باسمه تعالی

مقدمه

درس زبان خارجه در دوره کارشناسی ارشد رشته علوم قرآن و حدیث با هدف بهره برداری دانشجویان از متون تخصصی رشته خود به زبان انگلیسی در برنامه درسی آن به میزان ۲ واحد درسی، گنجانیده شده است .

شورای تخصصی رشته علوم قرآن و حدیث دانشگاه پیام نور به عنوان دانشگاه کتاب محور، برای اجرای درس مزبور میان آثار متعدد زبان انگلیسی که در موضوعات علوم قرآن و حدیث نوشته شده است، دائره المعارف قرآن چاپ شده در لیدن را بررسی کرده و ۴ مقاله از مجموعه مدخل های تنظیم شده آن را انتخاب کرده است.

به همین مناسبت برای بهره برداری دانشجویان عزیز ۴ مقاله نسخ، متشابه ، بسم الله ، و تفسیر به شرح ضمیمه مشخص شده تا دانشجویان محترم بتوانند با راهنمایی اساتید محترم خود به متن ها اشراف پیدا کرده و نسبت به نقد و بررسی متون تنظیم شده در دائره المعارف مزبور اقدام نمایند.

لازم بذکر است متن چاپی مقالات به صورت دائره المعارفی از لحاظ مطالعه و بهره برداری دانشجو سخت است، لذا با همت برخی از دانش آموختگان و دانشجویان به متن مقالات به صورت فایل word دسترسی یافته و به صورت PDF در اختیار علاقمندان قرار گرفته است.

با امید به موفقیت روزافزون

دانشجویان عزیز

گروه علوم قرآن و حدیث

The invocation *bi-smi llāhi l-ramāni lraīm(i),* "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," also known as the *tasmiya,* "naming/uttering (God's name)," occurs 114 times in the Qur_ān: at the headof every sūra except the ninth, which is entitled "Repentance" (Sūrat al-Tawba or Sūrat al-Barā_a), and also in q 27:30 as the opening of Solomon's (q.v.) letter to the queen of Sheba (see **bilqIs**). Of the 113 occurrences
at the head of a sūra, only the fi rst, that before the opening sūra, Sūrat al- Fāti_a (see **fAtiHa**), is commonly reckoned
as an *āya,* i.e. as q 1:1, although the other 112 unnumbered prefatory occurrences are still considered part of the sacred text (Rāzī, *Akām al-basmala,* 21; Suyū_ī, *Durr,* i, 20).

Precedents for and parallels to the basmala

The *basmala* has various historical precedents among invocational formulae in
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other traditions. Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/ 1144) long ago noted the pre-Islamic Arab use of parallel formulae such as "in the name of al-Lāt [or] al-_Uzzā" (*Kashshāf,* i, 29; see **idols and images; pre-islamic arabia and the qur_An**). T. Noldeke points out Jewish and Christian parallels to *bi-smi llāhi* in the recurrence of "in the name of the Lord" (gq, i, 112, 116-7; cf. ii, 42; see **jews and judaism; christians and chris tianity**) in the Hebrew and Christian bibles. Y. Moubarac suggests a coalescence of Jewish, Christian and pagan south Arabian infl uences behind the tri partite *Allāh al-ramān al-raīm* (Les etudes d'epigraphie, 58-61). There is also a parallel in the Mazdean formula *pad nām ī yazdān,* "in the name of (the)god(s)," at tested as early as the third century at Paikuli (P. Gignoux, Pad Nām, 162).

Meaning of the basmala *in the Qur_ān*

Grammatically *bi-smi llāhi* has the form of an oath (see **oaths**) introduced by *bi-* but traditionally it has been construed as an invocation, as opposed to an oath such as *billāhi,* "by God!" The *bi-* is held to require an implied verb expressing the intention

of the one uttering the *basmala* to act or begin an action "with the naming [glossing *ism* as *tasmiya*] of God." Thus al-_abarī (d. 310/ 923) cites Ibn _Abbās as saying that an action following utterance of the *basmala* – be it reciting, standing or sitting down – implies intent to perform the act "in the name of " or "by naming" God, not "through" God (as agent; *Tafsīr*, i, 114-8).

On the other hand, a modern interpreter, Rashīd Riā, says that to recite a sūra "in the name of God..." means to "recite it as a sūra coming from him, not from you" (*Tafsīr al-manār*, i, 44; A. Khoury, *Koran*, 147).

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

There are two possible grammatical readings of the fi nal three words of the *basmala:*

(i) with *al-ramān* and *al-raīm* taken as parallel attributive epithets of *Allāh,* seen in modern translations that replicate the Arabic word order (e.g. M. Henning [1901], "Allah, der Erbarmer, der Barmherzige;" R. Bell [1937], "Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate") or that emphasize the emphatic force of two cognate attributives (e.g. G. Sale [1734], "the most merciful God"; E.H. Palmer [1880], "the merciful and compassionate God"; R. Paret [1962], "der barmherzige und gutige Gott");

(ii) with *al-ramān* construed as a name of God in apposition to *Allāh,* modifi ed by the attributive *al-raīm,* (e.g. R. Blachere

[1949], "Allah, le Bienfaiteur misericordieux"; K. Cragg [1988], "God, the merciful Lord of mercy"). Al-_abarī's discussion (*Tafsīr,* i, 55f.) supports the former, which became the standard reading. Most commentators focus on distinguishing the meanings of *ramān* and *raīm,* taking the intensive *ra mān* to refer to God's mercy (q.v.) generally either (a) in this world and the next or (b) to all creatures; and *raīm* for God's mercy more specifi cally, limited

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either (a) to the next world only or (b) to the faithful only. The commentators note also that *ramān* can only be used of God while *raīm* can be applied to humans (_abarī, *Tafsīr,* i, 55f.; Ibn al-_Arabī [attr.], *Tafsīr,* i, 7; Za makhsharī, *Kashshāf,* i, 41-5; M. al-Gha rawī, *Ism,* 148-50).

While Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have preferred to read *al-ramān al-raīm* as paired attributive epithets (see **god and his attributes**), the other instances of *ramān* and *raīm* in the Qur_ān could support reading *ramān* as an appositive modified by *raīm.* The two words are paired only four times (q 1:3; 2:163; 41:2; 59:22) apart from the *basmala* and can in each case be cogently construed as a substantive *(al-ramān)* with a following adjective *(al-ra-īm),* "the compassionate Merciful [One]." *Ramān* occurs in the Qur_ān only with the defi nite article *al-* (57 instances in numbered *āya*s). *Raīm* occurs 81 times without the defi nite article as an adjectival predicate of God, most often paired with and following *ghafūr,* "forgiving." *Al-raīm* is found 32 times (including four occurrences apart from the *basmala* with *al-ramān*), all but once (q 34:2: *al-raīm al-ghafūr*) as an attribute following other divine names or attributes: *al-_azīz* ("the Mighty"), *al-ghafūr*("the Forgiving"), *al-tawwāb* ("the Relenting")and *al-birr* ("the Benefi cent"). Thus the qur_ānic evidence could support the translation, "God, the compassionate *(alraīm)* Merciful One *(al-ramān).*" This would accord also with pre-Islamic use of *al-ramān* as the name of God in south Arabia (see **archaeology and the qur_An**), the pagan Meccans' aversion to using it instead of *Allāh* (G. Ryckmans, *Lesreligions arabes,* 47-8; cf. J. Jomier, Le nomdivin, 2; Y.

Moubarac, Les etudes d'epigraphie, 58-9) and its use as God's name by Mu _ammad's contemporary, the "Arabian prophet" Musaylima (_abarī, *Ta_rīkh*, iii, 245-6; Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 42; cf. Noldeke, gq, i, 112-3; see **musaylima and pseudo-prophets**).

Place of the basmala *in the* Qur_ān

The question as to whether the *basmala* is to be counted as the fi rst *āya* in the Fāti_a (q 1) and the remaining 112 sūras it precedes has been discussed by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. The Muslim consensus is represented in the modern Cairo text, which counts it as an *āya* only in the Fāti_a, otherwise as an unnumbered line of text *(sa_r)* that separates the fi rst *āya* of every sūra (except q 9, "Repentance" [Sūrat al-Tawba]) from the last *āya* of the preceding sūra (cf. Suyū_ī, *Durr,* i, 20). The exception of Sūrat al-Tawba is held traditionally to stem from either (i) its being originally joined with q 8, "The Spoils of War" (Sūrat al-Anfāl), as a single unit later divided in two before the word *barā_a,* which thus became the fi rst word of q 9 (Suyū_ī, *Itqān,* i, 60, 65; Tirmidhī, 48:10.1; cf. Ibn al-_Arabī, *Futuāt,* 4, 211-3, 355-6, who says the *basmala* of q 27:30 is the one missing at the head of q 9) or (ii) its having as a main theme God's threats against the idolaters which makes the *basmala* inappropriate for it (Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* vii, 225; M. al-Gharawī, *Ism,* 77; see **idolatry and idolaters; polytheism and atheism**).

Whether the *basmala* even belongs to the Qur_ān at all has been a live question for Muslims (cf. M. b. _Alī al-Shawkānī, *Fat al-qadīr,* i, 64-5). According to most reports, neither Ibn Mas_ūd's nor Ubayy b. Ka_b's Qur_ān copy (*muaf,* see **codices of the qur_An**) included Sūrat al-Fāti_a. Further, Anas is reported as saying, "I performed the ritual prayer *(alāt)* with God's apostle, Abū Bakr (q.v.), _Umar (q.v.) and _Uthmān (q.v.) and I did not hear any of them recite '*bi-smi llāh...*'" (Muslim, _aī, 4:50; cf. 4:52; see **prayer**). However, Anas is also said to have reported that Mu_ammad recited q 108, "Abundance" (Sūrat al-Kawthar),

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with the *basmala* (Muslim, _aī, 4:53) and al-Suyū_ī (d. 911/1505) cites traditions that the *basmala* belonged to the revelations

from the beginning or sometime during the Prophet's mission (e.g. it "was sent down with every sūra"); however, he also cites traditions that the *basmala* was an opening or closing benediction given Mu _ammad at the institution of the ritual prayer (*alāt,*Suyū_ī, *Durr,* i, 20-3; cf. A. Spitaler, *Verszählung,* 31-2). The reciters (see **reciters of the qur_An**) and jurists of Medina, Basra and Syria did not consider it an *āya* at the beginning of a sūra, but a sūra divider and a blessing that one would use to begin any important act. Abū a- nīfa (d. 150/767) agreed, and the anafīs do not recite it audibly in the ritual prayer.

However, the Meccan, Kufan and most Iraqi reciters and jurists recognized it as an *āya* whenever it begins a sūra, as did al-Shāfi_ī (d. 204/820) and his followers who recite it aloud in the ritual prayer (*alāt)*and likewise the Shī_īs who recite it silently (Zamakhsharī, *Kash shāf,* i, 24-5; Rāzī, *Akām al-basmala,* 20; Shawkānī, *Fat alqadīr,*i, 64-5; H. Algar, Besmellāh, 172). The division of the law schools over the audible reciting of the *basmala* likely reflects the early tradition's ambivalence about both the *basmala* and the Fāti_a: Are they part of the Word of God (see **book**) or only invocations used by Mu _ammad? (cf. Noldeke, **gq**, ii, 79). It would also appear from the earliest extant Qur_ān pages that the *basmala* is almost always orthographically integral to the subsequent sūra's text and not set apart vis ually in any way (Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, *Mas āif San_ā_,* 36-61).Western scholars have also examined the question of the *basmala*'s relationship to the qur_ānic text (see **collection of the qur_An**). Noldeke suggests that at least as early as the Qur_ān copy (*mushaf,* q.v.) of af_a the *basmala* was used to separate sūras (**gq**, ii, 46). R. Blachere sees the *basmala* as a formula used by Mu_ammad to introduce letters and pacts which was inaugurated at some point to mark the beginning of a sūra (*In troduction,* 143-4). R. Paret says it was likely added later as a seventh verse to **q** 1 to allow "the seven oft-repeated [verses]" (*sab_an mina l-mathānī,* **q** 15:87) to apply to the Fāti_a (*Kommentar,* 11). A. Neuwirth argues from Christian and Jewish liturgical formulae and the Fāti_a's internal structure and content (e.g. repetition of part of the *basmala* in **q** 1:3) that

the *basmala* of q 1:1 did not belong originally to the Fātiha (cf. Noldeke, ɢQ, i, 116-7; ii, 41-2).

Place of the basmala *in Muslim life and tradition*

The *basmala* has been arguably the mostrepeated sentence in Muslim usage. It is axiomatic that a Muslim should begin every act of any importance with the *basmala* (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 26; Bājūrī, *Tufat al-murīd*, 3; Rāzī, *Akām al-basmala*, 19; M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 91; see **ritual and the qur_An**). Mu_ammad is quoted as saying that "every important affair that one does not begin with 'in the name of God' is void" (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, i, 31;M. al-Gharawī, *Ism*, 13; _abbān, *Risāla*, 21). Scriptural support is found in q 6:119 which begins, "Why do you not eat that over which the name of God has been mentioned?" Various traditions stress the *basmala*'s great power and blessing, e.g. "Whoever recites *bi-smi llāh al-ramān alrahīm* enters paradise (*al-janna* [see **paradise**; **garden**])" (A. Ghaylān, *Da_wa*, 37;cf. M. b. _Alī al-Shawkānī, *Fat al-qadīr*, i, 67-8).

The use of the *basmala* is often a legal and sometimes even political matter of importance. The divergence of the law schools concerning the audible recitation of the *basmala* in worship (q.v.), based on its status as an *āya* in the Fāti_a and elsewhere, has

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

Traditionally, the *basmala* carries special blessings and power (cf. I. al-Basyūnī, *Basmala*,19-20; _abarsī, *Majma_*, i, 26-7) and is used as a talisman in popular magic (see **amulets**). One tradition claims it is "… an *āya* of God's scripture not revealed to anyone other than the Prophet save for Solomon (q.v.) the son of David (q.v.)" (Suyū_ī, *Durr*, i, 20). Especially in mystical thought it is considered the quintessence of the Qur_ān:

According to Ibn al-_Arabī(d. 638/1240) "the *basmala* is the key toevery sūra" and God says that uttering the *basmala* is remembering *(dhikr)* him (*Futuā t*,viii, 343; vii, 274-5). An early Ismā_īlī work studied by W. Ivanov explains its esoteric meaning in cosmological terms (W. Ivanov, *Studies,* 68). The mysteries of the letters of the *basmala* are many, e. g. the popular tradition that all of the scriptures are contained in the dot of the Arabic letter *bā_* in the *bi-* of the *basmala* (_Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *Kahf,* 4-5; see **letters and mysterious letters**). Shī_ī sources develop a similar interpretation: According to Ja_far al- _ādiq (d. 148/765) and others, the greatest *āya* in the Qur_ān is the *basmala* (M. al-Gharawī, *Ism,* 77); all the areas of knowledge *(_ulūm)* are contained in "the four [Shī_ī _adīth] books" and their *_ulūm* in the Qur_ān and the *_ulūm* of the Qur_ān in the Fāti_a and the *_ulūm* of the Fāti_a in the *basmala* and the *_ulūm* of the *basmala* in the *bā_* of the *basmala* (M. al-Gharawī, *Ism,* 64, 98). In a variation on this theme, Mir Dard (d. 1199/1785) cites _Alī b. Abī _ālib (q. v.) as saying all mysteries are contained in the dot beneath the *bā_* of the *basmala* and he, _Alī, is that dot (A. Schimmel, *Pain,* 90).

Orthographically, the *basmala* is set apart by the traditional but grammatically exceptional omission of the prosthetic *alif* of *ism (<s-m-w)* connecting the *bā_* directly to the *sīn.* One attestation of this is the absence of mention of the *alif* from the tradition that _Umar said "Lengthen the *bā_,* show clearly the teeth [of the *sīn*] and make round the *mīm*" (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf,*i, 35).

The calligraphic embellishment of the *basmala* has always been a favorite artistic undertaking in Islam, whether executed in formal script styles, zoomorphic (bird, lion, etc.) designs, stylized calligraphic shapes *(tughra)* or decorative calligrams (see **art and architecture and the qur_An; arabic script; calligraphy**). The culmination of the calligrapher's art is often considered to be the famous *basmala* of the Ottoman artist A_mad Qarā_i_ārī (d. 963/1520) in which extreme application of the principle of assimilation of letters (the letters *rā_* and *yā_* disappear, *lām* is shortened and "Allāh" becomes symbolic vertical strokes)

leads to a *basmala* crafted into a single sweeping line of script without lifting the pen.

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Abrogation

A prominent concept in the fi elds of qur_ānic commentary and Islamic law which allowed the harmonization of apparent contradictions in legal rulings. Despite the voluminous literature Muslims have produced on this topic over the centuries, Western scholars have historically evinced little interest in analyzing the details of "abrogation." Although aware of these details, T. Noldeke and F. Schwally, for example, failed to probe adequately the signifi cant distinction made in applying theories of abrogation to the Qur_ān. To understand this application, it is important to distinguish the difference between the Qur_ān as a source and the Qur_ān as a text, the difference being the verses removed from the text, the substance of which remains a probative source for doctrine (J. Burton, *Collection,* 233). On the question of the relation between the Qur_ān and sunna (q.v.) — the customary practice of the Prophet Mu_ammad as documented in the _adīth — inadequate information betrayed I. Goldziher (*Muhammedanische Studien,* ii, 20) into inadvertently misrepresenting the importance of the stance adopted by the classical jurist al-Shāfi_ī (d. 204/820). More recently,J. Schacht's concentration on "contradiction" *(ikhtilāf)* as an acknowledged category in the _adīth and sunna as well as his speculation on the origin and nature of _adīth led him to minimize the role of the Qur_ān, its interpretation and its perceived relation to the sunna as factors important to the evolution of jurisprudence (*Origins,* 95-7).

 Classical Islamic jurisprudence recognizes two primary sources of legal rulings:
the Qur_ān and the sunna. In addition, two secondary post-prophetic sources were acknowledged:
analogy *(qiyās)* derived from one or other of the primary sources, and the consensus of qualifi ed legal experts *(ijmā_).* Abrogation is applicable to neither of the subsidiary sources, but only to

the documents on which they are based. Since abrogation is solely the prerogative of the lawgiver, it may be argued that it must be indicated before the death of the Prophet who mediated the laws supplied in the Qur_ān and sunna.

"The cancellation of a legal enactment" is an inadequate translation of the Arabic term *naskh* which includes, when applied to the Qur_ān, reference to "omission," although it more commonly signifi es "substitution." Abrogation may be external to Islam or internal. On its appearance, Christianity deemed itself to have replaced Judaism, while with its revelation, Islam saw itself as dislodging both of its predecessors as an expression of the divine will (al-Ghazālī, *al-Musta fā*, i, 111). For each of the historical revelations, there was a preordained duration (q 13:38), although Islam, intended to be the last of the series, will endure until judgment day (q 33:40). Like Christ, Mu_ammad came to confirm the Torah (q.v.) and also to declare lawful some of what had been previously declared unlawful (q 2:286; 3:50). For example, the Prophet was instructed to declare the food of Muslims lawful to the Jews (q 5:5). Indeed, some elements of Jewish law had been intended as punishment, imposed on account of their wrongdoing (q 4:160; 6:146).

To Muslim scholars, the abrogation of

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Judaism and Christianity by Islam was obvious, although internal abrogation remained less so. The latter had to be vigorously defended by appeal to the analogy of external abrogation, to verses in the Qur_ān and by reference to alleged instances of abrogation. For example, the Companion Salama b. al-Akwa_ (d. 74/693) is reported to have said, "When 'and those who can shall feed one of the poor (q 2:184)' was revealed, those who chose to break their fast [during the month of Rama_ān, q.v.] fed the poor until the verse was abrogated by 'Whoever is present during the month shall fast (q 2:185)' "
(Muslim, *_a_ī, K. al-_iyām*). In another instance, when a man inquired about the night prayer, the Prophet' s widow _Ā_isha

(q.v.) asked him, "Do you not recite q 73? The Prophet and his Companions (see **companions of the prophets**) observed the night prayer for a whole year during which God retained in Heaven the closing of the sūra, revealing the alleviation only twelve months later, whereupon the night prayer became optional from being obligatory" (Muslim, _aī). In these two instances of alleged abrogation, it is claimed that one regulation was withdrawn and replaced with a later one, although the replaced verses remained in the text.

q 2:180 requires Muslims to make testamentary provision for their parents and other close kin, while another passage (q 4:11-12) stipulates the shares in an estate which must pass automatically to a Muslim's heirs (see **inheritance**). In deference to the legal principle that no one may benefit twice from a single estate, parents and other close family members now lost the right to the benefi t stipulated in q 2:180. Widows, being named in q 4:12, lost the maintenance and accommodation for twelve months granted in q 2:240 (see **maintenance and upkeep**). For some classical jurists, one verse of the Qur_ān here ab rogated another. Others argue that the provisions of q 2:180 and q 4:11-12 were by no means irreconcilable, but that the exclusion of parents and widows from their dual entitlement had been settled by the Prophet's announcement, "There shall be no testament in favor of an heir." Here the Prophet's practice was seen as abrogating the Qur_ān.

The words and actions of the Prophet came to be regarded by many as a second source of Islamic regulation which, like the Qur_ān, was subject to the same process of change (al-āzimī, *I_tibār*, 23). For example, Mu_ammad announced, "I prohibited the visiting of graves, but now you may visit them. I had prohibited storing the meat of your sacrifi ces for more than three nights, but now you may store it as long as you see fi t. I had prohibited the keeping of liquor in anything but skin containers, but now you may use any type of container, so long as you drink no intoxicant" (Muslim, *_aī*, *K. al-Janā_iz*).

The qur_ānic passages concerning the change of the direction of prayer (*qibla*, q.v.) leave unclear which type of abrogation has taken place (q 2:142-50). Some scholars argued that the change

of direction indicated was a case of external abrogation. They held that the Prophet was bound by God's command to the Jews to face Jerusalem when praying, until this was abrogated by the qur_ānic verse. Others, interpreting the words "We appointed the direction of prayer which you formerly faced" (q 2:143) as a reference to turning to Jerusalem, saw the change as internal abrogation, with one qur_ānic ruling abrogating the other (al-Na__ās, *al-Nāsikh,* 15).

Noting the silence of the Qur_ān on the earlier direction of prayer, some other scholars presumed that praying toward Jerusalem had been introduced by the Prophet and later changed by the Qur_ān.

Al-Shāfi_ī's theory of abrogation

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

A key feature of al-Shāfi_ī's work is the emphasis on redefi ning the term "sunna" to restrict it to the words and actions reported from the Prophet alone. Others had interpreted the term in the older, broader sense to include the practice of other authorities, in addition to the Prophet. Al-Shāfi_ī sought to convince them that God had singled out the Prophet as alone qualifi ed to pronounce on the law. He amassed from the Qur_ān evidence that God in sisted on unquestioning obedience to his

Prophet (e.g. q 4:13, 65). Appealing to a series of verses linking Mu_ammad's commands and prohibitions to the divine will, and culminating in a verse which identifi ed Mu_ammad's will with the divine will (q 4:80), al-Shāfi_ī succeeded in recovering the unique prophet-fi gure central to and partner in the processes of divine revelation.

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

Abrogation and divine knowledge
To some minds, the idea that one verse from the Qur_ān abrogated another suggested that divine will changes and divine knowledge develops and this was held to contravene basic theological tenets. Those who allowed that some verses of the Qur_ān

abrogated others, responded that no Muslim ever objected to the notion that Islam had abrogated Christianity and

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Judaism. External abrogation of this type was an acknowledged eality, one to which the Qur_ān referred and consequently one that could be accepted. If God adapts his regulations to the different circumstances prevailing in different ages, as is apparent in the alteration of laws revealed to the different prophets, he may equally adapt regulations appropriate to the initial stages of one revelation to meet the changes wrought in the course of the revelation (al-Ghazālī, *al-Musta fā,* i, 111). Moreover, there was historical evidence of this having happened. For example, the Muslims at Mecca were bidden to be patient under the verbal and physical assaults of their enemies. When the Muslim community emigrated to Medina, they were ordered to answer violence with violence. The weakness of Meccan Islam was replaced by the numerical and economic strength of Medinan Islam. Given these changed conditions,patient forbearance could be replaced by defi ant retaliation (q 2:191, 216;20:130; 30:60; 73:10).

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

Human circumstances, however, do change and human knowledge does develop. When humans command one an other and subsequently become aware of unforeenconsequences, they are obliged to withdraw a command. Their lack of perfect foresight often obliges them to have second thoughts (*badā_*, Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, ii, 64), which according to classical Sunnī theology, may never by posited of the divine being. When abrogation occurs people may perceive a change, but this is only a change from the human perspective. God sends his prophets with his commands and the true believer is the one who obeys (q 4:65). Muslims should emulate the ideal attitude adopted by Abraham and his son, when both of them with full knowledge — in the Islamic tradition — were willing to proceed with the sacrifice.

The qur_ānic evidence

The claim that abrogation, understood as the cancellation of a legal ordinance, was solidly rooted in the revelation was connected with the appropriation of the qur-_ānic root *n-s-kh* as a technical term. The root occurs in no fewer than four verses which the classical exegetes treated as circumstantially unrelated contexts to be interpreted independently. That prevented scholars from agreeing on an unequivocal etymology and defi nition of *"naskh"* and led to the consequent emergence of a host of irreconcilable theories of abrogation. q 7:154 *(nuskha)* and q 45:29 *(nastansikhu),*the fi rst referring to tablets *(alwā)* and the second to a book *(kitāb),* united with the everyday usage, *"nasakha l-kitāb"* (copied a book), to produce the concept of "duplication." The essence of this understanding is

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a plurality of texts. This secular usage was said to be a synonym for *"naqala l-kitāb"* (transcribed the book) which, however, bears the added sense of "removal" hence "transfer" or "replace," as in the phrase *nasakhat al-shams al-_ill*, "the sunlight replaced the shadow" (an etymology that is rejected by some, see Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, ii, 61). "God abrogates *(yansakhu)* whatever Satan brings forth" (q 22:52) could yield only the sense of "suppression." This paralleled the secular usage

"nasakhat al-rī al-āthār" (The wind obliterated the traces [of an encampment, etc.]; cf. Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_,* ii, 61; al- Ghazālī, *al-Mustafā,* i, 107). In this usage, abrogation as "removal" carries the connotation of "withdrawal."

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

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

Theological objections to the interpretation

Still some scholars had diffi culty in accepting the mechanism of abrogation as worthy of God. Some went so far as to provide variant readings for the references to abrogation in the holy text (_abarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 478). One particular diffi culty was "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten without bringing a better one or one like it" (q 2:106). Some objected that no part of the holy text could be said to be superior to another so "without bringing a better one" could not be a reference to the Qur_ān. The same consideration applies to the Prophet's sunna abrogating the Qur_ān since no _adīth could be thought superior or even similar to a divine verse. The proponents of abrogation claimed that God was not referring to the text of the Qur_ān, but to the rulings conveyed by the text (al-Ghazālī, *al-Musta fā*, i, 125; cf. _abarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 471-2). While in terms of beauty, no qur_ānic verse can be considered superior to another and certainly no _adīth is more beautiful than a verse from the

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Qur_ān, the legal content of one verse – or even of a _adīth – could be considered superior to the ruling contained in another verse. Less easy to explain was the reason that in these cases God did not suppress the abrogated texts to avoid confusion (_abarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 472).

Variant readings

That the notion of portions of the holy text being forgotten was repugnant to some is shown in two procedures adopted to avoid that interpretation. As an exegetical alternative, a number of different readings (see **readings of the qur_An**) were proposed for the troublesome passages. In the passage "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten *(nunsihā)* without supplying a similar or better one" (q 2:106) attention focused on the word which the major ity of scholars read as *nunsi* (cause to forget). This reading was supported by "You will not forget *(tansā),* except what God wills" (q 87:6-7). Also suggested were "You are caused to forget" *(tunsa)* which is to be preferred to "You forget" *(tansa,* _abarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, 474-5). Both of the problems,

Mu_ammad forgetting on his own and God making him forget, could be circumvented by reading *nansa_,* "We defer" (_abarī, *Tafsīr,* ii, 476-8). q 2:106 would then be mentioning two revelatory processes, *naskh* and deferment. The deferment of *naskh,* in the sense of "copying," could mean "the deferring of revelation from the heavenly original (see **preserved tablet**) to its earthly representation in the Qur_ān," said to have occurred in the case of the night prayer which the revelation of q 73:6 changed from obligatory to optional (al-Shāfi_ī, *al-Risāla,* 108). Or it could mean deferring the removal of a passage from the Qur_ān, by leaving the passage in the text despite suppression of the ruling it contained (_abarī, *Tafsīr,* ii, 478). Generally the sense of the verb *nasa_a* (to defer) is held to be temporal, although it has also been said to have a physical connotation, "driving away," as men drive strange animals away from the cistern intended for their own beasts (Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf,* ad q 2:106; cf. _ūsī, *Tibyān,* i, 395). Transferred to the qur_ānic context, verses might be driven away from a text, even from human memory. Men may be caused to forget. In support of this interpretation, reports were cited which claimed that certain sūras were originally longer than they are in the present-day text of the Qur_ān. Even verses which had allegedly been revealed and failed to fi nd a place in the final text — such as the Ibn Ādam and Bi_r Ma_ūna verses (see J. Burton, *Sources,* 49-53) — were cited, supposedly from the few Companions who had not quite forgotten them (_abarī, *Tafsīr,* ii, 479-80).

Through another approach it is not even necessary to resort to variant readings because the Arabic word for "to forget" *(nasiya)* could be construed to mean "to remove something" or its opposite, "to leave something where it is" (_abarī, *Tafsīr,* ii, 476). This could mean that the verses were in the heavenly original, but not revealed, or the verses were left in the text of the Qur_ān and were neither repealed nor removed. Once replacement is ascertained to have occurred, it is immaterial whether the wording of an abandoned ruling is expunged or whether it is left to stand in the Qur_ān. The passages whose rulings have been replaced become inoperative or effectively removed (_abarī, *Tafsīr,* ii, 472).

Abrogation and the law

Legal scholars appealed to the principle of abrogation continually to resolve the apparent contradictions between the legal practice of the various regions of the Islamic world and between all of these and their putative sources in the revelation. "Forgetting" and "omission" were of no

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interest to the legal scholars who concentrated on "substitution" derived from "We substitute one verse in the place of another" (q 16:101) and imposed by them on "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten without bringing a better one or one like it" (q 2:106). The diffi culties which beset the exegetes and theologians were of little concern to legal scholars, who declared that "abrogation" *(naskh)* was a technical term with a meaning now clear to all (al-Ja__ā_, *Akām*, ad q 2:106). Most cited "We substitute one verse in the place of another" (q 16:101) as evidence that abrogation in the form of "substitution" had occurred, an interpretation already mentioned by the oldest exegetes (e. g. al-Farrā_, *Ma_ānī*, i, 64-5). In fact, abrogation as substitution became the theater of the liveliest development of the theories of abrogation.

The third type of abrogation

To the jurisprudent's interpretation of abrogation as "the replacement of the ruling but not of the text in which it appears" and to the exegete's "the withdrawal of both the ruling and its wording," a third type was added. q 5:89 mentions "a fast of three days" as one way to atone for breaking an oath. The Companion Ibn Mas_ūd (d. ca. 33/653) was said to have preserved in his personal notes the original reading of "a fast of three *consecutive* days." His anomalous reading was still referred to in the time of the legal expert Abū anīfa (d. ca. 150/767). Although the word "consecutive" was not found in the text of the Qur_ān that was in general use, the ruling was adopted into anafī doctrine (al-Sarakhsī, *U ūl*, ii,

81). This exemplifi es the third type of abrogation in which the text, but not the ruling, of a qur_ānic revelation was cancelled. q 4:15-16 introduces a penalty for illicit sexual behavior (see **adultery and forni - cation**). Both partners are to be punished with unspecifi ed violence and the female held under house arrest for life or "until God makes a way for them." The promised way was thought to have been provided in q 24:2, which imposed a penalty of one hundred lashes for male and female fornicators. Nevertheless, a Companion reported that the Prophet had announced, "Take it from me! Take it from me! God has now made the way for women. Virgin with virgin, one hundred lashes and banishment for twelve months. Non-virgin with non-virgin, one hundred lashes and death by stoning" (al-Shāfi_ī, *al-Risāla*, 129). Reports from other Companions show the Prophet extending the dual penalties to males while a number state that he stoned some offenders without fl ogging them (Mālik, *al-Muwa__a_, udūd, add al-zinā*). On the basis of this material, some concluded that this was a case of the Prophet's practice abrogating the Qur_ān. The vast majority of scholars, however, regarded the imposition of stoning as the penalty for adultery as an instance of a verse from the holy text being eliminated, although the ruling it contained remained in effect. The Medinan scholar Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), for instance, had heard that the penalty of stoning had originated in "the book of God," which in this case he understood to be the Torah. He reported that the Prophet had consulted the rabbis and the stoning ruling was indeed found in the Torah. With explicit reference to "the book of God," Mu_ammad imposed the ruling. Other scholars interpreted the term "the book of God" as a reference to the Qur_ān and were puzzled that they could not fi nd such a ruling within its pages. The Prophet's second successor _Umar (r. 12/634-22/644) gravely urged the Muslims not to overlook "the stoning verse" which, he maintained, had been revealed to Mu_ammad, taught by him to his Companions and recited in his company in the ritual

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prayers: "The mature male and female,stone them outright."
_Umar insisted that the Prophet, his immediate successor Abū
Bakr (r. 11/632-13/634) and he himself had put this ruling into
practice and claimed that fear of being accused of adding to the
holy text was the only reason that he did not actually write the
"verse" in the Qur_ān. Countless scholars in succeeding
centuries have stated with assurance that a verse with the same
or similar wording had once stood in the qur_ānic text. From
this, they concluded that a verse could be removed from the
Qur_ān without this vitiating the validity of the ruling it
contained (al-Ghazālī, *al-Musta fā,* ii, 124).
Al-Shāfi_ī did not analyze these materials from the standpoint of
those who saw here the abrogation of the Qur_ān by the sunna,
a claim which he at all times studiously avoided. Rather he
preferred to review the case on the basis of his theory of
exclusion *(takhī   ).* By imposing on slave women half the
penalty of the free, q 4:25 excluded slaves from the full brunt
of q 24:2 —which ordered a fl ogging of one hundred lashes for
male and female adulterers — and from the stoning penalty, since
death has no defi nable half. Therefore certain classes of free
Muslims may also be exempt from some of the penalties. The
Prophet's practice indicated that married offenders were not
covered by q 24:2 or, if they had originally been covered by
that provision, they were subsequently excluded. Their penalty
was to be stoning. The sunna of stoning had replaced the earlier
sunna of flogging and stoning. In his analysis, al-Shāfi_ī
maintained that the Prophet's words, "God has now made a way
for women," showed that the qur_ānic ruling "confi ne [the
women] in their home until they die or until God makes a way for
them" (q 4:15) had been abrogated (J. Burton, *Sources,* 143-
56).He asserted that the Prophet had dispensed with fl ogging
those who were to be stoned, although earlier he had applied
both penalties. Because fl ogging was undeniably a qur_ānic
ruling, some have mistakenly assumed that al- Shāfi_ī believed
that stoning was a qur_ānic ruling as well.
Al-Shāfi_ī did acknowledge a third type of abrogation in his
discussion of a different question, that of the withdrawal of a

qur_ānic verse while the ruling it contained remained in effect. q 4:23 lists the women whom a Muslim male is forbidden to marry, including his wet-nurse and any female to whom she has given suck. Scholars disputed the number of times a child had to be suckled by a woman to establish this ban to marriage. For Mālik, a single suckling in infancy suffi ced to create a barrier to marriage (Mālik, *al-Muwa__a_, al-Ra_ā_a, Ra_ā_at al- aghīr*). For others even a single drop of breast-milk initiated the ban. Al-Shāfi_ī fastened on one report in which the Prophet's widow _Ā_isha was said to have claimed that a verse imposing ten suckling sessions had been revealed to the Prophet and it was replaced by a second verse reducing the number of sessions to fi ve, which was also subsequently lost. Earlier Mālik had curtly dismissed this report *(al- Muwa__a_, al-Ra_ā_, al-Ra_ā_a ba_d al-kibar),* but al-Shāfi_ī made it central to his conclusions. He accepted this as the one undoubted instance of the withdrawal of aqur_ānic verse while the ruling it expressed remained valid (*Ikhtilāf al-adīth,* vii, 208 margin; see also J. Burton, *Sources,* 156-8).

Conclusion

It is clear that the theory of abrogation developed its own internal dynamic. Al- Shāfi_ī's theory that the abrogating verses of the Qur_ān had once existed was not accepted by all of his contemporaries, but it later gained widespread support. Mālikīs and anafīs had no general need of this principle while Shāfi_īs had no need what -

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ever to posit that the sunna abrogated the Qur_ān or vice-versa. One nevertheless fi nds Mālikī and anafī scholars claiming that three forms of abrogation are documented (al-Sarakhsī, *Uūl,* ii, 81; Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_,* ii, 66), just as one also fi nds Shāfi_īs adducing occurrences of the sunna abrogating the Qur_ān and the reverse which, they claimed, their eponym had overlooked (al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustafā,* i, 124). See also traditional disciplines of qur_Anic study.

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Ambiguous

A concept in qur_ānic exegesis which bears upon the
controversial issue of the amount of interpretive license which
may be taken in commenting on God's word. The root *sh-b-h* is
attested several times in the Qur_ān. In reference to the Qur_ān

or its verses, the active participle *mutashābih* (or *mutashābihāt*) appears twice with the sense of "ambiguous" or "similar."

q 3:7 states that the Qurᵇān consists partly of *mukam* verses and partly of *mutashābih*:

"It is he who sent down upon you the book (q.v.), wherein are verses clear *(āyāt mukamāt)*that are the essence of the book *(umm al-kitāb),* and others ambiguous *(mutashābihāt)."*

Numerous commentators, while examining q 3:7, mention two other verses which seem to contradict it. They are q 39:23, which states that all the verses of the Qurᵇān are *mutashābih*: "God has sent down the fairest discourse as a book consimilar *(kitāban mutashābihan)"* and q 11:1 in which all the verses of the Qurᵇān are characterized as clear: "A book whose verses are set clear *(ukimat āyātuhu)."* Al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), on the authority of the commentator Ibn abīb al-Nīsābūrī (d. 406/1015), argues that these passages present three different statements on the nature of the Qurᵇān: the Qurᵇān as clear *(mukam),* as ambiguous *(mutashābih)* and as a combination of the two. He characterizes the verse that supports the idea of the compound nature, a Qurᵇān made up of clear verses and ambiguous ones (q 3:7), as the "correct" one (*aī, Burhān,* ii, 68; cf. Suyūᵇī, *Itqān,* iii, 30).

The relation between the two components of the Qurᵇān is governed by the meaning ascribed to the word *mutashābih,*for which the exegetical literature offers a variety of definitions. The meaning of "similar" is used to document the miraculous nature of the Qurᵇān. On the other hand, the term interpreted as "ambiguous" has wider implications and bears upon three central qurᵇānic issues:

1. The juridicalvalidity of the Qurᵇān, where the ambiguous verses are contrasted with the clear ones.
2. The question of the validity of interpreting the Qurᵇān, where the ambiguous verses are used to argue the cases for and against interpretation.
3. The inimitability (q.v.) of the Qurᵇān *(iᵇjāz al-Qurᵇān).*

Similar verses

Similarity between verses may manifest itself either in the wording *(laf_)* or in the meaning *(ma_nā)* of the verse. Accordingly, *mutashābihāt* are sometimes defi ned as ver ses in which the same words are used to mean different things (Ibn Qutayba, *Ta_wīl*, 74; _abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 114, 116) or else as verses that use different words to express a similar sense (_abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 115-6; see L. Kinberg, Mu_kamāt, 145). In a widelyrepeated defi nition, wording and meaning appear together and the similar verses are presented as those that "resemble one another in rightness and truth *(al-aqq wa-l- idq)*, i.e. meaning, and in beauty *(al-usn)*, i.e. wording" (Baghawī, *Ma_ālim*, i, 426). Naturally, the resemblance of verses can occur only in cases of repetition. This explains why repetition is presented as one of the characteristic features of the *mutashābih* verses. The correlation between the repetition of the *mutashābih* verses and their resemblance is treated in one of the defi nitions adduced by al-_abarī (d. 310/923) where *mutashābih* verses are those in which the words resemble one another when repeated in other qur_ānic chapters (*Tafsīr*, iii, 116).

Similar verses and the *inimitability of the Qur_ān*

Each of the defi nitions dealing with the resemblance and the repetition of the *mutashābih* verses touches upon the inimita - bility of the Qur_ān. The relation between the inimitability (q.v.) of the Qur_ān and the *mutashābih* verses can be understood through the dichotomy of wording and meaning mentioned above. In his commentary on "It is he who sent down upon you the book, wherein are verses clear that are the essence of the book, and others ambiguous" (q 3:7), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) combines the verse under discussion with two verses already mentioned, q 11:1 and q 39:23, as well as "If [the Qur_ān] had been from other than God, surely they would have found in it much inconsistency" (q 4:82; see **difficult passages**). Based on the four verses, he concludes that the *mutashābih* verses are those which repeat, resemble and confi rm each other, and they prove the miraculous nature of the text. There are no contradictions in the Qur_ān. Rather, its verses confirm and reinforce one another. Simultaneously, the Qur_ān is also defined as consisting

of *mukam* verses, namely, verses written in an inimitable way. Thus these two features, i.e. noncontradictory confirmed messages and an inimitable style of language which cannot be produced by mortals, attest to the divine source of the Qur_ān (Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* vii, 180).

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

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can ever meet this challenge and the Qur_ān therefore, with its two styles, the *mukam* and *mutashābih,* will forever remain inimitable (*Zād,* i, 350-1; cf. Ibn Qutayba, *Ta_wīl,* 86).

Mutashābih *meaning "ambiguous"*

A common way to treat the terms *mukam* and *mutashābih* is to contrast the clarity of the fi rst with the ambiguity of the other. As was mentioned, this contrast bears upon some of the most prominent qur_ānic issues: the abrogating and abrogated verses (*al-nāsikh wa-1-mansūkh,* see **abrogation**), the authority to interpret the Qur_ān and the inimitability of the Qur_ān.

Ambiguous verses and the abrogating and abrogated verses

Among the defi nitions that contrast the *mukam* with the *mutashābih,* there is to be found the presentation of the *mukam* ver ses as abrogating ones *(nāsikhāt)* and the *mutashābih* as abrogated ones *(mansūkhāt).* A widely-cited defi nition represents the *mu kam* as the abrogating verses, the verses that clarify what is allowed *(alāl),* the verses that clarify what is prohibited

(arām), the verses that define the punishments (udūd, see **boundaries and precepts**) for various offenses, the verses that define the duties *(farā_i_)* and the verses that one should believe in and put into practice. Conversely, the *mutashābih* verses are the abrogated ones, the verses that cannot be understood without changing their word order *(muqaddamuhu wamu _akhkharuhu)*, the parables *(amthāl)*, the oaths (q.v.; *aqsām)* and the verses in which one should believe, but not put into practice (Ibn _Abbās, *Tafsīr*, 124; Abū _Ubayd, *Nāsikh*, 4; Ibn Abī ātim, *Tafsīr*, ii, 592-3; _abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 115; Baghawī, *Ma_ālim*, i, 426; Ibn _A_iyya, *Muarrar*, i, 400; Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, iv, 10; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, i, 345; Suyū_ī, *Durr*, ii, 5; Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, i, 314).

The *mukam* are presented here as the verses that deal with essential matters whereas the *mutashābih* verses are held to deal with secondary matters. This is the way to understand the comparison made in the qur_ānic text itself. q 3:7 defines the *mukam* verses as "the essence of the book" and the *mutashābih* as the rest.

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

Ambiguous verses and the authority to interpret the Qur_ān

Several commentators recognize three kinds of *mutashābih* verses:
those that cannot be understood, those that can be examined
and understood by everyone and those that only "the experts"
(al-rāsikhūn fī l-_ilm) can comprehend (e.g. Fīrūzābādī, *Baā_ir*,
iii, 296). The *mukam* are defi ned as clear verses that require
nothing to be un
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derstood whereas the comprehension of the *mutashābih* requires
explanation (_abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 116-7; _Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*,
i, 13; Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Baghawī, *Ma_ālim*, i, 428; Ibn
_A_iyya, *Muarrar*, i, 401; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vii, 184; Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, iv,
9; Suyū_ī, *Itqān*, iii, 3; Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, i, 314). A different set
of defi nitions represents the *mukam* as verses that contain or
permit only one interpretation whereas the *mutashābih* are those
that may be interpreted in more than one way (_abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii,
115-6; al-Ja__ā_, *Akām*, i, 281; Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Wā_idī,
*Wasī_*, i, 413-4; Baghawī, *Ma_ālim*, i, 427; _abarsī, *Majma_*, ii, 15;
Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, iv, 10; Suyū_ī, *Itqān*, iii, 4; Shawkānī *Tafsīr*, i,
314). While there is no room to doubt the instructions supplied
by the *mukamāt*, the ambiguity of the *mutashābih* verses may create
a situation in which the believers become confused, not knowing
which direction to choose. They may then tendentiously interpret
these verses in favor of their own personal interests.
  This raises the question as to whether any exegetical effort
should be made to eliminate the vagueness of the *mutashābih*
verses and two contradictory attitudes developed.
Some scholars claimed that the *mutashābih* verses are meant to
remain ambiguous and any attempt to interpret them might lead
the believers astray. Only God knows their true meaning and this
is the way it should stay. Others maintained that the *mutashābih*
are meant to be illuminated. Not only does God know the meaning
of these verses, but the scholars of the Qur_ān also know it.
Their duty is to supply the interpretation of them and this may
vary among the different scholars since the *mutashābih* verses
may be interpreted in a variety of ways. These two opposing
views on the validity of interpreting the *mutashābih* verses
parallel those on the interpretation of the Qur_ān as a whole.

Ambiguous verses as those that should not be interpreted
The basic argument against the interpretation of the *mutashābih*
is that knowledge of these verses is limited to God
(_abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 116; Māwardī, *Nukat*, i, 369; Ibn _A_iyya,
Muarrar, i, 401; Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, iv, 9; Abū ayyān, *Bar*, ii, 381;
Ālūsī, *Rū*, ii, 82). As such, they concern matters about which no
mortal has clear knowledge. To show that the essence of the
mutashābihāt cannot be grasped by human beings, several topics
defined as *mutashābih* are mentioned: resurrection day (Māwardī,
Nukat, i, 369; Baghawī, *Ma_ālim*, i, 427; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vii, 184;
Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, iv, 10; Abū ayyān, *Bar*, ii, 381; Zarkashī, *Burhān*,
ii, 70), the appearance of the Antichrist *(al- Dajjāl)* before the
end of days, the return of Christ (_abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii, 116) and
the prophesied day the sun will rise in the west (Māwardī, *Nukat*,
i, 369; Baghawī, *Ma_ālim*, i, 427; Abū ayyān, *Bar*, ii, 381), among
others (see **antichrist, apocalypse, resurrection; last judgment**).

A different argument contends that the *mutashābih* are those
verses whose meaning can be easily distorted (_abarī, *Tafsīr*, iii,
116; Ibn _A_iyya, *Muarrar*, i, 401; Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_*, iv, 9; Suyū_ī,
Durr, ii, 5; Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, i, 314). This should be understood
in light of the second part of the key verse "As for those in
whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part,
desiring dissension and desiring its interpretation" (q 3:7).
The commentators who correlate the *mutashābih* and dissension
(q.v.) adduce a number of qur_ānic verses in support of their
position. One such example is presented by al-Suyū_ī (d.
911/1505) on the authority of Sa_īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714): To
justify their ideas, the early sect of the Khārijīs (q.v.)
employed "Whoever fails to judge according to what God has sent
down is a wrongdoer" (q 5:47) and "Then the unbelievers
ascribe equals to their

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Lord" (q 6:1) to support their controversial doctrines. When
the Khārijīs faced the injustice of a leader, they read these two
verses together and, by assuming correlation between the two,
they set forth the following argument: He who does not judge

according to the principles of justice is an unbeliever. An unbeliever is a polytheist *(mushrik)* who ascribes equals to God. Thus a leader who acts in this manner can be deemed a polytheist (**Durr,** ii, 5). The technique used here joins two verses that were not necessarily meant to be combined and draws conclusions from this juxtaposition. By so doing, the Khārijīs were able to prove that their teachings — such as espousing that a caliph should be deprived of his position for acting improperly — are anchored in the Qur_ān and thus fully authorized.

Another example of the correlation between the *mutashābih* verses and dissension deals with the controversial issue of free will versus predestination (see **freedom and predestination**). The rivals are the rationalist Mu_tazilīs (q.v.) and the conservative Sunnīs. Both sides refer to the same verse, q 18:29 which states "Say, 'The truth is from your Lord.' So whoever wishes, let him believe and whoever wishes, let him disbelieve." The Mu_tazilīs defi ne the verse as *mukam,* i.e. the kind of verse that should be followed since it favors the argument for free will. The Sunnīs, who do not accept the idea of free will, defi ne this verse as *mutashābih,* i.e. the kind of verse that should not be followed. q 76:30 presents the opposite view: "You cannot will [anything] unless God wills it." The Mu_tazilīs defi ne this verse as *mutashābih* since it contradicts their view, but the Sunnīs defi ne it as *mukam* because it favors the idea of predestination.

By shifting the terms, it became possible to endorse or refute an idea according to one's needs (Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* vii, 182; Abū ayyān, *Bar,* ii, 382). The same method was applied to other verses on topics such as the disagreements between the proponents of determinism (Jabriyya) and the proponents of indeterminism (Qadariyya),or the issue of whether believers will see God in the afterlife (Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* vii, 185; Abū ayyān, *Bar,* ii, 382; cf. L. Kinberg,Mu_kamāt, 159).

The correlation between the *mutashābih* verses and dissension was also mentioned in the discussion of the reasons for the existence of the *mutashābih* in the Qur_ān:

God revealed them to test the people.Those who do not follow the *mutashābih* will be rewarded as true believers, while those who

follow them will go astray (Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, i, 353). The same idea is mentioned along with the fact that the *mutashābih* can be easily distorted. Although established and profoundly elaborated, the negative approach to the interpretation of the *mutashābih* was not the only one adduced in the exegetical literature. No less detailed were the arguments favoring their interpretation (see exegesis of the qur_An; classical and medieval).

Ambiguous verses as those that may be interpreted

The perception of the *mutashābih* as ambiguous verses was used to argue, as shown above, against their interpretation. The same perception, however, is also used to support and encourage their interpretation.

Although contradictory, the two approaches had a common starting point:

Ambiguous verses are dangerous in the sense that a wrong interpretation might mislead the believer. With this idea in mind, some scholars recommended avoiding any examination of these verses whereas others encouraged the interpretation of them, but prescribed caution with regard to the steps that need to be taken in this process. One precaution is to check the *mutashābih* against the *mukam*. This is expressed in a set of defi nitions which oppose

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the *mukam* and the *mutashābih* regarding the dependence of the latter. The *mukam* are defi ned as independent verses that need no explanation (Māwardī, *Nukat,* i, 369; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, i, 350; Abū ayyān, *Bar,* ii, 381) nor reference to other verses to be understood (al-Na__ās, *I_rāb*, i, 355; Qur_ubī, *Jāmi_,* iv, 11; Shawkānī, *Tafsīr*, i, 314). Conversely, the *mutashābih* are dependent verses that cannot be understood without consulting or comparing them to other verses (Baghawī, *Ma_ālim,* i, 427; Zarkashī, *Burhān,* ii, 68). The *mutashābih*'s dependence on the *mukam* derives from the clarity of the latter and the ambiguity of the former. The *mukam,* by interpreting the *mutashābih,* clears away any misunderstanding that might mislead the believer (Rāzī, *Tafsīr,* vii, 185). It thus can happen that when a believer consults a

mukam to understand an ambiguous *mutashābih,* he finds his way to the true faith (Rāzī, *Tafsīr,*vii, 185; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr,* i, 345). When a *mutashābih* is not interpreted in accordance with a *mukam,* those who rely on it will go astray (al-Ja__ā_, *Akām,* ii, 281). In light of this argument, the *mukam* are regarded as "the essence of the book" (*umm al-kitāb,* q 3:7) or "a source to which other verses are referred for interpretation" (Suyū_ī, *Itqān,* iii, 9).

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

Ambiguous verses and the inimitability of the Qur_ān

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

Almost every commentator identifies the "mysterious letters" (*fawāti* − or *awā_il al-suwar,* see letters and myste rious letters) of the Qur_ān as *mutashābih* (e. g. _abarī, *Tafsīr,* iii, 116-7). These are the letters that occur at the beginning of certain sūras and whose meaning is unclear. The signifi cance of the mysterious letters, as well as the other *mutashābih* verses, is considered a divine secret known only to God himself. Both should be regarded as parts of the book that God has prevented his people from understanding. Their concealed meaning points to the divine source of the Qur_ān and thus attests to its miraculous nature (_Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih,* i, 17).

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The ambiguity of the *mutashābih* verses enables believers to interpret them in more than one way. This means that the Qur_ān accommodates more than one approach to a given issue and that different trends in Islam are likely to fi nd their ideas refl ected in the Qur_ān (_Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih,* i, 26, 28. See also L. Kinberg, Mu_kamāt, 158, 168). This allows the holy text to serve as a source of answers and solutions to any problem at any time and represents one of the central aspects of the miraculous nature of the Qur_ān.

In examining the different attitudes toward the interpretation of the Qur_ān, H. Birkeland (*Opposition,* 9) states that the opposition to qur_ānic exegesis was never comprehensive and was aimed at the usage of human reasoning *(ra_y).* The validity of *tafsīr bi-l-_ilm,* i. e. exegesis based on _adīth (the records of the pronouncements and actions of the prophet Mu_ammad, see HadIth and the qur_An) was, in H. Birkeland's view, never disputed. Support for this theory can be found in the way the term *mutashābih* is treated in the exegetical literature as well as in its relation to the term *mukam.* The prohibition of interpreting the *mutashābih* verses may be understood as a refl ection of the opposition to the use of human reason. At the same time, allowing the interpretation of these verses seems to be conditional upon the usage of _adīth as a means of interpretation. Indeed, Muslim scholars have traditionally

not regarded the employment of _adīth to illuminate a qur_ānic verse as interpretation, but rather as a means of confirming the message included in the verse.

Consequently, a verse in harmony with a reliable _adīth may be relied upon as a source of guidance. Such a verse would be defined as *mukam*. The *muta shābih,* on the other hand, can never be regarded as authoritative. Both the need of various streams in Islam to have their distinctive ideas anchored in the Qur_ān and the injunction to follow only the *mukam* verses may explain the variance in the identity of the verses which different groups view as **mukam** and **mutashābih.** As shown above, a verse defi ned by one scholar as *mutashābih* may be characterized as *mukam* by another. The fl exible way in which the two terms were used enabled the commentators to adapt a verse to their needs by defining it as *mukam.* In so doing they were actually using their own independent reasoning presented as _adīth. See also **traditional disciplines of qur_Anic study.**

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Exegesis of the Quran: Early Modern and Contemporary

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

Aspects and limits of modernity in the exegesis of the Qur_ān

Treating early modern and contemporary exegesis of the Qur_ān as a distinct subject implies that there are characteristics by which this exegesis differs noticeably from that of previous times. The assumption of such characteristics, however, is by no means equally correct for all attempts at interpreting passages of the Qur_ān in the books and articles of Muslim authors of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even where such an assumption holds true, those authors do not always deviate significantly from traditional patterns and approaches (see **exegesis of the qur_An: classical and medieval**). Many Qur_ān commentaries of this time hardly differ from older ones in the methods applied and the kinds of explanations given. The majority of the authors of such commentaries made ample use of classical sources like al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) without necessarily adding anything substantially new to the already available interpretations. One should thus always bear in mind that in the exegesis of the Qur_ān there is a broad current of unbroken tradition continuing to this day. Still, in what follows attention will be directed mainly to innovative trends. The majority of the new approaches to exegesis has so far been developed in the Arab countries and particularly in Egypt. Therefore, this part of the Islamic world will be dealt with most extensively. Elements of novelty include the content as well as the methods of interpretation. When mentioning content, it should be said, first of all, that new ideas about the meaning of the qur_ānic text emerged largely in answer to new questions which arose from the political, social and cultural changes brought about in Muslim societies by the impact of western civilization. Of particular importance among these were two problems: the compatibility of the qur_ānic world view with the findings of modern science (see **science and the qur_An**); and the question of an appropriate political and social order based on qur_ānic principles (see **politics and the qur_An; community and society in the qur_An**) which would thus enable Muslims to throw off the yoke of western dominance. For this purpose the qur_ānic

message had to be interpreted so as to allow Muslims either to assimilate western models successfully or to work out alternatives believed to be superior to them. One of the problems to be considered in this framework was the question of how qur- _ ānic provisions referring to the legal status of women could be understood in view of modern aspirations towards equal rights for both sexes (see **feminism; gender; women and the qur_An**). Hitherto unknown methodological approaches sprang partly from new developments in the field of literary studies and communication theory, partly from the need to find practical ways and theoretical justifications for discarding traditional interpretations in favor of new ones more easily acceptable to the contemporary intellect, but without at the same time denying the authority of the revealed text as such. These approaches were

usually based on a new understanding of the nature of divine revelation and its mode of action in general.

Kinds of publications containing exegesis of the Qur_ān *and discussing exegetical methods*

The main place where exegesis of the Qur_ān can be found remains the commentaries. Most of them follow a verse by- verse approach (*tafsīr musalsal,* i. e. "chained" or sequential commentary). In the majority of cases such commentaries start from the beginning of the first sūra (q.v.; see also **fAtiHa**) and continue — unless unfinished — without interruption until the last verse of the last sūra. An exception is *al-Tafsīr al-_adīth* by the Palestinian scholar Mu_ammad _Izza Darwaza, which is based on a chronological arrangement of the sūras (cf. Sulaymān, *Darwaza*). Some *musalsal* commentaries are limited to larger portions of the text (known as *juz_,* pl. *ajāz_*) that were already in former times looked upon as units (e.g. Mu_ammad _Abduh, *Tafsīr juz_ _Ammā,* 1322/1904-5). Some are devoted to a single sūra (e.g. Mu_ammad _Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Fāti_a,*1319/1901-2). In a few cases such commentaries deal only with a selection of sūras made by the author for demonstrating the usefulness of a new exegetical method (_Ā_isha _Abd al-Ra_mān, *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī,* see below) or

the edifying purpose that the exegesis was originally meant to serve (e.g. Shawqī _ayf, *Sūrat al-Ra_mān wa-suwar qi_ār*). It should also be said that the traditional genre of commentaries which treat verses considered particularly diffi cult (see **difficult passages**) is still being pursued (e.g. Rāshid _Abdallāh Far_ān's *Tafsīr mushkil al-Qur_ān*). While it is true that most commentaries have been written for the consumption of religious scholars, some are explicitly designed to address the needs of a more general public. This is true, for example, in the case of Mawdūdī's (d. 1979) *Tafhīm al-Qur_ān* (see below), a commentary intended for Indian Muslims of a certain education who, however, do not possess knowledge of Arabic or expertise in the qur_ānic sciences. The last decades of the twentieth century in particular witnessed the publication of an increasing number of commentaries which classified key passages of the qur_ānic text according to main subjects and treated verses related to the same subject synoptically. The ideas of exegesis underlying this "thematic interpretation" *(tafsīr mawū_ī)* and the pertinent theoretical statements proclaimed in them can vary greatly from one author to the next, as will be seen below; also, in such thematic commentaries, the procedures of determining the meaning of single verses sometimes differ hardly at all from those applied in commentaries of the *musalsal* kind. Therefore, this thematic interpretation can oscilate between mere rearrangement of textual material and a distinct method of exegesis with new results. Generally, however, thematic interpretation concentrates upon a limited number of qur_ānic concepts judged by the author to be particularly important. This effect has also been achieved by Ma_mūd Shaltūt in his *Tafsīr al-Qur_ān al-karīm. al-Ajzā_ al-_ashara al-ūlā,* who steers a middle course between the *musalsal* and thematic approaches in not commenting upon the text word by word, but focusing attention on key notions (see Jansen, *Egypt,* 14). Where commentaries concentrate on a single, central qur_ānic theme or just a few (e.g. _Abd al-_Azīz b. al-Dardīr's *al-Tafsīr almaw ū_ī li-āyāt al-taw_īd fī l-Qur_ān al-karīm)*, this genre merges into that of treatises on basic questions of qur_ānic theology (see **theology and the qur_An**), such as Daud Rahbar's *God*

of Justice or — on a less sophisticated level — _Ā_isha _Abd al-Ra_mān＇s *Maqāl fī l-insān. Dirāsa qur_āniyya.*
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In addition, books or articles written in the field of Islamic theology or law that argue from qur_ānic texts — which most of them do to a great extent — include an element of exegesis. Printed collections of sermons, on the other hand, are not as relevant for exegesis as one might expect, since Islamic sermons are nowadays primarily laid out thematically, not exegetically. Discussions concerning the appropriate methods of exegesis are often located in introductions placed at the beginning of Qur_ān commentaries. A remarkable early modern case in point is Mu_ammad _Abduh＇s introduction to his *Tafsīr al-Fāti_a* (5–21, actually Mu_ammad Rashīd Ri_ās account of one of Ābduh＇s lectures). A small separate treatise about the principles of exegesis, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan＇s *Ta_rīr fī u_ūl al-tafsīr,* was already printed in 1892 (Agra, in Urdu). Since that time quite a few books and articles entirely devoted to methodological problems of interpreting the Qur_ān have been published, most of them since the late 1960＇s.

Main trends in the exegetical methods and their protagonists

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

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

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's basic notion for understanding qur_ānic revelation (see **revelation and inspiration**) is expounded in his above-mentioned treatise on the fundamentals of exegesis *(u_ūl altafsīr)* and put into practice in several other writings published by him: The law of nature is a practical covenant (q.v.) by which God has bound himself to humanity (see **natural world and the qur_An**), while the promise and threat (see **reward and punishment**) contained in the revelation is a verbal one. There can be no contradiction between both covenants; otherwise God would have contradicted himself, which is unthinkable. His word, the revelation, cannot contradict his work, i.e.

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nature (see **creation**). Sayyid Ahmad Khan complements this assumption with a second axiom: Any religion imposed by God — and hence also Islam, the religion meant to be the final one for all humankind — must necessarily be within the grasp of the human intellect, since it is possible to perceive the obligatory character of a religion only through the intellect (q.v.). Therefore it is impossible that the qur_ānic revelation could contain anything contradicting scientific reason. If some contemporary Muslims believe the opposite, this does not stem, in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's opinion, from the qur_ānic text as such, but from an erroneous direction within the exegetical tradition:

The holy book only seems to contradict modern science in certain places if one has not noticed that the passage in question must be understood metaphorically. According to Sayyid Ahmad Khan this metaphorical interpretation *(ta_wīl)* is, *nota bene*, not a secondary reinterpretation of an obvious meaning of the text, but a reconstruction of its original meaning: God himself had chosen to use certain metaphorical expressions in the text only on account of their currency as common metaphor (q.v.) in the Arabic usage of the Prophet's day, making them comprehensible to his contemporaries, the first audience for what had been revealed to him. Exegetes must, therefore, first try to understand the text as understood by the ancient Arabs to whom it was addressed in the time of the Prophet (see **language and style of the qur_An; pre-islamic arabia and the qur_An**). The practical result of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's exegetical endeavor on the basis of these principles is to eliminate miraculous events from his understanding of the qur_ānic text as much as possible, as well as all kinds of supernatural phenomena and other phenomena incompatible with his own scientific world view (see **miracle**). In the case of doubt, the reasoning of modern science, not the meaning of the text which was most likely accessible to the ancient Arabs, is his criterion of truth (q.v.).

He thus explains the prophet's night journey (see **ascension**) as an event that took place only in a dream (see **dreams and sleep**), while the jinn (q.v.) become, in his interpretation, some sort of primitive savages living in the jungle, etc. Mu_ammad _Abduh, taking over a well-known idea that can be traced back to the philosophy of the late phase of the European Enlightenment, conceived of the history of humankind as a process of development analogous to that of the individual and saw in the "heavenly religions" educational means by which God had directed this development towards its final stage of maturity, the age of science. According to him, Muslims are perfectly fit for sharing in the civilization of this age and can even play a leading part in it, since Islam is the religion of reason and progress. The Qur _ān was revealed in order to draw the minds of human beings to reasonable conceptions about their happiness in this world as well as in the hereafter. For _Abduh this means

not only that the content of the Qur_ān conforms to the laws of nature, but also that it informs people about the laws that are effective in the historical development of nations and societies. In this sense, the whole qur_ānic revelation seeks to bestow God's guidance *(hidāya)* upon humankind, and hence it has to be interpreted so as to make it easier for its audience to understand the goals God desires them to attain. Exegetes should devote themselves to the service of God's enlightening guidance and concentrate their efforts on searching the qur_ānic text to uncover God's signs (q.v.; *āyāt*) in nature and to discern the moral and legal norms

of which the text speaks (see **ethics and the qur_An**). This is their proper task rather than digressing into complicated scholarly discussions about the possible sense of individual words and phrases or immersing themselves in a variety of levels of meaning — whether grammatical or mystical (see **grammar and the qur_An; SUfism and the qur_An**) — that might be discernible in the text, particularly since these various understandings were quite unfamiliar to the Arabs of the Prophet's time. In order to grasp that to which God intends to guide humankind, the text has to be understood — and here _Abduh agrees once more with Sayyid Ahmad Khan — according to the meaning its words had for the Prophet's contemporaries, the first audience to which the revelation was disclosed. Moreover, commentators must resist the temptation to make qur_ānic statements definite where they have been left indefinite *(mubham)* in the text itself — e.g., by identifying persons whose proper names have not been mentioned — as well as the temptation to fill gaps in qur_ānic narratives (q.v.) with Jewish traditions of biblical or apocryphal origin *(Isrā_īliyyāt)* since these were handed down by previous generations of scholars who never stripped them of what contradicted revelation and reason (*Tafsīr al- Fāti_a,* 6, 7, 11–12, 15, 17). The characteristic features of _Abduh's own exegetical practice are reflected most clearly in his voluminous commentary widely known as *Tafsīr al-Manār,* which has become a standard work quoted by many later authors alongside the classical commentaries. _Abduh's actual share in it consists of the record of a series of

lectures that he gave at al-Azhar University around the year
1900 which covered the text of the Qur_ān from the beginning to
q 4:124. His pupil Mu_ammad Rashīd Ri_ā took notes of these
lectures which he afterwards elaborated and showed to his
teacher for approval or correction. In addition, he complemented
the passages based on _Abduh's lectures by inserting
explanations which he marked as his own — and in which he
displayed a more traditionalist attitude than that of _Abduh
(cf. Jomier, *Commentaire*). After _Abduh's death Ri_ā continued
the commentary on his own to q 12:107. _Abduh divides the
qur_ānic text into groups of verses constituting logical units
and treats the text of these paragraphs as a single entity. This
corresponds to his view that single words or phrases are not the
primary subject of interest for the commentator, but rather the
didactic aim of the passage, and that the correct interpretation
of an expression can often be grasped only by considering its
context *(siyāq)*. His interpretations, which he often enriches
with lengthy excursions, do not always consistently follow his
own declared principles but show a general tendency towards
stressing the rationality of Islam and its positive attitude
towards science, while aiming at the same time to eradicate
elements of popular belief and practice which he considers to be
superstitious. For _Abduh, too, in the case of doubt, science is
the decisive criterion for the meaning of qur_ānic wording.
Another Egyptian author, Mu_ammad Abū Zayd, who published a
commentary in 1930, can also be ranked among the exponents of a
rationalistic exegesis inspired by a popular appropriation of
the European Enlightenment. His book, *al-Hidāya wal- _irfān fī tafsīr
al-Qur_ān bi-l-Qur_ān,* created a considerable stir and was finally
confiscated by the authorities at the instigation of al-Azhar
University, which condemned it in an official report (Jansen,
Egypt, 88-9). The methodological device hinted at in its title —
namely that of explaining particular qur_ānic passages by
comparing them to parallel passages which address the same
subject in a more detailed way or in similar, though not
identical terms — was not completely novel even then, and has
been taken up more than once by later commentators, so far

without negative reactions on the part of the guardians of orthodoxy. What gave offence was apparently not the methodology so much as the ideas Mu_ammad Abū Zayd tried to propagate by making a very selective use of it: He argues that a far-reaching *ijtihād* is permitted with respect to traditional norms of Islamic law, and he does his best to explain away any miracles and supernatural occurrences in the qur_ānic narratives concerning the prophets (see **prophets and prophethood**).

Some commentaries contain elements of rationalistic exegesis in line with the insights of Sayyid Ahmad Khan or _Abduh, but use them only to a limited extent.

  Among these are *Tarjumān al-Qur_ān* (1930) by the Indian author Abū l-Kalām Āzād and *Majālis al-tadhkīr* (1929-39) by the Algerian reformist leader _Abd al-amīd Ibn Bādīs.

2. The so-called scientific exegesis of the Qur_ān

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

  It should be mentioned that Mu_ammad _Abduh's commentaries are not themselves devoid of attempts to read discoveries of modern science into the text. As is well-known, he considered the possibility that the jinn mentioned in the Qur_ān could be equated to microbes. He also considered it legitimate to understand the flocks of birds which, according to q 105, had thrown stones on the People of the Elephant (q.v.), to be swarms of flies which, by their polluted legs, had transmitted a

disease to them (*Tafsīr juz_ _Ammā,* 158). _Abduh's interest in such interpretations, however, did not parallel that of the supporters of scientific exegesis: He wanted to prove to his public that the qur_ānic passages in question were not contrary to reason by modern scientific standards, whereas proponents of scientific exegesis hope to prove that the Qur_ān is many centuries ahead of western scientists, since it mentions what they discovered only in modern times.

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

The basic pattern of scientific exegesis was not completely new: Several authors of classical Qur_ān commentaries, notably Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, had already expressed the idea that all the sciences were contained in the Qur_ān. Consequently, they had tried to detect in its text the astronomical knowledge of their times, then largely adopted from the Perso-Indian and Greco-Hellenistic heritage. Efforts of this

kind were still carried on by Ma_mūd Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1856) in his *Rū_ al-ma_ānī,* a commentary which, however, does not yet show any familiarity with modern western science. The fi rst author who attained some publicity by practicing scientific exegesis in the modern sense, i.e. by finding in the qur_ānic text references to modern scientific discoveries and advances, was the physician Mu_ammad b. A_mad al- Iskandarānī; one of his two pertinent books printed around the year 1880 bears the promising title *Kashf al-asrār al-nūrāniyya al-qur_ān̄iyya fī-mā yata_allaq bi-l-ajrām alsamāwiyya wa-l-ariyya wa-l-_ayawānāt wa-lnabāt wa-l-jawāhir al-ma_diniyya* (i.e. "Uncovering the luminous qur_ānic secrets pertaining to the heavenly and terrestrial bodies, the animals, the plants and the metallic substances," 1297/1879-80).

The most prominent representative of this *tafsīr _ilmī* in the early twentieth century was the Egyptian Shaykh _anāwī Jawharī, author

of *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur_ān alkarīm* (1341/1922-3). This work is not a commentary in the customary sense, but rather an encyclopedic survey of the modern sciences or, more exactly, of what the author classes with them – including such disciplines as spiritism *(_ilm ta_īr alarwā _)*. Jawharī claims that these sciences were already mentioned in certain qur_ānic verses, passages upon which his lengthy didactic expositions of pertinent topics are based. All this is interspersed with tables, drawings and photographs. Unlike most other enthusiasts of scientific exegesis, Jawharī did not employ this method primarily for the apologetic purposes, mentioned above, of proving the *i_jāz* of the Qur_ān. His main purpose was to convince his fellow Muslims that in modern times they should concern themselves much more with the sciences than with Islamic law; only in this way could they regain political independence and power. Other authors wrote books devoted to the scientific exegesis of qur_ānic verses mainly with apologetic intentions, among them _Abd al- _Azīz Ismā_īl (*al-Islām wa-l-_ibb al-_adīth*, Cairo 1938, reprint 1957), anafī A_mad (*Mu_jizat al-Qur_ān fī wa_f al-kā_ināt*, Cairo 1954, two reprints entitled *al-Tafsīr al-_ilmī lil-āyāt al-kawniyya*, 1960 and 1968) and _Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal (*al-Qur_ān wa-l-_ilm al-_adīth*, Cairo 1378/1959).

Some authors of well-known Qur_ān commentaries who do not rely exclusively on the method of scientific exegesis, but deal with the qur_ānic text as a whole (not only with verses lending themselves to this method), nevertheless practice scientific exegesis in the explanation of particular verses. Thus, elements of *tafsīr _ilmī* occur, for example, in *_afwat al-_irfān* (= al-Mu__af al-mufassar, 1903) by Mu_ammad Farīd Wajdī, in the *Majālis al-tadhkīr* (1929-39) by _Abd al-amīd Ibn Bādīs, and in *al- Mīzān* (1973-85) by the Imāmite scholar Mu_ammad usayn _abāabā_ī (d. 1982).

The scientific method of interpretation did not find general approval among Muslim authors who wrote Qur_ān commentaries or discussed exegetical methods. Quite a few of them rejected this method outright, like Mu_ammad Rashīd Ri_ā, Amīn al-Khūlī (whose detailed refutation of it [*Manāhij tajdīd*, 287-96] has often been referred to by later authors), Ma_mūd Shaltūt and Sayyid Qub (for these and other critics of the *tafsīr _ilmī* and their

arguments, see al-Mu_tasib, *Ittijāhāt al-tafsīr,* 302-13 and Abū ajar, *al-Tafsīr al-_ilmī,* 295-336). Their most important objections to scientific exegesis can be summarized as follows: (1) It is lexicographically untenable, since it falsely attributes modern meanings to the qur_ānic vocabulary; (2) it neglects the contexts of words or phrases within the qur_ānic text, and also the occasions of revelation (q.v.; *asbāb al-nuzūl*)

where these are transmitted; (3) it ignores the fact that, for the Qur_ān to be comprehensible for its first audience, the words of the Qur_ān had to conform to the language and the intellectual horizon of the ancient Arabs at the Prophet's time — an argument already used by the Andalusian Mālikite scholar al-Shāibī (d. 790/1388) against the scientific exegesis of his time (*al-Muwāfaqāt fī u_ūl al-sharī_a,* ii, 69-82); (4) it does not take notice of the fact that scientific knowledge and scientific theories are always incomplete and provisory by their very nature; therefore, the derivation of scientific knowledge and scientific theories in qur_ānic verses is actually tantamount to limiting the validity of these verses to the time for which the results of the science in question are accepted; (5) most importantly, it fails to comprehend that the Qur_ān is not a scientific book, but a religious one designed to guide human beings by imparting to them a creed and a set of moral values (or, as Islamists such as Sayyid Qub prefer to put it, the distinctive principles of the Islamic system; cf. below). Despite the weight of all these objections, some authors still believe that the *tafsīr _ilmī* can and should be continued — at least as an additional method particularly useful for proving the *i_jāz* of the Qur_ān to those who do not know Arabic and are thus unable to appreciate the miraculous style of the holy book (see Hind Shalabī, *al-Tafsīr al-_ilmī,* esp. 63-69 and 149-164; Ibn _Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-ta_rīr,* i, 104, 128).

3. Interpreting the Qur_ān from the perspective of literary studies

The use of methods of literary studies for the exegesis of the Qur_ān was initiated mainly by Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967), a

professor of Arabic language and literature at the Egyptian University (later King Fu_ād University, now University of Cairo). He did not write a Qur_ān commentary himself, but devoted a considerable part of his lectures to exegetical questions and also dealt with the history and current state of methodological requirements of exegesis in his post-1940's publications.

Already in 1933, his famous colleague _āhā usayn had remarked in his booklet *Fī l-_ayf* that the holy scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims belong to the common literary heritage of humankind (see **religious pluralism and the qur- _An; scripture and the qur_An**) as much as the works of Homer, Shakespeare and Goethe, and that Muslims should begin to study the Qur_ān as a work of literary art and use methods of modern literary research for its analysis, just as some Jewish and Christian scholars had done with the Bible (*al-Majmū_a al-kāmila li-mu_allafāt alduktūr _āhā usayn,* Beirut 19742, xiv, 215-9). He had added that such an approach was not to be expected from the clerics *(shuyūkh)* of al-Azhar, but that there was no reason to leave the study of holy scriptures to men of religion alone — why should people not be entitled to express their opinions about such books as objects of research in the field of literary art, "taking no account of their religious relevance *(bi-qa__i l-na_ari _an makānatihā l-dīniyya)*" (ibid., 216)? He concluded, however, that it would still be dangerous in his country to embark publicly on an analysis of the Qur_ān as a literary text. Amīn al-Khūlī shared the basic idea contained in these remarks and developed them into a concrete program; several of his students, along with their own students, tried to carry it out, some of them not without bitter consequences, as foreseen by _āhā usayn.

According to Amīn al-Khūlī, the Qur_ān is "the greatest book of the Arabic language and its most important literary work *(kitāb al-_arabiyya al-akbar wa-atharuhā l-adabī al-a__am)*" (*Manāhij tajdīd,* 303; see **literature and the qur_An**). In his view, the

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adequate methods for studying this book as a work of literary art do not differ from those that apply to any other works of literature. Two fundamental preliminary steps have to be taken:

(1) The historical background and the circumstances of its genesis — or in the case of the Qur_ān, its entry into this world by revelation — must be explored. For this purpose, one has to study the religious and cultural traditions and the social situation of the ancient Arabs, to whom the prophetic message was first addressed, their language (see **Arabic language**) and previous literary achievements, the chronology of the enunciation of the qur_ānic text by the Prophet (see **chronology and the qur_An**), the occasions of revelation *(asbāb al-nuzūl),* etc. (2) Keeping in mind all relevant knowledge gathered in this way, one has to establish the exact meaning of the text word by word as it was understood by its first listeners (see **form and structure of the qur_An**). In accordance with al-Shāibī, al- Khūlī assumes that God, in order to make his intention understood by the Arabs of the Prophet's time, had to use their language and to adapt his speech to their modes of comprehension, which were themselves determined by their traditional views and concepts. Hence, before the divine intention of the text can be determined, one has first to grasp its meaning as understood by the ancient Arabs — and this can be done, as al-Khūlī emphasizes, "regardless of any religious consideration *(dūna na_arin ilā ayyi _tibārin dīnī)*" *(Manāhij tajdīd,* 304). It then becomes possible to study the artistic qualities of the Qur_ān, by using the same categories and by keeping to the same rules as are applied in the study of literary works. The style of the Qur_ān can thus be explored in given passages by studying the principles which determine the choice of words, the peculiarities of the construction of sentences, the figures of speech employed, etc. (see **rhetoric of the qur_An; semantics of the qur_An**). Likewise, one can examine the typical structure of passages belonging to a particular literary genre. Since works of literary art are characterized by a specific relation between content or theme on the one hand and formal means of expression on the other, al-Khūlī attaches particular importance to the thematic units of the qur_ānic text and stresses that a correct explanation requires commentators to consider all verses and passages which speak to the same subject, instead of confining their attention to one single verse or passage (ibid., 304-6).

At the same time, al-Khūlī's approach is based on a particular understanding of the nature of a literary text: For him, literature, like art in general, is primarily a way of appealing to the public's emotions, as a means of directing them and their decisions. He therefore argues that the interpreter should also try to explain the psychological effects which the artistic qualities of the qur_ānic text, in particular its language, had on its first audience. Shukrī _Ayyād, who wrote his M.A. thesis, *Min wa_f al-Qur_ān al-karīm li-yawm al-dīn wa-l-_isāb* (n. d., unpublished, although a critical summary exists in al-Sharqāwī, *Ittijāhāt,* 213-6) under al-Khūlī's supervision, is reputed to have been the first to carry out a research project based on these principles. Also among al-Khūlī's students was _Ā_isha _Abd al-Ra_mān (pen name, Bint al-Shāi_), his wife. Her commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī lil-Qur_ān al-karīm,* is designed in conformity with the main features of al-Khūlī's methodological conception and in its preface explicitly refers to the suggestions received from him. _Ā_isha _Abd al-Ra_mān consciously

selected a number of shorter sūras to show in a particularly impressive way the fruits to be gathered by the application of al- Khūlī's method. Each of them constitutes a thematic unit, and the author gives a rough indication of the place of the respective sūra in the chronology of the Prophet's enunciation of the qur_ānic text and expounds the significance of its theme during this time in comparison with other phases of the Prophet's activity. To illustrate this point, she hints at other relevant sūras (q.v.) or parts of them, and discusses questions of the occasions of revelation *(asbāb al-nuzūl).* In doing so she attempts to give at least part of an outline of the historical background of the sūra under consideration (see **history and the qur_An**).

She highlights the most striking stylistic features of this sūra, e.g. relative length or shortness of sentences, accumulation of certain rhetorical figures, frequent occurrence of certain morphological or syntactical patterns, etc., and tries to demonstrate the specific relation of these features to the corresponding theme, citing a host of parallel verses from

other sūras which treat the same subject or show the same stylistic features. She also considers the emotional effect these peculiarities are meant to have on the listeners and attends to such questions as the impact of qur_ānic rhymes (see **rhymed prose**) on the choice of words and of the compository structure of the sūras. Additionally, she gives a careful verse-by-verse commentary in order to explain every single difficult word and phrase by comparing other qur_ānic verses which contain the same or similar expressions, quoting verses from ancient Arabic poetry, referring to classical Arabic dictionaries and discussing the opinions of the authors of — mostly classical — Qur_ān commentaries. In all this she displays a high degree of erudition. In general, _Ā_isha _Abd al-Ra_mān's commentary, as well as her other publications treating problems of the exegesis of the Qur_ān, have found a favorable reception even among conservative religious scholars, as she avoids broaching dogmatically sensitive points and apparently does not do anything but prove once more the stylistic *i_jāz* of the Qur_ān, now on the level of advanced philological methods.

Another student of al-Khūlī, Mu_ammad A_mad Khalaf Allāh, faced considerable difficulties in his use of al-Khūlī's approach and was exposed to the anger of leading religious scholars (*_ulamā_*) at al- Azhar. In 1947 he submitted his doctoral thesis *al-Fann al-qa_a_ī fī l-Qur_ān al-karīm* to the King Fu_ād University (now University of Cairo). On the basis of al-Khūlī's idea of literature as an instrument of appealing to emotions and directing them according to the author's intentions, Khalaf Allāh had set about studying the artistic means by which, according to his conviction, the qur_ānic narratives were so uniquely and effectively fashioned (Wielandt, *Offenbarung*, 139-52).

In order to be psychologically effective, narratives need not correspond absolutely to the historical facts. Khalaf Allāh even considers other requirements to be much more relevant for this purpose: They must refer to the listeners' customary language, previous conceptions and narrative traditions — in line with what al-Sh_ibī and al-Khūlī had already said about the importance of understanding the original reception of the message. They

must be adapted to the listeners' feelings and mental condition. Finally, they must be well constructed. He thus arrives at the conclusion that the qur_ānic narratives about prophets of earlier times are, to a large extent, not historically true: Although Mu_ammad's Arab contemporaries

certainly believed them to be true reports about what actually happened, God used them in the Qur_ān not primarily as historical facts *(wāqi_ ta_rīkhī),* but as psychological facts *(wāqi_ nafsī),* i.e. as a means of influencing the listeners' emotions (*al-Fann,*Cairo 19653, 50, 111). In order to achieve this, God took the subject matter of these qur_ānic narratives from stories and ideas already familiar to the ancient Arabs. Moreover, for the purpose of supporting Mu_ammad (q.v.) emotionally during the latter's often exhausting confrontation with the heathen Meccans (see **opposition to muHammad**), God reflected the Prophet's state of mind in the qur_ānic stories about earlier prophets by shaping these narratives according to Mu_ammad's own experience.

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

Nevertheless Khalaf Allāh's thesis was rejected by the examining board of his own university, one of the arguments being that its results were religiously questionable. Moreover, a commission of leading scholars *(_ulamā_)* of al-Azhar issued a memorandum classifying Khalaf Allāh as a criminal because he had

denied that the qur_ānic narratives were historically true in their entirety. A short time later he was dismissed from his position at the university on another pretext.

Occasional attempts at studying the Qur_ān as a work of literary art were also made by authors not belonging to al- Khūlī's school, again, mainly Egyptians (for details up to the 1960's, see al- Bayyūmī, *Khu_uwāt al-tafsīr al-bayānī,* 336-9). Sayyid Qub's *al-Ta_wīr al-fannī fī l-Qur_ān* bears witness to the aesthetic sensitivity of the author – who had previously made his name as a literary critic – and contains some cogent observations, but in contrast to the works of al-Khūlī's students it is not based on the systematic application of a method. The longest chapter of *al-Ta_wīr al-fannī* is devoted to the qur_ānic narratives; unlike Khalaf Allāh, Sayyid Qub does not voice any doubts about their historical truth. In short, it is possible to state that, since the 1970's, an increased interest in studying the qur_ānic narrative art has emerged (see e. g. _Abd al-Karīm Khaīb, *al-Qa_a_ al-qur_ānī fī man_iqihi wa-mafhūmihi;* Iltihāmī Naqra, *Sīkūlūjiyyat al-qi__a fī l-Qur_ān;* al-Qa_abī Ma_mūd Zala, *Qaāyā l-tikrār fī l-qa_a_ al-qur_ānī;* Mu_ammad Khayr Ma_mūd al-_Adawī, *Ma_ālim al-qi__a fī l-Qur_ān al-karīm*). Cognizant of Khallaf Allāh's fate, however, those authors who have addressed this topic in more recent times have tended to draw their conclusions rather cautiously.

4. Endeavors to develop a new theory of exegesis taking full account of the historicity of the Qur_ān

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

One such scholar is (Muhammad) Daud Rahbar, a Pakistani scholar who later taught in the United States. In a paper read at the

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

Fazlur Rahman, also of Pakistani origin and until 1988 professor of Islamic thought at the University of Chicago, proposed in his ***Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*** (1982) a solution for the hermeneutical problem of disentangling the eternal message of the Qur_ān from its adaptation to the historical circumstances of Mu_ammad's mission and discovering its meaning for believers of today. According to him, the qur_ānic revelation primarily "consists of moral, religious, and social pronouncements that respond to specific problems in concrete historical situations, "particularly the problems of Meccan commercial society at the Prophet's time (see **mecca**); hence the process of interpretation nowadays requires "a double movement, from the present situation to qur_ānic times, then back to the present" (ibid., 5). This approach consists of three steps: First, "one has to understand the import or meaning of a given statement by studying the historical situation or problem to which it was the answer"; secondly, one has "to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be 'distilled' from

specific texts in the light of the socio-historical background and the··· *ratio legis*"; and thirdly, "the general has to be embodied in the present concrete sociohistorical context" (ibid., 6-7). A methodological conception coming close to this approach, although confined to the interpretation of qur_ānic legal norms, had already been evolved since the 1950's by _Allāl al-Fāsī, the famous Mālikite scholar and leader of the Moroccan independence movement (cf. *al-Naqd al-dhātī,* 125, 221; *Maqā_id al-sharī_a,* 190-3, 240-1).

A remarkable recent development in the arena of theoretical reflection on the appropriate methods of interpreting the Qur_ān is the plea of the Egyptian scholar Na_r āmid Abū Zayd for a new exegetical paradigm, a plea made in several of his publications, particularly in his *Mafhūm alna __* (1990). He submitted this book to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Cairo, where he was teaching in the Arabic Department, together with his application for promotion to the rank of full professor.

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Abū Zayd's approach to the exegesis of the Qur_ān continues the tradition of al- Khūlī's school to a certain extent, but at the same time generalizes what had been the starting point of al-Khūlī's methodology, namely his idea about the form in which the Qur_ān can actually be subjected to interpretation. Whereas al-Khūlī had stressed that the Qur_ān is, above all else, a literary work and must be analyzed as such, Abū Zayd simply states that it is a text *(na__)* and must be understood according to the scientific principles which apply to the understanding of texts in general.

His conception of what it means to understand a text is based on a model of the process of communication first introduced by the American mathematician and information theorist C. E. Shannon (in *The mathematical theory of information,* published in 1947 in co-authorship with W. Weaver) and widely accepted since the 1960's among experts of linguistic as well as literary text theory. The model can be presented in the following terms: The information contained in a message can be understood only if the sender transmits it in a code (i.e. a system of signs) known to the recipient.

According to Abū Zayd this model is necessarily valid also for the process of revelation, in which a divine message is transmitted to human beings: The Prophet, the first recipient, would not have been able to understand the revealed text if it had not been fitted into a code understandable to him, and the same applies to his audience, the people to which it was sent. The code which is understandable to a prophet and to the target group of his message consists of their common language and the content of their consciousness, which is to a large extent determined by their social situation and their cultural tradition. Hence God must have adapted the qur_ānic revelation to the language, the social situation and the cultural tradition of the Arabs of Mu_ammad's time. This has far-reaching consequences for the methods of exegesis: In order to be able to understand the divine message, the exegetes of today have, on the one hand, to familiarize themselves with the code tied to the specific historical situation of the Prophet and his Arab contemporaries, i.e. those peculiarities of language, society and culture that are not theirs any more; only in that way will they be able to identify in the qur_ānic text the elements belonging to this code and to distinguish them from the immutably valid substance of the revelation. On the other hand, they have to translate the code of the primary recipients, the Prophet and his Arab contemporaries, into a code understandable to themselves, i.e. into the language and the social and cultural situation of their own time. This also means that they cannot rely uncritically on the long exegetical tradition from the Prophet's time to their own: The commentators of past centuries, such as al-Zamakhsharī or Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, certainly did their best to translate the divine message into the codes of their respective times, but our time has a code of its own.

Obviously, this methodical paradigm makes it possible to interpret the qur_ānic text in such a way that conceptions corresponding to the social and cultural context of the Prophet's preaching, but not tenable for the interpreter of today, can be classed as belonging to a bygone historical situation and not obligatory anymore, without discarding the

belief in the literal revelation of the Qur_ān and in the everlasting validity of its message. In fact, Abū Zayd has always declared unequivocally that he stays firm in this belief and that it is his conviction that the historical and cultural code in the text of the Qur_ān has been used by God himself, its sole author, and was not brought into it by Mu_ammad. Still, Shaykh _Abd al-abūr Shāhīn, a

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

Mohammed Arkoun, a scholar of Algerian origin who taught in Paris for many years, arrived at methodological conclusions quite similar to those of Abū Zayd, but by a different theoretical approach.

According to Arkoun, the *fait coranique,* i. e. the fact to which all attempts at understanding the Qur_ān have to refer in the final analysis, is the originally oral prophetic speech (see **orality; islAm**) which the Prophet himself and his audience believed to be God's revelation. This speech, which is attested in, but not identical with, the written text of the _Uthmānic recension of the Qur_ān (see **codices of the qur_An; collection of the qur_An**), was performed in a language and in textual genres tied to a specific historical situation, and in mythical and symbolic modes of expression (see **semiotics and nature in the qur_An; symbolic imagery**). It already contains a theological interpretation of its own nature and must be subjected to an analysis of its structure. The whole exegetical tradition is a process of appropriation of this *fait coranique* by the various factions of the Muslim

community. The text as such is open to a potentially infinite range of ever new interpretations as long as history continues, although the advocates of orthodoxy insist on absolutizing the results of a particular interpretation established at an early stage of this process. Any scientific study of the Qur_ān and of the exegetical tradition referring to it has to keep in mind that religious truth, insofar as it can be understood by Muslims as well as by adherents of other "book religions," becomes effective provided it exists in a dialectical relation between the revealed text and history. Contemporary scholars must use the instruments of historical semiotics and sociolinguistics in order to distinguish particular traditional interpretations of the qur_ānic text from the normative meaning which this text might have for present-day readers.

5. Exegesis in search of a new immediacy to the Qur_ān

All exegetical trends outlined so far — including scientific exegesis, whose supporters claim that the Qur_ān is centuries ahead of modern science — are in one way or another characterized by a marked awareness of the cultural distance between the world in which the qur_ānic message was primarily communicated and the modern world. In contrast to these approaches, the Islamist exegesis tends to assume that it is possible for Muslims today to regain immediate access to the meaning of the qur_ānic text by returning to the belief of the first Muslims and actively struggling for the restoration of the pristine Islamic social order. It is in this later form of exegesis that the author's underlying conception of the revealed text often finds expression. For example, Sayyid Qub in his Qur_ān commentary, *Fī _ilāl al-Qur_ān* (1952–65), insists that the Qur_ān in its entirety is God's message, and the instructions concerning the "Islamic system" or "method" *(ni_ām islāmī* or *manhaj islāmī)* contained in it are valid
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forever. The Qur_ān is thus always contemporary, in any age. The task is not primarily that of translating the original meaning of the qur_ānic text into the language and world view of modern human beings, but that of putting it into practice, as done by

the Prophet and his first followers, who took seriously God's claim to absolute sovereignty (_ākimiyya in Abū l-A_lā_ Mawdūdī's term) and set up the perfect "Islamic system." One of the consequences of this goal — i.e. achieving the system of the first Muslims in the way they followed qur_ānic instructions — is the marked preference usually shown by Islamist commentators for _adīth materials in their references to the exegetic tradition (see **HadIth and the qur_An; sIrA and the qur_An**). This can be seen in Sayyid Qub's commentary, in Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur_ān* (1949-72) and also in Sa_īd awwā's *al-Asās fī l-tafsīr* (1405/1985), the (largely ill-structured and much less original) commentary of a leading Syrian Muslim Brother. Although these authors quote classical commentators such as al-Zamakhsharī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī or al-Bay_āwī (d. 716/1316) here and there, they suspect them of having succumbed to the corrupting infl uences of Greek philosophy and *Isrā_īliyyāt*. When relying on "sound" _adīth materials, however, they feel they are on the firm ground of the Prophet's own commentary and hence also of the intentions of the revealed text as understood by the first Muslims.

The Islamist ideal of subordinating oneself to the divine word as immediately as the first Muslims had done can produce positive as well as questionable exegetical results. This becomes clearly visible in Sayyid Qub's *Fī _ilāl al-Qur_ān* where the author generally listens to the qur_ānic text with a great deal of personal attention and in relative independence of the exegetical tradition. On the one hand, this attitude of intense and direct listening sometimes enables him to grasp the original meaning and spirit of a given qur_ānic passage more adequately than many exegetes since the medieval period have been able to do.

On the other hand, his presumed immediacy also tends to make him ignore or play down points in which the qur_ānic text cannot be easily harmonized with modern ideas.

6. Conceptions associated with the thematic interpretation of the Qur_ān

As stated above, the thematic interpretation *(tafsīr mawū_ī)* of the Qur_ān is not always equivalent to a complete break with the exegetical methods applied in traditional commentaries of the *musalsal* kind.

Most authors, however, in reflecting on thematic interpretation, agree to a large extent about the advantages of concentrating one's exegetical endeavor on a limited number of themes dealt with in the Qur_ān. Two main arguments are put forward in favor of thematic interpretation: It enables exegetes to gain a comprehensive and well-balanced idea of what the divine book really says about the basic questions of belief, and thus reduces the danger of a merely selective and biased reading of the qur_ānic text; and commentaries based on such an interpretation are more suitable for practical purposes such as preparing Friday sermons or religious radio and television addresses (see everyday life, the qur_An in), because these kinds of presentations usually have a thematic focus. An additional argument mentioned in support of thematic interpretation is that it allows exegetes to take a more active role in the process of interpretation, bringing their own modern perspective to bear in this process more effectively than the traditional verse-by-verse commentaries, since in the traditional commentaries the interpreter merely reacts to what is said in the

text as it occurs, whereas in the *tafsīr mawū_ī* he can start from the application of his own questions to the text (adr, *uqaddimāt*, 18-22).

Highly problematic and not representative of the prevailing views about *tafsīr mawū_ī* is the conception of thematic interpretation advocated in 1993 by the Egyptian philosopher asananafī.

According to anafī, revelation is neither affirmed nor denied by thematic interpretation, since this method deals with the qur_ānic text without any distinction between the divine and the human, the religious and the secular (Method, 202, 210).

In contrast to the supporters of the thematic interpretation of the qur_ānic text, he considers the question of the divine origin of the Qur_ān to be largely irrelevant, but this is only

partly true where anafī's own interest in the qur_ānic text is concerned.

Irrespective of whether he personally attributes a religious character to the Qur_ān or not, his interest in interpreting this book and not any other text stems exclusively from the fact that many millions of Muslims believe the Qur_ān to be God's revealed word and can hence be most effectively influenced by its interpretation.

Moreover, in anafī's opinion, it is one of the "rules" of thematic interpretation that the commentator should conduct exegesis on the basis of a socio-political commitment, with the added assumption that the interpreter is always a revolutionary (ibid., 203-4). While it is true that every interpretation comes with prior assumptions, there is no reason why they should only be revolutionary. Finally, according to anafī, thematic interpretation is based on the premise that "there is no true or false interpretation" (ibid., 203) and that "the validity of an interpretation lies in its power" (ibid., 210). By professing this principle, anafī actually abandons the notion of the hermeneutical circle as a model for interpretation, and, instead, looks upon this process as a one-way street whose only destination lies in influencing the audience according to the preconceived intentions of the interpreter. The notion of the hermeneutical circle, as analyzed in differing forms by Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer and others, implies an interaction between interpreter and text in which the interpreter puts questions to the text on the basis of his own prior conceptions, which are themselves reshaped by the text itself. As Gadamer stresses, the text must "break the spell" of the interpreter's presuppositions, and its subject matter effects the correction of his preliminary understanding. For anafī, in contrast, the text has no significance of its own: In his idea of thematical interpretation, the committed interpreter's prior understanding is absolute, and the text is considered to be relevant only in so far as its interpretation can serve the purpose of enhancing the power of the interpreter's revolutionary arguments, which are not subject to critical review.

Problems of gaining acceptance for new approaches to the exegesis of the Qur_ān

New methodological approaches such as those of Khalaf Allāh, Fazlur Rahman and Abū Zayd sprang from the widely felt need to extract the permanent tenets of the qur_ānic message from the historical forms in which they were communicated to the Prophet's contemporaries and to recast them in terms of a modern intellectual outlook. These approaches also showed that this need can be served without abandoning the belief in the divine origin of every single word of the qur_ānic text and the binding character of its basic precepts.

Nevertheless, thus far, these approaches have not found wide acceptance among theologians and experts of religious law, and some of them have even provoked

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vehement reactions on the part of the religious élite. Some of the reasons for this phenomenon can be stated here.

The prevailing traditional exegetical paradigm has remained nearly unchallenged for centuries. It has thus become customary among religious scholars to confuse the permanence of their own way of interpreting the qur_ānic text with the everlasting truth of this text itself and, hence, to consider any attempt at promoting a new approach to exegesis as an assault on the authority of the divine book as such, but at the same time as an attack on their own interpretative authority. The latter is a particularly sensitive issue, as it concerns the social position of the *_ulamā_,* who have lost much ground in the fields of jurisdiction, public administration, education and academic studies since the early 19th century due to the general secularization of political and cultural structures. Moreover, if one allows new exegetical paradigms based on the acknowledgment of the historicity of the qur_ānic text and all its subsequent interpretations, this leads inevitably to an increasing plurality of competing interpretations. Such a situation would not only be contrary to the interests of the *_ulamā_,* for whom it would then become more difficult to defend their interpretative monopoly, but also to the intentions of the

poorly legitimized present governments of most Muslim states. These governments are accustomed to appealing to the Islamic religion as a unifying ideology in order to mobilize the loyalty of the masses in their favor, and for this purpose a largely uniform understanding of Islam is most suitable.

The relationship of mutual dependence of the religious establishment and the government which is nowadays typical of many Islamic countries makes the suppression of disagreeable innovations in the field of exegetical methodology relatively simple. Because of the above-mentioned presuppositions of their own exegesis, Islamists are strongly opposed to permitting a plurality of interpretations based on methods differing from their own. The present situation is additionally aggravated by the fact that methods which imply a more serious consideration of the historical dimension of the qur_ānic text and of the exegetical tradition referring to it are generally associated with the kind of research pursued by orientalists, who in their turn are accused of working for Western colonialism. This makes it very easy to start a massive campaign against any scholar advocating such methods. Under these circumstances, the fact that hardly any Muslim authors have appropriated the methods and results of modern non- Muslim qur_ānic studies is also quite understandable.

Rare exceptions to this trend are Amīn al-Khūlī and Daud Rahbar, both of whom recognized the value of the preliminary chronology of the qur_ānic text established in Th. Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorāns* (GQ). Still, on the basis of hermeneutical conceptions such as those of Abū Zayd and Fazlur Rahman, there will be continued attempts to enter into a farreaching scientific exchange with non- Muslim scholars without questioning the literal revelation of the Qur_ān. See also contemporary critical practices and the qur_An.

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