An Analysis of the Supernatural Archetype of the Prophet Muḥammad as Found in the *Sīra/Taʾrīkh* and *Tafsīr* Works of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr

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Abstract

Reports relating supernatural events - or miracles - in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632) have been traditionally either ignored by those modern scholars attempting to determine the historicity of the source material or have been studied piecemeal in an attempt to determine their origins by those scholars who see them as secondary additions. The current study will examine both the sīra/taʾrīkh, the story of Muḥammad’s life as told within larger works of universal history, and taḥṣīl, exegetical, works of two medieval Muslim scholars, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Ibn Kathîr (d. 773/1373), to attempt to determine how the reports of the supernatural fit into the story of Muḥammad’s life as a whole. The result is that there is both a supernatural and mundane archetype for the life of Muḥammad, and that they appear to mirror each other almost perfectly. Whereas the story begins with God performing all the miracles for Muḥammad’s benefit, by the time of his death in Medina, Muḥammad has completed his mastery over the forces of the supernatural, even to the point where it appears that God performs miracles directly in response to Muḥammad’s prayers. Thus, as Muḥammad gained more control over the movement he founded, he gained an equal amount of control over the forces of the supernatural. Both al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr include reports that contain the supernatural archetype, but also include reports that diverge from it in important ways. While there is not one, overall theory to explain why each author made the changes he did to the supernatural archetype of Muḥammad’s life, the examples in the following chapters indicate that the role of the supernatural versus the mundane, the politicization of the archetype, and authorial opinion were important to
each scholar and help to support the argument that the miracle stories are integral to the life of Muḥammad as a whole, and deserve to be studied as such.
Résumé

Des rapports reliant des événements surnaturel - ou des miracles - dans la vie du Prophète Mahômet (m. 11/632) ont été traditionnellement ignorés par ces érudits modernes essayant de déterminer l'historicité du matériel de source ou étés fragmentaires étudié afin d'essayer de déterminer leurs origines par ces érudits qui les voient en tant qu'additions secondaires. L'étude courante examinera tous les deux le sīra/ta'rikh, l'histoire de la vie de Mahômet comme dit dans de plus grands travaux de l'histoire universelle, et tafsīr, exégétique, travaux de deux érudits musulmans médiévaux, al-Ṭabari (m. 310/923) et Ibn Kathîr (m. 773/1373), d'essayer de déterminer comment les rapports de l'ajustement surnaturel dans l'histoire de la vie de Mahômet dans l'ensemble. Le résultat est qu'il y a un archétype surnaturel et banal pendant la vie de Mahômet, et qu'ils semblent se refléter presque parfaitement. Considérant que l'histoire commence par Dieu exécutant tous les miracles pour l'avantage de Mahômet, avant que de sa mort dans Medina, Mahômet ait accompli sa maîtrise au-dessus des forces du surnaturel, même au point où il s'avère que Dieu exécute des miracles seulement en réponse aux prières de Mahômet. Ainsi, car Mahômet a gagné plus de contrôle du mouvement il a fondé, il a gagné une quantité égale de contrôle des forces du surnaturel. Les deux al-Ṭabari et Ibn Kathîr incluent les rapports qui continuent l'archétype surnaturel, mais incluent également les rapport qui divergent de lui des manières importantes. Tandis qu'il n'y a pas d'un, la théorie globale pour expliquer pourquoi chaque auteur fait les changements l'a fait à l'archétype surnaturel de la vie de Mahômet, les exemples dans les chapitres suivants indiquent que le rôle du surnaturel contre le banal, la politisation de l'archétype,
et l'opinion de l'auteur étaient important pour chaque érudit et aident à soutenir
l'argument que les histoires de miracle sont intégrales à la vie de Mahômet dans
l'ensemble, et à mériter d'être étudiées en tant que tels.
Acknowledgements

A project such as this would have been impossible without the help and caring of several people. My advisor, Donald P. Little, has provided much-needed advice and encouragement, clarified some of my translations, and even gave the occasional push, which was needed more often than I care to admit. This entire endeavor would have never begun, much less finished, had it not been for his support. My co-advisor, A. Üner Turgay, was the first faculty member I met at McGill and always made me feel welcome, even when it meant phone calls from 1,500 miles away. It is to the efforts of these two men that I owe any success this project might enjoy, while responsibility for its faults remains my own. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Mr. Karam at McGill University, who took quite a bit of time out of his schedule to tutor me in Arabic, and without whose help I would have been lost. I have also had the good fortune of having the support of not one, but the staffs of two libraries who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help with discovering (and sometimes recovering) sources and the ever-important Interlibrary Loans. At the Institute of Islamic Studies Library, Salwa Ferahian, Wayne St. Thomas, and Steve Millier provided me with sources I would have otherwise missed, but more importantly gave me their friendship, which I will always cherish. At the University of South Alabama Library in Mobile, Debbie Cobb, Kathy Jones, and Jan Sauer have all gone out of their way to provide the sources and support needed to finish this project so far away from where it first began. The office staff at the Institute of Islamic Studies has been my foster family for the last seven years, and so a special thanks goes to Dawn Richard, Ann Yaxley, and Kirsty McKinnon.
It was Gina Bonelli who encouraged me to apply to McGill in the first place, and whose presence in Montreal made my time there an absolute adventure. My friends at the Institute and elsewhere have given me the type of support that only true friends can, and have taught me that there are more similarities between human societies than differences. Last, but certainly not least, I must thank my family for their undying love and support. My children, Hillary and Courtney Claypoole, have had to put up with a mother who piles books, articles, and Arabic translations all over the house and tries to convince them that microwave popcorn is a warm meal, but they have still somehow managed to become beautiful, intelligent young women who have made this effort worthwhile. My only regret is that my father, William Morgan Williams, Sr., did not live to see the impact that his love of history has had on my life, and so it is to his memory that this work is dedicated.
A Note on Translations

All translations of non-English texts used in this dissertation are my own with the following exceptions: the English translation of al-Ṭabari’s *History* as published by the State University of New York Press by various translators and the English translation by John Cooper of the Introduction to al-Ṭabari’s *Tafsir*. Trevor LeGassick’s translation of Ibn Kathîr’s *ṣira ta’rîkh* is somewhat troublesome, since he does not take his material from the *Bidâya wa ’l-Nihâya*, but from the work dedicated solely to Ibn Kathîr’s life of Muḥammad by Muṣṭafâ ‘Abd al-Wâhid. While this work sometimes correlates to the text of the *Bidâya*, sometimes it does not. Therefore, where the English translation matches Ibn Kathîr’s work, I have used LeGassick, but where the two texts do not match, I have used my own translation of the appropriate parts of the *Bidâya*. 
Introduction

The words and deeds of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11 AH/632 AD) are of the utmost importance for the Muslim community. Not only do they serve as one of the foundations for Islamic law, but they also reveal the model of Muḥammad’s life that Muslims are obligated to follow. The depiction of these words and deeds is found in a wide variety of genres, which are then used for a number of purposes. The authoritative hadith collections are used for the law, the works of sīra tell the story of Muhammad’s life and the life of the early community, and the tafsīr, or exegesis, of the Qurʾān, the book that contains the revelations Muḥammad is said to have received from God and the work that is at the very core of the Muslim faith, helps Muslims to understand the sometimes cryptic text of their scripture. Through all of these types of sources, an image of Muḥammad emerges that appears to be timeless. Muḥammad the Prophet becomes an archetype and the events of his life take on legendary proportions.¹

But the quest of modern scholars in the West has been to look beyond this archetypal Muḥammad in an effort to determine the historical reality of his life and mission.² In an attempt to achieve this end, scholars have become fixated on the

¹The notion of prophetic biography being itself an archetype for biographies of later figures has been studied by Michael Cooperson, Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Maʾmūn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Suleiman Alif Mourad, Early Islam Between Myth and History: Al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110H/728 CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

individual report, the *khbar*, and its component parts, the *isnād*, or chain of authorities, and the *matn*, or the text. While much important work has been accomplished, a consensus as to the authenticity of the source material has yet to be reached. The only aspect of Muḥammad’s life that appears to be agreed upon by scholars is that those reports that relate supernatural events are to be studied solely in an effort to determine when and from where they first entered the body of source material. Since the Qurʾān states that Muḥammad performed no miracles, modern scholars have hypothesized that these reports must have been added at a later date. In studies that attempt to determine the historicity of reports, these events are ignored completely.

Rather than examine individual reports in the life of Muḥammad to differentiate between archetype and historical truth, the current study will focus on the elements of the supernatural that are found in the story to attempt to determine how they fit into the narrative as a whole. The results have been somewhat surprising. The general story of

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4See Qurʾān 7:188, 10:49, 18:110, 25:7-8, 41:6, and 72:21 for examples of statements wherein Muḥammad is said to be just a man.

5Almost none of the articles in the collections on Muḥammad’s life and the history of early Islam cited above discuss reports of Muḥammad’s miracles.
Muḥammad’s life as depicted in the historical and biographical material portrays him as someone who began as an orphan, but who managed to gain a reputation for honesty and marry a wealthy businesswoman. After receiving the Revelation, he became a persecuted prophet who was forced to leave his hometown of Mecca for the oasis settlement of Medina, where, over time, he became the successful leader of both a proselytizing religion and an expanding community. So, how do the miracle stories fit into this tale? Oddly enough, the miracle stories appear to mirror Muḥammad’s mundane role almost perfectly. Before the Revelation of the Qurʾān, all of the miracles are performed by God for Muḥammad’s benefit. After the first visit by Gabriel, as Muḥammad gains followers, he also gains more control over elements of the supernatural. While God continues to perform miracles for Muḥammad, the Prophet is now able to perform miracles on his own account. But what about the Medinan period? Most scholars who attempt to determine historicity appear to rely more on the reports for this later period due to the argument that it contains less legendary material than that which covers Muḥammad’s early life in Mecca.\textsuperscript{8} But a count of the individual miracle stories reveals the opposite to be true. There are markedly more miracle stories related for the roughly ten years of the Medinan period than for the entirety of

\textsuperscript{8}See Fred Donner, \textit{Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing} (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1998), 204-5, whose theory of the Islamic communal memory argues that there were more people who had personal memories of the Medinan period than the Meccan, and so there are more reports for this period in general. While it is true that the Medinan period is given far more space in the stories of the life of Muḥammad, the fact that the number of miracle stories also increases dramatically must be taken into account. That scholars continue to rely on reports that claim to describe the Medinan period is indicated in the work by Gregor Schoeler, “Foundations for a New Biography of Muḥammad: The Production and Evaluation of the Corpus of Traditions according to ‘Urwah b. al-Zubayr,” \textit{Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins}, ed., Herbert Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2003), see especially 24.
Muḥammad’s life before his Hijra in 622 AD. These miracle stories show the finality of Muḥammad’s control over the forces of the supernatural, including not only the performance of miracles himself, but also occasions where God appears to perform miracles at his request. So, the archetypal image of Muḥammad is one of increasing power and control. As he gains control over an ever-expanding number of followers and territory, he gains an equal amount of control over the forces of the supernatural, thus completing the archetype.

While this alone is an important point to make about the life of Muḥammad, the devil, as they say, is in the details, and while investigating how this archetypal story was transmitted by different authors at different times, two important points emerged. First, although there are timeless elements to the story of Muḥammad that are found in any number of works about his life, different Muslim scholars appear to have their own ideas about how certain aspects of the archetype should be viewed by the community of believers. Each author alters Muḥammad’s archetypal image, whether consciously or not, to reflect both the author’s individual style and his time and place. Second, the story of the life of Muḥammad is intimately bound to the exegesis of the Qurʾān, including reports of his supernatural abilities. Many of the stories of his life, as reported in the biographical and historical material, include quotations from the Qurʾān, serve as reasons for why certain verses were revealed, or both. Thus, in order to examine how the miracle stories fit into the larger story of the life of Muḥammad, I have limited this

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This includes reports wherein individuals foretell the coming of a prophet or of Islam years before Muhammad’s birth. As stated above, the number of miracle stories increases dramatically for this later period, but the total number of reports does as well, so it may be possible that the ratio of miracle reports to mundane reports is the same for both the Meccan and Medinan periods. However, this would still have to be addressed by those who focus on the Medinan period for historical reconstruction.
study, where possible, to examples of those reports in the biographical and historical material that include both a miracle story and a Qur'ān citation. I have then examined the exegesis of those verses in an attempt to determine if they are portrayed in the same manner in the different genres involved.

On the face of it, the first point may not seem like such an important discovery. It is fairly well known that an author will tailor his stories to reflect his own situation, but for Muslim scholars of the medieval period of Islamic history, tailoring the story was supposedly out of the question. For scholars of the medieval Islamic world, the hadith format was becoming increasingly important in all types of works.\(^{10}\) All authoritative reports were eventually to have an isnaād that went back to the time of the Prophet himself. Any work of sīra, ta'rikh, or tafsīr was simply supposed to be a collection of authoritative reports from past authorities. The individual author was to act merely as collector and transmitter, and this is what many medieval Muslim scholars claimed to have done. However, a close examination of the historical and exegetical works of two such authors, al-Ṭabarī (d. in Baghdad, 310/923) and Ibn Kathīr (d. in Damascus, 773/1373), reveals that they did not simply relay the reports of others. Each of these men tells the story of the miracles of Muḥammad’s life in such a way that his own ideas and biases become evident, as do the ideas and biases of the society in which he lived.

The second aspect of this study, the relationship between the miracle reports in the biographical and historical material containing Qur'ān citations and the exegesis of

\(^{10}\)Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 73-81, discusses this evolution and argues that al-Ṭabarī attempted to use the hadith format in his *History* in order to make the genre of history acceptable to hadith scholars.
those verses, reveals that, while the *tafsīr* of some of the verses cited is linked directly to the miracle stories in question, the explanation of other cited verses either ignores the miracle stories entirely, or transmits reports of completely unrelated supernatural events. Overall, the supernatural archetype in the *tafsīr* works studied here is represented less than it is in the *sīra/taʾrīkh*, revealing that each author viewed the archetype as more central to the latter genre than to the former. It is also the examination of Qurʾān exegesis that helped determine the choice of the authors studied here. Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr are well known for their works of universal history (*taʾrīkh*), which include a lengthy relation of the biography (*sīra*) of Muḥammad, as well as for works of Qurʾān exegesis (*tafsīr*).

There are, however, other similarities between the two scholars that seem to favor a comparative study. Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr were, to varying degrees, followers of the Shāfiʿī legal school of thought. Al-Ṭabarī would go on to found his own *madhhab*, but it would not long survive his death. Ibn Kathīr became a devoted follower of the controversial Ḥanbalī reformer, Ibn Taimīya (d. 728/1328). Thus, while both men adhered, to an extent, to the Shāfiʿī *madhhab*, each exercised a certain amount of independent reasoning to step beyond the boundaries of his legal school of thought. Also, both men were involved in the controversies of their day relating to the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* and the Shiʿa sect. Al-Ṭabarī had been accused of Shiʿī sympathies and was forced to defend himself to the caliph’s officials. He was also attacked, sometimes physically, by the Ḥanbalīs of Baghdad, among other reasons, for his lack of support for

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11More detailed biographical material on each of these men can be found in Chapter Two of the present work.
the tenets of their movement. Ibn Kathîr makes numerous anti-Shî‘i comments in his works, and was a member of a council of legal authorities called upon to try a Shî‘i, who was later executed, for publicly insulting the first three caliphs, Abû Bakr (d. 13/634), ʿUmar (d. 24/644), and ʿUthmân (d. 36/656), among others. Ibn Kathîr’s relationship with the I‘tâlabîs of his day focused on the person of Ibn Taymiya, and this appears to have put him at odds with the leaders of the Shâfi‘î school in Damascus. These controversies impacted how both men depicted aspects of the supernatural archetype of Muḥammad in the works studied here.

The events that are examined in the current study, as related by both al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr, were chosen for reasons that are unique to each case. One event was chosen each for the pre- and post-Revelation Meccan periods, while two events were chosen for the Medinan period. The pre-Revelation Meccan period is represented by the story of the supernatural light that appeared on ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s face immediately before Muḥammad’s conception. None of the miracle stories for this period are given a Qur’ân citation by al-Ṭabarî, and even for Ibn Kathîr such citations are rare. Thus, this event was chosen because it is the only case where Ibn Kathîr provides a Qur’ân citation that matches part of a report related by both men that contains similar language. The miracle story for the post-Revelation Meccan period, Muḥammad’s multiplication of a small amount of food and drink to feed a large number of his kinsmen while he announces his mission to them for the first time, was chosen because it is one of the few times that al-Ṭabarî includes a supernatural event with overt

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12The fact that the Medinan period contains depictions of the vast majority of supernatural events in the life of Muḥammad is the reason that two separate episodes were chosen for this period.

13Abd Allâh is Muḥammad’s father.
political implications, Muḥammad’s designation of ‘Alī as his successor, but also because Ibn Kathīr goes out of his way to refute those implications. The two events of the Medinan period, Muḥammad’s clairvoyant knowledge of a letter sent by one of his Companions warning the Meccans of the Prophet’s imminent attack and God’s killing of two men who plotted to kill Muḥammad, contain reports of Muḥammad’s prayers to God being answered in a supernatural manner. These events were chosen, however, because, even though these miracle stories are of relatively minor importance for the overall tale of the Medinan period, both authors purposefully support a supernatural interpretation of the events despite the fact that the majority of the reports they relate do not necessarily indicate such an interpretation, thus revealing that each man was willing, at times, to put his own interpretation of events before the bulk of the evidence presented. Thus, even though each author was constrained to a certain extent by the *hadith* format of text and *isnād*, or chain of authorities, each also used his own interpretation of events to portray the image of the supernatural actions of the Prophet in a manner that revealed the author’s own opinions and the impact of the events of his time and place. The supernatural archetype of Muḥammad, then, becomes the framework on which both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr built their individual portrayals of the Prophet and his miracles, revealing that medieval Muslim scholarship, even by the time of Ibn Kathīr, was not the stiff, formalistic body of work it sometimes claimed to be, but was instead a thriving and ever-changing reflection of Islamic society itself.
Chapter One
Myth, Miracle, and History in the Life of Muḥammad: A Comprehensive Review of
the Scholarly Literature

The relation of tales of the supernatural appears to be as old as man himself. As
eyearly as the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, there has been mention of
magic and miracle. The difference between the two categories is, of course, dependent
upon whether one is on the outside looking in, or vice versa. It is a well known fact that
when one religious tradition supplants another, the miracles of the previous religion are
seen by the adherents of the new as magic or superstition, and are, therefore, suspect. Thus, to modern historians, attempting to view their sources through the lens of reason,
the stories of miracles performed by various individuals are viewed as either pious
fictional works or as the misinterpretation of common magic tricks. History, then, must
be studied objectively, rationally, and scientifically in order to be considered a serious
category of intellectual pursuit. To that end, the sources for the early Islamic era in
general and the life of the Prophet Muḥammad in particular have been used by historians
in the same manner as would, say, a dig site by archaeologists. Scholars sift through the
material, discarding what they view as irrelevant or false, searching instead for artifacts
that they see as historically valuable. By dismissing the tales of the miraculous, the soil,
if you will, of our metaphor, modern historians may be missing the one element that

appears to hold the site together. Rather than study the individual reports in an effort to determine which of them are authentic and which are not, or, more commonly, in an effort to devise a methodology by which to make that determination, perhaps a look at precisely those elements in the story of the early community that modern historians find so troublesome, but which were obviously viewed as indispensable by both their original authors and their later narrators, is in order.

*The Role of Miracle and Myth in Society*

Before an in-depth study of this phenomenon is attempted, however, it is perhaps best to discuss the wider topic of the role of miracle stories in society in general and to this end we will begin with James Frazer, Joseph Campbell, and Mircea Eliade. James Frazer’s work, *The Golden Bough*, compares the tale of the Roman hero Aeneas to that of other heroic figures in the mythologies of various cultures and compares the role of the vegetative element in these stories.\(^\text{16}\) He argues that ancient peoples were mystified by the acts of nature and saw in them works of magic. This, he claims, is part of man’s evolutionary track. He argues that “we shall perhaps be disposed to conclude that the movement of the higher thought, so far as we can trace it, has on the whole been from magic through religion to science.”\(^\text{17}\) He does not blindly claim that scientific thought is the highest level to which man can aspire, however, but states that “in the last analysis magic, religion, and science are nothing but theories of thought; and as science

\(^{16}\)James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994). The Golden Bough is the branch used by Aeneas as a key to unlock the gates of the Underworld.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 804.
has supplanted its predecessors, so it may hereafter be itself superseded by some more
perfect hypothesis...."^{18}

Joseph Campbell, appearing to continue Frazer's theory that myth is part of an
evolutionary step in man's journey from superstition to science, adds the theories of
psychology, especially those of Freud and Jung, to examine the role of myth in the lives
of both pre-modern and modern individuals and societies.^{19} He argues that "religions,
philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in
science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic
ring of myth."^{20} However, he claims that with the move from superstition to science,
especially the science of modern psychoanalysis, man has lost his way in the greater
scheme of things, and that, therefore, new symbols must take the place of the old. He
argues that the modern emphasis on the individual has severed mankind from the view
of human life as one part of a universal whole and that this view must be regained for
human life to have meaning.^{21}

Mircea Eliade discusses the role of the individual and the archetype in myth, as
does Campbell, but also argues in his work on history in pre-modern societies that the
members of these societies viewed time as cyclical rather than linear and viewed their
lives and deeds, therefore, as reenactments of deeds performed by gods and heroes.^{22} He

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^{18}Ibid., 806.
^{20}Ibid., 3.
^{21}Ibid., 388-391. He also argues that this does not mean we should return to the beliefs of the past, but
that we must devise a new means by which to see ourselves as part of a cosmic whole. To this end, a new
hero is needed to complete this task.
^{22}Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask
examines how this affected their view of history, and although he focuses on sources for
Eastern European history, his ideas can be applied to other societies as well. He argues:

The recollection of a historical event or a real personage survives in popular
memory for two or three centuries at the utmost. This is because popular
memory finds difficulty in retaining individual events and real figures. The
structures by means of which it functions are different: categories instead of
events, archetypes instead of historical personages. The historical personage is
assimilated to his mythical model (hero, etc.), while the event is identified with
the category of mythical actions (fight with a monster, enemy brothers, etc.). If
certain epic poems preserve what is called "historical truth," this truth almost
never has to do with definite persons and events, but with institutions, customs,
landscapes.\textsuperscript{23}

Eliade, too, concludes his work with a warning for modern man. He claims that modern
man, with his linear and de-mythologized sense of history, must effect a total change if
he is to avoid falling into spiritual despair. Even religious systems that propound a
definite beginning and end to time and human existence are able to avoid this despair,
because terrible events "were regarded as a punishment inflicted by God, the syndrome
of the decline of the 'age,' and so on. And it was possible to accept them precisely
because they had a metaphistorical meaning, because, for the greater part of mankind,
still clinging to the traditional viewpoint, history did not have, and could not have,
value in itself."\textsuperscript{24}

The role of myth in the ancient Middle East is examined by S. H. Hooke, in his
work, \textit{Middle Eastern Mythology}, which compares myths from the ancient
Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations to those of the ancient Hebrews as well as to

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 151. Friedrich Nietzsche also calls for history to perform a function, to be useful, and criticizes
those who would see in history any inherent value separate from its practical purposes. See Nietzsche, \textit{On
the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life}, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis and Cambridge:
those found in the New Testament. He argues that myth, specifically what he calls ritual myth, is the story that is told to explain ritual elements in religious ceremonies. He adds, however, that this does not mean that the myth is perceived as having no potency. On the contrary, he claims that “the spoken part, the myth, was not a mere description of the situation, but had magical power....” Therefore, it appears that religious ceremonies were performed by ancient peoples in an attempt to communicate with their gods, but that later peoples viewed these same ceremonics, complete with myth and ritual, as magical rather than religious. Fear of magic and witchcraft is also found in ancient Jewish sources, yet the Israelite king, Saul, convinces a witch to call upon the spirit of a dead prophet to give him advice. So, for the Jewish authors, the woman conjuring the spirit is a witch, rather than a religious figure, but the prophet whose spirit is summoned remains an authentic religious personage since he is recognized by Jewish society as part of their religious tradition.

26Ibid., 183. In this, he is discussing the similarities between the Babylonian Tammuz myth, and its use during the New Year rituals, and the Christian rite of the Eucharist, wherein the priest uses both myth and ritual to resurrect the dead god. But this can also be said of the later use of the recitation of parts of the Qur’an for magical protection as well as Ibn Kathir’s claim that the story of Muhammad’s life itself has healing properties, both of which will be discussed in more detail below. See also Alan Dundes, ed., Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).
271 Samuel 28:3-25.
appear that each religious tradition must determine what it will keep from previous 
religions and what it will shun as magic, myth, and witchcraft.

Islam is, of course, no exception and it is widely known that Muḥammad chose 
to keep certain elements of the pagan religious tradition of Mecca and to Islamicize 
these in an attempt to make them acceptable in the new order of things. Other aspects 
of the Arab pagan tradition were discarded, however, and came to be viewed with 
disdain and outright hostility. For example, circumambulating the Ka‘ba was retained, 
while divination was set aside. Also, those miraculous acts that were associated with 
Muḥammad’s role as prophet became reserved for him alone. Therefore, later figures 
who attempted to perform miracles similar to those of Muḥammad were shunned by 
many as purveyors of magic who intended to fool believers into straying from the true 
faith.29

29See al-Ṭabarī’s comments on the miracles claimed by the leaders of the Zanj and the Qarmatians. David 
Waines, tr., The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 36, The Revolt of the Zanj (Albany, NY: State University of 
New York Press, 1992), 32, 33-4; and Philip M. Fields, tr., The History of al-Ṭabarī, Vol. 37, The 
supernatural that was allowed to be retained by the Islamic community was the prophetic dream. 
According to tradition, this is the only part of prophethood that Muḥammad claimed would remain with 
his people after he had passed on, and we continue to see even the Prophet himself appear to Muslims in 
their dreams to advise them. See John C. Lamoreaux, The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream 
Interpretation (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002). Another work that examines the 
role of dreams in Islamic society is Leah Kinberg, “Dreams as a Means to Evaluate Hadith,” Jerusalem 
Studies of Arabic and Islam 23 (1999): 79-99. Her study reveals that dreams were sometimes used in 
concert with other methods to show the trustworthiness of either an individual authority or the text of an 
individual report. The use of dreams as a means of noting authoritateness would seem to strengthen the 
notion of dreams as a supernatural power passed on from Muḥammad to his followers. However, as will 
be shown later in this work, it would appear that certain popular practices, such as reciting part of the 
Qurʾān for magical protection, also have their origins in the prophetic powers of Muḥammad.
The Miracles of Muhammad in the Secondary Source Material

Modern works that discuss the miracles of the Prophet typically do so in order to determine their origins. The nineteenth century Hungarian scholar Ignaz Goldziher, in the second volume of his Muslim Studies, argues that, while Muhammad himself consistently denied any supernatural abilities, his contemporaries continued to ascribe them to him.\(^{30}\) After his death and the spread of Islam out of the Arabian Peninsula, the stories of his special powers grew faster than the orthodox version of his lack of miracles. Goldziher claims:

It is one of the most curious phenomena in the development of Islam to observe the case with which orthodox theology also adapts itself to the needs of popular belief, though this entails open contradiction to the unambiguous teaching of the Koran. The power of *ijma*\(^{31}\) here scored one of its biggest triumphs in the whole system of Islam, insofar as the belief of the people succeeded in penetrating into the canonical conception of the Prophet and, so to speak, forcing it to make him into a fortune-teller, worker of miracles, and magician.

He goes on to relate this change in the image of the Prophet as the direct precursor to the veneration of saints in Islam, an idea that he argues is “alien” to the religion.\(^{32}\)

Goldziher’s work has been extremely influential among Western scholars, and his dual arguments that the miracle stories were not part of the original religious views of orthodox Islam and that their integration into the religious texts reflect a conciliation by Muslim theologians to popular belief have retained their popularity. His views are only partly continued by Josef Horovitz in his article, “The Growth of the Mohammed Legend,” in which he argues that “even during that early period there was no definite,


\(^{31}\)Ibid., 261.

\(^{32}\)Ibid., 262.
clear-cut line of demarcation between the miracle-mania of the popular faith and the teachings of the theologians.” Horovitz agrees with Goldziher in that he states that the Muslim theologians purposefully included the popular legends in their works, but argues that these were not used in their disputations with the Christians at least until the last half of the eighth century AD, “since these had the Koran on their side and the miracles of the Prophet were still far from being a generally accepted article of faith.”

Daniel J. Sahas, in his article, “The Formation of Later Islamic Doctrines as a Response to Byzantine Polemics: The Miracles of Muḥammad,” argues that the compulsion to include miracles for Muḥammad was brought about by the “religious fervor and piety of the believers” as well as by the “direct challenge of the Christian polemicists comparing Muḥammed to the Jesus of the gospels.” Sydney Griffith, in his article, “The Prophet Muḥammad: His Scriptures and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century,” argues very strongly for a Christian influence where the miracles of Muḥammad are concerned. He states:

Running like a refrain through all of the Christian apologies of the first Abbasid century is the contention that miraculous signs, worked by the prophets in the name of God, or by Jesus in his own name, are the only sufficiently reasonable warranty for accepting Christianity, or, indeed, any scripture, anyone claiming divine inspiration, or any body of religious doctrine. The reason for this

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33Josef Horovitz, “The Growth of the Mohammed Legend,” in The Life of Muhammad, edited by Uri Rubin (Brookfield, VT: Ashagate Publishing Co., 1998), 270. Peter Brown, The Cult of Saints: its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) argues that the differentiation scholars make between “popular” and “orthodox” or “formal” in Late Antique Christianity is misleading, and that what was typically deemed “popular” is more than likely part of the more “formal” tradition from the beginning. It would appear that the same can also be said of the dichotomy between “popular” and “scholarly” in the Islamic tradition.

34Ibid.

insistence is the notable lack of personal miracles ascribed to Muḥammad, along with the Qurʾān’s rejection of miracles as a criterion for religious credibility.\textsuperscript{36} Griffith also argues that Christians living during the early ‘Abbāsid era were faced with the conversion to Islam of many of their fellow believers due to materialistic concerns. Thus, these writers chose to compare Islam as a religion based on material wealth with Christianity, which they claimed was based on the miracles of Jesus and the apostles.\textsuperscript{37} It appears, then, that a sort of vicious cycle may have existed whereby Christians were warning their fellows against conversion to Islam, in part due to its lack of miracles, which, in turn, helped to fuel the desire by Muslim writers to include miracle stories regarding their Prophet. Since Ibn Ishāq’s (d. 150/767) biography of Muḥammad, or at least Ibn Hishām’s (d. 218/833) recension of it, contains so many miracles, the inclusion of miracle stories would have had to have occurred quite early. Were the Christian writers of the early ‘Abbāsid era unfamiliar with this work? Or, was the work not yet considered part of the orthodox tradition?

Rather than investigate the motivations that drove Muslims to include miracle stories in their works, another group of scholars have chosen to examine reports of the supernatural in their Arabian and Islamic environments. Harris Birkeland, whose study on the traditions relating the cleansing of Muḥammad’s heart, takes to task previous scholars who focus solely on the external origins of the various versions of the tradition. Instead, Birkeland looks at the evolution of the timing of the incident, from Muḥammad’s childhood to his adulthood and back again, that takes place within the

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 389.
Islamic sources themselves over time. He argues that the methods of others, especially ethnographic comparison with other cultures, are not a reliable means of discovering what the traditions meant to their Muslim authors. He states that “the conclusion must be that both the single traits of the legends, their totalities as compositions, and their interrelations in the form they appear in the literature transmitted to us, can only be understood on the basis of their Islamic character.”

Also studying the elements of the supernatural in the Islamic tradition is Toufic Fahd, in his work *La Divination arabe: Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l’Islam*. He traces the different types of divinatory powers from their roots in the ancient Assyro-Babylonian culture through to the medieval Islamic world. He argues that Arab divination and prophecy were intimately linked, but that a differentiation came to be recognized in the fact that the Arab soothsayer worked with an intermediary creature between himself and the divine, whereas the Prophet was directly linked to God. Fahd ties this evolution from divination to prophecy to the societal evolution from nomadism to sedentarism in the Arab world. He also puts forward the theory that, with the introduction of Greek and Persian ways of thinking, the miracles of the soothsayers and prophets evolved into the sciences that were more acceptable to medieval Islam, including astrology and alchemy. Thus, Fahd’s study is an extremely valuable one in which he has placed the miracles of Muḥammad squarely within their Near Eastern context, both prior to and after his lifetime.

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38Harris Birkeland, *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammed’s Breast* (Oslo: I Kommisjon Hos Jacob Dybwad, 1955), 59. Birkeland specifically mentions the works of Horovitz, Shrieke, and Bevan as being unacceptable for such a study.

Another method of looking at reports of the supernatural in the Islamic source material for the life of Muḥammad is used by Jaroslav Stetkevych in his work, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth.* Stetkevych examines one set of traditions, that of Muḥammad’s discovery of a golden branch in a grave, recalling the story of the tribe of Thamūd, who were destroyed by God for their disobedience. He states, “I attempt in this study, first of all, to demonstrate the existence of a culture-specific, coherent pre-Islamic Arabian myth - which deserves to be qualified as autochthonous - and, further, to engage that Arabian myth in the dynamism of subsequent Islamic myth-building and mythopoiesis.” Stetkevych uses the Islamic source material to attempt to discover the pre-Islamic myth of the Thamūd, and then, much like Birkeland, to note its evolution within the Islamic tradition. Unlike Birkeland, he also compares the myth to other stories of mythic branches, including that of Gilgamesh and *The Aeneid.* While not specifically about miracles worked by the Prophet Muḥammad, his study does include the fact that it was Muḥammad who could recognize the bough and the person in whose grave it was found. Stetkevych argues that by this special knowledge, Muḥammad not only recognizes the golden bough, but is recognized by it and is thus confirmed as “the heir of Thamūdic Arabia.”

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41A prophet was sent by God to the Thamūd, who asked for a sign to prove his status. He produced, out of the mountain, a she-camel who was given specific watering rights at the tribe’s well. Eventually, people came to dislike the rules governing the she-camel’s watering rights and killed her. As a punishment, God destroyed them.
42Ibid., ix.
43Ibid., 112. It is interesting to note that, like the current study, he uses, among other sources, both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr as his sources for this incident in the life of Muhammad.
Narrative Historiography

Most works of modern historiography are written in a narrative format, in other words, they tell the story of events after critiquing the source material at their disposal. The usefulness of this narrative form of historiography has been the subject of heated debate among modern historians. Hayden White contends that the use of the narrative form in a work of historiography proves the continued link between history, on the one hand, and rhetoric and literature, on the other. He argues that “as long as historians continue to use ordinary educated speech and writing, both their representations of the phenomena of the past and their thought about these will remain ‘literary’ - ‘poetic’ and ‘rhetorical’ - in a manner different from anything recognizable as a distinctly ‘scientific’ discourse.” As an alternative, White argues that historians should instead engage in tropology, which he defines as “a theory of figuration and discursive emplotment,

...[which is] an instrument for relating the two dimensions of denotative and connotative signification by which historians endow past events, not only with factuality but with meaning as well.” In other words, history is not a science, and the sooner historians drop the charade that it is, the better. White does not argue, however, that historians purposefully intend to fictionalize their works, but does claim that “any representation of reality in the form of a narrativization necessarily fictionalizes its subject-matter,


\[46\] Ibid.
however much it may be based on facts.” Historians have been quick to criticize White’s theories, but none have yet successfully refuted them entirely.48

The narrative-literary form of historiography is also the subject of Stefan Leder’s article, “Conventions of Fictional Narration in Learned Literature,” in which he argues that “the existence of fictive contents in many narratives, regardless of their adherence to the genres of historiography, belles-lettres or hadith cannot be seriously contested.”49 He examines seemingly historical episodes in two works, one by al-Balādhuri and one by Mu‘āfā ibn Zakariya, and reveals how the presence or absence of the narrator, the “thematic structure of the plot [and]... [t]he degree of literary construction thus betrays that they result from the elaboration of pre-existing narrative models and not from the depiction of a historical reality.”50 This does not mean that there is no historical reality

47Ibid., 405-6. White also argues that it is not the intentions of the writers with which he is concerned, but rather the intentions of the text. This appears not to take into account the theory that the writer and the text are rather intricately intertwined and are, thus, not so easily dissected. See Louis Gottschalk, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Robert Angell, The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology, Prepared for the Committee on Appraisal of Research, Bulletin 53 (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1945).

48Some Islamicists have adopted certain aspects of White’s theories. Fred Donner, in his Narratives of Islamic Origins, states, “Narrative accounts thus belong to the broader category of literary sources, but are distinct from other literary sources, such as poems, adab works, etc.” (4, n. 5). However, he admits that even the non-narrative literary sources mentioned above “convey considerable information that must be seen as belonging to an implicit narrative framework.” (Ibid.) He also argues against the extremes of postmodernism and what he refers to as “the deconstructionist ‘program’...” (Ibid.) Boaz Shoshan, however, openly adopts the theories of White regarding narrative and history in his own deconstruction of al-Tabari’s History, Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Tabari’s History (Leiden: Brill, 2004), and states that “resorting to a critical approach in the analysis of a classical historical text is highly desirable for the new light it sheds on it. Besides, it can teach us a thing or two about the cultural norms and conceptual assumptions that played a role in the production of that text.” (ix) In other words, he argues that, rather than attempting to reconstruct historical events as most modern historians have done using al-Tabari’s work, historians should look at the History as a text in and of itself, and to this end, he uses deconstruction to examine individual parts of the text, grouping them according to the various literary themes that he claims they represent. More about this work will be discussed in the next chapter.


50Ibid., 59.
depicted in the Islamic source material, but that fact and fiction are often found side by side in seemingly factual historiographical material. Leder adds that “myth, for instance, is unmasked as pure invention, when it is alienated from its original context.”

The Chicken or the Egg: Tafsîr and Sîra

Reports of Muḥammad’s miracles occur in a wide variety of genres in the body of Islamic literature. The present study will limit itself to an examination of two: tafsîr and sîra/taʾrîkh. The last term, sîra/taʾrîkh, is used here to denote the biography of Muḥammad as written within larger taʾrîkh works of what are termed “world” or “universal” histories. Of the three main genres used to depict the events in the life of Muḥammad, sîra/taʾrîkh more readily lends itself to a study of Muḥammad’s miracles.52 Al-Ṭabari, unfortunately, does not include much of his own interpretation of the supernatural events in this genre, and so this study will examine not only the miracles of Muḥammad as related in his biography, but will also examine the exegesis of those Qurʾān verses cited by our authors in their sîra/taʾrîkh. The third genre, ḥadîth, was used as the basis for legal decisions, and works in this genre are structured differently than either sîra/taʾrîkh or tafsîr.53 The Western study of the latter genres focuses on the

51Ibid., 60. He also argues that myth “can, however, be recycled to fictional usage, as it is the case with the Greek myths in our times.”
52Another study that compares mythic elements in works of history to those of exegesis in the Islamic source material is Leigh N. B. Chipman, “Adam and the Angels: An Examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources,” Arabica 44, 4(2002): 429-455. Chipman, however, compares taʾrîkh, tafsîr, and qisas al-anbiyāʾ (lives of the prophets). This last genre is also included within the larger historical works of the two authors studied here, but will not be examined in this work.
questions of origins and authenticity, as it does for that of ḥadīth. Most scholars argue that if the origin of individual reports can be ascertained, then the next step of determining authenticity can be addressed. Only after this is achieved, can a narrative re-telling of the life of Muḥammad and the history of the beginnings of Islam occur. One important issue for scholars investigating the life of Muḥammad, then, is the question of which genre came first, tafsīr or sīra. In other words, did the sīra of Muḥammad arise out of attempts to explain the verses of the Qurʾān, or did the exegesis of the Qurʾān take shape out of the stories of Muḥammad’s life? In a series of articles, Andrew Rippin discusses this question in relation to the genre asbāb al-nuzūl (occasions of revelation). He argues that works dedicated to these types of reports alone were devised by later Muslims, perhaps as late as the eleventh century of the Common Era. He also argues that the individual sabab report, as found in larger works of tafsīr, “plays, however, ...what could be called a ‘haggadically exegetical’ function; regardless of the genre of exegesis in which the sabab is found, its function is to provide a narrative

55As stated previously, the present work does not participate in this quest, but one cannot in all good conscience use the sources dealing with the life of the Prophet Muhammad without at least mentioning these issues which have become so vital to Western scholars who attempt to discern their historicity.
account in which the basic exegesis of the verse may be embodied.”

He also states that he “tentatively trace[s] the origins of this material to the context of the qusṣās, the wandering story-tellers, and pious preachers and to a basically popular religious worship situation where such stories would prove both enjoyable and edifying.”

Rippin does not follow up his tentative conclusion by suggesting just how this material made its way from the qusṣās to the written works of tafsīr, and by doing so leaves the reader with more questions than answers. In another article, Rippin examines the work Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās in an effort to determine if it is an accurate reflection of the sayings of the important exegete. He concludes that “Ibn ‘Abbās is a mythic exemplum for the Muslim community. That is why he is cited within the isnād for Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās.”

Rippin has placed himself, therefore, within the camp of what Herbert Berg refers to as the sceptics in the study of early Islam. However, although Berg pairs the methodologies of Rippin with those of John Wansbrough, Rippin does not agree wholeheartedly with all of Wansbrough’s conclusions, as evidenced by his aforementioned views on the haggadic nature of certain parts of Qur’ānic exegesis.

Berg does his own study of the tafsīr reports attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, using those reports found in the exegesis of the tenth century scholar, al-Ṭabarî.

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58Rippin, “The Function of Aṣbāb al-nuzūl in Qur’ānic Exegesis,” 3. In so doing, he goes against the theory of John Wansbrough that this type of report is halakhic (having to do with the law). (1) See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 141-2, 177-85, but also see 121, where he argues that tafsīr as a whole is narrative, or haggadic, in nature.

59Ibid., 19. He argues that these individual sabab reports reflect the earliest attempt at exegesis in Islam, despite the fact that they were not compiled into their own genre until much later.


61Ibid., 74.

62Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, 82.

63Al-Ṭabarî is the obvious choice for such a study since he is well known for having grouped together an immense number of reports from a variety of sources.
combines an analysis of the *isnâds* with that of the *matns* of the individual reports, and has compiled an immense database of *isnâd* authorities. His final conclusion, however, is not promising:

*Isnâds*, therefore, were attached to material from the beginning of the third century of the Islamic calendar..., after which these *isnâds*, like the *matns* to which they were attached, continued to be subject to organic growth. Moreover, any date significantly earlier would bring the production of the *isnâds* for exegetical *hadîths* close enough to the death dates of some of the students of Ibn ‘Abbâs that there might have been some living memory of these individuals and what they may or may not have said. My analyses of the data do not support such a scenario.

However, *isnâds* were attached to exegetical material which in many cases must have been much older. It is not impossible that some of this material might even be old enough to derive from Ibn ‘Abbâs (if, indeed, he had ever been an exegete). However, my analyses suggest that the *hadîths* examined do not seem to originate with him or his students. If some of the material is authentic, it can never be recovered; the genuine material would have been treated in much the same manner as later accretions, adaptations, and additions - the manner of the transmission of the material would have obfuscated any evidence of its early provenance. Eventually *isnâds*, in some sense arbitrary *isnâds* but in some sense not fabricated ones, were attached to all of the material.64

Hence, if there are any reports that are authentic representations of the exegesis of Ibn ‘Abbâs, there is no way to differentiate them from those later reports that were simply ascribed to him by later Muslims.65 So, for Berg and others, without a clear method for determining the authenticity of individual reports, the early history of Islamic exegesis remains a mystery.

Lack of a definitive methodology for determining authenticity has not kept all scholars from hazarding a guess at the origins of *tafsîr* and *sîra*. In his work, *The Eye of

64Ibid., 215.
65Berg is not the first to come to this conclusion. See the conclusions of Frederick Leemhuis, “Origins and Early Development of the *Tafsîr* Tradition” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur‘an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 25-30. Berg’s original contribution to this argument, however, remains his impressively clear methodology.
the Beholder, Uri Rubin ignores the question of authenticity altogether and focuses instead on the ways in which the medieval Muslim community viewed the story of Muḥammad’s Meccan period. In an appendix to the main work, however, Rubin posits that it is the sīra that predates the tafsīr and that the Qur’ānic elements found therein were later additions. He is taken to task for this assessment by Wim Raven, whose article “The Biography of the Prophet and its Scriptural Basis” examines both the above work of Rubin and Gregor Schoeler’s Character und Authentie. Although he greatly admires Schoeler’s methodology, Raven criticizes the fact that he completely ignores the question of intertextuality between the sīra and the Qur’ān. Rubin, on the other hand, directly addresses the issue of the relationship between sīra, Qur’ān, and Biblical texts. Raven is not completely satisfied with his conclusions, however, and argues that Rubin should have used Schoeler’s methodology of examining all the versions of a tradition to fully discuss its meaning. Raven reveals the weaknesses in Rubin’s argument by applying his theory about the Qur’ānization of the sīra to a body of traditions not covered in Rubin’s book. He argues that some narrative elements in the sīra do reveal a later Qur’ānization, but that others do not, and this is his real criticism of Rubin’s work. He posits that, had Rubin been more thorough in his approach, he may

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67Ibid., 226-233.
69Ibid., 424-5.
70Ibid., 425-6.
have reached a similar conclusion.\textsuperscript{71} This does not mean that he finds no value in Rubin's work, and in fact applauds him for examining "the possible scriptural origins of the stories, and how these were removed, manipulated or enriched. In fact, the scriptural basis of Muḥammad's biography is the main subject of his book."\textsuperscript{72}

Rubin responds to the criticisms of Raven and others in his article, "The Life of Muḥammad and the Qurʾān: The Case of Muḥammad's Hijra," wherein he notes the objections of reviewers to his theory and contends that "the view that considerable parts of the sīra are the result of an exegetical mechanism was often brought up to diminish the historical value of the sīra."\textsuperscript{73} He adds that he is not attempting to prove or disprove the historicity of the sīra reports, "but rather to show that not everything that looks to the above scholars like exegesis is indeed exegesis."\textsuperscript{74} To do this, he examines the various reports relating the tale of how Muḥammad and a companion hide in a cave on their way to Medina. He begins with Qurʾān 9:40 and the various themes found in that passage, and then moves on to the stories of the cave found in the sīra.\textsuperscript{75} He argues, "In short, while in the Qurʾānic cave passage the Prophet and his companion are refugees, in the sīra they are fugitives. This crucial gap between the Qurʾān and the sīra rules out the possibility that the entire sīra cave story was drawn from the Qurʾānic cave

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., 430-1. He contrasts Rubin's work to that of Henri Lammens, who claimed that all sīra reports were founded by a need to explain the Qurʾān, rather than Rubin's claim that none of them were.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 425-6.


\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{75}Qurʾān 9:40 reads: "If ye help not (your Leader), (It is no matter): for Allah did indeed help him, when the Unbelievers made him leave: he had no more than one companion: the two were in the Cave, and he said to his companion, 'Have no fear for Allah is with us': then Allah sent down His peace upon him, and strengthened him with forces which ye saw not, and humbled to the depths the word of the Unbelievers. But the Word of Allah is exalted to the heights: for Allah is Exalted in might, Wise." All translations of Qurʾānic verses are from the 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Afi edition, unless otherwise noted.
passage.”

His final conclusion on the nature of the Islamic Scripture and the sīra is that both types of text come “from a common source.... The origin which both the Qurʾān and the sīra seem to be using is the communal memory of the Islamic umma.”

He continues:

Each represented an advanced version of the previous experiences that the community remembered and wished to document. In the sīra the believers documented their communal history (derived mainly from oral tradition transmitted among the individuals of the community), and in the Qurʾān they assembled what was remembered and considered the divine revelations of their Prophet.

Hence, although there are similarities between the two types of source, the Qurʾān (and its exegesis) and the sīra, this does not mean that the one grew out of the other. Instead, he argues that they were both drawn from a common pool of communal memory.

Thus, the questions of the origins and evolution of the genres of tafsīr and sīra/taʾrikh remain unanswered, at least definitively. They are important questions; however, they are not the ones being asked by the current study. This study examines why the elements of the miraculous in Muḥammad’s life appear as they do in the tafsīr and sīra/taʾrikh works of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Although the basic story remains the same in the works of both scholars, there are important differences that cannot be explained simply by the distance of time and place. The methodology of Rubin’s works are close to my own, but only in that the miracle stories are examined not in order to

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56Rubin, “Muḥammad’s Hijra,” 44.
57Ibid., 56.
58Ibid., 56-7.
59Ibid., 61. Rubin does not end his article here, however, and adds a short section on the Biblical sources for the cave story as well. His last argument appears to be that the inclusion of non-Qurʾānic sīra stories in works of tafsīr only shows “how sīra was recycled as exegesis.” This comment seems to be a bit of a last-minute quip to those who would argue that sīra stories located in works of exegesis, especially those that function as asbāb al-nuzūl, are proof of their Qurʾānic foundations.
determine their origins, but how later Muslims viewed them. Whereas Rubin charts the
evolution of the miracles from Biblical to Arabian to Islamic models and uses this
evolution to describe the medieval Islamic self-image in relation to Christians and Jews,
the present study examines both the constants in the story itself, the archetypal
Muḥammad, and the possible reasons for the inclusion of different reports and the
treatment of those reports by the two authors mentioned above, and it is to their lives
and works that we now turn.
Chapter Two
The Lives and Works of al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr

Abû Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarîr al-Ṭabarî was born in Āmul, capital of the province of Ṭabaristân, in 224-5/839.\(^8^0\) His family belonged to the class of landowners in the area, and the income from this land allowed al-Ṭabarî to devote his life to study, without having to worry overly much about monetary concerns.\(^8^1\) He was apparently quite bright as a child and was sent to study in the city of Rayy at the age of twelve. It was here that he studied under Abû ʿAbd Allâh Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Râzî (d. 248/862), who passed on to him many of his reports from Ibn Ishâq about pre-Islamic history and the life of Muḥammad.\(^8^2\) After about five years, his abilities had outstripped those of his teachers, and the decision was made that he should go to Baghdad to properly pursue an advanced course of study.\(^8^3\) Although making his home in Baghdad, al-Ṭabarî also traveled to various parts of the Islamic world to study under a number of important scholars from a variety of fields. These included the Kûfî scholars, Hannâd b. al-Sârî (d. 243/857), from whom he transmitted reports in his Tafsîr, and Abû Kurayb b. Muḥammad b. al-ʿAlâ’ (d. 247-8/861-2), whose reports are to be found in both his Tafsîr and his History.\(^8^4\) In Baṣra, he studied under such scholars as Ḥumayd b.

\(^8^0\) Franz Rosenthal has written an excellent biography of al-Ṭabarî in the first volume of the English translation of Ta'rikh al-rasul wa'l-mulûk, which is the source of most of the biographical information given here. See Rosenthal, History of al-Ṭabarî, Vol. 1, From the Creation to the Flood (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 5-134.

\(^8^1\) Ibid., 14.

\(^8^2\) Ibid., 17-8. According to Rosenthal, Ibn Ḥumayd is the only one of al-Ṭabarî’s teachers in Rayy who is well known to modern scholarship. Rosenthal adds that “Ibn Ḥumayd had lectured in Baghdad and had been welcomed there by Ibn Ḥanbal, who is even said to have transmitted traditions on his authority.” (17)

\(^8^3\) Ibid., 15-6.

\(^8^4\) Ibid., 20-1.
Maṣ'ada, from whom he learned tafsīr, and Muḥammad b. Bashshār, whose reports are found in his History. Al-Ṭabarī later traveled to Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, and studied under such scholars there as the Syrian al-ʿAbbās b. al-Walīd b. Mazyad al-ʿUdhri al-Bayrūṭī (d. 270/883-4), who taught him some of the variant Qurʾān readings, but who also passed on reports “through his father al-Walīd, the legal views of al-Awzāʿī, Syria’s most prominent jurist who had died in Beirut about a century earlier.”

Al-Ṭabarī also studied under such scholars as Muḥammad b. ʿAṣf al-Ṭāʾi al-Ḥimṣi (d. 272-3/885-6), whose reports are found in the Tafsīr, among other works, and Abū ʿUtba Aḥmad b. al-Faraj (d. 271/884-5), also of Ḥimṣ, who also served as a source for al-Ṭabarī’s Tafsīr. His teachers in Egypt included scholars who passed on their knowledge of the Shāfīʿī and Mālikī legal schools, such as al-Rabīʿ b. Sulaymān (d. 240/855) and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 268-9/882-3). Traveling for the purpose of study was the usual course of action for a student in the classical and early medieval Islamic world, and once his studies were complete, al-Ṭabarī had gained enough of a reputation to begin his own scholarly career.

Despite al-Ṭabarī’s apparently excellent reputation as a scholar, his time in Baghdad was not without controversy, and this centered mainly on his problems with the Ḥanbalīs. Al-Ṭabarī appears to have had a great deal of respect for Ahmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) himself, who died shortly before al-Ṭabarī’s move to Baghdad, but

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85Ibid., 20.  
86Ibid., 23. Al-Awzāʿī died in 157/773-4. (178, n. 95)  
87Ibid., 24-5.  
88Ibid., 27-8, 178, n. 93.  
89Ibid., 59-63, 69-78. He also appears to have had problems with rival scholars, one of whom went so far as to accuse him, in writing, of having pro-Shiʿī sympathies, and sending this complaint to Naṣr, the caliph’s Chamberlain, an important government official. In the ʿAbbāsid period, this type of accusation could have serious repercussions, although al-Ṭabarī’s denial appears to have been accepted. (59-60)
his relationship with the man’s followers was extremely troubled, especially in the last years of his life.\textsuperscript{90} One scholar even claimed to have been unable to study under al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} due to the fact that access to him was blocked by the \textcelsius{H}anbalis.\textsuperscript{91} Rosenthal cites several possible reasons for this animosity, the first of which was the publication of al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I}’s work on important legal scholars, \textit{Ikhtilaf al-fuqaha’}, in which no mention of Ibn \textcelsius{H}anbal is found.\textsuperscript{92} Rosenthal points out that al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} “is alleged to have expressed the opinion that he did not think of Ibn \textcelsius{H}anbal as a jurist whose work in the field of jurisprudence compared with that of other great authorities but rather as an important \textit{hadith} scholar.”\textsuperscript{93} While, for al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I}, the distinction between jurist and \textit{muhaddith} may not have held any intrinsic value judgement, for the \textcelsius{H}anbalis it was an outright insult. This appears to be a good example of the growing distinction between Islamic scholarship as it was understood by al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} and the seemingly absolute reliance on \textit{hadith} for judicial decisions espoused by the \textcelsius{H}anbalis.\textsuperscript{94}

The second reason cited by Rosenthal for the rift between al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} and the followers of Ibn \textcelsius{H}anbal is the precarious position of the latter in the extraordinarily

\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., 19. Rosenthal relates that this occurred despite reports that al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} may have gone to Baghdad with the express intention of studying under Ibn \textcelsius{H}anbal. Since the older scholar died before his arrival in the ‘Abbasid capital, al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} never actually studied with Ibn \textcelsius{H}anbal.

\textsuperscript{91}Mu\textcelsius{H}ammad b. \textcelsius{A}hm\textcelsius{D} b. ‘Uthm\textcelsius{A}n al-Dhahabi, \textit{Ta’rikh al-Islam}, vol. 23, (Beirut: D\textcelsius{A}r al-Kit\textcelsius{A}b al-‘Arabi, 1987), 281-2. No reason is given for why they were keeping students from him, but the report is followed by one that quotes Ibn Khuzayma as saying that the “\textcelsius{H}an\textcelsius{B}ila wronged him.”

\textsuperscript{92}Rosenthal, \textit{General Introduction}, 70.

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid. Rosenthal continues with another statement allegedly spoken by al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} that “he had not seen anyone transmitting legal opinions from Ibn \textcelsius{H}anbal or any followers of his that were considered authoritative....”

\textsuperscript{94}Norman Calder, “\textit{Tafs\textcelsius{I}r} from \textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I} to Ibn Kath\textcelsius{I}r: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham,” in \textit{Approaches to the \textcelsius{Q}ur\textcelsius{A}n}, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993): 101-140. Calder discusses the distinction between al-\textcelsius{T}abar\textcelsius{I}’s understanding of the “Islamic intellectual tradition” and Ibn Kath\textcelsius{I}r’s absolute reliance on \textit{hadith} by comparing the \textit{tafs\textcelsius{I}r} works of the two men. Calder’s work will be discussed in more detail below.
competitive world of Islamic scholarship in tenth century Baghdad.\textsuperscript{95} In the tenth century, the four schools of Islamic law had not yet become universally accepted. There were a number of legal schools of thought in operation and success was guaranteed to none. Al-Ṭabarî had begun his career as a follower of the Shāfi‘î school, and later founded a madḥhab of his own, which did not long survive his death, so the Ḥanbalîs would have likely viewed him as competition to their own fairly new school.\textsuperscript{96} Rosenthal further links the conflict to the explanation of Qur‘an 17:79, which states that the person who prays in the very early morning hours would be given a “praiseworthy position.”\textsuperscript{97} The traditional explanation of the verse was that Muḥammad would act as intercessor for the Muslim community on the Day of Judgement, but the Ḥanbalîs latched onto an interpretation whereby the position given to Muḥammad is on the Divine Throne.\textsuperscript{98} They argued that a report from Mujâhid, complete with an authoritative isnād, proves that this is the correct interpretation, and, furthermore, anyone who denied this interpretation was a heretic.\textsuperscript{99} Al-Ṭabarî, while not denying the interpretation outright, does argue that the traditional interpretation of the position of Muḥammad as intercessor is the better of the two.\textsuperscript{100} For a group such as the Ḥanbalîs had become, anything short of absolute acceptance smacked of rejection, and their conflict with al-Ṭabarî came to a boiling point when, according to Rosenthal, “enraged

\textsuperscript{95}Rosenthal, \textit{General Introduction}, 70-77.


\textsuperscript{97}Rosenthal, \textit{General Introduction}, 71. Qur‘an 17:79 states: “And pray in the small watches of the morning: (it would be) an additional prayer (or spiritual profit) for thee: soon will thy Lord raise thee to a Station of Praise and Glory!”


\textsuperscript{99}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100}Ibid., 73-7.
Hanbalites thereupon stoned his residence and caused a serious disturbance which had to be subdued by force.\textsuperscript{101}

Al-Ṭabarī died in 310/923 at his home in Baghdad.\textsuperscript{102} He was buried in the courtyard of his house and, according to a report in al-Dhahabī’s Taʾrīkh al-Īslām, an untold number of people “prayed over his tomb for a number of months night and day.”\textsuperscript{103} Rosenthal discusses al-Ṭabarī’s reputation as a scholar, stating:

The Fāṭimid caliph al-ʿAzīz, who reigned from 975 to 996, spent one hundred dinars for a copy of History that was offered to him. He then found out that his library already contained more than twenty copies of the work, including one in Ṭabarī’s own hand. According to Ibn Abī Ṭayyī’, 1,220 copies of History were in the library of the Fāṭimid palace complex when Saladin took over in 567/1171.\textsuperscript{104}

Al-Ṭabarī was quite a prolific scholar and wrote, besides his History, an equally famous and lengthy work of tafsīr, the legal work Ikhtilāf al-fuṣūḥ, and numerous other works on Islamic law and religion. Rosenthal details approximately twenty-nine separate works that he was supposed to have written, although some of these have been lost or were never completed.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{101}Ibid., 73. Rosenthal discounts reports that they so disrupted events that no visitors were present at al-Ṭabarī’s funeral and that the scholar had to be buried at night. (77-8)
\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., 141. The popularity of al-Ṭabarī’s works at the Fāṭimid court may have less to do with doctrinal issues and more to do with regional pride. Al-Ṭabarī had visited Egypt during his studies and this fact, along with his reputation, seems to have earned him the respect of the Egyptian scholarly community. Rosenthal mentions that the first biography of al-Ṭabarī to be written after the scholar’s own generation was completed by “the Egyptian scholar al-Qīṭī (568-646/1172-1248)..., entitled al-Tahrīr fī akhbār Muhammad b. Jarīr. Al-Qīṭī was a great admirer of Tabari, for he not only wrote this monograph but took the opportunity to list Tabari in other works of his, such as his dictionaries of grammarians and of poets named Muhammad; neither work, especially the latter, necessarily required mention of Tabari.” (8)
\textsuperscript{105}Since al-Qīṭī lived, not during the Fāṭimid, but during the Sunnī Ayyūbīd period, it would appear the that the tenth century scholar’s positive reputation in that area superceded doctrinal boundaries. On Egyptian regional pride, see Ulrich Haarmann, “Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 43,1 (1980): 55-66.
\textsuperscript{106}Ibid., 80-134. Rosenthal’s introduction includes a detailed account of al-Ṭabarī’s works.
He is also noted for not backing away from controversy in his lectures, and the sources mention that when he found out that a rival scholar was lecturing negatively about the reports concerning Ghadir Khumm, he was apparently compelled to include his own assessment. This led to the writing of his works of *al-fāḍā’il*, or virtues, of the first four caliphs, and then of al-‘Abbās, Muḥammad’s uncle and progenitor of the ‘Abbāsid line. According to Rosenthal, Ibn Kāmil (d. 350/961), in his biographical report on al-Ṭabarî, gives the reasons for the writings of these works:

One of the scholars in Baghdad had declared the Ghadir Khumm (episode) to be untrue because, he said, ‘Alî b. Abî Ṭalîb was in the Yemen at the time when the Messenger of God was at Ghadir Khumm.... When Abû Ja‘far learned about it, he started on a discussion of the virtues of ‘Alî b. Abî Ṭalîb and mentioned the various recensions of the tradition of Khumm. Many people flocked to listen to (his lectures on) the subject. Some extremist Shi‘ites, who unseemingly slandered the Companions, came together. So Ṭabarî started (to write) on the virtues of Abû Bakr and ‘Umar. Then the ‘Abbāsids asked him about the *fāḍā’il* of al-‘Abbās.

All of these works are now, unfortunately, lost. As Rosenthal points out, al-Ṭabarî’s work on Ghadir Khumm got him into a bit of trouble with later Sunnî scholars, who appear to have been less than thrilled to have an orthodox Sunnî scholar arguing for the authoritativeness of some of the reports used by the Shi‘a to support their own claims to

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106Ibid., 90-3. The scholar in question was none other than Abû Bakr b. Abî Dāwūd (d. 316/929), the same man who had reported al-Ṭabarî’s alleged heretical views to the government. On al-Ṭabarî’s work on Ghadir Khumm, see also al-Dhahabi, vol. 23, 283. The Ghadir Khumm incident took place at a stopping point, a place named Ghadir Khumm, along the return journey to Medina from Muḥammad’s Farewell Pilgrimage. It was here that Muḥammad was supposed to have ordered his followers to obey ‘Alî as they would himself. Later Shi‘î groups would use the reports of this incident as support for their claims for the primacy of ‘Alî over the first three caliphs and to support their own claims to political power. The Fātimids, especially, used the reports of this incident to support their rule in Egypt and North Africa. See Paula Sanders, “Claiming the Past: Ghadir Khumm and the Rise of Hāfizî Historiography in Late Fātimid Egypt,” *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992): 81-104.

107Rosenthal, *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 91-2. It was this last inquiry that led him to write on the virtues of Muḥammad’s uncle.
the caliphate. Given what is known of al-Ṭabarî’s character, it is doubtful that he would have been overly concerned by the opinions of these men.

Al-Ṭabarî’s Taʾrikh al-rusul waʾl-mulûk begins with the creation of the world and ends during his own lifetime, in the year 302/915. For the pre-Islamic era, he alternates between the history of the ancient Israelites and the Persians, giving a brief account of the Byzantines, Lakhmids, and Ghassānids, before moving on to the history of the Arabian Peninsula of the pre-Islamic era. He then gives a detailed account of the life of Muḥammad, and describes the history of Islamic civilization up to a few years before his own death. After Muḥammad’s journey to Medina, the work is organized into chapters corresponding to each year, and this organization continues to the end of the work. In his Introduction, al-Ṭabarî begins with a laudative section, wherein he praises God and discusses the act of creation. He then moves on to discuss two important points about his own role in the work. First, he reveals his purpose:

There were messengers sent by God, kings placed in authority, or caliphs established in the caliphal succession. God had early on bestowed His benefits and favors upon some of them. They were grateful for His favors, and He thus gave them more favors and bounty in addition to those bestowed by Him upon them in their fleeting life, or He postponed the increase and stored it up for them with Himself. There were others who were not grateful for His favors, and so He deprived them of the favors He had bestowed upon them early on and hastened

108Ibid., 92-3, 141. The example he gives is a criticism by Ibn Kathîr, and this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Rosenthal argues that, since Ibn Kathîr also transmits reports from the Syrian historian Ibn 'Asâkir (d. 571/1176) about Ghadr Khumm immediately after his comments about al-Ṭabarî, his complaint “may go back to an older source, perhaps Ibn ‘Asâkir. It is rather unlikely that Ibn Kathîr would have known Tabari's works.” (141) Although it is certainly possible that the comments regarding al-Ṭabarî may have been taken from Ibn ‘Asâkir, there does not appear to be any reason why Ibn Kathîr would not have access to al-Ṭabarî’s works, since Damascus was an important site of scholarly activity at this time. If the library in Fâṭimid Cairo and Ottoman Istanbul could have numerous copies of the History, certainly there could have been at least a few works by al-Ṭabarî extant in Damascus.

109Each of the four works studied here begins with a laudative section. This is a section in which the author praises God, and relates that praise to the subject matter about to be discussed. For example, in the works of history, the laudative section includes praise for God's act of creating the world.
for them His revenge. There were also others who were not grateful for His favors; He let them enjoy them until the time of their death and perdition.\textsuperscript{110}

Thus, al-Ṭabari’s purpose would seem to be an attempt to answer the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people, and why good things happen to bad people. For al-Ṭabari, God’s will is paramount in human history. If something bad happens to a good person, God will reward them in the afterlife. If something good happens to a bad person, God is simply waiting to punish them until after their death. Al-Ṭabari demonstrates this by recording the lives and deeds of important individuals of the past.

Second, he argues that he relies mostly on the reports of others:

[And] only very exceptionally upon what is learned through rational arguments and produced by internal thought processes. For no knowledge of the history of men of the past and of recent men and events is attainable by those who were not able to observe them and did not live in their time, except through information and transmission provided by informants and transmitters.\textsuperscript{111}

His argument here reveals that, although he does rely heavily on the reports of others, especially for the period before his own lifetime, he does, periodically, rely on his own intellect in the creation of this work. He goes on, however, to state that if anyone finds fault with the contents of the work, then “it is not our fault that such information comes to him, but the fault of someone who transmitted it to us. We have merely reported it as it was reported to us.”\textsuperscript{112}

During his account of the life of Muḥammad, and certainly for his representation of the supernatural aspect of that life, al-Ṭabari remains fairly silent as a narrator, making almost no comments about the reliability, or lack thereof, of the reports he

\textsuperscript{110}Ibid., 168; M.J. de Goeje, ed., \textit{Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk} (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), 5. This second work will hereafter be referred to as the Leiden edition.

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., 170; Leiden edition, 6-7.

\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., 171; Leiden edition, 7.
relates; however, although he claims to be merely a transmitter, it is unlikely that he would include reports that he himself considered faulty without some type of comment.\textsuperscript{113} One of his main sources for the life of Muḥammad is Ibn Išāq, whose famous biography of the Prophet al-Ṭabarī had studied with Ibn Ḥumayd in Rayy. And although Ibn Išāq did make use, at times, of the \textit{ḥadīth} format, he was certainly not consistent, so many of the events he relates lack any chain of transmitters, much less one that goes all the way back to Muḥammad. So, despite al-Ṭabarī’s apparent reliance on \textit{ta’rīkh bi’l-ḥadīth}, the types of reports that he includes in his work may themselves be indicative of his own personal opinion, if not of their authenticity, then of what they relate about the life of Muḥammad. In order to obtain a fuller picture of al-Ṭabarī’s views on these events, however, one must turn to another work, his \textit{Tafsīr}.

In his work of exegesis, \textit{Jāmi’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān}, al-Ṭabarī does, indeed, include much more of his own opinions and comments on the issues at hand than he does in his \textit{sīra/tārīkh}. As in his \textit{History}, he begins with a laudative section praising God, and then moves on to indicate his purpose for the work, claiming that he “shall, God willing, compose a comprehensive book, which will incorporate everything which people need to know about this Book, and which will surpass all other books on the subject.”\textsuperscript{114} He sets out its structure, indicating that he will relate the consensus and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., 170; Leiden edition, 6. It is also possible, however, that the volume on the Prophet’s Companions and those who came after them was supposed to have been used as a key, since he states, “I do this for the purpose of clarifying whose transmission (of traditions) is praised and whose transmission is accepted, whose transmission is rejected and whose transmission is disregarded, and whose transmission is considered feeble and whose transmission is considered weak.” He also states that he will give the reasons for these considerations. However, this volume does not appear to reveal any such information.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{114}Al-Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān}, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1986), 3–4. See also John Cooper, tr., \textit{The Commentary on the Qur’ān}, Being an Abridged English Translation of al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān}, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 9, which is the translation used here for all quotes from the Introduction. Al-Ṭabarī’s exegesis is known by several different titles,}
disagreement among various groups, and then discuss how these groups came to their conclusions, adding, finally, his own indication as to which group is correct.\textsuperscript{115} He later lists three elements he deems necessary for a successful exegesis of the Qur’an. First, it must have proof of its interpretation:

[Through reports that go] back to the Messenger of God alone to the exclusion of the rest of his community, through Traditions reliably attributable to him, either through an extensive transmission..., or otherwise through a transmission by righteous, reliable persons..., or because of an indication establishing their truth....\textsuperscript{116}

Second, he states that interpretations can be supported through proof of knowledge of the Arabic language.\textsuperscript{117} Finally, the interpretation must not differ from “what the pious predecessors among the Companions and the Leaders, and the Successors among the Followers, and the men of knowledge in the Community, have said.”\textsuperscript{118} Thus, one must rely on reports that go back to Muhammad, must show an expert knowledge of the Arabic language, and must not depart radically from already accepted interpretations. Elsewhere, he even states:

It is not permitted for anyone to interpret according to his own personal opinion those verses of the Qur’an whose interpretation can only be known through a

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., vol. 1, 4; Cooper, 9.
\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., vol. 1, 28-9; Cooper, 40. What this indication might be is never identified.
\textsuperscript{117}Ibid., vol. 1, 29; Cooper, 40.
\textsuperscript{118}Ibid.; Cooper 40.
text [reporting] the explanation of God's Messenger, or through an indication towards it which he has given.\textsuperscript{119}

So it would appear on the surface that al-Ṭabarî is here arguing vehemently for \textit{tafsîr bi'l-hadîth}. However, his description of what makes a report authoritative certainly seems to allow for a bit of leeway, and it is the resultant variety of interpretations in his \textit{Tafṣîr} that make it such a powerful expression of the genre.

The body of al-Ṭabarî's exegesis contains a variety of types of reports, including those that relate the historical context in which the verse was revealed, as well as those that explain the language or meaning of the verse through grammar or by using examples from poetry, and it is the reports giving a grammatical explanation that seem to outnumber all the rest. His \textit{Tafṣîr} either treats verses individually, or groups them with a varying number of the surrounding verses, but no explanation is ever given for this grouping.\textsuperscript{120} Sometimes he includes citations of other Qur'ān verses, either because the meanings of the verses are similar, or because one verse abrogates another. He also organizes the reports he relates into groups, based on whether they agree or disagree with a particular interpretation of part of a verse, and includes his own interpretation either in an introductory section or after having related the reports of others.

There are several possible reasons for al-Ṭabarî's lack of personal commentary in his \textit{History}, as opposed to its presence in his \textit{Tafṣîr}. It is possible that he intended to relate in another work, or in another part of the \textit{History}, his views on the reliability of those individuals identified in his chains of authority, as indicated by the comments he

\textsuperscript{119}Ibid., 27; Cooper, 35. He even adds a statement that anyone who comes to a correct interpretation, but who does so through faulty means, is still incorrect because he lacks certainty. Apparently, for al-Ṭabarî, the only way to obtain certainty in one's interpretation of the Qur'ān was to follow the rules.

\textsuperscript{120}The same is true of Ibn Kathîr's \textit{Tafṣîr} as well, and seems to be indicative of the genre as a whole.
makes in his Introduction to that work.\textsuperscript{121} It is probable, however, that he placed more importance upon a correct interpretation of the Qurān than he did upon the correct interpretation of the events of human history, and so was more compelled to provide his own opinion of which interpretation of the scripture was correct and which was not. But the overall tone of his relation of the life of Muḥammad in his History is one of quiet confidence. His relation of events without commentary seems to indicate that he was certain that his perceived audience was either intelligent enough to make up their own minds or that they were expected to know the story so thoroughly that they would inherently recognize which reports were deemed acceptable and which were not. Based on what we know of al-Ṭabarī’s life, this confidence seems to be indicative of his personality as a whole, but can also be seen as a sign of the confidence of his time and place.

The ‘Abbāsid world in the time of al-Ṭabarī was on the verge of being taken over by the Būyids, who entered Baghdad in 334/945. While this could be seen as the end of actual rule by the ‘Abbāsid caliphs, al-Ṭabarī’s own account of the events of his lifetime reveals that caliphal rule was already being questioned by some and outright refuted by others. In 224/838, the year before al-Ṭabarī’s birth, the Caliph and his court had moved out of Baghdad itself across the Tigris River to Samarra, due to problems with the ruler’s Turkish guard, who ultimately gained the power to make and unmake caliphs much as the Roman Praetorian Guard had done centuries earlier.\textsuperscript{122} But there were problems outside of the capital city as well. In 267/880, al-Ṭabarī reports that

\textsuperscript{121}See footnote 112, above.
\textsuperscript{122}Philip M. Fields, tr., \textit{The History of al-Ṭabarī}, vol. 37, \textit{The ’Abbāsid Recovery}, xiv. The caliphs returned to Baghdad during the reign of al-Muqtadīd (d. 289/902) in 279/892.
“tribe members seized the carpet covering the Ka‘ba and carried it off. Some of them went to the leader of the Zanj. This calamity shocked the pilgrims of the city.”¹²³ The Zanj were black slaves who had rebelled against the authority of the caliph beginning in 256/869 and who had managed to take a good portion of southern Iraq, especially the agriculturally rich area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.¹²⁴ Their rebellion was not successfully put down by the Caliph’s forces until 270/883.¹²⁵ But just as this problem was beginning to wind down, another took its place in the person of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (d. 271/884), who in 255/868 had been appointed governor of Egypt.¹²⁶ Apparently Egypt was not enough for Aḥmad, and al-Ṭabarī reports that, in 269/883, he sent troops to attempt to take the city of Mecca, but they were unsuccessful.¹²⁷ Ibn Ṭūlūn had basically taken control of Egypt and his loyalty to the ‘Abbāsid was nominal at best.¹²⁸ He was eventually successful in establishing a dynasty there. It is during al-Ṭabarī’s life, too, that he indicates the beginnings of problems with the Shī‘ī revolutionary groups, the Qarmatians and the Fātimids.¹²⁹ In 285/898, al-Ṭabarī reports that Muḥammad b. Abī al-Sāj was appointed as governor of Ḍhāherbayjān and Armenia,

¹²³Ibid., 6; Leiden edition, 1941.
¹²⁴Waines, The Revolt of the Zanj, according to Waines, “The generally accepted view of the origin of the Zanj is that they were blacks imported from East Africa at a time that cannot be determined.” (29-30, n. 117)
¹²⁶George Saliba, tr., The History of al-Ṭabarī, vol. 35, The Crisis of the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985), 154; Leiden edition, 1697. Another indication of the problems of the caliphate is that he was not appointed by the Caliph, but rather by the Turkic officer, Bāyakbāk, who had recently established his control over the Turkic forces of the caliphate.
after he had already militarily taken over this area and previously defied the caliph.\textsuperscript{130} This is indicative of a pattern, whereby someone would take a territory by force, at first defying the caliph, then, once his control had been established, he exchanged nominal recognition of the caliph’s suzerainty for legitimation as duly appointed governor, which was then often passed along to his descendants.

Thus, the ‘Abbāsid Empire during the end of the ninth/beginning of the tenth century, was anything but peaceful, however, it is important to note that almost all of the problems were internal to the Muslim world. While there were periodic skirmishes with the Byzantines, they remained a problem for the border territories. The heartlands of the empire, although beginning to splinter among the many groups vying for power, were still at least nominally under the control of the caliph. Despite its problems, the ‘Abbāsid empire, and thus the Muslim world, was still undefeated, and while al-Ṭabari’s entanglement with both the Shi‘a and the Ḥanbalis impacted his work, the overall confidence of an undefeated Muslim empire seems to have influenced it as well.

The life of Ibn Kathīr, the second author whose works make up the foundation of this study, stands in marked contrast to that of al-Ṭabari. Abū‘l-Fidā’ Iṣmā‘īl b. ‘Umar b. Kathīr was born in Buṣrā, Syria around 700/1300.\textsuperscript{131} His family appears to have had some scholarly background and Laoust states that his father was a “modest preacher” who had started out as a Ḥanafī, but who later became a follower of the Shāfī‘ī

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid., 72-3; Leiden edition, 2185.
school.\textsuperscript{132} After the death of his father, when Ibn Kathîr was only about six years old, he moved with an older brother to Damascus and began his studies there.\textsuperscript{133} Whereas al-Ṭabarî had traveled widely in pursuit of his studies, Ibn Kathîr did not venture much outside of Damascus.\textsuperscript{134} Like al-Ṭabarî, he was an excellent student, and quickly came to the attention of some of the most influential scholars in the city.\textsuperscript{135} Laoust lists four of these men as having the greatest impact on Ibn Kathîr’s thought, Burhân al-Dîn al-Fazârî (d. 729/1329), one of his first teachers, under whom he studied law; Jamal al-Dîn al-Mizzî (d. 742/1342), a famous traditionist who also later became Ibn Kathîr’s father-in-law; Ahmad b. Taymiya, the famous Ḥanbalî theologian whose conflicts with the Mamlûk regime would ultimately lead to his death in prison and whose thought seems to have made the deepest impression on Ibn Kathîr’s works; and, finally, Shams al-Dîn al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1348), a noted historian who had also been a student of both al-Mizzî and Ibn Taymiya.\textsuperscript{136} With the exception of Ibn Taymiya, all of these men belonged to the Shâﬁ’î school, although al-Mizzî and al-Dhahabi were noted for their support of the Ḥanbalî scholar.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{132}Laoust, “Ibn Kaṭîr, Historien,” 42.
\textsuperscript{133}Ibid., 42-3.
\textsuperscript{134}Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{135}Ibid., 43-4. Whereas Rosenthal was forced to look to the biographical dictionaries for information on al-Ṭabarî’s life, due to his subject’s silence on the matter, Laoust, while not ignoring these types of sources for Ibn Kathîr, was able to focus on the scholar’s own writings to gather information for his article, since Ibn Kathîr quite often imposes himself upon the text.
\textsuperscript{136}Ibid., 43-46.
\textsuperscript{137}Curtis, “Authentic Interpretation of Classical Islamic Texts,” 9-10. Curtis disagrees with Laoust’s assessment of the influence of some other scholars in Damascus upon Ibn Kathîr, but he does agree that the influence of the four men mentioned here, with the addition of ‘Alamat al-Dîn al-Birzâî and Ibn Qayyim al-Ja’zîya, weighed the most heavily on Ibn Kathîr’s thought. Curtis identifies Ibn Kathîr’s early teacher, al-Fazârî, as also being a supporter of Ibn Taymiya.
Unlike al-Ṭabarî, whose income from the family land holdings and from teaching allowed him to remain aloof from employment in the government, Ibn Kathîr made his living by teaching at various madrasas and by issuing legal verdicts. While some scholars did still teach out of their homes, the road to advancement now lay in the educational institutions of the Islamic world. Curtis, in his dissertation on the introduction to Ibn Kathîr’s Tafṣîr, notes that the scholar suffered from a lack of professional positions due to his support of Ibn Taymiya. In fourteenth century Damascus, scholarly success appears to have been largely determined by the relationship one had with the local leader of one’s madhhab. Since Ibn Kathîr was technically a member of the Shafî‘i school, he had to answer to the men of the Subkî family. These men did not appreciate the fact that several prominent members of their school openly supported a Ḥanbali, much less a trouble-maker like Ibn Taymiya. This hostility toward Ibn Kathîr as a follower of Ibn Taymiya is claimed by Curtis as the reason that Taqî al-Dîn al-Subkî broke protocol when it came time to name al-Mizzi’s successor to the three

138Laoust, “Ibn Kaﬁr Historien,” 51, 52-3, 55-6, 58, 61-2. Laoust cites at least three occasions at which Ibn Kathîr participated in a council of legal experts who were called upon by the provincial authorities and three occasions where he was named to posts at the mosque school Umm Šâlih, the Dîr al-ḥadîth al-ashrafiya, and, finally, the Umayyad Mosque itself.


140Curtis, “Authentic Interpretation of Classical Islamic Texts,” 65-6, 73. While this may be true to a certain extent, the fact that Ibn Kathîr participated in legal tribunals and that he did eventually receive a prestigious position at the Umayyad Mosque show that he was not completely ruined by his association with Ibn Taymiya and reveals the limit of the power of the Subkîs. In his Encyclopaedia of Islam article on Ibn Kathîr, Laoust points out several more honors and appointments earned by Ibn Kathîr, which would seem to call into question just how seriously his career was affected by his affiliation with Ibn Taymiya. Laoust, “Ibn Kathîr,” in Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition.

141Curtis, “Authentic Interpretation of Classical Islamic Texts,” 65-6, 73. The men in question were Taqî al-Dîn al-Subkî (d. 756/1356) and his son, Tâj al-Dîn al-Subkî (d. 771/1371).
positions left vacant at his death in 742/1342.\footnote{Ibid., 65-6. Curtis argues that it was tradition for the one closest to the previous office-holder to be named as successor. Since Ibn Kathîr was both student and son-in-law to al-Mizdî, he was apparently the obvious choice.} Taking for himself the directorship of al-Ashrafiyya, he named Muহammad b. Râfî’ b. Abî Muহammad al-Sallâmî (d. 772/1372), an ally of the Subkî family, to the other two.\footnote{Ibid., 66. Curtis notes that “these appointments were irregular enough to prompt al-Dhahabi and Ibn Ḥajjar al-‘Asqalânî to record comments about them.”} When the elder al-Subkî died in 756/1356, Ibn Kathîr was selected to fill the post at al-Ashrafiyya, but he did not stay long in the position, being replaced fairly quickly by al-Subkî’s son and successor, Tâj al-Dîn al-Subkî.\footnote{Ibid.}

While Ibn Kathîr may have been punished for his affiliation with Ibn Taymiya, he also seems to have been rewarded, perhaps by the Subkî family themselves, for supporting them on two occasions in which they were brought up on charges. The first incident occurred in 743/1343, when Taqî al-Dîn al-Subkî was accused of being involved in the unsuccessful, but bloody, rebellion of the Syrian governor Alṭunbughâ and the Egyptian amir Quṭlûbughâ al-Fakhîrî the previous year.\footnote{Laoust, “Ibn Kaṭîr Historien,” 52.} When Ibn Kathîr was consulted, according to Laoust, he abstained from participating in the matter because he saw it as a threat to the prestige of the judicial position itself.\footnote{Ibid.} It was only after this incident that Ibn Kathîr would begin to receive important public positions. In 746/1345, he gave the first sermon at the new mosque founded by the Amir Bahâ’ al-Dîn al-Marjânî (d. 759/1359).\footnote{Ibid.} Two years later, he was named to his post at Umm Śâlih, succeeding al-Dhahabi in that position; and Laoust states that “this chair remained for
him, for many years, his principal, if not only, teaching assignment.” While he was not named to these public positions until a few years after the trial of the elder al-Subkī, his assignment to the Umayyad Mosque did come almost immediately after a second incident. In 767/1367, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī was accused by the Ḥanāfī and Mālikī chief judges of what Laoust refers to as “diverse infamies on the nature of which the Bidāya remains mute.” Ibn Kathīr, along with many others, did participate in this trial, but worked quite diligently in favor of al-Subkī. Finally, after three hearings and the intervention of the governor himself, the matter was resolved in al-Subkī’s favor. Ibn Kathīr’s assignment to the Umayyad Mosque took place later the same year. Curtis notes the assignment at the Mosque, but he also notes al-Subkī’s absence at the first lecture, an act he sees as openly insulting to Ibn Kathīr. Laoust, on the other hand, sees the appointment as compensation from the Governor, Mankāfī-Bughā, rather than al-Subkī. While there is no evidence of direct involvement from the Subkī family in Ibn Kathīr’s favor, the fact remains that it was not until Ibn Kathīr made his public arguments in support of the leader of his school of law, thus showing himself to be a loyal Shāfi‘ī, that he began to receive his most important institutional positions.

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148Ibid., 53.
149Ibid., 61.
150Ibid.
151Ibid.
152Ibid., 61-2.
153Curtis, “Authentic Interpretation of Classical Islamic Texts,” 73. He skips over the two incidents with the Subkīs entirely. Laoust, however, states that the first lecture was well attended, including the governor himself, along with “the grand qādis and diverse notables,” and makes no mention of the absence of al-Subkī. Laoust, “Ibn Kathīr Historien,” 62.
154Ibid., 61-2.
Ibn Kathîr died in Damascus in 773/1373.\textsuperscript{155} He was buried in the cemetery of the Süfis near both Ibn Taymiya and al-Mizzî.\textsuperscript{156} According to Laoust, his most important work was his universal history, \textit{al-Bidâya wa'l-Nihâyâ}, which covers the history of the world from Creation to his own time with an added volume on the signs indicating the coming of the End of Days.\textsuperscript{157} He is also well known for his work on \textit{hadîth}, titled \textit{Kitâb al-Jâmi'}, a \textit{tafsîr} of the Qur'ân, and a variety of other works, including commentaries and a biographical dictionary of Shâfi'i scholars.\textsuperscript{158} While Laoust focuses on his work of history, and identifies him mainly with this discipline, Curtis complains that, although Ibn Kathîr's \textit{Tafsîr} "is one of the most popular texts among Muslims..., it has not received much attention from orientalists. Ibn Kathîr has received some attention as an historian but none as an exegete or scholar of \textit{hadîth}."\textsuperscript{159} Unfortunately, Curtis cites no evidence for the importance he places on Ibn Kathîr's \textit{Tafsîr} for later Muslim scholars, while Laoust points out that his work of history was used as the basis for other noteworthy historical works, including that by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʻAsqalânî (d. 852/1449).\textsuperscript{160} It is perhaps important to point out here that some of his medieval Muslim biographers describe him first as a Shâfi'i \textit{faqîh} rather than a historian or \textit{mufassir}.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{155}Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{156}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157}Ibid., 63-4.
\textsuperscript{159}Curtis, "Authentic Interpretation of Classical Islamic Texts," vii.
Like al-Ṭabarî’s *Ta’rîkh*, Ibn Kathîr’s *Bidâya* covers human history from the creation of the world to his own lifetime, but then, unlike the earlier scholar, moves on to describe the signs that foretell the coming of Judgement Day. Unlike al-Ṭabarî, too, Ibn Kathîr divides his description of the pre-Islamic world between Biblical and Arabian history, basically ignoring the Persians and even the Byzantines. After relating Muḥammad’s migration to Medina, Ibn Kathîr, like al-Ṭabarî, organizes his work by the events that occurred within a particular year, and this continues to the end. Later years are divided into an account of the events of that year and brief biographical notices of important individuals who died in that year.

Ibn Kathîr’s Introduction to the *Bidâya* does not provide us with a detailed explanation of his methodology for this work. He begins instead with a laudative section, as had al-Ṭabarî, and then moves on to the matter at hand, describing what subjects the work will cover. He states that he will describe the creation of the world, of the angels, *jinn*, and demons, and move on to the creation of Adam. Then he will discuss the various prophets and the stories of the Banû Ḩasan and the events of the *Jâhilîya* up to the time of Muḥammad. Here he adds, “So we mentioned his life just as is necessary, so hearts and desires are healed, and disease goes away from the sick.”

This is our first indication that, for Ibn Kathîr, the story of Muḥammad’s life itself is seen to have miraculous healing properties. He then states that he will describe the

163 Ibid., vol. 1, 3-4.
164 Ibid., vol. 1, 4.
165 It is, of course, possible that he means spiritual healing, but physical healing seems to be the interpretation intended here.
events up to his own time, and move on to "the portents of the Day of Judgement."\textsuperscript{166} Thus, while his work begins, like al-Ṭabarî’s, with the creation of the world, Ibn Kathîr continues the work beyond his own lifetime to describe the signs of the end of the world, giving his work a sense of closure not found in the Ta’rîkh.

After completing his description of what subjects the work covers, he moves on to more methodological issues, and argues that he will only relate stories from the Isrâ‘îliyât that are permitted, and that do not contradict “the Book of God and the Sunna of His Messenger...”\textsuperscript{167} He goes on to state that the stories he does relate from this group will not be relied upon for any religious, i.e., legal, meaning. He claims, instead, that he will rely upon the Qur’ân and the Sunna of Muḥammad, and that he will explain the traditions that are correct and those that are weak.\textsuperscript{168} Thus, he is arguing for an authoritative retelling of history, relying solely on authoritative sources, but, unlike al-Ṭabarî, he seems unwilling to even mention any possible recourse to the use of reason. Thus, from the beginning, Ibn Kathîr argues not only for the authoritative nature of his historical account, but describes, rather loosely, what it is that makes his account authoritative, and that is his reliance on reports that are based on the Qur’ân and the Sunna rather than relying in any way on the use of his own intellect. We shall see, however, that despite his arguments for the use of authoritative sources, Ibn Kathîr is willing to express his own opinion regarding certain events even if it goes against the bulk of the evidence he presents.

\textsuperscript{166}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167}Ibid., vol. 1, 5. The Isrâ‘îliyât are stories of Jewish origin that often deal with the Biblical prophets. Although these stories were widely used in the Islamic tradition, a growing number of Muslim scholars came to view them with suspicion.
\textsuperscript{168}Ibid.
Unlike al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr intersperses many of the reports he relates about the life of Muḥammad with numerous Qurʾān citations, as well as comments about the authoritativeness of a report’s chain of authorities, its text, or simply to relate that the same report exists in one of the Six Books of authoritative ḥadīth, or another source, with either the same or a similar isnād. Like al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr also makes heavy use of reports from Ibn Ishāq, but unlike the earlier scholar, he either points out the weakness of the individual report’s chain of authorities, or relates a similar or identical report that is found in one of the Six Books in order to enhance the authoritativeness of the text. Only rarely does Ibn Kathīr quote al-Ṭabarī directly in this section of his work, and when he does, it seems that he refutes him more often than not, but the two men do share many reports in common, even if Ibn Kathīr cites a source other than al-Ṭabarī. One of his favorite sources for events in the life of Muḥammad is the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, a source that is completely ignored by al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Kathīr seems to go out of his way to equate the work of the founder of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* with the Six Books. Often, he will relate a report and either point out that the same report exists in the Six Books and the *Musnad*, or, if the report is from the *Musnad*, but is not found in the Six Books, he will state that the report is *ṣaḥīḥ*, or excellent, but that the authors of the Six Books did not publish it. However, as we will see, even with his obvious admiration of the work of Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Kathīr is willing to express reservations about reports found in the *Musnad* if they disagree with his own interpretation of events.

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169 The Six Books are the *Ṣaḥīḥ* works of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/874), and the *Sunan* works of Ibn Māja (d. 275/888), Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/888), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), and al-Nasāʾī (d. 303/915). They are considered to be the most authoritative collections of ḥadīth.
Ibn Kathîr’s exegesis, Tafsîr al-Qur’ân al-‘Azîm, presents us with a more complicated situation, since, as Curtis points out, the entire introductory section after the laudative is actually a work by Ibn Taymiya.\textsuperscript{170} Curtis also notes that Ibn Taymiya’s work itself is largely based on the Tafsîr of al-Ṭabarî, whose work “Ibn Taymiyah preferred... by far over all other Qur’anic commentaries.”\textsuperscript{171} Thus, here we have a fairly direct link between the tafsîr works of our two authors. Curtis goes on to state that “Ibn Taymiyah’s preference for Ibn Jarîr’s Qur’anic exegesis influenced Ibn Kathîr, for his tafsîr is similar in style... and it is considered to be a refinement or an updated version of Ibn Jarîr’s tafsîr.”\textsuperscript{172} The presence of Ibn Taymiya’s introduction gives us a more detailed account of the methodology presented by Ibn Kathîr than we find in his Bidâya, but al-Ṭabarî, too, went into more detail in the introduction to his Tafsîr than to his History.\textsuperscript{173} Ibn Kathîr states, first, that the Qur’ân should be interpreted through the Qur’ân itself, since, he claims, “that which is general in one place is elucidated and expounded upon elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{174} If the Qur’ân does not provide an explanation, then one must turn to the Sunna of Muḥammad. At this point, Ibn Kathîr makes a claim for the Sunna that is not found in al-Ṭabarî’s works, namely, that Muḥammad received the Sunna in the same manner as he had the Qur’ân itself, in other words, that it had been

\textsuperscript{170}Curtis, “Authentic Interpretation of Classical Islamic Texts,” 7. The work in question is Ibn Taymiya’s Muqaddima fi Usûl al-Tafsîr.

\textsuperscript{171}Ibid., 77.

\textsuperscript{172}Ibid., 77-8. I would disagree with this assessment of Ibn Kathîr’s tafsîr in comparison to al-Ṭabarî’s, for whereas al-Ṭabarî brought together a wide variety of reports and ideas in his work, Ibn Kathîr’s is more limited in both scope and depth. Also, Curtis never states exactly who considered it to have this relationship to al-Ṭabarî’s work.

\textsuperscript{173}This is more than likely indicative of their views on the importance of spelling out a methodology for tafsîr as opposed to history, revealing that they viewed the first genre as far more important than the second.

\textsuperscript{174}Ibid., 91; Ibn Kathîr, Tafsîr al-Qur’ân al-‘Azîm, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 2000), 12.
revealed to him, rather than simply being an inherent part of his personality.\footnote{Curtis, “Authentic Interpretation,” 92; Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Tafsîr}, vol. 1, 12. They do not go into much detail as to exactly how the \textit{sunna} was revealed to Muhammad, just that it was.} Thus, it would appear that for Ibn Kathîr, the \textit{Sunna} was to be treated with the same authoritativeness as the Qur’ân itself, since it, too, was a Divine Revelation.

The Introduction continues, “At such time when we do not find the exegesis in the Qur’ân or in the \textit{sunna}, then we resort in this case to the statements of the Companions because they were the most apprised of correct exegesis.”\footnote{Curtis, 93-96; Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Tafsîr}, vol. 1, 12.} Favor is shown here especially to the four Rightly-Guided caliphs, Ibn Mas‘ûd (d. 32/653), and Ibn ‘Abbâs (d. 68/687).\footnote{Curtis, 97; Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Tafsîr}, 12-13.} In some cases, it is permitted to relate the stories of the \textit{Irsâ’llîyât}, but only if they come through an accepted authority, like those mentioned above, and if they “are used for corroborating not for validation.”\footnote{Curtis, 99-100; Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Tafsîr}, 13.} If the authoritative sources differ in their opinions, then all statements should be related, the incorrect and the correct should be pointed out, giving the reasons for doing so, and this should be done in the order of importance of the subject being discussed.\footnote{Curtis, 100; Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Tafsîr}, 13.} The last step is to rely on the reports of those who came after the Companions.\footnote{Curtis, 100; Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Tafsîr}, 13.} While this is all presented in a much more detailed fashion than in al-Ṭabarî’s work, Ibn Kathîr is here basically following the same exegetical principles set down by the earlier scholar.

Like al-Ṭabarî’s exegesis, Ibn Kathîr treats the verses of the Qur’ân either individually or in groups, without explaining the reasoning behind this treatment. Ibn Kathîr does not transmit as many reports relating to grammar or lexicography as does
al-Ṭabarī, but reports of this nature can be found in his work. He includes reports that relate the historical context of the revelation of the verse or verses in question, and actually quotes al-Ṭabarī’s work quite often. Unlike al-Ṭabarī, however, Ibn Kathīr includes numerous citations of other verses of the Qur’ān in his treatment of a verse. These citations can take place throughout the explanation of the verse, but clusters of citations are also to be found at either the beginning of the section, at its end, or both. As in his Bidāya, Ibn Kathīr includes numerous comments about the reported meanings of the verses and their authoritativeness or lack thereof. In his Tafsīr, too, however, he seems willing, at times, to push his own interpretation of events, sometimes in contradiction to the evidence he presents.

Overall, the tone of both works by Ibn Kathīr is fairly defensive, and stand in stark contrast to the quiet confidence of those of al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Kathīr goes out of his way to attempt to prove the authoritativeness of those reports that agree with his view of the life of Muḥammad, and is equally insistent in his criticisms of those reports that disagree with that view. He is especially critical in both works of any report that might support a Shi‘i interpretation of events, as will be examined in more detail later. It will be his vehement anti-Shī‘a stance that even causes him to express doubt about the authoritativeness of some of the reports related by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, a source that he attempts, at other times, to equate with the authoritative hadith collections. As al-

\[\text{Walid Saleh, in his work on al-Tha‘labī, argues that there was a marked increase in hostility between the Sunni and Shi‘i sects during the Mamlūk period and states that Shi‘i scholars were using Sunni sources, such as al-Tha‘labī, to support their views. Saleh, The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition, 215-221. Ibn Kathīr’s treatment of certain reports from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal that he perceived as potentially being used by the Shi‘a may be an indication that he was attempting to spare the Ḥanbali founder’s work from the same fate, while simultaneously arguing in favor of its authoritativeness.}\]
Ṭabarī’s confidence can be seen as a mixture of the strength of his own personality and as a sign of the confidence of Islamic civilization as a whole in the early tenth century, so, too, can Ibn Kathīr’s defensiveness be taken as an indication that, not only was he personally less confident than al-Ṭabarī, but that the Muslim world as a whole had become more defensive by the fourteenth century.

There is, however, a certain amount of disagreement among scholars regarding the role of strict traditionalism in Damascene society after the death of Ibn Taymiya. Henri Laoust argues that the influence of Ibn Taymiya was such that members of other legal schools and even some of the Mamlûk amirs were considered his disciples, referring to Ibn Kathīr and some of his contemporaries as “Ḥanbalized Shāfi‘īs.” Walid Saleh argues that Ibn Taymiya’s influence was such that his disciples carried on his attempts to discredit the *tafsīr* work of al-Tha’labi due to its use by Shi‘i scholars. He claims that “al-Tha’labi’s reputation never fully recovered from this attack.” The possibility also exists, however, that Ibn Kathīr’s defensiveness is not a sign of his times, but is, instead, a reaction against it. Norman Calder, as will be discussed in more detail below, argues that Ibn Taymiya and Ibn Kathīr were ultimately unable to convert the intellectual tradition of Islamic exegesis over to their arguments in support of sole reliance on the Qur’an and *ḥadīth*. But a brief mention of the events that intervened

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between the lives of al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr may shed light on possible reasons for an assessment of Ibn Kathîr’s defensiveness as indicative of his age.  

Between the time of al-Ṭabarî and that of Ibn Kathîr, the Islamic world was witness to several crises that appeared to change its fundamental character. Egypt and much of the surrounding area had been taken over by the Shi’î dynasty of the Fâṭimids in 359/969, and the Shi’î Bûyids were just the first of many foreign groups that would attack the capital of the ‘Abbâsid Empire, taking actual control away from the caliphs, while allowing them to retain their position. Beginning late in the eleventh century, Christian Crusaders from Europe would take Muslim territories in Syria and Palestine, including the city of Jerusalem, where they engaged in wholesale slaughter. The Saljûqs had taken control of the caliphate in 447/1055, and seemed unable or unwilling to do much to help those who suffered from these attacks from Christian Europe. Although Šalâh al-Dîn (d. 590/1193) took control of Egypt away from the Fâṭimids in 567/1171 and returned rule of their territories to Sunnî Muslims, as well as

185Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, eds., Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature (London: Routledge, 2003), argue, in their section on the translation of Ibn Kathîr’s exegesis of Qur’ân 98, that the scholar “relies totally upon hadith material; the era of Ibn Kathîr marks the final submersion of rationalism under the powers of traditionalism.” (128) The editors directly tie this victory of traditionalism to the larger events of the time, stating, “In the wake of the Mongol invasion of the Islamic heartlands and the fall of Baghdad in 656/1258, a close definition of Islam was felt by many to be needed as a method of Muslim self-preservation in the face of an external threat.” (Ibid.) While they do not provide any supporting evidence for this statement, it would seem to agree with the overall perception of this period of Islamic history. Certainly, more research needs to be done to determine whether the views of Ibn Taymiya and Ibn Kathîr reflect mainstream Muslim society in fourteenth century Damascus or whether their views were those of a defensive minority.


187For the Fâṭimids, see Hitti, 617-31; Hodgson, 21-28; and Lapidus, 283-7.

188On the Crusades, see Hitti, 635-58; Hodgson, 264-8; and Lapidus, 287-92.

189On the Saljûqs, see Hitti, 473-81; Hodgson, 42-6; and Lapidus, 117-23.
regaining control of Jerusalem, his descendants were eventually replaced by their own
Turkic slave soldiers, the Mamlûks, in 648/1250. Finally, the pagan Mongols took
Baghdad itself during their wave of destructive invasions and killed the caliph and his
family in 656/1258, thus seeming to destroy the very heart of Islamic civilization.

Not only had the political unity of the Empire been forever destroyed, but the
culture had changed dramatically as well. Education became more centralized under the
Saljûqs with the institution of the Nizâmiya, a series of schools set up by the vizier
Nizâm al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), in an apparent effort to ensure that only officially
accepted doctrines were taught to the next generation of scholars. In the same period,
Ash'arism became the official theological doctrine of Islam and the Mamlûks continued
to support its adherence. By the late twelfth/early thirteenth century the various
Sunni legal schools were narrowed down to four, Shâﬁ'î, Ḥanafî, Mâliki, and Ḥanbali,
and the Six Books were beginning to be accepted as the only repositories of
authoritative Sunni hadith. This centralization of authoritative religious and legal
institutions was supported by non-Arab rulers who were eager for some form of
legitimation, and this, too, had its impact on Muslim society by the fourteenth century,
as rulers who were converts to Islam tried to appear to their subjects as devout Muslims

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189For the history of the Ayyûbids and the Mamlûks, see Hitti, 645-54, 671-82; Hodgson, 267-8, 417-19;
and Lapidus, 291-4.
190On the Mongols, see Hitti, 482-8; Hodgson, 286-92; and Lapidus, 226-29.
191On the institution of the Nizâmiya, see Hitti, 410-11; Hodgson, 47-9; and Lapidus, 141-2.
192On the rise of the Ash'arî system, see Hitti, 430-1; Hodgson, 175-179; and Lapidus, 89-90, 135-7.
193The four schools are named after their founders, al-Shâﬁ'î (d. 215/830), Abû Ḥanîfa (d. 152/769), Mâlik
b. Anas (d. 179/795), and Ahmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). For the Six Books and their authors, see p. 61,
ote 169, above. Lapidus argues that "the late twelfth century..., brought a shift from sponsorship of
individual schools to equal recognition of the four major schools of law.... In 1234, as a further
expression of a pan-Sunni policy, a new madrasa was founded in Baghdad to house all four of the law
schools." (142)
and, thus, were reliant upon the support of the religious scholars, creating an uneasy balance between the power of the sultan and the demands of the 'ulamā'.”

But what did the 'ulamā' of Ibn Kathīr's day think of al-Ṭabarī? Rosenthal has already pointed out the numerous copies of al-Ṭabarī's History available in the libraries of the Fatimids, and it is a fair bet that at least some of these survived into the Mamlūk period. Also, Curtis has shown how al-Ṭabarī's Tafsīr was used extensively by both Ibn Taymiya and Ibn Kathīr. The latter scholar also included al-Ṭabarī's biographical notice in both his Bidāya and his biographical dictionary of Shāfiʿī jurists, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿīya. In the Bidāya, he begins with a full citation of al-Ṭabarī's name, the year he was born, and then a physical description of him. He notes that al-Ṭabarī “transmitted... on the authority of a large number of people, and departed to distant lands in the study of hadith, and he wrote the... Ta’rīkh, and... the perfect Tafsīr, which has no equal.”

He also relates several reports from other authorities that praise al-Ṭabarī's scholarly abilities, and then he moves on to those reports from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) dealing with al-Ṭabarī's problems with the Ḥanbalīs, first that one scholar claimed the “Ḥanābīla treated him [al-Ṭabarī] unjustly” and then that another scholar complained that he had been prevented from studying with al-Ṭabarī, because “the

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95It seems a universal truth that converts to a religion feel the need to be more devout than those born into the tradition, and this is doubly so for rulers. However, the Mamlūk public display of devotion was sometimes countered by the private events at court, as the various bloody rebellions, coups, and court intrigues reveal. Ibn Kathīr, Al-Bidāya wa’l-Nihāya, vol. 13, passim. D.P. Little, “Religion Under the Mamlūks.” History and Historiography of the Mamlūks (London: Variorum, 1986): 165-181, argues that the Mamlūks had to successfully juggle the interests of all of the groups in their territory, including the Christians, the Šūfīs, and the 'ulamā', in order to maintain control.

96Ibn Kathīr, Al-Bidāya wa’l-Nihāya, vol. 11, 156.

97Ibid., vol. 11, 157. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī wrote Ta’rīkh al-Baghdād, which Rosenthal includes as one of the most important sources of biographical information for al-Ṭabarī. Rosenthal, General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood, 9.
Hanabila were hindering anyone from meeting with him.” Ibn Kathir adds his own comments to these reports, first complimenting al-Tabari’s piety, his scholarly abilities, and relating some of his poetry. Then he discusses al-Tabari’s death and notes that “he was buried in his house, because some of the common people of the Hanabila and their riffraff prevented his burial during the day....” He adds that some of the negative views toward the scholar were due to the opinions expressed by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Dawūd, who is here described as a legal expert of the Syrian Zahirī madhhab. This appears to be the same person previously mentioned by Rosenthal as having forwarded his accusation of al-Tabari’s Shī‘i sympathies to the Caliph’s Chamberlain.

Ibn Kathir points out that some scholars claimed that al-Tabari allowed for the wiping of the feet in the ritual ablution before prayer, rather than washing them. This was an important point for Muslims, since the Sunnī perception was that the feet had to be washed, while the Shī‘a argued that they only had to be wiped. Thus, the claim that al-Tabari supported the necessity for wiping only could also be seen as an accusation of Shī‘i views. However, Ibn Kathir points out:

It is attributed to him that he used to speak of the permissibility of wiping (mashh) the two feet in ablations and that he did not require washing (ghusl) them, and he became famous for that. One of the ‘ulamā’ claims that there were two Ibn Jarirs, one of them being a Shī‘i, and that was attributed to him (on the ablutions), and they deny these qualities to Abū Ja‘far. His words which are relied upon in Tafsīr are that he required washing (ghusl) the two feet and with

199 Ibid.
200 Ibid. The Zahirī school, like al-Tabari’s own, did not survive to become one of the four accepted schools of legal thought in Islam, but its adherents certainly would have viewed al-Tabari as competition, as did the Hanbalis, and the steps taken by the Zahirī jurist reveal just how dangerous scholarly rivalries could become.
202 Ibid., 56-7.
203 Or “reputed for that.”
the washing (ghusl), rubbing (dalk) them, but he meant by rubbing (dalk), wiping (mash), but most people did not understand his intention. Those who did understand transmitted from him that he required washing (ghusl) and wiping (mash), the latter being rubbing (dalk). God knows best.\textsuperscript{204}

So, Ibn Kathir here seems to be attempting a middle path, arguing that, while al-Ṭabarî did require the washing, thus favoring the Sunni interpretation, he also included the rubbing of the feet in the ritual ablutions before prayer. This assertion, along with the familiar “God knows best,” reveals that either Ibn Kathir was not entirely certain himself how to interpret al-Ṭabarî’s views on this requirement or that he was attempting to portray the earlier scholar in as positive, i.e., orthodox, light as possible.

Ibn Kathir’s entry on al-Ṭabarî in his Ṭabaqāt al-Shafi’iya begins with al-Ṭabarî’s scholarly accomplishments, and describes him as an “author of great literary works, and of the great Tafsīr, a great man in the knowledge of the Qur’ān. His roots are among the people of Tabaristān, and he wandered the provinces in the study of knowledge....”\textsuperscript{205} Ibn Kathir then moves on to discuss those under whom al-Ṭabarî studied, and relates several reports about his abilities and achievements. He includes, again, his own comments about al-Ṭabarî’s difficulties with the Ḥanbalis, stating that the scholar had been accused of “adherence to Shi‘i doctrine”\textsuperscript{206} and that the Ḥanbalis had demanded a debate with him. Al-Ṭabarî agreed and appeared at the appointed time and place, but the Ḥanbalis never arrived. Ibn Kathir then adds that the Ḥanbalis equated their arguments, presumably those regarding the “praiseworthy position” of Muḥammad in Qur’ān 17:79, with the arguments of the previous generation regarding

\textsuperscript{204}Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidāya wa’l-Nihāya, vol. 11, 158.
\textsuperscript{206}Ibid., vol. 1, 219.
the issue of the createdness of the Qur'ān, and that they “clung fanatically” to this issue, but that “it was not as they maintained...” He adds the familiar, “but God knows best,” at the end of his comments on this subject to indicate, again, his uncertainty. Ibn Kathīr ends his section on al-Ṭabarī in this work with a hadīth related to him from his teacher and father-in-law, al-Mızzī, transmitted through al-Ṭabarī, which states: “The Messenger of God said: ‘Whoever completes, near his death, [the saying] “There is no god but God” will enter Paradise.’” Ibn Kathīr remarks that “it is unique from this path, and they [the authors of the Six Books] did not publish it.”

Thus, for the most part in his biographical entries on al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr portrays him in a positive light. He does this even though it brings him into sharp disagreement with the arguments of the Ḥanbalī community of tenth-century Baghdad. His praise is not unfaltering, however, as is revealed by his comments regarding the report related by al-Mızzī, which Ibn Kathīr admits is unique and not to be found in the authoritative collections of hadīth. But the overall picture given to us by Ibn Kathīr is that of an immense amount of respect for the earlier scholar. However, when we delve into the body of Ibn Kathīr’s sīra/tā’rīkh, we see that his respect for al-Ṭabarī is mitigated by his hatred for the Shī‘a, and that he was willing to discredit reports or entire works of the older scholar in order to deprive that group of any support they might have gained from his writings.

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207Ibid.
208Ibid.
209Ibid., vol. 1, 220.
210Ibid.
Ibn Kathîr, in his discussion of the events at Ghadîr Khumm, complains about al-Ṭabarî's work on this subject and states that in it al-Ṭabarî "conveyed the lean and the fat and the authentic and the faulty, as what prevails among most of the traditionists...."\textsuperscript{211} Thus, he criticizes the earlier scholar for relaying both authoritative and non-authoritative reports without differentiating between the two, much as he does throughout his \textit{sîra/tarîkh}. Since al-Ṭabarî did not differentiate between those reports that were acceptable and those that were not, he gave the Shi'a, in essence, a formidable arsenal of \textit{ḥadîth} to use in support of their arguments regarding the primacy of 'Ali.

Another instance in which Ibn Kathîr seems willing to discredit a report from al-Ṭabarî to avoid its perceived misuse by the Shi'a is the story of Muḥammad's acknowledgment of 'Ali as his successor after the Prophet's miraculous division of food and drink at his public announcement of his mission to his closest kinsmen.\textsuperscript{212} In fact, it is in connection to this story that Ibn Kathîr is even willing to shed doubt on a report from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal himself in order to deprive the Shi'a of their own interpretation of this event.\textsuperscript{213}

Finally, the biography of al-Ṭabarî by one of Ibn Kathîr's most important teachers, al-Dhahabî, is also a mixture of positive and negative views. After discussing al-Ṭabarî's importance as a scholar, al-Dhahabî relates one of his legal decisions, to which the later scholar adds the opinions of other jurists. He then refutes al-Ṭabarî's

\textsuperscript{211} Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Al-Bidâya wa l-Nihâya}, vol. 5, 208. What Ibn Kathîr fails to note is that al-Ṭabarî does not mention this event at all in his \textit{sîra/tarîkh}.

\textsuperscript{212} This particular event will be examined in detail in Chapter Four of the current study.

\textsuperscript{213} It is significant that when Ibn Kathîr relates a report from Ibn Ḥanbal that he disagrees with, he merely expresses doubt, but when faced with a report from al-Ṭabarî that he finds troublesome, he goes beyond the expression of doubt and makes his opposition very clear. Thus, even though he respected al-Ṭabarî, he still viewed the work of Ibn Ḥanbal as superior and clearly showed more respect for his reputation than for that of al-Ṭabarî.
ruling with a decision by Ibn Taymiya. So, it appears that al-Ṭabarî was best respected as anexegete in fourteenth century Damascus, but that perhaps at least one of the followers of the Ḥanbalî Ibn Taymiya still shared some of the hostility that had been shown toward him as a legal scholar by the Ḥanbalîs of his own day.

Al-Ṭabarî’s lack of commentary regarding his preference for one report over another in some of his works thus seems to have caused problems for both himself and later scholars. As noted above, his two-volume work on Ghadîr Khumm and the virtues of ‘Alî was already being exploited by the Shi‘a of his own day, necessitating further works on the positive qualities of the rest of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, as well as al-‘Abbās. Since the Fātimids and Qarmatians were already beginning to cause problems for the ‘Abbāsid dynasty, such exploitation of his works could have serious repercussions. However, the problems he experienced seem to stem more from his exegesis of the Qur’ān, wherein he does provide his own opinion as to which interpretation is to be preferred over others. It would be his interpretation of the “praiseworthy position” that would cause so many problems with the Ḥanbalîs, and his interpretation of the requirement for washing or wiping the feet during ritual ablutions would lead to accusations of Shi‘i sympathies. Ibn Kathîr, whose world had seen the physical reality of Shi‘i rule in Fātimid Egypt, reserved his most stinging comments in both his sīra/tārīkh and his tafsîr for those reports that could be used to strengthen any argument in support of Shi‘i claims. Although Ibn Kathîr denies the accusations of Shi‘i sympathies against al-Ṭabarî and strongly criticizes the Ḥanbalîs who attacked the

Al-Dhahabi, Ta‘rîkh al-Islam, vol. 23, 283-5. The story of the legal decision appears fairly incongruous with the rest of the section devoted to his life and work.
earlier scholar, he does go out of his way to refute those reports that may be interpreted
as supporting the Shi‘i view of the life of Muḥammad and the interpretation of the
Qur‘ān, even if it means besmirching the great scholar’s reputation.

Secondary Works on al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr

There are no small number of modern studies that use the works of al-Ṭabarī, and
even in those where he is not the primary focus, he is too important a figure for the
Classical and early Medieval period of Islamic history to ignore completely. Among the
most compelling recent studies are those by Claude Gilliot, who has published a number
of works on al-Ṭabarī’s History as well as his Taṣīr, two of which will be discussed
here.215 The common theme of these studies is the mythic element as found in both
works and their perceived importance by their author. He argues in the first article that
al-Ṭabarī’s History is too often used piecemeal by modern historians, and that we tend
to lose sight of it as a single, unified work.216 In order to accomplish this, he argues, we
must take into consideration two facts: first, that al-Ṭabarī was not just an exegete and
historian, but that he was also a scholar of Islamic tradition, law, and theology, and
second, we must not forget that al-Ṭabarī was Persian.217 As such, his work of history is
one that combines all of these elements and relates the dual stories of the Israelites, who
possessed prophecy, and the Persians, who exercised royal authority.218 Gilliot argues

215These include “Récit, mythe et histoire chez Tabari. Une Vision mythique de l’histoire universelle,”
Mêlanges 21 (1993): 277-289; and “Mythe, recit, histoire du salut dans le Commentaire Coranique de
217Ibid., 277-8.
218Ibid., 278.
that these two elements would converge for al-Ṭabari in the Islamic caliphate
“instituted by God.” After examining some of the stories in the History, such as the
stories of Noah and al-Ḍaḥḥāk, he concludes that al-Ṭabari combined the legends of the
Israelites and the Persians, along with the works of previous Muslim historians, to
produce a unified whole in which the archetype of the just sovereign anticipates the
ideal of Muslim government, while the tyrant provides the perfect antithesis to the life
of Muḥammad, whom Gilliot refers to as the “nodal point of the History.”

In the second article, Gilliot uses al-Ṭabari’s Tafsīr to “refute the rather
tenacious idea... of an Orient that does not change.” Using three examples of God as
master of life and death, he examines al-Ṭabari’s exegesis, specifically the reports that
relate the legendary material associated with Qur’ān 2:258-260. He concludes that, in
this case, it is the legendary reports, rather than those that relate grammatical, legal, or
theological matters, that perform an “independent function” in al-Ṭabari’s study, which

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22Ibid., 239-41. The three examples are the believing ruler versus the unbelieving ruler, the destroyed
city and the miraculous sleeper, and the story of the four birds. Qur’ān 2:258-260 read: “Hast thou not
turned thy vision to one who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because Allāh had granted him
power? Abraham said: ‘My Lord is He Who giveth life and death.’ He said: ‘I give life and death.’ Said
Abraham: ‘But it is Allāh that causeth the sun to rise from the East: Do thou then cause him to rise from
the West?’ Thus was he confounded who (in arrogance) rejected faith. Nor doth Allāh give guidance to a
people unjust. Or (take) the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet, all in ruins to its roofs. He said:
‘Oh! how shall Allāh bring it (ever) to life, after (this) its death?’ But Allāh caused him to die for a
hundred years then raised him up (again). He said: ‘How long didst thou tarry (thus?)’ He said:
‘(Perhaps) a day or part of a day.’ He said: ‘Nay, thou hast tarried thus a hundred years; but look at thy
food and thy drink; they show no signs of age; and look at thy donkey; and that We may make of thee a
Sign unto the people, look further at the bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh.’
When this was shown clearly to him, he said: ‘I know that Allāh hath power over all things.’ Behold!
Abraham said: ‘My Lord! Show me how thou givest life to the dead.’ He said: ‘Dost thou not then
believe?’ He said: ‘Yeal but to satisfy my own understanding.’ He said: ‘Take four birds; tame them to
turn to thee; put a portion of them on every hill, and call to them; they will come to thee, (flying) with
speed. Then know that Allāh is exalted in Power, Wise.’
Is “far from secondary” to the other types of reports. The results of the present study do not seem to support this thesis when other verse groupings are examined. While the legendary reports do serve an important function in the Tafsīr, and while they do tend to stand out among the other types of reports, they are not always the main focus of al-Ṭabari’s treatment of the verses of the Qur’ān, being sometimes vastly outnumbered by the other types of reports, most especially those of a grammatical and lexicographical nature.

Perhaps the most thorough examination of al-Ṭabari’s History as a narrative that contains certain literary elements is that by Boaz Shoshan, in his Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Ṭabari’s History. Shoshan argues that the History, and history itself, contain elements of literature that the historian, sometimes purposefully, includes in the text to provide it with meaning. He argues that he is not attempting to use al-Ṭabari’s work to reconstruct the Islamic historical past, but rather that he is deconstructing the History to look at how its component parts adhere to various modes of literary interpretation, or, rather, how different literary themes are found throughout the various parts of the History. He spends the first half of the work examining these literary themes and how they are portrayed in al-Ṭabari’s work. The second half of the book consists of specific incidents, wherein Shoshan examines in detail the various

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223 Ibid., 267.
224 Boaz Shoshan, Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Ṭabari’s History (Leiden: Brill, 2004), see especially his Introduction (xvii-xxxiv), where he compares various theories regarding the relationship between history and literature, and his discussion of the role of character in the History (148-54) for an example of how he portrays one such literary element as it was related by al-Ṭabari in that work. For Shoshan’s use of the theories of Hayden White, see note 48, above.
225 Ibid., xi.
literary themes elucidated in the first. The main point of this work, according to Shoshan, is "the ambiguous effect that the historical stories create, or... the effect created against the narrators' best intentions. In other words, my analysis is sometimes occupied, not with authorial intention, but with what may have escaped authorial attention." Therefore, the History reveals not necessarily history as it was, but history as al-Ṭabari and his sources chose to depict it, using a variety of techniques by which to stress those elements of the story they deemed most important. While I would disagree to a certain extent with his judgement that al-Ṭabari's work is more reliant on the narrative devices included by his sources, and that his own role was, especially for the early period of the work leading up to and including the life of Muḥammad, simply editorial, I agree with Shoshan that too much should not be made of his authorship of this part of the work. Al-Ṭabari himself claims that he is only passing on what was handed down to him. However, I would argue that the form of the sources at his disposal, the individual ḫabar reports, allowed for a much higher level of editorial complexity, even in the sīra/taʾrīkh, thus what Shoshan refers to as editing, may actually be closer to creating.

Another study that attempts to deal with al-Ṭabari's History from a holistic perspective is that by Ulrika Mårtensson, who analyzes the work in light of the

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226Ibid. Shoshan admits that his examples, such as the Saqīfa incident and the Battle of Siffin, are pivotal moments in Islamic history, and thus readily lend themselves to manipulation by al-Ṭabari.

227Ibid. He states that, while al-Ṭabari did act as author for the later years of the History, specifically those that take place during the scholar's adult life, he acted more as an editor for the earlier periods covered by the work.

228Ibid., xxix. Shoshan's analysis of the ḫabar form appears to agree with that of the current study, namely, that despite the surface appearance of a fractured account, narrative flow does occur in al-Ṭabari's History. For an example of this in the current study, see Chapter Four, below.
historian’s discourse with the subject studied. Unlike Shoshan, Märtensson is here attempting to interpret the historical information found in the *History*, and does so by examining both “the *khabar*-form and the religious content.” She discerns that “Ṭabarī analysed history in terms of a complex view of society,” and that the religious symbols are guides to this analysis. Rather than seeing in al-Ṭabarī’s introduction a traditionalist statement about his reliance on the works of others, she interprets his stance as being equivalent to the modern historian’s use of primary sources. She examines the religious symbolism in the text in light of the later events related by al-Ṭabarī. For example, the Creation of the world by God also created the foundation for the institution of the caliphate, and it is this institution, she argues, that provides the framework for the text as a whole. In the end, she disagrees with those authors who would argue that al-Ṭabarī’s work has a moralistic view, and instead claims that “he explained history in terms of a theory of society rather than moral dilemmas.” She also states, as did Gilliot, that al-Ṭabarī’s depiction of the Biblical prophets and the life of Muḥammad all point to the institution of the caliphate, but whereas Gilliot’s theories are fairly moralistic, Märtensson’s are institutional.

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229Ulrika Märtensson, “Discourse and Historical Analysis: The Case of Al-Ṭabarī’s History of the Messengers and the Kings,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 16:3 (2005): 287-331. She states that she is basing her study on the theories of Michel de Certeau, in his *L’Écriture de l’histoire*. (287-8) Unlike the majority of modern works dealing with Islamic historical texts, she does not attempt to dissect the chain of authorities of individual reports in order to ascertain their authenticity, but rather examines how al-Ṭabarī tied certain parts of the work to larger themes in Islamic history, thus she examines the *History*, not one report at a time, but instead studies the work as a whole, as does Gilliot.

230Ibid., 288.

231Ibid., 300.

232Ibid., 293-4.

233Ibid., 301.

234Ibid., 331. She includes here the works by Gilliot.

235Ibid.
While al-Ṭabari has been generally recognized as a scholar of sufficient importance to study in his own right, most Western studies of Ibn Kathîr tend to focus more on his involvement with Ibn Taymiya. This is justified to a certain extent, since the older man did have a profound impact on Ibn Kathîr. However, as has already been argued by Laoust, Ibn Kathîr’s Bidâya was itself used as the basis for later historical works, and thus was perceived by later Muslim writers as an important addition to the genre. For modern, Western scholars, however, Ibn Kathîr, as a subject of study in his own right, has been largely ignored. One exception to this, besides the studies by Laoust and Curtis already mentioned, is a study by Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala that examines Christian stories in Ibn Kathîr’s Bidâya, specifically his section on the lives of the prophets, Qisas al-anbiya. The story studied in this article is the conversion of Saul, who later becomes the New Testament figure Paul. Sala argues that the story of Saul’s/Paul’s conversion was one that was already in circulation among the Christian community in Damascus, and that it was only used by Ibn Kathîr after it had been thoroughly Islamized. Thus, his theory would seem to conform to those already espoused by Rubin and Stetkevych that Biblical and mythical stories made their way

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236 The biography by Laoust, “Ibn Kaṭîr Historien,” is a notable exception, but even Curtis’s work reveals that a large portion of the introduction of Ibn Kathîr’s Taṣfîr is actually from a work by Ibn Taymiya, see above. Laoust himself produced another article that puts Ibn Kathîr under the shadow of his teacher, “La Biographie d’Ibn Tâmiya d’après Ibn Kaṭîr,” Bulletin d’Études Orientales 9(1943): 115-162. In this article, he argues that Ibn Taymiya, based on what was written of him by Ibn Kathîr in his Bidâya, was more of a political, rather than a religious, reformer.

237 While the “cut and paste” methods of Ibn Kathîr prove problematic for the current study, I would posit that, like al-Ṭabari, it is doubtful that he would relate wholesale those aspects of the life of Muhammad or the exegesis of the Qur’ân that he did not agree with, at least not without comment.

238 However, see the articles by Norman Calder and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, below, which compare the exegesis of Ibn Kathîr to that of al-Ṭabari.


240 Ibid., 147, but see also his comments on the role of the “omniscient narrator” and its uses for Ibn Kathîr in this story. (152)
into the mainstream of orthodox scholarly works only after they had been given a proper Islamic context or focus.

A comparison of the works of al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr is not without precedent, and based on the views of the two authors that follow, the two men represent opposite ends of a spectrum. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, in her article “Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr,” argues that while al-Ṭabarî does provide a statement of his hermeneutics, it is one that is fairly simplistic.\(^{241}\) The introduction to the tafsîr work of Ibn Kathîr, however, includes a complex statement of Qur’ânic hermeneutics, which McAuliffe sees as the maturation of the genre. She claims:

Ibn Kathîr’s approach, on the other hand, is far more self-consciously methodological.... Even more striking is the fact that he has moved beyond a concern with classification to an emphasis on procedure. He has gone ahead to outline a series of steps by which an adequate exegesis may be conducted. Added to this is his interest in the feasible use of extra-Islamic sources and the methods by which their validity may be assessed. The precision with which he distinguishes useful from useless exegetical activity is of equal interest. Here again he has isolated, on the basis of a Quranic precedent, the sequential procedure which should be followed.\(^{242}\)

McAuliffe’s view of the evolution of exegesis between al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr has not gone unchallenged, however. Norman Calder, in his article “Tafsîr from Ṭabarî to Ibn Kathîr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with References to the Story of Abraham,” while not explicitly arguing against McAuliffe, reaches very


\(^{242}\) Ibid., 60-1.
different conclusions. He criticizes Ibn Kathir for not respecting the intellectual tradition of *tafsir*, in which scholars like al-Ṭabarî, Muḥammad b. Ḍahāmad al-Qurṭubî, and Fâkhîr al-Dîn al-Râzî allowed for a variety of different views regarding various aspects of the interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. According to Calder:

[ Ibn Kathir's] primary objective is to measure the text of the Qur'ān against the established collections of prophetic hadîth; his concern to measure it against the established scholastic disciplines is minimal. The authorities to whom he looks for support are not those who work in the great intellectual traditions of exegesis or law or kalâm but those responsible for the great collections of hadîth and those who figure in their isnâds....

This has a problematic impact on the earlier *tafsir* works, “Here begins a possibility of *al-tafsîr bi’l-hadîth* which retrospectively casts the whole tradition into the shade of *al-tafsîr bi’l-ra’îy*.” In essence, Ibn Kathir, following in the footsteps of Ibn Taymiya, succeeds in making his work of *tafsîr* acceptable to the science of hadîth, but in doing so, impoverishes it as an intellectual pursuit. For Calder, Ibn Kathir’s (and Ibn Taymiya’s) methodology did not irrevocably change the genre of *tafsîr*, and in fact he contends:

Their arguments were not irresistible. They were neutralized in any case by the intrinsic acquisitiveness of the *tafsîr* tradition, which struggled to contain the whole of a complex and developing past. And counter-arguments displaying a superior appreciation of what the *tafsîr* tradition was about had already been developed....

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243 Norman Calder, “*Tafsîr* from Ťabarî to Ibn Kathîr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham,” 101-140.
244 Ibid., 127-134.
245 Ibid., 130.
246 Ibid.
247 Ibid., 131. Calder here, too, seems unaware of the fact that the introductory section of Ibn Kathîr’s *Tafsîr* is, in fact, a work by Ibn Taymiya, but does note the older man’s influence.
Calder appreciates what he sees as the religious limitations of *tafsīr*; that as the community developed, the increasing number of variant interpretations could, in effect, tear the community apart. He also appreciates that Ibn Kathīr’s *ḥadīth*-based reading of exegesis appears to be an attempt at dogmatic centralization, an effort to transform the gray, hazy world of *tafsīr* into something as seemingly black-and-white as *ḥadīth*. In the process, however, Ibn Kathīr, although his “intemperate restrictions and his wholesale adoption of Islam’s second canon afforded him an easy popularity,” is harshly criticized by Calder for sacrificing “the unity of the diachronic community (so many great thinkers fall outside his definitions) and the independence of the disciplines.”

So, for Calder, Ibn Kathīr is what he claims to be, a scholar who slavishly follows the principles of *ḥadīth*, no matter what the consequences, to ensure the unity and orthodoxy of the community of believers, while al-Ṭabarī’s allowance of a variety of interpretations served to further enrich the intellectual tradition of the medieval Islamic world.

Although Calder’s study focuses on Ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr* work, his theory, on the surface at least, appears to apply to the *ṣira* section of *al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya* as well. While al-Ṭabarī continues to provide a wide variety of reports and possibilities without overtly interjecting much of his own interpretation into his *History*, Ibn Kathīr, although also providing a large number of reports, continues to rely heavily on works of *ḥadīth* and to be more interested in passing judgement in a determination of what is

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248Ibid., 138. Calder states that the “canonical six works had barely in the time of Ibn Kathīr established themselves.” However, it is obvious that they were established enough for Ibn Kathīr to see them as the most authoritative sources for his work of *tafsīr*.

249Ibid., 134.
allowed and what is forbidden than in any purely intellectual interest in the subject matter.\textsuperscript{250} Therefore, even though Tarif Khalidi argues that it was al-Ṭabarî who attempted to make \textit{taʾrikh} acceptable to scholars of \textit{ḥadīth}, it appears that it would be the works of Ibn Kathîr that would succeed for both \textit{tafsîr} and \textit{sîra/taʾrikh}.\textsuperscript{251} But appearances can be deceiving, and a careful study of the works of Ibn Kathîr reveals that, while he did focus on reports that were acceptable to \textit{ḥadîth} methodology, he did not allow his reliance on this methodology to override his own interpretation of events, especially when examining the supernatural archetype of the Prophet Muhammad.

\textsuperscript{250}This does not mean that al-Ṭabarî was uninterested in such pursuits, but that his methodology allowed for a bit more leeway in what he accepted and what he did not. It is also possible that al-Ṭabarî, rather than inserting a tradition in order to prove its incorrectness, simply did not include traditions with which he had serious problems, thus editing by omission rather than by direct comment. Since such a large number of his sources have been lost, however, it is unlikely that this possibility can be sufficiently examined to either prove or disprove its feasibility.

\textsuperscript{251}Tarif Khalidi, \textit{Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 73-81.
Chapter Three
The Archetype of Muhammad in the Pre-Revelation Meccan Period: The Role of the Supernatural in Muḥammad’s Conception

The archetypal story of Muḥammad’s life in the period leading up to his reception of the Revelation reveals a dual story-line, one mundane, the other supernatural.252 The first depicts Muḥammad as an orphan from a clan with little power or wealth who gains a reputation for honesty, marries a wealthy widow, and becomes a respected businessman. The second story-line mirrors the first, but contains numerous reports of supernatural events intended to show Muḥammad as marked by God even before receiving the Revelation. While Muḥammad and those around him appear aware of some of these miracles, others are seen only by select individuals. In this part of the story, Muhammad controls none of these miraculous events, and is represented as a somewhat passive receptor of God’s signs.

Although one of the main purposes of this study is to compare how the miracle stories that include a Qur’ān citation in the sīra ta’rīkh are then treated in the tafsīr work of the same author, such a comparison is nearly impossible for this period of Muḥammad’s life. At no point in the pre-Revelation Meccan period does al-Ṭabarî cite a verse of the Qur’ān in his sīra ta’rīkh. However, in one of the reports depicting the appearance of a light in the face of Muḥammad’s father, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, shortly before the Prophet’s conception, a portion of Qur’ān 6:124 is seemingly foretold

252 The archetype of Muḥammad’s life is here represented as being those elements of the story that are found in both al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathīr. Since al-Ṭabarî’s History is well known for compiling a wide variety of earlier sources, it is reasonable to take those stories that were reported by him and then survived to be repeated hundreds of years later by Ibn Kathīr as representative of the archetype.
by a Jewish soothsayer, as will be discussed in more detail below. This verse is directly cited for the same event, but in connection to a different report, by Ibn Kathir in his *sira ta'rikh*. Since this is the closest approximation of a Qur'an citation by al-Ṭabarî in this section of his *sira ta'rikh*, it is this event that will serve as the focus for the present chapter.

The archetypal story of Muḥammad's mundane life in the pre-Revelation Meccan period is one of adversity overcome. The death of his father before his birth left him at a disadvantage, so that it was reportedly difficult to find someone from the bedouin tribes willing to foster him. He was eventually fostered to a woman of the Banū Sa'd b. Bakr and was later returned to his mother, who died when he was six years old. He then went to live with his paternal grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who died two years later. At the age of eight, he moved into the household of one of his paternal uncles, Abū Ṭālib, who cared for him into adulthood. Through hard work, he gained a reputation for honesty and came to the attention of a wealthy widow, Khadija.

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253 Qur'an 6:124 states: "When there comes to them a Sign (from Allāh), they say: 'We shall not believe until we receive one (exactly) like those received by Allāh's messengers.' Allāh knoweth best where (and how) to carry out His mission. Soon will the wicked be overtaken by humiliation before Allāh, and a severe punishment, for all their plots."

254 Despite the fact that al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathir relate this event in their *sira ta'rikhs*, with either direct or indirect Qur'an citation, they fail to mention it entirely in their *tafsîrs* of Qur'an 6:124. Both men do allude, albeit sometimes quite indirectly, to the importance of Muḥammad's genealogy in their *tafsîr* works. This is, at least thematically, connected to the story of his conception, since the overall theme of this story is that God's direct actions ensured that Muḥammad would have an excellent lineage.


who hired him to work on her caravans. She was so impressed by him that they later married. He spent the next fifteen years or so of his adult life as a respected businessman and member of his community.

The mundane element of his life up to this point seems rather less than spectacular; certainly there is nothing in it to indicate that this man would go on to become the founder of a major religious movement. Other men in the history of the world overcame adversity to become great leaders, but few would claim such a link to the Divine as would Muḥammad. Thus, we turn to the supernatural aspect of the story. Before his conception, a light could be seen in the face of his father, ‘Abd Allāh, which disappeared after he had consummated his marriage with Āmina and she had conceived Muḥammad. Āmina would later claim that, during her pregnancy, she had dreamt of a light coming from her belly that lit up the castles of Buṣrā in Syria. During Muḥammad’s time with the Banū Sa‘d b. Bakr, his foster family enjoyed miraculous prosperity, while the rest of their tribe suffered from the effects of a drought. It would also be during this period that he would endure the cleansing of his heart at the hands of angels, who would then weigh him against an increasing number of men. When he was older, he was recognized as a prophet by the Christian monk, Bahīrā, who saw that

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the natural world, in the form of clouds and trees, went out of its way to honor him.\textsuperscript{265} As an adult, Khadija’s slave witnessed angels shading him from the sun with their wings.\textsuperscript{266} Of all these reported signs, the only ones Muḥammad appears to have been aware of, or later made aware of, was the dream of his mother and the cleansing of his heart by the angels. The honors shown to him by the natural world and his shading by the angels, were all witnessed by other individuals; Muḥammad himself appears to have been completely oblivious to them. The overall theme of the supernatural in this period is that all of these signs pointed to his future importance, but only certain privileged individuals were able to see and profit by them.

\textit{Al-Ṭabarī’s Sīra/Taʾrīkh}

Al-Ṭabarī reports roughly twenty-four separate supernatural events for this period of Muḥammad’s life in his \textit{sīra/taʾrīkh}, not including multiple reports of the same event. Most of the miracle reports for this period either describe a supernatural manipulation of the natural world or relate stories wherein Muḥammad’s coming was foretold.\textsuperscript{267} None of his reports for this period, whether mundane or supernatural, contain a citation from the Qur’ān. Even Ibn Kathīr, whose work includes many more Qur’ān citations in general than does that of al-Ṭabarī, rarely cites the Qur’ān for a supernatural event in this period. Neither author gives a reason for this, but it may


\textsuperscript{267}These include eleven different miracles pertaining to the natural world and six occasions foretelling the coming of Muḥammad.
simply have to do with the fact that the Qurʾān had not yet been revealed, and so was not as intimately related to this period of the life of Muḥammad as it was to the time after he began to receive the Revelation. Thus, as stated previously, the story of Muḥammad’s conception is the only story in which both authors relate, even if only indirectly, part of a Qurʾān verse.

There are four reports in al-Ṭabarī’s sīra/taʾrīkh that relate the story of Muḥammad’s conception. 268 Three of them contain supernatural elements, while the fourth does not. Two of them adhere to the archetypal image of Muḥammad’s conception, while the other two seem to diverge from this archetype. Al-Ṭabarī includes this story in his section on Muḥammad’s lineage. 269 He begins with Muḥammad’s father, ‘Abd Allāh, and works his way back to Adam himself. He states that ‘Abd Allāh was ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s youngest and favorite son, and, in the first report, which comes from Ibn Ishāq, he describes the promise made by the father to sacrifice a son. 270 Arrows are cast, and, of course, ‘Abd Allāh’s arrow is the one chosen, so ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, in a scene reminiscent of Abraham’s sacrifice, takes the young man to the Ka’ba with the intention of killing him. Unlike Abraham, however, it is not God, but his fellow Quraysh who stop him and suggest asking a female soothsayer for an alternative. 271 Her solution, or rather that of the jinn who is her familiar, is to once

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268 Watt and McDonald, Muḥammad at Mecca, 2-8; Leiden edition, 1074-1082.
269 Ibid., 1-43; Leiden edition 1073-1123. Oddly enough, this section comes after al-Ṭabarī’s description of the birth of Muḥammad and immediately precedes his relation of the encounter between Muḥammad and the monk, Bāhirā. The beginning of the section of al-Ṭabarī’s description of ‘Abd Allāh, including this quite lengthy report, can be found in full in the Appendix.
270 Ibid., 2-5; Leiden edition, 1074-78. This report is not the first in this section, but is the first that relates Muḥammad’s conception.
271 Ibid., 4; Leiden edition, 1076-77. She was not resident in Mecca, however, and the group of men traveled to Medina, only to be told that she was at Khaybar. They found her there and consulted with her about the appropriate course of action to be taken.
again cast arrows, but this time in order to determine how many camels are to be
sacrificed in 'Abd Allah's place. 'Abd al-Mu'ttalic agrees to this and the final count is
one hundred camels in place of the life of his son. Since the report reveals that the blood
money among Quraysh at that time was ten camels for one man, the implication here is
that 'Abd Allah was worth the value of ten men of his tribe.

Thus, 'Abd al-Mu'ttalib and 'Abd Allah are both shown as honorable men who
are favored by God. The older man is seen as intending to honor his word, even though
it is his favorite son that must die, while 'Abd Allah is aware of his impending death,
and yet does nothing to try to save himself. Their favor with God is revealed by the fact
that, while the arrows were being cast to determine the number of camels to be
sacrificed, 'Abd al-Mu'ttalib was said to have been standing in the middle of the Ka'ba,
praying to God. 272 Therefore, the number of camels to be sacrificed, signifying the value
of 'Abd Allah himself, was determined by God. Of course, the obvious Biblical parallel
cannot be ignored, and here Mu'ammad's grandfather and father are likened to Abraham
and Isaac, revealing their own importance even before Mu'ammad is born. 273 Therefore,
although they are pagan, both men are shown to be worthy ancestors of the Prophet.

The story, however, is not complete, and the true nature of 'Abd Allah's favor
with God is revealed at the very end of the report. Once the sacrifice is completed, 'Abd
al-Mu'ttalib immediately takes his son to be married. There is no break in the tale that

272 This is despite the fact that the arrows were being cast before the idol of the god, Hubal. See Watt's
comments on this topic in Watt and McDonald, Muhammed at Mecca, 2, note 4.
273 Elsewhere, al-Tabari notes the controversy over whether Abraham was supposed to have tried to
sacrifice Isaac or Isma'il, and comes to the conclusion that those scholars who argue in favor of Isaac are
SUNY Press, 1987), 82.
would make one think that any amount of time had passed since the camels were
sacrificed, and, indeed, the rhythm of the story is such that one can almost picture ‘Abd
al-Muṭṭalib leading his son by the hand out of the Ka‘ba where the camels had been
slaughtered, through the streets of Mecca. The rest of the report reads:

‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib left, taking his son ‘Abd Allāh by the hand. It is alleged that
he passed by a woman of the Banū Asad called Umm Qattāl bt. Nāwfall b. Asad
b. ‘Abd al-‘Uzza, the sister of Wāraqa b. Nāwfall b. Asad; she was by the Ka‘ba.
When she looked at his face she said, “Where are you going, ‘Abd Allāh?”
“With my father,” he said. She said, “I have for you as many camels as were
slaughtered for you, so sleep with me now.” “My father is with me,” he replied,
“and I cannot oppose his wishes or leave him.” ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib took him away
and brought him to Wāḥb b. ‘Abd Manāf b. Zuhra, who was the leading man of
the Banū Zuhra in age and eminence at that time, and the latter married him to
[his daughter] Āmina bt. Wāḥb, who was then the most excellent woman in
Quraysh as regards genealogy and status....

It is alleged that he consummated his marriage to her there as soon as he
married her, that he lay with her and that she conceived Muḥammad; then he left
her presence and came to the woman who had propositioned him, and said to her,
“Why do you not make the same proposition to me today which you made to me
yesterday?” She replied, “The light which was with you yesterday has left you,
and I have no need of you today.” She had heard [about this] from her brother
Wāraqa b. Nāwfall, who was a Christian and had studied the scriptures; he had
discovered that a prophet from the descendants of Ismā‘īl was to be [sent] to this
people; this had been one of the purposes of his study.274

The second report is one of two that appear to diverge from the archetype, and so
will be studied later. The third report originates with Ibn ‘Abbās, and reads:

When ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was taking ‘Abd Allāh to marry him to Āmina, they
passed by a female soothsayer from the tribe of Khath‘am called Fāṭima bt.
Murr, a convert to Judaism from the people of Tabāla, who had read the
scriptures and who saw light in his face. “Young man,” she said, “would you like
to lie with me now, and I will give you a hundred camels?” He replied,

As for unlawful relations, I would sooner die,
and as for lawful marriage, there can be none, as

274Watt and McDonald, Muhammad at Mecca, 5-6; Leiden edition, 1078-79. Translations of al-Ṭabarî’s
sīra/tāʾrikh are taken from the respective volumes of the English translation. Brackets in the sections
quoted here are as they appear in the published English translations.
I can clearly recognize.
So how can that be which you desire?

Then he said, “I am with my father and I cannot leave him.” His father took him and married him to Āmina bt. Wahb b. ‘Abd Manāf b. Zuḥra, and he stayed with her for three days. Then he left her, and when he passed by the Khath‘īmi woman he felt a desire to accept the proposition which she had made, and he asked her, “Would you like what you wanted before?” “Young man,” she said, “I am not, by God, a woman of questionable morals. I saw light in your face and wished it to be within me, but God willed that He should place it where He wished. What did you do after you left me?” He said, “My father married me to Āmina bt. Wahb and I stayed with her for three days.”

This is the one place in al-Ṭabarî’s reports of this event that even remotely refers to the Qur‘ān verse used later by Ibn Kathīr, Qur‘ān 6:124. Thus, the soothsayer, while not directly quoting the Qur‘ān, comes extremely close in her statement that God placed the light, i.e., the light of prophecy, where He willed. When ‘Abd Allāh tells her of his marriage to Āmina, the soothsayer recites two pieces of poetry in which she compares the light to that of the full moon and admits she wanted that light for herself, but that Āmina had taken it. It is with her poetry that the report ends.

These two reports reflect al-Ṭabarî’s rendering of the archetypal story of Muḥammad’s conception. ‘Abd Allāh is shown here to be valued, both by his family and by God, and to be a man who is able to control his lust long enough to be obedient to the wishes of his father. He is marked by a supernatural light that is apparently not visible to the general populace, but only to certain individual women. They offer

\[275\]Ibid., 7; Leiden edition, 1079-80.

\[276\]Although the verses from the Qur‘ān in this study are taken from the translation of ‘Abd Allāh Yūsuf ‘Afi, the translation of this verse by Arberry reads more closely to the woman’s statement: “And when a sign came to them, they said, ‘We will not believe until we are given the like of what God’s Messengers were given.’ God knows very well where to place His Message; and humiliation in God’s sight shall befall the sinners, and a terrible chastisement for what they devised.”

\[277\]Watt and McDonald, Muḥammad at Mecca, 7-8; Leiden edition, 1080-1081. Muḥammad is often compared to the full moon throughout the sīraʾta rīkh.
themselves to him, he refuses, and marries Amina, whereupon she conceives
Muḥammad, thus appearing to take the light into herself and proving her own favored
status. Thus, it is apparently not enough that both of Muḥammad’s parents have an
excellent lineage; the familial connections of the Prophet are shown here to have been
chosen by none other than God himself.

It is in the second and fourth report of this event that al-Ṭabarī diverges from the
archetype, possibly interjecting his own ideas about the story of Muḥammad’s
conception. This second report gives more specific information about ‘Abd Allāh’s
light, but in a slightly different context, in which ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib is absent entirely.
The report takes place sometime after ‘Abd Allāh married Amina, but before the
conception of Muḥammad. It is from Ibn Ishāq and states:

‘Abd Allāh paid a visit to a wife whom he had in addition to Amina bt. Wahb b.
‘Abd Manāf b. Zuhra. He had been working in clay and traces of the clay were
still on him, and when he invited her to lie with him she made him wait because
of this. He went out, performed his ablutions, washed off the clay which was on
him, and went to Amina’s quarters. He went in and lay with her, and she
conceived Muḥammad. Then he passed by this other woman and said, “Do you
wish to lie with me?” “No,” she replied. “When you passed by me before you
had a white blaze between your eyes. You invited me to lie with you and I
refused, so you went to Amina and she has taken it away.”

Here the report contains an inconsistency. Whereas at the beginning, the reporter claims
that the first wife only asked him to wait, the woman herself is now stating that she
refused him outright. The next section changes the story even further, but it is unclear
whether this is part of the original report, or a bit of commentary that has been added at
some point in the report’s transmission. It states:

\[\text{Ibid., 6; Leiden edition, 1079.}\]
They allege that this wife of his used to relate that when he passed by her he had
between his eyes something like the white blaze on a horse’s forehead, that she
invited him in the hope that he would lie with her, but that he refused and went
in to Āmina bt. Wahb and lay with her, as a result of which she conceived the
Messenger of God.\textsuperscript{279}

So, the first wife evolves from someone who simply wanted to wait for her husband to
be clean before having intercourse with him, to someone who refused him, to being the
one who was refused. Her status and that of ‘Abd Allāh are thus reversed through the
course of the report.\textsuperscript{280}

The last report having to do with the conception of Muḥammad does not refer to
a light or any other supernatural occurrence. It is a very brief report from al-Wāqiqî and
states:

‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was the handsomest of the men of Quraysh.
They told Āmina bt. Wahb of his handsomeness and his appearance and asked if
she would like to marry him, so she married him. He consummated his marriage
to her, and she conceived the Messenger of God. ‘Abd Allāh’s father sent him to
al-Madīna for provisions, where he died. When he was late in returning, ‘Abd al-
Muṭṭalib sent his son al-Ḥārith to look for him, but al-Ḥārith found that he had
died.\textsuperscript{281}

Of the four, this last report is the only one that does not include a supernatural element
in Muḥammad’s conception. Āmina is convinced to marry ‘Abd Allāh by her family’s
remarks about his good looks, Muḥammad is conceived, and story moves on to ‘Abd
Allāh’s death shortly thereafter. This is not the end of the matter, however, and

\textsuperscript{279}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{280}There is no discussion by al-Ṭabarî about this turn of events, but it certainly brings out many potential
issues, such as a wife’s right to refuse intercourse to her husband, as well as the notion that ‘Abd Allāh
himself, even with his wife’s recognition of the importance of the light he carried, was not irresistible to
women.
\textsuperscript{281}Ibid., 8; Leiden edition, 1081.
al-Ṭabari adds another report by al-Waqidi who disagrees with this last version of events. He argues:

This is an error. In our view the consensus of opinion concerning the marriage of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib is that which is related to us by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Zuhri - Umm Bakr bt. al-Miswar who said: ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib came with his son ‘Abd Allāh, seeking a wife for himself and one for his son; they were married at the same time. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib married Hāla bt. Uhayb b. ‘Abd Manāf b. Zuhra, and ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib married Amina bt. Wahb b. ‘Abd Manāf b. Zuhra.\footnote{Ibid.}

No mention is made here of Muḥammad’s conception, supernatural or otherwise, and the report appears simply to imply that ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and his son each married women from the same tribe at the same time.

Al-Ṭabari thus diverges from the archetypal image of Muḥammad’s conception in a number of important ways. In the story of ‘Abd Allāh’s other wife, he relates that Muḥammad was not conceived immediately after the marriage of Amina and ‘Abd Allāh. The timing of this archetypal conception, during their first sexual encounter, thus loses its significance and takes on an arbitrary tone. Also, the possibility that ‘Abd Allāh had other wives opens the door to the possibility of half-siblings for Muḥammad. If the light of prophecy came through ‘Abd Allāh, it could have passed to another child, thus potentially adding to the number of rivals for leadership of the community. The report from al-Waqidi, as well as the report responding to it, diverge from the archetype in that there is no supernatural significance for Muḥammad’s conception; he is conceived either due to the machinations of the young woman’s family, who convince her of ‘Abd Allāh’s good looks, or to the perceived convenience of his own family getting two brides at the same time, one each for father and son, although this last
report does not specifically mention the conception. Again, if Muḥammad’s lineage was not determined by God, or if the product of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s marriage to one of Āmina’s kinswomen had the same lineage, there would be no indication of Muḥammad’s future importance; indeed, he would be no different from other boys of his clan.

When taken as a whole, the story of Muḥammad’s conception, as related by al-Ṭabarî in his sīra/taʾrīkh, would seem to reveal an added element beyond adhering to or diverging from an archetype. Al-Ṭabarî shows that only three women could actually see the light in ‘Abd Allāh’s face, and these women each appear to represent a religious tradition that would eventually be shown as superseded by Islam, namely, Christianity, Judaism, and Arabian polytheism. Also, the conception story of the Prophet is fraught with sexual tension, complete with attempted seductions, and, with the offer of payment, apparent outright prostitution, since all three of the women discerned that the only way to attain the light for themselves was through sexual relations with ‘Abd Allāh. However, their efforts are for naught, since neither the women nor the religious traditions they seem to represent could either seduce or purchase their way into God’s favor, and the reports show that the conception of Muḥammad happened exactly as God had willed. Thus, al-Ṭabarî’s inclusion of all three reports could, indeed, be a literary device to reveal the perceived relation of Islam to the other religious traditions against which it was competing.
Al-Ṭabarī’s Tafsīr

Qur’ān 6:124 reads:

When there comes to them a Sign (from Allāh), they say: “We shall not believe until we receive one (exactly) like those received by Allāh’s messengers.” Allāh knoweth best where (and how) to carry out His mission. Soon will the wicked be overtaken by humiliation before Allāh, and a severe punishment, for all their plots.

In his exegesis of this verse, al-Ṭabarī does not mention the miracle of the light in ‘Abd Allāh’s face, nor does he mention Muḥammad’s conception. Instead, he focuses on the meaning of the verse itself, and this is quite typical of his tafsīr as a whole. He does, however, provide a vague contextualization for the verse, and states:

[The] unbelievers... said to the Prophet of God and his Companions: “We shall not believe... until God grants the wonders like those granted Moses from the parting of the sea, and Jesus from the revivification of the dead and healing of the blind and the lepers.”

This statement reveals that the group of unbelievers in this verse were familiar with the Biblical stories of the miracles of Moses and Jesus, and expected the same from the person claiming to be a prophet sent by the same God. Of course, this demand for a sign would have taken place after Muḥammad had received the Revelation and began to preach openly. Thus, it would have nothing to do with events that took place at his conception.

As for the part of the verse alluded to by the soothsayer in al-Ṭabarī’s sīra ta’rikh, “God knows best where to place His mission,” al-Ṭabarī reports, “Truly, the
signs of the prophets and messengers are not granted from men..."285 In other words, men do not provide signs, but these only come from God Himself. God continues to chastise the unbelievers by stating, "So I know the places [or ranks] of my messengers and to what people [they belong]...."286 This is the closest al-Ṭabarî comes to connecting the story of Muḥammad’s conception to Qur’ān 6:124.287 Just as the three women sought to obtain the light for themselves, attempting to take control away from God regarding the placement of the light of prophecy, the unbelievers in the verse claim that they are the ones who can tell a true prophet from a false one, and that the signs by which they can determine this are the miracles that are performed; thus, they, too, attempt to take power away from God by limiting the criteria that determines who is and is not a prophet. God responds that only He knows where and among whom He will send a prophet, implying that Muḥammad’s conception, as the combination of two specific bloodlines, was an act of the will of God. The light shining on ‘Abd Allāh’s face was merely the external indicator of the divine plan. Of all the individuals involved, only the Jewish soothsayer appears to be aware of the power of the divine will in the determination of events, but al-Ṭabari, for whatever reason, does not include her report in his Tafsīr.

It is only in the explanation of the last part of the verse, "Soon will the wicked be overtaken by humiliation before Allāh, and a severe punishment for all their plots," that al-Ṭabarî references a report from an authority other than himself.288 But here, too,

285Ibid.
286Ibid.
287Of course, he does not, at any time, specifically relate this verse to Muḥammad’s conception, but the themes prevalent in both the reports of the sīra/ta’rīkh and the tafsīr appear to be the same.
288Ibid.
he limits himself to an explanation of the grammar of the verse's wording and the meaning of the verse itself, rather than relate it to any historical event. There is no occasion of revelation for the verse in al-Ṭabarî's *Tafsîr*, nor does he provide any detailed chronology of when it was revealed or in response to what specific event. However, his commentary regarding the will of God in the placement of His messengers is thematically linked to the story of the conception of Muhammad, even if the link is rather less than direct. Therefore, of the two scholars examined here, Ibn Kathîr is alone in specifically linking Qur'ân 6:124 to the miracle surrounding the conception of Muḥammad, at least in his *ṣîra/tārîkh*.

*Ibn Kathîr's Sîra/Târîkh*

Ibn Kathîr's account of the pre-Revelation Meccan period includes roughly eighty-five separate supernatural occurrences, and, as in al-Ṭabarî, none of these are performed by Muḥammad himself. Whereas, for al-Ṭabarî, most of the reports of the supernatural for this period center upon the manipulation of the natural world, for Ibn Kathîr the overriding focus of his re-telling of this period of Muḥammad's life is that Muḥammad's prophethood had been foretold years before he received his first visit from Gabriel, in fact, years before he had even been born. Ibn Kathîr organizes his *ṣîra/târîkh* differently than does al-Ṭabarî for this event, and includes the story of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's vow to sacrifice one of his sons and his arrangement of the marriage between 'Abd Allâh and Āmina at the end of the first major part of his section on the

289 The combination of those reports that relate predictions of the coming of Islam itself with those that specifically describe the coming of a prophet, i.e., Muḥammad, comes to a total of about thirty-three. Reports relating supernatural events in nature number about seventeen.
story of the Prophet, which reports the events leading up to the actual lifetime of Muhammad himself. He begins the tale of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s attempted sacrifice with a report by Ibn Išḥaq, apparently the same report used by al-Ṭabarî, but abridges part of the report that appears to be given in full by the earlier scholar. Thus, like al-Ṭabarî, he begins his series of reports for this incident with one that fits the archetype.

While al-Ṭabarî related the two events in a single report, Ibn Kathîr gives the archetypal account of the marriage of ‘Abd Allâh and Āmina in a separate section from that of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s attempts to sacrifice his son. As in al-Ṭabarî’s sīra/tâ’rîkh, the section contains four reports that deal with the conception of Muḥammad, but unlike al-Ṭabarî’s account, all four reports contain elements of the supernatural. Three of these appear to follow the archetype, while the fourth diverges from it significantly. He begins with a report from Ibn Išḥaq, again without any further isnâd, and this is the same report found in al-Ṭabarî that relates the attempt by Umm Qattâl to seduce ‘Abd Allâh. The account is related much as it was in al-Ṭabarî, but Ibn Kathîr inserts his own comments, first, that her offer was probably one of marriage, rather than seduction, presumably because she offered him a hundred camels to replace the ones that had been sacrificed, and two, the fact that Muḥammad was conceived by ‘Abd Allâh and Āmina, as opposed to Umm Qattâl, was the will of God. He states, “So God made him of the finest and most noble lineage, as the Almighty put it, in the Qur’ân, ‘And God knows

291Ibid., vol. 2, 248; LeGassick, vol. 1, 125. He begins the report simply with “Ibn Išḥaq said.” The part of the report left out by Ibn Kathîr is the section that explains in detail how the early Meccans used the casting arrows at the idol of the god Hubal in the Ka’ba. Watt and McDonald, Muḥammad at Mecca, 3-4; Leiden edition, 1075-1076.
293Ibid., vol. 2, 249; LeGassick, vol. 1, 127-8. The report may actually be a continuation of the one by Ibn Išḥaq in the earlier section, but Ibn Kathîr treats it as a separate report altogether.
best where to place His prophethood." Thus, Ibn Kathir directly relates the
conception of Muḥammad to Qurʾān 6:124. He goes on in a second report, also from Ibn
Iṣḥāq, to add poetry spoken by the woman, and he states:

And Umm Qattāl bt. Nawfal said in the poetry she composed because she did not
get what she wanted, and that is what al-Bayhaqī transmitted from Yūnus b.
Bukayr on the authority of Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq, may God have mercy on him:
And take the Banū Zuḥra where they were
and Amina who bore a boy
She saw al-Mahdī when he mounted her
and a light that preceded him, ahead
to what she said:
So all creation were hoping for him, together
he leads the people rightly-guided, an Imām
Allāh shaped him from a light, purified him
so his glow took from us the gloom
And that is the work of your Lord who singled him out
whether he would move ahead one day or stay
So he guides the people of Mecca after faithlessness
enjoining thereafter the fast.295

The poetry has obviously been abbreviated, and this may have been the form in which
Ibn Kathir received the report; so, the reasons for the omission of part of the poem is
unknown. Again, we see the sexual aspect of the miracle in the fact that the light could
only be transferred through intercourse, as well as the mystical aspect of the light motif
itself, but Ibn Kathir makes no comment about the poem’s possible meaning.

The third report continues the archetypal story, and in it we find the tale of the
Jewish soothsayer, who, like Umm Qattāl, attempts to seduce ‘Abd Allāh while he is on
his way to being married to Amina.296 This report is, again, basically identical to that

294Ibid., vol. 2, 249; LeGassick, vol. 1, 128.
295Ibid., vol. 2, 249-50; LeGassick, vol. 1, 128. While this report could be counted as a simple addition to
the previous report, the fact that Ibn Kathir gives a fuller ʾismāʿīd for it reveals that he treated it as a
separate report.
296Ibid., vol. 2, 250-1; LeGassick, Vol. 1, 128-129. The text of the report is the same as that in al-Ṭabarī,
but the ʾismāʿīd is different.
found in al-Ṭabarî, quoted above. Ibn Kathîr makes no comment about this report, even though the soothsayer makes the same offer of replacement camels for those who were sacrificed as had Umm Qattâl, and the same statement that appears to quote part of Qur'ān 6:124 that we saw in al-Ṭabarî, which the later scholar cites, rather, in relation to the story of Umm Qattâl. So, the possibility exists that his comments regarding Umm Qattâl’s offer as being one of marriage and his connection of Qur’ān 6:124 to the first report, despite better evidence for such a connection in the report relating the attempts of the Jewish soothsayer, reveal that Ibn Kathîr may have favored the first report over the others.

Ibn Kathîr ends this section with a report originating from Ibn ‘Abbâs, which he cites from Abû Nu‘aym’s (d. 430/1038) Dalâ’il al-Nubûwa, and it is this report that diverges from the archetype.297 He states:

Truly ‘Abd al-Muţtalib came to Yemen in the journey of the winter, then he took up lodgings with a learned man of the Jews. He said: “So, one of the men of the people of the monastery - meaning the people of the book - said to me: ‘O ‘Abd al-Muţtalib, will you permit me to look at part of you?’ I said, ‘Yes, if it is not the genitals.’ Then he opened one of my nostrils, and he looked in it, then he looked in the other. Then he said, ‘I see that in one of your hands is kingship and in the other prophethood, but truly we supported that in the Banû Zuhra, so how is that?’ I said, ‘I do not know.’ He said, ‘Do you have a shâghâd?’ I said, ‘And what is the shâghâd?’ He said, ‘A wife.’ I said, ‘Not at the present time.’ He said, ‘Then when you return, marry from among them.’” So, ‘Abd al-Muţtalib returned. Then he married Hâla bt. Wahh b. ‘Abd Manâf b. Zuhra and she gave birth to Ḥamza and Ṣâfiya, then he married ‘Abd Allâh b. ‘Abd al-Muţtalib to Amina bt. Wahh, and she gave birth to the Messenger of God (ṢAAS). Then

297 Whereas sîra/tâ’rîkh relates the life of Muḥammad within the larger framework of universal history, all in chronological order, and tafsîr includes some description of the life of Muḥammad in an attempt to explain the text of the Qur’ān, Abû Nu‘aym’s Dalâ’il al-Nubûwa belongs to that genre which relates reports about the supernatural signs, or proofs, of Muḥammad’s prophethood. Al-Ṭabarî intended to write his own work in this field, but it was either never written, never finished, or was simply lost completely. Rosenthal, General Introduction, 88-9.
Quraysh said, when ‘Abd Allāh was married to Āmina, ‘fūlajī,’ meaning ‘Abd Allāh was successful and got the better of his father, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.298

This report diverges both from the archetype and from the final report in al-Ṭabarī, despite being remarkably similar to the latter. Although coming from a different source, claiming to originate with Ibn ‘Abbās and following a chain that does not include al-Waqīdī or any of the other authorities listed by al-Ṭabarī, it contains both important similarities and important differences from the report related by the earlier scholar. Both reports share the basic details of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and ‘Abd Allāh marrying women from the same tribe. However, in Ibn Kathīr’s report, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s marriage comes not at the same time as that of ‘Abd Allāh and Āmina, but years earlier, before ‘Abd Allāh himself was born. The two women involved are at least half-sisters in Ibn Kathīr’s account, although separated by many years, but are only cousins in al-Ṭabarī’s. Also, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s motives are supernaturally based and appear somewhat self-serving. He marries solely in order to gain the power and prophethood that was foretold. Therefore, we have an element of the supernatural in a report by Ibn Kathīr, which is very similar to a report in al-Ṭabarī that has none.299 This report diverges from the archetypal story of ‘Abd Allāh refusing seduction and marrying and impregnating Āmina in the same way as does the report found in al-Ṭabarī; however, by adding the supernatural element, this report appears somewhat rehabilitated. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, by marrying both himself and his son to women from

299Since this is obviously not from the same source as the report in al-Ṭabarī, we do not here have a clear example of adding material to a previously existing report. However, the fact remains that in al-Ṭabarī, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s marriage to a woman of the Banū Zuhra had nothing supernatural or unusual about it, whereas in Ibn Kathīr it does.
this clan to fulfill a prophecy, removes the element of the earlier report that detracted from the supernatural aspect of Muḥammad’s conception. So, although the report still diverges from the archetype, it also continues the archetype’s theme of Divine intervention in the genealogy of the Prophet.

The most important element in Ibn Kathīr’s relation of the story of Muḥammad’s conception seems to be the presence of the supernatural in all of the reports given. Whereas al-Ṭabarī allows for a report that includes merely a mundane reason for Muḥammad’s conception, ‘Abd Allāh’s good looks, Ibn Kathīr does not. This may mean that, despite his inclusion of the report about ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s supernatural expectations of his own marriage into the Banū Zuhra, the story of Muḥammad’s life was actually beginning to close in on itself by the time of Ibn Kathīr. His exclusion of reports not indicating a supernatural element in Muḥammad’s conception indicates the possibility that the mundane aspect of the story was no longer seen as viable and that, for the community of believers in Ibn Kathīr’s time, Muḥammad’s conception could only occur under supernatural circumstances.

*Ibn Kathīr’s Tafsīr*

As with the exegesis of Qur’ān 6:124 by al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr at no point overtly references the conception of Muḥammad. He does, however, join it to the previous verse, 6:123, and both verses state:

Thus have We placed leaders in every town, its wicked men, to plot (and burrow) therein: but they only plot against their own souls, and they perceive it not. When there comes to them a Sign (from Allāh), they say: “We shall not believe until we receive one (exactly) like those received by Allāh’s messengers.” Allāh
knoweth best where (and how) to carry out His mission. Soon will the wicked be overtaken by humiliation before Allāh, and a severe punishment for all their plots.

Unlike al-Ṭabari, however, he does directly reference Muḥammad’s genealogy, and so the theme, at least, of the conception story can be found more directly in his explanation of the verse quoted in his sīra/ta’rīkh. The structure of his exegesis includes citations of several other verses of the Qur’ān, explanations of the meanings of Qur’ān 6:123-4, and, unlike al-Ṭabari, reports from various other authorities.300 He does not include in the tafsīr of these two verses an occasion of revelation, but does make a brief reference to the meeting between Muḥammad’s uncle, Abū Sufyān, and the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, and it is in this section that Ibn Kathīr comes closest to connecting this verse to the topic of the conception of Muḥammad.

In his commentary, he argues that the unbelievers claimed that they would only believe in the message Muḥammad was preaching if they received the message directly from God, or at least from someone more important than Muḥammad. He states:

They did this although they admitted to his virtue, honorable lineage, respectable ancestry, and the purity of his household and his good breeding and his upbringing.... So that truly they used to call him amongst themselves, before that was revealed to him, al-Amīn.301

Thus, unlike al-Ṭabari’s exegesis, which has the unbelievers demanding a miracle like those performed by previous prophets, Ibn Kathīr argues that they questioned God’s choice of messengers. They wanted the message to come either from God directly or from someone with a higher social status than Muḥammad. Ibn Kathīr comments above that both his reputation and his lineage were already recognized as excellent by the

301Ibid., vol. 3, 694. Al-Amīn means honest or trustworthy.
Meccans, so they had no real reason to complain about his choice as Messenger of God. By interpreting the verse in this way, Ibn Kathîr ties it more closely to the story of Muḥammad’s conception, in which the Prophet’s lineage appears to have been chosen by God Himself.

Ibn Kathîr continues his exegesis of this verse by relating a different historical setting, the meeting between Abû Sufyân and the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, while maintaining the thematic continuity of his explanation. He states:

And the chief of the unbelievers Abû Sufyân recognized that when Heraclius, king of the Rûm asked him: “And how is his genealogy among you?” He said: “He has among us a (good) genealogy.” He [Heraclius] said: “Did you suspect him of lying before he said what he said?” He said: “No.”

Ibn Kathîr adds his own comments on this exchange by stating, “The report of his power was such that the king of the Rûm judged by the sanctity of his attributes... the truthfulness of His prophet and the veracity of what he brought.” In other words, the Christian king of the Byzantines recognized Muḥammad as a prophet of God even before the Meccans, and did so, in part, due to the excellence of his lineage.

Ibn Kathîr goes on to relate reports that discuss the lineage of Muḥammad and these, in combination with the reference to Heraclius above, are how Ibn Kathîr links his tatśîr of this verse to Muḥammad’s conception. For, not only does he quote this verse in the section of his sîra ta’rîkh that covers the conception of Muḥammad, he also quotes it in the very next section, which is the beginning of his Book of the Life of the Messenger

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302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
of God.304 This section begins with a treatment of Muḥammad’s lineage and is thus thematically linked to Ibn Kathīr’s treatment of the conception story. In this later section, though, it is not the conception of Muḥammad that provides the story around the verse, rather, as in the tafsīr, the setting is the conversation between Heraclius and Abū Sufyān. Thus, the correlation between the contents of this part of the sīra/tārīkh and the tafsīr for this verse appear to reflect that Ibn Kathīr’s Qurʾān citation regarding the conception of Muḥammad may have been viewed by him as less important than its inclusion in the story of Heraclius. What appears more likely, however, is the possibility that it served as a literary device to connect the two events in his sīra/tārīkh. This possibility would certainly seem to shed new light on the relationship between sīra and tafsīr, although it does not necessarily mean that every citation of the Qurʾān in the sīra or sīra/tārīkh was placed by the author for literary purposes, but in this instance and for this author, it is the possibility that makes the most sense.305

To sum up, then, the archetypal story of Muḥammad’s conception as told by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in their sīra/tārīkhīs appears to show that ʿAbd Allāh was favored by God with a light that only certain individuals could see. Either through his own fortitude or divine intervention, he circumvents attempts by these individuals to seduce him, and passes on this light to the child created with his wife, ʿĀmina. The archetype is changed by al-Ṭabarī in two ways: first, he relates a report wherein ʿAbd Allāh is shown

304Ibn Kathīr, Al-Bidāya wa’l-Nihāya, vol. 2, 252. It is unclear whether the section titles as found in the edited text are originally from Ibn Kathīr or were added by a later editor or copyist of his work. In either case, Ibn Kathīr is still connecting the conception of Muhammad and Qurʾān 6:124 with Abū Sufyān’s interview with Heraclius and discussions about Muhammad’s genealogy.
305Although Rubin and Raven both appear to argue for the primacy of either the sīra or the tafsīr for many of the stories of Muḥammad’s life, their arguments reflect the quest for origins rather than the issues studied here.
to have another wife besides Amina and that the conception of Muhammad takes place at a time other than the consummation of their marriage, and second, he allows for a report that has absolutely no supernatural element at all, and that relates the conception of Muhammad in a much more worldly, rather than other-worldly, fashion. These changes to the archetype appear to reveal that al-Tabari did not necessarily need Muhammad’s conception to have taken place on the couple’s wedding night, nor did he need for this to have been the first and only marriage for both individuals. It also seems to show that the supernatural element, although outweighing the mundane in the number of reports for this incident, was not seen as the only possibility for Muhammad’s conception. Therefore, al-Tabari’s version of the story seems to allow for a wider variety of possibilities regarding the conception of the Prophet. Ibn Kathir, on the other hand, changes the archetype in a way that appears to limit these possibilities. Ibn Kathir does not include the report of ‘Abd Allah’s other wife, nor does he relate the report that excludes the supernatural aspect of the story. Rather, he adds a report that changes the setting of the story away from ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s aborted attempted to sacrifice his youngest son, and instead shows the patriarch getting married in response to a Jewish prophecy. Thus it would appear that, for Ibn Kathir, the story of Muhammad’s conception had to be related to a supernatural event and, to a lesser extent, had to take place on the wedding night of ‘Abd Allah and Aminah, and that these two should have had no other spouses or offspring.

The tafsir works of both al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir in relation to Qur’an 6:124, while not directly citing the story of Muhammad’s conception, are at least thematically
connected to this incident. As in their *ṣira/taʾrikh*, al-Ṭabarî’s connection in his exegesis to the conception of Muḥammad is less direct than that of Ibn Kathîr. He does, however, place this verse and the conception story in the broader theme of the actions of God’s will in human history, and this connects back to his purpose for writing the *History* as a whole, as stated in his Introduction. Only God determines where and among whom He will place a prophet. Human beings, whether they be the women in the *ṣira/taʾrikh* or the demanding unbelievers in the *tafsîr*, do not get to make that determination. Ibn Kathîr, however, directly links his explanation of the verse to Muḥammad’s genealogy, thus making a stronger connection to Muḥammad’s conception story as found in his *ṣira/taʾrikh*. His explanation that the Meccans specifically asked for God’s message to be related through someone more important than Muḥammad ties in with the claims for the excellence of Muḥammad’s lineage, which his *ṣira/taʾrikh* shows as having been chosen by none other than God Himself. He adds to this explanation by relating the story of the meeting between Abû Sufyân and Heraclius in his *Tafsîr*, wherein the Christian emperor is convinced of Muḥammad’s status as prophet after Abû Sufyân admits that his lineage is a good one. So, although there is no element of the supernatural in either work of exegesis for this verse, the authors’ explanations of the verse do coincide with the broader themes associated with the story, namely the direct action of God in the location of the light of prophecy.
Chapter Four
The Archetype of Muḥammad in the Post-Revelation Meccan Period: The Politicization of the Supernatural in the Publication of Muḥammad’s Mission

After Muḥammad receives the first revelation, the story of his life changes dramatically. No longer do we have a neat division between supernatural and mundane archetypes, since his life during the roughly twelve year period leading up to his emigration to Medina in 622 AD appears to have been completely taken over by his role as prophet. The division is still there, but the line between the two halves of his life has become somewhat blurred. Whereas the story of the early period of his life revealed how he succeeded despite humble beginnings, the reports of this period show a marked decline in his mundane role as respected merchant, while at the same time revealing the emergence and continued growth of his status as prophet. It is during this period that Muḥammad himself begins to display increasing control over elements of the supernatural, performing some miracles rather than having all of them performed on his behalf. The miracle reports that are the focus of this chapter relate his miraculous multiplication of a small amount of food and drink to feed his extended family when he announces his mission. The reports relate that Muḥammad preached privately for roughly three years after the beginning of the Revelation, but then began to preach openly to his fellow tribesmen. The archetype of Muḥammad for this event contains two elements: a public announcement that includes no miracle, and a private announcement for members of his extended family that does include a miraculous event.306 Unlike the reports surrounding Muḥammad’s conception, this section of the

306 It remains unclear what, if any, significance should be attached to the apparent exclusivity of the miracle story in this section. The public pronouncement of God’s message would seem to have been the perfect time for a public miracle that could have been witnessed by all present, but instead the miracle is
story is connected to numerous verses of the Qur’ān by both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr and the story itself appears in both works of tafsīr. The reports of this section also differ in that neither of our authors diverges seriously from the archetype, but that each appears to have his own idea about what the archetype means in each of the two genres examined. The overall story of this event, by the time of Ibn Kathīr, appears to have taken on a serious religio-political meaning that he apparently could not ignore and found it necessary to refute. In his Tafsīr, he also adds a miracle story not found in the sīrat al-ṣa‘ība that seems to add an element of folk magic to the exegesis of the Qur’ān, as well as being an indication of the belief that later Muslims could enjoy some of the same supernatural benefits as the Prophet.

The story of Muḥammad’s mundane existence in Mecca between the first Revelation and the migration to Medina is one of sharp decline. While the new religious movement that became Islam was kept private, the reports relate that Muḥammad had no serious problems with his fellow Meccans. However, once he began to openly preach a message that opposed their traditional religious and social values, he faced increasingly stiff opposition. This opposition became so severe that he sent some of his followers to live in Abyssinia, while those who remained were forced to endure a boycott whereby they could neither trade with nor marry into the majority of the clans.
of Mecca. While the boycott eventually ended, the opposition did not, and Muḥammad was forced to look for another place to live. Finally, members of the Arab tribes in the oasis city of Medina came to him, requesting that he act as arbitrator in their civil war and agreed to take in his followers as well. He accepted and the move to Medina began.

Alongside this story of rejection and humiliation, however, is another story whereby Muḥammad begins to perform the miracles that are intended to prove the truth of his preaching. While the Qurʾān itself is supposed to be the ultimate miracle, the story of his life during this period contains several reports of supernatural activity. God still performs most of the miracles during this period, but Muḥammad now plays a slightly more active role. Muḥammad is said to have been taken up into heaven, where he is presented to the various patriarchs who welcome him into their company. He multiplies a small amount of food and drink so that it satisfies a large number of people. The boycott written against him is miraculously devoured by worms. Muḥammad preaches to and converts some of the jinn while returning from his failed trip to al-Ṭāʾīf. Satan begins to take an active interest in him by encouraging the

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Quraysh in their decision to kill him. Gabriel warns Muḥammad against the assassination plot. And, finally, Muḥammad escapes assassination by throwing dust on his assailants’ heads and quoting part of the Qurʾān, making him invisible to them. Thus, while the mundane story of his life for this period would seem to be one of defeat, the supernatural story-line appears to reveal just the opposite, rather, indicating an increasing control over the supernatural world, as well as over an increasingly large number of followers.

*Al-Ṭabari’s Sīra/Taʾrīkh*

Overall, al-Ṭabari relates reports for some seventeen supernatural events for this period. There is no single type of miracle story that dominates the others in this section, but there is an increasing amount of involvement in Muḥammad’s life by such supernatural entities as the angels, Satan, and the jinn. The event discussed here, the miraculous multiplication of food and drink to feed a large number of people, is an obvious allusion to the same type of miracle said to have been performed by Jesus. The section of al-Ṭabari’s *sīra/taʾrīkh* that discusses the publication of Muḥammad’s mission contains six reports, two of which, the longest, include elements of the

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316 Watt and McDonald, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, 142; Leiden edition, 1231-2; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 3, 176. While I do not include the reception of the various verses of the Qurʾān in this study, I do include any communication or activity between Muḥammad and the angels that does not relate to the act of the Revelation itself.
318 Matthew 15:32-39 and Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-10. The Biblical elements of Muḥammad’s Meccan period, including the publication of Muḥammad’s mission, have already been ably studied by Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 127-48. His focus is not on the miracle story itself, but rather on the themes of declaration and persecution.
Unlike the section on Muḥammad’s conception, al-Ṭabari begins his treatment of this event with an introduction that includes two Qurʾān citations, namely, Qurʾān 15:94 and 26:214-216.\textsuperscript{320}

The introduction appears to contain three parts. The first is the statement that the command to publicize God’s message came roughly three years after the beginning of the Revelation, and is followed by the citation of Qurʾān 15:94:

Three years after the commencement of his mission, God commanded His Prophet to proclaim the divine message which he had received, to declare it publicly to the people, and to summon them to it. God said to him: “So proclaim that which you are commanded, and withdraw from the polytheists.”\textsuperscript{321}

The second relates how Muḥammad had at first preached only in private, but was forced to be more overt by God’s command as found in Qurʾān 26:214-216:

In the previous three years of his mission, until he was commanded to summon people openly to God, he had kept his preaching secret and hidden. Then God revealed: “And warn your tribe of near kindred, and lower your wing (in kindness) to those disbelievers who follow you. And if they (your kinsfolk) disobey you, say: ‘I am innocent of what they do.’”\textsuperscript{322}

The introduction then concludes with the seemingly unrelated tale of how the first blood was spilled between Muslims and non-Muslims:

When the Messenger of God’s Companions prayed, they went to the ravines and concealed themselves from their fellow tribesmen. Once while Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ and a number of the Messenger of God’s Companions were in one of the ravines of Mecca, a group of polytheists suddenly appeared before them as they were praying, expressed their disapproval and reproached the believers for what they were doing. Finally, they came to blows, and Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ struck

\textsuperscript{319}Watt and McDonald, \textit{Muḥammad at Mecca}, 88-92; Leiden edition, 1169-1174.

\textsuperscript{320}Ibid., 88; Leiden edition, 1169. Most of the text of the introduction itself comes from Ibn Isḥāq, but al-Ṭabari makes sufficient changes to it to treat it as part of his own work.

\textsuperscript{321}Ibid., 88; Leiden edition, 1169.

\textsuperscript{322}Ibid.; Leiden edition, 1169.
one of the polytheists with a camel's jawbone and split his head open. This was the first blood shed in the time of Islam.\footnote{Ibid., 88-89; Leiden edition, 1169-70.}

Although this threefold division would appear to indicate that the introduction was at first composed of three separate parts, a closer reading reveals that the second section actually builds on the first and helps move the story along. The first establishes the chronology of the event, while the second gives the appropriate background information that actually leads into the final section of the introduction. Thus, as in Ibn Kathîr's use of Qur'ân 6:124 in the conception story of Muḥammad, al-Ṭabarî here appears to be using the citation of Qur'ân verses as a literary device to move from one section of his introduction to the next. Only after this does al-Ṭabarî relate reports that discuss the actual publication of the message given to Muḥammad.

The archetype of Muḥammad for this event appears to reveal that he was actually given two separate commands to perform two separate deeds. The first, as indicated by the first section of al-Ṭabarî's introduction and by the citation of Qur'ân 15:94, was the command to preach openly to the Meccans in general. The second, as indicated in the second section of the introduction and by the citation of Qur'ân 26:214-216, was the command to warn his extended family against their continued disbelief.\footnote{The verses cited actually only say to admonish one's family, but they do not specify against what, nor do they indicate possible consequences.} The introduction then ends with the story of the first blood spilled, which could serve two different functions in the story. It could either supply a more mundane reason for the coming hostility of the Meccans, since it was one of their own who was wounded, or
it could be seen as a literary foreshadowing of the later conflicts between the two groups.

The section following the introduction contains a number of reports that describe how Muḥammad fulfilled both the public and private aspects of God’s commands, thus providing detailed examples of the archetype. These reports also appear to be broken down into thirds, and so the structure of this section mirrors that of the introduction.

The first two reports contain the occasion of revelation for Qurʾān 111:1-5 and a quote from 34:46.325 The second two reports contain a detailed account of how Muḥammad announced his mission to a gathering of his kin, and was able to feed all of them with just a small amount of meat and milk.326 The last two reports are extremely brief accounts similar to the first two.327 To examine these reports in relation to how they follow the archetype, we will first study the public preaching of Muḥammad’s mission.

The first pair of reports are relatively short and straightforward, depicting how Muḥammad carried out the command to publicize his mission. The first report originates from Ibn ʿAbbās and relates:

One day the Messenger of God mounted al-Šafā and called out, “Beware this morning!” Quraysh gathered around him and said, “What is the matter?” Then he said, “If I were to tell you that the enemy would come upon you this morning

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325Ibid., 89; Leiden edition, 1170. Qurʾān 111:1-5 reads: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he! No profit to him from all his wealth, and all his gains! Burnt soon will he be in a Fire of blazing Flame! His wife shall carry the (crackling) wood - as fuel! - A twisted rope of palm leaf fibre round her (own) neck!” The second report discusses Muḥammad’s actions in response to Qurʾān 26:214-216. Both reports contain a quotation from Qurʾān 34:46, which reads: “Say: ‘I do admonish you on one point: that ye do stand up before Allāh - (it may be) in pairs, or (it may be) singly - and reflect (within yourselves): Your Companion is not possessed: he is no less than a Warner to you, in face of a terrible penalty.’” Only the last segment of this verse is quoted in the report, somewhat loosely, as Muhammad identifies himself as the Warner. Since some of these reports relate Muḥammad’s reaction to receiving Qurʾān 26:214-216, rather than the events leading up to their revelation, they are not here technically considered the occasion for the revelation of these verses.

326Watt and McDonald, tr., Muhammad at Mecca, 89-92; Leiden edition, 1171-1173.
327Ibid., 92; Leiden edition, 1174.
or this evening, would you believe me?” “Certainly,” they replied. He said, “I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible doom.” Then Abū Lahab said, “May you perish! Did you call us together for this?” Then God revealed: “The power of Abū Lahab will perish and he will perish” ...reciting to the end of the sûra.\textsuperscript{328}

The second report, also from Ibn ʿAbbās, contains more detailed information, and has Muḥammad specifically reacting to the revelation of Qur‘ān 26:214-216:

When God revealed the verse, “and warn your tribe of near kindred,” the Messenger of God went out, mounted al-Ṣafā, and called out, “Beware this morning!” Some said, “Who is that calling out?” and others said, “It is Muḥammad.” Then he said “Banū so-and-so, Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Banū ‘Abd Manāf!” They gathered round him, and he said, “If I were to tell you that horsemen were coming out at the foot of that mountain, would you believe me?” They replied, “We have never known you to tell a lie.” Then he said, “I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible doom.” Abū Lahab said, “May you perish! Did you only bring us together for this?” Then the following sûra was revealed: “The power of Abū Lahab will perish, and he will perish...” reciting to the end of the sûra.\textsuperscript{329}

This report gives not only the names of the groups called, but also relates the conversations that took place both among the people and between them and Muḥammad. The fifth report, through Ibn Iṣḥāq, also provides Muḥammad’s reaction to the revelation of Qur‘ān 26:214-216:

When the verse “and warn your tribe of near kindred” was revealed to the Messenger of God, he rose up in the valley and said, “Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Banū ‘Abd Manāf, Banū Qusayy!” Then he named the various groups of Quraysh, clan by clan, until he had come to the last of them, and said, “I summon you to God and warn you of his punishment.”\textsuperscript{330}

These reports seem to show a variety of possibilities for the archetype of Muḥammad’s public preaching. While the second and fifth reports state that Muḥammad’s call to his fellow tribesmen took place in response to a Qur‘ānic command, the first gives no such

\textsuperscript{328}Ibid., 89; Leiden edition, 1170.
\textsuperscript{329}Ibid.; Leiden edition, 1170.
\textsuperscript{330}Ibid., 92; Leiden edition, 1173-74.
indication and begins with the more literary formula "one day." However, it is the two reports that include the Qur'ān verse that link best with the theme of the introduction, which claims that Muḥammad began his public preaching in direct response to a Qur'ānic command. Again, it appears that al-Ṭabarānī is presenting more than one possible story for the beginning of Muḥammad’s public preaching.

The other aspect of the archetype is the more private meeting between Muḥammad and his extended family for the purpose of warning them against disbelief, and this is related in the third report of this section, originating with ‘Āfī and coming through Ibn Iṣḥāq. The report states:

When the verse “and warn your tribe of near kindred” was revealed to the Messenger of God, he called me and said to me, “‘Āfī, God has commanded me to warn my tribe of near kindred. I was troubled by this, for I knew that when I broached the matter to them they would respond in a way which I would not like. I kept silent until Gabriel came to me and said, ‘Muḥammad, if you do not do what you are commanded, your Lord will punish you.’ So prepare a measure of wheat for us, add a leg of mutton to it, fill a large bowl of milk for us, and then assemble the Bānū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib for me so that I may speak to them and tell them what I have been commanded to tell them.”

I did what he had told me to do and then called them to him. At that time they numbered forty men, more or less, including his uncles Abū Ṭālib, Hamzah, al-‘Abbas, and Abū Lahab. When they had gathered together, he called on me to bring the food which I had prepared. I brought it, and when I put it down the Messenger of God took a piece of meat, broke it with his teeth, and threw it towards the dish. Then he said, “Take, in the name of God.” They ate until they could eat no more, and yet the food was as it had been, except for where their hands had been. I swear by God, in whose hand ‘Āfī’s soul rests, that a single man of them could have eaten the amount of food which I put before all of them. Then he said, “Give them something to drink,” so I brought them that bowl and they drank from it until they had drunk their fill, and I swear by God that one man could have drunk that amount.

When the Messenger of God wanted to speak to them, Abū Lahab forestalled him and said, “Your host has long since bewitched you.” Then they dispersed without the Messenger of God speaking to them. On the following day he said to me, “‘Āfī, this man forestalled me by saying what you heard him

31Ibid., 89; Leiden edition, 1170.
saying so that the people dispersed before I could speak to them. Prepare the same food for us as you did yesterday, and assemble them here.”

I did this, assembled them, and brought the food to them when he called me. He did as he had done the previous day, and they ate until they could eat no more. Then he said, “Bring the bowl,” and they drank until they could drink no more. Then he spoke to them, saying, “Banū ‘Abd al-Mu'tṭalib, I know of no young man among the Arabs who has brought his people something better than what I have brought to you. I bring you the best of this world and the next, for God has commanded me to summon you to him. Which of you will aid me in this matter, so that he will be my brother, my agent, and my successor among you?”

They all held back, and although I was the youngest and the most bleary-eyed, pot-bellied, and spindly-legged of them, I said, “I will be your helper, Prophet of God.” He put his hand on the back of my neck and said, “This is my brother, my agent, and my successor among you, so listen to him and obey him.” They rose up laughing and saying to Abū Ṭālib, “He has commanded you to listen to your son and obey him!”

Thus, what began as a simple miracle story ends as an apparent justification for the primacy of ‘Alī. Al-Ṭabarī makes no comment here, but instead moves directly into the next report.

It is the fourth report of this section that appears to deviate from the archetype of the private meeting, and this is due to its much more overt political theme, as well as the fact that it leaves out all mention of the revelation of Qur'ān 26:214-216, thus taking away Muḥammad’s supernatural motivation for calling the meeting. Instead, it relates:

A man said to ‘Alī, “Commander of the Faithful, how did you become the heir of your cousin to the exclusion of your paternal uncle?” ‘Alī said, “Ahem” three times until everybody craned their necks and pricked up their ears, and then said, “The Messenger of God assembled the whole of the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, including his own closest relatives, to eat a year-old lamb and to drink some milk. He also prepared a quantity of wheat for them, and they ate until they were full, while the food remained as it was, as though it had not been touched. Then he called for a drinking cup and they drank until they could drink no more,

332Ibid., 89-91; Leiden edition, 1170-73.
while the drink remained as though it had not been touched and they had not drunk.

"Then he said, ‘Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I have been sent to all men in general and to you in particular. Now that you have seen what you have seen, which of you will swear an oath of allegiance to me to become my brother, my companion and my inheritor?’ Not one of them rose up, so I stood before him, although I was the youngest there. He said, ‘Sit down.’ He repeated the words he had spoken three times, while I would rise up and he would say to me, ‘Sit down.’ On the third occasion, he struck his hand on mine. In this way I became the heir to my cousin to the exclusion of my uncle." 333

The question of the man in the report, how ‘Ali came to have precedence over his uncle, meaning apparently al-'Abbās, would thus appear to support an interpretation that would be a direct justification for the claims of the ‘Alids over those of the ‘Abbāsids, since the latter claimed Muḥammad’s uncle, al-'Abbās, as their progenitor. ‘Ali’s response is certainly intended to be heard by a wide audience, since the report has him clearing his throat repeatedly, thus gaining the attention of all present before responding. 334 However, ‘Ali’s own role in the story has changed dramatically. Instead of being the one to prepare the food and drink, and to summon the men, in this report, Muḥammad performs all of these functions himself. ‘Ali is simply one among the many other men who were in attendance. Thus, his role has changed from that of a youth who would be expected to perform such tasks for the Prophet, to a young man important enough in his clan to be included in the summons. Muḥammad’s comments to his kinsmen that he was sent to them specifically seems to support arguments for the elevated status of the Prophet’s family. While the archetypal story of this meeting did have Muḥammad claiming a close connection to ‘Ali, there was no overt political

333Ibid., 91-2; Leiden edition, 1173.
message. Al-Ṭabarî diverges from this archetype by providing a report that spells out in no uncertain terms the religio-political meaning later given to this event.

But does this mean that al-Ṭabarî supported the arguments of the Shi’a?

Certainly, this cannot be ruled out as a possibility. Al-Ṭabarî has been portrayed by many as a devout defender of orthodoxy, but it is possible that, even by the late ninth and early tenth centuries, the idea of orthodoxy had yet to be firmly established. The heated debate over the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur’ān only one generation before al-Ṭabarî would seem to indicate that it had not. Therefore, it is entirely possible that al-Ṭabarî could espouse views that would be seen as offensive to later Sunnī notions of orthodoxy, but that in his own time and place were completely acceptable. And yet, his views regarding certain aspects of the events of early Islam were not appreciated by some of his contemporaries, such as the Ḥanbalīs, and, as we have seen, were also criticized by later scholars such as Ibn Kathîr. Another possibility is that al-Ṭabarî, while not necessarily supporting the primacy of ‘Alî over the first three caliphs, did support the idea that the ‘Alid claim to authority outweighed that of the ‘Abbâsids. This certainly would have been a dangerous assertion to make in the ‘Abbâsid capital city, but, based on what we know of this late period of their reign, al-Ṭabarî would have been among the least of their worries.

This brings us, finally, to the last report related by al-Ṭabarî for the publication of Muḥammad’s mission. This report, through al-Wâqidî, does not reference specific verses of the Qur’ān and includes no miracle, but instead simply states:


336For example, his work arguing for the authenticity of the reports about Ghadîr Khumm.
The Messenger of God was commanded to proclaim the divine message which he had received, to declare it publicly to the people, and to summon them to God.337

There is no indication in this report whether he obeyed the command or what response he may have received. This report, then, would seem to serve as a summation of the section as a whole, providing in brief what the previous reports related in detail.

Thus, al-Ṭabarî continues the archetype’s dichotomy of public and private, mundane and supernatural in the publication of Muḥammad’s mission. He diverges from both archetypes, however, by yet again adding possibilities. The archetype of Muḥammad’s public preaching would appear to be that it was done in response to the revelation of Qur’ān 26:214-216 and was responsible for the beginning of the opposition of the Meccans. Yet, al-Ṭabarî also includes reports that would seem to indicate that Muḥammad simply took it upon himself to preach to his fellow tribesmen and that do not relate what reaction, if any, he received from them. The archetype of the more intimate meeting between Muḥammad and his extended family includes the miraculous division of food and drink, as well as the superior faith of ‘Alī who, although just a sickly youth, believed in Muḥammad when no one else would. Al-Ṭabarî’s divergence from this archetype is perhaps the most important, since he relates a report that gives this story an overt religio-political message that appears to support the case of the ‘Alids over that of the ‘Abbāsids.

337Watt and McDonald, Muḥammad at Mecca, 92; Leiden edition, 1173-4.
Al-Ṭabarī's Tafsīr

Unlike his section on Muḥammad's conception, al-Ṭabarī makes four distinct Qur'anic references in his relation of the publication of Muḥammad's mission in his *sīra/tārīkh*. Two of these are directly cited in the introduction, while the other two are related in some of the individual reports. The first verse cited is Qur'ān 15:94. Unlike its citation in the historical work, however, in the *tafsīr* it is not treated as an isolated unit, but instead is joined to the two verses immediately preceding it.\(^{338}\) They read:

"Therefore, by thy Lord, we will, of a surety, call them to account, for all their deeds. Therefore expound openly what thou art commanded, and turn away from those who join false gods with Allāh."\(^{339}\) The main thrust of al-Ṭabarī's exegesis of this verse grouping has to do with its religious and grammatical meanings. Only one of the twenty-three reports in his *tafsīr*, coming through Ibn Ishāq and originating with Ibn 'Abbās, references the historical context of the verse, giving it the meaning of the public announcement, but it does not mention any specifics:

Allāh revealed, "Therefore expound openly what thou art commanded,..." then truly He commanded His prophet Muḥammad in the conveyance of His message (to) his people (*q-w-m)*...\(^{340}\)

A few of the other reports simply state that the verse grouping means that Muḥammad was ordered to recite the Qur'ān publicly or that he was commanded to pray publicly,

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\(^{339}\) Qur'ān 15:92-4.

\(^{340}\) Al-Ṭabarī, *Jamiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 14, 46. The exact meaning of the word, *q-w-m*, in this report is unclear. Was he supposed to only tell his immediate family, his extended family, his clan, or his entire tribe/people? This issue is not overtly discussed in either the *sīra/tārīkh* or the *tafsīr*, and thus may have been thought to be well known by their intended audiences. However, the fact that the individual reports have Muḥammad either making a general announcement or an announcement to specific clans or individuals reveals the possibility that even scholars like al-Ṭabarī were not completely certain of its precise designation.
but no other details or arguments are given.³⁴¹ For the most part, the exegesis of these verses focuses on grammar, their religious meaning, and eventual abrogation.³⁴² Nowhere in his taṣfīr does al-Ṭabari discuss the circumstances of revelation of any of the verses in this grouping. Historical context, in the specific sense of the reports located in his sīrah/taʿrīkh, is not found at all. Likewise, neither Qurʾān 15:94 nor the other verses joined to it are mentioned in any of the reports cited in his sīrah/taʿrīkh. The only place where 15:94 is recorded is the introductory section by al-Ṭabari himself. Thus, there does not appear to be a sharing of Qurʾānic citations and historical reports between the sīrah/taʿrīkh and the taṣfīr for this verse. Oddly enough, it is this verse that would seem to most closely match the order to publicize God’s message, and yet all of the reports in the sīrah/taʿrīkh that claim a Qurʾānic impetus to Muḥammad’s public preaching cite Qurʾān 26:214-216.

The second verse grouping referred to in al-Ṭabari’s sīrah/taʿrīkh is Qurʾān 26:214-216. His taṣfīr of these verses is broken up, with verse 213 being added to 214-215, while 216 is attached to the beginning of his treatment of 217-220.³⁴³ The first group, 26:213-215, reads, “So call not on any other god with Allāh, or thou wilt be among those under the Penalty. And admonish thy nearest kinsmen, and lower thy wing to the Believers who follow thee.” The second group of verses, 26:216-220, reads,

Then if they disobey thee, say: “I am free (of responsibility) for what ye do!” And put thy trust on the Exalted in Might, the Merciful - Who seeth thee standing forth (in prayer), and thy movements among those who prostrate themselves. For it is He who heareth and knoweth all things.

³⁴¹Ibid., vol. 14, 47.
³⁴²The order to separate or withdraw from the polytheists is later abrogated in favor of the command to fight them outright.
³⁴³Ibid., vol. 19, 72-77.
His grouping appears to make little sense here, since he ties the meaning of 26:216 to the previous verses, as he does in his *ṣira.taʾrīkh*, and mentions this verse only in the introductory section of his commentary on the later three verses, basically explaining that what Muḥammad is supposed to be free of responsibility for is the continued idol worship of those to whom he had delivered God’s message.\(^{344}\)

As in the *ṣira.taʾrīkh*, none of the reports treats the actual occasion of revelation for these verses, but instead details Muḥammad’s reaction. Al-Ṭabarī also includes an introductory section for his *tafsīr* of 26:213-215 that discusses what Muḥammad is warning against, i.e., polytheism and disbelief, and then continues to discuss who was to be included in this warning:

Allāh said to His prophet, Muḥammad, “And warn your kinsmen from your tribe, the nearest to you (in) kinship and warn them about Our punishment that is revealed to them in their unbelief.” And it was mentioned about this verse, when it was revealed, (that) he began with the tribe of his grandfather, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and his sons, so he cautioned them and he warned them.\(^{345}\)

This would appear to show al-Ṭabarī’s personal views regarding the correctness or incorrectness of the reports that follow, namely that those who claim Muḥammad’s warning was against polytheism and those who cite the identity of the people being warned as the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib are correct and that all others are to be treated with suspicion.

As for the section of the *tafsīr* containing the actual reports, there appears to be a variety of themes, some of which are found in the *ṣira.taʾrīkh*. First is the issue of who was meant by “your nearest kinsmen.” The reports dealing with this theme list various

\(^{344}\)Ibid., vol. 19, 76.
\(^{345}\)Ibid., vol. 19, 72.
groupings among the tribe of Quraysh, as well as certain individuals, specifically, Muḥammad’s daughter, Fāṭima, his aunt, Ṣafīya, and his uncle, al-ʿAbbās. The second theme is the warning itself. Most of the reports in this beginning section relate the message that nothing will protect those mentioned from the will of God and that they should take measures to protect themselves from Hell. The next theme appears to be very similar to that found in the first pair of reports in the sīra/tāʾrīkh, and this is the theme of placing Muḥammad’s call to his kinsmen at a particular place, thus giving it a kind of historical context. Al-Ṭabarānī cites several reports that place Muhammad at al-Ṣafā, repeating his call to his kinsmen, their response, and his warning. It is in this middle section of the exegesis that al-Ṭabarānī repeats several of the exact reports found in his sīra/tāʾrīkh. Reports fourteen and fifteen are identical to the first pair of reports in his History. Report fourteen, which originates with Ibn ʿAbbās, reads:

One day the Messenger of God mounted al-Ṣafā and called out, “Beware this morning!” Quraysh gathered around him and said, “What is the matter?” Then he said, “If I were to tell you that the enemy would come upon you this morning or this evening, would you believe me?” “Certainly,” they replied. He said, “I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible doom.” Then Abū Lahab said, “May you perish! Did you call us together for this?” Then God revealed, “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame...” to the end of the sūra.

Report fifteen, also originating with Ibn ʿAbbās, reads:

When this verse was revealed, “and warn your tribe of near kindred,” and your group among them, the righteous, the Messenger of God went out, mounted al-

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346 Ibid., vol. 19, 72-74. This could mean that these individuals had not converted to Islam at this time. While this is completely in line with the later conversion story of al-ʿAbbās, the possibility that Muḥammad’s own daughter, who would go on to have such a profound influence on Shiʿi Islam, did not convert until years after the beginning of the Revelation would have presented quite a challenge to later Muslim scholars. Thus, it is not surprising that al-Ṭabarānī makes no comment on these reports. I have not found specific information regarding the conversion of Ṣafīya, but it is unlikely that the mention of her name here lacks some kind of significance.

347 Ibid., vol. 19, 74. Since the report is identical, I have maintained the translation as found in al-Ṭabarānī’s sīra/tāʾrīkh.
Şafā, and called out, “Beware this morning!” Some said, “Who is that calling out?” And others said, “It is Muḥammad.” Then he said, “O Banū so-and-so, O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, O Banū ‘Abd Manāf!” They gathered round him, and he said, “If I were to tell you that horsemen were coming out at the foot of that mountain, would you believe me?” They replied, “We have never known you to tell a lie.” Then he said, “I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible doom.” Abū Lahab said, “May you perish! Did you only bring us together for this?” Then he stood up. So this sūra was revealed, “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame, perish he!” Like the recitation of al-A‘mahsh to the end of the sūra.\textsuperscript{348}

As in his sīra/tārīkh, the first of the above reports includes an allusion to Qur‘ān 34:46, and provides the occasion of revelation of 111:1-5. However, no mention is made in that report of the verse discussed in this part of the exegesis, namely 26:214. In fact, this is the only report that does not describe Muḥammad’s actions as a direct result of the revelation of 26:214. Thus, al-Ṭabarî continues his citation of fairly brief reports that provide a very public context for Muḥammad’s announcement of his mission.\textsuperscript{349}

Report eighteen is basically identical to the first report of the second grouping in the historical work, and is the only report in the exegesis of these verses that includes a supernatural element.\textsuperscript{350} This is, of course, the report wherein ‘Ali, upon Muḥammad’s command, prepares the food and drink, calls the men, witnesses the miracle, and stands as the only one willing to support Muḥammad in his cause. The main difference in this report is that, whereas the report in the sīra/tārīkh includes the words “my agent and my successor” after Muḥammad’s request for someone to act as his brother, the report in the tafsīr only has him state, “Which of you will aid me in this matter, so that he will be my brother, etc., etc.”\textsuperscript{351} It is unclear whether al-Ṭabarî himself made the change to

\textsuperscript{348}Ibid. While most of the report is identical to that found in the sīra/tārīkh, there are some minor differences that are included in my translation here.

\textsuperscript{349}Ibid., vol. 19, 73-4.

\textsuperscript{350}Ibid., vol. 19, 74-5.

\textsuperscript{351}Ibid., vol. 19, 75.
this report or whether this was the work of one of his reporters or even a later editor, so the importance of these changes remains unclear. That being said, however, the fact remains that the only two words that have been edited out are precisely those two that give this report a political interpretation in favor of ‘Alī’s immediate succession to Muḥammad. Also, al-Ṭabarī does not here repeat the second report of that particular grouping found in the sīra/taʾrīkh, the report in which ‘Alī relates the tale to a large assembly, and it is not found elsewhere in his exegesis of any of the verses mentioned. The first report of the last pair of reports in the sīra/taʾrīkh is also included in this part of the exegesis. It comes through Ibn Iṣḥāq, and reads:

When the verse “and warn your tribe of near kindred” was revealed to the Messenger of God, he rose up in the valley and said, “Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Banū ‘Abd Manāf, Banū Qusayy!” Then he named the various groups of Quraysh, clan by clan, until he had come to the last of them, and said, “I summon you to God and warn you of his punishment.”

But the final, summary report from al-Wāqidi is not included. The exegesis of 26:213-215 ends with a discussion of what was meant by “lower thy wing” and this section includes neither historical nor miraculous associations.

Thus, al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr of these verses seems to include the archetype depicted in the sīra/taʾrīkh, but not his divergence from it. He continues the public archetype by including numerous reports that are similar, as well as identical, to those found in his History and continues the private archetype by including the report of Muḥammad’s miraculous multiplication of food and drink. He does diverge from the archetype as presented in the sīra/taʾrīkh, but not in the same fashion. The only divergence we see in

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352Ibid.
353Ibid., vol. 19, 75-6.
his explanation of these verses is that Muḥammad is shown to have called out to individuals from his own family during the part of the story that was supposed to have been public and general, thus relating reports that appear to show Muḥammad airing private concerns during his first public preaching.

But what of the two verses cited in the reports in the *ṣīra taʿrīkh* that were not mentioned by al-Ṭabārî in his introduction? The first, 34:46 reads:

Say: “I do admonish you on one point: that ye do stand up before Allāh - (it may be) in pairs, or (it may be) singly - and reflect (within yourselves): your Companion is not possessed: he is no less than a Warner to you in face of a terrible penalty.”

The introductory section of his exegesis of this verse is limited to a discussion of the identity of those Muḥammad is advising, his tribe, and of what he is advising them, that is to say, obedience to God.\(^{354}\) Thus, the issue at hand for this verse is much the same as that of 26:214-216, the problem of identifying who was called and what message they were given. Of the three reports cited, none gives the historical context of this verse. The main focus here seems to be the variant readings of the verse, and the meanings of “pairs” and “individually.” One compelling point is that the two reports that cite part of this verse in his *ṣīra taʿrīkh* are not to be found in this section of his exegesis. This may be an indication that al-Ṭabārî viewed the importance of these verses, or at least his exegesis of them, as separate from their role in his *ṣīra taʿrīkh*.

The last group of verses mentioned in the *ṣīra taʿrīkh* are 111:1-5, which read:

Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he! No profit to him from all his wealth, and all his gains! Burnt soon will he be in a Fire of blazing Flame! His

\(^{354}\)Ibid., vol. 22, 70-1.
wife shall carry the (crackling) wood - as fuel! - a twisted rope of palm leaf fibre round her (own) neck.\footnote{The literal translation of Abū Lahab is father of flame.}

In the introductory section of his commentary on these verses, al-Ṭabarī limits himself to a discussion of the variant readings of the sūra’s first verse.\footnote{Ibid., vol. 30, 217. Qur’ān 111:1 reads: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he!”} Of the approximately forty-two separate reports cited in the exegesis of this sūra, only five deal with the same issues as those raised in the \textit{sīra/tā’rīkh}.\footnote{Al-Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi’ al-bayān}, vol. 30, 217-218.} However, the second report cited gives a historical context different from that found previously, stating:

Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he!... Abū Lahab said to the Prophet: “What will I get, O Muhammad, if I believe in you?” He said: “The same as the Muslims get.” So he [Abū Lahab] said: “My wealth surpasses them...”\footnote{Ibid., vol. 30, 217. The conversation continues with Muhammad asking Abū Lahab what he wants, and his response is that he wants the destruction of the religion of Islam, and it is for this reason that the verse was revealed. This theme of asking for material considerations in return for conversion is repeated in the story of ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. Qays in the next chapter.}

Thus, the verse is here shown as being revealed not in response to Abū Lahab’s criticisms of Muḥammad’s first public preaching, but because of his desire to be given special status as a Muslim due to his wealth before agreeing to convert.

Al-Ṭabarī goes on to directly cite many of the same reports as he does in his \textit{sīra/tā’rīkh}, but introduces them with a section that indicates his own opinion about the historical context of the revelation of these verses. He states:

Truly this sūra was revealed about Abū Lahab, because when the Prophet gave the call to his kinsmen, as when it was revealed, “And warn your nearest kinsmen,” and he gathered them for the call, Abū Lahab said to him, “May you perish this day! Is this what you called us for?”\footnote{Ibid.}
He then cites the four reports that correlate to the story of Muḥammad’s climbing of al-Ṣafā and calling to the Quraysh, as well as one report that does not give the physical setting, but is instead reminiscent of the summary report from al-Waqidi that ends the section in his sīra taʾrīkh. The first of the reports, originating with Ibn ʿAbbās, states:

The Messenger of God climbed that day al-Ṣafā, then he said: “Beware this morning!” So the Quraysh gathered to him, then they said: “What do you want?” He said: “What would you think, if I told you that the enemy (is coming) this morning or this evening, would you believe me?” They said: “Yes.” He [Muḥammad] said: “Then truly I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible penalty.” Then Abū Lahab said: “May you Perish! Is this what you called us and gathered us for?” Then Allāh revealed: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame...” to its end.\(^{360}\)

The second report is identical in text, but bears a different isnād, however, it, too, originates with Ibn ʿAbbās. These two reports are the same as the first report in al-Ṭabarī’s sīra taʾrīkh. The third report then states:

When it was revealed, “And warn you nearest kinsmen,” the Messenger of God rose upon al-Ṣafā, and cried out: “Beware this morning!” So the people gathered to him, and some came themselves, while others sent their messengers, then he said: “O Banū Ḥāshim, O Banū ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, O Banū So-and-so, O Banū, O Banū - What would you think if I told you that horses (are coming) from the foot of this mountain, wanting to vie for you, would you believe me?” They said: “Yes.” He said: “Then truly I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible penalty.” So Abū Lahab said: “May you perish this day! You called us for this?” So it was revealed, “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he!”\(^{361}\)

While this report shares similarities with the other reports in this section as well as those contained in the sīra taʾrīkh, it is not precisely the same. The next report, however, is identical to the second report in the sīra taʾrīkh. It, too, originates with Ibn ʿAbbās, and reads:

\(^{360}\)Ibid., vol. 30, 218.
\(^{361}\)Ibid.
When this verse was revealed: “And warn you nearest kinsmen” and your group among them, the righteous, the Messenger of God went out until he climbed al-Şafā, then he shouted: “Beware this morning!” So they said: “Who is this that is shouting?” They said: “Mūḥammad.” So they gathered to him, then he said: “O Banū So-and-so, O Banū So-and-so, O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, O Banū ‘Abd Manāf!” So they gathered to him, and he said: “What would you think if I told you that horses were coming out from the foot of this mountain, would you believe me?” They said: “We have not known you to lie.” He said: “Then truly I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible penalty.” Then Ābū Lahab said: “May you perish! You only gathered us for this?” Then he got up. So this sūra was revealed: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he!...” Al-A’mahash recited to the end of the sūra.362

These reports directly quote 26:214-216, 34:46, and 111:1-5 with a historical context similar to that found in both the sūra/taʿrīkh and in the exegesis of 26:214-216. The last report that relates the context of this verse reads:

Perish the hands of the Father of Flame!... When the Prophet sent to him [Ābū Lahab] and to others, and Ābū Lahab was the paternal uncle of the Prophet and his name was ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā, so he [Mūḥammad] told them [what he told them], then Ābū Lahab said: “May you perish! You sent to us for this?” So Allāh revealed: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame!”363

This report appears to act as a summarization of the events previously described. None of the details that are found in the other reports, the location of the conversation, the identity of whom Mūḥammad called apart from Ābū Lahab himself, nor even the text of his warning is included here. The lack of detail in this report means that it could have taken place at either the public announcement or the private meeting, but since the private meeting is nowhere discussed in relation to this sūra, the public announcement is the more likely venue. The placement of this report does not seem to be accidental, since it is the last to discuss this particular verse before the exegesis moves on to the next one. Although the rest of al-Ṭabārī’s commentary on this sūra does include some

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362Ibid.
363Ibid.
historical context, it is not related to either incident found in his *sīra*/*taʾrīkh*. Instead, it focuses on the meaning of “his wealth will not avail him” and the historical context of the label given to the wife of Abū Lahab as a “carrier of firewood” and even different arguments regarding the composition of the rope tied around her neck.\(^{364}\)

It would thus appear that, for al-Ṭabari, the supernatural element found in the miracle story of the food and drink is of minor, if any, significance in his *tafsir*. Instead, his treatment of this event focuses on identifying those who were called, what they were called to do, the possible consequences of ignoring this call, and the opposition of Abū Lahab. The miracle story is included, but the fact that it is related in only one report out of nearly a hundred would suggest that al-Ṭabari’s focus is definitely elsewhere. The dual archetype is repeated in the *tafsir*, but the focus is on the public announcement rather than the private meeting and the miracle associated with it. Nowhere in the *tafsir* of the above verses does he repeat the overtly religio-political report espousing ‘Alid superiority over the ‘Abbāsids, nor does he repeat al-Waqidi’s summary report. Since there appears to be a much higher number of reports for Muḥammad’s public announcement, it would seem that this is the aspect of the archetype he chose to stress in this particular genre. His inclusion of an alternative incident for the revelation of Qur’ān 111:1 would seem to indicate his allowance of this possibility, but again, this report is vastly outnumbered by those depicting the verse’s revelation in the context of Muḥammad’s public preaching. Also, the fact that he left out the second report from ‘Afi regarding the private meeting may indicate that he viewed it as inappropriate in a work of *tafsir*. Therefore, the archetype of Muḥammad for this incident is related rather

\(^{364}\)Ibid., vol. 30, 218-221.
differently by al-Ṭabarī in his *sīra taʿrīkh* as opposed to his *tafsīr*; and this may be our best indication, so far, of his views regarding these genres.

*Ibn Kathīr’s Sīra/Taʿrīkh*

For the post-Revelation Meccan period, Ibn Kathīr relates roughly sixty-five supernatural events. Unlike the pre-Revelation period, wherein the majority of the miracles in his account involved prophecies about Muḥammad or the coming of Islam, in this period, the most numerous miracles are those involving aspects of nature, and God and Muḥammad appear almost evenly matched in the number of such miracles performed. Ibn Kathīr’s treatment of this part of Muḥammad’s life in his *sīra taʿrīkh* is again structured in a slightly different manner than that found in al-Ṭabarī, as was the case in the section on Muḥammad’s conception. For example, he includes the story of the first blood spilled for Islam, but places it at the end of the section immediately preceding his chapter on *The Command to Announce the Mission.* He includes an introductory section that not only relates what events the chapter will cover, but also cites several verses of the Qurʾān. He ends this introductory section with a reference

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365 According to Ibn Kathīr’s account, Muḥammad performed around ten such miracles, while God was responsible for roughly thirteen.
366 Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 3, 38-40; LeGassick, vol. 1, 330-334. This is also similar to his separation of the story of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s attempt to sacrifice his son from the story of the marriage between ‘Abd Allāh and Āminah and Muḥammad’s conception.
367 Whereas al-Ṭabarī only cited two verse groupings in his introduction, Ibn Kathīr cites four, which are: Qurʾān 26:214-220 (“And admonish thy nearest kinsmen, And lower thy wing to the Believers who follow thee. Then if they disobey thee, say: ‘I am free (of responsibility) for what ye do!’ And put thy trust on the Exalted in Might, the Merciful - Who seeth thee standing forth (in prayer), And thy movements among those who prostrate themselves. For it is He who heareth and knoweth all things.”), 43:44 (“The (Qurʾān) is indeed the Message, for thee and for thy people; and soon shall ye (all) be brought to account.”), 28:85 (“Verily He Who ordained the Qurʾān for thee, will bring thee back to the Place of Return. Say: ‘My Lord knows best who it is that brings true guidance. And who is in manifest error.’”), and 15:92-93 (“Therefore, by thy Lord, We will, of a surety, call them to account, For all their deeds.”).
to his *Tafsîr* on the same subject, and specifically cites his exegesis of Qurʾān 26:214.\(^{368}\)

This is then followed by roughly six reports, all of which can be found in some form in either al-Ṭabarî’s *ṣīra ta’rîkh* or his *tafsîr*.\(^{369}\) Unlike al-Ṭabarî, many of Ibn Kathîr’s reports are interspersed with comments by the author that discuss the existence of similar reports, their *isnâds*, and his own personal views regarding the trustworthiness of the sources or the meaning of the text.

The reports in Ibn Kathîr’s *ṣīra ta’rîkh* that relate the dual archetype of Muḥammad’s public and private delivery of God’s message are grouped by the author in such a way that the first three relate Muḥammad’s public preaching, while the last three discuss his private meeting with his kinsmen. Unlike al-Ṭabarî, Ibn Kathîr’s reports on Muḥammad’s public preaching all connect the incident to the revelation of Qurʾān 26:214. Also, unlike al-Ṭabarî’s *ṣīra ta’rîkh*, Ibn Kathîr includes in this work reports that identify individuals, as well as clans, as objects of Muḥammad’s message. Thus, it would appear that, for Ibn Kathîr, the archetype of Muḥammad’s public preaching could only be in response to a command from God. Ibn Kathîr goes on to relate the more private setting of Muḥammad’s meeting with his extended family and includes the story of the miraculous division of food and drink. He takes issue with this facet of the archetype, however, and appears to go out of his way to refute every possible aspect of it that would support its political or religious use for the Shi’a. His reactions to these

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\(^{368}\)Ibn Kathîr, *Bidâya*, vol. 3, 38; LeGassick, vol. 1, 331.

\(^{369}\)The exact number of reports is rather subjective here, since Ibn Kathîr includes full reports, partial reports, and references to similar reports with similar *isnâds*. 
reports reveal both his vehement personal bias against Shi‘ism, as well as a possibly anti-Shi‘a atmosphere in Mamlûk Damascus.\textsuperscript{370}

The introduction to this section reads:

[He was commanded] to publicize the message to high and low, and He commanded him [Muḥammad] to be steadfast and tolerant and honorable against the ignorant, the stubborn, and the liars after the rise of evidence before them, and the sending of the greatest messenger to them. And he mentioned the suffering he met from them, he and his Companions...\textsuperscript{371}

Thus, Ibn Kathîr tells us that this chapter will cover not only the publication of Muḥammad’s mission, but also the negative response he received from his fellow Meccans. He goes on to cite several verses of the Qur’ān in connection to these events. He begins with Qur’ān 26:214-220:

And admonish thy nearest kinsmen. And lower thy wing to the Believers who follow thee. Then if they disobey thee, say: “I am free (of responsibility) for what ye do!” And put thy trust on the Exalted in Might, the Merciful - who seeth thee standing forth (in prayer), and thy movements among those who prostrate themselves. For it is He who heareth and knoweth all things.

He then moves on immediately to cite Qur’ān 43:44, which reads, “The (Qur’ān) is indeed the Message, for thee and for thy people; and soon shall ye (all) be brought to account.” He then cites, again without further comment, the first part of Qur’ān 28:85, which reads, “Verily He who ordained the Qur’ān for thee, will bring thee back to the Place of Return.”\textsuperscript{372} Ibn Kathîr here explains that this means that God made it necessary for Muhammad to publicize the Qur’ān, but that God will, in return, convey Muḥammad

\textsuperscript{370}Laoust describes an incident in which Ibn Kathîr was among a panel of judges who condemned a Shi‘i man to death for insulting the first three Caliphs, as well as Mu‘awiya and his son, Yazîd, at the Umayyad Mosque. See Laoust, “Ibn Katîr, Historien,” 55-6.
\textsuperscript{372}The rest of Qur’ān 28:85 reads, “Say: ‘My Lord knows best who it is that brings true guidance. And who is in manifest error.’”
to the “abode of the hereafter,” meaning “the afterlife.” He moves on to cite Qurʾān 15:92-3, which state, “Therefore, by thy Lord, we will, of a surety, call them to account, for all their deeds.” He moves on to refer the reader to his tafsīr of Qurʾān 26:214 for a more complete recitation of the reports related to this event:

And the verses and reports about this are quite numerous, and we already examined the speech about that in our book of Tafsīr. And we explained about the... speech of the Most High in the sūra of the poets, “And warn your nearest kinsmen.” And we conveyed numerous reports about that....

The section containing the reports after this introduction begins much like that in the sīra/taʿrīkh of al-Ṭabarī; the initial reports are brief and detail Muḥammad’s reaction to the revelation of Qurʾān 26:214. The first three reports relate how Muḥammad called out to those around him, including clans among the Quraysh as well as individuals. None of them contain a supernatural element. The first report is very similar to those found in both al-Ṭabarī’s sīra/taʿrīkh and tafsīr. It originates with Ibn ʿAbbās and comes from Ibn Ḥanbal and states:

When God revealed “And admonish thy nearest kinsmen” the Prophet came to al-Ṣafā, then he climbed upon it, and cried out: “Beware this morning!” So the people gathered to him, either coming themselves or sending a messenger. Then the Messenger of God said: “O Banū ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, O Banū Fihr, O Banū Kaʿb, what would you think if I told you that horses [were coming] from the foot of this mountain wanting to attack you, would you believe me?” They said: “Yes.” He said: “Then truly I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible penalty.” Abū Lahab, may God curse him, said: “May you perish this day! You called us only for this?” And God revealed: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he!”

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375 Ibid., vol. 3, 38-9; LeGassick, Vol. 1, 331-2. Whereas the reports in al-Ṭabarī give the complete citation, 26:214-216, Ibn Kathīr cites only the single verse, 26:214.
376 Ibid., vol. 3, 38; LeGassick, vol. 1, 331.
Thus, we have here the physical setting of the scene, al-Ṣafā, as well as all of the elements that are present in the similar reports in al-Ṭabarī’s sīra/ta’rīkh and tafsīr, for example, the questioning of Muḥammad’s reputation among his tribe, his calling to specific clans among the Quraysh, his recitation of part of Qur’ān 34:46, as well as the occasion of revelation of 111:1. Ibn Kathīr goes on to state that a similar report was also published through a different chain.377

The second report, is more reminiscent of al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr than his sīra/ta’rīkh. It also comes from Ibn Ḥanbal and reads:

When this verse was revealed “And admonish thy nearest kinsmen,” the Messenger of God called the Quraysh, the low and the high. Then he said: “O community of Quraysh, save yourselves from Hellfire, O community of the Banū Ka‘b, save yourselves from Hellfire, O community of the Banū Hashim, save yourselves from Hellfire, O community of the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, save yourselves from Hellfire, O Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad, save yourself from Hellfire, for truly I, by God, do not possess for you anything from God except mercy...”378

Thus, the contextualization is missing in that there is no physical setting, no climbing of al-Ṣafā, but simply the statement that Muḥammad called out to certain groups and one individual in response to a Qur’ānic revelation. Here, too, there is no citation of other verses of the Qur’ān, no indication of Muḥammad’s reputation among those assembled, and no response given. He is simply warning those named against their potential fate in the afterlife, and reminding them that he cannot necessarily intercede with God for their souls. Ibn Kathīr then cites other sources for this report, stating:

And Muslim transmitted it from a report of ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Umayr, and it was published in the Sahīḥayn from a report of al-Zuhri, on the authority of Sa‘īd b. Musayyab and Abū Šalama, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, and from another

378Ibid.; LeGassick, 331.
path, on the authority of Abū Hurayra in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad [b. Ḥanbal] and others.\textsuperscript{379}

He is here attempting to add to the authoritativeness of this report by showing that the same text could be found in other reports, and notes their presence in the authoritative works of Muslim and al-Bukhārī, as well as in that of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. This is one of several occasions in which he attempts to equate the authoritativeness of the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal with the *Ṣaḥīḥ* works of Muslim and al-Bukhārī.\textsuperscript{380}

The third report, once again from Ibn Ḥanbal, but originating with ‘Ā’ishah, is much shorter than the previous two and also leaves out the physical setting of Muḥammad’s call. It states:

> When He revealed, “And warn your nearest kinsmen,” the Messenger of God... rose. Then he said: “O Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad, O Šafiya bt. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I do not possess anything from God for you, ask me whatever you want from my wealth.”\textsuperscript{381}

This report is also missing what Muḥammad is warning his family members and fellow tribesmen against. He is simply telling this group that he cannot intercede for them with God, but does not mention his own role as a Warner as he has in the previous reports, nor do we see the reaction of those called. Again, Ibn Kathīr attempts to bolster the authoritativeness of this report by adding that it was also transmitted by Muslim.\textsuperscript{382}

Thus, Ibn Kathīr’s relation of the archetype of the beginning of Muḥammad’s public preaching in his *sīra/ta’rīkh*, appears to focus on its Qur’ānic impetus. All of the

\textsuperscript{379}Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 1, 331-2.

\textsuperscript{380}Although Ibn Kathīr does not specifically mention it here, al-Ṭabārī also includes similar reports in his *Ta’ṣīr*, but unlike the later author, does not make any comment about his authorities. Al-Ṭabārī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, vol. 19, 72-3.

\textsuperscript{381}Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 3, 38-9; LeGassick, vol. 1, 332.

\textsuperscript{382}Ibid., vol. 3, 39; LeGassick, vol. 1, 332.
above reports relate that Muḥammad only appeared publicly to his fellow tribesmen in response to the revelation of this verse. The three reports also seem to mix Muḥammad’s larger message to Quraysh with his more personal message to members of his immediate family, seeming to focus specifically on Fāṭima.\textsuperscript{383} Ibn Kathīr’s comments regarding these reports can either be taken as the author’s attempt to relate all the reports at his disposal, or as an attempt to bolster their authoritativeness or the authoritativeness of works such as Ibn Ḥanbal’s \textit{Musnad}. Thus, for Ibn Kathīr, the historical context of the public aspect of the announcement of Muḥammad’s mission does not appear to be as important as its Qur’ānic connection. The focus of these reports for Ibn Kathīr appears to be the connection between the Qur’ānic command and the beginning of Muḥammad’s public preaching, no matter the identity of those being called.

Ibn Kathīr continues with a report that is very similar to that found in al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{sīra/tarīkh} wherein ‘Aūlī narrates that Muḥammad miraculously fed his kinsmen with a small amount of food and drink. It comes from al-Bayhaqi’s (d. 458/1066) \textit{Dalāʾil al-nubūwa} and its chain includes Muḥammad Ibn Iṣḥāq and Ibn ‘Abbas, originating with ‘Aūlī, and states:

\begin{quote}
When this verse was revealed to the Messenger of God, “And warn your nearest kinsmen and lower thy wing to protect those believers who follow you,” the Messenger of God said: “I knew that if I began it with my group, I would see from them what I would hate, so I remained silent. Then Gabriel came to me and he said: ‘O Muḥammad, if you do not do what your Lord commands, he will punish you with Hellfire.’” Then he called to me ['Aūlī] and he said: “O ‘Aūlī, truly God has commanded me to warn my nearest kin, so arrange for us, O ‘Aūlī, a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{383}Al-Ṭabarī also reports in his \textit{tafsīr} that single out Fāṭima, but only in combination with several other reports. Ibn Kathīr’s relation of two reports out of three that mention Muḥammad’s daughter would, however, seem to indicate a conscious choice on his part.
sheep with a šā‘a of food, and prepare for us an ‘asī of milk, then gather the Banū Abd al-Muṭṭalib to me.” So I did, then they gathered to him that day and they were forty men, give or take a man, and among them were his paternal uncles Abū Ṭālib, Ḥamza, al-‘Abbās, and Abū Lahab, the wicked unbeliever. Then I brought them the bowl, and the Messenger of God took a piece of meat from it, tore it with his teeth, and then threw it back. He said: “Eat in the name of Allāh.” So the group ate from it until they were satisfied, and we only saw the traces of their fingers, and by God, truly one man could have eaten the like of it.

Then the Messenger of God said: “Give them something to drink, O ‘Aṭī.” So, I placed before them the large drinking-bowl, and they drank from it until they drank all of it, and I swear, by God, truly one man could drink the like of it.

Then when the Messenger of God wanted to speak to them, Abū Lahab, may God curse him, interrupted him, and said: “…Your companion has bewitched you.” So they dispersed and the Messenger of God did not speak to them.

Then, when it was the following day, the Messenger of God said: “Make the same for us as you did yesterday of the food and drink, for truly this man already interrupted with what you heard [him say] before the group ate.” So I did, then I gathered them to him and the Messenger of God prepared as he had the previous day. So they ate until they were satisfied and I swear, by God, truly one man could have eaten the like of it. Then the Messenger of God said: “Give them something to drink, O ‘Aṭī.” So I brought the large drinking-bowl, then they drank from it until they drank all of it, and I swear, by God, truly one man could drink the like of it. Then, when the Messenger of God wanted to speak to them, Abū Lahab interrupted his speech, and he said: “…Your companion has bewitched you.” So they dispersed and the Messenger of God did not speak to them.

Then, when it was the next day, the Messenger of God said: “O ‘Aṭī, make the same for us as I was going to prepare yesterday of the food and drink, for truly this man interrupted me as you heard before the group ate.” So I did, then I gathered them to him. Then the Messenger of God prepared as he had done the day before, so they ate until they were satisfied, then I gave them something to drink from the large drinking-bowl until they were satisfied, and by God, truly one man could have eaten and drank the like of it. Then the Messenger of God said: “O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, truly I, by God, do not know a young man from the Arabs (who) brought his group better than what I have brought you. Truly I bring you the power of this world and the hereafter.”

The remainder of this section in Ibn Kathir’s sīrat ar-Riḍḥ deals with variations on this report. The main difference between this report and that by al-Ṭabarī is that it ends with Muḥammad finally being given the chance to warn his kinsmen after Abū Lahab’s

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interruption, but without continuing his speech or revealing the response. Here, Ibn Kathîr adds: “Thus al-Bayhaqî transmitted it from the path of Yûnis b. Bukayr, on the authority of Ibn Ishâq, on the authority of a shaykh whose name is not known, on the authority of ‘Abd Allâh b. al-Ḥârîth.” By adding this, he is emphasizing the fact that there is an unknown person in the chain of authorities, thus making sure the reader spots the problems in this isnâd. Ibn Kathîr then moves on to specifically quote al-Ṭabarî, even mentioning the earlier scholar by name. He states:

And Abû Ja‘far b. Ja‘rîr transmitted it on the authority of Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd al-Râzî, on the authority of Salama b. al-Faḍîl al-Abrash, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Ishâq, on the authority of ‘Abd al-Ghaffâr Abû Maryam b. al-Qâsim, on the authority of al-Minhâl b. ‘Amr, on the authority of ‘Abd Allâh b. al-Ḥârîth, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbâs, on the authority of ‘Âli, and he mentioned the like of it. And he added after his speech, “And truly I bring you the best of this world and the hereafter, and God commanded me to call you to it, so which of you will support me in this matter in the manner of being my brother, etc., etc.” Then the entire group refrained from it, and I [‘Âli] said, although I was the youngest of them, and had the rheumiest of eyes, the biggest of bellies, and the most scarred legs, “I, O Prophet of God, will be your helper in this.” Then he took hold of my neck and he said: “Truly, this is my brother, etc., etc., so listen to him and obey.” Then the group rose, laughing, saying to Abû Ṭâlib: “He commands you to listen to your son and obey!”

Thus, the unknown person in the previous report’s isnâd is here identified, and Ibn Kathîr makes his own views of this source very clear by stating that “‘Abd al-Ghaﬀâr b. al-Qâsim Abû Maryam is alone in this, and he was a liar and a Shî‘î whom ‘Âli b. al-

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387Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 1, 333. Although the two authors appear to share several reports in common, Ibn Kathîr rarely mentions al-Ṭabarî as a source. This does not necessarily imply that this was a purposeful act, but rather could simply mean that both men used a common pool of sources. This is especially true of those reports listing Ibn Ishâq as an authority, but then moving on to someone like Aîmad b. Ḥanbal as the author of the published version rather than al-Ṭabarî. This may have more to do with Ibn Kathîr’s obvious preference for Ibn Ḥanbal’s Musnad as a source over al-Ṭabarî’s Ta’rikh.
Madini and others suspected of inventing the ḥadīth; the rest consider him weak."

But after making such a definitive statement regarding the lack of authenticity of this report, Ibn Kathīr admits that there is another source that would appear to lend it credence. He cites a report from a work of exegesis that seems to substantiate that of al-Ṭabarî, and even includes the scene between Mūḥammad and ‘Alī. He states:

But Ibn Abī Ḥātim transmitted in his Ṭafsīr, on the authority of his father, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Īsā b. Maysara al-Ḥarīthi, on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Qadīs, on the authority of al-Aʿmash, on the authority of al-Minhâl b. Amr, on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥarîth, who said: ‘Alī said: “When this verse was revealed, ‘And warn your nearest kinsmen,’ the Messenger of God said to me: ‘Prepare for me a leg of lamb with a șaʿa of food and a container of milk, and call to me the Banū Ḥāshim.’ So I called them, and truly that day they were about forty or forty-one men.” Then the story mentioned the like of what preceded to where he said: “And the Messenger of God surprised them with his speech. Then he said: ‘Which of you will complete for me my religion and be my successor among the people?’ They were silent and al-ʿAbbās was silent, fearing to protect his wealth, and I was silent for the age of al-ʿAbbās. Then he said it another time, and al-ʿAbbās was silent, so when I saw that, I said: ‘I, O Messenger of God.’ He said: ‘You?’ And truly, that day I was the most ill of them in appearance, truly I had the bleakest eyes, the biggest belly, and the most scarred legs.”

The scene is here, however, incomplete, in that Mūḥammad does not make his announcement to those assembled that ‘Alī is to be his successor, and is not even shown as having completely accepted the younger man’s offer himself. Ibn Kathīr then states that the isnād of this report does not include Ibn ʿAbbās and adds the familiar “but God knows best” to indicate, in a more subtle fashion, his uncertainty regarding its authoritativeness. He uses the same formula regarding a report from Aḥmad b.

\[\text{Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 1, 333. 'Alī b. al-Madini (d. 234/848) was an important early ḥadīth scholar. On a possible work of tafsīr written by him, see Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre asbāb al-nuzūl: A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," BSOAS 48,1 (1985), 3.}\]

\[\text{Ibn Kathīr, Bidāya, vol. 3, 40; LeGassick, vol. 1, 333-4.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 1, 334.}\]
Hanbal’s *Musnad* that would also seem to support the previous reports, stating: “And Imām Ahmad transmitted in his *Musnad* from the report of ‘Abbād b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Asadi and Rabi’a b. Nājidh, on the authority of ‘Alī, the like of what preceded, but God knows best.”

He ends this section of his *sīra ta’rīkh* with his own explanation for Muḥammad’s request and what he considers the real ramifications of the Prophet’s acceptance of ‘Alī’s support. He states:

And the meaning of his speech in this report: “Who will complete for me my religion and be my successor among the people” means in case of death, because he feared that if he undertook to deliver the message to the unbelievers among the Arabs, they would kill him. So, he trusted who would execute after him that which was good for his people, and completing (it) for him. But God already reassured him about that in the speech of the Most High, “O Messenger! proclaim the (Message) which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission. And Allah will defend thee from men (who mean mischief).”

Ibn Kathīr is here saying that Muḥammad was only concerned about appointing someone to follow him and take care of his family if he were killed before completing his mission. Therefore, Muḥammad’s acceptance of ‘Alī’s support would have had no political or religious implications. Ibn Kathīr even takes this role away from the younger man by adding that God revealed Qur’ān 5:67 in order to assure Muḥammad that he had God’s protection against his enemies, thus invalidating the need for a successor in case of his untimely demise.

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By refuting al-Ṭabarī’s report with an accusation of deception and Shi‘ī sympathies against one of the transmitters, and by adding a disclaimer to the other reports that he cites, even the report from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Kathīr appears to go out of his way to refute any source that would bolster ‘Alī’s immediate claim to the caliphate. And yet, even after he has called into question the authoritativeness of the isnāds of these reports, he adds an attack on the text itself. His interpretation of the meaning of Muḥammad’s request for someone to support him precludes any possible politicization of ‘Alī’s role. His addition of the reason for the revelation of Qur’ān 5:67 seems to add Qur’ānic authority to his own personal viewpoint. By refuting reports containing the scene between Muḥammad and ‘Alī after the former has delivered his message, Ibn Kathīr refutes part of the archetype itself. The story of Muḥammad’s public preaching includes a report wherein we are permitted to see the reaction of the Meccans to his announcement, but Ibn Kathīr’s attack on the end of the story relating the private aspect of the archetype would deny us this type of closure. Thus, it would appear that Ibn Kathīr’s hatred of the Shi‘ī movement was such that not only was he willing to express doubt about reports transmitted through al-Ṭabarī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, but that he was willing to adjust the archetypal story of Muḥammad in his sīra/taʾrīkh in order to deny that group the support this story appears to give. As we will see, he allows for a further adjustment to this part of the archetype in his Tafsīr.
Ibn Kathîr’s Tafsîr

As noted above, Ibn Kathîr refers his readers to his tafsîr of 26:214 in his sîra/tâ’rîkh, and it is in his explanation of this verse, and the others grouped with it, that we find his most extensive treatment of the publication of Muḥammad’s mission and the miracle associated with it in his Tafsîr.395 In this section, Ibn Kathîr groups 26:214 within his explanation of 26:213-220.396 He includes some twenty separate reports, which are preceded by an introduction that includes citations of several other Qur’ân verses.397 His introduction states:

The Most High says, commanding the worship of Him alone, He has no associate, and it is a real message that He will punish whoever associates (others) with Him. Then the Most High spoke, commanding His messenger to warn his closest kinsmen, that is to say those closest to him; however, he will not save anyone among them, except those who have faith in his great and mighty Lord. And He commanded him to lower his wing to he who follows him among the servants of God, the believers. And whoever renounces him, he whom God

396These verses read: “So call not on any other god with Allâh, or thou wilt be among those under the Penalty. And admonish thy nearest kinsmen, and lower thy wing to the Believers who follow thee. Then if they disobey thee, say: ‘I am free (of responsibility) for what ye do!’ And put thy trust on the Exalted in Might, the Merciful who seeth thee standing forth (in prayer), and thy movements among those who prostrate themselves. For it is He who heareth and knoweth all things.”
397These verses are: Qur’ân 36:6 (“In order that thou mayest admonish a people, whose fathers had received no admonition, and who therefore remained heedless (of the Signs of Allâh.”)); 42:7 (“Thus have We sent by inspiration to thee an Arabic Qur’ân; that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and all around her – and warn (them) of the Day of Assembly, of which there is no doubt; (when) some will be in the Garden, and some in the Blazing Fire.”); 6:51 (“Give this warning to those in whose (hearts) is the fear that they will be brought (to Judgement) before their Lord; Except for Him they will have no protector nor intercessor; that they may guard (against evil).”); 19:97 (“So have We made the (Qur’ân) easy in thine own tongue, that with it thou mayest give glad tidings to the righteous and warnings to people given to contention.”); 6:19 (“Say: ‘What thing is most weighty in evidence?’ Say: ‘Allâh is witness between me and you; this Qur’ân hath been revealed to me by inspiration. That I may warn you and all whom it reaches. Can ye possibly bear witness that besides Allâh there is another God?’ Say: ‘Nay! I cannot bear witness!’ Say: ‘But in truth He is the One God and I truly am innocent of (your blasphemy of) joining Others with him.”’); and 11:17 (“Can they be (like) those who accept a Clear (Sign) from their Lord, and whom a witness from Himself doth teach, as did the Book of Moses before it - a guide and a mercy? They believe therein; but those of the Sects that reject it - the Fire will be their promised meeting place. Be not then in doubt thereon: for it is the Truth from thy Lord: Yet many among men do not believe!”). As elsewhere, the number of reports here is subjective, since Ibn Kathîr also cites numerous instances where other authorities have repeated a report with a slight variation in its isnâd and points out when these are included in authoritative hadîth compilations.
created, whoever it may be, so then he is free of responsibility for him. And regarding this, the Most High said: “So whoever renounces you, say: ‘I am free (of responsibility) from what you do.’” And this special warning does not exclude the people at large, rather it is unrivaled in its punishment.398

From there, he cites the Qur’ān verses mentioned above and moves on to a report found in Muslim’s Ṣaḥīḥ, which states, “By Him who holds my soul in His hands, no one of this community who hears (of) me, whether he be Jew or Anṣārī, and does not then believe in me, will enter the fire.”399 This quote would appear to act as a thematic preamble for the reports that follow, indicating that for Ibn Kathīr the focus should be on Muḥammad’s role as warner and the punishment that awaits those who would disregard him or his mission.

The next six reports are much like the first reports in both works of sīrah taʿrīkh.400 They are relatively short, and simply mention that Muḥammad called out to particular groups or individuals among his fellow tribesmen and warned them of God’s impending judgment. Only one report, nearly identical to the first report in the sīrah taʿrīkh, provides the setting for the revelation of Qur’ān 111:1, also being the only report of this group that reveals what response Muḥammad received to his public preaching. It comes from Ibn Ḥanbal, originating with Ibn ʿAbbās, and reads:

When God, great and glorious, revealed: “And warn your nearest kinsmen,” the Prophet came (to) al-Ṣafā, then he climbed on it, and he cried out: “Beware this morning!” So the people gathered to him, some coming to him, and some sending a messenger, then the Messenger of God said: “O Banū ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, O Banū Fahr, O Banū Luʿayy, what would you think, if I informed you that horses [were coming] from the foot of this mountain, wanting to vie for you - would you believe me?” They said: “Yes.” He said: “Then truly I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible penalty.” Then Abū Lahab said: “May you perish

399Ibid.
400Ibid., vol. 3, 1363-4.
this day! You only called us for this?” And God revealed: “Perish the hand of the Father of Flame and Perish he!”

Three of the other reports relate this story to the revelation of Qur’an 26:214, seeming to continue the theme of Ibn Kathir’s *sīra/tarīkh*. The first of these is similar to the third report in the *sīra/tarīkh*, above. It, too, comes from Ibn Ḥanbal, originating with ‘Ā’isha, and states:

“When it was revealed: “And warn your nearest kinsmen,” the Messenger of God rose and said: “O Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad, O Ṣafīya bt. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I do not possess anything for you from God, ask me whatever you want from my wealth.”

This is followed by the comment that it is unique in the publication of Muslim. The second report of this group, from Ibn Ḥanbal again, is similar to report two in the *sīra/tarīkh*:

“When this verse was revealed: “And warn your nearest kinsmen,” the Messenger of God called Quraysh, the low and the high, and he said: “O community of Quraysh, save yourselves from Hellfire, O community of the Banū Ka‘b, save yourselves from Hellfire, O community of the Banū Hāshim, save yourselves from Hellfire, O community of the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, save yourselves from Hellfire, O Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad, save yourself from Hellfire, for truly I, by God, do not possess for you anything from God, except for mercy.”

This report is followed by the comment:

Muslim and al-Tirmidhī transmitted it from a report by ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Umayr, and al-Tirmidhī said: “It is unique from this direction.” And al-Nasā’ī transmitted it incompletely from a report of Mūsā b. Ṭalḥa, and he does not mention Abū Hurayra in it.... And they published it in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* from a report of al-Zuhri, on the authority of Sa‘id b. al-Musayyab, and Abū Salama b. ‘Abd al-Raḥman, on the authority of Abū Hurayra.

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401Ibid., vol. 3, 1363. Ibn Kathir follows this report with the comment that “al-Bukhārī and Muslim and al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā’ī transmitted it... on the authority of al-A’mash.”
402Ibid.
403Ibid.
404Ibid.
405Ibid., vol. 3, 1363-4. Again, this appears to be an attempt at equating the authoritativeness of a report found in the *Musnad* to those in the Six Books.
The third report that links this event to the revelation of Qur’an 26:214 also comes from Ibn Ḥanbal and states:

When it was revealed, “And warn your nearest kinsmen,” the Messenger of God climbed the great boulders from the mountain on its stone heights, and he began to cry out: “O Banū ‘Abd Manāf, rather I am a warner, rather like me and like you is the man who saw the enemy, so he went to warn his people, returning to get ahead of them, then he began to cry out and to shout - Beware this morning!”

Ibn Kathîr also adds comments to this report, stating that “Muslim and al-Nasâ’î transmitted it from a report of Sulaymân b. Ṭârkhân al-Taymî, on the authority of Abû ‘Uthmân ‘Abd al-Raḥman b. Sahl al-Nahadî, on the authority of Qubaysa and Zuhayr b. ‘Amr al-Hilālî.”

Of the remaining two reports in this group, neither attempts to connect the event of Muḥammad calling out to his fellow tribesmen to a Qur’ānic revelation. The first of the pair comes from Ibn Ḥanbal and includes Ibn Isḥāq in its chain of authorities, and reads:

The Messenger of God said: “O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, buy yourselves from God, O Ṣafīya, aunt of the Messenger of God, and O Fāṭima, daughter of the Messenger of God, buy yourselves from God, for truly I can be of no help for the two of you from God, ask what you want from my wealth.”

The second reads:

And Abū Ya‘lā said: Suwayd b. Sa‘īd informed us, Dāmām b. Ismā‘ıl informed us, on the authority of Muṣā b. Waradān, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, on

\[406\]Ibid., vol. 3, 1364.
\[407\]Ibid.
\[408\]Ibid. This is followed by yet another comment by Ibn Kathîr, who relates that the same text can be found in other reports. He states: It is unique from this direction. And it is unique also on the authority of Mu‘awiyah, on the authority of Zā‘ida, on the authority of Abū al-Zanâd, on the authority of al-A’raj, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, on the authority of the Prophet, the like of it. And it was transmitted also on the authority of Hasan, Ibn Lahi‘a informed us, on the authority of al-A’raj, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, traceable in ascending order of traditionaries to the Prophet (martû ‘in).
the authority of the Prophet: "O Banū Quṣayy, O Banū Hāshim, O Banū 'Abd Manāf, I am the warn... and the appointed time."\(^{409}\)

Of these six reports, five are from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. This appears to be one of the many times that Ibn Kathīr attempts to equate reports from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal with those found in the Six Books. He even points out which reports are unique to one of the Six Books, seeming to show that, even though some reports are only found in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, the authors of the Six Books were also not above transmitting unique reports. The message of these reports appears to be the same as that found in the sīra/tā 'rīkh: that Muḥammad announced his mission to certain tribes within Quraysh as well as to certain individuals. The reports vary as to whether or not this was in response to a Qur'ānic revelation.

It is with report eight that we arrive at the story of Muḥammad’s private announcement to his kinsmen and the scene between himself and ‘Aḥī, but Ibn Kathīr begins here with a report that seems to summarize those that follow and, like the report at the beginning of this section, serves to focus the reader on that element of the story that Ibn Kathīr deems most important. It comes from Ibn Ḥanbal and originates with ‘Aḥī, and states:

> When this verse was revealed, “And warn your nearest kinsmen,” the Prophet gathered from among the people of his house, and thirty assembled, then they ate and they drank. And he said to them: “Who will safeguard for me my religion and my promises, and be with me in Paradise, and be my successor among my people?” ...Then ‘Aḥī said: “I (will).”\(^{410}\)

While this report contains themes similar to those in the sīra/tā 'rīkh, there are also important differences. In this report, ‘Aḥī simply summarizes events without any great...

\(^{409}\)Ibid.
\(^{410}\)Ibid.
detail. The number of men in attendance is thirty, whereas in other reports it is forty. There is no mention of the miraculous multiplication of food and drink, nor is there any refutation by Muḥammad’s kinsmen. Thus, this report is unique in Ibn Kathir’s treatment of this event, since it seems to allow for a mundane element in Muḥammad’s private meeting, and is the only report in any of our sources to do so. While Muḥammad is still shown as obeying a command of God, he performs no miracle in the process.

The ninth report, also from Ibn Ḥanbal and originating with ‘Alī, includes the miracle story, but not the Qur’ānic motive, and in this section, Muḥammad himself calls attention to the supernatural event:

The Messenger of God gathered - or the Messenger of God called - the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib..., then he arranged a spread of food for them, so they ate until they were satisfied, and the food remained as it was, as if they had not touched it..., so they drank until they were satisfied, and the drink remained as if they had not touched it, or had not drank. And he said: “O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, truly I have been sent to you in particular, and to the people in general, and you have seen from this sign what you have seen. So which of you will pay homage to me because of that, being my brother and my companion?” No one rose to him. So, I [‘Alī] rose to him, although I was the youngest of the group. Then he said: “Sit,” until the third time, he hit his hand on my hand.411

Muḥammad’s message in this report seems to take a back seat to the miracle itself. This is nearly identical to the report in al-Ṭabarī’s sīrā/tāʾīrīkh, but without the introductory part that gives the setting in which it was related, thus omitting any potential interpretation that would seem to support ‘Alid claims to superiority over the ‘Abbāsids.

The tenth report is taken from al-Bayhaqi’s Dalā’il al-nubūwa.412 This report is very similar to that found in both Ibn Kathir’s and al-Ṭabarī’s sīrā/tāʾīrīkh as well as al-

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411Ibid.
412Ibid., vol. 3, 1364-5.
Ṭabari’s taḥsīr. Muḥammad describes to ‘Afi his hesitation to carry out God’s command and Gabriel’s threat of punishment, which acts as the impetus for the report.\textsuperscript{413} This report is different, however, in that Muḥammad must perform the miracle of the food and drink not twice, but three times before he has a chance to deliver his message to his kinsmen. As in the other works, Abū Lahab interrupts him, informs the other men that they have been bewitched, and they disperse. After the third miraculous division of the food and drink, Abū Lahab remains silent, and Muḥammad states “O Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, truly I, by God, do not know a young man among the Arabs who brought his people better than what I have brought you, truly I have brought you the best of this world and the Hereafter.”\textsuperscript{414} The report ends here and Ibn Kathīr states that Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār provides an alternate isnād, one in which Ibn Ishāq’s mystery source is revealed as ‘Abd al-Ghaffār b. al-Qāsim Abū Maryam, the same reporter he so completely discredits in his sīra/ta’rīkh.\textsuperscript{415} Ibn Kathīr continues by relating a report from al-Ṭabari, the same one that he relates in his sīra/ta’rīkh, that includes ‘Abd al-Ghaffār as a source.\textsuperscript{416} This report adds to the end of Muḥammad’s speech, and quotes Muḥammad as saying, “And He commanded me to invite you to it, so which among you will aid me in this matter in addition to being my brother and so on and so on?”\textsuperscript{417} None of the men responds, so ‘Afi volunteers, although he is the youngest and least physically fit among them. Muḥammad accepts him and announces to the group that ‘Afi is his brother and that they should listen to him and obey. As in the previous reports, this is

\textsuperscript{413}Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1364.
\textsuperscript{414}Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1365.
\textsuperscript{415}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{416}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{417}Ibid.
 unacceptable to the group and they leave. At this point, Ibn Kathır adds comments identical to those found in his *ṣūra/taʾrīkh* regarding the untrustworthiness of ‘Abd al-Ghaffār b. al-Qāsim Abū Maryam as a *ḥadīth* reporter, and again refers to him as “a liar and a Shīʿi.”

Ibn Kathır follows this with the last of the reports that deal with the publication of Muhammad’s mission in his *tafsīr* of these verses, and it repeats the lengthy tale of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, and the multiplication of the food and drink. In this version there are some forty men present at the meeting, but they are listed as belonging to the Banū Hāshim, as opposed to the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, as mentioned in the other reports. Again, Muḥammad must perform the miracle three times on three separate occasions before he is able to deliver his message and must actually take the men by surprise in order to do so. Abū Lahab is completely absent from this report, and it is the men as a collective whole who state that they have been bewitched. This is the only report in all of our sources with an indication that more people than just ‘Alī and Abū Lahab witnessed the miraculous division of the food and drink. This report is similar to others in that Muḥammad does not mention his mission for God, but instead asks: “Which of you will complete for me my debts and be my successor among my people?” The report also includes ‘Alī’s comments about al-‘Abbās and the older man’s concern for his property, as well as his own perceived low status among those assembled. The report ends here, with no indication whether Muḥammad accepted ‘Alī’s offer. Ibn Kathır’s comments are the same as those found in the *ṣūra/taʾrīkh* wherein he argues that

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418Ibid.  
419Ibid.  
420Ibid., vol. 3, 1365.
what Muḥammad really meant was that if he were killed in the course of his mission, he would need someone to look after his affairs. Here again, he dismisses the religio-political implications of the report and takes the extra step of arguing that the revelation of Qurān 5:67 further negates the need for ‘Afl’s promise of assistance by assuring Muḥammad that God will protect him from his enemies.

Despite his acerbic reaction to the above reports, Ibn Kathīr is careful to point out here that he has an immense amount of respect for ‘Afl. Indeed, he states that “there was none among the Banū Hāshim at that time who was more faithful... to the Messenger of God than ‘Afl....”\(^{421}\) However, having said that, he continues by citing a report of a much later incident wherein Muhammad is quoted as saying: “The most devout of people in this world are the prophets; those who oppose them most strongly are their relatives.”\(^{422}\) Ibn Kathīr here repeats his citation of the verses from 26:214-216 and then cites 26:217, wherein Muḥammad is told to put his trust in God. Our author then interprets this as meaning that God fulfills all of the roles that Muḥammad had asked of ‘Afl, stating: “So truly He is your helper and your guardian, and your protector and your success....”\(^{423}\) Thus, Ibn Kathīr has apparently successfully refuted the previous reports by questioning their chains of authorities, putting his own spin on the interpretation of the text, and then providing Qurānic support for his arguments.

The overall image of the archetype of Muḥammad’s publication of God’s message thus appears to have been rather seriously challenged by Ibn Kathīr’s tafsīr of this verse. Not only does he allow for a public announcement that has no Qurānic

\(^{421}\)Ibid.
\(^{422}\)Ibid., vol. 3, 1366.
\(^{423}\)Ibid.
component, he also allows for a private announcement that has no element of the supernatural. He includes the report found in al-Ṭabarî, but without the politico-religious implications. And he cuts short the archetype in a report wherein Muḥammad does perform his miracle, but no response is given to his request for support, ending the story before the involvement of ‘Alî. Ibn Kathîr thus appears to go out of his way, even to the point of changing the archetype itself, to deny the Shi‘a any use of reports that seem to support their cause.

But what of the other verses? Even though Ibn Kathîr himself cites his tafsîr of 26:214 as the most comprehensive treatment of this issue, could his exegesis of the other verses mentioned in his sîra/ta‘rîkh provide a more complete insight to his treatment of this event? It seems most reasonable to begin with Qur‘an 43:44, since this is the verse cited after 26:214. The explanation of this verse is embedded within that of Qur‘an 43:36-45, which states:

If anyone withdraws himself from remembrance of (Allâh) Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one, to be an intimate companion to him. Such (evil ones) really hinder them from the Path, but they think that they are being guided aright! At length, when (such a one) comes to Us, he says (To his evil companion): “Would that between me and thee were the distance of East and West!” Ah! Evil is the companion (indeed)! When ye have done wrong, it will avail you nothing, that day, that ye shall be partners in punishment! Canst thou then make the deaf to hear, or give direction to the blind or to such as (wander) in manifest error? Even if We take thee away, We shall be sure to exact retribution from them. So hold thou fast to the Revelation sent down to thee: verily thou art on a Straight Way. The (Qur‘ân) is indeed the Message, for thee and for thy people; and soon shall ye (all) be brought to account. And question thou our messengers whom We sent before thee; did We appoint any deities other than (Allâh) Most Gracious, to be worshiped?\footnote{Qur‘ân 43:44 is italicized.}
The exegesis of these verses contains six reports, none of which mentions the publication of Muḥammad’s mission. The author’s commentary, located between the fourth and fifth report, cites Qurʾān 26:214 along with other verses, but still does not specifically mention the event studied here. Instead, these verses are discussed for their religious and lexicographical meanings, but none of these appear to be associated with the event at hand beyond the overarching theme of calling mankind to the belief in God alone.

The next verse mentioned by Ibn Kathîr is Qurʾān 28:85. This verse is joined with verses 86-88 in the Tafsîr, and states:

Verily He Who ordained the Qurʾān for thee, will bring thee back to the Place of Return. Say: “My Lord knows best who it is that brings true guidance. And who is in manifest error.” And thou hadst not expected that the Book would be sent to thee except as a Mercy from thy Lord: Therefore lend not thou support in any way to those who reject (Allâh’s message). And let nothing keep thee back from the Signs of Allâh after they have been revealed to thee: and invite (men) to thy Lord, and be not of the company of those who join gods with Allâh. And call not, besides Allâh, on another god. There is no god but He. Everything (that exists) will perish except His own Face. To Him belongs the Command, and to Him will ye (all) be brought back.

Here there is no element of the miraculous, nor any reports that describe the publication of Muḥammad’s mission, but Ibn Kathîr does reference the order given to publicize the message of God in his introductory comments to this verse-grouping.425 He states:

The Most High commands His Messenger in the publication of the message and the public reading of the Qurʾān to the people, and (it is) a real message... in that He will bring him back to a Place of Return, and it is the Day of Judgement. He asks him whether he observed it among the burdens of prophethood. And to this the Most High said: “Verily He Who ordained the Qurʾān for thee, will bring thee back to the Place of Return,” which is: He imposed upon you the conveying

of it to the people. "He will bring thee back to the Place of Return" which is: to the Day of Judgement....\textsuperscript{426}

He follows this with a number of reports that give varying explanations for the Place of Return. Some of them agree with his assessment, that it refers to the Day of Judgment, while others claim that the Place is Mecca.\textsuperscript{427} Ibn Kathîr then goes on to discuss the variant meanings of some of the other verses in this grouping, including the verse that commands Muḥammad to "never be a supporter of the unbelievers."\textsuperscript{428} He does not, however, list any reports that detail how or even if Muḥammad obeyed this command. Thus, Ibn Kathîr, at no point in his explanation of these verses, relates a historical context for either Muḥammad's public or private announcement of his mission.

The last verse grouping mentioned in the introductory section of the publication story in his \textit{sīra/tawrīkh} is Qurʾān 15:92-3. These verses are embedded within his exegesis of Qurʾān 15:89-93.\textsuperscript{429} They read:

\begin{quote}
And say: "I am indeed he that warneth openly and without ambiguity" - (Of just such wrath) as We sent down on those who divided (Scripture into arbitrary parts) - (So also on such) as have made the Qurʾān into shreds (as they please). Therefore, by thy Lord, We will, of a surety, call them to account, For all their deeds.
\end{quote}

His \textit{tafsîr} of these verses contains eighteen reports, as well as an introductory section in which he indirectly connects these verses to the publication of Muḥammad's mission.\textsuperscript{430}

He states: "The Most High commands His Prophet to say to the people: 'I am indeed he that warneth openly...."\textsuperscript{431} Nowhere in his treatment of these verses does he give the

\textsuperscript{424}Ibid., vol. 3, 1409.
\textsuperscript{425}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{426}Ibid., vol. 3, 1410.
\textsuperscript{427}Ibid., vol. 2, 1022-3.
\textsuperscript{428}Ibid., vol. 2, 1022.
\textsuperscript{431}Ibid.
historical context of either Muḥammad’s public or private announcement. He does, however, relate a report in which Muḥammad uses a parable to compare himself and his mission to the tale of a man who warns his people of the coming of an invading army, and this is the closest connection we see to the other reports cited elsewhere that deal with Muḥammad’s public announcement to his fellow tribesmen. The report states:

And in the Sahīḥayn, on the authority of Abū Mūsā, on the authority of the Prophet, who said: “Rather like me and like what God sent me with compares (to) a man (who) came to his people, then he said: ‘O People, truly I saw the army with my eyes, and truly I am the... warner, so (save yourselves)!’ So then a (number) of his group obeyed, and they set out at nightfall and got underway at their leisure, and so they were saved. But a number of them accused him of lying, and so they woke in the morning in their places. Then the army came in the morning, and destroyed them and annihilated them. And that is similar to who obeys me and follows what I bring him, and it is similar to who disobey me and disbelieves what I bring him from the truth.”

This explanation is reminiscent of the reports cited previously wherein Muḥammad asks those assembled if he were to warn them of an impending attack, would they believe him? This report leaves out the recitation of part of Qurʼān 34:46 and the reaction of Abū Lahab, which leads into the revelation of 111:1, but it does give a more detailed account of Muḥammad’s warning itself. The remainder of the exegesis of these verses is not tied in any way to the initial publication of Muḥammad’s mission, and deals with the meanings of different parts of the verses, as well as commentary by Ibn Kathīr as to which reports are authoritative and which are not.

But what about Qurʼān 15:94, which al-Ṭabarī cites in his sīra/tarīkh? In his tafsīr of this verse, Ibn Kathīr joins it to Qurʼān 15:95-99:

Therefore expound openly what thou art commanded. And turn away from those who join false gods with Allāh. For sufficient are We unto thee against those

⁴³⁵Ibid.
who scoff - Those who adopt, with Allah, another god: but soon will they come to know. We do indeed know how thy heart is distressed at what they say. But celebrate the praises of thy Lord, and be of those who prostrate themselves in adoration. And serve thy Lord until there come unto thee the Hour that is Certain.

In only one of the sixteen reports related does Ibn Kathîr tie the meaning of these verses, especially 15:94, to the publication of Muhammad’s mission. It is a brief report that states:

And Abû ‘Ubayda said, on the authority of ‘Abd Allâh b. Mas’ûd, that the Prophet did not cease concealing (his mission) until it was revealed “Therefore expound openly what thou art commanded.” So he went out, he and his Companions.433

There is no historical context or detailed account in this report, but it does tie the verse to the event at hand. Thematically the majority of the exegesis of these verses deals with the trouble Muhammad experienced with the polytheists as a result of his publication of God’s message. Thus, only the first verse of this grouping is linked to the publication, while the rest deal with the response Muhammad received. The tafsîr of this verse grouping does contain an element of the supernatural, but it is from a different historical context and is not the same miraculous act as that which takes place during Muhammad’s private meeting with his kinsmen.

Ibn Kathîr relates three reports in which Muhammad gets revenge upon certain men who had tormented him.434 The most detailed report comes from Ibn Ishaq, and Muhammad is shown using the power given to him by God to punish his enemies.435 God sends the archangel Gabriel to stand with Muhammad and punish those individuals

433 Ibid., vol. 2, 1023.
434 Ibid., vol. 2, 1023-4.
435 Ibid., vol. 2, 1024.
who had mocked him. Every time Gabriel, or Muḥammad, the text is unclear as to who is performing these acts, points to a part of a man’s body, his death results almost immediately from an affliction in that part. Ibn Kathīr interprets the meaning of this story as a fulfillment of God’s promise to protect Muḥammad from those who refuse to believe.\textsuperscript{436} Although he does not tie this event to the private announcement made by Muḥammad to his family members, the theme of God’s protection is found in relation to Ibn Kathīr’s citation of Qur’ān 5:67 in the sīra/taʾrīkh as the reason why Muḥammad no longer needed ‘Ali to act in his stead in case he was killed in the course of carrying out his mission. The supernatural aid given to Muḥammad by God through Gabriel stands as a concrete example of the power of God’s protection.\textsuperscript{437}

There are three verse citations used by Ibn Kathīr that are found either in the reports he relates or in his comments that are not found in his introduction to this section in his sīra/taʾrīkh. The first is 34:46, which is treated alone in the tafsīr, and states:

\begin{quote}
Say: “I do admonish you on one point: that ye do stand up before Allāh - (it may be) in pairs, or (it may be) singly - and reflect (within yourselves): Your Companion is not possessed: He is no less than a warner to you, in the face of a terrible penalty.”
\end{quote}

Ibn Kathīr transmits only three reports for this verse, with two of them relating in some way to the story of Muḥammad’s public announcement to the Quraysh. The first of these gives the historical context of the announcement, but not the Qur’ānic command. It comes from al-Bukhārī and originates with Ibn ‘Abbās, and reads:

\textsuperscript{436}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{437}The theme of God’s protection is discussed again in Chapter Five of the present work in relation to an assassination attempt during the Medinan period.
The Prophet climbed al-Safā that day, and he said: “Beware this morning!” So the Quraysh gathered to him, then they said: “What do you want?” He said: “What would you think, if I told you that the enemy (was coming) this morning and this evening - would you believe me?” They said: “Yes.” He said: “Then truly I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible penalty.” Abū Lahab said: “May you perish! Is this what you gathered us for?” So God revealed: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame and Perish he!”

This report is obviously similar to those found in relation to 26:214 and details the archetypal story of Muḥammad’s public announcement. The next report relates Muhammad’s parable of the man who tried to warn his people of an approaching enemy, but unlike the previous mention of this story, it ends not with the reaction of the people and their reward or punishment, but simply that the warning was delivered. There is no miracle story here, nor is there any differentiation between Muḥammad’s public and private announcement.

The *tafsīr* of the next group of verses, 111:1-5, also contains an element of the supernatural, but again it is in a different context than the miracle story in the *sūra* *tabīkh*. The verses make up the whole of the sūra and read:

> Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he! No profit to him from all his wealth, and all his gains! Burnt soon will he be in a fire of blazing Flame! His wife shall carry the (crackling) wood - as fuel! - a twisted rope of palm leaf fibre round her (own) neck!

Ibn Kathīr’s exegesis of this sūra begins with an explanation for the occasion for its revelation. He does this through a report from al-Bukhārī that originates with Ibn ‘Abbās and is reminiscent of those in his *sūra* *tabīkh*.

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439 Ibid.
The Prophet went out to the valley, then he climbed the mountain, and cried out, "Beware this morning!" So Quraysh gathered to him, and he said: "What would you think, if I told you that the enemy (was coming), this morning and this evening - would you believe me?" They said: "Yes." He said: "Then truly I am a warner to you in the face of a terrible penalty." Then Abū Lahab said: "You gathered us for this? May you perish!" Then God revealed: "Perish the hand of the Father of Flame and Perish he!" to its end.\(^{440}\)

Yet again, this report lacks the Qur'ānic impetus for Muḥammad's announcement, but includes most of the other details of the story. The rest of the exegesis of this sūra focuses on the meanings of the remaining verses and it is here that we find an element of the supernatural that is not associated with the publication of Muḥammad's mission.

The miracle story is included in Ibn Kathīr's discussion of the role of Abū Lahab's wife, Umm Jamīl. He admits that she was one of the most important women among the Quraysh at that time and that "her name was 'Arwa bt. Ḥarb b. Umayya and she was the sister of Abū Sufyān."\(^{441}\) Since she supported her husband in his activities against Muḥammad, her punishment would be to support the fire that would burn him by carrying wood to feed the flames. After citing several reports that discuss the composition of the rope said to be around her neck, Ibn Kathīr adds two reports that describe a confrontation between Umm Jamīl and Muḥammad.\(^{442}\) The first report states:

When it was revealed, "Perish the hand of the Father of Flame!" the one-eyed Umm Jamīl bt. Ḥarb approached [Muḥammad].... And the Messenger of God was sitting in the masjid and with him was Abū Bakr, then when Abū Bakr saw her, he said: "O Messenger of God, she is approaching and I am afraid for you if she sees you." But the Messenger of God said: "Truly she will not see me." And he recited a Qur'ān, taking refuge in it. Just as the Most High said: "When thou dost recite the Qur'ān, We put, between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter, a veil invisible." So she approached until she came to a stop at Abū Bakr, and she did not see the Messenger of God. Then she said: "O Abū Bakr,
truly I have been informed that your companion has ridiculed me.” He said: “He did not... ridicule you.” Then she left, saying: “The Quraysh know that I am the daughter of their chief.”⁴⁴³

So, here again Ibn Kathîr has included a report of supernatural powers being given to Muḥammad by God. No mention is made of the report describing Muḥammad’s meeting with his kinsmen and the multiplication of food and drink. Also, unlike other reports of supernatural events, this report appears to read like an instruction manual for folk magic based on reciting Qur’ānic verses. The believer is told in this verse that he will be “veiled” against evil, and that all he has to do is recite the Qur’ān.⁴⁴⁴

The second report is slightly different: Abū Bakr sees Umm Jamîl coming and encourages Muḥammad to run away in order to avoid being physically harmed by her. Muḥammad refuses, stating: “Truly He will come between me and between her.”⁴⁴⁵ Here there is no recitation of the Qur’ān nor mention of 17:45. Again, Umm Jamîl holds her conversation with Abū Bakr, being unable to see Muḥammad sitting right in front of her. After she is gone, “Abū Bakr said: ‘Did she not see?’ He [Muḥammad] said: ‘No, an angel did not cease hiding me until she left.’”⁴⁴⁶

By including the first report, Ibn Kathîr appears to be giving some of the power God granted to Muḥammad to all believing Muslims. This is not as unusual as it may appear at first, since, according to Tewfîc Canaan, it was considered quite appropriate

⁴⁴³Ibid. The verse cited in this report is 17:45.
⁴⁴⁴Ibid. The report does not indicate just how much of the Qur’ān is meant here, but considering the amount of time involved between Abū Bakr’s warning and Umm Jamîl’s approach it would have to be a fairly short recitation.
⁴⁴⁵Ibid.
⁴⁴⁶Ibid.
by some Muslim scholars to use verses of the Qurʾān as inscriptions on magical amulets, as incantations for protection, and as recitations for healing.\textsuperscript{447} There are even reports that Qurʾāns were washed and that the water was then given as a remedy to heal sickness.\textsuperscript{448} Whether Ibn Kathīr tacitly approved of this or not is uncertain, but his inclusion of this report without negative comment would appear to indicate that he, too, believed in the protective power of the Qurʾān. This assertion is further supported by his own statement in the introductory section of his larger taʾrīkh work about why he has included the life of Muḥammad. He states, “So we mentioned his life just as is necessary, so hearts and desires are healed, and disease goes away from the sick.”\textsuperscript{449} But Ibn Kathīr’s inclusion of the second report seems to take away this possibility by claiming that it was not a recitation of the Qurʾān that hid Muḥammad, but was, instead, an angel who protected him.

But what of the last verse mentioned by Ibn Kathīr in his sīrah taʾrīkh regarding Muḥammad’s announcement of his mission? Unlike most of the previous verses examined, Ibn Kathīr treats Qurʾān 5:67 as a single unit. It states:

O Messenger! Proclaim the (message) which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His mission. And Allāh will defend thee from men (who mean mischief). For Allāh guideth not those who reject Faith.

Here Ibn Kathīr brings full circle the story of the beginning of Muḥammad’s public preaching by using this verse to report a story connected to its completion. He cites reports from al-Bukhārī and Muslim regarding Muḥammad’s Farewell Pilgrimage in


\textsuperscript{448}\textit{Ibid.,} 127.

\textsuperscript{449}Ibn Kathīr, \textit{Bidayā}, vol. 1, 4.
which he relates that all present responded to Muḥammad’s speech, agreeing that he had carried out his mission.\textsuperscript{450} Thus vindicated by his own followers, Muḥammad was confirmed as having completed his preaching of the message sent to him by God.

Ibn Kathîr moves on from this to explain the last part of the verse as a promise from God to protect Muḥammad against his enemies. He states:

And His speech: “And Allāh will defend thee from men (who mean mischief),” which means: “...I am your guardian and your helper and your supporter against your enemies and you will be victorious over them....” And the prophet was already, before this verse was revealed, being guarded.\textsuperscript{451}

He follows this statement with a report that relates that Muḥammad was concerned for his safety and prayed to God for protection. It comes from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and originates with ‘Ā’isha, and states:

‘Ā’isha used to relate that the Messenger of God was sleepless at night while she was at his side. She said: “What is the matter with you, O Messenger of God?” He said: “There is no pious man from my Companions who will guard me this evening.” She said: “Then between us I heard the sound of a prayer, so he said: ‘Who is this?’ Then he [the man] said: ‘I am Sa’d b. Mālik.’ Then he [Muḥammad] said: ‘What brings you?’ He replied: ‘I came to guard you, O Messenger of God.’” So she said: “Then I heard the Messenger of God snoring in his sleep.”\textsuperscript{452}

Ibn Kathîr comments here that ‘Ā’isha’s presence meant that the incident had to have taken place after the second year in Medina, during which time Muhammad consummated his marriage to ‘Ā’isha.\textsuperscript{453} The reports that come after this contradict those already related by stating that Muḥammad had been under guard until the verse was revealed. At this point, Muḥammad informs his guards that God will protect him,

\textsuperscript{450}Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Tafsîr}, vol. 2, 611.
\textsuperscript{451}Ibid., vol. 2, 612.
\textsuperscript{452}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{453}Ibid.
and that he no longer needs their protection. The first of these reports is again from
‘Ā’isha, and it states:

The Prophet used to be guarded until this verse was revealed: “And Allāh will
defend thee from men (who mean mischief).” The Prophet stuck his head out
from the tent and he said: “O you people, leave, for God will protect us.”

Here Ibn Kathīr adds his own comments to this turn of events, at least as they
are related in this report, stating:

Thus Ibn Jarīr transmitted it from the path of Ismā'īl b. ‘Alīya and Ibn Mardūya
from the path of Wahīb, both of them from al-Jarīrī, on the authority of ‘Abd
Allāh b. Shaqīq, (it is) incompletely transmitted, and he transmitted this
incompletely on the authority of Sa‘īd b. Jubayr and Muḥammad b. Ka‘b al-
Qarāṭī, and Ibn Jarīr and al-Rabī‘ b. Anas transmitted (it)." Thus it would appear that Ibn Kathīr is again trying to undermine a report related by al-
Ṭabarī. This report does not seem to have any intrinsic value in and of itself, but when
read in relation to Ibn Kathīr’s treatment of the reports relating the publication of
Muḥammad’s mission, the miracle of the food and drink, Muḥammad’s reported
designation of ‘Alī as his successor in his sīra/ta’rīkh, and his tafsīr of 26:214, his
comments fall into the familiar pattern of doing away with the reliability of al-Ṭabarī as
a traditionalist, at least as far as certain reports are concerned, in order to avoid the use
of such reports by the Shī‘a. This does not mean, however, that Ibn Kathīr disagrees
with this interpretation of events, and he goes on to relate five reports that agree, at
least in their basic text, with the one above. They all relate that Muḥammad was
being guarded, although the identity of his guard varies, until the verse was revealed,

\[\text{References:}\]

\text{454} Ibid.
\text{455} Ibid.
\text{456} Ibid.
and that after this occurred, Muḥammad gave up his human guard, preferring divine protection.\textsuperscript{457}

Again, in Ibn Kathīr's \textit{tafsīr} of this verse, our author relates another story with a supernatural element that is not related to the miraculous division of food and drink, nor to the publication of Muḥammad's mission. As in his explanation of 15:94, he provides a concrete example of God's protection of Muḥammad. This time, there is no visit from Gabriel, but there instead appears to be direct interference from God. Ibn Kathīr relates four reports that describe a scene in which someone either attempts or threatens to kill Muḥammad. The first is from al-Ṭabārī, and also appears in the earlier writer's \textit{tafsīr} of this verse. It states:

\begin{quote}
Abū Ja'far b. Jarīr said: al-Ḥārith informed us, 'Abd al-'Azīz informed us, Abū Ma'shar informed us, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Qaraṭī and others, they said: "The Messenger of God used to... prefer for him (and) his Companions shady trees. So he was speaking under them. A bedouin came to him, and pulled out his sword. Then he said: 'Who will protect you from me?' So he [Muḥammad] said: 'God.' Then the hand of the bedouin shuddered, and he dropped the sword. Then he hit the tree with his head until his brains scattered out. Then God revealed: 'And Allāh will defend thee from men (who mean mischief).''\textsuperscript{458}
\end{quote}

None of the other three reports include the death of the would-be assassin, but they are thematically linked in that someone either voices a desire to kill Muḥammad, or actually has a weapon in hand, but is compelled to desist in his activities. The unifying theme of these stories is Muḥammad's insistence that God will protect him. Again, this can be

\textsuperscript{457}Ibid., vol. 2, 612-3. Some of the reports identify al-'Abbās as the protector, while others name Abū Tālib. Ibn Kathīr points out that Abū Tālib could not have been protecting Muhammad when this verse was revealed, since the verse is Medinan, and Abū Tālib died in Mecca before the Hijra. He does make an attempt at compromise, however, by stating that Muhammad was being protected by his uncle in Mecca, and that the job was then taken over by the Anṣār in Medina until the verse was revealed.

\textsuperscript{458}Ibid., vol. 2, 613.
used as proof by Ibn Kathîr that Muḥammad did not need ‘Alî to succeed him, because God would make sure Muḥammad was not killed by his enemies. However, at no point in his relation of these stories does he tie their meaning to his comments regarding the scene between Muḥammad and ‘Alî at his private meeting with his kinsmen. Thus, there is no direct connection made here by our author, but the inference is certainly present nonetheless.

In the sīra/tâ’rîkh, Ibn Kathîr cites this verse as an example of why Muḥammad would not need ‘Alî’s support as executor of his estate. Since God would protect Muḥammad, ‘Alî was no longer needed. He repeats this assertion in his tafsîr of Qur’ān 26:214. However, in his tafsîr of Qur’ān 5:67, this verse is shown as being revealed in Medina, not Mecca, since ‘A’îsha relates the story as an eye-witness after her marriage to Muḥammad. Thus, this verse could not be connected to the events surrounding the initial publication of Muḥammad’s message. Also, at no point in his exegesis of Qur’ān 5:67 does Ibn Kathîr discuss Muḥammad’s publication of his mission, nor his private meeting with his kin. Therefore, Ibn Kathîr’s use of this verse in his sīra/tâ’rîkh is out of context related to his use of it in his tafsîr.

Ibn Kathîr’s overall portrait of Muḥammad’s publication of his mission in his work of tafsîr would seem to indicate that the archetype of the public announcement made by the Prophet was of significantly more importance, as it was in al-Ṭabarî’s Tafsîr. This is indicated by the fact that he relates the story, or certain aspects of it, in

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459 It is possible, however, that Ibn Kathîr simply meant that ‘Alî’s support was no longer needed after this verse was revealed. This would allow him to have spent a certain amount of time as executor of Muḥammad’s estate, but that he would not have held this position at the time of the Prophet’s death in 11/632, thus negating later Shî’i claims. However, if this is what Ibn Kathîr intended by his citation of this verse, he probably would have made this point clear in his comments on the related reports.
his exegesis of roughly five of the seven verse groupings cited in connection with this event in his *sīra taʾrīkh*. Reports depicting the private meeting between Muḥammad and his family members are only related in one verse grouping, Qurʾān 26:213-220, and these reports are refuted absolutely by Ibn Kathīr. The only exception to this refutation are those reports that do not indicate that Muḥammad accepted ‘Alī as his successor and the one report that left out the miracle story entirely. Whereas half of the reports listed in his *sīra taʾrīkh* deal with the archetype of the private meeting between Muḥammad and his family, only a fraction of those in his *tafsīr* cover the same event. This does not mean, however, that the element of the supernatural is only found in relation to these reports. In his *tafsīr* of these verse groupings, Ibn Kathīr relates five separate supernatural events: the miraculous division of food and drink, the death-curse Muḥammad and Gabriel placed on those who mistreated the Prophet, his invisibility from Umm Jamīl after reciting some of the Qurʾān, the appearance of the guard to protect him in immediate response to his prayer, and the protection he receives against assassination attempts. This would seem to indicate that, while the miracle story of the food and drink had taken on a completely unacceptable Shiʿī tone, the role of the miraculous in the life of Muḥammad was still seen by Ibn Kathīr as a vital part of the story as a whole. His inclusion of the report of Muḥammad’s invisibility would also seem to indicate contemporary belief regarding the power of the Qurʾān to protect those who truly believe.

The archetype of Muḥammad’s publication of his mission appears to have been changed rather drastically by both authors, but only in a small percentage of their
reports on this event. Al-Ţabarî, in his sîra/târîkh, appears to focus more on the public announcement and allows for reports that do not tie it to a revelation of the Qur‘ān. His reports on the private meeting, however, reveal that he was willing to add an overtly political report that appears to support an ‘Alid interpretation of the archetype. His tafsîr of the verses quoted in his account also appears to change the archetype somewhat. He allows reports that show Muḥammad calling to individuals as well as clans, and these are the reports as well that fail to mention any reaction caused by his announcement. Some of his tafsîr reports allow for alternate occasions of revelation, as is the case in sūra 111. For the private meeting, he does not include the political version of the miracle of food and drink, but instead appears to allow the archetype to stand on its own for this incident. Ibn Kathîr, on the other hand, is not as subtle as al-Ţabarî, and overtly challenges the archetype of the private meeting, while appearing to mix reports found in both al-Ţabarî’s sîra/târîkh and tafsîr. Whereas al-Ţabarî limited the reports of the public preaching in his sîra/târîkh to those wherein Muḥammad called out to entire clans, Ibn Kathîr includes in this genre reports that mix his call of clans and individuals. It is the archetype of the private meeting with the miracle of the food and drink that Ibn Kathîr takes to task, even casting doubt on a report by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in the process. It does not appear to be the miracle story itself that causes him so much trouble, rather, it is the last part of the story that relates Muḥammad’s apparent acceptance of ‘Alî as his successor. This is completely unacceptable to Ibn Kathîr and his work takes on a vitriolic tone as he attacks the report’s isnād, its meaning, and even supplies a verse of the Qur‘ān that he claims refutes it. Thus, the archetype of
Muḥammad for this event is set aside or even attacked for the personal and political reasons of our later author. His repugnance for this report is carried over into his Ṭafṣīr as are his comments regarding its authoritativeness, or rather lack thereof. He even goes so far as to include a report that leaves out the miracle altogether. Yet again, it is the public aspect of Muḥammad’s preaching that receives the most attention in this genre and here, too, the archetype is allowed to remain. Despite changes made by both authors in both genres, the basics of the story persist for the public archetype. It is the private archetype that seems to be the most controversial, and each author takes steps to put forth what may be his own version of events.
Chapter Five
The Archetype of Muḥammad in the Medinan Period:
Clairvoyance, the Power of Prayer, and Authorial Opinion

The move from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD signals a pivotal moment in the life of Muḥammad. By the time of his death, some ten years later, his transformation was complete. No longer was he the orphan, struggling for material success, nor was he the persecuted prophet, rejected by his own people. Rather, he had achieved the fulfillment of both his mundane and supernatural archetypes. As his worldly success grew, so, too, did his mastery over the forces of the supernatural. This period of his life contains, by far, the most numerous reports of miraculous events, and the one type of incident that outnumbers the rest is Muḥammad’s clairvoyance. Though there are many different miracle stories for the Medinan period, this chapter will examine two such events, one of which contains reports relating an example of Muḥammad’s clairvoyant abilities, while the other relates the direct actions taken by God to protect His prophet. The first event is the warning Muḥammad receives that one of his followers has written a letter to the Quraysh, informing them of the Prophet’s impending attack on Mecca. The second event includes two supernatural incidents, and these are the protection Muḥammad receives during the assassination attempt by ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. Qays, and how God kills these two men, apparently in response to Muḥammad’s prayer. Al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathir both portray the archetype of the knowing prophet, but both authors also allow a certain amount of variance from this image revealing that, perhaps, divergence from the archetype was permitted for stories that were not seen as having a vital importance or controversial interpretation. Both of these stories take place within the
framework of larger events, and so appear to have been seen by our authors as less
pivotal than were the miracles studied in the last chapter, but it could be precisely this
view of these miracles that allows us to better examine the potential viewpoints of both
al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr, since no major dogmatic issues were at stake and since they
would appear to have had no overt reason for altering the archetype.

The dual story-line of mundane versus supernatural is perhaps best laid out in the
story of Muḥammad’s Medinan period. Upon arriving at Medina, Muḥammad had to
deal not only with the increasingly hostile Meccans, but also with those groups and
individuals in Medina who refused to accept his authority.460 Slowly, he consolidated
his power within Medina, eventually defeating both the Meccans and the Medinan
Jewish tribes, and began to make treaty agreements with the various bedouin tribes in
the area. By the time of his death, he had gained total mastery over Medina, Mecca,
Yemen, and an increasingly large part of the Arabian peninsula. He had even begun to
send his armies to the north against the Byzantines, thus seeming to foreshadow the
conquests that would occur after his death.461

At the same time that Muḥammad the leader was gaining ground against his
enemies, Muhammad the prophet was gaining control over the world of the
supernatural, including his supernatural enemies, namely Satan and the jîn, whose
appearances decrease dramatically over the course of this period.462 Muḥammad’s

460Watt and McDonald, The History of al-Ṭabarî, vol. 7, The Foundation of the Community (Albany:
SUNY Press, 1987), 26-61, 85-7, 105-138, 156-61; Michael Fishbein, tr., The History of al-Ṭabarî, vol. 8,
The Victory of Islam (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 5-41; Leiden edition, 1281-1329, 1359-62, 1383-1427,
462Oddly enough, those jîn who converted to Islam in the post-Revelation Meccan period are not
mentioned again, and it is rare that we see a positive story about the jîn in general.
dependence on the supernatural world is revealed shortly after his arrival in Medina, when he allows his camel, or divine guidance of it, to choose the spot for his mosque. Most of the miracles for this period surround the various battles fought between the Muslims and their enemies, thus revealing that the story told is not just one of military prowess, but of divine aid on the road to success. Angels take an active part in the Battle of Badr, the dead of Uḥud do not decay, even after many years, and Muḥammad feeds the multitudes again before the Battle of the Ditch. Muḥammad receives a warning from heaven of the assassination attempt by the Banū Naḍîr and it is Gabriel who tells him that he must do battle against the Banū Qurayṣa. It is only during this period that Muḥammad is able to miraculously heal his followers, although it is never explained why he is able to heal some, and not others. Most significantly, throughout his time in Medina, Muḥammad appears to be in almost constant communication with the divine realm. Not only does he receive regular Qur'ān revelations, but he also receives numerous warnings and messages that help him in his cause, sometimes saving his life outright. Thus, his supernatural success appears to be an other-worldly mirror of his material success.

The Letter of Ḥātib b. Abī Balta‘a

Al-Ṭabarî’s Sīra/Ta’rīkh

Al-Ṭabarî relates roughly ninety-five miracle stories for this period in his sīra/tarīkh, the majority of which, twenty-eight, relate to Muḥammad’s clairvoyance. The first event studied in this chapter is an example of this clairvoyant power, as Muḥammad receives a supernatural warning that one of his followers has sent a message to the Quraysh, informing them of his planned attack on that city around 8/630. Al-Ṭabarî only relates one report for this incident in his sīra/tarīkh, and that is taken from Ibn Isḥāq.⁴⁶⁶ The story itself is related within the larger framework of Muḥammad’s attack on Mecca, and does not appear to have been seen as particularly important by al-Ṭabarî.⁴⁶⁷ The report states:

When the Messenger of God had decided to go to Mecca, Ḥātib b. Abī Balta‘a wrote a letter to Quraysh informing them of the decision of the Messenger of God to go to them, and he gave the letter to a woman. (Muḥammad b. Ja‘far alleged that she was from [the tribe of] Muzayna; others asserted that she was Sāra, a mawlah of one of the sons of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.) He paid her to deliver it to Quraysh. She put it on her head, twisted the hair on the sides of her head over it, and set out carrying it. But word of what Ḥātib had done came to the Messenger of God from heaven, and he sent out ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb and al-Zubayr b. al-Awwām, saying, “Overtake a woman with whom Ḥātib has sent a letter to Quraysh warning them of what we have decided about them.” The two went out and overtook her at al-Ḥulayfa, al-Ḥulayfa of Ibn Abī Aḥmad. They made her dismount and searched her saddle, but found nothing. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīb said to her: “I swear that the Messenger of God did not lie, nor have we lied. You shall produce this letter to me, or we will strip you.” When she saw that he was serious, she said, “Turn away from me.” He turned away from her, and she untied the sidelocks of her head, took out the letter and handed it to him. He brought it to the Messenger of God.

The Messenger of God summoned Ḥātib and said, “Ḥātib, what made you do this?” He said: “Messenger of God, by God, I am a believer in God and His

⁴⁶⁶Fishbein, Victory of Islam, 166-8; Leiden edition, 1626-7.
⁴⁶⁷Ibid.; Leiden edition, 1626-7. The report does not receive its own section heading, but instead is simply one of a number of reports of the events leading up to the actual taking of the city.
Messenger. I have not changed or altered. But I was a man with no roots or clan among the people, while I had family and children among them. And so I did them this favor for their sake.” ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said, “Messenger of God, let me cut off his head, for the man has played the hypocrite.” The Messenger of God said, “How do you know, ‘Umar? Perhaps God looked down on those who were at Badr on the day of the battle and said, ‘Do what you will, for I have forgiven you.’” Concerning Ḥāṭib, God revealed: “O believers, take not My enemy and your enemy for friends” to the words, “to Thee we turn,” and the end of the story.468

The story does not stand entirely alone, however, since al-Ṭabarī transmits a rather lengthy report immediately before it that relates how the truce between the Muslims and the Quraysh was broken, Abū Sufyān’s failed peace attempt, Muḥammad’s announcement to the people of his plans to march on Mecca, and, near the end of the report, his prayer to God to “keep spies and news from Quraysh until we take them by surprise in their territory.”469 Thus, the supernatural warning would appear to be in response to his prayer, and the prayer itself could be seen as a foreshadowing of the entire story of Ḥāṭib.

So, the archetype of Muḥammad as portrayed here by al-Ṭabarī would appear to be of a man whose prayers are answered by the Divine in the form of clairvoyant

468Ibid.; Leiden edition, 1626-7. The words in brackets reflect the punctuation of Fishbein’s translation. The Qur’ān verses cited in the report is 60:1-4, which read: “O ye who believe! Take not My enemies and yours as friends (or protectors) - offering them (your) love, even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you, and have (on the contrary) driven out the Messenger and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because ye believe in Allāh your Lord! If ye have come out to strive in My Way and to seek My Good Pleasure, (take them not as friends), holding secret converse of love (and friendship) with them: for I know full well all that ye conceal and all that ye reveal. And any of you that does this has strayed from the Straight Path. If they were to get the better of you, they would behave to you as enemies, and stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you for evil; and they desire that ye should reject the Truth. Of no profit to you will be your relatives and your children on the Day of Judgement: He will judge between you: for Allāh sees well all that ye do. There is for you an excellent example (to follow) in Abraham and those with him, when they said: ‘We are clear of you and of whatever ye worship besides Allāh: we have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred forever - unless ye believe in Allāh and Him alone.’ But not when Abraham said to his father: ‘I will pray for forgiveness for thee, though I have no power (to get) aught on thy behalf from Allāh.’ (They prayed): ‘Our Lord! In Thee do we trust, and to Thee do we turn in repentance: to Thee is (our) final Goal.’”

469Fishbein, Victory of Islam, 166; Leiden edition, 1625.
communication. This communication from a supernatural source is not a Qur'anic revelation, but is instead of a rather vague nature. There are examples wherein Muḥammad and Gabriel speak to each other outside of the Qur'anic context, such as when Gabriel tells him he must fight the Banū Qurayṣa, but no such scene is indicated here.\textsuperscript{470} Therefore, since the report only indicates that the warning came “from heaven,” it remains unclear as to whether this source was an angel, God himself, or some as yet unknown third entity. Another element that may be of some importance here is ‘Alī’s belief in Muḥammad, and it may be his faith in Muḥammad even when no letter is found that provides the report with the proof of the miracle at hand. Of course, this could also be another example of the mundane/supernatural dichotomy. While ‘Alī’s faith could be seen as reflecting his belief in the supernatural source of Muḥammad’s information, it could also be seen as ‘Alī’s faith in Muḥammad himself. Another unusual factor in this report appears to be Muḥammad’s uncertainty about the will of God. He tells ‘Umar, “How do you know...? Perhaps God looked down on those who were at Badr on the day of the battle and said, ‘Do what you will, for I have forgiven you.’”\textsuperscript{471} It is only after he says this that the report indicates the Qur’anic revelation. While Qur’ān 60:1-4 does order the Muslims not to befriend unbelievers, there is nothing in this verse group regarding the veterans of Badr, so Muḥammad’s question appears to remain

\textsuperscript{470}There is also a fascinating report in an earlier section of al-Ṭabarī’s History in which Gabriel tells Muhammad the story of Moses, Pharaoh, and the parting of the Red Sea. In it, Gabriel admits that he shoved pebbles in the mouth of the Pharaoh as he was drowning so that he could not pronounce the shahāda and thus become a Muslim so close to his death. This appears to relate, not only a non-Qur’anic conversation between Muhammad and the archangel, but also a certain amount of free will on the part of the latter. William M Brinner, tr., History of al-Ṭabarī, vol. 3, The Children of Israel (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991), 65, 71.

\textsuperscript{471}Fishbein, Victory of Islam, 167; Leiden edition, 1627.
unanswered.\textsuperscript{472} Therefore, the archetype of the knowing prophet is counterbalanced by
the concept that, while Muḥammad knows much that others do not, he does not know
everything.

\textit{Al-Ṭabarī’s Tafsır}

In his \textit{Tafsır}, al-Ṭabarī relates some seven reports for Qur‘ān 60:1.\textsuperscript{473} He begins
with an explanation of the meaning of the verse, sometimes using examples from poetry
for aspects of the language that he determines need clarifying. The final part of his
explanation appears to lead into the story of Ḥāṭib by explaining that God knew that
Muḥammad’s Companions had been “confiding secrets” with the unbelievers.\textsuperscript{474} In
doing so, they had strayed from the path to Paradise.\textsuperscript{475} Al-Ṭabarī then specifically
relates the revelation of this verse to Ḥāṭib’s letter, and states:

And it was mentioned that this verse was from one of this sūra revealed in the
matter of Ḥāṭib b. Abī Baṭa’a, and he had written to the Quraysh in Mecca
informing them about the order that the Messenger of God had kept secret from
them, and by that come the signs and the tales about the group of the
Companions of the Messenger of God and others.\textsuperscript{476}

\textsuperscript{472}It is also possible, of course, that this report could have been used as justification for the special
privileges given later to those who had fought at Badr.
\textsuperscript{473}Al-Ṭabarī, \textit{Jāmi‘ al-bayān fi tafsır al-Qur‘ān}, 60:1,
<http://www.alaufisir.com/Tafsir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=60&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfileNo=0>, 60:2-3,
<http://www.alaufisir.com/Tafsir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=60&tAyahNo=2&tDisplay=yes&UserProfileNo=0>, 60:4,
<http://www.alaufisir.com/Tafsir.asp?MadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=60&tAyahNo=4&tDisplay=yes&UserProfileNo=0>, May 2006. Qur‘ān 60:1 is treated separately, 60:2-3 are treated together, and 60:4 is treated
individually. Although al-Ṭabarī ties the meanings of the other verses in this group to the story at hand in
his comments, the reports of this incident are only found in his exegesis of 60:1.
\textsuperscript{474}Ibid., 60:1.
\textsuperscript{475}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{476}Ibid.
It is uncertain what he means by this statement, except that he may be claiming here that this incident is one of a number of miraculous occurrences involving Muḥammad’s Companions. This may be an indication that this group, too, was viewed by later Muslims as having a supernatural connection, and, thus, were to be considered even more authoritative as sources for the words and deeds of Muḥammad.  

The reports related by al-Ṭabarānī vary in how much of the story they tell, whether the miracle is explicitly stated as such or merely implied or even present at all, as well as certain details, such as how many men were sent after the woman and what reaction ʿUmar gave to Muḥammad. Thus, for the reports in the Tafsīr, the archetype of the knowing prophet appears counterbalanced by the possibility that Muḥammad received some of his information from a more mundane source. Al-Ṭabarānī clearly indicates the involvement of the supernatural in his introductory comments, but at the same time, does not explicitly disagree with any of the reports he relates, not even the two that omit the miracle entirely.

The first report is based on testimony by ʿAlī, who appears to begin his narrative in the middle of the story, when Muḥammad orders him to go after the woman.  

The Messenger of God sent me, I and al-Zubayr b. al-Awwām and al-Miqdād..., and he said: “Hurry along until you come to a plum garden, then truly in it is a woman in a howda and with her is a letter, so take it from her.” So we hurried along, racing our horses with us until we wound up at the garden, then we found the woman, and we said: “Take out the letter.” She said: “I do not have a letter

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477 If this is the case, it would appear that the Companions also enjoyed an archetypal dichotomy between the supernatural and mundane. Whether this has a positive or negative connotation remains unclear, however, since the story at hand does relate an example of their disobedience and apparent friendliness to the enemy.

478 Ibid.
with me.” We said: “Take out the letter, or we will throw away (your) clothes.” So she took it out from her braids, and we took the letter. Then we hurried with it to the Messenger of God, and it (was) from Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta’a to the people of Mecca, telling them of some of the commands of the Messenger of God.

So the Messenger of God said: “O Ḥāṭib, what is this?” He said: “O Messenger of God, do not be hasty against me. I was a man connected to Quraysh, but I did not have a clan among them, while those (others) with you among the Emigrants had clans, and they desired (to protect) their people in Mecca, so I wanted... (to protect) my family, and I did not do that as an unbelief nor apostasy in my religion nor approving of unbelief after Islam.” Then the Messenger of God said: “You speak the truth.” Then ‘Umar said: “O Messenger of God, let me cut off the head of this hypocrite.” He [Muḥammad] said: “Truly he was present at Badr. And you do not know, perhaps God notified the people of Badr, and He said: ‘Do what you want, for I have forgiven you.”

No overt mention is made here of Muḥammad’s plans to attack Mecca, so the historical context of the report remains in question. In this report, ‘Aīf is accompanied by al-Zubayr b. al-Awwām and al-Miqdād, and this is one of the variables in the archetype, since the number and identity of those accompanying ‘Aīf change for almost every report, while ‘Aīf remains the only constant when the identity of the pursuers is revealed. It is in the Prophet’s scene with Ḥāṭib that we have added information not found in the sīra/tarīkh. Ḥāṭib explains that the other Emigrants all had clans in Mecca to look after the loved ones they left behind, but that he did not, perhaps indicating that his faith in the Prophet at the time of the Emigration was stronger than the others, since he had more to lose. There is no mention in this report of how Muḥammad came to know about the woman and the letter, thus there is here no clear indication of a miracle. Muḥammad could have simply been told by someone who had this information. At the end of the report, there is an added remark that “al-Faḍl added in his hadīth, (that)

Sufyān said: ‘And it was revealed about him “O you who believe, take not my enemies

Ibid.
and yours as friends” to His speech “until you believe in God alone.” Thus, the
connection between this event and the revelation of 60:1-4 appears to have been added
on, and thus was not part of the original report.

The second report is also from 'Aâî, but begins with Muḥammad’s announcement
that he is going to attack Mecca. It contains details not found in the previous report,
giving a fuller sense of the story. It reads:

When the Messenger of God wanted to come to Mecca, he told the people among
his Companions confidentially that he wanted Mecca, and among them was
Hâṭîb b. Abî Balṭâ’a, but he [Muḥammad] revealed to the people (in general)
that he wanted Khaybar. So Hâṭîb b. Abî Balṭa’a wrote to the people of Mecca
that the Prophet wanted (them). So the Prophet sent me and Abû Mîrthad..., and
he said: “Come to a plum garden, then truly you will meet a woman in it and
with her is a letter, so take it from her.” So we hurried until we saw her in the
place that the Prophet mentioned, and we said: “Give me the letter.” Then she
said: “I have no letter.” So we took down her baggage and we searched, but we
did not find it in her baggage. So Abû Mîrthad said: “Perhaps it is not with her.”
But I said: “The Prophet did not lie and he was not misled.” So we said: “Take
out the letter, or else we will strip you....”

So we brought it to the Prophet, and the letter was from Hâṭîb b. Abî
Balṭa’a to the people of Mecca. Then ‘Umar stood up and he said: “He betrayed
God and His Messenger, permit me to cut off his head.” Then the Prophet said:
“Is he brave, for he was present at Badr?” He ['Umar] said: “Yes, but he... aided
your enemies against you.” Then the Prophet said: “Then perhaps God notified
the people of Badr, and He said: ‘Do what you want.’” Then ‘Umar wept and he
said: “God and His Messenger know.” Then he sent for Hâṭîb, and he said:
“(Why) did you induce (her) to do what she did?” So he said: “O Prophet of
God, truly I was a man joined to the Quraysh, and I had there family and
property..., so I wrote to them of that. By God, O Prophet of God, truly I believe
in God and in His Messenger.” So the Prophet said: “Hâṭîb b. Abî Balṭa’a spoke
the truth, so do not say anything to Hâṭîb except good.”

This report varies from the one immediately prior, as well as from that reported in the
ṣīra/tāʾīrīkh, in that Muḥammad makes a private announcement to his Companions that
he is marching on Mecca, but purposefully gives false information in his public

480 Ibid. Al-Faḍl and Sufyān are members of al-Ṭabarî’s chain of authorities for this report.
481 Ibid.
announcement, claiming instead that they are preparing to attack the Jewish oasis settlement of Khaybar. The report continues much like the previous one, but with a few notable changes. This time, ‘Ali’s only companion is Abū Mirthad, who also alters the story by expressing doubt after the woman denies having the letter and they are unable to find it in her baggage. ‘Ali alone remains firm in his belief. In this report, the scene between Muḥammad and ‘Umar takes place before the Prophet’s confrontation with Hāṭib, and this time ‘Umar weeps in response to Muḥammad’s speech about those at Badr. Another change is that Hāṭib does not just discuss his family in Mecca, but his property as well. The report ends with Muḥammad’s acceptance of the man’s statement as true and adds an order that people, or ‘Umar, the report is unclear who is being addressed, should not say anything negative to Hāṭib. All of these changes give the reader a wealth of detail about the story and the people in it. As with the previous report, however, the source of Muḥammad’s information about the woman and the letter she carries is not specified, thus again there is no clear indication of a supernatural element. Another factor in common with the first report is the statement at the end of this account that “Ḥabib b. Abi Thābit said: ‘So God revealed “O you who believe, take not my enemies and yours...”’ the verse.” So again, the connection of the verse appears as an addition to the original story.

The third report is from Ibn ‘Abbās, and links the verse directly to this incident, but merely summarizes the story:

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482Ibid.
483Ibid.
484Ibid.
“O ye who believe! Take not My enemies and yours as friends (or protectors) - offering them (your) love...” to the end of the verse. It was revealed about a man who was with the Prophet in Medina from Quraysh; he wrote to his people and his kinsfolk in Mecca, informing them and warning them that the Messenger of God was traveling to them. Then the Messenger of God was informed of his letter, so he sent ‘Ali b. Abi Ṭalib for it, so he brought it to him.\textsuperscript{485}

This report does not provide the detail of the previous reports, with the name of Muḥammad’s Companion being omitted, as is any partner for ‘Ali. Although the role of the Qurʾānic verse is here central to the report, there is no mention, again, of how Muḥammad received his information.

The fourth report is identical to the one in the sīrat ṣaʿrīkh, discussed above.\textsuperscript{486}

The fifth report directly relates the Qurʾānic revelation to this event, and includes an explicit statement of the supernatural source for Muḥammad’s knowledge.\textsuperscript{487} This report states:

When it was revealed, “O ye who believe, take not my enemies and yours as friends” (it was) about Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balṭa‘a, (who) wrote a letter to the infidels of Quraysh, advising (them) about it. Then God informed His prophet about that, so he sent ‘Ali and al-Zubayr, and he said: “Go, then truly you two will find a woman in such and such a place, so bring (me the) letter (that is) with her.”\textsuperscript{488}

The report continues as have some of the previous ones, detailing the encounter between the woman and the men sent after her, as well as between Muḥammad, ʿUmar, and Ḥāṭib. Again, however, at the end of this report is an added comment that the verses of the Qurʾān were revealed in relation to this event, but this time the verses cited go all the way to Qurʾān 60:7.\textsuperscript{489} Report six is simply a statement that this verse is “about the

\textsuperscript{485}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{486}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{487}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{488}Ibid. Quʾān 60:5-7 read: “Our Lord! Make us not a (test and) trial for the Unbelievers, but forgive us, our Lord! For Thou are the Exalted in Might, the Wise.’ There was indeed in them an excellent example for you to follow - for those whose hope is in Allāh and in the Last Day. But if any turn away, truly Allāh
correspondence of Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta‘a, who with it warned the unbelievers of Quraysh.⁴⁹⁰ No other information, such as Muḥammad’s knowledge of the event or even what Ḥāṭib was warning the Quraysh about, is included.

The final report of al-Ṭabarî’s ṭafsîr of this verse contains an important divergence from the archetypal story in that it claims that Ḥāṭib wrote his letter, not to warn the Quraysh about Muḥammad’s attack on their city, but in relation to a much earlier incident:

It was mentioned to us that Ḥāṭib wrote to the people of Mecca informing them of the journey of the Prophet to them (at the) time of al-Ḥudaybiya, so God informed His Prophet about that. And it was mentioned to us that they found the letter with a woman (who had hidden it) in the top of her head. So the Prophet of God called him [Ḥāṭib] and said: “What caused you to do that?” He said: “By God, I did not have doubts about the command of God, and I did not apostatize in it, but I have there [in Mecca] family and property, so I wanted to bribe the Quraysh about my family and my property.” And it was mentioned to us that he was an ally of Quraysh, not being from among themselves.⁴⁹¹

Al-Ṭabarî makes no comment about any of these reports, even the last one, above, that sharply disagrees with the timing of the event as related in the other reports. He simply passes them on as he does in his sîra/ta’rikh, but it must be pointed out that, unlike the exegesis of every other verse examined by either of our authors in this study, this is the only instance so far in which every report is directly tied to the historical context of the verse.

Thus, the archetype of Muḥammad for this event, as a prophet who receives secret knowledge from a supernatural source, is only explicitly upheld in three of the

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⁴⁹⁰Ibid.
⁴⁹¹Ibid.
preceding reports, one of which is identical to that found in the *sīra/tāʾrīkh*. The first two reports merely imply the supernatural aspect of this warning through the detailed description Muhammad gives of the woman’s location, while two other reports leave it out completely. Also, the connection between this event and the verses of the Qurʾān appears, in many of these reports, to have been added on, almost as an afterthought. The supernatural archetype in this story, therefore, is that God protected Muhammad and his cause by passing along information about which no one else was aware. The dual archetype of the mundane remains possible, however, in that Muhammad may have been informed by someone who learned of Ḥāṭib’s letter. However, since this is nowhere stated explicitly, and since al-Ṭabarî himself argues for this event as a sign from God, the supernatural element dominates. The only event that is completely missing in the treatment of this archetype in al-Ṭabarî’s *Tafsîr* is Muhammad’s prayer, which precipitated the miracle itself in the *sīra/tāʾrīkh*. This indicates that, while the *sīra/tāʾrīkh*, despite its surface structure of individual reports, is able to maintain a narrative flow, linking the events of one report to those in the next, the *Tafsîr*, by its very nature, is more limited in this respect.

*Ibn Kathîr’s Sîra/Taʾrîkh*

Ibn Kathir relates over two hundred sixty-five supernatural events in his *sīra/tāʾrīkh* for the Medinan period, and, as in al-Ṭabarî’s work in the same genre, the clairvoyance of Muhammad easily outdistances any other type of miracle.\(^{492}\) The event

\(^{492}\)The eighty-three reports of Muhammad’s clairvoyance are seconded only by the thirty-three reports of angelic activity during this period.
of Ḥaḍīb’s letter is presented as slightly more important for Ibn Kathîr, since it is related in a separate section with its own heading.\(^{493}\) Unlike al-Ṭabarî’s \(sîrā\,\,tā\,\,rîkh\), Ibn Kathîr relates three reports in this section and, as is typical, adds his own comments throughout. The first report is nearly identical to the one used by al-Ṭabarî in both genres studied above, and comes through Ibn Ishâq.\(^{494}\) The only differences are that al-Miqdâd does not accompany ‘Affî and al-Zubayr in pursuit of the woman, and that Muḥammad tells them the identity of the letter’s author and reveals its contents before sending them off in pursuit. Ibn Kathîr adds a comment about this report, stating that “Ibn Ishâq sent forth this story as \textit{mursal} [incompletely transmitted].”\(^{495}\) He adds that two other authorities, namely al-Suhaylî and Ibn Salâm, give the text of the letter, but each of these men gives a different text, and Ibn Kathîr is silent about which one he deems more acceptable.\(^{496}\)

The second report is much like the first one in al-Ṭabarî’s \textit{Tafsîr}, beginning with ‘Affî, but ending with al-Bukhârî. This report, too, starts the story in the middle, with Muḥammad sending ‘Affî, this time with both al-Zubayr and al-Miqdâd, after the woman.\(^{497}\) Like the other report, no miracle is explicitly stated, and the only indication of possible supernatural intervention is the detailed information Muḥammad gives about the woman and her location. The report ends with a statement that Qur’ān 60:1 was revealed in response, but does not identify a particular authority with this addition. The

\(^{493}\)Ibn Kathîr, \textit{Bidâya}, vol. 4, 283-5. The heading of this section is not Ibn Kathîr’s usual “Chapter” or “Division,” but is instead “The Story (\textit{qiṣṣa}) of Ḥaḍīb b. Abî Balta’a.”
\(^{494}\)Ibid., vol. 4, 283-4.
\(^{495}\)Ibid., vol. 4, 284.
\(^{496}\)Ibid. Although Ibn Kathîr is rarely silent when confronted with conflicting reports, the fact that he does not attempt to give the two texts a complete isnād is an indication that here he is simply relaying information, rather than determining authenticity or designating preference.
\(^{497}\)Ibid.
result is that the Qur'ān verse does not appear as something that has been added on at a later date. Here again, Ibn Kathīr makes comments about the report's authoritativeness, noting that "it is excluded (by) the rest of the group except Ibn Māja from the hadith of Sufyān b. ʿAyina. And al-Ṭirmidhī said: ‘Hasan Ṣaḥīḥ.'”

The third and final report is from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, but does not originate with ʿAflī. It differs from the first two reports in that at no time is a Qur'ānic connection made for this event. It states:

Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta'a wrote to the people of Mecca mentioning that the Messenger of God wanted to attack them. So He showed the Messenger of God about the woman who had the letter with her. So he sent for her, and then she took (the) letter from her head. And he said: “O Ḥāṭib, did you do this?” He [Ḥāṭib] said: “Yes, (but) truly I did not do it (out of) disloyalty to the Messenger of God and not (out of) hypocrisy. I know... that I was a foreigner in their midst and (that) my sons were with them, so I wanted to obligate them to protect them.” Then 'Umar said to him: “Shall I not cut off his head?” Then he [Mūḥammad] said: “Would you kill a man from the people of Badr? And you do not know, perhaps God notified the people of Badr, and said: ‘Do what you want.”

While the basics of the story remain the same, many of the details are here completely different. ʿAflī is not mentioned at all, and the report claims that the woman herself was brought before Muḥammad and gave him the letter directly. There is no Qur'ān verse associated with this report, but the miracle is explicitly stated, revealing Muḥammad's source for his information as not only supernatural, but divine. Again, Ibn Kathīr adds his own comment and states that the report is unique in its isnād from Aḥmad b.

Ibid. “Hasan Ṣaḥīḥ is a hadith designation that means the isnād of a report is excellent and is considered completely authoritative. Obviously, if Muslim did not include this report in his Ṣaḥīḥ, then this designation for this particular report is not unanimous among the authors of the Six Books.

Ibid., vol. 4, 284-5.

Ibid.
Hanbal.\textsuperscript{501} However, he ends the above statement by praising God. This may be another way of indicating a certain amount of doubt, and thus could be seen as an attempt to salvage the report itself, despite the fact that it does not meet the requirements of the \textit{hadith} authorities.

Thus, in the three reports given by Ibn Kathir for this event, two state explicitly that the information Mu\textlig{a}hammad received came from a supernatural source, and yet both reports are indicated as being faulty by our author. The authority of the remaining report, wherein the Qur\textlig{a}nic connection is indicated, but the miracle is only implied, is basically accepted. For Ibn Kathir, then, it seems that an explicit statement of the miraculous element of the story is unnecessary, as is the connection of this event to Mu\textlig{a}hammad's attack on Mecca.

\textit{Ibn Kathir's Tafs\textlig{i}r}

Unlike al-\textlig{T}abar\textlig{i}, Ibn Kathir groups his \textit{tafs\textlig{i}r} of Qur\textlig{a}n 60:1 with that of 60:2-3.\textsuperscript{502} These verses read:

O ye who believe! Take not My enemies and yours as friends (or protectors) - offering them (your) love, even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you, and have (on the contrary) driven out the Messenger and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because ye believe in All\textlig{a}h your Lord! If ye have come out to strive in My Way and to seek My Good Pleasure, (take them not as friends), holding secret converse of love (and friendship) with them: for I know full well all that ye conceal and all that ye reveal. And any of you that does this has strayed from the Straight Path. If they were to get the better of you, they would behave to you as enemies, and stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you for evil; and they desire that ye should reject the Truth. Of no profit to you will be your relatives and your children on the Day of Judgement: He will judge between you: for All\textlig{a}h sees well all that ye do.

\textsuperscript{501}Ibid., vol. 4, 285.

\textsuperscript{502}Ibn Kathir, \textit{Tafs\textlig{i}r}, vol. 4, 1875-1877.
The first five reports relate the verses to the incident of Ḥāṭib’s letter, while the remaining reports provide explanations for the meanings of the verses and are unrelated to this event. Ibn Kathîr begins his treatment of these verses with a lengthy introduction, which gives the story added details not found in his sîra/tâ rîkh. He states:

The reason for the revelation of the beginning of this great sûra is the story of Ḥāṭib b. Abî Balta’a. And he was... a vendor of firewood, and he was a man among the Emigrants (who) was also among the people of Badr. And he had family and property in Mecca, while he was not of Quraysh themselves, rather he was an ally of ‘Uthmân. So when the Messenger of God decided about the conquest of Mecca, when its people violated the treaty, the Prophet ordered the Muslims to prepare for their raid, and he said: “O God, keep our information from them.” So Ḥāṭib supported this, (but) he wrote a letter and he sent it with a woman from Quraysh to the people of Mecca informing them of what the Messenger of God had decided about raiding them.... Then God the Most High informed the Messenger of God about that in response to his prayer, so he sent (him) on the track of the woman, then he took the letter from her.

Thus Ibn Kathîr here specifically links the revelation of these verses to Ḥāṭib’s letter and Muḥammad’s planned attack on Mecca. He adds information not found elsewhere, for example, that Ḥāṭib was an ally of ‘Uthmân and that Ḥāṭib supported the attack on Mecca, but sent the letter anyway out of concern for his family and property there.

Most importantly, Ibn Kathîr specifically states that God is the source of Muhammad’s information and claims that this was in direct response to Muḥammad’s prayer. This is the only time in any of our sources that these two events are overtly linked. As we will see, however, not all of the reports that Ibn Kathîr relates fully support this assessment.

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503Ibid., vol. 4, 1875.
504The literal translation is “prevail against them our information,” but the translation given above seems to make more sense in this context. Allâhumma ‘annî ‘alayhim khabaranâ.
505Ibid. Ibn Kathîr does not identify who was sent after the woman.
The first report is from Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Kathīr bridges the introductory section to it with the comment, “And its soundness is evident in this agreed upon ḥadīth.” As with most of the previous reports examined, this one is narrated by ‘Alī, and begins with him and his companions, al-Zubayr and al-Miqdād, being sent after the woman, with Muḥammad giving them the same specific information about her location, but no details about the importance of the letter itself. The rest of the story is much the same, and ends with Muḥammad’s statement about those who fought at Badr. Thus, there is no supernatural element expressly stated in this report. Ibn Kathīr comments at the end of the report that “the group published it, except Ibn Māja, from another direction...,” and al-Bukhārī made additions in the Book of the Maghāzī that Allāh revealed the sūra: ‘O you who believe, take not my enemies and yours as friends.’

So, here, too, the attachment of the Qur’ānic revelation to this event is represented as a later addition to the original report.

Ibn Kathīr then moves on to the second report, also from ‘Alī, which he states is published in the Ṣahīḥayn, or the Ṣahīḥ works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and it, too, begins with Muḥammad’s order to pursue the woman, thus leaving out how he knows about the letter. This report contains variations from the others and reads:

The Messenger of God sent me and Abū Mīrṭahd and al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām, and all of us (had) horses, and he said: “Hurry until you come to a plum garden. Then truly in it is a woman from the unbelievers (and) with her is a letter from Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balṭa’a to the unbelievers.” So we overtook her traveling on a camel of hers where the Messenger of God said. So we said: “(Where is) the letter?” Then she said: “I have no letter.” So we made it [her camel] kneel down and we searched, but did not find a letter, so we said: “The Messenger of God did

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506 Ibid.
507 Ibid.
508 Ibid.
not lie; truly, take out the letter or we will strip you.” So when she saw the seriousness of our desire to restrain her..., then she took it out. So we hurried with her to the Messenger of God.\textsuperscript{509}

Already by this point in the report there are differences that must be noted. The woman is here identified as an unbeliever, whereas her religious affiliation has not been previously discussed. Also, the three men sent after her do not simply take the letter back to Muḥammad, as in previous reports, but the woman as well. The report continues with ‘Umar’s request to cut off Ḥāṭib’s head, Muḥammad’s questioning of the man, and Ḥāṭib’s explanation about his fear for his family and property in Mecca. At this point, however, the report again reveals slight changes:

So he [Muḥammad] said: “He told the truth. Do not speak of him except good.” Then ‘Umar said: “Truly he has been faithless to God and His Messenger and the believers, so permit me to cut off his head.” Then he [Muḥammad] said: “Is he not of the people of Badr...? Perhaps God appeared to the people of Badr, then He said: ‘Do what you wish for Paradise is imposed upon you - or, I have already forgiven you.’” ‘Umar wept and said: “God and His Messenger know.”\textsuperscript{510}

‘Umar has here repeated his request to kill the man, even after hearing his explanation. Again Muḥammad makes his comment about those who fought at Badr, but with the additional expression that perhaps God promised them a place in Paradise; ‘Umar weeps in response and states, “God and His Messenger know.”\textsuperscript{511} This is where the report ends, and no Qur’ānic connection is made.

The text of the third report is identical to one found in al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{Tafsīr}, but Ibn Kathīr relates that it, too, comes from al-Bukhārī.\textsuperscript{512} It includes the Prophet’s purposeful disinformation about his plans to take Khaybar, as well as Abū Mīrḥad’s

\textsuperscript{509}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{510}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{511}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{512}Ibid., vol. 4, 1875-6. The report is the second one in al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{Tafsīr} that has been examined above.
doubts about the woman having the letter. The report states that Muḥammad "was informed" of Ḥāṭib’s letter, but does not relate whether the source of the information was human or supernatural. 513 ʿUmar again weeps at Muḥammad’s response and the Prophet again orders people to say only good things to Ḥāṭib. This report also has a comment at the end about the event’s connection to a Qurʾān revelation that makes the tie to the verse appear as something added on to the original. 514 Ibn Kathir then states that al-Ṭabarī had transmitted this report from a similar chain, but that it had already been mentioned by the authors of the Maghāzī and the Sīra, thus making it seem that he viewed al-Ṭabarī’s History as less authoritative than the work of Ibn Isḥaq. 515 He then goes on to relate a report from Ibn Isḥaq that is identical to that found in al-Ṭabarī’s sīra ta’īkh, which reads:

When the Messenger of God had decided to go to Mecca, Ḥāṭib b. Abī Ban'a wrote a letter to Quraysh informing them of the decision of the Messenger of God to go to them, and he gave the letter to a woman. (Muḥammad b. Ja’far alleged that she was from [the tribe of] Muzayna; others asserted that she was Sara, a mawla of one of the sons of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.) He paid her to deliver it to Quraysh. She put it on her head, twisted the hair on the sides of her head over it, and set out carrying it. But word of what Ḥāṭib had done came to the Messenger of God from heaven, and he sent out ‘Aṭf b. Abī Ṭalib and al-Zubayr b. al-‘Awwām, saying, “Overtake a woman with whom Ḥāṭib has sent a letter to Quraysh warning them of what we have decided about them.” The two went out and overtook her at al-Ḥulayfa, al-Ḥulayfa of Ibn Abī Aḥmad. They made her dismount and searched her saddle, but found nothing. ‘Aṭf b. Abī Ṭalib said to her: “I swear that the Messenger of God did not lie, nor have we lied. You shall produce this letter to me, or we will strip you.” When she saw that he was serious, she said, “Turn away from me.” He turned away from her, and she untied the sidelocks of her head, took out the letter and handed it to him. He brought it to the Messenger of God.

The Messenger of God summoned Ḥāṭib and said, “Ḥāṭib, what made you do this?” He said: “Messenger of God, by God, I am a believer in God and His

513Ibid., vol. 4, 1876.
514Ibid.
515Ibid.
Messenger. I have not changed or altered. But I was a man with no roots or clan among the people, while I had family and children among them. And so I did them this favor for their sake.”  ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said, “Messenger of God, let me cut off his head, for the man has played the hypocrite.” The Messenger of God said, “How do you know, ‘Umar? Perhaps God looked down on those who were at Badr on the day of the battle and said, ‘Do what you will, for I have forgiven you.’” Concerning Ḥāṭib, God revealed: “O believers, take not My enemy and your enemy for friends” to the words, “to Thee we turn,” and the end of the story.\textsuperscript{516}

This report is the first in Ibn Kathīr’s \textit{Tafsīr} that specifically states that the information Muḥammad received came “from heaven...,” thus agreeing with his statement of its supernatural provenance in his introduction.\textsuperscript{517} The Qur’ān revelation is also related as a part of the original report, despite the fact that it is located, like the others, at its end.

The fifth report by Ibn Kathīr in his \textit{tafsīr} of this verse, and the last that gives any amount of detail about the story, contains some rather interesting changes.\textsuperscript{518} It is not related in its complete form, but appears to be summarized, and states:

These verses were revealed about Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balta‘a, that he sent Sāra, a \textit{mawla} of the Banū Ḥāshim, and that he gave her ten \textit{dirhams}. The Messenger of God sent in her tracks ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Aīf b. Abī Ṭālib, and they overtook her in the Jaḥfa.\textsuperscript{519}

The report does not indicate why Ḥāṭib gave the woman money or anything relating to the historical context of the story, and this is the only source that provides the exact amount of money that changed hands. At no point is anything stated about how Muḥammad was informed of the woman’s mission, and thus omits the element of the supernatural entirely. Another important difference is that, this time, ‘Aīf’s companion

\textsuperscript{516}Ibid. Again, since the report is identical to that in al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{sīra/taʾrīkh}, I have maintained Fishbein’s English translation.
\textsuperscript{517}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{518}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{519}Ibid.
is none other than ‘Umar himself. Ibn Kathîr then mentions other authorities who claim that the verse was revealed about Ḥāṭib, but no other details of the story are given. He adds a section explaining what the verse itself means, and it is in this section that we find the familiar citation of several other Qur’ân verses. The last mention about Ḥāṭib is a statement by Ibn Kathîr that this verse was revealed before Muḥammad forgave Ḥāṭib, but after the latter had expressed his concerns for his family and property.520

So, of the five reports related to this event in Ibn Kathîr’s Tafsîr, only one explicitly states that there was a supernatural element to Muḥammad’s knowledge about the woman and the letter. Three of the reports indicate what appear to be implied miracles based on the details Muḥammad knew about her location, while one does not contain the miracle at all. The reports that include the implied miracles could also conceivably be interpreted as examples of more mundane sources for Muḥammad’s knowledge. However, Ibn Kathîr’s introductory section sets aside any possible doubts about who informed Muḥammad, and takes the added step of connecting this information to Muḥammad’s prayer, something he does not do in the sīra taʾrîkh. The verses of the Qur’ân are also explicitly linked to this event by Ibn Kathîr, even though this link appears to have been added on to most of his reports. Oddly enough, the only report that reveals an explicit element of the supernatural, as well as containing what appears to be a firm connection to the Qur’ân verses, is the one by Ibn Ishâq, which he listed as mursal in his sīra taʾrîkh. Perhaps, at some point, Ibn Kathîr realized that this was the only report that completely supported his own assertions, since he does not

520Ibid., vol. 4, 1877.
repeat his criticism of it in his *Tafsīr*. Therefore, his introductory section allows us to see his own interpretation of the reports that follow, despite their apparent authoritativeness or lack thereof.

The overall image of the archetype of Muḥammad’s clairvoyance for this event appears to be resolutely supported by both of our authors. They both argue for a supernatural source for his knowledge about Ḥāṭib’s letter and claim this incident is the occasion for the revelation of Qurʾān 60:1, despite the fact that the majority of the reports they transmit do not seem to support these arguments. In fact, of the seven reports related in al-Ṭabari’s *Tafsīr*, only two directly support his assertions. Of the five reports in Ibn Kathīr’s *Tafsīr*, only one, that by Ibn Ishāq, appears to satisfy his argument for the miracle and the revelation of the verse. Therefore, for this incident, our authors are willing to overlook weaknesses in the *isnād* if the text of the report conforms to their own opinions, and this is especially true of Ibn Kathīr. His use of other reports from more authoritative sources that contain implied miracles could be an indication that he needed them to bolster his arguments for the text of Ibn Ishāq’s report. Al-Ṭabari, on the other hand, is not as overtly concerned with the authoritativeness of his sources, and though his relation of other reports in his *Tafsīr* could be used for an argument toward consensus, his reliance on Ibn Ishāq alone in his *sīra/taʾrīkh* indicates that, for this particular genre, he viewed the one report as sufficient.
The Story of ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. Qays

The second example of the element of the supernatural in the Medinan period of Muḥammad’s life that will be examined here is the story of ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. Qays. This story includes not only Muḥammad’s prayers being answered in a rather violent fashion, but also direct intervention by God to save Muḥammad’s life. ‘Āmir and Arbad were two men of the Banū ‘Āmir b. Ṣa‘ṣā’a who were among the delegation that tribe sent to Muḥammad around 10/632. This event is told in the wider context of the large number of delegations sent by the various bedouin tribes to Muḥammad after his conquest of Mecca. Unlike the story of Ḥāṭib’s letter, this tale is given its own section by both al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr in the sīra ta’rîkh. As in the story of Muḥammad’s conception, however, the main difference between the two authors is that al-Ṭabarî does not relate any Qur’ān verses in connection to this event in his sīra ta’rîkh, whereas Ibn Kathîr cites Qur’ān 13:9-13.\(^{521}\) Unlike the verses in the earlier story, however, both men do relate this event to the relevant verses in their works of tafsîr.

\(^{521}\) Qur’ān 13:9-13 reads: “He knoweth the Unseen and that which is open: He is the Great, the most High. It is the same (to Him) whether any of you conceal his speech or declare it openly; whether he lie hid by night or walk forth freely by day. For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession. Before and behind him: they guard him by command of Allâh. Verily never will Allâh change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls). But when (once) Allâh willeth a people’s punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect. It is He Who doth show you the lightning, by way both of fear and of hope: it is He Who doth raise up the clouds, heavy with (fertilising) rain! Nay, thunder repeateeth His praises, and so do the angels, with awe: He flingeth the loud-voiced thunderbolts, and therewith He striketh whomsoever He will, yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allâh, with the strength of His power (supreme)!”
Al-Ṭabarî’s Sīra/Ta’rīkh

As with the story of Hātib’s letter, al-Ṭabarî relates only one report in his sīra/tarīkh for this incident, again through Ibn Ishāq. It states:

The deputation of the Banū Ḥāmid came to the Messenger of God, and among them were ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl, Arbad b. Qays b. Mālik b. Ja’far, and Jābbar b. Sulmā b. Mālik b. Ja’far. These three were the chiefs and mischief-makers (shayāfīn) of the tribe. ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl came to the Messenger of God intending to act perfidiously. His people had urged him to embrace Islam because others had embraced it, but he said, “By God, I have sworn that I would not cease [to attain power] until the Arabs follow me. Am I to follow the footsteps of this youth from Quraysh?” Then he said to Arbad, “When we come to the man, I will divert his attention from you, and as I do that, cleave him with the sword.” When they came to the Messenger of God, ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl said, “O Muḥammad, can I [talk to you] privately?” He replied, “No, by God, [I will not talk to you] until you believe in God alone.” [‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl] repeated his request for privacy and went on talking to him, expecting that Arbad would act as he had told him, but Arbad did not return a word in reply. When ‘Āmir saw that Arbad did not respond, he again repeated his request and the Messenger of God gave him the same reply. When the Messenger of God refused, he said, “Then, by God, I will fill the land with red horses and men against you.” When he turned away, the Messenger of God said, “O God, protect me from ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl.” On their return, ‘Āmir said to Arbad, “Woe to you, Arbad! What happened to that with which I had charged you? By God, there was no man on the face of the earth whom I feared more than you, but by God, I shall never fear you after today.” “May you have no father, don’t be hasty with me,” Arbad replied, “By God, whenever I tried to do what you had asked me to do, you got in my way so that I could not see anything but you. Was I to strike you with the sword?” ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl said: The Messenger sent what you see, as if we were intending to raid the troops of horsemen. Our horses became lean while bringing us to Medina, and they killed the Anṣār in their midst.

While they were on their way back to their country, God afflicted ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl’s neck with a fatal disease [a tumor] and killed him while he was in the house of a woman from the Banū Salūl. He began to say, “O Banū ‘Āmir, a lump like the lump of a young camel, and death in the house of a woman from the Banū Salūl.” When they buried him, his companions left for the country of the Banū ‘Āmir. When they arrived there, their people came to them and asked Arbad what had happened. He replied, “Nothing, by God. He [Muḥammad] called on us to worship something. I wish he were near me now, and I would
shoot him with this arrow of mine and kill him." A day or two after he had uttered those words, he went out with his camel to sell it, and God sent a thunderbolt which scorched him and his camel. Arbad b. Qays was the brother of Labid b. Rabia by the same mother.\footnote{Ismail K. Poonawala, The History of al-Tabari, vol. 9, The Last Years of the Prophet (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 103-5; Leiden edition, 1745-7.}

The archetype of Muhammad for this story would thus appear to be a mixture of what has come before. Again, Muhammad is saved by a miracle of God, who tricks Arbad into thinking his companion is blocking his shot, and the Prophet’s prayer is answered with the death of ‘Amir, who is thus no longer able to order an attack. But God takes his protection of the Prophet a step further and kills Arbad, and his camel, after the man expresses his own desire to kill Muhammad. As with the miracles of the pre-Revelation Meccan period, Muhammad appears unaware of the first miracle, although since ‘Amir blames him directly, this could be an indication that Muhammad knew what they were planning and acted accordingly, either supernaturally or simply by refusing to turn his back, but the wording of ‘Amir’s poem would seem to indicate the former rather than the latter. Also, it is not revealed how or whether Muhammad received word of the strange and sudden deaths of these two enemies, thus again, we are left with the possibility that he was unaware that his prayer had been answered. So, whereas in the story of Ḥātib’s letter, Muhammad’s prayer is answered directly and he is able to act on this information, in this tale, Muhammad is yet again a passive receptor of God’s works. However, it is also possible that Muhammad’s relationship with the supernatural had reached the point where simply the act of making such a prayer guaranteed a response. By the end of the Medinan period, during which this event takes place, the archetypal Muhammad was so confident of his favored status with God that
he knew that if he prayed for protection, he would receive it, and it is this interpretation that is most likely.

Al-Ṭabarî’s Tafsîr

Al-Ṭabarî’s tafsîr of Qur’ân 13:9-13 directly links this event to the verses, specifically to 13:11-13, despite the fact that they are not cited in his sîra/ta’rîkh at all.523 They read:

He knoweth the Unseen and that which is open: He is the Great, the most High. It is the same (to Him) whether any of you conceal his speech or declare it openly; whether he lie hid by night or walk forth freely by day. For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession. Before and behind him: they guard him by command of Allâh. Verily never will Allâh change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls). But when (once) Allâh willeth a people’s punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect. It is He Who doth show you the lightning, by way both of fear and of hope: it is He Who doth raise up the clouds, heavy with (fertilising) rain! Nay, thunder repeateth His praises, and so do the angels, with awe: He flingeth the loud-voiced thunderbolts, and therewith He striketh whomsoever He will, yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allâh, with the strength of His power (supreme)!

The verses are all treated individually except 13:12-13, which are treated together.

However, in his explanation of what these verses mean, al-Ṭabarî does seem to tie the entire group together. His explanation of Qur’ân 13:9-10 focuses on the power of God to know everything, whether one admits it openly or tries to keep it secret, and again he

523 Al-Ṭabarî, Jāmi’ al-bayān fi tafsîr al-Qur’ân, 13:9,
http://www.altafsir.com/Tafsir.asp?MadhNo=0&TafsirNo=1&SoraNo=13&AyahNo=9&Display=yes&UserProfile=0>, 13:10,
http://www.altafsir.com/Tafsir.asp?MadhNo=0&TafsirNo=1&SoraNo=13&AyahNo=10&Display=yes&UserProfile=0>, 13:11,
http://www.altafsir.com/Tafsir.asp?MadhNo=0&TafsirNo=1&SoraNo=13&AyahNo=11&Display=yes&UserProfile=0>, 13:12-13,
uses examples from poetry and discussions on grammar and lexicography to support his arguments.\textsuperscript{524} It is in his rather lengthy explanation of Qur'an 13:11 that we see the first indication of this event.

The main controversy regarding this verse for al-Ṭabarî appears to be over what is meant by "those who go in succession."\textsuperscript{525} Al-Ṭabarî argues that the meaning of this verse is directly tied to the two previous verses, in that those who go in succession are guarding "he who lies hidden in the night," and that this ties in with God's knowledge of all things.\textsuperscript{526} The story of Āmir and Arbad appears in only one of the numerous reports listed for this verse, and each of the two miracle stories is explicitly related. It states:

'Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. Rabî‘a came to the Messenger of God, and Āmir said: "What will you give me if I follow you?" He said: "You are a horseman, I will give you the bridle of the horses." He [Āmir] said: "No," He [Muḥammad] said: "Then what do you desire?" He said: "For me the East and for you the West." He [Muḥammad] said: "No." He said: "Then for me the tent-dwellers and for you the city-dwellers." He [Muhammad] said: "No." He said: "Truly I will fill it up over you (with) horses and men!" He [Muḥammad] said: "God prohibits you this...." So they left.\textsuperscript{527}

At this point, the story is very much one of attempted bribery rather than assassination. Thus, this version of the story is different from that found in his sīra ta’rīkh in that the two men do not initiate this meeting with the intent to kill Muḥammad. Instead, Āmir,

\textsuperscript{524}Ibid., 13:9, <http://www.altasfsir.com/Tafsir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=1&tSoraNo=13&tAyahNo=9&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0>, 13:10,
\textsuperscript{526}Whereas the Yūsuf ‘Afi translation indicates that this means angels, al-Ṭabarî’s exegesis shows that this was not the only interpretation being circulated.
\textsuperscript{527}Ibid.
like Abū Lahab in the tafsir of 111:1-5, is attempting to exchange conversion for power. It is only when Muḥammad refuses him that ʿĀmir becomes enraged and threatens violence. The story continues with ʿĀmir and Arbad conspiring to go back and kill Muḥammad, reasoning that the Medinans will be satisfied with the payment of blood-money if they are successful. The report continues:

So they consulted (each other), and he [ʿĀmir] said: “Return and I will distract him from you with discussion, and (you will) be behind him. Then strike him with the sword, one stroke.” So the two of them (stood) likewise, one [Arbad] behind the prophet, and the other [ʿĀmir] said: “Tell us your story, what does your Qurʾān say?” Then he began to argue with him (in order) to keep him waiting until he [ʿĀmir] said: “What are you doing?” He [Arbad] said: “I placed my hands on the upright of my sword, then they became dry, so I did not have power over (it, as if I were) stuck in a quagmire and could not walk and (could) not move it [the sword].” So the two left.

Then, when they were in the lava field [outside of Medina] Saʿd b. Muʿādh and Usayd b. Ḥudayr heard about that, so the two went out (after) the two of them…. Then the two said to ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl: “O one-eyed, O wicked, O tasteless, you are he who imposed conditions on the Messenger of God? If you were not in the protection of the Messenger of God, I would not want to stop until I cut off your head, but you will truly not be spared…” Then he [ʿĀmir] said to Arbad: “You go out, O Arbad, to an agreeable direction and I will go out to the Nejd, then we will gather the men, and we will meet about him.” So Arbad went out until, when he was in al-Raqm, God sent a cloud from the summer (and) in it (was) a thunderbolt, then it burned him. And ʿĀmir went out, so that when he was in a valley…. God sent to him the plague, so he began to cry out: “O people of ʿĀmir, a growth like the growth of the young camel and it has killed me, O people of ʿĀmir, a growth like the growth of the young camel, it has killed me, and a death moreover in the house of a Salūṭiya and she is a woman of Qays…. ”

The element of the supernatural is here more strongly implied in that Arbad claims that, not only did his hand become so dry that he was unable to use his sword, but that he felt as if he were “stuck in a quagmire.” Thus, God protected Muḥammad from their plan.

Another addition is the appearance of the two Muslim men, who threaten ʿĀmir and

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528Ibid.
529Ibid.
Arbad for their attempts at selling their conversion, but nothing here is said by the two Muslims of the attempted assassination. Thus, it would appear that, even though God protected Muḥammad, the Prophet remained unaware of either the attempt on his life or the divine intervention. It is also at this point in the report that we see a bit of foreshadowing in the statement that, even though the two men are under the protection of Muḥammad, they will not be spared the punishment for their sins.

The narrator ties this story to Qurʾan 13:10-11 by stating that even though ‘Āmir and Arbad plotted in secret, God knew about their plans, and that the angels guarded Muḥammad from before him and behind him against the two assassins. He adds quotations from Qurʾan 13:12-14, and then adds some poetry recited about Arbad by his brother, Labid. Al-Ṭabari appears to take issue, not with the story itself, but rather with its interpretation in light of the verses at hand. He argues that the verses simply mean that God has knowledge of all things and that even if someone tries to hide his words or deeds, and even if he has guards in front of him and behind him, if he rebels against God, nothing will protect him. The rest of al-Ṭabari’s commentary on this verse relates to the arguments of the various groups of grammarians and their disagreements over the meanings of different parts of the verse.

It is only in al-Ṭabari’s tafsīr of Qurʾan 13:12-13 that we have a fuller treatment of the event involving ‘Āmir and Arbad. Again, there appears to be a controversy over the meaning of different aspects of these verses, and the first disagreement appears

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530Ibid.
531Ibid.
532Ibid., 13:12-3,
to be over the meaning of b-r-q, which Yusuf ‘Ali translates as lightning, but which can also have the connotation of something glittery, and so some of al-Ṭabarî’s authorities say, instead, that it means water. In his explanation of Qur’ān 13:13, we see a return to the story of the attempted assassination, but in it, too, a possible reason why this story contains no Qur’ānic revelation in his Sīra ta’rīkh. The commentary begins with a listing of reports that relate what Muḥammad used to say or do any time he heard thunder. Most of these simply have him praising God, but the last one of this series includes an element of folk magic, and states, “He who says, upon hearing the thunder: ‘Praise God and Praise Him,’ the thunderbolt will not hit him.” Thus, it appears that the power of the Qur’ān or the model of Muḥammad will protect those who believe. Al-Ṭabarî does not give any criticism of this report, and moves on to comment that when thunder sounds, it is glorifying God, and that God is above what some would ascribe to him, such as the taking of a female companion and a son, which are obvious references to the Christian divinity of Jesus. There does not appear to be a reason for this comment, since he moves on fairly quickly to a discussion of the reason for the revelation of this verse. He states that there is some disagreement on this subject, and then goes on to transmit reports that relate various stories in connection with this verse. Five of these reports indicate that it was revealed in a different context from that found

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533Ibid. Al-Ṭabarî claims that he has already discussed the variant meanings of b-r-q elsewhere, but does not say in relation to what verse.
534Ibid.
535Ibid. Here, too, al-Ṭabarî indicates a previous discussion on the topic without any further citation.
536Ibid.
537Ibid. Christianity does not, however, allocate a female companion to God, so it is possible that, since he makes this remark in reference to the throwing of thunderbolts, he could be indicating any number of polytheistic deities as, for example, the Greek god Zeus, who was well-known as the master of thunderbolts as well as for his numerous affairs with female companions.
in the *sira/ta'rikh*, while only one seems to support the story of ʾĀmir and Arbad. Al-Ṭabarî begins with four reports that relate stories whereby an individual, either someone named Jabbâr, a Jew, an unidentified man, or “a man of the pharaohs of the Arabs,” asks inappropriate questions about God.\(^{538}\) They each ask, in different contexts, what material God is made from. Usually the materials mentioned are gold, silver, rubies, or pearls, and, of course, none of these are appropriate, so God kills each of these men with lightning and then reveals the verse. Another possibility presented by al-Ṭabarî is from a report wherein “a man renounced the Qurʾān and lied to the Prophet....”\(^{539}\) This man, too, is destroyed by lightning, and then God reveals the verse.

Finally, al-Ṭabarî relates the report linking this verse to the story of ʾĀmir and Arbad.\(^ {540}\) The report begins by connecting the revelation of the verse to this event, stating:

It was revealed, meaning His speech, “He flingeth the loud-voiced thunderbolts, and therewith He striketh whomsoever He will,” about Arbad, brother of Labīd b. Rabîʿa, because he, Arbad, and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl b. Mâlik b. Jaʿfar appeared before the Prophet, then ʾĀmir said: “O Muḥammad, is it decided (that I) will be the successor after you?” He said: “No.” He [ʾĀmir] said: “Then I will be over the bedouins and you over the city-dwellers.” He said: “No.” So he [ʾĀmir] said: “Then what is this?” He [Muḥammad] said: “You will receive the reins of the horses, fight with one another over them, for truly you are a horseman.”\(^ {541}\) He said: “...Truly, by God, (I will bring) against you horses and men from the Banû ʿĀmir.” And he said to Arbad: “Either you protect me from him and I will strike him with the sword, or I will protect you from him and strike him with the sword.” Arbad said: “I will protect you from him and I will strike him,” so ʾĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl said: “O Muḥammad, I have business with you.” He [Muḥammad] said: “Profess!” So he [ʾĀmir] continued to draw near, while the

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\(^{538}\)Ibid. The third man whose name is given as a chief of the Banû ʾĀmir along with Ṭamīr and Arbad is also named Jabbâr. Since he is also depicted as an evil person, the report may well be about him, although this is not stated outright.

\(^{539}\)Ibid.

\(^{540}\)Ibid.

\(^{541}\)It appears here that Muḥammad is offering ʾĀmir command over the cavalry.
Prophet was saying “Profess,” until he laid his hand on his knee and leaned toward him while Arbad drew the sword. Then he withdrew from him somewhat. Then, when the Prophet saw its [the sword’s] shine, he was protected by a miracle..., so (that) the hand of Arbad became dry on the sword. And God sent on him a Thunderbolt, which burned him.\textsuperscript{542}

The poetry from Arbad’s brother is repeated, and this ends the report. Al-Ṭabarī adds that he has related another version of this story, and this is the report examined above in relation to 13:11. Only one other report in the numerous reports that follow relate to this story, and it is simply one that states that the verse was revealed about Arbad and that God sent the thunderbolt against him.\textsuperscript{543} The rest of the explanation of this verse has to do with the possible vowelization of the word \textit{m-f-ā-l}, which might make the word indicate God’s strength, as translated by Yūsuf ‘Ali, or as cunning, which appears to be the preferred meaning of al-Ṭabarī.\textsuperscript{544}

The supernatural archetype of Muḥammad in al-Ṭabarī’s \textit{tafsīr} of Qurʾān 13:9-13 would appear to be slightly different from that presented in his \textit{sīrātaʾrīkh}. Of the numerous reports transmitted, only three mention Arbad b. Qays, while only two of these mention the full story of his failed plot with ‘Āmir. All three of the reports link the event to the verses of the Qurʾān, and two of them explicitly relate the miracle that saved Muhammad’s life. Only one details the Divine punishment meted out to both men, while the second reserves that punishment for Arbad alone. However, the fact that they are in the minority, even among those reports that indicate possible reasons for the

\textsuperscript{542}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{543}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{544}Ibid. Yūsuf ‘Ali’s translation of the end of this verse is: “Yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allāh, with the strength of His power (supreme)!" The word in question, \textit{m-f-ā-l}, is thus translated as God’s power, but al-Ṭabarī expresses preference for an interpretation of the word that indicates God’s cunning.
revelation of this verse grouping, would seem to indicate some uncertainty on the part of al-Ṭabarî and may have led to his decision not to include the Qurʾān citation in his *sīra taʿrīkh*. Also, his report in that genre is not repeated in his *tafsīr*, possibly since it does not mention a Qurʾānic connection, which may also indicate his hesitancy about the relation of this story to this particular part of the Qurʾān. Therefore, whereas his *sīra taʿrīkh* yet again seems to reveal a certain confidence on his part, since he relates only one report for this event, his work of *tafsīr* appears more concerned with other aspects of the verse grouping, such as its meaning and matters of grammar and lexicography, making it seem that the archetypal Muḥammad is of only minor significance for his *Tafsīr* in this instance.

*Ibn Kathîr’s Sīra/Taʿrīkh*

Ibn Kathîr also gives this incident its own section in his *sīra taʿrīkh*, as he did that of Ḥāṭib’s letter, but instead has Arbad identified in the first part of the section as Arbad b. *m-q-y-s*. Unlike al-Ṭabarî’s treatment of this event in only one report in his *sīra taʿrīkh*, Ibn Kathîr relates some nine separate reports in this section, seven of which are actually linked to this event. The first is nearly identical to the one from Ibn Ishaq that appears in al-Ṭabarî’s *History*. It relates:

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545 Ibn Kathîr, *Al-Bidâya wa’l-Nihâya*, vol. 5, 56; LeGassick, vol. 4, 76. I am uncertain as to the vowelization of this word. As with the story of Ḥāṭib’s letter, the heading here reads: “The Delegation of the Banū ‘Amir and the story (qīṣa) of ‘Amir b. al-Tūfayl and Arbad b. *m-q-y-s*.” He is also sometimes referred to as Arbad b. Rabî’a, although LeGassick simply relates his name as Arbad b. Qays.

546 Ibid., vol. 5, 56-60; LeGassick, vol. 4, 76-81. When numbering reports for this section, then, only the ones actually examined here will be counted. The other two reports relate the story of a man from this tribe who converted to Islam and remained a faithful Muslim who lived to be over one hundred years old.

Then a delegation from Banu 'Amir came to visit the Messenger of God. It included 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. m-q-y-s b. Jaz' b. Ja'far b. Khālid and Jabbar b. Salmā b. Mālik b. Ja'far. These three men were the leaders and chief mischief-makers of their tribe.

When that enemy of God, 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl came to see the Messenger of God, it was with the intent of betraying him. His people had told him, "Abū 'Amir, others have accepted Islam, you do so too." But he replied, "I swear, by God, I made a vow I would never cease striving to get the Arabs to follow me; should I now follow this Quraysh fellow?"

He said to Arbad: "When we go see this man, I will get him to turn his face away from you. When I do this, you strike him with your sword!"

When they reached the Messenger of God, 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl said: "Muḥammad, will you come aside with me?" He replied: "No, by God, not until you believe in God alone." 'Amir repeated: "Please, just come aside with me, Muḥammad." And he began talking to him, waiting for Arbad to act. Arbad, however, did nothing. When 'Amir saw that Arbad was taking no action, he again said, "Muḥammad, do come aside with me," but he again replied, "No not until you believe in God alone Who has no partner."

When the Messenger of God thus rejected him, 'Amir said, "Then, by God, I will fill this place with horses and men to fight you!" When 'Amir had turned away to leave, the Messenger of God said: "O God restrain from me 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl."

When they had left the Messenger of God, 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl asked Arbad, "Had I not ordered you what to do? I swear, by God, there was no man on earth I considered more fearsome than you! I swear, I will never fear you again after today."

He replied, "I pray you, do not blame me too hastily. Whenever I was about to do as you had asked, you got in the man’s way so all I could see was you. Should I have struck you with my sword?"

They headed back home and when they had gone part way, God, the Almighty and Glorious, afflicted 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl with a growth in his neck. And God killed him in the home of a woman of Banu Salūl. He exclaimed, "O Banu 'Amir, shall (my) death be from a growth like that on a young camel in the home of a woman of Banu Salūl?"

549 LeGassick has "Al-Arbad then said," but the Arabic clearly states that Arbad is the one being addressed, not the one speaking. Thumma qa'la li-Arbad.
549 The Arabic text has: "Then he said to Arbad: Truly when we reach this man, I will distract his face from you, so then when you do that I will descend upon him with the sword." This implies that 'Amir will both be the one distracting Muhammad and the one hitting him with the sword.
550 LeGassick has Muhammad praying: "O God, take care of 'Amir b. al-Ṭufayl for me!"
Muḥammad prays for protection, the men have their quarrel, but this time there is no poetry from ‘Āmir to indicate that Muḥammad was responsible for what ‘Arbad saw. In fact, without the poetry, the story up to this point could be seen as one indicating no miracle, since it is possible that ‘Āmir was simply in the way. The report ends differently from the one in al-Ṭabarī, however, in that it only gives the death story of ‘Āmir, not ‘Arbad, thus leaving out any connection between ‘Arbad’s death by lightning and the Qur’ānic verse about God’s power to throw thunderbolts.

Ibn Kathīr moves directly and without comment into the second report, and this one, too, only relates the death of ‘Āmir. This report, from al-Bayhaqī, does not give his meeting as part of the delegation sent by his tribe, but rather begins by stating that ‘Āmir came to Muḥammad, who urged him to convert. The man again tries to negotiate for power, but Muḥammad refuses and ‘Āmir repeats his threat. This time, the prayer is slightly different, as Muḥammad asks, “O God, protect me from ‘Āmir and one of his group.” There is no mention of ‘Arbad at all in this report. Again, the man contracts a disease in his throat at the woman’s house, and rides out on his horse until he dies. It is at this point that Ibn Kathīr inserts the two reports about the other member of the Banū ‘Āmir b. Ṣa’ṣa‘a who converted and became a good Muslim.

The third report to deal with ‘Āmir and ‘Arbad begins with a comment by Ibn Kathīr that deals with the chronology of this event. He states that although Ibn Ishāq and al-Bayhaqī put this event after the conquest of Mecca, he argues that it took place

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54Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 4, 77. LeGassick here has Muḥammad say, “O God, rid me of ‘Āmir and give his people guidance!”
55Ibid., vol. 5, 57-8; LeGassick, vol. 4, 78.
before that.\textsuperscript{556} He relates the third report in relation to a previous event at Bi‘r Ma‘ūna.\textsuperscript{557} The report relates that Muḥammad prayed about ‘Āmir for some thirty days, asking God to kill him: “O God, restrain from me ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl with what you will and send on him what will kill him.”\textsuperscript{558} The report ends with the statement that God then killed him with the plague. This would seem to indicate that the later meeting between ‘Āmir and Muḥammad never took place.

The fourth report again leaves out the context of the tribal delegations, and states:

‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl went to the Messenger of God and told him, “I give you to choose between three options: you shall govern the people of the plains, while I the nomads, or I shall be your successor after you, or I will attack you with Banū Ghaṭafān and 1,000 stallions and 1,000 mares.” He was then, while staying in a woman’s house, afflicted with a malignant growth. At this, he exclaimed, “Shall it be a growth like that on a camel and death in the house of a woman of Banū so and so? Bring me my horse!” He rode away and died upon his horse.\textsuperscript{559}

So, here again, Arbad is left out of the story entirely, and the report is limited to the meeting between Muḥammad and ‘Āmir and the latter’s death after his threat.

Muḥammad makes no request via prayer, but ‘Āmir dies anyway, and there is no Qur’ānic connection to this story.

The fifth report appears to be a continuation of the first by Ibn Ishāq, since it begins with the return of the delegation to their territory after the death of ‘Āmir.\textsuperscript{560}

\textsuperscript{556}\textsuperscript{Ibid., vol. 5, 58; LeGassick, vol. 4, 78.}

\textsuperscript{557}\textsuperscript{Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 4, 78. The event at Bi‘r Ma‘ūna, which took place in 4/625, was the slaughter of several Muslims sent by Muhammad to the Banū ‘Āmir at the invitation of their chief. ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl, who was also important in the tribe, killed the first Muslim representative without looking at the letter of safe-conduct granted by the tribe’s chief, and even after he knew of it, he gathered others to him, who agreed to help him kill the others.}

\textsuperscript{558}\textsuperscript{Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 4, 78.}

\textsuperscript{559}\textsuperscript{Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 4, 78.}

\textsuperscript{560}\textsuperscript{Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 4, 79. Ibn Kathīr simply begins this with “Ibn Ishāq said.”}
They ask Abad what happened, he repeats the story as before, and includes his desire to kill Muḥammad. The report then relates the story of Abad and his camel and how they were both burned by the thunderbolt sent by God. Unlike the account in al-Ṭabarī, however, this report includes a much lengthier example of the poetry recited by Abad’s brother, Labīd b. Rabī’a.\(^{561}\) The sixth report, from Ibn Hishām, reads more like a *tafsīr* report, in that it begins by mentioning the Qur’ān verses and stating that they were revealed regarding ʿĀmir and Abad.\(^{562}\) This report gives the meaning of the verse regarding “those who guard from before and behind by the command of God” as protecting Muḥammad and that Abad was killed by God, but gives no details of the events.\(^{563}\)

Before moving on to the last report, Ibn Kathīr cites his own *tafsīr* of these verses, stating:

> And we already spoke about these noble verses in sūrat al-Raʾd, and to God goes all praise and credit. And he already recorded for us an *isnād*.\(^ {564}\) Ibn Hishām, may God have mercy on him, did not make note of it, so we transmitted it from the path of the ḥāfīz Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Ahmad al-Ṭabarānī in his great lexicon...\(^ {565}\)

The text of this report is much like that found in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* of Qur’ān 13:11, and states:

> Truly Abad b. Qays b. Jazʾ b. Khālid b. Jaʿfar b. Kīlāb and ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl b. Mālik came to Medina to see the Messenger of God in Medina. When they reached him, he was seated and they both sat down in front of him. ʿĀmir b. al-

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\(^{561}\)Ibid., vol. 5, 58-9; LeGassick, vol. 4, 79.

\(^{562}\)Ibid., vol. 5, 59; LeGassick, vol. 4, 80. Unlike the other reports, however, this begins with Qur’ān 13:8, which reads: “Allāh doth know what every female (womb) doth bear, by how much the wombs fall short (of their time or number) or do exceed. Every single thing is before His sight, in (due) proportion.”

\(^{563}\)Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 4, 80. The part of the verse quoted is from Qur’ān 13:11.

\(^{564}\)It is unclear here who is meant. It may have been Ibn Hishām, in which case the statement is rather contradictory, or some otherwise unidentified source.

\(^{565}\)Ibid.; LeGassick, vol. 4, 80.
Ṭufayl asked him, “Muḥammad, what will you do for me if I accept Islam?” The Messenger of God replied, “You will receive the same as the other Muslims and have the same obligations.”‘Āmir then asked, “If I accept Islam, will you ensure that I become leader after you?” The Messenger of God replied, “That shall not be for you or for your tribe. But you may have command over the cavalry.” ‘Āmir responded, “I already now have control over all the cavalry of Nejd. Give me control over the nomads, and you control the villages.”

“No,” he replied. As he was leaving him, ‘Āmir said, “I am going to fill up this place with horses and men to fight you.” The Messenger of God responded, “God will prevent you.”

When Arbad and ‘Āmir left, the latter suggested, “Arbad, I will distract Muḥammad from you by talking to him, and then you strike him with your sword. If you do kill Muhammad, they will want no more than to be satisfied by payment of the blood-wit. They dislike warfare. You will just give them the blood-wit.” Arbad replied, “I will do it.”

They proceeded back to the Messenger of God, and ‘Āmir addressed him, “Muḥammad, get up and come with me so I can talk to you.” The Messenger of God arose and went alone with him toward the wall where he stopped to talk to him. Arbad went to draw his sword, but when he touched it, his hand lost its grip on the sword’s hilt and he could not unsheathe it. Arbad was unable to strike him sufficiently quickly for ‘Āmir, because the Messenger of God turned and, seeing Arbad and what he intended, walked away from them both.

When Arbad and ‘Āmir left the presence of the Messenger of God, and reached the lava plain of Wāqīm, they halted. But Sa’d b. Muʿādh and Usayd b. al-Ḥudayr went out after them and said, “Clear off, you enemies of God! God damn you both!” ‘Āmir responded, “Who is that, Sa’d?” “That is Usayd b. Ḥudayr of the cavalry squadrons,” he replied.

They left, and while they were at al-Raqm, God sent a thunderbolt down on Arbad and killed him. ‘Āmir then left, and when he was in the lava field, God sent a malignant growth to afflict him. That night he spent in the house of a woman of Banū Salūl. He began feeling the growth on his neck and said, “A growth like that of a camel, in the house of a woman of Banū Salūl!” He loathed the idea of dying in her house.

He then rode off on his horse, made it gallop, then died on it as he returned. God revealed to them both, “God knows what every female...” and so on, to the words, “For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession. Before and behind him...” By this, He was making reference to Muḥammad. He then made a reference to Arbad and how God had killed him, then quoted the verse, “He sends the thunderbolts and uses them...”

\[566\]Ibid., vol. 5, 59-60; LeGassick, vol. 4, 80-1. The translation of the Qurʾān verse here reflects the Yūsuf ‘Āli translation as opposed to that found in LeGassick’s text, which is otherwise the wording of the translation given here.
In this report, the supernatural archetype has been slightly altered. While divine aid may have had a hand in Arbad's inability to draw his sword, ultimately it was the fact that Muḥammad turned around and saw what the man was doing that saved his life. Here Ibn Kathīr seems to add his own comment, although it could still be part of the report itself, that the presence of Sa'd b. Mu'ādh is troublesome in this chronology, and adds the familiar "but God knows best."\(^{567}\)

So, Ibn Kathīr's 
\(sīra/tā'īkh\) of this event relates seven reports, although the fifth appears to be a continuation of the first, that discuss 'Āmir and Arbad. The archetype of this story contains two miracles, the first is the supernatural reason that keeps Arbad from striking Muḥammad with his sword, and the second is God's retribution against 'Āmir and Arbad. The first part of the archetype is found definitively in none of the reports related here. It is only possibly implied in two reports, the first and the last. In the first report, Arbad claims that he could not strike Muḥammad because 'Āmir was constantly in the way. While this could have been the case, it could also have been an illusion sent by God to protect Muḥammad, but without the poetry found in al-Ṭabarī's account, the mundane element appears more likely. The first miracle is even less likely in the last report, wherein Arbad's hand becomes too dry to pull out his sword and Muḥammad turns around and sees him. Again, it is possible that divine intervention made his hand dry, but the report simply does not seem to indicate this. As for the second of the two miracles, the deaths of 'Āmir and Arbad, these, too, are not found in all of the reports. If report five is a continuation of report one, then the deaths of both

\(^{567}\text{Ibid., vol. 5, 60; LeGassick, vol. 4, 81. Sa'd b. Mu'ādh died immediately after the attack on the Banū Qurayza in 5/627. His presence after the meeting between 'Āmir and Muḥammad is troublesome, since the delegation did not arrive until some five years after the time of Sa'd's death.}\)
men are related and are ascribed to God. Report seven is, again, the only other report that gives the deaths of both men as an act of supernatural retribution. The second report only relates the death of ‘Āmir, but does not specifically describe it as an act of God, although the fact that it comes shortly after Muhammad’s prayer is a good indication that it was, in fact, supernatural. Report three has the supernatural death of ‘Āmir as a response to Muḥammad’s prayer, but relates it to a completely different incident, and Muḥammad has to pray for a month before anything happens. Report six indicates that God revealed Qur‘ān 13:13 in relation to how he killed Arbad, but fails to give any other details of the story. Thus, of the seven reports, the full archetype is described only in one, while another one leaves out any miraculous element whatsoever. Since Ibn Kathīr does not provide an introductory section for this event, his own opinions about the details of the story, besides the troubling chronological issues surrounding the presence of Sa‘d b. Mu‘ādh, are not given in the sīra/tā‘īkh, but the supernatural element certainly seems not to be fully supported by the reports he relates.

*Ibn Kathīr’s Tafsīr*

Although Ibn Kathīr’s *Tafsīr* includes numerous reports for Qur‘ān 13:9-13, only one is directly linked to the story of ‘Āmir and Arbad. The verses read:

Allāh doth know what every female (womb) doth bear, by how much the wombs fall short (of their time or number) or do exceed. Every single thing is before His sight, in (due) proportion. He knoweth the Unseen and that which is open: He is the Great, the most High. It is the same (to Him) whether any of you conceal his speech or declare it openly; whether he lie hid by night or walk forth freely by day. For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession. Before and behind

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him: they guard him by command of Allāh. Verily never will Allāh change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls). But when (once) Allāh willeth a people’s punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect. It is He Who doth show you the lightning, by way both of fear and of hope: it is He Who doth raise up the clouds, heavy with (fertilising) rain! Nay, thunder repeateth His praises, and so do the angels, with awe: He flingeth the loud-voiced thunderbolts, and therewith He striketh whomsoever He will... yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allāh, with the strength of His power (supreme)!

As in al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr*, there are many reports about what the verses mean, but there is no mention of ʿĀmir and Arbad until Ibn Kathīr’s exegesis of 13:12-3. It is not until nearly the end of his explanation of Qur’ān 13:13 that Ibn Kathīr even gets around to the occasion for the verse’s revelation.569 He begins with reports that discuss the origins of lightning and thunder, relating, for example, that God’s voice is the thunder and His laughter is the lightning, or that lightning comes from the movement of the tail of “an angel who has four faces: a human face, a bull face, an eagle face, and a lion face.”570 He then moves on to relate reports like those found in al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr* that detail Muḥammad’s reaction to hearing thunder, including the report in which the element of folk magic offers the believer protection against the lightning if he offers God praises similar to those of Muhammad.571

Like al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr relates reports indicating other possible incidents leading up to the verse’s revelation, including the stories of the various men who asked what material God was made of, and the story of the man who lied to Muḥammad.572 However, unlike al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr nowhere directly states that these are conflicting

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570Ibid., vol. 2, 978.
571Ibid.
572Ibid.
stories regarding the verse’s revelation. At this point, Ibn Kathîr gives his own version of events involving ‘Āmir and Arbad:

And they mention as the reason (for) its revelation the story of ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. Rabî‘a, when they came (to see) the Messenger of God (in) Medina. Then they asked him that he give them half of the command, but the Messenger of God refused. So ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl, may God curse him, said to him: “Truly, by God, we will fill it up against you (with) plain horses and recalcitrant men.” So the Messenger of God said to him: “God refuses you that.” Then truly they, both of them, (plotted) in the murder of the Messenger of God, so one of the two of them began to speak to him, while the other pulled out his sword (in order to) kill him from behind. So God the most High protected him from the two of them and safeguarded him. So the two went out from Medina, and they started off in the district of the Arabs [bedouin], gathering the people to war against him. So then God sent against Arbad a cloud (and) in it (was) a thunderbolt, so it destroyed him by fire. And as for ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl, so God sent against him the plague..., so he began to say, “O family of ‘Āmir, a growth like the growth of the young camel and death in the house of a Salûliya.” So the two of them died because God was against them, and God revealed about that: “He flingeth the loud-voiced thunderbolts, and therewith He striketh whomsoever He will... yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allâh.”

Ibn Kathîr ends his introductory section with the poetry recited by Arbad’s brother, eulogizing him. He then moves directly into the one report he relates for this incident and it is identical to report seven in his sîra/târikh. Again, this report contains the incident where Muḥammad turns and sees Arbad trying to draw the sword, and so this part of the supernatural element appears less likely. However, it does include the supernatural link to the deaths of both men, and so this part of the archetype appears to be upheld.

Thus, as in his tafsîr account of Ḥâṭîb’s letter, Ibn Kathîr completely upholds the supernatural archetype of Muḥammad in an introductory section despite the fact that his

573Ibid.
574Ibid.
575Ibid., vol. 2, 978-9. See also 240-1 above.
supporting sources are less than explicit in this matter. However, the fact that he only relates this story in one small section of the overall exegesis for these verses would appear to indicate that the archetype of Muḥammad for Ibn Kathir’s description of this incident in his *Tafsīr*, whether miraculous or mundane, is secondary in importance to explanations regarding the meanings of the verses themselves. The only real indication of the importance of these verses for their role in describing the archetype of Muḥammad would thus be the introductory section itself. Ibn Kathir does not give such an introduction to the reports listing other possible occasions for the revelation of these verses; and he goes out of his way to argue for his own interpretation of the story, no matter what his reports relate.

In conclusion, the archetype of Muḥammad for the Medinan period continues, to a certain extent, the mundane/supernatural dichotomy of the other periods. His worldly success proceeds at a rate matched only by his increasingly successful control over the supernatural world. The sheer number of reports of supernatural occurrences for this period reveals that arguments for its historicity over the Meccan period can no longer be unquestioningly accepted, and that the study of this period by modern historians must be rethought. In the case of Ḥāṭib’s letter, the archetype is of the knowing prophet, who receives secret knowledge from a divine or supernatural source. In the incident involving ‘Āmir and Arbad, he is the protected prophet, whose enemies must face not only his human supporters, but his supernatural protector as well. The violent deaths of these men are an indication that Muḥammad is someone whose prayers are answered quickly and with terrible certainty, and the comments made by Sa’d b. Mu‘ādh that
these men were under Muḥammad’s protection may indicate an awareness by
Muḥammad of his control over this type of power. He may have shielded them from his
human supporters so that they could be properly punished by his divine protector.

For al-Ṭabarī, the supernatural archetype, although not always well attested by
the reports at his disposal, appears to be just as important as the mundane. In the story
of Ḥāṭib’s letter, he relates only one report in his sīra/tāʾīkh, and that one states
explicitly that Muḥammad received his warning about his Companion’s treason from a
supernatural source. In his Tafsīr, he provides more reports, and a slight majority of
these contain a direct statement of supernatural activity. In addition, his comments in
his Tafsīr reveal that he himself argues for a supernatural element to this tale. Ibn
Kathīr relates more reports in his sīra/tāʾīkh for this incident than does al-Ṭabarī, but
does not appear to support the supernatural archetype as wholeheartedly as did his
predecessor. However, whereas he only seems to approve of the isnād of one of the
reports, one that contained an implied rather than explicit miracle, his inclusion of the
others may be an indication that, while not absolutely authoritative, they were still
necessary to complete the story. This theory is upheld in his tafsīr of the related verses,
where he adds his own commentary to the reports, indicating his wholesale support of
the supernatural archetype and he pointedly states that Muḥammad’s reception of this
knowledge was in answer to his prayer, something not directly indicated in any of the
other sources for this event.

The failed assassination attempt by ʿĀmir and Arbad and their sudden deaths are
also portrayed by al-Ṭabarī in his sīra/tāʾīkh as having a supernatural element. In the
lone report he relates about the incident in this genre, the poetry recited by 'Āmir points to his awareness of the involvement of the supernatural, and this poetry is not found elsewhere in our sources. The author does not, however, include a citation from the Qur'ān for this event. Al-Ṭabarī’s tafsīr of Qur'ān 13:9-13 does link the incident to the revelation of these verses, but it appears here that he is uncertain of this link due to the number of reports that connect the revelation of this verse grouping to other incidents. In the two reports he relates in his Tafsīr that detail this event, both include explicit statements supporting a supernatural explanation, and even though he takes issue with one, it is his source’s interpretation of its connection to the meaning of the Qur'ān verses rather than the description of the event itself that he criticizes. Ibn Kathīr provides many more reports for this incident in his sīra/tarīkh, but only one of these would appear to definitively support the supernatural archetype, while the others only include partial or implied support. It is in his Tafsīr, however, that we have, yet again, a statement by him indicating his connection of the events to the direct intervention of God on Muḥammad’s behalf and at Muḥammad’s request, despite the fact that the one report he relates in connection to this fails to do so definitively.

Thus, for both men, the supernatural archetype of Muḥammad for these incidents is supported either by the reports they relate or by their own comments. These comments are found exclusively in their works of tafsīr, but it may be possible that they correlate to their views of the same events in their sīra/tarīkhs as well. This being said, the fact that the total number of reports in their works of exegesis vastly outweighs the number of reports relating the events would also appear to indicate that, again for both
authors, portraying the archetype of Muḥammad, whether supernatural or mundane, was of secondary importance to the task of providing an authoritative explanation of the meanings of these verses. It would be left to their works of history to relate this archetype in a more narrative fashion. Thus, their description of the events studied here would seem to be an excellent example of the benefits of comparing works of sīra or sīra/tā’īkh to works of tafsīr to better determine a scholar’s views of the events being described. This comparison does not always provide the desired result, an overt statement of the author’s opinion, but certainly allows for a broader perspective of the author’s position on certain aspects of the life of Muḥammad.
Conclusion

The role of the supernatural in the life of Muḥammad is depicted by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathîr in their sīra taʾrîkh and tafsîrs as both adhering to and diverging from an archetype. The supernatural archetype of Muḥammad’s life mirrors that of his mundane, with the Prophet exhibiting an increasing amount of control over the forces of the supernatural as he gains power over an increasingly large number of followers. Thus, his supernatural success mirrors his worldly success. Both of our authors diverge from this archetype in a number of ways that reflects their choices as individual scholars, their views of the genres within which they worked, and the societies in which they lived.

Al-Ṭabarī’s depiction of this supernatural archetype in his sīra taʾrîkh reveals that he allows for a wide variety of possibilities in some cases, but that in others, he relates only one report and thus only one possible version of the story. His lack of commentary regarding the reports he relates in this genre makes the determination of his views difficult at best. However, when compared to his exegesis of the Qur’ān verses he relates to these events, his viewpoint can sometimes be ascertained. If the examples viewed herein are any indication of the work as a whole, the role of the supernatural in al-Ṭabarī’s Tafsîr takes a back seat to other issues, such as grammar and lexicography.

Al-Ṭabarī’s treatment of the conception of Muḥammad reveals that he allowed for a mundane representation of that event, relating reports that indicate supernatural involvement in the choice of the Prophet’s lineage, but also one report that does not. He also relates a report that shows Muḥammad’s father having wives other than Āmina, and changing the timing of the Prophet’s conception to a time other than the couple’s
wedding night. His exegesis of Qurʾān 6:124, which appears to be partially quoted by a Jewish soothsayer in one of the reports, while not specifically mentioning the conception of Muḥammad, is thematically linked to this event in that he focuses on the power of God to determine who will and will not be a Prophet, in other words, where the light of prophecy will reside.

In the story of Muḥammad’s publication of his mission to both his fellow tribesmen and his extended family, al-Ṭabarî reveals that there were two announcement stories, one public and one private. It is in the private announcement that we see the role of the supernatural exhibited in Muḥammad’s multiplication of a small amount of food and drink to satisfy over thirty of his relatives. The reports containing this miracle are politically and religiously controversial, since they also describe the scene wherein Muḥammad asks his relatives who will help him in his endeavor and succeed him, and only ‘Alī volunteers. Thus, in this case, the supernatural archetype becomes politically inflammatory. However, in his exegesis of the verses he relates in connection to this event, the political aspect and even the miracle story itself, is fairly negligible when compared to the public announcement, which contains no supernatural activity, and the linguistic explanation of the verses involved.

In al-Ṭabarî’s depiction of both the letter by Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balṭa‘a and the assassination attempt by ‘Āmir b. al-Ṭufayl and Arbad b. Qays, he relates only one report for each event in his ṣirāt aʾṭīkh. By thus limiting the perception of these events, he is controlling the archetype. The reports he relates contain explicit examples of Muḥammad’s clairvoyance and the supernatural response to his prayers. However, in al-
Ṭabarî's exegesis of the pertinent verses of the Qur'ān, he relates more reports, most of which allow only an implied supernatural context or none at all. He indicates through his own commentary on these verses that his preference is for the supernatural explanation of events, thus showing that he is here placing his own opinion, or his own perception of the archetype, ahead of the bulk of reports related to this event.

Taken together, al-Ṭabarî’s treatment of the supernatural archetype of Muḥammad in his sīra/tāʾrīkh and his tafsīr reveals a level of confidence that may well be indicative of not only his own personality but also the society in which he lived. Although he experienced some personal difficulties due to the variety he allowed in the source material he used, especially from the Ḥanbālīs and those who would accuse him of Shiʿī sympathies, these difficulties could not seriously lessen the overall appreciation of his intellectual achievement, as the success of his works in these two genres reveals. Islamic civilization in the tenth century AD had yet to be defeated by any outside force, and despite its internal problems, which were numerous, maintained its position of superiority in the ‘Abbāsid heartlands. This position of superiority can be seen, to a certain extent, in the variety al-Ṭabarî allowed in his depiction of the life of Muḥammad and, to a lesser extent, in his exegesis of the Qur'ān.

Ibn Kathīr's representation of the archetype in his sīra/tāʾrīkh is very similar to that found in his Tafsīr. In each genre, he intersperses many of the reports he relates with comments regarding their chains of authority, their texts, or both. It is in both genres that he attempts to judge these reports against those found in the Six Books, but related to this endeavor is his attempt to equate the Musnad of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal to
these authoritative sources. However, even though Ibn Kathīr makes serious claims for
the authoritative nature of his sources, he, too, at times, puts his own interpretation of
events before the very sources he claims to support.

In his treatment of the conception of Muḥammad, we see that Ibn Kathīr relates
only reports that contain a supernatural element. Thus, it would appear that he could
only accept a re-telling of Muḥammad’s conception that included an overt act of the will
of God. Also, he leaves out the report found in al-Ṭabarī that relates that ‘Abd Allāh
had another wife besides Āmina. Muḥammad’s lineage is of utmost importance in other
reports as well, such as those related to the meeting between Abū Sufyān and Heraclius,
and it is in these reports that the excellence of Muḥammad’s lineage is one of the signs
by which he can be recognized as a true prophet. It is also in this section that we see Ibn
Kathīr use a quote from the Qurʾān as a literary device to link two sections of his
ṣīra/tārīkh, tying the story of the conception to that of the meeting with the Byzantine
emperor, which itself leads into a discussion of Muḥammad’s genealogy. Ibn Kathīr’s
tafsīr of the verse related to this event, 6:124, does not discuss the Prophet’s conception,
but does relate those reports about Abū Sufyān and Heraclius. Our author relates the
verse and the meeting to the will of God in determining the bloodline of His chosen
prophet. Thus, for Ibn Kathīr, the role of the supernatural in Muḥammad’s conception
had become a prerequisite to the recognition of the importance of his lineage.

Ibn Kathīr becomes even more involved in attempting to put forward what he
deems a correct interpretation of the publication of Muḥammad’s mission, wherein he
uses all of the tools at his disposal to either discredit or re-interpret reports that could
support the primacy of ‘Alī and thus aid in the efforts of the Shi‘a. He even takes the added step of casting doubt upon a report from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, not to mention that by al-Ṭabarī, in order to defend his own explanation of the meaning of the events these reports relate. He attacks the isnād and the text of the report, and even provides Qur‘ānic justification for his re-interpretation. Thus, he argues that the report could not possibly mean that Muḥammad named ‘Alī as his heir, but must have simply meant that he wanted someone to watch over his estate in case he was killed in the course of his mission, but Ibn Kathīr then quotes Qur‘ān 5:67 that makes even this role unnecessary for the younger man. His exegesis of the verses he relates for this event reveals that his views regarding the potentially pro-Shi‘a report are the same in this genre, but this event is vastly outnumbered by reports depicting the public announcement of Muḥammad’s mission, as well as other concerns. The presence of numerous other, unrelated, miracle stories in the Tafsīr show that, for Ibn Kathīr, the role of the supernatural did have a place of importance in this genre regardless of his views of the miracle associated with this particular event.

It is in Ibn Kathīr’s depiction of Ḥātib’s letter and the assassination attempt by ‘Āmir and Arbad that we see him again putting forward his own opinion, sometimes in opposition to the bulk of reports he relates for these events. His comments in his sīra ta‘rikh regarding these events are limited, but in his exegesis, he expresses himself as clearly supporting a supernatural interpretation of Muḥammad’s clairvoyance, as well as the divine protection afforded him from his enemies. This is despite the fact that many of the reports he relates only provide an implied supernatural event or ignore the
supernatural element entirely in their relation of these events. Thus, for example, in the story of Ḥāṭib’s letter, the only report that fully supports the supernatural element of the story, that by Ibn Iṣḥāq, is one that Ibn Kathīr criticizes as being less than completely authoritative.

Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr were men who lived in societies that increasingly demanded that scholarly works meet the criteria of authoritative hadīth, and were forced to create works that appear to have had the same dual nature as did their depiction of the life of Muḥammad. On the one hand, their Introductions to both their Tafsīrs and their works of history contained statements that implied that they were following the accepted methodology of adhering to past authorities in the creation of their work. Al-Ṭabarī’s Introductions allow for more leeway, however, in that he openly admits that one can use a certain amount of rational deduction in the writing of history, but that one should always use the accounts of eye-witnesses; and in his Tafsīr, he seems to allow for a more vague conception of exactly what makes a report authoritative. Ibn Kathīr, however, goes into great detail in his Tafsīr’s Introduction to spell out, in no uncertain terms, what was acceptable and what was not. While the Introduction to his Bidāya is not as detailed, he still demands adherence to certain rules of transmission for the work to be considered authoritative and allows for no recourse to one’s own rational faculties. The actual works that they produced, on the other hand, appear, at least for the examples studied herein, to contradict the rules laid out in their Introductions. Both men were willing, at various times, to set aside authoritative reports or to include reports with incomplete isnāds in order to tell their own version of the story of
Muḥammad’s life in their sīra/tāʾīrikh or in order to support their own interpretation of the verses of the Qurʾān in relation to that story in their tafsīrs.

This is not the only example of a medieval Muslim historian setting up a grand design in his Introduction only to have the final work itself fall short. Donald P. Little, in his work on Mamlūk historiography, remarks that the famous historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1405-6/808), whose Muqaddima has been hailed as a groundbreaking work on the rise and fall of civilizations, basically failed to live up to the hype of his own introduction and whose actual work was only a summary of that by a previous historian.576 While I am not here saying that al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr’s Introductions are anything like that of Ibn Khaldūn, they do make certain claims for the rest of the work that do not appear to have been followed in every case. I do not view these divergences in a negative light, however, as they show that, even in the time of Ibn Kathīr, when many modern scholars claim that blind adherence to traditionalism had completely done away with the use of individual judgement, this type of judgement still existed.577 Be that as it may, the arguments used by these scholars, then as now, had to at least appear to follow the rules of their discipline in order to be accepted. As has been shown in this study, however, sometimes even this appearance was jettisoned to further advance the individual scholar’s own interpretation of events. These acts of individual judgement appear to reveal two possibilities, either their works are examples of the continued use of independent reasoning by certain scholars despite taking on an

577 See Calder, Mojaddedi, and Rippin, Classical Islam: A sourcebook of religious literature, 128.
authoritative appearance, or their works are examples of how the necessity of adhering
to an accepted image of Muḥammad, whatever that image might be, superceded the
necessity of relating an account with only completely authoritative reports. While the
second option is certainly a possibility, it is hoped that the findings of the current study
have helped advance the first option, since the broader implications of it would be an
image of medieval Islamic society that is much more vibrant than many scholars seem
determined to depict. Thus, al-Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr have taken on archetypes of their
own that I hope here to diverge from. Al-Ṭabarî was not always the champion of
independent reasoning as shown by his arguments in favor of adherence to accepted
norms, and Ibn Kathîr was not the strict disciple of Ibn Taymiya who forced Islamic
civilization into a cage of traditionalism. Both men argued in favor of using
authoritative sources, but both men also favored their own opinions above all else. And
so, while there is an archetype of the life of Muḥammad that remains constant, the
scholars studied here who transmitted this archetype were willing to diverge from it,
either to make the archetype more acceptable for their own time and place, or to make it
fit into their own individual views of what that archetype should entail.
Appendix

Partial Section of al-Ṭabarī’s description of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib

The name of the Messenger of God was Muḥammad, and he was the son of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. ‘Abd Allāh, the father of the Messenger of God, was his father’s youngest son. ‘Abd Allāh, al-Zubayr, and ‘Abd Manāf, who is Abū Ṭālib, were sons of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib by the same mother, Fāṭima bt. ‘Amr b. ‘Ā’idh b. ‘Imrān b. Makhzūm. This information was given to us by Ibn Ḥumayd - Salama b. al-Faḍl - Ibn Ishāq.


Yūnus b. ‘Abd al-A‘lā - Ibn Wahb - Yūnus b. Yazīd - Ibn Shīhāb - Qubayṣa b. Dhu‘ayb: A woman had sworn to sacrifice her son at the Ka’ba if she achieved a certain matter; she did [in fact] achieve it and then she came to al-Madīna to seek a legal opinion on her oath. She went to ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar, who said, “I do not know that God has given any command concerning oaths other than that one should be faithful to them.” “Am I to sacrifice my son, then?” she asked. ‘Abd Allāh replied, “God has forbidden you to kill one another,” and said no more to her than that. Then she went to ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās and asked his opinion. He replied, “God has commanded you to

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578Watt and McDonald, tr., Muḥammad at Mecca, 1-6; Leiden edition, 1073-1079. The translation here is that of Watt and McDonald, with the brackets as they appear in their work.
be faithful to your oaths and has forbidden you to kill one another. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Ḥāshim vowed that if ten of his sons grew to manhood he would sacrifice one of them. He cast lots among them, and the lot fell on ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, whom he loved more than any other. Then he said, ‘O God, shall I sacrifice him or a hundred camels?’ He cast lots between him and the camels, and the lot fell on the hundred camels.” Then Ibn ‘Abbās said to the woman, “My opinion is that you should sacrifice a hundred camels in place of your son.”

Finally the matter came to the attention of Marwān, who was governor of al-Madina at that time, and he said, “I do not think that either Ibn ‘Umar or Ibn ‘Abbās has given a correct opinion; no vow which contravenes God’s commands can be binding. Ask God’s forgiveness, repent, give alms, and perform such charitable actions as you are able. As for sacrificing your son, God has forbidden you to do that.” The people were delighted and lost in admiration at this verdict, and concluded that Marwān’s opinion was the correct one; from that time on they adopted the opinion that no vow which contravenes God’s commands can be binding.

Ibn Ishaq gives a fuller account of this matter of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s vow than one given above. Ibn Ḥumayd - Salama b. al-Faḍl - Muḥammad b. Ishaq: ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Ḥāshim, so it is said - and God knows best - had vowed when Quraysh made difficulties for him about the digging of Zamzam, that if ten sons were born to him and reached maturity so that they could protect him, he would sacrifice one of them to God at the Ka’ba. When he had ten sons grown to maturity and he knew that they would protect him, he brought them together, told them of his vow, and called on them to keep
faith with God in this matter. They expressed their obedience, and asked what they should do. He replied, “Let every one of you take an arrow, write his name on it, and bring it to me.” They did this, and he went into the presence of Hubal in the interior of the Ka’ba. Hubal was the greatest of the idols of Quraysh in Mecca, and stood by a well inside the Ka’ba in which were gathered the offerings made to the Ka’ba.

Beside Hubal there were seven arrows, on each of which there was writing. On one was written, “the blood money”; when a dispute arose as to which of them was responsible for paying blood money, they cast lots with the seven arrows to settle the matter. On another arrow was written “yes”; when they were considering some course of action, they cast lots, and if the “yes” arrow came out they acted on it. Another arrow had “no,” and if that came out they did not proceed with their course of action. On the other arrows was written “of you”, “attached”, “not of you”, and “Water.” When they wanted to dig for water they cast lots with the arrows, including this last one, and wherever it fell they started digging. Whenever they wanted to circumcise a boy, arrange a marriage, or bury someone who had died, or when they were in doubt as to the descent of one of them, they took him to Hubal together with a hundred dirhams and a slaughtering-camel which they would give to the custodian who used to cast lots with the arrows. They would bring forward the person about whom they wished to consult the oracle and would say, “O god of ours, this is so-and-so the son of so-and-so, about whom we wish to know such-and-such; so reveal the truth concerning him.” Then they would say to the custodian of the arrows, “Cast!” The latter would cast them, and if “of you” fell to the person in question, that meant that he was a fellow tribesman; if it was
“not of you,” he was a confederate; and if it was “attached,” he remained as he was, linked to them neither by descent nor alliance. In matters other than these, when “yes” came out they acted accordingly, and when “no” came out they deferred the matter until the following year, when they brought it up again. This recourse to the way the arrows fell was their ultimate method of deciding their affairs.

Accordingly, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib said to the custodian of the arrows, “Cast my sons’ arrows to determine their fate,” and told him of the vow which he had made. Each of them gave the custodian his arrow with his name written on it. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was his father’s youngest son and, it is claimed, the one he loved most, and ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib thought that if the arrow missed [this son] he himself would be able to endure the outcome. ‘Abd Allāh was the father of the Messenger of God. When the custodian of the arrows took the arrows to cast them, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib stood beside Hubal in the interior of the Ka‘ba, calling upon God. The custodian of the arrows cast, and the lot fell against ‘Abd Allāh. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib took him by the hand, took a large knife, and went up to Isāf and Nā’ila, two idols of Quraysh at which they used to slaughter their sacrifices, to sacrifice him. However, the Quraysh rose from their assemblies and came to him, saying, “What do you intend to do, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib?” He replied, “To sacrifice him,” but the Quraysh and ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s other sons said, “By God! You shall never sacrifice him but must get an excuse for not doing so. If you act thus men will never stop bringing their sons to sacrifice them, and how will the people survive in this way?” Then al-Mughīra b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar b. Makhzūm, from whose tribe ‘Abd Allāh’s mother was, said, “By God! You shall never sacrifice him, but
must get an excuse for not doing so. If it takes all we possess to ransom him, we shall
do so.”

The Quraysh and the other sons of ‘Abd al-Muţţalib then said, “Do not do this,
but take him to the Ḥijāz. There is a sorceress there who has a familiar spirit; ask her,
and you will know what to do. If she commands you to sacrifice him, you will sacrifice
him, and if she commands you to do something which offers relief to you and to him,
you can accept it.” They went to al-Madīna where, it is claimed, they found that she
was in Khaybar. They rode until they reached her and consulted her. ‘Abd al-Muţţalib
told her the story about himself and his son, what he had intended to do to him, and the
vow which he had made, and she said to them, “Retire from me for today, until my
familiar visits me and I can ask him.”

They retired from her, and when they had left her presence ‘Abd al-Muţţalib
stood and prayed to God. On the following day they went back to her and she said,
“Yes, news has come to me. How much is the blood-money among you?” They replied,
“Ten camels,” which it was. “Go back to your country, then,” she said, and bring
forward the young man and ten camels, and cast the arrows. If they fall against the
young man, add to the camels until your Lord is satisfied. If they fall against the
camels, sacrifice them, and your Lord will be satisfied and the young man will be
saved.”

They left and returned to Mecca, and when they had all agreed on the matter,
‘Abd al-Muţţalib stood and prayed to God. Then they brought forward ‘Abd Allāh and
ten camels, while ‘Abd al-Muţţalib was in the interior of the Ka‘ba beside Hubal
praying to God. The arrow fell against ‘Abd Allāh, so they added ten camels, making twenty, while ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib stood where he was praying to God. Then they cast again, and the arrow fell against ‘Abd Allāh, so they added another ten camels, making thirty. They went on in this way, casting the arrows and adding ten camels every time the arrow fell against him, until they had cast ten times and the number of camels had reached a hundred, while ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib continued to pray. Then they cast again, and the arrows fell against the camels. Then the Quraysh and those others present said, “Your Lord is satisfied at last, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.” They claim that he said, “No, by God, not until I cast the arrows against them three times.” So they cast the arrows between the camels and ‘Abd Allāh while ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib prayed, and they fell against the camels; then they did it again, a second and a third time, with the same result. Then the camels were slaughtered and left there, and no man or wild beast was turned back from eating them.

‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib left, taking his son ‘Abd Allāh by the hand. It is alleged that he passed by a woman of the Banū Asad called Umm Qattāl bt. Nawfal b. Asad b. ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā, the sister of Waraqā b. Nawfal b. Asad; she was by the Ka‘ba. When she looked at his face she said, “Where are you going, ‘Abd Allāh?” “With my father,” he said. She said, “I have for you as many camels as were slaughtered for you, so sleep with me now.” “My father is with me,” he replied, “and I cannot oppose his wishes or leave him.” ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib took him away and brought him to Wahb b. ‘Abd Manāf b. Zuhra, who was the leading man of the Banū Zuhra in age and eminence at that time, and the latter married him to [his daughter] Āmina bt. Wahb, who was then the most
excellent woman in Quraysh as regards genealogy and status. Her mother was Barra bt. ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā b. ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Dār b. Qusayy, Barra’s mother was Umm Ḥabīb bt. Asad b. ‘Abd al-‘Uzza b. Qusayy, and Umm Ḥabīb’s mother was Barra bt. ‘Awf b. ‘Abīd b. ‘Awīj b. ‘Adī b. Ka‘b b. Lu‘ayy.

It is alleged that he consummated his marriage to her there as soon as he married her, that he lay with her and that she conceived Muḥammad; then he left her presence and came to the woman who had propositioned him, and said to her, “Why do you not make the same proposition to me today which you made to me yesterday?” She replied, “The light which was with you yesterday has left you, and I have no need of you today.” She had heard [about this] from her brother Waraqa b. Nawfal, who was a Christian and had studied the scriptures; he had discovered that a prophet from the descendants of Ismā‘īl was to be [sent] to this people; this had been one of the purposes of his study.
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