

Selected Texts

From

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For

Graduate Students

Of

Quranic Sciences and *Hadith*

Department Of Quranic Sciences and *Hadith*

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Abrogation

نسخ

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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. Nöldeke 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 Muḥammad as documented in the ḥadīth — inadequate information betrayed I. Goldziher (*Muḥammedanische Studien*, ii, 20) into inadvertently misrepresenting the importance of the stance adopted by the classical jurist al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820). More recently, J. Schacht's concentration on "contradiction" (*ikhtilāf*) as an acknowledged category in the ḥadīth and sunna as well as his speculation on the origin and nature of ḥadīth 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*, 95-7).

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 (*qiyās*) derived from one or other of the primary sources, and the consensus of qualified legal experts (*ijmā'*). 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 *naskh* 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-Mustasfā*, i, 111). For each of the historical revelations, there was a pre-ordained duration (Q 13:38), although Islam, intended to be the last of the series, will endure until judgment day (Q 33:40). Like Christ, Muḥammad came to confirm the Torah (q.v.) and also 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'ān 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 Ramaḍān, q.v.] fed the poor until the verse was abrogated by 'Whoever is present during the month shall fast (Q 2:185)'" (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, K. *al-Ṣiyām*). In another instance, when a man inquired about the night prayer, the Prophet's widow 'Ā'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 sūra, revealing the alleviation only twelve months later, whereupon the night prayer became optional from being obligatory" (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*). 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'ān 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'ān.

The words and actions of the Prophet came to be regarded by many as a second source of Islamic regulation which, like the Qur'ān, was subject to the same process of change (al-Ḥāzimī, *I'tibār*, 23). For example, Muḥammad 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, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, K. *al-Janā'iz*).

The qur'ānic 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'ānic 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'ānic ruling abrogating the other (al-Naḥḥās, *al-Nāsikh*, 15). Noting the silence of the Qur'ān 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'ān.

Al-Shāfiʿī's 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'ān 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-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) to compose his *Contradictory ḥadīth (Ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth)* and *Treatise [on Jurisprudence] (al-Risāla)*, the earliest surviving statements on jurisprudential method.

A key feature of al-Shāfiʿī'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-Shāfiʿī sought to convince them that God had singled out the Prophet as alone qualified to pronounce on the law. He amassed from the Qur'ān evidence that God insisted on unquestioning obedience to his Prophet (e.g. Q 4:13, 65). Appealing to a series of verses linking Muḥammad's commands and prohibitions to the divine will, and culminating in a verse which identified Muḥammad's will with the divine will (Q 4:80), al-Shāfiʿī 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'ān contains everything that is needed and that many reports about

the Prophet's behavior were forged. Al-Shāfiʿī sought to convince these scholars that it was the Qur'ān itself that enjoined appeal to the prophetic sunna (*al-Risāla*, 79-105). The result was not merely his assertion that the Qur'ān 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'ān. Only a verse of the Qur'ān could abrogate another verse of the Qur'ān and these verses could only abrogate other qur'ānic 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-Shāfiʿī asserted that the ḥadīth 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-Shāfiʿī defined "abrogation" as "to abandon" (*taraka*, *al-Risāla*, 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-Risāla*, 106-13). Thus, for him, "abrogation" actually meant "substitution."

Abrogation and divine knowledge

To some minds, the idea that one verse from the Qur'ān 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'ān 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'ān 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 Ramaḍān, the earlier option 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-Shāfi'i, *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'*, Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, ii, 64), which according to classical Sunnī theology, may never be 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 4:65). 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 (*nuskha*) and Q 45:29 (*nastansikhu*), the first referring to tablets (*alwāḥ*) and the second to a book (*kitāb*), united with the everyday usage, "*nasakha 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 *nasakhat al-shams al-zill*, "the sunlight replaced the shadow" (an etymology that is rejected by some, see Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, ii, 61). "God abrogates (*yansakhu*) whatever Satan brings forth" (Q 22:52) could yield only the sense of "suppression." This paralleled the secular usage "*nasakhat al-rīḥ al-āthār*" (The wind obliterated the traces [of an encampment, etc.]; cf. Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, ii, 61; al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, i, 107). In this usage, abrogation as "removal" carries the connotation 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 (*nansakh*) a verse or cause it to be forgotten without bringing a better one 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 (*baddalnā*) 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, *Jāmi'*, 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, *Jāmi'*, ii, 63). In another report, the Companion Ibn Mas'ūd 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, *GQ*, 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'ān, 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 (Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, 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'ān. The same consideration applies to the Prophet's sunna abrogating the Qur'ān since no ḥadīth 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'ān, but to the rulings conveyed by the text (al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, i, 125; cf. Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 471-2). While in terms of beauty, no qur'ānic verse can be considered superior to another and certainly no ḥadīth is more beautiful than a verse from the

Qur'ān, the legal content of one verse — even of a ḥadīth — 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 (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 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 (see READINGS OF THE QUR'ĀN) were proposed for the troublesome passages. In the passage "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten (*nunsihā*) without supplying a similar or better one" (Q 2:106) attention focused on the word which the majority of scholars read as *nunsi* (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" (*tunsa*) which is to be preferred to "You forget" (*lansa*, Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 474-5). Both of the problems, Muḥammad forgetting on his own and God making him forget, could be circumvented by reading *nansa*, "We defer" (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 476-8). Q 2:106 would then be mentioning two revelatory processes, *naskh* and deferment. The deferment 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'ān," said to have occurred in the case of the night prayer which the revelation of Q 73:6 changed from obligatory to optional (al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risāla*, 108). Or it could mean deferring the removal of a passage from the Qur'ān, by leaving the passage in the text despite suppression of the ruling it contained (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 478). Generally, the sense of the verb *nasa'a* (to defer) is

held to be temporal, although it has also been said to have a physical connotation, "driving away," as men drive strange animals away from the cistern intended for their own beasts (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, ad Q 2:106; cf. Ṭūsī, *Tibyān*, i, 395). Transferred to the qur'ānic context, verses might be driven away from a text, even from human memory. Men may be caused to forget. In support of this interpretation, reports were cited which claimed that certain sūras were originally longer than they are in the present-day text of the Qur'ān. Even verses which had allegedly been revealed and failed to find a place in the final text — such as the Ibn Ādam and Bi'r Ma'ūna verses (see J. Burton, *Sources*, 49-53) — were cited, supposedly from the few Companions who had not quite forgotten them (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 479-80). Through another approach it is not even necessary to resort to variant readings because the Arabic word for "to forget" (*nasiya*) could be construed to mean "to remove something" or its opposite, "to leave something where it is" (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 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'ān and were neither repealed nor removed. Once replacement is ascertained to have occurred, it is immaterial whether the wording of an abandoned ruling is expunged or whether it is left to stand in the Qur'ān. The passages whose rulings have been replaced become inoperative or effectively removed (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 472).

Abrogation and the law

Legal scholars appealed to the principle of abrogation continually to resolve the apparent contradictions between the legal practice of the various regions of the Islamic 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" (*naskh*) was a technical term with a meaning now clear to all (al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām*, 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-Farrā', *Ma'ānī*, 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 jurist'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'ūd (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 Abū Ḥanīfa (d. ca. 150/767). Although the word "consecutive" was not found in the text of the Qur'ān that was in general use, the ruling was adopted into Ḥanafī doctrine (al-Sarakhsī, *Uṣūl*, ii, 81). This exemplifies the third type of abrogation in which the text, but not the ruling, of a qur'ānic 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 24:2, 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-Shāfi'i, *al-Risāla*, 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 (Mālik, *al-Muwatta'*, *Hudūd*, *Hadd al-zinā*). On the basis of this material, some concluded that this was a case of the Prophet's practice abrogating the Qur'ān.

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 Mālik 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," Muḥammad imposed the ruling. Other scholars interpreted the term "the book of God" as a reference to the Qur'ān 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 Muḥammad, 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 Abū 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'ān. Countless scholars in succeeding centuries have stated with assurance that a verse with the same or similar wording had once stood in the qur'ānic text. From this, they concluded that a verse could be removed from the Qur'ān without this vitiating the validity of the ruling it contained (al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, ii, 124).

Al-Shāfi'ī did not analyze these materials from the standpoint of those who saw here the abrogation of the Qur'ān 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 (*al-khṣīs*). 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'ānic 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'ānic ruling, some have mistakenly assumed that al-Shāfi'ī believed that stoning was a qur'ānic 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'ānic 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 Mālik, a single suckling in infancy sufficed to create a barrier to marriage (Mālik, *al-Muwatṭa'*, *al-Raḍā'a*, *Raḍā'at al-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'isha 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 Mālik had curtly dismissed this report (*al-Muwatṭa'*, *al-Raḍā'*, *al-Raḍā'a ba'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'ānic verse while the ruling it expressed remained valid (*Ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*, 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'ān had once existed was not accepted by all of his contemporaries, but it later gained widespread support. Mālikīs and Hanafīs had no general need of this principle while Shāfi'īs had no need what-

ever to posit that the sunna abrogated the Qur'an or vice-versa. One nevertheless finds Mālikī and Ḥanafī scholars claiming that three forms of abrogation are documented (al-Sarakhsī, *Uṣūl*, ii, 81; Qurtubī, *Jāmi'*, ii, 66), just as one also finds Shāfi'īs adducing occurrences of the sunna abrogating the Qur'an and the reverse which, they claimed, their eponym had overlooked (al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, i, 124). See also TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINES OF QUR'ĀNIC STUDY.

John Burton

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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 four

different Arabic roots, namely 'l-u, 'ṣ-m, 'f-f and h-j-r.

The paradigmatic event for the qur'ānic notion of abstinence is Q 74:2-5, which recounts one of the early examples of Muḥammad's experience of coming close to God as the revelation descends on him. God commands, "Arise and warn, your Lord magnify, your robes purify, and defilement flee (*fa-hjur*)."

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 Muḥammad is supported by a later qur'ānic reference — following the chronology of T. Nöldeke (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR'ĀN) — 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'jama*)" (Q 12:32).

Humans are continually in need of rejecting or fleeing from anything that interferes with the on-going movement of the spirit in response to God. For instance, Q 4:6 states, "If any man be rich, let him be abstinent (*fa-l-yasta'fj*)," in reference to the use of the property of orphans (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 (*wal-yasta'fj*) 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 (*ilā'*) from his wife for longer than four months: "For those who swear to abstain (*yu'lūna*) 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

ابهام

into the way the qur'ānic ideals of almsgiving strengthened communities and ameliorated inequities might still serve to aid Muslims to move beyond mere rhetoric in their search for continuity. See also GIFT AND GIVING.

Azim Nanji

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Alphabet see ARABIC SCRIPT; LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS

Altar see IDOLS AND IMAGES

Ambiguous

A concept in qur'ānic exegesis 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'ān. In reference to the Qur'ān or its verses, the active participle *mutashābih* (or *mutashābihāt*) appears twice with the sense of "ambiguous" or "similar."

Q 3:7 states that the Qur'ān consists partly of *muḥkam* verses and partly of *mutashābih*: "It is he who sent down upon you the book (q.v.), wherein are verses clear (*āyāt muḥkamāt*) that are the essence of the book (*umm al-kitāb*), and others ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*)." 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'ān are *mutashābih*: "God has sent down the fairest discourse as a book con-similar (*kitāban mutashābihan*)" and Q 11:1 in which all the verses of the Qur'ān are characterized as clear: "A book whose verses are set clear (*uḥkimat āyātuhu*)." Al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), on the authority of the commentator Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nisābūrī (d. 406/1015), argues that these passages present three different statements on the nature of the Qur'ān: the Qur'ān as clear (*muḥkam*), as ambiguous (*mutashābih*) and as a combination of the two. He characterizes the verse that supports the idea of the compound nature, a Qur'ān made up of clear verses and ambiguous ones (Q 3:7), as the "correct" one (*ṣaḥīḥ*, *Burhān*, ii, 68; cf. Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, iii, 30).

The relation between the two components of the Qur'ān is governed by the meaning ascribed to the word *mutashābih*, for which the exegetical literature offers a variety of definitions. The meaning of "similar" is used to document the miracu-

lous nature of the Qur'ān. On the other hand, the term interpreted as "ambiguous" has wider implications and bears upon three central qur'ānic issues: 1. The juridical validity of the Qur'ān, where the ambiguous verses are contrasted with the clear ones. 2. The question of the validity of interpreting the Qur'ān, where the ambiguous verses are used to argue the cases for and against interpretation. 3. The inimitability (q.v.) of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*).

Similar verses

Similarity between verses may manifest itself either in the wording (*lafẓ*) or in the meaning (*ma'nā*) of the verse. Accordingly, *mutashābihāt* are sometimes defined as verses in which the same words are used to mean different things (Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl*, 74; Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 114, 116) or else as verses that use different words to express a similar sense (Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 115-6; see L. Kinberg, *Muḥkamāt*, 145). In a widely-repeated definition, wording and meaning appear together and the similar verses are presented as those that "resemble one another in rightness and truth (*al-ḥaqq wa-l-ṣidq*), i.e. meaning, and in beauty (*al-ḥusn*), i.e. wording" (Baghawī, *Ma'ālim*, 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 *mutashābih* verses. The correlation between the repetition of the *mutashābih* verses and their resemblance is treated in one of the definitions adduced by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) where *mutashābih* verses are those in which the words resemble one another when repeated in other qur'ānic chapters (*Tafsīr*, iii, 116).

Similar verses and the inimitability of the Qur'ān

Each of the definitions dealing with the resemblance and the repetition of the *muta-*

shābih verses touches upon the inimitability of the Qur'ān. The relation between the inimitability (q.v.) of the Qur'ān and the *mutashābih* 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 11:1 and Q 39:23, as well as "If [the Qur'ān] 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 *mutashābih* 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 Qur'ān. Rather, its verses confirm and reinforce one another. Simultaneously, the Qur'ān is also defined as consisting of *muḥkam* 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 Qur'ān (Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vii, 180).

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) offers a different explanation for the correlation between the inimitability of the Qur'ān and the *mutashābih* verses. Trying to find a reason for the existence of the *mutashābih* verses in the Qur'ān, he argues that stylistically the *muḥkam* and the *mutashābih* verses represent the two major forms of expression used in the Arabic language, the concise (*mūjāz*) and the allusive (*majāz*). God has included both styles in the Qur'ān to challenge mortals to choose either style should they attempt to produce a Qur'ān similar to that brought by Muḥammad. However, no one

can ever meet this challenge and the Qur'an therefore, with its two styles, the *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, will forever remain inimitable (Zāid, i, 350-1; cf. Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl*, 86).

Mutashābih meaning "ambiguous"

A common way to treat the terms *muḥkam* 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 qur'ānic issues: the abrogating and abrogated verses (*al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*, see ABRIGATION), the authority to interpret the Qur'an and the inimitability of the Qur'an.

Ambiguous verses and the abrogating and abrogated verses

Among the definitions that contrast the *muḥkam* with the *mutashābih*, there is to be found the presentation of the *muḥkam* verses as abrogating ones (*nāsikhāt*) and the *mutashābih* as abrogated ones (*mansūkhāt*). A widely-cited definition represents the *muḥkam* 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 (*farā'id*) 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-mu'akkharuhu*), the parables (*amthāl*), the oaths (q.v.; *aqsām*) and the verses in which one should believe, but not put into practice (Ibn 'Abbās, *Tafsīr*, 124; Abū 'Ubayd, *Nāsikh*, 4; Ibn Abī Ḥatīm, *Tafsīr*, ii, 592-3; Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 115; Baghawī, *Ma'ālīm*, i, 426; Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *Muḥarrar*, i, 400; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, iv, 10; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, i, 345; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, ii, 5; Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, i, 314).

The *muḥkam* 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 qur'ānic text itself. Q3:7 defines the *muḥkam* 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 *muḥkam* verses contain the commands that are universal and never change, whereas the *mutashābih* verses contain the commands that are limited and do change. The *muḥkam* 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 *muḥkam* 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 Qur'an

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-rāsikhūn fī l-'ilm*) can comprehend (e.g. Fīrūzābādī, *Baṣā'ir*, iii, 296). The *muḥkam* are defined as clear verses that require nothing to be un-

Lord" (Q 6:1) to support their controversial doctrines. When the Khārijīs 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 (*Durr*, 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 Khārijīs 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'ān and thus fully authorized.

Another example of the correlation between the *mutashābih* verses and dissension deals with the controversial issue of free will versus predestination (see FREEDOM AND PREDESTINATION). The rivals are the rationalist Mu'tazilīs (q.v.) and the conservative Sunnīs. 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'tazilīs define the verse as *muḥkam*, i.e. the kind of verse that should be followed since it favors the argument for free will. The Sunnīs, who do not accept the idea of free will, define this verse as *mutashābih*, i.e. the kind of verse that should not be followed. Q 76:30 presents the opposite view: "You cannot will [anything] unless God wills it." The Mu'tazilīs define this verse as *mutashābih* since it contradicts their view, but the Sunnīs define it as *muḥkam* 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 (Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vii, 182; Abū Ḥayyān, *Bahr*, 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 (Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vii, 185; Abū Ḥayyān, *Bahr*, ii, 382; cf. L. Kinberg, *Muḥkamāt*, 159).

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

Ambiguous verses as those that may be interpreted

The perception of the *mutashābih* 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 *mutashābih* against the *muḥkam*. This is expressed in a set of definitions which oppose

derstood whereas the comprehension of the *mutashābih* requires explanation (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 116-7; 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*, i, 13; Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Baghawī, *Ma'ālim*, i, 428; Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *Muḥarrar*, i, 401; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vii, 184; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, iv, 9; Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, iii, 3; Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, i, 314). A different set of definitions represents the *muḥkam* as verses that contain or permit only one interpretation whereas the *mutashābih* are those that may be interpreted in more than one way (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 115-6; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām*, ii, 281; Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Wāḥidī, *Wasīṭ*, i, 413-4; Baghawī, *Ma'ālim*, i, 427; Ṭabarī, *Majma'*, ii, 15; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, iv, 10; Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, iii, 4; Shawkānī *Tafsīr*, i, 314). While there is no room to doubt the instructions supplied by the *muḥkamāt*, 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 tendentiously 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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān 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 (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 116; Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *Muḥarrar*, i, 401; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, iv, 9; Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr*, ii, 381; Ālūsī, *Rūḥ*, ii, 82). As such, they concern matters about which no mortal has clear knowledge. To show that the essence of the *mutashābihāt* cannot be grasped by human beings, several topics defined as *mutashābih* are mentioned: resurrection day (Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Baghawī, *Ma'ālim*, i, 427; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vii, 184; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, iv, 10; Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr*, ii, 381; Zarkashī, *Burhān*, ii, 70), the appearance of the Antichrist (*al-Dajjāl*) before the end of days, the return of Christ (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 116) and the prophesied day the sun will rise in the west (Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Baghawī, *Ma'ālim*, i, 427; Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr*, ii, 381), among others (see ANTICHRIST, APOCALYPSE, RESURRECTION; LAST JUDGMENT).

A different argument contends that the *mutashābih* are those verses whose meaning can be easily distorted (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 116; Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *Muḥarrar*, i, 401; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, iv, 9; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, 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 3:7). The commentators who correlate the *mutashābih* and dissension (q.v.) adduce a number of qur'ānic verses in support of their position. One such example is presented by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) on the authority of Sa'īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714): To justify their ideas, the early sect of the Khārijīs (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 (Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, i, 350; Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr*, ii, 381) nor reference to other verses to be understood (al-Naḥḥās, *I'rāb*, i, 355; Qurṭubī, *Jāmi'*, iv, 11; Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, i, 314). Conversely, the *mutashābih* are dependent verses that cannot be understood without consulting or comparing them to other verses (Baghawī, *Ma'ālīm*, i, 427; Zarkashī, *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, *Aḥkām*, ii, 281). In light of this argument, the *muḥkam* are regarded as "the essence of the book" (*umm al-kitāb*, Q 3:7) or "a source to which other verses are referred for interpretation" (Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, iii, 9).

Thus the ambiguity of the *mutashābih* verses creates the need to scrutinize them. Had the Qur'ān consisted only of *muḥkam* verses, there would have been no need for the science of the interpretation of the Qur'ān 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 fore. The learned (*ālīm*) and the ignorant (*jāhil*) would have been equal and intellectual endeavor would cease (Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl*, 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" (*rāsikhūn fī l-ilm*) mentioned in Q 3:7.

Ambiguous verses and the inimitability of the Qur'ān

As indicated above, the features of the *mutashābih* as "similar verses" are held to supply proof of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. 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" (*fawātiḥ* — or *awā'il al-suwar*, see LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS) of the Qur'ān as *mutashābih* (e.g. Ṭabarī, *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 Qur'ān and thus attests to its miraculous nature ('Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*, i, 17).

The ambiguity of the *mutashābih* verses enables believers to interpret them in more than one way. This means that the Qur'an accommodates more than one approach to a given issue and that different trends in Islam are likely to find their ideas reflected in the Qur'an ('Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*, i, 26, 28. See also L. Kinberg, *Muḥkamāt*, 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 Qur'an.

In examining the different attitudes toward the interpretation of the Qur'an, H. Birkeland (*Opposition*, 9) states that the opposition to qur'anic exegesis was never comprehensive and was aimed at the usage of human reasoning (*ra'y*). The validity of *tafsīr bi-l-ilm*, i.e. exegesis based on ḥadīth (the records of the pronouncements and actions of the prophet Muḥammad, see ḤADĪTH AND THE QUR'ĀN) 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 *muḥkam*. 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 ḥadīth as a means of interpretation. Indeed, Muslim scholars have traditionally not regarded the employment of ḥadīth to illuminate a qur'anic verse as interpretation, but rather as a means of confirming the message included in the verse. Consequently, a verse in harmony with a reliable ḥadīth may be relied upon as a source of guidance. Such a verse would be defined as *muḥkam*. 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 Qur'an and the injunction to follow only the *muḥkam* verses may explain the variance in the identity of the verses which different groups view as *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*. As shown above, a verse defined by one scholar as *mutashābih* may be characterized as *muḥkam* 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 *muḥkam*. In so doing they were actually using their own independent reasoning presented as ḥadīth. See also TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINES OF QUR'ĀNIC STUDY.

Leah Kinberg

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Exegesis of the Quran:

Early Modern

And

Contemporary

تفاسیر قران بسیار نوین

و معاصر

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Exegesis of the Qur'ān: 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'ān

Treating early modern and contemporary exegesis of the Qur'ān 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'ān 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'ĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL). Many Qur'ān 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-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and Ibn Kathīr (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'ān 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'ānic 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'ānic world view with the findings of modern science (see SCIENCE AND THE QUR'ĀN); and the question of an appropriate political and social order based on qur'ānic principles (see POLITICS AND THE QUR'ĀN; COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QUR'ĀN) which would thus enable Muslims to throw off the yoke of western dominance. For this purpose the qur'ānic 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'ānic 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'ĀN). 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 publications 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 musalsal*, 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 FĀṬIḤA) and continue — unless unfinished — without interruption until the last verse of the last sūra. An exception is *al-Tafsīr al-hadīth* by the Palestinian scholar Muḥammad 'Izza Darwaza, which is based on a chronological arrangement of the sūras (cf. Sulaymān, *Darwaza*). Some *musalsal* commentaries are limited to larger portions of the text (known as *juz'*, pl. *ajzā'*) that were already in former times looked upon as units (e.g. Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr juz' 'Ammā*, 1322/1904-5). Some are devoted to a single sūra (e.g. Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Fāṭiḥa*, 1319/1901-2). In a few cases such commentaries deal only with a selection of sūras made by the author for demonstrating the usefulness of a new exegetical method ('Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī*, see below) or the edifying purpose that the exegesis was originally meant to serve (e.g. Shawqī Dayf, *Sūrat al-Raḥmān wa-suwar qisār*). It should also be said that the traditional genre of commentaries which treat verses considered particularly difficult (see DIFFICULT PASSAGES) is still being pursued (e.g. Rashīd 'Abdallāh Farḥān's *Tafsīr mushkil al-Qur'ān*). While it is true that most commentaries have been written for the consumption of religious scholars, some are explicitly designed to address the needs of a more general public. This is true, for example, in the case of Maw-

dūdī's (d. 1979) *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (see below), a commentary intended for Indian Muslims 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 subject synoptically. The ideas of exegesis underlying this "thematic interpretation" (*tafsīr mawdū'ī*) 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 commentaries, the procedures of determining the meaning of single verses sometimes differ hardly at all from those applied in commentaries of the *musalsal* kind. Therefore, this thematic interpretation can oscillate between mere rearrangement of textual material and a distinct method of exegesis with new results. Generally, however, thematic interpretation concentrates upon a limited number of qur'ānic concepts judged by the author to be particularly important. This effect has also been achieved by Maḥmūd Shaltūt in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm. al-Ajzā' al-'ashara al-ūlā*, who steers a middle course between the *musalsal* 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. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. al-Dardīr's *al-Tafsīr al-mawdū'ī li-āyāt al-tawḥīd 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 — 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān's *Maqāl fi l-insān. Dirāsa qur'āniyya*.

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'an commentaries. A remarkable early modern case in point is Muhammad 'Abduh's introduction to his *Tafsīr al-Fātiha* (5-21, actually Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā's account of one of 'Abduh's lectures). A small separate treatise about the principles of exegesis, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's *Tahrīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, 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 (*uṣūl al-tafsīr*) 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'wil*) 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'ĀN). This is their proper task rather than digressing into complicated scholarly discussions about the possible sense of individual words and phrases or immersing themselves in a variety of levels of meaning — whether grammatical or mystical (see GRAMMAR AND THE QUR'ĀN; SŪFISM AND THE QUR'ĀN) — 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'ānic statements definite where they have been left indefinite (*mubham*) 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'ānic narratives (q.v.) with Jewish traditions of biblical or apocryphal origin (*Isrā'īlīyyāt*) since these were handed down by previous generations of scholars who never stripped them of what contradicted revelation and reason (*Tafsīr al-Fātiha*, 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 record of a series of lectures that he gave at al-Azhar University around the year 1900 which covered the text of the Qur'an from the beginning to Q 4:124. His pupil Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā took notes of these lectures which he afterwards elab-

orated 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 Riḍā 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 (*siyāq*). 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, Muḥammad 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 *ijtihād* is permitted with respect to traditional norms of Islamic law, and he does his best to explain away any miracles and supranatural 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 *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān* (1930) by the Indian author Abū l-Kalām Āzād and *Majālīs al-tadhkīr* (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 'ilmī*) 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 Muḥammad 'Abduh'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' 'Ammā*, 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 *ijāz*, miraculous inimitability (q.v.), appreciating this aspect of *ijāz* 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 Maḥmūd Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1856) in his *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, 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'ānic text references to modern scientific discoveries and advances, was the physician Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī; one of his two pertinent books printed around the year 1880 bears the promising title *Kashf al-asrār al-nūrāniyya al-qur'āniyya fi-mā yata'allaq bi-l-ajrām al-samāwiyya wa-l-arḍiyya wa-l-ḥayawānāt wa-l-nabāt wa-l-jawāhir al-ma'diniyya* (i.e. "Uncovering the luminous qur'ānic 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 'ilmī* in the early twentieth century was the Egyptian Shaykh Tanṭāwī Jawharī, author of *al-Jawāhir fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (1341/1922-3). 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 *spirīṭuizm* (*'ilm tahqīr al-arwāh*). Jawharī claims that these sciences were already mentioned in certain qur'ānic 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 enthusiasts of scientific exegesis, Jawharī did not employ this method primarily for the apologetic purposes, mentioned above, of proving the *i'jāz* 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 Islāmic 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-Islām wa-l-tibb al-ḥadīth*, Cairo 1938, reprint 1957), Ḥanaḥī Aḥmad (*Mu'jizat al-Qur'ān fi wasf al-kā'ināt*, Cairo 1954, two reprints entitled *al-Tafsīr al-'ilmī lil-āyāt al-kawniyya*, 1960 and 1968) and 'Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal (*al-Qur'ān wa-l-'ilm al-ḥadīth*, 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 'ilmī* occur, for example, in *Safwat al-'irfān* (= *al-Muḥaṣṣaf al-mufassar*, 1903) by Muḥammad Farīd Wajdi, in the *Majālis al-tadhkir* (1929-39) by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ibn Bādīs, and in *al-Mizān* (1973-85) by the Imāmīte scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tabāṭabā'ī (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 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, Amīn al-Khūlī (whose detailed refutation of it [*Manāḥij tajdīd*, 287-96] has often been referred to by later authors), Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Sayyid Quṭb (for these and other critics of the *tafsīr 'ilmī* and their arguments, see al-Muḥtasib, *Itijāhāt al-tafsīr*, 302-13 and Abū Hajar, *al-Tafsīr al-'ilmī*, 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 contexts of words or phrases within the qur'ānic text, and also the occasions of revelation (q.v.: *asbāb 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 Mālikite scholar al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) against the scientific exegesis of his time (*al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-sharī'a*, ii, 69-82); (4) it does not take notice of the fact that scientific knowledge and scientific theories are always incomplete and provisory 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 Quṭb 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 Shalabī, *al-Tafsīr al-'ilmī*, esp. 63-69 and 149-164; Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-tahrīr*, 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 Amīn al-Khūlī (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 him-

self, 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 *Fī l-sayf* 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-Majmū'a al-kāmila li-mu'allafāt al-duktūr Tāhā Husayn*, Beirut 1974², 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 entitled 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-qat'i l-naẓari 'an makānatihā l-dīniyya*)" (*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. Amīn al-Khūlī 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 Amīn al-Khūlī, the Qur'ān is "the greatest book of the Arabic language and its most important literary work (*kitāb al-'arabiyya al-akbar wa-atharuhā l-adabī al-a'zam*)" (*Manāhij tajdīd*, 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 Qur'ān, 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 qur'ānic text by the Prophet (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR'ĀN), the occasions of revelation (*asbāb 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 QUR'ĀN). In accordance with al-Shāṭibī, al-Khūlī 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-Khūlī emphasizes, "regardless of any religious consideration (*dūna nazarin ilā ayyi ḥibārin dīnī*)" (*Manāḥij tajdīd*, 304). It then becomes possible to study the artistic qualities of the Qur'ān, 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 Qur'ān can thus be explored in given passages by studying the principles which determine the choice of words, the pecu-

liarities of the construction of sentences, the figures of speech employed, etc. (see RHETORIC OF THE QUR'ĀN; SEMANTICS OF THE QUR'ĀN). 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-Khūlī attaches particular importance to the thematic units of the qur'ānic 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-Khūlī'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 qur'ānic text, in particular its language, had on its first audience.

Shukrī 'Ayyād, who wrote his M.A. thesis, *Min wasf al-Qur'ān al-karīm li-yawm al-dīn wa-l-ḥisāb* (n.d., unpublished, although a critical summary exists in al-Sharqāwī, *Ittijāhāt*, 213-6) under al-Khūlī's supervision, is reputed to have been the first to carry out a research project based on these principles.

Also among al-Khūlī's students was 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān (pen name, Bint al-Shāṭi'), his wife. Her commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī lil-Qur'ān al-karīm*, is designed in conformity with the main features of al-Khūlī's methodological conception and in its preface explicitly refers to the suggestions received from him. 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān consciously

selected a number of shorter sūras to show in a particularly impressive way the fruits to be gathered by the application of al-Khūfī'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 (*asbāb 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 compository 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,

ʿĀ'isha ʿAbd 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 *ijāz* of the Qur'ān, now on the level of advanced philological methods.

Another student of al-Khūfī, Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh, faced considerable difficulties in his use of al-Khūfī'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 fī l-Qur'ān al-karīm* to the King Fu'ād University (now University of Cairo). On the basis of al-Khūfī's idea of literature as an instrument of appealing to emotions and directing them according to the author's intentions, Khalaf 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. Khalaf 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-Shāṭibī and al-Khūfī 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 Muḥammad'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 (*wāqī' ta'rikhī*), but as psychological facts (*wāqī' nafsī*), i.e. as a means of influencing the listeners' emotions (*al-Fann*, Cairo 1965¹, 30, 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 Muḥammad (q.v.) emotionally during the latter's often exhausting confrontation with the heathen Meccans (see OPPOSITION TO MUḤAMMAD), God reflected the Prophet's state of mind in the qur'anic stories about earlier prophets by shaping these narratives according to Muḥammad'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 original audience of the divine message. This makes it possible to trace important features of these narratives to what Muḥammad and his Arab contemporaries knew from local traditions or what Muḥammad could have said himself on the basis of his experience. According to Khalaf 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 Muḥammad's situation and that of his audience. Khalaf Allāh never doubts that the entire text of the Qur'an was inspired literally by God and that Muḥammad had no share whatsoever in its production.

Nevertheless Khalaf 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 (*'ulamā'*) of al-Azhar issued a memo-

randum classifying Khalaf 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-Khulī's school, again, mainly Egyptians (for details up to the 1960's, see al-Bayyūmī, *Khutuwāt al-tafsīr al-bayānī*, 336-9). Sayyid Quṭb's *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī 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-Khulī's students it is not based on the systematic application of a method. The longest chapter of *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī* is devoted to the qur'anic narratives; unlike Khalaf Allāh, Sayyid Quṭb 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 Khaṭīb, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-qur'ānī fī manṭiqihī wa-maḥṣūmihī*; Ilūhāmī Naqra, *Sikūlūjiyyat al-qisṣa fī l-Qur'ān*; al-Qaṣabī Maḥmūd Zalaṭ, *Qadāyā l-tikrār fī l-qāṣaṣ al-qur'ānī*; Muḥammad Khayr Maḥmūd al-'Adawī, *Ma'ālīm al-qisṣa fī l-Qur'ān al-karīm*). Cognizant of Khalaf Allāh's fate, 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-Khulī 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'ānic 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'ān — which is addressed to people today as much as to Muḥammad'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-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*) in the qur'ānic 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 Muḥammad'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'ān from its

adaptation to the historical circumstances of Muḥammad's mission and discovering its meaning for believers of today. According to him, the qur'ānic 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'ānic 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 legis*"; and thirdly, "the general has to be embodied in the present concrete socio-historical context" (ibid., 6-7). A methodological conception coming close to this approach, although confined to the interpretation of qur'ānic legal norms, had already been evolved since the 1950's by 'Allāl al-Fāsi, the famous Mālikite scholar and leader of the Moroccan independence movement (cf. *al-Naqd al-dhātī*, 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'ān is the plea of the Egyptian scholar Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd for a new exegetical paradigm, a plea made in several of his publications, particularly in his *Maḥmūd al-naṣṣ* (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-Khūlī's school to a certain extent, but at the same time generalizes what had been the starting point of al-Khūlī's methodology, namely his idea about the form in which the Qur'ān can actually be subjected to interpretation. Whereas al-Khūlī 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 Muḥam-

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-Zamakhsharī or Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 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 Muḥammad.

Still, Shaykh 'Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn, a

member of the promotion board examining Abū 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 (*ilhād*) or unbelief (*kufī*). 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 Abū 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'ān have to refer in the final analysis, is the originally oral prophetic speech (see ORALITY; ISLĀM) 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 'Uthmānic recension of the Qur'ān (see CODICES OF THE QUR'ĀN; COLLECTION OF THE QUR'ĀN), was performed in a language and in textual genres tied to a specific historical situation, and in mythical and symbolic modes of expression (see SEMIOTICS AND NATURE IN THE QUR'ĀN; 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'ān 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'ānic 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'ān

All exegetical trends outlined so far — including scientific exegesis, whose supporters claim that the Qur'ān 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'ānic 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'ānic 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 Quṭb in his Qur'ān commentary, *Fi zilāl al-Qur'ān* (1952-65), insists that the Qur'ān in its entirety is God's message, and the instructions concerning the "Islamic system" or "method" (*nizām islāmī* or *manhaj islāmī*) contained in it are valid

forever. The Qur'ān is thus always contemporary, in any age. The task is not primarily that of translating the original meaning of the qur'ānic 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 (*ḥākimiyya* in Abū l-A'la' Mawdūdī'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'ānic instructions — is the marked preference usually shown by Islamist commentators for ḥadīth materials in their references to the exegetic tradition (see ḤADĪTH AND THE QUR'ĀN; SĪRĀ AND THE QUR'ĀN). This can be seen in Sayyid Quṭb's commentary, in Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (1949-72) and also in Sa'īd Ḥawwā's *al-Asās fī l-tafsīr* (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-Zamakhsharī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī or al-Bayḍawī (d. 716/1316) here and there, they suspect them of having succumbed to the corrupting influences of Greek philosophy and *Isrā'īlīyyāt*. When relying on "sound" ḥadīth 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 exegetic results. This becomes clearly visible in Sayyid Quṭb's *Fī zilāl 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 exegetic 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 (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) of the Qur'ān is not always equivalent to a complete break with the exegetic methods applied in traditional commentaries of the *musalsal* kind. Most authors, however, in reflecting on thematic interpretation, agree to a large extent about the advantages of concentrating one's exegetic 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 *tafsīr mawdūʿī* he can start from the application of his own questions to the text (Ṣadr, *Muqaddimāt*, 18-22).

Highly problematic and not representative of the prevailing views about *tafsīr mawdūʿī* is the conception of thematic interpretation advocated in 1993 by the Egyptian philosopher Ḥasan Ḥanaṣṣī. According to Ḥanaṣṣī, revelation is neither affirmed nor denied by thematic interpretation, since this method deals with the qurʾānic 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 qurʾānic text, he considers the question of the divine origin of the Qurʾān to be largely irrelevant, but this is only partly true where Ḥanaṣṣī's own interest in the qurʾānic text is concerned. Irrespective of whether he personally attributes a religious character to the Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān to be God's revealed word and can hence be most effectively influenced by its interpretation. Moreover, in Ḥanaṣṣī'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 Ḥanaṣṣī, 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, Ḥanaṣṣī 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 Ḥanaṣṣī, in contrast, the text has no significance of its own: In his idea of thematical 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 Qurʾān

New methodological approaches such as those of Khalaf Allāh, Fazlur Rahman and Abū Zayd sprang from the widely felt need to extract the permanent tenets of the qurʾānic 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 qurʾānic 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'ānic 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'ānic 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'ānic text and of the exegetical tradition referring to it are generally associated with the kind of research pursued by orientalist, 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'ānic studies is also quite understandable. Rare exceptions to this trend are Amīn al-Khūlī and Daud Rahbar, both of whom recognized the value of the preliminary chronology of the qur'ānic text established in Th. Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorāns* (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

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Rotraud Wielandt

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Exhortations

Verbal incitements, usually in the imperative mood, encouraging action on the part

of the addressee. "Exhortation" (*maw'izā*) is attested numerous times in the Qur'ān (Q 2:275; 3:138; 5:46; 7:145; 10:57; 11:120; 16:125; 24:34); moreover, much of the qur'ānic rhetoric (see RHETORIC OF THE QUR'ĀN; LANGUAGE OF THE QUR'ĀN) may be understood as an "exhortation" to heed God's message as proclaimed by the prophet Muḥammad. 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" (*ud'u ilā sabīli rabbika bi-l-hikmati wa-l-maw'izati l-hasanati*), a verse that has served as a motto for al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) famous attempt to introduce Aristotelian logic into religious apologetics (McAuliffe, "Debate"; Neuwirth, Ghazzali's Traktat). An earlier qur'ānic designation is *tadhkira*, literally "reminder" (Q 20:3; 56:73; 69:12, 48; 73:19; 74:49, 54; 76:29; 80:11), presented as the essence of the early recitations as such (see CHRONOLOGY AND THE QUR'ĀN). The strong interest that Muslim Medieval theorists took in qur'ānic 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'ĀN]) 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'ānic expression (see LITERARY STRUCTURES OF THE QUR'ĀN) such as narratives (q.v.), eschatological descriptions or legislative regulations (see LAW AND THE QUR'ĀN).

The earliest manifestations of qur'ānic exhortations are short admonitions that recommend the fulfillment of ritual duties such as prostration before God (Q 53:62; 96:19; see BOWING AND PROSTRATION) and glorification of God (q.v.; Q 69:52; for

Basmala

بسم الله

ings manifest themselves without the
of form.

Collision

Eklund maintains that *barzakh* emerges
the eschatological scene free of any in-
fluence from the People of the Book (*ahl al-*
kitāb, see PEOPLE OF THE BOOK; SCRIPTURE
in THE QUR'ĀN) and represents a "genu-
ine Islamic product, a rare phenomenon
the eschatological market" (*Life*, 82).
Most scholars hesitate to label it as purga-
tory, preferring the term limbo. *Barzakh* as
a barrier between this world and the next
acquires a life of its own. The expanded
sphere of the *barzakh* is exemplified in later
works, like that of al-Sha'rānī, where the
dead are depicted as conducting an active
afterlife allowing for a more dynamic inter-
action with the living. Here *barzakh* stops
short of being the passive barrier to the
afterlife.

Mona M. Zaki

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Bashīr see PROPHETS AND PROPHET-
HOOD; GOOD NEWS

Basmala

The invocation *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-*
rahīm(i), "In the name of God, the Merciful,
the Compassionate," also known as the
tasmiya, "naming/uttering (God's name),"
occurs 114 times in the Qur'ān: at the head
of every sūra except the ninth, which is en-
titled "Repentance" (Sūrat al-Tawba or
Sūrat al-Barā'a), and also in Q 27:30 as the
opening of Solomon's (q.v.) letter to the
queen of Sheba (see BILQĪS). Of the 113 oc-
currences at the head of a sūra, only the
first, that before the opening sūra, Sūrat al-
Fātiḥa (see FĀTIḤA), is commonly reckoned
as an *āya*, i.e. as Q 1:1, although the other
112 unnumbered prefatory occurrences
are still considered part of the sacred text
(Rāzī, *Aḥkām al-basmala*, 21; Suyūṭī, *Durr*,
i, 20).

Precedents for and parallels to the basmala

The *basmala* has various historical prece-
dents among invocational formulae in

other traditions. Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) long ago noted the pre-Islamic Arab use of parallel formulae such as “in the name of al-Lāt [or] al-‘Uzzā” (*Kashshāf*, i, 29; see IDOLS AND IMAGES; PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE QUR’ĀN). T. Nöldeke points out Jewish and Christian parallels to *bi-smi llāhi* in the recurrence of “in the name of the Lord” (GQ 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-rahīm* (Les études d’épigraphie, 58-61). There is also a parallel in the Mazdean formula *pad nām ī 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-smi llāhi* 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-llāhi*, “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 ‘Abbās 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-manār*, i, 44; A. Khoury, *Koran*, 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-smi rabbikā*, “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 rabbika*). 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-rahmān* and *al-rahīm* 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 [1962], “der barmherzige und gütige Gott”); (ii) with *al-rahmān* construed as a name of God in apposition to *Allāh*, modified by the attributive *al-rahīm*, (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 *rahmān* and *rahīm*, taking the intensive *rahmān* to refer to God’s mercy (q.v.) generally either (a) in this world and the next or (b) to all creatures; and *rahīm* for God’s mercy more specifically, limited

either (a) to the next world only or (b) to the faithful only. The commentators note also that *rahmān* can only be used of God while *rahīm* can be applied to humans (Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, i, 55f.; Ibn al-ʿArabī [attr.], *Tafsīr*, i, 7; Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 41-5; M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 148-50).

While Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have preferred to read *al-rahmān al-rahīm* as paired attributive epithets (see GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES), the other instances of *rahmān* and *rahīm* in the Qurʾān could support reading *rahmān* as an appositive modified by *rahīm*. The two words are paired only four times (Q 1:3; 2:163; 41:2; 59:22) apart from the *basmala* and can in each case be readily construed as a substantive (*al-rahmān*) with a following adjective (*al-rahīm*), "the compassionate Merciful [One]." *Rahmān* occurs in the Qurʾān only with the definite article *al-* (57 instances in numbered *āyats*). *Rahīm* occurs 81 times without the definite article as an adjectival predicate of God, most often paired with and following *ghafūr*, "forgiving." *Al-rahīm* is found 32 times (including four occurrences apart from the *basmala* with *al-rahmān*), all but once (Q 34:2: *al-rahīm al-ghafūr*) as an attribute following other divine names or attributes: *al-ʿazīz* ("the Mighty"), *al-ghafūr* ("the Forgiving"), *al-tawwāb* ("the Relenting") and *al-birr* ("the Beneficent"). Thus the qurʾānic evidence could support the translation, "God, the compassionate (*al-rahīm*) Merciful One (*al-rahmān*)." This would accord also with pre-Islamic use of *al-rahmān* as the name of God in south Arabia (see ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE QURʾĀN), the pagan Meccans' aversion to using it instead of *Allāh* (G. Ryckmans, *Les religions arabes*, 47-8; cf. J. Jomier, *Le nom divin*, 2; Y. Moubarac, *Les études d'épigraphie*, 58-9) and its use as God's name by Muḥammad's contemporary, the "Arabian prophet" Musaylima (Tabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, iii, 245-6; Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 42; cf.

Nöldeke, *GQ*, i, 112-3; see MUSAYLIMA AND PSEUDO-PROPHETS).

Place of the basmala in the Qurʾān

The question as to whether the *basmala* is to be counted as the first *āya* in the Fātiḥa (Q 1) and the remaining 112 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 Fātiḥa, otherwise as an unnumbered line of text (*saṭr*) that separates the first *āya* of every sūra (except Q 9, "Repentance" [Sūrat al-Tawba]) from the last *āya* of the preceding sūra (cf. Suyūṭī, *Durr*, i, 20). The exception of Sūrat al-Tawba is held traditionally to stem from either (i) its being originally joined with Q 8, "The Spoils of War" (Sūrat al-Anfāl), as a single unit later divided in two before the word *barāʾa*, which thus became the first word of Q 9 (Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, i, 60, 65; Tirmidhī, 48:10.1; cf. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Futuḥāt*, 4, 211-3, 355-6, who says the *basmala* of Q 27:30 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, *Tafsīr*, vii, 225; M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 77; see IDOLATRY AND IDOLATERS; POLYTHEISM AND ATHEISM).

Whether the *basmala* even belongs to the Qurʾān at all has been a live question for Muslims (cf. M. b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī, *Faṭḥ al-qadīr*, i, 64-5). According to most reports, neither Ibn Masʿūd's nor Ubayy b. Kaʿb's Qurʾān copy (*muṣḥaf*, see CODICES OF THE QURʾĀN) included Sūrat al-Fātiḥa. Further, Anas is reported as saying, "I performed the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) with God's apostle, Abū Bakr (q.v.), ʿUmar (q.v.) and ʿUthmān (q.v.) and I did not hear any of them recite *ʿbi-smi llāh...*" (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:50; cf. 4:52; see PRAYER). However, Anas is also said to have reported that Muḥammad recited Q 108, "Abundance" (Sūrat al-Kawthar),

with the *basmala* (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 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 sūra"); however, he also cites traditions that the *basmala* was an opening or closing benediction given Muḥammad at the institution of the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*, Suyūṭī, *Durr*, i, 20-3; cf. A. Spitaler, *Verszählung*, 31-2). The reciters (see RECITERS OF THE QUR'ĀN) and jurists of Medina, Basra and Syria did not consider it an *āya* at the beginning of a sūra, but a sūra-divider and a blessing that one would use to begin any important act. Abū Ḥa-nīfa (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 sūra, as did al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) and his followers who recite it aloud in the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) and likewise the Shī'īs who recite it silently (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 24-5; Rāzī, *Aḥkām al-basmala*, 20; Shawkānī, *Faṭḥ al-qadīr*, i, 64-5; H. Algar, *Besmillāh*, 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 Fātiḥa: Are they part of the Word of God (see BOOK) or only invocations used by Muḥammad? (cf. Nöldeke, *GQ*, ii, 79). It would also appear from the earliest extant Qur'ān pages that the *basmala* is almost always orthographically integral to the subsequent sūra's text and not set apart visually in any way (Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, *Maṣāḥif San'ā'*, 36-61).

Western scholars have also examined the question of the *basmala*'s relationship to the qur'ānic text (see COLLECTION OF THE QUR'ĀN). Nöldeke suggests that at least as early as the Qur'ān copy (*muṣḥaf*, q.v.) of Ḥafṣa the *basmala* was used to separate

sūras (*GQ*, ii, 46). R. Blachère sees the *basmala* as a formula used by Muḥammad to introduce letters and pacts which was inaugurated at some point to mark the beginning of a sūra (*Introduction*, 143-4). R. Paret says it was likely added later as a seventh verse to Q 1 to allow "the seven oft-repeated [verses]" (*ṣab'an min al-mathānī*, Q 15:87) to apply to the Fātiḥa (*Kommentar*, 11). A. Neu-wirth argues from Christian and Jewish liturgical formulae and the Fātiḥa'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 Fātiḥa (cf. Nöldeke, *GQ*, 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* (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 26; Bājūrī, *Tuḥfat al-murīd*, 3; Rāzī, *Aḥkām al-basmala*, 19; M. al-Gharawī, *Isṁ*, 91; see RITUAL AND THE QUR'ĀN). Muḥammad is quoted as saying that "every important affair that one does not begin with 'in the name of God' is void" (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 31; M. al-Gharawī, *Isṁ*, 13; Ṣabbān, *Risāla*, 21). Scriptural support is found in Q 6:119 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 llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* enters paradise (*al-janna* [see PARADISE; GARDEN])" (A. Ghaylān, *Da'wa*, 37; cf. M. b. 'Alī al-Shawkānī, *Faṭḥ 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 Fātiḥa and elsewhere, has

been especially subject to considerable Muslim debate and discussion (e.g. Rāzī, *Aḥkām al-basmala*, 38-78; Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *al-Radd*; cf. Bājūrī, *Tuhfat al-murīd*, 3-4). The question has even become the key issue for differing local interpretations of Islam in the case of modernists and traditionalists in Gayo society in Aceh (J. Bove, *Muslims*, 306-9).

Traditionally, the *basmala* carries special blessing and power (cf. I. al-Basyūnī, *Basmala*, 1930; Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ*, i, 26-7) and is used as a talisman in popular magic (see AMULETS). One tradition claims it is "... an āya of God's scripture not revealed to anyone other than the Prophet save for Solomon (q.v.) the son of David (q.v.)" (Suyūṭī, *Durr*, i, 20). Especially in mystical thought it is considered the quintessence of the Qur'ān: According to Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) "the *basmala* is the key to every *shayʿa*" and God says that uttering the *basmala* is remembering (*dhikr*) him (*Futūḥāt*, viii, 343vii, 274-5). An early Ismāʿīlī work studied by W. Ivanov explains its esoteric meaning in cosmological terms (W. Ivanov, *Studies*, 68). 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 *bāʾ* in the *bi-* of the *basmala* ('Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *Kahf*, 4-5; see LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS). Shīʿī sources develop a similar interpretation: According to Jaʿfar al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) and others, the greatest āya in the Qur'ān is the *basmala* (M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 77); all the areas of knowledge (*ʿulūm*) are contained in "the four [Shīʿī ḥadīth] books" and their *ʿulūm* in the Qur'ān and the *ʿulūm* of the Qur'ān in the Fātiḥa and the *ʿulūm* of the Fātiḥa in the *basmala* and the *ʿulūm* of the *basmala* in the *bāʾ* of the *basmala* (M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 64, 98). In a variation on this theme, Mir Dard (d. 1199/1785) cites 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (q.v.) as saying all mysteries are con-

tained in the dot beneath the *bāʾ* of the *basmala* and he, 'Alī, is that dot (A. Schimmel, *Pain*, 90).

Orthographically, the *basmala* is set apart by the traditional but grammatically exceptional omission of the prosthetic *alif* of *ism* (<*s-m-w*) connecting the *bāʾ* directly to the *sin*. One attestation of this is the absence of mention of the *alif* from the tradition that 'Umar said "Lengthen the *bāʾ*, show clearly the teeth [of the *sin*] and make round the *mīm*" (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 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 Aḥmad Qarāḥisārī (d. 963/1520) in which extreme application of the principle of assimilation of letters (the letters *rāʾ* and *yāʾ* disappear, *lām* 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

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Bāṭin and Zāhir see EXEGESIS 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 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*, *i'jāb*, *zīna*, *ḥilya*, *zukhruf*, *ṭayyib*, *alwān*, *qurrat 'ayn*, *bahī*) signal moral choices to be made or divine grace rendered (see CONSOLATION), while moral terms (e.g. the various terms related to *ḥusn*, *ilqān*, *fitna*, *karīm*) 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

کتاب

possessions and satisfactions. But the specialist of pre-Islamic poetry, Muḥammad al-Nuwayhī, 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 altercations, 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 (*balāran*) 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 (*batīrat*) 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 ḥadīths continue the Qur'ān's condemnation of pride and boastfulness as is illustrated in the well-known saying from Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*: "He who has in his heart the weight of a grain of mustard seed of pride (*kibriyā'*) shall not enter paradise." See also ARROGANCE; PRIDE; VIRTUES AND VICES.

Frederick Mathewson Denny

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Body see ANATOMY; GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES; ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Body Fluids see BLOOD AND BLOOD CLOT; BIOLOGY AS THE CREATION AND STAGES OF LIFE

Bohorās see SHĪ'ISM AND THE QUR'ĀN

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'ān than *kitāb* and yet its meaning is far more complex than the simple and almost universal translation "book" would seem to imply. The Qur'ān 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 *kataba* (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'ān 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'ānic 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 22:70). 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 27:75). 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 *ḥafīẓ* (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 18:49). "And each soul (q.v.) will be recompensed in full for what it has done" (Q 39:70). 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 (*naktub*) 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 *zūbur*, 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" (*ḥāfiẓīn kirāman kātibīn*, 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

ḥāṣ), 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; see also 69:19; 84:7). 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 *ḥāṣ* for each nation (Q 45:29). The image of judgment is a commercial one — a final settling of accounts. Like the inventory of creation 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 (*ʿalīm*) 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 3:154) nor hasten it since it comes by God's permission "as a writ to be carried out later" (*kitāban mu'ajjalan*, Q 3:145). 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 15:79). "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; 8:68; 13:38; 30:56) suggesting that the usage of the root *k-t-b* (to write) is largely metaphorical. The verb *kutiba* (it has been written) is used when speaking of various aspects of law (see LAW AND THE QUR'ĀN): 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 22:4; 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 (*kunnā 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 Qur'ān 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'ānic commentators to gloss occurrences of the verb *kataba* with such verbs as *amara*, *hafiza*, *hasiba* 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; 57:25). 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.v.; Q 2:53, 87; 17:2; 23:49; 25:35), to Jesus (q.v.; Q 3:48; 5:110; 19:30) and most often, of course, to Muḥammad (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 communicate to you just as we communicated (*awḥaynā*) to Noah (q.v.) and the prophets after him, as

we communicated to Abraham (q.v.) and Ishmael (q.v.) and Isaac (q.v.) and Jacob (q.v.) and the tribes, and Jesus and Job (q.v.) and Jonah (q.v.) and Aaron (q.v.) and Solomon (q.v.), and as we granted to David (q.v.) the *zabūr* (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.v.; Q 4:54; 40:53; 57:26; see also CHILDREN OF ISRAEL). Although attempts have sometimes been made to distinguish between messengers (*rusul*) and prophets (*anbiyā*) 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 (*tawrāt*, 18 times; see TORAH) and Gospel (*injīl*, twelve times; see GOSPEL); the generic *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā* ("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 *tawrāt*. Although the Qur'ān understands *tawrāt* to be the revelation given to the Jews, it is most often paired with Injīl 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 (*atā*, 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 3:184, 6:91) in his turn teaches it to the people (Q 2:129; 2:151; 3:164; 62:2). The people recite it (*qara'a*, Q 2:44, 113, 121; 10:94; 69:19),

learn it ('*alima*, Q 2:78, 144, 146), study it (*ʿilasa*, Q 3:79; 34:44; 68:37) and teach it (*ʿallama*, Q 3:79; see KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING).

In order fully to understand what the Qurʾān means when it speaks of *kitāb* in the context of revelation, it is necessary to view the word within the whole field of vocabulary with which it is used. The word acts as the focus for some of the most significant concepts in the Qurʾān. Two key terms in this respect (*āya* and *ḥikma*) appear with *kitāb* in something like a credal formula 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 (*āyāt*, see SIGNS), to purify them and to make known to them the *kitāb* 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 wisdom 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). *Kitāb* and *ḥikma* appear ten times together and form a virtual hendiadys. The term *āya* (pl. *āyāt*) is used to refer to everything that reveals God's will and ways, whether in nature (e.g. Q 2:266; 16:11-3; 30:46; see ANIMAL LIFE), history (e.g. Q 46:27), legislation (e.g. Q 24:61) or in revelation (e.g. Q 24:1). The *āyāt* of God are intended to prompt people to reason ('*aqala*), to learn ('*alima*), to ponder (*tafakkara*, *tadhakkara*) and so to come to faith (*āmana*). The coming of the *kitāb* with its *āyāt* provides insight into what God knows and what God commands. Therefore, far from being clearly distinguished from the above-mentioned registers, the *kitāb* of revelation is intimately linked with the same divine knowledge and authority

that they symbolize. The fundamental pattern (with associated verbal roots) is this: (a) As creator God knows ('*-l-m*) the truth (*ḥ-q-q*) of all things and is in command (*ḥ-k-m*) of all things. The symbol for this knowledge and authority is *kitāb*. (b) Given close attention and reflection ('*-q-l*, *f-k-r*, etc.), it is possible for people to learn ('*-l-m*) from the *āyāt* of nature and history much of the truth of what God knows and commands. 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 *āyāt* in order to remind (*dh-k-r*) the people of them, to make quite clear (*b-y-n*, *n-w-r*, *f-ṣ-l*) precisely what God requires (*ḥ-k-m*) and to warn (*n-dh-r*, see WARNING) of the coming judgment (*f-ṣ-l*, *ḥ-k-m*, *d-y-n*). (d) The symbol of this guidance is the *kitāb* — God's sending down (*n-z-l*) through the Prophet of an authoritative word (*q-w-l*, *k-l-m*) to address the current situation and the prevailing issue. This divine/prophetic address bears the name *kitāb* not because of its form (which remains oral and responsive) but because of its origin and its nature as a communication (*n-z-l*, *w-h-y*) of God's knowledge ('*-l-m*) and a clear statement (*b-y-n*) of God's commands (*ḥ-k-m*). (e) The community (see COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY IN THE QURʾĀN) addressed by God accepts the relationship of guidance first by accepting ('*-m-n*) that what the Prophet recites has a divine origin, then by committing themselves (*s-l-m*) to following (*t-b-*, *t-w-*) the divine will manifested in the prophetic 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 *kitāb*.

It is the phenomenon of the *kitāb* 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'ān whether anyone can be understood to be fully in possession of the *kitāb*. In this respect, the Qur'ān 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 (*naṣāra*), the Jews (*yahūd*, *Banū Isrā'īl*) and the Sabians (*ṣābi'ūn*). All of these groups are referred to in the Qur'ān as *ahl al-kitāb* or *alladhīna ūtū l-kitāb* (those who have been granted the *kitāb*; see PEOPLE OF THE BOOK; CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY; JEWS AND JUDAISM; SABIANS; MAGIANS). The Qur'ān calls for belief not only in the *kitāb* sent down to Muḥammad but also in the *kitāb* (or the plural *kutub*) sent down before him (Q 2:285; 4:136). It is precisely because they have already been recipients of God's revelation that the *ahl al-kitāb* are expected to recognize in Muḥammad 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 papyrus (*qarāfīs*, sing. *qirṭās*, 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'ān. 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'ĀN). 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'ĀN; READINGS OF THE QUR'ĀN). *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" (*alladhīna ūtū l-ilm*, 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'ān refers to the *umm* (literally "mother" hence "essence" or "source") of the *kitāb* (Q 3:7; 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 (*safarat kirām*, 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'ān: "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'ān distinguishes between those verses that are considered *muḥkamāt* (defined, fixed, firm, decisive, straightforward) and those that are *mutashābihāt* (lit. "resembling one another" possibly meaning "ambiguous" or "metaphorical"; see AMBIGUOUS). Since the Qur'ān 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'ānic 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 (*nāsikh*) verses because they remain firm and fixed whereas the *mutashābihāt*, although they resemble the others, are in fact without legal force due to their having been abrogated (*mansūkh*, see ABROGATION). Other commentators distinguish the *muḥkamāt*, those verses that can stand alone and so require little or no interpretation, from the *mutashābihāt*, 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'ān (Sūrat al-Fātiḥa; see FĀTIḤA) as *umm al-kitāb* since it is thought to contain the essential content of the Qur'ān. So also the so-called mysterious letters (*fawātiḥ*) at the beginning of some sūras have been

thought to contain in some mystical way the essence of the Qur'ān. (See LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS.)

The Qur'ān as kitāb

One of the most complex questions about the Qur'ān 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 Muḥammad 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 (GQ, ii, 1-3) argue that, given Muḥammad'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'ān. 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 Qur'ān are to be understood as belonging to the *kitāb* — the pericopes excerpted from the heavenly book, i.e. the *dhikr* 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 Muḥammad. 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 Muḥammad could have placed any duty above this one.

Muslim tradition has long understood that the Prophet intended the written codification of the Qur'ān; yet, the traditions about the collection and writing down of the text are at cross purposes (see CODICES OF THE QUR'ĀN). 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 Muḥammad 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 (q.v.) at the time, such written material as did exist could serve as not much more than an *aide-memoire* 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 Qur'ān was revealed or the form in which it was to be propagated and perpetuated. Both Western and Muslim approaches seem to read into the Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic *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 (Q 2:1-2) the Qur'ān speaks of the *kitāb*: "*Alif. Lām. Mīm. That is the kitāb about which there is no doubt, guidance for the God-fearing.*" Qur'ānic commentators were rather puzzled to find *dhālika* ("that") rather than *hādhā* ("this") in Q 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 Q 2:1 or to the sūras of the Qur'ān 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 (Qur'ān) 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

contains a large amount of commentary upon and analysis of the processes of its own revelation and the vicissitudes of its own reception in time. One wonders how the two genres can exist not just side by side but interwoven within a single document; how the Qur'ān can so constantly refer to itself in the third person and at the same time be considered a unity; how it can define and defend itself even as it is being revealed.

The Qur'ān is both itself and *about* itself; both *hādihā* and *dhālika*. Even in its final form it seems still a work-in-process, carefully observing and commenting upon itself. This is what makes it so enigmatic as a canonized, codified text. What is to be found "between the two covers" remains a surprise because it does not behave as though it were a completed volume nor, indeed, as the copy of a pre-existent heavenly document.

The Qur'ān actually rejects certain common conceptions of *kitāb*. It is reiterated several times that in the ministry of the Prophet there comes to the Arabs (q.v.) "a *kitāb* from God" (e.g. Q 6:19, 114). However, it is also clear that Muḥammad does not consider that the lack of any written text invalidates this claim in any way. When the Prophet is challenged to produce a writing from heaven as proof (q.v.) of his authenticity (Q 17:93; see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF), he is told to reply that he is merely a human messenger. In Q 6:7 God says, "Even if we had sent down a *kitāb* on papyrus and they were to touch it with their hands, those who disbelieve would have said, 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery.'" So when the Qur'ān speaks of itself as *kitāb*, it seems to be talking not about the form in which it is sent down but rather about the authority it carries as a manifestation of the knowledge and command of God.

This is borne out in another situation of challenge where the Prophet's critics de-

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" (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*, Q 25:32). To Muḥammad's interlocutors, a divine pronouncement must, almost by definition, be complete. Yet the Qur'ān comes only, as the commentators like to say, responsively (*jawāban li-qawlihim*), in installments (*munajjaman*) 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 (*faraqnāhu*) that you might recite it to the people at intervals (*'ala mukththin*), and we have indeed sent it down." In rejecting the claim that it should be sent down "as a single complete pronouncement" the Qur'ān 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'ān 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'ĀN) but rather demonstrates the Qur'ān's fundamental sense of itself: it "comes down" as the divine response placed on the lips of God's Prophet. In the ministry of Muḥammad, the *kitāb* 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 *kitāb*, then, does not indicate that the Qur'ān is to be understood as a

closed corpus of text, codified in writing; it was that language of itself long before it was either closed or written. The Muslim community used the same term while at the same time preserving the text primarily in oral form. The word *kitāb* rather expresses a claim as to the origin of the words on the Prophet's lips: they are *kitāb* because they come from God, from the realm of God's knowledge and authority, and these are symbolized by writing. Writing, of course, is a process of engagement with an audience. It involves re-writing and re-phrasing, emendation and development. This is what the Muslim interpretative tradition has recognized in the phenomenon of abrogation (*naskh*): that elements of God's word are conditioned by time and circumstance and so God exercises the prerogative of amending the text, removing the force of some earlier pronouncements and perhaps even their wording as well. The Qur'an is God's writing in the sense that it is God's definitive and authoritative word. Yet it is not the sum total of God's word but rather a token of it and a guarantee of continuing guidance. See also SCRIPTURE AND THE QUR'ĀN.

Daniel Madigan

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Book of David see PSALMS

Booty

Plunder taken in war (q.v.). The Qur'an does not mention the words *ghanīma* 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 Banū l-Naḍir, *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 (*ghanīma*) to the leader is upheld. The verse mentions that this share belongs to God and is to be spent on the Messenger, i.e.