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Abrogation

نسخ
Abrogation

A prominent concept in the fields of Qur'anic commentary and Islamic law which allowed the harmonization of apparent contradictions in legal rulings. Despite the voluminous literature Muslims have produced on this topic over the centuries, Western scholars have historically evinced little interest in analyzing the details of "abrogation." Although aware of these details, T. Nödeke and F. Schwally, for example, failed to probe adequately the significant distinction made in applying theories of abrogation to the Qur'an. To understand this application, it is important to distinguish the difference between the Qur'an as a source and the Qur'an as a text, the difference being the verses removed from the text, the substance of which remains a probative source for doctrine (J. Burton, Collection, 233). On the question of the relation between the Qur'an and sunna (q.v.) — the customary practice of the Prophet Muhammad as documented in the hadith — inadequate information betrayed I. Goldziher (The Mahomedanische Studien, ii, 20) into inadvertently misrepresenting the importance of the stance adopted by the classical jurist al-Shafi'i (d. 204/820) More recently, J. Schacht's concentration on "contradiction" (tāhlīf) as an acknowledged category in the hadith and sunna as well as his speculation on the origin and nature of hadith led him to minimize the role of the Qur'an, its interpretation and its perceived relation to the sunna as factors important to the evolution of jurisprudence (Origins, 95?).

Classical Islamic jurisprudence recognizes two primary sources of legal rulings: the Qur'an and the sunna. In addition, two secondary post-prophetic sources were acknowledged: analogy (qiyyās) derived from one or other of the primary sources, and the consensus of qualified legal experts (ijma'). Abrogation is applicable to neither of the subsidiary sources, but only to the documents on which they are based. Since abrogation is solely the prerogative of the lawgiver, it may be argued that it must be indicated before the death of the Prophet who mediated the laws supplied in the Qur'an and sunna.

"The cancellation of a legal enactment" is an inadequate translation of the Arabic term ṭalāh which includes, when applied to the Qur'an, reference to "omission," although it more commonly signifies "substitution." Abrogation may be external to Islam or internal. On its appearance, Christianity deemed itself to have replaced Judaism, while with its revelation, Islam saw itself as dislodging both of its predecessors as an expression of the divine will (al-Ghazālī, al-Mustafa, i, 111). For each of the historical revelations, there was a preordained duration (q.13:38), although Islam, intended to be the last of the series, will endure until judgment day (q.3:340). Like Christ, Muhammad came to confirm the Torah (q.v.) and to declare lawful some of what had been previously declared unlawful (q.2:286; 3:50). For example, the Prophet was instructed to declare the food of Muslims lawful to the Jews (q.5:5). Indeed, some elements of Jewish law had been intended as punishment, imposed on account of their wrongdoing (q.4:160; 6:146).

To Muslim scholars, the abrogation of
Judaism and Christianity by Islam was obvious, although internal abrogation remained less so. The latter had to be vigorously defended by appeal to the analogy of external abrogation, to verses in the Qur'an and by reference to alleged instances of abrogation. For example, the Companion Salama b. al-Akwa' (d. 74/693) is reported to have said, "When 'and those who can shall feed one of the poor (Q. 2:184)' was revealed, those who chose to break their fast [during the month of Ramadan, q.v.] fed the poor until the verse was abrogated by 'Whoever is present during the month shall fast (Q. 2:185)'." (Muslim, Sahih, K. al-Siyam). In another instance, when a man inquired about the night prayer, the Prophet's widow 'A'isha (q.v.) asked him, "Do you not recite Q. 73? The Prophet and his Companions (see companions of the prophets) observed the night prayer for a whole year during which God retained in Heaven the closing of the sura, revealing the alleviation only twelve months later, whereupon the night prayer became optional from being obligatory." (Muslim, Sahih). In these two instances of alleged abrogation, it is claimed that one regulation was withdrawn and replaced with a later one, although the replaced verses remained in the text.

Q 2:180 requires Muslims to make testamentary provision for their parents and other close kin, while another passage (Q. 4:11-12) stipulates the shares in an estate which must pass automatically to a Muslim's heirs (see inheritance). In deference to the legal principle that no one may benefit twice from a single estate, parents and other close family members now lost the right to the benefit stipulated in Q. 2:180. Widows, being named in Q. 4:12, lost the maintenance and accommodation for twelve months granted in Q. 2:240 (see maintenance and upkeep). For some classical jurists, one verse of the Qur'an here abrogated another. Others argue that the provisions of Q. 2:180 and Q. 4:11-12 were by no means irreconcilable, but that the exclusion of parents and widows from their dual entitlement had been settled by the Prophet's announcement, "There shall be no testament in favor of an heir." Here the Prophet's practice was seen as abrogating the Qur'an.

The words and actions of the Prophet came to be regarded by many as a second source of Islamic regulation which, like the Qur'an, was subject to the same process of change (al-Hazimī, Fathār, 23). For example, Muhammad announced, "I prohibited the visiting of graves, but now you may visit them. I had prohibited storing the meat of your sacrifices for more than three nights, but now you may store it as long as you see fit. I had prohibited the keeping of liquor in anything but skin containers, but now you may use any type of container, so long as you drink no intoxicant." (Muslim, Sahih, K. al-Janā'is).

The Qur'anic passages concerning the change of the direction of prayer (qibla, q.v.) leave unclear which type of abrogation has taken place (Q. 2:142-50). Some scholars argued that the change of direction indicated was a case of external abrogation. They held that the Prophet was bound by God's command to the Jews to face Jerusalem when praying, until this was abrogated by the Qur'anic verse. Others, interpreting the words "We appointed the direction of prayer which you formerly faced" (Q. 2:143) as a reference to turning to Jerusalem, saw the change as internal abrogation, with one Qur'anic ruling abrogating the other (al-Nahlāt, al-Nā Ра, 15).

Noting the silence of the Qur'an on the earlier direction of prayer, some other scholars presumed that praying toward Jerusalem had been introduced by the Prophet and later changed by the Qur'an.
Al-Shafi'i theory of abrogation

The Prophet's mission extended over twenty years. There was therefore nothing surprising in the idea that his instructions to his community should show signs of development. Little resistance was expressed to the notion that one of the Prophet's practices could abrogate another. Indeed, for scholars who undertook the derivation of the law from its sources in the Qur'an and sunna, the simplest means of disposing of an opponent's view was the blunt assertion that, although it had been correct at one time, it has since been abrogated. It was the need to regularize appeals to the sources and especially to the principle of abrogation that led the scholar al-Shafi'i (d. 204/820) to compose his Contradictory hadith (Likhtilaf al-hadith) and Treatise on Jurisprudence (al-Risala), the earliest surviving statements on jurisprudential method.

A key feature of al-Shafi'i's work is the emphasis on redefining the term "sunna" to restrict it to the words and actions reported from the Prophet alone. Others had interpreted the term in the older, broader sense to include the practice of other authorities, in addition to the Prophet. Al-Shafi'i sought to convince them that God had singled out the Prophet as alone qualified to pronounce on the law. He amassed from the Qur'an evidence that God insisted on unquestioning obedience to his Prophet (e.g. Q4:13, 65). Appealing to a series of verses linking Muhammad's commands and prohibitions to the divine will, and culminating in a verse which identified Muhammad's will with the divine will (Q.4:80), al-Shafi'i succeeded in recovering the unique prophet-figure central to and partner in the processes of divine revelation.

Those who denied the sunna any role in the construction of the law did so on the basis that the Qur'an contains everything that is needed and that many reports about the Prophet's behavior were forged. Al-Shafi'i sought to convince these scholars that it was the Qur'an itself that enjoined appeal to the prophetic sunna (al-Risala, 79-105). The result was not merely his assertion that the Qur'an required adherence to the sunna of the Prophet, but also the elevation of the sunna to the status of another form of revelation (Umm, vii, 271), elucidating, supplementing and never contradicting the Qur'an. Only a verse of the Qur'an could abrogate another verse of the Qur'an and these verses could only abrogate other Qur'anic verses. By the same token, a prescriptive practice of the Prophet could only be abrogated by his adoption of another practice. Contrary to the practice of earlier generations of scholars who were willing to believe that their doctrines abrogated those of their foes without any evidence to support the claim, al-Shafi'i asserted that the hadith documenting every actual instance of abrogation have survived. Therefore, one had to show that one sunna followed the other chronologically in order to determine which was abrogated. Although al-Shafi'i defined "abrogation" as "to abandon" (taraqa, al-Risala, 122), he added that no ruling is abrogated without a replacement ruling being promulgated in its stead, as had occurred in the case of the change of the direction of prayer (al-Risala, 106-13).

Thus, for him, "abrogation" actually meant "substitution."

Abrogation and divine knowledge

To some minds, the idea that one verse from the Qur'an abrogated another suggested that divine will changes and divine knowledge develops and this was held to contravene basic theological tenets. Those who allowed that some verses of the Qur'an abrogated others, responded that no Muslim ever objected to the notion that Islam had abrogated Christianity and
Judaism. External abrogation of this type was an acknowledged reality, one to which the Qur'an referred and consequently one that could be accepted. If God adapts his regulations to the different circumstances prevailing in different ages, as is apparent in the alteration of laws revealed to the different prophets, he may equally adapt regulations appropriate to the initial stages of one revelation to meet the changes wrought in the course of the revelation (al-Ghazālī, al-Mustasfā, i, 111). Moreover, there was historical evidence of this having happened. For example, the Muslims at Mecca were bidden to be patient under the verbal and physical assaults of their enemies. When the Muslim community emigrated to Medina, they were ordered to answer violence with violence. The weakness of Meccan Islam was replaced by the numerical and economic strength of Medinan Islam. Given these changed conditions, patient forbearance could be replaced by defiant retaliation (Q 2:191, 216; 20:130; 30:60; 73:10).

Muslim theologians maintained that divine will is sovereign and limited by no power in the universe. God may command or forbid whatever he wants. In the same way, divine knowledge is infinite and instantaneous. From all eternity, God has known what he proposed to command, when he would command it, the precise duration intended for each command and the exact moment when he proposed to countermand it. There is perfect harmony between divine will and divine knowledge. Perfect will does not alter and perfect knowledge does not develop. In the case of fasting during the month of Ramadān, the earlier opinion of fasting was subsequently made obligatory. In the case of the night prayer, an obligation was reduced to an option. In the case of the change in the direction of prayer, the Muslims were required to face Mecca after having been required to turn to Jerusalem. In each instance, the earlier ruling was viewed to be proper for its time and the later abrogation was also viewed to be proper in its time (al-Shāfī‘ī, al-Risāla, 117-37).

Human circumstances, however, do change and human knowledge does develop. When humans command one another and subsequently become aware of unforeseen consequences, they are obliged to withdraw a command. Their lack of perfect foresight often obliges them to have second thoughts (badā‘, Qurtubi, Jami‘, ii, 64), which according to classical Sunni theology, may never by posited of the divine being.

When abrogation occurs people may perceive a change, but this is only a change from the human perspective. God sends his prophets with his commands and the true believer is the one who obeys (Q 4:165). Muslims should emulate the ideal attitude adopted by Abraham and his son, when both of them with full knowledge — in the Islamic tradition — were willing to proceed with the sacrifice.

The Qur’ānic evidence
The claim that abrogation, understood as the cancellation of a legal ordinance, was solidly rooted in the revelation was connected with the appropriation of the Qur’ānic root n-s-kh as a technical term. The root occurs in no fewer than four verses which the classical exegetes treated as circumstantially unrelated contexts to be interpreted independently. That prevented scholars from agreeing on an unequivocal etymology and definition of “naskh” and led to the consequent emergence of a host of irreconcilable theories of abrogation. Q 7:154 (muskhah) and Q 45:29 (nasansikha), the first referring to tablets (al-tawākh) and the second to a book (kitāb), united with the everyday usage, “naskha l-kitāb” (copied a book), to produce the concept of “duplication.” The essence of this understanding is
a plurality of texts. This secular usage was said to be a synonym for “naqala l-kitāb” (transcribed the book) which, however, bears the added sense of “removal” hence “transfer” or “replace,” as in the phrase nas‐

akkhat al-shams al-zill, “the sunlight replaced the shadow” (an etymology that is rejected by some, see Qurṭubī, Jāmī’s, ii, 61). “God abolishes (nasakh) whatever Satan brings forth” (Q 22:52) could yield only the sense of “suppression.” This paralleled the secular usage “nasakhat al-rīh al-āthār” (The wind obliterated the traces [of an encampment, etc.] of. Qurṭubī, Jāmī’s, ii, 61; al‐

Ghazalī, al-Mustafa’s, i, 107). In this usage, abrogation as “removal” carries the connotati onation of “withdrawal.”

“We will make you recite so you will not forget except what God wills” (Q 87:6-7) and “We do not abrogate (nasakh) a verse or cause it to be forgotten without bringing a better or one like it” (Q 2:106) introduced the idea that God might cause his Prophet to forget materials not intended to appear in the final form of the text (J. Burton, Collection, 64). This interpretation could be reinforced by reference to “We substitute (haddalā) one verse in the place of another” (Q 16:101). The concept of “omission” was added to the growing list of meanings assigned to abrogation (Qurṭubī, Jāmī’s, ii, 62). According to one report, one night two men wished to incorporate into their prayer a verse which they had learned and had already used, but they found that they could not recall a syllable. The next day they reported this to the Prophet, who replied that the passage had been withdrawn overnight and they should put it out of their minds (Qurṭubī, Jāmī’s, ii, 63). In another report, the Companion Ibn Masʿūd decided to recite in his prayers one night a verse he had been taught, had memorized and had written into his own copy of the revelations. Failing to recall a syllable of it, he checked his notes only to find the page blank. He reported this to the Prophet who told him that that passage had been withdrawn overnight (Nöldeke, Q, i, 47, ii, 44).

Irrecoverable forgetting was thus formalized as “withdrawal,” a more satisfactory explanation for the disappearance of revealed material. Although the majority of scholars viewed forgetting as one of the mechanisms of abrogation affecting the Qur’an, there were those who strove to keep it separate from abrogation. According to one report, the Prophet omitted a verse in a prayer and asked one of his Companions why he had failed to prompt him. The Companion replied that he thought the verse had been withdrawn. “It was not withdrawn,” declared the Prophet, “I merely forgot it” (Saḥnūn, al-Mudawwana al-kubrā, i, 107).

Theological objections to the interpretation

Still some scholars had difficulty in accepting the mechanism of abrogation as worthy of God. Some went so far as to provide variant readings for the references to abrogation in the holy text (Tabart, Ṭafṣīr, ii, 478). One particular difficulty was “We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten without bringing a better one or one like it” (Q 2:106). Some objected that no part of the holy text could be said to be superior to another so “without bringing a better one” could not be a reference to the Qur’an. The same consideration applies to the Prophet’s sunna abrogating the Qur’an since no ḥadith could be thought superior or even similar to a divine verse. The proponents of abrogation claimed that God was not referring to the text of the Qur’an, but to the rulings conveyed by the text (al-Ghazālī, al-Mustafa’s, i, 125; cf. Tabart, Ṭafṣīr, ii, 471-2). While in terms of beauty, no qur’ānic verse can be considered superior to another and certainly no ḥadith is more beautiful than a verse from the
Qur'an, the legal content of one verse—
even of a hadith—could be considered
superior to the ruling contained in another
verse. Less easy to explain was the reason
that in these cases God did not suppress
the abrogated texts to avoid confusion
(Tabari, Tafsir, ii, 472).

Variant readings

That the notion of portions of the holy
text being forgotten was repugnant to some
is shown in two procedures adopted to
avoid that interpretation. As an exegetical
alternative, a number of different readings
(READINGS OF THE QUR'AN) were pro-
posed for the troublesome passages. In the
verse “We do not abrogate a verse or
cause it to be forgotten (nunähā) without
supplying a similar or better one” (Q 2:106)
attention focused on the word which the
majority of scholars read as nunari (cause to
forget). This reading was supported by
“You will not forget (lansā) except what
God wills” (Q 87:6-7). Also suggested were
“You are caused to forget” (lunsā) which is
to be preferred to “You forget” (lansa,
Tabari, Tafsir, ii, 474-5). Both of the prob-
lems, Muhammad forgetting on his own
and God making him forget, could be cir-
cumvented by reading nunat: “We defer”
(Tabari, Tafsir, ii, 476-8). Q 2:106 would
then be mentioning two revelatory pro-
cesses, naskh and deferment. The defer-
ment of naskh, in the sense of “copying,”
could mean “the deferring of revelation
from the heavenly original (see PRESERVED
TABLET) to its earthly representation in the
Qur'an,” said to have occurred in the case
of the night prayer which the revelation of
Q 73:6 changed from obligatory to optional
(al-Shaf'i, al-Risala, 108). Or it could mean
deferring the removal of a passage from the
Qur'an, by leaving the passage in the
text despite suppression of the ruling it
contained (Tabari, Tafsir, ii, 478). Gener-
ally, the sense of the verb nasat (to defer) is
held to be temporal, although it has also
been said to have a physical connotation,
“driving away,” as men drive strange ani-
mal away from the cistern intended for
their own beasts (Zamakhshari, Kashaqf,
ad Q 2:106; cf. Tusi, Tabyan, i, 395). Trans-
ferred to the Qur'anic context, verses might
be driven away from a text, even from hu-
man memory. Men may be caused to for-
get. In support of this interpretation, re-
ports were cited which claimed that certain
suras were originally longer than they are
in the present-day text of the Qur'an. Even
verses which had allegedly been revealed
and failed to find a place in the final
text—such as the Ibn Ahmad and Bi'r
Ma'una verses (see J. Burton, Sources,
49-53)—were cited, supposedly from the
few Companions who had not quite forgot-
ten them (Tabari, Tafsir, ii, 479-80).

Through another approach it is not even
necessary to resort to variant readings be-
cause the Arabic word for “to forget”
naziya could be construed to mean “to re-
move something” or its opposite, “to leave
something where it is” (Tabari, Tafsir, ii,
476). This could mean that the verses were
in the heavenly original, but not revealed,
or the verses were left in the text of the
Qur'an and were neither repeated nor re-
moved. Once replacement is ascertained to
have occurred, it is inmaterial whether the
wording of an abandoned ruling is ex-
punged or whether it is left to stand in the
Qur'an. The passages whose rulings have
been replaced become inoperative or effec-
tively removed (Tabari, Tafsir, ii, 472).

Abrogation and the law

Legal scholars appealed to the principle of
abrogation continually to resolve the ap-
parent contradictions between the legal
practice of the various regions of the Is-
lamic world and between all of these and
their putative sources in the revelation.
“Forgetting” and “omission” were of no
interest to the legal scholars who concentrated on "substitution" derived from "We substitute one verse in the place of another" (Q 16:101) and imposed by them on "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten without bringing a better one or one like it" (Q 2:106). The difficulties which beset the exegetes and theologians were of little concern to legal scholars, who declared that "abrogation" (nahki) was a technical term with a meaning now clear to all (al-Jassas, Aab man, ad Q 2:106). Most cited "We substitute one verse in the place of another" (Q 16:101) as evidence that abrogation in the form of "substitution" had occurred, an interpretation already mentioned by the oldest exegetes (e.g. al-Farrat, Maan, i, 64-5). In fact, abrogation as substitution became the theater of the liveliest development of the theories of abrogation.

The third type of abrogation

To the jurisprudent's interpretation of abrogation as "the replacement of the ruling but not of the text in which it appears" and to the exegete's "the withdrawal of both the ruling and its wording," a third type was added. Q 5:89 mentions "a fast of three days" as one way to atone for breaking an oath. The Companion Ibn Mas'ud (d. ca. 33/653) was said to have preserved in his personal notes the original reading of "a fast of three consecutive days." His anomalous reading was still referred to in the time of the legal expert Abu Hanifa (d. ca. 150/767). Although the word "consecutive" was not found in the text of the Qur'an that was in general use, the ruling was adopted into Hanafi doctrine (al-Sarakhi, Usul, ii, 81). This exemplifies the third type of abrogation in which the text, but not the ruling; of a quranic revelation was cancelled.

Q 4:15-16 introduces a penalty for illicit sexual behavior (see ADULTERY AND FORNICATION). Both partners are to be punished with unspecified violence and the female held under house arrest for life or "until God makes a way for them." The promised way was thought to have been provided in Q 2:4:2, which imposed a penalty of one hundred lashes for male and female fornicators. Nevertheless, a Companion reported that the Prophet had announced, "Take it from me! Take it from me! God has now made the way for women. Virgin with virgin, one hundred lashes and banishment for twelve months. Non-virgin with non-virgin, one hundred lashes and death by stoning" (al-Shafi, al-Risala, 129). Reports from other Companions show the Prophet extending the dual penalties to males while a number state that he stoned some offenders without flogging them (Malik, al-Muwatta, Hudud, Hadd al-zina). On the basis of this material, some concluded that this was a case of the Prophet’s practice abrogating the Qur’an.

The vast majority of scholars, however, regarded the imposition of stoning as the penalty for adultery as an instance of a verse from the holy text being eliminated, although the ruling it contained remained in effect. The Medinan scholar Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795), for instance, had heard that the penalty of stoning had originated in "the book of God," which in this case he understood to be the Torah. He reported that the Prophet had consulted the rabbis and the stoning ruling was indeed found in the Torah. With explicit reference to "the book of God," Muhammad imposed the ruling. Other scholars interpreted the term "the book of God" as a reference to the Qur’an and were puzzled that they could not find such a ruling within its pages. The Prophet’s second successor 'Umar (r. 12/634-22/644) gravely urged the Muslims not to overlook "the stoning verse" which, he maintained, had been revealed to Muhammad, taught by him to his Companions and recited in his company in the ritual
prayers: “The mature male and female, stone them outright.” ‘Umar insisted that the Prophet, his immediate successor Abu Bakr (r. 11/632-13/634) and he himself had put this ruling into practice and claimed that fear of being accused of adding to the holy text was the only reason that he did not actually write the “verse” in the Qur’an. Countless scholars in succeeding centuries have stated with assurance that a verse with the same or similar wording had once stood in the Qur’anic text. From this, they concluded that a verse could be removed from the Qur’an without this violating the validity of the ruling it contained (al-Ghazālī, al-Mustaṣfā, ii, 124).

Al-Shāfi‘ī did not analyze these materials from the standpoint of those who saw here the abrogation of the Qur’an by the sunna, a claim which he at all times studiously avoided. Rather he preferred to review the case on the basis of his theory of exclusion (takhlīš). By imposing on slave women half the penalty of the free, Q 4:25 excluded slaves from the full brunt of Q 24:2—which ordered a flogging of one hundred lashes for male and female adulterers—and from the stoning penalty, since death has no definable half. Therefore certain classes of free Muslims may also be exempt from some of the penalties. The Prophet’s practice indicated that married offenders were not covered by Q 24:2 or, if they had originally been covered by that provision, they were subsequently excluded. Their penalty was to be stoning. The sunna of stoning had replaced the earlier sunna of flogging and stoning. In his analysis, al-Shāfi‘ī maintained that the Prophet’s words, “God has now made a way for women,” showed that the Qur’anic ruling “confine the women in their home until they die or until God makes a way for them” (Q 4:15) had been abrogated (J. Burton, Sources, 143-56). He asserted that the Prophet had dispensed with flogging those who were to be stoned, although earlier he had applied both penalties. Because flogging was undeniably a Qur’anic ruling, some have mistakenly assumed that al-Shāfi‘ī believed that stoning was a Qur’anic ruling as well.

Al-Shāfi‘ī did acknowledge a third type of abrogation in his discussion of a different question, that of the withdrawal of a Qur’anic verse while the ruling it contained remained in effect. Q 4:23 lists the women whom a Muslim male is forbidden to marry, including his wet-nurse and any female to whom she has given suck. Scholars disputed the number of times a child had to be suckled by a woman to establish this ban to marriage. For Malik, a single suckling in infancy sufficed to create a barrier to marriage (Malik, al-Muwatta‘, al-Radā‘, Radā‘ at-ṣaghīr). For others even a single drop of breast-milk initiated the ban. Al-Shāfi‘ī fastened on one report in which the Prophet’s widow ‘Ā’ishah was said to have claimed that a verse imposing ten suckling sessions had been revealed to the Prophet and it was replaced by a second verse reducing the number of sessions to five, which was also subsequently lost. Earlier Malik had curtly dismissed this report (al-Muwatta‘, al-Radā‘, al-Radā‘ be’d al-kibar), but al-Shāfi‘ī made it central to his conclusions. He accepted this as the one undoubted instance of the withdrawal of a Qur’anic verse while the ruling it expressed remained valid (Ikhṭiṣāf al-hadīth, vii, 208 margin; see also J. Burton, Sources, 156-8).

Conclusion

It is clear that the theory of abrogation developed its own internal dynamic. Al-Shāfi‘ī’s theory that the abrogating verses of the Qur’an had once existed was not accepted by all of his contemporaries, but it later gained widespread support. Malikīs and Hanafīs had no general need of this principle while Shāfi‘ī had no need what-
ever to posit that the sunna abrogated the Qur'an or vice-versa. One nevertheless finds Malik and Hanafi scholars claiming that three forms of abrogation are documented (al-Sarakhsi, Usul, ii, 81; Qurtubi, Jami', ii, 66), just as one also finds Shafi'i deducting occurrences of the sunna abrogating the Qur'an and the reverse which, they claimed, their eponym had overlooked (al-Ghazali, al-Mustasfa, i, 124). See also Traditional Disciplines of Qur'anic Study.

John Burton

Bibliography


Abstinence

In the Qur'an abstinence in the sense of "restraint in or refraining from the indulgence of human appetites and impulses" is connected with words deriving from the divine Abstinence: the different Arabic roots, namely 'l-wa, 'r-m, 'f-f and h-y-r.

The paradigmatic event for the Qur'anic notion of abstinence is q. 7:3-5, which recounts one of the early examples of Muhammad's experience of coming close to God as the revelation descends on him. God commands, "Arise and warn, your Lord magnifies your robes, purifies and defilement flee (fa-hujr)." Drawing close to God requires abandoning or fleeing from all that might inhibit the human response to the divine initiative. This interpretation of an experience in the life of Muhammad is supported by a later Qur'anic reference — following the chronology of T. Noldeke (see Chronology and the Qur'anic) to an event in the story of Joseph (q.v.). Potiphar's wife admits that she tried to seduce Joseph, saying, "Yes, I attempted to seduce him, but he abstained (fa-sta'ama)" (q. 12:32).

Humans are continually in need of rejecting or fleeing from anything that interferes with the on-going movement of the human person in response to God. For instance, q. 4:26 states, "If any man be rich, let him be abstinent (fa-yasta'f)," in reference to the use of the property of others (q.v.) by their guardians, who are enjoined to abstain from misusing their power to exploit their vulnerable charges. Abstinence also means refraining from illicit sexual activity, as in q. 24:33: "And let those who find not the means to marry be abstinent (wa-l-yasta'f) till God enriches them of his bounty." On the other hand, marriage entails responsibilities. q. 2:226 forbids a man to carry out an oath of sexual abstinence (tad) from his wife for longer than four months: "For those who swear to abstain (fa-lata'ama) from their women, a wait of four months. After that, he must break his oath or she is divorced. See also Fasting."

Sheila McDonough
Ambiguous
Ambiguous

A concept in Qur’anic exegetical work which bears upon the controversial issue of the amount of interpretive license which may be taken in commenting on God’s word. The root sh-b-h is attested several times in the Qur’an. In reference to the Qur’an or its verses, the active participle mutashāhīḥ (or mutashābīḥ) appears twice with the sense of “ambiguous” or “similar.”

Q. 3:7 states that the Qur’an consists partly of muḥkam verses and partly of muṭashābīḥ: “It is he who sent down upon you the book (q. v.), wherein are verses clear (ayāt muḥkām) that are the essence of the book (umm al-kitāb), and others ambiguous (muṭashābīḥät).” Numerous commentators, while examining Q. 3:7, mention two other verses which seem to contradict it. They are Q. 39:23, which states that all the verses of the Qur’an are muṭashābīḥ: “God has sent down the fairest discourse as a book consonant (kitāb mutashābīḥat) and Q. 11:7 wherein the relation of the verses of the Qur’an are characterized as clear: “A book whose verses are set clear (ḥikmat ayāthānu)” (Al-Zarkashi (d. 794/1392), on the authority of the commentator Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nṣabr (d. 406/1015), argues that these passages present three different statements on the nature of the Qur’an: the Qur’an as clear (muḥkam), as ambiguous (muṭashābīḥ) and as a combination of the two. He characterizes the verse that supports the idea of the compound nature, a Qur’an made of clear verses and ambiguous ones (Q. 3:7), as the “correct” one (ṣahīḥ, Buhārī, ii, 68; cf. Suyūṭī, Itqān, iii, 30). The relationship between the two components of the Qur’an is governed by the meaning ascribed to the word muṭashābīḥ, for which the exegetical literature offers a variety of definitions. The meaning of “similar” is used to document the miracu-
lous nature of the Qurʾān. On the other hand, the term interpreted as “ambiguous” has wider implications and bears upon three central qurʾānic issues: 1. The juridical validity of the Qurʾān, where the ambiguous verses are contrasted with the clear ones. 2. The question of the validity of interpreting the Qurʾān, where the ambiguous verses are used to argue the cases for and against interpretation. 3. The imitability (q.v.) of the Qurʾān (īfāz al-Qurʾān).

**Similar verses**

Similarity between verses may manifest itself either in the wording (lażī) or in the meaning (maʿnā) of the verse. Accordingly, mutashābīḥāt are sometimes defined as verses in which the same words are used to mean different things (Ibn Qutayba, Ṭawīl, 74; Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, iii, 114, 116) or else as verses that use different words to express a similar sense (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, iii, 115-6; see L. Kinberg, Muhkamat, 145). In a widely-repeated definition, wording and meaning appear together and the similar verses are presented as those that “resemble one another in righteousness and truth (al-haqq wa-l-sidq), i.e. meaning, and in beauty (al-husn), i.e. wording” (Baghawī, Maʿālim, i, 426).

Naturally, the resemblance of verses can occur only in cases of repetition. This explains why repetition is presented as one of the characteristic features of the mutashābīḥ verses. The correlation between the repetition of the mutashābīḥ verses and their resemblance is treated in one of the definitions adduced by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) where mutashābīḥ verses are those in which the words resemble one another when repeated in other qurʾānic chapters (Tafsīr, iii, 116).

**Similar verses and the imitability of the Qurʾān**

Each of the definitions dealing with the resemblance and the repetition of the muta-
shābīḥ verses touches upon the imitability of the Qurʾān. The relation between the imitability (q.v.) of the Qurʾān and the mutashābīḥ verses can be understood through the dichotomy of wording and meaning mentioned above. In his commentary on “It is he who sent down upon you the book, wherein are verses clear that are the essence of the book, and others ambiguous” (Q 3:7), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) combines the verse under discussion with two verses already mentioned, Q 11:7 and Q 39:23, as well as “If [the Qurʾān] had been from other than God, surely they would have found in it much inconsistency” (Q 4:82; see DIFFICULT PASSAGES). Based on the four verses, he concludes that the mutashābīḥ verses are those which repeat, resemble and confirm each other, and they prove the miraculous nature of the text. There are no contradictions in the Qurʾān. Rather, its verses confirm and reinforce one another. Simultaneously, the Qurʾān is also defined as consisting of mukhām verses, namely, verses written in an inimitable way. Thus these two features, i.e. noncontradictory confirmed messages and an inimitable style of language which cannot be produced by mortals, attest to the divine source of the Qurʾān (Rāzī, Tafsīr, vii, 180).

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) offers a different explanation for the correlation between the inimitability of the Qurʾān and the mutashābīḥ verses. Trying to find a reason for the existence of the mutashābīḥ verses in the Qurʾān, he argues that stylistically the mukhām and the mutashābīḥ verses represent the two major forms of expression used in the Arabic language, the concise (miṣjāz) and the allusive (majāz). God has included both styles in the Qurʾān to challenge mortals to choose either style should they attempt to produce a Qurʾān similar to that brought by Muhammad. However, no one
can ever meet this challenge and the Qurʾān therefore, with its two styles, the mukham and mutashābih, will forever remain imitable (Zād, i, 350-1; cf. Ibn Qutayba, Tawārīkh, 86).

Mutashābih meaning “ambiguous”
A common way to treat the terms mukham and mutashābih is to contrast the clarity of the first with the ambiguity of the other. As was mentioned, this contrast bears upon some of the most prominent qurʾānic issues: the abrogating and abrogated verses (al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh, see Abrogation), the authority to interpret the Qurʾān and the inimitability of the Qurʾān.

Ambiguous verses and the abrogating and abrogated verses
Among the definitions that contrast the mukham with the mutashābih, there is to be found the presentation of the mukham verses as abrogating ones (nāsikhāt) and the mutashābih as abrogated ones (mansūkhāt). A widely-cited definition represents the mukham as the abrogating verses, the verses that clarify what is allowed (ḥalāl), the verses that clarify what is prohibited (ḥarām), the verses that define the punishments (ḥudūd, see Boundaries and Precepts) for various offenses, the verses that define the duties (fardūd) and the verses that one should believe in and put into practice. Conversely, the mutashābih verses are the abrogated ones, the verses that cannot be understood without changing their word order (muqaddamuhu wa-muʾākhkharuhu), the parables (amthāl), the oaths (q.v.; ʾaqām) and the verses in which one should believe, but not put into practice (Ibn ʿAbbās, Tafsīr, 124; Abū ʿUbayd, Nasikah, 4; Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Tafsīr, ii, 592-3; Tabart, Tafsīr, ii, 115; Baghawi, Muʿālim, i, 426; Ibn ʿAṣima, Muḥarrar, i, 400; Qurṭubi, Jamīʿ, iv, 10; Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr, i, 345; Suyūṭī, Durūʿ, ii, 5; Shawkānī, Tafsīr, i, 314).

The mukham are presented here as the verses that deal with essential matters whereas the mutashābih verses are held to deal with secondary matters. This is the way to understand the comparison made in the qurʾānic text itself. Q 3:7 defines the mukham verses as “the essence of the book” and the mutashābih as the rest.

Another way to examine the juridical value of the terms is to consider them as two kinds of divine commandments (q.v.). In this case, the mukham verses contain the commands that are universal and never change, whereas the mutashābih verses contain the commands that are limited and do change. The mukham contain the basic commandments, shared by all religions, such as obeying God and avoiding injustice. The mutashābih verses, on the other hand, contain the practical aspects of these commandments and may vary from one religion to another, e.g. the number of required prayers and the regulations concerning almsgiving and marriage (Rāzī, Tafsīr, vii, 183; cf. Māwardī, Nukat, i, 380). In this interpretation, the distinction between abrogating and abrogated verses becomes meaningless because the chronological element is replaced by a question of universality. This means that the mukham verses are defined as those that are universal to all of the revealed religions and the mutashābih verses are those that contain what distinguishes Islam from the other revealed religions.

Ambiguous verses and the authority to interpret the Qurʾān
Several commentators recognize three kinds of mutashābih verses: those that cannot be understood, those that can be examined and understood by everyone and those that only “the experts” (al-nāsikhaḥu l-tīm) can comprehend (e.g. Fī ṭarābūṭ, Bāsāʾīr, iii, 296). The mukham are defined as clear verses that require nothing to be un-
Lord” (q.6:1) to support their controversial doctrines. When the Kharijits faced the injustice of a leader, they read these two verses together and, by assuming correlation between the two, they set forth the following argument: He who does not judge according to the principles of justice is an unbeliever. An unbeliever is a polytheist (mushrik) who ascribes equals to God. Thus a leader who acts in this manner can be deemed a polytheist (Darr ii, 5). The technique used here joins two verses that were not necessarily meant to be combined and draws conclusions from this juxtaposition. By so doing, the Kharijits were able to prove that their teachings—such as espousing that a caliph should be deprived of his position for acting improperly—are anchored in the Qur'an and thus fully authorized.

Another example of the correlation between the mutashabi'ah verses and dissension deals with the controversial issue of free will versus predestination (see FREEDOM AND PREDETERMINATION). The rivals are the rationalist Mu'tazilis (q.v.) and the conservative Sunnis. Both sides refer to the same verse, q.18:29 which states “Say, ‘The truth is from your Lord.’ So whoever wishes, let him believe and whoever wishes, let him disbelieve.” The Mu'tazilis define the verse as muhakam, i.e. the kind of verse that should be followed since it favors the argument for free will. The Sunnis, who do not accept the idea of free will, define this verse as mutashabi'ah, i.e. the kind of verse that should not be followed. q.76:39 presents the opposite view: “You cannot will [anything] unless God wills it.” The Mu'tazilis define this verse as mutashabi'ah since it contradicts their view, but the Sunnis define it as muhakam because it favors the idea of predestination. By shifting the terms, it became possible to endorse or refute an idea according to one's needs (Razi, Ta'rif, vii, 18; Abu Hayyan, Bahir, ii, 382). The same method was applied to other verses on topics such as the disagreements between the proponents of determinism (Jabriyya) and the proponents of indeterminism (Qadariyya), or the issue of whether believers will see God in the afterlife (Razi, Ta'rif, vii, 185; Abu Hayyan, Bahir, ii, 382; cf. L. Kinberg, Muhammat, 159).

The correlation between the mutashabi'ah verses and dissension was also mentioned in the discussion of the reasons for the existence of the mutashabi'ah in the Qur'an: God revealed them to test the people. Those who do not follow the mutashabi'ah will be rewarded as true believers, while those who follow them will go astray (Ibn al-Jawzi, Zad, i, 353). The same idea is mentioned along with the fact that the mutashabi'ah can be easily distorted. Although established and profoundly elaborated, the negative approach to the interpretation of the mutashabi'ah was not the only one adopted in the exegetical literature. No less detailed were the arguments favoring their interpretation (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'AN; CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL).

Ambiguous verses as those that may be interpreted

The perception of the mutashabi'ah as ambiguous verses was used to argue, as shown above, against their interpretation. The same perception, however, is also used to support and encourage their interpretation. Although contradictory, the two approaches had a common starting point: Ambiguous verses are dangerous in the sense that a wrong interpretation might mislead the believer. With this idea in mind, some scholars recommended avoiding any examination of these verses whereas others encouraged the interpretation of them, but prescribed caution with regard to the steps that need to be taken in this process. One precaution is to check the mutashabi'ah against the muhakam. This is expressed in a set of definitions which oppose
derstood whereas the comprehension of the mutashābih requires explanation (Tabari, Tafsīr, iii, 116-7; 'Abd al-Jabbar, Mutashābih, i, 13; Māwardi, Nukat, i, 369; Baghawi, Ma‘ālim, i, 428; Ibn ‘Atiyya, Muḥarrar, i, 401; Razī, Tafsīr, vi, 184; Qurtubi, Jāmi‘, iv, 9; Suyūṭī, Itqān, iii, 3; Shawkānī, Tafsīr, i, 314). A different set of definitions represents the mukkamā as verses that contain or permit only one interpretation whereas the mutashābih are those that may be interpreted in more than one way (Tabari, Tafsīr, iii, 115-6; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Akhbār, ii, 281; Māwardi, Nukat, i, 369; Wahidy, Wāsī‘, i, 413-4; Baghawi, Ma‘ālim, i, 427; Tabarsti, Ma‘ājma‘, ii, 15; Qurtubi, Jāmi‘, iv, 10; Suyūṭī, Itqān, iii, 4; Shawkānī, Tafsīr, i, 314). While there is no room to doubt the instructions supplied by the mukkamā, the ambiguity of the mutashābih verses may create a situation in which the believers become confused, not knowing which direction to choose. They may then tenden-iously interpret these verses in favor of their own personal interests.

This raises the question as to whether any exegetical effort should be made to eliminate the vagueness of the mutashābih verses and two contradictory attitudes developed. Some scholars claimed that the mutashābih verses are meant to remain ambiguous and any attempt to interpret them might lead the believers astray. Only God knows their true meaning and this is the way it should stay. Others maintained that the mutashābih are meant to be illuminated. Not only does God know the meaning of these verses, but the scholars of the Qurʾān also know it. Their duty is to supply the interpretation of them and this may vary among the different scholars since the mutashābih verses may be interpreted in a variety of ways. These two opposing views on the validity of interpreting the mutashābih verses parallel those on the interpretation of the Qurʾān as a whole.

Ambiguous verses as those that should not be interpreted

The basic argument against the interpretation of the mutashābih is that knowledge of these verses is limited to God (Tabari, Tafsīr, iii, 116; Māwardi, Nukat, i, 369; Ibn ‘Atiyya, Muḥarrar, i, 401; Qurtubi, Jāmi‘, iv, 9; Abū Ḥayyān, Bahr, ii, 381; Alūst, Rūh, ii, 82). As such, they concern matters about which no mortal has clear knowledge. To show that the essence of the mutashābih cannot be grasped by human beings, several topics defined as mutashābih are mentioned: resurrection day (Māwardi, Nukat, i, 369; Baghawi, Ma‘ālim, i, 427; Razī, Tafsīr, vi, 184; Qurtubi, Jāmi‘, iv, 10; Abū Ḥayyān, Bahr, ii, 381; Zarkashi, Bahrān, ii, 70), the appearance of the Antichrist (al-Dajjāl) before the end of days, the return of Christ (Tabari, Tafsīr, iii, 116) and the prophesied day the sun will rise in the west (Māwardi, Nukat, i, 369; Baghawi, Ma‘ālim, i, 427; Abū Ḥayyān, Bahr, ii, 381), among others (see Antichrist, APOC- ALYSPE, RESURRECTION; LAST JUDGMENT).

A different argument contends that the mutashābih are those verses whose meaning can be easily distorted (Tabari, Tafsīr, iii, 116; Ibn ‘Atiyya, Muḥarrar, i, 401; Qurtubi, Jāmi‘, iv, 9; Suyūṭī, Durūs, ii, 5; Shawkānī, Tafsīr, i, 314). This should be understood in light of the second part of the key verse “As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension and desiring its interpretation” (Q.37). The commentators who correlate the mutashābih and dissension (q.v.) adduce a number of Qurʾānic verses in support of their position. One such example is presented by al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) on the authority of Sa`d b. Jubayr (d. 95/714): To justify their ideas, the early sect of the Kharijīs (q.v.) employed “Whoever fails to judge according to what God has sent down is a wrongdoer” (Q.5:47) and “Then the unbelievers ascribe equals to their
the muḥkam and the mutashābih regarding the dependence of the latter. The muḥkam are defined as independent verses that need no explanation (Mawardi, Nuṣrat, i, 369; Ibn al-Jawzi, Zad, i, 350; Abū Ḥāyyān, Bahr, ii, 381) nor reference to other verses to be understood (al-Nāhilī, Ibrāhīm, i, 355; Qurṭubī, Jami', iv, 11; Shawkānī, Tafsīr, i, 314). Conversely, the mutashābih are dependent verses that cannot be understood without consulting or comparing them to other verses (Baghawi, Ma‘ālim, i, 427; Zarkashi, Burhān, ii, 68). The mutashābih’s dependence on the muḥkam derives from the clarity of the latter and the ambiguity of the former. The muḥkam, by interpreting the mutashābih, clears away any misunderstanding that might mislead the believer (Rāzī, Tafsīr, vii, 185). It thus can happen that when a believer consults a muḥkam to understand an ambiguous mutashābih, he finds his way to the true faith (Rāzī, Tafsīr, vii, 185; Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr, i, 345). When a mutashābih is not interpreted in accordance with a muḥkam, those who rely on it will go astray (al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Akhām, ii, 281). In light of this argument, the muḥkam are regarded as “the essence of the book” (sum al-kidāb q.3:7) or “a source to which other verses are referred for interpretation” (Suyūtī, Itqān, iii, 9).

Thus the ambiguity of the mutashābih verses creates the need to scrutinize them. Had the Qurʾān consisted only of muḥkam verses, there would have been no need for the science of the interpretation of the Qurʾān to develop (Rāzī, Tafsīr, vii, 185-6). Had every verse been clear to everyone, the difference in people’s abilities would not come to the forefront. The learned (al-imām) and the ignorant (jāhil) would have been equal and intellectual endeavor would cease (Ibn Qutayba, Tawil, 86; cf. Rāzī, Tafsīr, vii, 185). Behind this perception is the notion that the mutashābih are verses that make people think when they try to identify them and use their own judgment in interpreting them. Consequently, it can be said that they are presented as verses that stimulate people and put them on their guard. It seems that the mutashābih are perceived as the conscience of the believer and indicate the level of his religious knowledge. Due to their ambiguity, dealing with them requires a high degree of religious discernment. The more profound the person, the better his decisions and thus the more pleasant his condition in the next world. This issue is thoroughly discussed in the commentaries with regard to the status of “the experts in knowledge” (rāsiḥān fi l-‘ilm) mentioned in Q.3:7.

**Ambiguous verses and the inimitability of the Qurʾān**

As indicated above, the features of the mutashābih as “similar verses” are held to supply proof of the miraculous nature of the Qurʾān. Additional evidence of this was found in the features of the mutashābih in the sense of “ambiguous verses.” This derives from two opposing attitudes toward the interpretation of these verses, opposition to interpreting the mutashābih and support for their interpretation.

Almost every commentator identifies the “mysterious letters” (fawāʾil al-suwar, see LETTERS AND MYSERIOUS LETTERS) of the Qurʾān as mutashābih (e.g. Tabart, Tafsīr, iii, 116-7). These are the letters that occur at the beginning of certain sūras and whose meaning is unclear. The significance of the mysterious letters, as well as the other mutashābih verses, is considered a divine secret known only to God himself. Both should be regarded as parts of the book that God has prevented his people from understanding. Their concealed meaning points to the divine-source of the Qurʾān and thus attests to its miraculous nature (Abd al-Jabbar, Mutashābih, i, 17).
The ambiguity of the mutashābih verses enables believers to interpret them in more than one way. This means that the Qurʾān accommodates more than one approach to a given issue and that different trends in Islam are likely to find their ideas reflected in the Qurʾān (ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Mutashābih, 1, 26, 28. See also L. Kinberg, Mukkamāt, 158, 168). This allows the holy text to serve as a source of answers and solutions to any problem at any time and represents one of the central aspects of the miraculous nature of the Qurʾān.

In examining the different attitudes toward the interpretation of the Qurʾān, H. Birkeland (Opposition, 9) states that the opposition to Qurʾānic exegesis was never comprehensive and was aimed at the usage of human reasoning (raʾy). The validity of tafsīr bi-l-ʿilm, i.e. exegesis based on hadith (the records of the pronouncements and actions of the prophet Muhammad, see hadith and the Qurʾān) was, in H. Birkeland’s view, never disputed. Support for this theory can be found in the way the term mutashābih is treated in the exegetical literature as well as in its relation to the term mukkam. The prohibition of interpreting the mutashābih verses may be understood as a reflection of the opposition to the use of human reason. At the same time, allowing the interpretation of these verses seems to be conditional upon the usage of hadith as a means of interpretation. Indeed, Muslim scholars have traditionally not regarded the employment of hadith to illuminate a Qurʾānic verse as interpretation, but rather as a means of confirming the message included in the verse. Consequently, a verse in harmony with a reliable hadith may be relied upon as a source of guidance. Such a verse would be defined as mukkam. The mutashābih, on the other hand, can never be regarded as authoritative. Both the need of various streams in Islam to have their distinctive ideas anchored in the Qurʾān and the injunction to follow only the mukkam verses may explain the variance in the identity of the verses which different groups view as mukkam and mutashābih. As shown above, a verse defined by one scholar as mutashābih may be characterized as mukkam by another. The flexible way in which the two terms were used enabled the commentators to adapt a verse to their needs by defining it as mukkam. In so doing they were actually using their own independent reasoning presented as hadith. See also traditional disciplines of Qurʾānic study.

Leah Kinberg

Bibliography

Exegesis of the Quran: Early Modern And Contemporary

تفاسیر قرآن بسیرا نوین و معاصر
Exegesis of the Qur‘an: Early Modern and Contemporary

This article deals with the exegetical efforts of Muslim scholars as well as with their views of exegetical methodology from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present.

Aspects and limits of modernity in the exegesis of the Qur‘an

Treating early modern and contemporary exegesis of the Qur‘an as a distinct subject implies that there are characteristics by which this exegesis differs noticeably from that of previous times. The assumption of such characteristics, however, is by no means equally correct for all attempts at interpreting passages of the Qur‘an in the books and articles of Muslim authors of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even where such an assumption holds true, those authors do not always deviate significantly from traditional patterns and approaches (see EXEGESIS OF THE QUR‘AN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL). Many Qur‘an commentaries of this time hardly differ from older ones in the methods applied and the kinds of explanations given. The majority of the authors of such commentaries made ample use of classical sources like al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210) and Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373) without necessarily adding anything substantially new to the already available interpretations. One should thus always bear in mind that in the exegesis of the Qur‘an there is a broad current of unbroken tradition continuing to this day. Still, in what follows attention will be directed mainly to innovative trends.

The majority of the new approaches to exegesis has so far been developed in the Arab countries and particularly in Egypt. Therefore, this part of the Islamic world will be dealt with most extensively.

Elements of novelty include the content as well as the methods of interpretation. When mentioning content, it should be said, first of all, that new ideas about the meaning of the Qur‘anic text emerged largely in answer to new questions which arose from the political, social and cultural changes brought about in Muslim societies by the impact of Western civilization. Of particular importance among these were two problems: the compatibility of the Qur‘anic world view with the findings of modern science (see SCIENCE AND THE QUR‘AN); and the question of an appropriate political and social order based on Qur‘anic principles (see POLITICS AND THE QUR‘AN; COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR‘AN) which would thus enable Muslims to throw off the yoke of Western dominance. For this purpose the Qur‘anic message had to be interpreted so as to allow Muslims either to assimilate Western models successfully or to work out alternatives believed to be superior to them. One of the problems to be considered in this framework was the question of how Qur‘anic provisions referring to the legal status of women could be understood in view of modern aspirations towards equal rights for both sexes (see FEMINISM; GENDER; WOMEN AND THE QUR‘AN). Hitherto unknown methodological approaches sprang partly from new developments in the field of literary studies and communication theory, partly from the need to find practical ways and theoretical justifications for discarding traditional interpretations in favor of new ones more easily acceptable to the contemporary intellect, but without at the same time denying the authority of the revealed text as such. These approaches were
usually based on a new understanding of
the nature of divine revelation and its
mode of action in general.

Kinds of publication containing exegesis of the
Qur’ān and discussing exegetical methods
The main place where exegesis of the
Qur’ān can be found remains the commentaries. Most of them follow a verse-
by-verse approach (tafsīr muṣaṣṣal, i.e.
“chained” or sequential commentary). In
the majority of cases such commentaries
start from the beginning of the first sūra
(q.v.; see also fāṭihah) and continue — un-
less unfinished — without interruption
until the last verse of the last sūra. An
exception is al-Tafsīr al-Hadīthī by the Pales-
tinian scholar Muhammad ʿIzzā Darwaza,
which is based on a chronological arrange-
ment of the sūras (cf. Sulaymān, Darwaza).
Some muṣaṣṣal commentaries are limited to
larger portions of the text (known as juzʿ,
jaqāz) that were already in former times
looked upon as units (e.g. Muhammad
ʿAbduh, Tafsīr juzʿ Ammād, 1322/1904-5).
Some are devoted to a single sūra (e.g.
Muhammad ʿAbduh, Tafsīr al-Fāṭihah,
1319/1901-2). In a few cases such comment-
aries deal only with a selection of sūras
made by the author for demonstrating the
usefulness of a new exegetical method
(ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Rahmān, al-Tafsīr al-bayāmī,
see below) or the underlying purpose that the
exegesis was originally meant to serve (e.g.
Shawqī Dayfī, Sūrat al-Rahmān wa-nun-
qātir). It should also be said that the tradi-
tional genre of commentaries which treat
verses considered particularly difficult (see
difficult passages) is still being pursued
(e.g. Rashīd ʿAbdāfah Farḥān’s Tafsīr muṣa-
ṣṣal al-Qur’ān). While it is true that most
commentaries have been written for the
consumption of religious scholars, some
are specifically designed to address the
needs of a more general public. This is
ture, for example, in the case of Maw-

dūdī’s (d. 1979) Taḥfīm al-Qur’ān (see below),
a commentary intended for Indian Mus-
lims of a certain education who, however,
do not possess knowledge of Arabic or
expertise in the qur’ānic sciences.
The last decades of the twentieth century
in particular witnessed the publication of
an increasing number of commentaries
which classified key passages of the
qur’ānic text according to main subjects
and treated verses related to the same sub-
jects synoptically. The ideas of exegesis
underlying this “thematic interpretation”
(tafsīr maṣāṣil) and the pertinent theoretical
statements proclaimed in them can vary
greatly from one author to the next, as will
be seen below; also, in such thematic com-
mentaries, the procedures of determining
the meaning of single verses sometimes
differ hardly at all from those applied in
commentaries of the muṣaṣṣal kind. There-
fore, this thematic interpretation can
percolate between mere rearrangement of
exegical material and a distinct method of
exegesis with new results. Generally, how-
ever, thematic interpretation concentrates
upon a limited number of qur’ānic con-
cepts judged by the author to be particu-
larly important. This effect has also been
achieved by Mabmūd Shaltūtī in his Tafsīr
al-Qur’ān al-karīm, al-ʾAjāʿīb al-ahāra al-ṣāli,
who steers a middle course between the
muṣaṣṣal and thematic approaches in not
commenting upon the text word by word,
but focusing attention on key notions (see
Jansen, Egypt, 14).

Where commentaries concentrate on a
single, central qur’ānic theme or just a few
(e.g. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. al-Dardirī’s al-Tafsīr al-
maṣāṣil li-ʾayāt al-tauhid fi l-Qur’ān al-karīm),
this genre merges into that of treatises on
basic questions of qur’ānic theology (see
THEOLOGY AND THE QUR’ĀN), such as
Daud Rahbar’s God of Justice or — on a
less sophisticated level — ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-
Rahmān’s Maṣāṣil fi l-insān. Dirāsa qur’ānīyya.
In addition, books or articles written in the field of Islamic theology or law that argue from Qur’anic texts — which most of them do to a great extent — include an element of exegesis. Printed collections of sermons, on the other hand, are not as relevant for exegesis as one might expect, since Islamic sermons are nowadays primarily laid out thematically, not exegetically.

Discussions concerning the appropriate methods of exegesis are often located in introductions placed at the beginning of Qur’anic commentaries. A remarkable early modern case in point is Muhammad ‘Abduh’s introduction to his Tafsir al-Fathih (5-21, actually Muhammad Rashid Rida’s account of one of ‘Abduh’s lectures). A small separate treatise about the principles of exegesis, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Tahdzib fi usul al-tafsir, was already printed in 1892 (Agra, in Urdu). Since that time quite a few books and articles entirely devoted to methodological problems of interpreting the Qur’an have been published, most of them since the late 1960’s.

**Main trends in the exegetical methods and their protagonists**

1. Interpreting the Qur’an from the perspective of Enlightenment rationalism

   The first significant innovation in the methods of exegesis, as they had been practised for many centuries, was introduced by two eminent protagonists of Islamic reform: the Indian Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) and the Egyptian Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905). Both of them, impressed by the political dominance and economic prosperity of modern Western civilization in the colonial age, ascribed the rise of this civilization to the scientific achievements of the Europeans and embraced a popularized version of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. On this basis they adopted an essentially rationalistic approach to the exegesis of the Qur’an, working independently of each other and out of somewhat different points of departure and accentuations, but with similar results all the same. Both were inspired with the desire to enable their fellow Muslims in their own countries and elsewhere to share in the blessings of the powerful modern civilization.

   For Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the traumatic experience of the Indian mutiny (1857), on the one hand, had roused in him the urge to prove that there is nothing in the Islamic religion which could prevent Indian Muslims from coexisting and cooperating peacefully with the British in a polity held together by a reasonable, morally advanced legal order and founded on scientific thinking. On the other hand, he had personally turned to a modern scientific conception of nature and the universe after many years of exposure to the impact of British intellectuals residing in India. These motives incited him to attempt to demonstrate that there could not be any contradiction between modern natural science and the holy scripture of the Muslims. (For a fundamental study of his principles of exegesis and the underlying ideas, see Troll, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, 144-170.)

   Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s basic notion for understanding Qur’anic revelation (see Revelation and Inspiration) is expounded in his above-mentioned treatise on the fundamentals of exegesis (usul al-tafsir) and put into practice in several other writings published by him: The law of nature is a practical covenant (q.v.) by which God has bound himself to humanity (see Natural world and the Qur’an), while the promise and threat (see Reward and Punishment) contained in the revelation is a verbal one. There can be no contradiction between both covenants; otherwise God would have contradicted himself, which is unthinkable. His word, the revelation, cannot contradict his work, i.e.
nature (see creation). Sayyid Ahmad Khan complements this assumption with a second axiom: Any religion imposed by God — and hence also Islam, the religion meant to be the final one for all humankind — must necessarily be within the grasp of the human intellect, since it is possible to perceive the obligatory character of a religion only through the intellect (q.v.). Therefore it is impossible that the Qur’anic revelation could contain anything contradicting scientific reason.

If some contemporary Muslims believe the opposite, this does not stem, in Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s opinion, from the Qur’anic text as such, but from an erroneous direction within the exegetical tradition: The holy book only seems to contradict modern science in certain places if one has not noticed that the passage in question must be understood metaphorically. According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan this metaphorical interpretation (ta’til) is, nota bene, not a secondary reinterpretation of an obvious meaning of the text, but a reconstruction of its original meaning: God himself had chosen to use certain metaphorical expressions in the text only on account of their currency as common metaphor (q.v.) in the Arabic usage of the Prophet’s day, making them comprehensible to his contemporaries, the first audience for what had been revealed to him. Exegetes must, therefore, first try to understand the text as understood by the ancient Arabs to whom it was addressed in the time of the Prophet (see language and style of the Qur’an, pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur’an).

The practical result of Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s exegetical endeavor on the basis of these principles is to eliminate miraculous events from his understanding of the Qur’anic text as much as possible, as well as all kinds of supranatural phenomena and other phenomena incompatible with his own scientific world view (see miracle). In the case of doubt, the reasoning of modern science, not the meaning of the text which was most likely accessible to the ancient Arabs, is his criterion of truth (q.v.). He thus explains the Prophet’s night journey (see ascension) as an event that took place only in a dream (see dreams and sleep), while the jinn (q.v.) become, in his interpretation, some sort of primitive savages living in the jungle, etc.

Muhammad ‘Abduh, taking over a well-known idea that can be traced back to the philosophy of the late phase of the European Enlightenment, conceived of the history of humankind as a process of development analogous to that of the individual and saw in the “heavenly religions” educational means by which God had directed this development towards its final stage of maturity, the age of science. According to him, Muslims are perfectly fit for sharing in the civilization of this age and can even play a leading part in it, since Islam is the religion of reason and progress. The Qur’an was revealed in order to draw the minds of human beings to reasonable conceptions about their happiness in this world as well as in the hereafter. For ‘Abduh this means not only that the content of the Qur’an conforms to the laws of nature, but also that it informs people about the laws that are effective in the historical development of nations and societies.

In this sense, the whole Qur’anic revelation seeks to bestow God’s guidance (hidāya) upon humankind, and hence it has to be interpreted so as to make it easier for its audience to understand the goals God desires them to attain. Exegetes should devote themselves to the service of God’s enlightening guidance and concentrate their efforts on searching the Qur’anic text to uncover God’s signs (q.v., āyāt) in nature and to discern the moral and legal norms
of which the text speaks (see ETHICS AND THE QUR'AN). This is their proper task rather than digressing into complicated scholarly discussions about the possible sense of individual words and phrases or impressing themselves in a variety of levels of meaning — whether grammatical or mystical (see GRAMMAR AND THE QUR'AN; SUFISM AND THE QUR'AN) — that might be discernible in the text, particularly since these various understandings were quite unfamiliar to the Arabs of the Prophet’s time. In order to grasp that to which God intends to guide humankind, the text has to be understood — and here ‘Abduh agrees once more with Sayyid Ahmad Khan — according to the meaning its words had for the Prophet’s contemporaries, the first audience to which the revelation was disclosed. Moreover, commentators must resist the temptation to make qur’anic statements definite where they have been left indefinite (mubah) in the text itself — e.g., by identifying persons whose proper names have not been mentioned — as well as the temptation to fill gaps in qur’anic narratives (q.v.) with Jewish traditions of biblical or apocryphal origin (Isrā taysīr) since these were handed down by previous generations of scholars who never stripped them of what contradicted revelation and reason (Tafsīr al-Fāṭihah, 6, 7, 11-12, 15, 17).

The characteristic features of ‘Abduh’s own exegetical practice are reflected most clearly in his voluminous commentary widely known as Tafsīr al-Manār, which has become a standard work quoted by many later authors alongside the classical commentaries. ‘Abduh’s actual share in it consists of the series of lectures that he gave at al-Azhar University around the year 1900 which covered the text of the Qur’ān from the beginning to Q 4:124. His pupil Muhammad Rashid Rida took notes of these lectures which he afterwards elaborated and showed to his teacher for approval or correction. In addition, he complemented the passages based on ‘Abduh’s lectures by inserting explanations which he marked as his own — and in which he displayed a more traditionalist attitude than that of ‘Abduh (cf. Jomier, Commentaire). After ‘Abduh’s death Rida continued the commentary on his own to Q 12:107.

‘Abduh divides the qur’ānic text into groups of verses constituting logical units and treats the text of these paragraphs as a single entity. This corresponds to his view that single words or phrases are not the primary subject of interest for the commentator, but rather the didactic aim of the passage, and that the correct interpretation of an expression can often be grasped only by considering its context (tīyāg). His interpretations, which he often enriches with lengthy excursions, do not always consistently follow his own declared principles but show a general tendency towards stressing the rationality of Islam and its positive attitude towards science, while aiming at the same time to eradicate elements of popular belief and practice which he considers to be superstitious. For ‘Abduh, too, in the case of doubt, science is the decisive criterion for the meaning of qur’ānic wording.

Another Egyptian author, Muhammad Abū Zayd, who published a commentary in 1930, can also be ranked among the exponents of a rationalistic exegesis inspired by a popular appropriation of the European Enlightenment. His book, al-Hidāya wa-l-irfān fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān bi-l-Qur‘ān, created a considerable stir and was finally confiscated by the authorities at the instigation of al-Azhar University, which condemned it in an official report (Jansen, Egypt, 88-9). The methodological device hinted at in its title — namely that of explaining particular qur’ānic passages by comparing them to parallel passages which address the same
subject in a more detailed way or in similar, though not identical terms—was not completely novel even then, and has been taken up more than once by later commentators, so far without negative reactions on the part of the guardians of orthodoxy. What gave offence was apparently not the methodology so much as the ideas Muhammad Abū Zayd tried to propagate by making a very selective use of it: He argues that a far-reaching *jihād* is permitted with respect to traditional norms of Islamic law, and he does his best to explain away any miracles and supernatural occurrences in the Qur’ānic narratives concerning the prophets (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD).

Some commentaries contain elements of rationalistic exegesis in line with the insights of Sayyid Ahmad Khan or ‘Abduh, but use them only to a limited extent. Among these are: *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (1930) by the Indian author Abū l-Kalām Āzād and *Majālis al-‘adāb* (1929-39) by the Algerian reformist leader ‘Abd al-Hamīd Ibn Bādīs.

2. The so-called scientific exegesis of the Qur’ān

Scientific exegesis (*tafsīr ‘ilmi*) is to be understood in light of the assumption that all sorts of findings of the modern natural sciences have been anticipated in the Qur’ān and that many unambiguous references to them can be discovered in its verses (q.v.). The scientific findings already confirmed in the Qur’ān range from Copernican cosmology (see COSMOLOGY) to the properties of electricity, from the regularities of chemical reactions to the agents of infectious diseases. The whole method amounts to reading into the text what normally would not ordinarily be seen there. Often trained in medicine, pharmacy or other natural sciences, even agricultural sciences, scientific exegetes are, for the most part, not professional theologians. This kind of exegesis has, however, gained entry into the Qur’ān commentaries of religious scholars as well.

It should be mentioned that Muhammad Abūd’s commentaries are not themselves devoid of attempts to read discoveries of modern science into the text. As is well-known, he considered the possibility that the jinn mentioned in the Qur’ān could be equated to microbes. He also considered it legitimate to understand the *flocks* of birds which, according to Q 105, had thrown stones on the *People of the Elephant* (q.v.), to be *swarms* of flies which, by their *polluted* legs, had transmitted a disease to them (*Tafsīr juz’ ‘Amma*, 158). ‘Abduh’s interest in such interpretations, however, did not parallel that of the supporters of scientific exegesis: He wanted to prove to his public that the Qur’ānic passages in question were not contrary to reason by modern scientific standards, whereas proponents of scientific exegesis hope to prove that the Qur’ān is many centuries ahead of western scientists, since it mentions what they discovered only in modern times.

Most enthusiasts of scientific exegesis regard this assumed chronological priority of the Qur’ān in the field of scientific knowledge as a particularly splendid instance of its *iḥāz*, miraculous inimitability (q.v.), appreciating this aspect of *iḥāz* all the more as a highly effective apologetical argument, in their view, to be directed against the West.

The basic pattern of scientific exegesis was not completely new: Several authors of classical Qur’ān commentaries, notably Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, had already expressed the idea that all the sciences were contained in the Qur’ān. Consequently, they had tried to detect in its text the astronomical knowledge of their times, then largely adopted from the Perso-Indian and Greco-Hellenistic heritage. Efforts of this
kind were still carried on by Mahmūd Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1856) in his Rūḥ al-maʿānī, a commentary which, however, does not yet show any familiarity with modern western science.

The first author who attained some publicity by practicing scientific exegesis in the modern sense, i.e., by finding in the Qur'anic text references to modern scientific discoveries and advances, was the physician Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Iskandarī, one of his two prominent books printed around the year 1880 bears the promising title Kashf al-arār al-nūrānîyya al-qur'ānîyya fi maṭ āṣa al-lajm bi-l-ṣarîm al-samāwîyya wa-l-arîsyya wa-l-hayawānî wa-l-nabît wa-l-ja'ābir al-maʿānîyya (i.e. "Uncovering the luminous Qur'anic secrets pertaining to the heavenly and terrestrial bodies, the animals, the plants and the metallic substances.") (1297/1879-80).

The most prominent representative of this tafsīr ilmi in the early twentieth century was the Egyptian Shaykh Šaṭāwī Jawhari, author of al-Jawāhir fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm (1341/1922-23). This work is not a commentary in the customary sense, but rather an encyclopaedic survey of the modern sciences or, more exactly, of what the author classes with them — including such disciplines as šīrūdīn (ilm tafsīr al-anwāḥ). Jawhari claims that these sciences were already mentioned in certain Qur'anic verses, passages upon which his lengthy didactic expositions of pertinent topics are based. All this is interspersed with tables, drawings and photographs. Unlike most other enthusiasm of scientific exegesis, Jawhari did not employ this method primarily for the apologistic purposes, mentioned above, of proving the ġalī of the Qur'ān. His main purpose was to convince his fellow Muslims that in modern times they should concern themselves much more with the sciences than with Islamic law: only in this way could they regain political independence and power. Other authors wrote books devoted to the scientific exegesis of Qur'ānic verses mainly with apologetic intentions, among them 'Abd al-'Azīz Ismā'īl (al-Isām wa-l-tūb al-hadīth, Cairo 1938, reprint 1957), Hanafī Ahmad Muṣī' al-Qur'ān fee waṣf al-kaʿānī (Cairo 1954, two reprints entitled al-Tafsīr al-ilmi lil-ayāt al-kaʿānīyya, 1960 and 1968) and Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal al-Qur'ān wa-l-ilm al-hadīth, Cairo 1378/1959).

Some authors of well-known Qur'ān commentaries who do not rely exclusively on the method of scientific exegesis, but deal with the Qur'ānic text as a whole (not only with verses lending themselves to this method) nevertheless practice scientific exegesis in the explanation of particular verses. Thus, elements of tafsīr ilmi occur, for example, in Ṣafīq al-ʿirfān (= al-Mushaf al-mufassar, 1903) by Muhammad Farīd Wajid, in the Majālāt al-aʿlākhīr (1929-39) by 'Abd al-Hamīd Ibn Badis, and in al-Mizān (1973-85) by the Imamīe scholar Muhammad Husayn Tabātabāʾī (d. 1982).

The scientific method of interpretation did not find general approval among Muslim authors who wrote Qur'ān commentaries or discussed exegetical methods. Quite a few of them rejected this method outright, like Muhammad Ṭabīb Rūḍa, Amin al-Khalīf (whose detailed refutation of it [Manāḥiṭ al-tajdid, 287-96] has often been referred to by later authors), Mahmūd Shaltūt and Sayyid Qub (for these and other critics of the tafsīr ilmi and their arguments, see al-Muḥsiṭ, līṭāḥāt al-tafsīr, 302-13 and 'Abū Ḥajār, al-Tafsīr al-ilmi, 295-336). Their most important objections to scientific exegesis can be summarized as follows: (1) It is lexicographically untenable, since it falsely attributes modern meanings to the Qur'ānic vocabulary; (2) it neglects the context of words or phrases within the Qur'ānic text, and also the occasions of revelation (q.v., istāb al-nuzūl).
where these are transmitted; (3) it ignores the fact that, for the Qur'ān to be comprehensible for its first audience, the words of the Qur'ān had to conform to the language and the intellectual horizon of the ancient Arabs at the Prophet's time — an argument already used by the Andalusian Mālikī scholar al-Shāhībī (d. 790/1388) against the scientific exegesis of his time (al-Muwaqqāt fi usūl al-shari'ah, ii, 69-82); (4) it does not take notice of the fact that scientific knowledge and scientific theories are always incomplete and provisional by their very nature; therefore, the derivation of scientific knowledge and scientific theories in Qur'ānic verses is actually tantamount to limiting the validity of these verses to the time for which the results of the science in question are accepted; (5) most importantly, it fails to comprehend that the Qur'ān is not a scientific book, but a religious one designed to guide human beings by imparting to them a creed and a set of moral values (or, as Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb prefer to put it, the distinctive principles of the Islamic system; cf. below).

Despite the weight of all these objections, some authors still believe that the tafsīr ilmī can and should be continued — at least as an additional method particularly useful for proving the ijāz of the Qur'ān to those who do not know Arabic and are thus unable to appreciate the miraculous style of the holy book (see Hind Shalabi, al-Tafsīr al-ilmī, esp. 63-69 and 149-164; Ibn ʿAshūr, Tafsīr al-aḥrīr, i, 104, 128).

3. Interpreting the Qur'ān from the perspective of literary studies

The use of methods of literary studies for the exegesis of the Qur'ān was initiated mainly by Amin al-Khuff (d. 1967), a professor of Arabic language and literature at the Egyptian University (later King Fu'ād University, now University of Cairo). He did not write a Qur'ān commentary himself, but devoted a considerable part of his lectures to exegetical questions and also dealt with the history and current state of methodological requirements of exegesis in his post-1940's publications.

Already in 1933, his famous colleague Tāhā Husayn had remarked in his booklet Fi l-jayf that the holy scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims belong to the common literary heritage of humankind (see Religious Pluralism and the Qur'ān; Scripture and the Qur'ān) as much as the works of Homer, Shakespeare and Goethe, and that Muslims should begin to study the Qur'ān as a work of literary art and use methods of modern literary research for its analysis, just as some Jewish and Christian scholars had done with the Bible (al-Majmuʿa al-kāmilah li-muḥaḍāfāt al-dukāṣ Tāhā Husayn, Beirut 1974, xiv, 215-9). He had added that such an approach was not to be expected from the clerics (shuyūkh) of al-Azhar, but that there was no reason to leave the study of holy scriptures to men of religion alone — why should people not be enabled to express their opinions about such books as objects of research in the field of literary art, “taking no account of their religious relevance (bi-qāl ʿi l-naṣariʾ an makānaṭāhā l-diniyya)” (ibid., 216)? He concluded, however, that it would still be dangerous in his country to embark publicly on an analysis of the Qur'ān as a literary text. Amin al-Khuff shared the basic idea contained in these remarks and developed them into a concrete program; several of his students, along with their own students, tried to carry it out, some of them not without bitter consequences, as foreseen by Tāhā Husayn.

According to Amin al-Khuff, the Qur'ān is “the greatest book of the Arabic language and its most important literary work (khāb al-ʿarabiyya al-akbar wa- август la-dabī al-aʿrāmi)” (Manāḥij al-ṣūūrāt, 303; see Literature and the Qur'ān). In his view, the
adequate methods for studying this book as a work of literary art do not differ from those that apply to any other works of literature. Two fundamental preliminary steps have to be taken: (1) The historical background and the circumstances of its genesis — or in the case of the Qurʾān, its entry into this world by revelation — must be explored. For this purpose, one has to study the religious and cultural traditions and the social situation of the ancient Arabs, to whom the prophetic message was first addressed, their language (see ARABIC LANGUAGE) and previous literary achievements, the chronology of the enunciation of the Qurʾānic text by the Prophet (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QURʾĀN), the occasions of revelation (arbaʾ al-nuzūl), etc. (2) Keeping in mind all relevant knowledge gathered in this way, one has to establish the exact meaning of the text word by word as it was understood by its first listeners (see FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE QURʾĀN). In accordance with al-Shātibī, al-Khuṭṭī assumes that God, in order to make his intention understood by the Arabs of the Prophet’s time, had to use their language and to adapt his speech to their modes of comprehension, which were themselves determined by their traditional views and concepts. Hence, before the divine intention of the text can be determined, one has first to grasp its meaning as understood by the ancient Arabs — and this can be done, as al-Khuṭṭī emphasizes, “regardless of any religious consideration ilā ayyī ṭabārīn dint” (Manāḥij al-ṣuḥādā, 304). It then becomes possible to study the artistic qualities of the Qurʾān, by using the same categories and by keeping to the same rules as are applied in the study of literary works. The style of the Qurʾān can thus be explored in given passages by studying the principles which determine the choice of words, the peculiarities of the construction of sentences, the figures of speech employed, etc. (see RHETORIC OF THE QURʾĀN; SEMANTICS OF THE QURʾĀN). Likewise, one can examine the typical structure of passages belonging to a particular literary genre. Since works of literary art are characterized by a specific relation between content or theme on the one hand and formal means of expression on the other, al-Khuṭṭī attaches particular importance to the thematic units of the Qurʾānic text and stresses that a correct explanation requires commentators to consider all verses and passages which speak to the same subject, instead of confining their attention to one single verse or passage (ibid., 304-6). At the same time, al-Khuṭṭī’s approach is based on a particular understanding of the nature of a literary text. For him, literature, like art in general, is primarily a way of appealing to the public’s emotions, as a means of directing them and their decisions. He therefore argues that the interpreter should also try to explain the psychological effects which the artistic qualities of the Qurʾānic text, in particular its language, had on its first audience.

Shukri ‘Ayyād, who wrote his M.A. thesis, Min wasf al-Qurʾān al-karim li-yawm al-dīn wa-l-hisāb (n.d., unpublished, although a critical summary exists in al-Shārqaṭī, Ittiḥāq, 213-6) under al-Khuṭṭī’s supervision, is reputed to have been the first to carry out a research project based on these principles.

Also among al-Khuṭṭī’s students was ‘Āisha ‘Abd al-Rahmān (pen name, Bint al-Shātī), his wife. Her commentary, al-Tafsīr al-bayānī il-Qurʾān al-karim, is designed in conformity with the main features of al-Khuṭṭī’s methodological conception and in its preface explicitly refers to the suggestions received from him. ‘Āisha ‘Abd al-Rahmān consciously
selected a number of shorter sūras to show in a particularly impressive way the fruits to be gathered by the application of al-Khūlī's method. Each of them constitutes a thematic unit, and the author gives a rough indication of the place of the respective sūra in the chronology of the Prophet's enunciation of the qur'ānic text and expounds the significance of its theme during this time in comparison with other phases of the Prophet's activity. To illustrate this point, she hints at other relevant sūras (q.v.) or parts of them, and discusses questions of the occasions of revelation (aštāb al-nuzūl). In doing so she attempts to give at least part of an outline of the historical background of the sūra under consideration (see HISTORY AND THE QUR'ĀN). She highlights the most striking stylistic features of this sūra, e.g. relative length or shortness of sentences, accumulation of certain rhetorical figures, frequent occurrence of certain morphological or syntactical patterns, etc., and tries to demonstrate the specific relation of these features to the corresponding theme, citing a host of parallel verses from other sūras which treat the same subject or show the same stylistic features. She also considers the emotional effect these peculiarities are meant to have on the listeners and attends to such questions as the impact of qur'ānic rhymes (see rhymed prose) on the choice of words and of the compositorial structure of the sūras. Additionally, she gives a careful verse-by-verse commentary in order to explain every single difficult word and phrase by comparing other qur'ānic verses which contain the same or similar expressions, quoting verses from ancient Arabic poetry, referring to classical Arabic dictionaries and discussing the opinions of the authors of — mostly classical — Qur'ān commentaries. In all this she displays a high degree of erudition. In general, 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahmān's commentary, as well as her other publications treating problems of the exegesis of the Qur'ān, have found a favorable reception even among conservative religious scholars, as she avoids broaching dogmatically sensitive points and apparently does not do anything but prove once more the stylistic tājız of the Qur'ān, now on the level of advanced philological methods.

Another student of al-Khūlī, Muhammād Ahmad Khalāf Allāh, faced considerable difficulties in his use of al-Khūlī's approach and was exposed to the anger of leading religious scholars (ʿulamāʾ) at al-Azhar. In 1947 he submitted his doctoral thesis al-Fann al-qasasī li-l-Qur'ān al-karīm to the King Fuʾād University (now University of Cairo). On the basis of al-Khūlī's idea of literature as an instrument of appealing to emotions and directing them according to the author's intentions, Khalāf Allāh had set about studying the artistic means by which, according to his conviction, the qur'ānic narratives were so uniquely and effectively fashioned (Wielandt, Offenbarung, 139-52).

In order to be psychologically effective, narratives need not correspond absolutely to the historical facts. Khalāf Allāh even considers other requirements to be much more relevant for this purpose: They must refer to the listeners' customary language, previous conceptions and narrative traditions — in line with what al-Shāṭībī and al-Khūlī had already said about the importance of understanding the original reception of the message. They must be adapted to the listeners' feelings and mental condition. Finally, they must be well constructed. He thus arrives at the conclusion that the qur'ānic narratives about prophets of earlier times are, to a large extent, not historically true: Although Muhammad's Arab contemporaries
certainly believed them to be true reports about what actually happened, God used them in the Qur'an not primarily as historical facts (wadq' at-tībh), but as psychological facts (wadq' nafsī), i.e., as means of influencing the listeners' emotions (al-Fann, Cairo 1965, 10, 111). In order to achieve this, God took the subject matter of these Qur'anic narratives from stories and ideas already familiar to the ancient Arabs.

Moreover, for the purpose of supporting Muhammad's emotional confrontation with the heathen Meccans (see OPPOSITION TO MUHAMMAD), God reflected the Prophet's state of mind in the Qur'anic stories about earlier prophets by shaping these narratives according to Muhammad's own experience.

Obviously, this interpretation implies that the content of the Qur'anic narratives about prophets corresponds for the most part to the content of the Prophet's consciousness as well as that of the audience of the divine message. This makes it possible to trace important features of these narratives to what Muhammad and his Arab contemporaries knew from local traditions or what Muhammad could have said himself on the basis of his experience. According to Khalāf Allāh, however, this correspondence results from the fact that God, the only author of the holy book, had marvellously adapted the Qur'anic narratives to Muhammad's situation and that of his audience. Khalāf Allāh never doubts that the entire text of the Qur'an was inspired literally by God and that Muhammad had no share whatsoever in its production.

Nevertheless Khalāf Allāh's thesis was rejected by the examining board of his own university, one of the arguments being that its results were religiously questionable. Moreover, a commission of leading scholars (ulama') of al-Azhar issued a memo-

randum classifying Khalāf Allāh as a criminal because he had denied that the Qur'anic narratives were historically true in their entirety. A short time later he was dismissed from his position at the university on another pretext.

Occasional attempts at studying the Qur'an as a work of literary art were also made by authors not belonging to al-Khūlī's school, again, mainly Egyptians (for details up to the 1960's, see al-Bayyūmī, Khutuwa al-tasīr al-bayānī, 335-9). Sayyid Qūb's al-Taṣīr al-fannī, l-Qur'ān bears witness to the aesthetic sensitivity of the author — who had previously made his name as a literary critic — and contains some cogent observations, but in contrast to the works of al-Khūlī's students it is not based on the systematic application of a method. The longest chapter of al-Taṣīr al-fannī is devoted to the Qur'anic narratives; unlike Khalāf Allāh, Sayyid Qūb does not voice any doubts about their historical truth. In short, it is possible to state that, since the 1970's, an increased interest in studying the Qur'anic narrative art has emerged (see e.g. 'Abd al-Karīm Khātīb, al-Qasas al-qur'ānī fī manāqib wa-maṣḥūmihi; İlhamī Naqa, Sīhālāyjyay al-qīsā fī l-Qur'ān; al-Qasabī Mahṣūd Zaīl, Qadāyā l-tīfrī fī l-qasas al-qur'ānī; Muḥammad Khayr Mahṣūd al-Adāwī, Muʿālim al-qīṣa fī l-Qur'ān al-kārīm). Cognizant of Khalāf Allāh's face, however, those authors who have addressed this topic in more recent times have tended to draw their conclusions rather cautiously.

4. Endeavors to develop a new theory of exegesis taking full account of the historicity of the Qur'an

The school of al-Khūlī had already given much importance to the task of recovering the meaning of the Qur'an as understood at the time of the Prophet and looked upon the Qur'an as a literary text which
had to be interpreted, as any other literary work, in its historical context. Since the late 1950's several scholars have come to the conviction that the Qur'anic text is related to history in a much more comprehensive way and that this fact necessitates a fundamental change of exegetical methods.

One such scholar is (Muhammad) Daud Rahbar, a Pakistani scholar who later taught in the United States. In a paper read at the International Islamic Colloquium in Lahore in January 1958, he emphasized that the eternal word of God contained in the Qur'an — which is addressed to people today as much as to Muhammad's contemporaries — “speaks with reference to human situations and events of the last 23 years of the Prophet's life in particular,” as “no message can be sent to men except with reference to actual concrete situations” (Challenge, 279). Rahbar calls urgently on Muslim exegetes to consider what this means for the methods of dealing with the revealed text. In this framework, he attaches special significance to the question of the occasions of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl) and to the phenomenon of the abrogation (q.v.) of earlier regulations by later ones (al-nāṣir uwa l-mansūkh) in the Qur'anic text. He expresses the expectation that exegetes react to the challenges of modern life more flexibly by taking notice of the fact that the divine word had to be adapted to historical circumstances from the very beginning, and that God even modified his word during the few years of Muhammad's prophetic activity in accordance with the circumstances.

Fazlur Rahman, also of Pakistani origin and until 1988 professor of Islamic thought at the University of Chicago, proposed in his Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition (1982) a solution for the hermeneutical problem of disentangling the eternal message of the Qur'an from its adaptation to the historical circumstances of Muhammad's mission and discovering its meaning for believers of today. According to him, the Qur'anic revelation primarily "consists of moral, religious, and social pronouncements that respond to specific problems in concrete historical situations," particularly the problems of Meccan commercial society at the Prophet's time (see Mecca); hence the process of interpretation nowadays requires "a double movement, from the present situation to Qur'anic times, then back to the present" (ibid., 5). This approach consists of three steps: First, "one has to understand the import or meaning of a given statement by studying the historical situation or problem to which it was the answer"; secondly, one has "to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be 'distilled' from specific texts in the light of the socio-historical background and the... ratio legi"; and thirdly, "the general has to be embodied in the present concrete socio-historical context" (ibid., 5-7). A methodological conception coming close to this approach, although confined to the interpretation of Qur'anic legal norms, had already been evolved since the 1950's by 'Allal al-Fasi, the famous Maliki scholar and leader of the Moroccan independence movement (cf. al-Naqd al-dhāt, 125, 221; Maqāsid al-sharī'a, 190-3, 240-1).

A remarkable recent development in the arena of theoretical reflection on the appropriate methods of interpreting the Qur'an is the plea of the Egyptian scholar Nasr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd for a new exegetical paradigm, a plea made in several of his publications, particularly in his Majhūm al-nass (1990). He submitted this book to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Cairo, where he was teaching in the Arabic Department, together with his application for promotion to the rank of full professor.
Abū Zayd’s approach to the exegesis of the Qur’ān continues the tradition of al-Khūṭrī’s school to a certain extent, but at the same time generalizes what had been the starting point of al-Khūṭrī’s methodology, namely his idea about the form in which the Qur’ān can actually be subjected to interpretation. Whereas al-Khūṭrī had stressed that the Qur’ān is, above all else, a literary work and must be analyzed as such, Abū Zayd simply states that it is a text (nass) and must be understood according to the scientific principles which apply to the understanding of texts in general. His conception of what it means to understand a text is based on a model of the process of communication first introduced by the American mathematician and information theorist C.E. Shannon (in *The mathematical theory of information*, published in 1947 in co-authorship with W. Weaver) and widely accepted since the 1960’s among experts of linguistic as well as literary text theory. The model can be presented in the following terms: The information contained in a message can be understood only if the sender transmits it in a code (i.e. a system of signs) known to the recipient. According to Abū Zayd this model is necessarily valid also for the process of revelation, in which a divine message is transmitted to human beings: The Prophet, the first recipient, would not have been able to understand the revealed text if it had not been fitted into a code understandable to him, and the same applies to his audience, the people to which it was sent. The code which is understandable to a prophet and to the target group of his message consists of their common language and the content of their consciousness, which is to a large extent determined by their social situation and their cultural tradition. Hence God must have adapted the Qur’ānic revelation to the language, the social situation and the cultural tradition of the Arabs of Muham-

mad’s time. This has far-reaching consequences for the methods of exegesis: In order to be able to understand the divine message, the exegetes of today have, on the one hand, to familiarize themselves with the code tied to the specific historical situation of the Prophet and his Arab contemporaries, i.e. those peculiarities of language, society and culture that are not theirs any more: only in that way will they be able to identify in the Qur’ānic text the elements belonging to this code and to distinguish them from the immutably valid substance of the revelation. On the other hand, they have to translate the code of the primary recipients, the Prophet and his Arab contemporaries, into a code understandable to themselves, i.e. into the language and the social and cultural situation of their own time. This also means that they cannot rely uncritically on the long exegetical tradition from the Prophet’s time to their own: The commentators of past centuries, such as al-Zamakhshari or Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzi, certainly did their best to translate the divine message into the codes of their respective times, but our time has a code of its own.

Obviously, this methodical paradigm makes it possible to interpret the Qur’ānic text in such a way that conceptions corresponding to the social and cultural context of the Prophet’s preaching, but not tenable for the interpreter of today, can be classed as belonging to a bygone historical situation and not obligatory anymore. Without discarding the belief in the literal revelation of the Qur’ān and in the everlasting validity of its message. In fact, Abū Zayd has always declared unequivocally that he stays firm in this belief and that it is his conviction that the historical and cultural code in the text of the Qur’ān has been used by God himself, its sole author, and was not brought into it by Muhammad.

Still, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Sābūr Shāhīn, a
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member of the promotion board examining Abu Zayd’s publications, voted against his advancement to the position of full professor, charging him, among other things, with a lack of orthodoxy. Several other supporters of traditionalist or Islamist views accused him of heresy (ikhâd) or unbelief (kufr). At the instigation of a member of an Islamist organization, in 1995 a court in Cairo nullified his marriage on the grounds that he had abandoned the Islamic religion and thus could not be married to a Muslim woman. The Egyptian Court of Cassation failed to annul this verdict. As he was in danger of being “executed” as an apostate (see Apostasy) by Islamist fanatics, he had to accept an appointment at a European university.

Mohammed Arkoun, a scholar of Algerian origin who taught in Paris for many years, arrived at methodological conclusions quite similar to those of Abu Zayd, but by a different theoretical approach. According to Arkoun, the fait coranique, i.e. the fact to which all attempts at understanding the Qur’an have to refer in the final analysis, is the originally oral prophetic speech (see ORALITY; ISLÂM) which the Prophet himself and his audience believed to be God’s revelation. This speech, which is attested in, but not identical with, the written text of the ‘Uthmânic recension of the Qur’an (see Codices of the Qur’an; Collection of the Qur’an), was performed in a language and in textual genres tied to a specific historical situation, and in mythical and symbolic modes of expression (see SEMIOLOGY AND NATURE IN THE QUR’AN; SYMBOLIC IMAGERY). It already contains a theological interpretation of its own nature and must be subjected to an analysis of its structure. The whole exegetical tradition is a process of appropriation of this fait coranique by the various factions of the Muslim community. The text as such is open to a potentially infinite range of ever new interpretations as long as history continues, although the advocates of orthodoxy insist on absolutizing the results of a particular interpretation established at an early stage of this process. Any scientific study of the Qur’an and of the exegetical tradition referring to it has to keep in mind that religious truth, insofar as it can be understood by Muslims as well as by adherents of other “book religions,” becomes effective provided it exists in a dialectical relation between the revealed text and history. Contemporary scholars must use the instruments of historical semiotics and sociolinguistics in order to distinguish particular traditional interpretations of the Qur’anic text from the normative meaning which this text might have for present-day readers.

5. Exegesis in search of a new immediacy to the Qur’an

All exegetical trends outlined so far — including scientific exegesis, whose supporters claim that the Qur’an is centuries ahead of modern science — are in one way or another characterized by a marked awareness of the cultural distance between the world in which the qur’anic message was primarily communicated and the modern world. In contrast to these approaches, the Islamist exegesis tends to assume that it is possible for Muslims today to regain immediate access to the meaning of the Qur’anic text by returning to the belief of the first Muslims and actively struggling for the restoration of the pristine Islamic social order. It is in this later form of exegesis that the author’s underlying conception of the revealed text often finds expression. For example, Sayyid Qutb in his Qur’an commentary, Fî zîdâl al-Qur’ân (1952–65), insists that the Qur’an in its entirety is God’s message, and the instructions concerning the “Islamic system” or “method” (nizām islâmî or manhaj islâmî) contained in it are valid
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ever. The Qur’an is thus always contemporary, in any age. The task is not primarily that of translating the original meaning of the Qur’anic text into the language and world view of modern human beings, but that of putting it into practice, as done by the Prophet and his first followers, who took seriously God’s claim to absolute sovereignty (hakimiyat in Abu l-A’la Mawdūdi’s term) and set up the perfect “Islamic system.”

One of the consequences of this goal — i.e. achieving the system of the first Muslims in the way they followed Qur’anic instructions — is the marked preference usually shown by Islamist commentators for hadith materials in their references to the exegetical tradition (see Hadith and the Qur’ān, Strait and the Qur’ān). This can be seen in Sayyid Qutb’s commentary in Mawdūdi’s Ta’ṣīl al-Qur’ān (1949-72) and also in Sa’di Ḥawwâ’s al-Asâs fi al-taṣīr (1405/1985), the largely ill-structured and much less original commentary of a leading Syrian Muslim Brother. Although these authors quote classical commentators such as al-Zamakhshârî, Fâhîr al-Dîn al-Rażî or al-Bâyâdî (d. 716/1316) here and there, they suspect them of having succumbed to the corrupting influences of Greek philosophy and Ḥarîrî fiqh. When relying on “sound” hadith materials, however, they feel they are on the firm ground of the Prophet’s own commentary and hence also of the intentions of the revealed text as understood by the first Muslims.

The Islamist ideal of subordinating oneself to the divine word as immediately as the first Muslims had done can produce positive as well as questionable exegetical results. This becomes clearly visible in Sayyid Qutb’s Fi qiyāl al-Qur’ān where the author generally listens to the Qur’ānic text with a great deal of personal attention and in relative independence of the exegetical tradition. On the one hand, this attitude of intense and direct listening sometimes enables him to grasp the original meaning and spirit of a given Qur’ānic passage more adequately than many exegetes since the medieval period have been able to do. On the other hand, his presumed immediacy also tends to make him ignore or play down points in which the Qur’ānic text cannot be easily harmonized with modern ideas.

6. Conceptions associated with the thematic interpretation of the Qur’ān

As stated above, the thematic interpretation (taṣīr matsâfî) of the Qur’ān is not always equivalent to a complete break with the exegetical methods applied in traditional commentaries of the musâjal kind. Most authors, however, in reflecting on thematic interpretation, agree to a large extent about the advantages of concentrating one’s exegetical endeavor on a limited number of themes dealt with in the Qur’ān. Two main arguments are put forward in favor of thematic interpretation: It enables exegetes to gain a comprehensive and well-balanced idea of what the divine book really says about the basic questions of belief, and thus reduces the danger of a merely selective and biased reading of the Qur’ānic text; and commentaries based on such an interpretation are more suitable for practical purposes such as preparing Friday sermons or religious radio and television addresses (see EVERYDAY LIFE, THE QUR’ĀN IN), because these kinds of presentations usually have a thematic focus. An additional argument mentioned in support of thematic interpretation is that it allows exegetes to take a more active role in the process of interpretation, bringing their own modern perspective to bear in this process more effectively than the traditional verse-by-verse commentaries, since in the traditional commentaries the interpreter merely reacts to what is said in the
text as it occurs, whereas in the tafsir mawātī the he can start from the application of his own questions to the text (Sadr, Muqaddimāt, 18–22).

Highly problematic and not representative of the prevailing views about tafsir mawātī is the conception of thematic interpretation advocated in 1993 by the Egyptian philosopher Hasan Hanafi. According to Hanafi, revelation is neither affirmed nor denied by thematic interpretation, since this method deals with the Qur’anic text without any distinction between the divine and the human, the religious and the secular (Method, 202, 210).

In contrast to the supporters of the thematic interpretation of the Qur’anic text, he considers the question of the divine origin of the Qur’an to be largely irrelevant, but this is only partly true where Hanafi’s own interest in the Qur’anic text is concerned. Irrespective of whether he personally attributes a religious character to the Qur’an or not, his interest in interpreting this book and not any other text stems exclusively from the fact that many millions of Muslims believe the Qur’an to be God’s revealed word and can hence be most effectively influenced by its interpretation. Moreover, in Hanafi’s opinion, it is one of the “rules” of thematic interpretation that the commentator should conduct exegesis on the basis of a socio-political commitment, with the added assumption that the interpreter is always a revolutionary (ibid., 203–4). While it is true that every interpretation comes with prior assumptions, there is no reason why they should only be revolutionary. Finally, according to Hanafi, thematic interpretation is based on the premise that “there is no true or false interpretation” (ibid., 203) and that “the validity of an interpretation lies in its power” (ibid., 210). By professing this principle, Hanafi actually abandons the notion of the hermeneutical circle as a model for interpretation, and, instead, looks upon this process as a one-way street whose only destination lies in influencing the audience according to the preconceived intentions of the interpreter. The notion of the hermeneutical circle, as analyzed in differing forms by Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer and others, implies an interaction between interpreter and text in which the interpreter puts questions to the text on the basis of his own prior conceptions, which are themselves reshaped by the text itself. As Gadamer stresses, the text must “break the spell” of the interpreter’s presuppositions, and its subject matter effects the correction of his preliminary understanding. For Hanafi, in contrast, the text has no significance of its own: In his idea of thematic interpretation, the committed interpreter’s prior understanding is absolute, and the text is considered to be relevant only in so far as its interpretation can serve the purpose of enhancing the power of the interpreter’s revolutionary arguments, which are not subject to critical review.

Problems of gaining acceptance for new approaches to the exegesis of the Qur’an

New methodological approaches such as those of Khalaf Allāh, Fazlur Rahman and Abu Zayd sprang from the widely felt need to extract the permanent tenets of the Qur’anic message from the historical forms in which they were communicated to the Prophet’s contemporaries and to recast them in terms of a modern intellectual outlook. These approaches also showed that this need can be served without abandoning the belief in the divine origin of every single word of the Qur’anic text and the binding character of its basic precepts. Nevertheless, thus far, these approaches have not found wide acceptance among theologians and experts of religious law, and some of them have even provoked
vehement reactions on the part of the religious élite. Some of the reasons for this phenomenon can be stated here.

The prevailing traditional exegetical paradigm has remained nearly unchallenged for centuries. It has thus become customary among religious scholars to confuse the permanence of their own way of interpreting the Qur'anic text with the everlasting truth of this text itself and, hence, to consider any attempt at promoting a new approach to exegesis as an assault on the authority of the divine book as such. But at the same time as an attack on their own interpretative authority. The latter is a particularly sensitive issue, as it concerns the social position of the 'ulamā', who have lost much ground in the fields of jurisdiction, public administration, education and academic studies since the early 19th century due to the general secularization of political and cultural structures. Moreover, if one allows new exegetical paradigms based on the acknowledgment of the historicity of the Qur'anic text and all its subsequent interpretations, this leads inevitably to an increasing plurality of competing interpretations. Such a situation would not only be contrary to the interests of the 'ulamā', for whom it would then become more difficult to defend their interpretative monopoly, but also to the intentions of the poorly legitimized present governments of most Muslim states. These governments are accustomed to appealing to the Islamic religion as a unifying ideology in order to mobilize the loyalty of the masses in their favor, and for this purpose a largely uniform understanding of Islam is most suitable. The relationship of mutual dependence of the religious establishment and the government which is nowadays typical of many Islamic countries makes the suppression of disagreeable innovations in the field of exegetical methodology relatively simple. Because of the above-mentioned presuppositions of their own exegesis, Islamists are strongly opposed to permitting a plurality of interpretations based on methods differing from their own. The present situation is additionally aggravated by the fact that methods which imply a more serious consideration of the historical dimension of the Qur'anic text and of the exegetical tradition referring to it are generally associated with the kind of research pursued by orientalists, who in their turn are accused of working for Western colonialism. This makes it very easy to start a massive campaign against any scholar advocating such methods. Under these circumstances, the fact that hardly any Muslim authors have appropriated the methods and results of modern non-Muslim Qur'anic studies is also quite understandable. Rare exceptions to this trend are Amin al-Khüll and Daud Rahbar, both of whom recognized the value of the preliminary chronology of the Qur'anic text established in Th. Nöldke's Geschichte des Corān (GQ). Still, on the basis of hermeneutical conceptions such as those of Abū Zayd and Fazlur Rahman, there will be continued attempts to enter into a far-reaching scientific exchange with non-Muslim scholars without questioning the literal revelation of the Qur'ān. See also CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL PRACTICES AND THE QUR'ĀN.

Rotraud Wielandt

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Exhortations

Verbal incitements, usually in the imperative mood, encouraging action on the part of the addressee. “Exhortation” (ma‘wiza) is attested numerous times in the Qur’an (Q 2:275; 3:139; 54:6; 7:145; 10:37; 11:20; 16:125; 24:34); moreover, much of the Qur’anic rhetoric (see RHETORIC OF THE QUR’AN; LANGUAGE OF THE QUR’AN) may be understood as an “exhortation” to heed God’s message as proclaimed by the prophet, Muhammad. It is explicitly recommended to the Prophet in Q 16:125, “Call unto the way of your Lord (see PATH OR WAY) with wisdom (q.v.) and fair exhortation” (fud’u ilâ sabîlî rabbika bi-l-khâmati wa l-ma‘wizâtî l-hasanâtî), a verse that has served as a motto for al-Ghazzâli’s (d. 505/1111) famous attempt to introduce Aristotelian logic into religious apologetics (McAuliffe, “Debate”; Neuwirth, Ghazzâli’s Tractatus). An earlier Qur’anic designation is tadhkîra, literally “reminder” (Q 20:3; 56:73; 60:12; 48:73; 74:49; 54; 76:29; 80:11), presented as the essence of the early recitation as such (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR’AN). The strong interest that Muslim Medieval theorists took in Qur’anic exhortations and modes of debate (McAuliffe, “Debate”) — be they divine-human addresses (God admonishing and encouraging the Prophet and implicitly the community [see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR’AN]) or interactions between humans (the Prophet being recommended to address the community or, more often, the unbelievers [see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF; DEBATE AND DISPUTATION]) — is easily explained by the predominance of address passages over all other kinds of Qur’anic expression (see LITERARY STRUCTURES OF THE QUR’AN) such as narratives (q.v.), eschatological descriptions or legislative regulations (see LAW AND THE QUR’AN).

The earliest manifestations of Qur’anic exhortations are short admonitions that recommend the fulfillment of ritual duties such as prostration before God (Q 53:62; 56:19; see BOWING AND PROSTRATION) and glorification of God (q.v.; Q 69:52; for
Basmala

بسم الله
BASMALA

Bashir — see prophets and prophethood; good news

Basmala

The invocation bi-smi llâhi l-rahmâni l-rahêmî, “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,” also known as the tasmîya, “naming/uttering (God’s name),” occurs 114 times in the Qur’an: at the head of every sûra except the ninth, which is entitled “Repentance” (Sûrat al-Tawbâ or Sûrat al-Bara’a), and also in q 47:30 as the opening of Solomon’s (q.v.) letter to the queen of Sheba (see Bilqis). Of the 113 occurrences at the head of a sûra, only the first, that opening the sûra, Sûrat al-Fatîha (see Fatiha), is commonly reckoned as an ëya, i.e. as q 1:1, although the other 112 unnumbered prefatory occurrences are still considered part of the sacred text (Rât, Ahkâm al-basmala, 21; Suyûtî, Du’â, i, 20).

Precedents for and parallels to the basmala

The basmala has various historical precedents among invocational formulae in

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Bibliography


other traditions. Al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144) long ago noted the pre-Islamic Arab use of parallel formulae such as “in the name of al-Lāt [or] al-‘Uzza” (Kashshāf; i, 29; see IDOLS AND IMAGES; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR’ĀN). T. Nöldeke points out Jewish and Christian parallels to bi-smī lāhī in the recurrence of “in the name of the Lord” (c.q. i, 112, 116-7; cf. ii, 42; see JEWS AND JUDAISM; CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY) in the Hebrew and Christian bibles. Y. Moubarac suggests a coalescence of Jewish, Christian and pagan south Arabian influences behind the tripartite Allāh al-rahmān al-raḥīm (Les études d’épigraphie, 58-61). There is also a parallel in the Mazdean formula pad nām i yazdān, “in the name of (the) god(s),” attested as early as the third century at Paikuli (P. Gignoux, Pad Nām, 162).

Meaning of the basmala in the Qur’ān
Grammatically bi-smī lāhī has the form of an oath (see OATHS) introduced by bi- but traditionally it has been construed as an invocation, as opposed to an oath such as bi-lāhī, “by God!” The bi- is held to require an implied verb expressing the intention of the one uttering the basmala to act or begin an action “with the naming [glossing ism as tasmiya] of God.” Thus al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) cites Ibn ‘Abbas as saying that an action following utterance of the basmala be it reciting, standing or sitting down — implies intent to perform the act “in the name of” or “by naming” God, not “through” God (as agent; Tafsīr, i, 114-8).

On the other hand, a modern interpreter, Rashīd Riḍā, says that to recite a sūra “in the name of God...” means to “recite it as a sūra coming from him, not from you” (Tafsīr al-mansūḥ, i, 44; A. Khoury, Korān, 147).

There are frequent invocations of God’s name in the Qur’ān apart from the basmala. The short formula, “in the name of God,” occurs only in Q 11:41: “[Noah (q.v)] said, ‘Embark in it [the ark (q.v.)]! In the name of God be its sailing and its mooring!’” However, bi-smī ṭabḥiḥā, “in the name of your Lord,” occurs four times, after the command to “glorify” (Q 56:74, 96; 69:52; cf. 87:1) or to “recite” (Q 96:1) expressing similarly the invoking of God’s name in performing an action. “Mentioning” or “remembering” (dh-k-r) God’s name occurs 13 times and Q 55:78 speaks of blessing God’s name (tabāraka smu ṭabḥiḥā). These passages have been interpreted specifically as exhortations to repeat the basmala to declare one’s righteous intention and to bless and consecrate any act, from drinking water to ritual ablution to marital intercourse (see BLESSING).

There are two possible grammatical readings of the final three words of the basmala: (i) with al-raḥmān and al-raḥīm taken as parallel attributive epithets of Allāh, seen in modern translations that replicate the Arabic word order (e.g. M. Henning [1901], “Allah, der Erbarmer, der Barmherzige,” R. Bell [1937], “Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate”) or that emphasize the emphatic force of two cognate attributives (e.g. G. Sale [1734], “the most merciful God”; E.H. Palmer [1880], “the merciful and compassionate God”; R. Paret [1862], “der barmherzige und güütge Gott”); (ii) with al-raḥmān construed as a name of God in apposition to Allāh, modified by the attributive al-raḥīm, (e.g. R. Blachère [1949], “Allah, le Bienfaiteur miséricordieux”; K. Cragg [1988], “God, the merciful Lord of mercy”). Al-Ṭabarī’s discussion (Tafsīr i, 55f.) supports the former, which became the standard reading. Most commentators focus on distinguishing the meanings of raḥmān and raḥīm, taking the intensive raḥmān to refer to God’s mercy (q.v.) generally either (a) in this world and the next or (b) to all creatures; and raḥīm for God’s mercy more specifically, limited
either (a) the next world only or (b) to the faithful only. The commentators note also that rahmān can only be used of God while rasūl can be applied to humans (Tabari, Taṣfi‘, i, 55; Ibn al-‘Arabī [attr.], Taṣfi‘, i, 37; Zamakhshari, Kashshāf, i, 41-5; M. al-Gharawī, Iḥām, 149-50).

While Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have preferred to read al-raḥmān al-raḥīm as paired attributive epithets (see God and His Attributes), the other instances of raḥmān and raḥīm in the Qur’ān could support reading raḥmān as an appositive modified by ri‘ā. The two words are paired only four times (Q 1:13; 2:163; 41:2; 59:22) apart from the basmala and can in each case be ingeniously construed as a substantive (al-raḥmān) with a following adjective (al-raḥīm), “the compassionate Merciful [One].” Raḥmān occurs in the Qur’ān only with the definite article al- (57 instances in numbered āyāt). Raḥīm occurs 8t times without the definite article as an adjectival predicate of God, most often paired with and following ghafūr, “forgiving.” Al-raḥīm is found 32 times (including four occurrences apart from the basmala with al-raḥmān), all but once (Q 34:2: al-raḥim al-ghafūr) as an attribute following other divine names or attributes al-a‘ẓīm (“the Mighty”), al-ghafūr (“the Forgiving”), al-tawṣīḥ (“the Relenting”) and al-birr (“the Beneficent”). Thus the Qur’ānic evidence could support the translation, “God, the compassionate (al-raḥīm) Merciful One (al-raḥmān).” This would accord also with pre-Islamic use of al-raḥmān as the name of God in south Arabia (see Archaeology and the Qur’ān), the pagan Meccan’s aversion to using it instead of Allāh (G. Rycjman, Les religions arabes, 47-8; cf. J. Jomier, Le nom divin, 2; Y. Moubarac, Les études d’histoire, 58-9) and its use as God’s name by Muhammad’s contemporary, the “Arabian prophet” Musaylima (Tabari, Taṣfic, iii, 245-6; Zamakhshari, Kashshāf, i, 42; cf. Nöldeke, Q. 1, 112-3; see Musaylima and Pseudo-Prophets).

Place of the basmala in the Qur’ān
The question as to whether the basmala is to be counted as the first āya in the Fātiha, (Q 1) and the remaining 110 sūras it precedes has been discussed by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. The Muslim consensus is represented in the modern Cairo text, which counts it as an āya only in the Fātiha, otherwise as an unnumbered line of text (sūrat) that separates the first āya of every sūra (except Q 9, “Repentance” [Sūrat al-Tawbah]) from the last āya of the preceding sūra (cf. Suyūṭī, Durū, i, 20). The exception of Sūrat al-Tawbah is held traditionally to stem from either (i) its being join originally with Q 8, “The Spoils of War” (Sūrat al-Anfal), as a single unit later divided into two before the word barā‘u, which thus became the first word of Q 9 (Suyūṭī, Iqtā‘, i, 60, 65; Tirmidhī, 48:101; cf. Ibn al-‘Arabī, Futūḥāt, 4, 211-3, 355-6, who says the basmala of Q 2:30 is the one missing at the head of Q 9) or (ii) its having as a main theme God’s threats against the idolaters which makes the basmala inappropriate for it (Rāzī, Taṣfi‘, vii, 225; M. al-Gharawī, Iḥām, 77; see Idolatry and Idolaters; Polytheism and Atheism).

Whether the basmala even belongs to the Qur’ān at all has been a live question for Muslims (cf. M. b. ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, Fāth al-qadīr, i, 64-5). According to most reports, neither Ibn Mas‘ūd’s nor Ubayy b. Ka‘b’s Qur’ān copy (mushaf, see Codices of the Qur’ān) included Sūrat al-Fātiha. Further, Anas is reported as saying, “I performed the ritual prayer (salāt) with God’s apostle, Abū Bakr (q.v.), ‘Umar (q.v.) and ‘Uthmān (q.v.) and I did not hear any of them recite ‘bi-smi’llāh...” (Muslim, Saḥīḥ, 4:50; cf. 4:52; see Prayer). However, Anas is also said to have reported that Muhammad recited Q 108, “Abundance” (Sūrat al-Kawthar),
with the basmala (Muslim, Sahih, 4:53) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) cites traditions that the basmala belonged to the revelations from the beginning or sometime during the Prophet’s mission (e.g. it “was sent down with every sûra”); however, he also cites traditions that the basmala was an opening or closing benediction given Muhammad at the institution of the ritual prayer (salat, Suyūṭī, Durr, i, 203; cf. A. Spitaler, Version, 81-92). The reciters (see reciters of the Qur’an) and jurists of Medina, Basra and Syria did not consider it an āya at the beginning of a sûra, but a sûra-divider and a blessing that one would use to begin an important act. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) agreed, and the Ḥanafīs do not recite it audibly in the ritual prayer. However, the Meccan, Kufan and most Iraqi reciters and jurists recognized it as an āya whenever it begins a sûra, as did al-Shāfī‘ī (d. 204/820) and his followers who recite it aloud in the ritual prayer (salat) and likewise the Shi‘īs who recite it silently (Zamakhshari, Khashšah, i, 245; Ṣa‘īd, Aškān al-basmala, 20; Shawkānī, Fath al-qadīr, i, 645; H. Algar, Besmellah, 172). The division of the law schools over the audible reciting of the basmala likely reflects the early tradition’s ambivalence about both the basmala and the Fatiha: Are they part of the Word of God (see book) or only invocations used by Muhammad? (cf. Nöldeke, Q 2, ii, 79). It would also appear from the earliest extant Qur’an pages that the basmala is almost always orthographically integral to the subsequent sûra’s text and not set apart visually in any way (Dār al-‘Alā‘ar al-‘Ijadiyya, Masāḥif San‘ā‘, 36-64).

Western scholars have also examined the question of the basmala’s relationship to the Qur’anic text (see Collection of the Qur’an). Nöldeke suggests that as least as early as the Qur’an copy (masḥaf, q.v.) of Hafṣa the basmala was used to separate sûras (Q 2, ii, 46). R. Blachère sees the basmala as a formula used by Muhammad to introduce letters and acts which was inaugurated at some point to mark the beginning of a sûra (Introduction, 143-4). R. Paret says it was likely added later as a seventh verse q 1:1 to allow “the seven of-repeated verses” (sab‘an mina l-matḥalān, Q 1:37) to apply to the Fatiha (Kommunik, 11). A. Neuwith argues from Christian and Jewish liturgical formulae and the Fatiha’s internal structure and content (e.g. repetition of part of the basmala in Q 1:3) that the basmala of Q 1:1 did not belong originally to the Fatiha (cf. Nöldeke, Q 2, i, 116-7; ii, 41-2).

Place of the basmala in Muslim life and tradition

The basmala has been arguably the most-repeated sentence in Muslim usage. It is axiomatic that a Muslim should begin every act of any importance with the basmala (Zamakhshari, Khashšah, i, 26; Bajuri, Tuhfet al-murid, 3; Ṣa‘īd, Aškān al-basmala, 19; M. al-Gha‘awi, Ism, 91; see Ritual and the Qur’an). Muhammad is quoted as saying that “every important affair that one does not begin with ‘in the name of God’ is void” (Zamakhshari, Khashšah, i, 31; M. al-Gha‘awi, Ism, 13; Ṣabban, Rissāla, 21). Scriptural support is found in Q 6:19 which begins, “Why do you not eat that over which the name of God has been mentioned?” Various traditions stress the basmala’s great power and blessing, e.g. “Whoever recites bi-smi l-lāh al-rāhman al-raḥīm enters paradise (al-jannāt see Paradise; Garden)’” (A. Ghaylān, Dar‘awā, 37; cf. M. b. ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, Fath al-qadīr, i, 67-8).

The use of the basmala is often a legal and sometimes even political matter of importance. The divergence of the law schools concerning the audible recitation of the basmala in worship (q.v.), based on its status as an āya in the Fatiha and elsewhere, has
been especially subject to considerable Muslim debate and discussion (e.g. Razi, Akhūn al-dīn, 38-78; Murtada al-Zabīdī, *Abd al-Wahab, 306-9).

Traditionally, the *basmala* carries special blessings and power (cf. I. al-Bāsqīnī, *Basemālā, 1980; Ṭabarast, *Majma‘*, i, 26-7) and is used as an amulet in popular magic (see *Amulets*). One tradition claims it is "... an *ayā* of God's scripture not revealed to anyone other than the Prophet save for Solomon (q.v.) the son of David (q.v.)" (Suyūṭī, *Darūr* i, 20). Especially in mystical thought it is considered the quintessence of the Qur'ān: According to Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 538/1146) the *basmala* is the key to every *ṣūra* and God says that uttering the *basmala* remembering (dhikr) him (Futūhāt, viii, 345 vii, 274-5). An early Ismā‘īlī work studied by W. Ivanov explains its esoteric meaning in cosmological terms (W. Ivanov, *Studies* 38). The mysteries of the letters of the *basmala* are many, e.g. the popular tradition that all of the scriptures are contained in the dot of the Arabic letter bā‘ in the bi‘ of the *basmala* (Abd al-Karim al-Jili, *Khaṣṣ* 4-5; see LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS). Shi‘ī sources develop a similar interpretation: According to Ja‘far al-Sadiq (d. 148/766) and others, the greatest *ṣūra* in the Qur'ān is the *basmala* (M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 77); all the areas of knowledge (*ta‘lum*) are contained in the "four [Shi‘ī] hadith books" and their *ta‘lum* in the Qur'ān and the *ta‘lum* of the Qur'ān in the Ṣāti‘a and the *ta‘lum* of the Ṣāti‘a in the *basmala* and the *ta‘lum* of the *basmala* in the bi‘ of the *basmala* (M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 64-98). In a variation on this theme, Mir Dard (d. 1199/1785) cites ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭalib (q.v.) as saying all mysteries are contained in the dot beneath the bā‘ of the *basmala* and he, ‘Ali, is that dot (A. Schimmel, *Pain*, 90).

Orthographically, the *basmala* is set apart by the traditional but grammatically exceptional omission of the prophetic *alif* of *ism* (<-m-w) connecting the bā‘ directly to the sin. One attestation of this is the absence of mention of the *alif* from the tradition that ‘Umar said "Lengthen the bā‘, show clearly the teeth [of the sin] and make round the mim" (Zamakhshārī, *Kashf*, 1, 35).

The calligraphic embellishment of the *basmala* has always been a favorite artistic undertaking in Islam, whether executed in formal script styles, zoomorphic (bird, lion, etc.) designs, stylized calligraphic shapes (*tughra*) or decorative calligrams (see ART AND ARCHITECTURE AND THE QUR'ĀN; ARABIC SCRIPT; CALLIGRAPHY). The culmination of the calligrapher’s art is often considered to be the famous *basmala* of the Ottoman artist Ahmad Qarabishār (d. 963/1550) in which extreme application of the principle of assimilation of letters (the letters ẓā‘ and ẓay‘ disappear, ẓām is shortened and “Allāh” becomes symbolic vertical strokes) leads to a *basmala* crafted into a single sweeping line of script without lifting the pen.

William A. Graham

**Bibliography**


Baṭin and Zahrī see exegetes of the Qur’ān: classical and medieval

Battles/Warfare see expeditions and battles

Be see creation; Jesus

Beast of Prey see animal life; lawful and unlawful

Beating see chastisement and punishment

Beauty

A quality in persons or objects that appeals to the human senses and exalts the spirit.

At least a dozen terms describe beauty in the Qur’ān, which is more often understood as a moral quality rather than an aesthetic one. It is a quality defined by its deep effects upon the beholder rather than by its own properties. Aesthetic terms (e.g. the various terms related to jamāl, ḥijāb, ṣifā, ḥilāfa, ṣawād, ḥurrā, ṭabīb, ṣawād, ṭabīb, ṭabīb) signal moral choices to be made or divine grace rendered (see consolation), while moral terms (e.g. the various terms related to humā, ḫakīf, fiyān, karām) signal either beauty or the appropriate response to it. Reference to three kinds of beauty is discernible in the Qur’ān. The first characterizes the signs (q.v.) of God in creation (q.v.): awesome, delightful, instructive or useful, but ultimately transitory. The second describes the ornaments produced by human beings: attractive and enticing but also meaningless and even deceptive. This, too, is transitory. The third kind of beauty is not of this world but rather is sublime and eternal. Each of these three categories will be discussed in sequence.

The Arabic word most often translated as
Book

كتاب
possessions and satisfactions. But the specialist of pre-Islamic poetry, Muhammad al-Nuwayr, once (in a 1970 exegesis seminar at the American University in Cairo) interpreted this passage as containing insider information that would have caused the original listeners to nod in recognition. It seems that Meccans used to argue and boast about who had the largest, most illustrious family, clan and tribe (see tribes and clans), to the point that in alterations, they would stagger from tavern to cemetery to tally the departed as well as the living members of a kinship (q.v.) group.

The Meccan army that attacked the Muslims at Badr (q.v.) in 2/624 is characterized most unflatteringly in q 8:47: “And do not be like those who came out of their dwellings boastfully (batiran) and in order to be seen by people, and to divert [them] from the path of God.” This and other passages teach, in one way or another, that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18). In a similar vein, q 28:58 declares that: “And how many a community that was exulting (batirad) in its [comfortable] way of living have We destroyed; now those dwellings of theirs, after them, except for a few, are deserted. And we are their heirs!”

Various hadiths continue the Qur'an's condemnation of pride and boastfulness as is illustrated in the well-known saying from Muslim's Sahih: “He who has in his heart the weight of a grain of mustard seed of pride (kibray) shall not enter paradise.” See also Arrogance; Pride; Virtues and Vices.

Frederick Mathewson Denny

Bibliography


Body
Body Fluids see Blood and Blood Clot; Biology as the Creation and Stages of Life

Bones see Biology as the Creation and Stages of Life; Death and the Dead

Book

There is probably no word more important to the understanding of the Qur'an than kitāb and yet its meaning is far more complex than the simple and almost universal translation “book” would seem to imply. The Qur'an uses the word 261 times, not only in describing itself but also in referring to earlier scriptures and to various other means God employs in dealing with creation (q.v.). The noun comes from the verb katasaba (to write) and thus can be applied to written material in any form — it is used for a letter in q 27:28-9 and for a legal document in q 24:33 — or to the act of writing itself. It also has extensive metaphorical uses which lead to the conclusion that in the Qur'an the term kitāb operates on several levels at once. Since it also carries the force of a verbal noun, in order to understand kitāb it is necessary to examine it together with the verb from which it derives. In Qur'anic usage the word represents a quintessentially divine activity and ap-
plies only rarely to human writing. The translation "scripture" does some justice to the connotations of kitāb but runs the risk of reading Jewish and Christian understandings of scripture into the Qur'ān which has its own unique conception of the phenomenon of God's writing.

Kitāb and divine knowledge

It is a commonplace of Near Eastern religions that God keeps both an inventory of everything created as well as a detailed record of all human deeds. The Qur'ān addresses its hearers as though they are quite familiar with these ideas. "Did you not know that God knows all that is in heaven and on earth? Surely it is in a kitāb. That is easy for God" (q:27:70). Nothing is too small or too great to be comprehended by God's knowledge (q:10:61) and nothing of the unseen remains unaccounted for in the kitāb (q:23:75). The birds and beasts, no less than humanity, have been recorded and nothing has been neglected in this inventory (q:6:38), not even their sustenance or habitation (q:11:6). The important thing to note in these verses about the inventory is the close connection between kitāb and knowledge. The kitāb represents what God alone knows: "And with him are the keys of the unseen (see Hidden and the Hidden). No one but he knows them, and he knows what is in the land and the sea. Not a leaf falls without his knowing it, not a grain in the darkness of the earth, nothing either wet or dry but it is in a kitāb that makes things clear" (q:6:59). This inventory is characterized as hujūf (guarding, watchful, remembering, q:50:4) like God (q:11:57; 34:21; see God and His Attributes). It is also said to be mubīn (clear or clarifying, q:6:59; 10:61; 11:6; 27:75; 34:3), echoing a term that the Qur'ān uses of itself (q:12:1; 27:1). This adjective is not only very common (119 uses) but also very significant in the Qur'ān: true clarity is something only God is able to provide, since only God has full knowledge of all things.

Closely related to this inventory is the divine recording of human deeds and thoughts, both good (q:3:53; 5:83; 9:120-1; 21:94) and bad (q:3:181; 4:81; 10:21; 19:79; 43:19; 80; 78:29). Everything said and done by human beings is recorded (q:10:61; 54:52; 82:11) in order that retribution and recompense may be made on the day of judgment (see Last Judgment): "And the kitāb is put in place, and you see the guilty fearful of what is in it. They say, 'What kind of a kitāb is this that passes over no matter either small or great without taking account of it?' And they find all that they did confronting them. Your Lord treats no one unjustly" (q:18:29). "And each soul (q.v.) will be recompensed in full for what it has done" (q:39:79). Good deeds are said to be written "to people's credit" (lahum, q:9:121; 21:94). This register is sometimes referred to as an imām (leader, example, authority): "Surely it is we who bring the dead to life. We record (nākūb) what they send before, and the traces [they leave behind]. And everything we have kept account of in an imām that makes things clear" (q:36:12; see also q:17:71; 36:12). On one occasion (q:54:52) it is called zubūr, a word often translated as "psalms" although it is actually a more general word for books, writings or scriptures. It is most often God who is depicted as recording (q:3:181; 4:81; 19:79; 21:94; 36:12; 45:29), but there is also talk of "envoys" (rusul, q:10:21; 43:80; see Messenger) who write and of "guardians, noble scribes" (kāfīrān kirāman kitābān, q:82:10-1) who know all that is done.

Although the record of deeds is often spoken of as a single entity, the final judgment is pictured as one in which each person will be handed the kitāb detailing his or her deeds. "On the day when we shall summon all people with their record
whoever is given his kitāb in his right hand — those will read their kitāb and they will not be wronged a shred’ (Q 17:71; also 69:19; 84:27). Anyone to be punished will be given the kitāb in the left hand (69:25) or behind the back (Q 84:10). In another place, there seems to be a separate kitāb for each nation (Q 45:29). The image of judgment is a commercial one — a final settling of accounts. Like the inventory of the record of deeds is characterized as mubīn (Q 10:61; 34:4; 36:12) in that it makes clear precisely the recompense or punishment to be apportioned (see Reward and Punishment). It is intimately related to God’s knowledge in that it reflects the fact that God is ‘most aware (‘alam) of what they have done’ (Q 39:70) and is a witness (shuhūd) to all actions in which people are engaged (Q 10:61). Taken together, these two activities of recording represent the completeness of God’s knowledge of all that exists and all that takes place.

Kitāb and divine authority

The idea of writing is also very much associated in Qur’ānic usage with the exercise of divine authority (q.v.; see also fate). The length of one’s life is “in a kitāb” and can neither be shortened nor lengthened (Q 35:11). One can neither escape death when it has been ‘written’ (Q 5:154) nor hasten it since it comes by God’s permission “as a writ to be carried out later’’ (kitāb-an mu‘ajjalān, Q 5:145). No city (q.v.) is punished by destruction without there having been a “known decree” (kitāb ma‘lūm, Q 15:4; see Punishment Stories). Such sentences of punishment are said to be “in the kitāb” (Q 17:58), as are those meted out to individuals (bi-imām mubīn, Q 16:79). “No calamity strikes either on the earth or among yourselves which is not already in a kitāb before we bring it into being — surely that is easy for God” (Q 57:22; see also Q 9:51).

It might seem that the use of the word kitāb in connection with these acts of divine authority indicates that they are envisaged as being recorded in some kind of book of decrees. However, the word is also used to apply independently to the decrees themselves (Q 2:235; 4:103; 8:58; 13:38; 30:56) suggesting that the usage of the root k-t-b (to write) is largely metaphorical. The verb kahsa (it has been written) is used when speaking of various aspects of law (see Law and the Qurʾān): retaliation (q.v.; Q 2:178), inheritance (q.v.; Q 2:180), fasting (q.v.; Q 2:183) and warfare (Q 2:216, 246; see war). God writes to determine obligations on various individuals and groups (Q 4:24, 66, 77; 5:32, 45; 57:27). In an unusual construction God is also said to have written mercy (q.v.) as an obligation for himself (Q 6:12, 54); this in effect expresses an element of the divine nature. In several uses of the verb “to write” there is a very close relationship between the decree and the record of people’s deeds. God writes punishments (Q 2:24; 59:3; see Chastisement and Punishment), entitlements (Q 2:187; 4:127) and rewards (Q 5:21; 7:156; 21:105). Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to make any separation at all between the recording of deeds and the determination of judgment: “This kitāb of ours pronounces against you truly. Surely we caused to be recorded (kumna nastansikh) whatever you used to do” (Q 45:29). The definitive divine judgment against evildoers is inseparable from God’s knowledge of all that they have done. Similarly, the recording of the time of each person’s death is presented both as a matter of knowledge and also as an act of determination — foreknowledge and foreordaining are somehow inseparable. This very ambiguity suggests that the Qurʾān does not so much contain a reference to a heavenly archive with separate registers.
and inventories as it does, in a more amorphous sense, to the overarching knowledge and authority of God.

It is common, of course, for Qur’anic commentators to gloss occurrences of the verb kataba with such verbs as amara, hafiza, hasaba or farada and, similarly, for translators to render them “command,” “remember,” “keep account of,” “enjoin,” “prescribe” or “decree.” They are surely right in detecting here a metaphorical usage of the verb “to write.” The question then arises whether the use of the noun kitāb is not likewise more metaphorical than concrete. As long as the kitāb operates only in the heavenly realm it makes little difference. However, the issue becomes more acute when an effort is made to try to understand what the Qur’ān means when it refers to itself as kitāb and when it speaks of the kitāb being “sent down” and given to other peoples through the prophets (see Prophets and Prophethood).

Kitāb and revelation

One of the most important concepts used in connection with revelation in the Qur’ān is kitāb (see Revelation and Inspiration). It is several times stated in general terms that whenever God sent prophets and messengers to give good tidings and to warn of judgment, he sent down with them the kitāb (Q 2:213; 3:81; 35:25; 40:70; 57:23). The kitāb comes with the truth so that the Prophet may judge according to it (Q 2:213). It is specifically mentioned as having been given to Moses (Q 1:19; 2:53, 87, 17:2; 23:49; 25:35), to Jesus (Q 4:16; 3:48; 5:110; 19:30) and most often, of course, to Muhammad (e.g. Q 5:48; 7:2; 14:1). The Qur’ān also mentions by name several of those to whom God has given revelation: “Indeed we communicated to you just as we communicated (awḥaynā) to Noah (Q 7:9) and the prophets after him, as we communicated to Abraham (Q 6:79) and Ishmael (Q 21:8) and Isaac (Q 6:80) and Jacob (Q 41:12) and the tribes, and Jesus and Job (Q 3:81) and Jonah (Q 3:81) and Aaron (Q 3:81) and Solomon (Q 3:82), and as we granted to David (Q 6:110) the zubur (see Psalms) (Q 4:163). This listing marks out one feature of the Qur’ān’s understanding of kitāb: It is thought to have a particularly close association with the lineage of Noah, Abraham and Israel (Q 4:48; 40:53; 57:26; see also Children of Israel). Although attempts have sometimes been made to distinguish between messengers (rasul) and prophets (nabiyya) on the basis of whether they were given a canonical text or merely an oral message, there appears to be no such consistent distinction in the Qur’ān itself.

Some canons resulting from God’s sending of the kitāb are mentioned by name: Torah (taurāt, 18 times; see Torah) and Gospel (ingil, twelve times; see Gospel); the generic al-suhfi al-ālā (“the former pages,” Q 20:133; 87:18) are specified as belonging to Moses and Abraham (Q 53:36-7; 87:19). It is not clear that Moses’ “pages” are thought of as identical to the taurāt. Although the Qur’ān understands taurāt to be the revelation given to the Jews, it is most often paired with Ingl and mentioned in connection not with Moses but with Jesus.

The kitāb is said to come to the prophets by wahy (inspiration, revelation or communication; e.g. Q 18:27; 29:45; 35:31). However, more commonly God is said to “send it down” (nazzala, anzala, e.g. Q 2:174, 176, 213, 231) or simply to “give” it (átā, e.g. Q 2:53, 87, 121, 146). God teaches the kitāb to Jesus (Q 3:48; 5:110), gives it as an inheritance to the Children of Israel (Q 40:53) and to some chosen servants (Q 35:32). The messenger who brings the kitāb (Q 3:84, 6:91) in his turn teaches it to the people (Q 2:129; 2:151; 3:164; 62:2). The people recite it (qara’ū, Q 2:44, 113, 121; 109:4; 69:19),
learn it (‘alima, Q 2:78, 144, 146), study it
(‘arasa, Q 3:79; 34:44; 68:32) and teach it
(‘alima, Q 3:79; see KNOWLEDGE AND
LEARNING).

In order fully to understand what the
Qur’ān means when it speaks of kīthā in
the context of revelation, it is necessary to
view the word within the whole field of vo-
cabulary with which it is used. The word
acts as the focus for some of the most sig-
nificant concepts in the Qur’ān. Two key
terms in this respect (ṣayt and ḥikma) appear
with kīthā in something like a credal for-

da that occurs four times (Q 2:129, 151;
3:164; 62:2). The role of the messenger
(rasūl) is to recite to the people God’s signs
or revelations (ṣayt, see SIGNS), to purify
them and to make known to them the kīthā
and the ḥikma. This latter term is often
translated “wisdom” but such a rendering
fails to take account of the origins of the
word in the verb ḥakama (to judge, to rule,
to decide). To the extent that ḥikma is wis-
dom at all, it is not to be mistaken for the
esoteric wisdom of the gnostic but should
be understood as the practical wisdom or
the wise authority of the experienced ruler
(see WISDOM; JUDGMENT). Kīthā and ḥikma
appear ten times together and form a vir-
tual hendiadys. The term ṣayt (pl. ṣaytā)
is used to refer to everything that reveals
God’s will and ways, whether in nature
(e.g. Q 2:66; 16:11-3; 30:46; see ANIMAL
LIFE), history (e.g. Q 46:37), legislation (e.g.
Q 24:61) or in revelation (e.g. Q 24:1). The
ṣayt of God are intended to prompt people to
reason (‘aqal), to learn (‘alima), to pon-
der (tajakkara, tadhakkara) and so to come to
faith (āmanā). The coming of the kīthā with
its ṣayt provides insight into what God
knows and what God commands. There-
fore, far from being clearly distinguished
from the above-mentioned registers, the
kīthā of revelation is intimately linked with
the same divine knowledge and authority
that they symbolize. The fundamental pat-
ttern (with associated verbal roots) is this:
(a) As creator God knows (‘l-m) the truth
(h-q-q) of all things and is in command
(h-k-m) of all things. The symbol for this
knowledge and authority is kīthā. (b) Given
close attention and reflection (‘l-m, j-k-r,
etc.), it is possible for people to learn
(‘l-m) from the ṣayt of nature and history much
of the truth of what God knows and com-
mands. Yet, they rarely do so. (c) In order
to call humanity to such attentiveness and
reflection, God sends prophetic messengers
(r-s-l, n-b-) who bring their communities
guidance (h-d-y), a privileged insight into
God’s knowledge and authoritative decree.
They recite (q-r-, t-l-w) God’s ṣayt in order
to remind (dh-k-r) the people of them, to
make quite clear (b-y-u, n-w-r, s-r-l) pre-
cisely what God requires (h-k-m) and to
warn (n-dh-r, see WARNING) of the coming
judgment (s-r-l, h-k-m, d-y-n). (d) The sym-
bol of this guidance is the kīthā — God’s
sending down (n-s-l) through the Prophet
of an authoritative word (q-w-r, k-l-m) to
address the current situation and the pre-
vailing issue. This divine/prophetic ad-
dress bears the name kīthā not because of
its form (which remains oral and responsive)
because of its origin and its nature as a communication (n-s-l, w-h-y) of God’s
knowledge (‘l-m) and a clear statement
(b-y-n) of God’s commands (h-k-m). (e) The
community (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY
IN THE QUR’ĀN) addressed by God accepts
the relationship of guidance first by ac-
ccepting (‘m-n) that what the Prophet re-
cites has a divine origin, then by commit-
ting themselves (t-l-m) to following (b-b-
-l-w-) the divine will manifested in the pro-
phetic word and, finally, by reciting (q-r-)
it in their turn. In this way, they become a
people who are identified and defined by
their having been granted the kīthā.

It is the phenomenon of the kīthā that
unifies this whole schema while itself remaining somewhat elusive. It is often referred to in the plural, the indefinite or the partitive form so it remains unclear from the Qur'an whether anyone can be understood to be fully in possession of the kitāb. In this respect, the Qur'an does not present the kitāb as a closed and definable corpus of text, but rather as an ongoing relationship of guidance.

Ahl al-kitāb — the people of the kitāb
It is the kitāb relationship that defines the Christians (nasīrūn), the Jews (yehud, Banū Isrā'īl) and the Sabians (ṣabi'ūn). All of these groups are referred to in the Qur'an as ahl al-kitāb or al-ladhīna ʿūtū l-kitāb (those who have been granted the kitāb; see People of the Book; Christians and Christianity; Jews and Judaism; Sabians; Magians). The Qur'an calls for belief not only in the kitāb sent down to Muhammad but also in the kitāb (or the plural kitāb) sent down before him (Q 2:285; 4:36). It is precisely because they have already been recipients of God's revelation that the ahl al-kitāb are expected to recognize in Muhammad a genuine messenger of God and to acknowledge in what he brings the same kitāb (Q 5:83; 13:43; 29:47) — not precisely the same text but the same message of God, the same guidance to humankind.

It is recognized that the Jews put "the kitāb that Moses brought as a light and a guidance for humanity" on papyri (qartāf, sing. qirtās, Q 6:91) yet it is not their possession of physical books that constitutes the ahl al-kitāb. If it had been, one might have expected an earlier attempt to have a written version of the Qur'an. As it was, a standardized written text was not produced, according to Muslim tradition, until perhaps as late as twenty years after the death of the Prophet during the caliphate of 'Uthmān (r. 23-35/644-56; see Collection of the Qur'an). The ahl al-kitāb seem to be thought of primarily as — like Muslims — reciters of the word of God rather than as writers and readers of books (see Recitation of the Qur'an; Readings of the Qur'an). Ahl al-kitāb should probably be understood as those who have been given not possession of but rather access to and insight into the knowledge, wisdom and sovereignty of God for which the very fluid term kitāb serves as a symbol. "Those who have been given the kitāb" are also called "those who have been given knowledge" (al-ladhīna ʿūtū l-lām, e.g. Q 16:27; 17:107; 22:54). They have learned to read the "signs" (cf. Q 45:2-7), yet it is clear that they do not actually possess all knowledge. They have rather been given access to the divine knowledge through God's initiative in addressing humanity through the prophets (cf. Q 20:110-114).

Umm al-kitāb — the "mother" of the kitāb
Three times the Qur'an refers to the umm (literally "mother" hence "essence" or "source") of the kitāb (Q 3:77; 13:39; 43:4). The latter two cases are traditionally read as referring to a heavenly archetype of the kitāb, a text that constitutes the source of all the particular versions given through Muḥammad and the other prophets. The commentary literature has developed what might be termed a "topography" of revelation that begins with the archetypal kitāb on the Preserved Tablet (lawḥ mahfūz, Q 85:22; see PRESERVED TABLET) and involves the noble scribes (saḥrat kārām, Q 80:15-6) who are said to have revealed the text to Gabriel (q.v.) over twenty nights and who, in his turn, revealed it to Muḥammad over twenty years. Yet the term umm al-kitāb can just as well be read in the symbolic way that has been suggested above. To God alone belongs the essence
of authority and knowledge, so whatever authoritative guidance is given through God’s messengers comes from that source. In q. 3:7 this term seems clearly to refer to part of the text of the Qur’an: “It is he who has sent down to you the kitāb, some of whose verses are decisive — they are the essence (umm, lit. “mother”) of the kitāb — and others that are ambiguous.” In this famously controversial verse the Qur’an distinguishes between those verses that are considered muḥkamāt (defined, fixed, firm, decisive, straightforward) and those that are muṭashābihāt (lit. “resembling one another” possibly meaning “ambiguous” or “metaphorical”; see AMBIGUOUS). Since the Qur’an does not specify which verses are which, this pair of terms has been interpreted in many different ways. It is the muḥkamāt that are said to constitute the essence or substance of the kitāb. Qur’anic commentators often understand this to mean that such verses lay down the principles of Islam; they contain the basis of creed and law; they outline all the duties, punishments and commandments (q.v.) that are essential to Islam (see BOUNDARIES AND PRECEPTS). The muḥkamāt are sometimes thought to be the abrogating (nāṣīḥah) verses because they remain firm and fixed whereas the muṭashābihāt, although they resemble the others, are in fact without legal force due to their having been abrogated ( mansūḥ, see ABROGATION). Other commentators distinguish the muḥkamāt, those verses that can stand alone and so require little or no interpretation, from the muṭashābihāt, those that can only be fully understood in relationship to other verses treating the same matter. The exegetical tradition has often identified the first sūra of the Qur’an (Sūrat al-Fātihah; see FĀTİHÂ) as ʿumm al-kitāb since it is thought to contain the essential content of the Qur’an. So also the so-called mysterious letters (jawwāṣīth) at the beginning of some sūras have been thought to contain in some mystical way the essence of the Qur’an. (See LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS.)

The Qur’an as kitāb

One of the most complex questions about the Qur’an is what it means when it refers to itself as kitāb. Western scholars have, by and large, taken the use of the word kitāb as an indication that Muhammad intended to provide his community with a written canon of scripture parallel to those possessed by the Christians and the Jews. G. Widengren draws on Near Eastern religious history to propose that the Prophet saw himself primarily as the bringer of a written corpus. Nöldeke-Schwally (EO, ii, t-3) argue that, given Muhammad’s understanding that his revelations were to serve in place of the Bible as the definitive document of the divine will, he must also have intended to safeguard them in written form. R. Bell takes al-kitāb to refer to a document originally conceived of as distinct from al-qur’ān and which ultimately replaced it. He suggests that what the text calls al-qur’ān is a collection of recitations that was probably closed about the time of the battle of Badr (2/624; see BADR). The kitāb was never actually completed and if it ever had any logical framework its organization was constantly intruded upon by the vicissitudes, both internal and external, of communal life. Bell understands the kitāb to have been intended to be the complete record of revelation; it was to comprise, in a slightly re-worked form, all the elements Bell previously distinguished as characterizing the stages in the development of the Prophet’s revelations: “signs” passages, stories of punishment, Qur’an. It was also intended to include the material — the appeals, regulations and exhortations demanded of him as a leader — unsuitable for a collection meant for recitation. Bell is largely followed in this approach by W.M.
Watt and A.T. Welch. For A. Neuwirth, the term *kitāb* functions as a symbol of the shared prophetic heritage, the common memory of salvation history which Muslims now share with the Christians and Jews. Neuwirth believes that only certain parts of the Qurʾān are to be understood as belonging to the *kitāb* — the pericopes excerpted from the heavenly book, i.e. the *dhālika* or recalling of prophetic history.

Perhaps the weakest part of all these scenarios is the idea that the task of producing a book of scripture was left undone because of other responsibilities and demands which pressed upon Muhammad. If one understands the verses about the *kitāb* to indicate that it was the Prophet’s defining function to produce such a canonical text, then it becomes difficult to see how Muhammad could have placed any duty above this one.

Muslim tradition has long understood that the Prophet intended the written codification of the Qurʾān; yet, the traditions about the collection and writing down of the text are at cross purposes (see _codices of the Qurʾān_). On the one hand, some traditions seek to assure those who trust written texts that there exists an unbroken manuscript tradition, authenticated not only by the Prophet but by the angel Gabriel. On the other, many traditions represent the writing down of the text as an act of doubtful piety and they portray the manuscript tradition as in some respects deficient and as dependent on an oral tradition codified only after the Prophet’s death. Neither strand of the tradition represents the text at the time of the Prophet’s death as having existed in a physical form that would indicate that Muhammad had all but finished preparing the definitive document of revelation. The scraps of wood, leather and pottery, the bones and the bark on which the revelations were apparently written down seem to indicate that the Prophet did not have in mind producing the kind of scroll or codex that was characteristic of Jewish and Christian use in other places. Furthermore, given the limitations of the Arabic script (ق.ع.) at the time, such written material as did exist could serve as not much more than an _aide-mémoire_ to those who knew that part of the text by heart.

Given all this, there remains considerable doubt as to whether the Prophet thought of the word *kitāb* as defining either the form in which the Qurʾān was revealed or the form in which it was to be propagated and perpetuated. Both Western and Muslim approaches seem to read into the Qurʾān what they know of the Christian and Jewish use of scripture in other contexts outside Arabia. However, in order to understand the meaning of the Qurʾānic *kitāb* as fully as possible, such preconceptions must not become the sole basis for its interpretation.

At the beginning of what might be called the text proper (2:2-2) the Qurʾān speaks of the *kitāb*: "Alif. Lām. Mīm. That is the *kitāb* about which there is no doubt, guidance for the God-fearing." Qurʾānic commentators were rather puzzled to find *dhālika* ("that") rather than *ḥādīḥa* ("this") in 2:2, but the majority of exegetical traditions opted to equate the two and in this they are generally followed by translators. Others, recognizing that *dhālika* logically refers to something absent or already complete, took it to refer variously to the mysterious letters of 2:1 or to the sūras of the Qurʾān that had thus far been revealed or even to the Gospel and the Torah. The issue was in effect side-stepped at this point yet the question remains: what is this *kitāb* that the *kitāb* is always talking about? What is the recitation (Qurʾān) about which verses are constantly being recited? The abiding enigma of the text is that, along with verses that are to be construed as timeless divine pronouncements, it also
mand to know why the recitation he claims is from God is being given to him only piecemeal rather than "as a single complete pronouncement" (jũnlata tan wãhidatasa, q 25:32). To Muhammad's interlocutors, a divine pronouncement must, almost by definition, be complete. Yet the Qur'ãn comes only, as the commentators like to say, responsively (jewâdan li-qawàthim), in installments (munâjzaman) according to situations and events in order that the Prophet will be able to address God's response to whatever objection is being raised, whatever question is being asked (q 25:33). In this context they quote q 17:106: "... and in the form of a recitation that we have divided up (fàruqãh) that you might recite it to the people at intervals (ala mukhîn), and we have indeed sent it down." In rejecting the claim that it should be sent down "as a single complete pronouncement" the Qur'ãn is asserting its fluidity and its responsiveness to situations. It is refusing to behave as an already closed and canonized text but insists on being the authoritative voice of God in the present.

This immediate and responsive quality of the Qur'ãn is illustrated again and again in one of its most characteristic rhetorical devices: the imperative, "Say!" (qul, the singular addressed to the Prophet is used 323 times, and it appears in other forms 26 times). This is not merely one among several literary forms (see LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE QUR'ÂN) but rather demonstrates the Qur'ãn's fundamental sense of itself: it "comes down" as the divine response placed on the lips of God's Prophet. In the ministry of Muhammad, the kitiã comes not as a finished tome in which to search for the divine wisdom and will but as a wise and commanding voice to be heeded.

The term kitiã, then, does not indicate that the Qur'ãn is to be understood as a
BOOKY


Book of David see Psalms

Booty

Plunder taken in war (q.v.). The Qur'ān does not mention the words *ghanima* or *fay*, which became the technical terms for booty in Islamic law, but refers explicitly only to the plural noun *maghānim* (q.4:94; 48:15, 19, 20); the verb *ghanima*, to take booty (q.8:41, 69); and the verb *afā'a* (from the same root as *fay*), to give as booty (q.33:50; 59:6-7). In pre-Islamic times the terms were synonymous. There are indications that in q.59:6-7, referring to the surrender of the Band I-Na'dir, *afā'a* denotes booty acquired not by actual fighting but as a result of the surrender of the enemy. Q.48:15, 19 and 20 suggest that taking booty is considered a normal element of warfare and q.8:69 confirms that booty taken from the enemy is lawful property. A specific rule is given in q.8:41 where the pre-Islamic custom of assigning one-fifth of the booty (ghanima) to the leader is upheld. The verse mentions that this share belongs to God and is to be spent on the Messenger, i.e.