

**The Quran as a Literary Masterpiece
within its Historical and Religious Milieus**

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Contents

1	Preliminary Notes	v
2	Introduction.....	1
2.1	Methodology	7
3	Placing the Text in History.....	11
3.1	The Traditional Account from Arabic Sources.....	13
3.1.1	Objections to the Traditional Account.....	15
3.1.2	Opposing Narratives	17
3.2	Earliest Manuscripts	20
3.3	Conclusion.....	25
4	The Religious Milieu	28
4.1	Mecca	30
4.2	Jews	32
4.3	Christians	33
4.4	Polytheists.....	35
4.5	<i>Ḥunafā'</i>	37
4.6	Expectation of a new prophet.....	39
4.7	Conclusion.....	41
5	Literary Devices.....	43
5.1	<i>Ḥadhf</i> : Omission of Words	43
5.2	Parallelism and Chiasmus	46
5.3	Imagery.....	48

5.4	Similes.....	49
5.5	Metaphors	51
5.6	Rhetorical Questions	53
6	The Quran as Literature	55
6.1	Composition.....	55
6.1.1	Introduction to the Approaches	58
6.1.2	Composition of the Verses.....	61
6.1.3	Composition of the Individual Surahs	64
6.2	The Role of a <i>Rasūl</i>	74
7	Reading <i>Sūrat Yūnus</i>	79
7.1	Methodology	79
7.2	Structure of the Surah.....	80
7.3	A: Prologue (1-10).....	83
7.3.1	Opening (1-2)	83
7.3.2	Creation of the World, and Reward in the Hereafter (3-10)	85
7.3.3	Emphasis on the Creation and the Reward (5-10).....	87
7.3.4	Verses 3-10 as a Whole	89
	B: Previous People Destroyed for not Believing in their <i>Rusul</i> (11-14).....	91
7.4	C: Opponents' Demand to Bring a Different <i>Qur'ān</i> (15-17)	94
7.5	D: Attitude of the Rebels Against God (18-27).....	96
7.5.1	Rejection of Those Other than God, and Wait Until God Decides (18-20)	97
7.5.2	When in Trouble, Ask God for Help/Plot Against Him When Relieved (21-3).....	98
7.5.3	People's Attitude and God's Accountability (24-5)	100

7.5.4	Rewards for Those Who Do Good, and Punishment for Evildoers (26-7)	101
7.6	E: Refutation of Polytheism (28-36).....	102
7.6.1	God Shall Suffice as Witness between Worshippers and Deities (28-30).....	102
7.6.2	Only God is the Provider and the Creator, and Guides to the Truth (31-6).....	103
7.7	F: The Quran is Denied Although Some Believe in It Too (37-44).....	105
7.8	X: Retribution for the Denial of a <i>Rasūl</i> (45-56)	107
7.9	F': God is a Witness over the Quran Being Recited (57-65)	110
7.10	E': Example of Polytheism: Noah's People Drowned (66-74)	112
7.10.1	Disbelievers Have No Evidence of Deities Associated with God (66-70)	112
7.10.2	Noah's People Deny Signs and Destroyed; Believers Established (71-3).....	114
7.10.3	More Messengers Brought Signs but Denied (74)	115
7.11	D': Example of Rebels: Pharaoh and His Followers Drowned (75-93).....	116
7.11.1	Truth Declared Sorcery	116
7.11.2	Sorcery Nullified, Truth Vindicated (79-82)	117
7.11.3	Believers Place Trust in God, Ask for Relief from Persecution (83-6).....	118
7.11.4	Moses' Prayer (87-9)	119
7.11.5	Pharaoh, Rebel and Tyrant, Drowned and Saved as a Sign (90-3)	120
7.12	C': Reference to Earlier Scriptures and This Revelation is <i>Ḥaqq</i> (94-5).....	121
7.13	B': Example of Jonah's People, Saved Due to Their Belief (96-103)	122
7.14	A': Epilogue (104-9)	124
7.15	Remarks on the Surah as a Whole	126
8	Concluding Remarks.....	128
9	Bibliography	132

9.1	Introductory Texts.....	132
9.2	' <i>Ulūm al-Qur'ān</i>	132
9.3	Hermeneutics	133
9.4	On the History of the Quran	135
9.5	Commentaries and Their Analyses.....	136
9.6	Historical Sources	137
9.7	Language and Literature.....	138
9.8	Other	139

1 Preliminary Notes

ALA-LC tables of the Library of Congress are used for all romanizations.¹ Words and phrases that are now commonly found in an English dictionary are not romanized.² Thus Quran instead of Qur'ān, Muhammad instead of Muḥammad and surah instead of *sūrah* are used. The exception is when a text is being quoted in which case the original romanization is preserved. The words are romanized (and thus italicized) when an explicit reference needs to be made to the original Arabic word despite its presence in English. For example, *Sūrat Yūnus* instead of surah *Yūnus*.

English translations for the Biblical text are taken from *The Bible: Revised Standard Version*. (Swindon: Bible Society, 1971). All other translations in this thesis are my own, except where explicitly attributed to another source.³

Verses from the Quran are referenced using the *surah:verse* format. Where the reference is quoted in text, the format Q2:1 is used to refer to, for example, *Sūrat al-Baqarah's* first verse. Similarly, for classical commentaries, references are provided by citing the verses in addition

¹ These tables can be accessed at <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsa/roman.html>.

² For this thesis, I have especially relied on Merriam-Webster.

³ I have benefitted greatly from the Quran translations of Arberry, Asad, Ayub Khan, Daryabadi, Hilali and Khan, Iṣlāḥī, Mawdūdī, Qaribullah and Darwish, Pickthall, Shakir, Sher Ali and Yusuf Ali. I have also made many of them available at <http://www.islamitexts.org>.

to the page number of a particular edition, e.g. “al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 3:299, commentary for Q3:96”.⁴ Narratives from the various collections, such as those by ‘Abd al-Razzāq, al-Bukhārī, Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj are quoted using the narrative number (in addition to the page number from Ibrāhīm, *al-Kutub al-Sittah*). This should help the reader locate the narratives more easily since the precise edition of *ḥadīth* collections is hard to find.

Dates are provided using the *hijrī* and Gregorian calendars separated by the symbol / both for years as well as centuries. Thus, it would be stated “the Prophet is reported to have arrived in Medina on “12 Rabī I 1/24 September 622”.⁵ Where the *hijrī* dates are not provided in the source materials, the conversion to *hijrī* was approximated.⁶

⁴ This is also helpful if one chooses to use websites such as <http://www.altafsir.com>.

⁵ See Muḥammad in EI², section “Muḥammad in Medina”.

⁶ I have used Microsoft .NET 2.0’s System.Globalizati.on.HijriCalendar class. See <http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/system.globalization.hijricalendar.aspx>, especially the remarks section. The URL was accessed on February 17, 2013.

2 Introduction

The Quran has had an extraordinary impact on the social, political and legal systems of the various Muslim societies throughout the history, which continues into the present times. The constitutions of several Muslim majority states canonize Islamic law and thus the Quran forms the basis of legal precepts in those countries.⁷ This is by no means a recent development. The Quran formed the foundation of the legal codes in the earliest Muslim empires and was extensively utilized by the jurists in court proceedings. In the first civil war fought between Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Ṣufyān and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib over 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān's death, when the former's soldiers were at the verge of a defeat, they are reported to have put copies of the Quran at the top of their weapons demanding that God's word be used for arbitration.⁸ Apparently 'Alī's men yielded to the demand which led a disenfranchised group to break off in retaliation claiming that the Quranic precepts had already decided the issue of 'Uthmān's death.⁹ In the Muslim history, this group would come to be known as the *Khawārij*, anglicized as Kharijites. This episode, by no means an anomaly, highlights the pivotal role that the Quran

⁷ See Brown, Nathan J. and Clark B. Lombardi. "Do Constitutions Requiring Adherence to Sharia Threaten Human Rights? How Egypt's Constitutional Court Reconciles Islamic Law with the Liberal Rule of Law," *American University International Law Review* 21 (2006): 379-435 at 381-383 and 397.

⁸ Hodgson, *Venture*, 1:214.

⁹ Hodgson, *Venture*, 1:215.

played in early Muslim discourses. It continued to similarly occupy a predominant position in the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties,¹⁰ as well as later Muslim empires.

At the same time, the Quran also holds a central place in the Muslim religious life. The five daily prayers include recitation of parts of the Quran by heart, and its verses are recited at important occasions such as weddings and deaths. Even the recitation is considered a form of worship and supposed to earn one reward from God. Numerous commentaries and texts discussing the Quran have been produced since its earliest days and, in turn, it had a profound impact on the Arabic language and literature. The Quran belongs to the category of texts which, in Bruce Fudge's words, "are granted unimpeachable authority, unquestioned authenticity and most importantly a cultural and intellectual centrality. This latter may be theological, legal, literal, linguistic or some combination thereof."¹¹

The Quran was composed in the seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula.¹² It engaged in intricate polemical debates with Jews, Christian and the Pagans, and when the Prophet Muhammad was preaching its message, his opponents alleged that he had fabricated it,¹³ he was a poet,¹⁴ and that the *jinn* had taught it to him.¹⁵ The Quran, among its other responses,

¹⁰ For a detailed exposition of the role of the Quran in the political arena in the earlier Muslim empires, see *The politics of exegesis* in Abdul-Raof, *Schools*, 55-83.

¹¹ Fudge, *Hermeneutics*, 2.

¹² The author is aware of the opinions that hypothesize a post-seventh century formulation of the Quran. These are discussed at length in chapter 3.

¹³ The Quran 11:13.

¹⁴ The Quran 21:5, 52:30, 69:41.

¹⁵ The Quran 37:36, 81:22.

insisted that it validated “what was with them”,¹⁶ it “attested the previous messengers”,¹⁷ and further stated its criteria of how to determine whether it was divine by calling its opponents to “produce another discourse like it.”¹⁸ When it made its claim to produce another discourse like it, it also declared that even “if all mankind and *jinn* were to come together to bring the like of this Quran, they would not be able to.”¹⁹ Their inability to produce a similar text would then establish it as God’s work insofar as its intended audiences were concerned. Keeping aside the discussion of its divinity and inimitability, some important questions arise for anyone wanting to study the Quran. What type of discourse is it and what does its message contain? What is the context of the attestation of the previous messengers, and what does it refer to? In addition to these questions, one is also faced with several linguistic, historical and hermeneutical barriers that need to be overcome to appreciate it as a literary work.

The Quran’s text is reported to have been intensely studied and analyzed since the Prophet’s time.²⁰ As with any other literary work, the Quran’s contents give insights into God’s rhetorical positioning, His purpose and even His personality, since He is considered its author by the Muslims.²¹ He clarifies His expectations from its followers, His judgments and opinions about

¹⁶ The Quran 10:37. This is a reference to other religious scriptures.

¹⁷ The Quran 37:37.

¹⁸ The Quran 52:34. Also see 2:23, 10:38, and 11:13 which narrate the same claim against one or more surahs.

¹⁹ The Quran 17:88.

²⁰ Al-Khaṭṭābī, *Bayān*, 21 in *Thalāth Rasā’il*.

²¹ I am acutely aware that God being the author of the Quran is not endorsed by non-Muslims. Nonetheless, I move forward with this assumption to avoid separating an ‘author’ from God as that unnecessarily complicates the comprehension of the issue. There are verses that refer to Him in third

the individual and societal behaviors, and His ideas of the unseen, such as the angels, the Heaven and the Hell, and the Judgment Day. Although the Quran is written in an established language, it nonetheless artistically differentiates its style from the literary genres of that era. Since the Quran contains some rhyme, it does not stand as plain prose. At the same time, it also lacks regular meters for it to be classified as a poetic work. It seems closest to an established style in the pre-Islamic Arabia called *saj'*,²² yet even that is an area of intense debate among scholars.²³ Even though its language, style, and contents as well legal and social implications

person, such as “God’s signs” (in Q10:95), while others simply refer to Him via the first person, such as “Our signs” (in the Q10:75). If an author were to be taken as an entity separate from God, then these two sets of verses will have to be understood referring to two distinct entities which is inconsistent with the Quran’s text, for example, “Verily, I am God, there is no other god except me, so worship me.” (Q20:14) If such an exercise were to be undertaken, it would introduce an unnecessary impediment for our investigation since almost the entire corpus of the Quranic studies, including commentaries, criticisms, *fiqh* works, and the like, treat God as its author and one would have to sift through those texts to discern the implications of this separation of entities.

²² *Saj'* was a prosaic style of the Arabic language that developed in the *jāhiliyyah* period and became ubiquitous in the post-Islamic scholarly works. Sometimes referred to as rhymed prose, *saj'* differs from ordinary prose in that phrases and lines end in rhyme while also being distinct from poetry for the lack of meters.

²³ The topic of *saj'* in the Quran is a contentious one. One group of linguists, led by al-Rummānī (d. 386/996) and al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013), confuted *saj'* in the Quran by illustrating stylistic differences between the two (Ṭabaq, *Dirāsah*, 86-93) while another group based their argument on the Quran’s *ījāz*. (Ibid., 94-101.) For example, in his argument, al-Rummānī distinguished *saj'* from the Quran’s rhyme, known as *fawāṣil* (sing. *fāṣilah*), based on the former being dependent on the restrictions of the rhyme while the latter’s rhyme reliant on what is intended by the content and thus being superior (al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat*, 97-99 in *Thalāth Rasā'il*). Opposing linguists argued that while the Quran’s text as a whole was clearly not *saj'*, it was not empty of it either, (Ṭabaq, *Dirāsah*, 101-6) most likely restricting themselves only to the stylistic aspects of the genre. See Mir, “Language,” in *The Blackwell Companion*,

emanating from it have been studied since the earliest times, new approaches to its study have still been proposed in twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and much work remains to analyze it in the light of those approaches.

This thesis is an attempt to study the Quran as a literary work using two of the recently proposed approaches. Such a study has two aspects to it. First, we have the question of how to *read* the Quran. That is, what are the linguistic styles used in it, how the text is organized and how to interpret its message. The second aspect of its study stems from this last point about the interpretation. In order to understand its message, we would need a deep understanding of the issues that it discussed. This is indeed a vast topic since these issues spanned various disciplines, such as social, economic, religious and political. Therefore, I confine this study primarily to a subset of the religious issues addressed in the Quran. This relationship of the content with the society is not a hallmark of the Quran only, rather literature in general has a close relationship with the society in which it is authored. In the words of Wellek and Warren, “the writer is not only influenced by society: he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it.”²⁴ Thus, this study not only looks at how the Quran’s message was tailored to the society around it, but also how it may have influenced the society in which it was authored.

The investigation of that society’s religious environment leads to yet another question about the placement of the text in the history. The first half of the seventh century in the Arabian

93-4 who distinguishes it from the utterances of Arab soothsayers, i.e. *Saj'*, based on the differences in “rhyme and assonance” and the “ethical orientation” of the two.

²⁴ Wellek, *Theory*, 97.

Peninsula was markedly different from the eighth century, or even the second half of the seventh century. In the early seventh century, the Arabs were confined to the Arabian Peninsula without any apparent central authority whereas by the end of the seventh century, they had created one of the largest empires in history. Therefore, this study begins with an investigation into the period by which the text must have been formed. Once that is established, the religious environment in the Arabian Peninsula at that time is explored. The investigation of the religious and historical contexts is captured in the first part of this thesis, which comprise of chapters 3 and 4.

The second part of this thesis deals with the literary devices, which enable an author to express their motive in the most effective way. Some of the devices employed in the Quran are unusual for those not familiar with the Semitic languages, especially Classical Arabic. We have modes such as *ḥadhf*, which is a form of ellipsis extensively employed in the Classical Arabic in which words and phrases are omitted and must be captured from the context. Those trying to read the Quran, especially in Arabic, may be completely unaware of such features and thus sentences that employ these styles may even seem incomprehensible.²⁵ We also have chiasmus and parallelism, which are a cornerstone of the Semitic literature in general and the Biblical texts in particular. Invariably, medieval and modern scholars have discussed literary devices in the Quran at length, and thus we have quite a few resources for our study of these modes. There are yet other literary issues, such as *naẓm*, which is the composition of words, paragraphs and chapters within a work to make a coherent whole. Thus, the second part of the

²⁵ In addition, if one is reading in English, they are at the mercy of the translation that may not bring out the implied meaning if it is especially a literal one.

thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter 5 deals with the literary devices, chapter 6 with the Quran's composition and textual analysis of select issues, and chapter 7 attempts a reading of *Sūrat Yūnus* in light of the principles discussed in the preceding chapters. The choice of *Sūrat Yūnus* is deliberate for three reasons. First, its text is manageable for this thesis's scope. Second, its primary focus is on the religious beliefs. Third, it presents some ideas about a *rasūl* that are discussed at length in the surah. This surah begins with the second verse questioning whether it is "strange for the people" that a scripture were "revealed to a man from amongst them to warn the people and give glad tidings to those who believe that they shall have high rank with their lord." It also notes the response of the disbelievers who "say, 'He is clearly a sorcerer.'"²⁶ These verses act as the topic sentences for this surah, and the rest of the surah, it will be shown, addresses the concerns raised in these.

2.1 Methodology

At this point, it seems pertinent to go over the resources employed for the study of the Quran as literature. While the complete bibliography is at the end of this thesis, prominent works, some of which were also utilized for this thesis, are discussed in this section.

Within classical texts, the works that deal with the various literary and linguistic aspects of the Quran, and could aid in the investigation of this topic, can be broadly divided into three categories. First are the commentaries on the Quran, called *tafāsīr* (singular *tafsīr*) in Arabic. Generally, every *tafsīr* meticulously goes through individual verses, often individual words,

²⁶ The Quran 10:2.

analyzing their grammar, lexicography, content and implications. These are typically multi-volume works often spanning thousands of pages due to their exhaustive treatment of the Quranic text.²⁷ The three most renowned *tafāsīr* of the medieval era are by al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī, and I have benefitted from all these although where necessary, I have investigated other *tafāsīr* as well.

The second category is that of *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* works. Unlike the commentaries which progress in a verse-by-verse fashion, these texts take a holistic approach to familiarize the readers with various issues of importance in the field of Quranic studies. The renowned examples of such works include al-Suyūtī’s *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, which is considered a milestone in the development of this branch of Qur’ānic studies, and al-Zarkashī’s *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. These cover a large number of topics, including those related to the history of the Quran, the composition of its text, the division of Meccan and Medinan surahs, and the Quran’s language and grammar. Within such works, discussions related to various Quranic verses, such as their structure, language, and implications, are also commonly found. However, most such works

²⁷ Because of differences in the authors’ preferences, the predominant style of any given commentary, usually classified as the “genre” within the fold of *tafāsīr* studies, can belong to one of these categories: legislative, linguistic, periphrastic and narrative to count just a few. See Abdul-Raof, *Schools*, 28-30 for the list of genres. Despite such a categorization, it may, however, by no means be the only genre embodied in the commentary, and thus a single commentary often incorporates multiple “genres” based on the immediate need of its author and its applicability to the purpose of the commentary. Walid Saleh argues that such a schematization is not necessarily visible in the *tafāsīr* literature, and additionally, it poses a problem of classification when one commentary incorporates multiple “elements” as expressed by Goldziher. See Saleh, *Quranic Exegesis*, 14-23 for a discussion of *tafāsīr* classification.

attempt to be exhaustive in their discussion of the issues pertinent to the study of the Quran as opposed to covering the complete text of the Quran, as is the case with the *tafsīr* works.

The third category, commonly referred to as *ījāz al-Qur'ān*, consists of works written to demonstrate the inimitability of the Quran. While often theological in nature, these works also undertake linguistic and hermeneutical discussions that are pertinent to understanding the Quran as a literary text. Thus, we find, for example, that in *al-Nukat fī Ijāz al-Qur'ān*, al-Rummānī argues that *ījāz* is of seven types,²⁸ and then spends all but five out of twenty-nine pages dealing with one of them: *balāghah*. He divides *balāghah* into some ten categories²⁹ and deals with them in extreme detail. For instance, he breaks *ījāz*, one of the subcategories of *balāghah*, into two further categories, *ḥadhf* and *qaṣr*, and then provides example for their various usages in the Quran.³⁰ For *isti'arah*, another subcategory of *ījāz*, according to my count he provides some forty-six examples from the Quran discussing the implications of the words used in the verses.³¹

From the modern *tafāsīr*, I have used Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm* and heavily utilized Iṣlāḥī's *Tadabbur*. Although I do not explicate Iṣlāḥī's methodology in this thesis, he has discussed various principles for the study of the Quran at length in his *tafsīr*. Nonetheless, I do present his opinions on two particularly important issues: those pertaining to the arrangement and

²⁸ Al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat*, 75 in *Thalāth Rasā'il*.

²⁹ Al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat*, 76 in *Thalāth Rasā'il*. The categories are *ījāz*, *tashbih*, *isti'arah*, *talā'um*, *fawāṣil*, *tajānis*, *taṣrīf*, *taḍmīn*, *mubālaghah*, and *ḥusn al-bayān*.

³⁰ Al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat*, 76 in *Thalāth Rasā'il*.

³¹ Al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat*, 85-94 in *Thalāth Rasā'il*.

coherence of the Quranic surahs, and those on distinctive characteristics of a *rasūl* that I discuss later in this thesis.

3 Placing the Text in History

The original scope of this thesis was intended to take a synchronic approach towards exploring the literary qualities of the Quran in the form that exists with us today, limiting it to the factors that would lead one to appreciate the text as a literary work without much regard to the history of the development of the text. However, we are faced with two challenges with such an approach. The first concerns the value associated with studying the Quran in its present form, for many a scholar has concluded that a better comprehension of the text may be possible if the surahs (and in many cases, groups of verses) are studied in their chronological order, which differs from the final arrangement in the standardized version. This naturally leads us to ask who arranged the text in its current form for it would give insight into the person (or the group of persons) whose recension is in our hands. If the text was arranged by the Prophet, it gives us additional impetus to study it in its current form for he is considered the ultimate source of the text in the traditional Arab accounts. In this context, the Quran then ought to provide us insight into his life and the events that took place between him and his opponents as elaborated in the text. Even if we do not approach the Quran from a believer's perspective, looking at the text as a historical entity may still enhance our understanding of its meaning.

The second challenge stems from the fact that the Quran makes direct and indirect references to several external personages and events in addition to the religious and societal beliefs of the

Arabian society. Many of these references are to biblical prophets and events and are thus easier to reference through external sources. However, quite a few refer to events pertaining to the life of the Prophet and his interactions with his followers and opponents alike. Some Quranic narratives require even more specific understanding of when the Quran must have come into existence. *Sūrat al-Faṭḥ* for instance begins with the words “we have awarded you a clear victory”³² but it is unclear what that victory is. Not only that, the more skeptical of the scholars have further questioned whether the Quran was authored in the early seventh century or is a later work,³³ thus opening up the possibility that a victory could refer to one of the later Arab conquests.

We are thus bound to begin with an investigation into the dating of the Quran for our understanding of its contents would vary significantly if it were authored in the ‘Umayyad period as opposed to during the Prophet’s life. The sources available to us for such an analysis fall into three categories: 1) Reports from the Arabic literary sources, 2) Reports from the non-Arabic sources, and 3) The dating and textual analysis of the earliest Quranic manuscripts. A scrutiny of these sources concludes that the Quran was authored in the first half of the seventh century and must thus have been first written down during the Prophet’s life.

³² The Quran 48:1.

³³ A view taken on by Michael Cook and Patricia Crone in *Hagarism*, see for example p. 18 and 29. Brown, *Islam*, 169 states, “If, on the other hand, the Qur’ān was canonized after the Arab conquests, then it may be taken to reflect the early formative period of Islamic law than shaping it.”

3.1 The Traditional Account from Arabic Sources

The tradition holds that the Quran was compiled into a book form, *muṣḥaf*, after the death of the Prophet during reigns of the first three caliphs although the accounts vary as to what really transpired and the exact chronology of the events. These accounts subsequently led to debates regarding whether the text was preserved as the Prophet left it, and whether the arrangement of surahs and verses was affixed by the Prophet during his lifetime or if it was modified afterwards. There are two important narratives of the collection of the Quran that will be discussed in this section. The first one describes collection in Abū Bakr's reign and the second when 'Uthmān was the caliph. These reports must, however, be scrutinized against the criteria established for this purpose.³⁴ Nonetheless, for the sake of brevity, technical terminology and various details are avoided in this section to present only a brief summary that highlights the complications of the issue.

In a narrative reported by al-Bukhārī,³⁵ Zayd ibn Thābit states that during the battle of Yamāmah, quite a large number of memorizers of the Quran had been killed, so 'Umar convinced Abū Bakr, who was the caliph at that time, that he must arrange for the compilation of the Quran. Initially reluctant Abū Bakr gave in to 'Umar's unflinching pressure despite the former's concern as to how could he undertake a task that the Prophet himself had not. They

³⁴ This opinion has also been voiced by John Burton who states in *Collection of the Quran* that the reports on this topic are conflicting enough that they must be scrutinized appropriately. See Burton, *Collection*, 227 and 234-5.

³⁵ The summary in this section is derived from al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 432 (narrative no. 4986), although this narrative has been reported in many other collections with various variations. See Saleem, *Collection*, 75-76.

then similarly persuaded Zayd, one of the Prophet's scribes, to embark on the mission to collect the Quran, something he had also initially refused citing the same reason as Abū Bakr. After having been convinced, Zayd collected the text of the Quran from various materials on which it had been written, as well as from "people's hearts." Then he found two verses of *Sūrat al-Tawbah* with Abū Khuzaymah that he did not find elsewhere. This compiled Quran was kept with Abū Bakr and after his demise it was passed on to 'Umar, and then to his daughter Ḥafṣah at 'Umar's demise.

A second narrative on the collection of the Quran chronologically follows the first one. During the battle of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān feared that the people differed in their recitations of the Quran and thus pleaded to 'Uthmān, the caliph at the time, that he save the unity of the nation (*ummah*) so they would not differ in their scriptures. 'Uthmān recalled the copy that was already with Ḥafṣah and ordered Zayd ibn Thābit, 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr, Sa'īd ibn al-Āṣ and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥārith to copy (or rewrite) it in manuscripts. If they were to disagree with Zayd, then 'Uthmān's order was to write it in the dialect of Quraysh for that is what it was revealed in. Once a number of copies had been made, 'Uthmān sent the original back to Ḥafṣah, and sent a copy to every province ordering that any materials containing the Quranic text be burnt. Zayd is supposed to have said that a verse from *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* was missed by him when making copies and since he remembered hearing the Prophet recite it, they searched until they found it with Khuzaymah.³⁶

³⁶ The summary for this narrative has been derived from al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 432-33 (narrative no. 4987) although this narrative, like the previous one regarding collection in Abū Bakr's time, has also been reported in various collections.

3.1.1 *Objections to the Traditional Account*

These narratives have several problems both in the text and in the chains of narration (*isnād*). As for the first one, Watt states that it “is probably not authentic,”³⁷ and holds it unlikely that until the time of the Prophet’s death “there had been no authoritative record of the revelations and no attempt to bring some order into them.”³⁸ Watt’s assertion is quite valid because the narrative itself yields to the fact that there were many Muslims who had already memorized the Quran. If they had already done so, what arrangement and order were they following? Yet another issue is that the number of memorizers who died in the battle of Yamāmah is also small,³⁹ which makes it even more unlikely that this could prompt Abū Bakr to act on it. In some reports, it is ‘Umar⁴⁰ who ordered the first collection of the Quran.

As far as its *isnād* is concerned, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, who appears in all the chains of narration, has been considered as highly unreliable by the scholars such as al-Shāfī, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, and al-Dhahabī,⁴¹ and thus his narratives were not accepted by them.

The second narrative also poses several problems. It would, for instance, be surprising that when writing the first copy of the Quran, Zayd missed a verse but remembered it a second

³⁷ Watt, *Introduction*, 32.

³⁸ Watt, *Introduction*, 40-41.

³⁹ Watt, *Introduction*, 41; Motzki, “The Collection,” 7; Saleem, *Collection*, 77-87. Both Saleem and Motzki mention that Schwally too criticized this narrative based on this reason with Saleem citing Nöldeke, Theodore and Fredrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans (Tārīkh al-Qur’ān)*, translated by Georges Tamer, 1st ed (Beirut: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2004): 253.

⁴⁰ Al-Suyūtī, *Itqān*, 1:76-79; Watt, *Introduction*, 41.

⁴¹ Saleem, *Collection*, 108-111.

time. Now 'Umar was a caliph for more than twenty years during which, it is claimed, an official copy was kept with him. If that were so, not only did no one ever find out that it was missing a verse, but it seems that even when this copy was prepared, it was not checked thoroughly despite the fact that there were many people who had memorized the Quran, especially if we were to accept the narrative of the collection ordered by Abū Bakr. As for the chains of narration, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī appears as the common link, who, as has been stated earlier, was considered unreliable.⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, whose commentary on the Quran is one of the earliest ones, has relied on variations of both these reports,⁴³ all of which have defects similar to the ones discussed earlier, and all of which have Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī in the chains of narration.

John Burton argues that Nöldeke, who wrote the first western treatise on this subject, and Schwally, who later edited it, had failed to differentiate between *jam' al-Qurān* and *jam' al-Muṣḥaf*.⁴⁴ While the former does not necessarily need to be composed in a book form, the latter must be. This is already evident from the two narratives discussed earlier where the text in the compiled form was verified from various materials as well as from the memories of the people.

⁴² Saleem, *Collection*, 182.

⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 1:54-58.

⁴⁴ Burton, *Collection*, 225.

3.1.2 *Opposing Narratives*

The narratives mentioned earlier are also in contradiction with several other narratives in which we find explicit references to *muṣḥaf*, that is, the Quran compiled in a book form. Our presentation of these opposing narratives is to provide context for the aforementioned ones that purport that a collection of the Quran took place during ‘Uthmān’s time. As these narratives shall indicate, Islamic tradition is rampant with reports that directly state or indicate that the Quran had already been collected during the time of the Prophet himself. Thus, even if the reports concerning the collection of the Quran during Abū Bakr and ‘Uthman’s caliphates were accepted as authentic, we are challenged with determining which set of reports to give preference to.

Yazīd ibn Abī ‘Ubayd reported that he was with Salamah ibn al-Akwa’ who would pray next to the pillar which was near the place where the *muṣḥaf* was kept, and he had seen the Prophet pray there.⁴⁵ This specific allusion to a *muṣḥaf* indicates that a written copy of the Quran was likely kept in the mosque for general use. ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Allāh reported that the Prophet forbade them from “traveling to the enemy territory with the Quran,” which both Bukhārī and Muslim have interpreted to mean *muṣḥaf*.⁴⁶ It is evident that this prohibition does not make sense unless it referred to a written copy. Ṭalḥah ibn Muṣarrif is reported to have asked ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Awfā if the Prophet had left any wills to which he replied that he had left *kitāb*

⁴⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 42 (narrative no. 502); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 757 (narrative no. 1136).

⁴⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 240 (narrative no. 2990); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1013 (narrative nos. 3839-41); Mālik, *Mu’aṭṭā’*, 258 (narrative no. 1865). Both Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s headings for these narratives use the term *muṣḥaf*.

Allāh, that is the book of God.⁴⁷ Once again the word *kitāb* here would indicate a reference to something that's well-known, that is, a manuscript or at least an organized collection.

In one narrative, Qatādah asked Anas ibn Mālik, “who collected the Quran (*jam' al-Qur'ān*) in the time of the Prophet?” He replied, “Four (persons), all of whom were from Anṣār: Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mu'āz ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thābit, and Abū Zayd.”⁴⁸ The phrase *jam' al-Qu'rān* used in this narrative can mean both the memorization of the Quran or its collection although it is more likely to be the first one, making a reference to those people who were known to Anas to have memorized the Quran. In another narrative, Anas states that four had collected the Quran when the Prophet died, and mentions the above list, replacing Abū al-Dardā' in place of Ubayy ibn Ka'b.⁴⁹

This list is not exhaustive and many more references exist in the narratives that indicate that the Quran had become a part of everyday life for the Muslims, including loud recitation in prayers, personal reading of the companions with the Prophet, teaching of the Quran, and its memorization.⁵⁰ For example, 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, a companion of the Prophet, reported that he learnt more than seventy surahs from the Prophet.⁵¹ Ibn Mas'ūd also reported that he recited *Sūrat Yūsuf* to the Prophet who appreciated his recitation.⁵² The Prophet himself was

⁴⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 220, 366 and 435 (narrative nos. 2740, 4460, and 5022.)

⁴⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 309 and 434 (narratives no. 3810 and 5003 respectively.)

⁴⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 434 (narrative no. 5004.)

⁵⁰ For a detailed list of narratives, see Saleem, *Collection*, 50-67.

⁵¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 434-435 (narrative no. 5000).

⁵² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 435 (narrative no. 5001).

seen to have been reciting *Sūrat al-Faḥ* on his camel at the time of the conquest of Mecca.⁵³ He once asked Yaḥyá, and in some narrations ‘Amr ibn Murrah, to recite the Quran to him. The narrator says he recited *Sūrat al-Nisā’* until a certain verse (number 41 in today’s Quran) when the Prophet asked him to stop, and his eyes had tears in them.⁵⁴ In addition, if the Quran was being recited loudly in three of the five daily prayers as is the common practice today, it becomes difficult to envisage that these memorizers were reciting the surahs and verses in different orders, and would be satisfied with it especially when they were being led in the prayers with a recitation markedly different than what they personally believed to be the Quran transmitted from the Prophet.

Thus, several medieval Muslim scholars also had differing opinions from the one that emphasized that the organization of the Quran took place after the Prophet’s demise. Al-Suyūṭī tells us of al-Zarkashī and Abū Ja’far ibn al-Zubayr both of whom held the opinion that the surah order was established by the Prophet.⁵⁵ Al-Suyūṭī recounts several scholars who held the opinion that the Quran was written down or surahs arranged by the Prophet with some even attributing it to divine guidance, such as al-Bayhaqī (*kāna al-Qur’ān ‘alá ‘ahd al-nabī murattiban suwarihi ‘alá hadha al-tartīb illā al-anfāl wa-birā’ah*)⁵⁶, Abū Ja’far al-Nuḥās (*tālīf al-suwar ‘alá hadha*

⁵³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 350, 413, 436-7 and 629 (narrative nos. 4281, 4835, 5034, 5047 and 7540 respectively).

⁵⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 377-8, 437-8 (narrative nos. 4582, and 5050, 5055 respectively).

⁵⁵ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1:80.

⁵⁶ Al-Suyūṭī, *Tartīb*, 32-3.

al-tartīb min rasūl Allāh),⁵⁷ and others. Abū Bakr al-Anbārī stated that whoever changed the order of the Quranic surahs has violated the Quran's *naẓm*.⁵⁸

As stated earlier, these narratives provide us with the data that a collection of the Quran after the Prophet's demise is not the only opinion even though it seems to have taken a prominent place during the Umayyad dynasty. Burton believes that the Quran's collection was associated with 'Uthmān to protect him against anti-Umayyad sentiments.⁵⁹ Based on the theory of *tawātūr*, he went a step further to conclude that "what we have today in our hands is the *muṣḥaf* of Muhammad."⁶⁰

3.2 Earliest Manuscripts

A yet another source that could lead to the date of the authorship of the Quran would be any manuscripts dating back to the time of the Prophet or shortly thereafter. Until the turn of this century, the earliest Quranic manuscripts had only been dated to the beginning of the second/eighth century.⁶¹ The most common method for dating a manuscript is the estimation of the physical age of the parchments using radio carbon dating. This is often combined with paleography to study the scripts, strokes and alphabet styles that may have evolved in a

⁵⁷ Al-Suyūṭī, *Tartīb*, 33.

⁵⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *Tartīb*, 32.

⁵⁹ Burton, *Collection*, 229-31.

⁶⁰ Burton, *Collection*, 239-40.

⁶¹ See Whelan, "Writing," 113-147 for a survey of earliest Quranic manuscripts and their dating. Also see p. 120 where she mentions the possible dating of the CBL 1404 manuscript to the first *hijrī* century by A. S. Yahuda, from whom the manuscript was purchased, but Bernhard Mortiz and Joseph Karabacek ascribed second and/or third *hijrī* centuries.

particular geography and time period. Textual-critical analysis forms yet another plausible means for aging the manuscripts and, in the case of the Quran, *qirā'āt* literature has also been recently employed to assess its validity against the manuscripts. Our focus in this section, however, will be on the radiocarbon dating and textual analysis.

Radio carbon dating initially provided such large ranges for the Quran's manuscripts that they could not be of much use to estimate relatively accurately the period of the Quran's formulation. For example, tests on two fragments yielded their dates to be between 595–855 CE and 775-995 CE, with 95% probability.⁶² The scientific techniques now being used for archeology have started to yield shorter date ranges. Thus, a parchment of a privately owned fragment of the Quran which was “most likely” supposed to have been “made between AD 610 and AD720,” was radiocarbon dated at a later time and was revised to have been “made between AD 609 and AD 695.”⁶³

More recently, folios from one of the manuscripts⁶⁴ of the *Ṣan'ā'* finds, labeled 01-27.1,⁶⁵ has

⁶² Dutton, “An Umayyad Fragment,” 64.

⁶³ Dutton, “An Umayyad Fragment,” 63-64.

⁶⁴ This is not a complete manuscript though, but contains reasonably large amount of text. For instance, parts of *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*, *Sūrat Yūsuf*, *Sūrat Hūd*, *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*, *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, quite large parts of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, *Sūrat al-Naḥl*, *Sūrat Maryam*, *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, almost all of *Sūrat al-Ra'd*, and all of *Sūrat al-Tawbah* exist in the manuscript along with fragments of other surahs.

⁶⁵ The first number in the numbering scheme of the *Ṣan'ā'* manuscripts identifies how many lines do the folios of a manuscript contain, the second number identifies the length in centimeters of every line and the third number is the number of the manuscript with such a scheme. Lack of consistency in either the number of lines on the folios of a manuscript or the length of the lines is indicated by 1. Thus, the 01-27.1 indicates that the number of lines on the folios of this manuscript is not consistent, the lines are

been studied by Elisabeth Puin, Behnam Sadeghi and others.⁶⁶ One of the folios was also brought to the Stanford University for study, which is referred to as Stanford '07 in the papers subsequently published by Sadeghi and others.⁶⁷ Analysis of the lower text shows it to have been written in the *Ḥijāzī* script,⁶⁸ which makes it having brought in use within the first century AH.⁶⁹ Additionally, the radio carbon dating performed at Stanford found the parchment to be older than 25 AH/646 CE with 75% probability, and older than 35 AH/655.5 CE with 91.8% probability.⁷⁰ With these dates, this manuscript is one of the earliest ones available to us today. The lower text of the palimpsest is considered as non-ʿUthmānic by both Sadeghi

about 27 centimeters long, and it is the first manuscript with such a configuration. See Dreibholz, "Treatment," 131-145 for the preservation process of Ṣanʿāʾ manuscripts and especially 140-1 for the numbering scheme.

⁶⁶ Behnam Sadeghi, along with others, has published two papers that discuss the dating and the contents of the manuscripts in detail. Elisabeth Puin has also published papers on the Ṣanʿāʾ manuscripts on paleographic and textual analysis. The discussion on Ṣanʿāʾ manuscripts in this section draws from these papers, which will be referenced appropriately.

⁶⁷ Sadeghi, "The Codex," 348. It must be kept in mind that this folio is not kept at the Stanford University, see Sadeghi, "The Codex," 343, note 1. Also see Sadeghi, "Ṣanʿāʾ 1," 13, note 29 where this issue is explicitly clarified.

⁶⁸ Puin, "Koranpalimpsest: Teil III," 233; Sadeghi, "Ṣanʿāʾ 1," 27.

⁶⁹ Puin, "Koranpalimpsest: Teil III," 233.

⁷⁰ Sadeghi, Bergmann, "The Codex," 353. In addition to the age provided in the text, I have read the probabilities off from Table 1. Uwe Bergmann, Philip Manning, and Roy Wogelius, "Chemical Mapping of Paleontological and Archeological Artifacts with Synchrotron X-Rays," *Annual Review of Analytical Chemistry*, 2012, no. 5: 361-389, states at page 371 that "the parchment was radiocarbon dated to the time of the prophet Muhammad," and then cites Sadeghi, "The Codex." It is my contention that this statement is not an accurate one and is superseded by the radiocarbon data provided in "The Codex".

and Puin because of its variations from the 'Uthmānic codex.⁷¹ Sadeghi argues that it ought to be the text of one of the Prophet's companions, which may have been copied from a parent manuscript,⁷² and thus labeled as C-1⁷³ by him for reference, an identifier that I will employ in this section. I must clarify at this point that the data from radiocarbon dating does not allow us to conclude that the manuscript necessarily belonged to a companion, although it is quite possible. It is the actual text that is ascribed to him and could have been copied by someone else in this manuscript.⁷⁴

As mentioned in the previous sections, the traditional Muslim sources regard oral recitation of the Quran as an important practice of the early Muslim community. Brockett argues in his comparison of Ḥafṣ and Warsh transmissions for a simultaneous oral and written tradition of the Quran that,

if the Qur'ān had been transmitted only orally for the first century, sizeable variations between texts such as are seen in the *ḥadīth* and pre-Islamic poetry would be found, and if it had been transmitted only in writing, sizeable variations such as in the different transmission of the original document of the Constitution of Medina would be found. But neither is the case with the Qur'ān. There must have been a parallel written transmission limiting variation in the

⁷¹ Puin, "Koranpalimpsest: Teil III," 237; Sadeghi, "The Codex," 384; Sadeghi, "Ṣan'ā' 1," 20.

⁷² Sadeghi, "The Codex," 345; Sadeghi, "Ṣan'ā' 1," 20.

⁷³ Sadeghi, "The Codex," 344; Sadeghi, "Ṣan'ā' 1," 17.

⁷⁴ Sadeghi, "The Codex," 383.

oral transmission to the graphic form, side by side with a parallel oral transmission preserving the written transmission from corruption.⁷⁵

In “The Codex,” Sadeghi demonstrates that the textual differences between C-1 and the ‘Uthmānic codex indicate that orality did in fact play a role,⁷⁶ an observation that Puin has also similarly made stating, “*mündliche Tradition zwar eine Rolle spielt*”.⁷⁷ Sadeghi’s analysis is based on the differences between the Companion codices with C-1 and ‘Uthmānic codices, and the plausibility of those differences being root caused to an oral tradition or the written text for the types of variations differ between memorizers and copyists. One example that Sadeghi provides in the context of *ḥadīth* is the variation between words such as “say” and “tell” which are essentially the same in meaning and thus could have been substituted by a transmitter.⁷⁸

Based on the variations seen in C-1 and codices, Sadeghi states that “the ‘Uthmānic, C-1, and the Companion codices generally have the same passages within the *sūras*, that the *sūras* were fixed before these various textual traditions branched off, in particular before the spread of the ‘Uthmānic version.”⁷⁹ This leads Sadeghi to conclude that the order of verses and sentences was affixed in a common ancestor, what he calls the “Prophetic Prototype”, from which both the ‘Uthmānic codex and C-1 branched off.⁸⁰ Another interesting observation made in C-1 is that the last two verses of *Sūrat al-Tawbah* were found “in the expected place. Since they are

⁷⁵ Brockett, “Value of Ḥafṣ and Warsh Transmissions,” *Approaches*, 44.

⁷⁶ Sadeghi, “The Codex,” 385-90.

⁷⁷ Puin, “Koranpalimpsest: Teil III,” 237.

⁷⁸ Sadeghi, “The Codex,” 385.

⁷⁹ Sadeghi, “Ṣan‘ā’ 1,” 23.

⁸⁰ Sadeghi, “The Codex,” 346 and 409.

also found in the ‘Uthmānic Qur’ān, and since it is not reported that any Companion codex was without them, these verses must have belonged to the prototype from which the C-1 and ‘Uthmānic text types emerged.”⁸¹ Lack of *bismillāh* between *Sūrat al-Anfāl* and *Sūrat al-Tawbah* has been ascribed to ‘Uthmān’s team in some reports, but *bismillāh* is not to be found in C-1 either, which implies that those reports are unlikely to be authentic.⁸² Gerd-Rüdiger Puin first mentioned a surah ordering different in the Ṣan‘ā’ manuscripts than that of the ‘Uthmānic recension without identifying any particular manuscript.⁸³ Five surah sequences in C-1 vary from those of the ‘Uthmānic recension,⁸⁴ and thus it could possibly be the manuscript to which Puin may have mentioned, confirming his claim. These include 9 -> 19, 15 -> 25, 63 -> 62, 11 -> 8, and 62 -> 89.

3.3 Conclusion

In the first part, I argued that the reports about a collection of the Quran in the time of Abū Bakr and ‘Uthmān are most likely unreliable. I must clarify that by saying so, I do not imply that a process of standardization of the script or text may not have been undertaken by either of them. However, the narratives that purport them to have collected (*jam’*) the Quran for the first time are the ones in question. Additionally, we saw several opposing narratives including

⁸¹ Sadeghi, Gourdazi, “Sana’a 1,” 23.

⁸² Sadeghi, Gourdazi, “Sana’a 1,” 26-27.

⁸³ Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, “Observations on Early Qur’ān Manuscripts in Ṣan‘ā’ ” in *The Qur’an as Text*, 107-111 esp. at 110-111.

⁸⁴ Puin, “Koranpalimpsest: Teil III,” 253-9; Sadeghi, Gourdazi, “Ṣan‘ā’ 1,” 24, and also 37-39 for a table documenting the surah transitions in the lower text.

some that claimed collection of the Quran during the Prophet's time, or that the Quran was an intrinsic part of the early Muslim community.

More importantly, the Ṣan'ā' manuscript 01-27.1 is most likely older than 35 AH/655.5 CE with greater than 90% probability and older than 55 AH/675.5 AD with 99.2% probability,⁸⁵ which puts to rest the hypothesis that it was formulated during the reign of 'Abd al-Mālik ibn Marwān or that it was a post-seventh century formulation. In all likelihood, this manuscript is from the first half of the seventh century.

As far as the theories of the Quran being formed much later than what the Muslim reports claim are concerned, Sadeghi argues that the analysis of C-1 "confirms the reliability of what has been reported about other Companion codices" in the early reports.⁸⁶ This implies that the earlier reports cannot be blankly discredited as unreliable although, without a doubt, a large corpus of those reports was forged or otherwise exaggerated, and thus each report must be individually judged for authenticity.

Leon Nemoy, in his review of *Hagarism*, while endorsing a study of the text and encouraging us to research the answers to the issues raised by the authors, posed the following question:

But is it more credible that the 7th century Arabs, or even their most astute leaders – the Prophet himself and the first two caliphs.[sic] Abū Bakr and 'Umar – could have thought up and put into brilliant execution a Machiavellian *tour de force* worthy of a Talleyrand, a Bismarck, or a Hitler? And why should the 7th

⁸⁵ Sadeghi, "The Codex," 353.

⁸⁶ Sadeghi, Gourdazi, "Sana'a 1," 20.

century Greek and Syriac authors, to whom Islam was an abomination and the Muslims the spawn of Antichrist, be regarded as better informed of the actual facts and more accurate in recounting them?⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Nemoy, Leon, "Crone-Cook's *Hagarism*," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, *New Series*, 68, no. 3 (Jan 1978): 180-181.

4 The Religious Milieu

The Quran makes direct references to the beliefs and practices of the various religious groups that, according to the traditional Arab accounts, existed in the Arabian Peninsula at the eve of Islam. The plethora of these references to the Jewish and Christian beliefs, and a large occurrence of issues pertaining to those communities in the Quran has led some contemporary scholars to postulate that it must have been composed outside of the Ḥijāz region. For instance, Brown states in his introduction to Islam, “If we place the Qur’ān in seventh-century Arabia, we can only make sense of its origins by importing significant Jewish and Christian influences into the Ḥijāz – influences for which there is very little convincing evidence. It would seem at least plausible to suggest that perhaps Arabia is not the context for the origins of the Qur’ān and that the Islamic scriptures more probably came together in the Near Eastern environment – in Syria and Palestine – during the first 150 years after the Arab conquests.”⁸⁸

Although more religions are recognized in the Quranic text, the major ones that were addressed included the Jews, the Christians and the polytheists of Arabia. Most of the Biblical prophets and patriarchs were referred to as prophets in the Quran too. The following two verses that mention a list of prophets, although not an exhaustive one,⁸⁹ suffice to elucidate

⁸⁸ Brown, *Islam*, 75.

⁸⁹ Lot, for instance, is mentioned in multiple places in the Quran but is absent from these verses. See the Quran 37:133 which reads, “*wa inna lūṭan la-min al-mursalīn,*” translated, “And Lot was one of our

the Quran's emphasis on Judeo-Christian prophets:

We revealed to you the same way as we had revealed to Noah and the prophets after him and we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, Jesus, Job, Joseph, Aaron and Solomon, and we gave David the Psalms. And we have narrated stories of some earlier messengers, and not narrated of other messengers, and God spoke with Moses.⁹⁰

Numerous incidents pertaining to the lives and missions of these prophets are mentioned as if they were well known in that region at the time. In the Quran, we find clear references of many Biblical stories, which, it would seem, the Quran's audience must be aware of. For example, in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, we read the following:

And remember when we saved you from Pharaoh's people who afflicted you with a cruel suffering, slaughtering your sons and sparing your women. There was a great trial in that for you from your lord. And remember when we separated the sea for you so we saved you and we drowned Pharaoh's people while you watched!⁹¹

Elsewhere in the Quran, the same episode has been narrated in more detail, but it is clear that the audience was aware of Pharaoh, his atrocities on the Children of Israel and that they were saved by God. Similarly, there are instances in which the Quran argues against existing

messengers.”

⁹⁰ The Quran 4:163-4.

⁹¹ The Quran 2:49-50.

theological beliefs, such as the reason for Adam’s expulsion from the Heaven, Jesus’ divinity, and idol worship.

In this section, I survey the epigraphic, archeological and historical sources to gain insight about the religious groups that were settled in the Ḥijāz region. This serves two purposes: 1) If we had not found any such groups in the Arabian Peninsula, then we would be bound to look outside the region; and 2) If evidence can be established for the existing of various religious groups mentioned in the Quran, then it shall aid us in interpreting the Quran’s text.

4.1 Mecca

A “Samaritan collection of Biblical legends,” as Moses Gaster called it, was dated by him to be as old as third century BC,⁹² and was referred to as “Asatir” by Samaritans.⁹³ Although it is ascribed to Moses, in Gaster’s opinion, it is of pseudepigraphic value only due to skepticism shown by scholars towards such an ascription.⁹⁴ Due to it being older than Islam, it is nonetheless important as a historical document. It proclaims that Ishmael and Abraham built Baka which is translated as Mecca by Moses.⁹⁵ This word, Baka, also appears in the Quran in the form of *Bakka*:⁹⁶

⁹² Gaster, “Preface,” *The Asatir*.

⁹³ Gaster, *The Asatir*, 1.

⁹⁴ Gaster, *The Asatir*, 5.

⁹⁵ Gaster, *The Asatir*, 262 (Chapter VIII: Birth of Moses).

⁹⁶ It has been argued by Muslim scholars that Bakka is the same as Baca mentioned in Psalms 84:6: “As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.” Biblical scholars have also interpreted it as “the valley of weeping” (For example, in American

The first house erected for the people is the one at Bakka, blessed and a guidance for the worlds.⁹⁷

The mention in *The Asatir* is not an isolated reference. The historian Diodorus mentions an oasis that the Arabs made sacred which also had an altar.⁹⁸ It is not clear what this altar was and there were multiple such altars, but the mention of oasis, and the land being sacred in which the altar was erected lead to a possibility that this mention is that of Mecca. Similarly, the 4th century bishop Epiphanius mentions “the pilgrimage to the house (*haggat al bait*),”⁹⁹ another term that appears multiple times in the Quran. For example Q2:125 and Q3:97 mention the “place of Abraham (*maqām Ibrāhīm*)” in conjunction with “the pilgrimage of the house (*ḥajj al-bayt*).” The *Khuzistan Chronicle*, a Nestorian account dated ca. 40 AH/660 AD, similarly states that since Abraham “lived in tents, he built that place for the worship of God and for the offering of sacrifices,” and that “it was no new thing for the Arabs to worship there, but goes back to antiquity, to their early days, in that they show honor to the father of the head of their people.”¹⁰⁰

Brown states that “the 2nd-century CE Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy mentions the Arabian

Standard Version, English Revised Version, and World English Bible.) Al-Rāzī believes the Arabic *bakkah* can also lend itself to this meaning due to it being possibly derived from the root *ba-ka-ya*, which also means “to weep” in Arabic. (Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 3:299, commentary for Q3:96).

⁹⁷ The Quran 3:96.

⁹⁸ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 158. Also, Brown, *Muhammad*, 96 which states, “The Greek historian of the 1st century BCE Diodorus mentions a temple in the Hejaz honored by the peoples of Arabia.”

⁹⁹ O’Leary, *Arabia*, 201.

¹⁰⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 187.

towns of ‘Yathrippa’ and ‘Mecoraba’,” and “the Jewish historian Josephus (d. c. 100 CE) tells us that it had long been held that the Arabs were descendants of Abraham through Ismail.”¹⁰¹

4.2 Jews

In the Quran, the Jews and the Christians are referred to as “the people of the Book”, an epithet that had been used for the Jews since the first century CE for their possession of a holy scripture in which answers to all the problems were sought for.¹⁰² Jews are considered to be the first settlers in Yathrib by early Arab historians,¹⁰³ although it has also been said that the Jews settled in the Arabian peninsula perhaps at the time of destruction of the first Temple,¹⁰⁴ with Jewish tribes having been settled in Medina before the Prophet migrated to the city where they were known to be expert jewelers and weapon makers. A certain Jew by the name Shubaytu made a family tomb in Mada’ in Salih (ancient Hegra) dating as far back as 42/43 CE with an inscription that explicitly identifies his religion.¹⁰⁵

Similar to the Christians, the Jews were very much part of the Arab culture so much so that the names of individuals and tribes were Arabized too, and the Jewish tribes of Banū Naḍīr and Banū Qurayṣa were “described as ‘kings’ (*mulūk*) over Medina, ruling Aws and Khazraj”.¹⁰⁶ Yemen had already been established as a Jewish stronghold in the early sixth century and was

¹⁰¹ Brown, *Muhammad*, 96.

¹⁰² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 307.

¹⁰³ Gil, “The origin of the Jews of Yathrib,” 146 in Peters, *The Arabs*.

¹⁰⁴ Ullendorff, “Hebraic-Jewish Elements,” 220-1.

¹⁰⁵ Hoyland, *Arabia*, 146; Hoyland, “The Jews,” *Historical Context 2*, 93-4.

¹⁰⁶ Gil, “The origin of the Jews of Yathrib,” 146-7 in Peters, *The Arabs*.

being ruled by a Jewish king named Dhū Nuwās who attacked Najrān, a city some 400 miles south of Mecca, “and massacred all those who would not renounce Christianity.”¹⁰⁷ Dhū Nuwās is reported to have been eventually defeated by the Abyssinians.¹⁰⁸ Jews are known to be merchants who carried goods back and forth into the region, and we also find references to Jewish customs, such as *Kiddūsh* and Sabbath, in the pre-Islamic literature.¹⁰⁹ There is also a mention of Jewish poets in the sources.¹¹⁰ The Jewish prayer at the Temple, both individual and in congregation, has historically consisted of standing, bowing and prostrating until the “faces touched the ground”¹¹¹ and, since the changes to the prayer’s posture occurred later,¹¹² Arab Jews of that time must have been praying in these positions, which were very close to how Muslims would later pray.

4.3 Christians

Najrān is known to have churches and a martyrium,¹¹³ which leads us to believe there must have been a sizable population of the Christians in the city. There is also evidence of a monastery in South Arabia from which apparently two monks visited Muhammad after his declaration of the prophethood.¹¹⁴ Although Christians, both Arab and Ethiopian,¹¹⁵ are known

¹⁰⁷ Gilbert, *In Ishmael’s House*, 5; al-Jabburī, *al-Sha’r*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Ullendorff, “Hebraic-Jewish Elements,” 224.

¹⁰⁹ Lichtenstadter, “Some References to Jews in Pre-Islamic Arabic Literature,” 188-92.

¹¹⁰ Ullendorff, “Hebraic-Jewish Elements,” 222; Hoyland, “The Jews,” *Historical Context* 2, 92.

¹¹¹ Hayim, *To Pray*, 204.

¹¹² Hayim, *To Pray*, 204-5.

¹¹³ See Shahid, “Byzantium in South Arabia,” 39 for non-Arabic and 69-70 for Arabic sources.

¹¹⁴ See Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 428 for a general existence of a monastery in

to have lived in Mecca in pre-Islamic times, the population seems small enough that a formal church order could not be established.¹¹⁶ Irfan Shahid provides formidable evidence and argues in favor of the existence of an Arabic bible in the pre-Islamic times in South Arabia,¹¹⁷ which strongly indicates that there were at least some native Arab Jews and Christians who may not have known any other languages. Two of the poems in *al-Mufaḍḍaliyāt* were composed by Christian authors with Arab names: Jābir ibn Ḥunayy and ‘Abd al-Masīḥ,¹¹⁸ the latter meaning “the slave of the Messiah.” The Ethiopians in Mecca had translated both the Old and the New Testaments, indicating possibly general availability of the Biblical texts to the Meccans.¹¹⁹ A famous Arab merchant by the name, Ḥayyān, is known to have converted to Christianity and settled in Najrān preaching Christian teachings leading to the spread of Christianity to the point that a bishop had also been appointed there.¹²⁰ Churches were also established in the cities of Ḥafār and Qāna’ to the south of Najrān¹²¹ confirming that the Christians were spread out in South Arabia. Hodgson states that Christians were allowed to perform the pilgrimage at

South Arabia in fifth century and Shahid, “Byzantium in South Arabia,” 42 for non-Arabic and 74-75 for Arabic sources on the existence of a monastery specifically in Najrān at the beginning of the seventh century. Also see Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 1:839-840.

¹¹⁵ Irfan Shahid, “Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 AD” in *The Encounter*, 12-13.

¹¹⁶ Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 389-92.

¹¹⁷ Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 427-9.

¹¹⁸ Lyall, *Mufaḍḍaliyāt*, 2:xxii.

¹¹⁹ Shahid, “Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 AD” in *The Encounter*, 17.

¹²⁰ Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 1:710-711.

¹²¹ Shahid, “Byzantium in South Arabia,” 29.

the Ka'bah,¹²² which indicates the possibility that the Arab Christians could have considered it a ritual.

4.4 Polytheists¹²³

According to Hoyland, until 4th century CE, “almost all the inhabitants of Arabia were polytheists,”¹²⁴ with more than a hundred names used for the deities representing the forces of nature such as rain, fertility, health, love, death, etc., that are still found in the inscriptions.¹²⁵

Some of these gods are mentioned only once or twice and it is possible that they were invoked by the travelers.¹²⁶ Offerings were made to the gods, most common of which were “animals, crops, food, liquids (milk and wine as libations), inscribed metal plaques or stone tablets, aromatics (usually burned to produce fragrant odors), edifices (walls, roofs, temples, wells, pillars, etc.) and manufactured objects (altars, incense burners, libration tables, metal tablets, statues, figurines, etc.).”¹²⁷

Another important feature of the South Arabian polytheistic society was their patron gods. Each people (Sabaeans, Minaeans, Qarabanians, Hadramites) had their own patron gods and

¹²² Hodgson, *The Venture*, 1:162.

¹²³ For Arab sources, see: Henniger, “Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion,” 109-128; Lecker, “Idol Worship in Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib),” 129-144; Watt, “Belief in a ‘High God’ in Pre-Islamic Mecca’,” 307-312, all of which are published in Peters, *The Arabs*.

¹²⁴ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 139.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 141-2.

¹²⁷ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 163.

were labeled as its “children”.¹²⁸ Several deities mentioned in the Quran also appear in the epigraphic data. O’Leary quotes Nabataean inscriptions that refer to the deity *Allāt*, also mentioned in the Quran: “this sanctuary to the lady Ellath”, “the priest of Ellath”, “temple ... built to Allath”.¹²⁹ *Akfal*, a term used for a sacred office in Ḥijāz, is used in connection with Allah at Rawwafa, Allat at Dedan and Dushara, and Hubal and Manat at al-Ḥijr.¹³⁰ Similarly, “*kāhin* of al-Uzzah” also appears in an inscription in Sinai.¹³¹ The deity Ghadd, meaning “good luck” appears in a Yemeni inscription.¹³²

Inscriptions in South Arabia show that blood was also offered as libation at the stone altars, an observation also confirmed by pre-Islamic poetry and early Muslim accounts.¹³³ Likewise, offerings were made at important occasions, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death,¹³⁴ as well as expiation after committing offences or violating some taboo.¹³⁵ O’Leary mentions an earlier altar, called *nuṣub* (pl. *anṣāb*), as “the widest spread form of Semitic religion” and was a “place of slaughter.”¹³⁶ It would not be wrong to conclude then that slaughter at the altars was in fact libation, which would include blood sacrifices too. This view has been adopted by Ali

¹²⁸ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 140.

¹²⁹ O’Leary, *Arabia*, 194.

¹³⁰ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 159. O’Leary also mentions Manāt in an al-Ḥijr inscription but it is unclear to me whether it is a different inscription or the one that Hoyland also cites. O’Leary in turn cites Cooke, A. B., *Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions*, (Oxford, 1903).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² O’Leary, *Arabia*, 195.

¹³³ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 166.

¹³⁴ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 164.

¹³⁵ Hoyland, *Arabs*, 165.

¹³⁶ O’Leary, *Arabia*, 196. See Q5:3 which uses the term *nuṣub* for the altars at which it forbade slaughter.

who states that these were “stone altars or stone columns on which oil was poured for consecration, or slabs on which meat was sacrificed to idols.”¹³⁷

4.5 *Ḥunafā'*

A monotheistic religion by the name *dīn Ibrāhīm*, the religion of Abraham, is mentioned in the Arab sources as being followed by those who were referred to as *ḥunafā'* (sing. *ḥanīf*).¹³⁸ Some scholars have shown skepticism in accepting those sources and, additionally, some other sources have instead attributed non-monotheistic religions to the *ḥunafā'*.¹³⁹ Uri Rubin¹⁴⁰ has argued that some of the Prophet's opponents were also *ḥunafā'*, and since the actual usage by Muslims seems to have been to prove that the Prophet was from a monotheistic lineage, “the reports concerning these persons must be taken as authentic because, as already noted by Fueck, no Muslim could have had any interest in characterizing these opponents of the Prophet”¹⁴¹ as such. Rubin then provides several narratives indicating that Abraham's relationship was very strongly recognized with the Ka'bah, and the vestiges of a religion associated to him could be found in Mecca. Gibb regards the existence of a local monotheistic

¹³⁷ Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, 271 note 794, commentary for verse 5:90, citing Renan, *History of Israel*, Chapter IV, and *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, Part I, 154, stating that “illustrations nos. 123 and 123 bis are Phoenician columns of that kind, found in Malta.”

¹³⁸ Rubin, “Ḥanīfiyya and Ka'ba,” 267-94 in Peters, *The Arabs*.

¹³⁹ See *Ḥanīf* in EI2.

¹⁴⁰ See Rubin, “Ḥanīfiyya and Ka'ba,” 267-94 in Peters, *The Arabs*.

¹⁴¹ Rubin, “Ḥanīfiyya and Ka'ba,” 267-8 in Peters, *The Arabs*.

Arabian religion as “historically certain,” although he acknowledges the challenges that lie in identifying who the *ḥunafā’* were.¹⁴²

Due to dearth of sources on *ḥunafā’* in the pre-Islamic world, we may at least look at the usage of the term in the Quran to gain insight into how it employed the term. The words *ḥanīf* and *ḥunafā’* appear some ten times in the Quran, out of which eight instances refer to Abraham as *ḥanīf*,¹⁴³ most of which further deny his association with polytheism. *Ḥanīf* in all these cases then clearly implies that Abraham followed a monotheistic religion, and Abraham himself is often associated closely with Mecca. For example,

Say, “God has spoken the truth, so follow the creed of Abraham who was not from among the polytheists.” The first house that was setup for the people is the one at Mecca, a source of blessings and guidance for the world. In that, there are clear signs, and the place of Abraham. Whoever enters it is secure. Whoever is able to reach it has (incumbent) upon themselves the pilgrimage of that house for God. And whoever denies it, then God is independent from the world.¹⁴⁴

We shall encounter one such example in *Sūrat Yūnus* as well, which seems to employ the term *ḥanīf* in the sense of monotheism. This is not to state that non-Arabic sources at this point support this point of view, rather that this point may be considered when reading Quranic text that makes references to *ḥunafā’*.

¹⁴² Gibb, “Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia,” 297-8 in Peters, *The Arabs*.

¹⁴³ Blois, “Naṣrānī and ḥanīf studies,” 16-17.

¹⁴⁴ The Quran 3:95-97.

4.6 Expectation of a new prophet

Since the Quran incessantly proclaimed Muhammad as another prophet (*nabī*) from the series of prophets sent earlier, a natural question arises regarding the general environment of the region concerning prophecy. It would not make much sense if the Quran, as an effective literary work, were to engage with its audience on issues of no interest to them. As Wellek and Waren put it, “Indeed, literature has usually arisen in close connection with particular social institutions.”¹⁴⁵ We can surely consider prophecy as a social institution at that time.

The Hebrew *navi*, considered a loan word from Akkadian *nabū*, already denoted prophecy¹⁴⁶ and could be related to the Arabic *nabī*. The current day Arabic translations of the Bible also employ the term *nabī* to identify a prophet. It is thus probable, although not certain, that if Arabic translations of the Bible existed in Mecca, they would have been using the same Arabic word that was to be later used by the Quran. This word appears in several verses of the current day Arabic Bible, such as Deuteronomy 18:15 which unequivocally proclaims the coming of another prophet: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a *nabī* like me from among you, from your brethren – him you shall heed.”¹⁴⁷

Many Muslim scholars have argued that people of the book were in fact expecting a prophet,¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Wellek, *Theory of Literature*, 89.

¹⁴⁶ See “Origins and development of Hebrew prophecy” in Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “prophecy,” accessed March 18, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/479082/prophecy>.

¹⁴⁷ “Arabic Life Application Bible,” accessed on March 18, 2013, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy%2018:15&version=ALAB>.

¹⁴⁸ For examples, see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:165; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 1:598-599. For modern scholars, see Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm*, 1:93 and Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 1:270.

and have maintained that the Bible contained passages with such indications.¹⁴⁹ Turning towards contemporary non-Muslim sources, we find that they also portrayed an environment that was amenable to the claim of prophethood. A Greek work titled *Doctrina Jacobi* (“Teachings of Jacob”), authored in 634 CE,¹⁵⁰ narrates a certain letter written by a Jew who had heard that “the prophet had appeared”, and that “he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come.”¹⁵¹ Although the writer then goes on to reject “the prophet” and positions Jesus as “the Christ” to prove the veracity of the Christian doctrine, the letter undoubtedly illuminates that the region’s religious environment was not only amenable to but perhaps also anticipating the advent of a new prophet. Similarly, a work titled “Secrets” attributes an apocalyptic vision to the second-century rabbi Simon ben Yohai in which the angel Metatron states that the Almighty will raise “up over them (Ishmaelites) a prophet according to His will and He will conquer the land for them, and they will come and restore it to greatness.”¹⁵² It has been argued that the document is likely to have been authored much after the rabbi, and it might even be after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, it nonetheless gives us an indication that a prophet was probably expected among the Ishmaelites. If the concept of prophecy were an anathema to these authors, they would instead be arguing not about whether Muhammad was a prophet or not, rather that there were not to be any more prophets.

¹⁴⁹ For example, al-Rāzī discusses this in the citation above.

¹⁵⁰ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 55.

¹⁵¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 57 citing Dagron, Gilbert and Déroche, Vincent. “Juifs et chrétiens dans l’Orient du VIIe siècle.” *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991), 209.

¹⁵² Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 309. For related visions attributed to Simon ben Yohai and a comparison of how Muhammad was referenced, see Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision,” 320-4.

When the Quran proclaimed Muhammad as a prophet and itself as the book of God in such a religious environment, it harnessed these sentiments maintaining that the Israelites and the Christians were for sure expecting a prophet. For example:

When there came to them a book (*kitāb*) from God confirming that which was with them while previously they used to pray for victory over infidels (*'alā alladhīna kafarū*), so when came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it (*kafarū bi-hi*). The curse of God be on the infidels (*al-kāfirīn*).¹⁵³

Since the context that this verse is alluding to is pre-Islamic, the first mention of infidels is to those who were considered such in the eyes of the Israelites, the Gentiles,¹⁵⁴ since the Israelites prayed for a victory over them. The second mention is a more general one, and perhaps includes the Israelites for they disbelieved, *kafarū*, in the book “that came to them”.

4.7 Conclusion

We do find some evidence in the sources to establish Mecca as the center of worship with some references to Abraham as its leading figure. The Arabian Peninsula had a rich religious environment with Jews, Christians and Polytheists living side by side.¹⁵⁵ Although the link of Abraham to Mecca is also attested in other sources, which we saw in section 4.1, the association of a monotheistic religion to *ḥunafā'* purely from non-Arab sources is not certain.

¹⁵³ The Quran 2:89.

¹⁵⁴ Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, 41.

¹⁵⁵ We also find other religions, such as Monophysites and Sabaeans, in the sources but to avoid unnecessary lengthening of investigation, I have not delved into those sources.

Devin Stewart states, “Significant evidence shows that the pre-Islamic Arabs were thoroughly familiar with Judaism and Christianity, which had each established a strong presence in Arabia and neighboring territories long before the advent of Islam.”¹⁵⁶ Based on the evidence observed in this section, we can safely raise two objections to the hypothesis that the Quran must have been formulated outside of the Ḥijāz region. Firstly, it is really an argument from silence and not based on concrete historical evidence. Secondly, the primary reason used to associate a non-Arabian region was supposedly the lack of data suggesting the existence of Jews and Christians in Ḥijāz. This latter argument loses its credence in the light of evidence seen already.

¹⁵⁶ Stewart, “Mysterious letters,” 324 in Reynolds, *New Perspectives*.

5 Literary Devices

The chapter delves into the devices that operate at a verse or a verse group level. Many of these devices, such as metaphor, imagery and simile, can be found in all texts and their general understanding is thus assumed. Some devices that were once heavily utilized in the classical literature are not as common today, such as parallelism and chiasmus. All of the aforementioned are presented in this chapter to highlight their usage in the Quran. In addition to these, the Quran also employs devices that are exclusive to the Classical Arabic in the way they are used. *Ḥadhf*,¹⁵⁷ for example, is one of such modes that is widely used in the Quran and is rife in the Classical Arabic. Any serious reading of the Quran would require intimacy with such special styles, which are bound to have an impact on the comprehension of the text.

5.1 *Ḥadhf*: Omission of Words

Out of the various literary devices, *ḥadhf*, a form of ellipsis, is perhaps the hardest to appreciate primarily because it is no longer in vogue in the modern languages. *Ḥadhf* is the omission of those words without which the meaning of the phrase can still be fully conveyed and the omitted words can be adduced either from the context in which they occur¹⁵⁸ or from the

¹⁵⁷ Although *ḥadhf* is usually considered ellipsis, its usage in Classical Arabic follows certain grammatical rules and seems more sophisticated than the ellipsis.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 2:74; al-Zarkashī, *Burhān*, 3:102-103; al-Rummānī, *al-Nukat*, 76 in *Thalāth Rasā'il*.

prevalent usage in the literature.¹⁵⁹ Commonly used in the classical Arabic literature, it is also extensively employed in the Quran. The commentators of the Quran often have to determine if *ḥadhf* had been applied in a particular verse and if so, which words had possibly been omitted. The simplest example is perhaps that of the phrase *bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*, usually translated, “In the name of God, most beneficent, most merciful.” Grammatically, it is only a prepositional phrase and lacks a necessary verb to form a complete sentence. A verb, such as I begin, (*abdā’u*) I read (*aqrā’u*) or I recite (*atlū*), has been omitted from it.¹⁶⁰ Since the omitted word is to be adduced from the context or prevalent usage, the scholars sometimes differ in what that specific word ought to be.

While a complete treatment of *ḥadhf* is a larger effort beyond the scope of this thesis,¹⁶¹ two of its types, both of which occur in *Sūrat Yūnus*, are covered in this section for an illustration of

¹⁵⁹ Sībawayh, *Kitāb*, 1:280-290.

¹⁶⁰ Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:12.

¹⁶¹ *Ḥadhf* is discussed in classical as well as modern works alike. For example, Sībawayh (d. 180/796), whose *Kitāb Sībawayh* is considered to be a founding text on the Arabic grammar, deals with *ḥadhf* in quite some detail although it needs to be sifted through the several volumes of his work as he does not deal with it in one place. Al-Rummānī discusses a few examples of *ḥadhf* but does not attempt to cover it exhaustively. Al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) presents a somewhat comprehensive exposition of *ḥadhf* in one place in which he covers all types, such as *ḥadhf* of *mubtadā’*, *khabr*, *al-fā’il*, *al-muḍāf wa iqāmat al-muḍāf ilayh muqāmihi*, *al-jār wa-al-majrūr*, etc. In addition, he also covers the cases where *ḥadhf* appears with *iltifāt*. He further outlines the differences of opinions between scholars and denotes a section to warnings. See al-Zarkashī, *Burhān*, 3:102-232. The most complete treatment of the subject is perhaps by al-Baghdādī (d. 1093/1682) in his eleven volume treatise *al-Baghdādī*, ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn ‘Umar, *Khazānat al-Adab wa-Lubb Lubāb Lisān al-‘Arab*, 13 vols, (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānji, 1998) but, like Sībawayh, it is also organized under each of the other grammatical categories and thus also needs to be searched through. Wright (d. 1889) covers it in some detail but restricts it to the accusative which “not

this feature. The first one is a phrase of command that begins with a verbal noun which appears in the accusative.¹⁶² Since it is a verbal noun and appears in accusative, a verb, which can often be *al-maf'ūl al-muṭlaq*, is omitted and must be supplied from the context or the usage.¹⁶³ For example, in the phrase *ṣabran lā jaz'an*, both *ṣabran* and *jaz'an* require a verb, *al-maf'ūl al-muṭlaq*, which has been omitted. If those omitted verbs are assumed in reading the phrase, it would essentially mean to be equivalent of *iṣbar ṣabran walā tajza' jaza'an*, that is, be patient and do not grieve immoderately.¹⁶⁴ A phrase such as *al-kilāb 'alā al-baqr* said to a hunter in which *al-kilāb* is accusative has *arsil* omitted from it, the meaning being “send the dogs at the antelopes”.¹⁶⁵ *Arsil* here is deduced from the general usage of such a phrase and the situation in which it is uttered.

unfrequently depends upon a verb which is understood,” and provides several examples to cover this particular type quite well. See Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, 2:72-75. Shāh Valī Allāh (d. 1182/1762) provides a number of examples but does not go into grammatical details except in a few cases. See Shāh Valī Allāh, *al-Fawz*, 59-62. Although his coverage of *ḥadhf* is also by no means exhaustive since he covers only that which is introduced by the accusative, it does however shed light onto the importance of this feature and how it can affect the meaning of a piece of text. Al-Farāhī (d. 1930), who defines *ḥadhf* as “the omission of extraneous words from the narrative,” lists the various types of *ḥadhf* that occur in the Quran, along with examples but his coverage leaves one wanting to gain more depth. See al-Farāhī, *Asālib*, 25-30. Also see Rahman, “Ellipsis in the Qur’ān,” in *Literary Structures*, 277-291.

¹⁶² Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, 2:72.

¹⁶³ Sibawayh, *Kitāb*, 1:280-290 (*bāb yuḥdhaf minhu al-fa'l likuthratihi fī kalāmihim*); Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, 2:74.

¹⁶⁴ Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, 2:73.

¹⁶⁵ Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, 2:75.

5.2 Parallelism and Chiasmus

Referred to as *al-laff wa-al-nashr*, both parallelism and chiasmus were identified in the Quran by the traditional scholars. Parallelism corresponds to two sets of literary elements where the first element of the first set corresponds with the first element of the second set and similarly second element of the first set corresponds to the second element of the second set, represented by A/B/A'/B' where A' corresponds to A and B' corresponds to B. A simple example would be the sentence, "The horn sounded, the ears deafened." Chiasmus, also known as the mirror construction, is when the formation of the second half is inverted: A/B/B'/A'. The same sentence could be rewritten as "The horn sounded, deafening the ears," to form a chiasmus.

Al-Suyutī provides five examples of parallelism and three examples of chiasmus. Chiasmus is the second type of *al-laff wa-al-nashr* in the reverse arrangement, i.e. '*alā 'aks tartībihi*'.¹⁶⁶ Examples of these modes are rife in the Quran both at the individual verse level as well as at the level of verse groups. In the context of monetary spending, the following verse is furnished by al-Suyutī:

- A And do not tie your hand to your neck
- B nor stretch it out completely
- A' lest you become blameworthy,
- B' destitute.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Al-Suyutī, *Itqān*, 2:120 (*al-naw' al-thāmin wa-al-khamsūn: fi badā'i' al-Qur'ān*).

¹⁶⁷ The Quran 17:29.

Tying the hand to one's neck, a metaphor for miserly behavior, would be blameworthy. On the other hand, stretching it out completely, that is, prodigal behavior, could lead to poverty.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, we find chiasmus in the following verse,¹⁶⁹ which al-Zamakhsharī calls *al-laff wa-tartībihi*:¹⁷⁰

A And from his signs is your sleep

B at night

B' and at day time

A' your seeking from his bounty¹⁷¹

In that are signs for those who listen.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Al-Suyuṭī, *Itqān*, 2:120.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:458, commentary for Q30:23.

¹⁷¹ The *wa* here is not translated because it corresponds (i.e. its 'aṭf is) to the *wa* of *manāmukum*. Thus the sentence in reality is *wa-min āyātihi manāmukum wa-btighā'ūkum min faḍlihi bi-al-layl wa-al-nahār*. Both al-Suyuṭī and al-Zamakhsharī have explained this. See notes 168 and 170 above for reference. Also see al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, v. 30:23, 9:93.

¹⁷² The Quran 30:23. For comparison, Lund, *Chiasmus*, 32, states many commentators have recognized in the following words of Jesus a chiastic structure”:

A Give not that which is holy unto the *dogs*,

B Neither cast your pearls before the *swine*,

B' Lest haply they (the swine) *trample* them under their feet,

A' And they (the dogs) turn and *rend* you. (Matthew 7:6).

5.3 Imagery

Imagery is associated not only with our senses but also with our psychology and thus often evokes an emotional response.¹⁷³ It is almost a universal phenomenon employed in literature and is not restricted to a particular language or culture. Although the Quran makes heavy use of visual imagery, it also relies on non-visual imagery, which is most profoundly employed for a demonstration of the eschatological process and its result. In general, Heaven is represented as *al-jannah*, that is “the garden”, and Hell as *al-nār*, that is “the fire,” both of which, insofar as the terms are concerned, are not any different from the Biblical concepts. Both these terms are indicative of the blissful life of those who performed noble deeds in this world as compared to those who would have overwhelmingly wretched ones. In addition to these terms, detailed descriptions of Heaven and Hell are abound in the Quran. For example:

On that day, some faces will be humiliated, weary and worn-out, who will be subjected to a blazing fire. They will drink from a boiling spring, and will not have any food except of thorns which will neither fatten one nor satisfy hunger. Some faces will be blissful, pleased with their struggle, in high gardens. They will not hear any vain talk. There will be a gushing spring in there, and there will be raised thrones, cups well-placed, cushions positioned in rows and spread out carpets.¹⁷⁴

The discussion of punishment and reward in the Hereafter, one could argue, is in fact its leitmotif for it surfaces in almost every issue that the Quran undertakes. One’s behavior and

¹⁷³ Wellek, *Theory*, 193-4.

¹⁷⁴ The Quran 88:2-11.

actions are tied to its consequence in the Hereafter. This process by which the Quran attempts to spiritually grow a person is expressed as God taking them out of “darkness towards light.”¹⁷⁵ This phrase is applied for Moses¹⁷⁶ and Muhammad’s¹⁷⁷ missions as well.

5.4 Similes

Similes in the Quran usually begin with the word *mathal* or one of its variations, or by the particle *ka*. They are many a times cast in the form of visual imagery. The best example of this phenomenon occurs in the 35th verse of *Sūrat al-Nūr*, also known as the “light verse,” in which God is presented as akin to the light of an oil lamp:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth. His similitude is like that of a niche in which there is a lamp. That lamp is (enclosed) in a glass. That glass is as if it were a star. It is lit from (the oil of) a blessed¹⁷⁸ olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is close to burning even though a fire has not touched it. Light upon light. God guides whomever He wishes to His light. God presents similitudes for people, and God knows everything.

As this simile unfolds, one finds that this is no ordinary lamp. Even though this lamp’s light is not directly discussed, all descriptions seem to stress upon the intensity of its light’s

¹⁷⁵ The Quran 2:257 and 5:16.

¹⁷⁶ The Quran 14:5

¹⁷⁷ The Quran 57:9 and 65:11.

¹⁷⁸ The word *mubārakah* can also be translated as verdant, beneficial or profitable. See Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm*, 3:407 and Islāhī, *Tadabbur*, 5:410.

luminance. The simile starts with the lamp's placement in a niche and then moves to its glass, which is "as if it were a star." Stars both produce their own light and have an element of beauty associated with them. But there is something deeper to the stars. They have been used for navigational purposes too, and thus, they guide a traveler towards their destination. Emphasis is laid on the olive tree and its oil, which is so volatile that it is "close to burning even though a fire has not touched it." The light produced by such oil ought to be unsurpassed in brightness.¹⁷⁹ After all this, God is said to be "light upon light," thus further intensifying God's image in our minds.

In *Sūrat al-Mudaththir*, the Quran differentiates the fate of those who performed righteous deeds from the evildoers, and then it turns around to question why the latter would not accept the Quran. Their attitude is illustrated as a simile that begins with *ka*.

So what is the matter with them that they are turning away from the admonishment?

As if they were terrified asses, fleeing from a lion!¹⁸⁰

An ass flees from the lion to save its life. All its energy is exerted in that pursuit and its focus is only on saving its life. No matter what, it must find a way out whether by hook or by crook. The ass here is a reference to the Quran's opponents who were running away from "the admonishment", a common term the Quran has used to describe itself. The exertion of energy on the part of the ass could be indicative of the vigor and, perhaps, treachery, with which the

¹⁷⁹ We must keep in mind that this is authored in a time when the oil lamp was the primary manmade means of light.

¹⁸⁰ The Quran 74:49-51.

Quran's opponents were opposing it. The simile could additionally be also extrapolated to convey their emotional state of fear and horror although the context of the preceding and succeeding verses does not provide us with any evidence that it were intended as such by the Quran. However, if deemed to be so, this fear could be based on their existing religious ideology being challenged or the possibility of their existing social and political order being toppled.

Right at the beginning of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, the Quran discusses those who were opposing the Prophet, and describes them using the following words:

Their example is like that of a man who lit fire. When his surroundings lit up, God took away their sight and left them in the darkness, they cannot see.¹⁸¹

The man referred to here is the Prophet who lit the fire, which brightened his surroundings. What fire is this? As mentioned in the preceding verses, it is an allusion to the true faith that God sent down via His prophet. And despite that, the opponents behaved as if they had turned blind and could not see this light of faith around them.

5.5 Metaphors

Metaphors in the Quran are a target of more intense discussion because, by their nature, metaphors can be hard to determine as compared to similes since the latter begin with an explicit word or particle identifying it. There are some examples though which easily stand out. In *Sūrat Banī Isrā'īl*, the Quran commands the believers to do good to their parents, and to not

¹⁸¹ The Quran 2:17.

even say “ugh” to them, but speak kindly. Then the next verse says,

And lower unto them the wing of humility, out of compassion, and pray, “O my lord!
Have mercy on them as they both took care of me as a child.”¹⁸²

At first sight, the phrase “wing of humility” seems awkward, but the context of parents helps discover the implication of the phrase. Birds provide for the sustenance of their chicks and fiercely protect them from external dangers until they fly independently and are completely weaned.¹⁸³ The wing denotes power and valor that is very much needed by the young bird, an indication of its independence from parents. The Quran emphasizes that when it comes to one’s parents, their wings ought to become the wings of humility, that is they ought to exert this newfound strength in being humble towards and supportive of their parents. The verse does not stop there. It continues with an antithesis to rationalize its edict and evoke a compassionate response within the individual towards his parents: *rabbayānī ṣaghīran*, they both took care of me as a child. Thus, one’s self-sufficiency, which would not have been possible without the care of their parents, is a reminder of one’s duty towards them.

A more controversial example of metaphorical usage is that of the Israelites when they had violated their pledge of the Sabbath, which is expressed in Jeremiah 17. In Ezekiel 20, which recounts the rebellion of the Israelites, God mentions that Israelites had “utterly desecrated”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² The Quran 17:24.

¹⁸³ Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 4:496-7, commentary for Q17:24.

¹⁸⁴ See for example Ezekiel 20:13. Desecration of the Sabbath is also mentioned in Ezekiel 20:16, 21 and 24.

the Sabbath. Nehemiah reminded of this desecration and the resulting “calamity” that was sent from God:

I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn’t your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.”¹⁸⁵

While referring to this desecration of the Sabbath, the Quran does not go into much detail perhaps because it was an already known event in the Bible. Thus, in one instance, it simply mentions a specific reason for why that particular group of Israelites had earned God’s wrath, a reason absent from the Bible.

And you surely know about those who transgressed from among you in the case of the Sabbath, we said to them: Become apes, despised!¹⁸⁶

The intensity of God’s wrath is reflected by the metaphoric association of that group of Israelites with the apes who were despised by God.

5.6 Rhetorical Questions

Unanswered rhetorical questions make a very effective tool in the Quran by capturing the attention of the reader, and probing them to contemplate on their train of thought.

¹⁸⁵ Nehemiah 13:17-18.

¹⁸⁶ The Quran 2:65.

Sometimes, these questions appear in the middle of a conversation to draw the attention towards a particular aspect of the issue at hand and then the discourse resumes as if a question had never been injected. The question is sometimes directly posed to the group whom the Quran is already addressing. In other cases though, the Prophet is told to ask the question as in the example below, in which the Quran addressed a group of Israelites who, according to this verse, believed that either they had immunity from hellfire or, at most, it would be an ephemeral punishment.

And they say, “The fire will not touch us except for a few days.” Say, “Have you taken a promise from God that He will not go against it or do you say about God that which you do not know?” Nay, whoever commits an error such that his error surrounds him, those are the people of the fire, in which they will abide forever.¹⁸⁷

The Quran first stresses upon the Prophet to question them if this were something that they had been foretold (probably an allusion towards the Bible) or if they were making it up. After that, it continues to respond directly to their belief such that the text would make a coherent reading even if the question was absent. The question nonetheless disrupts the reading and makes one contemplate on the question, without which the reading may not be as engaging:

And they say, “The fire will not touch us except for a few days.” Nay, whoever commits an error such that his error surrounds him, those are the people of the fire in which they will abide forever.

¹⁸⁷ The Quran 2:80-81.

6 The Quran as Literature

In this chapter, we turn towards the Quran as a holistic work. First, the issue of whether the Quran ought to be studied as an organized book or whether as a collection of disjointed texts with some common recurring themes akin to a “book of quotes on a subject” is discussed.¹⁸⁸ Scholars have approached the issue of the Quran’s composition from various angles, and I trace these approaches starting from Nöldeke, ending with the recent developments inspired from the studies in Semitic rhetoric. Second, the Quran lays heavy emphasis on God’s *rusul* with certain connotations, which are also discussed. I explore the pertinent characteristics of a *rasūl* within the Quranic framework.

6.1 Composition

The composition of works in the Western languages follows certain patterns that are not necessarily immediately visible in the Quran.¹⁸⁹ Thus, the Western scholars who initially attempted to study the Quran became quite frustrated with an apparent lack of an order in its composition.¹⁹⁰ Among the medieval Arab scholars, a group argued for the existence of a

¹⁸⁸ I borrow this phrase from Mir, *Coherence*, 20 where he presents Mawdūdī’s concept of *naẓm*.

¹⁸⁹ Cuypers, “Semitic Rhetoric,” 3-5.

¹⁹⁰ For example, Thomas Carlyle failed to see even the slightest sense in the Quranic text and called it “a confused jumble.” See Robinson, *Discovering*, 99. Brown, Norman, “The Apocalypse of Islam,” *Social Text*, no. 8 (Winter 1983-4): 155-171 at 155 states that Carlyle “perfectly articulated the response of every

coherent structure in the Quran while others held the opinion that the Quran lacked it. For example, among those who wrote on *ijāz*, al-Khaṭṭābī believed that the best compositional organization (*aḥsan naẓm al-tā'rif*) made the Quran inimitable,¹⁹¹ and that the opponents resorted to calling it poetry when they saw a coherent discourse (*kalāman manẓūman*).¹⁹² Al-Suyūṭī mentions Burhān al-Dīn al-Baqā'ī who composed a book on the organization of surahs and verses, and their literary styles, and also quotes al-Rāzī who stated in his commentary that the beauty (*laṭā'if*) lie in the correct (or suitable) arrangement of the surahs and verses (*munāsabāt al-suwar wa-al-āyāt*).¹⁹³ Al-Suyūṭī quotes several other opinions including al-Rāzī's who argued that the arrangement of the surahs and verses made the Quran inimitable.¹⁹⁴

At the same time, some traditional scholars also held that the Quran lacks coherence typical of an authored book primarily because of the varying circumstances in which it was revealed. Al-Suyūṭī notes the opinion of 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām who questions even the possibility

honest Englishman.”

¹⁹¹ Al-Khaṭṭābī, “Bayān,” *Thalāth Rasā'il*, 27.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 28. Mir believes that al-Khaṭṭābī's concept of *naẓm* was at the level of a sentence only because of the examples the latter cites in support of *naẓm*. See Mir, *Coherence*, 12. While Mir's observation concerning the examples furnished by al-Khaṭṭābī is valid, it is nonetheless difficult to arrive at the same conclusion as his because, as quoted above, al-Khaṭṭābī argued about *naẓm* in comparison with poetry and in the context of discourse (*kalām*). Mir himself quotes a passage from al-Khaṭṭābī in which he states that it is due to the modes of *naẓm* “that the parts of an utterance [*ajzā' al-kalām*] become well-knit.” The term *al-kalām* is more likely to apply to texts larger than just a sentence, even an entire work, and if al-Khaṭṭābī's intent was necessarily a sentence, one would question why did he not choose a more appropriate word such as *jumlah* or *'ibārah*. See al-Khaṭṭābī, “Bayān,” *Thalāth Rasā'il*, 36.

¹⁹³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 2:138 (*al-nau' al-thānī wa-al-sittūn: fī munāsabah al-āyāt wa-al-suwar*).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

of coherence in the Quran because “it was revealed in different circumstances,” and suggests that any attempts to find coherence in the Quran would be futile.¹⁹⁵ Some of the modern scholars have even proposed that the Quran be rearranged in the order in which it was revealed.¹⁹⁶

In the twentieth century, several works were published that attempted to find structure in the Quran. From the Indian subcontinent, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī’s (d. 1349/1930) works on Quranic studies were published in Arabic expositing issues related to the Quran’s *naẓm*, the principles of Quranic interpretation, and the results of his investigation on the Quran’s language. His commentary of a few surahs was also translated by his pupil Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1417/1997) and published in Urdu as *Majmu’ah-yi Tafāsīr-i Farāhī*. Iṣlāḥī then adopted those principles and applied them to the Quran in his momentous commentary *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān* in which he presented both “thematic and structural *naẓm* at the same time.”¹⁹⁷

In Europe, Angelika Neuwirth investigated and presented her findings on the structure of the Meccan surahs in *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*.¹⁹⁸ Both Iṣlāḥī’s and Neuwirth’s works were then judiciously utilized by Neal Robinson in *Discovering the Qur’an*.¹⁹⁹ Robinson

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ See for example, Stefanidis, “The Quran Made Linear”, 1-22 for a background and analysis of such an approach.

¹⁹⁷ Mir, *Coherence*, 24. A synthesis of these works, both from al-Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī, was presented by Mir in *Coherence in the Qur’ān*.

¹⁹⁸ See Friedman, “Interpreting” for an introduction and an analysis of Neuwirth’s approach.

¹⁹⁹ Of course, significant part of the book contains his original research. My intent is to mention the influence of the abovementioned works on the later ones.

credits Neuwirth’s “pioneering work in this field” and adopts her strategy in his section on the Meccan surahs.²⁰⁰ He then takes Iṣlāḥī’s work to develop his synthesis on *Sūrat al-Baqarah*²⁰¹ and devotes one of the two chapters on surah ordering to Iṣlāḥī’s theory stating that “a number of scholars from India and Pakistan have argued” that “the content of the surah had a bearing on the position they were assigned in the corpus.”²⁰² More recently, Michel Cuypers and Raymond Farrin have published works on an analysis of the structure of the Quranic surahs in accordance with the rules of Semitic rhetoric. Cuypers stated that “his analysis on the basis of Semitic rhetoric seems to confidently confirm” Iṣlāḥī’s conclusions on the surahs being semantically connected.²⁰³ In addition to a number of papers on smaller surahs, Cuypers has published a detailed analysis of *Sūrat al-Mā’idah* according to the rules of Semitic rhetoric in *Le Festin: Une lecture de la sourate al-Mâ’ida*.²⁰⁴

Since detailed expositions on the compositions of individual surahs are not available except from the modern scholars. In this section I will attempt to formalize the two approaches; referred to as Farāḥī-Iṣlāḥī,²⁰⁵ for the lack of a better identifier, and Semitic rhetoric.

6.1.1 Introduction to the Approaches

The primary difference between Farāḥī-Iṣlāḥī and Semitic rhetoric lies in the reference point

²⁰⁰ Robinson, *Discovering*, 99.

²⁰¹ Robinson, *Discovering*, 202.

²⁰² Robinson, *Discovering*, 271-83.

²⁰³ Cuypers, “Semitic Rhetoric,” 2.

²⁰⁴ This has been translated in English as *The Banquet: A Reading of the fifth Sura of the Qur’an*.

²⁰⁵ I am deliberately dropping the article *al-*, and align it with the same name that Mir has employed in *Coherence*.

for developing their theses. The former relies heavily on the Classical Arabic literature, preferably *jāhīlī* poetry,²⁰⁶ although literature from Islamic poets is also utilized. At the same time, previous sacred scriptures also play an important role in Farāhī-Iṣlāhī hermeneutics.²⁰⁷ Both al-Farāhī and Iṣlāhī are acutely aware of the apocryphalness of the *jāhīlī* literature but argue that a masterful critic can differentiate (*imtiyāz*) between the original and the manufactured.²⁰⁸ Unfortunately, neither of them formalized or expressed objective means of differentiating between the two. This reference point to the Classical Arabic literature is important for an appreciation of their hermeneutical approach because one finds that based on their study of Classical Arabic literature, both of them sometimes allude to an organization of verses and surahs that would otherwise seem to be based on principles now formalized in Semitic rhetoric.

The formalization of Semitic rhetoric took place in the eighteenth century when the rules of parallelism and chiasmus were discovered in the Bible.²⁰⁹ According to Cuypers, “further observations and systemizations would develop during the eighteenth and nineteenth century and even in the twentieth century.”²¹⁰ These rules, nonetheless, have been applied to various Semitic texts including Arabic, Akkadian, and Ugaritic confirming the applicability of these rules to various Semitic texts.²¹¹ Semitic rhetoric formalizes parallelism and chiasmus at two

²⁰⁶ Al-Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah*, 39-42. Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur*, 1:14-17.

²⁰⁷ Al-Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah*, 42-44. Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur*, 1:33.

²⁰⁸ Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah*, 40. Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur*, 1:15.

²⁰⁹ Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 28.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 28-29.

levels, *superior* (or autonomous) and *inferior* (or non-autonomous), and adds to that list what is referred to as ring composition, or concentric composition.²¹² Ring composition refers to chiasmus with an additional element in the center of the text thus forming a composition that can be expressed as A/B/X/B'/A'.²¹³ An important characteristic of a ring structure is “the correspondence between the beginning and the end. The correspondence usually involves the repetition of a conspicuous word or phrase, such as a proper name; also, there must be a clear thematic connection between the two sections. The correspondence serves to complete the circle and provide closure.”²¹⁴

As far as the levels are concerned, the inferior level starts with the smallest unit of text, defined as a *term*, which “corresponds to a lexeme or word that belongs to the lexicon – noun, adjective, verb and adverb.”²¹⁵ As the scope of the text is widened, *member*, *segment*, *piece* and *part* are defined, each of which is “formed of *one*, *two* or *three* units of the preceding level.”²¹⁶ Thus a segment may consist of up to three members and a part may consist of up to three pieces. After the *part* starts the superior level, which consists of *passage*, *sequence*, *section* and *book*, each of which may be “formed of *one* or *several* units from the previous level.”²¹⁷ Consequently, a passage can consist of several parts and a book may consist of several sections. It may be added here that compositions exhibiting parallelism, chiasmus or rings at the surah

²¹² Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 47.

²¹³ Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 48; Farrin, *Sūrat al-Baqara*, 18-19.

²¹⁴ Farrin, “Surat al-Baqara,” 18-9 citing Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 38.

²¹⁵ Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 47; also Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 374-5.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

level have been identified by other scholars too. Robinson argued for chiastic structures in *Sūrat al-Burūj* (along with two other surahs) which we shall examine later in conjunction with the approach of other scholars. Mir similarly presented a chiastic structure for *Sūrat Yūsuf* that we shall also compare against Cuypers' analysis.

6.1.2 *Composition of the Verses*

Throughout his commentary, Iṣlāḥī occasionally lists the literary devices he employs in understanding the composition of individual verses or passages. Although, this information is quite useful, it does not suffice for a newcomer to understand the intricate relationships between the verse parts and the verses. As mentioned earlier, in Iṣlāḥī's framework, this ability is gained through the mastery of the Classical Arabic literature. He organizes the translation in a modern paragraph style to bring out a coherent reading of the text. He also provides expansive notes that serve to determine the organization of the text. They include linguistic, historical and literary discussions, as well as intra-textual and inter-scriptural analyses. Organization of the Quran is just one component, albeit an important one, for Iṣlāḥī. I provide here an approximate rendering in English of his original Urdu translation of the second verse of *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*:

O believers! Do not desecrate *sha'ā'ir allāh*, neither sacred months, neither the offerings, neither the animals that have collars of sacrifice, nor those making their way to the house of God, who have set out for the grace and pleasure of their lord. And when you come out of the state of *ihrām*, then hunt. And do not let any nation's enmity, that it stopped you from *masjid-i ḥarām*, incite you to exceed the limits. Cooperate in virtuous

deeds and piety, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression and keep fearing God.

God is stern in retribution.²¹⁸

As Iṣlāḥī points out, this verse concerns itself with *sha'ā'ir Allāh*, which include sacred months, offerings, animals destined for sacrifice, and those who are advancing towards the house of God.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 2:450-1, commentary for Q5:2.

²¹⁹ Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 2:454.

verse starts with the member “O believers” with the corresponding member “fear God” in the last segment. Similarly, the commandment to not profane God’s rites is tallied with the commandment to not help others in sin and hostility. While C states that those who are advancing towards the house of God must not be stopped, the corresponding C’ states that you must not exceed limits against those who stopped you from the house of God. And the central segment, denoted by X, introduces an antithetical idea to the elements around it, being the only commandment applicable when one is not in the state of *iḥrām*.²²¹

This composition is clearly more sophisticated than the parallelism and chiasmus identified by Arab scholars discussed in chapter 5, and this approach has been applied by Cuypers to several surahs including *Sūrat al-Mā’idah*, which is a relatively longer one.²²²

6.1.3 *Composition of the Individual Surahs*

Nöldeke²²³ and Neuwirth²²⁴ connect the issue of coherence of surahs with a possibility of later additions (*Zusätze*) and alterations (*Veränderungen*) to their original text. A similar approach is also taken by Watt,²²⁵ where the change in rhyme or length of certain verses, or an apparent switch of the discussion, and then reversion to the original style or content implies that those

²²¹ Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 70.

²²² See bibliography.

²²³ Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 35-6. His opinions for individual surahs as he discussed them in section “2. A. Ueber den Ursprung der einzelnen Theile des Qorâns.”

²²⁴ Neuwirth, *Studien*, 201. Similar to Nöldeke, Neuwirth’s opinions for redaction appear when she discusses individual surahs in chapter “4. Die Komposition der Suren und ihre Baulmente.”

²²⁵ Watt, *Introduction*, 86-100.

verses were possibly a later addition.²²⁶ To compare their approaches, we can look at their treatment of *Sūrat al-Burūj*.

Nöldeke mentions that verses 8-11 of *Sūrat al-Burūj* were later additions by the Prophet himself for the following reasons: 1) the verses are longer than the others, 2) they express longer stretched speech (*Redeweise*) and 3) they contain a slightly different rhyme as compared to the verses with which they are connected.²²⁷ The implication, it seems, is that when the Prophet added those verses later, he could not match them with the existing text. This conversely also implies that if he had composed the entire surah together, these verses would have matched the surrounding ones in rhyme and length. I must clarify that our concern is not the redaction, which is not the subject of our inquiry, rather that the organization of the surah in its current form is problematic for Nöldeke insofar as its style is concerned. Although Nöldeke himself has not explicitly expressed so, the foregoing discussion would lead us to believe that the primary reasons for these verses to be discordant with the rest are not based on their content. Neuwirth similarly states that the surah is clearly not genetically uniform (*offenkundig genetisch nicht einheitlich*), and that verses 1-6 and 12-22, whose composition matches with that of the surahs of the same period, are *Sūrat al-Burūj*'s nucleus and verses 7-11 were added at a later time.²²⁸ Neuwirth explains somewhat more clearly that she drew the conclusion based on the

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 77.

²²⁸ Neuwirth, *Studien*, 223.

style and the length of the verses, although for verse 7, she also grammatically tallies *shuhūd* with *mashhūd* in verse 3.²²⁹

Farāhī-İşlāhī believe that every surah has a “distinct controlling theme,” called the ‘*amūd*’ of the surah.²³⁰ “The ‘*amūd*’ (literally, “pillar, column”) is the hub of a *sūrah*, and all the verses in that *sūrah* revolve around it.”²³¹ Thus, any discussion of surah’s *nazm* rests on successfully establishing its ‘*amūd*’ and how it unites “the entire *sūrah* into an organic whole.”²³²

İşlāhī presents *Sūrat al-Burūj* as a continuous reading that focuses on a single issue (perhaps the ‘*amūd*’²³³ of the surah²³⁴), which is God’s warning to the oppressors of their treatment of the earliest Muslims. In his opinion, *Sūrat al-Burūj* was revealed to warn Quraysh of their oppression against the earliest of the believers. Quraysh’s pretext for their actions was that the believers had deserted their ancestral religion and accepted a new faith. No matter how dire the situation, God shall be able to pull the reins and hold Quraysh accountable. Additionally, the surah gives consolation to the believers. He also argues that the Quran is urging here that it not be considered as poetry or a soothsayer’s utterance rather as divine revelation, and that

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Mir, *Coherence*, 38.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Mir, *Coherence*, 39.

²³³ Mir, *Coherence*, 38.

²³⁴ İşlāhī does not explicitly state in the introduction to this surah that he considers it the ‘*amūd*’. However, he does state in the introduction to *Sūrat al-Tāriq*, which he considers pairing with this one, that both surahs have the same ‘*amūd*’, which is that in the light of natural signs, the Quran is warning against the mockery of the judgment day and that God is giving leeway to the deniers but when he takes them into account, none can escape His grip.

its warning will materialize eventually.²³⁵ In the introduction to *Surat al-Burūj*, Iṣlāḥī breaks the surah into five sections presented in the following table.²³⁶

1-4	Oaths of the sky consisting of forts, ²³⁷ by the Judgment Day that the Judgment Day is inevitable, and by the catastrophe for those who will be thrown in the ditches of Hell.
5-11	Glad tidings for the believers who were oppressed for their belief in lord of heavens and the earth if they continue to hold ground despite tyranny, simultaneous warning to the oppressors who would not repent.
12-16	God's limitless reach of the oppressors, and a mention of mercy and forgiveness in accordance with God's attribute for those who would repent.
17-18	Mention of previous nations which, like Quraysh, similarly oppressed the believers and were thus taken to account by God.
19-22	Sorrow over Quraysh's misfortune for their denial of the Quran's warning (<i>indhār</i>) and for their lust for power. He has encircled them from all sides. This warning is an inescapable reality and the Quran is a noble and magnificent text (<i>kalām</i>), as opposed to poetry or soothsaying, that has been revealed by God, and it's origin is the guarded tablet (<i>lauḥ mahfūz</i>).

²³⁵ Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 9:283.

²³⁶ Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 9:283-4.

²³⁷ Iṣlāḥī used the Urdu plural *burjon*. I adopted Saleem's translation here for forts, which is based on Iṣlāḥī's explanation in his commentary of the first verse. See Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 9:287 and Saleem, "Sūrah Burūj" accessed on March 8, 2013 from <http://monthly-renaissance.com/issue/content.aspx?id=1165>.

In the translation, his paragraph division further separates verses 8-9 and 10-11. Even though Iṣlāḥī's division of this surah will match closely the mirror composition that is proposed by Robinson and Cuypers, Iṣlāḥī does not explicitly state so and thus, most likely he is not aware of this feature to the extent this surah is concerned. Nonetheless, the central section expresses what is, in Iṣlāḥī's opinion, the *'amūd* of the surah. The preceding section focuses on the treatment meted to the believers and the section following the center is God's handling of such previous nations. The first and last sections similarly correspond to each other as shown in Robinson's and Cuypers' analyses too.

Robinson provides two organizations for *Sūrat al-Burūj*. A ring composition based on the type of the content in the groups of verses is replicated here from Robinson's text:²³⁸

- A Opening (1-3)
- B Polemic (4)
- C Narrative (5-8a)
- D Attribute list (8b-9)
- X Eschatology (10-11)
- D' Attribute list (12-16)
- C' Narrative (17-18)
- B' Polemic (19-20)
- A' Revelation (vv. 21-22)

²³⁸ Robinson, *Discovering*, 141-2.

It may, however, be argued that with a limited number of classifications (polemic, narrative, attribute list, etc.), identification of such a structure is no big feat, and it could be applied to others surahs in somewhat of an arbitrary fashion to achieve the desired results. Although some of these categories are not subjective, for example the attribute list and eschatology, the limited number of classifications does indeed make it less attractive. Robinson's second organization based on the surah's content in a chiastic structure is ingenious indeed, a condensed form of which is presented in the following table.²³⁹

²³⁹ See endnote 11 in Robinson, *Discovering*, 312. In the "Preface to the Second Edition," Robinson states, "Although I indicated that three Meccan surahs seem to have chiastic structures, I attached little significance to this and even relegated the chiastic analysis off Surah 85 to an endnote. Since then, I have discovered that chiasmus is a key feature of some Madīnan surahs as well. As a result, I now realize that it has important implications for Quranic interpretation." See Robinson, *Discovering*, xiii.

- A Oaths (1-3)
- B Curse on the people of the trench, and what they did (*yafalūn*) to the believers. (4-7)
- C They blamed them for believing in Allah. List of Allah's attributes. (8-9)
- D The punishment of unrepentant persecutors. (10)
- D' The reward of righteous believers. (11)
- C' Allah's onslaught is terrible, "He originates and brings back to life", "The All-forgiving, the All-living", "Possessor of the glorious throne." (12-15)
- B' "Doer (*fā'āl*) of what He wills," Evocation of the hosts of Pharoah and Thamūd, and persistent denial of the unbelievers (16-19)
- A' "Allah is behind them, All-encompassing", "This surely is a glorious Qur'an", "In a well-guarded tablet". (20-22)

The most interesting are B and B' whereby B lists what the "people of the trench" did (*yafalūn*) with the believers and B' returns with God as the doer (*fā'āl*) of what He wills. Along with that, two previous nations are mentioned as examples of retribution which, according to the Quran, were dealt with sternly by Him. Same root *fā'-a-la* is used for both but *fā'āl*, the predicate used for God, is an intense form implying unrestrained capacity over the actions, such as *kadhhdhāb* for someone addicted to lying and *khayyāt*, a tailor, someone who can be seen as an expert in needlework.²⁴⁰ Similar to B/B', C and C' are also correspond to each other whereby C mentions

²⁴⁰ Haywood and Nahmad, *A new Arabic grammar of the written language* (Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2003): 353.

that the believers were blamed for believing in God and C' returns with God's pertinent attributes: 1) He shall hold the subjects accountable, 2) He shall raise them again, and 3) He is forgiving if any were to seek forgiveness from Him. D and D' emerge at the center of the text, and arguably serve the primary message of the surah. The surah is thus ordered such that the deeds of the people of the trench precede the center (D/D') and God's response follows it. Here we see the same phenomenon that Cuypers terms as *the law of shift at the centre*.²⁴¹ When seen in this structure, the challenge that Nöldeke and Neuwirth faced in the coherence of the surah owes itself to interpreting the Quran using Graeco-Roman rhetoric to which the Quran does not belong. Işlāḥī divides the text, although not as sophisticatedly as Robinson or Cuypers, according to what I had stated was the Classical Arabic rhetoric. Cuypers achieves similar results using Semitic Rhetoric.

Other authors, such as Mir, have also noticed chiastic structure in some surahs. He had argued a mirror structure for *Sūrat Yūsuf*, which he refers to as an example of *al-laff wa-al-nashr 'alá al-'aks* (A-F below are quoted from Mir's essay, and F'-A' are reconstructed based on his exposition in the paper.)²⁴²

²⁴¹ Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric," 16; Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 36.

²⁴² Mir, *The Qur'ānic Story*, 1-3.

- A Joseph's dream (4-6)
- B The brothers' plot against Joseph (8-18)
- C Potiphar's wife's attempt to seduce Joseph (23-29)
- D A similar attempt by Egyptian ladies (30-31)
- E Joseph's imprisonment (35)
- F The king's dream (43-44)
- F' Interpretation of king's dream (45-49)
- E' Joseph's release from the prison (50)
- D' Confessions of the Egyptian ladies, and
- C' Confession of Potiphar's wife (51)
- B' The brother's learn their lessons (58ff)
- A' Fulfillment of Joseph's dream (100)

As he himself notes, there are groups of verses excluded as exceptions for this structure to emerge, which include the caravan that rescued Joseph and sold him in Egypt, and the dreams of the two youths Joseph met in the prison. Despite those omissions, it can be argued that this organization provides a reasonable structure for this surah.

Cuypers has also suggested a mirror organization represented below.²⁴³

- A Prologue (1-3)
- B Vision of Joseph (4-7)
- C Joseph's disputes with his brothers: guile of brothers towards Joseph (8-18)
- D Joseph's relative promotion (19-22)
- E Attempted seduction of Joseph by the woman (23-34)
- F Joseph in prison, interpreter of the visions of both prisoners, and **prophet of monotheism** (35-42)
- F' Joseph in prison, interpreter of the visions of the king (43-9)
- E' Outcome of the woman's seduction: Joseph rehabilitated (50-3)
- D' Joseph's definitive promotion (54-7)
- C' Joseph's disputes with his brothers: Joseph's guile towards his brothers (58-98)
- B' Fulfillment of Joseph's vision (99-101)
- A' Epilogue (102-111)

The notable difference between the Mir and Cuypers is that the latter does not sacrifice any verse in the process of forcing a composition. Even though Cuypers states it to be a mirror composition, it does in fact seem to have a strong central piece with a message of monotheism

²⁴³ Cuypers, "Semitic Rhetoric," 16.

which Cuypers has emphasized. However, since the piece does not fall exactly at the center, a pure ring composition does not cleanly emerge.

6.2 The Role of a *Rasūl*

The Quran uses two terms, *rasūl* (pl. *rusul*) and *nabī* (pl. *anbiyā'*) to identify the people that, according to the Quran, were chosen by God to spread His message. While these terms seem to be applied interchangeably for the same personalities, in several places they also lend to different connotations based on the context of the passage in which they appear. In this section, I first provide background for establishing the difference between the two, and then look at the data concerning a *rasūl*. This is especially necessary for a study of *Sūrat Yūnus* in particular, although various other verses of the Quran have also been interpreted differently by scholars such as Iṣlāḥī owing to how the role of a *rasūl* is determined.

In the following verse, since the words *nabī* and *rasūl* are separated by *wa-lā*, the grammatical construction dictates that they be two distinct entities.²⁴⁴

*Wa-mā arsalnā min qablika min **rasūl** wa-lā **nabiyy** ...*²⁴⁵

And we did not send before you a **rasūl** nor a **nabī** ...

One of the narratives, although considered unauthentic,²⁴⁶ between Abū Dharr Ghaffārī and the Prophet also has the latter identifying a *rasūl* as a special *nabī*.²⁴⁷ Nonetheless, scholars, such as

²⁴⁴ For details on this grammatical rule, see Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, 2:327. This construction is also used to refer to riches and progeny as two distinct entities in verse 3:10.

²⁴⁵ The Quran 22:52.

al-Zamakhsharī, relied on this narrative and Q22:52 referred to above to establish the difference between a *rasūl* and a *nabī*. Al-Zamakhsharī states, “*min rasūl wa-lā nabīyy* is evidence for differentiation between a *rasūl* and a *nabī*.”²⁴⁸

Sūrat Yūnus refers to the Prophet Muhammad a number of times always using the word *rasūl* instead of *nabī*. This is not peculiar to *Sūrat Yūnus* only rather it seems to apply to all Meccan surahs except one incident,²⁴⁹ which I discuss later in this section.

I begin, however, with an investigation of their meanings. For *nabī*, *Lisān al-‘Arab* defines two meanings. These meanings owe to the difference of opinion between the scholars on the root from which this word could have been formed. *Nabī*, when considered having been derived from the root *na-ba-‘a*, means “one who relates news about God”,²⁵⁰ and if considered as derived from the root *na-ba-wa* it would mean that a *nabī* “is the most distinguished (or elated) over all the creation.”²⁵¹ As mentioned in section 4.6, the word *nabī* in Arab culture was most likely not a new term introduced by the Quran, rather the concept of a prophet existed in the Bible already with the word *navi’* used to denote the person holding this capacity. Most of the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs are also prophets according to the Quran. The

²⁴⁶ Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm*, 3:72, commentary for Q19.51. Additionally, it does not appear in any of the six more authentic collections of prophetic traditions.

²⁴⁷ Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, narrative no. 21257. The narrative states that there were 124,000 prophets out of which only 315 were messengers.

²⁴⁸ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, 3:160.

²⁴⁹ Bijlefeld, *A Prophet*, 15.

²⁵⁰ Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 14:9.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

relationship between Hebrew *navi'* and Arabic *nabī* is also endorsed by the Arabic versions of the Bible in which the word *nabī* is used for prophets such as Luke 18:18 which reads, “the law and the prophets (*anbiyā'*) were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, ...”.²⁵² Based on this, it is possible that the role of the Arabic *nabī* was presumed to be the same as that of the Hebrew *navi'*.

Lisān al-'Arab provides two meanings for the term *rasūl*: (1) a message, and (2) the possessor of a message.²⁵³ When a human being is called *rasūl*, it primarily implies the latter meaning. There is not much discussion regarding the difference between *rasūl* and a *nabī* by Manẓūr except what has been quoted by other commentators of the Quran. The Quran uses yet another term, *mursal*, which is defined to be a synonym of *rasūl* by *Lisān al-'Arab*, both words being derivatives of *arsala*.²⁵⁴ In this thesis, words *rasūl* and *mursal* are considered synonymous, as I did not find any difference in their usage in the Quran. The word *rasūl* can be used for a messenger in the ordinary sense of the word, that is, for someone not divinely appointed. In general, as far as the language is concerned, when a messenger or a message is sent from one place to another, it would be expressed by one of the derivatives of *arsala*. In Q27:35, we see that the word is used for the speaker, a human, specifically Queen Sheba, and the message as well. “Sending” is employed by using active participle of *arsala*, and “messenger” (i.e. someone who had been sent) by using its past participle. “But lo! I am going to send (*mursilah*) a present unto them, and to see what (answer) the messengers (*mursalūn*) return with.” (Q27:35) Thus, the sending

²⁵² Al-Farāhī, *Mufradāt*, 181.

²⁵³ Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 5:213-214.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

of a *rasūl* can be either a human endeavor or a divine one.

It has been noted both by Iṣlāḥī and by Bijlefeld that as far as the Quran is concerned, God assures protection and rescuing of His *rasūl*.²⁵⁵ In Bijlefeld's opinion, this is because "the defeat of His representative would be a victory over Him," and "no matter how strong the resistance is, the ultimate victory is not with men but with God."²⁵⁶

Bijlefeld also makes a critical observation that the word *rasūl* is not used in any Meccan surah except in Q7:94:

And we did not send (*arsalnā*) in any township (*qaryah*) a *nabī* without trying its people with distress and affliction so that they may humble themselves.

However, the verbal force is derived from *arsalnā* which, as argued earlier, could possibly take the connotation of sending as a *rasūl*. Even if we were not to accept this argument, what is important is that as we set forth to read *Sūrat Yūnus*, this context becomes important. Muhammad had been mostly claimed as a *rasūl*, even if there were a single exception. With that in mind, we move forth to the relationship between *rasūl* and *'adhāb*, which is used for the punishment or torment (henceforth only the word punishment is used for *'adhāb*) of opponents of a *rasūl* in several places in the Quran. For example, it is mentioned in Q17:15: "And we do not punish (*mu'adhdhibīn*) until we send a *rasūl*." *Mu'adhdhibīn*, being an active participle of *'adhdhāb*, conveys the same meaning of a punishment, which, according to Q17:15,

²⁵⁵ Bijlefeld, *A Prophet*, 22. This is a leitmotif of Iṣlāḥī's *tafsīr* and occurs in multiple places. In fact, to me it seems that Iṣlāḥī almost interprets the Quran from this lens.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

only happens when a *rasūl* has been sent. Similarly, the word '*adhdhāb*' is also employed by the Quran for the calamities that befell the disbelievers of the previous *rusul*:

And how many a community revolted against the ordinance of its Lord and His *rusul*, so We called it to a stern account and punished it (*'adhdhabnāhā*) with dire punishment (*'adhāban nukran*), so that it tasted the ill-effects of its conduct, and the consequence of its conduct was loss.²⁵⁷

Likewise, in the verses that commanded Muslims to wage fight against the Prophet's opponents:

What! will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first; do you fear them? But God is most deserving that you should fear Him, if you are believers. Fight them! God will punish (*yu'adhdhibu*) them with your hands, and He will lay them low and give you victory over them, and He will heal the breasts of the believing folk.²⁵⁸

After having visited this data, we suspend our judgment on these issues until after we read *Sūrat Yūnus*, which will undertake some of these issues in detail.

²⁵⁷ The Quran 65:8-9 (Pickthall's translation).

²⁵⁸ The Quran 9:13-4 (Shakir's translation).

7 Reading *Sūrat Yūnus*

The Meccan-Medinan classification of *Sūrat Yūnus* holds various opinions with most considering it a Meccan surah,²⁵⁹ although some verses have been argued to be Medinan.²⁶⁰ Mawdūdī states that it primarily addresses the polytheists of Mecca who were fiercely opposing the Prophet before his migration to Medina.²⁶¹

7.1 Methodology

I attempted a translation of the surah in a paragraph style as well as according to the rules of Semitic rhetoric. The former approach has been adopted by Abdel-Haleem, Asad, Iṣlāḥī and Mawdūdī where they translate the surah in paragraphs. Based on that reading, I arrived at a particular set of divisions. In the second step, I also attempted a study of the surah according to the rules of Semitic rhetoric and based on that, and I arrived at a different structure of the

²⁵⁹ Al-Zarkashī, *Burhān*, 1:193 (*dhakara mā nuzila min al-Qurʾān bi-Makkah thumma tartībīhi*); Asad, *The Message*, 324. Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*, 185 provides *asbāb al-nazūl* for verses 2 and 15, and in the context of the latter, he narrates that it was revealed regarding the polytheists of Mecca. I have not been able to find much material about *asbāb al-nazūl* of this surah, a difficulty that Mawdūdī also expressed, see Mawdūdī, *Tafsīr*, 2:258. Although Nöldeke states the different opinions on the classification of the surah, he lists it in the third Meccan period (Nöldeke, *Geschichte*, 117-8).

²⁶⁰ For instance, al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 1:20 notes two opinions: 1) The surah is Meccan except three verses, and 2) The first forty verses are Meccan, the rest are Medinan. Al-Rāzī considers only verse 40 to be Medinan, see al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 6:183.

²⁶¹ Mawdūdī, *Tafsīr*, 2:258.

surah. In this section, I will present my results of both attempts. As far as the surah structure is concerned, I present it in the one I assessed with Semitic rhetoric for that is superior in my opinion. Within individual passages, I present both a structural view as well as a paragraphed translation. I do wish to note, however, that for a paragraphed style of reading, I could reference the existing translations and their divisions, and contemplate on the differences to adjust my reading as necessary. In the case of Semitic rhetoric, I did not have a reference text because, to the best of my knowledge, a study of this surah has not yet been done. Since it is a first attempt, I present this as a draft that will need to be vetted and updated as more insight is gained into the contents of the surah.²⁶²

7.2 Structure of the Surah

The surah can be seen as divided into 11 passages in a concentric composition, shown in the following table.

²⁶² Needless to say, any structural analysis can only be performed in Arabic. However, the rhetorical analysis is presented in English for the purposes of this thesis, which also makes it more accessible.

- A Prologue (1-10)
- B Previous people destroyed for not believing in their *rusul* (11-14)
- C Opponents' demand to bring a different *Qur'ān* (15-17)
- D Attitude of the rebels against God (18-27)
- E Refutation of polytheism (28-36)
- F The Quran is denied although some believe in too (37-44)
- X Retribution for the denial of the *rasūl* after the allocated time has passed (45-56)
- F' God is a witness over the Quran being recited (57-65)
- E' Example of Polytheism: Noah's nation drowned (66-73)
- D' Example of those who rebelled: Pharaoh and his followers drowned (74-93)
- C' Reference to earlier scriptures and this revelation is *ḥaqq* (94-97)
- B' Example of Jonah's people, who were saved due to their belief (98-103)
- A' Epilogue (104-9)

Passage X forms the center of the surah and its main topic. The phrase *quḍīya baynahum bi-l-qisṭ*, that is, "judgment is passed between them with justice" appears twice in this passage and nowhere else in the surah. In fact, *bi-al-qisṭ* (or *qisṭ* for that matter) only appears in verse 4 outside of X where it is used for a just reward for the believers in the Hereafter. A commandment to await God's judgment also appears in the last verse of the surah.

It seems that all the passages preceding X focus on the behavior of the Prophet's opponents and those following X describe corresponding responses. Thus, in F, the opposition to the

Quran is illustrated using specific actions of the opponents, and whereas F' appears to be its response. Noteworthy is the appearance of the word *Qur'ān* in verses 15, 37 and 61, out of which the latter two appear in F/F'. The word also appears in C in which the Prophet's opponents ask him to bring "a different Quran". A reference is made to the reading (or recitation) of previous scriptures (*yaqrā'ūn al-kitāb*), *yaqrā'ūn* (in C') and *Qur'ān* (in C) share the same root and no other derivative of *qa-ra-a* appears elsewhere in this surah.

Although references to polytheism appear in multiple passages, derivatives of *sha-ra-ka* only appear in verses 18, 28, 34, 35, 66, 71 and 105. All except two appear in E (vv. 28-36) or E' (66-74). The references in sections E/E' are to *shurakā'*, the noun, as opposed to the action of the polytheists which is referenced in v. 18 and v. 105 via words that indicate a verbal force that focuses on the action. The passages E/E' thus oppose *shurakā'* directly unlike other passages. Similar to F, passage E depicts the behavior of the polytheists in a question/response format. As its response, E' illustrates the fate of Noah's opponents to whom Noah rhetorically pleaded to gather the help of their *shurakā'*.

Rasūl and *rusul* appear in verses 13, 21, 47 and 73. In v. 21, the mention is not of a *rasūl* sent towards a people. The verse states, "Say, 'God is quicker in planning.' Our *rusul* are recording what you are plotting." References in other verses (13, 47 and 73), however, directly mention a *rasūl* or *rusul* sent towards a people, and appear in the following contexts: 1) Previous people (*al-qurūn*) being destroyed (v. 13), 2) A judgment is passed for an *ummah* when their *rasūl* comes (v. 47), and 3) A general reference to the denial of *rusul* after Moses. Since Jonah is considered a

rasūl in the Quranic framework,²⁶³ thus while B states that the previous people perished for the lack of their belief in their *rusul*, B' recounts that Jonah's people were not subjected to the torment in "the worldly life" due to their belief. As for verses 21 and 73, although they appear in corresponding passages D/D', it is difficult to assign any importance to the occurrences of *rusul* since they refer to two different entities. At most, we may concede the possibility that the choice of these words could have been deliberate to support the mirror structure.

I provide a detailed analysis for the first few verses only. Afterwards, I reduce the complexity of the analysis in the later passages only focusing on the outer elements with the assumption that the reader would have understood the pattern and could possibly detect rhetorical elements. I have used bold, italics, caps and underline to draw attention to corresponding elements.

7.3 A: Prologue (1-10)

This passage is composed of three parts of verses 1-2, 3-4 and 5-10.

7.3.1 *Opening* (1-2)

The surah opens with two verses that act as its topic sentences. All the issues that are introduced in these opening sentences are addressed in other passages in this surah. I break these verses into three pieces in a ring composition represented in the following table.

²⁶³ For example, "And Jonah was one of the messengers (*mursalīn*)" in the Quran 37:139.

- ^{1a} Alif. Lām. Ra. These are the verses of the	wise book.
= ^{2b} Is it for	<i>the people</i> strange
= ^c that WE have revealed to	<i>a man</i> from among THEMSELVES
+ ^d that he warn	<i>the people</i>
+ ^e and give good news to	<i>those who believed</i>
+ ^f that THEY shall have a high rank with	THEIR LORD?
- ^g The <i>disbelievers</i> say, “He is a clear	sorcerer”.

The outer elements correspond to the statement that the Quran is a wise book, and the disbelievers’ response that the Prophet is a sorcerer. This label implies that the Quran was a product of his sorcery insofar as other Quranic verses are concerned.²⁶⁴ The central piece focuses on the reward in the Hereafter and consists of two segments b-c and d-f. An important observation here is the different words used for the relationship between God and the people in members c and f. The former emphasizes a relationship between the Prophet and those he was preach: his own people. The latter, on the other hand, changes it to impress upon the audience that they shall have reward with “their lord” (instead of “us”). Another interesting observation is that members b and d talk about the people in general, whereas c and e focus on a subset of those people: a single man for revelation, and those who believe for good news.

²⁶⁴ For example, *Sūrat al-Mudaththir* narrates an episode of a person who has been condemned by the Quran. According to the Quran 74:24-5, he stated, “This is nothing but sorcery handed down. It is nothing but the word of a man.”

Paraphrased translation:

Alif. Lām. Ra. These are the verses of the wise book. Is it strange for the people that we have revealed to a man from amongst themselves to warn the people and give glad tidings to the believers that they shall have a high rank with their lord? The disbelievers say, “He is definitely a clear sorcerer”. (1-2)

7.3.2 Creation of the World, and Reward in the Hereafter (3-10)

The following part, which seems to represent the response to the previous part, consists of two pieces. The first piece represented by verse 3 is formed of three segments organized A/X/A’.

^{-3a} Your **LORD IS GOD** (*rabbakum Allāh*)

+^b who **CREATED** (*khalaqa*) the Heavens and the Earth in six periods (*ayyām*),

-^c then established Himself on the throne governing all things.

*^d There is no intercessor except after his permission.

-^e This is **GOD YOUR LORD** (*Allāh rabbukum*)

+^f so worship Him.

-^g Will you then

not pay heed? (*tadhakkarūn*)

Pieces 3a-c and e-g match one another and use inverted formulas for *Allāh* as the *rabb*. 3a-c matches the lord, who is God, being someone who has “established himself on the throne governing all things,” with an emphasis on his creation by bringing it as the centerpiece. Piece 3e-g states that this is indeed God, who is your Lord, and ought to be worshipped. It then ends with a rhetorical question. Between all of this lies the center of the outer ring to draw

attention to the fact that “there is no intercessor except after his permission,” which is a direct reference to other deities, especially idols which were known to have existed in Arabia. Idols are often construed to be intercessors to God. Hence follows the prescription to “worship Him,” which implies it is to the exclusion of other gods.

The word *yaum*, singular of *ayyām*, means a day as well as a time period, *dahr*.²⁶⁵ Thus, several commentators have argued that the implication here is not six days per se rather six periods of time.²⁶⁶

The second part of this passage, represented by verse 4, consists of three pieces.

-^{4a} To him shall all of you return (*marji*²⁶⁷),

=^b it is God’s true promise.

-^c He **begins** the CREATION (*khalq*) then He is going to **return** (*yu’idu*) it

=^d so He can *reward* those who **believed**

+^e and

performed good deeds justly

=^f As for those who **denied**, there will be *boiling drink* and a *painful punishment*

+^g because they

used to deny. (*yakzibūn*)

²⁶⁵ See the entry for *yaum* in Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 15:466.

²⁶⁶ See al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 6:190-1; Āzād, *Tarjumān*, 3:37, commentary for Q7:54; and 3:477, commentary for Q10:3.

²⁶⁷ I have provided transliteration of *marji* and the *yu’idu* to make it clear that the Arabic original is not the same even though the same English word used in the translation.

Piece 4a-c is arranged concentrically where both the first member and the last member focus on the return to God. The center of the ring emphasizes it as God's promise. The second and third pieces have parallel members with the first member stating the reward or punishment, and the second member linking it to a specific behavior. The phrases "performed good deeds" and "used to deny" are also running parallel to the last member of piece 3e-g where it was said, "will you then *not pay heed?*"

7.3.3 *Emphasis on the Creation and the Reward (5-10)*

These verses are in three parts, verses 5-6 (consisting of two pieces) and 7-8 (consisting of a single piece) and 9-10 (consisting of two pieces). All six pieces are presented in the following table.

-^{5a} He is the one who made the SUN a radiance and MOON a light,
 -^b and *appointed stages* for it so that you are able to count years and (keep a) count.
 =^c **GOD** did not CREATE this without a purpose.
 +^d He explains the **signs** for the people who *have knowledge.* (ya'lamūn)

-^{6e} In the *difference* of DAY and NIGHT,
 =^f and what **GOD** CREATED in the skies and the earth
 +^g are the **signs** for the people who *fear.* (yattaqūn)

-^{7h} Those people who do not expect to meet us
 -ⁱ and are happy with the worldly life, and content with it
 +^j and who of our **signs** are *heedless.* (ghāfilūn)
 -^{8k} they are the ones whose abode will be fire
 -^l because of *what they did.* (yaksibūn)

-^{9m} (As for) those who *believed*
 -ⁿ and *performed good deeds,*
 +^o their **LORD** (*rabb*) will guide them through their *belief*;
 -^p rivers will flow under them in the gardens of delight. (*na'im*)

-^{10q} Their CALL in it will be, “May you be glorified, O **GOD!** (*allāhumma*)”
 +^r And their greeting will be, “Peace.”
 -^s And the close of their CALL will be that all gratitude is due to **GOD, THE LORD of the worlds**
 (*Allāh rabb al-'ālamīn*).

Pieces a-d and e-g are concentrically arranged with God's creation at the center, a specific example preceding it (in a-b and e) and a conclusion drawn that there are signs in this (d and g). In members a and e, sun and moon, and day and night appear as parallels with sun and moon being the two most potent signs visible during day and night respectively. In piece h-l, the heedlessness of the signs moves to a central position for those who are not expecting a meeting with the lord and will thus end in the fire.

The two pieces in the second part focus solely on believers, their behavior and their life in the Hereafter. "Lord", "God" and "God, Lord of the worlds" all appear in these two pieces and "God" appears in the first two pieces as well. Only the third piece does not contain this word.

7.3.4 Verses 3-10 as a Whole

Verses 3-10 start with the *rabbakum Allāh* and end with the supplication *al-hamd lillāh rabb al-'ālamīn* such that the words *rabb* and *Allāh* are reversed. These verses seem to be organized in a ring with the central piece focusing on the creation, its immediately preceding and following elements (C/C') focus on those who are subjected to punishment in the hereafter. Continuing out, B/B' focus on the believers' reward. Lastly, whereas A lays a claim on God being the lord, in A', the believers who are rewarded in the Hereafter praise and show gratitude to God acknowledging His attributes.

A Your **Lord is God** who CREATED **this world**, and established Himself on the throne.

There is no other intercessor. Worship Him. (3)

Return is to God, His true promise. He began the CREATION and will return it, so

B He can reward the believers justly

C And give painful punishment to the deniers (4)

X Take heed from the signs of God CREATED in this world (5-6)

C' Punishment for those not wary of the signs (7-8)

B' Gardens for the believers (9)

A' Praise and gratitude to him: **God, Lord of the worlds** (10)

Paraphrased translation:

Your Lord is the one who created the Heavens and the Earth in six periods (ayyām), then established Himself on the throne governing all things. There is no intercessor except after his permission. This is God your Lord so worship Him. Will you not pay heed? To him shall all of you return, for it is God's true promise. He began the creation then He is going to return it to Him so He can reward justly those who believed and performed good deeds. As for those who denied, there will be boiling drink and a painful punishment because of their denial. (3-4)

He is the one who made the sun a radiance and moon a light, and appointed stages for it so that you are able to count years and (keep a) count. God did not create this without a purpose. He explains the signs for those who have knowledge. In the difference of day and night, and what God created in the skies and the earth are the signs for the fearing. (5-6)

Those people who do not expect to meet us and are happy and content with the worldly life, and those who are heedless of our signs, they are the ones whose abode will be fire because of what they did. (As for) those who believed and performed good deeds, their lord will guide them through their faith; rivers will flow under them in the gardens of delight. Their call in it will be, “May you be glorified, O God!” And their greeting will be, “Peace.” And the close of their call will be that all gratitude is due to God, the lord of the worlds. (7-10)

7.4 B: Previous People Destroyed for not Believing in their *Rusul* (11-14)

This passage is composed of a single part that is concentrically arranged in three pieces. Piece A has the parallel arrangement e/f/e'/f' of two segments such that e and e' represent the condition of the sinful and f/f' is the response. In piece X, which also has parallel arrangement, the first segment g/h relates the response of God to a troubled man. Segment g'/h' shows his attitude after God's action. The last piece, also a parallel construction, explains how God deals with the wicked, especially those who denied their messengers. Between these segments, the progression is from mild to the sternest. The first segment makes it clear that the sinful get a chance, and the last segment states that eventually the punishment comes, which could be the ultimate destruction of those people.

A
 e And if God were to hasten the *case of sin* the way He does in the case of mercy,
 f then their time would have ended.
 e' So we let those who are *not anticipating meeting us*
 f wander in their contumacy. (11)

X
 g And when man is **afflicted** by a **trouble**,
 h he *calls upon us* (while lying) on his side or standing or walking.
 g' When we remove his **affliction** from him,
 h' he continues on as if he had *never called us* for the **trouble** that had **afflicted**
 him.
 That is how their actions have been made beautiful to the transgressors.²⁶⁸ (12)

A'
 j And we *destroyed* people before you when
 k they did evil even though their messengers had brought them the signs,
 l yet they were not to believe.
 j' That is how we *punish* the wicked nation.
 k' Then after that, we made you the heirs of the land after them
 l' so we can see how you act! (13-14)

²⁶⁸ English translations often render the meaning of *musrifīn* as prodigal or extravagant, for example by Pickthall, Shakir, Daryabadi, Ayub Khan, and Sher Ali. These meanings have a connotation pertaining to wealth or property whereas the discussion here is regarding one's deeds. However, the basic meaning of *asrafa* from which *musrifūn* is a plural active participle is to exceed or transgress in general. I have preferred this meaning, which Iṣlāḥī and Mawdūdī have used in their commentaries. (Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 4:29 and Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm*, 2:270.) Lane renders the meaning as, "He exceeded, or transgressed, the just, or right bound, or limit, or measure; acted extravagantly, exorbitantly, or immoderately." (Lane, *Lexicon*, 4:1351).

Paraphrased translation

And if God were to hasten the case of sin the way He does it in the case of mercy, then their time would have ended. So we let those who are not anticipating meeting us wander in their contumacy. (11)

And when some trouble afflicts man, he calls upon us (while lying) on his side or standing or walking. When we remove his affliction from him, he continues on as if he had never called us for the trouble that had afflicted him. That is how their actions have been made beautiful to the transgressors. (12)

And we destroyed people before you when they did evil even though their messengers had brought them the signs, yet they were not to believe. That is how we punish the wicked nation. Then after that, we made you the heirs of the land after them so we can see how you act! (13-14)

7.5 C: Opponents' Demand to Bring a Different Qur'ān (15-17)

A	And when our clear verses are RECITED to them,
	c those who do not believe <i>in meeting us</i> say,
	d “Bring a recital other than this one, or change it.”
B	d’ Say, “It is not for me that I change it according to my will. I but only follow what is revealed to me.
	c’ I fear the <i>torment of a great day</i> if I were to disobey Him.” (15)
A’	Say, “Had God wished I would not have RECITED it to you and neither would you have known it.
	c’ I have lived a life between you before this, don’t you use your brain? (16)
	d’ Who is more wicked than the one who associates a lie (<i>kadhiba</i>) towards
B’	God
	d or falsifies (<i>kadhhaba</i>) his signs.
	c The evildoers <i>do not succeed.</i> ” (17)

This structure is organized at three levels in two parts. Two of them are apparent due to labels in capital letters and small letters. A only states that recitation of the verses provoked a response. The response is expressed in B. A’ corresponds to A by stating that the recitation is only because God had wished so. Both B and B’ have internal mirror composition. In B, c/c’ focus on the Hereafter with c indicating that the opponents are denying it whereas the Prophet is concerned about it, and d/d’ represent their demand and the Prophet’s response. In B’, d’/d are the internal elements of the mirror composition such that d is focused on the

Prophet's actions and d' on the opponents. The Prophet was the one who could possibly associate a lie towards God by reciting the Quran while his opponents were falsifying it.

In B, c/c' pose a problem and it is difficult to see their relationship with each other. But if we look at B, it becomes clearer that the subject in c' is the Prophet, which corresponds to c' in A. Reading in the context, perhaps the statement, "I have lived a life between you before this" raises two possibilities. Either his opponents knew he would not attribute a lie on God, an issue that has been discussed in *tafsīr* and *sīrah* literature at length, or his opponents would concede to the fact that he is indeed fearful of the last day. Nonetheless, with either of these possibilities, the segments labeled c' in both B and B' are in first person singular, the subject being the Prophet, addressing the opponents. Similarly, the segments labeled c are in third person plural, the subject being the opponents. In addition, c in B ("those who do not believe in meeting us") and c in B' are the evildoers who will "not succeed". Similarly, d and d' also correspond both in number and in the message in B and B'. The Prophet is the one who cannot change what is revealed to him and must follow it (d in B), and would not associate a lie to God (d in B'). The opponents are demanding the change in the revelation (d' in B), and are falsifying it (d' in B').

Paragraphed translation:

And when our clear verses are recited to them, those who do not believe in meeting us say, "Bring a recital other than this one, or change it." Say, "It is not for me that I change it according to my will. I but

only follow what is revealed to me.²⁶⁹ I fear the torment of a great day if I were to disobey Him.” (15)

Say, “Had God wished I would not have recited it to you and neither would you have known it. I have lived a life between you before this, don’t you use your brain? Who is more wicked than the one who associates a lie towards God or falsifies his signs. The evildoers do not succeed.” (16-17)

7.6 D: Attitude of the Rebels Against God (18-27)

The structure of the paragraph is represented in the table below.

- | | |
|----|---|
| A | Rejection of worship of gods other than God, who can neither benefit nor harm. (18-9) |
| B | When in trouble, they ask God for help, but when helped, they plot against God. (20-3) |
| B’ | People of earth believe they are in control, but when God holds to account, everything is destroyed. (21-5) |
| A’ | For those who do good deeds is good in the Hereafter, and for those who do bad ones, there is fire. (26-7) |

²⁶⁹ The particle *in* in this sentence does not denote a conditional, it is rather *in al-nāfiyah*. See Wright, *Grammar*, 2:300-302 and 2:105 for this grammatical rule.

7.6.1 Rejection of Those Other than God, and Wait Until God Decides (18-20)

A And they worship those other than God who can neither harm them nor benefit them,

B and they say, “These are our intercessors to **God**.”

B’ Say, “Are you informing **God** of something that He does not know of it in the heavens and the earth?”

A’ He is pure and high above from that which they associate (to Him). (18)

C And the mankind was but one nation, then they differed,

X and had it not been for an earlier word of **God**,

C’ a verdict would have been reached between them regarding what they differ in. (19)

D And they say, “Why has a sign not been revealed from his lord?”

Y Say, “The unseen only belongs to **God**,

D’ so wait! I am also waiting with you.” (20)

Paragraphed translation:

And they worship those other than God who can neither harm them nor benefit them, and they say, “These are our intercessors to God.” Say, “Are you informing God of something that He does not know of it in the heavens and the earth?” He is pure and high above from that which they associate (to Him). (18)

And the mankind was but one nation, then they differed, and had it not been for an earlier word of God, a verdict would have been reached between them regarding what they differ in. (19)

And they say, “Why has a sign not been revealed from his lord?” Say, “The unseen only belongs to God, so wait! I am also waiting with you.” (20)

7.6.2 *When in Trouble, Ask God for Help, but Plot Against Him When Relieved (21-3)*

A | And when we give people a taste of mercy after an affliction had hit them,
| they immediately start **planning** (*makr*) against our signs.²⁷⁰
| Say, “God is quicker in **planning**.” (*makran*)
| Our messengers are recording what you are **plotting** (*tamkurūn*). (21)

B | He it is who makes you travel on land and sea to the point that when you are in a ship,
| and *suitable wind* is blowing around it,
| and they are rejoicing in it, a *violent wind* comes along and waves rise from every
| direction, and they think that they have been besieged.

X | They call upon God, making the religion sincere to Him, (saying that,) “If you save
| us from this, we will definitely be thankful.” (22)

B' | So when we save them, they go around **rebell**ing in the land without truth.

A' | O people! Your **rebellion** shall be upon you.
| Enjoy the worldly life, then you will return to us,
| and we will inform you of what you had been doing. (23)

²⁷⁰ The apodosis begins with *idhā* here, known as *idhā al-fujā'iyah*. See Wright, *Grammar*, 1:284 and 2:157 for the general rule and 2:345 for its use specifically in conditional sentences. Mawdūdī has translated this verse with the sense of urgency in the planning that I have preferred in my translation. See Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm*, 2:277.

In verse 23, “Enjoy the worldly life”, is a translation I have rendered of the phrase *matā’ al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*. This phrase is in accusative and thus needs a verb which is omitted (*maḥdhūf*). I have supplied that as “Enjoy”.²⁷¹

Paragraphed translation:

And when we give people a taste of mercy after an affliction had hit them, they immediately start plotting against our signs.²⁷² Say, “God is quicker in planning.” Our messengers are recording what you are plotting. He it is who makes you travel on land and sea to the point that when you are in a ship, travelling with suitable wind and rejoicing in it, a violent wind comes along, and waves rise from every direction, and they think that they have been besieged. They call upon God, making the religion sincere to Him, (saying that,) “If you save us from this, we will definitely be thankful.” So when we save them, they go around rebelling in the land without truth. O people! Your rebellion shall be upon you. Enjoy the life of the world, then you will return to us, and we will inform you of what you had been doing. (21-3)

²⁷¹ This is important to add back into the translation otherwise the intended meaning of the original Arabic text is not conveyed completely. None of Arberry, Ayub Khan, Daryabadi, Mawdūdī, Pickthall, Shakir, Sher Ali and Yusuf Ali provide the omitted verb in the translation. Only Asad adds the omitted verb to the translation rendering it as, “You care only for the enjoyment of life in this world.” This is what al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī have provided as one of the possibilities expressed using *tatamattā’ūn* which is *al-mafūl al-muṭlaq* of *matā’*. The other possibility that they have identified is *huwa*, which would translate to: “It is the enjoyment of life in this world”. (Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, 2:328; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 6:236.) Iṣlāḥī has expressed the omitted verb as an imperative, “Enjoy the life of the world.” (Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 4:37.)

²⁷² The apodosis begins with *idhā* here, known as *idhā al-fujā’iyah*. See Wright, *Grammar*, 1:284 and 2:157 for the general rule and 2:345 for its use specifically in conditional sentences. Mawdūdī has translated this verse with the sense of urgency in the planning that I have preferred in my translation. See Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm*, 2:277.

**7.6.3 People Believe They are in Control, but When God Holds to Account, Everything is Destroyed
(24-5)**

A | The example of this worldly life is like that of the water, which we send down from the sky, and due to which the vegetation on the *earth* flourishes from which feed the people and the animals.

X | And when the *earth* takes on its ornaments and is embellished, and its inhabitants think that they are masters over it, our verdict arrives by night or by day.

A' | So we make it like stubble as if there was nothing there yesterday. Likewise, we explain our signs to those who think. (24)

A' | And God calls towards the house of peace and He guides whom He wills to the right path. (25)

Paraphrased translation:

The example of this worldly life is like that of the water, which we send down from the sky, and due to which the vegetation on the earth flourishes from which feeds the people and the animals. And when the earth takes on its ornaments and is embellished, and its inhabitants think that they are masters over it, our verdict arrives by night or by day. So we make it like stubble as if there was nothing there yesterday. Likewise we explain our signs to those who think. And God calls towards the house of peace and He guides whom He wills to the right path. (24-5)

7.6.4 Rewards for Those Who Do Good, and Punishment for Those Who Do Evil (26-7)

A There is good, and more, for those who do good.

B And neither *blackness nor abasement* will touch their **faces**.

C They are the people of the Paradise, THEY WILL LIVE IN IT FOREVER. (26)

A' And the recompense of those who earned evil deeds is the like of it,

B' and *abasement* will cover them, there will be no defender for them from God. As if their **faces** had been covered with strips of *night's darkness*.

C' They are the people of the Hellfire, THEY WILL LIVE IN IT FOREVER. (27)

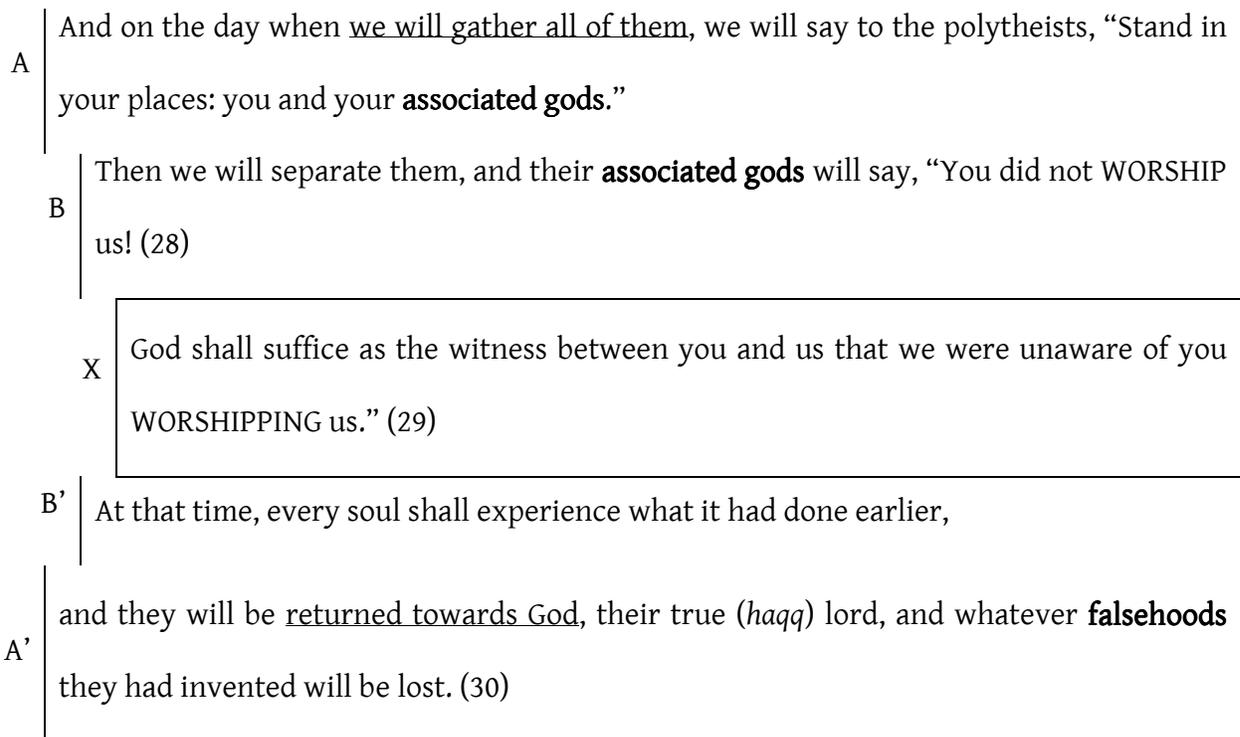
Paragraphed translation:

There is good, and more, for those who do good. And neither blackness nor abasement will touch their faces. They are the people of the Paradise, they will live in it forever. And the recompense of those who earned evil deeds is the like of it, and abasement will cover them, there will be no defender for them from God. As if their faces had been covered with strips of night's darkness. They are the people of the Hellfire, they will live in it forever. (26-7)

7.7 E: Refutation of Polytheism (28-36)

7.7.1 God Shall Suffice as Witness between Worshippers and Deities (28-30)

This passage is divided into two parts. The first part is concentrically organized as shown below.



Paragraphed translation:

And on the day when we will gather all of them, we will say to the polytheists, “Stand in your places: you and your associated gods.” Then we will separate them, and their associated gods will say, “You did not worship us!” God shall suffice as the witness between you and us that we were unaware of you worshipping us.” At that time, every soul shall experience what it had done earlier, and they will be returned towards God, their true lord, and whatever falsehoods they had invented will be lost. (28-30)

7.7.2 *Only God is the Provider and the Creator, and Guides to the Truth (31-6)*

A | Ask, “Who gives you provisions from the sky and the earth? Or who has power over hearing and sight? And who takes out living from the dead and dead from the living? And who controls everything?”

B | They will answer, “God.” Then say, “*Do you not fear him?* For that is **God, your true lord.** (*rabbukum al-ḥaqq*)” (31-32)

C | And, after **truth**, (*ḥaqq*) what else is there other than getting lost? So where are you turning away? That is how the word of your lord stands **true** (*ḥaqqat*) against the transgressors but they do not believe. (33)

A | Ask, “Is there any of your associated gods who begins the creation and then brings it back again?”

B | Say, “God begins the creation and then He shall bring it back again. So *where are you turning away?*” (34)

A | Ask, “Is there any from your associated gods who guides to the **truth?** (*ḥaqq*)”

B | Say, “**God guides to the truth** (*ḥaqq*). Is He who guides to the **truth** (*ḥaqq*) more **worthy** (*aḥaqq*) of being followed or one who does not guide and (rather) needs to be guided? So *what’s the matter with you? How do you judge?*” (35)

C | Most of them are following only conjecture. Conjecture cannot take the place of truth. God is aware of what they are doing. (36)

Paraphrased translation:

Ask, “Who gives you provisions from the sky and the earth? Or who has power over hearing and sight? And who takes out living from the dead and dead from the living? And who controls everything?” They will answer, “God.” Then say, “Do you not fear him?” For that is God, your true lord. And, after truth, what else is there other than getting lost? So where are you turning away? That is how the word of your lord stands true against the transgressors but they do not believe. (31-33)

Ask, “Is there any of your associated gods who begins the creation and then brings it back again?” Say, “God begins the creation and then He shall bring it back again. So where are you turning away?” (34)

Ask, “Is there any from your associated gods who guides to the truth?” Say, “God guides to the truth. Is He who guides to the truth more worthy of being followed or one who does not guide but needs to be guided? So what’s the matter with you? How do you judge?” Most of them are following only conjecture. Conjecture cannot take the place of truth. God is aware of what they are doing. (35-36)

7.8 F: The Quran is Denied Although Some Believe in It Too (37-44)

A | And this *QURAN* is not one that could be produced except by **God**,
and it confirms what is in their hands, and explains the book. (37)
There is no doubt that it is from **lord of the worlds**.

B | Or do they say that he has produced it?
Say, "Bring just a *SURAH* like it
and call whoever you can except **God** if you are truthful." (38)

C | But they are **DENYING** because of that which their intellect is unable to grasp *IT*,
and whose reality has not become apparent to them.

X | Likewise, those who were before them had also **DENIED**. So look at how was the
end of the *evildoers*. (39)
There are some from among them who **BELIEVE**, and some who do not **BELIEVE**,
and your lord best knows the transgressors. (40)

C' | And if they **DENY** you, say "For me are my actions, and for you, yours. You are free
of what I do and I am free of what you do." (41)

B' | And among them, there are those who listen to you, but will you make the deaf hear
when he does not reason? And among them, there are those who look at you, but can
you guide the blind when he cannot see? (42-3)

A' | **God** does not wrong men at all, but it is they who wrong themselves. (44)

Paraphrased translation:

*And this Quran is not one that could be produced except by God, and it confirms what is within their hands, and explains the book. There is no doubt that it is from lord of the worlds. Or do they say that he has produced it? Say, "Bring just a surah like it and call whoever you can except God if you are truthful."
(37-38)*

But they are denying because of that which their intellect is unable to grasp it, and whose reality has not become apparent to them. Likewise, those who were before them had also denied. So look at how was the end of the transgressors. There are some from amongst them who believe, and some who do not, and your lord knows the transgressors the best. (39-40)

And if they deny you, say "For me are my actions, and for you, yours. You are free of what I do and I am free of what you do." And among them, there are those who listen to you, but will you make the deaf hear when he does not reason? And among them, there are those who look at you, but can you guide the blind when he cannot see? God does not wrong men at all, but it is they who wrong themselves. (41-44)

7.9 X: Retribution for the Denial of a *Rasūl* (45-56)

And on the day when **HE SHALL GATHER THEM**, they will think as if they had not lived even a single hour of the day. They will recognize each other.

A

Those who denied meeting God and were thus not guided will be at a loss. (45)
And if we were to show you some of that which we are promising them, or give you **death, to us is their return**, and then God will be witness over that which they are doing. (46)

j | For every *ummah* is a *rasūl*. So when their *rasūl* comes to them, JUDGMENT IS PASSED BETWEEN THEM WITH JUSTICE AND THEY ARE NOT WRONGED. (47)

B

y | And they question when will that promise be fulfilled if you are **truthful**. Say, “I do not control over any harm or benefit for myself except what God wills. (48-9)

j'

For every *ummah* is an appointed time, and when their time arrives, they cannot put it off for a single moment nor can they **hasten** it. (48-9)

X | Ask (them), “If His torment (*‘adhāb*) were to come suddenly at night or by the day, what is it that the evildoers are **hastening**? (50)
Or is it that only when it will happen will you **believe** in it?” (51)

k

(It will be said,) “Now you **believe**! You had been trying to **hasten** it!”

Then it will be said to the *transgressors*, “Taste the eternal **torment**!

Are you recompensed except for what you earned?” (52)

B'

z | And they ask you, “Is it really **true** (*ḥaqq*)?” Say, “Yes, by my lord, it is **true** (*ḥaqq*) and you cannot overcome it.” (53)

k'

If every soul that had *transgressed*, had everything that’s in the earth, it would want to ransom itself with it. And they will feel the regret when they see the **torment** and JUDGMENT WILL BE PASSED BETWEEN THEM WITH JUSTICE AND THEY WILL NOT BE WRONGED. (54)

A'

Let it be known that whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to God.

Let it be known that God’s promise is **true** (*ḥaqq*), but most of them do not know. (55)

He is the one who gives life as well as **death**, so **TO HIM SHALL YOU RETURN**. (56)

This passage forms rings at multiple levels and is possibly a good example of Semitic rhetoric in the Quran.²⁷³ It is the central passage of *Sūrat Yūnus*, and that makes it even more profound. Part A is itself a ring with return to God appearing at both ends. But A' also ends with the return to God, thus forming symmetry between A and A'. Similarly, B and B' form rings as well as symmetry between themselves. Pieces j and j' in part B are symmetric too and employ at least the same formulas for the beginning, "for every *ummah* is". The choice of words at the end varies but agrees with the corresponding pieces in part B'. Thus, we see that j and k' both contain "judgment is passed between them with justice and they are not wronged," forming symmetry between the two elements. Similarly, j' and k emphasize the hastening of the time on the part of disbelievers with the centerpiece, X, emphasizing on the punishment in relation to the hastening. This prominent place of the punishment in the center of these various rings highlights what judgment is being talked about in the earlier verses.

In verse 50, the word for arrival of the punishment used is *biyātan* instead of *laylan*, the latter more commonly used for night. *Biyātan*, while still indicating the time of night, gives a sense of spontaneity.²⁷⁴ In the Biblical and Quranic stories of previous prophets, the people who were meted out punishments were caught unexpectedly. The Quran's choice of this word alludes to its audience that if such a tragedy were to befall on them again, they will be living comfortably in their homes until moments before it happens, and hence they should not consider their present luxury to infer impossibility of such a torment.

²⁷³ Initially, I was not as convinced about Semitic rhetoric in the Quran until I was able to determine the concentric arrangement of *Sūrat Yūnus* as a whole, and especially this passage. While I am still tentative about the organization of a few other passages, I am quite satisfied with this particular composition.

²⁷⁴ Manẓūr, *Lisan*, 1:547, entry for *biyāt* under root *ba-ya-ta*.

Paragraphed translation:

And on the day when he shall gather them, they will think as if they had not lived even a single hour of the day. They will recognize each other. Those who denied meeting God and were thus not guided will be at a loss. And if we were to show you some of that which we are promising them, or give you death, they will after all return to us, and then God will be witness over that which they are doing. (45-46)

For every nation is a messenger. So when their messenger comes to them, judgment is passed between them with justice and they are not wronged. And they question when will that promise be fulfilled if you are truthful. Say, "I do not control over any harm or benefit for myself except what God wills. For every nation is an appointed time, and when their time arrives, they cannot put it off for a single moment nor can they hasten it. Ask (them), "If His punishment were to come suddenly at night or by the day, what is it that the evildoers are hastening? Or is it that only when it will happen will you believe in it?" (It will be said,) "Now you believe! You had been trying to hasten it!" Then it will be said to the transgressors, "Taste the eternal torment! You are recompensed only for what you earned!" And they ask you, "Is it really true?" Say, "Yes, by my lord, it is true and you cannot escape." (47-53)

If every soul that had transgressed, had everything that's in the earth, it would want to ransom itself with it. And they will feel the regret when they see the torment and judgment will be passed between them with justice such that they will not be wronged. (54)

Let it be known that whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to God. Let it be known that God's promise is true, but most of them do not know. He is the one who gives life as well as death, so to Him shall you return. (55-56)

7.10 F': God is a Witness over the Quran Being Recited (57-65)

A | c O People! There has now come to you an *admonition* from your lord, a cure for what is
in the hearts,
y and a *guidance* and mercy for the believers. (57)
Say, "This is by God's *grace* and mercy."

c' So have them rejoice with it for it is better than what they are gathering. (58)

B | d Ask, "Do you realize that from what God has sent down as provisions, you have
made lawful and unlawful?"

z Ask, "Did God give you permission or are you **attributing (it) to God?**" (59)
And what will those who **attribute falsehood to God** think on the Day of
Judgment?

d' God is gracious towards people but most of them are not thankful. (60)

X | e And whatever business are you in, whatever you *recite from the Quran*, and
whatever you are doing,
f we are a witness over you when you are involved in it.
e' Not even the smallest thing is hidden from your lord in the earth and the sky
and neither is there anything smaller than that or larger
f' but it is (recorded) in a clear book. (61)

B' | g Let it be known that they who are friends of God
h shall not have any fear upon them nor shall they grieve, (62)

g' that is those who believed and feared Him, (63)

h' and there is good news for them in this worldly life as well as the Hereafter.

There is never a change in the God's words, it is a great triumph. (64)

A' | And do not let their words grieve you. All honor belongs to God, He is all-hearing,
omniscient. (65)

Paraphrased translation:

O People! There has now come to you an admonition from your lord, a cure for what's in the hearts, and a guidance and mercy for the believers. Say, "This is by God's grace and mercy." So have them rejoice with it for it is better than what they are gathering. (57-58)

Ask, "Do you realize that from what God has sent down as provisions, you have made lawful and unlawful?" Ask, "Did God give you permission or are you attributing falsehood to God?" And what will those who associate a lie to God think on the Day of Judgment? God is gracious towards people but most of them are not thankful. (59-60)

And whatever business are you in, whatever you recite from the Quran, and whatever you are doing, we are a witness over you when you are involved in it. Not even the smallest thing is hidden from your lord in the earth and the sky - and neither is there anything smaller than that or larger that is not recorded in a clear book. Let it be known that they who are closer to God shall not have any fear upon them nor shall they grieve, that is those who believed and feared Him, and there is good news for them in this worldly life as well as the Hereafter. There is never a change in the God's words, it is a great triumph. And do not let their words grieve you. All honor belongs to God, He is all-hearing, omniscient. (61-65)

7.11 E': Example of Polytheism: Noah's People Drowned (66-74)

7.11.1 Disbelievers Have No Evidence of Deities Associated with God (66-70)

A	j	Let it be known that <u>whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to God</u> ,
	y	and those who call upon deities other than God only follow their <i>conjectures</i> and <i>they are only lying</i> . (66)
	j'	He is the one who made the night so you can rest in it, and the day bright, in that are the signs for those who listen. (67)
X	k	They say, " God has taken a son. " He is above that! He is self-sufficient!
	z	<u>Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him.</u>
	k'	You do not have any evidence of that. Or are you saying about God <i>what you do not know?</i> (68)
A'		Say, "Those who <i>associate lies</i> to God shall not <i>succeed</i> ." (69)
		These are the provisions of the worldly life.
		<u>Then they will return to us</u> , and then we will make them taste a severe torment because they were disbelieving. (70)

Passage E (verses 28-36) begin and end with phrases that also mention the returning to God, which is repeated again in verse 70 in this part. The Christian belief of Jesus as son of God has been mentioned without any reference to either Christianity or Jesus. Although verses in other

surahs²⁷⁵ clarify that these claims were for Jesus, it seems that even in the Meccan period, such a reference was likely to be sufficient for the Quran's audience to comprehend the issue under discussion.

Paragraphed translation:

Let it be known that whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to God, and those who call upon deities other than God only follow their conjectures and they are only lying. He is the one who made the night so you can rest in it, and the day bright, in that are the signs for those who listen. (66-67)

They say, "God has taken a son." He is above that! He is self-sufficient! Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him. You do not have any evidence of that. Or are you saying about God what you do not know? Say, "Those who associate lies to God shall not succeed." (68-69)

These are the provisions of the worldly life. Then they will return to us, and then we will make them taste a severe torment because they were disbelieving. (70)

²⁷⁵ For example, the Quran 9:30 and 19:34-5.

7.11.2 *Noah's People Deny Signs and Destroyed; Believers Established (71-3)*

A	And recite to them Noah's story when he said to his people, "O my people! If troublesome for you has become my staying in your midst and reminding you of God's signs , then I have my trust in God ,
B	collectively decide your affair, and (include your) ²⁷⁶ associate-gods , and let there be no uncertainty in your decision.
X	Then <u>carry it out against me and do not give me time</u> . (71)
B'	So if you turn away, I have not asked you for any <i>reward</i> . My <i>reward</i> is only with God and I have been commanded that I be one of those who submit.
A'	So they DENIED him, <u>and we saved him and those who were with him in the ship</u> , <i>and we made them heirs (khalā'if)</i> <u>and drowned those</u> who DENIED our signs . See how was the end of <i>those who were warned</i> . (73)

A begins the story that Noah started with his people whereas A' narrates their fate. A' further

²⁷⁶ There are three ways to interpret the *wa* in *wa shurakā'akum*: 1) It is used in the sense of the word *with (ma')*; 2) It is an object of *ajmi'ū*; and 3) Its verb has been omitted.

presents an interesting composition. Those who were warned and denied God's signs were drowned. The emphasis is on making the saved as heirs (the center of the composition).

Paragraphed translation:

And recite to them Noah's story when he said to his people, "O my people! If my staying in your midst and reminding you of God's signs has become troublesome, then I have my trust in God - collectively decide your affair, and include your associate-gods as well, and let there be no uncertainty in your decision. Then carry it out against me and do not give me time. So if you turn away, I have not asked you for any reward. My reward is only with God and I have been commanded that I be one of those who submit. So they denied him, and we saved him and those who were with him in the ship, and we made them heirs and drowned those who denied our signs. See how was the end of those who were warned. (71-73)

7.11.3 More Messengers Brought Signs but Denied (74)

A	Then we sent messengers after him to <i>their people</i>
X	who brought signs to them but they did not believe because of that which they had already DENIED.
A'	That is how we close the hearts of the <i>transgressors</i> . (74)

Paragraphed translation:

Then we sent messengers after him to their people who brought signs to them but they did not believe on that which they had already denied. Likewise we close the hearts of the transgressors. (74)

7.12 D': Example of Rebels: Pharaoh and His Followers Drowned (75-93)

7.12.1 Truth Declared Sorcery

A	Then after them we sent <i>Moses and Aaron</i> to Pharaoh and his leaders with our signs but they <u>behaved arrogantly</u> , and they were <u>guilty</u> . (75)
B	So when truth (<i>ḥaqq</i>) came to them from us they said, “This is clear sorcery .” (76)
X	Moses said, “Are you saying this about the truth (<i>ḥaqq</i>) after it has come to you? Is this sorcery ? Sorcerers are never successful.” (77)
B'	They said, “Have you come to us to turn us away from that on which we found our forefathers, and so both of you become dominant in the land?
A'	We are not going to <u>believe</u> in the <u>two of you</u> .” (78)

Paragraphed translation:

Then after them we sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his leaders with our signs but they behaved arrogantly, and they were guilty. So when truth came to them from us they said, “This is clear sorcery.” Moses said, “Are you saying this about the truth after it has come to you? Is this sorcery? Sorcerers are never successful.” They said, “Have you come to us to turn us away from that on which we found our forefathers, and so both of you become dominant in the land? We are not going to believe in the two of you.” (75-8)

7.12.2 *Sorcery Nullified, Truth Vindicated (79-82)*

A | Pharaoh said, “Call every expert *magician* to me.” (79)

B | When the *magicians* came, Moses said to them, “Cast what you want to cast.” (80)

X | So when they casted their spell, Moses said, “What you have brought is **sorcery**. God will nullify it.

B' | God does not let the *mischief-makers* succeed. (81)

A' | God shall vindicate the truth (*haqq*) by His words, even though the *evildoers* may hate it.” (82)

Paragraphed translation:

Pharaoh said, “Call every expert magician to me.” When the magicians came, Moses said to them, “Cast what you want to cast.” So when they casted their spell, Moses said, “What you have brought is sorcery. God will nullify it. God does not let the mischief-makers succeed. And no matter how much the evildoers hate it, God shall vindicate the truth by His words.” (79-82)

7.12.3 Believers Place Trust in God, Ask for Relief from Persecution (83-6)

- A | So no one believed Moses except a few from among his people
|
| due to the fear of Pharaoh and his leaders lest they **persecute** them.
B |
| Pharaoh was for sure mighty on earth and was one of the *musrifn*. (83)
-
- X |
| And Moses said, “O my people! If you have faith in God then put your TRUST in Him
| if you have *submitted yourselves*.” (84)
|
| They said, “In God we TRUST.”
-
- B’ | “O our lord, do not make us (an object of) **persecution** for the transgressors. (85)
- A’ | And save us by your mercy from the *disbelievers*.” (86)

Paraphrased translation:

So no one believed Moses except a few from among his people due to the fear of Pharaoh and his leaders lest they persecute them. Pharaoh was for sure mighty on earth and was one of the transgressors. And Moses said, “O my people! If you have faith in God then trust Him if you have submitted yourselves.” They said, “We trust God. O our lord, do not make us object of persecution for the transgressors. Save us by your mercy from the disbelievers.” (83-6)

7.12.4 Moses' Prayer to Obliterate Disbelievers' Wealth and Harden Hearts until Torment (87-9)

A | And we revealed unto Moses and his brother, "Allocate a few houses for your people in Egypt, make your houses places of WORSHIP, establish prayer, and give good news to the **believers.**" (87)

B | Moses said, "O our lord, you have given *Pharaoh* and his leaders vainglory and wealth in the worldly life, our lord, that they may *lead astray from your path.*

B' | O our lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they will not **believe** until they see the painful torment." (88)

A' | He said, "Your SUPPLICATION has been accepted, so both of you stay persistent and do not follow the *path of those who do not know.*" (89)

Paragraphed translation:

And we revealed unto Moses and his brother that, "Allocate a few houses for your nation in Egypt, make your houses places of worship, establish prayer, and give good news to the believers." Moses said, "O our lord, you have given Pharaoh and his leaders vainglory and wealth in the worldly life, our lord, that they may lead astray from your path. O our lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the painful torment." He said, "Your supplication has been accepted, so both of you stay persistent and do not follow the path of those who do not know." (87-89)

7.12.5 Pharaoh, Rebel and Tyrant, Drowned and Saved as a Sign (90-3)

A | And we made the Israelites cross the sea while Pharaoh and his forces, out of ARROGANCE and TYRANNY, followed them until drowning overtook him when he said, “I believe that there is no god except Him whom the Israelites believe, and I am one of those submit to him.” (90)

X | Now? Even though you had been REBELLING earlier and you were from among the MISCHIEF-MAKERS! (91)

X | Today we shall save your body so you may become a sign for those who follow you. And there are many people who are unaware of our signs. (92)

A' | We established for Israelites a goodly abode and we gave them from among the pure things. And they did not dispute until knowledge had come to them. Your lord will decide on the Judgment Day between them about which they were in dispute. (93)

Paragraphed translation:

And we made the Israelites cross the sea while Pharaoh and his forces, out of arrogance and tyranny, followed them until drowning overtook him when he said, “I believe that there is no god except Him whom the Israelites believe, and I am one of those submit to him.” Now? Even though you had been rebelling earlier and you were from among the mischief-makers! Today we shall save your body so you may become a sign for those who follow you. And there are many people who are unaware of our signs. (90-2)

We established for Israelites a goodly abode and we gave them from among the pure things. And they did not dispute until knowledge had come to them. Your lord will decide on the Judgment Day between them about which they are in dispute. (93)

7.13 C': Reference to Earlier Scriptures and This Revelation is Ḥaqq (94-5)

A | So if you are in **any doubt** (*shakk*) concerning what we have REVEALED,
then ask those who have been reading the book before you.

X | For sure, truth (*ḥaqq*) from your lord has COME TO YOU, so do not become one of those
who **doubt** (*mumtarīn*). (94)

A' | And do not become one of those who **belie God's signs** lest you become one of the
losers. (95)

Paragraphed translation:

So if you are in any doubt concerning what we have revealed, then ask those who have been reading the book before you. For sure, truth from your lord has come to you, so do not become one of those who doubt. And do not become one of those who belie God's signs lest you become one of the losers. (94-5)

7.14 B': Example of Jonah's People, Saved Due to Their Belief (96-103)

c	Those against whom your lord's words have passed will not believe (96)
d	until they see the painful torment even if every sign comes to them. (97)
c'	Why is it so that not a single township believed so its belief could benefit it, except
A	the people of JONAH.
d'	When they believed , we took the torment of disgrace away from them in this worldly life and we gave them some time to live. (98)
B	Had your lord wished, everyone on the earth would have believed .
	So are you going to force (these) people to believe ? (99)
X	It is not for anyone that they attain belief except with the permission of God. He stamps uncleanness on those who do not use reason. (100)
B'	Say, "Look at what's in the skies and the earth."
	But signs and warnings do not satisfy those who do not (want to) believe . (101)
e	So are they waiting for anything other than the days of those who passed earlier?
f	Say, "So wait! And I am waiting with you." (102)
e'	So we save our <i>RUSUL</i> and, likewise, those who believe with them.
f'	It is a duty ²⁷⁷ upon us to save the believers . (103)

This passage revolves around belief. In A, people against whom God's judgment has passed do not believe until they see a torment, an example of which was Pharaoh. Only people of Jonah

²⁷⁷ *Haqq* is in accusative indicating that a phrase was omitted earlier.

are supposed to have believed such that the torment of the worldly life was taken away from that. A' states that as a principle too. Additionally, both A and A' have parallel structures. Across A and A', it seems that c/d/c'/d' and e/f/e'/f' correspond to each other too. For instance, c'/d' provide an example of Jonah and believers who were saved and e'/f' gives a general statement that the *rasūl* and believers are saved.

In B, had God wished, everyone would have believed, whereas in B', warnings and signs do not satisfy those who do not wish to believe. The center, X, is a rule that belief is attained only by God's permission and those who do not use their brain cannot be guided.

Paragraphed translation:

Those against whom your lord's words have passed will not believe until they see the painful torment even if every sign comes to them. Why is it so that not a single township believed so its belief could benefit it, except the nation of Jonah. When they believed, we took the torment of disgrace away from them in this worldly life and we gave them some time to live. (96-8)

Had your lord wished, everyone on the earth would have believed. So are you going to force them to believe? It is not for anyone that they attain belief except with the permission of God. He stamps on those who do not use reason. Say, "Look at what's in the skies and the earth." But signs and warnings do not satisfy those who do not (want to) believe. So are they waiting for anything other than the days of those who passed earlier? Say, "So wait! And I am waiting with you." So we save our messengers and, likewise, those who believe with them. It is a duty upon us to save the believers. (99-103)

7.15 A': Epilogue (104-9)

A | Say, "O people! If you are in any doubt about my religion then I do not worship those that
you worship other than **God**, but I do worship **God** who will give you death. And I have
been ordered that I become one of the *believers*. (104)

B | And that you submit yourself to the *ḥanīf* religion, and not be one of the *polytheists*.
(105)

C | Do not call upon anyone other than **God** who does not benefit you nor harm you, and
if you did that, you will definitely be one of the *transgressors*. (106)

C' | And if **God** afflicts a harm on you, no one can save you except Him. And if He wishes
good for you, then no one can stop His blessings, He makes it reach whoever He
wishes from His servants, and He is forgiving and merciful. (107)

B' | Say, "O people! Truth has come to you from your lord, so whoever follows it will follow
for his own benefit, and whoever goes astray will suffer its consequences, and I am not
responsible for you." (108)

A' | Follow that which has been revealed to you and persevere until **GOD MAKES A JUDGMENT**,
and **HE IS THE BEST OF THE JUDGES**. (109)

C/C' both focus on two aspects of polytheism. C is obvious, it directly commands to not invoke deities other than God, an issue that has been undertaken in various earlier passages in the surah. C' looks at it from the opposite way, that if God were to afflict trouble, no other deity could allay it. B prescribes adherence to *ḥanīf* religion to the exclusion of Polytheism. B'

proclaims arrival of truth and that adherence to it will be beneficial. Any other action is akin to going astray in the words of the Quran, the consequences of which the Prophet is not responsible for. A sets the context of the entire passage by declaring from the Prophet's tongue that he ought to follow his religion only, become a believer and that he will worship only God and none other. A' demands that he follow God's revelation and await a judgment from Him.

Paragraphed translation:

Say, "O people! If you are in any doubt about my religion then I do not worship those that you worship other than God, but I do worship God who will give you death. And I have been ordered that I become one of the believers, and I submit myself to the ḥanīf religion. And do not become one of the polytheists. Do not call upon anyone other than God who does not benefit you nor harm you, and if you did that, you will definitely be one of the transgressors. And if God afflicts a harm on you, no one can save you except Him. And if He wishes good for you, then no one can stop His blessings, He makes it reach whoever He wishes from His servants, and He is forgiving and merciful. (104-107)

Say, "O people! Truth has come to you from your lord, so whoever follows it will follow for his own benefit, and whoever goes astray will suffer its consequences, and I am not responsible for you." (108)

Follow that which has been revealed to you and persevere until God makes a judgment, for He is the best of the judges. (109)

7.16 Remarks on the Surah as a Whole

The surah begins with the Quran and revelation as the primary subject of the disbelievers' argument. The surah ends with the same topic, that is, the Prophet is commanded to follow the revelation. Similarly, the beginning also recounted that he was warning the people and giving good news to the believers. The surah ends with him being directed to await a judgment from God, possibly because of the warning that had already been issued or was being issued.

The center of the surah had a very strong passage focusing on the judgment being passed on a people, which is also how the surah ends. After having studied this surah, one cannot but notice that its intense focus on the issue of a *rasūl* and a punishment for his deniers. The first two verses of the surah seem to have set the context for such a discussion where the Prophet had been labeled a sorcerer.

As mentioned earlier, this surah is usually placed among the Meccan surahs, which seems reasonable based both on the data in the sources as well as the analysis by various scholars, both medieval and modern.²⁷⁸ The contents of this surah seem to indicate that the Quran had a profound impact on the society around it. From the sources, we find that idolatry, and anything that resembled it, was to become an abomination to Muslim faith and has continued to this day. Monotheistic proclamation of belief in God and Muhammad as his messenger were to become one of the five pillars of Islam. Muhammad was seen as one in a series of Judeo-Christian prophets, the example of two preceding ones, Noah and Moses, discussed in this surah. The emphasis on worship is apparent in the Muslim culture in which the daily prayers

²⁷⁸ See the introduction to the surah in the beginning of chapter 7 where the sources are cited.

form another one of the five pillars of Islam.

Interestingly, even though the Quran gave much importance to the punishment of a *rasūl*'s opponents in this worldly life, it did not lead scholars to generally classify it as a distinctive feature of a *rasūl*. The only exceptions are al-Farāhī and Iṣlāhī. The latter even contends that the Muslim wars on the polytheists were waged based on this principle, an issue I discuss in a bit more detail in Chapter 8. However, *Sūrat Yūnus*'s reading by itself does not seem sufficient to derive such a conclusion even within the Quranic framework.

8 Concluding Remarks

I began this thesis with an attempt to date the authorship of the Quran and concluded that it was most likely authored in the first half of the seventh century and certainly before 675 CE. For a later authorship, Sadeghi best summarized the improbability in the following words.

An Umayyad caliph could not promulgate the Quran unless we were to accept that not only was the Umayyad caliph able to promulgate the Quran as the word of a prophet Muhammad, he was also able to convince all the historians to create chains of narrations ascribing it to 'Uthmān. And no such dissent was reliably noted despite unflinching opposition to 'Uthmān by a reasonably large group of Muslims.²⁷⁹

Then I investigated the religious milieu of the Arabian Peninsula using historical sources outside of Muslim tradition to determine that Jews, Christians and Polytheists were all well established in the region. I also looked the conflicting reports regarding the *ḥunafā'* without having reached any conclusion insofar as the historical sources were concerned.

In the second part, I explored the usage of some literary devices in the Quran and delved into various issues relating to the Quran's composition both at the verse level as well as at the surah level. Finally, in the last chapter, I utilized both the narrative style of translation as well as Semitic rhetoric to analyze *Sūrat Yūnus*. In my study, an analysis of a surah based on these

²⁷⁹ Sadeghi, Bergmann, "The Codex," 366.

styles is far more rewarding than an atomistic study at the verse level. Even though I believe that many refinements can be made to the structure in chapter 7, the surah does seem to have been organized in a ring composition. In addition, the individual passages themselves exhibit parallel, mirror or ring constructions, thus creating compositions of such compositions.

As far as the Quran's contents are concerned, there is no doubt that Islam's main beliefs are authored in the Quran, some of which were noted in section 7.16, "Remarks on the Surah as a Whole". Whether they were established first and then authored, or authored in the Quran which influenced Muslims to adopt them is immaterial. In either case, we would arrive at the same conclusion that the Quran's importance, as literature, could not be undermined in the society in which it was authored.

The Quran also placed Muhammad as another prophet in a series of Biblical prophets.

At this point, I want to state a few words about the contents of *Sūrat Yūnus* in the context of the difference between a *rasūl* and a *nabī*. Iṣlāḥī's doctrine that a *rasūl*'s polytheistic opponents are necessarily annihilated in this world seems to find some ground in *Sūrat Yūnus* as well as in other passages in the Quran. I must state at this point that the veracity of this issue outside of the Quranic framework is not under discussion. The discussion at hand is whether the Quranic contents lead to such an allusion.

If we were to accept the historical framework set in the *sīrah* literature, we could hypothesize that early Muslims were influenced by the Quran's such commandments so strongly that they waged wars on the Prophet's opponents in compliance with this rule. It was a direct result of the Quranic commandments, and earlier Muslims had precedents in the form of the previous

rusul and their nations. Although the examples of both Noah and Moses furnished in *Sūrat Yūnus* pertain to natural calamities, there are examples elsewhere of a *rasūl*'s followers waging wars. Moses' example is the most pertinent in this regard where he is supposed to have been divinely commanded to fight.²⁸⁰ If we were to extend this further, this leads to the possibility that the Muslim conquests may have been a result of such commandments. The Prophet's successors probably thought that these commandments implied that they continue the battles as a divine edict. With the study conducted in this thesis, this is a hypothesis and cannot be conclusively stated so. However, these issues are of high importance because, based on these, Iṣlāḥī has opined that several verses of the Quran that were in direct opposition to the Polytheists or Jews and Christians in the Arabian Peninsula may no longer be applicable.

Although his complete doctrine is quite sophisticated and I shy away from discussing it at length, one cannot but notice at least two points: 1) The Quran does incessantly furnish examples of previous *rusul* and their nations having been obliterated. 2) We find an exception in the case of Jesus, who was proclaimed as a *rasūl*²⁸¹ but the Quran does not provide any example of his overcoming over his opponents. There can be three possible explanations for Jesus' case:

1) There was a punishment for Jesus' nation, but the Quran is simply devoid of it.

²⁸⁰ Iṣlāḥī, *Da'vat-i Dīn*, 239-40 states that David, Solomon and Moses fell into this category and their followers waged wars against those who denied the messengers. However, in Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur*, 8:58, he contradicts himself by stating that only Muhammad waged a war against his opponents. Based on other parts of his commentary, I believe that he held the opinion he expressed in *Da'vat-i Dīn* and his statement in *Tadabbur* is an error.

²⁸¹ For example, see the Quran 61:6, 4:157, and 4:171 all of which proclaim Jesus as a *rasūl*.

2) Jesus' case is an exception, which casts a doubt on these principles regarding the *rusul*.

3) One possible explanation could be that his companions were able to establish his mission making Christianity as one of the largest religions today. If accepted, this could draw an interesting parallel to the companions of Muhammad.

Stepping outside of the *sīrah* framework, based on the historical data already seen, an assessment of the strength of the Quran's relationship with the society is difficult to assess. We can possibly concede that, given that the Quran was most likely authored in the first half of the seventh century, it might have provided an impetus for Muslims to step out of their fledgling society in Ḥijāz and face other nations politically and militarily. We, however, do need additional historical data to ascertain the validity of such claims, and establish the extent to which the Quran really provided such an impetus, or acted as a catalyst for Muslim conquests.

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