENCE) or introduced innovations (see INNOVATION) was an infidel and was to be combated as long as he remained dissident. Moreover, if there were no repentance, the transgressor would be condemned to eternal punishment in hell (see REWARD AND PUNISHMENT; HELL AND HELLFIRE). This doctrine was used to support the Khārijī view that the killers of Umān could be justified in their act, and, for the Azāriqā, it became the theological basis for their action.

The obvious corollary of the doctrine of human responsibility was the doctrine of divine decree (qadar, see FREEDOM AND PREDESTINATION). Al-Ash’ārī (d. 324/935-6; Maqālāt, 93, 96, 104, 116) mentions some Khārijī groups that agreed with the Mu’ātīls (see MU’ĀTĪLĪS) in affirming human free will, but the general attitude of the Khārijīs supported the doctrine of predestination. The debate on qadar emerged in the Ibaḍī community during the imāmate of Abū ‘Ubayda (first half of the second/eighth century), who was conscious of the danger to the community of carrying rational arguments and disputation too far (see DEBATE AND DISPUTATION). He fiercely opposed ‘Abdallah b. Yazīd al-Fazārī for his rigidly rational reasoning and expelled Ḥamza al-Kūfī (cf. van Ess, 76, ii, 204-5) and ‘Atiyya (cf. van Ess, 76, iv, 204.), suspected to be followers of Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (cf. van Ess, 76, i, 73-5). According to Abū ‘Ubayda, God is all-powerful and all-knowing (see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES); he knows people’s acts but he does not determine them. Thus the individual is responsible for his or her actions and will be judged for them (Darjīn, Tabaqāt, ii, 233; Shammākhī, Siyar, 84-5; see LAST JUDGMENT; RECORD OF HUMAN ACTIONS). The Khārijī theological doctrine shared a number of features with Mu’tazilī theology as a result of a parallel development, since the center of Ibaḍism was still Baṣra at the time when the founders of Mu’tazilism were active there (Moreno, Nīte, 313-5). Khārijīs and Mu’tazīls used the same arguments, often borrowed from each other, to substantiate
their doctrines. In general, the dogma of the Khārijīs resembled certain main points made by the Muʿtazilīs, as in the case of the doctrine of anti-anthropomorphism (see ANTHROPOMORPHISM) and the theory of the createdness of the Qurʾān (q.v.). This latter doctrine was well established among the early Ibāḍīs in the Maghrib, as shown by a treatise in which the Rustamīd imām Abū al-Yaqūz (r. 241-81/855-94) quotes early Ibāḍī scholars (Cremonesi, Un antico documento, 148 E) on the matter. In 'Umān, the doctrine was first introduced only at the beginning of the third/ninth century, though it was opposed until the sixth/twelfth century.

The question of the imāmate was central for the Khārijī movement, together with the related question of membership in the community, which depended on the acceptance of its specific doctrines. It was on this latter question that the movement split into various sects over minor differences. The Khārijīs were not anarchists: they upheld the necessity of an imām, but rejected imāms such as 'Uthmān, 'Abī and Muʿāwiyā, insisting upon the personal qualities of the imām and his duty to enjoin good and forbid evil. They held that the limitation of the imāmate to the Quraysh (q.v.) was not valid: the most meritorious Muslim should be elected whatever his ethnic origins might be. In other words, for the Khārijīs, personal merits overruled considerations of descent. In their view, leadership stems from personal excellence, and the confidence that the community placed in its imām constitutes his authority (q.v.). When an imām commits major sins, his followers should not immediately dissociate themselves from him (al-bānū aʿanhu), but call him to formal repentance (cf. Rubinacci, Barāʾa, 1027-8). If he repents, and does not continue in his errors, then he retains his imāmate; if he does not, then it is the duty of his followers to dissociate themselves from him and, if necessary, fight him. The Khārijīs supported the principle that any Muslim could be elevated to the supreme dignity of the imāmate, even if he were “an Abyssinian slave whose nose has been cut off” (Shahrastānī, Milal, 87; see ABBYSSINIA; SLAVES AND SLAVERY). The Ibāḍī sources state that the imām must be male, an adult in full possession of his faculties and so on (see MATURITY; KINGS AND RULERS), but they do not regard a slave as eligible for the caliphate (Wilkinson, Ibadi Imāma, 538). The formulation of “even an Abyssinian slave” causes misunderstanding. It actually means that the Khārijīs held any qualified Muslim, even one of slavish origin, eligible to the imāmate – provided that he was of irreproachable character. Originally this “black slave” tradition was not a Khārijī statement nor was it concerned with the qualification of the imāmate. It expressed Sunnī quietism, which maintained that rulers must be obeyed however illegitimate they may be (Crone, “Even an Ethiopian slave,” 60-1).

It should be added that the Ibāḍīs were also eminent jurists (see TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINES OF QURʾĀNIC STUDY). The Ibāḍī school is one of the oldest surviving schools of law. Its foundation was attributed to Jābir b. Zayd (d. ca. 109/728-9). The first jurists of the movement were trained at his “circle” (ḥalqa); Abū Nūḥ Sālīḥ al-Dahhān, Ḥayyān al-Aṣrāfī, Dūmām b. al-Sāʿīb, Jaʿfar b. al-Sammāk, and Abū ‘Ubayda al-Tamūmī propagated the doctrine learnt from Jābir in secret meetings (majālīs), at which the members of the sect discussed questions of law and dogma. The first Ibāḍīs lived in places where Islamic law began to develop, namely in Baṣra and Kūfa, but also in the Ḥijāz, in close contact with the learned experts of the time with whom they
Some scholars have argued that the Ḩaḥīḍis derived their law from the orthodox schools, introducing only such superficial modifications as were required by their own political and dogmatic tenets (Schacht, Origins, 260 f.). Recent studies on the Ḩaḥīḍ madhḥab show, however, that from the beginning the Ḩaḥīḍis took a line detached from Sunnī schools and thus contributed to the general development of Islamic jurisprudence (Ennami, Studies in Ḩaḥīḍism, chap. iv; Wilkinson, The early development, 125-44; Francesca, The formation; id., Teoria e pratica, esp. chaps. 1-3).

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Bibliography


**Kings and Rulers**

Royal male sovereigns and other political leaders. The Arabic term *malik*, “king,” appears thirteen times in the Qur’ān (its plural form *malik* appears twice), and is derived from the root *m-l-k*, which connotes possession (q.v.), having power or dominion over someone or something (see power and impotence), or capacity, the ability to obtain something.

Other Qur’ānic terms relevant to this subject include *malik*, “dominion, power or kingdom,” and *malakūt*, “dominion or kingdom.” The former, which is attested many times in the Qur’ān, may be associated either with God or with human beings, while the latter, which appears only four times, is used exclusively in divine contexts, as in q 6:75 when God shows Abraham (q.v.) “the kingdom of the heavens and the earth” (*malakūta l-samāwāti wa-l-ard, see heaven and sky; earth*) or q 36:83: “Glory be to him in whose hand is dominion (*malakūt*) over all things.” The term *khulīfa* (derived from the root *kh*-l-*, which connotes succession or deputyship; see *caliph*), is attested twice in the Qur’ān, and in its application to David (q.v.) in q 38:26, this term, too, strongly suggests rulership (Lewis, *Political language*, 44; see also Paret, *Signification coranique*; al-Qādī, The term “khulīfa”). The term *imām* (q.v.; pl. *a‘imm*), a title which, like *khulīfa*, was greatly preferred by many Muslim political thinkers to *malik* in the early centuries of the Islamic period, also appears in the Qur’ān, where it connotes leadership, and has sometimes been interpreted in a political sense (see *politics and the Qur’ān*; also, although attested in the Qur’ān, the term *sulṭān* never appears.

**Khaybar** see expeditions and battles

**Kīf, Dhū al-** see dhū l-kīf; ezekiel; Elijah

**Kindness** see mercy
there in the sense of governmental power, a sense that was to become prevalent in later centuries).

Although the words malik and mulk are used in the Qurʾān in both human and divine contexts, the scripture and its traditional interpreters (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval) distinguish between true, eternal sovereignty (q.v.), that of God, and the temporal power that God grants briefly to whom he wishes (see eternity). Commentators on the verse q 3:26, where God is addressed as “the possessor of sovereignty, [you] who give sovereignty to whom you wish, and take sovereignty away from whom you wish, and exalt whom you wish and humble whom you wish” (mālika l-mulk tuʾī l-mulkā man tashāʿu wa-tanzūʾī l-mulkīa mimman tashāʿu wa-tuʿizzu man tashāʿu wa-tudhilīlu man tashāʿ), draw a specific contrast between divine and human sovereignty. For al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the verse emphasizes God’s total control over the disposition of temporal power: “All that is in your hands and at your behest; no one in your creation is free to act according to his wish, and exalt whom you wish and humble whom you wish” ( timespec of prophets are effective on the interior aspects of people, and tyrants have a great deal of command over the external aspects of people, whereas the commands of prophets are effective on the interior and exterior aspects” (Rāzī, Ṭafsīr, vii, 5; see also authority and obedience for discussion of another verse with theological overtones that had ramifications on later Islamic political history, namely Q 4:59, in which the believers are instructed to obey God, the messenger [q.v.] and “those of you who are in authority (ʿāli l-amr minkum)”).

In reference to God, the term malik is invested with sacrality: in q 20:114, God is called “the true king” (al-maliku l-ḥaqq; see also Q 25:26, al-mulkū yasmaʿādīhin al-ḥaqq) and he is twice described as “the holy king” (al-maliku l-quddās; the latter term is generally interpreted as meaning “pure, devoid of any impurity or deficiency”; see Baydāwī, Anwār, ii, 326, ad Q 59:23 and Tūsī, Tibyān, x, 3-4, ad Q 62:1). In Q 114:2, God is “the king of humankind” (malikī l-nās). In contrast to its use as a divine appellation, the term malik, when applied to earthly monarchs, often carries negative connotations in the Qurʾān. For example, in Q 27:34, the Queen of Sheba (q.v.)
God may grant sovereignty to those whom he favors, such as David, Solomon (q.v.; and Joseph (q.v.; it is noteworthy, however, that the Qur’ān does not attach the title of “king” to any of these figures); and Saul (q.v.; of whom the term “king” is used). In order to fulfil the divine purpose, God may also confer kingship on negative characters, such as Pharaoh (q.v.; who is described as “the king” in q 12:43, 50, 54, 72, 76), and the unnamed “king who confis- cates every good ship (see ships)” mentioned in q 18:79 (on his possible identity, see Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 570-1; see also khadir/khdir). As a woman, the Queen of Sheba — known to Islamic tradition as Bilqis (q.v.) — of whom the term “queen” is not used in the Qur’ān but who is described as “a woman who rules over them” (imra’a’tan tanlikhum, q 27:23), stands in a category of her own: for all her splendor, she is as an unbeliever and a woman sub- servient to Solomon (see women and the Qur’ān).

God’s sovereignty, unlike that of earthly kings, is absolute. He is repeatedly described as possessing “sovereignty over the heavens and the earth” (lillahi mulku l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi). In many instances, the phrase is interpreted as a reference to God’s creative power; at q 24:42, al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286 or 692/1293) glosses the qur’ānic text with the explication “for he is the creator of them both, and of the essences, accidents and actions within them” (Anwār, ii, 26; see cosmology; theology and the Qur’ān). Sometimes the description of God as possessing sovereignty over the heavens and the earth is meant to correct the errors of other religious groups, who may have failed to rec- ognize that “God is powerful without qualification” (gādir ‘alā l-ti-lāq; Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 252, ad q 5:17; see parties and factions). God’s possession of sovereignty may also be presented as a challenge to the unbelievers and their gods (see idols and images; idolatry and idolaters). Q 38:10 asks: “Or do they possess sover- eignty over the heavens and the earth and what lies between them?” Q 4:53-4, a pas- sage interpreted as a reference to the Jews (see Jews and Judaism), asks: “Or do they possess a portion of the sovereignty? If they did, they would not give the people so much as the speck on a date stone. Or are they jealous of the people for what God has given them of his bounty (see blessing; grace)? For we gave the family of Abraham the book (q.v.) and wisdom (q.v.), and we gave them great sovereignty.” (See the interpretations of these verses in Tūsī, Tibyān, iii, 228; al-Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 213-4.)

The qur’ānic notion of God’s sovereignty is also linked to the assertion of his uniqueness (see God and his Attributes). Twice the Qur’ān states, “He has no partner in sovereignty” (lām yakan lahu sharīkun fī l-mulk, q 17:111; 25:2; in the former verse, mulk is interpreted by Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 554, simply as “divinity”). On the day of judgment (see last judgment), sovereignty will be God’s (q 22:56). Sovereignty is also among the phenomena that will be seen by those in paradise (q.v.): “And when you see, you shall see felicity and great sovereignty” (wa-idha ra’ayta thamama ra’ayta na’īman wa-mulkan kabīran, q 76:20; cf. the hadith recounted in Bayḍāwī, Anwār, ii, 376).

On the earthly plane, kingship is depicted as a great but treacherous bounty that hu- man beings, even those who receive divine favor, are naturally inclined to covet. For instance, Satan (see devil) tempts Adam (see Adam and eve; fall of man) with the prospect of imperishable sovereignty: “O Adam! Shall I show you to the tree of immortality (see eternity) and sovereignty that never declines?” (q 20:120, yā ‘Adamu hal adulluka ‘alā shajaratī l-khuldi wa-mulkīn lā
Joseph addresses God with gratitude (see gratitude and ingratitude) for the sovereignty he has received from him (Q 12:101; see Qub, Ḥlāl, iv, 2029-30) and Solomon prays for kingship (Q 38:35). Those whom God leads astray (q.v.; see also freedom and predestination) seem almost intoxicated by the power of kingship. In Q 2:258, for example, Nimrod (q.v.) argues with Abraham about the latter’s God on the grounds that Nimrod himself received kingship. (For the reason given above in connection with Q 3:26, Mu’tazili commentators also paid close attention to Q 2:258; see Zamakhshari, Ḥashshāf, i, 304-5, where two explanations are given: that God gave Nimrod the wealth (q.v.), servants and followers that allowed him to become victorious [see victory], but did not make him victorious directly; or, that God made Nimrod a king as a test for his servants [see slaves and slavery].) Similarly, Pharaoh boasts of his claim to the kingship (kingdom) of Egypt (q.v.; Q 43:51). In his commentary on this passage, Sayyid Qub (d. 1966) contrasts Pharaoh’s kingdom of Egypt with the divine sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and notes how the masses, whose eyes are dazzled by the accoutrements of Pharaoh’s sovereignty, fail to perceive, in their hearts (see heart), the insignificance of these royal trappings (Ḥlāl, v, 3193; for a Ṣūfī interpretation of the Qur’anic Pharaoh, see Bowering, Mystical, 190-2; see Sufism and the Qur’ān).

However powerful kings may appear to be on earth, the Qur’ān makes clear that their authority in no way detracts from the overwhelming totality of God’s power. The Qur’ān strongly implies the contingency and the brevity of human, worldly kingship (e.g. Q 40:29, “O my people! Today the kingdom is yours, who are triumphant in the earth; but who will come to our aid in the face of God’s strength when it reaches us?”). Worldly power is invariably presented as part of God’s creation, utterly contingent on him and at his disposal. This subordination of earthly rulership to divine power is often emphasized in the exegetical literature. For example, the Persian Shi’i commentator Abū l-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. 525/1131 or later; see Shi’ism and the Qur’ān), in his discussion of Q 67:1, “Praise be to the one by whose hand is sovereignty, and he is powerful over all things” (tablaka lladhī bi-yadīhi l-mulk wa-huwa‘llāh kulli shay’in qadrīn), interprets the phrase bi-yadīhi l-mulk as follows: “Kingship (pādshāhī)… is by his command (amr) and power (qudrat), with ‘hand’ (q.v.) connoting strength and power, implying the sense of the administration and execution of affairs; the meaning is that sovereignty is his creation and at his disposal, such that he can bring it into existence and non-existence, increase it or decrease it, or modify it in various ways according to his wishes” (Abū l-Futūḥ Rāzī, Raʿī, xi, 208; a similar view is given by Ṭūsī, Tibyān, x, 57, who describes God as mālik al-mulk, “the possessor of kings”; see also Rāzī, Ṭafsīr, viii, 4, ad Q 3:26).

The Children of Israel (q.v.) are said to have received special divine attention, for they were at times favored with both prophethood and kingship. Moses proclaims: “O my people! Remember God’s favor to you, how he made prophets among you and made you kings, and gave you that which he did not give to any [other] of his creatures” (jā quami ‘dākūri nī’mūta ḫūbi ‘alaykum idh ja’ala fikum anbiyyā’i wa-ja’ala’akum mulūkān wa-‘akum mā lam yu’ti aḥadān min al-’alāmin, Q 5:20; for the exegetical treatment of this verse, see below).

David and Solomon both combine their service as prophets with the possession of mulk. Of David, Q 38:20 states, “We made his kingdom strong and gave him the wisdom and clear speech” (wa shadādnā...
mul kahu wa-atāyāhu l-ḣikmata wa-fasla l-khiṫāb); similarly q 2:251, “God gave him [David] the kingdom and the wisdom (al-mulka wa-l-ḣikma) and instructed him as to his will.” q 38:26 describes David also as a deputy or successor on earth (yā Dāʿūdu innā jaʿalākā khalīfatan fi l-ard), a phrase for which al-Bayḍāwī (Anwār, ii, 186) records two interpretations: that it refers to kingship (mulk) on earth, or that it portrays David as a successor to earlier prophets. A reference to Solomon’s kingdom appears in q 2:102 and an extensive treatment of Solomon’s career is given in q 27. In q 38:33 he prays to God for forgiveness (q.v.), and also for sovereignty (for the role of Solomon as “the proof of God for kings” in Şūfī tradition, see Bowering, Mystical, 64). While neither David nor Solomon is designated a king in the Qurʾān, their examples, and especially the proof-text q 38:26, are routinely cited in discussions of the excellence of kingship and its divine origins in later Islamic mirror literature.

A somewhat more ambiguous case is that of Saul, known in the Qurʾān as Ṭālūt. The Israelites are told by their prophet (who is nameless in the Qurʾānic account) that, in response to their request, God has sent them Saul as their king; yet the people reject Saul. q 2:247: “Their prophet said to them: ‘God has sent you Ṭālūt as a king (mālik).’ They said: ‘How is it that he should have sovereignty over us, when we are more worthy of kingship than he is? For he has not been given an abundance of wealth.’ He said: ‘God has chosen him over you, and has increased him largely in wisdom and stature. God gives his sovereignty to whom he wishes.’ ” The commentators account for the Israelites’ rejection of Saul by noting that he was poor, a shepherd, water carrier or tanner, and that he came from Benjamin’s (q.v.) stock, among whom neither prophethood nor kingship had appeared (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, v, 306 f.; Rāzī, Tafsīr, vi, 184-5; Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 127-8). The prophet (on whose identity see Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 127) went on to tell them that the ark (q.v.; tābūt) would come to them as a sign of Saul’s kingdom (q 2:248).

The exegetical literature reflects an apparent intent in some circles to minimize any possibly positive Qurʾānic emphasis on temporal kingship and this is most readily apparent in connection with the Qurʾānic passages that treat the singular combination of prophethood and kingship enjoyed on occasion by the Israelites. In q 5:20 (cited above), for example, Moses reminds his people of God’s favor to them, in that he made prophets among them and made them kings. Al-Ṭabarī, followed by al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and others, records a number of interpretations, several of which suggest that the text indicates not that the Israelites were kings, but that they were masters — of themselves, their womenfolk (see gender), their possessions, and so on (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, x, 160-3; Ṭūsī, Tibyān, iii, 481; Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 253: “God delivered them out of slavery in Egypt and made them masters (mālikūn) of their persons and their affairs, and so God called them ‘kings’ ”). Similarly, in his commentary on q 27:15, “And we gave knowledge to David and Solomon, and they said: ‘Praise be to God, who has favored us over many of his believing servants!’ ” (alladhi faḍḍalānā ‘alā kathirin min ‘ibādīhī l-ma’minin), al-Bayḍāwī (d. prob. 716/1316-7; Anwār, ii, 64-5) explicitly subordinates kingship to knowledge when he writes: “In this is a proof of the excellence of knowledge and the nobility of those who possess it, in that they [David and Solomon] gave thanks for knowledge and made it the basis of excellence, and they did not consider the kingship that they had also been given, though [that kingship] had not been given to anyone else.” When, in the following verse (q 27:16), the Qurʾān
states that Solomon inherited from David, al-Bayḍāwī (Anwār, ii, 65) describes his inheritance as “prophethood, or knowledge, or kingship” (see also Māwardī, Nakat, iv, 198).

The term imām (pl. aʾimma) suggests a person (or, in other contexts, a book, or a pattern) to be followed and in some instances in the Qurʾān the word may include the idea of political leadership. Perhaps most strikingly, God appoints Abraham as an imām (Q 2:124: qāla innī jāʾluka lil-nāsī imāman). For al-Ṭabarī (Taṣfīr, iii, 18) this means that God intended that Abraham should be followed. Al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) follows al-Ṭabarī’s interpretation and notes its particular relevance to prayer (q.v.; Nakat, i, 185; for a fuller treatment of the verse’s meaning from a Shiʿī perspective, see Ṭūsī, Taḥyān, i, 446, where the exegete records views according to which God by this verse made the imāmate incumbent on Abraham; on the Shiʿī view that Abraham combined the functions of prophethood and the imāmate, see Momen, Introduction, 147, and for Shiʿī readings of the Qurʾān on the subject of the historical imāms, see Momen, Introduction, 151-3).

In two cases, the term aʾimma is followed by the phrase “who guide by our command” (aʾimmatin yahdūna bi-ʾamrinā) — Q 21:73: “And we made them leaders who guide by our command, and we inspired them to do good deeds (q.v.), maintain prayer and almsgiving (q.v.), and they were worshippers (see worship) of us” and Q 32:24: “And we made among them [the Children of Israel] leaders who guide by our command” — which some commentators took to mean moral leaders, “leaders in goodness,” while others understood it as a reference to prophets (Māwardī, Nakat, iv, 366). In Q 28:5, the Qurʾān states that God wished to make the oppressed (alladhīna ṣudʿifū fī l-arḍ, see opposed on earth; joy and misery) into leaders (aʾimma, Māwardī, Nakat, iv, 234; Bayḍāwī, Anwār, ii, 77). In Q 9:12, the term imām, in the sense of a human leader, appears in a negative context: the reference there to “the leaders of unbelief” (aʾimmata ʾl-kāfīrī) is interpreted variously as referring to the leaders of the polytheists (see polytheism and atheism), the leaders of Quraysh (q.v.) or those who intended to oust the Prophet (Māwardī, Nakat, ii, 345; Ṭūsī, Taḥyān, v, 214; see opposition to Muhammad).

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Kinship

Relationship by blood or marriage. Although there is no single term that corresponds precisely to the English term “kinship,” the Qurʾān contains a variety of what might be identified as “kinship terms”: qurbā (near relative); arḥām (close kin, maternal kin); ʾashāna (clan, tribe; see tribes and clans); zawja (husband); zawja (wife); imraʾa (wife, woman); sāhiba (wife, companion, friend; the masc. sing., sāhib, is also attested in the Qurʾān, but does not
have the familial connotation of the feminine form); *akh* (brother, friend; see brother and brotherhood; friends and friendship); *hamim* (solicitous relative, close friend); *sihr* (affine, relation through marriage); *nasab* (lineage, kindred, attribution) and many others.

In “the legal verses” (*āyāt al-ahkām*), those that contain stipulations on a variety of matters, the Qurʾān also employs terms to set forth rules for marriage, divorce (see marriage and divorce) and inheritance (*mawāriḍ, turāth*), which are foundational to the *shariʿa* (see law and the Qurʾān). (In the case of marriage and divorce, the Qurʾānic text contains primarily verbal forms: “to marry,” *zawwaja, aḥsana, nakaha*, etc., “to divorce,” *talaqa, zāhana, taḥlqa*; the nominal forms that are prominent in the discourse of the *shariʿa*, such as *nikāḥ, talāq*, etc., are not as prevalent in the Qurʾān; but cf. for *nikāḥ* Q 2:235, 237, 24:33; for *talāq* Q 2:227, 229; and, as the name of a sūra, Q 65, “Ṣūrat al-Ṭalāq.”) As with all interpretations, the English glosses given here depend on particular judgments regarding “comparable” work done by words in two discourses.

The terms selected at random and cited above are among those used in the Qurʾān to urge or discourage certain kinds of behavior. Some are also used to specify particular rights and duties. But neither in the matter of moral exhortation and prohibition (see ethics and the Qurʾān; social interactions; prohibited degrees), nor in that of defining succession to property rights, are the people concerned necessarily connected by “biological links.” For example, those who look after the affairs of orphans (q.v.) are urged to regard them as “brothers” (Q 2:220); Qurʾānic inheritance rules affect people related by affinity (*muṣāḥara*); and various kinship terms can convey the sense of “friendship,” “solicitude,” etc., which raises the question of how so-called primary meanings are to be determined.

There is an explicit assumption held by scholars since the nineteenth century that the people of the Ḥijāż (see geography), among whom the Qurʾān was revealed, lived in a society that was essentially organized in “kinship” terms (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān). This assumption has serious implications for assessing the political, legal and moral reforms initiated by the Qurʾān (see politics and the Qurʾān; community and society in the Qurʾān). One of the first to talk about pre-Islamic and early Islamic “tribal” society in detail was Smith (*Kinship and marriage*, 1885), a major figure in the history of both orientalist and anthropological thought. The idea of “kinship” as the organizing principle of “early” societies had been a continuous part of evolutionary social thinking since before his time. It has been increasingly problematized, however, in contemporary anthropology (see Needham, *Rethinking kinship*). Most recently, Schneider (*Critique*) has demonstrated the questionable character of assumptions about “kinship organization.” Although they frequently draw on anthropology when discussing the society whose members first listened to the Qurʾān (see orality; revelation and inspiration), orientalists do not appear to have taken these important developments in anthropological theory into account.

The nineteenth-century belief that the seventh-century Ḥijāz was a “kinship-based society” allowed orientalists to interpret and explain references to “kinship” in the Qurʾān as a continuation of or break from pre-Islamic (*jāhibi, see age of ignorance*) principles and values. Thus Smith maintains that kinship among pre-Islamic Arabs signified the blood shared by all the members of a tribe, the common substance that defined each individual’s
responsibility for — among other things — exacting vengeance in the name of the tribe (see retaliation; blood money). Many others have echoed this view — even a century after Smith, including Bashir (Tawāzun al-naqā'īd), Donner (Early Islamic conquests) and Crone (Tribes and states).

Smith argues that since all amicable social relations were conceived in terms of “common blood,” the extensions of such relations had to be sealed by blood-rites. “The commingling of blood by which two men became brothers or two kins (sic) allies, and the fiction of adoption [see children] by which a new tribesman was feigned to be the veritable son of a member of the tribe, are both evidences of the highest value that the Arabs were incapable of conceiving any absolute social obligation or social unity which was not based on kinship; for a legal fiction is always adopted to reconcile an act with a principle too firmly established to be simply ignored” (Smith, Kinship and marriage, 51).

Smith does not notice the double meaning he gives to “kinship” here — the one being a “biological” link and the other a “cultural representation” of the latter — just as he fails to notice that the existence of rites of friendship and adoption in the Age of Ignorance (jāhilyya) indicates that an absolute obligation could be extended to those who did not share “common blood” (see clients and clientage). The point is that what he calls “a legal fiction” is not a statement that refers to imagined kinship but what Austin (How to do) called a “performative act.”

The notion of kinship, as expressed in a variety of terms (qaribah, nasab, ʻashira, qaum, ḥayy, etc.), is not simply an instance of “culture hitching a ride on nature” (Crone, Tribes and states, 355), i.e. of rights and duties attributed to biological facts. As a notion, kinship articulates distinctive ideas of social relations, morality and cosmology (q.v.), through which certain cultural facts can be constructed. Marriages as well as adoption create jural relations with mutual rights and obligations between persons who do not share “common blood.” These relationships are not confused with “blood relationships.” Marriage, for example, is a voluntary contract that is best seen as articulating one aspect of the total set of gender relations (see Rivière, Marriage; see gender) — and that is precisely how it is envisaged in the Qurʾān, often in explicit contrast to the Age of Ignorance. The relationship between blood brothers in the Age of Ignorance was apparently free of the rights and obligations that were legally ascribed to kinship roles. (The Qurʾān, of course, rejects legal adoption — see q 33:4, 37 — as it rejects rites involving human blood.) This means that “blood brotherhood” (like friendship) in the Age of Ignorance was based on what Levi-Strauss calls metaphor (similitude) as against metonymy (consubstantiation). When the Qurʾān repudiates the attribution of nasab between God and jinn (q.v.) it is both “similitude” and “consubstantiation” that are being denied (q 37:158-9; see metaphor; similes; God and his attributes; faith; polytheism and atheism).

Crone agrees with conventional historians (including Watt, Muhammad at Mecca; Muhammad at Medina, whom she attacks) that Mecca was “a tribal” society — a society based on “kinship.” “In social terms,” she observes, “the protection [q.v.] that Muhammad is said to have enjoyed from his own kin, first as an orphan and next as a prophet, would indicate the tribal system to have been intact” (Crone, Meccan trade, 233). Her argument, however, is not logically necessary. Yet Crone’s insistence that “the tribal system” was “intact” does raise interesting questions about the relationship of her “model” to her “data,” because it is
not entirely clear how someone who denies the credibility of all traditional Islamic sources relating to Meccan society at the time of the Prophet is able to make such an assertion. The answer would appear to lie in her resort to the writings of nineteenth-century European travelers and twentieth-century ethnographers (cf. Crone, Meccan trade, 236) — a style of historical inference adopted by other orientalists (e.g. Donner, Early Islamic conquests), even when they have not, as the radical skeptics have, dismissed all early Islamic sources (see Donner, Narratives, for a sober survey). Contemporary ethnographic studies of tribes — pastoral as well as agricultural — are useful for thinking about early historical periods, not because one can extrapolate from present social arrangements, which are extremely diverse, to distant historical ones, but because they can sensitize one to problems that need to be addressed when speculating about Islamic history (see History and the Qur’ān). The idea that contemporary “tribes” are living fossils of ancient ways of social life belongs to a theory of social evolution that anthropologists have long ago demolished and abandoned.

The resort to the modern ethnography of tribes for purposes of historical reconstruction also plays a crucial part in Powers’ (Studies) revisionist account of the origins of the Islamic law of inheritance. When Smith reconstructed pre-Islamic Arabian society he represented the Islamic rules of inheritance as a modification of pre-Islamic (jāhili) ones. Smith’s thesis eventually became the established orientalist view. It is this view that Powers has challenged on the basis of a re-reading of the inheritance verses (especially q 4:12, 176), to which arguments about the syntax of a Qur’ānic sentence and the meaning of the word kalāla are central (kalāla has been understood to mean “someone who has no parents or children, and therefore no direct heirs”; Powers translates it as “daughter-in-law”; see Inheritance; Grammar and the Qur’ān). Powers’ thesis is that the received Islamic system of inheritance (‘ilm al-farāʿī) is quite different not only from the pre-Islamic one but also from the proto-Islamic system of the Qur’ān that gave a far greater scope to the principle of testamentary bequests than the šari‘a allows. In evolutionary terms, the shift from the pre-Islamic system to the proto-Islamic one represents a double progress, (a) from the constraints of kinship to the freedom of contract (see Contracts and Alliances; Breaking Trusts and Contracts) and (b) from the principle of inheritance by seniority (brother to brother) to the principle of generational inheritance (father to son). Powers sums this up as “a transition from nomadism to sedentary life and from tribalism to individualism” (Studies, 210). The ilm al-farāʿī is therefore seen as a backward move, a clumsy compromise in the interests of power.

According to Powers, the proto-Islamic system was distorted for political reasons by the Prophet’s immediate successors who imposed the orthodox reading on the relevant verses (see Readings of the Qur’ān; Collection of the Qur’ān). The idea that the Prophet’s most trusted Companions (see Companions of the Prophet) and oldest converts would engage in a conspiracy against him concerning the proper meaning of a divine verse which inaugurated a new legal dispensation, one that was presumably in force during the Prophet’s lifetime, seems, according to Powers’ critics, far-fetched. (For this and other critical points relating to Arabic syntax and the etymology of kalāla, see Zia-deh, Review of Powers; see also Arabic kinship.
LANGUAGE; LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QURʿĀN.) Some Muslim modernists (e.g. Arkoun, *Min al-ijtihād*), however, have received Powers’ re-interpretation of the “kinship” *kātala* with enthusiasm because it supports their desire to challenge what they see as the ideological manipulation of the qurʿānic text by jurists and theologians determined to impose traditional authority (q.v.) on all believers and to prevent the use of critical reason by the individual (see ISLAM; CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL PRACTICES AND THE QURʿĀN).

So what does “kinship” mean in the Qurʿān? Certainly not “common blood,” a Western idiom, because the Arabic for “blood” (*damm*) is never used in the Qurʿān to denote that which relatives share in common (see BLOOD AND BLOOD CLOT; BIOLOGY AS THE CREATION AND STAGES OF LIFE). From a Muslim exegetical perspective, signification must be sought in the connection between believer and text. For pious Muslims qurʿānic meanings are not mechanically determined by grammatical and lexical criteria or by some objective context (see OCCASIONS OF REVELATION). Far from being a simple injunction, piety (q.v.) and fear (q.v.) of God (*birr wa-taqwā*) on the part of attentive Muslims is understood to be a presupposition for arriving at the meanings of the Qurʿān, because the divine recitation evokes and confirms what is already in the heart (q.v.) of the faithful man or woman (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; RECITATION OF THE QURʿĀN).

A number of themes emerge through the qurʿānic use of “kinship” terms. To begin with, any similitude and common substance between God and humans is strongly rejected (e.g. Q 5:18, and most famously in Sūrat al-Ikhlas, “Sincere Devotion,” Q 112; see ANTHROPOMORPHISM). God cannot be likened or compared to anything — particularly as everything is of his creation (q.v.). The Qurʿān does, however, recognize friendship between God and humans, but friendship in this case transcends the absence of similitude: for it was God who chose to make Abraham (q.v.) his friend (*khalil*) because the latter had given his entire being to him (Q 4:125; see ḤANĪF). The faithful, on the other hand, are bound by their common faith and the union of their hearts, which makes them brothers to one another (Q 3:103; 49:10). God has endowed human beings in this world with bonds of descent and affinity (*nasabon wa-zibran*) — that is to say, with enduring relations that are inherited as well as voluntarily undertaken (Q 25:54). Thus one owes obedience (q.v.) to one’s parents (q.v.) — and especially to one’s mother (Q 31:14): parents are to be welcomed and honored, just as the prophet Joseph (q.v.) welcomed his mother and his father (Q 12:99-100). Indeed obedience to parents is a virtue (see VIRTUES AND VICES, COMMANDING AND FORBIDDING) even if they happen to be non-Muslims (Q 40:8), so long as this does not involve disobedience (q.v.) to God (Q 58:22). (See, for example, the widely used textbook on the prescribed relations between parents and children in Islam, Šāhī, *ʿAlāʾīṯat al-ḥāb*, 15-41.) But on the day of judgment (see LAST JUDGMENT) one stands alone before God surveying one’s completed life (Q 23:101). All inherited and created bonds of life are there dissolved. One flees from all one’s kin — including one’s parents, brothers, spouse (ṣāḥiba), and children (Q 80:33-7). On that day any sense of kinship as common substance is proven meaningless. Only similitude links us together. Hence one must temper worldly attachments of every kind.

As understood by the faithful Muslim, the qurʿānic language of kinship articulates ways of behaving in this world in full
consciousness of God, rather than representing the traces of a secular society in the process of evolving from tribalism to individualism. See also family.

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Bibliography

Kitāb see book; people of the book; scripture and the Qur`ān

Knife see instruments

Knowledge and Learning

Cognitive understanding and its acquisition. Concepts of knowledge and learning appear frequently in nearly all types of Islamic discourse. They are commonly subsumed under a variety of Arabic words such as `ilm, ma`rifa, ṣaḥḥ, ḥikma and shu`ur, and the verbs and verbal derivatives of each, many of which find representation in the Qur`ān itself, at least in form if not in meaning.

The problem of defining knowledge and explaining its relationship to faith (q.v.) on the one hand, and to action and works on the other (see good deeds; evil deeds; ethics and the Qur`ān), became, for example, the subject of intense debate and eventual elaboration involving precision and technical complexity. One example is the great concern of the experts about establishing that human knowledge is contingent and temporally produced whereas that of God is not, although he somehow, despite the paradox, comprehends and is the author of what humans think (see intellect; freedom and predetermination). For both philosophy (falsafa) and theology (kalām) a precise understanding of the nature of knowledge (`ilm) is, in fact, for this and many other reasons an essential first premise to all subsequent reasoning (see philosophy and the Qur`ān; theology and the Qur`ān). A major category of Islamic literature took up the theme of the enumeration of the sciences (iḥbā` al-`ulam), that is, of laying out systematically all knowledge and explaining its value, ranks, and the relationship of one kind to the others. Religious scholars in Islam are “those who know” (al-`ulamā`, sing. `ālim). The search for knowledge (taḥlīl) is a duty for all Muslims, but especially for those who aspire to attain the status of a learned authority (q.v.). Seeking knowledge implies both finding and studying with a teacher and traveling to distant lands (even to China). Šūfī mystics (see Šūfism and the Qur`ān) sought to separate the process of knowing through intuitive perception (dhawāq) and presence from discursive learning and rational or intellec-
tual reasoning — an effort that has led to an impressively sophisticated body of writings, both by the Sūfis and by those who would deny their approach. Even earlier Muslims debated, as yet another example, the extent to which knowledge is confined to, or conveyed exclusively within, a natural language and its grammar (see grammar and the Qurʾān; Arabic language; language, concept of). For example, is what can be known in Arabic — the language of the Islamic revelation — different from Greek science and philosophy in part because of its linguistic home? Or does there exist a universal logic of thought that transcends (and is therefore superior to) particular expressions in use in a given culture? The ḥadīth (see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān), as yet one more category, already include numerous admonitions about the value of knowledge, its reward and the duty to seek it, to gather and preserve it, to journey abroad in search of it. In it teachers are accorded high honor; Muhammad was a teacher; the angel Gabriel (q.v.) also (see teaching).

All these examples merely hint at the enormous importance of knowledge and learning in the Islamic world over time and place from the earliest period of post-Qurʾānic Islam to the present (see teaching and preaching the Qurʾān). Every facet of Islamic thought was and continues to be affected by it. But it is doubtful that these concepts of knowledge or of learning and the characteristic value placed on them in Islam generally, come from the Qurʾān itself or find an echo there. It is, of course, always possible, and often done, to interpret the sacred text to draw on its amazing flexibility and thus yield almost any meaning from its words (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval; exegesis of the Qurʾān: early modern and contemporary). Nevertheless, given the original context for the Qurʾān, claiming as it does to represent the very words of God and not those of humans except secondarily, the perspective from which it speaks is not that of the community of Muslims. It does not reflect their later need to acquire or preserve knowledge.

In the world of the Qurʾān God alone knows (see God and His Attributes); truth (q.v.) is his. In it either humans do not know, even though they may think they know, or God causes a select few of them to possess a limited degree of knowledge and truth (see ignorance; impeccability). They know what he lets them know. This starkly different view of knowledge is perhaps best approached by observing a common theme in later Islamic thought of how to know God and, almost as important, how to express and verbally explain knowing God. One aspect of the problem is that God is infinite and no finite creature can know an infinite (see anthropomorphism). Knowing a thing implies comprehending the thing as it really and truly is. But that is impossible in relation to the infinite, unlimited, inexhaustible God. God cannot be known by humans; they will merely come to “acknowledge” him or “be aware” of him. Some authors make a distinction here between “knowing” (the verb ‘alima) and “recognizing” (the verb ‘arafa).

But, even so, is there any correspondence at all between the knowledge that God has and what knowledge the human possesses, acquires, or comes to know? Obviously, God himself does not learn, but does he teach? An important theme in Islamic writings concerns the relative worth of study and effort versus the spontaneous acquisition of inspired enlightenment (see revelation and inspiration; prophets and prophethood). Should the seeker of knowledge — here the exact meaning of...
knowledge can vary — read books and take instruction, or avoid both and prepare for the infusion of knowledge by grace through pious practice and exercise (see piety)?

In the Qur’ān the fact that God is all-knowing (‘ālim), knows what humans do not, and knows the unseen (‘ālim al-ghayb, ‘allām al-ghayb) is stressed constantly (see hidden and the hidden). The term all-knowing (‘ālim) appears literally again and again, often in combination with all-wise (ḥakīm, see wisdom; judgment) but also with all-hearing (samī‘, see hearing and deafness; seeing and hearing). One phrase states clearly that “over and above every person who has knowledge is the all-knowing” (q. 12:76). In fact, every Qur’ānic instance (thirteen in all) of the term “knower” (‘ālim [sing.]), which is the same word as that used later for the learned scholar, is followed by “unseen” (ghayb) and therefore refers unambiguously to God. It is true that there are references (five) to “those with knowledge” in the plural (‘ālimūn, ‘ulamā‘) and several expressions for humans “who know, understand, are aware” (tālā l-albāb, for example, or al-rāšikūn fi l-‘īlm). Nevertheless, God’s preponderance and omniscience is overwhelming, so much so as to bring into question what it means to assert that humans, even the prophets, know.

A further issue is how they come to know whatever it is that they know. Strictly within the Qur’ān, the terms for knowing and knowledge (‘īlm, ma‘rifa, fiqh, shu‘ur and the various forms they take) seem to suggest not a degree or quantity, but an absolute, in which the known object is simply the truth — what truly is — in its ultimate reality and not some fact of ordinary perception. Common human knowledge in its mundane form lacks value in comparison. Thus, to have knowledge or to come to have knowledge implies becoming aware of the true nature of the universe as God’s creation (q.v.) and of his role in it. In most cases, Qur’ānic references to those who know or do not know indicate only whether or not the person or persons understands this truth and do not indicate an acquired or accumulated degree of learning. Those who have knowledge (al-‘ulamā‘) are simply those who truly fear (q.v.) God (q. 35:28; q. 3:66 [among others]) refers to those who argue about a matter about which they have no knowledge; only God knows what they think they know.

The opposites of knowledge are ignorance (jahl), which is not having guidance (huda, as in q. 6:35; see astray; error), supposition or conjecture (q. 53:28) and the following of personal whims in the absence of knowledge (as in q. 6:119 and 90:29), all of which denote a failure, often willful, to perceive and acknowledge the truth. Even the expressions for those who possess understanding (īlam l-albāb), who are firmly grounded in knowledge (al-rāshīkūn fi l-‘īlm) or who come to know that which they formerly knew not (mā lam ya‘ām, mā lam takun ta‘ām), indicate, not learning in the normal sense of that word, but having such knowledge, that is, of being wise in matters of religion (q.v.) and the affairs of God.

Given that knowledge does not depend on study and learning, it is fair to ask if the Qur’ān contains a concept of instruction as in either the teaching by God of humans or humans of other humans, leading some to become more learned than others. There are in fact several verses that, in accordance with the Qur’ān’s fertile elasticity, can be construed in this manner. Most use the second — that is, transitive — form of the verb “to know” (‘alima), thus to “teach” (‘allama). Important examples include “he taught Adam the names of all things” (q. 2:31; see Adam and Eve); “we have no knowledge except that which you taught us” (q. 2:32); “the most merciful
taught the Qurʾān; he created man and taught him the explanation (al-bayān)” (Q 55:1-4); “Lord... you have taught me [Joseph] the interpretation of events” (Q 12:101; see Joseph; Dreams and Sleep; Foretelling; Divination; Portents); and “we have been taught the language of the birds” (Q 27:16; see Animal Life). It is easy to see how these cases can be, as they have been, understood as proof that God acts as the teacher of humankind, at least of the prophets. In a closely parallel example, however, God instead “brings” or “bestows” (ātā) knowledge: “we have brought to David (q.v.) and Solomon (q.v.) knowledge” (Q 27:15); the sense is rather of God’s causing the recipient to know something, not by instruction but by instantaneous revelation. “God revealed (anzala) to you the book (q.v.), and wisdom and caused you to know that which you previously knew not” (Q 4:113). This latter sense fits better the tone of the Qurʾān and of the power of God as expressed in it generally (see Power and Impotence). The slow accumulation of items of knowledge applies solely to humans learning from other humans. It involves a temporal and sequential process quite different from that of God. Accordingly, therefore, the first of these verses reads: “he caused Adam to have knowledge of the names of all things” and thus it does not imply a process of learning or that, despite his knowledge, Adam was “learned.” The cryptic words of Q 96:4-5, “he it is who taught by the pen; taught humankind (al-insān) what it knew not” suggest, however, the opposite since they indicate, if taken literally, a form of instruction that by its very nature must be sequentially ordered. The commentators note, however, that the verse may rather be read such that God taught the use of the pen, that is, writing itself. Nevertheless, the more common interpretation is that he taught by means of the pen and therefore quite possibly these verses point to some type of book learning (see book; Writing and Writing Materials). A few isolated verses also mention learning or instruction in a situation involving humans imparting (or purportedly imparting) knowledge from one to the other. Two of these (Q 44:14 and 16:103), however, cite false imputations that Muhammad had been taught what he knew by another man (a foreigner; see Informants; Strangers and Foreigners). One more verse (Q 2:102) speaks of a kind of sorcery or magic (q.v.) taught by devils (see Devil) for evil purposes, such as a spell to separate a man and his wife (see Marriage and Divorce; Jinn). Yet another verse (Q 9:122) contains a verb form that usually denotes quite clearly “to study” (tafaqqaḥa) and is there joined with the word “religion” (li-yatafaqqahū fī l-dīn), in a phrase that would translate “that they may study (or become learned in) religion.” The verse as a whole cautions the Muslims not to go to war (q.v.) altogether but to leave behind a contingent when the rest go out. But according to a widely accepted interpretation (credited by the commentary tradition to Ibn ‘Abbās [d. 68/686-8]), it applies specifically to a time when the Prophet was then actively receiving revelations and other instructions from God and, if none of the Muslims were to stay with him at home, none would come to know those aspects of the religion imparted to him in that interval. Subsequently, they could neither transmit it accurately to those not present nor insure its later preservation. And yet another view is that it is the party that goes out to war (not those who remain behind) that gains a deeper understanding and appreciation of religion — witnessing in this case how, by God’s support, a few Muslims can defeat a much larger force of unbelievers (see Expeditions and Battles) — and brings
that truth back with them to share with the others (see fighting; jihād). Both interpretations are related, for example, by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210; Tafsīr, xvi, 223-7), among others. Thus, despite the context of the passage as a whole, the “study of religion” which is what some authorities would later have it imply, is not necessarily what was involved in this particular situation.

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Korah

A figure living at the time of Moses (q.v.) who is mentioned both in the Bible and the Qurān. He is described in q 28:76-82 and briefly mentioned in two other verses. Korah (Ar. Qarīn) is introduced as one of the people of Moses, yet one who treated them unjustly (q 28:76-82; see justice and injustice; oppression). God accorded him such enormous treasures that “its very keys (maḏāhībahuyu) were too heavy a burden for a company of men” (q 28:76) to carry. When people urged him to use his wealth (q.v.) for God’s purposes and, with the world to come in mind (see eschatology), he would answer that the only reason he possessed his wealth was because of his knowledge (see knowledge and learn-

ing). Finally, when Korah “went forth unto his people in his adornment” (q 28:79) and his people argued about his fortune, God decreed his death, making the earth swallow him and his house (see punishment stories; chastisement and punishment). Two other verses mention the name of Korah. In the first of these (q 29:39) he, along with Pharaoh (q.v.) and Hāmān (q.v.), arrogantly (see arrogance) opposes the signs (q.v.) brought by Moses, while in the other he, along with Pharaoh and Hāmān, accuses Moses of being a lying sorcerer (q 40:24; see soothsayers; magic; lie; insanity).

As well as containing some elements that are similar to the biblical story of Korah (cf. Num 16; see scripture and the Qurān; myths and legends in the Qurān), the Qurān mainly stresses the fact, which had already been highlighted in rabbinical literature, of his great wealth. A saying of Muhammad, which reflects Qur’ānic content, mentions his name along with those of Hāmān and Pharaoh as examples of people destined to go to hell (q.v.; Ibn Hānbal, Musnad, ii, 160). Exegetical traditions usually recount that Korah was Moses’ cousin or, according to Muhammad b. Ishāq (d. 150/767), his uncle (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xx, 105; see exegesis of the Qurān: classical and medieval). He was so handsome or his voice, while reciting the Torah (q.v.), was so beautiful that he was named the Enlightened (al-munawwar). His appearance among his people is described with a wealth of detail, from his luxurious dress to the magnificence of his escort, consisting of three hundred maids, four thousand riding beasts with purple saddles or with seventy thousand or more soldiers. The keys of his treasures were the leather keys of his storehouses; they were no larger than a finger and so heavy that only forty men or forty camels or sixty mules could carry them.
Korah, envious of the prophethood of Moses and of the sacerdotal privileges of Aaron (q.v.; Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandi, Tafsīr, ii, 525; see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD), planned to get rid of Moses when the duty of the alms tax was revealed (see ALMSGIVING). He paid a woman to accuse Moses of adultery (see ADULTERY AND FORNICATION) but the woman, when examined by Moses, retracted her accusation and unmasked Korah’s plan. Moses ordered the earth to seize Korah and, in spite of his pleas, he and his house were completely swallowed up (Muqātil, Tafsīr, iii, 357). Other traditions state that every day Korah sinks deeper into the earth by the height of a man and that he will continue sinking at this rate until the day of resurrection (q.v.). It is also said, however, that while sinking in the earth, one day Korah heard Jonah’s (q.v.) voice in the belly of the whale and that he felt sorry when he learned of Moses’ and Aaron’s death; as a reward for this, God relieved him of the punishment (Majliš, Bihār, xiii, 253; see REWARD AND PUNISHMENT). Some other reports tell of Korah’s knowledge of alchemy and they are usually linked to the qur’ānic statement about his knowledge. Some traditions specify that he was able to change lead and copper into silver and gold (q.v.) or that Korah learned the art of alchemy from his wife, who was Moses’ sister (Kisā’, Qisas, 229; see MEDICINE AND THE QUR’ĀN; METALS AND MINERALS).

The origin of the Arabic form of the name of Korah (Qūrān) is unknown but seems to parallel the form of other names such as Aaron (Ḥārūn, Horovitz, ku, 131).

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Bibliography

Labor see manual labor; birth

Lactation

Production of milk for nursing a child; the act of nursing a child. Q 2:233, 4:23 and 65:6, all dating (according to Bell) from the Medinan period (see chronology and the Qur'ān), lay the foundations of an Islamic “ethics of breastfeeding” (the Arabic terms for which utilize derivatives of the triliteral root ṭ-ḍ-ḍ). In the Medinan sura Q 2:2, nurses (kull murḍi‘a) and nurslings (mā arda‘at) are mentioned in an eschatological context (see eschatology); the Qur’ānic story of Moses’ (q.v.) infancy (the Medinan Q 28:7, 12) includes references to nursing and wet nurses (marāḍi‘); and, finally, weaning (fisāl) is described as part of the stages of life (the Medinan Q 46:15; cf. the Meccan Q 31:14; see biology as the creation and stages of life).

That breastfeeding is a maternal instinct is implied in Q 22:2 and, even more strongly, in Q 28:7-12. In Q 22:2, nursing mothers, who due to grief and anxiety neglect their own nurslings, are listed among the signs of the dramatic displacement that will shake the universe on the day of judgment (see last judgment; apocalypse). Moreover, in Q 28:7-12, the love and care of Moses’ mother for her nursling find emphatic expression. Q 28:12 shows that the Arabs (q.v.) of the early seventh century were aware that infants sometimes reject the milk (q.v.) of women other than their own mothers (see children; pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur‘ān).

Q 2:233 calls upon the nurslings’ fathers to “provide reputedly for their [e.g. their repudiated, lactating wives] food and clothing” during “two full years” (cf. Q 31:14: wa-fisāluhu fidī‘amayni) unless both father and mother “by mutual agreement and consultation desire [weaning] (earlier)” (see parents; family). This could be read as an effort to protect repudiated (see marriage and divorce) women who were nursing — and their nurslings — in a society which was becoming sedentary (see geography; city) and experiencing increasing individualism as well as a transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal family structure (Bianquis, Family, 614; Watt, Muhammad, 272-89; see patriarchy; gender; women and the Qur‘ān). Wet-nursing (q.v.), in this context of the separation of the parents, is sanctioned by the
same verse. Q 65:6 explicitly refers, moreover, to the repudiated (divorced) wife who is being paid to nurse her own infant.

Q 4:23 mentions milk mothers and milk sisters among those with whom a man may not have sexual relations (see prohibited degrees; sex and sexuality). It thus adds a unique element to a long Semitic tradition of prohibitions of marriage by extending the range of incest beyond its definition in Judaism and Christianity (Héritier, Deux soeurs, 87-91; see also fosterage; scripture and the Qurʾān; Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity). According to Watt, the principle that milk-relationship is on the same level as blood-relationship may be avoided undue endogamy by making certain degrees of milk-relationship a barrier to marriage (Watt, Muhammad, 281; cf. Schacht/Burton and Chelhod, Radāʾ, 362; see also kinship; blood and blood clot).

Islamic rules concerning lactation, as formulated in works of Qurʾānic exegesis, Ḥadith and fiqh, are based on the normative verses among the above-mentioned. These were interpreted against a background of circumstances and needs that sometimes differed from those of the early Muslim community (see community and society in the Qurʾān). One example would be the growing importance of hired wet-nursing among urban higher social groups of the Muslim world in the high Middle Ages. Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148; Ṭabārī, 202-6) refers to no less than fifteen legal questions, the answers to which are based on Q 2:233. Such questions include, for instance, whether breastfeeding is a mother’s right or duty and, assuming it is her duty, whether or not noble women are exempted from fulfilling it. Ibn al-ʿArabī further concludes that a mother’s right to the custody of her child (ḥadāna, not mentioned in the Qurʾān) is based on Q 2:233 since the functions of — and therefore the right to — lactation (radāʾ) and hadāna cannot be separated (cf. Ilkīyāʾ al-Harrāsī, Ahkām, i/ii, 187).

Hadith and Qurʾānic commentaries, postulating a connection between the mother’s milk and her husband’s semen, explain Q 4:23 (explicitly referring to milk mother and milk sisters only) as intended to duplicate for milk relationships the list of those blood relatives with whom a Muslim man is forbidden to contract marriage (Giladi, Infants, 24-7).

Avner Giladi

Bibliography

Ladder see ascension

Lamp

Manufactured light-giving object. The most common reference to a lamp (ʿAr. miṣbāḥ and sirāj) in the Qurʾān is a metaphorical use (see metaphor) of the word sirāj to designate the sun (q.v.): “And we built over you seven firmaments (see Heaven and sky) and made a splendid light (sirājan wahhājan)” (Q 78:12-3; cf. Dāmaghānī,
Wujūh, i, 442); “And he made the moon (q.v.) a light among them and he made the sun a lamp (al-shamsa sirājan)” (Q 71:16); and “Blessed is he who made constellations (see Planets and Stars) in the sky and made it in a lamp (sirājan) and a light-giving moon” (Q 25:61). On one occasion (Q 33:46), however, the prophet Muḥammad is referred to as a light-giving lamp (sirājan munirān, see Names of the Prophet).

The most celebrated reference to a lamp (mishāh) is in Q 24:35, commonly known as the “Light Verse” (āyat al-nūr, cf. Dāmaghānī, Wujūh, ii, 231; see Light; Material Culture and the Qur’ān).

Jamal J. Elias

Bibliography (see also Bibliography of Light)
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Language, Concept of

The uniquely human faculty of (primarily) verbal expression. In the Qur’ān, the concept of language is expressed by the word lisān (lit. tongue). The other common term for language, lugha, which is well-attested in classical and modern standard Arabic (see Arabic Language), does not appear in the Qur’ān; one encounters only the related words laghw and lāghiya, which express exclusively the connotation of “vain utterance.”

There are twenty-five occurrences of the word lisān in the Qur’ān, fifteen in the singular and ten in the plural (alsina; the other plural, alsun, is not attested in the Qur’ān; cf. ‘Abd al-Bāqī). In all of its occurrences in the plural, lisān actually refers to the tongue as the organ of speech, a meaning found in six of its occurrences in the singular. While lisān designates the tongue as the organ of speech, speech (q.v.) itself and the act of speaking are designated by the verb qāla and its derivatives as, for example, in Q 20:27-8: “Unloose the knot upon my tongue that they might understand my words” (wa-ubtal ‘uydatan min lisānī yawqabā qawlī). The common metonymy — one encounters it in more than one language — of the tongue, the organ of speech, being used to mean the language articulated by means of that organ, appears in the nine remaining occurrences of lisān in the singular.

As to other important developments, the most interesting is surely Q 14:4: “And we have sent no messenger (q.v.) save with the tongue of his people that he might make all clear to them” (wa-mā aradha min rasūlin illā bi-lisānī qawmihi li-yubayyina lahun). The first part of this sentence is a restrictive clause offered as the premise to an argument whose conclusion constitutes a well known theological thesis: namely, that the Arabic of the Qur’ān is itself the very language of Muhammad, that is to say, a hypothetical “dialect of Quraysh (q.v.),” hypothetical in the sense that it is not documented in an independent manner (see Dialects).

The second part of Q 14:4 is based on a common conception of language as an articulation of thought (tabyin). Thus, efficacy in preaching (see also Q 19:97 and 44:58, yassarnāhu bi-lisānika, “now we have made it easy by your tongue”; see Prophets and Prophethood; Warner; Good News) is linked to a language viewed either as a commonly-spoken vernacular or as a hypothetically-constructed linguistic vehicle. According to the theological thesis mentioned above, the qur’ānic language is indeed the vernacular of Quraysh. But for
many Arabists, the Arabic of the Qurʾān is very close, if not identical, to the pre-Islamic poetic koine, itself a hypothetical construct (see Poets and Poetry; Language and Style of the Qurʾān; Form and Structure of the Qurʾān). Some other linguists turn towards a third hypothesis: the late homogenization of both language forms (for a general overview, see Jones, Language). The use of the second verbal form, ṣayyana, with an explicit object in q. 14:4 (see Tabarî, Tafsīr, xvi, 616, for an example of classical commentary on this passage) suggests that mubīn, as an active participle of the fourth verbal form, ḍahīna (see Grammar and the Qurʾān), may be similarly understood. See, for example, q. 26:105, where ḍīṣān ‘arabi mubīn, “a clear Arabic tongue,” can be understood as “an Arabic tongue that makes [all things] clear” (Tabarî, Tafsīr, xix, 112, for this signification). But the opposition found in q. 16:103 between a ḍīṣān qualified simply as a’jamī and a ḍīṣān with the double qualification of ‘arabi and mubīn makes one understand the former qualifier as the antonym of the two latter ones. In other words, its possible translation as “barbarous” conveys the dual sense of non-Arabic (‘a’jamī) and unclear (a’jam). For the exegetes’ debates on the meaning of a’jamī, see Wansbrough (q. 19:98-9), who includes this notion of ‘arabi and mubīn as functional equivalents.

In the juxtaposition of terms found in q. 16:103, one notes a furtive slip from an objective state, the communicative function of any language, to a subjective state, the clarity bestowed only on Arabic. It is this shift of signification that supported the theological logo-centrism of the medieval period (for example, see Shâfi‘î, Risāla, 34-55; also Gilliot, Elt, chapters 3 and 4) and provided justification for the linguistic nationalism of the modern era (qawmîyya < qawm) and what the American linguist Ferguson has described as “myths about Arabic.” See also illiteracy; inimitability; foreign vocabulary; Arabs; Arabic script.

Pierre Larcher

Language and Style of the Qurʾān

The semantic field of “language” includes several triliteral Arabic roots: l-s-n (Dāmaghānī, Wujūḥ, ii, 200-1; see H. Jensen, Arabic language, 132; see also LANGUAGE, CONCEPT OF), k-l-m (Yahyā b. Sallām, Taṣārif, 303-5; Dāmaghānī, Wujūḥ, ii, 186-7), l-w-l, l-h-n (Khan, Die exegetischen Teile, 276, on q. 47:30: “the burden of their talk,” laḥn al-qawm; Fück, ’Arabiyya, 133; Fr. trans. 202; Ullmann, Wa-hairu, 21-2). It should be noted that ḥgha in the sense of manner of speaking (Fr. parler, Ger. Rede) is totally absent from the Qurʾān — although the root l-qh-w is attested, but with the meanings of “vain conversation” (q. 23:3), “to talk idly” (q. 41:26), “idle talk” (q. 19:62; see Gossip), or to be “unintentional” in an oath (q. 2:225; 5:89; Dāmaghānī, Wujūḥ, ii, 198; Ibn al-Jawzī, Nuẓha, 531-2; see Oaths). The Qurʾān asserts of itself: “this is plain clear Arabic tongue/speech/
language (lisānun ‘arabiyun mubīnun)” (q 16:103), or that it is “in plain/clear Ara-
bic tongue/speech/language” (q 26:195).
In any case, this was the meaning of these verses according to the exegetes (see exegesis of the Qurān: classical and
classical and
medieval), and most translations have followed their lead, which, as will be dis-
cussed below, is problematic. It should
be noted that, in Arabic — as in
English — the concept of “language” is
multivalent, including both an oral and a
written manifestation. As will be discussed
below, the interplay between these two
aspects of language in the formation of the
qu’ānic corpus is only imperfectly under-
stood, a situation that leads to contested
explanations for certain features of the
qu’ānic language (for more on this sub-
ject, see orality).

Various general positions on the language and style of the Qurān
There are many opposing points of view
on the language and style of the Qurān, as
will appear through a selection of quota-
tions taken from both Muslim and non-
Muslim scholars (for reactions of Muslims
through the ages, see below). The Muslim
translator of the Qurān, M. Pickthall
d. 1935), a British convert to Islam,
described the Qurān as an “inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move
men to tears and ecstasy” (Pickthall, vii).
An earlier (non-Muslim) English translator
of the Qurān, G. Sale (d. 1736) thought
that: “The style of the Korān is generally
beautiful and fluent, especially where it
imitates the prophetic manner and script-
ure phrases. It is concise and often ob-
scure, adorned with bold figures after the
eastern taste, enlivened with florid and sen-
tentious expressions, and in many places,
especially when the majesty and attributes
of God are described (see God and his
attributes), sublime and magnificent”
(Preliminary discourse, 66). For the Austrian
J. von Hammer-Purgstall (d. 1856): “The
Koran is not only the law book of Islam
(see law and the Qu’ān), but also a mas-
terpiece of Arabic poetic art (see poetry
and poets). Only the high magic of the
language could give to the speech of
Abdallah’s son the stamp of the speech
(q.v.) of God” (Die letzten vierzig Suren,
25). For F. J. Steingass (d. 1903), the Qurān
is: “[…] A work, then, which calls forth so
powerful and seemingly incompatible emo-
tions even in the distant reader — distant
as to time, and still more so as to mental
development — a work which not only
conquers the repugnance with which he
may begin its perusal, but changes this
adverse feeling into astonishment and
admiration” (Hughes/Steingass, Qurān,
526-7). Another translator of the Qurān,
J. Berque (d. 1995), has tried to find a “diplomatic” solution in the face of the peculiar
language and style of the Qurān,
speaking of its “interlacing structure,”
symphonic effects” and “inordinating
junctions” (jonctions démesurantes, Berque,
Langages, 200-7; cf. id., Coran, 740: “a trian-
gular speech”; id., Relire, 33-4), showing
with these unusual qualifications the dif-
culty he had in expressing a consistently
positive judgment, such as, “It is not neces-
sary to be a Muslim to be sensitive to the
remarkable beauty of this text, to its full-
ness and universal value” (id., Relire, 129).
On the other hand, R. Bell (d. 1952)
remarked that, for a long time, occidental
scholars called attention to “the grammati-
cal unevennesses and interruption of sense
which occur in the Qu’ān” (Bell, Commen-
taries, i, xx). Indeed the qu’ānic scholar and
Semitist Th. Nöldeke (d. 1930) had already
qualified the qu’ānic language as: “drawl-
ing, dull and prosaic” (Nöldeke, Geschichte,
107, on the suras of the third Meccan
period; cf. id., De origine, 55; id., qg, i, 143;
n. 2, written by Schwally: “Muḥammad
was at the very most a middle-size stylist”).

For this German scholar, “while many parts of the Koran undoubtedly have considerable rhetorical power, even over an unbelieving reader, the book, aesthetically considered, is by no means a first-rate performance” (Nöldeke, Koran, 34). In Strassburg, he also wrote that “the sound linguistic sense of the Arabs (q.v.) almost entirely preserved them from imitating the oddnesses and weaknesses of the Qur’anic language” (Nöldeke, Sprache, 22; Fr. trans. Remarques, 34). J. Barth (d. 1914) was struck by “the disruptions of the relations” in the sūras (Störungen der Zusammenhänge; Studien, 113). The Iraqi English Semitist A. Min- gana (d. 1937) thought that the style of the Qur’an “suffers from the disabilities that always characterize a first attempt in a new literary language which is under the influence of an older and more fixed literature” (Syriac influence, 78; this older literature being for him Syriac; see Syriac and the Qur’ān). For the specialist in Arabic literature and Sūfism (see Sufism and the Qur’ān), R.A. Nicholson (d. 1945), “The preposterous arrangement of the Koran […] is mainly responsible for the opinion held by European readers that it is obscure, tiresome, uninteresting; a farrago of long-winded narratives (q.v.) and prosaic exhortations (q.v.), quite unworthy to be named in the same breath with the Prophetical Books of the Old Testament” (Literary history, 161; see Form and Structure of the Qur’ān; Scripture and the Qur’ān).

Other intellectuals waver between reactions of disgust and attraction in reading the Qur’an. In this category may be placed J.W. Goethe (d. 1832): “The Koran repeats itself from sura to sura […] with all sort of amplifications, unbridled tautologies and repetitions which constitute the body of this sacred book, which, each time we turn to it, is repugnant, but it soon attracts, astounds, and in the end enforces rever-
such a formalized, theoretical format. It begins with the assertion: The language of the Qur’an is Arabic. But which Arabic (see dialects)? This question found an answer in Islamic theology, wherein a special way of interpreting the Qur’anic text itself follows the Qur’anic statement: “And we never sent a messenger (q.v.) save with the language/tongue of his folk, that he might make [the message] clear for them” (li-yuhayyina labum, Q 14:4). The exegetes conclude from this verse that the language of the Qur’an is that of Muḥammad and his Companions (see companions of the prophet), understood as the dialect of Ḥijāz (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’an), and more particularly of the Quraysh (q.v.). To that first identification, Qur’anic Arabic = the Hijāzi dialect or the dialect of the Quraysh (al-lugha al-ḥijāzīyya, lughat Quraysh), they added a second one: the language of the Quraysh = al-lugha al-fushā. This last expression is the Arabic denomination of what the Arabists themselves call “classical Arabic.”

That identification originates less in the Qur’anic text than in an Islamic conception of the Qur’an, as it appears in the work of the philologist and jurist Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004). In the Qur’an itself lugha, with the meaning of language, or the feminine comparative fushā do not occur, but only the masculine of this last form: “My brother Aaron (q.v.) is more eloquent than me” (afṣahu minnī lisānān)” (Q 28:34). This verse shows, however, that the faṣāha 1) is above all, a quality of the one who speaks, 2) that there are degrees in it, and 3) that it is only metonymically transferred from the locutor to the language, in this case by the means of a specification (in Arabic grammar tamyīz; here lisānān indicates eloquence “concerning” language).

We find an echo of the Qur’anic formulation in the following affirmation of a scholar of Ravy quoted by Ibn Fāris with a chain of authority (see Hadīth and the Qur’an), Ismā’il b. Abī ’Ubayd Allāh Mu‘ awiya b. ’Ubayd Allāh al-Asbar (d. first half third/ninth cent.), whose father was the vizier and secretary of the caliph al-Mahdī: “The Qurayshites are the most refined of the Arabs by their tongues and the purest by their language (afṣāh al-ʿarab al-sinātan wa asfāhān lughatan).” To that affirmation no justification is given, save a dogmatical one: “The reason is that God… has chosen and elected (see election) them among all the Arabs (dhīlikā annā liḥāka… khtārum min jamīʿ al-ʿarab waṣṭafāhum), and among them he has chosen the prophet of mercy (q.v.), Muḥammad” (Ibn Fāris, al-Ṣāhihī, 52; Rabin, West Arabian, 22-3).

The metonymy is again seen at work in the book of the grammarian Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002; Khaṣṣaʾiʾiʾ, i, 260; see grammar and the Qur’an) saying of the language of the Hijāz: “it is the purest and the oldest (al-lugha al-fushā al-qudmā)” (Ibn Fāris, al-Ṣāhihī, 52; Rabin, West Arabian, 22-3).
was the most correct and purest Arabic dialect (afṣaḥa l-lughāti l-arabiyyati wa-
ัสفاحة), because the Quraysh were on all
sides far removed from the lands of the
non-Arabs” (Ibn Khaldūn, Iḥāṣ 1072; Eng.
But Ibn Fāris himself (al-Sūḥībī, 52) considers
this superiority to be the product of the
selection of the best elements of the different
Arabic dialects, a selection made possible by
the fact that Mecca (q.v.) was the
center of an inter-tribal pilgrimage (q.v.;
we shall see the interpretation given by
Kahle to this conception).

The Qur’ān on its own language and style. Does the
Qur’ān really say it is in “a clear Arabic tongue”?  
As the Qur’ān is a very self-referential text
(Wild, Mensch, 33), it has often been said
that it was “somewhat self-conscious with
respect to its language” (Jenssen, Arabic
language, 132), providing commentary on
its own language, style, and perhaps ar-
rangement. Support for this view is drawn,
first of all, from the apparent Qur’ānic qua-
ification of itself as being “plain/clear
Arabic tongue/speech/language.”

It would appear, however, that most of
the occurrences of lisān in the Qur’ān refer
to “tongue” as a vocal organ (Wansbrough,
q.s, 99; see also LANGUAGE, CONCEPT OF),
like q 39:28: “A lecture in Arabic, contain-
ing no crookedness (ghayra dhī ‘awajin, with-
out distortion)”; and in this case it can be
related to a topos of prophethical com-
unication (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETIHOD;
REVELATION AND INSPIRATION), reflecting
the speech difficulties associated with the
calling of Moses (q.v.; Exodus 4:10-7): “O
my lord, I am not eloquent, neither hereto-
fore, nor since you have spoken unto your
servant, but I am slow of speech, and of a
slow tongue” (verse 10). The Qur’ān, too,
knows this story, as evidenced by q 20:27,
wherein Moses says: “And loose a knot
from my tongue” (cf. also q 28:34, “My

brother Aaron is more eloquent than me in
speech (afṣaḥu minnī lisānī),” which is a
reversal of Exodus 4:14-5: “Is not Aaron
thy brother? I know that he can speak well
[…] And thou shalt speak unto him, and
put words in his mouth and I will be with
thy mouth [or: I will help you speak],
and with his mouth.” Such is the case also for
q 19:97: “And we make it [this scripture]
easy for your tongue (yassarnāhu bi-
lisānika).” It should be noted that the same
expression in q 44:58 has been translated
by Pickthall, with no apparent reason for
translating the two passages differently, as:
“[…] easy in thy language.” This theme
becomes a refrain in q 54:17, 22, 40: “And
in truth we have made the Qur’ān easy to
remember” (see MEMORY). Such texts
“could support the hypothesis that linguis-
tic allusions in the Qur’ān are not to the
Arabic language but rather, to the task of
prophetic communication” (Wansbrough,
q.s, ibid.; cf. Robinson, Discovering,
158-9).

The Qur’ān says not only that it is in
Arabic or Arabic tongue/speech/language
(lisān), but it seems also to declare that it is
in a plain/clear (mubīn) tongue/speech/language:
“We have revealed it, a lecture
(qurʾānan) in Arabic” (q 12:2; 20:113); “We
revealed it, a decisive utterance (ḥukmān) in
Arabic” (q 13:37); “a lecture in Arabic”
(q 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3); “this is a con-
fiming scripture in the Arabic language”
(lisānān ‘arabiyyan) (q 46:12); “in plain
Arabic speech” (bi-lisānīn ‘arabiyyin mubīnīn)
(q 26:195; cf. 16:103; see Rippin, Foreign
vocabulary, 226).

The reasons why the Qur’ān insists on
the quality and value of its own language
seem to be polemical and apologetic (see
POLEMIC AND POLEMICAL LANGUAGE). The
argument for its Arabic character, first of
all, should be put in relation with q 14:4:
“We never sent a messenger save with the
language/tongue of his folk (bi-lisānī
gawmihi), that he might make [the message] clear for them.” This declaration, by stressing the language of this messenger (Muhammad) and this folk (the Arabs), can be understood as a declaration of the ethnocentric nature of this prophetic mission, but also as a divine proof of its universality (Wansbrough, QS, 52:3, 98), challenging another sacred language, Hebrew (op. cit. 81), perhaps also Syriac, or more generally Aramaic (see informants).

But in stressing that it is in Arabic, the Qur’ān answers also to accusations which were addressed to Muhammad during the Meccan period (see opposition to Muhammad): “And we know well what they say: Only a man teaches him. The speech of whom they falsely hint (yalihidāna ilayhi) is outlandish (a’jamī), and this is clear Arabic speech” (Q 16:103). The commentators explain yulhidāna (Kūfān reading: yulhaddīna; Tabārī, Tafsīr, xiv, 180; see Readings of the Qur’ān) by “to incline to, to become fond of” (Muqātil, Tafsīr, ii, 487; Farrāʾ, Maʿāni, ii, 113), which is the meaning of the Arabic labada. But these explanations seem not to be convincing. Indeed, it has been shown elsewhere that the linguistic and social context to which this verse refers could be a Syriac one; the Arabic root l-h-d, being probably an adaptation of the Syriac l-ez, “to speak enigmatically,” “to allude to,” like the Arabic root l-gh-z (Luxenberg, Levant, 87-91; Gilliot, Coran, § 6; see also informants).

The contrast of a’jamī, often understood as barbarous or outlandish, with ‘arabī/Arabic, becomes very significant, if we consider Q 41:44: “And if we had appointed it a lecture in a foreign tongue (qur’ānaq a’jamīyyan) they would assuredly have said: If only its verses (q.v.) were expounded (fussilat) [so that we might understand]? What! A foreign tongue and an Arab (a’jamīyyan wa-‘arabīyyun)?” (or, in the rendition of Arberry: “If We had made it a barbarous Koran […] Why are its signs (q.v.) not distinguished? What, barbarous and Arabic?”). Fussilat was understood by an early exegete, al-Suddī (d. 128/745), as “clarified” (bayyinat, Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xxiv, 127; Tha’labī, Tafsīr, not quoting al-Suddī: “whose verses are clear; they reach us so that we understand it. We are a people of Arabs, we have nothing to do with non-Arabs (‘ajamiyya’);” cf. Muqātil, Tafsīr, iii, 746: “Why are its verses not expounded clearly in Arabic?”).

The expression “In plain/clear Arabic speech/tongue (hi-lisānān ‘arabīyyin mubāhin)” (Q 26:195; cf. 16:103) still needs more reflection, because the translation given here is — like most translations of the phrase — misleading from the point of view of morphology, and consequently of semantics. Mubin is the active participle of the causative-factitive abāna, which can be understood as: “making [things] clear.” Such an understanding of that expression is suggested by Q 14:4, which utilizes the causative factitive bayyana: “And we never sent a messenger save with the language/tongue of his folk, that he might make [the message] clear for them (li-yubayyina laham).”

But the adjectival opposition found in Q 16:103 between a’jamī on the one hand, and ‘arabī and mubīn, on the other, was understood by the exegetes as “barbarous,” i.e. non-Arabic (a’jamī) and indistinct (a’jamī), in contradistinction with clear/pure Arabic (Wansbrough, QS, 98-9; see Language, Concept of, for the opposing traditional view, variously expressed, i.e. “in clear Arabic/pure tongue,” see Widen-gren, Apostle, 151-2, in relation to the question of a pre-Islamic Arabic translation of the Bible; Horovitz, kī, 75).

The consequence, according to the theologians, is that the Qur’ān must be in a “smooth, soft, and plain/distinct speech
(sahl, layyin, wāḏīh)”: “In the Qurʾān there is no unusual/obscure (gharīb) sound-complex (ḥarf) from the manner of speaking (lughah) of the Quraysh, save three, because the speech (kalām) of the Quraysh is smooth, soft, and plain/distinct, and the speech of the [other] Arabs is uncivilized (wakhsīḥ), unusual/obscure” (Abū l-Izz Wāṣīṭ, d. 521/1127, al-Īshāḏ fi l-qiwarāʾ at al-ʿashq, quoted by Suyūṭī, Itqān, chap. 37, ed. Ibrāhīm, ii, 124). This dogma of the alleged superiority of the Hijāzī dialect did not have, in reality, great consequences in choosing among the various readings of the Qurʾān. In fact, “the home dialect of the Prophet has not occupied a particular place” in the Qurʾānic readings (Beck, ‘Arabiyya, 182), but, rather, the grammarians and exegetes tried to preserve a certain scientific autonomy in this respect (Gilliot, Précéllence, 100; id., Elī, 135-64; 171-84).

Some contemporary Muslim scholars have, for this reason, accused them of “distorting” the Qurʾānic readings, e.g. the book entitled “Defence of the readings transmitted via different channels against the exegete al-Ṭabarī” (Anṣārī, Dīfāʾ an al-qiwarāʾ at al-mutawātīra…).

The superiority of the Arabic language and the excellence of the Arabic of the Qurʾān
The Muslim scholars of religious sciences (see traditional disciplines of Qurʾānic study) and the ancient Arab philologists have spared no effort in enhancing the alleged superiority of the Arabic language over other languages: “Of all tongues, that of the Arabs is the richest and the most extensive in ways of expression (madhhaban). Do we know any man except a prophet who apprehended all of it?” (Šāfīʿī, d. 204/820, Risāla, 42, no. 138/[modified] Eng. trans., 88; Fr. trans., 69; Ibn Fāris, al-Sāḥibī, 40-7; Goldziher, Sprachgelehrsamkeit, iii, 207-11).

The Kūfīan exegete, grammarian and jurist, al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), explains the superiority of the speech of the Quraysh in a particular way, namely as based upon the pilgrimage and their outstanding taste and capacity of selection: “[His fictive interlocutor saying] Sagacity and beauty came to them merely because the Arabs were accustomed to come to the sanctuary for hajj and umrah, both their women and men. The women made the circuit round the House unveiled and performed the ceremonies with uncovered faces. So they selected them by sight and thought after of dignity and beauty. By this they gained superiority besides those qualities by which they were particularly distinguished. [al-Farrāʾ answers] We said: In the same way they were accustomed to hear from the tribes of the Arabs their dialects; so they could choose from every dialect that which was the best in it. So their speech became elegant and nothing of the more vulgar forms of speech was mixed up with it” (a text of al-Farrāʾ in Kahle, Geniza, 345. Eng. trans. Kahle, Arabic readers, 70). In a word, the Quraysh through their sagacity in choice were prepared to become the “chosen people of God” in language, that is Arabic.

The Muʿtazilite theologian and man of letters, al-Jāḥiz (d. 255/867; see Muʿtazilīs) is no less explicit on this subject, using the example of poetry whose “excellence is limited to the Arabs and to those who speak the tongue of the Arabs, and it is impossible that [Arabic] poetry should be translated and it cannot be conveyed [into another language].” He explains that, in translation, the meter, the rhyme, the rhythm, arrangement (nazm) and verse would be destroyed. Of course, everybody, including al-Jāḥiz, is familiar with the difficulty of translating poetry. But for this theologian only the Arabs have poetry in the sense of the Arabic term qaṣīda (odes) and accord with its norms; his primary
point is the superiority of the Arabic language as a presupposition for the excellence of the Qur'anic Arabic (Jāḥiz, Hayawān, i, 74-5; Gilliot, Elb, 86). We could, of course, continue to quote a number of philologists, exegetes and theologians on this matter drawn from all periods of Islamic history up to the present day; but these samples are sufficient to provide an insight into the essential features of this apologetic discourse.

The “Challenge Verses”

In the religious imaginaire on the language of the Qurʾān, the Challenge Verses (ṣayāt al-tahādī: q 2:23; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88; 52:33-4; see Wansbrough, q5, 79-82; Gilliot, Elb, 84-6; Radscheit, Herausforderung; van Ess, ṭg, iv, 607-8; see also provocation; inimitability) have also played a major role in the elaboration of a conception of a lingua sacra. These verses continue to be an important theme of Muslim apologetics, although they might be better explained in the context of Jewish polemics. The objection of the adversaries of Muhammad here seems to have had nothing to do with language, and the answer of the Qurʾān, “then bring a sûra like unto it,” also appears not to refer to language (see sûras). Three of these verses are a response to the accusation of forgery (q.v.) against Muhammad: “He has invented it” (ṣaṭāruhu, q 10:38; 11:13; ṭaqawwalahu, q 52:33). The framework indicates a “rabbinical” test of prophethood (Wansbrough, q8, 79): “Verily, though human-kind and the jinn (q.v.) should assemble to produce the like of this Qurʾān, they could not…” (q 17:88). The audience was not at all impressed by the product given by Muhammad, which they did not find particularly coherent — in any case, not as coherent as the other revealed books (Muqṭūl, ṭafsīr, iii, 234; Tābara, ṭafsīr, xix, 10, ad q 25:32; van Ess, ṭg, iv, 608; see book): “Why is the Qurʾān not revealed unto him all at once? [It is revealed] thus that we may strengthen your heart (q.v.) therewith; and we have arranged it in right order” (wa-rattalnāhu tartīl; Arberry: “better in exposition,” q 25:32).

But the same verbal noun (nomen verbi), tartīl, is problematic (Paret, Kommentar, 492). Several interpretations have been given by ancient exegetes: to proceed in a leisurely manner, pronounce distinctly, to recite part after part (Ṭabarānī, ṭafsīr, xxix, 126-7, ad q 73:4; Lane, Lexicon, i, 1028). Besides, it can be understood elsewhere as recitation or cantilation: “and chant the Qurʾān in measure” (wa-rattil l-qurʾān tartīl, q 73:4; Arberry: “and chant the Koran very distinctly”; Andrae, Ursprung, 192: “and recite the Koran in equal sections”). But this last passage has been also understood as “and make the Qurʾān distinct,” perhaps alluding to Muhammad “at the labour in composition” (Bell, Origin, 97; id., Commentary, ii, 444). It could also refer to the style of the Qurʾān: “the sense of the word [in q 25:32] is not exactly known, but it is likely to refer to the rhyme, the existence of which cannot be denied” (Mingana, Qurʾān, 545 b).

The adversaries of Muḥammad — but not only they — in fact, most of the Quraysh were not particularly impressed by the language or the content of his predicition: “muddled dreams (see dreams and sleep); nay, he has but invented it; nay, he is but a poet. Let him bring us a portent even as those of old [i.e. messengers] were sent [with portents]” (q 21:3; Blachère, Histoire, ii, 232). Despite the original auditors’ apparent skepticism as to the excellence of the Qurʾānic language, Muslim exegetes, philologists, jurists and theologians (see theology and the Qurʾān) opened the door to an elaboration of sacral representations and mythical constructions on the pre-eminence of the Arabic language and the supposed superiority and inimitability of the Qurʾānic language,
sentiments which were not present expressis verbis in the Qurʾān.

The foreign words
But q 41:44 became also a locus classicus in Qurʾānic exegesis in the debate over the occurrence of foreign words in the Qurʾān (in addition to Rippin, Foreign vocabulary, 226, see Ibn al-Jawzī, Funūn, 186-93) and, with q 16:103, on the informants of Muḥammad (see Madigan, Self-image, 199-200; see also informants). Some ancient exegetes had general pronouncements on the issue: according to the Kūfān companion of Ibn Masʿūd, Abū Maysara al-Hamdānī (d. 63/682): “There are [expressions] in the Qurʾān from every language (lisān)” (Ibn Abī Shayba, Maṣāḥaf, [Kitāb 22, Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, bāb 7], vi, no. 121, no. 299-53; Ṣahih, Tafsīr, i, 14, no. 6/Eng. trans. Commentary, i, 13; Suyūṭī, Iqān, chap. 10, ed. Ibrāhīm, i, 126; id., Muḥadhdhib, 194, ed. al-Ḥāshimī, 60-1). The same words are also attributed to the Khurasānī exegete al-Ḍahḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/723; Ibn Abī Shayba, ibid., no. 299-52; Suyūṭī, Muḥadhdhib, 194, ed. al-Ḥāshimī, 61). Or, according to another Kūfān, Saʿīd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714): “There is no language (ḥubṣa) on the earth which God has not revealed in the Qurʾān. And he [Ibn Jubayr or somebody else in the chain] said: the name of Jibrīl (Gabriel, q.v.) is the servant/man (ʿabd) of God, and the name of Mikā‘īl (Michael, q.v.) is the small servant/man of God” (see for this etymology Ṣabīrī, Tafsīr, ii, 389-92, ad q 2:297: jahr means ʿabd, servant/man). Wansbrough (followed, unfortunately, by Gilliot, Elī, 103), writes that the tradition of Ibn Jubayr was transmitted by Muqāṭīl (q5, 218). It is indeed in Muqāṭīl (Tafsīr, ii, 606), but it was added with a chain of authority by one of the transmitters of this book, ‘Abdallāh b. Thābit al-Tawwāzī (d. 308/920; Gilliot, Muqāṭīl, 41; see Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān). Or, according to Wahb b. Munabbīh (d. 110/728): “There are only a few languages which are not represented in some way in the Qurʾān” (Suyūṭī, Iqān, chap. 38, ed. Ibrāhīm, i, 123; id., Muḥadhdhib, 213, ed. al-Ḥāshimī, 106-7; id., Durr, i, 335, l. 16-7, ad q 2: 260, quoted from the Qurʾānic commentary of Abū Bakr b. al-Mundhīr, d. 318/930). But the tradition of Ibn Jubayr is also presented as one of the occasions of the revelation (q.v.) of the verse under discussion, q 41:44 (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xxiv, 127; Thaʾlabī, Tafsīr, ad q 41:44), because of the word aʾjamī, linked by ancient exegetes to the theme of the informants (Muqāṭīl, Tafsīr, iii, 745-6; Thaʾlabī, Tafsīr, quoting Muqāṭīl; see Gilliot, Informants, 513). That which “is not of the speech of the Arabs” was not, however, to everybody’s taste, and some ancient philologists who had extreme arabophile sentiments had hard opinions on this issue and condemned others: “some knowledgeable (⟩⟩) sometimes introduce non-Arabic words as pure Arabic out of their desire to mislead people and make them fail” (al-Khālid b. Ahmad, d. 175/791, Kitāb al-ʾAyn, i, 53, quoted by Tālmoun, Arabic grammar, 122).

All this entirely contradicts the quasi-dogma of the “purity” of the Arabic of the Qurʾān, but a theologian can always find a solution to a seeming contradiction, namely by transforming its object into a quality or a “miracle” (q.v.): “Other books were revealed only in the language of the nation to whom they were addressed, while the Qurʾān contains words from all Arabic dialects, and from Greek, Persian, and Ethiopic besides” (Ibn al-Naqībī, d. 698/1298, in Suyūṭī, Iqān, chap. 38, ed. Ibrāhīm, i, 127; Gilliot, Elī, 101; Rabin, West-Arabian, 19). It is possible that a tradition attributed to Muḥammad and transmitted from Ibn Masʿūd had an influence here on the theological representation of the superiority of the Qurʾān over the other revealed books: “The first book was
revealed from a single door; in a single manner (ḥarf, or, “genre, sound-complex”; this last, in other contexts, according to Rabin, West-Arabian, q.), but the Qurʾān was revealed in seven manners...” (Ṭabarī, Ṭafsīr, ed. Shākir, i, 68, no. 67; Gilliot, Les Sept “lectures.” II, 56; id., Langue, 91-2).

The problems of Qurʾānic grammar

Up until the present day, special books have been written by Muslims on this issue, particularly with the aim of finding a solution to the following problem: “What the grammarians forbid, although it occurs in the Qurʾān” Ḥassūn, al-Naḥawī l-qurʾānī, 12-114; Ḥājjārī, Naṣārīyya; see also Grammar and the Qurʾān, or related issues, like “The defence of the Qurʾān against the grammarians and the Orientalists” (Ḩājjārī, al-Ḏafāʾ ‘an al-Qurʾān...).

The mythical narratives on the superiority of Arabic

Interpretations of the passages of the Qurʾān that understand the language in a sacram and theological orientation, combined with ethnocentric Arab conceptions, have contributed to the elaboration of a hierarchy of languages, at the summit of which stands Arabic. Even if these ideas existed before, they were only systematically collected during the second half of the second/eighth and the third/ninth centuries. The constitution of an empire and the construction of a mythical conception of a common “perfect” language go together.

We find a statement about this hierarchy by the Cordoban jurist and historian Ḥādī b. Ḥabīb (d. 238/852), for whom the languages of the “prophets” were Arabic, Syriac and Hebrew: All the sons of Israel (q.v.; i.e. Jacob, q.v.) spoke Hebrew (see also Children of Israel); the first whom God allowed to speak it was Isaac (q.v.). Syriac was the language of five prophets: Idrīs (q.v.), Noah (q.v.), Abraham (q.v.), Lot (q.v.) and Jonah (q.v.). Twelve of them spoke Arabic: Adam (see Adam and Eve), Seth, Hūd (q.v.), Ṣāliḥ (q.v.), Ishaq (q.v.), Shū’ayb (q.v.), al-Khidr (see Khādir/khīdr), “the three in Sūrat Yā Sīn” (q. 36:14); Jonah, Khālid b. Sinān al-ʿAbsī, and Muḥammad. According to ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, Adam first spoke Arabic, but later this language was distorted and changed into Syriac (ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, Taʾrīkh, 27-8; Suyūṭī, Muẓḥīḥ, i, 30-1/Eng. trans. Czapkiewicz, Views, 66-7; Goldziher, Grammar, 44-5; Loucel, Origine. IV, 167-8).

This last opinion is supported by a tradition attributed to an individual often cited on such matters, the cousin and Companion of Muḥammad (who was ca. 10 years old when Muḥammad died); namely Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 69/688): “His [i.e. Adam’s] language in paradise (q.v.) was Arabic, but when he disobeyed his lord (q.v.), God deprived him of Arabic, and he spoke Syriac. God, however, restored him to his grace (ṭābaʿaʿalayhi), and he gave him back Arabic” (Ibn Ṭāhir, Taʾrīkh, vii, 407; Suyūṭī, Muẓḥīḥ, ii, 30; Loucel, Origine. IV, 167). It has been said that Adam “spoke 700,000 languages, of which the best was Arabic” (Ṭaḥlabī, Ṭafsīr, ad q. 55:4, from an anonymous source; Goldziher, Grammar, 45, quoting Baghawī, Maʿālim, presently still only in manuscript form; but the figure “700” in Baghawī, Maʿālim, iv, 266 has to be corrected!). The exegete (ḥāl al-taʾwil) explain the diversity of languages in the following way: God taught all the languages to Adam, but when his sons were scattered, each of them spoke one language, then each group that issued from them spoke its own language (WĀḥidī, Ṣawāḥī, i, 116; Nisāḥūrī, Ṭafsīr, i, 220; Abū Hāyyān, Bāḥṣi, i, 145, ad q. 2:31).

These endeavors of the Muslim exegetes and theologians express a mimetic concurrence with trends found among the Jews
(see Jews and Judaism) and the Syrians; for the latter, however, Adam spoke Syriac/Aramaic (Grünbaum, Beiträge, 63). Other sources refer to seventy two, seventy or eighty languages in the world (Goldziher, Grammar, 45-6; Loucel, Origine, IV, 169-70: only for 72).

The influence of the theological representations appears in the desperate attempts of the jurists to give sense to a set of contradictory, or disparate, ideas or facts: at the beginning there was a single language which God taught to Adam (see Knowledge and Learning), and it was, of course, the best one, Arabic (because the Qur’ān is in Arabic); there are several languages; the Arabic of the Qur’ān is the best Arabic; the Prophet was an Arab, and he belonged to the tribe of Quraysh (see Tribes and Clans). One of the solutions found, with recourse to legends and argumentation, was the following: at the beginning God taught a single language to humankind; the other languages were taught only later to the offspring of Noah, after the flood (according to Abū Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, d. 429/1037); according to Ibn ʿAbbās, the first to speak Arabic was Ishmael, which is interpreted as “pure Arabic,” meaning the Arabic of the Quraysh, “because the Arabic of Qahtān and Himyar [South Arabic] was spoken before Ishmael” (Zarkashā, Bahāʾ, ii, 16; Suyūṭī, Mughīrā, i, 27, quoting him; Goldziher, Grammar, 44).

These mythical narratives on language which are quoted in different genres of literature (exegetics, historiography, adab, etc.), and, even up to the present, appear in popular books, play a major role in the linguistic imaginaire of the Muslims. They are as important as the arguments of the scholars, who, moreover, also quote them to confirm their line of argument and to establish it definitively in the minds of their readers (for the origin of speech according to the grammarian Ibn Ḥimīnī, see Versteegh, Arabic linguistic tradition, 100-14; on al-Suyūṭī’s [d. 911/1505] presentation, see A. Czapkiewicz, Views, 64-6).

The “creation” of a Prophet against his competitors (poets, soothsayers, orators, story-tellers, etc.)

The strategy of Muhammad and of the first generations of Muslim scholars concerning poetry and poets had a reason other than the traditional tribal defense of honor (q.v.; ḫir; Nahshāḥī, Mumtiʿ, 220-7): How the Arabs protected themselves and defended their honor with poetry; Jacob, Beduinenleben, 176-8; Farès, Honneur, passim), even if Muḥammad saw himself more and more as a supra-tribal chief and was concerned to defend his own reputation. This other reason was a linguistically theological one.

Not only had the Qur’ān to be sharply distinguished from poetry (Hirschberg, Jüdische und christliche Lehren, 27-32; Gilliot, Poète, 378-9, § 111, 116) and the rhymed prose (q.v.; saj) of the Arab soothsayers (q.v.), but its superiority to poetry had to be demonstrated, an idea which was not obvious. Before the Arab poets, diviners (see divination; foretelling) and orators, Muḥammad had to “create” himself with the help of his supporters and to be “created” by the first generations of Muslim scholars. The Prophet whose language was excellent, “the most Arab of the Arabs,” is depicted as, after his birth, having been placed in the care of another in order to be nursed (see lactation; wet-nursing; fosterage) and brought up in clans whose Arabic was the “purest” (see also Sīra and the Qur’ān). According to the Companion Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Muḥammad is supposed to have said: “I am the Prophet who does not lie (q.v.), I am the son of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, I am the one who speaks the best Arabic (or “the most Arab of the Arabs,” aṭṭab al-ʿArab). The Quraysh has procreated
me, I grew up in the tribe of Sa’d b. Bakr [his nurse Ḥalīma was of that clan! [So you should not ask] from where this my manner of speaking comes (fa-annā yaًtīnī l-‘aḥnu”) (Ṭabarānī, Kāhīr, vi, 35-6, no. 5437; Ibn al-Sarrāj al-Shantarīnī, Ṭanbīḥ, 121-2; Gilliot, Poète, 385). Or: “Of you, I am the one whose Arabic is the best (anā a’rābukum), I am from the Quraysh, my language is that of the Sa’d b. Bakr” [Ibn Sa’d, Ṭabaqāt, i, 113; cf. Suyūṭī, Khaṣāʾīs, i, 63]; “I am of the Arabs whose language is the most pure and understandable (anā aʃāh al-’Arab).” This long translation is the nearest to the meaning of fasḥ at this time: whose Arabic is “rein, verständlich,” in opposition to the foreign languages, but also to the Arabic of the Arabs of the “frontiers” (Vollers, in his review of Nöldeke [Zur Grammatik], 126). Or: “I am the most eloquent creature” (Suyūṭī, Muḥāfa’i, i, 209-13; Wansbrough, 98, 93-4). Or, more expressly in relation to the Qurʾān: “Love the Arabs for three reasons, because I am Arab, the Qurʾān is Arabic, and the speech of the people of paradise is Arabic” (Ibn al-Anbārī, Īdāh, i, 21; Kahle, Qurʾān, 174, no. 28; 173, no. 22; cf. Muqṭā’il b. Sulaymān declaring: “The speech [kalām] of the inhabitants of the sky is Arabic”; Ibn al-Sarrāj al-Shantarīnī, Ṭanbīḥ, 77. This declaration was included in a tradition attributed to Muḥammad which continues: “and their language when they are standing before God in the last judgment [q.v.]”; Kahle, Qurʾān, 173-4, no. 25).

It should be noticed that these declarations of (or sayings attributed to) Muḥammad on the best language pertain to the categories of the pride (q.v.; fakhr) of the ancient Arabs and their poetry, and that they can be extended to other fields, for instance in that other saying of Muḥammad transmitted from the Companion Anas b. Mālik: “I was made superior to people with four qualities: generosity (see gift-giving), bravery (see courage), frequency of sexual intercourse (kathnāt al-jimā‘), great violence (shiddat al-baṭsh)” (Abū Bakr al-Īsmā‘īlī, Muṣṣām, ii, 621-2, no. 25; Ibn ʿĀsīkīr, Taʾrīkh, viii, 69-70). These traditional tribal values of the ancient Arabs, and above all the quality of the language, were transformed into proofs of prophecy.

This was and still is a necessary presupposition to persuade the Arabs and the non-Arab Muslims of the so-called superiority and inimitability of the Qurʾānic language, style and content (Gilliot, Eibh, 73-93, but also chaps. four and five). Through lack of written Arabic texts at their disposal (see orality and writing in Arabia), they could only lean on the “thesaurus of the Arabs” (dīwān al-’Arab), poetry, according to a celebrated declaration attributed again to Ibn ʿAbbās (Ibn al-Anbārī, Īdāh, i, 99-101, no. 110, 120; taken up by Suyūṭī, Ḳaḥān, chap. 36, 281, ed. Ibrāhīm, ii, 67; Wansbrough, 98, 217; Gilliot, Poète, 374-5; cf. Goldziher, Richtungen, 70). This ancient poetry became a benediction from the divine favor (see blessing; grace) because the “best language,” Arabic, was destined to prepare the coming of a still “more excellent” language, tongue and speech, the language of the Qurʾān (Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Ḳīna, i, 92, the lingua linguarum, scilicet Verbum Dei!)

But these scholars were conscious that the poet had been a dangerous competitor to the Prophet of Islam and to the text he presented as revelation (Gilliot, Poète, 331-2; 380-8). Indeed, according to the Baṣrān philologist, also a specialist in ancient poetry and Qurʾānic readings, Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀlī (d. 154/771), in a statement transmitted by his pupil, the Baṣrān philologist al-ʿĀṣmā‘ī (d. 213/828): “The poets occupied, among the Arabs (bedouins, see bedouin) during the Age of Ignorance (q.v.), the rank occupied by prophets in the nations [which have received a revelation];
then the sedentaries entered in relation with them (khālāthahum) and were taken on by poetry (iktasabū ... thesis and the approach of a linguist, as it already appears in the following declaration language and style context the “savage thought” of C. Levi-
disdained them” (Abū Ḥātam al-Rāzī, Ḥāna, i, 95; cf. Nahshālī, Mumtāz, 23). This ideological break between the “Age of Ignorance” — in another epistemological context the “savage thought” of C. Levi-Strauss — and Islam will lead Muslim scholars to a paradox: on the one hand, pre-Islamic poets and poetry are disparaged, but on the other hand their language, although it is, from their point of view, less sublime than the language of the Qurān, is extraordinarily praised because the verses of these poets are considered to be the best, sometimes the only evidence that can be quoted as support (shawāhid) for argumentation in the sciences of language (Baghdādī, Khizāna, i, 5-17/ Fr. trans. Gilliot, Citations, 297-316). A certain nostalgia may be seen behind the laudatory break which al-ʿAṣmaʾī traces between “savage thought” on the one hand and “culture” — here, Islam — on the other when he declares: “Poetry is harsh (nakīd); therefore it is strong and easy in evil (see good and evil), but if it is used in good, it becomes weak. For instance, Hassān b. Thābit was one of the best poets (fuhūl al-shuʿarāʾ) in the Age of Ignorance, but when Islam came, his poetry was dropped (sagāta shiʿruhu)” (Ibn al-Ṭahār, Uṣd, ii, 6, l. 17-18; Goldziher, Alte und neue Poesie, 196; with some difference in Ibn Qutayba, al-Shīʿ, 170, l. 9-11). But al-ʿAṣmaʾī, like the other philologists, collectors of poetry, jurists, exegetes, etc., is “at the borders of the orality (q.v.) to which he wishes to put an end […]. The ʿāлим [scholar] establishes a civilization of literacy and of its ways of thinking. As the builder of a culture he wants to control the relations between written science and knowledge which is orally transmitted” (Bencheikh, Essai, II).

But before poetry came to be controlled by philologists who were also jurists and specialists in the Qurān, traditions were employed to create a “united” language, or, better, the imaginary model of such a language, which had to be, more or less, in accordance with the “qurānic model.” These prophetic, or alleged prophetic, traditions had to be recalled, produced, or coined, against or in favor of poetry, giving a certain status to poets and poetry, so that they would not be competitors to the Prophet and to the book he had delivered. Ancient poetry was necessary to explain, justify and enhance the alleged preeminence of the qurānic language; but it had also to be put in its “proper place,” so that the Qurān should not be compared with human productions.

The philologists and theologians, in arranging and harmonizing the different and even contradictory traditions which circulated about the Arabic of the Qurān, the “eloquence” of the Prophet and of the Arabs — traditions whose enormous numbers, variety, contradictions and repetitions make the reader’s head swim, so that one is tempted simply to believe them and stick to the reasoning of the theologians — have established the enduring conception of a lingua sacra. Not only believers, but also many Orientalists in their presentations of the Arabic and qurānic language have been influenced by the power of this conviction.

The hypotheses of the Arabists

A gulf lies between the theological thesis and the approach of a linguist, as it already appears in the following declaration
of one of the founders of the Arabists’ school, F.L. Fleischer (d. 1888): “The question for us is not: What is the purest, the most beautiful and correct Arabic, but what is Arabic in general?” (Über arabischere Lexicographie, 5).

What constitutes the strength of the theological thesis for believers is precisely what represents its weakness for the critical scholar: It is based only on the Qur’anic text and upon conviction, without any verification of another nature. The extant (and scanty) epigraphic material (see Epigraphy and the Qur’anic Text) that evidences a language close to classical Arabic, insofar as its graphemes and the hazards of deciphering them allow, comes exclusively from northern Arabia (see Arabic Script; Orthography). More precisely, it is from areas that were under the control of the Ghassān and the Lakhm, considered to be Arabs whose “linguistic habit was not perfect (fa-lam takun lughatuhum tammat al-malaka)” “because they had contact with non-Arabs (bi-mukhala‘at al-a‘jam)” (Ibn Khaldūn, Ibar, 1072/Eng. trans. Ibn Khaldūn-Rosenthal, iii, 343).

Moreover, from the data preserved by the Arab grammarians and compiled by Rabin (West-Arabian, passim), it appears that pre-Islamic Arabic was heterogeneous, but that a regional east-west differentiation could be seen in it (for a detailed list of the features, above all morphological and syntactic, see Blachère, Histoire, i, 70–5; Versteegh, Arabic, 41-6). Now, what the Arabs call al-lugha al-fushā and the Arabists term classical Arabic coincides with neither eastern nor western Arabic, although — taken as a whole — it is closer to the eastern sphere.

The different arabist hypotheses have their origin in the contradiction between the theological thesis and these data. These hypotheses can be reduced to two: one weak, the other strong. Moreover, they have in common the presupposition of a diglossic situation in ancient Arabia: i.e. the coexistence of, on the one hand, the various dialects of the Arab tribes, and, on the other, a common language (which, among other things, was the vehicle of poetry, and for that reason, has been termed poetic koiné). Poetic koiné pertains to the ancient Arabic linguistic type, whereas the dialects should be, if not entirely at least partly, of the neo-Arabic type. The difference between both is the presence of i’rāb (case and mood endings) in the common language, its absence in the dialects.

But the Arabists do not agree on the origin of this koiné. For some — who think in terms of the Greek koiné, the basis of which is Attic Greek — it has a geographic origin: according to this hypothesis, this shared language began as an inter-tribal or super-tribal language, at the point of encounter of the two dialectical areas of Arabia, that is to say in central or northeastern Arabia. For others — who consider it along the lines of the Homeric Greek model — it is a Kunstsprache, an artificial language of great antiquity, without any connection to the linguistic reality. The Arabists also do not agree on the interpretation of i’rāb. For some, it is syntactic, even if they recognize that its functionality is weak, not to say non-existent (see the debate between Blau, Synthetic Character, and Corriente, Functional yield; id., Again on the functional yield). For others it is linked to the constraints of prosody and rhyme in an oral-formulaic poetry (Zwettler, Classical Arabic poetry).

In this context, the weak hypothesis is that of the majority of Arabists. For them the Qur’ānic Arabic is, save for some “Ḥijāzī” peculiarities, basically the same as the Arabic of pre-Islamic poetry; hence the qualification of “poetic and Qur’ānic koiné,” sometimes given to that language, and which is considered to be the basis of
The strong hypothesis is originally that of Vollers (d. 1909). He concludes that the Qur'an was first delivered by Muhammad in the vernacular of Mecca (q.v.), a west Arabian speech missing, among other features, the 'arab (Vollers, Volkssprache, 169; Zwettler, Oral tradition, 117-8, with discussion of this thesis; Versteegh, Arabic readers, 69-70). To him the presentation of language and style is the basis of the literary classical language of poetry (Vollers, Volkssprache, 175-85). For Vollers this language, though it is the basis of the literary classical language, is primarily an eastern Arabic speech, fitted, among other features, with the hamza), and we know that the Qur'an was rewritten in the common language of poetry (Vollers, Volkssprache, 193-97) best summarizes the hypothesis of Vollers. It is said that the inhabitants of the Hijaz were characterized by the loss of the glottal stop (takhīf al-hamza), contrary to the other Arabs who used the glottal stop (tahqīq al-hamza). And we know that the Qur'ānic orthography attests the addition of the hamza, a mark of the realization of the glottal stop.

The hypothesis of Vollers was taken up again by P.E. Kahle (d. 1964), but in a modified form (he does not maintain that the Qur'an was rewritten). He admits, without any further explanatory discussion, that the consonantal dactyls (see Codices of the Qur'an; Collection of the Qur'an; Muḥafā) traditionally attributed to the caliph 'Uthmān (q.v.) represents the Arabic spoken in Mecca (Kahle, Geniza, 142), but for him the "readings" (qirā'at, variae lectiones) of that dactyl express the influence of the poetic language. He based his hypothesis on a great number of traditions, more than 120, quoted in the Tamhid fi mar'īfat al-tajwīd of al-Ḥasan b. Muhammad al-Mālikī (d. 438/1046), in which people are exhorted to recite the Qur'an, respecting the 'arab (Kahle, Qur'an, 171-9).

Since Kahle's contributions appeared, older works containing the traditions upon which he based his theory have been made available (e.g. Abū 'Ubayd, Faḍā'il, 208-10, and passim; Ibn Abī Shayba, Musannaf, [Kitāb 22. Faḍā'il al-Qur'an, bāb 1], vi, 117-8, nos. 29903-19).

As Kahle remarks: "The recommendation to read the Koran with these vocalic endings presupposes that they were often not read" (Geniza, 143 n. 1). As some of these traditions were also known by the grammarian al-Farrā' (d. 207/822; Kahle, Geniza, 345-6 [Ar. text], 145-6 [Eng. trans.]); we should also add that some of the traditions were also known by Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām [d. 224/838] and by Ibn Abī Shayba [d. 235/849], this reveals the existence of a problem in the second/eighth century.

Two interpretations of that issue are possible. The first, a minimalist understanding, is that there was a slackening in the recitation of the Qur'an (q.v.) because of the non-Arab converts: in this case, these traditions are a call to order, reprimands, to stop a prevalent "lax reading" and to enforce an "exact reading" (Kahle, Geniza, 147). But the other possibility is that the grammarians and readers (qurā', qara'a) want to enforce on the community a reading and recitation consonant with an ideal Arabic that they have just established by the means of a large collection of data gathered from the bedouins and from poetry. Kahle inclines to this second interpretation, putting forward the concept he encountered in al-Farrā' (and which is also to be found in Ibn Fāris; see the translation of the text of al-Farrā' above), who presents the Arabic of the Hijaz, and thus of the Qur'an, as a selection from the best of the various dialects (Kahle, Qur'an, 179-82; id., Geniza, 145-6; id., Arabic readers, 69-70). To him the presentation of
al-Farrāʾ is an acknowledgment of the influence of poetic language on that of the Qurʾān, although he “antedated the influence of Bedouin poetry to an earlier period” (Kahle, *Geniza*, 146). Indeed, when it is released from its subjective elements, such a conception amounts to saying that the Qurʾānic language borrows features from different dialects (*fr. patères*), in other words that it is an inter-language.

Whereas the hypothesis of Vollers caused a scandal in Muslim circles and prompted a debate among the Arabists (Geyer, *Review*; and notably Nöldeke, *Einige Bemerkungen*; id., *Der Koran und die ‘Arabīja*), it seems that the hypothesis of Kahle has not really garnered much attention, with the notable exception of J. Fück (d. 1974), who rejected it (Fück, *Arabīja*, 3–4, n. 4; Fr. trans., 4–5, n. 4; see also Rabin, *Beginnings*, 25–9).

Now, however, things are changing with the progress in Arabic studies of sociolinguistics and of the history of linguistics. The Arabists today have gone beyond the diglossic representation of Arabic and are in favor of a polyglossic conception of Arabic and of a continuum, even of an inherent variation. In doing so they take up, in some way, the conception that the most ancient Arab grammarians, notably Sibawayhi, had of Arabic. These last did not understand the *lughāt* (“dialects”) as discrete varieties, but only as variants, good or bad, of one and the same language. In this context, the various “readings” (qirāʿāt) of the Qurʾān can be seen as the reflection of this linguistic variation. J. Owens has shown recently that the practice of the “major assimilation” (*al-idgām al-kabīr*, i.e. a consonantal assimilation between words) traditionally linked with the reader Abū Amr (d. 154/770), did not imply linguistically the loss of the inflexional ending, but only the absence of short vowels, inflexional or not, at the ending. This means that “[Voller’s] assumption that there was a koranic variant without case ending receives plausible support from the koranic reading tradition itself” (Owens, *Idgām al-kabīr*, 504).

Lastly, it should be noticed that none of the hypotheses of the Arabists challenges the following two assertions of the Muslim tradition: 1) the Qurʾān transmits the predication of the one Muhammad, and 2) there exists an ‘Uthmānic codex. This discussion of Qurʾānic language would be enlarged if, on the one hand, the hypothesis of Wansbrough (*qfs* — i.e. that there was a slower elaboration of the Qurʾānic text than is traditionally supposed — were taken into consideration, and, on the other, if, besides the “small variation” (different readings of the same ductus), the “great variation” (the existence of a non–‘Uthmānic codex) were also taken into account (Gilliot, *Coran*, § 29; id. *Reconstruction*, § 15).

**From language to style**

The link between Qurʾānic language and the linguistic style of the Qurʾān itself is the notion of *bayān*, and it is not by chance that the founder of Bābism (see *bābī*), ‘Alī Muhammad (d. 1850) wrote a book entitled *al-Bayān* (Bausani, *Bāb*). *Bayān*, a verbal noun (*nomen verbi*: distinctness; Fr. *le fait d’être distinct*), occurs only three times in the Qurʾān (q. 55:4: 75:19; 3:138; Bell, *Commentary*, ii, 329; Paret, *Kommentar*, 465; Blachère, ii, 74–5), e.g. q. 55:3–4: “He has created man. He has taught him utterance” (*al-bayāna*; or, “the capacity of clear exposition”); Arberry: “the Explanation”; Blachère: “l’Exposé”). Moreover, *tibyān* (exposition, explanation) occurs once (q. 16:89), and the active participle (*nomen agentis*), *mubīn*, twice qualifies the “Arabic tongue” (*lisān ‘arabī*), q. 16:103; 26:195; see *Language, Concept of*). But twelve times *mubīn* qualifies “book” (*kitāh*, q. 5:15; 6:59; 10:61; 11:6; 12:1; 15:1; 26:2; 27:1; 75:28:2; 34:3: 44:2), seven
times it modifies balāgh (q 5:92; 16:35, 82; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 64:12), and twice qur‘ān (q 15:1; 36:29). In this context, mubīn can be interpreted as the active participle (nomen agentis) of the fourth (causative) verbal form, abīn, used with an implicit object, simply a synonym of the second verbal form, bayana, meaning “making [things] distinct/clear.” But abīna can also be seen as an implicitly reflexive causative, and in this case mubīn is interpreted as “showing [itself] distinct/clear,” as suggested by the explicit reflexive in q 37:117: “al-kitāb al-mustābīn” (the clear scripture). The high number of the occurrences of the root b-y-n and its derivatives indicates that bayān is a characteristic of speech.

Developed at length by Šāfi‘ī (d. 204/820), the idea is that the Qur‘ān says things clearly; jurist that he was, he demonstrates this theory beginning with the legal obligations (see boundaries and precepts; law and the Qur‘ān; ambiguous; arbitration). But this is said with the underlying conviction that the Qur‘ān expresses itself clearly because it is in Arabic (we should remember here that “Qur‘ān” is qualified six times as “Arabic”; Šāfi‘ī, Risāla, 20-40/Eng. trans. 67-80/Fr. trans. 53-68; Yahia, Contribution, 361-410; 368-71: on Jāhiz; cf. Bāqillānī, Intiṣār, 256-71; Gilliot, Elt, 73; id., Parcours, 92-6). The central character of bayān in matters of style is attested by the fact that the phrase ‘ilm al-bayān (see von Grunebaum, Bayān) competes with ‘ilm al-balāgha for denoting Arabic rhetoric (which is not an oratorical art, but the art of all manners of speaking: poetical, oratorical, epistolary, etc.). But, for the most part — as opposed to ‘ilm al-ma‘āni — it designates the part of ‘ilm al-balāgha which deals with the expression of the ma‘ānī i.e. the lāzīm, in other words, stylistics. It should be noticed that the dogma of the inimitability of the Qur‘ān was linked with the theme (almost an article of faith) of the “eloquence” (balāgha) of Muhammad, which is in accordance with the theological representations on the “purity” of the language of Quraysh, and naturally the consummate “purity” of the language of the “chosen/purified (al-mustafā)” one, Muhammad, their kinsman, as seen above (see Râfī‘ī [d. 1937], “The inimitability of the Qur‘ān and the prophetic eloquence” [in Arabic; I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān wa-l-balāgha al-nabawīyya], 277-342; on this book, see Boullata, Rhetorical interpretation, 148).

The theological thesis on the style of the Qur‘ān

The theological thesis about the style of the Qur‘ān, however, goes far beyond the proclamation of the alleged clarity of the Qur‘ānic discourse, this clarity itself being linked to the language in which it is formulated. Its core is certainly the dogma of the i‘jāz al-Qur‘ān (van Ess, Ta, iv, 609-11; see also inimitability). Two points should be emphasized here. First, the dogma of the Qur‘ān’s inimitability is to the style of the Qur‘ān what the equation “language of the Qur‘ān = the speech of the Quraysh = al-lugha al-fushā” is to its language; i.e. it, too, is the result of the intersection of a textual element (the so-called Challenge Verses) and of the Islamic conception of the Qur‘ān as the speech of God (kalim Allāh). Secondly, the “inimitability” is bound to the stylistic order through the clear theological affirmation of the Mu‘tazilite theologian and philologist al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) on the balāgha of the Qur‘ān: “Its highest [rank is such that it] incapacitates (mu‘jiz) [anyone who attempts to reach it]; it is the balāgha of the Qur‘ān” (Nakat, in Rummānī et al., Rasā’il, 75). From this point of view, most books on Islamic rhetoric function as the “maidservant of theology” (rhetorica ancilla theologiae), as illustrated by the title of the book by the great rhetorician ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078): “The proofs of the
inimitability [of the Qur'an]” (Dalâ’il al-iṣāṣār; Abu Deeb, al-Jurjānī; Boullata, Rhetorical interpretation, 146-7).

The literary structure and arrangement or construction (nāzīm, a root which does not occur in the Qur'an; see Abu Deeb, Al-Jurjānī, 24-38; for Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Lagarde, Index, no. 2564; Gilliot, Parcours, 106-6) of the Qur'an is far from being self-evident. For this reason, Muslim scholars have not only dealt with this theme, but have composed works entitled Nāzīm al-Qur'ān (for this genre and a list of such books, see Audebert, L'inimitabilité, 58-9, 193-4; see also Literary Structures of the Qur'ān). But the theological debate concerning the core of its “inimitability” and the question of its createdness or uncreatedness also played a role in the genesis of this genre (van Ess, TG, iv, 112; many Arabic studies on this theme have been published: e.g. on Zamakhsharī: Jundī, al-Nāzīm al-qu'rānī). Eventually, entire Qur'ānic commentaries came to contain this word in their title, e.g. the Karrāmīte of Nishāpūr, al-ʿĀsīmī (Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd b. Muḥammad b. Ṭalib, d. 450/1058), composed the Kitāb al-Mahānī bi-nāzīm al-maʿānī, whose introduction has been published (Jeffery, Muqaddimas, 5-20; for the identification of the author, see Gilliot, Théologie musulmane, 182-3). This genre was also related to the principle of correspondence (muwāṣāhā; see Suyūṭī, Iṣâṣār, chap. 62, ed. Ibrāhīm, iii, 369-89 [Muwāṣāhat al-āyāt wa-l-sawār]; id., Muṭṭarāt, i, 54-74; id., Taḥbīṣ, 371-7; for Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Lagarde, Index, no. 2479; Gilliot, Parcours, 106-9) between the surās and between the verses (see also al-Suyūṭī’s special book entitled “The symmetry of the pearls. On the correspondence of the surās,” which he seems to have compiled from his larger book “The secrets of revelation” [Asrūr al-tanzīl]; see Suyūṭī, Tanāṣṣa, 53-4). The Qur'ānic commentary of Būrhān al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm al-Biqāʿī (d. 883/1480) combines in his title the words “arrangement/structure” and “correspondence” (nāzīm, ṭanāṣṣāb): “The string of pearls. On the correspondence of the verses and surās” (Nāzīm al-duwar fī ṭanāṣṣāb al-āyāt wa-l-sawār).

Generally speaking, all of the elements of style to be found in all great literature are seen as unique and almost special to the Qur'an because of the dogma of its inimitability. Even its weaknesses are viewed as wonderful, if not miraculous (see the introduction of Tabārī, Tafsīr, ed. Shākīr, i, 8-12/Eng. trans. in Commentary, i, 8-12; Gilliot, Elt, 73-8).

The positions of the Arabists on the style of the Qur'an

Some positions until recently

Read with eyes other than those of faith, Qur'ānic style is generally not assessed as being particularly clear, and “much of the text… is… far from being as mubīn (“clear”) as the Qur'ān claims to be!” (Puin, Observations, 107; cf. Hirschfeld, New researches, 6-7). Moreover, it does not arouse the general non-Muslim audience to such a degree of “enthusiasm” (Ṣafī, Coran, 117-8, 100-1) as that of the Muslims who are alleged to have fallen down dead upon hearing its recitation (Wiesmüller, Die von Koran getötet; cf. Kermani, Gott ist schön, chap. 4, “Das Wunder,” 233-314; id., Aesthetic reception).

To understand this reaction of the non-believer, the Qur'ān should first be characterized as “speech” (Fr. discours) as opposed to such comparable “texts,” i.e. the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels (q.v.; see also torah). To proceed so, it is possible to refer to a noteworthy opposition found within the Arabic linguistic tradition, that of two types of speech (kalām), the khabar and the inshan, which is equivalent to the Austrian categories of “constative,” as
opposed to “performative utterances” (Austin, How to do things with words). According to these categories, the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels present themselves as khabars (narratives on the creation [q.v.] of the world, the history of the Jewish people, the life of Jesus), even if these texts, whether considered as historical or mythic, are also edifying. On the other hand, the Qur’ān presents itself as non-narrative speech (inshā; cf. the traditional appellation: paraneous); the narratives (q.v.) it contains, often incomplete, are a type of argumentation by example (see nature as signs; myths and legends in the Qur’ān).

The lack of a narrative thread and the repetitions in the Qur’ān, when they do not provoke a negative reaction, compel the specialist to search for another organizational schema of the text, beyond that which is immediately apparent. The need for an alternative pattern behind the ordering of the text appears above all in the problem of the structure of the sūras. Of course, the ancient Muslim scholars, being experts in the Arabic language, were well aware of the organizational infelicities in the Qur’ānic text, but as men of faith they had to underscore the “miraculous” organization (naẓm) of the entire text, and to find rhetorical devices to resolve each problematic issue, e.g. the iqtiṣāṣ, the “refrain” (Fr. reprise), when the passage was too allusive, incomplete or even truncated. In this case of the “refrain,” the exegete had to refer to another verse in the same sūra or in another, from which the truncated passage is supposed to have been “taken” (ma‘khiṣūd min), or where it is “told accurately” (Ibn Fāris, al-Ṣāhibi, 239; Suyūṭī, Ṭaj, ed. Ibrāhīm, iii, 302, e.g. “and we gave him his reward in the world, and lọ! in the hereafter [see eschatology] he verily is among the righteous” (Q 29:27), has to be understood [as taken] from “But whoso comes unto him a believer, having done good works (see good deeds), for such are the good stations” (Q 20:75; see reward and punishment). This phenomenon could perhaps be related to a variety of the enthymema.

For reasons which have been put forth above, it is sacrilegious in a Muslim milieu to compare the Qur’ān to poetry, but it is evident that the language of the Qur’ān can be studied by a linguist in the same way as poetic language. The poetics of Jakobson (Closing statements), is one example of how the expertise of a linguist may be applied to the Qur’ān, especially from the point of view of “parallelism,” a central concept of that poetics.

In view of the position it has taken with respect to the Qur’ān, the religious thought of Islam has tended to impose a conception that became more radical over time. According to this conception, the Qur’ān is an original work that owes nothing to an external influence, be it local or foreign. The polemics against the orators (khatībs) and soothsayers (kāḥīns), as well as those against the appearance of loanwords in the Qur’ān and those surrounding the meaning of the adjective ummī (q.v.), as it is applied to Muḥammad in the Qur’ān (q 7:157, 158; “illiterate” messenger as opposed to messenger “of the community”; see illiteracy), should be interpreted in this context. Concerning this last-mentioned debate, A. Jones maintains that “[T]he notion that ummī means ‘illiterate’ is neither early nor accurate. It can only mean ‘of the umma’” (Oral, 58, n. 5). Contrary to the theological views concerning the style of the Qur’ān, Jones has shown, despite the scarcity of preserved materials, that the Qur’ānic style owes much to previous Arabic styles. These previous styles can be summarized in the following four categories: the style of the soothsayer (Jones, Language, 33-7: kāḥīn utterances), of the orator (Jones, Language, 38-41: khaṭīb
utterances), of the story-teller (Jones, Language, 41-2: ṣaṣṣ), of the “written documentary style” in the Medinan material (Jones, Language, 42-4: a comparison between a part of the Constitution of Medina and Q 2:158, 196). In support of this thesis of Jones, the following declaration attributed to Muḥammad can be quoted: “This poetry is rhymed expression of the speech of the Arabs (ṣaṣṣ min kalām al-‘Arab). Thanks to it, what the beggar asks for is given to him, anger is tamed, and people convere in their assemblies of deliberation (nādīḥim)” (Subkī, Tabaqāt, i, 224; Goldziher, Hīgāz-Poesie, 59). Jones would argue that Muḥammad knew well the efficacy of rhymed prose, and for that reason he used it in the Qurʾān.

Finally, Jones provides two very helpful visual representations of the registers of Arabic at the rise of Islam (Jones, Oral, 57). Although practically nothing survives of these registers, he sketches the relationships between — and among — the literary prose registers, on the one hand (poets, soothsayers and preachers), and the dialects of the people, on the other. These charts are useful for conceptualizing the place of the Qurʾān within the linguistic streams of pre-Islamic Arabia (see also ORALITY AND WRITING IN ARABIA).

The question of the rhymed prose (ṣaṣṣ) in the Qurʾān still needs further research, because, as noticed a long time ago, Semitic literature has a great liking for it, and, as seen above, Muhammad knew its effects very well: it “strikes the minds through its allusions, echoes, sonances and rhymes” (Grünbaum, Beiträge, 186). Later Muslim rhetoricians distinguished three or four types of rhymed prose in the Qurʾān: 1) al-muṭṭarraf (touched at the extremity), words having a different prosodic measure (waẓn) at the end of the elements of the phrase, but similar final letters: Q 71:13-4 (waqāran vs. aṭwāran); 2) al-muwāzāḥ (parallel), with similar prosodic measure, i.e. the same number of letters, and the same final letters (al-waẓn wa-l-warā): Q 88:13-4 (marfā‘a vs. muḥādā‘a); 3) al-muwāzana (cadence), final words with similar prosodic measure, but different endings: Q 88:15-6 (maṣṣafīa vs. mabhūthā); 4) al-mumāthala (similarity), wherein all the words have corresponding prosodic measure in each member, but different endings: Q 37:117-8 (Ibn Abī l-Isba‘, Badī‘, 108-9; Rāzī, Nihāya, 142-3; Ibn al-Naqīb, Muqaddim, 471-5; Nuwayrī, Nihāya, vii, 103-5; Garcin de Tassy, Rhétorique, 154-8; Mehran, Rhetorik, 167-8). In the best examples of the genre, each of the members (here favāsīl, pl. of favāsila, “dividers”) has the same measure: Q 56:28-9, “fi sidrīn makhāḍīn/wa-talān mandāḍīn” (Among thornless lot-trees/And clustered plantains).” The second or third member can, however, be a little longer than the previous one (Q 69:30-3). But for the same rhetoricians, the contrary is not permitted, save when the difference is tiny (Q 105:1-2). For them the most beautiful rhymed prose is that whose members have only a few words, from two to ten; if otherwise, it is considered to be “drawling,” as Q 8:43-4 (Mehren, Rhetorik, 166-7); on the dividers in the Qurʾān, from the traditional Muslim point of view, see Ḥasanwā, al-Fūṣila fi l-Qurʾān.

There are still other valuable points of view and theses on the style of the Qurʾān which have not been presented here (for some discussion of these, see INIMITABILITY). Some examples are the discussions on the literary features and rhetorical devices (see Ṣammtūd, al-Taṣkīr al-balâghi, 33-48, and passim; see also LITERATURE AND THE QURʾĀN; LITERARY STRUCTURES OF THE QURʾĀN), and especially the interesting studies of A. Neuwirth on the relationship between liturgy and canonization of the text, “the structurally definable verse groups,” contextuality, etc. (Neuwirth,
Einige Bermerkungen; id., V om Rezitationstext/Fr. trans. Du texte de récitation; see also her article Form and Structure of the Qur’ān).

The ancient Christian or Syriac connection

Some scholars (unfortunately, too few) have drawn attention to the importance of the Aramaic or Syriac substratum in the formation of the Qur’ān, basing their hypotheses on the fact that Syro-Aramaic or Syriac was the language of written communication in the Near East from the 2nd to the 7th centuries C.E. and was also a liturgical language. The stylistic idiosyncrasies of the Qur’ān did not escape Th. Nöldeke (Nöldeke, Sprache/Fr. trans. Remarques critiques). In addition to his observations on the Syriac loanwords in the Qur’ān, which others, prior to him, had noted, A. Mingana noticed that the qur’ānic style “suffers from the disabilities that always characterize a first attempt in a new literary language which is under the influence of an older and more fixed literature,” and that “its author had to contend with immense difficulties” (Mingana, Syriac influence, 78). But his observations led him to a hypothesis that is the opposite of the “credo” of Nöldeke which, until today, has been prevalent among most western scholars of Islam. This “credo” of Nöldeke is that, in spite of its “drawling, dull and prosaic” style (Nöldeke, Geschichte, 107), the Arabic of the Qur’ān is “classical Arabic.” In his research, Mingana observed and emphasized the Syriac influences on the phraseology of the Qur’ān, and placed them under six distinct headings: proper names, religious terms, common words, orthography, construction of sentences and foreign historical references (see also foreign vocabulary). Unfortunately, his remarks, although referred to by some scholars, were not taken into general account for two reasons: First, Mingana, too occupied with other works on Syriac, had no time to develop his hypothesis further. (His argument was further undermined by the fact that the material he had gathered in his article was not very important.) Secondly, the “dogma” of the Islamicists (Islamwissenschaftler, islamologues) on the “classicism” of the Qur’ānic Arabic continued and still continues to impose itself as self-evident proof, in spite of numerous objections to their own thesis expressed by the supporters of the alleged al-ʿarabiyya al-fushā of the Qur’ān.

Without being particularly influenced by Mingana’s article and having other concerns than this scholar, the German liberal Protestant theologian and Semitist G. Lüling wrote an important study which has also been overlooked and ignored (Ger. totgeschwiegen) by Islamicists and Arabists. This study, Über den Ur-Qur’ān (“On the primitive Qur’ān”), has recently been translated into English under the title A Challenge to Islam for reformation, with the suggestive subtitle, “The rediscovery and reliable reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic reinterpretation.” The point of departure is not the Qur’ān, but Lüling’s own scholarly orientation defined as promoting an “emphasis directed at self-criticism against the falsification of Christianity by its Hellenization resulting in the dogma of the trinity [sic, with a lowercase “t”] […]”, as well as against the falsification of the history of Judaism” (Challenge, lxiii, a passage not present in the German original). The theses of Lüling on the Qur’ān are as follows:

1) About one-third of the present-day qur’ānic text contains as a hidden ground-layer an originally pre-Islamic Christian text. 2) The transmitted qur’ānic text contains four different layers, given here chronologically: the oldest, the texts of a pre-Islamic Christian strophic hymnody;
the texts of the new Islamic interpretation; historically parallel to the second layer is the original purely Islamic material, which is to be attributed to Muḥammad (about two-thirds of the whole Qurʾān); and, finally, the texts of the post-Muḥammadan editors of the Qurʾān. 3) The transmitted Islamic Qurʾānic text is the result of several successive editorial revisions. 4) The presence of the successive layers in the Qurʾānic text can be confirmed by material in Muslim tradition (Gilliot, Deux études, 22-4; Ibn Rawandi, Pre-Islamic Christian strophic, 655-68). Of course, the theses of Lüling should be discussed, and not simply ignored, as has been the case until now (for more details on this work, see the reviews of Rodinson, Gilliot and Ibn Rawandi. For a second book of Lüling, Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad, see the reviews of Gilliot and Ibn Rawandi).

Recently, another Semitist scholar, Ch. Luxenberg, has taken up Mingana’s thesis in his work on the Syriac influence on the Qurʾān and outlined the heuristic clearly. Beginning with those passages that are unclear to western commentators, the method runs as follows: First, check if there is a plausible explanation in Qurʾānic exegesis, above all that of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), possibly overlooked by western scholars. If this does not resolve the problem, then check whether a classical Arabic dictionary, primarily Ibn Manẓūr’s (d. 1311), Liṣān al-Arab, records a meaning unknown to Ṭabarī and his earlier sources. If this turns up nothing, check if the Arabic expression has a homonymous root in Syriac, with a different meaning that fits the context. In many cases, Luxenberg found that the Syriac word with its meaning makes more sense than the Arabic term employed by the Qurʾān. It is to be noted that these first steps of the heuristic do not alter the consonantal text of the Cairene edition of the Qurʾān. If, however, these steps do not avail, he recommends changing one or more diacritical marks to see if that results in an Arabic expression that makes more sense. Luxenberg found that many instances of problematic lexemes may be shown to be misreadings of one consonant for another. If this method does not produce results, then the investigator should change one or several diacritical points and then check if there is a homonymous Syriac root with a plausible meaning. If there is still no solution, he checks to see if the Arabic is a calque of a Syriac expression. Calques may be of two kinds: morphological and semantic. A morphological calque is a borrowing that preserves the structure of the source word but uses the morphemes of the target language. A semantic calque assigns the borrowed meaning to a word that did not have the meaning previously, but which is otherwise synonymous with the source word (Luxenberg, Lesart, 10-15; Phenix and Horn, Review, § 12-4; Gilliot, Langue, § 4).

Of course, Luxenberg’s work must be discussed by Semitists and Islamicists, and poses other complicated problems, e.g. on the history of the redaction of the Qurʾān. But some of his theses do appear convincing, at least to the present writers. For instance, q 108 (Sūrat al-Kawthar), a text which has little meaning for a normal reader, and which is also a crux interpretum for the Islamic exegetes, has been convincingly deciphered by Luxenberg. Behind it can be found the well-known passage of 1 Peter 5:8-9: “Be sensible, watch, because your adversary the devil (q.v.) walks about seeking someone he may devour; whom you should firmly resist in the faith” (Luxenberg, Lesart, 269-76). We could mention also Luxenberg’s treatment of q 96 (op. cit., 276-83). But his dealing with q 44:54 and q 52:20, concerning the supposed “virgins of paradise” (houris, q.v.) has already struck a number of those who have read...
this book. Instead of these mythic creatures “whom neither man nor jinn (q.v.) has deflowered before them” (q 55:36; Bell, Commentary, ii, 551), or “whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before them” (Pickthall), are the grapes/fruit of paradise “that neither man nor jinn have defiled before them”: “Darin [befünden sich] herabhängende [pflichtigreife] Früchte, die weder Mensch noch Genius vor ihnen je bepflückt hat” (Luxenberg, Lesart, 248-51; also discussed in the following reviews of Luxenberg’s work: Nabilek, Weintrauben statt Jungfrauen, 72; Gilliot, Langue, §4; Phenix and Horn, Review, §30-4). In support of the thesis of Luxenberg we could refer to the informants (q.v.) of Muḥammad in Mecca, some of whom, according to the Islamic tradition, read the scripture or books, or knew Jewish or Christian scriptures. There is also the fact that the secretary of Muḥammad, Zayd b. Thābit, certainly knew Aramaic or Syriac before Muḥammad’s emigration (q.v.) to Yathrib (Medina, q.v.). In a well-known Muslim tradition, with many versions, Muḥammad asks Zayd b. Thābit to learn the Hebrew and/or Aramaic/Syriac script (see Lecker; Zayd b. Thābit, 267; Gilliot, Coran, §9-12). The hypothesis has been expressed according to which these traditions proceed to a situation reversal: the Jew Zayd b. Thābit already knew Hebrew and/or Aramaic/Syriac script; this, however, was embarrassing for Muḥammad or for the first or second generation of Muslims because it could be deduced, as in the case of the informants of Muḥammad, that the Prophet had borrowed religious knowledge from his secretary, and consequently from the Jewish or Christian scriptures. So the origin of Zayd’s literary knowledge (see LITERACY) may have come from an initiative, on the part of Muḥammad, to suppress these allegations (Gilliot, Langue, §4). But the following text of the Muʿtazili theologian of Baghdād, Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (al-Kaʿbī, d. 319/931), which seems a confirmation of our hypothesis of a reversal of the actual situation, has recently become available: I [Kaʿbī], concerning that issue, asked people well-versed in the science of the life of the Prophet (al-ʾilm bi-l-sīra, see SīRA AND THE QURʿĀN), among whom were Ibn Abī l-Zinād, Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ (d. 252/866) and Ābdallāh b. Jaʿfar (probably Ibn al-Ward, d. 351/962) who impugned that firmly, saying: How could somebody have taught writing to Zayd, who had learned it before the messenger of God came to [Medina]? Indeed, there were more people who could write in Medina than in Mecca. In reality when Islam came to Mecca, there were already about ten who could read, and when it was the turn of Medina, there were already twenty in it, among whom was Zayd b. Thābit, who wrote Arabic and Hebrew [...]” (Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī [al-Kaʿbī], Qabr al-akhbār, i, 202; Gilliot, Coran, §12). Without his realizing it, Luxenberg’s work falls within the tradition and genre of the readings (qirāʾāt) of the Qurʾān. It becomes still more obvious if we distinguish between “the small variation” (various readings of the same ductus) and “the great variation” (variations of the ductus, i.e. non-“Uthmānic” codices), on the one hand, and “a greater variation” (an Arabic/Aramaic transliteration of the ductus), on the other hand. The method of Luxenberg applied to passages of the Qurʾān which are particularly obscure cannot be brushed aside by the mere repetition of the Nöledeke/Spitaler thesis, or, as some would say, dogma (see Spitaler, Review of Fück, ‘Arabiyya). It must be examined seriously. From a linguistic point of view the undertaking of Luxenberg is one of the most
interesting. It will provoke in some Islamic circles the same emotion as did the hypothesis of Volland formerly, because it amounts to seeing in the Qur'an a kind of palimpsest. Such hypotheses, and the reactions they generate, push scholarship on the language and style of the Qur'an continually to examine and question its acknowledged (and implicit) premises.

Claude Gilliot and Pierre Larcher

Bibliography

Last Judgment

God’s final assessment of humankind. The subject of the last judgment (yawm al-dīn, yawm al-qiyāma) is one of the most important themes in the Qur’ān. It appears in many forms, especially in the first Meccan sūras (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN), which are dominated by the idea of the nearing day of resurrection (yawm al-qiyāma, see RESURRECTION) when all creatures, including jinn (q.v.) and animals (see ANIMAL LIFE), must be judged (see JUDGMENT).

Belief in the last judgment, with the concomitant belief in paradise (q.v.; al-jannah) for those who performed good deeds (q.v.) and in hell (jannaham, see HELL AND HELLFIRE) for those who did not believe in God and did evil (see GOOD AND EVIL; EVIL DEEDS), became one of “the pillars of faith” (arkān al-imān, cf. q. 4:136; see FAITH; BELIEF AND UNBELIEF), as these were called by later Muslim sources. Many sūras indicate that those who trust in God and in the day of resurrection are considered to be believers (q. 2:62, 126, 177; 3:114; 4:162; 5:69; 9:18) and those who refute these tenets are unbelievers, or those who have gone “astray” (q.v.; q. 4:136), and Muslims must fight them (q. 9:29; see ḥ Jahr; FIGHTING; WRA). The hadith literature adds material to emphasize the importance, in Islam, of belief in the resurrection (al-qiyāma, al-Bayhaqi, Shu ‘ab al-imān, ii, 5-72; see hadīth and the Qur’ān).

Certain Western researchers suppose (Seale, Arab’s concern, 90-1) that Muhammad tried, at the beginning of his proph- ecy, to convince his audience that there was going to be a day of resurrection. Considering their reaction (q. 75:3-4; 79:10-1) to this concept, Muhammad then warned them that there was going to be a day of judgment (q. 44:40). This line of thinking also maintains that the Meccans’ refutation of Muhammad’s doctrine of resurrection and a day of reckoning — and their tendency to ridicule these issues — may explain the abundance of references to these themes in the Qur’ān, as well as the conflations of yawm al-qiyāma and yawm al-dīn. There is reason to believe that such Qur’ānic abundance, supported by a flux of interpretations and hadiths elaborating the details of the last judgment, may have led P. Casanova to the following explanation for Muhammad’s failure to designate a successor: namely, Muhammad was convinced that the end of the world was so close at hand that he himself would witness it, and, consequently, there was no need for him to name a successor (Casanova, Mohammed, 12; for a critical view, see Watt-Bell, Introduction, 53-4; see CALIPH).

Qur’ānic appellations of the day of the last judgment

The most frequently occurring terms that refer to the last judgment in the Meccan sūras are, as mentioned above, “day of resurrection” (yawm al-qiyāma, seventy times in Meccan and Medinan sūras) and “day of judgment” (yawm al-dīn, thirteen times: q. 1:4; 15:35; 26:82; 37:20; 38:79; 51:12; 56:36; 70:26; 74:46; 82:15, 17, 18; 83:11; and four times without yawm, q. 51:6; 82:9; 95:7; 107:1). In the Medinan sūras, the dominant terms are “the last day” (al-yawm al-akhīs, twenty-six times: q. 2:8, 62, 126, 177, 228, 232, 264: 3:114; 4:38; 39, 59, 136, 162; 5:69; 9:18, 19, 29, 44, 45, 99; 24:2; 29:36; 33:21; 38:22; 60:6; 65:2) and al-akhīra (115 times). This last term, however, is mostly used for “the life to come,” “the last dwelling.” Some exegetes explain this term as “the mansion of the last hour” (dār al-sā’ “al-akhīra, Nasafi, Tafsīr, ad q. 6:32) or “the upraising, resurrection, paradise, hell, reckoning and balance” (… al-akhīra… ay al-ba’th wa-l-qiyāma wa-l-jannah wa-l-nār wa-l-hisāb wa-l-mīzān, Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr, ad q. 2:4).
The “day of resurrection” (ya'qūm al-qiyām) is also termed al-ya'qūm al-akhir, “since it is the last day and there is no day after it” (Tabari, Taṣfīḥ, i, 271).

Many terms or locutions appear in the Qur'ān that are explained by the majority of exegetes as synonymous with ya'qūm al-dīn. The following are the most important of these designations: “the hour” (al-sā'a, thirty-five times: q. 6:31, 40; 7:187; 12:107; 15:85; 16:77; 18:21, 36; 19:75; 20:15; 21:49; 22:1; 7:55; 25:11; 30:12; 14:55; 31:34; 33:63; 34:3; 40:46; 41:47; 50; 42:17, 18; 43:61, 66, 85; 45:27; 32; 47:18; 54:1; 46:79:42); “dreadful day” (ya'qūm azīm, q. 6:15; 10:15); “the day of anguish” (ya'qūm al-hāsra, q. 19:39); “barren day” (ya'qūm aqīm, q. 22:55; “since after it there will be no night,” cf. Tabari, Taṣfīḥ, i, 272); “the day of the upraising” (ya'qūm al-ba'īth, q. 30:36); “the day of decision” (ya'qūm al-fasıl, q. 37:21; 44:40; 77:13, 14, 38; 78:17); “the day of reckoning” (ya'qūm al-hisāb, q. 38:16, 26, 53; 40:27; see weights and measures) and “the day when the reckoning will be established” (ya'qūma yaqūmu ṭ-ḥisāb, q. 14:41); “the day of encounter” (ya'qūm al-talāq, q. 40:15); “the day of the imminent” (ya'qūm al-'āzīfa, q. 40:18) and the imminent (al-'āzīfa, q. 53:35); “the day of invocation” (ya'qūm al-tanāfūd, q. 40:32); “the day of gathering” (ya'qūm al-jam‘, q. 42:7; 64:9); “the day of the threat” (ya'qūm al-wa‘ād, q. 50:20); “the day of eternity” (ya'qūm al-khulād, q. 50:34; see eternity); “the day of coming forth” (ya'qūm al-khurāj, q. 50:42); “the terror” (al-wāgī‘a, q. 56:1; 69:15); “the day of mutual fraud” (ya'qūm al-taghābun, q. 64:9; see lie; honesty; markets); “the indubitable” (al-hāqq, q. 60:1, 2; see truth); “the clatterer” (al-qārī‘a, q. 60:4; 101:1, 2, 3); “the great catastrophe” (al-tāmam al-kubrā, q. 79:34); “the blast” (al-sākka, q. 80:33); “the promised day” (al-ya'qūm al-maw‘ūd, q. 85:2) and the “enveloper” (al-ghūshiya, q. 88:1).

Exegetes add some expressions which are said to refer to the day of the last judgment: “[fear] a day when no soul (q.v.) shall avail another” (ya'qūmman la taqṣīr nafsīn ‘an nafsīn shay‘an, q. 2:125); “the day when some faces (see face) are whitened, and some faces blackened” (ya'qūma taḥyādhu wa-jīhūn wa-tasawaddu wa-jīhūn, q. 3:106); “a day wherein shall be neither bargaining nor befriending” (ya'qūmūn la hāy‘un fiḥi wa-lā khili‘ūn, q. 14:31; see friends and friendship); “the day when their excuses shall not profit the evildoers” (ya'qūmūn la yaf‘ū‘a al-zālimīna ma’dhiratuhum, q. 40:52), or “a day when no soul shall possess aught to succor another soul” (ya'qūmūn la tamlika nafsīn li-nafsīn shay‘an, q. 82:19). This list is far from exhaustive. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), for example, gives more than one hundred names or epithets designating ya'qūm al-qiyām (Ghazālī, Ḥiyā‘, vi, 161; Frūzābādī, Bāsī‘ā, v, 416-21; Ibn Kathīr, Ashrījī al-sā‘a, 83-4, citing Ābd al-Haqq al-Ishbīlī’s Kāṭāb al-‘Aqība; ‘Āwājī; al-Ḥayāt al-‘akhīra, i, 45-55.

Creating a comprehensive vision

The Qur’ānic material on the last judgment is very rich and colorful but the allusions in the holy book do not provide a comprehensive picture of all of its details. As the various phases of the day of resurrection (ya'qūm al-qiyām) are mentioned in different sūras, sometimes clearly, sometimes metaphorically (see metaphor), but generally without an arranged description of these phases, there was a need to reconstruct the Qur’ānic vision of this theme in order to provide a complete picture. Such a task was performed by a number of Muslim authors, who drew upon one or more of the following categories to assist them in their efforts at elaborating upon the Qur’ānic material: exegetical literature (taṣfīḥ, see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR‘ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL), hadith, prophetic biography
especially in the Meccan sūras, the Qur’ān denotes signs that will presage and foretell the last judgment (see apocalypse). Most of these signs are natural catastrophes and some of them appear collectively in Q 81:1-14: the sun (q.v.) will be darkened, the stars (see planets and stars) will be thrown down, the mountains will be set moving, the pregnant camels (see camel) will be neglected, the savage beasts will be mstered (see animal life), the seas will be set boiling (or will overflow), the souls will be coupled (with their bodies), the buried female infant will be asked for what sin she was slain (see infanticide), the scrolls (q.v.; of deeds, good and bad) will be unrolled (see record of human action), heaven will be stripped away, hell will be set blazing and paradise (see garden) will be brought near. The mountains (will fly) like “tufts of carded wool” (Q 101:5) and graves will be overturned (Q 100:9; see death and the dead; cosmology).

Later Islamic literary genres add other signs like the rising of the sun from the west; the appearance of the Antichrist (Q.v.; al-masīḥ al-dajjāl, or simply al-dajjāl); the descent from heaven of the Messiah ʿĪsā b. Maryam (see Jesus; some reports attest that al-mahdi al-muntazar is ʿĪsā b. Maryam; Dānī, Sunan, v, 1075-80) who will fight the Antichrist, break the crosses (of the Christians; see Christians and christianity) and exterminate the pigs (yakṣīru or yaduqqu ʾs-lālīb wa-yagttu ʾl-khinzīr; Dānī, Sunan, 239-40, 242; Sīḥ Ibn al-Jawzī, Miʿrāḥ, i, 582-5; ʿṢālīḥ, Qāyāma, i, 71-5; see Jews and Judaism; polemic and polemical language); the appearance of the dābba (the reptile or the beast of burden) mentioned in Q 27:82 (ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Tafṣīr, ii, 84; Muslim, ʿṢāḥīḥ, K. al-Fitan, n. 2901; Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, Kitāb al-Fitan, 401-5). Three countries (in the east, the west and Arabia; see geography) will sink, and a fire from ʿAdan will drive

(sīra, see sīra and the Qurʾān), ascetic literature (zuhd, see asceticism), the “tales of the prophets” (qīnas al-anbiyāʾ), material of Jewish and Christian origin (īsā ʿlīyyāt), and Sufī writings (see Sufism and the Qurʾān). These genres contributed to the evolution of a new branch in the Muslim religious literature dealing with the day of resurrection (yawm al-qiyāma), including its preliminary signs (ashrāṭ al-sāʾa, cf. Q 47:18), detailed descriptions of its events, the last judgment, the intercession (q.v.) of the prophets (see prophets and prophet-hood) and then the reward or punishment (see reward and punishment) of each human being according to his or her behavior on earth. This branch is generally known as al-waḥīl yawm al-qiyāma (“dreads of the day of resurrection”). One of the oldest treatises dedicated to this topic is the Kātib al-Anwāl of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894; see also traditional disciplines of Qurʾānic study).

Time of the last judgment

The Qurʾān has a variety of allusions to the time of the day of judgment: (a) nobody, including the Prophet, can anticipate when it is expected to happen: only God knows its exact date (Q 7:187; 31:34; 33:63; 41:47; 43:85; 79:42-4); (b) “the hour” (al-sāʾa) may be very close (Q 21:11; 33:63; 42:17; 54:11; 70:6-7; it is “as a twinkling of the eye or even nearer,” ka-lamhī l-baṣarī aw hawā aqraṣu, Q 16:77; cf. 54:50); (c) it will occur suddenly (baghṭatān, Q 6:31; 7:187; 12:107; 22:35; 43:66; 47:18). Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) gives a very detailed list of Qurʾānic verses and traditions on this matter (Ashrāṭ al-sāʾa, 26-35; Wensinck, Handbook, s.v. s-saʾa).

Signs of the hour

A number of preliminary “signs of the hour” (ashrāṭ al-sāʾa) are enumerated in the Qurʾān. On many occasions, and more
humankind to the gathering place (al-
maḳshar). Gog and Magog (q.v.; Yaḥūj and 
Maḥūj) will attack the entire world, but will 
be eliminated near Jerusalem (q.v.; Nasāʾī, 
Sunan, vi, 424 ad q 27:82 gives a list of ten 
signs including the qurʾānic ones; Gardet, 
Les grands problèmes, 262, n. 6). The litera-
ture of apocalyptic portents (fitan 
and malāḥim, Fahd, Djaf; id., Malḥama; 
Bashear, Apocalyptic materials, and the liter-
erature cited there; id., Muslim apoca-
lipases) abounds in prophecies about wars 
predicting the last judgment. As an aside, 
modern Ahmadi (see AHMADIYYA) tafsīr 
regards al-dajjal as representing the mis-
sionary activities of the western Christian 
peoples, and Yaḥūj and Maḥūj as repre-
senting their materialistic and political 
authorities (Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kahf, 105).

The resurrection
In q 39:67-75, there is a detailed description 
of the events of the resurrection 
(al-qiyāma, al-baʿth, al-maʿād or al-nushūr; cf. 
Izutsu, God, 90-4). The entire earth will 
be grasped by God’s hand (q.v.) and the heav-
ens will be rolled up in his right hand. The 
trumpet (al-sūr) shall be blown and all crea-
tures, including angels (see ANGEL), will die, 
except those whom God wills. Then, it 
shall be blown again and they will be 
standing and looking on: ‘And the earth 
(q.v.) shall shine with the light of its lord 
(q.v.), and the book (q.v.) shall be set in 
place, and the prophets and witnesses (al-
shuhadāʾ; see MARTYR; WITNESSEING AND 
TESTIFYING) shall be brought, and justly 
the issue be decided between them, and 
they not wronged. Every soul shall be paid 
in full for what it has wrought; and God 
knows very well what they do. Then the 
unbelievers shall be driven in companies 
into hell until, when they have come forth, 
then its gates will be opened… It shall be 
said, ‘Enter the gates of hell, do dwell 
therein forever!’… Then those that feared 
their lord shall be driven in companies into 
paradise, until, when they have come forth, 
and its gates are opened, and its keepers 
will say to them: ‘… enter in, to dwell 
forever’… And you shall see the angels 
encircling about the throne (see THRONE 
of GOD) proclaiming the praise of their 
lord (see LAUDATION; GLORIFICATION OF 
GOD); and justly the issue shall be decided 
between them…."

Such a description raises some questions 
in Islamic theology (the question of an-
thropomorphism [q.v.; taṣsim]: God’s hand, 
his right hand; the questions of God’s jus-
tice that arise if the identity of believers 
and unbelievers is known; see FREEDOM 
AND PREDESTINATION; JUSTICE AND 
INJUSTICE; THEOLOGY AND THE QURʾĀN) 
and provokes discussions in the eschatologi-
cal literature, particularly about the iden-
tity of the creatures who will be exempted 
from dying after the first blow of the trum-
pet: the angel/angels Gabriel (q.v.; Jibrīl), 
Michael (q.v.; Mikāʾil), Isrāʾīl, “the angel of 
death” (malak al-mawāt), or God’s throne-
bearers and the fair females (al-ḥūr al-
ʿin, cf. Q. 44:54; 52:20; 55:72; 56:22; Nasaʾī, 
Tafsīr, iv, 66; see HOURS), or the martyrs (al-
shuhadāʾ; cf. q 3:169: qutil fī sabīli llāhī; see 
PATH OR WAY), or the prophets (possibly 
Moses [q.v.; Murāj]) or the immortal boys 
(wīldāʿun munkhaddātīna, q. 56:17; 76:19) 
and the interval of time between the two 
trumpet-calls (forty days, weeks, months or 
years; cf. Qurṭūbī, Tadhkāra, i, 194-201).

Since the ordering of events at this stage of 
the judgment day is not consistent and is 
sometimes even contradictory, many 
authors tried to arrange them (Ibn Kathīr, 
Nihāyā, i, 270-373; Ṭawājīr, Al-Hayāt al-
ākhira). Following these sources, an attempt 
of arrangement of these supposed events 
is presented below.

(a) “The blowing of the trumpet” (al-
naqīkh fī l-sūr). This is attested ten times in 
the Qurʾān (also nuqira fī l-nāqūr; nāqūr is
attested once, at Q 74:8; al-nāqūr = al-ṡūr; Fīrūzābādī, Baṣā/righthalfmoonir, v, 113). In the Qurʿān, the identity of the blower is not revealed. In all the verses dealing with al-naṣfāth fi 1-ṣūr, the verb appears in the passive tense. Traditions relate that the archangel Isrāfīl is appointed to this task (Ibn al-Jawzī, Taḥṣīra, ii, 309-11). He will stand at the eastern or western gate of Jerusalem (Iḥyāʾ; Suyūṭī, Durv, v, 339) or at “the rock of Jerusalem” (sakhrat baṭ al-maqdis, Tabarī, Taḥfīṣ, xvi, 183) and blow. After the first blowing, generally called naṣfāth al-ṣaʿq, “whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth shall swoon (ṣaʿiya), save those whom God wills” (Q 39:68). The exegeses explain the verb ʿaṣiya in this context as “to die” (māta, Lisān al-ʿArab, s.v. ʿṣ-iq; Nasafi, Taḥfīṣ, iv, 66; this meaning is peculiar to the usage of the tribes of ʿUmān, cf. Ibn ʿAbbās [attr.], al-Lughāt fi ʿl-ʿIrāq, 17). There were also discussions concerning the number of times the trumpet was blown. Most exegeses mention two, the blowing of the “swooning” (naṣfāth al-ṣaʿq) and that of the resurrection (naṣfāth al-ḥāth). Some, drawing upon Q 27:87-8, add a third blowing, “the terrifying” (naṣfāth al-fāṣa), ʿAwājī, al-Hayāt al-ḥikmā, i, 189-97). There are also traditions attributed to Muḥammad that he will be the first to be resurrected, but will be surprised to see Moses holding God’s throne (Bukhārī, Ṣahīḥ, vi, 453; Muslim, Ṣahīḥ, iv, 1844).

(b) The returning to life. It should be noted here that some believe that al-ḥāth, the “returning to life,” understood as the “resurrection of the souls and bodies” (Ibn Kathīr, Taḥfīṣ, iii, 206), means the “corporal rising” from the graves (al-maʿād al-jismānī, Ṣafārīnī, Mukhtasār, 387).

c) “The gathering” (al-hashr). Creatures, including humankind, jinn and animals, will be gathered (Q 6:38; 42:29; 81:3). Relying on Q 7:29 and 21:104, the exegetes explain that humankind will be gathered “barefoot, naked and uncircumcised” (ḥiyāt an ʿurātant ghurān, see clothing; circumcision). The unbelievers will be gathered to hell prone on their faces (yuḥšarina ʿalā waṭūḥāhim, Q 25:34; cf. 17:97). Al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870; Ṣahīḥ, vi, 137) reports that Muḥammad replied to somebody who did not understand this situation, saying: “Will not the one who made the person walk on his feet in this world (see creation), be able to make him walk on his face on the day of resurrection?”

(d) “The standing” before God (al-qiyyān, al-muṣāfaq). All creatures, including angels and jinn, have to stand (Q 3:78-79). The unbelievers will stand in the blazing sun, finding no shade anywhere (Q 56:42-3; 77:29-31; see hot and cold).

e) “The survey” (al-ʿard, Q 11:18; cf. 18:48; 69:18). This term is likened in many sources to “a king surveying his army or his subjects.” Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) rejects this interpretation and prefers to interpret ʿal-ʿard as “the settling of accounts with, and the interrogation” (al-muḥāsaba wa-l-muṣāfa ala, Rāzī, Taḥfīṣ, xxx, 110).

f) The personal books (kutub) or sheets (ṣuḥf, saḥā ʿif al-aʿmāl) containing all the acts of each person will be laid open (Q 17:13; 52:2-3; 81:10). The one who is given his book in his right hand will enter paradise, but “whosoever is given his book in his left hand” will roast in hell (Q 69:19-37). Some are given their books behind their backs; they will invoke their own destruction (Q 84:10-1). In some cases, God will change the evil into good deeds (Q 25:70).

g) The balances of justice (al-mawāṣīna al-qistā) will be set up (Q 21:47). “Whosoever’s scales [of good deeds] are heavy, they are the prosperous [by entering paradise] and whosoever’s scales are light, they have lost their souls [by entering hell]” (Q 7:8-9; 23:102-3; cf. 101:6-9).

h) The creatures will bear witness against
themselves (Q. 6:130). Their hands, legs, ears, eyes, tongues and skins will testify against them (Q. 24:24; 36:69; 41:22; 75:14). The prophets will submit testimony against their peoples (Q. 5:109). Jesus will be a witness against the misguided among the People of the Book (Q.v., ahl al-kitāb) — the Jews who believed that they had already crucified him and the Christians who believed that he is the son of God (Q. 4:159).

(i) “The investigation” (al-musā‘ala). God will interrogate the messengers (see messenger) and the peoples to whom they were sent (Q. 7:6). The messengers will be interrogated about the response they received from people to their message (Q. 5:109). The investigation will also include angels (Q. 34:40-1).

(j) The intercession (shafā‘a) in favor of somebody will not be accepted that day except from the one to whom God has given permission (see Q. 2:254; 7:53; 103; 20:109; 21:28; 74:48). The exegetes make a connection between al-kawthar (Q. 108:1), a river in paradise and al-hawd, Muḥammad’s private basin outside or inside paradise, from which believers will be invited to drink. Traditions stress the superiority of Muḥammad to all other prophets since he alone has been given this privilege (‘Awājī, al-Hayāt al-akhirā, i, 277-530). P. Casanova (Mohammed, 19-20) hypothesized that the first Muslim generation believed that Muḥammad, the last prophet, had to preside over the last judgment and to serve as their advocate in the presence of God. Shi‘ī literature states that later the shafā‘a was bestowed on the Prophet’s descendants, the imāms (Bar-Asher, Scripture and exegesis, 180-9; see imām; shī‘ism and the Qur‘ān).

(k) A bridge (ṣirāṭ) will be set up above and across hell (Q. 37:22-3) from one end to the other. Hadith literature adds very rich descriptions of this bridge and the manner in which different kinds of people will cross it. The sinners will slope downward into hell and the believers will enter paradise.

Some details cited above led the exegetes and other Muslim scholars to accept the doctrine of predestination since the identity of sinners and believers is known before doomsday (Q. 74:31). But it is at the day of judgment (yawm al-dīn) that the fate (Q.v.) of each creature is made explicit.

Explanation of some eschatological terms

Some terms dealing with the last judgment raised problems, which the exegetes and lexicographers tried to solve. One of the early Meccan sūras, Q. 75, is called al-Qiyāma (“The Resurrection”) because the word appears in its first verse. This term is generally explained by the lexicographers as yawm al-ba‘th, yaqūmu fihi l-khalq bayn yaday al-hayy al-qayyūm, “the day of returning to life, when all the creatures will rise before the ever-living, the one who sustains (see god and his attributes).” It seems that this word, qiyāma, is not Arabic. Ibn Manzūr (d. 711/1311) cites in the Lisān al-ʿArab an anonymous tradition that suggests that qiyāma is a borrowing from the Syriac/Aramaic qiyamathā. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) repeats this assertion when he speaks about al-qayyūm (Iṣqān, 172). The “first judgment” or al-qiyāma al-saykhra is supposed to be ’adhāb al-qabs, “the torment of the grave,” also termed the punishment of al-barzakh (purgatory; see barzakh), which includes the interrogation of the two angels, Munkar and Nakīr. Many utterances attributed to Muḥammad and cited in the canonical corpus ascribe to the Jews the first allusions to ’adhāb al-qabr (Nawawī, Sharh, v, 85-6).

In Arabic, the root d-y-n (dīn) poses some difficulties since it has three different etymologies and, in consequence, different connotations: (1) religion; (2) custom, usage (al-‘āda wa-l-sha‘ā); (3) punishment, reward (al-jazā‘ wa-l-mukāfa‘a; cf. Lisān al-ʿArab).
or judgment (Ibn ‘Abbās… al-dīn: ya‘īm ḥisāb al-khalāq wa-huwa yawm al-qiyāma; cf. Rāzi, Tafsīr, i, 25). This last connotation forms the basis of interpretations like the one — attributed to Qatāda (d. ca. 117/735) — that explains ya‘īm al-dīn in Q 1:4 as “the day on which God will judge humankind according to their acts” (ya‘īm yadīnī l-tāhā bi-a‘mālīhim, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Tafsīr, i, 27). The dominant meaning of dīn in Arabic is, however, “religion, religious law, custom” (Gardet, Din; id., L’Islam, 29-32). It seems that the sense “judgment” and “custom” is borrowed from the Hebraeo-Aramaic usage, which has its roots in Akkadian (dīnum, “judgment,” dayyānum, “judge”). On the basis of this root, the meaning of “sentence” is presumed. The title dayyānum was given in Akkadian to a judge, king or god. The dīnī, “laws,” served as direction or guidance for the judges to pass sentence on each case (Encyclopaedia biblica, s.v. mishpāṭ). In view of this etymology, it seems that M. Gaudfroy-Demobmyne (Mahomet, 449-58, especially 454-5) was correct when he translated ya‘īm al-dīn as “the day when God gives a direction to each human being.” See also law and the Qur’ān.

The place of the last judgment

The Qur’ān does not identify explicitly the place of the last judgment. The Companions of the Prophet (q.v.; sabāha), his Followers (tābi‘ūn) and later exegetes tried to find hints which could help to identify the precise location. For example, Q 57:13 was explained as referring to Jerusalem (Wasiṭī, Fadā’il, 14-6, no. 14-7) and Q 50:41 to the rock of Jerusalem (ibid., 88-9, no. 143-5). The need for a satisfactory answer caused the Muslims to search the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, since both allotted Jerusalem a dominant role in eschatology (q.v.) and considered it as the scene of the envisioned end of days (Prawer, Christian attitudes, 314-25). In this context, it is worth remembering that, at the beginning of the second/eighth century, Jerusalem was generally recognized in Muslim circles as the third holy place in Islam (Kister, You shall only set; Neuwirth, Sacred mosque). Later, there emerged traditions of Jewish or Christian origin where the connection was made between verses of the Qur’ān pertaining to the end of days and Jerusalem: “Nawf al-Bikālī [the nephew of Ka‘b al-‘Aḥbār] reported to the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 65/885/685-705) that in a verse of the Bible, God said to Jerusalem (bait al-maqdis): ‘There are within you six things: my residence, my judgment place, my gathering, my paradise, my hell and my balance (inna fi kūtubī l-mānazzal anna lāhā yaqūt; fika sittu khāyīlin, fika maqūmī wa-ḥisāhī wa-maḥshāri wa-ṣannatī wa-na‘ini wa-mīzānī’)” (Wasiṭī, Fadā’il, 23).

The Umayyad regime openly encouraged this view because it gave them legitimization to move the Muslim center of worship from Medina (q.v.), the city of the Prophet, to Syria (q.v.), which includes Jerusalem: Mu‘awiyah b. Abi Sufyān (d. 60/680), the first Umayyad caliph, propagated the use of the term “land of ingathering and resurrection on judgment day” (ard al-maḥshār wa-l-manshar) with regard to Jerusalem (Wasiṭī, Fadā’il, introduction, 20). At that time, the Muslims did not see any harm in absorbing Jewish and Christian traditions (Kister, Haddithā ‘an ba‘an isrā‘il, particularly if the traditions reinforced the words of the Qur’ān or explained unclear matters (see ambiguous; difficult passages).

One of the oldest sources to preserve such material is the Tafsīr of Muqṭāli b. Sulaymān (d. 150/768); here it should be noted that ‘Abdallah M. Shaḥāta, the editor of the Tafsīr, chose to transfer from the text to the footnotes these and other traditions extolling Jerusalem, since “most of them are ḥisāb al-dīn” [Muqṭāli, Tafsīr, ii, 513-5].
spite of the fact that they were included in the body of the text of three out of the four manuscripts which he had consulted for his edition). Here are some examples of such traditions: “God will set his seat on the day of the resurrection upon the land of Jerusalem”; “Jesus is destined to descend from heaven in the land of Jerusalem”; “God will destroy Gog and Magog in Jerusalem”; “The gathering of the dead and their resurrection will be in the land of Jerusalem”; “The sirāt (the narrow bridge over Gehenna) goes forth from the land of Jerusalem to the garden of Eden and hell” (see the English translation of these traditions in the appendix of Hasson, The Muslim view of Jerusalem). But this tendency of the early Islamic tradition to absorb Jewish and Christian material brought forth a reaction. The most vigorous representative of this reaction is Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who attacked all the traditions connecting the resurrection day with Jerusalem (see his Qā‘ida).

The last judgment in some previous religions

The Qur‘ān supposes that, in genuine Judaism and Christianity, the belief in al-akhirah, the resurrection and punishment or reward, formed a basic part of the message of Moses (Mūsā) and Jesus (Īsā, Q 12:101; 19:33; 20:14-6; 40:42-3). The Muslims think that the Jews, after “having perverted words from their meanings” (Q 2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41; see forgery), removed the concept of the resurrection from the Bible (Awājū, al-Ḥayāt al-akhirah, i, 116-23). Muslim tradition connects the punishment after death in the grave (‘adhāb al-qabr) to a Jewish source (Nawawī, Sharh, v, 85-6). It is therefore worth reviewing similar ideas in previous religions and in Islam.

Most of the signs of the hour (ashrāt al-sā‘a) appear in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature; these are known as hevlei mashiyyah, “the tribulations preceding the coming of the Messiah” (Grossman, Jerusalem, 295-303). Some of the similarities between the Qur‘ānic and biblical descriptions of these events are: the vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37; Ya‘ṣū and Ma‘ṣū (Q 21:96) — the biblical Gog and Magog — “will swiftly swarm from every mound”; “signs of the hour” abound in Isa 24; and Isa 27:1, but especially 27:13, “… the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the lord in the holy mount of Jerusalem,” bring to mind al-sūr or al-nāqūs, particularly in view of the Muslim explanation that al-sūr is a horn (Tirmidhī, Ṣahīh, iv, 620; Abū Dāwūd, ii, 537), the traditional Jewish sho-فار. The traditions explaining that the gathering and the last judgment must be in Jerusalem have their origin, perhaps, in this verse and in the midrashim, the homiletic interpretations of the scriptures. The blowing of the trumpet, the day of the lord, “a day of darkness and of gloominess,” the earth which shall quake, the heavens which shall tremble, and the sun and the moon which shall be dark are mentioned in Joel 2. The gathering of all the heathen will be in the valley of Jehoshaphat: “for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about” (Joel 4:12; see also Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1; Isa 66:16, 24). To explain the prevalence of such imagery, H. Gressmann (Ursprunge) claimed one century ago that there circulated, among many ancient peoples in the epoch of the prophets of Israel, prophecies about disasters (earthquakes, fires and volcanoes…) which would destroy the world and about a paradise with rivers of milk, honey and fresh water.

In the Book of Daniel 12:2, which retained a Persian influence and was very popular in the first century of Islam since many Muslims wanted to know the exact date of the last judgment, there appears
the idea of the resurrection and of everlasting life for some and everlasting shame and contempt for others. S. Shaked and W. Sundermann (Eschatology) very clearly show Zoroastrian and Manichean influences on eschatological material within Second Temple Judaism, Christianity and, later, on Islam. M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes (Mahomet, 405) claimed that, in the period of the emigration (q.v.; hījra) to Medina, the Qur’ānic verses stopped reporting about the punishment of sinners on earth and began to mention the last judgment. While a similar sequence has been suggested for the Hebrew Bible, there is no consensus on this matter among scholars of the Qur’ān.

In the New Testament, the Revelation of John contains many elements of the resurrection, but they do not resemble the Qur’ānic scheme. Gibb (Mohammedanism, 26-7) is certain that the doctrine of the last judgment in the Qur’ān was derived from Christian sources, especially from the writings of the Syriac Christian Fathers and monks (see Syriac and the Qur’ān; Monasticism and Monks). Tor Andrae, who devoted considerable attention to possible Christian antecedents (see esp. Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum), finds expression of the idea that nobody can determine the date of the last hour in Mark 13:32. Only God knows about that day or hour. Finally, many last judgment scenes appear, with some modifications, in early Christian apocalypses (Maier, Staging the gaze). Although the “beast” in Hermes vision 4, which represents a coming persecution, or the “leviathan” in Isaiah 27:1, which represents evil powers, are reminiscent of the dāhūba in Q 27:8 which became one of the “signs of the hour” (ashrāf al-sāʿa), Annemarie Schimmel correctly asserts that “the Koranic descriptions of Judgment and Hell do not reach the fantastic descriptions of, for example, Christian apocalyptic writing.”

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Bibliography

Laudation

The act or instance of praising or extolling, the object of such praise often being God. More precisely, laudation (hand) in the Qur'anic context refers to the specific formulaic phrase “praise belongs to God” (al-ḥamd li-llah), which occurs twenty-four times in the Qur’an. Perhaps the most significant instance of this formulaic phrase appears in the opening chapter of the Qur’an (see fāṭāha), directly following the basmula (q.v.). Here (i.e. Q 1:2), in the very first line of the Qur’an, the phrase is assertive (insāḥa ʿi, see FORM and STRUCTURE OF the QUR’ĀN; LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN). In its use, as the one uttering it creates a verbal expression of the actual praise (q.v.) he directs toward God. Given its prominent position in the text, this instance of lauding God becomes an essential and vital act for those who believe, a trial (q.v.) and test for those who submit (see FAITH; BELIEF AND UNBELIEF). In addition to this formulaic phrase, there are
several rhetorical variations of ḥamd that also point to the act of commending one’s lord (q.v.), which occur in twenty-one other Qur’ānic verses.

According to al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Tafsīr, i, 136), the phrase “praise belongs to God” means that gratitude belongs entirely to God alone for all the generous gifts he has bestowed upon his servants (see GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE; GIFT-GIVING; SERVANT). Praise may not be directed to anything that might be worshipped besides him nor to anything he has created (see CREATION; WORSHIP). Not only the praising of the speaker, but all possible praising belongs to God alone. Only God has the power to give his creation the sustenance, nourishment and the means through which one can achieve eternal salvation (q.v.; see also ETERNITY; BLESSING; GRATITUDE). No one has the right to claim or demand what God freely gives; for this reason alone all praise belongs to him. In the revelatory proclamation (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION), all praiseworthiness proceeds from him and to him it must return.

The exegetical literature (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL) debates the rather intricate relationship between ḥamd, “praise,” ṣḥūq, “gratitude,” and other forms of exaltation (for subhān llāhī, see GLORIFICATION OF GOD). Some traditions suggest that by giving praise to God one is thanking him for all he has given; others say praise means expressing one’s subservience (al-istikḥdhāʾ) or one’s commendation (thanāʾ) to him. Others assert a more qualitative difference between praising and thanking: when one praises God one praises him for his most beautiful names and attributes (see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES), but when one thanks him, one is thanking him for his munificence and favors. However that debate is decided, God orders his servants to extol him in terms befitting him. Praise belongs to him for all things, both beneficial and painful (see also GOOD AND EVIL).

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Laughter

Sound and/or facial expressions generally indicative of merriment. Laughter does not figure prominently in the Qurʾān: verb forms and participles derived from q-h-k occur just ten times compared to a stunning 179 appearances of its synonymous Hebrew cognates s-h-q/s-h-q in the Hebrew Bible. B-s-m for smiling appears just once and never the onomatopoetic q-h-q-h for strong laughter (an Arabic root form which, incidentally, more or less reverses and doubles the western Semitic onomatopoetic *-h-q from which the various triliterals for laughter seem to be derived). Laughter in the Qurʾān usually expresses disbelief in God and his messages/messengers (q 11:71; 43:47; 53:60; see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; MESSENER). This is also apparent when the unbelievers laugh at and mock the believers (q 23:110; 83:29). Laughter is thus closely linked with the subject of mockery (q.v.). Only once does it express harmless amusement (q 27:19) and twice joy (q 9:82; 80:39; see JOY AND MISERY). But while the joyful laughter of hypocrites (see HYPOCRITES AND HYPOCRISY) who stay behind instead of fighting (q.v.) for God’s cause (see JIHĀD; PATH OR WAY) signals a sinful disobedience (q.v.) that equals disbelief, the laughing faces of those who achieved paradise (q.v.) are the
reward of dutiful belief (see reward and punishment).

The references to laughter predominantly reflect the initial experience of Muḥammad as well as any other prophet (as attested by similar references to laughter and mockery in the Hebrew Bible; see prophets and prophethood); their message is derided. The Qurʾānic message counters this derision with eschatological threats (see eschatology). The last judgment (q.v.) will bring a reversal of fate (q.v.) and those who laughed sinfully will cry (q. q. 9:82; see weeping) and be laughed at by the believers (q. 8:34; for a similar threat of reversal in the New Testament, see Luke 6:25); for a corresponding prediction regarding mockery in the Qurʾān, see q. 9:79.

To explicate these overriding assessments, several verses and exegetical statements merit more detailed comments. First of all, the Qurʾān never categorically condems laughter as such. Pellat’s (Seriousness, 354) interpretation of q. 9:82 is clearly mistaken: the laughing hypocrites will be punished with prolonged crying for staying behind, not simply for laughing. The only verse to suggest that crying might generally be more appropriate than laughing is q. 53:57–62: “The approaching (hour) is imminent. None but God can avert it. Do you wonder at this news and laugh and will you not weep? You are raising your heads proudly [or, amusing yourselves: wa-antum sāmidīna]. Prostrate yourselves before God and worship!” Here (q. 53:60), it may be argued, is it not just the surprised laughter of disbelief in the last judgment that is inappropriate, but laughter in general, as opposed to crying (Ammann, Vorbild und Vernunft, 78). This can be interpreted as recommending a serious and more specifically pious attitude towards life instead of godless frivolity (see piety). But it remains open to debate whether, first, the recom-

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modation holds true beyond the very moment of speaking or the limited period during which the revelation expected the end of the world to happen at any moment (see apocalypse; revelation and inspiration); and, second, whether weeping should be limited to times of prayer (in the moderate sense of “There is a time for weeping and a time for laughing,” Eccles 3:4) or cultivated as much as possible. The latter, rather extreme literalist view — that weeping should be cultivated as much as possible — was taken by the ascetic “weepers” (bakkāʾ), those mystics who denounced laughter and shed many tears during their devotional exercises (Meier, Bakkāʾ; see Ṣūfism and the Qurʾān; prayer). The minimalist view — that at least prayer is certainly not a time for laughing — found acceptance in several law schools (ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Musannaf, i, nos. 3750–8 and 3770–8; Ibn Abī Shayba, Musannaf, i, 387 f.; see law and the Qurʾān).

The eschatological contempt for this world betrayed by q. 53:60 and best attested by its dismissal as mere play and amusement in q. 6:32 flourished in pious circles and especially among early ascetics who provided numerous dicta against laughter (Ammann, Vorbild und Vernunft, 74 f.), some of which found their way into ḥadīth collections and Qurʾānic exegesis (see asceticism; ḥadīth and the Qurʾān; exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval). Thus, the “small” and “big” (i.e. sin) of q. 18:49 could be interpreted as laughter, or as smiling and laughing, respectively (Ṭabarī, Taḥṣīl, ad q. 18:49; see sin, major and minor). But if such arbitrary embellishments are discounted, the one instance of Qurʾānic reserve against laughter that is open to exegetical generalization is a far cry from the Bible’s unconditional loathing (Eccles 7:6; James 4:9; Sir 21:20; Eccles 2:2; Eph 5:4; and, most instructive by comparison, Luke 6:25).
Q 53:60 is remarkable for another aspect that often goes unnoticed: it reflects the popular conception already attested in pre-Islamic Arabian poetry (see poetry and poets; pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ân) that laughter is caused by surprise (ta‘ajjub). Much later medical and philosophical theories of laughter based on this conception seem to be indebted to theological debates rather than Greek authors (Ammann, Vorbild und Vernunft, 14-19; see theology and the Qur’ân; medicine and the Qur’ân; philosophy and the Qur’ân). The debates were triggered by two verses. In Q 11:71-4, God’s messengers reassure a frightened Abraham (q.v.); his wife Sara laughs, is told that she will give birth to Isaac (q.v.; Ishāq) and Jacob (q.v.; Ya‘qūb) and, being old, she wonders at this strange thing (shay’ajīb). Her surprise, in turn, is called into question by the messengers: “Do you wonder (ta‘ajabna) at God’s command?” This is one of the rare examples where doubt (q.v.) in a prophetic message is noted, but not condemned as sinful. The chronology of the biblical version of the story (Gen 18:10-5), in which Sara laughs after she hears the lord’s announcement, makes clear the reason for Sara’s laughter: she is surprised at the idea of giving birth at her age. But Muslim commentators, beginning with Muhammad’s cousin Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/686-8), were faced with a text that has Sara laughing before she even knows what to laugh at. There were three solutions to this problem (Ammann, Vorbild und Vernunft, 19 f.; Tabarî, Tanfisir and Tabarsîf, Majma‘; ad Q 11:71): some exegetes restored the Bible’s sequence and meaning, others identified an earlier reason for surprised or joyful laughter, while a third group claimed that ḍabīkat here actually means ḍabdīt — she menstruated (see menstruation). The last opinion is not supported by sound philological evidence and seems particularly ill-advised since there is no reason for surprise if Sara had already menstruated before she is told she will give birth, but it has been duly cited by lexicographers ever since its initial proposal. The etymological message of the biblical story — Isaac (Ishāq) takes his name from his parents’ laughter — is clear in Hebrew, but not in Arabic, and thus escaped Muslim commentators. The loss of this detail need not be greatly regretted since the value of this folk etymology has been doubted anyway; the name Ishāq is probably of theophoric origin and expressed the wish that God should either laugh, that is, welcome the new-born or grown-up bearer of the name, or make him laugh, that is, happy.

This leads to Q 53:36-44, which contains the only theological statement about laughter in the Qur’ân (Q 53:43-4). It portrays God as the creator or ultimate cause of laughter and weeping: “Was it not prophesied to him what is [said] in the scrolls (q.v.) of Moses (q.v.; Mūsā) and Abraham […] that God is the end [of all], and that it is he who causes to laugh and to weep (aḍḥaka wа-akbā), and that it is he who causes to die and to live (amātā wa-akbāyā)?” It is in the context of God’s primordial and eschatological roles of creator and terminator that God is credited with causing woman and man to laugh and to weep (see creation; freedom and predestination). The verses, in fact, summarize how human destiny (q.v.) must be interpreted from the point of view of salvation history (see history and the Qur’ân; salvation). The joy and grief expressed by laughter and tears, corresponding, in the final analysis, to life (q.v.) and death (see death and the dead), are both sent by God. The exact wording conspicuously reverses the internal sequence of the two pairs: laugh — weep, die — live (see pairs and pairing). There is more to this than just the formal exigency of rhymed prose (q.v.; sa‘). Ending on a note of hope (q.v.), the final aḥyā suggests that the creator both
causes people to live in this world and re-
vives them in the hereafter, that is, fi nally 
raises them from the dead. This may mean 
that at least believers have more reason to 
laugh than to weep, and it certainly invalid-
dates the maximalist reading of the end of 
Q 53:60-2 (mentioned above), which would 
like to rule out laughter completely. For 
Muslim commentators, the theological 
question posed by this verse was whether 
God literally creates human laughter and 
weeping or only the reasons for it, such as 
joy and grief. The latter explanation was 
promoted by Mu’tazilis (q.v.) bent on de-
fending free will against the determinist 
causative phrasing of the verse. But there 
was one concession: irresistible laughter is 
God-sent laughter; thus the involuntary act 
is interpreted as willed by God (Ammann, 
Vorbild und Vernunft, 21 f.; Ţabari, Tafsîr; 
Ṭabarî, Majma’; Râzî, Tafsîr ad Q 53:43).

In the Qur’ân (as opposed to the biblical 
portrayal), God is never portrayed as 
laughing, but in several hadiths he is (see 
Gimaret, Dieu à l’image de l’homme, 263-79). 
This portrayal also sparked theological 
objections, this time against the implied 
anthropomorphism (q.v.). One of the 
more fascinating arguments jointly refutes 
God’s laughter and surprise by pointing 
out that only someone who originally did 
not know could wonder and laugh at some-
thing — whereas God is all-knowing (see 
god and his attributes). Surprise and 
laughter here and elsewhere are both seen 
as prerogatives of humans and linked with 
their rational faculties (Ammann, Vorbild 
und Vernunft, 42 f. and 26 f.; Lecomte, Traité 
des divergences, 235 f.; Zamakhshari, Kashshîf, 
ad Q 37:12; see INTELLECT).

The perplexing fa-tabassama dâhikan min 
qawlihî of Q 27:19 is probably best under-
stood as “he [Solomon] smiled amused at 
her [the ant’s word]” (Ammann, Vorbild und 
Vernunft, q f.; see Solomon; Animal Life).
But it may also reflect a long-standing rule 
of Near Eastern etiquette attested by 
Christian, Persian and also pre-Islamic 
Arabic sources (see e.g. the verse by Aws 
b. Ḥajar about women who “laugh but 
smilingly,” mā yândhakna illā tabassaman). This 
rule of cultured laughter subded to a 
mere smile was later attributed to the 
Prophet (Ammann, Vorbild und Vernunft, 
88-109 and 47-61). There is no reason to 
believe that the hadith in question was not 
fabricated. But it constitutes a respectable 
compromise between the Prophet’s well-
attested loud laughter in some instances 
and his ominous warning that “If you 
 knew what I know, you would laugh little 
and weep much!” (Ammann, Vorbild und 
Vernunft, 48 and 65-68).

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Law and the Qur’ân

The Qur’ân has a curious function in 
Islamic law. It is doubtless considered the 
first and foremost of the four major 
sources of the law (i.e. the sharī‘a). Yet in 
substantive legal terms and in comparison 
with the full corpus of the sharī‘a, the 
Qur’ân provides a relatively minor body of
legal subject matter, although a few of the most central rulings that govern the life of Muslim society and the individual (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’ĀN; ETHICS AND THE QUR’ĀN) are explicitly stated in it, or derived from one or another of its verses. The centrality of the Qur’ān in the shari‘a stems more from theological and intellectual considerations of the law and less from its ability to provide substantive legal subject matter (see THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN).

The early legal history of the text
While it is true that the Qur’ān is primarily a book of religious and moral prescriptions, there is no doubt that it encompasses pieces of legislation strictly defined. In propounding his message, the Prophet wished to break away from pre-Islamic Arabian values and institutions, but only insofar as he needed to establish, once and for all, the foundations of the new religion (see ISLAM; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR’ĀN). Pragmatically, he could not have done away with all the social practices and institutions that had prevailed prior and up to his time. Among the multitude of exhortations (q.v.) and prescriptions found in the Qur’ān, there are a good number of legal and quasi-legal stipulations. Thus legislation was introduced in select matters of ritual (see RITUAL AND THE QUR’ĀN), almsgiving (see ALMSGIVING; TAXATION), property (q.v.) and treatment of orphans (q.v.), inheritance (q.v.), usury (q.v.), consumption of alcohol (see INTOXICATION; WINE), marriage, separation, divorce (see MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE), sexual intercourse (see SEX AND SEXUALITY), adultery (see ADULTERY AND FORNICATION), theft (q.v.) and homicide (see MURDER; BLOODY SHED).

Medieval Muslim jurists and modern scholars seem to agree that the Qur’ān contains some five hundred verses with explicitly legal content. In comparison with the body of Qur’ānic material as a whole, the legal verses appear rather exiguous, conveying the impression that the Qur’ān’s preoccupation with legal matters is nothing more than incidental. At the same time, it has frequently been noted by Islamicists that the Qur’ān often repeats itself both literally and thematically. If we accept this to be the case, it would mean that the relative size of the legal subject matter, where repetition rarely occurs, is larger than previously thought. And if we consider the fact that the average length of the legal verse 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” (Goitein, The Birth-hour, 24). Therefore, while Qur’ānic law constitutes a relatively minor part of the shari‘a, the Qur’ān, in and by itself, is no less legalistic than the Torah.

The law of the Torah, Gospel and Qur’ān
This affirmation of significant legal content in the Qur’ān is crucial since it goes against conventional wisdom, which asserts that the Qur’ān acquired legal importance for early Muslims only toward the end of the first century a.h. (ca. 720 c.e.). Even in Mecca (q.v.), the Prophet already thought of the community he aimed to create in terms of a political and social unit (see POLITICS AND THE QUR’ĀN; SOCIAL RELATIONS). This explains his success in organizing the Arab and Jewish tribes (see TRIBES AND CLANS; JEWS AND JUDAISM; ARABS) in a body politic immediately after arriving in Medina (q.v.). The constitution that he drafted in this city betrays a mind very familiar with formulaic legal documents, a fact that is hardly surprising in light of the legal thrust of the Qur’ān and the role he had played as an arbitration judge (ḥakam, see JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE; MUḤAMMAD). In Medina, he continued to
play this role for some time, relying in his decisions, so it seems, on customary law and tribal practices hitherto prevailing. But from the Qur'an we learn that at a certain point of time after his arrival in Medina the Prophet came to think of his message as one that carried with it the law of God, just as did the Torah (q.v.) and the Gospel (q.v.). Sūra 5, revealed at Medina, marshals a list of commands, admonitions and explicit prohibitions concerning a great variety of issues, from eating swine meat to theft (see food and drink; lawful and unlawful; prohibited degrees; boundaries and precepts). References to the Jews and Christians (see christians and christianity), and their respective scriptures recur throughout. In Q 5:43 God asks, with a sense of astonishment, why the Jews resort to Muhammad in his capacity as a judge “when they have the Torah which contains the judgment (q.v.) of God.” The Qur'an continues: “We have revealed the Torah in which there is guidance and light (q.v.), by which the prophets who surrendered [to God] judged the Jews, and the rabbis and priests judged by such of God’s scriptures (see book) as they were bidden to observe” (Q 5:44). In Q 5:46, the Qur'an addresses the Christians, saying in effect that God sent Jesus (q.v.) to confirm the prophethood (see prophets and prophethood) of Moses (q.v.), and the Gospel to reassert the “guidance and advice” revealed in the Torah. “So let the people of the Gospel judge by that which God had revealed therein, for whosoever judged not by that which God revealed: such are sinners” (Q 5:47).

This is sufficient to show that the Prophet not only considered the Jews and Christians as possessing their own divine law but also as bound by the application of this law. If the Jews and Christians each have their own law, then what about Muslims? The Qur'an here does not shirk from giving an explicit answer: “We have revealed unto you the book (viz. the Qur'an) with the truth, confirming whatever scripture was before it… so judge between them by that which God had revealed, and do not follow their desires away from the truth… for we have made for each of you (i.e. Muslims, Christians and Jews) a law and a normative way to follow. If God had willed, he would have made all of you one community” (Q 5:48). But God did not wish to do so, and he thus created three communities with three sets of laws, so that each community could follow its own law. And like the Christians and Jews, the Prophet is again commanded (repeatedly throughout the Qur'an) to judge by what God revealed to him, for “who is better than God in judgment?” (Q 5:49-50).

Sūra 5, or at least verses 42-50 therein, seems to have been precipitated by an incident in which certain Jewish tribes resorted to the Prophet to adjudicate among them. It is unlikely that such an event would have taken place any later than 5 A.H., since the repeated references to rabbis implies a context of time when there remained a substantial Jewish presence in Medina, which could not have been the case after this date. Be that as it may, the incident seems to have marked a turning point in the career of the Prophet, and from that point on he began to think of his religion as one that should afford the Muslim community a set of laws separate from those of other religions. This may also account for the fact that it is in Medina that the overwhelming bulk of Qur'ānic legislation occurred (see chronology and the Qur'ān; occasions of revelation).

Muḥammad and the caliphs and the law
Although the Qur'an did not provide Muslims with an all-encompassing system of law, the evidence suggests that the Prophet
was strongly inclined to move in that direction. This inclination finds eloquent testimony in the stand of the Qur'ān on the matter of the consumption of date- and grape-wine. In the Meccan phase, wines were obviously permitted: “From date-palm and grapes you derive alcoholic drinks, and from them you make good livelihood (rizqan hasasan). Lo! therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense” (Q 16:67). In Medina, the position of the Qur'ān changes, expressing a growing distrust toward alcoholic beverages. “They ask you (viz. Muhammad) about wine (khamr) and gambling (q.v.; maysir). Say: ‘In both there is sin (see sin, major and minor), and utility for people’” (Q 2:219). The sense of aversion increases further: “O you who believe (see belief and unbelief), do not come to pray when you are drunken, till you know what you utter” (Q 4:43). Here, one observes a provisional prohibition against the consumption of alcohol only at times when Muslims intended to pray (see prayer). Finally, a categorical command is revealed in Q 5:90-1, whereby Muslims are to avoid alcohol, games of chance (see divination; foretelling) and idols altogether (see idols and images; idolatry and idolaters). It is interesting that the final, decisive stand on alcohol occurs in sūra 5 which, as we have seen, marks a turning point in the legislative outlook of the Prophet.

This turning point, however, should not be seen as constituting an entirely clean break from the previous practices of the Prophet, for he already played the role of a judge, both as a traditional arbitrator as well as a prophet. The turning point only marked the beginning of a new process whereby all events affecting the nascent Muslim community had therefore to be adjudicated according to God’s law, whose agent was none other than the Prophet. This is clearly attested to not only in the Qur'ān but also in the so-called Constitution of Medina, a document whose authenticity can hardly be contested.

That all matters should have been subject to the divine and prophetic decree must not be taken to mean that all the old problems encountered by the Prophet were given new solutions. Although a historical record of this early period is lacking in credibility (see history and the Qur'ān; hadīth and the Qur'ān), we may assert that, with the exception of what may be called the Qur'ānic legal reform, the Prophet generally followed existing pre-Islamic Arab practices. Indeed, one might argue that while these practices constituted the bulk of prevalent norms, the Qur'ānic legislation constituted nothing more than a supplement. It was not until later that pre-Islamic Arab practices were Islamicized by their inclusion under the rubric of prophetic sunna (q.v.).

Before the prophetic sunna came to play an important role in the law, and even while the conquests were underway and Medina was still the capital, there were mainly two sets of laws on the basis of which the leaders of the nascent Muslim community modeled their conduct, namely, pre-Islamic Arab customary law and the Qur'ān. The former was by and large the only “system” of law known to the conquerors, while the latter contained and symbolized the mission in whose name these conquerors were fighting (q.v.; see also expeditions and battles). The importance of the Qur'ān and its injunctions for the early Muslims can hardly be overstated. Early Monophysite sources inform us that when Abū Bakr, the first caliph (q.v.; d. 13/634), deployed his armies to conquer Syria (q.v.), he addressed his generals with the following words: “When you enter the land, kill neither old man nor child… Establish a covenant with every city and people who receives you, give
them your assurances and let them live according to their laws. Those who do not receive you, you are to fight, conducting yourselves carefully in accordance with the ordinances and upright laws transmitted to you from God, at the hands of our Prophet" (Brock, Syriac views, 12, 200; see war). It is interesting to observe that in this passage the reference to the Qur'ān is unambiguous, although one is not entirely sure whether or not the “upright laws” might refer in part to legal ordinances other than those laid down in the Qur'ān. But even more interesting is the contrast drawn between the laws of the conquered nations and the law transmitted from God through the Prophet. Abū Bakr’s orders to allow the mainly Christian inhabitants of Syria to regulate their affairs by their own laws is rather reminiscent of the Qur'ān’s discourse in sūra 5, where each religion was to apply to itself its own set of laws. Here, Abū Bakr was implicitly and, later in the passage, explicitly adhering to the Qur’ān’s letter and spirit, and in a sense to the personal stand adopted by the Prophet on this issue which is inextricably connected with the very act of revelation (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION).

The early caliphs, including the Umayyads, considered themselves the deputies of God on earth, and thus seem to have felt free to dispense justice in accordance with the Qur’ān. Abū Bakr, in consonance with the wishes expressed in his speech to the army of Syria, seems to have adhered, as a rule, to the prescriptions of the Qur’ān. Among other things, he enforced the prohibition on alcohol and fixed the penalty for its violation at forty lashes (see CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT). While enforcing the law in this case indicates the centrality of the Qur’ānic injunctions, it also demonstrates that beyond the very fact of the Qur’ānic prohibition (see FORBIDDEN) there was little juristic experience or guidance to go by. For this punishment, deemed to have been fixed arbitrarily, was soon altered by ‘Umar and ‘Abī (see ‘Abī b. Abī Ṭalīb) to eighty lashes, the reasoning being, so it seems, that intoxication was deemed analogous to the offense of falsely accusing a person of committing adultery (qadhf), for which the Qur’ān fixed the penalty of eighty lashes. ‘Umar was not only the first to impose the new penalty for inebriation but he is also reported to have forcefully insisted on strict adherence to the Qur’ān in matters of ritual, which became an integral part of the law.

The increasing importance of the Qur’ān as a religious and legal text manifested itself in the need to collect the scattered material of the book and thence to establish a vulgate (see COLLECTION OF THE QUR’ĀN; CODICES OF THE QUR’ĀN; ‘Uthmān (q.v.), who followed in the steps of his two predecessors in enforcing the rulings of the Qur’ān, took it upon himself to discharge this task. The collection of the Qur’ān must have had a primary legal significance, for it defined the subject matter of the text and thus gave the legally-minded a textus receptus on which to draw. The monumental event of establishing a vulgate signified the beginning of what may be described as the textual attention accorded the Qur’ān (see TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINES OF QUR’ĀNIC STUDY; FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR’ĀN; LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN; GRAMMAR AND THE QUR’ĀN). This attention reached its zenith only centuries later, but the decades that followed the event determined the direction of what was to come.

During the ensuing decades, Muslim men of learning turned their attention to the explicit legal contents of the Qur’ān. The paucity of credible sources from this period does not allow us to form a comprehensive picture of the developments in Qur’ānic studies. The scope of activities
that took place in connection with the development of the theory of abrogation (q.v.), however, may give us some clues as to the extent to which the Qur’ān played a role in elaborating Islamic jurisprudence.

Origins of the theory of abrogation
The rudimentary beginnings of the theory of abrogation seem to have arisen in response to the need for reconciling what appeared to the early Muslims to be seeming contradictions within the body of legal verses in the Qur’ān. The most immediate concern for these Muslims was neither theology nor dogma (see faith; creeds), for these were matters that acquired significance only later. Rather, their primary interest lay in how they might realize or manifest obedience (q.v.) to their God, a duty that was explicitly stressed in the Qur’ān. In other words, Islam meant, even as early as the middle of the first century, adherence to the will of God as articulated in his book. Thus it was felt necessary to determine what the stand of the Qur’ān was with regard to particular issues. Where there was more than one qur’ānic decree pertinent to a single matter, such a determination was no easy task. And to solve such difficulties, it was essential to determine which verses might be deemed to repeal others in the text of the Qur’ān.

The Companions of the Prophet (q.v.) are reported to have provided the impetus to such discussions. But the Muslim sources make relatively few references to the activities of the Companions in this field. It was the generation of the Successors that became most closely associated with discussions on abrogation, and with controversies about the status of particular verses (see exegesis of the Qur’ān: classical and medieval). The names of Ibrāhīm al-Nakha’ī (d. 95/713), Muslim b. Yaṣār (d. 101/719), Mujaḥīd b. Jaḥr (d. 104/722), and al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī (d. 110/728) were among the most prominent in such discussions. Qatāda b. Di‘āma al-Sadūsī (d. 117/735) and the renowned Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) also left writings that attest to the birth of the theory of abrogation, which by their time had already been articulated in writing. Though their original works were likely subjected to revision by later writers, the core of their thought has proven difficult to dismiss as inauthentic. Even if this core is reduced to a minimum, it nonetheless manifests an awareness on the part of these scholars of the legal thrust of the qur’ānic text.

For it is clear that the treatises were exclusively concerned with the ramifications of those verses that had direct bearing on legal issues.

The theory of abrogation appears to have developed in a context in which some qur’ānic prescriptions contradicted the actual reality and practices of the community, thus giving rise to the need for interpreting away, or canceling out, the effect of those verses seen to be discordant with other verses more in line with certain practices. Whatever the case may have been, the very nature of this theory points up the fact that whatever contradiction or problem needed to be settled, it had to be settled within the purview of qur’ānic authority. This accords with the assertion that the Umayyad caliphs not only saw themselves as the deputies of God on earth, and thus the instruments for carrying out God’s justice as embodied in the Qur’ān, but also as the propounders of the law in its (then) widest sense. In addition to fiscal laws and rules of war, they regularly concerned themselves with establishing and enforcing rules regarding marriage, divorce, succession, manumission (see slaves and slavery), pre-emption, blood money (q.v.), ritual and other matters. The promulgation of these rules could only have been carried out in the name of the lord on
whose behalf these caliphs claimed to serve as deputies.

The Qur’an in legal theory
With the evolution of the doctrine of abrogation and other aspects of qur’ānic legal studies, legal theory (uṣūl al-fiqh) began to emerge during the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. In this theory, the Qur’ān occupied a central role as the first source of the law, and this because, logically and ontologically, everything else either depends on or derives from it. Just as consensus and the inferential method of juridical qiyās were justified by means of prophetic sunna, this sunna, together with its derivatives, were justified by the Qur’ān. The explicit commands to obey the Prophet and to emulate his behavior ensured that the apostolic example (see messenger) became a source of law which supplements, in substantive terms, the qur’ānic legal content, and guarantees, in theoretical terms, the authoritativeness (ḥujjīyya) of other legal sources subsidiary to it. The chain of authority thus begins with God’s book in which his attribute of speech (q.v.; see also God and his attributes; word of God) not only manifests itself but is also made identical with the law.

Qur’ānic authority
The Qur’ān also guarantees the authoritativeness of the legal sources in epistemological terms. Metaphysically, God’s existence is assumed to be apodictically demonstrated, which entails the certainty that the Qur’ān is an embodiment of God’s speech. That the Qur’ān is known with certainty to embody one of the most essential of God’s attributes does not necessarily entail the conclusion that its subject matter, as known to the post-apostolic community, is certain. It is after all acknowledged as conceivable that its contents, or portions thereof, may have been forgotten or distorted, just as the Christians and Jews are said to have corrupted their own scriptures (see corruption; forgery). As a safeguard against such distortions and omissions, or perhaps in defense of qur’ānic authenticity, among other things, legal theory developed the doctrine of multiple, recurrent transmission, known as tawātūr. According to this doctrine, three conditions must be met for the tawātūr transmission to take place. First, the channels of transmission must be sufficiently numerous as to preclude any possibility of error (q.v.) or collaboration on a forgery. Second, the very first class of transmitters had to have received sensory knowledge (see seeing and hearing) of what the Prophet declared to be revelation. Third, these two conditions must be met at each stage of transmission beginning with the first class and ending with the present community.

The recurrent mode of transmission yields necessary, certain knowledge, so that the mind, upon receiving reported information of this type, need not even exercise its faculty of reasoning and reflection. Upon hearing recurrent transmissions of the verses, the mind has no choice but to admit the contents of the verses a priori as true and genuine. Unlike acquired knowledge, which occurs to the mind only after it conducts inferential operations, necessary knowledge is lodged in the mind spontaneously (see knowledge and learning). Thus, upon hearing a verse, or for that matter any report, from a single transmitter, one is presumed to have gained probable knowledge of its contents and its authenticity. In order to reach a level of necessary knowledge, the verse must be transmitted a sufficient number of times and each time by a different transmitter. Thus, the Qur’ān’s expansive assimilation in the Muslim community, in both
synchronic and diachronic terms, guarantees the certainty of its contents in the sense that its language is passed down through generations of Muslims in complete and accurate fashion (see Truth).

But does this guarantee certainty in construing the significance of its language? Qur’anic legal language, the jurists admitted, suffers in many instances from ambiguity — a situation that gave rise to the taxonomy known as muhkim/mutashābih (clear/ambiguous). According to this taxonomy, the Qur’ān contains univocal and equivocal language, the former having the epistemological status of certainty because it is capable of but one interpretation yielding a single, unquestionable meaning. The latter, however, is merely probable since it lends itself to be construed in more than one way. Thus, in theory, the Qur’ānic language distinguishes itself from prophetic hadith in that while it includes both muhkim and mutashābih — a problem which also pervades the hadith — its transmission is deemed to be ever certain, whereas the hadith’s transmission is considered to be often, if not dominantly, suspect (see Ḥadīth and the Qur’ān).

Fashioned thus, the theoretical discourse was agenda-laden. In order to exclude probability from the mode of Qur’anic transmission, the text was to be defined by the very terms of the transmission that guaranteed its certainty. In other words, instead of including in the Qur’anic text material that could be defined as probable, the textus receptus was limited to that body of material that was considered to have undergone tawwīṭ transmission. The admitted insignificant material that boasted only probabilistic status, such as Ibn Mas‘ūd’s (d. 32/652-3) recension, was a priori excluded from the textus receptus. Dubious recensions were to be treated as equivalent to prophetic hadiths, the justification being that such Companions as Ibn Mas‘ūd may have thought that the material they had heard from the Prophet was Qur’anic when in fact it was from the sunna.

Be that as it may, the Qur’anic text presented the jurist with no problem insofar as transmission and authenticity were concerned. Rather, the difficulty was with hermeneutics; i.e. how to interpret the Qur’anic language in the ultimate task of constructing legal norms. The aim of linguistic interpretation is to determine whether, for instance, a word is ambiguous, univocal, general, particular, constituting a trope, a command, etc. Each word is analyzed in light of one or more of these categories, one of the first being the category of tropes. The great majority of legal theorists maintain that most words in the Arabic language are used in their real sense and that metaphorical language is limited. Some jurists, however, such as Abū Ishaq al-Isfārā’īnī (d. 418/1027), are reported to have taken the position that tropes do not occur in the Arabic language, the implication being that the Qur’ān is free of metaphors (see Metaphor). A few others admit the existence of metaphors in the language but reject the claim that the Qur’ān contains any such words. The majority, however, hold the position that the Qur’ān does contain metaphors, and in support of this they adduce, among others, q 19:4: “And the head has flared up with grey hair.” It is obvious that the head itself does not “flare up” and that the metaphor issues from the substitution of fire (q.v.) for hair.

Words used in their real meanings are said to be either clear (mubayyān, mufassar) or ambiguous (mujmal). The latter category encompasses all expressions the denotation of which are so general and imprecise that the hearer would be expected to understand neither the intention of the speaker nor the point being made. The ambiguity stems from the fact that the ref-
different in the case of such words includes several attributes or different genera. In q 17:33: “And he who is killed wrongfully, we have given power (sultan) to his heir,” the term “power” (see power and impotence) is utterly ambiguous, since it could refer to a variety of genera, such as retaliation (q.v.), right to blood money, or even the right to pardon the murderer. This ambiguity explains why mujmal words tend to prevent texts containing them from having binding legal effect, for the ruling or the subject of that ruling derived from them would not be sufficiently clear as to enable Muslim jurists to understand what exactly is being commanded. It is only when such words are brought out of the realm of ambiguity into that of clarity by means of other clear “speech” that the legal effects of mujmal texts become binding.

Ambiguity is the result not only of the use of vague language, as evidenced in the aforementioned verse, but also of homonymous nouns that designate more than one object. An example illustrating the difficulty is the Arabic word ‘ayn, which equally refers to an eye (see eyes), to the spring (see springs and fountains) from which water issues, and to a distinguished person of noble lineage. Furthermore, ambiguity may accrue to an otherwise clear expression by virtue of the fact that it is associated with an ambiguous statement. For instance, q 5:1: “The beast of cattle is made lawful unto you (for food)” is, as it stands, fairly clear. Immediately thereafter, however, the verse continues with the statement: “except for that which is unannounced for you,” thus rendering the earlier statement ambiguous, since what is unannounced cannot be known without further documentation.

Univocal language in the texts of revelation is known as nāṣṣ, since its meaning is so clear as to engender certitude in the mind. When we hear the word “four” we automatically know that it is neither three nor five, nor any other number. To know what “four” means we have no need for other language to explain the denotation of the word. It is self-sufficiently clear. Against those few who maintained that the nāṣṣ rarely occurs in connection with legal matters, the majority of jurists argue that univocal language is quite abundant in the texts.

Equivocal words
Words whose signification is not readily obvious are of two types, the first of which includes those whose meaning is so general (‘āmm) that they need to be particularized if they are to yield any legal effects. The second type includes words with two or more possible meanings, one of which — the zāhir — is deemed, by virtue of supporting evidence, superior to the others. Words that equally include two or more individuals of the genus to which they refer are deemed general (‘āmm). Thus all plurals accompanied by a definite article are general terms, e.g. al-muslimūn, “the Muslims.” Some jurists considered words of this kind to belong to the category of the general even when not accompanied by a definite article. In addition to its function of defining words, this article serves, in the Arabic language, to render words applicable to all members of a class. Accordingly, when the article is attached to singular nouns, these nouns will refer to the generality of individuals within a certain class. Al-insān or al-muslim thus refers not to a particular individual but, respectively, to human beings or to Muslims generally. Yet another group of words considered to be general is that of the interrogative particles, classified in Arabic as nouns.

A general word in the Qurʾān may be particularized only by means of relevant words or statements provided by the
revealed texts. By relevant is meant words or statements that apply to the same genus denoted by the general word. Particularization (takhṣīṣ) thus means exclusion from the general of a part that was subsumed under that general. For example, while in Q 2:238, which reads “Perform prayers, as well as the midmost prayer (see noon),” the midmost prayer is specified, it cannot be said to have been particularized. Particularization would have applied if the verse had been revealed as saying “Perform prayers except for the midmost one.”

A classic example of particularization occurs in Q 5:3: “Forbidden unto you (for food) is carrion,” which was particularized by a prophetic report allowing the consumption, among others, of dead fish (see hunting and fishing). This example also makes clear that such reports, including solitary ones, can, at least according to some jurists, particularize the Qur’ān. Similarly, the Qur’ān can, as one can expect, particularize the sunna. Indeed, the vast majority of jurists held that statements in one of the two sources could particularize statements in the other.

There are at least two other types of particularization that apply to two different texts. The first type of particularization takes place when a proviso or a condition (sharat) is attached to, or brought to bear upon, a general statement. Q 3:97, for example, reads: “And pilgrimage (q.v.) to the house (see ka’ba; house, domestic and divine) is a duty unto God for mankind, for him who can find a way thither.” It is plain here that the obligation to go on pilgrimage is waived in the case of those who have no means to perform it. The second type, on the other hand, is particularization by means of introducing into the general statement, not a condition, but a quality (ṣifa). This is known as the qualification (taqyid) of an unrestricted (mutlaq) word or statement. For instance, in cases where a man swears not to resume a normal marital relationship with his wife (zihār), but later does, the penalty fixed in the Qur’ān is “freeing a slave” (Q 58:3). But the penalty for accidental homicide is “freeing a believing slave” (Q 4:92). The attribute “believing” has qualified, or particularized, the word “slave.”

When a qualifying attribute is to be found nowhere in the texts, the unrestricted expression must be taken to refer to the general category subsumed under that expression. And when a qualified word appears without an object to qualify, the word must be taken to apply only to that case which is subject to the qualification. Some difficulties arise, however, concerning the extent to which the principle of qualification should be applied when an unrestricted word meets with a qualifying attribute. In Q 58:4, it is stipulated that the penalty for zihār is either “fasting (q.v.) for two successive months (q.v.)” or “feeding sixty needy persons.” Unlike the general command to feed sixty persons, fasting here is qualified by the requirement that it be successive. Since these are two different types of penance (see repentance and penance), one relating to feeding, the other to fasting, the qualification applicable to the latter must not be extended to the former. But when the two penances (or rulings) are of the same nature, the attribute must be taken to qualify the unrestricted word or sentence. For instance, Q 2:282: “have witnesses (attest to the sale) when you sell one to another” is qualified by an earlier passage in the same verse stipulating “call to witness, from among you, two witnesses, and if two men are not available, then a man and two women” (see witnessing and testifying; gender).

In this case, both the qualified and the unrestricted rulings are one and the same, and they pertain to a single case, namely, concluding a contract of sale (see selling
and buying). But what would the interpretative attitude be in a situation where the qualified and unrestricted rulings are identical but the cases which give rise to them are different? Such is the case with *zikhr* and accidental homicide. The penalty for the former is “freeing a slave” whereas for the latter it is “freeing a believing slave” (Q 58:3, 4:92). In such an event, the latter must be considered to qualify the former, a consideration said to be grounded in reasoning, not in the actual language of the texts. That is to say, in the contract of sale God made it clear in the language of the Qur’an that a witness of a certain sort is meant, but in *zikhr* and accidental homicide there is no provision of specific language to this effect; the jurist merely reasons, on the basis of the text, that this was God’s intention.

We have said that equivocal words are classifiable into two broad categories, one encompassing general terms (*’amm*), together with those that may be called unrestricted (*mufassal*), and the other including words that are capable of more than one interpretation. Through a process of interpretation, technically known as *tawil*, one of the meanings, the *zikhr*, is deemed by the interpreter to be the most likely among the candidates, because it presents evidence that is absent in the case of the other possible meanings. An example of this sort of evidence would be language that takes the imperative (*amr*) or prohibitive (*nahy*) form, to mention the two most significant linguistic types in legal hermeneutics.

The jurists are unanimous in their view that revelation is intended to lay down a system of obligation and that the imperative and the prohibitive forms (whose prototypes, respectively, are “Do” and “Do not do”) constitute the backbone of that system’s deontology. Without coming to grips with the hermeneutical ramifications of these two forms, obedience to God can never be achieved. For it is chiefly through these that God chose to express the greatest part of his revelation.

Commands and prohibitions

Perhaps the most important question with regard to the imperative form was its legal effect. When someone commands another by saying “Do this,” should this be construed as falling only within the legal value of the obligatory (*wa’ib*) or also within that of the recommended (*mandah*) or the indifferent (*mubah*)? The Qur’an states “Hold the prayer” (Q 2:43), a phrase that was unanimously understood to convey an obligation. At the same time, the Qur’an stipulates “Write (your slaves a contract of emancipation) if you are aware of any good in them” (Q 24:33), language which was construed as a recommendation. Furthermore, in Q 5:2, the statement “When you have left the sacred precinct, then go hunting” was taken to indicate that hunting outside the Ka’ba is an act to which the law is indifferent.

Aducing such texts as proof, a minority among the jurists held that the imperative form in Qur’anic language is a homonym, equally capable of indicating obligation, recommendation and indifference. Others maintained that it signifies only recommendation. The majority of jurists, however, rejected these positions and held the imperative to be an instrument for decreeing only obligatory acts. Whenever the imperative is construed as inducing a legal value other than obligation, this construal would have to be based on evidence extraneous to the imperative form in question. Conversely, whenever the imperative form stands apart from any contextual evidence (*qarina*), it must be presumed to convey an obligation.

Once adopted by the majority, the position that the imperative form, in the
absence of contextual evidence, indicates obligation was given added support by arguments developed by a number of leading jurists. The chief argument (drawn, as would be expected, from both the Qurʾān and the sunna) is that when God commanded Muslims to perform certain acts, he meant them as obligations that can only be violated on pain of punishment: “When it is said unto them: Bow down, they bow not down! Woe unto the repudiators on that day” (Q 77:48-9).

A corollary of the determination of linguistic signification is that the jurist needs to reconcile conflicting texts relevant to a particular case whose solution is pending. He must first attempt to harmonize them so that each may be brought to bear upon a solution to the case. But should the texts prove to be so contradictory as to be incapable of harmonization, the jurist must resort to the theory of abrogation (nashkh) with a view to determining which of the two texts repeals the other. Thus, abrogation involves the replacement of one text, which would have otherwise had a legal effect, by another one embodying a legal value contradictory to the first.

Elaboration of the theory of abrogation

The juridical justification for the theory of abrogation derives from the common idea, sanctioned by consensus, that the religion of Islam abrogated many, and sometimes all, of the laws upheld by the earlier religions (see Scripture and the Qurʾān; Religious Pluralism and the Qurʾān). It is a fundamental creed, furthermore, that Islam not only deems these religions legitimate but also considers itself to be the bearer of their legacy. That the Prophet repealed his predecessors’ laws therefore goes to prove that abrogation is a valid hermeneutical instrument, one which is specifically approved in Q 2:106: “Such of our revelation as we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring (in place) one better or the like thereof,” and Q 16:101: “When we put a revelation in place of another, and God knows best what he reveals, they say: ‘Lo, you are but inventing. Most of them know not.’ ” These verses were taken to show that abrogation is applicable to revelation within Islam.

It must be stressed that the wide majority of jurists espoused the view that it is not the texts themselves which are actually abrogated, but rather the legal rulings comprised in these texts. The text qua text is not subject to repeal, for to argue that God revealed conflicting and even contradictory statements would entail that one of the statements is false, which would in turn lead to the highly objectionable conclusion that God has revealed an untruth.

Why there should be, in the first place, conflicting and even contradictory rulings is not a question in which the jurists were very interested. That such rulings existed, however, was undeniable and that they should be made to abrogate one another was deemed a necessity. The criteria that determined which text abrogates another mainly revolved around the chronology of Qurʾānic revelation and the diachronic sequence of the Prophet’s career. Certain later texts simply abrogated earlier ones.

But is it possible that behind abrogation there are latent divine considerations at work mitigating the severity of the repealed rulings? Only a minority of jurists appears to have maintained that since God is merciful and compassionate he aimed at reducing hardships for his creatures (see mercy). Abrogating a lenient ruling by a less lenient or a harsher one would run counter to his attribute as a merciful God. Besides, God himself had pronounced that “He desires for you ease, and he desires no hardship” (Q 2:185). Accordingly, repealing a ruling by a harsher one would contravene his own pronouncement. Their oppo-
nents, however, rejected this argument. They maintained that to say that God cannot repeal a ruling by another which involves added hardship would be tantamount to saying that he cannot, or does not, impose hardships in his law, and this is plainly false. Furthermore, this argument would lead to the absurd conclusion that he cannot cause someone to be ill after having been healthy or blind after having enjoyed perfect vision (see Illness and Health; Vision and Blindness). They reject the aforementioned Qur’anic verse (Q 2:185) as an invalid argument since it bears exclusively upon hardships involved in a quite specific and limited context, namely, the fast of Ramadān (q.v.). They likewise reject their opponents’ interpretation of the Qur’anic verse 2:106, which states that God abrogates a verse only to introduce in its place another that is either similar to, or better than it. What is “better,” they argue, is not necessarily that which is more lenient and more agreeable but rather that which is ultimately more rewarding in this life and in the hereafter (see Reward and Punishment; Eschatology). And since the reward is greater, it may well be that the abrogating text comprises a less lenient ruling than that which was abrogated.

Criteria for abrogation

If God’s motives for abrogation cannot be determined, then these motives cannot serve to establish which of the two conflicting legal rulings should repeal the other. The criteria of abrogation must thus rest elsewhere. The first, and most convincing criterion may be found in an explicit statement in the abrogating text, stating, for instance, that it was revealed specifically in order to repeal another. The second is the chronological order of revelation, namely, that a later text, in point of time, repeals an earlier one. The difficulty that arises here is to determine the chronology of texts. The first obvious evidence is one that appears in the text itself, as with the previous criterion. But such explicit statements are admittedly difficult to come by. Most conflicting texts therefore have to be dated by external evidence.

The third criterion is consensus. Should the community, represented by its scholars, agree to adopt one ruling in preference to another, then the latter is deemed abrogated since the community cannot agree on an error. The very fact of abandoning one ruling in favor of another is tantamount to abrogating the disfavored ruling. A number of jurists, however, rejected consensus as having the capability to abrogate, their argument being that any consensus must be based on the revealed texts, and if these texts contain no evidence of abrogation in the first place, then consensus as a sanctioning instrument cannot decide in such a matter. To put it differently, since consensus cannot go beyond the evidence of the texts, it is the texts and only the texts that determine whether or not one ruling can abrogate another. If a ruling subject to consensus happened to abrogate another conflicting ruling, the abrogation would be based on evidence existing in the texts, not on consensus.

If consensus is rejected as incapable on its own of abrogating a ruling, it is because of a cardinal principle in the theory of abrogation which stipulates that derivative principles cannot be employed to abrogate all or any part of the source from which they are derived. This explains why consensus and juridical inference (qiyās), both based on the Qur’ān and the sunna, were deemed by the great majority of jurists, and in fact by mainstream Sunnism, to lack the power to repeal either prophetic reports or Qur’ānic verses.

The other cardinal principle, to which resort is quite often made in jurisprudential
arguments, is that an epistemologically inferior text cannot repeal a superior one. Thus a text whose truth or authenticity is only presumed (= probable: *zannī*) can by no means abrogate another text qualified as certain (*qaṭ’/yaqūn*). On the other hand, texts which are considered of equal epistemological value or of the same species may repeal one another. This principle seems to represent an extension of *q2*:106 which speaks of abrogating verses and replacing them by similar or better ones. Hence, it is a universal principle that, like the Qur’ān, concurrent prophetic reports (*mutawāwīr*) may abrogate one another. The same rule applies in fact to solitary reports (*āḥād*).

Furthermore, according to the logic of this principle, an epistemologically superior text can abrogate an inferior one. Thus the Qur’ān and the concurrent sunna may abrogate solitary reports, but not vice versa.

Within the Qur’ān and the sunna, moreover, a text expressing a pronouncement (*qawl*) may repeal another text of the same species, just as a text embodying a deed (*fīl*) may repeal another text of the same kind. Moreover, in conformity with the principle that a superior text may repeal an inferior one, the abrogation of a “deed-text” by a “pronouncement-text” is deemed valid. For the latter is equal to the former in that it represents a statement relative to a particular ruling, but it differs from the former in one important respect: namely, that a “pronouncement-text” transcends itself and is semantically brought to bear upon other situations, whereas the “deed-text” is confined to the very situation which gave rise to it in the first place. A “deed-text” bespeaks an action that has taken place; it is simply a statement of an event. A “pronouncement-text,” on the other hand, may include a command or a generalization that could have ramifications extending beyond the context in which it was uttered. Q 6:135 and 155, taken to be “pronouncement-texts,” enjoin Muslims to follow the Prophet. So does Q 33:21: “Verily, in the messenger of God you have a good example (*uswātun*).”

Since one Qur’ānic verse can repeal another, it was commonly held that a verse may abrogate a prophetic report, particularly because the Qur’ān is deemed to be of a more distinguished stature. In justification of this view, some jurists further argued that since the Qur’ān is accepted as capable of particularizing the sunna, it can just as easily abrogate it. Other jurists, while adopting the position that the Qur’ān can repeal the sunna, rejected the argument from particularization. Particularization, they held, represents an imperfect analogy with abrogation — the latter entails a total replacement of one legal text by another, whereas the former does not involve abrogation, but merely delimits the scope of a text so as to render it less ambiguous.

**Qur’ān and sunna**

The Qur’ānic abrogation of the sunna has also historical precedent to recommend it. One such precedent was the Prophet’s peace treaty with the Quraysh (see *quraysh*) of Mecca (q.v.) whereby he agreed to return to Mecca all those who converted to Islam as well as those who wished to join his camp. But just before sending back a group of women who had adopted Islam as a religion, Q 60:10 was revealed, ordering Muslims not to continue with their plans, thereby abrogating the Prophet’s practice as expressed in the treaty. Another instance of Qur’ānic abrogation is found in verses Q 2:144 and 2:150, which command Muslims to pray in the direction of Mecca instead of Jerusalem (q.v.), the direction which the Prophet had earlier decreed to be valid (see *qibla*).

More controversial was the question of
whether the sunna can repeal the Qurʾān. Those who espoused the view that the Qurʾān may not be abrogated by the sunna advanced q 2:106 which, as we have seen, states that if God repeals a verse, he does so only to replace it by another which is either similar to, or better than it. The sunna, they maintained, is neither equal to, or better than the Qurʾān, and thus no report can repeal a qurʾānic verse. On the basis of the same verse they furthermore argued that abrogation rests with God alone, and that this precludes the Prophet from having the capacity to abrogate.

On the other hand, the proponents of the doctrine that the sunna can abrogate the Qurʾān rejected the view that the Prophet did not possess this capacity, for while it is true that he could act alone, he did speak on behalf of God when he undertook to abrogate a verse. The central argument of the proponents of this view, however, revolved around epistemology: both the Qurʾān and the concurrent reports yield certitude, and being of equal epistemological status, they can abrogate each other. Opponents of this argument rejected it on the grounds that consensus also leads to certainty but lacks the power to repeal. Moreover, they maintained, the epistemological equivalence of the two sources does not necessarily mean that there exists a mutuality of abrogation. Both solitary reports and qiyās, for instance, lead to probable knowledge, and yet the former may serve to abrogate, whereas the latter may not. The reason for this is that these reports in particular, and the sunna in general, constitute the principal source (asl) from which the authority for qiyās is derived. A derivative can by no means repeal its own source and since, it was argued, the Qurʾān is the source of the sunna as well as superior to it, the sunna can never repeal the Qurʾān.

Another disagreement with far-reaching consequences arose concerning the ability of solitary reports to repeal the Qurʾān and the concurrent sunna. One group of jurists, espousing the view that solitary reports can abrogate the Qurʾān and concurrent sunna, maintained that their position was defensible not only by rational argument but that such abrogation had taken place at the time of the Prophet. Rationally, the mere notion that a certain solitary report can substitute for a particular concurrent sunna or a qurʾānic verse is sufficient proof that this sunna or verse lacks the certitude that is otherwise associated with it. Since certainty is lacking, the solitary report would not be epistemologically inferior to the Qurʾān and the concurrent sunna, and therefore capable of abrogating the latter. It was further argued that solitary reports had been commonly accepted as capable of particularizing the concurrent sunna and the Qurʾān, and that if they had the power to particularize, they must have the power to repeal. But the most convincing argument in support of this position was perhaps that which drew on the dynamics of revelation at the time of the Prophet. A classical case in point is q 2:180, which decrees that “It is prescribed for you, when death approaches one of you, if he has wealth, that he bequeath unto parents and near relatives (see family; kinship) in kindness.” This verse, some jurists maintained, was abrogated by the solitary report “No bequest in favor of an heir.” Since parents and near relatives are considered by the Qurʾān as heirs, q 2:180 was considered repealed, this constituting clear evidence that solitary reports can repeal the Qurʾān and, a fortiori, the concurrent sunna.

The opponents of this doctrine rejected any argument which arrogated to solitary reports an epistemological status equal to that of the Qurʾān and the concurrent sunna. The very possibility, they argued, of
casting doubt on the certainty generated by these texts is a priori precluded. As they saw it, solitary reports, being presumptive to the core, can by no means repeal the Qur’ān or concurrent reports. Furthermore, any attempt at equating particularization with abrogation is nullified by the fact that particularization involves the substitution of partial textual evidence for other evidence by bringing two texts to bear, conjointly, upon the solution of a given legal problem. Abrogation, in contrast, and by definition, entails the complete substitution of one text for another, the latter becoming devoid of any legal effect. The example of qiyās served to bolster this argument: this method of legal inference is commonly accepted as capable of particularizing the Qur’ān and the sunna but it cannot, by universal agreement, repeal these sources. Finally, opponents of this doctrine dismissed the occurrence of abrogation on the basis of a solitary report in the case of bequests as an instance of faulty hermeneutics. The solitary report “No bequest in favor of an heir” did not, they insisted, abrogate the aforementioned Qur’ānic verse. Rather, the verse was abrogated by Q 4:11 which stipulates that parents, depending on the number and the degree of relation of other heirs, must receive fixed shares of the estate after all debts have been settled and the bequest allocated to its beneficiary. The specification that the parents’ shares are determined subsequent to the allocation of the bequest is ample proof that it is this verse which repealed Q 2:180, not the solitary report. If anything, these jurists argued, this report served only to confirm the Qur’ānic abrogation, a fact made clear in the first part of the report — a part usually omitted by those who used it to support their case for the abrogation of Qur’ānic verses by solitary reports. In its entirety, the report reads as follows: “God has given each one his due right; therefore, no bequest to an heir.” The attribution of the injunction to God, it is argued, is eloquent confirmation that the Prophet acknowledged and merely endorsed the abrogation of Q 2:180 by Q 4:11.

The Qur’ān in later legal discourse

The preceding outline represents the mainstream juristic discourse on the Qur’ān, discourse which was to dominate legal theory until the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, there were a number of theoretical attempts to formulate different legal concepts of the Qur’ān’s function in law. The most notable and influential of these was al-Shātibi’s (d. 790/1388) singular and creative doctrine.

Al-Shātibi’s holistic theory

Going beyond the conventional, atomistic view of the Qur’ān, al-Shātibi presents us with a unique theory in which the text is seen as an integral whole, where one verse or part cannot be properly understood without reference not only to other parts but also to the particular and general circumstances in which the text was revealed (ashūb al-nuzūl). Without such a referential approach, the meaning of the verses and the intention of God behind revealing them will not be intelligible to the human mind. All this, however, presupposes full knowledge of the linguistic conventions prevalent among the Arabs during the time of revelation (see Arabic language, language, concept of). God addressed the Arabs in a language they understood with reference to a reality that was specifically theirs, and since both language and reality may — and al-Shātibi implies that they do — differ from later usages and realities, the jurist must thoroughly ground himself in the linguistic and historic context of the Qur’ān’s revelation.

Thus adequate knowledge of the Arabic
language and of the circumstances of revelation, coupled with a holistic reading of the text, can guarantee what al-Shāṭibī deems a reasonable, moderate, and middle-of-the-road interpretation. To be properly understood, a Qur’ānic verse must be viewed in light of the verses that preceded it in time. Passages in the text revealed later must therefore be explained in terms of the earlier ones just as the entire Medinan revelation must be viewed in light of the Qur’ān’s Meccan phase.

And within each of the phases (Medinan and Meccan), the later verses are to be interpreted only after full consideration is given to what was revealed earlier. An example of this general principle is the Meccan sura, Surat al-An’ām (q 6, “The Cattle”), which embodied a holistic structure of the universal principles (asāl kul-liyya) of the law. Setting aside any part of it will lead to blighting the entire legal system. When the Prophet migrated to Medina (see emigration), q 2, Surat al-Baqara (“The Cow”), was revealed in order to explicate the general principles of the law. Though some of these details appeared elsewhere, here are found specific laws of ritual, diet, crime, commercial transactions (see breaking trusts and contracts), marriage, etc. The universal principles established in q 2 concerning the preservation of one’s religion, life, mind, offspring and property are all confirmed in the sura. Thus what was revealed in Medina subsequent to Surat al-Baqara must be viewed in its light. The significance of chronology here can hardly be exaggerated.

That the later sūras and verses explain what was revealed prior to them in time leads to a certain hierarchy in the Qur’ān, with the very early sūras being the most comprehensive. Even if a Medinan verse appears general in scope, there must always be a more general verse revealed earlier, the later verses always supplementing the earlier ones. The Meccan revelation thus constitutes the ultimate reference, particularly those parts of it revealed at the outset of the Prophet’s career. These latter lay down the most general and universal principles, namely, the protection of the right to religion, life, thought, progeny and property. Later revelation, particularly the Medinan, may complement these principles, but they primarily provide explanations and details relative to these universals.

Whether or not the Qur’ān contains all the details of the law, God perfected for Muslims their religion by the time the last verse of the text was revealed. Citing q 5:3, “Today I have perfected your religion for you,” al-Shāṭibī argues that the Qur’ān contains all the basic elements of faith, spiritual and practical. It treated of all things and, conversely, nothing that is essential in religion and life stands outside its compass.

The logical consequence of this argument represents no less than a complete relegation of the prophetic sunna to a secondary status and al-Shāṭibī, to be sure, does reach this very conclusion. But though the Qur’ān lays down the foundations of the law and religion, no rulings should be extracted from it without consulting the sunna because the latter, just like the Medinan revelation, provides explanation of and detailed annotation to the Qur’ān. Nevertheless, al-Shāṭibī affirms the completeness and self-sufficiency of the latter and, in consequence, rejects the view that the sunna offers any substantive addition to the Qur’ān.

Al-Shāṭibī’s position here is no doubt novel, signaling a total departure from the conventional view propounded in legal theory. He asserts that in the jurisprudent’s reasoning about individual legal cases, the Qur’ān merits attention before the sunna.
The latter’s demotion to second place here is the result of the higher degree of certitude the Qur’ān enjoys. While both sources as a whole are certain, the individual verses possess a degree of certitude higher than that enjoyed by individual prophetic reports.

The traditional doctrine of legal theory affirms that when the Qur’ān is ambiguous on a particular matter, or when it fails to address a given problem with exactitude and clarity, the sunna intervenes to determine the specific intent of the divine lawgiver. A case in point is the Qur’ānic injunction to cut off the thief’s hand. The sunna delimited the Qur’ānic instruction by decreeing that the punishment can only be imposed when theft is accompanied by breaking and entering and when the value of the stolen goods exceeds a certain prescribed amount. In the same vein, the general Qur’ānic permission for matrimony was narrowed down by the sunna in the form of a ban on marriage with the maternal or paternal aunt of one’s wife. Al-Shāṭibī does accept the authority of the sunna in such cases, but only insofar as it complements the Qur’ān. The sunna, in his view, merely brings out and articulates the intention of the Qur’ān. If a jurist establishes the exact meaning of a verse, we cannot say, al-Shāṭibī analogically argues, that the ruling based on that verse stems from the authority of the jurist himself. He, like the sunna, functions only as an interpreter of what is ultimately the very word of God.

Al-Shāṭibī on competing evidence in legal cases

When the jurist is presented with two different or contradictory pieces of evidence, both of which enjoy the same degree of certainty — thus precluding the possibility of one superseding the other — the common practice was to choose the evidence that was more suitable to the particular case at hand, even though it might not be Qur’ānic. Al-Shāṭibī sees no problem with doing so because the evidence in the sunna represents, in the final analysis, an explanation or reformulation of a general Qur’ānic text. Put differently, the evidential competition is not between the Qur’ān and the sunna, but, ultimately, between two different or seemingly contradictory statements within the Qur’ān. The latter, al-Shāṭibī reaffirms, contains the essence of the shari‘a, while anything else represents, so to speak, footnotes to the self-sufficient book. Here al-Shāṭibī’s hypothetical interlocutor replies by citing a number of Qur’ānic verses (such as Q 4:59, 5:92, 59:7) to the effect that the Prophet must be obeyed and that his sunna constitutes a source of authority equal to that of the Qur’ān. The specific directive to bow to the Prophet’s authority clearly indicates that he did introduce injunctions unspecified in the Qur’ān. Several prophetic reports to the same effect are then cited, condemning those who make the Qur’ān their sole reference.

But al-Shāṭibī does not see how this evidence refutes his position. When the sunna clarifies a verse pertaining to a particular legal ruling, the same ruling ultimately remains grounded in the Qur’ān, not the sunna. Both God and the Prophet presumably bestow on it a certain authority. Distinguishing between the two sanctioning authorities does not entail differentiating between two different rulings. In other words, when the Qur’ān calls, as it does, upon believers to obey God and the Prophet, it is understood that the Prophet’s authority derives, in the final analysis, from that of God. And since no distinction is being made between two different rulings belonging to a single case, then there is no proof that the sunna contains material that falls outside the compass of the Qur’ān.
A major role which the sunna plays vis-à-vis the Qur’an is to privilege one verse over another in deciding a particular case of law. For instance, the Qur’an generally permitted the consumption of good food and forbade that of putrid victuals without, however, defining the status of many specific types. The sunna then intervened to decide each kind in accordance with the principles regulated in the Qur’an, by subsuming certain foods under one legal norm or the other. In this way, the meat of donkeys and certain predatory animals came to be prohibited. Similarly, God forbade the ingestion of inebriants but permitted non-alcoholic beverages. The rationale behind this prohibition was the effect of alcohol on the mind in distracting the Muslim from worshipping his lord, let alone its negative social effects. The sunna interfered here by determining to which of the two categories date-wine and semi-intoxicating beverages belong. On the basis of qur’anic data, the sunna furthermore articulated the classic dictum that any beverage which inebriates when consumed in large quantities is prohibited even in small quantities.

Al-Shâṭibi on the subsidiarity of the sunna
But all this does not change the fact that the roots of the sunna ultimately lay in the book. Indeed, the sunna may contain some legal subject matter which is found neither in a terse statement of the Qur’an nor even in its more ambiguous or indirect passages (see difficult passages). Yet, its subject matter still has its origins in the Qur’an. It is al-Shâṭibi’s fundamental assumption that each qur’anic verse or statement possesses multifaceted meanings, some direct and others oblique. While a verse may exist in its own particular context and may appear to have an immediate, obvious meaning, this very verse may, at the same time, manifest another meaning that is identical to those found in other verses. Put differently, a group of verses may have one theme in common which happens to be subsidiary to the main meaning in each verse. The inductive corroboration of one verse by the others lends the common theme a certain authority that would reach the degree of certitude. But whereas this theme remains hidden in the linguistic terrains of the Qur’an, the sunna reveals it in the form of a prophetic report. The result of one such case of corroboration is the well-known and all-important prophetic report “No injury and counter injury in Islam.”

The Qur’an, however, does provide what al-Shâṭibi characterizes as the most important foundation of the law, namely, the principles that aim to serve the interests of people, be they those of the individual or the community. For, after all, the entire enterprise of the shari’a was instituted in the interests of Muslims whether these pertain to life in this world or in the hereafter. In order to safeguard these interests, the shari’a seeks to implement the principles of public welfare. The sunna, in the detail it lends to particular cases, is none other than an extension and detailed elaboration of the all-embracing qur’anic principles.

By relegating the sunna to a status subsidiary to the Qur’an and by hierarchically and chronologically structuring qur’anic material, al-Shâṭibi was aiming at achieving a particular result. He was of the opinion that Meccan revelation, with all its characteristic universality, is general and simple in nature, intended for an unlettered audience (see illiteracy). It is addressed to the community at large, to the legal expert and layman alike. Every Muslim, hailing from any walk of life, can comprehend it and can thus heed its injunctions without any intermediary. The Medinan revelation, on the other hand, came down to explicate, in some technical
detail, the universal principles laid down earlier. Hence, only the legal experts are equipped to deal with and understand the Medinan text. The complexity of its subject matter simply precludes the layman from confronting it directly.

The universality and generality of the Meccan revelation in effect means that it is devoid of mitigation and juridical license. The Medinan texts were thus revealed in order to modify and qualify the rigor that was communicated at an earlier point in time. Al-Shāṭībī reminds us at this stage that the Ṣūfīs set aside the Medinan licenses and adhered solely to the stringent demands of the Meccan sūras (see Shi’ism and the Qur’ān). He strongly insinuates that the Ṣūfīs attempted to impose their view of the law upon the general public of laymen. By insisting on the intellectual simplicity of the Meccan revelation, al-Shāṭībī was in effect arguing that laymen should be left alone to understand and comply with this revelation. He seems to say that if the Ṣūfīs choose to subject themselves to rigorous piety (q.v.), so be it. But it is not within their legitimate right to impose their will and perception of the law on the community of laymen. In these terms, he addresses himself equally to the jurists who, he advises, must not make evident to the public any of their practices that are unusually strict. It is, therefore, for the purpose of achieving this end that al-Shāṭībī recast the traditional, mainstream Qur’ānic methodology in a new form.

The Qur’ān in modern legal reform
It is to be stressed that of all traditional sources and legal elements, the Qur’ān alone survives largely intact in modern thinking with respect to the sources of law. The prophetic hadith is being largely and progressively marginalized; consensus is being radically reformulated and recast to fit western principles of parliamentary democracy; qiyās has been largely abandoned; public interest (maslahah, istiṣlāḥ) and juristic preference (istiḥsān) are still being invoked, but they too are being laden with modern notions which would render them unrecognizable to a traditional jurist.

While it is true, however, that the Qur’ān survives intact in the sense that no change has been effected in the perception of its contents and authority (see contemporary critical practices and the Qur’ān; exegesis of the Qur’ān: early modern and contemporary), it has, as have all the other sources, been stripped of the traditional interpretive tools that were employed in exploiting its positive legal repertoire. Thus, such notions as the ambiguous, univocal and metaphorical are no longer deemed pertinent for the modern legal interpretation of the text.

Much of the law of personal status in the Muslim world today still derives from the shari’a, although certain changes and modifications in this law have taken place. The Qur’ān afforded a good deal of subject matter in the construction of family law, a fact which explains why the reformers have been reluctant to affect fundamental reform in a legal sphere that has been for centuries so close to the heart of Muslims.

But the fact remains that the modern law of Muslim states has no theoretical, religious or intellectual backing. Realizing the total collapse of traditional legal theory, usūl al-fiqh, a number of twentieth-century Muslim intellectuals have attempted to formulate a theoretical substitute for the traditional methodology of the law. The great majority of reformers have been unsuccessful in their quest to construct a new theoretical function for the Qur’ān. To varying degrees, they have intentionally or otherwise abandoned the traditional theoretical apparatus and yet at the same time have failed to locate a theoretical substitute
that is direly needed. Many have reduced the law to a fairly narrow utilitarian concept, thereby relegating revelation to a position subservient to utilitarian imperatives. One of the most notable reformers, and one in whose theory the Qur‘ān plays a major role, is the Pakistani scholar and intellectual Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988).

Rahman’s method

Rahman takes strong exception to the traditional theory and its authors, blaming them for a fragmented view of the revealed sources, especially the Qur‘ān. In his opinion, both the traditional legal theorists and the exegetes treated the Qur‘ān verse by verse, and the sunna, report by report. The lack of cross-reference to the textual sources was thus responsible for the absence of an effective Weltanschauung that is cohesive and meaningful for life as a whole. A central ingredient in the task of understanding the Qur‘ānic message as a unity is to analyze it against a background, and that background is the Arabian society in which Islam first arose. Thus a thorough understanding of the Meccan social, economic and tribal institutions becomes necessary in order to understand the import of revelation for the purpose of universalizing it beyond the context of the Prophet’s career.

In an attempt to explain the significance of understanding the Qur‘ān as a whole and within a situational context, Rahman takes the case of alcoholic beverages, declared prohibited by the traditional jurists. As we have already seen, the Qur‘ān initially considered alcohol among the blessings of God, along with milk (q.v.) and honey (q.v.; q 16:66-9). Later, when Muslims moved to Medina, some Companions urged the Prophet to ban alcohol. Consequently, q 2:219 was revealed, stipulating a qualified prohibition of wine. Thereafter, on two successive occasions (q 4:43, 5:90-1), wine was finally banned categorically.

From this gradual prohibition of alcohol, the jurists concluded that the last verse, q 5:90-1, abrogated those which preceded it, and in an attempt to rationalize this abrogation they resorted to what Rahman terms the “law of gradation,” according to which the Qur‘ān sought to wean Muslims from certain ingrained habits in a piecemeal fashion, instead of commanding a sudden prohibition. Hence, it was necessary to support this law of gradation by other considerations in order to make the contradiction between the various verses intelligible. In the Meccan period, the Muslims were a small minority, constituting an informal community, not a society. It appears, Rahman says, that alcohol consumption in the midst of this community was in no way a common practice. But when the more prominent Meccans converted to Islam at a later stage, there were many who were in the habit of drinking alcohol. The evolution of this minority into a community and then into an informal state coincided with the growing problem of alcohol consumption; hence the final Qur‘ānic prohibition imposed on all inebriating substances.

It is thus necessary to draw from the isolated verses, which are particular and fragmented in nature, a general principle that embodies the rationale behind a certain ruling. The failure of the traditional jurists to elicit such principles, Rahman argues, has led to chaos. A telling example of this failure may be found in the case of polygamous marriage. In q 4:2, the Qur‘ān alludes to, and forbids, the guardians’ abuse and unlawful seizure of the property of orphaned children with whom they were entrusted. In q 4:127, the Qur‘ān says that these guardians should marry the orphaned girls when they come of age rather than return their property to them. Accordingly, in q 4:3 the Qur‘ān says that
if the guardians cannot do justice to the orphan’s property and if they insist on marrying them, then they may marry up to four, provided that they treat them justly. If they cannot afford them such a treatment, then they must marry only one. On the other hand, Q 4:129 stipulates that it is impossible to do justice among a plurality of wives. Like the case of alcohol, the Qur’ān is seemingly contradictory here: while it permits marriage to four wives if they can be treated with justice, it declares that justice can never be done in a polygamous marriage. But it must not be forgotten, Rahman asserts, that the whole Qur’ānic discussion occurred within the limited context of orphaned women, not unconditionally. The traditional jurists deemed the permission to marry up to four wives as carrying a legal force, whereas the demand to do justice to them was considered to be a mere recommendation, devoid of any binding effect. With this interpretation, the traditional jurists turned the issue of polygamy right on its head, taking a specific verse to be binding and the general principle to be a recommendation. In “eliciting general principles of different order from the Qur’ān... the most general becomes the most basic and the most deserving of implementation, while the specific rulings will be subsumed under them” (Rahman, Interpreting the Qur’ān, 49). In accordance with this principle, Rahman argues, the justice verse in polygamous marriages should have been accorded a status superior to that of the specific verse giving permission to marry up to four wives. The priority given to the justice verse in this case is further supported by the recurrent and persistent Qur’ānic theme of the need to do justice.

Rahman’s “double movement theory”

The task of eliciting general principles from specific rulings in the Qur’ān and the sunna must be undertaken, then, with full consideration of the sociological forces that produced these rulings. Inasmuch as the Qur’ān gives, be it directly or obliquely, the reasons for certain ethical and legal rulings, an understanding of these reasons becomes essential for drawing general principles. The multifaceted ingredients making up the revealed texts, along with those ingredients making up the background of revelation, must therefore “be brought together to yield a unified and comprehensive socio-moral theory squarely based upon the Qur’ān and its sunna counterparts” (Rahman, Towards reformulating, 221). But it may be objected that the process of eliciting general principles in this manner is excessively subjective. In refuting this claim, Rahman invokes the fact that the Qur’ān speaks of its own purposes and objectives, a fact that should contribute to minimizing subjectivity. Furthermore, whatever difference of opinion results from the existing subjectivity should be of great value, provided that each opinion is seriously and carefully considered.

This process of eliciting general principles represents the first step towards implementing a new methodology of the law. This methodology consists of two movements of juristic thought, one proceeding from the particular to the general (i.e. eliciting general principles from specific cases), the other from the general to the particular. Hence the designation of Rahman’s methodology as “the double movement theory.” In the second movement, the general principles elicited from the revealed sources are brought to bear upon the present conditions of Muslim society. This presupposes a thorough understanding of these conditions, equal in magnitude to that required to understand the revealed texts against their background. But since the present situation can never be iden-
tical to the prophetic past, and since it could differ from it “in certain important respects,” it is required that “we apply those general principles of the Qurʾān (as well as those of the sunna) to the current situation espousing that which is worthy of espousing and rejecting that which must be rejected” (Rahman, Interpreting the Qurʾān, 49). Just what the criteria are for rejecting certain “important respects” and not others is a crucial question that Rahman does not seem to answer decisively. For if these respects are important and yet are capable of being neutralized, then there is no guarantee that essential Qurʾānic and sunnaic elements or even principles will not be set aside.

The weakness of Rahman’s methodology also lies in the not altogether clear mechanics of the second movement, that is, the application of the systematic principles derived from the revealed texts and their contexts to present-day situations. Furthermore, the relatively few cases which he repeatedly cites in his writings on the subject do not represent the full spectrum of cases in the law, with the result that his methodology may be considered incapable of providing a scope comprehensive enough to afford modern Muslims the methodological means of solving problems different in nature than those he so frequently cites. What of those cases for which a textual statement is available but no information as to the context of its revelation? Or, still, how do modern Muslims address fundamental problems facing their societies when no applicable Qurʾānic or sunnaic text can be located? That Rahman does not seem to provide answers for such questions may be a function of his interest in elaborating a methodology confined in outlook to the revealed texts rather than a methodology of law proper.

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Bibliography


Lawful and Unlawful

That which is legally authorized, and that which is not. Among its various legislative pronouncements, the Qurʾān declares certain objects and actions lawful or unlawful. The words ḥalāl, “lawful, allowed, permitted,” and ḥarām, “unlawful, forbidden, prohibited,” and cognate terms from the triliteral roots h-l-l and h-r-m, respectively, most often designate these two categories and are of relatively frequent occurrence. Qurʾānic declarations of lawfulness or unlawfulness are limited to a relatively few areas of the law as later elaborated by Muslim jurists: for the most part, ritual, family law and dietary matters (see Ritual and the Qurʾān; Family; Marriage and Divorce; Food and Drink). On the other hand, the lawful/unlawful rubric also has non-legislative functions in the Qurʾān. Although the seemingly primary categories of ḥalāl and ḥarām were largely eclipsed by jurisprudential rubrics that were developed subsequently, the terms retained significance in ascetic thought (see Asceticism) and have recently become prominent in popular handbooks of religious law.

Vocabulary

Apart from denoting lawfulness, the root h-r-m indicates an exit from the ritual state connected with the pilgrimage (q.v.) and re-entry into the profane state (idhā halaltum, Q. 5:2; see Ritual Purity). In this sense, too, it is the antonym of h-r-m (see below). Concretely, it refers to dissolution (e.g. Q 66:2, metaphorically, of an oath; see BREAKING TRUSTS AND CONTRACTS; OATHS) and also alighting (e.g. Q 20:86, again metaphorically, of God’s wrath; see ANGER). The most common means for indicating lawfulness in the Qurʾān is to use the causative verb ḥalla, “to make lawful,” usually with God as the subject (e.g. Q 7:157, “He makes the good things lawful for them”) but it is sometimes passive (e.g. Q 5:1, concerning certain livestock; see Animal Life; Bounty). In one instance it occurs in the first person plural, in an address to Muḥammad (q. 33:50; see Form and Structure of the Qurʾān; Language and Style of the Qurʾān). Very occasionally, people are made the subject of this verb, to suggest that they wrongly deem something lawful (e.g. Q 9:37, though words derived from h-r-m are more common in such accusations; see below). Finally, it should be noted that the intransitive verb ḥalla, “to be lawful,” occasionally appears in the negative, to indicate that something is not lawful (e.g. Q 2:230, providing that one’s wife ceases to be lawful, i.e. available for sexual intercourse, after divorce). The Qurʾān also employs the adjectives ḥill and ḥalāl to indicate lawfulness (e.g. in Q 5:5 and Q 8:69, respectively, concerning certain foods).

Words derived from the root h-r-m not only connote God’s making something unlawful but also frequently express the idea of sacredness (see Sanctity and the Sacred), e.g. al-ṣahir al-ḥarām, “the sacred month” (Q 2:194; see Months); al-ḥaram, “the sacred precinct,” where the Ka’ba (q.v.) is located (Q 28:37); ḥurum, persons in the ritual state associated with pilgrimage (e.g. Q 5:1); and ḥurumāt, certain sacred ordinances or institutions (Q 2:194; 22:30).

The h-r-m-derived counterpart to ḥalla is the causative verb ḥarrama, “to make un-
lawful,” and, as in the case of the former, God is frequently its subject (e.g. Q 2:173, concerning foods). The Qur’an does not employ an intransitive verb derived from h-r-m, making do instead with the passive of ḥarrama (e.g. Q 5:3, also concerning foods) and the related passive participle (e.g. Q 6:145, again concerning foods; the corresponding participial form from abālla is not found in the Qur’an). A number of passages use ḥarrama in the first person plural and in most of these God recounts how he had previously made certain things, especially foods, unlawful and hence required clarification. Rhetorically, passages employing ḥunaḥ, “sin,” in variants of the phrase “It is not a sin for you to…” as an indirect means of describing lawful activities (e.g. Q 2:198, permitting commercial activity while in the ritual state required of pilgrims; see markets; selling and buying; sin, major and minor). Rhetorically, passages employing ḥunaḥ often imply that the activity in question might have been thought unlawful and hence required clarification. Commentators (see exegesis of the Qur’an: classical and medieval) gloss the word ḥijr as meaning ḥarām in two passages. In Q 6:138, unnamed persons declare certain produce and livestock ḥijr, which means, according to the commentators, that it was declared ḥarām, “off-limits, or sacrosanct,” in connection with a pagan rite (e.g. al-Ṭabar, Tafsīr, xii, 139-40). In Q 25:22, the phrase ḥijr mahjūr appears in the following sentence: “On the day they see the angels (see angel), there will be no glad tidings then for the wrongdoers, and they will say ḥijran mahju’rān.” Some commentators attribute the phrase in question to the angels and gloss it as meaning ḥarām muḥarram, that is, either paradise (q.v.) or the glad tidings (see good news) will be “strictly forbidden” to the wrongdoers (e.g. Baydāwī, Anwār, ii, 37). The phrase ḥijr mahjūr also appears in Q 25:53, where it seems to refer concretely to physical separation (e.g. Baydāwī, Anwār, ii, 43), and the word ḥijr appears alone in Q 89:5, where it is traditionally understood to mean “intelligence” (e.g. Baydāwī, Anwār, ii, 401; see intellect; knowledge and learning). The word suḥt appears at Q 5:42 and twice
at Q 5:62-3, always in the phrase “eaters/eating of suḥt” (akkālūna lil-suḥt, aklihimu l-suḥta), an apparently derogatory reference to the Jews. The commentators took suḥt to refer either generally to unlawful gain or specifically to bribes accepted by Jewish judges (e.g. Tabari, Taḥṣīs, x, 318-24, 447-8), thus connecting it with the remainder of Q 5:42, in which the Prophet is given permission to adjudicate Jewish legal matters. In Leviticus 22:25, a Hebrew cognate, mashḥat, refers to inherent “corruption” or “mutilation” which renders certain ritual offerings unfit (see CONSECRATION OF ANIMALS; CORRUPTION) but the more usual sense of the biblical Hebrew cognate is “destruction,” which is how a related Arabic word is used at Q 20:61. According to Jeffery (Fox, vocab., 165-6), suḥt means “unlawful” in a technical sense. He notes an interesting parallel with the Talmud (Shabb. 14b, discussing the principle of bal tashbīḥ derived from Deut 20:19) but opts for a Syriac origin of the word (sūḥtā, “depravity, corruption”). The remainder of this discussion deals only with words derived from the roots h-l-l and h-r-m.

What is lawful and unlawful?

As noted above, qur’ānic declarations of lawfulness and unlawfulness pertain mostly to ritual, dietary law and family law. For example, Q 5:96 declares the hunting of land animals while in the ritual state for the pilgrimage to have been outlawed (ḥurūrina) but fishing and eating the catch lawful (ṣuhilla, see HUNTING AND FISHING). In regard to dietary matters, the most prominent and oft-repeated rule provides that God has made unlawful (ḥarrama) carrion (q.v.), blood, swine flesh and what is consecrated to other than God (Q 2:173; 16:115; and with slight variations at Q 5:3 and 6:145). The largest number of rules that use this rubric concern family law. Q 4:22-4, for example, details which women have been made unlawful (ḥurrinat) to marry and which lawful (ṣuhilla). A noteworthy principle of Islamic commercial law at Q 2:275 provides that God made lawful (ḥallala) sales transactions and forbade (ḥarrama) usury (q.v.).

In contrast to the many overtly legislative passages which pronounce on lawfulness and unlawfulness, other passages employ the lawful/unlawful rubric to suggest that the Muslims are, perhaps, subject to fewer legal restrictions than previous communities. Several such passages use words derived from the roots h-l-l and h-r-m to suggest that God has begun to expand the category of the lawful, as in Q 5:3: “Today the good things (al-tayyibat) have been made lawful for you (ṣuhilla lakam)” (see also Q 2:172-3 [with h-r-m]; 5:4; 88; 7:157; 16:114). Other passages contain an implicit or explicit charge that certain human beings have mistakenly declared things lawful or unlawful (mostly the latter). These fall into three main groups: those in which people are enjoined not to outlaw what God has provided (Q 5:87; 6:140; 7:32; 10:59); those which generally complain that people have wrongly forbidden or made lawful unspecified things (Q 6:148; 9:29; 16:35, 116; 66:1); and those in which people are accused of wrongly outlawing (or permitting) certain specified things, mostly in connection with pagan practices (see generally Q 6:138-50; 9:37; see IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS).

Finally, several passages use the lawful/unlawful rubric to suggest that the Jews labored under a more burdensome law than the Muslims, either because the former created unnecessary rules (Q 3:30) or because God wished to punish them (Q 4:160; 6:146; 16:118). The process of repealing this more onerous law imposed on the Jews apparently begins with Jesus (q.v.), who says in Q 3:50 that he has come as a confirmation of the Torah (q.v.), to make
lawful (li-uḥilla) some of the things which had previously been forbidden (ḥurrima, compare Matt 5:17-9, in which Jesus denies that he has come to relax the Law).

Post-qurānic developments

Early commentators, such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687) and Muhammad al-Kalbi (d. 146/763) are said to have recognized declarations of lawfulness and unlawfulness (ḥalāl wa-ḥarām) as one among several fundamental modes of qurānic discourse (Versteegh, Arabic grammar, 64, 106; see also Wansbrough, 98, 149, 173-4; see literary structures of the Qurʾān). Exegetes and legal theorists, however, soon moved beyond this basic Qurʾānic distinction. The commentator and grammarian al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), for example, differentiates between Qurʾānic prohibitions (sing. naby) which aim merely to inculcate proper etiquette (adab) and those which function to outlaw something (naby maharrim; Kinberg, Lexicon, 863). This move marks the extraction of an abstracted and generalized concept of unlawfulness (and implicitly lawfulness), inferable from a text’s language and capable of being applied and elaborated outside the confines of those Qurʾānic passages that used the root ḫ-r-m (or ḫ-l-l). Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), for example, applied this same adab/maharrim distinction to prophetic ḥadīth (Shāfiʿī, Risāla, par. 926-60; see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān).

Scrutiny of the variously formulated legislative provisions in revealed texts, and speculation on their potentially disparate legal consequences, led jurists to a theory of gradations of legal obligation. More precisely, legal theorists developed a classificatory scheme of moral evaluations (āḥlām, sing. ḥukm) to which all human acts could be assigned: mandatory (wājib), recommended (mandūḥ), merely permitted (mubah), disapproved (makhruḥ), and forbidden (ḥarām or mahzūr). In a sense, the first four categories could be considered refinements of what is ḥalāl (Jackson, Islamic law, 118) but it is really only the outer categories of mandatory and forbidden that have the force of rules (Weiss, The spirit, 18-9), and they do not parallel the categories of ḥalāl and ḥarām (ḥalāl/lawful being a broader and different sort of category than wājib/mandatory). This graded scale eclipsed the fundamental Qurʾānic binary of ḥalāl/ḥarām, which came to be applied only in much more limited fashion to certain things (e.g. wine [Q.v.; see also INTOXI-cANTS]) and persons (e.g. potential spouses; Schacht, Introduction, 121 n. 2; see proHIBITED DEGREES). Contrasting with these developments in speculative legal hermeneutics, there emerged a pietistic tendency to view the world as fundamentally divisible into realms of lawfulness and unlawfulness. This “scrupulosity” (for a good example of which, see Cooperson’s description of Ahmad b. Hanbal [d. 241/853], Arabic biography, 112-8) may, perhaps, be considered a concern with ritual purity in the widest possible sense, but is in any event connected with the rise to prominence of the traditionists, part of whose “programme” was “to identify the categories ‘forbidden’ and ‘invalid’ ” (Schacht, Introduction, 46). The great theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) may be said to have reconciled to some extent the legal-hermeneutical and ethical-asceitic uses of the lawful/unlawful rubric in Book xiv of his Iḥyāʿ ulūm al-dīn (Revivification of the religious sciences), the Kitāb al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām (“Book of the lawful and the unlawful,” Fr. trans. R. Morelon, Le livre du licite et de l’illicite). Al-Ghazālī criticizes the view that the world has become so corrupted that one is no longer in a position to observe the distinction between ḥalāl and ḥarām. He insists, rather, that scrupulosity (waraʾ), an even stricter standard than ḥarām, is still possible. Practicing waraʾ
requires that one avoid not only what is ḫarām but also many things (and actions) which, though technically ḡalāl, possess the quality of ṣubḥa, “dubiousness” (for the more usual technical legal meaning of which, see Rowson, Subḥa). Al-Ghazālī’s technically accomplished analysis represents an interesting application of speculative modes of juridical thinking to an anti-theoretical, pietistic concern (see THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN).

In recent times, a number of popular books giving practical guidance on the application of Islamic law in everyday life take the categories of lawful and unlawful as their organizing principle. A prominent such work is al-Ḥalāl wa-l-Ḥarām fī l-Īslām (Eng, trans. The lawful and the prohibited in Islam) by Yūṣuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926). In the introduction, al-Qaraḍāwī says that he is the first to author a work devoted entirely to the topic of ḡalāl and ḫarām. Whatever al-Ghazālī might have thought of that claim, al-Qaraḍāwī’s work unleashed a virtual flood of books (some critical of al-Qaraḍāwī for his liberal views) devoted to distinguishing the ḡalāl from the ḫarām in daily life. Such works, including that of al-Qaraḍāwī, are now widely available in languages other than Arabic. Their contents derive, however, from the subsequently developed categories of classical Islamic law and, as such, they extend well beyond Qur’ānic declarations of lawfulness and unlawfulness, to cover the full range of activities possible in contemporary life.

See also LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN; ETHICS AND THE QUR’ĀN.

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Laziness see VIRTUEs AND VICES, COMMANDING AND FORBIDDING

Leader see KINGS AND RULERS; IMĀM

Leaf see WRITING AND WRITING INSTRUMENTS; SCRiOLS; TREES

Learning see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

Leather see HIDES AND FLEECe; ANIMAL LIFE

Left Hand and Right Hand

The terminal part of each arm, often with connotations of evil and good, respectively (see GOOD AND EVIL; HANDS). The left hand (ṣimāl, pl. shamā’il, mash’ama) and the right hand (ṣamān, pl. aymān, maymāna) appear in the Qur’ān in two contexts: first, the ḫisāb, a record or statement of personal
deeds to be given to every person on the day of judgment (yawm al-dīn, see Last Judgment; Record of Human Actions); second, the placement of the resurrected (see Resurrection) before they are sent off to either paradise (q.v.) or hell (see Hell and Hellfire). In this connection, the left hand or the left side is attested six times and the right hand or the right side fourteen times.

Those who refused to believe in the resurrection or persisted in their terrible sins (al-hith al-‘azīm, frequently explained as polytheism; see Polytheism and Atheism; Sin, Major and Minor) will receive their record in their left hand (q 56:41; 69:25) and will regret having relied on their wealth or power (sultān, q 69:25-9). They are identified as al-dāllān al-mukaddhdhiḥān (those who erred and denied Muhammad’s prophethood, q 56:3; see Astray; Error; Opposition to Muhammad). They will be punished (see Reward and Punishment) with burning winds (see Air and Wind) and boiling waters (see Water) and will eat of a tree called Zaqqūm (q 56:9, 41-56; see Agriculture and Vegetation); they will be fettered with a chain seventy cubits long and will roast in hell (q 56:9-4; 69:10-25; 90:19-20). In contrast, those who followed their mām (q.v.; generally explained as prophets or holy books; see Book; Prophets and Prophethood) and performed good deeds (q.v.) such as freeing a slave (see Slaves and Slavery), feeding an orphan (see Orphans) in famine (q.v.) or exhorting another to show pity and compassion will be given their record (kitāb) in their right hand (q 17:71; 90:12-8). Their reckoning will be easy (q 84:7-9) and their light (q.v.) will run forward before them and by their right hands (q 57:12; 66:8). Their abode will be paradise, there to be served by immortal boys while enjoying spreading shade, plentiful waters, abundant fruits and perfect virgins (q 56:8, 27-40, 90-1; 69:19-24; see Hourīs). They include a group from among the pre-Muhammadan believers (al-sābiqūn) and Muhammad’s followers (al-ākhirīn, cf. Muqātīl, Tafsīr, iv, 219). They will ask one another about those who entered hell (saqr, q 74:39-56; cf. 90:18 f.).

Exegetes (see Exegesis of the Qur’ān: Classical and Medieval) deal extensively with these topics, using traditions attributed to the Prophet, to his Companions (see Companions of the Prophet) or even to qosṣīṣ (preachers and tellers of legends; see Hadīth and the Qur’ān). They make a connection between ashāb al-mash’āma (q 56:9) or ashāb al-shimāl (q 56:41) with those who will be given their records (kitāb) in their left hand, and ashāb al-maymāna (q 56:8) or ashāb al-yāmīn (q 56:38, 90-1) with those who will be given their kitāb in their right hand. The term al-mutalaqqiyānī recorded in q 50:17-8 is explained as referring to the two “recording angels” sitting (qa’īd), one on the right of each human being, recording his good acts (hasanāt) and one on the left recording his sins (Ibn al-Jawzī, Tābīsin, ii, 254). These records form the yahā ʿāf al-a’māl, which will be presented during the final reckoning and judgment. Exegetes tried to elaborate and complete the Qur’ānic picture of the various elements that constitute this special phase of the last judgment. Since the Qur’ānic references to this reckoning are abundant but not always sequenced, there were many attempts to assign a chronological order to the different stages of this critical process. The most prevalent accounts assert that after the resurrection each person will be escorted by his two recording angels (Qurtubī, Tadhkira, i, 295-6). All will be gathered in the courtyards (ʿaraṣāt al-qiyāma). Those who receive their kitāb in their left hands or behind their backs (zawrīʿa zabīriḥ, q 84:10; the explanation of receiving the book behind the back is that
the right hands of these people will be fettered to their necks and their left hands will be turned to their backs, Ibn Kathîr, Tafsîr, viii, 378-9 ad Q 84:7-10) will regret that death was not their final step and that now they must be judged (see judgment). Their good deeds will be annulled and their bad deeds (see evil deeds) will be doubled in order to double their penalty (Qurtubi, jam‘i, xix, 271-3 ad Q 84:7-10). Their reckoning (bisâb) will be discussed, that discussion being a sign of their imminent punishment. Those who receive their kitâb in their right hands will undergo an “easy reckoning” (bisâb yasî, Q 84:7) consisting merely of a simple ‘arûd, God’s review or inspection of the resurrected (Qurtubi, Tadhkira, i, 382), and will rejoin their relatives in paradise. Al-Hasan al-Bašrî (d. 110/728) speaks about three ‘arûd, the first and the second comprising elements of discussion (jîdâl) and excuse (ma‘addûrî), the third, the scattering of the sheets (jatîyur al-halîf), Ibn Kathîr, Al-Nihâya, ii, 41). In some sources, these records (katub) are connected with the makâzîn, “balances” (recorded in Q 7:8, 9; 23:102, 103; 101:6, 8; see instruments; weights and measures). The good deeds will tilt the balance and open the way to paradise. Those whose balance of good deeds is too light will be sent to hell (Schimmel, Deciphering the signs, 219-41).

There were attempts to interpret the Qur’ânic verses dealing with ashbâb al-yamîn and ashbâb al-shimâl as references to specific persons or parties (see parties and factions). According to al-Zuhrî (d. 124/742), the first two brothers to receive their records will be the Companion Abû Salama b. ‘Abd al-Asad who will receive it in his right hand and the enemy of the Prophet, Sufyân b. ‘Abd al-Asad, who will receive it in his left hand (al-Nabî, Aswâ’îl, 34, no. 82). Shi‘i sources (see Shi‘ism and the Qur’ân), citing a tradition attributed to the sixth imâm Ja’far al-Sâdiq (d. 148/765), report that Q 69:19 refers to ‘Ali b. Abî Tâlib (q.v.) as the first to receive his kitâb in his right hand and that Q 69:25 refers to Mu‘âwiya b. Abî Sufyân or al-Shahî la’annahu lâhâ, “the Syrian, may God curse him,” who will receive his kitâb in his left hand (Qummî, Tafsîr, ii, 384; Majlis, Bîhâr al-anwâr, viii, 518, l. 11-12). A report attributed to ‘Ali b. Abî Tâlib attests that the ashbâb al-yamîn in Q 56:27 are asfâl al-muslimîn, “children of Muslims” (Abd al-Razzâq, Tafsîr, ii, 270; Tabarî, Tafsîr, xxvii, 179). Qatâda (d. ca. 117/735) reportedly interpreted “min asbâb l-yamîn” in the verse “Peace be with you’ from those on the right hand” (fa-salmûn laka min asbâb l-yamîn, Q 56:91) as meaning “from God” (min ‘indi lâhhî) or “from his angels” (cf. Tabarî, Tafsîr, xxvii, 213); but al-Qummî (fl. fourth/tenth cent.; Tafsîr, ii, 330) reports that the reference is to asbâb anîr al-mu‘minîn, meaning the adherents of ‘Ali, the “prince of the believers.”

The question of qada, “predestination,” (see freedom and predestination) which forms part of the pillars of belief (arkân al-imân, see faith; belief and unbelief) is addressed by most exegetes when they deal with the question of ashbâb al-yamîn or ashbâb al-shimâl. Traditions report that Muhammad appeared one day with two lists, one in each hand: the one in his right hand containing the names of those who will enter paradise, and the other, in his left hand, containing the names of those destined for hell (Tirmidhî, Şahîh, no. 2067; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, no. 6275). The records (katub) will be distributed before they are examined and each group will be directed to their destiny (q.v.). Since one of the most beautiful names of God (al-asmâ’ al-husnâ, see God and his attributes) is al-‘âdi, “the righteous,” authors tried, each one according to his creed (see creeds) or sectarian affiliation, to harmonize the contra-
dictory Qur'anic statements. This trend led to the belief that the last judgment will be a mere formality. Generally, with the exception of the Mu'tazila (see Mu'tazilites) and the Qadariyya (the group which held the position of free will), authors discussing the problem of the last judgment dealt more with the definition of a believer or unbeliever than with the matter of deeds themselves (Rippin, Muslims, 68-82; Gimaret, Théories, 335-6 [for the Mu'tazilites]).

According to Q 39:67, on the day of resurrection, “the heavens (see heaven and sky) shall be rolled up in his right hand.” Traditions add that the earth (q.v.) shall be rolled up in God’s left hand (Muslim, Ṣahih, Ṣifat al-qiyāma, no. 4995; see Apocalypse). Generally, this is taken to refer to God’s power (see power and impotence), especially by the Mu'tazila and the negators of anthropomorphism (q.v.), but some circles, like the Hanbali and particularly the Wahhabi, interpret it literally. Such interpretation led to the belief that God has two hands but that both are right ones, since the left hand is an epithet of created beings, and not of the creator (see creation): inna li-khāliqinā yadayn kiltāhumā yaminān, tā yasārā li-khāliqinā idhi l-yasāri min sifati l-makkhluqā (Ibn Kathiara, al-Tasbih, 66; Ibn Fūrak, Mushkil al-hadīth, 37-8; Blachère, Introduction, 216-21; Gimaret, Dieu à l'image, 202-4; Abdel Haleem, Understanding the Qur'an, 107-22). Sa'id b. Jubayr (d. 95/714) attributed to Ibn 'Abbās a tradition stating that the letter yā' at the opening of Q 19 (kāf, hā', yā'; 'ayn and sād) stands for yamin which is one of the names of God (Lišān al-'Arab, s.v. y m n', xiii, 459). According to a hadith, the Ka'ba (q.v.) is considered to be the right hand of God since it is touched and kissed (istiilām) during the pilgrimage (q.v.; Lišān al-'Arab, op. cit.).

In many ancient cultures, the right side was considered better than the left side (Gen 48:13-20). It symbolized goodness and kindness, while the left represented evil, the sinister, the bad. In Latin, the term sinistra means both left and sinister. In the Bible, God’s right hand represents his strong arm (Exod 15:15; Isa 62:8; Ps 118:15-6; 199:10). The Qur’ān itself (as discussed above) and later Islamic tradition attest to similar understandings of “left” (shmāl) and “right” (yamin). The bay'a, “pledge of allegiance,” must be performed with the right hand (see contracts and alliances; oaths); eating with the left is prohibited since this hand is used for cleansing after elimination and since Satan (see devil) usually eats and drinks using his left hand (Muslim, Ṣahih, no. 3763-6; see food and drink; ritual purity; lawful and unlawful). One should enter a mosque (q.v.) with the right leg and leave with left. During the prayer (q.v.), it is prohibited to expectorate in the direction of the qibla (q.v.) or the right side; while it is permitted toward the left side (Abd al-Razzāq, Muhannaf, i, 439-4). Until recently, it was customary in some Muslim countries to oblige left-handed children to use their right hand. This practice is based on the beliefs mentioned above and goes back at least to the first period of Islam: when Khalid b. al-Walid received Abū Bakr’s (q.v.) letter ordering him to leave Iraq (q.v.) for Syria (al-Shām) to support the Muslim forces there, his furious reaction was: “this [decision] was surely taken by the left-handed man,” meaning ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (q.v.; cf. Tabari, Ta’rikh, iii, 415). ‘Umar was, in fact, left-handed (Lišān al-'Arab, iv, 565, 's-r). Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Arabic root y-s-r means both “to be or become easy, prosperous,” and “left, left side.” In Q 87:8, al-yusrā is explained as paradise and in Q 92:10, al-'usrā is hell.

The terms shmāl and yamin also represent north and south. In the archives of Mari,
the Old Babylonian royal city on the banks of the middle Euphrates river, the west Semitic yamīna, “right,” designates the cardinal point south, and simʿal, “left,” indicates north. This use of south and north is deduced from the designation, known only from Mari, of certain tribes as dumu.Mes-yamīna and dumu.Mes-simʿal, ‘sons of the right’ and ‘sons of the left’ respectively (Malamat, Mari and the early Israelite experience, 33, 67-8; cf. id., Mari and the Bible, 299).

The term simʿal, spelled s-mʿa-l, appears in Genesis 14:15 and is generally translated as “north” — the north representing calamity (Jer 1:14). In later Jewish sources, the Devil is called Samaʾl or Sēmiʾel (see Samuel).

The Arabic name for Greater Syria is al-Shaʾm or al-Shaʾām. Arab lexicographers explain that this name is derived from šuʾm, “bad luck, misfortune” (Bashear, Yemen, 351-3). But, might one also suppose that Šaʾm is an Arabic derivation of the West Semitic Simʿal = Šimʿal, particularly in the light of the clear etymology of al-Yaman (Yemen), another ancient Arabic designation of a geographic area and a cardinal point?

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Bibliography


Leg see anatomy; anthropomorphism

Legends see narratives; myths and legends in the Qurʾān

Legion see ranks and orders

Legislation see law and the Qurʾān

Leper see illness and health

Letters see mysterious letters; Arabic script

Liar see lie

To deceive; anything which deceives. The polemical context of the Qurʾānic revelation and the discursive nature of Qurʾānic
scripture make lying one of the most frequently mentioned sins in the Qurʾān (see sin, major and minor). Furthermore, the Qurʾān’s oft-repeated references to itself as “the truth” (q.v.; al-haqq) and the declaration that God created the entire world “with truth” (q 46:3), make dishonesty a central characteristic of unbelief (kufr) and polytheism (shirk), such links sometimes being explicitly stated (q 16:39; 29:17; see belief and unbelief; polytheism and atheism; idolatry and idolaters).

Thus, the foremost liars in the Qurʾān are polytheists (mushrkhūn) who make false claims about God and his prophets, among them the accusation that the prophets lie (see prophets and prophethood). Both sides in this polemic (see polemic and polemical language) use the same terms: the most common being kadhaba, iftarā and ilk. In the mouths of unbelievers such falsehoods are regarded as among the most serious of sins. In the Qurʾān, various forms of kadhaba are attested eighty-two times, iftarā sixty times, and ilk in the sense of “lie” thirteen times. Other terms include zūn, attested four times, and a form of kh-r-q that is used once with the meaning to “freely attribute” (offspring) to God (kharaqa, q 6:100; see god and his attributes; christians and christianity; anthropomorphism).

The gravity of lying is seen in the repeated question “who is more wicked than one who invents falsehoods about God...” (wa/[ʃa]-man azlamu mimman iftarā ’alā ilāhi kadhaba). This question is posed nine times in this form (q 6:21, 93, 144:7; 737; 10:17; 11:18; 18:15; 29:68; 61:7), and twice with derivatives of k-dh-b (q 6:157; 39:32). This is usually directed at polytheists but q 61:7, following an excursus on those who rejected Jesus (q.v.), seems directed at Jews (see jews and judaism). Commentators such as al-Tabarī (d. 310/923), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) think that Jews and Christians may also be targets in other cases. These passages and others also show that lying in the sense of “freely inventing falsehoods” cannot in the qurʾānic context be wholly dissociated from “denying the truth” (kadhdhaba) as in “who is more wicked than one who invents falsehoods about God or (aw) denies the truth” (aw-kadhdhaba bi-t-haqq, q 29:68). Due to this, and to the fact that terms such as kadhaba and kharāqa may denote not only a false statement that the speaker knows to be false (and by which he means to deceive others), but also a false statement that the speaker thinks true, it is sometimes difficult to restrict the qurʾānic meaning of “lies” to “freely invented falsehoods”; for those who cling to what is simply false — or dress the truth with falsehood — (bāṭil in q 2:42; cf. 29:68 and eleven other places) are also taken to task (see error; astray). The hypocrites (munāfiqūn, see hypocrites and hypocrisy) are, in the case of Muhammad’s prophetic mission, the second most prominent liars after the polytheists. “God bears witness that the hypocrites are lying” (q 63:1; see also q 3:167 and 9:77; see witnessing and testifying). Other notable liars include those who slander other people’s wives (the scandal of ‘Aisha, q 24:11-24; see ‘Aisha bint Abī Bakr; gossip; wives of the prophet), Joseph’s (q.v.) brothers and Potiphar’s wife (q 12:17, 23-8; see women and the Qurʾān) and, of course, poets (q 26:224-6; see poetry and poets).

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Life

The vital force that distinguishes organic from inorganic matter. At the heart of the Qur’anic evocation of life are a paradox and two paradigms. The paradox arises from a dual attitude to, or sense of, “life” (ḥayāt). On the one hand, life as an animating force in the body is perceived as utterly sacred. Humans are urged not to kill their children (q.v.) out of fear of being reduced to poverty (inlāq, q 17:31; see poverty and the poor). God promises that he will provide for both parent and child (see family; parents) and warns that infanticide (q.v.) is a grievous sin (see sin, major and minor). The sanctity of life is stressed again a little later in the same sûra: “Nor take life (al-nafs) — which God has made sacred (allatī ḥarrama Allāh) — except for just cause” (bi-l-ḥaqq, q 17:33; see bloodshed; murder; retaliation). Yūsuf ‘Alī’s translation of nafs in Q 17:33 is closer to the corporeal sense intended than Arberry’s which reads: “And slay not the soul (al-nafs) God has forbidden (q.v.), except by right (bi-l-ḥaqq).”

Life in the sense of living out one’s corporeal existence is, however, paradoxically fraught with danger, illusion and deception. The Qur’ān exhibits an almost platonistic rejection of the life of this world (al-ḥayāt al-dunyā), characterizing it as nothing but “play and amusement” (la’ib wa-laḥaw) and contrasting it with the reward of the righteous in the hereafter (q 6:32; see good and evil; reward and punishment). There is a virtual repetition of the same words in q 57:20 where this leitmotiv of al-ḥayāt al-dunyā as la’ib wa-laḥaw is further amplified by its being powerfully designated as “goods and chattels of deception” (matā’ al-ghurūr). In the emphasis placed by the text on a physical world of transitory illusion and deception, and the explicit contrast in q 6:32 of this world and the next, there are obvious echoes of the lament in Ecclesiastes 1:2-3.

The first paradigm flows directly from God’s Qur’ānic designation as “the living” (al-ḥayy, q 2:255; 3:2; 20:111; 25:58; 40:65; see god and his attributes): God is the central focus of life (al-ḥayāt) in the Qur’ān. From him all else that is alive takes its being; by him everything is created ex nihilo (see creation; cosmology). To use Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428/1037) famous phrase, the production of all other life means that God is “the necessitating force behind existence” (wājib al-wujūd, Ghotchin, Lexique, 417-8). The Throne Verse (see throne of god), which enshrines this concept in the Qur’ān, is rightly accorded considerable prominence and respect in Islam:

God! There is no god but he, the living (al-ḥayy), eternal (al-qayyūm). No slumber can seize him, nor sleep (q.v.). His are all things in the heavens (see heaven and sky) and on earth (q.v.). Who is there who can intercede (see intercession) in his presence except as he permits? He knows what [appears to his creatures as] before or behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of his knowledge except as he wills. His throne does extend over the heavens and the earth, and he feels no fatigue in preserving them both. For he is the most high, the supreme [in glory] (q 2:255).

This Throne Verse is “one of the most famous and beloved of the verses of the Qur’ān, frequently recited as a protection against harm or evil” (Netton, Popular dictionary, 45; see popular and talismanic uses of the Qur’ān; everyday life, the Qur’ān in). It is a verse which proclaims God’s life, his self-subsisting and eternal nature, his vigilance, his divine ownership of his creation, his omniscience, his divine will (see freedom and predestination), his transcendence and unknowableness, his
power, his glory (q.v.) and his unity. It thus encapsulates a lucid, thumbnail sketch of many of the most important divine attributes. Although they are articulated as separate epithets, “the living” (al-ḥayy) and “the eternal” (al-qayyūm) are logically to be identified as a unity according to the classical doctrine of the oneness of God (tawḥīd, see POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM; ETERNITY). Commenting on this verse, Yūsuf ‘Alī (1872-1953) notes: “His Life is absolute Life, his Being is absolute Being, while others are contingent and evanescent...” (Yūsuf ‘Alī, Holy Qur’ān, 103, n. 297). For Islam and the Qur’ān, God is life and the creator and divine dispenser of life.

R. Arnaldez (Ḥayāt, 302) reminds us that “al-Zamakhshari [d. 538/1144] states that ḥayy, in the technical language of the theologians, describes one who has knowledge and power” (see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING; POWER AND IMPOTENCE). This concentration of “life” and “power” is an ancient archetype of the divine as seen, for example, in the hieroglyphic portrayals of the deities in Egypt (q.v.; see Hornung, Conceptions of God, 199-200; but cf. 230-3).

Further, such ancient archetypes portray an idea of “the creator’s loving care” for his creation — rather than Aristotle’s “unmoved” First Mover. In the Islamic paradigm, as well, the creator maintains (chosen) life by means both ordinary and extraordinary. Divine benefaction and sustenance (rizq) is mentioned frequently as are such acts of intervention as sending angels (see ANGEL) to fight on the side of Muḥammad at the battle of Badr (q.v.) in 2/624 (Q 3:123-5; 8:4, 9).

The verses in the Qur’ān which refer to life (al-ḥayāt) and to God as “the living” (al-ḥayy), were revealed in a particular historical milieu (see HISTORY AND THE QUR’ĀN; CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). Despite such barbarities as the burial alive of newly born female infants (see Q 17:31; Yūsuf ‘Alī, Holy Qur’ān, 703 n. 2214), the pre-Islamic notion of Mecca (q.v.) as a sanctuary for visitors and as a sacred territory (haram, see GEOGRAPHY) together with the concept of sacred months (q.v.; Shaban, Islamic history, 3: Q 2:194, 217), illustrate an environment in which there was some attempt at respect for, and preservation of, life. Later under the new Qur’ānic dispensation, blood revenge (ḥaḍa’, see BLOOD MONEY) would be replaced by just retaliation (qiṣāṣ, see Q 2:178-9; 17:33), thus inaugurating a new “respect for life” and, theoretically, further diminution of bloodshed and life lost.

God’s fundamental generative power whereby he creates new life ex nihilo is a basic leitmotiv of the sacred text. It is clothed with a basic biology (Q 23:12-16; see BIOLOGY AS THE CREATION AND STAGES OF LIFE) in which the human body is portrayed as developing, dying (see DEATH AND THE DEAD) and then being brought to life again (lit. ṭub’āthāna, Q 23:16) on the day of judgment (yawm al-qiyāma, see LAST JUDGMENT). The image here is of new, eternal life being born, or reborn, out of the distress, fires, convulsions and terrors of that last day, with a greater fire (q.v.), that of hell, as the final reward of the wicked (Q 52:13-4; see HELL AND HELL-FIRE). While eternal life will be born out of the cataclysm of the last day, humankind’s diurnal present life (al-ḥayāt al-dunyā) is likened in the Qur’ān to rainwater (ma‘, see WATER; NATURE AS SIGNS; BLESSING). This is sent down by God from the skies to refresh the earth (see AGRICULTURE AND VEGETATION), assist in the production of food and provide an, albeit ephemeral, earthly paradise (q.v.) which God will cause to pass (Q 10:24; see FOOD AND DRINK; GARDEN). It is this temporary aspect of the results of the life-giving water which is stressed here, together with the transient dimension of human life. There is a vivid
and obvious contrast that can be made between these images and the water imagery of the New Testament in which it is proclaimed “The water I give him will be a spring of water within him, that flows continually to bring him everlasting life” (John 4:14; see Scripture and the Qurʾān).

The first paradigm mentioned above is that of God’s creative gift of life and of the individual’s grateful return of that life to God at the moment of death. This life has, ideally, been enriched by faith (q.v.) and good works (q 2:277; q 19:20; see Good Deeds) if paradise is to be the final destination of the individual (see Gratitude and Ingratitude; Gift-Giving). In the beginning, God creates the first man, Adam (see Adam and Eve), from clay (q.v.), breathes into him his spirit (q.v.) and displays him to the angels for their admiration and respect (q 15:26-39). There is an archetypal “gifting” at the beginning of human time of new life to a new creation. And God does not forget his creation but guides, sustains and cures the previous life he has instituted (q 26:78-80; see Astray; Illness and Health), sends the final revelation, that of the Qurʾān as the last and ultimate guidebook to paradise (q 31:3; see Revelation and Inspiration). On the last day, he will raise the old life to a new one (q 26:81; see Resurrection). According to this paradigm, God, the archetypal and only creator and controller of life, gives life twice, first at birth and then by ultimately raising his creation to a new form of existence (q 56:60-2).

The second paradigm interwoven into, and to be extrapolated from, the fabric of the Qurʾān is that of life as a journey (q.v.) from terrestrial to celestial life. Man’s life involves much exertion and a hard toiling (kādhā, see Work) towards his lord (q.v.) but the final encounter is assured (q 84:6) after a journey from “stage to stage” (tābaqāt an tabaqān, q 84:19). As Yūsuf ʿAlī puts it in his comment on the latter verse: “Man travels and ascends stage by stage. In q 67:3 the same word in the form tābaqān was used of the heavens, as if they were in layers one above another. Man’s spiritual life may similarly be compared to an ascent from one heaven to another” (Yūsuf ʿAlī, Holy Qurʾān, 1711 n. 6047).

During the life journey the human is tested (q 2:155; 3:186; 47:31; 57:25; see Trial) and perhaps the archetypal “questing and testing” encounter in the Qurʾān, one which graphically illustrates that in such testing God’s ways are not human ways, is the famous encounter between Moses (q.v.; Mūsā) and al-Khīdhr (see Khādir/Khīdhr). This occupies a substantial section of the eighteenth sūra, Sūrat al-Kahf (“The Cave,” q 18:60-82). The essential nature of a human’s life journey (a journey palely adumbrated in this Qurʾānic encounter between Moses and al-Khīdhr but with a different objective) is that it is always a return to God, for reward or punishment. The created return to their source, the creator (q 6:60, 72; 10:45-6).

Life, then, in the Qurʾān has both a macro and a micro dimension, if it is viewed in terms of a journey (riḥla). From the global or macro viewpoint, all living beings, originating in, and created by, God, are journeying en masse in multifarious form towards the final cataclysm of the last day, a day of rebirth as well as destruction: “One day the earth will be changed to a different earth, and so will be the heavens” (q 14:48; see Apocalypse). From a micro perspective, each human life has an individual path to tread and an individual salvation (q.v.) to achieve: the wicked will be reborn to new life in eternal torment and the just and the righteous, who have followed “the straight path” (al-sīrāt al-
mustaqīm, see path or way) articulated so clearly and so often in the Qur'ān, will be reborn to eternal bliss. It is a return and a rebirth to a new life which will be accomplished in profound haste, almost as if both return and rebirth were long overdue, or the divine cosmic patience with humanity had suddenly exhausted itself: “On that day we shall leave them to surge (yamīju) like waves on one another: the trumpet will be blown, and we shall collect them all together (q 18:99). . . . The day whereon they will issue from their sepulchres in sudden haste (sirā'ān) as if they were rushing (yūḥdāna) to a goal-post [fixed for them]” (q 70:43).

In conclusion, earthly life, the return and the eschaton are, for the Muslim, different aspects of a single, multi-dimensional, eschatological frame (see eschatology). This is, as it were, our ultimate paradigm and ultimate paradox. Real life, for Islam, of necessity involves death coupled with a realizable eschatology whose basis is eternal life:

All of human history, then, moves from the creation to the eschaton. Preceding the final judgement will come signs (both cosmic and moral) signaling the arrival of the Hour as well as the specific events of the resurrection and assessment. Within this overall structure is the individual cycle which specifies the events of creation, death and resurrection. Part of the fatalistic determinism of the pre-Islamic Arabs was their sense that each human life is for a fixed term or ājāl. It is immutably set; on the appointed day one’s life comes to an end. This idea of an ājāl is repeated in the Qur'ān, both for individuals [q 6:2; 7:34; 16:61; 20:126] and for nations [q 10:49, 15:4-5]” (Smith and Haddad, Islamic understanding. 5).

This remains the fundamental Islamic paradigm for both medieval and modern Islamic theology (see theology and the Qur'ān), whatever the glosses of individual verses (āyāt) by contemporary exegesis (see exegesis of the Qur'ān: early modern and contemporary). It is worth noting, however, that the medieval philosophers (falsafa) often developed a different set of conceptions about the cycle of life, some of which appear difficult to reconcile with the basic theological positions of the Qur'ān (see Arnaldez, Hayāt, 393).

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Bibliography


Life after Death see eschatology; resurrection; paradise; hell and hellfire; reward and punishment
Lifetime see destiny; fate; life; death and the dead

Light

The emanation from a light-giving body: the essential condition for vision (see vision and blindness; seeing and hearing) — the opposite of darkness (q.v.). The Qur’ān is rich in references to light, both in the literal sense of the word as well as in symbolic and metaphoric senses (see metaphor; symbolic imagery). The most common word for light is nūr, although diya’ also appears on three occasions (also mīshāh and sirāj; see also lamp and fire).

Light as nūr most frequently appears juxtaposed to darkness (zulmāt). This is most common in the phrase “From the darkness into the light” (mina l-zulmāt ila l-nūr) which appears at least seven times in the Qur’ān (Q 2:257; 5:16; 14:1, 5; 33:43; 57:9; 65:11). In this context, light functions both as that with which one can see clearly in a literal sense and also as a metaphoric source of guidance and illumination, wherein darkness is akin to ignorance (q.v.) and being led astray (q.v.). In the first sense, light versus darkness is compared to having sight versus being blind (e.g. Q 13:16: “Say: Is the blind equal with one who sees or is darkness equal with light?”); this verse is repeated almost verbatim in Q 35:19). Elsewhere the direct connection between light and seeing versus darkness and not seeing is clearly evoked: “God took away their light and left them in darkness so they could not see” (Q 2:217), and the evocative “Or like the darkness in a deep ocean surmounted by crashing waves with dark clouds above — darknesses, one on top of the other. If he puts out his hand he can hardly see it. Therefore for anyone for whom God did not make a light, there is no light” (Q 24:49).

In its sense as guidance, light is very closely related to the important issues of revelation and prophecy (see revelation and inspiration; prophets and prophethood). The Torah (q.v.) and Gospel (q.v.; injīl) are referred to as “guidance and light” (hudan wa-nūrān) in Q 5:44 and Q 5:46. This is repeated for the Torah again in Q 6:91: “Say: Who sent down the book (q.v.) that Moses (q.v.; Mūsā) brought as light and guidance for humankind (nūrān wa-hudan līl-nās)?” Elsewhere, the word diya’ is used for the revelation sent to Moses: “Indeed we gave Moses and Aaron (q.v.; Hārūn) the criterion (q.v.; al-furqān) and a light (diya’an) and a reminder for those who do right” (Q 21:48; see memory).

Light is also used to indicate the revelation received by Muḥammad (see names of the Qur’ān): “So believe in God and his messenger (q.v.), and the light (nūr) that we sent down” (Q 64:8); “And thus we sent to you a spirit (q.v.; rūḥ) by our command. You did not know what the book was nor faith (q.v.), but we made it a light (nūr) with which we guide whom we wish of our servants” (Q 42:52); “O humankind! Indeed a proof (q.v.; buḥān) has come to you from your lord (q.v.). And we sent down to you a manifest light (nūrān mubīnān)” (Q 4:174). The majority of instances, however, appear to use “light” (nūr) as a reference to prophecy rather than Qur’ānic revelation: “There has come to you from God a light and a clear [or manifest] book (kitābun mubīnān)” (Q 5:15); “It is those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light that is sent down with him — it is they who will prosper” (Q 7:157). In one instance, Muḥammad is referred to explicitly as a source of light: “And an inviter to God by his leave, and a light-giving lamp (sirājan munīran)” (Q 33:46; see names of the prophet).
The word mubīn, normally translated as “clear” or “manifest,” has a special significance in instances where “light” refers to revelation and prophecy, since in Arabic mubīn and the root b-y-n mean not only “clear” but also “readily apparent.” Thus phrases such as kītāb mubīn, “clear book” (as in Qurʾān 5:15 mentioned above) or the common āyāt bayyānāt, “manifest signs,” carry a connotation of being “lit up” and clearly visible, not just “clear” (jāqīn). It also occupied a central place in the philosophy of virtually all Muslim neo-Platonists (see PHILOSOPHY AND THE QURʾĀN). It also occupied a central place in the Persian Islamic philosophical tradition commonly referred to as the illumination (ishrāqī) school, whose most famous exponent, Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Suhrawardī, was executed for holding heretical beliefs in 587/1191 (see HERESY; LITERATURE AND THE QURʾĀN).

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Bibliography

**Lightning** see weather

**Lion** see animal life

**Lips** see anatomy

**Listen** see hearing and deafness; seeing and hearing

**Literacy**

The ability to read and, often, to write. Literacy (framed in contemporary Arabic by expressions such as *maʿrifat al-qirāt wa-l-kitāba, thaqāfa* and their derivatives) is in many cultures considered a primary requisite for learning and education. In Arabia at the beginning of the first/seventh century, however, oral transmission of knowledge, memorization and the spoken word had a long tradition and were highly appreciated among the tribes (see tribes and clans; orality and writing in Arabia; memory; speech). Until that time, the use of writing and written matter — due also to the material conditions at that time — played a minor role (see material culture and the Qur’ān). Apparently reflecting this situation, the Qur’ān seems to consider issues related to literacy of subordinate importance to those of its counterpart, illiteracy. Nevertheless, literacy is implied to a certain extent and acquires significance whenever mention is made of the holy book (q.v.; *al-kitāba, al-Qur’ān*), reading and teachings from holy scriptures (*kutub, sūf*), knowledge and education in more general terms (see knowledge and learning), or means of writing such as ink and pencil (see writing and writing materials; instruments).

The Qur’ānic statements concerning the theologically important question of whether the Arabian Prophet was literate or not remain ambiguous. In q 25:3, for example, Muhammad’s opponents (see opposition to Muhammad) discredit the Prophet by claiming that he was not receiving a divine revelation but was merely relying on “writings of the ancients (*asāfīr al-nawwālin*, see generations) which he has written down [or which he has had written down] (*iktatabābā*) and which were dictated to him (*thulā al-aṣyā*) at dawn and in the early evening (q.v.; see also day, times of).” On the other hand, q 29:48 addresses Muḥammad by stating “not before this [revelation] did you read/recite (tālā) any book or inscribe it with your right hand, for then those who follow falsehood would have doubted.” (For this question and for the possible meanings of *al-nābi al-ummā*, see Günther, Muḥammad, 7-12; see also ummā, illiteracy.)

The five verses that are generally considered by Muslim tradition to comprise the first revelation to Muḥammad stress the written nature of religious knowledge:

Read/recite (*iqra*) in the name of your lord who created. Created man of a bloodclot (see blood and blood clot)! Read/recite [words of the holy scripture]! And your lord, the most generous, is the one [variant a:] who taught [the use of] the pen [variant b:] who taught by the pen. Taught man what he knew not [before]? (q 96:1-5).

Although another tradition favors q 74:1-5 as the first verses revealed, q 96:1-5 nevertheless belongs to the very oldest parts of the *textus receptus* of the Qur’ān. This would mean that Islam, from its very beginning,
in a remarkably impressive way prioritizes the gaining of (religious) knowledge, learning and education.

Q 96:4-5, “who taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not” (aladhi ‘allama bi-l-qalami; ‘allama l-insāna mā lan ya’lan) seems, according to a translation variant, to make an allusion to the “art of writing” as being a divinely granted human ability. The prepositional expression bi-l-qalami is then not to be understood as instrumental (“with the help of the pen”) but as a kind of second object (“the pen,” like in Q 2:282, with its allusion to God’s teaching writing; see Grammar and the Qur’ān).

This understanding, “who taught writing with the pen” (‘allama al-khāṭa bi-l-qalami), is reported to have been found in the ancient Qur’ān codex of ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr, who was a member of the commission appointed by the third caliph, ‘Uthmān (r. 23-35/644-56), to collect officially and publish the text of the Qur’ān (cf. Jeffery, Materials, 229; see Collection of the Qur’ān; Codices of the Qur’ān). It would indicate that God is the one who taught humankind the script “and other things” they did not know before (ma‘a asḥābīna ghayri dhālikā, Tabarī, Tafsīr, xii, 646) by teaching them the use of the pen. This understanding is reflected in the Qur’ān translations by Yūsuf ‘Allī, “He who taught (the use of) the pen,” Shakir, “Who taught (to write) with the pen,” and Paret (see also Nöldeke, Review, 723; and Paret, Kommentar, 515).

It is also possible (as a second variant), however, to understand the phrase as a general reference to knowledge of the revelation (see Revelation and Inspiration), which has been handed down by God to humankind through holy scriptures (Buhl, Das Leben, 137-8; Bell, Origin of Islam, 93-4; id., Qur’ān, ii, 653; Paret, Kommentar, 515; the translations by Arberry, “Who taught by the pen,” and Pickthall, “Who teacheth by the pen” are in this vein). Such an understanding would associate the content of these — God’s teachings — with the “guarded tablet” (al-lauḥ al-madhūfī, Q 85:22; see Preserved Tablet; Heavengly Book), on which the revelation is preserved in heaven in written form (see also Fück, Das Problem, 1). It would refer to the heavenly archetype of the Qur’ān, whose “pages [are] highly-honored, uplifted, purified by the hands of scribes (safara) noble, pious” (Q 80:13-5; see also 85:21-2; 56:77-80; 98:2-3; 74:52; for safara meaning “scribes,” “reciters” or “angels,” see Tabarī, Tafsīr, xii, 445-6; Qurṭubī, Ḫāmi‘, xix, 216; for the Semitic context of safara that clearly indicates the meaning of “scribes,” see Horovitz, Proper names, 229; furthermore Jeffery, Qur’ān, 13, 15; Paret, Kommentar 502).

On the other hand, this passage could refer more specifically to the holy scriptures (see also Q 2:151; 4:113; 69:11; 55:1-4), which had emerged from the heavenly “tablet” and which had been revealed to prophets before Muḥammad (such as suḥf Ibrāhīm wa-Mūsā, the “scrolls of Abraham [q.v.] and Moses [q.v.],” in Q 87:18-9; also 2:53; 46:12; see Prophets and Prophethood). Jews and Christians had been reading these older scriptures (yaqūṭa 1-l-kitāb, Q 10:94), even though some among them had denied them when Muḥammad came to them (Q 2:101-2; see Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity). (For the meaning of kitāb and ahl al-kitāb in the Qur’ān, see Book, People of the Book, Scripture and the Qur’ān; Augapfel, Das kitāb, also provides specific information; cf. Berg, Tabarī’s exegesis; Buhl, ‘Die Schrift’; Künstlinger, Die Namen; Tisdall, ‘The Book’).

The term talā, “reading” and/or “reciting,” occurs sixty-three times in the Qur’ān: the Children of Israel (q.v.) study the scripture (tatlına l-kitāb, Q 2:44); Jews
read in the Torah (q.v.; q 3:93); Jews and Christian read/recite their scripture (yatlūna l-kitāb, q 2:113), some of them at night (q 3:113; see DAY AND NIGHT). Reading the scripture in an accurate manner means to believe in God or, believe in it (i.e. the Scripture; q 2:121). Biblical narratives, which provide exemplary instruction for believers, are reported to have been read, and it is said that they be read/“re”-cited: such narratives include the story of Cain and Abel (q.v.; q 4:122), Noah (q.v.; q 10:71), Abraham (q 26:69), Moses and the Pharaoh (q.v.; q 28:3). Q 18:83 indicates that Muhammad (or possibly Moses) is even directed to read/recite something relating to dhū l-qarnayn (generally understood to be Alexander the Great, but possibly here referring to the devil [q.v.; see ALEXANDER]) when asked about him. But reading or reciting is not solely a human activity: satans read/re-cite (tālī) something about Solomon (q 2:102).

Most times, however, talā refers in general terms to reading the holy scriptures (kitāb, sūrat), reciting verses of the Qur’ān, or reading the Qur’ān (q 2:44, 113; 129, 151, 252; 3:58, 101, 108, 164; 6:151; 8:2, 31; 10:15, 16, 61; 13:10; 17:107; 18:27; 19:38; 19:73; 22:72; 23:66, 105; 27:92; 28:45; 53; 28:39; 29:45, 51; 31:7; 33:31; 34:43; 37:3; 39:71; 43:6; 8, 25, 31; 46:7; 62:2; 65:11; 68:15 like 83:13; 98:2; see RECITATION OF THE QUR’ĀN). Talā ’alā indicates more emphatically that God establishes a rule for people, which they learn by reading/reciting the teachings of the holy book (q 4:127; 5:1; 22:30; 23:72; see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN; BOUNDARIES AND PRECEPTS; LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL; FORBIDDEN; PROHIBITED DEGREES). In q 68:15 and q 83:13, an unnamed unbeliever is mentioned who, “when our signs (q.v.) are read/re-cited to him,” will say “[these are only] writings of the ancients.” That the expression asāfir al-nawwalān, which is relevant in this regard as well, refers to “writings” can be understood, for example, from q 68:37, “Or do you have a book in which you study!” (For further references, see ILLITERACY; for yāṣṭurūna meaning yakhṣūṭūna, yaktubūna, see Tabarî, Tafsīr, xii, 177-8.)

Another important term, qara‘a, also indicates both “reading” and “reciting.” Only the verses of q 96:1-3 start with the imperative, iqra‘; to introduce God’s command to the Prophet to “repeat” verses of the revelation (see also Paret, Muhammad, 47-8). This mode of introduction, “re-cite” or “read,” seems to express in one word the primary motive for the entire proclamation of the Qur’ān and its programmatic character: Muhammad was called upon to speak aloud a holy text. If qara‘a means “reciting,” however, it would not necessarily imply a writing or the ability to read as prerequisites. If it refers to “reading,” Muslim commentators have noted that Muhammad was inspired by a scripture in a divine language (see LANGUAGE, CONCEPT OF), which would not require any knowledge of reading or writing profane language. (For the idea that it was a “writing” from which Muhammad was ordered to “read,” see the famous biography of the Prophet by Ibn Ishāq [d. ca. 150/767]; see Ibn Ishāq, Sīnâ, i, 236, n. 5; Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 106; see also, Schoeler, Charakter, 59-117; for the etymology and the meaning of the word “Qur’ān,” see NAMES OF THE QUR’ĀN; ARABIC LANGUAGE; ARABIC SCRIPT, SCRUTIPIRE AND THE QUR’ĀN; RECITATION OF THE QUR’ĀN.)

Q 7:145 confirms that God had “written” (kataba) for Moses “an admonition (see EXHORTATIONS) of every kind, and a distinguishing of everything,” and he had done so “upon the tablets,” which he had handed over to Moses on Mount Sinai (q.v.) so that he would command his people according to those laws (see COMMAND-
ments). Q 5:110 states that God had taught Jesus (q.v.) the “book (kitāb), the wisdom (q.v.), the Torah and the Gospel” (q.v.; see also Q 3:48-9). The Qurʾān is taught by God as well (Q 53:7; 51:1-2). It is then the duty of God’s messengers (see messenger) to “read” God’s signs to the people (yatāliʿ ‘alayhim āyāthihī) and to “teach them the book and the wisdom, and [to] purify them” (Q 3:164; also Q 2:129, 151; 4:113; 62:2; 65:4).

A warning of certain writings is given in Q 2:78-9; there are books written by some Jews who do not “read” (or consciously “ignore”) the holy scripture but fabricate by themselves writings different from the holy text as revealed (see forgery): “And there are some among them (i.e. the Jews) who are not reading the holy scripture (ammīyyīn), who do not know the book but know only fancies and mere conjectures. But woe to those who write the book with their hands and then say ‘This is from God,’ that they may sell it for a small price. So woe to them for what their hands have written…”

The books in which all the deeds of human beings are recorded until the day of judgment (see last judgment), and the idea that God “writes” (kataba) everything that people do, are mentioned many times (see record of human actions). For example, the Qurʾān warns that God “write[s] down what they (the people) send before and what they have left behind. [He has] taken account of everything in a clear register” (Q 36:12); his “messengers (i.e. the guardian angels) are writing down what you are devising” (Q 10:21; also 43:80); “everything that they have done is in the scrolls (of the former generations); and everything, great or small, is inscribed (mustatār)” (Q 54:52-3); God “writes down” (wa-l-lāhu yaktabu) everything that some people think up all night (or plot, yubayyitūna) “other than” what you [Muḥammad] say (Q 4:81; cf. also Paret, Der Koran, 68).

Sūra 68, entitled “The Pen,” starts with the oath “[I swear] by the pen, and that which they inscribe” (wa-l-qalam wa-mā yastūrūna). This verse, possibly the second oldest verse in the Qurʾānic revelation (Ṭabarī, Taafsīr, xii, 645), lends itself to several explanations: it is understood to allude to (a) the art of writing or (b) the scripture of revelation or, again, to (c) the pen with which all the deeds and the fate of every person are recorded (Paret, Kommentar, 516).

Medieval commentators draw special attention to the latter concept, i.e. that before heaven (see heaven and sky), water (q.v.) and earth (q.v.), God created the pen which inscribes all happenings until the day of resurrection (q.v.; aswālū mā khalaqa llāhu al-qalam…, based on a prophetic saying; see e.g. Tabarī, Taafsīr, xii, 177-8). Incidentally, the idea of the many pens and seas of ink (midād, Q 18:109; cf. 31:27) also occurs in Jewish sources (cf. Strack/Billerbeck, Kommentar, ii, 587; Haeuptner, Koranische Hinweise, 99-100).

Writing as a way to fix juridical matters, however, is clearly favored in the Qurʾān. In Q 2:282-3, the need for people who are able to write, the importance of written documents, and the practices of writing and dictating become evident. Detailed instructions as to how to proceed are even given: “O believers, when you contract a debt (q.v.) one upon another for a stated term, then write it down! And let a writer (kātib) write it down between you justly. And let not any writer refuse to write it down, as God has taught him [i.e. the art of writing]. So let him write it down. And let the debtor dictate! […] And if the debtor be a fool, or weak, or unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian (see guardianship) dictate justly… […] And be not loath to write it down, whether it (i.e. the amount) be small or great…! That is more equitable in God’s sight… But take
witnesses whenever you are trafficking one with another! And let neither a scribe nor a witness suffer harm. […] And if you are upon a journey, and you do not find a writer, then a pledge [?] in hand [should be required]” (cf. Tabari, Taṣfīḥ, iii, 117; Tyan, Histoire, i, 73; Schacht, Origins, 186; Nöldeke, ṣq, i, 78-84; Buhl, Das Leben, 136-8; Khoury, Koran, iii, 249-54 for more detailed explanations and references).

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Bibliography

Literary Structures of the Qur‘ān

Rhetorical, grammatical and linguistic devices utilized in the conveyance of meaning. The message of the Qur‘ān is couched in various literary structures, which are widely considered to be the most perfect example of the Arabic language (q.v.; see also LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR‘ĀN). Arabic grammars were written based upon the Qur‘ānic language (see GRAMMAR AND THE QUR‘ĀN), and, by the general consensus of Muslim rhetoricians, the Qur‘ānic idiom is considered to be sublime. This article is concerned with these literary structures and how they produce meaning in the Qur‘ān in an effective way.

Muslim doctrine holds that the Qur‘ān is inimitable, its inimitability (q.v.) lying not only in its matchless literary style (see FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR‘ĀN) but also in its religious content. As such, the Qur‘ān is considered the avowed miracle (see MIRACLES) of the prophet Muhammad, testifying to the truth (q.v.) of his prophethood and the enduring veracity of his message (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD; MESSENGER). These doctrinal considerations frame classical Muslim considerations of the literary structures of the Qur‘ān and their manner of generating religious meaning. It should be emphasized that these literary structures are not
deemed mere otiose embellishments of the text of the Qur’ān but are rather the factors that produce its powerful effect in the specific forms presented. If the form of a Qur’ānic text is changed in any way, however small or seemingly innocent, the meaning is modified, often significantly. Take, for example, “iyyāka na‘budu” (Q 1:5). By syntactically placing the pronominal object (iyyāka) before the verb (na‘budu), rather than after it (as the pronominal suffix -ka), the meaning of the Qur’ānic verse is specified to be “only you do we worship.” This is significantly different from “we worship you” (na‘buduka), which declares worship of God but does not exclude the possibility of worshiping other deities as well (see POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM). Syntax, therefore, is an important element of the literary structures of the Qur’ān, for it helps to determine the specific meaning of the text.

A further example will highlight another aspect of the quality of Qur’ānic literary structures: “wa-lakum fi l-qāṣāṣī hayātan” (Q 2:179), which means “and in retaliation (q.v.), there is life for you.” Muslim rhetoricians have compared this Qur’ānic verse with the pre-Islamic Arabian proverb, “al-qatlu anfā lil-qatli,” which means “killing is more likely to preclude killing” (see PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QU'RĀN; MURDER; BLOOD MONEY). Although the two statements are not exactly congruent, they both advocate the application of the death penalty in cases of murder, maintaining that such a punishment results in a safer society, as it both deters others and removes the murderer from the community (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QU'RĀN; CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT). Attention has been drawn to the sound of the words in these two statements; the phonemes of the pre-Islamic proverb are difficult to pronounce in succession, alternating — as they do — between the sounds of a and q at opposite ends of the laryngeal uttering process, interposed between the repetitive dental cluster ūd, whereas the phonemes of the Qur’ānic verse, in contrast, flow easily on one’s tongue. Phonology, therefore, is another important element in literary structures, for it governs and ensures the acoustic and phonic fluidity of the Qur’ānic text, helping it to achieve good reception and deliver its meaning effectively (see RECITATION OF THE QU'RĀN).

As these examples demonstrate, the Arabic language forms the basis for the literary structures of the Qur’ān, and is the vehicle through which the intended meaning has been conveyed. The Qur’ān was revealed to the prophet Muḥammad in Arabic, as the text itself reiterates (e.g. Q 12:2; 20:113; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3) and it is in Arabic that his contemporaries first heard the message, a message that affected both their hearts (see HEART) and minds (see INTELLECT). It is in Arabic that later generations of Muslim believers of all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds have continued to hear and recite the Qur’ānic text, the text from which they have drawn guidance to shape their lives. To them a translation of the Qur’ān into any other language is not really the Qur’ān (lit. “recitation”; see ORALITY; ORALITY AND WRITING IN ARABIA), irrespective of its accuracy and faithfulness to the Arabic original. Furthermore, like other languages, Arabic has its own specific way of conveying meaning, which has been connected with particular cultural contexts; the Qur’ān’s use of this idiom is notably unique and, for believers, miraculous. Muslims therefore celebrate this unique and inimitable Qur’ān, and aspire to retain the authentic association of language, culture and faith (q.v.) so central to their lives.
The qur’ānic text in the prophet Muhammad’s lifetime

According to tradition, the Qur’ān was revealed piecemeal to the prophet Muhammad in about twenty-three years (between 610 and 632 C.E.). It was orally received and memorized (see memory), and some qur’ānic passages were probably written down by his literate Companions (see companions of the prophet) on flat stones, shoulder blades, palm leaves, parchment and other materials (see codices of the Qur’ān; literacy). Although qur’ānic passages of different lengths were revealed intermittently — frequently with specific reference or in response to particular circumstances and events — and were thus not necessarily intended or taken as continuing where the previously revealed text had left off (see occasions of revelation; chronology and the Qur’ān), it was the prophet Muhammad who — according to tradition — instructed the early believers as to the proper placement of these passages in the larger (and growing) oral text that would become the holy scripture of Islam. By the end of Muhammad’s life in 10/632, the Qur’ān had 114 sūras ranging from the shortest — with three verses (Q. 103, 108, and 110) — to the longest, with 286 verses (Q. 2). Muslim tradition says that Muhammad designated the position of every verse but one (Q. 4:176), since that verse was revealed just before his death. His Companions chose the place for this verse based upon its meaning, context, and style (see Draz, Introduction, 15, n. 3).

The qur’ānic text after the prophet Muhammad’s death

When the oral Qur’ān was later “collected” by the Prophet’s Companions in “book” form in ca. 28/650, the 114 sūras were arranged largely according to size, and not according to the chronological order of revelation; the longer sūras were placed first and the shorter ones followed in a generally descending order of length. The notable exception to this arrangement is Q. 1, Sūrat al-Fātiha (“The Opening”), which, although it has only seven verses, was placed at the beginning of the qur’ānic codex. According to Muslim tradition, copies of the Qur’ān have normally been disseminated in this form since its initial collection (one revisionist theory of the collection and compilation of the Qur’ān is provided by John Wansbrough, who, in his Qur’ānic studies, argues that the Qur’ān did not attain its current form until about the end of the second/eighth and beginning of the third/ninth century; see collection of the Qur’ān; Muḥṣaf).

One should keep in mind the originally oral character of the Qur’ān and the amount of time that elapsed before each of its sūras, especially the longer ones, were revealed in their entirety. Hence, it is necessary to look at the literary structures of the sūras (Q.v.) to discover how each forms a unit, canonically constituting one chapter. Some pre-modern Muslim exegetes (see exegesis of the Qur’ān; classical and medieval) examined these structures, and offered theories of nasm (lit. “order”) highlighting the verbal organization of the sūra’s wording with regard to its syntax and rhetorical figures of speech (see rhetoric of the Qur’ān); others offered theories of munāṣaba or tanāṣub (lit. “relationship”) about the linear relatedness of verses (Q.v.) within the sūra, or even of one sūra and the next. But the treatment of the sūra as a unit was not really broached by Muslim scholars until the twentieth century, notably by Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlahī (1906-97) and Sayyid Qūṭb (1906-66).

The sūra as a unit

In his Tadabbur-i Qur’ān (1967-80), Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlahī concentrates on the semantic...
and thematic content of the sura as a coherent unit. He finds that, semantically, the suras are linked in complementary pairs and that the Qur'an contains seven groups of suras, each with a block of Meccan suras and a block of Medinan ones, which deal, respectively, with theoretical and practical aspects of the block's theme. İslahi's concept is insightful, if a little too schematized, but it does not give literary structures their due place in generating and conveying the meaning of the Qur'anic suras in his systematized scheme.

In his Fi zilâl al-Qur'an (1952-9), Sayyid Qūtb focuses on the coherent unity of each sura — mostly with regard to its semantic and thematic qualities — but he does identify structural characteristics related to its diction, syntax, imagery and phonology that reflect the intended meaning and mood of the sura. He finds that each sura has a core or central point, a theme that he calls its mīḥawār (lit. its "axis"), around which it revolves. In his view, the sura may have one topic (mawdū'ī) tightly bound to its theme or it may have more topics so bound; the theme may sometimes be double-lined (as in long suras), but each line (khatt) of the theme is then strongly bound to the other. For example, Sayyid Qūtb believes that 2 has a double-lined theme whose two lines are strongly bound together. The first thematic line revolves around the hostile attitude of the Jews (see Jews and Judaism) to Islam in Medina (q.v.) and their friendly relations with the Arabian polytheists and hypocrites (see Hypocrites and Hypocrisy). The second thematic line revolves around the corresponding attitude of the Muslims in Medina and their growth as a believing community prepared to carry the responsibility of God's call after Jewish rejection. Both lines are complementary and tightly bound together throughout the sura, which eventually ends as it began: by exhorting (see Exhortations) human beings to belief in God (see Belief and Unbelief), his prophets, his scriptures (see Book; Scripture and the Qur'an) and the metaphysical unseen world (see Hidden and the Hidden). From beginning to end, the several topics of the sura are related to this double-lined theme.

In all circumstances, Sayyid Qūtb believes each sura has a special atmosphere (jāwâ) integrating its topic or topics harmoniously and a musical rhythm (iğâ maṣūqī) consonant with its topic or topics. He maintains that both jāwâ and iğâ maṣūqī strengthen the effective delivery of its intended meaning. The aesthetic effects of the Qur'an's literary structures are discussed at some length by Sayyid Qūtb in his books al-Taṣawir al-fannī fi l-Qur'an (1945) and Mashâhid al-qiyāma fi l-Qur'an (1947), where he gives a detailed view of the manner in which the structures generate the intended meaning and deliver it with verbal beauty and psychological power.

Some Western scholars, on the other hand, have criticized the Qur'an because they perceived it as lacking in certain literary virtues. None other than T. Nöldeke stated "dass der gesunde Sprachsinn der Araber sie fast ganz davor beewahrt hat, die eigentlichen Selsamkeiten und Schwächen der Koransprache nachzuahmen" (Zur Sprache, 22; Fr. trans. "Le bon sens linguistique des Arabes les a presque entièrement préservés de l'imitation des étrangetés et faiblesses propres à la langue du Coran," in id., Remarques critiques, 34). Thomas Carlyle (cf. Arberry, Koran, i, 12), no mean admirer of the prophet Muhammad as a hero, thought of the Qur'an as "toilsome reading" and considered it to be "a wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite." R.A. Nicholson (cf. Arberry, Koran, ii, 9) referred to European readers of the Qur'an who held that "it is obscure, tiresome, uninteresting; a farrago of
long-winded narratives and prosaic exhortations.” W. Montgomery Watt (Watt-Bell, Introduction, 73) spoke of “disjointedness” as “a real characteristic of Qur’anic style.”

Yet Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, the first modern British Muslim to make an English translation of the Qur’an (which he did not call “The Qur’an,” but pointedly entitled The meaning of the glorious Koran and subtitled “An explanatory translation”) refers to the Qur’an in his foreword as “that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy.” Another Englishman, Arthur J. Arberry, who also translated the Qur’an into English, offered his translation as only The Koran interpreted and devised “rhythmic patterns and sequence-groupings” in it to reflect certain aspects of its literary structures in Arabic. Although in his introduction Arberry admits (Koran, i, 24) that it is “a poor copy of the glittering splendour of the original,” he later says that each “sūra will now be seen to be a unity within itself, and the Koran will be recognized as a simple revelation, self-consistent to the highest degree” (Koran, ii, 15-6). More recently, the works of Angelika Neuwirth have focused on the literary merit and integrity of whole sūras (cf. e.g. Neuwirth, Zur Struktur der Yūsuf-Sure; see also N. Robinson, Discovering the Qur’an).

The study of the qur’ānic sūra as a unit with coherent unity is still in need of focused, philological elaboration in modern scholarship. With the possible exception of the German school of qur’ānic studies, the analytical tools and categories for such research, as well as the relevant technical methods and terminology, need to be developed and established, as has been achieved — however dissonantly — with the study of other scriptures and of other literary genres. Such a study will help better understand not only the sūra and its literary structures, but also — ultimately — the whole Qur’ān as a holy scripture with a singular message. The study of the macrostructure of the Qur’ān should build on the conclusions of studying its microstructures as manifested in the sūra and its individual, componental pericopes (see narratives; for an example of the contemporary German scholarship on the macro- and microstructures of the Qur’ān, see the eq articles by Angelika Neuwirth, esp. sūras; form and structure of the Qur’ān; rhetoric of the Qur’ān).

The prose of the Qur’ān

As Arabic is the language of the Qur’ān, its use in a variety of literary forms should be closely examined. To be noted first and foremost is the fact that the qur’ānic text is written in prose. It is a very special kind of prose, to be sure, and it is unique in many ways; but it is definitely prose and not verse. Classical Arabic verse has regular meter and recurring rhyme as two of its basic features, which are partly responsible for its symmetry and harmony. These features are clear in the long tradition of the Arabic qaṣīda, the ode. The prose of the qur’ānic text, on the other hand, is not at all metrical; furthermore, its rhyme is neither regular nor constantly based on an identical rhyme-letter as in classical Arabic verse. It is often replaced by assonance, and, sometimes, completely ignored. Muslim scholars have been reluctant to call the prose of the qur’ānic text saj‘, “rhymed prose” (q.v.), possibly because this term is associated with the prose pronouncements of pagan priests and the prose utterances of fortune-tellers (see foretelling; divination) or soothsayers (q.v.) in pre-Islamic Arabia (see also poetry and poets), as well as with the prose of later Arabic writings in Islamic history characterized by a degree of artificiality or mannerism. The term saj‘, how-
ever, is not appropriate mainly because not all of the Qur’ānic text is written in rhymed prose. Muslim scholars prefer to designate the prose of the Qur’ānic text as one divided into fawāṣiḥ, “rhetorical periods” (singular fāṣīḥ). Each period in the text contains a semantic-grammatical unit forming an āya, “a verse,” usually ending with rhyme or assonance echoing the rhyme or assonance of other verses in the proximate textual neighborhood. Sometimes, however, a rhetorical period ends without such rhyme or assonance.

An āya may be short and can consist of as few as one word (e.g. Q 69:1; 101:1) or even a couple of “mysterious letters” (q.v.) at the beginning of certain sūras (e.g. Q 20:1; 36:1). It may also be quite long and consist of as many as fifty words or more. When the āyāt are short, the effect of the rhymes or assonances in the text is powerful because, given their proximity to one another, they continue to ring in the immediate memory of the reader or listener and instill the meaning with persistence. When, however, the āyāt are long, the effect of the rhymes or assonances as such is less powerful on account of the distance between one and the next, thus possibly allowing for them to fade in the immediate memory; in these instances, however, their effect is usually reinforced through their inclusion within a brief rhyming phrase or clause tagged to the end of the āya as a coda, a device which can serve to remind the reader or listener of the preceding statement, pressing it home, and clinching the argument of the āya.

A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the nature of rhyme or assonance in both the short and long verses of the Qur’ān. Some examples of the short verses are as follows: 1. After the basmala (q.v.), Q 112 (in full) reads: (1) qul huwa lāahu ʿabād (2) Allāhu l-ṣamad (3) lam yālid wa-lam yālad (4) wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan ʿabād. Here the rhyme is -ad. To be noted is the fact that the final inflection of the rhyme-word is disregarded lest the rhyme be broken; otherwise, the final words would not rhyme and would read, respectively: ʿabādun, l-ṣamadu, yālad, and ʿabādun. 2. Verses 9-11 of Q 93 read: (9) fa-ammā l-yatāna fa-lā taqhar (10) wa-amānā l-sāʾila fa-lā taṣhar (11) wa-amānā bi-niʿmati rabbika fa-ḥaddīth. Here the rhyme of verses 9 and 10 is -ar but it is ignored in verse 11. Examples of long verses are as follows: 1. Q 2:143 has forty-five words, ending with the coda inna ʿallāha bi-l-nāṣī la-raʿa ʿifūn raḥīm, the rhyme of which is -ām, echoing the majority of the other rhymes in the sūra, which consist of -ām and of the assonantal -in and -ām. There are, however, verses in this sūra that end in -ā (Q 2:148) or -āb (Q 2:165-6), or -ār (Q 2:167), as well as other consonantal endings, in which the rhyme or assonance of the majorities of the verses of the sūra is ignored. 2. In the same sūra, verse Q 2:255 has fifty words and ends with the coda wa-huwa l-ʿalīyyu l-aṣīm. The verse that follows, Q 2:256, which consists of twenty-four words, ends with the coda wa-l-lāhu samīʿun ʿalīm. Both verses rhyme in -ām, echoing most of the other rhymes and assonances in the sūra, and the coda in each reinforces and clinches the argument of the āya.

From the above, it can be observed that the verses of the Qur’ānic text are of various lengths. In the longer sūras, the verses are usually long and in the shorter sūras they are usually short, but this is not an invariant rule. Even within a single sūra, the verses vary in length. Although they tend to be of a fairly similar length, they are not necessarily equal in length nor are they composed of parallel and corresponding syllables, as in metrical composition with prosodic feet, to produce the exact symmetry of versification. Nonetheless, the prose of the Qur’ānic text has a certain rhythm to it, which varies from sūra to sūra.
and even within one sūra, particularly if it is a long one. This rhythm is not that of a fixed meter but that of a unique composition that allows the topic at hand to qualify it and modify its cadences, using verses of varying lengths, mostly with rhymes or assonances and sometimes without. The topic of the sūra may gradually unfold different aspects of its major theme, and the verses of the sūra may accordingly have a different rhyme-letter for each aspect, especially in sūras of some length; but, again, this is not an invariant rule.

In sum, the prose of the Qurʾān is not totally rhymed prose, nor is it totally unrhymed free prose. It is a unique blend of both, with an important contribution by assonance, couched in a variety of short and long verses dispensed in sūras of various lengths. The different patterns of rhymes, assonances and free endings in the verses, as well as the different lengths and rhythms of these verses and the varying lengths of the sūras themselves, are all literary structures related to the meaning offered. In the final analysis, they comprise an essential element of the effective delivery of the total message of the Qurʾān.

**Phonology**

From the Arabic text of the Qurʾān, it is obvious that sound plays a major role in the effect its words produce, an effect that a translation of the Qurʾān into other languages fails to preserve, despite the best efforts of the translators. Arthur J. Arberry made a genuine effort in his English translation of the Qurʾān “to devise rhythmic patterns and sequence-groupings in correspondence with what the Arabic presents.” Despite his commendable effort, he admits that, in the end, his interpretation is a poor echo of the original, as noted above.

The sound of Arabic words in the Qurʾān is an important element of literary structure in producing a rhetorical medium that delivers the meaning effectively. This element functions at different levels. At the level of vocabulary, there is what rhetoricians would come to describe as the “eloquence of the single word” (faṣāḥat al-mufrad): the individual words in the Qurʾān consist of letters that flow harmoniously without tongue-twisting difficulties or ear-jarring sounds, each word agreeing with common usage and the morphological rules of Arabic. These later rhetoricians also noted the “eloquence of composition” (faṣāḥat al-murakkab) with regards to the wording of individual verses: the order of words is such that their phonemes flow with ease from one word to the next in pronunciation and are aurally perceived with a pleasant sensation. Meanwhile, the construction follows the rules of correct syntax, allowing variations that cater to the rhetorical intention and effectiveness of semantic delivery. At the level of passages consisting of shorter or longer sequences within a sūra, the verses of varying lengths are threaded together by rhymes and assonances, their rhythms varying according to their topics and modulated according to their moods in order to produce maximum effect. At the level of the whole Qurʾān, which consists of short, middle-sized and long sūras, the total message leaves a phonological and semantic impression that is considered absolutely sublime and that has often been said to go beyond the exquisite harmony of music; this is “that inimitable symphony” according to Marmaduke Pickthall. Muslim rhetoricians have called this unique composition of the Qurʾān nazm al-Qurʾān (lit. “the order of the Qurʾān”), a reference to the beautiful fusion of its wording and meaning in accordance with principles of grammar, rhetoric, and phonology, briefly outlined above. Considering the Qurʾān’s divine provenance to be a matter of faith and deeming its content transcendent and
its composition unique, Muslim theologians have considered it to be the prophet Muḥammad’s miracle and declared it to be beyond human ability to imitate. By the early part of the third/ninth century, they developed the doctrine of iḥāz al-Qurān, literally, the Qurān’s incapacitation (of humans and jinn [q.v.]), but technically denoting the miraculously inimitable character of the Qurān. According to the theologians, the doctrine that human beings and jinn are incapable of imitating the Qurān has been proven by their continuing inability to meet its clear challenge to them to do so (Q 10:38; 11:13; 17:88; see Boullata, Rhetorical interpretation, 149-57).

Transtextuality
As in music, repetition plays an essential role in any literary text of poetic effectiveness. In the Qurān, it takes the form of repeated rhythms, rhymes, assonances, refrains, patterns of structure and variations on the same theme. It is meant to inculcate the Qurānic message with power while employing a sublime language that seizes the heart and mind — without being enthralling or entrancing in the pejorative, incantatory sense of enslaving comprehension, spiritual absorption, and meaningful reaction.

Transtextuality allows several kinds of repetition, whereby a usage with strong associations of meaning in one part of the Qurān is encountered in another part or in other parts of it with echoes of the earlier usage, either at the intratextual level of the same sura or at the intertextual level of all the sūras. Two obvious examples of refrains may be used to demonstrate this repetition at the intratextual level. The refrains are repeated several times, with a stronger effect each time as the text builds to a climax. The first example is Q 55, a sura consisting of seventy-eight short verses, of which thirty are a refrain asking the rhetorical question: “Which then of the favors (see grace; blessing) of your lord (q.v.) will you two deny?” The first instance of this refrain occurs after verse 12, and appears thereafter following every verse or two; after verse 44, the refrain alternates with every verse until the end of the sūra. The sūra enumerates the bounties of God to the two kinds of creatures: human beings and jinn (see creation). It mentions God’s creation of humankind, the jinn, the orderly universe and the world (see cosmology) with its wonders, blessings, gifts, bounties, and benefits that are granted to all out of his mercy (q.v.). One of these blessings is God’s teaching of the Qurān. On the day of judgment (see last judgment), all creatures will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds (see good deeds; evil deeds; record of human actions). The sūra describes the physical features of the reward and punishment (q.v.), leaving no excuse for anyone to deny the prior favors of the lord, which are incrementally stressed throughout the sūra, culminating in the climax, with the thirty repetitions of the rhetorical question.

The other example of refrains recurring throughout a single sūra is found in Q 77, which consists of fifty short verses, ten of which are a refrain in the form of a threat: “Woe on that day to those who deny” (see lie; gratitude and ingratitude). The day in question is yawm al-faṣl, “the day of decision,” on which the physical features of the world will collapse and all creatures will be brought before God for judgment (see apocalypse). The sūra begins with a succession of enigmatic oaths (q.v.) assuring everyone that what has been promised will indeed occur. Then it proceeds to a frightening description of the universe as it collapses. Creatures are reminded that God had created them and the world’s benefits for them. They are reminded that
God had destroyed the evil-doers of yore (see generations) and will punish all sinners (see sin, major and minor), whose tricks will not avail against them nor protect them from the blazing flames (see fire; hell and hellfire). Meanwhile, the righteous will dwell amid shades and fountains, eating fruits and consuming and drinking what they desire, in just reward for their pious lives (see garden; paradise; food and drink; piety). God’s favors and his promised punishment throughout the sura are punctuated by the repeated threat of woe to those who, on that day of decision, deny the truth of God’s power, but will not be permitted to speak and excuse themselves. The repeated threats serve to highlight the fearful punishment and, in contrast, the blissful joy of reward (see joy and misery; hope).

Repetitions in the form of refrains like these two examples do not occur elsewhere in the qur’anic text. There are, however, other kinds of repetition in the form of words or turns of phrase that are too many to enumerate, which contribute to that specific quality of the qur’anic style, giving it a particular tone. That which was called coda above, namely a maxim that comes at the end of a verse clinching its purport, is an example of such a repetition, a refrain that occurs in the Qur’ān at both the intratextual and the intertextual levels. An example of such a coda is wa-huwa l-‘azīzu l-hākim, “And he is the mighty, the wise” (q. 29:42). This also occurs without the definite article but usually with Allāh (“God”) instead of the pronoun huwa (“he”), as in q. 5:38: wa-lāhu ‘azīzun ḥakīm, “And God is mighty, wise.” This coda occurs about forty times in the Qur’ān.

Variations — with a different attribute of God (see god and his attributes) — also occur, such as q. 44:42: inna huwa l-‘azīzu l-rāhīm, “Verily, he is the mighty, the merciful,” or q. 67:2: wa-huwa l-‘azīzu l-ghafūr, “And he is the mighty, the forgiving” (see forgiveness). Among the many other codas is the one found in q. 2:20: inna l-lāha ‘alā kulli shay in qadīt. “Verily, God is powerful over everything,” which also occurs without inna (“verily”) and begins with wa (“and”), as in q. 2:284: wa-l-lāhu ‘alā kulli shay in qadīt. “And God is powerful over everything.” The pronoun huwa or hu may also be substituted for Allāh, as in q. 30:50 and q. 41:39, respectively. This coda occurs about thirty times in the Qur’ān.

Another form of repetition in the Qur’ān is the telling of punishment stories (q.v.), in each of which a messenger is sent by God to a certain people to teach them, to turn them away from their evil deeds and to warn (see warner) them against God’s punishment if they do not heed. When they persist in their evil ways, God’s punishment is visited upon them in a variety of terrible ways. Such is the story of the messenger Hūd (q.v.) sent to the Arabian pre-Islamic group of people called ‘Ād (q.v.). Likewise, it is the story of the messenger Šāfīḥ (q.v.) sent to a certain people of ancient Arabia called Thamūd (q.v.). Some of the stories have biblical equivalents, such as the story of the messenger Shu’ayb (q.v.) sent to the people of Midian (q.v.) or the story of Noah (q.v.) and his people or of Lot (q.v.) and his people or some aspects of the story of the prophet Moses (q.v.) and Pharaoh (q.v.). Q. 26 contains a group of these punishment stories, some of which are repeated with variations in q. 54, Q. 7, Q. 11, Q. 51, and elsewhere. Not only is the pattern of events in these stories generally parallel, but the wording is often similar, sometimes even identical in certain parts of the story (see Welch, Formulaic features). The oral nature of the original qur’anic message is very evident in these stories, repeated in a variety of similar ways to suit different audiences in the Prophet’s lifetime. Their purpose, then and later, is to
warn and threaten unbelievers, to convince them of the power of God and the certainty of his punishment, and to reassure those who believe in God and accept Muhammad’s message that he is truly God’s messenger sent to the world as a warner and a bearer of good tidings (see good news) about a new religion and a new societal order. The rhetoric of thematic and verbal repetition in the stories inculcates this purpose strongly and helps instil the meaning effectively.

**Imagery and figurative language**

Metaphors (see metaphor) and other figures of speech abound in the Qur’ān. As in the scriptures of other world religions and in the literatures of all nations, figurative language is used to enhance the effect of what is said by making it beautiful, impressive, aesthetically striking, and semantically powerful. It persuades through literary devices that stir the imagination and appeal directly to the senses. On this count, the Qur’ān often offers dramatic uses of figurative language in its literary structures, as well as original and daring insights of unforgettable aesthetic and semantic effect.

There is much in the Qur’ān that continues to adhere to the literal usage of the Arabic language, that is, the use of words for what they have commonly been used to designate. Yet, as in other languages, there are some words whose figurative usage has become so common as to be accepted as normal literal usage. English words like leg, neck, and eye, which originally refer to parts of humans or animals, are no longer considered metaphorical when used in such expressions as “the leg of a table,” “the neck of a bottle” and “the eye of a needle.” In a similar manner, the Arabic word šarī‘a, which originally refers to a path leading to water sought for drinking, has come to refer metaphorically to religious law, as attested in q 45:18 (see law and the Qur’ān). This religious law is — if obeyed — the path leading to the quenching of spiritual thirst and the preservation of societal health and well-being, hence the connection of šarī‘a referring to Islamic law. Another similar Qur’ānic use is the Arabic word ḥara, which originally meant tepidity, but has been commonly used to mean interval of time between happenings; q 5:19 reads: qad jā‘akum rasūlinā yubahayiru lakum ‘alā ḥaratin min al-rusuli, “Our messenger has come to you to make things clear to you after an interval between the messengers.” Here ḥara may also effectively be read — as originally intended in Arabic — to mean tepidity. The Qur’ānic statement can then be understood as saying: “Our messenger has come to you to make things clear to you after the tepidity of [people’s faith in earlier] messengers” (for further discussion, see Abu-Deeb, Studies in the magāţ). Aside from these matters, however, the Qur’ān has an amazing abundance of fresh and vivid images and figures of speech in its literary structures, an abundance that has made a perceptive modern literary critic and exegete like Sayyid Qūṭb argue that what he calls taswīr fannī, “artistic imagery,” is indeed the preferred style of the Qur’ān (see Boullata, Sayyid Qūṭb’s literary appreciation). Classical rhetoricians and exegetes of the Qur’ān writing in Arabic, like al-Jurfānī (d. 471/1078) and al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538/1144), among others, have long drawn particular attention to this inherent quality of imagery in the Qur’ānic style.

The primary instance to be noted is the fact that the Qur’ān speaks of God in anthropomorphic language (see anthropomorphism). Although it says of God laysa ka-mithlīsh Shay‘un (q 42:11), “Nothing is like unto him,” it speaks of the “hand of God” (e.g. q 3:73; 5:64; 48:10) and sometimes speaks of “his hand” (e.g. q 23:88;
Muslim theologians have long discussed such wording and often differ — each according to his theological school — about the explanation. But it appears evident that, linguistically, there is figurative speech here, the word hand metonymically referring to God’s power (see *power and impotence*). The same applies to the “eye of God,” as in *li-tusa‘a‘alā‘aynī* (Q 20:39), i.e. “that you [Moses] may be formed before my eye,” metonymically meaning under God’s protection and according to his will (see *eyes*). In the same manner, the Qur’an ascribes attributes to God, such as mercy (q.v.), knowledge (see *knowledge and learning*), hearing (see *hearing and deafness*), sight (see *vision and blindness; seeing and hearing*), speech (q.v.), love (see *love and affection*), justice (see *justice and injustice*), power, generosity (q.v.), forgiveness, oneness, wisdom (q.v.), glory (q.v.), greatness and so on. God is also said to have sat on the throne (humma stavā‘alāl‘ārsh, Q 7:54; 10:3; 13:2; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4 and elsewhere), with the word “throne” taken to be a symbol (see symbolic imagery) of his omnipotence and majesty (see *throne of God*).

Likewise, the afterlife (see *eschatology*) is described in the Qur’an in terms of physical pleasure in paradise and physical pain in hell, denoting, respectively, reward and punishment for deeds done on earth (q.v.) in this life, and fulfilling God’s promise of reward and his threat of punishment elaborated in the Qur’an. The material joys of paradise are concurrent with the spiritual satisfaction of being near God, experiencing eternal peace and bliss, and delighting in the beatitude of salvation (q.v.). The material sufferings of hell are concurrent with the spiritual affliction of being exiled from God’s presence, the frustrating experience of eternal self-blame and regret, and the permanent agony of being condemned to the misery of damnation. Jewish and Christian literature have parallel details of the afterlife, but the Qur’anic image is, on the whole, *sui generis*. This image can be culled from different, scattered texts of various lengths in the Qur’an, most of them found in the Meccan sūras. Each text concentrates on specific scenes from paradise or hell, or from both, usually presented in a contrastive way. Each text, with its different details, adds to the total picture of the afterlife. In his *Mashāhid al-qiyāma fl l-Qurān*, Sayyid Qūtb surveys 150 scenes taken from eighty sūras of the Qur’an, sixty-three of them from the Meccan period and seventeen from the Medinan period.

Perhaps even more graphic is the Qur’anic image of the last day, the time when history comes to a climax: the universe is dismantled, the dead are resurrected (see *death and the dead; resurrection*), the last judgment occurs, and an eternity (q.v.) in paradise or hell begins for those consigned to either according to their deeds. What happens on this last day is described in ominous words such as in Q 82:1-5: “(1) When heaven is cleft asunder, (2) When the stars (al-kawākah, see *planets and stars*) are dispersed, (3) When the seas are burst, (4) And when the tombs are laid open, (5) Each soul shall then know its former and latter deeds.” Or, Q 81:1-14, “(1) When the sun is rolled up, (2) When the stars (al-najūm) are darkened, (3) When the mountains are made to move, (4) When the ten-month pregnant she-camels are abandoned (see *camel*), (5) When the wild beasts are herded together, (6) When the seas are made to seethe, (7) When the souls are united, (8) When the female infant buried alive (see *children; infanticide*) is asked, (9) For what sin she was killed, (10) When the scrolls (q.v.) are spread out, (11) When heaven is stripped off, (12) When hell is set ablaze, (13) And
when paradise is brought near, (14) Each soul shall then know what it has produced.” Of grammatical note in these qur’ānic passages is the fact that the main verbs are used in the passive voice and without mention of the specific doer of the action, or that they occur in the seventh or eighth morphological verbal form, forms which usually denote passivity. This structure increases the perception of the passivity of the universe at the end of time as it obeys an omnipotent God who does not even need to be mentioned as the doer because he is known to be the only one with commensurate power and authority to act at that cosmic scale.

There are several other qur’ānic passages with such ominous, eschatological and cataclysmic scenes foreshadowing humans with such ominous, eschatological and catastrophic events. The event is heralded by a terrible shout (ṣayha, Q 36:39), a thunderclap (ṣākhka, Q 80:33), one blast of a trumpet (Q 69:13: ṣākhka fi l-ṣūriṇ nafkhātum wāḥida) or two blasts (Q 39:68: ṣākhka fi l-ṣūriṇ [...] ṭhumma nafkhā fīhi ukhrā), and other portents (as mentioned above). The Qur’ān often gives this day a special, alarming attribute (as mentioned above). The Qur’ān often gives this day a special, alarming attribute such as al-ḥaqq (Q 69:1) or al-ṣārī’a (Q 101:1) or yaqum al-fāṣl (Q 77:13). In order to magnify the unknown and unexpected dread of the day, it immediately follows this attribute with a rhetorical question or double question, asked in awe-inspiring tones, as in Q 69:2-3, “What is al-ḥaqq? And what shall make you know what al-ḥaqq is?”, or Q 101:2-3, “What is al-ṣārī’a? And what shall make you know what al-ṣārī’a is?” or Q 77:14, “And what shall make you know what yaqum l-fāṣl is?”. In a similar way, the Qur’ān gives hell other names, such as saqar (Q 74:26) or al-ḥutama (Q 104:4) and follows that name with a rhetorical question, asking as in Q 74:27, “And what shall make you know what saqar is?”, and Q 104:5, “And what shall make you know what al-ḥutama is?”. A menacing description is then provided, with terrifying details.

Among the other qur’ānic names of hell are al-jaḥīm (“the hot place”), al-sa’īr (“the blaze”), laẓā (“flame”), and al-nār (“the fire”). These very names evoke the physical torment of the damned by fire and burning, hence the qur’ānic image of hell’s inmates asking those in paradise for water but being denied it (Q 7:50). To drink, they are given boiling water like molten lead (ka-l-muhli), scalding their faces (Q 18:29), or they are given festering liquid pus (mā ’in ṣāhidin) which they can hardly swallow (Q 14:16-7). They are given to eat from the zaqqūm tree, whose bitter fruits are like heads of devils (Q 37:62-5; see agriculture and vegetation). They burn in hell but do not die or live, and they are not consumed; whenever their skins are scarred, they are given fresh skins so that they may continue to be tormented (Q 4:56). Their torment reaches to their very souls and they wish they could ransom themselves with all their earthly possessions and they feel remorse within them on seeing their punishment (Q 10:54; see repentance and penance). They bite their hands in regret and wish they had chosen the messenger’s way (Q 25:27). They wish they could return to the world and be believers (Q 26:102), and they cry for help to the lord to be let out in order to do righteous deeds, but they will not be helped, for they had been forewarned (Q 35:37).

In contrast, the eternal reward of the good and just people is a place of physical pleasure and spiritual bliss; it is jannāt al-nāṭi’tān (“the gardens of delight”) or jannāt al-firdaws (“the gardens of paradise”) or simply al-jannā (“the garden”). Through it, rivers flow (Q 5:119), rivers of unpolluted water, rivers of milk (q.v.) unchanging in flavor, rivers of delicious wine (q.v.), and
rivers of clear honey (q.v.; q 47:15). The inmates recline with their spouses on couches in pleasant shades, enjoying fruits and whatever they call for (see SPRINGS AND FOUNTAINS; and they do not have headaches by drinking therefrom, nor are they intoxicated (see INTOXICANTS). They eat fruits and the flesh of fowls as they desire. They have fair wide-eyed maids who are like well-preserved pearls (see HOURIS). No vain or sinful talk do they hear, but rather greetings of peace (q 56:17-26; see Gossip). They experience no fear (q.v.) or sorrow (q 7:49) and they are happy forever (q 11:108). Their faces are radiant, looking toward their lord (q 75:22-3); for they are the muqarrabūn, “those brought near” (q 56:11), in the gardens of delight.

Although these contrasting images can be filled out with further details from other Qur’ānic passages on the afterlife, they suffice here to give an idea of the impressive imagery of the Qur’ān. They demonstrate some of the most striking aspects of the imaginative power of the Arabic language to paint large scenes. The literary structures of the Qur’ān, however, also use this imaginative power to paint small scenes. This usage is found in many of the Qur’ān’s similes (q.v.), metaphors, and figures of speech of every kind. A few examples should give an idea of the wide-ranging Qur’ānic employment of such figurative language. The following is one of the complex similes: The futility of praying to false gods who never respond (see IDOLS AND IMAGES) is likened to a man who stretches out his open palms to scoop water to his mouth but cannot bring any water to it (q 13:14). One of the metaphors utilizes an oath, swearing by the personified morning as it begins: wa-l-subhi idhā tanaffasa (q 81:18), meaning, “And by morning when it breathes.” The vivid expressiveness comes not from the mere personification of morning, but from the ascription of breathing to the rise of day, denoting the resumption of life and movement after night’s stillness. Another example of a metaphor appears when Zechariah (q.v.; Zakariyyā) describes his old age. In q 19:4, he is reported as saying, “And my head is ablaze with hoary hair” (wa-sh-sha‘ala b-ru’su shaybah). The spread of white hair on his head with advancing age is portrayed as the spread of fire, which may first begin with one or two sparks then grows inexorably into a flame. The image is made more striking by its grammatical construction: the head itself is the subject of burning, not the hoary hair, which is added as an accusative of specification.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Qur’ān utilizes a wide variety of literary devices to convey its message. In its original Arabic idiom, the individual components of the text — sūras and āyāt — employ phonetic and thematic structures that assist the audience’s efforts to recall the message of the text. Whereas scholars of Arabic are largely agreed that the Qur’ān represents the standard by which other literary productions in Arabic are measured, believing Muslims maintain that the Qur’ān is inimitable with respect to both content and style (see LITERATURE AND THE QUR’ĀN). From a linguistic standpoint, moreover, an understanding of the harmony within and between the Qur’ān’s literary structures will be further enhanced by continuing study of macro and micro units of the text.

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**Literature and the Qur‘ān**

This article deals with two main topics: the Qur‘ān as literature, which focuses on the literary aspects of the Qur‘ān, and the Qur‘ān in literature, which focuses on the use of the Qur‘ān in various Islamic literatures: Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Punjabi, and Malay. For further and more comprehensive discussion of the utilization of the Qur‘ān in various non-Arabic Islamic literatures, see the articles *South Asian Literature and the Qur‘ān*; *Southeast Asian Literature and the Qur‘ān*; *Turkish Literature and the Qur‘ān*; *Persian Literature and the Qur‘ān*; *African Literature*.

**Qur‘ān as language**

The literary study of the Qur‘ān focuses on how the Qur‘ān uses its form, i.e. its language, style, and structure (see *Language and Style of the Qur‘ān*; *Form and Structure of the Qur‘ān*) to convey its message or content, i.e. its worldview, values and norms (see *Ethics and the Qur‘ān*).
The emphasis in such a study falls on the “how” rather than on the “what” of the qurʾānic presentation. The literary aspect of the Qurʾān has been, in one form or another, a subject of study since early times but generally the context of such treatment has been theological, confessional or didactic rather than literary (see theology and the Qurʾān). The starting point in most such works on this topic is the challenge that the Qurʾān issues to the disbelievers, namely, to produce a work like the Qurʾān if they doubt its divine origin (see inimitability; revelation and inspiration; book; word of God). This approach is illustrated by the works of Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī (d. 403/1012) and ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1087) — Ijāz al-Qurʾān and Dalā’il al-i'jāz, respectively. Both al-Baqillānī and al-Jurjānī seek to show that, as the word of God, the Qurʾān is inimitable and, since it cannot be replicated by any human being, in whole or in part, it constitutes a miracle (q.v.). As such, it is a proof (q.v.) of the authenticity of Muhammad’s prophecy (see prophets and prophethood) and, consequently, of the religion of Islam. Such works do not, in principle, attempt to isolate the literary aspect of the Qurʾān for independent consideration. In 1939, Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) wrote that while works on the rhetorical aspect (balāgha) of the Qurʾān do indeed exist (see rhetoric of the Qurʾān), no independent literary, i.e. artistic, study of the Qurʾān exists “to this day” (Quṭb, Taṣwīr, i, 206). In recent years, the literary aspect of the Qurʾān has received greater attention. A significant work in this connection is Literary structures of religious meaning in the Qurʾān, edited by Issa Boullata (see literary structures of the Qurʾān). As Boullata (Literary structures, x) points out in his introduction, literary structures include such diverse elements as “diction, phonology, morphology, syntax [see grammar and the Qurʾān], rhythm, rhetoric, composition and style, in addition to matters related to tone, voice, orality [q.v.], imagery, symbolism [see symbolic imagery; metaphor], allegory, genre, point of view, intertextuality, intratextual resonance and other literary aspects — all of which are set within a historic epistemology and cultural ambience.” In combination with one another, these elements produce “the total meaning which it (the Qurʾān) contains and which many generations have tried to comprehend” (ibid.).

Historically, the atomistic style of exegesis (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval), which has dominated in Qurʾānic studies, has militated against the development of a proper literary approach to the Qurʾān. In the atomistic approach, individual verses (q.v.) and verse segments become the focus of study, with little literary significance attached to the larger units of composition. Little wonder that this approach laid the Qurʾān open to the charge of disjointedness: the reader gets a strong impression that the Qurʾān moves from one subject to another quickly and arbitrarily, and perhaps without following any organizing principle. And it is no surprise that few studies of narrative — of plot, dialogue, characterization — in the Qurʾān consequently exist, for the very concept of narrative presupposes the existence of sustained presentation, which an atomistic approach does not allow (see narratives; myths and legends in the Qurʾān).

One can argue that the charge of disjointedness against the Qurʾān is overstated. First, it obviously does not apply to many of the shorter sūras (q.v.; for example, to sūras 80-114), to a number of medium-sized sūras, and to many passages and sections in larger sūras. In many places, an easily identifiable principle of
composition is seen to impart unity to portions of the text, as in q 56:7-44 and q 37:72-148, where a brief opening statement in each case is followed by details. Second, a closer study of the Qurʾān can identify certain patterns of composition in it. Al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1391) has shown, for instance, that the Qurʾān follows certain rules of ordering with fair regularity. Thus, it nearly always mentions existence before nonexistence, the heavens (see heaven and sky) before the earth (q.v.), place (see geography; spatial relations) before time (q.v.), darkness (q.v.) before light (q.v.) and night before day (see day and night), hearing before sight (see seeing and hearing), messenger (q.v.; rasūl) before prophet (nabī), Jesus (q.v.) before Mary (q.v.), and the Meccan Emigrants before the Medinan Helpers (see emigrants and helpers; see, for these and other details, Zarkashī, Burhān, iii, 233 f.). Rules are likewise respected in serial descriptions; q 4:23-4, for example, lists, in order of increasingly distant relationships, the women a man is forbidden to marry (see prohibited degrees). Third and most important, the Qurʾān, perhaps more than any other scripture, has a living context that is vital to understanding its message. This living context is comprised of the direct and immediate record of the life and struggle of Muḥammad (q.v.) and his followers in first/seventh-century Arabia (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān), and, in many cases, includes, as background, unspoken assumptions, unstated questions and objections, unexpressed concerns, doubts, and reservations, knowledge of all of which was shared among the participants in a given situation (see opposition to Muḥammad; occasions of revelation). Proper consideration of this living context shows that the Qurʾān possesses a high degree of coherence and continuity. It must also be noted that a number of modern scholars of the Qurʾān, Muslim and non-Muslim, have seen many patterns at work in the Qurʾān and have drawn attention to previously unnoticed compositional elements therein (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: early modern and contemporary; contemporary critical practices and the Qurʾān).

Literary features

The Qurʾān has a rich repertoire of literary features, among the best known being rhymed prose (q.v.; saj) and economy of expression, with its two subtypes of “ellipsis” (hadīf) and “terseness” (fāżī). The rhythm of the Qurʾān is best appreciated when the Qurʾān is recited or chanted (see recitation of the Qurʾān). In the pages that follow, we will review selected literary features of the Qurʾān, to see how they are used to convey, enhance and set off its meaning-content.

Words. Individual words used in many places in the Qurʾān turn out, on closer examination, to have special significance in the contexts in which they occur. The prophet Jonah (q.v.), convinced that the people of Nineveh would never believe, decides to leave the city. The word used to describe his departure is abaqa (q 37:140), a word which is typically used in Arabic for a runaway slave (see slaves and slavery). Jonah is no slave. But then he is indeed one — God’s (see servant). Being in the service of God, Jonah ought not to have decided on his own to quit prophesying but should have waited for God’s command. The use of abaqa for Jonah, thus, transforms his departure from a simple physical act to one that is fraught with moral implications. Again, the city of Medina (q.v.), which is almost invariably so called in the Qurʾān, is designated by its pre-emigration name, Yathrib, only once, in q 33:13. This is significant because in that verse the call “O people of Yathrib” is made by those
who would desert the ranks of the Muslims at a time of crisis, hoping that Islam would soon be wiped out and that Medina would revert to its earlier pagan status and to its pre-Islamic name, Yathrib (see HYPOCRITES AND HYPOCRISY; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM; IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS). The use of “Yathrib” in q 33:13, thus, graphically portrays the mentality of a certain group of people at a crucial juncture in the early history of Islam.

Two words used for the same object or phenomenon in the Qurʾān each appear to have contextual relevance. ʿĀsā, the general word for a rod (q.v.), occurs when the referent is the staff of Moses (q.v.; as in q 2:60 and 7:17). But the word for an old man’s staff is minṣaʿa, and it is a minṣaʿa on which Solomon (q.v.) leans just before his death (q 34:14), the word indicating, without any further help from the context, that Solomon died an old man. Similarly, q 10:5 uses the word diyaʾi, which denotes bright light and also heat, for sunlight, but the word nūr, which is more general, for moonlight (see SUN; MOON).

In a large number of cases, sets of two or more words acquire their full meaning only when they are seen in a dialectical relationship with each other (see PAIRS AND PAIRING). An obvious category of examples is that of the divine attributes, of which one example should suffice (see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES). Many verses speak of God as being powerful (ʿaẓẓ) and wise (ḥakīm): since he is wise, he does not abuse his might; since he is mighty, his is not ineptual wisdom (q.v.; see also POWER AND IMPOTENCE). A complementary relationship thus comes to exist between the attributes of ʿaẓẓ and ḥakīm. On a higher level, the Qurʾān sometimes uses several words for one essential meaning — except that each word has a different nuance. A most interesting example occurs in q 7:198. In describing expertly crafted idols (see IDOLS AND IMAGES) that look quite real, this verse employs three words for the verb “to see”: wa-tarāham yanzūrūna ilayka wa-hum li yubširūna (see VISION AND BLINDNESS).

A detailed analysis of the highly complex relationship between the three words — raʾā, nazara, and abṣara — is not possible here, though a tentative English translation, “And you notice that they are looking at you, but they do not see,” might suggest the degree of complexity.

In view of its concern with nuance, one can expect to find wordplay in the Qurʾān. q 12:70 has an extended play on the word saraqa, “to steal” (see THEFT): Joseph’s brothers are “accused” of stealing the king’s cup (see CUPS AND VESSELS) but are, in fact, being accused of having “stolen” Joseph (q.v.) away from his father. In a similar manner, q 2:61 plays on the word misr, which means both a “city” (q.v.) and “Egypt” (q.v.). Thus, Moses, unhappy at the wandering Israelites’ (see CHILDREN OF ISRAEL; JEWS AND JUDAISM) demand for the good food to which they were accustomed in Egypt, says: “Go into some misr and you shall have what you have asked for!” As an indefinite noun, misr means “city,” but as a diptote it is the name of the country, Egypt. The use of misr in the verse draws a contrast between the simple food eaten in the freedom of desert life and the more elegant food eaten in a state of servility in Egypt and, thus, the Israelites’ demand is put in a political and moral context.

Imagery. Sayyid Qūṭb (d. 1966) has argued that the distinctive literary feature of the Qurʾān is its ability to picture abstractions. A fine example is q 24:33, the Light Verse, which states at the outset that God is the light of the heavens and the earth, then proceeds to give details of that light in terms of a similitude. Other examples of this phenomenon are found in the many passages that give graphic details of the cataclysmic last hour and have a truly epi-
Qur‘ānic parables usually illustrate key ideas of the Qur‘ān. There is a variety of such parables, which are often signaled by a phrase like “The parable of [such-and-such a person] is....” We may take as an example q 2:17-8, which describes the attitude of those who refuse to accept the guidance they have been looking for when it is presented to them — ironically missing the opportunity for which they have been looking: “Their parable is that of a man who kindled a fire (q.v.); when it had lit up the surrounding area, God took away their light, leaving them in layers of darkness, unable to see as they are. Deaf (see hearing and deafness), dumb, blind — so they shall not return!” (q 2:264-5) makes the point that only acts of charity done to win God’s pleasure will be rewarded in the hereafter (see eschatology; reward and punishment; good deeds); condescension toward or harm of the recipient of a favor will wipe out a charitable act, just as the dust on a rock is wiped clean by rain, whereas charitable acts done in a true spirit of piety will grow, just as a garden on a height will grow and prosper even if it gets a drizzle.

Parallelism, chiasmus, and epanados. Various kinds of emphasis are produced through parallelism, which has an ABAB’ structure (as in q 11:24: those who are blind and those who are deaf/those possessed of sight and those able to hear; see also q 20:118-9; 28:73). Emphasis is also produced through chiasmus or reverse parallelism, which has an ABB’A’ structure (as in q 40:58: those who are blind and those who are sighted/those who believe [see belief and unbelief] and do good deeds and those who do evil deeds [q.v.]). Some of these arrangements are quite elaborate and complex, as in q 35:19-22, where parallel and chiasitic structures interpenetrate. In the story of Joseph in the twelfth sūra, the plot is constructed on the principle of
chiasmus; as Mustansir Mir (The Qur'ānic story of Joseph) has shown, the first half of the sūra builds a series of tensions which are then resolved in reverse order in the second half. In *epanadós*, one returns to the idea with which one started (*seditus ad propositum*), highlighting, on the one hand, the importance of the reiterated idea and, on the other hand, the interconnectedness of the materials enclosed between the two occurrences of the idea. Q 17:22-39, thus, begins and ends with the prohibition of setting up false deities; and Q 23:1-11 enumerates a number of qualities of the true believers — those who will “achieve success” — the passage underscoring the importance of the prayer (q.v.) ritual by referring to it at the beginning (Q 23:2) and toward the end (Q 23:9; cf. a similar emphasis on prayer in the large section of Q 2:163-238, where prayer is mentioned at the beginning, in Q 2:177 and at the end, in Q 2:238).

Other devices. We will briefly note several other devices used in the Qur'ān, giving one example of each and indicating the purpose it serves in its context. Q 2:51 accuses all of the Israelites of worshipping the calf (see *calf of gold*) when only some of them had done so. This substitution of the whole for a part (*synecdoche*) underscores the principle of collective responsibility. God sends down rain from the skies but Q 45:3 says that God sends down *rizq*, “sustenance”: by substituting effect for cause (*metonymy*), the verse focuses our attention on the actual products of the rainwater we consume, eliciting from us a response of gratitude (see *gratitude and ingratitude; blessing; grace*). Q 4:102 asks the embattled Muslims to “take their guard (*hidhr*) and their weapons (*aslīha.*)” The verb for “take,” *akhdhā*, applies literally to “weapons,” but only metaphorically to “guard.” The use of one verb in two senses (*syllepsis*) indicates that the best way to take one’s guard in a situation of war (q.v.) is to have one’s weapons ready. Q 9:62, using the singular pronoun for God and Muhammad when one would expect the dual, deliberately violates grammar for effect (*enallage*), implying that, in order to please God, the believers must first please his messenger by obeying him, for to obey Muhammad is to obey God (see obedience). Q 21:89-90 says that God granted Zechariah’s (q.v.) prayer for a son, even though Zechariah was very old and his wife was sterile: “We granted his prayer and gave him John (see *John the Baptist*), and we made his wife fertile for him.” The sequence, one feels, should have been: We granted his prayer; we made his wife fertile for him; and [having done so] we gave him John. The reversal of the expected sequence (*hysteron proteron*) in the verse suggests immediacy: Zechariah’s prayer was granted without any delay at all, so much so that the detail itself, “We made his wife fertile for him,” was not allowed to intervene between the prayer and its acceptance. In many verses, a series of divine attributes is presented without the use of the conjunction “and” (*kāfā*), as in Q 59:23: “He, God, is the one other than whom there is no god: King, possessor of glory, [source of] peace, giver of security, protector, mighty, dominant, proud.” Such an omission of the conjunction (*asynedeton*) serves to emphasize the unity or integrality of all the divine attributes and their simultaneous existence in the same deity — and, by thus negating division or distribution of the attributes among several deities, to reinforce the doctrine of monotheism. In Q 21:63, Abraham (q.v.), tongue in cheek, rejects the charge of demolishing the idols of the temple, imputing the act to the chief idol, whom he had spared, and suggesting that the temple custodians ask the broken idols about the matter. This affirmation through denial (*apophasis*) enables him to
checkmate his opponents, for he means to drive home the point that a dumb piece of rock does not deserve to be deified.

Irony. Irony is created through a contrast between appearance and reality, for example, between a situation as it is or might develop and the situation as it appears to someone. In tempting Adam and Eve (q.v.) in the garden (q.v.) of Eden, Satan (see Devil) suggests to them that the fruit of the forbidden tree could transform them into angels but that God would not like them to become angels; hence the prohibition to eat of the tree (q 7:20). But the angels have already bowed (see Bowing and Prostration) before man (q 2:30-4) and acknowledged his supremacy, so that man’s attempt to become an angel (q.v.) constitutes a descent, not an ascent, on his part (see Fall of Man). In the story of the People of the Garden (q 68:17-33), the rich but niggardly owners of the orchard, upon seeing their orchard destroyed, think that they must have arrived at someone else’s orchard, and so they exclaim, “We have lost our way!” (innā la-dāllīna, q 68:26). But they do not realize that they have lost their way not in the literal sense but in the figurative — moral — sense. Upon realizing that it is their own orchard they have reached after all, they say that they are mahrumān (q 68:27), that is, deprived of the produce, not realizing that they have been deprived of God’s blessings in this world and the next. The Qur’ānic story of Joseph (q 12), like the biblical, offers a dramatization of the thesis that God’s purposes are inexorably fulfilled and irony is one of the principal means of establishing that thesis (see Mir, Irony in the Qur’ān).

Characterization and dialogue. Very few of the persons mentioned or referred to in the Qur’ān are actually named. In almost all cases, however, they are distinctive enough to be recognizable. The Qur’ānic Moses is, of course, unmistakable, but so is the unnamed man who comes rushing in from the far end of the city to inform Moses of the Egyptians’ plot to kill him (q 28:20). The Qur’ānic Joseph is easily recognizable but so is the unnamed Egyptian noblewoman who tries to seduce him (q 12:23). A few points about characterization in the Qur’ān may be noted (comparisons with characterization in the Bible will be fruitful). First, there is very little physical description. This absence indicates that such detail is not a crucial element of character: people must not be judged on their appearance but on the strength of their deeds (cf. q 49:13: “The noblest of you in the sight of God is the most pious one of you”; see piety). Second, the Qur’ān does not recount the day-to-day events and happenings in the lives of its characters, whom we encounter only at decisive moments when, through their speech or action, they reveal their true selves, or provide significant clues about their views, attitudes, and inclinations, and help us “place” them. Third, there are not only individual but also collective characters in the Qur’ān. In many places (e.g. in q 11, “Hūd”), the Qur’ān speaks of small or large groups of people, even nations, as if they were a single personality speaking or acting in unison. Thus, in a dialogue, a prophet might be represented as addressing a number of courtiers or nobles who speak and act as if they were a single entity. The implication, of course, is that the view held in common, or the action done in concert, is more important than the individuality of the characters. Even in these cases, however, the group qua group is usually seen to have its distinctive identity. Thus, Joseph’s brothers (in q 12), the magicians of Pharaoh (q.v.; q 7:113-26; 20:65-73; 26:41-51), and the People of the Garden (q 68:17-32) have clearly identifiable personalities. Fourth, just as there are groups that look like individuals, so there are individuals
who represent types. It is true that Qur’anic characters are, as a rule, presented within the general framework of the conflict between good and evil (q.v.), but they are not abstractions. Regardless of their moral alignment, most characters come across as men and women of flesh and blood and display traits that are very much human. And while many of the Qur’anic characters are either “good” or “bad,” they can hardly be called flat — in the sense in which E.M. Forster famously used the term. Moses, quite obviously, is a multidimensional figure, as are Abraham, Joseph, the Queen of Sheba (see Bilqīs), and Pharaoh’s magicians, who all undergo some kind of change and development with time. (On dialogue in the Qur’an, see dialogues.)

Taṣrif as a narrative principle. Taṣrif, a word used in the Qur’an to denote the changing patterns of movement of the winds (q 2:164: 45:5) and also the diverse modes of presentation of the Qur’anic message (nasarīfū, as in q 6:65; and sarrafān, in q 17:41; 46:27), may be called a Qur’anic narrative principle. Typically, the Qur’an does not present, for example, a story all in one place but breaks it up into several portions, relating different portions in different places, often with varying amounts and emphasis of detail, as they are needed and in accordance with the thematic exigencies of the suras in which they occur. The Qur’an does not tell a story for its own sake but in order to shed light on the theme under treatment in a particular sura. In doing so, it eliminates chronology (see chronology and the Qur’an) as an organizing principle in narration, replacing it with the principle of thematic coherence, a principle that determines which portion of a story will be narrated in what place. In other words, the story told in a given sura is likely to be sura-specific. A number of Western writers — among them Angelika Neuwirth, Anthony Johns, Neal Robinson and Matthias Zahniser (see bibliography) — have attempted to see Qur’anic suras as unities or as possessing thematic and structural coherence.

Repetition. The Qur’an appears to be repetitive in respect of both thematic substance and formal expression. Muslim scholars who have dealt with this phenomenon have concluded that repetition in the Qur’an, whether in form or substance, is usually quite significant and purposeful. At a basic level, repetition serves to put emphasis on a point, catching an overflow of meaning, as in q 19:42-5, where Abraham, imploring his father to abandon the worship of idols, utters yā abāti (“O my dear father!”) no fewer than four times, the repetition indicating his deep love and concern for the salvation (q.v.) of his father. Sometimes, repetition is used to insure a cumulative impact, as when a series of verses or sentences, beginning with the same word or words create a crescendo effect, leading to a climactic point (e.g. q 7:195; 52:30-43). One or more phrases repeated two or more times, say, at the beginning of a series of passages, may serve as a frame for presenting an argument or making a comment. q 26:104-90 relates the stories of five prophets — Noah (q.v.), Hūd (q.v.), Sālīḥ (q.v.), Lot (q.v.) and Shu’ayb (q.v.) — and their nations. All five passages in this section have an almost identical beginning. The repetition in this passage may appear to be formulaic but in fact it highlights (here and in many similar passages, e.g. q 7:59-102) several things: that the many prophets sent by God all preached the same essential message; that each of these prophets was a member of the nation he addressed, so that the people, who knew him to be truthful and thus had little reason to reject his message, opposed him out of sheer stubbornness (see lie; truth; insolence and obstinacy); that
although each prophet sought to rectify the evil peculiar to his nation, all of them began their preaching by calling their peoples to the correct faith (q.v.), which is the foundation of all good conduct; and that Muḥammad the prophet should not grieve at his rejection by the people of Mecca (q.v.), for just as God has punished the rebellious nations of those prophets, so he will punish the Meccans if they continue to oppose him. The formal identity of expression in the several parts of the passage thus conveys a complex set of meanings.

At times the Qurʾān employs refrain. A celebrated example occurs in Q 55, where the verse “Which of the blessings of God will you, then, deny?” occurs no fewer than thirty-one times. According to Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥi (1906-97), this sūra was revealed in Mecca at a time when Muḥammad’s opponents adamantly refused to accept the Qurʾān, defiantly asking for the punishment with which they were threatened in case they disbelieved. The sūra, accordingly, uses the refrain to force their attention. As Iṣlāḥi puts it: “This stylistic feature of repeatedly drawing someone’s attention to something is, of course, used only when the addressee is either so stubborn that he is unwilling to accept what goes against his wishes, or so obtuse that he cannot be expected to see reason unless he is held by the scruff of his neck and forced to pay attention to every single thing” (Iṣlāḥi, Tadabbur-i Qurʾān, vii, 119). In other words, the refrain in Q 55 serves to bring into relief the particular mentality of the Meccan disbelievers at a certain stage of Muḥammad’s ministry. Iṣlāḥi notes that Q 54 was revealed in a similar set of circumstances, and that it, too, has a refrain (“How were my punishment and my threat?” see id., Tadabbur-i Qurʾān, vii, 119).

The classical works on the Qurʾān are important aids to understanding the Qurʾān. Yet, from an artistic or literary point of view, they have certain limitations; the principal one being that, in these works, the literary study of the Qurʾān rarely achieves independence of theological considerations. In this respect, the study of the Qurʾān as literature in the modern sense of the term is in its beginning stages. Such study will definitely be helped by insights gleaned from the study of the Bible as literature, though the differences between the two scriptures will require that each be approached essentially on its own terms (see Scripture and the Qurʾān). The field of the literary study of the Qurʾān holds considerable promise and is one in which cooperation between Muslim and Western scholars can be quite fruitful.

Qurʾān in literature

There is no doubt that the Qurʾān exerted a tremendous influence on various Islamic literatures, just as it did in other areas of artistic and intellectual activity in Islamic civilization. Its influence on Arabic literature in particular was, as expected, the earliest, but also the most intensive and enduring: Arabic, after all, was the language in which the Qurʾān was revealed. But as Islam moved beyond its initial area of dissemination, both in the first centuries of its expansion but also in subsequent periods of commercial, military and missionary activity, the Qurʾān interacted with numerous linguistic and literary cultures.

Qurʾān in Arabic literature

Although Arabic, as a language and a literary tradition, was quite well developed by the time of Muḥammad’s prophetic activity, it was only after the emergence of Islam, with its founding scripture in Arabic, that the language reached its utmost capacity of expression, and the literature its highest point of complexity and sophistication. Indeed, it probably is no
exaggeration to say that the Qurʾān was one of the most conspicuous forces in the making of classical and post-classical Arabic literature.

According to the Muslim scholars (both of the Qurʾān and of literature), the use of the Qurʾān in literature is to be clearly distinguished from the “imitation” of the Qurʾān, muʿārada, deemed to be beyond the capability of human beings. Comparing the two phenomena, the literary scholar al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1039) has the following to say in the theoretical introduction to the earliest and most comprehensive book on the subject, his al-Iqtibās min al-Qurʾān al-kaʾārin (Thaʿālibī, Iqtibās, i, 37-9; see also Gilliot, Un florilège coranique). He first dwells on the idea of the Qurʾān as God’s most beautiful and majestic speech (q.v.) whose revelation sent shock waves among the eloquent Arabs of the time and made them admit humbly of its superiority, of their inability to produce anything like it, and hence of its being the Prophet’s miracle — like Moses’ rod and Jesus’ ability to heal the sick and raise the dead. Understandably, he concludes, anyone who tried to imitate the Qurʾān after the spread of Islam failed; what people could do was “to borrow” from it (iqtibās, as in the book’s title). Consequently, according to al-Thaʿālibī, whereas imitation of the Qurʾān was a breach of the distinctive status of the Qurʾān and the Prophet, unfeasible and foolish, borrowing from the Qurʾān protected the Qurʾān’s and the Prophet’s distinguished status, and was therefore both feasible and wise. It adorned the litterateurs’ speech, beautified it, and made it more eloquent, elevated, and sublime. Thaʿālibī offers this as an explanation for the borrowing from the Qurʾān that was widely practiced by all involved in the various branches of literary expression, both oral and written, up until his own day.

Al-Thaʿālibī — writing in the late fourth/early eleventh century — was not only in favor of Qurʾānic borrowing in literature but also completely oblivious to the issue of its legitimacy. Before him, only two religious scholars had expressed their aversion to it: al-Hasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728; see Qalqashandī, Ṣabh, i, 190) and al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012; see Zarkashī, Burḥān, i, 483). Later, however (possibly as late as the eighth/nineteenth century), the question of the legitimacy of Qurʾānic borrowing became a subject of discussion in the works of scholars of the Qurʾān, literature, and rhetoric (see Zarkashī, Burḥān, i, 481-5; Suyūṭī, Iṣqān, i, 147-9; Qalqashandī, Ṣabh, i, 190-1; Macdonald/Bonebakker, Iqtibās, 1992). Significantly, though, almost all of these scholars noted that, with the exception of the Mālikīs, the vast majority of the scholars found Qurʾānic borrowing either permissible or commendable. While these authors themselves did not object to the principle of mixing the sacred (see sanctity and the sacred) with the profane (q.v.), they examined and regulated its suitability; there were places where such usage could be considered befitting, and hence would be acceptable (e.g. in sermons, speeches, testimonies); not unbefitting, and hence permissible (e.g. in love poetry, letters, stories); and unbefitting, and hence impermissible (e.g. in jest, vulgarity and profanity; and cf. Thaʿālibī, Iqtibās, chap. 16). In these judgments they seem to have been guided by matters of precedence and historical reality. For the scholars could not deny the numerous reports that the Prophet and some of his most venerable Companions (see companions of the Prophet) had used Qurʾānic citations in their speech/ḥadīth (see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān), as well as the fact that borrowing from the Qurʾān in literature was very widespread in the works of litterateurs, among them some of the most pious and strict religious scholars, such as al-Shāfīʿī (d. 204/820) and
All of this confirms — as is alluded to by al-Suyūṫī (d. 911/1505; Itqān, i, 147, l. 11-2) — that the theoretical discussion of the legitimacy of qur’ānic borrowing is a late phenomenon and that before that time the Qur’ān was used freely in literature.

What the scholars meant exactly by “borrowing” can be gleaned from the terms they used to describe this phenomenon. The first two terms which we encounter are rather peculiar and seemingly negative: they are sariqa, “theft or plagiarism” — as in the title of ʿAbdallāh b. Yahyā b. Kunāṣa’s (d. 207/822) now lost book, al-Kumayyī’s (d. 126/744) thefts (sariqāt) from the Qur’ān (Ibn al-Nadīm, 77/70-1/1, 155) — and ikhliṣa, “theft or misappropriation” — as in al-Hamdānī’s (d. 334/945) description of Bishr b. Abī Kubār al-Balawī’s (d. after 202/817) Qur’ān-studded letters (Hamdānī, 86). The context of these terms, however, indicates that they meant something positive like “plucking” — a kind of stealthy, unexpected appropriation of qur’ānic materials which takes the readers/listeners (pleasantly) by surprise. After the fourth/tenth century, the terms for qur’ānic borrowing become more clearly neutral and more or less standardized: istīḥāḍ, “extraction,” tadmīn, “insertion” (a word taken over from the insertion of poetry or proverbs in prose), ʿaqd (used for the Qur’ān in poetry only), also ʿistishhād, “citation,” ʿtiswāḥ/talmīḥ, “allusion,” ʿishāra, “reference,” in addition to two more words which mean “extraction”: istinbāṭ and istikhraj (Tawḥīd, Bayāʾī, i, 230; Thāʿālībī, Iṭiḥās, i, 193; Zarkashī, Burhān, 483; Qalqashandī, Sulḥ, i, 189, 194, 197, 199, 200; Suyūṭī, Itqān, i, 147; Jomāḥ, The Use of the Qurʾān, 1-2). As understood by Muslim scholars, then, qur’ānic borrowing in literature occurs when literate extract some material from the Qurʾān and insert it skillfully into their literary products in the form of citation, reference, or allusion.

The use of the Qurʾān in Arabic literature began as early as the lifetime of the Prophet, for we know that some of the new poet-converts to Islam, ʿAbdallāh b. Rawāḥa (d. 8/629), Kaʿb b. Zuhayr (d. 26/645), and Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 54/674), used it extensively in their poetry (Khan, Vom Einfluss des Qurʾāns; see Poetry and Poets). As the Islamic community expanded, this use grew conspicuously and was undertaken not only by Muslims but also by non-Muslims, like the Christian Umayyad poet al-Akhṭāl (d. 90/709) and the Sabian ʿAbbāsid prose writer Abū Hilāl al-Šābī (d. 384/994). This was unavoidable for a number of reasons: the Qurʾān was not only a powerful religious guide and companion in ritual for the believers but also an equally powerful literary text for all of the residents of the Islamic realm, believers and non-believers alike. Its text and script (see Arabic Script; Arabic Language; Collection of the Qurʾān; Codices of the Qurʾān) were standardized early enough to make it reasonably accessible even to non-native speakers of Arabic. From the earliest times, professional Qurʾān reciters roamed the empire, teaching and transmitting it (see Teaching and Preaching the Qurʾān). Teachers in the informal schools made it a primary item in their curricula; scholars established disciplines of learning to investigate each aspect of it (see Traditional Disciplines of Qurʾānic Study); and the supremacy of Arabic as the language of state, society and civilization made it practically impossible to escape its impact. Indeed, before the end of the Umayyad period (132/750), the Qurʾān was identified by the chief secretary of the central chancery, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 132/750), as the first item in the required list of studies needed by the state’s secretaries (al-Qāḍī, The
impact of the Qur’ān, many of whom became leading figures of Arabic literature for centuries to come. This idea became rooted so deeply that it was repeated by scholars over and over again (see Qalqashandi, Shīb, i, 200-1). In the sixth/twelfth century a secretary to the Fāṭimids, Ibn al-Ṣayrāfī (d. 542/1147), wrote an entire book entitled Intiḥāl al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm (as yet unpublished) in which he listed the Qur’ānic verses that could be used by the state’s secretaries in the presentation of a multitude of topics. On another level, the Qur’ān seemed to be the only — or at least, the principal — factor of stability in the early, turbulent decades of Islam, when factionalism was rampant, there were conflicts galore and it could not but become part of the Islamic experience and early history beginning with the mission of Muḥammad, and to many aspects of morality, ethics, law (see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN), theology, cosmology (q.v.) and eschatology, are, among others, themes that many litterateurs used in their work. Such themes tended to occur in some genres more than others; one encounters them most frequently, for example, in elegies, self-praise, panegyric and its opposite, satire, and above all in ascetic, Sūfī and devotional literature (see SŪFISM AND THE QUR’ĀN).

The use of the literary aspects of the Qur’ān is more difficult to categorize: it could occur anywhere, sometimes in the most unexpected places, as in a poem on wine-drinking — hardly a positive activity in Islam (Zubaidi, The impact, 328; see WINE; INTOXICANTS). Other examples collected by Zubaidi (The impact, 325, 326, 334) indicate that images in literature derived from the Qur’ān can be coined through similes and metaphors as well as Qur’ānic motifs, like the motif of exile from heaven, as in al-Farazdaq’s (d. 110/728)...

(see SLOGANS FROM THE QUR’ĀN). For not only did the Qur’ān create an entirely new linguistic corpus to express its message, it also endowed old, pre-Islamic words with new meanings and it is these meanings that took root in the language and subsequently in the literature. Again, because in Qur’ānic borrowing words can be taken out of their Qur’ānic context, there are almost limitless contexts in which they may be used.

Qur’ānic themes also occur frequently in literature. Themes pertaining to God and his power/mercy (q.v.), to the Qur’ān with its many names (see NAMES OF THE QUR’ĀN), to prophethood and the stories of various prophets and messengers, to the relation of God to humans and of humans to God with various aspects, to the human condition from the Fall onward, to the Islamic experience and early history beginning with the mission of Muḥammad, and to many aspects of morality, ethics, law (see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN), theology, cosmology (q.v.) and eschatology, are, among others, themes that many litterateurs used in their work. Such themes tended to occur in some genres more than others; one encounters them most frequently, for example, in elegies, self-praise, panegyric and its opposite, satire, and above all in ascetic, Sūfī and devotional literature (see SŪFISM AND THE QUR’ĀN).

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portrayal of himself after he had divorced his beloved wife: “She was my paradise (q.v.), from which I was exiled/Like Adam when he rebelled against his lord (q.v.; see also rebellion).”

More frequently, Qur’anic characters with powerful symbolic values [like Joseph for beauty [q.v.], Abraham for faith, Pharaoh for persistence in disbelief, and so forth; see belief and unbelief] are mentioned in literature to draw striking images of the ideas the literateur wants to communicate. The most enduring of these symbolic characters is the devil, the arch-representative of disobedience and sin (see sin, major and minor), whose image is often portrayed vividly and in great detail in political and other literature, notably by ‘Abd al-Hamīd al-Kātib [see al-Qāḍī, The impact, 304-6].

Initially, the insertion of Qur’anic material in Arabic literature happened effortlessly and without any particular purpose in mind, as manifested by the poetry of the Prophet’s contemporaries (mentioned above). With the passage of time — but still quite early — as the literate became more aware of the Qur’ān’s great potential, they drew upon it with both more consciousness and more sophistication. They began to use it out of piety, to beautify their literary products, to render them more witty, forceful and effective (particularly in sermons, speeches and political literature), or to make them more convincing to their audiences, especially when dealing with controversial issues that could benefit from divine sanction, like sectarian beliefs (see Jomaih, The use of the Qur’ān, loc. cit.). The letters of the second/eighth century prose writer Bishr al-Balawī [see below] are a shining example of the degree of sophistication and complexity that Qur’ānic borrowing reached, as we find, for example, in a letter describing his delight at the addressee’s promise to give him money, and then his despair when this promise was rescinded (al-Qāḍī, Bishr ibn Abī Kābār, 161):

… when I mentioned [my need to you], you brightened up like dawn, rejoicing as if at good news (cf. Q 80:38-9), and you promised “a fair promise” (Q 20:86). So I spent my pension on account of your brightening up, and I became liberal with my children on account of your rejoicing, and I borrowed from my friends on account of your promise. But when I came to you requesting fulfillment, you frowned and showed displeasure (cf. Q 74:22), then you turned away in pride (cf. Q 74:23). Now the money is gone, hope (q.v.) is cut off, and I have despaired of [attaining] my ambition “as the disbelievers have despaired of those who are in the graves” (Q 60:13).

The use of the Qur’ān for ideological purposes and for propaganda also occurred early due to historical circumstances and it still occurs today. Its use for social and political criticism resonates in many literary works and has lately become particularly conspicuous in modern Arabic literature, as in the politically scathing poems of the contemporary Egyptian poet Ahmad Maṭār, where one reads, for example (Lāfiṭāt, 11):

I read in the Qur’ān: “The power of Abū Lahab will perish.” (Q 111:1)
The submission media declared: “Silence is golden.” [But] I loved my poverty . . . [So] I continued to recite: “And he will perish.” (Q 111:1) “His wealth and gains will not exempt him.” (Q 111:2) My throat was confiscated, For incivility.
And the Qurʾān was confiscated,
Because it spurred me to [incite] trouble.

The way in which Qurʾānic materials were used in both poetry and prose varied greatly from one author to another and within the works of a single author, sometimes even within a single piece (see al-Qāḍī, Bishr ibn Abī Kubār, 99-109; id., The impact, 289-307). On the level of syntax, authors made changes in person (first to third, or second to third) and number (plural to singular, and vice versa). They used pronouns for Qurʾānic nouns when they needed, and replaced the nouns with verbs from the same root. A Qurʾānic definite noun could become indefinite, and a phrase in the imperative mood could be changed to the indicative if the syntax required such a modification.

Changes of Qurʾānic materials dictated by style are a little more complex and their detection requires familiarity not only with the Qurʾānic text but also with the writer’s style. If the writer tends to use parallelism in his work, he is likely to resort to amplification, where he would take, for example, a two-word Qurʾānic expression, break it up, bring a synonym for each word, then add a conjunction in the middle, thereby ending with a pair of parallel expressions. To amplification also belongs a technique called analogy, where the writer takes a Qurʾānic expression, adds to it one or more parallel expressions of his own, thereby amplifying the text analogically. Conversely, an author may also resort to reduction when brevity is the goal, as in invocations, for example. Of the techniques of reduction, one could mention coining. This consists of the creation of single-word terms that are summations of whole Qurʾānic phrases. Another technique, grammatical translation, consists of taking one or more Qurʾānic āyas of a particular mood (e.g. imperative) and then “translating” them into words (e.g. He ordered…), thereby causing the Qurʾānic statements to be reduced. On a simpler level, a writer could, for stylistic purposes,
use synonyms or antonyms for Qur'ānic words, re-arrange words and expressions in the borrowed sentences, and consciously change the length of the borrowed or added segments so as to accord with the author's preferences in musical cadence.

Finally, the use of the Qur’ān in literature also took the form of allusion or reference, whereby a writer makes incidental mention of some Qur'ānic material which is so well-known as to evoke clear and strong associations, like, for example, Abraham's fire (Q 2:68-71), Lot's wife (Q 6:66:10), Joseph's shirt (Q 12:18), Moses' rod (Q 2:60; 7:107, 117, 160; 26:32, 45, 63; 27:10; 28:31), Šāliḥ's she-camel (Q 7:73; 77; 11:64-5; 17:59; 26:155-7; 91:13-4), or the People of the Cave (ashāb al-kahf, Q 18:9-26; see men of the cave). Since this technique requires minimal accommodation from the writer and at the same time allows him optimal benefit from the Qur’ān's presence in the text, it was used very frequently in literature, particularly in poetry.

The Qur’ān is used slightly differently in Arabic poetry than in Arabic prose. This is due to two differences between poetry and prose: genre and historical origin. With the exception of the relatively recent free verse, the generic restrictions of meter and rhyme in Arabic poetry limited Qur'ānic borrowing quantitatively and qualitatively. In comparison with prose writers, who could introduce their borrowed materials by statements indicating their source (e.g. "as God, may he be exalted, said in his book..."), cite verbatim entire āyāt no matter how long, and relate in detail entire Qur'ānic narratives, poets had to limit the number of āyāt on which they could draw, cut them short except in rare instances, depend heavily on various techniques of reformulation and give precedence to allusion and reference over citation and leisurely tracing. Consequently, while a prose piece could have most of its sentences drawn from Qur'ānic materials, like many of the sermons of Ibn Nubātā (d. 374/984; see Canard, Ibn Nubātā), a poem comprised entirely of Qur'ānic references is considered a noticeable aberration and could be judged flatly as "bad" (Tha’alibī, Iṣḥāqīs, ii, 37).

Another factor in the greater latitude of Arabic prose in Qur'ānic borrowing is that, at the rise of Islam, it had shallow roots in the pre-Islamic literary tradition — in contrast with poetry, which was deeply entrenched in that tradition: the highly stylized, complex, and sophisticated poetic form, the ode (qasīda), had an extremely important social function as it reflected the Arabs' environment, activities, beliefs, and value system. Thus, when the Qur’ān became a part of the Arabs' new world, prose fell almost completely under its spell. Poetry resisted — despite the Qur'ān's hostile attitude towards pagan poets and poetry (see Q 26:224-6). This tension is particularly notable since the Qur’ān did not offer itself as a poetic work to replace the old poetic tradition but was rather an inimitable divine revelation (see Q 21:5; 37:36-7; 52:30-1; 69:40-1). As a result, the ode as a mono-rhymed, dual hemstitched form and segmented structure survived and remained, with variations, the basic form of poetic expression in Arabic literature until modern times, allowing the Qur’ān to influence its diction, themes, powerful images, motifs and symbols. Prose, on the other hand, allowed the Qur’ān to influence, in addition to the above, its very form and structure, style and rhythm, even to the point of creating new genres in it.

In the area of form, the Qur’ān generally influenced Arabic literary prose, contrary to poetry. Like each of the Qur’ān's sūras, a typical prose piece would begin with the Qur’ān-based formula "in the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate," called the basmālā (q.v.); indeed, prose
pieces lacking the basmala are considered batrā, “clipped” or “docked,” indicating imperfection. In epistolary prose — the most pervasive genre in Arabic literature until the modern period — in particular, this beginning is often followed, after naming the sender and the addressee, by another Qur’ān-based formula “I praise [before you] God other than whom there is no god,” as attested from the first/seventh century in the papyri and elsewhere (see e.g. Becker, Papyri, 58, 62, 68, 92, 96, 100).

Still another Qur’ānic formula is found at the ends of most letters: “peace be upon you,” or briefly “peace.” In a way, perhaps not unlike Qur’ānic sūras, Arabic prose displayed a great deal of formal variety within a recognizable unity. Genres as diverse as letters, treatises, testaments, sermons, invocations, and incantations exist, and works from each of these genres vary in length and complexity. Yet, each would be recognizable as a letter, treatise, testament, etc. Perhaps this is what explains a rather peculiar phenomenon in Arabic literary prose, namely that a piece of it — usually a short one — would be composed exclusively of one or more Qur’ānic verses.

On the level of structure, prose pieces often betray specific Qur’ānic influence in that they build upon a Qur’ānic concept, phrase, or word and allow those elements to dictate their structure. One example is the letters or sermons which begin with the Qur’ānic formula al-hamd li-llāh (thanks/praise be to God) or, less frequently, the almost synonymous and equally Qur’ānic subhāna lāhū (see GLORIFICATION OF GOD; Laudation). Such prose pieces tend to be cyclical in structure since each section (or cycle) begins with the same formula, followed by what God is being praised for (see ‘Abbās, ‘Abd al-Hamīd, 161-2; al-Qādi, The impact, 295-6). This kind of writing was developed in the early second/eighth century and was so distinct and potent that it was given the name taḥmīd (te deun) genre. Similarly, letters or testaments which begin with the Qur’ānic concept ūsīka bi-taqwā lāhū, “I counsel you to fear God,” tend to have a spiral structure, in the sense that they are composed of successive pieces of advice that end only when the author has completed his treatment of the virtues he wishes to advocate (see Virtues and Vices, Commanding and Forbidding). A third example consists of letters or proclamations that begin with Qur’ānic concepts and phraseology to the effect that God chose Islam to be his religion. Such prose pieces normally have a carefully constructed three-part “sequential” structure, the first of which discusses pre-Muhammadan human history, the second the mission of Muḥammad, while the third discusses the main topic of the piece.

Stylistically, the Qur’ān greatly influenced Arabic prose. It is conceivable that one of the most conspicuous features of Arabic prose, parallelism (izdiwāj), i.e. repeating one meaning in two or more phrases, goes back to Qur’ānic influence. More certainly, the fairly frequent tendency of prose writers to use antithetical pairing (tafā’alā) has its origin in the style of the Qur’ān, where opposites are often juxtaposed (e.g. good/evil; believers/non-believers). Probably even rhymed prose (sa‘j), whose use flourished in mid- and late medieval times but was never completely absent from prose in other periods, had its roots in the Qur’ān’s style, too (see Heinrichs and Ben Abdesselam, Sadji, 734-6). This matter is somewhat problematic since sa‘j was condemned by the Prophet. Because, however, this condemnation is linked to the utterances of the pre-Islamic pagan soothsayers (q.v.; kuhbān) and is thus deemed unsuitable for supplication (du‘a‘; see Wensinck, Concordance, ii, 431), its use outside this sphere was taken, in varying degrees, to be acceptable. Such was especially the case as the Qur’ān,
by example, rendered it implicitly permissible. All of the stylistic features that have been mentioned serve the musical cadence of sentences, an area in which the Qurʾān excelled, particularly at the ends of āyas.

And here, again, Arabic prose followed in the footsteps of the Qurʾān, making musical cadence a stylistic value after which it constantly strives.

Finally, there are some genres of prose whose very existence would have been inconceivable had the Qurʾān not been their guiding light, in particular that of the sermon, which is almost entirely dependent on Qurʾānic ideas, formulations and stories of ancient peoples (see generations). On another level, there are two Arabic literary works whose foundational principle lies deep in the Qurʾānic vision of the day of judgment and the fate of people in heaven or hell (see hell and hellfire); without this vision they could not have been written. These are Ibn Shuhaḍyā’s (d. 393/1003) al-Tawāḥī wa-l-zawāḥī and al-Maʿarrī’s (d. 449/1057) Risālat al-ghufrān, both of which consist of imaginary journeys undertaken by their respective authors to the afterworld where they encounter litterateurs and scholars and ask them about their salvation or about their condemnation to hellfire, in addition to discussing with them matters of art, language and literature. Al-Maʿarrī’s other work, al-Fusūl wa-l-ghufrān, must also be mentioned among the works whose raison d’être is the Qurʾān. This book, whose very title, “The book of paragraphs and endings composed as an analogy of the verses and sūras [of the Qurʾān],” speaks of its indebtedness to the Qurʾān, is an ascetical piety work devoted to the praise of God and the poet’s expression of fear of him and hope in his forgiveness (q.v.). It is actually written as an imitation of the styles of the Qurʾān. Last but not least, no study of the Qurʾān in Arabic literature is complete without a pause at the Yemeni second/eighth-century prose writer mentioned above, Bishr b. Abī Kabār al-Balawī, who was “famous for stealing/appropriating the Qurʾān” (Hamdānī, Ṣifāt, 86). Although only seventeen of his letters have survived, it is clear that the Qurʾān is the overpowering force behind them, driving them in diction, style, images, symbols, word-, phrase- and sentence-order, and in both their internal and external structures.

Indeed the Qurʾān governs the totality of each letter in its artistic imagination and internal movements, as well as its details. Indeed, at the hands of al-Balawī, the use of the Qurʾān in literature became an art unto itself.

Qurʾān in Persian literature

The Muslim conquest of Persia in the first/seventh century led to the rise of a new literature, produced in Arabic by the converts to Islam. But the Pahlavi literary tradition continued to exist and prosper. The attempt of Firdawṣī (d. 411/1020) to avoid the use of Arabic words in his Shāh-nāma, a poetical recounting of Sasanian history down to the Muslim conquest of Iran, represents the will to assert the independence of the native literary tradition rather than the rejection of Arabic literature — with the Qurʾān at its center — as an alien tradition. Nizāmī (d. 605/1209) in his romance Haft paykar, “Seven beauties,” deals with a similar theme — the life-story of the Sasanian ruler Bahram Gūr — but his work, though it draws heavily on that of Firdawṣī, contains many references and allusions to the Qurʾān.

The Qurʾān influenced Persian literature in several ways. The Qurʾānic literary feature of saj, “rhymed prose,” influenced not only the stylized prefaces and introductions that the authors wrote for their works but, in varying degrees, the general style of authors, as well. The literary genre known
as “mirrors for princes” came to include a treatment of Qur’anic themes and characters. Since study and knowledge of the Qur’an were an important part of classical Persian culture in the Islamic period and since this culture was shared between the secular and religious sectors of society, the ability, in conversation and writing, to cite appropriately from the Qur’an and to recognize such citations came to be viewed as a mark of sound general education. Reference to the Qur’an can be expected to occur in almost all genres of literature — and in almost any writer’s work. Abū Naṣr Ḥumayd b. Maṣūr Asādī (d. before 423/1034) invented the manūṣara (“debate”) poem (see DEBATE AND DISPUTATION). In one such poem (Browne, Literary history, ii, 150-2), Night and Day each claim to be superior to the other, both presenting a series of arguments, many of them based on the Qur’an. Night argues, for example, that it was at night that Muhammad departed for his heavenly journey (Q 17:1) and that it is the Night of Power (q.v.; Laylat al-Qadr), that, in the Qur’an, is deemed better than a thousand months (q.v.; Q 97:3). Day retorts that fasting (q.v.) is observed during the day (Q 2:187), that the Friday prayer (q.v.) is performed during the day (Q 62:9); and that resurrection (q.v.) will occur at daytime. ‘Umar al-Khayyām (d. before 530/1135) is not a particularly religious writer. Yet, in one of his quatrains (Rubā’iyat, 210, no. 379), he justifies wine-drinking by claiming to have found in the Qur’an a “luminous verse” on wine (bar-gird-i pēyāla āyatā raušshan ast), and, in another (ibid., no. 381), compares the wine-cup to Noah’s ark (q.v.), saying that it will save one from the storm of sorrow (jīfān-i gham, see JOY AND MISERY). To ‘Umar al-Khayyām is also attributed a satirical quatrain, quoted by Browne (Literary history, ii, 254), in which the apparently cryptic bal hum is, as Browne explains (ibid., n. 2), a reference to Q 7:179 (vs. 178 in Browne) and Q 25:46 (vs. 44 in Browne), a Qur’anic comment to the effect that a certain type of people are “like animals, or rather even more misguided.”

It is, however, in Persian mystical poetry that the influence of the Qur’an, in terms of both substance and language, is most evident. The Maṣūqī al-taṣrīf of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (513-627/1119-1230) takes its name from Q 27:16 and the birds of the story are guided in their search for their king, Simurgh, by the wise hoopoe — the bird mentioned in the same sûra (Q 27:20; ‘Aṭṭār makes use of the unmistakable wordplay on the hoopoe’s Arabic name, hudhud, and the Qur’anic concept of ḥudūd, “guidance”). Sa’dī’s Majālis-i pāngānā, “Five sessions,” are studded with Qur’anic quotations. Ḥāfız (d. 791 or 792/1389 or 1390), addressing himself, swears “by the Qur’an you have preserved in your breast” to support his claim of having written exquisite poetry (Dīwān, 280). Indeed, his poetry contains not only easily identifiable Qur’anic phrases but also subtle allusions to Qur’anic events and characters. Gar man ālāda dāmanam chi ‘ajab/hama ālam gawāh-i ’ismat-i ā’īst, “What is the wonder if my hem is soiled [i.e. if I am seen to be guilty] — the whole world bears witness to his/her innocence!” (ibid., 36) is a verse that is clear in itself but is also a powerful appropriation of a Qur’anic incident: in Q 12, the innocent Joseph is framed and Potiphar’s wife, Joseph’s would-be seducer, is allowed to go scot-free. The allusion enables Ḥāfız to imbue his verse with the ironic overtones present in the Qur’anic narration of the incident.

But it is, perhaps, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s poetry that offers the most remarkable instance of the influence of the Qur’an on Persian literature. Nicholson’s index (fihrist)
of the Qur’anic verses that have been cited by Rūmī in his Mathnawī gives some idea of the Qurʾān’s influence (Mathnawī, iv, 391-408). It is, however, not exhaustive, for Rūmī not only cites actual phrases and verses from the Qurʾān but also reworks them, gives a Persian rendition of them and makes subtle allusions to Qur’anic themes or characters. In the First Book (daftar) of the Mathnawī alone there are about two hundred explicit or implicit references to the Qurʾān, only a few of which we will note here. Emphasizing the need to surrender to God’s will, Rūmī says: ʿam-chu Ismāʿīl pīshās sar bi-nih, “Lay down your head before [i.e. obey] God like Ishmael (q.v.)” (who willingly offered to be sacrificed by Abraham at God’s behest; Mathnawī, i, 8; see q 37:102-3). In one of the stories, the hare succeeds in ensnaring the mighty lion and then rushes off to inform the other animals: sāʿī nakhchīrān dawādī an shīr-gīr/kaʿbshirū yā qawmu idh jāʾa l-bashīr, “That lion-catcher ran off to the animals, saying, ‘Good news (q.v.) for you, my people, for one bearing good tidings has come’” (Mathnawī, i, 83). Abshīrū is the greeting the people of heaven will receive (q 41:30), whereas idh jāʾa l-bashīrū evokes q 1296, wherein a harbinger informs Jacob (q.v.) in Canaan of the safety and well-being of his son Joseph in Egypt. Stressing the importance of listening over speaking, Rūmī first says that hearing is the proper path to speech and then writes an Arabic couplet, the first hemistich of which ʿadkhulū l-abyāta min abwābiḥā/wa-ṭallā l-aghīrāda fi asbābiḥā, “Enter houses by the door, and seek goals using the means proper to them”) is a slightly modified version of q 2:189, a verse criticizing certain pre-Islamic pilgrimage (q.v.) practices. Again, immortality is to be sought only through self-loss in God: kullu shayʿin ḥālīkun juz waḥ-i ʿū/chān naʿdar waḥ-i ʿū hāstī mājū,

“Everything is going to perish except his countenance; if you are not before his countenance, do not seek to have existence,” a line clearly reliant on q 28:88 (see FACE OF GOD). Rūmī keeps bringing his readers back to the Qurʾān, ensuring that their contact with the Qurʾān, whether on the level of thought or of language, is never broken. Not without reason did the poet ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/9/1492) call the Mathnawī the Qurʾān in Pahlavi.

Qurʾān in Urdu literature
Compared with Persian, Urdu is a young language, whose proper literary career did not start until the early eighteenth century. While it continued the historical legacy of the Perso-Arabic Islamic culture in India — it succeeded Persian as the court language of Mughal India — Urdu developed under certain peculiar circumstances. Unlike Persian, Urdu was strongly influenced in its formative phase by writings with a religious and moral orientation. In fact, the history of the development of Urdu as a language is closely linked with the history of Islamic reformism in India. Some of the figures in this broad reform movement whose writings contributed to the growth of Urdu as a literary language are the first translators of the Qurʾān into Urdu, Shāh Raff al-Dīn (1750-1818) and Shāh ʿAbduʾl-Qādir (1753-1813), who were sons of Shāh Wali Allāh al-Dīlawī (1703-73); Sayyid ʿAbd al-Khān (1837-98), the founder of the Aligarh Movement; Naẓīr ʿAbd al-Mâlik (1831-1912), author of several edifying novels (one of these, Tawbattuʾn-naṣīḥ, takes its title from q 66:8); and Alīf Husayn Hālī (1837-1914), author of the powerful poem Rise and ebb of Islam. The writings of these authors reflect their preoccupation with Islamic, including Qur’anic, themes and motifs. There are, of course, writers in whose works such themes
and motifs receive a deliberately pronounced emphasis, as in the poetry of the eighteenth-century mystic Khwaja Mir Dard (1721–1785), who is preoccupied with the transience of worldly existence and in the masterly prose of the twentieth-century reformist Abu al-Kalâm Āzād, who frequently cites Qur’ānic verses to support his arguments, inviting Muslims to base their thought and action on the Qur’ān.

References and allusions to the Qur’ān will, however, be encountered in all manner of Urdu literature. In Mir Ḥasan’s (d. 1786) Sihru l-hayān, “The spellbinding story,” one of the best known of the Urdu maṭhawāís, the childless king is dissuaded from becoming a hermit by his courtiers who remind him of the Qur’ānic injunction of la tagnātī, “Do not despair” (q. 39:53): “Do not despair” (q. 39:53): In a gašāda, Sawdā shower praiseworthy on a ruler, saying that, compared with him, even Solomon would be dwarfed to an ant — an allusion to the story of Solomon and the ants in q 27:18–9 (see Animal Life). In a ghazal, Ibrāhīm Dhawqī (1790–1854) says: “He who is not found to be a world-loving dog (q.v.) — the like of him will not be found among angels,” which recalls q 7:176. In another verse, he says that killing a tiger, lion or python is not as great a feat as is the killing of the nafs-i aṁmāra (the baser self that impels one to evil), to which allusion is made in q 12:53. In his poetry, Ghālib (d. 1869) makes a number of allusions to the Qur’ān, most of them playful. In one place (Dīvān, 49), he says that one like him would have withstood the impact of the divine epiphany much better than Moses (according to q 7:143, Moses fell down unconscious when, at his demand, God manifested himself on Mount Sinai; see Sinai), commenting wryly that a wine-drinker should be served only as much wine as he can take without losing his senses. He compares his dejection-filled heart to Joseph’s dungeon — a reference to q 12 (ibid., 9). One of his verses reads (ibid., 188): waraq tamām hu’u awr madh bāqī hai/safina chāhī’e is bāh-r-i be-kārīn ke lī’ē, “The sheet of paper is filled up, but there is still more praise to offer: a ship is needed to cross this boundless sea.” This is a possible allusion to q 31:27, according to which God could not be praised enough even if all the trees in the world were to become pens and all the seas were to become ink (see Writing and Writing Materials). In a few verses Ghālib cites portions of Qur’ānic verses verbatim (e.g. ibid., 74, 214).

It is, however, Muḥammad Iqbal’s (d. 1938) poetry that bears the deepest imprint of the Qur’ān; this is true of Iqbal’s Persian as well as his Urdu poetry, but only the latter will be discussed here. Many of his verses appear to be adaptations of Qur’ānic verses. For example, Iqbal describes some of the qualities of a true Muslim in the following words (Kulliyāt, 507): ho halqah-i yā-rān to bāreshān ki taraf ḥaqq narm/razm-i ḥaq-o-bātīl ho to faṣlād hai mu’min, “In the company of friends the believer is soft like silk (q.v.), but in the clash of truth and falsehood he is like steel.” This instantly brings to mind q 48:29. Alluding to q 21:68–9, according to which Abraham was thrown into the fire by the king of his time (called Nimrod [q.v.] by tradition), Iqbal points to the modern challenges to Islam, asking a question (ibid., 257): “Again there is a fire, there is Abraham’s offspring, and Nimrod, too! Is all of this meant to put someone to the test?” In a poem about Khizr (Ar. Khidr; the Islamic literary tradition gives this name to the man, referred to in q 18:65, who was sent by God to initiate Moses into some of the mysteries of the divine administration of the universe; see Khidr/Khidr), Iqbal writes (Kulliyāt, 256): kasht-e miskīn-o jān-i pāk-o dīwār-i yatīn/
The poor man’s boat, the pure soul (q.v.), and the orphan’s (see orphans) wall! Even Moses’ knowledge suffers from bewilderment before you.” Here, the first hemistich, which consists of three two-word phrases, makes a compact reference to the three uncommon incidents which are narrated in q. 18:71-82, and which a surprised Moses witnessed in the company of Khizr. Iqbal borrows or adapts from the Qur’an a large number of terms and phrases, but these terms and phrases in his works are not, as they might have been in another writer’s, embellishments, but are rather essential instruments of his thought. A full study of the impact of the Qur’an on Iqbal’s poetry is yet to be made.

Qur’an in Punjabi literature

Punjabi Sufi literature shows definite signs of the influence of the Qur’an. Addressing a wide but illiterate audience and using earthy language while drawing on scenes and events of daily life, Muslim mystics stress the need to worship God with a pure heart, live a simple, honest life, seek a wisdom higher than that found in dry books, shun empty ritualism (see Ritual and the Qur’an), abandon pride, greed and hypocrisy, and remember death and the day of judgment. These are broad Islamic themes but, in many instances, they have a definite Qur’anic basis, as a study of the works of major Sufi poets will show. In a poem, Bullhe Shâh (d. 1172/1758) wonders why people are quarreling over God when God is closer to them than their jugular vein, a clear reference to q. 50:16 (see Artery and Vein). In more than one place, Bullhe Shâh says that all one needs to study is alif, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet and the first letter of the divine name, Allah. This is a simple but dramatic way of highlighting the centrality of the doctrine of God in the Qur’an — Allah being, incidentally, the noun with the highest frequency in the Qur’an. Implying that advice and guidance will be lost on a confirmed sinner, Sultan Bâhû (d. 1103/1691) says that rain will not benefit a stony heart, which reminds one of q. 2:264; and, again, that a stone is better than a heart that is forgetful of God, an obvious reference to q. 2:74. Bâbâ Farîd (569-665/1173-1266) says that one who has been misled by Satan will not listen even if words of wisdom and good counsel were shouted at him — a statement that brings to mind q. 2:17 (possibly also q. 7:175 and 58:19). Shâh Husayn’s (d. 1002/1593) frequent references to the transient nature of the world and of worldly pleasures are Qur’anic in their spirit. In a number of instances, Punjabi Sufi poets cite short phrases from the Qur’an, either in the original Arabic or in translation. A careful reader of these poets, especially of Sultan Bâhû, cannot fail to note the influence of the Qur’an — both at the level of theme and at the level of language — on this literature.

Qur’an in Malay literature

Islam arrived in the Malay world in the fourteenth century c.e. but, notwithstanding the works of a writer like the mystic Hamza Fansuri (sixteenth-seventeenth centuries), Malay language and literature cannot be said to have been influenced by Islam or the Qur’an in the same way as were some of the other Muslim languages and literatures. Like Malay society, Malay literature emphasizes uniformity and conventionality and tends to view assertion of individualism or originality and expression of spontaneous feeling as wayward and disruptive (anonymity of authorship is typical of classical Malay literature). This emphasis limited the stock of literary themes and devices available to a writer,
who was further limited by the social context of this literature. As essentially a palace literature, a literature of patronage, Malay writers depicted mostly the lives and exploits of rulers and aristocrats. The emphasis on conventionality also restricted the scope of foreign literary influence. Accordingly, classical Malay literature, even when it was influenced by Islam, largely retained its pre-Islamic thematic repertoire and structural framework. Thus, the well-known and predominant genre of prose romance called \textit{hikayat} continued to deal with the themes of the ancient Hindu epics. Even when heroes from Muslim history were introduced or substituted in stories, they were usually cast in the roles of familiar pre-Islamic figures, the \textit{hikayat} generally receiving only an Islamic varnishing. But instances of Islamic or Qur’anic influence on \textit{hikayat} literature do exist, as suggested by such titles as \textit{Hikayat Ib\={i}s} and \textit{Hikayat nabi T\={u}saf}, and — as clearly and significantly illustrated in the \textit{Hikayat mah\={a}r\={i}ya ‘\={A}l\={i} — the employment of Qur’anic terms, phrases and invocatory expressions (see \textit{exhortations}), by the treatment of such Qur’anic themes as God’s ability to accomplish his purposes against all odds and the need for human beings to put their trust in God (\textit{see trust and patience}) and by the adaptive use of such Qur’anic stories as that of the prophet David (Q.21:8-9) or that of Jesus’ miraculous power to revive the dead (Q.3:49).

There is one other, and rather peculiar, way in which the Qur’an influenced Malay literature. Classical Malay written literature, which no less than Malay oral literature was meant to be heard rather than read, acquired certain qualities associated with oral literature. Since Malay literature, in general, had to be chanted, the tradition of Qur’an recitation, according to Sweeney (\textit{Authors and audiences}, 32), gave a “definite Islamic flavor to the chant.”

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\textit{Qur\={a}n in literature.}

\textit{Qur\={a}n in Arabic literature.}

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Load or Burden


**Liturgical Calendar** see Festivals and commemorative days

**Load or Burden**

Something carried or borne, often with difficulty. The concept of load or burden appears in the Qurʾān approximately fifty times, in several forms, conveying a range of implications that can be classified as descriptive, metaphorical (see metaphor), and morally didactic.

As a term of physical description, variants of the radical *ḥ-m-l* frequently depict the load borne by animals such as cattle, donkeys and camels ([Q 12:72; 16:7; 62:5; see camel; animal life]), as the cargo aboard ships ([Q 23:22; 40:80] or related to natural elements such as clouds laden with rain ([Q 51:2; see air and wind; nature as signs]). It also applies, usually as the verbal noun *ḥamal*, to the bearing of children ([Q 7:189; 22:2; 65:6; see also biology as the creation and stages of life]). Its usages, however, are not restricted to expressly material burdens, as, for example, angels ([see angel]) are described as supporting the weight of the heavenly throne ([Q 40:7; 69:17; see throne of god]).

As a metaphor, the Qurʾān may specify load or burden as a generalized onus, the significance of which depends on the
surrounding context. It alludes to the burdens (awzār) of war (q.v.; Q 47:4) or it contrasts two men, one who follows the straight path (see Path or Way) while the other is a burden (kall) upon his master (Q 16:76; see Slaves and Slavery; Clients and Clientage). The term īṣr which occurs more rarely, refers at one point to the load placed by God upon those who accept his covenant (q.v.; Q 3:81) and elsewhere to the load that the Prophet will lift as a yoke, to relieve those who heed his message (Q 7:157). Another passage mentions the earth (q.v.) “throwing out its burdens” (alḥqāl, Q 99:2), an apocalyptic image which al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 700/1301; Anwār, ad loc.) interprets as the tombs yielding up their dead (see DEATH AND THE DEAD; APOCALYPSE). Likewise, the Qur’ān speaks of God opening up the breast (see Heart) of Muḥammad and “removing your burden which was breaking your back” (Q 94:2-3) which appears to indicate the anxious and vulnerable circumstances Muḥammad experienced at the outset of his mission in Mecca (q.v.; see also Opposition to Muḥammad).

Finally, load or burden arises in a number of similar phrases that reflect a key teaching of the Qur’ān regarding the fundamental responsibility of each individual for his or her own moral and religious growth and integrity (see Ethics and the Qur’ān). The line “no one who carries a burden bears the load of another” occurs with slight variation six times (Q 6:164; 17:15; 24:54; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38) and in every instance it is accompanied by allusions, direct or indirect, to the day of judgment (see Last Judgment). The Tālālayn consistently offer a succinct gloss for “burden” (wāẓira) in commenting on these passages, equating it with ḍhūm or dhunab, meaning sins or faults (see Sin, Major and Minor). Likewise, they and other commentators emphasize the reference to the account-

ability of each single individual before God in the acquisition of eternal reward or punishment (see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval; Reward and Punishment; Eternity).

One instructive variant on this theme recounts an incident when disbelievers called upon believers (see Belief and Unbelief): “Follow our way; we shall carry the burden of your sins.” In response, the Qurʾān not only refutes the fallacy of this presumption on the part of the disbelievers but adds that those who lead others astray (q.v.) by such claims “will carry their own loads and other loads besides their own” (Q 29:12-3). This passage offers a qualification of the statements that limit the moral responsibility of individuals to their own behavior by indicating that leading others astray by offering to bear their burdens, will reap a penalty of the sort that renders these deceivers an extra measure of culpability in much the fashion that they themselves had suggested.

Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) notes that this doctrine of individual moral accountability echoes the Prophet’s recognition of the consequences of personal freedom in moral terms (see Freedom and Predestination), just as his statement with regard to belief was formulated in his famous final declaration: “You have your religion and I have my religion” (Q 109:6; see Faith; Religious Pluralism and the Qurʾān).

A number of ḥadīths (see Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān) elaborate upon these verses with accounts of a surprise encounter after one’s death at which each individual soul will be confronted by a set of vivid forms, one beautiful and the other repulsive, which will identify themselves as the good and evil deeds (q.v.) performed during that person’s lifetime (see also Good Deeds; Good and Evil; Record of Human Actions).

More recent schools of interpretation,
such as those represented in the twentieth century by al-Mawdūdi and Rashid Riḍā, reflecting upon these same verses, have emphasized a reformist agenda. They point out, for instance, that the logic of strictly individualized merit and retribution serves to refute many aspects of popular piety (see festivals and commemorative days). They have been especially critical of elaborate funerary and memorial rituals, including the establishment of waqf endowments in support of such tomb-centered practices as well as the cult of saints and prayerful appeals for their intercession (q.v.).

Patrick D. Gaffney

Bibliography

Lord

One who has power and authority. One of the most frequent nouns in the Qurʾān, “lord” generally refers to God but on a few occasions designates a human master. Three terms in the Qurʾān can be rendered into English as lord: ṭabīḥ, mawla and wali.

Ṭabīḥ recurs 971 times in the Qurʾān, never as an isolated word with the definite article (al-ṭabīḥ) but always as the first term in a genitive construct (i.e., the lord of the heavens and the earth), most often with a personal pronoun as suffix. Ṭabīḥ conveys not only the meanings of lord and master but also of caregiver, provider, sustainer (cf. the Arabic verb ṭabīḥ, “to be lord,” and also “to bring up, to care for”). The word is used to express the universal lordship of God (cf. q. 4:1, the lord of all humankind [al-mīs]) with special reference to his (but see gender for a discussion of the complexities of gender in Arabic grammar) creative act (“the lord of all the worlds/of the whole creation” [q.v.; ṭabīḥ al-ʿalāmin], in forty-two instances); the lord of previous prophets (“the lord of Moses [q.v.] and Aaron [q.v.],” q 7:122; 26:48; cf. 20:70; see prophets and prophethood); as well as the special relationship between the lord and the believer (“God is my lord,” q 19:36, “and Noah [q.v.] called unto his lord,” q 11:45; see belief and unbelief). When in the plural (ṭabīḥ), the term indicates gods other than the one God and the opposition between the numerous gods and the one God is emphasized (q 9:31: “they have taken their rabbis and their monks for their lords [ṭabīḥ] beside the God [min dīnī lāhī, see Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity; monasticism and monks]; and “… diverse lords… or the one God,” q 12:30; also q 3:64; cf. Quḥb, ẓilāl, 15; see polytheism and atheism).

The term ṭabīḥ with reference to a human master is found in Sūrat Yūsuf (“Joseph,” q 12). In this lively and linguistically interesting narrative of Joseph’s life (see narratives), the tension between loyalty to the human master and to the eternal lord is sustained by the consecutive use of the same term in both its meanings; Joseph (q.v.) says to the wife of his master (Potiphar): “Goodly has my master (ṭabīḥi) made my lodging” (q 12:23), with the narrative continuing “and he [Joseph] would have succumbed had he not seen a proof of his
lord’s truth (burhān rabbihi)” (q 12:24). The link is even more evident in Joseph’s own words to the king’s messenger: “Go back to your lord (rabbika, “the king”) … my lord (rabbī) [alone] has full knowledge of their [the women’s] guile” (q 12:250). Rabb as human master occurs again in q 12 with reference to the Egyptian king in q 12:41 and 42 (see Pharaoh).

The lordship and majesty of God over the whole creation are conveyed through expressions such as rabb al-ʿālamīn, as mentioned earlier, and also “the lord of the heavens (see heaven and sky) and the earth (q.v.) and what is between them” (q 26:24), “the lord of the east and the west and what is between them” (q 26:28), “the lord of the seven heavens” (q 23:86), and “the lord of the two easts and the two wests” (q 55:17). Lordship expressed through creation implies not a once and for all action but a continuous process (Quṭb, Ḥalīl, 15-7); rabb is not only the originator but also that which preserves, manages and regulates this creation (Ibn al-Qurṭub, Tafsīr, 10).

In some instances the terms rabb and Allāh are found together so as to reiterate the identity and specificity of lordship and divinity: “My lord is God” (rabbī Allāh, q 40:28), or “God is my lord” (q 3:51; 19:36; 43:64), as well as “our lord is God” (q 22:40; 46:13). Moreover, the use of rabb as lord could imply the correct relationship to be entertained between the creator and his creation, especially with the human being whose role as servant (q.v.; ʿabd) is to worship the creator (cf. q 3:51; 89:28-9; cf. Abū Hayyān, Bahī, 18; Qūnawī, Ijūz, 293). The majority of classical as well as modern exegetical (tafsīr) works (see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval; Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Early Modern and Contemporary) provide explanations for the meanings of the term rabb in the Qurʾān. Rabb describes God as master, sus-

...
preserved in the scriptures as constant reminders to the whole of humankind (see revelation and inspiration; scripture and the Qur’ān; book).

In his seminal and controversial work *The foreign vocabulary of the Qur’ān* (136-9), the scholar Arthur Jeffery believed the Qur’ānic use of the term *rabb* with reference to God to be the result of a linguistic borrowing from Aramaic or Syriac and also that the use of *rabb* to indicate “human chieffains” but also pre-Islamic gods was already attested by pre-Islamic poetry and inscriptions (ibid., 137; see foreign vocabulary). It should nevertheless be added that there is evidence of the use of *rabb* or *rabbānā* as a title to address the pre-Islamic kāhīn, “priest/officiant of sacrifices” (Fahd, *Divination*, 107-8; see soothsayers). In a 1958 article, the French Islamicist J. Chelhood, applying criteria similar to those used in biblical textual criticism, analyzed the frequency of occurrence of the terms *rabb* and *Allāh* for a tentative chronology of the Qur’ānic sūras. Chelhood noted that while the use of the term *rabb* clearly decreases in the Meccan sūras, that of *Allāh* increases considerably from the third period of Meccan sūras onwards. Such observations led Chelhood to posit some hypotheses (summarized in Böwering, *Chronology*, 329-30), which importantly link Qur’ānic language and style (see language and style of the Qur’ān) to the inner chronology of the Qur’ān (see chronology and the Qur’ān).

The Qur’ān also uses *mawlā*, “tutor, trustee, helper, ally,” carrying the connotation of protector to signify divine lordship (Q. 47:11: “God is the *mawlā* of the faithful, the unbelievers have no *mawlā*”; also Q 2:286; 3:150; 6:62; 8:40; 9:31; 22:78; 47:11; 66:2). In other instances, however, *mawlā* is clearly used in a non-religious non-divine sense to indicate a friend, an ally (Q 16:76; 19:5; 44:41). *Wali*, one of the ninety-nine divine names (see God and his attributes), occurs in several instances in lord of the sense of protector, guardian (Q. 2:257; 3:68; 4:45; 7:155; 13:11), but also of friend (Q. 5:55; 6:14; 42:9; 45:19; see friends and friendship. It is also used, often in the plural form (awliyā’), with reference to a human protector or friend (Q 3:28, 175; 4:89, 144; 5:51; etc.).

Simonetta Calderini

Bibliography


**LOT**

The prophet sent to the people of Sodom as mentioned in both the Bible and the Qur’ān. In the latter, he is attested twenty-seven times. Among the Qur’ānic stories of divine punishment (see punishment stories; chastisement and punishment), that of Lot (Lūṭ) and Sodom is second in terms of quantity to that of Noah (q.v.) and the flood. As in the Bible, it continues, in Q 11:69-83, 15:57-77, and Q 29:31-5, the story of the three angels (see angel) who visited Abraham (q.v.), announcing the birth of Isaac (q.v.), and of Abraham’s
dispute with them on the fate of Sodom (Gen 18:9). More frequently it is an independent tale, the angels playing their part as Lot’s guests: Q 7:80-4; 26:160-74; 27:54-8; 37:133-8; 34:33-7.

In many details, the story is the same as other Qur’anic tales of divine punishment: Lot was the brother (ākhū) of his people (qawm, see brother and brotherhood), a messenger (q.v.; masal, rasūl) who admonished his people to fear (q.v.) God; he demanded obedience (q.v.) and did not ask for remuneration. Like Noah, Hūd (q.v.), Sulaymān (q.v.), Moses (q.v.) and other prophets (see prophets and prophethood), he was accused of being a liar (cf. Q 3:184; see lie). His people were addicted to homosexuality (q.v.), held up travelers (see hospitality and courtesy; highway robbery), and practiced wickedness in their councils (see good and evil; sin, major and minor). In vain Lot tried to convert them, offering them his daughters for marriage (see marriage and divorce). He showed hospitality to the angels, protecting them from the obtrusiveness of his people. The evildoers (see evil deeds) tried to enter his house by force but were deprived of their eyesight by divine interference (see vision and blindness). When the inhabitants threatened to expel Lot from the city, he prayed to God for help. The angels told Lot and his family to leave the city at night, forbidding them to turn back. Punishment came at sunrise. Rain fell on the evildoers, the city was turned upside down, and stones (hijāra min sijjīl) hailed from the sky. According to other versions, the punishment was a fire, a sandstorm (hāsib) or a convulsion from the sky (rijz min al-samā’). Lot and his family were rescued but his wife remained in the city and died. She was punished because she had conspired with the sinners. Like Noah’s wife, she is an example of unbelieving wives who betrayed their husbands (Q 66:10; see women and the Qurʾān).

In Muslim folklore the story has been developed extensively from biblical and extra-biblical Jewish and Christian tradition, much of which has been included in the exegetical tradition (tafsīr; see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval). Lot’s people lived in three cities, five cities according to some, of which Sodom was the capital. It was reduced to an ugly, evil smelling lake, which is obviously the Dead Sea. God made it “a sign for those who believe” (Q 15:77; see belief and unbelief; signs; geography). The cities are called al-Mu’tahātāt because Gabriel (q.v.) tore them out of the earth, lifted them with his wing, turned them upside down, and crushed them on the ground, then stones were hurled on them. Lot’s people, men and women alike, were the first of humankind to practice homosexuality. The men were married but had unnatural intercourse with their wives. Lot did not offer them his own daughters, for as a prophet he was the father of his community, the same as Muḥammad (whose wives have been called “mothers of the believers”; cf. Q 33:6; see wives of the prophet). In Arabic, homosexuality is “lāṭiya” and unnatural intercourse of men with women is termed “minor lāṭiya” (lāṭiya ṣughrā, cf. Wensinck, Concordance, vi, 152; see sex and sexuality). According to ḥadīth (see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān), lāṭiya is forbidden on pain of death for both partners. Homosexuals will be stoned as stones killed Lot’s people (see stoning; boundaries and precepts). Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) taught that the transgressors should be thrown from a height (al-lā’ī al-lāṭiq min shāhiq), and then stoned.

Heribert Busse
Love and Affection

Feelings of personal attachment induced by kinship (q.v.) or sympathy. *Ababba* is the most used verb to express the idea of love.

The lexical field of the concept “love” has other roots, however, such as *w-d-d*, among others. The verbal noun *kabb*, “love,” is mentioned nine times in the Qurʾān. Love links humankind to God, human beings to one another and the individual to earthly life and its pleasures. As far as God’s love is concerned, it focuses on persons but also on their qualities or their actions. In fact, the human being is often split between two contradictory attachments, one capable of leading to his damnation, the other to his salvation. And thus love is not dissociated from faith (q.v.) in the relationship with God or with humankind.

God takes the initiative in this whole and his love anticipates that of human beings: “He will cause people to come whom he will love and who will love him” (Q 5:34).

This divine love appears as a pure act of election (q.v.), especially in the case of a prophet (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD) such as Moses (q.v.): “And I have projected upon you a love (mahabba) on my part” (q 20:39). Nonetheless, people attract God’s love to themselves by their works and especially by imitation of the Prophet, but there can be no pretension of loving God on their own initiative. It is said thus to the Prophet: “Say: if you truly love God, follow me, God will love you” (Q 3:31). To say that one is loved by God is, in the view of the Qurʾān, all the more unacceptable in that such a pretension is part and parcel of a certain confusion of the human and the divine (cf. Q 5:18, “The Jews and the Christians have said: We are the sons of God and his well-beloved ones” [*ahib-ba’ahu*], see JEWS AND JUDAISM; CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY).

The Qurʾān qualifies God as he who loves (al-wadīd), a name which, in the two places it occurs (Q 85:14; cf. 11:90, where the definite article is not used), is linked to the attributes of mercy (q.v) and forgiveness (q.v.). In the same way it is the “all-merciful” (al-raḥmān) who places in the hearts (see HEART) of the believers (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF) love of or attachment to him (wadd) by way of response to their faith and their works (cf. Q 19:96). If the name *al-wadīd* gives the clearest expression to the reciprocity of love between God and humans, other divine names also suggest on God’s part a form of affection comparable to that of humans: He is the good, the merciful (al-bar al-raḥim, Q 52:28), just as people are good towards their parents (q.v; cf. Q 19:14, 32; see also FAMILY). He shows compassion as does the Prophet towards the believers: “He has at heart that which you suffer, he has care
for you, for the believers, compassionate (mawṣif) and merciful” (q 9:128). This same compassion (mawṣif) can be found in the disciples (see apostle) of Jesus (q.v.), although it is not clear whether the sentiment is directed towards God or towards creatures. It is doubtlessly both, since the tender care shown to John (q.v.; Yahyā) by God (ḥanānān min lada‘nā) manifests itself in his filial piety (cf. Q 19:13, 14).

Love, in the sense of affection and compassion, thus appears as a movement by God towards humans that is reciprocated, and then a movement by a human being towards his fellow creature. The verb ahbab/yaḥyibbu often, however, indicates another type of relationship. God is said to love or not to love such conduct. Love, and its opposite, establishes from then on a law defining human actions according to the extent to which they conform or fail to conform to the divine will (see law and the Qurʾān). God loves those who act for the best (al-nuḥṣini‘, five times; see good deeds; good and evil) or the just (al-muqṣitūn, three times; see Justice and Injustice), in such a manner that whoever performs acts lovable to God attracts the divine love to himself: “those men who love to purify themselves and God loves those who purify themselves” (q 9:108). On the other hand, God does not love qualities that clash with his nor does he love types of behavior contrary to his law, such as shown by the unjust (al-żālimūn, three times) or the transgressors (al-muṭādūn, three times; see boundaries and precepts), etc.

As we shall soon see, love or friendship between human beings is not fully recognized by the Qurʾān unless confirmed by faith. It is also worth noting that the term ḥubb, in the sense of human love, is only used once with an apparently negative connotation. In q 12 (Ṣūrat Yūsuf, “Joseph”), love in all its various forms plays a complex role. Jacob’s (q.v.) preference for Joseph (q.v.) and the jealousy (see envy) of the latter’s brothers (“Joseph is more beloved [ahbab] of our father than are we,” q 12:8; see brother and brotherhood; Benjamin) are indirectly the cause of the love of the wife of al-ʿAzīz (see kings and rulers). But whether or not Joseph was sensitive to this, according to the divergent interpretations of the commentators (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval) on q 12:24 (cf. De Prémare, Joseph, 63-5), the passionate type of love that grips the heart (cf. q 12:30, qad shaḥa-fahā ḥubbān) is attributed only to women (see women and the Qurʾān). Tempted afresh, Joseph calls on divine protection against the wiles of women and states that he would prefer (ahbab) prison to his inclination for woman (ṣubba lāykhīnna, q 12:33-4). Even if subsequent tradition places (greater) value on the love between Joseph and Zulaykha, we have to recognize that it is the love of Jacob for his son that guides the story, from beginning to end. By way of contrast, the legitimate attraction felt by the daughter of Jethro (Shuʿāyḫ [q.v.]) for Moses is only barely hinted at (cf. q 28:25-6). This also applies to the Prophet’s attraction for Zaynab (q 33:4; see wives of the prophet), another instance which illustrates how little attention the Qurʾān devotes to the love of a man for a woman or that of a woman for a man. In q 33 (Ṣūrat al-ʿAzhāb, “The Clans”), despite an entire passage being devoted to the Prophet’s spouses, marital love is only alluded to in the command given to the Prophet to ensure that his wives experience joy (see joy and misery) and satisfaction (cf. q 33:51). Several verses recall that in the beginning man and woman were a unique entity which marriage implicitly aims to re-establish (see marriage and divorce). Developing this idea, however, one verse qualifies the love between spouses as one of those mysteries of cre-
ation (q.v.) which lead to knowledge of God (see knowledge and learning):

“Among his signs (q.v.) he has created for you, out of your very souls (see soul), spouses so that you may find rest in them and he has placed between you love

(mawadda) and mercy. Surely there are in that signs for people who reflect” (q 30:21).

Seen from this vantage point, the happiness obtained by or for wives and by the descendants issuing from this happiness is expressed by a term

(qurrat a-yun, “the freshness of the eyes”) that emphasizes its paradisiacal nature (compare q 25:74 and 33:31 with q 32:17; see paradise). As a whole, the passages in q 2 (Sūrat al-Baqara, “The Cow”) and q 4 (Sūrat al-Nisā’, “Women”) that relate to marriage deal with the relationships between spouses in terms that are too legal to suggest bonds of love or affection. The reciprocal attraction between the future spouses is simply suggested in connection with re-marriage or a proposal of marriage (q 2:232, 233), or with reference to the equality to be observed between the spouses (q 4:129).

As the commentators emphasize in their interpretation of these latter verses, equality cannot relate to love that man cannot control. A further Qur’ānic image of spouses is found in q 2:187, in which the pair are portrayed as garments for each other (see clothing).

The passages giving strong expression to the love between God and humans or between spouses thus occur infrequently in the Qur’ān. The term ḥubb (and verbal derivatives of b-b-b such as ḥabba) is used much more often for that which occupies the human heart first and foremost, passion and worldly goods: “and you devote to material goods a terrible love” (q 89:20; see wealth). Humans are inevitably pushed to the desire for things and persons rather than to the things or persons themselves: “Embellished for people is the love of desires, the desire of women, of children, of massed quintals of gold (q.v.) and silver, thoroughbred horses, flocks and crops. That is the joy of the life here below, but being with God is an excellent return” (q 3:14). The opposition between the love of things and the return to God is contained in an element of the Qur’ānic discourse that places faith in opposition to other attitudes (such as hypocrisy or disbelief; see hypocrites and hypocrisy). Thus the love of God is opposed to the worst of sins (see sin, major and minor):

“There are people who choose, outside of God, rivals whom they love as the love of God, but the believers have a stronger love for God (ashadda ḥabban illāhi, q 2:165).

In the same way that human beings are naturally born towards sensual desires, “it is God who has made you love (ḥabba) the faith and has embellished it in your hearts and has made you detest (karraha) impiety, prevarication (see lie) and disobedience” (q.v.; q 49:7). Humanity thus finds itself split between two incompatible loves: the one that leads to faith and conformity with the divine will, and the other, which brings one to the nether world (cf. q 2:216; see hell and hellfire). The close link between faith and love also conditions love between human beings. One can only truly love believers, since love for unbelievers separates one from God and attracts one towards this world: “You will not find people who believe in God and the last day (see last judgment) and who [also] show their friendship (yawvidān, see friends and friendship) towards those opposed to God and to the one he has sent” (q 58:22). Here friendship (mawadda) links up again with the concept of walīya, “friendship, alliance, attachment” (see contracts and alliances). Adopting unbelievers as friends or allies (wali, pl. awliyā) is equivalent to lining up on the side of the enemies (q.v.) of God (cf. q 60:1). God alone can
turn this hostility into friendship. But meanwhile one can show goodness and justice towards the unbelievers on condition that they show no hostility towards Islam (cf. Q 60:7-8). It is one of the duties incumbent on the one who calls on God to bring about the transformation of the enemy into a close friend (sawtī hamīm, cf. Q 41:34). In the same way, the relationships with the People of the Book (q.v.) are defined in terms of friendship and hostility. They cannot be adopted as awliyāʾ (cf. Q 5:51). A distinction is made, however, between the Jews and the Christians, “closer in friendship (aqrabahum mawaddatan) to the believers” (Q 5:82). True friendship thus rests on faith and a shared expectation of the world to come (see eschatology), so much so that on the day of the resurrection (q.v.) the unbelievers will find themselves without “a close friend” (sadiq hamīm, cf. Q 26:101; also Q 40:18; 70:10). It is in this kind of eschatological context that the Prophet appeals to love or friendship for one’s relatives (al-mawaddat fi l-qurba, Q 42:23). Al-Tabarī (d. 310/923; Tafsīr, xxv, 157) lists four different interpretations of this expression, while showing preference for the first: 1) the Qurayshites (see Quraysh) are invited to love the Prophet because of his kinship with all the clans of his tribe; 2) the believers should love the close kin of the Prophet (see family of the Prophet); 3) they must love God in approaching him through their works; 4) they should also love their own kin. From an historical point of view the first two interpretations could, respectively, correspond to the Meccan and Medinan phases of the revelation (see chronology and the Qurʾān; occasions of revelation; revelation and inspiration), while the second two minimize the importance of the love of the Prophet’s family, the People of the House (q.v.; ahl al-bayt), Taken overall, these abundant commentaries show the many possible directions of love in the Qurʾān: love of God confirmed by works, love of the Prophet and his kin, love for one’s own kin, which, in a sense, implies the whole body of believers, as is also said of the wilāya (cf. Q 5:55; see community and society in the Qurʾān). The presence of God, the source and finality of all things, gives direction to the entire discourse of the Qurʾān: love and friendship can only come from God and lead back to him. The loving relationship between man and woman is disregarded except on this condition. The ideal wives are called qawmītān, obedient and devoted, both to God and to their husbands (cf. Tabarī, Tafsīr, viii, 294, on the subject of Q 4:34). In the Qurʾān only the love and friendship of God extend beyond the limits of this world.

The few passages in the Qurʾān dealing with love have scarcely encouraged authors to extract from the Qurʾān the fundamentals of divine and human love. Traces of the affective side of love are found mainly in the sunna (q.v.; see also Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān). The Sūfīs themselves (see Sūfism and the Qurʾān), when quoting verses such as Q 2:165 or Q 5:54, are more likely to express their love for God in terms of the Arabic tradition, poetic and private. In his Ḥaqīq al-tafsīr, al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) is more preoccupied with bringing together the statements concerning love made by the spiritual masters than he is with commenting on Q 3:31. A commentator such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210; Tafsīr, iv, 204-8) gives an outline of a theory of love based on Q 2:165. But Ibn al-Arabi (d. 638/1240) in his al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya (ii, 327-32; Gloton, Traité, 69-92) has especially illuminated the foundations of the metaphysical doctrine of love found in the Qurʾān. Yet—unless the present writer is mistaken—it seems that no author has attempted a synthesis of all the passages
in the Qurʾān dealing with love and its associated concepts.

Denis Gril

Bibliography

Lowly see Oppressed on Earth, the

Loyalty

Being true to anyone to whom one owes fidelity. The idea or concept of “loyalty” occurs discursively in the Qurʾān and is dispersed under a variety of rubrics. Even though there is no single term that specifically deals with the theme of “loyalty,” it nevertheless features in the discussions and exegesis of a number of verses (see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval). The concept is most frequently encountered in relation to “pacts of mutual assistance” (mawālid, see Contracts and Alliances; Breaking Trusts and Contracts) and other formations of the Arabic root ṭ-l-y, whose basic meaning is “friend/ally” (wali, see Friends and Friendship). In an eschatological context (see Eschatology), on the day of judgment (see Last Judgment), those who are consigned to hell (q.v.; see also Reward and Punishment) are said to have no “bosom” or “close” — i.e. “loyal” — friend (hāmil, e.g. Q 69:35; yadīq, Q 26:101) or intercessor (see Intercession). The notions conveyed by terms like “friend,” “close” and “ally” normally, however, occur as adjectives in the Qurʾān and are therefore not exact equivalents of the English noun, “loyalty.” Loyalty is not explicitly defined in the commentaries but it is frequently described and illustrated contextually. Two kinds of loyalty are discernable from various Qurʾān passages: (1) corporate loyalty that demands a commitment to the community of faith (q.v.; see also Community and Society in the Qurʾān) and (2) individual loyalty displayed towards fellow Muslims as well as to non-Muslims, a phenomenon that is more ambiguous and complex (see Ethics and the Qurʾān). Corporate loyalty is framed by those passages of the Qurʾān that regulate the relationship between believers and unbelievers as well as those verses that define the covenantal relationship between the Muslim and God (see Belief and Unbelief; Covenant). The Qurʾānic narrative unmistakably implies that inter-human conduct — irrespective of whether it occurs within the confessional community of Muslims or with outsiders — is largely contingent on the relationship between humans and God.

This theistic dimension casts its shadow on the themes of loyalty and friendship. Thus, the believers who fulfill God’s will are clearly identified with God’s cause and his people (see Path or Way). Any partisanship and association with those who reject God’s will shall have castigatory consequences depending on the extent to which such links are offensive to God and the cause of righteousness on earth. Showing affection or displaying dislike to any human being ought to be exclusively for the sake of God (al-ḥabb lillāh wa-l-bughd lillāh), a phrase frequently cited by commentators as a saying attributed to the Prophet (see Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān). Thus, the God of the Qurʾān mediates the
most intimate bonds of friendship, confidence, privacy and loyalty (see trust and patience).

Explicit traces of Islam’s founding history (see history and the Qur’an; occasions of revelation) are evident in Qur’anic narratives (q.v.) and norms that structure the notions of friendship and loyalty. The Qur’anic narrative reflects the vagaries of the intense inter-communal relationships between believers on the one hand, and polytheists, Jews and Christians on the other; as the nascent community of believers became a sizeable political entity in Medina (q.v.; see also Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity; polytheism and atheism). Initially, Qur’anic pronouncements meticulously regulate the political relationships, but the moralizing discourse that colors these identities gradually grows and intensifies (see politics and the Qur’an; religious pluralism and the Qur’an).

Prior to the normative influence of Islam (q.v.) in Arabia, alliances customarily were based on grounds of kinship (q.v.; nasab) while military and political strength depended on one’s choice of political friends or allies (wali, pl. awliyya; see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’an). The increasing hostilities between the Muslims and their Meccan opponents, exacerbated by the support of the Medinan Jews for Muḥammad’s enemies (q.v.) correlate directly with the Qur’ān’s prohibition and restriction of corporate loyalty and mutual help pacts (muwāldāt) between Muslims and non-Muslims (see opposition to Muḥammad).

Verses in seven different passages repeatedly stress the fact that believers ought not to take unbelievers as their allies (Q 3:28; 4:89, 139, 144; cf. 5:51, 57, 80-1).

In one instance even the People of the Book (q.v.; Jews and Christians in this case), towards whom the Qur’ān generally shows deference, are deplored as potential partners in alliance since they are alleged to have loyalties with each other and they are suspected of harboring vengeful enmity towards the Muslim community (Q 5:51). In fact, the rhetoric becomes so intense that the verse even goes on to assert that those Muslims who transgress this prohibition and form such alliances are deemed to “be part of them,” namely one of the Jews or Christians, a severe rejection that equates the identity of the offender with the ideological “other.” The Qur’ān specifically prohibits loyalty treaties with non-Muslim parties when the latter are favored “in preference to believers” (min dīnī l-μu′minīn, Q 3:28). In other words, if alliances with non-believers turn out to harm the interests of fellow Muslims then they are outlawed as a matter of principle. Only expediency (taqiyya, see dissimulation) permits the continuation of loyalty treaties with unbelievers, especially if breaking such treaties would pose a genuine threat to the welfare and safety of Muslims.

Nevertheless, the Qur’ān does permit Muslims to show kindness as well as to exhibit virtuous conduct and justice to those non-Muslims who are not engaged in active hostility towards them (Q 60:8-9). While this passage has general implications, and could easily be viewed as also sanctioning corporate loyalty across religious boundaries, many commentators only permit its interpretation as reference to individual and private loyalty. Again, such relationships are subject to the caveat that they do not harm the general welfare of Muslims. Q 5:52 also reinforces the theme of individual loyalty found in Q 60:8-9. It, however, forcefully plays off loyalties based on kinship against loyalties based on faith. Q 5:52 deems it unimaginable that one can show “love” (q.v.) to
someone who is related by blood and kinship ties but who contests and disputes the divine message and prophecy (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). The inference is clear: bonds of faith outweighloyalties based on family and kinship ties. Even though he is said to have lied three times (cf. Gilliot, Trois mensonges), the prophet Abraham (q.v.; Ibrāhīm) is cast as the paragon of loyalty toward the divine as in q 53:37. Abraham’s willingness to fulfill (waaffā) his commitments to God, including his readiness to sacrifice (q.v.) his son (cf. q 37:99-111) and his disavowal of his father’s idolatry (cf. q 6:74-84; see IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS), turns him into God’s loyal friend (q 4:125; see ḤANĪF). In q 2:40 the Children of Israel (q.v.) are reminded of their duty to fulfill their part of the covenant (wa-aṣfū bi’-ʿabī ʿif bi-ʿahdikum) as a sign of loyalty to God. Fulfillment (ffāh) of promises, contracts and agreements are crucial supplements to the Qur’ān’s covenant-based worldview (see OATHS). There is also an isomorphic relationship between secular and cosmological loyalties because it is presumed that one who has a sound creed (see CREEDS) would also be better equipped ethically to fulfill worldly commitments and contractual obligations.

Some pre-modern and modern exegetes (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: EARLY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY) are confronted by two major interpretative questions with regard to the exegesis of loyalty. Firstly, controversy exists about whether q 60:8-9, which permits relations with non-hostile unbelievers, is abrogated by the later revelation of q 9:5 (known as the “verse of the sword”; see ARBARGATION; FIGHTING). The latter abrogates all agreements and treaties that Muhammad had with non-Muslim political entities and fosters an uncompromising hostility towards all unbelievers. Secondly, if q 60:8-9 is not abrogated, then does it sanction the tolerance of personal and individual loyalty across religious boundaries as opposed to the prohibition of corporate loyalty of a political nature?

The Persian exegete al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) argues that q 3:28 decisively prohibits believers from taking unbelievers (kuffār) as their “helpers (aʾwānā), protectors (aṣār) and partisans (ẓāhirīn).” Taking non-Muslims as protectors in preference to believers, he adds, is tantamount to affirming their religion, thereby strengthening the false beliefs of the enemy against those of the Muslims (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr iii, 228). Even though believers are admonished not to make pacts that favor unbelievers in “preference to fellow believers,” most exegetes deem it acceptable to maintain strategic loyalties for the purpose of survival. In the view of a number of commentators, the struggle of belief against unbelief is a permanent one and thus there is an — albeit implicit — general rule that prohibits loyalty pacts. Therefore, al-Ṭabarī views the act of a Muslim displaying loyalty to non-Muslims to be an extremely displeasing and a hostile act against God, his Prophet and the believers at large. And any Muslim who shows loyalty to Jews and Christians, he goes on to say, has “declared war on the people of faith” (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, vi, 276).

Interestingly, the Shiʿi exegete al-Ṭabarṣī (d. ca. 552/1157; see SHIISM AND THE QUR’ĀN) understands the Qur’ān’s prohibition against alliances and friendships with non-Muslims to be for reasons of power. Seeking alliances and loyalty pacts with non-Muslims is tantamount to seeking a position of invincibility with those whose faith is unacceptable to God. Such alliances undermine the believers’ faith in God and affect God’s estimation of their
beliefs (Ṭabarṣī, Majma, vi, 261). The terms “Jews” and “Christians” generically represent all classes of unbelievers, towards whom hostility is obligatory and thus friendship and loyalty with them is, implicitly, outlawed (Ṭabarṣī, Majma, vi, 119).

Al-Ṭabarṣī treats unbelief in an almost undifferentiated manner, because he maintains that all non-Muslims have “a single hand against the Muslims.” He also believes that the summons to show virtuous and equitable treatment of non-Muslims in Q 60:8-9 was abrogated by the “verse of the sword.” He concedes, though, that Q 60:8-9 allowed some Muslims during the Prophet’s time to interact with their non-Muslim relatives who did not actively show hostility to Muslims. This specific verse permits loyalty affiliations with non-Muslims with whom Muslims have treaties, says al-Ṭabarṣī, citing a general consensus that permits the demonstration of kindness to persons deemed to be subjects of the “territory of war” (q.v.; dār al-ḥarb).

The Andalusian exegete al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) declares with unequivoal finality that unbelievers, Jews as well as those Muslims who espouse heretical tendencies (see heresy), cannot be treated as friends and relied upon as loyal intimates (Jāmi, iv, 178). He believes that Q 3:118 strictly forbade believers to take as loyal confidants (ḥitāna) a person from another religion. “Every person,” he adds, “who is contrary to your way of life (madhhab) and religion (dīn), [surely] there is no need for you to converse with him.” He goes so far as to say that appointing “protected persons” (ahl al-dhimma) as agents in transactions or as clerks and secretaries in government is not permissible. In his jeremiad he rails against the “ignorant and stupid governors and princes” of his day who had ignored the Qur’ān’s teachings on these matters (Qurṭubī, Jāmi, iv, 179).

Al-Qurṭubī’s vehemence stems from the prohibition found in Q 5:51 that severs loyalty pacts (muwālāt) with unbelievers, a command he claims will remain in force “till the day of judgment” (Qurṭubī, Jāmi, vi, 217). He went so far as to disallow the employment of non-Muslims even in instances that might be beneficial to the religion of Islam (Qurṭubī, Jāmi, v, 416). Al-Qurṭubī’s antipathy for alliances and interactions with non-Muslims was most likely fuelled by the common perception among the Muslim religious classes of his day that the rulers of his native Andalusia had capitulated to Christian political influences and had endangered the suzerainty of Islam in the Iberian peninsula.

For the modern revivalist commentator Sayyid Qurṭb (d. 1966), the verses examined above suggest the impossibility of inter-religious political co-existence. For him, the Qurʾān mandates the “total isolation” of Muslims from other ideological communities (Qurṭb, Ẓīdāl, ii, 907). Employing a Qurʾānic idiom, Qurṭb says that Muslims are the only group that can legitimately be called “the party of God” (ḥizb Allāh) as a model for universal moral rectitude (see parties and factions). Among world-views, he attributes this separatist understanding as unique to Islam, for it necessarily and inevitably anticipates an ideological confrontation with the anti-Islamic mores and norms of non-Muslim societies at large. This separatist imperative, in his view, makes it impossible for Muslims to give political loyalty to any other ideological group since doing so would be tantamount to apostasy (q.v.). Islam’s tolerance for the People of the Book should not be confused with an endorsement of loyalty pacts. Qurṭb argues that modern history — especially the history of colonialism, and the creation of the state of Israel that resulted in the dispos-
session and expulsion of the Palestinians from their native land — was achieved as a result of a hostile Christian and Jewish collusion. He saw this as conclusive proof that loyalty to such religious communities could be nothing but an anathema to Muslim sensibilities (Qūṭb, ḥilāl, ii, 907-17; id., Ma‘ālim, passim).

In his commentary on Q 60:8-9, Qūṭb retreats from his earlier position, which was absolutely against loyalty pacts across religious boundaries. Here he concedes that God permits “mutual friendly relations” (maqvadda) on an individual level towards those non-Muslims who do not show aggression towards Muslims. While reiterating the ban on loyalty pacts, he implicitly concedes that pacts may be possible with friendly non-Muslim entities (Qūṭb, ḥilāl, vi [xxviii], 3544). His rhetoric becomes conciliatory by arguing that Islam is a dogma (‘aqīda) of love and it has no interest in conflict if there is no hostility directed at Muslims.

The Pakistani ideologue S. Abū ‘Alā Maudūdī (d. 1979) interprets the verses that deal with loyalty pacts in a functional manner. For him they serve as a reminder to Muslims not to become instruments in the service of enemies who, in the end, will undermine their existential interests. While Maudūdī’s tone, unlike that of Qūṭb, is subdued, he also argues that the Qur’ān prohibits friendship with hostile non-Muslims and taking them into confidence, while recommending kind and just treatment for those non-Muslims who do not demonstrate active enmity towards Muslims (Maudūdī, Message, ii, 19).

Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), the Austrian-born convert and Qur’ān commentator, states that the verses prohibiting loyalty pacts with non-Muslims cover both political and moral alliances. His interpretation is that those who deny the truth of the divine message are precluded from being real friends to believers in a corporate sense, while not ruling out friendship between individuals of different religions (Asad, Message, 252-3, n. 82). The Qur’ān, however, permits corporate loyalty pacts with those non-Muslims who are well disposed towards them (Asad, Message, 155, n. 73).

From this brief and select sample of exegetical materials it becomes apparent that the notion of loyalty is framed within the evolving narrative of the Qur’ān’s discourses on the construction of the Muslim individual and corporate “self” in the mirror of the non-Muslim “other.” Genuine loyalty can only occur among those who are ideologically of one’s own kind, according to some Muslim exegetes.

Most early commentators follow a strict chronological hermeneutic. One sees therefore an initial tolerance for loyalty based on kinship being gradually supplanted by a loyalty based on faith as the pax-Islamica grows in Arabia. Corporate inter-faith loyalty, in turn, can only occur under certain limited conditions, while there is some leeway for Muslims to maintain individual loyalties across the boundaries of faith. Theism and bonds of faith ultimately mediate loyalty. Loyalty to a fellow-believer reinforces one’s belief in a common God which, in turn, creates a notion of community that transcends kinship and ethnicity.

Ebrahim Moosa

Bibliography
Secondary: C. Gilliot, Les trois mensonges d’Abraham dans la tradition interprétante
Luqmān

A personage whom the Qurʾān notes for his wisdom. Only q 31, the sūra bearing his name, mentions this wise man, and it devotes eight of its thirty-four verses (q 31:12-19) to Luqmān’s wisdom (q.v.). At the time of Muhammad, the Arabs may have known two Luqmāns: one, the son of Ād (q.v.), renowned for intelligence, leadership, knowledge, eloquence and subtlety (Heller, Luqmān, 81; see Knowledge and Learning); the other, Luqmān the Sage (al-ḥakim), famous for his wise pronouncements and proverbs (see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān). The latter — if these two are not in fact one — appears in q 31.

Luqmān’s identity, however, is by no means certain. Muslim interpreters (see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval) identify him as a Nubian, an Ethiopian or an Egyptian slave who worked as a carpenter or a shepherd. Some others place him among the Hebrews as the nephew of Job (q.v.), the son of Bāʾūrāʾ, son of Nāḥūr, son of Tāriḥ, the father of Abraham (q.v.; Ibrāhīm) who lived long enough to provide knowledge for David (q.v.; Dāʾūd) the king. The majority of interpreters agree that he was not a prophet and not an Arab (see Prophets and Prophethood; Arabs). Orientalists (see Post-Enlightenment Academic Study of the Qurʾān) have associated Luqmān with such figures as Prometheus, Lucian and Solomon (q.v.). He is identified with the biblical Baalam (= Ibn Bāʾūrāʾ), partly because the Hebrew bālaʿ and the Arabic laqima both meaning “to swallow.”

The modern commentator al-Qāsimī (d. 1914; see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Early Modern and Contemporary) also mentions this connection. Because his admonition, “lower your voice; for the harshest of sounds... is the braying of the ass” (q 31:19), finds a counterpart in the Syriac sayings of Aliqār, Luqmān has also been identified with that legendary sage (see Syriac and the Qurʾān). Finally, the contemporary scholar Mahmud Muftic shows that the Luqmān of the Qurʾān can be identified with the Greek physician and Pythagorean philosopher Alcmaeon (571-497 B.C.E.), a position also assumed by some Orientalists. Their names are clearly similar and the extant fragments of Alcmaeon’s writing exhibit a striking similarity to the teachings of q 31. Muftic finds in this sūra a physicians’ oath that he thinks is superior to the oath of Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.E.; cf. Muftic, Which oath?; see Medicine and the Qurʾān).

Two themes occurring prominently in the Luqmān section of q 31 provide coherence for the sūra: (1) the greatness of the one God (see God and His Attributes) and the necessity of worshipping him exclusively and (2) the importance of being good to parents (q.v.) within the limits of a higher allegiance to God. Luqmān models ideal parenthood, instructing his son in a life of gratitude and exclusive worship (q.v.) of God (q 31:12, 13; see Gratitude and ingratitude; Children; Family). The striking shift from Luqmān’s voice to God’s voice in verses 14 and 15 focuses the reader’s attention on the commands in the verses: be good (see Good and Evil) to parents; show gratitude to God and to them; and obey them unless they require worship of something other than God (see Obedience). The sūra closes with a warning: neither parent nor child can help each other on the day of judgment (q 31:33; see
LAST JUDGMENT; INTERCESSION. A final verse stresses the greatness of God (q 31:34). Whatever his more specific identity may have been, Luqmān stands out in the Qurʾān as a wise parent, exhorting his son to grateful worship of God, grateful obedience to his parents, personal piety (q.v.) and communal responsibility (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QURʾĀN).

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Bibliography


LAST  see VIRTUES AND VICES, COMMANDING AND FORBIDDING; DESIRE; SEX AND SEXUALITY

Lūṭ  see LOT
Madness  see insanity
Madyan  see midian

Magians

Originally a term for the professional priesthood of the pre-Islamic religious institution in Iran, in qur’ānic usage it is presumably a term for all followers of that religion. The Arabic term translated as “Magians,” (al-majūs) is attested once at Q 22:17, a late Medinan sūra (see chronology and the qur’ān), where the list Jews (see jews and judaism), Christians (see christians and christianity) and Sabians (q.v.) attested in Q 2:62, now also includes them. The etymology and history of the term and the question whether the Magians are People of the Book (Q.v.) are the two large issues raised by this single attestation.

The old Persian magus as the title for a professional priestly tribe is well attested in surrounding languages, Akkadian, Armenian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, Sanskrit and presumably old Sinitic (see foreign vocabulary). These religious professionals appear to have traveled far beyond Iranian held lands. Their religious aura seems to have been widely recognized but they also played administrative, military and commercial roles. In the Sasanian dynasty a wider array of titles were used within the priestly bureaucracy but the special status of the title in its middle Persian forms survived. The older term, however, also was widely circulated, presumably because of the prominent Christian mention of the Magi in the birth stories of Jesus. It likely passed into Arabic through Syriac (see syriac and the qur’ān; arabic language). Early Muslim commentators do not limit the term to professional priests and describe the Magians as worshippers of the sun (q.v.), an interpretation also attested in Sanskrit sources. Later commentators recognize that fire (Q.v.) is the stereotypical object of worship by the Magians. The fire-cult is the hallmark of the Magian tradition for later heresiographers and in Islamic literature, especially within the Persianate context (see persian literature and the qur’ān).

The enumeration of apparently six forms of religion in Q 22:17 has been the primary focus of commentary (see exegesis of the qur’ān: classical and medieval). The text lists believers, Jews, Sabians, Christians, Magians and those who associate
something else with God (see polytheism and atheism; belief and unbelief; god and his attributes). Debate on this and other passages has focused on the status of the intermediate four traditions. Are they to be classed with the believers or the associators or are they in an intermediate position (see faith)? While some have argued that there is only one true and five false religions here mentioned, the bulk of the tradition either recognizes that at least some members of the four named traditions are to be classed with the believers or the traditions themselves are the so-called religions of the book in addition to Islam (q.v.; see also religion; religious pluralism and the Qurʾān). Whether the Magians were to be included among the People of the Book (q.v.) was debated since it appeared that the religion lacked a prophet (see prophets and prophethood) and a scripture (see book), and there was also significant theological controversy concerning their identity as monotheists and their doctrine of the creation (q.v.) and the power of evil (see good and evil; theology and the Qurʾān).

Apologists worked hard to counter these charges and to argue that they belonged in the category of religions of the book. The story of Alexander the Great’s (q.v.) destruction of the original scripture became prominent and the attempts already made by the Sasanians to organize the remaining written tradition were consolidated. The legend of Zoroaster was remolded to present him along the lines of Islamic prophethood. In general, Islamic authorities have granted them partial status as a People of the Book (see law and the Qurʾān). Interestingly, Muslim authorities have also recognized the affinity that exists between the Magian priest and the Islamic judge, exercising a political and judicial role that depended on the close cooperation of religious functionary and ruler, a Persian ideal that became central to Islamic notions of the state (see kings and rulers; politics and the Qurʾān).

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**Bibliography**


**Magic**

The art which claims to produce effects by the assistance of supernatural beings or by a mastery of secret forces in nature. The contrast between the rational and the irrational, of supreme importance to the human being, even in the present day, suggests the question: “Is magic credible?” The Qurʾān replies in the affirmative, both when speaking about magic — describing its deeds and consequences — as well as by concluding with two apotropaic sūras, which are often regarded as protective talismans (see popular and talismanic uses of the Qurʾān), and thus confirmations of magic. To this could be added the various hadiths of the Prophet (see hadith and the Qurʾān) in which something like magic is spoken of (see divination; foretelling; gambling), or enchanting magical acts that affect the Prophet himself are described. Despite this apparent credibility of magic, it should be understood that normative Islam does not conceive of or admit to the existence of powers other than those of God (see power and impotence), or to a belief that one can accept help from anyone or anything other than God (see
BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM). Magic, therefore, is depicted as a distorted appropriation of fideistic values, wrongly understood or poorly expressed by demons, as the Qur’ān itself states numerous times.

In this, the religion of the pre-Islamic Arabs, who made sacrifices to the gods and the forces of nature, and who trusted magic without, however, experiencing the necessity of believing in a future life (see FATE; DESTINY; SACRIFICE; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR’ĀN) is totally different from the religion of Islam. I would therefore assert that the hypothesis, put forward by various scholars (Chelhod, Introduction; id., L’arabie du sud, for example), that Islam might derive from religions present in pre-Islamic Arabia should be rejected (see AGE OF IGNORANCE; SOUTH ARABIA, RELIGION IN PRE-ISLAMIC).

The Arabic word used for magic, ṣīhr (from s-h-r), can be understood in both a restrictive and an expansive sense. The word appears twenty-eight times in the Qur’ān (q 2:102; 5:110; 6:7; 7:116; 10:76, 77, 81; 11:7; 20:57; 58, 63, 66, 71, 73; 21:3: 26:35, 49; 27:13; 28:36, 48; 34:43; 37:15; 43:39; 46:7; 52:15; 54:2; 61:6; 74:24). Ṣīhr literally means “enchantment” and etymologically the word seems to indicate that type of seduction which affects a hypnotized person. It can also mean a circumlocation of an exaggeratedly rhetorical nature (thus one speaks of beautiful words giving rise to enchantment). The great theologian Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) defined magic as something that passes (ṣarf) from its true nature (ḥaqiqā) or from its natural form (ṣūra) to something else, something that is unreal, or merely an appearance (khayāl).

From the root s-h-r is derived the Qur’ānic word for “witch” (ṣāhīra or saḥāhā; masc. saḥhār); the infinitive verbal form saḥara indicates “to bewitch, to fascinate”; the wizard or conjurer is termed saḥḥār, or sāḥīr (some other Arabic terms for those who deal in magic, which do not occur in the Qur’ān, are silʿāt, “sorceress,” and qaṭrūbī, “wizard”). The Persian magu (Gk. magos) was used by the Zoroastrian priests, and furnished the term majūs in Arabic, where it continued to indicate the Zoroastrian priests. It is in this same form that we find the word in the Qur’ān, used to specify the very same Zoroastrian priests (q 22:17; see MAGIANS). To denote an astrologer, or fortune-teller, we have the word kāhin, from the triliteral root k-h-n. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the kāhin very closely resembled the figure of a priest (the term can be linked to the Hebrew kōhēn, which, for the most part, carries the meaning of “priest”). From the same root is derived the verbal noun kahānā, “premonition and prophecy,” and kahanah, “predicting the future” (q 32:29: “Therefore, take heed [fa-dhakkir] because, by the grace of your lord, you are neither a fortune-teller [kāhin] nor possessed [majnūn]”; see LIE; INSANITY). But in pre-Islamic Arabia, it is very possible that the “prophetess” (or sibyl, kāhinah) played the more important role, with her male counterpart, the kāhin, as ʿarrāf (deriving from ʿirāf: having a knowledge of invisible things and future events), being relegated to the function of relocating lost or stolen objects (see GENDER; PATRIARCHY).

As they pronounced their oracles in rhymed prose (q.v.; saj), the kāhīnān were considered poets (shāʾī, pl. shuʿārā; see POETRY AND POETS), with whom they were often confused in pre-Islamic Arabia. The verbal polemics among the Arab tribes of this period, occasioned by major feast days (see FESTIVALS AND COMMEMORATIVE DAYS), large markets (q.v.), or great pilgrimages (see PILGRIMAGE), were famous. Each of these tribes was guided by a judge (ḥākam, hākim, see JUDGMENT; JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE) who was often a poet fortune-
teller. Such poets would praise the feats of war (q.v.), the power and the honor (q.v.) of the tribe (see TUBES AND CLANS), countering the self-praise of his opponents. Such contests for precedence and glory (muqâkharât, munâjârât) generated a large body of poetic literature which has been the subject of study and authentication.

Various kuhhâân enter the legends surrounding Muhammad, as for example the magician Sañfîh, who is said to have lived six centuries and, after having predicted the advent of Islam, died on the very same day in which the Prophet was born. The Qur’ân, which more than once alludes to the accusations that Muñhammad engaged in “magic,” attests to the fact that the Prophet himself was called sâhîr and mashaâ’i, “bewitched,” and even “poet” in the fortune-teller sense of the word (Q 10:2; 11:7; 21:2-3; 25:7-8; 34:43-7; 37:14-5; 38:4; 43:30-1; 46:7; 52:29-30; 54:2; 69:38-43; see OPPOSITION TO MUHAMMAD; POLEMICAL LANGUAGE). Walîd b. Mughîrâ, one of the richest idol worshipers (see IDOLS AND IMAGES; IDOLATRY AND IDOLATORS) of Mecca (q.v.), was heard saying, upon hearing the Prophet: “In all this, I find only borrowed magic.”

Despite the Qur’ânic and Islamic denunciation, even renunciation, of magic, there are two main currents of “magic” in the Islamic world: that found in the Mediterranean region and that of central Asia. The first, based upon an ancient philosophical heritage, evinces the fruits of the indestructible Mesopotamian teachings of astrology; of numerology (q.v.), and talismanic arts (of which the Babylonians and the Chaldeans were perhaps the greatest inventors). Also evident here is an Egyptian influence (particularly in reference to Hermes Trismegistus, Ar. Hirâm al-muthâl-thâth bi-l-hikma), as well as the legacy of King Solomon (q.v.), the incontestable founding figure of great magicians. The second current gathers elements from Shamanism, Taoism and Hinduism, all of which are very rich in magicians, magical arts and magical texts. Whereas the Mediterranean culture gave rise to numerous theories and practices which penetrated European countries via various forms of translation (in particular that of alchemy, al-kimiyâ), the central Asiatic culture gave birth to great currents of mystic thought. This “mysticism” was studied by various Sûfî orders (see SÚFISM AND THE QUR’ÁN), especially in some orders (târuq sing. tariqa) of the Hurûfiyya, the Bektashiyya and the Miṣriyya, wherein it was adapted to the charisma of the particular order.

Let us now turn our attention to the last two sûras of the Qur’ân, Q 113 Sûrat al-Falaq, “The Oncoming Dawn,” or “The Crack”; al-falaq being the moment of separation between day and night) and Q 114 Sûrat al-Nâs, “Humankind”), which are known as the mu’aawwadhitân, “the two seekers of refuge.” Popular Muslim practice holds that by reciting them one is saved from curses through the search of a divine protector. According to the traditional Muslim chronology of revelation (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION), they are, respectively, the twentieth and the twenty-first sûras (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’ÁN). As they were revealed in Mecca (q.v.), they are considered to be among the most ancient. The “darkness” (q.v.; ghâsîq) mentioned in the third verse of Q 113 (“from the evil of darkness as it spreads”) is, according to the commentators, not evil in itself but a favorable moment for the propagation of evil, of malicious deeds (see EVIL DEEDS), of criminal acts (see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR), of the actions of demons and sorcerers (see GOOD AND EVIL; NIGHT AND DAY). This is linked to the belief that the influence of magic was more easily diffused during the night. The fourth verse of the same sûra (“and from the evil
of the women who blow on knots”) refers

to the blowing upon knots made in the

proper fashion (i.e. tied nine or eleven
times), a magical practice much in use in

Semitic circles, above all Canaanite, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Hebrew, but also

found in many tribes of central Asia. It was

particularly popular in Jewish circles,

despite its rigid prohibition in the Pentateuch (Deut 18:9-14; regarding this, one

may turn to Gen 44:5; Lev 19:31; Num

22:7-11; Ezek 21:26-8, etc.; see JEWs AND

JUDAISM). An allusion to this practice is

found in the Sumerian MAqlū (The Burnt

Tables), where we read: “His knot is open,

his witchcraft has been cancelled, and his

spells now fill the desert.” The blowing

itself, the bad breath and the spit, are con-

sidered an enemy’s curse. Along these

lines, Babylonian writings define an “evil

one” as “the one with an evil face, mouth,
tongue, eye, lip, and saliva.”

Well-known in Arabia long before the

advent of Islam, these knots were used to

tie good and evil forces in equal measure.

As he left his house, an Arab would tie a

knot around a branch of a hedge. If upon

his return he discovered that the knot had

been undone, he understood that his wife

had betrayed him (see ADULTERY AND

FORNICATION). A similar practice is fol-

lowed today in the oases of the Sahara

desert, where healers make eleven knots in

a red or black woolen thread, reciting at

each knot the appropriate invocations in a

soft voice. They then wrap the thread

around the head of anyone who wishes to

be healed of eye discomfort.

Muslim tradition mentions a particular

situation of this in relation to Muhammad.

A sorcerer had made eleven knots in a

rope, reciting spell-like formulas in order to
do harm to the Prophet, who then became

ill. He returned to normal health only after

having recited Q 113 and 114 eleven times.

Q 113 relates above all to the evil spells used

against one’s physical state, against the

healthy body, protecting it against that

which could render turbid one’s psyche,
soul, and serenity (see ILLNESS AND

HEALTH). It is believed to save one from the

psychic disturbances inserted in human

mortals by Satan (that occult persuader;

see DEVIL), whether through demons (see

JINN) or through other evil humans (see

ENEMIES; for further discussion of the use

of Q 113 and 114 as imprecations for deliv-
erance from evil, see Graham, Beyond, 109).

The very first sûra of the Qur’ān, Sūrat

al-Fātiḥa (“The Opening,” see FĀTIHA)
is also considered a talisman of great

potency. According to the traditional chro-
nology, it is the fifth sûra revealed to the

Prophet at Mecca (in the year 610 or 611).

All of the letters of the Arabic alphabet

(see ARABIC SCRIPT; ARABIC LANGUAGE)

are contained therein, except seven (f, j, sh,
th, z, kh, z). These seven letters came to be
called “the missing letters of Sūrat al-

Fātiḥa” (sawāqi al-fātiḥa, cf. Mandel Khān,
L’alfabeto arabo, 177). Those who fashion tal-

ismons consider these letters rich in magi-
cal virtue and thus often use them in their

charms.

The three sûras mentioned above were,

for many centuries, used as talismans, writ-
ten on pieces of paper and carried on one’s

person or enclosed in a specially shaped

case. These cases were often made of silver

(q.v.) and had an oblong shape, frequently

in hexagonal sections. From the ninth/
fifteenth century onwards, the cases were

often made from hard stone and no longer

had an inner space to enclose writings,

thereby becoming imitations of the origi-

nal case. Nevertheless, these cases became,
in themselves, a sort of luck charm, even

when they no longer contained verses from

the Qur’ān (see EPIGRAPHY AND THE

QUR’ĀN).
In addition to the above-mentioned verses, which are held to be the most effective, other verses, of an apotropaic nature, were used to ward off danger. For example, in the Qur'an, a short verse known as “the tunic of arms,” or “the iron-shirted tunic,” was carried into battle by soldiers, in the hope of avoiding the enemy’s blows. Soldiers also made use of a short verse (q.v.) named “Black Wednesday.” The months of the Muslim calendar; see calendar, halfway moon were notoriously unlucky, and nicknamed “Black Wednesday.” The months (q.v.) that were considered to be totally unlucky were — always in the Muslim calendar — the first month of the year, Muharram, and the second, Safar. Islamic astrologers used 41:36-7 to support their belief that, according to the days of the week and the position of the stars (see planets and stars), human beings experience lucky days and unfavorable days, as reported in full detail by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210; Taṣfīḥ, xxvii, 113).

Two Qur’anic prophets have long been associated with the realm of magic and the esoteric: Moses (q.v.) and Solomon. Narratives about Moses (Mūsā) may be found, with variations and repetitions, in Suras 2, 5, 7, 10, 18, 20 and 28, in addition to brief mention in other passages. In Qur’an 20:56-70, the Qur’an touches upon his “magic contest,” in which, with the help of God, he is victorious over the magicians of Pharaoh (q.v.). Qur’an 18:60-82 is understood to allude to another magical episode involving Moses, which post-Qur’anic tradition describes as having taken place on a journey in search of the fountain “of eternal youth.” Qur’an 2:101-2 and its reference to Solomon (Sulaymān) is of particular importance because it speaks of the probable origins of magic on the earth. This was due to Hārūt and Mārūt, hung by their feet in the well of the Temple of Astarte in Babylon. According to a Hebrew legend, also present in the pre-Islamic milieu, Hārūt and Mārūt were two angels, condemned by God to live upon earth because they had become infatuated with a woman (cf. Thalābī, Qīsas, 43-7 for an Islamic version of this story; see HĀRŪT AND MĀRŪT for further [Islamic and pre-Islamic] details on these figures). In the Hebrew environment, this brings to mind the “sons of Elohim,” who loved the daughters of man and the fallen angel, masters of magic.

Al-Baydawī (d. ca. 716/1316-7), using his concise and terse style, dedicates an entire page of his commentary to Hārūt and Mārūt, while al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), in his Kāshshāf, devotes a page and a half. Even longer sections are to be found in the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī (see exegesis of the Qur’an: classical and medieval). These commentators discuss another “magical” allusion in the Qur’an, one found in Qur’an 15:16-8; 37:6-10; 67:5 and 72:8-9: these passages recount how demons sometimes push forward towards the limits of a celestial judicial assembly, listen to what the angels and the blessed are saying, and then descend to earth to treacherously whisper...
what they have heard to magicians and sorcerers.

In the short verses of q̲ 27:17; 34:12-4; and 38:34-40, the Qur‘ān speaks repeatedly of Solomon, and of the magical powers which God bestowed upon him, offering him the aid of jinn. Narratives such as these contributed to the legends found in later European sources, in which Solomon appears as a great magician, endowed with a supernatural power over demons, the forces of nature and animals (see Animal Life). He perfectly understood all their languages (see Mandel Khān, Solomon [in addition to Solomon] for further discussion of the powers of this Qur‘ānic figure). According to such tales, he even wrote magic procedures in various books, which he then had buried under his throne (or inserted into its base) and these books would one day be re-discovered, at least in part, and spread about by ordinary magicians.

Hadīths also speak widely of magic. Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī (cf. Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 75:33) makes specific reference in a hadīth to the protective value of the recitation of the Fātiha used as an act of exorcism. Al-Awād b. Zayd remarked that he questioned ʿĀisha (see „ʾIshā bint ʿAbī Bakr“) about the use of magic as a cure for poisonous animal bites and she answered:

“The Prophet authorizes its use against every sort of poisonous animal” (Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 76:37).

Also, according to ʿĀisha, the Prophet was able to perform exorcisms while invoking God (Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 76:38, 2). According to a Companion of Muḥammad, Abū Qatādā (see Companions of the Prophet), the Prophet stated: “Our good dreams (see dreams and sleep; foretelling) come from God, and the bad ones from the demonic. When one of you has a bad dream, breathe three times once you are awake, and recite the talismanic sūras that protect us from evil, and your dream will not cause you any harm” (Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 76:39, 1). An evil eye launched against the Prophet was also described in detail by ʿĀisha (Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, 76:47).

On the basis of the magic accepted by the Qur‘ān and hadīth, there arose a series of eminent Islamic scholars, essayists, and authors of treatises upon specialized subjects of magic, some of whom were magicians themselves. Many books were written about the topic from a sociological or a psychological point of view. More popular works were composed about how to construct talismans, lucky charms, or an evil eye to circulate among people, using either praiseworthy “white” magic (al-tariqa al-madmūda) or blameworthy “black” magic (al-tariqa al-madmūma). The following are only the principal figures from this myriad of authors: In the third/ninth century there were Abū Ḥabdallāḥ Jābīr b. Ḥayyān, a Ṣūfī alchemist and magician known as Geber in Europe, and Dhū l-Nūn Abū l-Fayḍ al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861), a great Ṣūfī master. Later came Ibn al-Nadīm Muḥammad b. Ishāq, author of the Fihrist (ll. fourth/tenth cent.), Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) one of the greatest Ṣūfī and Muslim theologians, and Abū l-Qāsim Maslama b. ʿAbd al-Majīdī (d. 398/1007), known in Europe as “pseudo Pira-trix” (the “pseudo Hippocrates”) who, along with Ibn Wahshiyya (ll. prob. fourth/tenth cent.), was very well known in the occidental world, and from whose books “the secret alphabets” and the symbols used by alchemists were taken. In the sixth/twelfth century, one can count the famous theologian and exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, whose studies are of exemplary balance, and Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), of whose works manuscripts abound (cf. Dietrich, al-Būnī). Of paramount importance is the first sociologist of Islam, the historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/
1406), who in his writings dealt fully with magic and talismans. In the present day, both Yūsuf al-Hindī and Muḥammad al-Afghānistānī of Cairo have written much and gathered a large amount of information related to curses and evil spells as well as lucky charms.

Reading the texts of the many Muslims who busied themselves with magic, both of the authors cited here, and of many others, it becomes apparent that, in practice, the topic is subdivided into different fields: 1) the "science of letters," letters divided into the quadrants of fire, air, earth, and water (see cosmology; nature as signs); 2) the "mysterious letters" (q.v.) of the Qurān which open some sūras, and those "missing" in the first sūra; 3) the value of numbers; 4) the power of the ninety-nine exceptional and indescribable name-attributes of God (see God and His Attributes), in particular that of the secret name, the hundredth, to perform miracles; 5) the use of the names of demons in invocations related to black magic.

We also observe the construction and utilization of magical quadrants such as lucky charms for protection from the evil eye or as reinforcements in exorcisms. The culmination of this science is the production of lucky charms and talismans, for which the following are utilized: 1) texts from the Qurān; 2) the hand motif (khamsa, the five fingers), called "the hand of Fājīma" in the West (for one example, see Figure x of epigraphy); 3) vegetative and related materials; 4) animal motifs; 5) hard, precious stones (see metals and minerals); and 6) tattooing.

Some scholars have seen a relation between knowledge of these values and those necessary for the spiritual evolution of the mystic of Islam, the Šiʿī, who nears a greater comprehension of God by rising to the seven levels of spiritual evolution, symbolized by: 1) sound (see hearing and deafness); 2) light (q.v.); 3) number (geometry, construction, subdivision of luminosity; see measurement; numbers and enumeration); 4) a letter (the secret meanings of names, grammatical constructions; see grammar and the Qurān); 5) word (dhikr, the recitation of the ninety-nine names of God, or the recitation of the Qurān [q.v.]); 6) symbol (see metaphor; simile); 7) rhythm and symmetry.

One can note in summation that while the Qurān counters the human tendency to ascribe divinity, or divine attributes, to various supernatural beings, it does not deny the existence of such beings. Rather, while recognizing the human need to come to terms with the intangible — be it through dreams, fables or magic — the primary message of the Qurān is the affirmation of the submission of all of creation — visible and invisible — to the one God. See also Soothsayers.

Gabriel Mandel Khān

Bibliography


Magog  see gog and magog

Maidens  see modesty; virtue; sex and sexuality; hours

Maintenance and Upkeep

Preservation and repair of property, or, more commonly in the Qur’ān, the care for one’s dependents. In Islamic law, nafaqā indicates the obligation to maintain one’s dependents (see guardianship). The Qur’ān uses nafaqā of expenditures in general, even those against Islam at q 8:36. It is enjoined by q 2:215-6 for the benefit of parents (q.v.), relatives (see kinship), orphans (q.v.), the poor (see poverty and the poor) and wayfarers (see journey; similarly q 17:26; 30:38). Repeated injunctions to do good to one’s parents (wālidayn iḥsānan) have also been taken to require their maintenance (q 4:36; 6:151; 17:23; 46:15). q 2:240 calls for the maintenance of the widow (q.v.) for a year, apparently from the man’s estate. q 25:67 indicates that they do best whose expenditures are neither excessive nor stingy. In the context of divorce, finally, q 65:6-7 enjoins husbands to allow their wives to live where they themselves do and not to be hard on them if they are pregnant (see marriage and divorce).

Later Islamic law (see law and the Qur’ān) lays out the duty of maintenance in specific terms, which have the advantage of being more or less enforceable by temporal authority but necessarily lack the generous, free character of the Qur’ānic injunctions. Jurisprudents agree that zakāt covers one’s duty of maintenance toward non-relatives (see almsgiving; community and society in the Qur’ān). The duty of maintenance is laid especially on men but also, with reference to q 2:233 and 6:57, on women toward their children (see women and the Qur’ān; birth). Maintenance specifically includes food (see food and drink), clothing (q.v.), shelter (see house, domestic and divine) and the provision of a servant (q.v.) if the beneficiary’s social status requires it (see also slaves and slavery; social relations). For men, it may also include ’īfāf, the provision of a licit sexual partner (see concubines; sex and sexuality). Partly on the basis of q 2:219, wives claim maintenance before parents or children, for they provide reciprocal favors. If a husband refuses to maintain his wife, she may ask the religious judge (qādī) to dissolve the marriage. Jurisprudents disagree over the relatives to whom one owes nafaqā, the Mālikīs going so far as to require maintenance of parents and children alone. See also wealth.

Christopher Melchert

Bibliography

Majesty see God and His Attributes
Majūs see Magians
Male see Gender
Malice see Enemies
Malikīs (Mālikī) see Law and the Qurʾān
Manāt see Idols and Images
Manna see Moses; Food and Drink
Manners see Hospitality and Courtesy
Manslaughter see Murder; Bloodshed

Manual Labor

Literally “work with one’s hands,” it often carries the implication of strenuous physical exertion. Manual labor is not a topic explicitly addressed in the Qurʾān though the term “forced laborer” (ṣukhrī) is mentioned once and the Qurʾān describes some of the ancient prophets (see Prophets and Prophethood) as having been able to achieve prominence by using forced and voluntary labor in great building projects (see Art and Architecture and the Qurʾān; Archaeology and the Qurʾān).

The Qurʾān states that it is God who “raises some to levels above others so that some of them compel others to work for them” (Q 43:32; see Social Interactions; Social Relations; Community and Society in the Qurʾān). The point of this verse is not to justify forced labor. Rather, it is to deny that this kind of worldly power, although permitted by God, is an indication of God’s favor (see Blessing; Grace; Kings and Rulers; Politics and the Qurʾān; Power and Impotence; Authority). Accompanying verses state that even though Muhammad was not the most successful man in Mecca (q.v.) or Medina (q.v.), God nonetheless chose him as his prophet. In Q 43:32, “the mercy (q.v.) of your lord (q.v.) is better than what they amass,” the last term is understood as a reference to wealth (q.v.) and worldly success.

The Qurʾānic description of Solomon (q.v.) regally commanding labor from jinn (q.v.) and satans (Q 21:82; 34:12-3; see Devil), perhaps as a form of punishment (‘ʿidḥāḥ, Q 34:14; see Chastisement and Punishment), contrasts sharply with the humble image he and other prophets assume in early Islamic literature. Only Moses (q.v.) is explicitly stated in the Qurʾān to have done work requiring physical strength (Q 28:26). Nevertheless, the “stories of the prophets” (qisas al-anbiyāʾ) relate that all the prophets practiced a trade. Books on economics (q.v.) also discuss the professions of the prophets: a work attributed to al-Shaybānī (d. 189/804) relates that Solomon wove baskets, Noah (q.v.) was a carpenter and Idrīs (q.v.) was a tailor (Shaybānī, Kashr, 76).

The significance of the attribution of humble labor to the prophets can perhaps best be discerned in the story that David (q.v.) — who is described in the Qurʾān only as having been “taught by God” how to forge iron (Q 21:80) and that God “made iron soft for him” (Q 34:10; see Metals and Minerals) — actually worked the iron with his own hands in order to support himself after having been criticized for “eating from the state treasury” (Shaybānī, Kashr, 77). This echoes the criticism leveled against the Umayyad caliphs for drawing from the state treasury for all their
expenses, in contrast to the “rightly guided caliphs” who are said to have tried to support themselves (see Caliph).

Similarly, a group of early Şüfi s (see Şûfi sm and the Qur’ân) is criticized for refusing to earn a living, preferring to live on charity (see Almsgiving). The obligation to earn a living (al-kasb, al-iktisâb) is particularly advocated by scholars like Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241/855) who criticize any dependence on the support of corrupt governments (see Law and the Qur’ân). To avoid forbidden earnings it may be necessary to engage in manual labor, these scholars argue, using examples of the prophets and Companions (see Companions of the Prophet) to support their position that there is nothing inherently dishonorable in manual labor (Mattson, Believing slave, 220). Indeed, argues al-Shaybâni (Kâsh, 73), Muslims could not fulfill their ritual obligations (see Ritual and the Qur’ân; Ritual Purity) if, among other things, some people did not make jars to carry water for ablution (see Cleanliness and Ablution) and others did not weave clothes to cover the body for prayer (q.v.).

The issue of the honor (q.v.) or dishonor of manual labor is not prominent in the Qur’ân despite the great importance this issue assumes in the corpus of hadith and early anti-Şûfi polemics (see Hadîth and the Qur’ân). Similarly, the Qur’ân does not discuss the effect a woman’s status will have on whether she is required to perform household chores, although this is an important legal issue in early Islam (Mattson, Believing slave, 192). The Qur’ân indicates that status differences based on family and tribal affiliation (see Kinship; Tribes and Clans) were generally more important at the rise of Islam than considerations of profession. No doubt this can be attributed to the fact that the Hijâz at the rise of Islam was not as well developed as the urban centers of the Fertile Crescent, where sharp divisions of labor and hereditary professions were important aspects of society (see Geography; City; Bedouin; Iraq; Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ân).

The issue of honor aside, early Muslim scholars admitted that it was generally difficult and tiring to earn a living. According to some commentators, one of the worst consequences of being removed from paradise (q.v.) for Adam (see Adam and Eve) was that he subsequently had to exhaust himself earning a living (Shaybânî, Kâsh, 75). The Qur’ân indicates that one of the rewards of paradise will be freedom from having to engage in tiring work (al-naşib, Q 35:35; see also Maintenance and Upkeep).

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Bibliography

Manuscripts of the Qur’ân

Within the handwritten heritage of the Islamic world (see Orthography; Arabic Script), the Qur’ân occupies by far the most conspicuous place — at least in terms of sheer volume. Until the present day, copyists, amateurs as well as professionals, have devoted much time and effort to transcribing the revealed text by hand. It is therefore no wonder that the topic “manuscripts of the Qur’ân” should cover a wide variety of cases: Qur’âns are found in one volume (mushaf, q.v.) or sets (rab’ā) from two to sixty volumes but also as excerpts, usu-
ally connected with prayers (see prayer).
In all these cases, the manuscripts take the form of a codex, that is a book made up of one or many quires obtained by folding together a varying number of sheets of parchment, paper or perhaps also papyrus. Qurʾāns are also found on other materials, like wood or textile, and in other formats, rolls or sheets, for instance, both being used as talismans. The following article will focus solely on the manuscripts in codex form. It should, however, be noted that the study of these manuscripts is unevenly developed: some aspects like illumination (see ornamentation and illumination) or calligraphy (q.v.) have already been well investigated while others, e.g. the early written transmission of the text, still await comprehensive studies. The bulk of the material, manuscripts without illumination or in more ordinary hands of later periods, have not even been examined or catalogued in spite of their importance for the study of a wide range of subjects, from popular piety to the diffusion of the book in the Islamic lands.

Modern printed editions (see printing of the Qurʾān) tend to reproduce the features of “classical” Qurʾāns — including even the catchwords — which were prevalent during past centuries. Yet, before this “classical” form was attained, the Qurʾānic manuscripts underwent many changes, at a rather rapid pace, during the first centuries of Islam. As a consequence, this article will devote a great deal of attention to the early period, since it witnessed many variations and reforms and paved the way for the modern Qurʾānic codex.

Pre-ʿUthmānic manuscripts
The first “manuscripts” are only known through the reports of early Muslim scholars. According to their sources, the text was initially written on shoulder blades from camels (for a later example, see Fig. 111 of Fāṭihah), flat stones or pieces of leather during the Prophet’s lifetime in order to preserve the revelations as they came (see occasions of revelation). Even if the concept of “book” (q.v.; kitāb) was already familiar to the first Muslim community, there is no evidence that any codex with the text of the revelation was available before Muḥammad’s death (see codices of the Qurʾān). Such a format is closed and therefore ill-adapted to a situation in which the Qurʾān was still receiving additions. The heterogeneous materials mentioned in the Muslim tradition suggest that these amounted to notes meant for private use, and hence quite different from a text which has been “published” in a sense close to the modern use.

Be that as it may, nothing from these early notes has been preserved — another argument supporting the idea that they were not considered manuscripts in the full sense of the word — and the later development of the Qurʾānic codex left all these materials completely aside (see collection of the Qurʾān). Shoulder blades with Qurʾānic excerpts are known from later periods, but do not correspond to any attempt to have had the whole text recorded in that fashion. According to one Christian source, early Muslims did write the text of the Qurʾān on scrolls, in imitation of the Jewish Torah (q.v.; al-Kindī, Risāla). Here again, though, no material evidence has survived that would substantiate that claim; the parchment rolls with Qurʾānic text published by S. Ory are rotuli and not volumina like the Torah.

Some time before the sixth/twelfth century, ancient copies of the Qurʾān gained the reputation of having been written by ʿUthmān (q.v.) or ʿAlī (see ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib) or other prominent figures of early Islam: in some cases, as in Cordoba, the text in question contained only a few pages, while in Damascus, an entire copy
of such a Qurān was kept in the Great Mosque (al-Harawi, Kitāb al-Ishārāt, 15; Ş. al-Munajjid, Études, 45-60). Judging from the manuscripts that have survived, the attribution is often based on a note by a later hand but sometimes a colophon does seem to lend support to this claim. Ş. al-Munajjid has attempted to counter such claims, maintaining that the material involved is later, dating mainly from the third/ninth century (see for instance Topkapı Sarayı Museum, TKS At, or Türk İslâm Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 458 — both in Istanbul). Additionally, the above-mentioned colophons sometimes contain gross mistakes (in Istanbul, one example is found at the Topkapı Sarayı Museum, TKS Y 745; the copyist is supposed to be ‘Alī b. Abī [sic] Tālib; his name is written at a right angle to the normal disposition of the text). Original expressions of worship developed around these relics: in Cordoba, two servants took the bound volume with the leaves from a treasury in the Great Mosque; a third man, carrying a candle, walked in front of them. They all went to the place where the imām (q.v.) stood for prayer in order to lay the volume on a Qurān stand (al-Maqqarī, Naḥf, i, 360; see RITUAL AND THE QUR’ĀN). A. Grohmann has compiled a list of dated early Qur’ānic manuscripts (Problem, 216 n. 17): the oldest dates from 94/712-3 but this Qurān has never been published and there is considerable doubt about it. Qur’ānic palimpsests have also been said to antedate the ‘Uthmānic edition (Mingana and Lewis, Leaves).

The Hijāzī and Unayyad codices
The earliest Qurān manuscripts and fragments do not contradict the information provided by the Islamic sources about the “edition” of an official recension of the Qurān by the third caliph, ‘Uthmān (r. 23-35/644-56). Attempts to assign codex fragments to an earlier period have not been conclusive: the palimpsests published by A. Mingana and A. Lewis are certainly among the earliest fragments preserved, but nothing indicates that they necessarily predate many others. The same also holds for the two palimpsests sold at an auction in 1992. The oldest text on both is written in the so-called “Hijāzī” script, a designation coined by M. Amari in the middle of the nineteenth century — he spoke of “écriture du Hijāzī” — on the basis of Ibn al-Nadīm’s (d. ca. 385/995) description of the earliest Arabic scripts:

The first of the Arab scripts was the script of Makkah, the next of al-Madinah, then of al-Baṣrah, and then of al-Kūfah. For the alifs of the scripts of Makkah and al-Madinah there is a turning of the hand to the right and lengthening of the strokes, one form having a slight slant (trans. B. Dodge).

The study of the early Qurān manuscripts and fragments in the Paris collection enabled Amari to identify those fragments that demonstrated the various features noted by Ibn al-Nadīm. Unfortunately, his work has remained largely ignored, and research on these documents did not advance significantly until N. Abbott’s contribution to the subject (Rise of north Arabic script). The methodical publication in facsimile of these early Qur’āns was begun in 1998 (cf. Déroche and Noseda [eds.], Sources de la transmission du texte coranique).

The name of the script — Hijāzī — (like the designation “Kūfic”) does not mean that these manuscripts were transcribed in the Hijāz. The bulk of the material presently known comes from three repositories of old Qur’ānic codices, in Damascus, Fustāṭ and Ṣanʿā. (The present locations of these codices also cannot be taken as a conclusive argument as to their origin,
which remains for the moment uncertain.) On the other hand, the fact that the collection in Qayrawān does not contain such material only has the value of an argument e silentio. A preliminary survey shows that the script varies widely — as if the peculiarities of the individual hands were of little concern to the scribes, the patrons or the readers. This diversity might be ascribed to regional habits, but this does not satisfactorily explain why, in manuscripts written by more than one scribe from the same region, the hands of the various copyists are so different from one another that they can be recognized at first glance (e.g. Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 328a f. 28a and b [for f. 28a see Fig. 1], or Dār al-Makhtūtāt, inv. no. 01-211). A common standard concerning the script had probably not yet developed, and it would thus be safer to speak of Ḥijāzī style, rather than Ḥijāzī script. For the sake of convenience, we shall use here the designation of Ḥijāzī codex.

The dating of this material relies mainly on paleographic arguments: slant and shape of the alif, elongation of the shafts, but also the similarities with the script of the earliest papyri as pointed out by M. Amari and later by A. Grohmann. So far, no direct evidence — for instance, a colophon — has been found. One could perhaps expect confirmation from a Carbon 14 analysis of the parchment, but, since the geographic provenience is not clear, such results could only be taken as an indication of its age. The dating to the second half of the first/seventh century can therefore only be tentative, and future research might throw light on the chronology of the Ḥijāzī codices. The defective writing of the alif/qala instead of qāla being the best known instance) adds weight, however, to the early dating of these manuscripts and fragments, some of which count the basmāla (q.v.) as a verse (see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 328a). With the exception of these peculiarities, most of the manuscripts currently known are very close to the canonical text. Some fragments of Ḥijāzī codices found in Ṣan`ā’ are said to include some textual variants which were not recorded by later literature (see Readings of the Qurʾān), and to offer an order of the sūras differing from the arrangements of both the canonical text and the codices of Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy (Puin, Observations, 111; see Form and Structure of the Qurʾān).

In these Ḥijāzī codices [of Ṣan`ā’], the script is slender and regularly spread out on the page. The spaces between characters, regardless of whether the said character is part of a word or not, are always identical; as a consequence, words can be divided at the end of a line. Clusters of dots show the ends of verses but groups of five or ten verses do not seem initially to have been singled out. Vowels are not recorded and diacritical dots are used in varying degrees by the copyists; when two or more copied a text together, they do not appear to have agreed on common rules but dotted the letters according to their own habits (compare for instance Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 328a f. 7b and 38a). The number of lines varies from one page to another, even though the copyists used ruling. A blank space is left between sūras, but some of the fragments suggest that crude decorations in ink were already allowed (if they do not belong to a second stage of the Ḥijāzī codices). The sūra titles found on these manuscripts are often in red ink: they were added later. There are a few instances of division of the text into seven parts, with the indication within the written area itself — i.e. British Library, BL Or. 2165, where such division is indicated in green ink. This is in contrast to the later practice
of adding the indications of the textual divisions in the margins (the indications that do not appear in the margins are also additions but the shortness of these marks makes it impossible to date them, and thus to assess how much time had elapsed between their addition and the copying of the Qur’anic text itself).

The material available to us shows that early Muslims made a choice which was to shape the history of the Qur’an as a manuscript: they adopted for their own scriptures the kind of book which was common at that time, namely the codex, and started copying the text in long lines — whereas in other book traditions of the Middle East the texts were arranged in columns. Most of the Hijāzī codices are in the then usual vertical format, except a few, which are in the oblong format that was to become the rule for Qur’ānic codices during the second/eighth century: as the script of these latter manuscripts is more regular than in other Hijāzī codices, it has been suggested that they belong to a later stage of development — perhaps the end of the first/seventh or the beginning of the second/eighth century.

All of the earliest Qur’ānic manuscripts that have come down to us were written on parchment. The amount of text on the few fragments of papyrus published by A. Grohmann is too small to establish whether Qur’ānic codices on papyrus existed side by side with parchment ones or not: these fragments could just as well have come from extracts. As is the case with the script, the way in which the parchment was used to produce quires varies greatly from one manuscript to another — inasmuch as enough folios remain to allow a reconstruction of the original quires.

The anticipated use of the various Hijāzī codices cannot be determined: the size of many of them would suggest a public use, in a mosque (q.v.) for instance. Judging by the evidence of a Paris manuscript (Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 328A; see Fig. 1), these codices seem to have been cared for over a long period of time: some places of this manuscript where the ink appears to have faded have been written over by a hand which can not be dated to earlier than the end of the third/ninth century.

By the end of the first/seventh or beginning of the second/eighth century, a new trend was changing the appearance of the Qur’ānic codex. As far as can be determined by the best reconstruction of the chronology of the Qur’ānic scripts, it was the Umayyad period that witnessed the emergence of a style in which the letter forms were more regular and the shafts more vertical. This may be linked with the reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik who decided that the chancery of the empire should use Arabic instead of Greek and Persian, thus promoting the use of the Arabic script. On the other hand, one consequence of these administrative decisions could have been the emergence of the concept of specifically Qur’ānic scripts. The script of the papyri of the first/seventh century and that of the Hijāzī codices have similarities; this will no longer be the case in the following period, and the gap between Qur’ānic and secular scripts will widen. Another argument for the dating of this style to the Umayyad period are sūra headbands of a Qur’ān found among the Damascus fragments (Türk İslam Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM ŞE 321) which are clearly related to the decorative repertory of the mosaics on the Dome of the Rock (see AQSĀ MOSQÛE). Ornament is thus making its way into the Qur’ānic manuscripts (the evidence that is available today indicates that this is the first instance of the use of gold in Qur’ānic ornamentation). Other experimentations are documented in this group of manuscripts and fragments: in some of them, as
was usual at that time, a blank line has been left between two sūras, but the place is highlighted by the use of colored inks (red and/or green) for the first lines of the beginning of the next sūra and sometimes also for the last lines of the preceding one. This is also when groups of ten verses begin to receive a special marker, in some cases only a letter with numerical value (abjad). In one fragment (Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 330c), it is written in gold. Other attempts which can be attributed to this period or somewhat later are more puzzling: for example, calligrams with colored inks developing over the writing surface. The orthography itself was changing: it is far from homogeneous from one manuscript to another, and sometimes even changes within the same manuscript, but overall it does show an evolution towards the scriptio plena.

Another Qur’ān attributed to the Umayyad period is more difficult to evaluate: some fragments (Dār al-Makhtūtāt, inv. no. 20-33.1) are the only remnants of a large manuscript (51 × 47 cm), which originally contained about 520 folios. The impressive illuminations (particularly the two representations of a mosque) have no equivalent and the script foreshadows later developments; an elaborate frame surrounds the written area on the first folios of the text (for examples of these fragments, see Figs. 1 of fātiḥa and 1 of ornamentation and illumination).

The Qur’ānic codex in early ‘Abbāsid times

Our knowledge of the Qur’āns of the third/ninth century, which include a few dated manuscripts, is fairly developed. The earlier part of the ‘Abbāsid period, however, remains somewhat unclear as the information about it is still very scarce. Here again, the dating of Qur’āns to the second/eighth century relies mainly on paleography. But, as compared with the evidence from the first/seventh century, we are on surer footing in this century, since more paleographic evidence has survived. The Qur’ānic scripts of that period are traditionally known as “Kūfic,” but “early ‘Abbāsid scripts” would be more accurate; the linking of any of them with the town of Kūfa remaining unclear. As a whole, the scripts bear witness to the emergence of a body of highly skilled scribes and a complex set of rules concerning the use of the various styles. In the eighties of the twentieth century, a tentative typology was created in order to classify the material: it defines six groups of scripts (called A to F), subdivided into a varying number of styles (for instance B II or D IV; see Déroche, Abbasid tradition, 34-47; id., Catalogue, I/1. Aux origines de la calligraphie coranique, 37-45). The terminology and results of this typology have been used here in order to provide clarity to the following account.

A major development of this period is the introduction of a system for the notation of the vowels. These are indicated through the positioning of red dots with respect to the consonant: an “a” — fatha — above the letter, an “i” — kasra — below it or a “u” — damma — after it; the indefinite case ending (tanwin) is noted by a duplication of the dot. Although it was reportedly invented by Abū l-Aswad al-Du’ali (d. 69/688), this system does not seem to have been used before the end of the first/seventh century. Qur’āns from the Umayyad period have red dots: but are they contemporaneous with the script itself? Since the dots were necessarily an addition (neither the ink nor paint nor the writing implement were those used for the copy of the unadorned orthography, i.e. rasm), doubt always remains about the time that elapsed between the copying of the text and the addition of the dots. The system was later perfected with the addition of dots for the glottal stop — hamza — (green
or yellow) and the consonantal duplicator — *shadda* — (yellow, orange or blue); sometimes their modern form is written with colored ink. The sign for the absence of a vowel — *subān* — is rarely indicated. Other signs were used in the Maghribi in order to note more accurately the pronunciations (see Nuruosmaniye Library 23, completed in Palermo in 372/982-3). This system remained dominant until the end of the fourth/tenth century and was apparently still used late into the tenth/sixteenth century for a Yemeni (?) Qurʾān. In the Maghribi, but also in qurʾānic manuscripts in Sudāni script, the *hamza* was indicated by a dot until very recently (see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 576, dated 1195/1781).

Early in the period under discussion here, some Qurʾāns were still in the vertical format: the B I group of scripts could be typical for the early part of the second/eighth century (see Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg, IOS C 20 or Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 331) and bear witness to the transition from the Hijāzī codex — to which its somewhat slender script is probably related — to the early ‘Abbāsid one. Alongside this tradition, which was gradually fading out, another stouter kind of script (akin to that of Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, inv. no. 20-33.1) came to be the qurʾānic script *par excellence*. It is commonly associated with the oblong format, although the change from the vertical format cannot have been motivated solely by script aesthetics. One reason for this shift — unrecorded in our sources, however — may have been a desire to give the Qurʾān a visual identity clearly different from that of the Torah (roll) or the Gospels (vertical codex; see GOSPEL). Another development which probably played a role in the horizontal lay-out of the Qurʾān, but about whose influence on this matter the sources are also silent, is the nearly con-

temporary controversy about writing down ḥadīth (see ḤADĪTH AND THE QURʾĀN). During
the period, the number of lines to the page became increasingly regular: this evolu-
tion may stem from a will to control the text more easily.

The earliest sūra titles contemporaneous with the copy of the text itself are found in manuscripts tentatively attributed to the second/eighth century, but such texts are not the rule. For, up until this time, the sūras were separated from each other by a blank space or by an ornament — ranging from very crude ones to highly sophisti-
cated illuminations. The headband had not yet found its shape: some ornaments occupy irregularly the rectangular space of the line, others are already enclosed within an outer rectangular frame; the vignette also appears, sometimes at both ends of the headband (see Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek, FLB Ms. orient. A 462, ff. 6 b and 11 a). The origin of the vignette has been connected with the tabula ansata of classical Antiquity; but since the early sūra headbands are an-epigraphic and devoid of vignette, one wonders whether this explanation, borrowed from epigraphy (see EPIGRAPHY AND THE QURʾĀN), can be applied to manuscripts. Coptic paragraph marks show that marginal devices were known to the copyists of the period. At any rate, the need for information led very soon to the introduction of the sūra titles into the Qurʾāns. Depending on the manuscripts, these were noted either at the beginning or at the end of the sūra. In the former case, the sūra title is introduced by a formula including the word *fāṭḥa* (“opening”), in the latter by *khāṭima* (“ending”; both can be developed in various ways and even combined). During the third/ninth century, it became the rule to indicate the title at the beginning of the sūra, without any introductory formula. The names given to some of the sūras vary from one
manuscript to another. The number of verses is generally given next to the title and the ends of the verses are usually, but not always, indicated. Only rarely do ornamental verse end markers number the individual verses with *abjad* numerals (see numbers and enumeration; numerology): most copies distinguish only groups of five and ten verses.

The most impressive achievement of the period is a group of giant Qur’āns (Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 324 and Forschungs- und Landesbibliothek, FLB Ms. orient. A 462 contain fragments of one of them), dating probably from the second part of the second/eighth century (a Carbon 14 dating of one page suggested a date between 640 and 765 C.E.; the earlier date seems more in keeping with other data). They may have been inspired by earlier attempts, like the above-mentioned Dār al-Makhtūṭāt, inv. no. 20-33. 1. The manuscripts measure roughly 68 × 53 cm and have twelve lines of text per page — in one case, the figure is slightly more than double this amount: twenty-five lines on a single page. Reconstructions based on the state of the manuscripts indicate that they would have had more than 600 folios, each of them composed of the hide of one animal. In spite of their thickness, they seem to have been bound as single-volume Qur’āns. These manuscripts were much larger than any earlier Qur’ān that has been preserved, and their production would have required an extraordinary financial investment. They were most probably ordered for mosques, but their size suggests that they would have served a purpose other than simply recitation or reading (see recitation of the Qur’ān). We are told that ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb abhorred Qur’āns in small script and was delighted when he saw large copies. In spite of the anachronism of this anecdote, it draws attention to the fact that large copies were favored by Muslims of the first centuries. Since congregational readings, such as that during the Friday prayer (q.v.), do not require such massive volumes, they may have served an apologetic or political function.

There is no clear evidence that multi-volume sets existed before the beginning of the third/ninth century, even if some of the earlier manuscripts contain marginal indications of divisions into sevenths, for instance. But from the third/ninth century on, both the manuscripts and the texts attached to them — mainly endowment documents (*waqfyyāt*) — indicate that multi-volume sets were common. Some of the scripts, like D I, actually seem closely connected with this kind of Qur’ān, their size demanding a full text of such magnitude that it would have been impossible to bind all the folios as a single book. This led to the appearance of boxes (*tābūt, ṣundūq*) which could keep all the volumes of a set together. In the case of Amājūr’s Qur’ān, the endowment document (*waqfyya*) of 262/876 states that two boxes were needed to store the thirty *juz* ʿ (Déroche, Qur’ān of Amāḡūr, 61). This manuscript had only three lines to the page — which means that the total number of folios was enormous. It seems that such multi-volume Qur’āns were the solution needed for the production of manuscripts in this period that were, in the end, as large as the second/eighth century giant Qur’āns described earlier. As a rule, wealthy patrons ordered them for mosques, Qur’ānic codices are also known to have been the property of individuals: a few are actually dated according to notes recording births or deaths in a family. These were usually single volumes written in smaller scripts like B II, for instance.

There is also a greater range of illumination to be found in Qur’āns from the early ʿAbbāsid period, which may be, however,
simply due to the fact that more material has been preserved than for the earlier period. Some Qur’āns have no decoration whatsoever, or minimal indication of titles and divisions in red, green or yellow, while others use gold for the same purpose. The most sophisticated manuscripts may have an opening page — without any text — that spans two folios (very few have more than two such pages), sûra headbands with a vignette in the margin and a variety of verse or group markers. The beginning of the text itself is sometimes set into a decorated frame. Some Qur’āns also have an illuminated double page at the end. Multi-volume sets offered as many opportunities as there were volumes in which to illuminate the beginning (and possibly the end) of each section of text (see the series of which Topkapı Sarayı Museum, TKS EH 16 is part). Gold is heavily used in illumination, but also for the copying of the text. In spite of earlier statements by Muslim scholars like Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) against the use of gold for that purpose, chrysography seems to have received wide acceptance. Even if the story reported by Ibn al-Nadm (Fihrist, 9) that a Qur’ān in gold script was produced for ‘Umar II were a forgery, a famous manuscript of ‘Abbāsid times, the “Blue Qur’ān,” is far from being the only instance of gold script used for copying the Qur’ān. Other refinements, like dyed parchment, were also in use: blue parchment has been mentioned, but yellow, pink and orange are also documented.

With the exception of a text by al-Jahshiyārī, who recorded an anecdote about silver binding in Umayyad times (Kitāb al-Wuzurā’, 26; Latz, Das Buch, 79), we have no information about the bindings of Qur’ānic manuscripts until the third/ninth century. From that period onwards, various collections, but mainly that of Qayrawān, have bindings of a distinctive shape: they are indeed closer to boxes than to any kind of binding previously known. The boards are made of wood and are covered with leather, often decorated; in front of the three outer edges, a continuous strip of leather glued onto the lower board protects the Qur’ān. When the upper board is down and the book is closed, a leather thong fastened to the gutter side of the lower board can be tied over a metal peg projecting out of the edge of the upper board: the manuscript can thus be kept tightly closed. Bindings of non-Qur’ānic manuscripts are almost unknown for this period, making comparison impossible; but it has been suggested that the bindings described here were specifically made for the Qur’āns.

A century of change

During the fourth/tenth century, the appearance of the Qur’ānic codex is altered by various developments, some of which were already in evidence by the end of the third/ninth century. The first one involves the scripts: a new style, connected to scripts already in use in non-Qur’ānic manuscripts and administrative documents, received increasing acceptance as a Qur’ānic script, only to be superseded — slightly later — by naskhi and naskhi-related scripts. This new style is the last script to have been in use in Qur’ānic manuscripts all over the Islamic world. While variants appear in the execution, it basically relies on well-defined aesthetics and a clear repertoire of letterforms. The names given to the more refined versions of this script — Persian Kūfic, Oriental Kūfic — are somewhat misleading: the earlier name of “Kūfic naskhi” is a better descriptive since the basic shapes are closer to the so-called “cursive.” The earliest Qur’ān in this script is a multi-volume set copied on parchment before 292/905, possibly in a Persian speaking area; in addition to the
script, its vertical format foreshadows the changes of the next decades (Chester Beatty Library, CBL 1431). The new style was nevertheless also used in manuscripts with an oblong format, like the Qur’āns copied on parchment in Palermo in 372/982-3 (Nuruosmaniye Library 23; see Fig. 11 of ORNAMENTATION AND ILLUMINATION) or on paper in Isfahān in 383/993 (Türk İlahı Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 453-6).

The calligraphic possibilities of the new style might explain why it remained in use for a considerable period of time. Whereas the last dated Qur’ān in early ʿAbbāsid script from the central Islamic lands was — according to the current state of our knowledge — written in 362/972, the latest dated Qur’ānic manuscript in the new style was finished in 620/1223 (Mashhad, Āstān-i Quds Abbāsid R. 84). One cannot exclude the existence of later copies since it remained a favorite script among illuminators, and was used, for instance, in titles. A short excerpt of the Qur’ān was even written in a highly ornamental variant of the script as late as 909/1503 (Topkapı Sarayi Museum, TKS R. 18 in Istanbul).

A major evolution of the fourth/tenth century was the use of so-called cursive scripts, commonly called naskhī, as Qur’ānic scripts. The earliest dated example of a naskhī-related script for a Qur’ān originates from Upper Mesopotamia or northern Syria; it is dated to 387/997. Somewhat later in the same century, a parchment fragment in the oblong format with the last šīrūs in an unmistakably Maghribī hand bears a colophon stating that the copy was ended in Rajab 398/March-April 1008. This evidence indicates a growing trend towards making the Qur’ānic codex more legible to the ordinary people, and towards closing the gap between the script of the Qur’ānic codices and that which was used in daily matters, a gap which had opened during the second half of the first/end of the seventh, beginning of the eighth century, but was gradually disappearing. It also documents the emergence of a split between the eastern and western parts of the Islamic world represented by the Maghribī script, which would become the hallmark of the manuscript production in the Maghrib and in Muslim Spain. Interestingly enough, the earliest Maghribī fragments show a greater respect for the material aspects of the Qur’ānic codex tradition, namely the oblong format and the parchment. Once again the transition to the “modern” scripts was by no means a quick one, as is witnessed by the production of Qur’āns in the ‘new style’ during a long period, albeit in decreasing numbers; further research will have to investigate the possible use in the Maghribī of early ʿAbbāsid scripts after the end of the fourth/tenth century. Even if calligraphers of the early ʿAbbāsid period skilled in very small script succeeded in reducing the number of pages and the size of the Qur’āns, early manuscripts in naskhī (for instance British Library, BL Add. 7214; see Fig. 11) attained an even greater compactness, perhaps explaining the success of these last-named copies (which may also have been less expensive).

The development of grammar (see GRAMMAR AND THE QUR’ĀN) led to the invention of systems that were increasingly precise in order to note the correct pronunciation of the Qur’ān. The modern system of vowels was used on the Qur’ān of 292/905, but since the older system of red dots is also present on that manuscript, it is highly probable that the modern vowels are a later addition. The Palermo Qur’ān, on the other hand, is fully punctuated: vowels but also other orthoepic signs indicate the correct pronunciation. The modern system of vowels and orthoepics came into use during the fourth/tenth century. During this period, the modern signs
for shadda and sukūn, both in color, were associated with the red-dot vocalization. Modern vowels and orthoepics were written in color by the copyist of the “Nurse’s Qur’ān” in Qayrawān in 410/1019-20: the document recording his work states that he vocalized the manuscript. The same Uthmān b. Ḥusayn al-Warrāq completed a thirty-volume Qur’ān in 466/1073-4, probably in eastern Iran: he also recorded that he added vowels and orthoepics — in color — to the text (Mashhad, Āsitān-i Quds 4316). The famous “Qur’ān of Ibn al-Bawwāb” contrasts with this practice: vowels and orthoepics are written with the same ink as the rest of the text (Chester Beatty Library, CBL 1431, dated 391/1000-1); this is also the case in the manuscript of 387/997. The western Islamic world followed another path, as will be shown below.

The second major development of the period is the introduction of paper, which gradually replaced parchment — at least in the east. The earliest datable Qur’ān on paper was completed by the end of the first half of the fourth/tenth century, almost a century later than the earliest non-Qur’ānic Arabic manuscript on paper. The increasing use of this material also altered the appearance of the Qur’ānic codex. The third development, perhaps connected with the second, has to do with the format of the text: a return to a vertical format is seen in this period. Even if, as evidenced by the Isfahān Qur’ān, it was possible to produce paper Qur’āns in the oblong format, the majority were now in the vertical format, thus suggesting that it was better adapted to the new material. All these changes did not go hand in hand, even if they seem somewhat interrelated, and they did not meet with general acceptance overnight. Their economic implications also need to be evaluated. Paper was less expensive than parchment, even if we do not know exactly how much cheaper it was. Should we assume that books became more affordable for a larger number of people, even though they remained a luxury, and that therefore their production pace had to increase? There were two ways in which the need for more manuscripts could be met: the first one being an increase in the copyist’s speed, the second one an increase in the number of copyists. There is finally another question that arises: was the new style more legible for readers as well as faster for copyists, since it was easier to write?

The new vertical sizing also forced the Qur’ānic manuscripts to adapt new formats for complete page illumination. It appears that this was not simply a matter of rotating the existing compositions by ninety degrees since the relationship between height and width had changed. Rather, this changed dimension of the illuminations is possibly the reason why compositions based either on a central circle or on the repetition of a small pattern in order to cover the surface became increasingly popular. Another evolution was the introduction of text into the illuminated opening pages: the earliest instances are not clearly dated (perhaps already at the end of the third/ninth century) but a few dated manuscripts of the fourth/tenth century include on the opening double page information about the number of sūras, verses, words and letters found in the Qur’ān.

Few manuscripts document the continued production of large Qur’āns during this period. Multi-volume sets, however, remain quite common. The Isfahān Qur’ān had four volumes and The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art Qur’ān 89, which is perhaps slightly later, had originally seven; many had thirty. All are of a comparatively small size, particularly those composed by division into thirtieths (juz’). The “Nurse’s Qur’ān” attests to the production of large-
sized Qur’āns in the western part of the Islamic world. In 410/1019-20, the otherwise unknown scribe (warrāq), ʿAlī b. Ahmad, wrote the thirty juz’ of this Qur’ān in Qayrawān; he was also responsible for its vowel signs, illumination and binding. 552 pages of this work have been preserved: they measure 45 × 29 cm and have only five lines of text on a page. The set was kept in a large wooden box that contains an inscription commemorating its being donated to a mosque by Fāṭima, the nurse of the Zirid ruler al-Muʿizz b. Bāḍīs.

Towards the modern Qur’ānic codex

Over the following centuries and down to the present day, Qur’āns were written in a wide variety of the so-called “cursive” scripts, some of them — such as nastaʿlīq (see Topkapı Sarayā Museum, TKS HS 25, dated 945/1538-9) — used only in exceptional cases. A few styles were more frequently used for Qur’ānic manuscripts than other documents. Even if copyists would also transcribe other texts with these styles, their designation as “Qur’ānic” scripts retained its validity. In the central Islamic lands, the manuscripts of higher quality were most frequently written in the scripts which the literature about calligraphy calls naskh (also nashī, muḥaqqaq, rayḥānī (also rayḥān) and thulūth (also thulth). Regional varieties of scripts emerged in other areas. In India, for instance, Bihārī was in use during the late eighth/fortieth and the ninth/fifteenth century. Classical styles could undergo regional modifications: the script typical of Chinese Qur’āns of the ninth/fifteenth century has been described as a peculiar form of muḥaqqaq deriving from earlier Persian models. The Bihārī might in turn have been imitated on the eastern coast of Africa, where the influence of India is known to have been felt (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art Qur 706, dated 1162/1749).

The particular script usually remains homogeneous from the beginning to the end of a manuscript — this also applies to copies with alternating lines in two or three different styles. In some cases, the word Allāh or entire entire sentences are highlighted: they are either written in larger letters or in ink different from that of the text itself (see for example John Rylands University Library, UL 760-773). Other manuscripts are more puzzling: in some, only the names Ahmad (q 61:6) and Muhammad (q 48:29) are written in larger letters (see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 413 [see Fig. vi], and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA Rogers Fund 1940). Such features could be related to specific forms of religious behavior, which still need to be investigated.

Page setting was seen by copyists and patrons as a way of enhancing the appearance of the text. At the beginning of our period, the Qur’āns were apparently all written in long lines of identical height and length. Later, the copyists started playing with both elements, perhaps influenced by chancery traditions that are apparent in pilgrimage certificates from Saljūq times found in Damascus. An early example of this revised page setting is Chester Beatty Library, CBL 1438, dated 582/1186 (see Fig. iv). In some Qur’āns in Bihārī script, the copyists used two sizes of script side by side, the larger one for the first and last lines of each page, the smaller one for the rest of the text (Leiden University Library [Oriental Department], Or. 18320 dated 811/1408-9). Later manuscripts document the use of various colors of ink in order to achieve a more complex effect on the whole page. In Persianate areas, but also in Turkey, a complex grid, usually with three larger lines framing two groups of smaller script written in black ink became popular; the larger lines, in white, blue, red or gold, contrast sharply with the rest. This page
setting is also known in Chinese Qur'āns where the difference between the lines is somewhat subdued — in terms of size as well as of color, black being used throughout the page. From the eleventh/seventeenth century onwards, Indian Qur'ānic manuscripts feature a page setting which looks like that found in Qur'āns from Safavid Iran: the written surface, defined by a golden frame, is divided into identically-sized large bands in which the text is written, and which are separated from one another by smaller bands that could contain a translation. A second frame, close to the edge of the page and larger than the former one, marks off an area surrounding the text which may either be blank — with the exception of markers for the groups of verses or such indication — or contain a commentary to the Qurān.

It is obviously difficult to summarize here the “rules” of Qur'ānic illumination: the material available is far too vast and offers many variations. The following, therefore, are only a few of what may be termed “general guidelines.” One rule is strictly observed: the Qur'ānic manuscript was never illustrated — to date, the only published example of an “illustrated” Qur'ānic manuscript (Gottheil, Illustrated copy, 21-4) is a fake. Even if scholarly interest has been primarily focused on the works of master illuminators found on the most expensive manuscripts, one has to remember that many Qur'āns received an ornament of some kind, even if it was only a rubricated frame for the beginning of the text. The concept of the double-page played a major role in Qur'ānic manuscripts, especially in their illumination: the artists tried to balance the composition, overcoming the physical division of the two pages and giving it an overall unity. Whatever its quality may be, illumination held more or less the same role and place which had been progressively agreed upon during the first centuries. The function of the ornament is primarily to indicate the beginning or the end of a part of the text: it can be the beginning of the manuscript and, since these Qur'āns have no title page, the ornament is meant to send a kind of signal or, with the help of Qur'ānic quotations, to “name” the book. Q 56:77-80 is perfectly suited to this task: “That this is indeed a Qurān most honorable in a book (q.v.) well-guarded, which none shall touch but those who are clean.” After the preliminary pages — one double-page or more of pure ornament, with or without writing — illumination occurs in various places: within the written surface are the divisions into verses or groups of verses but also the titles of the sūras. In the margins are indicators for the verse groupings (more developed than those already mentioned), for the various divisions of the text into equally-sized parts, or for the ritual prostrations (ṣajda, see bowing and prostration; ritual and the Qurān), and the vignettes corresponding to the sūra headings. The beginning and the end of the text itself can also be highlighted by an illuminated frame: for the beginning of single-volume Qur'āns, the main option is either to have the opening sūra, the Fātīḥa (q.v.), on a double page and the first verses of sūra 2 on the next one, or to have the Fātīḥa facing the beginning of sūra 2 on the same double page. In some early multi-volume Qur'āns, the Fātīḥa is repeated at the beginning of each juz’. The last sūras may also be set within a frame; some Qur'āns have additional illuminated pages with a prayer and/or a divination formula (fāl-nāma). In some multi-volume Qur'ānic manuscripts, a first-page illumination may provide the number of the volume within the series; the end of each volume may receive an ornament with Q 83:26.

The repertoire of ornamentation inher-
ited from the previous period relied mainly on geometric and vegetal forms. Illuminations were geometrically structured until the end of the ninth/fifteenth century, when more fluid forms of ornament were introduced. These broad orientations were translated in various ways in the different parts of the Islamic world: this is reflected in the studies on Qurʾānic illumination which usually present the material according to periods and regions. Such categorizations are often decisive in determining the provenance of a Qurʾān. One should nevertheless be aware that some areas have not yet been sufficiently investigated, or offer various difficulties. This, for instance, is the case of India, where the existence of many centers of Qurʾān-production with local orientations, as well as lasting ties with Afghanistan or Iran may have confused the researchers, often unable — at least for the moment — to distinguish Qurʾāns copied in India from others imported from the north. For areas like China or Indonesia, the study of illumination is only beginning and, even if its features seem as a whole quite distinctive, it has to be remembered that some periods remain unexplored.

The early Qurʾānic bindings that have been preserved were apparently meant to distinguish the Qurʾān from any other manuscripts. When this practice came to an end is not clear; bindings from the fifth/eleventh century indicate that Qurʾāns of that time were bound in the same manner as other manuscripts, but solutions had to be found in order to identify easily the sacred book of Islam. According to authors like al-ʿAlmawī (d. 981/1573), the etiquette concerning book storage recommended that Qurʾāns should be put on top of the pile. But this might have been insufficient (in medieval times, books were stored horizontally), hence the practice of using Qurʾānic quotations in lieu of a title on the binding. The fore-edge flap was likely the primary place for such a quotation: stamping a text on bindings was not completely new, since some early bindings for Qurʾāns already had inscriptions on their boards — usually eulogies like *al-mulk bi-llāh* (“God’s is the dominion”) — and later bindings of multivolume sets bore the number of each volume on the fore-edge flap: the Qurʾān in ten volumes completed in Marrakesh by ʿUmar al-Murtaḍā in 634/1236 bears witness to this practice (see British Library, BL Or. 13102). Mamlūk bindings show early instances of the use of Qurʾānic verses thereon (Museum für Islamische Kunst, SMPK I. 5622). The stamping of texts was facilitated by the development of the binders’ techniques which led to the introduction of plates in the stamping process: on later bindings, it became customary to have Q 56:77 on the fore-edge flap; Q 6:115 is more unusual in this place. On the boards, there was room for more developed texts: around the field, a series of cartouches could contain Qurʾānic verses (Q 2:255 or 56:77-80; both appear on Chester Beatty Library, CBL 1545) or hadith (see Türk İslâm Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 423). Quotations also occur on the inner side of the board: Q 2:255, the “Throne Verse” (see *Throne of God*), and Q 33:56 (see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 418). The use of precious metals and stones was continued: very ancient examples do not seem to have survived, but Ottoman bindings are well-known (Topkapi Sarayi Museum, TKS Inv. 2/2121; see *Material Culture and the Qurʾān*).

Animal hides (mainly sheep and goats) were used as the raw material for parchment; the dimension of the final sheet was limited by the size of the species used. Paper technology allowed for the production of far larger sheets: the mobile form
technique limited their size to what craftsmen were able to handle in and out of the paste vat, while the fixed form, although not as efficient as the former in production levels, could help in the manufacture of very large sheets of paper. On the other hand, pasting was opening possibilities unknown to parchment users. The development of very large Qur’ānic benefited from these technical advances during the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fortieth centuries. Both single and multi-volume Qur’ānic manuscripts are involved: the ʿÖlcaytu Qurʾān in thirty juzʾs has five lines of text on pages reaching 72 × 50 cm, and the pages of the so-called Baysonghur Qurʾān measure 177 × 100 cm. The latter has been related to an anecdote recorded by Qādī Aḥmad, showing Tūnūr despising a miniature Qurʾān written by a calligrapher who, a few months later, came back with a Qurʾān so huge that it had to be carried on a cart. In Mamlūk Egypt, a number of very large single-volume Qurʾāns — they usually measure about 100 cm high or more — were ordered for the mosques by wealthy patrons. The use of multi-volume Qurʾānic manuscripts is also better documented: those produced for sultans or emirs were part of the stipulations of the documents of religious endowments (waqfyya) they established in Cairo. The texts of these legal documents show that readers were appointed for daily recitation of the juzʾ; a keeper in charge of the manuscripts would also distribute them among the readers. Rashīd al-Dīn’s provisions for his own tomb in Tabrīz included Qurʾānic reading by three persons.

In the fourth/fifth century, some of the manuscripts begin to include “scientific information” about the text itself. Previously, such information had been limited to the sūra titles and possibly to their verse count. Now, on double page illuminations, global data about the text and its various components (sūras, verses, words, letters, and so on) are available. At the same time, concordances (in fact, methodical repertoires of verse endings) often register an increasing wealth of information for each sūra: for example, the various verse counts and the relative position within the revelation. Together with the title, this information, which may also have been available in contemporary works of exegesis (tafṣīr), found its way into Qurʾānic manuscripts possibly during the fifth/seventh century. As far as we know, Qurʾāns with alternative readings (see Readings of the Qurʾān) were produced during the sixth/seventh century: the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art Qurʾān 979, which contains abbreviations in red within the text and notes in the margins giving information about the correct recitation of the text and its variants. At the end of the manuscript, the Qurʾānic text is followed by a series of short pamphlets on subjects like the recitation of the Qurʾān, the authorized readings (here, the Ten) as well as the differences in verse counts according to the various schools or the chronology of the revelations. This tradition of “scientific” Qurʾāns, which were probably used for teaching purposes or as memoranda for scholars, was maintained over the centuries — as shown by the manuscript Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 448, dated 979/1572, which contains such information.

Qurʾāns with interlinear translation were probably not meant for the same audience, although the situation is not always completely clear with respect to Qurʾānic commentaries (tafṣīr), which sometimes look like Qurʾānic manuscripts. Assessing the date of the introduction of interlinear translations proves to be difficult: it is sometimes hard to be certain about the contemporaneity of the Qurʾānic text and translation — which latter is, de facto,
an addition. In many — but not all — instances, the page layout is planned so as to leave room for the interlinear translation. Among the earliest dated manuscripts of this group are Mashhad, Āsitān-i Quds 464 (translation into Persian, dated 384/1188) and Türk İslâm Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 73 (translation into eastern Turkish, dated 734/1333-4). Qur’āns with marginal tafsīr can also be mentioned here: they were not necessarily meant for scholars, and they also often include an interlinear translation (usually below the line, rarely above it). Most seem to have been written in Iran and India after the tenth/sixteenth century, and the Persian commentary is written in the margins according to a carefully planned page layout. Qur’ānic manuscripts copied in India in Bihārī script during the ninth/fifteenth century and provided with commentaries written in a more casual manner are among the early instances of the integration of such texts into Qur’ānic manuscripts (see King Faisal Centre, Riyadh 2825). Commentaries added to a Qur’ān well after it had been written are clearly quite another case.

The manuscripts of the Qur’ān very often also contain other texts. As stated above, there are early examples of literature related to the correct reading of the text, as well as indications of its components (the number of sūras, verses, letters, etc.). Often at the end of the Qur’ān, there is the prayer that is recited upon the completion of the reading/reciting of the text. Its length and appearance vary: in luxury copies, it is written on a double page in gold letters, within an illuminated frame (see, for instance, Chester Beatty Library, CBL 1544 or Museum für Islamische Kunst, Inv. Nr. I. 42/68). Other prayers are also found in this position: in the manuscript at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 448, one of the earliest attributed to al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the prayer is adapted for magical operations (see magic); a second prayer, which aids in falling asleep, is also provided. Other texts are also related to the Qur’ān, like the various divination formulas (fāl-nāma) found in numerous manuscripts (see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 418; see Fig. vii).

The qur’ānic codex in the western Islamic world and in west Africa

In the handwritten tradition of the Qur’ān, regional developments can be recognized but nowhere do they seem so pronounced as in the western Islamic world. The first qur’ānic codices in Maghribī script were written as early as the end of the fourth/tenth century, but further study of the Qayrawān collection might show that distinctive Maghribī features — i.e. script, decoration, but also techniques — were already present at an earlier stage. The earliest fragments are written on parchment, a material which remained in use until the eighth/fourteenth century. They are of the oblong format, although most Maghribī Qur’āns are in a square format reminiscent of that used for a group of manuscripts of the second/eighth century. This square shape is found mainly in copies written on vellum, but small Qur’āns of the thirteenth/nineteenth century written on paper still preserve this peculiar format (see The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art Qur 434). Nevertheless, when paper became the material commonly used for copies of the Qur’ān, the manuscripts as a whole changed to the vertical format.

The script has many varieties, a small hand commonly known as Andalusī being used for single-volume Qur’āns; larger scripts are found in multi-volume manuscripts. For a long time, the vowels retained the red color which was the rule in early Qur’āns; dots were still in use on the
earliest Maghribī copies, but in the fifth/eleventh century the modern signs became the rule. For an extended period, dots were also used for the hamza (yellow; see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 576, dated 1195/1781) and sometimes for the wasla (green); other orthoepics, with their modern shape, are in blue (or sometimes in red).

Illuminations were produced over a long period of time according to patterns, some of which were already in use during the fourth/tenth century; in this respect, geometry played a major role with full page illuminations, and the inscriptions were only exceptionally integrated into the illuminated opening pages (see Istanbul University Library A 6754). Not infrequently, the text was followed by an illuminated page containing a prayer or a colophon written within a frame in a script very different from that of the Qur’ānic text itself (see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 385; see Fig. v). Gold and silver were also used in copying the text itself: Bibliothèque nationale, Smith-Lesouëf 217 contains a few folios of a delicate example of Maghribī chrysography, and a five-volume Qur’ān was written with silver ink on paper dyed purple (Bibliothèque nationale, BNF Arabe 389-392 are four such folios). The manufacture of dyed papers for Qur’ānic manuscripts continued for some time, a fact to which some manuscripts on blue and green paper bear witness (see Bibliothèque Générale et Archives, BGA D 1304).

The large Qur’ān tradition was alive in the western Islamic world as shown by the above-mentioned “Nurse’s Qur’ān” and by two volumes now in Istanbul (Türk İslam Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 359 and 360, 52 × 55 cm); their 994 remaining folios, with seven lines to the page (one line is roughly 6.5 cm high) and their richly illuminated sūra titles indicate that a colossal investment was needed to carry out this project.

Qur’ānic manuscripts in Sudānī script are only known in recent times — from the second half of the eleventh/seventeenth century onwards. The Sudānī is reminiscent of Maghribī scripts and is rather conservative. The vowels are often in red, the hamza being indicated by a yellow dot. Illuminations are usually geometrical and seem to rely only on colors — gold has so far not been reported. The beginning of the Qur’ān is often highlighted with a larger ornament in the shape of a frame; on top of it, outside the frame, there is sometimes the basmala (q.v.) and also the tasfiya. In other manuscripts, the ornament separates the first sūra from the second one. Other larger illuminations are usually found at the beginning of the second half of the Qur’ān (which in Sudānī tradition is equivalent to Qur’ān 19:1), but also, in addition to that, at the beginning of the second and fourth quarters (see, for instance, Leeds University Library, Arabic ms. 301). Even if the divisions into seven and sixty parts (ḥizb), as well as the subdivisions of the latter into eight sections, are frequently indicated in the margins, in this handwritten tradition, the four parts are evidently of greater importance.

These Qur’ānic manuscripts are also set apart by their traditional binding: the flap is oversized — its extremity almost reaching the back of the volume when it is closed — and terminates with a leather thong that can be rolled several times around the book in order to keep it closed. Moreover, in a number of cases the manuscript was provided with a leather pouch (in those instances in which it is missing, it may have been lost), which was intended as an external protection for the Qur’ān. These peculiarities may be related to another feature of Sudānī manuscripts, namely the fact that they were written on
bi-folios or even folios that were left loose; with neither quires nor sewing, a very protective binding was the only solution against the folios being lost or mixed up.

**Later developments**

With the exception of the juz’ (thirtieth) and the ḥizb (sixtieth), some of the divisions of the text into parts of identical size fell into disuse and were only rarely indicated in the margins of single-volume Qur’āns. Sets of four or seven volumes became rarer, even if some examples could still be found: a seven-part Qur’ān was written in India by the end of the twelfth/eighteenth century (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art Qur 70), while four-volume sets are known in the Maghrib during the same period (see Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 586 or 6989). In contrast, the juz’ became more important for organizing the text, even in single-volume Qur’āns. As early as the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century, a Qur’ān in Bihārī script in one volume is distinguished by the use of developed illumination in the margins of each opening corresponding to the beginning of a juz’ (Leiden University Library Or. 18320, dated 811/1408-9), a practice which became common in later Iranian deluxe Qur’āns (see Chester Beatty Library, CBL 1542 or Staatsbibliothek, SB 10450). In less expensive copies only the middle of the text is indicated in this way (Bibliothèque nationale, BNF Arabe 418 or Chester Beatty Library, CBL 1344). Qur’ān sets in thirty volumes are plentiful, ranging from the more modest to gorgeous ones, and can be found from the Maghrib to China. This evolution may possibly be connected to a wider practice of Qur’ān reading. Other elements point in the same direction: in Iran, and also in India, according to historical records, copyists used a minute script in order to fit each juz’ to the space available on a double page; the reader wishing to read a section of the text each day, in order to complete the reading within one month, thus had the daily reading in a concise format (for instance Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, BSB Cod. arab. 1118; see Fig. viii). There are even instances of Qur’āns in the so-called ghubār script written on two pages, each being divided into fifteen areas corresponding to the juz’ (see Sotheby’s sale Lou502, 10 October 2000, lot 26).

The juz’ was evidently important in the religious customs, but also proved to be an extraordinary tool for the more efficient copying of the sacred text. Early in the twelfth/eighteenth century, Ottoman copyists apparently reached an optimal calibration of the Qur’ān and found a way of matching the juz’ with the kind of quire they were commonly using, namely the classical ten folios quire. It followed from this that the subdivisions of the juz’ matched a definite amount of folios. The clever use of the possibilities of extension or contraction of the Arabic script even resulted in every page finishing with a verse ending: hence the name āyāl ber-kenār for these Qur’āns written with fifteen lines to the page in a small format, on ca. 300 folios (that is, thirty quires of ten folios). It was perhaps a step towards a more efficient production process — to some extent reminiscent of similar moves in late medieval Europe, when the printing press was threatening the traditional book production. Illumination also became standardized to some extent, with a double opening page containing sūra 1 and the beginning of sūra 2, gilded frame for the text, floral markers for the juz’, and so forth. This presentation was highly successful, and modern printed editions still follow this model.

This development is certainly behind the further elaboration of the Qur’ānic text. It was probably noticed at about the same time that the same words/groups of words
appeared in almost the same position on every opening. While keeping the text division previously described, some copyists succeeded in moving those words or groups so that they appeared on both pages of every opening on the same line and in a symmetrical position, highlighted in red ink. In the case of q 26, whole verses were treated in this fashion. Attempts to trace this peculiar page layout back to specific milieus or to speculations on the Qur'anic text have so far been unsuccessful. Its diffusion was not restricted to the Ottoman empire (Türk İslâm Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 469): it was also known in the Maghrib, where Ottoman influence was felt (National Library, NL 14.246, in Tunis).

Some manuscripts contain only selected parts of the Qur’ân. The excerpts are usually chosen because they may be recited during a prayer, but the choice is not always so simple to explain, as shown by a copy of Sūrat al-Fāṭihah done in a highly sophisticated style (Topkapı Sarayı Museum, TKS R. 18, dated 909/1503). In the Ottoman empire, these small volumes were called Eņ'am, since they usually begin with an extract from q 6 (Sūrat al-An’ām), often following the Fāṭihah; the selection may vary but in many cases ends with the last sūras. q 36 is also popular and is sometimes the first of the volume. In Iran and India, this sūra appears as the first in Qur’anic selections (followed by q 48, 56, 67 and 78; see The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art Qur 280). Obviously, the choice was not restricted to these sūras, and a survey of this material would certainly give some insights into Muslim piety of later centuries — most of the manuscripts so far published seem to date from the tenth/sixteenth century or later.

Production and conservation
Matters of manuscript production are still largely ignored by scholars, as are the economic aspects. Is it lawful to sell or buy a Qur’ân? Is it permissible to copy the Qur'anic text for a fee? The debate about these issues arose at an early date and was quickly answered in the affirmative. Many anecdotes are told about the high prices commanded by copies written by famous calligraphers. But the cost of a more ordinary Qur’ân remains obscure, as does the importance of the diffusion of the Qur'anic manuscripts in the Islamic lands. For more recent times, a study of the archives and of what remains of the production may provide limited though very valuable answers, but it seems difficult to determine how much access the Muslims of the eleventh/seventeenth century, for instance, had to a copy of their sacred text. How much time was needed to copy a Qur’ân? Information found in the manuscripts themselves is scattered but could give more concrete data: according to the colophons of the juz’ of an Egyptian Qur’ân dated 1175/1751, the copyist was writing a juz’ in eight days (Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 515). Some Ottoman copyists indicate the number of Qur’âns they had so far transcribed.

The price of the manuscripts was high, and they were usually used over a long period of time. They were treated with reverence, and when they fell into decay special care had to be taken about their fate. Some scholars considered that the parchment or the paper could be reused for the preparation of the boards of a Qur’ân binding, while others insisted that the manuscript should be buried or burned. There are also instances of deposits, as in Qayrawân, Cairo or Damascus, which are close to the Jewish practice of the genizah.

Attempts have been made to relate the manuscripts to specific milieus (Whelan, Writing the word) or to correlate a change in the script with religious developments.
(Tabbaa, The transformation), but the lack of comprehensive surveys of the material hampers such approaches. As a result, we still know too little about the role played by Qur’anic manuscripts within the Islamic world until a comparatively late period.

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Bibliography

Markets

Public places in which commercial transactions occur. The term ʾaṣṣāqā, “markets,” occurs in two places in the Qurʾān, but is used incidentally to indicate that the prophets were men who shared the same nature as those they were sent to teach: “What sort of a messenger is this who eats food and walks through the markets?” (Q 25:7); “And the messengers whom we sent before you all ate food and walked through the markets” (Q 25:20; see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD; FOOD AND DRINK; MESSENGER; IMPECCABILITY). The Qurʾān makes no reference to any particular market (see CITY; GEOGRAPHY; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QURʾĀN). This is despite the fact that there were some very large markets in Arabia both during the pre-Islamic period and during the time of the revelation of the Qurʾān (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION) and with which Muḥammad would have been very familiar. Aside from the famous market of ʿUkāz near Mecca (q.v.) and that of Medina (q.v.), there was the market of al-Ḥajār which was the biggest and richest oasis on the peninsula, that of al-Ḥira, the capital of the Lakhmids and a vital caravan city between Persia and Arabia, and Dūmat al-Jandal, an oasis town on the direct route between Medina and Damascus and one of the principal markets of northern Arabia. The birthplace of the Qurʾān was initially Mecca and its second home was Medina, both prosperous commercial centers (but cf. P. Crone, Meccan trade, 133-48). That the Qurʾān was initially addressed to people who were engaged in commercial activities is clearly reflected in its ideas and language (see LANGUAGE OF THE QURʾĀN; LITERARY STRUCTURES OF THE QURʾĀN; OCCASIONS OF REVELATION). Only a few examples out of many will be given here.

The commercial language of the Qurʾān is not only used in illustrative metaphors but also to express fundamental points of doctrine (see METAPHOR; THEOLOGY AND THE QURʾĀN). Thus, the last judgment (q.v.) is a reckoning or an accounting: “Then he that will be given his record (kitāb) in his right hand will say, ‘Here, read my record!’” (Q 69:19; see also Q 69:25); “Then he who is given his record in his right hand, soon will his account be taken by an easy reckoning” (hisāḥ, Q 8:47-8; see also Q 8:410 f.; see RECORD OF HUMAN ACTIONS; LEFT HAND AND RIGHT HAND). It is at this time that human actions will be weighed: “We shall set up scales of justice for the day of judgment” (Q 21:47; see WEIGHTS AND MEASURES; JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE); “Then he whose balance [of good deeds] will be found heavy, will be in a life of good pleasure and satisfaction” (ʾishāṭin rādiyatān, Q 101:6-7; see also Q 7:8-9).

The Qurʾān often makes use of the concept of trade (ṭijāra). Occasionally the meaning is prosaic: “Let there be among you traffic and trade (ṭijāra) by mutual goodwill” (Q 4:29). But more usually the meaning is metaphorical: “There are those who have bartered guidance for error (q.v.); but their trade is profitless” (Q 2:16); “Those who rehearse the book (q.v.) of God, establish regular prayer (q.v.; al-ṣalāt)
and send in charity (see almsgiving) out of what we have provided for them, secretly and openly, hope for a trade that will never fail” (q. 35:29; see also q. 61:10). Similarly, the concepts of buying and selling are often used metaphorically, for example: “God has purchased from the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs in God’s purchase is the reward and the punishment” (q.v.; see belief and unbelief; faith; reward and punishment). Selling is used to express renouncing God’s revelation: “Do not sell the covenant (q.v.) of faith; reward and punishment” (q.v.). Selling is also used to express renouncing God’s revelation: “Do not sell the covenant (q.v.) of God for a miserable price” (q. 16:95; see also q. 2:41; 3:77); “These are the people who buy the life (q.v.) of this world at the price of the hereafter” (q. 4:286; see eschatology); “Miserable is the price for which God have they sold for a miserable price” (q. 9:9).

In several places the Qur’ān stresses the need to give fair weight and measure:

“My people, give just weight and measure” (q. 11:85); “Give weight with justice” (q. 55:9); “Woe to those who deal in fraud, those who when they have to receive by measure from people exact full measure, but when they have to give by measure or weigh for them, give less than is due” (q. 83:1-3; see also q. 6:152; 17:33).

Given Muhammad’s intimate concern with commercial affairs, it is perhaps not surprising that he is said to have been the first to appoint persons with jurisdiction over the markets (a post later to develop into that of the Islamic market inspector, the muhtasib), who were to ensure the orderly and fair running of business transactions. He is reported to have employed Sa‘d b. Sa‘d b. al-‘Āṣ as inspector of the market of Medina sometime after the conquest of Mecca (8/650; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, Istī‘āb, ii, 621). Samrā‘ bint Nuhayk al-

Asadiyya, a contemporary of the Prophet, is mentioned as frequenting the market of Medina, asking people to behave well there (ibid., iv, 183). It is likewise reported that Muhammad enjoined ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭālib (q.v.) to “order good and forbid evil” (al-amr bi-l-ma‘yif wa-l-nahī ‘an al-munkar; Sergeant, A Zaidi manual, 11-2; see good and evil) — a qur’ānic injunction which eventually became synonymous with the muhtasib’s duties — and that ‘Ali used to go round the markets every morning like a muhtasib, ordering the merchants to give fair measure. See also selling and buying.

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Bibliography


Marriage and Divorce

The social institution through which a man and a woman are joined in a social and legal dependence for the purpose of forming and maintaining a family (q.v.), and the regulated dissolution of such a union. Both marriage and divorce are legal issues extensively dealt with in the Qur’ān (see law and the Qur’ān). Marriage
between a man and a woman is called
nikāḣ. In most cases, the verb nakaḣa, “to
marry,” is used to denote men marrying
women, but in one case, also women mar-
rying men. Giving a woman away in mar-
riage is nakaḣa when there is mention of a
father or guardian (see GUARDIANSHIP),
zawwaja when God is mentioned. The mar-
riage partners are both called zawj (pl.
azwaj), the husband also ba’l (pl. ba’ila).
Divorce is called ṭalaqa; the corresponding
verb ṭallaya, “to divorce,” always occurs
with men as the subject of the verb.

Marriage
Aims of marriage
(1) In the Qur’ān, marriage is, first of all,
the favored institution for legitimate sexual
intercourse between a man and woman
(the secondary institution being concubi-
nage; see CONCUBINES; SEX AND SEXUAL-
ITY). This is obvious from the different
rules concerning marriage as well as
behavior prescribed in dealing with the
other sex (see SOCIAL INTERACTIONS), con-
demnation and punishment of illegal
sexual intercourse (see ADULTERY AND
FORNICATION) and the fact that even part-
nership between men and women in para-
dise (q.v.) is thought to have the form of
marriage (e.g. Q 2:25; 44:54). Chastity (q.v.)
is one of the cardinal virtues demanded of
Muslims (see VIRTUES AND VICES, COM-
MANDING AND FORBIDDING). To marry is
therefore desirable for every member of
the community of believers, even for slaves
(Q 24:32; see SLAVES AND SLAVERY). (2)
Marriage is a means to strengthen the relation-
ship between different individuals and
groups of the community (see SOCIAL
RELATIONS), and the prohibition of inter-
marriage is a means to prevent relation-
ships between certain individuals and
groups (Q 2:221; 4:24-5; 5:5; 24:3; 26; 60:10;
see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE
QUR’ĀN). (3) Marriage is seen as a necessary
institution to secure the reproduction of
the community and to guarantee the off-
spring an effective upbringing (Q 4:1; 7:189;
16:72; 17:24; see CHILDREN). (4) The mar-
riage relationship is the most elementary
form of society, the nucleus which is
thought to guarantee for its individual
members a harmonious life because of the
physical and mental support which hus-
band and wife give each other (Q 30:21).
(5) Marriage serves as an institution to sup-
port or protect female members of the
community who have lost the backing of
their family, such as orphans (q.v.) and
widows (Q 4:3, 127; see WIDOW; WOMEN
AND THE QUR’ĀN).

Marriage partners
There are rules concerning the choice of
partners, largely formulated from the per-
spective of Muslim men (see PATRIARCHY;
GENDER; FEMINISM AND THE QUR’ĀN). Cer-
tain groups of people are forbidden (q.v.),
others permitted, the criteria being reli-
igion, relationship, social status and moral
behavior (see PROHIBITED DEGREES). For-
bidden are: heathens (polytheists; Q 2:221;
60:10; see POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM); close
blood relatives (see BLOOD AND BLOOD
CLOT; KINSHIP); the corresponding milk
(q.v.) relatives (see FOSTERAGE); close in-
laws; previous partners of ascendants or
descendants; two sisters at the same time
(Q 4:22, 23; see SISTER); and fornicators or
adulterers (the latter may, however, inter-
marry or marry heathens; Q 24:3, 26). The
fact that heathens (see IDOLATRY AND
IDOLATERS; BELIEF AND UNBELIEF) and
adulterers are prohibited as marriage part-
ners for chaste Muslims carries the conse-
quence that existing marriages must be
terminated if one of the spouses falls into
such a category (Q 60:10). Permitted are:
Muslims, women of the People of the
Book (q.v.), the parallel cousins from
among the close relatives and slaves (even
for freemen and freewomen) provided they are chaste (Q 2:221; 4:24-5; 5:5; 24:32; 33:50).

Furthermore, the number of partners is mentioned in the Qurʾān: Men may marry up to four women at the same time, provided they think they are able to treat them equally (Q 4:3; for the syntactic problems of the verse cf. Motzki, Muḥṣanāt, 207-10). In view of the doubts which Q 4:129 expresses about an individual’s ability to really meet this condition, some have argued that monogamy seems to be preferred to polygamy. Contrary to what Muslim commentaries claim (see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval), polygamy does not seem to have been a prevalent social custom in pre-Islamic Mecca (q.v.) and Medina (q.v.; cf. Tabari, Tafsir, vii, 534 ad Q 4:3; Stern, Marriage, 62, 70; see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān).

Q 4:3’s injunction to marry more than one woman at the same time appears to have been prompted by special historical circumstances in Medina: the unfair treatment of female wards by their guardians. The Prophet is granted special consideration concerning the number of wives he might take (see Wives of the Prophet): originally, there was no limit for him, but at a certain moment in his career in Medina, he was forbidden to marry again (Q 33:50, 52; see Occasions of Revelation).

The contraction of marriage

The Qurʾān presupposes that a marriage is preceded by a marriage proposal, called ḥithā (Q 2:235), which the suitor has to make to the woman’s guardian. The guardian of the woman draws up the marriage contract (ṣulṭ al-nikāḥ) on her behalf and must ensure that it is fulfilled (see Contracts and Alliances; Breaking Trusts and Contracts). He is, therefore, called “the one who has the marriage contract in his hand” (Q 2:237). Although mediated, the marriage is considered a legal agreement concluded between the man and the woman herself, called a mithāq ghalīz, “firm bond,” in Q 4:21. An important element of the marriage contract is the bridewealth (q.v.), which becomes the bride’s property. In Muhammad’s time, the bridewealth was sometimes fixed at the betrothal, sometimes later (Q 2:236-7). The marriage is not definitely concluded until its consummation, through which all legal consequences become effective. A prerequisite of the consummation of marriage is that the partners have reached the marriageable age (Q 4:6), which most exegetes equate with the beginning of puberty (ḥulum, hayūd; cf. Motzki, Vollwassen, 56-8).

The legal consequences of marriage

By the marriage contract, sexual intercourse between the partners becomes legitimate and both are entitled to inherit from each other (Q 4:12; for the shares, see Inheritance). Additionally, each marriage partner has certain obligations: The wife is obliged to grant her husband sexual intercourse whenever he wishes except during her menstruation (q.v.), the time of her obligatory fasting (q.v.) and during the pilgrimage (q.v.; hajj, Q 2:187, 197, 222-3), and she must accept her husband’s authority (q.v.; Q 2:228; 4:34). The husband is liable to give to his wife the bridewealth due to her, which remains exclusively her own property (q.v.), and to provide clothes, food and lodging for her and their joint children (Q 2:233, 240; see Maintenance and Upkeep). The financial gifts that the woman receives are the prime reason for her marital obligations mentioned above (Q 4:34; see also Gift-Giving).

A special feature or effect of marriage is that it makes a slave woman “chaste”
(muḥṣana), meaning that by a marriage to a Muslim (free or slave), sexual intercourse with others becomes prohibited for her (Q 4:25). Slaves are thus not necessarily considered to be chaste because they are deemed to be the property of their owners who can use them sexually, be it as concubines or by forcing them into prostitution (Q 4:33). Marriage curbs such power of the owner (see Motzki, Muḥṣanāt, 199-201).

A few early exegetes tried to find evidence in Q 4:24 for a form of marriage called nikāh al-mutʿa, “marriage of enjoyment,” which differs considerably from the regular marriage described throughout the Qurʾān in that it is limited in time and legal consequences, and shows peculiarities which makes it appear close to prostitution (see Temporary Marriage). That such a type of marriage is meant in Q 4:24 is improbable, however, in view of the rules of marriage propagated by the Qurʾān as a whole (cf. Motzki, Muḥṣanāt, 201, 212; the subject is fully treated in Gribetz, Strange bedfellows and S. Haeri, Law of desire).

Divorce

Aims of divorce

According to the Qurʾān, divorce is a means by which the man purposely brings his marriage to an end — in contrast to the end of marriage by the death of one of the spouses. As described by the Qurʾān, marriage is intended to be long lasting and unbounded in time. This is suggested by labeling it a “firm bond” between a man and a woman and by the rules concerning divorce. The relation between the spouses should ideally be determined by love (q.v.) and understanding (mawadda wa-raḥma, Q 30:21; cf. 2:228) and important decisions concerning both should be made with mutual approval and consultation (Q 2:233). When this harmony does not develop, however, or fades away in the course of time, the Qurʾān allows or even advises spouses to bring the marriage to an end (Q 2:231), thus giving both individuals a chance for a new and perhaps happier relationship. This does not mean, however, that every tiny difference of opinion between the spouses should be solved by divorce. The Qurʾān admonishes the husband to treat his wife with equality, even if he does not love her (Q 4:19, 129); to forgive her when she had opposed him so that he had to discipline her (Q 4:34; see Disobedience; Forgiveness; Chastisement and Punishment; Insolence and Obstinance); and to try first to come to an agreement other than divorce (Q 4:129). If the spouses are not able to settle their dispute themselves, then the community is asked to intervene and to appoint two arbiters, one from each of the spouses’ families, in order to mediate a reconciliation between the spouses (Q 4:35). There are, moreover, other measures to avert hasty divorces: First, there are two waiting periods of three months prescribed by the Qurʾān before the divorce is final (see Waiting Period). These periods of physical separation between the spouses give the man the chance to rethink his decision and allow him to annul the divorce. Secondly, a man who, in a fit of anger, takes an oath not to have any sexual intercourse with his wife, is allowed a four-month period to break this oath which otherwise leads automatically to divorce (Q 2:226).

Types of divorce

In the Qurʾān, four types of divorce can be distinguished: two direct forms of divorce, ivalaʾ and ivalaʾ by ʾadlīdaʾ, and two procedures resulting in divorce, ʾilāʾ (or zihār) and ʿan.

(1) Talaq is the declaration made by the husband to divorce his wife; it becomes
final only after his wife has completed three menstrual periods (or months), provided that the husband has not withdrawn his divorce in the meantime. He has the right to declare and withdraw a *talāq* only twice. The wife does not have the right to divorce her husband in this fashion. The principal reason for this lack of equality is the bridewealth that the man would have given to his wife at marriage and that becomes her property. A divorce costs the man not only his wife but also the investment he has made to marry her. The husband may renounce his privilege by giving his wife the choice between divorce and continuation of marriage (Q. 33:28; the Prophet is asked to do that), but he alone can declare her divorced. A definitive divorce has to be made public by declaring it before two witnesses (Q. 65:2; see WITNESSING AND TESTIFYING).

The connection between bridewealth and divorce shows how it is possible for an unhappily married woman to receive a divorce from a husband who is not prepared to let her go generously: bargaining for it. The Qur’ān (Q. 2:229) suggests this possibility through the term *iftadat*, “to ransom herself.” (3) Q. 2:226-7 and Q. 58:2-4 deal with the case in which a man “swears his wife off,” which means that he makes an oath (see OATHS) not to have sexual intercourse with her anymore. Such an oath is effective (although the *zikar* oath is disapproved of in the Qur’ān) and, if it is not broken in the course of the following four months, i.e. if the man does not resume conjugal intercourse, leads to divorce. (4) When a husband accuses his wife of adultery without being able to prove it by producing four witnesses, he must swear to the truth of his accusation four times and then call God’s curse (Q. v.) upon himself in case he is lying (see LIE).

His wife escapes punishment by the same procedure if she swears that he is lying (Q. 24:6-9). Since marriages between Muslims and adulterers are prohibited and the relationship between the spouses is irretrievably ruined by such an accusation, divorce seems to be the only logical consequence.

**Legal consequences of divorce**

Two sorts of consequences can be distinguished: those resulting from the declaration of divorce and those of the finalized divorce. If a menstruating woman is declared divorced after the consummation of the marriage, she must observe a waiting time (*‘idda*) of three menstrual periods. A woman who is not menstruating must wait for an interval of three (lunar) months. During this time she may not remarry. If the woman realizes during this interval that she is pregnant, she must inform her husband. For a pregnant woman the waiting time is prolonged until childbirth (Q. 2:228; 33:49; 65:1, 4). During the waiting months, the woman has the right to stay in the house in which she is living and her husband must provide for her (Q. 2:241; 65:1, 6).

After divorce has been finalized, the man cannot remarry his divorced wife until she has been married to another man (Q. 2:230). The former husband has no further obligations towards the divorced woman, except if she has a baby. During the period of breast-feeding, which a mother is entitled to sustain until her child is two years old (see LACTATION), the former husband (or his heirs) must provide for the maintenance and clothes of the mother and child and pay her a wage for the breast-feeding (Q. 2:233; 65:6). In the case of an unconsummated marriage, divorce obliges the man to compensate the
divorced woman (if the bridewealth was not yet fixed) or to pay her half of the bridewealth (Q 2:236-7).

Conclusion

Martyrs
Those who die (generally at the hands of others) for their faith. In a Sunni Islamic context, martyrs are primarily those who fight unbelievers for the advancement of Islam, and sacrifice their lives for this (see Fighting; Belief and Unbelief; Suicide). This represents a marked difference with the situation of the defensive martyrs of early Christianity, who voluntarily suffered death as the consequence of witnessing to and refusing to renounce their religion. Christian martyrs were killed by hostile authorities in a period when their religion had no prospect of earthly success, whereas the early Sunni martyrs fell in battle during generally successful military campaigns (see Expeditions and Battles; War; Politics and the Qur’ān). Shi‘ī martyrdom has a coloring of its own (see Shi‘ism and the Qur’ān). It was shaped by the case of the martyr ʿarif excellence, Husayn b. ʿAlī (see Family of the Prophet; ʿAlī

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Shahīd

The common Arabic word for martyr is *shahīd*, pl. *shuhadāʾ*, a term that abounds in Islamic literatures from tradition literature onwards (see Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān). *Shahīd* occurs frequently in the Qurʾān, but at first glance means only “witness” (see Witnessing and Testifying; Witness to Faith) or “confessor.” Under the influence of early Christian usage, however, traditionists and exegetes (see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval) occasionally did interpret the Qurʾānic *shahīd* as “martyr.” The Greek *martyr* and Syriac *sāhdāʾ* had similarly developed semantically from “witness” via “confessor, testifier to the faith” to “martyr” (Goldziher, *ms*, ii, 350-1; Wensinck, *Oriental doctrine*, 147, 155).

Q 3:140, “God may know who are the believers and choose *shuhadāʾ* from among you,” is embedded in a war-context; it is therefore no wonder that al-Ṭabarī (*d. 310/923*) and the authorities he quotes (*Taḏiš*, nos. 7912-16) speak exclusively of martydom. Other verses give far less reason for such readings. Yet, in Q 4:69,

“Those who obey (see Obedience) God and the messenger (q.v.) will be with those whom God has favored, prophets (see Prophets and Prophecy), just men, *shuhadāʾ* and the righteous...,” both al-Ṭabarī (*Taḏiš*; ed. Shākir, viii, 532) and Muqāṭīṭ (d. 150/767; *Taḏiš*, iv, 243) interpret *shuhadāʾ* as those “killed in God’s way” (see Path or Way). In Q 57:19, “the pious and the *shuhadāʾ* in their lord’s sight” are martyrs according to Muqāṭīṭ (*Taḏiš*, iv, 243); al-Ṭabarī mentions “those who fell in battle or died in God’s way” as one of the possible interpretations (*Taḏiš*, xxvii, 134). The comments on the *shahīd*-verses in early Sunnī exegetical works (sing. *taḏīr*) are generally meagre: the verses about those who were killed in battle generated much more exegesis.

The Qurʾān on those who fell in battle

Without using the term *shahīd*, the Qurʾān speaks in several Medinan sūras of those who fight for the cause of God (“in God’s way,” *fi sabīl ilāhi*; see Jihād) and are killed. Whoever trades this life for the life to come concludes a profitable deal and is promised “a great reward” (Q 4:74; see Eschatology; Reward and Punishment). God buys from the believers their lives and their wealth (q.v.) in return for paradise (q.v.; Q 9:111). “And were you to be killed or to die in the way of God, forgiveness (q.v.) and mercy (q.v.) from God are better than what they amass. And were you to die or to be killed, it is to God that you will be gathered” (Q 3:157-8). As a matter of fact, *all* Muslims will be gathered, but those killed in action are privileged. They are often believed to enter paradise directly after having been killed, by virtue of a verse like this one: “Those who die in the way of God, he will not let their works be lost. He shall guide them and set their minds aright; and shall admit them into paradise, that he has made known to them” (Q 47:4-6; cf. Q 9:111). The martyrs are thus spared the torment in the grave, the “intermediate state” (see Barzakh) and the last judgment (q.v.). They are not even dead (see Death and the Dead): “And do not consider those who have been killed in the way of God as dead; they are alive with their lord, well-provided for” (Q 3:169; cf. 2:154).
Commentary and ḥadīth on those who fell in battle

In connection with the qur'ānic verses mentioned above, the state and whereabouts of the martyrs and their reward in the hereafter are discussed in the biographies of the Prophet (see sīra and the qur'ān), in commentaries on the Qur'ān (sing. tafsīr, see exegesis of the Qur'ān: classical and medieval) and in tradition literature. In the early tafsīr works, the material is distributed throughout the discussions of a number of qur'ānic verses rather randomly, and in ḥadīth collections it is also scattered over many different places. Here, therefore, a thematic arrangement seems more appropriate than a verse-by-verse treatment. Some large clusters of relevant hadith and tafsīr are to be found in Tabarī, Tafsīr, ad Q 2:154 (ed. Shākir, iii, 214-9); ad Q 3:169 (ed. Shākir, vii, 384-95); ad Q 47:4-6 (ed. Shākir, xxvi, 26 f.), and in ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827), Musnad, v, 263-6, no. 9553-62.

Historical martyrs

“Those who are killed in God’s way” are said to be those fighters who fell at Uhud (Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, 604, 605; Eng. trans. Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 400; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Tafsīr, ad Q 47:4-6, no. 2873; Tabarī, Tafsīr, nos. 7913, 8205, 8214-15), or at Badr (q.v.; Muqātīl, Tafsīr, ad Q 2:154. 47:4-6).

Among the Muslims fallen at Uhud was the father of Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh. Muḥammad said to Jābir: “I will give you good news, Jābir. God has restored life (abyāhu) to your father who was killed at Uhud...” (Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, 605; Eng. trans. Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 400; Tabarī, Tafsīr, no. 8214). The word abyāhu implies that he was brought back to life shortly after having been killed. ʿAbdallāh had asked the lord whether he could be sent back to the world to fight and be killed once more. In some traditions, this episode is presented as the “occasion for the revelation” (see occasions of revelation) of Q 3:169 (Ibn Māja, Sunan, muqaddima, 13, 190; Tirmidhī, Sunan, tafsīr ad Q 3, 18).

ʿAbdallāh was not the only person who wanted to go back to earth. According to the “birds-tradition” (see below) all martyrs so wish, and even the Prophet said he would like to be killed repeatedly in God’s way (e.g. Bukhārī, Sunan, jihād, 7; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, ii, 231).

The prerogatives of martyrs

A prophetic tradition enumerates nine (or three, or six, or ten) prerogatives of a martyr. His sins (see sin, major and minor) will be forgiven with the first gush of blood (see bloodshed); he will be shown his abode in paradise; he will be dressed in the garment of belief; he will be married to the houris (q.v.); he will be protected against the torment of the grave; he will be safe from the great terror [i.e. the last judgment]; the crown of dignity, one ruby of which is better than this world, will be placed on his head (see metals and minerals); he will be married to seventy-two wives from among the houris; he will intercede for seventy of his relatives (Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, iv, 131, 200; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Musnad, 9559; Ibn Māja, Sunan, jihād, 16/2799; see kinship).

The houris in paradise

During his ascension (q.v.), the Prophet saw in paradise an attractive “damsel with dark red lips.” In response to his question, she told him that she was promised for Zayd b. ʿA ๆ, his adoptive son (Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, 270; Eng. trans. Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 186). The text does not state that the woman was promised to Zayd because he was to be killed in battle, nor when he would obtain her. But in other texts the connection between martyrdom and the enjoyment of beautiful women in paradise is unmistakable. The above text
on the prerogatives of martyrs even mentions the houris twice. Another tradition promises only two women: “The blood of a martyr will hardly be dry on the earth, when his two spouses will already be rushing to meet him” (e.g. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Musannaf, 9561; Ibn Māja, Sunan, jihād, 16/2798), but here it is clear that the martyrs will be united with them at the very moment of their death.

Do martyrs go to paradise immediately after death?

According to the last tradition, the martyrs are in paradise immediately after their death. Other texts support this belief. When the believers once admired a costly gown, the Prophet asked: “Do you admire this? By him in whose hand my life is, the napkins of Sa’d b. Mu‘ādh in paradise are better than this!” (Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, 903; Eng. trans. Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 608). Sa’d had died from a war injury and hence was a martyr, feasting in paradise.

More frequent, however, are comments that make a point of the martyrs abiding near paradise, but not in it. “They are with their lord, they are provided with the fruits of paradise and they feel its breeze, but they are not in it” (Tabarî, Taṣfīr, no. 2317). Or they are “by the Bāriq river, at the gate of paradise, in a round green tent, their provision from paradise coming out to them morning and evening” (Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, 605; Eng. trans. Ibn Ishāq-Guillaume, 400; Tabarî, Taṣfīr, nos. 2323, 8210; Ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, i, 266; van Ess, ṫa, iv, 525, Eklund, Life, 39). The only privilege of the martyrs, says al-Tabarî, is that in their “intermediate state” (barzakh) they will be provided with food from paradise, which will be given to no other believer before the resurrection (q.v.; Tabarî, Taṣfīr, ed. Shākir, iii, 216).

Although the Qur’ān clearly speaks of paradise as the abode of those who fell, it does not say when they will arrive there. The exegetes may have sensed a theological difficulty: how were their blood-stained, mutilated bodies to be physically restored at the end of times, together with all other human beings, if they were in paradise already?

The frequently quoted “birds-tradition” (van Ess, ṫa, iv, 523-5; Eklund, Life, 16-20, 67-8) seems to aim at a compromise: the souls of the martyrs are close to God and may well visit paradise, but they do not stay there permanently before they are rejoined with their bodies. The text occurs in too many variations to cite all of them here; for this tradition, see the reference to the larger hadīth and taṣfīr clusters above. In a simple form it runs as follows: “The souls of the martyrs are in the shape of white birds that feed on the fruits of paradise” (‘Abd al-Razzāq, Musannaf, 9553). The souls (see soul) can be “in the shape of birds,” or “like birds with God,” “turned into green birds” or be just “birds.” Or they are “in birds”; “in the bellies (jauf) of birds”; “in the crops (hawsala) of green birds,” etc. These birds eat (ta’alū) or obtain necessary sustenance (ta’laq, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Musannaf, 9557) from the fruits of paradise, or forage (tawrah) wherever they want in paradise. But often they are said to “nestle in (golden) lamps that are hung (mu’allaqa) under the throne of God (q.v.),” and the throne is not in paradise. (Mu’allaqa may be inspired by the word ta’alū in an earlier version.) In many places (e.g. ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Musannaf, 9554), the lord appears and asks whether they desire anything else. Of course they do not, but, like Jābir’s father, they would wish to go back into their bodies to fight and be killed again. This wish is refused, but in some versions the martyrs are comforted with the prom-
ise that their relatives on earth will be informed about their present state, which then results in the revelation of Q 3:169-70. In two versions of the “birds-tradition,” they live in paradise after all “… in the shape of green birds in paradise” (Tabari, Taṣfīḥ, no. 2322); and: “the souls of the martyrs are in round white tents in paradise, in each of which are two spouses” (Tabari, Taṣfīḥ, no. 2324; see marriage and divorce; tents and tent pegs). Or they get to know each other in white birds that eat from the fruits of paradise; their dwellings are near the ‘lote-tree of the boundary’ (ṣidrat al-muntāhā, cf. Q 53:14; see agriculture and vegetation; trees), wherever that may be (Tabari, Taṣfīḥ, nos. 2319, 8215).

Other traditions on martyrdom

Certain ḥadīth explain how martyrs should be buried, or what should be done about their debts (q.v.; but this is not the place to discuss such details which bear no relation to the Qur’ān (see Wensinck, Handbook, 146-8; Kohlberg, Shahīd).

In Sunnī Islam, martyrdom is connected with jihād. Since, after the expansionist first century of Islam, gradually, fewer and fewer battles against unbelievers were fought, there was less chance to take part in war, and hence to be killed in action. Therefore, and also to enable as many believers as possible to share in the blessing of martyrdom, the term shāhīd was given a wider interpretation and was understood to encompass every sacrifice (q.v.) for God’s cause, or any difficult act of whatever nature (see trial). According to prophetic traditions, one could become a martyr by dying abroad, in an epidemic, in childbirth, by pleurisy or by drowning (q.v.), or by being killed in defence of one’s family or one’s property (q.v.; Kohlberg, Shahīd).

And, last but not least, “the ink of the scholars is of more value than the blood of the martyrs” (Goldziher, ms, ii, 390; see writing and writing materials).

Martyrdom in later times

In times and places where jihād was militarily revived, the idea of martyrdom was reactivated as well. During the Ottoman conquests in Europe, and during rebellions against European colonial powers, Muslim soldiers who fell in battle could rightly be called martyrs (see rebellion). In writings about jihād, there was not always an interest in martyrdom. Ibn Taymiyya (661-728/1263-1328), for instance, a major source of inspiration for Islamists in our days, eagerly expands on jihād, but hardly ever refers to martyrdom.

The twentieth century saw the rise of militant Islamist groups, to whose concept of jihād the writings of Ibn Taymiyya contributed greatly (see exegesis of the Qur’ān: early modern and contemporary). Perhaps the first modern Sunnī Muslim who explicitly preached martyrdom was the Egyptian Hasan al-Banna (1906-49), the founder of the Muslim Brothers. In his On jihād he quotes the relevant Qur’ānic verses and a host of traditions that extol the blessings of martyrdom, and ends his treatise with a sturdy, rhetorically impressive plea for it. Since he was murdered by the secret police, his followers had no difficulty in recognising him as a martyr. Martyrdom recurred as a topic in the publications of the Brothers, and the many who were executed by the Nasser regime in the fifties and sixties became martyrs themselves. Another famous Islamist martyr, who has had an enormous impact in militant circles, was the Egyptian Sayyid Ḥūth. After years in prison, he was hanged in 1966. In his often reprinted Qur’ān commentary Fī zīlāl al-Qur’ān he quotes the familiar traditions in reference
to Q 3:154, but adds an almost lyrical passage on martyrdom (Qūb, Žīlāl, i, 199-202; cf. ibid., iv, 314).

Modern Iran
In traditional Shi‘ism, there was no clear connection between jiḥād and martyrdom. Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 61/680) was venerated for his ostentatious suffering rather than for his military prowess. Since the last Shi‘ī imām (q.v.) was believed to be ‘hidden’, there was no one who could lawfully proclaim a religious war. From the 1960s onwards a new, activist and reformist type of jiḥād was propagated, combined with a tendency towards activist martyrdom. Leading figures in this movement were the sociologist professor ‘Alī Shar‘aṭī, and the Ayatollahs Ṭāleqānī and Muṭahharī (Abedi and Legenhausen, Jiḥād). After the Islamic revolution in 1979, the fresh ideological fervor was stained by the bloody reality. During the war with Iraq in the 1980s, masses of soldiers and child-soldiers were encouraged to seek martyrdom as cannon fodder and in mine fields, the ‘key of paradise’ hanging around their necks.

Lebanon and Palestine
From 1982 on, the Shi‘ī, Iranian-guided faction Ḥizbollāh (lit. “party of God”) organized suicide squads in Lebanon against Israel and the United States, motivated by the certainty that they would die as martyrs. Present-day individual suicide bombers in Palestine are the spiritual heirs of the Muslim Brothers, but are also influenced by a centuries-old popular tradition of glorifying death on the battlefield (Jarrar, Martyrdom). Although Sunni legal scholars do not agree on how far one can go in seeking martyrdom, suicides invariably have been motivated by qur‘ānic verses and traditions, prophetic as well as non-prophetic (akhbār), on the immediate reward for martyrs in paradise, with an emphasis on the heavenly brides. Traditions on martyrdom that slumbered for centuries have turned out to inspire modern militants, who only thirty years ago would still have fought under secular banners (see also oppression; oppressed on earth, the).

Wim Raven

Bibliography


Mārūt see Hārūt and Mārūt

Marvls

Amazing, incredible matters and events. Besides the specific contents of Qur’ānic verses employing the root ‘-j-b, the ‘ajā‘ib al-Qur’ān (“marvels of the Qur’ān”) came to refer to a vast genre of literature comprising travels (see journey; trips and voyages), cosmography (see cosmology), biology (see biology as the creation and stages of life; science and the Qur’ān), and the supernatural (see magic). Eight of the sixteen Qur’ānic instances of this root in which it has this sense, are verbs (e.g. “Do you wonder?”) and refer to surprise at God’s actions; the rest are nouns, adjectives and adverbs. The words occur in some of the most influential passages of the Qur’ān: many announce God’s sending of a Warner (q.v. e.g. q 38:4); two concern Abraham (q.v.) and Sarah’s reaction to the news of a new child (q 11:72, 73; see good news); one refers to the Sleepers in the Cave (q 18:9; see men of the Cave); and another to Moses (q.v.), Khīḍr (see Khādir/Khīḍr) and a fish (q 18:63). But the ‘ajā‘ib al-Qur’ān do not refer to these narratives (q.v.) specifically; instead this genre came to signify God’s creation (q.v.) and power (see power and impotence) as mentioned in the Qur’ān (see nature as signs), such as stars, planets (see planets and stars), animals (see animal life), seas, plants (see agriculture and vegetation), rain, thunder, seasons (q.v.), eclipses, geography (q.v.), the human body, and so forth. All of creation, its entities and processes, was viewed as part of the ‘signs’ (q.v.) of God, demonstrating his existence, majesty and order for the world. Since the Qur’ān frequently calls upon the believers to pay attention to the signs, studying the features of creation, the marvels of the world, became one form of worship of and reverence for God.

Three of the most famous works of this genre are ‘Ajā‘ib ‘ulām al-Qur’ān (“The wonders of the sciences of the Qur’ān”) by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), Nukhbat al-dahr fī ‘ajā‘ib al-barr wa-l-bahr (“A cosmography of the wonders of the land and the sea”) by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī (d. 727/1327) and ‘Ajā‘ib al-makhlūkāt (“The wonders of creation”) by Zakariyyā b. Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283). Al-Qazwīnī distinguishes between ‘ajīb (marvel, wonder) and gharīb (strange), in that the former impairs the human being in his ability to understand the cause of anything, especially the familiar (such as the sun [q.v.] rising), while gharīb consists of unusual things (such as earthquakes). Thus, by contemplating even the everyday occurrences of life — the growing of plants, the digestion of food, the flowing of the tides — the believer marvels at the real, has a sense of wonder and amazement, and is thereby led to an awareness of the transcendence of God. Contemplation of the unusual or strange occurrences which rupture the normal pattern of events (naqḍ al-‘ādāt) can serve to enhance this sense of wonder at the
creator’s power even further. In an iterative fashion, recording such extra-qur’anic marvels turned the believer’s attention back to the unique and miraculous nature of the Qur’ân itself (see inimitability). Many writers, in order to expand their catalogues of wondrous things undertook great journeys (cf. e.g. the Rihla of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa [d. 788/1377], entitled Tahfât al-nazzâr fi ghara’ib al-ansâr wa-‘ajâ’ib al-asfâr). The ‘ajâ’ib al-Qur’ân genre followed on an earlier group of writings known as kutub al-‘azama, which aim at the glorification of God (q.v.; ta’zîm Allâh) through the study of the world. The best known is Kîtâb al-‘azama of Abû al-Shaykh al-Anṣârî of Iṣfahânî (d. 369/979), considered the model for al-Ghazâlî’s (d. 505/1111) Kîtâb al-Tafakkuk, part of the latter’s Ištâ’ al-tâm al-dîn. Mention should also be made of the works entitled Kîtâb al-‘Azama by al-Muhâshîbî (d. 243/857); this work, however, has not survived intact; see van Ess, Die Gedankenwelt, 163-7 for a Ger. trans. of a segment that has survived), by al-Sijistânî, and Burhân al-Dîn Ibrâhîm b. Muḥâmmad al-Halâbî al-Dimâshiqî (d. 936/1549).

See miracles for discussion of the qur’anic accounts of supernatural interventions in human affairs.

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Bibliography


Mary

Mary (Ar. Maryam) the mother of Jesus (q.v.; ‘Īsâ) is the most prominent female figure in the Qur’ân and the only one identified by name (see women and the Qur’ân). Her story is related in three Meccan sūras (19, 21, 23) and four Medinan sūras (3, 4, 5, 66; see chronology and the Qur’ân), and the nineteenth sūra, Sūrat Maryam, is named for her. Overall, there are seventy verses that refer to her and she is named specifically in thirty-four of these (Smith and Haddad, Virgin Mary, 162). According to the qur’anic accounts, signs of divine favor surrounded her from birth. As a young woman, she received the angels’ (see angel) message that God had chosen her and purified her, chosen her above the women of the worlds, followed by their annunciation of a child born from God’s spirit (q.v.), a word from God (see word of God) cast into Mary, whose name was Jesus son of Mary, the “anointed one” or Messiah, one of God’s righteous prophets (see prophets and prophethood). The qur’anic revelation celebrates Mary as an example for the believers because of her chastity (q.v.), obedience (q.v.) and faith (q.v.); it also affirms God’s one-ness by emphasizing the created nature of Mary and of her son Jesus (see God and his attributes; creation).

Marwa see sâfâ and marwa
Mary, Zechariah, Jesus, and John

In sûras 3, 19 and 21, Mary’s story is intertwined with that of her guardian, the prophet Zechariah (q.v.; Zakariyyā). In sûras 19 and 21, the accounts of Zechariah’s prayer for a child in old age and the glad tidings of the birth of John (Yahyā; q 16:2-15; 21:86-90; see JOHN THE BAPTIST; GOOD NEWS) directly precede the passages on Mary’s sinless conception of the prophet Jesus (q 19:16-35; 21:91; see SEX AND SEXUALITY). In sûra 3, however, Zechariah’s story (q 3:38-41) is inserted between the verses on Mary’s birth and childhood (q 3:33-7) and the angels’ message to Mary of God’s special grace (q.v.) upon her, followed by their annunciation of the birth and prophethood of Jesus (q 3:42-51). The angels’ words announcing the birth of John to Zechariah (q 3:39) are almost identical with those on the birth of Jesus to Mary (q 3:45); and Zechariah’s (q 3:40) and Mary’s (q 3:47) questioning of the message, and the divine, or angelic, affirmation of God’s omnipotence to Zechariah (q 3:40) and Mary (q 3:47) also bear strong similarities. Furthermore, the wording of God’s praise and blessing on John (q 19:12-5) is almost identical with Jesus’ words of blessing about himself, spoken in the cradle (q 19:30-3; see FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR’ĀN).

This close association between the figures of Zechariah and Mary on the one hand and those of John and Jesus on the other establishes a special place for Mary in the Qur’ānic context of prophetic history. Some medieval Muslim theologians (see THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN) — especially of the short-lived Zāhiri school, such as Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba (d. 456/1064) — even assigned the rank of “prophethood” (nabūwāt), as opposed to “messengerhood,” (risāla, see MESSENGER) to Mary and also the mothers of Isaac (q.v.) and Moses (q.v.) and the wife of Pharaoh (q.v.). They justified this classification on the grounds that these women received knowledge (see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING) from God through word or inspiration (Ibn Ḥazm, Milāl, 119-21; see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION). Consensus-based Sunnī theology, however, strongly rejected this position as a heretical innovation (q.v.; bid‘a, see also HERESY).

Mary’s birth and service in the temple

The story of Mary’s birth, early life in the temple, and divinely-decreed superior rank is related in sûra 3, revealed in Medina (q.v.). The Qur’ānic verses affirm that Mary’s special status began even before she was born. God privileged Adam (see ADAM AND EVE), Noah (q.v.), the family of Abraham (q.v.) and the family of ‘Imrān (q.v.) with special status (q 3:33). Before giving birth to Mary, her mother, the wife of ‘Imrān, consecrated her unborn child to God’s service (assuming that she was carrying a boy). Seeing that the baby was a girl, and knowing that service in the temple was a male prerogative, she was bewildered, since God had accepted the offering even though the child was female (see GENDER). ‘Imrān’s wife named her daughter Mary and invoked God’s protection (q.v.) upon her and her offspring against Satan (q 3:33-6; see DEVIL). God accepted Mary graciously and made her grow up in a goodly manner, placing her in the charge of Zechariah (q 3:37). Whenever Zechariah would enter upon her in her prayer room, he found miraculous sustenance with which God had provided her (q 3:37). According to authenticated tradition, it was because of her mother’s prayer for God’s protection that both Mary and her son Jesus escaped “the pricking of the devil” at birth, which happens to all other human beings and is the reason why babies...
cry when they are born (Ibn Kathīr, Qisas, ii, 370-1, 461).

The exegetical literature (tafsīr, see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval) and the genre of literature known as “tales of the prophets” (qisas al-anbiyāʾ) further relate that Mary grew up in the temple where she worshiped day and night until her unequaled piety (q.v.) and righteousness became known among the Israelites (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, vi, 402-3; see children of Israel; Jews and Judaism). She lived in the mihrāb, a secluded cell or upstairs chamber; the door to this chamber was always locked and only Zechariah had the key. He would lock her into the room but, as noted above, whenever he visited her, he found wondrous provisions: winter fruit during summer time and summer fruit during winter time (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, vi, 333-8; Kisāʾi, Qisas, 328; Ibn Kathīr, Qisas, ii, 373, 385; Baljoun, Koran interpretations, 22, 65-6). Among the people who served with Mary in the temple, mention is made of Joseph, a carpenter, who is sometimes identified as Joseph son of Jacob and/or Mary’s cousin on her mother’s side (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xvi, 49-50; Rāzī, Tafsīr, xxi, 202; Ibn Kathīr, Qisas, 388, 390).

Mary’s rank and purification

Following four verses that tell of the tiding to Zechariah of John’s birth (Q 3:36-41), the relevant verses of sūra 3 further pursue the theme of God’s special favor on Mary: (1) in the words of the angels, “God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds” (Q 3:42); (2) their exhortation to be “devoutly obedient toward your lord (q.v.), prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down” (Q 3:43; see bowing and prostration); and (3) an indication that the right to her guardianship was settled by the casting of lots among quarreling contestants (Q 3:44; see gambling).

Exegesis has interpreted the “first choosing” in Q 3:42 (i.e. the first item in this tripartite divine message to Mary) as God’s acceptance of Mary for his service, providing her in the temple with sustenance that freed her from all labor (see manual labor) and granting her the ability to hear the angels’ words. The “second choosing” (i.e. the third item in this divine message) is said to have consisted in God’s gift of Jesus (Ḥusayn, Khadīja)’s daughter Fāṭima (q.v.) and granting her the ability to hear the angels’ words. The “third choosing” (i.e. the third item in this tripartite divine message) is said to have consisted in God’s gift of Jesus (Ḥusayn, Khadīja)’s daughter Fāṭima (q.v.) and granting her the ability to hear the angels’ words. The “second choosing” (i.e. the third item in this divine message) is said to have consisted in God’s gift of Jesus (Ḥusayn, Khadīja)’s daughter Fāṭima (q.v.) and granting her the ability to hear the angels’ words.

On the question of Mary’s rank above the women of the worlds, the exegetical debate is remarkable both for its intensity and the lack of consensus. At stake is Mary’s ranking among the Qurʾānic women figures but also, and perhaps more importantly, in relation to the elite women of Islam, especially the Prophet’s wives Khadija (q.v.) and ’Āisha (see ’Āisha bint Abī Bakr) and his daughter Fāṭima (q.v.). The problem is addressed by questioning whether Mary’s preeminence is absolute (over all other women and for all times) or relative (over the women of her own time). The larger number of traditions recorded in tafsīr and qisas al-anbiyāʾ literature establish, on the authority of the Prophet (see hadith and the Qurʾān), that Mary and Fāṭima, Khadija and Āṣya (the Pharaoh’s wife) are the best women of the world and also the ruling females in heaven (see heaven and sky; kings and rulers); traditions on ’Āisha’s inclusion in this group are fewer in number. While Āṣya’s and Mary’s merit is established on the basis of Q 66:11-2, Khadija’s merit is seen in her great service to the Prophet’s mission, and that of ’Āisha in her status as Muḥammad’s most beloved wife (see wives of the
prophet) and a prominent authority on his legacy after his death (Ṭabarī, Taʾfīṣ, vi, 393-400; Rāzī, Taʾfīṣ, viii, 45-6; Ibn Kathîr, Qīṣas, ii, 375-81; Rashîd Riḍâ, Manâsî, iii, 300). According to some qīṣas al-aḥbâyāʾ reports, Mary and Āṣya, Khâdhîja and ʿĀʾisha share the privilege of being Muḥâmmad’s wîfly consorts in paradise (q.v.; Ibn Kathîr, Qīṣas, ii, 375-83; see Marriage and Divorce).

This leaves the question of Mary’s ranking in relation to the Prophet’s daughter Fâṭima. In Muslim piety, especially Shiʿî piety (see Shiʿism and the Qurʾān), the figures of Mary and Fâṭima are closely associated. Mary was one of four miraculous midwives who assisted Khâdhîja in Fâṭima’s birth (McAuliffe, Chosen of all women, 26-7), Mary appeared to Fâṭima to console her during her last illness (Ayoub, Redemptive suffering, 50), both were visited by angels, and both received miraculous sustenance during childhood and the periods of isolation preceding the birth of their child, or children. Their association also involves attribution to both of a shared quality of purity (tahâra, see Ritual Purity), which meant freedom from menstruation (q.v.) and bleeding at childbirth (McAuliffe, Chosen of all women, 22-3; Ayoub, Redemptive suffering, 70-2, 75; see Birth, Biology as the Creation and Stages of Life), while their deepest tie lies in their joint image of mistress of sorrows (Ayoub, Redemptive suffering, 27, 30, 39, 48-50). Although according to the Qurʾān, Jesus was persecuted and rejected by his people but not slain, Shiʿî hagiography has recognized strong affinities between Jesus and Husayn (Ayoub, Redemptive suffering, 35; see Family of the Prophet), as also between their holy mothers. In popular devotions (see Festivals and Commemorative Days), Mary and Fâṭima, sacred figures of solace and hope (q.v.), are at times revered simultaneously (Smith and Haddad, Virgin Mary, 180-1). While some traditions — reported on the authority of the Prophet — award Mary and Fâṭima equal rank as the two reigning females in the celestial realm of the hereafter, most Shiʿî authorities rank Fâṭima above Mary; indeed, Fâṭima is sometimes referred to as Maryam al-kubrâ, “Mary the Greater” (McAuliffe, Chosen of all women, 23-4, 26-7). In the Sunni taʾfīṣ, these notions are almost absent, while opinions are also largely divided on the exact meaning of Mary’s purity (tahâra) or purification (taḥārâ).

Most interpreters rely on those traditions which establish that, in the physical sense, Mary was a woman like all others. She is said to have begun menstruating during the time of her service in the temple, from which Zechariah removed her to his wife’s care until she had regained physical purity, and to have been ten, or thirteen, or fifteen years old at the time of the angelic annunciation of the birth of Jesus, by which time she had completed two menstrual cycles (Ṭabarī, Taʾfīṣ, xvi, 45-6; Zamakhshari, Kashshâf, ii, 7-8; Râzî, Taʾfīṣ, xxi, 196-201; Baydâwî, Amwâs, i, 578-9; Kisâʾî, Qīṣas, 328; Ibn Kathîr, Qīṣas, ii, 385, 457). Traditions on the forty days of isolation that Mary is said to have observed after the delivery of her child “until she was healed of childbirth” further indicate to many interpreters that Jesus’ birth was in its physical symptoms an ordinary event (Zamakhshari, Kashshâf, ii, 11; Ibn Kathîr, Qīṣas, ii, 393). Conversely, some interpreters have recorded traditions and/or their own scholarly opinions that Mary’s purity included chastity as well as freedom from bleeding (Râzî, Taʾfīṣ, viii, 46; Baydâwî, Amwâs, i, 155). According to the modernist Muḥâmmad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), it was this quality of purification that enabled Mary to serve in the temple while Fâṭima’s equally miraculous freedom from the defilement of
menstruation was the cause of her honorific title al-zahrā', “the radiant, luminous” (Rashīd Riḍā, Manāth, iii, 300). In classical as well as modern sources, however, such readings have remained marginal to the consensus-based doctrine that Mary’s purity was “ethical,” meaning that it concerned her character and soul (see ETHICS AND THE QUR’ĀN). While physically a woman like all others, she was free of all lowly character traits and exempted from all sin (see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR). Sunnī exegesis thus came to define Mary’s purity in terms of ʿīma, “sinlessness,” the quality that Islamic dogma ascribes to God’s prophets (see IMPECCABILITY). Nevertheless, to the scholars who interpreted her story, Mary’s status remained sui generis because of the equally consensus-based Islamic doctrine that her physical nature was that of an ordinary woman (Ṭabarī, Ṭafsīr, vi, 400; Zamakhshārī, Kashf al-shāf, i, 277; Rāzī, Ṭafsīr, vii, 46; Baydāwī, Anwār, i, 155; Ibn Kathīr, Qīṣās, ii, 374; Rashīd Riḍā, Manāth, iii, 300). In the medieval sources, some prominence was awarded to the link between Mary’s purity and her mother’s prayer to God to protect her daughter and her daughter’s offspring against Satan (Q. 3:36; cf. Ibn Kathīr, Qīṣās, ii, 370-1, 461). A few modernist qur’ānic interpreters have questioned whether Mary’s holiness, quite apart from all considerations of her physical purity, would not qualify her for inclusion among men in the full sense of their status in Islamic doctrine, liturgy and law (Smith and Haddad, Virgin Mary, 173, 179; see FEMINISM AND THE QUR’ĀN; EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: EARLY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY).

Concerning the matter of Jesus’ conception without a human father, consensus among classical and modern scripturalist scholars has consistently maintained that Mary was a virgin (batūl) when she conceived her child from God’s spirit. While the term ‘virgin’ (batūl) does not appear in the Qur’ān, the devout often use it in reference to Mary. In Sunnī and especially Shi‘ī popular piety, the title is also applied to Fāṭima (Smith and Haddad, Virgin Mary, 179-80). Exegetical literature largely disregards the question of whether Mary’s virginity prevailed after Jesus’ birth. While Mary’s purification “from the touch of men” implied perpetual virginity to some religious scholars (cf. Rāzī, Ṭafsīr, vii, 46), the matter was not fully discussed, and some modern interpreters appear to deny that Mary retained her virginity beyond Jesus’ birth (cf. Bahī, Sunnat Maryam, 14). Even though, however, some nineteenth and twentieth century modernist Islamic scholars on the Indian subcontinent have rejected the notion of Mary’s motherhood while a virgin (Baljón, Koran interpretations, 69-70; Parrinder, Jesus, 69 f.; Smith and Haddad, Virgin Mary, 175), mainstream Islamic consensus has upheld the tenet of the virgin birth of Jesus.

_God’s spirit (rūḥ) and a word (kalima) from God:_

_Mary and the birth of Jesus_

The earliest and longest account of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus is found in the sūra of Mary (Q. 19:16-33), revealed in Mecca, which relates the announcement, Jesus’ birth, and Jesus’ first words.

Mary had withdrawn from her family to an eastern place and was in seclusion. And we sent our spirit (rūḥ) to her, and it took the shape of a well-proportioned human. She said: “I take refuge with the Compassionate from you. [Go away] if you fear God.” He said: “I am only your lord’s messenger, that I give you a pure boy.” She said: “How could I have a boy when no human has touched me and I am not an unchaste woman?” He said: “Thus. Your lord says: It is easy for me, and so that we make him
a sign for the people and a mercy (q.v.) from us. It is a settled matter” (Q 19:17-21).

Mary conceived and retired to a remote place where the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree (see date palm). In her despair she cried out that she wished she had died before this and been forgotten, but then she heard a voice from below her instructing her to cease grieving, drink of the little brook that God had placed beneath her, eat of the fresh ripe dates of that tree, be joyful and abstain from speaking with anyone. When she then brought her baby to her people, they accused her of unchastity, but Jesus in the cradle announced himself to them as God’s blessed prophet whom God had charged with prayer, almsgiving and filial piety toward his mother (Q 19:22-33).

In Q 21:91, also of the Meccan period, Mary is called “She who guarded her shame. Then we breathed (or blew) into her of our spirit (rūḥ), and we made her and her son a sign for the worlds,” while in Q 23:50, also of the Meccan period, the son of Mary and his mother are likewise revealed to be a sign from God. The third passage about God’s spirit in the context of Mary’s motherhood is found in Q 66:11-2, dated to Medina, “And God has given an example to those who believe… [in] Mary the daughter of ’Imrān who protected her shame and we breathed (or blew) into it [or her] of our spirit (rūḥ). And she testified to the truth of her lord’s words and his books and was of the devoutly obedient.” According to Q 19:17, 21:91, and 66:12, Mary thus conceived Jesus from God’s spirit.

In Q 4:171, Jesus is identified as “God’s messenger (rasūlu lāh), his word that he cast into Mary and a spirit from him.” Jesus was supported with the holy spirit (q.v.; rūḥ al-qudus, Q 2:87, 253; 5:110). The casting of God’s spirit into Mary recalls the gift of God’s spirit to Adam shaped from clay (q.v.; Q 15:29; 32:9; 38:72) while Jesus’ support by means of the holy spirit recalls the strengthening of those in whose hearts (see heart) faith is firmly established “with a spirit from himself” (Q 58:22). The Qurʾān speaks of the trusted spirit as the agent of God’s revelation (Q 26:193; cf. 16:102). The spirit is mentioned together with, but separate from, the angels (Q 70:4: 78:38; 97:4) and as a gift conveyed by the angels to God’s chosen servants (Q 16:2). In its role as conveyor of revelation, the spirit is identified as Gabriel (q.v.; Jibrīl, Q 2:97). In Mary’s story, the spirit is the life-creating force of, or from, God. Qurʾānic commentary, however, has consistently differentiated between “our spirit sent to Mary in the form of a well-proportioned man” (Q 19:17) and “our spirit [of] which we breathed into Mary” (Q 21:91; 66:12), identifying the former with the angel Gabriel and the latter with the life substance with which God (directly) awakened Adam to life from clay, just as it (directly) awakened Jesus to life in Mary’s womb (Rāzī, Tafsīr, xxi, 196, 200-1; xxii, 218; xxx, 50; Taʿāwūs, Tafsīr, 26, 30; Qurṭbī, Ṣilāḥ, iv, 2306).

The classical interpreters established that Gabriel was a means, or instrument, of God’s creative power, whence they linked his agency with God’s breathing, or blowing, of his spirit into Mary by developing the theme of Gabriel’s blowing at Mary’s garment or person (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, xvi, 48; Zamakhsharī, Ḥashshāṣ, iii, 8; Rāzī, Tafsīr, xxi, 201; Bayḍāwī, Anwār, i, 578-9; Kisāʾī, Qīṣṣa, 328; Ibn Kathīr, Qīṣṣa, ii, 387-8). In contrast to the usual course of nature (kharq al-ʿāda), the divine breath caused Mary to conceive. While the physical aspect of how this occurred was of interest to some medieval rationalist exegetes like al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209; Tafsīr, viii, 50-2) and a few modernist interpreters like ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935; Manār, iii, 308), most
classical and modern interpreters have reckoned the physical manner of Mary’s conception from the spirit a divine mystery beyond human understanding and, therefore, not of human concern (Bahāʾī, Sūrat Maryam, 14; Qurʾān, Ṣīlāh, i, 396-7; iv, 2307).

A second angelic annunciation scene to Mary is related in Qurʾān 3:45-51, revealed in Medina, where it is preceded by the accounts of Zechariah’s guardianship of Mary and Mary’s special blessings in the temple, presented above. In Qurʾān 3:45, the angels announce to Mary that “God gives you glad tidings of a word (kalima) from him whose name is the Messiah (al-masīḥ) Jesus son of Mary, highly regarded in this world and in the hereafter (see eschatology), and one of those brought close [to God].” Similar to her words to the divine spirit/God’s messenger in Qurʾān 19:20, Mary then questions her lord, “How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?” He said: “Thus. God creates what he wills. When he has decreed a matter he only says a word (kalima) and it is” (Qurʾān 3:47; see cosmology). The angels’ glad tidings to Mary of a word (kalima) from God who is her son (Qurʾān 3:45) is reiterated in Qurʾān 4:171 which speaks of Jesus as “the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, God’s messenger and his word that he cast into (or bestowed upon) Mary, and a spirit from him.”

Qurʾānic exegesis has recorded different interpretations of the meaning of God’s word (kalima) in the context of Jesus as a word from God (Qurʾān 3:45) and Jesus as his (i.e. God’s) word which he cast into, or bestowed upon Mary (Qurʾān 4:171). The richest formulation of this theological debate is found in the Tafsīr (viii, 49-50) of the medieval rationalist theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, whose arguments were at least partially based on older sources such as al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) Tafsīr (vi, 411) but were also reiterated, with little change, by the nineteenth century modernist rationalist school of Muhammad ʿAbduḥ (Rashīd Riḍā, Manābī, iii, 304-5). To these exegetical authorities, the meaning of God’s kalima, “word,” in the context of Mary’s conception of Jesus is multifaceted and in large part metaphorical (see metaphor). It connotes God’s creative power and his (verbal) act of the creation of Jesus. But kalima also indicates the gospel (q.v.), the essence of Jesus’ prophetic mission; elsewhere, Jesus himself is figuratively referred to as “God’s word” by way of defining his mission, which is to clarify God’s message anew and cleanse the record of past revelations from distortion (see forgery). Finally, kalima, the word, is said to be God’s message to Mary about the birth of Jesus. To most modern and contemporary religious experts, however, who show little interest in the whole scholastic rationalist tradition, the theological problematic of Jesus as a word from God (Qurʾān 3:45) or (God’s) word bestowed upon Mary (Qurʾān 4:171) is not an urgent concern, and they place it in the category of the Qurʾān’s obscure (mutashābih) teachings, “a matter above human understanding and, therefore, none of man’s concern” (e.g. Qurʾān, Ṣīlāh, i, 397; see ambiguous; difficult passages).

Membership in the created order

Both major accounts on the manner in which Mary conceived and bore her son Jesus (Qurʾān 19, Meccan, and Qurʾān 3, Medinan, quoted above) end with the affirmation of Jesus’ full humanity. Speaking in the cradle, Jesus announces that

I am God’s slave. He has given me the book (q.v.) and has made me a prophet. He has made me blessed wherever I be and has charged me with prayer (q.v.) and almsgiving (q.v.) as long as I live, and filial piety toward my mother. And he has not
made me tyrannical and villainous (see oppression; arrogance). And peace be upon me the day I was born and the day I die and the day I am resurrected alive (see resurrection). Such is Jesus the son of Mary — to say the truth which they doubt. It is not for God to acquire (or to take to himself) any child. Praised be he (see glorification of God; laudation)!

When he decides a matter he only says to himself: “Be!” and he is (q. 3:59). In the verses of q. 4:171 and q. 5:17, 72-3, 75-6, and 116-7, revealed in Medina, special emphasis is placed on Mary’s and Jesus’ full humanity, including refutation that they should form part of a “trinity” (q.v.).

In their interpretations, Muslim exegetes assert that the affirmation of God’s oneness is the central issue and purpose of all the verses on Mary, Mary, God’s handmaiden, and her son Jesus, God’s slave and prophet, are not “gods” (q. 5:17, 72, 75-6, 116). The refutation of the notion of “three” (trinity) of q. 4:171 and q. 5:73 is the divinely-revealed correction of a blasphemous Christian association (see Christians and Christianity) of Mary “the female consort” and Jesus “the son” with God, in a “family setting.” The Qur’anic refutation of this blasphemy (q.v.) corresponds with the rejection of equally blasphemous pagan Arabian allegations that the angels were God’s “daughters” whom God begat with the jinn (q.v.; in interpretation of q. 37:149-59; cf. 43:19-20) or that pagan deities were God’s “daughters” (53:19-23; see South Arabia, religion in pre-Islamic; polytheism and atheism; satanic verses).

Mary and Eve

In clarifying the nature of Jesus as fully human, the Qur’an repeatedly likens Jesus to Adam because both are God’s creations whom God brought to life by his divine word and decree. Hadith has expanded this equation into a human tetragram where Mary parallels Adam, and Jesus parallels Eve. Just as Eve was created from Adam without a woman, so was Jesus created from Mary without a man (Ibn Kathir, Qisas, ii, 387). The Qur’an-based Muslim doctrine that Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience (q.v.) was but a “slip” or “error” (q.v.), repented and forgiven (by the divine gift of prophethood; see repentance and penance; forgiveness), has, however, precluded any other linkage between Eve and Mary in this context. It is only in some esoteric Sunni (see Sufism and the Qur’an) sources that the tetragram of Adam, Eve, Mary, and Jesus, placed into the context of God’s self-revelation, has been said to signify God’s forgiveness for the sin of Eve through Mary (Smith and Haddad, Virgin Mary, 182-3).

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Bibliography


Maryam see Mary

Massacre see murder

Master see lord; scholar

Material Culture and the Qur’ān

In view of the all-encompassing significance of the Qur’ān in the faith (q.v.) of the Muslim community it is to be expected that its influence would be manifested in many spheres of life (see everyday life, Qur’ān in). The holy book has had an impact not only through its cultic role but also as a venerated object and through its importance to other cultural practices. The Qur’ān’s effect on material culture is an extension of the various functions it plays in devotional life and although some of these must have been prominent since the establishment of the faith in the seventh century, other uses have evolved over time and continue to be modified by the community’s geographical expansion as well as by the broader development of its religious and visual culture.

Although one might assume that the Qur’ān had its greatest impact on the way of life of the Muslim community in the centuries that immediately followed its promulgation, evidence in the form of surviving manuscripts (see codices of the Qur’ān) and of Qur’ānic citations on objects or architecture suggests that in fact the opposite is true — that the importance of the Qur’ān in both religious and material terms has grown more complex and elaborate over time and indeed continues to evolve today (see art and architecture and the Qur’ān; archaeology and the Qur’ān; epigraphy and the Qur’ān). The reasons for its escalating importance are not always discernible but we hope that our exposition will spark further inquiry into this question. Despite the subject’s obvious importance, the various ways in which the Qur’ān has affected the material culture of the broad expanse of the Muslim community has yet to receive sustained analytical consideration. The following essay should thus be considered a preliminary sketch on this topic rather than a definitive statement about it.

In order to provide an outline of the major phases and issues involved, this essay will have a general introduction followed by both chronological and thematic divisions. Its first phase will cover the period in which the evidence is the most fragmentary, from the rise of Islam in the seventh century c.e. until the fifth/eleventh century, and will concentrate on the regions of the new faith’s birth and early expansion — the Middle East, north Africa and Spain. The second period, the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, witnessed an increasing impact of the Qur’ān on material culture as well as a broad extension of Islam into new regions. Because of its abundance and complexity, evidence from this and the succeeding period will be treated within geographical regions and according to dynastic divisions. Dynasties that straddle these broad periods will be discussed in the epoch of their greatest importance. The final section, devoted to developments from the sixteenth century to
the present, will again be treated regionally. Special attention will be given to areas not well represented in earlier periods such as east and southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite the broad chronological and geographical scope of this topic, certain aspects of the Qur’ān’s connection with material culture are encountered in most regions, although their relative prominence probably fluctuated over time. In every region and period special care was given to the manufacture, use and preservation of individual copies of the Qur’ān (see مُسْتَهَ) — be they manuscripts in codex, scroll or single-sheet format (see مَانْسِبَة الدَّرْو) or, more recently, printed copies (see طباعة الْقُرْآن). Scholars have debated when and where the text first assumed the form it retains today and the scripts with which it was copied have been classified and analyzed (see اسْمِ النَّصّ; الْبَيْان). Little attention has been given, however, to the importance of sectarian, regional or dynastic views for determining the various ways that the Qur’ān’s text has been transcribed over the centuries nor has adequate attention been given to the question of whether a particular copy’s physical features reveal the use for which it was intended. Many of the practices connected with the manufacture or preservation of Qur’ān copies are believed by modern scholars to have had a wider effect in stimulating the development of the book arts. It has often been suggested that there was a transfer of techniques or styles ranging from calligraphy (q.v.) to illumination (see دِسْتَرَة الدِّجْلَة) and binding from the Qur’ān to other kinds of books but the possibility that Qur’ān manuscripts borrowed features from elsewhere has been little investigated.

It has often been noted that portions of the Qur’ān’s text appear on certain kinds of portable objects and are inscribed on many architectural monuments but rarely has such an observation led to any sustained consideration of the reasons behind this use. Studies have explored the significance of the inscriptions belonging to specific buildings and a broader compilation of such texts accompanied by indices and interpretative essays published by E. Dodd and S. Khairullah has suggested that Qur’ānic citations on religious architecture fulfill the communicative and symbolic role played by images in some other faiths (see إِسْكَان). They acknowledge, however, that it is often difficult to provide a consistent explanation for the popularity or use of a specific sūra or verse in architecture (see سُورَة بَيْت النَّجَاح). R. Hillenbrand’s evaluation of their findings has likewise concluded that in the case of mosques the selection and application of Qur’ānic citations was often “surprisingly undirected.”

The use of the Qur’ān’s text on objects has been even less studied than its role in architecture. The reasons why portions of its text appear on some types of objects and not on others have not been clearly elucidated. Each quotation is not of equal importance; over time some usages became formulaic and probably were almost mechanical. Nevertheless, even the repeated use of a given text on a particular type of object or in a specific architectural context is potentially indicative of a deeper connection which links the object or structure in question to a facet of the Qur’ān’s text or to its significance for religious practice and daily life.

Another virtually universal role of the Qur’ān is as a source of comfort and support for the individual believer in this life as well as in the next (see eschatology), although the history and development of such practices is often difficult to establish. The appearance of citations from the Qur’ān on tombstones or other funerary
structures is often the earliest sign of the presence of Muslims in a given region. Its text is also inscribed on a range of objects that functioned as amulets (q.v.) or talismans (see popular and talismanic uses of the Qur’ān) intended to bring succor to an individual believer in daily life (see trust and patience).

The formative period: seventh to eleventh centuries (first to fifth centuries hijrī)

The importance of the Qur’ān for the Umayyad period: 41-132/661-750

Most of the extant early Qur’ān copies derive from caches of manuscript pages, detached bindings and related religious materials that were discovered during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in several mosques, including the Great Mosque of Qayrawān in Tunisia, the mosque of ‘Amr in Cairo, the Umayyad mosque in Damascus and the Great Mosque of Ṣan‘ā’ in the Yemen. The overwhelming majority of such Qur’āns survive only in a very fragmentary state, indicating that these copies were probably discarded because they had sustained damage that made them unsuitable for further use. The rather disorderly manner in which these fragments were preserved also tends to underscore the conclusion that initially the recited Qur’ān was of greater liturgical significance than its written version (see orality; orality and writing in Arabia; recitation of the Qur’ān). Despite their wide geographic distribution, few of these Qur’ān fragments retain any documentation about their date and place of copying. Examination of these pages by a succession of scholars including B. Moritz, N. Abbott, A. Grohmann and F. Déroche has established that they derive from various early Qur’ān manuscripts but no consensus has emerged about either the date or geographical origin of these fragments.

The initial hope that some might date to the seventh century has been largely, but not entirely, abandoned in favor of dates ranging from the eighth to tenth centuries. The traditional recollection of the Muslim community that the Qur’ān’s text was compiled in the mid-seventh century during the caliphate of ‘Uthmān (q.v.; 23-35/644-656; see also collection of the Qur’ān) cannot be confirmed through manuscript evidence, and claims that certain extant copies were written by him or even were splattered with his blood are probably legends. A study by E. Whelan has established that as early as the late seventh century the preparation of Qur’ān manuscripts was entrusted to specialists who were both skilled calligraphers and persons respected for their religious knowledge. Links can also be made between the manuscript tradition and early monumental epigraphy because both textual and visual evidence demonstrates that calligraphers trained to copy the Qur’ān were responsible for designing the mosaic inscriptions in monuments erected with the patronage of the Umayyad caliphs ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 64-86/684-705) and his son al-Walīd (r. 86-96/705-15).

The reign of ‘Abd al-Malik marks the moment when the Qur’ān’s importance as a symbol of the power and legitimacy of the new Muslim polity was made manifest not only to the Muslims themselves but also to their non-Muslim subjects and to their adversaries, the Byzantines (q.v.). The reforms that ‘Abd al-Malik instituted — whereby Arabic became the primary language of administration and governance (see Arabic language) — also gave citations from the Qur’ān a new level of public prominence. This transition, which reached its climax in 77/696-7 with the minting of new epigraphic gold coins, probably began five years earlier in 72/691-2 (see money). During these five
years the Qurʾan was used alongside texts or designs of Byzantine origin in various contexts. One of the first places in which the Qurʾan made its appearance is on the papyrus rolls produced in Egypt by the state-controlled factory. By 74/693-4 or 75/694-5, Arabic appeared alongside Greek in the protokollon, a text written on the first sheet in a papyrus roll. Both the Arabic text and its Greek translation consisted of phrases from different parts of the Qurʾan fused into a continuum. Usually the protocol text included phrases from q 3:173; 6:163; 9:33; 61; 47:19; 61:1, 9 and most of q 112. A key example of this transition between Byzantine traditions and the new Umayyad approach is the undated double-sided lead seal of Ḥabīb al-Malik preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı, Istanbul and published by I. Artuk in 1952. In shape, structure and design it is modeled on the lead seals that Byzantine authorities prefixed to important documents or various kinds of goods. In this case, the seal’s obverse bears cartouches inscribed with the caliph’s name and his titles (in Arabic) flanking a large letter “A” that, in turn, is framed by a pair of long-necked birds. The obverse’s outer border bears short phrases reiterating key beliefs of the Muslim community from q 6:163; 39:45; 48:29; and q 49:19, a selection of texts similar to those used on Ḥabīb al-Malik’s reform coins (see Numismatics) and his bilingual papyrus protocols. The border of the reverse carries a grapevine and its center combines a pair of lions with the name Filastin (Palestine) in Arabic.

Qurʾānic phrases also appear on the gold dinars struck in Damascus and other cities after Ḥabīb al-Malik’s monetary reform in 77/696-7, and on silver dirhams struck from 79/698-9 onward (for an example of such coinage, see Fig. 1 of Epigraphy). The caliph’s use of the Qurʾan on coins elevated coinage to a position as signifier of sovereignty (q.v.) among Muslim rulers and led later dynasties to employ its text as a source for inscriptions appropriate to their own position and ambitions (see Politics and the Qurʾan). Both the obverse and reverse of Ḥabīb al-Malik’s reform coins have texts at their center and around their perimeter. The central text of the obverse consists of the three distinct citations that create the profession of the faith (q 6:163; 39:45; 47:19; see Witness to Faith) and these texts overlap so that the last word of the first phrase also functions as the first word of the second phrase: “There is no God but God; God alone.” The marginal text, composed of phrases from q 48:29 and 9:33, establishes Muhammad’s prophetic mission. The central text of the coin’s reverse carries q 112:1-3 and reiterates a belief in God’s unity, eternity (q.v.) and absolute singularity (see God and His Attributes; Polytheism and Atheism).

Monumental architecture

Extensive citation of Qurʾānic passages on architectural monuments, one of the characteristics of structures built for Muslim patrons in many regions and periods, also begins with Ḥabīb al-Malik. The earliest surviving example of this practice, the Dome of the Rock (qubbat al-sakhra) in Jerusalem, bears a date (72/691-2) that probably documents the beginning of its construction. Those inscriptions with gold letters silhouetted against a dark blue ground were executed in glass mosaic or painted on embossed metal plaques. The outer face of the interior’s octagonal ambulatory bears five distinct prayers each of which opens with Qurʾānic citations affirming God’s unity and eternity. Passages cited in one or more of these prayers include q 6:112,163; 17:111; 39:45; 47:19; 57:2 and q 64:1. The Prophet’s role as divine messenger (q.v.) and intercessor (see Intercession) is also reiterated using both q 48:29
or Q 33:56 and extra-Qurʾānī invocations. The mosaic inscriptions of the ambulatory’s inner face augments these themes with praises of Jesus (q.v.), son of Mary (q.v.), and stresses his role as divine messenger, while also providing a refutation of Christian beliefs about the Trinity (q.v.; Q 4:171-2; 19:34-6; see Christians and Christianity). Originally, inscribed metal plaques were probably situated at the building’s four entrances but only two of them survive. The north door panel enunciates Muhammad’s missionary role and his links to earlier prophets (Q 2:136; 3:84 or Q 61:9; see Prophets and Prophethood), whereas the eastern one stresses God’s omnipotence and eschatological themes (Q 2:255; 6:12, 101, 112: 3:26; 7:156).

The style of the script used in the Dome of the Rock’s inscription and the presence therein of diacritical signs link it to scribal practices used in preparing manuscript copies of the Qurʾān; it is likely, therefore, that its designer or designers were among those who specialized in that exacting task. A Qurʾānic scribe is mentioned as the designer of a mosaic inscription of the Great Mosque of Medina erected under the patronage of al-Walid b. ‘Abd al-Malik between 88-91/706-10. This mosque’s qibla (q.v.) wall was inscribed with Q 93 and Q 114, sūras that stress eschatological themes. Literary descriptions of the Medina mosque suggest that other sections of the Qurʾān, and possibly its entire text, were inscribed over its doors, around its courtyard and within the sanctuary.

Qurʾānic inscriptions executed in mosaic were also included in the Great Mosque of Damascus, another important commission of al-Walid.

Evidence from the Umayyad period demonstrates the wide influence of actions taken by members of that dynasty in defining the contexts in which Qurʾānic citations would appear for several centuries. In order to have such a lasting impact, their actions must also have been in consonance with the preferences of their co-religionists. The fact that Qurʾānic excerpts appearing on their papyrus protocols, personal seals, coins and monumental architecture are closely related variants reiterating the core tenets of Islam suggests that the Umayyad leaders’ primary concern was to affirm and disseminate those beliefs.

Excursus on the importance of the Qurʾān for individual Muslims

During the second/eighth through fourth/tenth centuries brief excerpts from the Qurʾān also played a role in the more personal spheres of life and appear on seals, seal rings, amulets and tombstones. A third/ninth or fourth/tenth century amulet case inscribed with Q 112 was excavated in eastern Iran at Nishāpūr. Tombstones from Egypt, Syria and north Africa believed to date from the eighth and ninth centuries are inscribed with a variety of short Qurʾānic phrases. The earliest Syrian tombstones carry a variant of the profession of faith (shahāda) that combines the phrases from Q 6:163 and Q 47:19 that affirm God’s absolute unity; phrases also contained in many papyrus protocols. A Tunisian tombstone of 270/883 contains Q 3:185, “Every soul shall taste of death,” a text that became one of the standard citations on funerary monuments but Q 37:61, “For the like of this, let the workers work,” popular in Egypt in the first Islamic centuries, is little used in later periods (see Death and the Dead). A number of early tombstones from Egypt and Syria employ phrases that stress reliance on or trust in God such as “ḥasbiya illāhu” (Q 9:129; 39:38) or its close variant “ḥashunā illāhu” (Q 3:173; 9:59). These phrases were also engraved on ring-stones where they may have had a talismanic function. A small lead dish attributed to the second/
eighth or third/ninth century in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (MTW 621) that may have served a medical-magical purpose is impressed with figures of birds and animals as well as the basmala (q.v.) and ḥabīja llāh (Q 9:129; 39:38).

**Use of the Qurʾān between 132/750 and 494/1100**

During the first centuries of `Abbāsid rule from 132/750 to ca. 494/1100, links between the Qurʾān and broader aspects of culture appear to have intensified; trends begun under the Umayyads continued without interruption but new approaches were also formulated. One of the continuing practices is the striking of coins with Qurʾānic citations and another is the custom of inscribing the Qurʾān on architecture. Monuments from this period suggest that the selections used for the latter purpose could convey very specific messages reflecting particular facets of the local religious landscape, as well as aspects of dynastic policy. Rulers whose subjects included significant numbers of Christians appear to have been particularly enthusiastic about developing special modes of honoring and displaying the Qurʾān. These features are present in monuments erected under the sponsorship of not only the `Abbāsids, but also of their rivals — the Umayyad rulers of Spain and the Fāṭimids of Egypt and Syria.

The `Abbāsids and the Qurʾān

Stress placed by the `Abbāsids on their kinship (q.v.) with the Prophet, a relationship that was a key factor in the establishment of their dynastic legitimacy (see KINGS AND RULERS; CALIPH; ISMĀʿIL), led them naturally to a close association with the Qurʾān. In addition to the inclusion of the Qurʾān on coins and in monumental architecture, practices initiated under the Umayyads and shared by most later Islamic dynasties, the early `Abbāsids period also laid the foundation for new approaches that would, in subsequent centuries, expand this book’s roles in material culture. From the late third/ninth century onward the `Abbāsids included a Qurʾān associated with `Uthmān himself in their court regalia; it was carried in processions and used in ceremonies. This practice probably stimulated other rulers to include Qurʾāns of unusual sanctity in their own religious and courtly rituals.

The debate over whether the Qurʾān was created or eternal (see CREATEDNESS OF THE QURʾĀN), which occupied religious scholars during the third/ninth through fourth/tenth centuries, was contemporary with important developments in calligraphy that made manuscripts of its text more legible. Baghdād appears to have been the locus of experiments whereby the Qurʾān was transcribed with cursive scripts previously used for a variety of secular needs, a practice traditionally linked with the names of calligraphers associated with the `Abbāsids in the `Abbāsid court including Ibn Muqla (272-328/885-940), Ismāʿīl b. Ḥammād al-Jawhari (d. ca. 392/1002), and `Alī b. Ḥilāl al-Sītrī known as Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. ca. 413/1022). `Abbāsid support for the `Uthmānic recension of the Qurʾān as revised by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) helped to promulgate more standardized versions of its contents and generally to increase the prestige of manuscript copies, even as the use of paper made such books more widely available. The earliest surviving Qurʾān manuscripts written on paper date to the mid fourth/tenth century and from that date onward some copies include charts that document the number of words, letters and diacritical signs in the Qurʾān’s text. Certain specimens are believed to come from Iran but similar volumes, including copies in Dublin and Istanbul (Chester Beatty Library, CBL MS 1431; Türk İslâm
Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 449) linked to Ibn al-Bawwāb, were probably produced in Iraq (the opening page of the Ibn al-Bawwāb Qurʾān in the Chester Beatty Library can be seen in Fig. 11 of BASMALA). A Qurʾān in the Khalili Collection (Qurʾān 572) dated to 582/1186 appears to have been made for a scholar specializing in Qurʾānic studies. It has not only the usual tabulation of the text’s contents but also a full critical apparatus, including the ten canonical reading variants (qirāʾāt, see READINGS OF THE QURʾĀN) and their transmitters as well as other particulars on the text’s pronunciation during recitation.

Widespread acceptance of the views enunciated by religious scholars that the Qurʾān was the eternal speech (q.v.) of God (see also WORD OF GOD) had important consequences for the text’s roles in many spheres of life, including material culture. From the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth centuries the Qurʾān was the focus of study by commentators who analyzed both its exoteric and esoteric significance (see EXEGESIS OF THE QURʾĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL); practices that exploited the symbolic or magical power of the Qurʾān’s text had a more profound impact on material culture than the more literal exoteric tradition (see ṢŪḤĪM AND THE QURʾĀN). The establishment of a finite and largely canonical text fostered new approaches that focused on the value of not only its constituent words but also on the mysterious letters (q.v.) placed at the beginning of many sūras. These and other key phrases or passages including the beautiful names of God (al-ʾāsmāʾ al-husnā) were subjected to particular scrutiny.

Belief in the eternal nature of the Qurʾān also encouraged its use to safeguard persons and property through the development of a variety of magical-protective devices ranging from seals to rings, amulets and talismans, and these views were probably also instrumental in its citation on weapons, helmets, armor or other accoutrements of war (see INSTRUMENTS). Iraq had long been a center for the use of magical and protective rituals, but it was during the early ‘Abbāsid period that the Qurʾān appears to have usurped the role of other texts and materials in these procedures with the composition of treatises by the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 198-218/813-33) and by Jamāl al-Dīn Yusuf al-Kindī (d. 256/870). One technique that gained popularity was the conversion of the Qurʾān’s words, or even of its individual letters, into numbers that could, in turn, be used to create diagrams and formulas (see NUMEROLOGY). Among the Shiʿa (see SHIʿISM AND THE QURʾĀN), knowledge about how to create amulets and talismans from Qurʾānic extracts was attributed to the imāms and in particular to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. ca. 148/763). Although the intellectual foundations of these developments were laid in the early ‘Abbāsid period, most of the evidence about their implementation comes from later centuries.

The Umayyad rulers of Cordoba and the Qurʾān: 139-423/756-1031
The initial stages of the development of a distinctive approach to the copying and use of the Qurʾān in Spain probably coincided with the rule of the Umayyads at Cordoba, but the earliest surviving Qurʾān manuscript that can be firmly linked to this region dates to 382/1090. It is written on vellum in an angular script with rounded sub-linear components often described by modern authors as “Maghribi.”

The Great Mosque of Cordoba, a structure erected in several phases between 169/785 and 483/1009, exemplifies the ways in which the rituals occurring in a religious structure could have a dynamic relationship with the Qurʾānic texts inscribed upon it (see MOSQUE). Inscriptions
commemorating the mosque’s renovation by al-Hakam in 354/956 include citations from the Qurʾān and are clustered around the miḥrāb and in the bays flanking it to the left and right. Those on the dome in front of the mihrāb (q. 2:238; 31:22) urge the believer to be steadfast in his faith and those in the adjacent bay and on the walls of the mihrāb chamber itself (q. 2:77-8) remind the worshipper of a Muslim’s obligations to pray and give alms (see prayer; almsgiving). Texts inscribed on the mihrāb’s outer frame (q. 2:286; 3:8; 51:1-2) urge the believer to be steadfast in his faith and those in the adjacent bay (i.e. q. 7:43; 40:65), through which the caliph or imām entered the building, emphasize God’s omnipotence, singularity and the absence of a consort or progeny. The latter comments were seemingly aimed at the Cordoban ruler’s Christian subjects or competitors.

This theme is elaborated upon in texts inscribed on the approach to the mihrāb that refer to the Qurʾān and to its superiority over the scriptures of the Christians and the Jews (see Jews and Judaism; scripture and the Qurʾān), including q. 3:3, 7, 19; 35:31. The date at which these texts were inscribed on the building is uncertain, but their presence has been linked to the fact that the Cordoba mosque also owned an unusually large and venerable Qurʾān, a few unbound pages of which were believed not only to have been copied by the caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān but even to carry traces of his blood. The date and circumstances of this manuscript’s arrival in Spain are obscure, but it eventually became the focus of a ceremony that appears to emulate aspects of the Christian liturgy current in medieval Spain. At the beginning of the prayer service the carefully wrapped Qurʾān was removed from a chamber along the qibla wall and carried by two men in a candlelit procession to the mosque’s mihrāb, where it was placed on a special stand and its text was read to the assembled worshippers.

If this elaborate ceremonial use of a venerated Qurʾān began in Spain’s Umayyad period, the book’s presence may even help to explain unusual features of the Cordoba mosque’s construction and embellishment, including the presence of qurʾānic passages affirming the holy book’s superiority over those of rival faiths. In the mid sixteenth/twelfth century Cordoba’s ʿUthmānic Qurʾān was transferred to the Great Mosque of Marrakesh at the request of the Almohad ruler ʿAbd al-Muʾmin (r. 524-58/1130-63), where it continued to be the focus of veneration.

Egypt: third/ninth to sixth/twelfth centuries
Monuments connected with ʿAbbāsid patronage followed Umayyad precedents in their programmatic citation of the Qurʾān in architecture, and one of the best examples is situated in Egypt. Although normally a measuring device would not be considered a religious structure, the portions of the Qurʾān inscribed on the Nilometer (miqrās al-nil) at Fustāt, essentially a stone-lined pit linked to the Nile that measured the height of its flood, stress its links to God’s beneficence and generosity (see blessing; grace). According to historical accounts, in 247/861 the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Mutawakkil ordered the Nilometer, which was of Byzantine date, to be rebuilt, and he entrusted the task of providing it with appropriate citations from the Qurʾān to Abū l-Raddād, a muezzin (muʾadhdhin) and Qurʾān instructor attached to the mosque of ʿAmr in Fustāt. The latter claimed to have selected the texts and then to have carved them on marble panels, which were later integrated into the Nilometer’s inner walls on two different levels. The lower set consists of four separate excerpts of equal length extolling
God’s munificence in sending the rain that permits the vegetation to grow and sustains all life (q 22:5, 62; 42:28; 50:9; see AGRICULTURE AND VEGETATION; WATER). The carved panels of these texts were set into the wall’s four sides at the level that marked the height of the flood. As the level of the Nile rose, those panels were submerged, thereby linking their text with the example of God’s bounty that they celebrated. A fifth text placed above the high-water mark enjoins man to offer gratitude for the rain that leads to the creation of rivers on which ships (q.v.) can sail to the sea (q 14:32-3; see GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE).

The Fāṭimid dynasty of north Africa and Egypt (297-567/909-1171) both continued earlier practices such as inscribing the Qurʾān on their coins and devised new ways to use it in their celebrations and architectural monuments. A Qurʾān copy said to have been written by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (q.v.) that was housed in the mosque of ʿAmr was the focus of personal veneration by members of the dynasty. Carefully wrapped copies of the Qurʾān were also carried through Cairo and Fustāṭ during the processions that marked important holidays and festivals (see FESTIVALS AND COMMEMORATIVE DAYS).

The dynasty’s claim to possess a special insight into the Qurʾān’s significance by virtue of their kinship to the prophet Muhammad raises the possibility that their use of the holy book could have reflected both esoteric interpretations of its text aimed at their supporters and esoteric ones intended for the general public. P. Sanders and others have suggested that the manner in which the Qurʾān is inscribed on the mosque of al-Ḥākim (completed ca. 401/1010) at Cairo reveals these dual goals. Texts on the building’s exterior, notable for their legibility and visual prominence, include passages that remind Muslims of their religious duties (q 9:18; 24:36-7). Although intelligible to the populace at large, these verses could also refer to the Ismāʿīlī mission. Those on the interior were probably intended primarily for perusal by supporters of the dynasty and may make indirect reference to the Fāṭimids and their religious role as guides for the community (q 3:1-17; 6:1-7; 7:1-22; 8:1-13; 48:1-22). The same message was probably reinforced by a pair of white silk curtains embroidered in red with q 62 and q 63 that were suspended near the mosque’s miḥrāb during the month of Ramaḍān (q.v.). Even the Fāṭimid placement on military banners of q 61:13, a widely used verse about the divine source of victory (q.v.), may have had such a dual significance. Fāṭimid coins have the distinction of carrying two separate verses on their obverse, q 9:33 and q 5:55.

Iran: third/ninth to fifth/eleventh centuries Qurʾānic inscriptions on Iranian architecture of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century generally reveal a building’s intended function, but some ensembles are noteworthy for the way in which the selected texts can be linked to broader religious questions. One such structure is a domed square building in the city of Yazd now known as the “Twelve Imāms,” erected in 429/1038 under the patronage of a local dynasty of Daylamī origin with Shīʿa leanings (the Kākīyids). This structure was probably intended to commemorate an event or person of religious importance. Its Qurʾānic texts (q 2:255, 163:40:65) focus on God’s omnipotence, uniqueness and omnipresence, and this has led S. Blair to suggest that it was intended to evoke the presence of the Twelfth Imām believed to be alive, yet in occultation.

Several sets of architectural inscriptions make reference to the beautiful names of God (al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā), using either
qur'ānic or extra-qur'ānic texts demonstrating the growing popularity of these epithets. Three fifth/eleventh century tombs, one at Safid Buland in the Farğana valley and two at Kharraqān in western Iran between Hamadān and Qazvīn, refer to them by using q 59:21-4, but a fourth monument, the north dome of the Great Mosque of Isfahān, dated to 481/1088, includes an extra-qur'ānic litany enumerating thirty-two divine epithets.

The ways in which extracts from the Qur'ān can be used to establish the function and interpretation of monumental architecture is demonstrated by the foundation inscriptions of the two large domes belonging to the Great Mosque of Isfahān. The qibla dome erected for Sultan Malik-shāh by Nizām al-Mulk in 479/1086-7 carries the opening sections of q 23 that remind the individual Muslim of his religious duties, a selection that underscores that ruler's role as supporter of the faith. The northern dome built by the latter's rival Ṭāj al-Mulk in 481/1088 is inscribed internally with texts that extol the benefits of night prayer (i.e. q 3:97; 17:78-9; see DAY AND NIGHT) and enumerate the divine attributes (al-asmā‘ al-ḥusnā). This combination suggests that this chamber was the site of nocturnal vigils during which the holy names were recited or recollected. The paucity of objects that survive from early Islamic Iran makes it difficult to judge the degree to which the Qur'ān appeared on personal effects during the second/eighth to fifth/eleventh centuries. Some ceramic vessels produced in eastern Iran or Transoxiana during the third/ninth through fourth/tenth centuries have carefully executed Arabic inscriptions written in a hand that resembles that used in contemporary Qur'ān manuscripts. Most of their texts consist of maxims with a practical bent but some are hadith and a recently published bowl in the Tāriq Rajab Museum dated to 300/912 is inscribed with q 68:51-2 (see Fig. 1). The Khalili Collection contains a number of amulets that have been attributed to the third/ninth or fourth/tenth century, on which citations from the Qur'ān are juxtaposed with schematically drawn animals. Some are small pendants, tubes or pierced disks probably intended to be worn, but others are spoons or spindle whorls. The portions of the Qur'ān most often cited are q 1:2; 8:46; 12:21; 21:87; 105; 109; 112; 118.

Twelfth to fifteenth centuries (sixth to ninth centuries hijrī)

If in the first Islamic centuries citations from the Qur'ān on buildings, objects and documents suggest that it was used as a resource for the self-definition of the Muslim community, from the sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries greater stress was laid on the holy book as a sacred object and on the Qur'ān as a support for the devotional life of the community. Citations of the Qur'ān on buildings and objects have a more consistently interpretive or programmatic character than in earlier centuries and reflect a more focused linking of its text with a building’s function or the setting in which an object was used. These centuries also coincided with the rise of institutional Sūfism and many prominent Qur'ān calligraphers were affiliated with such groups. Most Sūfis, particularly those with a Sunnī orientation, made study and recitation of the Qur'ān a cornerstone of their devotional life. Sūfī communities often commanded a substantial popular following that included rulers and highly placed officials who, in turn, constructed residences for Sūfis. These residences, known variously as rīḥāts, khānqāhs and zāwiyas, were often provided with endowments that financed the recitation, study and copying of the Qur'ān. The faith and practices of Islam were also carried to
new regions of Asia and Africa largely through an expansion of trade and cultural contacts, thereby expanding the geographical scope of the Qur’an’s impact. In addition, the spread of Sufism introduced a broad spectrum of the population to exoteric and esoteric interpretations of the Qur’an that had previously been the concern of small clusters of scholars and ascetics (see asceticism). The authors of commentaries and symbolic interpretations drew attention to passages that were both religiously charged and particularly eloquent, an emphasis that encouraged the repetition of those texts on buildings or objects. Inter-related concepts disseminated in this period held that God’s reality is manifested in every letter, word, verse and chapter of the Qur’an’s text and that this essence could also be symbolically expressed in numbers. This view enunciated in the late fourth/tenth century by scholars including Ibn Baṭṭa (d. ca. 365/975) was popularized by Ibn al-‘Arabī (560-638/1165-1240) who focused particular attention on meanings and symbolic values of the attributes of God (al-āsma‘ al-ḥusnā) enumerated in q 59:22-4 and extra-Qur’ānic litanies.

These beliefs led to the creation of diagrams constructed with letters, words or their numerical equivalents that made a coded reference to key portions of the Qur’an. The Shams al-ma‘ārif of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Būnī (d. 622/1225) was a popular compendium about the occult properties of the Qur’an, the benefits to be derived from the use of the divine attributes (al-āsma‘ al-ḥusnā) and methods for arranging them in “magic squares.” Although al-Būnī himself was born in north Africa and died in Cairo, the popularity of “magic squares” and other talismanic schemes was widespread and enduring. Within the broad territorial expanse in which Islam was practiced and over the three centuries in question, it is possible to discern regional and dynastic divergences in the manner in which the Qur’an interacted with material culture and in the degree to which it became a vehicle of personal piety or dynastic legitimization. The clearest distinctions are between the parts of the Muslim world that encouraged the development of new approaches to the study, transcription, decoration and use of the Qur’an (Mesopotamia, Iran, the Levant, Anatolia, and Egypt) and those regions where the conservatism of the religious authorities appears to have slowed the pace of change (north Africa, Spain and the western Sudan). Special conditions also pertained in regions such as the Indian subcontinent, southeast Asia and China where Islam competed with well-established local faiths and their deeply ingrained cultural practices.

North Africa, Spain and the western Sudan

Manuscripts produced in north Africa and Spain during the sixth/twelfth to ninth/fifteenth centuries are notable for their conservatism. Their archaic features include transcription on parchment and a reliance on modes of decoration resembling those in Qur’āns from earlier centuries. Simple unornamented sūra headings were used in north African manuscripts long after they had been replaced by more elaborate framed varieties in areas further east. The local preference for Qur’āns in a square format that persisted into the ninth/fifteenth century may also have a religious foundation because it helped to distinguish them from other books in which a more vertical format was customary.

The persistence of archaic features in this region may be connected with the conservative views about the Qur’an espoused by
the Mālikiyya, followers of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179⁄796), some of whom believed that Qurʾān manuscripts should not only be unornamented but even devoid of punctuation or sūra headings. Some Mālikīs considered the introduction of manuscript copies into mosques an unacceptable innovation because the books could challenge the liturgical primacy of the spoken and remembered text (see memory).

Despite these scruples, the Qurʾān continued to be integrated into various spheres of daily activity even in areas where Mālikī views prevailed. Legends and ceremonies surrounding the ‘Uthmānic codex of Cordoba suggest that some Qurʾān manuscripts acquired a liturgical role even in a region where the views of Mālik’s followers had great prestige. Although under the Almoravids (r. 454-541/1062-1147) Mālikī religious authorities relegated study of the Qurʾān to a secondary position behind that of Islamic law (fiqh, see law and the Qurʾān), that dynasty did not abandon the practice of inscribing the Qurʾān on their coins. Their approach is evident in the coins struck by the Almoravid Yaʿqūb b. Tāshufīn (r. 453-500/1061-1106). The obverse carries the usual profession of faith as well as his titles, but the reverse has Q 3:85, in which Islam is proclaimed as the only faith acceptable in God’s eyes, conveying a more sectarian message.

The Almoravids’ competitors and successors, the Almohads (524-668/1130-1269), made the Qurʾān a focus of their devotional life and also used it as an instrument of dynastic legitimization. An indication of the Almohad enthusiasm for the Qurʾān is the battle flag of Abū Yaʿqūb Yusuf II captured after his defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa in 609/1212 (see Fig. iii). The inscription on it, Q 61:10-2, encourages Muslims to undertake wars for the sake of the faith (see war; fighting; jihād), in return for which God will forgive them their sins (see sin, major and minor; forgiveness) and admit them to the paradisiacal gardens (see gardens; paradise; reward and punishment). The Almohad’s reverence for the Qurʾān is also evident in their treatment of the ‘Uthmānic codex belonging to the Great Mosque of Cordoba mentioned above. In the mid-sixth/twelfth century it was transferred to the Great Mosque of Marrakesh at the request of `Abd al-Muʾmin (r. 524-538/1130-63). There, he and his successors devised new ways to honor and use the precious volume. It was stored in a special chamber along the qibla wall from which it emerged during the prayer service, as if by magic, supported on an “X” shaped stand or kursî that rested, in turn, on a metal track along which it moved into and out of the prayer hall. The mechanism on which the Qurʾān and its support moved resembled the one used to transport the nearby minbar from its special storage chamber to the prayer hall and back again. Even when not in use, this Qurʾān had a special status, for it was provided with a binding ornamented with precious materials, wrapped in magnificent textiles and stored in a specially constructed chamber. After the demise of the Almohad dynasty, this manuscript is said to have passed into the hands of later north African rulers including the Marīnid Abū Yaʿqūb Yusuf (r. 685-706/1280-1307). At times of crisis, the Marīnids carried the ‘Uthmānic Qurʾān into battle wrapped in precious textiles and protected by a leather shoulder bag. The more recent west African habit of producing unbound Qurʾān manuscripts and of storing them in leather bags may also have some distant connection with this practice and with the memory that the most venerable leaves of Cordoba’s ‘Uthmānic Qurʾān were unconstrained by a binding.
Islam’s penetration into the western sub-Saharan zone between the sixth/twelfth and ninth/fifteenth centuries was facilitated by the positive attitude toward the faith adopted by a number of regional rulers, but the manner in which Islam was disseminated in sub-Saharan Africa also had important reverberations for that region’s material culture. In Africa persons versed in the principles of Islam and the text of the Qur’an spread their knowledge primarily through oral instruction; indeed some influential Muslim scholars are said to have arrived in the area without any books. The knowledge that they transmitted was written by their students on small individual writing boards and then committed to memory. The importance accorded to oral transmission in the region may help to explain why so few Qur’ans manuscripts from there are known before the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

Evidence from Nasrid Spain suggests that ambivalence existed there towards a wider integration of the Qur’an into daily life. The Nasrids made extensive use of the extra-qur’anic phrase lā ghāliba illā lāhā, “Victory comes only from God.” It was inscribed on their weapons, on the walls of their palaces at the Alhambra as well as on their personal seals and talismans — places in which other dynasties of the period such as the Mamluks or Ottomans might have used the nearly synonymous qur’anic expression nasyr min Allāh, “Victory comes from God” (Q 61:13). The walls of the Alhambra were, however, also inscribed with quotations from the Qur’an and a small leather pouch that is among the surviving personal effects of Muhammad II, the last Nasrid ruler of Granada, may well have once contained a miniature Qur’an. Small square Qur’ans appear to have been quite popular in ninth/fifteenth century Spain, suggesting that the custom of wearing a manuscript on one’s person was not restricted to the dynastic family.

**The Qur’an in the east**

During the sixth/twelfth to ninth/fifteenth centuries in the Levant, Anatolia, Iraq and Iran, the rising importance of the Qur’an as a religious artifact is signaled by both literary and material evidence. Its centrality to religious practice is also evident in the endowments given to madrasas and khānqāhs that supported specialists in the discipline of Qur’an recitation or scribes who prepared manuscript copies, both of whom often had students under their tutelage. Some of the most splendid Qur’ans appear to have been copied for members of dynasties that ruled in Iran, Anatolia, Syria and Egypt ranging from the Saljūqs and Ayyūbids to the Mamluks, Mongols, and Timūrids. Many of these were large and elaborately decorated multi-volume sets intended for deposit in the monuments constructed by their respective patrons, particularly their tombs. Important mausoleums were often provided with teams of Qur’ān reciters whose perpetual chanting was believed to benefit both the living and the dead.

The importance of Qur’an manuscripts to funerary rites is underscored by the fact that ornamented and inscribed “X” shaped reading stands described in their inscriptions as ṭabāl or kursī were placed in the tombs of important political or religious figures in Iran and Anatolia. Several examples dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century are known, including three from the Konya region of Turkey.

Syria and Egypt are associated with a branch of study that sought to harness the power of the Qur’an to enhance the health and well-being of the believers. This impulse led to the composition of treatises on “prophetic medicine” (al-tibb al-nabawī, see Medicine and the Qur’an), in which references to the Qur’an and hadith (see Hadith and the Qur’an) were combined with practical advice on a variety of topics affecting health (see Illness and Health).
Some of the most respected authors of texts on this topic were Syrians primarily remembered for their religious knowledge, such as Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1345) or Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). Their work was continued by the Egyptian scholar al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). The praise lavished on bees in the Qur’ān (Q. 16:68-9), where honey (q.v.) is extolled as a source of healing, gave this natural product particular prominence in such treatises. This positive attitude probably led, in turn, to the creation of beehive covers inscribed with religious formulas. Although the most popular texts on prophetic medicine (al-tīb al-nabawī) were composed in the eighth/fourteenth or ninth/fifteenth century in Syria and Egypt, the publications of inscribed beehive covers attribute them to thirteenth/nineteenth century Iran. Sweets based on honey also play a significant role in the celebration of religious holidays, particularly in north Africa.

This period and region was also hospitable to the development of quasi-magical methods for harnessing the Qur’ān’s curative power to alleviate the afflictions of daily life. Metal bowls inscribed internally or externally with selections from the holy book along with other prayers provide a point of intersection between medical treatment and religio-magical practices (see Fig. 1). The earliest dated examples bear the name of a Syrian ruler, Nūr al-Dīn Zanjī (r. 569-77/1174-81), and others are traditionally linked to the Ayyūbid ruler Şalāḥ al-Dīn (i.e. Saladin; r. 564-89/1169-93); both also financed the construction of hospitals, the former in Damascus and the latter in Cairo. The academic scholarship of medicine associated with such institutions derives from the humoral tradition of Late Antiquity but that scientific tradition appears to have coexisted with the more popular approach exemplified in the magical-medical bowls. Their popularity is demonstrated by the vast numbers which survive, as well as by the fact that they were produced over a wide area including Iran, India, China and Indonesia and as late as the thirteenth/nineteenth century. In later centuries, Qur’ānic citations were often augmented by other invocations, such as prayers to the imāms and talismanic devices, particularly “magic squares.”

Syria

Evidence about the veneration accorded to some Qur’ān manuscripts and the new ways in which its text was used comes from Syria. A study by J.M. Mouton of the ‘Uthmānic Qur’ān that occupied a place of honor in the Umayyad mosque of Damascus between the late eleventh and late nineteenth centuries c.e. demonstrates the extent to which it had become an object endowed with numinous powers rather than a book to be read. It was housed in a special container near the mosque’s mihrāb, displayed at regular intervals to the congregation for their veneration, and in times of crisis carried in procession through the city’s streets for protection against invading armies or other dangers. Mouton has suggested that the transfer of this venerated Qur’ān from Tiberias to Damascus in 492/1099 and the ways in which it was subsequently used were stimulated by the presence of crusaders in the Levant and the resultant Muslim-Christian conflicts. He also documents how the Būrid and Ayyūbid rulers of Damascus encouraged the manuscript’s cult so as to strengthen public support for their own governments. Another of their goals was to shift to the ‘Uthmānic codex the popular veneration accorded to a Qur’ān ascribed to the hand of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib that had been deposited in the Damascus mosque during Fāṭimid rule.

The various roles played by the Qur’ān in the religious life of Ayyūbid Aleppo are documented in the inscriptions found on
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monuments erected in that city during the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries and published by Y. Tabbaa. The al-Sultāniyya madrasa was founded by the local ruler al-Zāhīr Ghāzī (r. 582-613/1186-1216), who is buried on its premises. In addition to legal scholars, this institution supported a Qurʾān reciter who was to instruct others in his craft; these activities were expected to provide a benediction to the sultan buried within its precincts. Another Aleppo monument, the khānqāh-madrasa al-Firdaws erected with the patronage of al-Zāhīr’s wife Dayfā Khāṭṭīn (d. 641/1243) contains programmatic inscriptions from the Qurʾān amplified by other texts that reveal the structure’s intended functions. The foundation text opens with q 43:68-72, which details the joys awaiting the faithful in paradise. A long poetic inscription engraved around the building’s courtyard describes the ecstatic rituals of nightly prayers and Qurʾānic recitations that will ensure a spiritual reward for the building’s Ṣūfī residents, who may have followed the teachings of al-Suhrawardī al-Maqṭūl (d. 587/1191). The complex’s mosque has a miḥrāb inscribed with q 38:17-22, a text that depicts David’s (q.v.) penitence in his miḥrāb and the wisdom (q.v.) granted to him by God to adjudicate disputes. This text suggests that the building’s Ṣūfī residents arbitrated disputes brought before them in that chamber.

‘Abbāsid Iraq and affiliated regions
Development in ‘Abbāsid Iraq continued to exert a formative influence on regions within the dynasty’s cultural sphere that persisted even after the latter’s extinction in 656/1258 at the hands of Mongol invaders. Paradoxically the ‘Abbāsids’ end served to canonize Iraqi traditions and to make them a point of reference, even as new cultural and artistic centers developed in other regions including Iran, Syria, Egypt and Anatolia. Iraq was also important as a center for the rise of institutionalized Ṣūfism, and many prominent Qurʾān calligraphers were affiliated with such groups. The Qurʾān’s centrality to the culture of the late ‘Abbāsid period is evident in the fact that the era’s most celebrated calligrapher, Yāqūt al-Musta’sīmī (d. ca. 697/1298), an official secretary (kātib al-dīwān) of the last ‘Abbāsid caliph, gained his fame not through the execution of his official duties but through the copying of the Qurʾān. Copies allegedly written by Yāqūt are preserved in various collections, and calligraphers are known to have emulated his style in Iran during the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries as well as in Ottoman Turkey. The proliferation of these “Yāqūt’s” Qurʾāns underscores the role played by the self-conscious emulation of famous models in the practice of calligraphy. Other prominent Iraqi scribes and illuminators of the late ‘Abbāsid period found employment in Egypt under the Mamluks (648-923/1250-1517), a dynasty that placed special emphasis on preserving the religious legacy of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate and under which the veneration of the Qurʾān was given particular prominence.

D.L. James’ study of seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth century Qurʾāns has demonstrated that lavishly ornamented manuscripts were often produced by teams of specialists, a circumstance which underscores the high level of skill involved in their manufacture. Although the practice of creating especially lavish manuscripts probably arose in late ‘Abbāsid Baghdadī, a beautifully calligraphed and illuminated specimen manuscript produced for the Zanjīd ruler of the northern Jazira, Muḥammad b. Zanjī (r. 594-616/1197-1219), demonstrates that even minor rulers aspired to own manuscripts of the highest
quality. The most impressive examples, however, were produced for the Ilkhanid Mongols, their close associates and successors, or for Mamluk emirs and sultans in Syria and Egypt. A manuscript that may have been destined for the mausoleum of the Īlkhānid Ghazan, with its muḥaqqqaq script and diacritics entirely in black, was copied by Aḥmad b. al-Suhrawardī, who was both a disciple of Yaqūt and a member of a famous family of Sūfis from western Iran. There also are large-scale sets produced for the funerary complex of the Īlkhānid ruler Öljeytü (r. 703-16/1304-16) by three different teams of calligraphers and illuminators in Baghdad, Mawsil and Hamadan.

The division of labor in the production of luxury Qur’āns probably both reflected and encouraged an increasing specialization and professionalization of book production. This phenomenon may be linked to another development that occurred within the ‘Abhāsīd cultural zone — the transfer of decorative modes from elaborate copies of the Qur’ān to other texts. This process is particularly striking in Iran and Anatolia but can also be documented in Mamluk Egypt. The parallels between qur’ānic and non-qur’ānic manuscripts seem to be most evident with texts that are religious in character. Examples of this phenomenon include a sixth/twelfth or seventh/thirteenth century copy of the Du‘ū‘ al-munājja‘, a book of prayers attributed to the Imām Zayn al-Ābidīn, from Iraq or Iran (now in the collection of G.I. Shaker). This volume has opening illumination and calligraphy comparable to Qur’āns of the same period and region. Another case in point is provided by lavishly illuminated late seventh/thirteenth or early eighth/fourteenth century copies of the Mathnawi al-Ma‘navi of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (now in Konya and Vienna), a text sometimes described as a “Persian Qur‘ān.” The Rūmī manuscripts possess elaborate gold-illuminated frontispieces and headings at the opening of each section of the text. The transfer of decorative modes associated with Qur‘ān manuscripts to other texts continued during the ninth/fifteenth century, especially in the Indo-Iranian cultural sphere, until the two traditions of book production effectively merged.

Mamluk Egypt

By any measure, veneration of the Qur‘ān was central to both personal and public piety in Egypt under the Mamluks. A number of the Mamluk sultans or their high officials devoted substantial resources to the support of activities connected with the recitation, study or copying of the Qur‘ān. This focus not only explains why the Mamluks commissioned substantial numbers of large, lavishly produced Qur‘āns but helps to explain why those manuscripts also had a broad impact on the portable arts and on the design and decoration of religious architecture. Enamed and gilded glass lamps from Mamluk buildings inscribed with the Light Verse (q. 24:35) are the best-known examples of this interconnection, but other manifestations of this enthusiasm can be documented (for an example of a Mamluk mosque lamp, see Fig. iv).

Baybars al-Jāshnikīr (r. 708-9/1309-10) gave evidence of his attachment to the Qur‘ān during his career as emir and sultan. He made a substantial endowment to the al-Ḥākim mosque that included support for two instructors in the art of Qur‘ān recitation, for a scribe to prepare Qur‘ān copies and for twenty Qur‘ān reciters. His mausoleum that overlooked one of Cairo’s main streets was linked to a khānqāh. Daily recitation of the Qur‘ān played an important role at both institutions. Qur‘ān reciters attached to his
mausoleum performed this task in a window embellished with a grill taken from the caliphal palace in Baghdād. It is fitting that the earliest surviving Mamlūk Qurʾān was prepared for him. Its seven volumes, now in the British Library, were extensively illuminated by three painters and copied in gold by a Baghdād-trained calligrapher who may also have designed the prominently placed Qurʾānic inscription (Q 24:36-8) on the funerary complex’s street facade.

Craftsmen linked to Iraq also produced chests to store Qurʾāns of particular importance. One such chest, dated to 723/1322, made for the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and signed by one Aḥmad al-Mawsīlī, is now in the al-Azhar mosque. An undated box now in Berlin was made by a certain Muḥammad b. Sunqūr al-Baghdādī. Both are square containers of metal-sheathed wood with inscriptions executed in silver inlay. Inscriptions on the Berlin box include Q 56:76-80, which both celebrates the Qurʾān’s revelation (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION) and stresses the need to protect the holy book from contamination (q.v.), a text widely used on either the binding or opening illumination of manuscripts from the ninth/fifteenth century onward. The presence of Q 59:22-4, which enumerates the divine attributes (al-‘asmāʾ al-husnā), on the box’s lid underscores the container’s shrine-like character.

Further evidence of the Qurʾān’s importance to the Mamlūks is provided by the funerary madrasa and khānqāh founded by Barqūq al-Yalbughāwī in 788/1386. Its endowment provided for the training of Qurʾān reciters and the study of Qurʾānic commentaries, as well as for professional Qurʾān reciters attached to both its khānqāh and mausoleum. The design of the panels of this building’s doors and its domed port-
tal reflect the designs used in Qurʾānic binding and illumination, underscoring the practical and aesthetic connections that existed between architectural decoration and the book arts in fourteenth century Cairo. Kurūsīs, platform stands designed to support large-scale Qurʾāns and to provide an elevated seat for a reader, were constructed for mosques, especially in Egypt, from the eighth/fourteenth century onward. The popularity of kurūsīs suggests that the liturgical use of large-scale Qurʾāns increased in the Mamlūk period.

Yemen
Despite the fact that the Yemen was one of the first regions to embrace Islam, the role of the Qurʾān in its religious and cultural life has so far been but little explored. Mosques and madrasas constructed with the patronage of two local dynasties, the Rasūlīds (626-858/1228-1454) and the Tāhirīds (858-923/1454-1517) provide the best evidence about local attitudes toward the Qurʾān. A recent study of the ʿAmariyya Madrasa in Rada illustrates the ways in which citations from the Qurʾān — augmented by short litanies painted over the mosque’s doors and on its walls and domes — articulate that building’s meaning and functions. The ensemble is notable for the way it links litanies about God’s power and omnipotence (Q 3:15-8; 9:18) with descriptions of the rewards that await the faithful in paradise. This theme is reiterated over doors linking the sanctuary to lateral chambers that probably served as classrooms where students were instructed in the Qurʾān, hadith and fiqh.

Iran and central Asia
Strong regional differences are evident within this zone. Its western portions were tightly linked to the traditions of late ʿAbbāsid Baghdād but in eastern Iran,
central Asia and Afghanistan an idiosyncratic and rather archaic approach lingered until the Mongol invasion. In Afghanistan a mannered and angular script sometimes called “eastern Kufic” was used in Qur’ān manuscripts; the major facades of religious buildings were emblazoned with even more elaborate versions of this script. Monuments erected in Afghanistan by members of the Ghūrid dynasty (r. 401-612/1011-1215) were practically wrapped in a blanket of inscriptions, many of which are Qur’ānic. The most spectacular example, a 213 foot high minaret on the Harī Rūdāh at the Ghūrid capital of Frūzkūh/Jām carries the entire text of Qur’ān in eight pairs of intertwined vertical inscription bands executed in cut-brick, as well as Qur’ān in the name and of its patron Muḥammad b. Sām (r. 538-99/1136-1203; see Fig. V of epigraphy). The Ghūrid habit of displaying substantial sections of the Qur’ān or other religious texts on building facades gave their architecture a didactic character that is also evident in monuments erected by their subordinates and successors, the Delhi sultans.

Calligraphers trained in ‘Abbāsid Baghdad and broadly associated with the legacy of Yaqtī became established in western Iran during the late seventh/eighth and eighth/fourteenth centuries and their skills were transferred to subsequent generations. The career of Yaḥyā b. Naṣr al-Jamālī al-Ṣūfī exemplifies the way in which personal piety, calligraphic skill and the support of important patrons all served to enhance the prestige of Qur’ān manuscripts. Yaḥyā, a practicing Ṣūfī, modeled his writing on that of Yaqtī and is traditionally linked to the latter’s student Muhārak Shāh b. Qūṭ of Tabrīz. Despite his illustrious pedigree, Yaḥyā’s calligraphic legacy was perpetuated largely through his association with the ruler of Shīrāz, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Isḥāq Ḥiǧū (r. 743-754/1343-53). Both Abū Isḥāq and his mother Tashī Khāṭūn demonstrated a personal devotion to the Qur’ān and in particular to its manuscripts. In 751/1351 Abū Isḥāq erected a special structure (known as Bayt al-‘asāḥif) in the courtyard of the principal mosque of Shīrāz to house his Qur’ān collection. Its Qur’āns were intended for mosque use and, possibly, also for study and emulation by scribes. The repository’s foundation inscription was designed by Yaḥyā al-Ṣūfī. Tashī Khāṭūn was particularly devoted to the tomb and cult of the ‘Alīd Aḥmad b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, locally known as Shāh-i Chirāgh, and she provided his funerary complex with Qur’ān manuscripts and endowed it with funds to ensure the holy book’s perpetual recitation. Several Qur’ān manuscripts signed by Yaḥyā al-Ṣūfī survive, including a set from 745-7/1344-6 given by Tashī Khāṭūn to the Shāh-i Chirāgh shrine.

The calligraphic traditions of ‘Abbāsid Iraq, particularly those linked to the transcription of the Qur’ān, continued to shape scribal practice in Shīrāz and the other book production centers of Iran and central Asia during the Tīmūrid era and beyond. Two of Tīmūr’s grandsons, Ibrāhīm Sulṭān b. Shāh Rukh and Baysonghor b. Shāh Rukh, attained renown for their skill as Qur’ān calligraphers. Ibrāhīm Sulṭān’s residence in Shīrāz appears to have encouraged his emulation of the tradition of Yaḥyā al-Ṣūfī (for an example of Ibrāhīm’s penmanship, see Figs. IVA and B of Fāṭḥa), whereas Baysonghor designed large-scale Qur’ānic inscriptions for architectural monuments including the shrine of Imām ‘Alī al-Riḍā in Mashhad.

The Tīmūrid period was also marked by experiments in producing Qur’āns of unusual dimensions. A certain ‘Umar al-Aqṭa’ is said to have presented two Qur’āns

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to Tīmūr — one so small that it could be concealed under a ring-stone, and the other gargantuan. Tīmūr is said to have been unimpressed by the miniscule manuscript but delighted at the large one. Whatever the veracity of this account, other evidence demonstrates that both very large and very small manuscripts were produced during the ninth/fifteenth century. A white stone Qurʾān stand designed to hold a manuscript about two meters in height is situated at the center of the courtyard of the mosque of Bībī Khānum in Samarqand (see Fig. v of MOSQUE), and pages from a manuscript of similar scale often attributed to Tīmūr’s grandson Baysonghur b. Shāh Rukh are preserved in several collections. Ninth/fifteenth century miniature manuscripts also survive.

South, southeast and east Asia

The eastward expansion of Islam from the sixth/twelfth to ninth/fifteenth centuries into the Indian subcontinent, as well as into China and the Indonesian archipelago, can be documented in historical sources, but it is often difficult to define the role played by the Qurʾān in the material culture of newly Islamicized areas. This question is particularly perplexing for the Indian subcontinent, where colonies of Muslims were established along the coast of Sind as early as the second/eighth century and shortly thereafter in enclaves along India’s western and eastern coasts. At present, however, monuments erected during the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries by the Ghūrids or their representatives and successors, particularly the first Delhi sultans, provide the earliest tangible evidence for the role played by the Qurʾān in the region.

A series of buildings in Pakistan and India carry bold and even dramatic inscriptions from the Qurʾān or related hadith in a manner reminiscent of monuments erected in Afghanistan with Ghūrid patronage. The best examples include the Ribât of Ḍiyū b. Karmak, dated ca. 572/1176 and situated near Multān, and mosques in Delhi and Jaunpur erected between the 580s/1190s and the early seventh/thirteenth century. A. Welch (Qurʾān and tomb) has suggested that Qurʾānic inscriptions on the Great Mosque of Delhi, popularly known as Quwwat al-Islam, help to articulate that structure’s meaning to both Muslims and non-believers. Its minaret, the Qūb Manār, is inscribed with q 48:6 and 2:256-8 which link God’s omnipotence to the punishment awaiting hypocrites and idolators (see IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS; HYPOCRITES AND HYPOCRISY). Within the mosque, however, the qibla facade with its freestanding arches is inscribed with texts that reiterate the basic tenets of the faith and remind Muslims of their religious obligations.

The extensive use of Qurʾānic citations on mosques and tombs built by the first Delhi sultan, Iltutmish, and his close associates may have grown out of the extensive use of texts in Ghūrid architecture, but the Indian examples are both more legible and more overtly didactic, suggesting that such mosques served as instructional aids to the faithful. The scanty physical evidence for the production of Qurʾān manuscripts in the Indian subcontinent during the sixth/twelfth to ninth/fifteenth centuries is often ascribed to the region’s climatic conditions but other factors may also have inhibited the growth of scriptoria. Qurʾānic inscriptions and foundation texts on Indian monuments from the eighth/ fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries are executed in a mannered, even convoluted script known as tughrā that has more in common with chancery scripts than with normal book hands, raising doubt about
whether their designers also copied Qurʾān manuscripts.

East Asia

Although some of the coastal cities of China had substantial colonies of Muslims from the second/eighth century onward, their customs and beliefs had little impact on the remainder of the population. That situation changed with the advent of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 C.E.), when Muslims held positions of power and authority second only to that of the Mongols themselves. The dispersal of Muslim soldiers and administrators throughout Yuan territory introduced Islam into new regions. Most of the physical evidence connected with the practice of Islam in Yuan China is in the form of Qurʾān manuscripts or inscriptions on architecture. It comes from two areas, the Mongol capital Khanbaliq (later Beijing), and from the province of Yunnan. There were exceptions to the general characterization of the Ming period (1368-1644 C.E.) as a time when Chinese Muslims were forcibly sinicized: for example, in the early Ming period some Muslims continued to copy Qurʾāns and sponsor religious institutions.

The oldest known Qurʾān in China, dated to 718/1318 and connected with the Dongsi mosque in Khanbaliq/Beijing, remains unpublished. Two ninth/fifteenth century Chinese Qurʾāns are in the Khalili Collection. One, Qur 934, is dated to 804/1401 and was copied in Khanbaliq for that city’s principle mosque known as the Mosque on Niu Jie (Ox Street); the other, Qur 960, was copied in 875/1471 at the Dār al-Hadith Madrasa in Madinat Yunnan (probably Yunnanfu, later Kunming). These two specimens suggest that Chinese Qurʾāns had distinctive features. They resemble the Qurʾāns of the late Abbāsid period in that they were written in the muḥaqqaq script and divided into thirty volumes, but their illumination contains floral elements of local origin and the doublures of their bindings were cloth covered.

The blending of Chinese and imported features seen in these eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth century Qurʾāns has an architectural parallel in the best preserved of China’s historic mosques, the Great Mosque of Xian, described by J.S. Cowen as “a mosque in the guise of a Buddhist temple.” The wall framing its miḥrāb is inscribed with parts of the Qurʾān that reiterate the principles of the faith and remind the faithful of their religious obligations (q 19:18-9; 48:2-4, 11-2) and are executed in a script related to that found in Chinese Qurʾāns. The earliest phase of the present structure can be traced to 796/1392. Historical sources also link it to the patronage of Cheng Ho (1371-1433?), the powerful Muslim eunuch who served the Yung-lo emperor (r. 1403-25) as chief admiral of the Ming fleet. He directed a series of voyages that sought to expand Ming influence and cultivate trade with both insular southeast Asia and regions to the west. Some of his expeditions reached the Arabian peninsula and the eastern coast of Africa. These connections affected material culture in both the Near East and China, but the evidence in hand for China concerns the local replication of Near Eastern metalwork in blue and white porcelain, a phenomenon unconnected to the Qurʾān.

Despite the prominence and wealth attained by Cheng Ho there is also evidence from the Ming period that Chinese Muslims adjusted their practices to conform to local traditions. A Bakhārān, Shams al-Dīn ’Umar, known as Sayyid-i Ajall (1211-79 C.E.), one of the most important Muslims in Yuan service, became the governor of the Yunnan province and his
descendants continued to be prominent there for several generations. Some of their tombs have been identified, but their inscriptions are in Chinese and make no reference to the Qur’an.

Southeast Asia
The expansion of Islam to the regions of Malaysia and Indonesia was a gradual process accomplished largely through peaceful means. This situation is particularly striking in the islands that comprise Indonesia, where Islam was introduced through the actions of traders who brought to the region the traditions of their own homelands. These were often amalgamated to the prevailing local traditions already permeated with Hindu-Buddhist features. Among the earliest traders were Muslims from the Malabar and Coromandel regions of India, although it is uncertain whether they should be linked to the tombstones with Arabic inscriptions and occasional Qur’anic phrases dated to the fifth/eleventh-seventh/thirteenth centuries that have been discovered in coastal settlements along the Malay peninsula and in Sumatra.

Sixteenth to twentieth centuries (tenth to fourteenth centuries hijri)
Many of the long established uses for the Qur’an continued; its text was still inscribed on buildings and objects, although its citation on coins diminished — especially after Muslim countries adopted currencies modeled on those of Europe. Innovations of this period appear directed at the individual believer; manuscripts of the Qur’an were more frequently provided with devotional aids such as commentaries, special prayers or supplementary instructions. Special anthologies were developed for personal use that contained only a few sūras or linked the Qur’an with other religious texts. Another practice that gained strength in most regions was the use of amulets and talismans, in which extracts from the Qur’an were combined with other symbols including “magic squares.”

Explanations given in a widely used magico-compendium cited earlier, the Shams al-ma’ārif of al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), had helped to popularize this practice, but further details and examples were provided by later treatises such as the Shams al-‘afāq of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bīstāmī composed in 827/1423 (see magic). Such diagrams appear to have been used over a wider geographical region and employed in more diverse ways during the tenth/sixteenth to thirteenth/nineteenth centuries. These devices were produced in a bewildering variety of forms and made from a wide range of materials. They include cases to hold texts or diagrams, small metal plaques or engraved stones worn around the neck or tied to the arm, magical-medicinal bowls from which curative potions were drunk, and even garments covered with densely written words and symbols. The latter could either be worn or carried folded in a pouch. Some garments may even have been intended for funerary use. More recently, talismanic texts or diagrams were written on leather, cloth or paper or even printed for mass distribution. Some types of materials are primarily associated with specific regions, but the diversity of these devices and the paucity of publications about them make it difficult to separate amulets or talismans into clear groups or to postulate their historical development; in some areas their production continued well into the fourteenth/twentieth century.

In order to better explore these themes, as well as to delineate local developments, the Qur’an’s role in material culture from the tenth/sixteenth to fourteenth/
twentieth centuries will be treated in three geographical zones with subdivisions where appropriate: a central zone comprising the Ottoman empire, Iran, central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, another devoted to Africa and a third encompassing east and southeast Asia.

Central Islamic regions

In the Mediterranean region, largely dominated by the Ottoman empire, and within the Iranian cultural sphere, where Islam had been firmly entrenched for centuries, this period brought incremental rather than dramatic change. Qur’anic scribes followed well-established calligraphic traditions but manuscripts exhibit greater diversity with respect to their size, shape and critical apparatus. Innovations of this period shared by both the Ottoman Mediterranean and the Indo-Persian cultural sphere were a fondness for manuscripts executed in a minute script, the extensive production of talismanic devices incorporating portions of the Qur’an believed to have protective powers, and the Qur’an’s use for prognostication (see foretelling; divination). The text continues to be inscribed on architectural monuments, often in programmatic ensembles that also include relevant hadith. Portions of the Qur’an also appear on diverse objects including banners used by armies and Sufis alike, swords, helmets, body armor, tomb furnishings and clothing. Although these practices are known to some extent in most regions, their popularity and the date of their first appearance vary from one locality to another.

Calligraphers working in Iran appear to have enjoyed great prestige over a wide area. Their methods of transcribing the Qur’an were often emulated; ownership seals and other evidence demonstrate that Iranian manuscripts were prized among the Ottomans and in India. Many tenth/sixteenth century Iranian Qur’ans have a demonstrable continuity with the calligraphic practices of late ’Abbāsid Iraq in their juxtaposition of different hands in the text’s transcription, but they also acquired new features including prayers to be recited before and after consulting the holy text, and they frequently end with a fānlāma. The latter tabulates the good or bad fortune associated with each letter of the alphabet to aid in interpreting auguries derived from a random consultation of the Qur’an, a process known as istikhāra.

Shīrāz scribes appear to have been the most prolific producers of Qur’ān manuscripts during the tenth/sixteenth century, but their copies rarely contain any indication of the patron for whom they were commissioned. The same scribes also produced a wide variety of literary manuscripts that can be almost as lavishly decorated as their Qur’āns. The two sets of manuscripts have some common features; the insertion of a pair of illuminated pages at the Qur’an’s midpoint (q 18:1) is paralleled in Shīrāz copies of Firdawsi’s Šahnāma. The routine inclusion of a fānlāma in tenth/sixteenth century Shīrāz Qur’āns may have some connection with the widespread bibliomantic use of the Dīvān of Ḥāfiz, a local poet.

The largest and most opulent Shīrāz Qur’ān manuscripts have extensive illumination shimmering with gold, blue and other colors. One copy, Khalili Qur 729, dated to 959/1552, that may have belonged to the Safavids and later entered the Mughal imperial library, employs the contrast of blue and gold in its delicately executed floral illumination, throughout the Qur’an’s text and in the appended “concluding prayer” (du ‘a-i khātim). Just as the Qur’an was often juxtaposed with selected hadith in the inscriptions on Safavid
religious architecture, panels containing ḥadīth frame both this manuscript’s gilded covers and its opening pages.

A late thirteenth/nineteenth century Persian treatise in the Khalili Collection (Ms. 412) furnishes a more complete guide to qur’anic bibliomancy than does the fāl-nāma commonly appended to the holy text. Detailed procedures for taking auguries are linked both to a technical manual on Qur’ān recitation and to a talismanic chart that invokes the names of the imāms and presents other kinds of devotional aids in tabular form. One chart links individual sūras of the Qur’ān with particular months of the year.

Iranian scribes also produced Qur’āns in which the text is compressed into a very small space. Qur’āns transcribed in this fashion took several different forms; some were miniature books of rectangular or polygonal, usually octagonal, format but in other cases the text was densely transcribed on a few pages of normal size, a single sheet of paper or a scroll. Usually their scribes used scripts known collectively as the ghubār (dust-mote) hands that are often said to have been developed for use with the pigeon-post but were probably also employed for the production of amulets worn or carried on the person. As amulet cases are known from the third/ninth or fourth/fifteenth century onward, the practice of making miniature Qur’āns is likely to antedate the earliest literary references to their production, which link them to the patronage of Tīmūr (r. 771-807/1370-1405). A miniature octagonal Qur’ān now in the Khalili Collection (Qur 371) is dated to the ninth/fifteenth century and a hexagonal one in the Chester Beatty Library (Ms. 1517) may be from ninth/fifteenth century Turkey, but most published examples are from the tenth/sixteenth century or later. Although, as was mentioned earlier, miniature Qur’āns were popular in Naṣrid Spain, their transcription in ghubār script is closely associated with Iran, whence this practice spread westward to the Ottoman empire and eastward to the Indian subcontinent.

Miniature octagonal Qur’āns produced in Ottoman Turkey are often described in publications as sanjaq (Battle-standard) Qur’āns, with the presumption that they were placed in metal cases and tied to military banners. The Ottomans also used scroll-format Qur’āns for this purpose, and a tenth/sixteenth century example in the Topkapi Sarayı Museum retains not only its octagonal cylindrical case but also the red cord by which it was once tied to a staff.

In Iran, miniature Qur’ān codices in octagonal format and their associated cases appear to have been mainly carried or worn by individuals for their personal protection; their cases were often designed to be tied to the upper arm as part of a bāzū-band (a bracelet for the upper arm). Some Iranian scribes demonstrated their virtuosity by using several sizes of ghubār script in a single volume. Those working in the city of Shirāz appear to have produced miniature Qur’āns on a commercial basis during the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries.

A miniature Qur’ān dated to 1085/1674-5 now on loan to the Kuwait National Museum (LNS 373 HS) was probably copied in India and has a bejeweled jade binding of Indian manufacture. This densely written rectangular manuscript was originally transcribed as a continuous text without illumination or internal divisions. Both were subsequently added, largely in the book’s margins, as were prayers to be recited before and after consulting the manuscript, and a fāl-nāma.

The practice of wearing a miniature Qur’ān is also attested among the Tatar princes living within the Russian empire.
The collection of the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, includes a small rectangular silver case inlaid with turquoise and lapis lazuli and dated to 1002/1593-4 that was made for Uraz Muhammad, a ruler of the Kasimov Khānate. This case, designed to be attached to a belt, is inscribed with q 2:255, a verse widely believed to have protective powers.

By the mid-eleventh/seventeenth century the focus of Qurʾānic production and study in Iran had shifted from Shīrāz to Isfahān, where the last phase of the Safavid period coincided with a revival of religious studies. The leading Qurʾānic calligrapher of the late eleventh/seventeenth and early twelfth/eighteenth century was Ahmad Khān Nayrizī, active between the 1080s/1670s and the 1150s/1740s. He produced monumental inscriptions for architecture but was particularly renowned for his Qurʾāns that were copied in a clear, confident naskh; many of them were provided with an interlinear gloss in Persian.

Although Persian interlinear translations of the Qurʾān were first introduced in the tenth century, they became more common in the late Safavid period as part of a campaign to diffuse knowledge of the Qurʾān among a wider spectrum of the population. Most often included was the translation/gloss of ʿAlī Rūdā Ardakānī composed in 1084/1694-5. Many Qurʾāns also had marginal commentaries attributed to the Shiʿī imāms. The calligraphy and presentation of Nayrizī’s Qurʾāns were widely emulated during the twelfth/eighteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth centuries.

During the period from the tenth/sixteenth to thirteenth/nineteenth centuries Iran also witnessed an expanded popularity for amulets and talismans in which sūras believed to offer protection against a wide variety of misfortunes and illnesses were combined with prayers to the imāms, other texts and symbols. The most elaborate Iranian talismans are transcribed onto sheets of parchment, perhaps gazelle skin, and were apparently folded and carried in cases. One is dated to 1337/1919 and others are probably from the thirteenth/nineteenth century. Some feature “magic squares” with thousands of units based on the mysterious letters that open certain sūras, selected Qurʾānic texts, the divine names (al-ʿasmāʾ al-ḥusnā) and other prayers, or their numerical equivalents.

A few talismanic garments have also been attributed to Iran, but the protection provided by metal magical-medicinal bowls appears to have been more appreciated locally; inscribed bowls were probably exported eastward from Iran to south and east Asia, where local variants were produced. Metal plaques used as arm amulets and inscribed with a variety of brief Qurʾānic citations were popular in eastern Iran during the thirteenth/nineteenth century. A variant type employing some Hebrew letters and known from Iraq may be linked to that region’s folk traditions.

Arms and various accoutrements of war ranging from swords to helmets, body armor and military banners were inscribed with texts from the Qurʾān in both the Ottoman empire and the Indo-Iranian world, but this practice is especially well-documented among the Ottomans, where it was well underway by the early tenth/sixteenth century.

**The Ottoman realm**

This discussion will have two parts: the first devoted to the ninth/fifteenth through the eleventh/seventeenth centuries and the second focusing on the twelfth/eighteenth through the fourteenth/twentieth centuries. The wide territorial expanse of the Ottoman empire and that dynasty’s extraordinary longevity (ca. 680-1342/1281-1924) ensured that there was no single
Ottoman approach to the veneration of the Qur’ān and that its uses evolved with time. The fissiparous tendencies of such a large-scale state were, however, counterbalanced by the development, in the course of the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/sixteenth centuries, of a strongly hierarchical and centralized bureaucratic and military structure that was often mirrored in cultural life. The religious or aesthetic preferences of the sultans were often widely emulated by their subordinates.

Fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (ninth to eleventh centuries hijrī)

The Ottoman sultans saw themselves as leaders of the Muslim world and their approach to the Qur’ān synthesized and elaborated upon features developed by their predecessors, especially the ‘Abbāsid caliphs and their successors, including the ʿIlkhānid Mongols and the Timūrids. The sultans Bāyezīd II (r. 886-918/1481-1512) and Suleyman (r. 926-74/1520-66) were particularly influential in establishing a distinctive Ottoman approach to the Qur’ān’s transcription and veneration. The main calligraphic tradition that took root at the Ottoman court derived from Irano-Iraqi precedents, in particular the calligraphic modes associated with Yāqūt and his successors; it also focused particularly on the transcription of the Qur’ān and other religious texts. A preference for the six canonical scripts as they were codified in the late ‘Abbāsid period is evident in both manuscript copies of the Qur’ān and in citations from it rendered in stone-cut inscriptions placed over mosque portals, as well as in the inscriptions, whether painted or executed in glazed ceramics, that were widely applied to the walls, vaults and domes of religious buildings, particularly tombs and mosques. The Qur’ān even appears in some parts of the Topkapı Sarayi, such as in the ceramic tile revetments of the bedchamber of Murād III (r. 982-1003/1574-95).

Ottoman court calligraphers created monumental qur’ānic inscriptions, manuscripts of the holy book as well as more specialized devotional tracts containing only a few sūras or even a single one. The calligraphic lineage that predominated in Ottoman court manuscripts of the Qur’ān began with the son of a Suhrawardi shaykh from Bukhārā, Shaykh Hamd Allāh also known as Ibn al-Shaykh (d. 926/1520). He was closely associated with Sultan Bāyezīd II as a şehzade both during the latter’s residence in Amasya and in Istanbul, after he ascended the throne. In addition to Qur’ān manuscripts copied in naʻlīk script, Shaykh Hamd Allāh also designed monumental qur’ānic inscriptions and produced devotional manuals focusing on individual sūras including q 6, 18, and 78 that were often combined with other religious texts. Another seminal calligrapher, Ahmad Qarāḫišārī (d. 963/1556), active during the reign of Sultan Suleyman, was particularly renowned for his design of large-scale inscriptions for architectural use, a skill that was also cultivated by his pupil and adopted son Hasan Çelebi (d. 1002/1593).

The hierarchical structure of Ottoman patronage linked the size of a Qur’ān donated to a religious institution with the status of its donor, with the largest ones reserved for the sultans themselves. Ahmad Qarāḫišārī began to copy the largest known Ottoman Qur’ān, which measures 62 by 43 cm, for Sultan Süleyman but it remained unfinished at the scribe’s death in 963/1556. Documents about this manuscript published by Filiz Çağman demonstrate that between 992/1584 and 1005/1596 subsequent sultans devoted substantial sums to its completion. The Ottoman association of the largest Qur’āns with royal patronage may spring from the above-mentioned enthusiasm of Timūr
and his descendants for oversized Qur’āns — a practice known to the Ottomans through literary sources as well as from actual manuscripts.

A religious anthology copied by Qarāḫī in 945/1547 (Türk İslam Eserleri Müzesi, TIEM 1438) epitomizes the Ottoman use of calligraphy as the kinetic extension of devotional practice. It contains Q 6, the Burda of al-Būrī, and assorted prayers and hadith. This manuscript is also a virtuoso sampler, juxtaposing scripts with one another. Its opening pages contain invocations in three dramatic and distinct hands while the main body of the text is also transcribed in three different hands, large-scale thulth, medium-sized naskh, and fine ghubār. The manuscript uses a page scheme described by Ottoman sources as the “Yāqūt format,” which juxtaposes a line in large-scale gold thulth at the top and bottom of the page with a densely written central panel in black naskh script.

The career of Ḥāfiẓ Uthmān Efendi (d. 1110/1698) exemplifies the varied skills required of Ottoman court calligraphers; he excelled both at composing monumental qur’ānic inscriptions and transcribing Qur’ān manuscripts. He also taught calligraphy at the court, where his students included Sultan Muṣṭaḥr II (r. 1106-15/1695-1703). Perhaps because of their varied responsibilities, court scribes were not always able to satisfy the needs of their patrons so that the latter sought manuscripts produced elsewhere; during the tenth/sixteenth century Qur’āns from the Iranian city of Shīrāz appear to have been particularly popular in Turkey.

The 923/1517 conquest of the Mamlūk domains by the Ottomans generated a transfer of Syrian and Egyptian artisans to Istanbul; the new arrivals added a further dimension to the Turkish treatment of the Qur’ān. The Ottomans emulated the Mamlūk practice of protecting Qur’ān manuscripts of unusual sanctity with special chests; most of the surviving examples come from dynastic tombs. Ottoman Qur’ān chests often take the shape of miniature, domed buildings made from wood and embellished with inlays in contrasting colors or of different materials. They resemble architectural models and may have been designed, or even built, by court architects.

The most varied and extensive citations found on arms and various accoutrements of war occur on swords. The many traditions that were attached to the swords of the Prophet gave this weapon a special status among Muslims, although how that status was expressed in material terms varied from time to time and place to place. Literary traditions affirm that the ‘Abbāsids made use of swords believed to have belonged to the Prophet himself in their ceremonies and regalia, but few details about their physical appearance are known. A group of swords from the end of the Nasrid period in Spain that survive in various Spanish collections have hilts inscribed with pious phrases, but these do not appear to have included qur’ānic citations. Some Mamlūk swords have inscribed blades but those texts are historical rather than qur’ānic.

An Ottoman sword dated to 914/1509 provides an example of the verses linked to weaponry. It is inscribed with the most frequently cited texts: Q 2:253, Q 6:3 (the Victory Verse) and Q 2:255 (the Throne Verse), reminders that God’s support is sufficient against any adversary. More unusual is the evocation of the Men of the Cave (q.v.; ahl al-kahf, identified as the Seven Sleepers) and their dog (q.v.), Qiṭār. Their revival after a long sleep is viewed as a harbinger of the resurrection (q.v.). This assortment of texts contrasts with the simple, direct statement taken
from q 65:3, enjoining trust in God and confidence in his oversight, inscribed on the blade of a sword dated to 940/1533-34 that was made for Sultan Süleyman. Qur’anic passages are also frequently inscribed on helmets and body armor. The most popular verses on both groups of objects are again q 61:13 and 2:255; both appear on an iron helmet inlaid with silver (now in Vienna) that is said to have belonged to Soğollu Mehmed, vizier to three sultans between 972/1565 and 987/1579.

The practice of inscribing the Qur’an on garments occurred in several regions, but the earliest and best-documented examples were made for members of the Ottoman court ranging from the sultans to their sons or high-ranking officials between the late ninth/fifteenth and early eleventh/seventeenth centuries. One served as a shroud, some were worn under armor in battle, and still others with particularly elaborate calligraphy or ornamentation may have been worn on ceremonial occasions. The association of these garments with leading members of the Ottoman court is reflected in the elaboration of their design and the quality of their calligraphy. The range of Qur’an citations that are inscribed upon them defies easy categorization and suggests that some were produced for individual use at a specific moment.

Eighteenth to twentieth centuries (twelfth to fourteenth centuries hijri)

It is during this period that the Qur’an’s use for prognostication began to shape its transcription and visual presentation. The bibliomantic use of the Qur’an — in which a person opens the book at random and then seeks guidance from its text — often focused on key words or phrases of particular import. Some twelfth/eighteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth century Ottoman manuscripts used a variety of techniques to draw the reader’s attention to portions of the text that were of special significance, such as by writing them in a contrasting color such as red. This highlighting of key phrases was often accompanied by other enhancements of the text’s appearance. Sometimes each page of the text was treated as a discrete physical unit by ensuring that all its verses were complete, an approach that required a careful modulation of the spaces between words. A Qur’an in the Khalili Collection (Qur 10) dated to 1124/1712 exemplifies this approach.

A group of calligraphers connected to the city of Shumnu/Shumen in Bulgaria during the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, including Seyyid Mehmed Şükri, specialized in the production of Qur’ans that augmented the significance of some pages through an even more complex procedure. In this case each half of a pair of facing pages had a mirror image relationship to the other. This symmetry extended even to individual words or phrases of particular importance, such as the epithets of God, so that when the book was closed the key words on one page were in alignment with those on the opposite side.

Banners carried by the Ottoman armies or used on their naval vessels were also inscribed with citations from the Qur’an, in addition to other texts and symbols. Most of the extant examples are of thirteenth/nineteenth century date but they are believed to replicate designs used in earlier centuries. The portions of the Qur’an cited include q 4:95-6, 61:13 and q 112. Symbols used include a schematic representation of the sword of the prophet Muḥammad and then ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (dhū l-faqr) and of the standard carried by Ayyūb al-Anṣārī. Members of Ottoman dervish orders also carried similar banners on their pilgrimage to Mecca (see Fig. vi).
The establishment of the Mughal dynasty (932-1274⁄1526-1858) inaugurated the most brilliant phase of Islamic culture in the subcontinent. Many of its characteristic features were developed during the fifty year reign of that dynasty’s third ruler, Akbar (962-1014⁄1556-1605), but this general rule does not apply to the role of the Qur’an in the region’s religious and cultural life. Akbar’s personal interest in religious syncretism that culminated in his proclamation of a new era and a new faith, the Din-i Ilahi, also led him to relegate the Qur’an to a secondary role. Despite his well-documented fascination with manuscripts, Akbar is not known to have commissioned a single Qur’an — although he did own a parchment copy attributed to the caliph Uthman. Among Akbar’s acts in 992⁄1584 that signaled the promulgation of the Din-i Ilahi was the removal of the profession of faith (shahada) from Mughal coins, thereby creating a rupture with a religio-political tradition that stretched back to the Umayyads. The text used in its place, Allahu akbar jalla jala’luhu, “God is great, splendid is his glory,” is ambiguous, for it simultaneously makes reference to God and to Akbar. The same phrase is also inscribed on Akbar’s cenotaph at Sikandra, along with citation of the ninety-nine names of God, a combination that once again could be interpreted in more than one fashion. These texts are amplified by Akbar’s eulogy, in Persian prose, inscribed on the exterior portal of his tomb complex. His mausoleum was completed during the reign of his son and successor Jahangir (1014-37⁄1605-27), who continued many of his father’s religious practices.

Radical though they might have been, Akbar’s actions did not mean that in the Mughal empire the Qur’an disappeared from the public arena, much less from the devotional practice of the individual Muslim. His views about the Qur’an failed to diminish enthusiasm for its use in amulets and talismans including “magical-medicinal bowls.” Although no such metal vessels from his reign appear to have survived, they must have existed. One inscribed with his name and the title of one of his high officials, the Khan-i Khānān, was replicated in over-glaze painted porcelain by Chinese artisans; examples are preserved in both Malaysian and European collections.

The most significant use of the Qur’an among the Mughals is its role in funerary or commemorative structures. By the sixteenth century the tombs of saintly personages were firmly established as the emotional locus of popular piety and the most important event of the liturgical calendar was the commemoration of a saint’s death that was believed to mark the moment they attained unity with God, a union described as an ‘urs (mystical wedding; see marriage and divorce; monasticism and monks). The metaphorical interpretation of the tomb as a gateway to heaven is evident in the Qur’ānic inscriptions placed on their portals; in some instances tomb inscriptions also allude to the heavenly union of the deceased with God. Although these practices were formulated in conjunction with the tombs of Sufi saints, they were also applied in monuments supported with royal patronage. For example at Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar’s palace city near Agra, constructed between 979⁄1571 and 994⁄1585, the Boland Darwaza or principal gateway to the mosque-shrine complex that houses the tomb of Shaykh Sālim Chishti (d. 980⁄1572) is inscribed with Q 39:73-5, 41:30-1 and 41:53-4, texts that describe the welcome awaiting the faithful at the gates of paradise. The most extensive epigraphic program of this material culture...
character on a Mughal monument is, however, that of the Tāj Mahal, the funerary complex erected by Shāh Jahān for his wife, Arjumand Bānū Begum, known as Mumtāz Mahal, following her death in 1631, and in which he, too, was subsequently buried (for an example of this craftsmanship, see Fig. VIII of Epigraphy).

Mughal sources describe the Tāj Mahall as the Rawzā-i munawara. “The Illuminated Tomb,” a name that reflects the building’s white marble facing and that material’s numinous associations. The black stone Qur’ānic inscriptions inlaid on the two faces of its main (south) gate, the tomb chamber’s external and internal facades and its cenotaphs convey the monument’s significance and demonstrate how its architectural form and ornamentation were used to convey a message at once personal and religious that celebrates this tomb as the site of the paradisiacal 'awr of Mumtāz Mahall and Shāh Jahān.

Those inscriptions were designed, and probably selected by, a Persian-born calligrapher and religious scholar, ‘Abd al-Haqq Shīrāz Amānāt Khān. His scheme utilizes portions of the Qur’ān that describe the last days and the reception awaiting the believer in paradise; their placement evokes a litany recited in the course of a visit. An unusual aspect of his scheme is the fact that most of the sūras are cited in their entirety. The south face of its main gate is inscribed with q. 89, its northern side with q. 93, 94 and 95. The ensemble of texts inscribed on the tomb proper propels the visitor on a clockwise circumambulation of the exterior from south to west and on a counter-clockwise movement around the interior chamber from southeast to south. The exterior’s four portals carry the majestic verses of q. 36 (known as Tā Sin), widely recited to commemorate the dead; the doors within those portals are framed by q. 81, 82, 84, and 98 with their dramatic evocation of the world’s end (see Apocalypse; last judgment). The tomb’s interior chamber also has two levels of inscriptions. The upper one encircles the wall and concludes in the frame of the southeast niche; it contains q. 67 with its evocation of God’s role as creator (see Creation) and ultimate judge. The lower series consisting of q. 48 and 76, describing the eternal rewards awaiting the faithful, encircles the remaining niches and doorways from southeast to south. The south doorway, facing the cenotaphs, is surrounded by q. 39:53-4 describing God’s compassion (see Mercy). The upper surface of Mumtāz Mahall’s cenotaph is inscribed with a prayer addressed to God recalling his promise of salvation (q.v.) that combines q. 41:30 and 40:7-8.

The reliance on the Qur’ān for the Tāj Mahall’s inscriptions demonstrates the degree to which Shāh Jahān (r. 1037-68/1628-57) had broken with the religious policies of his father and grandfather. Not surprisingly, he placed the profession of faith (shahāda) on his coins and sponsored more traditional forms of Islamic piety including Qur’ān recitations in his public audience chamber on the occasion of religious festivals. This trend was further augmented during the reign of his son Awrangzīb (1068-1118/1658-1707), who made the Qur’ān the foundation of his personal devotional life. A Qur’ān in the Khalili Collection (Qur. 417) was copied in 1108/1696-97 by one of his daughters, Zinat al-Nisā’, and probably illuminated by her Persian tutor, Muhammad Sa‘īd.

The revival of interest in the Qur’ān at the Mughal court was affected by the local religious climate, in particular by actions taken by members of the Naqshbandiyya Sūfī order. ‘Abd al-Bāqī Ḥaddād, an Iranian calligrapher active at Awrangzīb’s court, is credited with introducing to India the practice of transcribing Qur’āns within a small space. The cumulative effect of
these trends encouraged a broader interest in the Qurʾān in the region during the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not only does the local production of its manuscripts increase but that text is used in a variety of physical contexts. These include the production of talismans and talismanic garments as well as the addition of religious texts to weapons, body armor and banners. These practices may well have reached India from Iran or even from the Ottoman empire, but they also acquired a local flavor. Indian talismanic garments normally contain the integral text of the Qurʾān instead of the combination of texts and symbols that predominate in Iran and Turkey. Many of the published Indian accoutrements of war were produced for local Deccani rulers during the twelfth/eighteenth century, and these often combine Qurʾānic citations with Shiʿī litanies. The same combination of Qurʾānic texts and Shiʿī prayers also appears on talismans that were produced in both Iran and India (for an example of this combination on an Iranian battle standard, see Fig. x of epigraphy).

East Asia

The reign of the Cheng-te emperor (1506-21 C.E.) exemplifies the manner in which Muslim eunuchs at the Ming court helped to integrate the Qurʾān into Chinese material culture. He is remembered for the way in which he delegated the administration of his empire to the eunuchs of the imperial household, many of whom were Muslim. It was through their control over palace workshops that some of the blue and white porcelain produced at the imperial kilns in Jingdezhen bear inscriptions in Persian and Arabic, including passages from the Qurʾān. Most of the objects follow Chinese traditions in form and function; those with the longest Qurʾānic texts are vertical screens designed to be placed on a table, where they could have served in lieu of a miḥrāb for private devotions. One in the Percival David Foundation, London, is inscribed with Q 72:18-20 (see Fig. v). A fragment bearing a prayer in Arabic was recently excavated at the site of the Ming imperial kilns in Zushan.

Whether these goods for court use were linked to a broader production of inscribed objects or vessels intended for export to Muslim regions is not yet clear. A few other bowls from the Cheng-te reign preserved in Near Eastern collections and inscribed with Arabic texts may have been sent as gifts to Muslim rulers. The expanded production of bowls inscribed with Qurʾānic passages occurs in the “Swatow porcelains” decorated in over-glaze enamels generally linked to the Wan-li reign (1573-1619 C.E.). Two series of magical-medicinal bowls now in Malaysian and European collections, one type directed at a Sunnī audience and another with Shiʿī prayers, are inscribed internally with selections from the Qurʾān as well as historical inscriptions that link their design to a high official at the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar. A third group focuses primarily on Q 2:256 and is non-sectarian. These three groups of bowls exhibit a broad range of quality, but in the best examples the accuracy of their inscriptions suggests that Muslims were involved in their production. The decoration of a fourth series of porcelain magical-medicinal bowls dating to the twelfth/eighteenth century combines a central “magic-square” with concentric rings of Qurʾānic citations. The inscriptions on many of them appear to have been drawn rather than written, suggesting that artisans with no knowledge of Arabic were replicating a model supplied to them.

The question of how these vessels inscribed with the Qurʾān affected the material culture of China’s Muslim population...
is uncertain. Any broader examination of the role of the Qurʾān in China must take account of the manner in which Islam absorbed features from the region’s dominant cultural traditions, particularly Confucianism. This current is epitomized by the hesitant approach of Chinese Muslims toward the printing and translation of the Qurʾān (see TRANSLATIONS OF THE QURʾĀN). Although excerpts from the Qurʾān had been either paraphrased or transliterated into Chinese since at least the sixteenth century, the first integral translations were produced only in the fourteenth/twentieth century. The knowledge of the Qurʾān was, for most Chinese Muslims during these centuries, limited to passages memorized for devotional use under the tutelage of their ʿākhūndān.

Malaysia and the Indonesian archipelago
The character of Muslim practice in this region has always blended local traditions with imported features, but the source of the latter has varied over time. During the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries connections were strong with the Muslims of Gujarat in western India, who brought with them connections to various Ṣūfī orders; more recently, links to the Arabian peninsula have assumed a primary importance. Initially, acceptance of Islam appears to have caused only limited changes in the island’s material culture, although this perception may be shaped by a climate that precludes the preservation of organic materials such as manuscripts. One topic that deserves further investigation is the way in which the importance of textiles in the region’s local social and ceremonial life led to their use in religious observances. The Khalili Collection contains a selendang, a kind of shawl worn draped around the head or shoulders, which is covered with densely written Arabic inscriptions that include the widely used “Victory Verse” (q 61:13; see Fig. vii).

Studies of the religious life of the region have demonstrated the popularity of short religio-magical tracts that have a Qurʾānic foundation, but are independent compositions often written in vernacular languages and distributed to believers by local religious figures with mystical tendencies (see also SOUTHEAST ASIAN LITERATURE AND THE QURʾĀN). The twelfth/eighteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth century Qurʾāns from Malaysia or Indonesia are generally copied in a form of naskh and written on European paper. Their illumination contains luxuriant foliage embellished by finials that derives from local decorations in other media. A Qurʾān in the Shaker Collection may have been written primarily with a brush rather than a pen.

Africa
The religious and cultural traditions of Muslim Africa can be divided into three broad geographic zones. The first, which stretches along the Mediterranean from Egypt to Morocco, has been covered in earlier sections of this essay so here attention will be focused on sub-Saharan west Africa and on the continent’s eastern portion, a region that includes the Sudan, Somalia and the eastern littoral as far as Mozambique, often called the “Swahili coast.” These western and eastern regions differ in their approach to religious architecture, in their modes of transcribing the Qurʾān, and also in the manner in which the sacred text was integrated into the activities of daily life (see also AFRICAN LITERATURE). Many roles assumed by the Qurʾān in west Africa bear the impress of the religious and cultural traditions of north Africa, particularly Morocco, whereas customs along the Swahili coast often display a close affinity to the practices of south Arabia.
It is often said that in Africa, Islam develops distinctive features in response to local traditions and rituals. One distinctive regional tradition, copying the Qur’an on loose folios or even a collection of single sheets that are then stored and carried in a leather pouch, probably derives from north Africa, where texts from the seventh/thirteenth century mention the storage and transportation of Qur’ans in leather bags. The earliest surviving west African manuscripts of this type appear to date from the eleventh/seventeenth century, and they continued to be produced into the thirteenth/nineteenth century. The script with which the text was transcribed in west Africa also is rooted in north African scribal practice.

Other west African approaches to the Qur’an appear to derive from local needs and customs including a fondness for linking portions of its text with specific designs or images, creating an iconographic whole that can be used in conjunction with particular rituals. A good example of such a fusion are the talismans that combine a highly stylized image of Burāq, the Prophet’s mount during his heavenly ascension (q.v.), not with Q 17:1 (where that event is described), but rather with the ever popular Q 2:255. In Sierra Leone these text-image hybrids were customarily affixed to the doorways of houses to protect the inhabitants against nefarious forces or evil spirits.

Three printed talismans purchased ca. 1970 C.E. at Mopti in Mali and published by G.C. Anawati (Trois talismans musulmans) offer a more elaborate fusion of text and image than this simple Burāq amulet, and were intended to provide protection against a wider variety of difficulties. One features a circular device, possibly symbolic of a cave, containing the names of the Seven Sleepers and their dog Qīṯmīr (mentioned in Q 18) that is framed by Q 2:255 and is accompanied by seven additional verses of particular potency (Q 9:31; 10:107; 11:6; 56:29; 60:35; 39:36). A second, said to offer protection during voyages by ship, has the drawing of an oblong object, possibly a boat, and a “magic square” filled with the numerical equivalents of selected divine attributes (al-asmā’ al-husnā). The accompanying Qur’anic citation links fragments taken from a number of verses and culminates in the mysterious letters prefaced to several sūras. The third talisman, intended for protection against the maladies of love, has a square of nine units divided by diagonal lines into a series of triangular compartments. This frame is composed with the words of Q 94, and the Prophet’s name is inscribed at the intersections of four sets of lines (see Names of the Prophet). A simpler version of this design, focusing only on the word Allāh, was used ca. 1980 C.E. in Ghana by the Imām of Techiman to decorate cloth for ceremonial use.

Copying and memorizing the Qur’an was the foundation of education for the Muslims of both west and east Africa, a circumstance that helped to link the symbolic language of the two zones (see Teaching and Preaching the Qur’an). Even the materials used in that transfer of knowledge gained a power and prestige of their own. Children customarily copied the Qur’an onto hand-held writing boards with pen and ink. After a given section of the text had been memorized, the board was washed to prepare it to receive the next installment; the resulting mixture of ink and water was prized for its curative and protective powers. Writing boards were also decorated with various abstract patterns and those designs were, in turn, transferred to other objects. Among the Hausa of Nigeria, persons skilled in Qur’anic calligraphy were often called upon...
to prepare patterns for embroideries and other decorations.

The writing board itself can even become a kind of symbolic replacement for the Qur'an. Its distinctive outline of an upright rectangle with an arrow-shaped handle protruding from one narrow side appears in architectural decoration and on portable objects. The fusion between the Qur'an's text and the manner in which it was transmitted is epitomized in an elaborately decorated writing board from Omdurman in the Republic of the Sudan (see Fig. viii). Its central zone is inscribed with q 97, which describes the Qur'an's revelation on the Night of Power (q.v.), an event linked to 27 Ramaḍān and celebrated with considerable pomp in the region.

East Africa

Most of the east African objects in western collections are linked to the epic struggles centered in the present Republic of the Sudan between the British army and the Mahdiyya movement led by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi (d. 1913/1895) and his successor Khalīfa 'Abdullāhī (d. 1317/1899). Those objects coupled with contemporary descriptions and photographs demonstrate the varied ways in which the Qur'an served to bolster the Mahdi's army and his ideas. They recited it as they went into battle, followed banners inscribed with its text, carried swords with Qur'anic inscriptions and wore armor festooned with Qur'anic phrases and other prayers inscribed on leather-covered amulets or written on miniature writing boards.

There are too few published east African Qur'āns to support broad conclusions. One in the Khalili Collection, Qur 706, dated to 1162/1749, appears to have been made by a professional scribe for a religious scholar because it also contains supplementary texts about techniques of recitation, as well as selected ḥadiths and prayers. Its naskh script has some affinities with hands used in western India; the manuscript was once in Zanzibar. An example dated to 1296/1879 in the Safwat Collection appears to have been copied by its owner for his personal use in the region of Helvān on the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Its naskh script resembles scholarly hands used in Egypt, but its boldly executed red and black illumination must spring from local traditions.

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Bibliography

Maturity

Full physical and mental capacity. The notion of maturity (ashudd, rushd) has reference to a person who has attained complete natural development, who is fully grown and capable of assuming the responsible management of his or her own affairs.

Physical maturity

The common word indicating physical maturity is ashudd, from the root sh-d-d meaning “to strengthen.” It occurs eight times in the Qurʾān, in every instance in conjunction with some form of the root b-l-gh, which in itself connotes “coming of age.” The same root also yields words that signify eloquence in speech, thus suggesting a connection between maturity and the ability to express oneself forcefully and elegantly. An individual who has passed puberty and achieved majority is bāligh. In two instances, q 6:152 and q 17:34, a phrase with derivatives of these two roots has reference to guardianship (q.v.) over the property (q.v.) of orphans (q.v.). Guardians are commanded not to appropriate the wealth (q.v.) of orphans and to act with regard to it only in a proper (“the best”) manner until the minor comes of age, at which time his property must be turned over to him, if he be found capable of managing it. The legal schools extended the same rule to the guardianship of a father over the property of his own children (q.v.; see also family; law and the Qurʾān).

Exceptions to the absolute prohibition of a guardian’s use of a ward’s wealth are allowed, however, as in q 4:6, where something like a wage for the guardian’s efforts in overseeing the property of his ward seems to be permitted for those who do not enjoy great wealth of their own. Important is that the guardian should act always in the best interest of the ward and not waste the latter’s resources recklessly or foolishly. There is a specific warning against speedily devouring a ward’s wealth in order to utilize it all for the guardian’s purposes before the ward comes of age and is entitled to his or her property.

The connection between maturity and the control of property is also made in the story of Moses’ (q.v.) encounter with one of the servants of God to whom had been “granted mercy (q.v.) from us and to whom we had taught knowledge (see knowledge and learning) from ourselves” (q 18:65), a figure who is usually identified with Khīḍr (see Khādir/Khīdr). The explanation for Khīḍr’s restoration of a broken-down wall in a city that had received him and Moses ungraciously lay in a treasure buried beneath the wall. The treasure belonged to two orphaned boys whom God intended should reach their maturity and thus be able to claim their treasure.

According to the legal schools, the indications of maturity are the physical developments that normally accompany puberty. In the case of boys they are the appearance of pubic hair and the occurrence of nocturnal emissions, while in girls they are...
the onset of menstruation (q.v.), the consummation of marriage and the fact of the woman’s having lived with her husband for a period of time (see marriage and divorce). Pregnancy is also an evidence of maturity in girls.

There is disagreement among the legal schools about the age at which maturity is achieved if the usual physical signs are absent. The majority holds that age fifteen marks the passage to maturity. If the signs of puberty are present, some would allow the age to be pushed back as far as nine years but no farther. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) allows a guardian to maintain custodianship of a ward’s property until age twenty-five if the latter is deemed incompetent to manage it properly alone. In such a case the criterion for determining maturity is clearly not solely physical.

The age of maturity is made somewhat unclear by certain other considerations. For example, a child is considered to have achieved the power of discrimination by the age of seven, discrimination being certainly one of the aspects of maturity. Seven is the age at which boys must begin to fulfill the religious duties, such as prayer (q.v.), that are incumbent upon adult Muslims. In cases in which there is dispute between parents about the custodianship of a child who has reached seven years, the child is held to have sufficient powers of discrimination to be able to choose with which of the parents he will live. There is a similar ambiguity about maturity in connection with the age of marriage. Although betrothal may occur at any age through the action of a child’s custodian, the consummation of a marriage is presumably an occurrence that marks the full development of an individual. Pregnancy is, therefore, an indication of maturity.

There are some matters for which maturity is a necessary condition. The disposition of one’s self or one’s property cannot be made until maturity is reached, the responsibility before that time falling upon the custodian or guardian of the immature person. Guardianship of a minor is, therefore, restricted to those who are of full age and free (see slaves and slavery). A wali or guardian who provides a marriage partner for a minor child must be a person of full age. Similarly it is only a person of full age who may adopt a child, though a woman must also have the consent of her husband to do so. Maturity is also a necessary but not a sufficient condition for one who wishes to enter into a contract (see contracts and alliances). The primary requisite for a witness in a criminal case is that he should be a male Muslim of good character who has reached either puberty or the age of fifteen (see witnessing and testifying; sin, major and minor). In general, as these examples show, maturity is a necessary condition of legal competence in the purview of Islamic law.

Mental maturity (rushd)
In the verses that deal with the management of the property of orphans, guardians are commanded to test the orphans before turning their property over to them (q.4:6). The basis for delivering the property is “if you find in them rushd,” i.e. sound judgment (q.v.) or mental competence for the handling of their own affairs (see insanity). The negative expression of the same point is made in q.4:5 where the command is given “make not over your property… to the weak of understanding.” Mental competence is also associated with attaining full age in the story of Joseph (q.v.) where it is said of him “and when he reached his maturity we gave him wisdom and judgment” (q.12:22). Precisely the same is said of Moses (q.28:14). Māwardī (d. 450/1058) and other classical
exegetes (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’AN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL) insist that mental maturity (glossed as 'āqil) be a requirement for the caliphate (cf. al-Qādi, Term; see also CALIPH; IMĀM).

Spiritual maturity
A verse that enjoins loving treatment for one’s parents (q.v.; Q 46:15; see also SOCIAL INTERACTIONS; KINSHIP), indicates that a true realization of God’s goodness comes when one “attains maturity and reaches forty years of age.” At that time a person begins to thank God for the blessing (q.v.) bestowed upon the parents and himself, to ask that he may do good that pleases God, to pray for the well-being of his offspring, and to affirm his submission to God (see GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE; GOOD AND EVIL). Full spiritual realization, thus, seems to come long after physical maturation.

Maturity as proof of God’s creative power
In two verses of the Qur’ān (Q 22:5 and 40:67) the attainment of maturity is presented as an argument for God’s sovereignty over the world as its creator (see CREATION; COSMOLOGY). He is described as the one who created people from dust, effected their development in the womb and brought them forth as babies so that they might achieve their maturity (see BIOLOGY AS THE CREATION AND STAGES OF LIFE). The creative process and its stages are offered as a proof (q.v.) against those who deny the resurrection (q.v.). The God who brought the human race into being can restore what has apparently been lost. In Q 40:68, immediately following the description of a human being’s development through the stages of life, the point is driven home by the statement “He it is who gives life (q.v.) and causes death (see DEATH AND THE DEAD), so when he decrees a thing, he only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.”

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Bibliography

Maymūna  see WIVES OF THE PROPHET

Measurement
Finding the magnitude of a physical quantity such as length, area, volume, weight, and time. The full meaning of the term ‘measurement’ covers five constituent parts: (i) the quantity to be measured, (ii) the act of measuring, (iii) the measuring instrument (see INSTRUMENTS), (iv) the magnitude (measure) of the quantity measured, and (v) the unit of measurement. The present discussion touches upon each of the five components, with the understanding that the Qur’ānic mention of any one of them would imply their totality, i.e. the actual performance of a complete measurement. It should be noted that the actual measurement of length, area, volume and weight is done on a material object or a substance. In the case of time, the measurement is of an event whose duration is to be calculated.

The usual Arabic equivalent of ‘measurement’ is qiyyās (or qays, qaws) from the roots q-y-s and q-w-s (Lane, ii, 2577-8, 2574-5),
but this noun and all other words that could be derived from these roots, except the word qaws (‘bow’), are absent from the Qur’ān. There are some words, however, derived from the root q-d-r which are synonyms to those derived from the previous two roots (q-y-s or q-w-s); examples of these are: qaddara, corresponding to qāsa, ‘to measure’, and migātas, corresponding to migyās, ‘a measure’ (Jawhari, Sihākh, iii, 967). Such words from the root q-d-r are found in various verses and imply measurements of length, volume, weight and time. Beside these, there are other words connected with the different types of measurements and these are derived from various roots: dh-r-', q-w-s, t-w-l and ‘r-d for length; m-s-h for area; k-y-l and s-w’ for volume; and w-z-n, th-q-l and kh-f-f for weight measurements.

Measurement of length

In the following qur’ānic passages we find words derived from the roots q-d-r, dh-r’, q-w-s, t-w-l and ‘r-d. Q 34:18 reads “We measured (qaddārnā) the [length of the] journey (q.v.) between them (i.e. the cities),” where the act of measuring is to be understood metaphorically (see metaphor). In Q 34:11, however, the verb is used in the literal sense: “measure (qaddir) the link [i.e. of armor; see David].” Q 60:32 utilizes both dhar’ (‘a measure of [length]’ and dhirā’ (‘a cubit’): “a chain [i.e. of the inhabitants of hell; see hell and hellfire; reward and punishment] whose measure is seventy cubits.” Qāb (‘a measure’) and qawsayn (‘two [Arabian] bows’; equivalent to two cubits; see Tāj al-‘arūs, iv, 235) appear in Q 53:9: “He [Gabriel, q.v.] was (at a distance) whose measure is two bows or nearer” (see ascension; visions). As an expression, the length of ‘two bows’ commonly connotes a short distance.

Q 17:37 utilizes tūl, a term that ordinarily signifies length, to indicate “height”: “You will never reach the mountains in height.”

The vast difference between the height of the mountains and human height is emphasized by this uncharacteristic use of tūl.

Finally, the notion of ‘breadth’ is indicated by the term ‘ard: “a paradise (q.v.) whose breadth is as the breadth of the heaven(s) and the earth” (Q 57:21; cf. 3:133; see heaven and sky; earth). The word ‘breadth’ is used rather than ‘length’, as it is actually the ratio of breadth or width to the greater length of, for example, a rectangular figure, that convey an idea of great magnitude. This verse illustrates the vast expanse of paradise in breadth (and, of course, in length), whose dimensions are known to God alone, a theme taken up in hadith literature, as well.

Measurement of area

There are three qur’ānic passages that include words derived from the root m-s-h, a root which has the connotation of passing one’s hand over an area, as also in ablutions (see cleanliness and ablution) and anointing. The term for “area” (misāḥa), although derived from this root, eventually came to have a meaning independent of the actual act of wiping one’s hands over a surface. “Wipe (with your wet hands) your heads and feet to the ankles… and wipe (imsāḥa) your faces and hands with it (i.e. clean soil or earth)” (Q 5:6). Q 4:43 also contains this second injunction. Q 38:33 reads as follows: “Then he began wiping (or stroking; masḥan) the shanks and necks (i.e. of the horses).” In these verses, the various forms of m-s-h imply passing (one’s hand) over a surface (e.g. face, neck). One can say that this action, on a larger scale, can be taken to resemble the surveying of a plot of land in order to obtain its area, but of course, in that case, an actual ‘measurement’ of certain quantities (e.g. length and breadth) is done, from which the precise area is calculated. By such extrapolation the Arabic term masāḥa corresponds to ‘a surveyor’ and misāḥa means ‘area.’ Yet,
Measurement of volume

A number of Qur’anic verses containing words derived from the roots *k-y-l*, *q-d-r*, and *s-w-* signify meanings associated with the measurement of volume. The words derived from the root *k-y-l* are: *kāla*, to measure the volume or to give a measure of volume (cf. Q 17:35; 83:3); *ikāila*, *yakīlū* (in the form *nakalī*), to receive a measure of volume (Q 12:63; cf. 83:2); *kayl*, a measure of volume (Q 6:152; 7:85; 12:59-60, 63, 65, 88; 17:35; 26:181), together with the special measure, *kayl baʿa*, camel’s load (Q 12:65; see CAMEL; LOAD); and *mikīl*, a measure of volume (Q 11:84, 85). This vocabulary specifically connotes an act of measurement and the use of a vehicle or vessel of measurement (see CUPS AND VESSELS). One example of such a vessel is a “cup” or “goblet.” Q 12:72 speaks of the *suqā‘* or drinking cup, a word derived from the root *s-y-w*- (A related but non-Qur’anic term, *ṣī‘*, signifies either a measuring vessel of a specific capacity or a unit of volume measurement.)

The words derived from the root *q-d-r* are *gaddara*, to measure the volume (Q 76:16) and *qadar*, a measure of volume (Q 13:17; 23:18; 43:11). The passages just cited vary in the degree of measurement specificity which they convey.

Measurement of weight

The words included in Qur’anic verses dealing with the measurement of weight are derived from the roots *w-z-n*, *th-q-l*, *kh-f-f* and *q-d-r*. Words derived from the root *w-z-n* include *wazana*, ‘to weigh’ (Q 83:3; cf. the imperative *ziṃū* in Q 17:35 and 26:182, and the verbal noun *waṣaẓ* at Q 7:8; 18:105; 55:9). In Q 7:8 and 18:105 the ‘weighing’ is that of the deeds of people at the day of judgment (see LAST JUDGMENT; GOOD DEEDS; EVIL DEEDS; RECORD OF HUMAN ACTIONS), and thus a metaphorical use, while in Q 55:9, the act of weighing is a real one. Another derivative of *w-z-n* is *muḍān* (*pl. mawḍūzūn*), which has three different meanings in the Qur’ān: firstly, it is used as a symbol of justice (Q 42:17; 55:7; 57:25; see JUDGE AND INJUSTICE). Secondly, it means ‘a weight’ either literally as in Q 6:152; 7:85; 11:84-5; 55:9, or metaphorically, when speaking of those whose good deeds are heavy or light in comparison with their bad deeds (Q 7:8-9; 23:102-3; 101:6-8). An expanded translation would be: “those whose weights on the scales or balances are heavy or light,” in keeping with the figurative use of *muḍān* in the passages. Lastly, *muḍān* means the instrument for measuring weight, i.e. a balance or a scale used in the real sense (Q 55:8), or metaphorically, as in Q 21:47, “We set up the just balances for the resurrection (q.v.) day.” In three successive verses in Q 55 (Ṣūrat al-Raḥmān; Q 55:7-9), the same word (*muḍān*) has the three meanings: ‘justice,’ ‘a balance or a scale’ and ‘a weight’, respectively. Fākh al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210; Tafsīr, xxix, 91) gives also the alternative meanings: *muḍān* (a balance or a scale), *waṣaẓ* (weighing) and *maṣwūn* (the weighed object). In Q 17:35 and 26:182, *ṣītās* (a synonym of *muḍān*, ‘a balance’) is used in the real sense.

The words derived from the root *th-q-l* are *thuqala*, ‘to be heavy’ (Q 7:8; 23:102; 101:6) and *mīthqāl*, ‘weight’ (Q 4:40; 10:61; 21:47; 31:16; 34:3, 22; 99:7-8). From the root *kh-f-f* comes *khaffa*, ‘to be light’ (Q 7:9; 23:103; 101:8), while *q-d-r* yields *miqṭār* (Q 13:8), *qadar* (Q 15:21; 42:27; 54:49) and *qadr* (Q 65:3); these last three all mean ‘a
measure’ of weight but are often used metaphorically (see fate; destiny; freedom and predestination).

There are other words mentioned in the Qur‘ān that represent certain weights. In Q 3:75, qintār (≈ 100 pounds) is used as a symbol for heavy weights, in contrast with the small weight of the dinār (about 4 g; see money). The dinār (pl. darākhim), which is equivalent to about 3 grams, is also attested (Q 12:20), although this verse actually refers to dinārs in its commercial connotation (see selling and buying).

**Measurement of time**

Terminology for the measurement of intervals or duration of time is found in several Qur‘ānic verses. Four of these contain words derived from the root q-d-r: “God measures (or determines the measure of; yuqaddiru) the night and the day” (Q 73:20; see day and night; day, times of); “a day whose measure (miqdar) is a thousand/fifty thousand years” (Q 32:5; 70:4; see days of God); “to a known measure (or term; qadar)” (Q 77:22). In four other verses (Q 3:30; 18:12; 57:16; 72:25), the Arabic word amad is used, corresponding to ‘a term’ or ‘an interval of time’ or ‘a measure of time.’ Among the verses just cited, in Q 32:5 and 70:4 the ‘measure’ or ‘magnitude’ of time is given; in Q 18:12, 73:20 and 77:22 it is known to God alone; while in Q 3:30, 57:16 and 72:25, it is described as a long measure of time.

One of the units of time measurement is the year (sana) mentioned in Q 32:5 and 70:4. The other is “a day” (yawm), mentioned in the same verses. One should, however, differentiate between the word ‘day’ (nahār) of Q 73:20 meaning ‘daytime’ or ‘daylight’ and the yawm used in Q 32:5 and 70:4, which denotes the sum of the durations of nighttime (layl) and daytime or daylight (nahār; see noon; calendar; prayer). The word sā‘a ‘hour’ is mentioned in 48 verses; and in 40 of these, it is used as an expression for the time of the beginning of the day of resurrection. In one verse (Q 9:117), it is described as the ‘hour of hardship,’ thus meaning an unspecified period of time. In the remaining 7 verses (Q 7:34; 10:45; 49:16:61; 30:55; 34:30; 46:35), however, it can be taken to mean the unit of time (i.e. the hour); note the expression ‘hour of daylight’ (Q 10:45; 46:35).

**Accuracy of measurement**

A number of Qur‘ānic verses contain commands to perform measurements of volume and weight in an accurate manner by giving full (or complete) measurements. These will require the use of accurate measuring instruments (a balance or a scale with the correct counterweights and a vessel of the correct volume or capacity). Also there must be no manipulation of the measuring instruments that would result in ‘giving short’ (yunqi) measurement of volume or weight, or ‘giving less than due’ (yukhsir) of the measured volume or weight (see cheating). Justice (qisṭ) is also to be observed when performing the measurements, and is achieved by giving or receiving no more and no less than due of the measured quantity. Such commands are the following: “Give full measurements of volume and weight” (mus ḥāl kaysa wa-l-mizāna, Q 7:85), “give full measurements of volume and weight with justice (qisṭ)” (Q 6:152; cf. 11:85), “perform your weighing with justice and do not give less weight than due” (Q 55:9), “do not give short measurements of volume and weight” (Q 11:84), and “give full measurement of volume, and be not of those who give less (volume) than due” (Q 26:181). As mentioned in the introductory section of this article and as also indicated by al-Ṭabarānī.
(d. 518/1153; Majma') in his commentary on the verses q 7:85 and 11:85, the words “volume” and “weight” mentioned above connote the substance (or object) whose volume or weight is to be measured. In the injunction to “weigh with the right (accurate) balance” (al-qisṭas al-mustaqšīm, q 17:35; 26:182), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (Tafsīr, xx, 206) defines al-qisṭas al-mustaqšīm as the well-leveled balance that does not tilt to either side. Finally, in Sūrat Yūsuf (q 12, “Joseph”), there are two verses containing statements in accord with the command of giving full measurement of volume. In q 12:59, Joseph (q.v.) tells his brothers (see brother and brotherhood): “Do you not see that I give full measurement of volume?” And in q 12:88, his brothers say to him: “Give full measurement of volume to us.”

While emphasis in the verses just cited is on the measurements of volume and weight, where these cover numerous commodities in everyday life, it is reasonable to assume that the other types of measurements (i.e. of length, area, and time) were expected to be performed accurately as well.

**Measurement and Muslim society**

Measurement of length, area, volume, weight, and time were implemented in the everyday life of traditional Muslim society. These measurements were required in such matters as commerce, selling and buying (e.g. food, drink, clothing [q.v.; see also food and drink]), housing, and land surveying. They are also required in observing the rules of the Islamic law (shari'a, see law and the Qur'an) connected with prayers (salāt), almsgiving (q.v.; zakāt), land taxation (khārāj, see taxation), and inheritance (q.v.; 'ināh); all need some kind of measurement, using the appropriate measuring instruments and units (see, for example, Mawardi, Ḥakhām). As an example, prayers require measurement of time and land taxation needs measurements of area, volume and weight.

In addition to the units mentioned in the Qur'an (dhirā', sā', qinṣār and sā a), a variety of other units, related to those mentioned above, have been used in different countries at different times. Example of these are “qaṣaba” for length, jarīb and faddān for area, qist and wasq for volume, iqqīya (ounce) and ratl (pound) for weight (see Hinz, Islamische Masse und Gewichte), and daṭīqa (minute) for time measurements.

An official ‘Bureau of Standards’ (dār al-iyār; see Ibn Mammātī, Qawānīn, 333-4 and Maqrīzī, Ḥiḍāyat, ii, 242-3) was established early on in Islamic polities in order to issue ‘legal’ standard glass coin weights and heavy weights and measuring vessels (dinār, dirham and fals [coin weights]; iqqīya and ratl [weights]; and qist [vessels], together with their fractions of 1/4 or 1/3 or 1/2; see Miles, Early Arabic glass weights; Balog, Umayyad, ‘Abbasid and Tulunid glass weights; and Morton, Catalogue). These standards were used by the market inspector (al-muhtasib) to check the accuracy of the weights of coins and of heavy weights as well as that of the capacities of measuring vessels in circulation in the market place (see economics). The master standards were kept in the bureau.

In medieval societies, by the orders of the rulers (caliphs) or their representatives (see caliph; kings and rulers), certain words and pious legends were inscribed on volume and weight standards (Miles, Early Arabic glass weights; Balog, Umayyad, ‘Abbasid and Tulunid glass weights; Morton, Catalogue) in order to comply with the Qur'ānic commands of giving full measurements of these quantities (see Epigraphy and the Qur'ān; Material culture and the Qur'ān; Everyday life, Qur'ān in). These include the word ‘wāfī,’ meaning ‘full capacity’ or volume if inscribed on
measuring vessels and ‘full weight’ when inscribed on weights. Others are pious legends such as the verse q 26:181 (mentioned above) and the two statements: “al-waṣaf’a lillāh” and “amana Allāh bi-l-waṣaf’a,” which, respectively, have the implicit meanings: “give full measurements of volume and weight as commanded by God” and “God commands [you] to give full measurements of volume and weight.” See also weights and measures; time; spatial relations.

Said S. Said

Bibliography


Mecca

The city (q.v.) in the Arabian peninsula that was the birthplace of Muḥammad, which, due to the presence of the Ka‘ba (q.v.) therein, is revered as one of the “holy cities” in Islamic culture. A description of Mecca based strictly upon the Qur‘ān could lead to the radical revision of a large number of stories from classical Arabic sources, which are most often of a mythical or legendary kind (see geography; history and the Qur‘ān). It can be argued that the historiographical elements provided by these sources with respect to Mecca, a city of great religious and political importance, should only be considered insofar as they are corroborated by the Qur‘ān, in some shape or form. All elements which the Qur‘ān ignores, such as the retrospective emphasis on the site at Mecca or its position as the “center of the universe” should be avoided because they refer to an intellectual framework that belongs to later stages in the evolution of the corpus of Islamic beliefs and representations.

Mecca is explicitly mentioned only twice, in two relatively late passages of the Qur‘ān (q 48:24 [makka] and q 3:96, spelt bakka; see chronology and the Qur‘ān). These may well be derivations from a more complete rendering of the name, which would be recognized in the Macoraba mentioned by Ptolemy. Several other passages make reference to the city or its surroundings, such as q 14:37, “a valley without cultivation.” It will be noted, too, that Medina (q.v.), another Qur‘ānic place of tremendous importance, is in a similar position, as it is named on only three occasions: q 33:13 (Tatḥrib), q 33:60 and q 9:120. The presence of these place references in the text of the Qur‘ān indicates that the tribal tradition reported in the ancient historical writing of the ‘Abbāsid period can be cautiously taken as a general framework for analysis, particularly when this tradition is not distorted by a perspective of Islamic agrandizement, such as an overestimation of the role of the family or clan of Muḥammad (see family of the prophet; people of the house).

Initially it was only the tribe of Quraysh (q.v.; see also tribes and clans) which
lived in the city of Mecca, and of which Muḥammad was a member, that was the intended recipient of the Qurʾān’s message. The very short sūra q 106 (Ṣurat Qaryas) sets out the fundamental elements of the dialogue between the ṭabh, the divine being (who will be given several names during the course of the revelation; see LORD; GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES), Muhammad (most often represented as “you”) and the tribe (referred to as “they” or “you,” for example, “their assembly…” of q 38:6, al-malā‘a ‘in minhum). This dialogue was to last for the entire period preceding the expulsion of Muḥammad, which would take place in 622 C.E. (the date according to post-qurʾānic tradition), and which is clearly indicated in q 47:13: qaryatuka allatī akhrijatuka, “your city, which has expelled you….” Qaryat is the general term used in the Qurʾān for a “place of fixed abode” in contrast to the nomadic world (see NOMADS; BEDOUIN). In the Medinan period of the qurʾānic revelation (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION), ṭumm al-qurʾā, the “mother of the cities” (q 42:7; 6:92), indicates Mecca, which Muhammad has been given the task of converting. In numerous other passages, this term is applied to rebel cities (singular or plural), which have been punished by God, according to the Qurʾān (see PUNISHMENT STORIES; GENERATIONS). This is a warning and an example of the fate that is promised to the inhabitants of Mecca if they continue to reject the divine command addressed to them.

The Qaryas, who are named only once in the Qurʾān (q 106:1), are immediately summoned to “worship” (q.v.; ‘ibāda) the “lord” (ṭabh) of the “house” (ḥayt, see HOUSE, DOMESTIC AND DIVINE) from which we can conclude that this house was located in their city. Q 48:24, gives the precise location of this sacred place, which is situated “in the lower regions of Mecca” (ḥayt makkah), that is in the lowest part of the town, into which the rainwater runs and wherein are located the famous wells of Zamzam (these are not, however, mentioned in the Qurʾān; see SPRINGS AND FOUNTAINS). The ḥayt, the Meccan “house” of the supernatural, is correctly identified as the Kaʿba. This is apparent from two late references, q 5:95 and 5:97; the latter uses the specific expression ḥayt for it. The fact that it is shared with non-Muslims — thus showing that the cult surrounding it dates from an earlier time — can be read in q 8:34-5, which criticizes the tribal ritual (see SOUTH ARABIA, RELIGION IN PRE-ISLAMIC). Those who do not render thanks to God, the kāfūrūn or the idolaters (mushrikin), those who associate others with God (in other words, those who refuse to listen to the message conveyed by Muḥammad; see GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE; IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM), are not, however, formally excluded from the rituals connected to the Kaʿba until the very end of the Medinan period (q 9:28). In any event, the word ḥayt does not indicate a temple, as one reads all too often, but a collection of sacred pre-Islamic stones, around which were made a series of “turns” (ṭawāf), to which the Qurʾān alludes elsewhere (q 22:29 and q 2:158). The black stone, which would have been the principal sacred stone, is not mentioned in the Qurʾān.

The Meccan tribe, according to q 106, ought therefore to give due recognition to the “lord of the house” for the protection (q.v.) he bestowed upon them: preserving them from famine (q.v.) and from fear (q.v.; takḥattāf, i.e. from attacks on their town, cf. q 28:57; 29:67), ensuring the success of their (commercial) voyages in winter and in spring (ṣayf), the establishment of “alliances (with the tribes)” (ṭāf, see CONTRACTS AND ALLIANCES) which he had allowed them to conclude (another mention of the
protection of caravans afforded by the divinity is in connection with the Sabaean Yemenites, Q 34:18-9; see CARAVAN; YEMEN; SHEBA). Primitive worship undoubtedly included the sacrifice (q.v.) of large domesticated animals (nahz, dromedaries; see CAMEL; CONSECRATION OF ANIMALS) at the actual site at Mecca, as another very early verse (Q 108:2) indicates (other later passages describe the sacrifices as taking place intra muros, within the walls, viz. Q 22:33; 5:95, 97). The place of sacrifice was to be found in the immediate vicinity of the “house,” in all likelihood on the small hill of al-Marwa (see SAFA AND MARWA). Although the Qur’ân does not give an exact location, the fact is touched upon in Muslim tradition. The Qur’ân mentions the high hills of al-Sa‘fa and al-Marwa as places which are “marked out” (sha‘a‘a‘ir, Q 2:158), indicating that they were designated places of ritual. This would have consisted of a tawaf, circumambulation, culminating finally in the sacrifice at al-Marwa.

The sacrifice at the close of the pilgrimage (q.v.) was transferred, however, to the valley of Min‘â during the lifetime of Mu‘ammad himself, in the ceremonies at the end of the year 10/632, which took place shortly before his death (see FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE). This move was a political decision — to bring together in a single trip two pilgrimages that had been hitherto separated, both in time and location, that is the pilgrimage of the people of Mecca and of other places in western Arabia and the pilgrimage of the surrounding nomads. Thus the “holy month” (in the singular; see MONTHS) is mentioned several times in the Qur’ân, when dealing with the rites of the Ka‘ba (Q 2:196, 217); this may be a reference to the rites of spring of the seventh month (Rajab), which took place exclusively on the site of Mecca. On the other hand, it is the bedouin ritual (of autumn), ‘arafah, which is clearly intended in Q 2:197-9. The nomads’ religious calendar had three holy months when they were forbidden to mount their normal raiding parties (see FIGHTING; WAR); the eleventh and twelfth months of the current year and the first month of the following year. Q 9:2, 5, 36 mention four holy months, thus adding the holy period of those who lived in a settled location to the three successive months of the nomads. As for the seasonal separation of the “intercalary month” (nasi‘), clearly an anti-bedouin measure, this was proclaimed only at the very end of the Medinan period, when the Medinan tribal confederation had gained effective control of the entire region (Q 9:37).

The very early qur’ânic passages of Q 106 and Q 108 are typically local in nature. One cannot yet discern any biblical influence, not even monotheism (see SCRIPTURE AND THE QUR’ÂN). The Meccans are simply told not to mistake their protector. The theme of Mecca as a secure city, benefiting from effective protection, is repeated throughout the Meccan period, using a terminology which is to recur constantly: haram ‘âmin, an inviolable and secure place (Q 28:57; 29:67; the “protected city,” al-balad al-‘amin, of Q 95:3 certainly refers to Mecca, as does the city “which [God] made inviolable,” haramahâ [al-rabb], of Q 27:91). The same theme recurs in the Medinan period with the settling in the Meccan valley of Abraham (q.v.) and his family, including his sons Ishmael (q.v.) and Isaac (q.v.), in Q 14:35-9. Furthermore, it is in accordance with this ban, which preserves the city of Mecca from any violence, that the Muslims from Medina (who had entered the city in 630 C.E. to take control of it, following an agreement with the leading ‘Abd Shams clan) are asked to restrain their passions as fighters and plunderers (Q 2:190-5; see BOOTY).

Interest in Mecca, which seemed to have
diminished during the first part of the exile of Muhammad to Medina (see emigration), was rekindled in the light of several political and religious episodes. They were centered on the presence of the Meccan “house” as a focal point for the developing religion, and functioned as a pretext for reaching a political settlement with the tribe of Quraysh. First of all there was the matter of the qibla (q.v.), the correct direction to face while praying, reported in q 2:142-51. The change of the qibla was the result of the break with the Jews of Medina (see Jews and Judaism). Although the previous direction for prayer was not definitely Jerusalem (q.v.) but more probably a picture of the mountain of Moses (q.v.) and the holy valley around it (q 79:16, etc.; see Sinai), the new direction imposed by the Qur’an was absolutely unambiguous. The formula al-masjid al-harâm, already seen in q 17:1, refers to the site of the Ka’ba at Mecca. Repeated several times in the passage on the qibla (q 2:144, 149, 150) it becomes a customary Medinan formula when referring to the Meccan ritual pilgrimage. It would perhaps be better in etymological terms, nevertheless, to translate masjid as signifying “place of prostration” (see bowing and prostration) rather than “mosque” (q.v.).

The second episode to advance Mecca is that which the Qur’an calls al-fath, both a divine “victory” (q.v.) and a divine “gift” (see gift-giving). It refers to an agreement reached in the year 628 c.e., called the pact of al-Ḥudaybiya in Muslim historiography. The relevant passages in the Qur’an refer to a “vision” (ruyxā, see visions). This foretold that Muhammad and his followers would make a pilgrimage to Mecca, even though the Meccans denied them access to the city (q 48:27). The subsequent unfolding of events and the happy ending are described, which allow the simultaneous emergence of both a political compromise and the completion of the ritual pilgrimage and sacrifice on the site at Mecca intra muros (q 48:10, 18, 24, 25). Other passages recall the episode a posteriori (q 8:34; 5:2; 22:25, 27-9, 33). In q 22:29, 33 there appears a previously unknown phrase, which describes the Ka’ba as al-hayr al-ʿatīq, the “ancient house.”

The most remarkable new development with regard to Mecca during the Medinan period concerns the position and behavior ascribed to Abraham by the Qur’an. First and foremost a biblical prophet, by the end of the Meccan period Abraham has become the leading exponent of monotheism in the face of the conflict against idols (see idols and images) in his father’s land (q 21:51-70). He is thus portrayed in Medinan passages of the Qur’an as the founder of the Ka’ba, the first divine “house” on earth, and then as the originator of the Meccan ritual intra muros (cf. q 2:125-8; 3:96-7; 22:26-8; it is later tradition which attributed the exterior rituals, which are of nomadic origin, to Abraham). The formula maqām Ibrāhīm, “the place which Abraham holds,” of uncertain meaning, is mentioned twice (q 2:125; 3:97). It is possible that, originally, it actually indicated the entire site of Mecca. Muslim tradition probably prescribed the precise limits of its meaning by a particular story, one which described a rock situated to the east of the Ka’ba in which there is a deep footprint of the patriarch, which was made when he built the divine “house” here.

Thus Abraham (and his family) became the first to “submit to God” (muslim). The primordial religious “voice,” called by Abraham (milat ibrāhīm), and “hanifism” (ḥanīfiyya), the religion of the “pure” (the meaning of ḥanīf [q.v.], first used in q 3:67, is uncertain) are presented as directly pro-
ducting the Islam of Muḥammad. Furthermore, according to q 2:129, Abraham himself asks God to send a “messenger” (q.v.; rasūl) to the Meccans to provide them with revelation. This spectacular development results directly from the ideological break with the Jews of Medina, which had become irreparable. Ishmael became associated with the actions of his father at Mecca without being really assigned a precise role, nor is there any independent story about him in his own right. Later Muslim thought was to develop its portrayal of the role of Ishmael at Mecca considerably, in particular his dramatic arrival in the valley of Mecca with his mother Hagar. As for the sacrifice of Abraham mentioned in q 37:107, the historiographical tradition and Muslim exegesis place it in the valley of Minā. Before Ishmael was brought into this, there was some doubt concerning the identity of the sacrificial victim. The Qurʾān, however, is devoid of these anecdotal developments (see narratives).

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Bibliography

Media and the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān has been embodied and circulated in an ever-expanding variety of media forms during the modern period. The material qualities of these different media technologies have had an impact both on the ways the revealed text has come to be used, and the structures of knowledge and authority (q.v.) that those usages serve to uphold. Any inquiry into these transformations must begin with the premise that media practices are not determined by the physical qualities of technological forms but, rather, are always structured by cultural processes.

In the case of the Qurʾān, these processes include the standards of usage and interpretation that Muslims have attempted to apply to the shifting set of media environments they have encountered so as to sustain and enrich the traditions they have inherited. They also include the limits and uneven results of those attempts.

Historians of Islam have often been puzzled about why Muslim societies adopted printing technology so late in its development (see PRINTING OF THE QURʾĀN), and especially about why Muslim scholars historically expressed reticence in regard to its use for the Qurʾān. Despite the fact that presses, operated by Christians and Jews, had become commonplace in the urban centers of the Ottoman Empire by the mid-sixteenth century, it was not until three centuries later that Muslims began to make extensive use of the technology; and even then, its application to the Qurʾān continued to provoke considerable opposition. This reluctance to adopt printing technology has often been taken as evidence either of an attempt by religious authorities to retain their monopoly over the dissemination of knowledge, or of a
more general traditionalism or conservatism characteristic of Muslim societies — a resistance to the innovations of the modern world apparent in everything from dress styles to forms of government (see *Politics and the Qurʾān*). An entire generation of Orientalists came to see the Muslim response to print technology as an attempt to resist the forces of historical change by a society whose ability to shape its own history was beginning to wane in the face of expanding European power.

The fact that the printing press provoked similar reactions and resistances in Europe at the time of its first appearance was often forgotten in such accounts, a historical amnesia no doubt indebted to the triumphalist account of Western historical progress.

Much of the earlier scholarship concerning the use of new media technologies for the reproduction and dissemination of the Qurʾān assumed the history of the Bible as normative, and viewed those instances where Muslim practice diverged from that norm as historical distortions requiring explanation. As a number of recent scholars have pointed out, however, the Qurʾān cannot easily be assimilated to the generic category of scripture, a category founded on biblical scholarship and thus of limited applicability to other religious traditions (see *Book; Scripture and the Qurʾān*).

New media technologies have posed different problems for Muslim scholars than they have for their Christian counterparts, a difference owing to the distinct ways revelation has been conceptualized within the respective traditions (see *Revelation and Inspiration*). By exploring some of the concerns expressed by Muslims in regard to the use of diverse media forms for the reproduction and dissemination of the Qurʾān, we can perhaps gain further insight into the kind of historical object the Qurʾān has been for Muslims in the modern period.

**Print**

In order properly to frame the question of media and the Qurʾān, a few observations on the concept of revelation within the Islamic tradition will be useful. As an audition not heard by the ear but received (silently, as it were) by the heart (q.v.) of the prophet Muḥammad, the Qurʾān presupposes and demands an epistemology that defies and challenges ordinary ways of knowing. Insofar as the Islamic account of revelation combines and interconnects the ear, heart, voice, and text, any attempt to apprehend the Qurʾān through a single sensory modality will necessarily be inadequate (see *Orality*). For this reason, the Qurʾān always exceeds its specific textual embodiments. Within both scholarly and non-scholarly contexts, the written text has tended to remain subordinated to a complex of oral and recitational practices (see *Recitation of the Qurʾān*; *Oral Tradition and Writing in Arabia; Orthography; Arabic Script*), whose primary locus is in the human heart. These practices, and the structures of discipline and authority that uphold them, ensure the Qurʾān’s correct reproduction and reception, its proper embeddedness in hearts, in voices, as well as in written texts. Indeed, prior to the adoption of the printing press, even the production of manuscript copies generally required the vocalization of the text as an intermediary step along the process, understood as a necessary condition of its accurate reproduction in textual form (see *Manuscripts of the Qurʾān*). In fact, when the Egyptian standard edition of the Qurʾān was produced in the 1920s, the scholars entrusted to ensure its accuracy relied not on manuscript versions, but on
the study of different traditions of recitation (cf. as-Said, *Recited Qurʾān*; Weiss; Modern phonographic collection; see also readings of the Qurʾān). In short, the Qurʾān’s various verbal and textual instances have always remained thoroughly interwoven and interdependent, the revealed word never reducible to a stable, self-sufficient object, such as a book (see writing and writing materials). In light of this fact, Muslim concerns about the application of new media technologies to the Qurʾān did not simply reflect the privileging of the human voice within Islamic epistemologies, as some scholars have argued. Such technologies posed a broader challenge: namely, how can the practical and institutional conditions that ensure an ethical response to divine revelation be upheld across new and rapidly changing media environments?

Not surprisingly, one of the worries expressed by early modern scholars in regard to the printing press was that the mass dissemination of printed copies of the Qurʾān would lead to its circulation to locations where proper moral comportment was not upheld, as well as into the hands of non-believers (see belief and unbelief) where the text would not be treated with the required respect and care. In its capacity to reproduce versions of the Qurʾān in vast, seemingly infinite quantities, the printing press threatened to unleash the sacred text from the structures of discipline and authority that governed its social existence and ensured its ethical reception. In addition, Muslims must have been rather horrified by the first highly flawed, and generally poor quality copies of the Qurʾān printed by Europeans. It is worth remembering here that, contrary to our usual assumptions, accuracy was not one of the qualities generally ascribed to the early printing presses in Europe. Indeed, the “stigma” of — i.e. the lower status accorded to — printed books earned them a reputation in some circles of the later Renaissance as being less faithful to the original than were those produced by hand in late-medieval and early modern *scriptoria*. For Muslims, the possibility of mistakes remained an ongoing concern as long as the structures of expertise, supervision, and authority, as well as the technological means, remained inchoate. Outright opposition to the printing press, however, became increasingly unsustainable by the early nineteenth century, as Muslim societies were gradually being reorganized in accord with Western social and political models. As a technology central to the exercise of power and the organization of political life within modern societies, the press came to be viewed as an instrument essential to any reform project. The fact that Christian missionaries made extensive use of the press in order to disseminate the Bible provided a further incentive for Muslim reformers to adopt printing technology. Thus, once Muslims saw that the benefits afforded by such mass duplication (in making the Qurʾān universally available) outweighed the dangers, Muslim presses begin to reproduce printed versions in large numbers. This occurred in the mid-nineteenth century both in czarist Russia and British controlled India, and somewhat later in the century in different regions of the Middle East.

**Phonograph**

The phonograph raised a rather different set of questions for Muslims when it was first introduced into Islamic societies. Snouck Hurgronje provides an account from 1915 of an early appearance of the phonograph in Java, Indonesia. The first phonographs on the island were operated by itinerant performers who, for a fee,
would set them up in public locations and demonstrate their use with records of both musical selections and recited verses of the Qurʾān. In the incident recounted by Hurgronje, one such demonstration was attended by a Javanese scholar, Sayyid Othman, who subsequently produced a *fatwā* on the permissibility of listening to phonographic records of the Qurʾān (see *lawful and unlawful*). His discussion of the issue is worth examining as it reveals a style of reasoning that reappears throughout the modern historical period in debates about the technological mediation of the Qurʾān. The *fatwā* begins with the assertion that it is acceptable for Muslims to attend demonstrations involving the phonographic reproduction of the Qurʾān as long as the conduct of those in attendance remains decent, and as long as the act of listening does not produce sensual excitement or lead to temptation. It is forbidden, however, to use the device in a place of amusement, or where non-Muslims are present, as the Qurʾānic verses may “produce derision and mockery (q.v.),” and hence serve as an agent of unbelief (Hurgronje, Phonograph, 163). Up to this point, Sayyid Othman’s argument bears considerable similarity to those put forth by much earlier scholars in regard to the printing press on the need to ensure that certain ethical norms be followed in the distribution and use of printed versions of the Qurʾān. The next part of the *fatwā*, however, responds to the question of whether one receives divine reward for listening to the Qurʾān reproduced phonographically, a question specific to phonics, but not print, technologies. Here, Sayyid Othman notes that, insofar as “the sounds of the Qurʾān are no longer produced by the organs of speech destined for each one of them… [and therefore] do not possess the peculiar, legally demanded, qualities,” no divine reward will accrue to their listener (Hurgronje, Phonograph, 163). Here we see an attempt to define authoritatively the limits of phonographic technology for the reproduction of the Qurʾān, an attempt grounded in an (implicit) theory of mediation. In the passage from human voice to vinyl disk to mechanically reproduced sound, certain qualities essential to the recitation as an act of worship (q.v.) are lost. Admittedly, Sayyid Othman’s opinion on this matter was not (and is not today) universally shared (Hurgronje mentions a dissenting view from a scholar in Singapore; Phonograph, 164–5). It is in the kind of questions the Javanese scholar asks, however, that we find the outline of an Islamic tradition of inquiry into questions of media technology, a tradition that has played a key role in defining the interpretive conventions and norms of use for new media forms in Muslim societies.

**Radio**

This tradition can be further elaborated by reference to an early disagreement over the use of the radio for broadcasting Qurʾānic recitation. In the 1950s, a broadcasting system was established in Nigeria with the transmission of Qurʾānic recitation included in the programming content. Concerned with the moral and legal probity of the practice, the then Emir of Kano sent out requests to scholars for *fatwā* on whether such programming was permitted by the Islamic *shariʿa* (see Law and the Qurʾān). Among the *fatwā* he received opposing the broadcasts, one by the Emir Jaʿafaru Ishaq of Zaria argued that by inserting segments of recitation between non-religious programs on sports or news, the broadcasts violated the injunction stipulating that the Qurʾān must always be placed within contexts suitable to its divine and revered status. In other words, it is the structure of the medium...
itself (the serial ordering of radio programming) that elicits his concern, not the context of reception foregrounded by Sayyid Othman in regard to the phonograph. In another fatwā, a Senegalese Sufi shaykh (see Sufism and the Qur‘ān), Ibrahim Niass, countered this claim by emphasizing the self-contained and independent quality of each program on the radio, and thus the immunity of the recitation segment from the corruptions of the programs that preceded and followed it. In short, while the opinions of these scholars diverged sharply, their reasoning exhibits a shared set of concerns about the suitability of certain media contexts for the Qur‘ān in light of the respect demanded by the revealed word. It is in this sense that these viewpoints — as well as those mentioned above in relation to print and phonographic technology — exemplify a shared tradition of reflection on the topic of media and the Qur‘ān. And while today there are few Muslim scholars who oppose the broadcasting of Qur‘ānic recitation programs, and indeed, most argue that more air time should be given to such religious topics, it is not unusual to find requests for fatwā on the ethical distinction between live and mediated auditions.

Cassettes and CDs

The dissemination of the Qur‘ān via new media forms is not a process determined by scholarly debate alone. Popular media practices are also largely shaped by the ordinary users of those technologies. For example, one of the most popular media forms for the audition of Qur‘ānic recitation in recent years has been the cassette tape and, more recently, the CD ROM. Commercially produced recordings of famous reciters, such as ʿAbd al-Baṣīt ʿAbd al-Ṣamad (Egypt), Hajjah Maria Ulfah (Indonesia), and Mustafa Ozcan Gunes-dogdu (Turkey), have become ubiquitous throughout Muslim societies. People listen to these tapes and CDs in all sorts of situations and locations, alone in their homes, in stores, cafes, and barbershops, as well as in taxis, buses, and other forms of public transportation (see everyday life, Qur‘ān in). For some of those who listen to them, Qur‘ān tapes represent an Islamic alternative to other kinds of commercialized popular entertainment. Indeed, as opposed to recordings of popular music, these tapes and CDs tend to bring with them some of the norms of sociability associated with the mosque (q.v.), such that when they are played in a public location, like a store or bus, they produce an environment wherein certain styles of speech and comportment become marked as inappropriate, and are likely to draw public censure from others present. A heated argument between customers at a café in Cairo or Fez, for example, may well elicit the comment, “Show some respect while the Qur‘ān is being recited!” Practices such as these reflect popular sensibilities more than the pronouncements of scholars.

“Qur‘ānic commodities”

The rendering of the Qur‘ān in the form of popular media commodities, such as recitation tapes, raises several important and interesting issues. As a number of scholars have noted, the omnipresence of the Qur‘ān, embedded in multiple artifacts and media technologies, has affected the sense of sacredness the text elicits, the sensibilities and emotions that constitute a human response to God’s word. Insofar as the printed Qur‘ān, mushaf (q.v.; pl. masāḥif), recorded Qur‘ānic recitations, and a variety of objects bearing Qur‘ānic verses are produced, marketed and displayed in a manner similar to other commodities, they have become connected to forms of consumption and pleasure not previously integral to Qur‘ānic practices of interpretation.
(see exegesis of the Qurʾān: early modern and contemporary), memorization (see memory), and recitation. For example, since Qurʾān tapes are often played at the same times and in the same locations as other popular entertainment media, recordings of Qurʾānic recitation have come to function as a kind of background sound, one that signals the religious commitment of the store owner or taxi driver, but does not demand the sort of attention traditionally associated with practices of recitation. Moreover, in much of the Middle East and south Asia today, musḥāf are sold not only in bookstores, but also in shops that carry household goods, stationery, clocks, and other kinds of merchandise. The fact that the text is placed among a jumbled assortment of commercially available artifacts in a store suggests that the distinction the musḥāf may be accorded by those who purchase it (evident, for example, in the care with which it is displayed in the home) may not carry over to contexts of commercial display and sale. In other words, the kind of respect shown to the musḥāf may be increasingly context dependent, as consumers come to distinguish between commercial and religious contexts, as well as public and private ones (Starrett, Religious commodities, 158-60).

Beyond printed copies of the Qurʾān, Qurʾānic verses now adorn a vast assortment of religious commodities, such as wall plaques, brass trays, posters, stickers, and greeting cards, as well as newspapers, magazines, calendars and other printed materials (see material culture and the Qurʾān). People commonly use these decorative items inscribed with verses to adorn the walls of their houses (see house, domestic and divine) or shops, or the windows and dashboards of their cars. Taxi drivers in the Middle East frequently carry a small musḥāf mounted on the dashboard. Indeed, the development of a market in what might be called “religious commodities” has driven the creation of ever-new Qurʾānic artifacts over recent years. Computer games geared to help children memorize verses of the Qurʾān and learn about the lives of the prophets are now available in multiple languages (see computers and the Qurʾān; narratives; prophets and prophethood); phone services allow callers to hear a sūra (see sūras) of their choosing for a small fee; video tapes of well-known Qurʾān reciters are easily found (though, for the time being, they remain far less popular than audio versions); key chains, amulets (q.v.), clocks, lighters, bumper stickers, all bearing Qurʾānic inscriptions, abound (see popular and talismanic uses of the Qurʾān).

In many countries where Muslims predominate, newspapers have adopted certain Qurʾānic verses as mottos. Newspaper articles on practically any topic may begin with a segment of Qurʾānic verse. In addition, it is now common for newspapers to dedicate considerable space to discussing the meaning and theological importance of particular verses (q.v.). Occurring in these very different practical contexts, these heterogeneous usages of Qurʾānic language mediate distinct patterns of response from Muslims, as consumers, worshippers, or national citizens. In this regard, the sociologist Fariba Adelkhah notes that the feeling of mourning that Shiʿite Muslims (see Shiʿism and the Qurʾān) have traditionally associated with the Qurʾān has been attenuated to a certain extent by the text’s wide circulation and general ubiquity in contexts of everyday life (Adelkhah, Being modern, 108). Similarly, the prefacing of all forms of public oratory with either the baṣmala (q.v.) or other Qurʾānic expressions has become so standardized since the Iranian revolution that it is now made the
object of popular jokes. A popular example from contemporary Tehran goes as follows: when a farmer is now asked what he uses to fertilize his fields, he responds, “In the name of God, sh*t!”

It would be wrong, however, to conclude from these observations that the Qur’ān is simply being rendered another form of commodified popular entertainment. Despite the reproduction and dissemination of “qur’ānic commodities” within commercial domains, and the extensive recourse to qur’ānic citations within modern political and social life, we continue to find the establishment of certain normative standards of use informed by ideas of the respect and distinction owed to the divine word (see the word of God). Thus, while qur’ānic verses may be imprinted on many household items, they are usually not applied to those used in activities that would compromise their purity, such as cooking, eating, or cleaning. Likewise, as decorative objects, maṣāḥif and other popular religious artifacts bearing qur’ānic verses will usually be displayed in a manner that respects their high status and value, placed above other artifacts that may be hanging on a wall, for example, or set apart from surrounding objects of display. When mounted on the dashboard of a car, maṣāḥif are ordinarily placed in a central location, and enclosed in a protective box covered in velvet or some other attractive material.

This proliferation of such “qur’ānic commodities” has been met with a variety of responses from Muslim scholars and intellectuals: while for some it is seen as evidence of a renewed religiosity among Muslims, for others, including many of those religious scholars (’ulamā’) trained in traditional institutions (see traditional disciplines of Qur’ānic study; teaching and preaching the Qur’ān), it represents a kind of commercialization inappropriate for the Qur’ān. Differences of opinion aside, insofar as the ability of the ’ulamā’ to direct the course of development within Islamic societies has been gradually attenuated as these societies have adopted secular legal and political structures, the ’ulamā’ frequently find themselves having to adjust to these new conditions. In short, attempts by the scholarly community to direct the introduction of the new media technologies, to define their uses and epistemological and ethical limits, while not entirely without effect, are often severely limited by the marginalization of this community from social and political power.

Internet

Perhaps the impact of new media forms on the Qur’ān is nowhere more visible today than on the internet. The Qur’ān is available online through thousands of different websites. It can be found in both text and audio formats, as well as in numerous translations (see translations of the Qur’ān). Insofar as the internet medium offers new techniques for accessing the Qur’ān and related materials, it makes possible new kinds of reading practices. For example, internet versions of the Qur’ān can be accessed and explored via keywords, subjects or themes, or personal names. Moreover, those accessing the Qur’ān online through one of the many websites that make it available will often find themselves at the nexus of a vast body of secondary sources of information (scholarly guides, commentaries, speeches, sermons, audio versions) on the particular verse or chapter they have chosen to read. Some of the translations of the Qur’ān found within this domain incorporate short glosses or commentaries within the text itself, thereby redefining the text’s traditional boundaries. Given the novelty of these practices, many of the ethical,
theological, and practical issues raised by such a “virtual Qur’ān” have received little scholarly attention. Not surprisingly, within the advice sections and chat rooms of Islamic websites it is not uncommon for visitors to raise such questions as: Must one approach a virtual Qur’ān in a state of ritual cleanliness (see cleanliness and ablution; ritual purity)? If one moves sections of text around on the screen, is one committing an offense to the divine word? It remains to be seen as to what kinds of norms will develop in relation to the use of the Qur’ān within the internet. What is clear, however, is that the technical and practical operations that this medium makes available will certainly generate new uses and interpretive possibilities for those who avail themselves of it. As has been the case with other media forms, the task for Muslims will be to ensure that the ethical and epistemological conditions essential to the ways the text positions itself within Islamic traditions are upheld.

Media, authority, knowledge

The availability of the Qur’ān in ever-new media forms has also influenced the sociology of religious knowledge in Muslim societies (see social sciences and the Qur’ān). As the anthropologist Dale Eickelman and others have noted, the mass reproduction and diffusion of the Qur’ān, together with the advent of universal modern literacy (q.v.), has enabled recent generations of Muslims to engage with the text in ways that had previously been available only to scholars (see scholar). Muslims increasingly study and interpret the text outside the institutions of religious knowledge that had previously secured the authority of particular readings. Moreover, individuals now bring forms of literacy acquired in secular public schools to their reading of the Qur’ān, an innovation that has lead to a proliferation of new interpretive and citational practices (see contemporary critical practices and the Qur’ān; literature and the Qur’ān). One result of this has been what some scholars have labeled a “democratization” of religious knowledge, a transformation often compared to that associated with the advent of Protestant Christianity in Europe during the sixteenth century. This process is evident in the proliferation of sites of Islamic authority (e.g. Islamic research institutes, preaching organizations, popular Islamic media-intellectuals), in the multiplicity and heterogeneity of media forms involved in the production and circulation of Islamic knowledge, and in the relocation of scholarly arguments outside the traditional institutions of religious learning into a wider public arena. Such a shift was already evident in Egypt as early as the 1920s, in such practices as the publication of Muḥammed ʿAbduh’s tafsīr in the pages of the journal al-Manār (as collected and edited by his student, Rashīd Riḍā), one of the new popular Islamic media forms that emerged at the time and that was geared to a broad, non-specialist audience. Indeed, as mentioned above, it is now common to find theological debates taking place within media oriented toward a general public, in newspapers, popular magazines, or booklets sold inexpensively in bookstalls and on sidewalks (see theology and the Qur’ān). In addition, many of the most influential Muslim thinkers and activists today have never received training within traditional centers of Islamic learning, but are instead essentially self-taught. As these examples suggest, the structures of Islamic authority have undergone considerable change as they have become increasingly dependent on the institutions and media practices of national and transnational public spheres.

Charles Hirschkind
Bibliography


**Medicine and the Qur'an**

There is very little in the Qur'an that is strictly medical in content. The most direct reference is in q 16:69, which states that the drink (sharāḥ) produced by bees, i.e. honey (q.v.), is “healing” (ṣifā) for people (see ILLNESS AND HEALTH). The word ṣifā, “health,” is further attested three times but in contexts where it is often understood in the meaning of remedy against ignorance (q.v.; jāḥl) of God and the revelation (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION). The word illness (mārāḍ) is attested thirteen times but in all these cases it refers to the heart (q.v.), and is traditionally interpreted to denote religious doubt and not any actual physical ailment. Sick people (mārāḍ, pl. mardān) are referred to in connection with religious duties and illness is in these cases presented as a valid excuse not to perform a particular duty. In addition to these direct references, there are in the Qur'an injunctions that have been given a medical interpretation. Among these are the dietary instructions and the requirement to fast regularly (see FOOD AND DRINK; FASTING).

In the first/seventh century, Muslims became acquainted with Greek medical views and gradually the medicine of Hippocrates and Galen gained a position of authority. The Muslim physicians and medical theorists systematized it and elaborated on the Greek theory and the resulting synthesis is usually called Islamic or Graeco-Islamic medicine. It is not, however, in any way Islamic in character but is based solely on teachings of the Greek masters and their Muslim counterparts such as Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and al-Rāzī (d. 313/925). Despite its high status,
Graeco-Islamic medicine was not the only medical system applied to the treatment of illnesses; people resorted to a variety of alternative treatments based on home remedies and local curing traditions. One alternative approach was expressed in the so-called Prophet’s medicine (al-ṭibb al-nabawī), which was developed by scholars of the religious sciences and was based on the Qur’ān and the sunna (q.v.) of the Prophet. The authors of the Prophet’s medicine showed that medical principles could be found in the Qur’ān and that the medical views that the Prophet had expressed were not in contrast with the current medical theory. The authors did not deny the achievements of the physicians working within the established medicine of the period but often referred to a number of authorities in the field. What they wanted to achieve by developing the Prophet’s medicine was a further improvement and elaboration that would give medicine a clearly Islamic character.

The development of the Prophet’s medicine

From fairly early on, Muslims showed an interest in finding out what had been the Prophet’s view on illnesses and how he had treated them. The major collections of the Prophet’s sayings that were compiled in the third/ninth century (see Ḥadīth and the Qur’ān) include hadiths that have a medical content. Among them are the general injunctions to treat the sick but some of them also contain more specific instructions or advice. These sayings mainly reflect the contemporary medical views of the Arabs (q.v.) and either accept or reject the traditional cures, while some of them refer to the changes that Islam had brought to curing practices and even to the concept of illness. Sayings such as “The Qur’ān is the best medicine” and “Rise to pray, for prayer (q.v.) is a cure” introduced new religious therapies, whereas the saying “Do not curse fever; it removes sins like fire removes dross from iron” indicated that illnesses should not be seen as meaningless suffering but as an atonement (q.v.) and, as such, as something positive (Ibn Māja, Sunan, Ṭibb, nos. 3438, 3460, 3501). These hadiths were usually put together in special chapters, e.g. al-Bukhārī’s (d. 256/870) al-Ṣaḥīḥ has a chapter on the sick (Kitāb al-mardā) and a chapter on medicine (Kitāb al-ṭibb). In Ibn Māja’s (d. 273/887) Sunan, all the medical hadiths are assembled in one chapter on medicine (Kitāb al-ṭibb).

These medical sayings aroused further interest among some scholars and they started to compile specialized collections, where only medical sayings were included. These collections formed the beginning of the literary genre known as the Prophet’s medicine (al-ṭibb al-nabawī). The earliest surviving books entitled al-Ṭibb al-nabawī date from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. The largest of them was compiled by Abū Nu’aym al-İsfahānī (d. 430/1038) and it contained as many as 838 medical hadiths. He was able to expand the number of hadiths by including several variants of a hadith as independent items; thus he had no less than twenty-six entries containing a variant of the saying “for every illness there is a cure.” The interest for medical hadiths was not confined to Sunnī scholars but also Ṣhadī scholars collected them (see Shī‘ism and the Qur’ān). They concentrated on the medical sayings of the imāms (see Imām) and usually titled their collections “Medicine of the imāms” (Ṭibb al-imma). One of the earliest compilations was written by the brothers Abū Ṭāṭāb b. Abdallāh and al-Ḥusayn b. Bīṣṭām b. Shāhpūr and has been dated to the fourth/tenth century.

These early collections were mere compilations of medical hadiths and they did not contain any attempts to analyze the medical advice or opinions expressed in the say-
ings. The most interesting aspect of these collections was their arrangement: the ḥadīths were arranged in chapters by subject and the chapter division followed that of the contemporary standard medical books. The next stage of development occurred in the seventh/thirteenth century, when ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231) took up in his “Forty medical traditions” (al-Arba‘īn al-tibbīyya) some of the Prophet’s sayings and commented on their medical content. Al-Baghdādī was not only a ḥadīth scholar but also a practicing doctor, well acquainted with the medical theories of the day. About a century later, another doctor, the oculist ‘Alá’ al-Dīn al-Kahhlāl b. Ṭarkhān (d. 720/1320) commented upon a large number of medical sayings in his book “The prophet’s rulings on the art of medicine” (al-Ṭibb al-nabawī fi l-sīnā‘ al-tibbīyya). He also listed eighty-three simple drugs or foodstuffs that were mentioned in the ḥadīth material. Al-Baghdādī and al-Kahhlāl b. Ṭarkhān proved that the Prophet’s advice and instructions were acceptable in the light of contemporary medical theory. Their commentaries still concentrated on individual ḥadīths but formed a basis for further development, where the Prophet’s medicine was presented in a systematic manner including both theoretical discussion and practical advice. This new stage is apparent in the texts of two eighth/fourteenth century scholars Muhammad al-Dhahābī (d. 748/1348) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya (d. 751/1350), both entitled al-Ṭibb al-nabawī. In addition to presenting and analyzing ḥadīths dealing with particular cures or illnesses they tried to place these sayings in a wider medical framework and therefore took up issues related to medical theory, such as the elements, humors and general causes of illnesses. In this discussion they did not only refer to the Prophet’s sayings but also quoted Qur’ānic verses and interpreted them in order to support their argumentation. Both al-Dhahābī and Ibn al-Qayyim were acquainted with the current Graeco-Islamic medicine and admitted its achievements, but they wanted to show that it was not necessary to refer to non-Islamic authorities such as Hippocrates or Galen. It was perfectly possible to create a medical practice that was based on Islam, on the guidance of the Prophet and the Qur’ān. The texts of the two authors differ from each other in their treatment of the subject. Al-Dhahābī’s text forms a small medical handbook presenting the basic theoretical issues, albeit in a very concise manner. In the practical section of the book he chose to discuss some common illnesses and their cures, disregarding the fact that not all of them were mentioned in the ḥadīth material. Ibn al-Qayyim also presented the main theoretical issues but confined himself to discuss in detail only those illnesses of which the Prophet had spoken. He was very much concerned with the religious implications of the Graeco-Islamic medicine and discussed these matters much more thoroughly than al-Dhahābī, who showed a more unquestioning acceptance of the current medical theory. This makes Ibn al-Qayyim’s text far more interesting and useful for an analysis of the special features of the Prophet’s medicine. He attempted to solve the problematic issues in a manner that secured an adherence to the teachings of Islam but also made it possible to follow the guidelines of the accepted medical theory. Anti-medical views The development of the Prophet’s medicine can be seen as a reaction to the anti-medical views present in the Muslim community. The early ascetics (see ASCETICISM) stressed complete reliance on
God alone (tawakkul) and the extreme forms of reliance prevented the ascetic from any form of action. The wider community of Muslims never accepted the most extreme practices but it seems that even people outside ascetic circles shared the idea that medication meant meddling with God’s divine purpose (see FREEDOM AND PREDESTINATION). According to a tradition, Abū al-Dardā’, one of the Companions of the Prophet (q.v.), had refused treatment: “A doctor with his medicine and medicaments cannot protect me against what God has foreordained for me” (Dhahabi, Ṭibb, 152). Some scholars of the religious sciences claimed that a person who resorted to medication acted against the qur’ānic injunction: “In God let the believers put all their trust” (Q. 9:51; Reinert, Die Lehre, 207-13; see TRUST AND PATIENCE; BELIEF AND UNBELIEF). Other scholars refuted these arguments by referring to abundant hadith material that attested the Prophet’s approval of medicine. One of the most explicit sayings is: “Servants (see SERVANT) of God, use medicaments! God did not give an illness without giving it a cure” (Ibn Māja, Sunan, Ṭibb, no. 3436).

It may be that especially the earliest collections of medical hadiths were assembled in order to counter the anti-medical views. The numerous sayings showed that the Prophet had not only advised others to be treated but also that he himself had received medical treatment. The Muslim community accepted medication as the summa of the Prophet and refused the view that medical treatment was an action indicating a weakness in belief. Quite the contrary, by resorting to medication an individual proved his reliance on God and belief in God, because he accepted the medicaments as God’s gift (see GIFT-GIVING) and wisdom (q.v.; Ibn al-Qayyim, Ṭibb, 10).

Another issue that made medicine controversial was the theological problem of causality (see THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). The speculative theologians, both Mu’tazilis (q.v.) and Ash’arīs, held the view that God directly created all events (see CREATION) and that the nexus between cause and effect was not real but only apparent. According to them, illnesses were accidents (aʿrād) created by God and an individual remained ill as long as God continuously recreated the illness in him or as long as he did not order it to disappear (cf. Wolfson, Philosophy, 522-43). Medicaments were useless because they did not have any natural properties that would affect the illness. This attitude made some theologians reject medication and it was possibly the motive that led the Mu’tazilī scholar Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Iskāfī (d. 240/854) to ignore his doctor’s advice. Al-Iskāfī consulted a doctor, got a prescription but decided to take drugs that were considered to have an effect opposite to the prescribed ones. He did not, as he may have believed would happen, get well in spite of the wrong medication, but, instead, his condition deteriorated and he soon died (Rosenthal, Defence, 524).

The Ash’ārī scholars accepted the view that the perceived connection between a cause and an effect is not something that occurs independently but is each time created by God. It was God’s custom (ʿidda) always to create a sequence in the same way and therefore a pattern emerged which looked like causality. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) illustrated the doctrine by explaining that when cotton was brought into contact with fire, it was not the fire that caused the cotton to burn. It was God who created the burning at the time when the cotton touched the fire. The fire did not have any natural ability to burn nor cotton the ability to be burned. The burning would not have taken place if
God had not created it (Wolfson, *Philosophy*, 544).

The practical consequences of this theory did not lead the Ashʿarīs to reject medicaments. Al-Ghazālī argued that medicaments could be used, because medication and recovery formed a sequence that was constantly created by God. Medicaments could be used but an individual should remember that the drugs did not have any inherent curing properties. It was actually God who created the recovery each time a drug was used (Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, iv, 250-1).

In contrast to the ascetics and speculative theologians, the traditionalist scholars did not have scruples in accepting medication. They supported their positive attitude by referring to hadiths that illustrated the Prophet’s acceptance of medical treatment. They did not share the theoretical view that causality did not exist but maintained that, in a causal connection, God acted through intermediary causes. This meant that God had created intermediaries with effective qualities. These were means (ʿashāb) that God had intended people to use and benefit from. Among these were medicaments, which God had endowed with natural capacities that made them effective factors in curing illnesses (Perho, *Prophet’s medicine*, 70-5).

The authors of the Prophet’s medicine, according to whom medication was an effective way to combat illnesses, belonged to the traditionalist school. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya referred to the fate of the people of ‘Ād (q.v.; Q 46:21-7) and stated that it was the wind (see *air and wind*) that destroyed them, i.e. God had used the wind as an intermediary of destruction and the capacity to destroy was in the wind’s character (see *punishment stories*). The Qurʾān could be seen to attest that God had placed in all created things qualities (ṭabāʿī) and capacities (quwān) that could influence other created things. God created medicaments and he had given them qualities and capacities that could be used to cure illnesses; the causal nexus between medication and cure was true and not only apparent (Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ṭibb*, 9, 130).

Further, Ibn al-Qayyim found the three purposes of medicine, i.e. the restoration of health, its preservation and the prevention of illness, all attested in the Qurʾān. He quoted the verse that allows a traveler to postpone his fasting (Q 2:184) and explained that if a traveler would add fasting to the hardships caused by travel conditions, he would endanger his health (see *journey; trips and voyages*). The Qurʾānic permission of postponement presented the medical principle of preserving health. The principle of restoring health was evident in Q 2:196 allowing a person who did not participate in the actual pilgrimage (q.v.) to compensate for it by fasting or giving alms (see *almsgiving*). According to Ibn al-Qayyim, he could then shave his head like a pilgrim and the shaving was in his case good for his health, because it opened pores and allowed harmful substances to leave the body. Here Ibn al-Qayyim referred to the contemporary medical principle of releasing corrupt substances from the body in order to restore health. The third objective of medicine was to prevent illnesses from occurring and this principle Ibn al-Qayyim saw reflected in Q 4:43, where a sick person is advised to perform his ablutions (see *cleanliness and ablution*) with sand instead of water (q.v.). According to Ibn al-Qayyim this provision was made to prevent the individual from exposing himself to water that may contain substances that could worsen his condition. This Ibn al-Qayyim saw as God’s guidance for the prevention of illnesses (Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ṭibb*, 2-3).
Theory in the Prophet’s medicine in the eighth/fourteenth century

According to the Graeco-Islamic theory, all things are composed of four elements: fire (q.v.), air, water and earth (q.v.). In humans, these elements are present in the form of four humors: yellow bile, blood, phlegm and black bile. In a healthy individual the humors are in balance, whereas an illness is seen as an imbalance that should be rectified either by a diet or actual medication. Life is maintained by the innate heat (ḥarām gharīziyya), which is contained in the heart and nourished by spirits (Gk. pneumata, Ar. arwāḥ). There are three types of spirits: natural, animal and psychic spirits, which support the corresponding faculties that govern the various physiological processes in the body. Natural spirit originates in the liver, animal spirit in the heart and psychic spirit in the brain. The spirits and faculties reach the various organs through veins, arteries and nerves and maintain life in the organ and enable it to function (see ARTERY and VEIN). For example, the psychic spirit and the psychic faculty are carried from the brain by nerves to the organs and enable humans to perceive and move.

This theory was not only known and appreciated by the medical profession but it seems that it received a wide recognition in society. One indication of this is the fact that even the scholars of religious learning, al-Dhahabī and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya who formulated the theory of the Prophet’s medicine, considered it a valid description of human physiology. In the Prophet’s medicine, the Graeco-Islamic views of physiology were not usually discussed in very great detail but the theory was cursorily presented indicating that it was generally known and widely accepted.

In some cases, the authors referred to the Qurʾān and pointed out that certain aspects of the theory were, in fact, confirmed in the revelation. For example, in discussing fetal development al-Dhahabī accepted the Graeco-Islamic view that the fetus originated in a mixture of male and female semen (see BIOLOGY AS THE CREATION AND STAGES OF LIFE). In his opinion this was also attested in the Qurʾān and he quoted the verse “We created man of an extraction of clay (q.v.), then we set him, a drop (maftūḥ), in a receptacle secure” (q 23:12-3). The traditional interpretation identified the word maftūḥ, “drop,” as male sperm but al-Dhahabī ignored this and spoke of both male and female semen. He claimed that “from the fluid of the man are created the basic organs and from the fluid of the woman is created the flesh” (Dhahabī, Tibb, 215). By broadening the meaning of the word “drop” to include also female semen, al-Dhahabī was able to show that there was no contradiction between the accepted medical theory and the Qurʾān.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya took up the Graeco-Islamic idea of elements as the basic components of the human being and compared this view to the information given in the Qurʾān. He could find three of the four elements attested in the Qurʾān: water, earth and air (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibb 15). Water is mentioned in q 25:54: “And it is he who created of water a mortal (bashar).” The element earth is referred to in a number of verses according to which God created man of dust (turāb), e.g. q 18:37. A combination of water and earth is indicated when it is said that man was created from clay (ṣalāl), e.g. q 6:2. The presence of air is attested in q 55:14: “He created man of a clay like potter’s.” This clay (salāl) is dried clay and, therefore, its ingredients are not only earth and water but also the air that dried it.

Ibn al-Qayyim accepted that these three elements were present in man, but he rejected the fourth element, fire. The Qurʾān
God also created the cure for an illness, but also this occurred through secondary causes, i.e. through the use of medicaments and therapies. Medicaments were means given by God for the benefit of the people. The Prophet’s words “For every illness there is a cure. God did not give an illness without giving it a cure,” were seen as an encouragement to study medicine, to determine the causes of illnesses and to search for methods of curing. The authors of the Prophet’s medicine stressed that in this process of searching, the medical practitioners should also pay attention to the medical knowledge of the Prophet. The physicians should look for help in the spiritual cures that God had revealed to the Prophet and learn how reliance on God or turning to God in prayer could be used to cure illnesses of the soul (q.v.). But also the cures that the Prophet had recommended for physical illnesses should be studied, because God may have given him useful information concerning causes of illnesses, medicaments and curing methods (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibb, 7; Dhahabi, Tibb, 52).

The authors of the Prophet’s medicine accepted the Graeco-Islamic view that the physiological cause of an illness was an imbalance of the four humors. The imbalance was caused either by an abnormal increase of one of the humors or by corruption of the humors. These changes were again caused by external factors such as corrupted air, unsuitable diet, imbalance in rest and motion of the body, imbalance in the soul, too much or too little sleep, and abnormalities in excretion and retention of bodily fluids (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibb, 4-5; Dhahabi, Tibb, 22). These six factors were the so-called six non-naturals of the Graeco-Islamic theory and their role in preserving health and correcting imbalances was decisive.

In addition to these causes, the authors of the Prophet’s medicine also recognized...
witchcraft (siḣr, see magic) and the evil eye (ˈayn, see eyes) as etiological factors. The major authorities of the Graeco-Islamic medicine did not usually recognize these factors but the religious scholars were convinced of their existence (see traditional disciplines of Qur'ānic study). According to them, the existence of the evil eye was attested in the Qur'ān: “The unbelievers wellnigh strike you down with their glances” (Q 68:51; see seeing and hearing; vision and blindness). The effect of the evil eye and witchcraft was based on the influence of spirits. The Graeco-Islamic theory taught that in the human body there were three types of spirits (Gk. pneuma, Ar. rūḥ) that supported various physical functions. In the Prophet’s medicine these spirits gained some new characteristics and powers: the spirits could be either good or evil (see good and evil; spirit; jinn) and their effect could be projected onto other people. If a person’s humors were badly imbalanced, the evil spirit could gain power over his soul. It could then further damage both the soul and body but it could also damage other persons because the affected individual could send the evil influence towards others and cause an illness in them.

Ibn al-Qayyim considered the evil eye to be an illness that its possessor could not control. The envy (q.v.) the person felt was the cause of the evil eye and he could not prevent the damage it caused. The only way to cure the disease was to eradicate the feeling of envy from the soul. When a believer accepted that God was the one who determined what each individual had or did not have, he would see the wrongness of being envious. He should follow the example of the Prophet, who said: “Whatever God wills. There is no might except in God.” By strengthening his faith in God, a person could prevent the evil spirits from gaining power, because if a person allowed God to fill his heart, the evil influences of witchcraft and the evil eye would not affect him (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibh, 98-101; 127-33).

Ibn al-Qayyim also ascribed some incurable illnesses, such as epilepsy and plague, at least partially to evil spirits. In this way he was able to explain why the Graeco-Islamic medicine provided only insufficient treatment. The evil spirits did not respond to ordinary medicaments and therefore the physicians were unable to cure the diseases the spirits caused. They were unaware of the merits of the religious cures, such as prayer, recitation of the Qur'ān (q.v.) and almsgiving. If the physicians accepted the guidance of the Prophet’s medicine in this matter, they would learn the complete etiology of diseases and understand the benefits of religious cures. These cures strengthened the good spirits that also resided in people and the good spirits would then fight against the evil spirits and diminish their influence (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibh, 30-1; 51-4).

The problem of contagion (ˈadwā) The Graeco-Islamic medical theory recognized that certain illnesses were contagious, i.e. they could be transmitted from a sick person to a healthy one. According to the theory, epidemics, such as plague, began when people inhaled air that was corrupted by stagnant water, decaying cadavers or drought. The contagious disease caused the sick persons to discharge damaging vapors that corrupted the surrounding air and when a healthy person inhaled this air, it reached his spirit (Gk. pneuma, Ar. rūḥ) and corrupted it. The spirit got into the blood (see blood and blood clot) and the body lost its temperamental balance, causing the person to develop the symptoms of the disease. All contagious diseases did not spread through miasma, corrupted air, but through touch or, as in the case of pink eye (ophthalmia, ramad)
through eyes. A person suffering from ophthalmia did not corrupt the surrounding air but his sight rays (šuʿāʾ baṣarī) were corrupt and could damage a healthy eye (Qustā b. Lūqā, I dāʾ, 24–6; Dols, Black death, 88–92).

The existence of contagious diseases was acknowledged in the medical literature, but the scholars of religious sciences did not find it easy to accept contagion. If it was God who caused illnesses, how could a sick person independently infect a healthy person? Especially speculative theologians who rejected causality found it impossible to accept contagion. But even the traditionalist scholars who recognized the reality of the causal nexus, linking cause and effect, encountered problems in the question of contagion. As usual, they studied the opinions of the Prophet but had to admit that the hadith material did not provide a clear answer. The hadiths were contradictory, some stating that the Prophet had denied contagion: “There is no contagion (ʿadwāʾ), no augury; no owl, and no snake” (Bukhārī, Sahīh, Tībīb, bāb 45; see foretelling; divination; soothsaying). This hadith connected contagion to other pre-Islamic beliefs: reading omens (see portents) in birds’ flight, believing that the dead could reside in owls, or thinking that stomach pain was caused by a gnawing snake (Ibn Ḥajar, Fath al-bārī, x, 132, 165; Juynboll, Authenticity, 140 n. 5).

The hadiths rejecting contagion were contradicted by others showing that the Prophet had recognized the contagious character of some diseases: “Do not take a sick one to a healthy one” (Bukhārī, Sahīh, Tībīb, bāb 54).

The authors of the Prophet’s medicine tended to accept the existence of contagion but they were aware of the ambiguous nature of the hadith material. Al-Dhahabī presented both types of hadiths, those that recognized contagion and those that rejected it. He admitted that contagion did exist and was caused by miasma, corrupted air. A person could contract an illness by being in contact with people suffering from specific illnesses. He reminded people, however, that they should not fear contagion because God predestined all illnesses and epidemics. He seemed to connect an overt fear of catching a contagious illness to the pre-Islamic belief that some people were ill omened and therefore best avoided (see fate; destiny). This kind of excessive fear was what the Prophet had meant when he said, “There is no contagion” (al-Dhahabī, Tībīb, 167–8, 187).

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya expressed his acceptance of contagion in a much more unequivocal manner. In his opinion, God had given some diseases an ability to be transmitted. These transmittable (naqqāla) illnesses spread from person to person through miasmatic air, as was explained in the current medical theory. To support his view, he quoted several hadiths that seemed to accept the existence of contagion. He admitted that many scholars considered it difficult to establish the Prophet’s opinion on the question and saw the hadiths to be contradictory. Ibn al-Qayyim did not share this view but stated that the contradiction was only apparent and was based on the scholars’ imperfect understanding of their content. He then gave a number of suggestions that would solve the conflict and maintained that the Prophet’s basic view had been to recognize the transmittable character of some illnesses (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tībīb, 116–21).

The term naqqāla, “transmittable,” that Ibn al-Qayyim used to characterize contagious illnesses was carefully chosen. Ibn al-Qayyim used it to differentiate the medically defined contagion from the one about which the Prophet had said: “There is no contagion (ʿadwāʾ).” When he limited the
Prophet’s rejection to a particular pre-Islamic, non-medical belief in contagion, it was possible to accept the general medical views of transmissibility of illnesses. Like al-Dhahabī, also Ibn al-Qayyim stressed that even though contagion existed, people should not think it was the sole cause of illnesses. Contagion was a cause created by God and to deny its existence was to deny God’s law, but to think that contagion alone caused an illness would be idolatry (shirk, see idolatry and idolaters) because it would equate contagion with God. God had created the causal nexus between contagion and illness but he was able to remove the causality if he so desired. Everything that happened was ultimately subject to God’s will; therefore an exaggerated fear of contagion indicated that a person believed more in contagion than in God and this could damage the soul and endanger salvation (q.v.; Ibn al-Qayyim, Miṣfāṭ, 269).

Interdependence of body and soul
The Graeco-Islamic medicine represented a holistic approach to health and illness, where both physical and emotional balance were seen as prerequisites of health. In order to maintain health, it was important that a person followed a life-style suitable to his or her temperament. Apart from suitable diet and physical activities, people should avoid excessive emotions because these could affect the balance of the body and lead to serious physical symptoms. Excessive emotions were seen as illnesses of the soul (amrād al-nafs) and included emotions such as anger (q.v.), worry and passionate love (see love and affection). In order to cure a patient suffering from the symptoms caused by these emotions, the physicians had to realize that the patient’s emotions were out of balance and treat both the emotional and physical balance of the patient.

Because the health of the soul and the health of the body were understood to be closely linked, the physicians not only prescribed suitable diets but also gave advice on proper ethical and moral behavior (see ethics and the Qur’ān; virtues and vices, commanding and forbidding). The purpose of these instructions was to prevent emotional disturbances. Muḥammad b. Zakariyya al-Rāzī (d. 313/925) stated that in order to preserve emotional balance, a person should endeavor to live quietly without quarrelling with people, be just and honest, help others and feel sympathy towards them (Rāzī, Tibb, 91-2). The physicians’ view on a balanced, good way of life was based on the teachings of philosophers and did not contain any religious references. The scholars of religious sciences did not usually approve of the physicians’ general philosophical advice but wanted to define the best way of life in more religious terms. The Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) wrote a book that had the same title as al-Rāzī’s book, namely al-Ṫibb al-rūḥānī, “Spiritual medicine.” The choice of title indicated that he wanted to counter the physician’s advice by his own. Ibn al-Jawzī agreed that emotional balance was a crucial factor in health and his advice on preserving that balance was in many ways close to that of al-Rāzī. The significant difference was his choice of vocabulary that gave the advice a religious content. He recommended that people should defeat their passions and avoid what God has forbidden (q.v.), treat others with fairness (see justice and injustice) and help them with advice when needed. The body should be among people but the soul (qalb) should be with God (Ibn al-Jawzī, Tibb, 66-7).

The authors of the Prophet’s medicine shared the Graeco-Islamic holism and warned against the dangers of uncontrolled emotions. Al-Dhahabī pointed out
that anger heated the body and dried it, whereas worry and grief could cause fever. He found that also the Qur’ān advised people to avoid excessive emotions: “Do not exult; God loves not those that exult” (q. 28:76; see boast; arrogance) and “A garden (q.v.) whose breadth is as the heavens and earth, prepared for the godfearing who... restrain their rage” (q. 3:133-4).

According to al-Dhahabī, the Prophet had been exemplary in his avoidance of excessive emotions and he illustrated this by quoting hadiths in which the Prophet had shown restraint or advised Muslims to do so (Dhahabī, Ṭibb, 45-7).

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya also stressed the interdependence of body and soul. Following the current medical views, Ibn al-Qayyim advised against emotional imbalance and recognized the physical damages caused by excessive emotions — emaciation, fevers, in severe cases even death. His main concern, however, was not to restore the emotional balance in order to cure the physical symptoms but, instead, he considered the physical suffering a transitory matter that could be endured. The more serious danger that the illnesses of the soul entailed was the danger they posed to the individual’s salvation and eternal life (see eternity).

Ibn al-Qayyim based his view about the seriousness of these diseases on the fact that they were mentioned in the Qur’ān as something leading to sin and loss of faith (q.v.). The diseases of the soul (nafs) were the diseases of the heart (qalb) referred to in the Qur’ān. These illnesses could be divided into two groups: disease of doubt (shakk) and disease of lust (shahwa). The disease of uncertainty (q.v.) and doubt was referred to in the verse: “What, is there sickness in their hearts, or are they in doubt, or do they fear that God may be unjust towards them and his messenger (q.v.)? Nay, but those — they are the evil-doers” (q. 24:50; see evil deeds). It is also attested in two other verses, namely q. 2:10 and q. 74:31. The disease of lust was mentioned in the verse: “Wives of the Prophet (q.v.), you are not as other women. If you are godfearing, be not abject in your speech, so that he in whose heart is sickness may be lustful; but speak honorable (ma’rif) words” (q. 33:32). The diseases of the heart were specified to include the excessive emotions that the Graeco-Islamic medicine categorized as illnesses, namely passionate love, worry and grief (Ibn al-Qayyim, Ṭibb, 2).

The dangers of excessive emotions
According to Ibn al-Qayyim, indulging in excessive emotions endangered the salvation of an individual because the emotions were a sign that the person did not really trust in God. Al-Rāzī, the physician, pointed out that it was foolish to grieve for losses because everything in the world perishes (Rāzī, Ṭibb, 67-8). In Ibn al-Qayyim’s opinion excessive grief was not only folly but also an act of disobedience (q.v.). He reminded his readers that everything that God had created was God’s property (q.v.) and whatever humans possessed (see wealth; possession) was only lent to him by God. Inasmuch as God possessed everything, a person did not have the right to consider anything his or her own and instead of grieving for a loss, should accept it as the will of God and remain patient. This he saw recommended in the Qur’ān: “Who, when they are visited by an affliction, say, ‘Surely we belong to God, and to him we return’; upon those rest blessings (see blessing) and mercy (q.v.) from their lord (q.v.), and those — they are the truly guided” (q. 2:156-7). Despair (q.v.) could lead a believer to think that God was unjust and he could end in losing his faith. In this way succumbing to temporal grief would lead to eternal punishment, whereas
patience in adversity would assure eternal happiness in paradise (q.v.; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ṭibb*, 147-57; see also REWARD AND PUNISHMENT).

The Graeco-Islamic medical theory considered passionate love (*ishq*) an imbalance of the soul, which then damaged the physical functions of the body. In the most serious cases it could weaken the innate heat and cause death. The Prophet’s medicine also recognized the physical effects of passionate love but more attention was paid to the spiritual damage the illness caused. Ibn al-Qayyim warned that an unchecked passion could develop into idolatry (*shirk*) if the lover was so obsessed with the desire of his beloved that his love for God was replaced by his passion for the beloved. The passionate desire for a created being would expel from his heart the love for his creator and this would mean that he had abandoned Islam. The physicians were concerned with the physical effects of the illness and the danger it posed to the patient’s survival. For Ibn al-Qayyim, it was more important that the patient realized the threat the excessive emotion posed to the eternal life of his soul. The purpose of the recommended therapies was to make the patient see that he had to regain emotional balance in order to save his soul (Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ṭibb*, 207-8, 212-3).

Medicaments and other curative methods

According to the medical theory, illnesses were the results of humoral imbalance and curing meant reestablishment of the balance. Changing the patient’s diet often did this, but if this was not sufficient, drugs were administered. The purpose of the drug therapy was to counter the corrupted humor and evacuate it from the body. The drugs were chosen in accordance with the allopathic principle, i.e. the drug used had a quality that was opposite to that of the disease. If a disease was deemed to be hot, a drug that was temperamentally cold should counter it. The basic drugs were simple, consisting of only one herb, fruit or other foodstuffs or minerals but the physicians could also prescribe compound drugs consisting of a large number of ingredients.

The authors of the Prophet’s medicine accepted the allopathic principle and in their lists of simple drugs and foodstuffs they recorded the temperament of the substance and listed the complaints against which it could be used. Their descriptions of these qualities tallied well with the standard medical opinions and they obviously based them on information given in Graeco-Islamic medical books. For the most part, their lists consisted of drugs mentioned in the ḥadīths or the Qur’ān (see METALS AND MINERALS; AGRICULTURE AND VEGETATION) but also other, generally known drugs were included. The ḥadīths the authors quoted in their lists of drugs were rarely medical in content and it seems to have been sufficient that a medical item was mentioned by the Prophet: “The believer, who recites the Qur’ān, is like a lemon: pleasant to taste and pleasant to smell” (Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ṭibb*, 218; Dhahabī, *Ṭibb*, 52). Even though the content of the ḥadīth did not point to any medical use of the item mentioned, it proved that the Prophet had not rejected its use. The same applied to verses of the Qur’ān, e.g. the verse referring to the pomegranate as one of the benefits bestowed by God (q. 55:68) was quoted in connection with presentations of the fruit’s medical properties (Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ṭibb*, 243; Dhahabī, *Ṭibb*, 89).

The authors of the Prophet’s medicine also accepted the use of compound drugs, even though the ḥadīths showed that the Prophet had favored simple drugs. They based their acceptance on the Graeco-Islamic medical view that the patient’s habits and circumstances should be taken
into account when determining a suitable treatment. Ibn al-Qayyim pointed out that the Muslims of the early community (see Community and Society in the Qur’an) had led a simple life and followed a simple diet. Therefore, also their humoral imbalances could be treated with simple drugs. In contrast, city (q.v.) dwellers were used to a more complex diet and, consequently, their illnesses were also more complex. If a physician deemed that simple drugs were not sufficient to treat an illness, he should, in that case, prescribe compound drugs (Ibn al-Qayyim, Ṭibb, 5-6, 57; Dhahabi, Ṭibb, 50, 143).

Apart from drugs, the Graeco-Islamic medicine further recognized cupping, venesection and cautery as efficient methods of curing. Cupping and venesection were used to evacuate corrupted humors, whereas cautery — burning with hot iron — was used to treat pains, tumors and bleeding wounds. All these methods were also accepted in the Prophet’s medicine, although the ḥadīth material gave, once again, conflicting evidence of the Prophet’s opinion regarding venesection and cautery. Limiting the applicability of those ḥadīths that rejected venesection and cautery solved the problem. Ibn al-Qayyim stated, referring to the authority of physicians, that venesection should not be used in hot climates — as in the Hijāz — or during hot seasons. The Prophet’s rejection of venesection meant that it should not be used in circumstances that might harm the patient (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibh, 41-2). Similarly, traditions rejecting cautery did not make the method forbidden but limited its use to medically accepted purposes. What the Prophet had rejected were the superstitious beliefs that some people had regarding the method (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibh, 50; Dhahabi, Tibb, 182-3).

The Graeco-Islamic medicine accepted the use of wine (q.v.) in the treatment of illnesses because it was considered to have a high nutritious value. The scholars of Islamic law held wine to be forbidden basing their view on Q. 5:90-1 (see Intoxicants) and therefore the authors of the Prophet’s medicine could not accept its medical use. They did, however, admit that wine had beneficial qualities and had proved to be able to cure some illnesses. They rejected wine because God had forbidden it and to use something God had forbidden would damage the believer’s soul and endanger his salvation. Taking up the interdependence of body and soul, Ibn al-Qayyim added that it was important to choose a curing method and medication that the patient could accept and trust. If a physician prescribed a drug that his patient knew to be a substance God had forbidden, the patient could not believe in its curative powers and, as a result, the medicine would not cure him. The anxiety caused by disobedience to God’s commands could actually make the patient’s condition worse (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibh, 123-4; Dhahabi, Tibh, 75-6; see Commandments; Boundaries and Precepts).

Divine medicaments

A special feature of the Prophet’s medicine was its promotion of curing practices that had been recommended by the Prophet or could be found in the Qur’an. The authors called them divine medicament (adwiyat ilāhiyya) or the Prophet’s medicaments (adwiyat nabawiyya) and they were prayer (ṣalāt), patience (ṣabr), fasting (ṣawm), jihād (q.v.), the Qur’an itself and incantations (ruqan, sing. ruqya). These medicaments could be used to cure physical disorders and their efficiency as cures was based on their spiritual and physical influence. For example, the ritual prayer was seen both as a physical exercise, where the performer moved his joints and relaxed his inner organs, and as a religious act that directed
the performer’s thoughts towards the hereafter (see eschatology), away from pain, strengthening his soul and faculties (Dhahabī, Tibb, 201; Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibb, 164).

The use of the Qur’ān as a medicament was based on Q 17:82: “And we send down, of the Qur’ān, that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers.” According to Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Dhahabī, the Qur’ān was the perfect cure for all diseases, both of the body and those of the soul. The book could be used as a curing object by bringing it into contact with the diseased part of the body, either by placing it on the painful spot or, in the case of eye diseases, letting the eye gaze at the Qur’ān (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibb, 272; Dhahabī, Tibb, 202). In explaining the efficiency of the Qur’ān as medicament, Ibn al-Qayyim again referred to the patient’s need to believe in the cure; as in the use of any other medicament, in the use of the Qur’ān it was also required that the patient believed firmly in the benefits of the cure. Only in that case could the disease be defeated (Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibb, 272).

The verses (q.v.) of the Qur’ān could also be used as cures. The authors instructed that a verse could be written in ink, either on a paper or directly on the inside of a vessel and then the text was dissolved in water. The patient then drank the water as a medicine. It was also possible simply to recite a verse or recite it over water, which was then drunk by the patient or was sprinkled over him. Some verses had specific uses — Q 6:98, for instance, could be used against toothache, Q 12:111 and Q 46:35 in cases of difficult birth (q.v.), and Q 11:44 against nosebleed. The authors indicated that the verses should be written in this way only to cure actual illnesses and should not be used as protective amulets (q.v.; Dhahabī, Tibb, 197-9; Ibn al-Qayyim, Tibb, 277-8; see also protection).

Written cures did not necessarily have to consist of Qur’ānic verses; other texts were also permissible. Al-Dhahabī stressed that these texts should be seen as supplications to God and, therefore, they should be texts with meaning and should not contain anything non-Islamic (Dhahabī, Tibb, 165). Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Dhahabī rejected the use of protective amulets that were very popular in the contemporary society. Magic was taken seriously and scholars like Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) considered the art of talismans and letter magic as sciences (Ibn Khaldūn, Muqaddima, iii, 156-227; see mysterious letters; numerology; popular and talismanic uses of the Qur’ān). Physicians used charms as a part of their therapy and the magic squares or geometric symbols they used were based on ancient magical traditions. Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Dhahabī advised against relying on this type of charm and, instead, guided people to base their incantations on Qur’ānic verses or simple devotional texts.

The later development of the Prophet's medicine

The books of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and al-Dhahabī presented the Prophet’s medicine in a systematic manner combining the hadiths and current medical theory. The authors did not want to reject the established Graeco-Islamic medicine but they wanted to add an Islamic dimension to current medical practices. In the authors’ opinion, the Graeco-Islamic medicine would benefit from the inclusion of the special knowledge that God had given to his Prophet. The divine medicaments — prayer, fasting, incantations, etc. — were treatments that the physicians should study and adopt. The authors did not uncritically promote everything that the Prophet had recommended but reviewed the instructions in the light of Graeco-Islamic theory and then either accepted the Prophet’s guidance or re-
jected it as having been applicable only in the environmental conditions of the Ḥijāz in the Prophet’s time.

Ibn al-Qayyim’s and al-Dhahabī’s books influenced some of the later authors of the genre. The Ḥanbālī scholar Jalāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Muḥammad al-Surramarrī (d. 776/1374) wrote “The book on curing pains in the medicine of the people of Islam” (Kitāb Shīfā‘ al-ʿālām fi ṭibb ʿabī al-ʿĪslām) and followed in the arrangement of his material the model set by al-Dhahabī. The Ḥanafī scholar Ibn Ṭūlūn al-Dimashqī (d. 953/1546) quoted both al-Dhahabī and Ibn al-Qayyim extensively in his book “The thirst-quenching spring of the Prophet’s medicine” (al-Manhāj al-rawzī fi ṭibb al-nabawī). He arranged his material in accordance with al-Muḥājīn written by Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 687/1288), one of the major scholars of Graeco-Islamic medicine in the later period.

The Shāfīʿī scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) compiled medical ḥadīths in his work “The correct method and the thirst-quenching spring of the Prophet’s medicine” (al-Manhāj al-sawwāb wa-l-manhāl al-raʾīsī fi ṭibb al-nabawī). He continued the tradition set by the early collections and simply assembled ḥadīths under headings taken from medical books, leaving them un glossed. He did not discuss the ḥadīths nor did he present any details of the medical theory. There is, however, some indication that he may have studied the works of the earlier authors of the Prophet’s medicine, even though he did not refer to them in his book on medical ḥadīths. In the commentary on the Qur’ān, Tafsīr al-Jālālāyīn, which al-Suyūṭī completed, he commented on the verse “He was created of gushing water” (q. 86:6) and stated that the water (māʾ) issued from both the man and the woman (dhīʿ indīfīq min al-rajiʿ wa-l-maʾa). This interpretation was not traditional (cf. Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, ad loc.) but indicates that al-Suyūṭī was aware of the medical views on this issue. His commentary reflects very closely the idea of male and female semen expressed by al-Dhahabī in his book al-Tībīb al-nabawī.

The influence of the Prophet’s medicine on practicing physicians and the treatments they recommended is difficult to determine. The Prophet’s medicine seems to have remained a genre adopted by the religious scholars, whereas the standard medical literature of the period from the eighth/fourteenth to the eleventh/sixteenth centuries was dominated by Graeco-Islamic medicine. There are, however, some texts written by physicians indicating that the Prophet’s medicine was indeed used and its recommendations applied. One of these was written by Mahdī b. ʿAlī al-Ṣanawbārī (or al-Ṣubnūrī) al-Yamānī (d. 815/1412) and it was titled “The book on mercy in medicine and wisdom” (Kitāb al-Rahmah fi ṭibb wa-l-hikma). Another was written by Ibrāhīm b.ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Azraqī (d. after 890/1485) with the title “The book on the benefits of medicine and wisdom made accessible” (Kitāb Taṣḥīḥ al-manāfī fi ṭibb wa-l-ḥikam). Nothing much is known of the authors but they seem to have been physicians practicing in Yemen. Their texts are usually classified as belonging to the Prophet’s medicine, even though references to Graeco-Islamic authorities abound. Al-Azraqī actually listed standard Graeco-Islamic medical books as his major sources and the only book on the Prophet’s medicine he quoted was Ibn al-Jawzī’s al-Luqāṭ.

Al-Azraqī’s book contains very few references to the Prophet or to the Qur’ān and the treatments recommended by the Prophet are only listed as one of the alternatives. There is no attempt to discuss any of the religious issues taken up by earlier authors of the Prophet’s medicine. The same applies to al-Ṣanawbārī’s book and,
although he quoted more ḥadīths than al-Azraqī, he was not concerned with the theological implications of the medical theories. Al-Ṣanawbarī supported the medical view of the four elements and, in contrast to Ibn al-Qayyim, did not reject the status of fire as one of the elements, but actually claimed that the Prophet had accepted it: “God created man from four things, from water, clay, fire, and wind. If the water dominates, the person is a scholar (q.v.) or noble. If the clay dominates, he sheds blood (see bloodshed), is evil and insolvent in this world and the hereafter. If the fire dominates, he is oppressive or tyrannical (see oppression). If the wind dominates, he is a liar (see lie)” (Ṣanawbarī, Rahma, 3-4). Al-Ṣanawbarī did not give any reference to the source of the ḥadīth and it cannot be found in the major collections (cf. Wensinck, Concordance, s.v. khalaqa). Al-Ṣanawbarī obviously felt the need to provide the ḥadīth to prove his point, but he did not further discuss the issue.

In the eleventh/sixteenth century, Dāʿūd al-Anṭākī (d. 1008/1599) wrote a medical handbook, “Memorandum for those who understand” (Tadhkira ʿalā l-ḥāb), which represents the views of the Graeco-Islamic school. In the book, he stressed the importance of medicine and claimed it to be the most important of the sciences, one that enjoys a position more noble than the religious sciences (see science and the Qurʾān). He supported this by quoting ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib’s (q.v.) words: “Knowledge is of two types; the knowledge of religions and the knowledge of bodies” (see knowledge and learning). According to al-Anṭākī, ʿAlī had added: “and the knowledge of bodies has precedence over knowledge of religions” (Anṭākī, Tadhkira, i, 11).

Otherwise, al-Anṭākī’s references to ḥadīths are rare and quotations from the Qurʾān non-existent. Interestingly, the only chapter with a larger number of ḥadīths is that on plague (ṭāʿān). The plague was endemic in the Middle East and the death toll was high each time an epidemic broke out. In addition to countering the plight medically, society also responded by stressing observance of religious duties and encouraging recitations of the Qurʾān and the ḥadīths (cf. Dols, Black death). This must have made those sayings of the Prophet that dealt with plague very well known, and thus al-Anṭākī included them in his handbook. He not only quoted them but also discussed their meaning. His opinions did not present anything controversial but followed the mainstream views (Anṭākī, Tadhkira, iii, 217-9).

Al-Azraqī, al-Ṣanawbarī and al-Anṭākī presented talismanic cures alongside allopathic herbal or dietetic treatments. Al-Anṭākī devoted a separate chapter to talismans and gave instructions on how to prepare them and explained the meanings of the symbols. Al-Azraqī and al-Ṣanawbarī included talismans in the presentation of cures for various diseases. They also provided instruction on how to write them, but they did not discuss their meaning or underlying systems. When compared to the written texts that Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Dhahabi recommended for curing some illnesses, the talismans of the three physicians look very different. They do not generally consist of Qurʾānic verses or known prayers but contain symbols, numbers and letters reflecting a magical tradition older than Islam. Al-Ṣanawbarī did occasionally recommend the use of Qurʾānic verses as well, but a verse alone did not usually suffice. For example, as one of the cures of small-pox (judarī) he recommends that part of the verse ʿQ 2:243 be read over seven grains of barley — over each grain three times. The last quoted word “die” is repeated twice followed by an incantation (Ṣanawbarī, Rahma, 100).
The medical books of these three authors reflect the contemporary medical practices that sought to ease the sufferings of the sick by diets, medicaments, religious cures, and talismans. The books are concise handbooks that do not dwell very much on the theoretical aspects of medicine but offer practical advice. There was an obvious need for such books, as al-Azraqī himself stated: “When I saw that [today] there are very few people who concern themselves with medicine but those who seek help from it are many, and this art being buried under the great and common need for it on the part of the people, it appeared to deserve special devotion since no human being can avoid it…. This, then motivated me to collect certain materials concerning this art” (Azraqī, Tashīl, 2-3; Eng. trans., Rahman, Health, 45). The interest in illnesses and their cures remained strong and when printing was introduced the books of al-Sanawbarī and al-Anṭākī became popular reference works for home remedies (cf. Gallagher, Medicine and power, 26-7; Gallagher accepts the mistaken ascription of Kitāb al-Rahma to al-Suyūṭī).

Contemporary development

When the Europeans gave up the humoral theory as the basis of human physiology in the nineteenth century c.e., its support in the Islamic world started to wane as well. The strong European presence in the Middle East enabled the elites to become acquainted with the scientific progress made in Europe, and they increasingly resorted to the services of European physicians. The local practitioners continued to treat the masses of the population, among whom the traditional medicine still retained its status. In the areas that were colonized by the Europeans, the situation started to change rapidly because the colonial masters supported Western medicine as the only legitimate practice and considered all other forms to be charlatanry or quackery. The medical education was standardized to follow Western models and gradually the humoral theory fell into oblivion. The Graeco-Islamic medicine and the Prophet’s medicine survived as folkloric ideas and influenced home remedies and dietary customs (Gallagher, Medicine and power, 83-96).

In the Indian subcontinent the Graeco-Islamic medicine — which was there called Unani medicine, i.e. Greek medicine — re-surfac ed in the twentieth century c.e. and in the independent states of India and Pakistan it has, with the help of government-funded research, become a competitive and serious alternative to Western medicine. Also elsewhere in the Islamic world, the recent years have shown an increasing interest in the holistic approach that the Graeco-Islamic medicine provides. It is seen as an alternative to the symptom-centered Western medicine and its dietary and herbal therapies are gaining support among people who have seen that the expensive Western chemical drugs are not necessarily more effective in combating illnesses.

The Prophet’s medicine has also benefited from the growing interest in alternative medical practices. The medical sayings of the Prophet have not been forgotten but form a part of the popular medical wisdom that offers simple household remedies for common ailments. In addition, old treatises of the Prophet’s medicine have been reprinted. Currently, one of the most readily available texts is Ibn Qayyīm al-Jawzīyya’s al-Ṭibb al-nabawī. In some cases, the editors not only printed the treatise, but also supplied footnotes that explain the eighth/fourteenth century medical concepts to the modern readers and provide modern medical views on the illnesses and treatments discussed in the text. There are also contemporary books on
the Prophet’s medicine but usually they do not promote the humoral concepts presented in the older text. Instead, they interpret the hadiths in the light of modern medical knowledge. This is due to the background of the authors who are typically physicians trained in Western medicine. In their way, they are doing the same as their early predecessors did: namely, trying to combine the Prophet’s medical guidance with contemporary medical theory. Some of these books can be seen as apologies intended to prove the superior knowledge of the Prophet also in medicine. Book titles such as “The inimitability of the Prophet’s medicine” (I’jāz al-tibb al-nabawi) indicate this approach.

There are, however, contemporary books that have more ambitious goals. One of the most substantial of these is al-Tibb al-nabawi written by Mahmūd Nāżim al-Naṣīmī (d. 1986). Mahmūd al-Naṣīmī was a physician well acquainted with the modern developments of medicine. In his book, he takes up contemporary issues, such as birth control (q.v.) and organ transplants, and discusses thoroughly the ethical and religious implications of the practices. In his argumentation, he regularly refers to the Qur’ān, hadiths and Islamic legal literature (see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN). After presenting various arguments on a particular medical issue, he proceeds to give a ruling, which he himself calls a fatwā, a term that belongs to Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). His method is apparent in his discussion of smoking. He first analyzes the opinions of the jurists who gave their rulings in the eleventh/seventeenth century when the use of tobacco spread to the Middle East. He concludes that the scholars considered smoking as forbidden (ḥarām) or abominable (makrūh) on the basis that it was addictive, it smelled bad and was expensive. Al-Naṣīmī continues by giving a detailed account of the health risks that modern medical opinion connects with smoking, also taking up aspects such as second-hand smoke and the effects of smoking on the fetus. His ruling is that the extensive health risks make smoking forbidden (ḥarām) or at least abominable (makrūh). He supports this ruling by quoting the Qur’ānic injunction against suicide (q.v.; Q 4:29). He also quotes a hadith according to which all those who eat poison on purpose will suffer eternally in hell (Naṣīmī, Tīb, i, 343-73).

Al-Naṣīmī clearly wanted to formulate an Islamic opinion on various medical issues and practices that have ethical implications. Some may see the Prophet’s medicine as an alternative holistic approach to illnesses, in line with the Graeco-Islamic or Unani medicine. But al-Naṣīmī is a representative of a viewpoint that does not want to revive the Prophet’s medicine as an independent, special medical system based on humoral principles but rather wants to use it as a tool to formulate an Islamic medical approach. In this, he is following in the footsteps of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and Muḥammad al-Dhahābī, who wanted to situate their contemporary medical practices within an Islamic framework.

The modern authors have the same ambition of extending the applicability of Islamic norms to medicine and assuring that modern medicine does not exceed the bounds of what is considered ethically sound.

Irmeli Perho

Bibliography


Medina

One of the primary settlements of the Hijāz in Muḥammad’s time, to which he emigrated (see emigration) from Mecca (q.v.), and where he died. The town of Medina is mentioned in the Qurʾān only in passing (see below). If based solely on the Qurʾānic data, therefore, any entry concerning Medina would be unduly short because our knowledge of pre- and early Islamic Medina derives almost entirely from other, and usually much later, source material. On the other hand, Medina is the setting for much of the Qurʾānic message, and the later period of Muḥammad’s prophetic career as well as the beginnings of Islam is unlikely to be understood without a proper knowledge of the town, its settings and its inhabitants.

Medina, one of the major settlements of the Hijāz and some 350 km to the north of Mecca, was in pre-Islamic times commonly called “Yathrib” (the Iathribba of the Greek geographers). As such, the town is named in Q 33:13 where the Medinan Muslims are addressed as “people of Yathrib” (ahl yathrib). This name is also present in pre-Islamic poetry and in the so-called “Constitution of Medina,” and it remained current in later Arabic poetry as well (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān; Poetry and Poets). The term al-madīna, which means simply “the town” in Arabic, appears as the designation for Yathrib in Q 9:101, 120, 63:8 and quite possibly in Q 33:60; in other instances, however, the noun al-madīna (pl. al-madīnān) is not used as a proper name but refers to other cities (e.g. Q 7:123; 12:30; 15:67, etc.; see city). The origin of the name “Medina” for the settlement of Yathrib is uncertain, though it seems more likely that it derives from the Aramaic term for town/city/settlement (madītha) than that it is an abbreviated form of the Arabic epithet “the town of the
Prophet” (madīnat al-nabī), as later Islamic tradition has it. The town was also given many honorific epithets, which were reckoned as names as well. The most prominent among these is al-tayba, “the perfumed” or also “the healthy.” In the modern age, the name of Medina is commonly extended to al-madīna al-munawwara, “Medina the illuminated,” whereas in former centuries one often spoke of al-madīna al-sharīfa, “the noble city” (or also “Medina the noble”).

Early Islamic Medina
As stated above, there is next to no information about the town, its history and topography in the Qur’ān itself. Any account of Medina in pre- and early Islamic times must therefore be based on later literary sources. The earliest local history, now lost but amply cited in later works, was written by Ibn Zabāla (d. ca. 200/815). Although these sources provide a wealth of material, we encounter here the general predicament of early Islamic history, namely that the historicity of this information proves very hard to establish and evaluate (see HISTORY AND THE QUR’ĀN). Much of what we can say about pre- and early Islamic Medina is thus hypothetical. Although some studies of recent years, especially those by M.J. Kister and M. Lecker, make thorough use of the material available, their results — as valuable as they are for the details that they offer — must, on the whole, be seen as conjectural; topographical and genealogical features can be reconstructed more easily than strictly historical events and developments. Of little help so far have been archaeological records of Medina and its surroundings, mainly because there is little opportunity for fieldwork focused on pre- and early Islamic history in the Ḥijāz (see ART AND ARCHITECTURE AND THE QUR’ĀN; ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN).

At the time of the Prophet, the Medinans were essentially living off of their agricultural production (see AGRICULTURE AND VEGETATION), and local dates (see DATE PALM) were among the most cherished products. The hot climate, however, is described as unhealthy and the vast lava-fields outside the town diminished the size of the arable land. Although a number of markets (q.v.) existed there, Medina cannot be regarded as a town of commerce like, for example, Mecca. The settlement itself was a loose grouping of living quarters or zones, interspersed with groupings of palm groves and fields, with the individual living quarters often fortified by strongholds (āṯām). Medina extended over a large area (of several square miles) and thus covered a wider — but less densely populated — area than does the modern town; no city walls are known from before the fourth/tenth century.

The population of pre-Islamic Medina consisted of pagan Arab and Jewish clans (see JEWS AND JUDAISM; TRIBES AND CLANS), with only a marginal presence of other monotheists (see SOUTH ARABIA, RELIGION IN PRE-ISLAMIC; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM; IDOLATRY AND IDOLATORS). It is not known with certainty whether the Jews had come from Palestine or whether they were Arab proselytes. Some smaller Arab tribes do, however, appear to have been either affiliated with Jewish tribes, or converts to Judaism, and the sources report cases of Arab-Jewish marriages (see MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE). Furthermore, the literary heritage of the Medinan Jews, Arabic poetry, indicates that they were an integral part of the local culture (see ARABIC LANGUAGE). The intricate and still partly obscure history of the Medinan Jews has been much researched especially as
they were a constant and dominant factor in pre- and early Islamic Medinan society (for further discussion, see NADER, BANU AL-; OPPOSITION TO MUHAMMAD; QURAYZA). The two Arab super-clans known as Aws and Khazraj constituted the most important pagan faction in Medina. These groups had emigrated in pre-Islamic times from Yemen to Medina, where they eventually overcame the previously dominant Jewish faction. The result was a sort of unstable stalemate that lasted until the Prophet’s arrival in Medina (see POLITICS AND THE QUR’AN). The Arab clans, in any case, were also engaged in inner conflicts that often resulted in feuds and mutual bloodshed (q.v.).

This much can be said on the basis of the source material, yet much else remains in the dark. For example, scattered notices are encountered in later writings about the ties of the Medinan Jews with Sasanid Persia and Yemen (q.v.). Yet it is impossible to detail what these ties might have looked like and what influence they could have exerted. It seems clear, though, that Medina (and central Arabia in general) was not cut off from the centers of post-Hellenistic culture. Such contact is surmised from the commercial ties (see SELLING AND BUYING; CARAVAN) of the Hijaz with Syria (q.v.) and the pervasive presence of monotheistic ideas throughout the area in pre-Islamic times. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that the Medinan Jews and other monotheists would not have had any contact with their coreligionists elsewhere, although substantial information is lacking in that regard.

When the Prophet came to Medina in 622 C.E., the town was divided between the various pagan and Jewish clans. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad was invited by deputies of the Aws and Khazraj to settle in Medina and to act as an arbiter of internal affairs. Once Muhammad arrived in Medina, most members of the Aws and Khazraj became Muslims and were henceforth known as the Prophet’s “Helpers” (al-anṣār) although some continued to oppose him in secret (see EMIGRANTS AND HELPERS). Muhammad settled first at Qubarah, at the southern fringe of Medina, and there he also erected the first mosque (q.v.) of Islam. Although the Prophet enjoyed the support of the Arab clans he avoided becoming too closely affiliated with them and tried to remain aloof from their societal bonds (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’AN). Rather, he tended to rely upon his fellow Emigrants (al-muhajirūn), which brought about misgivings between the Medinan Helpers and the Meccan Emigrants and resulted in a tension between both groups that was not resolved until much later in Islamic history.

The decade following the Prophet’s move from Mecca to Medina is commonly dubbed “the Medinan period” (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’AN). According to the accounts in the classical sources, the outline of events during that time is fairly well known and there is no need to repeat it here (see Watt, Muhammad at Medina). It is important, however, to note that Muhammad first adopted a conciliatory policy among the Arab clans and towards the Jews (as is shown by the so-called “Constitution of Medina”), yet after growing troubles in Medina and the overt enmity of the Meccans he switched to a more resolute attitude that made him send raids and engage in greater battles, in Medina itself (against the Jews) as well as in its surroundings (e.g. against the Meccans at Badr [q.v.] and Uhud; see EXPEDITIONS AND BATTLES). The outcome of the Prophet’s determination was, especially after the capture of Mecca and the defeat of the Medinan Jews, the formation of the first Islamic
community. In the view of many modern Muslims, this Medinan period saw the creation — and at the same time the apogee — of the true Islamic state, whose exemplary character is seen as the model for all future Islamic societies.

For Islam as a religion, Medina was the place where almost all decisive elements of the Islamic creed (see Creeds; Faith) took definite shape. The longer Medinan suras of the Qurʾān have been deeply influential in the formation of Muslim life. Many details of ritual (e.g. fasting [q.v.] and the direction of prayer; see Qibla; Ritual and the Qurʾān) were introduced during Muḥammad’s Medinan years, and his discussions with the Medinan Jews on theological matters helped to formulate and clarify his message (see Theology and the Qurʾān). The Prophet’s presence in Medina also conferred, in the eyes of later Muslims, a unique sacredness on the town, and the later legal authority Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) would not mount a donkey in the town because he would not allow its hooves to trample upon the soil that contained the Prophet’s sepulchre.

**Medina in later Islamic history**

After the death of Muḥammad in Medina the town did not immediately lose its political importance. Nonetheless, events soon turned the attention of the Muslims away from the Hijāz. Shortly after Muḥammad’s death, ‘Alī (see ‘Alī b. Abī ʿĪlib) had shifted the center of governance to Kūfah and, after some twenty years of caliphal presence in Medina (see Caliph), the Umayyads moved the capital of the Islamic polity to Syria. Politically, Medina was thus cast at the margins of Islamic history, where it has remained ever since. One major revolt against Umayyad caliphal power in the first century was launched in Medina in 63/683 but it was crushed and Medina was looted. In the following century, we hear of Shiʿī uprisings which were likewise subdued (see Shiʿism and the Qurʾān). Until modern times, the only events of a political nature were short-lived conflicts between the governors of Medina, the emirs of Mecca, and other local potentates during the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk periods. The local powers, however, were always weak and the region largely depended upon the Yemenite Rashīfs and the Mamlūk sultans, before it became part of the Ottoman empire and, finally, of the Wahhābī kingdom (see Wahhābis).

In contrast to the insignificance of Medina as a center of power, the town has always, albeit in varying degrees, remained a center of both scholarship and devotion. As a locus of devotion, Medina is second only to Mecca. In fact, the sepulchre of the Prophet in Medina — the Muslim “holy tomb” *par excellence* — has led some Muslim scholars to prefer Medina over Mecca because “the spot of the Prophet’s tomb is nobler than the Kaʾba [q.v.] and the Throne of God [q.v.],” (al-Samḥūṭī, *Waǧūf*, i, 28). “The visitation of the Prophet” (*ẓiyārat al-nabī*), i.e. the visitation of his sepulchre, grew over the centuries into an almost obligatory sequel to the pilgrimage to Mecca (see Visiting; Festivals and Commemorative Days). The resurgence of Sunnism in the central Islamic lands from the sixth/twelfth century onwards, together with the newly defined role of the Prophet as intercessor (see Intercession), further bolstered the importance of Medina. In addition, the Medinan Banū Thawāb cemetery, arguably the most significant single burial area in Islam (largely destroyed by the Wahhābīs in modern times), has been an important site of visitation for both Sunnīs and Shiʿīs.

As a center of scholarship and intellectual activities, Medina remained over the centuries a place of learning. In the second Islamic century, Medina hosted a range of important jurisprudents (e.g. Rabīʿa al-
Ra'y; Mālik b. Anas, eponym of the “Medinan” tradition of law; see LAW AND THE QUR'ĀN, sīra scholars (e.g. Mūsā b. ʿUqba; IbN ʿIshaq; see SĪRA AND THE QUR’ĀN), and traditionists (e.g. al-Zuhārī; Hishām b. ʿUrwa; see HADITH AND THE QUR’ĀN). From the fourth to the seventh Islamic centuries, Medina proved to be the most significant link for the transmission of knowledge from the eastern part of the Islamic world to the western (al-Andalus). From the early Mamlūk period onwards, the town finally developed into an important center of scholarship and mysticism. Many secular rulers and pious persons endowed a number of sites of learning and other facilities in Medina. In the later Mamlūk age and during the Ottoman period, Medina seriously rivaled Cairo and Damascus as a place of learning; the distance of Medina from the centers of political power seems to have favored this development. Among the most famous scholars who were active in Medina are Ibn Farḥūn (d. 799/1397), al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497), al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1506) and Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690).

Finally, the importance of Medina for Islamic culture and devotion in general gave rise to the Arabic poetical genre of “praising Medina” or “longing for Medina” (al-tasḥawwaq ilā l-madīna). This interesting genre, which is closely connected to poetry in praise of the Prophet, has been little studied and appreciated by modern scholarship.

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Bibliography

Pre- and early Islamic Medina is discussed in most of the better-known writings dealing with the Prophet’s life; the same holds true for early legal compendia [of the siyar type], Qur’an commentaries, and hadith anthologies. For the later ages, there is much material in history books, geographical and biographical dictionaries, and travel literature, e.g. by Ibn Ḥabšy and Ibn Baṭṭūta. Most modern biographies of Muhammad and general monographs about early Islam also contain accounts of pre- and early Islamic Medina. The best sources for our knowledge of Medina in general derive, however, from Arabic town histories.


Memory

The power, function or act of reproducing and identifying what has been learned or experienced; the faculty of remembering. The Qur’an presents memory not as a faculty or storehouse but as a primary mode of divine-human interaction. The primary Qur’anic words related to memory are based upon the radical dh-k-r: dhikr, dhakara, dhikrā, tadhkira, and tatahdhkara; depending on context, the primary sense of remembrance, reminder, contemplation, taking heed, or recitation (see recitation of the Qur’an) is meant by these Arabic words. The believer is enjoined to remember and to remind others of the figures of earlier prophetic cycles.

Remembrance is at the center of a web of metonymy attaching it to a range of concepts, each of which is a partial extension of dhikr even as dhikr serves as an extension or instantiation of the pair concept. In the case of remembrance and revelation (see revelation and inspiration), for example, the message of the Qur’an is continually called a dhikr or dhikrā and the Qur’an is given the epithet “that which contains or embodies remembrance” (dāḥā l-dhikrī, Q 38:1). The Qur’an is both the occasion or catalyst for dhikr as well as what should be recalled, the object of dhikr. It is the object of dhikr in another sense as well, the object of reminder that can be meditative (one mentions or recalls dhikr for oneself) or social (proclamation or recitation as a reminder for others). In the case of the prophets, remembrance opens onto a series of temporal and semantic frames: God has made the Qur’an easy to remember (Q 54:17-40); the Qur’an enjoins the believer directly to remember the prophets; the Qur’an itself which tells their story is a reminder; the believer is commanded to remind others of the Qur’an and its stories; and the prophets themselves should serve as a reminder, even as their stories depict them reminding their peoples or urging them to remember. Each new act of remembrance is an enactment of the acts of remembrance that occurred with previous revelations, all of which are drawn up into the Qur’an as articulations in a collapsing telescope. The People of the Book (q.v.) are called dhl al-dhikr (Q 16:43; 21:7). The Qur’anic revelation is nothing but a “reminder to all beings” (Q 38:87; 81:27).

Dhiks overlaps with other central Qur’anic concepts in equally robust fashion. The injunction to “be patient and remember”
(cf. q 38:17-8) links patience and dhikr in a manner that can suggest that one will result in the other, that they are aspects of a single act, or that they are two distinct acts. The same injunction goes on to make a dyad of the remembrance of a prophet [in this case the prophets David [q.v.] and Job [q.v.] and the patience modeled by the prophet as an example to those who remember him.

The mutual implication of dhikr with the qur’ānic obligations is also shown in the case of prayer, for which it is both occasion and catalyst: “When you have carried out the prayer, remember God standing and sitting and on your side” (q 4:103). Yet the postures of the body can also become, more generally, the moment of dhikr: another verse employs the same formula (“standing, sitting, and on your side”) in a context unconnected to ritual prayer (q 3:191). Dhikr should not only be embodied through its connection to the physical positions and postures, but it is also closely tied to the act of articulating the praises of God, tasbīh, as an expression of frequency: “And remember your lord often and recount his praises by evening (q.v.) and by the break of day” (q 3:41; see dawn) or morning (q.v.) and afternoon (q.v.; q 7:205; 76:25), even as the times of day (see day, times of) are clearly then reinforced by the prayer as a form of dhikr. Remembrance also serves as a link among obligatory rituals (blessings over sacrifice, salāt, and zakāt; see ritual and the Qur’ān) as well as a link among those practices and divine-human and human-human relational obligations such as the injunction to have a heart that trembles at the mention of God (q 22:35; see ethics and the Qur’ān; community and society in the Qur’ān).

The Qur’ān commonly states that it is only those with a spiritually discerning intellect (q.v.; ālū l-ālāhāb) who heed and dwell upon the signs (tatadhakkara) and allow those signs to serve as a reminder, to instigate the act of remembrance (e.g. q 3:190-1). The signs are commonly the creation (q.v.) of the heavens and earth (q.v.; see also heavens and sky), the alternation of day and night (q.v.), and polarities of odd and even, male and female (see gender; pairs and pairing), or verses (q.v.) of the Qur’ān. Yet neither the signs by themselves nor the ability to heed them can guarantee a successful act of remembrance. As with all human activity, God’s will serves as a cause or at least a primary condition: “They do not remember except by the will of God” (q 74:56; see freedom and predestination). Another injunction, “Remember God when you forget” (q 18:24), sharpens the paradox of “remembering to remember” that would be explored in depth by theologians such as al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857). Remembrance also forms a dyad with awe (q 8:2), gratefulness (cf. q 5:110), faith (“You who keep the faith and remember God often,” q 33:41), and hope (q.v.; “And seek the grace of your lord and remember God that you might prosper,” q 62:10).

Dhikr is a key factor in forgiveness (q.v.), promised for those who, “when they have committed a shameful act or oppressed themselves, remember God” (q 3:135), even as prohibited acts (wine [q.v.], gambling [q.v.; see forbidden] prevent a believer from remembering. Whoever turns away after being reminded of his lord will suffer great pain (q 72:17). To those who remember God, God also promises reciprocity: “Remember me, I will remember you” (q 2:152). Remembrance is at the heart of the covenant (q.v.) between God and the human being: “Children of Israel (q.v.), remember my bounty to you and keep faith with my covenant” (q 2:40). The qur’ānic concept of dhikr interacted throughout Islamic civilization with the poetic notion, especially the
remembrance of the beloved in love poetry
(see love and affection). In Şūfism (see
şūfism and the Qur’ān) both concepts
were merged into ritual practice, with the
meditative use of the dhikr, that is a meditative
utterance, most often a Qur’ānic quote,
the tahliil (lā ilāha illa lāh, “there is no god
but God”), or a divine name or names,
repeated aloud or silently. The ritual use
of dhikr was matched by a developed theo-
logical understanding of it.

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Men of the Cave

Name given to the protagonists of a long
Qur’ānic passage containing a version of
the story of the seven sleepers of Ephesus.
The Qur’ān states that the Men of the
Cave (aṣḥāb al-kahf) and of al-Raqīm (see
below) were among God’s signs, and says
they were youths who took refuge in a cave
(q.v.) and invoked God’s mercy (q.v.;
Q 18:9-10). God made them and their dog
(q.v.) fall into a deep sleep (q.v.) for many
years and then woke them from their slumber.
The Qur’ān explains that they were
pious youths fleeing from the idolatry (see
idolatry and idolaters) of their people and
that they found refuge in a cave
(Q 18:11-7). When the youths awoke they
were under the impression that only a day
or so had passed, and decided that one of
them should take some coins and go to buy
food in the town. God used them to dem-
onstrate to the inhabitants of the town that
there is no doubt concerning the hour (see
apocalypse; last judgment; eschatolo-
ogy). The inhabitants of the town argued
about building a place of worship dedi-
cated to the youths (Q 18:18-21). The final
part of this passage recounts the argu-
ments among the people about how many
youths were in the cave: people will insist
variously that, in addition to the dog, there
were three or five or seven people (see
numbers and enumeration). Muslims are
instructed not to dispute these questions
with anybody since only God really knows
how many of them were there and the
length of time that they spent asleep in the
cave which, it is stated, was a total of 309
years (Q 18:22-6). The sūra containing this
episode (Q 18) is entitled Sūrat al-Kahf
(“The Cave”).

Later traditions (see ḥadīth and the
Qur’ān; exegesis of the Qur’ān: clas-
sical and medieval) added particulars
that elaborated upon the Qur’ānic contents.
According to Wahb b. Munabbih (d. ca.
112/730), the youths adopted their faith
from a Christian apostle (see Christians
and Christianity) and found refuge in a
cave while they were fleeing from their
king who regarded them as having caused
his son’s death (Abd al-Razzāq, Tafsīr, i,
397-8). Other accounts state that the
youths were believers in God, sons of nota-
bles of their town or even princes. Upon
the Roman emperor Decius’ entrance into
their town — usually referred to as Ephes-
sus or Tarsus — they and their dog es-
caped into a cave to avoid both the idolatry
of their fellow citizens and the emperor’s
persecution. The emperor, instead of
capturing them in the cave, had the en-
trance walled up, erecting on the spot a
tablet in which their story was told. This
tablet was made of lead or stone and put
into a box of copper and, according to some traditions, was prepared by two believers belonging to the house of Decius. God caused the youths and their dog to fall asleep in the cave and 390 years later, the Roman emperor Theodosius, exasperated by Christian disputes about the resurrection (q.v.), asked for a clear sign from God. It thus happened that a shepherd reopened the entrance of the cave and at that moment God raised them up. One of the youths was sent to buy food in the town and he wandered dazed and confused since he was convinced that he had only been asleep for one day (Thalabī, Qisas, 380-4).

When the inhabitants of the town saw his coins they immediately suspected that he had found a treasure but later discovered the truth when the youth took them to the cave and they were able to read the inscription on the tablet.

Other exegetical reports attempt to elucidate some of the more controversial Qur'ānic passages. Several solutions are proposed for the mysterious name al-Raqīm (q.v.) it was the name of the valley, of the town, of the dog or, even better, of the one or two tablets bearing the names and story of the Men of the Cave (cf. Mawardi, Nukat, iii, 286-7). The youths are usually numbered as seven but some traditions state that there were more. The various estimates of their number mentioned in the Qur'ān are attributed in the exegetical tradition to differing Christian opinions about the matter. The reports — as is common in Qur'ānic exegesis (tafsīr) — also include full descriptions and the names of all the characters of the story, i.e. the dog, the town, the month and even the cave. The great popularity of this Qur'ānic story is also attested by the numerous and varied localizations of the cave and by the sanctuaries relating to the Men of the Cave all over the Muslim world as is attested in geographical literature (Kandler, Die Bedeutung, 82-98; Hernández Juberías, La península imaginaria, 137-61).

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Menstruation

The monthly flow of blood from the uterus. Menstruation is explicitly mentioned by the Qur‘ān in two contexts: ritual purity (q.v.) and the law of marriage and divorce (q.v.). In the context of ritual purity, menstruation is one of a fairly broad set of bodily functions also mentioned within the text of the Qur‘ān as excretion and sexual activity, Q 4:43; 5:6; see sex and
SEXUALITY) requiring ablutions in order to restore the state of ṭahāra required for prayer (q.v.) and other rituals (see RITUAL AND THE QUR’ĀN; CLEANLINESS AND ABLUPTION). Menstruation is categorized in Islamic law as a cause of major impurity analogous to that entailed by sexual intercourse (see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN). In the context of marital law, the menstrual period provides evidence that a widowed or divorced woman is not pregnant by her previous husband and provides the unit of measurement for the waiting period (q.v.), or ‘idda, that must expire before she may contract another marriage.

Despite the complexity of Islamic law relating to menstrual purity, the Qur’ān touches on the subject only once. “They ask you about menstruation (al-mahdi),” states Q 2:222, “say, it is an adhan. Remain aloof from menstruating women and do not approach them until they become pure again; when they have purified themselves, go to them as God has instructed you. Indeed, God loves those who repent (see REPENTANCE AND Penance) and those who purify themselves.” The word adhan, derived from a root meaning “to cause harm to,” is semantically very open; it has been translated with English words as diverse as ailments of the scalp (Q 2:196), rain during (outdoor) prayer (Q 4:102) and scornful patronage directed towards the objects of charity (Q 2:262, 263, 264; see Almsgiving; Path or Way). In verse Q 2:222 both the nature of the harm involved and the identity of the person suffering it are unspecified.

Many exegetes interpret it in terms of the “dirtiness,” smelliness and general offensiveness of menstrual blood; this is the dominant opinion in medieval commentaries, particularly those based closely on transmission from early Muslim authorities (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL). Others, particularly modern interpreters, focus on the indisposition of, or possible harm to, the menstruating woman herself (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: EARLY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY). This harm is often understood in medical terms (see MEDICINE AND THE QUR’ĀN). Thus, the Egyptian modernist Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935; Manār, ii, 359) writes that “[even] if the man escapes from… harm the woman can scarcely escape it, because intercourse disturbs her reproductive organs for something that they are neither ready nor prepared to do, because they are occupied with another natural function, which is the expulsion (ifrāz) of the… blood.” Similarly, the Shi‘ī (see Shi‘ism and the Qur’ān) commentator Muḥammad al-Sabzawārī (d. ca. 1297/1880; Jadid, i, 266) writes, “Menstruation’s being a ‘harm’ may be from the point of view of the woman’s state, because she experiences weakness and is overcome with lassitude when the bleeding occurs and suffers a great deal of hardship and discomfort…. It may possibly also be from the point of view of [the menstrual blood’s] being ill-smelling and substantively impure (najis); the man may be repelled by it, and the woman may [thus] be harmed, even if [only] psychologically.” In contrast, the Egyptian revivalist Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966; Ḷāliḥ, ii, 241-2) understands the prohibition of marital intercourse during menstruation in terms of the fiṭra, the fundamental human constitution. Only in the period of purity (when the woman is not menstruating) can intercourse achieve both the natural desire for physical pleasure and the fundamental aim (ghāya fiṫriyya) of sexual intercourse, which is the continuation of the species (see BIONOMY AS THE CREATION AND STAGES OF LIFE). Finally, some com-
mentators also note that the word adhan is used elsewhere in the Qurʾān specifically to refer to minor and insignificant hardships (cf. Q 3:111), thus minimizing the harm or offense associated with menstruation.

The main legal issue in the interpretation of Q 2:222 is the degree of avoidance implied by the verse’s injunction to “remain aloof from” (iʿtazālu) menstruating women. Although the most obvious literal reading of the verse itself would suggest complete separation from menstruants, the tradition of occasions of revelation (q.v.; asbāb al-nuẓāl) suggests a much more limited form of avoidance. According to this tradition, the verse was sent down in response to the questions of Companions of the Prophet (q.v.) who observed that the Jews (or, in other versions, the pagan Arabs [q.v.]) or the Zoroastrians; see JEWS AND JUDAISM; PEOPLE OF THE BOOK; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QURʾĀN) would not share food with a menstruating woman or remain in the same house with her. When the verse was revealed, the Prophet clarified it by saying, “Do anything but have sexual intercourse [with them].” Hearing of this, the Jews exclaim, “This man does not want to leave a single thing in which he does not contradict (khālafa) us!” (In some versions, the questioners then wonder if they can have sexual intercourse during menstruation, which the Prophet emphatically forbids.) This narrative frame reverses the initial impact of the verse itself, from an injunction to avoid menstruating women to an injunction to limit their exclusion. (Many commentators suggest that the word mahīḍ should be read as a noun of place, and that the verse should actually be understood to enjoin avoidance of the place of menstruation, i.e. the genital area, rather than of the menstruating woman herself.) The avoidance of sexual intercourse, but not of commensality or other physical contact, is often seen to manifest the moderate “middle path” of the Islamic dispensation (cf. Q 2:143), striking a balance between the Christians (who allowed intercourse with menstruating women; see CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY) and, variously, Jews, Zoroastrians and pagans (who shunned them altogether; see POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM; SOCIAL INTERACTIONS; SOCIAL RELATIONS).

See also contamination.

Marion Holmes Katz

Bibliography


Merchandise see SELLING AND BUYING

Mercy

Forbearance from inflicting harmful punishment on an adversary or offender; disposition to exercise compassion or forgiveness. The term “mercy” (rahma), with its cognates and synonyms, is omnipresent in the Qurʾān; and derivatives of the
triliteral root gh-f-r which carry many of the same connotations are also attested throughout the Qur’ān. Muḥammad, for example, is characterized as a merciful man (q 9:128) and believers are exhorted to show mercy and kindness in their daily lives (as at q 7:199; 17:23-4; 42:43; 64:14; 90:17). “Compassion and mercy” are singled out as admirable characteristics of the followers of Jesus (q.v.; q 57:27; see also CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY). Muslims are “strenuous with infidels, but merciful among themselves” (q 48:29; see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM; JIHĀD).

Mercy as an attribute of God

Overwhelmingly, though, the Qur’ān focuses upon mercy as an attribute of God (see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES). He is ahl al-maghfira, “the source [or owner] of forgiveness” (q 74:56), “who forgives sin and accepts repentance” (q 40:3), “merciful and loving” (q 11:90), “the most merciful of those who show mercy” (q 7:155; 12:64; 21:83; compare q 7:155; 23:109, 118). In fact, humans are exhorted to be merciful precisely because they hope for mercy from him (see q 24:22). With the exception of the ninth sūra, every chapter opens with an invocation of God as “the merciful, the compassionate” (al-rahmān al-raḥīm) and that phrase occurs, along with variant statements of the same concept, dozens of times within the text itself. Commentators early and late (see exegesis of the Qur’ān: classical and medieval; exegesis of the Qur’ān: early modern and contemporary) have sought to understand the distinction between rahmān and raḥīm, both of which are derived from r-h-m, the same Arabic root from which rahma comes. Classical commentators frequently argued that rahmān is stronger, more inclusive, than raḥīm (see, for example, the discussions at Ṭabarî, Tafsîr, i, 42-3 and Ibn Kathîr, Tafsîr, i, 17-21, where various authorities are cited to the effect that the mercy associated with the former applies to all creatures, whereas the latter is bestowed only upon believers, or that, while both operate in this world, only the former extends into the world to come). Modern orientalist exegesis tends rather to view the two terms as paronomastic repetition, sometimes translating them together as “all-merciful” (thus, for example, Paret, Kommentar, 11.)

In fact, as attested upwards of forty times (as at q 17:110), “the Merciful” (al-rahmān) serves as an alternate name for God. Sūra 55 is titled “The Merciful” and the great classical commentator al-Ṭabarî (d. 310/923) maintained that, unlike al-raḥīm, the title al-rahmān belongs uniquely to God and cannot legitimately be given to any creature. “Al-rahmān,” declared the early ascetic and traditionist al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrit (d. 110/728; see ḤADITH AND THE QUR’ĀN), “is a forbidden name” (see Ṭabarî, Tafsîr, i, 45-6; compare Nöldeke, q, i, 112-3, 121; q 40 [Sūrat al-Munîn], “The Believers,” is sometimes known as Sūrat Ghāfir [“Forgiving One”], from ghāfir, another attribute of God with connotations of mercy or forgiveness, found in q 40:3). As the uniquely merciful, God wants to make things easy, not difficult, for humans (see q 2:185).

“Both his hands are outstretched” (q 5:64; compare q 110:3). Accordingly, he makes allowance for their weaknesses and for the constraints under which they live (q 2:263; 4:25, 43; 98-9: 3:3; 6; 45; 6:145; 9:91-2; 16:106, 115; 20:73; 24:33; 58:12; 73:26), is indulgent with human frailties like ignorance (q.v.; q 4:17; 16:110; 33:5) and is patient with their sins (q 22:48; 24:14, 20; see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR). Indeed, were God to punish humans according to what they deserve, none would remain alive (q 16:61; 33:45; see CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT; PUNISHMENT STORIES;
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT). His provision of material blessings (see blessing; grace) such as rain, the seasons (q.v.), the winds (see air and wind), the alternating of night and day (see day and night), the oceans, and the celestial bodies (see planets and stars), is emblematic of his kindness and mercy toward humankind (see, for example, q. 2:222, 29, 164, 243; 14:32-4; 162-8; 17:66; 22:65; 25:47-8; 27:63; 28:73; 30:46, 50; 42:28, 32-4; compare Tabari, Tafsīr, 1, 43; see nature as signs; cosmology; water). Even more importantly, divine revelation (see revelation and inspiration) is a mercy from God (as at q. 2:121-2; 6:153, 157; 7:63; 11:118-9; 17:86-7; 18:65; 36:5-6) and it is by his mercy that the righteous are not led astray (q.v.; q. 4:113; 12:33). It is also through his mercy that they are delivered from destruction at the hands of the wicked or from the consequences of their own errors (for various examples, see q. 2:37, 47, 63-4; 7:72; 11:43, 47, 58, 66, 94; 20:121-2; 54:34-5; see error).

But God’s mercy is not bestowed indiscriminately (see justice and injustice). Revelation is not given to everybody. Not everyone is saved (see salvation). He recompenses all people according to their works (q. 11:111; 14:51; see good deeds; evil deeds; record of human actions). Whereas the righteous merit his forgiveness, the wicked earn his wrath (see anger). At the final judgment (see last judgment), people will “see their works, so that whoever does an atom’s weight (see weights and measures) of good will see it and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it” (q. 99:6-8; compare q. 3:115).

The wicked will confess their sins but will nonetheless be consigned to the flames of hell (q. 67:11; see hell and hellfire). “God will show them their works, and they will sigh regretfully, yet they will not escape the inferno” (q. 2:167). There, their punishment “shall not be lightened nor shall they be helped” (q. 2:86). No individual will be wronged; God is not unjust (q. 3:25). But, for believers, his verdict will be more than just. For he accepts repentance (see, for example, q. 4:16; 24:5; 42:25; cf. 2:192; 9:102-4; 27:11; 39:53-4; see repentance and penance), and the Qur’ān exhorts humankind to seek his mercy (see, for example, q. 2:199; 4:106; 17:24; 27:46; 47:19; 71:10) as earlier prophets (see prophets and prophethood) and others have done (e.g. Noah [q.v.], at q. 11:47; 71:28; Moses [q.v.], at q. 7:151, 155; David [q.v.], at q. 38:24; Solomon [q.v.], at q. 38:35; cf. 27:19). Even the angels (see angel) of the divine court implore forgiveness for the righteous (see q. 42:5). Believers should strive, even vie, to gain his mercy (q. 57:21). To receive it is far greater than to amass material treasure (q. 3:157; 6:16; 43:32). “God will pardon the worst of their deeds, and reward them for the best of what they have done” (q. 39:35). “We shall accept from them the best of what they have done and overlook their misdeeds” (q. 46:16). Whoever repents, believes, does good works, and follows right guidance will be forgiven (q. 20:82; compare, for example, q. 7:204; 8:2-4; 39:9). God will give believers “a double portion of his mercy” (q. 57:28) and overcompensate their good deeds (q. 4:40; 6:160; 10:26; 64:17). But he will not accept deathbed repentance (q. 4:18; 6:158; 23:63-7; 99:101; 38:3; 46:84-5; 44:10-14). Nor does he admit human or angelic intercession (q.v.; q. 2:123; 3:192; 4:109, 123; 10:27; 39:54; 44:41-2), except by his own appointment (q. 10:3; 19:87; 43:86; 53:26; 63:5-6; believers are sometimes expressly forbidden to pray for the unrighteous; see, for example, q. 9:84, 113-4). No soul can bear the burden of any other soul (q. 17:15; 39:7) and, on the day of judgment, family and other human relationships will count for nothing (q. 23:101; 35:18; 66:10; 70:8-15).
Several passages affirming God’s disposition to forgive simultaneously stress the swiftness and severity of his punishments. “Tell my servants that I am the forgiving, the merciful one, and that my punishment is the painful punishment” (Q 15:49-50; compare Q 5:98; 6:147, 165; 7:167; 13:6; also Q 3:4, 11; 5:2; 17:57). And, in fact, the eminent traditionist and exegete Ibn ‘Abbās (d. ca. 68/688) maintained that the very meaning of God’s title al-rahmān al-rahīm is that he “is gentle with those to whom he wishes to exercise mercy, and distant and severe with those whom he wishes to treat with rigor” (cited in Tabarî, Tafsîr, i, 44).

For God does not love the unbelieving and unrighteous (Q 2:276; 3:32, 57, 140; 4:107); indeed, he is their “enemy” (Q 2:98; see enemies). “Who despairs of the mercy of his lord except those who have gone astray?” (Q 15:56; see despair). And, though God may forgive anything else (even apostasy [q.v.; see Q 3:85-91, 106; 4:137], he will not show mercy to those who persist in the worship of any god but himself (Q 4:48, 116; see idols and images; idolatry and idolaters). Moreover, the Qur’ān’s portrayal of God as merciful is further complicated by its insistence upon predestination (see, for example, Q 15:4-5; 16:35; 18:57-8; 26:200; 81:27-9; see fate; freedom and predestination) and upon his role in fostering a disposition to evil among the wicked (as at Q 2:27, 10, 15; see good and evil; destiny). The Qur’ān emphasizes God’s sovereign freedom to bestow or withhold his mercy and to favor wherever he will (e.g. at Q 2:105; 4:48-9; 6:83-8; 10:107; 33:17; and many other places). See also forgiveness.

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Bibliography


Merriment see laughter; joy and misery

Messenger

One who comes bringing information. The main word for messenger in the Qur’ān is rasūl, denoting “one sent with a message,” which occurs 236 times and its plural, rasūl, ninety-five times. Mursal (pl. mursalūn), the passive participle of a verb from the same root letters, and which also means “one sent with a message,” occurs thirty-six times. Both rasūl and mursal usually refer to a human agent whom God sends to guide a people by communicating to them in a language they understand (Q 14:4; see language, concept of; Arabic language; revelation and inspiration). The central message of these messengers is to shun false gods (see polytheism and atheism; idolatry and idolaters; idols and images), the powers of evil (see good and evil; devil) and injustice (see justice and injustice), and to worship (q.v.) the one true God (Q 16:36; see belief and unbelief). Muhammad, through whom God revealed the Qur’ān and through whom God guides all humankind, represents the model and final rasūl of God (Q 33:21, 40).

Arabia before and at the time of Muḥammad (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān) was acquainted with the term rasūl. Al-Hamdānī (d. ca. 334/945) cites traditions about south Arabian tomb inscriptions that identify Hūd (q.v.) and
Shu‘ayb (q.v.) but also Hanzala b. Sa‘fwan as messengers of God (see Archaeology and the Qur‘an). One of the inscriptions even designates Ḥārith b. ‘Amr the rasūl of the rasūl Allāh, Shu‘ayb (Hamdān, al-Īṣfīl, 134, 136, 139, 142). Musaylima (q.v.) — another Arabian prophet — referred to himself as “the messenger of Allāh” in a letter to Muhammad (Ṭabarī, Taʾrikh, i, 1749).

While the Qur‘an states that it has not narrated the stories of all the messengers sent by God (q 40:78; see Narratives), it identifies — among a long line of prophets preceding Muhammad (see Prophets and Prophethood) — some as messengers (rasūl) by name: in the biblical tradition, Noah (q.v.; Nūḥ), Lot (q.v.; Lūṭ), Ishmael (q.v.; Ismā‘īl), Moses (q.v.; Mūsā) and Jesus (q.v.; ʿĪsā); Shu‘ayb, messenger to his people the Midianites (see Midian); and the Arabians Ḥud and Šālīḥ (q.v.), sent to their respective tribes, ʿĀd (q.v.) and Thamūd (q.v.). In q 37:123 and 139 respectively, Elijah (q.v.; Ilyās) and Jonah (q.v.; Yūnus) are included as among the musāliḥān. Although whether the Qur‘an reveals a clear distinction between the roles of prophets and messengers is disputed, generally speaking, prophets are found exclusively among the People of the Book (q.v.), that is in the biblical tradition (see Scripture and the Qur‘an), and messengers are depicted as closely connected with a people/community (qawm, ahl, umma, see Community and Society in the Qur‘an). The non-biblical messengers, Ḥud, Šālīḥ, and Shu‘ayb are sent to specific communities but are never referred to as prophets. Al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 716/1316-7; Anwār, ad q 22:32) distinguishes prophets who bring no divine law (shari‘a) from messengers who bring divine law (see Law and the Qur‘an) and a holy book (q.v.). But no clear Qur‘ānic evidence supports this distinction. The Qur‘an designates neither Abraham (q.v.; q 87:19; 53:36-37) nor David (q.v.; q 17:35; 4:163) specifically as messengers, yet they are both connected with scriptures. The Qur‘an designates Moses, Jesus and Muḥāammad as both prophets (q 6:83-9; 3:68) and messengers (q 7:104; 3:49; 3:144). Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373; Taḥfīṣ, ad q 4:163) says reports differ but one well-known tradition enumerates 124,000 prophets, among them 313 messengers.

Several sūras of the Qur‘an contain a series of stories of similar structure featuring all or most of a set of seven messengers (see Form and Structure of the Qur‘an): Noah, Ḥud, Šālīḥ, Lot, Shu‘ayb, Abraham (Ibrāhīm), and Moses. The fact that among these messengers the Qur‘an fails to designate only Abraham as a rasūl may suggest his status as a messenger is assumed. Q 26:10-191 contains all seven narratives; and an incomplete set of these narratives occurs in q 7:59-93; 11:25-123; 37:75-148; 54:49-42. In most of these, the messenger declares a message; his people reject him; God rescues him along with his faithful followers; and some calamity punishes those who reject the message (see Punishment Stories). These accounts support the notion that messengers are distinguished from prophets by their association with a people/community. This structure coincides closely with the experience of Muḥāammad, providing him comfort, reassuring his supporters and warning his opponents (see Opposition to Muḥāammad). In q 26, for example, each separate account ends with this reassuring refrain, “Surely in this there is a sign; yet most of them do not believe. Your lord is the mighty one, the merciful” (e.g. q 26:67-8). While the calls of the messengers and any personal struggles they may have had are left out of the Qur‘ānic stories, their nature and role are strikingly consistent and may be fairly summarized as follows. These merely human agents (q 16:43; 25:20) come
to announce (see good news) and warn (q 18:56; see warning) and must be obeyed (q 4:64; see obedience). Although some messengers are higher in rank than others (q 2:253), the faithful believe in all of them and do not distinguish among them (q 2:136; 4:150-2). Just as every city (q.v.) has a “warner” (nadhīr, q 33:24; cf. 26:208) and a guide (cf. q 13:7) and every people will have a “witness” (shahid, see witnessing and testifying) on the day of judgment (q 16:84, 89; 4:44; see last judgment), so every people will have received a messenger (q 10:47; 28:59) to proclaim the oneness of God and warn against idolatry and injustice (q 16:36; 17:15). Messengers proclaim God’s word in their own people’s language (q 14:4) and only perform miracles (q.v.) with God’s permission (q 40:78). The coming of a messenger precipitates a crisis in which some reject and others accept the challenge to believe in and obey God and his messenger. Unbelievers consistently mock them (q 15:11; see mockery) and accuse them of falsehood (q 2:87; 23:44; see lie). All messengers are affected by Satan (q 22:52) and, if repentant, can be forgiven (cf. q 27:10-12; see repentance and penance; forgiveness). Like prophets (q 2:61, 91; 3:21, 112, 181; 4:153), messengers may even be killed (q 2:87; 5:70; see murder). But they will be avenged (q 30:47). Messengers are so closely linked with the divine that obedience to them amounts to obedience to God (q 4:80). References to messengers before Muhammad occur almost always among Meccan verses (see chronology and the Qur’ān) — the exceptions being references to Moses and Jesus (q 61:5-6).

The Qur’ān terms some messengers ilā l-‘azmī, “gifted with determination,” but these are not named (q 46:35). Post-Qur’ānic interpretation considers ilā l-‘azmī to mean exalted messengers. The angels are also called mursalūn (q 15:57; 51:31) and rasūl (q 10:21; cf. 42:51). Royal messengers are designated by both terms (q 12:50; 27:35). The feminine plural of mursal, mursalāt, possibly designates winds in q 77:1 (see air and wind). The Qur’ān never uses rasūl to designate disciples of Jesus (q 3:32-3; 61:14; 5:111). It calls them hawārīyyān, “apostles” (see apostle). These helpers and followers of Jesus profess to be muslim (q 3:52; 5:111) and ask him to bring down a table from heaven to strengthen their faith (q 5:112-3).

Muhammad is called “the messenger of God” (q 7:158; 48:29). God sends him to a people never previously visited by a messenger (cf. q 28:46; 32:3). Like other messengers, he must “rise and warn,” communicating the proper social and ritual responses to God’s oneness (q 7:42). Muhammad’s mission extends to all creatures (lit-‘ālamān, q 21:107), he being both “the messenger of God” and the “seal of the prophets” (q 33:40). The phrase “God and his messenger” occurs at least eighty-five times, all but one (q 72:23) in Medinan passages (q 7:158 being a Medinan verse). The phrase links obedience and disobedience (q.v.) to God with obedience and disobedience to Muhammad twenty-eight times — all in Medinan passages, e.g. q 5:92. No such linkage exists in passages where Muhammad is referred to as a prophet (nabī).

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Bibliography


**Messiah**  see jesus

**Metals and Minerals**

Substances that have luster, are opaque and may be fused, and chemical elements or compounds occurring naturally as a product of inorganic processes. The Qurʾān does not utilize the generic term for both metal and ore (*maʿān*, but references the two most widespread metals in common use on the planet: iron (*ḥaddīd*), which is mentioned six times, and copper (*nḥāṣ*), mentioned once, as well as molten copper (*qṭr*), mentioned twice. Iron, which gives its name to q 57 (ʿSūrat al-Ḥaddīd) and which God sent down to earth, possesses great strength and is very useful to human-kind (q 57:25); it comes in the shape of lumps (q 18:96); truncheons are made from it (q 22:21) and God made it malleable for David (q.v.; q 34:10). Copper will be hurled at the guilty on the day of judgment (q 55:33; see last judgment); Dhū l-Qarnayn (see alexander) poured molten copper on a dam between two mountains (q 18:96) and God had this metal flow from a spring (see springs and fountains) for Solomon (q.v.; q 34:12). The exact nature of the molten metal called *mabl*, which appears three times — in connection with the sky (q 70:8), the tree of Zaqqūm (q 44:45; see trees) and the potion for wrongdoers in hell (q 18:29; see hell and hellfire; reward and punishment; food and drink) — is unknown. As to precious metals, gold (q.v.; *dhāḥah*) is attested seven times in the Qurʾān, and silver (*fiḍlī*) six times; they are twice used in conjunction. Gold is mentioned as being hoarded (q 3:14; 9:34), and as a material from which bracelets (q 18:31; 22:23; 35:33; 43:33) and dishes (q 43:71) are made. The Qurʾān notes that silver, too, is hoarded together with gold, and that vases, flasks and bracelets are made (q 76:15, 16, 21) from it (see cups and vessels; instruments).

The mineral mentioned most frequently in the Qurʾān is stone (q.v.; *ḥājār*, pl. *ḥijārān*), spoken of twelve times. Moses (q.v.) hit the stone with his stick (see rod) and twelve springs gushed out (q 2:60; 7:160; see springs and fountains); stones will feed the fire of hell (q 2:24; 66:6); although stones are hard, some may split and others may break up (q 2:74); there are also stones that God sends from heaven (q 8:32; 11:82; 15:74; 17:50; see heaven and sky), as well as those that Abraham’s (q.v.) messengers (see messenger) throw at the guilty and those that flights of birds throw on enemies (q.v.; q 51:33; 105:4; see abraham). The second mineral named in the Qurʾān is clay (q.v.; *fār*), mentioned ten times in connection with the creation (q.v.) of humans by God. Two other mentions are in relation to the building of a tower by Pharaoh (q.v.; q 28:38) and to the stones that Abraham’s messengers throw (q 51:33). There are two kinds of clay: clinking clay (*salsāl*) such as pottery (q 55:14), extracted from malleable mud (*mīn hamaʾin masūnīn*, q 15:26, 28, 33), and hard clay named *ṣījīl* (from the Latin *sigillum* or from the Aramaic *ṣgyl*), with which some of the stones thrown from heaven are made (q 11:82; 15:74; 105:4).
Concerning precious minerals, the Qur'an knows but three: ruby (yāqūt), coral (q.v.; marjān) and pearls (lu’lu’), which are compared to the ephebes and the houris (q.v.) of paradise (q.v.; 52:24; 55:58; 76:19); coral and pearls come from the seas (Q 55:22) and pearls will be used for adorning the believers (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF) in paradise (Q 22:23; 33:33).

Gérard Troupeau

Metaphor

Literary device that conveys semantic equation without a linking participle such as “like” or “as.” Metaphor (ṭisti’ara) is the subject of much discussion and classification in the science of Arabic rhetoric (cf. Bonebakker, Istā’ara); this article will of necessity confine itself to major classifications and to uses that relate to how religious scholars (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL) have sought to understand metaphor’s appearance and use in the Qur’an.

Definition

Metaphor is an example of figurative language (majāz) as opposed to “literal” or “true” expression (ḥaqqqa, cf. Reinert, De Bruijn and Stewart-Robinson, Mağāz). Within the realm of figurative language, metaphor, like its close associate, simile (ṭashbīḥ, tanthīl, see SIMILES), refers to joining or linking two or more concepts for purposes of comparison or semantic equation. Arab rhetoricians detail numerous subcategories for both metaphor and simile; nonetheless, their basic distinction between the two resembles that found in the Western rhetorical tradition. In both, simile achieves comparison by means of a linking particle that suggests similarity: “as, like,” etc. (e.g. “in battle, this man fights like a lion”). Metaphor, however, denotes semantic equation; its semantic overlap or “borrowing” (ṭisti’ara) is direct and does not rely on linking particles (e.g. “in battle, this man is a lion”).

As in most rhetorical traditions, Muslim scholars and critics debated the merits and limits of metaphor. They agreed that to the extent that metaphors link or equate concepts not commonly associated, they may create images of striking semantic impact and aesthetic force. One can, however, push metaphors too far. Far-fetched metaphors, when they are unbelievable or ridiculous, distort or dilute meaning. The pre-modern Arabic poetic tradition contains much discussion of the semantic and artistic appropriateness of metaphors that poets created, especially those of the “new school” (cf. Khalafallah, Badi‘; see POETRY AND POETS). Representatives of this school, such as Abū Tammām (d. 231/845) and al-Buḥṭurī (d. ca. 284/897), became famous for formulating rhetorically embellished metaphors and other forms of figurative language that were considered either brilliantly daring or shockingly outrageous by their various admirers and opponents.

Critics, however, also recognized that continuous use usually lessens the aesthetic force of metaphors so that they become trite: the above-mentioned “he is a lion in battle” is an example of such an over-used metaphor.

Between these two poles of the far-
fetched and the hackneyed falls the metaphor whose appearance measurably enriches, perhaps almost imperceptibly, the aesthetic power, eloquence, and grace of a text: “And, out of kindness, lower to [your parents] the wing of humility” (Q. 17:24).

The appearance of this third class of metaphor in the Qur’an is for Muslim scholars one of the text’s proofs of inimitability (q.v.; iJāz, cf. Von Grunebaum, I’djāz; Baqillānī, Ijāz, 69-112; Jurjānī, Dalā’īl, 66-73, 262 f.). As al-Jurjānī states, “Speech does not deserve the term eloquent unless meaning precedes expression, and expression meaning” (Jurjānī, Dalā’īl, 267). This is what a good metaphor does.

Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) mentions several definitions of metaphor in his Iqān. He settles on the following: “The essence of metaphor is when a word is borrowed from something for which it is known and applied to something for which it is not known.” In other words, metaphor occurs when a concept is borrowed from its customary semantic domain and applied to a semantic domain in which it is not usually employed. For example, in the Qur’ānic verse cited above, “wing” is “borrowed” from its usual determination as the limb of a bird that enables it to fly and then applied to prescribe one aspect of children’s respect for their parents. The power of this metaphor is enhanced by its denotation that, as a sign of humility, the respectful child “lowers his wing,” a symbol of independence. “The purpose of metaphor,” al-Suyūṭī (Iqān, ii, 780-1) continues, “is to reveal an aspect that is hidden, to emphasize something that is not sufficiently clear, to exaggerate, or to achieve the joining or overlap (of concepts).”

Use and interpretation
The Qur’ān is replete with metaphors. It is useful to distinguish, however, between two types. On the one hand, there are metaphors whose import is mainly stylistic and figurative — such as “wing of humility” or “the morning (q.v.), when it takes breath” (q 81:18; see Air and Wind) — and which may be taken as examples of the iJāz or inimitable style of the Qur’ān. On the other hand, there are expressions that may or may not be deemed as metaphorical, depending on the theological stance or persuasion of the commentator. Prominent examples of this second category are Qur’ānic expressions attributing physical attributes or mental or emotional operations to God (see Anthropomorphism). Such metaphors became the subject of much theological controversy between the Mu’tazila and their opponents (see Gimaret, Mu’tazila; see also Mu’tazilīs). Examples are the Qur’ān’s attribution to God of such physical attributes as “face” (q.v.), “hand” (q.v.) or “thigh”; such emotional states as “mercy” (q.v.) or “wrath” (see Anger); or Qur’ānic representations of God’s agency or acts by means of physical description (God’s creation of Adam, or his descent to his throne, for example; see Throne of God; Creation; Adam and Eve). At issue here is the question of whether such attributions were “metaphorical” or “real.” On the one hand, there was the theological position of the Mu’tazila, who held that God transcended physical representation; hence, references in the Qur’ān to divine possession of physical attributes or human emotions were “metaphorical” (Gimaret, Mu’tazila, 788-9).

Other theological schools, such as the Ḥanbalīs and the Zāhīris, however, believed that literal meanings in the Qur’ān should be upheld as true. The position that the Ash’arīs developed was intermediate; they held that one should take the literal meaning of the Qur’ān “without asking how” (bi-ūt kayf). Of particular interest for the topic of metaphor is that this provides a case study of how even deciding what is
literal and what is metaphorical may easily develop into a matter of heated theological controversy, especially when the literal truth of a religious text is a principle of faith (q.v.; see also THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN).

At times, theological controversies are less often unequivocally resolved than made moot through prolonged discussion. Passions burn brightly for a time but their flames eventually ebb, in the same way, perhaps, that metaphors too often used become banal. Hence, by the time of al-Suyūṭī, the Qur’ān’s reference to God’s possessing physical attributes, such as a face or hand, is categorized as an example of the ambiguous (q.v.) or multivalent verses in the Qur’ān rather than a topic for elaborate theological discussion (Suyūṭī, Itqān, i, 639-70). In this context, he specifically cites q 3:7:

He it is who sent down the book (q.v.) to you. In it are verses (q.v.), decisive — they are the mother of the book — and others multivalent. As for those in whose hearts (see HEART) is deviancy, they follow that which is multivalent in it, desiring dissenion, and desiring its interpretation. Yet no one knows its interpretation except God, and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING) say, “We have faith in it, for it is all from our lord (q.v.).” Yet none remember except those who are possessed of prudent minds (see MEMORY; INTELLECT).

In his discussion of the clear and decisive (muḥkam) and multivalent or ambiguous (mutashābih) verses, al-Suyūṭī adopts an exegetical stance that by his time had become standard among mainstream Sunnī commentators. This approach holds, in essence, that however one may define certain verses or parts of the Qur’ān as ambiguous, one should understand their meaning in the context of the verses that are perceived of as clear and decisive (see Ayoub, Qur’ān, ii, 20-46). An instance of this approach as applied to metaphor lies in the verse itself, where the meaning of the phrase “mother of the book” is defined by the term muḥkam. In other words, it does not refer to a literal “mother” but rather to “clear and decisive meaning.” Interestingly, this exegetical approach is to a large extent a mirror image of al-Suyūṭī’s definition of metaphor cited above: “The essence of metaphor is when a word is borrowed from something for which it is known and applied to something for which it is not known.” Instead of moving from the known to the unknown, as one does to create a metaphor, the traditionalist commentator determines the semantic intent of an ambiguous phrase, such as appearances of metaphorical usage, through reference to known clear and unequivocal expressions that envelop an otherwise too open semantic field. The goal here is to restrict interpretation that may transgress the boundaries of accepted faith.

If traditionalist commentators restrict the limits of interpreting metaphor through reliance on non-figurative verses of the Qur’ān, the Islamic philosophers did the same by relying on rational interpretation (see PHILOSOPHY AND THE QUR’ĀN). Typical of this approach is Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 595/1198) in his work Faṣl al-maqāl, “The decisive treatise.” Similar to the approaches of Ibn Sinā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) and al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and following an hermeneutical tradition that can be traced back to Plato and the Stoics, Ibn Rushd distinguishes among classes of human intellectual ability and their resultant capacity to “assent” to the truth value of a text. For him, “demonstration,” i.e. reliance on syllogistic argument, is the clear path to truth (q.v.). Nonetheless, he recognizes that relatively few individuals
have the intellectual capacity to master philosophy and thus employ demonstration effectively. Religion, however, must be accessible to all. Hence metaphors and other rhetorical devices (see Rhetoric of the Qur'an) are a necessary component of a religious text such as the Qur'an so that it may convince all types of people to believe in its message. As Ibn Rushd (Fasl, 46, also 30-1; Eng. trans. 59, 49) states:

God has been gracious to those of his servants who have no access to demonstration, on account of their natures, habits, and lack of facilities for education. He has coined for them images and likeness of these things, and summoned them to assent to those images that come about through the indications common to all men, that is, dialectical and rhetorical indications.

The presence in the Qur'an of such rhetorical devices as metaphors is thus for philosophers a necessary communicative tool. Their eloquence and beauty are doubtless proof of the holy text’s inimitability, but they are also intrinsic to its natural functionality: they are needed to promote assent and to inspire belief among the general populace.

A third exegetical stance toward metaphors in the Qur'an also became prominent. This approach did not seek to delimit the interpretation of metaphors, but rather to better understand their import through elaboration or meditation. Prominent examples of this trend are the mystics (see Sufism and the Qur'an), yet many groups (Isma'īlīs, ḥurūfīs, etc.) whose vision of Islam encompasses an esoteric dimension have also embraced it. A well-known mainstream example of this trend is al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). For him, the symbolic language of the Qur'an was an object of profound reflection, a pathway that enabled believers to bridge the physical world of human activity to the spiritual realm of divine truth. An example of his approach is his treatise Mishkât al-anwâr, “The niche for lights.” This work is based mainly on Q 24:35, the Light Verse:

God is the light (q.v.) of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of his light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (q.v.) — the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star — kindled from a blessed tree, an olive that is neither of the east nor of the west whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; light upon light; God guides to his light whom he will. God strikes similitudes for humans, and God has knowledge of everything.

Typical of al-Ghazālī’s method is his discussion of the metaphor: “God is the light of the heavens and the earth.” Al-Ghazālī proceeds to distinguish among three levels in regard to the meaning of light. The first is that of physical phenomenon whereby the human eye sees the earth by means of the light of the sun. The second is the mental plane, whose eye is the faculty of intelligence as illuminated by the light of the truth found in the Qur'an itself. Finally, there is the spiritual dimension, where gnostic intuition is illuminated by the rays of the light of the divine presence. For al-Ghazālī, a mature believer is someone who attains perception of each of these levels of knowledge (Ghazālī, Mishkât al-anwâr, 41-64; Eng. trans. 79-121; see Maturity).

It is clear that the theological or hermeneutical issues that the presence of metaphors in the Qur'an may provoke can be just as significant as their rhetorical or aesthetic effects — as important as these latter are. This suggests the pertinence of the idea that much of how one understands a text depends on the exegetical approach or
theological stance that one brings to its study. See also LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN; LITERARY STRUCTURES; SYMBOLIC IMAGERY.

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Bibliography

Meteor see PLANETS AND STARS

Michael

An angelic being, Michael (Ar. Mīkāl; also Mīkā‘il; Mīkā‘il; Mikā‘il) is mentioned by name only once in the Qur’ān (Mīkāl, q 29:8) in a verse affirming belief in God’s angels (including Gabriel; see ANGEL; GABRIEL) and apostles (see MESSENGER) as a requirement of faith (q.v.) for the community of believers (mu‘minin, see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’ĀN). The role of Michael, however, is elaborated in ḥadīth and qur’ānic interpretation (see ḤADĪTH AND THE QUR’ĀN; ELEXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL). This angel, whose ontological status seems to be (along with Gabriel) higher than that of other angels, appears in several types of literature in the Islamic world: the traditional histories of Muhammad and the prophets (see SŪRA AND THE QUR’ĀN; PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD) as well as cosmological, mystical and theosophical literature (see COSMOLOGY; ESCHATOLOGY; SŪFISM AND THE QUR’ĀN).

Many versions of Muḥammad’s night journey (al-isrāʾ) and ascension (q.v.) to the throne (al-mi‘rāj, see THRONE OF GOD), based on q 17:1, describe Michael and Gabriel as appearing to Muhammad, preparing him for his journey. Al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) narrative has Gabriel asking Michael to bring a basin of water from Zamzam so that Gabriel can purify the Prophet’s heart (q.v.; Ṭafsīr ad q 17:1). Gabriel cuts open the Prophet’s chest, washes his heart three times with the three (successive) basins of water brought by Michael, removing all malice and inserting the qualities of gentleness, knowledge (see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING), faith, certitude and submission. This sūra serves as a basis for the Islamic belief in the Prophet’s protection from sin (see IMPECCABILITY).

Michael also figures in versions of the “tales of the prophets” (qisas al-anbiyāʾ) literature. In a story clearly meant as a teaching on the virtue of trust in God alone (tawakkul, see TRUST AND PATIENCE; FEAR; PIETY), Abraham (q.v.) refuses the aid of all the archangels, including Michael, who visited him when he was cast into the fire
Michael (along with the angel of death, Isra'īl; see DEATH AND THE DEAD; for references to the Kitāb Ahwāl al-qiyāma, see Smith and Haddad, Islamic understanding, 71, 81). Some narratives have Michael and Gabriel operating the balance, the niṣāḥn, the principle of justice, upon which the good and bad deeds of individuals will be weighed (see GOOD DEEDS; EVIL DEEDS; JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE; WEIGHTS AND MEASURES; INSTRUMENTS). Although mentioned only once in the Qur'ān, Michael’s pairing with Gabriel provided the basis for his (exalted) status in later literature.

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Bibliography


Midian

The name of a geographic locale and of a people mentioned in the Qur’ān. In post-qur’ānic Islamic tradition and in the Hebrew Bible, Midian (Ar. Madyan) is also the name of one of Abraham’s (q.v.) sons through Keturah (cf. Gen 25:2), the eponymous ancestor of the Midianites. The
origin of the name is unknown. Mendenhall (Studies) notes that the Hebrew midyān (from the root mady-) is non-Semitic and may be a cognate to the later term, mùdâd, from which Medes is derived. In the Septuagint, the word is found as Madian or Midiam. The biblical Midianites were linguistically and culturally an Arab people associated with camel (q.v.) nomadism, caravans (q.v.) trading and shepherding (see nomads; Bedouin; Arabs). Most Midianite names mentioned in the Hebrew Bible occur also in pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions (see epigraphy and the Qurʾān; pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān), with the Midianite priest and father-in-law of Moses (q.v.), Yitro (Eng. Jethro), also rendered as Idr (orig. Ar. ʿItrū), also Exodus 3:1; 4:18; 18:1, 2, 5, 6, 12, etc.), retaining the old Arabic nominative case ending which is rare in Hebrew names (cf. the Ar. Geshem/Gashmu in Neh 2:19; 6:1, 2, 6). Archaeological evidence in the northern Hijāz east of ʿAqaba (see geography) seems to confirm biblical portrayals of Midian/Madyan as an important political entity that emerged in that vicinity during the thirteenth century B.C.E. Midian successfully projected its political and military power over Israelites, Moabites and other peoples in areas corresponding to today’s Jordan, Israel and Palestine. The name is attested in Greek and Latin sources and turns up well into the period of Islam’s emergence in the seventh century C.E., although the powerful Midianite polity may have died out as early as the tenth century B.C.E. Later biblical references seem to be geographical or genealogical in nature rather than political.

Arab geographers generally locate Midian in the northern Hijāz west of Tabūk, although a variant tradition associates it with Kafr Manda near Tiberias, close to where the Druze (q.v.) today locate the grave of their major prophet, Shuʿayb (q.v.).

In the Qurʾān, the people of Midian are one of the ancient but no longer existing peoples (al-umām al-khâliya), destroyed because they refused to listen to the warnings of their divinely-sent prophets (see prophets and prophethood; punishment stories; warning). The Qurʾān echoes the biblical portrayal of Midianite trading in its criticism of their dishonesty in commercial transactions (Q 7:85; 11:84; possibly also Q 11:95; see economics; weights and measures). The name Madyan, which occurs in the Qurʾān ten times, refers either to a geographical place to which Moses fled (Q 20:40; 28:22-3) or to a people or folk to whom the prophet Shuʿayb was sent (Q 7:85-93; 97:60; 11:84-95; 22:44; 29:36-7). The former set of references parallels the biblical Midian of Exodus while the latter most likely reflects indigenous pre-Islamic Arabian tradition (see myths and legends in the Qurʾān). The two separate trajectories of traditional lore are joined in the Qurʾān because of their common reference to Midian. That connection became embellished in the later exegetical tradition where the prophet Shuʿayb becomes Moses’ father-in-law (Tabari, Taʾrīkh, i, 443; id., History, iii, 30-1; Tha’labī, Qisas, 145, 154; Kisāʾī, Qisas, 191, 207-8), and the Midianites are the people whom King Saul (q.v.) was commanded to proscribe (Tabari, Taʾrīkh, i, 561; id., History, iii, 141-2; cf. 1 Sam 15), etc.

The Qurʾānic Midianites are also closely connected with the “people of the thicket” (or “thicket,” ayḥâh al-aykā, Q 15:78-9; 38:13; 50:14; see people of the thicket). Shuʿayb is sent to both (Q 26:176-89) and both also exhibit dishonest trading practices. Beeston (The ‘Men’) suggests that both Qurʾānic designations refer to the same group, who are designated either by their ethnic or kinship (q.v.) identity as Midianites or by their religious association with the vegetation deity, dhīl l-sharā
(Greek Dusares) as the “people of the tanglewood.” The latter association must of course be much later than the probable historical dating for the strong Midianite polity of the early Iron Age. Thus the long-lived legend of the ancient Midianites may have been conflated with the great Nabatean civilization that flourished and then died out in the general vicinity a millennium later.

Reuven Firestone

Bibliography


Milbrab  see qibla; art and architecture and the qur‘ān; mosque

Milk

Fluid secreted from the mammary glands of female mammals for the nourishment of their young. The two verses in which the Arabic word for milk, laban, occurs are q 16:66 and 47:15. They have distinct contextual references, though they share the sense of belonging to the signs (q.v.) of God’s bounty (see blessing) toward humankind and of being a reward for believers’ acknowledgment of the divine economy (see belief and unbelief; reward and punishment). The first verse refers to terrestrial existence. “In cattle (see animal life) too you have a worthy lesson. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies… pure milk, pleasant for those who drink it” (see food and drink). The second verse is one of the many descriptions of the afterlife (see eschatology).

“The likeness of paradise (q.v) which the righteous have been promised. There shall flow in it rivers of purest water (q.v.), and rivers of milk forever fresh; rivers of wine (q.v.; see also intoxicants) delectable to those who drink it and rivers of clearest honey” (q.v.). The famous hadîth scholar and historian al-Dhâhâbî (d. 748/1348) noted in his work on prophetic medicine (see medicine and the qur‘ān) that the best fresh milk is human milk drunk directly from the breast (see lactation; wet-nursing). He further observed that all milk in time loses its freshness and becomes sour; hence God described the milk of paradise as “forever fresh.”

In traditions reported by Abû Dâwûd (d. 275/889) and al-Tîrmîdî (d. ca. 270/883-4) from Ib-n ʿAbbâs (d. 68/686-8), the Prophet said that whomever God has given milk should bless God saying, “May he give us more,” for I know of no food or drink to replace it.” Another story, found in the six so-called canonical collections of traditions (see hadîth and the qur‘ān) from the Companions Anas (d. 91-3/710-12; see companions of the prophet), recalls some people suffering from a stomach disorder for which the Prophet recommended they drink the milk and urine of she-camels, a remedy that cured their ailment (see illness and health). The same remedy is found unattributed in the early compendium by Ibn Ḥâbib (d. 328/935) of medical folklore and Galenic data and likely belongs to traditional Arab practice.
(see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān). Of the various kinds of milk available, sheep, goat, donkey, buffalo, camel, and cow’s milk appear especially favored next to that of the human breast. Ibn Ḥabīb also preserves a statement he attributes to the Prophet in which the milk of cows is described as a marvel, their butter as a remedy and their meat as a medicine. In a tradition related by al-Nasāʾī (d. 303/915) from Ibn Masʿūd (d. 652-3), the Prophet said, “God did not bring down any disease without also creating a remedy for it; so drink the milk of cows, for they feed off all kinds of plants.” This implied that there were different milks for different ailments to which Ibn Ḥabīb added the detail that owing to this characteristic of cow’s milk, it was a cure for every ailment except senility and old age (ḥaram).

The only cautionary note concerning milk in general is found in a tradition preserved by al-Bukhārī (c. 256/870) and Muslim (d. ca. 261/875) from Ibn Abbās that the fat of milk was bad for anyone with a fever or headache owing to the swiftness with which the milk is turned into bile. It is possible that this reflects the traditional notion, expressed by al-Ḥārīth b. Kalada (d. 13/634-5), that milk is good for pains so long as it is drunk with the fat removed (laban makhṭūd). Finally, an interesting “ethnographic” item has been passed down by Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 58/678) — found in both al-Bukhārī and Muslim — concerning women of the Children of Israel (q.v.; Banū Isrāʾīl) who lost their fear of mice because the tiny rodent was believed to drink goat’s milk but would not touch camel’s milk, and Jews neither ate camel (q.v.) meat nor drank its milk (see Jews and Judaism; Forbidden; Lawful and Unlawful).

David Waines

Bibliography

Miracles

Supernatural intervention in the life of human beings. When defined as such, miracles are present in the Qurʾān in a threefold sense: in sacred history, in connection with Muhammad himself and in relation to revelation. Although an almost indispensable attribute of prophecy, Muḥammad was not thought to have been granted any miracles in the traditional sense as they were not, ipso facto, sufficient to convince unbelievers (see Proof; Belief and Unbelief). In the Qurʾān, the concept of miracle takes on a cosmological and eschatological dimension (see Cosmology; Eschatology), and the supreme miracle is finally identified with the Qurʾān itself: divine speech in human language (see Word of God). The threefold sense of the miracle corresponds to the three meanings of the word āya (pl. āyāṭ), a Qurʾānic term which indicates the “verses” (q.v.) of the book (q.v.), as well as the “miracle” of it and the “signs” (q.v.), particularly those of creation (q.v.). The term āya is often followed or replaced by its nominalized qualifier, bayyina (pl. bayyināt), i.e. “a clear sign,” a designation which underlines the relation between miracles and the Qurʾān, which is itself qualified by bayān, (“clear, evident speech”). At times the sense of astonishment and wonder which the concept of “miracle” evokes may be rediscovered in the term ’ajāh, a word used with regard to
the attitude of humans, positive or negative, when faced with the supernatural or revelation (see revelation and inspiration; marvels).

**Miracles in sacred history**

There are few biblical or Arab prophets (see prophets and prophethood) in whose stories (see narratives) miracles do not play a part. Adam (see Adam and Eve) had no one to convince and was not favored by a single miracle, nor did he perform any. This shows that, first and foremost, the miracle is intended, if not to convince, then at least to confute unbelievers who deny the truthfulness of a given prophet (see lie). The oven (tannûr) out of which the water burst and announced the flood is an appropriate sign for Noah (q.v.; Q 11:40; 23:27). Hûd (q.v.), the prophet of the ‘Ad (q.v.), had no particular sign, thus prefiguring Muhammad. To his people who rebuked him for not producing a miracle (bayyina) he answered: “Are you surprised that a message (dhikr) has come to you from your lord (q.v.), through a man of your own people, to warn you?” (Q 7:69; see Warner). In contrast, the mission of Ṣāliḥ (q.v.) was confirmed by a she-camel with its young appearing miraculously from a mountain. By cutting the she-camel’s hamstrings, the prophet’s opponents brought forth their punishment (Q 7:73; 11:64; 54:27-29; 91:11-15; see punishment stories; chastisement and punishment). For these three peoples, divine punishment arrived in the form of a sudden, natural catastrophe.

The story of Abraham (q.v.) is marked by several miracles. God commands the blazing fire (q.v.) into which he was thrown to become “coolness and a means of safety” (Q 21:69). A sacrificial animal is sent to replace his son who was about to be killed (Q 37:107; see sacrifice; consecration of animals). In some of the prophet narratives, it is worth noting that the miraculous apparition may simultaneously bring life and death (Q 11:69-73; 15:51-6; 37:112): angels (see angel) announce the birth of Isaac (q.v.) at the same time as the punishment of Lot’s (q.v.) people. God’s insistence on the total destruction of the city by a cry, a shower of rocks or a complete upending emphasizes dramatically the miracle of divine protection afforded to Lot and his family (Q 11:81; 54:37). The list of peoples annihilated is rounded off by the “Companions of the Wood” (aṣḥāb al-ayka, see people of the thicket), identified as the Midianites (see Midian) and destroyed either by a cry or by an earthquake, although their prophet Shu’ayb (q.v.) was still not favored with a particular miracle (cf. Q 7:88; 11:84; 94:15; 83:29-36). Moses (q.v.), the most frequently mentioned prophet in the Qur’ān, is one with a twofold mission, to both Pharaoh (q.v.) and the Children of Israel (q.v.). He is also accompanied by the greatest number of miraculous events of all of the Qur’ānic prophets. Rescued from the waters, spared from the massacre of the male infants and restored to his mother as a result of divine protection (q.v.; Q 20:37-41; 28:7-13), God speaks to him from the “bush.” It is then that he receives the two signs of his mission: the staff (see rod), which becomes a serpent when it is cast down before the magicians but regains its normal shape when held again, and his hand, which is white, but not infected by leprosy. These signs were intended to persuade Pharaoh to allow the Children of Israel to leave Egypt (q.v.). Only the magicians (see magic) are convinced by the miracle of the staff, which devours their own staffs when transformed into snakes (Q 7:115-26; 20:65-76; 26:38-51). This story shows the difference, despite appearances, between miracles and magic, between divine intervention and human manipulation. Only
the eyes of faith (q.v.), however, can see this difference. This story also shows the soteriological function of the miracle: when they behold this, the magicians become believers and prefer the world to come, declaring that they are ready to face the earthly punishment of Pharaoh. There is also a clear parallel with the Qur’anic term for its revelations — the āyāt — considered as magic by the Quraysh (q.v.). Pharaoh deals with magical portents (q 27:12), the signs called āyāt bayyināt (q 17:101) or āyāt mufāṣṣalāt, all of which are expressions that could be applied to the revelations that Muhammad receives (cf. q 11:1; 41:3, etc.).

Among the “nine” signs of Moses there are five plagues of Egypt (rather than the biblical ten). They are qualified as mubṣira or bāṣā‘ir because they should awaken inner meditation in those for whom they are destined, the audience and readers of the story. The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh is brought to a close by the destruction wrought in the crossing of the Red Sea (e.g. q 20:77-8; 26:60-8), an episode often recounted in the tales of peoples who have been destroyed. The miracles with which the Children of Israel are favored in the Sinai (q.v.) desert are both a testimony to their being a chosen people (see election) and an advertizing to the perils of straying (see astray; error); the manna (see food and drink) and the quails, the protective cloud (see sechina), the twelve springs (see springs and fountains) which Moses makes gush forth when he strikes the rock with his staff (q 2:57; 7:160; 20:80). Should we consider as miraculous the revelation of God on the mountain, a vision which terrified Moses (q 7:143), the “resurrection” of the Children of Israel, struck down because they demanded to see God (q 2:55), the mountain rising in front of them at the time of the covenant (q.v.; q 2:63, 93; 4:154) or the tablets given to Moses on Mount Sinai (q 7:145; see commandments)? In all these instances, the miracle is always closely related to eschatology and revelation.

Miracle and revelation are also clearly distinguished from their opposites, as in the episode of the golden calf (see calf of gold), where both occur simultaneously. The personage that the Qur’ān calls al-Sāmirī brings the statue to life by throwing onto it a handful of earth which has been touched by the shoe of Gabriel’s (q.v.) horse. This individual thus possesses certain knowledge (see knowledge and learning) of the life-giving power of something bearing the mark of the spirit (q.v.; see also holy spirit). By appropriating for himself miraculous power, however, contrary to the will of God and without the knowledge of the prophet, he merely works an “anti-miracle” and leads men astray (q 20:87-8, 96). Likewise the case of Korah (q.v.; Qārūn), who claims to owe his wealth “to a knowledge” he possesses, of which he boasts (see boast). In the end he is swallowed up by the earth, just as Pharaoh is swallowed up by the waves (q 28:76-81).

The story of the cow which Moses commands the Children of Israel to sacrifice so that a murderer (q.v.) victim, touched by a part of the animal, may come back to life to identify his murderer, is clearly meant as a symbol of resurrection (q.v.). It should be understood to have an inner meaning, as it shows the hardening of hearts (see heart), a theme that is touched upon immediately afterwards (q 2:67-74). The fish which comes back to life “at the meeting of the two seas” (see barzakh) leaps from the basket and “makes its way back into the sea in an amazing manner (‘ajab)” in order to show Moses and his servant that they have reached the place where they must stop, clearly assumes a similar meaning (q 18:63). It may be observed that the term ‘ajab is spoken not by the prophet, but by
his young servant. In the remainder of the story, the mysterious servant, traditionally called al-Khāḍir (see khadhir/khidr), whose disciple Moses becomes at one point, does not perform any miracles as such; Moses does not need them. By his presence at events, he merely points out to Moses the knowledge that God has given him as a gift. Here the miracle is quite simply the knowledge given to certain men, inspired directly by God, linking the miraculous directly to revelation (q 18:62-82).

In q 2 (Sūrat al-Baqara, “The Cow”), the Qurʾān again retells a biblical story (see scripture and the Qurʾān), with the accession of Saul (q.v.; Ṭālūt) to the throne confirmed by a miraculous sign: the return of the ark (q.v.) of the covenant, carried by angels (q 2:248). His successors, David (q.v.) and Solomon (q.v.), are also granted miraculous powers: the former is given expertise with iron (see metals and minerals) and the mountains glorify God (see glorification of God; laudation) with him; the demons (see devil), jinn (q.v.) and winds (see air and wind) obey the latter (q 34:10-3; 38:36-9) and he is taught the “language of the birds” (q 27:16; see animal life). Endowed with these powers by virtue of their position, both David and Solomon are tested in the exercise of their kingship by supernatural intervention (see kings and rulers). Two angels appear before David in his private chamber as litigants to remind him of his sin with regard to his general, and a “body” is placed on Solomon’s throne to remind him that he is only king by divine delegation (q 38:21-4; 34). Solomon does likewise with the Queen of Sheba (see Bilqis) by having her throne moved. It is not Solomon himself who carries out this miraculous deed, but one of his companions, traditionally named as ʿĀṣaf b. Barakhyā. Endowed with a “certain knowledge of the book,” he is more powerful than the jinn. In this story, the miracle is not performed by the prophet, who simply thanks God, but by a man acting on his authority (q.v.) and in accordance with revelation (q 27:40). Theologians and Sūfis were later to find in this story the model for the miracles of the saints as a continuation of those of the prophets (see Sufism and the Qurʾān).

The Qurʾān also mentions the miraculous cure of Job (q 38:42-4) as well as the incident in which Jonah, having been swallowed by the whale, is cast up on land where there is the plant (yaqūţ, a squash or something similar) with which God covers him to protect him from the sun (q 37:139-46). In these two instances, the miracles of the cure and the protection are examples of the grace reserved for those who have been chosen after being put to the test (see trial).

As was the case with Isaac (q.v.), the births of the last two prophets of the Children of Israel, John (see John the Baptist) and Jesus (q.v.), are announced, respectively, to Zechariah (q.v.) and Mary (q.v.) by angels (q 3:39 and q 3:45-6) or directly by God and the spirit (q 19:7, 17-21). At the time of the birth of Jesus, Mary, who miraculously receives sustenance in Zechariah’s chapel in the temple (q 3:37), has to shake the trunk of a withered palm tree to have fresh dates fall from it, while underneath runs a stream (according to one meaning of sarī, q 19:24-5). Jesus speaks from the cradle (q 19:29-30) and, as the human manifestation of the creative power of the word (kun), is constantly performing miracles. He proclaims to his people: “I bring you a sign/miracle on behalf of your lord; I will make for you a bird from clay with God’s permission (bi-idhni lāh), I will cure the blind and the leper, I will resurrect the dead (see Death and the Dead) and I will tell you what you eat and what you store in your homes. This will be a sign for
you if you are believers” (q 3:49; also q 5:110). This passage, while stressing the specific calling of Jesus, also defines the conditions and the limits of the miracle: the prophet does not act on his own accord, and the miracle is only useful to someone who believes; likewise, the verses of the book are only understood by those who recognize the truth (q.v.) that is in them. The cognitive purpose of the miracle is made clear in the story of the food from heaven (mâ‘ ida, see table), which Jesus asks God to send down at the request of the apostles (see apostle). He answers their request by praying that this may be a commemoration (‘id) and a sign (āya), but he first of all questions their faith. The disciples justify themselves by saying that they wanted peace of mind (q 5:113-4). Jesus leaves this world as miraculously as he entered it because he is taken up by God (q 4:158).

Abraham does likewise. When he has asked God to let him see the resurrection of the dead, the response is: “Don’t you believe?” Next he is commanded to sacrifice four birds, cut them up and scatter them. When he summons them, the birds are made whole again and restored to life (q 2:260). Here, the miracle involves contemplation of the mystery; it has the sole function of elevating the intellect (q.v.) to a different plane of understanding, bringing the peace, that is, of heartfelt certainty.

Neither the distinction between the miracles of the prophets and those of the saints, nor the respective terms used to describe them (mu‘ jizât, karâ mât) are from the Qur‘ân. Among non-prophetic miracles, the Qur‘ân mentions some āyât (q 18:9, 17) with regard to the Men of the Cave (q.v.). Likewise, the man who wonders about resurrection and whom God makes die and then resurrects one hundred years later is identified variously as Ezra (q.v.; ‘Uzayr), as al-Kha‘dîr, or as someone who does not believe in resurrection (q 2:239). The miracle is an exemplum and is convincing when God wishes it to be.

Prophetic and saintly miracles in extra-qur‘ânic literature

Theological treatises ascribe a general pattern of development to prophetic miracles, as evidence of prophecy and in order to distinguish them from the miracles of the saints (karâ mât). For Ash‘arî and Sûfî writers (see theology and the Qur‘ân), the stories in the Qur‘ân about individuals who are not prophets, such as Mary, the Men of the Cave, al-Kha‘dîr or Ḥā’fiz b. Barâkhiyâ, serve as proof of the existence of miracles by the saints. Abd al-Qâhir al-Baghdadî (d. 429/1037) describes how miracles are an indispensable part of prophecy and sets out the miracles of the main prophets in the Qur‘ân up to Muḥammad (cf. his Usîl al-dîn, 169-85). In his work on the distinction between prophetic and saintly miracles (Kûšâb al-Bayân ʻan al-fârî fayna l-mu‘ jizât wa-l-karâmât wa-l-hiyyal wa-l-kahâna wa-l-sîhr wa-l-nârân jât), al-Bâqillânî (d. 403/1013) discusses theological controversies on the subject in an abstract manner, without recounting the stories of the miracles. The same applies to al-Juwaynî (d. 478/1085) who, on the subject of prophecy, devotes several passages to prophetic miracles, without giving a single example from the Qur‘ân (cf. al-Irshâd, 178-205 [Ar. text], Fr. trans. 266-305). This is also the case with Qâdî ʻAbd al-Jabîbîr (d. 415/1025; cf. al- Mughnâ, vol. xv al-Tabâhha‘ât wa-l-mu‘ jizât).

Theologians are, however, inclined to follow the Qur‘ân by linking the question of miracles (mu‘ jizât) with the insuperable nature of the text of the Qur‘ân (i‘jiz), the main proof of its divine origin (cf. Antes, Prophetenwunder, 21-8; Gimaret, La doctrine d’al-Ash‘arî, 459-66). In his general study of Islamic dogma, Hermann Stiegeler sets out the positions of Sunnî theologians re-
garding miracles and then devotes a long passage to the prophetic figures of Islam. His description of Muhammad’s life is followed by an extensive discussion of the miraculous nature of the Qur’ān and the subject of its inimitability (q.v.; cf. Die Glaubenslehren des Islams, 161-9, 189-338, 372-408, and under the index entries Wunder, Wundercharakter des Qur’ān). Richard Grämlich does likewise in his study of the miracles of the saints. His presentation makes clear, in particular, the twofold aspects of divine power and divine favor in miracles and the distinction made by Ṣūfis and theologians between muḥājīt and karāmāt. He also discusses miracles in the Qur’ān that are not prophetic (cf. Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes, 16-81; on the miracles in the Qur’ān as models for the miracles of the saints, see D. Gril, Les fondements scripturaux).

Supernatural intervention in sacred history thus occurs in many forms. The miracle shows either divine omnipotence (see POWER AND IMPOTENCE) — with its fate of punishment and destruction, whether of peoples or individuals — or (divine) favor, bestowed above all on the prophets or others who have been chosen. Angels, the messengers (see MESSENGER) of the unseen (see HIDDEN AND THE HIDDEN), are often its heralds or its vehicle. The favor (see GRACE; BLESSING) is often portrayed as sustenance (q.v.) or protection (q.v.). The miraculous powers which the prophets or their followers receive may only be exercised with divine permission. Once this is granted, nothing can prevent their effectiveness; it is this, among other things, which sets them apart from magic. The miracles of resurrection, demonstrations of favor and omnipotence are intended to enable perception of divine action and to make a proclamation of the advent of the world to come. The miracle shares this eschatological function with revelation.

The prophetology and cosmological teaching undergirding these stories in the Qur’ān demonstrates to us the small role of the miracle that it permitted to its very first auditor, Muhammad himself.

The Prophet and miracles
While the attitude of earlier prophets, especially their endurance when put to the test is constantly recalled to Muhammad as a model to follow and a source of comfort, the miracles which served to confirm and authenticate their missions are denied him. In more than one passage of the Qur’ān we find him vainly asking God for a sign to convince his people: “If you could wish for a passage opening into the ground or a ladder up to the sky in order to give them a sign! If God had wanted to he would have gathered them all on guidance. Therefore do not be among those who are ignorant” (q 6:36; see IGNORANCE). Elsewhere are listed miracles sought by the Prophet: the simple descent (from heaven) of a book or an angel (q 6:7-8), the outpouring of a spring or a stream in a garden, a downpour from the skies, a house full of treasure, and his being transported to heaven (q 17:90-3). This last request appears in the sūra that begins with a reference to the journey by night (see ASCENSION). This shows that “the greatest signs” that the Prophet must contemplate during the course of his ascension are intended for him rather than for the unbelievers. The Qur’ān thus explains the relative pointlessness of miracles: since God has not given faith to the unbeliever, he is incapable of belief (see FREEDOM AND PREDESTINATION). Furthermore the refusal of divine signs and the coming of angels risks provoking divine punishment (e.g. q 25:20-2). Like others before him, Muhammad is accused of untruthfulness and magic (q 54:2; 74:24, etc.) and his people challenge him to bring about the punishment
that he proclaims. Confronted by such accusations, he is reminded of the pointlessness of miracles. Instead of this he must assert his own human nature (see impeccability) and repudiate all miraculous power (e.g. Q 6:50), but proclaim instead the revealed character of his inspiration and actions. This abolition of miracles is only an apparent contradiction of the prophetic models set forth as examples for him. The humanity and the weakness of other prophets, especially at the time of the miracles, receive great emphasis: the fear of Abraham during the visit of the angels (Q 51:28) or the fear of Moses confronting the magicians (Q 20:57). Jesus, as we have seen, only performed miracles with divine sanction (Q 3:49, 79; 13:38).

Nonetheless, the miracle is not completely absent from references to the life of the Prophet and his Companions (see companions of the prophet). Angels intervene to help believers at Badr (q.v.) and Ḥunayn (q.v.; Q 3:124-6; 8:9-13; 9:25-6). Although the Qurʾān does describe a magical action of the Prophet (ṣamaʿ, i.e. his throwing of stones in the face of the enemy at Badr, thus, according to tradition, causing the defeat of the Quraysh), it immediately denies the efficacy of this act, just as it lays bare the actions of the believers: "You have not killed them; it is God who has killed them, you did not advance, when you advanced; God advanced (ṣamaʿ)…" (Q 8:17). For the majority of religious commentators (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval), the splitting of the moon (q.v.) mentioned at the beginning of Q 54 (Sūrat al-Qamar, "The Moon") is indeed a miracle received by the Prophet to convince the Quraysh: "The hour is approaching and the moon is split asunder. But if they see a sign, they turn away or say: transient magic!" (Q 54:1-2). These verses, as we can see, lay particular stress upon the meaning of the sign and the charge of magic, and thus upon the pointlessness of the miracle for the unbelievers. Muḥammad does not perform miracles himself: this makes the divine act appear all the more striking, and indicates that the signification of the miracles of earlier prophets may be rediscovered in the revealed book and its verses and signs.

Miracles and revelation
At the same time as miracles are refused to the Prophet, the gauntlet is thrown down to jinn and men to produce a similar book or even ten sūras (Q 17:88; 11:12-3); elsewhere, the challenge is to produce a single sūra (Q 2:23; 10:38; see provocation). These passages have led theologians to say that the miracles of the Prophet are characterized by challenge (tahaddīn), and to elaborate the doctrine of the inimitable nature of the Qurʾān (iʿjāz). As a miracle is a display of omnipotence as well as of divine favor and mystery, the Qurʾān calls upon the Prophet and his followers to recognize its “miraculous” nature from the evidence of its signs and verses: “But it [the Qurʾān] provides clear signs (āyāt bayānitāt) in the breasts of those who have received knowledge. Only the unjust dispute our signs; they say, why are [miraculous] signs not sent down to him by his lord. Answer, the signs are close to (ʿinda) God and I am only one who gives a clear warning” (Q 29:49-50; see also Q 6:109). On the other hand, the Qurʾān contains all the signs and nothing has been omitted from it (cf. Q 6:37-8; 18:34); on the other, the signs are close to (ʿinda) God, as well as “in the breasts.” The miracle of the Qurʾān is therefore of the interior kind. The miracle, however, is also in creation, since it reveals in its many signs, which the Qurʾān has enumerated in a great number
of verses, the action and unity of God. In more than one passage, the response to a request for a miracle by the Prophet is a call to contemplate the signs of creation (e.g. Q 10:20 f.; 13:7 f.; see NATURE AS SIGNS). These signs are often symbols of resurrection just as the miracle foreshadows the world beyond, whether via the annihilation of the unjust or by the contemplation of the other world, where the extraordinary is ordinary (see REWARD AND PUNISHMENT).

In addition to this traditional view of the miracle of the Qur’ān, it should also be noted that one trend in modern Qur’ānic exegesis is the examination of the Qur’ān for predictions of the scientific discoveries of recent times — the so-called taṣfīr ‘ilmī. For more on this topic, see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: EARLY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY; SCIENCE AND THE QUR’ĀN.

But for the person who knows how to read the world, the ordinary signs of earthly life reflect the spiritual realm, just as the multiplication of a grain seven hundredfold foretells the reward of almsgivers (see ALMSGIVING) in the next world (Q 2:261). This is why the Qur’ān is astonished at the astonishment of men who have difficulty believing that a divine reminder should be given to them via a human intermediary. Thus prophecy and revelation are indeed “the miracle” in the true meaning of the word (Q 7:63, 69; 10:2; cf. 38:4-5; 50:2). Jinn describe the Qur’ān as “marvelous” (‘ąghaḥ) to indicate the difference between their inspiration and that of prophecy. In the same way, unbelievers marvel at resurrection while it constantly takes place before their eyes (Q 13:5).

Granted or denied, the miracle is indeed at the center of Qur’ānic discourse, of the prophethology, of the cosmology and of the eschatology of the sacred text.

Bibliography


Mischief see CORRUPTION

Misery see CORRUPTION

Misguidance see FREEDOM AND PREDESTINATION; ASTRAY; ERROR; GUIDANCE

Denis Gril
Mockery

Insulting or contemptuous action or speech. Mockery (h-z-‘, s-kh-r) figures regularly in the Qur’ān. The nouns and verb forms derived from h-z-‘ appear forty-three times, those derived from s-kh-r fifteen times. Both are used synonymously as is attested by Q 6:10 and Q 21:41. Mockery in the Qur’ān usually expresses disbelief (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF) in God and is thus closely linked with the subject of disbeliefing laughter (q.v.). It does so in a more or less formulaic way and in a manner that underlines the assumed universality of Muhammad’s prophetic experience: God’s prophets are derided (wa-mā ya’tihum min rasūlin illā kānū bihi yastahzī‘āna, “No messenger [q.v.] came to them whom they did not mock”; Q 15:11; also Q 36:36; 43:7; see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). The formula itakhadha huzuwān, “He took in mockery,” typically describes God’s signs (q.v.) and his messengers as being the objects of mockery (e.g. Q 2:231; 18:56; 106; 21:36; 25:41; 31:6; 43:35; 45:9). In Q 5:57-8, it is the believers’ religion (q.v.) and prayer (q.v.) that become the objects of mockery and playful joking (huzuwān wa-la’īban). Only once do the unbelievers suspect their prophet Moses (q.v.) of mocking them (Q 2:67) — as if their roles were reversed.

The Qur’ān counters such ridicule with threats of past and future revenge (see VENGEANCE): God will punish the mockers with hell (see HELL AND HELLFIRE) at the last judgment (q.v.) and — lest this should not impress the unbelievers — has already done so before in specific cases (see PUNISHMENT STORIES; REWARD AND PUNISHMENT). The most common formula for this is the strangely suggestive phrase wa-hāqa bihim mā kānū bihi yastahzī‘āna, “They shall be/were encompassed by that at which they mocked” (future: Q 11:8; 39:49; 45:33; past: Q 16:34; 40:83; 46:26). A variant substitutes wa-hāqa bihim mā… with fa-saqfā yatīthim anbā‘u mā… “News (q.v.) shall reach them of that…” (Q 6:5; cf. 26:6), with kadidhabā bi-l-haqq, “They denied the truth (q.v.),” as the preceding misdemeanor (see LIE). The complete argument runs thus: “Messengers indeed were mocked (h-z-‘) before you. Then those that scoffed at them (s-kh-r) were encompassed by that at which they mocked (h-z-‘)” (Q 6:10; 21:41). The idea of retaliation (q.v.) is best expressed in instances of exact reversal: God will mock the mocking hypocrites (see HYPOCRITES AND HYPOCRISY) and whoever ridicules the believers (Q 2:15; 9:79). A prophet like Noah (q.v.) can say the same: “If you scoff at us we shall surely scoff at you as you scoff now!” (Q 11:38) — God’s punishment is imminent. As for the mocking hypocrites, their excuse — “We were only chatting and joking (l-b’b)” — will not be accepted (Q 9:64-6). The Qur’ānic discourse does not allow for anything beyond truth and its denial; the realm of play, fiction and joking remained ontologically incomprehensible and morally suspect in relation to these narrow premises.

There are three explicit orders regarding mockery, all of them prohibitive. The first warns the believers against befriending those who ridicule their religion and their call for prayer (Q 5:57-8); believers must not stay when their companions start to mock God’s signs (Q 4:140 with a probable reference back to Q 5:57-8). The provision is, of course, a variant of the universal wisdom to avoid bad company. The simple “Do not take God’s signs/verses (q.v.) in mockery”
of q 2:231 seems more loaded when interpreted in its context. This passage falls, in fact, in the middle of the rules of divorce and remarriage (see marriage and divorce). This might well mean that they are not to apply God’s rules in jest, thus pointing to an unspoken fear: that a body of rules accommodating whims invites men to treat divorce as a joke and thus abuse God’s revelation (see revelation and inspiration). Q 49:11, finally, forbids all believers, male and female, to ridicule each other as the person mocked at may be better than his or her mocker. The prohibition is uttered in a series of rules against anything likely to split the Muslim community (see community and society in the Qur’ān; commandments; boundaries and precepts). They jointly constitute a call for peace and harmony among the believers who are idealized as brothers (Ammann, Vorbild und Verunruht, 35-7; see brother and brotherhood). Further occurrences of h-z-‘ and s-ḥ-ḥ-r are to be found in q 2:212; 9:79; 13:32; 15:95; 23:110; 30:10; 37:12-4; 38:63; 39:56.

Ludwig Ammann


Moderation

The action or an act of moderating, i.e. to abate the excessiveness of an act, to render less violent, intense, rigorous, extreme or burdensome. This concept appears in various contexts in the Qur’ān. For instance, q 17:33 calls for the self-restriction of those who have been given the right to avenge the death of one’s kin (see blood money; vengeance; retaliation), and q 17:110 advises neither to utter the prayer (q.v.) aloud nor in a silent voice “and to seek a way between that” (cf. q 49:3; 7:205).

The moderation of God’s punishment (see chastisement and punishment; reward and punishment) is expressed eleven times in the Qur’ān by the adjective ḥalîm, forbearing or clement (see God and his attributes; mercy). Q 2:225 and 235 conclude that God is “forgiving and forbearing” (ghafûrûn ḥalîmûn), since he does not judge the fulfillment of the believers’ oaths (q.v.) and their promises by what they have expressed unintentionally (see breaking trusts and contracts). Al-Zamakhshart (d. 538/1144) explains God’s forbearance (ḥilm) as suspension of punishment (lû ya’atiyu bî l-siqûba) and mildness from tyranny (ḥalîm ‘an al-jâ’ir, see oppression; kings and rulers), a fact that itself is part of God’s promise to mankind (Kashshâf, i, 394; 473; 510). Halîm also appears as an attribute of three outstanding humans. Abraham (Q.v.; Ibrâhîm, q 9:114, 11:75), the son he is about to offer (q 37:101), and — in an ironic allegation used by his adversaries — the prophet Shu’âyb (Q.v.; q 11:87) are considered halîm, “patient, not rushing to take revenge if wronged” (Jâlalayn, ad q 11:75). These passages together with evidence from pre-Islamic poetry (see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān; poetry and poets) led Goldziher to conclude that hilm in the sense of calmness, moderation, and resistance to the vengeful ways of pre-Islamic tribal society is a central virtue in Islam (see virtues and vices, commanding and forbidding; community and society in the Qur’ān; ethics and the Qur’ān). He assumed that hilm and not knowledge (‘ilm), should be considered the opposite of the pre-Islamic ‘Age of Ignorance’ (q.v.;
Moderation as a principle of human action expressed in the roots ṣ-w-ṭ and ṣ-w-ṣ appears in six verses. The value judgment on this principle is ambiguous. In Q 31:19, Luqmān (q.v.) calls on his son to be moderate in his walk and to lower his voice because God loves no one who is pompous and boastful (q 31:18; see boast; arrogance). The invitation is expressed through the imperative of the verb qasada that originally means “to direct oneself towards something” and the verse could have been understood as a demand “to straighten one’s walk” (on this and the connection to the Aramaic Ahīqār texts, cf. Horovitz, Kt., 136). The derived meaning of “following the middle course” is more directly expressed through the eighth form of this verb. Q 5:66 mentions a “moderate community” (ummata n muqtaṣadatun) among the People of the Book (q.v.) who have not engaged in the trespassing of their peers (see boundaries and precepts). In Q 33:32 a moderate part is also considered among the chosen group of God’s servants. Its place is between those who wrong themselves and some who outdo each other in good deeds (q.v.). Q 31:32 connects a moderate attitude with negative associations. Those who are µuqtaṣid seem to lack commitment in their belief. Q 68:26 and Q 2:143 express, however, the positive connotations of a “middle position” (awsat and wasat). This is most explicit in the latter verse where the believers are described as a “community in the middle” (ummata n wasatan) because they serve both as witnesses against the people (shahadāt alā l-nās) and they accept the Prophet as a witness for themselves (see witnessing and testifying).

The exegetical literature connects the two concepts of a well-balanced middle with that of a mediator. It refers to the usage among the Arabs (q.v.) and translates the word wasat in Q 2:143 as khīyān, “choice, option.” There is little explanation for what this means. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Ṭafsīr, iii, 142), for instance, starts at a different point and argues that wasat stands for the middle of two extremes and describes the moderation of the Muslim believers: “They are neither exaggerators (abl al-ḥbulaww) in respect to religion, (…) nor those who reduce something (abl al-ṭaṣqīr).” Al-Ṭabarī interprets wasat therefore as ‘adl, “equity,” and concludes that this is what khīyān means. The identification of wasat with ‘adl, “justice,” already appears in the ḥadīth (Tirmīdhi, Ṣaḥīh, Ṭafsīr al-Qur’ān, 3, 8; see ḥadīth and the Qur’ān) and is later supported by various arguments (Rāzī, Ṭafsīr, 4, 108 f.). The same interpretation is also applied to muqtaṣid (Baydawī, Anwār, i, 266 f.). For Sayyid Qūṭ (d. 1966; ‘ẓilāl, i, 130 f.), the ummata n wasatan of Q 2:143 expresses the central place of the Muslim community among humankind. The Muslim community is endowed with ‘adl, understood as equitable justice (qist) and demonstrates it towards humankind (see justice and injustice). The moderation of one’s commitment, however, was, following Q 31:32 and 33:32, seldom regarded as an exemplary behavior and al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) book al-Iṣṭiḥād fī l-iṣṭiḥād, for instance, does not argue for a moderation of one’s convictions but refers to the moderate depth of instruction in the Muslim creed (see creeds) within this book.

Frank Griffel

Bibliography

Modesty

Evincing decorum in one’s actions and dress. The Qurʾān enjoins Muslims to observe modesty in their clothing and honesty in their behavior. It is said in Q 7:26 “We have sent down raiment (see clothing) to hide your nakedness (see nudity) and splendid garments, but the raiment of piety (q.v.) is the best.” Instead of specifying or requiring any particular form of clothing or covering for Muslims (see veil), the Qurʾān sets forth fairly broad standards of principle regarding modesty. Q 24:31 states “Tell the believing women… not to display their adornment except that part of it which appears outwardly” (see women and the Qurʾān; belief and unbelief). Q 24:30 reads “Tell the male believers to avert their eyesight…” and Q 33:59, “O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the women of the Muslims to let down over them a part of their outer garments; it is more suitable (dhālika adhā) that they will thus be recognized and not molested” (see wives of the prophet; family of the prophet). The term hawān means modesty or humility in Q 25:63: “The servants of [God], most gracious are those who walk in the earth in humility, and when the ignorant (see ignorance) address them, they say “Peace!” (see arrogance). Isṭalīḥ means “in a bashful way” in Q 28:25; “Afterwards one of the [damsels] came back to him, walking bashfully (ʿalā stihyāʾīn)...” In the absence of Qurʾānic specification, it is the responsibility of divergent schools of law (see law and the Qurʾān) to define the way such principles should be interpreted and executed on the basis of textual indicators, analogy, or other methods of legal reasoning such as ḥisābun and ʿistīlāḥ (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval; traditional disciplines of Qurʾānic study).

The Qurʾān teaches extreme simplicity with regard to dress. At the time of the Prophet, the basic articles of clothing for both male and female consisted of an undergarment, a body shirt, a long dress, gown, or tunic, and an outer garment such as a mantle coat or wrap, footgear consisting of shoes or sandals, and a head covering. As underwear would interfere with the circulation of air, it is said that originally none was worn, a practice that may have been common before the coming of Islam. The ʿizār (undergarment) and the sirwāl (under-drawers) were worn, however, at the time of the Prophet. We may consider undergarments as one of the accommodations to the new moral sensibilities since they were an effective mark of modesty (see ethics and the Qurʾān; pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān).

A central concept in Sunnī law concerning dress is the ʿawra. The ʿawra is that part of the human body that is to be covered in ordinary public settings. The term is perhaps best translated as “the modesty zone,” meaning that part of the body the covering of which is required for purposes of public modesty or decency. Since indecent exposure is one of the factors that, according to most jurists, invalidate a prayer (q.v.), it was
necessary for the Muslim jurists to clarify the concept of indecent exposure. It is in this connection that they go to great lengths to explain what constitutes the 'awra. Generally speaking, the 'awra that must be covered in the ritual prayer is identical with the 'awra that must be covered in ordinary public settings, although a few authors draw a distinction between an "'awra in prayer" and an "'awra outside of prayer." In addition to those sections of the books that deal with ritual prayer, the subject of dress emerges in discussions of nazar, “looking,” which are found in the “Book of marriage” in the Shafi’i, Maliki, and Hanafi schools [see MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE; CHASTITY; ABSTINENCE; ADULTERY AND FORNICATION]. Within Hanafi law books, however, the subject of nazar is placed variously under “Book of preference” (kitab al-istihaṣan), “Book of abominations” (kitab al-karāhiya, see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR) or “Book of forbidding and permitting” (kitab al-ḥazr wa-l-ibāha, see LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL, FORBIDDEN). Under these headings are placed the discussions of what parts of the body may be seen and what parts may not be seen.

As a whole, the Hanafi, Shafi’i and Maliki schools all agree that the entire body of a free woman is her ‘awra except her face and palms. The Hanafi school is the only school that regards the palms of a free woman as part of her ‘awra. The four schools also agree that the area between the navel and the knees is the ‘awra of a man. Most Shafi’i and all Maliki and Hanafi schools exclude the navel and the knees from a man’s ‘awra, while the Hanafi jurists agree that the navel is not part of the ‘awra but the knee is. The Hanafis generally regard the ‘awra of the slave woman the same as the ‘awra of the man, although some regard a slave woman’s bosom (ṣadr) as part of the “‘awra in prayer,” not as part of the “‘awra outside prayer” [see SLAVES AND SLAVERY].

According to the Malikis and Hanbalis, a man is allowed to look at and touch the entire body of a child who is not yet seven years old [see CHILDREN; MATURITY]. According to the Shafi’i, a man is allowed to look at the whole body of free female children except what is between the navel and knees. The Hanbalis hold that a man is allowed to look at the head, face, neck, hands, shanks and feet of free female minors under the age of nine. The Hanafis say that there is no rule of ‘awra for a little child’s body since there is no fear of temptation in the looking and touching.

The voice of a woman is sometimes considered part of the ‘awra. Concerning the voice of a free adult female stranger [see STRANGERS AND FOREIGNERS], there are different opinions among the Hanafi jurists. In the opinion of al-Ḥaskāfī (d. 1088/1677), the voice of a woman is not ‘awra. The opposing view is expressed in the succinct phrase, “The melody of the woman is ‘awra” (naghmat al-mar’ā ‘awra). Ibn ʿAbīdīn (d. 1258/1842) says that it is recorded in al-Kāfi, authored by al-Marwazi al-Ḥakim al-Shahīd (d. 334/945): “Do not follow [a woman] in public, because her voice is ‘awra” (Ibn ʿAbīdīn, Hāshiya, 406). One of the conditions that allow women to visit a mosque (q.v.) is that women are forbidden to raise their voice during the prayer. For the Prophet said: “Glorification of God (q.v.) is for men, tapping the hands is for women” (al-tasbiḥ lil-nisā‘ wa-l-tasfiq lil-nisā‘). If the imām (q.v.) has to be warned of an error, men should say subḥān Allāh, “God be glorified,” but women should only tap their hands. See also SEX AND SEXUALITY.

Shiu-Sian Angel Hsu

Bibliography
Monasticism and Monks

From well before the rise of Islam, and then well into the later Middle Ages, monasticism was a distinctive feature of Christian life, both in the milieu in which Islam was born (see Christians and Christianity; South Arabia, Religion in Pre-Islamic), and in the Christian communities subsequently integrated into the world of Islam. Accordingly, from the perspective of its relationship to Islam, one must consider the phenomenon of Christian monasticism under three headings. In the first place, there is its presence in the Arabic-speaking communities before and up to the time of Muḥammad (see Arabs; Arabic Language). Then, there are the passages in the Qur’an that mention “monks” (three times) and “monasticism” (once). Finally, “monks” and “monasticism” are discussed in the Islamic texts that both interpret the Qur’an and set the boundaries of Islamic life in later times.

Already by the fifth century monks and their monasteries were plentiful on the borders of Arabia. From the deserts of the Sinai (q.v.) peninsula northward into Syria/Palestine (see Syria), eastward along the edge of the Syrian desert into Mesopotamia and southward into Iraq (q.v.), monastic communities flourished. Monastic institutions were at the heart of Christian church-life in nearby Egypt (q.v.) and Ethiopia (see Abyssinia). In a number of places, such as the monastery of St. Eu- thymius in the Judean desert, the monks actively fostered the growth and development of Christianity among the neighboring Arab tribes, who then had the monastery as the center of their religious life. Similarly, the shrines of St. Simeon the Style at Dayr Sam’an/Telanissos and of St. Sergius at Ruṣafa/Sergiopolis in Syria regularly attracted large numbers of Arab tribesmen among their frequent visitors. On the borders between the territories of the Byzantine Romans and the Arab tribes of Arabia proper, the Ghassānid tribal federation, allies of the Byzantines (q.v.), presided over a widely distributed population of monks and monasteries to an extent that a closer examination of texts and archeological data are only lately revealing (see Archaeology and the Qur’an). Similarly, on the northeastern frontier between the territories controlled by the Persian Sassanids and the tribesmen of Arabia, in the territories of the Lakhmid allies of the Persians, centered near the city of Hira in lower Mesopotamia, monastic communities flourished. Natively Arabic-speaking monks seem to have made up a large part of these monastic populations, usually with a Syriac theological and liturgical heritage (see Syriac and the Qur’an); Arab pastoralists regularly sojourned among the Syriac-speaking Arameans of the area.

From these monastic centers on the near periphery of Arabia, in the fifth and sixth centuries monks and monasticism penetrated into Arabia proper. Remains of their establishments have been uncovered along the southern coasts of Arabia as well as in cities in the interior such as Najrān (q.v.). A few Syriac texts speak of the activities of monks in Arabia, and a number of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabic texts similarly record their presence. Poets, for example, in the classical qasidas sometimes mention the lights burning in the cells of monks in the dark of night (cf. Cheikho, Le christianisme). More helpfully, the biographical traditions concerned with Muḥammad’s early years mention several encounters between monks and the young prophet-to-be, most famously his encounter with the monk Baḥīra, who reportedly recognized the sign of prophecy on his
body (see prophets and prophethood). A monk Fīmiyyūn is also named in the sīra (see Sīra and the Qurʿān) in connection with the establishment of Christianity in Najrān (see Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, i, 31). And the early Persian Companion of Muḥammad (see companions of the prophet), Salmān, is said to have come to the profession of Islam due to his earlier association with monks, one of whom had premonitions about the coming of Muḥammad and Islam (see Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, i, 217-8). These and other mentions and allusions in Arabic texts to monks and monasticism in the world in which Islam was born testify to their common presence among the Christians known to Muḥammad and the Qurʿān. They do not suggest a wide and well-established monastic presence in the Ḥijāz and its environs, in the heart of Arabia. But by Muḥammad’s day monks and monasticism were certainly known to be an integral feature of Christian life, and monks may well have been prominent among the Christians actually known to Muḥammad.

In the Qurʿān, “monks” (rabbān) are mentioned three times (q 5:82; 9:31, 34) and “monasticism” (rabbāniyya) once (q 57:27). In general, one may say that the Qurʿān’s attitude to monks mirrors its ambivalent attitude towards Christians at large. On the one hand, the Qurʿān says that the reason Muslims will find those claiming to be Christians “closest in affection to the believers” is that “there are among them priests (qissiyyūn) and monks, and they are not arrogant” (q 5:82; see arrogance). On the other hand, the Qurʿān also says that Jews (see Jews and Judaism) and Christians respectively “take their rabbis (ahbār) and monks as lords (arbaḥ, see Lord) besides God” (q 9:31). And the text goes on to say, “many of the rabbis and monks devour the wealth (q.v.) of the people unjustly and turn [others] from the way of God” (Q 9:34; see path or way). While in the many translations and interpretations of the Qurʿān into western languages there are a number of variations in rendering the technical terms in these passages, usually due to lexical or exegetical considerations, the sense of the judgments about the monks remains the same in all of them.

In one passage the Qurʿān addresses the institution of monasticism itself but there is significant disagreement among commentators and translators, both medieval and modern (see exegesis of the Qurʿān: classical and medieval; exegesis of the Qurʿān: early modern and contemporary), Muslim and non-Muslim, about what the text actually says (cf. Beck, Das christliche Mönchtum). In one understanding, the text speaks of the followers of Jesus (q.v.), of whom God says, “We put into the hearts (see heart) of those who followed him mercy (q.v.), compassion, and monasticism; they innovated/re-invented/invented it; we prescribed for them only to please God, but they did not exercise a proper compliance. So we provided their reward for those of them who believed; many of them are sinful” (Q 57:27; see reward and punishment; sin, major and minor). On this reading monasticism is understood to be something initially instituted by God; subsequently Jesus’ followers re-invented it and introduced innovations into it. Alternatively, most Muslim interpreters have understood the verse to say, “We put into the hearts of those who followed him mercy and compassion. Monasticism they invented — only to seek to please God. We did not prescribe it for them. And they did not exercise a proper compliance. So we provided their reward for those of them who believed; many of them are sinful.” On this reading monasticism is understood to be a human innova-
tion totally, not something mandated by God. Most interpreters favor some form of the second reading, regarding the first one to be the product of a faulty grammatical construction on the part of those who would accept it (see esp. Tabari, Tafsir; Zamakhshari, Kashshaf, ad Q 57:27; cf. Gimaret, Jubbâ’i, 787; see Grammar and the Qur’a’n). Nevertheless, some earlier Muslim exegetes and some modern scholars have in fact entertained the theoretical possibility of some form of the first reading (cf. McAuliffe, Qur’anic, 260–84).

Traditionally, Muslim scholars have considered monasticism to be an instance of the Christians’ putting religious burdens on people beyond what God has mandated and then not being able to support them. By way of contrast, the prophetic tradition (hadith, see Hadith and the Qur’a’n) according to which, “There is no monasticism in Islam,” gradually gained currency among Muslims. While many scholars have questioned the authenticity of this tradition, it is nevertheless widely reported and accepted. Similarly, another controversial prophetic tradition says, “The monasticism of this community is jihād (q.v.).” These traditions seem to have come into prominence in the context of debates among Muslim scholars in the early centuries about the legitimacy of Sufism (cf. Massignon, Essay, 99; see Sufism and the Qur’a’n). Muslim scholars have also been careful to point out that the disapproval of monasticism should not be mistaken for a disapproval of the hermit’s way of life (see Asceticism), or the practice of a religious retreat, including sexual abstinence (q.v.), undertaken for a time for legitimate religious reasons. Rather, what is rejected in monasticism, according to many scholars, is the commitment to lifelong celibacy that the Christian institution entails. Celibacy is seen by some commentators to be the innovation introduced by Christians into what Muslims could consider to be an otherwise acceptable, even divinely instituted, monasticism.

After the rise of Islam and the consolidation of the territories of the Christian, ecclesiastical provinces of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem under Muslim rule, Christian monks writing in Syriac, Greek and Arabic were the first to call attention to the doctrinal and moral challenges of Islam to Christians (see Ethics and the Qur’a’n; Theology and the Qur’a’n). Monks were also the first Christians to adopt Arabic as an ecclesiastical language, to write theology in Arabic and to translate the Christian Bible and other classical Christian texts into Arabic. In the agreements drawn up to govern the relationships between Muslims and Christians in early Islamic times, monks were often exempted from the payment of the poll tax (q.v.; jizya), and often the authority of the Prophet himself was claimed for this dispensation. Monasteries were often considered to be privileged places by Muslims and Christians alike, where help could be sought and interreligious conversations could take place. Some of them claimed to have patents offering them special protection. Contrariwise monks and monasteries were sometimes targets of anti-Christian attacks. In Arabic secular literature from the early period a genre of poetic writing often called diyārīyāt, or “monastic poems,” developed that celebrated monasteries as places of revelry. See also Church; Informants.

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Money

Measure of value or medium of exchange. Money as such is barely attested in the Qurʾān. A small number of terms refer to coins of indistinct weight and fineness. Some other words denote vague units of weight (see WEIGHTS AND MEASURES) or have no monetary significance, though they often appear as monetary terms in later classical Arabic (see ARABIC LANGUAGE). Words or phrases identifying definite units of value are absent.

The phrase darāḥim ma’dūda, “a counted number of silver coins,” in q 12 (Sūrat Yūsuf, “Joseph”; q 12:20) indicates silver coins of no particular weight and fineness.

Al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144; Kashshāf, ad loc.) emphasizes here that the term darāḥim means “not gold (q.v.) coins” (ay lā danānīr). Most early commentators speculate on the number of coins implied, suggesting numbers from twenty to forty. The verse agrees generally with the Hebrew Bible where Joseph (q.v.) is sold for twenty shekels (see SCRIPTURE AND THE QURʾĀN). The Qurʾānic reference, however, is anachronistic since it refers specifically to coins and not standard weights of silver. Modern scholarship places the historical figure of Joseph in the early second millennium b.c.e., long before the invention of coinage in the seventh century b.c.e.

The term wariq, sometimes read waraq, in q 18:19 also refers generally to silver coins. It may derive from the thin silver drhams of the Sasanians, particularly the later Sasanians. These coins resemble leaves, familiar from the cognate waraq. Wahb b. Munabbīh (d. ca. 114/732) equates it with darāḥim (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, viii, 197). Ikrima (d. 105/723-4), Ibn Ṭabīq (d. ca. 150/767) and Abdallāh b. Ubayd b. Umayr use it in a lengthy exegetical story to mean coins plainly identifying the king who struck them (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, viii, 197-203).

Other terms mark only standard weights or vague units of weight. The sole attestation of dinār appears as a fraction of qintār (q 3:75). Since the term derives from the Roman denarius and Byzantine dinarion, it may refer to a weight of gold. The reference differs somewhat from later classical Arabic where dinār refers variously to a denomination of Muslim gold coins, a standard unit of weight corresponding to the weight of this denomination or a gold coin of any standard.

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of weight. It appears in a number of verses as an indication of a very small weight — glossed variously as of an ant, or an atom or a mite (mithqāl dharratin, Q 4:40; 106:1; 34:3; 22:99:7, 8) — or, specifically, as the weight of a mustard seed (mithqāl ḥabbatin min khardalīn, Q 21:47; 31:16; see SCIENCE AND THE QUR’ĀN: NATURE AS SIGNS). In contrast, the term later usually identifies a standard weight corresponding to the weight of Sasanian drahms or Muslim dinars, slightly more than four grams, or to Sasanian drahms themselves.

No other terms in the Qur’ān shed any light on the existence or use of money. The term ‘ṣin occurs without any monetary sense though in later Arabic it often signifies gold, gold coins or ready cash. References to gold (dhahab) and silver (fīdda) usually appear in connection with bracelets, vessels and platters (see INSTRUMENTS; CUPS AND VESSELS; FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS; MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE QUR’ĀN; METALS AND MINERALS).

The language of the Qur’ān reflects generally the monetary situation of the Hijāz of the early seventh century c.e. (see GEOGRAPHY; HISTORY AND THE QUR’ĀN). Coinage circulated in small quantities from the neighboring lands of Syria and Iran but played a very minor role in its commerce (see CARAVAN; SELLING AND BUYING). It was only loosely tied, if at all, to any system of weights and measures. See also NUMISMATICS; EPIGRAPHY AND THE QUR’ĀN.

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Bibliography


MONTHS

Monks
see MONASTICISM AND MONKS

Monotheism
see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM

MONTHS

The portions into which the year is divided, each one corresponding approximately to the length of a complete revolution of the moon (q.v.). As with many Qur’ānic notions, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the original meaning of the word “month” from its later exegetical elaboration (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL). Despite efforts to identify this original meaning either contextually or by reference to parallel passages, the influences and stereotypes of this rich exegetical tradition impinge heavily upon attempts to understand this Qur’ānic word. The only way to avoid these influences and stereotypes is to become a “clean slate” and to approach this term without any prior knowledge of the developed exegetical tradition, an epistemological stance that is difficult or impossible to achieve.

The term “month” shahr (pl. shuḥūr and ashhuqr) occurs twenty-one times in the text of the Qur’ān: four times in what are generally believed to be “Meccan” sūras and seventeen times in the ones which are
usually associated with the “Medinan” period of Muḥammad’s life (cf. Amir-Ali, The “month”; see Chronology and the Qurʾān). In the four Meccan sûras only the singular grammatical form is used, although in two instances it refers to more than one month. In the sûras from the Medinan period it appears in the singular, dual and two different forms of the plural. Perhaps the earliest sûra to mention the term is q 97:3, which deals with the famous night of revelation or of the divine determination (laylat al-qadr, see Night of Power). In q 46:15, the singular form appears in the phrase “thirty months.” Finally, in a rather obscure passage from q 34:12, God gives Solomon (q.v.; Sulaymān) power over the winds (see Air and Wind), which “made a month’s journey in the morning and a month’s journey in the evening.” In the sûras from the Medinan period the word “month” is usually associated with various religious rites (e.g. the slaughter of sacrificial animals and the minor and greater pilgrimages, that is the ‘umra and the ḥajj; see Pilgrimage; Consecration of Animals; Sacrifice) as well with the fast (see Fasting) of Ramadān (q.v.). In such contexts, it is often qualified by the epithet “sacred” or “holy” (al-shahr al-ḥarām, e.g. q 2:194, 217; 5:2, 97).

It is often argued that some of these passages, namely q 5:2 and 97, refer to an ancient religious festival and pilgrimage which the pagan tribes of Arabia celebrated in Rajab (Wellhausen, Reste, 98-101; see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān; South Arabia, Religion in Pre-Islamic). Originally observed in spring, Rajab was the month of the ‘umra pilgrimage, during which pre-Islamic Arabs (q.v.) abstained from warfare (see War) and brought sacrificial animals to the Meccan sanctuary (ibid., 94; Kister, Rajab, 191-2; see Geography; Mecca; Sacred Precincts). Whether the festival of Rajab also involved a period of obligatory fasting remains unclear. The special place, however, of this month in Muslim popular piety, which appears to be a carryover from the pagan Arabian past (see Age of Ignorance), is richly attested by Muslim literature and ethnographic evidence from various areas of the Muslim world (Kister, Rajab, 191-2). At the same time, q 9:5 mentions several sacred months (al-ashkur al-ḥurūm, cf. q 2:197); furthermore, q 2:197 specifies that the ḥajj should take place “in months well known.” These statements caused some confusion among Muslim interpreters who could not understand why the plural form (and not the dual or the singular) was used in these passages. Those who held that two Arabian “sacred” months are implied, namely Rajab, which initially was the season of the lesser pilgrimage (‘umma) and Dhū l-Ḥijja, which was the month of the ḥajj proper, were unable to explain why the dual form of the word shahr was not used here. Others, such as al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), considered the plural form to be a reference to the months that immediately precede Dhū l-Ḥijja, namely Shawwāl and Dhū l-Qa‘da, all of which formed a triad of holy months (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, ii, 54; cf. Ali, Holy Qurʾān, 79, n. 217). This explanation is tenuous. While the sacredness of Dhū l-Qa‘da is abundantly attested by both the pre-Islamic and early Islamic traditions, Shawwāl did not play any special role in either. Nor was it protected by the taboo against violence which was associated with the four sacred months mentioned in q 9:36 (see Murder; Fighting; Bloodshed). Most Muslim commentators agreed that the passage in question refers to Dhū l-Qa‘da, Dhū l-Ḥijja, al-Muḥarram and perhaps also to Rajab.

A number of Western scholars accepted this explanation (see Post-Enlightenment Academic Study of the Qurʾān). They
provided different reasons, however, for the sacredness of these months. J. Wellhausen (Reste, 88) argued that before Islam most of Dhū l-Qā‘da was occupied by annual festivities and fairs at ‘Ukāẓ and Majanna, whereas the first two weeks of Dhū l-Hijja were dedicated to the annual fairs and pilgrimage rites at Dhū l-Majāz, ‘Arafa, and Minā. As for al-Muharram, in Wellhausen’s view, it was the first month of the ancient Arabian calendar (q.v.), which was originally celebrated in autumn with the annual hajj. He also argued that Rajab was its spring counterpart, corresponding to the Jewish Passover (ibid., 98-9; see Jews and Judaism). Over the centuries, both months gradually moved from their original places due to the inability of pre-Islamic Arabs to keep proper record of time (q.v.). Thus, by the time of Muḥammad’s life Rajab was celebrated in autumn, while the hajj now took place in spring. According to Wellhausen, the month of the hajj eventually turned into three consecutive months due to local differences in time-reckoning as well as the desire on the part of the Quraysh (q.v.) to accommodate all prospective pilgrims from across Arabia. Interesting as this explanation is, it seems rather far-fetched and fails to account for the fact that al-Muharram is a relatively late name of the month of Safar I (see e.g. ʿLisān al-ʿArab, iv, 463), which together with Ṣafar II and the other “paired” months of the Arab calendar formed what Wellhausen described as the “Wintersemester” (ibid., 97). Unless it can be determined when and why Ṣafar I became a sacred month, it is difficult to accept Wellhausen’s thesis without serious reservations (see Sanctity and the Sacred).

Q 9:36 is also significant in that it stipulates twelve as the proper number of the months of the year, which it describes as being part of “the right” or “true” religion (q.v.). Furthermore, the verse that follows (q. 9:37) contains what some scholars regard as the prohibition to “postpone” or “transfer” (nāsi‘) the sacred month from its usual place. The exact meaning of this passage and especially of the term nāsi‘ mentioned here still eludes both Muslim and Western researchers. A. Moberg (An-Nasī‘) suggested a compelling solution to this problem. In elaborating on the Muslim exegetical tradition Moberg argued that the verse in question refers to the intercalation of an additional month every two or three years by the pre-Islamic Arabs who strove to keep their lunar calendar in line with the seasonal one. According to Moberg, this practice was necessitated by the particularity of the lunar calendar, whose months total an average of about 354 days per year as opposed to the 365 days of its solar/seasonal counterpart. The difference of approximately eleven days per year was made up by the intercalation, which, according to some Muslim authors, was entrusted to certain members of the Bani Kināna tribe (see Tribes and Clans). As a result, pre-Islamic Arabs found themselves living by a combined lunar-solar calendar, which facilitated their trade with the agricultural populations of the Fertile Crescent and Mesopotamia (see Iraq: Caravan), who, quite naturally, relied on a seasonal calendar (Paret, Mohammed, 19-20; Beeston, Epigraphic, 18-9).

In consequence of the intercalation, the Arab tribes faced the problem of how to deal with three successive sacred months, which had been traditionally associated with the hajj, namely Dhū l-Qā‘da, Dhū l-Hijja, and al-Muharram. Since the intercalary month was inserted after the last month of the year (i.e. Dhū l-Hijja), they could treat it as profane and thus engage in raids and warfare against their neighbors (see Expeditions and Battles). Alternatively, they could declare it sacred and
hence observe “God’s peace,” as required by Arabian custom. In the former case, the succession of three holy months would be interrupted and the original sacred month would be separated from its two predecessors by an intervening profane month. In the latter case, however, the original sacred month (Dhū l-Qa‘da) would lose its sacred status and that would be transferred (nasa‘a) to the intercalated month.

That neither solution was satisfactory for the fledgling Muslim community is attested by Q 9:37, which, according to the tradition, was revealed during the last year of the Prophet’s life. Whether the practice condemned by Q 9:37 involved actual manipulation of the calendar in the form of intercalation or was simply the realignment of sacred and profane months within a year is a moot point (see e.g. Effendi, Mémoire; Fück, Zur an-nast; Plessner, Review). Later, F.C. de Blois (Ta’rikh) suggested that a prototype of this practice can be found in an early Sabaean inscription (see archaeology and the Qur’an). There, a Sabaean community asks God’s forgiveness for deferring certain ritual activities until a later date. If we accept the traditional dating of Q 9:37, which places it in the tenth year after the emigration (q.v.; hijra) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina (q.v.), i.e. shortly before the Prophet’s death, it can be argued that the prohibition of the nasi‘ was occasioned by the desire on the part of the Muslim community and its leader to dissociate themselves from the practices of their pagan neighbors and to reassert themselves as a totally new religious community (see Islam). This line of argument could further suggest that it also marked the rupture with the Judaic tradition, whose adherents practiced intercalation to keep their religious holidays within the same season. Seen from this perspective, the prohibition of intercalation may fall into the same category as the relocation of the fast of the ‘Āshūra to Ramaḍān or the change of the direction of the prayer from Jerusalem (q.v.) to the Meccan sanctuary (see ka’ba; qibla). In other words, it may constitute either conscious or unconscious assertion of a separate identity by the new religious community and its leader.

A review of Qur’anic passages that contain the word “month” reveals that it is often linked to the lunar calendar. Thus, in Q 2:185, the word shahr seems to denote the new moon that signals the beginning of a new calendar month. This usage is richly attested by Arab lexicographers who trace the etymology of the word to the root sh-h-r, “to be apparent,” or “to manifest one/itself” (Liṣān al-‘Arab, iv, 431-3; cf. Ṭabarī, Ta’ṣīr, i, 552). This meaning is further confirmed by epigraphic evidence from south Arabia, where sh-h-r was “a synonym for the first day of the calendar-month” (Beeston, Epigraphic, 8; see epigraphy and the Qur’an; Arabic script). In many verses, the new moon is expressly described as the measurement of time par excellence. A typical example is Q 2:186: “They will question you concerning the new moons (al-ahilla). Say: ‘They are appointed times for the people, and the pilgrimage.’” This and other similar verses indicate that the beginning of the month or of the year must be established by an actual observation of the new moon (Q 10:5; cf. 71:16). According to Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 69/688), the meaning of this verse is that “by means of it (i.e. the new moon) [the people] determine the affairs of their religion, the waiting periods of their wives, the time of their pilgrimage and the due dates for their debts” (Ṭabarī, Ta’ṣīr, i, 580; see debt; waiting period; marriage and divorce). This commentary conveniently demarcates the spheres of human activities that are to be regulated by lunation. In another exegetical statement “the
affairs of their religion” are specified as “the periods of fasting and of breaking the fast.” They are to be determined by the “observation of [the moon’s] waning and waxing” (ibid., 581; cf. Ibn Kathîr, Tafsîr, i, 503).

Q 10:5 and 36:39 give us an insight into how pre-Islamic Arabs and the first Muslims reckoned their time. These verses refer to the system of twenty-eight lunar mansions (manâzîl), i.e. stars, groups of stars or spots on the sky in which the moon “is located on each successive night of the sidereal (not the synodic) month” (de Blois, Ta’rikh, 260; see STARS AND PLANETS). Whereas later Muslim astronomers abandoned this system in favor of more precise astronomical calculations, it has survived until today and lies at the foundation of agricultural calendars in many Arab countries and their neighboring areas.

One consequence of the Qur’anic injunction to use the moon for keeping time is the practice of watching for the new crescent to determine the beginning and the end of Ramaḍān. Of all Muslim schools of law (see LAW AND THE QUR’ÂN) and sects (see THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ÂN) only the Ismā‘îlis (see SHI‘ISM AND THE QUR’ÂN) rely on mathematics to calculate the length of their months (see SCIENCE AND THE QUR’ÂN; MEASUREMENT). All other Muslim communities insist that the beginning and end of the new month, especially of Ramaḍān, be determined by the sighting of the new crescent. The importance of Ramaḍān for the Muslim ritual is attested by the fact that it is the only month of the calendar that is explicitly mentioned in the Qur’ân (q 2:185; see FESTIVALS AND COMMEMORATIVE DAYS; RITUAL AND THE QUR’ÂN). Commentators add that, apart from its sacred status as the month of fasting, the holiness of Ramaḍān springs from its being the month of revelation (inzâl al-Qur’ân, see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION).

The night in which, according to the tradition, the whole of the Qur’ân was revealed to Muḥammad falls on 27 Ramaḍān. Commentators consider it especially propitious, since q 97:3 describes this night (laylat al-qadr) as being “better than a thousand months.”

Another important religious activity associated with a calendar month is the pilgrimage (hajj), which takes place during the month of Dhū l-Ḥijja. This month is second in the previously-discussed triad of sacred months, which were respected by many Arab tribes before Islam. According to commentators, their sacred functions are evident from their names. Dhū l-Qa‘da is interpreted as the period of “sitting still,” when the warlike bedouins (see BEDOUIN) of Arabia stayed in their tents and abstained from raiding and fighting their neighbors (Ṭabarî, Tafsîr, ii, 589). The name of Dhū l-Hijja is indicative of its function as the month of pilgrimage, although the actual ritual activities are limited to four days, i.e. seventh — tenth, but in practice continue until the thirteenth. The name of al-Muḥarram (“the sacred” or “protected”) speaks for itself (see PROTECTION; FORBIDDEN). It is the month of peace, whose sanctity is assured by God himself. Likewise, the name of Rajab also connotes the idea of veneration and reverence (Lane, iii, 1033 and Lisân al-‘Arab, i, 411). Its special status is further accentuated by its numerous honorific epithets, such as “the deep” (al-asamâ), because no rattling of swords or other weapons was heard during it, or “the one that pours forth [divine mercy]” (al-asâb, see PIETY; MERCY). Before Islam, it was celebrated by the sacrifice of the first-born of the flock — a practice that was abolished by the Prophet in a special hadîth. Despite this prohibition, many Muslims hold Rajab in high regard and mark it by fasting on certain days and by slaughtering sacrificial
Finally, a substantial body of traditions exalts the eighth month of the Muslim calendar, Sha'ban, which many consider to be a month of voluntary fasting. The night of the fifteenth of Sha'ban is regarded as the holiest time of the whole month. A number of hadiths recommend that one should spend it in “vigil prayer and supplication, and the morrow in fasting” (Kister, Sha’bān, 23-4; see bowing and prostration; vigils). Furthermore, some commentators identify it with the “blessed night” (layla mubāraka) of Q 44:3, which is considered to be the night of the remission of all sins (see sin, major and minor; forgiveness). Hence its popular name, “the night of acquittance” (laylat al-barā’a).

Some Muslims mark it with special prayers and supplications in the hope of obtaining divine rewards that are promised “to those who exert themselves in devotion during this night” (ibid., 27). At the same time, many commentators rejected this tradition, arguing that laylat al-barā’a was the night of revelation and thus is identical with laylat al-qadr of Q 97:1. Although the Qurʾān itself is silent about the special status of the months just discussed, except for Ramadān, their importance is thrown into sharp relief in the famous hadith that quotes the Prophet as saying “Rajah is the month of God, Sha’ban is my month, and Ramadān is the month of my community” (ibid., 37).

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Bibliography

Moon

The satellite of the earth, which takes a little less than one solar-calendar month to complete its revolution. In the Qurʾān, the general Arabic term for moon (qamar) occurs twenty-seven times, usually paired with the sun (q.v.; shams). Sūra 54 is entitled “The Moon” (Sūrat al-Qamar), in reference to the moon seeming to split in two at the time the Meccans began to persecute the Muslims (see mecca; opposition to muḥammad). The new or crescent moon (hilāl) appears only once (in its plural form, aḥilla, Q 2:189), and neither the term for the full moon (badr) nor that for the night when no moon is visible (i.e. sirār) is mentioned.

The moon has a multi-faceted role in Islamic culture: its phases define the Muslim (ḥijrī, see emigration) calendar (q.v.); the sighting of the new moon during Ramadān (q.v.) begins the fasting (q.v.) month; the moon’s positioning in the sky can be used to mark time (q.v.); lunar symbols abound in Islamic mysticism and esoterica; and the lunar eclipse has theological significance (see theology and the Qurʾān; ǧūfism and the Qurʾān). There is a rich vocabulary in
classical Arabic for the moon and the days of the lunar month (Ibn Sīda, Mukhaṣṣaṡ, ix, 26-32). Every three nights of the lunar month were grouped together under a special name. In Arabic poetry, the moon, especially the crescent moon, figures prominently (Tīfashī, Surūr al-nafs, 65-80). As an important Islamic symbol, the crescent moon dates back to the Umayyad period and is currently used on the flags of many Muslim countries (see EPIGRAPHY AND THE QUR’ĀN).

The Qur’ānic allusions to the moon are varied. It appears in a dream (see DREAMS AND SLEEP) of Joseph (q.v.; Q 12:4), as well as in the story of Abraham’s (q.v.) conversion (Q 6:77; see IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS; ḤANIF). It is the object of oaths (q.v.; e.g. Q 74:32; see FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR’ĀN). As one of the signs (q.v.) of God’s beneficence to humankind (e.g. Q 14:33; see GRACE; BLESSING; COSMOLOGY; NATURE AS SIGNS), the moon, too, prostrates to God (Q 22:18; see CREATION; BOWING AND PROSTRACTION; GLORIFICATION OF GOD). God placed the moon in the heavens (see HEAVEN AND SKY) as an aid to humans: while it functions as a light (q.v.; Q 71:16), its primary use is to mark time (cf. Q 2:189; 6:96; see DAY AND NIGHT; DAY, TIMES OF).

Of the twelve lunar months, only Ramaḍān is mentioned by name in the Qur’ān (Q 2:185). In pre-Islamic Arabia an intercalary month (nasī‘) was added to bring the shorter lunar calendar of 354 days into alignment with the seasons (q.v.), but this was expressly forbidden in the Qur’ān (Q 9:37) and in statements of Muhammad (see PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR’ĀN). The rationale ordinarily given for this ban is that holy months, such as Ramaḍān, could then be confused with ordinary months. Each month began with the first sighting of the crescent moon, resulting in elaborate rules in legal texts for determining the beginning of the fasting month (see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN). By the ninth century, al-Khwārizmī compiled a table showing lunar crescent visibility for the latitude of Baghdad. Despite such astronomical models for predicting the lunar crescent, religious law stipulated that the new moon be physically seen by a male Muslim of good standing.

An alternative lunar calendar was provided by charting the nightly progression of the moon vis-à-vis the stars for a full lunaion, a period of about twenty-seven and one-third days. This system of twenty-eight lunar stations (manāţīl al-qamar) is elaborated in Islamic astronomical and astrological texts, but is not specifically mentioned in the Qur’ān. Another pre-Islamic calendar plotted months by noting the number of days after the crescent moon until the moon joined with the Pleiades (thūragīyā). While commentators often associate Sūrat al-Najm (“The Star,” Q 53), with the Pleiades, there is no specific mention of this conjunction calendar in the Qur’ān or ḫādith (see ḫĀDĪTH AND THE QUR’ĀN).

Although Muhammad condemned the use of stars for prediction (see FORTUNETELLING; DIVINATION; PLANETS AND STARS) — an interdiction against the so-called amwā‘, which Arab scholars linked to the lunar stations — and worship of the sun or moon is forbidden in the Qur’ān (Q 41:37; see IDOLS AND IMAGES; SOUTH ARABIA, RELIGION IN PRE-ISLAMIC), the moon has a variety of symbolic associations in Islamic esoteric and mysticism. As one of the seven “planets” (al-kawākib al-sayyāra), the moon figures prominently in astrology, especially when it enters zodiacal houses and lunar stations. The moon was considered cold and wet in the humoral system and was generally linked in esoteric lore with the lungs in the body, the faculty of intelligence (see INTELLECT; KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING), salty food, saffron,
morning

Morality see ethics and the Qurʾān

Morning

The early part of the day (see day and night). Morning as a part of the day is mentioned on several occasions in the Qurʾān. Three sūras are named after particular times or phenomena of the morning: Sūrat al-Fajr (“Dawn,” Q 89), Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā (“Forenoon,” Q 93) and Sūrat al-Falaq (“Daybreak,” Q 113). In English, as in other Indo-European languages, uncertainty exists as to which time span the term “morning” actually covers. In these languages, morning is often interpreted as denoting “the first part of the day, until noon (q.v.),” “from sunrise (see dawn) to noon,” or also “the time from midnight to noon.” The word that is frequently used in Modern Standard Arabic as an equivalent of the English “morning” is sabāḥ. Words that are derived from the Arabic root ʿ-b-h form, however, only one part of a larger number of words that are used in the Qurʾān to describe the morning time.

Terminology

In the Qurʾān, morning or parts of it are described by a number of lexical expressions: the Arabic bukra (q 19:11, 62; 25:5; 33:42; 48:9; 54:38; 76:25) and ikhār (q 3:41; 40:55) designate the early morning, or the first part of the day, between the time of the prayer (q.v.) of the daybreak and sunrise (Lane, s.v. bukra). The term ḍuḥā (q 7:98; 20:59; 93:1; 79:29, 46; 91:1; 93:1) describes the early part of the forenoon, after sunrise: according to some, this is when the sun (q.v.) is yet low, according to others, when the sun is somewhat high (Lane, s.v. ḍuḥā) or up to the moment when the sun has traversed the diurnal arc (Pel-lat, Layl and nahār). According to al-

camphor (q.v.), white sandalwood incense, silver and chrysolite. The waxing and waning of the moon were believed to influence the growth of plants and animal hair, milk and egg production, the movements of animals and even the flavor of meat (Qazwīnī, ‘Ajāʾīb, 48-52). Religious mystics used the moon as a symbolic metaphor for the prophet Muhammad. Some of the divine names of God (see God and his attributes), e.g. “the knowing” (al-ʿalām) and “the creator” (al-khāliq), are particularly associated with the moon. There is a single reference in the Qurʾān (q 75:8) to the moon being eclipsed (khasafa) on the day of judgment (√qawm al-qiyāma, see last judgment; apocalypse). Legal texts record a special prayer for both lunar and solar eclipses. In Arab folklore there was much speculation about the meaning of an eclipse, including a widespread story that a fish had swallowed the moon.

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Bibliography


Hamadhānī (d. 319/932; Alfi/zlowerdot, 287), ḍuḣā follows al-ghadāt. The term fajr (q 2:187; 17:78; 24:58; 89:11; 97:5) is often rendered as “daybreak,” “dawn,” or “the light of morning” (Lane, s.v. fajr). The term falsaq, “daybreak, the bright gleam of dawn,” is derived from the Arabic root f-l-q, “to split, cleave.” It occurs in one passage of the Qur /righthalfmoonān (q 113:1) in the phrase ṭabab al-falsaq, “lord (q.v.) of the daybreak.” Words derived from the root gh-d-w like ghadāt and ghudaww (q 6:52; 18:28; also q 7:205; 13:15; 40:46) again denote the first part of the day, the period between the time of the prayer of daybreak and sunrise. Before the terms that describe the times of prayer were standardized, for some time after Muḥammad’s death ghadāt was sometimes used as an alternative term to describe the morning prayer, which later became commonly described as ṣalāt al-fajr (cf. Wensinek, Mikāt). The words sahar (q 54:34) and ashār (q 3:17; 51:18) are related to the Semitic *ṣahr which, in various forms, is used to denote “dawn” in a number of Semitic languages (Mustafa, Morgenanbruch, 113). The Arabic word ṣubb is commonly rendered as “daybreak, dawn, or forenoon,” counted from sunrise to noon or, according to some, from midnight to noon or from the beginning of the latter half of the night to the time when the sun declines from the meridian (Lane, s.v. ṣubb). Ṣubb (q 11:81; 74:34; 81:18; 100:3) and other words derived from the root s-b-h (ṣabāh, q 37:177; ṣabh, q 6:96) occur in a number of qur’ānic phrases describing the morning time. Verbal forms of the root ṣ-b-h, like sabhah (q 54:38), ashbha (e.g. q 29:37) or mushbihina (q 15:83) are rendered as “to enter upon the time of morning” or “morning prayer” (q 30:17). They also have the sense of “to come to be in the morning,” as in q 67:30 (Lane, s.v. ashbha).

On the other hand, several metaphorical expressions (see metaphor) are used to describe the morning as, for example: by the night when it journeys on (wa-l-layli idhā yasrī, q 89:4; see oaths); at the declining of the stars (idhār al-nujūm, q 52:49); the rising of the sun (ṯulā’ al-shams, q 50:39); the first part of the day (waṣjī al-nahār, q 3:72); after sunrise until midday, or at sunrise (ishrāq, q 38:18); at sunrise (mushriqīna, i.e. entering upon the time of sunrise; q 15:73; cf. q 26:60). The word ṭasreḫūna, to pasture in the morning (q 16:6), may also be interpreted as a metaphorical description of the morning time.

**Morning as a part of the day**

Ancient oriental systems of belief describe the morning as the time at which human-kind is transferred from the realm of darkness (q.v.), chaos and death (see death and the dead) to the realm of light (q.v.), life (q.v.) and justice (Görg and Lang, Lexikon, ii, 46; Gurney, Hethiter, 150; see justice and injustice). In the Hebrew Bible (Ps 46:6), morning is the time when God supports the believers (see belief and unbelief). In the Qurʾān, morning marks the end of the dark night, as in q 97:5 where the dawn (fajr) heralds the end of the Night of Power (q.v.; laylat al-qadr). For the Arabs (q.v.) in pre-Islamic times, however, the morning was not necessarily the beginning of the full or official day (Fischer, “Tag und Nacht,” 749, 756; see also day, times of).

In the qurʾānic narrative, morning is the time of rest (q 18:62; ghadāʾ, the morning meal, signifies a period of rest after a long journey) or of important activity, e.g. when Muḥammad leaves his household to prepare for a battle against the unbelievers (see belief and unbelief; expeditions and battles) in the morning (q 3:121). As in the Bible (e.g. Ps 104:23), morning is represented in the Qurʾān as the time when
daily work, e.g. harvesting the garden (q.v.), begins (Q 68:21-5). In the same pericope, however, morning is the time of chastisement (see CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT), when the fruit that the unbelievers intend to gather have been taken away by God overnight to send them a sign of his power (see POWER AND IMPOTENCE) and a warning (q.v.; Q 68:26-33). There are other episodes that identify morning as the time in which God inflicts or threatens to inflict evil upon the unbelievers (q.v.; Q 7:98; 37:177; see PUNISHMENT STORIES; GOOD AND EVIL). In Q 54:38, Q 11:81 and Q 15:73, morning is denoted as the time of chastisement of the people of Lot (q.v.) who had previously disputed the warnings of God. The punishment of the tribe of Thamûd (q.v.), who had ignored God’s message that was brought to them by Šâliḥ (q.v.), also comes in the morning (Q 7:78; 11:67). This pattern is repeated in the passages on the punishment of the Madyan (q.v.; Q 29:37; see MIDIAN) and the people of al-Hîr (Q 15:80; see BâH). The consequence of the punishment of the people of Lot will become visible in the morning (Q 15:66) and Q 46:25 also determines morning as the time when the results of the punishment of the tribe of ‘Ad (q.v.) become manifest. At the same time, morning is the time of mercy (q.v.) when the folk of Lot are exempted from the punishment brought upon them (Q 54:34). The regular return of the sun after night is attributed to God as one of his marvelous creations (Q 79:29; see CREATION; SIGNS; MARVELS; BLESSING). He is mentioned as the one who splits the sky into dawn (fâ’il q al-isbâh, Q 6:96) and the epithet “lord of the daybreak” (rabb al-falâq, Q 119:1) is used in the same sense.

Morning as a metaphor

In Q 79:46 the term ḏuhâ stands for a short period of time stating that those who are called up from their graves to final judgment (see LAST JUDGMENT) will feel that only an evening (q.v.) or its forenoon, i.e. a much shorter period of time (q.v.) than in reality, will have passed since they had been buried. Another occurrence of morning as a measure of time may be found in Q 34:12 where the giant morning stride of Solomon (q.v.) equals a month’s journey (q.v.). Ghâdît (ghudwaw) in combination with ‘ashâ, ‘asîl, or ʿâsîl (evening) denotes the constancy of religious service or of another activity or phenomenon (Q 6:52; 18:28; 7:205; 13:15; 24:36; Hamadhâni, AlFâzî, 291). The terms bâkra and ʿibkâ, ʾishrâq (or mushriqâna) and ʿubb (or mushbîhâna) also occur in conjunction with words denoting evening to suggest constancy of a particular activity. In Q 16:6, bringing the cattle home in the evening and driving it to pasture in the morning (tasrâhu) again stands for a recurrent activity that illustrates the beauty of God’s creation. In Q 3:72, morning, i.e. the beginning of the day (waŷ al-ناسr), and evening (āsâr) denote two different times in which the Jewish people (see JEWS AND JUDAISM) shall act in a different manner, namely believe and disbelieve in the holy scripture. In some passages (e.g. Q 28:18), morning appears as a narrative means of indicating the beginning of a new episode of a particular story (see LITERARY STRUCTURES OF THE QUR’ÁN). This usage of morning is known also from the Bible (Görg and Lang, Lexikon, 846).

Divine service, religious and everyday life

Morning is mentioned as one of the times of the day at which prayer (salât al-fajr, e.g. Q 24:38) and glorification of God (q.v.; tashbîh, e.g. Q 30:17; 33:41; 38:18; 48:9) must be performed. Q 51:18 promises paradise (q.v.) to those who asked God for forgiveness (q.v.) during the morning prayer (see
Morning marks the beginning of the ritual practice of fasting (q.v.) during the month of Ramaḍān (q.v.). In Q 2:187 the believers are instructed to resume fasting when a white thread is clearly distinguishable from a black one at dawn. In several cases, morning is part of formulaic evocations (Q 7:34; 81:18; 89:1; 91:1; 93:1). This again may be understood as a reference to the creative powers of God.

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Bibliography

Moses

The most prominent pre-Islamic prophet in the Qurān and in extra-qurānic Islamic tradition (see Prophets and Prophet- hood). Moses’ name (Mūsā) is attested 136 times in the Qurān, in passages of varying length and narrative complexity. The qurānic narratives dealing with Moses and the allusions to him far exceed those relating to other figures of the Islamic history of salvation (q.v.), including Abraham (q.v.). The references to Moses are spread throughout the Qurān, with mentions already in the Meccan sūras. Most narratives (q.v.) about Moses, however, date from the Medinan period of revelation (see Chronology and the Qurān), when Muḥammad came in close contact with Jews (see Jews and Judaism).

The topics in the qurānic account of Moses go back to biblical and post-biblical narratives. The details in the Qurān and in early Islamic exegesis testify to the great influence of Jewish Haggada on Muḥammad and early Islam (see Scripture and the Qurān). This does not mean, however, that the qurānic Moses fully corresponds to the Moses of Jewish tradition.

The Qurān has its own point of view and its own interpretation of the older narrative material. The essential feature of the allusions to the past is a typological interpretation of the earlier narratives, by which the biography of Moses is seen in the light of the biography of Muḥammad (q.v.). The Qurān reminds its audience of Moses’ deeds and the events connected with him, associating these deeds and
events with the circumstances in Muḥammad’s life (see occasions of revelation; revelation and inspiration). There are two major themes that emerge in the story of Moses: God as creator (see creation) and lord (q.v.; rabb), and a typological pattern that draws parallels to Muḥammad. As in all of the Qur’ānic stories of the prophets, emphasis is placed upon Moses’ monotheism (see polytheism and atheism) and his role as a divine messenger (q.v.): he has to endure accusations of lying (see lie), as well as oppression (q.v.) and hostility at the hands of the unbelievers (see belief and unbelief) and evildoers (see evil deeds) to whom he is sent until he and his followers are rescued and his enemies (q.v.) destroyed by God (see punishment stories). In the Qur’ānic purview, such details of the story of Moses prefigure Muhammad’s biography (see sīra and the Qur’ān). Although in most cases the Qur’ānic verses address Muhammad directly, their contents are to serve as a reminder to the Qur’ān’s audience, as the conclusion to a long passage relating the story of Moses demonstrates: “Thus do we recount to you some of the stories of the past. And we have caused to come to you from us a reminder” (Q 20:39; see memory).

Moses’ infancy

The Qur’ān tells of Moses’ infancy, when God suggests to Moses’ mother that she leave him in a box (tābūt) in the sea. She does this, and the sea throws it upon the shore, where the family of Pharaoh (q.v.) finds him. The wife of Pharaoh (and not, as in the Bible, his daughter) protects the child. Moses is therefore brought up among the people of Pharaoh as a child and remains for years among them (Q 26:18). Moses’ sister follows the child and watches Moses from afar, without Pharaoh’s people being aware. Since Moses refuses the milk (q.v.) of the nurses (see lactation; wet nursing), his sister says to the people of Pharaoh: “Shall I show you a household who will rear him for you and show good will to him?” (Q 28:12). In this way, she directs the people of Pharaoh to his natural mother, who suckles him. God restores Moses to his mother, that she might be comforted and might know that the promise of God is true (Q 20:37–40; 28:7–14; see trust and patience).

Moses’ killing of the Egyptian

Moses’ break with the polytheistic background of his childhood comes about when he reaches maturity (q.v.) and is given jurisdiction and knowledge (Q 28:14; cf. 26:21; see knowledge and learning): “He entered the city at a time when its people were not paying attention, and in it he found two men fighting, one belonging to his faction and the other to his enemies. The one who belonged to his faction called him to help against the one who belonged to his enemies, so Moses struck him and finished him. He said: ‘This is the work of Satan (ḥādīhā min ḍhāyṣīnī). He is clearly an enemy who leads astray (q.v.; mudīl),’” (Q 28:15). God forgives Moses (Q 28:16). When early theology (see theology and the Qur’ān) discussed the origin of sin (maṣūla, see sin, major and minor), the Qadariyya-Muʿtazila quoted Q 28:15 as evidence that “leading astray” (ṣīla) is not from God (Ritter, Studien, 72; see error; muʿtazilīs; freedom and predestination; justice and injustice). This verse provides a starting point for the Muslim discussion of causality (Ṭabari, Tafsīr, ad loc.; Rāzī, Tafsīr, xxiv, 201; see also devil). Moses’ break with Pharaoh and his people is cemented (cf. Q 26:19). Pharaoh’s council (al-mala’)—Moses’ later oppo-
position — take counsel against him, to kill him (q 28:20) and he goes forth from Egypt (q.v.) afraid (q 28:21).

Moses’ flight to Midian
On his flight from Egypt Moses comes to Midian (q.v.; Madyan; q 28:22-8). There he helps two women, the daughters of an old man (shaykh kabīr), to water their flocks. Their father says to Moses: “I wish to marry you to one of these two daughters of mine, on condition that you hire yourself to me for eight years, and if you do complete ten, that is of your own will…” (q 28:27). Although the Qur’ān does not mention the name of the old man who hired Moses, commentators (see exegesis of the Qur’ān: classical and medieval) identify him as Yathrā (Jethro; cf. Exod 3:1; 4:18; 18:1 f.) or the Qur’ānic prophet Shu‘ayb (q.v.; Tabarî, Tafsīr, ad loc.; Rāzî, Tafsīr, xxiv, 206 f.).

Moses’ election and mission to Pharaoh
When Moses fulfills his term, he goes out with his household. In the holy valley of Tuwā (q.v.) he receives a divine message and mission: “He perceived on the side of the mount a fire (q.v.)…” (q 28:29). “When he came to it he was addressed: ‘O Moses, I am your lord. Take off your sandals, for you are in the holy valley Tuwā. I have chosen you, so listen to what is inspired. I am God. There is no God but I. Serve me and establish the prayer for my remembrance…” (q 28:11-17; cf. q 28:30; 79:16). Commentators explain that Moses’ sandals were made from the skin of the carcass of an ass, i.e. one that was not slaughtered; therefore, Moses was ordered to take them off (Tabarî, Tafsīr, ad loc.). The order Moses received, when he came to the fire and was called “from the tree” (shajara, q 28:30), marks the beginning of Moses’ prophetic mission. He is sent with two proofs (burḥānān) to Pharaoh and his council of nobles (mala‘), namely the sign (āya) of his staff (see rod) that was transformed into a serpent and the sign of his hand that became white (q 20:17-23; 28:31-2; see proof; signs; miracles). God orders Moses to tell Pharaoh: “Go to Pharaoh! He has rebelled (see rebellion; arrogance). And say: Do you have any desire to purify yourself, and that I should guide you to your lord in fear (q.v.)?” (q 79:17-9). Moses’ brother Aaron (q.v.) is sent to Pharaoh together with Moses; in this mission, they are given authority (q.v.; sulṭān, q 23:45; 28:35; cf. 4:153; 11:96). Al-Ṭabarî (d. 310/923; Tafsīr, ad loc.) explains Moses’ authority (sulṭān) as the signs (āyat) and evidences (bāyyināt) that God gave him.

Moses’ signs and evidences
The signs (āyat) and evidences (bāyyināt) of Moses’ prophethood are significant elements of the typological schema of the Qur’ānic story about him (q 2:92; 7:103, 105; 11:96; 14:5; 17:104; 23:45; 28:36; 29:39; 40:23; 43:46-7): as al-Ṭabarî (Tafsīr, ad loc.) explains, these are an argument (hujja) of Moses’ truthfulness (ṣidd) and prophethood (nabwawwā). Pharaoh and the nobility (al-mala‘) of his people (qawm, q 7:127) — a type of council or assembly — reject, however, these signs and proofs: “Then… we sent Moses with our signs (bi-āyātīnā) to Pharaoh and his council of nobles (mala‘i‘ī)…” (q 7:103; cf. q 11:97; 23:46; 28:32; 43:46). “Moses said: O Pharaoh, I am a messenger from the lord of the worlds… I came to you with an evidence (bāyyinā) from your lord, so send forth with me the Children of Israel (q.v.). [Pharaoh] said: If you came with a sign, bring it, if you are one of those who speak the truth. So [Moses] threw his staff, and lo, it was a serpent manifest. And he drew forth his hand, and lo, it was white to the onlookers.
The nobility of Pharaoh’s people (al-malā‘ min qawmi fir`awwān) said: ‘Surely this is a knowing magician…’” (Q 7:104-9; cf. 26:30-5; see MAGIC). There are nine signs that Moses brings to Pharaoh and his people (Q 17:101; 27:12). According to early commentators, these are: flood, locusts, vermin, frogs, blood, Moses’ staff, Moses’ hand, destruction, and the sea (Tabari, Tafsir; ad loc.).

The underlying narrative of these Qur’anic passages is the biblical account of Moses’ and Aaron’s encounter with Pharaoh, the miracles they perform, the calamities they bring down upon Egypt and Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The Qur’anic version of this narrative is, however, remodeled in accordance with its typological interpretation of the story of Moses. Moses’ signs and proofs correspond to Muhammad’s signs and proofs. Pharaoh’s council of nobles corresponds to the leading clan representatives (malā‘) of Mecca (q.v.; see also TRIBES AND CLANS), Muhammad’s opposition (Q 38:6; see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’AN; OPPOSITION TO MUHAMMAD), above all the leader of the Banū ‘Abd Shams, Abū Sufyān, and the leader of the Banū Makhzūm, Abū Jahl, both archenemies of Muhammad.

Moses’ patience

After Moses shows his signs and evidences, whereupon the defeated magicians of Pharaoh are cast down, prostrate themselves and proclaim their faith in God and Moses’ and Aaron’s message (Q 7:113-26), the nobility of Pharaoh’s people (al-malā‘ min qawmi fir`awwān) say to Pharaoh: “Will you leave Moses and his people to cause corruption (q.v.) in the land, so that he may forsake you and your gods?” He said: “We shall kill their sons, and keep their females alive, and over them be victors.” Then Moses said to his people: ‘Seek help in God and endure patiently (wa-`shirū)! The earth belongs to God, he makes whomsoever he wants of his servants inherit it, and the end result (al-`aqība) is to those who are piously in fear of God…. It may be that your lord will destroy (an yahlika) your enemy…’” (Q 7:127-9; cf. Q 2:49; 14:6). Patience (sabr) is another keyword of the typological pattern. Before Moses and his people are rescued and their enemies defeated, they have to be patient. This corresponds to Muhammad’s biography. According to Islamic exegesis and historiography Muhammad and his followers in the Meccan period had to endure the hostility of the Meccan “nobles” (mala‘) patiently. When they had to migrate to Medina (q.v.; see also emigration), they were allowed to fight against the Meccan Quraysh (q.v.), Muhammad’s own clan, and were victorious over them by the help of God (see also EXPEDITIONS AND BATTLES; VICTORY). According to the early Qur’ān commentators, the turning point was the revelation of Q 22:39-41: “Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged, God is well able to give them victory. Those who have been driven out of their houses without right only because they said God is our lord…” Early commentary maintains that this was the first revelation to allow armed fighting (q.v.; qīdāl) and war (q.v.; ḥarāb) against unbelievers (Tabari, Tafsir; ad loc.; see also JHĀD). Until these verses (q.v.) were revealed, Muhammad “had simply been ordered to call men to God and to patient endurance (sabr) against insult… The Quraysh had persecuted his followers, seducing some from their religion, and exiling others from their country…” (Ibn Iṣḥāq, Sīra, i, 467; Ibn Iṣḥāq-Guillaume, 212).

Patience (sabr, Q 14:5-6) is combined with thankfulness (shukr, see GRATITUDE AND INGREDIENT): “We sent Moses with our signs (āyāt): ‘Bring your people from the
darkness (q.v.) to the light (q.v.), and remind them of the days of God (q.v.; ayyām Allāh). ‘Therein are signs for everyone who is patient and thankful (sabbūr šakūr).’ Commentators explain that people have to be patient when they are tested (uṣūliyya, see TRIAL), and thankful when God bestows favor (niʿma, see GRACE; BLESSING) upon them [Tabarî, Tafsîr ad loc.]. Moses and his people, therefore, were obliged to be patient before their rescue, and to be thankful after they were rescued by God’s favor.

Moses’ deliverance and Pharaoh’s destruction

The Qur’ânic story of Moses reaches its peak at the rescue, or deliverance (q.v.; najât), of him and his people and the punishment (see CHASTISEMENT AND PUNISHMENT) and destruction (halâk) of Pharaoh and his army (jund) by drowning (q.v.): “So we took vengeance (q.v.) on them and drowned them in the sea, for having counted our signs false, and having been neglectful of them. And we caused the people who had been oppressed (see OPPRESSED ON EARTH, THE) to inherit the east and the west of the land on which we bestowed blessing. The good word of your lord was fulfilled upon the Children of Israel for their patience. And we destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had been constructing and embellishing” (Q 7:196-7). Pharaoh’s council of nobles (malaʿ), who “thought themselves great” were also destroyed: “They accused them [i.e. Moses and Aaron] of lying, and were among those who were destroyed” (Q 23:45-8).

While God drowned Pharaoh and his army, he rescued Moses and his followers who had passed through the sea: “When we divided the sea for you and delivered you and drowned the people of Pharaoh before your eyes” (Q 2:50; cf. Q 7:138; 8:54; 10:90; 17:103; 26:52-68; 43:55; 44:23-4).

Q 44:23-31 (cf. Q 26:32) tells the history of Moses’ departure from Egypt. God told Moses: “Set out by night with my servants. You are going to be followed. And leave the sea gaping wide. They are an army (jund) to be drowned.” Q 26:63-6 (cf. also Q 20:77-8) is more detailed with regard to Moses’ dividing the sea: “We inspired Moses: ‘Strike the sea with your staff, and it separated (infalaga).’ Each part became like a mighty cliff. We brought thither the others. We delivered Moses and those with him, all of them. Then we drowned the others.” The drowning of Pharaoh and his people is a topos for God’s helping the believers to triumph, giving them power and bringing about the defeat and destruction of the unbelievers, especially the unbelieving sovereign (see KINGS AND RULERS).

‘Abbâsid propaganda used this topos against the Umayyads. In the year 132/750, when the last Umayyad caliph (q.v.) Marwân b. Muḥammad was defeated at the river Zâb, the pontoon bridge was cut. Al-Ṭabarî (Taʾrikh, iii, 41; Eng. trans. J.A. Williams, History, xxvii, 164 fn) reports: “More were drowned that day than were slain in battle.” The victorious ‘Abbâsid, ‘Abdallâh b. ‘Ali, then recited Q 2:50 and someone else recited verses reviling Marwân: “now the oppressor is the oppressed… a Pharaoh in persecution….”

Besides Pharaoh the Qur’ânic mentions two other enemies of Moses who were also destroyed, Korah (q.v.; Qârûn) and Ḥâmân (q.v.; Q 29:39-40).

God speaks to Moses and Moses wants to see God

After the deliverance of Moses and the Children of Israel and their departure from Egypt, God “appointed for Moses forty nights” (Q 2:51); in the meantime Aaron replaced Moses among his people (Q 7:142). “When Moses came to our appointment, and his lord spoke to him (kallamahu rabbahu), he said: ‘My lord, show me [yourself] that I may gaze upon you.’
He replied: ‘You will not see me. But gaze upon the mountain, and, if it stands still in its place, then you will see me.’” When God revealed himself to the mountain, he sent the mountain crashing down, and Moses fell down senseless. When he recovered, he said: “Glory unto you (see glorification of God; laudation)! I turn to you repentant (see repentance and penance), and I am the first of the believers” (Q 7:143).

While early commentators explained these verses by reference to earlier biblical and extra-biblical narratives (Tabari, Tafsir; ad loc.), theologians raised the following questions: How did God speak with Moses, and what does God’s speaking (kalām) mean (see word of God; speech)? Did God speak only to Moses, or also to others? Does Moses’ request for seeing God with his eyes (ru’ya) mean that it is possible to see God (see seeing and hearing; anthropomorphism)? Why did Moses ask God to see him with his eyes (q.v.) though he undoubtedly knew that it is impossible to see God in this world (dunyā, see face of God; eschatology)? Is the ability to see God (ru’ya) only impossible in this world, or is it also impossible on the day of resurrection (q.v.) and in the hereafter? They discussed also whether Moses’ request to see God was a sin (see sin). Since Moses returned repentant (tāba) from it (Rāzī, Tafsir, xiv, 186 f.). After Moses’ “returning” (tawbah) from his request to see God, God says to Moses: “I have chosen you above humankind by my message and by my speaking (bi-kalāmī). So hold what I have given you and be thankful. And we wrote for him, upon the tablets (alsūh), a lesson to be drawn from all things… then [told him]: ‘Hold it fast, and command your people, to take the best of it…”’ (Q 7:144-5; see preserved tablet; commandments). Q 4:164 also reports God’s speaking to Moses: “and to Moses God spoke directly (kalāmā… taklīman)” (cf. Q 7:144). Therefore commentators hold that God’s speaking to him is a special favor that distinguishes Moses from all other prophets (Rāzī, Tafsir, xii, 87). At the time that God spoke to Moses, the Children of Israel constructed the calf of gold (q.v.) and worshiped it (Q 7:148-9; 20:85-91). “When Moses returned to his people, angry and sad… he cast down the tablets (al-alsūh)…” (Q 7:150; cf. 20:86). “When Moses’ anger (q.v.) calmed down, he took up the tablets…” (Q 7:154).

Moses’ kitāb and furqān
Q 2:253 speaks of the “book” (q.v.) or “scripture” (kitāb, cf. Q 2:87; 6:154) of Moses: “When we gave Moses the scripture and the criterion (q.v.; al-furqān), in the hope that you might be guided” (cf. Q 2:87: 6:154: 11:17: 110: 17:2: 19:51: 21:43: 23:49: 25:35: 26:43: 32:23: 41:45: 46:12). Some early commentators gloss kitāb and furqān, explaining furqān as the separation (farq) and distinction (fasl) between true (haqq) and false (bāṭil); with this gloss, they interpret furqān in the sense of “criterion.” This exegesis is al-Ṭabarī’s and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1212) starting point for a more complex interpretation. Al-Ṭabarī explains the kitāb as the tawrāt (see torah), which “we wrote for him (katabn lahu) upon the tablets (al-alsūh)” (Q 7:145), given to Moses by God. This scripture (kitāb) is the furqān, in so far as God “separated” (farq) true from false by this scripture. Furthermore, the Torah (tawrāt), in so far as it is “separation” (furqān) of true and false is guidance (budā; cf. Q 7:154: “the tablets, and in their inscription there is guidance”) for those who follow what is contained therein (Ṭabarī, Tafsir, ad loc.). Al-Rāzī (Tafsir, iii, 73) explains the “separation” (furqān) of true and false as part of the tawrāt, namely as the “roots (usūl) and branches (furū’i) of religion (din).” Other early commentators explain furqān according to the Qur’ānic typology. They liken
Moses

The contrasting concepts of guidance (hudā) on the one hand and leading astray (idāl) on the other are also associated with a Qur’ānic typology. Since at “the day of Badr” one of Muhammad’s archenemies, Abū Jahl, led the Meccan polytheists, Muhammad is paralleled to Moses. Abū Jahl, moreover, reminds one of Pharaoh, “who led his people astray (adallā), and did not guide (mā hadā)”? (Q 20:79). Moses’ guidance, in early theology Pharaoh’s leading astray is also used as a paradigm: since guidance (hudā) comes from God (e.g. Q 2:98; 92:12-13) the question arose as to whether leading astray (idāl) also comes from God. The early Qadarīyya-Mu ṭazila held that “guidance is from God and leading astray is from man.” In one of the oldest documents of early theology, the Pharaoh of the Qur’ānic story of Moses is the example for the “leading astray of man” (Ritter, Studien, 71; Schwarz, Letter, 23).

The pages of Moses

Q 87:18-9 mentions the “first” or “former pages” (al-suhf al-īlā) of Moses: “Verily this is in the first pages, the pages of Abraham and Moses” (cf. Q 20:133; see also orality and writing in Arabia). Some commentators identify that which “is in the first pages” with the preceding verses, Q 87:14-7: “Prospered has he who purifies himself (see cleanliness and ablution), makes mention of the name of his lord and prays (see prayer). No, you prefer the world (dunyā), but the hereafter is better and more lasting.” The exegesis of other commentators follows a more restricted method of interpretation, namely that Q 87:18-9 refers only to the immediately preceding verse, i.e. Q 87:17: “But the hereafter is better and more lasting.” Commentators also explain the “pages of Moses” (suhf Mūsā) as part of those “former pages,” namely the pages of all other former prophets. None of these interpretations, however, necessitates a difference between the “pages of Moses” and the “book of Moses” (kitāb Mūsā) or the Torah (tawrāt, Tabari, Tafsīr, ad loc.; Rāzī, Tafsīr, xxxi, 135-6).

Moses and the servant of God whom God had taught of his knowledge

Q 18:60-82 refers to a journey in which Moses, accompanied by a boy (fatā), searches for “the meeting place of the two seas” (see barrier): “When they reached
the meeting place of the two seas they forgot their fish and it took its way in the sea freely” (saraban, q. 18:61). When Moses noticed that they forgot the fish, he said: “This is what we have been seeking.” On their way back to the place whence they had come they found “one of our servants (‘abd min ‘ibādānū), upon whom we had bestowed mercy (q.v.; rahma) and taught knowledge” (‘ilm, q. 18:64-5). The narrative commentary combines the story of the fish with the topos of Moses boasting of knowledge. When Moses was preaching, someone asked: “Who of the people knows best?” Moses replied: “I do,” not attributing knowledge to God. Therefore God tells him that there is a servant of God at “the meeting place of the two seas” (q. 18:60), who knows more than Moses. When Moses asks how to find him, God replies: “Take a fish and put it in a basket. When you miss it, he will be there” (Ṭabarī, Taṣfīr, ad loc.; id., Taʾrīkh, i, 417; Brinner, History, iii, 6). When Moses finds the servant of God whom God had taught of his knowledge, Moses says to him: “May I follow you, so that you may teach me the right conduct which you have been taught?” He says: ‘Lo! You cannot bear with me’… ‘If you go with me, do not ask me anything until myself mention it to you” (q. 18:66-70).

Then the Qur’ān reports the story of the three deeds of the unnamed servant of God. Moses is not able to suffer the deeds to occur without interpretation, since he lacks the knowledge to understand (q. 18:71-82). Commentary and tradition (ḥadīth, see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān) identify Moses’ boy companion (fātā) with Yashūʾ b. Nūn, the biblical Joshua, Moses’ servant (Exod 24:13; Num 11:28). The servant (ʿabd) of God who was endowed with knowledge is identified as al-Khīḍr; “the green man, the green” (see Khādir/ Khīḍr). His knowledge, which was superior to that of Moses, raised the question of their relationship. Muslim scholars dis-

cussed the type of knowledge he had and whether or not he was a prophet (Rāzī, Taṣfīr, xxi, 126 f.; Brinner, History, iii, 1 n. 1; Franke, Begegnung, 70 f.; 306-14).

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Bibliography


Mosque

A Muslim place of prayer (q.v.). The English word “mosque” derives, via the French
mosque, the Old French mousquaij, the Old Italian moschea and moscheta, and the Old Spanish mezquita, from the Arabic word masjid, meaning a place of prostration (ṣajda, see bowing and prostration) before God. The word masjid (and its plural masjīd) appears twenty-seven times in the Qur’ān, fifteen times in the phrase al-masjid al-ḥarām, “the holy mosque,” where it presumably refers to the sanctuary surrounding the Ka’ba (q.v.) in Mecca (q.v.). The word masjid is used once in the phrase al-masjid al-aqṣā, “the furthest mosque” (q. 17:1). In Muhammad’s lifetime this probably referred to a place of prayer in heaven (see ascension), although later commentators have universally understood this phrase to refer generally to the sanctuary of Jerusalem (q.v.) and specifically to the mosque erected at the south end of the Temple Mount. Other uses of the word masjid in the Qur’ān indicate that it could be applied to any place where God was worshipped, whether in Islamic or pre-Islamic times, as, for example, the tomb of the Seven Sleepers mentioned in q. 18:21 (see men of the cave). Later authors agreed that the concept of the masjid was not specific to Islam; the historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) mentions that King David (q.v.), for example, had a masjid (Pedersen, Masjid). The word muṣalla, referring specifically to a place for ṣalāt, or prayer, appears only once in the Qur’ān (q. 2:125), where God made the maqām Ibrāhīm, “station of Abraham,” in Mecca “a place of prayer” (see abraham).

Whereas any place where ritual worship (q.v.) is performed would technically be a muṣalla, the word has taken on a special meaning in Islam as a large undifferentiated space, usually outside the city, where the extraordinary ṣalāts are performed (see ritual and the qur’ān). These include the festival prayers (see festivals and commemorative days) marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan (q.v.) and the tenth day of Dhū l-Hijja, when animals are also slaughtered (see slaughter; consecration of animals) in commemoration of Abraham’s (Ibrāhīm’s) sacrifice (q.v.), as well as the extraordinary prayers for rain. In later times, particularly in Persian-speaking lands, the festival muṣallā is normally known by the Persian name ʿid-gah, “festival place.” The word muṣallā has also taken on a secondary meaning in some regions of the Muslim world as “the covered part of a mosque.” Jāmī’, a third word commonly applied in later times to congregational mosques, does not appear in that form in the Qur’ān but derives from the later usage masjid al-jāmī’, “congregational mosque,” which itself was also transformed into such phrases as the Persian masjid-i jum’a, “Friday mosque” and the Urdu jama’ masjid, “congregational mosque.” In modern usage, the word masjid (Turkish mescit) is sometimes used to refer to a small mosque for daily prayer, while the word jami’ (Turkish cami; Ottoman cümi) is understood to refer to a congregational mosque for communal worship on Friday (see friday prayer).

The Qur’ān gives absolutely no indication of what, if any, form a masjid should take, and perfectly valid worship may be performed after ablution (see cleanliness and ablution) virtually anywhere, using only the most minimal markings on the ground or a mat or rug. When Muslims gather in groups for communal worship, they line up in rows facing the qibla (q.v.), or direction of prayer, and repeat a series of prayers and, following the imām (q.v.) or prayer leader, perform a series of prostrations. Starting from these modest beginnings, over the centuries Muslims have built praying-places of great power and beauty that count among the finest examples of world architecture (see art and architecture and the qur’ān). This article will discuss the history and development of such structures and their
constituent elements as they evolved over the centuries.

*Early history and constituent parts*

It is generally accepted by both Muslim and non-Muslims alike that the simple house erected by the prophet Muhammad after he emigrated from Mecca to Medina (q.v.) in 622 (see emigration) played a key role in the evolution of the mosque. According to later accounts, this building was a roughly-square building with mud-brick walls approximately 100 cubits (ca. fifty meters) to a side. Several doors led to the interior, which comprised an open court with several small rooms along the eastern wall in which the Prophet and his wives lived (see wives of the prophet). Porticoes supported on palm-trunks and thatched with palm fronds running along the north and south walls provided shade for the activities of Muhammad, his family and his Companions (see family of the prophet; people of the house; companions of the prophet). Until Muhammad broke with the Jews (see Jews and Judaism) in Rajab or Sha'bân 2/December 623-January 624 and the qibla, or direction of prayer, was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca (q 2:136), the northern portico, known as the mughatta, or “covered area,” was used for prayer and the southern portico, known as the suffa, “row (of columns),” was used for accommodating Muhammad’s dependents and guests, who were known as the ahl al-suffa (see hospitality and courtesy; community and society in the Qur’ân). After the qibla was shifted to Mecca, these arrangements were reversed, with the larger covered area on the south and the smaller one on the north. Following this precedent in later times, the mosque might provide temporary lodging for travelers and scholars (Grabar, *Formation*, 105-58; Hillenbrand, *Islamic architecture*, 30-128).

On Fridays, the Prophet would lead noon (q.v.) congregational worship in the court, his position marked by his lance (‘amza) thrust in the ground. He would address the community of believers from a raised seat, or pulpit, made from tamarisk wood, which was moved into position as needed. Although the minbar is not mentioned in the Qur’ân, the Prophet’s seat was derived from the pre-Islamic judges’ seat and symbol of authority (Becker, Die Kanzel). The minbar is the only common feature of the later mosque to have been used by the Prophet. The earliest minbars had only two or three steps, but the earliest example to survive is a teakwood specimen with many steps from the ninth century in the Great Mosque of Qayrawân, now in Tunisia.

Following Muhammad’s death in 632, he was buried under the floor of one of the living rooms to the side of the court. The Prophet had disapproved of any monumental commemoration of the dead (see death and the dead) but his grave was eventually surrounded by a low screen and covered with a dome as the building was expanded. Although the grave became the focus of popular veneration, it was never allowed to become a focus of prayer (see intercession). In later times, bodies were not buried under mosques but tombs of important individuals were sometimes erected adjacent to them. In other cases, when the tomb of a particularly holy figure in some cemetery became the focus of popular veneration, a mosque might eventually be built to accommodate worship there.

Muhammad’s immediate successors, the caliphs (see caliph), continued to use the house-mosque in Medina and it was expanded to accommodate the increased numbers of believers. As a result of the rapid expansion of the faith throughout Arabia and into Iraq (q.v.), Syria (q.v.) and Egypt (q.v.), believers resident in these
regions needed places for communal worship. In some regions, such as Syria, existing churches (see church) provided sufficient and suitable space, and they were either appropriated or divided between the Christians and Muslims. In other regions, such as Egypt or Iraq, where suitable buildings were lacking in the required places, new structures were erected. In Jerusalem, according to the European pilgrim Arculf, the Muslims had erected a massive but rather crude structure at the southern end of the Temple Mount (see Aqṣā mosque) by ca. 50/670 (Creswell, *Muslim architecture*, id., *A short account*).

According to much later accounts, the first mosque in Egypt was built at Fuṣṭāt; it was a small structure measuring 50 × 30 cubits (25 × 15 meters) with a very low roof supported on multiple columns or piers. In Iraq, where the new towns of Kūfa and Baṣra were founded in 19/640, the first mosques were marked out by a ditch or low wall and orientated towards Mecca. The Mecca-facing, or gība, part of the mosque might be covered with a thatch roof supported on multiple columns or piers to provide shade. As Muslim power was consolidated in the following decades, these makeshift and temporary structures were rebuilt with more durable materials, but the many-columned (“hypostyle”) system of supports was maintained.

The second and fourth caliphs, ʿUmar (q.v.) and ʿAlī (see ʿAlī b. ʿAbī Tālib), were murdered in mosques and the third, ʿUthmān (q.v.), was murdered while reading the Qurʾān, so it was thought necessary to provide some sort of protection for the ruler when he attended the mosque. This screened enclosure, which allowed the ruler to be seen but not approached, was known as the maqṣūra. The eighth/fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khalḍūn ascribed the introduction of the maqṣūra to the first Umayyad caliph Muʿāwiya (r. 41-60/661-80) or to one of his successors, Marwān I (r. 64–5/684–5), but the sources are in some disagreement about the date. The first examples were made either of brick or wood, and the oldest to survive is the magnificent wooden example from the fifth/eleventh century also in the Great Mosque of Qayrawān. In later centuries, when the Islamic rulers participated with less frequency in Friday worship, the maqṣūra came to serve less of its original practical function, although it and the area immediately around the mīhrāb and minbar remained the focus of the mosque’s interior decoration. The Ottoman sultans later introduced a royal loge, hünkar mahfīl, into their mosques. Unlike the centrally-placed maqṣūra, the Ottoman loge was placed to the side of the mosque and in some instances, such as the Selēmiye mosque (Selīm II, r. 974–82/1566–74) in Edirne, raised on the second floor (see Fig. viii).

With the establishment of the Marwānid branch of the Umayyad family and the shift of the capital from Arabia to Syria, the caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705) and al-Walīd (r. 86–96/705–15) embarked on an ambitious program of construction in the major cities of the realm. The “sacred mosque” (al-masjid al-harām) in Mecca and the Prophet’s mosque in Medina, which had already been enlarged several times to accommodate larger numbers of Muslims, were completely rebuilt, as was the mosque of Damascus, which the Muslims had heretofore shared with the Christians of that city. The Umayyad mosque of Medina is known only through later texts (Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*) but the Damascus mosque, despite a disastrous fire in the late nineteenth century, survives largely intact. Built within the walls of a Roman temple enclosure, the Damascus mosque was one of the most ambitious architectural projects of the time. Like the Dome of the
Rock in Jerusalem, the mosque used the forms and motifs of late antique architecture, such as basilical halls with columns, arches, gables, domes, mosaics and marble revetments, to create a new Islamic architecture. On the south, slightly less than half the enclosed space was covered as a prayer hall; the rest was left open as a courtyard.

The most notable feature of the Damascus as well as the Medina mosque was the introduction of the miḥrāb, a semicircular niche in the center of the qibla wall (Whelan, Origins). Although the origins and meaning of the miḥrāb remain a matter of intense speculation, the form seems to have had a commemorative function, to judge from a slightly earlier silver dirham decorated with a niche enclosing an upright that has been interpreted as the Prophet’s spear (Miles, Miḥrab and ‘Anazah). In any event, the miḥrāb immediately became a distinguishing feature of virtually all mosques (Papadopoulo, Le miḥrāb) and the minbar was, from an early date, placed to the right of the miḥrāb.

At Damascus, the area immediately in front of and beside the miḥrāb, which presumably comprised the caliph’s maqṣūra, was architecturally emphasized by a massive gabled bay and dome (see Fig. 1). Comparable but more modest forms were used to emphasize the miḥrāb area at Medina. The interior walls of the Damascus and Medina mosques were decorated with mosaics and inscriptions (see EPIGRAPHY AND THE QUR’ĀN); the surviving mosaics at Damascus show a riparian landscape with houses and pavilions which perhaps depicts paradise (q.v.) as it is described in the Qur’ān, but few, if any, other mosques had such specific decoration.

The disposition of some mosques, such as those in Aleppo, Diyar Bakr and Harrān, may have been based more or less closely on the example of the Damascus mosque, but the Umayyads do not seem to have established a standard mosque type. Rather, the Umayyad idea of a mosque appears to have comprised a rather flexible association of constituent parts, which should include (in decreasing order of importance): orientation towards Mecca, a miḥrāb in the qibla wall, open and covered spaces, arcades surrounding the courtyard, domes or raised roofs in the area near the miḥrāb, and a maqṣūra. Some or all of these features can be seen in smaller mosques of the Umayyad period, such as at Qur al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī, Jabal Says, etc.

The ‘Abbāsids, who seized power from the Umayyads in 132/749, appear to have had no doctrinal objection to the mosque as it had evolved under Umayyad patronage — although the ‘Abbāsids did claim that the Umayyads’ excessive elevation of the minbar was wrong. The ‘Abbāsids consequently ordered minbars reduced in size but as the Qayrawān minbar (mid-third/ninth century) still has many steps, the order seems not to have been effective. Literary sources indicate that the ‘Abbāsids established mosques in the second half of the second/eighth century at Baghdād, their new capital in Iraq, as well as in other cities. None has survived intact, but they do not appear to have deviated from the Umayyad norm in any significant way. By the early third/ninth century, however, many ‘Abbāsid mosques began to have a single tower located next to the entrance in the wall opposite the miḥrāb.

These towers are traditionally understood to have been places from which the call to prayer (alḥān) was given by the muezzin (mu’āthdhīn) but there is no evidence to suggest that these towers were erected for this purpose (Bloom, Minaret). In early Islamic times, the first call to prayer was normally given from the doorway or roof of the mosque; Shī’īs in particular continued to follow this practice (see SHI’ISM AND THE QUR’ĀN). Under the later Umayyads, sev-
eral mosques had a small structure on the roof, known epigraphically as miḥrān
(place for the adhān), which was presumably meant to protect the muezzin from the elements. Only the mosque of Medina had four towers in Umayyad times, and these do not seem to have been used for the call to prayer. If, in later times, towers were often used for the call to prayer, the tower seems to have been introduced into the mosque simply to indicate its presence from afar. Such an interpretation would coincide with the most common Arabic name for these towers, which is manāra, “a place or thing that gives light” (cf. Hebrew menorat), whence (via the Turkish minare) the English word “minaret.”

Like the mosque itself, there was no particular shape the minaret needed to take: the square and battered third/ninth-century tower of the Great Mosque of Qayrawān was modeled on a nearby Roman lighthouse (see Fig. ii), while the contemporary towers attached to the mosques of al-Mutawakkil and Abū Dulaf at Sāmarra’ in Iraq are helicoidal spirals, a form invented by ‘Abbāsid builders. In Syria, square stone towers became common, while in Iran, cylindrical and polygonal towers of astonishing height showed off the talents of Iranian builders, particularly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

As ablution (wuḍū’i) is required before ritual worship, many mosques are known to have been provided with facilities for washing, although few such installations have survived the centuries. The ninth/fifteenth-century Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) preserved a description of the late third/ninth-century ablution pavilion in the courtyard of Ibn Ṭūlūn’s mosque in Cairo (which was, incidentally, surmounted by a place for the muezzins). A magnificently-decorated sixth/seventh-century ablution pavilion has been preserved from the original Almoravid mosque of Marrakesh, although the mosque itself has not survived (Meunié and Terrasse, Nouvelles recherches; see Fig. iii).

Other elements of mosque furniture include the dīkka, a platform sometimes found in congregational mosques (for one example, see Fig. vi). They are used on Fridays by muezzins giving the third call to prayer before the salāt in the mosque, as well as by “repeaters” (muballīgh) to enable the entire congregation to hear in the pre-loudspeaker age. Reading-stands (kursī) held the large manuscripts of the Qur’ān that were often presented to mosques as pious gifts; some also provided a seat for the reader. Most kursīs were made of wood, elaborately carved and inlaid with colored woods and bone or ivory, but other materials were used. Perhaps the largest is the stone reading stand in the courtyard of the mosque of Bibi Khānum in Samarqand (see Fig. v). It is thought that it was made to hold the enormous manuscript of the Qur’ān whose pages measure over 1 × 2 meters, of which several leaves survive. From an early date, lamps (see LAMP) and candlesticks were installed in mosques to provide light (q.v.) at night. Some were made of metal elaborately decorated with piercing and inlaying (Behrens-Abouseif, Metal lamps), while others, particularly in the Mamlūk period, were made of glass enameled with intricate inscriptions and designs (Wiet, Lampes et bouteilles; for one example of the latter, see Fig. iv of material culture and the qur’ān).

Some enameled glass Mamlūk lamps were inscribed with the Light Verse (Q 24:35), a particularly felicitous choice. Mats or carpets often covered the floors of mosques to prevent the worshiper from getting dusty. The Prophet is said to have initiated the custom of praying on a carpet, although some Muslims reject this practice as a later innovation.
Types of mosques
During the first centuries of Islam, Muslims carried the flexible idea of the hypostyle mosque from its homeland in Syria and Iraq throughout the Muslim world. Before ca. 400/1000, hypostyle or “Arab-type” mosques were erected everywhere from Spain and Morocco in the west to Iran and central Asia in the east. While all share general features of planning and orientation, Muslim patrons and builders were sufficiently flexible to accommodate local traditions of construction and decoration. Thus, the mosque of Cordoba in Spain, begun by Umayyad emigrants from Syria in the late second/eighth century, used a distinctive two-tiered system of supports and mixed construction of recycled stone and brick to support tile-covered gabled roofs. The third/ninth-century builders of the mosque at Qayrawān continued local Tunisian traditions of fine ashlar construction, using recycled antique stone columns and capitals to support a flat timber roof. In most of Iran, brick, whether sun-dried or fired, became the major material of construction for supports and coverings; the scarcity of wood had led Iranian builders in previous centuries to develop ingenious techniques for covering large spaces with brick vaults. In some areas of Iran and Anatolia, on the other hand, where timber continued to be available after the Muslims first settled the region in the late fifth/eleventh century, builders developed a timber-framed hypostyle mosque. Two examples are the small village mosque at Abyāna (Iran; before 1103 C.E.) or the Esrefoğlu mosque at Beyschir (696/1206), although this structure, like many other Anatolian mosques, is enclosed in stone walls. In the Maghrib the hypostyle type of mosque became typical, and its popularity excluded virtually all other types.

The inherent flexibility and adaptability of the hypostyle mosque made it so popular in such a wide variety of situations over such a long period that the name “Arab-type” mosque, which is sometimes used, is patently unsuitable. The plan, with some variation, is found for example in an early mosque in west Africa (e.g. the eighth/fourteenth-century Djingere-Ber mosque at Timbuktu) as well as a modern one in the same region (the Great Mosque of Mopti built in 1935). It is also found in east Africa (e.g. the Great Mosque, Kilwa Kisawānī; begun in the sixth/twelfth century), India (the Quwwat al-Islam mosque, Delhi; begun 592/1196), China (e.g. Yangzhou mosque, Jiangsu Province; begun 673/1275[?]) and southeast Asia (e.g. Masjid Agung, Demak; founded 881/1477); and modern architects continue to exploit its structural possibilities, as in the Mosque of the King (Marbella; 1981) or the King/Abd al-Azīz mosque (Casablanca; 1983; Frishman and Khan, The mosque).

Most mosques surviving from the early centuries of Islam are large structures intended for congregational worship, but several smaller mosques also survive from the second/eighth century and later. Found in such cities as Toledo (Spain), Qayrawān and Sīsā (Tunisia), Fusṭāṭ (Egypt), Termāz (Uzbekistan), and Balkh (Afghanistan) as well as in rural areas of Arabia and central Asia, this type of mosque is characterized by nine square units arranged in a $3 \times 3$ grid, with four columns or piers supporting the roof. The germ of the type is found in the Umayyad mosques of Khān al-Zabīh, Umm al-Walīd and Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt. The widespread popularity of this “nine-bay” plan suggests that it, like the hypostyle mosque, was diffused from some central source (King, Nine bay).

The hypostyle mosque, whether large or small, may have been the most common type in early Islamic times, but literary evidence suggests that other types of struc-
tters were also used where available. In Iran, where free-standing domed chambers and vaulted halls had been essential elements of the architectural vocabulary in pre-Islamic times, it is possible that pre-existing domes and iwāns (a barrel-vaulted hall open at one end) would have been adapted for use as mosques, much as how, in Syria, basilicas had been transformed into mosques. The crucial archaeological evidence for this transformation is lacking, however, perhaps because many of these structures were built of mud-brick, and fell into dust once abandoned. The undated domed mosques at Yazd-i Khwāst and Qurva may be recycled older buildings. The prayer hall of the Iranian mosque at Nayrūz (perhaps begun 363/973) is a large single iwān which has a mihrāb at one end and is open to the courtyard at the other. In the late fifth/eleventh century, however, the Saljuq rulers of Iran, who made their capital at Isfahān, transformed the third/ninth-century hypostyle mosque of that city by removing many of the columns in the area immediately in front of the mihrāb and inserting a huge freestanding brick dome in their place. The building of the Isfahān dome in 479/1086-7 by the powerful vizier Nizām al-Mulk during the reign of Malik-shāh has been shown to have been directly inspired by Malik-shāh's restoration of the maqsūra dome in the Damascus mosque, which had been destroyed by fire a few years before (Blair, Surveyor). While the idea of the great dome may have been inspired by the precedent of Damascus, the form this new dome took was dependent on earlier buildings in central Iran, such as the freestanding domed tomb in Yazd known as the Twelve Imāms (429/1038). Indeed, the Isfahān dome was initially freestanding within the hypostyle hall, but such a structure was both structurally unstable and visually awkward, so a massive iwān was soon erected in front of it. This iwān physically and visually linked the courtyard to the maqsūra dome, and the flanking hypostyle halls were connected to the new parts. The iwān’s court facade was embellished by a high rectangular frame, known as a pīsh-tūq, which was, perhaps at a later date, flanked by slender towers. By the early sixth/twelfth century, three other iwāns had been erected at the midpoints of the three other sides of the court, so that the mosque had taken on an entirely new aspect. In place of the hypostyle halls surrounding the spacious courtyard, there was now a massive arched iwān in each of its four sides; that on the qibla side terminated in a huge dome over the mihrāb.

The prestige of the mosque in Isfahān (see Fig. iv), which was the Saljuq capital, coupled with the inherent flexibility of the four-iwān plan, which had been used for centuries on a much smaller scale in residential and palatine architecture, led builders throughout the Saljuq realm to copy the developments at Isfahān. Older hypostyle mosques were transformed by the addition of a dome and one or more iwāns (e.g. Ardistan), and new mosques were built from scratch using the new plan (e.g. Zawārā). Indeed, by the eighth/forteenth century, the four-iwān mosque had become the Iranian mosque type, and such plans were used in various scales from the modest (Varamīn, 722/1322 and later) to the mammoth (Timūr’s mosque of Bihī Khānum in Samarqand, 802-3/1399), where even the lateral iwāns were domed. The four-iwān type continued to be the most popular in later periods in Iran and central Asia, as for example in the Kalān mosque (920/1514) in Bukhāra or the Masjid-i Imām (formerly Masjid-i Shāh) erected by the Safavid Shāh ‘Abbās between 1021/1612 and 1040/1630 in Isfahān.

As Iranian cultural norms were prevalent in most of the eastern Islamic lands in the
period after ca. 650⁄1250, the Iranian combination of an īwān leading to a dome over the miḥrāb, or even the four-īwān type plan, was widely disseminated, although, like the hypostyle mosque before it, its features were often creatively reinterpreted, as at the Ülüm Câmi’ (621⁄1224) at Malatya in southeast Anatolia, where the courtyard is very small, and the mosque of Baybars I (665⁄1266) in Cairo, where the īwān is a sort of hypostyle hall and the dome was built of wood.

The Iranian type of four-īwān mosque was used on the Indian subcontinent, as for example at Thatta (1054⁄1644), but the essential features of the plan were more commonly adapted to create a new Indian type of mosque more suited to the climate. Like earlier Hindu temples, this type of mosque is often raised on a high plinth. It comprises a vast walled court with minarets set at the exterior corners and massive portals on the main and lateral axes. On the exterior, these are approached by flights of steps and are topped with small minaret-like towers and open pavilions. Within the court, which often has no surrounding arcade, the prayer hall occupies most but not all of the qibla wall’s width. Projecting into the court, the fairly shallow prayer hall comprises a central īwān-like portal leading to a dome chamber over the mihrāb and minbar. This īwān and dome unit is usually flanked by smaller versions of it, other domed bays and towers linked together behind a screen-like façade. An early example is found at the Atala mosque at Jaunpur (810⁄1408; see Fig. vii); a later one is the Badshahi mosque at Lahore (1084⁄1673), said to be the largest mosque in the subcontinent.

Another distinctive type of mosque, characterized by a single large dome, developed in Anatolia, particularly under the Ottomans (r. 1281–1924 c.e.). After the region was opened for Muslim settlement follow-

ing the Battle of Manzikert in 463⁄1071, the first mosques erected, such as the ‘Alā’ al-Din mosque in Konya (550-617⁄1155-1220), were hypostyle structures. Perhaps in response to the severe Anatolian winter climate, these mosques had no courtyard, or only a vestigial one. Most early Anatolian mosques were, therefore, closed halls resting on a multitude of columns, sometimes fronted by courtyards akin to the forecourts of some Byzantine churches. Indigenous Byzantine experience with building domed and vaulted churches in stone, combined with the knowledge of Iranian traditions of building brick vaults and domes brought by the Saljuqs, undoubtedly encouraged local builders to experiment with the covering of mosques with domes and vaults; the subsequent history of the mosque in Anatolia, particularly under the Ottomans, is dominated by the desire to create a unified prayer space under a domical covering.

Scholars have debated the origins of the mature type of Turkish domed mosque. Some see its origins in the simple, single domed mosque preceded by a portico, such as the Mosque of Haç Özbe at İznik (734⁄1333), while others see it in the more complex organization of domed and vaulted elements characteristic of the Bursa-type or zāwiya (Turk. zaviyel) mosque usually associated with a dervish cloister, in which a domed central space precedes a vaulted or domed īwān-like prayer hall and is flanked by corresponding īwān-like spaces to the left and right which could be used for teaching, etc. (see ŞÊVISM AND THE QUR’ĀN). Other vaulted or domed chambers in the corners, often furnished with fireplaces, could be used for lodging itinerant dervishes. This completely covered mosque type, well suited to the harsh Anatolian climate, is exemplified by the Yeşil Câmi’ (815-22⁄1412-19) at Bursa.

In the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/six-
teenth centuries the Ottoman sultans sponsored a series of immense domed congregational mosques which combined various trends, including the single domed space (as at Iznik), the completely covered space (as at Bursa), the large dome before the mihrab (as in Iranian mosques) and the open arcaded forecourt (as in the Great Mosque of Damascus or Byzantine churches). These buildings were the centerpieces of large religious and charitable foundations. The earliest examples, such as the Üç Şerefeli mosque in Edirne (841-51/1437-47), have vast central domes with low subsidiary spaces, but the best known examples represent creative responses to the models of Byzantine architecture, primarily the great church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, which had been founded by the emperor Constantine in the fourth century C.E. and rebuilt in the sixth century by the emperor Justinian. Immediately after the conquest of Constantinople in 857/1453 by the Ottoman emperor Mehemmed II the church was converted into the city’s first congregational mosque by the addition of a mihrab, minbar and minarets. The Süleymaniye mosque in Istanbul (964/1557), the masterpiece of Ottoman architecture by the great architect Sinan, for example, follows the model of Hagia Sophia by using an immense central dome buttressed at either end by semi-domes. The many windows create a highly centralized space, which contrasts with the strongly directional space of the prototype. Unlike many mosques of earlier times, in which the exterior facade was often neglected in favor of a focus on the interior or courtyard, the exteriors of the imperial Ottoman mosques were clearly meant to be monumental, presenting cascades of domes and semi-domes punctuated by slender minarets. The central mass is often enveloped in the domes of the adjacent religious and charitable foundations, which frequently included the tomb of the founder.

The power and prestige of the Ottoman empire in the Balkans, north Africa and the Near East encouraged the construction of similar if somewhat simpler mosques (and complexes) in the capital cities of the Ottoman empire. Sometimes these structures incorporated local architectural motifs and techniques, such as the striped masonry used in the Sulaymaniyya complex at Damascus, completed in 1562/1554-55, or the ogee windows of the tenth/sixteenth-century mosque of Sinan Pasha in Cairo. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries C.E., the Ottoman type of domed mosque has been adapted throughout the world and has become one of the most popular designs for new mosques. These can range from banal copies of Sinan’s masterpieces in reinforced concrete to inventive reinterpretations in modern materials, such as Vedat Dalakoy’s State Mosque (1970-86) in Islamabad, Pakistan, or Skidmore, Owings and Merrill’s Islamic Cultural Center (1987-91) in New York (Holod & Khan, Contemporary mosque).

Distinct types of mosques have also developed in other areas of the Islamic world. In Indonesia, for example, the Java-type mosque is set in a courtyard surrounded by a stone wall. It has a veranda on the front, and is characterized by a square plan, raised foundations, tapering roof two to five stories high, and a projecting mihrab. In China, many mosques, particularly those built under the Ming emperors, are reminiscent of indigenous Chinese temples. Other distinct styles have also evolved in east and west Africa.

Decoration of mosques

Virtually all media of Islamic art are represented in the decoration of mosques, with the one proviso that Islam forbids the representation of animate beings (i.e. humans...
and animals) in such situations where they might be taken as objects of devotion, as in mosques. Thus, one rarely, if ever, finds pictorial or sculptural representations in mosques, whose main decoration has consisted of inscriptions, often from the text of the Qur’an, and vegetal and geometric designs. In the early period, the interior decoration of major Umayyad mosques, such as those in Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem and Damascus, adapted the techniques and many of the motifs of Byzantium, so colored and gold glass mosaic was popular. In later times, carved and molded plaster, carved and painted wood, glazed ceramic tile and marble paneling were commonly used media of decoration.

In many times and places, the interior of the mosque has been more important than the exterior, and the decoration has been concentrated largely on the inside. This may have resulted from the idea that the mosque is centered around the courtyard, and consequently the building is planned and intended to be seen from the courtyard outwards. The result is that exteriors were neglected, often irregular, and hardly distinguished from the surrounding urban fabric. At first, doorways were simple affairs with no great decoration, but eventually they became places of some importance, perhaps following the lead of the portals to the “sacred mosque” (al-masjid al-haram) in Mecca, which were monumentalized at an early date, and eventually projected from the mosque wall itself. The earliest fancy portal to survive is the Bāb al-Wuzara’, “Vizier’s Gate” (241/855-6) at the Great Mosque of Cordoba, in which the doorway has been embellished with inscriptions and carving (Brisch, Zum Bāb al-Wuzara’). Congregational mosques of the Fāṭimid period emphasize the doorways, probably because of the Fāṭimid aversion to building minarets. The triple-arched portal of the Great Mosque at Mahdiyya (308/921), the first Fāṭimid mosque in Tunisia, is modeled on a late antique triumphal arch (Bloom, The origins). Archaeologists working in Iṣfahān in the 1930s discovered a large portal in baked brick and carved plaster. On the basis of its style, it has been identified as the portal of the Jurjir mosque built by the Būyid vizier Ibn ‘Abbād in the third quarter of the fourth/tenth century (Blair, Monumental inscriptions, 52-3).

Qurʾanic inscriptions in mosques were usually prepared as coherent programs of decoration, although few complete programs have survived and the meaning is usually inferred from surviving fragments. The mosaic inscriptions in the Great Mosque of Damascus, for example, are known to have focused on eschatological texts about the day of judgment (sūras 78 and 79 of the Qurʾan; Finster, Die Mosaiken; see eschatology; last judgment; apocalypse), while the stucco inscriptions carved in the walls of the mosque of al-Azhar in Cairo (founded 363/972) used verses such as q 21:101-7 to describe the paradise that awaited the true believers (see belief and unbelief). Other decorative programs seem to have been somewhat less selective: medieval sources assert that the carved wooden friezes running under the ceiling of the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn in Cairo (265/879) repeated the whole text of the Qurʾan, and the inscriptions in the mosque of al-Ḥākim, also in Cairo, contain the opening verses of many different chapters (Bloom, Mosque of al-Hakim).

Nevertheless, specific Qurʾanic verses were inscribed in appropriate situations. The most common Qurʾanic text used for inscriptions in mosques is q 9:18, which states that God’s mosques should be reserved for good Muslims who believe in God, pray, pay alms (see almsgiving), and
worship God alone (Dodd and Khairallah, The image; Blair, Mosque inscriptions). The text, one of the few in the Qur’an to actually mention mosques and what should be done within them, quickly became popular in congregational mosques. Other Qur'anic citations commonly found in mosques include the Throne Verse (q 2:255; see throne of god), which extolls God’s majesty and is often used around domes, the Light Verse (q 24:35-8), which describes God as the light (q.v.) of the heavens (see heaven and sky) and the earth (q.v.), and Sūrat al-Fath (“Victory,” q 48; see victory). Although the Light Verse is often associated, because of a mistranslation, with the common motif of a lamp in a niche, certain verses were often associated with specific parts of mosques. Mihrābs often contained verses q 17:72-9, which mention prayer and vigil (see vigil).

Qur'anic verses were also selected to give a particular inscription a specific ideological position. An inscription once on the exterior of the mosque of al-Ḥākim (380-405/990-1013) quotes Q 28:5, which uses the word a'ima, the plural of imān, the title by which the Fātimids styled themselves. Similarly, an inscription on one of the same mosque’s towers cites q 11:72, containing the phrase ahl al-bayt (“people of the house”), which the Fātimids interpreted as a direct reference to themselves as the descendants of the Prophet (Bloom, Mosque of al-Hakim). Similarly, the portal of the Jurjur mosque in Iṣfahān (ca. 350/960) is inscribed with q 3:18, in which the use of the word qisṭ may have been chosen to advertise the building’s function as a Mu'tazilite foundation (Blair, The octagonal pavilion; see Mu'tazilīs). As sectarian struggles increased over the course of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, such pointed uses of Qur'anic inscriptions only increased, but in later times verses with more general application came to be expressed in monumental tiled and painted inscriptions.

Jonathan M. Bloom

Bibliography

Mosque of the Dissension

Scene (and symbol) of opposition to Muhammad in Medina (q.v.) in 9/630, to which allusion is made in q 9:107: “And those who have taken a mosque (q.v.) in opposition (dirārān, see OPPOSITION TO MUHAMMAD) and unbelief (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF), and to divide the believers, and as a place of ambush for those who fought God and his messenger (q.v.) aforetime, will swear ‘We desire nothing but good’; and God testifies they are truly liars (see LIЕ).” This obscure incident took place in Qubā’, in upper (i.e. southern) Medina (see Lecker, Muslims, map. 2), sometime after Rajab 9/ October 630 (the date of the expedition of Tabuk; see EXPEDITIONS AND BATTLES). The mosque (q.v.) to which the passage alludes has various designations: “mosque of the dissension” or “mosque of the opposition” (masjid al-dirārā; less commonly, “mosque of division” or “mosque of hypocrisy” (masjid al-shiqāq/al-nifāq; see HYPOCRITES AND HYPOCRISY; CORRUPTION; PARTIES AND Factions).

Although the accounts of the incident agree about the outline of the events, they do reveal some significant differences. The essential outline of events is as follows: well after Muhammad’s emigration (q.v.) from Mecca (q.v.), a group of “dissenters” established a mosque in lower Medina, rivaling a mosque already in place. As Muhammad became more firmly established in Medina, the political leadership of lower Medina came under his control. Sometime after the erection of the mosque, but still within the Prophet’s lifetime, and as the political opposition to Muhammad decreased, the “mosque of the dissension” burnt to the ground.

Despite the Qur’ānic assertion that the builders of the “mosque of dissension” erred, the report transmitted by Sa’d b. Jubayr (d. 93/714), is sympathetic to these builders: “The [clan of] ‘Amr b. ‘Auf built a mosque and their nephews, the [clan of] Ghanm b. ‘Auf [in some versions: the so-and-so; ‘Umar b. Shabba, Taʾrikh, i, 53], envied them. They said: ‘We, too, built a mosque and invited the messenger of God to lead our prayer (q.v.) in it as he did in the mosque of our companions. Perhaps Abū ‘Āmir will pass by and lead our prayer in it’. When the Prophet was about to set out to go to them, he had a revelation [prohibiting him to go]” (Baladhuri, Ansāb, i, 282; trans. Lecker, Muslims, 76-7). In the context of this report, it is noteworthy that Sa’d b. Jubayr adopts an anti-Khazrajī position in the dispute between the tribe of Aws (specifically the ‘Amr b. ‘Awf) and the tribe of Khazraj (see TRIBES AND CLANS) over the identification of another mosque, that founded upon piety (q.v.; q 9:108).

From the account of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. bet. 91/711 and 101/720), it could be inferred that the mosque of “dissension” was built before the battle of Badr (q.v.), that is, several years before its destruction in the year 9/630 (Baladhuri, Ansāb, i, 283; ‘Umar b. Shabba, Taʾrikh, 54-5; Lecker, Muslims, 81-5). According to yet a third account, ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687-8), this mosque was built by order of the great opponent of Muhammad, Abū ‘Āmir (the “monk”), as a “hostile stronghold” for a Byzantine expedition force (Tabarī, Taʾrif, xiv, 270, no. 17187; Lecker, Muslims, 83-7; see BYZANTINES).

The account of the exegete Muqātil b.
Sulaymān (d. 150/767), while agreeing with the outline of the accounts found in the other versions, adds a...
Names and appellations

When, however, the Qur'an addresses the Prophet directly in the second person, he is not referred to as "Muhammad," but is called by various appellations that indicate his relation to God. Here, apart from rasul, the title most frequently used is al-nabî, "prophet" (q. 8:64; 66:8, etc.). The appellation "servant" (q.; 'abd) of God is also used most probably with reference to the Prophet (q. 17:1; 25:1; 39:36; 72:19). Other epithets allude to the purposes of his mission, the most frequent being bashîr, "announcer," and nadîr, "warner" (q.; e.g. q. 2:119, etc.), as well as mudhakkir, "reminder" (q. 88:21). In q. 33:45-6, a series of titles is provided: shâhid, "witness" (see witnessing and testifying), mubashshir, "bearer of good tidings" (see good news), nadîr, dâ'î, "one who calls [unto God]" (see invitation), and sirîj munîr, "light-giving lamp" (see light; lamp).

More particular designations are derived from his state at the time of the address (see occasions of revelation). Thus the Qur'an addresses him as al-muzzammil, "the enwrapped" (q. 73:1) and al-muddaththir, "the shrouded" (q. 74:1) when prompting him to rise and accomplish his mission. This pair of appellations probably symbolizes withdrawal and reluctance. See also names of the Prophet.

Revelation

The revelation of the divine message, which the qur'anic Prophet is supposed to deliver, is described in a variety of terms depicting the content as well as the process of revelation. What is revealed to the Prophet is most frequently called qur'an (e.g. q. 6:19; 20:2, etc.), which the Prophet is supposed to "recite" (li-taqra'ahu, q. 17:106; an atlawa, q. 27:92; see orality; recitation of the Qur'an, or "chant" (rattil, q. 73:4). But the latter command may also

Muhammad

The Muslim Prophet to whom God's revelation was "sent down" (nazzîla, q. 47:2; see prophets and prophethood; revelation and inspiration). On three occasions the name is followed by the title "messenger" (q.; rasîl), i.e. God's messenger (q. 3:144; 3:40; 48:29).

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be understood in a different sense (Paret, Mohammed, 492). The Qur’án is not only recited by the Prophet but is also being recited to him during revelation (q 75:18; cf. q 87:6).

The revelation received by the Prophet is most frequently described as a kitāb, a “book” (q.v.; Q 4:105; 54:48, etc.). It is recited to him during revelation (q 28:2-3) and he, in turn, is supposed to recite it (q 18:27; 29:45). The plural, kutub (“books”), also appears as something recited by the Prophet but is also being recited to him during revelation (q 4:147). The revelation received by the Prophet may also be described as dhikr; as with the story of Dhul-Qarnayn (q 18:83; see Alexander). This form is the infinitive of dhakara, to “mention,” or to “remind,” so that dhikr is an “allusion” to a story (see memory). Nevertheless, the same term is also the name of the entire revelation (q 16:44, etc.), probably because it alludes quite frequently to stories of past generations. In fact, the injunction udhkur fî l-kitāb, “mention in the book,” is frequently used in passages prompting the Qur’anic Prophet to recount stories about previous prophets (q 19:16, 41, etc.).

The primary stage of revelation that precedes public recitation of texts is represented by the verb awchā, which is frequently used in the Qur’án to describe the act of communicating divine texts to the Prophet. The kitāb is communicated to him in this way (q 35:31), as well as the Qur’án (q 12:3) and the stories of the unseen (anbā’ al-ghayb, cf. q 3:44; 11:49; 12:102). That the verb awchā describes the initial stage of revelation is indicated in several passages in which the Prophet is expected to recite what has been revealed (awchynay; ʿiḥyyn) to him (q 13:30; 18:27; 29:45), which means that an intimate process of revelation has preceded actual recitation. Instructions as to how revelation should be received are given to the Prophet in q 20:114, where he is advised not to “hasten” (la ījżay) with the Qur’án before the completion of revelation (wahy). More specific directions are given in q 75:16-9 where he is instructed not to move his tongue with (revelation) to hasten it, and wait with its recitation till it is recited to him (in full).

The revelations received as wahy by the
Prophet originate in a person, an angel (q.v.), described as “terrible in power,” who stood on the “higher horizon” and then drew nearer and nearer (q.v. 53:4-10). Elsewhere he is described as “having power, with the lord of the throne (see THRONES OF GOD) secure, obeyed moreover trusty,” and the Prophet “saw him” (ra‘īhu) in the clear horizon (q. 81:20-1, 23). The heart (q.v.; al-fu‘ād) of the Prophet once “saw” (ra‘ā) this mighty person near a (celestial?) lote-tree (musrāt al-manṭṭahā (q. 53:11-8; see AGRICULTURE AND VEGETATION).

The most prevalent verbs, however, which describe the imparting of texts to the Prophet are various derivatives of n-z-l, “to come down.” For example, in q. 17:106 the Prophet is expected to recite the Qur‘ān that was sent down successively (nazzalnāhu) to him. What was sent down to him this way is called in one instance furqān (q. 25:1; see NAMES OF THE QUR‘ĀN), which is also the name of what was given to Moses (q. 2:53). The process of sending down ends at the Prophet’s heart (‘alā qalbikā), and is carried out by an intermediary called Jibrīl, the angel Gabriel (q.v.; q. 2:97), or al-rūḥ al-aminū, “the faithful spirit” (q. 26:193-4); elsewhere he is called rūḥ al-qudūs, “the holy spirit” (q. 16:102; see HOLY SPIRIT).

The beginning of the process of sending down revelation seems to be indicated in q. 44:2-3 where it is stated that the kitāb was sent down during a “blessed night.” Elsewhere this night is called laylat al-qadr (q. 97:1; see NIGHT OF POWER), and in yet another passage, the sending down of the Qur‘ān is said to have taken place in the month of Ramadān (q.v.; q. 2:185). The sending down of the kitāb is praised as a grand manifestation of God’s bounty (see BLESSING) to the Prophet, which has provided him with knowledge (see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING) that he did not have before (q. 4:113; 42:52). The Prophet himself has not asked for this favor (q. 28:86), and had it not been for God’s mercy (q.v.), he might have withdrawn the revelation altogether (q. 17:86-7). God’s benevolence, however, which emanates from the revelation of the book, also envelops the believers (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF). The Prophet is expected to teach them the book, thus providing them with knowledge that they do not have yet (q. 2:151; 3:164; 62:2). The book is also the means by which the Prophet is expected to decide in matters on which the believers are disagreed (see JUDGMENT) and guide them to the right path (q. 16:64, 89; see PATH OR WAY; ASTRAY). Therefore the sending down of the book indicates God’s compassion (rahma) unto them (q. 16:89), as does also the sending of the Prophet himself as a messenger to all beings (q. 21:107).

Aims of the mission

The mission of the qur‘ānic Prophet has a dominant apocalyptic aspect, as his role is to warn the unbelievers of their eschatological punishment (see APOCALYPSE; ESCHATOLOGY; REWARD AND PUNISHMENT). This aspect comes out in passages describing the aims of revelation. Thus in q. 38:70, the essence of what is revealed (yūhā) to the Prophet is focused on his mission as a warner (nadhir). In q. 6:19, the Prophet says that the Qur‘ān was revealed (āḥiya) to him so that he “may warn you thereby,” and in q. 21:45, he says that he warns only by the wahy. Likewise, the book (al-kitāb) is said to have been sent down so that the Prophet may warn by it (q. 6:92; 7:2, etc.). What he is expected to warn of is the hour (e.g. q. 79:42-5, etc.), or the day of judgment (see LAST JUDGMENT) that the Qur‘ān calls by various names (e.g. q. 14:44; 19:39; 40:18, etc.). Some passages do not explicitly refer to the eschatological future and focus instead on examples from the history of some extinct communities (see...
Here the Prophet is requested to warn his contemporaries of the calamity that befell the peoples of 'Ad (q.v.) and Thamûd (q.v.; e.g. Q. 41:13-6, etc.).

Other passages in which the Prophet is addressed directly bring out the monotheistic message in his mission. He is demanded to proclaim (iqra') the name of his lord (q.v.; Q. 96:1), or praise (sabbih) his name (Q. 36:96; 69:52; 87:1; see Laudation; Glorification of God) or declare (adhkar) it (Q. 73:8; 76:25). In other passages he is instructed not to worship idols apart from God (Q. 17:22, 39; 26:213; 28:88), and not to be one of the mushrikûn, i.e. those who associate other deities with God (Q. 12:108; 28:87, etc.; see Idols and Images; idolatry and idolaters; polytheism and atheism).

**Scope of the mission**

The scope of the mission of the Qur'anic Prophet changes between universal and local. The latter comes out in passages in which the Prophet is supposed to warn his own people (qawm) in his own language (bi-lisânika), namely Arabic, thus making his message easy to understand (Q. 19:97; see also Q. 44:58). The local scope of the Prophet's mission is further evident in the statement that every messenger was sent to address his people (qawm) by their own language (Q. 14:4). The same is implied in the idea that the Prophet has been sent to a qawm to which a warner was never sent before (Q. 28:46; 32:3; 36:6; see also Q. 34:44). His audience is even smaller in a passage commanding him to warn his closest clan (āshîrâ, Q. 26:214). In another passage he is said to have been sent to a community (umma) that has been preceded by other nations (Q. 13:30), which seems to mean that his audience is Arabian, and is different from previous nations (Jews and Christians). Moreover, in Q. 62:2 he is presented as a messenger belonging to the ummiyyûn, i.e. the gentiles, to whom he has been sent to teach the book and the wisdom (q.v.). This corresponds to further passages in which he is presented as one of his own audience (minkam, min an físâkum; see Q. 2:151; 9:128, etc.). Above all, he is said to have received an Arabic Qur'ân so that he may warn Umm al-Qurâ (Q. 42:7; see also Q. 6:92, 90:1-2), which is probably Mecca (q.v.), and those who dwell around it. God himself, whom the Prophet is commanded to worship, is described as local, namely, “the lord of this town which he has made sacred” (Q. 27:91). This again may be a reference to Mecca.

On the other hand, other passages, of a clear universal orientation, imply that the Prophet has been sent as a messenger, or to warn and bear good tidings, to all human-kind (lîl-nâs), or all beings (lîl-‘ulâmîn) or human beings (bashar), without confining the audience to a specific group (Q. 4:79; 7:158; 21:107; 25:1; 34:28; 74:36). When a specific group is nevertheless indicated, it is the People of the Book (q.v.), to whom the Prophet has come in order to warn and display many things that they have been concealing of the book (Q. 5:15). He has come to them after an interval (fatra) between the messengers (Q. 5:19), and is expected to judge them according to the book that has been revealed to him (Q. 5:42-3; 48, 49; see also Q. 4:65, 105). This is based on the idea that the Qur'ân can clarify for the Children of Israel (q.v.) most of the matters they dispute (Q. 27:76). Apart from human beings, the Qur'ân also affects the demons (jinn), who listen to its recitation and become believers (Q. 46:29-31; 72:1-2).

**The faith of the Qur'anic Prophet**

The Qur'anic Prophet was the first of his people to become a Muslim, one who has deserted shirk (i.e. the worship of deities)
other than God, considered as his “associates”). This is stated in Q 6:14: “Say: ‘Shall I take to myself as protector other than God, the originator of the heavens (see HEAVEN AND SKY) and of the earth (q.v.; see also CREATION), he who feeds and is not fed?’ Say: ‘I have been commanded to be the first of them that became a Muslim (aslama).’ Be you not of the associators (lā takānāna mina l-mushrīkina).’” The battle against shirk that underlies the Prophet’s monotheistic thrust also emerges in Q 6:162-3: “Say: ‘My prayer (q.v.), my ritual sacrifice (q.v.), my living, my dying — all belongs to God, the lord of all being. He has no associate (sharīk). Thus have I been commanded and I am the first of those who have become Muslims.’” The abandonment of shirk means the purification (ikhlās) of one’s faith (q.v.); it is this that has made the Prophet a Muslim: “Say: ‘I have been commanded to serve God, purifying my religion (q.v.) for him, and I have been commanded to be the first of those who have become Muslims’” (Q 39:11-2).

The Qur’ānic Prophet and previous prophets

Although the Prophet is the first Muslim among his people, previous prophets are also described as fighting against shirk and are hence designated as Muslims. This is the case with Noah who is one of “those who became Muslims” (Q 10:72), while Moses is the “first of those who became believers” (Q 7:143). This reveals the notion that the Prophet is a link in a chain of prophets sent to previous communities. In fact, he is the final link, as indicated in the title khāṭān al-nabīyīn, “seal of the prophets,” by which the Qur’ān designates Muḥammad (Q 33:40). Muḥammad, so the Qur’ān states, is only a messenger following other messengers who passed away before him (Q 3:144). In this respect he is like any other messenger in that chain, for example, Jesus (q.v.), about whom it is also stated that other messengers passed away before him (Q 5:75). As a link in a successive chain, the Prophet appears in the list of prophets with whom God made a covenant (q.v.; Q 33:7) and here, apart from the Prophet himself, the other prophets mentioned are Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

The affinity between the Prophet and the previous ones comes out in the idea that all of them experienced the same process of revelation. This is stated in Q 4:163: “We have revealed to you (waḥaynā ʻl-yakīn) as we revealed to Noah and to the prophets after him, and [as] we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael (q.v.), Isaac (q.v.), Jacob (q.v.), and the tribes (see ISRAEL), Jesus and Job (q.v.), Jonah (q.v.) and Aaron (q.v.) and Solomon (q.v.) and we gave psalms (q.v.) to David (q.v.) …” The book that was revealed to the Prophet is not unique to him either, as other prophets were also sent with “the book” that was designed to guide them and resolve their disputes (Q 2:213). The goals of revelation are also common to all prophets, including the Prophet. He was sent to give warning as well as good tidings (bashshir) to the believers (e.g. Q 2:25, etc.), and the same is applicable to the previous messengers who were also sent to warn the evil doers and bear good tidings to the righteous (Q 6:48, etc.; see GOOD DEEDS; EVIL DEEDS; GOOD AND EVIL). The model of the previous prophets is continued in the career of the Prophet, and this comes out most clearly in what is known as the “punishment stories” (q.v.; for which see e.g. Watt-Bell, Introduction, 127 f.). They describe the events in the lives of prophets such as Sālīh (q.v.) in terms identical to those used for the experience of the Prophet (ibid., 193–4). In one case (Q 73:15), the parallelism is explicitly drawn, where it is stated that God sent the Prophet in the same manner as a messenger (i.e. Moses) was sent to warn Pharaoh (q.v.).
As a result of the affinity between the Prophet and the other prophets, the religion revealed to all of them is one and the same (Q 42:13). Hence the Qurʾān urges the Muslims to believe in all that was sent down to each one of the prophets and not make division among any of them (Q 2:136, 285; 3:84). It follows that the message of the book that was revealed to the Prophet is essentially the same as that of the books revealed to previous messengers. Therefore, the Qurʾān asserts several times that the book that was sent down to the Prophet “confirms (muṣaddiq) what was before it” (Q 35:31; cf. 3:3; 5:48; 6:92). In one case, the Arabian provenance of the Prophet’s book is declared (Q 46:12; see ARABS; ARABIC LANGUAGE) and here the Qurʾān points out a specific book that has preceded the Arabian one, namely, the book of Moses (see also Q 46:30). In the same way, Jesus is said to have confirmed the Torah (q.v.) that had been revealed before him (Q 3:50; 5:46; 6:6).

The messianic position of the Qurʾānic Prophet

In some passages, however, the Prophet occupies a distinguished position among the prophets, and the covenant God makes with them revolves exclusively around his own person, which thus acquires a messianic position. To begin with, in Q 3:81 God establishes a covenant with the prophets to the effect that when a messenger comes and confirms the book that is with them, they should believe in him and support him. This seems to mean that all prophets, as well as their respective peoples, must join the Prophet whenever he appears. Moreover, the description of the Qurʾānic messenger is said to have been written in the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians (see SCRIPTURE AND THE QURʾĀN; CORRUPTION; FORGERY), namely, the Torah and the Gospel (q.v.), where he is described as al-nābi al-ummī, “the gentle prophet” (cf. Rubin, The eye, 23-30; see UMMĪ; ILLITERACY), and God’s mercy is promised to those among them who follow him (Q 7:137-8). A more specific name of the Qurʾānic messenger as described in the scriptures of the previous prophets is Ahmad, about whom Jesus brings to the Children of Israel the good tidings (Q 61:6). Taken together, these passages build up a messianic image of the Prophet behind whom humankind is supposed to unite as one community of believers (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QURʾĀN).

The religion of Abraham

The universal link of the Prophet, which is based on the identity of the message he shares with the prophets of the Children of Israel, or the People of the Book, is absent from other passages that establish a direct connection between the Prophet and Abraham. Thus in Q 3:68 it is declared “those standing closest to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet, and those who believe.” The Qurʾānic Prophet is explicitly instructed to follow what is called the “religion” (milla) of Abraham, and such passages surely exclude the religion of the Jewish and Christian prophets from the scope of the Prophet’s faith (see JEWS AND JUDAISM; CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY). Abraham himself is declared to have preceded the revelation of the Torah and the Gospel (Q 3:65), and to have been neither Jewish nor Christian, but a hānīf (q.v.), a Muslim and not a mushrik, “associator” (Q 3:67). As the latter designation stands mainly for Arabian polytheists (see SOUTH ARABIA, RELIGION IN PRE-ISLAMIC), following the religion of Abraham means disassociation not only from the Jewish and Christian religious legacy but also from the Arabian one. The Prophet is explicitly demanded to follow the religion of Abraham in Q 16:123, while the rest of the believers are ordered to do the same in Q 3:95. In
Q 2:135: the believers who adhere to the religion of Abraham are thus refraining from becoming Jews or Christians. In another passage the Prophet is merely instructed to become a hanif and here the demand is designed to prevent the Prophet from being a mushrik (Q 10:105). Although Abraham’s name is not explicitly mentioned, the demand again is probably to follow Abraham’s model. The same applies to Q 30:30 where the Prophet is urged to become a hanif and adhere to the religion which is God’s “original creation” (fitra), upon which he created humankind. The relation between the idea of the “original” religion and Abraham is clear from other passages describing Abraham’s natural monotheism (Q 6:79).

The particularistic trend of the passages which create a direct connection between Abraham and the Prophet again seems to confine the scope of the message of the Prophet to the Arabian sphere, because Abraham himself, when linked to the Prophet, features in a clearly local context. This is the case in Q 2:127-9, where Abraham and Ishmael “raise up” the foundations of the house (the Ka’ba [q.v.]), and then Abraham prays to God to send from among his descendants a prophet who will teach them the book and the wisdom.

The qur’anic Prophet between God and man
As a messenger of God, the Prophet is a chosen person, because God “chooses (yastafi) messengers of the angels and of humankind” (Q 22:75). The Qur’an is therefore described as the “speech (q.v.) of a noble messenger” (Q 69:40). As God’s chosen messenger, the Prophet is the recipient not only of his revelation but also of his infinite supervision, compassion and protection (q.v.). This is noted in passages such as that in which God is said to have never forsaken the Prophet (Q 93:3), and to have exalted his fame (Q 94:4), or raised him up to a laudable position (maqām mahmūd, Q 17:79). God’s compassion towards the Prophet comes out in the statement that God himself, as well as the angels, pray for the Prophet’s peace (Q 33:56). For his part, the Prophet is instructed to ask for God’s pardon (Q 4:106; 47:19; see FORGIVENESS), and is in fact granted complete forgiveness for all sins (Q 48:2; see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR). God’s guidance is also secured for the Prophet (Q 93:7), as well as his benefaction. God thus has improved the socio-economic status of the Prophet (Q 93:6, 8), and gave him “abundance” (al-kawthar, Q 108:1), as well as the “oft repeated” (q.v.; mathā’ī) and the great Qur’an (Q 15:87). God has also alleviated from him the burden of fears and anxieties (Q 94:1-3). God’s guidance is also manifest in the ritual sphere (see RITUAL AND THE QUR’ĀN), and it is he who instructs the Prophet on when to pray (e.g. Q 20:130; 40:55; 50:39-40), and on what the direction of prayer (qibla [q.v.]) should be (Q 2:144). The fact that the Prophet has become the first Muslim among his community is the result of God’s ritual guidance. The Prophet is ordered to say (Q 6:162-3): “My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying — all belongs to God, the lord of all being. No associate has he, so I have been instructed, and I am the first of those who have become Muslims” (cf. Q 6:14).

The qur’anic Prophet and the believers
God’s mercy on the Prophet is extended to the community that is supposed to follow the Prophet and support him, and it is God who has consolidated the believers behind the Prophet. The Prophet could not have achieved this alone (Q 8:63). God’s mercy for the Prophet generates the Prophet’s mercy for the believers, or as stated in
q 3:159: “It was by God’s mercy that you were gentle to them…” In the subsequent part of the same passage, God advises his messenger to pardon the believers and ask forgiveness for them, and to consult them in his affairs. Accordingly, the Prophet is described as “a messenger from among yourselves; your suffering (q.v.) is grievous to him, and he is anxious for you, gentle and compassionate to the believers” (q 9:128). Forgiveness of sins, which emanates from the Prophet’s presence, is particularly emphasized. Thus in q 4:64 it is stated: “… If, when they wronged themselves, they had come to you and prayed for God’s forgiveness, and the messenger had prayed for forgiveness for them, they would have found God forgiving, compassionate” (see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES). The Prophet’s mercifulness towards the believers is also manifest in his function as a “witness” (shahid) for his community (q 2:143; 22:78). This seems to be an eschatological role, as is indicated in passages describing the last judgment in which the Prophet is a witness for his community while the other communities have their own witnesses, their prophets (cf. q 4:41; 16:89; see also q 16:84; 28:75). His role as a shahid probably means that he gives evidence as to the identity of both the righteous among his people, and of the evildoers. For their part, the believers are expected to take the Prophet as their model (uswa) in their devotion to God and in hoping for his reward at the last judgment (q 33:21). Their love for God is the reason why they must follow the Prophet, which is the only way to gain God’s love and mercy in return (q 3:31; see LOVE AND AFFECTION). From this affinity between God and his messenger follows the need to obey them both (q 3:32; 4:59), because to obey the Prophet means obeying God (q 4:80; see OBEDIENCE). Similarly, pledging allegiance (bay'a) to the Prophet means pledging allegiance to God (q 48:16) and God is indeed pleased with those who pledge allegiance to his Prophet (q 48:18; see CONTRACTS AND ALLIANCES). Women, too, pledge allegiance to him and when they do they must follow strict religious and moral codes and obey him (q 60:12; see ETHICS AND THE QUR’ĀN; VIRTUES AND VICES, COMMANDING AND FORBIDDING; WOMEN AND THE QUR’ĀN). Apart from obedience, the believers are expected to be more loyal to their Prophet than to their own selves (q 33:6), and treat him with due respect (see LOYALTY). This means that when they are in his presence they cannot withdraw without first asking his leave (q 24:62-3), and they are not permitted to raise their voices above his (q 49:1-5, 7; see SOCIAL INTERACTIONS). As the believers’ model of devotion, the Prophet is also the source of their law, which he gives to them through a revelation (see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN). Thus in q 6:151-3 he is commanded to tell them: “Come, I will recite what your lord has forbidden (q.v.) you…” This is followed by a list of legal and moral regulations (see BOUNDARIES AND PRECEPTS).

The Qur’ān does not only deal with the duty to obey the Prophet but also with his own individual status among the believers. This is apparent mainly in verses defining his share in the spoils of war as compared with the shares of the rest of the believers (see BOOTY). In q 59:7 the spoils belong to God and his messenger, as well as to his kinsmen (see FAMILY OF THE PROPHET; PEOPLE OF THE HOUSE) and needy Muslims (see POVERTY AND THE POOR), and the Prophet is given complete authority to distribute the booty: “Whatever the messenger gives you, take; whatever he forbids you, give up.” Similarly, in q 8:1 it is stated that the spoils (anfāl) belong to God and
the messenger. In q 8:41, however, only one-fifth of the booty belongs to the Prophet and the needy, and the rest is distributed among the participating warriors.

Reference is also made to the status of the Prophet’s wives among the believers (see WIVES OF THE PROPHET). They are proclaimed as equal in status to the mothers of the believers, which means that they cannot become wives to the believers after the Prophet (q 33:6). Special moral obligations are prescribed to them as wives of the Prophet, and their conduct must be immaculate. If they wish to remain his wives and not be divorced (see MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE), they must undertake not to behave indecently, remain in their homes, not display their finery, as was the custom in the first Age of Ignorance (q.v.; jähiliyya) and have to pray and give alms (see ALMSGIVING) and obey God and his messenger. God will reward them twice over for all this (q 33:28-34). Instructions to the believers as to how to behave in the Prophet’s household are also specified. The believers should not call uninvited, nor linger after meals. They have to ask his wives for any object they want only while standing behind a curtain (q 33:53; see VEIL; BARRIER). Nevertheless, allusion is made also to some obscure domestic problems that the Prophet had with two of his wives (q 66:1-5), as well as to a group of persons who “came with the slander (jāḥi)” (q 24:11 f.; see GOSSIP). The nature of the slander is not disclosed in the Qur’ān, but Muslim tradition associates it with ʿĀ’isha (see ʿĀ’ISHA BINT ABĪ BAKR). In contrast to the Qur’ānic proclamation that the Prophet’s wives are the mothers of the believers, the Qur’ān declares that Muhammad is not the father of any of the believers (q 33:40), meaning that he can marry their women after them. This statement is made in connection with the affair of Zayd (b. Ḥāritha), Muḥammad’s adopted son, the only contemporary of Muḥammad — apart from the Prophet himself — who is mentioned by his proper name in the Qur’ān. It is stated that after Zayd accomplished what he would of his wife, God gave her in marriage to the Prophet, and the Qur’ān asserts that it is lawful for the believers to marry the wives of their adopted sons (q 33:37; see LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL).

The Qur’ānic Prophet and the unbelievers

The relationship between the Prophet and the unbelievers occupies the bulk of the Qur’ānic passages dealing with his prophetic mission, and many aspects of the negative reaction of the unbelievers to his message are described (see OPPOSITION TO MUḤAMMAD). Their disbelief is depicted in some chapters as a refusal to listen to him. In one passage the unbelievers say: “Our hearts are veiled from what you call us to, and there is heaviness in our ears (see HEARING AND DEAFNESS), and between us and you there is a veil” (q 41:5). In another instance they almost strike him down with their glances when they hear him preach (q 68:51). Scornful reactions are also typical when the Prophet reproaches them for worshipping deities other than God (q 21:36; 25:42; see MOCKERY). The Qur’ān emphasizes the unbelievers’ stubbornness (see INSOLENCE AND OBSTINACY) when stating that even if God sent the Prophet “a book on parchment which they can touch with their hands,” they would still not believe in him (q 6:7).

Disbelief is often focused on a specific article of the faith preached by the Prophet, namely resurrection (q.v.) and the last judgment, which the unbelievers usually reject as an impossible process (q 17:49, 98; 21:38, etc.). The unbelievers also make specific demands as a condition for their belief in the Qur’ānic Prophet. In
they ask him to change the contents of his revelations and make them more agreeable, and in Q 2:120 (see also Q 2:135) the Jews and the Christians ask him to follow their religion. The disbelief of the Jews, or the People of the Book, is especially condemned. They have rejected the Prophet despite the fact that the book revealed to him confirms their own scriptures. They are accused of deliberately ignoring the injunctions of their own book [i.e. to believe in the Prophet] (Q 2:89, 91, 101; see also Q 4:47).

Active persecution by the unbelievers is also addressed in the Qur’ān, particularly their threat to expel (akhrāja) the Prophet from his homeland (Q 17:76). In Q 8:30 this is one of a series of other options contemplated, such as confining him or even killing him. In Q 9:13 the scheme to expel the messenger is coupled with the violation of oaths taken by the unbelievers, two offences that justify waging war on them (see BREAKING TRUSTS AND CONTRACTS). The threat of expulsion recurs in stories about previous prophets (Q 14:13) such as Shu’ayb (Q.v.; Q 7:88) and Lot (Q.v.; Q 7:82; 26:167; 27:56), where it again forms a major component of persecution. Expulsion, however, is not merely a threat but is also an accomplished fact that emerges in the reference to “your city which has expelled you” (Q 47:13). The Prophet and the believers suffer expulsion from the homeland, as indicated in Q 60:1. Here, “expelling the messenger and you [i.e. the believers]” features as one of the offences of the unbelievers, and in Q 2:217 those expelled are the inhabitants of the sacred mosque (Q.v.; see also SACRED PRECINCTS). Expelling them and denying them free access to the sacred mosque are denounced as offences worse than fighting (Q.v.) during the forbidden months (Q.v.). The believers who have been expelled are ordered to kill their foes “wherever you come upon them and expel them from where they have expelled you…” (Q 2:191), which again makes expulsion a cause for war (Q.v.). The same offence of forced expulsion is also a reason for the believers to dissociate from unbelievers guilty of this offense, or of assisting others in it (Q 60:9).

Not only does the Qur’ān refer to the existence of disbelief but it also reveals the various reasons for it, which stem from different sources. In one case its origin is fear; the unbelievers say that if they follow the Prophet they will be snatched from their land (Q 28:57). Those who speak here are probably the people of Mecca, to whom God immediately answers that he has established for them a “secure sanctuary (harām ʾāminan), into which are brought the fruits of everything” (Q 28:37; cf. Q 8:26; 29:67). The message of the Prophet stands here in clear contrast to the Arabian values on which the security of the people of Mecca rested. The disbelief of the contemporaries of the Prophet is often coupled with doubts as to the authenticity of his message, i.e. whether he truly is the messenger of God. These doubts originate with presumed faults in his personality and message. The personal accusations against the Prophet are often based on the claim that he is but human, and God does not usually send humans as his messengers, only angels (Q 17:94; 21:3). The Jews also held this point against him (Q 6:31), and similar reservations were also held about previous prophets by their contemporaries (e.g. Q 11:27, Noah; Q 26:154, Šāliḥ; Q 26:186, Shu’ayb). Even as a human being the social status of the Prophet is not elevated enough to be a prophet (see SOCIAL RELATIONS). This claim by the unbelievers is indicated in Q 43:31: “They say: 'Why was this Qur’ān not sent down to some distinguished (ʾazīm) man of the two cities?’”

As a result of the notion that a messenger of God must be an angel, the demand is
often raised by the unbelievers that the Prophet produce signs from heaven, i.e. miracles (see miracle). He is asked either to produce an unspecified sign (īya) himself (q 7:203), or have one sent down to him from God (q 13:7, 27). In q 11:12 he is requested to have a treasure sent down to him, or an angel escorting him (see also q 6:8-9; 25:7-8). A prolonged series of specific signs is required in q 17:90-3: that a stream be made to gush forth (see springs and fountains); that he produce a garden (q.v.) of palms and vines with rivers flowing through it; that he make heaven fall; bring God and the angels as a surety; produce a house of gold (q.v.) ornamentation; go up to heaven and bring down a book that can be read. The People of the Book (q 4:153) also ask for a real book from heaven, and the Jews expect to see a sacrifice that will be devoured by fire (q.v.; as a sign of its acceptance by God; q 3:183).

Failing to produce proofs of his divine person, the Prophet is accused of being a sorcerer (q 10:2; 11:7; etc.; see magic) and a poet possessed by jinn (q.v.; majnūn, q 37:36; 44:14; see also insanity; poetry and poets). His prophetic message, too, is not accepted as divine, and is rejected as a “hotchpotch of dreams” (q 21:5; see dreams and sleep). The unbelievers usually mention such faults when refusing to abandon the worship of their deities (q 37:36). His messages are often rejected as forged (q 11:35; 46:8) or plagiarized (see forgery). In the latter case, his sermons are denounced as “fairy-tales of the ancients” that have been dictated to him (q 25:4-6; see also q 6:25-6, etc.), or have been learnt from a human master (q 74:25; see also q 44:14), whose origin is said to be non-Arab (q 16:103; see informants; see also Ahrens, Muhammad, 42-4). They too, so the unbelievers claim, can do the same (q 8:31). His message, however, is also denounced as being an innovation previously unheard of in other religions (q 38:7), one which deviates from the forefathers’ religion (q 34:43). The criticism in this respect is mainly directed against the clear dissimilarity between the structure of the Prophet’s sermons and those of previous prophets. Thus in q 28:48 the unbelievers wonder why the Prophet has not received a revelation like that of Moses, and in q 25:32 they ask why the Qur’ān was not revealed to the Prophet all at once.

**Divine protection**

A large space is allotted in the Qur’ān to God’s defense of the Prophet against the various aspects of rejection, providing the main basis on which rests the status of the Prophet as a messenger of God. In general, the Qur’ān asserts the absurdity of disbelief by stressing that it arose in spite of the unbelievers’ original desire for guidance. Thus in q 33:42 the unbelievers swear that if a warner came to them they would be more rightly guided than any other nation, and in q 6:157 they swear that if a divine book was revealed to them they would be more rightly guided than any other nation (see also q 37:167-70). God sets out to legitimize the authority of his messenger as an exclusive source of guidance, and for this a variety of arguments are set forth in defense of the authenticity of his message. In response to attacks on the mental integrity of the Prophet, God addresses the unbelievers saying: “Your comrade is not astray, neither does he err (see error), nor does he speak out of caprice” (q 53:2-3). In calling him “your comrade” (sāḥibukum), the Prophet is made one of their own kind, whose integrity must be well-known to them. In this manner God also addresses the unbelievers in q 34:46, telling them that “no madness (jinna) is in your comrade” (cf. q 7:184), and again in q 81:22: “Your comrade is not possessed (majnūn).”
The origin of the Prophet’s integrity and mental fitness is God’s mercy (nīfān) which prevents him from being a kāhīn, “soothsayer,” or possessed (q 52:29), and indeed God repeatedly asserts that he is neither a kāhīn, nor a poet or possessed (q 68:2; 69:40-2, etc.). To this context seems also to belong the frequent Qur’ānic insistence that the Prophet is not expecting a reward or a wage (ajīr) for his messages (e.g. q 25:57; 34:47; 38:86), which means that he is delivering the word of God and not his own. A more straightforward statement about the authenticity of his revelation is repeated in numerous passages asserting that the Prophet was sent “with the truth” (bī-l-ḥaqq; cf. q 2:119, 232; 4:170; 9:33; 35:24, etc.; see TRUTH), and that God and the angels bear witness to the truth of his message (q 4:166; 13:43, etc.). The fact that the Qur’ān confirms the previous scriptures, and mainly the stories about earlier prophets, is also invoked in support of its authenticity (q 12:110-1). Similarly, when the Prophet is himself beset by doubts as to the genuine nature of what has been revealed to him, he is advised to consult those who are well versed in previous scriptures — and thus know that the Qur’ān and those scriptures are alike (q 10:94).

The Qur’ān also answers more specific aspects of the doubts raised by the unbelievers as to the authenticity of the Prophet’s message. To the charge of plagiarism God responds by pointing to the Arabic language of the Qur’ān, which excludes the possibility of a non-Arab master teaching the Prophet, as insinuated by his opponents (q 16:103). The Arabic language renders the Qur’ān clear to the audience (q 12:2; 41:3) who would not have accepted a non-Arabic revelation that could not have been understood (q 26:193, 198-9; 41:44). Perhaps the assertion that the Prophet did not read any book before the revelation of the Qur’ān or write it down (q 29:48) is also designed to refute the charge of plagiarism. The human nature of the Prophet, which is held against him by his opponents, is admitted by God himself, who orders his messenger to say that he is merely a human being who (nevertheless) receives revelations (q 18:110; 41:6; see also IMPREGNABILITY). God stresses that the mortality of the Prophet does not prevent him from being a messenger of God, and to prove this, God tells his Prophet to remind the unbelievers that other prophets were mortals too. Thus God advises his Prophet to say that Moses received revelations as a human being (q 6:91), and that messengers to older communities were also merely humans (rījāl, q 12:109, etc.). The same argument is followed when the Qur’ān asserts that the Prophet is not an innovation among other messengers (q 46:9). Moreover, a messenger of God always remains mortal, and he is not permitted to have other people worship him as a god (q 3:79). While the human nature of the Prophet is acknowledged, however, the divinity of his message is emphasized. To prove this, God advises the Prophet to challenge the unbelievers who claim that the Qur’ān is forged to produce one or ten chapters (sūrat) similar to the Qur’ānic ones, if they can (q 16:38; 11:13), or a story (hadīth) like it (q 52:33-4; see INIMITABILITY; PROVOCATION). Due to the Qur’ān’s divinity the human Qur’ānic Prophet has no control over its contents, nor of the time of its revelation. This point is made when people demand that he change his message into a more agreeable one, to which he is prompted to say: “It is not for me to alter it of my own accord; I follow nothing except what is revealed to me… Had God willed it, I would not have recited it to you… I have been living among you a lifetime before it…” (q 10:17-6).

The constant human nature of the
Prophet prevents him from complying with the demands for miracles, and when this demand is made, God commands his messenger to say that the unseen (ghayb) belongs to God alone (q 10:20). This seems to mean that he is but a mortal messenger who cannot perform supernatural acts of his own volition. Only God has the power to produce signs, as the Qurʾān itself states elsewhere (q 6:37, etc.), and it is for him to decide whom he wishes to guide (q 13:27). Previous prophets are put in the same situation when commanded to produce signs, and they too answer that they are but mortals and that they can only produce miracles with God’s permission (q 14:10-11).

Besides, the Qurʾān says that the unbelievers had a chance to draw a lesson from previous scriptures which they know (and not wait for fresh signs; cf. q 20:133). The same reply, namely, that the Prophet has no knowledge of the unseen, is given when demands are made for signs of the approaching hour, i.e. the end of the world, about which the Qurʾān warns quite often (q 7:187-8; 72:25-7). The demand to produce signs sent by God may take the form of a request to bring down from heaven a written text (kitāb) that humankind can read (see above). To this the Prophet is again directed to say: “I am but a mortal, a messenger” (q 17:93). Elsewhere he is advised to say that he is not an angel, which also seems to be in response to the request for signs (q 6:50; cf. q 11:31, Noah). Nevertheless, the Prophet himself does get a chance to see God’s signs, as stated in q 17:1: “Glory be to him who carried his servant by night from the sacred mosque to the further mosque which we have blessed all around, that we might show him some of our signs…”

Apart from defending his authenticity in the eyes of the unbelievers, God directly helps the Prophet himself, which is designed to encourage him and offer him various kinds of comfort and moral support (see consolation). To begin with, comfort is offered through the statement that God exempts the Prophet from responsibility for the unbelievers, saying that his mission is only to deliver the message (q 5:99), and that he is not supposed to be the guardian of the unbelievers (q 6:107; 10:108; 17:54, etc.). God himself undertakes the responsibility for them (q 42:6). To emphasize this point God says that the Prophet cannot guide the dead (see death and the dead), the blind (see vision and blindness) and the deaf (q 27:80-1; 30:52-3; 35:22), neither can he force them (to repent; q 50:45; see tolerance and compulsion; repentance and penance).

To comfort the Prophet and encourage him, God tells him that he is aware of the distress that the words of the unbelievers have caused him (q 15:97), and advises him not to let his soul be wasted in regrets for the unbelievers (q 33:8). Although the Prophet tends to consume himself with anguish over their disbelief (q 18:6; 26:3), God tells him not to let the unbelievers torment him by what they do or say (q 3:176; 5:41; 10:65; 15:88; 16:127; 27:70). God states that the Qurʾān has not been revealed to him to make him miserable (q 20:2), nor to disquiet his heart (q 7:2). In a series of passages God encourages the Prophet to bear patiently (ṣibīn) the hardships and adhere to his prophetic mission (see trust and patience). For example, in q 10:109 he is urged to endure his sufferings patiently and to follow what is being revealed to him (cf. q 43:43). In q 20:130 he is told to bear patiently what the unbelievers say, and continue proclaiming the lord’s praise day and night (see also q 52:48-9, etc.). In other passages God demands that the Prophet patiently endure his sufferings along with those who call to their lord in the morning (q.v.) and evening (q.v.), and not yield to the temptations of worldly pleasures.
When urging his Prophet to endure the hardships, the example of previous prophets is often adduced. Thus, in Q 46:35 he is entreated to be as patient as other prophets previously were, and in Q 38:17 he is told to exercise patience with what is being said to him and remember David the man of might. Conversely, he is told to be patient to him and remember David the man of religious pluralism and the Qurʾān. He is further told to exercise patience with what is being said to him and remember David the man of might. Conversely, he is told to be patient to him and remember David the man of religious pluralism and the Qurʾān. In some instances God prompts him to tell the unbelievers that his own religion will remain different from the one they follow, as for example in Q 10:104: “I do not worship those you worship apart from God” (see religious pluralism and the Qurʾān). Similarly, in Q 10:41 God says: “If they say that you lie, tell them: ‘I have my work and you have your work. You have nothing to do with what I do, and I have nothing to do with what you do’” (see also Q 26:216). The same quietist policy is suggested to the Prophet in passages advising him to rely on God and await his final judgment. Thus in Q 22:68-9 God tells him: “And if they should dispute with you, say: ‘God knows very well what you are doing, God shall judge between you on the day of resurrection….’” Elsewhere he is advised to say, when the people turn their backs on him: “God is sufficient for me, there is no God but he, in him I have put my trust” (Q 9:129; cf. Q 27:79; 33:48). Similarly, he is advised to debate with the unbelievers in a gentle and a refined manner (Q 16:125; 23:96; see debate and disputation). When the unbelievers demand of the Prophet that he abandon his religion and follow them instead, God again advises him on how to stay firm. In one particular instance the Prophet and his followers are challenged to become Jews and Christians, in which case, staying firm means following the religion of Abraham (Q 2:135). In more general terms, the unbelievers would like to see the Prophet following their “evil inclinations” (ahwāʾ), and here God encourages him not to follow their ahwāʾ and adhere to his own sharīʿa (Q 45:18; 5:48-9; see also Q 42:15). In more explicit terms, God demands that he “not obey” the unbelievers and the munāfiqūn, “hypocrites” (see hypocrites and hypocrisy), and only follow what is being revealed to him (Q 33:1-2).
A unique case is Q 17:73-5 in which the unbelievers come near to tempting the Prophet away from that which has been revealed to him, inciting him to forge a more agreeable revelation, following which they will take him as their friend (see FRIENDS AND FRIENDSHIP). It is only thanks to God’s intervention that he remains firm, and the Qur’ān asserts that if he had inclined to them God would have punished him severely. A similar situation of a distorted revelation is described in Q 22:32 with reference to previous prophets: Each one of them was subjected to the temptation of Satan who cast words of his own into their recitation. The Qur’ān, however, asserts that God annuls what Satan casts and confirms his own signs.

In other passages God’s protection of his messenger is more active which implies a more militant clash between the Prophet and the unbelievers. To begin with, in Q 5:67 God grants him immunity from the people to help him deliver his message safely. When the unbelievers expel the Prophet, God sends him his sechina (q.v.; sakīnatahu) and supports him with unseen legions. This event occurs when the Prophet and a companion of his are hiding in a cave (q.v.) and he reassures his friend that God is with them (Q 9:40). To help the Prophet endure his expulsion, God promises him in a special vision (ru’yā) that he and the believers will enter the sacred mosque and there perform the rituals (Q 48:27). A similar promise is perhaps made in Q 28:83: “He who imposed the Qur’ān on you will surely restore you to a place which will be home.” In direct military clashes with the unbelievers, God actually fights for him (Q 8:17), and grants him victory (q.v.; fātah, Q 48:1). God’s protection and aid emanate from his mercy and bountifulness towards the Prophet, which avert all attempts at injuring him (Q 4:113), and as a result of this God has rid him of those who mock him (Q 15:95), and promises to rid him of those who do not believe (Q 2:137). His foes are explicitly warned about God’s wrath, as in Q 17:76, where those who plot to expel him from the land are warned of a swift destruction. Likewise, God took vengeance on the foes of previous prophets (Q 30:47). Fighting angels inflict God’s wrath on the Prophet’s foes, smiting them above the necks (Q 8:12-13). The angel Gabriel (q.v.) too is his protector, alongside the righteous among the believers and the other angels (Q 66:4). But God’s retribution usually awaits the foes in hell (see HELL AND HELLFIRE). The fate of hell awaits those who assault the Prophet during prayer (Q 96:9-19), and those who make a breach with him (Q 4:115; 59:4; cf. Q 47:32).

In response to such opposition, the Qur’ān sets clear limits to God’s mercy as emanating from the Prophet, and explicitly excludes the unbelievers from it. Thus in Q 9:113 it is stated that “It is not for the Prophet and the believers to ask pardon for the associates, even though they may be near kinsmen (see KINSHIP), after that it has become clear to them that they will be the inhabitants of hell.” For his part, the Prophet is commanded to wage holy war on the unbelievers, as stated in Q 9:73 and in Q 66:3: “O Prophet, struggle (jāhīd) against the infidels and the hypocrites and be harsh with them; their refuge is hell — an evil homecoming” (see also Q 25:52; see JIHĀD). God’s help to the Prophet also encompasses the entire community of believers, and his help is therefore described in several passages as being extended to them collectively. Thus in Q 8:26 God says: “Remember when you were few and abased in the land (see OPPRESSED ON EARTH, THE), and were fearful that the people would snatch you away; but he gave you refuge and assisted you with his help, and provided you with
the good things, for which you might be haply thankful.” Divine help is usually given to the believers on the battlefield, as seems to be the case in Qurʾān 3:123: “There has already been a sign for you in the two companies which encountered each other, one company fighting in the way of God and another unbelieving; they saw them twice the like of them, as the eye sees, but God assists with his help whom he will.…” A specific designation of the place in which God helped the believers is provided in Qurʾān 3:123: “God helped you at Badr (q.v.) when you were abject.…”

**The Qurʾān and Muhammad’s sīra**

The Qurʾān contains numerous allusions to events in the Prophet’s life without placing them in a concrete context. Apart from issues already mentioned above there are many more allusions to incidents and experiences, most of which gain their context outside of the Qurʾān, in the realm of the sīra, i.e. Muḥammad’s biography. Here the Qurʾānic allusions to the Prophet’s life and prophetic experience reappear as embedded in a clear chronological sequence of events. It is impossible to survey here all the Qurʾānic allusions that are found in the sīra; only some of them will be highlighted.

One of the earliest sīra compilations in which a massive presence of Qurʾānic allusions exists is by Ibn Ishāq, whose sīra of Muḥammad is available in several recensions, the most famous of which is Ibn Hishām’s (d. 218/833). Here the general narrative framework — which is retained in every other biography of Muḥammad — is as follows: The life of the Prophet is divided into two major phases, Meccan and Medinan, which corresponds to the traditional division of the Qurʾān into Meccan and Medinan periods. The Meccan period spans from Muḥammad’s birth until his emigration (q.v.) to Medina (q.v.). The episodes covering this phase describe his birth and his early years in Mecca, his first revelation, the beginning of his public preaching, his persecution by his fellow Quraysh tribesmen, and his emigration to Medina. The Medinan period consists of episodes describing his arrival there, the consolidation of his relations with the local Arab tribes, his struggle against the local Jews, and primarily his campaigns and battles (maghāzī) against Mecca (see Expeditions and Battles). These clashes culminated in the fall of Mecca, and in the eventual spread of Islam throughout Arabia. This sequence of events has a well-established chronological framework: The Meccan period begins with what is known as the “Year of the Elephant,” in which, according to most traditions, Muḥammad is said to have been born (with reference to sūra 105, “The Elephant”; see Abī Raḥma). His first revelation is said to have occurred when he was forty; his emigration is dated to ten years later (622 c.e.), and the fall of Mecca is dated to 8/630, while Muḥammad’s death is said to have taken place in 10/632.

**The Meccan period**

For the Meccan period the sīra uses Qurʾānic passages that have been embedded in traditions describing Muḥammad’s first revelation, first admonitions, and especially his persecution by the unbelievers (for details see Rubin, Ḥijr, 103-66). For the first revelation the most prevalent passage that has been selected is Qurʾān 96:1-3: “Recite in the name of your lord who created.…” For the subsequent event of the temporary lapse of revelation, Qurʾān 93:3 was chosen: “Your lord has not forsaken you nor does he hate [you].” For his first public sermon, Qurʾān 26:214 was adduced: “And warn your nearest relations.…” Several Qurʾānic passages appear in sīra descriptions of Muḥammad’s persecution by the Meccans, e.g. sūra 111 in which Abū Lahab is cursed
and promised punishment in hell. Abū La- 
hab is the designation of an uncle of 
Muḥammad and in the sīra he leads a 
strong opposition against the Prophet for 
which this chapter is said to have been re-
vealed as divine retribution. Other pas-
sages that appear in the context of 
persecution describe the exchange of accu-
sations between the Prophet and his oppo-
nents (e.g. Q. 4:13-4:13:31; 23:7-8; 17:90-3; 
16:103). One of them, Q. 38:4-8, is embed-
ded in traditions describing the role of 
Abū Tālib, another of the Prophet’s un-
cles, in helping his nephew confront the 
unbelievers. The passage about the 
Prophet and his companion in the cave 
(q. 9:40) appears in the descriptions of 
Muhammad’s journey (ḥijra) from Mecca 
to Medina, the companion being Abū Bakr 
(see companions of the Prophet).

The Medinan period

The Medinan period revolves around 
Muḥammad’s campaigns against the Meccans as well as against the Jews, and in 
some cases the links between them and the 
Qurʾān are obvious, because the names of 
some campaigns are explicitly mentioned 
in scripture. This applies to Badr (2/624), 
which is mentioned in a passage describing 
angels assisting the fighting believers 
(q. 3:123-8), and to Hunayn (q.v.; 8/630). 
The latter location is mentioned in a pas-
sage again describing how the sechina as 
well as unseen legions (of angels) help the 
fighting believers (q. 9:25-6). In other cases 
the link is only revealed through the traditi-
ons (see hadīth and the Qurʾān), while 
in the Qurʾān explicit links are missing. 
Thus there are additional passages linked 
in traditions to Badr, mainly q. 8:1-19 in 
which the division of spoils is discussed, 
and the help of angels smiting the unbe-
lievers is described yet again. The connec-
tion with other campaigns is revealed 
through traditions only. Passages that are 
linked to the battle of Uhud (3/625), for 
example, are q. 3:121-2, in which the 
Prophet lodges the believers in their 
ditches for the battle, and “two parties” of 
the believers are about to lose heart. The 
praise of martyrs (q.v.; shuhadā’), whom the 
Qurʾān describes as “living with their lord” 
and rejoicing in his bounty (cf. q. 3:169-71) 
is also linked to the believers who fell at 
Uhud. The expulsion of the Jewish tribe 
of al-Naḍīr (see Naḍīr, Banū al-) from 
Medina is reported with reference to 
q. 59:1-3 which describes the expulsion 
of the unbelieving People of the Book from 
their habitations. They thought that their 
fortresses would defend them but God 
defeated them in the end. A link to the 
Battle of the Ditch (see people of the 
ditch) and the subsequent campaign 
against the Jewish tribe of Qurayṣa (q.v.; 
5/626-7) is found in traditions about 
q. 33:9-27. Here the Qurʾān describes hosts 
of confederates (ahzāb) coming against the 
believers whom God defeats by means of 
winds (see air and wind) and unseen 
legions (of angels).

Special reference is made to the role of 
the hypocrites (munāfiqūn) in spreading 
doubts among the Medinan believers, 
“people of Yathrib,” and in inducing them 
to retreat. The faithful believers who have 
remained firm are praised, and the passage 
concludes with the defeat of the People of 
the Book who supported the confederates. 
They are brought down from their for-
tresses and the believers slay some of them 
and take others as captives. God bequeaths 
their lands and possessions to the believers. 
To the Jews of Qurayṣa are also linked the 
verses of q. 8:55-8 in which those who have 
broken their compact with the Prophet 
are severely criticized. The affair of al-
Ḥudaybiya (6/628) and the subsequent 
campaign against the Jews of Khaybar are 
linked to the bulk of sūra 48. In it the 
believers pledge allegiance to the Prophet
“under the tree,” and God rewards them with a swift victory and many spoils.

Among the remaining Qur’ān allusions in the sūra, sūra 9 may also be mentioned. It is connected to events that took place during Muhammad’s campaign to Tabi‘ūk (g/630) as well as during Abū Bakr’s pilgrimage (q.v.) to Mecca (g/631). Problems with opposing groups within Medina (led by Abū ‘Amir and others) are also connected to this sūra, mainly to q 9:107 in which reference is made to “those who have taken a mosque in opposition and unbelief, and to divide the believers…” (see MOSQUE OF THE DISSENSION). The final stages of his career, when most of the pagan Arabs became Muslims and delegations came from all over Arabia to pledge allegiance to the Prophet in Medina, are connected to q 110 (Sūrat al-Naṣr, “Succor”). In it (q 110:2) the Prophet sees “men entering God’s religion in throngs.” Muhammad’s farewell sermon which he delivered during his last pilgrimage to Mecca (10/632; see FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE), a few months before his death, has also many Qur’ānic links, e.g. q 5:3: “Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing of you and I have approved Islam for your religion.”

The chronology of revelation

The link between the Qur’ān and the life of Muhammad as established in the sūra has provided the Qur’ān with a concrete context of revelation, or asbāb al-nuzūl, as this came to be known among Muslim Qur’ān exegetes. Since the mid-19th century C.E., scholars investigating the history of the Qur’ān have followed the sūra framework which the Qur’ān has acquired, and developed the traditional asbāb al-nuzūl into an elaborate chronology of revelation (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). They divided the Qur’ānic passages not only into Meccan and Medinan periods, but also into “early Meccan,” “late Meccan,” and so on. Not all of the scholars have shown the same degree of dependence on Islamic tradition and some, like Bell, gave more weight to textual considerations of style and form (see FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR’ĀN; LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN). All of them, however, have treated the Qur’ān as the prophetic creation of the historical Muhammad, and as a key to the study of his own spiritual development. The relationship between the Qur’ānic text and the historical Muhammad is, however, far from clear. Some, like John Wansbrough, have not even accepted the Arabian provenance of the Qur’ān. Above all, it should especially be borne in mind that the sūra and the asbāb al-nuzūl traditions are all part of hadīth material, the historical authenticity of which has been shown to be very problematic. A reconstructed chronology of revelation based on this material must therefore be taken with the utmost caution.

Uri Rubin

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MURDER


Murder

The unlawful killing of a human being with malicious forethought. The Qur’ān uses the verb qatala to denote “kill” as well as “murder.” In the latter sense it is used to describe both infanticide (q.v.), as in q 17:33: “Nor take life — which God has made sacred — except for just cause. And if anyone is murdered...” In the former sense qatala is used to describe not only the unlawful killing of humans but also that of non-humans. In q 5:32: “Whosoever kills another — unless for murder or highway robbery (fasâd fi r-ard, see THEFT; CORRUPTION) — it is as though he has killed the entirety of humanity.”

The penalty for the latter is the death of the murderer at the option of the victim’s next of kin, as in q 17:33: “Nor take life — which God has made sacred — except for just cause. And if anyone is mur-

Muḥkamāt wa-Muṭashābihāt

see AMBIGUOUS; ELEXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN:
CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL; VERSES

Mule

see ANIMAL LIFE

Mu’minin

see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF
ordered, we have given his heir authority [to demand qisāṡ or to forgive].” If they choose not to exercise this right, they are entitled to compensation, diya, as in q 2:178, “If any remission is by the deceased’s heir [lit. “brother”; see inheritance], then reasonable demands are granted and generous compensation is his due” (see bloodshed; blood money; kinship; boundaries and precepts).

According to the Qur’an, intentional murder is second only to associating other deities with God in terms of its sinfulness (see sin, major and minor; idolatry and idolaters). Indeed, it is the only sin other than polytheism (see polytheism and atheism) for which the Qur’an explicitly threatens eternal damnation (see eternity; eschatology), at least in cases where the victim is a believer in God, as in q 4:93, “Whosoever intentionally kills a believer is punished in hell (see hell and hellfire), to dwell therein forever, with the anger of God and his curse (q.v.); and God prepares for him an awful punishment” (see reward and punishment).

The best reading of the Qur’an, however, would also extend this threat to include the intentional murder of any person, simply by virtue of the victim’s humanity. This non-sectarian reading of the absolute immorality of murder (see ethics and the Qur’an) is based on the general language of q 5:32, which states in full: “Whosoever kills another — unless for murder or highway robbery (fasiḍ fi l-arḍ) — it is as though he has killed the whole of humanity. And, whosoever saves a life (q.v.), it is as though he has saved the whole of humanity.”

This verse appears at the end of the story of Cain and Abel (q.v.), and the Qur’an describes this rule as having been decreed for the Children of Israel (q.v.). None of the commentators (see exegesis of the Qur’an: classical and medieval), however, suggest it is limited to that group but, instead, assume that its significance also extends to Muslims. One report attributed to al-Hasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) explains this extension as follows: “Why should the blood of Jews (see Jews and Judaism) be more precious to God than our blood?” (Tabarî, Tafsîr, x, 239, ad q 5:32). According to the Qur’an, Cain killed Abel because he was jealous when his sacrifice to God was rejected but Abel’s was not. When Cain resolved to kill Abel and informed him of that intention, Abel appears in the Qur’an to accept calmly his brother’s decision, announcing that he would rather die than kill his own brother unlawfully (see lawful and unlawful; brother and brotherhood). Indeed, Abel’s apparent willingness to submit to his brother’s plan gave pause to interpreters of the Qur’an who argued that Abel must have defended himself. Accordingly, they agreed that he only meant that he would not kill his brother in self-defense for fear of killing him unlawfully. Alternatively, some argued that self-defense might not have been allowed at that time.

The classical commentators do not give an explicit answer about the relationship of q 4:93, where the threat of eternal punishment for murder is expressly associated with the murder of a believer (see belief and unbelief; community and society in the Qur’an), to the more general language of q 5:32, except by explaining how it is possible to equate the murder of one person with the murder of all humankind. Indeed, this latter problem occupies most of the attention of the commentators. Al-Tabarî (d. 310/923; Tafsîr, ad q 5:32) reports several different opinions on the meaning of this seemingly problematic analogy, beginning with an opinion attributed to Ibn ‘Abbâs (d. 69/688). According to this report, nafs, “person,” as used in q 5:32, does not mean a generic person, but rather connotes either a prophet (see
prophets and prophethood) or a religious leader (imām, q.v.). Most opinions al-Ṭabarī reports, however, suggest that the analogy is conceptual, viz. the sin of intentional murder should be deemed as monstrous as killing the whole of humanity. Al-Ṭabarī accepts this position mainly on the corroborating evidence of Q 4:93, which conclusively establishes the monstrosity of even one intentional murder.

Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209; Ṭafṣīr, ad Q 5:32) further develops this argument, saying that the analogy has three plausible interpretations. The first is that humans should deem the intentional killing of even one of them as heinous as killing all of them; the second is that humans should act just as urgently to prevent the murder of one person as they would to prevent the murder of their species; and the third is that someone who is prepared to kill another intentionally for worldly gain, is prepared to kill again, and is prepared to kill another intentionally for species; and the third is that someone who intends to preserve the human race (see also war; jihād; hostages; death and the dead).

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Bibliography

Primary: Rāzī, Ṭafṣīr; Ṭabarī, Ṭafṣīr, ed. Shākir; Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Miṣāṣ; Zamakhsharī, Kashshāf.


Mūsā see moses

Musaylima

Musaylima b. Thumāma b. Kabīr b. Ḥabīb b. al-Ḥārith b. ‘Abd al-Ḥārith, a leader of the Banū Ḥanīfah and rival of the Prophet. Muslim sources derisively nickname him “Musaylima the liar” (al-kadhdhāb, see li’). Musaylima is a diminutive form of Muslama; this can be deduced from a verse of ‘Umāra b. ‘Ukayl (Mubarrad, Kāmil, iii, 26).

The basis of the rivalry between Muhammad and Musaylima was the latter’s claim to prophethood (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). Musaylima made his people believe that he was receiving revelation from God the Merciful (al-Rahmān, see god and his attributes) through the angel Gabriel (q.v.). It is essential to stress that...
Musaylima never denied the prophethood of Muḥammad; he rather claimed that he was destined to share this mission with him. In all their encounters, Muḥammad categorically rejected the quest of Musaylima to share his mission or be appointed Muḥammad’s successor after his death (see caliph; politics and the Qurʾān; community and society in the Qurʾān). The letters exchanged between them bear clear evidence of their contrasting attitudes. Musaylima wrote to Muḥammad using the title “Messenger (q.v .) of Allāh” and claimed that God bestowed on him partnership in prophethood (fa-innī qad ushrīktu fī l-amri ma’aka). “Half of the earth (q.v .) was given to Quraysh (q.v .) and the other half was allotted to us (i.e. to Banū Ḥanīfa), but Quraysh are people who exceed their bounds.” In his response, the Prophet addresses Musaylima as “the liar,” asserts that the earth (in its entirety) belongs to God who gives it “as heritage to whomever he pleases of his servants” (Bayhaqī, Maḥāsin, i, 49; see geography; cosmology).

Early traditions (see hadīth and the Qurʾān) may help establish the period of Musaylima’s activity and his connections with Mecca (q.v .). According to reliable sources, he married Kayyisa bint al-Ḥārith of the Meccan aristocratic clan of ‘Abd Shams (see tribes and clans), Musaylima was her second husband. The Prophet met Musaylima in Medina (q.v .) several times (it is reported that when Musaylima arrived in Medina for the first time accompanied by a unit of Banū Ḥanīfa warriors, he stayed in Kayyisa’s grove). In reference to the impertinent demands of Musaylima, Muḥammad refused to give him “even a splinter of a palm branch” which he held in his hand. At a later meeting with a delegation of Banū Ḥanīfa, the members of the delegation decided to embrace Islam, but changed their minds after returning to Yamāma, and aligned themselves with Musaylima instead. Musaylima was held in high esteem: his companions called him “the merciful one of Yamāma” (raḥmān al-Yamāma). Also, as befitted the usual manner in which holy persons, soothsayers (q.v .) and prophets appeared, he was veiled and disguised. There are many common features and methods in the prophetic careers of Musaylima and Muḥammad. Like Muḥammad, Musaylima claimed to be the recipient of divine revelation (see revelation and inspiration). Further, he claimed to heal the sick (see illness and health) and work miracles (see miracle). Naturally enough, Muslim tradition describes his claims to such powers as totally baseless.

In Yamāma, Musaylima succeeded in gaining the support of many tribal groups who came under his control after the death of Hawdha, the former chief of the area in the service of Persia. In the last years before the Prophet’s death, he attempted to establish a social order based on an alliance (see contracts and alliances) between the people of Yamāma and tribal groups which moved to Yamāma and settled there. Musaylima erected a safe area (ḥaram) in which certain places inhabited by his allies (ṣurūṭ al-ahālīf) were included. According to Muslim sources, the haram was managed in a corrupt way and the Banū Usayyid, who served as its guardians mistreated other groups. When these groups complained, Musaylima did not readdress the injustice. Instead, he read to them “the answer he got from heaven,” meaning a verse from his Qurʾān: “[I swear] by the darkness of the night and by the black wolf, the Usayyid did not violate [the sanctity] of the haram” (see sanctity and the sacred; justice and injustice). When the Usayyid continued their transgressions, another verse was released: “[I swear] by the dark night and by the softly treading...
The death of the prophet Muhammad raised the hopes of the community of Musaylima. In one of the speeches said to have been delivered in that period and which was directed to the Banū Ḥanīfa, Musaylima stressed the qualities of his people and his land in comparison with Quraysh and Mecca: “What made Quraysh more deserving of prophethood than yourselves? They are not greater in number than you; your land is wider than their land. Gabriel (Jibrīl) descends from heaven like he used to descend to Muḥammad.” Musaylima claimed that the revelation transmitted to Muḥammad had ceased with his death and henceforth it would be transmitted to him alone. The feeling that he was now the sole prophet is expressed in a verse attributed to Musaylima:

O you, woman, take the tambourine and play,
and disseminate the virtues of this prophet!
Passed away the prophet of Banū Ḥāshim,
and rose up the prophet of Banū Ya/lefthalfmoonrub (Ibn Kathīr, Bidāya, vi, 341).

Musaylima’s adherents grew in number and prestige. The situation in Yamāma inspired a feeling of security and peace (q.v.). This feeling was, however, shaken by the unexpected arrival of a former soothsayer (see divination; foretelling), who claimed that she had been granted revelations from heaven. Her name was Sajāحة bt. al-Ḥārith. She was a Christian of the tribe of Tamīm but lived among the Christian Arabs of Taghlib (see Christians and Christianity; Arabs). According to some sources, the forces led by Sajāحة intended to attack the troops of Abū Bakr under the command of Khālid b. al-Walīd who set out to crush the apostasy (q.v.; ridda) of the tribes after the Prophet’s death. In her forces were warriors from her people and others who joined them. After some skirmishes, she decided to fight Musaylima and conquer Yamāma. Musaylima invited her to meet him in order to negotiate a peaceful solution. He recognized Sajāحة as his partner in prophethood and declared that the land allotted by God to Quraysh would be transferred to Sajāحة and her people. The other half would belong to Musaylima. Moreover, Musaylima granted Sajāحة the crops Yamāma had produced that year and promised her the crops of the next year. Sajāحة returned to the Jazīra after a few days. (Some reports maintain that Musaylima married Sajāحة, but differ as to whether she remained with him until his death, or if he cast her off soon after their marriage; cf. Vacca, Sadjāحة.)

Abū Bakr became aware of the rising authority of Musaylima and decided to send Khālid b. al-Walīd at the head of the Muslim army to fight Musaylima and his forces. He wrote a letter to Khālid b. al-Walīd, stressing the power of the Banū Ḥanīfa and their courage. The bravery of Banū Ḥanīfa is said to have been mentioned in Q 48:16. On his way to fight Musaylima, Khālid b. al-Walīd informed his army of Abū Bakr’s letter concerning Banū Ḥanīfa. In the clashes with the Banū Ḥanīfa, a division of the army that came from those Medinans who had assisted Muḥammad in his emigration (q.v.) from Mecca (the Anṣār, see emigrants and helpers) attacked Yamāma and fought bravely together with the Meccans who had fled with Muḥammad (the Muhājirūn). They were summoned to help out in dangerous situations in the bloody battle of ‘Aqrabā’. At the outset, the Banū Ḥanīfa succeeded in repulsing the bedouin (q.v.) attacks. The solution of Khālid was to put the bedouin fighters of the army behind the lines of the well motivated and stead-
fast warriors of the Emigrants (Muhājirūn) and Helpers (Anṣār). Cases of exemplary bravery on the part of these groups are recorded in the sources. Eventually, Walshī killed Musaylima with his javelin in a place dubbed in the Muslim sources as “the Garden of Death.” According to some far-fetched traditions, Musaylima was 140 or 150 years old when he died in 11/632.

The intense loyalty of Musaylima’s followers can be gauged from the various stories that have been passed down. A woman who heard about his death exclaimed, “Alas, prince of the believers!” (waʾ amīr al-munīnināh). A wounded warrior of the Banū Ḥanīfa, in his agony, asked a Muslim warrior to kill him in order to put him out of his misery. Upon hearing of Musaylima’s death, he remarked: “A prophet whom his people caused to perish” (nabīyya ḍayyaʾ ʾahu qaṣmuhu). The Muslim warrior, enraged by these words, gave him the coup de grâce.

The belief in the prophethood of Musaylima survived among his believers in the first decades of Islam. His adherents used to gather in the mosque of the Banū Ḥanīfa in Kūfah and the call lā ilāha illā llāh wa-Musaylima rasūlu llāh was heard from the minaret. “Abdallāh b. Masʿūd ordered the detention of the followers of Musaylima. Some repented and were released. Those who clung to their faith were executed.

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Bibliography


Muḥṣaf

A non-ṣūrānic term (pl. muṣāḥāf) denoting the written corpus of the Qurʾān; in both classical and modern contexts this term creates a theological distinction between the individual’s copy of the Qurʾān and the hypostatized notion of God’s speech (q.v.; see also HEAVENLY BOOK; PRESERVED TABLET; WORD OF GOD; BOOK). The term stems from the same root as the word sūḥaf, “pages, books,” which the Qurʾān sometimes uses for documents of superhuman origin (for lexicographical details see Burton, Muḥṣaf, 668-9; see also INSTRUMENTS; WRITING AND WRITING MATERIALS). Several issues are connected with the written corpus of the Qurʾān: its origin; the history and art of writing down the Qurʾān (see COLLECTION OF THE QURʾĀN; CODES OF THE QURʾĀN; CALLIGRAPHY; ARABIC SCRIPT; ART AND ARCHITECTURE AND THE
QUR'AN; ORNAMENTATION AND ILLUMINATION; its orthography (q.v.) and reading signs; and the etiquette of using the mushaf (see MANUSCRIPTS OF THE QUR'AN; EVERYDAY LIFE, QUR'AN IN; RITUAL AND THE QUR'AN). The following will treat only the first issue; for the other aspects see the respective entries (see also TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN).

The question of how the written corpus of the Qur'an came into being is disputed among Muslim and Western scholars (see POST-ENLIGHTENMENT ACADEMIC STUDY OF THE QUR'AN). The dispute results from a difference in opinion concerning the reliability of the sources that can be used to answer the question (see CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL PRACTICES AND THE QUR'AN). No text or partial text of the Qur'an can be reliably dated to the lifetime of Muhammad: to date, there is no textual evidence that the Prophet himself or scribes whom he may have used penned any of the oldest surviving Qur'anic manuscripts (see ILLITERACY). Early manuscripts of the Qur'an are rare and their dating is controversial (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR'AN). The text itself does not contain clear indications as to its compiler. The view that the written corpus of the Qur'an is a reliable collection of revelations received by Muhammad is, therefore, essentially based on the Islamic tradition (see INIMITABILITY; REVELATION AND INSPIRATION; EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'AN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL). Many Western scholars doubt the reliability of this tradition, at least as far as the first Islamic century is concerned (see INFORMANTS). Nevertheless, most of them accept the gist of the reports on the collection and edition of the Qur'an as historically true.

According to current Muslim opinion, the written corpus of the Qur'an as it exists now — and as it is also attested in manuscripts dating at least from the third/ninth century, possibly even from earlier times — came into being as follows: When the Prophet died, there was no complete and definitive collection of the revelations that had been authorized by him. More or less extensive pieces of Qur'anic revelation had been committed to memory by his followers (see ORALITY; MEMORY); and several individuals had written some of the revelation down on various materials. Shortly after his death, the first collection of these written and memorized records of the revelation was made by order of the first caliph (q.v.), Abu Bakr (r. 11-13/632-4) and it was written on leaves (suhuf). The reason given for this collection and compilation was the death of several Companions (see COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET). These men, who were famous for their knowledge of the Qur'an, had died during the wars of apostasy (q.v.; ridda) and people were afraid that with further deaths parts of the Qur'an might become lost. Abu Bakr gave Zayd b. Thabit, a former scribe of the Prophet, the task of collecting all of the Qur'an that was available. When Abu Bakr died, the leaves on which Zayd had written the Qur'an passed to the caliph's successor, 'Umar (r. 13-23/634-44); and, after his death, to his daughter, Hafsa (q.v.), who was also one of the widows of Muhammad (see WIVES OF THE PROPHET). Some twenty years after Abu Bakr's collection, during the caliphate of 'Uthman (r. 23-35/644-56), dissension between followers of other collections of the Qur'an induced the caliph to issue an official collection of the Qur'an, to deposit a copy in the most important administrative centers of the empire and to suppress other existing collections. This canonical version was again edited by the Medinan Zayd b. Thabit, helped by three men from Quraysh (q.v.), on the basis of the collection he had already made at Abu Bakr's request, and which Hafsa put at the disposal of the committee. This caliphal
edition of the Qurʾān, *al-mushaf al-ʿuthmānī*, quickly achieved universal acceptance, becoming the *textus receptus* among Muslims. Such, in summary, is the traditionally accepted Muslim view of the origin of the written corpus of the Qurʾān. It is based on two reports that are transmitted in a large number of sources. Alternative accounts, which are also found in Islamic sources (see Schwally, Sammlung, 15-8, 50-4; Burton, *Collection*, 120-8; 138-59), found no permanent recognition.

Some Western scholars have challenged the Muslim view about the history of the *mushaf*. F. Schwally rejected the historicity of the first collection, that made at the behest of Abū Bakr. Others considered the Islamic narrative on this double collection completely fictitious and provide various suggestions for the date of origin of the written corpus: the time of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65-86/685-705, Casanova, *Muhammad*; Mingana, *Transmission of the Kurʾān*; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*), or the third/ninth century (J. Wansbrough, *QS*), or the time of the Prophet himself (Burton, *Collection*). According to most of these scholars, the traditional reports concerning the collection and edition of the Qurʾān were fabricated during the third/ninth century. A recent study (Motzki, *Collection*) shows, however, that the two traditions upon which the current Muslim understanding of the history of the *mushaf* is based have Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhārī (d. 124/742) as an undeniable common link (see Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān), and both were already in circulation by the first quarter of the second/eighth century. The content of these traditions probably goes back to the last decades of the first/seventh century. Accordingly, an official written corpus must have already existed in the second half of the first/seventh century. This suggests that the time of ʿUthmān may indeed be a reasonable date of origin for the *textus receptus* of the Qurʾān, a conclusion that is corroborated by several reports about ʿUthmān, which seem to be independent of each other. Yet, what the early dating of these traditions means for the reliability of the details they report still needs to be investigated.

The above-mentioned traditions suggest that before the official edition of the Qurʾān was promulgated, several written compilations of codices of the Qurʾān existed, which were made or owned by different Companions. Although they became obsolete after the emergence of the official version and allegedly were suppressed, there are reports of scholars who, as late as the fourth/tenth century, claim to have seen manuscripts based on Companion codices (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 29). Variants of these *mashāḥif* from the *textus receptus* were collected and discussed as early as the beginning of the second/eighth century (see Motzki, *Origins*, 110-11), a practice continued in subsequent centuries (see *Readings of the Qurʾān*). The reliability of the alleged variants is difficult to ascertain. According to Burton (*Collection*, 211) they are fictitious and contribute nothing to the understanding of the history of the written corpus. In view of the early date of some reports concerning the Companion codices, however, the issue requires further study.

According to Islamic tradition and as evidenced in the earliest extant manuscripts of the Qurʾān, the first copies of the *mushaf* were devoid of diacritical points, vowel signs, markers to indicate the end of the verses and of the sūras (*q.v*), and the names of the sūras (see Recitation of the Qurʾān; Form and Structure of the Qurʾān; Arabic Language; Arabic Script). Although these devices to make the reading of a text unambiguous (see Ambiguous; Difficult Passages) and to facilitate its use developed only in the course of the first Islamic centuries (see
Mu'tazila

A religious movement in early Islam, the Mu'tazila became the dominant theological school in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century (see THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). The movement was allegedly founded by Wāṣîl b. ‘Aṭâ’ (d. 131/728-9) who was towards the end of his life joined by Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. 143/760 or 144/761), a prominent disciple of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). Most issues related to the incubation phase of the movement as well as the original meaning of the term Mu’tazila — which has the sense of “those who dissociate themselves, who keep themselves apart” — remain enigmatic. Later sources offer a number of different explanations, sometimes blatantly tendentious. It was apparently Abū l-Hudhayl (d. ca. 227/841) who first defined the five principles of the Mu’tazila — the principle of God’s unity (taḥwīd, see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES), of God’s justice (‘adl, see JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE), of the promise and the threat (al-wa’d wa-l-wa‘id, see REWARD AND PUNISHMENT), of the intermediate state of the Muslim sinner (al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn, see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR) and the principle of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil (al-amr bi-l-ma‘ruf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar, see GOOD AND EVIL; VIRTUES AND VICES, COMMANDING AND FORBIDDING) — as indispensable to Mu’tazili identity. Later authors differentiate between two periods of Mu’tazilism following the incubation phase. In the early phase (ca. 200-35/815-50), when Mu’tazilism was at the height of its political influence and public prestige, the representatives of the movement displayed great diversity on the doctrinal level. In the second, scholastic phase Mu’tazili thought was systematized. Coherent theological frameworks were formulated by Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī (d. 319/913),

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Bibliography


Mushrikūn see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM

Musīc see RECIATION OF THE QUR’ĀN; RECITERS OF THE QUR’ĀN

Muslim see ISLAM

Mutawātīr see TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE QUR’ĀN
who was identified with Baghdād, and by Abū 'Ali al-Jubbaṭi (d. 303/915), who was identified with Baṣra; the latter was followed by his son Abū Ḥāšim (d. 321/933), the founder of the so-called Bahshamīyya or Bahāshīma. The last innovative school within Mu'tazilism originated with Abū l-Husayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), who developed independent theological views that set him apart from the school of Abū Ḥāšim. Despite much criticism by the Bahshamīyya and later heresiographers that he introduced philosophy (see Philosophy and the Qur'ān) under the cover of theology, Abū l-Husayn’s views were successful to the extent that his school established itself side by side with the Bahshamīyya. In some areas the Mu'tazila persisted until the Mongol invasion at the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century. Mu'tazilism was also adopted by the Zaydiyya and the Twelver Shi’a (see Shi’ism and the Qur’ān) and determined their respective theological outlooks for centuries to come.

The nature of the Qur’ān
Because of their uncompromising interpretation of God’s unity (tawḥīd) as expressed in Q 27:26, Q 112, etc., the Mu'tazilis were strictly opposed to the admission of anything co-eternal with God (see Eternity). This applied first and foremost to God’s essential attributes, which must be identical with him and not different eternal attributes or entitative determinants. This also applied in their view to the Qur’ān — the speech of God (kalām Allāh, see Word of God; speech) — that cannot possibly be co-eternal with God but was necessarily created in time (see Createdness of the Qur’ān). Thus they accused those denying that the Qur’ān had been created of asserting its eternity and of destroying God’s unity by claiming that something was co-eternal with him. Among the standard Mu'tazili arguments was Q 2:106, which was also the Qur'ānic basis for the doctrine of abrogation (q.v.). The centrality of this doctrine for the Mu'tazilis can be seen from the numerous titles of works on khalq al-Qur'ān listed by Ibn al-Nadīm (fl. fourth/tenth cent.) in the section of his Fihrist devoted to the Mu'tazila (Ibn al-Nadīm-Dodge, i. 388-9, 391, 393, 395, 396-7, 401, 412, 414-6, 418, 425, 429-30). It was basically this insistence of the Mu'tazilis — on the createdness of the Qur’ān, in the sense of its temporality, and their accusation that the opponents, in fact, held to the eternity of the Qur’ān — which provoked the traditionists to combine their denial of the createdness of the Qur’ān with the affirmation of its eternity or pre-existence. This line of argumentation was first formulated by ʿAbd b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). In the pre-mihna period (see Inquisition), by contrast, the conflict over the nature of the Qur’ān was not concerned with the question of its temporality versus its eternity. Rather, the discussion was whether God speaks in a literal sense, i.e. whether the Qur’ān is the speech of God, as the upholders of an anthropomorphic concept of God held (see Anthropomorphism), or whether God does not speak in a literal sense but rather creates the sound of speech which can be heard, as was the view attributed to Jahm b. Saʿwān (d. 128/745). Both positions implied the temporality of the Qur’ān. Another discussion on the nature of the Qur’ān in the pre-mihna phase associated with Abū ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbdullāh al-Fār (d. 120/737) and Imām ʿAbd al-Sādiq (d. 148/765) revolved around the issue of whether the Qur’ān, in accordance with the commonly accepted dogma that everything besides God is created, is also created (see Creation). Whereas Imām al-Sādiq reportedly rejected this conclusion, arguing that the
Qurʾān is neither creator nor created, but rather the speech of God, Abū Hanīfa apparently accepted the argument and held that the Qurʾān indeed is created. Again, those who denied the createdness of the Qurʾān in this second discussion refrained from combining their view with the notion of the uncreatedness or even eternity of the Qurʾān. It was therefore only after the miḥna and as an immediate result of the Muʿtazīlī argumentation on this issue that the conflict turned on the question of the createdness of the Qurʾān, in the sense of its temporality, versus its uncreatedness in the sense of its eternity. A further difference to the pre-miḥna period was that, unlike the Jahmiyya, the Muʿtazīlīs did not deny that God truly speaks, and they affirmed that the Qurʾān is indeed the speech of God. The difference between human and divine speech is that God, because of his omnipotence (see power and impotence), does not need instruments when he produces speech. It was only Muʿammad (d. 215/830) among the Muʿtazīlīs who deviated from this view. According to him, God does not actually speak nor does he have actual speech. He also maintained that the Qurʾān is brought forth (muhdath)—not truly created—by the substratum in which it inheres. For the Qurʾān is an accident and God does not create accidents.

The majority of the Muʿtazīlīs, like almost all theological schools, considered the Qurʾān as the principal miracle confirming Muhammad’s prophethood (see Prophets and Prophethood; miracle). The proof of its miraculous character was human inability to match the Qurʾān despite the challenge to do so (e.g. Q 10:38; 11:13; 52:33-4; also Q 2:23-4; 17:88; see Inimitability). They differed among themselves, however, on the question of why those who were challenged were unable to match it. While some Muʿtazīlīs maintained that the miraculous inimitability of the Qurʾān arises from its intrinsic quality, others denied this and argued that it is due to God’s preventing humankind from matching it. The latter position was known as the doctrine of prevention (ṣafa). The view that God deprived the people of the power to match the Qurʾān is usually ascribed to Abū Ishaq al-Nazzām (d. around 221/836), who was apparently the first to consider the Qurʾān a miracle. Another early representative of the ṣafa doctrine was al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869), who also composed a book on the choice and arrangement of words in the Qurʾān (kitāb fi l-iḥtiyyāt li-naẓm al-Qurʾān), as did Ibn al-Ikhshīd (d. 326/937; Kitāb Naẓm al-Qurʾān, see Form and Structure of the Qurʾān; Literary Structures of the Qurʾān; Language and Style of the Qurʾān). Al-Jāhīz’ contemporary ’Abbād b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 250/864) and the latter’s teacher Hishām al-Fuwaṭī (d. ca. 218/832) are reported to have still denied that the Qurʾān is to be considered as a miracle proving Muhammad’s prophetic mission, although both subscribed to the doctrine of ṣafa (van Ess, 176, iv. 7, 41, 609). The ṣafa-doctrine was held by most of the representatives of the school of Baghdad. The majority of the later Baṣra Muʿtazīlīs rejected the doctrine of prevention, arguing that the inimitability of the Qurʾān was based on the rhetorical uniqueness of the book (q.l.) and the excellence of its style (see Rhetoric of the Qurʾān). ’Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), for example, who devotes an entire volume of his Muḥźni to the issue of ʾiʿjāz, explains the miraculous inimitability of the Qurʾān with its intrinsic stylistic excellence and its eloquence (faṣāḥa) and argues against the doctrine of prevention. The earliest Muʿtazīlī treatises on the issue of the miraculous inimitability of the Qurʾān were composed as early as the second half of the second/eighth century by two students of al-
Jubbārī: Muhammad Ḥumayd b. Zayd al-Wāṣiṭ (d. 306/918) wrote a treatise entitled Kābīb Ijāz al-Qurʿān; and Muhammad b. Ṣayd al-Wāṣiṭ (d. 306/918) wrote Kābīb Ijāz al-Qurʿān fī nazmihi isc-taʿlīf. Neither of these is preserved. The earliest extant independent Muʿtazilī treatise on this issue carrying the word ijāz in its title was written by Abī Ḥamīd ibn al-Qaṣṣāf (d. 384/994; al-Nukat ʿīj ijāz al-Qurʿān, in Rummānī et al., Rasā′īl).

**Qur’ānic exegesis**

Among the extant Muʿtazilī commentaries on the Qurʿān, al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538/1144) al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqīq al-tanzīl is the most renowned. Its popularity was grounded in its mostly philological character; by contrast, it rarely provides theological argumentation, although al-Zamakhshārī was familiar with the last two school traditions within Muʿtazilism, the followers of Abū Hāshim al-Jubba’rī and those of Abū l-Husayn al-Bāṣrī. Most of the earlier Muʿtazilī commentaries, which were apparently much more representative of the Muʿtazilī tendency, are lost. In some cases, only titles of works are preserved; for other commentaries, substantial portions are preserved in the writings of later authors. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Dirār b. Ḥamīd (d. 180/796?) composed two exegetical works, a commentary (tafsīr) and an interpretation (taʿwīl) of the Qurʿān (Ibn al-Nadīm-Dodge, i, 416–7). It is not clear whether these two titles refer to two different works or to one and the same, nor whether the work(s) constituted complete Qurʿān commentaries or only dealt with selected passages. Among the Muʿtazilīs of the early third/ninth century, Ibn al-Nadīm reports that Bishr b. al-Muṭṭamīr (d. 210/825-6) composed a Kābīb Taʿwīl mutashābih al-Qurʿān, and Jaʿfar b. Harb (d. 236/850) authored a Kābīb Mutashābih al-Qurʿān, both of which are lost (Ibn al-Nadīm-Dodge, i, 80, 391, 411). The latter-mentioned work was consulted by the Muʿtazilī Ibn al-Khaṭṭāf when he composed his Radd al-lālā l-jabiyya al-qadariyya fī mā taʿallaqa bihi min mutashābih al-Qurʿān al-karīm during the fourth/tenth century (van Ess, 76, vi, 288, no. 3). Ibn al-Nadīm further reports that Abū l-Hudhayl composed a book on Mutashābih al-Qurʿān (Ibn al-Nadīm-Dodge, i, 80; cf. also van Ess, 76, iii, 265 f.; v, 367-9, no. 55), traces of which are apparently preserved in Abū al-Jabba‘r’s Mutashābih al-Qurʿān, in al-Faqqī b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 548/1153) Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʿān and Muḥammad b. al-Husayn al-Sharīf al-Raḍī’s (d. 406/1015) Ḥaqīq aq al-taʿwīl. Abū l-Hudhayl apparently defined in this work the criteria that need to be applied in Qurʿān exegesis. On the issue of how knowledge can be gained from the Qurʿān, he addressed the question whether passages of the Qurʿān that are formulated in a general manner may be restricted to a particular group of people. The issue was raised by the Murjiʿīs, who denied that Qurʿānic verses that speak about the fate of the unbelievers (see belief and unbelief) and the eternal punishment in hell (see hell and hellfire) in a general manner are to be applied to Muslims also. As a Muʿtazilī, Abū l-Hudhayl believed in eternal punishment for grave sinners and therefore argued that general Qurʿānic statements are to be understood in a general manner as long as there is no indication to the contrary. Abū ʿAlī al-Jabba‘rī later on adopted and further elaborated Abū l-Hudhayl’s view, whereas his son Abū Hāshim took the opposite view. During the second quarter of the third/ninth century, Qāsim b. Khalīl al-Dimashqī (al-Dimashqī), who, according to al-Kaʿbī, was a student of Abū l-Hudhayl, wrote a commentary of which no traces are preserved (Ibn al-Nadīm-Dodge, i, 393;
Extensive systematic commentaries on the Qurʾān were composed by Abū Bakr al-Āṣām (d. 201/816), Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 303/915), Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka’bī al-Balḥī (d. 319/931) and by Abū Muslim Muḥammad b. Bahr al-İṣfahānī (d. 322/934); cf. Ibn al-Naḍīm-Dodge, i, 76, whose Ḫāmi’ al-ta’līl li-muḥākam al-tanzīl (or Ḫāmi’ al-ta’līl al-Qurʾān) is reported to have consisted of 14 or 20 volumes, or even more (Sezgin, qās, i, 42-3; Kohlberg, Medieval Muslim, 203-4, no. 231). Although, again, none of these tafsīr works is preserved, ample quotations from them survive in the extant works of later authors, such as al-Tafsīr al-kabīr of Fakhir al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), the İmāmī exegetical works of Abū Ḥa ḡal al-Tūṣī (d. 459/1067; al-Tībānī fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān) and of al-Ṭabrisī (Maḥmūd ‘al-bayān) and, most importantly, al-Ḥakīm al-Jushamī’s (d. 494/1101) al-Tahdhib. Al-Āṣām apparently dealt in his commentary on the Qurʾān with historical and philological issues as well as with doctrinal matters (van Ess, 70, ii, 403-7; v, 198-202 [texts nos. 15-21]). The work was consulted by Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and fragments of it are preserved in Abū Manṣūr al-Māṭūrīdī’s (d. 333/944) Ta’wilāt ahl al-sunan, in Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha‘lībī’s (d. 427/1035-6) al-Kashf wa-l-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān and particularly in al-Tahdhib fi l-tafsīr of al-Ḥakīm al-Jushamī, the latter usually gives al-Āṣām’s view together with those of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū Muslim al-İṣfahānī. Al-Āṣām’s commentary is also often quoted by Abū l-Futūḥ al-Rāzī (first half sixth/twelfth century), by his contemporary al-Ṭabarsī and later on by Fakhir al-Dīn al-Rāzī, although it may be assumed that those later authors received al-Āṣām’s commentary through intermediary sources. No mention of al-Āṣām’s Tafsīr is to be found, by contrast, in al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) Ḫāmi’ al-bayān ‘an ta’wil ayy al-Qurʾān, although the possibility that the latter was familiar with the work cannot be excluded, nor is there any mention of his commentary in Abū al-Jabbār’s Kitāb Mutashābih al-Qurʾān or in Abū Ḥaḡal al-Tūṣī’s al-Tibānī. To judge from the preserved fragments, al-Āṣām endeavored to develop a comprehensive qur’ānic theology, dealt with the issue of abrogation, and formulated an original view on the distinction of clear (muḥkamāt) and ambiguous (q.v.) verses (mutashābihāt), both of which can be grasped rationally; the only difference is that in the latter case deeper reflection is called for. Quotations from the multi-volume commentary of al-Ka’bī are preserved in the Amālī of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) and possibly in the Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl of al-Māṭūrīdī (d. 333/944). In particular, later commentaries preserve ample quotations and paraphrases of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī’s exegesis; this is especially true of al-Tibānī’s, of which only the multi-volume Al-Ṭabarsī among the İmāmīs, of al-Tafsīr al-kabīr of Fakhir al-Dīn al-Rāzī and, most significantly, of al-Tahdhib fi l-tafsīr of the Mu’tazīli, later Zaydī, scholar al-Ḥakīm al-Jushamī, which still awaits critical editing. On the basis of this material, Daniel Gimaret (Jubbī) and Rosalind W. Gwynne (The “Tafsīr”) have tried to reconstruct Abū ‘Alī’s commentary.

Against the exegeses of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī and Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka’bī, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Asḥārī (d. 324/935) wrote his Tafsīr al-Qurʾān wa-l-radd ‘alā ma ḥāla fi l-bayān min ahl al-ṭik wa-l-buhtān wa-naqḍ mā ḥarrafahu l-Jubbī wa-l-Balḥī fi ta’wilātā (Sezgin, qās, i, 604 no. 10), of which only the introduction (muqaddima) and fragments are preserved.

Of the apparently very large commentary, al-Ḫāmi’ al-ta’līl (or tafsīr) al-Qurʾān, of ‘Alī b. Īsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), a fol-
lower of the school of Ibn Ikhsāṣ, who himself had abridged the commentary of al-Ṭabarī (Ibn al-Nadīm-Dodge, i, 76), only a small portion is extant in manuscript (Sezgin, ṣaṣ, viii, 112-3). It was highly regarded by later authors and has been used extensively by al-Ṭūsī in his Ṭibyān, the latter being, according to Daniel Gimaret, “un plagiat pur et simple de celui de ‘Ali b. Ḣārī ar-Rummānī” (Gimaret, Ḥubbā’, 23). A contemporary of al-Rummānī, Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987), composed a work entitled Kitāb al-Tatābbu ʿl-kašām Abī ‘Alī al-Ṭubbāʾī fī l-tafsīr, which is lost (Sezgin, ṣaṣ, vii, 110). Also lost is a work of Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Khallāl al-Baṣrī (alive in 377/987) entitled Mutashābīh al-Qur’ān, excerpts of which are preserved in writings of Ibn Ṭawūs (d. 664/1266) (Kohlberg, Medical Muslim, 292-3, no. 457). Various exegetical works authored by representatives of the Bahshamiyya, notably of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, are extant; to these belong his Ṭanzīḥ al-Qur’ān ʿan al-majāţīn, which was published twice before the discovery of its author’s summa theologica during the 1950s in Yemen (Cairo 1326, 1329) and his Mutashābīh al-Qur’ān which is concerned with the ambiguous verses, i.e., those that apparently convey meanings incongruent with Muʿtazilite positions. By contrast, ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s most extensive commentary, apparently entitled Muḥātīḥ, seems to be lost. The most significant Muʿtazilī work of exegesis after ʿAbd al-Jabbār was al-Tahdhib fi l-tafsīr of al-Hākim al-Jushami, a student of Abū Ḥāmid Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ishāq al-Najājī (d. 433/1041), who in turn was a student of ʿAbd al-Jabbār.

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Bibliography


Mysterious Letters

The alphabetic characters of the Arabic language (q.v.) that appear in non-verbal combinations at the beginning of certain sūras (q.v.) of the Qur’ān, just after the basma (q.v.). The gift of “letters” came to
the Arabian peninsula by way of a slow evolution of orthographies (see Arabic script; calligraphy; orality and writing in Arabia). While the whole story is quite complex, the cursive consonantal alphabet of twenty-eight letters in which the Qur’ān was recorded was derived from a form of the Nabatean script, which in turn had descended from Syriac/Aramaic forms (see Syriac and the Qur’ān). It ultimately sprang from the same common ancestor whose innovation around 1500 B.C.E. gave rise to the Hebrew alphabet and the south Arabian alphabets that first recorded the exploits of the kings of Saba’ (see sheba) and Ḥadramawt (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān; kings and rulers). Indeed, with the exception of the far-eastern symbols and syllabaries still in use in China and Japan, every language on the earth is written today with forms that are related in some way to this alphabetic family.

One could hardly say too much regarding the impact of the Qur’ān culturally and literally on the Arab peoples (see Arabs; language and style of the Qur’ān). The Qur’ān is considered the epitome of the Arabic language, and the works of the classical grammarians and exegetes (see exegesis of the Qur’ān: classical and medieval) who examined the inimitability (q.v.; i’jāz) of the Qur’ān laid the groundwork for the rules of Arabic grammar (see grammar and the Qur’ān). Eventually the Qur’ān was credited with a stabilization of speech (q.v.) and orthography (q.v.) that enabled increased expression, and a consequent advancement of learning (see knowledge and learning). But it must be remembered that a substantial portion of the works of the early grammarians was devoted to attempting to explain those Qur’ānic passages that fall outside of the purview of the normative “rules” of Arabic grammar. At an even more basic level, Qur’ānic orthography is itself archaic (cf. Nöldeke, AQ, iii, 26 f.), and, in fact, can not be said to have become “standard.” One mystery in the Qur’ān that endures is the existence of seemingly inexplicable combinations of letters that appear at the beginning of twenty-nine of the sūras. They are referred to as “the isolated/disconnected letters” (al-hurūf al-muqaddasihā) or “the opening letters” (hurūf al-fawādīh). These “mystery letters” themselves and the sūras they precede are given here for reference: aḥ, Q 10, 11, 12, 14, 15; ʿalām, Q 2, 3, 29, 30, 31, 32; ʿalams, Q 13; ʿalams, Q 7; ḫm, Q 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46; ḫmsʾq, Q 42; ṣ, Q 38; ṣml, Q 26, 28; ṭḥ, Q 20; ʿq, Q 50; ʿḥṣ, Q 19; ṵ, Q 68; ʿṣ, Q 36.

Before presenting contemporary and traditional explanations of these letters, mention must be made of the orthography of the mysterious letters in the context of the Arabic script, particularly that of the seventh century. There are eighteen Arabic graphemes (al-šīf, bāʾ, ḫim, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ), fifteen in the non-final position (identical bāʾ/ḥāʾ/yāʾ and ḫāʾ/ɡāf), expressing a total of twenty-eight sounds (for further details, see Arabic script). In the earliest Arabic script, there were no dots to indicate the difference between letters that were represented by the same grapheme, but had different sounds: a bāʾ (“b”) and a ṭāʾ (“t”), without the presence of, respectively, the single dot below or the double dots above the hooked form of the letter, become indistinguishable. The fourteen letters that compose the mysterious letters represent every consonantal form in Arabic as exemplified in this early script (in which ʿawāʾ, ʿaʾ and ɡāf were the same grapheme, as were ḫāʾ, ḫāʾ and ɡāf). Thus, the mysterious letters comprise — comprehensively — the graphemes of the Arabic script of the seventh century: the five that represent only one letter (al-šīf, ṭāʾ, nāʾ, nāʾ, hāʾ), as well as
the other nine (ȝâ', ḥâ', râ', sīn, ṣād, ṫā/righthalfmoon, qâf, kâf). It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that these mysterious letters were intended to represent the Arabic alphabet (see Welch, al-Kur‘ān, 414), shedding new light on passages such as q. 16: 103, which state that the revelation of the Qur‘ān is “clear Arabic tongue/speech” (lisân al-arabiyât muhibban). But this theory does little to explain the reason for the placement of the letters at the head of their respective sūras (see also unity of the text of the Qur‘ān). While Muslim scholars have developed a variety of explanations for these letters, a number of Western scholars have also set themselves the task of explaining both the meaning of the letters themselves, as well as the reason for their placement at the beginnings of these particular sūras.

Traditional explanations

To the faithful Muslim, these letters are part of the divine revelation of the Qur‘ān itself (see revelation and inspiration). In the recitation of the Qur‘ān (q.v.) these “openers” or “beginnings” of the sūras (fawâṣīl al-sūvar; awā‘il al-sūwar) are recited as letters of the alphabet (i.e. Q 2: 1 is read “alif lâm mimm”). A variety of explanations for the letters has been proffered in the classical commentaries: these letters are the names of the sūras or markers for the separation of the sūras, names of God or abbreviations of his names (i.e. al standing for al-rahmân, aln for al-rahîm or Allâh latîf majîd [“God, gentle, glorious], etc.; cf. Welch, al-Kur‘ān, 412; Robinson, Discovering, 320 n. 10; see God and his attributes), oaths (q.v.) by which God proclaimed. Traditional sources also suggest that the letters are mystical signs with symbolic meaning (see Şî‘ûfism and the Qur‘ān) based upon the numerical values assigned to the letters (see numbers and enumeration; numerology), or, alternatively, suggest that the letters were a means of attracting the attention of the Prophet or his audience (cf. Suyûtî, Itqân, iii, 21-30).

One theory that has gained interest and adherents among Muslims in more recent times concerns the claimed existence of multiple patterns of the number “nineteen” hidden in the text of the Qur‘ān (cf. Khalîfî, Qurān). This is said to be an experientially provable sign of the inimitability of the Qur‘ān, the inexpressible and unrepeatable quality of the Qur‘ān’s style.

Some of these findings, while interesting, seem somewhat contrived, e.g. the assertion that “nineteen” can be found in the mysterious letters because twenty-nine sūras (by one calculation) in the Qur‘ān begin with them, fourteen different letters from the alphabet are used (again, depending on whether one counts the single letters ṣād, qâf and nûn which occur before three sūras) and there are fourteen different combinations of these disconnected letters in the beginning of the sūras. The sum of these numbers is fifty-seven (29 + 14 + 14 = 57). Fifty-seven is a multiple of nineteen (3 × 19 = 57).

Although, as can be seen from the preceding paragraphs, Qur‘ān commentators have put forth many explanations for these mysterious letters (one of the most popular and enduring — although lacking any consensus — being that these mysterious letters are contractions of words or phrases; see Watt-Bell, Introduction, 64), most classical and contemporary Muslim scholars maintain that the full signification of these letters is known only to God (Welch, al-Kur‘ān, 412).

Contemporary theories in western scholarship

Non-Muslim theories have varied widely, but tend to fall in two categories: abbreviation and redactional. (Other recent, but less tenable, proposals include the theories that they are mystical symbols used as battle cries, or that they are mnemonic devices
which summarize the contents of the sūras; Robinson, Discovering, 320 n. 10; Watt-Bell, Introduction, 64). Proponents of abbreviationist positions have tended to view the mysterious letters as independent of the original Qur’ānic text. In this category may be listed Hans Bauer (Anordnung), who proposed that the letters stood for various catchwords, and Eduard Goosens, who has argued that the letters are contractions of earlier, now defunct, titles of the sūras. James Bellamy (Mysterious letters) proposed an abbreviation theory that is less arbitrary than the others: following the suggestions of classical Qur’ānic commentators that the majority of the mysterious letters are abbreviations for al-rahmān and/or al-raḥīm, Bellamy posits that most of the mysterious letters stand for these names of God in the basmala and that all of the other mysterious letters (with some emendations, which he elaborates upon in a later article; see his Proposed emendations, 572-3) are abbreviations for the basmala. In his view, these abbreviations were introduced (in the Meccan period, by the Prophet’s scribes) at the beginning of 29 sūras instead of the basmala, and that later scribes did not understand the abbreviation and inserted the basmala in addition to the mysterious letters. Welch (al-ʔurʾān, 413), however, argues that Bellamy’s theory is not entirely consistent with the textual evidence concerning the chronology of the Qurʾān which would suggest that the letters are more likely from the Medinan period (see Chronology and the Qurʾān), and does not explain the relationship of the letters to their immediate contexts (i.e. why are they placed at these twenty nine sūras, and not others?).

The other category of theories, the redactional, examines the mysterious letters as a means for ordering the Qur’ānic text (see Form and Structure of the Qurʾān), and tends to see these opening letters as part of the original corpus (see muṣḥaf). Although, as mentioned above, Bauer (Anordnung) believed the letters to be abbreviations of catchwords, he provided statistical support for the theory that the letters influenced the final arrangement of the Qurʾān (cf. Welch, 413-4 for a discussion of Loth and Schwally’s contribution to the development of this theory). Bell saw both the mysterious letters and the basmala as part of the original corpus, albeit revised: he argued that they were early Medinan revisions adapting the sūras for inclusion in the written scripture (Welch, al-ʔurʾān, 414; Watt-Bell, Introduction, 63-4, 138, 143). The current form of this redactional theory centers on the observation that the Qur’ānic sūras are not strictly arranged from longest to shortest, even with the exclusion of the opening sūra (Sūrat al-Fāṭihā; see fāţiḥa) and the two concluding sūras. It has been proposed that exceptions were made to the “decreasing-length” ordering for groups of sūras beginning with the same mysterious letters. In a recent study, however, Neal Robinson (Discovering, 260-70) has clearly demonstrated some problems with this theory: 1) there are some exceptions to the “decreasing-length” rule that cannot be accounted for even by the intervening sūras that begin with the mysterious letters and 2) not all the sūras that begin with the same letters are arranged together. While not entirely discounting the value of the sūra length and the presence of the letters in ordering the sūras, Robinson suggests that other factors (such as the repetition of key words or phrases in consecutive sūras) were taken into account by the redactors of the Qur’ānic corpus.

But proponents of this theory have not only attempted to explain the discrepancies of the “decreasing-length” ordering of the sūras. They have also tried to explain what the individual letters stand for. In his
ground-breaking study, Theodor Nöldeke (q.q., 215 f.) argued that the letters were abbreviations standing for the names of people whom Zayd b. Thābit had consulted for the readings of the sūras (see readings of the Qurʾān; rectifiers of the Qurʾān). He later believed that they were merely mystical and meaningless symbols attempting to imitate the heavenly book (q.q.v.; see also book) the Prophet would have beheld (for further discussion of this change in Nöldeke’s thinking, which was effected by Loth’s argument of a Jewish Kabbalistic influence on Muḥammad in the late Meccan and early Medinan periods, see Welch, al-Kurʾān, 412; see also Jews and Judaism). Hartwig Hirschfeld expanded on Nöldeke’s initial theory and attempted to identify the sources themselves, suggesting that the letters stood for the following individuals: m = Muhīṭra; s = Ḥafṣa; r/z = al-Zubayr; k = Abū Bakr; h = Abū Hurayra; n = ‘Uthmān; ʿ = Ṭalḥa; ʿ = Saʿd (b. Abī Waqqāṣ); ḥ = Ḥudhayfa; ʿ = ʿUmar/ʿAlī/ʿAbd Ḥamīd b. ‘Abbās/ʿAlī/ʿAbd b. Badr/Alī/ʿAbd b. Ṭalḥa; q = al-Qāsim b. Rabīʿa.

The principal weakness of the Nöldeke/Hirschfeld theory, as with all the theories put forth on the issue, is that it does not — indeed, cannot — prove its case. The ability to produce identifications of the letters, whether they are names or whole words, does not prove that the identifications are correct. The catalogue of various identifications stands as a tribute to the imagination of the researchers rather than as a secure solution.

My own work on this issue has surfaced a previously undetected and potentially important detail about the mysterious letters. I observed that the patterns themselves produce a set ranking within the letters. Comparing the eleven different multiple-letter combinations in which thirteen different letters appear reveals that the order of the letters is not random or arbitrary. One would not expect this to happen if the letters stood for sentences or words; such a system would not have been likely to prevent violations in a ranking. Thus, for example, the mim never appears before the sīn, which in turn never appears before the ‘ayn; the lām never appears before the alif, etc. (for a more detailed discussion of this “ranking” of the letters, see Massey, New investigation, 498-q). For this observation to hold true, however, some explanation is needed in the matter of Q 42, which begins with the pattern hmʿsq. At first glance, it seems that this violates the order (insofar as the mim appears before the sīn). But the verse divisions have generally separated this cluster into hm and then ʿsq. In this case there are actually two separate patterns here. Another possibility is that, given the location of the sūra in the middle of six other sūras with the hm pattern, the hm has been added later by analogy.

Quite significantly, the set ranking I have observed goes well beyond the statistical possibility of a random production. Calculating the odds for such patterns if only two letters are used shows that there are about even odds of a random selection succeeding in having an inviolate pattern (156 possible patterns with seventy-eight [1/2] of them not violating any given pattern). When the pattern length is extended to three, however, the chance of randomness quickly diminishes (1716 possible patterns with only 286 of them [1/6] not violating any given pattern). In the case of the mysterious letters there are four cases of two letter patterns, four cases of three, four cases of four and one case of five. In this particular case, statistical analysis argues strongly against randomness. If the letters are not random, one can rule out the possibility that they are words or sentences. While such structures would have semantic intentionality, they would not
prevent the violation of an ordered list of letters. Also ruled out is the theory that the letters are nothing other than the imitation of celestial characters or nonsense letters. This observation, I would argue, lends strong support to the Nöldeke/Hirschfeld theory. If the letters are an ordered list, the best candidate for referents is the names of people who, for some reason, are being ranked by the person who has put down the letters.

The letters, then, constitute a form of critical textual apparatus (see textual criticism of the Qur’ān). According to reliable accounts from the early history of Islam, when Zayd b. Thābit, at the order of ‘Uthmān (q.v.), compiled the Qur’ān (see muṣḥaf; collection of the Qur’ān; codification of the Qur’ān), he used several sources. For those sūras that had either more than one source (or perhaps whose reading is supported by more than one source over and against other variant readings which he chose to reject), he acknowledged those sources by listing one-letter abbreviations of them, in his own perceived rank of importance and reliability. He was never inconsistent in his own ranking of the sources, hence the order we can now find among the mysterious letters was produced. Whether or not Hirschfeld has correctly identified the letters with the names for which they stand can simply never be known. He has astutely produced parallels for the letters from strong candidates of the period, but he may or may not be right. The names may all be scribes who never showed up in the tradition or any early literature. But the discovery of the ranking of these letters tips the scales in the direction of an ordered list of names.

If this is a catalogue of sources the ‘Uthmānic Qur’ān has carefully built into it an early attempt to assure the readers of the credibility of the text from which they were reading. It is possible, as some have suggested, that the letters that appear alone (ṣād, qāf, nūn) may not have the same purpose as the collections themselves. Nūn in particular has the story of Jonah (q.v.) and the great fish (nūn) as a cogent explanation of this letter.

Conclusion

Adequate explanation both for the meaning of the “mysterious letters” and why they occur before the 29 sūras in which they appear has yet to appear. Although a number of reasonable theories of the significance of these mysterious collections of letters has been proposed — abbreviations for the basmala, or for some of the divine names, or for various individuals (possibly reciters of the Qur’ān) — none is definitive. The inconsistencies with the observation that they appear largely before sūras that interfere with the “decreasing sūra-length” organization of the Qur’ān have yet to be explained satisfactorily. Finally, further study is needed about the fact that they represent, comprehensively, the graphemes of the earliest Arabic script.

Keith Massey

Bibliography

Myths and Legends in the Qurʾān

Myths are narratives that serve to explain and describe the experienced world by laying bare its archetypal patterns (see cosmology); they are often staged in a cosmic or supernatural framework so as to manifest binding truths, to generate meaning and provide guidance. Legends, raising no such universal claim, may be understood as narratives of pious imagination celebrating an exemplary figure.

Are there myths and legends in the Qurʾān? Even today, this is a controversial question, since the term “myth,” in particular, is sometimes thought to be irreconcilable with the concept of revelation (see revelation and inspiration). The reasons for such hyper-sensitivity are historical; to quote Jaroslav Stetkevych (Golden bough, ix):

Within the premises of [the] Arabian stance — begun with the Qurʾān’s instant, and almost total, doctrinal impact — Arabic cultural history with all its anthropological constructs, was supposed to have begun and thereafter forever to unfold in the clarity of broad daylight, as it were. All “falsehood” and all “truth” were forever absolutely differentiated into some timeless pre-revelation (the age of the Jāhilīyah) that was followed by an equally timeless revelation (the Qurʾān), that is, into that which exists not and that which exists: al-bāṭīl and al-ḥaqq.

The two terms, myth/legend and revelation, once taken as indicators of different degrees of truth (q.v.), emanating from sources of unequal credibility, become mutually exclusive: Myths under such a perspective cannot be easily accepted as powerful expressions of significant human experience deemed worthy of transmittal to later generations because of their archetypal evidence and universal validity, but are, rather, suspected of representing deviance and willful ignorance (jāhilīyya). Their re-use as a prop for scriptural events — a common practice in Christian iconography — occurred, although to a lesser degree, in the later haggadic elaboration of Qurʾānic narratives (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval). Events related in the Qurʾān itself, are, however, considered “true” and sufficient to represent the past (see history and the Qurʾān). Non-Qurʾānic pre-Islamic narratives are held to be devoid of meaning, as they were superseded by the only meaningful revelation (see south Arabia, religion in pre-Islamic).

But the concepts of “myths and legends” cover not only ancient “pagan” narrative but have been redirected as terms to denote narratives informed with a particular hermeneutic code. It is their intrinsic ability to recall archetypal patterns of interaction that invites the listener to identify with or find guidance through particular figures. “Myth” and “legend,” understood as hermeneutically distinguished genres of narrative, are to be found in all kinds of literature, irrespective of their profane or sacred character (see literature and the Qurʾān). As diverse studies in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament alike have shown (Alter and Kermode, Literary guide; Alter, Biblical narrative; Frye, The great code), mythic and legendary narratives figure amply in the two older monotheistic scriptures. The dynamics of their immanent mythopoiesis provides narrative texts with significant subtexts adding surplus meaning to the plot, thus proving not only effective with pre-revelation
audiences, but also particularly fit to serve
the aims of revelation itself.

Although this article focuses on the
Qur'ān, it will be necessary to survey par-
ticular aspects of the problematic in the
broader framework of scripture in general
(see literary structures of the
Qur'ān). Not only does the Qur'ān typolo-
logically represent a manifestation of
monotheistic scripture and thus partake in
the hermeneutical characteristics of a
sacred canon, the Qur'ān also displays,
even more perspicuously than the two
other scriptures, the process of the emer-
gence of a scripture. If this is true, a com-
parison between the treatment of myth(s)
and legends in the Qur'ān on the one
hand, and in the two other monotheistic
scriptures on the other, promises to throw
important light on the particular develop-
ments of the Qur'ān. Subsequently, an
attempt at a typology of myths and legends
in the Qur'ān will be undertaken through
consideration of a selection of significant
cases. Since the qur'ānic narrative is often
inconsistent, i.e. sophisticated structures
appearing alongside fragmented panels of
mythic images, it is important to discuss
not only complete narrative units but also
overall mythical visions looming under
dispersed single elements. As against the
positive evidence of mythopoiesis in the
Qur'ān, the anti-mythic tendencies, which
likewise exist, will also be considered.

Scripture and myth

Scripture as a medium of the demythification
of the world

Myth, in the narrow sense of a narrative
about personified or demonized supernatu-
ral powers working in individual or collect-
ive human life, is of course incompatible
with the scriptural concept of one exclu-
sive divine agent in nature and history. In
fact, scripture as such has been credited as
the medium of demythification par excelle-
ce. It has been noted of the three
monotheistic religions that their scriptures
do not, in the way mythic thinking does,
refer back to an archaic sacred order,
anchored in a primordial beginning that
needs to be restored, but refer to events
that themselves are part of an extended
continuous nexus of happenings. This is
particularly true for Christianity and Islam,
two religions that are based on events that
are understandable only in view of what
preceded: neither initiates traditions but
rather presupposes them. It is noticeable
that in both religions human history
receives a new evaluation through the cen-
tral event that necessarily judges the pre-
ceding era to be of inferior quality and
that promises to have an imprint on all
further history. The basic structure of past,
present and future thus cannot be viewed
in a symmetrical way since the theological
evaluations are unequal (Zirker, Christentum,
see time).

The fact that scripture dissolves pre-
monotheistic, iterative or circular patterns
of memory (q.v.), that it tends to “histori-
cize” memory, becomes most evident from
its re-interpretation of the myth-imprinted
“pagan” world submitted to ever repeat-
ing cyclical processes of seasonal change
(see fate; destiny; generations; geo-
graphy). In contrast, the scriptural world-
view reflects the process of an evolution in
linear time. Monotheistic scripture margin-
alizes cosmic experience, the impact of the
powers of nature as manifest in the sea-
sonal cycle, in favor of historical experi-
ence, presenting decisive communal events
as unique manifestations of divine power
(see power and impotence; freedom
and predestination). Scripturally insti-
tutionalized feasts (see festivals and
commemorative days) thus no longer
serve to mark the yearly changes of seasons
(q.v.) but commemorate outstanding events.
worked by the divine agent in the community in the past. Scriptural demythification thereby touches a realm of human life that is vital for the coherence of a society: i.e. rituals and feasts (see Ritual and the Qur’ān). Once having placed a taboo upon viewing spirits and demons (see Jinn; Devil) as potent agents in the drama of the seasonal cycles, scripture has to provide etiological substitutes to give meaning to the feasts as well as to inspire the effervescence and the perception of renewal that make up the festal atmosphere (Assmann, Fest). This reconstruction has been, in the Islamic context, carried out in a particularly rigorous way. Whereas the two other monotheistic religions kept the time frame of older seasonal feasts and co-opted their essential symbols, enriching and reshaping them according to the new salvation-historical meaning of the individual feast — thus preserving a mythic subtext to be reclaimed whenever desired, Islamic festivals have fared differently. Though strikingly conservative in terms of ritual procedure, i.e. continuing many of the ancient pre-Islamic ritual performances clearly informed by the symbolism of changing seasons (Wellhausen, Reste), Islam has strictly dissociated them from their ancient Arabian precedents through a new calendar (q.v.) which bears no relation to the seasonal cycle, thus dismissing any mythic association emanating from that source (Neuwirth, Three religious feasts). Moreover, the Islamic rites were given new meanings commemorating historical events crucial to the community’s identity, or were reinterpreted as mere acts of worship (q.v.) divinely imposed through the words of earlier prophets (see Prophets and Prophethood).

But myth is not exclusively about supernatural powers working in nature (see Miracle); it is also about extraordinary human figures, excelling in strength, courage (q.v.), shrewdness, endurance and other heroic faculties. In the Hebrew Bible not a few characters of heroic standing have survived scripturalization, i.e. integration into a vision dominated by divine will: they appear to act autonomously rather than being directed by a divine force behind them. Although not consistently designated as heroic but responding to diverse challenges of human acting and suffering, and never totally severed from divine will or providence, major biblical figures, primarily Moses (q.v.) and David (q.v.), and to a lesser degree also Abraham (q.v.), Jacob (q.v.), Joseph (q.v.) and Solomon (q.v.) as well as more episodic figures like Samson, Ehud and Judith have retained a heroic image. As against that, few heroic figures would be found in the Qur’ān. Not only are the protagonists of narratives from the ancient Arabian lore absent, but also most of the biblical figures that do play a role in the Qur’ān are not represented as heroes either. Their appearance has been changed: as they do not receive a consistent portrayal, nor are their stories continuously followed over a span of time long enough to display character development, but are, rather, presented episodically in very diverse contexts, these figures are not developed enough to impress as heroes (see the discussion of Solomon and David below). Others, like the Arabian Hūd (q.v.), Šāliḥ (q.v.) and Shu’ayb (q.v.), do not act autonomously but remain throughout performants of the divine will, so that their actions seem to lack momentum, making it difficult for the reader to associate them with those key figures contained “in kindred structures and symbolic systems that range from Gilgamesh and the Hebrew Bible to Homer and Vergil” (Stetkevych, Golden bough, ix).

Still, in the Qur’ān some figures do acquire heroic dimensions such as Noah (q.v.; Nūḥ), Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Joseph
(Yūsuf) and, most especially, Moses (Mūsā).

Qur'ānic scripture and story-telling

Scriptural demythification, which is particularly strong in the Qurʾān, also touches upon another vital need: the transmission of knowledge, particularly the practice of story-telling. Qurʾānic narrative has hitherto usually been considered as a continuum. Its continuous treatment of prophetic episodes with similar, sometimes identical, messages led scholars to the conclusion that there is something like “the Qurʾānic narrative,” attesting a cyclical concept of revelation (Paret, Geschichtsbild). Although Horovitz, in his groundbreaking study on Qurʾānic narrative, strictly committed himself to Nöldeke’s periodization, scholars after him have ordinarily failed to acknowledge, or even rejected, any substantial development in the Qurʾānic representation of prophets and messengers (see messenger) except in terms of increasing detail. In general the Qurʾān has been judged to evidence no serious interest in history. Fred Donner (Narratives of origin, 84) states:

The purpose of stories in the Qurʾān, then, is profoundly different from their purpose in the Old Testament; the latter uses stories to explain particular chapters in Israel’s history, the former to illustrate — again and again — how the true Believer acts in certain situations. In line with this purpose, Qurʾānic characters are portrayed as moral paradigms, emblematic of all who are good or evil…. [The Qurʾān] is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets or peoples before Muḥammad, or of Muḥammad himself, because in the Qurʾānic view the identity of the community to which Muḥammād was sent is not historically determined, but morally determined.

This view, which relies on a macro-structural reading of the Qurʾān, not surprisingly conforms with the image of the Qurʾān that became dominant in Islam itself after the official canonization of the corpus by ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (see collection of the Qurʾān; codices of the Qurʾān; ‘Uthmān): the Qurʾān was no longer perceived as a communicational process but as the time-transcending divine word (see Word of God) transmitted by the prophet Muḥammad, the final figure in a series of impeccable (see impeccability) superhuman messengers bearing an identical message. This a-historical perception has recently been adopted by a number of modern scholars, inspired by postmodern methodological approaches no longer concerned with philological-historical problems (see contemporary critical practices and the Qurʾān; post-enlightenment academic study of the Qurʾān). To view the Qurʾān in such a “holistic” way — in accordance with its later Islamic reading — is, however, only one possible way of reading it, since the a-historical image of the Qurʾān covers another, more complex, layer of understanding that can be laid bare only through an acute micro-structural reading (see form and structure of the Qurʾān).

To do justice to Qurʾānic narrative, one has to look for earlier narrative traditions familiar to the community that may have influenced the Qurʾānic narrative style (see language and style of the Qurʾān; orality and writing in Arabia; narratives; scripture and the Qurʾān). Given the fact that the early sūras (q.v.) display a linguistic and stylistic character very close to the enunciations of pre-Islamic soothsayers (q.v.; kāhin, pl. kahana) whereas
later sūras come close to monotheistic liturgies with pericopes of scriptural readings in their central part (for further discussion, see Form and Structure of the Qurʾān), one arrives at the conclusion that Qurʾānic narratives partake in diverse discourses and thus constitute at least two distinct groups: texts that still mirror the principle of a highly emphatic, succinct and sometimes enigmatic presentation current in saj’ al-kahana (see rhymed prose) on the one hand, and texts more inclined towards a lively episodic presentation displaying sophisticated narrative strategies, on the other. The former genre is more formalized and thus limited in its narrative range, relying strongly on repetition, parallelism and anaphors, etc.; the latter is flexible, tending towards detail and diversity.

Whereas the former drives home one particular message, there are far more complex intentions behind the second. Due to the new Qurʾānic worldview, which staged past and present events as part of the drama of a series of divine interventions in human interactions, the orally transmitted scenarios of Arabian memory (see orality; Arabs), whose protagonists were committed to worldly, often heroic, aims were widely marginalized — if not dismissed as a whole — or re-interpreted to fit the new paradigm. In the words of Stetkevych (Golden bough, 10):

The knowledge of the communal Arabian past and its inheritors’ creative and re-creative self-knowledge within it were definitely not furthered by the concrete, a-historical and anti-mythical doctrinal stance that relegated mythic materials to anecdotal and “catechistic” functions.… The problem with a number of (these) nuclei of myth was that in their survival in the new code, that is, through their co-optation by the Qurʾān (and the subsequent dogmatizing tradition), they were put to the service of a rhetoric that was almost inimical to “narrative” itself — this despite the Qurʾānic claim that there they are being told in the best of narrative ways. That is, in the Qurʾān, narrative and indeed everything else is subordinated to the overarching rhetoric of salvation [q.v.] and damnation.… [see reward and punishment] Rarely do we sense in the Qurʾān a self-sufficient and self-justifying joy in storytelling, indeed, rarely, if at all, does the Qurʾān allow for the formation of “themes” in the literary terminological understanding, that is, of descriptive (of imagist) units that possess their own formal and thematic circumscription and “sufficiency” and are not intruded upon by a stylistically disruptive rhetoric. Rather than themes in the literary sense, the Qurʾān, therefore, knows primarily rhetorically subordinated motifs.

What Stetkevych has labeled “rhetorics” is, however, deeply rooted in the Qurʾānic message as such and thus from a different perspective should be viewed as complementary. It is true that Qurʾānic storytelling does not express an authorial stance such as is that which Alter finds realizable in biblical narrating (Biblical narrative, 184):

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the role played by the narrator in the biblical tales is the way in which omniscience and inobtrusiveness are combined.… In the Bible… the narrator’s work is almost all récit, straight narration of actions and speech, and only exceptionally and very briefly discourse, disquisition on and around the narrated facts and their implications. The assurance of comprehensive knowledge is thus implicit in the narratives, but it is shared with the reader only intermittently and at that quite partially. In this
way, the very mode of narration conveys a double sense of a total coherent knowledge available to God (and by implication, to His surrogate, the anonymous authoritative narrator) and the necessary incompleteness of human knowledge, for which much about character, motive, and moral status will remain shrouded in ambiguity.

As against the meticulous shaping of personages and the sophisticated coding and de-coding of their motives, which characterize biblical narrative, Qur’anic narrating pursues complex “para-narrative” aims. Narratives, at least insofar as they are unfolded to some extent and recall plots already known from biblical literature, are presented as excerpts or messages from the book (q.v.; al-kitāb), which is clearly taken to be a corpus of literature apart from the rest of the known stories that are currently available through oral tradition. This remoteness of “kitāb-generated” narrative certainly has a strong bearing on the style of the stories presented as kitāb readings. It forces on them a distinct linguistic code that, on the one hand, confers on the diction a highly stylized form (rhymed prose resulting in somewhat forced syntactic structures; see Grammar and the Qur’ān), serving to distinguish it from profane narrative. On the other hand, it implants these narratives with the new message of the imminent eschatological catastrophe (see eschatology; catastrophe), which brings the narrative close to an exhortative appeal (see Exhortations) or, later, a sermon. It is exactly the discursive elements so marginal in biblical narrative that matter primarily in the Qur’ānic narrative: the explicit presentation of the moral or theological implications for the community that can be deduced from the narrated facts or speeches (see Ethics and the Qur’ān; Theology and the Qur’ān). To fulfill this purpose, a stylistic device unknown to the Bible has been created to accommodate the particular moral or theological deductions from the Qur’ānic discourse, the clausula (see Neuwirth, Studien). This stylistic device consists in a particular closure of the long verses of late Meccan and Medinan times (see Chronology and the Qur’ān): the last sentence of a verse does not partake in the main strand of communication, but presents a comment on its contents indicating divine approval or disregard of the fact reported, e.g. “Truly you are of the faulty” (innaki kunti min al-khātīfīn, q 12:29; see Sin, Major and Minor; Virtues and Vices, Commanding and Forbidding). It may also refer to one of God’s attributes (see God and His Attributes), e.g. “Truly he is the hearer, the seer” (innahu huwa l-sāmī’u l-bāṣir, q 17:1; see Seeing and Hearing), which, in the later stages of Qur’ānic development, have become parameters of ideal human behavior. This comment is clad in a widely formalized shape and is thus easily identifiable.

Qur’ān and history

How does the Qur’ān view prior history? Keeping the canonical process in mind, we have to ask the question on two different levels, distinguishing between two subsequent paradigms. The Qur’ān, in the beginning of its development, encodes history in the discourse of the umam khāliya, the accounts about the dispatchment of messengers to previous communities who called their people to worship and obey one God but who failed to convert their communities (see Obedience; Punishment Stories). Here, the Qur’ān “pans over a landscape where time is less a chronology than a continuum” (Khalidi, Arabic historical thought, 8). The scenarios are mostly, though not exclusively, Arabian (see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān). The early Qur’ānic messenger stories have replaced a previously existing culture-
specific, coherent pre-Islamic Arabian myth. In Stetkevych’s words (Golden bough, 3):

Arabia and the Arabia-nurtured and Arabic-speaking world [see ARABIC LANGUAGE] has most stubbornly denied itself the acknowledgment of a “mythological conditioning.” An earnestness, and even somberness, of rigorous theological dogma came to reign with an almost puzzling... march through more than a millennium of history. It succeeded from the first qur’anic moment in almost suppressing or banishing into unusually reclusive layers of subconsciousness that part of the counter-dogmatic Arabian cultural “self” which, under conditions of a less stable doctrinal rigor, would have had the strength to lead that culture to its remythologizing, or to an awareness of its “mythological conditioning.” In this respect even more inhibiting than the suppressions and condemnations that came forth from the doctrinal apparatus which had formed itself around the newly-arrived Arabian sacred text and which soon succeeded in forming its own cultural code was the co-optation by that new code of much of the most centrally autochthony-determining materials of the old code.

The significance of the stories about the Arabian messengers lies in their endurance (ṣabr) and obedience in calling humans to accept divine guidance: every community should have been warned through a revelation in order to be spared temporary or eschatological punishment (see TRUST AND PATIENCE; WARNER). It is noteworthy that the qur’anic virtue is no mere endurance, but

prophecy is not overcome by the enmity of unbelief [see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF]. Its endurance keeps the cause from capitulation, so that it may anticipate the victory other factors will achieve. It is not, broadly, a suffering which in itself and of itself makes the fabric of the triumph that is to be. This calls for other forces whose opportunity tenacity ensures (Cragg, Event, 158).

It is sober, pragmatic thinking and acting, ḥilm, self-denying dedication to the divine message, islām, that is portrayed here — the reversal of jahl, heroic unrestraint (see ISLAM; FAITH; IGNORANCE). In fact, jahl in the Qurʾān itself was to become the label of the pre-Islamic epoch that was termed jāhilīya (see AGE OF IGNORANCE).

Thus jahl/jāhilīya had to have been a singularly important concept (or state) in archaic Bedouinity [see BEDOUINS] to have deserved such a stupendous “transfer” into its new terminological prominence — and into its paradoxical semiotic self-denial. We must, therefore, entertain the strong notion that its denial by the new Arabia that emerged with Islam also meant Arabia’s denial of myth as its cultural, autochthony-defining ingredient. For myth, all myth, is hardly conceivable without the presence of jahl somewhere near its very core. This jahl, however, also in its archaic Arabic understanding, is above all that kind of heroism that also contains its own tragic flaw (Stetkevych, Golden bough, 10).

The predicament of the ancient messengers whose message is rejected is shared by the Prophet himself (see OPPOSITION TO MUḤAMMAD). The contents of revelation in the umam khāliya discourse (i.e., the stories of earlier nations destroyed because of their unbelief) thus does not have a history; the bearers of the revelation and their addressees do not form a chain of succession.
History and revelation repeat each other following the same pattern. This discourse has, however, to be differentiated from a grand narrative that emerges at a later stage in the Qurʾān. What is usually upheld to apply to the Qurʾān as such: the renunciation of a chronological frame for the events of pre-Qurʾānic history, the repetitiveness of the Qurʾānic narrative — “events are arranged in clusters, repetitive in form” (Khalidi, *Arab historical thought*, 8) — as a sign of the insistence of an identical message, the total disregard for mythic primacy, etc., on closer gaze, does not hold true except for the first paradigm. Here, “the whole history is present at once to God.” But the situation successively changes substantially when a new paradigm is adopted, switching the focus from the deserted sites of the real homeland to the orbit of the messengers of the People of the Book (q.v.; *ahl al-kitāb*), the prophets (anbiyāʾ), whose discourse as intermediaries between God and man is much more sophisticated. Overtly, they form a prophetical succession and their activities taken together not only constitute a scenario of historical episodes, but, more and more, betray a tendency to chronology. Their communications and actions prove rich in experiences and fit to exert a mythopoeic impact on the self-understanding of the emerging community itself; indeed, these activities not seldom provide the matrix for the prophet’s and his community’s behavior in certain situations of crisis, and more often the matrix of their understanding of their own predicament (Neuwirth, Erzählen). It is no longer the projection of present experience onto the image of the past that was representative for the earlier discourse, but the converse: experiences of the past provide a model for the understanding of the present. The entrance of the Qurʾānic community into the orbit of those earlier societies endowed with a scripture is presented as an event of seismic proportions: “If we sent down this Qurʾān upon a mountain, you would see it humbled, shattered by the fear of God” (Q. 59:21; Khalidi, *Arab historical thought*, 7). This degree of self-confidence would not have been feasible in the earlier stages; it marks a caesura in arranging history that should not be ignored.

The wide canvas from Adam [see Adam and Eve] to Jesus [q.v.] depicts for Muḥammad’s people the meaning and destiny of their own cause. Biblical material, in independent shape, is rehearsed in lively corroboration of Qurʾānic authority. All prophecy accumulates towards it, so that revelation may culminate. Other Scriptures are mentors, not masters. It is the ruling theme of prophecy as crisis which they consistently serve. The patriarchal retrospect witnesses to a continuity of truth and multiplies the signs by which the Meccan/Medinan situation must be read both in conflict and prosperity (Cragg, *Event*, 171).

Consequently, it is little surprising to find a particular hermeneutic trait familiar from the Hebrew Bible [see Torah] and especially the Gospels (q.v.) prominent again in Qurʾānic narrative: typology (Busse, Herrschertypen). “Types” are exemplary representations in scripture of still more momentous events or more significant figures yet to come. Thus the divine trials (see trial) of the past are to be considered “types” of the last judgment (q.v.) that will supersede everything preceding it, the dispatch of earlier prophets in a way “prefigures” Muḥammad’s activities. This device is crucial for the Qurʾānic image of history:

It is this historical review of the past in the present which gives to the Qurʾān and Islam the characteristic quality of *Jihād*
or struggle, in the deepest and non-technical sense of that term. The very sequence of the prophets is a sequence of law and claim, of insubordination and nemesis. The logic within it is the unremitting necessity of struggle and the necessary sinews of strength. To bring a divine message is to incur a human enmity and so, in turn, to enter a trial of stamina and resolve, of the will and the means to outstay the opposition. In this logic, suffering is present as a preliminary to its redress. It is that which has to be endured before it can be terminated. It bears the odds until they can be evened and reversed. The successful eventuality is held open by the refusal to be denied it, and this demands persistence and non-compromise. Existence is poised, so to speak, between prophecy and eschatology, in that the prophetic address to humanity must have, in token and in fact, that writ of success which eschatology brings to final authenticity in the last judgment. The utter unambiguity of the eschatological must belong suitably and surely with the interim evidence of prophetic standing in time and in power (Cragg, Event, 171-2).

Reflections of myth and mythopoiesis in the Qur‘ān

Virtual myths of history

In the following an attempt will be undertaken to classify myths and legends in the Qur‘ān as to their cultural contexts. Myths and legends are not taken to be mutually exclusive; viewing the stories about earlier prophets as legends does not preclude taking note of their mythical elements.) A historical classification following the biblical succession of “scripturalized myths” does not appear too promising in view of the non-historical disposition of the Qur‘ān and the absence of the notion of a linear historical process leading up to the present of the listeners. The “atomism of time” that underlies the Qur‘ānic vision of history, “which is typological in nature and focused on the history of the prophets,” has been noted (for more, see Böwering, Chronology, 319 f.). The myth of man’s first transgression, the story of Adam (Gen 1:3), in the Qur‘ān does not serve to initiate history as an unpredictable and ambiguous process of divine-human interaction, but rather constitutes one exemplary episode of the “anthropological constant” of human vulnerability to being seduced. Except for the expulsion from the garden, however, this does not bear grave consequences for the fate of humankind (see fall of man). The myth, which is introduced at a rather late stage of Qur‘ānic development and is presented in diverse contexts, serves to demonstrate changing insights into the nature of evil: it is less a myth of beginning than a debate about evil (see good and evil). The account will therefore be treated in its typological context (see “Transgressions” below).

Noah

Similarly, the biblically prominent myth of the renewal of the world after the flood (Gen 6:5-8) in the Qur‘ān does not appear in its mythical-historical setting as the closure of a period of immediate divine interventions into creation (q.v.) as a whole. This story is related (or alluded to) within the two discourses of the destroyed peoples (umam khāliya) and of the prophets (anbiyā’). First conveyed as the initial account of a chain of punishment legends in Q 54:9-17 (followed by stories about ’Ād [q.v.], Thamūd [q.v.], Lot [q.v.], and the people of Pharaoh [q.v.; Fir‘awn]) and, subsequently as a story filling a complete sūra, Q 71 (Sūrat Nūḥ, “Noah”; Q 71:1-28), the legend of Noah is introduced in isolation from a particular salvation-historical beginning, although the event is obviously imagined as preceding all the other stories in time. It is
shaped after the pattern of the punishment stories that emerge during the first Meccan period. Accordingly, both the flood and the ark (q.v.) are devoid of mythical dimensions, being reduced to mere instruments of individual punishment and salvation respectively. The story continues to be remembered through the entire Meccan period, not only in extended lists of punishment stories (Q 7:69; 11:89; 14:9; 38:12; 50:12; 51:46), but also in narrative form. In Q 37:75-9 it is followed by a story about Abraham’s confronting his unbelieving community and other episodes of the history of the Children of Israel (q.v.; Banū Isrā’îl); in Q 26:105-22 it is followed by stories about ‘Īd, Thamîd, the people of Lot, the “People of the Thicket” (q.v.; ashâb al-ayka), always presenting Noah as a member of his people (akh, Q 26:106) who tries to convert them. None of these reports, however, dwell on the mythical dimension of the story as the first major caesura in history.

Noah receives new momentum after the change of paradigm and the new orientation to the kitâb tradition of the Children of Israel. The viewing of the prophets as a chain of succession within the orbit of scripture gives each one an individual significance. This change is reflected in a particularly extensive version of Noah’s story in Q 11:23-49, followed by kindred stories of ‘Īd and others. Here, both the preparation of the ark (jûl) and the selection of the animal species are mentioned (see Animal Life). The cosmic dimension of the flood is alluded to, the final blessing on Noah sounding as if the event was meant as a caesura in salvation history (an echo of this version appears in Q 10:71-4). At this later stage of the canonical process, when the world of the book has replaced the scenario around the sanctuary of Mecca (q.v.), Noah ascends from his stance as a mere warner (rasûl) to become a prophet (nabi) in the line of Adam — (Noah) — Abraham — Jesus. In this context, the longevity (Noah remained among his people 950 years; Q 29:14) and genealogical relations in general occasionally gain momentum: thus the Children of Israel are presented as the “seed of those whom we carried with Noah” (dhurrizyata man ḥamalnû mîna nûh, Q 17:3; cf. 19:38). In still later, Medinan sūras, like Q 33:7, when the Prophet himself has entered the rank of the prophets (anbiyâ’) and prophets are viewed as partners in a covenant (q.v.), Noah appears here as the first: “(wa-idh akhâdhnî mina l-nabiyya mîna l-nabiyya mîna wa-min nûh). A structuring of prophetical history is in the making and it is this period of time into which Q 19:38 fits: “These are those whom God blessed from the prophets from the seed of Adam and of those we carried with Noah [on the ark]” (îlîa ika lladhîna an’âna l-lîhâ ‘alayhim min al-nabiyya min dhuhrayati ādama wa-mimman hamalnû ma’a nûh…). This development reaches its climax in Q 3:33: “Truly God preferred Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of ‘Imrân above all the creatures” (inna l-lîhâ ṣîfât ādama wa-nîhân wa-âla ibrâhîma wa-âlâ ‘imrâna ʿalâ l-ʿâlamîna). Accordingly, the divine commandments (q.v.) have been transmitted through that line of succession: Q 42:13, “He ordained for you the religion (q.v.) that he commended to Noah and which we inspire in you” (shara’a lakum mina l-dînî mîna waasîyâ bihi nîhân wa-lladhi asechynî ilayk). Still, Noah remains part of two traditions, that of an episodic warner (in Medinan sūras; Q 9:70; 22:42) — one of many — whose people (qaem) vanishes and who thus would have no spiritual survival and that of a prophet (nabi) whose reception is secured through his participation in a succession of prophets who belong to the scriptural, i.e. biblical, tradition. What is most striking in the
Noah-legend is the lack, or at least the fading appearance, of the essentially mythical characteristics of the story. Thus, the catastrophic uniqueness of the event, the vehemence of the divine wrath (see anger) inducing the creator to annihilate humankind, the universality of the catastrophe, are nowhere expressed. The historical dimension, the total renewal after the drowning (q.v.) of humankind is not dramatized, the divine re-acceptance of drowning (q.v.) of humankind being only partial (q. 11:48; to say nothing of the conclusion of a new covenant between God and man). Not surprisingly, the age before the deluvium is not marked as it is in the Bible and in later Islamic historiography (al-Azmeh, Ibn Khaldun) by particular physical anomalies, such as the existence of fabulous creatures and miraculous qualities in humans, thus appearing as an epoch which does not yet partake of the historical period proper, but demands a new, a second beginning. In the Qurʾān the flood has no such function.

David and Solomon — virtual cultural heroes?
Nor does the “Solomonic mythic florilegium” (see david; solomon), which in the Qurʾān reflects post-biblical rather than biblical knowledge, constitute a consistent story. It focuses on the two heroes’ power over the animal and spirit world, as well as natural phenomena: David is lord of the birds (q 38:17–g), he commands the mountains (q 38:18; 34:10); Solomon understands the language of the birds (q 27:16) and of the ants (q 27:18–g), he commands the wind (q 21:81; 34:12; 38:36; see air and wind), and is in control over the demons (shayātīn) and jinn (q 21:82). At the same time, both are in the rank of prophets (anbiyāʾ), a merit that in David’s case is underlined by his receiving the psalms (q.v.; zubur, q 17:53); his competent judgment (q.v.; q 38:21–6; cf. 2 Sam 2:1-15) and his just government (see justice and injustice; authority), which qualifies him to be called a khālaṣa on earth (q 38:26; see caliph). In Solomon’s case this rank is evidenced by his being granted command over nature and demons. Yet, both remain symbolic figures (see symbolic imagery), Solomon’s essential fame being due to his miraculous relationship with animals and demons with particular supernatural faculties — a privilege that, however, does not distract him from his devotion to the one God. His faithfulness is particularly manifest in the episode with the Queen of Sheba (see bilqīs). When her throne is transferred to his palace by the ḥārl (q.v.), he understands the miraculous act not as his personal triumph but as a trial (fitna) to prove his gratefulness (q 27:40; see gratitude and ingratitude). His aesthetically stunning palace (sāhr) with fittings so fine that they produce a “trompe d’œil” — the Queen takes the brilliant floor to be a water pool — becomes the reason for the conversion of the Queen to the worship of the one God, thus constituting an “antitype” to the building erected by Pharaoh (also sāhr) with the blasphemous intent to have a view on the God of Moses (see blasphemy). There are some hints at the conception of both figures as innovators: David is instructed to make coats of mail (q 21:80; 34:10–11), and Solomon is knowledgeable about a source of metal (q 34:12); yet their story is hardly apt to serve as an etiology for the human attainment of control over material resources and individual technical inventions; nor do the related facts mark initial achievements sufficient to portray the protagonists as cultural heroes.

Moses’ exodus (ʿissāʾ)
The only qurʾānic narrative that could be viewed as a myth of history is the report of the exodus of Moses, which, in Jewish
tradition, signifies the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery; for the Muslim community, this exodus becomes a prototype for the believers’ taking refuge from oppressive unbelieving rulers (see oppression; oppressed on earth, the). The event of the exodus (isrā’) has certainly effected a strong influence on the Prophet’s own experience of his emigration (q.v.; ḥijra); moreover, before that event, it served as a pattern of finding spiritual relief (isrā’) in a situation of social suppression in Mecca that had become unbearable to the believers (Neuwirth, Remote temple). Still, the story is not reflected through a full-fledged narrative but is only briefly evoked (i.e. Q 20:77; 26:15-7; 37:115-6). It does not, moreover, represent the decisive turn in the history of Moses’ people. It is worth noting that in the Qur’anic story of Moses, the exodus is rivaled by another solution for the oppressed Children of Israel since the salvation of Moses’ people is also portrayed in terms of a typological reprise of the flood story (Busse, Herrschertypen, 75). Thus, the invitation to Noah and his family to settle after the flood (Q 23:29) finds its analogy in Q 17:104, where the Children of Israel are given (cf. also Q 7:137; 26:59) the land of Egypt (q.v.) with all its gardens (see garden), springs (see springs and fountains), fields and treasures (Q 26:57-8; 44:25-8; see blessing; grace; wealth). It is perhaps not the change of real place (as in the exodus) that matters. In the Qur’anic view the promised land may be anywhere that it is possible for the believers to live uncompromised — whether the place is purged of unbelievers through a divine trial, or whether the unbelievers have no further access to the believers after the latter have found refuge by an emigration (ḥijra). Indeed, an “exodus,” an isrā’, may even be performed spiritually, as shown in the example of the Prophet’s night journey (see ascension) — his nocturnal translation to the Jerusalem (q.v.) temple (Q 17:1; see aqṣā’ mosque).

Power and violence

Local history inscribed with God’s terror: al-umam al-khāliya

There appears to be one single — though variegated — archetypal paradigm in the Qur’ān that has retained its cathartic power throughout the development of the corpus: the story of the annihilated nations, al-umam al-khāliya (see punishment stories). This archetypal topic, which in the Qur’ān has taken the place of the biblical myth of the destruction of the Babylonian tower, is about human hubris resulting in a divine retaliation that annihilates the community and destroys their ambitious project of self-sufficient existence. In the Qur’ān it is not one event but a cycle of similar happenings that demonstrates this pattern. Repeatedly, ancient communities have waxed proud in view of their social success, their wealth, sometimes their luxuriously built residences, their security and fame (see pride; arrogance). Being reminded by a divine messenger (see shu’ā’īb, šālih, Hūd) of God’s claim to worship and thanksgiving they defy and mock the warning (see mockery). They are then overtaken by God’s punishment and destroyed. The enigma of the still visible ruins and the vague memory of formerly flourishing communities in the broader neighborhood of the listeners have thus been given an explanation: Not unfavorable social conditions (as presupposed for the deserted living spaces recalled in the amatory introduction of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda) or changes in the area’s balance of power, but a dramatic divine intervention, an outburst of divine wrath, caused the disappearance of the once glo-
rious cities (see city). The two most expressively presented concepts in these punishment stories are human hubris on the one hand, unfolded in “quotations” of the unbelievers’ words of rejection, and divine wrath on the other, manifest in the rapidity, the suddenness of destruction often initiated by a divine sign, a seismic scream, or brought about by a vehement storm, an earthquake and the like.

Horovitz (ku), who first examined the punishment stories, classified them as “legends.” They deserve, however, to be considered as archetypes: human hubris, entailing blasphemy, leads to divine retaliation. What is missing from the stories is the expression of a fatal human intent to rival God — as is characteristic of the biblical tower-builders. The Qur’ānic city-dwellers do not seek a confrontation with God: not being monotheistic believers they treat the divine warning rather indifferently, reacting (if at all) with arrogance and annoyance. The Qur’ānic narrative, thus, as far as the contest between the peoples and their messengers is concerned, remains largely devoid of dramatic effects. The ever-recurrent typological pattern is overwhelming; it is due to an interpretation of history informed by the experience of the Prophet and his community (see occasions of revelation): “Just as the Qur’ānic emphasis on the atomism of time had frozen the flux of time into that of reiterated instants of God’s action, so its typology of history had collapsed the rich variety of past events into a regularly recurring pattern” (see Böwering, Chronology, 319). This certain loss in terms of quantitative knowledge of historical facts may be viewed, however, as a gain in expressiveness in the process of conveying the message. It is God’s role that retains highly dramatic traits; the divine figure appears sometimes strikingly close to that of a mythic agent: “And their [i.e. the Thamūd’s] lord doomed them for their sin and razed [their dwellings]” (fa-damdama ʿalayhim rabbukum bi-dhanbihum fa-sauwā, q 91:14), “and your lord poured on them the disaster” (fa-sabha ʿalayhim rabbuka sawta ʿadhāb, q 89:13). This highly metaphoric speech (see metaphor) is made possible by the linguistic medium of saj, which would be ill-suited to accommodate complex narratives. One has to keep in mind that the historical and temporal scope of the Qur’ān cannot be viewed in isolation from the Qur’ān’s rhetorical tradition, whose kāhin-speech models are undeniable (see rhetoric of the Qur’ān). Kāhin speech is shrouded in mystery; rather than revealing facts, it encodes them. Since the situation in antiquity is typologically close to that of the believing group around the Prophet, the vacuum is filled with rejoinders from their experience. Thus the current situation acquires surplus meaning by being underscored with an archetypal dimension whose pattern even appears inscribed into the landscape of the broader homeland. Although the stories about the flood, on the one hand, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see lot) and the punishment of Pharaoh, on the other, are not geographically associated with the Arabian peninsula (belonging, rather, to the cycle of biblical stories situated in the Holy Land or its surroundings, a cycle which at a later stage of the Qur’ānic development becomes dissociated from the punishment stories), they reveal in the early suras the pattern of the Arabian retaliation (q.v.) legends. In summary, one may note that the punishment stories provide a pattern for the initial lack of success experienced by the Prophet and his community in Mecca. Worldly values held by the unbelieving elites and an endangered and isolated stance on the part of the messenger,
make up the ever-repeated pattern without generating a linear relation between them (for a reconstruction of the pre-Islamic myth wrought about the ancient people of Thamûd, see Stetkevych, *Golden bough*).

**Trangressions of boundaries**

The first act of disobedience as a double etiology: Man's exile from paradise, Satan's representation of evil

An explicit divine interdiction was violated by the first man, *Adam*, and his unnamed wife: despite a divine injunction not to approach a particular tree in paradise (q.v.), they both tasted the forbidden (q.v.) fruit (see *agriculture and vegetation*). Through this act they became aware of their nakedness (see *nudity*). Shocked by this new awareness that is felt as shameful exposure, they feel the need to cover themselves (see *modesty*). Soon afterwards, they are called on by God to render account for their transgression (see *boundaries and precepts*). Instead of being cursed and condemned to hard work and painful childbearing as in the biblical precedent, they are treated rather gently. They are sent “down” from paradise (ʿihbiṯū) to settle on earth (q.v.) — not, however, to their fatal detriment, since this punishment is immediately followed by a new offer of divine guidance (Neuwirth, *Negotiating justice*; see also astray). Nor is the news of their mortality, which is disclosed to them together with the news of their exile (Q 20:117), momentous since it is alleviated by the simultaneous assurance of their ultimate resurrection (q.v.).

It is true that the story serves *inter alia* to explain the existence of humankind on earth; this is not, however, in any striking contrast to their sojourn in paradise since, in the Qur'ānic understanding, their terrestrial habitat is decent if not luxurious. More often, the story is adduced to demonstrate the dangerous nature of Satan — his obsequiousness exposing man’s nakedness (Q 7:27), his insincerity in promising benefits he will not deliver (Q 7:22). Satan, who from the beginning of the Qur'ānic reception of the story (Q 20) is instrumental in the couple’s transgression, is only in the last report (Q 7) ultimately to blame. It is obviously not the etiological dimension that caused the story to be repeatedly presented in the Qur’ān, since a few virtual etiologies (which, in the biblical report support the significance of the narrative as a cultural myth) remain undeveloped in the Qur’ān, such as the fact of the first couple’s achieving a mature perception of themselves, their learning about their sexuality (see *sex and sexuality*) and their inventing the custom of clothing (q.v.). The telos of the story, rather, points to theodicy. It is true, the first couple were not substantially blamed and punished for their disobedience (q.v.), yet the pattern of “transgression followed by rendering account” — a particularly effective archetype — has been established as the primordial pattern of human-divine interaction (see *record of human actions*). In the Qur'ānic understanding the regret of the perpetrator saves him from a hard punishment (see repentance and penance).

Satan, under the name of Iblîs, was viewed in the beginning as the tester, the agent of legitimate challenge to humans. He was delegated to perform this task during a debate with God that arose after he had shown his defiance of blind obedience (q.v.), refusing to bow down before a being — namely *Adam* (Q 15:33) — other than his divine lord (q.v.). Indeed, the transition of created beings from submissive creatures to autonomous agents in the interaction with the Divine, belonging to Adam in biblical tradition, in the Qur’ān is Iblîs’ achievement whose tragic consequences he takes upon himself. It is only through his work that the elect community, who is not liable to fall victim to his seduc-
tion, becomes distinguishable from the unbelievers. Whereas God himself in the first debate scene agreed to the project proposed by Iblîs (Q 15:41), in the further development of the community Iblîs’ image — once his persona has merged with that of Satan (al-shayṭān) — darkens considerably: in the end he appears as the enemy of humans, the personification of evil par excellence. He and his escorts will therefore be annihilated in hellfire so as to re-establish justice at the end of times (see HELL AND HELLFIRE). Iblîs is, however, rehabilitated in later Islamic tradition. Although the Qur’ānic account of creation does not culminate in human acquisition of knowledge (see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING) as a fruit picked from the forbidden tree at Iblîs’ instigation, still Iblîs is raised — in the profane tradition — to the rank of the seducer, the permanent agent of provocation through whom a substantial broadening of ‘horizons of experience becomes possible. He enjoys an equally unique position in at least one branch of Şūfi tradition (see ŞÛFISM AND THE QUR’ĀN) that has strongly influenced literature, where Iblîs is acknowledged as the sole figure possessing knowledge about the true will of God. His ongoing influence — not only as an ambivalent, but as a tragic figure as well — continues to manifest itself in diverse forms (Awn, Satan’s tragedy; Shaikh, Der Teufel).

The elect space: From Mecca to Jerusalem
The mythical notion of a space that excels over all other space is traceable in the Qur’ān, though it is widely modified to suit the framework of a religion of revelation. While there is a strong notion of Mecca’s excellence in the early sūras (Q 90:1; 95:3; 105; 106), the focus during the Meccan era switches to Jerusalem, which first enjoys the unique rank of being the point of orientation in the prayer (q.v.) of the early Muslim worshippers (see QIBLA). Although the Qur’ān itself does not explicitly mention Jerusalem by name, the adoption of the rite to pray towards it clearly presumes its high rank in the community. The night journey (ʾīsār) of the Prophet in a miraculous way transferred him temporarily to the “remote temple” (Q 17:1, al-masjid al-aqṣā), the destination of the prayers of the community. During the later Meccan activities of the Prophet, Jerusalem with its temple becomes the prototype of a holy city. In Medina (q.v.) it served as the model for the perception of a religious center, after which the new Islamic holy city was shaped. Mecca, which takes over as the space of origin for Islam, is thus not only a place from which the Islamic ritual originated, but also — in analogy to Jerusalem (cf. Isa 2:3: For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem) — the birthplace of Islamic verbal worship, as indicated in Q 2:129: “Our lord! And raise up among them a messenger from them who will recite to them your signs and teach them the book and the wisdom and enrich them. Truly you are the mighty, the wise” (rabbanā wa-bʾath fīhim rasūlan minhum yatīlaʾālayhim āyātika wa-yuʾallimuhumu l-kitāba wa-l-hikmata wa-yuzakkīhim innaka anta lʾ-ʾazīzu l-hakim; see Neuwirth, Spiritual meaning). As the place at which all Muslim prayers converge, Mecca is the center of the earth, the omphalos mundi.

Love and sexuality
Joseph and Zulaykha
The myth of the woman who, through her seduction of the man, brought mischief into the world does not exist in the Qurʾān (see GENDER; WOMEN AND THE QURʾĀN). Eve was not instrumental in Adam’s transgression and is thus not considered responsible for Adam’s predicament. Still the notion of a devious behavior innate in women is confirmed in the Qurʾān, labeled
kayd al-nisā’, which is explicitly and par excellence attributed to the unnamed wife of Potiphar, the Egyptian official in whose house Joseph (q.v.) was lodged. Although she does not succeed in seducing Joseph and leading him astray from his way as a chosen one of God (see election), she does exercise some power over him. Being sexually attracted to her and thus distracted from his exclusive devotion to God, he finds the strength to resist her only through divine intervention (q. 12:24). Still, she is not categorically derogated in the Qur’ān; rather, unlike the situation in the biblical story, she is given the opportunity to repent and acknowledge her moral failure. This opens the way for her post-qur’ānic rehabilitation and elevation to the rank of Joseph’s beloved and, later, wife. It is worth noting that though her behavior in the Qur’an appears to be an attempted act of zinā (see adultery and fornication), she is not actually accused of such a transgression of the limits set to female freedom (see boundaries and precepts). In view of her positive image in the Qur’an, it is not surprising that she could be accepted in Šūfism as a female icon.

The virgin mother: Mary
A reverse projection of the seductress is the virgin mother, Mary (q.v.; Maryam). She, again viewed from the outward appearance of her fate, manifests a case of transgression of the limits of female freedom, although is herself innocent. Having borne a child outside of marriage, she is rescued from the wrath of her relatives by a miracle: her baby son is endowed with the power of speech (q.v.) and speaks on her behalf. He presents himself as God’s elect, a rank also enjoyed by John (Yahyā; see John the Baptist), the son of Zechariah (q.v.; Zakariyyā), whose birth was likewise accompanied by miraculous circumstances. Mary is the only female figure in the Qur’ān presented by name; she also has the privilege of being personally addressed by God’s word through an angelic messenger (see word of god; holy spirit; gabriel). In the Qur’ān, Mary is not presented as a suffering woman as she is in Christianity (see christians and christianity) since she does not have to see her son suffer (see suffering; crucifixion). In Islam the prototype of the suffering woman is, in later tradition, embodied in Fāṭima (q.v.), the daughter of the Prophet. Thus, the role that, according to Christian understanding, Mary plays in the eschatological realm is, in Islam, taken over by Fāṭima, although with a marked difference:

Only Mary has a necessary role in the scheme of redemption. Fatima plays a more active role at the End of Days than does Mary, but there is no suggestion in Islam that redemption would be impossible without her. According to the (Shi‘ite) Islamic view of redemption as the fulfillment of human life through suffering, Fatima, as the greatest sufferer on earth, will enjoy the greatest rewards on the day of resurrection (Sered, Rachel, Mary, Fatima, 136).

Paradisiacal distributions of the genders
What is not stressed in the narratives is, however, presupposed in the qur’ānic worldview: it is male dominance that “informs life on earth and life in heaven…. While the Qur’ān assures women of faith that they will go to heaven [Q 4:124; 16:97] it offers them no insight as to what their place in heaven will be” (Combs-Schilling, Sacred performances, 61). Paradisiacal space — this has been lamented over and over by Muslim feminists (see feminism and the Qur’ān) — seems to be equipped solely for the believer of the male sex. It is true that the depictions of paradise, which appear in the early sūras and portray banquet scenes with the believers being served...
by beautiful youths and enjoying the company of (or being married to) beautiful young girls, labeled ḥūrīn (see ourū]s) for the striking beauty of their eyes, reflect a purely male imagination of ultimate happiness (Q. 55:56-8; 44:54). These descriptions of the Qur’ānic janna (lit. “garden”) have been discussed in detail by Horovitz (Koranische Paradies), who suggests that they reflect magnifications of festal banquets familiar in the circles of tribal elites and well-known to the listeners of the Qur’ān from their representation in ancient Arabic poetry. They may thus be understood as static tableaux of both natural and sensual consummation and spiritual bliss. Andrew Rippin (Commerce of eschatology, 134), in contrast, has viewed these images as a “fundamental appreciation of ideal human nature as the monotheistic tradition conceives it.”

The images of the garden have been interpreted by anthropologists, — who view them through their exegetical amplifications — however, primarily under the aspect of sexual satisfaction:

With the ḥūrī, sexual satisfaction is never ending, and not marred by fear as it is on earth. Men have nothing to fear from the ḥūrīs, for they have no personalities, no individual desires, no chance for roaming; the Qur’ān guarantees their virginity, that they will not have been touched by man nor jinn when the believing male enters them, and they will be permanently attached to the man to whom they are given (Combs-Schilling, Sacred performances, 95).

Whereas earlier sūras insist on these projections into the eternal sphere of earthly bliss understood on the basis of male experience, later texts modified the image. Their explicit mentioning of female participation in paradisaical recompense (Q. 43:70-3) reflects a new understanding of earthly and heavenly life on the side of the listeners. Meanwhile, a community had been established, where women — not least in the Prophet’s own household (see wives of the prophet; family of the prophet) — played vital roles. The issue of transcendent happiness was no longer taken as part of a symbolic realm, but debated in its details and fleshed out to form a reference text for the believers. The “impressionist,” somewhat enigmatic and highly symbolic text of the old janna-descriptions was transformed into a reference text where, ritually and legally, in terms of justice and morals, everything should be spelled out unambiguously.

It may be helpful for understanding the contextuality and historical conditions for the Qur’ānic descriptions of janna, to remember that the Prophet himself may have had a more complex and positive appreciation of women.

Early Islam exhibits much the same trajectory in the definition of the female as does early Christianity… Islam has its ‘A’isha [see ‘A’isha bint Abī Bakr] just as Christianity has its Mary Magdalene. Both are highly charged sexual and sensual females — the one suspected of adultery in the desert, the other confirmed of prostitution — and yet each is valued as somehow intrinsically pure and good in the eyes of the founder of the faith, Muhammad or Jesus. It seems plausible that these founders did not dichotomize sexuality and spirituality in the ways that their followers did, and in fact found them persuasively combined in these women. Yet their esteem for that combination was not to endure. Neither ‘A’isha nor Mary Magdalene became the dominant image of the proper female in the respective cultural traditions that arose out of the two faiths. Muslims on the whole find blasphemous the notion that it might have been good for ‘A’isha… to have become a public model for other
women, while Christians on the whole find blasphemous the notion that Jesus might have exchanged sexual tenderness with Mary Magdalene... Yet it could be argued that the founders of the two faiths were broader in their understanding of the possible combinations of faith, womanhood, and sexuality than the majority of their followers, and that they made that acceptance clear — Muhammad by dying in 'Aisha’s arms and Jesus by first appearing after his crucifixion to Mary Magdalene, whom he authorized to go and tell the male disciples the earthshaking news that he still lived. These events are recorded in the hallowed texts. Yet the dominant cultural perspectives that have developed in the contexts of these faiths for the most part leave by the wayside these two women as embodiments of proper womanhood and instead concentrate the collectivity’s attention and definitions on immaculate conception and virginal mothers (Combs-Schilling, Sacred performances, 91-2).

Fates of the hero

There are a few figures in the Qur'an who acquire heroic dimensions, the most prominent being Abraham, Joseph, Moses (see for his appearance in q 18, Jung, Four archetypes), and Jesus (see Bauschke, Jesus). Their stories are not devoid of archetypal traits as the following selected examples may illustrate.

Abraham, destroyer of idols

Abraham is the protagonist of a most diversified narrative reported in several Qur'anic texts (q 6:74-84; 19:41-50; 21:51-73; 26:69-86; 29:16-27; 37:83-98; 43:26-7; 60:4). The earliest achievement in his career is the smashing of the idols (see Idols and images), i.e. the destruction of the old order, thus making a new order possible. The incident, which is not biblical but midrashic, portrays him as a cultural hero. A debate with an unbelieving ruler usually identified with Nimrod (q.v.; q 2:258-60) and the destruction of the idols of his father (q 6:74-84; 19:41-50; 21:57-8; 26:16-27; 37:93; see Idolatry and Idolaters), which is followed by his being sentenced to be burnt alive — a fate from which he is saved by God (q 21:68-9; 29:24; 37:97-8), leads to his expulsion from his homeland. Abraham performs a hajj, a secession from his father and his homeland to encounter God in a new land where he will raise his family (q 14:48-9; 21:71; 29:26). Though a number of further encounters with God are recalled in the Qur'an (his intimate relationship with the divine lord earns him the title of a friend of God, khalil Allah; see Friends and friendship), it is his early identification as a monotheist (hanif, q.v.) in a pagan world, that elevates him to his unique rank, in the Qur'an and later in Islam, as the founder of monotheistic worship. With his emigration he sets an example for the believer who, when living under persecutors of religion, chooses emigration. He becomes the prototype of the prophet Muhammad and, as such, rightly figures prominently in the text of the Muslim ritual prayer.

Abraham and sacrifice

The subverted approach to the problem of succession: not by the son’s replacing the father, but the father’s preparedness to annihilate his son is reflected in the Qur'an in the episode of Abraham’s sacrifice (q.v.) of his son (q 37:102-13). Unlike the biblical case, in the Qur'an the son voluntarily sacrifices himself (q 37:102) but the father is spared the enactment of the sacrifice through divine intervention. The story, which is the central etiology of the Islamic pilgrimage (q.v.; hajj), a ceremony believed to have been initiated by Abraham, has
been interpreted by anthropologists in terms of a corroboration of patriarchy (q.v.).

The Ibrāhīm myth powerfully undergirds the rightful domination of father over son, of senior men over junior men, of all males over females and children — of patriarchy. Ibrāhīm (Islam’s archetypal father) submitted to God’s demand even to the point of trying to kill his own son, and the son, because he was faithful and loyal (Islam’s archetypal son) actively cooperated with the father’s attempt at his own sacrifice; the son knowingly submitted to what was to be his death at this father’s hands…. Islam’s myth both transcends and reinforces patrilineality, the inheritance [q.v.] of goods and position through the male line. Transcendence comes because, as told in the Qur’ān, the prophet Ibrāhīm had to deny his own father in order to remain faithful to the one God (Ibrāhīm’s father rejected monotheism and forced the fissure between father and son). Yet the Qur’ān also reinforces patrilineality by portraying the ultimate sacrifice that God demands of humans as the sacrifice of the most precious tie on earth… the fundamental patrilineal connection. The myth of sacrifice ennobles that bond over all others. So at the same time that the Qur’ān underlines the limits of patrilineal affiliation (Muslims must deny it if it threatens the faith), it reinforces patrilineality, for it was the father in connection with the son that made for connection to the divine and won for father and son — and by extension also humanity — long life on earth and eternal life thereafter. According to tradition, Ibrāhīm and his son walked away from the place of sacrifice and went on to establish some of the holiest places in Islam (Combs-Schilling, Sacred performances, 57 ff.).

Moses — prophet and leader of his people

The closeness of the Islamic Prophet to Moses is attested already in early sūras. Q 52 and Q 93 start with an oath (see oaths) by Mount Sinai (q.v.) and the sanctuary of Mecca, the scene of Muḥammad’s own activity. Moses is evoked in Meccan sūras more than 120 times, more often than any other biblical figure. This is not surprising since Moses is the Israelite prophet par excellence. To him God had spoken with an intimacy unrivaled by any other messenger. He had been granted the Torah and, by leading the exodus out of Egypt, had shaped the destiny of the Israelites in most significant ways. It is worth noting that Moses is portrayed first as a messenger sent to an unbelieving ruler, Pharaoh. But unlike the rest of the early warners, he is uniquely equipped for his task: he was called by God at a sacred place (al-wādī l-maqaddas tūwān, q 20:12; cf. 79:16) where he was allowed to hear the voice of God himself — a point elaborated in later reports (q 20:13; see anthropomorphism) — and was ordered to perform (and endorse) the ritual prayer (q.v.; aqīmi l-yalūta, q 20:14). It is this particular authorization and his subsequent delivery from fear (q.v.) and anxiety (ishrāh lī sādřī, q 20:25) that give him the strength to speak out in front of Pharaoh, the stubborn denier of the oneness of God (see insolence and obstinacy). Moses is thus a prefiguration of the Prophet himself, who also was granted an intimate encounter with God, experiencing a vision — according to one interpretation — of ‘God himself’ seated on his throne (q 53:6-7: dhū mirrātīn fa-stawwā wa-huwa bi-l-yuqūl l-a’lā; see visions; throne of God), a supernatural experience which, like Moses’, was staged in a particularly exalted place, near “the garden of promise” (jannat al-ma’wā, q 53:15). Like Moses, Muḥammad
experienced a widening of the breast (q 94:1: a-lam nashraḣ laka ṡadraka) during the early phase of his prophetic activity.

Later portrayals of Moses complement his fate before his divine call to prophethood without embellishing his ambivalent personality: while still in Egypt, he unintentionally killed a person, and is thus obliged to hide. It is on his way back from his refuge in Midian (q.v.) that he receives the divine call. The emphasis remains on his debates with the powerful ruler, Pharaoh, whom he is unable to convince, and who prevails over the messenger. Not unlike other stubborn unbelievers, Pharaoh is punished in this world and awaits punishment in the next. As in previous retaliation legends, in this case, too, the believers are saved, with a miraculous passage through the sea. The exodus (īsrā‘), which typologically resembles the hijra, is, however, not compared to that latter event. Moreover, it serves as a prototype for the Prophet’s and the Meccan believers' spiritual exodus (q 17:1) out of their local situation of distress; i.e. by imagining the Holy Land and orienting themselves in their prayers towards Jerusalem. Moses’ role as a leader and lawgiver of his people is often evoked but rarely presented (see LAW AND THE QUR‘ĀN) — his trial of the culprits of the blasphemous veneration of the golden calf (q 2:51-4; 20:87 f.; see CALF OF GOLD) is the only example of his practicing the ethical injunction to command the good and forbid the wrong (al-amr bi-l-ma‘rāf wa-l-naḥy ‘an al-munkar; see VIRTUES AND VICES, COMMANDING AND FORBIDDING).

Moses has also left traces in Islamic ritual, since his receiving the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai became significant for the Islamic festal calendar, with Ramaḍān (q.v.) having its prototype in the Mosaic Day of Atonement (see FASTING; ATONEMENT).

In the Medinan Sūrat al-Baqara (“The Cow”; q 2), the sūra that contains the promulgation of the fast of Ramaḍān (q 2:187-90), one of the main themes carries the motifs of the Moses story connected with the Day of Atonement.

“Moses’ stay on Mount Sinai, the sin of the golden calf, God’s forgiveness [q.v.] and bestowal of the book… are repeated in sūra 2 with much emphasis” (cf. Goitein, Ramaḍān, 190). There is also a hint as to the time of the implementation of the Mosaic rule of fasting: the mention of the bestowal of the revelation together with that of al-furqān (lit. “decision, redemption, liberation”) in q 2:185 (bayyinātin mina l-hadīṯ wa-l-furqānī; cf. q 44:1-4; see CRITERION) — recalls the text commemorating the battle of Badr (q.v.; q 8:41: wa-mā anzalnā ‘alā ‘abdīn yauwma l-furqānī yauwma ltaqā l-jamā‘ān, “what we revealed to our servant on the day of discernment, the day the two groups met”). In this latter context, furqān connotes a decisive, liberating victory over threatening enemies. It is both experiences — as K. Wagendonk (Fasting) has concluded — the decisive military victory of the Muslim community and the bestowal of the book upon them, that have given rise to the institution of the month of fasting in Islam. This is very much in accordance with the case of Moses (q 2:53: wa-idh ʿālaynā mūsā l-kitāba wa-l-furqānā, “when we gave Moses the book and the criterion”), the central figure of the founding legend of Jewish fasting on the Day of Atonement, who likewise brought his people a twofold blessing, political liberation and divine revelation (see POLITICS AND THE QUR‘ĀN).

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Nabī see prophets and prophethood; Muḥammad

Nadhīr see warner

Naḍīr (Banū al-)

One of several Jewish clans of Medina (q.v.) in pre- and early Islamic times (see Jews and Judaism; Tribes and Clans; Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān). In the Islamic tradition, they are usually considered part of the triad of important Medinan Jewish clans that also includes the Banū Qaynuqāʾ (see Qaynuqāʾ) and the Banū Qurayṣa, though often only the Naḍīr and the Qurayṣa (q.v.) are mentioned. The latter two were sometimes called al-kāhinān, “the two priest clans” and Arabic sources provide an Arabicized “Israelite” genealogy of the Naḍīr reaching back to Aaron (q.v.; Hārūn).

The actual origin of the Naḍīr is obscure, as is the derivation of their name. A number of persons belonging to them are known by name from the Arabic sources and some of these play an important role in Muhammad’s Medinan period (see Chronology and the Qurʾān). Among the latter are the poet Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf, who mocked (see mockery) the Prophet and was then assassinated in a nocturnal raid to Khaybar (see Expeditions and Battles); Sallām b. Abī l-Ḥuqayq, likewise assassinated in Khaybar; and Ḥuyayy b. Akhṭāb, the father of Ṣaḥīya, who eventually was one of Muhammad’s wives (see Wives of the Prophet). The Naḍīr, we are told, supported the Meccan allies against the Muslims, e.g. by sheltering Abū Sufyān and inciting the Meccans (as well as other Jewish clans) to oppose the Prophet (see Opposition to Muḥammad).

The story of the Naḍīr and the exact chronology of events cannot, from today’s perspective, be reconstructed with certainty. The most common version is as follows: After growing tensions, Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf was killed in 3/625. Then, after the battle of Uḥd (q.v.), the Naḍīr attempted to assassinate Muḥammad by having a rock fall upon him. The plot failed but the Muslims laid siege to their quarter in late 3 or 4/625. After about two weeks and possibly without any serious fighting (q.v.), the Naḍīr capitulated; they had lost their spirit when Muḥammad ordered their palms (see Date Palm) to be destroyed, reference to which is found in q 59:5, according to
Muslim exegetes (see exegesis of the Qur’an: classical and medieval). The Naḍīr agreed to leave Medina for Khaybar on the condition that they carry away their movable belongings but surrender their lands and dwellings. When the Muslims conquered Khaybar in 7/628, the Naḍīr were expelled again and this time left for Syria (q.v.). In Khaybar, Saffiya was taken captive; the Prophet freed her, she converted to Islam and was married to him. This “orthodox” account of the siege with the Naḍīr is, if studied in detail, not without serious drawbacks. Other sources report diverse motives for the siege (e.g. the Naḍīr breaking a treaty with the Muslims), and the sequence of events remains confused; even the second expulsion of the Naḍīr from Khaybar is questionable. The actions of prominent members of the Naḍīr cannot be fully individualized, and some later descendants of the Naḍīr whose existence is ascertained for the first Islamic centuries remain completely obscure.

Although the Naḍīr are not named in the Qur’an, a number of passages are often said to refer to them or to one of their members, e.g. Q 2:84 f., 178, 256; 4:51, 60; 5:11, 42. Q 59:2-15 is, however, by far the most important passage. These verses relate, according to the majority of sources, to the siege and expulsion of the Naḍīr. Although these verses do mention some details of what is reported in the “orthodox” version (e.g. the destruction of the palm trees), the bulk of this passage deals with the partition of the booty (q.v.) among the Muslims (Q 59:6-10). In any case, the general vagueness of Q 59:2-15 also supports those existing reports that differ from the “orthodox” version of what, exactly, happened to the Naḍīr and why. It seems significant that some early exegetes did claim — due to the use, in Q 59:2, of the ambiguous term al-hashr, which might mean a grouping together of people (such as for a siege or for an expulsion) or the congregation of humankind on the last day (see Last Judgment) — that these verses do not refer to a historical event at all, but rather to the fate of the Jews at the end of time (see Eschatology; Apocalypse).

Marco Schöller

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NaFS see soul; spirit; life; anatomy
Najrān

A major Arab urban center of pre-Islamic south Arabia, not attested by name in the Qur’ān, but probably alluded to in q 34:18 and 85:10. The dominant group of the city was the tribe of Balḥārith, the chief clan of whom was Banū ʿAbd al-Madān (see tribes and clans; Arabs; pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān). Najrān was both an agricultural and an industrial center producing cereals, fruits, vegetables, leather and textiles (see hides and fleece; hunting and fishing; city; agriculture and vegetation). It was also a caravan (q.v.) city, at which the celebrated spice route bifurcated, running through Yamāma into Mesopotamia and through the Hijāz into Syria (q.v.; Bilād al-Shām; see also geography). But the flourishing caravan city became involved in religion — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — which changed the course of its life and history (see Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity).

Christianity reached it in the fifth century, and soon Najrān became an episcopal see and the main center of Christianity — predominantly Monophysite — in the Arabian peninsula. Around 520 c.e., Yūsuf, the Judaizing king of Himyarite south Arabia (see Yemen; south Arabia, religion in pre-Islamic), persecuted the Christians of the region and some four hundred Najranites were killed, both men and women, including their chief, al-Ḥārith/Arethas. Shortly thereafter, the Ethiopians (see Abyssinia) restored Christianity and this ushered in the golden period of Najrān as an Arabian martyropolis, “the city of martyrs,” and the holy city of the Arabs for one hundred years. A great martyron was built, Kaʿbat Najrān, which became a pilgrimage center for the Christian Arabs. The cult of relics was given an impetus, and martyrdoms were con-

structed both in south Arabia and in Syria (Bilād al-Shām) among the Monophysite Ghasānids, relatives of the Balḥārith of Najrān. Its martyrs were canonized by the universal Church, which celebrates their feast on the 24th of October.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century profoundly affected the fortunes of Najrān. The two phases of its encounter with Islam, first the dialogue and then the confrontation, represent the earliest chapter in the history of Muslim-Christian relations. The first friendly encounter is reflected in the figure of Quss, said to have been the bishop of Najrān. It is not altogether incredible that he was such and that Muḥammad did indeed hear him preach at ʿUkāz. Najrān is implied in a Qur’ānic verse (q 34:18) either as one of the “blessed cities” or those “clearly visible” while a tradition attributed to Muḥammad (see Ḥadīth and the Qur’ān) considers it one of the protected, guarded cities. An echo of the martyrdom in Najrān may possibly be audible in a Qur’ānic verse, q 85:10 (and not in the allusion to the People of the Ditch [q.v.] of q 85:4-9, as is often thought).

The Muslim conquest of south Arabia put Islam and Najrān on a collision course. A delegation reached the prophet Muḥammad from Najrān in Medina (q.v.) in 10/630. The objurgation (mubāhala; see curse; oaths) was averted when the delegation withdrew from the contest, and Muḥammad concluded a treaty with them. In this treaty, the Najranites were assured of their freedom of worship (q.v.) but they had to pay an annual tribute (see taxation; contracts and alliances; religious pluralism and the Qur’ān). This treaty was the first of its kind between the nascent Muslim state and a Christian one, the city-state of Najrān. Soon, during the caliphate of ʿUmar, the Najranites were ordered to vacate their city, which
they did, settling in Iraq (q.v.) in al-Najrāniyya, a locale not far from Kūfa.

Christianity, however, did not entirely vanish from Najrān but lingered into early Islamic times. Part of Balḥārith apparently remained and did not emigrate. In due course, Christian Najrān did vanish and became a toponym denoting a heap of ruins, called Ukhdūd (q.v.), while another Najrān, Muslim Najrān, arose to the north-west of Ukhdūd, and whose Arabs still call themselves Balḥārith; today, both lie in the district of ’Asr in Saudi Arabia.

Irfan A. Shahid

The personal name of the Prophet

According to the rules of Arabic nomenclature, the full personal name of Islam’s founder was Ābū l-Qāṣīm Muḥammad b. ’Abdallāh al-Ḥashimi al-Qurashi. The kunya Ābū l-Qāṣīm recalls that he was the father of a boy called al-Qāsim, who died at an early age. Some ḥadīths (see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān) sought to limit the use of this kunya, after the time of Muḥammad (Déclais, La kunya). The name Muḥammad, “worthy of praise,” had been used before Islam, albeit rarely (recently some western scholars have interpreted the belabored attempts to find attestations of “Muḥammad” in the Age of Ignorance [q.v.; jāhilīyya] as evidence that Muḥammad was not, in fact, the Prophet’s given name). Ibn Sa’d collected several pious traditions, according to which five people (including an ʿusuf, bishop) had been given this name before Islam. Their parents hoped that each would be the awaited prophet (see prophets and prophet-hood). For his part, al-Qādī ʿIyāḍ (d. 144/1149) indicates that there were others who were called Muḥammad (al-Šifāʾ, 230) when he states: “God prevented those with this name from claiming to be prophets or others declaring them to be so or some cause manifesting itself in them which might make anyone consider the merits of their case.” ’Abdallāh is the name traditionally ascribed to Muḥammad’s father. The other names indicate that he belonged to the Ḥashim clan of the Quraysh (q.v.) tribe (see tribes and clans; family of the prophet).

The Qurʾān mentions the name Muḥammad four times (q 3:144; 33:40; 47:2; 48:29). In another verse (q 61:6) the name appears as Āḥmad and its meaning is disputed. In this verse, Jesus (q.v.) states: “I announce a messenger (q.v.) who will come after me, whose name will be Āḥmad.” The majority of commentators have regarded it as a

Nakedness  see nudity

Names of God  see god and his attributes

Names of the Prophet

The proper personal name as well as the titles and other additional names Muḥammad (q.v.) has claimed, or by which Muslims have recognized him.

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proper name but it may be simply a superlative adjective: “whose name will be most deserving of praise” (a reference to the meaning of Muhammad). In the reading of Ubayy b. Ka‘b, this verse is rather different: “I announce a prophet whose community (see Community and Society in the Qur’an) will be the final one and by whom God will put the final seal on prophets and messengers” (Paret, Kommentar, 476).

Be that as it may, Ahmad has become a proper name among Muslims. The expressions al-rasūl, “the messenger” (Q 2:143; 3:32, 86, etc.), and al-nabī, “the Prophet” (Q 3:68; 5:81, etc.), indicate his mission and serve as actual proper names in the same way as “Christ” is used to describe Jesus of Nazareth by Christians (see Christians and Christianity).

The names and titles of the Prophet in the hadith collections

Malik b. Anas (d. 179/796) concluded his Musallat with a section entitled “Chapter on the Names of the Prophet,” which contains the following single hadith of Jubayr b. Mut‘im: “The Prophet said: ‘I have five names. I am Muhammad; I am Ahmad; I am al-Mahdi, because through me God abolishes unbelief; I am al-Hassan because men will be gathered behind me (at the end of time); I am al-Qaib (‘the last’).’” Al-Bukhari (d. 256/870; Sahih, Kitab al-Managib) has a section entitled “The Names of the Prophet.” He quotes Q 33:40, 48:29 and Q 61:6, cites the above-mentioned hadith of Jubayr and adds the following hadith of Abu Hurayra (d. ca. 58/678): “The messenger of God has said: ‘Do you not admire how God has turned away from me the insult and the curse of the Quraysh? They insult a mudhammam, they curse a mudhammam, whereas I am a muhammad.’” He ends with a parable upon the “seal of the prophets” and a hadith on the Prophet’s kunya. Muslim (Sahih, Kitab al-

Farad’i]) has the same heading, under which he quotes the hadith of Jubayr and the following one by Abu Mūsā al-As‘i: “The messenger of God told us some of the names he had. He said ‘I am Muhammad and Ahmad and al-Muqaffa (the one who comes after the others; cf. Q 2:87; 5:46; 57:27) and al-Hassan and the Prophet of repentance (see repentance and penance) and the Prophet of mercy (q.v.).’” The Musnad of Ibn Hanbal quotes the same hadiths in the sections dedicated to Jubayr (iv, 80-4), to Abu Hurayra (ii, 244), to Abu Mūsā (iv, 404, with the variant “Prophet of battles” [see expeditions and battles] instead of “Prophet of mercy”), and to Ḥudhayfah b. al-Yamān (v, 405). In the same way, he recounts from ‘Abī b. Malik (vi, 25) how the Prophet proclaimed his titles before a Jewish assembly that refused to recognize him (see Jews and Judaism): “By God, I am al-Hassan, I am al-Qaib, I am the chosen Prophet (al-nabī al-mustafā) whether you believe it or not!”

These lists have become a traditional, canonical set of information, as can be shown by Ibn Sa‘d (Tabaqat, i, 104), Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī (Jawāmi‘, 19) or again by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111; Ihyā‘, K. al-Ādāt, ʿadāt al-ma‘ṣīha wa-akhlāq al-nubuwwa). Strictly speaking, these names are actually titles that define Muhammed’s mission. Their occurrence in collections of hadith serves a dual purpose. Faced with the Arabs (q.v.) of Medina (q.v.) and the earlier religions (see South Arabia, Religion in Pre-Islamic), it is an affirmation that the Prophet of Islam was entrusted with a definitive and universal mission. And it perhaps also seeks to restrain the enthusiasm of the devout by restricting the names of the Prophet to ten or fewer.

Devotional litanies

In the Musnad of Ibn Hanbal, the hadith of Abu Mūsā is introduced thus: “The mes-
senger of God told us his names. We have retained some of them but not others.”

This is an implicit admission that the Prophet had more names that are not known to us. There is nothing to prevent the faithful from seeking to find them once more and reciting them in certain instances, as in devotion. This is why lists appeared of what are called al-asmāʾ al-sharifā, “the noble names,” some comprising ninety-nine names, i.e. the same number as “the beautiful names” of God (see God and His attributes), some with fewer, some with many more (cf. Epalza, Los nombres; Schimmel, And Muhammad, 105-22). One example of the popular devotion that centered around the names of the Prophet (often taking the form of “litani- nies”) is evidenced by the 201 names of Muḥammad contained in the list compiled by Imām al-Juzā’ī (d. 869/1465; an Ar. version, with commentary, is found in al-Sharnūbī’s Sharḥ; for an Eng. rendition of a similar list, see Elsie and Young, List; Rudvin, Supplementary note).

This phenomenon occurred at the same time as the establishment of the feast of the birth of the Prophet (mawlid nabawī, see festivals and commemorative days) in the seventh/thirteenth century; on this occasion, in fact, the faithful recited panegyrics in praise of the Prophet, in particular, the well-known Burdā, “The Prophet’s mantle,” of the poet al-.Bushrī (609-93/ 1213-95). Curiously, it was in this same period that devotion to the name of Jesus was becoming widespread in Christendom, particularly under the influence of St. Bernard (Noye, Jesus, 1115-20).

Certain scholars, such as al-Ghazālī (cf. Epalza, Los nombres, 152 n. 13, citing the thesis of F.M. Pareja, Mahoma en el Islam, Rome 1946, 67-8), criticized those who gave the Prophet names other than those that had been given him by his family and opposed the veneration of the names of the Prophet, a practice that, to them, seemed to involve a dangerous confusion with devotion to the names of God. Others, seeing these additional names as an established traditional collection, sought to understand and explain it. Thus al-Qāḍī ‘Īyād, an important figure in Andalusian Mālikī literature (see Law and the Qur’ān), dedicates eighteen pages of his popular work al-Šifāʾ bi-ta‘rīf ḥuṣnīq al-muṣṭafā, “The healing through recognizing the rights of the chosen one,” to the names of the Prophet (al-Qāḍī ‘Īyād, Shifāʾ, i, 228-46). In an initial chapter, he lists them as follows: Firstly, those laid down in the ḥadīths of Jūbayr, Naqqāsh, Abū Mūṣā and Makkī (who talks of “ten names,” including Tā-Hā and Yā-Sīn, the initial letters of Q 20 and Q 36, respectively; it may be noted here that an exegetical trend existed wherein names of the Prophet were derived from the so-called “mysterious letters” [q.v.]). Secondly, there are those designations found in the Qur’ān itself, such as: shāhid, “witness” (see witnessing and testifying); mubāshshir, “bearer of glad tidings” (see good news); nādhir, “warner” (q.v.); dā‘ī ilā liḥīf, “caller to God” (see invitation); sīrajun munirān, “shining lamp” (Q 33:46; see lamp; light); or al-‘urwa al-wuthqā, “the firmest handle” (Q 2:256); al-nabi al-ummī, “the Prophet coming from a pagan milieu” (Q 7:157-8; see illiteracy; literacy; ummī; polytheism and atheism, etc.); or “in the earlier books of God, in the books (see book) of the prophets, in the ḥadīths of his messenger; in the general practice of his community,” as al-muṣtafā, “the chosen one”; al-habīb, “the beloved” (see love and affection); sayyid waṣalādī adām, “the lord (q.v.) of the sons of Adam” (see Adam and Eve, etc. Next, there are the names of supposed biblical origin, such as al-mutawakkil, “he who trusts” (see trust and patience); al-mukhtār, “the chosen one”;
Muhammad is not ḥabīb, “a powerful hero, tyrant,” he may be given this name because of Psalm 45:4, which invites the royal hero (ḥabīb in Hebrew) to draw his sword and impose his law (see kings and rulers; oppression). The author concludes by warning against any danger of anthropomorphism (q.v.): “just as the being of God is unlike that of other beings, so his attributes do not resemble those of his creatures (see creation).”

Esoteric meditations

The faithful can express their devotion to the beloved by reciting a litany of his names and qualities. They may also focus their meditation on one or two of the names and draw from them knowledge (see knowledge and learning) hidden from the eyes of the profane (q.v.). Here, we will make do with a few references to a field which is ipso facto without limit.

The direct relationship between God and the name of Muhammad should be stressed. Hassān b. Thābit, “the poet of the Prophet,” is thought to have composed the following verse: “[God] has shared his name with him to heap honor upon him, because the master of the throne (see throne of God) is mahnād and he is muhammad” (al-Qādī ʿIyād, Shifāʾ, i, 237). The authors of stories concerning the Prophet were certain that the name of the Prophet was written upon the divine throne itself. Many have been pleased to note the proximity of the names Allāh and Muhammad in the words of the shahāda (see witness to faith). Consequently, it became acceptable to apply the usual process of esoteric interpretation to the name of the Prophet. Several exegetes (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval; ʿṢūfism and the Qurʾān) noted that the four consonants of his name resulted from the following four words ʿmajd, “glory” (q.v.), raḥma, “mercy,” Mulk, “royalty,” and...
Dawām, “perpetuity” (see eternity).
The very shape of these Arabic letters (m-h-m-d), when written together, call to
mind the silhouette of a prostrate human being (see bowing and prostration),
forming the model upon which Adam was created (Ḥallāj, Ẓawāṣīn). This opinion
was developed at length by Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240; La profession, 114-27), who
also advises: “This chapter, which we have devoted to the composition of the letters of
the name of the chosen one, is not known
by the doctors of religious law and escapes
their knowledge, except if God wishes it.”
Furthermore, the resources of Arabic cal-
ligraphy (q.v.) have been used to illustrate
the name of Muhammad in a wide array of
styles (see also ARABIC SCRIPT). Still
others have based their poems and medita-
tions upon a ḥadīth qudsi in which God
speaks thus: anāʾ ʿamīd bi-lā mīm, “I am
Ahmad without the letter mīm,” or, put in
another way: “I am ʿabd [the one and
only],” says God. Ahmīd is therefore the
messenger who is a guide towards the one
and only God (cf. Schimmel, And Muḥam-
dīd, 257-9). To be sure, these consider-
ations go beyond the Qurʾānic text itself.
Nevertheless, they demonstrate how
Islam turned its prophet into a quasi-
supernatural personality.

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Names of the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān calls itself by a variety of
names, which throw light on the various
aspects under which it presents itself. A
study of the names of the Qurʾān thus
becomes part of the exercise in under-
standing the Qurʾānic phenomenon. Schol-
ars number differently the names the
Qurʾān uses for itself. According to al-
Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the divine revelation
(tanzīl, see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION)
has four names: Qurʾān, Quraṭūn, kitāb, and
dhikr. Al-Ṭabarī hastens to add that, in the
Arabic language (q.v.), each of these names has “a meaning and an aspect”
quite distinct from the meanings and
aspects of the other three — implying that the distinction is retained in the Qurʾān.
To these four names, al-Suyūṫī (d. 911/1505) adds tanzīl, which, in fact, occurs in the opening part of al-Ṭabarī’s statement just quoted. Al-Zarkashi (d. 794/1392; *Burhān*, i, 272–82) quotes Abū I-Ma’ālī ‘Uzayzī as saying that the Qurān has fifty-five names (al-Zarkashi and, following him, al-Suyūṫī [*Itqān*, i, 50–2], give brief explanations of many of these); he quotes another writer as saying that the Qurān has more than ninety names. The difference in the numbering is due to the fact that some writers consider only the best-known names (and so may count only a few substantives as names) while others also regard as names the many adjectives or phrases that are descriptive of the Qurān.

It is probably best to take a moderate view of the matter. The figure of ninety odd names seems too large and the figure of four or five too small. It is true that certain names of the Qurān are very well-known and come to mind immediately but their meanings are explained, illustrated, and qualified in a significant way by at least a small number of other words and phrases, which, too, may properly be termed names of the Qurān. All such designations will be so treated in this article. After examining the five names that make up al-Suyūṫī’s principal list, we will look at a number of less well-known names, focusing, in both categories, on substantives. Next we will consider adjectives that are used, whether attributively or predicatively, to describe the Qurān.

Qurān
A proper name (ʿalam) of the Islamic scripture, the word Qurān is originally a māṣdar (verbal noun), and is used in this sense in Q 75:17, 18: “It is our responsibility to collect it and recite it (qurānahu); so, follow its recitation (qurānahu) when we recite it.” It is sometimes used as an indefinite and sometimes as a definite noun, and may refer to a part (q 72:1) or the whole (q 6:19) of the scripture; in several places, qualifying adjectives meaning “noble” (*karīm*, q 56:77; *majīd*, q 8:41; *ajab*, “marvelous,” q 72:1) are used. It has, however, also been suggested that Qurān was not always understood to be a proper name for the Muslim holy book, and that it has its origins in the Syriac *qeryānā* (see Jeffery, *For. vocabs.*, 233; see also foreign vocabulary; informants).

The triliteral Arabic root letters that form the word Qurān (q-r-n) have the sense of “to collect.” The Qurān, literally “recitation” or “reading,” is so called because, in reading or reciting it, one joins — or collects — a number of letters and words, reciting or reading them in sequence (see recitation of the Qurān; orality). The meaning of “collection” has led scholars to see thematic and structural significance in the scripture (see form and structure of the Qurān). According to some theologians, the name Qurān draws attention to the fact that the scripture contains (“collects” in itself) the essence of all the revealed books (see book) — or rather the essence of all knowledge (see knowledge and learning; in al-Rāḡib’s words: li-kawnihi jāmiʿan li-thamarati kutubihī bal li-jāmiʿ thi thamarata jāmiʿi l-ʿulūmi). Supporting evidence for this idea is found within the scripture, according to which the Qurān offers an elucidation (tafsīl, q 12:111) or exposition (tihyān, q 16:86) of all things. Referring to the same meaning of “collection,” others have argued that the Qurān is a well-structured discourse in that its verses (q.v.), passages, and sūras (q.v.) are well-knit or well-composed — or “collected” — rather than disconnected or “uncollected” (see literary structures of the Qurān). This view, they maintain, must constitute one of the assumptions in reading and interpreting the Qurān, and, furthermore, that one’s study of the
Qur’an must be guided by the principles that underlie the composition or structure of the Qur’an.

The Qur’an is an Arabic (‘arabi) Qur’an (Q 12:2) — for Arabic was the language of the people to whom Muhammad was sent as a prophet and to whom the Qur’an was first addressed (see Prophet and Prophethood): “We never sent a prophet except in the language of his nation, that he may make [matters] plain for them” (Q 14:4). Every prophet, therefore, speaks and presents his message in the language of his people. But according to the classical commentators verses like Q 12:2 do not necessarily suggest that the Qur’an was addressed to the Arabs (q.v.) only, for the thrust of such verses is that the Arabs, since they were being addressed in their own language and so understood the Qur’an without any difficulty, had no excuse for not accepting its message. Wordplay may also be involved in calling the Qur’an Arabic. The root of the word ‘arabi has the meaning of clarity and lucidity — a meaning that is indicated in Q 16:103, where this word is contrasted with ‘ajami, “non-Arabic,” which in this context has connotations of lack of clarity or lucidity but for another conception of the linguistic milieu of the Qur’an and the first Qur’anic audience, see Language and Style of the Qur’an.

An interesting use of the word Qur’an occurs in Q 15:91, where it seems to have been used for the Jewish scriptures — “those who tore the Qur’an to shreds,” a reference, according to the commentators, to the Jews’ (see Jews and Judaism) violations of the commandments of the Torah (q.v.; cf. the hadith, cited by al-Suyūṭī, in which the Prophet called the Psalms [q.v.: zabūr] of David [q.v., qur’ān]. Qur’an, in this larger, generic sense of “scripture” would be analogous to the word islām (q.v) in its generic or perennial sense (cf. Q 3:19; also Q 2:133, and other verses, where several prophets before Muhammad are called muslimūn).

Furqān

Furqān, a word of non-Arabic origin, means “that which sets apart or distinguishes,” and is usually translated as “distinction” or “criterion” (for an Aramaic derivation meaning “deliverance, redemption,” see Jeffery, Fox, vocab., 225-9). In Q 8:41, the word designates the battle of Badr (q.v.; in the year 624 C.E.), because it clearly marked off the party of truth (q.v.) from the party of falsehood (see LIE). In Q 21:48 it is used for the Torah (also Q 2:53), the wa‘e between al-kitāb and al-furqān being exegetical), and in Q 25:1 (also Q 2:185), for the Qur’an. According to Amīn ʿAlīn Islāḥī (1906-97; Tadabbur-i Qurān, i, 169, ad Q 2:33), the revealed scriptures are called furqān in four senses: first, they offer a detailed account of the divine commandments (q.v.) and injunctions; second, they distinguish between truth and falsehood, and between the lawful and the unlawful (see Lawful and Unlawful); third, they are absolutely clear as to their intent and purpose; fourth, they afford human beings the wisdom (q.v.) that enables them to go through life with a full understanding of the distinction between good and evil (q.v.), and between right and wrong.

The two words so far discussed, Qur’an and furqān, are regarded by al-ʿAlūsī (d. 1270/1854; Rāh, i, 10) as the two most fundamental names of the Qur’an: all other names are reducible to these two. According to al-ʿAlūsī, these two names are often taken by Sūfis (see Sufism and the Qur’an) to represent, respectively, knowledge in a compact form and knowledge in a detailed form: Qur’an stands for “esoteric knowledge of divine origin that is summative in character and is a compendium of all the truths” (al-ʿilm al-ladunni l-ijmālī...
l-jāmi’ lil-haqqā ‘iq kullihā), whereas furqān is “detailed knowledge that serves to set truth apart from falsehood” (al-‘īm al-ta‘fīlī l-fāriq bayn al-haqq wa-l-bātîl) — and the Islamic scripture contains both types of knowledge. With this distinction between qurān and furqān in mind, he cites Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) as saying that while qurān includes furqān, the opposite is not true, for the whole (qurān) may be said to contain parts (furqān), but the parts may not be said to contain the whole. This may serve to show why, in al-‘Āmil’s view, qurān and furqān are the most fundamental of all the names of the Qurān.

Kitāb

The word kitāb, as used in the Qurān, has several meanings, many of which become constituent elements of the meaning of the name kitāb as used of the Qurān. These meanings are: revealed scripture (Q 2:44); authoritative document (Q 37:157); the Preserved Tablet (Q.v.) that is in the heavens (see heaven and sky) and that contains a record of everything that has happened or will happen (cf. Q 6:59); deed-scroll (Q 69:19, 25; see record of human actions); divine decree (Q 8:68); legal injunction (Q 98:3); and epistle or written message (Q 27:28). As a book that has been revealed (for example, Q 14:1, kitābun anzhalnahu ilayka, “a book that we have sent down to you [Muhammad]”), the Qurān is an authoritative message from God, containing as it does a series of prescriptive laws. In many verses, the word kitāb is used for pre-qurānic scriptures — as, for example, in Q 2:87 (Torah) and Q 10:30 (Gospel; see gospels). The designation of the Qurān as kitāb thus makes it part of a larger tradition of revealed scriptures.

By calling itself a book — kitāb (Q 2:2 and elsewhere) — the Qurān makes a break with the oral tradition of Arabia (see orality and writing in Arabia). In contrast to the Jews and Christians (see Christians and Christianity), who possessed scriptures and so were called ahīl al-kitāb, “People of the Book” (Q.v.; e.g. Q 3:65; see literacy), the idolatrous Arabs (see Polytheism and Atheism; South Arabia, Religion in Pre-Islamic), who did not have a scripture, were called ummiyyān, “unlettered ones” (see ummī; illiteracy). While ummiyyān was an identifying title of these Arabs, and, as such, was value-neutral, in certain religious contexts it did connote — and the Arabs themselves understood it to connote — inferiority of status, the People of the Book being viewed as enjoying, by virtue of their possession of scriptures, an elevated status. This explains why, for example, toward the end of the Meccan period of Muḥammad’s ministry (see Chronology and the Qurān), the Quraysh (Q.v.) sought to enlist Jewish and Christian “scriptural” support in their attempt to upstage Muhammad by challenging qurānic pronouncements about biblical history and personages (see Scripture and the Qurān; Narratives; Myths and Legends in the Qurān) — a fact that forms part of the background of such sūras as Q 18 (Sūrat al-Kahf, “The Cave”; see Men of the Cave) and Q 19 (Sūrat Maryam, “Mary” [Q.v.]). With the advent of the Qurān — or rather the Qurān as kitāb — therefore, the Arabs came to possess a scripture similar to the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and were raised to the level of the Jews and Christians.

More important, the name kitāb highlights the function of scripture as law, for that which is written down is deemed to have at least three distinctive qualities (see Law and the Qurān). The first of these is clarity: a piece of writing is supposed to be free from ambiguity (cf. the word “graphic”; see orthography). The second is objectivity: a document, having an
independent existence, serves as a check against subjective and arbitrary interpretation of the law — a function that, for example, the Twelve Tables were meant to perform in Rome during the early Republic when the plebeians agitated against patrician excesses. The use of kitāb in q 68:37, “Do you have a book in which you read?” (am lakum kitābun fīhī tadrusūn) has this meaning of objectivity. The third is definitiveness: the written word has always enjoyed a putative authoritative status. As kitāb, then, scripture becomes a reliable source of knowledge and wisdom (Q 2:159; 35:40; in Q 10:1 and elsewhere, the Qurʿān is called al-kitāb al-hakīm, “the wise book”), a book that deserves to become one’s object of study and reflection (Q 38:29; see Teaching and Preaching the Qurʿān), and an adjudicator of matters (Q 2:213; cf. 4:105). Q 46:30 parallels the Qurʿān — “a book that has been revealed after Moses (q.v.)” — with the Torah, highlighting the status of the Qurʿān as the law.

By calling itself kitāb, then, the Qurʿān claims to be a source of authority (q.v.). This explains the use of the plural kutub in the sense of “laws” in q 96:3. Incidentally, when Muslim jurisprudents discuss the sources of Islamic law, they often use the word al-kitāb to designate the first source, the Qurʿān, probably because of the legal connotations of that word.

But the Qurʿān calls itself not just a book, but “the book” (al-kitāb, cf. the early Christian designation ta Bible, literally “the books,” for the scriptures). This serves to emphasize the status of the Qurʿān as an indispensable source of knowledge and guidance (see Astray). Al-kitāb, in Q 2:2 for example, may also signify that the Qurʿān, being the final revelation from God, supersedes all other previous scriptures and that now it alone has the status of being the book.

In q 39:23, the Qurʿān is described as kitāban mutashābihan mathānīya. Mutashābih, literally “resembling,” implies that the contents of the Qurʿān are similar to, and concordant with, one another. In other words, the Qurʿān is marked by consistency, and, in spite of its considerable diversity of theme and variation of style, it possesses organic unity. As for mathānī, it is usually interpreted as “oft-repeated (q.v.) ones,” which would be a reference to the fact that the Qurʿān frequently repeats its contents in order to fix these firmly in the minds of its listeners or readers.

Q 41:41 calls the Qurʿān kitāban ’azīzun, “a mighty book.” The Arabic word ’azīz, usually translated “mighty,” connotes unassailability. The Qurʿān is a book that — as the very next verse explains — is secure against any incursions of falsehood: “Falsehood does not encroach upon it from the front or from behind” (lā yaṭēhi l-bāṭilu min baynī yadayhi wa-lā min khalfīhī).

In a sense, the name kitāb is a complement of the name qurʿān. As ‘Abdallāh Drāz says (Naba’, 13), qurʿān and kitāb together represent the fact that the Islamic scripture is both recited and written, and, furthermore, that the scripture can be properly recited and written only when it is preserved in both suḏār, “human breasts,” and suṭār, “documentary form” — which in turn means that memory (q.v.) and document shall reinforce each other in the project of preserving the integrity of the divine word. And, Drāz concludes, this is exactly how the universal Muslim community fulfilled its mission or responsibility in this regard (for more on kitāb, see Jeffery, Qurʿān and, more recently, Madigan, Self-image).

Dhikr

Literally “remembrance,” dhikr is used of the Qurʿān in several places, for example in Q 38:8, which reports an objection raised by certain opponents of Muḥammad (see...
opposition to Muḥammad): “Has the remembrance been sent down upon him [Muḥammad] from among all of us?” (a-unzila ‘alayhi l-dhikru min bayninâ); the words dhikrā and tadkhîri (as in q 6:90 and q 6:48, respectively) are also used. In q 43:44, where the Qurʾān is called “a dhikr for you and your people” (dhikrun laka wa-li-qawmika), dhikr acquires the additional meaning of exaltation and honor. The Qurʾān is called “the wise remembrance” (q 3:58), “a blessed remembrance” (q 21:50), and “a remembrance for the entire world” (q 68:32). Not only is the Qurʾān itself a remembrance, the act of taking remembrance by it, too, has been made easy (q 54:17, 22, 32, 40), so that no one might claim that the Qurʾān remained a closed book.

Dhikr is of two main types: verbal, dhikr bi-l-lisān, literally, “remembering by means of the tongue,” and mental, dhikr bi-l-qalb, literally “remembering by means of the heart (q.v.).” Both are mentioned in the Qurʾān — for example, the first in q 68:51: lamnā samī‘ū l-dhikra, “when they hear the remembrance,” and the second in q 3:135: dhakarā li-hā ḫa-fa-staghfarū li-dhunāḥhim, “They remember God, and then they seek forgiveness (q.v.) for their sins (see sin, major and minor).” In a verse like q 38:1: “By the Qurʾān, one of remembrance” (wa-l-qurʾānī dhī l-dhikri), the two meanings are combined. To call the Qurʾān dhikr, therefore, is to say that the text of the Qurʾān ought to be recited by the tongue and its teachings kept in mind. Thus both the development of the Islamic art of Qurʾānic recitation and the popularity of the Muslim practice of memorizing the text of the Qurʾān may be seen as the unfolding, in history, of the idea of the Qurʾān as dhikr.

Furthermore, dhikr as a name of the Qurʾān signifies that the scripture reminds human beings of certain truths of which, at some level, they are already aware. This implies that the message of the scripture is not alien to human nature (what the Qurʾān calls fitra in q 30:30), or that the truths introduced by the scripture are not inconsistent with the truths of which human beings have an instinctive understanding. In turning to the Qurʾān and accepting its message, therefore, human beings will only be responding to the call of their fitra. Thus, the sending down of scripture by God does not constitute an imposition on human beings, but rather is to be understood and appreciated as valuable help in giving direction to human life.

Tanzil

Tanzil (q 26:192 and elsewhere) is usually translated “revelation” but, strictly, the word denotes sending something down in portions or installments, as opposed to sending it down all at once. Q 25:32 quotes an objection of the opponents of the Qurʾān: “Why was the Qurʾān not sent down (nuzzila) upon him [Muhammad] all at once?” In light of this objection, the name tanzil acquires some significance, for the Qurʾān does address the objection. To begin with, q 17:106 contains, besides the word tanzil, the phrase “And a Qurʾān which we have divided into parts, so that you may recite it to people at intervals” (wa-qurʾānān faraqqūhu li-taqra‘ahu ‘alā l-nāṣi ‘alā muṭthin). Q 16:102 may be taken to explain the wisdom behind tanzil. According to this verse, tanzil may have a threefold significance: first, it strengthens the believers by offering repeated and variegated expositions of the Qurʾānic message; second, it provides for the believers, that is, the first-generation Muslims, guidance on matters and issues as they arise during their struggle to establish Islam in Arabia; and third, it reassures them by informing them that, like other believing nations in the past, they, too, will eventually meet
with success in this world and in the next (see also q 16:89; see eschatology; reward and punishment).

Additional designations

The Qur’ān uses a number of other names for itself, and these, too, have formed the basis for extended exegetical and theological reflection:

Kalām Allāh, “The word/speech of God” (q 9:6; 48:15). This name is also used for the Torah (q 2:75). Divine revelation is called kalām Allāh in order to distinguish it from the speech of humans, jinn (q.v.), and angels (see angel). The essence of the word kalām is lafz, “word,” and this, according to some scholars, is proof that the revelation a prophet receives from God takes verbal form. Historically, it is this name — kalām Allāh — which gave rise to the theological issue of the createdness of the Qur’ān (q.v.) leading Muslim theologians to distinguish between various meanings of the word kalām as applied to divine revelation.

Wahy, usually translated “revelation,” literally means “quick intimation” (ishāra sarī‘a) — which intimation, as al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (fl. early fifth/eleventh cent.; Mufradāt, s.v. w-h-y) explains, may take the form of word, sound, or gesture (“intimation” would seem to be a better word than Bell’s [Watt-Bell, Introduction, 21] “suggestion,” the connotations of which are somewhat different from those of the Arabic word). As a technical term, wahy carries special importance because it is used in the Qur’ān both for the process and for the content of revelation (the same might be claimed for tanzil, but the use of wahy in the Qur’ān is more nuanced). The dual nature of wahy can be seen in a verse like q 53:4, “This is but a revelation that is being revealed” (in huwa illā wahy mumīn yāhā). Q 42:51 identifies four ways in which God speaks to a human being (an yakallimahu llāhu), two of them involving wahy, namely: God speaking to a person wahyīn, and a messenger (q.v.; that is, an angel) conveying (yūḥi) to a person whatever is willed by God. Q 23:7, which mentions Gabriel (q.v.) as the one who brought the Qur’ān to Muḥammad, would seem to establish the second of those two ways as the one in which Muḥammad received the scripture. Thus, wahy as a name of the Qur’ān specifies the mode in which revelation was conveyed to Muḥammad. But the important point is that wahy is identified in Q 42:51 with the speech, kalām, of God. Since kalām, as we have already noted, is verbal in character, the name would seem to lend support to the verbal conception of revelation. Furthermore, since wahy is quick intimation, it is implied that a prophet’s reception of revelation from an angel is virtually immediate — with the attendant implication that a prophet’s revelation is unadulterated or uncompromised either by his own thought or imagination or by the intervention of any demonic power (see devil; this last idea would in turn refute the objection, made by Muḥammad’s opponents that, like the soothsayers [q.v.] of Arabia, he received revelation through the medium of jinn).

Hudā, “guidance” (q 27:77). The Qur’ān is so called because it guides to the right path, clearly distinguishing it from the wrong path. The name implies that the choice to accept the hudā rests with human beings, the Qur’ān simply pointing the way (e.g. q 76:3). For similar reasons, the Qur’ān is called maw‘īza, “advice, admonition” (q 10:57; see exhortations; warning).

Nūr, “light” (q.v.; q 4:174). The Qur’ān brings human beings forth from darkness (q.v.) and ignorance (q.v.) and sets them on the well-lit path of guidance (q 5:15-6). The phrase actually used in q 4:174 is nūraan mumīnān, “clear light,” which implies that
the light of the scripture is both unmistakable and easily accessible.

Basā’ir, “insights” (q 7:203). The Qur’ān is a treasury of special insights, which, to interpret the Arabic word literally, help the listener or reader to “see” the truth (see seeing and hearing; vision and blindness).

Hikma, “wisdom” (q 17:39). The Qur’ān both contains and teaches wisdom. In q 54:5 it is called hikma ḏalīqa, “consummate wisdom,” because it contains divine wisdom, which is the highest form of wisdom.

Rahma, “mercy” (q.v.; q 27:77). God, the creator of all, is the guide of all (q 7:54: a-tā ātha l-khalqu wa-l-amīn, “Behold, to him belong creation and command”). But guiding humanity, or furnishing it with a code of conduct, is a manifestation of the mercy of God. It is on account of his mercifulness that God has decided to save human beings by showing them the right course of action (see salvation). In q 17:86-7, cessation of revelation is equated with denial or withholding of mercy.

Bashīr, “giver of good tidings” and nādīkhīr, “warner” (q 41:4; see good news; warning). The Qur’ān promises reward to those who accept its message and threatens with punishment those who reject that message.

Rūḥ, “spirit” (q.v.; q 42:52). The scripture is a life-giving force, and those who live by it will have true life (cf. Deut 8:3: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the lord”).

Aḥsan al-hadīth, “the finest discourse” (q 39:23; see inimitability). The Qur’ān excels, both in point of beauty of style and in point of wisdom of content, any other discourse. In q 12:3, the qur’ānic story of Joseph (q.v) is called aḥsan al-qasas, “the finest story.”

Shīfā, “cure, remedy” (q 10:57; 17:82; see illness and health). The Qur’ān treats the maladies of the heart and the soul (q.v), purging people’s inner selves of ignoble traits.

Muhaymin, “supervisor, protector” (q 5:48). The Qur’ān “watches over” the other scriptures in the sense that, on the one hand, it contains the essence of their teachings and completes those teachings, and, on the other hand, provides the yardstick by which the authenticity and validity of those scriptures may be judged (see muṣaddiq, below).

Ḥabl Allāh, “the cord of God” (q 3:103). The word ḥabl, “rope, cord,” is an Arabic metaphor (q.v) for covenant (q.v). The Qur’ān is God’s ḥabl because it at once constitutes and explains the terms of the covenant that God makes with humanity. The salvation of human beings, therefore, depends on their fulfillment of the covenant with God.

Balāgh, “communication” (q 14:52). The Qur’ān, according to this verse, is balāghun lil-nās, “a communication for people.” The name implies, first, that the Qur’ān has been communicated to humanity fully and accurately — in the very form in which it was sent down by God — and, second, that human beings, once they receive it are responsible for deciding what their relationship to it shall be.

Finally, a number of adjectival names are used to describe the Qur’ān in various contexts. A brief review of some of them follows (some of them were noted in the discussion above, but will be dealt with here from a more general point of view).

Mubīn, which can mean both “clear [in itself]” and “that which clarifies,” implies (as in q 12:1 and q 36:60) that the language of the Qur’ān, being standard Arabic, is neither convoluted nor ambiguous (q.v), and, consequently, generously yields its true meaning to those who come to it on its terms (q 5:15-6). The use of the word implies that those who are being addressed by
means of it — the first addressees, that is — cannot reject it on the grounds that they are unable to understand it (see difficult passages).

Karīm, “noble” (Q 56:77). The Qur’ān is “noble” because it comes from a noble source, and, being noble, it deserves to be treated with reverence. The same may be said of majid, “glorious, illustrious” (Q 85:21) and ‘āli, “exalted” (Q 43:4). In Q 80:13-4, the Qur’ān is called subhān, “sheets/scriptures,” that are makarrama, “honored,” marfī‘a, “exalted,” and mutahhara, “made pure.”

Mubārak, “blessed” (Q 21:50; 38:29).

The scripture is a source of blessings (Ar. barakāt) which, following Q 7:96, “blessings of the heaven and the earth” (barakātān min al-samā‘ wa-l-ardj), can be interpreted as material as well as spiritual; compare with Q 5:66, which says that had the People of the Book upheld the Torah and the Gospel, “they would have eaten from above [their heads] and from under their feet,” that is, they would have enjoyed material prosperity (see blessing; grace; wealth).

Hakīm, “wise” (Q 41:42). The word is used in the Qur’ān for both God and the scripture. This means that the Qur’ān, being the word of God (q.v.), reflects the attributes of the one who sent it down; both the word and its speaker are full of wisdom (see God and His Attributes). Hakīm also has the connotations of “solidity, firmness, decisiveness,” and suggests that the Qur’ān is free from such weaknesses as vagueness, ambiguity, and doubt (q.v.; cf. qawl faṣl, “decisive word,” in Q 86:13), and also that it has been made secure against any “interference” such as textual corruption (see forgery; corruption; collection of the Qur’ān; textual criticism of the Qur’ān).

Qayyīm, “right, straight” (Q 18:2). This word is contrasted in the verse with ṣawāj, “crooked, aberrant” (cf. Q 18:1). Qayyīm (like al-qayyīm, which is used in Q 2:255 as an attribute of God) is one who or that which sustains not only himself or itself but also someone or something else. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī explains the word thus: “well-established [in its own right] and setting in order people’s affairs as they pertain to this world and the next” (ḥābit muqawwim li-ʾāshīhim wa-ma’āḏīhim, Mufradāt, ad loc.). Being qayyīm, then, the Qur’ān both represents the straight course and ensures that those who follow it will stay on that course.

Musaddiq. The Qur’ān is “a musaddiq of that which precedes it” (musaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi), namely, the previous scriptures (Q 2:97). The Arabic word can mean “that which confirms (something else) to be true and correct,” and this is the general interpretation of the word when it occurs in such a context. This, however, is not very convincing since the Qur’ān’s confirmation of the previous scriptures would leave the matter of its own authenticity hanging in the balance — a thought that ill suits the contexts in which the Qur’ān is called a musaddiq of the earlier scriptures. A more plausible interpretation, one offered by Amīn Alḥsan Iṣlāḥī (Tadabbur-i Qur’ān, ad loc.), is that musaddiq in these contexts means “that which actualizes.” In other words, the Qur’ān represents the materialization of the prophecies that were made in the early scriptures. The first meaning, “to confirm (something else),” would still be valid, but will have to be re-stated: the Qur’ān confirms those contents or parts of the early scriptures that agree with the Qur’ān’s own outlook. In either case, the name musaddiq establishes an important connection between the Qur’ān and the earlier scriptures.

Conclusion
The foregoing makes it plain that a study of the names of the Qur’ān should be of
Names of the Qur‘an

considerable interest to a student of the Islamic scripture. The pre-Islamic Arabian practice of assigning many names to a being, entity, or phenomenon might explain, in part, why the Qur‘ān, too, uses so many names for itself (see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur‘ān). But the practice, whether by the pre-Islamic poets (see Poetry and Poets) or by the Qur‘ān, was not indulged in for its own sake; rather, it was aimed at elucidating, from as many angles as possible, the nature and attributes of the thing in question. With the Qur‘ān, however, the practice is raised to a higher level: the many different names of the Qur‘ān not only represent so many facets of the Islamic scripture, but they also make up, when seen in relation to each other, a coherent and meaningful statement in their own right, shedding light on the ethos, orientation, and function of the scripture. We will conclude by offering a few observations.

First, an analytical look at the names (both substantives and adjectives) of the Qur‘ān will indicate that they underscore different aspects of the Islamic scripture. For example, some names (kalām Allāh, wahy) speak to the origin of the Qur‘ān, maintaining that it comes from God — and that it is not, therefore, the product of the Prophet’s mind or the concoction of a soothsayer (see occasions of revelation). Others (bayān, mubīn, ‘arabī) claim linguistic purity and excellence for the Qur‘ān (see Language, Concept of), implying that the Qur‘ān presents its meaning with the utmost clarity, such that it cannot be rejected or disregarded on the grounds of incomprehensibility or ambiguity. Still others (hudā, hikma) draw attention to the function and purpose of the Qur‘ān: this is a book that guides to the right path and furnishes the wisdom that is needed to lead a successful life. Some names (kitāb, kalām Allāh), since they are used of other scriptures as well, stress that the Qur‘ān is part of the series of divine dispensations that have come from God to prophets (e.g. Q 4:163 says that God gave Muhammad wahy in the same way in which he gave wahy to Noah [q.v.] and other prophets). Other names (muhaymin, musaddiq) point to the distinction of the Qur‘ān among the scriptures. The name kitāb endows the Qur‘ān with authenticity, while the name dhikr stresses the consonance of the Qur‘ānic teaching with human nature.

Second, most of the names of the Qur‘ān will be found to occur throughout the period of Muḥammad’s revelation, which lasted for about twenty-two years. Take, for example, the five names discussed in the beginning. While some of them occur more frequently than others, all of them occur in both Meccan and Medinan sūras, an indication that the manifold conception of the Qur‘ān had started taking shape quite early.

Third, it appears that the listener or reader of the Qur‘ān is meant to keep in mind the interrelation of the names. This becomes clear from the fact that the names are frequently used in conjunction with, or in close proximity to, one another. We have already noted that substantive names are frequently qualified by adjectival ones. A few additional examples may be noted. Tanzīl al-kitāb (where tanzīl is a maṣdar) occurs more than once. Maw‘īza, shifā‘, hūdā, and rāhma occur together in Q 10:57. Q 17:106 may contain a possible wordplay — wa-qur‘ānan faraqnūhu, “and a Qur‘ān that we have given in detail” — where faraqnū, from the same root as farqān, implies that the Qur‘ān—collection is identical with the Qur‘ān—distinction (see above).

Mustansir Mir
Nāmūs

Term found in early Muslim traditions on the Prophet’s life (ṣira, see SIRA AND THE QUR’ĀN), but not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’ān. Its original meaning was “the revealed law.” The word was later interpreted as a designation for the angel Gabriel (q.v.; Jibrīl).

In an early Arabic translation of a gospel fragment, the Greek expression en ton nomo autōn (John 15:25), which means “the law of the Jews,” i.e. the Torah (q.v.), is rendered as fil nāmūs (Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, 150). This rendering is based on a Palestinian Syriac translation of the gospel (q.v.; Gullaume, Version, 292; see SYRIAC AND THE QUR’ĀN).

In the sīra traditions the word al-nāmūs occurs most prominently in the Khaḍīja — Waraqā story, of which several versions were transmitted and which is part of the reports about Muhammad’s call to prophecy (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD; INFORMANTS). Waraqā, a cousin of Muhammad’s first wife Khadija (q.v.), is said to have become a Christian (see CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY), to have studied with Jewish and Christian scholars (see SCHOLAR; JEWS AND JUDAISM) and to have translated some texts of the gospels into Arabic (the rarer variant “Hebrew” seems to be a transmission error) and to have written them down. After having been informed about Muhammad’s revelations, Waraqā, in one of the versions, says: “This is the nāmūs which was sent down upon Moses” (q.v.; hādhā l-nāmūs alladhī un-zila ’alā mūsā; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Muṣannaf, v, 323; Bukhārī, Sahīh, i, 4-5; Muslim, Sahīh, i, 142). This immediately suggests that, in this case as well, al-nāmūs is adopted from the corresponding Syriac word meaning “the revealed law” for, according to the Bible and the Qur’ān, this is what Moses and Muhammad received.

Recent studies have shown that the famous version of the story of Muhammad’s call to prophecy, at least its essential elements, most probably goes back to the Meccan storyteller (qāsī) ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr (d. 68/687-8; Schoeler, Charakter und Authen-
tie, 59-117; Juynboll, Early Islamic society, 160-71). This version was already a combination of different reports and narrative motifs, which must have circulated independently at that time or even earlier (see ORALITY AND WRITING IN ARABIA). This assumption is corroborated by versions of the story which do not contain the vision of an angel (q.v.), and which seem to be independent of the narration that goes back to ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr. In one of these versions, Waraqā says: “This is a nāmūs like the nāmūs of Moses” (fa-hādhā nāmūs minthala nāmūs mūsā; Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, i, 195; Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, i, 312). The reference to the nāmūs of Moses seems, therefore, to belong to the original kernel of the story and must have meant God’s law revealed to Moses.

The Syriac word put into the mouth of an Arab Christian suggests that the original Muslim narrator of the story, who lived in the first half of the first/seventh century but cannot be identified any further, was
acquainted with the Christian expression. This does not hold for later transmitters and, in the course of time, the interpretation of the term changed. The fact that the Khadija-Waraqa story came to be prefaced with narrations about visions of the angel Gabriel, contributed greatly to the development of the idea that al-nāmūs referred to this angel. This became, for Muslim scholars, the common understanding of the term al-nāmūs in the Khadija-Waraqa story.

The change of meaning left both Muslim and Western scholars with a problem. Neither in the Qurʾān nor in the biblical book of Exodus is it said that Moses received his revelations through an angel. Muslim scholars solved the problem by generalizing Muhammad’s experience of revelation (cf. Q 2:97), claiming it for all prophets (see REVELATION AND INSPIRATION). Furthermore, Muslim scholars asserted that al-nāmūs is a word “applied to Gabriel by the people of the book” (Lane, 2854; see PEOPLE OF THE BOOK). Some Western scholars presumed that the idea of the nāmūs as an angelic being who came to Moses and other prophets had a Christian origin: in their purview, this interpretation resulted from a confusion of the terms nomos and prophetēs, which were used in conjunction in eastern Christian liturgical formulas (Baumstark, Das Problem, 503-6), and which were also closely related to one another in the Gnostic literature of Palestinian origin (Andrae, Der Ursprung, 204). The development of the meaning described above, however, makes such speculations superfluous. In later Muslim philosophical literature, the term al-nāmūs is used with the meaning of “the divine law” (Plessner, Nāmūs, 954-5; see LAW AND THE QURʾĀN).

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Narratives

Stories of individuals and communities of the past, of varying length, many of which appear in numerous renditions throughout the Qurʾānic text, but are found predominantly in the Meccan sūras of the Qurʾān (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QURʾĀN). Although the Qurʾān does relate the tales of prophets (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD) and other notable persons, tales that presumably were already familiar to the first auditors of the Qurʾān (see ORALITY AND WRITING IN ARABIA; SOUTH ARABIA, RELIGION IN PRE-ISLAMIC), the stories that are characterized as “narratives” contain certain requisite structural features (Q 21, Sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ), takes its name — “The
Prophets” — from the fact that it is comprised of tales of various prophets, many of which fall within the parameters of this literary genre; see FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR’ĀN. The proportion of the narratives in the Qur’ān is very large: 1453 verses (Sherif, Guide, 46), or about a quarter of their total number (ca. 6000; Abū ‘Amr al-Dāní, in Suyūtī, Itqān, i, 232). They consist of accounts concerning prophets or so-called prophets, messengers (25 of them fall into these two categories; Suyūtī, Itqān, chap. 69, iii, 67; see MESSENGER), sages, legends in the Qur’ān; history and the Qur’ān). Before discussing the narratives themselves, an overview of the Arabic terminology for “narratives,” as well as an outline of the Qur’ānic passages that are termed as such, is in order.

The semantic field of narratives in the Qur’ān
The following list is an overview of the most important Arabic words used within the semantic field of “narratives” in its broadest sense: qīṣa or qāṣaṣ (story, narrative); sīra (lit. “way of acting,” it is also used for “battles,” “story,” or “biography”; see SĪRA AND THE QUR’ĀN); ḥadīṣ (denotes primarily a saying or an action of an account of the Prophet, and, secondarily, of his Companions [see COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET], but also means “narrative,” “speech,” etc.; see ḤADĪTH AND THE QUR’ĀN); ḥikāya (the verb from which it derives means “to relate,” thus, “narrative,” “story”); sawar (literary entertainment, mostly at night); ḥuwarqa (incredible tale, legend); ʾustūra (history without foundation, legend; in present usage, sometimes also myth); risāya (the verb means to recite, transmit a story, a poem; thus, a transmission or version; nowadays, a novel); nāḍira (short, witty, subtle and amusing anecdote); khabar (information, statement, narrative, piece of history); mathal (parable); maqāma (appears in the 4th/11th cent.; assembly, Fr. “séance”; for further discussion of these terms, see Abdel-Meguid, Survey).

Qīṣa does not appear in the Qur’ān. Qāṣaṣ, which lends itself to the name of a sūra (q 28, Sūrat al-Qāṣaṣ, “The Story”), is used with a sense relevant to the present discussion four times (three of which contain permutations of the corresponding verb): at q 3:62, “This is the true story” (concerning Jesus [q.v.]; q 7:176, “So relate the story” (order given to Muhammad; this “story” is glossed as both “the Qur’ān” [Muqātil, Tafsīr, ii, 75] and “the recitation” [Dāmahānī, Wujūh, ii, 159]; see RECITATION OF THE QUR’ĀN); q 12:3: “We will relate to you the fairest of stories” (i.e., the tale of Joseph [q.v.]; here, Qatāda (d. 118/736) notes that “qāṣaṣ” means: “From the past books [min al-kutub al-mādiyya] and the ancient decrees of God about the nations [wa umār Allāh al-sāliḥa fi l-umam]”; Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, ed. Shākir, xv, 551-2, no. 18772; Ibn Abī l-Zamanīn, Tafsīr, ii, 315); q 28:25. The verb qāṣaṣ (to tell a story, to relate; see above) is attested, among other places, at q 11:100: “the cities whose tidings (anbā’) we relate (naqāṣṣa) to you [see city; PUNISHMENT STORIES]”; q 11:120: “We relate to you tidings (anbā’) of the messengers”; q 18:13 (where it is used with nāba’); q 20:99 (with anbā’); q 40:78; q 4:164; q 7:7. It is used in the third person singular imperfect at q 6:57 (subject: God himself) and at q 27:76 (subject: the Qur’ān). In q 16:118, the verb is in the perfect, and the subject is God (here, Blachère offers the following translation: “ce que Nous t’avons énuméré”).

Ḥadīṣ, pl. ḥaḍāthīn, also occurs in the Qur’ān with the meanings of talk, saying, discourse, story, tale (q 31:6; 12:6; 23:44, etc.; Hirschberg, “Gottes-Schriften,”
79-80; Horovitz, ku, 7). Usṭūra is mentioned 9 times, but only in the plural (asāṭīr), and always in the construct asāṭir al-nawwālīn (q 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:3; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13), usually translated as “tales/fairy tales of the ancients” (see generations). But if we consider q 25:3, where the opponents of Muhammad (see opposition to Muhammad) say “asāṭir of the ancients that he has written down, so that they are recited to him at dawn and in the evening,” the word could be also understood as “writings” or “scriptures” (see book). Probably derived from Syriac (see syriac and the Qur'ān; foreign vocabulary), it is found also in the Sabean stū (lit. inscription). The Qur’ān uses also the verb satara in the meaning of “to write” (cf. q 17:58; 33:6), as did the ancient poets (Nöldeke, q 69:1; 15:7; Horovitz, ku; 69:70; Hebbo, Fremdwörter, 30-1; see poets and poetry). Al-Naṣrābī al-Ḥārīṣ (see informants), who was in close contact with the Christians of al-Ḥira (see Christians and Christianity), is reported to have said: “Muhammad cannot tell a better story than I and his talk is only of old fables which he has copied as I have” (Ibn ʿIshāq, Sūra, 235, Eng. trans. Ibn ʿIshāq-Guillaume, 162). Ḥabar (pl. akhvār) occurs 3 times in the Qur’ān with the meaning of “news, information, tidings of” (q 27:7; 28:29; 99:4; 47:31; 99:4).

Although not one of the more common Arabic words for “narratives,” to this list we should also add nabaʾ (pl. anbāʾ; story, information, or tidings, and which appears in q 5:27; 6:34; 7:175; 9:70; 10:71; 14:9; 26:69; 27:22; 28:3; 38:21; 64:5; 68:2, etc.).

Distribution of the narratives in the Qur’ān

A single story is the focus of some sūras: q 105 (“The Elephant,” which alludes to the story of Abraha [q.v.]; for a discussion of this sūra, see Neuwirth, Studien, 36, 234; Marshall, God, 40-2; Blachère, no. 41. For all the references to Blachère below, note that Blachère, nos. 1-48 correspond to the first Meccan period, 49-70 to the second, 71-92 to the third, and 93-116 to the Medinan; see chronology and the Qur’ān;); q 71 (“Noah”; Blachère, no. 53; Marshall, God, 90-3), in which there is an “arabization” of the pantheon of the opponents of Noah (q.v.): “Do not leave your gods, and do not leave Wadd or Suwāʾ…” (q 71:23; Paret, Geschichtsquellen, 36-7; Fahd, Panthéon, 132-4, 154-6, 182-97, on the “five Noachic idols”; see idols and images; idolatry and idolaters; polytheism and atheism); q 12 (“Joseph”; Blachère, no. 79), the longest narrative of the Qur’ān (see de Prémare, Joseph et Muhammad), but this, contrary to q 105 and 71, ends with peroration (Horovitz, ku, 1); q 28 (“The Story”; Blachère, no. 81)tells of Moses (q.v.), Aaron (q.v.) and Háman (q.v.; q 28:2-46, adding an account on Korah (q.v.; q 28:76-82; cf. q 40:24; 29:39; Abbās, Qisas, 416-9), probably because it was omitted in the preceding section on Moses (Bell, Commentary, ii, 53), which reads like a summary of Numbers 16. Some exegetes see a connection in the ordering and the themes of q 26:18-9 and q 27:7 (both on Moses), and q 28:2-46, viewing this latter section as a commentary on the two earlier passages (Suyūṭī, Tantawi, 168).

Some narrative pieces, which, although in the redaction of the Qur’ān we possess (see collection of the Qur’ān; codices of the Qur’ān), have been integrated into sūras containing non-narrative materials, can be isolated from their position in the sūra and appear to be originally independent units: q 89:6-1-(Blachère no. 42; Marshall, God, 46-7), which discusses ʿĀd (q.v.), Iram (q.v.) of the pillars, Thamūd (q.v.) and Pharaoh (q.v.; on Iram see Horovitz, ku, 89-96). This segment has the same formulaic introduction as q 105 (“Have you not seen how your lord did with…”). In
q 38:67-88 (Blachère, no. 61), on Adam (see ADAM AND EVE), the angels (see ANGEL) and Iblîs (q.v.), the unity of the passage can be seen not only from the common subject, but from the rhymes in ʾim, ʾin, ʾin, ʾim (Nöldeke, ʾaQ. i, 131; see RHYMED PROSE), and from introductory and conclusive formulas that both contain the word “tiding” (nabāʾ). q 14:1-21 (“Abraham”; Blachère, no. 78) can be isolated as a unity, although its limits are not as clear as in the preceding examples. The same thing could be said of q 40:23-56 (Blachère, no. 80), on the incredulity of Pharaoh, because the following passage, q 40:57-85, with rhyme in ʾin and ʾin, has no relation to it (Nöldeke, ʾaQ. i, 153; Horovitz, kt. 2).

In addition to these whole or partly closed narrative pieces we find other passages that are composed entirely of several stories, or which are built around a core of sagas that are composed entirely of several examples. The same thing could be said of q 40:23-56 (Blachère, no. 80), on the incredulity of Pharaoh, because the following passage, q 40:57-85, with rhyme in ʾin and ʾin, has no relation to it (Nöldeke, ʾaQ. i, 153; Horovitz, kt. 2).

In q 19 (“Mary”; Blachère, no. 60), the two parts: q 19:2-74 (composed only of stories) and q 19:75-98, were probably not together initially, as seen from the difference in the rhyme scheme. In the narrative part (q 19:2-63), we find some of the earliest Qurʾānic mentions of New Testament figures: Mary (q.v.; in q 19:28, Mary is called “the sister of Aaron”; later, at q 3:35 and 66:12, she is likewise considered the daughter of Ḳūrān [q.v.; Horovitz, Jewish proper names, 10], Zechariah (q.v.), John the Baptist (q.v.) and Jesus (q 19:2-40; Nöldeke, ʾaQ. i, 130), followed by accounts of Abraham (q 19:41-50), Moses, Ishmael (q.v.) and Idris (q.v.; q 19:51-8). q 38 (“Sâd,” also named “The Son of David”); Ibn al-Jawzī, Zâd, vii, 3; Kandil, Surennamen, 51; Blachère, no. 61), one of whose narrative passages is discussed above, is constructed similarly: introduction (q 38:1-11); stories: q 38:12-6 (destroyed nations), q 38:17-28
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(David [q.v.], Q 38:29-40; Solomon [q.v.], Q 38:41-4; Job [q.v.], Q 38:45-9 (mention of Abraham, Isaac [q.v.], Jacob [q.v.; in five qur'anic verses he is seen as the son of Abraham, and not his grand-son; cf. Q 21:72; 29:27; 6:84]). Ishmael, Elisha [q.v.], Dhū l-Killâ [q.v.]; and, finally, a conclusion on the believers and unbelievers in the afterlife (Q 38:30-66; Horovitz, KH, 2-3; for the rest of the sûra [Q 36:67-88], see above).

The construction of Q 18 ("The Cave" or "People of the Cave": Blachère, no. 70) does not use the same mode of closure: introduction (Q 18:1-8), stories (Q 18:9-98), conclusion on the fate of the unbelievers and believers (Q 18:99-110). The stories are of: the Seven Sleepers (Q 18:9-26; see MEN OF THE CAVE), the master of the garden (Q 18:32-44; cf. Isaiah 5, the Song of the Vineyard; Luke 12:16-21; Hirschfeld, New researches, 87-8; Sabbagh, Métaphore, 217-18, §35, 265; Lohmann, Gleichniserden, 88-96; cf. Q 68:17-33, "the masters of the garden"; Andréac, Mohammed, sein Leben, 70; id., Mahomet, 85 [Fr. trans.]; 'Abbâs, Q35a, 419-23). Moses and the servant of God (Q 18:60-82), Dhū l-Qarnayn (lit. "the possessor of the two horns"); Q 18:83-98, with an evocation of the tale of Gog and Magog [q.v.]; Horovitz, KH, 130; see ALEXANDER). As we see here, Q 18:27-31 and Q 18:45-50 interrupt the set of stories. Q 27 ("The Ant," or the sûra of Solomon; Blachère, no. 69; Suyúṭī, Itqān, chap. 17, 1, 194; Kandil, Sûrennämen, 51) also varies from the pattern. After the introduction (Q 27:1-6) we do find narrative sections: Moses (Q 27:7-14). David, Solomon, the hoopoe (see ANIMAL LIFE), the Queen of Sheba (Q 27:15-44; Lassner, Demonizing; Gilliot, La reine de Saba', légende ou réalité?; Norris, Elements, 236-7; see bilqîs), Thamûd (Q 27:45-53), Lot (Q 27:54-8). But the rest of the sûra (Q 27:59-93) cannot be seen as the conclusion of the preceding stories; it is too long for that, and it has a hymnic, a polemical (see POLEMIC AND POLEMICAL LANGUAGE) and an eschatological content.

On the other hand, the major part of Q 11 ("Hūd"); Blachère, no. 77; Marshall, God, 97-105) deals with stories (Q 11:25-100), and is followed by eschatological reflections related to them (Q 11:101-17). The introduction (Q 11:1-24), however, appears not to have a close internal relationship to these two parts. The narrative sections are: Noah (Q 11:25-49), Hūd (Q 11:50-60), }.{Sālih (Q 11:61-8), Abraham (Q 11:69-83), Shu‘ayb (q.v.; Wansbrough, QS, 21-5, 28-9) and the Midianites (Q 11:84-95; see MIDIAN) and Moses (Q 11:96-8). Q 29 (Blachère, no. 89) has various accounts: on Noah (Q 29:14-5), Abraham and Lot (Q 29:16-35), Midian, Shu‘ayb, Ād, Thamûd, Korah and Pharaoh, Hāmān and Moses (Q 29:36-40; Horovitz, KH, 23). In Q 7 (Sūrat al-ṭārîf, "The Battlements"; Blachère, no. 89; Marshall, God, 106-14; see PEOPLE OF THE HEIGHTS) the narrative sections are predominant: Iblîs, Adam and his wife (Q 7:11-25; Hirschberg, Stuﬁ enfall, 33-6), Noah, Hūd, Sālih, Lot and Shu‘ayb, and the destroyed cities (Q 7:39-102), Moses, the magicians (see MAGIC) and the five scourges of Egypt (q.v.; Q 7:133), etc. (Q 7:103-62), the transgressors of the Sabbath (q.v.) transformed into monkeys (Q 7:163-8; Speyer, Erzählungen, 313-4, 340-1; see JEWS AND JUDAISM), reminder of the signs (q.v.) of God towards humankind (Q 7:160-74), reminder of the tidings (naba‘) of God (Q 7:175-6); but neither the long interruption in the text (Q 7:26-58), nor the end of this sûra (Q 7:177-206) are in an inner relation with these narratives. And in the introduction, we find only a brief allusion to them, in Q 7:4: "How many a city we have destroyed" (see Q 7:1-10; cf. Suyúṭī, Tanásug, 87, in which the relation between Q 6:6, "how we destroyed before them many a generation," and the beginning of Q 7
is stressed; see Horovitz, *ktv*, 3). Q 2 (Blachère, no. 93) also contains several stories or legends: Adam (Q 2:30-9); Moses (Q 2:49-70; Marshall, *God*, 126-7; the name of the sūra “The Cow” is taken from Q 2:68 f.; cf. Numbers 1-10; Saul (q.v.), David (q.v) and Goliath (q.v); Q 2:243-52; Horovitz, *ktv*, 106, 123; Jād al-Mawlā, *Qisas*, 174-89).

Even if narrative sections do not comprise the major part of the entire text of other sūras, they do constitute an important part of some: Q 51:24-46 (on Abraham and his guests, Moses and Pharaoh, Ḥād, Thamūd and Noah; Blachère, no. 49; Marshall, *God*, 48-9); Q 37 (Blachère, no. 52); on Noah (Q 37:75-80), Abraham and Isaac (Q 37:83-113), Moses and Aaron (Q 37:114-22), Elijah (Q 37:123-30), Lot (Q 37:133-8), Jonah (q.v; Q 37:139-48); Q 44 (Blachère, no. 55); on Pharaoh (Q 44:17-33); Q 21 (“The Prophets”; Blachère, no. 67); on Moses and Abraham (Q 21:48-73), Lot, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Jonah, Zechariah, John, with mention of Ishmael, Idrīs, Dhū l-Kifl, and allusion, without their names, to Mary and Jesus (Q 44:74-91; Horovitz, *ktv*, 3); Q 36 (Blachère, no. 62), the parable/story of the inhabitants of the ungodly city who did not listen to the words of the three apostles (Q 36:13-29; often related to tales about disciples of Jesus at Antioch [see *Apostle*]; Tabart, *Tafsīr*, i, 789-93; id., *History*, iv, 167-70; Mas ūddī, *Marūn/Prairies*, §127-8, 722; in particular, the figure of Habib the Carpenter, perhaps to be identified with Agabus, is often connected to this story; Vajda, Habib al-Nadjīdār; Grimme, *Mohammed*, ii, 97; Ahrens, *Mohammed*, 143-4; Bell, *Commentary*, ii, 138-9; Horovitz, *ktv*, 19-20; Fück, Zum Problem, 74; Blachère, 250, n. 12: “Parabole des citadins impies”; Norris, Elements, 255-6; Q 34:10-9 (“Sheba”; Blachère, no. 87), on David, Solomon and al-'Arīm (q.v; the last named possibly refers to the breaching of the dam of Mārib; Bell, *Commentary*, ii, 116); Q 6:74-83, on Abraham and his father Āzar (q.v; Horovitz, *ktv*, 85-6; Blachère, no. 91); Q 5 (“The Table”; Blachère, no. 116), on the two sons of Adam (Q 5:27-32; Āin and Abel [q.v.] are not named; cf. Gen 4:16), Jesus and the “table” (q.v; mā‘īda, probably an Ethiopic derivative; Jeffery, *Fox vocab.*, 255-6), etc. (Q 5:110-6, the “table” from which the sūra takes its name is often understood as a reference to the Eucharist; Norris, *Elements*, 255).

In other sūras the narrative sections are reduced to a few verses. This is the case in Q 69:4-12 (Blachère, no. 24), which references Thamūd, Ḥād, Pharaoh, the subverted cities (al-mu'tafikāt), and the ark (q.v; of Noah). Q 17 (“The Night Journey,” also called “The Sons of Israel”; Blachère, no. 74; see *ascension*) mentions Adam, the angels and Iblīs (Q 17:61-5), Moses and Pharaoh (Q 17:101-4). Some sūras have only allusive verses: Q 85 (Blachère, no. 43), to “the People of the Ditch” (q.v; aḥāb al-mu'tahādūd, Q 85:1-7, this could be an allusion to the persecution of the Christians of Najrān [q.v.] by the Jew Dhū Nuwās; Muqātīl, *Tafsīr*, iv, 647-8; this interpretation, and others, are seen in: Tabart, *Tafsīr*, xxx, ed. ‘Ali, 131-5; Bell, *Commentary*, ii, 517-8; Horovitz, *ktv*, 92-3), Pharaoh and Thamūd (Q 85:17-20; Marshall, *God*, 44-5); Q 53:50-4 (Blachère, no. 30; Marshall, *God*, 47), to Ḥād, Thamūd, Noah, the subverted city (al-mu'tafikāt); Q 44:37 (Blachère, no. 55), to the people of ‘Utbah (q.v.; Horovitz, *ktv*, 102-3; for the longer narrative section of this sūra, see above). Finally, it should be noted here that the pericope of Sūra Luqmān (Q 31; see *Luqmān*) which deals with that legendary hero (Q 31:12-19; Blachère no. 84) pertains more to the genre of wisdom-literature than to that of narratives (Horovitz, *ktv*, 132-6).
Still other verses contain a mere enumeration: Noah, the People of the Well/Ditch (asḥāb al-rass, see PEOPLE OF THE DITCH), Thamūd, Ād, Pharaoh, Lot, the People of the Thicket and the people of Tubba’ (q. 50:12-4; Blachère, no. 56); Noah, Ād, Pharaoh (in q. 38:12 Pharaoh is termed “he of the tent-peg” [see TENTS AND TENT PEGS]; cf. q. 89:10; Muqtil [Tafsīr, iii, 638] describes some form of punishment supposedly practiced by him; Bell [Commentary, ii, 537] suggests boundary-posts or a form of punishment; Speyer [Erzählungen, 283] sees it in an allusion to the construction of the Tower of Babel attributed to Nimrod [q.v.]; Horovitz [kt, 130] thinks this eponym refers to constructions undertaken during his reign; see q. 28:38; Norris, Elements, 249); Thamūd and Lot (q. 38:12-4; Blachère, no. 42; see the discussion of the longer narrative section of this sūra above); the destruction of Ād, Thamūd, the People of the Ditch, and other generations (q. 25:38; Blachère, no. 68); the people of Noah, of Abraham, of Lot, of Midian (Horovitz, kt, 138) and Moses, Ād and Thamūd (q. 22:42-5; Blachère, no. 109; Marshall, God, 119-24); Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Elijah, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, Lot (q. 6:83-77; Blachère, no. 91); see also q. 4:163-5 (Blachère, no. 102); q. 9:70 (Blachère, no. 115). The Qur’ān’s transition from long narrative passages to such mere enumerations of narrative motifs is represented by passages which are very formulaic and concise, elliptical versions of stories, such as q. 21:74-91 (see above; Horovitz, kt, 3).

The reader of the Qur’ān is struck by the fact that the narratives and particularly the punishment stories occupy less space in the Medinan sūras than in the Meccan (Horovitz, kt, 25-7). In the Medinan period only a few brief narratives or set phrases (e.g. q. 2:246-51, where Muhammad’s new situation as a military leader is mirrored in the lives of Saul and David; Marshall, God, 162; q. 5:20-6, etc.), often in reference to punishment stories, “constitute the rather meagre narrative clothing of the believer-unbeliever relationship in Medina” (Marshall, God, 161). One explanation for why there is this difference in the pre- and post-emigration (ḥijra, see EMIGRATION) material could be the changed religious situation; yet another may be that Muhammad’s authority was better accepted in Medina (Marshall, God, 163), and that he therefore had to turn his attention to the legal matters involved in organizing a city: i.e. visions figured more prominently in the first stage of his mission, whereas practical matters absorbed much of the later part.

Categorization of the narratives

In a well known tradition, Muhammad was taught to recite the Qur’ān according to seven ʿahruf (pl. of ʿahrif, edge, letter, word, aspect, etc.; ʿTabari, Tafsīr, ed. Shākir, i, 43, no. 40; 50, no. 47; id., Commentary, i, 21 [Eng. trans.]; see READINGS OF THE QUR’ĀN). This has been most commonly interpreted as dialects (q.v.), readings, etc. But, there are other understandings of “ḥarif,” which seem to be a summary of the essential genres contained in the Qur’ān: “The Qur’ān was sent down according to seven ʿahruf: command and prohibition (see COMMANDMENTS; FORBIDDEN), encouragement of good and discouragement of evil (see GOOD AND EVIL), dialectic [a better rendition of jadal is controversy; see DEBATE AND DISPUTATION], narrative, and parable (qaṣas wa-mathal)” (ʿTabari, Tafsīr, i, 58-70; id., Commentary, i, 29; Gilliot, Les sept “lectures,” 20-1; in other versions, “narrative” [qaṣas] is replaced by “ambiguous” [mutashābih]; see AMBIGUOUS). Yet other interpretations understand the seven
\textit{harfs to be}: “[... ] Permitted and prohibited, command and prohibition, relation (\textit{khabar}) of what was before them and will be after them, the exposition of parables” (\textit{Abū ’Ubayd}, \textit{Gharīb al-hadīth}, iii, 160). This seems to be a primitive attempt to classify the essential genres contained in the Qur’ān. In some versions, where “narrative” is replaced by “ambiguous,” the question arises as to whether or not the narratives were “ambiguous” (\textit{Suyūṭī} \textit[Iqān}, chap. 43, iii, 4] takes Qur’ānic legal passages \textit{(see LAW AND THE QUR’ĀN)}, as well as “promise and threat,” or eschatological discussions, to be “well established,” \textit{muḥkam}; narratives and parables are termed “ambiguous,” \textit{mutashābih}; \textit{Abd Rabbbī} \textit{Bukāhīt}, 57) writes that narratives do not pertain to \textit{mutashābih}, but he does not provide any further explanation), that is, in need of an interpretation. In this context the contrasting pair \textit{muḥkam}/\textit{mutashābih} (lit. clear/ambiguous) refers to the difference between legal proscriptions and prescriptions that must be obeyed, and the narrative materials, which are a matter of warning \textit{(see WARNER)} and inquiry, or “the object of belief but not of conduct” (\textit{Abū ’Ubayd}, \textit{Nāṣīḥ}, 3-4, according to \textit{Ibn Ṭabā fís}; \textit{Wansbrough}, q5, 150-1). Be that as it may, the narratives appeared very early as one of the major components of the Qur’ān.

As for a classification of the narrative materials, we can distinguish between the stories of the prophets and messengers, the punishment stories (\textit{Watt-Bell, Introduction}, 127-35; \textit{Welch, Formulaic features of the punishment-stories}), which include large portions of the preceding category, and the other stories \textit{(see above under Distribution of the narratives in the Qur’ān)}.

\textbf{Formulaic features in the narratives}

It is well known that a wide variety of formulaic elements occur throughout the Qur’ān \textit{(see LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN; GRAMMAR AND THE QUR’ĀN)}. This is in keeping with its basically oral nature \textit{(see ORALITY)}, but perhaps is also a consequence of its reshaping. Such formulaic elements include introductory statements, refrains \textit{(e.g. “O which of your lord’s bounties will the two of you deny?” in Q 55; see EXHORTATIONS)}, and repeated rhyme phrases, etc. (\textit{Nöldeke, adg}, i, 29-30; \textit{Wansbrough}, q8, 25-7; \textit{Crapon de Crapon}, \textit{Coran}, 215 f.; \textit{Neuwirth, Studien}, 175-6). The accounts of the Qur’ān also contain formulaic features, which are, in the words of \textit{Welch} \textit{(Formulaic features, 77)}, “repeated elements that convey added force to passages that are already powerful in their warnings” to those who reject the supposed “messengers” of God.

The great deeds of God in history, in creation \textit{(q.v.)} and in the universe \textit{(see COSMOLOGY)} are his signs (\textit{āyāt}). This is the reason why we find so many transitions in the Qur’ān from descriptions of creation to narrative sections, as is the case in the Psalms (Ps 68, 105, 106, etc.), with which the Qur’ān shares so many features, stylistic forms, and themes in common (\textit{Paret, Geschichtsquellen}, 38; indeed, these similarities have led some scholars to speak of “Semitic” rhetorical structures; \textit{Meynet et al., Rhetorique sémitique}; \textit{Cuypers, Structures rhétoriques dans le Coran}, 109, 191-3; id., Structures rhétoriques des sourates 105 à 114, 192-3). This creation-narrative transition results in a peculiar type of ellipsis, in which short words \textit{(like idh [usually translated as “when”] and wa-idh [“and when”]) introduce something new in the development of the text, indicating that “something happened/will happen.” \textit{Wa-idh} is the most frequent sign of this type of transition: Q 2:30, 34; 18:16, 50, 60; etc. Almost always this formula introduces legends or legendary features (\textit{Nöldeke, Neue Beiträge}, 17; \textit{Horovitz, kv}, 4). \textit{Idh} occurs
only rarely in this function: Q 12:4; 27:7. These words are followed by the perfect, often of verbs expressing a mode of speaking (gāla, nādā), a fact which shows that, for the Qur’ān, it is not so much the events that are important, as the rendering of the words (Horovitz, ibid.; see speech).

The following are examples of other transitions:

One formula appears twice in the early period: “Have you not seen how your lord did with…” (Q 105:1; 19:6; also in Q 25:45, but here it is related to a natural phenomenon). A shorter (Medinan) formula: “Have you not regarded” (a-lam tara ilā, Q 2:243, 246, 258) is used in narrative sections, whereas a slight variation (a-lam tara anna) is frequent in hymnic descriptions (Horovitz, KT; 4:5).

The interrogative expression, “Have you received the story…” (Hal atāka hadīth, Q 85:17; 20:9; 51:24; 79:15; also in other contexts, such as the eschatological one of Q 88:1) is close to “Are there not come to you the tidings…” (a-lam ya’tikam naba’, Q 64:5; 14:9). A recurrent formula in the punishment stories is: “[So and So] cried lies” (kadidhabat, Q 91:11; 60:4; 54:9, 18:23, 33; 26:105, 123, 141, 160; 38:12; 40:5; 50:12; see 1.1).

Other formulas have as a common feature God speaking in the first person plural, as “Surely we have sent” (laqad arsalnā), “We have sent” (inā arsalnā), or “when we sent” (idh arsalnā, cf. e.g. Q 73:15; 71:1; 36:14; 23:23; 27:45; 2:151 [”as also we have sent,” kamā arsalnā]), “we gave” (wa-laqad ataynā) or “we gave him” (atayabhā), with an object (science, judgment [q.v.], wisdom, etc.; cf. Q 21:48, 51, 74, 79; 27:15; 31:12; 34:10); “we will recite to you something of the tidings of…” (nattā ‘aleyka min naba’, Q 28:3). See above for “we relate” (naqassā; Horovitz, KT; 5).

“To recite” (talā) and “to inform” (nabha’sa, see above under naba’), however, are used mostly in the imperative: Q 26:69; 10:71; 7:175; 5:27. This is also the case for “to mention/remember” (dhakara): “and mention in the book” (Q 19:16, 41, 51, 54, 56); “and remember our servant” (Q 38:17, 41, 45); “and make mention of/remember” (Q 38:48; 46:21; Horovitz, ibid.). Another imperative is “Propose to them the parable/example of…” (wa-dīb labum mathalan, Q 18:32; 36:13; cf. 16:112; 66:10, in which the subject is God, but neither of which is an imperative; Horovitz, ibid.). For the formulas particular to the punishment stories, see Horovitz, KT; 6 and Welch, Formulaic features.

It should be noted also that special formulas occur at the ends of legends in some sûras: “Now we have made the Qur’ān easy for remembrance” (wa-laqad yassarnā l-qur’āna lil-dhikri); “Is there any who will remember” (fa-hal min madhakkir, Q 54:17; cf. Q 54:22, 32, 40; or only with the end of this formula, Q 54:31); “Surely in that is a sign, yet most of them are not believers” (Q 26:8, 67, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174, 190). These loci belong to the broader genre of “sign-passages,” an expression of R. Bell (Watt-Bell, Introduction, 123-7; Wansbrough, QS, 5-6).

Main characteristics of the narratives, their literary and theological effect

Most of these narratives present mythical characters of stereotyped figures. Their repetition throughout the Qur’ān, above all in the Meccan sûras, in long, middle-sized and short sections, or allusive passages, had and still has an effect on the listener or reader. Their binary oppositional form, peculiar to the myths, puts the listener/reader in a state of ethical or theological decision or choice concerning his or her own status (Gilliot, De l’impossible censure du récit légendaire; see ethics...
AND THE QUR’ĀN; THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). Some of these binary oppositions are: good vs. evil; staying on the right path (ḥuda) vs. straying from it (dalāl, see ERROR; astray); believers vs. unbelievers; submission (islām) to God vs. “rebellion” (q.v.; see also DISOBEDIENCE; CORRUPTION); hero vs. anti-hero; “messenger” or “prophet” (or king; see KINGS AND RULERS) vs. Pharaoh or “tyrant” (Gilliott, Récit, mythe et histoire, 280-3; see OPPRESSION; POLITICS AND THE QUR’ĀN); good cities vs. subverted or destroyed cities (see PAIRS AND PAIRING).

Muslim exegetes, with the help of extra-qur’ānic traditions, use these passages to establish a real typology of submission to God and rebellion against him, adding many other narratives or details, so that the allusive text of the Qur’ān might be “completed” (Gilliott, Mythe, récit, histoire du salut, 241), and, above all, so that these narratives — particularly the accounts about the prophets and messengers — may appear as a preparatio prophetica, i.e. a preparation and anticipation of the character and deeds of the prophet Muḥammad (Gilliott, Récit, mythe et histoire, 278-9). It is therefore no wonder, given the importance of the narratives in the Qur’ān, that the tales/stories of the prophets became a genre in its own right in Arabic Islamic literature, which had its beginnings towards the end of the first/sixth century (Khoury, Légendes prophétiques). These traditions, like those contained in the qur’ānic commentaries (there is much overlap between the accounts found in these two literary genres), are borrowed from the Jewish, Christian, Arabic, Hellenistic, Persian, etc., lore of the Middle East, but they are chosen, reinterpreted and adapted according to the Weltanschauung of Muḥammad, the Qur’ān and Islam (q.v.).

But the Qur’ān itself, whose narrative passages evince a familiarity with the aforementioned lore of the Middle East (leading some to the conclusion that Muḥammad, his informants and Companions probably, in several cases, had Aramaic books and oral traditions at their disposal; Luxenberg, Die syro-aramäische Lesart, passim) already manifests this same process. These accounts, however, most of which are not long (that of q 12, on Joseph, is the longest one), have been established according to a new situation, a new representation of God, the universe, creation, prophets, and humankind: “In speaking of the Biblical prophets, Muḥammad more than once fashioned his narrative on the contemporary situation in Mekka and Yathrib” (Rezvan, Qur’ān, 41b, with examples). The characters presented in these stories are anticipations of Muḥammad, particularly the character of Abraham, who appears as a “Muḥammadan Abraham” or “a biblical Muḥammad” (Fück, Zum Problem, 77, probably referring to Snouck Hurgronje, Het Mekkaansche Feest, 23-30 [Fr. trans. in id., Selected works, 186-93]; C.H. Snouck Hurgronje, La légende qorânique d’Abraham). One could even say that in the narratives on the prophets, Muḥammad “substitutes his person to that of the ancient prophets” (Ahrens, Muhammed, 139; Nöldeke, q 12, 119-20). With the psychological and theological evolution of Muḥammad, the individuality of the different messengers becomes more and more indistinct, and the similarities with the Arabian prophet greater (see q 6:84-90, with a mere list: Isaac, Jacob, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Noah, David, Solomon, Zechariah, John, Jesus, Elijah, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, Lot, but this time without the “Arab prophets,” Hūd, Šālāb, Shu’ayb; Blachère, no. 91). At the same time, their adversaries express the peculiarities of the contemporary opponents of Muḥammad (R. Paret, Geschichtsquelle, 36). This treatment of the prophets in the Qur’ān has led at
at least one scholar to speak of the “mono-prophetism” of the Qurʾān and of Islam (A.-L. de Prémare, L’islam comme monoprophetésme), meaning that all the prophets are seen as Muhammad saw himself in his conception of prophecy and in his life (cf. the allegation that the Arabian prophet had been foretold in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures in Q 7:157; Wansbrough, QS, 63-5). This is the consequence of Muhammad’s claim of finality, or completion (Ger. Totaltätsanspruch; Beck, Monotheistische Religion, 68), with respect to the preceding religions. These prophet narratives can therefore be considered one of the most important vehicles of Qurʾānic and Islamic theology and ethics.

The narratives of the Qurʾān have, until the present day, continued to be very popular in Islam. Those on the prophets are especially so: they are presented in special books (even for children), together with the post-Qurʾānic traditions about the prophets. Even if a number of contemporary Muslim scholars try to “purify” (censure) the Islamic exegetical literature of such “Judaica” (Abū Shahaba, al-Isrāʿīliyyāt; Rabiʿ, al-Isrāʿīliyyāt fi Taḥfīz al-Ṭabarī), these “fairytale” continue to be prized as narrative entertainment (“the pleasure of the text”) and for the religious and ethical messages they convey. In fact, the passages described as narrative consist “not so much of narrative as of exempla” (Wansbrough, QS, 18), a remark which corresponds to the “fragmentary character of Muslim scripture” (ibid.; see Scripture and the Qurʾān).

Today, debate occasionally arises among Muslim scholars concerning the literary qualification of Qurʾānic narratives. All, or nearly all, are agreed upon the “inimitable” qualities of the Qurʾān, both in content and in style (Muṣṭafā, al-Jāzʿī: ʿAbd Rabbih, Baḥth, 141-90; see Inimitability). But some have insisted that the purpose of the narrative passages is not primarily “historical,” but, rather, that the Qurʾān utilized the “narrative art” to convey its theological, social and ethical message (see Contemporary Critical Practices and the Qurʾān: Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Early Modern and Contemporary). For instance, M.A. Khalaf Allāh (born in 1916) wrote a thesis on the Qurʾānic narratives, which he submitted in 1947 to the Fuʿād 1st University (now Cairo University), in Cairo. Under pressure from scholars of al-Azar, it was refused. But the text was reworked by its author and published as a book in 1951 (Khalaf Allāh, al-Fann al-qasasī; Jomier, Quelques positions). The book takes a psychological approach towards the narratives (see also Naqra, Ṣikāḥīyyat al-qisṣa), looking at the relations of Muhammad and other prophets with their societies (see Community and Society in the Qurʾān). It is also an apologetic work. Some suspected him (Kaḥīth, al-Qasas al-qurʾānī, 275-348, where even the symbolism is rejected; ʿAbd Rabbih, Baḥth, 215-61) of doubting, or bringing into question, the “historicity” of the Qurʾānic accounts. While the work of Khalaf Allāh would not be a locus of controversy in European or North American universities, the standard insights of form criticism remain unacceptable in most Muslim institutions of higher learning. To apply the term ‘myths’ to the Qurʾānic narratives, to speak of myths in the sense that historians of religion use the term in defining the generative and foundational elements of religion, is anathema in such institutions.

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in the Arabic language (q.v.; Q 12:2).Elaborating some general semiotic principles, Roman Jakobson (Language in relation) insists that all messages are composed of signs. The Qur’an has no problems with this idea and, indeed, over and over again, articulates a fundamental semiotics of its own: it does not have the sophistication of the complex theories offered by a C.S. Peirce (1839-1914; Collected papers) or an Umberto Eco (Theory of semiotics) but in scope and breadth it has every claim to being their equal: God proclaims, for example, that he will show humankind his signs (q.v.; lit. āyātān) on the furthest horizons as well as deep within themselves (Q 41:53). People, such as the prophet Joseph (q.v.; Yūsuf) and his brothers (see BROTHER AND BROTHERHOOD), can be signs for those who seek, or enquire after [the truth] (al-sā’ilān, Q 12:7). The very heavens (see HEAVEN AND SKY) and earth (q.v.) are alive with the signs of God:

Behold! In the creation (q.v.) of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day (see DAY AND NIGHT); in the sailing of the ships (q.v.) through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, thereby giving life to an earth that is dead (see AGRICULTURE AND VEGETATION); in the beasts of all kinds that he scatters through the earth (see ANIMAL LIFE); in the change of the winds (see AIR AND WIND), and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; — (Here) indeed are signs for a people that are wise (la-‘ayātin li-qawmin ya’qilān, Q 2:164; see also Q 3:190).

It is clear from this brief quotation that natural phenomena comprise a large portion of the divine signs and it is with these that this article will deal. According to the Qur’an, nature itself praises God (Q 24:41;

Nāsīkh wa-Mansūkh see ABBREVIATION

Nāṣr see IDOLS AND IMAGES

Nāṭik see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’ĀN; POLITICS AND THE QUR’ĀN

Nature as Signs

Creation, i.e. natural phenomena, as indications of God’s existence and power. In Islamic belief the Qur’an is God’s final message (risāla) conveyed by God’s last messenger (q.v.; rasūl) and Prophet (nabi, see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). Muhammad, to all humankind. Not only is it a final, yet primary, message but it is also a lucid and enlightening message, a Qur’an nubūn (Q 15:1; see NAMES OF THE QUR’ĀN) which distinguishes the good from the bad (qawāl fasil, Q 86:13), and which was revealed

The Empedoclean elements: The semiotic substratum

The pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles (d. ca. 433 B.C.E.) held that the phenomenal world derived from the four key elements of fire, air, water and earth which would combine in varying proportions to produce all that we see around us. While the Qur’an adheres to no such tidy theory, it is nonetheless clear that the four elements figure largely in a variety of forms and, importantly, denote or signify numerous salutary messages for the believers.

Fire

While fire is clearly a sign, reminder or memento (tadhkira) of God’s providence to humankind (cf. Q 56:73), being in A. Yusuf Ali’s words “an emblem of man’s earliest civilisation” and standing “as a symbol of physical comfort and convenience to man [see blessing; grace], of the source of spiritual light [q.v.], and also of the warning to Evil [see Good and evil] about its destruction” (Yusuf Ali, Holy Qur’an, 1492, n. 5255), there can be little doubt that, for the majority of Muslims, fire (al-nár), primarily represents — indeed is! — hellfire (see Hell and Hellfire; Reward and Punishment); and in harmony with his destined domain, Iblis (see Devil) himself was created from fire. The wicked and the unbelievers (kāfirūn, see Belief and Unbelief) are destined for hellfire where they will burn in appalling torment (see e.g. Q 40:70-2). Islamic eschatology, as Smith and Haddad (Islamic understanding) show, developed a vision of seven layers of al-nár with “each descending one an abode of increased torment.” Thus “the purgatorial fire (jahannam)” will be reserved for grievously sinful Muslims (see sin, major and minor) while “the blazing fire (sa’ār)” will be for the Sabians (q.v.). Fire in the Qur’an, then, in addition to being a gift (see Gift-giving), may also signal pain, torment and loss. The latter, perhaps, constitute its primary signification.

Importantly, however, fire in the Qur’an signifies presence, both divine and human (cf. Yusuf Ali, Holy Qur’an, 791, n. 2541). For the prophet Moses (q.v.; Mūsā) the burning bush was a sign of God’s presence and majesty (Q 20:10-12; see Sechina). Immediate acknowledgement of that sacred presence was required in the divine command that Moses should remove his shoes (Q 20:12; compare Exod 3:1-5). God’s voice “blazed forth” in the middle of nature itself, epitomized by that fire.

Finally, fire, paradoxically, signifies both danger and security in the Qur’an: danger, because the giant-king Nimrod (q.v.) attempts to burn the prophet Abraham (q.v.; Ibrāhīm) to death in a fire (cf. Q 21:68-9, compare Daniel 3:16-50); security, because God commands the fire to be cool and to become a place of peace and safety (salāman) for Abraham.

Air

The standard Arabic word for “air, atmosphere, wind, weather, climate,” is al-khaqāʾ (pl. ahkāyān, ahkā; cf. Gk. āēt). It is in its synonyms, however, and especially in words for wind like rīḥ (pl. rīyāḥ) which imply air, that we may best seek and survey this second Empedoclean element in the text of the Qur’an. Wind is a sign of divine providence and bounty and, as A. Yusuf Ali
puts it (Holy Qurʾān, 1663, n. 5864), the winds “are powerful factors in the government of the physical world... [and] point to the power and goodness of God” (see POWER AND IMPOTENCE; MERCY). The winds are both subject at all times to his will (cf. Q 42:33) and powerful implements of that will: they drive the rain-bearing clouds, reviving dead lands with a fruitful harvest in a manner akin to the forthcoming day of resurrection (q.v.; Q 7:57, see also Q 15:22; 30:48, 51). Q 77 is entitled Sūrat al-Mursalāt, which means literally “those who have been sent.” Watt (Companion, 289) notes that the oath (see OATHS) that comprises Q 77:1-5 (“By the emissaries [winds] in succession, by the raging hurricanes”) has been variously interpreted. It is possible that the first three verses are a reference to rain clouds while the fourth and fifth describe destroying winds. But he is aware that all the verses may be interpreted as referring to angels (see ANGEL). If the reference in Q 77:5 (“those who bring down a reminder”) is indeed to the broadcasting of a reminder or message (dhikr, see MEMORY) by the winds, then A. Yusuf Ali’s (ibid.) comment has some merit: “They literally carry sound, and therefore Messages, and metaphorically they are instrumental in making God’s Revelation accessible to hearers.” Fanciful or not, it is clear from the above that the air, in the form of the winds, serves as a major vehicle of God’s power and bounty, and implies a less fearsome aspect of his natural creation than the terrible nār.

Water
Just as God has absolute power over the winds (cf. Q 42:33) so too he is lord of water: if he wished he could make it immediately undrinkable by rendering it bitter or salty (ṣuğān) (Q 56:70; see also Q 11:7; see THRONES OF GOD). In a phrase that might variously have won the approval of both Empedocles and Darwin (although, of course, the Qurʾān does not teach evolution; see BIOLOGY AS THE CREATION AND STAGES OF LIFE), God states in the Qurʾān: “And we have made everything which lives out of water” (wa- jaʿa ʿanā min al-māʾ kulla shayʾ in ḥayyin, Q 21:30; see also Q 24:45). People themselves are essentially a creation by God from, or out of, water (Q 25:54).

Water, then, participates in a fundamental Qurʾānic semiotics of divine creation.

Abdel Haleem (Understanding) reminds us that there are more than sixty references to water in the Qurʾān, more than fifty to rivers and more than forty to sea. The sacred text itself insists that in the rain (lit.: “in what God sends down from the heavens in the way of water”) “are signs for a people who understand” (ayātīn ti-qawmīn yaʿqilānā, Q 2:164). The signs involve God’s power and providence and may be divided semiotically into three major images and three simple signs, which build on these images: all together they constitute a kind of unstated covenant (q.v.) between God and man. It is not formally articulated in the style, for example, that the covenant is formulated in Genesis 15:18-21 and 22:15-8 between Yahweh and Abraham, but in its own way it is just as powerful.

Firstly, terrestrial life itself (al-hayāt) is likened to the rain that has a transitory effect on the parched earth: new plant life springs up but ultimately the earth absorbs the rainwater leaving only a more lasting aridity (Q 18:45). In the following verse, the Qurʾān points or signifies its own moral: money and heirs will pass but the merit derived from good deeds (q.v.) will endure in the sight of God (Q 18:46).

Secondly, water is a symbol and sign of life itself, terrestrially, but also, by extension, a sign of the divine life of God who has power over it. The Qurʾān asks what would happen if, one day, someone awoke
to find that his water had vanished. Who could replace that flowing water? (q. 67:30; see also Yusuf Ali, *Holy Qur’an*, 1583, n. 5591). There are interesting analogies to be drawn here (but not pressed overmuch) with John 4:13-4, where we read of the encounter by the well of Jesus (q.v.) and the Samaritan woman to whom God promises water that will quench every thirst and flow continually.

Our third major *qur’ānic* image, particularly apposite in its linkage of divine message and water, is that of the sea (*al-baḥr*) transformed into ink (*mīḍādīm*) and its never being sufficient to write out the words of God [lit. kalimāt rabbī] even if replenished with another sea of ink like it (q. 18:109; see *word of God; writing and writing materials; instruments*).

Building particularly on the last image of water as transformed into the inky vehicle for the divine message, we may now note that the Qur’ān tells us that God provides two kinds of water for the benefit of humankind: sweet fresh water and salt sea water (see q. 25:53; 35:12; see *barzakh; barrier*). Water is a divine gift to man (cf. q. 23:18-9; 50:9-11; 80:25). This is our first “simple sign,” water as a sign of divine bounty.

Just as with water, humans are free to accept or reject the message of God, for there should classically be no compulsion in religion (cf. q. 10:99, see also lā ikrāha fī l-dīn; q. 2:256; see *tolerance and compulsion; religious pluralism and the Qur’ān*). In which case, pursuing our metaphorical [but, nonetheless *qur’ānic*; see *metaphor*] identification of water as an inky vehicle for the divine message, that water may “become” our second and third “simple signs”: it may be a sign of divine reward or a sign of divine punishment. The righteous will drink from the bounteous rivers (*ānḥār*) of paradise (q.v.; cf. q. 47:15); the wicked will drink boiling water (*ḥumīn*) in hell and resemble thirsty camels (see camel) whose thirst cannot be slaked (*al-khīm*) in their anguish (q. 56:54-5; see *food and drink*).

The covenant which may be deduced or extrapolated from all these watery images, real and metaphorical, is a very simple one; its spirit infuses the whole Qur’ān: God tells the believers that, if they show gratitude (see *gratitude and ingratitude*) for the multifarious examples of his terrestrial bounty (an example of which is water), by doing good deeds, then they will assuredly receive a full reward in paradise. Ingratitude or contempt for that same bounty equals disbelief (*kafr*) and will plunge the ingrate into the fires of hell.

**Earth**

The Qur’ān refers much more to “the earth” (*al-ard*), i.e. this terrestrial world, by comparison with the heavens or skies (*al-samāwāt*), than earth *qua* earth in the stark, elemental Empedoclean sense. Thus there are references to the creation of the heavens and the earth (q. 2:164; 3:190) and that creation is indeed one of the signs (*āyāt*) of God, a semiotic indicator to those with real insight of God’s majesty and power. The earth is full of God’s signs (q. 51:20) and God is the lord of the heavens and the earth (*al-samāʾ wa-l-ard*, q. 51:23). That spacious earth (q. 29:56; also q. 15:19), provisioned by God (q. 77:27) as a gift to man (see q. 78:8-16) to be managed by man (q. 67:15), will one day be changed out of all recognition, at the end of time on the last day (q. 14:48; see *last judgment; apocalypse*). On that terrible day of resurrection even the most hidden deeds (see *evil deeds*), which have been performed on the earth, will be made known (see q. 99:1-8; also Yusuf Ali, *Holy Qur’an*, 1771, n. 6238; see *record of human actions*).

Much closer to the Empedoclean sense of earth *qua* earth, as opposed to *the* earth, is
the Arabic word ṭīn meaning “clay” (q.v.) or “soil.” In that great primal act of dis-
obedience (q.v.), pride (q.v.) and rebellion (q.v.), Iblīs refuses to bow down before
God’s new creation, Adam (see ADAM AND EVE; BOWING AND PROSTRATION), as a
mark of respect, proclaiming: anā khayrun minhu: khalaqtānī min nārin wa-khalaqtahu min
ṭīnīn, “I am better than he is: You created me from fire and you created him from
clay” (Q 7:12; see also Q 2:34; 17:61; 38:71-6).

In addition to ṭīn, the Qur’ān also uses other Arabic words for the same event,
which are closer to the Empedoclean elemental sense than ard: “Behold! your lord
said to the angels: ‘I am about to create man, from sounding clay, from mud
molded into shape’” (min šalsālit min ḥama‘īn masnūnin, Q 15:28; see also Q 15:33).

Terrestrial phenomena: The semiotics of the flora and fauna of the Qur’ān

Moving now from the four classical, simple Empedoclean elements of antiquity, fire,
air, water and earth, out of which all natural phenomena were believed to be com-
pounded, we find that the Qur’ān is rich in the names of the more complex or com-
 pound natural structures or phenomena like trees (q.v.) and animals. These will be
adumbrated here: several signify God’s bounty to the earth, which he himself has
created.

The Qur’ān mentions and symbolically utilizes a variety of trees (see symbolic
imagery). Some like the mysterious lote or lotus tree, sidrat al-muntahā, which grows in
paradise, signify gardens (see GARDEN) and blessedness, especially when shorn of their
thorns (Q 53:14; see also Q 56:28). A. Yusuf Ali (Holy Qur’ān, 1444, n. 5093) succinctly
comments on the symbolism of this tree:

“The wild Lote is thorny; under cultivation it yields good fruit and shade, and is sym-
 bolic of heavenly bliss…. The symbolism here is that the farthest Lote-Tree marked
the bounds of heavenly knowledge as revealed to men (see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING),
besides which neither angels nor men could pass.”

The lote tree, however, has a terrestrial as well as a celestial dimension. Besides being
a sign of eternal life in paradise (see ETERNITY), it could also be a product and sign of
terrestrial destruction and decay (see PUNISHMENT STORIES). The collapse of
the Mā’rib dam in the sixth century C.E. in Saba‘ (immortalized in the Qur’ān under
the rubric of sayl al-ʿarīm, “the flood of the dam,” but recorded even before the revela-
tion of the Qur’ān in the epigraphic south Arabian inscriptions, see CIIH 541 in Conti
Rossini, Chrestomathia, 73, 1.43; see also CIIH 540 in ibid., 71, 1.6; see SHEBA;
al-ʿarīm; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR’ĀN) left in its wake, according to the
Qur’ān, only two gardens “Producing bitter fruit and tamarisks, and some few
(stunted) lote-trees” (Q 34:16; see GEO-
GRAPHY; EPIGRAPHY AND THE QUR’ĀN).

Other trees of paradise named in the Qur’ān are the tah; it is not entirely clear
what kind of trees these are here but they are mentioned after the thornless lote trees
(Q 56:20) and signify yet more examples of the joys and beauties of the plant life in the
paradisiacal garden. A. Yusuf Ali (Holy Qur’ān, 1487, n. 5238) hazards that they
may be a species of acacia tree and Ar-
berry (Koran) has no hesitation in actually translating the word as acacias (Lane and
Penrice, Dictionary, define tah as a collective noun meaning a kind of acacia [acacia gum-
mifera] but also as a banana tree). Both the thornless lote trees and these acacias are
part of the furniture of paradise and, it hardly needs to be stressed here, the most
common word for the latter in the Qur’ān has a particular semiotic significance in
terms of visual beauty (q.v.): it is al-janna,
the garden, a constant motif in Qur’ānic
eschatology. Thus we are told that it is in “gardens of ease [happiness or bliss]” (jannāt al-naʿīm) that the above-named trees will be found (q 56:12).

All nature, then, is deployed in the Qur’ānic imagery of paradise to indicate a state of bliss to which the believer should aspire and towards which that person should work with sound belief and good deeds (see faith; joy and misery). The celestial paradise is made credible by reference to terrestrial natural images with which the recipients of the Qur’ānic message are already familiar.

Of course, not all the trees mentioned in the Qur’ān signify blessedness. The text offers us a short simile in which an “evil tree” (kalima khabīthah) is said to resemble an “evil tree” (shajara khabīthah, q 14:26; see gossip). Perhaps the most famous of the “evil trees” mentioned in the Qur’ān is the tree of Zaqqūm (q.v.), “the cursed tree” (al-shajara al-mal’ūna, q 17:60; see also q 37:62-6; 44:43-6; 56:32). This tree, which is “bitter” and “pungent” (see Yusuf Ali, Holy Qur’ān, 711, n. 2250), represents all that is unpleasant in the way of plant life. Netton has defined it (Popular dictionary, 264) as follows:

Bitter smelling and fearsome tree in the pit of Hell with flowers which resemble demonic heads. The stomachs of sinners obliged to eat from this tree in Hell will be badly burned…. The Zaqqūm tree with its bitter fruit and foul smell was not only associated with the infernal regions of Hell but also with Arabia.

Again, then, a powerful semiotic (and olfactory!; see smelling) link is made between actual and perceptible terrestrial phenomena on the one hand, and threatened potential phenomena that may be encountered in another life, on the other.

Turning now from the semiotics of the principal flora of the Qur’ān to the fauna, we note firstly that there are two general statements made about animals in the Qur’ān. The first of these is that the creeping animals (dābbāḥah) and flying birds are all said to form “communities” (umma) like humankind (q 6:38; see community and society in the Qur’ān). The extensive intertextual weight borne in Islam by such a word as umma needs no underscoring.

Suffice it to say that here the word signifies inter alia a divine ordering or harmony of creation “in groups” where mutual cooperation (taʿawwun) and generosity are expected. The semiotic antitheses of these virtues are numerous and include “self-centeredness,” “individuality,” “isolation,” and the selfishness and greed born of such attitudes and lifestyles: the Qur’ān (e.g. q 89:17-20) condemned them all (see also ethics and the Qur’ān).

Here the parable of the two men in q 18 (Sūrat al-Kahf, “The Cave”; q 18:32-44) is instructive. The proud, selfish arrogant man, who has two well-endowed gardens that are eventually ruined, is in sharp contrast to his humbler neighbor whom he clearly despises. But in his fall from material wealth (q.v.) the proud man equates his selfish attitudes with polytheism itself (q 18:42; see polytheism and atheism). In this parable, then, the Qur’ān signals in the most lucid way that selfishness and greed lead to ruin and that divine protection (q.v.) is to be had in the umma whose characteristics are generosity, mutual respect and cooperation. The two gardens in the parable, of course, are twin images or signs of God’s gift of paradise to humankind.

But that gift has to be earned even though, in the parable, it is “given” almost gratuitously. From the point of view of the semiotics of nature in the Qur’ān and its ubiquitous didactic aspect, it is instructive to note that the parable of the two men in q 18 follows on immediately from a vivid
description of the paradisiacal garden (lit. “the gardens of Eden,” jannāt /lefthalfmoonādnin, q 18:31), couched in the most physical — indeed natural — terms. The semiotic lesson is clear: Nature is an image of the garden of paradise itself. Nature misused, abused or taken for granted, signals contempt for the divine creator who will assuredly punish such attitudes and actions.

It comes as no surprise then, to learn that those who reject the signs of God, which are clearly present in the whole of nature (cf. q 41:53), are specifically regarded as deaf (summ) and dumb (bukm) and living in darkness (q.v; q 6:39; see vision and blindness; hearing and deafness).

The second major general statement about animals in the Qur’ān is that they have been created for the service of humankind whether they be cattle (an ‘ām), horses (khayl), mules (bighāl) or donkeys (hamīr, q 16:5-8). The cattle provide warmth and food and foster a sense of beauty as they are driven backwards and forwards to pasture. The equines are for both riding and ornament (zīna). The semiotics of these verses are abundantly clear and need little further emphasis: as with the “good” trees and plants, the animal kingdom as it flourishes on earth is a sign of God’s bounty to humankind and it is designed for the latter’s use (see also Hides and fleece; Hunting and fishing). The ethic which pertains is very similar to that in Genesis 1:26-8 in which man is placed in command of all the wildlife on earth.

There are numerous references to animals, birds and insects in the Qur’ān; some give their names to whole sūras: e.g. q 2, “The Cow” (Sūrat al-Baqara); q 6, “The Cattle” (Sūrat al-An‘ām); q 16, “The Bee” (Sūrat al-Nahl); q 27, “The Ant” (Sūrat al-Nāmi); q 29, “The Spider” (Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt); and q 105, “The Elephant” (Sūrat al-Fil). Elsewhere, there are references to camels (e.g. q 7:73); birds (e.g. q 67:19) and the small creeping animal (dābbah) which gnawed through the staff of the prophet Solomon (q.v; Sulaymān) after the latter’s death (q 34:14) and which is variously translated as “worm of the earth” (A. Yusuf Ali), and “the Beast of the Earth” (Arberry). All of these signify, to one degree or another, God’s creative presence, power and majesty. Perhaps, however, the most dramatic and starkest of all the animals mentioned in the Qur’ān, in terms of any identification with sign, is the “she-camel” (nāga) in q 7:73-84. The prophet Śāliḥ (q.v) is sent to the Arabian tribe of Thamūd (q.v). Śāliḥ orders the tribe to worship the one true God and identifies, as a sign of the covenant God makes with them through him, a she-camel. This is to be left unharmed and permitted to graze at leisure. But Śāliḥ’s message is rejected, the she-camel is hamstrung and the tribe of Thamūd, in turn, is hit by an earthquake. The she-camel, originally a sign of true belief, covenant, blessing and good order becomes a symbol of divine vengeance and destruction. Thus good signs in the Qur’ān can, Janus-like, turn into symbols of doom.

Celestial phenomena: The semiotics of the heavenly spheres

q 41:53 proclaims that God’s signs are visible in nature and elsewhere, in the furthest lands of the earth (fi l-‘ajāfī), and nowhere is this more evident or ubiquitous than in the qur’ānic contrast between light and darkness (see Pairs and pairing). Light is a clear sign of God’s transcendence, as in the famous and poetic Light Verse, q 24:35: “God is the light (nūr) of the heavens and the earth. The parable of his light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp (q.v.): the lamp enclosed in glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star…”

God is the creator of both light and darkness (q 6:1) but the latter, as with many
other world religions, can be a sign of evil and isolation from God. Those who reject God’s signs are characterized, not only as being deaf and dumb, but as being “in darkness” (fi l-zulumāt, Q 6:39). The very alternation of day and night is a set of two signs: a reminder of God’s presence, a divinely appointed calendar (q.v.). And if the “sign of the day” (āyāt al-nahār) is designed for sight or enlightenment (Q 17:12), then, by analogy, the purpose of the “sign of the night” (āyāt al-layl) is abundantly clear.

As with some of the fauna mentioned in the Qurʿān which we have surveyed, the natural phenomena of the heavens give their names to a number of different sūras in the Qurʿān: for example, we note Q 53, “The Star” (Sūrat al-Najm; see PLANETS AND STARS); Q 54, “The Moon” (q.v.; Sūrat al-Qamar); Q 85, “The Constellations” or “The Signs of the Zodiac” (Sūrat al-Burūj); Q 89, “The Dawn” (q.v.; Sūrat al-Fajr); Q 91, “The Sun” (q.v.; Sūrat al-Shams); and Q 113, “Daybreak” or “The Dawn” (Sūrat al-Falaq; see DAY, TIMES OF).

It is interesting that some of these natural celestial phenomena whose names figure above as sūra titles, also feature as oaths in the sacred text (see LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QURʿĀN: LITERARY STRUCTURES OF THE QURʿĀN). For example: “By the star when it goes down” (Q 53:1); “By the break of day” (Q 89:1); “By the sun and his (glorious) splendor, by the moon as she follows him” (Q 91:1-2). All of celestial nature thus constitutes a body of powerful signs, witnessing to God’s creative power and bounty to humankind. As such, the above are powerful oaths indeed. In Q 113 refuge is sought with “the lord of the dawn” from, inter alia, “the evil of dusk at nightfall as it spreads” (sharri ḡhāṣiqin idhā waqaba, Q 113:3). Here is that vivid contrast again between light as a sign of God and goodness, and darkness as a symbol of evil.

**Conclusion: The semiotics of nature in Qurʿānic eschatology**

On the last day we are told in the Qurʿān that the heaven will be split and the stars put out while the mountains are scattered (Q 77:8-10), and that the sun will become dark, the stars will be dispersed and fall, the mountains will disappear and the seas will boil and be poured forth (Q 81:1-14; 82:1-5). All these cataclysmic signs will be the most lucid natural evidence that an Islamic parousía is nigh. Not only that but they will signal in the most terrible way the dawn of real self-knowledge for each individual (Q 82:5).

The semiotics of nature in the Qurʿān may be condensed into a simple fundamental truth: Nature is a body of created signs that reveal God’s bounty, mercy and creative goodness to humankind. But the beauty with which God has endowed the earth is also a test: “That which is on earth we have made but as a glittering show for the earth (zinatan labā), in order that we may test them — as to which of them are best in conduct” (Q 18:7; see TRIAL).

Nature itself, then, shares in the general Qurʿānic predilection for “questing and testing” (see especially Q 18, Sūrat al-Kahf; see also Netton, Towards a modern tafsīr). Nature can be a prime semiotic feature in the lesser testing of humankind on earth (see Q 18:7 above); its eschatological destruction will inaugurate the greater test of the last judgment.

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NEWS


Neck  see anatomy

Necklace  see ‘A’isha bint Abī Bakr

Needle  see instruments

Neighbor  see hospitality and courtesy

News

Report of [recent] events. News in the Qur’ān centers around words derived from the root n-b-, especially the verb nabba’a/yanabbi‘u, meaning “to inform,” which occurs forty-nine times, its synonym anba’a/yunubi‘u, occurring four times, and the noun naba‘, meaning “a piece of news,” which, with its plural (anbā‘), appears twenty-nine times. There is also a single appearance of istanba‘/yastanbi‘u, meaning “to ask for news” (q 10:53). A completely different root, kh-b-ṣ, provides seven occurrences of nouns meaning “news” or “information,” khub, khabar, and the plural of the latter, akhabār.

Qur’ānic references to news cover a considerable number of different meanings. Perhaps the most prevalent is the “great news” (al-naba‘/al-‘aẓīm, q 78:2; cf. q 3:15; 10:53; 34:7; 98:67, 88) of the coming day of judgment (see last judgment), one of the main bases of the prophet Muhammad’s teaching (see eschatology). This includes the frequently reiterated idea that God will inform all at the judgment of that which they used to do (q 5:48, etc., often repeated; see record of human actions) and what they did not do (q 75:13). In particular, God admonishes Jews (q 62:8; see jews and judaism), Christians (q 5:14; see christians and christianity), hypocrites (q 9:94, etc.; see hypocrites and hypocrisy) and unbelievers (q 6:5; 26:6; see belief and unbelief) that they will be informed at the judgment of their former actions. Furthermore, the prophet Muhammad is particularly singled out as the bearer of various kinds of news. Thus, he informs his hearers about God and the afterlife (q 3:15; 10:53; 15:49; 18:103). Muhammad also imparts information from the unseen (see hidden and the hidden) concerning the fate of earlier peoples and their prophets (q 5:60; 6:34; 7:101; 11:160, 120; 22:72; see generations; punishment stories; prophets and prophethood), specifically giving stories or details about Adam (q 5:27; see adam and eve; gain and abel), Noah (q.v.; q 10:71; 11:49), Abraham (q.v.; q 15:51; 26:69), Joseph (q.v.)
and his brothers (q 12:102; see Benjamin; brother and brotherhood), Moses (q.v.; q 7:103; 20:99; 28:3), David (q.v.; q 38:24), Dhu al-Qarnayn (q 18:91; see Alexander), Mary (q.v.; q 3:44) and the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (q 18:13; see men of the cave). Such information is described as “news of the unseen” (anbā al-ghayb), indicating that God has miraculously transmitted it to the Prophet (q 3:44: 11:49; 12:102; see Knowledge and Learning). Indeed, as if to emphasize this point, God reminds the Prophet that he was not an eyewitness to these ancient events but God is providing him with precise information about them (q 3:44; 12:102). On the other hand, some news about past peoples should be common knowledge, for it has been given before (q 9:70; 14:9). Perhaps even closer to the common notion of prophecy as extrasensory perception and precognition is Muḥammad’s divinely conveyed knowledge about certain contemporary matters (q 9:64, 94; 26:221; 66:3; see Foretelling; Divination). That various earlier prophets are also described as having such miraculous knowledge reinforces the concept of prophethood in general (q 2:33; 3:49; 12:15, 36-7, 45; 18:68, 78). The ability of the prophets to give news of the unseen is contrasted with the inability of the angels (q 2:31; see Angel) and the unbelievers (q 6:143) to do the same.

Beside the more frequent qur’ānic usage of news to indicate divinely inspired information, the concept also refers occasionally to ordinary reports (q 27:7, 22; 28:29; 33:20; 47:31; 49:6; 66:3). These include the interesting qur’ānic admonition to investigate ordinary news before acting on it, lest one make a regrettable mistake by a rush to judgment (q 49:6). Associated with this concept is the idea that every piece of news has a final resting place (q 6:67), which could be read as implying that a specific truth underlies every action, suggesting a positive view of reality. An equally positive view explains the verse as meaning that every piece of news about the afterlife will eventually be fully realized and fulfilled.

See also Good News.

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Primary: Muqtūl, Taṣfīr; Qurṭūbī, Ḥāmi; Tabarī, Taṣfīr.

Niche see Light

Night see Day and Night; Day, Times of

Night Journey see Ascension

Night of Power

The night during Ramaḍān (q.v.) when, according to classical exegesis, the Qur’ān was sent down. The phrase “Night of Power” (laylat al-qadr) appears in q 97:1, and lends itself to the name of the sūra (Sūrat al-Qadr). Its Meccan or Medinan origin is in dispute, although it is usually associated with the early Meccan period (see Chronology and the Qur’ān). This night is described as a night better than a thousand months (q.v.) in which angels (see Angel) and the spirit (q.v.; rūh, i.e. Gabriel [q.v.], other high angels, etc., cf. Rāzī, Taṣfīr, xxxiii, 32) descend by leave of their Lord from every command (anw, cf. q 16:2), and there is said to be a peace that lasts until the break of dawn. The “blessed” night during which God sent down the Qur’ān (q 44:3; cf. 2:185; see Revelation and Inspiration; Book) is believed to be the night of qadr (Tabarī, Taṣfīr, xxv, 64).
Commentators have understood qadr as either power or empowerment (qudra), or divine determination (qadar) or fate (q.v.; see also destiny; freedom and predestination). Muslim commentators (see exegesis of the Qur’an: classical and medieval), following Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/668-8), have suggested that the Qur’an was sent down from the Preserved Tablet (q.v.; cf. Q 85:21-2; see also heavenly book) to the lowest heaven (see heaven and sky) on this night and then revealed by Gabriel to Muhammad over a period of twenty or twenty-three years (Tabarī, Tafsīr, xxx, 166; cf. Ibn Išāq-Guillaume, 111-2); or, following al-Sha‘bī (d. ca. 103/719f.), that this night was the occasion of the first revelation (Tabarī, Majma‘, ix, 516-21; Rāzī, Tafsīr, xxxiii, 27-8; cf. Tabarī, Tafsīr, xxx, 166); or, as noted by Sells (Sound, 244-5; cf. Burckhardt, Introduction, 43-4), following ‘Āisha (see ‘Āisha Bint Abī Bakr) and ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar (d. 73/693), that the Qur’an would have been revealed to Muhammad not verbally but in an experience in which the words were inchoate (see orality; form and structure of the Qur’an). Wagendonk, Wensinck and Lohmann discuss its possible role as a new year’s festival in pre-Islamic times. Bell (Commentary, ii, 563f.) alludes to the Christian feast of the eve of the Nativity (see Christians and Christianity). Flessner, following Goeitein (Zur Entstehung, 189 f.), discusses its parallel with the Jewish holiday of the Day of Atonement (‘Āshūrā, see fasting; Jews and Judaism). For al-Tabarī (d. 310/923; Tafsīr, xxv, 64.), Ramadān was a propitious period for revelations (other religious traditions; see festivals and commemorative days).

Classical interpreters debated over which night constitutes the night of qadr but most believed, following Ibn ‘Umar, that it could fall on several odd-numbered nights in the last ten days of Ramadān (Bukhārī, Sahih, 381-2; Muslim, Sahih, ii, 822-4); moreover, following ‘Āishah and Abu Sa‘īd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693), it is associated with the Prophet’s retreats to the mosque (q.v.) for vigils (q.v.; iʿtikāf) during the last ten days of Ramadān (Muslim, Sahih, 824, 828; Tirmidhī, Sahih, v, 138-9). Due to uncertainty over the exact night, retreats to the mosque where vigils are held take place on several or all of these nights.

Present-day Shi‘ī tradition celebrates this night along with the death of ‘Ali (the 10th, he is wounded; the 21st, he dies; the 23rd, the night of qadr proper; see shī‘ism and the Qur’an). In popular tradition, this night is associated with a number of wonders (found in hadīths; see hadīth and the Qur’an; marvels; miracle): forgiveness (q.v.) of one’s sins (see sin, major and minor), prostration of everything on earth (see bowing and prostration), determining every person’s destiny for the upcoming year, direct entry into paradise (q.v.) for whoever dies on this night (see death and the dead), granting of wishes (see wish and desire), or, following al-Sha‘bī (d. 100/718-9), angels greeting every pious (see piety) human being (cf. Bousquet, Iʿtikāf; Qurṭbūnī, Jāmi‘, xxviii, 134).

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Nimrod

Abraham’s antagonist. Nimrod was, as is told in the Bible, the first potentate on earth. His empire included Babel and the surrounding countries (Gen 10:8-12).

According to Islamic tradition, Abraham (q.v.) was his contemporary. Although Nimrod (Ar. Namrud) is not named in the Qurʾān, he is, according to the exegetical literature (tafsīr, see EXEGESIS OF THE QURʾĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL), the Qurʾānic tyrant who pretends to be able to give life (q.v.) and death (see DEATH AND THE DEAD), a claim which Abraham successfully refutes (q 2:258). Nimrod is also said to have been the one who tried to burn Abraham in a furnace, from which he was saved by God’s command: “O fire (q.v.)! Be cool!” (q 21:67-9).

In Islamic tradition, as expounded in exegetical (tafsīr) and “stories of the prophets” (qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ) literature, the story of Nimrod and Abraham is richly adorned with elements taken from extra-biblical Jewish and Christian sources (see JEWS AND JUDAISM; CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY; SCRIPTURE AND THE QURʾĀN). It resembles the story of Pharaoh (q.v.) and Moses (q.v.) as told in the Qurʾān. Like Pharaoh, Nimrod ordered all children who were still nursing (see Laqta) to be killed when he was informed — either in a dream (see DREAMS AND SLEEP) or by the astrologers — that a child was going to be born who would contest his claim to be God. He distributed food to his subjects, dismissing, however, without supply those who refused to confess his deity. Abraham’s dispute as told in q 2:258 allegedly occurred when he appeared before the king to obtain his family’s ration. Naturally, he went away empty-handed, but miraculously brought home excellent food.

According to another version the dispute took place when Abraham was summoned because he had destroyed the idols.

The building of the tower of Babel has also been ascribed to Nimrod; he wanted to see Abraham’s God, a parallel to Pharaoh’s high palace built for the same purpose (q 28:38). Nimrod’s tower was destroyed by a heavy storm: “God took their structures from their foundations” (q 16:26). As a result, human language was confused. Another version says that Nimrod erected a high building to look down on Abraham in the furnace. The high building sometimes is said to be the pyramids. In fact, the names Pharaoh and Nimrod are exchangeable. Nimrod even went so far as trying to kill Abraham’s God: He rose to the sky in a chest lifted by eagles and fancied that he had killed God when the arrow he had shot returned smeared with blood. His death was as painful as that of Titus the conqueror of Jerusalem as told in the Talmud (Gittin 56b): a gnat penetrated into his brain,
tormenting him for four hundred years, the same length of time he had ruled as an ungodly king. See also NARRATIVES; MYTHS AND LEGENDS IN THE QUR’ân.

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Bibliography


Noah

One of the major prophets of Islam, Noah (Ar. Nûh, Heb. Noâh) is an equally important figure in Judaism and Christianity (see SCRIPTURE AND THE QUR’ÂN), where, however, he is not considered a prophet (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). His biblical story, probably reflecting ancient Near Eastern precedents, occurs in Genesis 6-10 and in later Jewish texts. In the Qur’ân and in later Islamic tradition he is numbered among the prophets of warning (see WARNER), along with the Arabian prophets Hûd (q.v.) and Sâlih (q.v.), as well as the biblical Lot (q.v.; Lût), Jethro (Shu‘ayb, q.v.) and Moses (q.v.; Mûsâ), conveying God’s threats of punishment to their sinful peoples (cf. Q 9:70; 22:42; 31:41-6; 54:18, 23, which link Noah with the earlier prophets Hûd and Sâlih, reassuring Muhammad by telling him that they, too, had been denied, vilified and mistreated by their people. Some elements of the Qur’ânic account seem to parallel certain Jewish post-biblical midrashic embellishments of the Bible story, in which Noah appears as a prophet and admo-
for upright with boiling water (Q 11:40; 23:27). Again, unlike the biblical account, Q 11:44 relates that after the deluge, the ark came to rest on the mountain al-Ḥūṣūlī (see Ḫūṣūlī) instead of the biblical “mountains of Ararat” (q.v.; Gen 8:4).

Later writers

Islamic Qur’ān exegetes, ḥadīth scholars and the authors of the literary genre of “tales of the prophets” (qiṣṣas al-anbiyāʾ) expand and embellish the stories found in the Qur’ān and others found in the Bible (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR’ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL; ḤADĪTH AND THE QUR’ĀN). Using a variety of approaches, they base their work on the early biographers of Muḥammad, who tell of the many prophets before Muḥammad who were sent to their own peoples, beginning from creation (q.v.). A number of these biographical works, such as that of Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/845; Ṭabaqāt), which is based on earlier sources such as Ibn Ishaq (d. ca. 150/767) and Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828 or 219/833), contain “tales” of various prophets. Ibn Sa’d tells of Noah’s genealogy from Adam down to his father Lamech (Lamak), saying that because there was no one in those eras who prohibited forbidden (q.v.) acts, God made that Noah’s task. Noah had preached to his people for 120 years without success and was commanded by God to build the ark when he was 600 years old. Differing from several other accounts, Noah had four sons (not the biblical three), the fourth being Canaan (Kanān), also called Yām by the Arabs, whereas in the Bible, Canaan is a son of Ham. Based on Q 11:43, some tales relate that Canaan refused to enter the ark, claiming that he could save himself from the deluge by climbing to the top of the highest mountain, but perished in the ever-rising water. We also learn that Noah’s wife was one of the unbelieving people as was the wife of Lot. Both had married righteous men to whom they were unfaithful (Q 66:10), so when Noah asked God to have mercy on Canaan, God refused, saying that, as the offspring of his wife’s deception, he was not his kindred (cf. Q 11:46).

In his Ṣāhib al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) relates that when Noah’s people appear before God on the day of judgment (see LAST JUDGMENT) and are asked whether he had conveyed God’s message to them, they would say that he had not, although Noah had previously told God that he had done so. When God asks him who would act as his witness regarding this matter, Noah answers that Muḥammad and his people would bear witness for him (see WITNESSING AND TESTIFYING). Noah came out of the ark on the tenth of Muḥarram, the ‘Āshūrāʾ, which therefore became a day of fasting (q.v.) for both humans and animals who had been in the ark for six months. Noah’s wife is named Aṃzūra by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and joins Noah in the ark. But the later writer al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 685/1286) calls her Wāliya and, although in Q 66:10 she is simply referred to as a non-believer, here (and in some other accounts), she is left behind or drowned because she had said that Noah was majnūn (“insane”; see INSANITY) when he spoke to his people. For many scholars, the tales claiming that Noah’s wife, otherwise said to have come out of the ark with him, was left behind or was drowned, raise the issue of how many humans were actually saved from the deluge. These numbers vary from seven, excluding her — Noah, his three sons and their wives — to eight, with her. In another version, however, the total number of those saved was eighty, including the pious children of Adam’s son Seth.

The historian and Qur’ān exegete al-Ṭabarī, in his Taʾrīkh, tried to coordinate biblical figures like Noah with the semi-mythical early Persian rulers (see MYTHS
AND LEGENDS IN THE QUR’ĀN). He states that “some people” claim that Noah lived during the reign of the evil king Biwarasb, also known as al-Dāhkhāk. Though he admits that the Persians did not know the story of the deluge, al-Ṭabarî, in the story of the Iranian king Afarīdān, says that he mentions him only because “some people” say that he was Noah; he later claims that Afarīdān’s story resembled that of Noah. Al-Ṭabarî also tells of Noah’s long life, saying that for 950 years he had called the people to God but whenever one generation passed away, the next one followed in unbelief. He also recounts that the oven from which the boiling water poured forth had belonged to Eve and came into Noah’s possession, either in India, according to one tradition, or in Kūfa in Iraq, according to another tradition transmitted by al-Ṭabarî. We also read in this work the biblical story of the raven and the dove sent forth by Noah, which is not found in the Qurʾān.

Al-Ṭabarî’s works served as a significant source for the important later qisas work Ṭarāfīs al-majnūnīs of al-Tha’labī (d. 427/1036), much expanded with additional and different tales, most of them about many more prophets, including others from non-Qur’ānīc sources. We are told that Noah planted teak trees that he cut down to use for building the ark after they had grown for forty years. Al-Tha’labī relates that during those years Noah ceased calling the people to God and that God made the women barren so no children were born during that time. God told Noah to build the ark with “its head like the head of a cock, its middle like the belly of a bird, and its tail inclining like the tail of a bird.” The tales of al-Kisāʾī (dates unknown) include the story of Noah in a style that may seem to reflect folk literature. He writes of an evil king, a great-grandson of Enoch, son of Cain (see CAIN AND ABEL), who ruled the land where Noah lived and “was a mighty tyrant and the first to drink wine (q.v.), gamble (see GAMBLING), sit on thrones (see KINGS AND RULERS), commission work in iron, brass and lead (see METALS AND MINERALS), and to adopt clothing spun with gold (q.v.).” He and his people worshipped idols (see IDOLS AND IMAGES), the names of which resemble some of the pagan gods mentioned in the Qurʾān. This caused Noah to withdraw to the wilderness until God had Gabriel (q.v.) send Noah as a prophet to his people. In his Qisas, the Andalusian al-Ṭarāfī (d. 454/1062), in a chapter on Noah’s story, relates that, although q 29:14 says that Noah lived for “a thousand years minus fifty,” earlier writers are quoted as maintaining that was only his age at the time of the deluge, saying variously that he actually lived to be 1530 or 1650 years old. Al-Ṭarāfī also relates many conversations between Noah and God.

In some qisas tales, the sinful people of Noah’s time, rejecting the divine warnings that he relays, are said to have descended from the union of the offspring of Cain with those of Seth. Thereupon God commanded Noah to build the ark (faḥl, lit. “boat”), in order to save himself and other believers from the deluge with which God would punish the rest of humankind. In some versions of this tale, Noah built the ark unaided (using the wood of trees he himself had planted many years earlier), while in others he was helped by his sons. He was mocked (see MOCKERY) and attacked by the people of his town, who refused to believe his dire predictions of doom; like his wife, some of them even called him majnūn (q 54:9). The qisas literature gives us the dimensions, form and arrangements of the vessel. In al-Kisāʾī’s version of one such tale, we are told that Jesus (q.v.), at the urging of the apostles (see APOSTLE), called upon Shem (Ṣām),...
the long-dead son of Noah, to rise from his grave and provide Jesus with information about the ark. We learn that its lowest level was for the animals, its second level for the humans, and the upper one for birds. The ants were the first creatures to enter the ark and the donkey the last, slowed down because Iblis, the devil (q.v.), was holding on to his tail. Another unwanted figure who was saved from destruction was the giant Og (‘Uj), son of ‘Anaq (Heb. for “giant”), who was too tall for the water to reach his head. The idea of his height is probably based on the biblical mention of Og being one of the last of the Rephaim, a people of giants (Deut 33:11, et al.).

Al-Kisāʾi states that the name Nūḥ means “he wailed (for his people)” from the verb nāḥa, whereas Jewish tradition derives it from the Hebrew nīḥam, “he gave comfort.” After the deluge the peoples of the earth became divided among Noah’s three sons: Sām’s descendants were the Arabs (q.v.), Persians and the Byzantines (q.v.; Rūm), the “good” nations; Yāfīth (Japheth) was the ancestor of the Turks, Slavs and Gog and Magog (q.v.), possessing no good qualities. Because Ham (Ḥām) disobeyed the prohibition of intercourse while on the ark and had slept with his wife, his children were born black and all the black peoples of the earth are their descendants. In another version, blackness resulted from Noah’s cursing Ham upon learning that, unlike his brothers, Ham had laughed when he saw his sleeping father’s nakedness. The Musnad of Ahmad b. Ḣanbal (d. 241/855) quotes the Prophet relating the testament of Noah to his sons, for example, forbidding idolatry (shirk, see IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS) and pride (q.v.; kibr).

In Christian theology, Noah symbolizes the just man, providing an example of faith and submission to God, and becoming a prefiguration of Jesus. Elements of the story of Noah, the deluge, the ark and the dove are all incorporated into Christian symbolism. In Judaism Noah occupies a middle stage between Adam and Abraham, as a righteous and blameless man who walked with God and was saved from the flood to become the progenitor of a new human race. God’s covenant with Noah (Gen 9:8-17) was expanded by the rabbis into the Noachide commandments, incumbent upon all humanity.

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Bibliography


Nomads

Peoples who make and remake their settlements in a variety of places, often depending upon climatic conditions. Nomads
Nomads

(a’rāb) are the non-urban population of the Arabian peninsula, attested ten times in the Qur’ān.

Oasis-town and countryside

By the time of the Prophet, the Near Eastern social trichotomy of peasants, townspeople and nomads had developed into the dichotomy of nomads and urbanites in northern and central Arabia (see city; pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān). This was the result of the “bedouinization of Arabia,” a social process which had set in with the emergence, since the first half of the first millennium B.C.E., of the bedouin (q.v.) — belligerent tribes led by a tribal aristocracy that practiced large-scale camel herding (see camel). The bedouin dominated large territories due to their enhanced mobility, and brought small-stock breeders and farmers into submission. They cooperated with the oasis towns in long-distance trade. Sedentary tribes like the Hudhayl (see tribes and clans) adopted the social organization, attitudes, values, literary forms and the inter-tribal language of this literature from the bedouin (thus creating what became known as the Dīwān Hudhayl). The trade goods exported from Mecca to Syria were basically the products of Mecca’s nomadic environment: leather, textiles and livestock (q 16:3–7; 16:80; see hides and fleece). Q 16:80 still presupposes the archaic, round tent made of leather (tíraż, qubba), attested as early as the seventh century B.C.E. (i.e. on the reliefs of Ashurbanipal), instead of the now common rectangular black tent made of goat-hair (bayt al-sha’y), already mentioned in the Bible in connection with north Arabian tribes of the fifth through third centuries B.C.E. (Song of songs 1:5).

The Qur’ānic attitude towards the nomads

The tribes in the vicinity of Medina (q.v.) are blamed for insufficient zeal to fight in the Prophet’s wars (q 9:90, 120; 48:11, 16; see expeditions and battles; jihād). Their orthodoxy is doubtful: “The nomads (al-a’rāb) are the worst in unbelief (see belief and unbelief) and hypocrisy (see hypocrites and hypocrisy)...” (see q 9:37-101). These nomads say that they believe, but the Prophet is told to say to them “You do not believe, but you [only] say ‘We submitted’; For faith (q.v.) has not entered into your hearts” (49:14; see heart). The conflict which surfaced here is one between attitudes that are fundamentally irreconcilable: the Prophet demands submission to his faith and allegiance to his politics once and for all (see politics and the Qur’ān) while the nomads are accustomed to a political system in which allegiances, intra-tribal as well as inter-tribal, are open to constant renegotiation (see contracts and alliances; breaking trusts and contracts). The Prophet acts as leader of a theocratic state-to-be, in which citizenship of a totally egalitarian nature is acquired by conversion, i.e. an individual act. In the nomads’ world, kinship (q.v.) and the collective decision of the clan or tribe are the highest authorities — whereas all freeborn males of a single tribe may regard themselves as equals, they might not hold other tribesmen (not to speak of peasants) in similar esteem (see community and society in the Qur’ān). Muhammad himself was an urbanite; the sphere of the nomads represents the spatial and social opposite of the town (q 33:20). None of the prophets (see prophets and prophethood) whom he cites as his predecessors was sent to nomads; their destinations were always oases and towns (see punishment stories; narratives). Although he claims that the Qur’ān is revealed in clear Arabic (q 12:2; 13:37, etc.; see Arabic language; revelation and inspiration), its orthography (q.v.) is not that of the literary language of the
nomads (the language of classical Arabic poetry; see poetry and poets). It is written down, rather, in the *koinē* of the west Arabian caravan (q.v.) towns (see orality and writing in Arabia). The term *'arab*, which never ceased to denote “nomad,” had acquired the status of an ethnonym used by the Arabs themselves, as seen in the 328 C.E. funeral inscription of Imru’ al-Qays from al-Namāra (*RCEA* 1); hence the ambiguity in the term *'arabī* and the irony contained in its application to the language of the Qur’ān. See also Arabs.

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Bibliography


Noon

The middle of the day. In the Qur’ān, the Arabic word *zuhr* does not designate solely a time of day (see day, times of). Reference to derivatives of *z-h-r* is only made in the particular context of the noon observance of the ritual prayer (q.v.; *salāt*) and the time prior to which it must not start; according to some interpretations, the “middle prayer” (*al-salāt al-wustāh*, Q 2:238) also alludes to noonette. Beyond the legal aspects of the noon prayer, however, discussion of the term involves issues of time and punctuality. It is in this respect that the institution is particularly significant as its point of reference is the sun (q.v.) at its zenith. The connection between noon prayer and the concept of time in general is clearly evidenced, among other indications, by the feminine form of verbs or adjectives associated with it, caused by the omission of the feminine noun, “prayer” (e.g. *wa-lammā kānāt il-‘zuhr*; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 98).

Noontime, like other prayer times, serves as the temporal anchor for various events, which go beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to mention the rather interesting connection between noon and death (see death and the dead), such as that of al-Ma‘mūn (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, x, 280), to funerals (Baghdādī, *T[a][r]īkh Baghdādī*, ix, 468), or to obituaries (Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Wafāyāt*, i, 362). Noon served Gabriel (q.v.) more than once as the time in which he appeared to the Prophet: once when the direction of the prayer was changed (Ibn Ḥibbān, *Thiqāt*, i, 153; see qibla), another in the context of Quraysh (q.v.; ibid., i, 274). It was the time for many battles in history, such as the one waged against Abū Jahl (Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, iii, 336), that against Quraysh (q.v.; ibid., iv, 14), and the battles of the first *fitna* (Qalqashandī, *Maʿāthīs*, i, 95), among others (see expeditions and battles; fighting).

Segments of time connected with noon and the noon prayer often serve to indicate a definite time or period (Shāfīʿī, *Akhbār*, i, 260) as well as its shortness or brevity (Abū Nuʿaym, *Hīya*, ix, 142). Whereas for the polytheists (see polytheism and atheism) the day of judgment (see last judgment) will continue for fifty thousand years, for the believer it will only last as long as the time between noon and evening (q.v.) prayer (Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, v, 289).

Noon prayer

The origin of the name of the noon prayer is explained as derived from “the heat of the sun” (*zakhra*), “the time most suitable
noon prayer consists of four rak`as (see bowing and prostration), the first two of which the Prophet used to prolong (Ibn Taymiyya, Iqtid`ā, i, 102). Jurists prohibit the addition of a fifth rak`a or the repetition of the prayer except in extraordinary circumstances (id., Majm`ū, xxiii, 260). On the other hand, it is reported that in certain cases the Prophet himself would be content with two rak`as only (id., Kitab, xxiv, 190), or that sometimes he would have four rak`as before the prayer itself (Qur`ān, Jāmi`, ii, 224) and two following it (Ghazālī, Arār, 296). The noon prayer is therefore one of three that could be shortened (Shāfī`i, Abkām, 179). Sometimes the Prophet would recite in its course q 84:1 (iddhū l-sam`ū u nshaqqat) or q 87:1 (sabbihs ma rabbīka l-a`lā).

Time of prayer

Noon prayer must not be made before its earliest mandated time (Ibn Taymiyya, Minhāj, vi, 202) and perhaps the fear of breaking this prohibition made Umar establish the ruling that this prayer be performed when an object’s shadow is one foot long (id., Iqtid`ā, iv, 196). As a general rule the Prophet used to make it at noon (bi-l-hājira, Muslim, Sahih, i, 446) but its temporal boundaries were set by Gabriel. The angel, on two consecutive days, prayed it with the Prophet: the first time was at the earliest possible moment, i.e. when the sun moves from the zenith and casts a shadow of a given object as thin as a shoelace (Ibn Taymiyya, Umada, iv, 150), when the sun had just declined (dalaka) from the center (Ṭabarî, Tafsīr, xv, 137), or disappeared from the “belly” of the sky (zulat `an baṭnī l-sam`ū, Shāfī`, Abkām, iii, 248). A much more forgiving phrasing for this earliest permissible moment for the performance of the prayer is given by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111; Arār, 296): when the movement of the sun is apprehended by the senses. On the next day, Gabriel set the

Composition

The noon prayer consists of four rak`as (see bowing and prostration), the first two
latest time permissible as the time at which the shadow of the object equals its length (Ibn Taymiyya, ‘Umdu, iv, 150), the time that is defined by the evening prayer (Shāhī, Abhām, iii, 233). Once this moment has passed and the noon prayer has not been prayed, it is considered a sin (fiṣq, see sin, major and minor) and, being equivalent to the sins of adultery (see adultery and fornication) or theft (q.v.), bars the believer from entering heaven (Ibn Taymiyya, Katub, vi, 427; see reward and punishment; chastisement and punishment). Some lawyers set the final period for the noon prayer as the setting of the sun (Qurṭubī, Jāmi‘i, viii, 75). These parameters are not all that rigid as far as the season of the year is concerned: in summer the required length of shadow is three to five feet, whereas in winter it is seven (Līsān al-ʿArab, xii, 470). This is also true for the weather: in winter, due to clouds, one may set the prayer time earlier (taṣāl) than the above decree (Ibn Taymiyya, Iqtiḍā‘i, i, 133). On the other hand, some advocated the permissibility of postponing the noon prayer until after sunset because of the heat (Bukhārī, Sahih, i, 198).

Relation to other prayers

Many identify the noon prayer as the “middle prayer” referred to in the Qurʾān, because it is “in the middle of the day” (Ibn Kathīr, Bihāyī, i, 292). It is sometimes counted along with the afternoon prayer (al-ʾāṣr) as belonging to the evening (al-ʿishā‘), Rāzī, Mukhtār, i, 183), without conceding the separate identity of each prayer: joining the noon prayer to that of the afternoon is judged to be a breach, and is typical of the Shi‘īs and the Ravāfīs (Ibn Taymiyya, Minḥāj, v, 175; see Shi‘īsm and the Qurʾān). In rare cases it is allowed, as when the Prophet himself did so at ‘Arafāt (q.v.; id., Jawāhī, vi, 372). The Friday prayer (q.v.) is made around noon time, and is sometimes referred to as “the abridged noon prayer” (al-ṣūh al-maqṣūra, id., Majmū‘, xxiv, 190) but in spite of this similarity, different rules apply to each (id., Katub, xxiv, 190), e.g. the rules of the call to prayer (adhān, id., ‘Umdu, iv, 98).

Action

Like other prayers, the noon prayer pardons sins that were committed during the time between the dawn prayer and its performance (Ibn Kathīr, Bihāyī, ii, 493). It is also a reference point to phenomena and actions that are not necessarily of a religious nature. Often the structure of such an indication is “the Prophet prayed the noon-prayer then…” (Ibn Qānīn, Muṣjam, i, 249), or the time at which the subject arrived at a given place is given in relation to the time of the noon prayer (Ibn Qayyīm al-Jawzīyya, Ẓād, ii, 233; see journey; trips and voyages).

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Bibliography

Nudity

The state of being devoid of clothing (q.v.). In general, the Qurʾān enjoins modesty (q.v.) and evokes nudity only negatively. Q 24:30-1 insists upon physical modesty for both men and women, while the narrative of Adam and his spouse in Q 7:19-27 [see NARRATIVES; ADAM AND EVE] associates nudity with the first human act of disobedience (q.v.).

As in the Hebrew Bible, the first couple’s nudity is made manifest — the specific manner is disputed by the exegetes — after they partake of the fruit of the forbidden tree. Q 7:22 states, “So by deceit he [i.e. Satan; see DEVIL] brought about their fall (see FALL OF MAN): when they tasted of the tree, their sawāt became apparent to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their lord called unto them: ‘Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy (see ENEMIES) unto you?’ ” The word sawāt is derived from the Arabic root meaning “to be bad, evil,” and is sometimes interpreted to mean that Adam and Eve realized their error (q.v.) or “saw the evil of their [ways].” Following this interpretation, some English translations render the word as “shame” or “evil intentions.” More concretely, the word sawāt is understood to refer to the genitals (fajar, ’awras, see SEX AND SEXUALITY). Certainly the idea of physical nakedness is implied by the Qurʾānic text, in which the couple’s reaction to the sudden manifestation of their sawāt is the fashioning of garments. For some exegetes, the word denotes the physical genitals while retaining connotations of moral negativity (see ETHICS AND THE QURʾĀN). Thus, the medieval Andalusian exegete al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272; Jāmiʿ, vii, 181) states that the private parts bear the names saw’a and ’awra because people find it unpleasant to display them (li-anna izhārahu yasīʿu ẓāḥi-bahu). Jurists derived from this verse the legal principle (see LAW AND THE QURʾĀN) that it is undesirable (gabīḥ) to expose one’s genitals, and that in the absence of any other suitable material it is incumbent on one to fashion clothing of leaves.

Exactly how Adam and Eve’s nakedness “became apparent” is not specified in the Qurʾān; a widely-reported tradition attributed to the Prophet’s Companion Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/686-8; see COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET) states that in the garden (q.v.) they were covered with a coating that then receded from their bodies and remained only on the tips of their fingers and toes, forming the nails. The “nakedness” of Adam and his spouse is not merely a physical but a moral denudation; the passage continues by evoking God’s mercy (q.v.) in providing clothing and adornment for humankind, and concludes by stating “the garment of consciousness of God (libās al-taqwā) is best” (Q 7:26; see PIETY; KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING).

The words saw’a and ’awra are used elsewhere in the Qurʾān to refer, not to nudity per se, but to other states of exposure, vulnerability and intimacy. In Q 5:31, God sends a raven to show Cain how to cover the shamefully exposed body (saw’a) of his murdered brother (see CAIN AND ABEL). In Q 33:13, unwilling warriors make the excuse that their houses are exposed to attack (inna buyūtanā ’awra, see FIGHTING); and
Q 24:58 refers to three times of the day (see day, times of) when it is customary to withdraw into privacy (as well as, according to many commentators, to undress) as *`awrāt.*

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Bibliography

Nūḥ see Noah

Numbers and Enumeration

Words representing amounts and the designation of the number of objects. The Qur‘ān makes full use of a range of Arabic words denoting numbers and counting. In doing so, it employs the number words both in terms of literal counting and of representative images and symbols (see symbolic imagery), many with an ancient heritage. Words are employed for each of the cardinal unit numbers and occasional higher numbers, including 10, 11, 12, 19, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 99, 100, 200, 300, 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, 50,000, and 100,000. The number words “one” and “two,” although numerically indicated through grammar in Arabic (along with the generic plural, of course), are used both for emphasis and counting purposes. Of the ordinal numbers, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 8th appear in the text. Fractions also figure significantly, primarily because of their legal usage in matters of inheritance (q.v.) as dealt with in Q 4:1/2, 1/3, 2/3, 1/4, 1/5, 1/6, 1/8, and 1/10 are all employed.

In terms of mathematical concepts, the Qur‘ān makes use of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and ratios. “Addition” is conveyed by words related to ḥāla, which is, however, often best understood simply as “increase.” In a passage such as Q 18:25, “And they tarried in the cave (q.v.) three hundred years, and they added nine more,” specific addition of numbers is suggested. A sense of subtraction is found in the word “less” as expressed through the use of the word ʿillā as in Q 29:14, “We sent Noah (q.v.) to his people, and he tarried among them a thousand years less fifty.” Mathematical multiplication may be conveyed by kaththara in Q 7:86, “You were few and he multiplied you,” and by yadhra ‘u in Q 42:11, “He has appointed for you, of yourselves, pairs, and pairs also of the cattle, therein multiplying you,” although both of those may be taken in the sense of “reproduce” rather than mathematical multiplying. Doubling things specifically uses ḍāʾa (and ḍīf for “a double”) but this is also often taken with a more generic sense of “multiply” as in Q 64:17, “If you lend God a good loan (see contracts and alliances; debt), he will multiply it for you.” Division in the sense of separating things into parts is conveyed via words related to ḍālami, as in Q 54:28, “And tell them that the water is to be divided between them, each drink for each in turn.” A sense of ratios emerges in passages having to do with odds in battle (see victory; fighting; war) such as Q 8:66, “If there be a hundred of you, patient men, they will overcome two hundred; if there be of you, a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by the leave of God.” Note may also be taken of the idea of “odd,” watī, and “even,” shaf, employed in Q 89:3, although these terms appear outside a mathematical context. “Pairs,” mathnā, is an elaboration of “two” and is used in counting sequences, for example, in Q 4:3, “Marry such women (see marriage and divorce; women and the Qur‘ān) as seem good to you, in pairs, triples or
quadruples” (also see Q 35:1 for the wings on angels; see Angel).

Counting itself — that is, doing mathematical reckoning — is quite frequently conveyed through ‘adda, “to number,” and its derivatives, e.g. Q 9:36, “the number of months (q.v.) with God is twelve,” and Q 19:84, “We are only numbering them for a number” in reference to the unbelievers (see Belief and Unbelief). The root is also used in the sense of an indefinite number (i.e. “many”) of items (Q 10:3, “the number of years”). The root aḥṣā is also used in a similar manner as in Q 36:12, “Everything we have numbered in a clear register.” The use of both roots (‘d-d and h-s-w) in Q 19:94 should be noted, “He has indeed counted (aḥṣā) them and he has numbered (‘adda) them,” in reference to all those in “the heavens (see Heaven and Sky) and the earth (q.v.).” Another word, ḥasība, and its derivatives convey a more general sense of “calling to account” with God as the reckoner.

On several occasions things are enumerated in the Qur’ān, simply for the purposes of counting, as in the debate regarding how many sleepers there were in the cave (Q 18:22; see Men of the Cave) or the presence of God being counted as one extra in groups who conspire secretly (Q 58:7).

The Qur’ān’s vocabulary of numbers includes senses derived from the widespread Near Eastern symbolic value of numbers which undoubtedly permeated pre-Islamic culture as well as having been fully incorporated within the biblical tradition (see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān; Scripture and the Qur’ān). The social values, however, conveyed through number symbolism in the Qur’ān are less obvious than in other ranges of symbolism (e.g. as found in colors [q.v.]). For example, the symbolism of “seven” days in a week does not seem to convey a great deal about the social values of seventh century Arabia when it is employed in the Qur’ān. Rather, it speaks more significantly of the ancient heritage of such symbols whose actual social value has perhaps been lost but which provide a structuring to human experience nevertheless (see Community and Society in the Qur’ān).

“Three” (thālātha) is a number of plurality, perhaps reflected in the fact that “two” can be indicated through the grammatical dual in Arabic whereas a separate word must be used for “three” (see Grammar and the Qur’ān; Arabic Language). Duality — whether expressed by the grammatical ending or by the word ithnān — is natural and perfect, whereas “three” indicates a collection of things (in common with the units up to ten), as is suggested by the use of the plural noun in grammatical construct case following the number word when enumerating things. The natural and perfect nature of “two” is reflected by the use of duality in the case of the animals going into Noah’s ark (Q 11:40, “Embark on it two of every kind”; see Animal Life) and in the description of creation (q.v.; Q 13:3, “And of every fruit he placed there two kinds”; see Agriculture and Vegetation). There is also the Qur’ānic injunction to have two male witnesses for contracts (although note one man and two women; Q 2:282; see Witnessing and Testifying; Contracts and Alliances). Duality is, at the same time, opposed to oneness — whether expressed in the word wāḥid or aḥad — quite clearly: “Take not to you two gods. He is only one God” (Q 16:51; see God and His Attributes). “Three,” on the other hand, may be a number of pain and grief (see Joy and Misery; Suffering), especially as opposed to unity. Q 77:30 speaks of the punishment of the judgment day (see Eschatology; Reward and Punishment; Last Judgment) in saying, “Depart to a triple-massing
shadow,” the three-ness of this shadow being an emphasis on its awfulness (see darkness). “Three veils” encircle the child in the womb according to Q 39:6 (see birth). Fasting (q.v.) for three days overcomes legal problems (Q 2:196; 5:89). The people of Šālib (q.v.) can enjoy their homes for three days before punishment comes (Q 11:65; see punishment stories). And, of course, the idea of worshipping three gods is firmly condemned (Q 4:171; see christians and christianity; polytheism and atheism).

Attention has been drawn in scholarship to the symbolism of “four,” ḍaba’, and its multiples in Arab historical narratives and the resultant lack of precision in associated historical details. The grounding of those symbols is to be found in the Qurān. The role of “forty” is especially prominent but this is founded upon the widespread symbol of “four” as representing “perfection, completion and culmination.” “Forty” becomes a major chronological unit, building upon the formative one of Muḥammad as forty years old when he began to receive revelation (see revelation and inspiration), an age likely selected as reflective of Q 46:15 and its association of the age of forty with maturity (q.v.) and religious wisdom (q.v.). Of “four” and “forty,” it has been suggested that they are “the numbers which determine or express the extent to which certain deeds arouse divine approbation or ire or simply demonstrate the hand of God at work in the world” (Conrad, Abraha, 231). The qurānic material, however, adds an extra level of specification to the symbol of “four,” and, in doing so, stays within Near Eastern patterns.

“Four” is the number of perfection, completion and culmination, specifically of the “material order,” as reflected in ideas of the four elements of existence, the four directions of the compass, the four corners of the earth (q.v.), the four phases of the moon (q.v.), the four seasons (q.v.), and so on. “Four” in the Qurān is the number used in the context of legal requirements (see law and the Qurān), certainly reflecting ideas of the wholeness and perfection of material culture but defining that material culture primarily in legal terms, as is appropriate to the Islamic social world (see material culture and the Qurān). A man may marry up to four wives (Q 4:3; four witnesses are required to the accusation of adultery (Q 4:15; see adultery and fornication); if there are not four witnesses, then an oath uttered four times suffices (Q 24:4-9, with, note, the fifth oath to say that he is not a liar; see lie; oaths); there are four months that are sacred (Q 9:2, 36).

“Four” related to a period of time has legal status as well: four months of abstinence from one’s wife for divorce (Q 2:226; see abstinence) and widows (see widow) are to wait four months plus ten days before remarrying (Q 2:234) — the perfection of the number “ten” being added to the legal number “four.” No other number used in the Qurān predominates in its legal application in the way that “four” does. “Four” as the symbol of legality continues in later Islam with the four schools of law and the four righteous caliphs (see caliph). Certainly, other instances of the use of “four” do not have a specific legal overtone: creation is separated out into two days plus four, and in the latter four, God “ordained therein its diverse sustenance” (Q 41:10) — that is, the creation of the material world.

“Five,” khamsa, on the other hand, is half a group — that is, half of “ten” — and despite its later significance in Islam in the ideas of the “five” daily prayers (see prayer), the “five” ritual pillars, and the five “pillars” of the creed (see creeds; faith), it is not used in the Qurān with any such reference. The enumeration of
rituals is not supported through a symbolic use of the number in the Qurʾān. “Five” is used in expressions of large numbers (5000 swooping angels in Q 3:125; one day is 50,000 years in Q 70:4; see DAYS OF GOD), and overall the number simply appears to convey a significantly large quantity.

The number “six,” ṣitta, relates only to the number of days of creation in the Qurʾān; this is significant in that “six” is sometimes spoken of as a number symbolic of “incompleteness” because it is one less than the heavenly number of “seven.” The Qurʾān does not use “six” apart from the creation story, and it speaks of those six days without giving any importance to the seventh day that follows it which, in the biblical tradition, completes the process.

“Six” seems to have lost its symbolic value in the Qurʾān and is entirely subsidiary to Near Eastern creation traditions. It is also polemically charged — that is, it is used with an emphasis on the rejection of the seventh day that follows it which, in the biblical tradition, completes the process.

“Seven,” sabʿa, like “three,” is a prominent number of plurality but it clearly has a symbolic value deeply imbedded in the notion of the seven stars or planets from ancient Babylonian times (see PLANETS AND STARS). Virtually all the uses of “seven” in the Qurʾān relate to cosmography in one way or another (see COSMOLOGY). The seven heavens or firmaments (Q 17:44), seven gates to hell (Q 15:44; see HELL AND HELLFIRE), seven oceans (Q 31:27), and the motif of seven in the story of Joseph (q.v.) and the interpretation of the dreams (Q 12:43-8) all reflect this (see DREAMS AND SLEEP). “Seven” is the number of the supra-mundane world.

Such values continue in later Muslim tradition. Ibn ʿAbbās, while still a youth, is reported to have said to ʿUmar (see COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET; HADITH AND THE QURʾĀN):

God is odd in number and he likes odd numbers. Days of the universe turn around seven, he created our sustenance out of seven, he created man out of seven, above us he created seven skies, below us he created seven layers of the earth, he gave us the seven oft-repeated (q.v.; mathānī), he forbade marriage with seven relatives in scripture (see PROHIBITED DEGREES), and he divided the legacy into seven parts, he confined the numbers of bows of our bodies [in prayer] to seven (see BOWING AND PROSTRATION), the messenger of God walked around the Kaʿba (q.v.) seven times and between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa (see ŞAFĀ AND MARWA) seven times, he threw seven stones [at Mīrıyām], and the night of glory (see NIGHT OF POWER) is one of the last seven nights of Ramadan (q.v.; Suyūṭī, Itqān, iv, 206-7).

“Seven” used in the form of “seventy” is generally interpreted simply as “a large number” (see Conrad, Seven, 46; and references including Ibn Khaldūn who says that “seventy” is used by the Bedouin [q.v.] to mean “many”).

“Eight,” thamāniya, is used five times, plus once as “the eighth” in a counting sequence (Q 18:22), once as “an eighth” in matters of inheritance (Q 4:12) and once as “eighty” for the number of lashes for bearing false witness (Q 24:4). There appears to be no unifying symbolic value in the Qurʾānic use of “eight.”

“Nine,” ṭisʿa, being one less than “ten” is used with the sense of one remaining to be added or to bring completion. Moses (q.v.) received nine clear signs before Pharaoh (q.v.; Q 17:101; 27:12); nine people did cor-
ruption (q.v.) in the city of Thamūd (q.v.) and conspired against the tenth person who was Śāliḥ. Also note the use of “ninety-nine” in q 38:23, the only time a combination of tens and units that equals more than the number nineteen is used in the Qurʾān; again, it is counted as one less than a hundred, suggesting that something is lacking, just as in the relationship between “nine” and “ten”.

Arabic uses a decimal numeration system, as reflected in digits that are multiples of ten and the existence of separate words for one hundred and one thousand. “Ten,” ‘asb, as a basic number of counting, seems a reasonable extrapolation from the physiological fact that humans have ten fingers upon which to count. The Qurʾān uses “ten” to reflect this, in that it is the number of counting and of transaction (see selling and buying), and of dealing with gifts (see gift-giving) and with people. “Ten” carries a good value. One good deed brings ten like it (q 6:160; see good deeds); feeding ten people expiates an oath (q 5:89); the bringing of ten sûras like the Qurʾān is the challenge put forth (q 11:13; see inimitability; provocation); ten is three plus seven for the days of a fast in lieu of an offering on the pilgrimage (q.v.) both major and minor (q 2:196, hajj and ‘umra).

From eleven through nineteen, the singular noun is used following the counting number in Arabic. There is a sense of a “heap” here, a plurality of things becoming one undifferentiated group when eleven is reached. Eleven itself is used only once in the Qurʾān, in the eleven stars that bow down to Joseph (q 12:4). “Twelve,” on the other hand, is used five times, in reference to fountains (q 2:60; 7:160; see springs and fountains), chieftains (q 5:12), tribes (q 7:160) and months (q 9:36). It certainly conveys a sense of completion and perfection, suggesting that “twelve” is not always meant literally but sometimes signifies that a full complement is found in the group being counted. Most interesting is the assertion that God declares there to be twelve months. The resultant sense of a divine legitimatization for such an aspect of human culture is striking.

“Nineteen” is famous because of its use in expressing the number of angels in Q 74:39 and may be understood as the sum of “seven” and “twelve,” two numbers of ancient symbolic value. While some have suggested that the number “nineteen” has been used merely for rhyme purposes in the verse (see language and style of the Qurʾān; rhymed prose), the usage of this number drew attention early in Islam, and traditions emerged regarding, for example, the use of nineteen letters within the basmala (q.v.; also see Wensinck, Handbook, 12a, for the traditions on “nineteen” as the number of words in the call to prayer, adhān). The number continues to fascinate, especially because of the recent work of the late Rashid Khalifa in the United States and his attempt to prove the miraculous character of the Qurʾān via the numerical significance of “nineteen” (see mysterious letters). The Internet has become the current forum for the discussion of his ideas through his mosque community in Tucson, Arizona, called the United Submitters International (see www.submission.org). As is common with such attempted numerical proofs, the results are based upon both the characteristics of numbers themselves and statistical analysis of dubious validity (see Gardner, The new age, 170-4; i.e. the “demonic” 666, etc.).

The Qurʾān, not unexpectedly, uses the symbolic language of the Near Eastern monotheist culture. The Arabic of the
seventh century participates fully in those kinds of symbolic representations, although the values which they convey (for example, the auspiciousness of “seven” as reflected in its cosmographical usages in the very ancient world) are deeply embedded and not necessarily explicitly stated. The Qurʾān also uses these symbols with its own particular emphases, as in the legal character of the number “four” within the context of material culture. See also numerology.

Andrew Rippin

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Primary: Suyūṭī, Itqān.

Numerology

Study of the occult signification of numbers. Number symbolism is built into the Arabic alphabet since each letter in the Old Semitic abjad ordering had a numerical equivalent (see Table 1 below; see Arabic script). Muslims practiced gematria in divination (q.v.) and healing (see medicine and the Qurʾān) as well as in Qurʾānic exegesis (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval). In Islamic cosmology (q.v.) the alphabet numbers were linked to stars and planets (see planets and stars), the four humors, names of God (see God and His attributes), angels (see angel), demons (see devil) and a large variety of esoteric phenomena. The first nine numbers were aligned in a magic square, known as budūh or Geber’s Square, which added up to 15 in all directions:

```plaintext
4  9  2
3  5  7
8  1  6
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Originally from ancient China, Arab scholars attributed this square to Adam (see adam and eve) and commonly wrote it on amulets (q.v.) as a protection against evil spirits and misfortune. Magic squares were also constructed for names, such as one that adds up to 66, the numerical sum of the letters in “Allāh.”

In Qurʾānic interpretation Muslim scholars noted that half, or fourteen, of the letters of the Arabic alphabet appeared at the beginning of sûras (see mysterious letters). These were called zāhīn “visible,” or nū‘ “light”; the remaining letters were būtīn, “hidden,” or gūlma, “dark.” Some Şūfīs (see şūfism and the Qurʾān) interpreted the fact that b (=? 2) was both the first letter in the Qurʾān (from bismillāh, see basmala) and in the Hebrew Bible (b’reshīt) as an allusion to the created world (see creation). The repetition of certain numbers in the Qurʾān held special interest. For example, seven was the number of creations (q 7:12), heavens (q 23:86; see heaven and sky), lands (q 6:12; see earth), seas (q 31:27), gates (q 15:44), cows and years in Joseph’s (q.v.) vision (q 12:46, 47; see visions; dreams and sleep) as well
as the number of verses in the opening sūra of the Qur’ān, the Fātiḥa (q.v.), and words in the shahāda (see witness to faith). The seven letters that do not appear in the Fātiḥa were thought to be magically powerful (see magic). Seven was also the number of days in a week, geographical zones, planets, stages of man (see biology as the creation and stages of life) and much more in Islamic belief and practice.

The Brethren of Purity (ikhwān al-safā) of fourth/tenth century Baṣra applied Pythagorean and Neoplatonic number theory in order to better understand the principle of unity at the center of Islamic belief. In their view, God relates to the world as one relates to other numbers. Of special interest was the perfect number (equal to the sum of its parts) 28, because it represents the letters in the Arabic alphabet, the lunar stations (see moon), and vertebra in the backbone. This was also the sum of the top row and right column of the budh (see above). See also numbers and enumeration.

Daniel Martin Varisco

Table 1

The numerical value of Arabic letters in the abjad ordering of the letter values

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Bibliography


Numismatics

The subdiscipline of history that deals with coins as historical evidence. For Islamic coins, the use of Qur’ānic inscriptions is an indicator of the issuing authority’s religious belief and political loyalties (see politics and the Qur’ān).
Muslims in the Ḣijāz had used Roman and Persian coins, so it was natural, when they had conquered a large part of the Roman empire and the entire Sasanian empire of Iran, to allow similar coins to be minted in Egypt (q.v.), Syria (q.v.), and Iran. Only in Iran were Arabic inscriptions added under the early caliphs (see caliph). These were limited to simple brief religious statements added to the Persian images and inscriptions of the prototypes. The earliest, and most common, was bism Allāh (“in the name of God”; see basmala), and there are a variety of others (Gaube, Arabosasanidische Numismatik, plates 2–4), all merely slogans, in many cases used only by one governor, such as bism Allāh ṭabbī (on the coins of Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān, r. 47/55/668–75) or bism Allāh al-ʿazīz (on the coins of a certain ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, 65/685–6).

Qurʾānic inscriptions do not appear until after ʿAbd al-Malik’s conquest of the eastern caliphate in 72/691 (Crone and Cook, Hagerism; Whelan, Forgotten witness). In the same hijrī year, 72 (see calendar; emigration), the mint of his capital Damascus began producing gold coins of Roman type and silver Persian-type coins with the shahāda, the Islamic creed (see witness to faith; creeds), which is not recorded before this date. The same formula appears among the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, built in 72/691, and on most Persian-type coins of the eastern caliphate beginning in 72 and 73 a.h. The shahāda does not appear as such in the Qurʾān, but it is composed of elements drawn from the Qurʾān:

“There is no god but God” (lā ilāha illā Allāh, Q 37:35, and 47:19); “he alone” (wahdāhu applied to God, Q 7:70 and three other places); “He has no associate” (lā sharika lahu, Q 6:163); and “Muhammad is the messenger” (q.v.) of God” (Muhammadan rasūlu Allāh, Q 48:29). This formula, “There is no god but God alone, none is like unto him, Muḥammad is the messenger of God,” remained a standard inscription on most Islamic coins for centuries, at least until the fall of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate in the seventh/thirteenth century, and thereafter, usually abbreviated to the first and last elements, into the twentieth century in some countries. In numismatic publications it is often called the kalima, perhaps an Anglo-Indian terminology.

The first two-thirds of the shahāda form the central obverse inscription of the first Islamic coins (without images, bearing only Arabic inscriptions), which were gold dinars minted in Damascus in 77/697, and silver dirhams beginning two years later (see money; Fig 1 of epigraphy). The central reverse inscription was Q 112:1–4, nearly the entire text of Sūrat al-Ikhlās:

“God is one, God is the eternal (see eternity); he does not beget and he was not begotten, and there is nothing like him.” The middle phrase suggests that the intended audience for this statement were the Christians, those of Rome and also those whom the Muslims ruled (see christians and christianity; byzantines). This inscription was standard only for the duration of the Umayyad caliphate, until 132/750, but it was used occasionally later, as late as the fifth/eleventh century; it would be interesting to examine the varied circumstances in which it was revived. These central inscriptions were arranged in horizontal lines on both faces. One of the two circular inscriptions that surrounded the central lines was another qurʾānic verse, “Muḥammad is the messenger of God, who sent him with guidance and the religion of truth to make it supreme over every religion, even if the polytheists detest it” (see polytheism and atheism). The first phrase, which completes the shahāda, is Q 48:29, while the rest...
is q 9:33 or the identical q 61:9. Here again, the statement is directed to the non-Muslims within and outside the caliphate. This sentence also became a standard part of the inscriptions on all coins until the fall of the caliphate, and for a long time thereafter in Egypt and some other countries. The other outer circular inscription stated that the coin was struck in the name of God, and continued with the hīrī date in words, as well as the name of the issuing mint on silver dirhams. With this latter exception, coin inscriptions at the beginning were exclusively religious, justifying the term “Islamic” which was applied to them in medieval and modern times.

These were the main standard inscriptions of the Sunni caliphates. Early rebels against them added two more qur’ānic inscriptions. The Khārijījīs (q.v.), in the rebellions of the 70s/690s and again in those at the end of the Umayyad era, added the statement lā hukm ilā lillāh, “There is no judgment (q.v.) but God’s,” which is not literally qur’ānic but parallels in i l-hukm illā lillāh found in three places in the Qur’ān (q 6:57; 12:40, 67), as well as many other references to God’s judgment.

The partisans of the rule of the Prophet’s family (see FAMILY OF THE PROPHET; PEOPLE OF THE HOUSE; SHI'ISM AND THE QUR’ĀN) used another verse, q 42:23, “Say: I do not ask of you for it any recompense except love of kin (see KINSHIP),” which appears on the coinage of ‘Abdallāh b. Mu‘āwīya (r. 129/746-7) who claimed the caliphate for himself and that of Abū Muslim (d. 137/755) who fought for the ‘Abbāsid (Wurtzel, Coinage), as well as on ninth-century coins of the Zaydī imāms (see IMĀM).

With the victory of the ‘Abbāsid family, the central caliphal mint was transferred to Iraq, and the central reverse inscription of the Umayyads was replaced by the conclusion of the shahāda, “Muḥammad is the messenger of God,” words which now appeared twice on the coins. This remained the standard central reverse inscription of most Islamic coins. The other inscriptions stayed the same, until, in 145/763, al-Mahdī, the governor of Khurāsān and the future caliph, was the first person allowed to put his name on dirhams (in an executive formula that replaced the normal reverse center inscription). Within a few years, it had become quite common for various individuals to be named on silver and then on gold coins, but the caliph al-Ma‘mūn (r. 196-218/811-33) put a stop to this, restoring the completely anonymous, purely religious, inscriptions of the beginning of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, and otherwise standardizing the coinage, making gold and silver coins alike in arrangement and epigraphy at all mints throughout the caliphate (see EPIGraphY AND THE QUR’ĀN). He also made two additions to the former inscriptions, both of which remained standard for the duration of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate. In 193/809, when his father died leaving him as governor of the eastern caliphate on behalf of his brother the caliph, the single word lillāh was added to all coins issued in his realm in the space above the reverse inscriptions. This word, or rather prepositional phrase, has a clear meaning, either “for God” or “belonging to God,” but its significance is not obvious. Does it apply to the coin or to the caliph who authorizes it? Whatever its import, it was probably put on the coins as an indication of al-Ma‘mūn’s piety in contrast to his brother al-Amīn (r. 193-8/809-13), whom he ultimately defeated in civil war. This victory was celebrated by the addition of another qur’ānic inscription, q 30:4-5, “God commands (lillāhi l-amru), in the past and in the future; and on that day the believers will
rejoice in God’s victory (q.v.),” placed on the obverse of all coins as a second outer circular inscription (El-Hibri, Coinage reform). Al-Mu’tasim (r. 218-27/833-42), al-Ma’mūn’s successor, retained all these standard inscriptions, but with one important addition: his own caliphal title, al-Mu’tasim bi-llāh, placed below Muhammad rasūl Allāh on the reverse. His successors followed the same practice, and sometimes added other names: their son and anticipated successor most commonly, but also, with increasing frequency, the names of certain distinguished wazīrs, powerful generals, and autonomous provincial governors. Legally, the powerful Sunni dynast of the fourth/tenth century onwards were in the latter category. Although they were named on the coins and controlled their minting, they always named the caliph as overlord and included all the elements mentioned above on their coinage: the “Victory Verse” around the outer edge of the obverse, with “struck in the name of God” followed by the denomination, mint city, and date as the inner circular inscription; the first part of the shahāda as the central element of the obverse, sometimes abbreviated; on the reverse, lillāh above “Muhammad is the messenger of God,” with the “prophetic mission” verse (Q 9:33 or the identical Q 61:9) around the edge.

Rebels against the caliphate, and Islamic dynasties outside the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, often used different inscriptions to proclaim their ideology and differentiate themselves from the Sunni ‘Abbāsids. The pro-‘Alid Abū l-Sarāyā exhorted his troops on dirhams of Kufa (195/814-15) with the verse “Indeed, God loves those who fight in his path in ranks, as though they were a building well-compacted” (Q 61:4; see FIGHTING; PATH OR WAY). In place of the usual outer circular inscriptions ‘Ali b. Muḥammad, the šāhib al-Ẓanī, used the beginning of Q 9:111: “God has purchased from the believers their persons and their goods, in return for paradise (q.v.) if they fight in the path of God,” a stirring call to arms; and on the reverse, “And those who fail to judge according to God’s revelation, they are the unbelievers” (kāfirūn, cf. Q 5:47; see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF), justifying his war against the Muslims around him (Miles, Ninth century hoard, 71-4, 131-3). The Zaydi imāms in Daylam and Ṭabāristān used several qur’ānic verses at one time or another, including Q 42:23, the so-called “kinfolk verse,” mentioned above; Q 22:39, “Permission [to make war (q.v.) is given] to those who are oppressed, and surely God is able to give them victory” (wa-inna lā ḥarām la-qaddirun, see OPPRESSION; OPPRESSED ON EARTH); the end of Q 33:33, “God only wants to remove pollution from you, O people of the house, and to purify you thoroughly”; and Q 17:81, “Say, the truth (q.v.) is come and falsehood has vanished, for falsehood indeed is bound to perish” (Miles, al-Mahdī al-Ḥaqq; Stern, Coins, 211-19). This latter verse was widely employed, being found on some of the coins of the Idrīsids in eighth century Morocco (Eustache, Corpus) and on many coins of Yemen, having been introduced there in 297/910 by the Zaydi imām al-Hādī ilā l-Ḥaqq (Bikhazi, Coins).

Outside the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, the Fāṭimids proclaimed their descent through the addition of ‘Ali wa-li Allāh after Muhammad rasūl Allāh, and through various other references to ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭalib (q.v.) and Fāṭima (q.v.), but did not employ any new qur’ānic verses. As heirs of the Aghlabids, who followed ‘Abbāsid practice in effect when they became autonomous, the Fāṭimids took no notice of al-Ma’mūn’s innovations but employed all the standard inscriptions of early ‘Abbāsid coinage (Lane-Poole, Catalogue, iv, 275) plus ‘Alid additions. In
Spain, the Umayyad emirs retained the inscriptions of caliphal Umayyad dirhams to the letter, and when they declared themselves caliphs, merely substituted their names and titles for the former Umayyad reverse, q 112:1-4. The first new Qur’ānic inscription in the Maghrib was introduced by the Almoravids whose standard obverse marginal inscription was q 3:83, “And whoever desires a faith (q.v.) other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the end he will be among those who perish.” Subsequently a great many different Qur’ānic verses and references were used by the Almohads and their successors; Hazard (Numismatic history, 36-40) lists 61 different verses and phrases used in north Africa, which are keyed back to the issues on which they appear on pages 365-71. In fourteenth-century Spain, the Nasrids of Granada, facing extinction by the Christians, used the verse “Say: O God, master of dominion, you give dominion to whom you wish and strip dominion from whom you wish, and you exalt whom you wish and humble whom you wish — in your hand is all good” (q 3:26).

After the fall of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, the ‘Ikhāns and their successors, although their coinages were very diverse, introduced a few exceptional inscriptions which were used briefly under ‘Olcyytī and Abū Sa’īd. ‘Olcyytī’s coinage (between 703-9/1304-10) bore two Qur’ānic verses not used elsewhere on coins, the long first half of q 48:29, and most of q 24:53, as well as phrases indicating his new Sunni allegiance, whereas before he had designated ‘Alī as wałī Allāh and named the twelve imāms. Abū Sa’īd, on his issue of 718-21/1319-22, used the end of q 2:137, “God will suffice you against them, for he is the all-hearing, the all-knowing” (see seeing and hearing; God and his attributes), forming the words into an arch resembling a mihrāb (see mosque) enclosing the abbreviated shahāda (Lane-Poole, Catalogue, vi, lvi-lvii, 46, 62).

The use of long Qur’ānic quotations went out of style in the early modern era. The Ottomans scarcely ever employed religious inscriptions on their coinage. The Shāhs of Iran at most used the shahāda with the addition of ‘Alī wałī Allāh and the twelve imāms; the Mughals did the same, without the Shāī additions. More often, both empires filled the coin faces with Persian verses and long titulature. In Yemen, coins issued by the Zayātī imāms continued to bear ‘Abd al-Malik’s shahāda past the middle of the twentieth century.

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**Nūn, Dhū al-** see jonah

**Nurse** see fosterage; wet-nursing
Oaths

Solemn assertions or promises. In English the word “oath” has various related senses. One usually involves using the name of God, or of some other revered or dreaded being, object or place, in order to give force and solemnity to an utterance (an assertion, promise, denial, curse, etc.).

Oaths of this type, where a statement includes a phrase such as “by God,” “by the stars when they set,” “by this land,” etc., are common in the Qurʾān. Many such oaths occur in sūras traditionally regarded as having been among the earliest to be revealed, and their compressed grammar and unusual vocabulary pose difficulties of comprehension (see grammar and the Qurʾān; language and style of the Qurʾān). Understood as communications of God himself, there are nevertheless examples (e.g. Q 4:65; 16:69) where they are made “by God” (tallāhi) or “by your lord” (q.v.; wa-raḥība). The fact that God uses oaths in the Qurʾān is taken to be among the proofs of its inimitability (q.v.; cf. Suyūṭī, Muʿṭarab, i, 449-55).

The interpretation of oaths to natural phenomena, such as stars (see nature as signs; planets and stars), which occur in early sūras (see chronology and the Qurʾān), has posed problems for exegetes (see exegesis of the Qurʾān; classical and medieval; see also Kandil, Schwüre; Neuwirth, Images). Muqāṭīl (d. 150/767) explains the oath of Q 53:1 (“by the star when it sets”) as referring to the time that elapsed between revelations; the Qurʾān itself is therefore called “naqīm” (Tafsīr, iv, 159; cf. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Tihān, 161; al-Farrāʾ, Maʾānī, iii, 94). Later exegetes, such as al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505; Itqān, iv, 53-9), explain these oaths as following the custom of the Arabs (q.v.): as the Qurʾān was revealed in the language of the Arabs, it adopted their formulaic expressions (see Arabic language; language, concept of). The problematic is further complicated when the style of these formulaic expressions is examined: for, stylistically, these oaths have been understood to be akin to the rhymed prose (q.v.) of the pre-Islamic soothsayers (q.v.; see Ibn al-Naqīb, Muqaddima, 238-9; cf. Nöldeke, ΑQ, i, 60, 75; Wellhausen, Reste arabischen Heidentums, 135; see also poetry and poets), yet the Qurʾān denies that Muḥammad is a soothsayer.

Finally, sometimes these oaths appear in the reported speech of, for example, Abraham (q.v.; Q 21:57: “By God, I shall set snares for your idols”; see idols and
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images) or the sons of Jacob (q.v.) in Egypt (q.v.; Q 12:73: “By God, you know that we did not come to commit evil in the land…”).

A second type of oath is typically a statement or promise guaranteed by calling upon a revered being or object as a witness, usually made to another person or party, often in a formal legal or quasi-legal context (see witnessing and testifying; law and the Qur’ān). It is common to distinguish between an oath in this sense and a vow, a promise to do or avoid something, which may be made directly to God or some other being and may be made privately and internally. Inasmuch as the words of a vow, however, tend to follow fixed formulae, may involve other human beings, and may invoke the name of the being to whom it is being offered, the distinction between an oath and a vow is not always clear. There are some cases in the Qur’ān — and outside it — where derivatives of the root y-m-n (usually understood in connection with oaths) may be equally understood as referring to vows (see the discussion of al-laghw fi aymānikum below).

Vocabulary and types of oaths

The most common words indicating swearing and oaths in the Qur’ān are derivatives of the roots y-m-n, h-l-f, and q-s-m. They seem to be used interchangeably and often jointly in expressions such as “oaths which you have sworn” (aymānikum idthā halafum, e.g. Q 5:89) or “they swear a solemn oath by God” (ayqamū bi-ilāhī jahda aymānikhim, e.g. Q 6:109). The root q-s-m, which is associated with the notion of dividing and apportioning, as well as with swearing and oath taking, is used both in connection with the oath as a forceful statement (Q 5:106-7 recommends that when making a will two just men should be chosen as witnesses and asked to swear — yuqismān — that they will not act corruptly). The references in Q 2:67-71 to the cow which God commanded the people of Moses (q.v.) to slaughter are sometimes explained by exegetes in connection with the group oath known in Islamic law as the qasāmā, which is not attested by name in the Qur’ān.

On the other hand, nadhara and nadh, understood more in connection with vows, occur independently and on some occasions clearly refer to the promising of a pious act to God: in Q 19:26 Mary (q.v.; Maryam) says, “I have sworn/vowed a fast (nadhartu … sawmum) to God” (see fasting); in Q 3:35 Imrān’s (q.v.) wife, pregnant with Mary, says to God, “I have sworn/vowed (nadhartu) to you what is in my womb as a consecrated offering.”

The bay’a (giving allegiance or entering a contract of clientage) may also be understood as a form of oath (see contracts and alliances). The noun bay’a itself does not occur in the Qur’ān but there are a number of cases where the third form of the verb is used, and Q 48:10 makes it clear that it involves a ritual acceptance of God’s representative as one’s patron (see clients and clientage): “Those who offer allegiance to you (yubāyi i‘naka) do so to God. God’s hand (q.v.) is over theirs [an allusion to the hand clasp involved in such contracts]. Whoever betrays his oath (man na-kathā) only betrays himself but whoever fulfils what he has contracted to God (awfā binā ’ihdā ’alayhu llāha), he will grant him a tremendous reward.”

Two other procedures mentioned in the Qur’ān are related to swearing oaths and making vows. They involve a man renouncing sexual relations with a woman or women who would normally be available to him. Q 2:226-7 says that those who swear
or vow not to have relations with their wives (lilladhīna yūṭāna min nisāʾihim) should wait for four months. If they revert (fāʾū) [i.e. resume relations?], God is forgiving and merciful; if they decide on divorce, he is all-hearing and all-knowing” (see MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE; ABSTINENCE; CHASTITY). Outside the Qurʾān the word ʾilāʾ is used with reference to a vow of (temporary) abstention from a certain woman or women. If the abstention lasts longer than four months, the man must either divorce the woman or resume relations with her (see SEX AND SEXUALITY). The vow is made invoking one of the names of God (see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES) and is subject to an act of atonement (kaṭṭūra) if broken. Some commentators say explicitly that yūṭāna means yahhīṭūna.

Q 33:4 and Q 58:2-3 refer unfavorably to the practice whereby a man makes a wife sexually unavailable to him by ẓihār — a noun which does not occur in the Qurʾān, but is implied in the use of the related verb form in such phrases as azwājakumulīʾītuzāhirīna minhunna (Q 33:4) and alladhīna yuzāhirīnā minkum min nisāʾihim (Q 58:2).

Commentators explain that this practice involved the man putting the woman in the category of those prohibited to him for sexual relations (see PROHIBITED DEGREES) by saying to her, “You are to me as the back (zahr) of my mother,” where “back” has a sexual connotation. Although this is not strictly an oath or vow, it does involve the use of a ritual formula and is subject to acts of atonement (listed in Q 58:3-4) which are more severe than those laid down in Q 5:89 for the breaking of (other?) types of oath.

Vocabulary used in connection with the breaking of oaths includes n-k-th (explained as metaphorical use [see METAPHOR] of its literal association with unraveling or untwisting the fibers of a garment or a wooden toothpick, sûwâk) and n-q-d. H-n-th, which is used outside the Qurʾān often as a technical term in connection with breaking or incurring liability for oaths (see BREAKING TRUSTS AND CONTRACTS), but also more generally in the sense of “sin” (see SIN, MAJOR AND MINOR), occurs twice: in the story of Job (q.v.; Q 38:44) we are told that God ordered him lá taḥnath, which some commentators understand as “do not break your oath,” while in Q 56:46 persisting in al-ḥinth al-ʿażīn is mentioned as the sin of those consigned to hell (see HELL AND HELLFIRE).

The opponents’ oaths

Many references concern the oaths that the opponents (mushrikūn, munāfīqūn [see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; POLYTHEISM AND ATEISME; IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS]), “People of the Book” [q.v.], and others; see also OPPOSITION TO MUHAMMAD] make, falsely, insincerely, or for worldly gain.

[The munāfīqūn] would come to you swearing by God that that they only wanted benifience and reconciliation (iḥsānun wa-tawfīqan) (Q 4:62); “on the day when God will raise them all together they will swear to him as they swear to you… but they are liars” (Q 58:18; see RESURRECTION; LIE); “the mushrikūn swear by God one of their strongest oaths that they will believe if a sign (see SIGNS) comes to them. Say: The signs are with God alone…” (Q 6:106). “Those who barter God’s covenant (q.v.) and their oaths for a small price” (Q 3:77) is often associated with the Jews (see JEWS AND JUDAISM) and sometimes understood to refer to the swearing of a false oath (yamin fājīra) in order to obtain property illegitimately. Satan (see DEVIL) is reported to have sworn to Adam and Eve (q.v.; qāsamaḥumā) that he was a good adviser to them (Q 7:21).

Q 68:10 refers to the unidentified opponents as ḥallāf màkin, “despicable swearer of oaths.” Subsequently (Q 68:17-33), their
fate is compared to that of the unspecified “owners of the garden” (q.v.; ʾasḥāb al-janna) who swore (aṣsamū) to harvest it on the next morning. They failed, however, to make istithnā’—understood to mean that they omitted to say ʾin shāʾʾllāh, “God willing,” after swearing. While they slept, an affliction sent by God befell the garden, and when they came to harvest the fruit they found that there was none left. Mutual recriminations and recognition of guilt followed. The parable has been read as a warning against pride (q.v.) or complacency (Speyer, Erzählungen, 426).

In two passages (Q 58:16 and 63:2) the hypocrites (munāfīqūn) are accused of making their oaths a ḥanna, “shield, armor,” and turning others from the way of God (see PATH OR WAY). These are interpreted as referring to the oaths or the ḥilf which the hypocrites of Medina (q.v.) had made with the Muslims, claiming that they were believers, in order to deflect the Muslims from the way of God, i.e. from the putting into practice of God’s commands regarding the People of the Book and the unbelievers, to which they should really have been subject.

There are other allusions — especially in Q 9 — to agreements guaranteed by oath between the Qur’anic community and its opponents (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’ĀN), although here too the emphasis is on the possibility or likelihood that the opponents will break them. Q 9:2-3: If the mushrikiūn with whom you have made an agreement “undo their oaths after their agreement (in nakathā aymānahum min ba’diʾaḥāthin) and attack your religion, fight the imāms (see I.1.11) of kufr. They have no oaths (aināhum laʾaymānā labhum)…. Will you not fight a people who have undone their oaths…?” Traditional commentators associate the first twenty-nine verses of Q 9 with the period following the conquest of Mecca (q.v.), when agreements previously made between the Prophet and non-Muslims in Arabia were ended — after a period of four months’ grace — and non-Muslims were barred from the Mec- can sanctuary (see kaʾba; POLITICS AND THE QUR’ĀN).

The binding and loosing of oaths
There are so many such references to the opponents swearing oaths (often “by God”) that the Qur’anic texts must reflect a society in which the swearing of oaths was a stock feature of speech (see PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR’ĀN). Q 2:224, “Do not make God an ‘urdu to your oaths…” (see further below), and Q 5:89, “preserve (wa-hfazū) your oaths,” are sometimes interpreted as injunctions against proximity in the making of oaths. As in other societies where oath taking is an important part of everyday life, tension must have existed between, on the one hand, the idea that oaths were solemn undertakings which, once entered into, had to be kept and, on the other, an awareness that it was often impossible to keep an oath. In the latter case some way out had to be found. Various Qur’anic passages, taken together, seem to illustrate this tension.

The verses which stress most strongly the need to honor oaths are probably Q 5:89 (where wa-hfazū is more usually understood as “keep” in the sense of “fulfil”) and Q 16:91-2, 94. The latter repeat an injunction to fulfil the covenant of God (ʾahd Allāh) when it has been entered into (idhā ʾahdatum) and not to break oaths (laʾtuquṣū la-aqmānā) after they have been affirmed. Breaking them is then likened to a woman who ruins her thread by untwisting (in-kt-th) it, thus weakening it. A possible motive for breaking them is suggested by the phrase, “[Do not] take your oaths as a deception (dakhalan) between yourselves, one party
Dakhal is generally glossed by words meaning “trick” or “deceit,” and a tribal practice of the Age of Ignorance (q.v.; jāhilīyya) is suggested as the reason why the oaths in question were sometimes broken: one of the contracting parties (a tribe or other social group) was induced to abandon the other by the appearance of a third party which was bigger and stronger (arbā is understood as meaning “more numerous”). Nevertheless, the passage is understood to contain a general principle: al-Tabari, (d. 310/923; Taṣṣūṣ, xiv, 163-9), while not ruling out that there may have been an occasion of revelation (see occasionalism of revelation) about which it is impossible to be certain, nevertheless considers the ruling contained therein to be generally applicable (wa-inna l-iyya kānat qad nazalat li-sabab min al-asbāb wa-yakina l-hukm bi-hā ‘āmman fi kull mā kāna bi-ma‘āl sabāb alladhi nazalat fihi).

Q 2:225 and 5:89, while they reassure us that God will not hold us responsible for al-laghw (“slips,” but see below) in our oaths, nevertheless stress that he will hold us responsible “for what your hearts (see heart) have acquired” (Q 2:225) or “for that which you have contracted oaths” (Q 5:86).

Nevertheless, both of those verses recognize the possibility of al-laghw in an oath: God will not hold us liable for al-laghw in our oaths (lā yu‘ākhiḍhūkum lāhū bi-l-laghwī fi aymānikum). The commentators disagree on the precise meaning of al-laghw fi l-aymānī but they agree that it refers to oaths which, because of the mental or physical state of the one swearing — for example he may be angry, making a joke, or involved in bargaining — or because the words used are inappropriate, are not binding.

Other than appealing to the circumstances in which it had been made, the other obvious way out of an oath which had been sworn but which could not be kept is the kaffāra (see atonement), various forms of which are set out in Q 5:89. Commentators and jurists differ regarding whether a kaffāra is necessary in the case of al-laghw fi l-aymān.

Oaths (or vows) of abstention, made for ascetic or other reasons (see asceticism), may have been a particular problem. The reference to al-laghw in Q 5:89 follows the previous verse’s command to “eat of what God has made lawful for you, seeking the pleasure of your wives (see wives of the prophet).…” The following verse then goes on to say that God has made
incumbent upon you (plural) the expiation (?) of your oaths (taḥillat aynānikum). Commentators explain these verses as references to an incident in which the Prophet undertook to avoid something which was not contrary to God’s law. Many versions talk of his expressing his determination to avoid sexual relations with a slave girl out of deference to one or two of his wives. Others refer to a certain drink or to honey (q.v.). God then made clear that it was not right that he should declare ḥarīm what God had made ḥalāl.

Although q 66:1 has a singular vocative addressed to the Prophet while q 66:2 is understood as addressed to the Muslims in general, the reports about the Prophet’s “declaring forbidden” tend to agree that it involved an oath. Whether the ṭahrīm was in itself an oath, or whether it was made together with an oath, many reports refer to the Prophet’s “swearing” (b-h-l-f and y-m-n) and to his having to make a kaffāra. Some, interpreting the ṭahrīm as a remunciation of sexual relations, use the noun ḥālā and the verb ṣāliṭā.

Questions concerning oaths and vows occupy considerable space in the classical works of Islamic law, and the Qur’anic materials are taken into account in the discussions. Typically oaths and vows are discussed under the heading ḥiṭāb al-aymān wa-l-nudhrūr although ḥāli and ḥiṭār are usually discussed mainly in the sections on divorce (ḥiṭāb al-talāq). For discussion of taking oaths on the Qur’ān, see EVERYDAY LIFE, QUR’ĀN IN; POPULAR AND TALISMANIC USES OF THE QUR’ĀN; RITUAL AND THE QUR’ĀN.

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Obedience

Act or fact of complying with the demands of one in authority (q.v.). The idea of obedience, with its concomitant concepts of legitimate authority and power to command, occurs with considerable frequency in the Qur’ān. Though several different Arabic expressions convey the idea of obedience, derivatives of the root ʿ-ʿ-ʿ, especially the verb ʿaṭṭaʿa/ʿuṭṭaʿa, predominate, as exemplified in the longest sustained passage on obedience (q 24:47-56). While
atā’a/yuṭ‘u normally means, “to obey,” it sometimes bears the less insistent meaning of “to heed” (q 3:168). The verb ittaba’u/yattabi’u carries the meaning “to obey” (as perhaps in q 3:31, 53) with even less frequency, as it normally means “to follow,” often in a negative sense. Verbs of the root s-l-m, especially sallama/yusallimu and aslama/yuslimu, give the meaning “to submit” but these connote a relatively passive initial act of submission and usually lack the element of putting obedience into active practice found in the verb atā’a/yuṭ‘u, the sense of which they only occasionally approach (as perhaps in q 3:20; 4:65).

Obedience demanded in the Qur’ān is primarily to God and the prophet Muḥammad (eleven occurrences together of atā’a/yuṭ‘u in the imperative). Only one verse (q 4:59) adds obedience to “those having authority among you,” who are best explained as appointees of the Prophet representing his authority in his absence, although other explanations have been offered (see caliph; kings and rulers; imām). Obedience to God and his Prophet means unquestioning submission to God’s commands mediated through the Prophet (q 4:65; 33:36). It is, however, somewhat tempered by the instruction to the Prophet to consult with his followers before deciding on an action (q 3:159; cf. q 4:83; 42:38).

Several other types of obedience also appear in the Qur’ān. Obedient wives (see marriage and divorce) are said to deserve kind treatment (q 4:34) and the Prophet’s wives (see wives of the prophet) in particular are told to obey God and his Prophet (q 33:33), while two verses imply that children (q.v.) should obey their parents in all cases except where the latter oppose them in religion (q 29:8; 31:15; see family; kinship). Conversely, the Qur’ān warns the Muslims not to obey devils (q 6:121; see devil), unbelievers (q 3:149; see belief and unbelief), some People of the Book (q.v.; q 3:100) and counsels the Prophet not to heed those who try to prevent worship (q.v.; q 96:19), various stripes of unbelievers (q 13:37; 18:28; 25:52; 68:8, 10), hypocrites (q 33:1, 48; see hypocrites and hypocrisy), sinners (q 76:24; see sin, major and minor), and most people (q 6:116). The Muslims are also warned not to try to get the Prophet to obey their wishes (q 4:97).

Thus, the Qur’ān provides a rather simple doctrine of obedience, giving a chain of command from God to the Prophet to the Muslims, in which no contradiction or immediate difficulty is visible. Nevertheless, there clearly seems to be a development of the doctrine when the relevant verses are placed in their probable historical context (see chronology and the Qur’ān) according to the Prophet’s biography (see sīra and the Qur’ān) and the alleged dates and occasions of revelation (q.v.).

First, most of the commands to the Prophet not to heed unbelievers fall in passages attributed to the Meccan period. This suggests that the situation of Islam was not yet securely established, so that intrusive outside influences were to be feared and that such reminders were needed to avoid the temptation of taking an easier path of compromise. Also, no calls to obey the prophet Muhammad personally occur in Meccan passages of the Qur’ān at all, perhaps because the Prophet’s authority was already accepted by his small following on a firsthand basis. In verses attributed to the Meccan period, only certain of the former prophets command their followers to be obedient to them personally (see prophets and prophethood). These prophets include Noah (q.v.; Nūḥ), Hūd (q.v.), Sālīḥ (q.v.), Lot (q.v.; Lūṭ), Shu’ayb (q.v.), Aaron (q.v.; Hārūn) and Jesus (q.v.; ʿĪsā; cf. q 20:30; 26:108, 110, 126, 131, 144, 150, 163, 179: 43
57, 63; 71:3). If a need to obey Muḥammad is discoverable in such verses, it is only by implication, for no connection is made explicit there.

Rather, all of the direct calls for obedience to God and his Prophet come from passages considered Medinan, starting in 1/622 but mostly dating from 4/626 and later. When Muḥammad moved from leading a small religious group trying to establish itself at Mecca (q.v.) to actually founding a polity and eventually a sovereign city-state at Medina (q.v.), obedience to him personally grew in importance as a theme (see politics and the Qurʾān). As the Muslims became more numerous and started to be drawn from more diverse ethnic groups than the Quraysh (q.v.) alone, the need for personal obedience to the leader became more obvious (see community and society in the Qurʾān). This was especially the case when fighting (q.v.) was prescribed by Qurʾānic revelation (traditionally first in q. 22:39-40), requiring obedience to military commands. The command to fight was revealed either just before the second oath of al-Aqaba in 621 c.e. (see oaths; contracts and alliances) or right after the emigration (q.v.; hijra) in 1/622 (see also war; expeditions and battles; jihād).

Thereafter, the various oaths of allegiance (bayʿa or muḥāyaʿa) mentioned in the sīra and the ḥadīth (see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān) constitute important milestones in the institutionalization of obedience to the Prophet in his lifetime. The few chronological indications in these sources usually connect such oaths with the two oaths of al-Aqaba in 620-1 c.e. and the oath of al-Hudaybiya in 6/628. Only the latter, however, has a clear chronological connection with Qurʾānic verses — namely q. 48:10 and 48:18, wherein the allusions to a formal oath of allegiance clearly refer to al-Hudaybiya and are one of the best-established chronological indications in the Qurʾān. Other allusions to formal oaths of allegiance in q. 60:12 and q. 9:111 are later, attributable to 8/629 and 9/630 respectively. The covenant (q.v.; mīthāq) of q. 5:7, involving a promise of “We hear and obey,” must likewise refer to a contractual obligation of obedience by the believers but the verse most likely postdates al-Hudaybiya. Cognate verses, however, containing the phrase “We hear and obey” (q. 2:283; 24:31; cf. q. 6:16) may be earlier in date. Whatever the details, one sees a formalization of vows of obedience in the form of a personal oath of allegiance to the Prophet as the Medinan polity grew. On the other hand, long, late passages such as q. 9:38-57 and q. 9:81-106 suggest the continuing difficulty that the Prophet had in enforcing compliance.

Later exegesis (see exegesis of the Qurʾān: classical and medieval; exegesis of the Qurʾān: early modern and contemporary) mostly equates obedience to God and the Prophet with obedience to the Qurʾān and the sunna (q.v.) of the Prophet. Passages most often quoted in support of this include q. 4:38-69, 5:44-50 and 33:36 as well as many ḥadīths. Pro-government interpretations are rare, as exegetes eventually do not consider Muslim polities legitimate successors of the Prophet, whatever the pretensions of the regimes themselves may have been. See also disobedience.

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Obscenity  see curse

Obstinacy  see insolence and obstinacy

Occasions of Revelation

Reports, transmitted generally from the Companions of Muhammad (see companions of the prophet), detailing the cause, time and place of the revelation of a portion (usually a verse; see verses) of the Qur’an. Underlying the material transmitted as “occasions of revelation” (*ashbāb al-nuẓūl*) are certain understandings about the process of Qur’ānic revelation (see revelation and inspiration). The Qur’an is understood to have been revealed piece by piece over the period of some twenty-two years of Muhammad’s preaching career. Muslim exegetes (see exegesis of the Qur’an: classical and medieval) have thus approached the Qur’an through the framework of the life of Muhammad, for example speaking of it as having different characteristics during the time Muhammad was in Medina (q.v.) as compared to when he was in Mecca (q.v.). They also maintained that pieces of it were revealed in response to, or as reflections of, certain situations in the life of Muhammad. Both the structure and the contents of the Qur’an provided evidence to them of these conceptions (see language and style of the Qur’an; form and structure of the Qur’an). The apparent conflict between these ideas and the normative Muslim notion that the Qur’an is the eternal word of God (q.v.; see also eternity) seems to have occasionally surfaced; it is found both as a motif of argument between those who professed the Qur’an’s eternality and those who supported the opposing doctrine of the Qur’an as the created word of God (see createdness of the Qur’an) and as a topos of inter-religious polemic. Ultimately, however, any conflict was resolved by the dogmatic assertion that there is no conflict and that God always acts in the best interests of his creation (q.v.). For example, the fifth/eleventh century author of *Kitāb al-mabānī li-nuẓūm al-ma‘ānī* (40) simply states that the Qur’an was revealed according to the needs of the situation but that the arrangement of the text as it stands today mirrors that found in the eternal “heavenly tablet” (on the author of this text, see Gilliot, *Sciences coraniques*, 57-60; see preserved tablet; book; heavenly book).

Working on the basis that the text was revealed in certain circumstances, it was apparent to the exegetes, then, that the correct interpretation of a given verse could depend upon knowing those circumstances. This led to the identification and compilation of exegetical reports which talked about the revelation of a given verse; knowledge of those reports was asserted to be the key to all interpretation (although such claims are central to each and every approach to Qur’ānic exegesis). Historically, it is not certain how the compilation of the *ashbāb al-nuẓūl* occurred. The reports may have originated within the context of the life story of Muhammad.
(see sīra and the Qur'ān); they may have been found among the stock of material used by the popular preachers in early Islam (see Teaching and Preaching the Qur'ān); they may have been a part of the documentation used by legal scholars to understand how a Qur'ānic law was to be applied (see Law and the Qur'ān); or they may have been a form of exegesis in and by themselves.

Fundamentally, as the material has been discussed and collected by Muslim exegetes, the sabāb is differentiated by its literary character. A sabāb is a report in which something or someone is characterized as having been involved in some way in the life of Muhammad. The report will describe an event or situation and will state, “then the verse was revealed” (fa-nazalat al-āya), connecting a particular Qur'ānic text to the situation. A typical example is as follows:

“They are asking you about wine [q.v.] and maysir [a type of gambling, q.v.]. Say: in them both is great sin [see sin, major and minor] and uses for the people, but their sin is greater than their use.” This verse [q 2:216] was revealed about Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and Mu‘ādh b. Jabl and a group from the Anṣār [“Helpers”; see emigrants and helpers] who came to the Prophet and said, “Give us a ruling about wine and maysir for the two of them are destroyers of the intellect [q.v.] and plunderers of property [q.v.].” So God revealed this verse (Wāhidī, Ashbāḥ 64-5).

Such reports were an integral part of all exegesis, although in the early centuries the material was not separated out in any way — neither by technical terminology nor by literary form. The book of Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ahmad al-Wāhidī al-Nisabūrī (d. 468/1075), Kitāb Ashbāḥ nuzūl al-Qur'ān, collected together as many reports as the author could find, listing material relevant to sections of eighty-five sūras of the Qur'ān. This work is both the most famous of the genre devoted to gathering such material, and also one of the earliest (it is, at the very least, the work which firmly established the genre). Al-Wāhidī’s work may be seen as emerging at the time of the rise of traditionalism within Islamic learning in general, a period in which the authority of tradition, rather than reason, was judged to be supreme (thus making sense of al-Wāhidī’s explicit and polemical claim that the asbāb are the key to exegesis).

Several other works exist from the centuries after al-Wāhidī which attempt either to gather more material or to refine the criteria used for collection. Among the works are those of al-‘Irāqī (d. 567/1171), who attempts to distinguish the occasions of revelation from the stories of the prophets (qīṣa al-anbiyā’, see Prophets and Prophethood), two genres which al-Wāhidī often conflates; al-Ja‘barī (d. 732/1333), whose work provides an edited version of al-Wāhidī’s text; Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449), who provides a compendium of reports from classical ḥadīth sources; al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who both supplements al-Wāhidī’s sources (and thus has material on sections of 102 sūras) and eliminates reports he considers inappropriate; and al-Uḫūrī (d. 1190/1776), whose work gathers together material from various of the “sciences” (‘ulūm) of the Qur’ān including the “occasions of revelation” (see Traditional Disciplines of Qur’ānic study). Other anonymous or unidentified works exist in the manuscript libraries of the world and a few modern works have been published, but overall the inventory of texts devoted to the topic is fairly slim as compared to such other exegetical genres as abrogation (q.v.), al-nāṣikh wa-l-mansīkh.

Within general exegetical texts, the asbāb al-nuzūl reports are usually integrated and
not distinguished from other material. When they are cited, they perform a number of exegetical functions. Central to these functions is the reports’ capacity to embed lexical glosses, resolve literary figures, support variant readings (see readings of the Qur’ān), provide narrative expansion (see narratives) and clarify contextual definition for narrative and legal purposes.

Lexical glosses are easily incorporated in a story such that the wording of a Qur’ānic verse is restated:

They said, “Oh Prophet of God, is charity given secretly better or charity given openly [see almsgiving]?” So God revealed the verse [Q 2:271], “If you expose charity, it is still good. If you hide them and give them to the poor, that is better for you and will act as an atonement [q.v.] for you from your bad deeds” (Waḥidi, Asbāḥ, 82; see evil deeds).

Here the Qur’ānic abdā (tudū), “expose,” is glossed as ‘alānīya, “give openly,” and akhfä (tukhfi‘), “hide,” as sirr, “secretly.” In other contexts, this type of glossing facilitates the restatement in literal language of the meaning of a Qur’ānic metaphor (q.v.) or the provision of a word left out by ellipsis. Different reports can also be cited in order to support different readings of the text.

Narrative expansion seems to reflect the needs of the Qur’ānic storyteller and his audience. Many of the asbāb al-nuzūl reports answer the questions of curious people who will ask, “Who was it who said that?” or “Why did somebody do that?”

‘Ali [see ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalib] had only four dirhams. He gave away one of the dirhams at night, one at day, one secretly and one publicly. The Prophet said to him, “What has made you do this?” He said, “I did it so that I would be worthy of God who has made a promise to me.” The Prophet said to him, “Now that is yours.” So God revealed the verse [Q 2:274], “Those who give their possessions at night and at day, secretly and in public, they will have their reward with their lord” (Waḥidi, Asbāḥ, 86; see reward and punishment).

Such a report clarifies who it was who did the action with those specific characteristics (why are only these four types of giving specified, it may have been wondered). Noticeable in this particular instance are the possibilities for ideological argumentation on the basis of the asbāb al-nuzūl reports. For example, this story would support the Shi‘īs (see Shi‘ism and the Qur’ān) and their claims about ‘Ali.

While reports may well have additional implications in the legal realm, the impetus and relevance of the reports seem to lie primarily elsewhere. For example, when the Qur’ān proclaims in Q 2:189, “It is not piety to enter houses from their rear;” it is difficult for the curious listener not to wonder just who it was who would have done such a thing (it was the pagan Arabs, although the circumstances under which they would have done so have varying interpretations; see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān). Likewise, when the Qur’ān states in Q 2:116, “They say, ‘God has taken a son; glory be to him!’” a sahaba can answer the question of who “they” were who said such a thing (it was the Jews of Medina and the Christians of Najrān [q.v.], according to Waḥidi, Asbāḥ, 96; see Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity).

Delimitation of the context of a given verse can in itself serve a number of functions. Sometimes, it is necessary to be able to assert the limits to a Qur’ānic pericope in order to avoid misinterpretation of the following verses. In that sense, the asbāb function as indicating paragraphs within the
otherwise unpunctuated text. This can prevent interpretations that could have serious legal implications. One such example may be seen in Q 2:114-5. The first verse deals with the destruction of mosques (in some asbāb reports this is specified as the Christians destroying the temple in Jerusalem [q.v.], Wāḥiḍī, Asbāb, 33; see MOSQUE); verse 115 then goes on to say “To God belongs the east and the west; wherever you turn, the face of God (q.v.) is there.” There are some interpreters, then, who suggest that these two verses go together; that is, Q 2:115 refers to situations in which a mosque has been destroyed and thus the gībla (q.v.) cannot be determined (Qurṭūbī, Jāmi‘, ii, 83). A great majority of reports, however, separate the context of the two verses and, for the latter, speak of a situation in which some people at the time of Muhammad were traveling (either with or without the Prophet; the story varies; see JOURNEY; TRIPS AND VOYAGES) and they stopped for prayer (q.v.). Because it was cloudy, dark or foggy they could not determine the gībla. Everyone prayed in the direction that they thought best but in the morning the error became clear. Then this verse was revealed. While this situation may be thought to follow the same principle as that of the destroyed mosque in Q 2:114, the report makes it clear that the ruling of verse 115 is not limited by the specific situation of verse 114 and has more general applicability (see Suyūṭī, Labbāḥ, 26-7, for one example). As is characteristic of the asbāb al-nuzūl literature, however, another series of reports is found which provides a radically different situation for the revelation of Q 2:115, separating it even further from verse 114. These reports all relate to the permission given to perform the supererogatory prayer while riding a camel regardless of the direction being faced (see Wāḥiḍī, Asbāb, 35, for one example).

Overall, but perhaps best understood as their primary function, the asbāb al-nuzūl reports serve to “historicize” the Qur’ān; they ground the text firmly in the life of Muhammad and make an otherwise context-vague text very much a part of the seventh century Hijāz (see HISTORY AND THE QUR’ĀN; CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). Regardless of what the report might say in terms of the details, this specificity always underlies the story, regardless of how trivial or how complex it may be. Muslim exegetes express this sense by pointing out the way in which the material demonstrates that the Qur’ān really is revelation: the sabab is the proof of God’s concern for his creation. Al-Ṣuyūṭī (Iqān, i, 83) explains this by saying that the sabab is the “rope” — that being one of the root senses of the word sabab itself — by which human contemplation of the Qur’ān may ascend to the highest levels even while dealing with the mundane aspects of the text.

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Bibliography

Ocean  see water

Odors and Smells

Aromas — both pleasant and unpleasant — detected with the olfactory sense. In contrast to the many references to the senses of hearing and sight (see Seeing and Hearing), smell is rarely mentioned in the Qur’ān. Two words from the root *r-w-h* are used in this respect: *riḥ* and *rayhān*. The former appears nearly always with the meaning of “wind” (see Air and Wind), but on one occasion (Q 12:94) it is said that Joseph’s (q.v.) father (see Jacob) perceives his son’s scent (*riḥ*) in the shirt brought to him by his brothers (see Brother and Brotherhood). As for the latter word, it occurs in Q 55:12, in the context of a description of God’s creation (q.v.): “Fruits, and palm-trees (see Date Palm) with sheaths, and grain in the blade (see Grasses), and fragrant herbs (*rayhān*)” (Q 55:11-2; see Agriculture and Vegetation). The sweet odor which characterizes herbs such as basil-royal, common sweet basil or ocimum basilicum (see Lane, s.v. *rayhān*) is considered here as one of God’s gifts to humankind (see Blessing). Herbal fragrances are, however, absent from the abundant references to heavenly gardens (see Garden), where other and more precious odors can be found.

Although the Qur’ān does not mention general Arabic terms for perfumes, such as *fīb* or *iḥq*, it does mention that, in paradise (q.v.), “the pious shall drink of a cup (see Cups and Vessels) whose mixture is camphor” (q.v.; Q 76:5) and “they are given to drink of a wine (q.v.) sealed whose seal is musk” (Q 83:23-6; see Intoxicants). In the ḥadīth literature (see Hadith and the Qur’ān), camphor, which is distilled from the camphor tree, is repeatedly referred to in the context of funeral ceremonies (see Death and the Dead). In the biographical texts about Zaynab, the daughter of the Prophet (see Family of the Prophet; People of the House), Muḥammad, upon her death, is depicted as having ordered Zaynab’s corpse washed in these accounts, the body was afterwards perfumed with camphor (cf. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i, 316-7). In Islamic culture, musk, a perfume derived from animal products, has been traditionally considered as the best and most expensive of all perfumes; in the ḥadīth literature, it is used to perfume the Prophet’s head. The ḥadīth literature also describes the sand of the rivers in paradise (see Water of Paradise) as being made of musk. Both camphor and musk, which were not known in classical antiquity, are of east Asian origins. Shortly before the advent of Islam they are documented in the Sasanid empire and in Byzantium (see Byzantines). Musk was mentioned in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry (see Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān; Poetry and Poets), as is attested in the poems by Imru’ al-Qays. The presence of musk in the Qur’ān was to give this perfume a heightened status among other fragrances, enhancing its aromatic qualities with an added religious prestige. Musk and
camphor were also used for pharmaceutical recipes and, in the luxurious and cosmopolitan kitchen of the ‘Abbāsid caliphs, for cookery (see medicine and the Qur’ān; food and drink).

On a more common level of consumption, good smell (al-rīḥ al-tāyyīb) could be obtained through other and less expensive perfumes. There was a general appreciation of the well-being that is derived from good smells and odors. Well-known traditions speak of the love of the Prophet for cleanliness and ablution (see cleanliness and ablution), which includes bathing, the use of a toothbrush, hair care, etc. While perfumes were accepted for both women and men, many traditions discourage the former from using them both within and outside the home, except when it is for the pleasure of their husbands.

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Bibliography

Offspring see family; generations

Oft-Repeated

One of the names of the Qur’ān (q.v.) or of parts of it. The Arabic form mathnān is the plural of mathnā or mathnāt, and is a derivative of the root th-n-n; which signifies repetition, duplication. In Q 39:23, the form mathnān occurs within the following description of the Qur’ān: “God has sent down the fairest discourse as a book (q.v.), similar in its oft-repeated (mutashābihan mathnāiya), whereat shiver the skins of those who fear (q.v.) their lord (q.v.).…"

The most prevalent explanation is that the scripture has been called mathnān because its various themes — religious duties, laws and regulations (i.e. Tabart, Tafsīr, i, 103; see law and the Qur’ān; boundaries and precepts), stories of previous prophets (i.e. Suyūṭī, Itqān, i, 184; see prophets and prophethood; narratives), allusions to the reward awaiting the righteous in paradise (q.v.) and of the punishment of the sinners in hell (see hell and hellfire; reward and punishment; sin, major and minor) — are repeated (yuthannā) throughout its chapters. Less frequently encountered explanations are that the Qur’ān is recited repeatedly and the audience never finds it boring (see recitation of the Qur’ān). Another explanation takes mathnān as denoting the praise (thanā) of God that is reiterated in the Qur’ān (see glorification of god; laudation).

The term mathnān does not, however, always denote the entire Qur’ān; it is also explained as standing only for certain parts of scripture. This meaning is seen in the explanation that the term stands for the suffixes of the verses (Māwardt, Nukat, v, 123), which would be an allusion to the repetitive rhymed form of the verses (q.v.; see also language and style of the Qur’ān; form and structure of the Qur’ān).
More prevalent is the identification of the term with Qur'ānic chapters or groups of chapters. This is the case in traditions stating that mathānī are the sūras (q.v.) that come next (thānā) in terms of length to the sūras containing at least a hundred verses. Twenty to twenty-six sūras are included in this group.

The perception of the term mathānī as standing for some chapters of the Qurʾān underlies also the interpretations of q 15:87, in which God says to the Qurʾānic Prophet: “We have given you seven of the mathānī and the glorious Qurʾān.” Muslim exegetes (see Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval) have offered a variety of interpretations for the “seven of the mathānī,” most of which hold that seven mathānī out of the entire Qurʾān are meant. The closing phrase, “and the glorious Qurʾān,” is explained as denoting the rest of the Qurʾān that has been given to the Qurʾānic Prophet in addition to the seven mathānī.

The seven mathānī are defined in two major ways. First, the seven longest chapters of the Qurʾān. Muslim exegetes explain that they were named mathānī because of their repetitive treatment of various subjects, such as legal matters, stories, parables and admonitions (see warning). The second definition is the seven verses of the opening chapter (q 1, Sūrat al-Fātiḥa; see Fātiḥa) of the Qurʾān. Muslim exegetes explain that the verses of the Fātiḥa have been called mathānī because they are repeated (tathannā) daily in every prayer (q.v.; cf. Ṭabarī, Taḥṣīl, i, 103). A different explanation is that the Fātiḥa was called mathānī because God gave it exclusively (istathmāhā) to the Qurʾānic Prophet, and withheld it from all other prophets (see Prophets and Prophethood). Yet another interpretation is that this sūra has been divided into two (ithnān) parts, one containing the praise of God and the other, the entreaty of his servants. Another explanation is that some words and phrases are repeated in it, etc. An interpretation appearing only in relatively late commentaries identifies the seven mathānī with the seven ḥawāmīn, i.e. the sūras opening with the letters ḥāʾ and mīm (see Mysterious Letters).

There is also an interpretation that places the seven mathānī outside the scope of the Qurʾān, and is included in a tradition of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), the sixth Shī‘ī imām (q.v.; see also Shī‘ism and the Qurʾān). He reportedly said that the seven mathānī are seven exclusive virtues (kawāmāt) by which God has honored his Prophet: (i) righteousness, (ii) prophethood, (iii) mercy (q.v.), (iv) compassion, (v) love (see Love and Affection), (vi) friendship (see Friends and Friendship), (vii) sechina (q.v.; Māwardī, Nukat, iii, 171). Other Shī‘ī traditions identify the seven mathānī with seven Shī‘ī imāms (Ayyāshī, Taḥṣīl, ii, 269-70).

Nevertheless, some exegetes held that the “seven of the mathānī” and the “glorious Qurʾān” are identical, being merely different designations of the one and the same object that was given to the Qurʾānic Prophet. The clause “and the glorious Qurʾān” was explained as providing additional praise to the object described as “seven of the mathānī.” From the syntactical point of view it was explained as a shortened or condensed form signifying: “… and [they, i.e. the seven mathānī, are] the glorious Qurʾān.”

The object designated as “the seven mathānī” and as “the glorious Qurʾān” is explained in a variety of ways. Some exegetes identify it again with the Fātiḥa, in which case “the glorious Qurʾān” features as a name of this particular chapter, the seven verses of which constitute the seven mathānī. Yet other traditions say that the
Opposition to Muḥammad

Resistance to the political and religious authority (q.v.) of Muḥammad. The Qurʾān is very much a document that shows the struggle of a new faith (q.v.) coming into existence, and the career of Muḥammad is very much the story of a man who eventually defeated all odds when shaping the first community of believers (see Community and Society in the Qurʾān). Additionally, the Qurʾān concept of prophecy (see Prophets and Prophethood) is profoundly marked by the experience of opposition (see Q 25:31; 40:5). The fact of being opposed both theologically and politically (see Politics and the Qurʾān; Theology and the Qurʾān) has marked Islam from its beginnings, and the successful effort to overcome opposition was an important factor in its development which led to a self-confident religion of great appeal to possible converts.

Theological opposition was leveled against the tenets of the new faith as preached by the Prophet; political opposition was directed first against the social and economic consequences of nascent Islam in Muḥammad’s hometown (see Mecca), then against the claim to hegemon of the quickly expanding Muslim community in Medina (q.v.). The most serious theological opposition came from Jews (see Jews and Judaism), while the Meccan pagans were hardly able, as far as we know, to counter Muḥammad’s monotheistic vision (see below; see Polytheism and Atheism; South Arabia, Religion in Pre-Islamic). The Christians (see Christians and Christianity), who are generally portrayed in a more favorable light in the Islamic sources, appear less eager to enter into discussions with the Prophet (see Debate and Disputation).

Object named “the seven mathānī” and “the glorious Qurʾān” is actually the entire Qurʾān. In this case the seven mathānī are taken as signifying seven repetitive aspects of the Qurʾān’s contents: (1) commands (see Commandments), (2) prohibitions (see Forbidden), (3) good tidings (see Good News), (4) warnings (see Warner), (5) parables (q.v.), (6) divine mercy, (7) stories of past generations (q.v.).

In accordance with the notion that the seven mathānī are the entire Qurʾān, some exegetes say that their number denotes seven asbāb, i.e. the seven parts into which the Qurʾān is divided, or its seven volumes.

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Old Age  see Youth and Old Age; Biology as the Creation and Stages of Life

Olives  see Agriculture and Vegetation

Omens  see Portents; Divination; Foretelling

Omnipotence  see Power and Impotence

Opponent  see Enemies
and are more frequently reported as having been persuaded by the new message. Active political and military opposition against Muhammad and his followers was primarily the work of the Meccans (see expeditions and battles; fighting); the Jewish tribes in Medina and Khaybar opposed the Prophet without resorting to open aggression (although not a few sources tend to stress that the Jews either provoked the Muslims or took active measures against them). Even Muḥammad’s own family (see family of the prophet) were guilty of opposing him (cf. q. 111:1-5, and commentaries on this sūra).

Muḥammad, who acted both as prophet and founder of a new religion and as a political and military leader of his supporters, was, naturally, the main target of the opponents of early Islam, no matter how their hostile intentions were defined. With the concerns of faith and the duties of the believers inextricably linked in his person, opposing the Prophet meant opposing God, or, put differently: “Whosoever obeys the messenger, thereby obeys God” (q. 4:80; see also q. 4:152; 58:3; 59:7). As a result of the opposition that arose against his person, Muḥammad suffered, during his years in Mecca, from humiliation, derision (see mockery) and from being treated either like a madman (see insanity) or an outcast. Some people would even fling pebbles at him while he was praying and others kicked stones at him so that he had to run away with bleeding feet. During the Medina period (see chronology and the Qurʾān), he had to survive various attempts at his life, be it the poison of a Jewish woman or the drawn sword of a bedouin (q.v.; it is nevertheless difficult, as a perusal of the relevant sources shows, to link the specific events as reported in Islamic tradition and sīra literature with the rather vague Qurʾānic allusions to such attempts: q. 5:11; 8:30, 71; 16:127; 48:20; see sīra and the Qurʾān).

Muḥammad’s reaction against his opponents varied in time and according to the possibilities within his reach. In the Meccan period, he was satisfied — due to the lack of effective means and a large group of followers — to merely censure the activities of his opponents and to turn his back on them in patience and to leave their punishment to God (see trust and patience; punishment stories). This attitude becomes obvious from numerous Qurʾānic verses that are traditionally reckoned to belong to Meccan sūras (e.g. q. 6:66-70; 10:168; 13:43; 15:89-99; 16:125-8, etc.). Also, the so-called “punishment stories” (Strafl egenden; see the list in Watt-Bell, Introduction, 132) were to provide the Prophet with fitting examples of what had happened in earlier times and in analogous situations. Once in Medina, however, and with military means at his disposal, the Prophet did not limit himself anymore to simply accusing and warning (q.v.) his opponents, but called his followers to actively fight for the cause of Islam (q. 2:190-3, 216; 3:146; 4:75 f., 84, 89 f.; 8:39, 65; 9:13 f., 29, 123; 47:4; 61:4) and was himself ordered to be the first in line (q. 9:73; see jihād). The cause of Islam was thus no longer the cause of God alone, and Muḥammad exhorted the members of his community: “O believers! Fight the unbelievers who are in your vicinity and let them find you ruthless! And know that God supports the godfearing” (q. 9:123; see belief and unbelief) — a sentiment very much in contrast to Muḥammad’s passive stance during his former stay in Mecca. The transfer of power from God’s hands into those of humans, that is, the switch from relying on eschatological punishment to settling matters in this world, seems complete (see eschatology).
As mentioned above, the two main groups of opponents during the career of Muhammad were the Meccan pagans and the Jews. Both were eventually subdued by more or less violent means (see below). The Christians — much fewer in number than the Arabian Jews — never posed the same threat to the Prophet’s community, and the encounter with the Christian population in northern Arabia (see *Pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’ān*) and southern Syria (q.v.) in the last years of Muhammad’s lifetime generally did not lead to bellicose events; any conflicts were settled peacefully, e.g. by contracts (see *Contracts and ALLIANCES*).

The same may be said of the bedouin tribes of the Hijāz (al-’arab, see *Arabs*), who often opposed the Prophet’s efforts to rally them to his cause (e.g. Q 48:11, 16) and thus, for a long time, were not an integral part of the nascent Islamic community (see Q 9:97-9). Also, tensions among the inhabitants of Medina had led to the formation of an, as it were, intra-Islamic group of opponents (a considerable part of whom were Jewish converts) known as “the hypocrites” (al-munāfiqūn, see *Hypocrites and Hypocrisy; Mosque of the Dissension*). Even though they feature prominently in the Medinan sūras (e.g. Q 59:11 f.; 63:1-8, but also 9:74, 106), their role can only be reconstructed from the extant sources with difficulty; nevertheless, their influence on the course of events in Medina as well as their potentially detrimental activities do not appear very threatening, at least when compared to those of the Meccans and the Jews.

**The Meccan pagans**

From the beginning of his prophetic mission, Muhammad had to cope with the fierce opposition of many of his Meccan compatriots. Curiously, the qur’ānic data suggest that their opposition was primarily directed against elements of monotheist belief (Q 6:25), such as the resurrection of the dead (see *Resurrection*), the day of judgment (see *Last Judgment*) or the denial of the existence of Arabian deities. In Islamic tradition, however, the pagans hardly figure as opponents on religious grounds. The few pagan “priests” (kūhān, see *Soothsayers*) who appear in *ṣīra* literature and related genres are not depicted as Muhammad’s opponents but rather foretell or announce his prophethood. The Meccan leaders, on the other hand, are shown as being driven by the interest to preserve the status quo of the Meccan hierarchy, as well as by economic considerations (in order to save their sources of income which depended on pagan festivities); this is in accordance with the Qur’ān, which often censures their material greed (e.g. Q 89:17-20, 104:1-3; see *Wealth; Markets; Selling and Buying; Caravan*). When speaking, however, about the Meccan period as represented in the Qur’ān, W.M. Watt rightly observes: “There are virtually no factual details about the persons who accepted Islam, and only a modicum of general information about the opponents. Most of this last is about the verbal arguments between these and Muhammad” (Watt, *Mecca*, 81).

What the Qur’ān does, in fact, convey is the sense of oppression Muhammad must have felt in Mecca, coupled with an inability to counteract such adversities and even a fear of giving in to the pagans (Q 17:73 f.; see *Satanic Verses*). Over the years, Muhammad’s followers grew in number; with this, the opposition of the Meccans became less restrained. Some Muslims resorted to leaving their hometown and went into exile in Ethiopia (see * Abyssinia*). The Prophet himself first tried to gain a foothold in nearby Ṭā’if but, when this had failed, he reached an agreement with the people of Medina at Ṭā’if. Thus the emigration (q.v.) of the Prophet to Medina
was, initially, the outcome of the Meccans’ opposition (q 47:13). Many of his followers accompanied Muḥammad, and the Qurʾān alludes in a number of verses not only to the general hardships endured by the early Muslims (q 2:155, 3:126, 3:186, 60:2), but also to the painful experience of losing one’s home and possessions: “And those that emigrated in God’s cause (see path or way) after they were wronged, we shall surely lodge them in this world in a goodly lodging; and the wage of the world to come is greater, did they but know” (q 16:41; see also q 4:100 f., 16:110, 22:39, 60:8 f.).

The Medinan period brought about the change from putting up with pagan opposition to striking back. Muslims and Meccans met each other in various skirmishes and bigger clashes, several of which are described at length in the Qurʾān, although even among the “orthodox” non-qurʾānic sources, there is no complete unanimity — with the exception of q 3:123 (battle of Badr), q 33:20-5 (War of the Ditch; see People of the Ditch; Expeditions and Battles) and q 9:25 f. (battle of Hunayn [q.v.]) — as to which verses refer to which event. The early tafsīr works in particular, e.g. those by Mujāhid (d. 104/722) and Muqāṭil (d. 150/767), often yield accounts different from the later accepted versions. Up to the decisive treaty of al-Hudaybiya, traditionally associated with q 48 (Sūrat al-Fath, “Victory”), however, the Meccan opposition had gradually lost much of its force, and the Muslim conquest of Mecca largely put an end to the Meccan opposition (q 110, Sūrat al-Naṣr, “Succor”).

The Arabian Jews

Muḥammad encountered the opposition of Jews while still living in Mecca, although non-verbal conflict broke out only when he was in Medina. Aside from the pagans, Muḥammad appealed particularly to the Jews (q 2:40-8), despite knowing that their aversion was the greatest: “That because God has sent down the book (q.v.) with the truth; and those that differ regarding the book, are showing strong enmity [?]” (q 2:176; cf. Paret, Mohammad, 28; see People of the Book). And although the Qurʾān repeatedly stresses that putting in doubt elements of faith and resorting to dispute is merely a general human trait (q 18:34; 22:3, 8), the Jews — both in the Qurʾān and the Islamic tradition — are portrayed as having been the most tenacious antagonists of Muḥammad (although the Christians, too, had a share in that; cf. q 2:139; 3:65). In sīra literature, already in the pivotal account by Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), we normally find one or more lengthy chapters that deal with Muḥammad’s theological discussions with the Jews, together with indications of which qurʾānic verses were either the subject or the result of those disputes; such discussions, both with Jews and other opponents, are reflected variously in the Qurʾān, in particular in the verses which start with the phrase “They question you about…” (e.g. q 2:217, 219; 5:4; 7:187; 17:85; 18:83, etc.). Inevitably, the Prophet is depicted as defeating the arguments of his opponents, who then take to cheating (q.v.) or will not argue on the accurate record of their revealed scriptures (q 2:75; see also 2:89-91, 101; see Forgery).

In Medina, when Muḥammad distanced himself from pagan opposition, the Jewish opposition soon became a major preoccupation. After initial and intense follow-ups to the disputes in Mecca, between the years 2/624 and 5/627 the Muslim community got rid of the three major Jewish tribes: they expelled the Jewish Banū Qaynuqāʿ and Banū I-Naḍır from Medina, while the Banū Qurayza were killed and enslaved (see Nadīr, Banū al-; Qaynuqāʿ;
The Qur’ānic verses traditionally associated with these events by the Muslim scholars are q 33:26 f. and q 59:1-15. Moreover, during the same period some leaders of the Jewish opposition, notably Ka‘b b. al-Ashraf, were assassinated either in Medina or Khaybar; the latter town was conquered in 7/628. In the sources it remains unclear, however, whether at that point there were no Jews left in the Ḥijāz or whether some Jewish settlements (e.g. Fadak) persisted.

Finally, it must be remarked that a reconstruction of the events relating to the opposition to Muhammad and their relevant chronology relies heavily on the information provided in the vast Islamic tradition, as well as on the commonly accepted chronology of Qur’ānic verses. Many studies in recent years have shown that the historical value of this tradition cannot always be trusted (see Collection of the Qur’ān; Hadīth and the Qur’ān; Post-Enlightenment Academic Study of the Qur’ān). On the other hand, by no means should Islamic tradition be considered irrelevant, as it might be utilized either in tracing the ideological differences within early Islam or in unearthing accounts which do not fit the “canonical” Islamic view (as developed from the late second/eighth century onwards); it could thus deepen or change our future understanding of early Islamic history.

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Bibliography

Those with no political or other power; the downtrodden. Several verses of the Qur’ān refer to those who are “weak” (da‘if; pl. ḥu‘afā‘), and other derivatives of ḥ-‘af’, or those who are “deemed or made weak” (musta‘af; pl. musta‘afūn, as well as the tenth verbal form of ḥ-‘af’, Q 4:75-97;
7:75; 8:26; 28:4-5; 34:31-3). R.B. Serjeant (The ḍa/lefthalfmoonīf, 33) has argued that the Qurʾānic term ḍa/lefthalfmoonīf does not simply mean “weak,” but rather usually refers to “persons without the capacity to fight for and defend themselves” (see fighting; oppression). By extension, it refers to the peasants and shepherds (see poverty and the poor), to women (see women and the Qurʾān) and children (q.v.), to clients (see clients and clientage) and slaves (see slaves and slavery), and to all those who do not bear arms and are dependent on others for their protection. The term mustad of often has connotations similar or identical to those of the ḍa/lefthalfmoonīf (ibid., 36) but especially those of degradation and debasement and often also of persecution. Q 28:4-6 describes Pharaoh’s (q.v.) persecution when “he had exalted himself in the land and had divided its inhabitants into sects (ṣiya’am, see Shi’A), abasing (yastaʃa’f) one party of them, slaughtering their sons and sparing their women, for he was of the workers of corruption (q.v.). Yet we desired to be gracious to those that were abased in the land, and to make them leaders (a’immatan, see kings and rulers; imām), and make them the inheritors, and to establish them in the land.” A tradition in al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923; Taʾrikh, i, 1563 f.; also Serjeant, The ḍa/lefthalfmoonīf, 34 f.) characterizes the earliest followers of Muhammad as “the weak (al-du’afā’), the poor, the young, and women.” In q 8:26, in what is often understood by the exegetes to refer to the condition of the earliest Muslims in Mecca (q.v.) before the migration (see emigration) to Medina (q.v.), God reminds the believers of God’s favor on them at a time “when you were few and abased in the land (mustad’afīn fī l-ard)… he gave you refuge and confirmed you with his help.” In q 4:75, the believers are reproached for not fighting “in the way of God (see path or way), and for the men, women, and children who, being abased, say, ‘Our lord, bring us forth from this city (q.v.) whose people are evildoers (zālīm).’” Those who are thus abased or oppressed are expected to migrate from the land where they have been persecuted. To have the ability to migrate from such a land and yet not do so is enough to imperil one’s salvation (q.v.), as the Qurʾān’s strong admonition of those who falsely claim the status of the mustad’afīn makes clear (q 4:97-9).

This admonition refers, according to many exegetes (see exegesis of the Qurʾān, classical and medieval), to those people in Mecca who had converted to Islam but had not migrated to Medina even though they had the ability to do so. Many of them were forced to participate in the battle of Badr (q.v.) on the side of the Mec- cans and against the Muslims of Medina (Ṭabarī, Taʾṣīrāt, ix, 100-12). The status of those killed while fighting on the side of the unbelievers, or those who died while still in Mecca was held by many exegetes to be the same as that of the unbelievers themselves, even though they claimed to have been coerced (cf. ibid., ix, 102 [no. 10959], 104 f. [no. 10263]; see belief and unbelief; hypocrites and hypocrisy).

Those, however, who were entirely lacking in any means to migrate — and who were, therefore, genuinely powerless — were excused. The famous scholar and Qurʾān exegete Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 67-8/686-8) claimed, together with his mother, to be among such mustad’afīn in Mecca (Ṭabarī, Taʾṣīrāt, ix, 106 f.), though the exegetes found it more difficult to extend the same justification to his father, al-ʿAbbās — the uncle of the Prophet (see family of the Prophet) and the progenitor of the ʿAbbāsīd dynasty — who had fought on the side of the pagan Mecans under what he reportedly claimed were circumstances
of coercion (cf. ibid., ix, 106, no. 10265).

The mustaḍ'afūn in the Qurʾān include believers as well as unbelievers. Though their status as mustaḍ'afūn is defined by their dependence on others and/or by their lowly and persecuted condition in society, the Qurʾān pointedly notes that each individual bears sole responsibility for his or her moral conduct and is to be held accountable for it (see ethics and the Qurʾān; freedom and predestination; on children as mustaḍ'afūn in the sense of not bearing such responsibility, however; cf. van Ess, 76, i, 277). To argue, like those of the ḍuʿafāʾ/mustaḍ'afūn who are consigned to hell (see hell and hellfire), that they had merely followed their leaders in error (q.v.) would be as futile as to call upon the latter for any help on or after the day of judgment (cf. Q 14:21; 34:31-3; 40:47-8; see last judgment; intercession).

Many modern Muslims have seen in God's promise to establish the mustaḍ'afūn on earth, and to make them its leaders, a Qurʾānic sanction for revolutionary activism (see rebellion). Franz Fanon's The wretched of the earth was translated by 'Ali Shariʿātī in the early 1960s as Mostadż ḍafīn-i zamān, thus contributing to the social revolutionary connotations of this Qurʾānic term, which now came to be understood as “the oppressed” and the dispossessed in the sense, primarily, of being economically exploited (see economics). Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches before and immediately after the Iranian revolution of 1979 were laced with references to the mustaḍ'afūn in this sense, and he often spoke of them as the main supporters of the revolution and thus as the people deserving to be its principal beneficiaries. A “Mostaḍ'afūn Foundation” (būyād-i mustaḍ'afūn) was established in 1979 (as the successor to the powerful Pahlavi Foundation) to appropriate the properties belonging to those associated with the overthrown regime and to redistribute them among the poor; and the mustaḍ'afūn were prominent among those mobilized for participation in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). E. Abrahamian (Khomeinism, 52) has argued, however, that after the revolution, Khomeini came to moderate considerably his earlier rhetoric about a class struggle between the oppressed and their wealthy exploiters, and spoke increasingly of the need for harmonious ties between the middle and the lower classes; the term mustaḍ'afūn now “became — like the term sans culottes in the French Revolution — a political label for the new regime’s supporters and included wealthy bazaar merchants.”

In the context of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, Qurʾānic references to the mustaḍ'afūn became the basis of an Islamic variant of “liberation theology,” with the prophet Muhammad and indeed all the other prophets being seen as having struggled on behalf of the oppressed and the exploited. Where earlier understandings of the Qurʾānic references to the mustaḍ'afūn seem to suggest that people would be judged in the hereafter on the basis of their conduct (see record of human actions; eschatology), and irrespective of their social standing in the world, certain contemporary religious intellectuals in South Africa have argued that the solidarity of the oppressed transcends differences of faith, and that the Qurʾān comes down on the side of the mustaḍ'afūn even when they are not believers (Esack, Qurʾān, liberation and pluralism, 98-103 and passim; see also politics and the Qurʾān).

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Primary: Dāmaghānī, Wujūh, ii, 32-3 (see esp. p. 33, ad Q 4:37: kunnā mustaḍ'afūn fi l-ard = maqāhirīn); Tabārī, Tafsīr, ed. Shakīr; id., Taʾrīkh. Secondary: Arberry; E. Abrahamian, The Iranian
Oppression

Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power. There is no single word in the Qurʾān that perfectly translates the term “oppression.” An array of words, such as ṣafah (attested seven times), gahr (ten times), ṭaghyān (nine times; cf. Izutsu, Structure, 140-2), ṭawāqūn (seven times; cf. Izutsu, Structure, 161-4), ṣīṭāṣ al-ʿaf (five times) and the most frequently attested, ṣulm (twenty times; cf. Izutsu, Structure, 152-61), all share an essential semantic aspect of this concept: i.e. exceeding the appropriate limits of behavior in dealing with others, while violating their essential human rights. The Qurʾānic portrayal of the behavior of Pharaoh (q.v.) and his people, al-mala’, conveys perfectly the image of the oppressive ruler and the oppressive class on the one hand, and the oppressed subjects on the other. Similar models are conveyed in all the Qurʾānic stories of the prophets and their peoples (see narratives; prophets and prophethood), such as those of the people of Ṭād (q.v.) and Thamūd (q.v.), of Noah (q.v.), Lot (q.v.), Abraham (q.v.) and Jesus (q.v.), where people are categorized as either mustakhbirūn (lit. “proud, arrogant”; see arrogance; pride; cf. Izutsu, Structure, 131-44 for a discussion of the various aspects of haughtiness) or mustadʿafūn (“downtrodden”; cf. Q 7:75, 137, 150; 14:21; 28:4; 34:31-3; 40:47; and others; see oppressed on earth, the). The former always deny God’s revelation (see revelation and inspiration) and persecute the prophets and their followers, who are the mustadʿafūn. This is also the case of the prophet Muhammad with the people of Mecca (Q 8:26; cf. 4:75; see opposition to Muhammad). In all such cases, the earth (q.v.) will be inherited by the oppressed, God promises (Q 28:5).

But Pharaoh exceeded even the limits of denying the divine message and persecuting Moses (q.v.) and his followers when he claimed divinity and the exercise of divine authority on earth. His image in the Qurʾān is that of the tyrannical ruler par excellence (Q 79:17; cf. 22:24, 34), who causes corruption (Q 28:5), misleads his people (Q 20:79; see astray; error) claims to be god (Q 29:40; 28:38) and demands the absolute submission and unquestioned obedience (q.v.) of the people (cf. Q 40:29). His actions cause the division of the people into the following groups (ṣīʿa, sing. shīʿa, Q 28:4; see shīʿa): on the one hand are the aristocrats (al-mala’), who are the privileged and ostentious (al-mutrafūn) and, accordingly, the arrogant oppressors (al-mustakhbirūn); on the other are the mustadʿafūn or the oppressed, those who have lost power, been marginalized, despised and persecuted. It is understandable, then, why the Qurʾān uses the same word to denote God’s attribute (see god and his attributes) of supreme power (al-qāhib, see power and impotence) and to refer to Pharaoh’s oppressiveness. When Pharaoh responds to the conviction of his mala’ that he must act against the people of Moses, the Qurʾān states: “Their male children will we slay; [only] their females will we save alive; and we have over them irresistible power” (qāhirūn, Q 7:127). The connotation of gahr in this specific context is very close to “oppression.” This Qurʾānic passage, therefore, lends itself to an
argument that qāḥr may most closely denote the concept “oppression.” The verbal form taqhar is used by the Qurʾān in the context of advising the prophet Muḥammad and, as a matter of fact, all Muslims, not to mistreat orphans (q.v.; Q 93:9).

When related to humans, the nominal form qāhir refers, then, to someone claiming to be God (who alone is al-qāhir and al-qāhhār) who performs massive mistreatment, i.e. oppression against others. In modern times, the categorization of the enemy — be it America or Ṣaddām Ḥusayn, or the apartheid political regime of South Africa — as the “oppressor” came to be a very effective ideological weapon in sacralized struggle (see jihād).

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Oral Transmission see readings of the Qurʾān; orality; orality and writing in Arabia; collection of the Qurʾān

Orality

The quality of spoken, as opposed to written, communication. The Arabic Qurʾān emerged against the backdrop of a long history of oral poetic composition and recitation (see poetry and poets; orality and writing in Arabia). It is a composite text consisting of oral recitations born in an oral culture of great refinement and long tradition. It is hard to over-emphasize the importance of oral poetry among the northern Arab tribal nomads (q.v.) of the pre-Islamic world (see pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qurʾān; Arabs; beduīn). Their major art form was the spoken word of poetry, and in particular their three-part ode, or qaṣīda. The recitative chanting of their poetry was their music and the highest expression of their eloquence. Every tribe had a poet who could compose and recite verses in praise of it or in denigration of its opponents. Perfection of oral poetic composition and recitation was something much admired and much desired. It was in this oral poetic milieu that the Qurʾānic recitations arose and became a new standard of oral literary and religious excellence and beauty (el Tayib, Pre-Islamic poetry; Zwettler, Oral tradition, 3-88; see recitation of the Qurʾān).

Although the Qurʾān has had a rich and central role in the history of Muslim piety and faith as “sacred book,” it has always been preeminently an oral, not a written text — as strikingly so as any of the world’s great religious scriptures except the Vedas. In the history of Islamic piety and practice, the role of the written scriptural text has always been secondary to the dominant tradition of oral transmission and aural presence of the recited text. The Qurʾānic revelation (see revelation and inspiration) recognized by Islamic tradition as the first given to Muḥammad, q. 96, begins: “Recite (iqra’) in the name of your lord (q.v.) who created.” This signals clearly that the revelations were from the outset meant to be oral repetitions of the revealed word of God himself (see word of god; speech). The Prophet is quoted in one ḥadīth (see ḥadīth and the Qurʾān) as saying, “Embellish the recitation (al-qurʾān) with your voices, for the beautiful voice increases the beauty of the Qurʾān”
This underscores the centrality of the oral and aesthetic dimensions of the Qur'ān in Muslim tradition. As Stanley Lane Poole put it, “from first to last the Koran is essentially a book to be heard, not read” (Zweemer, Translations, 82; although note that this judgment is anachronistic, in that there was no “book” of the Qur'ān until long after the early revelations to be recited were proclaimed by the Prophet; see mushaf; collection of the Qur'ān; codices of the Qur'ān; book; manuscripts of the Qur'ān). In Muslim tradition, the highly developed system of rules for proper recitation (taṣwir) “is believed to be the codification of the sound of the revelation as it was revealed to the Prophet…. Thus the sound itself has a divine source and significance, and, according to Muslim tradition, is significant to the meaning” (Nelson, Art, 14). The only way to understand the Qur'ān and its place in Muslim history and contemporary life is to grasp the centrality of its role as oral text par excellence.

There can be little argument that the scripture (al-kitāb) of Muslims has been functionally a “spoken book” — the divine “word” itself, the very discourse of God ipsissima vox, given to Muhammad as “an Arabic recitation” (qurʾān arabiyy; cf. i.e. Q 12:22; 20:113; see Arabic language). This has lent immense importance to the Arabic text of the Qurʾān, its verbatim memorization, and its artful and reverent recitation — so much so that the rejection of recitation of any translation of the Qurʾān (above all in the daily worship rituals, or salah; see prayer; ritual and the Qurʾān; translations of the Qurʾān) has been almost total in Islamic societies.

Theologically, the Qurʾān as “word of God” in Islam compares not to the Bible in the Christian tradition (see scripture and the Qurʾān) but to the person of the Christ as the logos tou theou, the divine Word (Söderblom, Einführung, 117; cf. Graham, Beyond, 217 n. 3; Kermani, Gott, 465 n. 195; see createdness of the Qurʾān): the closest comparable Muslim practice to the Eucharist would consequently be either the ubiquitous practice among Muslims of oral recitation of the Qurʾān or that of learning the text by heart, hifz al-Qurʾān (Smith, Some similarities, 52, 55-7; see memory). One of the most respected religious titles a Muslim can bear is that of hifz(a), one who knows the entire Qurʾān by heart. Qurʾān recitation and memorization have always been central to deep spirituality as well as to everyday life in Muslim societies: “The discipline of Qurʾānic memorization is an integral part of learning to be human and Muslim” (Eickelman, Knowledge, 63; see everyday life, Qurʾān in).

Historically, the original meaning of the very word qurʾān testifies to this fundamental orality of the text from its inception: the Qurʾānic revelations were oral texts meant to be rehearsed and recited, first by Muḥammad (as witness the more than 300 occurrences of Qul!, “Say! [oh Muḥammad],” before particular passages of the sacred text), then by the faithful to whom Muḥammad was to recite them. They were explicitly not revealed as “a writing on parchment” (Q 6:7; see writing and writing materials). The word qurʾān is a verbal noun form derived from the root q-r-t, “to recite, read aloud,” and hence the proper translation of al-qurʾān is “the Reciting” or “the Recitation” (Graham, Earliest meaning). The Arabic word qurʾān is not attested prior to the Qurʾān itself and it was likely derived from, or influenced by, the Syriac cognate word qeryānā, “lection, reading,” used by Syriac-speaking Christian communities (see christians and christianity) both for the oral liturgical reading from scripture (lectio, anagnosis) and
for the scripture passage that is read aloud (lectio, perioché, anagnōisma) in divine service (Bowman, *Holy scriptures*; A. Neuwirth and K. Neuwirth, *Sūrat al-fātiha*; cf. Graham, *Beyond*, 209 n. 36; see Foreign Vocabulary; Names of the Qur’ān). Both the Muslim and Christian usages have parallels also in the rabbinic use of the Hebrew cognates qerî’a and miqrâ to denote the act of scripture reading and the pericope read aloud, respectively ([J. Horovitz, *Qur’ān*, 67; Nöldeke, *Q. Q.*, i, 32; Graham, *Beyond*, 209 n. 37). In the Qur’ānic text itself, there are a number of uses of the word Qur’ān that can best be taken as verbal-noun (maṣdar) usages: e.g. “the dawn (q.v.) recitation” in Q 17:78 and “…Ours it is to collect and to recite it (qur’ānahu), and when we recite it, follow the recitation of it (qur’ānahu)” (Q 75:17-8). These readings are bolstered in the ḥadīth at various points, such as when Muhammad speaks well of whoever “is constantly mindful of God during [his] reciting” (qur’ān, Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, iv, 159). Other examples: when Muhammad explains to a companion who witnessed a horse trying to bolt during his night recitation, “That was the divine presence (sakīna, see Sechino) that descended with the reciting” (al-qur’ān, Bukhārī, *Ṣahīḥ*, 66.11), and the report that Muhammad “raised his voice in the recitation (qur’ān) in his prayer” (ṣalāt, Muslim, *Ṣahīḥ*, 4.145; cf. 4.149, 154; 6.232-37). These examples of the early understanding of Qur’ān as a verbal noun remind us of the strong historical basis for the ongoing orality of the Qur’ān in Muslim usage down the centuries to the present moment. This orality has always been a striking element in both Muslim religious practice and even in quotidian life in Islamic societies, where the use of Qur’ānic formulae has been a permeating reality of everyday speech, even down to small repeated phrases that have passed into everyday usage (see Slogans from the Qur’ān).

One thinks of the basnala (q.v.) and Fāṭihā (q.v.), or the many Qur’ānic phrases such as mā shā’ā līḥā (Q 18:39) or al-handu lillāhī (Q 1:2; see Laudation) as only the most evident (for examples of such usages, see Piamenta, *Islam in everyday speech*, 10, 73, 75, 86-7; Jomier, *La place du Coran*). The five-times-daily ritual of prayer (ṣalāt) is the most obvious place to look for daily recitation of the Qur’ān, since without some Qur’ānic recitation the salāt is legally invalid (see Lawful and Unlawful). But well beyond penetration of Qur’ānic phrases into everyday speech and the formal demands of the rites of daily worship, the recited word of scripture has always been prominent in Muslim communities. Recitation of the Qur’ān is woven into the very fabric of life in Muslim communities. A ḥadīth has Muḥammad say, “the most excellent form of worship (q.v.; ṣibāda) among my people is reciting the Qur’ān” (Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’,* 1.8.1). Qur’ān recitation has been a, if not the, major form of entertainment in Muslim societies, and it has for centuries been raised to an art form (see Nelson, *Art: Kermani, chap. 3*). Qur’ān memorization, recitation, and study have formed the core of Muslim education at all times and around the world in Islamic societies (see Teaching and Preaching the Qur’ān). Centuries ago, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 784/1382; *Muqaddima*, iii, 260; Ibn Khaldūn-Rosenthal, iii, 300; cf. Graham, *Beyond*, 215 n. 35) noted that “teaching the Qur’ān to children is one of the marks of the religion that Muslims profess and practice in all their cities,” and a still older ḥadīth text claims that “knowledge shall not perish so long as the Qur’ān is recited” (Dārimī, *Sunan*, 1.18.8; see Knowledge and Learning).

In sum, the orality of the Qur’ān is a constant source of inspiration to Muslims in all walks of life. Al-Ghazālī
(d. 507/1111; Iḥyā’/righthalfmoon, 1.8.1) put it well: “Much repetition cannot make it [the Qur’ān] seem old and worn to those who recite it.” The importance and power of the oral qur’ānic word are captured in the hyperbolic and metaphorical, but still acute, observation of the modern Iranian scholar, Muhammad Taqi Shar’ī-Mazinānī, about the aural impact of the recited text: “The Qur’ān was a light [q.v.] that extended through the opening of the ears into the soul; it transformed this soul and as a consequence of that, the world” (as cited in Kermani, Gott ist Schöhn, 44). See also LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN.

William A. Graham

Bibliography

Orality and Writing in Arabia

Transmission of knowledge through the spoken and written word. In pre-Islamic Arabia, culture was largely transmitted orally, with writing being used for practical matters of daily life (i.e. trade; see SELLING AND BUYING) — although there was an awareness of Jewish and Christian scriptures (see SCRIPTURE AND THE QUR’ĀN; ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN). Oral sources, by their very nature, are transient. We are thus left to glean what we can about orality (q.v.) and writing/script from secondary Arabic sources that were committed to writing long after Arabic script (q.v.) was fully developed. It may be said, however, that the interplay of orality and writing in this milieu shows up most clearly in the Qur’ān itself (see LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN; FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR’ĀN).

Orally-transmitted attestations of writing and scripture in pre-Islamic Arabia

There were four kinds of oral literature in pre-Islamic Arabia: those of the poet (shā‘ir, see POETRY AND POETS), the soothsayer (kāhin, see SOOTHSAYERS), the orator (khāṭīb) and the story-teller (qāṣī). The advent of Islam was very unfavorable to kāhin material and to pre-Islamic khatīb material, and the little that has survived
has nothing to tell us about writing, a subject to which neither the kāhin nor the khaṫīb was likely to have referred in the first instance.

Poetry
We are more fortunate in what we can draw together from the surviving corpus of pre-Islamic poetry. It contains a fair number of references to writing, usually based on the convention by which the traces of an almost effaced, long deserted campsite are compared to written material. Both epigraphic and documentary writing are mentioned. Very rarely does the same poem refer to both. Thus the Muallaqa of Labīd has: “the stones there contain writings” (duʾamina l-tuhīyya silāmuhā, l. 2) and “writings whose texts have been renewed by their pens” (zuburun tuǧiddu mutūnahā aqlāmuhā, l. 8).

The majority of references must be assumed to refer to a script for Arabic writing, though its form is uncertain; but there are some passages that might possibly refer, explicitly or implicitly, to south Arabian forms of writing. This possibility can be seen in a passage from Labīd’s Qaṣīda nūniyya:

… ka-annahā
zuburun tuwjiddu mutūnahā
mutaʾawwidun laḥīnu l-yuʾūdu bi-kaffiḥi
ɡallāman ʾilā ʿusūnī ḍhabula ʿaw-bānī
… as though they were writings over which the Yemeni lad moved back and forth in his accustomed way, clever, his hand moving a pen over dried palm-fronds or over pieces of a ben-tree

Not only does waʿlidu yamānī point to the south, the terms zubur, “writings,” and ʿusūh, “palm-fronds,” would appear to have south Arabian origins (see writing and writing materials).

The corpus of poetry contains a fair number of references to Jews and Christians (see Jews and Judaism; Christians and Christianity) but references to their scriptures are difficult to find. There are some references to the Christian anchorites (see asceticism; monasticism and monks) using lights for their devotions at night (and, by implication, reading), as in the Muallaqa of Imruʾ al-Qays (lines 39 and 72). Once, however, Imruʾ al-Qays has part of a line referring specifically to Christian writings: “like a line of writing in the books of monks” (ka-khṭṭī zabūrin fi masāḥifi rubbānī); and al-Aswad b. Yaʾfur refers to Jewish written material: “the letters of two Jews from Taymā’ or the people of Madyan [see Midian] on/their parchments which they recite with accomplishment” (sūṭiru yahdīyyayni fi muḥragayhimā/mujādayni min Taymāʾu aw āhī Madyan).

The accepted view is that these references to writing were part of poetic convention and that the bedouin (q.v.) tribesmen themselves were little concerned with writing, and there seems to be no reason to doubt this. That the illiterate poet Ṭarafa should liken his camel’s cheek to “Syrian parchment” seems typical of the convention (see literacy; illiteracy). Nor does there seem to be an exception in the case of the poet — or two poets — known as al-Muraqqish (probably meaning “the one who puts black on white”). The name is thought not to derive from him acting as a scribe but to be a sobriquet that stems from part of a line that runs: “the traces resemble what a pen has inscribed on the back of the /parchment” (wa-l-rūsūnu ka-ʿma * raqqasha fi zahrī ṭ-adimi qalam).

Stories
Moving on from the evidence of poetry to the story-tellers’ material, very little is to be found in the background stories that accompany most of the surviving poems or
in the legends of the “days of the Arabs” (ayyām al-‘arab). Even then, the stories that have come down to us are at best problematical, as they were susceptible to recasting and accretion down to ‘Abbāsid times; and some of them, such as the placing of copies of the mu’allaqāt on the Ka’ba (q.v.), appear to be total fiction. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note two points from the famous story of the poets al-Mutalammis and Ṭarafa preserved in the Kitāb al-aghānī of Abū I-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, in which they are portrayed as being sent off by the ruler of al-Ḥira to the governor of al-Baḥrayn, each with a note telling the governor to execute the bearer of the note. In one way, the story hinges on the illiteracy of the two poets; in another, there is the assumption that literates who did not already know the contents of a message would be able to read it.

Extent of literacy in pre-Islamic Arabia

Overall, the background material seems to indicate that there was a certain amount of literacy in the settlements (see city), particularly the key centers of al-Ḥira, Medina (q.v.) and Mecca (q.v.). This is plausible, though any direct evidence from the period is lacking. There is, for example, nothing to link Labīd’s Yemeni youth with any particular place. It is not unreasonable, however, to suggest that his main concern was with documents and that the most likely place where documents would be produced was a settlement. But even if most of those employed in writing lived in settlements it is unlikely that they were numerous. It is also reasonable to assume that writing in Arabic script was for practical purposes, with other languages and scripts being used for religious purposes. Culturally this would have mattered little in pre-Islamic times, for the same sources make it clear that cultural material (that of the poets, soothsayers, orators and story-tellers) was orally transmitted.

There are other problems about the role of writing among the Arabs in the early seventh century c.e. to which we have no clear answer. One must accept the generalization that the crucial function of a script, whether alphabetic or not, is to convey a version of the spoken word in a form that can be recognized and understood by a person with knowledge of that script and of the language that it encodes. It is not clear, however, how this applied in early Arabic documents. Any document that has come down to us through traditional sources is now written in a fairly high register, and with no obvious colloquial features (see dialects; grammar and the Qurʾān). This may not be far from the mark; but, as is usual in Arabic sources, there is a total failure to pay any attention to the gradations of register between the four literary forms: šīr — kāhin — ḥaṭīb — qaṣṣ. Nor is there any sign of dialect. This simply does not tally with what we find in papyri, in which colloquialisms, a sign of dialect, are to be found from the earliest surviving documents onwards.

The traditional view is that Arabic script was defective until roughly the end of the seventh century c.e. This is certainly true of graffiti, but that is hardly germane to the discussion. The graffiti and the traditional view might also incline us to the view that the script functioned largely at an aide-mémoire level. Again it would appear that we are being pointed in the wrong direction. Labīd’s vignette about the Yemeni youth and the story of al-Mutalammis and Ṭarafa seem to point to a fairly extensive use of writing, whether or not the script was fully formed.

Earliest literary evidence from the Islamic period

It is against this background that we should consider the implications of the surviving
papyri and in particular of the earliest extant Islamic document, a papyrus from upper Egypt, now preserved in the Austrian State National Library and known as PERF 558 (for more on this papyrus, see Gruendler, Development, 137; Jones, Dotting). It has texts in both Arabic and Greek, and each bears a date: in Arabic “the month Jumâdâ I of the year 22” and in Greek “the thirtieth day of the month of Pharmouthi of the Indiction year 1” (23 April 643).

This invaluable dating is not the only important thing about PERF 558. The script is more advanced than we might expect if we accept the traditional accounts of the development of Arabic script (q.v.). The Arabic text is written in a clear cursive hand; and it contains a fair sprinkling of dots. There are dotted forms of six letters (ṣ, kā, dhāl, ṣād, shin and nān, all of which are also to be found without dots); there are some long vowels (ā, ē, and ā are all to be found, though medial ā is most frequently omitted); and there are some examples of alif maqṣūra.

The script of PERF 558 is rightly characterized by Beatrice Gruendler (Development, 135) as being a “fairly developed script.” She adds “the first cursive impulse must therefore be expected several decades earlier.” This also seems a fair judgment. A period of several decades, however, dating back from 643 c.e. takes us back into the pre-hijra period (see EMIGRATION). We are thus forced to conclude that the traditional accounts of the development of Arabic writing, and of the diacritics in particular, i.e. that in the seventh century the Arabic script functioned at a primarily aide-mémoire level, must be wrong so far as a cursive form of Arabic is concerned.

There is another scrap of evidence that we might reasonably consider as providing some corroboration of this view. There is a hemistich in Labîd’s qasida mimiyya beginning ‘afʿa l-rasmu am lâ that runs: “There is a trace of Aṣmâ‘ that has become dotted like a sheet of writing” (li-Asmâ‘ a rasmu ka-l-sabâḥati a’jamâ‘). It is true that Labîd lived for almost forty years in the Islamic period, but his language and thought are very traditional and again take us back to the earlier part of the seventh century C.E.

A full use of the script is also indicated by some material found in the literature on the Prophet’s biography (ṣîra, see SÎRA AND THE QUR’ÂN). There are no cogent reasons, for example, to reject the authenticity of the treaty documents now known as the Constitution of Medina, or to believe that these were not committed to writing at the time that they were drawn up. Equally, writing plays a crucial role in the story about the expedition to Nakhlâ in Rajab of 2 A.H., in which the sealed orders were issued to the leader of the Muslim raiding party.

Finally the Qur’ân shows itself to be strongly in favor of the use of writing for practical purposes. The key passages are a very lengthy one, Qur’ân 2:282-3, concerning the recording of debts (q.v.) and other transactions, and the much shorter Qur’ân 24:33, about writing documents. It would seem that these stipulations about the writing of documents are possible because there was a pre-Islamic sunna of writing for practical purposes, and, on the evidence of the papyri, writing was a tradition of accomplished scribes.

The writing of the Qur’ân (see ORTHOGRAPHY; MANUSCRIPTS OF THE QUR’ÂN) is another matter, for its original mode of delivery was oral (see RECITATION OF THE QUR’ÂN). Thus any written version is a secondary form, as the text depicts in a narrative (see NARRATIVES) about Moses (q.v.; Qur’ân 6:91). Given, however, that there was knowledge of copies of Jewish and Christian scriptures, the psychological pressure for the nascent Islamic community to have written copies of its own scripture must have been irresistible.
(see codices of the Qur’ān; collection of the Qur’ān). Tradition has it firmly that at least some of the Qur’ān was committed to writing during Muḥammad’s lifetime, although there is no agreement about when the copying started or how much of it was copied during his lifetime — though most references are linked to the final years of his residence in Medina. This writing is said to have been done by a small group of scribes, known as the “scribes of the revelation” (kutṭāb al-waḥy). The authenticity of this material is disputed but even if it is rejected, it is likely to echo something of what happened.

This takes us back again to the form of writing used. It has always been thought that the development of the Kūfic form of Arabic script — without any diacritical dots — was a concomitant of the Qur’ān’s being committed to writing. That may be so, but it would then point to a two-track evolution of Arabic script in the seventh century C.E.: Kūfic basically as a form of aide-mémoire to go with the oral text, while a more cursive form, which used dots at the whim of the writer, was employed for more practical documents.

Orality, writing and the Qur’ān

There is a remarkable contrast between the scanty gleanings set out above — i.e. the degree of literacy in the Arabia of Muḥammad’s day, the function and nature of the Arabic script, and the evidence for the writing down of the Qur’ān during Muḥammad’s lifetime (including the script in which it would have been recorded) — and what we find attested in the Qur’ān itself. First, the appurtenances of writing, though not frequently mentioned, are pretty well represented in the Qur’ānic vocabulary: qalam, raqq, qirā’āt, sjīlāt, lāwāh, subūf, Zubur, midāw, etc. Unfortunately there is nothing about the script beyond the odd phrase such as kitāb masīṭūr (Q 52:2) and kitāb marqīm (Q 8:39, 20), which do not add to our overall knowledge.

The riches about writing, however, lie with the single root k-t-b which is a key item in Qur’ānic vocabulary. There are over fifty examples of the verb kataba, which are fairly evenly split between the concrete “to write” and the abstract “to prescribe.” This is overshadowed, however, by the use of kitāb, which is the tenth most common noun in the text, with over 250 occurrences.

There are no real surprises about the meanings of kitāb, though perhaps they have a greater range than most of the central items of Qur’ānic vocabulary. In over 200 of the occurrences it means what is normally translated as “scripture,” with most of the rest meaning “document,” “record” or “decree,” with a couple examples each of “letter” and “fixed time” rounding off the meanings. Usage and context show, however, that when kitāb means “scripture” it is hardly ever concrete in sense.

There is, for example, the fact that Qur’ān, “recitation,” and kitāb, “scripture,” are to some extent interchangeable. The most striking instance is the phrasing of Q 15:1, “These are the signs of the scripture and of a clear recitation” (ṭilka ʿayātū l-kitābī wa-qur’ānīn mubīn), and Q 27:1, “These are the revelations of the recitation and a clear scripture” (ṭilka ʿayātū l-qur’ānī wa-kitābīn mubīnīn).

Also Q 46:29 has “Who listened to the recitation” (yastāmīʿūna l-qur’āna), while the following verse has “We have heard a scripture” (innā sāmīnā kitāban, Q 46:30). There are also a number of verses which refer to the “scripture” being recited (see Q 2:44, 113, 121; 17:93; 29:1; also Q 29:48 quoted below).

There are, however, other passages that show that the essential relationship between the two words is more complex, with kitāb apparently referring to a heavenly exemplar and Qur’ān to an earthly
recitation (see heavenly book; preserved tablet). Thus in q 41:3 we find “A scripture whose signs are expounded as a recitation in Arabic” (kitābun fasīlāt āyātuhu quʾānan ʿarabiyyan), and in q 43:2-3, “By the clear scripture — we have made it a recitation in Arabic” (wa-l-kitābī l-mubīn innā jā ʿabūhu quʾānan ʿarabiyyan; see also names of the Qurʾān).

On the basis of these and similar passages, particularly with the phrase kitāb mubīn (q 12:1; 26:2, etc.; cf. 5:19; 13:1), one can make a good case for arguing that “divine message” would give a clearer indication of the meaning of kitāb than “scripture” does. God does not transmit the divine message to his messengers in writing. The use of the verb aschā, “suggest, inspire,” is perhaps the clearest indication of that.

That the committing of the divine message to a written form is a secondary stage after the revelation is indicated most clearly by q 6:91, “Say, ‘Who sent down the scripture which Moses brought as a light (q.v.) and a guidance to the people? You put it on parchments, revealing them, but concealing much’” (qul man anzala l-kitāba lladhī jāʾa bihi mūsā nūrān wa-hudān lil-nāsī; tajʾilānahu qarāfīsa, tabdīnāhā wa-tukhfīna kathīiran).

In one passage, q 29:48, a verse denying that Muhammad had had a revelation before the Qurʾān, writing may be seen as having the same standing as recitation: “You did not recite any scripture before this nor did you write it with your right hand” (wa-mā kantu tattā l-muʿni qabīhi min kitābīn wa-lā takhūtūhu bi-yaminak; see opposition to Muhammad; ummī; left hand and right hand). The Prophet is never, however, given the command to “write,” though from time to time he is told to “recite,” and frequently, of course, the instruction is “say.”

Nevertheless, the importance of written scripture is acknowledged in such early passages as q 52:2-3: “By a scripture inscribed on unrolled parchment” (wa-kitābīn masūrin fi raqqīn mashūrīn) and q 87:18-9: “This is in the ancient scrolls (q.v.), the scrolls of Abraham (q.v.) and Moses” (ānā hādhā la-fi l-suḥufī l-ilā suḥufī Ibrāhīma wa-Mūsā).

It is several times acknowledged that the People of the Book (q.v.), as the Jews and Christians are generally known, have written versions of the scripture, and what they do with them is commented on very adversely in q 2:79 (see polemic and polemical language; corruption; forgery).

In the end, none of the passages containing the root k-t-b can be said directly to encourage the writing of the divine message, but there is one verse, q 25:5, that indicates that the Meccans linked writing to the revelation, in a pejorative way: “They say, ‘Fables of the ancients that he has had written down; and they are dictated to him morning and evening’” (qālū asāṭīra l-aḥwāla l-kitābahā fa-hiya tumālā ʿalayhi bukratān wa-asīlan; see informants).

It is not fanciful to think that this priority of the oral over the written would have influenced early believers in one direction, while a very natural desire to have written copies would have pulled them in the opposite way.

On the other hand, the Qurʾān is strongly in favor of the use of writing for practical purposes. The key passage is a very lengthy one, q 2:282-3, concerning the recording of debts and other transactions, which contains no less than eight places in which a form of kataba is used and one of annaba, “to dictate.” One should also note the much shorter q 24:33: “Such of those whom your right hands possess who seek the document, write it for them if you know some
good in them” (wa-ladhīna yabtaghūna l-kitāba mimmā malakat aymānukum fā-kātibūhum in 'alintum fi-him khayyran). The meaning of “the document” in this verse is disputed, but however it is interpreted it is clear that writing is stipulated for a practical purpose, and this is precisely the same thrust that we see in Q 2:282-3.

Conclusion

Although the Qur’ān reflects a prejudice for an oral — as opposed to a written — preservation of scripture, papyri from the early Islamic period show a highly developed script. This evidence, together with material found in the sīra — and even the Qur’ān itself — lend support to a theory of a pre-Islamic development of Arabic script with diacritics. These two trends (oral preservation of culture, but the utilization of writing in mundane matters) indicate a two-fold development of the Arabic script: one (Kūfic, mentioned above) that served as a memory aid in the preservation of orally-transmitted culture and scripture, and a more differentiated one used in the transactions of daily life.

Alan Jones

Bibliography


Original Sin  see FALL OF MAN

Ornamentation and Illumination

From early times written copies of the Qur’ānic text were embellished with various kinds of ornament that served to divide the text into manageable units, enhance readability, and enliven the visual qualities of the page and the book. Like the Torah of the Jews but unlike the Bible of the Christians, the Qur’ān was never illustrated with pictures, but rather embellished only with non-figural, non-representational decoration. In contrast to the study of western manuscripts, where the term illumination encompasses both figural and non-figural decoration, scholars of Islamic art usually make a careful distinction between illuminated manuscripts, which were decorated only with non-representational geometric and vegetal designs, and illustrated, i.e. pictorial ones (see ICONOCLASM).

General considerations

Charting the origins and development of Qur’ānic illumination is difficult since early manuscripts (i.e. those produced before the end of the third/ninth century) were never signed or dated (see MANUSCRIPTS OF THE QUR’ĀN). Later manuscripts, in contrast, were often signed and dated by the calligrapher and sometimes even by the illuminator(s). In addition, otherwise-undated manuscripts can sometimes be
dated by later inscriptions, such as endowment records (waqfyya) or other external evidence. One of the benchmarks for dating early manuscripts in the so-called Kufic, or angular, script, for example, is the multi-volume Qur’ān manuscript endowed by Amājūr, governor of Damascus for the ‘Abbāsids, in 262/876 to a mosque in Tyre (Déroche, Qur’ān of Amāgūr; see calligraphy; Arabic script).

While it is unquestionably true that the general picture over the course of the centuries reveals a development from plain to ornately embellished manuscripts, it is often simplistically — but wrongly — assumed that the earliest copies of the text were always plain and that later examples carried increased amounts of ornament. This assumption is easily disproved by the discovery of at least one palimpsest, that is a reused parchment page, in Șan’ā’ (Dār al-Makhtūṭāt, MS 00-27.1), in which an unornamented version of the Qur’ānic text in Kufic script replaced an earlier one in a similar script embellished with ornamental headings. A cursory examination of the nearly 40,000 fragments from 1,000 early parchment manuscripts of the Qur’ān accidentally discovered in 1972 in the ceiling of the Great Mosque of Șan’ā’ indicated that just one-eighth of them were illuminated (von Bothmer, Meisterwerke Islamischer Buchkunst).

In the fourth/tenth century, paper gradually began to replace parchment as the main medium for Qur’ān manuscripts, spreading from the east, where it was first used, to the west, where parchment remained the preferred support well into the seventh/thirteenth century. Coincident with this change of material was a shift in format from horizontal (“landscape”) to vertical (“portrait”), as well as an increase in the amount and variety of the illumination, which was undoubtedly easier and therefore cheaper to execute on the new medium. The reverence universally accorded to the Qur’ān meant that calligraphers and illuminators used the finest materials for their work, and many Qur’ān manuscripts made in later centuries contain superb illumination, reckon them among the finest works of art ever produced in the Islamic lands. Western scholars, accustomed to paying more attention to images than words or nonrepresentational decoration, however, have often neglected the study of Qur’ānic illumination and decoration, and it is only in recent years that scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, have begun to address the subject with the care it deserves. Such careful study may help to localize and date particular manuscripts as well as to reveal how manuscripts of the Qur’ān were actually read and used.

Ornament was used in manuscripts of the Qur’ān to separate individual verses (āyāt), groups of verses, chapters (sūras) and divisions such as sevenths and thirtieths which allowed the text to be read over the course of a week or a month. As these divisions, as well as the titles of the sūras (see sūra), were not considered to be part of the revealed text, they were almost always differentiated in some way, whether by size, script, color, or illumination. Ornament was also used to frame and enclose the full text or individual volumes of it with decorative frontispieces and finispieces. In addition, volumes were protected by bindings of leather and pasteboard which themselves could be ornamented with bindings of leather and pasteboard which themselves could be ornamented with tooling, stamping, gilding, and other fancy techniques. In later copies of the Qur’ān, similar or complementary designs were used on the pages and the binding, but as few, if any, early manuscripts of the Qur’ān have survived attached to their original bindings, it is still impossible to discuss the relationships between the decoration of text and binding in the early period.
Given these problems of establishing the chronology of early Qurʾān manuscripts, the following article is arranged typologically according to the size of the division marked by the ornament. It does not consider the variously colored dots found in early manuscripts of the Qurʾān; although they may appear decorative, they were used to indicate vocalization of the text (Dutton, Red dots [parts I and II]). This discussion moves from smallest to largest, beginning with markers used to separate verses (q.v.) and culminating in full and double pages of illumination with and without text. Within each section, examples are generally presented chronologically. A final section investigates the growing division of labor that accompanied the increased decoration of the Qurʾānic text. For a discussion of the modern printed Qurʾān, however, see Printing of the Qurʾān.

Verse markers and marginal ornaments
The division of the Qurʾānic text into 114 sūras with approximately 6200 verses is very old and the subject of occasional disagreement, principally on the placing of divisions between the verses, not on the contents of the text or the order of the verses themselves (see Codices of the Qurʾān), which is generally thought to have been established during the reign of the caliph ʿUthmān (q.v.; r. 644-56; see also Collection of the Qurʾān). Division into verses is marked by the occurrence of rhyme or assonance (see Rhymed Prose; Form and Structure of the Qurʾān; Language and Style of the Qurʾān); differences occur because of variants in reading (see Readings of the Qurʾān) and decisions about whether or not a particular rhyme marks the end of a verse. Another divergence occurs over whether or not the bāsmala (q.v.) is counted as a verse. The publication of the standard Egyptian edition of the Qurʾān in 1924 under the aegis of al-Azhar has provided a standard numbering system that is used by many scholars today. The divisions found in medieval manuscripts, therefore, do not necessarily correspond to those used at the present time, and it is possible that a close study of the variations of the verse markings used in different copies might help to establish localizations and chronologies for particular groups of manuscripts.

As calligraphers writing in the early Kūfic scripts did not generally differentiate between the internal spaces between the unconnected letters of a single word and the spaces between different words, let alone between sentences, division between verses might be indicated by something as simple as a series of diagonal slashes made by the calligrapher after writing the last word of a verse or by a gold circle or pyramid of three or six circles added by the calligrapher or someone else after the entire page had been copied. The celebrated calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 413⁄1022) discreetly marked the end of verses with three small dots in the copy of the Qurʾān he penned in the rounded naskh script in 391⁄1000-1, but did not otherwise interrupt the flow of his writing (Rice, Unique Ibn al-Bawwāb manuscript). Several centuries later, the Baghdadī calligrapher Yaḥūṭ al-Mustaʿsimī (fl. seventh/thirteenth cent.) typically used gold rosettes punctuated with blue dots to separate individual verses, and this style was later adopted by many calligraphers in Mamlūk Egypt, Ottoman Turkey, and elsewhere. Sometimes calligraphers left spaces for these verse markers; sometimes they wrote the text in an unbroken line, returning to add the verse markers above the line of script. A gold marker, whether a single rosette or a pyramid of circles, eventually became the standard indicator of the end of an individual verse.
To make it easier for a reader to locate a particular verse, especially in the longer chapters with hundreds of verses, calligraphers normally marked groups of five and ten verses. The standard marker for five verses was a teardrop shape, derived from the Arabic letter hāʾ, the alphanumeric (abjad) symbol for “five” (see numberology). As the alphanumeric symbol for “ten” — the letter yāʾ — would have been visually inappropriate, the standard marker for ten verses was a circle, often inscribed with the appropriate alphanumeric symbol for the decade (e.g. sīn for sixty). Since the alphanumeric system used in the Islamic west differed slightly from that used in the central and eastern lands, the way these systems count tens of verses can be an important means to distinguish manuscripts produced in the different regions. For example, the famous “Blue Qurʾān,” written in gold on blue-dyed parchment, was once routinely attributed to Abbāsid Merv and Persia. The manuscript, however, uses the western system of alphanumeric counting, where sixty is indicated by the letter ṣād, making an attribution to Qayrawān in Tunisia or elsewhere in the Maghrib much more likely (Bloom, Al-Maʿmūn’s Blue Koran).

To further facilitate finding one’s place in the text, illuminators normally placed larger markers for groups of five and ten verses in the outer margin of the page at a place corresponding to where the group of verses ended in the text. Sometimes these markers repeat the teardrop or circular shape of the ornament found in the text; sometimes they stand in place of it. The teardrop shape is typically inscribed with the word khams (five), whereas the circular motif corresponding to the decades is normally inscribed with the number spelled out (e.g. sittin, “sixty”). Sūras with many short verses, typically those revealed earlier in Mecca (q.v.), can require as many as six or seven marginal devices on a single page, thereby leading the illuminator to fill the outer margin with an alternation of oval and circular decorative motifs (e.g. Afarvand, Gulchinî, 50).

Calligraphers and illuminators also came to use the outer margins to display other kinds of information, such as places in the text when bowing of the head (rūkāʾ) or prostration (ṣajda) is indicated (see bowing and prostration; recitation of the Qurʾān). Marginal notations were also employed to indicate division of the text into thirtieths (juzʿ/ajzāʾ; Pers. sipāra), sevenths (subʿ/ashāʾ) and sixtieths (hīzh/ahzāb), which facilitated reading over the course of a month or a week. Such marginal notations do not appear in the earliest manuscripts of the Qurʾān, but became increasingly common from the fourth/tenth century onwards. For example, a manuscript of the Qurʾān made at Palermo in 372/982-3 has marginal ornaments outlined in black ink with red or green paint showing divisions into thirtieths, tenths, ninths, sevenths, and fifths (see Fig. 11). The sajdas are similar in form, but are written in gold; and the sixtieths are indicated by a circle containing the word ḥīzh written in gold between two vegetal motifs against a red-hatched ground (Déroche, Abbasid tradition, no. 81). One fifth/eleventh-century scholar considered sajda-markings irreverent additions to the holy text, a clear indication that they had become common by his time (Rice, Unique Ibn al-Bawwāb manuscript, 17 n. 1).

Another use for the margin was to allow the calligrapher to correct mistakes he had made in transcription. For example, when copying folio 137b of his Qurʾān manuscript, Ibn al-Bawwāb inadvertently left out the hundredth verse of sūra 17. When he discovered his mistake, he corrected the omission by adding the missing verse in a rectangular tabula ansata in the margin. To
show the reader where to insert the missing verse, the calligrapher added a gold rosette in the space he had left for the circular marker he normally used to indicate the end of ten verses (Rice, *Unique Ibn al-Bawwāb manuscript*, 13 and pl. VIIIb). Similarly, after Yāqūt al-Mustaʿsimī had inadvertently omitted the word *nuṭfa* (sperm) from q. 23:15 in a manuscript he completed in Jumādā I 685/June-July 1286, he added the missing word vertically in the inner margin, with a little arrow in the text showing where it should be inserted. When the manuscript was ruled, the outer bands had to be interrupted to enclose the missing word (Afarvand, *Gulchini*, 50).

**Chapter divisions**

There was great variation in the way illuminators could separate one chapter, or sūra, from another. The simplest was just to leave a blank line, but more often illuminators added vegetal or geometric decoration (illumination) and/or information about either the following or the preceding sūra. This information normally would include the sūra title, the number of verses in it, the place where it was revealed (either Mecca or Medina), the chronology, or a combination of any of these (Déroche, *Abbasid tradition*, 23). To call attention to this information, illuminators often wrote it in another color, typically gold, enclosed it in a box, and extended it into the outer margin with a palmette. The Palermo Qur’ān manuscript mentioned above has sūra titles in gold with no further ornament, but Ibn al-Bawwāb’s manuscript has elaborate titles in rectangular frames with fantastic palmettes sprouting into the outer margin (see Fig. iv). His style was continued by Yāqūt and many later calligraphers. The palmette extending into the margin, which is already found in many manuscripts of the Qur’ān written in kūfī script, served to indicate where a new chapter began without requiring the reader fully to open the book. This reader-friendly feature undoubtedly explains why this archaic motif persisted for many centuries. At the end of the Qur’ānic text, where the chapters are short, there might be as many as five or six chapter divisions on a double-page spread in a manuscript with many lines of writing on each page. This concentration of ornament could threaten visually to overwhelm the text, but a skilled artist adjusted his decorative scheme to escape such pitfalls. To avoid cluttering the pages at the end of his Qur’ān manuscript, Ibn al-Bawwāb, for example, did not frame his chapter titles as he had done elsewhere, but left them plain (James, *Qur’āns and bindings*, no. 18).

Titles are normally written at the beginning of a sūra, but sometimes they were placed at the end. This was the case with a celebrated five-volume manuscript endowed to the Almohad mosque of the Qaṣba in Tunis during the reign of the Ḥaṣṣid sultan Abū Fāris in Ramaḍān 807/March 1405. The text was copied in silver ink on purple paper, but the chapter titles were written afterwards at the end of the chapter in gold ink with gold rosettes in the margins. In some cases, the calligrapher did not leave enough space for the full text of the title, and he had to squeeze it into the available space (Déroche, *Les manuscrits du coran. Du Maghreb à l’Insulinde*, nos. 305-308).

**Fully-decorated text pages**

To enhance further the visual qualities of the text page, calligraphers and illuminators increasingly enclosed the text block on each page within a decorative frame. By doing so, they vastly increased the labor and cost of production, especially on multi-volume manuscripts with five or seven lines of text per page that might run to many thousands of folios. The typical
frame comprised a series of lines of varying width and color — usually black, blue, and gold — ruled around the text block after it had been written. Such frames become relatively common in Persian, Turkish, and Indian manuscripts made from the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, but they are not normally found in early Kufic manuscripts of the Qur’ān. One notable exception is a unique chryso-graphic (written in gold) manuscript in two volumes, most of which is in the Nuruosmaniye Library, Istanbul (see Fig. 111). Each parchment page is framed with a decorative band of white fillets enclosing gold, green, and red dots; the outer margin of each page has a fantastic winged palmette sprouting golden pine cones and pomegranates (Déroche, Abbasid tradition, no. 41).

Equally unusual is the decorative treatment found in a dispersed manuscript on paper often known as the Qarmathian Qur’ān, conventionally dated to sixth/twelfth-century Iran. Each text page has four lines of an extremely attenuated form of the distinctive script variously known as Qarmathian, eastern Kufic, New Style, or warraq enclosed within a rectangular frame from which half-palmettes extend from the corners into the outer margins (see Fig. v). The letters of the text are themselves enclosed in reserve panels, and the remaining surface of the text block is entirely filled with spiraling vegetal arabesques traced in pale ink. Each double spread is worked in matching colors, indicating that the manuscript was meant to be seen as a succession of double-page spreads. The production of the 4500 pages that this thirty-volume manuscript originally contained would have been an extraordinarily time-consuming and expensive undertaking in which the decoration was virtually as important as the calligraphy itself (Saint-Laurent, Identification).

Rulings and other forms of decoration were sometimes added to earlier manuscripts that were deemed too plain for later taste. For example, at some indeterminate date the Kufic letters on an undecorated parchment page in Washington, DC (Freer Gallery of Art, 45,16) were enclosed by reserve panels and the background tinted blue (Atıl, Art of the Arab world, no. 2). At the same time, spurious attributions to famous figures in Islamic history, such as 'Uthmān or 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib (q.v.), were often added. The Ottomans, whose libraries contained an enormous quantity of earlier manuscripts transcribed by master calligraphers across the Islamic lands, often added decoration in the current Ottoman taste. For example, in 962/1554-5 the noted illuminator Qarā Memi sumptuously decorated a manuscript that had been copied by the İlkhanid calligrapher ‘Abdallāh Şayrāfī in 745/1344-5; the manuscript was also rebound at this time for the treasury of the Ottoman vizier Rüstem Pasha (Atıl, The age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, no. 14).

From an early date, full pages of decoration were typically found at the beginning and the end of manuscripts of the Qur’ān. In particular, the opening double page containing Sūrat al-Fatihā (“The Opening,” Q 1; see FATIHĀ) and the first verses of Sūrat al-Baqara (“The Cow,” Q 2) gave artists opportunities to display their mastery of many different types of decoration. Because the outer pages of a volume are more subject to wear and disintegration, they are the ones most often lost from early manuscripts. One rare survival, found in the Great Mosque of Šanā‘a, shows the Fatiḥa (with no title) enclosed in a broad multicolored frame with hatching between solid bands (see Fig. 1 of FATIHĀ). One may imagine that the facing page in this manuscript would have contained the first verses of Q 2 in a similar frame. Writing in his small naskh script, Ibn al-Bawwāb found
that the Fāṭiḥa occupied only four lines, so his opening page also contains the first six verses of chapter 2 (see Fig. iv), which is continued on the facing page. To balance the copious ornament on the right-hand page, he expanded the marginal ornament on the left page. This arrangement seems to have become standard by the fifth/eleventh century (i.e. see Fig. II of FĀṬIḤA).

In an attempt to create increasingly impressive opening pages, calligraphers from the ninth/fifteenth century onwards either spread the short text of the Fāṭiḥa over both opening pages (see Figs. IV a and b of FĀṬIḤA) or put the Fāṭiḥa on the right-hand page and a corresponding number of verses from the beginning of q 2 on the left-hand one. In either case the illuminator surrounded the small text blocks with large and elaborate frames of vegetal and geometric decoration, containing cartouches inscribed with such information as the title, verse count, and place of revelation. By the tenth/sixteenth century these decorative frames came to overwhelm the text itself, which might be inscribed in lobed oval cartouches worked into the overall decorative composition (see Figs. VI a and b).

One of the most magnificent examples of Ottoman illumination is the frontispiece to a manuscript transcribed by Ahmad Qarāḫisārī in 953/1546-7 for Sultan Sūleymān the Magnificent. The calligrapher and the illuminator, Qarā Memi, worked together closely, for the first and last lines on each page of the opening double page have been written not in the small naskh used for the rest of the text but in a majestic thuluth that frames the small text block. In addition to traditional motifs such as arabesques and cloud-bands, the illumination also contains naturalistic plants and flowers that revolutionized the decorative vocabulary of the age. In addition, the entire book was bound in cloth of silver over a paste-board core and decorated with gold plaques inlaid with rubies, turquoises, and pearls, making it one of the most sumptuous copies of the Qurʾān to have survived (Atıl, The age of Sultan Sūleymān the Magnificent, no. 9).

This was a unique manuscript commissioned by a royal patron, but such elaborate opening pages became the norm, even for commercial production. In Iran, the city of Shīrāz emerged as a center for the mass-production of manuscripts with elaborate frontispieces; to speed up production, the basic decoration was done with a template and the calligraphy and finer details added by hand (Bloom and Blair, Islamic arts, 337).

Decorative pages
Another way that manuscripts of the Qurʾān could be decorated was to add frontispieces and finispieces, or purely decorative pages set at the beginning and end of the text or of individual volumes. The thickness of the parchment used in early manuscripts and the few lines written on a single page of a large luxury manuscript meant that many early Kūfī copies of the Qurʾān, particularly those in a horizontal format, were produced as multi-volume sets, typically containing as many as thirty or sixty volumes. Each volume probably had a decorative double-page frontispiece, to judge from the many full pages of illumination found in museum collections around the world. The horizontal format of the codex led illuminators to decorate their pages with rectangles filled with strapwork ornament executed in gold and color, typically with an elaborate palmette projecting into the outer margin. These strapwork patterns are comparable to those found on early bookbindings from the Great Mosque of Qayrawān (Marçais and Poinssot, Objets kairouanais) and Şanʿā (Dreibholz, Some aspects).
In addition to the many frontispieces with geometric decoration, there is one representational example known: an extraordinary, but very fragmentary, double frontispiece discovered in the Great Mosque of Ṣan‘ā‘ (see Fig. 1). It depicts two buildings with arcades and hanging lamps that are generally accepted to represent mosques. As the date and provenance of these pages remain a matter of lively scholarly debate, it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw further conclusions about what mosques, if any specific ones, these images are meant to represent, although it has been commonly assumed that they are meant to represent either Mecca (q.v.) and Medina (q.v.) or Medina and Damascus (von Bothmer, Architekturbilder im Koran; see also AQĀ MOSQUE).

With the shift to vertical-format manuscripts on paper, full pages of non-representational geometric decoration, often known as “carpet” pages, began to proliferate. Ibn al-Bawwāb provided his manuscript with two sets of such pages, one before the beginning of the text (fols. 8b-9a) and the other after the end (fols. 284b-285a). Both are based on strapwork designs of intersecting circles. The apparent simplicity of the designs is belied by the complexity of the execution, making them early masterpieces of the illuminator’s art. In addition to these non-representational pages, Ibn al-Bawwāb provided his manuscript with several other sets of double frontispieces and finispieces with text specifying the numbers of elements — chapters, verses, words, letters, diacritical marks, etc. — according to the particular reading (that of the Kūfīans following ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭalīb) adopted in the manuscript. The words have been written in various decorative scripts and enclosed within elaborate arabesque frames.

Perhaps the greatest examples of the illuminator’s art are found in the large-scale multi-volume manuscripts produced for the Īlkhānids and Mamlūks in the eighth/eleventh century. In the frontispieces to these manuscripts, the space normally occupied by the text block is filled with a geometric strapwork pattern, often generated from a central star polygon. The interstices between the strapwork bands are filled with exquisite arabesques, typically worked in gold and ultramarine blue, the whole enclosed by an arabesque frame with palmettes projecting into the outer margins. In their complexity and subtlety these magnificent double pages represent the epitome of Islamic illumination. The combination of gold and ultramarine blue remained perennially popular for illumination, ranging from verse markers and chapter titles to full pages. This choice is not surprising since these two pigments were the most expensive in the artists’ palette and signified the reverence in which illuminators — and their patrons — held the holy scripture.

Because of the rectangular format of the page, Īlkhānīd and Mamlūk illuminators were often led to divide the rectangular field into a central square field (which was easier to fill with a star motif) sandwiched between horizontal bands above and below. Sometimes the central motif was inscribed with an appropriate Qur’ānic verse, such as Q 4:42 (“It is sent down by one full of wisdom worthy of all praise”), as on a manuscript illuminated by Abū Bakr, who was known as Şandal, in the opening years of the eighth/eleventh century (James, Qur’āns and bindings, no. 25). In other manuscripts a larger selection (e.g. Q 56:77-80 or Q 26:192-7) might also be written in the four bands across the top and bottom of the opening double pages. By contrast, in the Maghrib where square-format parchment manuscripts of the Qur’ān remained
popular for centuries, a distinctive form of carpet page decoration developed, with a square field enclosing overall strapwork patterns, often reserved in white against a gold ground.

In other types of books, the opening folio (a) might contain a rosette with the title of the work, the name of the author, or the name of the patron who commissioned the manuscript, but, as the Qur’ān does not have a title, calligraphers and illuminators had to find other solutions. One was to inscribe the opening rosette with an appropriate qur’ānic citation such as Q 56:79: “Which none shall touch except those who are clean” (see cleanliness and ablution; ritual purity). For example, Q 56:79 was inscribed in a rosette on the recto of the first folio of a multi-volume manuscript made at Marāgha in 738/1338 (J. A. James, Qur’āns and bindings, no. 47). On other manuscripts the central rosette was inscribed with Q 17:88: “If the whole of mankind and the jinn (q.v.) were to gather together, they could not produce the like of this Qur’ān...” (Déroche, Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe, 255).

Calligraphers and illuminators

In early times the illuminator and calligrapher may have been one and the same person. Ibn al-Bawwāb, for example, not only copied his manuscript but was also responsible for the fine and extensive program of illumination. We know this because he sometimes used the same tools (a pen, not a brush) and materials (ink, not color) for the illumination that he had used for the calligraphy. As manuscripts became increasingly large and complex, however, there was a corresponding division of labor between calligrapher and illuminator, and illumination became a distinct specialty, itself eventually divided into sub-specialties such as outlining or gilding. One of the first known instances of an illuminator signing his work is found in a Qur’ān manuscript made at Bust (now in Afghanistan) in 505/1111-12 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, BNF Arabe 6041). A certain ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān signed his work in the middle of the gold strapwork decoration on the final page above the colophon bearing the signature of the calligrapher, ‘Uthmān b. Muḥammad (Lemaistre, Splendeurs, no. 36). By ʿIlkhānid and Mamlūk times the division of labor had become even greater, a development that is no surprise considering the size and magnificence of the finest manuscripts. For example, in the seven-volume manuscript copied by Muḥammad b. al-Valūdī for the Mamlūk emir (later sultan) Baybars al-Jashankī in 704-5/1304-6, three separate artists worked on the decoration. Two masters — ʿAbū Bakr, known as Šandal, and Muḥammad b. Mubādir — did the illumination (tadhḥīb), and a third — Aydughdī b. ‘Abdallāh al-Badrī — did the outlining (zammaka). Colophons and signatures clearly show that there was a hierarchy in these positions, for in a manuscript completed a decade later on 27 Ramaḍān 713/15 January 1314 for the Mamlūk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad by the Ayyūbid prince and calligrapher Shāhdū, Aydughdī had been promoted to illuminator and was himself assisted by the “left-handed draughtsman,” ‘Alī b. Muḥammad (James, Qur’āns of the Mamlūks, nos. 1 and 6).

ʿIlkhānid calligraphers and illuminators typically worked in steady teams. ʿAlīmad b. Suhrāwāndī, for example, was repeatedly paired with the illuminator Muḥammad b. Aybak b. ‘Abdallāh, and the calligrapher Arghūn al-Kāmilī worked with the designer (nagūsh) Muḥammad b. Sayf al-Dīn. These teams typically worked on the multi-volume manuscripts from beginning to end. ʿAlīmad b. Suhrāwāndī
and Muḥammad b. Aybak, for example, worked in this way on the thirty-volume “anonymous Baghdād” Qur’ān (now dispersed; see Fig. vii), the former doing the copying first and the latter then illuminating the text. The dated colophons indicate that there was some overlap, for the calligrapher was completing the writing of the last volumes when the illuminator began decorating the first ones. The calligrapher worked twice as fast as did the illuminator: transcribing a juz’ took a month and a half, while illuminating it took slightly less than three months. In total, it took seven years (701-7/1301-8) to produce the thirty-volume large-format manuscript (James, Qur’āns of the Mamluks, no. 39).

Few later patrons had the wealth or inclination to commission such splendid copies of the Qur’ān, so later examples are more often smaller and copied in fewer volumes with illumination concentrated in only a few places. Nevertheless, wealthy segments of society always desired fine copies of the Qur’ān, and several centers of commercial production emerged. A tenth/sixteenth-century visitor to Shirāz, for example, described commercial production there, in which small family businesses employing fathers, sons, and even daughters as scribes, illuminators, and binders, produced a thousand books a year. Most of the artists were anonymous, but the biography of one famous calligrapher-illuminator, Rūzbihān Muhammad, can be established. Having learned his art from his father, a calligrapher, and his grandfather, an illuminator, Rūzbihān had a long career spanning some thirty-five years, 920-54/1514-47. Similarly, from the twelfth/eighteenth century onwards, the town of Shumen in Bulgaria became a center for the almost-industrial production of elaborately decorated manuscripts of the Qur’ān, a cottage industry that ended only with the advent of commercial lithography in the late thirteenth/nineteenth century (Stanley, Shumen).

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Bibliography

Orphans

Children (q.v.) who have lost their parents, generally to death. Ḥālim (pl., ḥālāmā), a term designating a fatherless minor child (al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, Mufarradāt, Lisān al-ʿArab, s.v.), appears throughout the Qurʾān more than twenty times. Early verses from the first Meccan period (see chronology and the Qurʾān), celebrating God’s providence towards the orphan Muhammad (q 93:6), warn against oppressing orphans as such (q 93:39) and identify those who turn away the orphan as unbelievers (q 107:2; see belief and unbelief). Later verses from the same period rebuke the unbelievers for not honoring the orphan (q 89:17), exhort them to feed “on a day of famine (q.v.) an orphan of kin…” (q 90:14-5; see kinship) and refer to the reward reserved in the hereafter (see reward and punishment; eschatology) for believers who “give food for the love of him [i.e. God] to the poor (see poverty and the poor), the orphan and the prisoner” (q 76:8-9; see prisoners). These exhortations (q.v.) can be seen not only as a reaction against the injustice (see justice and injustice) and violence to which widows (see widow) and orphans were subjected by the Meccans (Roberts, Social laws, 44) but also as aimed at strengthening unity among the Muslim converts in the face of a growing threat from outside as well as from within the group (O’Shaughnessy, Qurʾānic view, 37; see opposition to Muhammad; community and society in the Qurʾān).

Rules concerning the fair and just way Muslims, who serve as guardians of orphans, should deal with their property (q.v.) are laid down by verses from the second and third Meccan periods (see ethics and the Qurʾān). Fair treatment of orphans ranks as one of the primary moral obligations for Muslims (q 17:34; 6:152; see Azhary-Sonbol, Adoption, 55). An example for the right treatment of orphans’ wealth (q.v.; in the spirit of the above-mentioned verses) where God himself serves as the guardian, can be read in the narration of God’s servant (al-Khadr, according to Qurʾān commentaries) who, as one of his enigmatic acts, sets up a wall about to fall down, explaining that “it belonged to two orphan youths…and under it was a treasure belonging to them…and your lord (q.v.) wished that they should reach full age, and bring forth for themselves their treasure as a mercy (q.v.) from your lord” (q 18:77, 82; see khadir/khmdr; myths and legends in the Qurʾān).

In the early Medinan period, probably against the background of the battles of Badr (q.v.) and Uhud which left large numbers of Muslim children orphaned (O’Shaughnessy, Qurʾānic view, 35, 37; Azhary-Sonbol, Adoption, 55; see expeditions and battles), the Qurʾān re-emphasizes, as part of the religious duties of Muslims, the importance of deeds of beneficence towards the orphan (e.g. q 2:83, 177; 4:36; cf. Éxod 22:21-3; Deut 24:17; 27:19; for comparison with Christian sources see O’Shaughnessy, Qurʾānic view,
36 n. 16) and encourages the believers to extend practical help to orphans by contributing to their welfare (q 2:215) and by providing for them when inheritances and spoils are divided (q 4:8; 8:41; see INHERITANCE; BOOTY). It also warns “those who consume the property of orphans wrongfully” that they will be punished in the hereafter with “fire (q.v) in their own bellies” (q 4:10; see HELL AND HELLFIRE) and gives guardians concrete instructions on how to handle the affairs of fatherless children and particularly how to protect their wealth and property rights (q 2:220; 4:2, 6; q 4:5 may also be understood as referring to orphans; see Ṭabarī, Ṭafsīr, ad loc.). Two Medinan verses (q 4:3, 127, the latter explicitly) connect the treatment of orphans with the marriage of guardians (see Watt, Medina, 276, 281; id., Prophet and statesman, 154; Azhary-Sonbol, Adoption, 56; see MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE). The just treatment of orphans, a motif which receives much attention in the Qur’ān, has had a long-term impact on later Islamic ethics, law and practice (Chaumont and Shaham, Yatĭm; Roberts, Social laws, 42-3; Azhary-Sonbol, Adoption, 55-7). See GUARDIANSHIP for a further discussion of the Qur’ānic provisions for the protection of orphans.

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Bibliography

Primary: Lisān al-ʿArab; al-Rāghib al-İsfahānī, Muḥaddīṯ; Ṭabarī, Ṭafsīr.

Orthography

Lit. “correct writing,” it has a three-fold nuance: a) the art of writing words with the proper letters, according to standard usage; b) correct spelling, or, alternatively, mode of spelling; c) grammar treating of letters and spelling. The history of the formation of a “standard” Qur’ānic orthography is the focus of this article; the particularities of Qur’ānic spelling, letters and grammar are treated in greater detail elsewhere (see ARABIC SCRIPT; ARABIC LANGUAGE; GRAMMAR AND THE QUR’ĀN; LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR’ĀN; INIMITABILITY; MYSTERIOUS LETTERS). The orthography of the Qur’ān — as a system of rules ensuring the uniformity of the text’s written transmission — underwent several stages of development. Its history is inextricably bound with that of Arabic grammar and the traditional disciplines of Qur’ānic study (q.v.; ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān), primarily those of the readings of the Qur’ān (q.v.; ‘ilm al-qirā‘āt) and the recitation of the Qur’ān (q.v.; ‘ilm al-tajwīd), as well as the most important events that affected the Muslim community and the caliphate.

Muhammad left no fixed text of the revelation (see MUSHAF), and Arabic writing at that time conveyed only consonants (see CALLIGRAPHY). Furthermore, the script was ambiguous, as the same sign could indicate several letters. Memorization remained the main method of preserving the sacred text (see MEMORY). The sources have retained traces of resolute opposition to the very idea of a written record of the text as doomed to reproduce mistakes (see...
orality; orality and writing in Arabia). The characteristic features of this period, in which the Qurʾān existed in both written and oral form, determined the difficulties that Muslim authorities encountered as they developed rules for recording a uniform text of the Qurʾān. The text attested in early Qurʾānic fragments served, indisputably, only as an aid for recitation from memory. In codifying the sacred text (see codices of the Qurʾān; collection of the Qurʾān), it was imperative for the Muslim community to complete several tasks: to develop a graphic form of the Qurʾānic text (rasm or ḥaṭṭ, kitāb, kitāba, kataba) acceptable to all authorities; to introduce a system of diacritics (ʾaʿim, ʾiǧām, naqṣ) and vocalization (šakhl, ishšāl, tasqšāl, ḥaravštāl, sometimes also naqṣ) and to establish a single vocal form (ḏabd or lafẓ, nutq); and to establish uniform rules for recitation (qawāʾid al-qurʾān). Because even after the solution of the first two problems the possibility of ambiguity remained (see ambiguous).

In order to create a unified redaction of the Qurʾānic text, it was imperative to investigate the basic grammar of Arabic and to develop an apparatus for the written representation of the text. In addition, political will and authority (q.v.) were needed (see politics and the Qurʾān). According to Muslim tradition, the political will and authority needed for the task were provided, initially, by the rightly-guided caliphs (see caliphs): Abū Bakr (q.v.; al-ṣubḥ al-bakriyya), ʿUmar, ʿUthmān (q.v.; ḥaṣm ʿuthmānī) and ʿAlī (see ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib). Later, the initiative passed to two outstanding Iraqi governors, Ziyād b. Abīhi (d. 53/673) and al-Ḥajjāj (d. 95/714), and the protection of two influential wasḥās in the caliphate, Ibn Muqṭa (d. 329/940) and Ibn Ṯāsa (d. 335/946).

As consonantal roots in Arabic can be vocalized in diverse fashion, various systems developed in centers of Muslim scholarship, primarily the Iraqi cities of al-Kūfah and al-Ṭāba. At that time, famed “readers” (al-qurrāʾ) were also famed grammarians, for example Ibn Abī Ishāq al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 118/735–6) or Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀlāʾ (d. 154/770; see reciters of the Qurʾān). The generation of the Prophet’s grandchildren and great-grandchildren gradually succeeded in creating an elegant system of diacritics, which permitted a shift from a scriptio defectiva to a scriptio plena. A tradition insistently connects the first stage of this process with Abū l-Aswad al-Duʿāʾī (or al-Ḍīf; d. 69/688). This man, from the circle around ʿĀlī, is known as the founder of Arabic syntax (ʾilm al-naḥṣ). Tradition connects Abū l-Aswad’s work first with an initiative of ʿĀlī and, later, with instructions from the noted Umayyad governor and sworn brother of Muḥammad b. ʿAbīhi, who ruled the entire eastern section of the caliphate.

The concrete individuals are less important than the way the tradition treats their roles, particularly those of ʿĀlī and Ziyād b. Abīhi. The former must have understood the importance of furthering the unification of the Qurʾānic text, both for the cause of Islam (q.v.) and for his own reputation. As for Ziyād, a faithful servant of the Umayyads famed for his intelligence and decisiveness, he was precisely the man to grasp, on the basis of state and dynastic interests, the imperative of continuing work on the text of the scripture. It is possible that, at this stage, the heart of the matter was the necessity of using already existing diacritical marks in copying the Qurʾān.

The tradition no less insistently foregrounds the role of another equally powerful, decisive and intelligent Umayyad governor, al-Ḥajjāj. He instructed his
clerks, Naṣr b. ʿĀṣim (d. 89/707) and Yahyā b. Yaʿmur (or Yaʿmar; d. 129/746), to complete the development of a system to designate long and short vowels as well as a number of additional elements in the writing system. It is important to note that this provoked opposition, especially in Medina (q.v.). Progress toward a scriptio plena threatened to reduce the influence of qur’ānic readers (qurrāʾ), who knew the text by heart and were recognized by society as the main bearers of the tradition.

The maturation of a writing system and the establishment of a grammatical system were largely completed by the end of the ninth century. At that time, Khalil b. Ahmad (d. 170/786-7 or 791) developed and introduced additional diacritical signs. His famous pupil Sibawayhi (d. ca. 189/796), the grammarians al-ʿĀṣimāʾī (d. 213/828), Abū ʿUbayda (110-210/728-824-5), Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830-1), pupils of the above-noted Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ, and al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) created works which successfully codified the elements of language and established an orderly grammatical system. Sibawayhi’s Kitāb contains an enormous number of qur’ānic examples. The grammar was created for the sake of the Qurʾān, but also relied upon it.

In the ninth century, the center of scholarly activity shifted to Baghdād, where the beginning of the tenth century witnessed several attempts to achieve a new level of unification in the qur’ānic text. The main role fell to Ibn Mujāhid (245-324/859-935), who worked in Baghdād and enjoyed the successive protection of two extremely influential grand wazīrs, Ibn Muqla and Ibn ʿIsa. Ibn Mujāhid’s work, al-Qirāʾ āt al-sabīʿ, pretended to near official status and established a system of permissible qur’ānic “readings.” The system proposed in the work relied on the consonantal basis of the “Uthmānic version” and limited the number of variant vocalizations to seven; these belonged, correspondingly, to seven authorities of the eighth century. For each tradition, two slightly different variants (al-riwāyāt) were noted. All of them were acknowledged as equally lawful; the use of other variants (al-ikhtiyār), however, was forbidden. Although this system gradually became very widespread, others continued to exist. These were known as “three after seven” and “four after ten.” In practice, however, only two of the systems noted by Ibn Mujāhid became widespread: the Kūfān, “Haṣī (d. 246/860) ‘an ʿĀṣim (d. 127/744),” and, to a lesser degree, the Medinan, “Warsh (d. 197/812) ‘an Naṣrī (d. 169/785).” The “battle of the readings” was accompanied by pointed polemics which, in sum, reflected serious ideological and political disagreements within the Islamic community.

Even after Ibn Mujāhid, however, it remained possible to understand the sacred text in more than one way. The system that had been developed did not provide for anything analogous to punctuation. The science of qur’ānic recitation (ʿilm al-tajwīd), which codifies the rules for reading the Qurʾān (qawāʾid al-qirāʾ āt), provided a framework for solving the problem. The history of how the tradition of ʿilm al-tajwīd took shape, which is linked both to ʿilm al-qirāʾ āt and the etiquette of reading, remains unwritten. It was closely tied to the mystical-ascetic movement in Islam later to be termed al-taṣawwuf, which emerged in the second half of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries (see ASCESTICISM; SUFISM AND THE QURʾĀN).

Tradition holds that the first to write a special work on ʿilm al-tajwīd was a contemporary of Ibn Mujāhid, Mūsā b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Khāqān al-Baghḍādī (d. 325/936). The set of fifteen pausal signs employed by
qur‘ānic readers went back to the detailed system developed and introduced by Khalīl b. Ahmad. As the eighth book of al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) Ḥanāfī ‘ulīm al-dīn indicates, by the twelfth century this system had already been worked out in detail and accepted by the community. The rules for reading the Qur‘ān (qawā‘id al-qirā‘āt) described in detail questions of the assimilation and dissimilation of consonants, the influence of consonants on the pronunciation of the following vowel and the accentuation of phrases in accordance with meaning, etc. The placement of pauses (waqf wa-ibtidā‘) was especially important, for pause indications fulfilled the role of punctuation, guaranteed the intelligibility of each verse’s (āya) semantic content and bound them into a whole (see verses; FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QUR‘ĀN; SūRA). Despite the complexity of the resulting system, it still serves only as a reminder and requires a thorough knowledge of the rules.

Although by the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries the basic problems involved in unifying the sacred text had been solved, centuries would be required to complete the process. Among the many events that took place during that time, we note two, which played a special role. In 1202/1787 the full Arabic text of the Qur‘ān was printed for the first time in Russia (see PRINTING OF THE QUR‘ĀN). The edition differed in a basic fashion from European editions, primarily because it was Muslim in character: the text was prepared for printing by Mullah ‘Uthmān Ismā‘īl. In 1216/1781-2 the St. Petersburg Arabic typeface was transferred to Kazan, where the Muslim printing press was opened, and where, beginning in 1217/1802, this text of the Qur‘ān was published many times. The so-called “Kazan Qur‘āns,” viewed as the first Muslim edition, spread widely in the East and were reproduced numerous times. It is possible that this edition played a decisive role in the centuries-long process of standardizing qur‘ānic orthography.

The final stage of the work on the unification of the qur‘ānic text is connected with the appearance in Cairo in 1342/1923-4 of a new edition of the text; it represents now the final step in canonizing the orthography, structure of the text and rules of reading. Drawn up by a special panel of Muslim scholars it was based on one of the “seven readings” (Hafs ‘an ʿĀṣim). The members of the panel relied in their work not on an analysis of early manuscripts, but on contemporary Muslim works on the issue of “readings” (al-qirā‘āt) as well as on the living tradition of prominent Qur‘ān reciters (Ṣa‘īd, Recited Koran). This undoubtedly narrows the significance of the work. Nonetheless, the Egyptian edition, today accepted throughout the Muslim world, as well as by European scholars, represented a significant step forward. Together with the encyclopedia of qur‘ānic readings (Kuwait, 1402-5/1982-5), it forms the nucleus of a critical edition. Still, the appearance of the Egyptian edition did not eliminate all other traditions of textual transmission. In the western Muslim world and in Ṣaydī Yemen, traditions remain which go back to a different transmitter of the text, Warsh. Today, publications of the Qur‘ān in this transmission appear not only in North Africa but in Cairo and Riyadh as well.

Although an analysis of extant copies of the Qur‘ān confirms the outline of the traditional history of qur‘ānic orthography and the text in general, they also clearly demonstrate that new light may be shed on the current understanding of the history of the consolidation of the text of the Qur‘ān (see MANUSCRIPTS OF THE QUR‘ĀN).
Qur'anic fragments dated to the first/seventh — third/ninth centuries preserve a large number of mixed and transitional variants, whether one examines orthography, the numeration of verses (āyās) or known systems of variant readings. Either all of these variants and systems were artificial from the start, or they arose after the manuscripts of the early period were copied and reflect a higher level of uniformity and regularity in the copying of Qur'āns.

The orthographic discrepancies preserved in the early manuscripts affect, for the most part, the writing of long vowels and the hamza (for examples of these orthographic discrepancies, see Rezvan, Qur'ān, 45-6 [Tables 11-13]). In the first place, one encounters the omission of alifs in various noun and verb forms. In many cases the hamza was conveyed where required by alif, waw or yā or simply omitted. Early Qur'ānic manuscripts may preserve traces of discrepancies rooted in the morphological systems of the eastern and western Arabian dialectal groups. These manuscripts also display several vocalization systems based on the use of dots of various colors, as well as different systems of tajwīd marks which preceded those established in the fourth/tenth — sixth/twelfth centuries. Careful description and study of early manuscripts and the creation of a detailed data-base of early copies by paleographers, linguists and historians may furnish material for reconstructing the early history of Qur'ānic orthography from a perspective different than that conveyed by the traditional accounts.

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Bibliography


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**Ostentation** see **Age of Ignorance**

**Oven** see **Instruments; Hell and Hellfire; Noah**
لا إله إلا الله، لا إله إلا الله، فلكل من له اسمه ما إليه اسم، وحده عز وجل، وحلف له بالله ما له، لا يعفو الله، ولا يغفر، وما كان له من حسن، ولا من سوء، وما حلف له بالله من حسن، ولا من سوء، فلكل من له اسمه ما إليه اسم، لولا شيء من شيء.

[iv] Example of a Qur’anic manuscript in which the lines of script alternate in height and length (dated to 582/1186). Q 18:93-110 is shown here. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (CBL 1438, f. 109a).
[v] Qur’an manuscript from the western Islamic world (on parchment, dated 703/1304), with a marginal ornament indicating the daily readings for the month of Ramaḍān in the lower part of the margin. The text contains Q 26:220-27:20. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (BNF Arabe 385, f. 80a).
Later Iranian Qur’ān manuscript (dated to 1126/1714) in a minute hand, in which an entire juz’ (a thirtieth of the Qur’ān) appears on two facing pages (here, only one such page – containing a hizb, or a sixtieth of the Qur’ān – is shown). In the margin, there are accounts in Persian about Muhammad’s life and commentaries by the sixth imām, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. Courtesy of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (BSB Cod. arabe 1118, f. 17v).
[vii] Javanese selendang, a kind of shawl worn draped around the head or shoulders, which is covered with densely written Arabic inscriptions that include Q 61:13, the “Victory Verse” (Java, early twentieth century). Courtesy of The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London (TXT104).
[1] Courtyard of the Umayyad mosque of Damascus (85-96/705-15, with later additions) showing the axial transept and dome in front of the mihrab. Photograph courtesy of Jonathan M. Bloom.
[III] Ablution pavilion (known as the Qubbat al-Ibādiyyīn) from the destroyed Almoravid congregational mosque (Marrakesh, sixth/twelfth century). Photograph courtesy of Jonathan M. Bloom.
[iv] Congregational mosque of Isfahan (sixth/twelfth century and later) showing courtyard with two (of four) iwāns. Photograph courtesy of Sheila S. Blair.
[vi] Funerary mosque-madrasa of Sultan Hasan showing prayer hall with dikka (the platform on which the muballigh might stand) in foreground and mihrab and minbar in background (Cairo, begun 756/1356). Photograph courtesy of Jonathan M. Bloom.
[viii] Selimiye mosque exterior (Edirne, 975-82/1568-75). Photograph courtesy of Jonathan M. Bloom.
[t] Left half of a double-page frontispiece from a fragmentary copy of the Qur’ān (late first/early eighth century) found in the Great Mosque at Ṣan‘ā’ depicting two buildings with arcades and hanging lamps, commonly believed to depict mosques. Courtesy of Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, University of Saarbrücken (Ṣan‘ā’, Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt, inv. no. 20-33.1).
[iv] Right-hand side of opening double-page with Q 1-2:6 from the copy of the Qur’ān transcribed by Ibn al-Bawwāb at Baghdad in 391/1000. Note the sura titles in rectangular frames with palmettes extending into the outer margins. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (CBL 1431, f. 9b).
[vi a] Left-hand side of the opening double page with Q. 1 from a copy of the Qurʾān transcribed by Rūzbihān Muhammad at Shīrāz, ca. 965/1558. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (CBL 1558, f. 3r).
[vi b] Right-hand side of the opening double page with Q 1 from a copy of the Qurʾān transcribed by Rūzbihān Muḥammad at Shīrāz, ca. 965/1558. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (CBL 1558, f. 2v).
Right side of a double-page frontispiece from the anonymous Baghdād Qurʾān illuminated by Muḥammad b. Aybak (early eighth/fourteenth century). Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (CBL Is 1614.2).