

Article

Quran as Scripture in Classical Muslim Scholarship

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Abstract: Recent scholarship focuses on the plasticity of the concept of “scripture” as it is defined by different religious traditions. Based on its contents, the Quran is most commonly compared to the Bible, yet such an approach misses the distinct way that the Quran is understood as an authoritative text by classical Muslim scholarship. Even “basic” information—knowing the number of words, the names of surahs, the structure of the text—is essential to understanding how Muslims see the Quran as scripture and the foundations upon which it is built. Muslims regard the Quran as the word of God, revealed to the prophet Muhammad, the primary source for determining the beliefs and practices of Islam. The text of the Quran is used in the teaching of Arabic and is the focus of Islamic learning. It is regarded as interceding on behalf of those who revere it, is recited as a part of regular rituals, and is treated as a sacred object in ritual and everyday settings. The exegetical and ritual use of the Quran is a fundamental means for Muslims to both relate and distinguish themselves from other religious identities, especially those such as Jews and Christians, with whom they share a common scriptural tradition.

Keywords: Quran; scripture history of religion; exegesis; ritual; Arabic; prophet Muhammad; Suyuti; Mecca; scripture



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1. Introduction

For billions of Muslims, the Quran is scripture. Unlike the Bible, the Quran is considered to be a word-for-word record of God’s words, revealed to the prophet Muhammad and codified as the source for Muslim beliefs and practices, regarded as a model for the Arabic language, and recited and used as a sacred object during prayers and other acts of worship.

Although there is a long history of Western scholarship on the Quran (especially its text and use by Muslims) and a more recent surge in scholarship on the origins and early history of the Quran text, little attention has been given to examining how and why the Quran is understood as an authoritative text by Muslims.¹ Over the past few decades, most scholarship has focused on comparing the Quran and its exegesis by Muslim scholars to the Bible and other biblical literature produced by Jewish and Christian communities, with the aim of showing influence and interdependence. Such an approach has tended to produce a conception of the Quran that blurs some of the more significant aspects of the Muslim understanding of “scripture”, as distinct from that of other biblical religions. Close comparisons between the Quran and Bible and their interpretive communities have missed what might be called a “mythical” or more ahistorical formative view of the Quran as scripture detailed in classical Muslim scholarship.

This article reviews the classical Muslim understanding of the Quran as scripture with attention even to the basics, such as the definition of “Quran”, the contents and structure of the text, its revelation, the history of the text, how Muslim scholars compare the Quran to other scriptures, its use in liturgical and ritual contexts, and how the Quran is supposed to be studied. Reviewing these fundamental aspects of how classical Muslim scholarship understands the Quran helps to illuminate how “scripture” can be both a historical proof of Islam and the mission of the prophet Muhammad, but also a timeless document whose message is applicable to ever-changing historical circumstances through theology and law.

2. The Meaning of “Quran”

According to Muslim scholars, the word “Quran” is derived from one of two Arabic roots. Some scholars maintain that the term is derived from the Arabic root “QRN”, meaning to “put together” or “assemble” because the Quran is a book that is assembled from the revelations given to the prophet Muhammad. Other scholars explain that the term “Quran” is derived from the Arabic root “QR” meaning to “read” or “recite” because the Quran was recited to the prophet Muhammad and is designed to be recited in ritual practices.

Within the Quran itself, the term “Quran” is used in several contexts with different meanings. Q 56:77–80 appears to have the most complete description of the Quran:

It is a noble Quran, in a guarded book, which no one but the ritually pure may touch, sent down from the Lord of the worlds.

Other verses seem to suggest that the term “Quran” does not refer to the whole of the revelations collected together but applies to parts of the revelation. Q 72:1 refers to a part of the Quran that was heard by the Jinn, and Q 75:17 mentions “its Quran” or “the Quran’s Quran”, apparently indicating a part of the larger text. In his exegesis of Q 72:1, Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) relates an account, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, that the Jinn overheard part of the revelation the prophet Muhammad was receiving (Ṭabarī 1992). Other verses in the Quran define “Quran” in various ways. Q 20:2 refers to the Quran as something “sent down” by God, and Q 76:23 specifically says the Quran was sent down as a revelation. According to Nāṣir al-Dīn ‘Abdallāh al-Baḍāwī (d. 1286) this means that God revealed the Quran to the prophet Muhammad in segments so that they could be applied to the specific circumstances that were at issue in the community at the time of the revelation (Baḍāwī 1998). Q 25:32 states that the Quran was sent down in stages over a period of time.

Q 27:19 instructs people to seek the protection of God against Satan when reading the Quran, and Q 17:82 states that the Quran is a “healing” and “mercy” to the believers.

We sent down the Quran as a healing and a mercy for the believers. For the unjust it brings nothing but loss.

In Q 17:45, there is mentioned a special divider that the Quran places between believers and unbelievers.

When you recite the Quran, we put between you and those who do not believe in the hereafter a hiding veil.

Several verses, such as Q 12:1, refer to an “Arabic Quran”, suggesting that this Arabic revelation is to be distinguished from other non-Arabic revelations. Faruq Sherif explains that the Quran is supposed to have been revealed only in Arabic, but some scholars have suggested non-Arabic and pre-Islamic origins for the term “Quran” and the other terms used by Muslims to designate the Quran and its parts (Sherif 1995). The term “Quran”, used some seventy times in the Quran itself, could be related to the Syriac “qeryana”, used to refer to a “scripture reading” or “lesson” in Christian contexts. The term “surah”, mentioned nine times in the Quran and used to designate the larger chapter-length divisions of the Quran, might also be related to the Syriac “surta”, meaning “scripture reading” in Christian contexts.

It is important to note that the term “Quran” does not necessarily refer to the complete collection of revelations nor to a physical book. Muslim scholars use the Arabic term “muṣḥaf”, meaning “codex” or “scripture”, to designate a physical copy of the Quran, although the Quran is also preserved in other forms, such as copied onto scrolls or other physical objects. Ibn Ushtah cites a report that when the Quran was assembled and written down onto paper, some people wanted to call it *sifr* (derived from the Hebrew for “book” or “scripture”), but Abu Bakr decided to call it *muṣḥaf* (derived from the Christian Ethiopic term for scripture) (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 164–65). The term “Quran” is also applied conceptually to individual verses from the Quran and to principles that are derived from the text of the Quran, and, as such, the term is often synonymous with “revelation” or “canon”, as used in other religious traditions.

Muslim scholars refer to the other names given to the revelation and its compilation within the text of the Quran. According to Abu al-Mu‘ānī ‘Uzayzī b. ‘Abd al-Malik, there are 55 names for the Quran mentioned in the text of the Quran (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 159–61). In his *Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Zarkashī (d. 1393) includes the same list of names (Zarkashī 1994, pp. 370–72). These include “noble Quran” (Qur‘ān karīm, Q 56:77), “God’s speech” (kalām Allāh, Q 9:6), “clear light” (nūr mubīn, Q 4:174), and “straight path” (ṣirāṭ mustaqīm, Q 8:153). According to a tradition cited by al-Sulafī, the most descriptive title given to the Quran is a “message for humanity from which they can take warning”, to be found in Q 14:52 (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 164).

3. Contents and Structure of the Quran

Classical Muslim scholars emphasize the importance of knowing the exact content and dimensions of the Quran. Although this may seem like overly elementary information, knowledge of the Quran as scripture is not understood only or even primarily as knowing the semantic value of its contents. Not unlike the ancient and medieval Jewish Masoretes, classical Muslim scholarship on the Quran devotes much attention to the physical and conceptual makeup of what constitutes scripture.

Classical Muslim scholars explain that the text of the Quran is divided into 114 surahs or chapters. Each surah contains a number of verses, ranging from only 3 to 286 verses, although the overall length of a surah is determined by the number of words, not the number of verses. Muslim sources provide different counts for the total number of words in the Quran, from 77,934 to 77,277 (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 219; von Denffer 1994, pp. 67–70). Within a standard Quran, these surahs are arranged like the New Testament epistles of the apostle Paul, from longest to shortest, with the exception of the first surah, which is one of the shortest. Muslims also divide the Quran according to different schemes corresponding to methods of memorization and recitation, i.e., into seven and thirty different portions. Muslim scholarship disagrees about the methods and the reasons for how the surahs and the verses within them are ordered. In his *Sharḥ al-sunnah*, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Baghawī (d. 1118) writes that the contents of the Quran, including the order of the surahs and the verses, were determined by revelation and conforms exactly to a version of the Quran preserved in heaven (Baghawī 1998). Ibn al-Ḥiṣṣār states that the order of the surahs and the order of the verses were fixed by the prophet Muhammad based on information he received from revelation (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 194). According to Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ibn Fāris (d. 1004), the order of the surahs was determined after the death of the prophet Muhammad by his followers, but the order of the verses within the surahs was confirmed by the prophet Muhammad as it was communicated to him by the angel Gabriel (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 194–95; Zarkashī 1994, pp. 258–67). Other scholars, such as Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ibn ‘Aṭīyah (d. 1151), relates that the order of many of the surahs, such as the first seven long surahs, was known during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad (Ibn ‘Aṭīyah 2001).

There are some minor disagreements concerning the number of surahs and the numbering of certain verses, but, overall, the order of the surahs and the verses within them is fixed. For example, every surah, except for Q 9, begins with the “*basmalah*”, which is the phrase “In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate” (bism Allāh al-rahīm al-rahīm). According to Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), the scholars of Medina, Basra, and Syria did not regard the *basmalah* as a proper verse when it occurred at the beginning of each surah, but the scholars of Kufah and Mecca did count the *basmalah* as a verse (Zamakhsharī 1995). Some Muslim scholars, because of the *basmalah* missing from the beginning of Q 9, regard Q 8 and Q 9 as a single surah and, therefore, count only 113 surahs in the Quran. Other scholars do not include the separated letters that occur at the beginning of certain surahs as proper verses (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 204–9). There are also individual and groups of verses that are considered to have been revealed decades later than the rest of the surah, such as Q 2:125 in the middle of Q 2, which is classified as a “Medinan” surah. In his *Itiqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī

(d. 1505) provides a list of all the surahs, with the different opinions regarding the number of verses supposed to be distinguished in each surah (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 213–17; Zarkashī 1994, pp. 287–90).

In addition, Muslim tradition preserves the variant orders of some of the earliest Quran codices, such as those ascribed to Ubayy b. Ka‘b and Ibn Mas‘ūd. In his *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, Abū Bakr ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Dā‘ūd al-Sijistānī (d. 922) records all the variants from non-standard codices, but modern scholars like John Wansbrough are skeptical that the slight differences noted can be used as a record of the actual process of codification (Sijistānī 1985; Jeffery 1937; Wansbrough 1977). Angelika Neuwirth points out that neither Ubayy b. Ka‘b nor Ibn Mas‘ūd appear to have included Q 1, Q 113, and Q 114 as separate surahs in their Quran codices (Neuwirth 1981; *Form and Structure of the Quran* 2002). In his *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) says that Q 113 and Q 114 are to be understood as a single unit (Rāzī 1990). It is reported that the codex of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was organized according to the order in which the revelations were received by the prophet Muhammad (Burton 2002). The need for further study of the history of the Quran text and its variants is highlighted by some of the recent finds from Quran manuscript fragments in the Great Mosque in San‘a, Yemen (Puin 1996, pp. 107–11).

Each of the surahs is named, and modern editions of the Quran number the surahs consecutively. Most of the names of the surahs are agreed upon by tradition, but many of the surahs are designated with various names. Neal Robinson explains that the names are usually taken from the first word, or collection of letters, of the first verse of the surah, but can also be taken from a word in the first two verses of the surah or elsewhere in the surah (Robinson 1996, pp. 256–58). Many surahs are named after the first verse subsequent to the *basmalah* when that first verse consists only of a collection of Arabic letters, which are not normally thought to form an Arabic word. This includes “Ṭā Hā” (Q20), “Ṣād” (Q 38), “Qāf” (Q 50), and others, which are often known by other names. According to al-Zarkashī, these Arabic letters correspond, in part, to the other names given to the surahs where they occur (Zarkashī 1994, p. 213). The name can sometimes be descriptive of the contents of the surah or a portion of the surah, such as the surah that is named after Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the surahs named after Abraham, Noah, and Joseph. Some surahs are commonly known by two names, such as Q 17, called “Night Journey” (al-Isrā) and “Israelites” (Banū Isrā‘īl).

4. Revelation of the Quran

Muslim scholars devote a great deal of attention to how, when, and where the Quran was revealed. The authority of the Quran is predicated upon its status as a revealed text, and the interpretation of the Quran is closely related to the specific circumstances of its revelation. Q 2:185 states that it was during the month of Ramaḍān that the Quran was revealed, and Q 97:1 states that it was revealed on the Night of Fate (laylat al-qadr). Muslim scholars attempt to reconcile this with Q 25:32, that the Quran was revealed in parts, applying to certain contexts over an extended period of time during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad.

In his study of the Quran, al-Suyūṭī outlines three positions regarding how the Quran was revealed, all of them beginning with the assumption that the Quran was taken from the “preserved tablet” in heaven. The first opinion is that the text of the Quran was sent down into the earthly heavens during the Night of Fate and was then revealed in portions over a number of decades. The second opinion is that the text of the Quran was sent down into the earthly heavens on different Nights of Fate during a period of decades and that these portions were revealed throughout the year in which they had been sent down. The third opinion is that the text of the Quran was first revealed on the Night of Fate, but after the initial revelation, it was revealed in portions at various times during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad.

According to a report preserved in the ḥadīth collection of Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī (d. 892), the Quran was sent down as a single whole into the earthly heavens to

a place known as the “House of al-‘Izzah”, where it was memorized by Gabriel, who then communicated it in portions to the prophet Muhammad (Tirmidhī 1937, p. 11). Muslim scholars explain that only the Quran was revealed in portions, whereas earlier scriptures were revealed all at once to the prophets. Ibn Furak relates that the Torah was revealed as a single text because Moses could read and write, but the prophet Muhammad was given the Quran in pieces so that he could memorize it (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 124). Other scholars claim that the Quran was revealed in pieces because parts of it abrogated parts that had been revealed earlier and because the Quran was revealed in response to problems and questions posed to the prophet Muhammad in the development of his community.

Some scholars maintain that the prophet Muhammad was elevated to a special position in order to take possession of the Quran, but other scholars hold that the angel Gabriel was lowered so that he could communicate the Quran to humanity through the prophet Muhammad. Muslim scholars debate whether the Quran is a verbatim copy of the preserved tablet in heaven, if the content of the preserved tablet was translated into Arabic by Gabriel for the prophet Muhammad, or if Gabriel brought to the prophet Muhammad the meaning of the preserved tablet but not its contents word for word (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 119–20). In his introduction to the Quran, Mohammad Abu-Hamdiyyah underlines that the revelation directed the prophet Muhammad and those who would hear the Quran from him to use their human reason as a means of comprehending the message (Abu-Hamdiyyah 2000). Nawas b. Saman relates that the revelation was like an earthquake that shook the heavens, and Ibn Mas‘ūd, a well-known follower of the prophet Muhammad, reports that the sound of God making a revelation was like a chain over rocks. According to Abū al-Ma‘ālī ‘Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), some of what God communicated to the prophet Muhammad through Gabriel was in the form of commandments, and, although the principles were communicated directly, the actual words used by God and Gabriel might not have been identical. According to a report given on the authority of al-Sha‘bī, before Gabriel, the angel Israfil was sent to the prophet Muhammad for a period of three years, teaching him words and things not in his own language (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 119–20).

Some surahs are considered to have been revealed all at one time or multiple times during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad. Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn al-Naqīb relate that parts of the Quran were revealed with the special protection of multiple angels.

Parts of the Quran were revealed with attachments. Surah al-An‘ām [Q 6] had attached to it seventy thousand angels. The Fātiḥah [Q 1] was revealed with eighty thousand angels. The “Throne Verse” (Q 2:255) was revealed with thirty thousand angels. Surah Yā-Sīn [Q 36] was revealed with thirty thousand angels. Surah al-Zukhruf [Q 43]: “Ask about those we sent before you”, was revealed with twenty thousand angels. The rest of the Quran was revealed by Gabriel alone (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 234).

It is related, on the authority of Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, that there were always four angels with Gabriel when he brought parts of the Quran to the prophet Muhammad. A report given on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās states that Q 6 was revealed in Mecca all in one night, with seventy thousand angels surrounding it. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib relates that, except for Q 6, the rest of the Quran was revealed in portions of five verses at a time to the prophet Muhammad. According to Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhawī (d. 1497), the Fātiḥah (Q 1) was revealed two times, which accounts for the different readings of certain words in the verses. Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) maintains that Q 17:85 is a verse that was revealed multiple times (Ibn Kathīr 2006), and al-Zarkashī explains that certain verses and surahs were repeated because they were applicable to more than one set of circumstances in the life of the prophet Muhammad (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 119–20; Zarkashī 1994, pp. 123–35). Additionally, al-Zarkashī provides an extensive list of all the verses that are repeated in the text of the Quran (Zarkashī 1994, pp. 202–41).

In most cases, the revelation of the Quran is said to coincide with the prophet Muhammad’s institution of the belief or practice it is supposed to institute. In some cases, however, the revelation of the Quran comes after or before the belief or practice of the ruling it

supports. Ibn al-Ḥiṣṣār relates that the obligation to perform ablution before prayer and other ritual practices was fixed before the revelation of the verses requiring it (Q 5:6). According to Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066), the verses requiring the paying of *zakāt* (Q 87:14–15) were revealed in Mecca, but the obligation to follow this practice was not established by the prophet Muhammad until he was in Medina (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 116). Other verses are considered to predict events that were to occur subsequent to their revelation rather than describing events that had passed. In his *Jāmi‘ li-l-aḥkām al-Qur‘ān*, Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī (d. 1271) explains that Q 38:11 foretells the victory of the prophet Muhammad at the Battle of Badr (Qurṭubī 1985). A report given on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd relates that Q 17:81 and Q 34:49 predicted the prophet Muhammad’s conquest of Mecca and the cleansing of the idols from the Ka‘bah (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 116–18).

In the standard editions of the printed Quran, each of the surahs is labeled as “Meccan” or “Medinan”, and Muslim scholars have different explanations for what these designations signify. Some, such as Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1148), hold that “Meccan” refers to surahs that were revealed while the prophet Muhammad was in and around Mecca while “Medinan” refers to surahs revealed in and around Medina. Others maintain that the Meccan surahs are those revealed before the *Hijrah*, before the prophet Muhammad left Mecca for Medina, and the Medinan surahs were revealed after the *Hijrah*. A third opinion is that the Meccan surahs were addressed to the people of Mecca and the Medinan surahs were addressed to the people of Medina (Zarkashī 1994, pp. 202–85). More specific delineations, such as that outlined by Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad in his *Kitāb al-tanbīh ‘alā faḍl ‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, are also found.

One of the best disciplines of Quranic Studies is knowledge of the revelation and its sequence, the order in which it was revealed in Mecca and Medina, what was revealed in Mecca but implemented in Medina or revealed in Medina and implemented in Mecca, what was revealed in Mecca for the people of Medina or revealed in Medina for the people of Mecca, that which resembles Meccan revelations in the Medinan ones and that which resembles Medinan revelations in the Meccan ones, what was revealed in al-Juhfah, what was revealed in Jerusalem, what was revealed in Ta‘if, what was revealed in al-Hudabayah, what was revealed in the night and day, what was revealed in groups or alone, Medinan verses in Meccan surahs, Meccan verses in Medinan surahs, what was carried from Mecca to Medina, what was carried from Medina to Mecca, what was carried from Medina to Ethiopia, what was revealed with ambiguity, what was revealed fully explained, and that about which there is disagreement: some say Medinan and some say Meccan (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 25).

A number of scholars refer to a ḥadīth report in which the prophet of God says: “The Quran was revealed in three locations: Mecca, Medina, and Syria”. Some scholars interpret “Syria” as meaning Jerusalem and referring to the prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey (al-Isrā) and Ascension (al-Mi‘rāj), during which he traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 25–55; von Denffer 1994, pp. 85–89).

A number of Muslim scholars also discuss that some of the Quran appears to have been revealed “on the tongue” of the followers of the prophet Muhammad. In his collection of ḥadīth reports, al-Tirmidhī cites a ḥadīth report in which the prophet Muhammad states that God put the truth into the mouth of his follower ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 110; Tirmidhī 1937, p. 3683). Ibn Mardawayh relates, on the authority of Mujāhid, that ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb used to make judgments and the Quran was revealed to him. In a ḥadīth report cited by al-Bukhārī, there are three verses which are said to have been revealed to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, including Q 2:125 and Q 66:5 (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 110; Bukhārī 1981, p. 4213). Other verses, said to have been revealed to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, include Q 23:12–14 and Q 2:98, and yet other verses are associated with other followers of the prophet Muhammad, including his wife ‘Ā’ishah and followers who are only mentioned anonymously. Muslim scholars also list verses such as Q 6:104 and 114, which are the words

of the prophet Muhammad, Q 19:64, which are the words of Gabriel, and Q 37:164–166, which are the words of angels rather than the words of God (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 112).

5. History of the Text of the Quran

The collection of the text of the Quran is said to have occurred in three stages: in the time of the prophet Muhammad, in the time of Abū Bakr, and in the time of ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān.

According to many Muslim scholars, the prophet Muhammad received different portions of the Quran, but, at the time of his death, these revelations had not been collected or edited into a single text. In his collection of ḥadīth reports, Muslim scholars cite a ḥadīth report in which the prophet Muhammad instructs his followers not to write down anything from him except for the Quran. There are traditions, however, that several of the followers of the prophet Muhammad had collected and made compilations of the revelations, including his wife ‘Ā’ishah and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. It is reported that the prophet Muhammad recited the revelations he received to his followers, who memorized what they heard and wrote it down on parchment, rocks, palm-stalks, pieces of skin, bones, and wood. Scholars differ in their views concerning how well organized this collection of the prophet Muhammad’s recitations was. Some, such as al-Baghawī, state that the prophet Muhammad told his followers exactly how to compile the verses and surahs they had collected from his recitations (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 427–44; Zarkashī 1994, pp. 326–33; von Denffer 1994, pp. 31–45). In his *al-Intiṣār*, the Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) relates that the order of the verses was stipulated by Gabriel, who used to give instructions as to where particular verses were to be placed (Bāqillānī 2001).

During his caliphate, Abū Bakr is reported to have become concerned with the loss of the Quran when a number of the prophet Muhammad’s followers who had memorized the Quran died in the battle of Yamamah (Bukhārī 1981, p. 4702; Suyūṭī 1996, p. 187). Ibn al-Ṭīn explains that Abū Bakr did not edit the Quran but merely ordered that it be copied from all that was preserved to a single collection. According to al-Bāqillānī, the caliph Abū Bakr only intended to establish which recitations were from the prophet Muhammad and to remove those which were not from him. Ḥārith al-Muḥasibī claims that Abū Bakr assembled the Quran from the deposit of paper found in the house of the prophet Muhammad in which the Quran was kept, binding together what was found there into a single collection of pages. Others, such as Hishām b. ‘Urwah, report that Abū Bakr ordered Zayd b. Thābit to collect the Quran from all of those people who had memorized and written down portions of it from the recitations of the prophet Muhammad (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 427–44; Zarkashī 1994, pp. 326–33).

The codification of the Quran into a single, standardized text is attributed to the third caliph ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān. Anas b. Mālik relates that ‘Uthmān ordered Zayd b. Thābit, ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr, Sa‘īd b. al-‘Āṣ and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥārith to copy the pages of what was preserved of the recitations of the prophet Muhammad into a codex. A number of scholars maintain that no verse was to be included in the codex except that for which there were two witnesses, meaning something memorized and something written. There are some verses, such as Q 9:128–129, which are said to have had only one witness but were included in the final codex, and other verses which were left out, such as the so-called “Stoning Verse”, attested only by ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. ‘Uthmān is also credited with commissioning official copies of this codex to be sent to each of the provinces (Mecca, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Basrah, Kufah, and Medina) and ordering the destruction of all the variant versions of the Quran (Zarkashī 1994, p. 334).

According to Anas b. Mālik, ‘Uthmān ordered Zayd b. Thābit and the other editors of the Quran to write the Quran in the dialect of the Quraysh tribe of Mecca because it was supposed to have been revealed to the prophet Muhammad in that dialect. Other scholars, however, maintain that the Quran was revealed in seven different dialects, including that of the Quraysh, Hudhayl, Tamīm, al-Azd, Rabi‘ah, Hawazīn, and Sa‘īd b. Bakr. Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 838) is reported to have explained that not every word in the Quran

was revealed in seven different dialects but that the Quran contains all seven dialects within it. A number of traditions exist concerning the foreign words found in the Quran, including Ḥimyaritic Arabic, Omani Arabic, Nabataean, Persian, Ethiopian, Hebrew, Indian, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac words. According to al-Ṭabarī, this only demonstrates that Arabic has some loan words from other languages, that other languages borrowed from Arabic, or that Arabic shares cognates with other languages. According to al-Suyūāī, if Arabic was the original language from which all other languages developed, then all of these words would be Arabic words in their origins (Suyūāī 1996, pp. 427–44; Zarkashī 1994, pp. 305–19, 378–87).

In addition to fixing the language of the text, the version commissioned by ʿUthmān is supposed to have established the script, but various scholars debate what is meant by the ḥadīth report that the Quran was revealed in seven parts (aḥraf). Some scholars maintain that this refers to the seven different versions of reciting the Quran. Ibn Qutaybah relates that this refers to the variants in the text of the Quran, including vowel changes (Q 2:283), verb changes (Q 34:19), changes in pointing (Q 2:259), letter changes (Q 56:29), word order changes (Q 50:19), something added or removed (Q 92:3), and where one word is used for another (Q 101:5). Legal scholars claim that this refers to seven types of meaning in the Quran: restricted and unrestricted, general and specific, textual and non-textual, abrogating and abrogated, ambiguous and explained, excepted and apportioned. Sufis claim that it refers to seven types of worship mentioned in the Quran: asceticism, moderation with certainty and resolve, service with life and honor, issuing legal judgments with insight and reasoning, control with fear and politeness, supplication and asking for forgiveness with mercy and thanks, patience with consideration and love, and joy with witnessing (Suyūāī 1996, pp. 250–58; von Denffer 1994, p. 37).

Along with a full study of the contents of the Quran, Muslim scholars preserve reports about parts of the Quran that were omitted from the text, lost, forgotten, or otherwise not included in the standardized text. Jurists cite two verses that, although missing from the text of the Quran, are still considered to have legal weight: the verse requiring stoning as a punishment for adultery, and the verse stating that ten or five periods of nursing establish a maternal relationship between a child and its wet-nurse. A report cites Ibn ʿUmar as saying that people should not claim they have memorized all of the Quran but only what is extant, for “all of it is not known, and much of the Quran has been lost” (Suyūāī 1996, p. 281). A number of traditions refer to the much longer length of several surahs, known by memory or in variant codices such as that of ʿĀʾishah, including Q 33, which is said to have contained more than 200 verses although the extant surah in the standard codex is only 73 verses. Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī recites a verse from a surah of more than 100 verses, which was “recalled” or taken back by God, and al-Ḥusayn b. al-Munādī reports that two surahs not found in the standard codex, called al-Khalʿ and al-Ḥafd, were memorized by some of the followers of the prophet Muhammad (Suyūāī 1996, pp. 280–81). Imāmī Shiʿī sources catalogue a number of verses they claim were altered or removed from the text codified by ʿUthmān, and Shiʿī Quran manuscripts are extant with verses and surahs not found in the standardized collection attributed to ʿUthmān (Ibn Shahrāshūb n.d.; de Tassy 1842; Tisdall 1913; Kazem-Beg 1843).²

6. The Quran in Relation to Other Revealed Scriptures

The Quran is clear about the requirement for people to believe in the text of the revelation and the prophets responsible for bringing revelation to humanity. A number of verses establish the relationship among the prophets and the scriptures with which they are associated.

Q 4:136. You who believe: Believe in God, his messenger, the book which he revealed to his messenger, and the books which he revealed previously. If a person rejects God, his angels, his books, his messengers, and the Last Day, he has gone far astray.

Q 1:136. Say: We believe in God, what was revealed to us, what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes, what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what

was given to the prophets from their lord without distinction among them. We are those who submit to him.

Q 3:84. Say: We believe in God and what was revealed to us, that which was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes, what Moses, Jesus, and the prophets brought from their lord without making a distinction among one of them. We submit to him.

Q 42:13. He (Prophet Muhammad) legislated for you the religion which he bequeathed to Noah. What we revealed to you is what we bequeathed to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Establish religion and do not make distinctions within it. Serious is that which you make incumbent upon those who associate other things with God. God chooses what he wants and guides those who repent.

According to a ḥadīth report preserved in the collection of Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 965), Abū Dharr asked the prophet Muhammad how many scriptures God had revealed to humanity, and the prophet Muhammad replied that scriptures had been revealed to Adam, Seth, Idris (or Enoch), Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad (Ibn Ḥibbān 1984).

The scriptures revealed to Adam, Seth, and Idris are the “first scriptures” (al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā) mentioned in Q 87:18 according to Muslim exegesis. In his commentary on this verse, al-Ṭabarī explains that all the knowledge of all the people on the earth was collected together in 30 scrolls and given to Seth and Idris. According to Q 26:196, the “scriptures of the first ones” (zabur al-awwalīn) contain the same revelation found in the Quran. Q 80:13 states that the revelation given to the prophet Muhammad was preserved in “honored scriptures” (ṣuḥuf mukarramah) and Q 98:2 refers to the “Apostle from God” reciting the “pure scriptures” (ṣuḥuf muṭahharah). Citing Q 2:62, Fazlur Rahman shows how the pluralistic position of the Quran requires an inclusive view of other religious traditions and their scriptures (Rahman 1994). In his study of how the Quran portrays itself through the use of key terminology relating to “writing” and “books”, Daniel Madigan stresses that the Quran is not a “closed” text but one that continues to respond to the needs of the human community (Madigan 2001).

The Psalms are said to have been revealed to David. Q 4:163 and 17:55 both state that God gave the Psalms to David.

Q 4:163. We revealed to you just as we revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon. To David, we gave the Psalms.

Q 17:55. Your Lord is most knowledgeable about what is in the heavens and the earth. We caused some of the prophets to be better than others. We gave Psalms to David.

According to a tradition preserved by al-Suyūṭī, some versions of the Quran replaced the term “Psalms” (zabūr) with “Quran” in Q 4:163. Some scholars maintain that *zabūr* is one of the names of the Quran on the basis of this verse and, based on the identity of the revelation contained in the Quran and in the Psalms, given to David. The Quran also quotes from Psalms in Q 21:105.

Q 21:105. We have already written in the Psalms (al-zabūr), after the reminder (al-dhikr): “My servants, the upright, shall inherit the land”.

Hava Lazarus-Yafeh and others have shown that this should be considered to be a citation of Psalm 73:29 (Lazarus-Yafeh 1992, p. 77; de Goeje 1897, pp. 179–85).

Psalm 73:29. The righteous (ṣādiqīm) shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever.

According to Muslim exegesis, the “reminder” in Q 21:105 is the Torah or a generic reference to any of the other books that were sent down to the prophets, all of which contain the same revelation.

The Quran also mentions the Torah and the Gospel as revealed scripture and often equates them with the revelation given to the prophet Muhammad. Q 3:3–4 refers to the Quran, along with the Torah and Gospel, as scripture in which people are expected to believe.

Q 3:3–4. He revealed to you the book in truth, confirming that which is in his hands. He revealed the Torah and the Gospel before as a guide to people. He revealed the Furqan.

Those who reject the signs of God, to them is a severe punishment. God is Mighty, Lord of Retribution.

A similar concept is found in Q 48:29.

Q 48:29. Muhammad is the messenger of God. Those who are with him are stronger than the disbelievers, compassionate among one another. You will see them bow and prostrate themselves, seeking the grace of God, pleasure. Marked on their faces are the traces of the prostration. This is their example in the Torah. Their example in the Gospel is like a seed which sprouts its blade, then strengthens it, becomes thick, and stands on its own, being a wonder and delight to the sower. It fills the unbelievers with rage at them. God promised those from among them who believe and act upright forgiveness and a supreme reward.

In his commentary on Q 9:111, Ibn Kathīr explains that God revealed the Torah to Moses, the Gospel to Jesus, and the Quran to Muhammad in all of these books, making a promise in all of these books that those who strive to do God's will on earth will enter paradise (Ibn Kathīr 2006).

In other places, the Quran seems to chide those who do not follow what is contained in the Torah.

Q 62:5. The example of those who carry the Torah but who do not carry out its obligations is like a donkey which carries scripture. Evil is the example of the people who reject the signs of God. God does not guide the people who are tyrannical.

The Arabic word for "sign" is also the word used for "verse" (ayah) in the Quran and other scripture, and Muslim exegesis explains that these earlier scriptures, like the Quran, are revealed signs from God. Q 7:157 states that the prophet Muhammad is foretold in the Bible and that the message he brings is a relief from the heavy obligations imposed in earlier revealed scriptures.

Q 7:157. Those who follow the apostle, the gentile prophet whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Gospel. He commands the good and forbids the wrong. He allows them the good things and forbids them what is bad. He releases them of their heavy burdens and the yokes that are upon them. Those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him, they are the ones who will prosper.

According to Muslim exegetes like Abū al-Layth Naṣr b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (d. 983) and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), the "heavy burdens and yokes" refers to the commandments made incumbent upon the Israelites in the revelation of the Torah (Samarqandi 1993; Ibn al-Jawzī 2001). As James Kugel and Rowan Greer point out in their analysis of Matthew 11:28–30, Muslim exegesis maintains that with the Quran, God provides a continuation and fulfillment of earlier revealed scripture (James and Greer 1986, pp. 124–54).

Muslims are instructed not to make distinctions among scriptures and within scriptural traditions. For example, ḥadīth reports from the prophet Muhammad maintain that certain parts of the Quran are unique and had not been revealed before.

The prophet Muhammad said: "Do you know a surah the like of which was not revealed in the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, or the Furqan?" I said: "No". He said: "Say: He is the one God" and "Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn" (1113:1), and "Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the People" (114:1).

Roberto Tottoli demonstrates how the contents of earlier scriptures are essential to the message of the Quran and the prophethood of Muhammad (Tottoli 2002). It is evident that some Muslim scholars found it possible to derive belief and practice from scriptures revealed before the Quran, but many Muslim scholars maintain that earlier scriptures are superseded by the revelation of the Quran. 'Alī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) holds that all people should follow the Quran since it contains from earlier revealed scriptures all that is necessary to determine correct belief and practice (Ibn Ḥazm 2016, pp. 287–329). Earlier scripture, while revealed, is irrelevant and can be misleading if not interpreted in light of the more recent revelation contained in the text of the Quran.

Muslim study of the Bible and other scriptures is not uncommon in the history of Islamic civilization, as is the comparative study of other religious traditions. Much of this scholarship focuses on highlighting how the Bible can be interpreted as being consistent with the Quran. In his *Dalā'il al-nubūwah*, al-Bayhaqī identifies biblical passages such as those found in Isaiah, often used by Christian exegetes in reference to Jesus, as referring to the prophet Muhammad (Bayhaqī 1405, pp. 276–377; Rubin 1995, pp. 30–31). Muslim scholars also engage in textual criticism of the Bible, with particular attention to the purposeful or accidental alteration of the text that is sometimes related to the allegation that Jews and Christians “altered” the Bible by misinterpreting the revelation contained within the text. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153) explains that this textual criticism includes attention both to alteration of the text (*taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*) and alteration of the meaning (*taḥrīf al-ma‘anī*) of the text (Shahrastānī 1986, p. 212). Most common, especially in classical Muslim scholarship, disputes over the correspondence of the Quran and Bible revolve not around missing content but a question of how the agreed-upon content is to be interpreted.

7. Muslim Study of the Quran

Muslim scholarship and the Islamic sciences focus on the Quran as the primary source of knowledge. The text of the Quran is studied as an example of the Arabic language, as the basis for theology, and for knowledge of the revelation from which Islamic law is derived. Muslim “Quranic Studies” (*‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*) is a discipline that focuses on all aspects of the study of the Quran, including a number of sub-disciplines such as Quran interpretation, which occupy a major portion of the overall Islamic sciences. In general, Muslim scholarship on the Quran can be divided into three main areas: the character and virtues of the Quran, the Quran as a ritual object, and the exegesis of the Quran as scripture.

Fadail. Muslim scholarship preserves a number of traditions from the prophet Muhammad and his companions concerning the special character of the Quran. These virtues of the Quran (*faḍā'il al-Qur’ān*) are related both to the uniqueness of the Quran as an uncreated revealed text and to the effects the Quran is supposed to have on those who revere it as scripture.

Muslim scholars refer to the special character of the Quran as *i‘jāz* or the “inimitability” of the Quran. According to the Imamī Shi‘ī scholar al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim al-Mūsawī al-Khū‘ī (d. 1992), *i‘jāz* includes that the Quran is a miracle performed by the prophet Muhammad and that the Quran contains knowledge, both hidden and manifest, concerning correct belief and practice (Khū‘ī 1998, pp. 39–68). In his *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, al-Isfahānī states that *i‘jāz* refers to the miracle of the Quran itself and to the unique character of the message it contains (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 1009). In Muslim theological circles, the *i‘jāz* of the Quran is held to include that the Quran revealed to the prophet Muhammad is a copy of a pre-existent book, called “mother of the book” (*umm al-kitāb*) and “preserved tablet” [*lawḥ mahfūl*], that is regarded as being uncreated and co-eternal with God (Madelung 1985, pp. 503–25).

The unique character of the Quran is closely tied to the authority of the prophethood of Muhammad as proof of Muhammad’s prophetic character. According to al-Suyūṭī, the miracle of Moses was the magic he performed, and the miracle of Jesus was the healing he performed, but, in the time of Muhammad, proof of divine inspiration was the clarity of expression in Arabic (*faṣāḥah*) (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 1008). Toufic Fahd explains that the verses of the Quran surpassed in form and superseded in content the rhymed prose (*saj‘*) used in divination by the pre-Islamic *kāhin* and other cult figures (Fahd 1966). In his *Mabāḥith fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, the modern Quran scholar Mannā‘ al-Qaṭṭān cites Muḥammad Rashīd Ridā (d. 1935) on the importance of distinguishing the language of the Quran from non-revealed poetry (Qaṭṭān 1996, pp. 29–30). In his *I‘jāz al-Qur’ān*, al-Bāqillānī explains that the miracle of the Quran is that, unlike earlier scriptures, its contents are designed to last and be relevant until the end of time and, thus, cannot be improved upon and do not need to be repeated (Bāqillānī 1993).

Muslim scholarship collects and preserves a number of traditions that go back to the prophet Muhammad and his followers regarding the miraculous effect of the Quran upon those who revere the Quran. Many of these traditions concern the ability of the Quran to protect people from harm and to heal them from sickness. Memorizing the Quran is said to make one's skin impervious to fire; reciting the Quran causes God to send special angels for protection, and those who recite the Quran become like prophets and angels. In his *al-Tibyān fī ādāb ḥamalāh al-Qurʿān*, Abū Zakarīyā Yaḥyā' b. Sharaf al-Nawawī reports, on the authority of the prophet Muhammad's wife 'Ā'ishah, that whenever the Prophet became sick, he would recite Q 113 and Q 114, spitting into his hands and then rubbing his hands over the length of his body (Nawawī 1996).

Other traditions concern the ability of the Quran to intercede on behalf of people at the Day of Judgment. According to a report, given on the authority of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, in the ḥadīth collections of al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah (d. 887) and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), if a person reads and follows the Quran, then God will cause him to enter Paradise and he can intercede for ten members of his household (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 1117). In his *Mu'jam*, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 971) reports, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, that if a person learns the book of God and follows what is in it, then God will guide him away from being misled and preserve him on the Day of Resurrection (Suyūṭī 1996, p. 1118). The recitation of the Quran is also supposed to provide protection from Satan. Q 2 and Q 3, the longest surahs in the Quran, are singled out by the prophet Muhammad and are said to appear in physical form on the Day of Resurrection at the side of those people who lived according to the verses in these surahs (Suyūṭī 1996, pp. 1121–22). Wilfred Cantwell Smith has remarked that the Muslim conception of the Quran as being uncreated, healing the sick, and interceding on behalf of its followers on Judgment Day coincides closely with the Christian conception of Jesus (Smith 1993, pp. 65–91).

Ritual object. The Quran as a physical object and as a liturgical text is central to Muslim ritual practice. Muslim jurists stipulate that a portion of the Quran is to be recited as a part of regular ritual prayers, and many Muslims recite the "Fātiḥah" (Q1), the short first surah of the Quran, as a part of prayer. The recitation of the Quran is also stipulated for special prayers, such as those performed at funerals, and at the two annual holidays of 'Eid al-Fiṭr and 'Eid al-Aḍḥā. It is also customary for the entire text of the Quran to be recited during the month of Ramaḍān since it is during this month that the Quran is said to have been first revealed to the prophet Muhammad.

Muslim scholarship outlines in great detail the specialized training required for proper recitation of the Quran. The rules for the practice of recitation, often called *tajwīd*, are concerned with pronunciation of the text of the Quran according to seven standardized readings, as articulated by Abū Bakr b. Mujāhid (d. 936). Other Muslim scholars such as Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 1429) refer to ten readings, and others mention fourteen authoritative readings, all of which are said to go back to the prophet Muhammad's recitation of the Quran (Goldziher [1920] 1970). This training includes the assimilation of consonantal sounds, the articulation of vowels, types of pauses, and the use of breaks and repetition in reciting the text. There are also a series of rules pertaining to the comportment of the reciter, including customary prostration (*sajdah*) performed at fourteen places in the Quran (Q 7:206, 13:15, 16:49–50, 17:107, 19:58, 22:18, 23:60, 27:25–26, 32:15, 38:24–25, 41:38, 53:62, 84:20–21, 96:19).

Physical copies of the Quran are regarded as sacred objects and, as such, are to be produced, stored, handled, and disposed of only under certain conditions. In his book on the handling of the Quran, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 1277) discusses issues such as adding to or deleting a letter or word from the Quran, how to write a Quran codex, on what material a codex can be written, how to preserve the codex, and how to travel with a Quran. Basic to the rules of handling a Quran codex is that the person must be ritually pure, having performed the ablution (*wuḍū'*) or washing (*ghusl*) required for the performance of other rituals, as stipulated in Islamic law. According to al-Nawawī and other scholars, it is forbidden for an impure person to touch or carry a Quran unless there is something

protecting the Quran from contact with the person. Following this same principle, it is forbidden for a non-Muslim to touch a Quran, and some scholars maintain that a Quran cannot be sold, nor can it be owned by a non-Muslim. The disposal of physical copies of the Quran, including pieces of clothing and food on which verses from the Quran are written, is also regulated by certain rules designed to safeguard the sacred character of the revelation.

Josef Meri points out a number of ways Muslims use the Quran as a talisman and amulet (Meri 2002, pp. 484–98). Ibn Taymīyah reports that some people use the Quran to predict the future (faḥ al-fa‘l), and verses from the Quran are engraved on the inside of cups and bowls to protect those who eat and drink from them (Ibn Taymīyah 1998). Verses from the Quran written on small pieces of paper or cloth are packaged or wrapped in metal, cloth, leather, or even paper and worn on a person as an amulet to provide protection from harm and sickness. It is also reported that verses from the Quran that are written out and then dissolved in water or earth can be consumed or rubbed on the body to provide healing and protection. Many of these practices are described by Edward Lane, Edward Westermarck, and Ja‘far Sharif (Lane 1890; Westermarck 1933; Sharif [1921] 1972). Quran shirts, on which all or part of the Quran is written, are widely attested through Islamic history and were often worn in battle to provide protection from harm.

Exegesis. Muslim interpretation of the Quran can be divided into three main approaches that are often distinct but overlapping: systematic interpretation (tafsīr), legal interpretation (takhrīj), and esoteric interpretation (ta‘wīl).

Systematic interpretation, which constitutes the largest and most popular approach to the interpretation of the Quran, proceeds seriatim and sequentially, often verse by verse or word by word, through the text of the Quran from beginning to end, following the standard order of the text. Although interpretive styles developed at different times and places in Islam history, this type of interpretation commonly includes glosses on certain words, narratives providing details to the context and content of the verses, listings of variant readings, comments on the syntax and morphology of the text, and some indication of what was happening to the prophet Muhammad at the time he received the revelation of the surah or verses. Characteristic of this “classical” style of exegesis is the attempt to explicate the text of the Quran by citing ḥadīth reports with full chains of transmission, going back to the prophet Muhammad and his followers. In addition, exegetes relied upon oral and written traditions from outside, often from Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Bible and from the Bible and biblical literature more broadly defined.

The most famous of these classical Sunnī exegetes include Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597), ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā’ Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), and al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505). Imāmī Shi‘ī scholars also produced Quran commentaries according to this classical style, stressing traditions from the Shi‘ī Imams in addition to reports from the prophet Muhammad and his other followers (Bar-Asher 1999). The best known Shi‘ī exegetes include ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 937), Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), ‘Abū ‘Alī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1153), Muḥammad b. al-Murtaḍā al-Kāshānī (d. after 1680), and Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (d. 1982).

This type of interpretation tends to concentrate on the narrative components of the Quran, which largely means the stories of the prophets, all of whom, according to Muslim exegesis, are also mentioned in the Bible. Some of the best-known exegetes also produced separate works focusing on the stories of the prophets, in which passages from the Quran and their interpretation were structured according to the historical chronology of the narrative rather than the order in which they occurred in the text of the Quran. This includes works by al-Tha‘labī (d. 1035) and Ibn Kathīr. This prophet-by-prophet structure allowed for a continuous and more accessible narrative that was closely connected with sermons and popular Quran interpretation (Wheeler 2002). These stories from the Quran were the basis of pre-Islamic history leading up to the prophethood of Muhammad and are one of the most popular genres for illustration.

Like systematic interpretation, legal interpretation proceeds according to the order and structure of the Quran but only comments on those verses which have relevance to legal issues. Legal interpretation is more interested in the context of when and where certain verses were revealed: what question was the prophet Muhammad being asked or what was happening in his society, to which a particular revelation applied. Legal interpretation is about extracting general principles from these concrete situations mentioned in the Quran, and, therefore, legal exegetes emphasize information about the referents in the text and how different verses addressing similar legal issues are to be related in the context of when they were revealed. The most famous of legal commentaries include that of al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 981), Ilkiyā al-Harrāsī (d. 1110), Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1148), and al-Qurāubī (d. 1271).

Esoteric interpretation is found within the more exoteric works of classical systematic interpretation, but some scholars wrote works (or had works transmitted from them by their students) that focused exclusively on the esoteric meaning of the revelation. Some of these works are not extant separate from larger collections or are unknown outside of references to the works and brief extracts from them, such as the esoteric Quran interpretations of the Fifth Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. Claude Gilliot records that the lost work of Ibn Masarrāh is said to have consisted of 66 volumes through Q 18:53. These works often do not comment on the whole text of the Quran but are characterized by their focus upon particular surahs, themes, or even single phrases in the Quran (Gilliot n.d.). This includes the two extant commentaries attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240), the commentary of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274) on the first surah, and the commentary of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1428) on the *basmalah* in the Quran. Helmut Gätje explains that esoteric interpretation is characterized by distinguishing between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*) meaning of the text, which often includes attention to symbolism, allegory, and the numerology of the Arabic alphabet (*jafr*) (Gätje 2000). Other important works include esoteric comments on the Quran such as the *Risālah al-qushayrīyah* of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), the *‘Arā’is al-bayān fi ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān* of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī (d. 1209), the *Fawātiḥ al-ilāhīyah wa al-mafātiḥ al-ghaybīyah* of al-Nakhjuwānī (d. 1514), and the *Baḥr al-madīd fi tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd* of Ibn ‘Ajībāh (d. 1809).

8. Conclusions

As scripture, the Quran contains the revelation sent down to the prophet Muhammad, which is to be interpreted as a source for determining belief and practice. To be authoritative, however, the Quran cannot be interpreted apart from the historical context in which it was revealed, as provided by Muslim Quran scholarship. To understand the practical relevance of the Quran, it is necessary to know the sequence of how different parts of the Quran were revealed and to what contexts these parts were applied by the prophet Muhammad. Muslim Quran scholars emphasize the requirements of knowing the language of the text, how it was recorded and written, the details of its compilation, and its character as revelation.

Muslim jurists maintain that knowledge of the specifics of how the text of the Quran was revealed and recorded is essential for the legal interpretation of the Quran and its application to changing circumstances. Knowledge of historical and philological detail is indispensable to induce more general principles from the specific rulings and cases preserved in how the prophet Muhammad applied revelation to the particular issues of the time and place he lived. From these general principles can be deduced legal opinions applicable to contemporary situations, making the historical text of the Quran relevant to novel circumstances. To discern these general principles and apparent contradictions among them requires knowing which parts of the Quran were revealed when, to whom, and to what sort of conditions. Was the verse designed to establish a general principle to be applied indefinitely in unrestricted circumstances, or is the principle intended only for one specific time and place or even a single person?

In addition, it is important to recognize that the Quran is not only or even primarily regarded as a container of meaning but as a source of God’s word to be recited in ritual

contexts and that the Quran itself is a sacred object to be treated according to special rules. The Quran, for Muslims, symbolizes both the separation and the reunion of God and humanity. It is, like Jesus for Christians, how God allows humanity to grasp what is beyond their fallen nature. The contents of the Quran provide a narrative account of how humanity became separated from God but also how God has made possible the return of humanity to its original state. It is part of a long history of revelations to different people through various prophets, and, thus, the Quran can only be understood in relation to its place in the history of God's revelation to humanity, through the Bible, earlier prophets like Moses, Jesus, and Abraham, and through the ancient history of religions. This embedded character of the Quran demands further historical, conceptual, and comparative study of the text, its relation to other texts and traditions, and its role in the origins of human culture. The Quran is a text and an object that can be and has been used in different ways to build communities, support destructive violence, and create opportunities for dialogue, pluralism, and attain new heights of human achievement.

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Notes

¹ Notable exceptions include Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1993) and Arthur Jeffrey (1952).

² Ibn Shahrāshūb, "Mathālib al-nawāqib", ms. Nāṣiriyyah Library, Lucknow, fol. 43a and his *Faḍl al-khiṭāb fī ta'rif al-kitāb* (Tehran: Lithograph, n.d.), 156-157 both cited in Moezzi, 205n468. On the Sūrah al-Nūrayn, see Garcin de Tassy, "Chapitre inconnu du Coran," *Journal Asiatique* 13 (May 1842): 431-439 and Mirzā Alexandre Kazem-Beg, "Observations de Mirzā Alexandre Kazem-Beg, professeur de langues orientales à l'Université de Casa, sur le Chapitre inconnu du Coran," *Journal Asiatique* 14 (1843): 373-429; St. Clair Tisdall, "Shi'ah additions to the Koran," *Moslem World* 3.3 (July 1913): 227-241.

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