



Revelation in Islam: Qur'ānic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives

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Revelation in Islam: Qur'ānic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives

A dissertation presented

by

Khalil Andani

to

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

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in the subject of

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Abstract

This dissertation is an intellectual history of Muslim understandings of Qur'ānic Revelation from the first/seventh century to the fifth/eleventh century as presented in the Qur'ān, Sunni *ḥadīth*, Qur'ān commentary, Sunni *kalām*, Imami Shi'ī *ḥadīth*, and Shi'ī Ismaili philosophical theology. The study conceptualizes diverse Islamic theologies of revelation through an analytical framework featuring three hierarchical dimensions: 1) a Revelatory Principle representing differing conceptions of God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) and Writing (*kitāb Allāh*); 2) a Revelatory Process describing various modes of divine/angelic sending down (*tanzīl*) and inspiration (*wahy*) through the Prophet Muhammad, and 3) Revelatory Products including qur'ānic recitation, scripture, the Prophetic Sunna, and the Shi'ī Imamate. The dissertation argues that Sunni and Shi'ī Muslims understood Qur'ānic Revelation through competing and often mutually contradictory models constructed within different historical and theological contexts. The revelatory models that developed through the fifth/eleventh century fall into four types:

- 1) the "qur'ānic model" in which the Prophet formulates divinely inspired Arabic *qur'āns* and prophetic guidance as adaptations (*tafṣīl*) of God's transcendent writing;
- 2) the "scriptural models" from Sunni *tafṣīr* in which the Qur'ān as God's book pre-exists in heaven and is then sent down to earth;

- 3) the “theological divine speech models” in Sunni *kalām* that center on God’s uncreated/created speech and its manifestation as the Arabic Qur’ān and the Prophetic Sunna;
- 4) the “divine inspiration models” in Imami Shi‘i *ḥadīth* and Shi‘i Ismaili thought that frame the Qur’ān as a divinely inspired composition of the Prophet that manifests God’s transcendent word and requires the Imams’ revelatory hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) to be comprehended.

The dissertation’s argument culminates by highlighting and contextualizing Imami Shi‘i and Ismaili understandings of revelation espoused by certain Shi‘i Imams and Ismaili *dā’īs* (missionaries) – including Imam al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Imam al-Mu‘izz (d. 365/975), al-Rāzī (d. 322/934), the Brethren of Purity (fl. fourth/tenth century), al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974), al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020), al-Mu’ayyad (d. 470/1077), and Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 481/1088). It demonstrates that Ismaili models in particular constitute a unique alternative to Sunni views of revelation by offering competing and vastly different accounts of the Revelatory Principle, Process, and Products.

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Dedication

*For my grandmother Sakar Andani (1921-2011),
my children Iliyan and Sinan Andani,
my beloved friends Abd al-Hakeem Seth Carney (1979-2007) and Zafrin Khandani (1983-2007),
and finally, my Spiritual Father and Mother (1957–) who supports all my endeavors*

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The director and overseer of my decade-long academic journey has been my advisor Professor Ali Asani. Back in the summer of 2011, when I was unemployed and living with my parents after having departed the corporate world of financial accounting, the prospects of an academic career seemed dim at best. At this time I gratuitously ran into Professor Asani at a book launch, where he promptly convinced me to apply to Harvard Divinity School for graduate study. Since that day, he has patiently and gently guided my academic progress and transformed me from an amateur reader of books into a scholarly contributor of academic research. I owe my successes in academia and the completion of this dissertation to Professor Asani's academic tutelage, personal warmth, and immense generosity of time and knowledge. I am also very grateful for the numerous opportunities that Professor Asani opened for me to participate in his own research, teaching, and public engagements. If I grow into a scholar with just half the merits of Professor Asani, I will consider myself extremely fortunate.

My classes during my first day at Harvard were Arabic and Islamic philosophy courses taught by Professor Khaled El-Rouayheb. At that time, I could never have imagined that I would be lucky enough to have him as my advisor and exemplar in the field of Islamic intellectual history. Professor El-Rouayheb's eminently high standards, meticulousness in research, and erudition in Islamic thought serve as a model for the intellectual historical work in this dissertation. Thanks to my extensive studies with him, I now engage classical Arabic texts with an ease and confidence that I once believed I could never possess. I am also grateful to him for helping facilitate my first publication in the *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*.

When Professor Justine Landau began her appointment at Harvard in 2015, my knowledge of Persian was rudimentary and in need of improvement. From the very first day of her classes, Professor Landau became my mentor both in Persian instruction and in graduate school generally. Thanks to her patience with my learning, confidence in my potential, and extensive feedback on all my work, my Persian proficiency substantially increased in a very short time. Professor Landau also guided and accompanied me in reading the Persian poetry and prose of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, whose ideas are central to this dissertation and whom I had longed to read in the original language for many years. Studying these Persian texts with Professor Landau remains a highlight of my time at Harvard.

The participation of Professor William Graham on my dissertation committee was a great honor. I consider him to be one of the living legends in the field of Qur'ānic Studies and had already been citing Professor Graham's work frequently in the early chapters of this dissertation when he generously accepted a request to become one of my examiners. I am most thankful for his incredibly detailed and erudite feedback on this dissertation at a level rarely seen in my academic career. To be able to read and respond to his commentary and challenges to my thinking was a singular opportunity that I will always treasure. I consider myself greatly privileged to have gained so much from Professor Graham's vast knowledge, meticulous analysis, and kind spirit in such a short time.

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In order to apply to graduate school, I received initial training and support from Professors Peter Frick, Meena Sharify-Funk, Marta Simidchieva, and Laury Silvers. My engagement with the study of religion in the university environment started when Peter Frick allowed me to audit his religious studies classes and even invited me to make suggestions to his course materials. Meena Sharify-Funk welcomed me into her course on Islamic Traditions and imparted a great deal of spiritual wisdom, the most impactful of which was her advice to “mind your heart”. Marta Simidchieva guided my first encounter with the theories and methods of Islamic historiography. Finally, Laury Silvers challenged my preconceptions about the study of Islam and sparked the beginning of my confidence to present academic work in public forums.

Leaving a promising career in financial accounting and returning to school for the uncertain and fragile career prospects of academia would not have been possible without the steadfast moral, emotional, and financial support of my mother Jamica, my father Aziz, and my brother Baba. Their help and encouragement, especially at the beginning of my daunting academic journey, reinforced my self-confidence as I embarked on a risky career transition. Their support has been continuous down to the last stages of this dissertation. My mother was instrumental in helping take care of our children so I could attend to my research. I also wish to acknowledge the help and encouragement of my aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, from the Andani, Pirbay, Maherali, Gillani, and Valimohamed families. My circles of friends back home, including the Nighthawks (Rafiq, Salmaan, Sameer, Nadeem, Al, Ahsen, Sandeep, Jameel), the Unionville/Toronto Crew (Zahra, Nawaz, Suman, Aly, Al-Karim, Beno, Natasha), the Circle, the IG Team and Membership, and many other well-wishers provided a great deal of social, intellectual, and emotional support throughout my graduate studies and kept me from becoming lost in the ivory tower.

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The completion of a Ph.D. degree requires a great deal of non-academic labor and sacrifice, which often remains overshadowed by outward academic achievement. In addition to relocating her career and steadfastly supporting my academic aspirations, my wife Aliyah provided a great deal of unseen services towards our family's wellbeing and comfort while I completed my doctoral work. On many an occasion my wife relieved me from childcare duties so I could find the necessary time and space to research, write, and attend important conferences. She financially supported our growing family, took on a greater share of household duties, and endured many sleepless nights for our two young children – all of which allowed me to complete this Ph.D. within five years. Her devotion to and support of my academic goals and our family demonstrates that behind every successful doctoral graduate is an even more successful spouse. My two sons Iliyan and Sinan have been a beacon of sheer joy and love throughout my academic career. Many paragraphs and pages of this dissertation were written in between changing, feeding, and playing with them.

Before I conclude, I wish to recall the memories of my two late beloved friends, Seth Abd al-Hakeem Carney (1979-2007) and Zafrin Khandani (1983-2007), both of whom sought to become Islamic Studies professors but prematurely passed away before having the chance to do so. I have always understood my academic vocation as a vicarious fulfilment of their aspirations, and I pray that their souls may participate in my achievements.

Finally, throughout my entire life, my most beloved supporter and biggest fan since my infancy has been my paternal grandmother Sakar Andani. Words fail to describe our lifelong bond, which continues to endure well beyond her departure from this earth. I dedicate this dissertation to her, along with my two deceased friends and my two living sons.

Note on Transliterations

All Arabic and Persian terms have been transliterated in accordance with the Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) system. For consistency, I have transliterated Arabic terms used in Persian prose according to the Arabic transliteration (e.g. *sharī'a* instead of *sharī'at*).

I have anglicized and dropped the vowel markers in rendering certain proper names and designations, such as: Sunni, Sunna, Abbasid, Buyid, Fatimid, Shi'i, Imami, Ismaili, Saljuq, Baghdad, Basra, Caliph/Caliphate, Imam/Imamate, Ottoman, etc. in accordance with their common usage in modern scholarship.

Introduction

Introduction: Qur'ānic Revelation in Islam

*I have chosen the Qur'ān
and the faith of Muhammad,
because they were the ones
chosen by Muhammad.
Nāṣir-i Khusraw¹*

The Muslim experience of God's revelation through the Prophet Muhammad, which initially manifested as a series of Arabic recitations called the Qur'ān, reverberates throughout Islamic history, thought, and practice across time and space. Over a billion and a half Muslims belonging to otherwise diverse spiritual affiliations attest to the Qur'anic and prophetic revelatory event whenever they declare that "there is no god except God and Muhammad is His Messenger" in their daily prayers. The spiritual radiance of the Qur'ānic Revelation illuminated Muslim lives in various forms including Qur'anic recitation in prayer, iconic Qur'ān codices (*maṣāḥif*), the Islamic imperial coinage, Islamic art and architecture, Arabic grammar and philology, qur'ānic calligraphy, qur'ānic exegesis and Islamic theology, Sufi poetry and audition rituals, healing talismans displaying qur'ānic words, and even routine activities such as preparing food in vessels inscribed with Qur'anic words.²

¹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān*, translated in Faquir Muhammad Hunzai and Kutub Kassam (eds.), *The Shimmering Light: An Anthology of Ismaili Poetry* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1997), 50.

² On the magical properties associated with the material form of the Qur'ān, see Travis Zadeh, "An Ingestible Scripture: Qur'anic Erasure and the Limits of 'Popular Religion'," in Benjamin Fleming and Richard Mann (eds.), *History and Material Culture in Asian Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 97-119; idem, "Touching and Ingesting: Early Debates over the Material Qur'ān," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129/3 (2009): 443-466; idem, "Fire Cannot Harm It: Mediation, Temptation, and the Charismatic Power of the Qur'ān," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10/2 (2008): 50-72. For a summary of the different textual manifestations of the Qur'ān in Muslim thought and culture, see Walid Saleh, "Word," in Jamal Elias (ed.), *Twenty-One Words in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 356-376.

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Introduction

From the very inception of Islam, there arose theological and philosophical questions about the very nature of the Qur'ān as God's Speech or God's Writing, the precise mode of its revelatory sending down (*tanzīl, inzāl*) or inspiration (*waḥy*) through the Prophet Muhammad, and the theological status of the Qur'ān as a recitation (*qirā'a*) or an inscription within a codex (*muṣḥaf*). The modern Al-Azhar scholar, Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zurqānī (1948-2000), has emphasized the concept of revelation as the most pertinent of all theological issues in Islam:

Knowledge of the revelatory descent of the Qur'ān (*nuzūl al-qur'ān*) is the foundation for faith (*al-imān*) in the Qur'ān as the Speech of God, and the foundation for the verification (*taṣdīq*) of the Prophethood of the Messenger and that Islam is true. Thus, it is the root-principle for the rest of the discussions in the qur'ānic sciences that follow.³

The topic of Qur'ānic Revelation has attracted renewed interest in modern times among Muslim intellectuals in Iran, the Arab world, and Southeast Asia. Several modernist Muslim thinkers, including Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammad Arkoun, Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari, and Abdolkarim Soroush, have called for a rethinking of pre-modern ideas about the Qur'ān's revelation and proposed new revelatory models to pave the way for Islam to be reinterpreted in contemporary contexts.⁴

Despite the sustained debate surrounding the Qur'ān's metaphysical and theological status in Muslim history, most Islamic studies scholarship propagates or simply takes for granted only

³ Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-'irfān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Fawwāz Zamarlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1995), 37.

⁴ A summary of the proposals of these Muslim intellectuals is given in Forough Jahanbaskh, "Introduction", in Abdolkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). See also Katajun Amirpur, *New Thinking in Islam: The Jihad for Democracy, Freedom and Women's Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). More recently, Ali Akbar has embarked on an intellectual project analyzing various modern approaches to revelation, see Ali Akbar, *Contemporary Perspectives on Revelation and Qur'ānic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming December 2019); idem, "Towards a humanistic approach to the Quran: new direction in contemporary Islamic thought," *Culture and Religion* 20/1 (2019): 82-103; "'Abdolkarim Soroush's Approach to 'Experience' as a Basis for His Reform Project," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28/3 (2017): 313-331; "A Contemporary Muslim Scholar's Approach to Revelation: Moḥammad Moḡtabeh Šabestari's Reform Project," *Arabica* 63/6 (2016): 656-680. See also the studies in Alessandro Cancian (ed.), *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Iran* (London: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2019).

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Introduction

one Muslim theological view of Qur'ānic Revelation: the idea that the Qur'ān in the form of a pre-conceived “scripture” is God’s literal, eternal, and verbatim word; that this Qur'ānic “scripture” was verbally dictated to Prophet Muhammad in the Arabic language by the Angel Gabriel; and that the Prophet recited this Qur'ān verbatim while having no agency in the revelatory process. This single Muslim theological position permeates contemporary academic and educational literature on Islam as if it exhaustively accounts for Muslim understandings across all times and places. The below examples suffice to demonstrate this:

The Quran is for Muslims the verbatim Word of God, revealed during the twenty-three-period of the prophetic mission of the Prophet Muhammad through the agency of the Archangel Gabriel (Jibrīl or Jibra'īl)... This *Book*, according to Islam, was revealed by Gabriel to the Prophet during the twenty-three years of his prophetic mission on different occasions during night and day, in both Makkah and Madinah, in such a manner that, although the words of the Quran came out of his mouth, its Author is God.⁵
(Seyyed Hossein Nasr)

For Muslims the Qur'an is the literal word of God. It is God speaking, not merely to the Prophet in seventh-century Arabia, but from all eternity to all humankind.⁶
(Farid Esack)

God speaks directly in the Qur'ān, and Muhammad is seen as a passive recipient to whom the Book was simply ‘sent down’...which is most significant in considering the historical basis for Islamic beliefs.⁷
(M.A.S Abdel Haleem)

God is the speaker of the Qur'an and Muhammad its recipient; the Qur'ān itself is considered the verbatim word of God, revealed in clear Arabic to Muhammad.⁸
(Gerard Bowering)

It is commonplace to hear Muslim authors assert that the Qur'an is the literal word of God. This statement should probably be taken as an assertion that the word of God as revealed to

⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “General Introduction,” in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (General Editor), *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), xxiii-xxiv

⁶ Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide: A Guide to its Key Themes, History and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 31.

⁷ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, “Qur'an and hadith,” in Tim Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20-32: 20.

⁸ Gerard Bowering, “Qur'an,” in Gerhard Bowering, Patricia Crone, Wadad Kadi, Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Maham Mirza (eds.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 447-456: 448.

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Muhammad are indeed the words of God. That is, the Arabic text of the Qur'an is regarded as divine speech.⁹
(Carl W. Ernst)

For Muslims, the Qur'an is literally God's Word as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and in case you didn't realize it, the Qur'an is in Arabic, so God speaks Arabic.¹⁰
(Fred Donner)

Yet it is simply not the case that *all* Muslims throughout history conceived the nature of the Qur'ān in such a simplistic and singular manner. Indeed, Muslim exegetes, theologians, philosophers, and mystics have historically voiced a myriad of perspectives about the ontology of the Qur'ān as divine or revelatory speech, the process of its revelatory descent, the creative agency of the Prophet Muhammad, and the theological status of the Arabic words of the Qur'ān.

Muslim beliefs about the revelatory nature of the Arabic Qur'ān cover a vast spectrum. They range from considering the Qur'ān to be God's uncreated and eternal verbatim speech; a pre-existent scripture inscribed in heaven at the beginning of time; God's created speech generated in real-time in direct response to historical events; a temporally created verbal expression of God's eternal non-verbal speech; the Prophet Muhammad's divinely inspired words composed in response to his own circumstances; and a revelatory discourse of symbols and parables coined by God or Muhammad to represent higher level spiritual truths. These perspectives, some of which may be found in the Qur'ān, *kalām* theology, qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), Islamic Peripatetic philosophy (*falsafa*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Sufism, and various forms of Shi'i Islam, indicate that different groups of Muslims may *read and hear* the same Qur'ān but are each *imagining* this Qur'ān to be something different, thereby leading to different interpretations.

⁹ Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, With Select Translations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 62.

¹⁰ Fred Donner, "Islam's Origins: Myth and Material Evidence," Lecture Delivered at The American Academy in Berlin, 31 January 2019, accessed online 3/1/2019: <https://www.americanacademy.de/videoaudio/islams-origins-myth-and-material-evidence/>.

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Speaking to this very point, the late Shahab Ahmed observed that “the practitioners of these modes of reading disagree not merely about the meaning of what they are reading/the Qur'ān/the sign, they disagree about what they are reading — that is, they disagree about what the Qur'ān/the sign is.... the Qur'ān is constituted by philosophy and Sufism as a different fact/sign to the fact/sign that it is for law and theology.”¹¹

Nevertheless, this theological and philosophical diversity concerning Qur'ānic Revelation is hardly given a voice in contemporary Qur'ānic studies and Islamic studies. This is significant because any given framework of Qur'ānic hermeneutics – which remains a pertinent topic well into modern times – is directly premised on a doctrine of revelation. In other words, how one theorizes the nature of the Qur'ān as divine revelation – for example whether the Qur'ān is eternal divine speech, temporally contingent divine speech, divinely inspired human speech, or the expression of a mystical prophetic experience – is directly tied to how one reads and interprets the Qur'ān. David Vishanoff has rightly noted that “every Islamic hermeneutic assumes some implicit theory about the nature of God's speech and the Prophet's experience.... How a Muslim thinker imagines God's speech has (or logically ought to have) crucial implications for how that thinker understands and interprets the Qur'ān.”¹² In the end, as the late Shahab Ahmed again astutely points out, every Muslim throughout history constructs and interprets Islam through recourse to some concept of Qur'ānic Revelation:

¹¹ Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 257.

¹² David Vishanoff, “Can Qur'ānic Interpretation Be Both Practically Adequate and Theologically Principled? Some Instructive Historical Examples of the Delicate Connection between Hermeneutical Theories and Doctrines of Divine Speech,” Conference Paper Delivered at *From Revelation to Scripture: A Symposium on Divine Speech and Prophetic Inspiration in Islam*, Cambridge Muslim College, Cambridge, UK, September 12, 2015. Available online: <http://david.vishanoff.com/wp-content/uploads/Can-Quranic-Interpretation.pdf>.

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The human phenomenon that is Islam is thus the full spectrum of intellectual, material, spiritual, bodily, imaginal, psychic, social, and discursive engagements by Muslims to order and give meaning to their lives in the world through reference to and in terms of the Divine Revelation—which range of engagements are all, first and foremost, predicated upon the *various determinations* by Muslims of what Divine Revelation itself *is*.¹³

In light of these facts, a focused historical study of how Muslims thought about Qur'ānic Revelation over the centuries, which showcases perspectives across a diversity of theological, exegetical, and philosophical affiliations, remains a desideratum in modern scholarship. This need is underscored by the fact that Muslims have no consensus on the meaning of the qur'ānic terminology about revelation, such as *kitāb*, *tanzīl*, *kalām Allāh*, or *wahy*, whose presumed meanings have been shifting throughout history. Such a study would not only illuminate the manifold ways that Muslims have theologically imagined the Qur'ān but also shed light on the ontological assumptions through which they interpret it. My dissertation seeks to address this need.

Dissertation Objectives:

This dissertation is an intellectual history of Muslim understandings of Qur'ānic Revelation from the first/seventh century to the fifth/eleventh century. The term “Qur'ānic Revelation” as used throughout this study refers to beliefs about the ontology of the Qur'ān's divine origin as God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) and/or Writing (*kitāb Allāh*), the process of its revelatory sending down (*tanzīl*) and inspiration (*wahy*) through the Prophet Muhammad, the theological status of its revelatory manifestations as oral recitation, scripture, and various products of extra-qur'ānic inspiration including the Prophetic Sunna and the Shi'ī Imamate. The dissertation analyzes depictions of Qur'ānic Revelation as presented in the Qur'ān, Sunni *ḥadīth*, classical Qur'ān

¹³ Ahmed, *What is Islam*, 345.

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commentary (*tafsīr*), Sunni *kalām* theology, Imami Shi'i *ḥadīth*, Twelver Shi'i *kalām* theology, and Shi'i Ismaili philosophical theology through the formative and classical periods of Islam.¹⁴

This study provides a historical and analytical account of how various Muslim theologies and cosmologies of Qur'ānic Revelation evolved from the first/seventh century onward amidst important socio-political, theological, and sectarian developments. It thereby argues that Sunni and Shi'i Muslims understood Qur'ānic Revelation through diverse, competing, and mutually contradictory visions, each of which entail different theories of Qur'ānic hermeneutics. To describe and account properly for these diverse Muslim models of revelation, the dissertation employs an original analytical framework utilizing the concepts of: 1) a transcendent Revelatory Principle, 2) a hierarchical Revelatory Process, and 3) one or more Revelatory Products, which include the Arabic Qur'ān recited by Muhammad, the Prophetic Sunna, the Shi'i Imamate, and the Ismaili form of hermeneutics called *ta'wīl*.

The dissertation specifically highlights and contextualizes Shi'i Ismaili understandings of Qur'ānic Revelation espoused by several Shi'i Ismaili Imams and *dā'īs* (missionizing philosophical theologians) – including Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Imam al-Mu'izz (d. 365/975), Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/944), the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*) (fl. fourth/tenth century), Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. 349/960), Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1020), al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077), and Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 481/1088) – whose views on this topic have

¹⁴ My study does not cover the development of Sufi and Muslim Peripatetic (*falsafī*) views of Qur'ānic Revelation for the following reasons. First, the Sufi views of revelation do not develop into a distinctive formulation until after the fifth/eleventh century; second, the debates about revelation in Sunni *tafsīr*, *kalām*, and Ismaili literature do not consider any Sufi views, which suggests their views were really not part of the conversation in these periods; third, the views of al-Farābī and Ibn Sīna have been adequately covered in prior studies (see literature review below). Fifth/eleventh century Twelver Shi'i views are covered by way of overview in Chapter 6.

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yet to be systematically examined in modern scholarship. It argues that these Ismaili formulations constituted a unique alternative to Sunni accounts of Qur'ānic Revelation, as evidenced by the distinctive Ismaili views of the Revelatory Principle, Process, and Products and the ensuing debate on these issues that lasted over two centuries.

Review of Literature:

The present study speaks to, builds upon, and brings together research within four Islamic studies subfields: 1) Qur'ānic studies; 2) Islamic intellectual history of *kalām* theology, *falsafa*, and Qur'ān commentary; 3) Shi'i studies; and 4) Ismaili studies. Within Qur'ānic studies scholarship, there are several articles and monographs employing historical-critical and literary-semantic analysis of the Qur'ān. Some of these works focus on revelatory terminology, such as *qur'ān*, *kitāb*, *tanzīl*, *wahy*, etc. They include investigations of the qur'ānic notion of scripture (Jeffery 1952, Bell 1934, 1970),¹⁵ religious concepts in the Qur'ān (Izutsu 1964),¹⁶ ideas of Prophethood and revelation in early Islam (Fiegenbaum 1973, Graham 1977),¹⁷ the Qur'ān's self-definition as a *qur'ān* and a *kitāb* (Graham 1987, Madigan 2001),¹⁸ the literary discourse of the Qur'ān as an

¹⁵ Richard Bell, "Muhammad's Visions," *The Muslim World* 24/2 (April 1934), 145–154; Arthur Jeffery, "The Qur'ān as Scripture," *The Muslim World* 40 (1950): 41-55 (Part 1); 41 (1950): 106-134 (Part 2); 42 (1950): 185-206 (Part 3); 42 (1950): 257-275; Richard Bell, M. W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

¹⁶ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an* (Tokyo: Keio University, 1964; Reprint, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002).

¹⁷ J. W. Fiegenbaum, "Prophethood from the Perspective of the Qur'an," (Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 1973); William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977).

¹⁸ See studies in William A. Graham, *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies: Selected Writings* (Burlington and Surrey, VT: Ashgate, 2010); Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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evolving oral proclamation (Neuwirth 2010, 2015, 2019; Saleh 2015),¹⁹ and the Qur'ān's claims to divine authority (Sinai 2006; Boisliveau 2014).²⁰ The collective findings of the more recent studies complicate the oft-repeated claim that Muslims always regarded the Qur'ān as God's verbatim speech in the form of a closed physical scripture. The qur'ānic idea of *kitāb* turns out to be a symbol of divine knowledge and authority as opposed to a concrete scripture and is more prominent than the idea of *kalām Allāh* (God's Speech) at least within the Qur'ān. Likewise, the term *qur'ān* denotes a piecemeal process of discrete oral recitations instead of designating a finished corpus. The notion of divine inspiration and revelation in early Islam is rather ambiguous and seems to involve the person of the Prophet in contrast to later theories that divorce Muhammad from any agency in the revelatory process. These findings set the stage for studying how the Qur'ān, as the source and reflection of the earliest Islamic beliefs, conceives the nature and process of its own revelation. The implications of such a study on subsequent Islamic intellectual history also require consideration.

Scholarship on Qur'ānic Revelation in Islamic theology, philosophy, and exegesis has largely focused on the uncreated versus created Qur'ān controversy in Sunni *kalām* theology (Madelung 1974; Wolfson 1976; van Ess 1996, 2018).²¹ These studies, despite their immense

¹⁹ Angelika Neuwirth, "Two Faces of the Qur'an: *Qur'an* and *Mushaf*," *Oral Tradition* 25/1 (2010): 141-156; idem, "The 'discovery of writing' in the Qur'an: tracing an epistemic revolution in Arab Late Antiquity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 42 (2015): 1-29; idem, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Walid Saleh, "A Piecemeal Qur'ān: *furqān* and its Meaning in Classical Islam and Modern Qur'ānic studies," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 42 (2015): 31-71.

²⁰ Nicholai Sinai, "Qur'ānic self-referentiality as a strategy of self-authorization," in Stefan Wild (ed.) *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān*, *Diskurse de Arabistik* 11 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 2006), 103-134; Anne-Silvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

²¹ Wilferd Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran," in J. M. Barral (ed.), *Orientalia Hispanica sive studia F. M. Pareja octogenario dicata* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1974), 504-525; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (London, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 235-303; Josef van Ess, "Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology," in Stefan Wild (ed.), *The*

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merits, are still limited in scope: they begin with proto-Sunni Muslim ideas of the Qur'ān in the late second/eighth century and cover viewpoints up to the early fourth/tenth century; they exclusively focus on Sunni theological debates, with most attention given to Ḥanbālī and Mu'tazilī perspectives leading up to and during the Abbasid Inquisition (*miḥna*), with far less attention paid to Ash'arī, Māturīdī, and Shi'i Muslim positions. With the exception of works by Vishanoff and Farahat, which focus on Islamic legal hermeneutics, fifth/eleventh century developments in Sunni *kalām* ideas of revelation have largely gone unnoticed.²² Meanwhile, a separate track of studies has looked at ideas of revelation espoused by the Muslim Peripatetic philosophers (*falāsifa*) (Rahman 1958; Azadpur 2012).²³ The only study analyzing *tafsīr* models of revelation is a book chapter by Yasin Mol, which mainly focuses on al-Māturīdī's exegesis.²⁴ Rustom's study on Mullā Ṣadrā's understanding of the Qur'ān as a scripture and as a manifestation of being (*wujūd*) is one of the few works to explore Islamic mystical and philosophical conceptions of revelation.²⁵ In any case, there remains a historical disconnect between Qur'ānic studies scholarship on the Qur'ān's self-presentation in the first/seventh century, the Sunni theological ideas of the Qur'ān as “God's

Qur'an as Text (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 177-194; Idem, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, Vol. 4 (Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 1991-1997), 179-227, 612-629; idem, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*. Vol. 4 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), 203-257; 658-700.

²² David Vishanoff, *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law* (American Oriental Series: 93) (New Haven: Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 2011); Omar Farahat, *The Foundation of Norms in Islamic Jurisprudence and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 66-128.

²³ Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958). The most recent study is Mohammad Azadpur, *Reason Unbound: On Spiritual Practice in Islamic Peripatetic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

²⁴ Arnold Yasin Mol, “*Laylat al-Qadr* as Sacred Time: Sacred Cosmology in Sunnī *Kalām* and *Tafsīr*,” in Majid Daneshghar and Walid A. Saleh (eds.), *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin* (Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān) (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 74-97.

²⁵ Mohammed Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012).

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Speech” (*kalām Allāh*) developing in the third/ninth century onward, and the Sunni exegetical notions of the Qur'ān as the “Book of God” (*kitāb Allāh*) pre-existing in heaven in Sunni *tafsīr*.

The few studies that speak to Shi'i Muslim understandings of the Qur'ān include the works Bar-Asher, Amir-Moezzi, and Rizvi.²⁶ These authors focus on Imami Shi'i approaches to the Qur'ān as reflected in early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. They collectively show that the process of the Qur'ān's compilation by the Sunni Caliphs was contested early on by the Shī'a, who alleged falsification (*tahrīf*) in the 'Uthmānic codex. From a Shi'i perspective, the sanctity and authority of the Qur'ān as a revelatory discourse revolves around the figure of the Shi'i Imam, who alone is its true guardian (*qayyim*). Likewise, the true meaning of the Qur'ān is only accessible through the Imam and the Qur'ān's essential message is about the Imam's onto-cosmological and spiritual authority (*walāya*). Issues that still require investigation include early Shi'i notions of divine inspiration and revelation, especially pertaining to the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) and the precise relationship between the Imam and the Qur'ān as a recitation or scripture.

Scholarship in Ismaili studies over the past three decades includes several articles and books dedicated to the life and thought of select Ismaili thinkers. These include monographs on Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934) by Nomoto (1999),²⁷ Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971)

²⁶ Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in early Imāmī-Shiism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 1999); Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Sajjad Rizvi, “The Speaking Qur'an and the Praise of the Imam: the Memory and Practice of the Qur'an in the Twelver Shia Tradition,” in Emran El-Badawi and Paul Sanders (eds.), *Communities of the Qur'an* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2019), 135-155.

²⁷ Shin Nomoto, “Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy According to the Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934-5),” Ph.D Dissertation (Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1999).

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by Walker (1993, 1996),²⁸ the Brethren of Purity (fl. fourth/tenth century) by various scholars,²⁹ Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020) by De Smet (1995) and Walker (1999),³⁰ and al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078) by Qutbuddin (2014) and Alexandrin (2017).³¹ Each of these studies only contains a few pages on Ismaili views of Qur'ānic Revelation as part of broader discussions of the relevant thinker's understanding of Prophethood. There has been more fascination in Ismaili studies on the distinctively Ismaili form of Qur'ānic exegesis known as *ta'wīl*, with chapters by Poonawala (1988) and Bar-Asher (2008), and a recent book by Hollenberg (2016).³² The aim of these studies has been to analytically conceptualize Ismaili *ta'wīl* within the broader genre of Qur'ānic exegesis and commentary. Drawing on sociological theories of religion, Hollenberg situated Ismaili *ta'wīl* as a sociological and cognitive process of fostering a sectarian mindset within members of the Ismaili movement.

²⁸ Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *Intellectual Missionary* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1996).

²⁹ Michael Ebsstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Abbas Hamdani, "An Early Fatimid source on the time and authorship of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā'*," *Arabica* 26 (1979): 62-75; "A Critique of Paul Casanova's Dating of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā'*," in *Medieval Isma'ili History and Thought*, F. Daftary (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145–152; "Brethren of Purity, a Secret Society for the Establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate: New Evidence for the Early Dating of their Encyclopædia," in M. Barrucand (ed.), *L'Égypte fatimide son art et son histoire* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), 73–82; "The Ikhwān al-Safā': Between al-Kindī and al-Farābī," in *Fortresses of the Intellect. Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary*, ed. Omar Ali-de-Unzaga (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers in Association with the Institute of the Ismaili Studies, 2011), 189-212.

³⁰ Paul E. Walker, *Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥakim* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1999); Daniel De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'intellect: Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l'oeuvre de Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (Xe/XIe s.)* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1995).

³¹ Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da'wa Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, *Walāyah in the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī Tradition* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017).

³² Ismail K. Poonawala, "Ismā'īlī *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān," in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 199-222; Meir M. Bar-Asher, "Outlines of Early Early Ismā'īlī-Fāṭimid Qur'ān Exegesis," *Journal Asiatique* 296 (2008): 257-296; David Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān: Early Ismā'īlī Ta'wīl and the Secrets of the Prophets* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016).

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Meanwhile, there are only two short studies dedicated to Ismaili ideas of Qur'ānic Revelation. One of them is a conference paper by De Smet (2014), who provides samples of how certain Ismaili Neoplatonist *dā'īs* theorized aspects of divine inspiration, prophetic composition, and Qur'ānic compilation.³³ He himself notes the “absence of studies on the Ismaili conception of the Qur'ān” and his chapter stresses that Ismaili views on this topic are quite incompatible with the far more popular Sunni theological positions. Asani's chapter (2019) speaks to how the modern Ismaili Khoja community engages with the text of the Qur'ān and raises the issue of the broader Ismaili theology of revelation that informs these engagements.³⁴ Overall, a comprehensive analysis of Ismaili views of Qur'ānic Revelation that covers multiple Ismaili thinkers and situates their ideas within broader theological debates among Sunni exegetes and theologians remains a dire need in modern scholarship.

Overall, the scholarly literature on the topic of Qur'ānic Revelation within Qur'ānic studies, Islamic intellectual history, Shi'i studies, and Ismaili studies remains fragmentary at best. The relevant publications to date only cover select Qur'ānic concepts, specific Sunni theological trends, small historical periods, or samples from individual Muslim thinkers. These gaps call for a more comprehensive scholarly investigation of Qur'ānic Revelation in Islam, that threads together multiple Islamic traditions and provides a historical narrative of how different Islamic theologies of revelation developed over time and in mutual debate.

³³ Daniel De Smet, “Le Coran: son origine, sa nature et sa falsification. Positions ismaéliennes controversées,” in Daniel De Smet and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (eds.), *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l'islam* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2014), 231-268.

³⁴ Ali Asani, “Nizari Ismaili Engagements with the Qur'an: the Khojas of South Asia,” in *Communities of the Qur'an*, 39-56.

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Dissertation Method and Framework

Studying various historical Muslim models of Qur'ānic Revelation – which were often mutually contradictory and grounded in different theological frameworks – runs the risk of two pitfalls. The first is offering a merely descriptive or emic account of the ideas professed by each Muslim thinker; such an approach may strive to take every Muslim thinker on his or her own terms but does not provide analytical value and fails to offer a more generalized conception of the phenomena under study. The second is to impose etic analytical categories upon the views of a given Muslim thinker; this ends up forcing their ideas into a given theological, hermeneutical or philosophical structure and distorts their meaning. Many accounts purporting to present “the Muslim understanding” of Qur'ānic Revelation in academic and educational literature, as quoted earlier, describe the Qur'ān as God's literal and eternal speech in the form of a scripture that was dictated verbatim to the Prophet Muhammad. These characterizations privilege one specific theological understanding of the Qur'ān over others; they analytically conflate the notions of divine speech, scripture, the Arabic Qur'ān, and divine inspiration – all of which are distinct concepts represented by different terminologies in Muslim sources.

Another tendency in modern scholarship has been to describe Muslim views of the Qur'ān by drawing parallels with the theological status of Jesus Christ in Christian theology. In this perspective, the Qur'ān is “the Word of God made book”, with Qur'ānic Revelation being a process of “inlibration” in the same way that Jesus is “the Word of God made flesh” through the process of incarnation. This famous comparison between the Qur'ān and Christ was first proposed by the Lutheran Archbishop of the Church of Sweden, Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931) in the 1923 Gifford Lectures. He only employed the analogy for polemical purposes – to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Islam on the grounds that Islam's only analogue to Christ was its

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scripture (the Qur'ān) and not its Prophet.³⁵ Heinrich Frick first presented this comparison in modern scholarship within his 1928 work, *Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft*, and sourced it to Söderblom.³⁶ The same analogy was later popularized by Wilfred Cantwell Smith in 1957 for more charitable purposes and remains a fixture in educational literature on Islam after having been repeated by many renowned scholars of Islamic studies.³⁷ Wolfson even coined the term “inlibration” to describe the revelatory relationship between God’s attribute of speech and the revealed Arabic Qur'ān according to Islamic theology. However, the Qur'ān and Christ analogy is problematic because it imposes a theological model from Christianity upon Muslim beliefs about the Qur'ān and does not allow the latter to be studied on its own terms.³⁸ In sum, both of the above characterizations of Qur'ānic Revelation flatly equate the Arabic Qur'ān, its scriptural format as a “book”, and its revelatory transmission with God’s eternal speech; and in doing so, they end up reducing the entire phenomenon of Qur'ānic Revelation to the Qur'ān as a scriptural text.

In the present study, I have endeavored to study various Muslim thinkers’ ideas of Qur'ānic Revelation on their own terms, with due regard to their historical, social, and intellectual contexts,

³⁵ See Nathan Söderblom, *The Living God: Basal Forms of Personal Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 326ff.

³⁶ Heinrich Frick, *Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft* (Berlin, Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1928), 16, 68-73, which I learned from William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 217, Endnote 3.

³⁷ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 17-18; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), 43-44; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 279ff; Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, Vol. 1 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 11; Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam: An Introduction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 75. A critical appraisal of this analogy will be the subject for a future study.

³⁸ One of the only sustained critiques of the Qur'ān Christ analogy, where the Qur'ān is defined as a “book”, is Daniel Madigan, “God’s Word to the World: Jesus and the Qur'an, Incarnation and Recitation,” in Terrence Merrigan and Frederik Glorieux (eds.), *Godhead Here in Hiding: Incarnation and the History of Human Suffering* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 143-158. This critique is summarized in Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 88-95.

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and with a receptive approach that prioritizes each author's theological logic. In so doing, I have sought to follow the intellectual historian Quentin Skinner's advice "to situate the texts we study within such intellectual contexts as enable us to make sense of what their authors were doing in writing them" and "to follow their distinctions, to appreciate their beliefs and, so far as possible, to see things their way."³⁹ To carry this out, I analytically approached the phenomenon of Qur'ānic Revelation in three steps: I first documented how Muslim thinkers within each tradition and historical period theorized Qur'ānic Revelation on their own terms largely based on primary sources; I then reflected upon the many revelation models under study and synthesized a "pan-emic" analytical framework (to be described below) that speaks to and accounts for all of them without diminishing their distinctive features;⁴⁰ finally, as reflected in the text of this dissertation, I provided an historical account of the emergence and development of these different revelation models and described each of them using my analytical framework.

Muslims have historically thought about revelation in terms of a transcendent source within or in proximity to God, a process by which revelation comes forth from its divine origin and descends into the human world, and a final revelatory format (such as scripture) through which the revelation remains accessible to its recipients. A suitable analytical framework must speak to how Muslims variously imagine Qur'ānic Revelation as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is not simply reducible to the text of the Arabic Qur'ān. For the purpose of this study and more generally, I propose that we can better conceptualize and describe various Muslims models of

³⁹ Quentin Skinner, quoted in Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory (eds.), *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 2.

⁴⁰ I have borrowed this term "pan-emic" from Ahmed, *What is Islam*, 106.

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Qur'ānic Revelation by analytically differentiating between a “Revelatory Principle”, a “Revelatory Process”, and a “Revelatory Product”.

A Revelatory Product is an earthly phenomenon – an oral discourse, a scripture, or even a human figure – that a religious community engages with as something “revealed” by God. The Arabic Qur'ān – primarily as something recited by the Prophet Muhammad and secondarily in its transmitted oral and written formats among Muslims – is such a Revelatory Product but it is by no means the only one recognized by Muslims. Sunni Muslims regard the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad as a complementary Revelatory Product that is indispensable in arriving at the fullness of God's guidance. Furthermore, many Twelver and Ismaili Shi'i Muslims recognize the divinely inspired teachings of the Shi'i Imams as a Revelatory Product to some degree. To these examples, one may also add that the mystical teachings of many Sufis and mystical thinkers like Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), or Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) recognize God's Friends (*awliyā' Allāh*) as the recipients of divine inspiration (*ilhām*) after the Prophet Muhammad.⁴¹ The Sufi poet 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) famously described Rūmī's *Mathnavī-yi ma'navī* as “the Qur'ān incarnate in the Persian language” and spoke of Rūmī himself as “not a prophet but a revealer of a book.”⁴² The Arabic Qur'ān, far from encompassing the totality of revelation in the Muslim historical experience, is but one Revelatory Product; Muslims have recognized other Revelatory Products alongside it, albeit with subsidiary levels of authority.

⁴¹ For Rūmī's view of *wahy* and *ilhām* in relation to the Friends of God, see John Renard, *All the King's Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 28-39.

⁴² On the attribution of these lines to Jāmī, see Franklin Lewis, “Towards a Chronology of the Poems of the *Dīvān-i Shams: A Prolegomenon for a Periodization of Rumi's Literary Oeuvre*,” in Leonard Lewisohn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2014), 145-176, :150, note 15.

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To speak of anything as “divinely revealed” implies the existence of a higher level, properly inaccessible (“un-revealed”) domain of reality that is being partially disclosed to humanity through the event of revelation. In other words, the very idea of Qur'ānic Revelation acknowledges an ontologically prior and revelatory superstructure that is connected to or part of God and potentially knowable by human beings; this is the transcendent revelatory source from which the Qur'ān comes forth and which it “reveals” to those who otherwise lack direct access to it. One of the best analytical descriptions of this concept comes from Shahab Ahmed, who refers to this “unseen” revelatory domain as the “Pre-Text” of revelation as opposed to the “Text” that is the Arabic Qur'ān:

This Unseen Reality is ontologically prior to and alethically (that is, as regards truth) larger than the textual product of the Revelation: it is the source of Revelation.... The Pre-Text of Revelation is Pre-Text both in the sense that it is ontologically and alethically prior to the Text and is that upon which the Truth of the Text is contingent (as that which is ontologically and alethically prior to Text...the Pre-Text, as the world of the Unseen, is continuously present—or, strictly speaking, continuously absent—at all times and places as the domain of prior and higher Truth). The Truth of the Text of the Revelation is only the Revelatory Product: as such, it is but an expression in the here-and-now of this world of the Truth of the Pre-Text of the Revelation. That the Qur'ān/Text of the Revelation is true but does not encompass all the Truth of the Unseen Pre-Text of Revelation is accepted by all Muslims.⁴³

For my analytical framework, I have borrowed Ahmed's idea of the “Pre-Text of Revelation” and renamed it as the “Revelatory Principle”: this is the idea of a transcendent domain of reality that is ontologically prior to and substantially greater than any given Revelatory Product. The Revelatory Principle functions as the divine source, celestial archetype, and comprehensive truth matrix that becomes partially accessible through its Revelatory Products.⁴⁴ All of the Muslim

⁴³ Ahmed. *What is Islam*, 346-347. One need not agree with Ahmed's definition of Islam as a hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, Text, and/or Con-Text of the Revelation to Muhammad to accept the merits of his concept of Revelation as Pre-Text and its distinction from the Text of the Qur'ān.

⁴⁴ I prefer the name “Revelatory Principle” to “Pre-Text” to avoid any preconceived notion that the primary manifestation of revelation is “text” of any kind.

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thinkers and theologies under examination in this study subscribe to this Revelatory Principle while disagreeing about its name, ontology, and contents. But the general idea of the Revelatory Principle – which is both transcendent and immanent with respect to its Revelatory Products such as the Qur'ān – has been a consistent feature in Muslim theological frameworks. However, Muslims differed about what the Revelatory Principle truly is – whether it is God's eternal speech as sounds and letters, God's eternal nonverbal speech, or Neoplatonic emanations – and this led to divergent valuations of the Revelatory Product(s).

The event of revelation entails special acts of divine communication, inspiration, or disclosure through which the Revelatory Principle is manifested or “revealed” in the form of one or more Revelatory Products. These revelatory acts constitute the “Revelatory Process”. The Qur'ānic terms used to describe it include *tanzīl* (to send something down), *inzāl* (causing something to descend), and *wahy* (inspiration). But the meanings of these terms were hotly contested among Muslims and differ depending upon the time period, discursive genre, and theological school. As will be seen below, Muslims imagined the Revelatory Process in a myriad of ways. The popular belief that the Angel Gabriel travelled between heaven and earth and verbally recited the Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad is only one vision of the Revelatory Process among Muslims; a well attested alternate view holds that contents of the Revelatory Principle were communicated to Muhammad by spiritual intermediaries as a non-verbal inspiration or illumination. In any case, a Revelatory Product is the outcome of a Revelatory Process that “reveals” the Revelatory Principle.

The merits and advantages of studying Qur'ānic Revelation in terms of a Revelatory Principle, Revelatory Process, and Revelatory Product may be demonstrated by one example. Let us consider a famous Muslim creed (*'aqīda*) composed by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Faḍālī

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al-Shāfi'ī (d. 1236/1831), a prominent scholar of al-Azhar University, titled *Kifāyat al- 'awāmm fī mā yajibu 'alayhim min 'ilm al-kalām* (*What Suffices for the Common People of the Knowledge of Kalām*) as it appears in the commentary of his foremost student Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Bājūrī (1189-1276/1784-1860), who became the grand imam of al-Azhar.⁴⁵ Al-Faḍalī's *Kifāya* was a standard textbook of Sunni Ash'arī theology during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Rippin, al-Faḍalī's creed "had authority in all parts of the Shafi'ite world; it has been translated into Swahili as well as Malay and Javanese."⁴⁶ Riddell observes that this text "served as a vehicle for transmitting non-Sufi theological perspectives to the Malay world."⁴⁷ The *Kifāya*, therefore, was a highly influential theological work among Sunni Muslims in Egypt and Southeast Asia. Its perspectives on Qur'ānic Revelation are worthy of serious consideration.

Throughout the *Kifāya*, al-Faḍalī discusses the proper interpretation of God's attributes. One section is dedicated to discussing the Speech of God and its relationship to the Qur'ān. Al-Faḍalī begins by defining God's Speech as "an Eternal Attribute subsisting in His Essence without letters or sounds, transcending precedence, succession, inflection, and construction in contrast to temporal speech." In other words, God's Speech is not comprised of verbal words or letters in any language; instead God's Speech is eternal, unitary, transcendent, uncreated, and subsists within God's Essence. Al-Faḍalī continues his discourse by carefully explaining that God's Eternal

⁴⁵ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Faḍalī al-Shāfi'ī, *Kifāyat al- 'awāmm fī mā yajibu 'alayhim min 'ilm al-kalām*, as quoted in Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Bājūrī, *Ḥāshiyat al-Bājūrī 'alā Kifāyat al- 'awāmm fī 'ilm al-kalām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007), 138ff. For al-Bājūrī's life, works, and intellectual context, see Aaron Spevack, *The Archetypal Sunnī Scholar: Law, Theology, and Mysticism in the Synthesis of al-Bājūrī* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014).

⁴⁶ Andrew Rippin, "Introduction," in Andrew Rippin and Jan Knappert (eds.), *Textual Sources of the Study of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 20. A translation of al-Faḍalī's creed is provided in this book on pp. 126-134, but it has some differences with my translation.

⁴⁷ Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 28.

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Speech is not exactly the same as the Arabic Qur'ān that was revealed to and recited by the Prophet Muhammad:

The meaning of His Speech that He possesses necessarily is not the noble utterances (*al-alfāz al-sharīfa*) sent down to the Prophet because the latter are temporal (*hādīth*) while the attribute subsisting in His Essence is eternal. These [noble utterances] are comprised of priority, posteriority, inflection, chapters, and verses while the Eternal Attribute is devoid of all of this. Thus, it contains neither verses, chapters, nor inflections because these exist with speech comprised of letters and sounds while the Eternal Attribute transcends letters and sounds as mentioned above. These noble utterances do not indicate to the Eternal Attribute in the sense that one understands the Eternal Attribute from them. But rather, what is understood from these utterances is only equivalent to what is understood from the Eternal Attribute if the veil is lifted from us as we hear them – so it obtains that these utterances indicate to the meaning and this meaning is equal to what is understood from the Eternal Speech subsisting in His Essence. Take notice of this difference, for many are mistaken about it and designate both the Eternal Attribute and the noble utterances as a *qur'ān* (recitation) and the Speech of God; but the noble utterances are created and inscribed in the Guarded Tablet. Gabriel brought them down to the Prophet after they were sent down in the Night of Decree (*laylat al-qadr*) in the Abode of Glory (*bayt al-'izza*) in the lowest heaven, transcribed in parchments and deposited within it.⁴⁸

The contrast that al-Faḍalī draws between God's Eternal Attribute of Speech and the “noble utterances” that make up the Arabic Qur'ān is significant. God's Speech is eternal and transcends the Arabic Qur'ān, which is comprised of temporally created components like sounds, letters, ordering, verses, and chapters. The Arabic Qur'ān is not even identical to God's Speech in its linguistic meaning. The person who hears the Arabic words and verses in the Qur'ān has not necessarily grasped the truth content of the Eternal Speech of God; one can only access the real meaning of God's Speech “if the veil is lifted” as he hears the Qur'ān. Therefore, al-Faḍalī concludes, it would be a gross mistake to straightforwardly equate the Arabic Qur'ān with God's Eternal Attribute of speech, as if the terms *qur'ān* and “Speech of God” mean the same thing.

Al-Faḍalī's theological positions starkly contradict the various quotations shown earlier where several Islamic studies scholars simply defined the Arabic Qur'ān as God's literal or eternal speech. This shows that the phenomenon of Qur'ānic Revelation, even in mainstream Sunni

⁴⁸ al-Faḍalī, *Kifāyat* quoted in al-Bājūrī, *Hāshiyat*, 138.

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theology, is simply not reducible to the text of the Qur'ān. The all-important distinction between the Eternal Speech of God and the “created noble utterances” of the Arabic Qur'ān, which al-Faḍalī is at pains to stress, necessitates the analytical distinction between a Revelatory Principle and a Revelatory Product. In al-Faḍalī's Sunni theology, the Eternal Attribute of God's Speech that transcends all temporal and material qualities is the Revelatory Principle; the “noble utterances” that constitute the Arabic Qur'ān comprise the Revelatory Product. God's Speech is partially disclosed in the Qur'ān, but it remains ontologically and epistemically vaster than the Qur'ān. What al-Faḍalī describes at the end of the passage – that the “noble utterances” of the Qur'ān were first created and inscribed in the heavenly Guarded Tablet, then sent down to the Abode of Glory in the Night of Decree, and finally delivered to the Prophet by Gabriel – is his account of the Revelatory Process.

Al-Faḍalī's theological creed, which was quite popular and authoritative among Muslims in the modern period, represents a mature and developed Sunni account of Qur'ānic Revelation. But his formulation demonstrates how and why the frequently presented one-dimensional descriptions of Muslim views of the Qur'ān that pervade academic literature are inaccurate. The existence of such sophisticated models of Qur'ānic Revelation in the modern period underscore the importance of tracing the historical origins and development of Muslims accounts of revelation with an adequate analytical framework.

Summary of Dissertation Chapters and Findings:

This dissertation is divided into three parts. Part 1 (consisting of Chapter 1) sets out to determine the earliest beliefs and ideas about the Qur'ān's revelatory status as reflected in the Qur'ān itself; this investigation assumes that the Qur'ān's contents substantially date to the first/seventh century.

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The first chapter analyzes qur'ānic terminology like *kitāb*, *tanzīl*, *kalām*, and *wahy*, by drawing mainly on the qur'ānic text and synthesizing the findings of major secondary studies. It argues that the Qur'ān portrays itself as a series of divinely inspired recitations that convey divine guidance dynamically in real-time situations and serve as prophetically constructed manifestations of a unitary transcendent divine writing (*kitāb*). In the Qur'ān's revelatory framework, God's *kitāb* is not a material scripture but a transcendent realm of divine decrees and knowledge that partially manifests to humanity through prophetic guidance. Qur'ānic *wahy* is a non-verbal divine inspiration that the Prophet perceives through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, which the Prophet then "translates" into Arabic recitations tailored to the needs of his community.

Part 2, consisting of Chapters 2, 3, and 4, presents an intellectual history of proto-Sunni and Sunni Muslim ideas of Qur'ānic Revelation from the second/eighth century to the end of the fifth/eleventh century. Chapter 2 argues that the compilation and canonization of the Qur'ān into a closed book caused proto-Sunni Muslims to reify their idea of the Qur'ān into a scripture and eventually identify the scripturalized Qur'ān with the *kitāb Allāh*. It further demonstrates how this scriptural idea of the Qur'ān as a material book informed the concept of revelation in Sunni *ḥadīth* and Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*). In these sources, qur'ānic terms like *kitāb*, *tanzīl*, and *wahy* were re-interpreted to entail the angelic transportation and verbal dictation of a pre-existent qur'ānic text from heaven. Chapters 3 and 4 investigate and track theological developments in formative and classical Sunni *kalām* where the Qur'ān in its oral recited format was conceived primarily as God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*). By mapping out the diverse perspectives of several Ḥanbalī, Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, and Māturīdī theologians, both chapters show how Sunni theologians espoused a variety of often mutually contradictory Qur'ānic Revelation models in which qur'ānic terms like *kalām Allāh*, *kitāb*, *tanzīl*, and *wahy* were reinterpreted within different theological frameworks.

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How particular visions of God's Speech and its revelatory manifestations lead to distinct methods of qur'ānic hermeneutics is also explored. One recurring theme in *kalām* theology is the ontological distinction and relationship between God's Speech in reality (*ḥaqīqa*) and the Arabic Qur'ān as recited, written, and heard by human beings; with this distinction, the Sunni *kalām* models partially revert to the qur'ānic model of revelation seen in Part 1. This section also speaks to the status of the Prophetic Sunna as a revelatory expression of God's Speech alongside the Arabic Qur'ān.

Part 3, comprising Chapters 5, 6, and 7, is an intellectual history of Shi'i views of Qur'ānic Revelation with primary attention given to Ismaili thought. It covers the major developments in proto-Shi'ism (first/seventh century), Imami Shi'ism (second/eighth and third/ninth century), and Ismaili Shi'ism (third/ninth century, fourth/tenth century, and fifth/eleventh century). Chapter 5 analyzes how proto-Shi'is understood the concept of the *kitāb Allāh* in terms of its integral relationship to the Prophet Muhammad's family (*ahl al-bayt*), namely 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his sons. This chapter further investigates how Imami Shi'is envisioned the Ḥusaynid Shi'i Imams as having access to a transcendent realm of divine knowledge called *kitāb Allāh* through various mediums of divine inspiration. The same chapter maps out early pre-Fatimid Ismaili ideas of Qur'ānic Revelation according to which the Prophet Muhammad is a special human being who receives non-verbal divine inspiration from God's transcendent creative word and "translates" it into symbol-filled revelatory discourse and laws. The chapter also proposes a new definition of Ismaili *ta'wīl* as a divinely inspired "revelatory hermeneutics" that the Imams disclose as a necessary complement to the Prophet's revelatory speech. Chapters 6 and 7 investigate how Ismaili *dā'īs* in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century formulated Neoplatonic frameworks of Qur'ānic Revelation, through which they participated in theological debates taking place in Sunni

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kalām and *tafsīr*. These two chapters demonstrate that Ismaili thinkers conceived divine inspiration as a non-verbal Neoplatonic emanation from the Universal Intellect and Soul (equated to God's Pen and Tablet) and defined the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* as the prophetic composition (*ta'līf*) of Muhammad. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad in Ismaili thought functions as a creative revelatory agent, who produces the Arabic Qur'ān using words, ideas, symbols, and idioms drawn from his own context. Both chapters also register how Ismaili thinkers framed the Ismaili Imam as a recipient of divine inspiration from the transcendent Neoplatonic domain, the bearer of revelatory *ta'wīl*, and the "speaking *kitāb Allāh*" possessing authority over the "silent" Qur'ān *qua* recitation or scripture. Overall, the Ismaili paradigm of Qur'ānic Revelation represents both a complete break with and an important alternative to Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām* models while still offering a coherent interpretation and extension of the Qur'ānic model of revelation seen in Part 1.

In general, the dissertation's findings challenge the conventional scholarly presentation, prevalent across academic and educational literature, that all Muslims viewed the Qur'ān as God's literal speech dictated verbatim to the Prophet Muhammad. The dissertation shows that four different paradigms of Qur'ānic Revelation emerged and developed through the formative and classical periods of Islam:

- 1) The "Qur'ānic model" based on the Qur'ān's discourse about revelation, which describes God's Transcendent Kitāb (Revelatory Principle) being communicated as non-verbal inspiration (*wahy*) to the Prophet Muhammad and then adapted (*tafsīl*) into the form of piecemeal, responsive, and historically situated Arabic recitations that comprise the Qur'ān and prophetic guidance (Revelatory Products);
- 2) The "scriptural models" of classical Sunni *tafsīr* according to which a pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān as God's Book (*kitāb Allāh*) inscribed in the heavenly Guarded Tablet (Revelatory Principle) is initially sent down (*inzāl, tanzīl*) to the lowest heaven and then orally dictated by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad and subsequently compiled into scripture (Revelatory Product);
- 3) The "divine speech models" of Sunni *kalām* theology that variously describe how God's created or uncreated Speech (*kalām Allāh*) (Revelatory Principle) is taught (*i'lām*) to the Angel Gabriel

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and orally communicated to the Prophet Muhammad in the form of the recited Arabic Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunna (Revelatory Products);

4) The “divine inspiration models” of Shi'i Ismaili philosophical theology, in which God's creative Word (Revelatory Principle) by means of spiritual intermediaries (such as the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul) emanates as non-verbal divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*) to the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams; the Prophet symbolically composes (*ta'līf*) and condenses (*tanzīl*) this inspiration as the Arabic Qur'ān (God's silent *kitāb*) and the *sharī'a* (Revelatory Products) while the hereditary Shi'i Imams function as God's speaking *kitāb* and teach the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) (Revelatory Products).

Our investigation begins with the Qur'ān itself. The text of the Qur'ān, in the view of most scholars, dates to the first/seventh century and reflects theological understandings that prevailed during the Prophet Muhammad's own lifetime and a few generations after. In Chapter 1, our main objective will be to distill how the Qur'ān understands itself as revelation. Doing so will require us to set aside conceptions of the Qur'ān that developed later – as divine speech or even divine scripture – and address fundamental questions along the lines of what Tazim Kassam has posed:

Did Muhammad himself think of the Qur'an as a book? Did he make any effort to compile all the revelations he received into the Qur'an? When did the Qur'an come into existence as the book of scripture we know it to be today? What was the Qur'an before it came to be the Qur'an? Put differently, what was revelation before it came to be a book of scripture? Is there not a valid distinction to be made between revelation as experience and revelation as book?⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Tazim R. Kassam, “Signifying Revelation in Islam,” in Vincent Wimbush (ed.), *Theorizing Scriptures* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 29-40: 33.

Part 1: Revelation in the Qur'ān

Chapter 1: From the Transcendent Kitāb to the piecemeal *qur'āns*: A Qur'ānic Model of Revelation

1.0 Introduction: A Historical-Critical Reading of the Qur'ān

In this chapter, I employ a historical-critical reading of the Qur'ān to present an argument concerning the qur'ānic concept of revelation – which would be the earliest Islamic idea of revelation operative in the first/seventh century. A historical-critical approach to the Qur'ān seeks “to understand the text at hand in the light of views, concepts, and modes of expression current in the historical situation from which it originated, and of events and developments contemporaneous with it.”⁵⁰ I first argue that the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* does not mean a physical scriptural book, but rather conveys the idea of “divine writing” or “divine prescription” as a process in which God decrees guidance for human beings. Second, I demonstrate that the qur'ānic cosmology of revelation features a “Transcendent Kitāb” – a celestial divine “writing” containing God’s comprehensive knowledge, decrees, guidance, and records of cosmic history – as the archetypal source of all revelation. The Arabic *qur'āns* recited by Muhammad are piecemeal manifestations of this Transcendent Kitāb tailored to his audiences through a process of revelatory adaptation (*tafṣīl*). Third, I argue that the Qur'anic concept of divine communication called *wahy* is a non-verbal spiritual inspiration as opposed to a verbatim oral dictation; it entails that Muhammad plays

⁵⁰ Nicolai Sinai, “Historical-Critical Readings of the Abrahamic Scriptures,” in Adam J. Silverstein and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Online Edition: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697762.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199697762-e-39>.

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an active role in composing the Arabic *qur'āns* as a “translation” of this non-verbal inspiration.⁵¹ The basis for these arguments is an analysis of the intra-qur'ānic semantics of the terms *kitāb*, *tafṣīl*, *tanzīl*, *kalām*, and *wahy*. In making the argument, the chapter draws synthetically on philological, semantic, and literary findings from prior studies (Bell 1934; Jeffery 1950; Izutsu 1964; Bell 1970; Fiegenbaum 1973; Crollius 1974; Graham 1977, 1984; Madigan 2001, 2006; Sinai 2006; Neuwirth 2010, 2015, 2019; Saleh 2015).

In offering a historical-critical reading of the Qur'ān in this chapter, my goal is not to invalidate the long history of diverse qur'ānic interpretation. Rather, I am presenting what I believe to be the most plausible account of the qur'ānic idea of revelation based on a methodology grounded in historical context and intra-qur'ānic semantics. My approach is based upon “interpretative charity” – the assumption that the Qur'ān contains a coherent and internally consistent position on revelation that can be discovered through critical textual analysis. Historically speaking, my reading is committed to the following historical claims about Islamic origins that find considerable support in scholarship:

- There was an individual known as Muhammad b. 'Abdullāh who lived in the Arabian Ḥijāz during the first half of the seventh century; he made claims to prophecy and divine inspiration and led a community of followers for some twenty years. The general outlines of Muhammad's mission narrated in post-qur'ānic sources are largely reliable.⁵²

⁵¹ I am using the terms “verbal inspiration” and “non-verbal inspiration” in a similar manner as biblical studies. Verbal inspiration refers to a mode of inspiration where the recipient of revelation is given precise words in human language which he conveys verbatim. Meanwhile, non-verbal inspiration means that the recipient of revelation is not given the precise words, but rather, ideas, insights, thoughts, or inspired contents which the recipient then articulates and expresses in his or her words. See “Verbal Inspiration”, *Oxford Biblical Studies Online*, accessed on 6/22/2019: <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t94/e1990>. This is also the meaning of verbal inspiration as discussed in the context of Islam, see van Ess, “Verbal Inspiration?”.

⁵² For non-Muslim and Muslim sources from the seventh century (634 AD) onward attesting to the historical existence of Muhammad and the emergence of Islam, see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997). For the argument that the emergence of mutually conflicting factions in the first/seventh century – such as the Partisans of 'Uthmān, the Partisans of 'Alī, the Khārijīs, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids – who nevertheless have a similar account of the historical Muhammad, see Nebil A. Husayn, “Scepticism and Uncontested History: A Review Article,” *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 7/4 (2014): 384-409. Andreas Görke, “Prospects and limits in the study of the,

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- The Qur'ān as it exists today contains, more or less (notwithstanding interpolations, changes in *sūra* and verse order, differences in vocalization, and divergent codices), a transcript of Muhammad's oral proclamations made during his prophetic career and is a documentary source for this period.⁵³
- The *sūras* that make up the Qur'ān can be chronologically divided into Meccan and Medinan phases based on Muhammad's prophetic mission.⁵⁴
- The Qur'ān's consonantal text (*rasm*) reached closure around 650 CE when it was compiled in the form of the 'Uthmānic codex (*muṣḥaf*), which serves as the source-archetype for the Qur'ān's written transmission in subsequent generations.⁵⁵

historical Muḥammad,” in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (eds.), *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 137-151:141. With respect to the historicity of the prophetic career of Muhammad, Schoeler studied a great number of traditions reported on the authority of 'Urwā b. al-Zubayr concerning Muhammad's first revelation experience and other narratives and showed that the transmission lines of this material through Hishām b. 'Urwa and al-Zuhrī are historically reliable chains of transmission. This conclusion effectively reduces the “gap” of historical uncertainty in the transmission of these historical narratives to a few decades by showing they reliably go back to 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 93-94/711-713), see Gregor Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad* (New York: Routledge, 2011). Görke and Schoeler analyzed various narrations traced back to 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr and concluded that the general outline of the *hijra* accounts attributed to 'Urwā are based on firsthand reports of Muhammad's life, see Görke and Schoeler, “Reconstructing the Earliest *sūra* Texts: The *Hiḡra* in the Corpus of 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr,” *Der Islam* 82/2 (2005): 209-20. Finally, Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler, in a co-authored article responding to the criticisms of Stephen R. Shoemaker, present arguments that authentic historical material about Muhammad's mission can be traced back through al-Zuhrī and 'Urwa, see Andreas Görke, Harald Motzki, and Gregor Schoeler, “First Century Sources for the Life of Muḥammad? A Debate,” *Der Islam* 89/2 (2012): 2-59. For the Arabian context and location of the Qur'ān, see Suleyman Dost, “Arabian Qur'ān: Towards a Theory of Peninsular Origins,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2017).

⁵³ Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 48-62, argues that the Qur'ān text must have crystalized before the First Civil War (34-41/656-661) because the Qur'ān, unlike the *ḥadīth* corpus, shows no traces of the theological and political debates about the early Caliphs or the Imamate, no reference to caliphal dynasties such as the Umayyads and the Abbasids, and no mention of any conflicts that occurred later. On p. 61 Donner writes: “It does seem clear that the Qur'ān text, as we now have it, must be an artifact of the earliest historical phase of the community of Believers, and so can be used with some confidence to understand the values and beliefs of that community.” Angelika Neuwirth has voiced some strong arguments in favor of the Qur'ān being the work of a single author, namely Muhammad, as opposed to a collective work of several authors that was coalesced later by an editorial committee, see Angelika Neuwirth, “Meccan Texts – Medinan Additions? Politics and the Re-Reading of Liturgical Communications,” in Rüdiger Arnzen and Jörn Thielmann (eds.), *Words, Texts and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea* (Leuven; Paris; Dudley, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2004), 71-94. The strongest and most detailed argument that the Qur'ān has a single author is given in Behnam Sadeghi, “The Chronology of the Qurān: A Stylometric Research Program,” *Arabica* 58/3 (2011): 210-299.

⁵⁴ For recent work on the chronology of the Qur'ān, see Sadeghi, “The Chronology of the Qurān,” and Nicolai Sinai, “The Qur'an as Process,” in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān* Vol. 6 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 407-440.

⁵⁵ Nicolai Sinai, “When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part 1,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77/2 (June 2014): 273-292 and “Part 2,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77/3 (October 2014): 509-521. Harald Motzki employs *isnad-cum-matn* analysis on traditions about the compilation and canonization of the Qur'ān under Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān and concludes – contrary to the views of Wansbrough and Burton – that these traditions can be dated to the lifetime of al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) and were first circulated anywhere between the end of the first/seventh century and the first quarter of the second/eighth century, see Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur'ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments,” *Der Islam* 78 (2002): 1-34. Gregor Schoeler argues the admission in Muslim traditions that various versions of the Qur'ān, both non-'Uthmānic and 'Uthmānic, continued to exist after 'Uthmān's redaction is evidence

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If the Qur'ān truly dates to the religio-political movement led by the Prophet Muhammad (whether one calls it “Islam”, “Paleo-Islam”, or the “Believers movement”), the contents of the Qur'ān should reflect the beliefs and ideas of its author (whether that is God, Muhammad, or multiple authors) as well as some segment of the first qur'ānic community.⁵⁶ Therefore, my argument concerning the Qur'anic concept of revelation is also a historical claim as to what the earliest proto-Muslim/Muslim understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation would have been in the first/seventh century.

1.1 Prior Studies on the Qur'ānic Concept of Revelation

Early studies by Richard Bell (1934) and Arthur Jeffery (1950) assumed and took for granted the view that the Qur'ān, in speaking of itself as a *kitāb*, refers to a closed written scripture – in agreement with later Muslim tradition. Jeffery held that the Qur'ān spoke of two kinds of divine communication to Prophets: non-verbal inspiration and verbally dictated scriptural revelation and that Muhammad's understanding of revelation developed from the former to the latter based on

of the authenticity of this event, see Gregor Schoeler, “The Codification of the Qur'ān,” in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *The Qur'an in Context, 779-794*. Behnam Sadeghi shows that the Ṣan'ā' 1 palimpsest dates to the first half of the seventh century, and the lower codex of Ṣan'ā' 1 manuscript is a non-'Uthmānic variant codex that matches some of the non-'Uthmānic Companion Codices in Sadeghi and Uwe Bermann “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet,” *Arabica*, 57/5 (2010): 343-436. Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi's analysis of the non-'Uthmānic lower codex of Ṣan'ā' 1 shows that the *sūras* of the Qur'ān crystallized earlier than the canonization of the 'Uthmānic Qur'ān. They also discuss how the radiocarbon dating of Ṣan'ā' 1 places the parchment and the lower codex to before 671 AD (99% probability), before 661 AD (95.5% probability), or before 646 AD (75% probability), see Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān,” *Der Islam* 87/1-2 (2012), 1-129. The most recent study that establishes the existence of a single “archetype” for the Qur'ān is Marijn van Putten, “The Grace of God' as evidence for a written Uthmanic archetype: the importance of shared orthographic idiosyncrasies,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 82/2 (Jun 2019): 271-288.

⁵⁶ The documentary nature of the Qur'ān has been a methodological principle of several major studies, including Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Patricia Crone, *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters*, ed. Hanna Siuruna (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016); Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*. Walid Saleh, “The Preacher of the Meccan Qur'an: Deuteronomistic History and Confessionalism in Muḥammad's Early Preaching,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 20/2 (2018): 74-111; Nicolai Sinai, “The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur'an,” *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 66 (2015–2016): 47–96; idem, “Muḥammad as Episcopal Figure,” *Arabica* 65 (2018): 1-30.

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the idea that Muhammad intended the Qur'ān to be a scriptural text along Jewish and Christian lines.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Bell also affirmed that Muhammad intended to compile a physical scripture, but took a more nuanced view of revelation; he suggested that *wahy* as presented in the Qur'ān and in the thought of Muhammad did not necessarily entail verbal dictation, but rather, flashes of inspiration; meaning that Muhammad was inspired to produce the Arabic *qur'āns* as opposed to the *qur'āns* being dictated to him verbatim.⁵⁸ Toshihiko Izutsu's analysis of key terms in the Qur'ān (1964) ultimately argued for the majority Muslim position that *kitāb* means scripture and that Qur'ānic Revelation entails God's literal speech (*kalām*) consisting of linguistic utterances being verbally dictated to Muhammad.⁵⁹ Izutsu's analysis also yielded important insights on the pre-Islamic and qur'ānic semantics of terms like *kitāb* and *wahy*. J. W. Fiegenbaum's unpublished 1973 dissertation directly challenged some of these views; he vehemently argued that *kitāb* in the qur'ānic context does not mean written scripture, that God's word (*qawl, kalima*) does not entail verbal linguistic speech, and that *wahy* does not consist of verbal dictation to the Prophet. However, his arguments did not find much traction in scholarship despite the strength and thoroughness of his analysis.⁶⁰ One year later, Ary A. Roest Crolius (1974) published a comparative study of the Qur'ān and the Vedas containing important research on the qur'ānic

⁵⁷ Jeffery, "The Qur'ān as Scripture." Several early Orientalists took the view that the Qur'ānic idea of *kitāb* denotes physical and/or heavenly scripture, including: George Sale, *The Koran, commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammed, translated into English immediately from the original Arabic* (London: C. Ackers, 1734); William Muir, *The Testimony borne by the Coran to the Jewish and Christian Scripture* (Agra, India: the Agra Religious Tract and Book Society, 1856); Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1883). For a review of all these studies, including Western interpretations of *kitāb* as scripture or as heavenly book (or both), see Mohsen Goudarzi, "The Second Coming of the Book: Rethinking Qur'ānic Scripturology and Prophetology," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2018), 49-95.

⁵⁸ Bell, "Muhammad's Visions," 145-149.

⁵⁹ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 163-208.

⁶⁰ Fiegenbaum, "Prophethood from the perspective of the Qur'ān."

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concept of God's word (*qawl, kalima*) and scripture (*kitāb*); he offered conclusions very similar to Fiegenbaum, but his work was also not picked up in later scholarship.⁶¹

Beginning with his 1977 study, William A. Graham questioned the exclusively scriptural and literalist conceptions of the Qur'ān during the life of Muhammad and early Muslim tradition through his emphasis on qur'ānic orality, the earliest meanings of the term *qur'ān*, and his study of the different and relatively fluid modes of revelation in early Islam.⁶² In some critical analytical comments on the developed Sunni Muslim view of revelation, Mohammad Arkoun (1988) drew attention to how the canonization of the Qur'ān into a bounded scriptural text fundamentally altered the manner in which the Muslim community engaged with the Qur'ān and understood its process of revelation.⁶³

In a 1999 article, Abdullah Saeed argued that the traditional Sunni view of revelation as God's literal speech dictated to Muhammad is the position of the Qur'ān itself.⁶⁴ In making this argument, however, Saeed drew extensively on later Sunni exegetical and theological interpretations of the Qur'ān. Following the lead of Arkoun and Graham, Daniel Madigan's 2001

⁶¹ Ary A. Roest Crolius, *The Word in the Experience of Revelation in Qur'an and Hindu Scripture* (Rome: Universtia Gregoriana Ed., 1974), 17-187. The author writes as a Catholic theologian, but his analysis of the qur'ānic concepts is very thorough and not colored by Catholic theology in the slightest. Madigan mentioned this book in the preface to his own monograph, admitting that he was not aware of Crolius' work, which prefigures many of his own arguments published in 2001.

⁶² Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word*, 1-50. Graham's study was the published version of his 1973 Ph.D. Dissertation. See also, idem, "The Earliest Meaning of 'Qur'ān'," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series 23/24 (1984): 361-377; idem, "Qur'ān as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture," in Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 23-40; and "Revelation", in Daniel Brown (ed.), *The Concise Handbook to the Hadith* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019).

⁶³ Mohammad Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation: From the Ahl al-Kitāb to the Societies of the Book," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series 28/1-4 (1988): 62-89.

⁶⁴ Abdullah Saeed, "Rethinking "Revelation" as a Precondition for Reinterpreting the Qur'ān: A Qur'ānic Perspective," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1/1 (1999): 93-114.

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monograph, *The Qur'an's Self-Image* and his entries in Brill's *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* provided detailed semantic analysis of the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* and concluded that the term *kitāb* is a symbol for divinely-prescribed guidance manifesting God's knowledge and authority in the form of a responsive divine engagement with human beings; consequently, the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* in Madigan's view does not strictly refer to a fixed and bounded scriptural corpus, and his findings revise much of the assumptions of prior scholars.⁶⁵

Nicolai Sinai's important article (2006) on the Qur'ān's self-authorization and scripturality took up Madigan's conclusions and modified them through further analysis. Sinai argued that the Qur'ān roots its claim to divine authority in a multidimensional vision of *kitāb*: at the highest level, there is a celestial, heavenly, or transcendent *kitāb*, exceeding the bounds of human knowledge and language, that serves as the repository and register of God's knowledge, decrees, and records of human history. At the earthly level, the qur'ānic recitations in Arabic are piecemeal and historically contingent renderings of this celestial *kitāb* in the form of adaptations (*tafsīl*) or commentaries from the celestial *kitāb* suited for particular audiences.⁶⁶ Angelika Neuwirth incorporated the conclusions of Graham, Madigan, and Sinai in her literary analysis of the Qur'ān. In the course of several studies (2010, 2015, 2019), Neuwirth depicted the Prophet Muhammad's

⁶⁵ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*; idem, "Book," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 5 Vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001-2006). Accessed 5/11/2017: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00027. It must be noted that Madigan's central claim about *kitāb* is very similar to those of Fiegenbaum and Crollius. But each author argued differently and emphasized different parts of the data. For this reason, the present chapter draws upon and synthesizes the viewpoints of all three authors in making the same argument.

⁶⁶ Nicolai Sinai, "Qur'anic self-referentiality," in Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*.

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reception of *wahy* and his recitation of the Arabic *qur'āns* as a performative “reading” from the celestial *kitāb* posited by Sinai.⁶⁷

In the most recent study of qur'ānic self-referentiality, Boisliveau (2014) argued that the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* means “holy scripture” according to Jewish and Christian ideas. A great deal of her analysis relied on the meaning of qur'ānic terminology according to later Arabic lexicons, such as the *Lisān al-'arab* of Ibn Manẓūr (d. 722/1312). This suggests that some of her interpretations of terms like *kitāb* convey a great deal of post-qur'ānic development in terms of theological meaning.⁶⁸

1.2 Towards a Qur'ānic Concept of Revelation: Sources and Method

In what follows, I undertake a critical semantic analysis of specific terminology within the Qur'ān to delineate the Qur'ān's concept of revelation in its seventh-century context. My analysis focuses on semantic fields of meaning internal to the Qur'ān, specifically those associated with the terms *kitāb*, *tafṣīl*, *tanzīl/inzāl*, *kalām/kalima*, *wahy*, and *rūḥ*. In other words, I argue that the best way to determine what the Qur'ān means by a specific term is to examine holistically how the word is used throughout the Qur'ān, as opposed to merely isolating one or two cases or back projecting a later theological definition of the word into the Qur'ān. This methodology is based on a key principle articulated by Ludwig Wittgenstein: “the use of the words teach you their meaning” and

⁶⁷ Neuwirth “Two Faces of the Qur'an.”; idem, “The ‘discovery of writing’ in the Qur'an.” Neuwirth's most recent study, which amalgamates her views on this subject is *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*. In this latter publication, which is a translation of a 2010 German book, Neuwirth suggests that only specific *sūras* and verses (in the Middle Meccan period) are manifestations of the celestial *kitāb*, while other qur'ānic *sūras* are identical to this *kitāb* (in the Medinan period). But this seems to be her older position that was updated in 2015.

⁶⁸ Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même*.

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“the meaning of a word is its use in the language.”⁶⁹ It is also a methodology inspired by many prior studies surveying and documenting the semantic range of specific qur'ānic terms. As the above literature review shows, a great deal of work has already been done on this front. Thus, along with my own analysis of qur'ānic material, I reperform and reformulate seminal arguments from several prior studies. In particular, my analysis of the qur'ānic concepts of *kitāb* and *tafṣīl* synthesizes the core arguments of Fiegenbaum (1973), Crollius (1974), Graham (1977), Madigan (2001), Sinai (2006), Saleh (2015), and Neuwirth (2010) to support the claims that: a) the Qur'ān in its emergent phase did not present itself as a “book” *qua* closed written scripture; b) the word *kitāb* as used in the Qur'ān, in the context of revelation, generally means God's order, decree, and prescription; and c) the qur'ānic vision of *kitāb* is hierarchical and multi-dimensional. Subsequently, I critically engage with the arguments of Jeffery (1950), Bell (1934), Izutsu (1964), Fiegenbaum (1973), and Neuwirth (2015) on the qur'ānic concepts of *tanzīl* and *wahy* in conjunction with my own analysis of the relevant qur'ānic material. In doing so, I argue that qur'ānic *wahy* is a non-verbal inspiration entailing a productive role for the Prophet in rendering this inspiration into Arabic recitation (*qur'ān*). I then show how Graham's findings (1977) and more recent scholarship (Sinai 2018) concerning revelation and prophethood in early Islam corroborate my interpretation of the qur'ānic idea of revelation.

This study does *not* rely upon what the *tafsīr* tradition has to say about the qur'ānic model of revelation because the interpretations of classical and medieval Muslim exegetes (*mufassirūn*) reflect post-qur'ānic understandings of qur'ānic terminology and also reflect later theological

⁶⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, as quoted in Omar Ali-de-Unzaga, “Citational Exegesis of the Qur'an: Towards a Theoretical Framework for the Construction of Meaning in Classical Islamic Thought,” in Abdou Filali Ansari and Aziz Esmail (eds.), *The Construction of Belief: Reflections on the Thought of Mohammad Arkoun* (London: Saqi Books, 2012), 168-193, 184.

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developments. According to Karen Bauer, “*tafsīr* is each scholar’s attempt to relate his world to the world of the Qur’an; it is his attempt to relate his intellectual, political and social concerns to the Qur’an’s original text.”⁷⁰ Relying on *tafsīr* literature also results in a restrictive interpretation of the Qur’ān since there are important Muslim hermeneutical projects apart from *tafsīr*, including *kalām*, *falsafa*, Ismaili philosophy, and Sufism, that also offer qur’ānic exegesis. Nevertheless, all of these Muslim hermeneutical discourses remain important for the study of revelation in Islam during the post-qur’ānic period and are taken up in Chapter 2 onward.

1.3 Divine Writing: Qur’ānic *Kitāb* as Divine Prescription

The first step in arriving at a qur’ānic model of revelation is properly understanding the meaning of the terms used in the Qur’ān for the revelatory guidance brought by Muhammad and his predecessors. The word *Qur’ān* today is habitually taken to mean the finished textual corpus of recitations originally uttered by the Prophet in the seventh century. However, this corpus is but a collated transcript of what was originally a series of piecemeal oral recitations or *qur’āns* recited by Muhammad in a variety of circumstances over two decades; these *qur’āns* interacted with and responded to various events, situations, and feedback involving the Prophet’s various audiences.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Karen Bauer, *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur’anic Exegesis* (London, New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013), 8.

⁷¹ My use of the term *qur’āns* (lower case q) as opposed to Qur’ān in this Chapter is intentional. When I use the word “Qur’ān” with an uppercase Q, I am referring to the full redacted Qur’ān in general regardless of its textual or oral format; I use the word “*qur’ān*” to refer to the piecemeal, oral, and processual recitations spoken by Muhammad during his prophetic mission. This use of the term *qur’ān* is based on William A. Graham’s observations about the earliest meaning of *qur’ān* in Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qur’ān’,” 373-377 where a *qur’ān* refers to a specific revealed recitation: “There are also numerous instances in the Ḥadīth where *qur’ān* refers clearly to a single revelation/recitation. The Companions seem to have had a fear of doing something that might cause ‘a *qur’ān* to be sent down about that’. Particular *qur’āns* were revealed on particular occasions, as several traditions show; Ibn ‘Umar tells how a man came to Muhammad to say that ‘a *qur’ān* was sent down to him last night’ (*inna ... qad unzila ‘alayhi al-laylata qur’ān*)” (p. 375).

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Thus, the Qur'ān in its original format and discursive setting was the outcome of a revelatory event forming part of an extended dialogue between Muhammad and his contemporaries. In a recent study of the Qur'ān's literary genre, Adam Flowers concludes that the original elements of the oral Qur'ān were small sets of recitations as opposed to a scriptural corpus:

It must be remembered that the Prophet did not recite the Qur'an in its entirety to a listening audience; rather, he recited small portions of Qur'anic revelation to a listening audience that were later compiled into the written form of the Qur'an. Considering the traditionally accepted twenty-three-year period of Muḥammad's prophetic career, small instances of revelation consisting of only a few verses each seems the only sustainable way to extend Qur'anic revelation over such an extended period of time. Each piece of recited revelation, then, would exist independently in its form from other such revelations; that is, by nature of being recited as a free-standing unit, often seemingly in response to particular events or debates within the earliest Muslim community, there would be no explicit thematic or, most pertinently, syntactic relation to previously recited revelatory material... These are the original modes of Qur'anic revelation and, therefore, the Qur'an's original generic forms.⁷²

In its earliest meaning and usage, even the term *qur'ān* in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* denotes a single instance of revelatory recitation (the Qur'ān frequently speaks of “this *qur'ān*”, “an Arabic *qur'ān*”, “a *qur'ān*”, “its *qur'ān*”). According to Graham, “the ‘proper-noun’ sense of *qur'ān* in the Qur'ān is that of a fundamentally oral and certainly an active, ongoing reality, rather than that of a written and ‘closed’ codex such as is later represented by the *maṣāḥif*.”⁷³ Instead of a monograph resulting from a premeditated authorial composition, the Qur'ān in its emergent phase during Muhammad's lifetime resembled something like the modern day Google Maps, through which the community was being guided and “re-routed” by qur'ānic recitations in real-time, with fresh *qur'āns* providing new guidance for changing conditions.

Although the Qur'ān was oral, piecemeal, and dynamic, the most frequent and pivotal qur'ānic term that designates revelation is the word *kitāb*, which appears some 255 times in the

⁷² Adam Flowers, “Reconsidering Qur'anic Genre,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2022 (2018): 19-46: 34.

⁷³ Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qur'ān’,” 373.

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Qur'ān. The Qur'ān uses the term *kitāb* to designate a great many things (see Table 1.1 below): the qur'ānic recitations of Muhammad, the Torah brought by Moses, the content of what God reveals through prior Prophets and Messengers, God's heavenly writing containing all of His decrees and His knowledge of all things, every individual's record of deeds, divinely-prescribed laws (*kutub*; *kitāb Allāh*), God's revelatory guidance possessed by other communities (based on which they are called *ahl al-kitāb*), and any written document such as a contract or a letter. Sometime after the compilation and canonization of the Qur'ān as a standardized codex (*muṣḥaf*) in the mid-first/seventh century, the qur'ānic terms *al-kitāb* and *kitāb Allāh* became synonymous with the qur'ānic verses inscribed within the 'Uthmānic codex (*muṣḥaf*).⁷⁴ In other words, for developed Sunni and Twelver Shi'i Muslim exegesis and theology, *al-kitāb* and *kitāb Allāh* is *al-Qur'ān*, and *al-Qur'ān* is contained between the two covers of the *muṣḥaf* (*mā bayn al-daffatayn*).

⁷⁵ But these post-qur'ānic meanings of *kitāb* and *qur'ān* should surely not be taken for granted or read back into the Qur'ān given its original format as an open-ended oral proclamation unbounded by any codex. As Aziz Al-Azmeh rightly observes: "The vague, but nevertheless insistent, idea that the codex, an integrated and ideally complete literary artifact, is somehow the natural condition

⁷⁴ Graham, "The Earliest Meaning of 'Qur'ān'," 361-362. This issue will be addressed in Chapter 2.

⁷⁵ Various versions of *ḥadd al-Qur'ān* (the definition of the Qur'ān) from Sunni thinkers define *al-Kitāb* as *al-Qur'ān* in this way. See examples in Shady Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 79-87. From the second century onward, the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition further asserted that the complete *al-kitāb/al-Qur'ān* in the Arabic language pre-existed in a heavenly Guarded Tablet; that it was subsequently sent down to the nearest heaven "all at once" (*jumlatan wāḥidan*) on the Night of Power; and finally dictated piecemeal to Muhammad by Gabriel over the two decades of his prophetic mission. Several narrations from the Companions professing this belief are provided in Abū l-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. (Beirut: Mu'assasāt al-Risāla Nāshrūn, 2008), 93-94. We discuss the details of this belief in Chapter 2.

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of the Qur'ān rather than one of its possible forms of storage and distribution is an unnecessary assumption.”⁷⁶

The 255 instances of the word *kitāb*, occurring in various forms (singular, plural, definite, indefinite, partitive) throughout the Qur'ān, pose a challenge to any reader in terms of synthesizing the plurality of these *kitābs* into a coherent concept. The approach taken by Fiegenbaum, Crollius, and Madigan was to search for a “unitary” understanding of the broad qur'ānic usage of *kitāb* and *k-t-b* words. As Madigan puts it, “we either picture a heaven cluttered with books and records, or we search for a unitary concept of *kitāb* that can comprehend all these usages. The pattern of usage we have observed seems to imply that the *kitāb*, for all the complexities of its manifestation, is a unity.”⁷⁷

1.3.1 The Qur'ānic Rejection of Written Scripture

Taking stock of what the Qur'ān explicitly denies about its idea of *kitāb* is important and allows one to eliminate certain Qur'ānic Revelation models at the outset. The Qur'ān evidently speaks against the idea of Muhammad bringing down, directly from heaven, a pre-existent or finished written scripture that his audiences can read on material pages. It denies the request that the qur'ānic recitations in their entirety be revealed through Muhammad in a singular revelatory event, and even criticizes the Children of Israel for putting the *kitāb* of Moses into a written format.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Modelling the Paleo-Qur'ān: Declamations, Reiterations, Fragments and Collations,” in Asma Hilali and Stephen R. Burge (eds.), *The Making of Religious Texts in Islam: The Fragment and the Whole* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2019), 35-76, 38.

⁷⁷ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 171.

⁷⁸ All qur'ānic verses quoted in the dissertation are based on Arberry's translation from *The Koran Interpreted* (1955), as published on <http://al-quran.info/>. I have left certain terms untranslated and amended the translation in minor ways. Most of my changes consist of changing the words “thee/thy” to “you/your”.

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Had We sent down on you a *kitāb* on parchment (*kitābin fī qirṭāsīn*) and so they touched it with their hands, yet the unbelievers would have said, 'This is nothing but manifest sorcery.' (Q. 6:7)

The People of the *kitab* ask you to bring down upon them a *kitāb* from the heaven; and they had asked Moses for greater than that and said, 'Show us God openly.' And the thunderbolt took them for their evildoing. (Q. 4:153)

Those who disbelieve say, 'Why was the recitation (*al-qur'ān*) not sent down upon him all at once (*jumlatan wāḥīdatan*)?' Even so, that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and We have chanted it very distinctly. (Q. 25:32)

They measured not God with His true measure when they said, 'God has not sent down aught to any mortal.' Say: 'Who sent down the *kitāb* that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments (*qarāṭisa*), revealing them, and hiding much; and you were taught that which you knew not, you and your fathers.' (Q. 6:91)

The above verses demonstrate that the Qur'ān in its historical emergence and recitation by Muhammad was neither conceived by its author nor perceived by its immediate audience as a unitary written scripture that people could read for themselves. The verses echo requests by Muhammad's hostile audiences to deliver something written "on parchment" (*fī qirṭāsīn*) from heaven as a demonstration of his prophetic credentials. Commenting on these verses, Madigan observes that for Muhammad's first listeners, "the Qur'ān was not seen primarily in written, documentary terms; the Meccans felt it should be supplemented with something in writing."⁷⁹ Q. 6:91 distinguishes between the *kitāb* that God sent down to Moses and its written inscription on parchments (*qarāṭisa*), the latter being the work of Moses' followers, for which they are criticized since the written format allows them to conceal God's guidance. The demand for the Qur'ān to come "all at once" (*jumlatan wāḥīdatan*) in Q. 25:32 further shows that the Qur'ānic recitations were not perceived as parts of a premeditated scriptural canon that already existed in heaven; rather, they appeared as discrete and impromptu recitations occurring within and in response to circumstances. Commenting on the above verses along with Q. 6:154-157, Walid Saleh observes

⁷⁹ Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 55.

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that “the underlying argument is that the Qur’ān was not a book like the two others, nor should they expect one. It is thus clear that those whom the Qur’ān calls unbelievers had requested such a complete book.”⁸⁰

In response to these objections, the Qur’ān’s revelatory parameters were described and defended in the following verse:

We divided the *qur’ān* (recitation) in order that you (Muhammad) will recite it to the people as you live among them (*‘alā mukthin*) and We are indeed sending it down seriatim. (Q. 17:106)⁸¹

This verse, emphasizing that Muhammad continuously recites the *qur’āns* to his people on a piecemeal basis while he is physically present among them, presents a model of Qur’ānic Revelation that seems diametrically opposed to the idea of a community being given and subsequently guided by a finished and self-sufficient written scripture. The Qur’ān’s model of piecemeal historically contingent *qur’āns* entails an “open” format of recurring and evolving guidance that both responds to specific situations and interacts with its audiences; in other words, the Qur’ān as a dynamic revelatory event does not “behave” like a scripture at all. In contrast, a scripturalist model entails a one-time delivery of a closed scriptural canon to serve as a comprehensive and definite guidebook for any and all situations that may arise. If the Qur’ān as an oral and responsive phenomenon is akin to being guided and re-routed in real-time like Google Maps, then the static guidance of a finished scripture or “book” resembles the experience of using a printed map to reach one’s destination.

⁸⁰ Walid Saleh, “A Piecemeal Qur’ān: *furqān* and its meaning in classical Islam and modern Qur’anic studies,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 42 (2015): 31-71: 40.

⁸¹ As quoted in *ibid.*, 41.

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Despite its oral, incomplete, and *ad hoc* format, to which the Meccans and the *ahl al-kitāb* objected, the Qur'ān confidently asserts that Muhammad is reciting a *kitāb* to his people. This fact is well noted by Madigan: “Even though the Qur'ān claims the title *kitāb*, its authority and divine origin are somehow different from those of a physical, written heavenly document.”⁸² It follows from the above analysis that the idea of a completed scripture in writing or the notion of a singular revelatory event leading to a written scripture is certainly *not essential* to the Qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* and is perhaps even *excluded* by it. Madigan provides the following summary of the Qur'ānic attitude to *kitāb* based on the revelatory formats it rejects:

By using the term *kitāb*, the Qur'ān seems merely to have adopted the technical term for scripture used by the other religious communities with which Islam claims kinship. This in itself would be unremarkable. However, the Qur'ān also denies the value of a written format, even one originating in heaven. It certainly knows of physical writing from heaven, yet it sees no necessity for it, nor proof value in it. Furthermore, the Qur'ān refuses to behave as an already codified corpus (*jumla wāḥida*), making clear in its form as well as in its statements that it prefers to operate as the voice of divine address to the present situation.⁸³

There is little evidence in the Qur'ān and in early *ḥadīth* to suggest that Muhammad ever intended to compile the Qur'ānic recitations into a single definitive corpus and publish it for the community to use as a comprehensive scripture after his death. Graham observed that “until the codification of what has since served as the *textus receptus* – or at least until active revelation ceased with Muhammad's death – there could have been no use of *al-qur'ān* to refer to the complete body of ‘collected revelations in written form’.”⁸⁴ “The scraps of wood, leather and pottery, the bones and the bark on which the revelations were apparently written down,” Madigan observes, “seem to indicate that the Prophet did not have in mind producing the kind of scroll or

⁸² Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 55.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 76.

⁸⁴ Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qur'ān’,” 362.

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codex that was characteristic of Jewish and Christian use in other places.”⁸⁵ In his study of the canonization of the Qur'ān in the first century, Gregor Schoeler notes that it is “hardly conceivable that before his death the Prophet established a final edition of the revealed text, or that he constantly brought one version of it up to date...this would have been in complete contrast with the methods employed by ancient Arabic poets.”⁸⁶ The Qur'ān also lacks any instruction for the Prophet or his community to record the qur'ānic recitations as physical writing or collate them into a physical book. This is not to claim that the qur'ānic recitations were not transcribed at some point, perhaps even in Muhammad's lifetime; only that their being written and compiled into a corpus was not essential to their revelatory status and that there were no definitive measures taken in Muhammad's lifetime to produce a scriptural canon.

1.3.2 The Qur'ānic *Kitāb* as Genus of Divine Prescription and Decree

After establishing which meanings of *kitāb* are seemingly rejected by the Qur'ān, we are finally in the position to examine the positive range of meaning indicated by the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb*. Before analyzing the qur'ānic usage, it is helpful to note the scope of meaning present in Arabic words formed from the *k-t-b* root. According to the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, the Arabic word *kitāb* is from the Aramaic *katab*, meaning “to sew together” or “to put together.”⁸⁷ Likewise, the second/eighth-century Arabic dictionary *Kitāb al-'Ayn* of al-

⁸⁵ Madigan, “Book”, in McAuliffe (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

⁸⁶ Schoeler, “The Codification of the Qur'an,” 784.

⁸⁷ Jan Retso, “Aramaic/Syriac Loanwords,” in Lutz Edzard and Rudolf de Jong (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), BrillOnline Reference Works: <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-arabic-language-and-linguistics/aramaic-syriac->

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Farāhīdī (d. 170/786) defined *kataba* as “to sew something with a strap” (*kharaza al-shay' bi-sayr*) and *kitāb* as its *maṣḍar*.⁸⁸ According to the fourth/tenth-century Arabic dictionary *Maqāyīs al-Lughā* of Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004), the root-principle (*aṣl*) of *kataba* is “joining something to something else” (*jam 'shay ilā shay*). His entry references several usages of *kataba* and *kitāb/kutub* in the Qur'ān (Q. 2:183 – *kutiba 'alaykum al-ṣiyām*; Q. 98:2-3 – *yatlū ṣuhuf muṭahhara fīha kutub qayyima*) where he notes that *kitāb* means “obligation” (*farḍ*), “judgment” (*ḥukm*), and “upright laws” (*aḥkām mustaqīma*).⁸⁹ In more developed classical Arabic, the verb *kataba* (Form I) means “to write”, but also “to prescribe [something for ('alā) someone]”, “to ordain [something for ('alā) someone]”, “to make something obligatory” [for ('alā) someone]; “to conjoin [something to ('alā) something]”, “to bind [('alā) something/someone to something]”. *Kattaba* (Form II) can mean “to tie” or “to arrange” in the sense of “to prepare troops”. The word *kitāb* itself, as the *maṣḍar* (verbal noun) of *kataba*, can mean “a thing in which or on which one writes”, i.e. a book, but also has the meaning of “divine prescript, appointment, ordinance, judgment, sentence, decree.” The word *katība* means “a military troop”, “battalion”, or “a collected portion”.⁹⁰ Based on the earliest meanings of *kitāb* and various words in Arabic constructed from *k-t-b*, the overall meaning that emerges is that of “binding”, “ordering”, “prescribing”, or “arranging”, in addition to the reified and nominal meaning of “book”.

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⁸⁸ Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, Lisaan.net Classical Arabic Linguistic References, online version: <http://lisaan.net/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8/?book=5>.

⁸⁹ Ibn Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, Lisaan.net Classical Arabic Linguistic References, online version: <http://lisaan.net/%D9%83%D9%8E%D8%AA%D9%8E%D8%A8%D9%8E/?book=9>.

⁹⁰ These meanings are all found in the *k-t-b* entry of Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), online edition: <http://www.tyndalearchive.com/tabs/lane/>.

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In addition to the etymology of *kitāb*, it is equally important to take note of the image and meaning of “writing” in the context of Late Antique oral cultures. Unlike the modern situation where writing is a ubiquitous and routine medium of communication, writing in a pre-modern oral culture served to “fix” or “make permanent” certain words, deeds, or decrees. Crollius stresses that the primary function of writing in an oral culture was not communication but to manifest authority:

Writing served for recording and for fixing. By writing, facts and deeds were recorded, orders and laws were fixed, and thus rendered unalterable. Previously to thus being rendered immutable, the facts and deeds had already taken place, the words and orders were already expressed. Writing did not serve immediately for communication: its main purpose was to render indelible the record, to render irrevocable the law. And as the art of writing was the special trade of a few, the words “he wrote,” when said of somebody endowed with authority (a divinity, a king or a prophet), do not necessarily mean that this person wrote with his own hand. In writing, the idea of rendering immutable was predominant.⁹¹

Both the etymological and contextual meanings of *kitāb* convey the sense of “writing” in the sense of “binding”, “ordering”, “ordaining”, “making permanent”, and “stipulating” or “decreeing”. This range of semantic meaning, as we will see, is strongly reflected in the qur'ānic usage of *k-t-b* and *kitāb* word forms.

Fiegenbaum (1973), Crollius (1974), and Madigan (2001) independently analyzed various qur'ānic *k-t-b* words and reached similar conclusions.⁹² Having reperformed their analyses, I have synthesized their qur'ānic data on the verbal and noun forms of *kitāb* as follows:

Figure 1.3.2: *Kataba* and *Kitāb* in the Qur'ān

A. God's “Writing” (*kataba*) in the Qur'ān:

1. God records (*kataba*) all things that happen: 3:53, 3:181, 4:81, 5:83, 9:120-21, 10:21, 19:79, 21:94, 36:12, 43:19, 43:80.
2. God prescribes/establishes (*kataba*, *kutiba 'alā*) obligations for others: 2:178, 2:180, 2:183, 2:187, 2:216, 2:246, 4:66, 4:77, 4:127, 5:32, 5:45, 7:145, 57:27
3. God prescribes/establishes (*kataba*) for Himself: 6:12, 6:54

⁹¹ Crollius, *The Word in the Experience of Revelation*, 92.

⁹² For these analyses, see Fiegenbaum, “Prophethood from the Perspective of the Qur'ān,” 114-193; Crollius, *The Word in the Experience of Revelation*, 103-155; Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 107-124.

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4. God prescribes/establishes (*kataba*) punishments: 22:4, 59:3
5. God prescribes/establishes (*kataba*) rewards: 5:21, 7:156, 21:105
6. God decrees (*kataba*) the course of events: 3:145, 7:156, 8:69, 9:51, 13:38-39, 15:4, 30:56, 58:21-22

B. God's *Kitāb* in the Qur'ān:

1. The *kitāb* containing all divine knowledge, decrees, and historical events: 6:38, 6:59, 10:61, 11:6, 13:39, 17:58, 18:49, 20:52, 22:70, 23:62, 27:75, 34:3, 35:11, 39:69, 45:28-29, 50:4, 57:22, 78:29.
2. A person's *kitāb* of deeds: 17:13, 17:14, 17:71, 23:62, 45:28-29, 69:19, 69:25, 83:7, 83:9, 83:18, 83:20, 84:7, 84:10.
3. *Kitāb* as God's decree and prescription: 2:101, 3:23, 4:24, 4:103, 5:44, 8:75, 9:36, 13:38, 18:27, 30:56, 33:6, 98:3
4. *Kitāb* sent down or given to all Prophets / Messengers and their descendants: 2:213, 3:79, 3:184, 19:12, 19:30, 29:27, 35:25, 57:25-26
5. *Kitāb wa-l-ḥikma / ḥukm* given to all Prophets including Jesus and Muhammad: 2:129, 2:151, 2:231, 3:48, 3:79, 3:81, 3:164, 4:54, 4:105, 4:113, 5:48, 5:110, 6:89, 6:114, 45:16, 62:2
6. The *kitāb* sent down / given to Moses: 2:53, 2:87, 6:91, 6:154, 11:17, 11:110, 17:2, 23:49, 25:35, 28:43, 32:23, 37:117, 40:53, 41:45, 46:12
7. The *kitāb* sent down / inspired to Muhammad: 2:87-2:89, 2:176, 3:3, 3:7, 4:105, 4:127, 4:136, 4:140, 5:48, 6:114, 6:155, 7:196, 16:64, 16:89, 18:27, 21:10, 28:86, 29:45, 29:47, 29:48, 29:51, 35:31, 38:29, 39:23, 39:41, 42:15, 46:30
8. The *qur'āns* as a *kitāb* confirming the *kitāb* of Moses: 2:87-2:89, 6:91-6:92, 6:154-6:155-6:156-6:157, 11:17, 46:12, 46:30
9. The *kitāb* in *sūra* openings: 2:2, 7:2, 10:1, 11:1-3, 12:1, 13:1, 14:1, 15:1, 18:1, 26:2, 27:1, 28:2, 31:1-3, 32:1-2, 39:1-2, 40:2, 41:3, 43:2-4, 44:2, 45:2, 46:2, 52:2
10. *Kitāb* distinct from Arabic *qur'āns*: 10:37, 12:1-2, 15:1, 27:1, 41:3, 43:2-4, 56:77-80
11. *Kitāb / kutub* as object of faith: 2:85, 3:119, 2:177, 2:285, 4:136, 42:15, 66:12

“Writing” (*kataba*) with God as the subject is an active process of “divine writing” where God is “recording” whatever occurs (A1), “decreeing” the course of events (A6), “prescribing” or “establishing” rules of conduct and obligations on Himself and others (A2-A3), and “decreeing” reward and punishments (A4-A5). The meaning that emerges from the Qur'ān's usage of the *k-t-b* verb has clearly to do with God's knowledge, decree, and prescription. As for the word *kitāb*, if we temporarily put aside the mentions of God's revelatory *kitāb* given to Prophets, the Qur'ān uses *kitāb* for God's record of deeds (B1-B2) and God's decrees concerning human beings (B3). In such cases, the words *kitāb* and *kitāb Allāh* plainly mean God's decree, law, prescription, or order

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(Q. 4:24, 8:75, 9:36, 30:56, 33:6, 98:3).⁹³ For example, Q. 4:24 caps a series of verses legislating the types of women whom the believing men cannot marry: “And prohibited to you are all married women except those your right hand possesses. [This is] the *kitāb Allāh* upon you.” Q. 9:36 states that “the number of months with God is twelve months in the *kitāb Allāh* the day He created the heavens and the earth.” There are also places in the pre-Islamic poems of Labīd and the Hudayl tribe where *kitāb* is used in the sense of *qaḍā'* (decree, ordaining) – a usage that also appears in Qur'ān 3:145 and 15:4 where *kitāb* refers to God's decree ordaining death and destruction.⁹⁴ Based on its etymology, pre-Islamic, and qur'ānic usages, the meaning of *kitāb* is most fundamentally “divine prescription” and “divine decree” whereas there is no instance in the Qur'ān where God physically composes a material earthly book.

Based on his data, Fiegenbaum concluded that “the most important facet of the meaning of the words in the Qur'ān drawn from the *k-t-b* root has to do with putting into force or making effective God's will. Thus for something to be *k-t-b* is equivalent to its being enacted by the Divine Power.”⁹⁵ Along the same lines, Madigan's conclusion was that *kitāb* – both its verbal form (*kataba*) and in terms of its wider semantic field constructed by the terms used alongside it – functions throughout the Qur'ān as a symbol of God's authority, decree, and knowledge. God granting *kitāb* to a community through His prophet means disclosing and manifesting His authority and inviting them to His guidance in a responsive, ongoing, and dynamic manner. One can express the conclusions of Fiegenbaum, Crollius, and Madigan by conceptually rendering the qur'ānic

⁹³ As an experiment, one may compare side-by-side translations of these verses where *kitāb Allāh* is translated as “scripture of God” and “decree of God” respectively. The second translation presents a much more consistent meaning across all these verses.

⁹⁴ Fiegenbaum, “Prophethood”, 139-140.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

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sense of *kitāb* into English as “divine writing” in the sense of “divine prescription” as opposed to “book” or “scripture”. In addition, the translation of “writing” for *kitāb* is more faithful to its etymology than “book” or “scripture” because it conveys the idea of an ongoing process whereas a “book” is a final and completed entity. As Derrida has remarked, “the idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing.”⁹⁶

When *kitāb* is understood to mean “divine prescription (writing)”, many of the seemingly disparate Qur'ānic usages of the term *kitāb* for revelation become more coherent. For example, numerous verses (B4-B5) state that all Prophets and Messengers including Abraham's chosen progeny, Jesus, and Muhammad were given *kitāb* and *kitāb wa-l-ḥikma/hukm* by God. Madigan has shown that the phrase *kitāb wa-l-ḥikma* based on its frequent Qur'ānic usage refers to one entity as opposed to two different objects (the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunna) as later Sunni thinkers would argue.⁹⁷ If *al-kitāb* simply means “the scripture” or “the book” in the sense of a physical corpus, then the Qur'ān is saying that every Prophet and Messenger delivered the same scriptural corpus to their people. This reading, however, fails to cohere with the fact that the Qur'ān was not a finished physical scripture during its revelatory phase; it also does not square with the instances where a divinely revealed law is called *kitāb* or “prescribed” (*kutiba*) for the community. However, if *kitāb* means divine prescription or decree in the generic sense and refers to everything that shares in the genus of “God's writing” *qua* prescription, then it makes perfect sense for the Qur'ān to say that all Prophets and some of their descendants were given *kitāb*. Thus, the *kitāb* of Moses, the

⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), 19. This reference was brought to my attention when reading Linda Lee Kern's Ph.D. Thesis, as referenced and quoted in Chapter 2.

⁹⁷ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 93-96. See our Chapter 4 for a discussion of the revelatory status of the Prophetic Sunna.

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Qur'ān, and particular laws (see Q. 98:3) are called *kitāb/kutub* because they manifest God's authority – not because they constitute written scriptural canons. Likewise, the term *ahl al-kitāb* refers to communities who have been recipients of divinely decreed guidance as a result of which they partake in a relationship with God characterized by obedience to and faith in His *kitāb* – regardless of whether they possess it as a written canon.

Both Madigan and Fiegenbaum stress how reading *kitāb* as “book” or “scripture” in the Qur'ānic context is inaccurate and misleading. Fiegenbaum concluded that “to understand *kitāb* on the level of Book or Scripture is to distort and seriously reduce its potential meaning as used in the Qur'ān. It is to impair the transparent quality of the word *kitāb*.”⁹⁸ Madigan went further and concluded that the Qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* is even opposed to the notion of a scriptural totality:

Taken all together, what the Qur'ān says of the *kitāb* points not to a circumscribed corpus of liturgy, dogma, and law that can be duplicated and parceled out for each group, but to an open-ended process of divine engagement with humanity in its concrete history. That is the reason that the Qur'ān's *kitāb* remains ever-present yet still elusive.... The elusiveness of *kitāb* is also the reason why it cannot be translated as 'book'. A book lays claim to a certain fixity and completeness; it has no trouble being delivered *jumlatan wāḥidatan*, since it is a completed whole. The too-easy option of the understanding of *kitāb* as 'book' is precisely what opens the way to fundamentalism, which identified the limits of God's *kitāb* with the boundaries of the received text. The Qur'ān, as we have seen, rejects such a possibility by holding itself above canons and limits.⁹⁹

The above analyses informed by prior studies reveals that *kitāb* in the Qur'ān functions as the *genus* of divine writing/prescription/decreed rather than a concrete object such as a book or scriptural canon. Anything that is manifesting or enacted by God's authority and knowledge belongs to the “*kitāb* genus” – whether it be divinely revealed guidance brought by the Prophets, a legal injunction, a divine order, God's celestial register of decrees, a person's book of deeds, the teachings of the Prophets, or the Arabic *qur'āns*. Thus, Qur'ānic Revelation does not entail the

⁹⁸ Fiegenbaum, “Prophethood,” 153.

⁹⁹ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 178.

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delivery of a tangible book of scripture. As Madigan explains: “The Qur'ān does not present the *kitāb* as a closed and definable corpus of text, but rather as an ongoing relationship of guidance.... When the Qur'ān speaks of itself as *kitāb*, it seems to be talking not about the form in which it is sent down but rather about the authority it carries as a manifestation of the knowledge and command of God.”¹⁰⁰

1.4 The Hierarchy of *Kitāb*: Transcendent *Kitāb* and Arabic *qur'āns*

Madigan, Crollius, and Fiegenbaum each employed a synchronic approach to their analysis of semantic meaning in the Qur'ān. Their findings present the semantic meaning of *kitāb* at a single point in time in the qur'ānic text post-compilation, but do not account for the historical development of the qur'ānic usage of *kitāb*. A diachronic analysis of how the Qur'ān as a progressive and shifting discourse uses the term *kitāb* to define itself before specific audiences was performed by Nicolai Sinai in 2006. His findings, which were later complemented by two studies of Neuwirth, contribute key insights to the qur'ānic view of revelation and his arguments are taken up below.

1.4.1 The Transcendent *Kitāb* as the Revelatory Principle

Sinai focuses on how the Qur'ān presents, frames, and defines its recitations amidst the objections and feedback of its various listeners. Basing his analysis on the qur'ānic chronology of Theodor Nöldeke (with minor modifications), Sinai first noted that the earliest *sūras* (Q. 93, 94, 105, 106, 108) do not seem to contain any direct reference to the divine author of the qur'ānic recitations. It

¹⁰⁰ Madigan, “Book.” In *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

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is only in the context of answering various objections to Muhammad's message that the *qur'āns* begin to define themselves, meta-textually, as God's sending down (*tanzīl*).¹⁰¹ "Qur'ānic self-referentiality must accordingly be understood as gradually emerging from a process of discussion with an audience, the expectations and convictions of which had to be convincingly addressed."¹⁰² In this context of both defending and defining itself in the face of opposition from its immediate audience, the Qur'ān began to evoke the idea of *kitāb* by drawing on the word for scripture used by contemporary Jews and Christians. Rather than defining themselves as a written scripture (which they are not), the Arabic *qur'āns* self-presented as a "sending down" (*tanzīl*) from a celestial, heavenly, or transcendent *kitāb*.¹⁰³

Sinai believes that the Qur'ān takes this position to invest Muhammad's recitations with an indirect participation in scripturality without conforming to the Jewish and Christian expectations of scriptural canons. In the Meccan *sūras*, Q. 80:11-16 speaks of the qur'ānic recitations "in honorable pages, exalted and purified" (*fī suḥūf mukarama marfū'a muṭahhara*) in the hands of angels (*safara*); Q. 85:21-22 states that the recitation is in a "guarded tablet"; 56:77-80 speaks of "a noble *qur'ān* in a hidden *kitāb* that only the purified (*al-muṭahharīn*) [may] touch". In all three cases, the Arabic *qur'āns* are depicted as issuing from an inaccessible celestial *kitāb* to

¹⁰¹ Sinai, "Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality," 105-109.

¹⁰² Ibid., 111.

¹⁰³ The first Orientalist scholar to posit the idea of a transcendent or archetypal *kitāb* was the Austrian Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893). In his view, the qur'ānic *kitāb* always refers to the heavenly *kitāb* and this stems from Jewish-Christian influence. Accordingly, the heavenly *kitāb* designates revelation and not physical scripture; every prophet perceives this *kitāb* through "divine illumination" and the specific contents brought by each Prophet are "adapted to temporal circumstances" while the essence of all revelation is the same. At the same time, he affirms that Moses, John, Jesus and Muhammad had comprehensive access to *al-kitāb*. Similar interpretations were offered by Hubert Grimme, Theodor Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally, Johannes Pederson, and Joseph Horowitz. Their ideas are summarized in Goudarzi, "The Second Coming of the Book," 56-77. Sinai's proposal, which is adopted by the present study, goes further than these prior studies in clearly specifying the relationship between the transcendent/archetypal *kitāb* and the earthly *qur'āns* or earthly *kitāb*.

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which only those purified by God (presumably the angels) have access. In Sinai's view, "Q 56, Q 80, and Q 85 posit a transcendent source document, participation in which is supposed to invest Muḥammad's recitations with a mediated kind of scripturality.... Yet contrary to audience expectations, the *kitāb* is placed out of human reach, and is said to be accessible only in the shape of the oral recitations delivered to Muḥammad."¹⁰⁴

This notion – that the Arabic *qur'āns* are expressions of a celestial or "Transcendent Kitāb" – is fundamental to the qur'ānic concept of revelation. As I will show below, this idea finds confirmation through three important features of the Qur'ān's discourse on the terms *kitāb* and *qur'ān*. The first feature is that the Qur'ān uses the same key term, *kitāb mubīn*, when speaking about God's comprehensive *kitāb* that contains His knowledge, decrees, and records of cosmic history and when referring to God's revelatory *kitāb* that manifests to humanity in the form of Arabic *qur'ān*. The second feature is a persistent distinction found throughout the Qur'ān between the terms *kitāb* and *qur'ān* – necessitating that *kitāb* and *qur'ān* (even the sum of all the *qur'āns*) are not intensionally identical, even if they extensionally overlap. The third feature is that the Qur'ān explicitly defines the Arabic *qur'āns* as a *tafṣīl* (adaptation, specification) of the Transcendent Kitāb.

On the first point, Sinai argues that the celestial *kitāb* of revelation and the heavenly *kitāb* of God's decrees and records are one and the same, in contrast to earlier scholars who posited them as separate.¹⁰⁵ Numerous qur'ānic verses across the Meccan and Medinan periods describe a special celestial *kitāb* with God that contains the entirety of divine decrees, knowledge, and cosmic

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 115.

¹⁰⁵ Sinai, "Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality," 118.

Revelation in Islam: Qur'ānic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives

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history (6:38, 6:59, 10:61, 11:6, 13:39, 17:58, 18:49, 20:52, 22:70, 23:62, 27:75, 34:3, 35:11, 39:69, 45:28-29, 50:4, 57:22, 78:2) such as the following:

Did you not know that God knows all that is in the heaven and earth? Surely that is in a *kitāb*; surely that for God is easy. (Q. 22:70)

No affliction befalls in earth or in yourselves, but it is in a *kitāb*, before We create it; that is easy for God. (Q. 57:22)

With Him are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them but He. He knows what is in land and sea; Not a leaf falls but that He knows it. Not a grain in the earth's shadows, not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is in a clear *kitāb* (*kitābin mubīn*). (Q. 6:59)

One of the most frequent designations for God's comprehensive *kitāb* encompassing virtually all things is *kitāb mubīn* (Q. 6:59, 10:61, 11:6, 34:3, 27:75). This same *kitāb mubīn* features prominently in Meccan *sūra* openings that introduce Muhammad's Arabic recitations. Several Middle Meccan *sūras* consist of revelatory announcements that center on the terms *kitāb mubīn* and *qur'ān*.¹⁰⁶ Many of these *sūra* openings refer to the signs of a materially absent *kitāb mubīn*:

Alif Lām Rā'. Those are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitābi l-mubīni*). We have sent it down as an Arabic *qur'ān*; haply you will understand. (Q. 12:1-3)

Alif Lām Rā'. Those are the signs of the *kitāb* and a clear *qur'ān* (*qurānin mubīn*). (Q. 15:1)

Ṭā' Sīn Mīm. Those are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitābi l-mubīni*). (Q. 26:1-2)

Ṭā' Sīn. Those are the signs of the *qur'ān* and a clear *kitāb* (*kitābin mubīn*). (Q. 27:1)

Ṭā' Sīn Mīm. Those are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitābi l-mubīni*). (Q. 28:1-2)

Ḥā' Mīm. By the clear *kitāb* (*wa l-kitābi l-mubīni*). Behold We have made it an Arabic *qur'ān*; haply you will understand. And behold it is in the *umm al-kitāb* with Us, sublime indeed, wise. (Q. 43:1-4)

Ḥā' Mīm. By the clear *kitāb* (*wa l-kitābi l-mubīni*). We sent it down in a blessed night. We are ever-warning. (Q. 44:1-3)

¹⁰⁶ The *Ḥawāmīm sūras* are analyzed intertextually in Islam Dayeh, "Al-Ḥawāmīm: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Surahs," in Neuwirth et al. (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context*, 461-498. However, Dayeh does not explore the concept of revelation or the nature of the *kitāb* mentioned in the beginning of these *sūras*.

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These qur'ānic *sūra* announcements (Q. 12, 15, 26, 27, 28) refer to the “signs of a/the clear *kitāb*” with the remote demonstrative pronoun *tilka* as opposed to the proximate *hādhihi*, suggesting that this *kitāb mubīn* and its signs are something absent and not immediately present to the audience of the Arabic *qur'āns*.¹⁰⁷ These cases all resemble the phrase *dhālika l-kitāb* (“that is the *kitāb*”) found in Q. 2:2, which has caused much confusion among Qur'ān commentators as to what “that *kitāb*”, as opposed to “this *kitāb*”, truly refers to. The openings of *sūras* 12, 43, and 44 state that this very same *kitāb mubīn* has been “sent down” in the form of *qur'āns*.

Madigan makes a very important observation concerning the qur'ānic phrasing in the above quoted *sūra* proclamations.¹⁰⁸ He argues that the “signs” (*āyāt*) of the/a clear *kitāb*” mentioned in these proclamations (e.g. “*tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn*”) are not the actual verses of the Arabic *qur'āns* but refer to God's signs and decrees in the cosmos and in history. The qur'ānic recitations of the Prophet effectively describe “those signs” of the *kitāb* in the Arabic language for his community:

[T]he Qur'ān's speaking voice, its speaking self, very often seems to be referring not simply to itself but rather beyond itself. Just as in the case of *kitāb* the text uses *dhālika*, so too with *āyāt* it uses the remote demonstrative *tilka* eleven times, eight of them at the beginning of a *sūra* in a formal statement involving standard elements: mysterious letters, mention of “the *kitāb*” or “a *kitāb*” (on two occasions also “a *Qur'ān*” or “the *Qur'ān*”) and the adjectives *mubīn* or *ḥakīm*. The other three uses are also formulaic: *tilka āyāt allāh natlūhā 'alayka*... The question remains, however, whether the *āyāt* were understood as the words or verses that followed (or in some cases preceded) the formulaic statement or whether the *āyāt* are the divine actions and engagements which the verses recount, and to which they bear witness. Perhaps that is the strength of the remote demonstrative *tilka*: the verses that follow are about *those* signs of God which in nature, history and prophetic engagement reveal God's authoritative and omniscient decree (*kitāb*). These signs have now been recounted to and interpreted for the Arabs in their own language (*Qur'ānan 'arabiyyan*) and they in turn are called upon repeatedly to recite them so that they may reflect on them and so live with God

¹⁰⁷ In other *sūra* openings, the same *kitāb* is mentioned. See Q. 10:1 – “Those are the signs of the wise *kitāb*”; 13:1 – “Those are the signs of the *kitāb*”; 14:1 – “A *kitāb* which We have sent down to you.”

¹⁰⁸ Daniel A. Madigan, “The Limits of Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān,” in Stefan Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 2006), 59-70.

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as their guide. It is important to take the *tilka* seriously. Simply to reduce it to *hādhihi* is to fail to see that the verse is referring to something beyond itself, indeed beyond the text.¹⁰⁹

If the *kitāb mubīn* is the realm of God's knowledge, records, and decrees (as numerous qur'ānic verses show), then "those signs of the *kitāb mubīn*" must be something absent from the audience hearing the *qur'āns* – thus the pronoun *tilka/dhālika* instead of *hādhihi/hādhā*. The *kitāb mubīn* mentioned in the *sūra* proclamations (Q. 12, 15, 26, 27, 28) is the very same *kitāb mubīn* said to be "sent down" or "made" into an Arabic *qur'ān* (Q. 43, 44). Thus, a plain reading of the various *kitāb mubīn* passages in the Qur'ān reveals that God's comprehensive *kitāb* of divine knowledge, records, and decrees is identical to God's revelatory *kitāb* whose signs (*āyāt*) are recited as an Arabic *qur'ān*.

In sum, there is one celestial divine writing or "Transcendent Kitāb" – variously called *lawḥ mahfūz* (85:21-22), *kitāb makhnūn* (56:77-80), *kitāb mubīn* (6:59, 10:61, 11:6, 12:1-3, 26:1-3, 27:1, 27:75, 28:1-2, 34:3, 43:1-4, 44:1-3), *kitāb ḥakīm* (10:1), *umm al-kitāb* (13:39, 43:4) and often just *kitāb* (6:38, 18:49, 20:52, 22:70, 23:62, 35:11, 39:6, 45:28-29, 57:22, 78:29).¹¹⁰ This Transcendent Kitāb is what I have previously referred to as the Revelatory Principle – the ontological and archetypal source of Qur'ānic Revelation and all prophetic guidance. On this point, Crollius describes the Transcendent Kitāb as a "Scripture-realm", simultaneously containing all of God's knowledge and constituting the source of revelation:

The Scripture belongs to that realm where no change is possible, where God's decisions exist before they are realized, where His knowledge embraces the beings before they exist, and where what is done or said on earth is conserved till the Last Day. What is revealed to the Prophet of Islām, and to those before him, "from with God," likewise exists with God "in a Scripture." This "Scripture-

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 63. For the idea of the Signs of God in the Qur'ān in general, see William A. Graham, "The Qur'ān as a Discourse of Signs," in Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Scheffeld (eds.), *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s 70th Birthday* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 263-275.

¹¹⁰ Sinai, "Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality," 119.

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realm” is the “source” of revelation. In this sense the expression *Umm al-kitāb* has to be understood.¹¹¹

The Transcendent Kitāb of God’s knowledge, records, and decrees remains carefully distinguished from the Arabic *qur’āns* uttered by Muhammad within the discourse of the Qur’ān. While the qur’ānic recitations are also called a *kitāb* (divine writing) in their own right (a point on which we will comment later), these Arabic *qur’āns* remain distinct from the Transcendent Kitāb from which they emanate and to which they provide their audience with partial access. Madigan observes that “the Qur’ān maintains a distance between itself and the *kitāb* by referring to it in the third person: it gives so much of its attention to observing, proclaiming, defending, and defining the *kitāb* that it can scarcely be considered identical to it.”¹¹² Sinai’s comments on the *kitāb-qur’ān* distinction are also instructive:

Contrary to traditional Islamic identification of both terms, in some middle and late Meccan texts, *kitāb* and *qur’ān* are actually kept carefully distinct... Even though *qur’ān* from a certain stage on can refer to the corpus of recitations that have so far been revealed – a corpus, though, that has not yet reached closure –, it frequently specifies merely the characteristic mode of display in which *al-kitāb* is being delivered unto and by Muḥammad... Thus, whereas *al-kitāb* evokes a celestial mode of storage – i.e. writing –, *qur’ān* points to an earthly mode of display... The heavenly *kitāb* is, as it were, ‘unpacked’ in the form of an Arabic recitation, rather than having been composed in Arabic from eternity on.¹¹³

It should be noted at this juncture that the Transcendent Kitāb, being carefully differentiated from the Arabic *qur’āns*, cannot be conceived as a literal textual transcript of the Arabic *qur’āns* in heaven, as maintained in the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition.¹¹⁴ There is an ontological gap between the Transcendent Kitāb and the oral *qur’āns*, which is bridged in a revelatory process through which

¹¹¹ Crollius, *The Word in the Experience of Revelation*, 141.

¹¹² Madigan, *The Qur’an’s Self-Image*, 181.

¹¹³ Sinai, “Qur’ānic Self-Referentiality,” 120-121.

¹¹⁴ This subject is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

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the contents of the former are “Arabized” into something Muhammad’s audience can understand.¹¹⁵

1.4.2 The Arabic *qur'āns* as Adaptations (*tafṣīl*) of the Transcendent *Kitāb*

The manifestation of the Arabic *qur'āns* from the Transcendent *Kitāb* is not simply a matter of “transporting” or “transcribing” a physical text from one place to another. For this reason, it is important to focus on what the *Qur'ān* has to say about the revelatory process – *how* the Transcendent *Kitāb* is displayed in and through the Arabic *qur'āns*. Several of the revelatory proclamations that begin the Middle Meccan *sūras* speak to this issue:

Alif Lām Rā'. Those are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitābi l-mubīni*). We have sent it down (*anzalnāhu*) as an Arabic *qur'ān*; haply you will understand. (Q 12:1-3)

Ḥā'. Mīm. A sending down (*tanzīl*) from the Merciful, the Compassionate. A *kitāb* whose signs have been distinguished (*fuṣṣilat*) as an Arabic *qur'ān* for a people having knowledge. (Q. 41:1-3)

Ḥā' Mīm. By the clear *kitāb* (*wa l-kitābi l-mubīni*). Behold We have made it (*ja'alnāhu*) an Arabic *qur'ān*; haply you will understand. And behold it is in the *Umm al-Kitāb* with Us, sublime indeed, wise. (Q. 43:1-4)

The process by which the Transcendent *Kitāb* (*kitāb mubīn*) is manifested as an earthly Arabic *qur'ān* is variously described by the verbs *tanzīl*, *inzāl*, *ja'l*, and *tafṣīl*. While the first three verbs have broad *qur'ānic* usage and describe the descent of many things like rain, manna, and iron (*tanzīl* and *inzāl* are examined in detail below), *tafṣīl* is noteworthy because it offers a precise characterization of how the Transcendent *Kitāb* is communicated to an earthly audience. Both Sinai and Neuwirth focus on the verb *tafṣīl* as defining the relationship between the Transcendent *Kitāb* and the earthly *qur'āns*: “In a number of passages from Mecca II and III, then, *kitāb* and

¹¹⁵ My argument concerning the distinction and non-identity between *kitāb* and *qur'ān* also finds confirmation in the linguistic analysis of Jan Retso, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London, New York: Routledge, 2003), 40-47.

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qur'ān are clearly distinguished, the transformation process leading from one entity to the other being labelled as *tafṣīl*.¹¹⁶ As we will see, *tafṣīl* in the qur'ānic context of revelation is best rendered into English as “adaptation”. In several verses, the *qur'āns* recited by Muhammad are portrayed as a *tafṣīl* or *mufaṣṣal* of the Transcendent *Kitāb*:

Alif. Lām. Rā. A *kitāb* whose signs are made decreed, then adapted (*fussilat*) from Him Who is Wise and Aware. (Q. 11:1)¹¹⁷

Ḥā. Mīm. A sending down (*tanzīl*) from the Infinitely-Merciful, the Compassionate. A *kitāb* whose signs have been adapted (*fussilat*) (as) an Arabic *qur'ān* (recitation) for a people who know. (Qur'an 41:1-3)

What, shall I seek after any judge but God? For it is He who sent down to you the *kitāb* well-adapted (*mufaṣsal*). (Q. 6:114)

And We have brought to them a *kitāb* that We have adapted (*fassalnāhu*), resting on knowledge, a guidance and a mercy unto a people that believe. (Q. 7:52)

If We had made it a non-Arabic *qur'ān*, they would have said, ‘Why are its signs not adapted (*fussilat*)?’ What, a non-arabic (recitation) and Arab (messenger)?’ (Q. 41:44)

This *qur'ān* could not have been forged apart from God; but it is a confirmation of what is before it, and an adaptation (*tafṣīl*) of the *kitāb*, wherein is no doubt, from the Lord of all Being. (Q. 10:37)

In their stories is surely a lesson to men possessed of minds; it is not a tale forged, but a confirmation of what is before it, and an adaptation (*tafṣīl*) of every thing, and a guidance, and a mercy to a people who believe. (Q. 12:111)

The above verses all state that the Transcendent *Kitāb* has undergone a process called *tafṣīl* in order to take physical form as the Arabic recitations spoken by Muhammad. Whenever God performs *tafṣīl* in general (Q 6:97-98, 6:119, 6:126, 7:32, 7:52 etc.), it is accomplished for the sake of (*li-*) some audience (Q. 6:97 – *qad faṣṣalnā al-āyāti li-qawmin ya lamūna*). With respect to the Transcendent *Kitāb*, Q. 10:37 specifies that the Arabic *qur'ān* is precisely a “*tafṣīl* of the *kitāb* wherein is no doubt”, which is also “that *kitāb*” of Q. 2:2. Q. 6:114 describes the Arabic *qur'āns*

¹¹⁶ Sinai, “Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality,” 121.

¹¹⁷ I follow the Arberry translation for these verses, but I have translated *faṣṣala* as “adapt” based on its meaning as explained below.

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as “a *kitāb* well-adapted” (*mufaṣṣal*); Q. 41:1-3 states that the signs of the Transcendent Kitāb were “adapted (*fuṣṣilat*) as an Arabic *qur'ān*”. All of *Sūra* 12 is defined as “an adaptation (*tafṣīl*) of all things” (Q. 12:111), where “all things” describe the contents of the Transcendent Kitāb; Q. 41:44 confirms that the *qur'āns* are “adapted” (*fuṣṣilat*) into Arabic for the sake of their Arabic-speaking audience. This means that the Transcendent Kitāb is not originally in Arabic; it was only revealed in this language for the audience’s sake as argued by Dayeh: “The Qur’an therefore makes a clearly conscious and courageous preference for a comprehensible language which the audience will comprehend, over a scriptural language whose only virtue is its antiquity. Furthermore, the passages hint at a theory of divine communication that is essentially pragmatic.”¹¹⁸

Thus, *tafṣīl* is a process that expresses and renders the Transcendent Kitāb into discourse whose formal content is intelligible and tailored for an audience. Sinai therefore concludes that “a *tafṣīl* of something, it seems, must always target a specific audience in a specific situation.”¹¹⁹ He further notes how in the Qur’ān such a *tafṣīl* takes the form of “an *ad hominem* address tailored to

¹¹⁸ Dayeh’s remarks on the Qur’ān’s constant defense of being a *qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan* concur with the claims of Sinai and Neuwirth that the *qur’āns* being in Arabic are a result of being “adapted” (*mufaṣṣal*) to the needs of their audience. Dayeh, “Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Surahs,” 479-480: “What can be gleaned from these passages dealing with the Arabic nature of the text, I would suggest, is that there might have been a query, or even a challenge posed to the language of this revelation. This query could have sounded like this: if the Prophet claims that this revelation is from the same source of earlier revelations, then why was his revelation not revealed in one of the languages of these earlier revelations (e.g. Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, etc.)? This challenge could have come from a pagan, a Jew, a Christian, or from all of them. The issue at stake here is the integrity of the linguistic medium itself, the Arabic language. Why an Arabic revelation? The Qur’anic response recurs throughout the corpus: *bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīn, qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan ghayr dhī ‘iwajin, qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan la-‘allakum ta‘qilūn, al-kitāb al-mubīn, allāhu anzala aḥsana l-ḥadīth, and wa-hādihā kitābun muṣaḍḍiqun lisānan ‘arabiyyan li-yundhira alladhīna ḡalamū wa-bushrā li-l-muḥsinīn*. In plain words: a clear and comprehensible language so that the audience may understand its message. The Qur’an therefore makes a clearly conscious and courageous preference for a comprehensible language which the audience will comprehend, over a scriptural language whose only virtue is its antiquity. Furthermore, the passages hint at a theory of divine communication that is essentially pragmatic: *qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan litundhira umma l-qurā wa-man ḥawlahā*.”

¹¹⁹ Sinai, “Qur’ānic Self-Referentiality,” 121.

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a particular communicative context.”¹²⁰ Saleh argues that *tafṣīl* involves “dividing” the *kitāb* into piecemeal recitations so as to convey divine guidance in the most effective manner.¹²¹ In actual practice, Neuwirth observes that *tafṣīl* takes the form of paraphrases or commentaries of the Transcendent Kitāb as opposed to literally conveying its contents. These paraphrases are adapted to the needs of the audience, thus facilitating their guidance:

Tafṣīl, thus, implies a kind of paraphrase from the *kitāb* adapted to the listeners' scope; one might speak of a *targum* of the celestial text... This observation equally throws light on the fact – often perceived as vexing – that in the Qur'ān individual stories are told more than once and presented in different versions: these in the light of the hermeneutics of *tafṣīl* are to be considered as subsequent renderings of a particular *kitāb* periscope, repeatedly re-phrased and adapted to the changing communal situation.¹²²

Situating the Arabic *qur'āns* as the *tafṣīl* or contextual adaptations of the Transcendent Kitāb and its signs does not simply mean that the latter is translated into Arabic. This is because, firstly, the Transcendent Kitāb in the Qur'ān is not presented as a text in any human language, but rather, as a celestial domain of God's decrees and knowledge far removed from human perception; secondly, the Qur'ān tends to retell the same story multiple times in different situations, often in response to the assumptions, knowledge, objections, and questions of its interlocutors.¹²³

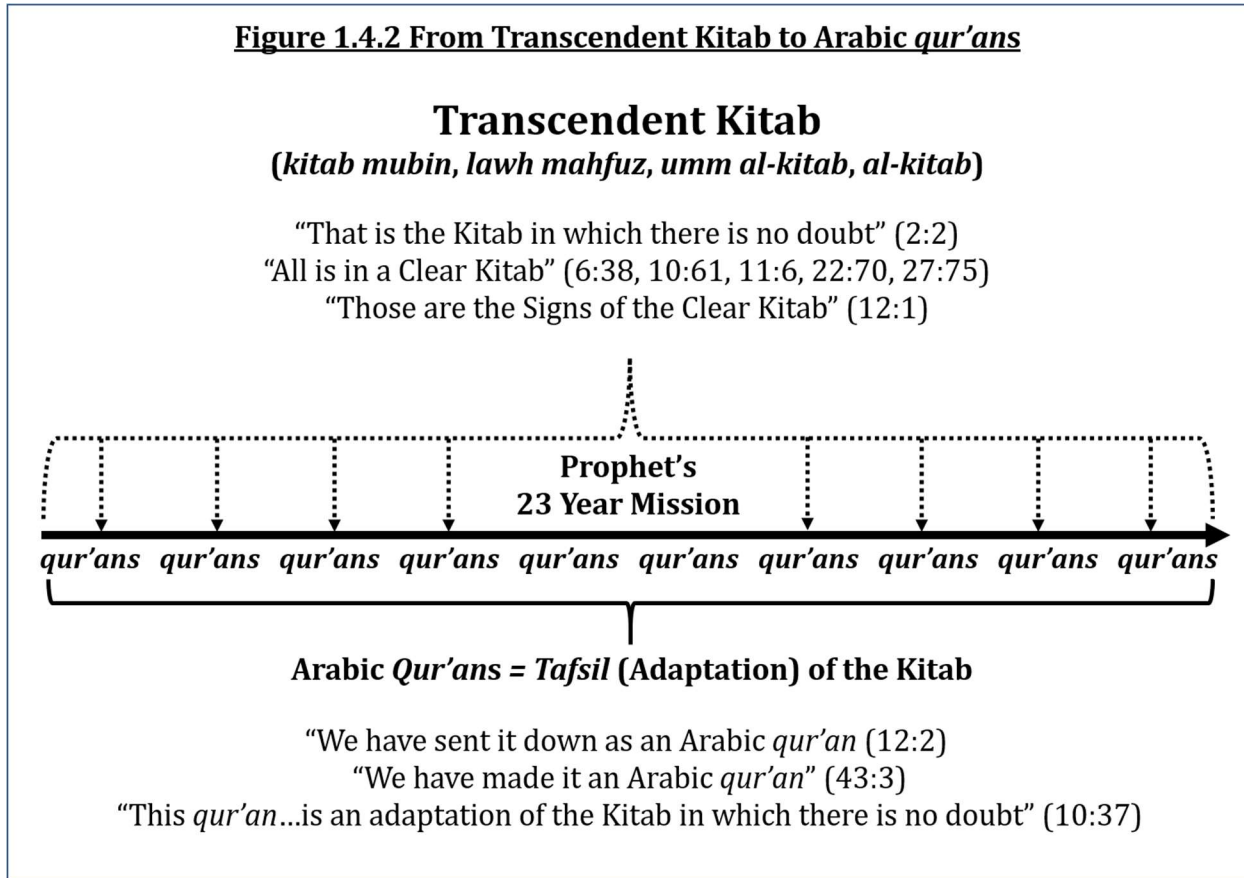
¹²⁰ Ibid., 122.

¹²¹ Saleh, “A Piecemeal Qur'ān,” 47.

¹²² Neuwirth, “The Discovery of Writing,” 24.

¹²³ The issue of repeating different versions of the same story is explored in Joseph Witzum, “Variant Traditions, Relative Chronology and the Study of Intra-Quranic Parallels,” in Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, Robert G. Hoyland, Adam Silverstein (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honour of Patricia Crone* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014), 1-50.

Figure 1.4.2 From Transcendent Kitāb to Arabic *qur'ans*



The analyses of Sinai, Saleh, and Neuwirth collectively show that *tafsīl* entails adaptively communicating the Transcendent Kitāb to a situated audience by means of *ad hominem* commentary and paraphrases in a piecemeal format – thereby taking the form of oral *qur'āns* for Muhammad's audiences (see Figure 1.4.2). Although the Arabic *qur'āns* remain formally and ontologically distinct from the Transcendent Kitāb, the Qur'ān refers to the open-ended series of Arabic *qur'āns* as “a *kitāb*” in some sense. This most often occurs in verses that present the Arabic *qur'āns* as a *kitāb* “confirming” (*muṣaddiq*) the *kitāb* of Moses (Q. 2:87-2:89, 6:91-92, 6:154-57, 46:12, 46:30). The Qur'ān, therefore, registers specific adaptations (*tafsīl*) of the Transcendent Kitāb, such as the *kitāb* given to Moses and the piecemeal *qur'āns* recited by Muhammad, as a *kitāb* in the sense of being an instantiation of the Transcendent Kitāb. Thus, the *kitāb* of Moses is

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called a “*tafṣīl* for all things” (Q. 6:154, 7:145) just as the *qur'āns* are called a “*tafṣīl* of all things” (Q. 12:111). Sinai frames it best when he proposes that the earthly *qur'āns* or the *kitāb* of Moses, as a *tafṣīl* of the Transcendent Kitāb, inherit some of the “*kitāb-ness*” of the latter and form a *kitāb* in their own right.¹²⁴ In the opinion of Sinai, “the Qur'ān considers itself both a translation and an interpretation of the *kitāb*.”¹²⁵ Yet, there is a mysterious unitary relationship between the *kitāb* of Moses, the *qur'āns* of Muhammad, and the Transcendent Kitāb at a deeper level, since reciting the earthly *qur'āns* is tantamount to reciting the Transcendent Kitāb.

How, then, should one conceive of the *kitāb-qur'ān* relationship? Within the Qur'ān's discourse about revelation, the Transcendent Kitāb variously known as *kitāb mubīn*, *kitāb ḥafīz*, or *umm al-kitāb* is the Revelatory Principle – defined in this dissertation's analytical framework as a transcendent domain of reality that is ontologically aethically prior to and substantially larger than the Qur'ān itself. The Transcendent Kitāb clearly registers as the Revelatory Principle since, as the domain of God's decrees, guidance, records, and knowledge, it is the celestial archetype of the Arabic *qur'āns* and its scope is substantially grander than the latter. The Arabic *qur'āns* are the “Revelatory Products” because they are the earthly expressions in which the Transcendent Kitāb is partially disclosed and provide their audience with partial access to it. At the same time, the Transcendent Kitāb is immanent or present through the Arabic *qur'āns*, since the latter are the manifestation of the former. This revelatory relationship grants the reciter and hearers of the

¹²⁴ Sinai, “Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality,” 132: “Since they derive from a heavenly *kitāb*, they inherit from it some of the defining characteristics of *kitāb-ness*, notably internal unity, canonical relevance and authority, and congruity with earlier revelations.” This view was shared by the early 19th century scholar Hubert Grimme, who believed that specific revelations are called *kitāb* because they issue from a heavenly archetypal *kitāb*. See Hubert Grimme, *Mohammed, Zweiter Teil: Einleitung in den Koran. System der koranischen Theologie* (Münster: Aschendorff Buchhandlung, 1895), 25, 72-74. Thanks to Goudarzi for bringing this to my attention. He discusses Grimme's views briefly in “The Second Coming of the Book,” 62-64.

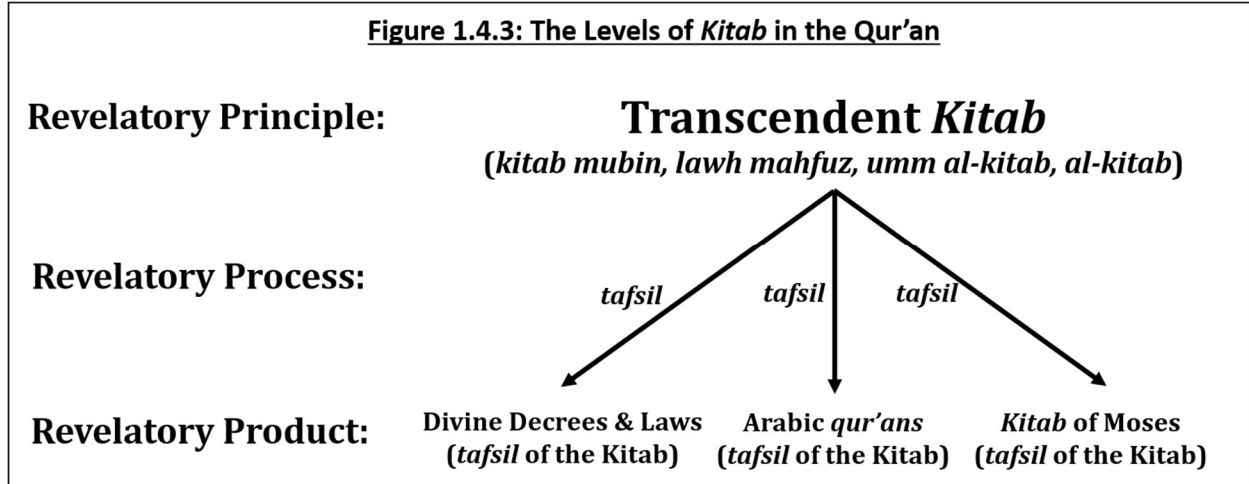
¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

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qur'āns some form of immanent access or even participation in the Transcendent Kitāb. Reciting and hearing the *qur'āns* is tantamount to hearing and reciting the Transcendent Kitāb which is their revelatory archetype. Conceiving the Transcendent Kitāb as the Revelatory Principle, at once transcendent and immanent with respect to its Revelatory Products, explains the oft-repeated *qur'ānic* statements about Muhammad, his community, and prior prophetic communities being those who recite the *kitāb* (2:44:, 2:113, 2:121, 3:113, 4:127, 18:27, 29:45, 29:48, 29:51, 35:29).

When the various cases of *kitāb* and *k-t-b* were examined synchronically by Fiegenbaum, Crollius, and Madigan, the semantic meaning of *kitāb* turned out to be “divine writing” in the sense of a genus. This prior finding reconciles with the present distinction between the Transcendent Kitāb and earthly *qur'āns* as follows: *kitāb* as such is the genus of whatever conveys God’s authoritative decree and prescription, symbolized by the image of divine writing. The ontological source and foundation of the “*kitāb* genus” is the Transcendent Kitāb (*umm al-kitāb*, *kitāb mubīn*, *kitāb makhnūn*, etc.). This means that the *qur'āns* of Muhammad, the *kitāb* of Moses, the *injīl* of Jesus, the *zabūr* of David, or any divinely revealed guidance brought by a Prophet, are each a historically situated manifestation or *tafsīl* (adaptation) of the Transcendent Kitāb suited for particular communities in which the latter is immanently present; it is for this reason that the Qur’ān can claim that all Prophets and Messengers brought *kitāb* and that prior recipients of prophetic guidance are called *ahl al-kitāb* without possessing the same Revelatory Products. The Qur’ān can equally refer to specific divinely mandated laws, such as rules about marriage or inheritance, as *kitāb Allāh* or *kutub* (Q. 3:145, 4:24, 8:75, 9:36, 15:4, 24:33, 33:6, 98:2-3); this is not because those laws are physical writings but rather because they partake in and express something of what God has “written”, “prescribed” or “decreed” in the Transcendent Kitāb. The *qur'ānic* concept of *kitāb*, therefore, is not about written scriptures or the delivery of “books” from

heaven; rather, qur'ānic *kitāb* means God's prescription or decree as modulated through a hierarchy, stemming from the Transcendent Kitāb and manifesting as earthly divine prescriptions (see Figure 1.4.3).



1.5 Divine Inspiration in the Qur'ān: *Tanzīl*, *Kalima*, and *Wahy*

Most Qur'ān commentators in the *tafsīr* tradition interpreted the qur'ānic statements that God “sent down” the *kitāb* or the *qur'ān* to the Prophet Muhammad (Q. 2:89, 2:185, 3:3, 3:7, 4:105, 4:136, 4:140, 5:48, 12:3, 16:64, 39:41) or that God “sent down” *kitāb* to the Prophets or Messengers (Q. 2:213, 57:25) as a literal description of physical books, including the Qur'ān, the Torah, and the Gospel, spatially descending from heaven to earth.¹²⁶ Eventually, in the post-qur'ānic period, the terms *tanzīl* and *wahy* became different names for the Qur'ān itself. Based on this chapter's findings, however, it is necessary to revisit conventional understandings of the Qur'ān's *n-z-l* discourse before analyzing the other terms that it uses for revelation, such as *kalima* and *wahy*.

¹²⁶ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation, which looks at classical Sunni exegetes' interpretations of the Guarded Tablet. See al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, 93-97; Abū 'Abdullāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1957-1958), 228-230.

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1.5.1 The Qur'ānic Meaning of *Tanzīl* and *Inzāl*

Based mostly on the interpretations from later Muslim exegetes, modern scholars likewise regard the Qur'ānic *n-z-l* verbs in Form II (*nazzala; tanzīl*) and Form IV (*anzala, inzāl*) as pertaining to the mechanics (*kayfiyya*) of scriptural revelatory descent (*nuzūl*), according to which God spatially sent down the Qur'ān and other scriptures from heaven to earth through angelic mediation.¹²⁷ Contrary to this reading, I argue that *tanzīl* and *inzāl*, in the perspective of the Qur'ān, are not descriptions of *how* the *qur'āns* (or *kitāb*) are communicated to Muhammad. Rather, I maintain that the Qur'ānic uses of these *n-z-l* verbs simply stress the fact that God is the agent, source, and authority of whatever is “sent down” as opposed to describing the revelatory process itself, an idea that the Qur'ān connects to revelation to refute accusations of the *qur'āns* being mere poetry or soothsayer speech. The Qur'ānic evocations of God's *tanzīl* and *inzāl* is an assertion of God's continuous and beneficial action toward His creation in which He demonstrates His power and authority as opposed to verbal revelation specifically.¹²⁸

The various forms of the *n-z-l* verb in the Qur'ān, such as *nuzūl* (to descend), *tanzīl* (to send down), and *inzāl* (to send down), imply a spatial hierarchy between God and His creation. As

¹²⁷ See Jeffery, “The Qur'an as Scripture” (Part 3); Stefan Wild, “Spatial and temporal implications of the Qur'anic concepts of *nuzūl*, *tanzīl*, and *inzāl*,” in Stefan Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān*, 137-153.

¹²⁸ Cf. Boisliveau, *Le Coran*, 108-114. Her analysis focuses on cases where *qur'ān* or *kitāb* are the objects of *tanzīl/inzāl*: “L'usage coranique de la racine *n-z-l* concerne donc le fait que Dieu fait descendre soit une Écriture sainte, soit un bienfait. Il montre que Dieu fait descendre le Coran de la même façon que ses bienfaits – souvent sous forme de pluie – ou bien quelque chose de l'Au-delà – souvent en lien avec les anges, ou les anges eux-mêmes. Ce Coran descend sur son envoyé Mahomet de la même façon que d'autres choses descendent sur d'autres prophètes ou sur d'autres hommes. Et Dieu fait descendre ce Coran, est-il parfois précisé, pour clarifier, ou bien, dans un moment spécifique. Il convient de souligner que le sens de mouvement du haut vers le bas, du divin vers l'humain, exprimé par cette racine, est trop souvent traduit par « révélation » – qui fait plutôt référence en français à un dévoilement fait à la conscience humaine d'une chose autrement inaccessible, dévoilement qui se fait essentiellement à l'intérieur de la conscience, dans un sens influencé par le christianisme – alors qu'il s'agit davantage de « descente » presque physique (en tous cas, spatiale) d'un message divin, indiquant la position d'autorité absolue de Dieu, mais sans idée de « dévoilement » ni d'intériorité” (p. 112).

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noted by Stefan Wild, the Qur'ānic imagery of God “sending down” something presupposes a cosmic hierarchy symbolized by height, with God, Holy Spirit, the angels, and other heavenly powers in the upper domain and humankind and *jinn* in the lower domain.¹²⁹ Taken at face value, a *tanzīl* or *inzāl* means that God bestows something from the higher domain of the unseen to the lower domain of the seen and everyday. The conjugated *nazzala* finite verb appears 63 times (with God as the agent in 60 cases) in the Qur'ān and its verbal noun *tanzīl* appears 15 times. The conjugated *anzala* finite verb is used 188 times (plus 7 uses of the participle).¹³⁰ The majority of the *nazzala* and *anzala* verb usages in the Qur'ān feature God as the agent and the *kitāb*, the *qur'ān*, the *dhikr*, or an unspecified object (*mā*) as the object of the “sending down.” The verbal noun *tanzīl* is always used in connection to *kitāb* or *qur'āns*. Therefore, one might simply interpret *nazzala* and *anzala* as denoting technical prophetic “revelation”, as most pre-modern and modern scholars have done. However, such an interpretation would be premature. Not only does the idea of “sending down” fail to match the literal meaning of “communication” or “revelation”, but numerous Qur'ānic usages of *nazzala* and *anzala* where *kitāb* or *qur'ān* is *not* the direct object seriously call the equation of *tanzīl/inzāl* with “revelation” into question. For example, of the 60 instances of the conjugated *nazzala* verb where God “sends down” something, the object being “sent down” is neither the *kitāb* nor *qur'ān* nor *dhikr* in at least 26 cases. One frequently reads about God “sending down” rain water (Q. 8:11, 29:63, 30:24, 31:34, 42:28, 43:11, 50:9); sending down authority (*sultān*) in actual or hypothetical scenarios (Q. 3:151, 6:81, 6:111, 7:33, 7:71, 22:71); sending down manna and quail (Q. 20:80), a table of food from heaven (Q. 5:112) or

¹²⁹ Wild, “Spatial and temporal implications,” 142.

¹³⁰ Madigan, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Accessed 5 October 2017 on BrillOnline Reference Works: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00174.

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sustenance (Q. 40:13, 42:27). Among the 188 qur'ānic uses of the *anzala* verb, there are over 50 instances where God is “sending down” something other than the *kitāb*, *qur'ān*, or *dhikr*. Again, in these cases, the most frequent object that God “sends down” (*anzala*) is rain (Q. 2:22, 2:164, 6:99, 7:57, 10:24, 13:17, 14:32, 15:22, 16:10, 16:65, 18:45, etc.); additionally, God “sent down” manna and quail (Q. 2:57, 7:160), tranquility (Q. 9:26, 9:40, 48:4, 48:18, 48:26), authority (*sultān*) (Q. 12:40, 30:35), angels (Q. 9:26, 41:14, 25:21, 23:24), and clear signs (Q. 2:159, 13:7, 24:34, 24:46, 24:1, 22:16). One verse mentions that God sent down the *kitāb* and the balance along with iron (Q. 57:25) while another mentions that God sent down eight types of cattle (Q. 39:6).

Overall, among the various instances of the Form II and Form IV *n-z-l* verbs in the Qur'ān, revelatory products (*kitāb*, *qur'ān*, *dhikr*, etc.) are the direct object in 60% of cases while 40% of the cases consist of God sending down various non-revelatory phenomena like angels, provision (water, sustenance, cattle), authority, and other items.¹³¹ The numerous instances where God “sends down” objects other than *kitāb* or *qur'ān* strongly indicate that the verbs *nazzala* and *anzala* do not specify revelation or inspiration but convey a broader meaning in the Qur'ān, as articulated by Fiegenbaum:

“Sent down” (*n-z-l*), or a similar phrase, is a frequent expression in the Qur'ān. It is a favorite way of speaking of the activity of God. Within the immediate context of “sent down” one usually finds an indication that something “happens” as the consequence. God governs by “sent downs”... What comes down has the potential for causing something to come to pass; certain results may be expected. The “sent down” comes with authority, for whatever it is, it originates with Him who is Power... The sending down of *kitāb* is a way of speaking of God's rule and this meaning is most clearly seen if “truth” (*haqq*) is understood as the Qur'ān uses it.¹³²

¹³¹ See the analysis and table of qur'ānic *n-z-l* words in Daniel Birnstiel, “Illibration or Incarnation: A critical assessment of Christoph Luxenberg's alleged Christmas liturgy in surah 97,” in Serdar Kurnaz (ed.), *Horizonte der Koranexegese und Koranwissenschaften* (Munster: Waxmann, forthcoming), pre-print paper accessed on 9/14/2018: https://www.academia.edu/12623061/Illibration_or_Incarnation_A_critical_assessment_of_Christoph_Luxenberg_s_alleged_Christmas_liturgy_in_surah_97.

¹³² Fiegenbaum, “Prophethood,” 147-148.

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God manifests His power and authority to His creatures through decisive and beneficial “sending downs”. This is most evident in the verses that call for God to send down authority (*sulṭān*) in order to authorize the practices of a certain group of people (*nazzala* – Q. 3:151, 6:81, 6:111, 7:33, 7:71, 22:71; *anzala* – Q. 12:40, 30:35). The beneficial nature of these “sending downs” is expressed by the frequent mention of God sending down water.

Neuwirth’s analysis of qur’ānic evocation of *tanzīl/inzāl* shows that the Qur’ān asserts the sending down of the *qur’āns* in response to pre-existing Arabian pagan notions of poetic speech inspired by jinn and satans, since Muhammad was accused of being a mere poet and soothsayer (see Q. 69:40-43).

“God’s sending down” could then be understood as a corrective of the common pre-Islamic imagination of supernatural verbal conveyances through inspiring spirits, jinns or satans, which “bring down” their wisdom, gleaned through eavesdropping on the higher spheres, to the individuals to be inspired, that is, to poets or soothsayers... So the sending down, set into this “pagan” context, should be understood at first in the sense of a “correction,” that is, an apologetically motivated replacement of an existing mythic configuration, not the result of theological reflection.¹³³

Thus, when viewed in the context of its earliest usages in Q. 69:43 and 56:80, the *tanzīl/inzāl* imagery connected to the Prophet’s recitations is not descriptive of how revelation comes to him, but a qur’ānic endorsement of the divine origin and authorization of the *qur’āns* against accusations of demonic inspiration.

In sum, the *nazzala / anzala* verbs do not refer specifically to revelation. For the Qur’ān to claim that God sends down something is to simply say that the object sent down – like *kitāb*, *qur’ān*, *injīl*, water, signs, tranquility, provision, favor, etc. – is bestowed and authorized by God’s power and will. The Qur’ān employs a “sending down” discourse about the *kitāb* and *qur’āns* to respond to charges that the Prophet was merely a poet or soothsayer.

¹³³ Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur’ān and Late Antiquity*, 67.

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1.5.2 Assessing the Qur'ānic Evidence for the Verbal Dictation Theory of Revelation

Several modern scholars of the Qur'ān, including Izutsu, Jeffrey, Rahman, Saeed, and Sinai maintain that the Qur'ān presents revelation as something verbally dictated to Muhammad. In other words, Muhammad heard the Arabic *qur'āns* orally from Gabriel and recited them verbatim to his community. This view is so entrenched in pre-modern Muslim *tafsīr* and *kalām* theology that it is often taken for granted and instinctively read back into the Qur'ān by modern scholars. Pre-modern and modern arguments usually rely on one or two qur'ānic verses presented as “smoking guns”.

Izutsu specifically refers to Q. 75:16-19 quoted below:

Move not your tongue with it to hasten it (*lita jala bihi*);
Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it.
So, when We recite it, follow its recitation.
Then Ours it is to explain it. (Q. 75:16-19)

Izutsu reads the indirect object, the “it” of “to hasten it” (*lita jala bihi*), as referring to the Qur'ān in general, where the Prophet is being told to wait patiently for Arabic *qur'āns* recited to him by Gabriel, and then repeat what he hears exactly without trying to change anything.¹³⁴ But there is an alternative and more integral reading of the same passage offered by Fiegenbaum.¹³⁵ Taken as a whole, *Sūra 75 (Sūrat al-Qiyāma)* is evidently speaking about the impending Day of Resurrection as shown in the verses both preceding and succeeding Q. 75:16-19:

Nay, but man desires to continue on as a libertine,
asking, ‘When shall be the Day of Resurrection?’
But when the sight is dazed
and the moon is eclipsed,
and the sun and moon are brought together,
upon that day man shall say, ‘Whither to flee?’

¹³⁴ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 195. Nicolai Sinai interprets the verses in the same manner, according to his recent podcast on the Qur'ān. See Nicolai Sinai, “Introducing the Qur'ān,” University of Oxford Podcasts, accessed April 4, 2019: <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/introducing-quran>.

¹³⁵ Fiegenbaum, “Prophethood,” 215-219. I am following and reproducing his arguments about these verses.

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No indeed; not a refuge!
Upon that day the recourse shall be to your Lord.
Upon that day man shall be told his former deeds and his latter;
nay, man shall be a clear proof against himself,
even though he offers his excuses.
Move not your tongue with it to hasten it (*lita 'jala bihi*):
Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it.
So, when We recite it, follow its recitation.
Then Ours it is to explain it.
No indeed; but you love the hasty world
And leave be the Hereafter.
Upon that Day faces shall be radiant
Gazing upon their Lord (Q. 75:5-23)

Therefore, when Q. 75:16-19 is read in its proper context, the indirect object of the phrase “to hasten it” (*lita 'jala bihi*) turns out *not* to be the Qur'ān and so these verses are *not* about Qur'ānic Revelation. Instead, the object (“it”) of “to hasten it” (*lita 'jala bihi*) clearly refers to the Day of Resurrection mentioned several verses earlier. In Q. 75:16-19, the Prophet and/or the Qur'ān's immediate audience is warned that one should not try to hasten the Day of Resurrection by prematurely announcing its advent. This interpretation of Q. 75:16-19 as referring to the Prophet and his followers being under pressure to hasten the announcement of the Day of Resurrection is supported by many other verses of the Qur'ān where Muhammad, the believers, and others are warned about seeking to hasten the Day of Judgment (note the verb *ista 'jala* used in Q. 6:57, 22:47, 29:53-54, 42:18, 46:53):

So be patient, as the Messengers possessed of constancy were also patient. Seek not to hasten it for them (*lā tasta 'jil lahum*) -- it shall be as if on the day they see that they are promised, they had not tarried but for an hour of a single day. A Message to be delivered! And shall any be destroyed but the people of the ungodly? (Q. 46:35)

Thus, Q. 75:16-19, when read in the context of *Sūra 75* as a whole and in conversation with parallel verses, has less to do with the mechanics of revelation and does not appear to endorse the theory of verbal dictation of the Qur'ān to Muhammad.

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A second argument for the verbal dictation theory of Qur'ānic Revelation centers upon the Qur'ānic references to the *kalām* (speech) and *kalimāt* (words) of God. Izutsu quotes Q. 9:6, which speaks about someone hearing the *kalām Allāh*:

And if any of the idolaters seeks your protection, grant him protection until he hears the *kalām Allāh*; then convey him to his place of security -- that, because they are a people who do not know. (Q. 9:6)

Izutsu believes that the *kalām Allāh* (Q. 9:6, 2:75) and the *kalimāt Allāh* mentioned in the Qur'ān refer to a divine speech that has the characteristics of audible human speech, consisting of verbal linguistic utterances: "Here it is contextually evident that 'God's speech' refers to what God has spoken and said to the Prophet, *i.e.* words revealed to him."¹³⁶ On this basis, Izutsu concludes that "*wahy* is a partial and more particular concept falling under the general concept of *kalām*... In the Qur'anic Revelation, God (*A*) talks to Muhammad (*B*) in *B*'s language, that is Arabic."¹³⁷ The underlying premise behind Izutsu's argument is that *kalām Allāh* and *wahy* is audible speech in common with human speech. "Revelation is, after all, a kind of 'speech'...in so far as it is *speech*, it must have all the essential attributes of human speech."¹³⁸ However, there is no reason to accept this far-reaching premise as axiomatic. Izutsu's claim that *kalām Allāh* must have the outward characteristics of human *kalām* is an extra-qur'ānic theological assumption widely contested in the classical Sunni *kalām* tradition. In fact, Izutsu's view was only upheld by the Mut'azilīs, who held that "God's speech is of the genus of speech intuitively known in this world"¹³⁹ and consists of

¹³⁶ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 165.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹³⁹ 'Abd al-Jabbār, quoted in Johannes Reinier Theodorus Maria Peters, *God's Created Speech* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 293. His views are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

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“articulate sound” (*ṣawt muqaṭṭa*).¹⁴⁰ But the Ash‘arīs believed that God’s Speech is eternal, non-verbal, and wholly different from human speech. In the Ash‘arī view, the “hearing” of the *kalām Allāh* in Q. 9:6 means “understanding” or “comprehension” of God’s eternal non-verbal speech.¹⁴¹ Thus, Izutsu’s understanding of *kalām Allāh* as verbal linguistic speech is a theological premise that is neither self-evident nor follows logically from the Qur’ān.

A closer examination of the qur’ānic use of *k-l-m* terms reveals that the semantic field of meaning associated with God’s *kalām*, *kalima*, and *qawl* does not necessarily or strictly convey the idea of verbal linguistic speech. Fiegenbaum already examined several qur’ānic verses in which God speaks (*qāla*) or decrees (*qaḍā*) an affair (*amr*) by saying “Be” (*kun*) (Q. 2:117, 3:47, 19:35, 40:68, 3:59, 6:73, 16:40, 36:82), such as the following:

It is He who created the heavens and the earth in truth (*bi l-ḥaqqi*); and the day He says ‘Be’, and it is; His saying (*qawlihi*) is true (*al-ḥaqqu*), and His is the Kingdom the day the Trumpet is blown; He is Knower of the Unseen and the visible; He is the All-wise, the All-aware. (Q. 6:73)

The meaning of God’s word (*qawl*) in such passages is God’s decree, creative activity, and power. There is certainly no sense that God’s word (*qawl*) must be verbal speech in language that shares the attributes of human speech. As Fiegenbaum observes, the stress in the above passages is on how God’s word results in His decisive action: “God wills, creates, rules, and determines the destiny of His creation by His Word, the Word which has in it the potential to become deed. That is the primary point to be emphasized in these passages.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 302.

¹⁴¹ For Ibn Kullāb’s view of Divine Speech and Q. 9:6, see Chapter 3 and Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 248-250; for al-Juwaynī’s view, see Chapter 4 and Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Ḥikmah ilā qawāṭi‘ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i’tiqād*, tr. Paul E. Walker as *A Guide to the Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2000), 56-75; for al-Ghazālī’s view, see Chapter 4 and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī’s Moderation in Belief*, tr. Aladdin M. Yaqub (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013), 114-126.

¹⁴² Fiegenbaum, “Prophethood,” 133.

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Many qur'ānic verses (Q. 10:82, 10:96, 39:71, 6:115, 10:64, 21:45, 42:14, 42:24) mention “a word (*kalima*) from God” or the “words of God” (*kalimāt Allāh*). Far from having the meaning of God uttering linguistic words, these passages speak of the *kalimāt Allāh* as God's decrees, acts, promises, assurances, and judgements, most often in relation to manifesting the truth (*ḥaqq*) to human beings. For example, some verses speak of a “word of chastisement” (*kalimat al-'adhāb*) that brings punishment to the sinful (Q. 39:19, 39:71); others refer to a “word of decision” (*kalimat al-faṣl*) coming from God by which the people's disagreements are judged (10:19, 42:14, 42:21). One verse speaks of “a *kitāb* from God” (Q. 8:68) with the same function as the “words” of God, based on which Madigan voiced “an underlying presumption that *kalima* ‘word’ and *kitāb* are equivalent.”¹⁴³ According to Crollius, God's *kalimāt* given to Adam (Q. 2:37), Abraham (2:124), and Mary (66:12) are “an expression of God's will, commands, or prescriptions which are to be fulfilled. The context is again one of promise of future divine assistance.”¹⁴⁴ Some explicit examples of how the “words of God” in the Qur'ān carry the sense of God's acts, decrees, promises, and executions of His Will can be found in *Sūra* 6 and *Sūra* 10 quoted below:

We know indeed that it grieves you the things they say; yet it is not you they cry lies to, but the evildoers - it is the signs of God that they deny. Messengers indeed were cried lies to before you, yet they endured patiently that they were cried lies to, and were hurt, until Our help came unto them. No man can change the words of God (*kalimāt Allāh*); and there has already come to you some tidings of the Envoys. (Q. 6:33-34, see also 6:115)

Those who believe, and are godfearing - for them is good tidings in the present life and in the world to come. There is no changing the words of God (*kalimāt Allāh*); that is the mighty triumph. (Q. 10:63-64)

Pharaoh said, ‘Bring me every cunning sorcerer.’ Then, when the sorcerers came, Moses said to them, ‘Cast you down what you will cast.’ Then, when they had cast, Moses said, ‘What you have brought is sorcery; God will assuredly bring it to naught. God sets not right the work of those who

¹⁴³ Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 184.

¹⁴⁴ Crollius, *The Word in the Experience of Revelation*, 44.

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do corruption. God verifies the truth (*al-haqq*) by His words (*bikalimātihi*), though sinners be averse.' (Q. 10:79-82)

These verses employ the terms *kalimāt Allāh* in such a way that they do not simply refer to verbal utterances or the revealed words of a scripture. In Q. 6:33-34 and 6:115, the words of God refer to what God has willed and decreed for His Messengers, which will always prevail; this is the meaning of “no man can change His words.” Pace Izutsu, Crollius observes that the meaning of “God’s words” in this context is not the actual words of the Qur’ān, but God’s command and promise to His Messenger:

And so, *kalimat-Allāh*, in these discourses directed to Muḥammad, appears to mean the order by which God sends His Messengers: the election and mission, with the assurance of divine assistance and of final victory, rather than that it expresses here the content of the revelation to be transmitted.¹⁴⁵

Likewise, the *kalimāt Allāh* in *Sūra* 10 refer to what God wills to happen concerning His creation. In Q. 10:63-64, the words of God that do not change relate to God’s promise that believers will have good tidings in this world and the next – a divine promise that will inevitably come to pass and cannot be altered. God’s words in Q. 10:79-82 refer to God’s decrees and acts by which He manifests the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) that Moses brought before the challenges of the Pharaoh’s sorcerers. Clearer evidence that the qur’ānic concept of *kalimāt Allāh* does not strictly connote oral or written speech is found in Q. 18:109 and 31:27, which state that the Words of God can never be exhausted even if all of the earth’s trees were pens and all of its seas were ink – thereby suggesting that the *kalimāt Allāh* transcend physical words altogether.¹⁴⁶ As we will see in Chapter 2 and 3, second century qur’ānic exegetes did not take the *kalimāt Allāh* in Q. 18:109 and 31:27 to be verbal words.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁴⁶ Both Q. 18:109 and 31:27 appear to be a reworking of statements found in Rabbinical literature, where a Rabbi states: “If all the heavens were parchment, and all the trees were quills and all the seas were ink, it would not suffice to write down all the Torah I learned from my teachers.” See Tractate Soferim 1:8, quoted in David Haddad, *Masa’asei Avos* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2007), 104. Thanks to Ghilene Hazem for reminding me of this reference. For research on the Rabbinical and Islamic contexts of both verses, see Shari L. Lowin, “If All the Seas Were Ink: Tracking

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When viewed against the Qur'ān's broader *k-l-m* discourse, Q. 6:9, "grant him protection until he hears the *kalām Allāh*," takes on a different meaning from Izutsu's reading. Hearing the *kalām Allāh* in this verse does not simply mean hearing God's verbal words in Arabic; rather, it means "hearing what God has decreed, prescribed, and promised."¹⁴⁷ It is more likely that the *kalām Allāh*, i.e. divine decree that the idolater should hear per Q. 9:6 refers to a specific divine decree, namely the cessation of Muhammad's treaty with the polytheists mentioned at the beginning of *Sūra* 9, where the polytheists are given four months to leave Mecca. Thus, the verse says "grant him protection until he hears the *kalām Allāh*; then convey him to his place of security": meaning that the polytheist should be granted amnesty by the believers so he can hear the divine decree, i.e. *kalām Allāh*, given in the preceding verses of *Sūra* 9. In any case, the Qur'ānic concept of *kalām* and *kalimāt Allāh* does not necessitate God uttering verbal speech, nor is *kalām Allāh* simply identical to the verses of the Qur'ān.¹⁴⁸ In sum and *pace* Izutsu, the essential meaning of the Qur'ānic *kalima* / *kalimāt Allāh* is the concept of God's immutable decrees, acts, and commands by which He manifests His will in creation.¹⁴⁹

the Evolution of a Motif across Islamic and Rabbinical Literature," Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Quranic Studies Association, San Diego 21-25 November, 2019.

¹⁴⁷ The same reading applies to Q. 48:15 where the Bedouins who stay behind from battle and still desire the war booty are accused of wishing to change the *kalām Allāh*. There is no indication that *kalām Allāh* here refers to the Arabic *qur'āns*; instead it seems to refer to God's prior decree or promise (described in Q. 9:83, 48:11, 48:14) that the Messenger and the believers would return from battle successful and would not be joined by the Bedouins. Furthermore, that Qur'ān refers to Jesus as a *kalima* of God in Q. 3:45, 3:47, 3:59, 4:171, 19:34, further proves that *kalimat Allāh* is not a linguistic concept.

¹⁴⁸ Boisliveau performed her own analysis of the *k-l-m* and *q-w-l* words in the Qur'ān and reached a very similar conclusion in *Le Coran par lui-même*, 130-135. She rightly notes (p. 132-133) how the *Lisān al-'arab* and other lexicons take for granted that the Qur'ān is *kalām* and *kalimāt Allāh* and then seek to justify this appellation. While Boisliveau's interpretation follows the lexicographers in stressing that the Qur'ānic recitations are *kalām Allāh*, she admits that the Qur'ānic concept of *kalām/kalimāt* is much wider than the verses of the Qur'ān.

¹⁴⁹ The same conclusion was given by Fiegenbaum, "Prophethood", 133.

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1.5.3 The Qur'ānic Concept of *Wahy*: Non-Verbal Inspiration

Having scrutinized the main arguments offered by modern scholars in support of the verbatim dictation theory of revelation, we can see how little evidence there is in the Qur'ān to support this position. Instead, the key to ascertaining the qur'ānic vision of the mechanics of Qur'ānic Revelation lies in a thorough analysis of the qur'ānic discourse involving the term *wahy* / *aḥwa*. *Wahy* is “admittedly by far the most important of all words in Arabic denoting the phenomenon of Revelation.”¹⁵⁰ I submit that the qur'ānic idea of *wahy*, both in general and in the case of Muhammad in particular, is an inner divine inspiration as opposed to an external, verbatim auditory mode of speech dictation; accordingly, the Arabic *qur'āns* are inspired compositions or “translations of *wahy*” by the Prophet as opposed to literal divine dictations. This is based on four arguments: first, the meaning of *wahy* in pre-Islamic poetry is a mysterious esoteric form of communication that is a far cry from an explicit auditory dictation; second, the qur'ānic usage of *awḥa* and *wahy*, in the majority of cases where recipients are human or non-human, refers to a non-verbal divine communication in which the recipient is informed or guided to a particular course of action as opposed to being dictated actual words; the *wahy* specific to Muhammad is mediated by a celestial entity called the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*), which is received in his heart – the faculty of inner vision and insight – as opposed to his faculty of audition; third, Neuwirth's comparison of the pre-Islamic and qur'ānic meanings of *wahy* suggests that the latter is a prophetic “reading” of the Transcendent Kitāb that Muhammad subsequently expresses as Arabic *qur'āns*; fourth, the idea of *wahy* as internal spiritual inspiration that the Prophet himself verbalizes as the Arabic *qur'āns* is consistent with the ambiguous portrayals of the internal “speaker” of the Qur'ān

¹⁵⁰ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 169.

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variously depicted through first-person, second-person, and third-person pronouns. Finally, to corroborate my claims about *wahy* as non-verbal and the Arabic *qur'āns* as prophetic compositions, I present below (in Section 1.6) the arguments of William A. Graham, who found that both the Qur'ān and early Muslim accounts fail to differentiate clearly between the divine inspiration that results in Muhammad reciting the Arabic *qur'āns* and Muhammad's extra-qur'ānic speech and guidance.

The term *wahy* has wide usage in pre-Islamic poetry and the qur'ānic use of *wahy* to describe prophetic inspiration, as opposed to a biblical or Greek term for prophetic inspiration is worthy of note. This suggests that the pre-Islamic meaning of *wahy* would help clarify the qur'ānic meaning of the word. This topic was explored by Izutsu extensively and, more recently, by Angelika Neuwirth. The examples adduced by Izutsu show *wahy* to be a mysterious, esoteric, and hidden communication between two parties. He cites the poetry of 'Alqamah al-Faḥl in which the cracking sounds made by a male ostrich to a female ostrich are called *wahy*. The poet also compares the ostrich's sounds to Greeks speaking among themselves in an unintelligible language. The upshot from both examples is that *wahy* is a communication that appears incomprehensible and inaccessible to outsiders.¹⁵¹ The second example cited by Izutsu is where *wahy* refers to mysterious letters or characters that the remains of a deserted abode resemble in the odes of Labīd. The same analogy is used by al-Marrār b. Munquidh in his poetry, where abandoned and faded desert encampments resemble barely discernable and scarcely readable letters called *wahy*.¹⁵² In

¹⁵¹ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 171-172.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 172.

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these examples, *wahy* refers to a kind of writing or lettering that appeared mysterious and astonishing to Arab onlookers.¹⁵³

Based on these pre-Islamic poetry examples, Neuwirth concludes that *wahy* signifies what is essentially non-verbal: “*Wahy* is no technical term for writing but rather denotes a non-verbal communication through signs such as may take place between animals or – if between humans – involving a foreign, incomprehensible language.”¹⁵⁴ She also highlights how *wahy* in pre-Islamic poetry is “evoking the consciousness of aporia and the perception of loss”¹⁵⁵ because the *wahy* predominantly refers to ruins and traces of desert encampments.¹⁵⁶ Even in the examples of the clucking ostriches or talking Greeks, *wahy* is not used to specify the verbal nature of the communication, but rather, the unintelligibility of this communication to third parties. Therefore, the pre-Islamic meaning of *wahy* is essentially a non-verbal form of esoteric communication taking place through signs unintelligible to those not participating in it. This meaning of *wahy* carried into the early Islamic period: Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 54/674) likewise described a tribe’s faded desert abodes as “writing on threadbare parchment” using the term *wahy*.¹⁵⁷ Based on the term’s literary context, it is reasonable to suppose that the meaning of *wahy* as non-verbal communication continues in the Qur’ān.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 173.

¹⁵⁴ Neuwirth, “The Discovery of Writing,” 10-11.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵⁶ For several examples of *wahy* used in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, see James E. Montgomery, “The Deserted Encampment in Ancient Arabic Poetry: A Nexus of Topical Comparisons,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40/2 (1995): 283-316. This reference is provided by Neuwirth.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 289

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The verb *awḥa* and the verbal noun *wahy* altogether appear 78 times in the Qur'ān. The concept of *wahy* is often related to the mechanics of prophetic inspiration in the Qur'ān. On seven occasions (Q. 4:163, 12:109, 16:43, 21:7, 42:3, 42:13, 42:51), the Qur'ān stresses that God inspired Muhammad through *wahy* in the very same way that He inspired other Prophets:

We have inspired you (*awḥaynā ilayka*) as We inspired Noah, and the Prophets after him, and We inspired Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, Jesus and Job, Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and We gave to David the Psalms. (Q. 4:163)

There are 18 places where the Qur'ān states that Muhammad was inspired through *wahy* – where the content or product of this *wahy* relates directly to the Arabic *qur'āns* (Q. 6:19, 10:15, 12:3, 13:30, 17:38, 17:73, 17:86, 38:69-70, 42:7, 20:114), the *kitāb* (18:27, 29:45, 35:31, 42:52), or “the news of the Unseen” (3:44, 11:49, 12:102). Whereas Jeffery, Izutsu, and Saeed among modern scholars understand the *wahy* that produces Muhammad's recitations of Arabic *qur'āns* to be an auditory dictation in Arabic that Muhammad heard and repeated verbatim, the way that the term *awḥā/wahy* is used in numerous other qur'ānic verses does not convey the idea of a verbal dictation at all.

In several verses about non-prophetic communication, *wahy* certainly means a non-verbal form of guidance or suggestion. In Q. 99:5, God informs the earth by *wahy* with news on the Day of Judgment; the Prophet Zechariah, who had been rendered unable to speak by God, “signaled” (*awḥā*) his people to glorify God in the morning and evening (Q. 19:11). In Q. 41:12, God “inspired” (*awḥā*) each of the heavens with its affair or command. Finally, in Q. 16:68-69, God inspired (*awḥā*) the bee as to where to build its habitations and what to eat. These verses are worth quoting in full:

And your Lord inspired the bees, saying: ‘Take unto yourselves, of the mountains, houses, and of the trees, and of what they are building. Then eat of all manner of fruit, and follow the ways of your Lord easy to go upon.’ Then comes there forth out of their bellies a drink of diverse hues wherein is healing for men. Surely in that is a sign for a people who reflect. (Q. 16:68-69)

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In the above verses, God inspires the bee with commands and guidance toward specific actions that allow the bee to build its dwellings and produce honey. While the Qur'ān depicts the content of this *wahy* to its listeners as an imperative, “take...eat...follow”, there is nothing in the verse that suggests that the *wahy* itself comes to the bee as dictated speech in some sort of bee language. The use of the *awḥā* verb (as opposed to more concrete speech verbs) for a nonhuman suggests that God's *wahy* to the bee is essentially non-verbal. On this basis, Bell asserted that the qur'ānic use of *wahy* in general is quite different from the idea of actual words being communicated to a recipient:

The later developed Moslem dogmatic takes *wahy* to be the highest form of inspiration, and to consist of the communication of the actual words of the revelation to the prophet by an angel intermediary. But as used in the Qur'ān itself, the words *wahy*, *awḥā* by no means always or even generally have that sense. Usually, some such word as “suggest,” “prompt,” “put into the heart of,” is a better translation than “reveal.”¹⁵⁸

Thus, in these four verses, given the context of the sender and recipients of the communication (i.e. senders who cannot speak, non-human recipients who do not use language), the Qur'ān is clearly using *wahy* to denote a communication that is non-verbal in its essence and pre-verbal in its form – such that the recipient can verbally convey its contents to others.

In another set of qur'ānic verses, numbering to at least thirty-six, God is the agent of *wahy* and the recipients are human beings. In these instances, the recipient of *wahy* is given information, guidance, or instruction to follow a course of action. In many cases, the recipient of *wahy* is a Prophet and this is highly relevant because the Qur'ān is often at pains to point out that Muhammad receives *wahy* in the same manner as his predecessors among the Prophets. God inspired (*awḥaynā*) Moses to throw his staff to defeat Pharaoh's magicians (Q. 7:117); to strike the stone with his staff (7:160); to travel by night through the sea and use his staff to split the waters (20:77,

¹⁵⁸ Bell, “Muhammad's Visions,” 147.

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26:52, 26:63); and to settle his people in Egypt in houses (10:87). God inspired (*awḥaynā*) the mother of Moses to cast Moses in the river to keep him safe (20:38). He also inspired (*awḥaynā*) Noah to construct the Ark under God's eyes and God's *wahy* (11:36, 23:27). As Bell argued, these verses do not at all suggest that the content of God's *wahy* to these Prophets and human beings is a verbal dictation, but rather, a call or an impetus to a course of action:

Even when the agent of *wahy* is Allah, and the recipient a messenger or prophet, what is communicated is not the words of a revelation, but, as in most of the instances already given, a practical line of conduct, something to do, not to say... These practical "suggestions" are indeed often formulated in direct speech, as if it were a form of words which had come into the person's mind... These formulations, however, are always quite short, the sort of phrase, one may remark, which might flash into a person's mind after consideration of a question, as the decision and summing up of the matter.¹⁵⁹

One might designate these examples in the Qur'ān where God inspires Noah, Moses, or others as "inspirations to action" as opposed to auditory dictations. Understanding them as verbal dictations would entail, for example, that Noah built the ark according to step by step verbal dictations from God; yet the Qur'ān does not provide any hint of this being the case.

Even though the Qur'ān sometimes illustrates the content of these inspirations in the form of verbal imperatives, i.e. "strike", "construct", this serves as a narrative device for the listeners. This is proven by the fact that when the Qur'ān describes the same event of prophetic *wahy* to Moses or Noah in two different *sūras*, the command or guidance given through *wahy* is verbalized differently for the audience. For example, in Q. 20:77 and in Q. 26:52-63, the same event is narrated where God inspires Moses. But in Q. 20, it is expressed as "Go with My servants by night; strike for them a dry path in the sea, fearing not overtaking, neither afraid"; whereas in Q. 26 the same divine inspiration depicted as two separate commands to "Go with My servants by night" and "Strike with your staff the sea." These differences underscore the fact that the *wahy* in these

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

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various “inspirations to action” is not to be understood as the communication of specific words but rather of commands or directions to the recipient. Izutsu – despite adhering to the verbal dictation theory of revelation for Muhammad – concurred that *wahy* in the above cases was not verbal: “The sole purpose of *wahy* here is to prompt certain action; it is a kind of imperative. The words themselves do not count. The purpose of *wahy* once achieved, it is no longer necessary for the words to remain permanently.”¹⁶⁰ Likewise, Bell remarked that, at least in the early parts of the Qur'ān, “*wahy* does not mean the verbal communication of the text of a revelation, but is a ‘suggestion,’ ‘prompting’ or ‘inspiration’ coming into a person’s mind apparently from outside himself.”¹⁶¹

If one takes seriously the qur'ānic statements that Muhammad's reception of *wahy* is akin to that of former Prophets, then the cases of non-verbal *wahy* that the Qur'ān links to Noah and Moses should apply to all the *wahy* given to Muhammad. This theory finds confirmation in how the Qur'ān narrates stories of past Prophets – their revelatory experience and their interactions with their own communities – as each being a type of, and precursor for, the mission of Muhammad.¹⁶² In similar instances, the Qur'ān instructs Muhammad to “follow” what has been given him as inspiration (Q. 6:50, 7:203, 10:109, 33:2, 34:50, 43:43, 46:9, 21:43), such as the religion of Abraham (Q. 16:123) or certain maxims of wisdom (17:30-38); he is “inspired” with the dictum “your god is one God” (Q. 18:110, 21:208, 41:6); he is also informed by inspiration that a group of *jinn* listened to the *qur'ān* (Q. 72:1). These cases resemble the various “inspirations to action”

¹⁶⁰ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 194-195.

¹⁶¹ Bell, “Muhammad's Visions,” 148.

¹⁶² On this theme, see Michael Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of ‘The Poets’ and the Qur'ānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority,” in James L. Kugel (ed.), *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 75-119: 98-101.

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given to Prophets like Noah and Moses as noted above. Even Jeffery, who himself espoused the verbal dictation of scripture, admitted that these Qur'ān verses about Muhammad being inspired to follow a particular divine guidance are all cases of non-verbal inspiration or “prompting” in the same way that God inspired the bee (Q. 16:68-69):

When Muḥammad refers to his own reception of *wahy* it is quite clear that he places his experience in this matter on the same level as that of those previous messengers whom he mentions in his preaching... When he feels the prompting to follow the creed of Abraham, when he is inspired by a spirit of new religious interest, when he feels guided by what his Lord suggests to him, when he fears lest he may be neglecting somewhat of that to which he feels the prompting, when he is under the urge of the call to become one of the “warners”, this seems to be nothing particularly different from the inner prompting felt by the mother of Moses, nor indeed from that instruction from within which directed the bee where to set up its house.¹⁶³

For Jeffery, *wahy* as God's inspiration to the bee and His inspiration to the Prophets is “to give direction by an indication from within.”¹⁶⁴ Jeffery went on to claim that when the Qur'ān speaks of particular statements being the product of *wahy*, such as the uniqueness of God, the message of monotheism revealed to all Prophets, the message not being alterable by the Prophet, or learning that the *jinn* listened and believed in the *qur'āns*, then “we are dealing with something not prompted from within but given from without.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, Jeffery held that non-verbal *wahy* is “prompted from within” while verbally dictated *wahy*, as far as the Qur'ān is concerned, is “given from without.” However, as we saw above, the Qur'ān does not present *wahy* in such terms.

We can now turn to the various qur'ānic verses stating that God inspired the *qur'āns* or the *kitāb* to Muhammad through *wahy*:

Say: ‘God is witness between me and you, and this *qur'ān* has been inspired (*uḥīya*) in me that I may thereby warn you and whomsoever it may reach.’ (Q. 6:19)

¹⁶³ Jeffery, “The Qur'an as Scripture (Part 3),” 192.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 190-191.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 192.

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Thus We have sent you among a nation before which other nations have passed away, to recite to them that which We have inspired (*awḥaynā*) in you. (Q. 13:30)

Recite what has been inspired (*uḥiya*) in you from the *kitāb*, and perform the prayer. (Q. 29:45)

And so We have inspired (*awḥaynā*) in you an Arabic *qur'ān*, that you may warn the Mother of Cities and those who dwell about it, and that you may warn of the Day of Gathering, wherein is no doubt -- a party in Paradise, and a party in the Blaze. (Q. 42:7)

As already shown, *wahy/awḥā* is used widely in pre-Islamic poetry and in the Qur'ān with the meaning of non-verbal communication – such being the case when the recipients of *wahy* are nonhumans as well as humans. Therefore, it seems most appropriate to understand the Qur'ān's claim that Muhammad recites the *wahy* given to him from God as *qur'āns* in the sense that God inspires Muhammad through a non-verbal inspiration, which he, Muhammad, expresses verbally in the form of Arabic *qur'āns*. In this way of understanding qur'ānic *wahy*, Muhammad personally formulates the precise Arabic words, phrases, and verses as a “translation” of the *wahy* he receives from God as opposed to the qur'ānic verses being verbally dictated to him. In her most recent publication on the Qur'ān, Neuwirth also takes this position: “It is in this sense, that is, as a nonverbal communication converted into an understandable message only by the messenger, that *wahy* should be understood when it is connected to revelation.”¹⁶⁶

This interpretation is in keeping with the subtle but meaningful distinction in the Qur'ān between receiving *wahy* and the act of reciting (see Q. 13:30, 29:45). On this basis, Bell concluded that:

When therefore in other passages Muhammad speaks of the Qur'ān being “suggested” to him, it is a question whether we should not understand, not that the actual words of the Qur'ān had been conveyed to him verbally, but that the idea of composing a Qur'ān had come to him in this way.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Neuwirth, *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*, 444.

¹⁶⁷ Bell, “Muhammad's Visions,” 147-148.

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Bell was not alone in taking this position. In his revision of *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, W. Montgomery Watt offered an exposition and defense of Bell's view that the Qur'ān being the outcome of *wahy* does not entail the verbal dictation of the recitations. Even when entire passages, such as *Sūra Yusuf*, are declared to be the result of *wahy*, the meaning of the word still conveys the sense of inspiration as opposed to dictation: "Even in such passages, however, the actual verbal communication of the stories is not certainly implied. The fundamental sense of the word as used in the Qur'ān seems to be the communication of an idea by some quick suggestion or prompting, or, as we might say, by a flash of inspiration."¹⁶⁸

Another qur'ānic theme that has direct bearing on the mechanics of *wahy*, most particularly the *wahy* to Muhammad, is the role of a celestial entity variously called "Spirit", "Holy Spirit", "Trusted Spirit", or God's Spirit ("My Spirit", "Our Spirit", "His Spirit").¹⁶⁹ The Qur'ān states that God breathed (Q. 15:29, 21:19, 66:12) into Adam and Mary from His Spirit (*min rūhī; min rūhihi; min rūhinā*). When people ask the Prophet about the Spirit (*al-rūh*), he is simply to tell them that "the Spirit is from the Command of my Lord" (Q. 15:85). The Holy Spirit or Trusted Spirit (*rūh al-amīn*) is said to have brought down the Qur'ān to the heart of the Prophet Muḥammad (Q. 26:192-195; 16:102); in Q. 2:97, "Gabriel" is given the same role as the Spirit as in the other two verses. The Holy Spirit (*rūh al-quḍus*) is explicitly connected to Jesus whom God strengthened (*ayyada*) through it (Q. 2:87; 2:253; 5:110). The Spirit is never called an "angel" in the Qur'ān but is sometimes named with the angels (Q. 97:4, 16:2, 78:83) – suggesting that the Spirit is the source or the highest level of angelic being. Two other verses state that God "sends down the angels with

¹⁶⁸ Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 20-21.

¹⁶⁹ The various qur'ānic mentions of the spirit (*rūh*) are analyzed in Michael Sells, "Spirit", in McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Online edition accessed on 9/4/2017: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00193.

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the Spirit" (Q. 16:2) or "casts the Spirit from His Command" (Q. 40:15) upon whomever He chooses of His servants.

One Qur'ānic verse (Q. 42:52) explicitly associates the Spirit with *wahy*. Q. 42:51-52 are worth presenting together:

It belongs not to any mortal that God should speak to him, except by inspiration (*wahy*), or from behind a veil, or that He should send a messenger and he inspires (*fayūhiya*) whatsoever He will, by His leave; surely He is All-high, All-wise.

Even so We have inspired in you a Spirit (*rūh*) of Our Command. You did not know what the *kitāb* was, nor the faith; but We made it a light, whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants. And surely you guide unto a straight path. (Q. 42:51-52)

Q. 42:51 has been subject to great debate and speculation among the *mufasssirūn*. The verse appears to present three possible categories for God's communication with human beings in general: through *wahy*, through speaking from behind a veil, or through sending a messenger to convey *wahy* to a divinely selected recipient. For the purposes of this chapter, however, whether God's inspiration to Muhammad is of the first category or the third category is of little consequence. In either case, the mode of divine communication to the Prophet is *wahy*, meaning a non-verbal inspiration. Even in the third category where God sends a messenger, the latter still "inspires" (*yūhiya*) the recipient through *wahy*. The next immediate verse, Q. 42:52, speaks directly to God's inspiration to Muhammad and confirms this reading: "Even so We have inspired (*awḥaynā*) in you a Spirit (*rūh*) of Our Command." Thus, the Qur'ān consistently states that God inspires Muhammad and His servants in general through the medium of the Spirit (Q. 26:193, 16:2, 16:102, 40:15, 42:52).

While Q. 42:52 explicitly makes the Spirit the instrument of God's inspiration (*wahy*) to Muhammad, Q. 26:193 and surrounding verses provide a more precise account of how the Spirit makes contact with the Prophet:

Truly, it is a sending down of the Lord of all Being

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The Trusted Spirit brought it down (*nazala bihi l-rūhu l-amīn*)
Upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners (*'alā qalbika litakūna mina l-mundhirīn*)
In a clear Arabic tongue (*bi-lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīn*) (Q. 26:193-195)

Say: 'Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel – it is he who brought it down upon you heart (*nazzalahu 'alā qalbika*) by the leave of God, confirming what was before it, and for a guidance and good tidings to the believers. (Q. 2:97)

The Sunni *mufasssirūn* including Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī, al-Mātūrīdī, and al-Rāzī, all interpreted Q. 26:193-195 as a description of the Angel Gabriel bringing down the Arabic *qur'āns* verbatim to Muhammad.¹⁷⁰ These commentators all glossed the above verses as “the Trusted Spirit brought it down to your heart in clear Arabic language.” Thus, they read *bi-lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīn* (in clear Arabic language) as a clause describing the phrase *nazala bihi al-rūhu l-amīnu 'alā qalbika* (the Trusted Spirit brought it down to your heart). However, the actual verses do not exactly specify this. The prima facie reading based on the actual order of the verses indicates that *bi-lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīn* describes *al-mundhirīn* (the warners), and al-Rāzī registered this as the first possible reading. According to this reading, Q. 26:193-195 does not at all imply the verbal dictation of Arabic *qur'āns* to the Prophet and leaves the precise details ambiguous. Writing much later, even al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūfī admitted this as the most apparent reading of the verse.¹⁷¹ However, the description that the Spirit descends to Muhammad's heart in the above verses is significant because it correlates with *Sūra* 53 in which God's *wahy* to Muhammad also takes place in his heart. The first part of *Sūra* 53 is quoted below:

By the star when it sets!
Your companion has not strayed nor is he deluded;
He does not speak from his own desire.
It is nothing but an inspiration inspired to him (*in huwa illā wahyun yūhā*).
It was taught to him by one with mighty powers
And great strength, who stood straight,
While He was on the highest horizon
And then approached and came down

¹⁷⁰ For details and references for their interpretations of the verse, see Chapter 2.

¹⁷¹ Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 229-230; al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, 101.

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Until He was two bow-lengths away or even closer,
And inspired in His servant what He inspired (*fa-awḥā ilā 'abdihi mā awḥā*).
The heart did not make up what he saw.
Are you going to dispute with him what he saw? (Q. 53:1-12)

This *sūra* has been subject to a great deal of literary and thematic analysis by Richard Bell, Josef van Ess, and Nicolai Sinai.¹⁷² For present purposes, it is the mention of *awḥā* or *wahy* four times in *Sūra* 53 that is of significance. As noted by Sinai, “Q. 53:4 and Q. 53:10 for the first time in the Qur'an employ the concept of ‘inspiration’ (*wahy*, *awḥā*) as a technical term for the Qur'anic revelations.”¹⁷³ He further remarks that “the substantive and the corresponding verb appear four times (twice in verse 4 and twice in verse 10) and hence give the impression of being deliberately foregrounded.”¹⁷⁴ While Q. 53:3-4 grounds Muhammad's act of speaking in the *wahy* inspired to him, Q. 53:10-12 connects the act of *wahy* to the heart of Muhammad and to his heart's inner vision.

The Qur'an, throughout its remarks in Q. 42:52, 26:194, 2:97, and 53:1-12, connects *wahy*, the Spirit (*rūḥ*), and the heart of the Prophet.¹⁷⁵ While a full analysis of the role of the heart (*qalb*) remains outside the scope of this study, it is important to register that the Qur'an associates the heart/hearts (*qulūb*) with understanding (*fiqh*), knowledge (*ilm*), and inner vision or insight. Throughout the Qur'an, those who refuse to recognize God and His signs are said to have blind hearts (Q. 22:46) or a seal over their hearts (2:7, 6:25, 16:108, 17:46, 18:57, 30:59, 45:23, 41:5,

¹⁷² Bell, “Muhammad's Visions”; Josef van Ess, “Vision and Ascension: *Sūrat al-Najm* and its Relationship with Muḥammad's *mi'rāj*,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1/1 (1999): 47-62; Nicolai Sinai, “An Interpretation of *Sūrat al-Najm* (Q. 53),” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13/2 (2011): 1-28.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷⁵ Q. 42:24 addresses the hypothetical situation where Muhammad invents false sayings about God by stating that God could put a seal upon his heart.

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63:3). A fuller picture would be as follows: God inspires Muhammad with *wahy* by the mediation of the Spirit (*rūh*) (Q. 42:52) and the Spirit is received by Muhammad's heart (26:194, 2:97, 42:52); Muhammad's heart perceives this Spirit of *wahy* through a kind of inner vision (53:10-12). *Wahy*, therefore, is perceived by the heart of Muhammad through an inner insight as opposed to his auditory faculty (hearing) associated in the Qur'ān with the ears. This gives further grounds to suppose that *wahy* in the Qur'ān, even in the case of Muhammad, is a non-verbal inspiration that the recipient perceives through inner vision as opposed to auditory perception. The qur'ānic association of *wahy* with the inner "seeing" of the heart becomes all the more significant when one considers the pre-Islamic meaning of *wahy* as mysterious and undecipherable writing in the desert. Examining the relationship between *wahy*, writing, and prophetic vision can help illuminate the qur'ānic concept of *wahy* in relation to the Prophet's act of reciting the *qur'āns*.

Neuwirth illustrates important continuity between the pre-Islamic "*wahy* of loss" and the qur'ānic *wahy* of divine and prophetic inspiration in that both are linked to the pre-Islamic idea of writing. After documenting the pre-Islamic usage of *wahy* in Arabian poetry already noted above, Neuwirth analyzed the meaning of the term *qur'ān* in relation to the qur'ānic idea of the Transcendent Kitāb as argued above. Neuwirth appropriately notes how the meaning of *qara'a* is not merely "to recite", but also "to read aloud"; likewise, *qur'ān* also means "reading" and not just "recitation". Drawing on *Sūras* 87, 96, and 68, Neuwirth argues that the Qur'ān depicts the Prophet "reading" from a transcendent or celestial source – what I refer to in this chapter as the Transcendent Kitāb. Referring to Q. 96:3-4, "Read, since your Lord is the most generous" and Q. 68:1-2, "*Nūn*. By the pen and what they inscribe," Neuwirth believes that "the Prophet is taught to

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read to his community from a materially absent, transcendent writing.”¹⁷⁶ Further confirmation is found in Q. 98:2-3, which states that the Messenger “recites purified sheets” (*yatlū ṣuhuf muṭahhara*). Thus, the Qur’ān “alludes to a transcendent divine writing – it reports a mode of ‘virtual reading’ from an elevated coded text.”¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, the term *qur’ān* as used in the Qur’ān should be understood as a recitation or “reading” of the Transcendent Kitāb or “a reading from a celestial text.”¹⁷⁸

Several qur’ānic verses already noted both distinguish and connect the Prophet’s reception of *wahy* from the Transcendent Kitāb and his recitation of it as an Arabic *qur’ān*.

Thus We have sent you among a nation before which other nations have passed away, to recite to them that with which We have inspired (*awḥaynā*) in you. (Q. 13:30)

Recite what has been inspired (*uḥiya*) in you of the *kitāb* of your Lord; no man can change His words. Apart from Him, you will find no refuge. (Q. 18:27)

Recite what been inspired (*uḥiya*) of the *kitāb*, and perform the prayer. (Q. 29:45)

And that which We have inspired (*awḥaynā*) in you of the *kitāb* is the truth, confirming what is before it; God is aware of and sees His servants. (Q. 35:31)

Wahy is given to the Prophet “from the *kitāb*” (*min al-kitāb*), that is, from the Transcendent Kitāb. Stated in different terms, the Transcendent Kitāb is the Revelatory Principle containing the substantive content of the non-verbal inspiration that is *wahy*. If one accepts Neuwirth’s view of a *qur’ān* being the Prophet’s performative “reading” from the Transcendent Kitāb, then *wahy* as non-verbal inspiration mediated by the Holy Spirit must be a kind of spiritual vision by which the Prophet gains access to or “reads/recites” the Transcendent Kitāb. This interpretation is entirely consistent with the Arabic *qur’āns* being contextualized specifications or *tafsīl* from the

¹⁷⁶ Neuwirth, “The Discovery of Writing,” 15.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 17.

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Transcendent Kitāb adapted to Muhammad's audiences, as argued earlier. In sum, the Qur'ān presents the Prophet "reciting" what he "reads" from the Transcendent Kitāb through *wahy*.

This idea of *wahy* as the Prophet "reading" and "reciting" from a Transcendent Kitāb – itself inaccessible to humanity – connects directly to the pre-Islamic use of *wahy* as the appearance of indiscernible writing, except that the Qur'ān's use of *wahy* both evokes and reverses the sense of bewilderment and meaninglessness associated with it. Neuwirth thus argues that the *wahy* from the Transcendent Kitāb is best conceived as a non-verbal language, unintelligible to others, that the Prophet "reads" and "decodes" for his people by expressing it as Arabic *qur'āns*: "This unique act of supernatural reading thus resembles the decoding of an otherwise unintelligible writing, a *wahy*. Indeed, in the Qur'ān, the receiving of *wahy* occasionally figures in the position of the Prophet's act of reading... God's language is a 'coded non-verbal language,' a *wahy*, which needs to be "translated" into human language."¹⁷⁹ Accordingly, the process of *wahy* necessitates that the Prophet "translates" the content of the *wahy*, consisting of non-verbal signs imperceptible to non-prophets, into human language. "The act of receiving revelation itself is conceived as a process of "reading" and thus of making sensually present the eternal and transcendent Word."¹⁸⁰ In this context, the Arabic *qur'āns* are the Prophet's "translation" of the non-verbal *wahy* that he receives or "reads" from the Transcendent Kitāb through the medium of the Spirit (*rūh*). This entails that the Arabic *qur'āns* are not dictated to Muhammad verbatim. Instead, as suggested by Bell, Watt, and Neuwirth, Muhammad constructs the precise words, coins the expressions, and creates the verbal utterances that make up the Arabic *qur'āns*: "The general content of the utterance was

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

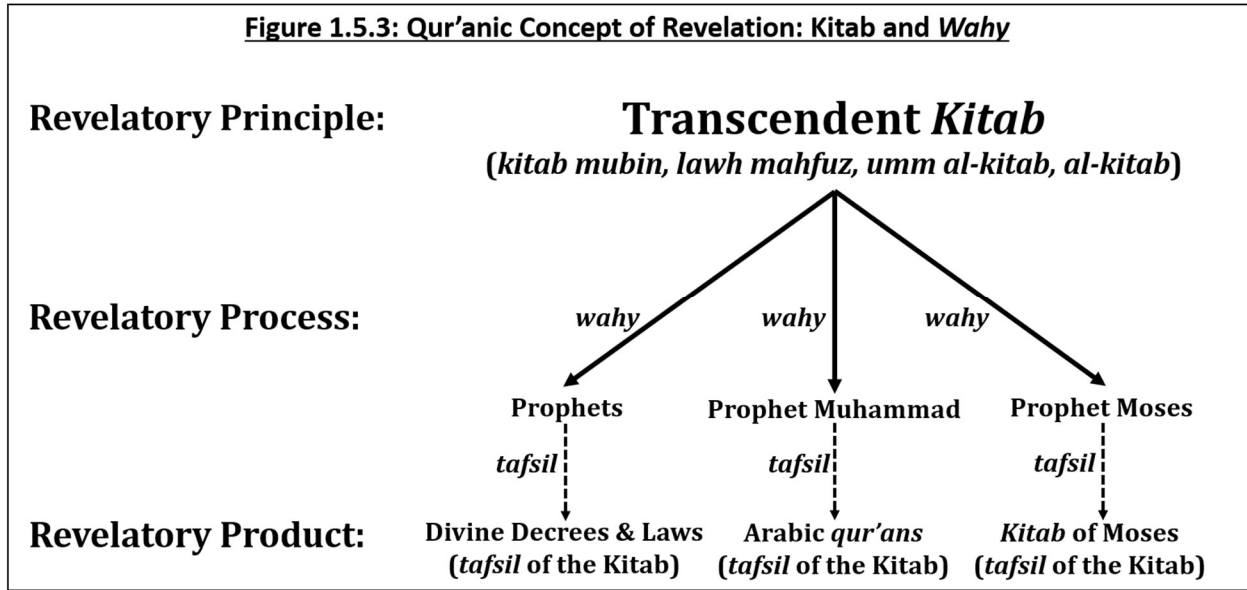
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perhaps 'revealed' from without, but it was left to Muḥammad himself to find the precise words in which to speak."¹⁸¹ Admittedly, the Qur'ān offers few details on the specifics and mechanics of *how* the Prophet effectively "encodes" the *wahy* he receives as Arabic *qur'āns*. However, this interpretation remains consistent with some of the qur'ānic verses usually interpreted to advance the verbal dictation theory. For example, when Q. 20:114 tells Muhammad, "do not hasten with the *qur'ān* (recitation) before its *wahy* is completed to you," this indicates that Muhammad plays a productive role in translating *wahy* into Arabic recitations. The verse, like many others, differentiates between Muhammad's reciting (*qur'ān*) and his reception of *wahy*. Bell and Watt also interpreted Q. 73 and Q. 75:16-19 as allusions to the interior process by which Muhammad came to form the actual words of the qur'ānic recitations.¹⁸²

If *wahy* is understood as a non-verbatim spiritual inspiration granting the Prophet access to the contents of the Transcendent Kitāb, then the process of *tafsīl* – constructing *ad hoc* commentaries and articulations of the Transcendent Kitāb for a target audience – is the precise function and principle product of the Prophet. In other words, the qur'ānic concept of revelation is one where the Prophet performs *tafsīl* or "adapts" the contents of the Transcendent Kitāb perceived through *wahy* into the Arabic *qur'āns*. Given the Qur'ān's repeated assertion that Muhammad receives *wahy* like the prior Prophets, it is conceivable that the Qur'ān regards all prophetic enunciations as *tafsīls* of the Transcendent Kitāb in the same manner (see Figure 1.2).

¹⁸¹ Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 22.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*



The idea of the Arabic *qur'āns* as Muhammad's "prophetic translations" of non-verbal divine inspiration (*wahy*) from the Transcendent Kitāb, which adapted for a target audience, offers a useful avenue to make sense of the shifts in the Qur'ān's authorial voice between first-person plural and first-person singular, and the variation in which the "divine speaker" of the Qur'ān is variously referenced by first-person plural ("We"), first-person singular ("I"), and third-person singular ("He, your Lord, Allah"). Most qur'ānic exegetes and modern scholars simply see these shifts as rhetorical devices aimed at presenting and emphasizing a message for the audience.¹⁸³ The strongest literary argument that the Qur'ān's multifarious employment of first-person plural, first-person singular, and third-person singular serves as a rhetorical device comes from Neal Robinson.¹⁸⁴ Arguing against the views of Watt, who maintains that some of the Qur'anic verses

¹⁸³ For example, see Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide*, 72-74, and Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999), 20.

¹⁸⁴ Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, Second Edition (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 224-255.

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(featuring “We”) are spoken by angels, Robinson claims that the “implied speaker” throughout most of the Qur’ān is God, despite the pronominal shifts. His main argument is that the actions performed by “He”, “We”, and “I” mentioned in the Qur’ān are often the same, implying these pronouns refer to the self-same entity. Robinson’s arguments, although strongly presented and quite compelling, presuppose that “the whole of the Qur’an is the word of God which was brought to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel piecemeal over a period of twenty-three years.”¹⁸⁵ Ultimately, Robinson’s interpretation is premised on a certain theology of revelation from the outset and a synchronic approach to the Qur’ān. However, a different interpretation emerges if one analyzes the phenomenon of authorial voice “shifts” in the Qur’ān from both a diachronic perspective and the conception of the Qur’ān as a divinely inspired “prophetic discourse”.

On this very point, Sinai makes several perceptive observations concerning the gradual development of the notion of a “divine speaker” in the Qur’ān. Sinai generally bases his diachronic analysis of the qur’ānic *sūras* on Nöldeke’s chronology (as many scholars do) but follows Harris Birkeland’s view that the first qur’ānic recitations were *Sūras* 93, 94, 105, 106, and 108.¹⁸⁶ Based on the stylistic features and content of these five *sūras* and some of the early Meccan *sūras*, Sinai argues that the framework of a “divine speaker” addressing a human messenger was a gradual development that crystalized through different stages in response to feedback from the Prophet’s evolving audience. While Sinai admits that the divine speaker-human messenger model was implicit in the earliest *sūras*, the idea of the *qur’āns* as an address in the “divine voice” to the Prophet appeared gradually:

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 224.

¹⁸⁶ Sinai, “Qur’ānic self-referentiality,” 107. In a personal communication, Sinai informed me that he no longer holds to some of Birkeland’s chronology. However, even if *Sūra* 96 was the first revealed recitation, I believe Sinai’s theory still holds.

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It is nonetheless striking that Q 105 and Q 106 could easily have passed for prophetic rather than divine speech... *sūras* 82, 89, 91, 99-107 and 111 all lack the divine 'I' / 'we' and non-generic use of the second person singular. Other texts exhibit no clear first person references to God and only contain an unambiguous second person address of the prophet in their concluding sections (cf. Q 79:42, Q 82:24; at the end of Q 86 and Q 88, both a divine speaker and an individual messenger appear). *Sūras* 77, 83 and 85, by contrast, lack an explicit address of the prophet, yet have first person references to a divine speaker towards the middle or the end of the texts... Nevertheless the fact remains that a substantial number of early texts do not seem particularly concerned about clearly differentiating divine and prophetic voice and skip into the divine perspective only locally, as it were, perhaps for reasons of rhetorical emphasis.¹⁸⁷

In other words, many of the early Meccan *sūras* could reasonably be interpreted as being “prophetic speech” as opposed to a divine dictation. *Sūras* 89, 91, 99, and 100 exhort their listeners to reform their conduct in the face of an impending Day of Judgment but lack authorial reference to God as the speaker of these recitations; these and other *sūras* (82, 101-107, 111) could easily be “prophetic” addresses and exhortations. The fact that the Qur'ānic discourse evolved out of a “prophetic speech” style is quite consistent with the idea of the Arabic *qur'āns* as Muhammad's oral “translation” of non-verbal/verbatim inspiration (*wahy*) – a “translation” whose specific contents are rhetorically, stylistically, and substantively “tailored” to audience attitudes. In this respect, the entirety of the Arabic *qur'āns* – both the early *sūras* and the later *sūras* – can be conceptualized as “prophetic speech” expressing “divine speech”, as opposed to divinely-dictated speech. Even in the later *sūras*, where the divine “authorial voice” is apparent through the use of the first-person plural/singular and God is referred to in third-person, there continue to be abrupt pronominal shifts between these different “voices”. Some of these shifts – from a reference to the divine speaker as first-person plural to first-person singular or third-person singular (and vice versa) occur mid-verse or within a cluster of consecutive verses (see Q. 96:14, 35:9, 16:1, 39:15, 20:113, 5:44, 20:124, 75:1-3, 2:38, 11:37, 70:39-41, 18:109, 39:53, 10:22). In at least eight Qur'ānic verses from the later *sūras*, the speaker is evidently Muhammad, as the word “say” is not

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 108-109.

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found before the utterances (Q. 6:104, 6:114, 11:2, 27:91, 42:10, 51:50, Q. 43:61, 61:10). Furthermore, Q. 19:64 and 37:164-166 are evidently spoken by a plurality of entities (perhaps angels) in the first-person plural.¹⁸⁸

Commenting on the above qur'ānic data, Aziz al-Azmeh observes that everything Muhammad spoke was “potentially” a *qur'ān* and that the qur'ānic voice in some verses is the Prophet, whereas in others the Prophet conveys divine inspiration in his own words:

The idea that all that was pronounced by Muḥammad was, however fragmentary, separately and potentially Qur'ān, seems to have been very early, a notion of performative *pars pro toto*.... In addressing its hearers, the Qur'ān is multivocal, and deploys three anonymous grammatical persons, shifting in the course of the text, sometimes unexpectedly, a fact which is likely to reflect the process of collation as distinct from continuous redaction: the first person singular, the third person singular and the first person plural. Muḥammad is clearly the speaker in some verses, especially earlier ones. He is addressed on his own in other verses, or transmits revelation in his own words. Some intermediary sent by God or proceeding from Him is a possible speaker in other verses, sometimes with puzzling situations where the speaker may be either God or an extra-mundane intermediary, not least when God is spoken of in the third person singular, which could on occasion imply the Apostle as the speaker. God speaks in the first and third persons singular. Both phenomena, pronominal shifts and multivocality, are commensurate with both the variety of settings during which vatic speech was delivered and the purposes of delivery, and the uncertain boundaries between various extra-mundane beings.¹⁸⁹

The lack of explicit divine voice/author in the Early Meccan *sūras* – displaying the form of “prophetic speech” – and the shifting dynamics of the “authorial voice” of the Qur'ān even in later *sūras* (i.e., in evident cases where the Prophet or the several entities are speaking) blur the line between “divine speech” and “prophetic speech” in the Qur'ān. This is not the kind of phenomenon one would expect if the Qur'ān strictly presented itself as a divine dictation to the Messenger; but, it is very much consistent with my argument that the Arabic *qur'āns* self-present as divinely inspired prophetic compositions of the Prophet, where he is effectively “translating” non-verbal

¹⁸⁸ Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 235-238. Robinson regards these verses as exceptions to his general rule that everything in the Qur'ān is best understood as a divine address, as opposed to the speech of the Prophet or the angels.

¹⁸⁹ Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 445-446.

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divine inspiration (*wahy*) through his own speech in conversation with various other parties. A prophetic discourse that seeks to convey, express, or “translate” a non-verbal divine (and/or angelically mediated) address would be characterized by the authorial voice ambiguity one finds throughout the Qur'ān.

The biblical and Jewish studies scholar Benjamin Sommer observed similar shifts between divine and human authorial voices in the Pentateuch and the prophetic literature (Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Amos) of the Hebrew Bible. He argued that these texts are best conceived as prophetic “translations” of divine speech, as opposed to dictated divine speech:

The speakership shifts constantly, because the prophecy is neither composed by the prophet nor dictated to him. This passage emerges out of a combination of divine inspiration and human response. Jeremiah is a participant, not a vessel. The fluidity of speakers demonstrates that for Jeremiah, prophecy was conceived of as involving both a divine element and a human element that could not be fully isolated from each other.¹⁹⁰

Similar to the case of the Hebrew Bible, the idea of the Arabic *qur'āns* as “prophetic speech” expressing “divine speech” better coheres with this qur'ānic phenomenon than the currently popular theories.

In summary, there seems to be little qur'ānic basis for the claim that the Qur'ān presents the prophetic revelatory communication to Muhammad as an auditory verbal dictation. While *nazzala* and *anzala* were certainly understood in later qur'ānic exegesis as describing the physical descent and verbal dictation of a pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān from the heavens to the earth by the angels, the qur'ānic domain of meaning associated with *nazzala* / *anzala* is that of God manifesting His power and authority by acting decisively and beneficially toward His creatures. Likewise, the semantics of *kalām* / *kalimāt* and *qawl* in the Qur'ān convey the idea of God's immutable decrees

¹⁹⁰ Benjamin Sommer, “Prophecy as Translation: Ancient Israelite Conceptions of the Human Factor in Prophecy,” in Diane Sharon and Kathryn Kravitz (eds.), *From Bringing the Hidden to Light: The Process of Interpretation* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary and Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 271-290: 287.

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and actions as opposed to verbal auditory speech akin to human speech as Izutsu supposes. The qur'ānic concept of *wahy*, when analyzed in its pre-Islamic and qur'ānic usages involving nonhuman, human, and prophetic recipients, looks more like non-verbal divine inspiration or divine guidance – most often related to conveying information or directing a course of action. Contrary to the views of Jeffery and Izutsu, the Qur'ān does not seem to distinguish between a non-verbal *wahy* “from within” and a verbal *wahy* from “without”. Qur'ānic *wahy* as a non-verbal divine inspiration to Muhammad – in line with the views of Bell, Watt, and Neuwirth – stands as a textually supported and logical reading of the Qur'anic data. This entails that the Prophet coins and constructs the Arabic words, expressions, and verses of the Arabic *qur'āns* as a verbal “translation” or “formulation” of *wahy*; this idea is already implicit in how the Qur'ān mentions Muhammad's reception of *wahy* and his subsequent recitation as two different processes. When understood in the context of the pre-Islamic idea of *wahy* as unintelligible writing and the qur'ānic ontological distinction between the Transcendent Kitāb and the Arabic *qur'āns* as the prophetic adaptation (*tafṣīl*) of the former, qur'ānic *wahy* is best understood as the Prophet's “reading/reciting” of the Transcendent Kitāb – which, like the pre-Islamic *wahy*, remains undecipherable to all people (who are not Prophets). Accordingly, the Prophet's recitation of the Arabic *qur'āns* figure as performative “readings” or “translations” of the Transcendent Kitāb constructed and tailored to his audience as a *tafṣīl*. The ambiguity in the Qur'ān's “authorial voice” blurs the clear-cut distinction between prophetic speech and divine speech in the Qur'ān – a phenomenon quite compatible with the idea of the Arabic *qur'āns* being the prophetic “translations” of non-verbal *wahy*.

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1.6 The Prophetic-Revelatory Event in Early Islam

Corroborating evidence that the Qur'ānic *wahy* to Muhammad is of a non-verbal character, entailing the Prophet's productive role in composing the Arabic *qur'āns*, comes from William A. Graham's investigation of early Islamic conceptions of divine and prophetic word. In his examination of the Qur'ān and the Sunni *ḥadīth* corpus, Graham makes some important observations about how the earliest generations of the community experienced and remembered the "prophetic revelatory event" involving Muhammad as an ongoing event as opposed to sets of discrete bounded texts existing independent of the Messenger. Graham's main finding is that the phenomenon of revelation in early Islam is best understood as a "unitary reality" centered upon the person of Muhammad, which includes both the divinely revealed *qur'āns* and Muhammad's inspired prophetic guidance.

There is evidence that in the formative decades of Islam, for those for whom the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth were still primarily oral rather than written facts, the distinctions between revelation and prophetic inspiration were, even though present in some degree, less absolute, and certainly less important than the overwhelming awareness of one's being close to what has here been termed "the prophetic-revelatory event". In the early sources, there are glimpses of a more unitary understanding of its own origins by the early *Ummah*, and a broader interpretation of revelation than was later the case. It appears that for the Companions and the early Followers of the Prophet, the divine activity manifested in the mission of Muhammad was a unitary reality in which the divine word, the prophetic guidance, and even the example and witness of all who participated in the sacred history of the Prophet's time, were all perceived as complementary, integral aspects of a single phenomenon.¹⁹¹

If the early Islamic community viewed revelation as a "unitary" phenomenon that integrates the figure of Muhammad, the *qur'āns*, and his prophetic speech, then this belief also reflects their understanding of the relationship between the *qur'āns* and the person of Muhammad.

If the Qur'ānic concept of *wahy* necessitates a productive and active role for the Prophet in composing the *qur'āns* (as argued above), then one would expect to find echoes of this idea in

¹⁹¹ Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, 15.

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some of the post-qur'ānic traditions circulating in the next few generations. This is precisely the picture that Graham depicts from his investigation of early Islamic sources: the *qur'āns* recited by Muhammad during his prophetic mission and shortly thereafter were recognized by the early community as both “divine word” and “prophetic word”:

At least until the 'Uthmanic redactors some two decades after Muhammad's death brought the separate *qur'āns* that had been revealed to the Prophet “between two covers” (*bayn ad-daffatayn*), and perhaps for some time thereafter, the intimate involvement of the Prophet with the revelatory process that produced the *qur'āns* appears to have been a natural and unproblematic assumption for the Community. The contemporaries of the Prophet and even their immediate successors were close enough to the active, ever-unfolding, often *ad hoc* Qur'anic revelations to have recognized that the *qur'āns* were in a sense prophetic word as well as divine word. Nor did that recognition lessen the force of the *qur'āns* for them as revelation.... Thus it can be argued that the boundaries of divine word and prophetic word were apparently much more loosely defined in the thinking of the first century or so of Islam than was possible, at least among the religious scholars, in later times.¹⁹²

The *qur'āns* being “prophetic word” as opposed to verbal “divine dictates” that Muhammad recites mechanistically is quite consistent with the qur'ānic view of prophetic revelation argued thus far. Several historical examples in early Muslim sources attest to how “the early Muslims were able to recognize and accept Muḥammad’s own *active, intimate, human* involvement in the revelatory process.”¹⁹³ As examples, Graham notes that qur'ānic *sūras* like *Sūras* 1, 113, and 114 read more like prophetic prayers than divine dictations. Graham also cites important instances of the Prophet’s creative involvement in the Revelatory Process as conveyed in Sunni sources, examples which have been analyzed recently by Yasin Dutton.

In one widespread account found in the *Muwattā'* of Mālik b. Anas (93-179/711-795) and later *ḥadīth* collections, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644) heard another companion recite *Sūrat al-Furqān* differently from the way he had learned it and raised the issue with the Prophet. The Prophet replied the Qur'ān was sent down according to the recitation of both companions and

¹⁹² Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 29.

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added that the Qur'ān was sent down “according to seven modes” (*‘alā sab‘ati aḥruf*). A similar account involved Ubayy b. Ka‘b (d. ca. 19-35/640-656), a well-known Qur'ān reciter, where the Prophet again authorized two different versions of the same qur'ānic verse and even added that the ending formula of divine names in a given set of qur'ānic verses could be substituted with different divine names.¹⁹⁴ There are further reports where the Prophet authorized one of his scribes to change the ending of a qur'ānic verse from *‘azīzūn ḥakīm* to *ghafūrun raḥīm*, where he remarked that “Yes, they are the same”. Other versions of this story report different kinds of substitutions of qur'ānic words with the Prophet again saying that “Yes. Both are correct.”¹⁹⁵ As observed by Dutton, these instances show that “the Qur'ān was not completely unvariable, with every vowel and consonant fixed right from the very beginning. Rather, there was a degree of variation that was clearly acceptable...which could involve changes of word order and/or the substitution of one formulaic phrase for another, as long as the basic meaning and underlying message was not altered in any way.”¹⁹⁶ Overall, these examples illustrate the historical memory of the Prophet authorizing concurrent variant versions of a qur'ānic *sūra* and allowing substitutions of one formula with another – all in an *ad hoc* manner in response to his community's needs. These reports suggest that the Prophet operated as someone who composed and authorized *qur'āns* in various versions as and when circumstances required it. This phenomenon better coheres with the idea of the Prophet himself verbalizing *wahy* as opposed to waiting for the verbal dictation of every variant of all six thousand qur'ānic verses.

¹⁹⁴ Yasin Dutton, “Orality, Literacy and the ‘Seven *Aḥruf*’ Ḥadīth,” *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* 23/1 (2012): 1-49, 18-21.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

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Based on such examples, Graham observes that “the early Community was apparently able to view the Qur'ān both as the word of God and as the word of Muḥammad.”¹⁹⁷ Some early reports indicate that even the term *qur'ān* initially applied to all the words heard from the Prophet – including both his qur'ānic and extra-qur'ānic speech. Some companions report hearing “many *qur'āns* from Muḥammad” while some passages described as Muhammad’s words in early sources coincide with qur'ānic verses. There are also several instances where the Prophet’s reported farewell sermons contained sentences that are found, with little variation, in the Qur'ān as well.¹⁹⁸

A secondary corollary of the “prophetic-revelatory event” is how, even in the Qur'ān, the authority of the *qur'āns* and the Prophet’s own guidance, judgments, and conduct, are placed on the same level. This seems to have been a Medinan development from the earlier Meccan *sūras* where Muhammad’s function is primarily that of a warner and preacher.¹⁹⁹ The qur'ānic refrain for believers to “obey God and His Messenger,” also found in documents like the Charter of Medina, bears witness that the guiding authority of Muhammad and the qur'ānic recitations were practically unified and indivisible in the Medinan phase of his mission. The divine-prophetic authority of Muhammad pervades the Qur'ān in numerous verses that speak to Muhammad’s role of conveying guidance and explanation (Q. 5:15, 5:19, 16:44, 16:64, 42:52) and call for absolute obedience of the believers to the commands and judgments of the Messenger (Q. 4:80, 4:64, 4:65,

¹⁹⁷ Graham, “Divine Word and Prophetic Word,” 25.

¹⁹⁸ These examples are summarized in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi with Etan Kohlberg and Hasan Ansari, *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an: Scriptural Sources of Islam Between History and Fervor*, tr. Eric Ormsby (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 54-55.

¹⁹⁹ For the rather humble role of Muhammad in the Meccan Qur'ān as a warner and conveyer of news, see Walid Saleh, “The Preacher of the Meccan Qur'an.”

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4:105, 7:157, 24:51, 33:6, 33:36, 48:10).²⁰⁰ Nicolai Sinai's recent study of the Medinan Qur'ān describes the exaltation of the Prophet Muhammad's status to that of God's vicegerent and deputy in the following terms:

Medinan texts closely link the Messenger with God by calling not only for obedience to "God and His Messenger" but also by demanding "belief in God and His Messenger" (*Q.* 49:15, 57:7.19.28, 64:8), as opposed to "belief in God and the Last Day". Such bracketing induces what David Marshall has described as a "godward movement of the Messenger". *Q.* 9:128 goes so far as to ascribe to the Messenger two attributes (kindness and mercy) that are otherwise reserved for God and thus implies the Messenger's "participation in divine characteristics"... In line with the lofty status claimed for the Messenger, Medinan passages repeatedly address the etiquette of being received by him or interacting with members of his household (*Q.* 24:62-63, 33:53-55, 49:1-5, 58:12-13). An atmosphere of almost courtly distance is thus created around him... In sum, the Medinan suras portray the Messenger as an awesome, towering figure who unites paternal, kingly, and priestly aspects and whose role certainly goes far beyond the function of relaying divine revelations that is predominant in the remainder of the Qur'an.²⁰¹

The Medinan *sūras* elevate the authority and functions of the Prophet Muhammad far beyond merely delivering and reciting Qur'ānic recitations to his community. They grant "extra-Qur'ānic authority" to Muhammad, which implies that his prophetic guidance, judgments, and conduct are a product of *wahy*. This claim is also consistent with how the Qur'ān speaks of prophetic *wahy* in general.

Several Qur'ānic verses examined earlier speak of God's *wahy* to Muhammad and prior Prophets (Noah, Moses) in terms of "inspirations to action." Certain Medinan Qur'ānic verses (*Q.* 2:129, 2:151, 3:154, 62:2) define the mandate of the Messenger of God as: 1) reciting God's Signs, 2) purifying the people, 3) teaching *kitāb* and *ḥikma*, and 4) teaching the people what they do not

²⁰⁰ The latest study on the nature of Muhammad's authority in the Medinan verses of the Qur'ān is Nicolai Sinai, "Muḥammad as Episcopal Figure," *Arabica* 65/1-2 (2018): 1-30. See especially the sub-section entitled "Muḥammad's Status and Functions in the Medinan Qur'ān", where the author analyzes numerous examples and verses that I have mentioned above. An earlier study of this topic is Alford T. Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself: The Koranic Data," in Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis (ed.), *Islam's Understanding of Itself* (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1983) 15-52.

²⁰¹ Nicolai Sinai, "The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur'an," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 66 (2015-2016): 47-96: 70-71.

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know. Apart from the first role of reciting God's signs – which is fulfilled by Muhammad's recitations of the Arabic *qur'āns* – the remaining functions are all “extra-qur'ānic” roles that refer to the Prophet's guidance, teachings, and judgments. On these latter roles, Q. 4:113 and Q. 17:39 state that the *kitāb*, *ḥikma*, and new knowledge that Muhammad teaches to his community are also what God has “sent down” (*anzala*) and “inspired” (*awḥā*) in him. The Prophet's duties of “teaching” *kitāb* and *ḥikma* show that the *qur'āns* are not the only expressions of *kitāb*; evidently, the extra-qur'ānic teachings of the Prophet are also manifestations of the truths contained in the Transcendent Kitāb. Furthermore, several qur'ānic verses speak to the Prophet's performance of intercessory functions in the matter of believers seeking forgiveness for their sins and offering repentance where the Messenger mediates God's acceptance and forgiveness (Q. 4:64, 9:99-104). For these reasons, Graham concludes that “it must have been extremely difficult for those close to the Prophet to keep the authority of the divine judgments communicated as *qur'āns* distinct from the authority of his own judgments as God's Apostle.”²⁰²

These various extra-qur'ānic functions ascribed to the Prophet in the Qur'ān are evidence that the scope of qur'ānic *wahy* is much wider than Muhammad's role of reciting the *qur'āns* and extends to a host of other matters. It is perhaps for this reason that the Sunni *ḥadīth* literature depicts Muhammad receiving “extra-qur'ānic” *wahy* throughout his life. One such narration states that “God continued sending *wahy* to the Messenger of God before his death up to the time that he died, and most of the *wahy* came on the day in which the Messenger of God died.”²⁰³ A number of narrations paint the general picture of Muhammad receiving extra-qur'ānic *wahy* throughout his

²⁰² Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, 16.

²⁰³ Ibid., 36. The Arabic text of this narration can be found in Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Jāmi' al-Sahīh* (Saḥīh Muslim), Book 56, Ḥadīth No. 12, accessed on 9/12/2017 on Sunnah.com: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/56/2>. For consistency, I translate *rasūl* as “Messenger” instead of Apostle and I have left *wahy* untranslated.

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prophetic mission – informing his decisions, judgments, answers to questions, and courses of action. For example, the Prophet receives *wahy* and provides an answer to a question about *‘umra*.²⁰⁴ When asked about whether good can bring evil, the Prophet learns the answer to the question through *wahy*.²⁰⁵ In another situation, the Prophet is informed by *wahy* as to the benefit of using a tooth-stick (*siwāk*) for an elder person.²⁰⁶ While talking to a seller of grain, the Prophet learns through *wahy* that the seller is deceiving him.²⁰⁷ Graham summarizes this material and notes that it provides a generally accurate picture of early Muslim understandings of revelation even if the specific details are the result of later developments.²⁰⁸ These accounts of *wahy*, although originating in post-qur'ānic literature, are consistent with the many qur'ānic verses surveyed above that speak of *wahy* as “inspirations to action”. They also corroborate the non-verbal nature of *wahy* argued above and blur the hard distinction between the qur'ānic and extra-qur'ānic discourses of the Prophet (see Figure 1.6).

²⁰⁴ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Jāmi' al-Sahīh*, Book 15, Ḥadīth No. 12, accessed on 9/12/2017 on Sunnah.com: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/15/12>.

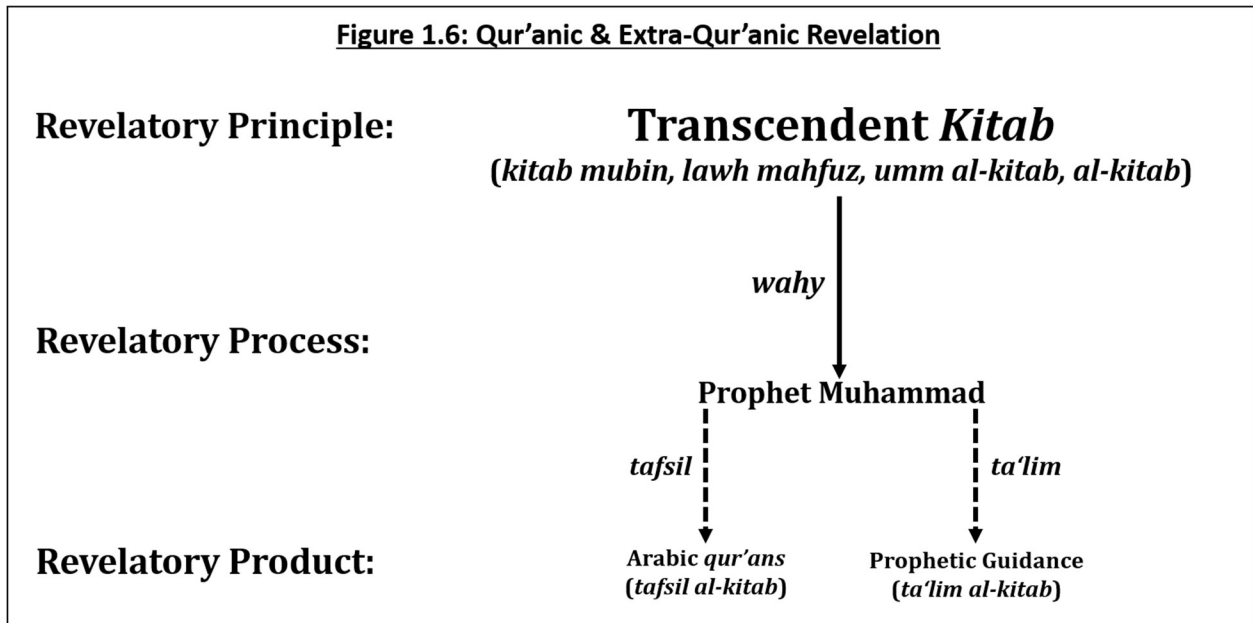
²⁰⁵ Al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-Suḡhrā*, Book 23, Ḥadīth No. 2581, accessed on 9/12/2017 on Sunnah.com: <https://sunnah.com/urn/1077580>

²⁰⁶ Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book 1, Ḥadīth No. 50, accessed on 9/12/2017 on Sunnah.com: <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/1/50>.

²⁰⁷ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Book 24, Ḥadīth No. 37, at Sunnah.com: <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/24/37>

²⁰⁸ Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, 36-37.

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In summary, early Muslim perceptions of the Prophet's experience and mission as a unitary "prophetic-revelatory event" lends further support to this chapter's central claim: that the qur'anic concept of *wahy* is a non-verbal inspiration that entails the active involvement of the Prophet in the formation of the Arabic *qur'ans* and which also extends to the Prophet's extra-qur'anic statements and activities.

1.7 Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, through a semantic analysis of the qur'anic concept of revelation focused on the concepts of *kitāb*, *tafṣīl*, *tanzīl*, and *wahy* as they are used in the Qur'ān and a detailed engagement with qur'anic studies scholarship, this chapter has sought to argue the following:

- a) the Qur'ān in its emergent phase was an orally dynamic and interactive revelatory event consisting of piecemeal *qur'ans* as opposed to a static written scripture; the concept of *kitāb* in the Qur'ān conveys the meaning of divine decree and prescription, represented in the active image of "divine writing", as opposed to a closed physical scripture;
- b) the Revelatory Principle of the Qur'ān is a "Transcendent Kitāb", variously called *kitāb mubīn*, *umm al-kitāb*, or *al-kitāb*, which is both the repository of God's decrees, records,

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and knowledge and the celestial archetype of the all prophetic revealed guidance; accordingly, the Arabic *qur'āns*, consisting of situated adaptations or *tafṣīl* from the Transcendent Kitāb, constitute the Revelatory Product;

c) in the Revelatory Process, the qur'ānic idea of *wahy* is a non-verbal spiritual inspiration as opposed to an auditory divine dictation, by which the Prophet “reads” the Transcendent Kitāb through the medium of the Holy Spirit and thereby produces the Arabic *qur'āns*;

d) the early Muslim community in the Prophet's lifetime and in the first several generations perceived Qur'ānic Revelation as part of a unitary “prophetic-revelatory event” involving the active role of the Prophet in the production of both the Arabic *qur'āns* and extra-qur'ānic prophetic guidance.

If the Qur'ān wholly or partially reflects the beliefs of its author (whether that is God, Muhammad, or multiple authors/redactors) and its first listeners (Muhammad, his proto-Muslim community, the first generation), then the qur'ānic idea of revelation proposed above amounts to the earliest Muslim (or proto-Muslim) understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation and forms the historical baseline from which later interpretations of revelation evolved in Islamic thought. The first pivotal change in post-qur'ānic developments in the concept of revelation among early Muslim communities was the compilation and canonization of the Arabic *qur'āns* into a closed physical scripture known as *al-Qur'ān* or the Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*); a closer examination of this emergence follows in Chapter 2.

Part 2: Revelation in Sunni Muslim Exegesis and Theology

The next three chapters constitute an analytical historical survey of the many theologies of Qur'ānic Revelation that developed within several emergent Sunni traditions of Islam from the second/eighth century to the end of the fifth/eleventh century. Contrary to popular belief reflected in much academic and educational literature, there is no single “Sunni” Muslim understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation. These chapters collectively argue that in what would later be called Sunni Islam there was a diversity of positions concerning:

- 1) the ontology of the Revelatory Principle, variously conceived as a heavenly Guarded Tablet containing a pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān (in *tafsīr*), the Knowledge of God, the Speech of God, or the Will of God (in the theological discourse of *kalām*);
- 2) the Revelatory Process of “sending down” (*tanzīl*, *inzāl*) and “divine inspiration” (*wahy*) – describing how the contents of the Revelatory Principle are communicated to the Prophet and manifested in the form of the revealed Arabic Qur'ān;
- 3) the nature of the Revelatory Product – the Arabic Qur'ān in its recited or scriptural form and the Prophetic Sunna collected in *ḥadīth* reports; and the ontological relationship between the Revelatory Product and the Revelatory Principle.

Distinctive Qur'ānic Revelation models exist across diverse Islamic discourses of religious thought, including prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), theology (*kalām*), creed (*‘aqīda*), and Sufism. Even within a single Muslim discursive project, such as Sunni *kalām* for example, the understanding of revelation differs among the Ḥanbalī, Ash‘arī, Māturīdī, Karrāmī, and Mu‘tazilī schools.

The next three chapters provide a detailed examination of revelation models in various Sunni traditions; we begin by critically examining the scriptural canonization of the Qur'ān in the first/seventh century and demonstrate its implication on early proto-Sunni concepts of Qur'ānic Revelation found in *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* literature (Chapter 2); we then consider the origins of the debate over the Qur'ān's status as God's Speech in early *kalām* theology and among the Sunni

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traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) during the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries (Chapter 3); and we conclude by analyzing developed models of Qur'ānic Revelation premised on the concept of God's Speech in classical Sunni *kalām* of the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries (Chapter 4). These specific genres and periods were chosen because they were formative for the theological ideas that also engaged Ismaili thinkers when they were formulating their own positions; specifically, we will see fourth/tenth- and fifth/eleventh-century Ismaili philosophers evoking particular Sunni theological claims about the Qur'ān in the course of reinterpreting or refuting them.

The general argument in these chapters is that Sunni theologies of Qur'ānic Revelation – including commonly assumed beliefs such as the Qur'ān being the “Book of God” or the “Speech of God” – are diverse and were historically constructed within different theologies conditioned by socio-political events. In general, the theories of Qur'ānic Revelation found in the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition are premised on the Qur'ān's scriptural status in the format of “God's Book”, which was the outcome of several processes in the first century including canonization, socio-political developments, and hermeneutics. Meanwhile, the revelatory theories found in the Sunni *kalām* tradition are premised on the Qur'ān's recitational format as “God's Speech”, which was itself subject to various theological understandings. This and the two following chapters will highlight this diversity, giving an historical account of the development of each position, and analyzing the core theological issues and debates that underlie the various positions on revelation. Our aim in these segments is to offer the widest and most detailed survey of various Sunni positions on Qur'ānic Revelation in modern scholarship.

Chapter 2: The Book of God (*Kitāb Allāh*): Scriptural Canonization and Qur'ānic Revelation in Sunni *Ḥadīth* and *Tafsīr*

2.0 Introduction: The Qur'ān from Revelation to Scripture

Most people take it for granted that the Qur'ān always functioned as a scripture possessing the august status of the *kitāb Allāh* (Book of God) for all Muslims across time and space. In this view, the Qur'ān is a closed corpus of divinely-revealed recitations in the form of a written text, possessing the highest degree of divine authority over the community, whose final canonized form is divinely purposed to be the primary source of divine guidance for all believers in all times. By the term “scripture”, I mean “the idea of a collection of material that, whatever its history, is perceived as a unitary whole, and the implied authority and sacrality of a text with unique claim to transcendence and truth.”²⁰⁹ As we saw in the prior chapter, this idea of the Qur'ān as a closed physical scripture containing definitive divine guidance for all times and places is nowhere endorsed in the Qur'ān. This is because the Qur'ānic discourse of *kitāb*, *qur'ān*, *tanzīl*, *tafsīl*, and *wahy* concerns what is more properly designated as *revelation* rather than *scripture*. Analytically speaking, *revelation* and *scripture* are two different concepts – a fact overlooked by many but well noted by the late Michael Zwettler:

scripture – a canonical discourse possessed, cognized, revered, dealt with, and augmented by and within a historically established and evolving religious community – and *revelation* – as, materially, more or less the same discourse *prior* to its canonization and “scripturalization,” at the point of its production and issuance as a genre of verbal communication or expression which would *perhaps*

²⁰⁹ William A. Graham gives the following description of scripture: “the notion of a relatively sizable, usually composite text (as opposed to a single narrative, legal code, discourse, or the like); the idea of a collection of material that, whatever its history, is perceived as a unitary whole, and the implied authority and sacrality of a text with unique claim to transcendence and truth”, in “Scripture as Spoken Word,” in Miriam Levering (ed.), *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 129-169: 140.

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have been addressed to the formation, delineation, or regulation of such a religious community before or during its embryonic stages.²¹⁰

This chapter is about the socio-political and hermeneutical processes that brought about the “scripturalization” of the Qur’ān – the decisive transition from the Qur’ān *as revelation* existing as an evolving oral revelatory discourse engaging the nascent qur’ānic community to the Qur’ān *as scripture* existing in the form of a canonized closed text possessed and interpreted by the post-qur’ānic community. I argue that the canonization of the Qur’ān over the first/seventh-eighth century caused significant changes in the Qur’ān’s physical, phenomenological, and theological status among post-prophetic Muslim communities; in other words, there was a decisive shift in how post-qur’ānic communities conceived the Revelatory Product of Qur’ānic Revelation as distinct from the views of the original qur’ānic community in the time of the Prophet. Through a series of socio-political and hermeneutical developments, the Qur’ān became a “scripture” over the first century and this “scripturalization” invested it with the designation and status of the *kitāb Allāh*, later understood to mean the reified “Book of God”. The Qur’ān’s newly acquired scriptural status went on to determine how Muslims from the second century onward understood Qur’ānic Revelation as reflected in the interpretive discourses of *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*.

During the lifetime of Muhammad, the Qur’ān presented itself and was perceived as a revelatory event consisting of piecemeal divinely inspired oral recitations, *qur’āns*, each addressing specific circumstances faced by the Prophet and his community and continuously speaking to new situations. As aptly described by Aziz al-Azmeh, “the Qur’ān was a process of performative communication, persuasion and pressure, responding to developing circumstances,

²¹⁰ Michael Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto,” note 2 on p. 206. Thanks to my colleague Alexandr Morse for bringing Zwettler’s work to my attention.

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thereby bearing repetition, reiteration, inflection, self-abrogation and other forms of self-reflexivity, and manifold interpolation.”²¹¹ The idea of a closed written corpus called *al-Qur'ān* was not operative during the Qur'ān's revelatory phase, as Graham notes: “Until the codification of what has since served as the *textus receptus* – or at least until active revelation ceased with Muhammad's death – there could have been no use of *al-qur'ān* to refer to the complete body of ‘collected revelations in written form’.”²¹² As I also showed in Chapter 1, when the Qur'ān refers to itself, prior revealed guidance, or specific commands as *kitāb*, it uses the term *kitāb* in the sense of what God has “prescribed” (*kataba*) as divine guidance; these instances are all called *kitāb* – not because they constitute written closed scripture – but because they originate from, express, and manifest God's Transcendent Kitāb (*kitāb mubīn, umm al-kitāb, lawḥ maḥfūz*) in which all divine knowledge, records, and decrees are encompassed. The Qur'ān knows no concept of itself as a closed scriptural canon that is to be used as a guiding document generalized to all situations arising indefinitely in the future; rather, as I shall demonstrate, the idea of the Qur'ān as a scripture conveying divine guidance generalizable to all situations very much results from the phenomenological, theological, and hermeneutical outlooks of the post-qur'ānic community's reception of the Qur'ān. The words of Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his pioneering work, *What is Scripture?* speak to this very point: “No text is a scripture in itself and as such. People – a given community – make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way. I suggest: scripture is a human activity.”²¹³

²¹¹ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 451.

²¹² Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qur'ān’,” 362.

²¹³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1st printing, 1993, 2nd printing, 2005), 18.

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According to Muslim traditional accounts, the collection, compilation, and canonization of the Qur'ān into a closed written scripture was only pragmatically accomplished through the efforts of 'Umar, Abū Bakr, and 'Uthmān and not at the command of the Prophet Muhammad.²¹⁴ While the material process of the Qur'ān's canonization has been much discussed in modern scholarship, far less attention has been paid to the phenomenological, theological, and hermeneutical dimensions of its canonization. Angelika Neuwirth has voiced the key issue as follows: "Until now, too little attention has been paid to the *cognitive* aspects of canonization.... From the community's perspective, what essentially new qualities did the corpus acquire after its literary fixation, after the authorisation of a final version?"²¹⁵ In this chapter, I first argue that the early post-qur'ānic community's conception of the Qur'ān and its understanding of *kitāb* underwent a decisive shift over the first century. Instead of conceiving the Qur'ān as an open-ended series of piecemeal oral recitations, each disclosing God's *kitāb* for particular situations, many within the nascent community came to regard the closed 'Uthmānic written codex of all past qur'ānic recitations as the definitive *kitāb Allāh* – "the Book of God" possessing supreme divine authority and providing comprehensive divine guidance generalizable to any and all future situations. This evolution in the material and theological status of the Qur'ān occurred through three interrelated developments in the first century, all representing dimensions of "scripturalization":

1) First, materially and textually speaking, the oral Qur'ān as a discourse consisting of various multi-form recitations partially written in multiple fragments and codices was

²¹⁴ For a critical description of this canonization process and the most recent review of scholarly investigations of it, see Herbert Berg, "The collection and canonization of the Qur'ān," in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2017), online version, accessed 1/20/2018: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315743462.ch3>

²¹⁵ Angelika Neuwirth, "Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Hijr*. Observations on the Qur'ānic "Canonical Process" and the Emergence of a Community," in Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 184-215: 184-185.

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compiled, canonized, and “reduced” to the standardized written Qur'ān inscribed in a single authoritative codex (*muṣḥaf*) codified under 'Uthmān, whose skeletal text (*rasm*) tolerated less variability in the Qur'ān's recited form.

2) Second, the *physical* canonization of the Qur'ān was accompanied by a *phenomenological* canonization whereby the post-Qur'ānic community “reified” what were originally piecemeal oral *qur'āns* into a singular and static scriptural object. In this process, the Qur'ān underwent a phenomenological shift from being conceived as a “revelatory canon” to being regarded as a “scriptural canon”.

3) Third, the physical and phenomenological canonization of the Qur'ān precipitated a *theological* elevation of the Qur'ān's status: the Qur'ān gradually became identified with *al-kitāb* or *kitāb Allāh*, conceived as “the Book of God”; the Qur'ān collected “between the two covers”, now invested with the status of *kitāb Allāh*, became the divinely authoritative document for the guidance of the post-qur'ānic community and subject to various hermeneutical projects.

These two conceptions of the Qur'ān – the original idea of piecemeal, prophetically-mediated recitations and the later notion of a self-contained, authoritative scripture – are fundamentally different and involve different models of revelation. This claim is demonstrated in the second part of this chapter, which demonstrates that the newly acquired material, phenomenological, and theological status of the Qur'ān as scripture informed the proto-Sunni Muslim models of Qur'ānic Revelation. As a result of the scripturalization of the Qur'ān, two proto-Sunni doctrines of revelation – prophetic *wahy* as verbatim dictation and the literal pre-existence of the Arabic Qur'ān in heaven – were articulated in early *ḥadīth* and the classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition.

2.1 Canonization: From the piecemeal oral *qur'āns* to the Book of God (*Kitāb Allāh*)

2.1.1 Physical Canonization: From Qur'ānic Discourse to Qur'ānic Scripture

The canonization of the Qur'ān was a multi-faceted process involving both a material and a phenomenological transition in the form and status of the Qur'ān from an open-ended revelatory process of oral recitations to a closed scriptural object. The material dimension of this process saw

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the reduction of “multi-form” oral Arabic *qur'āns*, partially inscribed as various fragments in multiple codices (*maṣāḥif*), to the closed skeletal text (*rasm*) of the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* (codex). Several studies based on historical and philological methodologies lend considerable support to the general Muslim claim that the qur'ānic consonantal text reached closure around the time of 'Uthmān.²¹⁶ Here we can recall various accounts where the Prophet allowed his companions to recite the same qur'ānic *sūra* differently and allowed variant qur'ānic formulations on the grounds that the Qur'ān was sent down “according to seven modes (*ahruf*)”. Over the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad and well into the pre-'Uthmānic era, Dutton tells us that “the Qur'ān is essentially a ‘multiform’ text, such as one would expect with a text that manifested in a society where the oral, rather than the written, was the norm.”²¹⁷ He further concluded that the oral recited forms of the Qur'ān in the pre-'Uthmānic period contained much more variation than what was eventually permitted in the post-'Uthmānic period. Al-Azmeh posits the existence of multiple written codices, such as those of Zayd b. Thābit (d. 40/660), Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/650) and Ubayy b. Ka'b (d. 31/649). While there is little historical witness to the state of the Qur'ān prior to the 'Uthmānic canonization, Al-Azmeh speculates that the production of the “official” 'Uthmānic codex was the outcome of multiple processes involving both oral and written materials that had hitherto, albeit fragmentarily, served as vehicles for the Qur'ān prior to its canonized form in the standard *muṣḥaf*:

The transformation of the Word of God and of the Book into Scripture acquiring a sealed canonical nature was a process that involved the redaction by many hands of oral delivery by many voices, the acceptance, rejection and ultimately the intertextual assembly and sequential organisation, and, quite possibly, the editing of such redactions in a variety of codices, one of which ultimately became canonical, under the decisive direction of political agency. All the while, the Qur'ān, for the period

²¹⁶ Sinai, “When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure,” Part 1-2.

²¹⁷ Yasin Dutton, “Orality, Literacy and the ‘Seven *Ahruf* *Ḥadīth*,” 3.

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preceding the sealing of its canon, and for longer fragmentarily, possessed the hallowed status of a canon in formation, and in this sense was used canonically before its integral canonisation.²¹⁸

ʿUthmān's canonization resulted in restricting the Qur'ān to only one written form or orthographic “skeleton”, known as *al-rasm al-ʿUthmānī*, copies of which were circulated throughout Muslim towns (Medina, Mecca, Kufa, Damascus, Basra) to the exclusion of other recitation forms and codices.²¹⁹ Based on several examples of variant Qur'ān codices and recitation formats attested in Sunni *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*, Dutton has described the pivotal transition from a “multiform” oral Qur'ān in the pre-ʿUthmānic period to the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf* as follows:

That is to say, the Qur'ān, which of course means literally ‘recitation’, was a typically ‘multiform’ phenomenon at the beginning of its life, reflected in the *ḥadīth* about the seven *aḥruf* and in the multiplicity of variants recorded from the Companions and others in the *qirā'āt* and *tafsīr* literature, and was then ‘reduced’ to one dominant written form in the time of ʿUthmān. The ‘Companion codices’ can then be understood as reflections or memories of this initial multiform phenomenon, as indeed Mālik's comment, in the context of the seven *aḥruf*, about the Companions having their own, implicitly differing, *muṣḥafs*, indicates.... In short, it appears that an initially predominantly oral, ‘multiform’ (at a ‘seven-level’ degree of multiformity, i.e. seven *aḥruf*) text, becomes reduced to a predominantly written, and necessarily more uniform, text. That is, we see a change of emphasis from an oral to a written form, while the basic content remains exactly the same. Put differently, we could say that the *kitāb* of Allah gets expressed as *qur'ān* on the tongue of the Messenger, and then as *ṣuḥuf* and *maṣāḥif* by the pens of the Muslims—and all are aspects of one and the same thing.²²⁰

The second stage in the material canonization of the Qur'ān, termed “the Second *Maṣāḥif* Project”, was one where the Umayyad Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65-86/685-705) commissioned his governor al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 95/713) to implement a few changes in the orthography, vowels, diacritics, recitation conventions, and word counts of the ʿUthmānic codices while also clamping down on the “unofficial” codices like that of Ibn Masʿūd.²²¹ By the fourth/tenth century,

²¹⁸ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 464.

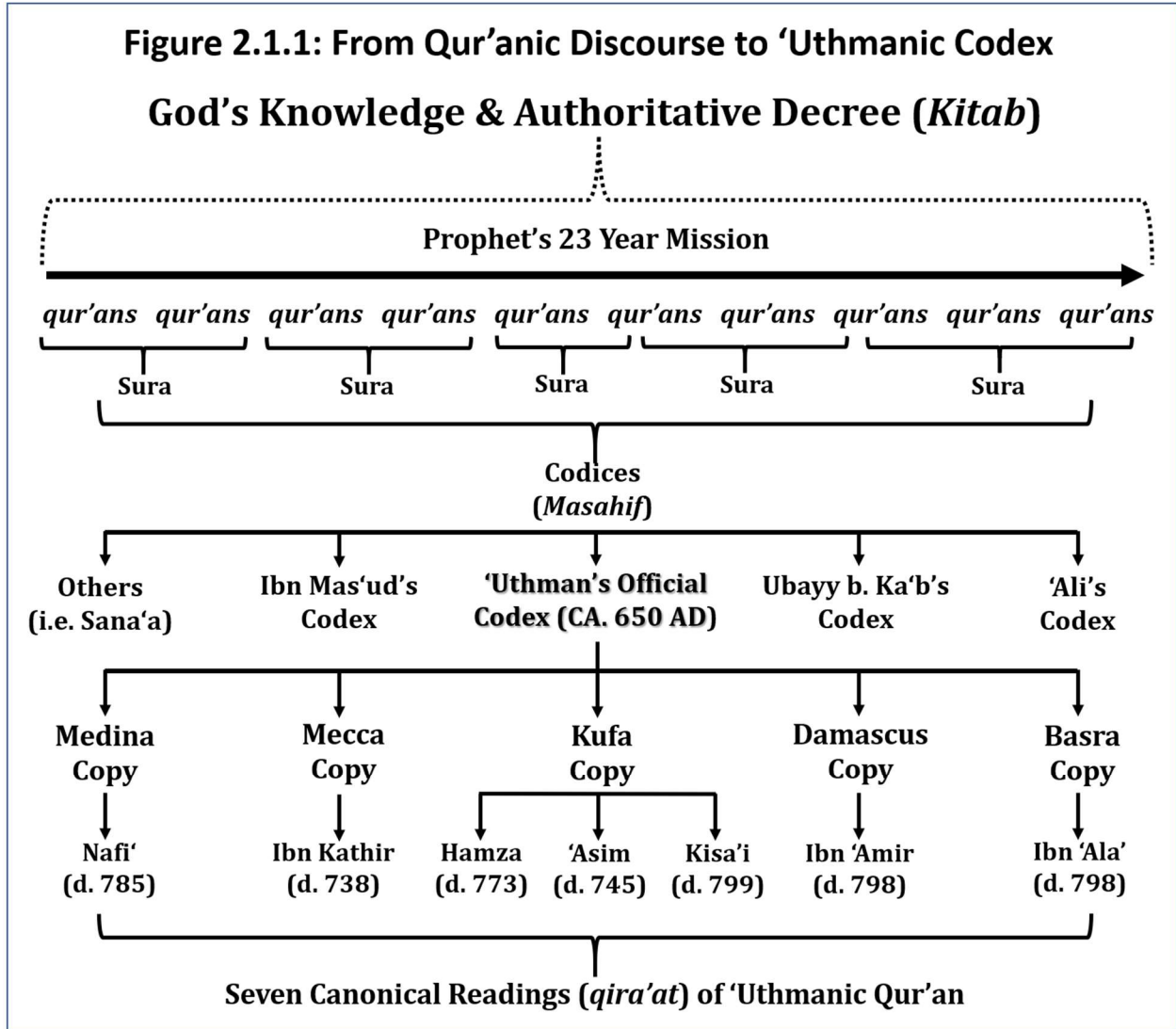
²¹⁹ Dutton, “Orality, Literacy and the ‘Seven *Aḥruf* *Ḥadīth*,” 2.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

²²¹ Omar Hamdan, “The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project: A Step towards the Canonization of the Qur'anic Text,” in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, 795-835.

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scholars of the emerging Sunni tradition had further canonized “seven readings” (*qirā'āt*) of the 'Uthmānic *rasm* (see Figure 2.1.1):



The material reduction of the multiform oral *qur'āns* to a fixed qur'ānic codex had far-reaching consequences for the post-'Uthmānic community's engagement with the Qur'ān. Mohammad Arkoun was among the first to draw attention to the important hermeneutical and theological changes in how Muslims from the first century onward engaged with the canonized format of the Qur'ān. He outlined a hermeneutical shift from the “oral qur'ānic discourse” to the

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“Official Closed Corpus”. Arkoun laid out the hermeneutical, social, and political implications of this process as follows:

As a cultural fact, the O.C.C. [Official Closed Corpus] has three fundamental implications:

- 1) The Qur'ānic discourse, initially uttered and used as an oral discourse, becomes a text. This transformation will bring about a number of radical changes, which must be considered by linguistics and semiotics;
- 2) The sacred character of this text will be extended to the book as the material receptacle and vehicle of the “Revelation”;
- 3) The book as a cultural instrument will be the basis of another fundamental change in the societies of the Book, i.e. the increasing role, and finally, the domination of written learned culture over the oral folk culture. This domination is related to the state, which will develop a need for official archives and historiography. This will, in turn, favor the emergence of a social group called 'Ulamā', the specialists in charge of the exegesis of the holy texts, and the orthodox elaboration and use of law and beliefs.²²²

The compilation and canonization of the qur'ānic recitations into “the book”, the official scripture contained within the official codex, precipitated a shift in the post-qur'ānic community's conception of the Qur'ān and revelation in general. As Arkoun notes, when the oral qur'ānic discourse effectively became fixed as a text, the concept of revelation was reoriented around “the book”. This is clearly different from revelation taking the form of open-ended oral *qur'āns* that are being renewed and updated continuously. As it will be shown, the compilation of the Qur'ān into a closed corpus prompted the early post-prophetic community to “reify” the piecemeal qur'ānic recitations into the static hermeneutical object called the “Book of God”. Miriam Levering, commenting on this phenomenon across religious traditions, observes that “when the sacred text is in the form of a book, it is regarded as complete. It contains everything of importance, and can be applied to all aspects of human life.”²²³ As a hermeneutical object, the Qur'ān as scripture required exegesis and became subject to the opinions of individual interpreters employing

²²² Arkoun, “The Notion of Revelation,” 74-75.

²²³ Miriam Levering, “Introduction”, in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 9.

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a text-based hermeneutic to ground their ideas of correct belief and practice in scripture. Had the Qur'ān not been compiled into a canonized textual volume, the history of Islamic hermeneutics would likely have been quite different.

The sheer novelty of compiling the Arabic *qur'āns* into a unified corpus is attested in Muslim accounts about the Qur'ān's compilation.²²⁴ In one such account, 'Umar convinces Abū Bakr and Zayd b. Thābit that the qur'ānic recitations must be collected and compiled into a single volume. Various second/eighth- and third/ninth-century Muslim sources report how 'Umar was concerned about the preservation of the Qur'ān following the death of many Qur'ān reciters in battle. Abū Bakr narrates that 'Umar urged him "to collect the Qur'ān" (*an tajma'a al-Qur'ān*). Abū Bakr disagreed and replied: "how can I do something the Messenger of God did not do?" (*kayfa af'alu shay'an lam yaf'alhu rasūlu Allāhi?*). 'Umar then insisted, "[because,] by God, it is a good thing (*khayrun*)." Abū Bakr goes on to say that 'Umar did not cease talking back to him until "God opened my heart to that (*sharaha Allāhu li-dhālika ṣadri*) and I saw what 'Umar saw." Zayd then narrates how he was with 'Umar and Abū Bakr when the latter approached him and asked him to seek out the Qur'ān and "collect it" (*ajma'hu*). Zayd remarks that what Abū Bakr is asking of him is harder than being ordered to move a mountain. Then Zayd replied to both of them: "How can you two do something that the Prophet did not do?" (*kayfa taf'alāni shay'an lam yaf'alhu al-nabī*). Repeating 'Umar's words, Abū Bakr also on this occasion insisted, "[because,] by God, it is a good thing." Then, in similar fashion as 'Umar did with Abū Bakr, Zayd reports that Abū Bakr did not cease talking back to him until "God opened my heart to what He had opened

²²⁴ The most comprehensive study of Muslim accounts of how the Qur'ān was compiled within third/ninth-century to ninth/fifteenth-century writings is Viviane Comerro, *Les traditions sur la constitution du muṣḥaf de 'Uthmān* (Beiruter Text und Studien 134; Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2012).

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the heart of Abū Bakr and 'Umar.”²²⁵ Zayd then goes on to describe how he began seeking out the Qur'ān and collecting it from various sources including parchments, blades of grass, leaves of date-palm trees, and “the breasts of men”. The tradition concludes by noting that Zayd's compilation of the Qur'ān remained with Abū Bakr, who entrusted it to 'Umar, who in turn bequeathed it to his daughter Hafsa. The second tradition about 'Uthmān's canonization of the Qur'ān narrates that the Caliph had been informed about differences in the recitation of the Qur'ān among the people of Syria and Iraq. Evidently wary of communal division developing over variations in the Qur'ān, 'Uthmān obtained the Qur'ān manuscripts of Hafsa and formed a committee consisting of Zayd b. Thābit and others to codify a standardized version of the Qur'ān based on the dialect of the Quraysh. He then ordered that all other Qur'ānic materials, such as variant codices, be destroyed.²²⁶

Before analyzing the contents of these traditions, let us first offer a word about their dating and authenticity. Both Sunni and Shi'i Muslims generally accept that the first collection of the Qur'ān was accomplished by 'Umar and Abū Bakr and that the canonized version was commissioned by 'Uthmān. Harald Motzki analyzed both traditions – one about 'Umar's initiation of the Qur'ān compilation project and the other about 'Uthmān's canonization – and performed *isnad cum matn* analysis on their chains of transmission in earlier and later sources.²²⁷ Motzki concluded that both traditions were put into wider circulation by Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (51-124/671-

²²⁵ This version of the tradition is from Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 65, Ḥadīth 4679, accessed on 9/12/2017: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/65>; the tradition has been translated and extensively analyzed Linda Lee Kern, “The Riddle of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in Bukhārī's Kitāb al-Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ (and the Question of the Routinization of Prophetic Charisma),” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1996), 74-75. See also al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 66, Ḥadīth 8: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/66>.

²²⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 66, Ḥadīth 9: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/66>.

²²⁷ Motzki, “The Collection of the Qur'ān.”

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742), the “common link” in the various transmission lines. Thus, both traditions can be dated to the first quarter of the second century at the latest. It is also possible that al-Zuhrī, if he did not make up the tradition, heard it from his own teachers, which would push back the dating of the traditions into the latter part of the first century. It remains possible that the general sense of these traditions is historically accurate: that ‘Umar originated the very idea of compiling the Qur’ān into a single volume, and, after much heated discussion, he managed to convince or pressure Abū Bakr and Zayd to execute the project; and further that Zayd’s codex was later used by the “‘Uthmānic committee” to produce the official written version of the Qur’ān.

It is also necessary to consider traditions found in both Sunni and Shi'i sources that claim that Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – revered as the first Imam of the believers by the Shi’is – also collected the Qur’ān. Seyfeddin Kara analyzed several reports that narrate how ‘Alī delayed pledging allegiance to Abū Bakr and remained aloof from him in order to collect the Qur’ān, only for the community later to reject his compilation. Kara’s *isnād-cum-matn* analysis dated the earliest group of these traditions (found in Sunni *ḥadīth* collections) to Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728). He concluded that the issue of who collected the Qur’ān remained a source of heated debate well into the early second century.²²⁸ Kara completed a subsequent study of seven Shi'i narrations attributed to the Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/733). These traditions, with minor differences, claim that only the Imams “collected/knew the entire Qur’ān in its exoteric and esoteric dimensions” (*jama‘a al-Qur’ān kullahu zāhirahu wa-bāṭinahu*). Kara noted the ambiguity in the term *jama‘* – which could mean “to collect” or “to know” the Qur’ān by heart and concluded that *jama‘a* here “refers not to the collection of the Qur’ān but to its true and definitive

²²⁸ Seyfeddin Kara, “The Suppression of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib’s Codex: Study of the Traditions on the Earliest Copy of the Qur’ān,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75/2 (2016): 267-289.

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understanding.”²²⁹ Kara concluded that the source of these traditions was Muḥammad al-Bāqir, that *jam'* refers “not to a collection comparable to that accomplished by Zayd b. Thābit, but rather a complete knowledge of the text and its correct understanding”, and that a later transmitter may have adjusted the traditions' content to claim that 'Alī physically collected the Qur'ān.²³⁰ Note that these findings about the content and dating of the above Shi'i accounts do not contradict the claim about 'Uthmān's collection of the Qur'ān becoming the official qur'ānic text used by the early community.

Al-Azmeh believes that the above traditional Muslim accounts of the Qur'ān's compilation at the direction of the early Caliphs are generally accurate. More importantly, these reports reveal the explicit efforts of a central political authority to create a canonical qur'ānic scripture:

In all, we have the impression of a deliberate process of aggregative collation by 'Umar I and 'Uthmān, predominantly of written material probably already started under Abū Bakr, of various lengths and states of completion, written on a variety of materials, in addition to base autograph codices. The aim was evidently the production of a binding literary canon... That there were many Qur'ānic fragments and autograph codices in circulation is beyond dispute, and it was indeed these that partly occasioned the attempts at codification by a political authority starting to formulate a religious policy in the medium of which Muḥammad's charisma might be transmitted.²³¹

In either case, whether the above accounts truly go back to the early Caliphs or date to the late first/early second century, their content reveals the discontinuity between whatever Muhammad must have had in mind with respect to the Qur'ān's form and function after his death and what 'Umar, Abū Bakr, Zayd, and 'Uthmān eventually accomplished. In stressing two times that a compilation of all the qur'ānic recitations into a single volume was “something that the Messenger of God did not do”, the first account actually demonstrates that the transformation of the Qur'ān

²²⁹ Seyfeddin Kara, “The Collection of the Qur'ān in Early Shi'ite Discourse: The traditions ascribed to the fifth Imām Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Bāqir,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26/3 (2016): 375-406: 390.

²³⁰ Ibid., 404-405.

²³¹ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 468-469.

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into a physical, closed volume – in the form of a “book” or “scripture” – was very much an innovation engineered by the post-prophetic community and perhaps even spearheaded by the first two Sunni Caliphs. The strong protest on the part of both Abū Bakr and Zayd indicates that their passionate disagreement may reflect some historicity in the differing attitudes toward the codification process; it would be much more expedient simply to fabricate a prophetic statement where he authorizes or even performs the physical compilation of the Qur'ān. But the only way this complete break with the Prophet's own practice is justified was by asserting that God Himself intervened in the process to open the hearts of Abū Bakr and Zayd to accepting 'Umar's opinion. In other words, the tradition claims that God sided with 'Umar over Muhammad's known practice and directly endorsed the compilation of the *qur'āns* through what appears to two acts of divine inspiration. Even if this 'Umar/Abū Bakr/Zayd tradition is not historical, it may represent a sort of proto-Sunni apology or post-facto justification for the compilation of the qur'ānic text, since this action went directly against the recognized practice of the Prophet. The fact that the major characters of the account are presented as the first two Sunni Caliphs and the Prophet's scribe lends further weight to this hypothesis because their names carry authority in the Sunni tradition.

How could the idea of compiling the qur'ānic recitations into a single volume or “book” represent a departure from the original revelatory event and practice of the Prophet? Linda Lee Kern, who has studied these traditions in great detail, provides a noteworthy analysis:

This is the point under contention as what “the Messenger of God did not do”.... The main difference between a series of recitations or writings and a unified Book is that the latter is a *totality*. Whereas the former has an ongoing, and especially unfinished, quality, related to specific contexts, the latter pretends to be a generality. The consolidation of various texts for institutional purposes further bestows an archival function upon them, thereby changing them in the process from mere narratives into a *document*. The “canon-ization” of the recitations then, the compiling of the revelations into one manuscript, had both reifying and political implications.²³²

²³² Kern, “The Riddle of 'Umar,” 73-74.

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The nature and function of the Qur'ān were altered fundamentally by the very act of compiling what are otherwise piecemeal divinely inspired *qur'āns* addressing specific contexts into a unified book speaking to all situations. The product of this compilation, the closed qur'ānic text, possesses a kind of independent, self-contained authority over the community indefinitely into the future that the otherwise non-unified piecemeal *qur'āns*, as divine guidance about particular past situations, never had. One cannot help but note the contrast between the earliest qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* as “divine writing” – a continuous and interactive process in which God “prescribes” divine guidance as a live recitation event in response to evolving circumstances – and the idea of a finished book containing prior divine guidance for particular situations that is frozen in written form and the application of which extends to all times and contexts indefinitely. Kern's comments on this issue, evoking Derrida's contrast between “the book” and “writing” are instructive:

In canonizing a scripture, the text becomes the *absolute* truth, against which the truth value of every other text can only fall short. For even if a certain series of revelations were already assumed to be the literal words of God before they were canonized as a Book as such (as was the case with the Qur'ān), their canonization *as* a Book renders them henceforth universal and fixed truths, generalizable for all times, all persons and all places. The words of the revelation are no longer heard primarily as a personal appeal, but rather first and foremost as a binding and inescapable law. This assumption of a full presence of meaning in the notion of the Book is quite “foreign,” according to Derrida, to writing. It is incongruous with the fact that the latter is, like Weber's prophetic charisma, “always in the process of originating.”²³³

The very idea that a textual compilation of prophetically enunciated qur'ānic guidance, all of which spoke to *prior* situations, possesses divine authority and guidance for all *future* situations faced by the post-prophetic community is neither obvious nor axiomatic. It is merely one possible solution to the question of post-revelatory authority – an interpretation that had to be argued for and developed like any other.

²³³ Ibid., 153-154.

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At the literary and textual level, recent research by Andreas Kaplony illustrates how the sheer act of compiling and conjoining separate *sūras* into one corpus facilitated the “scripturalization” of the Qur’ān. Kaplony compared the structure of the Qur’ānic *sūras* to pre-A.D. 800 Arabic documents and inscriptions. These documents include formal writs like protocols, letters, registers, agreements, tax injunctions, etc. A class of these writs are called “Kitāb Documents” because they each open with a phrase like “this is the *kitāb* of so-and-so.”²³⁴ Kaplony found that the Qur’ānic *sūra* taken as an individual unit displays the same structural features (the Basmala, a prologue, main content, etc.) as a typical Arabic Kitāb document. For example, the full Basmala, which precedes every *sūra* but one, also signifies the beginning of a single independent Kitāb document. This led Kaplony to conclude that “the compilers of the Qur’ān wanted to emphasize that the single *sūras* were autonomous documents, and that the Qur’ān as a whole was a collective manuscript made up of single independent manuscripts that were only secondarily put together.”²³⁵ Going even further, Kaplony examined the interrelationship among the Qur’ānic *sūras* in terms of their structural content and found each *sūra* functioning as an autonomous divine writ or decree (*kitāb*). Based on this finding, Kaplony suggested that “the Qur’ān was not intended to be a monograph, but rather a compilation of independent writs.”²³⁶ Overall, Kaplony’s findings serve as corroboration for the arguments made thus far in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 – that the pre-canonical Qur’ān consisted of autonomous *sūras* (or smaller units) recited orally, each of which functioned as a *kitāb* of God in the sense of God’s decree or “writ”, not in the sense of a “book”

²³⁴ Andreas Kaplony, “Comparing Qur’ānic Suras with Pre-800 Documents,” *Der Islam* 95/2 (2018): 312-366: 312-315.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 319-320.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 322.

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or “scripture”. As Kaplony aptly concludes, “the Qur’ān is no monograph, but a compilation of autonomous *sūras* each claiming to preserve Muḥammad’s revelation.”²³⁷ Neuwirth, more than anyone else, has illustrated how the act of compiling these *sūras* into a single “book” removed the literary dynamics among the *sūras* as stages in a communication process. This entailed the literary “flattening” of their structural and historical context since every textual unit in the canonized Qur’ān holds the same rank:

Once all parts of the corpus had become equal in rank, arbitrarily selected texts could be extracted from the context of their sura and be used to explain arbitrarily selected others. Having thus become virtually decontextualized, they were stripped of the tension they once partook of within their original units. Genuine text units thus lost their literary integrity and could therefore mistakenly be thought to be mere repetitions of each other. Thus, with its final canonization as a codex, the Qur’an had become dehistoricised. It was not the process of its successive emergence, which is mirrored in the text, that was acknowledged as its brand but the timeless, eternal quality of its message.²³⁸

The compilation of the qur’ānic *sūras* into a single corpus ushered in the development of a somewhat new and different conception of the Qur’ān by the end of the first century.

The canonization of what were originally piecemeal *qur’āns* into a physical book had important consequences for the concept of Qur’ānic Revelation and directly affected how terms like *qur’ān* came to be understood. The Qur’ān in the form of scripture became the primary Revelatory Product in the eyes of many believers, as if God had sent down the complete “book”, containing the totality of His guidance applicable to all times, to Muhammad and all post-prophetic generations as a singular revelatory object resembling something like a pre-determined script – as opposed to each *qur’ān* being revealed through a responsive and dynamic revelatory event:

A momentous development occurred: canonisation – a decisive break in the perception of the Qur’ān, changing it from a document of a divinely-guided historical dialogue (i.e. a religious discussion with and about others) to a document of divine monologue.... Canonisation reconfigured

²³⁷ Ibid., 342.

²³⁸ Neuwirth, “Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*”, 186.

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the text from a flow of speech determined by its time into a chain of timeless individual text units without beginning or end and replete with reiterated references to transcendence.²³⁹

On this basis, Neuwirth has argued that the Qur'ān as a communication process and the Qur'ān as a scriptural text amount to two very different phenomena, each requiring its own methodology to be studied. As a communication process, the Qur'ān is an oral discourse between God, the Prophet, and the Prophet's immediate listeners where the divine voice continuously speaks to the Prophet and, through the Prophet, with the listeners, and through some listeners to others. But when the Qur'ān has been compiled into the scriptural codex, the features and layers of the communication process are “flattened”, as it were, into a sort of “divine monologue” addressed to whomever reads the qur'ānic text:

The communication process comes closest to a drama, whereas the *muṣḥaf* presents itself as a divine monologue, in generic terms, a kind of a hagiographic account.... On the exterior level, which in literary texts is occupied by the author of the printed dramatic text and his readers, the *muṣḥaf* authored by God addresses the readers of the written *Qur'ān*.... Looking back once again to the exterior level, the *muṣḥaf*, the divine voice has merged with that of the Prophet to become the narrator, whereas the interacting audience has disappeared from the stage completely, to become mere objects of the sole speaker's speech. These two scenarios of the *Qur'ān*—as a communication process and as a scriptural codex—are thus essentially different and consequently demand methodologies of their own.²⁴⁰

While the physical canonization of the Qur'ān in the form of the 'Uthmānic codex took place within twenty years of Muhammad's death, the phenomenological consequences of this event in terms of how the early community experienced the Qur'ān was a more gradual process. To appreciate the latter transition, it is helpful to analyze the Qur'ān's role and status within the first-century community by delineating different types of canon.

²³⁹ Neuwirth, “Neither of the East nor of the West (*lā sharqīyya wa lā gharbiyya*, Q. 24:35): Locating the Qur'an within the History of Scholarship,” in Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 3-52: 23.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

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2.1.2 Phenomenological Canonization: From Revelatory Canon to Scriptural Canon

From the beginning of the Prophet Muhammad's mission to the compilation of the Qur'ān, and from the latter event until the end of the first century, we can distinguish at least two phases in the canonization of the Qur'ān in terms of its physical form and phenomenological function within early Muslim communities. I refer to these two types of "phenomenological canonicity" as "revelatory canon" and "scriptural canon". Distinguishing between different views of the Qur'ān as a phenomenon allows us to register the hermeneutical event of the Qur'ān's canonization as something both precipitated by and analytically distinct from its physical canonization. Thus, a clear difference emerges between the community's initial experience of the Qur'ān as revelatory event, which they re-enacted through liturgical qur'ānic recitation, and its later experience of the Qur'ān as scripture in the post-'Uthmānic period. Several recent studies lend analytical and historical support to the claim that the Qur'ān underwent two phases of phenomenological canonization.

Based on his study of Jain and Christian uses of scripture, Kendall W. Folkert proposed an analytical distinction between two concepts or functions of canon in a religious tradition, which he terms Canon I and Canon II. His explanation of Canon I is as follows:

Canon I denotes normative texts, oral or written, that are present in a tradition principally by the force of a vector or vectors.... By 'vector' is meant the means or mode by which something is carried; thus Canon I's place in a tradition is largely due to its 'being carried' by some other form of religious activity; and Canon I's significance for a tradition cannot be grasped fully without reference to its carrier and the relationship between the two.... The most common vector of Canon I is ritual activity, but other significant carriers are also to be found.²⁴¹

In other words, a Canon I phenomenon is an oral or written text whose authority and function in a religious tradition is dependent upon, carried by, or derived from another religious activity or

²⁴¹ Kendall W. Folkert, "'Canons' of 'Scripture,'" in Levering (ed.), *Rethinking Scripture*, 170-179: 173.

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authority – which he calls a “vector”. Folkert himself concluded that the Bible in Catholic Christianity and other liturgical churches functions as Canon I because its authority, presence, and function is “vectored” by the authority of the Church and the ritual activity of the priest in liturgy such as the Eucharist.²⁴² The second type of canon, called Canon II, is an oral or written text that functions as the primary locus of normative authority in a tradition and serves as the vector for other religious authority and activities:

Canon II refers to normative texts that are more independently and distinctively present within a tradition, that is, as pieces of literature more or less as such are currently thought of, and which themselves often function as vectors.²⁴³

Canon II scripture is, among other major features, especially characterized by being viewed as independently valid and powerful, and as such, being absolutely closed and complete. What is in Canon II is normative, true and binding; what is outside of it is secondary in all these respects.²⁴⁴

Thus, a Canon II phenomenon possesses a self-contained authority. Other forms of authority are subsidiary to and derivative of it. Folkert saw the Bible as a Canon II scripture in the Protestant churches, given the Protestant *sola scriptura* orientation and the secondary and derivative nature of rites, commentary, and other religious acts in comparison to the Bible. Within this Canon I/II framework, the oral *qur'āns* during the life of Muhammad and in the period prior to its official canonization by 'Uthmān constituted a Canon I phenomenon. This is because the revelatory authority of the *qur'āns* was mediated or “vectored” through the Prophet and carried by liturgical activity such as the ritual prayer (*al-ṣalāt*). Starting with the canonization of the 'Uthmānic codex and continuing through the Umayyad standardizations of the official text, the Qur'ān eventually acquired Canon II status. This is evidenced by how the Qur'ān became the symbolic authority to

²⁴² Ibid., 178.

²⁴³ Ibid., 173.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 176.

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anchor religious institutions (the Caliphate, the Prophetic Sunna, the *'ulamā'*), ritual activity, material culture (i.e. Dome of the Rock) and hermeneutical projects such as exegesis, law, and theology. As Folkert notes, “Canon II most commonly serves as a vector of religious authority, but it is also to a large degree a carrier of ritual iconolatry and/or individualist piety.”²⁴⁵

Angelika Neuwirth, speaking about the Qur'ān specifically, likewise distinguishes two processes of canonization in early Islam: the first process is a “canonization from below”, through which the prophetic community engages with the Qur'ānic recitations as a divinely authoritative and dynamic communication process. They recited the *Qur'āns* as acts of prayer and devotion, in which the *sūra* was the main canonical unit of oral recitation. Neuwirth elsewhere describes this phenomenon as “the emergence of an oral canon which was tangible within live recitation and whose *Sitz im Leben* was the community's service, the ritual ... with its central prayer rite, the *ṣalāt*.”²⁴⁶ The second process is a “canonization from above” referring to the textual compilation of the Qur'ānic recitations into a closed scripture by 'Uthmān and its standardization by the Umayyads. Accordingly, the “canonization from above” is an expression of political power and an imposition of sorts.²⁴⁷

Along similar lines, Aziz Al-Azmeh has demarcated two phases of the Qur'ān's canonization – the initial phase of an “open canon *in statu nascendi*” which lasted from the Prophet's mission to 'Uthmān's canonization (and possibly for decades after) and the phase of the “sealed canon” that began with 'Abd al-Malik's reforms at the latest. Al-Azmeh refers to the “open

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 173.

²⁴⁶ Neuwirth, quoted in Berg, “The collection and canonization of the Qur'ān”.

²⁴⁷ For Neuwirth's illustration of “canon from below” and “canon from above”, see Neuwirth, “Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*”, 187-188.

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canon” as a situation where “the Qur’ān, for the period preceding the sealing of its canon, and for longer fragmentarily, possessed the hallowed status of a canon in formation, and in this sense was used canonically before its integral canonisation.”²⁴⁸ He stresses that the Qur’ān during this “open canon” phase certainly held revelatory status for the community of believers, but that its principal function was one of performative ritual piety – akin to a communal “recall” or “imitation” of the original qur’ānic revelatory event.

It was beatific audition and benediction, and its significance as an emblem of unity and of differentiation, that were primary. The rest was serviceable, of relevance at certain points of concrete application, but otherwise secondary. The Qur’ān was to be recited, not necessarily for the conveyance of information or instruction. What was remembered of it, when remembrance there was, would have been the resonances of sonority, diction, and, above all, a name that betokened divine presence. The Qur’ānic canon in scriptural formation was, above all, a performative phenomenon.... It cannot be assumed, as is not infrequently the case, that, during the lifetime of Muḥammad and in the decades immediately thereafter, there had been available a notion of a sealed Scripture standing apart from its delivery and use, and it would be anachronistic to assume the availability of any notion of *sola scriptura*, despite the fact that the written redaction of the Qur’ān as a *muṣḥaf* was in progress from early on.²⁴⁹

During this period of the “open canon”, as Muslim sources attest, the Qur’ān’s oral and written forms were fragmented and scattered. Parts of the Qur’ān were inscribed and circulated upon the hearts of the early believers as well as various written materials like parchments, animal skins, and individual codices (*maṣāḥif*). However, as Al-Azmeh observes, the Qur’ān’s divinely authoritative and revelatory status subsisted despite its diffuse format because every portion of the Qur’ān participated in and encompassed the revelatory charisma of the whole: “In the course of formation as well as in its post-canonical condition, every fragment, declaimed from memory or read out, was a synecdoche for the whole, a *pars pro toto*, exuding charisma and betokening presence.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 464.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 461.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 452.

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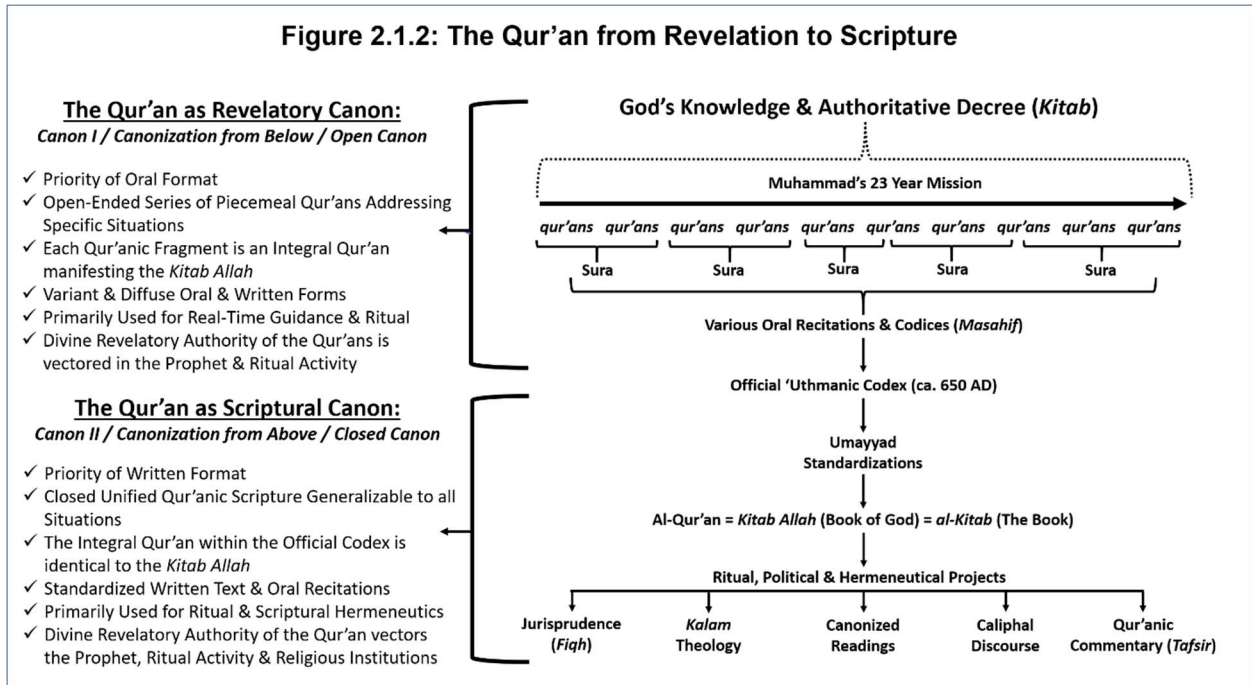
He further describes the idea of *pars pro toto* as one “where every fragment declaimed or inscribed is Qur’ān.”²⁵¹ This idea expresses the Qur’ānic concept of revelation seen in Chapter 1, where every instance of qur’ānic recitation – whether consisting of one verse, many verses, a *sūra*, or several *sūras* – functions as an integral revelatory *qur’ān* manifesting the unitary Transcendent Kitāb. “What we are dealing with is the circulation of material of canonical status, and thus fully Qur’ānic, prior to the establishment of a formal sealed literary canon.”²⁵² Al-Azmeh posits that the Qur’ān reached the full hermeneutical status of “closed canon” or “the canon of scripture” only after the Umayyad reforms of ‘Abd al-Malik. He describes the Qur’ān’s status as closed canon as “a situation where the material was given a durable form, and the canon of scripture itself and as a whole acquired an enduring authority, later to be at once closed in a literary sense, and open to the hermeneutical possibilities of reading by exegesis and related operations.”²⁵³ One can synthesize the frameworks of Folkert, Neuwirth, and Al-Azmeh and apply them to the case of the Qur’ān as follows (see Figure 2.1.2):

²⁵¹ Ibid., 453.

²⁵² Ibid., 460.

²⁵³ Ibid., 453.

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Folkert's Canon I, Neuwirth's "canonization from below", and Al-Azmeh's "open canon" all describe what I am calling "revelatory canon", which describes the Qur'an's physical form and function during its emergence within the life of Muhammad and the early first century. The Qur'an as "Revelatory Canon" was experienced as an open-ended series of piecemeal revealed recitations, each conveying divine guidance for particular situations. The community recited these *qur'āns* in the form of *sūras* as ritual worship, where each *qur'ān* functioned and was experienced as a complete manifestation of God's *kitāb*; this predominantly oral function of the Qur'an continued in Muslim ritual life where only short portions of the Qur'an are recited in prayer. However, by the end of the first century, the Qur'an's physical format and hermeneutical function had shifted to the "scriptural Canon", consisting of the Qur'an in its scriptural format as a single, composite text regarded as complete and divinely authoritative, with standardized written and oral formats subject to various hermeneutical enterprises.

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The above analysis documents a definitive and long-lasting change in the physical and phenomenological status of the Qur'ān for Muslims in the course of the first century or so of Islamic history. The major theological consequence of this shift was that the Qur'ān in its scriptural format became recognized as, and equated to, the *kitāb Allāh*, taken to mean “the Book of God”, by the beginning of the second/eighth century.

2.1.3 From *al-Qur'ān* to *al-Kitāb*: The “Qur'ānicization” of the *Kitāb Allāh*

The term *kitāb Allāh* or *al-kitāb* is one of the most prevalent labels for the Qur'ān in Muslim discourse. Today, the term *al-Qur'ān* has become nearly synonymous with *al-kitāb/kitāb Allāh*.²⁵⁴ However, the equation between the Qur'ān and the *kitāb Allāh* seems to have been a gradual development over the first century, in no small part due to the canonization of the Qur'ān into a physical scripture. As seen in Chapter 1, the Qur'ān uses the term *kitāb Allāh* to designate God's decrees, orders, and laws (Q. 2:101, 3:23, 4:24, 4:103, 5:44, 8:75, 9:36, 18:27, 30:56, 33:6) according to which *kitāb Allāh* is best rendered as “the decree of God”; at no point does the Qur'ān refer exclusively to itself by the full term *kitāb Allāh*. The Qur'ānic concept of *kitāb Allāh* is much broader in scope than the sum-total of Arabic *qur'āns* recited by Muhammad: the Qur'ān describes the Prophets of Israel and prior communities judging by the *kitāb Allāh* (3:23, 5:44); *kitāb Allāh* includes the divine commands in the Qur'ān as well (4:24). The Arabic *qur'āns* are called the “*tafsīl* of the *kitāb*” (10:61) and “a *kitāb* in the Arabic language” (46:12, 46:30). Initially, the Qur'ān in its recited and scriptural form seems to have functioned as a theophanic and talismanic symbol of the *kitāb Allāh qua* God's authoritative decree, but without being directly identified

²⁵⁴ Various examples of *hadd al-Qur'ān* are surveyed in Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān*, 79-116. All of them take for granted that *al-Qur'ān* is *al-Kitāb*.

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with it. However, by the early second century, the Qur'ān was wholly identified with the *kitāb Allāh* itself.

This gradual development in the status of the Qur'ān viz. the *kitāb Allāh* can be illustrated by way of several first-century examples of how the Qur'ān was liturgically evoked in religio-political discourse. Nicolai Sinai hypothesizes that the first-century Muslim community initially regarded the Qur'ān primarily as a symbol of God's communication to the Arabs and as a unifying center for the emerging Arab empire, as opposed to a scriptural text subject to detailed exegesis for law, theology, etc.²⁵⁵ Similarly, Madigan presents this initial conception of the Qur'ān as follows: "One might say that the principal function of the Qur'ān was to stand more as a reminder and as evidence *that* God had addressed the Arabs than as the complete record of *what* God has, or had, to say."²⁵⁶ Al-Azmeh best describes this situation by reference to how the 'Uthmānic Qur'ān codex functioned primarily in ritual contexts in the first century:

The 'Uthmānic codex was designed for lodging in mosques and for matinal reading, much like copies of the Gospels: hallowed objects whose sanctity and contents were functions altogether distinct, albeit intersecting at specific points. Its sanctity performed magical functions, such as bearing witness to oaths or performing healing, protective, divinatory and supplicatory functions, including fragmentary use in epigraphy of the first Hijra century.... Moreover, recitation of the Qur'ān was, and still is, a devotional act rather than a commitment to comprehension or scholarship, displaying an element of virtuosity, and consisting of contact with a sanctified sonority and receipt of its charisma.²⁵⁷

In other words, in the first century the primary function of the Qur'ān both as recitation and as embodied in the 'Uthmānic codices seems to have been one of ritual piety, devotion, and talismanic invocation.

²⁵⁵ Nicolai Sinai, "The Qur'anic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān," in Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (eds.), *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 113-143: 123.

²⁵⁶ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 52, quoted in Sinai, "The Qur'anic Commentary," 125.

²⁵⁷ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 463.

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Later Muslim accounts about the first century report that several Muslim religio-political groups, including the early Caliphs, the Shi'i Imams, the Umayyads, and numerous opposition groups evoked the Qur'ān using the term *kitāb Allāh* in their messaging. For example, al-Ṭabarī's reports about the Battle of Ṣiffīn involving the forces of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Mu'āwiya are replete with references to *kitāb Allāh*. It is said that Mu'āwiya's army raised parts of the Qur'ān written on parchments (*maṣāḥif*) upon their lances. Al-Ṭabarī's account relating the words of Abū Mikhnaf reads as follows:

So they raised the *maṣāḥif* on lances and said: "This is the *kitāb Allāh* between us and you. Who will protect the frontier districts of the Syrians if they all perish, and who those of the Iraqis if they all perish?" When the men saw that the *maṣāḥif* had been raised, they said, "We respond to the *kitāb Allāh*, and we turn in repentance to it."²⁵⁸

Some in 'Alī's army evidently recognized these qur'ānic fragments as the *kitāb Allāh*, and as a result, they stopped fighting. The Ṣiffīn Arbitration Agreement between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya states: "We will comply with the authority (*ḥukm*) of God and His *kitāb*, and nothing else will bring us together. We will refer to the *kitāb Allāh*, from its opening to its close; The two arbitrators...will act in accordance with whatever they find in the *kitāb Allāh*."²⁵⁹ While it is tempting to understand *kitāb Allāh* in these examples as strictly designating the Qur'ān of the 'Uthmānic codex, we must keep in mind the strong possibility that al-Ṭabarī's rendition of these events has back-projected later meanings of *kitāb Allāh* into his account. The translator Gerald Hawting even observes that "expressions such as *the Book of God* or *the Book* did not yet designate the Qur'ān as we understand it."²⁶⁰ Thus, Al-Azmeh believes that the evocation of the term *kitāb Allāh* while

²⁵⁸ See al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 17, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater, tr. G. R. Hawting (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 78ff for this account.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

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hoisting Qur'ān parchments (*maṣāḥif*) was more of a symbolic action and that the material Qur'ān functioned more as an emblem, as the most immediate manifestation of the *kitāb Allāh*, as opposed to a text subject to detailed exegesis:

Before the development of formal hermeneutical and jurisprudential disciplines of reading and of interpretation, the Qur'ān was almost entirely a point of identification and mobilisation, and a token of habituation to novel conceptions. At Ṣiffīn, arbitration was famously agreed once Qur'ānic *maṣāḥif* were hoisted atop lances, and the call was made to settle the dispute by reference to God or the Book of God and to His Apostle or His Apostle's example. The question has been posed as to whether this implied that the Word of God was to be the arbiter, or that the two sides to the conflict really constituted one group whose emblem was the visible and lisible expression of God's word. Clearly, there is little reason to assume that the technical means were available to opt for the former possibility, on an assumption that the *maṣāḥif* might be seen as a manual of negotiation. The Book of God and the Way of His Apostle were, and often continued to be, polemical and defensive notions, deployed symbolically and vaguely. In the case of Ṣiffīn, it was clear that parties to the battle were calling for a truce in the name of God, not proposing that they pore over whatever fragments of text they had and labour over them exegetically or juridically to reach a singular solution that they might yield.²⁶¹

Following Al-Azmeh's argument, I would propose that the term *kitāb Allāh* when used at Ṣiffīn and in other first-century contexts conveyed the more general meaning of whatever God has prescribed and decreed in the broader sense, of which the material Qur'ān codices or parchments (*maṣāḥif*) served as the most eminent symbols or expressions for the early community.

This broader symbolic sense of God's authoritative and just decree seems to be the meaning of the terms *al-kitāb* and *kitāb Allāh* in other first century evocations of the term. This is the sense of the term *kitāb Allāh* when Imam al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (d. 61/680) writes to the Basrans, saying: "I summon you to the *kitāb Allāh* and the *sunna* of His Prophet";²⁶² or when he describes the rightful Imam as "one who acts according to the *kitāb*, one who upholds justice, one who professes truth, and one who dedicates himself to God."²⁶³ Certain Umayyad Caliphs and governors including al-

²⁶¹ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, 462.

²⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 19, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater, tr. I.K.A Howard (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 26.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 32.

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Ḥajjāj, 'Umar II, and Yazīd III reportedly evoked the *kitāb Allāh* to rein in rebels and have them submit to Umayyad rule; in this context, the *kitāb Allāh* simply meant the Caliphate's way of conducting matters.²⁶⁴ Many rebel groups in the first century used the phrase “*kitāb Allāh* and the *sunna* of His Prophet” frequently as an opposition slogan, often accusing the Umayyads of violating these two things. During this time, the term *sunnat al-nabī* also had not yet acquired its later, post-Shāfi'ī developed meaning of Muhammad's actual words and example as recorded in prophetic traditions.²⁶⁵ Crone and Hinds believe that the terms *kitāb Allāh wa-sunnat nabiyyihi* had the more general meaning of enjoining good and forbidding evil and actually conveyed their invoker's idea of righteousness and correct practice.²⁶⁶ They further note that “the collocation of book and *sunna* stood for justice, whatever justice was perceived to be in each particular case.”²⁶⁷

Along the same lines, in his study of the collection of the Qur'ān, John Burton found that the term *kitāb Allāh*, based on its usage in the Qur'ān and early *ḥadīth* literature, initially had a broader meaning than just the Qur'ān. In his view, in 'Umar's claim that stoning was prescribed in the *kitāb Allāh* and in several *ḥadīths* stating that the Prophet judged and gave rulings “in accordance with the *kitāb Allāh*”, the original meaning of *kitāb Allāh* was “the verdict of God, in accordance with His Law”; he also cited Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) in support of this reading.²⁶⁸ The above examples indicate that during the first century, terms like *kitāb* or *kitāb Allāh*

²⁶⁴ Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 2nd edition paperback (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; 2003), 62-63.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. 63-68. Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 38: “Nonetheless, since early on, opponents of the government authorities refer to “the Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet”; but the formula in question was never filled in as to its contents. One used it simply to plead for justice.”

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 62.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 66.

²⁶⁸ John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 75-116.

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still retained a fluid or more symbolic meaning akin to the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb*. The Qur'ān inscribed in the 'Uthmānic codex was evoked in relation to or as the *kitāb Allāh* in more or less symbolic fashion: the term *kitāb Allāh* continued to convey the broader concept of “what God has prescribed” in terms of justice and righteousness while the material Qur'ān served as the most proximate expression of the *kitāb Allāh*.

The selective use of terms, verses, and motifs from the Qur'ān as a tool of religious legitimation by the Umayyad Caliphs likely played a key role in promoting the Qur'ān's status as a self-contained divinely authoritative scripture. Fred Donner has presented a strong case that the religious identity of the early community during the first century Umayyad era evolved out of a more or less ecumenical monotheistic “Believers” movement of the Prophet's time into a more exclusivist and confessional “Muslim” community in the Umayyad period.²⁶⁹ This was thanks in large part to what he termed “Qur'ānicization” – a process in which central Umayyad institutions and practices were legitimized and rebranded using qur'ānic terms – such as *khalīfa*, *muslim*, *islām*, *qādī*, and *jihād* – while the Umayyad Caliphs laid claim to being the “vicegerents of God” on earth.²⁷⁰ Van Ess finds signs of this process in Umayyad coinage, specifically 'Abd al-Malik's inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, and various other examples of material culture.²⁷¹ This “Qur'ānicization” affected the social, political, administrative, and communal domains of the early

²⁶⁹ Fred M. Donner, “From Believers to Muslims. Patterns of Communal Identity in the early Islamic Community,” *Al-Abhath* 50-51 (2002-2003): 9-53. For more on Donner's argument on the ecumenical and interconfessional nature of Muhammad's movement, see idem, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁷⁰ Fred M. Donner, “Qur'ānicization of Religio-Political Discourse in the Umayyad Period,” *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 129 (2011): 79-92.

²⁷¹ See Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*, Vol. 1, tr. John O'Kane (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2017), 11-19.

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community and one of its most important effects was the development of a distinctly “Islamic” or “Muslim” confessional identity bounded off from Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. There is further evidence to suggest that the Umayyads also worked hard to regulate aspects of ritual performance such as prayer forms, prayer times, the direction of prayer (*qibla*), the Friday prayer, the pilgrimage (*hajj*), etc.²⁷² It is also reported that the Umayyads sought out storytellers, narrators, and informants, such as ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/713), Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib (d. 94/713) and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), and encouraged their narration of stories on the origins of Islam and the mission of Muhammad – accounts that would form part of the prophetic *sīra* literature and *ḥadīth*.²⁷³ On the basis of this evidence, Donner concludes that “the Umayyads can be credited with helping to establish the fundamental identity of the Muslim community which all their political successors and indeed all later Muslims have taken for granted.”²⁷⁴ Amidst these socio-political and religious developments of Qur’ānicization, it is almost certain that by the end of the first century many in the emerging Muslim community came to view the Qur’ān in its canonized format as the foundational scripture of their newly crystalized religious orientation.

Jewish and Christian influences upon nascent Muslim conceptions of the Qur’ān must also be considered. The presence of *Isrā’īliyyāt* (Jewish and Christian narratives) in Muslim interpretations of the Qur’ān was significant in the early period and the foremost transmitter of such narratives was Wahb b. Munabbih (36/644-110/728 or 114/732). It is likely that Wahb’s ideas left a lasting impact on first century Muslim views of the Qur’ān. In this respect, Wahb understood

²⁷² Fred M. Donner, “Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: The Silent Heritage of the Umayyads,” in Antoine Borrut and Paul M. Cobb (eds.), *Héritages Omeyyades/Umayyad Legacies* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010), 187-211: 193-201.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 206.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

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revelation strictly in terms of physical scriptural canons; he taught that God had sent down 163 “scrolls or sheets” (*ṣuḥuf*) to prior prophets: Seth and Moses were given fifty scrolls, Adam, Noah and Ṣāliḥ each received two scrolls; Enoch (Idrīs) was given thirty; Ḥūd received four; Abraham was given twenty scrolls, whereas David, Jesus, and Muhammad were each given one scripture – the Psalms, the Gospel, and the Qur'ān respectively. While most scholars dismiss Wahb's specifications as “figments of his fertile imagination”,²⁷⁵ his understanding that the content of revelation comprises physical books or scriptures is noteworthy. Such a view must have colored how other first-century Muslims regarded the Qur'ān. It is also possible that *kitāb Allāh* in the first century also designated the Torah and that members of the early community adopted this label for the Qur'ān. For example, Mālik b. Anas, in trying to identify the source of the stoning penalty, was still not sure whether 'Umar was using the term *kitāb Allāh* for the Torah, the Qur'ān, or the Sunna.²⁷⁶

Nicolai Sinai theorizes that the expanding Umayyad empire amidst Jewish and Christian influences eventually led to the Qur'ān being used and circulated more widely by the end of the first century. It was thereby disconnected from its original, Late-Antique, Ḥijāzī context and underwent a “general loss of semantic status.”²⁷⁷ By the late first century, members of the expanding Muslim community had invested the Qur'ān with a new semantic status – that of a canonized scripture: “Muslims are likely to have scoured the Qur'ān for effective ammunition against their opponents, as a result of which they would have become increasingly familiar with

²⁷⁵ Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism & the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 1996), 17-18.

²⁷⁶ John Burton, “Qur'ān and Sunnah: A Case of Cultural Disjunction,” in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 137-158: 152.

²⁷⁷ Sinai, “The Qur'anic Commentary,” 123.

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the literary corpus that they acknowledged as their scriptural canon.”²⁷⁸ As individuals began interpreting the Qur'ān for legal, theological and exegetical purposes, various storytellers and traditionists provided narrative content used to expound the meaning and context of specific Qur'ānic verses removed from their original Ḥijāzī semantic and historical context. In Sinai's view, this process of “re-oralisation through narrative amplification” reached a turning point at the end of the first century when the earliest Qur'ān commentators like Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722) began analyzing the Qur'ān as a standalone scripture; in the following generation, scholars like Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) were attempting to interpret the entire Qur'ān from start to finish.²⁷⁹ Based on Sinai's analysis, the transition from the Qur'ān functioning primarily as devotional recitation to serving as a scripture bearing divine authority and subject to various forms of exegesis was complete by the early second century.

The outcome of all these first-century developments was the total identification of the Qur'ān in its scriptural form with the *kitāb Allāh* while also understanding the latter to mean “the Book of God”. One finds this designation throughout the *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* literature and repeated within numerous “definitions of the Qur'ān” (sing., *ḥadd al-Qur'ān*) from various Muslim scholars.²⁸⁰ The direct equation between the scripturalized Qur'ān and the *kitāb Allāh* represents a major shift from the intra-Qur'ānic meaning of *kitāb Allāh* as the transcendent source and active process of God's prescription and decree. In directly identifying the *kitāb Allāh* with the Qur'ān, many in the late first-century Muslim community inadvertently “downsized” or reduced the

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 124.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 124-130.

²⁸⁰ Various examples of *ḥadd al-Qur'ān* are surveyed in Nasser, *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'ān*, 79-116. All of them take for granted that *al-Qur'ān* is *al-Kitāb*.

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broader qur'ānic concept of *kitāb Allāh* to the latter: *kitāb Allāh* is henceforth *al-Qur'ān* contained between the two covers of the physical codex.²⁸¹ This interpretation would have major implications for the concept of revelation as echoed in various traditions in the name of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb examined in the following section.

2.1.4 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb: The Qur'ān as the Book of God (*Kitāb Allāh*)

Given the first-century developments in the Qur'ān's emerging status as the *kitāb Allāh*, one finds explicit evidence in traditions dating from the early second century that Muslims came to identify the Qur'ān in its scriptural format as the *kitāb Allāh*. While a complete and extensive analysis of these sources remains outside the scope of this study, we shall focus on two statements that the Sunni historical, biographical, and *ḥadīth* traditions attribute to the second Sunni Caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Whether historical or not, the Sunni tradition portrays 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb as zealous for the Qur'ān and the implementation of its ordinances in the early community, for which he is called the “Guardian of the Book of God” (*waqqāf 'inda kitāb allāh*). In her well-documented study of 'Umar's portrayal in Sunni traditions, Linda Lee Kern observed that “'Umar effectively 'oversaw' the Book in a triple sense: He contributed to (1) the physical preservation of the revealed

²⁸¹ Both concurrent with and partially in response to the reduction of God's revelation and *kitāb Allāh* to the Qur'ān was the emergence of the concept of *sunna*, the equation of the *sunna* with the Prophet's reported teachings and actions, and the elevation of the prophetic *sunna* to the status of being divinely-revealed. For details on this process, see Adis Duderija (ed.), *The Sunna and its Status in Islamic Law* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015); Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word*; Gulatherus H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Ḥadīth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); idem, “Some New Ideas on the Development of Sunna as a Technical Term in Early Islam,” in G. H. A. Juynboll, *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadith* (Variorum: Ashgate, 1996); Adis Duderija, “The Evolution in the Canonical Sunni Hadith Body of Literature and the Concept of a Sound Hadith during the Formative Period of Islamic Thought as based on Recent Western Scholarship,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 23/4 (2009): 1–27; idem, “The Evolution in the Concept of Sunnah during the First Four Generations of Muslims in Relation to the Development of the Concept of an Authentic Hadith as based on Recent Western Scholarship,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 26/4 (2012): 393–347. While this subject is not the focus of this study, I will offer some comments on the *sunna* being a product of revelation near the end of Chapter 4 and summarize these developments.

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text, (2) the interpretation of its meaning and (3) the means by which its authority would be practically implemented.”²⁸² One report depicts ‘Umar preventing the Prophet Muhammad from leaving behind a written will because he regards the Qur’ān, which he calls the *kitāb Allāh*, as entirely sufficient for the community’s guidance. The second report presents ‘Umar’s speech at the mosque on the day of Abū Bakr’s assumption of the Caliphate, where ‘Umar instructs the community to hold fast to and be guided by the Qur’ān, which is the *kitāb* God left within the Prophet’s community for their continued guidance. These accounts are important for two reasons. First, each account identifies and reifies the piecemeal *qur’āns* into a single object called the *kitāb Allāh* (the Book of God), which is said to suffice as divine guidance for the community after the Prophet. Second, these accounts reveal traces of important differences and tensions between the earliest qur’ānic view of the *qur’āns* as oral piecemeal guidance co-extensive with the Prophet’s divinely-inspired authority and the post-‘Uthmānic view of the Qur’ān as a physical scripture possessing a divine authority separate from and independent of the person of the Prophet.

In the first account, the Prophet is lying sick on his deathbed and gathers some of his companions around him. In this tradition, ‘Umar plays a decisive role in what transpires. One version of the account reads as follows:

When death came to take the Messenger of God, a number of prominent men were in his chamber, among them ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and the Prophet said, “Draw near to me so that I may write you a testament (*kitāban*), lest you go astray after my death.” But ‘Umar said, “The Messenger of God has been overtaken by pain, and you all have the Qur’an (*indakum al-qur’ān*). The Book of God is sufficient for us” (*ḥasbuna kitāb Allāhu*). The household of the Prophet disagreed and began to dispute with one another. Among them was one who said, “Draw near so that the Messenger of God may write his testament for you, lest you go astray after he dies.” Among them was another who said what ‘Umar had said. When the foolish talk and disagreements around the Messenger of God became acute, he commanded, “Leave, all of you!” ‘Ubayd Allāh said: Ibn ‘Abbās used to say, “A

²⁸² Kern, “The Riddle of ‘Umar,” 20.

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disaster! What a disaster! The only thing that prevented the Messenger of God from writing that testament down for them was the quarreling and clamor!"²⁸³

The above account was reported in various sources: Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) cited a total of nine reports in his *Ṭabaqāt* and al-Bukhārī (194-256/810-870) reported several versions in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.²⁸⁴ The tradition also appears in al-Ṭabarī's *History*.²⁸⁵ The earliest report of the account came from Ma'mar b. Rāshid (96-153/714-770) found in the *Muṣannaḥ* of 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827). Ma'mar was a student of al-Zuhrī and related the account from him. We can therefore date the tradition as originating no later than the lifetime of Ma'mar b. Rāshid in the early second century. Three versions of the account reported by al-Bukhārī also include al-Zuhrī in the list of transmitters.²⁸⁶ If the transmission from al-Zuhrī (51-124/671-742) is authentic and he heard the report from his teachers, one could go further and date the report to the late first century. It also remains possible that the account conveys a real historical event from the Prophet's last illness.

Most likely, the tradition in its current form came into being after the Qur'ān had already been compiled into a single volume or book; accordingly, the tradition may have been coined to bolster the claim that the canonized Qur'ān is truly the *kitāb Allāh* and should be the most authoritative source of guidance for the community after Muhammad's death against which other sources of written guidance, such as *ḥadīth*, are unnecessary. But if the question of *ḥadīth* is put

²⁸³ Reported by Ma'mar b. Rāshid, tr. Sean W. Anthony, *The Expeditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 189-191. This is a translation of the traditions narrated by Ma'mar b. Rāshid (96-153/714-770) recorded in the *Muṣannaḥ* of 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827).

²⁸⁴ The various reports of this event are analyzed in Gurdofarid Miskinzoda "The Story of 'Pen and Paper' and its Interpretation," in Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi'i Islam* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 231-249: 234-239.

²⁸⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 9, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater, tr. Ismail K. Poonawala (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 174-175.

²⁸⁶ Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 3, Ḥadīth No. 56: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/3/56>; Book 75, Ḥadīth No. 30: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/75/30>; Book 96, Ḥadīth No. 93: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/96/93>.

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aside for a moment, the tradition does not seem to be offering an argument for the Qur'ān over the *ḥadīth*; instead, the account reveals a tension or a debate within the first-century community about the very nature of the canonized Qur'ān's divine authority in contrast to the Prophet's authority, without really making an argument for the authority of the former.²⁸⁷ Consider the words attributed to 'Umar: "You all have the Qur'an (*indakum al-qur'ān*), the *kitāb Allāh* is sufficient for us." (*ḥasbuna kitāb Allāhu*)." Whether 'Umar himself actually uttered this statement does not change the fact that the words express a particular and highly significant perspective about the authority of the Qur'ān in its later canonized form.

Despite the lack of certainty in dating the tradition, one can assume that 'Umar's words at the Prophet's deathbed express the attitude of some segment of the first-century Muslim community toward post-prophetic divine guidance. It is the claim that the canonized Qur'ān is the *kitāb Allāh* and wholly sufficient for post-prophetic guidance that is important for our present purposes. As Kern notes, this viewpoint represents an important development in the concept of Qur'ānic Revelation within the early community:

'Umar's declaration that the Book of God was sufficient changed the concept of what revelation was, however, just as much as it altered the conception of the Prophet's role. For this is the first time that 'Umar spoke of a "Book of God" as a finished and definite entity. Rather than his usual reference to a particular revelation (that had either come down or might come down), 'Umar evoked here a totality of eternally perfect revelations, or more precisely, *the* Revelation. He thus seemed to consider the on-going, unpredictable and situation-specific revelations to be a thing of the past. In their place, 'Umar's "Book of God" was a known object capable of extending a generalized guidance to the community for all time.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Cf. Miskinzoda, 248, who concludes that "the major message of these traditions is that the scripture is the most important guide for the Muslims and that there was no need for something else besides it to be written down." I do not believe the tradition in its totality is this one-sided. The content of the tradition seems ambivalent at best and the narrator laments how the occasion was a very sad event.

²⁸⁸ Kern, "The Riddle of 'Umar," 61.

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‘Umar’s assertion, firstly, radically separates the Qur’ān’s authority from Muhammad’s authority, or the message from the messenger. As we saw in Chapter 1, the qur’ānic concept of revelation entails that the *qur’āns* were both mediated by the Prophet as to their verbal content and complemented by the Prophet’s guidance; that the Transcendent Kitāb lies ontologically beyond the recited *qur’āns*; and that the authority of the Qur’ān and Muhammad were united in what Graham calls “the prophetic-revelatory event”. ‘Umar’s claim here equates the Transcendent Kitāb with the early *qur’āns*, divides the unitary prophetic-revelatory event by segmenting it into the Prophet and a reified Qur’ān, and replaces the divine authority of the former with the latter. The tradition thus bears witness to a radical shift from Qur’ānic Revelation being understood as a series of prophetically-mediated, oral, and situation-specific *qur’āns* to the idea of a self-contained scripture containing comprehensive divine guidance for all periods, possessing authority independent of the Prophet. On this latter point, it is worth mentioning that ‘Umar also reportedly made statements about how divine inspiration (*wahy*) had been “cut off” (*inna al-wahy inqata’a*) after Muhammad’s death and that all people would henceforth be judged by their outward actions and not their inner thoughts.²⁸⁹ Such statements further underscore the irreducible difference between a continuous “event” of revelation and a static scripture.

A second account reporting the statements of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb further highlights how the notion of a canonized qur’ānic scripture has important bearing on the concept of Qur’ānic Revelation. This is a report from Anas b. Mālīk (612-709) narrating ‘Umar’s speech on the day Abū Bakr assumed the Caliphate. ‘Umar had previously refused to accept the Prophet’s death and instead maintained that Muhammad would return to the community. However, once he accepted

²⁸⁹ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 52, Ḥadīth No. 5: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/52/5>. Also noted in Kern, “The Riddle of ‘Umar,” 414.

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the Prophet's demise, 'Umar insisted on making a speech at the mosque in Medina. According to the version reported by Ma' mar b. Rāshid, 'Umar recanted his earlier statement and then added: "But if it truly be that Muḥammad has died, then God has placed among you a light by which you might be guided: this Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*). So hold fast to it, and take as your guide that by which God guided Muḥammad!"²⁹⁰ In the version of Ibn Ishāq (85-151/704-768), 'Umar said: "God has left His Book with you, that by which He guided His Apostle, and if you hold fast to that God will guide you as He guided him."²⁹¹ Al-Bukhārī provided both versions in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* while al-Ṭabarī provided Ibn Ishāq's version.²⁹² In all of these sources, the first two names in the accompanying chain of transmission are Anas b. Mālik and al-Zuhrī. Since both Ma' mar and Ibn Ishāq report it, the tradition could date to the first quarter of the second century. But if the transmission from al-Zuhrī is authentic and he heard the tradition from his teachers, then its date can be pushed back into the late first century.

In both versions, 'Umar declares that God has provided the "Book of God" (*kitāb Allāh*) as His guidance for the community after the Prophet. This statement again speaks to the themes already noted above: the Qur'ān having the status of self-sufficient divine guidance for the post-prophetic community. However, 'Umar's second statement, "take as your guide that by which God guided Muḥammad" or "God will guide you as He guided him" expresses a nascent concept of Qur'ānic Revelation developing in the late first/early second century. The Arabic Qur'ān that God has left with the community is declared to be the very same thing by which God guided

²⁹⁰ Ma' mar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 188-189.

²⁹¹ Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, The Life of Muhammad*, tr. Alfred Guillaume, (New York, Oxford, Karachi: Oxford University Press 1955; 1998 reprint), 686-687.

²⁹² Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 93, Ḥadīth No. 79: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/93/79>; Book 96, Ḥadīth 2: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/96/2>; Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 9, 190-191.

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Muhammad. In other words, 'Umar is asserting that God revealed the Qur'ān to Muhammad in the very same form that the community possesses afterward, i.e. as Arabic verses and chapters. This has several important implications for the concept of Qur'ānic Revelation. Firstly, 'Umar's formulation effectively nullifies the pre-Islamic and intra-Qur'ānic view of divine inspiration (*wahy*) being a mysterious communication or "reading" of the Transcendent Kitāb that remains unintelligible to non-prophets, which we saw in Chapter 1. Instead, 'Umar's formulation collapses the ontological distinction made in the Qur'ān between the Transcendent Kitāb and the Arabic *qur'āns* and fuses them into the scripturalized Qur'ān. This also suggests that God revealed the Qur'ān in the Arabic language to Muhammad; this is a primitive form of the Sunni doctrine of verbatim revelation. Furthermore, this declaration means that the community henceforth has access to the very same divine guidance that was given to Muhammad, except that the community holds authority over its interpretation just as the Prophet did in his own time. Thus, there is an implicit claim that Muhammad's authority to interpret and expound revelation has been assumed by the community at large.

In summary, the Qur'ān was originally a series of piecemeal recitations (*qur'āns*) both mediated through and united with the prophetic authority of Muhammad and was understood by the earliest community in this manner. As we saw in Chapter 1, this means that Qur'ānic Revelation was initially a communication process that provided responsive and divinely prescribed oral guidance disclosing God's Transcendent Kitāb to the community based on changing circumstances. After Muhammad's death, the qur'ānic recitations were compiled into a single written corpus around 650 CE – a measure that Muslim tradition credits to the early Caliphs. This act of canonization and compilation was perceived by some within the early community as an innovation departing from Muhammad's own practice; even then, the formation of the canonized

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Qur'ānic scripture ignited a shift in how most of the post-prophetic community henceforth conceived the Qur'ān. The physical canonization of the Qur'ān was accompanied by a phenomenological canonization, in which the form and function of the Qur'ān evolved from being a “revelatory canon” of open-ended and diffuse *qur'āns* as the primary product of revelation, each expressing God's Transcendent Kitāb within various circumstances, to a “scriptural canon” in which the unitary corpus of Qur'ānic recitations constitutes the primary Revelatory Product. At the socio-political and theological level, the canonized Qur'ān became gradually identified with the originally broader concept of *al-kitāb* or *kitāb Allāh* over the first century, as indicated by how various religio-political factions associated the scriptural Qur'ān with the *kitāb Allāh* and the general idea of divinely mandated justice. Other key factors that played a role in the evolution of the Qur'ān into a scripture include the Umayyad “Qur'ānicization” project and the influence of Jewish and Christian beliefs about God sending down written scriptures (*ṣuḥūf*, *maṣāḥif*). By the end of the first century, a decisive shift had occurred in the community's understanding of the *kitāb Allāh* from its broader Qur'ānic meaning of the “decree of God” to the restricted meaning of the canonized Qur'ān. Two important traditions attributed to 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb asserted the self-contained divine authority of the canonized Qur'ān. In these accounts, 'Umar reified the Qur'ān as the Book of God in a way that differs from the Qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* and *qur'ān*; he separated the Qur'ān in its scriptural form from the authority of Muhammad and elevated the former over the latter – thus rejecting the unity of the prophetic-revelatory event of Muhammad's own lifetime. Most importantly, at the theological level, 'Umar's view of the Qur'ān suggested a concept of revelation that differs from the Qur'ānic idea of *wahy*: that God revealed the Qur'ān to Muhammad in the very same form of Arabic recitations that the post-prophetic community possesses after him. All of this demonstrates a decisive hermeneutical and theological shift in how the community

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conceived the Qur'ān – from piecemeal recitations mediated by Muhammad that render the *kitāb Allāh* for specific situations to a reified physical scripture, equated to the *kitāb Allāh* itself, providing generalized guidance for all times. The development of scriptural conceptions of the Qur'ān took place concurrently with the circulation of stories concerning Muhammad's experience of revelation.

2.1.5 Early Accounts of Muhammad's Revelatory Experience in *Ḥadīth*

The first century was a period in which various narrations and accounts of Muhammad's life and prophetic career began to circulate among storytellers (*quṣṣā*) and traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*). Some of these accounts described the Prophet Muhammad's revelatory experience of receiving the Qur'ān. One famous cluster of narratives found in various sources including *sīra*, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr* purports to be an account of the Prophet's first revelation, which was traditionally linked to *Sūrat al-'Alaq* (Q. 96).²⁹³ The story of what transpired and what the Prophet experienced on this occasion has been reported in different versions by numerous authors including Ibn Hishām, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Sa'd, al-Bukhārī, and others. According to Gregor Schoeler's meticulous analysis of the transmission lines and versions of the "first revelation accounts", the story can be subdivided into several parts, each with a different motif. The most complete version of the tradition, transmitted by 'Abd al-Razzāq from Ma'mar b. Rāshid, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Zuhrī, 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, and 'Ā'isha, includes the following elements:²⁹⁴

²⁹³ The story has been the subject of numerous studies. I am relying mainly on the recent studies of Uri Rubin and Gregor Schoeler. See Uri Rubin, "Iqra' bi-smi rabbika...! Some notes on the interpretation of *Sūrat al-'alaq*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 213-230; Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad*, 38-79.

²⁹⁴ Schoeler, *The Biography*, 39. He includes a longer list but I have focused only on the first revelation experience and not its aftermath.

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1. Muhammad has dream visions like the “crack of dawn” as the first signs of prophethood; he is also engaged in religious practices in solitude on Mount Ḥirā’.
2. The Angel appears and announces to Muhammad that he is the Messenger of God.
3. The Angel commands Muhammad to recite (*iqra*’) and Muhammad refuses: “I am not a reciter” (*mā anā bi-qāri*’). The Angel presses Muhammad three times until he recites *Sūra* 96:1-5.
4. Muhammad returns to Khadīja in fear and orders her to wrap him up.
5. Muhammad expresses his fear to Khadīja and she comforts him and praises him.

Before analyzing the content, it is worth summarizing the scholarly findings concerning the dating of the tradition. Schoeler is convinced that al-Zuhrī personally related this story in his lectures. In general, Schoeler concluded that the above stock of stories about Muhammad’s first revelation were known and transmitted in the second half of the first century. He also specified that some of this stock, consisting of Muhammad’s religious practices, his being ordered to recite, seeing the Angel on the horizons, and returning to Khadīja was disseminated in the first century as the tale of a storyteller (*qāṣṣ*). He further supposed that ‘Urwa picked this up and reshaped it into a prophetic *ḥadīth*.²⁹⁵ Uri Rubin held a different opinion on the dating of the first revelation account. He argued that only one account, where Muhammad returns to Khadīja and reports seeing a light and hearing a voice, can actually be traced back to Hishām b. ‘Urwa and that this short report represents the earliest and original story; other elements including the *iqra*’ story were added later. Overall, historical analysis indicates that this account of the first revelation to Muhammad dates to sometime in the second half of the first century.

In terms of content, Schoeler distinguished between two accounts of the Prophet’s first revelation experience – the Ibn Ishāq version and the Zuhrī version.²⁹⁶ The former has more

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 78-79.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 63-67.

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elaborate imagery and presents the first revelation taking place in a kind of dream state for Muhammad while the latter presents Muhammad being awake. One important implication for Qur'ānic Revelation is that both versions describe the communication from the angel to Muhammad as being auditory: Muhammad hears voices and hears the angel telling him to recite. In other words, the prophetic *wahy* in this first revelation account has evolved from the Qur'ānic idea of non-verbal mysterious communication to a clear auditory dictation of Qur'ānic verses. Second, Neuwirth has focused on the Ibn Ishāq version in which Muhammad relates of the Angel that “he came to me while I was asleep with a coverlet of brocade whereupon was some writing, and said, ‘Read’.”²⁹⁷ She observes that the notion of the angel carrying a physical document of inscribed Qur'ānic verses for the Prophet to recite aloud is an important shift from the Qur'ānic idea of the Prophet reciting from a Transcendent Kitāb seen in Chapter 1:

The scene depicted in the report however differs from the Qur'ānic scenario in a substantial detail – it presupposes not a Transcendent but a material writing as the prophet's master copy to be read from.... The Qur'ānic text of Sūra 96 in contrast that alludes to a transcendent divine writing – it reports a mode of “virtual reading” from an elevated, coded text, which in the shortly later Sūra Qur'ān 55:1-4 will even reappear as the pre-existent Word of God.²⁹⁸

Thus, the late-first century accounts of Muhammad's first revelation display a two-fold evolution from the earliest Qur'ānic concept of revelation: prophetic inspiration (*wahy*) has evolved into auditory angelic dictation and the source of the Qur'ānic recitations is depicted as a material text instead of a celestial divine writing. The above accounts date from around the period when the post-prophetic community began equating the codified Qur'ān to the *kitāb Allāh*. This means that the new scriptural conception of the Qur'ān led to more “scriptural” and mechanical understandings of Muhammad's prophetic inspiration.

²⁹⁷ Ibn Ishāq, tr. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 105.

²⁹⁸ Neuwirth, “The Discovery of Writing,” 15.

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Another important account of Muhammad's experience in receiving *wahy* is a narration frequently reported in the Sunni canonical *ḥadīth* literature. Its narration in the *Muwaṭṭā'* of Mālik b. Anas reads as follows:

Al-Ḥārith b. Hishām asked the Messenger of God: "How does *wahy* come to you?". He [the Messenger] said: "Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of the bell and this is most difficult for me. Then it departs from me and I have grasped what he said. Sometimes the angel takes on the likeness of a man, so he speaks to me and I remember what he says." 'Ā'isha said: "I saw it [*wahy*] descending upon him on a very cold day. When it passed from him, his forehead was flooding with sweat."²⁹⁹

Mālik b. Anas narrates the above tradition from the chain of Hishām b. 'Urwa, 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, and 'Ā'isha. The same tradition appears in canonical Sunni collections with different chains going back to Hishām b. 'Urwa including Bukhārī,³⁰⁰ Muslim,³⁰¹ al-Tirmidhī,³⁰² and al-Naṣā'ī.³⁰³ Of the five reports in these collections, four chains go back to Mālik b. Anas transmitting from Hishām b. 'Urwa and two chains feature other individuals reporting from Hishām. In all cases, the first four names in the chains are Hishām b. 'Urwa, 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, and 'Ā'isha. Based on this preliminary analysis, Hishām b. 'Urwa (61-145/680-763) is the main transmitter of this account and we can conservatively date this tradition about the Prophet's revelatory experience of *wahy* to the first half of the second century at the latest.

In terms of its content, this tradition speaks to at least two modes of prophetic *wahy*: the first mode is rather ambiguous and suggests a kind of non-verbal inspiration that Muhammad

²⁹⁹ Mālik b. Anas, *Muwaṭṭā' Mālik*, Book 15, Ḥadīth No. 479, accessed on 9/12/2017: <https://sunnah.com/urn/404760>

³⁰⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 1, Ḥadīth No. 2: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/1/2>; Book 59, Ḥadīth No. 26: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/59/26>.

³⁰¹ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 43, Ḥadīth No. 117: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/43/117>.

³⁰² Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 3634, accessed on 9/12/2017: <https://sunnah.com/urn/635020>.

³⁰³ Al-Naṣā'ī, *Sunan al-Naṣā'ī*, Book 11, Ḥadīth No. 59: <https://sunnah.com/nasai/11/59>.

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experiences in a physically intense manner after which Muhammad finds the actual words of the Qur'ān within himself; the second mode is an angelic vision where Muhammad perceives the angel speaking to him in human form and directly hears words spoken to him. The first mode of inspiration certainly echoes the earlier qur'ānic idea of *wahy* being non-verbal and mysterious, while the second mode seems to be a further development where the Qur'ān is verbally dictated to the Prophet. This late-first-century tradition, therefore, seems to be a transitional point in the process through which verbal auditory dictation became established in the proto-Sunni and Sunni traditions as the central form of qur'ānic *wahy*.

In general, both the tradition about Muhammad's first revelation in Mecca and the account of his revelatory experience of *wahy* can be roughly dated to the late first century or early second century. The contents of these traditions reveal a shift in how the early community conceived the idea of Qur'ānic Revelation. In both traditions, there is a depiction of Muhammad aurally receiving oral speech from an angel – which is the essence of the developed verbal dictation model of revelation. This is a noteworthy development from the qur'ānic model of *wahy* being inner, nonverbal inspiration from the Holy Spirit. In the Ibn Ishāq version of the first revelation account, the angel brings the first verses of the Qur'ān in the form of a material writing – a notion that Neuwirth views as an evolution from the qur'ānic idea of the transcendent divine writing. The account of Muhammad's reception of *wahy* reflects both the earlier idea of *wahy* being a mysterious nonverbal communication and the more developed notion of *wahy* as angelic oral delivery. All of this seems to indicate a gradual but important shift in early proto-Sunni understandings of revelation evolving through the first century from the earlier Qur'ānic model to the verbal dictation model predominant in Sunni biographical, exegetical, and theological traditions.

2.2 Qur'ānic Revelation in Classical Sunni *Tafsīr*

The idea of the Qur'ān as God's Book and the most authoritative document for divine guidance after Muhammad's death came to monopolize most Muslim conceptions of the Qur'ān in subsequent centuries. The entire ensemble of Muslim literary, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual discourses including recitation, grammar, philology, calligraphy, art, architecture, theology, law, politics, ethics, mysticism, peripatetic philosophy, etc. took inspiration directly or indirectly from the Qur'ān. The canonization of the Qur'ān as a scriptural text gave rise to an entire discrete discourse in Muslim thought: Qur'ānic exegesis or commentary (*tafsīr*). The *tafsīr* tradition showcases some of the earliest and most popular understandings of Qur'ānic Revelation among Muslims. An examination of *tafsīr* literature demonstrates that Qur'ānic exegetes read their new scriptural concept of the Qur'ān back into verses that were not originally about the Qur'ān's existence as a complete written scripture, thereby leading to new understandings of Qur'ānic Revelation.

According to Walid Saleh, *tafsīr* "is one of the most voluminous of Islamic literary genres, second only to the legal tradition ... making this genre a continuous record of what Muslims of different lands and different ages have thought on various topics."³⁰⁴ *Tafsīr* was also the earliest discourse to emerge among the various literary and religious sciences of Islam. Van Ess speculates that *tafsīr* came into being through the fusion of two activities: the Qur'ān reciters (*qurrā'*) reciting the Qur'ān outside of the mosque and the storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*) elaborating on what was recited

³⁰⁴ Walid Saleh, "Qurānic Commentaries," in *The Study Quran*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E. B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1645-1648: 1645.

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through a “midrash-like exegesis”.³⁰⁵ In the earlier and later periods, *tafsīr* as a discipline integrated various other branches of knowledge, including philology, grammar, theology, history, law, etc. The main reason for the concentration of these disciplines in *tafsīr* was a direct result of the formation of the qur'ānic text, as Versteegh explained:

The result of the analysis of these materials is that after the death of the Prophet all scholarly activities concentrated on the text of the Qur'ān. At this stage there were not yet any specialized disciplines dealing with only one aspect of Qur'ānic studies. The text was not studied and commented upon for its own sake, but in order to elucidate the meaning of God's word, and there was no separation between the study of various aspects of the text. Consequently, we find in the earliest commentaries an amalgam of different aspects of Islamic scholarship: historical narrative, abrogation, pre-Islamic lore, lexicography, legal application, theology, reading, and grammar.³⁰⁶

The earliest *tafsīr* works seem to have originated at the end of the first century or in the early second century; these include the *tafsīr* of Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Qatāda (d. 117/735), Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), and Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767). These early *tafsīrs* were short and probably originated as lectures. However, the *tafsīr* tradition proliferated far and wide over the next twelve centuries of Muslim history, resulting in numerous, often massive commentaries incorporating various interpretative methodologies.

Before turning to accounts of Qur'ānic Revelation in certain *tafsīr* works, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the qur'ānic commentator or exegete (*mufasssir*), his *tafsīr* or interpretation of the Qur'ān, and the Qur'ān itself. The qur'ānic exegetes from the outset certainly believed that their *tafsīr* disclosed the true and original meaning of the Qur'ān. Yet, the Qur'ān lends itself to many possible meanings and interpretations. The *tafsīr* tradition as a whole displays

³⁰⁵ van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 53.

³⁰⁶ Cornelis H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 195, quoted in Karen Bauer (ed.), *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis*, (London, New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013), 6.

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a diverse range of interpretations on any given verse or issue. While the aim of the Qur'ānic exegete was to uncover the true meaning of the Qur'ān, the resultant *tafsīr* was very much a product of “meaning-creation”: the exegete creates new meaning as he interprets the Qur'ānic text through his “pre-textual” beliefs, assumptions, and methodologies.³⁰⁷ Karen Bauer describes this most clearly by maintaining that “*tafsīr* is each scholar’s attempt to relate his world to the world of the Qur’an; it is his attempt to relate his intellectual, political and social concerns to the Qur’an’s original text.”³⁰⁸ Following Bauer, I approach *tafsīr* as a dynamic interplay between *eisegesis* and *exegesis*, between the meanings that the commentator reads *into* the Qur'ān and the meanings he extracts and derives *from* the Qur'ān: “It is a genre that creates and imposes meaning on the Qur'ān; it is also a genre that takes meaning from the text of the Qur'ān, expanding it with all the methods at the exegete’s disposal.”³⁰⁹ This interplay must be kept in mind when considering how specific Qur'ān commentators interpret various Qur'ānic verses on revelation.

Despite the great divergence of interpretation featured across the *tafsīr* tradition, Sunni *tafsīr* seems to present a more or less uniform model of Qur'ānic Revelation. I will demonstrate this by analyzing commentaries on specific Qur'ānic verses on the sending down (*inzāl, tanzīl*) and inspiration (*wahy*) of the Qur'ān from the following Sunni Muslim exegetes:

1. Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr*³¹⁰
2. Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Bauer, *Aims, Methods and Contexts*, 8.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Mujāhid b. Jabr, *Tafsīr Mujāhid b. Jabr*, published on “Altafsir.com” (Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2002-2019): www.altafsir.com; accessed 5/6/2019. Hereafter cited as Mujāhid b. Jabr, *Tafsīr*.

³¹¹ Muqātil b. Sulayman, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, published on “Altafsir.com” (Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2002-2019): www.altafsir.com; accessed 12/12/2017. Hereafter cited as Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*.

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3. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-923), *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*³¹²
4. Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (247-333/333/944), *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-sunna*³¹³
5. Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035), *al-Kashf wa l-bayān*³¹⁴
6. Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *al-Kashshāf 'an haqā'iq al-tanzīl*³¹⁵
7. Muḥammad b. 'Umar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (544-606 /1149-1209), *Tafsīr al-kabīr (mafātīḥ al-ghayb)*³¹⁶
8. Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (745-794/1344-1392), *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*³¹⁷
9. Abū l-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khūdayrī al-Suyūfī (849/1445-911/1505), *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*³¹⁸

While the above Qur'ān commentators are certainly not wholly representative of Sunni *tafsīr*, each of them was noteworthy and influential in the Sunni tradition; their views constitute a significant sample of Sunni Qur'ānic exegesis from different periods through the sixth/twelfth century. More specifically, I show how these Sunni exegetes projected the idea of the Qur'ān as a closed, written and self-contained scripture upon their conception of revelation, which is rooted in the following interpretations:

- a) understanding most *kitāb* references within the Qur'ān to mean physical scriptures – either referring to the Qur'ān in canonized form or prior revealed scriptures (the Torah,

³¹² Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, 25 Vols., ed. 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 2001). Hereafter cited as al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*.

³¹³ Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna Tafsīr al-Māturīdī*, 10 Vols., ed. Majdī Muḥammad Surūr Bāsallūm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2005). Hereafter cited as al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*.

³¹⁴ Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *Al-Kashf wa l-bayān*, 10 Vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Tūrāth al-'Arabī, 2002). Hereafter cited as al-Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*.

³¹⁵ Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf 'an haqā'iq al-tanzīl wa 'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl*, ed. Khalīl Ma'mūn Shiha (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2009). Hereafter cited as al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*.

³¹⁶ Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, 32 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981). Hereafter cited as al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*.

³¹⁷ Abū 'Abdullāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Turath, 1957-1958).

³¹⁸ Abū l-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Bakr al-Suyūfī, *Al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*. (Beirut: Mu'assasāt al-Risāla Nāshrūn, 2008).

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Gospel, Psalms); thus, the Revelatory Product is conceived as a scripture instead of an open-ended series of piecemeal *qur'āns*.

b) conceiving the Revelatory Principle – the source of Qur'ānic Revelation – to be a heavenly material book called the Guarded Tablet or *umm al-kitāb* (Q. 43:1-3, 56:77-78, 85:22-23) which contains a physical transcript (*nuskha*) of a pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān complete with all of its *sūras* and verses; as a result, the ontological distinction in the Qur'ān between the Revelatory Principle and the Arabic *qur'āns* implied by *tafsīl* is no longer operative;

c) framing the Revelatory Process as a spatial “sending down” (*inzāl, tanzīl*) of the Qur'ān (Q. 2:185, 97:1, 44:1-3) from heaven; interpreted as the physical descent (*nuzūl*) – by way of angelic transcription and dictation – of the pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven (either in a single descent or in twenty annual installments), followed by Gabriel's descent with and dictation of piecemeal qur'ānic recitations to the Prophet over twenty years in anticipation of his circumstances;

c) differentiating between non-verbal and verbal modes of *wahy* while specifying that Gabriel verbally dictated the Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad in the Arabic language (Q. 26:193-195).

2.2.1 Reading *al-Kitāb* as *al-Qur'ān* in Sunni *Tafsīr*

Taking the word *al-kitāb/kitāb* as a designation of the Qur'ān itself or a prior scripture like the Torah, Psalms or Gospels became a widespread and almost unanimous interpretation in the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition. This represents an important and decisive shift in the meaning of *kitāb* from its original and broader qur'ānic meaning of divine prescription, decree or guidance as we saw in

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Chapter 1. For example, the phrase “that is the *kitāb*” (*dhālika l-kitāb*) in Q. 2:2 was widely interpreted by Sunni exegetes to mean “this is the Book” (*hādha l-kitāb*), referring to the Qur’ān between the two covers; other possible meanings were raised but never pursued.³¹⁹ As I argued at length in Chapter 1, given that the Qur’ān was neither written, collected, closed, nor canonized when *Sūra 2* was first recited by Muhammad, *dhālika l-kitāb* (“that is the *kitāb*”) and similar expressions can hardly refer to the Qur’ān as it exists in the *muṣḥaf*; they more likely refer to the meta-textual, Transcendent Kitāb that is manifested through the Arabic *qur’āns* or to *kitāb* in its wider and more general meaning of divine decree or prescription. But the Sunni *tafsīr* reading passed over this meaning and consequently, as Madigan aptly notes, “the frame of reference of the affirmation ‘*dhālika l-kitāb*’ in Q 2:2 is reduced to the compiled official text itself; the text and metatext are rolled into one.”³²⁰

Neuwirth, perhaps more than anyone else, has explained how one’s interpretation of these few words, *dhālika l-kitāb*, reflects two fundamentally different notions of the Qur’ān – the later idea of “this” scriptural Qur’ān versus the earlier idea of the oral *qur’āns* being an expression of “that” Transcendent Kitāb. The Sunni *tafsīr* tradition subscribed to the former notion. But given the textual format of the Qur’ān that the Sunni exegetes were engaging with, their interpretation makes logical sense within their own context as Neuwirth observed:

[R]eading the Qur’an as a homogenous, post-redactional corpus, as *muṣḥaf* (the “outer communication level”), one has to translate the verse cited above (Q 2:2), *dhālika l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi hudan li-l-muttaqīn*, as “This [i.e., the Qur’an] is the scripture in which is no doubt, a right guidance to the God fearing”; reading it however as a testimony of the proclamation process, the “inner communication level,” one will take *kitāb* to mean not the Qur’anic corpus, but rather the heavenly scripture reclaimed by the Prophet as a “template of revelation”: “That is the [heavenly] scripture, no doubt is in it, a right guidance for the God fearing.” The text read in this way has been reconfigured from an already closed “book”, the “Qur’an”—present here and now—to an open text

³¹⁹ Madigan, “The Limits of Self-referentiality,” 59. All the commentators examined in this chapter took *dhālika l-kitāb* to mean *hādha l-kitāb*.

³²⁰ Ibid.

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that is still on its way to closure. The canonic “mis-reading” of this important verse is not, however, arbitrary. If we set the *Fātiḥa* aside as an introductory prayer and look past the introductory letter names *alif lām mīm*, the verse presents the first pronouncement of the Qur'an. It can easily be comprehended that, understood in this sense by the redactors after the death of the Prophet, appeared as particularly suited for the beginning of the codex, where it can fulfill the function of an expressive dedication of what the Qur'an book that has become the substitute for the voice of the proclaimer addressing the already constituted community.³²¹

This manner of simply identifying *al-kitāb* with the Qur'an permeates the Sunni exegesis of numerous phrases that begin with the remote demonstrative phrase *tilka āyātu* (“those are the signs”) of the *kitāb* (Q. 13:1, 15:1), the wise *kitāb* (Q. 10:1, 31:2), or the clear *kitāb* (Q. 12:1, 26:2, 27:1, 28:2). For example, let us consider the Sunni commentaries on Q. 12:1, “those are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*)”: for Muqātil, *al-kitāb* simply meant “the Qur'an”,³²² al-Ṭabarī understood “those are the signs” (*tilka āyāt*) to mean “these are the verses” (*hādhihi āyāt*) of the clear book, meaning the Qur'an,³²³ al-Māturīdī offered several options: *kitāb* here may mean the previous scriptures, the Qur'an, or the Guarded Tablet in which the Qur'an is written in Arabic; in either case, al-Māturīdī held that *al-kitāb* means a material written scripture,³²⁴ al-Tha'labī believed *al-kitāb al-mubīn* is either the Guarded Tablet that contains the written form of the Arabic Qur'an, or refers to the Qur'an in Arabic;³²⁵ according to al-Zamakhsharī, “those are the signs (*tilka āyāt*)” refers to “these verses” of Sūra 12 and *al-kitāb al-mubīn* refers to the Sūra itself;³²⁶

³²¹ Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 115-116.

³²² Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*:
<http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=12&tAyahNo=2&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

³²³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 6. See also his interpretation of *tilka āyātu l-kitāb al-ḥakīm* in Q. 31 which is similar to this, in *ibid.*, Vol. 18, 531-532.

³²⁴ Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 6, 207-208.

³²⁵ Al-Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 5, 196.

³²⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, 502.

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likewise, al-Razī held that “those signs (*tilka āyāt*)” refers to “these” (*hādhihi*) verses of the Sūra and that *al-kitāb al-mubīn* means the Qur'ān. In all of the above interpretations, we see the various commentators taking “those are the signs of the *kitāb*” to mean “these are the verses of the Qur'ān”; the Qur'ān as a bounded text is thereby understood as referring back to itself as a closed and complete corpus, instead of referring to God's signs in general. Madigan believes that this type of reading – which glosses “those signs” of the God's *kitāb* (decree) as “these verses” of the recited Qur'ān – was the direct result of the canonization and compilation of the Qur'ān. He explains this development in terms of the two-stage canonization (canon from below vs. canon from above) seen earlier from Neuwirth:

In short, what I am proposing is that with the canonization of the text, there is a quantum leap in the sense of self-referentiality that is projected onto the Qur'ān. This is true at both stages in the canonization process identified by Neuwirth – the liturgical canonization “from below” and then the official canonical compilation “from above”. This projected self-referentiality needs to be recognized as coming from largely the believing community rather than from the text itself. In the first canonization, the community reflects on the *āyāt* of God by reciting the text. The verses of these liturgical readings (*Qur'ān*) begin as the point of contact with God's guidance, but gradually come to be identified with that guidance. In the second stage – the compilation of the prophetic materials, whether liturgical in form or not – the resulting scriptural corpus becomes the concretization of God's otherwise interactive word. It is particularly this second stage which creates the impression of reflexivity and extreme self-referentiality. Pronouncements that once pointed to and proclaimed the signs of God's activity in creation, in history and in prophetic ministry are now themselves identified as *āyāt*. Those signs (*tilka āyāt*) have become ‘these verses’.³²⁷

In a similar fashion, these exegetes all interpreted the term *qur'ānan 'arabiyyan* in the following verse (12:2), “We have sent it down as an Arabic *qur'ān*; haply you will understand” and similar occurrences, to mean the Qur'ān as a closed Arabic text – something reflected in modern translations of *qur'ānan 'arabiyyan* as “an Arabic Qur'ān.” This reading also projects the idea of an already complete canonized Qur'ān into these verses, which were revealed when there was no

³²⁷ Madigan, “The Limits of Self-referentiality,” 69.

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such Qur'ān. As Madigan further notes, this reading eclipses the intra-qur'ānic meaning of *qur'ān* as a performative mode of verbal display:

The principal loss is the verbal, performative force of the word. The fact that translators prefer to transliterate the word rather than translate it further reduces the verbal aspect of *Qur'ān*. For example, the recurring phrase "*Qur'ānan 'arabiyyan*" is often translated as "an Arabic Qur'ān." However, a more neutral, indeed more literal translation – "to be recited in Arabic" or "as a recitation in Arabic" – would give a richer sense of the original and avoid what could be called a premature scripturalization of the word.³²⁸

Thus, the original meaning we saw in Chapter 1 – that God reveals the Transcendent Kitāb in the form of verbal Arabic recitations (*qur'āns*) – has been eclipsed by the presence and authority of the canonized Qur'ān. The dynamic revelatory event entailing piecemeal *qur'āns* has been scripturalized into a static qur'ānic text.

Sunni exegetes likewise understood the statement that the Messenger recites God's Signs and teaches *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikma* to the believers (in Q. 2:151, 4:153, 62:2) to mean that Muhammad recites the verses of the Qur'ān and teaches the Qur'ān. Once again, the broader meta-textual significance of the Messenger recounting God's Signs present throughout the Cosmos and teaching God's prescribed guidance to the community is reduced to his act of reciting and teaching the Qur'ān; the qur'ānic recitations have become identified with the very signs of God they disclose and point to. Similarly, the "*kitāb* of your Lord" and "His words" (*kalimāt*) in Q. 18:27, "Recite what is inspired to thee of the *kitāb* of your Lord; no man can change His words", were generally understood by these exegetes as referring to the Qur'ān and the words of the Qur'ān respectively. Al-Ṭabarī glossed "the *kitāb* of your Lord" as "this Book", i.e. the Qur'ān and took "His words" to mean the Arabic words of the Qur'ān sent down to the Prophet.³²⁹ Al-Tha'labī and al-

³²⁸ Ibid., 62; cf. Graham, "Earliest Meaning" in *Islamic and Comparative studies*, esp. p. 135.

³²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 15, 234.

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Zamakhsharī offered similar readings, equating the *kitāb* with the Qur'ān recited by Muhammad.³³⁰ Al-Māturīdī admitted two possible meanings for “the *kitāb* of your Lord” – the Guarded Tablet or the Qur'ān itself – although his options ultimately reduced its meaning to the content of the Arabic Qur'ān recited by Muhammad. Al-Māturīdī's interpretation of “His words”, also specified several possible meanings, some of which convey the broader intra-qur'ānic meaning of *kalimāt Allāh* explained in Chapter 1. For example, al-Māturīdī admitted that “God's words” may refer to God's custom (*sunnat Allāh*), God's decrees and promises to believers in this world and the hereafter, God's proofs and demonstrations by which God establishes His religion, or the actual words of the Qur'ān.³³¹ If anything, the contrast between the restricted interpretation of “*kitāb* of your Lord” and “His words” given by al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha'labī and al-Zamakhsharī and the more open view of al-Māturīdī illustrates how many Sunni commentators habitually reduced the meaning *al-kitāb* to the Qur'ān itself and pinned down terms like “God's Words” (*kalimāt Allāh, kalām Allāh*) as references to the words of the Qur'ān.

As a final example of this broad interpretive trend in Sunni *tafsīr*, even the qur'ānic commands to obey God were often taken by Sunni commentators to mean obedience to the commands of the Qur'ān. A case in point is the commentaries on Q. 4:59 – “O believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority (*ulū l-amr*) among you. If you should quarrel on anything, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; that is better, and fairer in the issue.” While commentators on this verse spend most of their ink on debating the identity of the *ulū l-amr* (the possessors of authority), for our purposes it is only

³³⁰ Al-Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 6, 165; al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, 618.

³³¹ Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 7, 161-162.

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important to consider the Sunni exegetical opinion on the meaning of “obey God and obey the Messenger” and “refer it to God and the Messenger”. Al-Ṭabarī interpreted the command “refer it to God” to mean referring to the Qur’ān and following the rulings found within it; He took “refer it to the Messenger” to mean referring to the Prophet when he is alive and to his Sunna (equated with the content of sound *ḥadīth* by Sunnis) after his death.³³² Al-Māturīdī interpreted “obey God” to mean obedience to “what He commanded you and prohibited you in His Book”, i.e. the Qur’ān; he took the phrase “obey the Messenger” to mean obedience to what the Prophet commanded in his Sunna.³³³ Al-Māturīdī also specified several interpretations of the Qur’ānic command to refer disagreements to God and the Messenger – where “refer it to God” means “to the Book of God” or “what is found in the Book of God”.³³⁴ Likewise, even al-Zamakhsharī’s Mu‘tazilī interpretation of the Qur’ān glossed “refer it to God and the Messenger” as “to the Book and the Sunna.”³³⁵ This interpretation endured to the period of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who interpreted “obey God and obey the Messenger” as an indication (*ishāra*) to the Book and the Sunna.³³⁶

What we see in the above examples – where *al-kitāb* is taken to mean the Qur’ān in its compiled form and obeying or referring to God means obeying the Qur’ān – is no insignificant matter. To the post-Qur’ānic and modern mentality, such a reading may seem obvious or axiomatic. But we must consider what “obeying God and obeying the Messenger” and referring matters to

³³² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 7, 184-185.

³³³ Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 3, 226.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, 228, 229, 232. Al-Māturīdī offers this interpretation in various contexts, such as what the jurists should do when they disagree, the question of *ijtihād*, and in refuting the claims of the Shī‘a concerning the authority of the Imams. In all these cases, he asserts that referring the matter to God means referring to the Qur’ān.

³³⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, 242.

³³⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 10, 148.

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them meant during the emergent phase of the Qur'ān's revelation as depicted in Chapter 1. In the presence of the unitary prophetic-revelatory event and the absence of the canonized text of the Qur'ān, such a thing could only have meant obeying and referring to the living guidance of the Muhammad, who responded to questions either through prophetic guidance or by reciting new *qur'āns* speaking to the situation at hand. However, the interpretations of the Sunni exegetes entail nothing less than an ontological, theological, and hermeneutical “collapse” in which God, His *kitāb*, and the responsive and dynamic qur'ānic revelatory event – in which the Transcendent Kitāb by way of the Prophet's mediation is manifested through piecemeal *qur'āns* – have all been effectively subsumed into the Qur'ān *qua* scriptural book. The ontological distinctions and dynamics among God's decrees issuing from the Transcendent Kitāb, the person and authority of the Prophet, and the Arabic *qur'āns* recited by him have been “flattened” as it were. Stated differently, these readings entail that God, His *kitāb*, and the Prophet's revelatory authority have almost become “inlibrate”, i.e. incarnate in the form of a book, as aptly described by Madigan:

The canonized text has become so central that scarcely anything beyond it can be considered important – except God – though the extent to which God becomes intimately identified with the text makes even this exception moot.... Even though by Ṭabarī's time that gloss would have seemed unexceptional, it indicates a shift of crucial significance that had taken place in the years following the official canonization of the text. The responsive voice of the divine that used to intervene in and through the mission of the Prophet has now been reduced almost without questioning to a closed text. Along with that reduction, in fact, two other moves have taken place: the *kitāb* has been equated to Qur'ān, and Qur'ān has been equated to the content of the *muṣḥaf*. Following this tendency in the tradition, we have become accustomed to speak of the content of the *muṣḥaf* as though it were the sum total of the revelation given to the Prophet by God.³³⁷

The Sunni *tafsīr* tradition thus came to understand the Qur'ānic meaning of *al-kitāb* and references to obeying God solely in terms of the scripturalized Qur'ān. This interpretation effectively invested the Qur'ān *qua* scripture with self-contained and primary authority for all divinely revealed knowledge and truth. But this was merely the first step in a larger theological development in

³³⁷ Madigan, “The Limits of Self-Referentiality,” 59-60.

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which the written Arabic Qur'ān became more and more elevated. Having equated the scriptural Qur'ān with the Transcendent Kitāb and the absolute authority of God, Sunni exegetes went further and asserted the Qur'ān's literal pre-existence in heaven.

2.2.2 The Heavenly Pre-Existent Qur'ān and its Revelatory Descent (*nuzūl*)

In the prior chapter, we saw how the Qur'ānic framework of revelation envisages a Transcendent Kitāb containing the sum of all divine knowledge, records, and decrees, becoming manifest through piecemeal Arabic *qur'āns* by means of *tafṣīl* – the process by which the Transcendent Kitāb is rendered into ad-hoc recitations adapted to the situation and knowledge of their audience. Accordingly, the Arabic linguistic quality of the *qur'āns* is the outcome of the *tafṣīl* process and does not exist prior to the Prophet's act of reciting; the Transcendent Kitāb, as the repository of God's decrees and knowledge, is never presented in the Qur'ān as a linguistic text in Arabic. We also saw how the verbs *nazzala* (to send down) and *anzala* (to cause to descend) in the Qur'ān convey the broader meaning of God's decisive and beneficial action towards His creatures – as evidenced by the myriad of things that God “sends down” according to the Qur'ān. However, in Sunni *tafsīr*, both the concept of the Transcendent Kitāb and the idea of the Qur'ān's “sending down” (*nazzala*, *anzala*) were interpreted and understood along materialist lines – as the literal physical sending down of the Arabic Qur'ān from a pre-existent transcript within the heavenly Guarded Tablet.

Sunni *tafsīr* theories of the pre-existence of the Qur'ān in heaven and its spatial revelatory “descent” (*nuzūl*) to earth were generally presented through the exegesis of several Qur'ānic verses including Q. 2:185, 43:2-3, 44:2-4, and 97:1. In general, the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition arrived at three closely related but distinct views of Qur'ānic Revelation based on these verses, as we will see

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below. But underlying all three theories is the belief that the Qur'ān, prior to its recitation by Muhammad, literally pre-existed as a complete textual transcript (*nuskha*) in a heavenly book variously called the Guarded Tablet (*lawḥ mahfūz*), clear book (*kitāb mubīn*), and hidden book (*kitāb maknūn*). This theory was grounded in their readings of Q. 56:77-78 (Nay, but it is an honorable Qur'ān in a hidden book"),³³⁸ Q. 85:21-22 ("Nay, but it is a glorious *Qur'ān* in a guarded tablet") and Q. 43:3 ("and behold, it is in the *umm al-kitāb*, with Us"), where the term *Qur'ān* was taken to mean the entire Qur'ān as a complete text.

The Sunni exegetes described the Guarded Tablet or *umm al-kitāb* as containing every decree that God "wrote" concerning His creatures prior to their creation, and, in this respect, they identified it with the *kitāb mubīn* mentioned in various Qur'anic verses. But they also asserted that the Qur'ān existed as a complete textual transcript in Arabic within the Guarded Tablet. Mujāhid b. Jabr glossed Q. 56:78-80 to mean "the Qur'ān is from My Book ... the Book that is in heaven that none touch except the angels."³³⁹ According to Muqātil's gloss of Q. 43:3, "He [God] says to the people of Mecca: if you deny this Qur'ān, then its transcript (*nuskhatahu*) is in the Root-Source of the Book (*aṣl al-kitāb*), meaning the Guarded Tablet."³⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī explained that this verse means "verily, this Book [i.e. the Qur'ān] is in the Root-Source of the Book (*aṣl al-kitāb*) from which it was transcribed (*nusikha minhu*)." To substantiate his reading, he referred to a tradition

³³⁸ For a study of various Sunni interpretations of the *kitāb maknūn* of Q. 56:78-80, see M. J. Kister, "Lā Yamassuhu illā l-muṭahharūn...Notes on the Interpretations of a Qur'ānic Phrase," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 309-334.

³³⁹ Mujāhid b. Jabr, *Tafsir*:
<https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=78&tSoraNo=56&tAyahNo=78&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

³⁴⁰ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsir*:
<http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=43&tAyahNo=2&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

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where Ibn 'Abbās states: “Verily, the first of what God created was the Pen. Then He commanded it to write what He intends to create. So the Book is with Him.” He further related the words of 'Aṭīyya b. Sa'd, who said that “the Qur'ān is in the *umm al-kitāb* which is with God, from which it is transcribed.”³⁴¹ Al-Māturīdī said that the *umm al-kitāb* could refer to prior scriptures, but maintained nevertheless that the Qur'ān is transcribed in the Root-Source of the Book (*aṣl al-kitāb*).³⁴² Al-Zamakhsharī identified the *umm al-kitāb* with the Guarded Tablet of Q. 85:22 and explained that “it is called *umm al-kitāb* because it is the root-principle (*al-aṣl*) in which the Book is affixed, from which it is transmitted and transcribed.”³⁴³ Likewise, al-Tha'labī explained that “this Book”, i.e. the Qur'ān “is in the *umm al-kitāb*, meaning the Guarded Tablet which is with God, from which it [the Qur'ān] was transcribed.”³⁴⁴ In the same fashion, al-Rāzī described the *umm al-kitāb* in the same way as the above exegetes and also noted that “the Qur'ān is established with God in the Guarded Tablet.”³⁴⁵ The above interpretations, widespread and pervasive in the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition, entail that the Qur'ān existed as a complete scriptural text in the Arabic language, fixed in the Guarded Tablet, long before its revelation to the Prophet.

This idea of the “pre-existent Qur'ān” should not be confused with the “uncreated” or “eternal” (*qadīm*) Speech of God, which developed in Sunni *kalām* theology at the instigation of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (to be discussed in Chapter 3). In fact, a pre-existent Qur'ān inscribed in the

³⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 20, 546. Al-Ṭabarī's views on this matter based on his commentaries on various Qur'ānic verses are analyzed in Saleh, “A Piecemeal Qur'ān,” 53-60. Saleh was among the first modern scholars to draw critical attention to this topic, albeit for different purposes.

³⁴² Al-Māturīdī, Vol. 9, 146.

³⁴³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, 984.

³⁴⁴ Al-Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 8, 328.

³⁴⁵ Al-Rāzī, Vol. 27, 195.

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Tablet still suggests that the Qur'ān is created and the early Mu'tazilīs formulated their early views within this framework. Most took the Guarded Tablet to be a creation of God, albeit a very special one, although the early *tafsīr* tradition seemed little concerned with this point. Nevertheless, asserting a pre-existent Qur'ān negates the all-important process of *tafsīl*, which features prominently in the Qur'ān and which ontologically differentiates the contents of the Transcendent Kitāb from the piecemeal recitations in Arabic adapted to specific audiences. The pre-existent Qur'ān of the Sunni exegetes is already in the form of Arabic chapters and verses in the Guarded Tablet and thereby bypasses the process of *tafsīl* entirely. Accordingly, the process of revelation merely requires that this pre-existent Qur'ān be “delivered” to the Prophet – either by transcription (copying) into an earthly text, verbal dictation, or a combination of both.

Having established a pre-existent Qur'ān, Sunni exegetes came to conceptualize the process of Qur'ānic Revelation by speculating on the meaning of the following Qur'anic verses:

The month of Ramaḍān, wherein the *qur'ān* was sent down to be a guidance to the people. (Q. 2:185)

Behold We sent it down on the Night of Destiny (Q. 97:1)

By the Clear Kitāb. We have sent it down in a blessed night (We are ever warning). (Q. 44:2-3)

On the whole, Sunni exegetes considered three models of Qur'ānic Revelation based on the above verses. These models were schematized by al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries respectively as they summarized a great deal of *tafsīr* material from the centuries preceding them.³⁴⁶ The first model claims that the Arabic Qur'ān pre-existed in the Guarded Tablet, and that a portion of the Qur'ān was sent down from the Tablet to the lowest heaven on the

³⁴⁶ Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 228-229; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 94-97. They also mention a fourth model (both authors label it as the third model) which simply states that the revelatory descent of the Qur'ān began in the Night of Destiny. No further details on this model are provided by any of the Sunni exegetes considered in this chapter. For that reason, we have avoided getting into it.

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Night of Destiny – which most Muslims take to be a night among the last ten nights of Ramaḍān in which Muhammad received the first qur'ānic verses from Gabriel. According to this model, God sent down a portion of the Qur'ān from the Tablet to the lowest heaven on an annual basis, in every Night of Destiny, for the duration of the Prophet's mission (variously reported to be twenty, twenty-three or twenty-five years). Then Gabriel would dictate that portion of qur'ānic verses to Muhammad in a piecemeal manner over the course of each subsequent year. This view was promoted by Muqātil in his interpretation of Q. 97:1, 2:185, and 44:3, as quoted below:

“*Verily We sent it down*” (Q. 97:1), meaning God sent down the Qur'ān from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven, to the scribe-angels (*safara*) who are the recorders among the angels. He would send down inspiration (*wahy*) on this night commensurate with whatever Gabriel would bring down to the Prophet in the year; each of them [the Nights of Destiny] corresponding to its like [from the year before] until the entire Qur'an descended (or was sent down) from heaven “*in the Night of Destiny*” in the Month of Ramaḍān.³⁴⁷

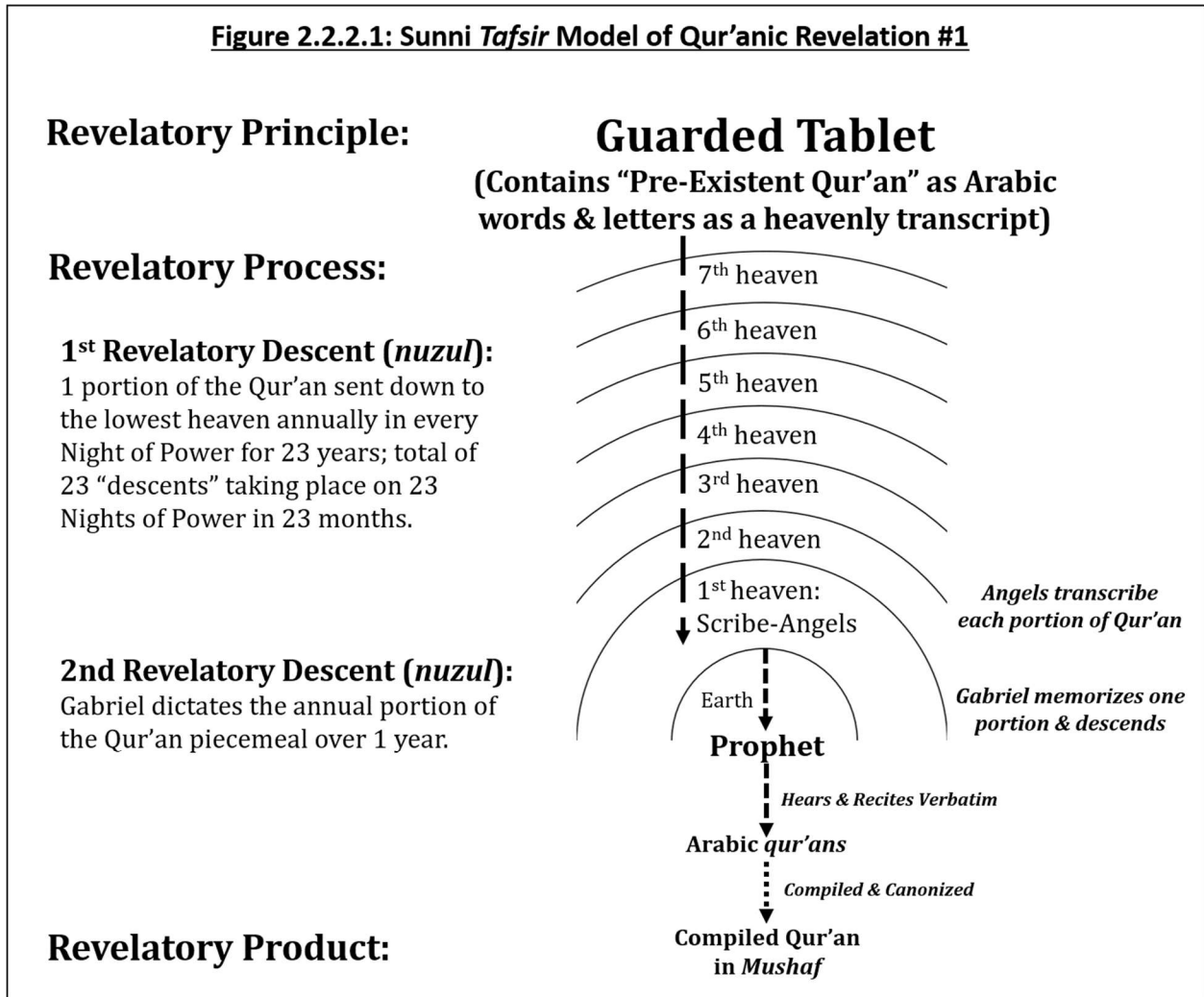
“*Verily We sent it down*” (Q. 44:3), meaning the Qur'an from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven, to the scribe-angels. It was sent down from the Guarded Tablet in every Night of Destiny. Thus, God would send down from the Qur'an to the lower heaven according to the measure of whatever Gabriel would bring down in the year, according to its likeness from the preceding year, until the entire Qur'an descended (or was sent down) in the Night of Destiny, in the Blessed Night – so it is the “*Blessed Night*”.³⁴⁸

The above remarks present a cosmology of Qur'ānic Revelation involving two different stages of revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) and different parties functioning at each level. We will call this model T1 (Tafsīr Model #1):

³⁴⁷ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*:
<http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=97&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

³⁴⁸ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*:
<http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=44&tAyahNo=3&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

Figure 2.2.2.1: Sunni *Tafsir* Model of Qur'anic Revelation #1



The second model of Qur’anic revelatory descent, which we will call T2 (Tafsīr Model #2), claims that the entire Qur’ān descended from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven in a single initial revelatory descent on the first Night of Destiny; the Qur’ān was then divided into annual portions and given annually to the Angel Gabriel over twenty years; Gabriel then verbally dictated each year’s installment to the Prophet over the subsequent year. This model could be the earliest on record given that a very simplified version of it was related by Mujāhid b. Jabr in the late first century. His commentary on Q. 56:78-80 affirmed the revelatory descent of the entire Arabic Qur’ān from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās:

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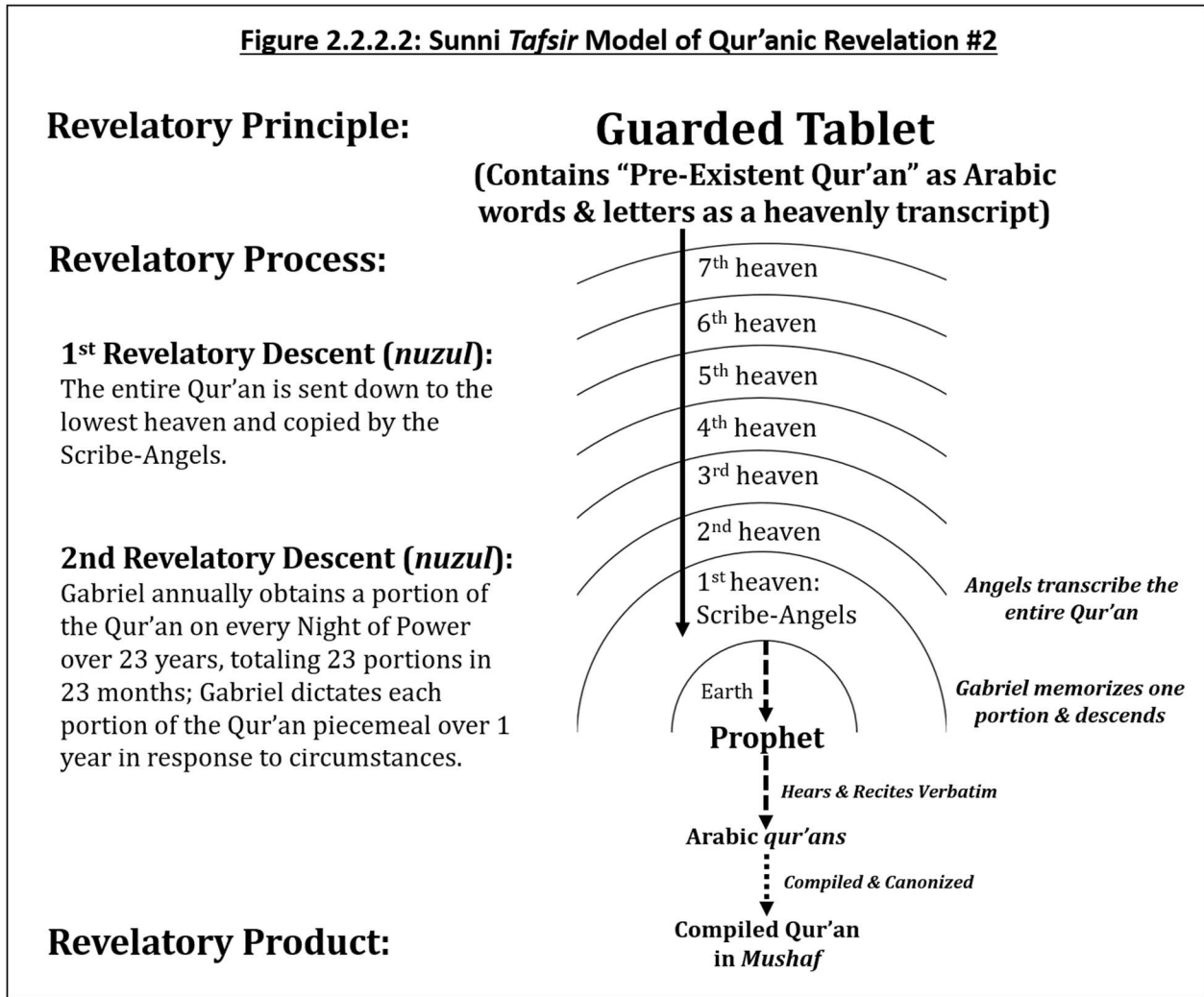
The entire Qur'ān descended to the lowest heaven all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*). Then it was sent in installments to Prophet as portions, divisions, and partitions [consisting of] a verse, two verses, and more.³⁴⁹

A generation after Mujāhid, Muqātil described the T2 model with more detail in his commentary on Q. 2:185: “The entire Qur'an descended from the Guarded Tablet to the scribe-angels (*safara*) in one night, the Night of Destiny. Gabriel took it from the guardian angels in twenty months and conveyed it to the Prophet over twenty years.”³⁵⁰ The T2 Model looks like the following:

³⁴⁹ Mujāhid b. Jabr, *Tafsīr* of 56:75ff, online version: <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=78&tSoraNo=56&tAyahNo=78&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Figure 2.2.2.2: Sunni *Tafsir* Model of Qur'anic Revelation #2



The T1 and T2 models of Qur'anic Revelation continued to be referenced by later Sunni exegetes. Al-Ṭabarī reported the T1 model of Qur'anic Revelation from Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), a transmitter of many legal *ḥadīths* and a student of a student of Ibn 'Abbās. According to the report, Ibn Jurayj said that "He [God] would send down from the Qur'an in the Night of Destiny everything He sends down from the Qur'an in that year. Thus, it descended from the seventh heaven to Gabriel in the nearest heaven. Gabriel would only bring down from that [annual portion]

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to Muhammad what His Lord commanded him.”³⁵¹ Al-Māturīdī reported the T1 model while showing some uncertainty about it, adding that God alone knows best.³⁵² Al-Rāzī discussed the T1 model as well and endorsed it as a plausible interpretation based on the meaning of the words in Q. 2:185, since the word “Ramaḍān” could refer to every month of Ramaḍān.³⁵³ Al-Zarkashī reported the T1 model but did not really endorse it. Meanwhile, al-Suyūṭī reported the T1 model but stated his personal preference for the T2 model, attributing the following statement to Ibn ‘Abbās:

The Qur’ān descended all at once from the presence of God from the Guarded Tablet to the honorable scribe-angels (*al-safara al-karām al-kātibīn*) in the lowest heaven, then the scribe angels conveyed it to Gabriel in installments in twenty nights, and Gabriel conveyed it in installments to the Prophet in twenty years.³⁵⁴

The T1 and T2 models of Qur’ānic Revelation appeared early in the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition, as evidenced in the exegesis of Mujāhid (d. 104/722), Muqāṭil (d. 150/767) and Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), and they likely date to the late first century. However, both models were eclipsed in popularity by a third model of Qur’anic revelatory descent, which was also reported to be a teaching of Ibn ‘Abbās. Al-Ṭabarī provided several reports about this model on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās in his exegesis of Q. 97:1, some of which are quoted below.

The Qur’ān descended (*nazala*) in the Night of Destiny from the highest heaven to the lowest heaven, entirely all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*). Then it was divided into two periods. Then Ibn ‘Abbās recited this verse, “No, I swear by the falling of the stars” (Q. 56:75), and he said: It descended piecemeal (*mutafarriqan*).³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 3, 191.

³⁵² Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 10, 583.

³⁵³ Al-Rāzī, Vol. 5, 92.

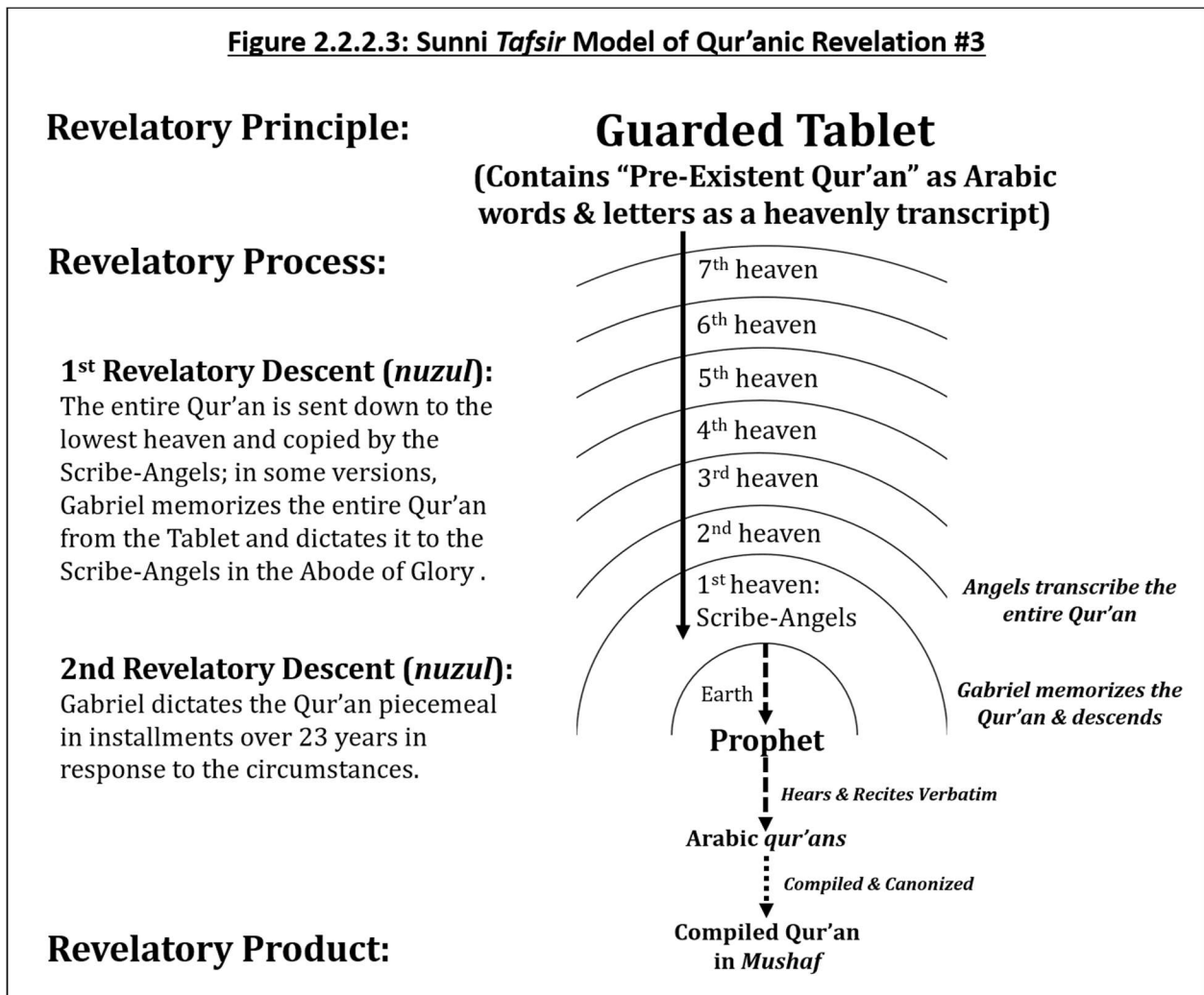
³⁵⁴ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 96.

³⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Commentary on Q. 97:1, Vol. 24, 543.

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The Qur’ān descended all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) upon Gabriel in the Night of Destiny. He [Gabriel] did not bring down anything from it except what He was commanded (with).³⁵⁶

According to this third model of revelation, the entire Qur’ān descended to the lowest heaven on the Night of Destiny and was given to the Angel Gabriel. In some reports, it was Gabriel who brought the Qur’ān down from the Tablet. Gabriel then brought parts of the Qur’ān down to the Prophet over the next twenty years as and when circumstances required. We can refer to this third model of Qur’ānic Revelation as T3 (Tafsīr Model #3).



³⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Commentary on Q. 2:185, Vol. 3, 191.

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The T3 model was both reiterated and expanded upon by later Sunni exegetes with more rigor than the T1 and T2 models. As Saleh puts it, “what we have in al-Ṭabarī is a Qur’ān, descending in its totality from the original eternal book and already fully formed, into the lowest heaven, and transported in installments to Muḥammad, akin to the regular payments of a debt, for him to collect.”³⁵⁷ Al-Māturīdī described the T3 model in his commentary on several occasions.³⁵⁸ His exegesis of Q. 2:185 contained a similar statement sourced to Ibn ‘Abbās: “The *Furqān* descended/was sent down (*nazala/nuzila*) all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) from the Tablet to the lowest heaven in the month of Ramaḍān in the Night of Destiny – a Blessed Night. Then after that it was sent down gradually according to installments in the months and the years according to the determination of needs.”³⁵⁹ Al-Tha‘labī’s exegesis of Q. 97:1 added that the Qur’ān in the lowest heaven was established in the Abode of Glory (*bayt al-‘izza*) and that Gabriel dictated it to the scribe-angels.³⁶⁰ His remarks on Q. 44:2-3 described the process in similar terms: “God sent down the Qur’ān in the Night of Destiny from the *umm al-kitāb* to the lowest heaven, and then He sent it down to His Prophet during the nights and the days.”³⁶¹ Al-Zamakhsharī strongly asserted this same view in the introductory remarks of his Mu‘tazilī *tafsīr*: “Praise is due to God who caused the Qur’ān to descend (*anzala*) as composed and arranged speech (*kalāman mu’allafan munazzaman*), and [then] sent it down (*nazzalahu*) for the benefit [of the people] in

³⁵⁷ Saleh, “A Piecemeal Qur’ān,” 55.

³⁵⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 9, 196; Vol. 10, 583.

³⁵⁹ Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 44.

³⁶⁰ Al-Tha‘labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 10, 247.

³⁶¹ Al-Tha‘labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 8, 349. His statement here almost matches al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* of Q. 44:2-3 in al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 21, 5.

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installments.”³⁶² In his commentary on Q. 97:1, al-Zamakhsharī explicitly stated that the Qur’ān “was sent down all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) from the seventh heaven to the lowest heaven. The honorable scribe-angels were commanded with transcribing it in the Night of Destiny, and Gabriel would bring it down upon the Messenger of God in installments.”³⁶³ Al-Rāzī noted that the T3 model was the most popular understanding of Qur’ānic Revelation among the exegetes.³⁶⁴ But he still accepted all three models as equally plausible readings of Q. 97:1 and 2:185.³⁶⁵ Al-Rāzī further understood the Qur’ānic verb *anzala* (*inzāl*) to mean the revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) of scripture in a single instance – specific to the Torah, Gospel, and the Qur’ān in heaven; meanwhile, he understood the verb *nazzala* (*tanzīl*) to mean a gradual piecemeal mode of descent, which specifically pertains to the Qur’ān in the second stage of its descent from the lowest heaven to earth.³⁶⁶

Writing much later, Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī added further details and speculations to the T3 model of Qur’ānic Revelation. Drawing on a great number of Sunni positions, they both speculated that Gabriel could have received the Qur’ān above the heavens in two ways that accord a major role to Gabriel: either a) God inspired the Qur’ān to him through a spiritual inspiration (*ilhām*) – an idea found in *kalām* theology; or 2) Gabriel memorized the Qur’ān from the Guarded Tablet, brought it down to the Abode of Glory (*bayt al-‘izza*) in the lowest heaven, and dictated it

³⁶² Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, 23 (Introduction to Commentary).

³⁶³ Ibid., 998. See also 1214: “It was sent down (*unzila*) all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) in the Night of Destiny from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven, and Gabriel took it from the guardian angels (*safara*), and then he would bring it down to the Messenger of God in installments in twenty-three years.”

³⁶⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 5, 91.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 92.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 93.

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to the scribe-angels.³⁶⁷ Al-Suyūṭī also drew on earlier Sunni scholars to discuss several possible reasons for why God sent down the entire Qur'ān to the lowest heaven before dictating it piecemeal to Muhammad. One reason was to show the inhabitants of the heavens and the angels that the Qur'ān was God's final message. Another reason was to show that the Qur'ān's revelatory descent (*muzūl*) was equal to that of the Torah – as it was believed that the Torah also descended to Moses in a single revelatory descent. This showed that Prophet Muhammad was on par with Prophet Moses. A third reason that al-Suyūṭī cited was that the Qur'ān's revelatory descent in two stages – all at once and piecemeal – was a special honor for Muhammad since repeated visits by Gabriel strengthened the Prophet's heart.³⁶⁸

All three *Tafsīr* models of Qur'ānic Revelation, regardless of their differences, were equally premised on the pre-existence of a complete Qur'ān comprising a full transcript (*nukhsa*) of letters, verses, and *sūras*. The pre-existent Qur'ān took ontological priority over an open-ended piecemeal series of *qur'āns*. The real difference between T1, T2, and T3 lies in their respective degrees of piecemeal revelation: the T1 model has the pre-existent Qur'ān become divided as it is transcribed from the Tablet; the T2 model divides the Qur'ān only after it descends to the lowest heaven and as it is delivered to Gabriel; the T3 model divides the Qur'ān only when Gabriel delivers it to the Prophet. In other words, the Qur'ān is less piecemeal and more unified in T3 over T2 and T1.

In this respect, the *tafsīr* models stand completely opposite to the Qur'ān's own statements that Muhammad does not bring down any book from heaven and that the qur'ānic recitations will

³⁶⁷ Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 228-230; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 96-97, 100-102.

³⁶⁸ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 96-97.

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never be sent down all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*). It is fair to say that the Sunni *tafsīr* models of revelation, with their emphasis on the Qur'ān's material pre-existence and its revelatory descent *in toto*, reflect the Sunni exegetes' own engagements with the Qur'ān's scriptural written form rather than the Qur'ān's perspective during its original emergence (which denies the value of heavenly scriptures and singular descents). Thus, Madigan observes that:

It is clear that the motivation for developing such a schema does not come from within the text; for it rejects the notion that it is somehow incomplete and that it ought to be made public in a single pronouncement in order to prove its completeness. The motivation seems rather to arise from a sense within the community that its scriptural canon must be fixed and complete by its very nature as the utterance and decree of God – *kalām Allāh* and *kitāb Allāh*.³⁶⁹

While it is true that the Sunni *mufasssīrūn* acknowledged the piecemeal format of Qur'ānic Revelation, this format was relegated to the lowest level – from Gabriel to Muhammad – and effectively reduced. In such a framework, the piecemeal oral nature of the Qur'ān was entirely pre-determined by its pre-written format in heaven. Saleh even argued that al-Ṭabarī and other Sunni exegetes blunted the significance of any Qur'ānic verse attesting to the Qur'ān's piecemeal form (e.g. Q. 17:106 refers to the Qur'ān being “divided”) by obscuring the meaning of its words and subordinating its interpretation to the pre-existence of the Qur'ān:

Admitting to a piecemeal revelation Qur'ān is here inconsequential, since it is a mere transportation of it from one location to another. The Sunnī tradition admits to this historical truth about the Qur'ān, that it was revealed over a twenty-two year span, yet prevents this aspect from having any bearing on the theology of the created Qur'ān.³⁷⁰

This idea of the pre-existent Qur'ān in heaven completely negates the “responsive” nature of the Qur'ānic discourse because every verse and *sūra* was already “scripted” in preparation for pre-determined events. On this point, Madigan concluded that “the Qur'ān thus understood can no longer be read as a divine engagement with humanity, calling for and responding to human action;

³⁶⁹ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 68.

³⁷⁰ Saleh, “A Piecemeal Qur'ān,” 55.

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rather it becomes entirely the predeterminer of that action.”³⁷¹ In this way, the Sunni *tafsīr* models of Qur'ānic Revelation not only collapsed the original qur'ānic distinction between the Transcendent Kitāb and the earthly *qur'āns* or the Revelatory Principle and Revelatory Product, but also radically altered the function and format of the latter by reifying the *qur'āns* into a pre-scripted qur'ānic text waiting in heaven to be sent down to earth at the right moment. Whatever the value of the Qur'ān's piecemeal delivery to the Prophet, the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition came to view the lowest stage of Qur'ānic Revelation exclusively as an oral dictation of this pre-existent Qur'ān by Gabriel as discussed in the next section.

2.2.3 Revelation as Verbal Dictation in Sunni *Tafsīr*

As we saw in Chapter 1, the term *wahy/awḥā* is one of the most important qur'ānic designations for prophetic inspiration, both in reference to Muhammad and prior prophets. From a pre-Islamic and intra-qur'ānic perspective, *wahy* denotes a mysterious non-verbal or pre-verbal inspiration by which God communicates to His creatures, including animals, humans, and Prophets. In the context of Qur'ānic Revelation, *wahy* is the Prophet's visionary perception or “reading” of the Transcendent Kitāb through the medium of the Spirit; the Prophet then renders or “translates” this *wahy* into human language in the form of the Arabic *qur'āns*. The Sunni exegetes altered the qur'ānic concept of *wahy* as a non-verbal inspiration and reinterpreted its meaning in accordance with the ideas analyzed above – the pre-existence of the entire Arabic Qur'ān in the Tablet, its singular heavenly descent to the lowest heaven, and its verbal dictation to the Prophet by Gabriel in installments. As a result, the Sunni exegetes distinguished different modes of *wahy* – including

³⁷¹ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 48.

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the broader sense of inspiration found in the Qur'ān and the specific sense of verbal dictation by an angelic messenger.

This development was already taking place with Muqātil b. Sulaymān in the early second/mid-eighth century. Muqātil argued in his *Kitāb al-wujūh wa l-naẓā'ir* that there are five different meanings of *wahy* in the Qur'ān, based on an assumption that the word *awḥā/wahy* often means something quite different in every case it is used.³⁷² He said that the first meaning of *wahy* is the verbal dictation of scripture that Gabriel delivers to all the Prophets, by which he conveyed the Arabic Qur'ān verbatim to Muhammad. The second meaning is *ilhām*, non-verbal inspiration, pertaining to how God inspired (*awḥā*) the bee (Q. 16:68) or the disciples of Jesus (5:111). The third meaning is “writing”, which Muqātil claimed to be the meaning of Q. 19:11 where Zechariah signals his people to praise God in the morning and evening. The fourth meaning is “command” as per Q. 41:12 where God commanded each heaven with its affair. The fifth meaning is “speech”, such as in Q. 99:5 where God tells the earth to deliver its news. Among these meanings, Muqātil identified the mode of Qur'ānic Revelation to the Prophet as the first type of *wahy*.

Meanwhile, most qur'ānic exegetes based their interpretations of *wahy* on Q. 42:51. This verse appears to specify three different modes of divine-human communication in general:

It belongs not to any mortal that God should speak to him, except by inspiration (*wahyan*), or from behind a veil, or that He should send a messenger and he inspire (*fa-yūḥiya*) whatsoever He will, by His leave; surely He is All-high, All-wise. (Q. 42:51)

³⁷² Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Kitāb al-wujūh wa l-naẓā'ir*, in John Wansbrough, *Qurānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Investigation* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), tr. Andrew Rippin, 209 (English text), 297-298 (Arabic text).

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Al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Tha'labī, and al-Zamakhsharī all offered similar readings of Q. 42:51 regarding different modes of God's communication to human beings.³⁷³ They agreed that the occasion of the verse's revelation was in response to Muhammad's being questioned by the Jews about how God could speak directly to him. According to all four commentators, the first mode by which God communicates to human beings including Prophets, called *wahy*, is a non-verbal mode of inspiration internal to the person, often taking the form of dream-visions. The second mode, from behind a veil, refers to the way God spoke to Moses without Moses seeing Him. The third mode involves God sending an angelic messenger to communicate His will by *wahy*. The exegetes held that this third type of divine communication specifically refers to God sending Gabriel to orally dictate the Qur'ān to the Prophet.

Meanwhile, al-Rāzī gave a much lengthier albeit similar explanation of 42:51. He specified that all three forms of communication mentioned in 42:51 are technically called *wahy*. Al-Rāzī defined the first kind of divine communication mentioned in the verse as a case where the person receives *wahy* from God without any intermediary but does not hear God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) in its essence (*'ayn*).³⁷⁴ This mode is also called *ilhām* or the casting of information into the heart or in dreams; this is how God spoke to the mother of Moses, commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, and inspired David with the Psalms. He defined the second kind of divine communication as the case where the person receives God's *wahy* without an intermediary figure but does hear God's Speech in its essence – this being the case of Moses hearing God's Speech. He viewed the third form of communication, where God sends a messenger to reveal by God's permission, as the case

³⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 20, 540; al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 9, 144-147; al-Tha'labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 8, 325; for al-Zamakhsharī's view, see Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshaf: Al-Zamakhshari's Mu'tazilite Exegesis of the Qur'an* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 117.

³⁷⁴ Al-Rāzī conceived God's Speech along Ash'arī lines (to be discussed in Chapter 3 & 4).

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where the recipient hears God's *wahy* through an intermediary figure. Al-Rāzī described Muhammad's reception of the Qur'ān as this third kind of *wahy* and offered a list of five necessary conditions for revelation to take place in this manner.³⁷⁵

Having specified the various modes of Qur'ānic *wahy*, including the third mode that is mediated by an angelic messenger, the Sunni exegetes interpreted Q. 26:192-195 as a description of how Angel Gabriel descended with the verses of the Qur'ān to Muhammad specifically:

Truly, it is a sending down of the Lord of all Being
The Trusted Spirit brought it down (*nazala bihi al-rūḥu l-amīn*)
Upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners (*'alā qalbika li-takūna min al-mundhirīn*)
In a clear Arabic tongue (*bi-lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīn*) (Q. 26:192-195)

Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Māturīdī each read these verses as evidence that the Angel Gabriel, identified here as the Trusted Spirit, descended with the Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet Muhammad and dictated its contents word for word in the Arabic language. They specifically interpreted the phrase *bi-lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīn* (in clear Arabic language) as an adverbial clause describing the phrase *nazala bihi al-rūḥu l-amīnu 'alā qalbika* (brought it down to your heart), instead of being a description of *al-mundhirīn* (the warners). This is noteworthy given that the verses in order actually read as “the Trusted Spirit descended with it upon your heart, in order that you may be among the warners in clear Arabic language” (*nazala bihi al-rūḥu l-amīnu 'alā qalbika li-takūna min al-mundhirīn bi-lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīn*). Nevertheless, Muqātil glossed the verse as “He sent it down ‘in clear Arabic language’, so that they understand what is in it.”³⁷⁶ Al-Ṭabarī glossed the verse similarly, stating that “it is a sending down from the Lord of the Worlds, the Trusted

³⁷⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 27, 187-188.

³⁷⁶ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*:
<http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=26&tAyahNo=193&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

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Spirit descended with it in their Arabic language” (*nazala bihi al-rūḥu l-amīnu bi-lisānihim al-‘arabī*).³⁷⁷ Based on his interpretation, Gabriel recites the Qur’ān to Muhammad until he becomes aware of it in his heart.³⁷⁸ Māturīdī read the verses to mean that “the Trusted Spirit descended with it upon your heart in clear Arabic language so you may be among the warners” (*nazala bihi al-rūḥu l-amīnu ‘alā qalbika bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīnin li-takūna min al-mundhirīna*).³⁷⁹ These commentators all took the reference to Muhammad’s heart to mean that he was able to memorize what Gabriel recited to him.

Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī each admitted two valid readings of *bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīnin*.³⁸⁰ In the first reading, the *bi* of *bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīnin* relates to the “warners” (*al-mundhirīn*), who are said to be Arabic-speaking Prophets such as Ṣāliḥ, Shu‘ayb, Ismā‘īl, and Muḥammad. The second reading relates the *bi* to *nazala bihi al-rūḥu l-amīn*, suggesting that the Trusted Spirit (Gabriel) brings down Qur’ānic verses “in the Arabic language” to Muhammad’s heart because Arabic is what Muhammad himself understands in his own heart and is also the language of his people.³⁸¹ Both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī preferred the second reading and thereby asserted Gabriel’s verbatim dictation of the Arabic Qur’ān to Muhammad. The possibility of an alternate interpretation – that Gabriel brought the Qur’ān to Muhammad as pure meanings without Arabic expressions (*alfāz*) was never explored by any of the above Sunni exegetes. But we do find a very brief reference to this possibility in the writings of al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī.

³⁷⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 643.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 642.

³⁷⁹ al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 8, 85.

³⁸⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr*, 769; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 24, 165-168.

³⁸¹ al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 24, 168.

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They both reported the existence of three different views among Muslims on how Gabriel brought the Qur'ān to Muhammad. The first view was that Gabriel memorized the Arabic Qur'ān as a set of verbal utterances (*al-alfāz*) from the Guarded Tablet (which contains letters the size of Mount Qāf), descended to the earth, and dictated the Qur'ān verbatim to Muhammad. The second view was that Gabriel only descended with meanings (*ma'ānī*) and conveyed them to Muhammad while Muhammad created the verbal utterances to express those meanings. Both authors rejected this second view but noted that its proponents grounded their position in the apparent sense (*ẓāhir*) of Q. 26:193-195: “The Trusted Spirit brought it down upon your heart.” We will later encounter this same argument from the Ismailis in later chapters. The third view was that God inspired (*al-hama*) Gabriel with the meanings and Gabriel expressed them in the Arabic language; Gabriel first recited the Qur'ān in the heavens before descending to earth and dictating it to the Prophet.³⁸² We will later see that some Ash'arīs took this position. However, all the Sunni exegetes examined in this chapter opted to read Q. 26:193-195 as a description of Gabriel orally dictating the Qur'ān in Arabic to Muhammad, even though there are other plausible interpretations of the verses.

2.3 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we first examined how Muslim conceptions of the Qur'ān evolved over the first century through the process of “scripturalization”. While the Qur'ān was initially an oral piecemeal discourse and interactive revelatory event mediated by the Prophet, the post-prophetic community's physical and phenomenological canonization of the Qur'ān altered its theological and hermeneutical status. Many Muslim communities by the end of the first century came to regard

³⁸² Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, 229-230; al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, 101.

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the Qur'ān as a canonized scriptural corpus possessing supreme divine authority and containing divine guidance generalizable to all situations. Throughout this process, the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb Allāh* with its originally broader scope of meaning was gradually subsumed by the Qur'ān itself and was eventually downsized to the content of the two covers of the *muṣḥaf*. This new scripturalized conception of the Qur'ān, which had taken hold by the early second century, was reflected in a number of traditional accounts from the early-second century evoking 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who was credited with taking the innovative measure to have the qur'ānic recitations compiled into a single volume. We further saw how early-second-century accounts in the Sunni *ḥadīth*, purporting to report Muhammad's revelatory experience at the start of his mission and more generally, portrayed the Prophet's reception of *wahy* as a verbal dictation from the angel. These reports exhibit the first seeds of the idea that the Revelatory Process involved the verbal dictation of the Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad instead of being inspired to him through the non-verbal esoteric communication that is qur'ānic *wahy*.

This new idea of the Qur'ān as the self-contained and divinely authoritative Book of God gave rise to the science of qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and served as the founding premise for the different models of Qur'ānic Revelation asserted by the Sunni exegetes in their commentaries. These exegetes came to interpret the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* solely in terms of scripture, often equating *al-kitāb* with *al-Qur'ān* in the sense of the canonized Qur'ān between the two covers of the *muṣḥaf*. The Sunni exegetes took the qur'ānic phrase, “those are the signs of the clear *kitāb*” (*tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn*), and similar occurrences that speak to the Transcendent Kitāb of God's knowledge, records, and decrees to mean “these are the verses of the Qur'ān” (*hādhihi āyāt al-Qur'ān*). In a certain respect, even the authority of God evoked in the Qur'ān came to be seen solely in terms of the authority of the Qur'ān. Similarly, the Sunni exegetes reduced the idea of

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God's Transcendent Kitāb (*al-kitāb al-mubīn, umm al-kitāb, al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) to a material Guarded Tablet containing the physical transcript (*nuskha*) of the completed Arabic Qur'ān even before its revelatory descent to the angels and the Prophet. This was nothing less than a radical theological shift in which the ontological distinction between the Transcendent Kitāb and the earthly *qur'āns* was lost. Thus, the Sunni exegetes conceived the Revelatory Principle as the heavenly Guarded Tablet containing the pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān and understood the Revelatory Product to be the earthly canonized Qur'ān in the *muṣḥaf*. The earthly Qur'ān is ontologically identical to the heavenly Qur'ān in the Tablet.

Having established these revelatory premises, the Sunni exegetes interpreted the “sending down” (*inzāl, tanzīl*) and revelatory descent (*muzūl*) of the Qur'ān in terms of the transportation, transcription, and dictation of the pre-existent heavenly Qur'ān. They seriously entertained three distinct but closely related models of Qur'ānic Revelation, all of which can be conservatively dated to the early second century. The upshot of all three models was that a) the Arabic Qur'ān pre-existed in the Guarded Tablet in the seventh heaven; b) the Qur'ān was sent down to the lowest heaven either in annualized portions over twenty years or all at once (*jumla wāhida*), where it was transcribed by the angel-scribes; c) Gabriel dictated the relevant portions of the Qur'ān to the Prophet over the course of the year in a piecemeal fashion, in anticipation of the Prophet's circumstances. Regardless of which model they preferred, the Sunni exegetes were unanimous that the final stage of the Qur'ān's revelatory descent involved Gabriel descending to Muhammad and orally reciting the verses of the Qur'ān in Arabic. This is the standard Sunni theory of verbatim revelation, which is also affirmed in the *kalām* tradition; in such a conception, the Prophet is entirely passive in receiving the Qur'ān which he repeats without any alteration or modification.

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In sum, the Sunni *tafsīr* models entail that “the Book of God” (*kitāb Allāh*) – the canonized Arabic Qur’ān in its sounds, letters, verses, and chapters – is the Revelatory Product of Qur’ānic Revelation and ontologically identical to the pre-existent heavenly Qur’ān existing as a material text in the Revelatory Principle (the Guarded Tablet). In other words, the Sunni *tafsīr* models conceive Qur’ānic Revelation primarily in terms of a material book and only secondarily in terms of piecemeal oral recitation. But this formulation also runs the risk of effectively “downsizing” an originally richer and multidimensional concept of Qur’ānic Revelation into a physical book. Madigan believes that this reduction led to further developments in *kalām* theology, whereby the Qur’ān’s ontological status came to be defined in terms of the *kalām Allāh* (Speech of God) instead of the *kitāb Allāh* in reference to a physical written text. This is perhaps because the *kitāb Allāh*, having been wholly reduced to the canonized qur’ānic *muṣḥaf*, turned out to be too limiting and somewhat impoverished:

When the *kitāb Allāh* becomes too closely identified with just what is written down in the *muṣḥaf*, the concept of *kalām Allāh*, the speech of God, defended by the orthodox as an essential attribute of the divine nature, starts to take over the richness of the former, yet the two are never quite distinguished. Books are speech.... However, the focus on the ontological status of the Qur’ān may be not merely the result of speculation but rather an attempt to recover something that was lost when the concepts of *kitāb Allāh* and *qur’ān* were collapsed into the content of the *muṣḥaf*. The rich understanding of revelation operative in very early Islam, which Graham so carefully presented in an early work, was threatened with impoverishment by a focus on the written codification of the Qur’ān text. In the speculations of the Muslim theologians, something of that richness is allowed to reemerge.³⁸³

Debates about the Qur’ān’s status as God’s Speech (*kalām Allāh*), prevalent in Sunni *kalām* theology from the third/ninth century onward, opened new horizons in Muslim understandings of Qur’ānic Revelation. These discussions involved theological categories and concerns quite different from the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition. Different schools of *kalām* theology ultimately arrived at their own distinct models of revelation, which we will begin to explore in the next chapter. If one

³⁸³ Madigan, *The Qur’an’s Self-Image*, 49-50.

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maintains that the scriptural conception of the Qur'ān in *tafsīr* inadvertently collapsed the original Qur'ānic vision of revelation into the scriptural form of the Qur'ān, then the *kalām* tradition based on the Qur'ān as God's Speech would end up restoring this multi-dimensional view of Qur'ānic Revelation.

Chapter 3: The Speech of God (*Kalām Allāh*): Qur'ānic Revelation in Formative Sunni *Kalām* Theology (Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries)

3.0 Introduction: Qur'ānic Revelation Sunni *Kalām* Theology

This chapter analyzes early theological debates concerning the Qur'ān being the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) and builds off the prior work of Madelung (1974) and Wolfson (1976).³⁸⁴ Drawing on available primary sources and seminal secondary literature, I consider the origins of this debate in the mid-second/eighth century and analyze third-fourth/ninth-tenth-century formative positions of early Sunni traditionists, Mu'tazilī thinkers, pre-Ash'arī theologians, and Ḥanafī scholars. I first argue that Sunni *kalām* theologians discussed and conceptualized the Qur'ān primarily in its oral recited form as God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) in contrast to the Qur'ān's codified scriptural format that came to be defined as God's Book (*kitāb Allāh*). I show here that the Sunni theological notion of God's Speech evolved out of an earlier idea of the Qur'ān as God's Knowledge (*'ilm Allāh*), which itself is a theologization of the Qur'ānic concept of the Transcendent Kitāb containing God's knowledge, records, guidance, and decrees seen in Chapter 1. I then argue that various proposals concerning the ontology of God's Speech and the nature of Qur'ānic Revelation in Sunni theology were determined by the theological binary of uncreated/eternal (*ghayr makhlūq/qadīm*) vs. created/temporally generated (*makhlūq/muḥdath*) in *kalām* cosmology. My analysis reveals that framing the key issue around whether the Qur'ān is uncreated or created is an overly simplistic account of Sunni *kalām* positions; rather, both the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'ān

³⁸⁴ A small portion of the Muslim views covered in this chapter was previously described by way of overview in W. Montgomery Watt, "Early Discussions about the Qur'ān" (Part 1), *The Muslim World* 40/1 (January 1950): 27-40; (Part 2), *The Muslim World* 40/2 (April 1950): 96-105.

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encompassed and led to a diverse range of mutually conflicting theological positions. The three main areas of theological contention were: 1) the nature of God's Speech as uncreated or created; 2) the relationship between God's Speech and the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* recited sounds and letters (otherwise called the "recitation"), and 3) the process by which God's Speech is revealed or "sent down" as the qur'ānic recitation in Arabic.

I first demonstrate that the earliest Muslim theological views from the mid-second/eighth century, apparent in early Sunni *tafsīr* and echoed in early *kalām* debates, considered the Qur'ān as the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) in the sense of expressing God's Knowledge (*'ilm Allāh*). Through the third/ninth century, I show how these ideas evolved through numerous theological debates involving Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746), several early Muslim traditionists, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's (d. 241/855) arguments during the Abbasid Inquisition (*miḥna*), and the early Mu'tazilī theologians. Aḥmad identified the Qur'ān as the uncreated Speech of God issuing from God's uncreated Knowledge while the early Mu'tazilīs debated the created nature of the Qur'ān as a body or accident within their *kalām* ontological framework. Further developments took place over the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth century with the contributions of Ibn Kullāb (d. ca. 241/855), Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936), and several Ḥanafī theologians including Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). Each of these scholars systematized and defended the traditionalist claim that the Qur'ān was the uncreated Speech of God within the methods and frameworks of *kalām* theology, leading all of them to draw ontological and formal distinctions between God's uncreated Speech and the Arabic sounds, letters, and words of the Qur'ān.

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3.1 The Cosmos of Islamic *Kalām* Theology

Beginning sometime in the second/eighth century, Muslim thinkers began to conceptualize, theorize, and philosophically validate their religious beliefs in terms of a total worldview through a rational, speculative, and philosophical process of inquiry and investigation. This rational inquiry into the foundational tenets of Islam echoed patristic, Hellenic, and distinctively Arab and Islamic conceptions. By the end of the third/ninth century, this mode of theological investigation – called the “science of the root-principles of religion” (*‘ilm al-uṣūl al-dīn*) or the “science of *kalām*” (*‘ilm al-kalām*) – had become “a unique form of theologizing, unique not simply in vocabulary and style but also in form and conception.”³⁸⁵ *Kalām* is often translated as “theology” and its practitioners dubbed as “theologians” (*mutakallimūn*); this rendering remains adequate if one allows two important caveats. Firstly, the actual science of *kalām* covered much more than “theology”, i.e. the study of God and God’s relationship to the world. In fact, the scope of classical *kalām* included a theory of knowledge (epistemology), a theory on the kinds of existents (ontology), a theory of bodies and motion (physics), a theory of the normative valuation of human acts (ethics), and arguments for the existence of God and the prophethood of Muḥammad (apologetics). In other words, *kalām* includes theology but also much more in its aim to offer and support a comprehensive picture of reality. Nevertheless, one may validly retain the description of “theology” to characterize *kalām* because *kalām*’s goals were eminently theological.³⁸⁶ Secondly,

³⁸⁵ Richard M. Frank, “Remarks on the Early Development of the Kalam,” in Richard M. Frank and Dimitri Gutas (ed.), *Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism in Medieval Islam: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, Vol. 1 (Varorium Collected Studies; Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 315-329.

³⁸⁶ The best analysis on what precisely *kalām* is comes from Richard M. Frank, “The Science of *Kalām*,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 2/1 (1992): 7-37. See also idem, “Knowledge and *Taqlīd*: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ash‘arism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109/1 (1989): 37–62. For a summary of the core features of Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī *kalām*, see Richard M. Frank, “Currents and Countercurrents [in the Mu‘tazila,

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kalām was not the only theological enterprise that Muslim thinkers were involved in. Other theological discourses that were distinct from *kalām* and often competing with it included Peripatetic Muslim philosophy (*falsafa*), Ismaili Muslim philosophical theology (*ḥikma* or *'ilm al-bāṭin*), qur'ānic commentary (*tafsīr*), prophetic tradition (*hadīth*), various Muslim ascetic-mystical traditions collectively known as Sufism, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In reality, all of these Islamic truth-projects count as “theology” in the broader sense despite their differing premises, methods, approaches, and truth claims. To maintain this nuance, I will speak of “*kalām* theology” instead of simply “theology” to make it clear that the scope of Muslim theology remains wider than *kalām*. Having stated these caveats up front, it is now appropriate to offer a very general picture of the worldview espoused in Islamic *kalām* theology.

Kalām theology, like any intellectual discourse in the pre-modern period of Islamic thought, contained a great deal of internal diversity where even definitions of basic concepts like “knowledge”, “thing”, and “speech” were heavily debated. What follows is a brief explanation of certain concepts and categories of *kalām* worldviews that have bearing on the theories of Qur'ānic Revelation to be discussed below. Firstly, in terms of method, *kalām* is a reflective inquiry (*naẓar*) in which one seeks knowledge (*'ilm*) of things not immediately known. The epistemic foundation of this inquiry is necessary knowledge (*'ilm ḍarūrī*) – which includes truths that are known intuitively (*badīhī*) through intellect (*'aql*) and knowledge by sense perception (*idrāk*).³⁸⁷ The inquiry takes place through seeking proofs (*istidlāl*) by way of both rational (*'aqlī*) argument through logical inference, and revealed (*shar'ī*) knowledge, such as material from the Qur'ān and

Ash'arites and al-Ghazālī],” in Richard M. Frank and Dimitri Gutas (ed.), *Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism in Medieval Islam: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, Vol. 1, 113-134.

³⁸⁷ Discussions of these kinds of knowledge appears in Islamic *kalam* and legal works. See Binyamin Abrahamov, “Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20/1 (1993): 20-32.

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accepted prophetic traditions. In practice, this could take the form of arguments and refutations that quote the Qur'ān or attempt to prove one truth claim by disproving the other.³⁸⁸ The result of this inquiry is acquired (*muktasab*) or speculative knowledge (*'ilm nazārī*).

As the goal of *kalām* is to seek knowledge of things, theologians considered two categories of what is “knowable” (*ma 'lūm*): the existent (*mawjūd*) and the non-existent (*ma 'dūm*). An existent is what exists “out there” in the world beyond the mind, while a non-existent entity could be something like a unicorn, which the mind can conceive but does not actually exist. Following on this, *kalām* theology divides whatever exists into two types: the eternal (*qadīm, azalī*) and the temporally generated (*muḥdath*).³⁸⁹ The eternal (*qadīm*) is what always exists, infinitely in the past and infinitely into the future; the prime example of an eternal existent is God. There was widespread agreement that God eternally exists with His attributes (although the precise content and nature of those attributes was subject to debate). A temporally generated thing (*muḥdath, ḥadith*) is something whose existence has a temporal beginning, meaning that it initially did not exist and then came to exist. Theologically speaking, this distinction means that God alone is eternal (*qadīm*) and all things other than God, namely all created beings (*makhlūqāt*), are temporally generated (*muḥdath*). Thus, in such a framework, to be “created” (*makhlūq*) is to be temporally generated (*muḥdath*) and to be “uncreated” (*ghayr makhlūq*) is to be eternal (*qadīm*).

³⁸⁸ For an example of the *kalām* method defined and laid out, see Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf fīmā yajibu i' tiqāduhu wa-lā yajūzu al-jahl bihi fī 'ilm al-kalām*, Second Edition, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Dār al-Tawfiq al-Namūdhjiyya, 2000), 15. The explanation that follows is loosely based on al-Bāqillānī's text and, inevitably, there were theologians who saw matters differently.

³⁸⁹ The precise translation can be debated. *Muḥdath* has also been translated as “originated” but I have avoided this in order not to confuse it with *mubda'* (originated) as used by the Ismailis.

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Temporally generated things consist of three types of things: body (*jism*), atom (*jawhar*) and accident (*'araḍ*).³⁹⁰ The atom (*jawhar*), in the words of Richard M. Frank, “is the ultimate, indivisible unity of corporeality.”³⁹¹ As an indivisible monad, the atom takes up volume in some spatial location. The atom in and of itself is imperceptible and does not have any particular qualities like colors, tastes, odors, or virtues, etc., but it can serve as the substrate (*maḥall*) of these qualities (which are accidents). A body is something composed (*mu'allaf*) of two or more atoms; a body itself is the result of the conjunction (*ijtimā', ta'līf*) of atoms, which are the particles (*ajzā'*; sing. *juz'*) of a body.³⁹² An accident is a real quality or attribute that inheres in an atom, such that its own existence subsists (*qā'im*) in the atom. Thus, an accident does not exist “on its own”; it can only exist by inhering within a substrate, namely, the atom. This entails that qualities and attributes like color, taste, odor, will, knowledge, power, life, speech, whiteness, blackness, etc. are accidents and have real existence inside their substrate. For example, a particular body is “black” if and when some of its atoms contain the accident “blackness”.³⁹³ Any given atom is never devoid of accidents, which are the source of its qualities. The theologians believed that positing accidents was necessary in order to explain particular features and behaviors of atoms and bodies, i.e. a particular body looks, feels, behaves, smells or moves in a certain manner only because of specific accidents inhering within its atoms.

³⁹⁰ Al-Bāqillānī holds that there are three kinds of *muḥdath*: bodies, atoms, and accidents. But, as it turns out, the term “body” for Ash'arī thinkers means whatever is composed of atoms and can also refer to an atom that adjoins another atom or two atoms that are adjacent. For details see Richard M. Frank, “Bodies and Atoms: The Ash'arite Analysis,” in Michael E. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of George F. Hourani* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39-53.

³⁹¹ Richard M. Frank, *Beings and their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Mu'tazila in the Classical Period* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1978), 96.

³⁹² Frank, “Bodies and Atoms,” 44-46.

³⁹³ This example is given in *ibid.*, 45.

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Having expounded the above ontological categories, we are in a good position to appreciate the main argument offered by *kalām* theologians to prove the existence of God – an argument that relies on the *kalām* cosmological worldview noted above. The basic outline of the argument is that the world in its entirety is temporally generated (*muḥdath*) – it exists after having not existed – because its constituents are all occurrents (*ḥawādith*) that change from state to state, or atoms whose accidents are always undergoing change. It is then argued that the process of the world's temporal change cannot go back infinitely into the past, since if this were the case, then an infinite amount of time would have passed until the present moment. The idea that an infinite amount of time has already passed entails a contradiction, since an actual infinity cannot be traversed. Therefore, this world has a finite past and must have come into being at a certain point before which it did not exist.³⁹⁴ It logically follows that the world, being entirely temporally generated (*muḥdath*) at a certain point in the past, requires a “generator” or “producer” (*muḥdith*) to bring it into existence. This “world producer” must be eternal (*qadīm*), not temporal; it would either be an eternal natural cause or an eternal agent possessing will. It cannot be an eternal natural cause because every cause produces its effect immediately and such an eternal cause would eternally produce a world that also exists eternally. But the world is temporally finite, not eternal. Therefore, it follows that the producer (*muḥdith*) of the temporally generated (*muḥdath*) world must be an eternal agent with will – this being is God.

³⁹⁴ An early version of the argument is found in Alfred L. Ivry, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics: A Translation of Ya'qub al-Kindi's Treatise "On First Philosophy" (fi al-Falsafah al-Ula)* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1974), 73-75. See also p. 25, where the author notes how early Muslim theologians used the argument. See also Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, tr. Michael Marmura (Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 30-46. I am drawing the summary of the argument from al-Juwaynī, *A Guide to the Conclusive Proofs*, 11-18.

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Finally, we must register the important fact that pre-sixth/twelfth-century Sunni *kalām* theology does not accept the idea of an immaterial spiritual human soul that survives independently of the body – a position that runs counter to Avicennian, Ismaili, and Sufi thought, later *kalām* theology, and modern religious intuitions.³⁹⁵ As Tariq Jaffer observes, “a majority of the *mutakallimūn* adhered to a materialistic notion of the self, and claimed that there was no self-subsisting soul that managed the body.”³⁹⁶ Many such theologians believed that the “spirit” (*rūḥ*) or the “soul” (*nafs*) was either the same thing as the body (*jism*), the accident of life, the breath of the body, or a subtle body (*jism laṭīf*) within the physical body akin to vapor that circulates in the orifices of the human body.³⁹⁷ In this perspective, the “life” of the human body is a particular accident that inheres in the body and does not directly derive from the spirit. The spirit merely provides the body with moisture as a kind of nourishment akin to food and drink.³⁹⁸

The different *kalām* schools held mutually conflicting positions on a number of theological, ontological, and cosmological issues: first, they disagreed over the nature of God – whether God has attributes, the nature of His attributes, and the content of His attributes; second, they differed over whether God is the creator of all actions or whether humans voluntarily create their own actions out of free choice; third, they held different positions over the normative-ethical value of

³⁹⁵ The classical Ash‘arī conception of the body, life and spirit of the human being is analyzed extensively in Aymen Shihadeh, “Classical Ash‘arī Anthropology: Body, Life and Spirit,” *The Muslim World* 102 (July/October 2012): 433-477.

³⁹⁶ Tariq Jaffer, “Bodies, Souls and Resurrection in Avicenna’s *ar-risāla al-aḍḥawīya fī amr al-ma‘ad*,” in David C. Reisman, Ahmed H. al-Rahim, *Before and After Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 163-198: 168.

³⁹⁷ For these various positions among Ash‘arīs, see Shihadeh, “Classical Ash‘arī Anthropology,” 465-77. For example, Abū Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’ (d. 458/1066) writes: “The spirit is a body and it is a vapor circulating in the orifices of the body, drawing moisture [water] from the wind and causing it to circulate.” See Abu Ya‘lā b. al-Farrā’, *Kitāb al-Mu‘tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wadi Z. Haddad (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1974), 89-90.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

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human actions – whether actions have intrinsic ethical value or whether all ethical value derives from God's commands and prohibitions; they differed on epistemology – whether human beings through their cognitive processes produce knowledge or whether God creates knowledge within the subject;³⁹⁹ all of these differences explicitly or implicitly inform *kalām* discussions on the nature of the Qur'ān.

3.2 From the *Kitāb Allāh* to the Speech of God (*Kalām Allāh*): Second/Eighth- and Third/Ninth-Century Debates on the Qur'ān

The use of the term “Speech of God” (*kalām Allāh*) to refer to, describe or define the Qur'ān is minimal in first-century statements about the Qur'ān, even as reported in second- and third-century accounts. As we saw in Chapter 2, various accounts of the Prophet's mission, his companions, and first-century events found in the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768), the *Expeditions* of Ma'mar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770) whose narrations date back to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), and the historical chronicles of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) do not refer to the Qur'ān as God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) but rather as the *kitāb Allāh*; and, as we observed in Chapter 2, there still appears to be a distinction in the first century between the Qur'ān in its recited or scriptural form and the *kitāb Allāh* in the broader sense of God's authoritative decree. Greater frequency of the term *kalām Allāh* for the Qur'ān seems to begin in the mid-second/eighth century and becomes more widespread from the third/ninth century onward.

As shown in Chapter 1, the Qur'ān uses the terms *kalām Allāh* (Q. 9:6) and *kalima/kalimāt Allāh* according to their earliest pre-theological meaning of God's decrees, binding promises, and

³⁹⁹ These differences and others are summarized in Frank, “Currents and Countercurrents.”

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orders. In the second century, Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) described the Qur'ān as *kalām Allāh* on a few occasions, but without the later theological significance of the term.⁴⁰⁰ The six canonical Sunni *ḥadīth* collections compiled in the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries contain four distinct statements where the Prophet, a companion, and the follower Sufyān al-Thawrī (97-161/715-778) reportedly described the Qur'ān as the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*).⁴⁰¹ But even in these reports, the term *kalām Allāh* lacks the theological loading that it later acquired in *kalām* theology and instead seems to serve as one of the merits (*faḍā'il*) of the Qur'ān.

⁴⁰⁰ See Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, Q. 2:51 in reference to what was written on the Tablets of Moses: <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=2&tAyahNo=51&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>; Q. 3:113 In reference to the People of the Book reciting the Signs of God, which he glosses as “meaning they recite the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*)”, without further commentary on the term. <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=3&tAyahNo=113&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>; Q. 20:38 In reference to God's command to Moses to declare to Pharaoh that he is the Messenger of God. <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=20&tAyahNo=38&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>; Q. 67:38 and 78:2 where comments that the Qur'ān is called “great news” (*naba' aẓīm*) because it is the Speech of God without further commentary. <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=38&tAyahNo=65&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>; <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=78&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>; Q. 67:41 He states that the Qur'ān is prevented from falsehood and leading astray because it is God's Speech. <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=41&tAyahNo=39&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>; Q. 45:35 The “signs of God” are glossed as the Qur'ān as the Speech of God. <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=45&tAyahNo=31&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>; Q. 48:15 The word *kalām Allāh* appears in the verse, which he interprets as what the Prophet commanded the believers. <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=48&tAyahNo=15&tDisplay=yes&Languageid=1>

⁴⁰¹ 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd said “God has not created anything in heaven or earth greater (*a'ẓām*) than *āyāt al-kursī*.” Sufyān said: “Because *āyāt al-kursī* is the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) and the Speech of God is greater than God's creation of the heavens and the earth.” *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Book 45, Ḥadīth No. 322: <https://sunnah.com/urn/631160>. For other references to the Qur'ān as *kalām Allāh* in the *ḥadīth* see *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Book 45, Ḥadīth No. 3122, 3175 and 3176. The four statements appear in several of the canonical collections.

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A good example illustrating the difference between second/eighth-century pre-theological understandings of “God’s Words” (*kalimāt Allāh*) in the Qur’ān and later theological views is how Muslim exegetes interpreted Q. 31:27: “And if whatever trees upon the earth were pens and the sea [was ink], replenished thereafter by seven [more] seas, the words of God would not be exhausted.”⁴⁰² Al-Tha‘labī in the fifth/eleventh century simply took the *kalimāt Allāh* to mean God’s uncreated Speech: “This verse requires that His Speech (*kalāmahu*) is uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*) because that which has no limit and what is connected to it in its meaning is uncreated.”⁴⁰³ Al-Tha‘labī’s interpretation was clearly based on the developed Ash‘arī *kalām* position that God’s Speech is an uncreated divine attribute. However, much earlier in the second/eighth century, Muqātil interpreted the “Words of God” (*kalimāt Allāh*) in Q. 31:27 to mean “God’s Knowledge and His wondrous miracles” (*‘ilm Allāh wa-‘ajā’ibuhu*).⁴⁰⁴ Muqātil interpreted Q. 18:109, which also mentions the *kalimāt Allāh* as never running out, in the same manner: God’s Words are God’s Knowledge which never runs out.⁴⁰⁵

As we will see below, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal described the Qur’ān as a part of or coming from God’s Knowledge in his disputations with the *kalām* theologians during the Inquisition (*miḥna*),

⁴⁰² The Arberry translation of this verse was rather unclear. I have adjusted it.

⁴⁰³ Al-Tha‘labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 7, 322; also translated in Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1, note 2. However, al-Tha‘labī’s exegesis of the similar verse Q. 18:109 does not attempt to link the “Words of my Lord” to God’s eternal attribute of Speech (*kalām*). He instead glosses the Words of God as “His wisdom (*ḥikma*) and His marvels (*‘ajā’ib*)”, which matches the earliest interpretation in Sunni *tafsīr*; see al-Tha‘labī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 6, 202. The interpretation of *kalimāt Allāh* as God’s Knowledge also appears in al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 8, 316: “The Knowledge of God would not be exhausted.”

⁴⁰⁴ *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulayman*, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=31&tAyahNo=27&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

⁴⁰⁵ *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulayman*, <http://altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=67&tSoraNo=18&tAyahNo=109&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

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and this served as the key premise for his claim that the Qur'ān is uncreated. Writing in the latter half of the third/ninth century, the Sufi Qur'ān commentator Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) likewise took the Words of God in Q. 31:27 to be the Knowledge of God and described the Qur'ān as a subset of God's Knowledge: "His Book (*kitābuhu*) is part of His Knowledge, and if a servant was given a thousand ways of understanding each letter of the Qur'ān, he would not reach the end of God's Knowledge within it."⁴⁰⁶

These early views were also reflected in al-Ṭabarī's exegesis of the same verses in the early fourth/tenth century; he took the "Words of God" to mean God's Knowledge and read Q. 18:109 and 31:27 to mean that "in the Torah there is [only] a little of God's Knowledge", i.e. God's Knowledge is not encompassed by the Torah, despite the Jews claiming otherwise. Al-Māturīdī offered a similar reading of these verses, which is also consistent with his reading of God's Words in Q. 18:27 ("there is no changing His Words") as seen in Chapter 2.⁴⁰⁷ Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, also writing in the fourth/tenth century, interpreted the same two verses as an affirmation of God's eternal uncreated Speech, but his commentary briefly evoked the older interpretation: "My Lord's Words have not run out, just as God's Knowledge has not run out."⁴⁰⁸ This commentary of al-Ash'arī contains an echo of the earlier views of Muqātil and al-Ṭabarī that God's Words refer to His Knowledge.

⁴⁰⁶ Sahl b. 'Abdullāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsir al-Tustarī*, tr. Anabel Keeler & Ali Keeler (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2011), 146.

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 18, 573. See also al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 7, 215-216, where he offers several interpretations of *kalimāti rabbihi*, which include God's creations (*khalā'iq*), God's Knowledge, the Qur'ān, explanation (*bayān*) about His creation, or that there is no limit to what God created with respect to knowledge (*'ulūm*). None of his interpretations refer to God's uncreated Speech.

⁴⁰⁸ Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Isma'īl al-Ash'arī's al-Ibāna 'an uṣūl ad-Diyāna*, tr. Walker C. Klein (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1940), 68.

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These examples together indicate that some Muslims in the second/eighth century identified God's Speech and God's Words with God's Knowledge. This was the view of Muqātil in the second/eighth century and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Sahl al-Tustarī in the third/ninth century, who both identified the Qur'ān *qua* God's Speech with God's Knowledge. This position also endured with al-Ṭabarī, al-Maturīdī, and al-Ash'arī in the fourth/tenth century. It follows from this that some Muslims in the early second century did not regard God's Speech in general and the Qur'ān in particular as something distinct from God's Knowledge.

In one respect, identifying the Qur'ān as both God's Speech and God's Knowledge represents an important avenue of theological development from the original qur'ānic concept of *kitāb*. It also represents a theological trajectory that differs from the identification of the *kitāb Allāh* with the canonized Qur'ān in the *muṣḥaf*, which was documented in the prior chapter. The Qur'ān, as seen in Chapter 1, closely associates the Transcendent Kitāb – the celestial archetype of the Arabic *qur'āns* – with God's Knowledge:

Did you not know that God knows all that is in the heaven and earth? Surely that is in a *kitāb*; surely that for God is easy. (Q. 22:70)

With Him are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them but He. He knows what is in land and sea; Not a leaf falls but that He knows it. Not a grain in the earth's shadows, not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is in a clear *kitāb* (*kitābin mubīnin*). (Q. 6:59)

The Transcendent Kitāb – variously called *kitāb mubīn*, *umm al-kitāb*, or simply *kitāb* throughout the Qur'ān (6:38, 6:59, 10:61, 11:6, 13:39, 17:58, 18:49, 20:52, 22:70, 23:62, 27:75, 34:3, 35:11, 39:69, 45:28-29, 50:4, 57:22, 78:2) – contains all of God's knowledge, records, decrees, and guidance. This Transcendent Kitāb is the Revelatory Principle of Qur'ānic Revelation and the Arabic *qur'āns* are its historically situated oral manifestations on earth. The close association between God's knowledge of all things and the Transcendent Kitāb in the Qur'ān may have

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prefigured later theological developments. In identifying the Arabic Qur'ān with both God's Speech and God's Knowledge, these early qur'ānic exegetes and traditionists seem to have reified and theologized the qur'ānic idea of the Transcendent Kitāb and the Arabic *qur'āns* into the divine attributes of knowledge and speech. Given the theological and intellectual context of *kalām* theology, this development from the Transcendent Kitāb in qur'ānic theology to God's attributes of Speech and Knowledge in *kalām* theology is not entirely unexpected and perhaps represents a natural theological shift.

This theological trend in *kalām* theology ultimately led to a different interpretation of the qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* and *qur'ān* from that which tended to predominate in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature, where the concept of *kitāb Allāh/al-kitāb* was reduced to the Qur'ān as contained within the *muṣḥaf*. As we will see, Sunni *kalām* thinkers differentiated the Speech of God and its Arabic recitation from the "Book of God" (*kitāb Allāh*) consisting of the codified Qur'ān in the *muṣḥaf*. In sum, the conception of the Qur'ān among certain segments of Muslims evolved over the second/eighth and third/ninth century from the *kitāb Allāh* to the Knowledge of God (*ilm Allāh*), and then from the Knowledge of God to the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) thereafter.

3.2.1 God Speaks Not: Ja'd b. Dirham (d. 124/742 or 125/743) and Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746)

According to modern scholarship, the controversy over whether the Qur'ān is God's Speech seems to have begun in the early second/eighth century, perhaps at the instigation of Ja'd b. Dirham (d. 124/742 or 125/743) and Abū Muḥriz Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746).⁴⁰⁹ The extent of their personal responsibility cannot be determined, but it is widely reported that both thinkers harbored views

⁴⁰⁹ Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran." I am following Madelung's general narrative with some modifications and additional details.

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about the Qur'ān that were met with widespread opposition. Very little is known about Ja'd b. Dirham apart from the fact that he worked in the Umayyad administration and was executed by one of its governors. The most widely attested reports come from the third/ninth-century writers al-Bukhārī (194-256/810-870), al-Dāramī (181-255/797-869) and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. They report that Umayyad governor Khālīd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qasrī personally executed Ja'd on the day of 'Īd al-Aḏḥā. As he undertook the execution, the governor said: "I am going to offer Ja'd, son of Dirham, who has claimed that God has not taken Abraham as a friend and has not spoken to Moses. God is far above what the son of Dirham has said."⁴¹⁰ Other reports focus on theology, claiming that Ja'd expressed skepticism concerning God's attributes and that he taught the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān to Jahm b. Ṣafwān.⁴¹¹

Within debates about the Qur'ān in the polemics of the third/ninth century and onward, Jahm b. Ṣafwān and his party, the Jahmīs, were frequently invoked as professing all sorts of heretical views. Cornelia Schöck observes that, despite his later ill repute, "Jahm b. Ṣafwān is the first Muslim 'theologian' in the full and proper sense."⁴¹² She further notes that "all Muslim parties agree that Jahm is the first or among the first who introduced the principle of intellect (*'aql*) and the method of reasoning to derive opinions from propositions (*ra'y*) in Islam." One key difficulty

⁴¹⁰ Gerald Hawting, "The Punishment of 'Heretics' in the Early Caliphate," in Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro (eds.), *Public Violence in Islamic Societies: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Public Sphere, 7th-19th Centuries CE* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 27-41: 28.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28-31.

⁴¹² Cornelia Schöck, "Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-6) and the 'Jahmiyya' and Dirār b. 'Amr (d. 200/815)," in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), accessed on 3/15/2018: <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199696703>. My overview of Jahm's theology is drawn from this chapter.

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is that all of what is known of Jahm's beliefs are reported by his opponents such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, who lived a century later.

Jahm apparently envisioned a rather comprehensive worldview – a comprehensiveness akin to what is found in later *kalām* – within which he situated his theological ideas concerning God, created beings, human agency, etc. A foundational principle of Jahm's theology is the ontological distinction between God and “things” (*al-ashyā'*): God cannot be called a “thing” (*shay'*) in any sense because all things are temporally generated (*muḥdath*). Ontologically, this means that God is beyond existence and cannot be called an existent (*mawjūd*).⁴¹³ Everything created is corporeal and bodily; God is the only incorporeal existent. Corporeal existents, being created, come into being and pass away. God alone is eternal and the sole cause and agent of all existents and activities. This entails that all acts (*af'āl*) in the world are created by God, even human acts: God creates within man the potential to act, the act of will, and the act of choice. Jahm also espoused a negative theology that bears some Neoplatonic echoes: God is absolutely simple, incorporeal, and unintelligible to the point that He cannot be described by any form of predication, including the Qur'ānic names of God. He is beyond possessing any attributes (*ṣifāt*) and has no likeness. Jahm regarded God's knowledge and power as His created actions through which He knows and exerts power, although their precise ontological status stands somewhere in between God's Essence and created existents.⁴¹⁴ According to other sources, Jahm's position was that God is entirely knowing, hearing, and seeing – a notion which Frank likens to the concept of

⁴¹³ See Richard M. Frank, “The Neoplatonism of Ḡahm ibn Ṣafwān,” in *Philosophy, Theology, and Mysticism in Islam*, Vol. 1, 396-424.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 408-410.

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Neoplatonic hypostases.⁴¹⁵ Such a theology has profound implications for Jahm's view about God's Speech and the Qur'ān.

As reported in sources written over a hundred years later, Jahm effectively denied that God speaks in any meaningful sense. This is entirely consistent with his negative theology concerning God being unintelligible and incorporeal. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal reported that Jahm and his followers argued that God does not actually speak because He has no physical organs, while speech comes from the chest, tongue and lips. Therefore, God merely “produced something through which He expressed himself. He created a sound and made it heard.”⁴¹⁶ Khushaysh b. Aṣram al-Nasā'ī (d. 253/867) reported that Jahm denied that God spoke to Moses. He further reported the Jahmis saying that:

God...does not speak, that the Qur'ān is created, and that he did not speak to Moses, nor does He ever speak. God created an utterance and a speech (*khalāqa qawlan wa-kalāman*), and His utterance and speech struck the ears of the creature whom God wanted (to make hear it). The hearer then transmitted it on behalf of God after he had heard it. And he called this utterance and speech.⁴¹⁷

In accordance with the above views, Jahm is credited as being the first to say that the Qur'ān is a creation of God. Al-Ash'arī reported in his famous doxology (*al-Maqālāt*) that Jahm said that “the Qur'ān is a body and the action (*fi'l*) of God. And he used to say that movements also are bodies. There is no agent except God.”⁴¹⁸

Regardless of the almost contemptuous way in which he is discussed in later sources, many of Jahm's theological positions prefigured the major views of later *kalām* theology, *falsafa*, Ismaili

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 412-413.

⁴¹⁶ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā l-Zanādiq wa l-Jahmiya*, ed. Muḥammad Fihri Shaqafa, 32-33, 64, quoted in Wilferd Madelung, “The Origins,” 506.

⁴¹⁷ Khushaysh b. Aṣram al-Nasā'ī, in al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbīh wa l-radd 'alā ahl al-ahwā'*, ed. S. Dederling, 75, quoted in Madelung, “The Origins,” 506.

⁴¹⁸ Al-Ash'arī, as quoted in Schöck, “Jahm b. Ṣafwān.”

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philosophy, and Sufi ontology. Jahm's view that God alone is eternal and incorporeal in contrast to everything else being temporal and corporeal clearly anticipated the eternal-generated (*qadīm-muḥdath*) categories upheld in developed *kalām*; his idea that God does not possess real attributes or that He is identical to all knowledge or all power would be upheld in some way by the Mu'tazilis and the Ismailis; his understanding of God as the sole cause and agent of all acts including human actions was adapted in some form by Ḥanbalī and Ash'arī theologians; his claim that God does not utter *audible* speech in the manner of human speech and sounds would eventually be espoused by all major *kalām* traditions in some form or another.

In addition to his theological acumen, Jahm was a political activist. He served as a secretary to al-Ḥārith b. Surayj, who revolted against the Umayyads from 116/734-128/746 in eastern Khurāsān. Near the end of this revolt, Jahm was captured and executed in 128/746.⁴¹⁹ Despite meeting a rather unfortunate end, Jahm's ideas apparently provoked a strong response and engendered a longstanding debate over the nature of the Qur'ān. This allowed the reputation to outlive the man for generations to come.

3.2.2 The Qur'ān is the Speech of God: The First Responders

The initial responses to Jahm b. Ṣafwān's claim that God did not literally speak and that the Qur'ān was His creation were far less radical than later claims that the Qur'ān is eternal and uncreated.⁴²⁰ In the face of Jahm's assertion that God does not truly speak and creates the Qur'ān as a body

⁴¹⁹ Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshaf: Al-Zamakhshari's Mu'tazilite Exegesis*, 114.

⁴²⁰ This is the longstanding argument made by Madelung in "The Origins." My account of the theological debate of this period is based on Madelung's narrative.

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(*jism*), many Muslims of traditionalist circles responded by simply saying that the Qur'ān is God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*).

One such response came from Shi'i circles and was attributed to the Shi'i Imams Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/733). According to Sunni and Shi'i sources, the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq was asked: "Is the Qur'ān creator (*khāliq*) or created (*makhlūq*)?" He replied: "It is neither creator nor created. It is the Speech of God (*laysa bi-khāliq wa-lā makhlūq wa-lākinahu kalām Allāh*)."⁴²¹ Likewise, the Shi'i traditionist al-Kashshī ascribes a similar statement to Imam al-Bāqir, who said that the Qur'ān is neither the Creator nor created, but it is the Speech of God.⁴²² Further confirmation and elaboration of this Shi'i position comes from Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), a famous partisan of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Al-Ash'arī reports Hishām's to be that "the Qur'ān is the attribute of God and it is neither permissible to say that it is created nor that it is the Creator" (*al-Qur'ān ṣifat Allāh, lā yajūz an yuqāl: innahu makhlūq wa-lā innahu khāliq*).⁴²³ Hishām made a further distinction between two referential meanings of the term "Qur'ān". In the first sense of meaning, the Qur'ān means articulate sounds in Arabic, which Hishām calls the "impression" (*rasm*) – referring to the skeletal text of the Qur'ān written in the codices. In the second sense, the Qur'ān is God's action (*fi'l*) in the same way that God's

⁴²¹ Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq quoted in Madelung, "The Origins," 508. A similar statement is attributed to the Twelver Shi'i Imām 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā: "It is neither the Creator nor created but it is the Speech of God" (*laysa bi-khāliq wa-lā makhlūq wa-lākinahu kalām Allāh*). See Muḥammad b. Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābawayh al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Sayyid Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭehrānī (Qumm: Jama'at al-Mudarrisin, 1995), 218.

⁴²² Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000), 93.

⁴²³ Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī, *Maqālat al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, 2 Vols., ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 1990), Vol. 1, 114, and Vol. 2, 256.

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knowledge (*ilm*) is His action; in this respect, the Qur'ān as God's act "is not He and not other than Him."⁴²⁴

Early third/ninth-century proto-Sunni traditionists responded in a somewhat similar way. The traditionist Yazīd b. Hārūn of Iraq (d. 205 or 206/820-22) said that "the Qur'ān is the Speech of God, may God curse Jahm and whoever says what he has said."⁴²⁵ Yaḥya b. Yaḥya al-Tamīmī of Nīshāpūr (d. 226/840) reportedly said: "The Qur'ān is the Speech of God; whoever doubts it or claims that it is created is an infidel."⁴²⁶ Sufyān b. 'Uyayna (d. 198/813-4) related that 'Amr b. Dīnār al-Makkī (d. 125-126/742-744) said: "God is the Creator and everything besides Him is created. The Qur'ān is the Speech of God, from Him it came forth (*bada'a*) and to Him it shall return."⁴²⁷ A later Ḥanbalī scholar, Diyā' al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (fl. 630/1232), in his treatise entitled "The Peculiarity of the Qur'ān in its Returning to the Merciful, the Compassionate" (*Ikhtishāṣ al-Qur'ān bi 'audihi ilā l-Raḥīm al-Raḥmān*), provided another statement of 'Amr b. Dīnār al-Makkī according to which "our *shaykhs* for seven years" used to say that "the Qur'ān is the Speech of God, from Him it came forth (*bada'a*) and to Him it shall return" (*al-Qur'ān kalām Allāh minhu bada'a wa-ilayhi ya'ūd*).⁴²⁸

The cited early Shi'i and proto-Sunni traditionist views on the nature of the Qur'ān appear to stake out a "middle position" concerning the Qur'ān's theological status. By asserting that the

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Madelung, "The Origins," 507.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 511.

⁴²⁸ Diyā' al-Dīn al-Maqdisī, *Ikhtishāṣ al-Qur'ān bi 'audihi ilā l-Raḥīm al-Raḥmān*, edited and published in A. J. Arberry, "A Ḥanbalī Tract on the Eternity of the Qur'ān," *Islamic Quarterly* 3/1 (1956), 16-41: Arabic text on p. 24, line 3-5. Edited text is given on pp. 23-29. Maqdisī attributes similar statements to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Ibn 'Abbās.

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Qur'ān is neither Creator (*khāliq*) nor created (*makhlūq*), the Shi'i Imams and their associates granted the Qur'ān an intermediate theological position below God but above His creatures. Hishām also made a further distinction between the Qur'ān *qua* Arabic sounds, the consonantal text or “impression” (*rasm*), and the Qur'ān in its essential nature – which he takes to be either an attribute (*ṣifa*) or an action (*fi'l*) of God. The proto-Sunni idea that the Qur'ān “came forth (*bada'a*) from God and returns to God” and “is not created” (*laysa bi-makhlūq*) differs from the later Sunni claim that the Qur'ān is “uncreated” (*ghayr makhlūq*) and eternal (*qadīm, azalī*). The traditionalist position seems to be that the Qur'ān still “begins”, “appears”, or “issues forth” (conveyed by the verb *bada'a*) from God while nevertheless not being counted as a mere creature (*makhlūq*); this means that the Qur'ān is neither eternal nor beginningless (as it has a beginning which is connoted by the verb *bada'a* in various reported statements). The idea of the Qur'ān as “beginning from God” differs from the Qur'ān being “uncreated” (*ghayr makhlūq*) because the latter term refers to God and what exists with or in God and is co-eternal with God, such as the divine attributes. Like the Shi'i positions, the proto-Sunni statements grant the Qur'ān a theological status lower than God but higher than His creatures.⁴²⁹ In Madelung's words, this means that “the Qur'ān is associated with God much more closely than any part of His creation” and therefore “expressive of the essence of God.”⁴³⁰

These early Shi'i and proto-Sunni statements prove that the initial debate taking place in the late second/eight century and early third/ninth century did not always turn on the uncreatedness or eternality of the Qur'ān; it was about *whether* God spoke in general and *whether* the Qur'ān is

⁴²⁹ Madelung, “The Origins,” 513-514.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 511.

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His Speech. The initial response to Jahm was that God does speak and that the Qur'ān is His Speech, although the details behind this claim had not yet been worked out. While this initial position was certainly less developed compared to later views of God's Speech as eternal (*qadīm*) and uncreated (*ghayr makhluq*), it should still be kept in mind that viewing the Qur'ān as the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) in the theological sense still represents an important shift from the first-century view of the scripturalized Qur'ān as the *kitāb Allāh* in the sense of "God's Book" – which itself was a development from the still earlier, broader and multivalent qur'ānic concept of *kitāb*. Furthermore, late-second-century understandings of the *kalām Allāh* also have a different meaning from the earliest qur'ānic concepts of *kitāb* and *kalimāt / kalām Allāh* which convey the more general meaning of God's decree, prescription, and commandment as noted in Chapter 1.

It remains possible that in defining the Qur'ān as "God's Speech" (*kalām Allāh*), the proto-Sunni traditionists and the Shi'i Imams understood the Qur'ān as issuing from and expressive of God's Knowledge (*'ilm Allāh*). As we saw earlier, Muqātil in the second/eighth century, al-Tustarī in the third/ninth century, and al-Ṭabarī and al-Māturīdī in the fourth/tenth century interpreted God's Words (*kalimāt Allāh*) mentioned in Q. 31:27 and 18:109 as the Knowledge of God. This all suggests that some segment of Muslim traditionists through the third/ninth century conceived the Qur'ān as an expression or excerpt of God's Knowledge. As we will see below, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's remarks speak to the identity between the Qur'ān, God's Speech, and God's Knowledge for the traditionalist camp.

3.2.3 The Qur'ān is God's Uncreated Knowledge: Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855)

The year 220/835 saw a respected and aged Muslim scholar stripped naked and subject to repeated floggings from the poles and whips of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (r. 213-227/833-842) for one simple reason: he vehemently *refused* to declare that the Qur'ān was created by God. The old

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man was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), who went on to become an iconic and infamous figure in Sunni Islam; this unfortunate episode took place during the *miḥna*, the first so-called “inquisition” in Muslim history. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal was one of the *muḥaddithūn* (traditionists), narrators of the traditions attributed to Prophet Muhammad; he along with numerous other traditionists had been summoned by the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-213/812-833) to affirm publicly the doctrine of the “createdness of the Qur'ān” (*khalq al-Qur'ān*) in 218/833. But Aḥmad refused to do so.

The reasons why al-Ma'mūn began the Inquisition have been debated by historians. Recent explanations range from the Inquisition being a power play to enhance and enforce the Caliph's authority as argued by John A. Nawas;⁴³¹ a bid to bolster the social power of *kalām* theologians and reduce the influence of the traditionists over the population as asserted by Nimrod Hurvitz;⁴³² or an exercise of the Caliph's religious authority to define orthodox belief and practice.⁴³³ Some of these explanations, along with opinions from older scholarship, portray the creation of the Qur'ān as a pseudo-issue, a pretext, or a facade by which the Caliph asserted his authority and sought to achieve his objective.⁴³⁴ However, even if one accepts these proposed motivations, the theological dimension of the Inquisition can hardly be ignored; the Caliph's selection of the Qur'ān's createdness to be the central issue could not have been arbitrary. Hayrettin Yucesoy rightly observes that “[w]hether the Qur'ān was created was, therefore, far from being a pseudo-

⁴³¹ John A. Nawas, “A Re-examination of Three Current Explanations for Al-Ma'mūn's Introduction of the *Miḥna*,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26 (1994): 615-629.

⁴³² Nimrod Hurvitz, “*Miḥna as Self-Defense*,” *Studia Islamica* 92 (2001): 93-111.

⁴³³ John P. Turner, *Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Political and Religious Authority in the Abbasid Empire* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

⁴³⁴ Some of the earlier scholarship is reviewed in Hayrettin Yucesoy, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam: The 'Abbasid Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century* (University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 130-132.

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question.... The Miḥna essentially involved God's unity, *tawḥīd*, and opposed anthropomorphism, *tashbīh*. The dispute over the Qur'ān raised fundamental religious issues, including the core belief of Islam.”⁴³⁵

Al-Ma'mūn's letters reveal two paramount concerns – upholding God's absolute unity and correcting the masses' utter lack of theological knowledge as evidenced by their belief in the eternity of the Qur'ān. In one of his letters quoted by al-Ṭabarī, the Caliph lambasted the ignorant masses for lacking theological discernment and placing the Qur'ān and God at the same level:

The masses and the great multitude of the mean people and the lowest classes do not think, do not reflect, and do not use the arguments and the guidance God has provided; they are not enlightened by the light and the argumentations of real knowledge; this is the situation in all religions and all territories... They show this most clearly by putting God – the Blessed and Exalted – on the same level with the Qur'ān, which He has sent down; they are all agreed, unanimously and unequivocally, that the Qur'ān is eternal, exists from the first beginning, and is not created nor produced nor originated by God.⁴³⁶

Thus, the Inquisition in general and the debates between the Caliph's theologians and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in 220/835 in the presence of large crowds directly touched on two issues: the theological debate concerning God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) vis-à-vis the nature of the Qur'ān and the meta-theological debate of whether *kalām* theology holds any normative authority in Islam.⁴³⁷

The beginning of the Inquisition in 218/833 focused on compelling numerous jurists and traditionists to confess publicly that the Qur'ān is created. The only person to resist and hold out was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, which for him resulted in two years of imprisonment, followed by a

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 132.

⁴³⁶ Quoted in Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 2.

⁴³⁷ That these were the two main issues in the Inquisition is noted in the recent study of Nimrod Hurvitz, “Al-Ma'mūn (r. 198/813-218/833) in the Miḥna,” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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theological interrogation and flogging.⁴³⁸ Most significant for present purposes is how, in the midst of the Inquisition, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal not only denied the creation of the Qur'ān, but went one step further and declared the Qur'ān to be uncreated and eternal. This is important because his formative positions and arguments for the uncreated Qur'ān were taken up and elaborated, in one form or another, in three major Sunni *kalām* schools – the Ḥanbalīs, Ash'arīs, and Māturīdīs. For this reason, it is important to consider the statements and arguments Aḥmad made in the course of his interrogation under Caliph al-Mu'taṣim and in his later correspondence with the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232-247/847-861).

W. M. Patton drew on multiple sources to provide an account of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's statements before the Caliph's *kalām* theologians and a translation of his letter written to the Caliph after the Inquisition. When asked by the governor 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ishāq as to what he thought about the Qur'ān, Aḥmad responded by asking him what he thought about God's Knowledge.⁴³⁹ Aḥmad then argued that the Qur'ān was part of God's Knowledge (*'ilm*) and must therefore be uncreated, lest God exist without His Knowledge: "If this Knowledge be uncreated then the Qur'ān must be uncreated.... Did God exist and not his Knowledge?"⁴⁴⁰ To the great annoyance of his interlocutors, Aḥmad did not recognize the legitimacy of their *kalām* arguments and insisted that all proof solely comes from the Qur'ān and Sunna.⁴⁴¹ When accused of setting up another God with God, Aḥmad simply said: "He is one God, eternal; none is like Him and none is equal. He is

⁴³⁸ Critical studies on the narrations of these events are Nimrod Hurvitz, "Who is the Accused? The Interrogation of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal," *Al-Qanṭara* 12/2 (2001): 359-373; Michael Cooperson, "Two Abbasid Trials: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ḥunayn b. Ishāq," *Al-Qanṭara* 12/2 (2001): 375-393.

⁴³⁹ W. M. Patton, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1897), 100.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 103-14.

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even as He has described Himself.”⁴⁴² After his release, during an audience with the Caliph al-Mutawakkil and his theologians, Aḥmad was asked to prove that the Qur'ān was uncreated. He argued by relying on Q. 7:54, “Verily, His are the creation (*al-khalq*) and the command (*al-amr*).” When told that the Command was created, Aḥmad replied “What! The command created! Nay it creates that which is created.”⁴⁴³ This argument from the distinction between God's Command and God's creation is important as it shows up in later *kalām* discourse.

Aḥmad also penned a letter responding to Caliph al-Mutawakkil's request for him to share his views about the Qur'ān.⁴⁴⁴ In this letter, Aḥmad ascribed statements to the Prophet and early Companions where they say the Qur'ān is the Speech of God (*kalām*). He quoted several qur'ānic verses including Q. 9:6 (“...grant him safety until he hears the Speech of God), 7:52 (“Verily, His are the creation and the command”) and 55:1-3 (“The All-Merciful taught the Qur'ān”). He also relied on Q. 55:1-3, 2:140 and 13:27 to argue that the Qur'ān is a part of God's Knowledge:

He said (mightily and glorious is He), “The Merciful – He has taught the Recitation, created man, taught him exposition” (Q. 55:1-4), informing (us) that the Qur'an is part of His Knowledge.... He said, “Thus, We have revealed it as a criterion in Arabic. If you follow their whims after the knowledge that has come to you, you will have no protector or defender against God” (Q. 13:37). The Qur'an is thus part of the Knowledge of God. In these verses is evidence that what he [the Prophet] brought is the Qur'ān.⁴⁴⁵

Aḥmad also claimed that the early generations of Muslims professed that the Qur'ān is uncreated:

It has been related, moreover, from more than one of those who went before us that they used to say “the Qur'ān is the Speech of God uncreated (*kalām Allāh ghayr makhlūq*)” and that is what I believe. I am no dialectical theologian (*ṣāhib kalām*); I approve of argument in a matter of this kind only by means of what is in God's Book or a tradition from the Prophet, or from his Companions, or from

⁴⁴² Ibid., 106.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. 162-163. Arabic text is given on p. 158-159.

⁴⁴⁵ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, tr. Christopher Melchert, “Early Ḥanbalī Creeds Translated,” 2015, 25, unpublished paper accessed on 4/25/2019 on the Oxford University Research Archive: <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:3f641916-8c75-4114-8e90-db25de3fa7be>.

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those who followed them, but, as far as anything else, argument by means of it is not to be commended.⁴⁴⁶

Aḥmad's statements show that he opposed the very legitimacy of *kalām* theology and came to see the Qur'ān as eternally existing in God's Knowledge and therefore uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*). In an ironic way, Aḥmad's arguments for an uncreated Qur'ān sound very much like *kalām* theology. Although he never wished to submit to *kalām*'s rules of engagement, Aḥmad's assertion that the Qur'ān is uncreated – as opposed to the traditionist view that the Qur'ān is the Speech of God which came forth from Him and returns to Him – seems to have done exactly that. Therefore, Madelung credits Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal with being the first traditionist scholar to profess that the Qur'ān is uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*). The evidence for this is that the traditionists at the start of the Inquisition never went so far as to say that the Qur'ān is uncreated. Aḥmad initially opposed anyone who went *beyond* saying that the Qur'ān is the Speech of God: “When the leading traditionists of Baghdād at the beginning of the *miḥna* were questioned by the governor of Baghdād about their doctrine concerning the Qur'ān, all of them, including Ibn Ḥanbal, stated it is the speech of God, without adding ‘uncreated.’”⁴⁴⁷ But during the Inquisition, facing a barrage of dialectic from *kalām* theologians, Aḥmad evidently changed his view and came to see the Qur'ān as uncreated and eternal. In one of his later writings, Aḥmad reportedly said that God “is always speaking since He willed” (*lam yazal mutakalliman idhā shā'a*).⁴⁴⁸ Aḥmad even justified his change of belief with his adoption of the “uncreated” view by saying: “I established firm

⁴⁴⁶ Patton, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, 163.

⁴⁴⁷ Madelung, “The Origins.” 520.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 517.

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knowledge of it only later.”⁴⁴⁹ This raises the question as to what Aḥmad precisely meant and intended by his statements about the Qur'ān.

In his own mind, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal had nothing to do with *kalām* theology and simply affirmed the descriptions of God and the Qur'ān within revealed sources. Although Aḥmad's view on the Qur'ān may lack the theological sophistication of later *kalām* theologians, his statements on the matter betray a rudimentary theological framework underlying his view. Aḥmad argued that the Revelatory Principle – the source and substance of what is revealed in and as the Arabic Qur'ān – is God's Knowledge (*ilm Allāh*). His quoted statements during the Inquisition and his letter to the Caliph clearly state that “the Qur'ān is from God's Knowledge.” Evidently, Aḥmad understood God's Speech in the form of the Qur'ān as a disclosure of God's Knowledge to humankind. The Revelatory Product is the Arabic Qur'ān in its words, letters, verses and chapters, and it is a subset or part of God's Knowledge. This led to the conclusion that the Qur'ān is essentially identical to God's Knowledge, which must be uncreated since God is uncreated. It is necessary to appreciate how Aḥmad's view on the relationship and essential identity between the Qur'ān, God's Speech, and God's Knowledge is a direct development of the prior views. We saw earlier how Muqātil and later exegetes interpreted the qur'ānic statement that “God's Words” (*kalimāt Allāh*) are never exhausted (Q. 18:108, 31:27) as a reference to God's Knowledge never being exhausted. We also saw how early Shi'i and proto-Sunni traditionists described the Qur'ān as God's Speech which begins with and returns to God. In one respect, Aḥmad's conception of the Qur'ān as God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) and a subset of God's Knowledge (*ilm Allāh*) was quite consistent with these earlier views. However, Aḥmad's additional claim was that since God's Knowledge is uncreated, then

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

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God's Speech – the Qur'ān – which issues from and essentially conveys God's Knowledge must likewise be uncreated. This position is also significant because Aḥmad's identification of the Qur'ān, God's Speech, and God's Knowledge clearly differed from contemporary proto-Sunni thinkers (Ibn Kullāb and early Mu'tazilīs) and later classical Ḥanbalī and Ash'arī theologians, who all considered God's Speech and God's Knowledge to be different divine attributes. One actually finds Aḥmad's precise position taken up later by Ibn Ḥazm, who equated God's Speech with God's Knowledge: "The Qur'ān is the Speech of God and His Knowledge, and hence uncreated.... He, to Him belong might and glory, has informed [us], that His Speech is His Knowledge, and that it is eternal and uncreated."⁴⁵⁰

As for Aḥmad's understanding of the Revelatory Process, it remains unclear what his actual view was. However, Madelung found evidence that Aḥmad based his understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation on a prophetic *ḥadīth* related on the authority of 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd:⁴⁵¹

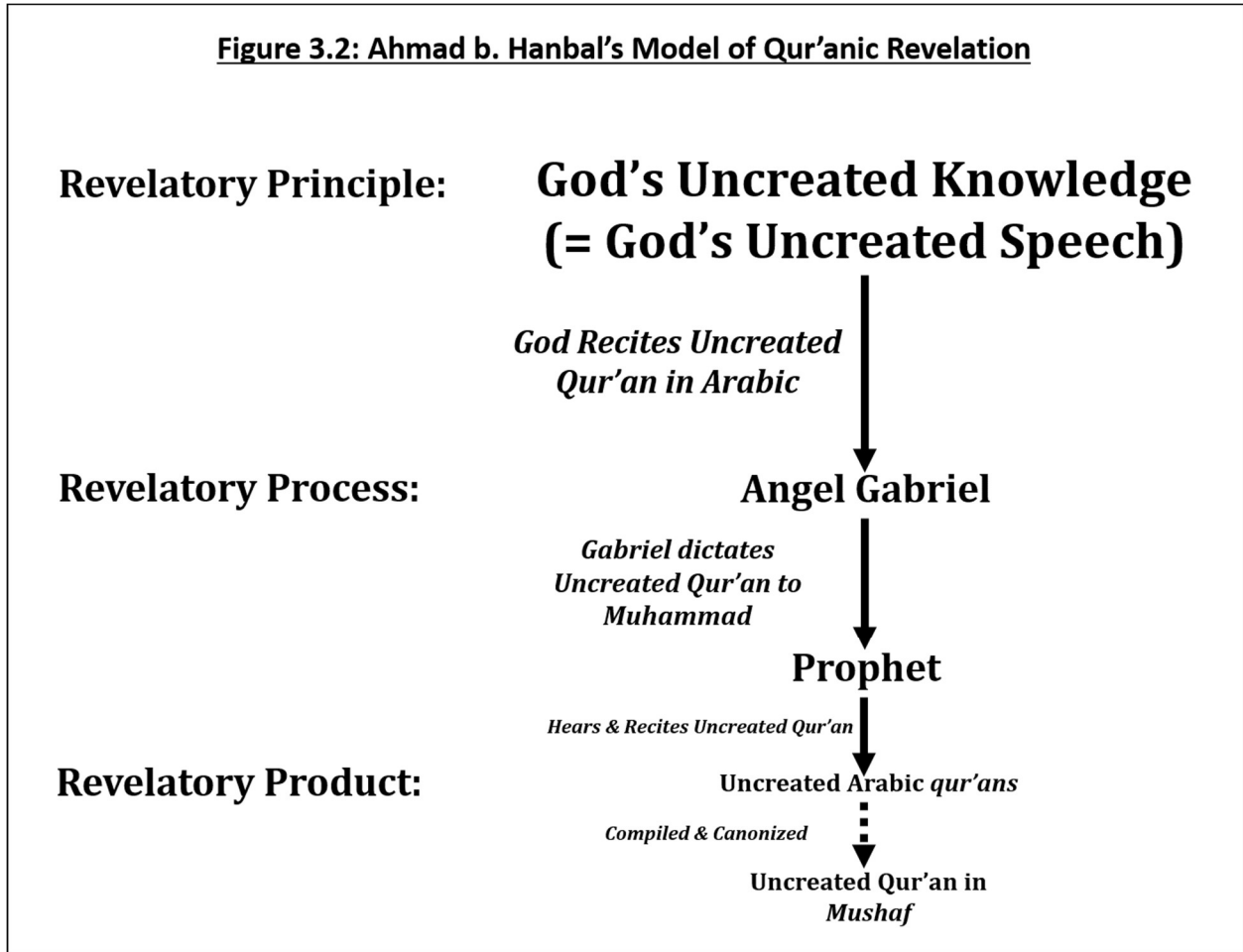
When God speaks *wahy*, the people of heaven hear ringing like a chain dragged upon a rock, and they faint. They remain like this until Gabriel comes to them. When Gabriel comes to them, they arise from their hearts and say: "O Gabriel, what did your Lord say?" Gabriel says, "the Truth". So they say, "the truth, the truth."⁴⁵²

This material suggests that Aḥmad understood God literally to have recited His Uncreated Speech in Arabic, which Gabriel heard and then dictated to the Prophet. The above *ḥadīth* was heavily quoted by his Ḥanbalī successors and reinterpreted by Ash'arī theologians to bolster their distinctive views about God's Speech not being in the form of sounds. Figure 3.2 below depicts what Aḥmad's understanding of the Revelatory Process may have looked like:

⁴⁵⁰ Ibn Ḥazm, quoted in Livnat Holtzman, "Elements of Acceptance and Rejection in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's Systematic Reading of Ibn Ḥazm," in Camilla Adang, Maribel Fierro, Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba: The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 601-644: 622.

⁴⁵¹ Madelung, "The Origins," 514.

⁴⁵² *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Book 42, Ḥadīth No. 143: <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/42/143>



The cumulative effect of the Inquisition, the interrogation of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, and his shift in theological belief was the “popularization” of the theological claim that the Qur’ān is uncreated. Over the next few centuries, the entire Inquisition narrative was revised to make it seem as if the vast majority of proto-Sunni traditionalists of earlier periods believed that the Qur’ān was uncreated. Later scholars sometimes asserted that over 550 Muslims from the second generation after the Prophet believed the Qur’ān to be God’s Uncreated Speech. Numerous *ḥadīths* were circulated, claiming that the Prophet himself taught that the Qur’ān was uncreated and condemned

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proponents of the creation of the Qur'ān as infidels.⁴⁵³ Once the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān was conceptualized and situated within the *kalām* framework espoused by the Mu'tazilīs of the third/ninth century, “uncreated” became tantamount to “eternal” (*qadīm*). Thus, within a century, the idea of the Qur'ān as the Speech of God developed further into the idea of the Qur'ān as the uncreated and eternal Speech of God. This underscores the pervasive and determining power of the *kalām* framework expounded earlier in this section: the ontological binary of *qadīm* (eternal) vs. *muḥdath* (temporally generated), equivalent to uncreated vs. created, both framed and constrained theological discussions about the nature of the Qur'ān. As it turns out, the *kalām* categories determined debates about the Qur'ān's createdness as well, leading to a diversity of opinions among the third/ninth-century Mu'tazilīs, to whom we now turn.

3.3 Formative Positions on the Nature of the Qur'ān: Third/Ninth-Century Views

3.3.1 God's Speech is Created: Early Mu'tazilī Views

As the debate over the nature of the Qur'ān raged on through the third/ninth century, the Mu'tazilīs of Baghdad and Basra developed their own highly intricate theories on the issue. The precise origins of the Mu'tazilīs remains a matter of scholarly and historical discussion with no consensus.⁴⁵⁴ But what is certain is the importance of the Mu'tazilī contributions to the formation of *kalām* theology and its subsequent developments. In this section, we will look at how the “pre-scholastic” Mu'tazilīs – Ja'far b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850), Ja'far b. Mubashshir (d. 233/848), Abū l-

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 522.

⁴⁵⁴ A good discussion of three approaches to Mu'tazilī origins is Racha el-Omari, “The Mu'tazilite Movement (I): The Origins of the Mu'tazila,” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 227/841), Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 231/845), and Muʿammar b. ʿAbbād (d. (d. 215/830) – conceived the Qurʾān as a created entity (*makhlūq*) within their *kalām* framework.⁴⁵⁵ In this period, there were two branches of the Muʿtazilīs – the Baghdad school and the Basra school. The founder of the Baghdad school was considered to be Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir (d. 226/841) and members of this school included Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb and Jaʿfar b. Mubashshir. The leading member of the Basra school was Abū l-Hudhayl, and Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām was his follower. Muʿammar was also based in Basra.⁴⁵⁶

The theological background of all their viewpoints was a distinctive Muʿtazilī understanding of the absolute unity of God – an issue directly related to the question of God’s attributes and the nature of the Qurʾān in particular.⁴⁵⁷ The Qurʾān refers to God by numerous names, such as the one (*al-wāḥid*), the unique (*al-aḥad*), the creator (*al-khāliq*), the sustainer (*al-rabb*), the powerful (*al-qādir*), the living (*al-ḥayy*), the knowing (*al-ʿālim*), etc. The Qurʾān also speaks of God’s hands, face, and eyes and describes various divine actions like punishment, providence, reward, etc. Within an ontological framework where essence (*dhāt*) and attribute (*ṣifa*) are real entities, there arises the question of whether the Qurʾānic divine names and descriptions refer to real attributes (*ṣifāt*) that are different from and additional to God’s Essence. The Ḥanbalīs, Ashʿarīs, and Māturīdīs all took the view that the divine names refer to real and mutually distinct

⁴⁵⁵ The earliest and most detailed discussion of their views on the Qurʾān is in Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 238-278. A more recent secondary source is Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshaf*. Both authors draw on al-Ashʿarī’s *Maqālāt*, from whom I am sourcing these Muʿtazilī positions.

⁴⁵⁶ A short overview of these two schools is given in Richard C. Martin, Mark Woodward, Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Muʿtazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (London: Oneworld, 2006), 27.

⁴⁵⁷ These thinkers all had different views with respect to theology, ontology, cosmology, and epistemology. For some examples see Richard M. Frank, “The metaphysics of created being according to Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf: a philosophical study of the earliest *kalām*,” in Richard M. Frank and Dimitri Gutas (ed.), *Early Islamic Theology: The Muʿtazilites and al-Ashʿarī: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, Vol. 2 (Varorium Collected Studies; Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), iv+1-53; idem, *Beings and Their Attributes*.

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attributes (*ṣifāt*), some of which eternally exist in or alongside God's Essence. Most early Mu'tazilīs reportedly took the view that God possesses no distinct attributes: He is beyond all created categories like substance, accident, atom, etc. and creaturely attributes like movement, rest, magnitude, smell, touch, etc.⁴⁵⁸ They came to accept that God has certain "attributes of Essence" (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) that are identical to God's Essence. For example, God is living, knowing, and powerful where life, knowledge, and power are identical with His Essence and do not exist as distinct entities. For Abū l-Hudhayl, "God is knowing through a knowledge that is Himself" (*huwa 'ālimun bi- 'ilmīn huwa huwa*). He is powerful through a power that is Himself. He is living through a life that is Himself. It is likewise with respect to His hearing, seeing, eternity, glory, sublimity, majesty, and greatness." Abū l-Hudhayl also allegorically interpreted the Qur'ānic mentions of God's face (*wajh*) and self (*nafs*) to mean God's Essence, God's hands to mean His favor (*ni'ma*), and God's eye to mean His knowledge (*'ilm*).⁴⁵⁹ Meanwhile, al-Nazzām and others interpreted the predications like God is knowing, living, powerful and other names as affirmations of God's Essence while negating ignorance, incapacity, and death in Him.⁴⁶⁰ Fourth/tenth- and fifth/eleventh-century Mu'tazilīs developed these doctrines further and distinguished between God's attributes of Essence and His attributes of action – the latter being God's acts that are temporally created (*makhlūq*) and generated (*muḥdath*) and not eternal (*qadīm*).

⁴⁵⁸ Al-Ash'arī reports that "most of the Mu'tazilīs, the Khārijīs, many of the Murji'īs, and some of the Zaydis [held that] God is knowing, powerful, and living by His Self (*bi-nafsihī*), not through knowledge, power, or life", see *Maqālāt*, Vol. 1, 244. See also Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshaf*, 103-104. However, early Mu'tazilīs did not, by any means, hold identical views on matters of theology. Al-Ash'arī describes a diverse set of positions in *Maqālāt*, Vol. 1, 244-249.

⁴⁵⁹ Kifayat Ullah, *Al-Kashshaf*, 105 and al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, Vol. 1, 245. For details on Abū l-Hudhayl's theology, see Richard M. Frank, "The divine attributes according to the teaching of Abū l-Hudhayl al-'Allāf," in Richard M. Frank and Dimitri Gutas (ed.), *Early Islamic Theology: The Mu'tazilites and al-Ash'arī: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, Vol. 2, 451-506.

⁴⁶⁰ Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, Vol. 1, 247.

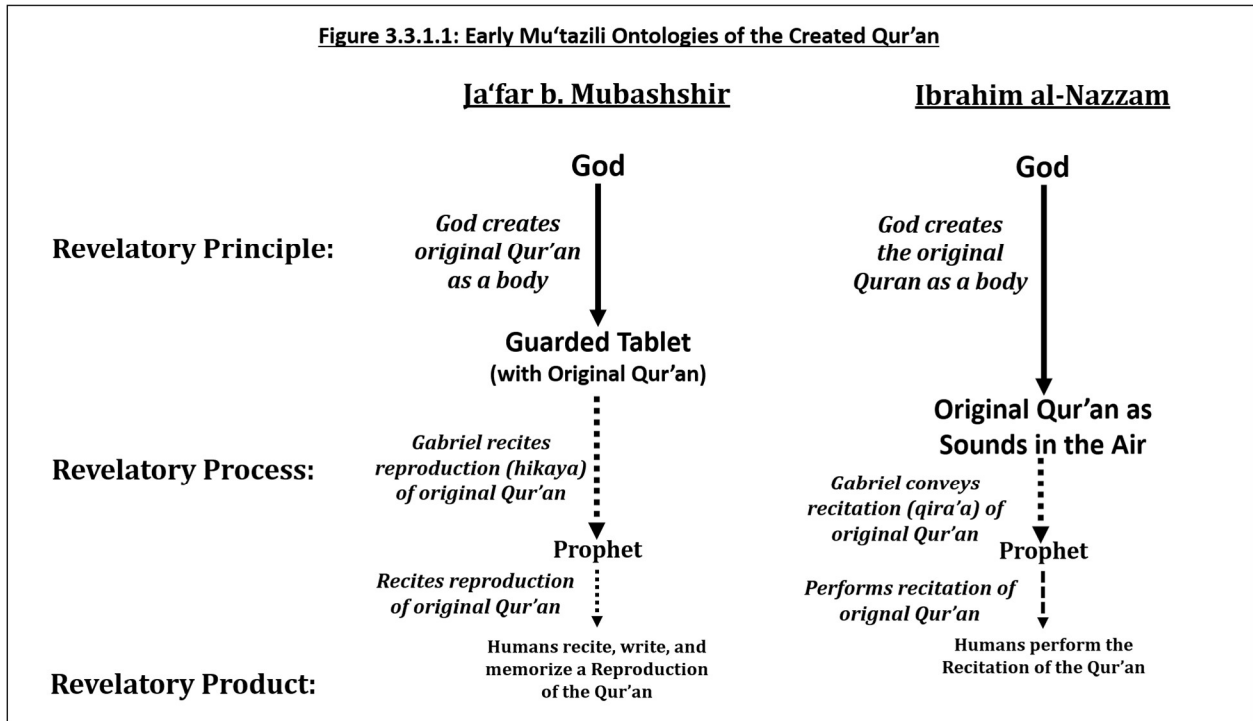
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Given that the major concern of Mu'tazilism was to safeguard God's absolute unity, professing an eternal uncreated Qur'ān entailed positing an uncreated entity co-eternal with God. In the eyes of some (such as the Caliph al-Ma'mūn), this came awfully close to the Christian doctrine of the uncreated Logos or Son of God. On one hand, the Mu'tazilīs accepted that the Qur'ān is God's Speech, in agreement with the Muslim traditionalists who responded to Jahm; but they also maintained that God's Speech is something temporally generated (*muḥdath*) and created (*makhlūq*), in disagreement with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and the majority of Muslim traditionists. In a certain respect, their position fell midway between the views of Jahm and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. However, when interpreted within a *kalām* theology framework, the issue becomes more complicated.

If the Qur'ān is created, then it must necessarily fall under one of the categories of existing things recognized in *kalām* theology: an atom (*jawhar*), a body (*jism*), or an accident (*'araḍ*). This was the first problem confronted by these Mu'tazilī thinkers. The second problem arose from how one answered the first question. If the Qur'ān is a body, then how does this body move from one place to another when a person recites the Qur'ān? Or perhaps the real Qur'ān remains in one place, and what people recite is some sort of copy, imitation, or expression of the original Qur'ān? Or perhaps God creates a new Qur'ān afresh whenever a person recites it or writes it or memorizes it? All of these were possible theological options for the proponents of a created Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān is a body present in a single place:

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For Ja'far b. Mubashshir (d. 233/848), the Qur'ān “is a body and it is impossible that it exists as an accident because they [Ja'far and his partisans] deny that God or one of His worshippers performs (or enacts) an accident, and nothing is enacted with God except what is a body.” Ja'far b. Mubashshir further stressed that God is neither body nor accident and that He is one.⁴⁶¹ His view that the Qur'ān must be a body is premised on the belief that divine and human acts (*af'āl*) cannot be accidents – since accidents only exist and inhere within bodies. Thus, the implicit reasoning seems to be that if the Qur'ān were an accident, it then follows that the Qur'ān must inhere or subsist in God. As we shall see later, the view that God's Speech subsists in God is something that non-Mu'tazilīs would take up. Ja'far b. Mubashshir also offered a theory to explain the fact that the Qur'ān is recited, written, and memorized in many places at one time while being a body. He

⁴⁶¹ Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, Vol. 2, 260.

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first explained that: “God created the Qur’ān in the Guarded Tablet and it is not possible for it to relocate. It is only possible for the Qur’ān to exist in one place in a single time, because the existence of a single thing at one time in two places in the sense of indwelling (*al-ḥulūl*) and being fixed in place is impossible.”⁴⁶² Thus, the original Qur’ān remains fixed in the Guarded Tablet. However, Ja‘far b. Mubashshir still affirmed that “the Qur’ān is written in the codices and memorized in the hearts of the believers.”⁴⁶³ But he qualified this statement by adding that “what is heard, memorized, and written is the reproduction [or imitation] (*ḥikāya*) of the Qur’ān without leaving anything out from it. It [the reproduction] is the act of the writer, the reciter, and the memorizer.”⁴⁶⁴ This means that when people recite the Qur’ān, write it down, or memorize it, their recitation, writing, or memorization is *not* the original Qur’ān, but only a reproduction or imitation of the original Qur’ān. Nevertheless, Ja‘far maintained that “what is heard, written, and memorized is the Qur’ān that is in the Tablet in its essential meaning (*‘ayn*), even though it is its likeness (*mithl*) and reproduction (*ḥikāya*).”⁴⁶⁵ In sum, Ja‘far b. Mubashshir’s view was that God created the Qur’ān as a body (*jism*) in the Guarded Tablet, and that people’s recitation, writing, and memorization of this Qur’ān is actually an essential reproduction (*ḥikāya*) of the original Qur’ān fixed in the Tablet. This implies that the Angel Gabriel memorized the Qur’ān from the Tablet and recited its reproduction to the Prophet, who in turn recited this reproduction to his community. In

⁴⁶² Ibid., Vol. 2, 268-269. See also Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa l-nihāl*, Second Edition, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub ‘Ilmiyya, 1992), 61: “Al-Ka‘bī relates from the two Ja‘far’s that they both said that God, the Exalted, created the Qur’ān in the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*) and it is not possible that it be moved, since it is not possible that one thing exists in two places in the same state.”

⁴⁶³ Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, Vol. 2, 268-269.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

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another place al-Ash'arī reported that the Mu'tazilīs generally believed that the recitation (*qirā'a*) of the Qur'ān was different from the Qur'ān itself, the former being the act of human beings and the latter being God's action (*fi'l*).⁴⁶⁶ This idea of the *qirā'a* and *ḥikāya* would become important in debates about the Qur'ān a century later and even taken up by 'Abd al-Jabbār.

Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 231/845) also taught that the Qur'ān is a body, partly using the same implicit reasoning as Ja'far b. Mubashshir. For example, al-Nazzām maintained that “the Speech of God is a body and that this body is articulate, composed, and audible sounds, and that it is the act (*fi'l*) of God and His creation.”⁴⁶⁷ However, unlike Ja'far, al-Nazzām did not believe that God created the Qur'ān in the Tablet. Instead, his view was that “the Speech of God is in the air and that the reciter isolates its meaning through his reciting it so it is heard accordingly.”⁴⁶⁸ In other words, al-Nazzām does not accept the Qur'ān's created pre-existence in the Tablet – which was a popular belief in the *tafsīr* tradition. His view was instead that God creates the Qur'ān “in the air” during the process of its revelation and this implies that the Angel Gabriel isolated it from the air and recited it to the Prophet. Finally, due to the Qur'ān being a body, al-Nazzām held that the Qur'ān always remains in only one place – the place where God first created it – in the air. Therefore, his view was that “human beings only perform the recitation (*qirā'a*). The recitation is motion and it is other than the Qur'ān.”⁴⁶⁹ Thus, al-Nazzām believed that human beings do not hear or enunciate the original Qur'ān or Speech of God, but only its recitation (*qirā'a*). As we will see in Chapter 4, al-Nazzām's denial of a pre-existent Qur'ān in the Tablet, while upheld

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., Vol. 2, 271.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, Vol. 1, 268.

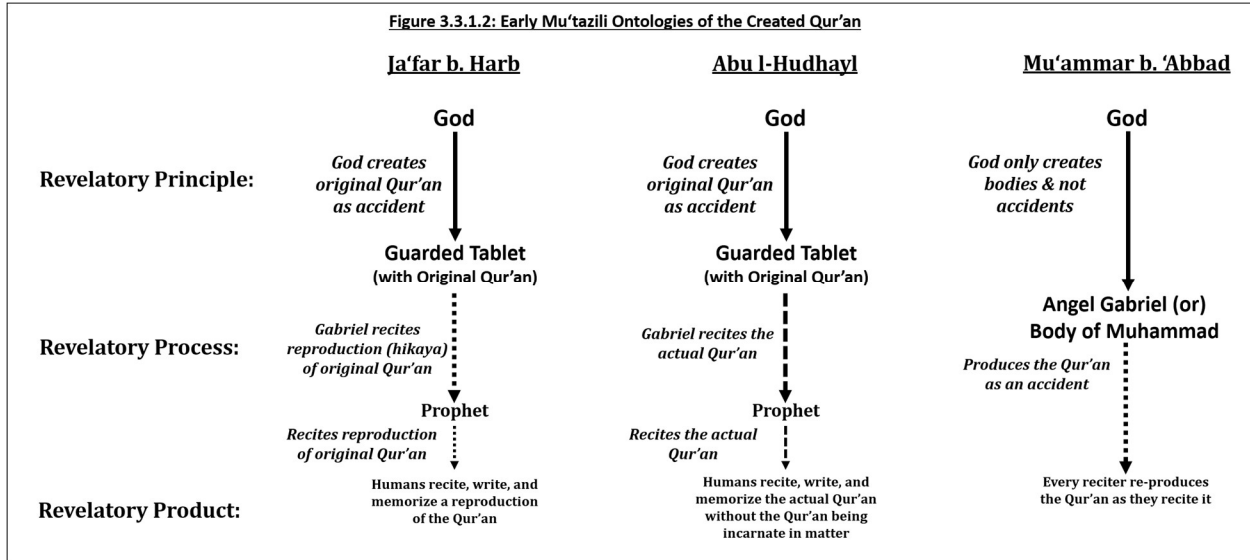
⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. 2, 261.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 268.

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unanimously in classical Sunni *tafsīr*, became the dominant position in fifth/eleventh-century Sunni *kalām* theology.

The Qur'ān is an accident present in many places at once:



Ja'far b. Harb and many of the Baghdad Mu'tazilīs were reportedly of the view that “the Speech of God is an accident and that it is created.... it is impossible for it to disappear from the place in which God created it and move to another [place].”⁴⁷⁰ Ja'far b. Harb also agreed with Ja'far b. Mubashshir that God created the Qur'ān in the Tablet and that what people recite, write, and memorize of the Qur'ān is not the original Qur'ān, which remains affixed in the Tablet, but a reproduction or imitation (*hikāya*) of the original Qur'ān.⁴⁷¹ The reports of al-Ash'arī and al-Shahrastānī specify that both Ja'fars held the same view on this matter. However, there were other

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., Vol. 2, 268-269.

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possible views on this issue among those who held that the Qur'ān is an accident created by God. For example, al-Ash'arī reports one faction who believed that whenever a person recites, writes, or memorizes the Qur'ān, God creates with them a Qur'ān similar to the original Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet.⁴⁷²

Abū l-Hudhayl also professed that the Qur'ān is an accident. But his understanding of how the Qur'ān could be present in multiple places at once was quite nuanced, as per the below account of his beliefs:

God created the Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet and it is an accident. The Qur'ān is found in three places: a place in which it is memorized, a place in which it is written, and in the place in which it is recited and heard. The Speech of God [likewise] exists in many places according to the manner of what we explained [above], but not in the sense that the Qur'ān is relocating or moving or disappearing in reality. It is only found in the place where it is written, recited or memorized. So if its writing is erased from a place, then it is no longer there, but not in the sense of becoming non-existent. If its writing exists in a place, then it exists there in the writing but not in the sense of being relocated to there.⁴⁷³

As per the above report, Abū l-Hudhayl sought to affirm that the Qur'ān is immanently present in many places at once – wherever it is written, recited, memorized and heard – without being ontologically located and incarnate in those places. This is indicated by his claim that when the Qur'ān is written in some place and then erased, it is not the case that the Qur'ān actually becomes non-existent or disappears. Although he did not use the precise words, Abū l-Hudhayl seems to be saying that the Qur'ān, while being an accident, does not actually “inhere” or “indwell” in any of the places in which it is truly present. This is an important position because a very similar view was taken up by the Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools of *kalām* theology in the eleventh century. His position also implies that the Angel Gabriel memorizes the Qur'ān from the Tablet and recites the

⁴⁷² Ibid., Vol. 2, 265-267. Al-Ash'arī provides various views on the idea of the Qur'ān as a created accident as part of “the account of Ja'far”, so it is difficult to tell which view he professed.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., Vol. 2, 267-268.

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Qur'ān to the Prophet, who in turn recites it to the community; in each of these cases, the Qur'ān itself (not its reproduction) is recited in reality.

Mu'ammār b. 'Abbād (d. 215/830), a leading theologian of Basra during Harūn al-Rāshīd's caliphate, held to a unique view of the Qur'ān as compared to other Mu'tazilīs. His theology has been called naturalistic because he believed that God only creates bodies and that the actions of these bodies are "accidents" (*al-'araḍ*) and not directly created by God. According to later reports from Ibn al-Rāwandī and Khayyāt, "Mu'ammār maintains that the Qur'ān is not the work of God, nor is it, as according to the view of the generality of the people, an attribute in the essence of God; it is rather the work of nature." According to al-Ash'arī:

The followers of Mu'ammār claim that the Qur'ān is an accident... But it is impossible that God should have made it in the true sense of the term, for they consider impossible that accidents should be an act of God. They think, therefore, that the Qur'ān is an act from the place from which it is heard. If it is heard from the bush, then it is an act of the bush, and wherever it is heard it is the act of the abode in which it happens to be located."⁴⁷⁴

Mu'ammār thus believed that "the Qur'ān is an act produced by the nature of the substance in which it is, and it is not a creator or something created, but it is produced by the nature of the thing in which it abides."⁴⁷⁵ Al-Khāṭib al-Baghdādī interpreted Mu'ammār's views to mean that "God has no Word, since he could not say God's Word was an eternal attribute.... The Qur'ān, according to him, is the act of the body in which the Word happens to be located, but is not an act of God, nor an attribute."⁴⁷⁶ In sum, Mu'ammār's view was that God does not produce Speech directly; instead God's Speech is the action and accident of the body from which it is heard. In the context of the Qur'ān, this would mean that either the Angel Gabriel or Muhammad is the body whose

⁴⁷⁴ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalam*, 276-277.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

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action is God's Speech, depending upon who first recited the Qur'ān. According to Wolfson's interpretation of this material, this means that God created some special bodies – such as the burning bush, the prior Prophets and Muhammad – and endowed them with the capacity to speak or produce the Speech of God.⁴⁷⁷ In this respect, Mu'ammār's view was that the Qur'ān is the production of the Prophet Muhammad or the Angel Gabriel and only God's Speech in the indirect sense that God created them for this task. While Mu'ammār's view may seem rather irregular, one will find semblances of it among the later Ash'arīs, the Peripatetics like al-Farābī and Ibn Sīna, and the Ismailis.

The formative Mu'tazilī positions discussed above, which either define the Qur'ān as a body (*jism*) or an accident (*'araḍ*), can also be classified into another framework: those who assert the pre-existence of the Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet and those who do not. As we saw earlier in Chapter 2, the idea of the Qur'ān pre-existing in the Guarded Tablet prior to its revelation to Muhammad came from the speculations of Sunni *tafsīr* literature and was grounded in several narrations attributed to Ibn 'Abbās and others. These narrations describe how the Qur'ān was sent down to earth through two “descents”: its first descent was from the Guarded Tablet to the nearest heaven and the second descent was from the nearest heaven to the Prophet over 23 years. The early Mu'tazilīs were clearly aware of this idea of a pre-existent Qur'ān and in some of the above positions the Guarded Tablet featured prominently. In particular, Ja'far b. Mubashshir, Ja'far b. Ḥarb, and Abū l-Hudhayl all believed that God created the Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet as a body or an accident and that the original Qur'ān remains established there. This, however, presented the problem of how to account for the Qur'ān apparently existing in numerous locations. All three

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 278.

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thinkers solved it by making subtle distinctions between the original Qur'ān and its representations (*ḥikāyāt*) or limiting the Qur'ān's ontological presence to various places. Meanwhile, al-Nazzām and Mu'ammār did not subscribe to any notion of the Qur'ān's pre-existence and instead affirmed that the Qur'ān was created either in the air or at the very moment it was first recited. Al-Nazzām seemed to make the same distinction between the recitation (*qirā'a*) of the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān itself, which is a body that remains in its original locus of creation. This early Mu'tazilī distinction between God's Speech, which is the original Qur'ān created in the Tablet (the two Ja'fars, Abū l-Hudhayl) or in the air (al-Nazzām), and the earthly Qur'ān is perhaps one of the earliest *kalām* formulations to differentiate between two dimensions of Qur'ānic Revelation – an original Revelatory Principle and its earthly Revelatory Product. The original Qur'ān, God's Speech created in the Tablet, is the Revelatory Principle – it is both the source of revelation and its substantive content. The recitation (*qirā'a*) or reproduction (*ḥikāya*) of the Qur'ān, which is what human beings recite, read, write, memorize, and hear, is the Revelatory Product; it was first recited by the Angel Gabriel and then by Muhammad. When these Mu'tazilīs specify how the original Qur'ān is present but not incarnate wherever a person recites, reads, or writes the Qur'ān, they are suggesting that the Revelatory Principle is immanent and present in the Revelatory Product without being ontologically identical to it.

In sum, third/ninth-century Mu'tazilī thinkers confronted a series of theological challenges that arise when one affirms that the Qur'ān is God's created Speech. The various solutions involved positing God's Speech as a body or an accident and making fine distinctions between the Qur'ān's mode of presence in various locations. Some of these formative Mu'tazilī ideas continued to be debated well into the fifth/eleventh century, even if they are only preserved in refutations. Nevertheless, if affirming the creation of the Qur'ān brought forth certain challenges, then taking

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the Qur'ān to be uncreated and eternal came with its own set of problems. We see an early attempt to address these concerns in the ideas of 'Abdullāh b. Kullāb to whom we now turn.

3.3.2 God Speaks for Eternity: 'Abdullāh b. Kullāb (d. ca. 241/855)

The opposition to the doctrine of the created Qur'ān in the third/ninth century was not limited to the traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*), but also included *kalām* theologians who shared some beliefs with the former group. Perhaps the most influential of the latter group was one 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Sa'īd, a theologian of Basra, who earned the nickname “Ibn Kullāb” because of his ability to overwhelm his opponents in debate (*kullāb* means “grappling hook”).⁴⁷⁸ Nothing written by Ibn Kullāb has survived, but his views were quite influential to the point that there were “Kullābī” theologians well into the fourth/tenth century before Ash'arism became more popular. Some of Ibn Kullāb's ideas as reported by al-Ash'arī and later scholars, continued, albeit in modified form, in Ash'arī *kalām* theology. It may even be appropriate to refer to Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī himself as a “Kullābī” theologian. For this reason, it is necessary to present and analyze some of Ibn Kullāb's formulations concerning the nature of God's attributes, and his unique understanding of God's Speech in relation to the Arabic Qur'ān and other scriptural revelations.

Ibn Kullāb's ideas concerning God were in line with the so-called “Attributionists”, the groups who affirmed that God possesses real and distinct divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) described by His names. He took the view that God is always (*lam yazal*) knowing (*'ālim*), living (*ḥayy*), speaking (*mutakallim*), hearing (*samī'*), seeing (*baṣīr*), mighty (*'azīz*), sublime (*'aẓīm*), glorious (*jalīl*), etc.

⁴⁷⁸ For background on Ibn Kullāb, including the contents of this paragraph, see Harith Bin Ramli, “The Predecessors of Ash'arism: Ibn Kullāb, al-Muḥāsibī and al-Qalānsī,” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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through the attributes of knowledge (*ilm*), life (*ḥayā*), speech (*kalām*), hearing (*samʿ*), sight (*baṣr*), might (*ʿizza*), sublimity (*ʿazama*), glory (*jalāl*), etc., which are real entities that exist additional to God's Self (*nafs*) or Essence (*dhāt*).⁴⁷⁹ In other words, the phrase “God is knowing” means “He possesses knowledge.”⁴⁸⁰ This formula was applied by Ibn Kullāb to some 30 divine attributes, including anger, mercy, hatred, and affection. With respect to these 30 divine attributes, he maintained that “they are not God and not other than He” and that “they subsist in God (*qā'ima bi-llāh*).”⁴⁸¹ Thus, God's names and attributes are co-eternal with God's Essence in the sense that “He is eternal, never being without with His names and His attributes (*innahu qadīmun lam yazal bi-asmā'ihī wa-ṣifātihī*).”⁴⁸²

Ibn Kullāb's general theory of the divine attributes entails that God's Speech is an eternal attribute that subsists in God like His other attributes: “God is always speaking (*lam yazal mutakalliman*) and the Speech of God is His attribute subsisting in Him. He is eternal (*qadīm*) with His Speech (*bi-kalāmihi*). His Speech subsists in Him just as knowledge subsists in Him and power subsists in Him.”⁴⁸³ However, Ibn Kullāb understood God's Speech as something beyond letters, words, language, and any kind of change, alteration or division. In this respect, Ibn Kullāb made a

⁴⁷⁹ Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, Vol. 1, 249-250. An extensive analysis of Ibn Kullāb's view of God's attributes and their interpretation in Sunni theology is given in Robert Wisnovsky, “One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 65-100.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 249-250.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸² *Ibid.* I have chosen to translate *lam yazal* in this sentence and in most cases where it functions as a copula as “always”. For the different grammatical usages and theological significance of *lam yazal* and related expressions, see Richard M. Frank, “‘*Lam yazal*’ as a formal term in Muslim theological discourse,” in Richard M. Frank and Dimitri Gutas (ed.), *Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism in Medieval Islam: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, Vol. 1, 243-270.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 257.

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clear distinction between the Speech of God and its Arabic expression in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sound and letter:

The Speech [of God] is not letters and sounds, and it is neither divisible, partible, dissectible, nor alterable; it is a single essential meaning (*ma'nā*) in God. The impression (*rasm*) is various letters and it is the recitation of the Qur'ān (*qirā'at al-Qur'ān*).... The expressions (*'ibārāt*) of the Speech of God differ and diverge, while the Speech of God is neither different nor diverse, in the same way that our invocations (*dhikr*) of God differ and diverge while the Invoked One (*al-madhkūr*) neither differs nor diverges. The Speech of God is only called Arabic because the impression (*rasm*), which is its expression (*'ibāra 'anhu*) and its recitation (*qirā'atuhu*), is Arabic – so it is called Arabic for a reason. Likewise, it is called Hebrew for a reason – that the impression which is its expression, is in Hebrew.⁴⁸⁴

According to the above report, Ibn Kullāb did not plainly profess the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān in the same manner as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. First, Ibn Kullāb conceived God's Speech as an attribute or essential meaning (*ma'nā*) distinct from God's Knowledge whereas Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal identified them. Second, Ibn Kullāb clearly differentiated the Qur'ān's Arabic linguistic impression (*rasm*), which he calls the “expression” (*'ibāra*) of God's Speech, from the Divine Speech *qua* essential meaning and divine attribute. The expressions of the Speech of God are variable and diverse and apparently include the Arabic Qur'ān and prior scriptures in other languages like Hebrew. This means that the Speech of God, as an eternal attribute, is neither Arabic nor Hebrew or any other language. Only its impression (*rasm*), expression (*'ibāra*), and recitation (*qirā'a*) are linguistic and verbal. In this way, Ibn Kullāb drew a clear demarcation between the Qur'ān as Arabic sounds, letters, words, and phrases, and the eternal Speech of God itself.

Another report about his views demonstrates Ibn Kullāb's belief that what human beings recite of the Qur'ān is merely the “recitation” (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech and not the Speech itself:

The Recitation (*qirā'a*) according to him is not “what is Recited (*al-maqrū'*)”. “What is Recited” subsists in God (*qā'im bi-llāh*). In the same way, the invocation (*dhikr*) of God is other than God, so the Invoked One (*al-madhkūr*) is eternal (*qadīm*), always existing (*lam yazal mawjūdān*) while the invocation of Him is temporally generated (*muḥdath*). It is likewise the case for “what is

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., Vol. 2, 258.

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Recited” that God is always speaking it, while the Recitation is created (*muḥdath makhlūq*) and it is an acquisition of the human being.⁴⁸⁵

The “Recitation” (*al-qirā'a*), which is in Arabic and consists of sounds and letters, differs from “what is Recited” (*al-maqrū'*) in the same way that human beings’ “invocation” (*dhikr*) of God differs from “He who is invoked” (*al-madhkūr*). When expressed in the categories of *kalām* theology, the Speech of God is eternal (*qadīm*) while its Arabic recitation is created (*makhlūq*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*). This also holds for what people hear of the Qur'ān. The actual sounds, tones, utterances, and words of the Qur'ān heard by human beings are not the Speech of God but only its recitation. Created beings only hear God's Speech directly in certain special cases such as that of Moses: “What we hear the reciters recite is an expression (*ibāra*) of the Speech of God while Moses heard God speaking His Speech.” This position led Ibn Kullāb to interpret the Qur'ānic verse (9:6) which tells the believers to grant the idolater safety “until he hears the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*)” in the following manner: “The meaning of His saying, ‘grant him safety until he hears the Speech of God’ (Q. 9:6) is ‘until he understands the Speech of God’.”⁴⁸⁶ This interpretation is informed by the idea that God's Speech is not audible to begin with and cannot be heard by human ears. Interpreting the Qur'ānic mention of “hearing” as “understanding” later became a trademark Ash'arī interpretation.

Ibn Kullāb's understanding of God's Speech and its distinction from the Arabic Qur'ān has bearing on the precise modality and content of the eternal Speech of God. If the Arabic letters, sounds, and phrases of the Qur'ān are not eternal but created, and if the Speech of God is eternal and beyond language, then it becomes difficult to pin down what exactly the eternal Speech of

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol. 2, 270.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., Vol. 2, 258.

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God consists of. Another difficulty lies in how one can still affirm that the words of the Qur'ān are God's Speech in any meaningful way. The Arabic Qur'ān contains commands, prohibitions, and information – all of which are functions of conventional speech. But Ibn Kullāb's theory implies that the eternal Speech of God is not, in and of itself, any of these things. His solution to these problems was reported as follows:

It [the Speech of God] is called a command for a reason, it is called a prohibition for a reason, and an information for a reason. God is always a speaker before His Speech is called a command, and before the existence of the cause for which His Speech was called a command. The statement is likewise regarding His Speech being called a prohibition or an information. I deny that the Creator is always commanding, informing, and prohibiting. Verily God does not create a thing except that He says to it "Be" and it is impossible that His speech be created.⁴⁸⁷

Thus, Ibn Kullāb held that God's Speech, considered in itself, cannot be described in terms of commands, prohibitions, or information. However, the Divine Speech becomes manifest as and takes on the form of concrete commands, prohibitions, and information as the result of a particular reason or cause (*sabab*) in creation. In other words, God's Speech only becomes concretized in specific contexts. God's Speech thus turns out to be an abstract and unitary entity, signifying an ontological distance between God's Speech and the concrete statements in the Arabic Qur'ān. This view, however, was debated among later *kalām* theologians and eventually rejected in part by al-Ash'arī and his followers.

In Ibn Kullāb's theology, the eternal Speech of God – a singular and unitary attribute subsisting through God's Essence – is the Revelatory Principle, while its created expressions or recitations constitute the Revelatory Product. The Revelatory Principle, as God's Speech, is eternal, transcendent, supra-verbal and supra-linguistic. The Revelatory Products include the Hebrew Torah, the Syriac Gospels, the Arabic Qur'ān, and any other divinely revealed discourse

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., Vol. 2, 258.

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insofar as they consist of verbal linguistic sounds, words, and letters in the form of commands, prohibitions, and information. Unlike Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, for whom the Qur'ān is a subset of God's Knowledge and ontologically identical with it, Ibn Kullāb drew a clear demarcation between God's Knowledge and God's Speech and made a wide distinction between the latter and the Arabic Qur'ān. In this respect, it is significant that the Qur'ān, in Ibn Kullāb's view, is not the Divine Speech itself but a particular Arabic expression and recitation of the Divine Speech. Likewise, specific statements found in the Qur'ān like God's command to a Prophet or his community are not God's eternal Speech, but only its temporal expressions. At the same time, the Speech of God as the Revelatory Principle is immanent in and accessible through the Revelatory Product. The Revelatory Principle is "what is Recited" (*al-maqrū'*) and the Revelatory Product is the "Recitation" (*al-qirā'a*, *al-tilāwa*).⁴⁸⁸ This formulation means that God's Speech is the substantive content of the recitation. Thus, human beings can attain an understanding of God's Speech by way of hearing the Arabic Qur'ān in recitation. Yet there remains a clear boundary between the Arabic Qur'ān and God's Speech itself. Thus, Ibn Kullāb's conception of the Revelatory Principle and the Revelatory Product entails an ontological distance between them that goes much further than early Mu'tazilī attempts to distinguish the original Qur'ān and its reproduction (*hikāya*) or its recitation (*qirā'a*).

A key question that Ibn Kullāb surely addressed – but for which we have few details – is the nature of the Revelatory Process – namely, how the eternal unitary Speech of God is rendered and made manifest into the revealed Arabic discourse of verbal commands, prohibitions, and information brought by a Prophet to his community. A glimpse of his view (and his party's view)

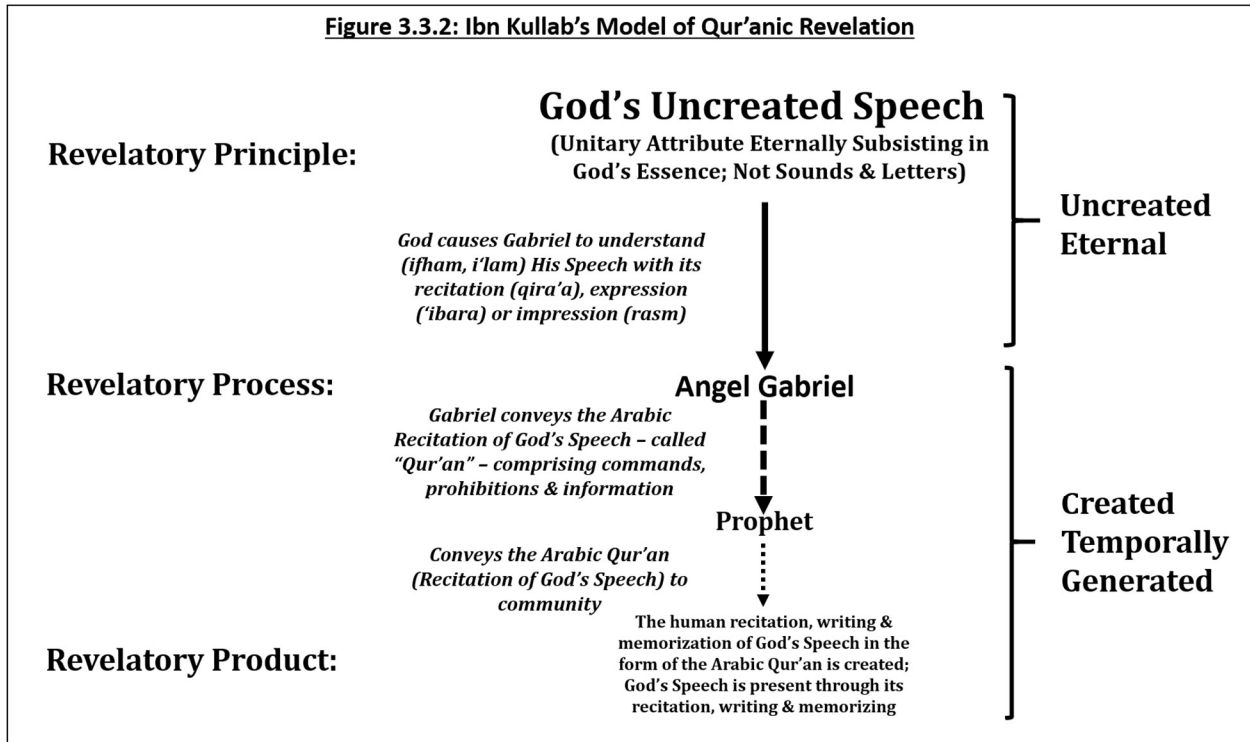
⁴⁸⁸ My standard translation for *al-qirā'a* is "the Recitation". However, when *al-qirā'a* appears alongside *al-tilāwa*, then the former is translated as "the Reading" and the latter as "the Recitation". In all cases, the authors are using both terms synonymously.

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on the revelation of God's Speech in the world is reported much later by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). As seen earlier, the Qur'ān uses the verbs *nazzala* and *anzala* to speak about the "sending down" (*tanzīl*, *inzāl*) of revelation and a host of other items (such as water, sustenance, manna and quail, etc.). The classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition, from early on, came to understand *inzāl* and *tanzīl* mainly as descriptions of the descent of the pre-existent Qur'ān from heaven to earth. As Ibn Taymiyya reports, Ibn Kullāb and his followers interpreted the expression "sending down" (*inzāl*) in a metaphoric way. They said, with respect to God's Speech, that "its 'sending down' (*inzāl*) means 'causing it to be known' (*al-i'lām bihi*) and 'causing it to be understood' (*ifhāmihu*) to the angel or the descent of the angel with what he understood of it (*bi-mā fahimahu*)."⁴⁸⁹ While this description is not very precise, the terms *i'lām* and *ifhām* are noteworthy because they were picked up by later Ash'arī thinkers including al-Ash'arī himself and his successors in their interpretations of *inzāl* and *wahy*, as we will see. It is likely that Ibn Kullāb interpreted the Qur'ānic language of "descent" (*inzāl*, *tanzīl*) in such terms because the eternal Speech of God in his theology is not something that can literally move, transfer or descend from place to place. One's theological conception of the Revelatory Principle inevitably influences one's conception of the Revelatory Process as well as the Revelatory Product. It also opens the question of how exactly a transcendent Revelatory Principle is verbalized or manifested in human language. In this respect, there is a hint in this report that Ibn Kullāb assigned the Angel Gabriel a kind of agency in rendering God's Speech into concrete linguistic expressions based on his own understanding of the Divine Speech. We also see later Ash'arīs focus on this latter idea as they work with Ibn Kullāb's ideas.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Risālat al-tibyān fī nuzūl al-Qur'ān* in *Majmū'a al-rasā'il al-kubra*, 2 Vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1972), Vol. 1, 215.

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In summary, Ibn Kullāb's positions on the nature of God's Speech and its relationship to the Qur'ān were innovative for their distinctiveness and formative in the history of Sunni thought because of their pervasive influence on later *kalām* theologians. Ibn Kullāb's conception of God's attributes as eternal entities subsisting in God and the eternal Divine Speech in particular were adopted by al-Ash'arī and his successors. Ibn Kullāb's distinction between the Revelatory Principle as God's uncreated Speech and the Revelatory Product being its recitation (*qirā'a*), impression (*rasm*), and expression (*ibāra*) in the form of linguistic letters, sounds, and words was a longstanding contribution to the Sunni tradition, even if later thinkers rejected some of his proposals while adopting others. On this point, Ibn Kullāb's views have some parallels with Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, who distinguished between Qur'ān's linguistic impression (*rasm*) and the Qur'ān itself as God's act (*fi'l*); several Mu'tazilīs also differentiated between the original Qur'ān in the Tablet and what human beings recite, write, and memorize as its reproduction. Ibn Kullāb's

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understanding of the “sending down” of the Divine Speech in the sense of causing it to be known and understood is equally important in later *kalām* theories of revelation. As it turns out, most of Ibn Kullāb’s distinctive views were taken up and adopted by Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, whose ideas will be examined in the following section.

3.4 Developing Positions on the Nature of the Qur’ān: Fourth/Tenth-Century Views

3.4.1 God’s Speech is Uncreated, its Expression is Created: Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936)

The biographies of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, initially a Mu‘tazilī theologian who publicly denounced Mu‘tazilīsm, are filled with hagiographical details. Among the little information known about him is that al-Ash‘arī was initially based in Basra and was a student of the famous Mu‘tazilī theologian Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 303/915), at which time Mu‘tazilīsm was entering into its scholastic period. At around the age of 40, he parted ways with Mu‘tazilī theology and moved closer to the beliefs of the Sunni traditionists or *ahl al-ḥadīth* on a number of points.⁴⁹⁰

The disagreement between the Mu‘tazilīs and the Sunni traditionists pertained to a number of issues besides the status of the Qur’ān: the Mu‘tazilīs believed that God’s attributes are identical with His Essence, that humans voluntarily performed and created their own actions, and that the human capacity to distinguish what is good from evil is independent of divinely revealed guidance where all actions have intrinsic moral value; the Sunni traditionists believed that God possesses real attributes as stated in the Qur’ān, that God creates all actions performed by human beings, that

⁴⁹⁰ For these introductory remarks on al-Ash‘arī, I am drawing on Jan Thiele, “Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ash‘arism (Fourth-Fifth/Tenth-Eleventh Century),” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). The most definitive study of his theology is Daniel Gimaret, *La doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī* (Paris: Cerf, 1990).

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good and evil are determined by what God respectively commands and forbids, and that human beings require divinely revealed guidance in order to know what God commands and prohibits. Al-Ash'arī ended up taking positions that appear to fuse the Mu'tazilī and Sunni traditionist views in a manner similar to Ibn Kullāb. Mirroring early Mu'tazilī arguments, he affirmed that God is unlike His creatures, denied that God is a body, and employed the *qadīm/muḥdath* categories within this theology.⁴⁹¹ Like Ibn Kullāb, al-Ash'arī regarded the divine attributes as real and distinct entities that subsist in God's Essence. However, he limited these eternal divine attributes to life, knowledge, power, hearing, sight, will, speech, (and possibly eternity) as opposed to the 30 eternal attributes of Ibn Kullāb.⁴⁹² This entails that God is eternally living, knowing, powerful, hearing, seeing, willing and speaking through the qualities of life, knowledge, power, hearing, sight, will, and speech. These divine attributes subsist eternally in God's Essence and they are not God and not other than God.⁴⁹³ Al-Ash'arī also accounted for other names and attributes that people ascribe to God established by reason, linguistics, or revealed sources – such as intelligence (*'aql*), understanding (*fahm*), perception (*idrāk*), compassion (*rahma*), glory (*'izza*), majesty (*jalāl*), etc. In his view, these sorts of attributes are identical in meaning to one of the seven

⁴⁹¹ Al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, tr. Richard J. McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ash'arī* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 9-12.

⁴⁹² Ibid. For his arguments on God possessing life, knowledge, power, hearing, and sight where each of these are attributes distinct from God's Essence, see pp. 12-19. For his discussion on God's Eternal Speech, see pp. 20-32, and for his discourse on God's will, see pp. 33-44. A comprehensive analysis of al-Ash'arī's view of God's attributes is given in Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 259-281. Gimaret argues that eternity is the eighth eternal divine attribute alongside the seven that al-Ash'arī speaks of most explicitly.

⁴⁹³ This position of al-Ash'arī concerning these seven essential divine attributes is confirmed in the report of his beliefs found in Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fūrak (Ibn al-Fūrak), *Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sā'iḥ (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2005), 44-46. For this work, I used the 2005 Cairo edition but compared all my passages against the 1987 edition in *Mujarrad maqālāt Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, ed. Daniel Gimaret (Beirut: Dār el-Mashriq, 1987).

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essential attributes of life, knowledge, will, power, speaking, hearing, and seeing. Other attributes, like generosity for example, are attributes of God's action (*fi 'l*) and not His essence.⁴⁹⁴

The Nature of God's Speech:

Al-Ash'arī's idea of God eternally possessing attributes entails that the Speech of God is eternal and uncreated. He elucidated and argued these positions in several works. The analysis that follows considers the material in his *Ibāna* and his views as reported by Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015-16).⁴⁹⁵ In his *al-Ibāna 'an uṣūl al-diyāna*, al-Ash'arī adopted a polemical approach toward the beliefs of the Jahmīs and the Mu'tazilīs while advancing the views of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. He employed the same Qur'ānic references (Q. 30:25, 7:54) to argue that God's Command is different from God's creation, and then equated God's Command with His Speech.⁴⁹⁶ Echoing Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, he put forth a logical argument that God's Word must be uncreated since every creature is created by means of it and if this were not the case, then God's created word would require another word to come into being itself.⁴⁹⁷

Al-Ash'arī also provided new arguments of his own to buttress his positions. He quoted many other Qur'ānic verses to refute the claims of the Jahmīs that God's Speech is created. In particular, he argued for the absurdity of the idea that God's Speech is created within a created

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 45-47. For his view on the names of God generally see Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 345-365.

⁴⁹⁵ For an overview of al-Ash'arī's views on God's Speech, see Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 309-322. My analysis is based on primary sources but I have cross-referenced with Gimaret's work.

⁴⁹⁶ Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibāna*, 66-67.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 67; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 312.

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essence or substrate.⁴⁹⁸ In one section, al-Ash'arī asserted that the Qur'ān is uncreated because it mentions God's names: "Then how can the Qur'ān be created," he asked, "when the name of God is in the Qur'ān? For this makes it necessarily true that the names of God are created, and if His names were created, His unity would be created, and likewise His knowledge and power."⁴⁹⁹

Another argument he gave was that if the Speech of God were created, it would be found in created things, and all creatures would hear God's Speech. Such a thing, he claimed, would deprive the Prophets of all distinction. Al-Ash'arī often dwelled on the implications that God's Speech being created would have on the distinction of Moses. It would mean that what Moses heard was not God's Speech but merely the voice of the bush in which God created His Speech. This would mean that there is no real difference between Moses hearing God's Speech and anyone else hearing it.⁵⁰⁰

It is also clear from his arguments that al-Ash'arī conceived "uncreated" very much in terms of "eternal" or "unending." Thus, in one argument, al-Ash'arī appealed to the belief that God's anger and God's satisfaction are uncreated: if they were created, he opined, God's anger toward infidels and His satisfaction with angels and prophets and His friends would come to an end.⁵⁰¹ He also devoted an entire section to relating the opinion of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and other Sunni traditionists which confirm that the Qur'ān is uncreated. In his last set of arguments, al-

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 68-69.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 70; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 311.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 71; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 313.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 73.

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Ash'arī attacked those who refrain from saying that the Qur'ān is uncreated and objected to the words “utterance of the Qur'ān” (*lafẓ al-Qur'ān*) as an inappropriate and objectionable term.⁵⁰²

The *Ibāna*'s positions run very close to the views of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, and based on reports from later Ash'arī theologians, there was more to al-Ash'arī's views on God's Speech than what is contained in his extant works. For this reason, it is important to consider al-Ash'arī's views as reported in the *Mujarrad maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī* of Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fūrak (d. 406/1015-16).⁵⁰³ Ibn Fūrak was a second generation Ash'arī thinker, who spent his scholarly career in Baghdad, Rayy, and Nishapur. He was familiar with al-Ash'arī's works and wrote a commentary on the *Kitāb al-Luma*.⁵⁰⁴ What follows is a summary of al-Ash'arī's teachings on the nature of God's Speech and its ontological relationship to the Arabic Qur'ān based on Ibn Fūrak's report.⁵⁰⁵

A-Ash'arī's reported definition of speech in general was that “speech is a meaning subsisting in the soul (*al-qā'im bi-l-nafs*), and not sounds and letters.”⁵⁰⁶ To support this idea, he quoted well-known poetry and Qur'ān verses where people are described as making statements internally within their minds or hearts. This theory of speech later became known as *kalām nafsī* (inner speech) but the reported views of al-Ash'arī lack a detailed elaboration of it. Ibn Fūrak only

⁵⁰² Ibid., 81-82.

⁵⁰³ For background information and a summary of this work, see Daniel Gimaret, “Un document majeur pour l'histoire de kalām: Le Muḡarrad Maqālat al-Aš'arī d'ibn Fūrak,” *Arabica* 32/2 (1985): 185-218.

⁵⁰⁴ Jan Thiele, “Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ash'arism (Fourth-Fifth/Tenth-Eleventh Century),” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁰⁵ Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 60-69. My colleague Rodrigo Adem is currently translating the entire text of Ibn Fūrak to English. He kindly gave me access to his draft translation, against which I compared my own translations. Nevertheless, all translations from Ibn Fūrak are my own.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 68.

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mentions al-Ash'arī's theory of speech in the latter portion of his report, well after his teachings about God's Speech. With respect to the latter, al-Ash'arī reportedly maintained that:

The Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) is His eternal attribute (*ṣifa qadīma*), always subsisting in His Essence (*bi-dhātihī*), and nullifying silence, muteness, and deficiency from it. It is neither sound nor letters nor connected to outlets or instruments. It is heard (*masmū'*) in reality by the one whom God causes to hear it and understood (*mafhūm*) by the one whom God causes to understand it and recognize its meaning.⁵⁰⁷

Since God's Speech transcends sounds, it is only God who causes a person to hear it or understand it. For example, God caused Moses to hear His Speech directly without any intermediary, by way of initiating hearing in Moses' mind and comprehension (*fahm*) in his heart. In the same way, God caused the Prophet Muhammad to hear His eternal Speech during his heavenly ascension (*mi'rāj*).⁵⁰⁸

The Eternal Speech and the Created Recitation:

For the generality of people, who are not specially favored by God to hear His Speech directly, “it is possible that it [the Speech of God] is heard with its expression (*'inda al-'ibāra*).... The expression is also heard (*masmū'a*) when it is perceived and the Speech of God is heard (*masmū'an*) with its [the expression's] hearing (*'inda samā'ihā*).”⁵⁰⁹ The expression (*al-'ibāra*) of the Speech of God is the same as what others call the “recitation” (*al-qirā'a*) – the Arabic sounds, letters, and words of the Qur'ān. The Divine Speech is uncreated and eternal while its expression or recitation is created (*makhlūq*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*). This means that the eternal Speech of God may be heard, meaning understood, when one hears the audible Arabic recitation

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

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of the Qur'ān. “The Speech of God is ‘what is Read’ (*al-maqrū'*) and ‘what is Recited’ (*al-matlū'*) with the temporal generation (*ḥudūth*) of the Reading (*al-qirā'a*) and the Recitation (*al-tilāwa*).”⁵¹⁰ These statements entail that the Speech of God and its expression or recitation are two ontologically distinct entities – even though the former is immanent and present in the latter.

Al-Ash'arī rejected the use of the terms “reproduction” (*ḥikāya*) or “utterance” (*lafẓ*) of God's Speech. The former term, *ḥikāya*, entails that someone produces a likeness (*mithl*) of God's Speech through creating an imitation or reproduction of it. But this is impossible because God's Speech, as an eternal attribute of God, cannot have any likeness (*mithl*).⁵¹¹ He rejected the term *lafẓ* because the linguistic meaning of this word conveys the sense of casting or spitting something out of the mouth. People only produce a *lafẓ* of what comes from themselves, so it is not appropriate or accurate to use this term for the Speech of God.⁵¹² Al-Ash'arī affirmed that the Speech of God is read (*maqrū'*) through the reading (*qirā'a*) of the readers, recited (*matlū'*) through the recitation (*tilāwa*) of the reciters, written (*maktūb*) through the writing (*kitāba*) of the writers, and memorized (*mahfūz*) through the memorization (*hifẓ*) of the memorizers.⁵¹³ The reading, recitation, writing, and memory are temporally generated and created, while the Speech of God is eternal. However, the Speech of God does not ontologically or spatially inhere *in* the physical substrate (*maḥall*) where the reading, recitation, writing, or memorization are located. For example, it is correct to say that the Speech of God is written in a physical tablet, but it does not exist or inhere in this physical tablet. If this were the case, it would entail an eternal attribute

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 61; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 315.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid., 62; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 317-318.

⁵¹³ Ibid, 62-63; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 316.

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inhering in a temporally generated object, which is impossible. In the same way, the Prophet Muhammad is said to be “written in the Torah” in the sense that he is described in the Torah, not that the Prophet himself physically exists in the Torah.⁵¹⁴

Al-Ash‘arī’s distinction between the uncreated eternal Speech of God and its created temporally generated expression or recitation framed his conception of the Arabic Qur’ān insofar as it consists of verbal linguistic sounds, letters, words, verses, and chapters and the issue of its miraculous qualities. The earliest Muslim scholars to put forth an argument that the Qur’ān cannot be imitated or matched by human beings include Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 230/845), al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869), and Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), although their renditions are far less developed than later versions of the argument. The detailed theories of the Qur’ān’s miraculous inimitability (*ijāz*) were articulated in the decades after al-Ash‘arī by scholars such as Abū l-Ḥasan al-Rummānī (d. 386/994) and Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 338/998).⁵¹⁵ Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām believed the Qur’ānic miracle was God’s act of deflecting (*ṣarf*) or preventing any of the Arabs from imitating the Qur’ān, which they otherwise could have done if left to their own devices. He also held that the miracle of the Qur’ān also lay in its containing hidden knowledge (*ghuyūb*). Some Mu‘tazilīs adopted this theory of “deflection” (*ṣarfa*) while many did not.⁵¹⁶ The majority of the theories on Qur’ānic inimitability centered upon the Qur’ān’s style and eloquence in terms of its verbal utterances (*alfāz*), meanings (*ma‘ānī*), and orderly arrangement (*naẓm*).⁵¹⁷ Al-Ash‘arī’s position

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 316.

⁵¹⁵ Sophia Vasalou, “The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur’an: General Trajectories and Individual Approaches,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 4/2 (2002): 23-53: 24.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 32.

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on the inimitability of the Qur'ān took form along these lines. Firstly, he believed that the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān is a quality of the created recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech and not the eternal Speech itself. In specific, the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) belongs to "its recitation initially without imitation or following [anyone else], just as the Prophet brought it, so the recitation of the Prophet is called inimitable according to this aspect." In other words, only the Prophet's initial and original recitation (*qirā'a*) of the Qur'ān is inimitable (not the recitations of those who recite it thereafter). As for the actual quality of inimitability, al-Ash'arī said that this consists of both the "eloquence of the orderly arrangement" (*faṣāḥa al-naẓm*) of the Qur'ān and its "reports of unseen matters", consisting of various information in the Qur'ān that the Prophet could not have known about himself, such as the accounts of prior Prophets.⁵¹⁸

Having strictly distinguished the eternal Speech of God from its Arabic recitation (*qirā'a*), Al-Ash'arī likewise differentiated between the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) and the Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*), the latter being the most pervasive name of the Qur'ān written in the codex. The former is the eternal divine attribute subsisting in God's Essence while the latter is that in which God's Speech is written. The chapters, verses, and other ways of dividing the Qur'ān apply to the Book of God and not to the Speech of God, since these are physical divisions. In this way, al-Ash'arī dismissed the arguments of the Mu'tazilis and Jahmis, who claimed that the Qur'ān's division into verses and chapters prove the createdness of God's Speech. Similarly, al-Ash'arī argued that the Speech of God in its Arabic expression and recitation is only called a *qur'ān* (reciting) because "some of its expressions are joined (*qurina*) with others and that the collection and the separation [of the Qur'ān] is [only] respect to the recitation (*al-qirā'a*) and does not pertain

⁵¹⁸ Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 63.

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to the Speech [of God].”⁵¹⁹ Additionally, he maintained that “the Speech of God is called a *qur'ān* (recitation) because it is recited in Arabic.”⁵²⁰ Thus, the term *qur'ān* refers primarily to the created and temporally generated expression and recitation of God’s Speech in the Arabic language and is not truly a designation of the eternal Divine Speech. In a similar fashion, al-Ash‘arī understood terms like Torah, Psalms, and Gospel as references to temporally generated expressions (*‘ibārāt*) of the Speech of God in various languages. Thus, God’s Speech – being eternal and non-verbal – is not at all identical to the Torah, Gospel, or Arabic Qur’ān with respect to their linguistic forms.⁵²¹

On the above points, al-Ash‘arī’s views on God’s Speech came very close to those of Ibn Kullāb. Both thinkers believed that God possesses eternal attributes which subsist in His Essence, while differing on their precise number (al-Ash‘arī has seven eternal attributes compared to Ibn Kullāb’s thirty attributes). Departing from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, both saw God’s Speech as a different attribute from God’s Knowledge. They each conceived the uncreated Speech of God subsisting in God’s Essence as the Revelatory Principle and distinguished it from its created “expression” (*al-‘ibāra*) or “recitation” (*al-qirā’a*); the latter being the Revelatory Product, which is the Arabic Qur’ān, the Hebrew Torah, and other divinely-revealed verbal discourses. Thus, God’s Speech and its expressions/recitations are two different entities; they remain ontologically and formally distinct. This is evidenced by al-Ash‘arī’s use of the qualifiers “eternal” (*qadīm*) for the Speech of God and “temporally generated” (*muḥdath*) for its expression or recitation; since nothing can be both eternal and generated, these two descriptions must refer to two different things. However,

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Ibid. Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 319.

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God's Speech is present and immanent through its expressions/recitations: their respective relationship is accordingly framed in terms of "what is recited" / "recitation, "what is written" / "writing", etc. But one important difference between Ibn Kullāb and al-Ash'arī was how they defined the nature and content of God's eternal Speech.

God's Speech as Command, Prohibition, and Information:

As seen earlier, Ibn Kullāb believed that God's Speech does not eternally consist of commands, prohibitions, and information; God does not command, forbid, and inform in eternity. God's Speech only becomes commands, prohibitions, and information when it takes a verbal linguistic expression on the basis of some cause or reason related to an address. This entails, for Ibn Kullāb, a unitary understanding of God's Speech as a simple attribute bereft of any kind of multiplicity in meanings. Al-Ash'arī departed from Ibn Kullāb on this very point, as did his successors. Al-Ash'arī felt that the idea of God's Speech existing in eternity without being command, prohibition, information, or interrogation, amounts to an unintelligible concept of Divine Speech that differs little from silence. In his view, any kind of speech (*kalām*) – human or divine – defined in this way amounts to silence despite consisting of various expressions.⁵²² On these grounds, al-Ash'arī held that God's eternal uncreated Speech is eternally and essentially a command, prohibition, information, and interrogation. This is perhaps one of the most subtle and difficult teachings in Ash'arī *kalām* theology.

Al-Ash'arī reportedly said that "the Speech of God is a speech in itself (*li-nafsihi kāna kalāman*), a speaking in itself (*li-nafsihi takallaman*), a command (*amran*), a prohibition

⁵²² Ibid., 67.

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(*nahiyyan*), an information (*khabran*), and an address (*khiṭāban*), and it is understood according to various aspects.”⁵²³ At the same time, he maintained that there is no multiplicity in God’s Speech: “The Speech of God is a single thing without partition or division; but it encompasses what is infinite in meaning.”⁵²⁴ In order to account for how God’s Speech can essentially be command, prohibition, and information concerning multiple things in eternity and yet still be one entity, al-Ash‘arī offered a somewhat complex explanation. As he maintained, the Speech of God is information in the sense that it informs people about anything for which it is appropriate to give information about and it never conveys misinformation. The actual information content of God’s Speech is immutable and unchanging even while the descriptions of this information content vary and change in expression according to the temporal states of the addressees of God’s Speech. For example, God’s Speech contains eternal information about something before it exists, as it exists, and after it no longer exists. The descriptions and expressions of this information content will vary: before the object being informed about exists, the information in God’s Speech is verbalized as an expression about the future – about something *that will be*; when the object exists, the information in God’s Speech is expressed through a statement about the present – about something *that is*; after the object has ceased to exist, the information is expressed through a statement about *what has occurred*. But, in all these cases, “the description differs according to its information with the variation of the state of what is reported about, while the information (*al-khabar*) is one in its essence (*wāhidan fī nafsihi*).”⁵²⁵ For example, if the Prophet reports that “Zayd will die tomorrow”,

⁵²³ Ibid., 65.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 67; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 319.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 66.

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then today, this information about Zayd's death prior to its occurrence is expressed in a certain manner. When today passes to tomorrow and the death of Zayd actually occurs, there is no change in the information (*al-khabar*) itself after the event, but the expression of the information will be different. There is only a change in what was reported about (*al-mukhbar*) and within the expressions of sounds and letters that express the information.⁵²⁶

On similar grounds, al-Ash'arī explained that God's Speech in its essence is always a command, prohibition, promise or threat in relation to certain individuals:

[God's Speech] in itself is a command to do everything that He is known to command, a prohibition from everything that He is known to prohibit, and its being a promise and a threat consists only in its informing about reward and punishment; it is a promise to those He knows will die upon faith and a threat to those He knows will die upon disbelief.⁵²⁷

To substantiate further his point that God's Speech is eternally and simultaneously command, prohibition, and information, al-Ash'arī compared the state of God's Speech to the state of God's Knowledge. God's Knowledge is a knowledge about many objects of knowledge, but it is one entity. Likewise, God has power over many objects of power but it is a single attribute. Despite al-Ash'arī's insistence that the information content of God's Speech pertains to many things while the Speech itself remains one and indivisible, it is difficult to pin down the precise nature of God's Speech in his thought. The above example of how the information in God's Speech can be expressed in multiple forms and different kinds of statements, i.e. past tense, present tense, future tense, means that there is no one-to-one semantic correspondence between the contents (commands, prohibitions, information) of God's Speech and the statements found in the Qur'ān or other revelatory discourses. For example, it is quite possible for an eternal command (i.e. the

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid. Thanks to David Vishanoff for his assistance in translating this passage.

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command to pray daily) in God's Speech to be expressed by multiple verbal expressions including imperative statements ("pray!") or informative statements ("prayer is enjoined at fixed times"). Likewise, it is possible for information in God's Speech to be expressed verbally as an imperative statement or as an informative statement. In other words, there is an ontological and hermeneutical gap between God's Speech and its verbal expressions as found in the Qur'ān because God's Speech is not simply identical to the semantic meaning of Qur'ānic statements. While al-Ash'arī does not go into the details of this problem, it would have important implications for Qur'ānic hermeneutics as we will see in Chapter 4.

The Revelatory Process: The Sending Down (*inzāl*) and Inspiration (*wahy*) of God's Speech

Al-Ash'arī's views, as noted above, entail that the uncreated Speech of God is the Revelatory Principle, which eternally comprises or encompasses every divine command, prohibition, information, and interrogation. As we also saw, the Revelatory Product is the Qur'ān as an Arabic recitation (*qirā'a*), and specifically, the recitation initially uttered by the Prophet Muhammad. This raises the question of how the eternal supra-verbal Divine Speech is manifested and revealed as its Arabic expression and recitation. On this issue, al-Ash'arī's views were reportedly as follows:

The meaning of "sending down of the Qur'ān" (*inzāl al-Qur'ān*) is "causing the [angelic] messenger to descend with it" (*inzāl al-rasūl bihi*) in the sense that he memorizes it in a high place (*'uluww*) and then conveys it in a low place (*sufū*). It is said that he "brought down the Qur'ān" (*nazzala al-Qur'ān*) according to the meaning that what he heard in a high place (*'uluww*), he conveyed in a low place.⁵²⁸

Al-Ash'arī's explanation seems to be directed to the literalist and spatial understandings of God's causing the Qur'ān to descend (*inzāl al-Qur'ān*) prevalent in *tafsīr* literature. As we saw earlier, the Sunni exegetes believed that the Qur'ān literally descended or was brought down as a material

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 65.

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text by Gabriel all at once from the Tablet to the lowest heaven and was subsequently communicated to the Prophet in installments. In this interpretation, these exegetes understood the Qur'ānic descriptions of *anzala* (causing to descend) and *nazzala* (sending down) in spatial terms. Al-Ash'arī, however, redefined and reinterpreted the spatial language of “descent”, taking expressions like *inzāl al-Qur'ān* (causing the Qur'ān to come down) to mean causing the angelic messenger (Gabriel) to memorize the Qur'ān at some higher level and convey it at a lower level. In this respect, the object of God's “causing to descend” is no longer the Divine Speech itself, but the angelic messenger, namely Gabriel. Al-Ash'arī further explained that the Qur'ānic expressions like “he brought down the Qur'ān” are meant in a figurative sense only. As he explained, when a person hears someone's speech in a high place on the earth and then comes down to a lower place and conveys this speech, it is common to say that “he brought down the message and the speech of such-and-such person. In reality, what descends is the messenger – [in] a descent of transformation and movement.”⁵²⁹ On this point, al-Ash'arī's view comes close to what is reported from Ibn Kullāb. We may recall that Ibn Kullāb's explanation that the meaning of *inzāl al-Qur'ān* (causing the Qur'ān to descend) is “causing it to be known (*al-i'lām bihi*)” and “causing it to be understood (*ifhāmihu*)” by the angel and the subsequent descent of the angel with what he understood of God's Speech.⁵³⁰ Al-Ash'arī's interpretation that it is the angel who literally “comes down” from a high plane to a lower plane, as opposed to God's Speech literally descending, appears to be inspired by Ibn Kullāb's position.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Risālat al-tibyān fī nuzūl al-Qur'ān* in *Majmū'a al-rasā'il al-kubra*, Vol. 1, 215. Ibn Taymiyya is reporting Ibn Kullāb's views.

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Al-Ash'arī also provided an explanation of how God's Speech can be communicated to a human being. In this case, he interpreted the qur'ānic terminology of *wahy/awḥā* in terms of several possible ways that such communication takes place:

The meaning of “inspiring [God's] Speech” (*īḥā' al-kalām*) is “causing it to be understood” (*ifhāmuhu*) and “casting” (*ilqā'*) its understanding and its hearing into the heart of the one who is inspired. This is possible in several ways: one of them is that He creates the expression (*al-'ibāra*) of His Speech and sets up an indication (*dalāla*) for the hearer that it is an expression (*'ibāra*) of His Speech, in order that he recognizes His Speech by means of it, and conveys it to the one he conveys it to with understanding, certainty, knowledge, and recognition. It is also possible that He creates writing in a tablet or in another specific body and connects it with a sign by which the one looking upon it recognizes that it is the writing of His Speech. Likewise, it is possible that it is specifying understanding through initiating recognition and hearing in the heart of the one he causes to understand it in order that he knows immediately what God intends by His address to him and the meanings of His Speech.⁵³¹

The precise modality of the inspiration (*wahy*) of God's Speech to human beings may vary. Al-Ash'arī considered several possibilities, albeit with some ambiguity on the details. These possible modes of the revelation of God's Speech include:

- a) God creates a verbal expression (*'ibāra*) of His Speech that the recipient physically hears along with a sign by which the recipient recognizes that what he heard is truly God's Speech.
- b) God “writes” His Speech in a tablet or a body – where His Speech is written in the form of an expression (*'ibāra*) as well accompanied by an indication by which the recipient recognizes; this seems to be the modality of the Sinaitic revelation to Moses.
- c) God enables and causes the recipient of His Speech to recognize His intent (*murād*) and the meaning of His Speech, by way of initiating understanding (*fahm*) and hearing in his heart: this seems to be the case mentioned earlier where God causes specially selected individuals like Moses and Muhammad during his heavenly ascent (*mi'rāj*) to hear and understand His Speech.

Al-Ash'arī evidently recognized multiple modalities of *wahy* or *ihyā'* to accompany his theory of God's Speech, each of which entail that God causes the recipient to recognize and understand His Speech. However, it is not clear which of the above modes applies to God's communication of His Speech to Gabriel and its subsequent rendering into the Arabic Recitation recited by Muhammad.

⁵³¹ Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 65. See also the short discussion in Gimaret, *La doctrine*, 320-321.

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Ibn Fūrak provided some more details on al-Ash'arī's understanding of the Revelatory Process in later discussion about God's reward and punishment. The passage below conveys al-Ash'arī's views on how the Prophet and Gabriel understood the meaning of certain ambiguous Qur'ānic expressions about reward and punishment which mention terms like “believers” or “unbelievers” whose precise scope of meaning is unclear. Al-Ash'arī believed that the meanings of such Qur'ānic passages were known to Gabriel and the Prophet and sought to explain how God communicated those meanings to them as follows:

The Messenger understood that [meaning] from Gabriel through recitations (*bi-qarā'in*)⁵³² combined with the address [of God], not through the address [of God] itself. As for Gabriel – it is possible that he understood those [meanings] from God through an initiation of understanding (*fahm*) He created for him; it is also possible that He made for him indicators (*dalāla*) that only point toward a single meaning and that he [Gabriel] understood His intent through those indicators; it is also possible that he had understood that through a linguistic indication (*bi-amāra*) of specific intimations (*kināya*)⁵³³ that He creates within a body or in another language in which there are specific words coined for full extension and verbal forms used for all-inclusiveness without homonymity (*bi-lā ishtirāk*).⁵³⁴

Al-Ash'arī was clear that the Prophet understood God's Speech by means of its Arabic recitations (*qarā'in*) dictated to him by Gabriel; the Prophet did not perceive God's Speech directly. This is the “verbal dictation” model seen earlier among Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition. However, al-Ash'arī was evidently undecided as to how Gabriel perceived God's Speech and its meanings. In the above passage, the first possibility is that God directly created the understanding (*fahm*) of His Speech within Gabriel; this corresponds to the third mode of revelation in the earlier passage. The second possibility is that God created indicators (*dalāla*) that Gabriel hears and through which Gabriel understands His Speech; this corresponds to the first mode of revelation in

⁵³² This could also be translated as “indicators”. The text itself is not clear on what the *qarā'in* mean.

⁵³³ On the term *kināya*, see Joseph Dichy, “Kināya”, in Lutz Edzard, Rudolf de Jong (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, Online Edition, 2011. Accessed 10/23/2018: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1570-6699_eall_eall_com_vol2_0073.

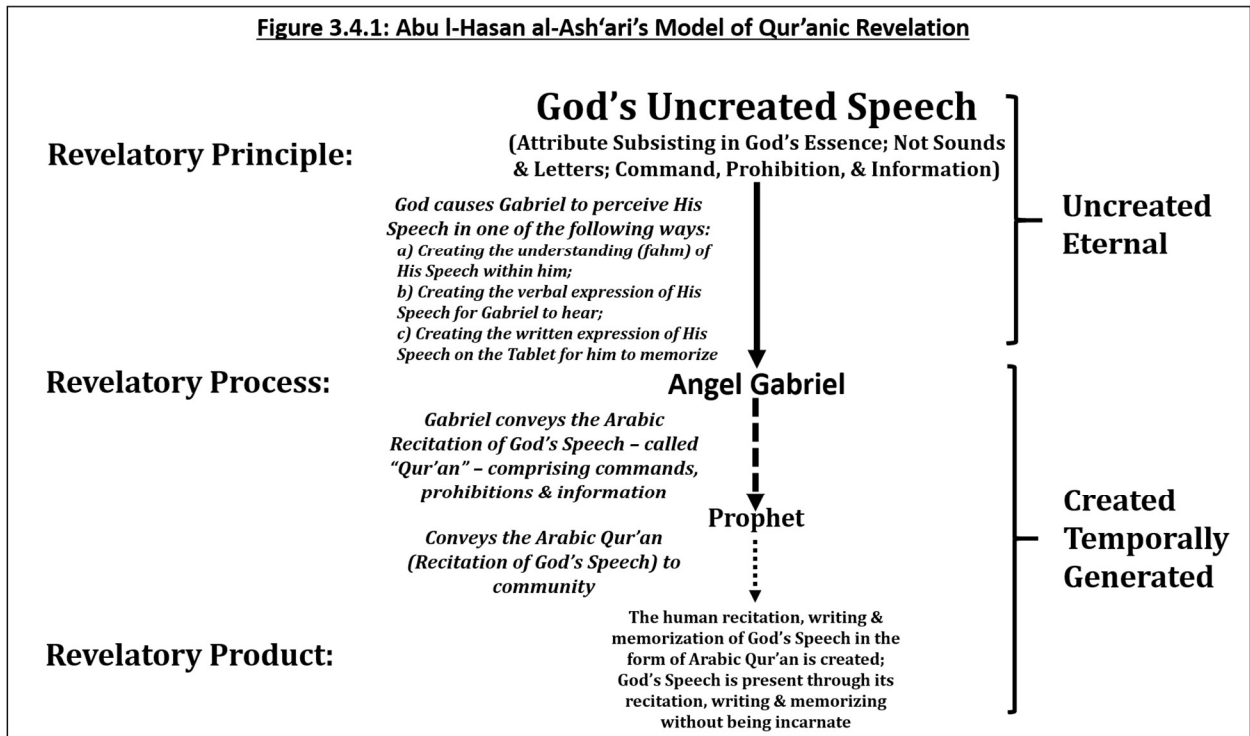
⁵³⁴ Ibid., 169. Special thanks to David Vishanoff who assisted in the translation of some difficult terms.

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the earlier passage. The third possibility is that God creates linguistic indication in a body by which Gabriel understands God's intent in a clear manner; this corresponds to the second mode of revelation in the earlier passage. It is conceivable that this latter case refers to God creating the Arabic Recitation (*qur'ān*) of His Speech within the Guarded Tablet. The only other place he mentioned the Guarded Tablet was in the general context of how the Speech of God is "written" (*maktūb*) in a physical locus without actually "inhering" within that place.⁵³⁵ It remains possible that when al-Ash'arī spoke of the angelic messenger memorizing the Speech of God at a high place (*'uluww*), the latter also refers to the Guarded Tablet. Even then, the role of the Guarded Tablet does not occupy a major stage in al-Ash'arī's vision of the Revelatory Process and represents, at best, one possible medium of Qur'ānic Revelation. Evidently, al-Ash'arī was open to other modes of revelation by which Gabriel comprehended the Speech of God. It was left to his successors to select from these possibilities in tailoring their own theories of revelation.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 62.

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In sum, al-Ash'arī's view on Qur'ānic Revelation represents a major development and milestone in *kalām* theology. He first developed the general idea of “speech in the soul” to ground the idea that speech need not take the form of sounds, a claim on which he based his concept of God's Speech. He incorporated some of Ibn Kullāb's contributions in his view of the Revelatory Principle as the eternal uncreated Speech of God subsisting in God's Essence; and in his ontological differentiation between the uncreated Speech and the created temporarily generated expressions (*al-ibārāt*) and recitations (*qirā'āt*), consisting of verbal linguistic sounds and letters, with the latter being the Revelatory Product. However, in a departure from Ibn Kullāb, al-Ash'arī maintained that God's Speech is eternally a command, prohibition, information, and interrogation – in that it is always one or more of these things for some addressee(s). In this respect, al-Ash'arī held that God's Speech is a unitary attribute encompassing multiple and infinite meanings in the same way that God's knowledge is one reality encompassing many objects of knowledge. Finally,

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al-Ash'arī, also incorporating Ibn Kullāb's teachings, interpreted the sending down (*inzāl*) and the inspiring (*ihyā'*) of God's Speech to mean "causing it to be known or understood" (*i'lām, ifhām*): Gabriel first understands God's Speech at a higher level, then descends to a lower level, and subsequently conveys the verbal linguistic recitation of God's Speech to the human recipient. This interpretation means that it was Gabriel who actually "descended" (*nazala*) and not God's Speech – which remains eternal, uncreated, and unmoved. However, al-Ash'arī offered three possible modalities of revelation by which God communicates His Speech to Gabriel without deciding firmly on any one of them.

Al-Ash'arī's ideas on Qur'ānic Revelation were seminal in the history of Islamic thought, as evidenced by the existence of the Ash'arī school of *kalām* theology. The central concepts and ambiguities in his teachings were further refined and interpreted by his successors, as will be seen later. At the same time, however, the problem of Qur'ānic Revelation was also being addressed by a group of thinkers based in Central Asia, the self-declared followers of Abū Ḥanīfa, whose ideas became the foundation of the Māturīdī school of *kalām* theology. Thus, before surveying subsequent developments in Ash'arī, Mu'tazilī, and Ḥanbalī theology, it is to these formative Ḥanafī thinkers that we now turn.

3.4.2 The Qur'ān is the Uncreated Speech of God Communicated through Created Letters: Early Ḥanafī and Māturīdī Positions (Fourth/Tenth Century)

In this section I examine some early Ḥanafī views on Qur'ānic Revelation as presented in third/ninth- and fourth/tenth-century sources. Several Ḥanafī scholars in this period professed doctrines and teachings prefiguring the later developed views of the Māturīdī school, which only emerged as a distinct school of *kalām* theology in the late fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth

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century.⁵³⁶ Thus, prior to this emergence, Ulrich Rudolph rightfully speaks of a “Ḥanafī theological tradition”, which was less of a school and more like an umbrella of diverse theological interpretations purporting to carry on the teachings of Abū Ḥanīfa. This Ḥanafī theological tradition was dominant in northeastern Iran and Transoxania from the second/eighth century onward. Early Ḥanafī scholars in this tradition included Abū Muqātil al-Samarqandī (d. 208/823) and Abū Muṭī al-Balkhī (d. 199/814). In the early fourth/tenth century, the Sāmānid rulers of Khurāsān and Transoxania adopted the doctrines of the eastern Ḥanafīs as their official religious position. This period also saw the career of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, at whose hands the Ḥanafī theological tradition was transformed, largely in part as the result of his consolidation of its teachings and his refutations of other theological schools.

Unlike the views of the Ash‘arīs and the Mu‘tazilīs, the early Ḥanafī and Māturīdī positions on the Qur’ān have hardly been studied; their inclusion is essential to provide a complete picture of how Muslims in this period understood Qur’ānic Revelation.⁵³⁷ Here I consider four Ḥanafī and Māturīdī sources: 1) the *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*, which Wensick dates to the lifetime of Ibn Ḥanbal, and which Peters estimates to be written around 210/825;⁵³⁸ 2) the *Fiqh Akbar II*, also attributed

⁵³⁶ Ulrich Rudolph, “Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism,” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). My introductory remarks on Ḥanafī theology are based on this chapter. See also Ulrich Rudolph, *Māturīdism and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, tr. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), for the latest and most comprehensive study of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī and his intellectual context.

⁵³⁷ During the latter phase of this dissertation, I became aware of a forthcoming chapter on this topic by my colleague Philip Dorroll. See “The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur’ān in the Māturīdī Tradition,” in Ögr Üyesi Muhammet Raşit Akpınar (ed.), *Matüridi Düşünce ve Matüridilik Literatürü* (Istanbul: Selçuk Üniversitesi, 2018), 123-140. Dorroll kindly provided me with the pre-publication draft of his chapter.

⁵³⁸ This is the dating given in Peters, *God’s Created Speech*, 334. See translation of the creed in A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 127. The full reference for this source is given below.

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to Abū Ḥanīfa, which Watt dates to 350/961;⁵³⁹ 3) The *Kitāb al-Sawād al-a'zam* of al-Ḥākim al-Samarqandī (d. 342/953), an authoritative and definitive Ḥanafī creed composed at the request of the Sāmānid court; and 4) al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* and *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, where he discusses his concept of God's Speech in his commentary on Q. 9:6 and Q. 69:40.⁵⁴⁰

Early Ḥanafī Creeds:

The *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa* offers an early Ḥanafī perspective on the nature of the Qur'ān as God's Speech. The translation based on the creed's text as it appears in a later commentary is as follows:

We say that the Qur'ān is the Speech of God, uncreated (*kalām Allāh ghayr makhlūq*), His inspiration (*waḥīyyuhu*) and His sending down (*tanzīluhu*). It is not He and not other than He. But rather, it is His attribute in reality, written in the codices, recited by the tongues, and preserved in the breasts, without residing in them. The ink, the paper, and the writing are all created because they are the acts of the servants, while the Speech of God is uncreated. This is because the writing (*al-kitāba*), the letters (*al-ḥurūf*), the words (*al-kalimāt*), and the verses (*al-āyāt*) are the indicators of the Qur'ān (*dalālat al-Qur'ān*) required by the servants, while the Speech of God subsists in His Essence (*qā'im bi-dhātihī*) and its meaning is understood by means of these things. Whoever says that the Speech of God is created is an unbeliever in God, the Sublime. God is worshipped eternally, and His Speech is “what is Recited”, “what is Written”, and “what is Memorized” without passing away from Him.⁵⁴¹

Although Wensinck and Peters date this statement to the mid-third/ninth century, some of the language suggests a fourth/tenth-century date. One noteworthy point of note is the opening phrase *bi-an al-Qur'āna l-kalāmu llāhi ghayru makhlūq* (the Qur'ān is the Speech of God, uncreated) – which seems to be a trademark “Ḥanafī phraseology” that continues among later Māturīdī thinkers

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 334. See translation of the creed in Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 188. The full reference for this source is given below.

⁵⁴⁰ The references for al-Māturīdī's works are given below. Another important Ḥanafī source is *al-'Aqīda al-Taḥāwīyya* (The Creed of Ṭaḥāwī) translated in W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 48-56.

⁵⁴¹ Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī al-Ḥanafī (d. 786/1384), *Sharḥ waṣīyyat al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfa*, ed. Muḥammad al-'Aydī, Ḥamza al-Bakrī (Amman: Dar al-Fath, 2009), 93. Cf. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 127, and Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 60.

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as we will see.⁵⁴² The description of God's Speech as an uncreated attribute (*ṣifa*) of God that "subsists in His Essence" (*qā'im bi-dhātihī*) seems to betray a Kullābī or an Ash'arī influence. Furthermore, the creed seems to differentiate the uncreated Speech of God from "the writing (*al-kitāba*), the letters (*al-ḥurūf*), the words (*al-kalimāt*), and the verses (*al-āyāt*)", which are called "indicators of the Qur'ān" (*dalālat al-Qur'ān*). However, the Ash'arī differentiation between God's Speech and its "expression" (*ibāra*) or "recitation" (*qirā'a*) is not present in this creed. Therefore, one must remain agnostic concerning the precise date of the *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*; it could even have originated in the fourth/tenth century, having incorporated Kullābī or Ash'arī ideas.

The *Fiqh Akbar II*, attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, but clearly composed after him, presents a fourth/tenth-century Ḥanafī viewpoint on God's Speech.

The Qur'ān is the Speech of God, written in the codices, preserved in the hearts, recited upon the tongues, and sent down upon the Prophet. Our utterance (*lafẓunā bi l-Qur'ān*) is created, our writing of it is created, and our recitation of it is created, while the Qur'ān is uncreated. What God mentioned in the Qur'ān, narrating about Moses and other Prophets, and about Pharoah and Iblīs – all of that is the Speech of God, informing about them. The Speech of God is uncreated while the speech of Moses and other creatures is created. The Qur'ān is the Speech of God and it is eternal unlike their speech. Moses heard the speech of God just as God said: "And God spoke to Moses in speech." God was [still] a speaker [even] when He was not speaking to Moses. God was a creator in eternity even while He was not creating the creatures. There is nothing like Him and He is the hearing, the seeing. When God spoke to Moses, He spoke to him with His Speech, which is His attribute in eternity.⁵⁴³

The positions in the *Fiqh Akbar II* represent a much more developed viewpoint on God's Speech than the *Waṣīyyat* quoted above. This creed specifies the terms "utterance" (*lafẓ*) of the Qur'ān and "recitation" (*qirā'a*) of the Qur'ān as being distinct from the Qur'ān *qua* uncreated Divine

⁵⁴² For more on this Ḥanafī phraseology, see Doroll, "The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur'ān in the Māturīdī Tradition." I have omitted page numbers to Doroll's chapter as I was provided with a pre-publication draft to read and cite from.

⁵⁴³ *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar II*, attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyya, 1342/1923), 5-6. Cf. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 188, and Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 62-68.

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Speech. The use of *lafz* differentiates the creed's Ḥanafī position from the view of al-Ash'arī, who clearly disapproved of this term. The phrase about God being a creator in eternity is also a trademark Ḥanafī position, as the Ḥanafīs and later Māturīdīs believed that God's attributes of action are eternal like His attributes of essence.⁵⁴⁴ At the same time, describing the utterance, recitation, and writing of the Qur'ān as “created” (*makhlūq*) and the Speech of God as “uncreated” comes close to al-Ash'arī views. However, this position is not framed in the same way as al-Ash'arī's idea. The key difference is specifying the utterance, writing, or recitation of the Qur'ān with the possessive pronoun, i.e. “our recitation”, suggesting that these things are created in the sense of being human acts. Meanwhile, al-Ash'arī, as we saw above, maintained a clear ontological distinction between God's Speech and its recitation, with the latter existing objectively independent of their human performance.

Al-Samarqandī's Position on Qur'ānic Revelation:

An important and highly influential Ḥanafī perspective on the Qur'ān is found in a creedal work written by Abū l-Qāsim Ishāq b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥākim al-Samarqandī (d. 342/953). This work, known as *Kitāb al-Sawād al-a'zam*, was composed at the behest of the Sāmānid governor of Transoxania and Khurāsān, Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad (r. 279-95/892-907). He had summoned the scholars of Samarqand, Bukhārā and other Transoxanian regions to compose a creedal work setting forth orthodox beliefs. Rudolph refers to this work as a “fixed catechism”, dually authorized by the 'ulāmā' and the ruler⁵⁴⁵ and described it as “a creed that would reflect the most important

⁵⁴⁴ On this point, see Rudolph, “Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism.”

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 99.

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theological doctrines of the Ḥanafīya on a popular level.”⁵⁴⁶ The work was subsequently translated into Persian, later obtaining a wide circulation.⁵⁴⁷ The text was translated by al-‘Omar in his 1974 doctoral dissertation, “The Doctrines of the Māturīdite School with Special Reference to As-Sawād al-A‘ẓam of al-Ḥakīm as-Samarqandī.”⁵⁴⁸ Two sections of the text, Article 12 and Article 40, are devoted to the Ḥanafī position on the Qur’ān.

In Article 12, al-Samarqandī required the believer to testify that “the Qur’ān is the Speech of God, uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*) because the Qur’ān is God’s Speech in reality, not figuratively.” God’s Speech was then defined as His uncreated attribute because anything whose attribute is created must also be created.⁵⁴⁹ Al-Samarqandī then proceeded to quote several prophetic traditions where the Prophet Muhammad is said to condemn belief in the createdness of the Qur’ān as unbelief. He also furnished statements attributed to his master Abū Ḥanīfa where he says that “the Qur’ān is the Speech of God, uncreated.”⁵⁵⁰ The author then attacked anyone who suspends judgment on the issue, refusing to say the Qur’ān is created or uncreated. Finally, al-Samarqandī added that “the books that God has revealed through His prophets from the time of Adam to the period of Muhammad are 104.”⁵⁵¹ After giving examples of these revealed books given to Adam, Seth, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad, he claimed that “all

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁴⁸ Farouq ‘Omar ‘Abd-Allah al-‘Omar, “The Doctrines of the Māturīdite School with Special Reference to As-Sawād al-A‘ẓam of al-Ḥakīm as-Samarqandī,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1974). The translation of the text, based on manuscripts, is on pp. 79-218, on which I rely for this section.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 113-116.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 117.

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of these books are the Speech of God and His attribute. They are uncreated. Whoever holds the view that a word of them is created is an unbeliever in God, and is called a Jahmite and Mu'ṭazlite.”⁵⁵² These statements, taken at face value, appear not too different from early Ḥanbalī views and the ideas of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal himself. They effectively identify the Revelatory Product, such as revealed Arabic Qur'ān and all other scriptures, with the Revelatory Principle – namely, the uncreated Speech of God. However, to identify straightforwardly the Qur'ān and all other revealed scriptures with God's uncreated attribute of Speech raises the question of how al-Samarqandī understands the linguistic sounds and letters of the Qur'ān (and other books), as well as the ink and paper they are written with. On such issues, al-Samarqandī's creed provides further details in Article 40.

In Article 40, al-Samarqandī required the believer to affirm that “what is written on the copies is really, and not figuratively, the Qur'ān, and that we really read it, and that it is really the Qur'ān which is among us, which we write on the copies, and which the children write on their slates.”⁵⁵³ The author elaborated on this by stating that the Angel Gabriel and the Prophet Muhammad delivered the Qur'ān to the community in reality and not figuratively; that the companions actually wrote this Qur'ān in their codices and that from God to the companions, it is the same Qur'ān being heard and conveyed. His overall point, stressed over and over, is that the Qur'ān written down or recited by the community is the same Qur'ān revealed through Gabriel and Muḥammad and that there is one Qur'ān, not two Qur'āns.⁵⁵⁴ This sort of argumentation seems

⁵⁵² Ibid., 118.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 155: ‘Then if that misguided one says, “What is written, and the letters are created, because I write it, and it is an indication of (*dāll 'alā*) the Qur'ān, therefore the real Qur'ān is concealed and as if the Qur'ān is one thing in reality, and another figuratively, so that there are two Qur'āns”, that is an absurdity.’

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to be directed at the Kullābī-Ash'arī distinction between the Speech of God and its created expression or recitation. The argument may also target the statements voiced in the *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa* examined earlier, that “the writing (*al-kitāba*), the letters (*al-ḥurūf*), the words (*al-kalimāt*), and the verses (*al-āyāt*) are the indicators of the Qur'ān (*dalālat al-Qur'ān*) required by the servants.” Later Ḥanbalī and Ḥanafī scholars did, in fact, accuse the Ash'arīs of believing in two Qur'āns.

Al-Samarqandī, even after affirming that one and the same Qur'ān is present in every place of writing and recitation, still had to address the theological status of the Qur'ān's sounds and letters; are they eternal or created? Does God speak with these sounds and letters? In the context of the Revelatory Process, al-Samarqandī presented a much more subtle and nuanced perspective in the following quotation:

But God gave utterance “without letters or syllables (*hijā*)”, while Gabriel (Jibrīl)⁵⁵⁵ heard it from God with both letters and syllables: and Gabriel recited it to Muḥammad with letter and syllables, and Muḥammad recited it to God's creatures with letters, and we recite it and write it in the same way. Know that that which we recite and write on the copies is the Qur'ān which Gabriel and Muḥammad recited, and which God uttered, neither more nor less by a single letter: and the paper upon which it is written, and the ink and the pen are all created, but what is written on the copies is the Qur'ān, uncreated, and he who says it is created is an unbeliever in God. So if anyone asks you, “Did God utter the Speech?”, say, “Of course!”, and if he says, “When did He utter it, or Where did He utter it, or How did He utter it, or How much did He utter?”, then say, “Without any When or Where or How or How much”. If he says, “In a subdued voice or in a loud voice?”, say, “Neither subdued nor loud”.⁵⁵⁶

So if anyone asks you if the Qur'ān is that which God uttered, or which Gabriel heard, or which Gabriel conveyed to (lit. cast into) the Prophet, or that which is written in the copies, or that which you yourself write, then you answer him as the jurists would answer him, and say to him: “God uttered without syllable after syllable, nor letter after letter, nor in a succession of time. God made Gabriel hear the Qur'ān, what is with Gabriel is the Qur'ān, what Gabriel brought down to Muḥammad is the Qur'ān, what Muḥammad recited to the people is the Qur'ān, and his Companions lengthened and shortened its letters.”⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ I have translated Jibrīl in his translation as “Gabriel” in all cases.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 154.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, 157-158.

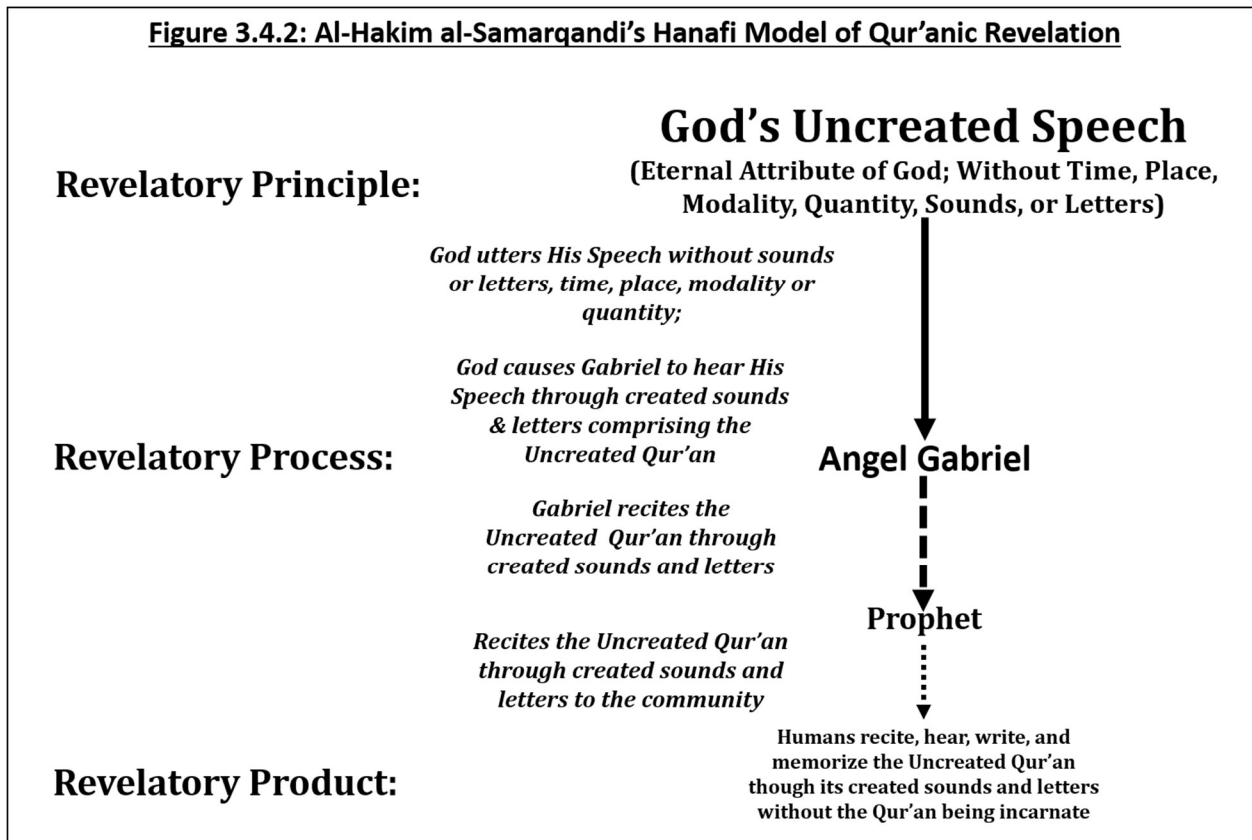
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Al-Samarqandī's exposition in Article 40, as quoted above, is extremely valuable in illuminating early Hanafī conceptions of Qur'ānic Revelation. Firstly, he writes that God's Speech is ultimately unknowable and mysterious: God speaks in a way that is beyond sounds and letters, time, and any kind of created quality (place, modality, quantity, volume). The approach here to the nature of Divine Speech is very much *bi-la-kayf*, an attitude found in the early Hanafī creeds. Then God caused Gabriel to hear His Speech through sounds and letters. What Gabriel heard was the Qur'ān and this Qur'ān is ontologically identical to God's Speech. Gabriel then recited the Qur'ān to Muhammad through sounds and letters, who in turn recited it to his companions and creatures in general. It is the same Qur'ān, the Speech of God, that people recite and write down, even while the pen, ink, and paper is created. However, at the same time, what al-Samarqandī says above clearly implies that the Qur'ān recited by Gabriel, Muhammad, and all people through sounds and letters, is formally distinct from the supra-verbal Speech that God utters; formally distinct because the creatures only hear and recite the Qur'ān through sounds and letters while God does not utter sounds and letters. Al-Samarqandī evidences this formal distinction when he says that "his Companions lengthened and shortened its letters." In the next section, he expands on this point: "Do you not see that a man says that such-a-one makes his recital (*tilāwa*) long-drawn-out, and such-a-one lightens the recital? For whether he lengthens, shortens or lightens the recital, it is all of it the Speech of God."⁵⁵⁸ Al-Samarqandī, therefore, admits that the "recital" (*al-tilāwa*) of the Qur'ān can be lengthened or shortened or otherwise modified by humans – without this causing any change in the Qur'ān's status as the Speech of God. This suggests that the sounds and letters by which humans recite, write, and hear the Qur'ān are created and accidental (and not essential)

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

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to the Speech of God. Nevertheless, this formal distinction here does not imply ontological distinction: there is but one Qur'ān. The Qur'ān as recited and written is ontologically identical to the uncreated Speech of God, while being formally distinct with respect to the sounds and letters. To state the idea differently, al-Samarqandī's view is that the semantic meaning of the Qur'ān's words, verses, and chapters is God's eternal uncreated Speech while the sounds, letters, and syllables by which humans hear and vocalize this meaning are created.



It is important to note the difference here between Ibn Kullāb's and al-Ash'arī's view of God's Speech and al-Samarqandī's Ḥanafī view, as they may be easily confused. The main difference is this: Ibn Kullāb and al-Ash'arī held that the uncreated Speech of God and its created verbal expression or recitation in Arabic (or any language) – consisting of the sounds, letters,

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words, verses, and chapters are ontologically and formally distinct; they are two different entities that respectively warrant the description *qadīm* and *muḥdath*. Al-Ash'arī's view of this distinction means that even the verbal semantic meaning of a Qur'ānic statement is not identical to the command, prohibition, or information that the statement expresses in God's Speech. We saw this earlier with the example of informative statements in the Qur'ān and how the same eternal information content could be expressed through varying created expressions. At the same time, al-Ash'arī still affirmed the creedal formula that the Speech of God is truly read (*maqrū'*), recited (*matlū*), written (*maktūb*), and memorized (*maḥfūz*) through its reading (*qirā'a*), recitation (*tilāwa*), writing (*kitāba*), and memorization (*ḥifz*) – based on his idea that God's Speech is immanently present in its created expressions. Meanwhile, al-Samarqandī believed that God's uncreated Speech, which transcends sounds and letters and eludes all physical qualities, is ontologically identical – at the level of meaning – to the Qur'ān that is recited and written, even while the Qur'ān's sounds and letters are created. Thus, al-Samarqandī admitted a formal distinction between the Qur'ān as God's supra-verbal Speech and the Qur'ān's sounds and syllables. However, this formal distinction concerns only the sounds and letters, which are accidental aspects of the Qur'ān subject to change, like the shortening or lengthening of a recitation. In general, al-Samarqandī's position seems to fall midway between the Ḥanbalī view that the Qur'ān in its sounds and letters is uncreated and the Kullābī-Ash'arī position.

Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī on God's Speech:

Finally, it is important to consider al-Māturīdī's views on the Speech of God. His remarks on this topic, which are not very detailed, can be found in his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, a highly important and influential *kalām* work, and his Qur'ān commentary. The *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* actually marked a

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watershed moment in the development of Ḥanafī theology, because al-Māturīdī structured it differently from prior Ḥanafī theological writings. In its order of topics, he followed the framework of Mu'tazilī *kalām* texts, which begins with epistemology, proceeds to physics, and then goes through the proofs of God, the divine attributes, and arguments for Muhammad's prophecy, before engaging further theological issues. With respect to metaphysics, al-Māturīdī held views that differed from other *kalām* theologians, whose general positions were summarized at the start of this section. Al-Māturīdī believed that corporeal beings were composed of "natures" (heat, cold, moisture, dryness) – an idea that most *kalām* theologians did not subscribe to. For al-Māturīdī, God has two kinds of eternal attributes – attributes of essence and attributes of action. Thus, he considered God's unity, freedom, power, will, knowledge, and power of creation (*takwīn*) as real eternal attributes, along with God's wisdom and justice. Unlike the Ash'arīs, who held that God acts in a voluntaristic manner independent of human valuations of goodness and justice, al-Māturīdī held that God is always just and "puts everything in its (right) place" – a position closer to Mu'tazilī ideas.⁵⁵⁹

In one section of his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī discussed his concept of God's Speech. He argued that God's Speech is an eternal and uncreated divine attribute based on revelation and intellectual proofs. On the former, he quoted various qur'ānic verses mentioning God speaking to Moses or God's speech to human beings (Q. 42:51). From a rational standpoint, he argued that if God is powerful and knowing, then He must also be a speaker; maintaining otherwise implies that God is either hindered from speaking or incapable of it – a claim which negates God's knowledge

⁵⁵⁹ Rudolph, "Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism."

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and power.⁵⁶⁰ In this section, al-Māturīdī briefly discussed how God's Speech itself cannot be "heard" by creatures. Instead, God creates an audible medium for creatures to hear, through which they gain access to His eternal Speech: "He causes us to hear His Speech through what is other than His Speech, just as He caused all others among us to hear His Speech...He caused Moses to hear it through the language of Moses and the letters He created and the sound He constructed, so He caused him to hear what is not created."⁵⁶¹ Thus, al-Māturīdī's took the position that God's creatures cannot hear His Speech directly without the medium of linguistic sounds and letters. This view has important implications for al-Māturīdī's view of the Qur'ān as God's Speech, which are explored in his *tafsīr*.

We can find more forthcoming remarks from Māturīdī on the topic of Divine Speech within his Qur'ān commentary. In his exegesis of Q. 9:6, "If the idolater seeks your protection, grant him a place of safety until he hears the Speech of God," al-Māturīdī reiterated his position that God's Speech cannot be heard in its essence; what the idolater hears as he hears the Qur'ān are only the letters, which point to God's Speech: "The reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the Speech [of God] is not heard through the speech itself (*bi-kalām nafsihi*) since it is what the letters of speech point to, with [respect to] what orders the letters and combines them, and it [God's Speech] does not have sound that is heard."⁵⁶² The person who hears the Qur'ān recited only hears the letters, not God's Speech directly. Nevertheless, the letters that one hears are still connected to God's Speech, in that they indicate it and serve as the intermediary by which the latter is perceived: "Hearing pertains to the

⁵⁶⁰ Abū Mansūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, ed. Bekir Topaloglu, Muhammad Aruci (Istanbul: Maktaba al-Irshād; Beirut: Dār al-Ṣadir, 2001), 120.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁵⁶² Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr al-Māturīdī*, Vol. 5, 301.

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sound by which one perceives and understands the Speech. So the hearing of the Speech [of God] is according to the principle of metaphor, not reality.”⁵⁶³ Thus, in al-Māturīdī's view, when the Qur'ān mentions someone “hearing” God's Speech, it is speaking only metaphorically.

This interpretation was further emphasized in the al-Māturīdī's commentary on Q. 69:40, “It is the word of an honorable messenger.” In this section, he again quoted Q. 9:6 and offered more commentary. Once again, seeking to explain why the Qur'ān speaks of someone hearing the Speech of God, al-Māturīdī stated that:

The root-principle (*al-aṣl*) is that the Speech (*al-kalām*) and the Word (*al-qawl*) [of God] are not heard; what is heard of them is only the sound by which the Speech and the Word [of God] are recognized, and which points to it. It is not [the case] that His Speech in reality is His sound. Thus, this Qur'ān is also related to the Speech of God because it points to His Speech, not because it [the Speech of God] is heard in reality.⁵⁶⁴

The above comment, consistent with his remark in *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, discloses al-Māturīdī's distinctive view of the Qur'ān vis-à-vis God's Speech. It is evident that he regarded the Qur'ān's words, letters, and sound as that which indicates toward God's Speech, and not as God's Speech itself; hence, his statement that God's Speech is not heard in reality. One could extend his position to the recitation, writing, and memorization of the Qur'ān as well – that humans recite, write, and memorize God's Speech metaphorically and not literally. Although al-Māturīdī does not spell it out this way, the implication of his statements is that the Speech of God is ontologically and formally distinct from the Qur'ān *qua* sounds and letters. The relationship between them is that the Qur'ān *qua* sound and letters are what creatures actually hear and these are the indicators of God's Speech, which may be understood but not heard in reality.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., Vol. 5, 302.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., Vol. 10, 189.

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Al-Māturīdī's ideas continued among his students and early proponents of what would later be called the Māturīdī tradition of *kalām* theology. One of the more famous of al-Māturīdī's students was Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-'Iyāḍī (d. ca. late fourth/tenth century), the son of Abū Nāsr al-'Iyāḍī, who was the teacher of al-Māturīdī himself. Al-'Iyāḍī's position on the Qur'ān as God's Speech is found in a short creedal work titled *Al-Masā'il al-'Ashr al-'Iyāḍīyya*, in which he states: "The Qur'ān is the Speech of God and the Speech of God is uncreated and not contingent."⁵⁶⁵ This is the trademark Ḥanafī phraseology seen in the Ḥanafī creed *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa* examined earlier. What is important about this phrasing is that the direct claim, "the Qur'ān is uncreated" found in Ḥanbalī and Ash'arī discourses, is avoided; rather, the Qur'ān is first identified as the Speech of God and then the Speech of God is properly described as uncreated. The formulation effectively places a theological "distance" between the Qur'ān and what is "uncreated".⁵⁶⁶ This may seem like an overly subtle distinction but later Māturīdī thinkers relied upon this phrasing to elucidate their theology of the Qur'ān as God's Speech.

An example of such elaboration is found in the *Jumal uṣūl al-dīn* of Abū Salama Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (ca. second half of the fourth/tenth century), who was the student of a student of al-Māturīdī. In this work, Abū Salama stressed the difference in terminology between the words *qur'ān* and *kalām Allāh* as follows: "It is permissible that what is in the physical codices (*maṣāḥif*) of the Qur'ān and the breasts of people be called 'Qur'ān' and the Speech of God in the sense of what is understood from the meaning [of the written words], not

⁵⁶⁵ Quoted in Dorroll, *The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur'ān in the Māturīdī Tradition.*"

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

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in the sense that it [the written word] is [the Speech of God] in reality (*fī l-tahqīq*).”⁵⁶⁷ In this statement, Abū Salama clearly differentiated the Speech of God “in reality” from the recited, written, or memorized form of the Arabic Qur’ān. The term *qur’ān* by itself, in his view, only seems to designate the Arabic Qur’ān *qua* words while the term Speech of God designates the meaning of the Qur’ān’s words *qua* God’s eternal attribute. Abū Salama compared the difference between the Qur’ān’s recited, written, or memorized format and God’s Speech in reality to the difference between the written word “Allāh” inscribed on a page and Allah Himself: there is certainly no sense that Allah essentially dwells on the physical page. Again, in positing this ontological difference between the Arabic Qur’ān and God’s Speech, Abū Salama was following the lead of al-Māturīdī himself.

The above analysis showcases two major approaches to the Qur’ān as God’s Speech that existed among fourth/tenth-century Ḥanafī theologians including al-Māturīdī himself. The *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfa*, *Fiqh Akbar II*, and al-Ḥākim al-Samarqandī’s creed all explicitly identify the Qur’ān as God’s Speech in a real (and not metaphorical) sense and assert that creatures indeed hear God’s Speech in reality; still, they make a formal but not ontological distinction between God’s Speech as spoken by God and the human recitation/writing/memorization of the Qur’ān. Meanwhile, al-Māturīdī’s ideas of God’s Speech differed not only from the Ḥanbalīs and Ash‘arīs, but his views diverged from other Ḥanafīs of his time as well. Al-Māturīdī emphasized the ontological difference between the Qur’ān’s audible sounds and the supra-verbal Speech of God. In al-Māturīdī’s view, humans hear created sounds and letters in reality and only hear God’s Speech metaphorically and not literally; this general idea of ontological distance between the

⁵⁶⁷ Quoted in *ibid.* I have made minor adjustments to the translation.

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Arabic Qur'ān and the Speech of God was also asserted by his successors al-'Iyādī and Abū Salama. This actually brings al-Māturīdī's views closer to those of al-Ash'arī, although differences still remain. It remains to be seen whether the Māturīdī theologians of the following century strictly followed al-Māturīdī's ideas on God's Speech or picked up other Ḥanafī and non-Ḥanafī positions.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

While the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition conceived the ontology and revelation of the Qur'ān in terms of a pre-existent written scripture, the Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*), sent down from the heavens and then dictated to the Prophet in installments, early Sunni *kalām* discussions on Qur'ānic Revelation moved along a different trajectory. Beginning sometime in the late second/eighth century, proto-Sunni traditionists and *kalām* theologians began debating the nature of the Qur'ān in its oral recitational format in terms of the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), not as the Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*). In other words, the focus shifted from the Qur'ān's existence among the community as a closed written text to its oral recitation and ontology in relation to God. One of the early positions among Qur'ān exegetes and proto-Sunni traditionists was that God's Words (*kalimāt Allāh*) mentioned in the Qur'ān refer to the Knowledge of God. There were also early attestations that the Qur'ān was from or identical to God's Knowledge. In other words, the Qur'ān and God's Speech more generally were conceptualized in relation to God's Knowledge – which is a direct development from the Qur'ānic idea of the Arabic *qur'āns* as manifestations of the Transcendent Kitāb of God's knowledge, degrees, records, and guidance.

The many contending positions about the status of the Qur'ān over the second and third centuries included the claims that God does not speak at all and merely creates sounds that Prophets hear (Ja'd and Jahm); that the Qur'ān is theologically distinct from God but higher than His

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creatures (Imam al-Bāqir, Imam al-Ṣādiq, Hishām b. Ḥakam); that the Qur'an is God's Speech which issues from God and returns to Him (proto-Sunni traditionists); that the Qur'ān is God's uncreated eternal Speech and Knowledge (Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal); that God created His Speech consisting of the Arabic Qur'ān as a body or an accident (early Mu'tazilīs); and that God's Speech is an uncreated distinctive attribute that subsists in God's Essence (Ibn Kullāb). A second issue stemming from these early positions was the question of how the Qur'ān that humans recite, hear, write, and memorize is related to the Speech of God (whether it is uncreated or created). In other words, this was the question of how the Qur'ān in the form of a verbal linguistic Revelatory Product recited by humans relates to its Revelatory Principle. This issue was also met with a variety of answers including the affirmation that the Qur'ān recited, heard, written, and memorized by humans is identical to God's Speech (proto-Sunni traditionists, Abu l-Hudhayl, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal) and the view that what humans actually recite, hear, write, and memorize of Arabic sounds and letters is a reproduction (*ḥikāya*), expression (*'ibāra*), impression (*rasm*), or recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech (the two Ja'fars, al-Nazzām, Ibn Kullāb, respectively). The third issue, although implicit in these early debates, was the nature of the Revelatory Process. Ibn Ḥanbal's positions, based on several *ḥadīths*, entailed that God recites His uncreated Speech in Arabic, which Gabriel hears and dictates to the Prophet. The early Mu'tazilīs understood either that God created a pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet, from which Gabriel dictated it to Muhammad (two Ja'fars, Abū l-Hudhayl); that God created the Qur'ān in the air whence Gabriel dictated it to Muhammad (al-Nazzām); or that God creates a capacity within Gabriel or Muhammad to utter the Qur'ān (Mu'ammār). Meanwhile, Ibn Kullāb reportedly believed that the Angel Gabriel played a key role in understanding God's unitary uncreated Speech and rendering it into the Arabic Qur'ān dictated to Muhammad, although his precise views on this remain unknown.

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In the fourth/tenth century, more theologians took up these debates and synthesized some of the aforementioned ideas into new positions. Most prominent among them were al-Ash'arī, al-Samarqandī, and al-Māturīdī. Al-Ash'arī's contributions were so influential that they gave rise to an entire theological tradition after him. His theological views in general and his ideas of Qur'ānic Revelation in particular were greatly indebted to Ibn Kullāb. Like the latter, al-Ash'arī affirmed that the Revelatory Principle is God's uncreated Speech – a divine attribute eternally subsisting in God's Essence; he also regarded specific verbal linguistic manifestations of God's Speech, these being the Revelatory Products like the Arabic Qur'ān or the Hebrew Torah, as created expressions (*'ibārāt*) and recitations (*qirā'āt*) of the Speech of God. He differed with Ibn Kullāb in holding that God's Speech itself was eternally comprised of commands, prohibitions, and information, which were then revealed through created diverse expressions in the scriptures in order to speak to specific contexts. Like Ibn Kullāb, al-Ash'arī affirmed the presence or immanence of God's Speech with or through its human recitation, hearing, writing, and memorization while maintaining that these are all created and that God's Speech never inheres within a material created substrate. In other words, the Revelatory Principle remains ontologically distinct from the Revelatory Product while being immanently present through it. In terms of the Revelatory Process, al-Ash'arī specified three modes by which God reveals His Speech to human beings – creating an auditory expression (*'ibāra*) that the recipient hears, inscribing it as created writing upon a body or tablet, or inspiring a person through their heart to recognize His intent. Al-Ash'arī was undecided as to which of these three modes applies to God's communication of His Speech to Gabriel; but he did believe that Gabriel dictated the Arabic Recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech to Muhammad.

Meanwhile al-Samarqandī and al-Māturīdī worked within an existing Ḥanafī theological tradition and devised positions of their own. Al-Samarqandī wrote the highly influential *Kitāb al-*

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Sawād al-a'zam in which he asserted that the Qur'ān is God's uncreated attribute of Speech. However, he maintained that God uttered His Speech as something beyond temporal or material qualities and beyond sounds and letters and then caused Gabriel to hear the Divine Speech through sounds and letters. Gabriel then conveyed God's Speech through sounds and letters – this being the Arabic Qur'ān – to the Prophet who, in turn, recited it to the community. While al-Samarqandī affirmed that the sounds and letters in the recitation (*tilāwa*) of the Qur'ān are created, he did not go as far as to say that the recitation, writing, or memorization of God's Speech is created. He maintained that even with people lengthening or shortening its sounds or letters, the Arabic Qur'ān remains the Speech of God. Thus, al-Samarqandī ontologically identified the Revelatory Principle, God's uncreated Speech, with the Revelatory Product, the Arabic Qur'ān, while maintaining a formal distinction between them, since the Arabic Qur'ān is only perceived by humans through created sounds and letters. Finally, al-Māturīdī's views on the Qur'ān as God's Speech, while not very detailed, are also noteworthy; he too understood God's Speech as His uncreated attribute. Like other Ḥanafīs, al-Māturīdī held that God's Speech can only be understood by human beings by means of sounds and letters. But he maintained that God's Speech is only heard metaphorically not literally, since humans can only hear sounds and letters.

These interpretations of Qur'ānic Revelation in early Sunni *kalām* theology invite comparisons with the Qur'ānic concept of revelation analyzed in Chapter 1 and classical Sunni *tafsīr* models of Qur'ānic Revelation examined in Chapter 2. We saw in Chapter 2 how early second/eighth-century Muslim understandings of the Qur'ān envisaged it as a closed scripture and reduced the multivalent and hierarchical Qur'ānic concepts of *kitāb* and *kitāb Allāh* to the scripturalized Qur'ān of the codex. This understanding led to theories of Qur'ānic Revelation in classical Sunni *tafsīr* entailing the spatial descent of the Qur'ān as a complete text via transcription

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and dictation from heaven to the earth. The concepts of Qur'ānic Revelation in early Sunni *kalām* theology represent a partial return or restoration of certain features from the earliest qur'ānic concept of revelation. For example, the theological focus on the Qur'ān's recitational form as God's Speech instead of its codified form as God's Book is a return to conceiving the Qur'ān primarily as an oral discourse. Ontologically speaking, the Speech of God takes priority over the Book of God. According to the view of al-Ash'arī, for example, the Book of God is a created locus where God's Speech is written in the form of its created expression: the various divisions of the Qur'ān into verses, chapters, sections, etc. – divisions that evidence createdness – pertain to God's Book and not to God's Speech. The Guarded Tablet as the locus of a written pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān – so prominent in Sunni *tafsīr* models of Qur'ānic Revelation – does not play an important role in how Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Ibn Kullāb, al-Ash'arī, or the Ḥanafī and Māturīdī scholars understand the Revelatory Process of God's Speech; at most, the Guarded Tablet is one of the many places where God's Speech may be written in the form of a created expression. Furthermore, the theological idea of God's Speech as the Revelatory Principle directly correlates with the qur'ānic concept of the Transcendent Kitāb revealed in and through the Arabic recitations as shown in Chapter 1. Likewise, the ontological distinction that certain Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī and Māturīdī *kalām* theologians made between God's Speech and the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* recitation, writing, and memorization parallels the qur'ānic distinction between the Transcendent Kitāb and the Arabic *qur'āns*.

Further developments in the Sunni *kalām* doctrines of God's Speech within the classical Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, Ḥanbalī, and Māturīdī schools took place in the following century. In these fifth/eleventh-century models, the above *kalām* positions on Qur'ānic Revelation were further

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refined and substantiated in the course of inter-*kalām* debates, a sample of which we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: The Created and Uncreated Speech of God: Qur'ānic Revelation in Classical Sunni *Kalām* Theology (Fifth/Eleventh Century)

4.0 Introduction

In this Chapter, I comparatively examine the mature and developed views of Qur'ānic Revelation among prominent Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, Ḥanbalī, and Mātūrīdī theologians of the fifth/eleventh century. I argue that these theologians presented highly refined and systematized models of Qur'ānic Revelation that were formed through mutual debate and conversation. I show that these refinements and developments primarily consisted of: 1) the systematic definition of God's Speech as the Revelatory Principle based upon a more general definition of speech, which served as the premise for a doctrine of Uncreated Divine Speech or Created Divine Speech; 2) a detailed account of the Revelatory Process that outlines the specific role of the Angel Gabriel in mediating the manifestation of the Revelatory Principle in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet; 3) a more lucid delineation of the ontological distinction and relationship between the Revelatory Principle and the Arabic Qur'ān consisting of sounds and letters; 4) an account of the hermeneutical principles through which the Arabic Qur'ān must be interpreted for legal purposes – the contents of which differ depending on which Qur'ānic Revelation model the theologian subscribed to. I also show how several Muslim thinkers including al-Shāfi'ī (d. 205/820), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1072), al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) conceived the Prophetic Sunna as a Revelatory Product of a parallel Revelatory Process and framed both the Qur'ān and the Sunna as revelatory expressions of God's Speech.

The teachings of al-Ash'arī and al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) exerted considerable influence upon all of these discussions: Ḥanbalī theologians like Abū Ya'lā (d. 458/1066), even when

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formulating their own positions, did so using Ash'arī frameworks; 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) addressed many of his Mu'tazilī arguments to Ash'arī objections; the Ash'arī thinkers al-Juwaynī and al-Ṣiqillī (d. 493/1100) further developed their predecessors' teachings; Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (d. 505/1115) incorporated several Ash'arī teachings into his Māturīdī positions. Amongst these discussions, the Ash'arī position and the Māturīdī position accorded special agency to the Angel Gabriel in rendering God's uncreated non-verbal Speech into the Arabic Qur'ān comprised of sounds and letters. All the Sunni *kalām* theologians of this period also espoused Qur'ānic Revelation models that diverge with Sunni *tafsīr* models – most apparently in their exclusion of the doctrine of the pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet. As a whole, this chapter offers an original contribution to the study of Qur'ānic Revelation in classical Sunni *kalām* theology because many of the theological doctrines explored below have yet to be examined in modern scholarship. But first, it is necessary to first outline the socio-political situation in the Abbasid areas where most of these theologians were active.

4.1 The Socio-Political Context of Fifth/Eleventh-Century Sunni *Kalām* Theology

Regions like Baghdad and Khurāsān in the fifth/eleventh century were a hotbed of intra-Muslim debate and theological disagreement. The consolidation of Sunni Islam in terms of theology, jurisprudence, and spiritual practice had not yet taken place. Instead, the milieu was characterized by an intellectual dynamism where multiple legal and theological traditions vied for legitimacy. What is often called Islamic “orthodoxy” was still up for grabs and Shi'i Islam posed a formidable challenge:

In Khurasan, as elsewhere, there was a wide range of Islamic thought and a variety of paths to religious recognition. Not only did Shi'ism pose a threat to unity, but within Sunni Islam there was no consensus on what constituted normative Islam. In this fluid period there was no agreement on

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which of the existing styles of Islam was canonical and competition and strife were common between different factions.⁵⁶⁸

Islamic theology in fifth/eleventh century was not merely an academic and intellectual endeavor. Theological debates, especially those concerning the nature of the Qur'ān, were embedded in political, social, and communal divisions; at the same time, certain socio-political conflicts and power maneuvers were often enacted and presented with theological overlay. We see this at the beginning of the eleventh century during the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Qādir. The chronological lead up to these conflicts was the instability of the Abbasid Caliphate through the fourth/tenth century. The first half of the tenth century saw a rapid succession of Abbasid Caliphs, leading to the establishment of the Buyid Amirate. The Buyid *amīrs*, being a Shi'ī family based in northern Iran, retained the Abbasid Caliph as a powerless figurehead and as a tool for their own symbolic legitimacy. Clearly symptomatic of this political situation was how al-Qādir was installed as Caliph in 381/991 after the Buyids deposed his cousin. However, al-Qādir's reign proved to be a turning point for the ideological reconstruction of the Sunni Caliphate and the Caliph's emergence as the spokesman of Sunni Islam. Al-Qādir accomplished this by aligning himself with the Ḥanbalī school of law and enforcing Ḥanbalī theological beliefs, while condemning Shi'ī, Ash'arī, and Mu'tazilī positions.⁵⁶⁹

Several Shi'ī Ismaili incursions into Abbasid territory at the social, religious, and political levels seemed to have urged the Caliph to take these actions. The Fatimid Ismaili *da'wa* (summons)

⁵⁶⁸ Margaret Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan: The Karramiyya in Nishapur," *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 37–51: 38.

⁵⁶⁹ Shainool Jiwa, "The Baghdad Manifest (402/1011): A Re-Examination of Fatimid-Abbasid Rivalry," in Farhad Daftary, Shainool Jiwa (eds.), *The Fatimid Caliphate: Diversity of Traditions* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2018), 22-79: 36-37. This is the latest article focusing on the Fatimid ideological, social, and political incursions into the heartland of the Abbasid empire in the eleventh century.

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was active throughout Abbasid domains to the great chagrin of the emerging Sunni establishment. There had even been diplomatic exchanges between the Buyid 'Aḍud al-Dawla and the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-'Azīz bi'llāh around 367-368/977-978. Iraq was a major center of the Ismaili *da'wa* and the chief Ismaili *dā'ī* Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020) was active in the region in the fifth/eleventh century. Despite being in the heart of Abbasid territory, al-Kirmānī made a concerted effort to convince the Buyid vizier in Baghdad, Fakhr al-Mulk (r. 401-407/1010-1016), to accept the religious authority of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Ḥākīm bi-Amr Allāh.⁵⁷⁰ In this environment, Sunni-Shi'i fighting broke out in Baghdad in 398/1008, where the Shi'i protesters proclaimed their support for the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Ḥākīm, chanting "Ya Ḥākīm, Ya Maṣṣūr."⁵⁷¹ There is even evidence that members of the Twelver establishment were sympathetic to the Fatimids. Sharīf al-Rāḍī (d. 406/1016), the famous Twelver Shi'i scholar, 'Alid descendant of Mūsā al-Kāzīm, and leader (*naqīb*) of the Iraqi *ashrāf* (descendants of the Prophet) reportedly penned the below verses against al-Qādir in support of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph in 400/1009-1010:

[Why should] I bear humiliation in the land of the enemy, when in Egypt the Caliph is an 'Alid.
His father is my father, his friend (*mawlāhu*) is my friend (*mawlāy*)
If the distant stranger bears malice for me
That which ties my neck to his neck, is the sayyid of all men, Muḥammad and 'Alī.⁵⁷²

On the political front, the leaders of the 'Uqaylids in Mosul and Mazyadids in southern Iraq, publicly proclaimed their allegiance to the Fatimid Imam-Caliph in 401/1010 and acknowledged

⁵⁷⁰ Jiwa, "The Baghdad Manifesto," 44-45.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁷² Translated by Jiwa based on the reports of Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Athīr, and al-Maqrīzī, *ibid.*, 41. Jiwa goes on to provide conflicting accounts of what happened after these verses were brought to al-Qādir's attention.

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the 'Alid Fatimid descent of the Ismaili Imams. All of this resulted in what Paul Walker has called a "Fatimid noose" around Baghdad.⁵⁷³

These developments prompted al-Qādir to issue the Baghdad Manifesto in 402/1111, a document denouncing the Fatimids and connecting them to a patently false and scandalous genealogy, which was signed by prominent court scholars and read out publicly throughout the Abbasid territories.⁵⁷⁴ Al-Qādir proceeded to issue the famed Qādirī Creed (*al-Risāla al-Qādiriyya*) in 409/1018, followed by three letters in 420/1029.⁵⁷⁵ The content of these declarations promoted Ḥanbalī theology, particularly concerning the Qur'ān, and condemned all other views including Shi'i, Mu'tazili, and even Ash'arī positions. All of this constituted al-Qādir's powerplay to reinforce his Caliphal authority on religious grounds and bolster a Sunni traditionalist interpretation of Islam. Some of al-Qādir's religious edicts including the Qādirī Creed were re-issued by his son al-Qā'im in 433/1041. These measures precipitated factional conflicts between the Ḥanbalīs, Mu'tazilīs, Ḥanafīs, Shāfi'īs, and Ash'arīs.

After the Saljuqs led by Tughril-Beg came to occupy Khurāsān, they also intervened in these conflicts. In 445/1053, Tughril-Beg ordered the cursing of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī alongside the Shi'is in the mosques throughout Khurāsān. He also expelled prominent Ash'arī-Shāfi'ī thinkers, including Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), from the Ash'arī-Shāfi'ī stronghold

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 47-48.

⁵⁷⁴ For details, see *ibid.*, which is the latest and most comprehensive study of this document.

⁵⁷⁵ For a French translation of the Creed and an analysis of its contents, see George Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqīl et la resurgence de l'Islam traditionaliste au XIe siècle* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1963), 304-310; see also *idem*, "The Juridical Theology of Shāfi'ī: Origins and Significance of Uṣūl al-Fiqh," *Studia Islamica* 59 (1984): 5-47.

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of Nīshāpūr.⁵⁷⁶ Some four hundred scholars are reported to have left Khurāsān during this time.⁵⁷⁷

In the mist of such persecution, the famous Ash'arī scholar Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, known for his fusion of Sufism and Ash'arī theology, rose to the defense of al-Ash'arī and the necessity of *kalām* theologians in general. He attempted to appeal to the Saljuq Sultan by noting their shared concern for upholding orthodox beliefs in the public realm.⁵⁷⁸

With the appointment of Nizām al-Mulk as vizier by Alp Arslān, who succeeded as the Saljuq Sultan in 455/1063, this persecution of the Ash'arī-Shāfi'īs was stemmed. Nizām al-Mulk instead supported them by establishing the famed Nizāmiyya *madrasas* in Nīshāpūr and Baghdad, where both Ash'arī theology and Shāfi'ī law were taught. Thus, the exiled al-Juwaynī returned as an instructor in the Nīshāpūr *madrasa*.⁵⁷⁹ During this time, as Rodrigo Adem observes, the Shāfi'ī-Ash'arite theologians of Nishapur achieved a synthesis between the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and the *mutakallimūn*, with public proclamations of their solidarity against “innovation”. Adem brands this synthetic rapprochement of various Sunni factions as the “Nishapurian synthesis” whereby Ash'arī theology found a medium in the Shāfi'ī legal school to achieve its intellectual and social objectives, all the while taking a strong unified stand against Fatimid Ismaili thought and other “heresies”.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁶ C. E. Bosworth, “The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian World (A.D. 1000-1217),” in J. A. Boyle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6 (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968; reprint: 1993, 1997, 2001), 1-200: 46. A more recent description of these theological disputes in eleventh-century Baghdad is found in Rodrigo Adem, “The Intellectual Genealogy of Ibn Taymīya,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2015), Chapter 6, 267-299.

⁵⁷⁷ Adem, “The Intellectual Genealogy,” 285.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 279-280.

⁵⁷⁹ Ann K. S. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press and Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 238.

⁵⁸⁰ Adem, “The Intellectual Genealogy,” 279-280.

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Despite the cover provided by the Nizāmiyya, the Ash'arī-Shāfi'īs and the Ḥanbalīs often clashed in Baghdad, leading to public violence.⁵⁸¹ One such incident took place in 469/1077 when Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī (d. 514/1120), son of the famous Sufī Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, aroused the Ḥanbalī masses as he preached at the Nizamiyya mosque and criticized the Ḥanbalī belief in the eternity of the Qur'ān. A great deal of fist-fighting took place, which led to multiple arrests. The Ḥanbalīs, at one point, threw bricks at their opponents from the top of their mosque. The Caliph intervened to resolve the conflict, resulting in al-Qushayrī continuing to teach in the presence of guards. Shortly after, the conflict was reignited, this time with the Ḥanbalīs attacking the Ash'arī view of God's Speech.⁵⁸² These various examples illustrate how the masses of the public in Baghdad espoused Ḥanbalī beliefs – as reinforced by the caliphal creeds – while the Ash'arī-Shāfi'īs often faced public criticism and were perceived as innovators.⁵⁸³

The above examples showcase how theological differences manifested in factionalism and violent conflicts in Baghdad and the political Abbasid-Fatimid rivalry. At the center of some of these conflicts, particularly the clashes between Ḥanbalī and Ash'arī groups, was the nature of the Qur'ānic Revelation.

⁵⁸¹ See Daphna Ephrat, "Religious Leadership and Associations in the Public Sphere of Seljuk Baghdad," in Miriam Hoexter, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Nehemia Levtzion (eds.), *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 31-48.

⁵⁸² Adem, "The Intellectual Genealogy," 290-292.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 289.

4.2 Mu'tazilī Positions on Qur'ānic Revelation: 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025)

'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadānī was the most prominent Mu'tazilī scholar of his time and popularly known as the chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) of Rayy. He was a student of Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915), his son Abū Hāshim 'Abd al-Salām b. Muḥammad al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933), and Abū 'Abdullāh al-Baṣrī (d. 369/979). Among 'Abd al-Jabbār's students were Sharīf al-Rādī (d. 406/1016), Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), and the Zaydī imām, al-Mu'ayyad billāh (411/1020). 'Abd al-Jabbār authored a number of works including *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa l-'adl* (*The Comprehensive Work on the Chapters of Divine Oneness and Justice*), a comprehensive account of Mu'tazilī theology and *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa nabīyinā Muḥammad* (*Establishing the Proofs of the Prophethood of our Prophet Muhammad*) – a series of proofs for the prophethood of Muhammad accompanied by refutation of other schools of thought.⁵⁸⁴

Theology, Epistemology and Ethical Theory:

'Abd al-Jabbār's understanding of God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation is rooted in a Mu'tazilī theology of divine attributes, divine acts, and ethical value.⁵⁸⁵ In this theology, God is absolutely one and unique and possesses several essential attributes (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*): He is essentially powerful (*qādir*), knowing ('*ālim*), living (*ḥayy*), perceiving (*mudrik*), existent (*mawjūd*), and just ('*ādil*). These attributes are states (*aḥwāl*) of God's Essence and not distinct attributes super-added

⁵⁸⁴ Wilferd Madelung, "'Abd-Al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad,'" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I/2, 116-117; an updated version is available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abd-al-jabbar-b-ahmad> (accessed on 3/23/2018).

⁵⁸⁵ Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 253-257. I will be relying mostly on this study for the background theological positions of 'Abd al-Jabbār.

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(*zā'ida*) to His Essence. God also performs actions, which are created and temporally generated, such as generation (*tawlīd*), existentiation (*ijād*), and creation (*khalq*). God has a will (*irāda*) which is temporally generated (*ḥādith, muḥdath*) but does not inhere in a substrate (unlike other created things). There are secondary causes in the world and human beings create their own actions. God's actions of commanding, forbidding, informing, and imposing duties upon humankind are expressive of His will.⁵⁸⁶ Theologically speaking, God's Speech is one of God's actions and not an attribute of His Essence. In the matter of ethics, 'Abd al-Jabbār held to ethical objectivism, where various human acts have inherent ethical value as praiseworthy or blameworthy and human beings are theoretically capable of recognizing the ethical value of any human act through rational deliberation. In 'Abd al-Jabbār's ethical framework, God's Speech promotes normative value judgments that are otherwise accessible to human knowledge. As Vishanoff observes, "God's speech, however, does not bring about the legal values of acts, or anything else; it can only describe what is already true.... God's speech functions only as an indicative statement that conveys information."⁵⁸⁷

The Definition of Speech and Speaker:

'Abd al-Jabbār devoted the seventh section of his magnum opus, *al-Mughnī*, to the subject of God's Speech and the createdness of the Qur'ān (*khalq al-Qur'ān*). He presented the Mu'tazilī position about God's Speech received from his teachers in the opening pages as follows:

The position of our teachers is that the Speech of God is from the genus of intelligible speech in this world (*fī l-shāhid*), and it is arranged letters and articulate sounds. It is an accident which God creates in bodies in such a manner to be heard and its meaning being understood. The angel conveys that [Speech of God] to the Prophets on account of what God commands him and teaches him of benefits

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 273-277.

⁵⁸⁷ Vishanoff, *The Formation*, 143.

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(*ṣalāḥan*). It [God's Speech] comprises command, prohibition, information, and the rest of the divisions like the speech of the servants. According to them, it is not correct to affirm eternal speech different from our (temporal) speech, just as it is not correct to affirm eternal motion.⁵⁸⁸

The above statement illustrates the developed Mu'tazilī approach to the issue of God's Speech. They first established a definition of speech in general, that accounts for human speech in the created world. Subsequently, they conceived the nature and modality of God's Speech based on the reality of speech (*kalām*) in general. In a certain fashion, this approach shared common features with the Ash'arī methods examined earlier. However, the divergence between Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī positions began with the very definition of speech.

Even while approvingly quoting the views of his teachers, 'Abd al-Jabbār still sought to improve their definition of speech. Peters notes four different definitions of speech throughout his major works.⁵⁸⁹ The prominent elements of 'Abd al-Jabbār's concept of speech, as revealed in his four definitions, were as follows:

- a) speech consists of two or more letters (*ḥarf, ḥarfayn, ḥurūf*); letters are defined generally in line with the views of Arab linguistics; letters belong to the genus of sound that issues from the human mouth;⁵⁹⁰
- b) the letters exist in arrangement (*niẓām*); the letters are ordered in an arrangement and this arrangement is not an accident, because sounds are accidents and cannot inhere in another accident;⁵⁹¹
- c) the letters are intelligible or intuitively known (*ma'qūl*); this means that people know the letters through their own intuitive experience;⁵⁹²
- d) speech is something that obtains or occurs (*ḥaṣal*); the occurrence of speech means that speech does not subsist or remain.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁸ 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī, *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb li-tawḥīd wa l-'adl*, 16 Vols. (Cairo: 1960-69), Vol. 7, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abiyārī (Cairo: 1960), 3.

⁵⁸⁹ Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 294.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 296-297.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 300.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

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ʿAbd al-Jabbār provided further descriptions of speech: speech is articulated sound (*ṣawt muqaṭṭaʿ*) and belongs to the genus of sound; all speech is sound but only articulate sound is speech; speech is an accident just as sound is an accident;⁵⁹⁴ his view here differs from some early Muʿtazilīs who defined the Qurʾān *qua* speech as a body (*jism*) as we saw in Chapter 3; the accidental nature of speech means that speech does not remain, as bodies do; being an accident, speech inheres in a substrate by necessity;⁵⁹⁵ speech is also perceptible (*mudrak*), communicative (*mufīd*), and something humans produce through generation (*tawlīd*).⁵⁹⁶ ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s position contrasts with the Ashʿarī teaching that “speech subsisting in the soul” (*kalām qāʿim bi-naḥs*) or “inner speech” (*kalām naḥsī*) is beyond sounds and letters, where the latter merely indicates toward inner speech; this difference determines the trajectory of each school’s argument toward defining God’s Speech.

Following the definition and description of speech, ʿAbd al-Jabbār went on to define a “speaker” (*mutakallim*) or “the one who is speaking”. He argued the position that “the subject who makes speech (*fāʿil al-kalām*) is qualified as speaking, and that he is qualified in this way because he made it.”⁵⁹⁷ This position is best understood in relation to the earlier claim that speech must inhere in a substrate because it is an accident. The substrate in which speech inheres cannot be qualified as “speaking”; only the one who produced that speech is a speaker.⁵⁹⁸ For example, if the

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 302-303.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 305.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 304-305.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 313.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 323.

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substrate of speech is qualified as a speaker, it would entail that a person's tongue is a speaker.⁵⁹⁹ Once again, this definition is significant in how it contrasts with the Ash'arī position that the speaker is the one in whom speech subsists (*qā'im bihi*). This difference has far-reaching implications. We saw earlier how al-Ash'arī initially argued in *al-Ibāna* that if God created the speech that Moses heard within the burning bush, then this speech would actually be the speech of the bush, not the Speech of God. This argument, taken up by later Ash'arīs, turned into the general claim that if God created His Speech in the essence of a creature, then this speech would be the creature's speech, not God's Speech. Both arguments presuppose the Ash'arī definition of a "speaker" – that the speaker is he "in whom speech subsists". But 'Abd al-Jabbār, in defining the speaker as the one who creates or produces speech, effectively immunized his position from these Ash'arī attacks. Returning to the specifics of 'Abd al-Jabbār's definition of a speaker, another formula he provided is "that the reality of the speaker is that speech is brought into being from his direction and on account of his intention (*qaṣḍihi*) and his will (*irādatihi*)."⁶⁰⁰ This formula defines the speaker as the one who creates speech as an expression and communication of his intention and will. It follows from this fact that any speech expressive of the speaker's intention must always take the form of a command, prohibition, or information.⁶⁰¹

The Qur'ān as God's Created Speech:

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 324.

⁶⁰⁰ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, Vol. 7, 48; also translated and transliterated in Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 327-328.

⁶⁰¹ Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 329.

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Having defined both speech (*kalām*) and the speaker (*mutakallim*) in general terms, 'Abd al-Jabbār went on to discuss the nature of God's Speech and the status of God as a speaker. It is important to contextualize his concept of God's Speech and revelation within the broader theological framework underlying many of his ideas. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār's Mu'tazilī theology, God's justice is a root-principle, which determines the nature of God's acts, including the act of speaking and the act of revealing His Speech. Since all of God's acts are just and good, it follows that the essential purpose of God's Speech is to confer benefit upon His servants. Thus, the Qur'ān's value lies in the practical benefit it provides to humanity. What is the nature of this benefit? According to Mu'tazilī epistemology, human beings through their God-given intellect, faculties of sense perception, and reflection are able to arrive at knowledge of ethical-normative values and obligations – such as the knowledge of which acts are good or evil for them. However, a great number of matters – both ethical and cosmological – are not within the practical reach of human beings left to their own devices and remain unknown to them. Therefore, God's justice obligates Him to disclose this information to human beings through a medium other than intellect and sense perception – this medium being the revelation of His Speech through Prophets. Thus, God's justice makes the revelation of God's Speech a necessary action on His part as Peters explains:

God's revelation is not His free act, but, since He knows that this revelation is for the benefit of mankind, He necessarily must give it to them...When God performs an act, He must do it because of some benefit He finds in the act concerned. This cannot be His own benefit; hence, it must be the benefit of other beings. Consequently, whenever God makes speech, He necessarily does so for the benefit of human beings or for the benefit of other understanding beings (angels or demons).⁶⁰²

God's Speech, as revealed through prophets, is beneficial because it both conveys information about what is unknown to human beings and gives confirmation and support to what they already

⁶⁰² Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 416-417.

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have come to know through their own intellects. Thus, in one section of the *Sharḥ uṣūl al-khamsa*, 'Abd al-Jabbār and his commentator describe God's Speech as a favor (*ni'māt*) of God upon human beings: "The Speech of God sent down upon His Messenger enters into the chapter of favor (*ni'ma*) because one recognizes the permissible and the prohibited by means of it and turns to it regarding the laws (*al-sharā'ī*) and rulings (*al-aḥkām*)."⁶⁰³ Accordingly, the contents of God's Speech in the Qur'ān are expressions of God's will, which is directed toward providing benefit for human beings. As Peters observes, "speech becomes command, prohibition, and information through the intention, the concomitant will... This intention is the only condition for speech to occur as a command, prohibition, or information."⁶⁰⁴

Although 'Abd al-Jabbār saw the Arabic Qur'ān as the created Speech of God, his theological vision entails that God's Speech is ultimately expressive of a higher Revelatory Principle – this being God's just will. God's Speech, which reaches human beings through a Revelatory Process, is an indicator of God's will, which is in turn determined by God's justice. In other words, the essential function of God's Speech through revelation is to disclose God's just will to human beings. God's just will is the Revelatory Principle; the earthly Revelatory Product is God's Speech, namely the Arabic Qur'ān and other speech produced by God. The relationship between the Revelatory Principle (God's just will) and the Revelatory Product (the Arabic Qur'ān) is best described by Vishanoff: "Revelation is not a direct communication from one person to another; it is a sign, an indicator, a piece of evidence placed by God in the world so that from it

⁶⁰³ 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī and Qayyām al-Dīn Mānkḏīm Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī Shashdiw, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, ed. Abd-El-Karim Ousman (Cairo: Wahba Library, 1965), 530.

⁶⁰⁴ Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 356.

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his servants might deduce His will, and thus come to know the legal values of human acts.”⁶⁰⁵

Having discussed God's just will as the Revelatory Principle, it is now appropriate to consider the ontological status of the Revelatory Product (the Qur'ān) and the nature of the Revelatory Process by which the Qur'ān is transmitted from God to humankind. In the beginning of his section on God's Speech in *al-Mughnī*, 'Abd al-Jabbār described the generally agreed position held by himself and his fellow Mu'tazilīs on these questions:

There is no disagreement amongst all of the People of Justice regarding the fact that the Qur'ān is created (*makhliq*), temporally generated (*muḥdath*), and made (*ma'fūl*): it was not and then it was. It is something other than God, and He produced it on account of the benefit of the servants. He is capable (*qādir*) of [producing] its like and He is described as informing, speaking, commanding, and prohibiting by it from the perspective that He made it. Each of them says that He is speaking (*mutakallim*) by it [the Qur'ān].⁶⁰⁶

It is worth unpacking the above statement according to the three general descriptions it provides for God's Speech being the Qur'ān: that it is created, that God produced it for the benefit or wellbeing of His servants; and that it consists of commands and prohibitions. On the first point, the createdness of the Qur'ān as God's Speech, 'Abd al-Jabbār clearly followed the lead of prior Mu'tazilīs going back to the third/ninth century as seen in Chapter 2. To this end, he offered several arguments for the createdness of the Qur'ān, which have been analyzed in prior studies.⁶⁰⁷ One such argument observes that God's Speech belongs to the genus of human speech, which is essentially temporal; another argument is that the Qur'ān consists of several different parts, which is not possible for an eternal being; another point is that since God produced the Qur'ān as His Speech, then it must be other than Him and therefore cannot be eternal like Him.

⁶⁰⁵ Vishanoff, *The Formation*, 143.

⁶⁰⁶ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, Vol. 7, 3.

⁶⁰⁷ Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 340-384.

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Another kind of argument draws on the Qur'ān's descriptions of itself: in several verses the Qur'ān describes itself as *muḥdath* (temporally generated), *ma'fūl* (made), *ḥadīth* (new), *muḥkam* (precise), *mufaṣṣal* (divided). The Qur'ān states that it was preceded by the *kitāb* of Moses, which suggests that the Qur'ān is temporal. Even the stock Ash'arī proof-text for God's Speech being uncreated, "The only words We say to a thing, when We desire it, is that We say to it 'Be,' and it is" (Q. 16:40), was turned against them as 'Abd al-Jabbār, by seizing on the term "when" (*idhā*), argued that it indicates temporality for God's Speech. 'Abd al-Jabbār also furnished certain *ḥadīths* where the Prophet's words imply the creation of the Qur'ān, such as "God was and nothing else, then He created the Reminder (*al-dhikr*)" or "God did not create in heaven or earth anything greater than the Verse of the Pedestal (*āyat al-kursī*) in *Sūrat al-Baqara*."⁶⁰⁸

The Process of Qur'ānic Revelation:

'Abd al-Jabbār's above positions – that speech (*kalām*) is an arrangement of two or more letters, a speaker (*mutakallim*) is one who produces speech, and God's Speech is created and temporally generated – all entail that God's Speech is identical to the Arabic Qur'ān in its sounds, letters, verses, and chapters (as well as other speech God has produced similar to the Qur'ān like the Torah and Gospel). The Qur'ān as speech is a created accident (*'araḍ*) and does not endure by itself but must inhere in a substrate. This means that the Qur'ān is oral speech essentially and not a physical book or scripture, as conceived in the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition. In describing 'Abd al-Jabbār's position, Peter explains that "God's speech can neither be a book – a written text is not speech, but

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 350-351. See also 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, Vol. 7, 89-94, for his comments on specific Qur'ānic verses that show the createdness of the Qur'ān.

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only a sign of speech once spoken – nor a person; it is neither an eternal law, nor God.”⁶⁰⁹ All of this has important implications for how ‘Abd al-Jabbār understood the Revelatory Process of God’s Speech.

As seen in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the classical Sunni *mufasssirūn* and three prominent Mu‘tazilī theologians – Ja‘far b. Ḥarb, Ja‘far b. Mubashshir, and Abū l-Hudhayl – professed belief in a pre-existent Qur’ān; that God established or created the entire Arabic Qur’ān as a complete text in the Guarded Tablet prior to the creation of the world, or at the beginning of creation. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, however, explicitly rejected this longstanding and popular idea. He was compelled to reveal his own view about how God created the Qur’ān in the course of an argument he launched against the Kullābī-Ash‘arī view that God’s Speech is eternal through God’s Essence.

In particular, ‘Abd al-Jabbār argued that the Kullābī-Ash‘arī position led to God being a liar (*kādhīb*) because they must admit that God eternally spoke the words “Indeed, We sent Noah to his people” (Q. 29:14) in eternity before Noah and his people even existed. Thus, he reasoned, this report – if it forms part of God’s eternal Speech – must be a lie since it describes events that do not yet exist.⁶¹⁰ After expounding this argument, ‘Abd al-Jabbār had to address an important rebuttal to his claim, which his hypothetical opponent voiced as follows:

Is it not your position (*min qawlikum*) that God created the Reminder (*al-dhikr*), which is the Qur’ān, before all things, according to what was narrated from [the Prophet]: “God was and nothing else, and then He created the Reminder”? So according to the way you interpret His saying, “Verily, We sent Noah to his people,” and ward off His being a liar, we interpret it likewise. So even if we say that He is eternally speaking, is it not your position (*min qawlikum*) that God spoke the Qur’ān first, and then established it in the Guarded Tablet, and then commanded Gabriel to bring it down in successive stages?⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 417.

⁶¹⁰ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, Vol. 7, 78.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 79. Some corrections to the text were suggested in Peters, *God’s Created Speech*, 347. My translation of the passage has benefitted from the assistance of David Vishanoff.

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‘Abd al-Jabbār’s interlocuter thus turned the traditional beliefs of the Mu‘tazilīs against him, arguing that he too was committed to the belief that God’s Speech existed before anything else was created, thereby leading to the conclusion that it still contained lies. In fact, in a later part of *al-Mughnī*, ‘Abd al-Jabbār actually quoted this same prophetic *ḥadīth*, “God was and nothing else, and then He created the Reminder”, as proof that the Qur’ān had been created by God.⁶¹² His opponent, therefore, had reasonable grounds to argue on this basis. His opponent’s argument also referenced a model of Qur’ānic Revelation that some early Mu‘tazilīs certainly subscribed to: that God first spoke the entire Qur’ān, established it in the Guarded Tablet before the creation of all other things, and then commanded Gabriel to bring down specific verses in a piecemeal manner during the Prophet’s mission. This model was quite widespread in the classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition and was even upheld by the Mu‘tazilī exegete al-Zamakhsharī writing a century after ‘Abd al-Jabbār as we saw in Chapter 2.

In response to his opponent’s counter argument, ‘Abd al-Jabbār distanced himself from the Mu‘tazilī belief of a pre-existent Qur’ān created by God before all things, as explained in the below remarks:

Reason indicates that He [God] cannot possibly have created the Reminder [the Qur’ān] without there being the person present and alive who benefits from it; otherwise, His creation of it [Qur’ān] would have been for sport. So his [the Prophet’s] saying, “God was and nothing else”, is according to its outward meaning. His saying, “Then He created the Reminder”, does not preclude the meaning that He created the person who benefits from the Reminder simultaneous with it or before it, so its meaning must be interpreted according to what we said. This [saying] does not indicate that God created the Qur’ān before all things or simultaneous with them. If this is correct, then what he [the opponent] tried to force upon us is void, because it is possible that in the aggregate of the Qur’ān are [things] that God created [in the past]. As for the reports about the Prophets [in the Qur’ān], they state things as they were: He created [those reports] only after the occurrence (*kawn*) of these things [described by them]. There is nothing in the outward meaning [of the Prophet’s saying] saying that He [God] created the entire Reminder before all of these things; in fact, it is not even clear that the Reminder mentioned here is the Qur’ān as opposed to other books or something else. Our position that He first created the Qur’ān, and then it was sent down in successive stages does not preclude the correctness of what we said [earlier] – that He [God] informed about His sending Noah [only]

⁶¹² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, Vol. 7, 215.

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after He had [actually] sent him; so His Speech is true [and not a lie as the opponent claimed earlier].⁶¹³

What 'Abd al-Jabbār explained in the above passage discloses a great deal about his understanding of the Revelatory Process by which God creates the Qur'ān and reveals it to Muhammad. He made two important points: first, that it makes no sense for God to create the Qur'ān before His creation of creatures who can benefit from the Qur'ān. This claim logically follows from 'Abd al-Jabbār's view that God's Speech primarily exists to benefit His creatures. In the very last section of the seventh volume of *al-Mughnī*, 'Abd al-Jabbār stressed again that God could only create the Qur'ān if an intelligent creature already existed to benefit from it:

If He has spoken by that (sc., the Qur'ān) and produced it without there being a responsible person (who could be addressed by it), it (sc., the Qur'ān) would have been useless. Therefore, He must produce it when there is someone who benefits by it in one of two ways: either by taking it upon himself and bringing it to someone else so that that becomes an imposing of duties (*taḳlīf*), or because he understands its meaning and obeys it since he is addressed by it and it will be useful for him, or because of both things altogether. But His producing it (sc., the Qur'ān) when both ways are lacking would be useless, and God is far above that. Therefore, one must conclude that He produced the Qur'ān when there was someone, be it an angel, human being, or demon, who had the quality we mentioned.⁶¹⁴

Thus, if 'Abd al-Jabbār sought to be internally consistent, he simply could not profess belief in a pre-existent Qur'ān; such a view runs counter to his belief that God's Speech only exists to benefit His servants and would result in God's Speech containing "lies" in terms of reporting events that did not yet happen.

Secondly, 'Abd al-Jabbār stated that the various reports about Prophets and other events mentioned in the Qur'ān were created by God only *after* these events actually occurred. From this statement, one may confidently suppose that 'Abd al-Jabbār regarded the verses of the Qur'ān to be created in time and in response to the historical circumstances and events faced by Muhammad

⁶¹³ Ibid., 80. This translation benefitted from the help of Khaled El-Rouayheb and David Vishanoff.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 224, tr. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 402.

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and his community. For example, verses about certain battles or the Prophet's arguments with his wives would have been produced by God only after the events they refer to had taken place.

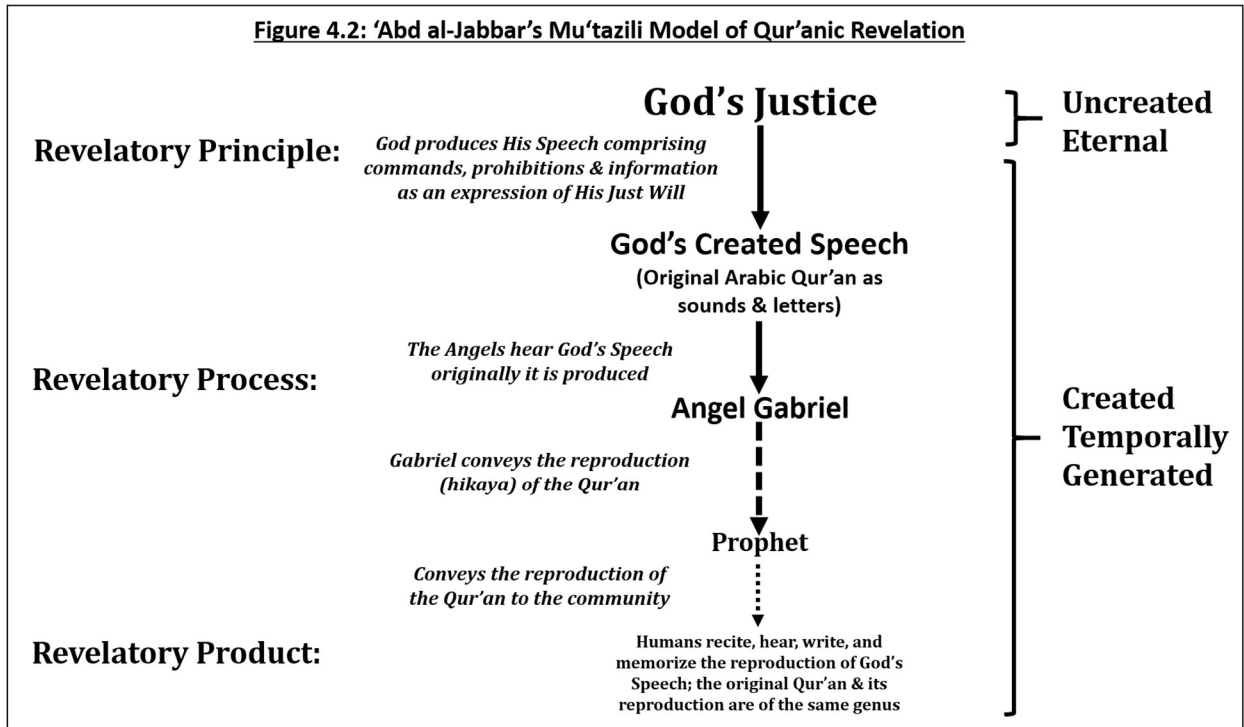
ʿAbd al-Jabbār's contemporaries apparently understood his rejection of God first creating the Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet prior to His creation of the world and pressed him on this issue. Later in *al-Mughnī*, when defending the createdness of the Qur'ān and the difference between God's Speech and its reproduction (*ḥikāya*), ʿAbd al-Jabbār presented a question posed by one of his opponents: "Is it not established that His Speech is on the Guarded Tablet?" The implication being that the entire Qur'ān was written upon the Guarded Tablet before being sent down to the Prophet. ʿAbd al-Jabbār responded as follows:

Verily God creates a speech initially (*fī l-ibtidā'*) which the angels hear, and then they inscribe it on the Tablet. So it is said that "He wrote it in the Tablet" in the metaphorical sense (*wajh al-majāz*), just as it is said that the knowledge of al-Shāfi'ī is in this book.⁶¹⁵

The above response sheds further light on ʿAbd al-Jabbār's model of Qur'ānic Revelation. First, God creates or produces specific verses of the Arabic Qur'ān at a specific time; the angels – including Gabriel – hear God's Speech directly and one of them brings it down to the Prophet. The angels also inscribe God's Speech in the Guarded Tablet. But the Tablet plays no role at any stage of the Revelatory Process. The status of the Tablet seems to be theologically and cosmologically minor as ʿAbd al-Jabbār simply says that God merely wrote His Speech in the Tablet in a metaphorical sense.

⁶¹⁵ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, Vol. 7, 201.

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Finally, it is necessary to consider how 'Abd al-Jabbār conceived the relationship between God's Speech, which He created and produced at a certain point in time and the Qur'ān as it is recited, heard, written, and memorized by human beings in the corporeal world. This was a bone of contention among many Mu'tazilī, Kullābī, and Ash'arī thinkers from the third/ninth century onward and was discussed well into the fifth/eleventh century. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Mu'tazilī theologians Ja'far b. Ḥarb and Ja'far b. Mubashshir held that the original Qur'ān was created in the Guarded Tablet and what humans recite as Qur'ān is a reproduction (*hikāya*) and likeness (*mithl*) of the original Speech of God. The Kullābī and Ash'arī positions on this issue evolved over time: Ibn Kullāb saw the Arabic Qur'ān as recited, heard, written, and memorized as the impression (*rasm*), expression (*ibāra*) and recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's non-verbal eternal Speech; al-Ash'arī followed him in maintaining that the Arabic Qur'ān as recited, written, and memorized was an expression (*ibāra*) and recitation (*qirā'a*) of the uncreated Speech of God. As

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we will see, al-Bāqillāni and his Ash'arī successors rejected the concept of *'ibāra* as inappropriate but retained the idea of the Arabic Qur'ān as the recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech.

Within this debate, 'Abd al-Jabbār took the position that God produced His Speech and it was heard directly by the angels; but what the Angel Gabriel recited to Muhammad, what Muhammad recited to his community, and what Muslims recite today is actually the “reproduction of God's Speech” (*ḥikāyat kalām Allāh*). However, this does not imply any theological difference between the original Qur'ān and its reproduction; they both belong to the same genus – created and temporally generated speech. 'Abd al-Jabbār's overall view of the matter is well summarized in the relevant section of the *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*:

The Qur'ān is the Speech of God and His inspiration (*wahy*). It is created (*makhlūq*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*). God sent it down upon our Prophet so it could be knowledge and indication to his prophethood, and He appointed it for us an indication to the rulings to which we refer with respect to the permissible and the prohibited. It is obligatory for us to praise, thank, glorify, and sanctify [God] for this. It [the Qur'ān] is that which we hear and recite today. Even if it is not being temporally generated [now] from the direction of God, it is attributed to Him in reality; just as what we recite today is from the ode of Imru' al-Qays in reality, even though it is not being temporally generated from him now.⁶¹⁶

This position follows from 'Abd al-Jabbār's definitions of speech and speaker in general: since God's Speech is an accident and does not remain or endure indefinitely, whatever humans recite of the Qur'ān today can only be a reproduction of it. Secondly, what humans memorize of the Qur'ān is a reproduction because human memory does not contain speech itself, but only the knowledge of the arrangement of its letters so that the person can reproduce the speech. Nevertheless, the reproduced speech truly belongs not to the reproducer, but to the original producer, the speaker. Thus, the reproduced Qur'ān must be properly attributed to God. When asked about how anyone can verify whether the reproduction heard today from another person is

⁶¹⁶ 'Abd al-Jabbār and Mānkḏīm, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, 528.

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truly God's Speech, 'Abd al-Jabbār evoked the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān. The reproduced Qur'ān remains inimitable (*mu'jiz*) with respect to its arrangement and testifies that it was spoken by God. In doing so, the Qur'ān verifies the truthfulness of the Prophet and all of this together verifies the Qur'ān as recited today as the reproduction of the Speech of God.⁶¹⁷

Hermeneutical Implications:

'Abd al-Jabbār understood God's Speech as a created expression of God's justice and will has some important hermeneutical implications worth highlighting. As mentioned earlier, the primary function of God's Speech is indicative – to inform human beings of the moral valuation of actions that they are potentially capable of adducing through their own intellect, but cannot do so in fact.⁶¹⁸ Based on this function, 'Abd al-Jabbār held that God's Speech must be clear in providing sufficient evidence for humans to determine His will and intention.⁶¹⁹

Practically speaking, general expressions in the Qur'ān like “the thieves” or “the adulterers” should be interpreted generally and without particularization.⁶²⁰ In other words, if God uses the word “the thieves” in the Qur'ān, then He is referring to any and all thieves. 'Abd al-Jabbār did allow for such expressions to be understood in a more particular or restricted senses – but only if God provides rational or textual evidence to particularize the meaning. Based on this principle of clarity, 'Abd al-Jabbār took the view that a Qur'anic imperative expression is only an obligatory duty imposed by God if God also provides evidence that not performing the act warrants

⁶¹⁷ Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 396-397.

⁶¹⁸ Vishanoff, *The Formation*, 136.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

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punishment. Without such evidence, the imperative expression found in the Qur'ān is only a recommendation.⁶²¹

Conclusions:

ʿAbd al-Jabbār offered a robust and innovative conception of God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation situated within an integrative Mu'tazilī theological vision. While he certainly drew a great deal of ideas from his predecessors and teachings, ʿAbd al-Jabbār synthesized and improved upon them when formulating his own positions. He defined speech in terms of an arrangement of two or more intelligible letters from the genus of sound; an occurring accident that does not subsist on its own and requires a substrate. He defined a speaker as one who produces or makes speech. He conceived the Speech of God as belonging to the genus of speech in the created world and God as the one who produces speech. Thus, God's Speech in general is created (*makhlūq*), temporally generated (*muhdath*), and made (*maf'ūl*). In terms of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's theological vision, God's Speech is an expression of God's will and the latter determines the meaning of the former; God's will, in turn, is an expression of God's justice. Accordingly, God's justice obligates Him to produce Speech – by which God discloses legal obligations and the normative-ethical value of various actions to human beings so they may attain benefit. In setting forth this position and focusing on the createdness of the Qur'ān, ʿAbd al-Jabbār offered numerous arguments from both reason and divinely revealed texts (Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*). As a major departure from his Mu'tazilī predecessors (the two Ja'fars, Abū l-Hudhayl) and the classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition, he entirely rejected the pre-existence of the Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet prior to the Revelatory Process; he instead

⁶²¹ Ibid., 130-131.

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maintained that God creates the contents of the Qur'ān in time after the events they describe have occurred. This means that God created the Qur'ān in time on a piecemeal basis just prior to sending it down to the Prophet. Accordingly, the Revelatory Process as envisaged by 'Abd al-Jabbār consists of God producing the Qur'ān as His Speech at the appropriate time, the angels hearing the Qur'ān directly from God, and then Gabriel delivering it to the Prophet. In line with his concept of speech being an accident without subsistence, 'Abd al-Jabbār held that the Arabic Qur'ān as recited, read, and heard by human beings is the reproduction (*ḥikāya*) of the original Qur'ān that God created as His Speech and which was directly heard by the angels. Finally, 'Abd al-Jabbār's theory of God's Speech was wed to specific hermeneutical principles: the function of the Qur'ān being primarily informative, and the principle of clarity, which means that the meaning of Qur'ānic terms must be clear in and of themselves or clarified by other evidence that God provides.

4.3 Ash'arī Positions on Qur'ānic Revelation: al-Baqillani (d. 403/1013), al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and al-Ṣiqillī (d. 493/1100)

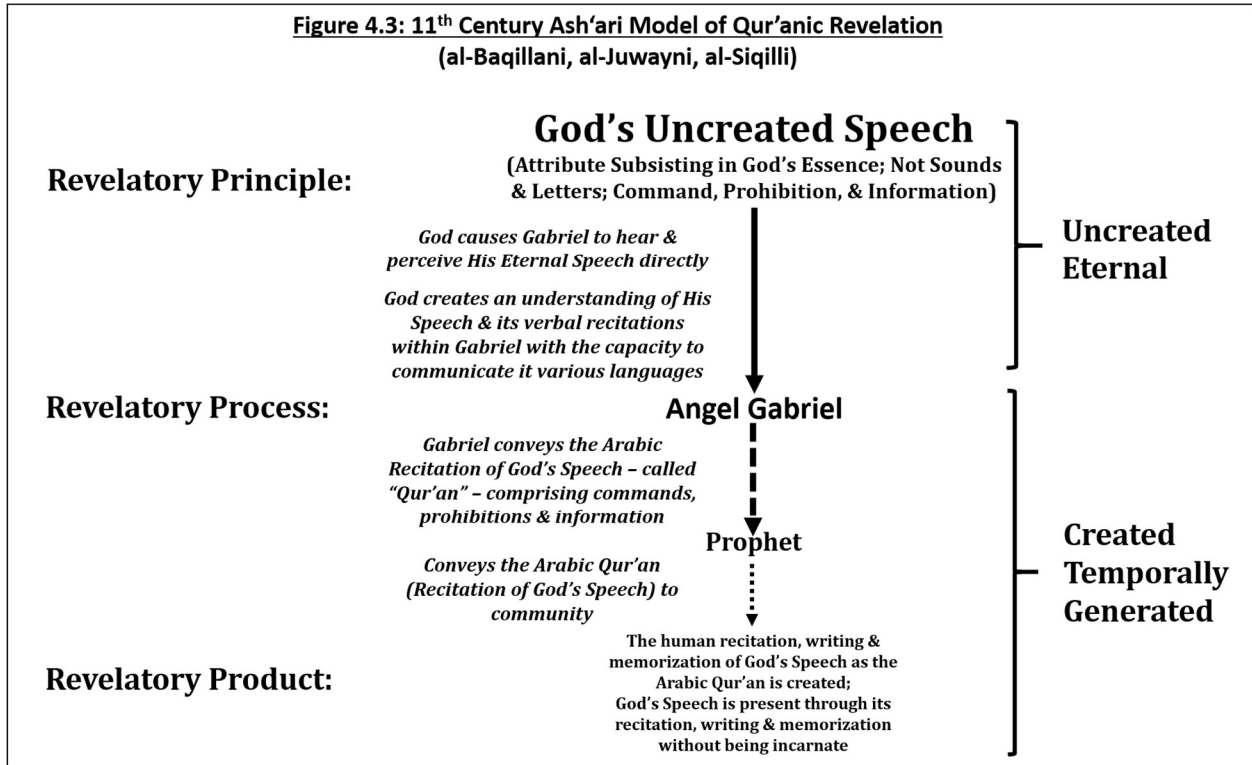
In this section, we consider fifth/eleventh-century Ash'arī conceptions of Qur'ānic Revelation according to three major Ash'arī theologians – Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), and Abū Bakr b. Sābiq al-Siqillī (d. 493/1100). In general, all three of these theologians subscribed to the general principles of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's theology of God's Speech as represented by Ibn Fūrak with some minor differences. They each affirmed the idea of “inner speech” (*kalām nafsi*) as a meaning within the soul; they identified the Revelatory Principle as God's Speech – an uncreated eternal divine attribute, beyond sounds and letters, subsisting in God's Essence; they distinguished – ontologically and formally – between the

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uncreated Speech of God and its created verbal-linguistic recitation (*qirā'a*) or indications (*dalāla*) comprised of sounds and letters, which is the Revelatory Product; they regarded the Arabic recitation (*qirā'a*) as miraculously inimitable (*mu'jiz*) with respect to its literary arrangement (*nazm*) by which God suspended the habitual course of created events to validate Muhammad's prophethood; they believed that God's Speech is an eternal meaning (*ma'nā*) containing commands, prohibitions, information, and interrogations, independent of the created verbal expressions of its earthly recitations; they affirmed the real presence or immanence of God's Speech through its reading, recitation, writing, and memorization, while noting that God's Speech does not physically inhere or reside in the readers, the reciters, the codices, or the hearts; finally, they all used the word *qur'ān* in an equivocal way – sometimes the word *qur'ān* refers to God's Speech itself and in other cases it refers to the Arabic recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech. This is an important point of semantics because the Māturīdī theologians took a different stance regarding the term *qur'ān* and how it may be used.

Therefore, in what follows, I will refrain from presenting each of these Ash'arī theologians' positions on God's Speech (which overlap greatly) and instead focus on their understanding of the Revelatory Process by which God's Speech (Revelatory Principle) is manifested as the Arabic Qur'ān (Revelatory Product) uttered by the Prophet Muhammad and later memorized and written down by the community. It will be shown that the formulations of al-Bāqillanī, al-Juwayni, and al-Siqillī present the Angel Gabriel as a mediator in the Revelatory Process and thereby frame the Arabic Qur'ān as the utterance (*qawl*) of Gabriel based on his understanding of God's Speech, which God creates within him (see Figure 4.3 below).

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4.3.1 Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1113): Qur'anic Revelation as the Word of Gabriel

Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī was active at the time when the Abbasid Caliphate suffered from the numerous internal problems noted above, during which civil unrest often took place in Baghdad. He was reportedly a second-generation follower of al-Ash'arī and rose to become a leading Ash'arī theologian of Baghdad.⁶²² Al-Bāqillānī also helped counter the Fatimid Ismaili influence in Baghdad and other areas on behalf of the Abbasid Caliph: at the intellectual level, al-Bāqillānī authored a polemical treatise against the Ismailis; at the political level, al-Bāqillānī persuaded the Buyids to take action when the Uqaylids gave allegiance to the Fatimid Imam-Caliph. The Ismaili *dā'ī* al-Kirmānī also named al-Bāqillānī as someone al-Qādir relied upon to undertake such

⁶²² Yusuf Ibish, "Life and Works of al-Bāqillānī," *Islamic Studies* 4/3 (September 1965): 225-236; Sabine Schmidtke, "Early Ash'arite theology. Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and his *hidāyat al-mustaršidīn*," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 60 (2011): 39-72.

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things.⁶²³ Al-Bāqillānī presented a detailed account of Qur'ānic Revelation in his *al-Inṣāf fīmā yajibu i'tiqāduhu wa-lā yajūzu al-jahl bihi fī 'ilm al-kalām* (*The Summary of Necessary Knowledge in Theology*), devoting over 70 pages to the topic.⁶²⁴ While he argued against the createdness of the Qur'ān (*khalq al-Qur'ān*) in other writings, including *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* (*The Introduction*) and *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn fī shārh uṣūl ma'ālim al-dīn* (*Guidance of Those Seeking Direction in the Explanation of the Principles of the Knowledge of Religion*),⁶²⁵ his *al-Inṣāf* contains his most expanded views on God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation. The main source of the below analysis of al-Bāqillānī's understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation will be this latter work.

God's Uncreated Speech and its Created Arabic Recitation:

As mentioned earlier, al-Bāqillānī professed classical Ash'arī positions concerning God's Speech being eternal and uncreated, the created recitation (*al-qirā'a*) of God's Speech, the difference between a person hearing the Recitation (*al-qirā'a*) and hearing "what is Recited" (*al-maqrū*), and speech as a meaning in the soul known as inner speech (*kalām nafsī*). However, al-Bāqillānī differed from earlier Ash'arīs in that he rejected the description of the Arabic Qur'ān as the *ibāra* (expression) of God's Speech and preferred to describe it as the recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech. Throughout his *al-Inṣāf*, al-Bāqillānī offered arguments for these positions and refuted

⁶²³ Paul E. Walker, "Introduction," in Ḥamīd al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age: An Islamic Treatise on the Necessity of the Imamate*, edited and translated by Paul E. Walker (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007), 16.

⁶²⁴ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf fīmā yajibu i'tiqāduhu wa-lā yajūzu al-jahl bihi fī 'ilm al-kalām*, Second Edition, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Dār al-Tawfīq al-Namūdhjiyya, 2000), 68-142.

⁶²⁵ In *al-Tamhīd*, al-Bāqillānī focuses on arguing for the eternity of God's Speech, but he does not get into the nature of the Revelatory Process. See *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957), 237-251. For *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*, see notes above.

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both Mu'tazilī and Ḥanbalī objections. In the midst of this discussion, he provided a rather detailed account of the Qur'ān's Revelatory Process.

Before discussing the Revelatory Process, al-Bāqillānī illustrated the difference between the Speech of God as “what is Recited” (*al-maqrū'*, *al-matlū*) and the “Recitation” (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech as what Gabriel and the Prophet uttered. To accomplish this, al-Bāqillānī referred to several Qur'ānic verses where the Messenger of God is commanded to recite the Qur'ān, such as Q. 17:106: “And a *qur'ān* We have divided for you to recite it to mankind at intervals, and We have sent it down successively.” Commenting on this verse, al-Bāqillānī explained that:

He [God] informs us that the Qur'ān is sent down and inspired from Him and that the Messenger recites it and teaches it. So “what is Communicated” (*al-mawḥā*), “what is Sent Down” (*al-manzūl*), and “what is Recited” (*al-maqrū'*) is the eternal Speech of God and the attribute of His Essence, while its recitation (*al-qirā'a*) is the action of the Messenger, which is his attribute.⁶²⁶

Al-Bāqillānī cited similar verses to support his claim that the Speech of God is distinct from the Messenger of God's recitation of that Speech. In this respect, he also quoted Q. 27:92, where the Prophet has been commanded “to recite the Qur'ān.” Al-Bāqillānī explained that this verse establishes Muhammad as a reciter and the recitation as his attribute, whereas what Muhammad is commanded to recite is God's eternal Speech, called *al-qur'ān*, which refers to God's attribute.⁶²⁷ These arguments set up the premises for al-Bāqillānī's model of Qur'ānic Revelation.

The Revelation of God's Speech through Gabriel's Utterance:

In line with Ash'arī thought, al-Bāqillānī believed that only God causes a creature to hear His eternal uncreated Speech, with or without an intermediary. Basing himself on this principle, al-

⁶²⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 77.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 77-78.

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Bāqillāni went on to interpret Q. 42:51, which was heavily commented on by the Sunni exegetes as setting forth the modalities of revelation. This verse describes three different modes of how God's Speech is revealed to a human being, which al-Bāqillānī interpreted as follows:

Sometimes He causes the one whom He wills among the creatures to hear His Speech without an intermediary and without a veil – such as His speaking to our Prophet in the Night of Ascension (*laylat al-mi'rāj*). The proof of the three [ways] is His saying, “*God does not speak to any mortal except [through] inspiration (wahy)*” (Q. 42:51); and it is that God caused our Prophet to hear His Speech on the Night of Ascension (*laylat al-mi'rāj*) without intermediary or veil, because He said regarding that Night, “*So He inspired (awhā) in His servant what He communicated*” (Q. 53:3-5). The *wahy* here is not according to *ilhām*, but rather, according to hearing (*al-samā'*) and causing to understand (*al-ijhām*); “*or from behind a veil*”, like He caused Moses to hear His Speech without intermediary but veiled him from seeing/vision [of Him]; “*or He sends a messenger, so he inspires by His permission what He wills*”, so the one He wills hears His Speech through the intermediary of the proclamation (*tablīgh*) of the Messenger or the recitation of the reciter.⁶²⁸

Al-Bāqillānī's interpretation of Q. 42:51 is very much reflective of Ash'arī theological principles. It may be remembered that many Sunni exegetes including Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Rāzī, understood the first mode of revelation, *wahy*, as non-verbal inspiration (*ilhām*) or dream-visions and ranked it as the lowest mode of divine communication to humans. Departing from this view, al-Bāqillānī understood the first type of *wahy* as the highest mode of God's communication; it describes how God caused the Prophet Muhammad to hear His eternal Speech in the most direct manner, without any intermediary whatsoever. This occurred when Muhammad had the vision of God during his heavenly ascent (*mi'rāj*). This view, which grants Prophet Muhammad the highest degree of divine communication, follows directly from al-Ash'arī's teachings as reported by Ibn Fūrak. The second mode of revelation, where God speaks from behind a veil, is exemplified in the case of Moses when he heard God's eternal Speech without seeing God. On this point, al-Bāqillānī's view agrees with the qur'ānic exegetes discussed

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 91.

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in Chapter 2. But once again, his interpretation is based on the Ash'arī idea that Moses heard God's uncreated Speech in the sense that God caused him to hear it in his heart.

The third mode of revelation, where God sends a messenger to inspire what He wills in a person, is interpreted by al-Bāqillānī rather broadly. The exegetes interpreted the “messenger” solely as the angel of revelation who dictates God's message to prophets. But for al-Bāqillānī, the meaning is more general in that people hear God's Speech through an intermediary figure without directly hearing God's Speech or seeing God. The intermediary “messenger” in this case can be an angel, a Prophet, or other human beings. One example of this is when the Prophet's companions hear the Speech of God through the Qur'ānic recitation of the Prophet Muhammad, in which case the Prophet is the “messenger”; another example is when the followers hear the Speech of God by means of the oral recitation of a companion, in which case the companion is the “messenger; and likewise in every generation.⁶²⁹ In other words, the “messenger” in the third mode of revelation is an angel, a Prophet, or a Qur'ān reciter. As we will see, the process of Qur'ānic Revelation occurs in the third mode.

Having established the above tri-modal framework of divine communication, al-Bāqillānī went on to expound the particular manner by which God reveals His Speech in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad. He took Q. 26:192-195 as his starting point:

Truly, it is a sending down (*tanzīl*) of the Lord of all Being
The Trusted Spirit brought it down (*nazala bihi l-rūhu l-amīnu*)
Upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners (*'alā qalbika litakūna min al-mundhirīna*)
In a clear Arabic tongue (*bi-lisānin 'arabiyyin mubīnin*) (Q. 26:192-195)

Commenting on this verse, al-Bāqillānī noted that the “sending down” (*inzāl, tanzīl*) God's Speech described above specifies four things: 1) the sender (*al-munazzil*), 2) what is sent down (*al-*

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 91.

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munazzal), 3) the recipient of the sending down (*al-manzūl ilayhi*), and 4) the means of sending down (*al-manzūl bihi*). He then explained what each of these four things are:

The “sender” (*al-munazzil*) is God, the Exalted, according to His saying “*Verily We sent down the Reminder*” (Q. 15:9), and His saying, “*We sent down to you the Reminder*” (16:44). “What is sent down” (*al-munazzal*) is the Eternal Speech of God, the Exalted, eternal through His Essence, according to His saying: “*Verily, it is a sending down from the Lord of the Worlds.*” [This is] according to the sense which we explained – this being a descent of causing knowledge (*al-i'lām*) and causing understanding (*al-ifhām*), not a descent of movement (*ḥaraka*) and relocation (*intiḳāl*). “The recipient of the sending down” (*al-manzūl ilayhi*) is the heart of the Prophet, according to His saying, “*upon your heart, so that you may be among the warners.*” “The means of the sending down” (*al-manzūl bihi*) is the Arabic language by which Gabriel recites it and we recite it until the Day of Resurrection, according to His saying “*in clear Arabic language.*” What actually descends (*al-nāzil*) according to the reality of being moved from level to level is the utterance (*qawl*) of Gabriel.⁶³⁰

In the above passage, al-Bāqillāni carefully specified that “the sender” (*al-munazzil*) of revelation is God, “what is sent down” (*al-munazzal*) is the Speech of God, and “the recipient of the sending down” (*al-manzūl ilayhi*) is the heart of the Prophet Muhammad. However, he very carefully adds the qualification that the meaning of “sending down” or “descent” here is not a physical coming down where God’s Speech is moved or relocated in the spatial sense. Instead, he maintained, the meaning of “sending down” (*inzāl, tanzīl*) is “causing knowledge” (*al-i'lām*) and “causing understanding” (*al-ifhām*) of God’s Speech in the person to whom it is sent.

In taking this position, al-Bāqillāni clearly parted ways with the Sunni *mufasssīrūn* who did understand *inzāl* and *tanzīl* as the physical descent of the Qur’ān through the heavens and to the earth from the Guarded Tablet. Al-Bāqillāni’s view directly follows the reported teachings of Ibn Kullāb and al-Ash’arī, who used the very same terms, “causing knowledge” (*al-i'lām*) and “causing understanding” (*al-ifhām*), when explaining the “sending down” (*inzāl*) of God’s Speech. Accordingly, “the means of the sending down” (*al-munazzal bihi*) and what actually “descends” (*al-nāzil*) in the Revelatory Process is not God’s Speech itself but the Angel Gabriel with his word

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 92.

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or utterance (*qawl*) – which is the Arabic recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān. The claim that it is Gabriel who literally “comes down” is a development from al-Ash'arī's reported view that the angelic messenger memorized God's Speech at a high place and descended to a low place to convey it. However, al-Bāqillānī also went further than this when he presented Gabriel as the proximate source of the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* recitation (*qirā'a*) that Muhammad and others recite until today. In other words, al-Bāqillānī maintained that the Arabic Recitation that comprises the sounds, letters, and verses of the Qur'ān is the speech or utterance of Gabriel (*qawl al-Jibrīl*) and not the recitation or utterance of God.

This claim in itself is quite significant, representing a clear departure from Ḥanbalī, Mu'tazilī, and Sunni *tafsīr* conceptions of Qur'ānic Revelation. For example, according to both Ḥanbalī and Mu'tazilī thought, God Himself utters or produces the verbal linguistic sounds and letters of the Qur'ān; according to the *tafsīr* tradition, God inscribes and establishes the Qur'ān as sounds and letters in the Guarded Tablet and Gabriel memorizes it from there before descending with it. Al-Bāqillānī cited two Qur'ānic verses (Q. 69:40, 81:19) to back up his claim that the Arabic Qur'ān is the utterance (*qawl*) of Gabriel. Both verses state, “Verily, it is an utterance (*qawl*) of an honorable messenger.” As we saw earlier, the Sunni exegetes admitted that the “messenger” in these verses is either Gabriel (81:19) or Muhammad (69:40) and undertook detailed explanations as to why the Qur'ān is the Speech of God despite being attributed to Gabriel or Muhammad. Instead, al-Bāqillānī quoted both verses as proof that Gabriel was the first to utter the Arabic Qur'ān and his commentary follows below:

This is a report from God that the Arabic linguistic arrangement (*al-naẓm al-'arabī*), which is the Recitation of the Speech of God (*qirā'at kalām Allāh*), is the utterance (*qawl*) of Gabriel, not the speech of a poet or a soothsayer. They said, “*this is only the speech of a mortal.*” So He refuted them by these two verses and likewise He refuted them also when they said: “*Surely, a mortal man teaches him. The tongue of the one they refer to is foreign while this is clear Arabic*” (Q. 16:103). It follows from this that God taught Gabriel the Qur'ān; its proof is His saying, “*The All-Merciful taught the Qur'ān*” (55:1-2). Gabriel taught our Prophet; its proof is His saying, “*one mighty in*

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power taught him” (53:5). He [the Prophet] used to recite with Gabriel in the state of his recitation, fearing that he would forget it, until God forbade him from that by His saying, “*Do not hasten with the recitation until its revelation to you is completed and say, My Lord increase me in knowledge*” (Q. 20:114). “*Do not move your tongue to hasten it*” (75:16). This means: “do not hasten with your recitation until Gabriel finishes.” Then his heart became still such that he memorized it entirely and its memorization was established in his heart.⁶³¹

After explaining how the Arabic Qur'ān is the utterance of Gabriel, al-Bāqillānī further specified that Gabriel's utterance is the Arabic linguistic arrangement (*naẓm*) of the Qur'ān. This is significant because the Ash'arī position concerning the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) takes the literary arrangement (*naẓm*) of the Arabic letters and words to be inimitable (*mu'jiz*). Thus, the initial recitation (*qirā'a*) of the miraculous Arabic Recitation of the Qur'ān comes from Gabriel, not God. This affords a degree of mediation to Gabriel because Gabriel learns the Qur'ān from God without God reciting it to him.

Even though al-Bāqillānī does not spell it out, his stated view here implies that God taught the Arabic Qur'ān to Gabriel by creating the knowledge of its miraculous Arabic linguistic arrangement (*al-naẓm al-'arabī*) within him; Gabriel then enacted this knowledge and became the first creature to orally recite the Arabic Qur'ān. In line with Ash'arī occasionalist theology, according to which God creates knowledge whenever a creature comes to know something, al-Bāqillānī could still say that God “taught” Gabriel the Qur'ān.⁶³² But according to these same Ash'arī principles, whenever God creates an action within a creature – such as will, knowledge or even speech – that action is properly attributed to the creature. Al-Ash'arī argued in his *al-Ibāna* that “it is impossible for God to create His Speech in a created thing, because that created thing

⁶³¹ Ibid., 92-93.

⁶³² For the Ash'arī idea that God creates all events and all human knowledge and human cognitions, see Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 155-156, 164, 231-232. For al-Ash'arī's views, see Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 273, where he reports al-Ash'arī's position that God creates all the perceptions (*idrāk*) of human beings and their knowledge (*ilm*).

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would have to be the speaker of it.”⁶³³ Thus, what is implicit in al-Bāqillānī's formulation is the fact that the Arabic Qur'ān with its miraculous literary arrangement (*naẓm*) of sounds, letters and words is the initial action of Gabriel. On this point, we saw in Chapter 3 that al-Ash'arī believed that miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) only applies to the initial recitation of God's Speech while subsequent recitations based on hearing and repeating it from another are not technically miraculous. When Ash'arī theological principles are applied to the case of God creating the knowledge of the Arabic Qur'ān within Gabriel and Gabriel then reciting it, the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* the Recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech turns out to be the utterance (*qawl*) and action (*fi'l*) of Gabriel and only comes from God by creaturely mediation.

Al-Bāqillānī then went on to describe Gabriel's recitation of the Qur'ān to Muhammad and the Prophet's efforts to memorize the recitation. On this point, al-Bāqillānī's view is consistent with all other Sunni thinkers in the belief that the Revelatory Process consists of the verbal dictation of the Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad by Gabriel. Thus, Muhammad plays an entirely passive role in hearing the Arabic Qur'ān from Gabriel, whereas Gabriel is both passive and active: passive in hearing God's Speech, active in learning its Arabic Recitation, and active in reciting the Qur'ān to the Prophet.

So it follows from this that Gabriel, peace be upon him, learned the Speech of God and understood it, and God taught him the Arabic linguistic arrangement (*al-naẓm al-'arabī*) which is its recitation. He [Gabriel] taught the recitation to our Prophet, and the Prophet taught it to his companions. Those who follow did not cease transmitting it from the pious ancestors until it reached us, so we recited it after having not recited it. The recitation (*al-qirā'a*) differs because the recitation of Gabriel is other than the recitation of our Prophet, and the recitation of our Prophet is other than the recitation of his companions, and the recitation of his companions is other than the recitation of those after them... But “what is read” (*al-maqrū'*) and “what is recited” (*al-matlū'*) is the Eternal Speech of

⁶³³ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna*, 69. See also al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 69 where he briefly considers whether God could create His Speech in the essence of a creature and denies this, since it entails that God's Speech would belong to something other than God.

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God, which is not created and does not resemble the speech of created beings; it is recited through the recitation of the Messenger and the recitation of everyone else.⁶³⁴

The Arabic recitation is created while God's Speech is eternal. This is evidenced by the fact that everyone's recitation of God's Speech is different and their recitations are temporal. Thus, the Speech of God and the Arabic recitation remain ontologically and formally distinct. What Gabriel verbally dictates to Muhammad is *not* the eternal Speech of God directly, but only its Arabic recitation – the Arabic Qur'ān – in which God's Speech is immanent but not incarnate. The Arabic Qur'ān or recitation is what Muhammad recited to his community and what the Muslims recited until the present day. But the eternal Speech of God remains present through the Arabic Recitation of every reciter – from Gabriel to the present day – so one can still maintain that what is ultimately recited (*al-maqrū'*) is the Speech of God.

Al-Bāqillānī's theory of the Revelatory Process is both nuanced and multi-layered. At least four different levels of the transmission of God's Speech are involved. The first level is the direct perception of God's uncreated and eternal Speech by Gabriel; the second level is Gabriel learning the Arabic recitation (*qirā'a*) of the Qur'ān through God creating the knowledge of the Arabic linguistic arrangement within Gabriel; the third level is Gabriel enunciating the Arabic Recitation of God's Speech, i.e. the Arabic Qur'ān, to Muhammad. The fourth level is Muhammad's recitation of the Qur'ān to his community. Evidently, the idea of the Arabic Qur'ān in its entirety pre-existing in the Guarded Tablet is absent from al-Bāqillānī's understanding of the Revelatory Process. It is less clear whether God taught or created the entirety of the Arabic Qur'ān to Gabriel in one instance or whether Gabriel learned it on a piecemeal basis. But in either case, Gabriel's

⁶³⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 93-94.

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recitation of the Qur'ān to Muhammad occurred piecemeal and what Gabriel recites of the Qur'ān is created (*makhlūq*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*).

Response to Ḥanbalī Arguments:

In subsequent sections of the *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*, al-Bāqillānī defended his theory of Qur'ānic Revelation against objections by the Ḥanbalīs. The Ḥanbalīs denied the ontological difference between God's Speech and its Arabic recitation; they believed that God eternally spoke and uttered the Arabic sounds and letters that make up the Qur'ān. In opposing their arguments, al-Bāqillānī reiterated his interpretations of the "sending down" (*inzāl*) of God's Speech and emphasized the mediating role of Gabriel in the Revelatory Process. In doing so, he offered noteworthy interpretations of both Qur'ānic verses and prophetic traditions quoted by his Ḥanbalī interlocutors.

The Ḥanbalīs countered al-Bāqillānī's positions by quoting Qur'ānic verses to support their claim that God directly recites the verses of the Qur'ān and directly narrates the Qur'ānic stories to the Prophet. These include: "These are the signs of God We recite (*natlūha*) to you in truth" (Q. 2:252); "We recite (*natlū*) to you something of the tidings of Moses and Pharaoh truthfully, for a people who believe" (Q. 27:3); and "We will narrate (*naquṣṣu*) to you the fairest of stories" (Q. 12:3). The Ḥanbalīs argued that such verses prove that God Himself recites sounds and letters in Arabic. In response, al-Bāqillānī offered a counter interpretation of these same Qur'ānic verses. He argued that the action of reciting or narrating is not actually performed by God, despite the wording of "We recite" or "We narrate" in the verses; in reality, he claimed, it is Gabriel who recited the Qur'ānic verses and narrated the Qur'ānic stories to Muhammad. However, since Gabriel only recited by the command of God, God attributed the action of reciting to Himself in the Qur'ān. Al-Bāqillānī noted that this is a widespread feature of the Qur'ān and applies to other cases like the

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action of the Angel of Death. Thus, while Q. 5:52 says that “We have brought to them a Book that We have well distinguished”, it was the Prophet who actually brought the Book by God’s command; so God attributed the action to Himself. Similarly, Q. 21:96 says that “We breathed into Maryam from Our Spirit” but al-Bāqillāni notes that it was Gabriel who breathed into her even while God attributed the action to Himself.⁶³⁵ This form of interpretation could potentially be used to explain many of the acts attributed to God in the Qur’ān as really being the actions of His creatures including the Prophets and Gabriel.

The Ḥanbalīs also presented prophetic traditions describing how God speaking *wahy* causes a loud sound to reverberate throughout the heavens as proof of their claims that God utters sound. One version of this tradition, which appears in the third/ninth-century Sunni *ḥadīth* collections, is as follows:

From ‘Abdullāh b. Mas’ūd, the Messenger of God said: When God speaks through *wahy*, the people of heaven hear a clattering in the heavens like a chain dragged upon a rock, and they faint. They remain like this until Gabriel comes to them. When Gabriel comes to them, they arise from their hearts and say: “O Gabriel, what did your Lord say?” Gabriel says, “the Truth”. So they say, “the Truth, the Truth.”⁶³⁶

Al-Bāqillānī offered several responses to this Ḥanbalī argument. In doing so, he closely analyzed the wording of the above tradition and similar reports. First, al-Bāqillānī noted how the *ḥadīth* itself does not say that God utters sounds; he then reiterated his view that the inspiration (*wahy*) and sending down (*inzāl*) of God’s Speech means causing the recipient to know and understand God’s Speech. He quoted several qur’ānic verses to underscore the difference between “what is

⁶³⁵ Ibid., 107-108.

⁶³⁶ Abū Dawūd, *Sunan*, Book 42, Ḥadīth No. 143: <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/42/143>; see also Madelung, “The Origins,” 514 for a discussion of this tradition.

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inspired” (*al-mawḥā*) and the inspiration (*al-waḥy*) along the same lines as the difference between “what is recited” (*al-maqrū*) and the recitation (*al-qirā'a*):

It says that “when God speaks through waḥy, a sound came forth with it.” It does not say “when God speaks through sound.” The inspiration (*al-waḥy*) is not the same as “what is inspired” (*al-mawḥā*) because “what is communicated” is the Speech of God and the communication (*al-waḥy*) is the sending down (*inzāl*) of the Speech of God and causing knowledge (*i'lām*) of the Speech of God. What indicates to the correctness of this [statement] is the Qur'ān. This is that God differentiated between the two of them and He said: “Likewise We have inspired in you a *qur'ān* (Q. 42:7).” So the inspiration (*al-waḥy*) is sending down (*inzāl*) the Qur'ān, causing knowledge (*i'lām*) of the Qur'ān, and causing understanding (*ifhām*) of the Qur'ān which is the Speech of God, and He said: “Verily We inspired to you as We inspired to Noah, and the Prophets after him” (Q. 4:163), meaning ‘We sent down (*anzalnā*) to you and caused you to understand (*afhāmanā*) Our Eternal Speech, just as We sent down and caused those before you to understand Our Eternal Speech’ – so the causing of understanding (*al-ifhām*) did not exist, and then it did. As for what is understood (*al-mafhūm*), it is that which is Eternal Speech of God and it exists established before the causing of understanding (*al-ifhām*) and after it according to one attribute without divergence or difference.⁶³⁷

Per his commentary above, al-Bāqillānī clearly defines *inzāl* and *waḥy* as referring to one and the same event – the process of causing knowledge (*i'lām*) and understanding (*ifhām*) of God’s Speech. He further noted that the *ḥadīth* exists in different versions, some of which distinguish between God’s Speech and the sound heard in the heavens as different things altogether. In all versions of the *ḥadīth*, it is the Angel Gabriel alone who hears God’s Speech while everyone else hears a sound of the beaten chain:

This *ḥadīth* has been narrated from different versions, and the sound related to it resembles the beating of a chain to the creatures, not the true Speech [of God]...The Prophet said: “When God spoke through waḥy a strong trembling from it overtook the heavens from the fear of God. When the people of the heavens heard it, they swooned and fell down in prostration. The first among them to raise his head was Gabriel. So God spoke from His communication what He willed, and then Gabriel would make it reach the angels. Whenever he passed by [each] heaven, its inhabitants asked him: “What did our Lord say?”. Gabriel said: “The Truth, and He is exalted and great.” So it is established [from this narration] that the sound resembling the chain is the trembling of the heavens, because they heard the sound of the trembling of the heavens, not the Speech of God. With respect to this, they asked Gabriel “what does our Lord say?”. So this indicates that they did not hear the Speech of God, they only heard the sound of the trembling of the heavens that resembles the beating of the chain – because if they had heard what Gabriel heard, then they would have understood what Gabriel understood.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁷ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 126.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 126-127.

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Through scrutinizing the wording of the above *ḥadīth* and quoting other versions, al-Bāqillānī was able to demonstrate that the content of this prophetic tradition actually supports his view of Qur'ānic Revelation. He demonstrated how the content of these narrations do not entail God speaking through sound and instead distinguish Gabriel as the only heavenly creature who directly heard and understood the eternal uncreated Speech of God. Al-Bāqillānī's exegesis of the above *ḥadīths* dovetails quite nicely with his view, seen earlier, that God caused Gabriel to perceive His Speech directly and understand it and that Gabriel only conveyed the Arabic recitation of God's Speech to others including the Prophet.

Having analyzed al-Bāqillānī's Ash'arī conception of the Revelatory Process and its distinctive view of the Arabic Qur'ān as the utterance of Gabriel, we can move on to briefly consider the views of the next great Ash'arī master, Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī, who remains one of the most influential Sunni thinkers in history.

4.3.2 Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085): Qur'ānic Revelation through Gabriel's Understanding and Instruction

After being forced to leave Nīshāpūr by the Saljuq persecution of the Shāfi'ī scholars, al-Juwaynī returned and was appointed by Nizām al-Mulk to teach at the Nizāmiyya *madrasa*, which he did until his death. Known as the “*imām* of the two holy places” (*imam al-ḥaramayn*) and the teacher of the famous al-Ghazālī, al-Juwaynī was a towering theologian in the Sunni tradition.

Al-Juwaynī's views on God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation are found in his *Kitāb al-Irshād*, which sets forth his account of orthodox Sunni theology. In this work, he presented the standard Ash'arī views of God's eternal and uncreated Speech, the concept of inner speech (*kalām nafsī*), the difference between the recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech and “what is recited” (*al-*

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maqrū'), different meanings of the term *qur'ān*, and a lengthy refutation of his opponents' positions. On these topics, al-Juwaynī's views did not substantially differ from al-Ash'arī and al-Bāqillānī, but he did elaborate further on certain ideas. For example, to illustrate al-Ash'arī's idea that God's Speech is eternally command, prohibition, and information, al-Juwaynī explained that even God's command to Moses to "take off your shoes" is an eternal command that never changes; the command eternally exists in anticipation of Moses' coming and it only reached Moses when he came into existence.⁶³⁹

On the matter of Qur'ānic Revelation, al-Juwaynī provided a brief but precise explanation near the end of his section on God's Speech. His remarks are worth quoting in full:

The Speech of God was sent down to the Prophets and many verses from God's Book indicate this. However, the meaning of "sending down" (*al-inzāl*) is not moving something down from a high place to a low place; sending down (*al-inzāl*) in the sense of relocation (*al-intiqāl*) is specific to bodies and atoms. Whoever believes in the eternity of God's Speech, its subsistence in the Essence of the Creator, and the impossibility of its separation from that to which it is attributed will not doubt the impossibility of its being relocated from it. Whoever believes in the temporal generation of the Speech [of God] and holds that it is an accident is also not allowed to enter into the belief entailing its relocation since accidents neither separate nor relocate. Thus, the meaning of "sending down" (*al-inzāl*) is that Gabriel perceived (*adraka*) the Speech of God when he was in his station above the seven heavens, and then descended to the earth. He caused the Messenger to understand (*afhama*) what he himself understood (*mā fahīma*) at the Lotus of the Limit without relocating the essence of God's Speech. When it is said: "The message of the king descended to the palace, this does not entail the relocation of his voice or the relocation of his speech subsisting in his soul."⁶⁴⁰

Al-Juwaynī's above remarks are consistent with the views of al-Ash'arī and al-Bāqillānī examined earlier. Of some importance is his statement that Gabriel first perceived and understood the Speech of God and then caused Muhammad to understand (*afhama*) what he himself understood of God's Speech. This strongly implies that the Arabic Qur'ān revealed to Muhammad is the verbal

⁶³⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief*, 71; idem, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥīm (Cairo: Maktaba al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2009). The entire discussion of God's Speech is on pp. 93-122 of the Arabic edition.

⁶⁴⁰ Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 120. My translation was informed and aided by Walker's translation in *Conclusive Proofs*, 74.

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utterance of Gabriel and Gabriel's understanding of the eternal Speech of God, which – according to Ash'arī occasionalism – was created by God within Gabriel. In this respect, al-Juwaynī's description of the Revelatory Process recognizes the mediation of the Angel Gabriel in God's creation of the Arabic recitation of His Speech as in al-Bāqillāni's account. What al-Juwaynī does not mention is God teaching Gabriel the Arabic linguistic arrangement (*al-naẓm*) of the Qur'ān, although one may assume per Ash'arī theology that God created that knowledge within Gabriel. Thus, al-Juwaynī's view further positions Gabriel as the locus for God's creation of the Arabic Qur'ān that is eventually recited to and by the Prophet.

4.3.3 Abū Bakr b. Sābiq al-Ṣiqillī (d. 493/1100): Qur'ānic Revelation through Gabriel's Recitation

An important but hitherto unstudied Ash'arī text concerning Qur'ānic Revelation is the *Mas'ala al-shāri' fī l-Qur'ān* by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Sābiq al-Ṣiqillī (d. 493/1100).⁶⁴¹ Originally hailing from Sicily, al-Ṣiqillī was a Mālikī-Ash'arī scholar and a student of Abū l-Walīd al-Bājī (d. 474/1081). He studied in al-Andalus and in Mecca before settling in Egypt where he passed away.⁶⁴² Al-Ṣiqillī (d. 493/1100) penned a short treatise putting forth his views of God's Speech and the Revelatory Process that leads to the composition of the Arabic Qur'ān in response to the claims of a certain Egyptian scholar, whom he only names “al-Shīrāzī in Egypt.” This al-Shīrāzī reportedly professed a Ḥanbalī position on the Qur'ān, claiming that the recitation of the Qur'ān

⁶⁴¹ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Sābiq al-Ṣiqillī, *Mas'ala al-shāri' fī l-Qur'ān*, in *Kitāb al-Ḥudud al-kalāmiyya wa al-fiqhiyya 'alā ra'y Ahl al-Sunna al-Ash'ariyya*, ed. Mohamed Tabarani (Tunis: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2008). Thanks to Hasan Ansari for bringing this author to my attention.

⁶⁴² See editor's introduction in *ibid.*, 9-11 for an outline of al-Ṣiqillī's biography, about which some details are not clear.

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heard from the reciter, including the sounds, letters, and tunes are eternal and uncreated.⁶⁴³ He further claimed that if the recitation (*al-tilāwa*) of God's Speech is created, then the community's reverence and glorification of the Qur'ān's recitation and the Qur'ānic codex (*muṣḥaf*) is unnecessary.⁶⁴⁴

Remaining true to Ash'arī principles, al-Ṣiqillī began his treatise by reasserting the transcendence, eternity, and unitary nature of God's Speech and denying that God speaks in sounds or letters.⁶⁴⁵ He further asserted that the audible recitation of God's Speech, comprising the sounds, letters, and tones of the Qur'ān, is created and not eternal, and that whoever believes that the recitation is eternal has committed unbelief.⁶⁴⁶ He then repeated the Ash'arī refrain that the Speech of God is truly (*'alā ḥaqīqah*) present between the two covers of the codex, recited in the prayer niches, recited upon the tongues, and preserved in the hearts even while the pen, paper, ink, letters, and tunes are created.⁶⁴⁷

What is of considerable interest for our purposes is al-Ṣiqillī's account of the Revelatory Process by which God's uncreated Speech is sent down through Gabriel in the form of the created Arabic recitation. He introduced the topic by first focusing on how some specially chosen creatures, like Moses and Adam, heard God's Speech without any intermediary. In his account of Moses and Adam, al-Ṣiqillī explained that God caused each of them to hear His Speech but also

⁶⁴³ As reported by al-Ṣiqillī in *ibid.*, 215. The editor of the text believes that this "al-Shīrāzī in Egypt" was the Fatimid Ismaili *dā'ī* and scholar, al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. However, on this point, the editor is plainly incorrect. Not only does al-Ṣiqillī fail to label his opponent as belonging to the Ismailis (*al-Bāṭiniyya*), but the theological position of this "al-Shīrāzī in Egypt" that al-Ṣiqillī relates is certainly not an Ismaili position on the Qur'ān.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

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created in them a knowledge or understanding of what the Divine Speech conveyed to him specifically.⁶⁴⁸ For example, while Moses and Adam each heard the self-same eternal and uncreated Speech of God, they each understood a different command or information from it. On one occasion, Moses heard God's Speech and understood the message as: "*Verily I am God; there is no god but I; therefore serve Me*" (Q. 20:14). On another occasion, the message Moses understood from hearing the same Speech of God was: "*What is that, Moses, thou hast in thy right hand?*" (Q. 20:17). Adam heard the same eternal Speech of God on two occasions (Q. 2:35 and Q. 2:38) and also understood a different message each time – the first was for him to remain in the Garden and second was for him to descend to earth.⁶⁴⁹

These explanations establish a kind of "two-tier" perception of God's Speech by these prophets, consisting of their direct reception of the Divine Speech accompanied by a specific knowledge or understanding of the Divine Speech that God creates within each of them at the same time. On this very point, al-Şiqillī stated that "what is heard from God in this world and the Hereafter is one thing without division, meaning it does not differ and nothing of it comes before the other; it is without modality, without likeness, and without resemblance, while the hearing of Moses and Adam is what differs and changes."⁶⁵⁰ What we seem to have here is a slight modification of the early Ash'arī idea that certain prophets (Adam, Moses, Muhammad) heard God's Speech without any mediation. Instead, there seems to be some sort of specificity in the form of a knowledge or understanding that God created in their hearts. Thus, the respective

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 218.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 219.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 219.

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understandings that Adam, Moses, and Muhammad have from hearing the same Speech of God are all different.

Al-Ṣiqillī then moved on to consider the special case of Gabriel, who is also one of the creatures whom God distinguished in hearing His Speech without an intermediary.

Likewise, Gabriel hears the Speech of God and he understands from it what God wills. Then God creates for Gabriel the capacity (*al-quḍra*) to communicate (*tablīgh*) what he heard from God to every community in their own language, just as God said: “*And We have sent no Messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he might make all clear to them*” (Q. 14:4). So he [Gabriel] conveys what he heard to Moses in Hebrew; he conveys to Jesus in Syriac; and he conveys to Muhammad in Arabic. So Gabriel’s understanding and communication is what differs, while the Speech of God is one and eternal, subsisting in His Essence; it does not change as the languages change and it is not diversified through the diverse meanings understood from it.⁶⁵¹

Gabriel not only hears the eternal Speech of God, but God also endows him with the special power or capacity of linguistic enunciation (*tablīgh*) by which Gabriel conveys His Speech to every community in their own tongue. The crucial stage in the Revelatory Process is Gabriel because Gabriel’s understanding and communication of God’s Speech is what diversifies its forms into different languages and Revelatory Products: “Gabriel’s understanding and communication is what differs, while the Speech of God is one and eternal.” Gabriel therefore possesses a certain level of agency in the Revelatory Process because God’s Speech first becomes verbal, linguistic and audible at his level of understanding, not at the level of God’s Essence or uncreated Speech, and not at the level of the prophets. Based on al-Ṣiqillī’s remarks here and earlier, since every creature who hears God’s Speech directly comes away with an understanding of the Speech of God specific to him, it would not be implausible to suggest each creature’s understanding is its own “interpretation” of God’s Speech. Al-Ṣiqillī thus spoke of God’s Speech being “one and eternal” with “the diverse meanings understood from it.” This suggests that while God’s Speech

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

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is one and the same reality heard by all, every hearer understands it differently, resulting in different creaturely interpretations of the same Divine Speech. Gabriel's rendering of the Divine Speech into different verbal linguistic discourses – such as Hebrew revelation conveyed to Moses or the Arabic revelation conveyed to Muhammad – amount to different interpretations of God's Speech as understood by Gabriel.

Al-Ṣiqillī then addressed the specific case of Qur'ānic Revelation and the role of Gabriel in understanding and enunciating the Arabic recitation of the Speech of God to the Prophet Muhammad. The entire passage merits being quoted below:

Likewise, when God, may He be exalted, caused Gabriel to hear His Eternal Speech, He created for him in his heart the understanding (*al-fahm*) of everything God wills regarding His creatures and His Messengers, so Gabriel then understood. Then Gabriel would descend, conveying what he heard out of necessity (compulsion) into utterances (*alfāz*) in accordance with what he understood; he would learn and only estimate [or gauge] what he heard through those utterances (*al-alfāz*) and that linguistic arrangement (*al-naẓm*) – in terms of chapters, verses, or words in one time or another. So, whomever among the prophets who hears him [Gabriel], would hear it [God's Speech] recited (*matlū*) through the recitation (*qirā'a*) of Gabriel. All those whom God does not [directly] address would hear it [God's Speech] recited (*matlū*) from the Prophet through the Prophet's recitation (*bitilāwat al-nabī*), which is his created letters, sounds, and melodies as arranged into chapters and verses — in accordance with what Gabriel brought down. This is because the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) [of the Qur'ān] is only with respect to the arrangement (*naẓm*) of the created letters according to the type of arrangement called a *sūra*.⁶⁵²

Al-Ṣiqillī's explanation has important bearing on the nature of the Revelatory Process and the mediating role of Gabriel. Like Adam, Moses and other chosen prophets, Gabriel heard God's Speech directly, and retained an understanding of it that God created within him. Subsequently, Gabriel descended to the Prophet and expressed that understanding of God's Speech into the verbal utterances and linguistic arrangement (*naẓm*) that comprise the Arabic Qur'ān. The Prophet heard the Arabic Recitation of the Qur'ān from Gabriel while everyone else heard this recitation from the Prophet.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 220.

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According to Ash'arī epistemology, as seen earlier, God creates knowledge within the knowing subject and whatever God creates within a creature is properly attributed to that creature. It was on this basis that Ash'arīs objected to the Mu'tazilī idea that God created His Speech in a created substrate like a tree or a rock – since this would entail that the tree or rock uttered the speech. The same Ash'arī logic applies to this case – where God creates an understanding of the various recitations of His Speech within Gabriel and Gabriel recites the Qur'ān (and Revelatory Products like the Torah or Gospel) based on his understanding of God's Speech. Accordingly, the Recitation of God's Speech, constituting the Arabic Qur'ān, is properly attributed to Gabriel and would technically be the “the word (*qawl*) of Gabriel”, even though God created that knowledge within him. Thus, al-Ṣiqillī presented the Arabic Qur'ān in its recited sounds, letters, verbal expressions, and miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) as the words of Gabriel; these words in Arabic constitute the Recitation (*qirā'a*) of God's eternal and uncreated Speech.

Hermeneutical Implications:

The Ash'arī theory of Qur'ānic Revelation expounded by al-Bāqillānī and his successors leads to ambiguities and difficulties when it comes to the legal interpretation of the Qur'ān. The ontological difference between the eternal uncreated Speech of God and the created verbal expressions of the Arabic Qur'ān entails a “hermeneutical distance” between them that the human interpreter must traverse in deducing the true meaning of the Qur'ān.⁶⁵³ This means there is clear-cut one-to-one correlation between a Qur'ānic verbal expression – an imperative, indicative, vocative, or interrogative – and the eternal meaning (*ma'nā*) in God's Speech that the verbal expression

⁶⁵³ Vishanoff, *The Formation*, 180.

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conveys – command, prohibition, information, or interrogation. In other words, an imperative phrase in the Qur'ān does not necessarily express a command in God's eternal speech; it may just as well be a recommendation or information. Furthermore, Qur'anic terms like “the believers”, “the adulterers”, or “the unbelievers” do not necessarily convey general meaning (referring to all believers, adulterers, or unbelievers). As Vishanoff observes, “the expression alone does not convey either generality or particularity; its meaning is indeterminate...Therefore, one must suspend judgment on the interpretation of apparently general expressions, until further evidence is found.”⁶⁵⁴

Conclusions:

With the formulations of al-Ṣiqillī, we see the culmination of key developments in Ash'arī theories of God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation which began in the thought of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and perhaps even Ibn Kullāb before him. One major result of these developments is the idea that the Angel Gabriel is the intermediary for God's creation of the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* verbal linguistic recitation. This development seems to have been prompted or at least influenced by factors both internal and external to Ash'arī theology. As for internal factors – first, the Ash'arī doctrine that God's Speech is an eternal, uncreated, unitary Divine attribute that transcends sounds, letters, words, and all created attributes entails that God does not directly recite the Arabic Qur'ān; second, their view of God's Speech makes it impossible for Ash'arī theologians to affirm a literal “sending down” (*inzāl*) of God's Speech in the sense of displacement, movement or transcription as affirmed by the classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition, who took *inzāl/tanzīl* in more or less literal terms; third, the

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 169.

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Ash'arī distinction between God's Speech and its Arabic Recitation required Ash'arī theologians to explain the precise origins of the latter in the Revelatory Process. In terms of external pressures, one cannot ignore the Ḥanbalī and Mu'tazilī polemics against the Ash'arī's views on God's Speech, with the Ḥanbalīs arguing that God's uncreated Speech is the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sounds and letters, and the Mu'tazilī arguing that God's created Speech is the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sounds and letters. Then there is also the Ismaili factor, with the Fatimid Ismaili summons present in the heartland of Abbasid territory and Ismaili *dā'īs* spreading Ismaili teachings by attacking various Sunni beliefs. Faced with a dialectical assault on three fronts, it is not surprising that the Ash'arī theologians consolidated and refined their teachings on God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation to better support their theological positions.

The first signs of this trend were found in the reported views of Ibn Kullāb, who seemingly reinterpreted the meaning of “sending down” (*inzāl*) God's Speech as “causing knowledge” (*al-i'lām*) and “causing understanding” (*al-ifhām*) of it. Al-Ash'arī followed this view, employing the very same Kullābī interpretation of “sending down” and further clarifying that the literal “descent” (*nuzūl*) pertains to the angelic messenger (Gabriel) and not the Speech of God. In his view, the angelic messenger memorizes God's Speech at a high place and “descends” to a low place (the earth) to convey it. Subsequently, al-Bāqillānī both upheld and elaborated these teachings by providing a robust and detailed account of the Revelatory Process. He specified that God caused Gabriel to hear His eternal Speech without mediation and then taught Gabriel its Arabic Recitation. In his view, the Arabic Recitation of the Qur'ān with its miraculous inimitable arrangement (*naẓm*) is the utterance (*qawl*) of Gabriel, not the direct utterance of God, since God's Speech remains beyond sounds and letters. Al-Bāqillānī also responded to Ḥanbalī arguments from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* by reiterating and emphasizing the mediating role of Gabriel as the only heavenly creature

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to hear God's Speech directly and as the divinely authorized agent who literally utters the Qur'ānic verses to Muhammad. Al-Bāqillānī's vision of Qur'ānic Revelation thus accorded a more central role to Gabriel than other Sunni thinkers. Following all this, al-Juwaynī described the Revelatory Process as one where Gabriel perceives God's Speech when he is beyond the seven heavens and descends to earth to communicate his understanding of God's Speech to the Prophet in the form of the Arabic Recitation. Al-Juwaynī's formulation, albeit brief, implies that the Arabic recitation of the Qur'ān revealed to Muhammad, and subsequently recited by him to others, is Gabriel's understanding of God's Speech, which God created within him. Finally, al-Ṣiqillī's views appear to be the strongest assertion concerning the mediation of Gabriel in God's communication and manifestation of His Speech as the Arabic Qur'ān. Al-Ṣiqillī explicitly stated that Gabriel was the first creature to enunciate the verbal expressions (*alfāz*) and the literary arrangement (*naẓm*) of the Arabic Qur'ān and various verbal revelatory discourses, which resulted from his understanding of God's Speech that God created within him. These various Ash'arī articulations in the fifth/eleventh century all entail that the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* created sounds, letters, words, and verses is the created word (*qawl*) of Gabriel while also being the Recitation of the uncreated Speech of God.

4.4 Ḥanbalī Positions on Qur'ānic Revelation: The Qādirī Creed (409/1018) and Abū Ya'lā (d. 458/1066)

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's understanding of the Qur'ān as the uncreated Speech of God spread far and wide through the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries among Muslim traditionists and led to the formation of a Ḥanbalī theological tradition. As we saw above, Ḥanbalī teachings on the nature of the Qur'ān were both popular and influential. The Qādirī Creed, which we will examine below, was read out in mosques throughout the Abbasid empire on several occasions. Various accounts

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of the factional violence in Baghdad and Khurāsān as well as passing remarks in certain *kalām* works reference the “masses” of people who held Ḥanbalī beliefs about the Qur'ān.

At the same time, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's ideas were also subject to variant interpretations among his students and followers in different places. For example, a fourth/tenth-century perspective comes from Ibn Baṭṭa al-'Ukbarī (304-387/917-997), a second-generation follower of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. Ibn Baṭṭa professed that the Qur'ān “is knowledge of His knowledge, uncreated, and how[ever] it may be read, how[ever] it may be written, and where ever it is recited and in whatever place it may be, be it heaven or on earth in all situations and in all places it is God's uncreated Speech.”⁶⁵⁵ A different interpretation of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's teachings was advanced by Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064).⁶⁵⁶ He certainly followed Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's teaching on the identity between the Qur'ān and God's Knowledge. In Ibn Ḥazm's words, “the Qur'ān is the Speech of God and His Knowledge, and hence uncreated... He, to Him belong might and glory, has informed [us], that His Speech is His Knowledge, and that it is eternal and uncreated.”⁶⁵⁷ However, Ibn Ḥazm also believed that the term “Speech of God” (*kalām Allāh*) refers to five things, four of which are created and one of which is uncreated.⁶⁵⁸ The five things are: 1) the human voice through which the Qur'ān is uttered (*malḥūz bihi*); 2) the contents of the Qur'ān such as the prescriptions of prayer, fasting or pilgrimage, 3) the written copy of the Qur'ān, 4) the memorized Qur'ān, and

⁶⁵⁵ From Ibn Baṭṭa's creed translated in Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 134. For the French translation of the creed, see Ibn Baṭṭa al-'Ukbarī, *La profesion de foi d'Ibn Batta*, ed. and tr. Henri Laoust (Damascus: Institute Francais de Damas, 1958).

⁶⁵⁶ See Livnat Holtzman, “Elements of Acceptance and Rejection in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's Systematic Reading of Ibn Ḥazm” For Ibn Ḥazm's views, see also Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 259-262.

⁶⁵⁷ Holtzman, “Elements of Acceptance and Rejection,” 622.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 625, quoting Ibn Ḥazm: “the name Qur'ān applies equally and truly to five different things from which four are created and one is uncreated.”

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5) the Speech of God that is God's Knowledge.⁶⁵⁹ In light of such diversity, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak about an umbrella of "Hanbalī" perspectives, all of which claim adherence to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's teachings, instead of positing a single uniform Ḥanbalī position. In this section we will consider two fifth/eleventh-century Ḥanbalī perspectives on Qur'ānic Revelation: the Qādirī Creed proclaimed by the Abbasid Caliph in 409/1018 (later re-issued by his son al-Qā'im in 433/1041) and the teachings of Abū Ya'lā b. al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066), the Ḥanbalī *qāḍī* of Baghdad.

4.4.1 The Qādirī Creed on God's Speech

The contents of the Qādirī Creed were provided by Ibn al-Jawzī in his historical chronicle within his account of the year 433/1041, when the Caliph al-Qā'im republished the Creed.⁶⁶⁰ The first part of the Creed is a statement on the nature of God and His names and attributes. God is extolled and praised with a host of predicates derived from scriptural sources without differentiating between eternal divine attributes and divine acts as in other *kalām* schools. There is also an emphasis against the metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of any divine names as practiced by Mu'tazilīs and Ash'arīs. The section on God ended with the following statement: "Every attribute by which He described Himself or by which His Messenger described Him is a real attribute without any metaphor."⁶⁶¹ Such statements reflect a Ḥanbalī anti-*kalām* attitude and preference to

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 623-624. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 259.

⁶⁶⁰ Abū l-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Alī b. al-Jawzī (Ibn al-Jawzī), *al-Muntaẓam fī tārikh al-muluk wa l-umam*, Second Edition, 17 Vols., ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā and Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1995), vol. 15 (Years: 387 AH – 447 AH), 279-282. An earlier translation of the Creed based on an earlier edition of the Ibn Jawzī text appeared in Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, Andrew Rippin (eds.), *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature* (Routledge, 2004), 160-163.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 280

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stick to the literal meaning of scripture. The Creed then transitioned into presenting what al-Qādir deemed to be the “orthodox” belief concerning the Qur'ān as God's Speech:

He is a speaker through His Speech without created organs like the organs of the creatures.... Know that the Speech of God is uncreated (*ghayr makhluq*), which He spoke directly (*takalama taklīman*) and sent down to His Messenger upon the tongue of Gabriel, after Gabriel heard it from Him and recited it to Muhammad. Muhammad recited it to his companions, and the companions recited it to the community. It does not become created through the recitation of the creatures because this Speech in its essence is that which God spoke. So it remains uncreated in every situation that it is recited, memorized, written, and heard. Whoever says that it is created in any state is an unbeliever whose blood is permissible (to be shed) after he is asked to repent of it.⁶⁶²

The Qādirī Creed appears to articulate the “popular” Ḥanbalī position on the Qur'ān as God's Speech as it was perhaps understood by the masses; namely, that God directly speaks the Arabic sounds, letters, words, verses, and chapters of the Qur'ān and that these are entirely eternal and uncreated. This position also entails that the Qur'ān is uncreated wherever it is to be found – whether recited, memorized, written, or heard. This position was attributed to the Ḥanbalīs by their opponents including 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Juwaynī, and al-Ghazālī. Al-Shahrastānī related that the Ḥanbalīs, whom he terms anthropomorphists, claim that “the letters, sounds and written books are eternal (*qadīma azaliyya*)” and that God speaks with an actual voice.⁶⁶³ As we saw earlier, al-Bāqillānī argued with certain Ḥanbalīs who claimed that God directly recited the verses of the Qur'ān in Arabic. In general, the popular Ḥanbalī position makes the Revelatory Principle wholly identical to the Revelatory Product: the Arabic Qur'ān is the literal uncreated and eternal Speech of God, directly spoken by Him, consisting of the same sounds and letters recited by human beings. This stands in complete contrast to the Mu'tazili, Ash'arī, and Ḥanafī views.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² Ibid., 281.

⁶⁶³ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 96.

⁶⁶⁴ For the views of the Ḥanbalī scholar Ibn Qudāma, see Hans Daiber, “The Creed (*'Aqīda*) of the Ḥanbalite Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī: a newly discovered text,” in Wadad al-Qāḍī (ed.), *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for*

4.4.2 The Ḥanbalī *Kalām* of Abū Ya'ālā b. al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066)

A more nuanced and sophisticated Ḥanbalī position on the Qur'ān comes from Abū Ya'ālā b. al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066), who was the most prominent Ḥanbalī scholar of his time. His views are found in the first extant Ḥanbalī *kalām* text called *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* (*The Trustworthy Book on the Principles of Religion*), which is a summary of a longer work that is no longer available. In the century prior to Abū Ya'ālā, certain Ḥanbalī thinkers had already departed from anthropomorphic positions characteristic of earlier Ḥanbalīs: al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941) denied any likeness between God's attributes and creaturely attributes. This has been called a “non-interventionist” position regarding the modality (*kayfiyya*) of God's attributes, popularly known as *balkafa* or *bi-lā kayf* (without asking how). Around the same time, the Ḥanbalī scholar Abū l-Ḥusayn b. al-Munādī (d. 335/947) supported the practice of metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of God's attributes.⁶⁶⁵ In this intellectual context, Abū Ya'ālā employed the methods of *kalām* theology in his works and accepted speculative inquiry (*naẓar*) as legitimate, even describing it as an obligation from God upon His creatures.⁶⁶⁶ “*Naẓar* is the first of what God requires for his rational creatures, leading to the recognition of God because the one who does not recognize God cannot possibly come close to Him, just as if you do not recognize a person, you cannot attain

Iḥsān 'Abbās on his Sixtieth Birthday (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981), 105-112; idem, “The Quran as a “Shibboleth” of Varying Concepts of the Godhead,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 14 (1994): 249–296.

⁶⁶⁵ Jon Hoover, “Ḥanbalī Theology,” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶⁶⁶ Abū Ya'ālā b. al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066), *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Wadi Z. Haddad (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1974), 19-20.

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closeness to him.”⁶⁶⁷ I will first briefly consider Abū Ya‘lā’s views on God’s attributes before focusing on his position on God’s Speech and Qur’ānic Revelation.

God and His Attributes:

Contrary to most characterizations of Ḥanbalī theology as literalistic and anthropomorphic, Abū Ya‘lā adhered to a rather sophisticated theory of God’s Essence and Attributes. He maintained that God is described through two kinds of attributes: essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyya*) and qualifying attributes (*ṣifāt ma‘nawiyya*). Essential attributes are those which, if denied from God, entail the denial of God’s Essence. Examples of essential attributes are God’s life, power, knowledge, will, perception, hearing, seeing, speech, command, prohibition – by virtue of which He is living, powerful, knowing, willing, perceiving, hearing, seeing, speaking, commanding, and forbidding. The qualifying attributes are God’s creativity, providence, justice, making beautiful, favor, reward, and punishment – by which He is creative, providing, just, beautifying, favoring, rewarding, and punishing. The qualifying attributes, however, proceed from God’s act while the essential attributes follow from His Essence.⁶⁶⁸ Abū Ya‘lā also affirmed the reality of the seemingly anthropomorphic “organs of God” mentioned in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, such as God’s eyes, face, hands, shin, feet and legs. His position on the nature of “God’s organs” was quite nuanced and noteworthy. On one hand, he rejected understanding these descriptions in a physical sense; thus, God certainly does not possess eyes, a face, hands, feet, etc. in the sense of physical human organs. However, Abū Ya‘lā also refused to interpret these descriptions using the metaphorical

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 44.

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interpretation (*ta'wīl*) characteristic of the Mu'tazilīs and Ash'arīs – where God's hands are a metaphor for God's power or God's face is a metaphor for God's Essence; doing so would deny the reality of God's hands and face, a reality that the Qur'ān clearly affirms. Instead, Abū Ya'lā took the position that all of these – face, hands, legs, feet, etc. – are real attributes of God that are super-added (*zā'ida*) to His Essence.⁶⁶⁹ What these descriptions truly disclose of God, one simply cannot know.

God's Eternal Speech as Sounds and Letters:

Abū Ya'lā devoted a small section of his *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad* to the topic of God's Speech, which is one of God's essential attributes. He began his discourse by saying that “God is a speaker with an eternal uncreated Speech, that is neither body, atom, nor accident. He is described by it with respect to what does not cease. His Speech has no resemblance to the speech of human beings.”⁶⁷⁰ He then contrasted his position with various other schools including the Jahmīs, Mu'tazilīs, Karrāmīs, and others. Most significantly, he explicitly rejected the views of “the anthropomorphists (*al-mushabbihā*), Qadarīs, Najjārīs, and Karrāmīs who say that the Speech of God is similar to the speech of human beings.”⁶⁷¹ He then offered arguments from the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and reasoning to demonstrate that God's Speech is uncreated and eternal. These arguments run very close to al-Ash'arī's stock arguments in *al-Ibāna* and those of later Ash'arī thinkers. For example, Abū Ya'lā quoted qur'ānic verses about God's Command (*amr*) being different from His

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 51-55.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

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creation (*khalq*), referenced prophetic *ḥadīth* that say the Qur'ān is uncreated, and provided arguments as to why God's Speech could neither be a created atom or accident, created within God's Essence, nor created within some creaturely essence.⁶⁷² These are stock *kalām* arguments used by other theologians. From these arguments, it is evident that Abū Ya'lā understood the concepts of "eternal" (*qadīm*) and "uncreated" (*ghayr makhluq*) along the same lines as the Ash'arīs and Mu'tazilīs. Akin to the Ash'arīs, he held that God's Speech is eternally a command, prohibition, and information in and of itself. Thus, Abū Ya'lā maintained that God's uncreated Speech is a prescriptive, proscriptive, and indicative address for God's creatures.⁶⁷³

The most difficult dimension of Abū Ya'lā's position on God's Speech is the precise relationship or identity of God's Uncreated Speech with the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sounds and letters. On one hand, as we saw above, Abū Ya'lā said that God's Speech has no resemblance to human speech and he rejected the views of certain groups who said that God's Speech is similar to human speech. On the other hand, Abū Ya'lā made several statements suggesting God's Speech is identical to the qur'ānic sounds and letters that are recited, written, memorized, and heard by human beings. He rejected the Ash'arī definition of a speaker (*mutakallim*) as one in whom speech subsists as well as the Mu'tazilī definition of a speaker as the maker (*fā'il*) of speech. Instead, Abū Ya'lā defined a speaker as a "sayer" (*qā'il*) and nothing more.⁶⁷⁴ He equally rejected the Ash'arī position that speech is a meaning in the soul that transcends sounds and letters; instead he said that "the reality of both eternal and temporally generated speech is intelligible letters and audible

⁶⁷² Ibid., 87.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., 92-93.

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sounds.”⁶⁷⁵ Abū Ya‘lā further held that the sounds and letters of God’s Speech are heard in and of themselves and not only heard on the condition that they reach the ears of the hearer.⁶⁷⁶ All of this suggests that the eternal uncreated Speech of God consists of sounds and letters that are, in some ways, similar to the sounds and letters of human speech.

Abū Ya‘lā explicitly rejected the Ash‘arī view that the Recitation (*al-qirā’a*) of God’s Speech is created and ontologically distinct from “what is Recited” (*al-maqrū’*) – the Divine Speech itself. He instead argued that the Recitation and the “what is Recited” are one and the same thing – the Speech of God itself:

The Recitation (*al-qirā’a*) is “what is Recited” (*al-maqrū’*), the writing is “what is written”, and they are both eternal (*qadīm*). This is in contrast to the Ash‘arīs who say that the Recitation (*al-tilāwa*) is not “what is Recited” (*al-maqrū’*) and that the Recitation is temporally generated (*muhdath*) and created (*makhlūq*) and that the writing (*al-kitāba*) is likewise. The proof that the Recitation (*al-qirā’a*) is “what is Recited” (*al-maqrū’*) is His saying informing about the Quraysh [who said]: “*Surely this is not except the speech of a mortal. I will cast him into Hell*” (Q. 74:25-26). Thus, He threatened them with fire due to their claim that this is only the speech of a mortal, and it is known that the Quraysh by this speech referred to the recitations (*al-qirā’āt*) which they heard from the Prophet and from his Companions. So when He threatened them according to that, it proves that it is not the speech of a mortal.... The Muslims are in agreement that the recitations (*al-tilāwāt*) and the readings (*al-qirā’āt*) [of the Qur’ān] are the Speech of God because everyone among them when he hears the recitation of the reciter says: “This is the Speech of God” and points to the sound heard from him.⁶⁷⁷

From the above explanation, it follows that Abū Ya‘lā regards the Arabic Qur’ān *qua* Recitation (*al-qirā’a*, *al-tilāwa*) and God’s eternal Speech as one and the same. In other words, the Arabic Qur’ān *qua* sounds, words, and chapters, that are heard in a person’s recitation are God’s uncreated Speech: “The Speech of God is what is heard with the recitation of the reciter and its hearing is

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, 92.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 88. See also p. 90-91 for another set of arguments that what humans hear from a Qur’ān reciter is God’s Speech.

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from the reciter.”⁶⁷⁸ This differs from the Ash‘arīs who said what a person hears from the reciter is only the Recitation (*qirā'a*) of God’s Speech while they may hear the actual Speech of God from God *with or through* the recitation of the reciter *but not from* the reciter. Abū Ya‘lā took the same position with respect to the writing of the Qur’ān in a book or its memorization in the hearts; they are the Speech of God itself.

The Revelation of God’s Speech:

Abū Ya‘lā claimed that what human beings actually speak when reciting the Qur’ān is the very Speech of God: “We speak the Speech of God, in contrast to the Ash‘arīs who say it is not possible to speak the Speech of God, but [it is only possible to say that], ‘we recite the Speech of God’.”⁶⁷⁹ Likewise, he argued that humans actually hear the Speech of God with the recitation of the Qur’ān reciter and indeed hear God’s Speech directly from the reciter when he recites any part of Qur’ān. He contrasted his view with the position of the Ash‘arīs, who say that nobody hears the Speech of God directly except Moses and Muhammad in special cases.⁶⁸⁰ In line with these positions, Abū Ya‘lā explained how the Revelatory Process simply consists of the Prophet receiving God’s Speech itself from Gabriel and not merely its Arabic Recitation. He explicitly rejected the Ash‘arī views, seen earlier, that interpret the meaning of *inzāl* (causing to descend) as a process of *ifhām* (causing to understand) and *i‘lām* (causing to know). Instead, Abū Ya‘lā cited qur’ānic verses to

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid. 90.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

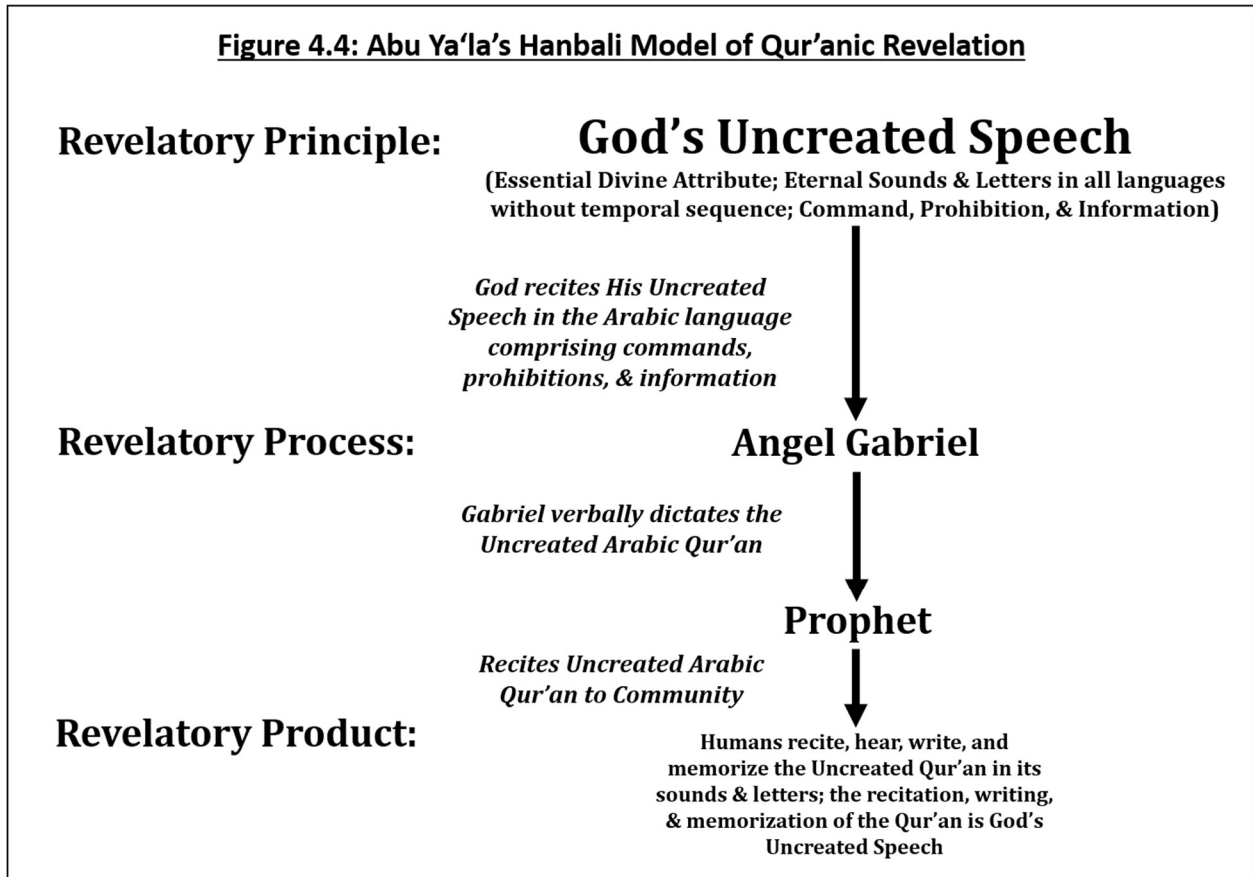
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argue that the *ifhām* (causing to understand) and *i'lām* (causing to know) of God's Speech mean that God simply "recites" His Speech to the Prophet:

Its recitation (*tilāwatahu*) is its being made known (*i'lāmuhu*) and its being understood (*ifhāmuhu*) by His saying: "We recite to you of the news of Moses." Its meaning is "We cause you to know and We inform you." And likewise is His saying: "God spoke to Moses directly" [means that] He caused him to know His intent (*bi-murādihī*) and informed him of it. The Speech of God was sent down in reality to the heart of the Prophet, in contrast to the Ash'arīs who say that [only] its recitation (*qirā'atuhu*), its expression (*'ibāratuhu*), its being made understood (*ifhāmuhu*), and its being made known (*i'lāmuhu*) were sent down (*nuzila*). The proof of it is His saying: "The Trusted Spirit brought it down upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners in a clear Arabic tongue."⁶⁸¹

Thus, the Revelatory Process for Abū Ya'lā' simply consists of God reciting the Qur'ān in Arabic to Gabriel, who recites it verbatim to the Prophet. The Prophet in turn recites what he hears of the Speech of God verbatim to his community. What everyone recites is the eternal uncreated Speech of God in all cases. Furthermore, Abū Ya'lā' does not seem to posit any concept of a pre-existent Qur'ān as a complete text in the Guarded Tablet.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.



Abū Ya'la's above comments certainly suggest that he viewed God's uncreated and eternal Speech to be identical to the Arabic Qur'an in the form of verbal linguistic speech constituted by sounds and letters. This reading matches the "popular" Hanbalī viewpoint seen earlier and to which other theological schools addressed their polemics. However, one must be cautious about this interpretation because Abū Ya'la also says that God's Speech has no likeness to human speech. A helpful clue to his view is a statement he made in his discussion of God's attributes. After stating that God speaks through a single speech, Abū Ya'la added: "It is not impossible that He has a single speech in diverse languages that ensures understanding for every addressee in his own

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language and these languages subsist in God's Essence without sequence just as letters subsist in His Essence without sequence."⁶⁸²

Based on this remark, Abū Ya'la's view seems to be that God's eternal uncreated Speech consists of the very sounds and letters of the Arabic Qur'ān but without those sounds and letters existing in any kind of temporal or spatial sequence. His denial of sequential sounds or letters makes conceptually accounting for his notion of Divine Speech quite difficult if not impossible. What we are given is a series of affirmations and negations: God's Speech *is* eternal sounds and letters; God's Speech *is* the Arabic Qur'ān as it is recited, heard, written, or memorized; God's Speech *is not* sequential or temporal sounds and letters; God's Speech *is not* in the likeness of human speech. Nevertheless, these statements allow us to conclude that for Abū Ya'la, the Speech of God and the Arabic Qur'ān are ontologically identical; they are not two separate entities (i.e. the former being uncreated, the latter being created) as the Ash'arīs maintain. In some manner, the sounds and letters of God's eternal Speech are ontologically identical to the sounds and letters of the Qur'ān, despite the latter being perceived by creatures through human language, sequence, and temporality. Thus, the Speech of God and the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sequential sounds and letters as recited, heard or memorized by humans are still distinct in some way. But, the precise modality of this distinction cannot be known – apart from the fact that the God's Speech, as recited by humans, has sequence. In this context, it would be inappropriate to say that Abū Ya'la straightforwardly affirms that the Arabic Qur'ān as sounds and letters as recited by human beings is uncreated and eternal – as his opponents portray the Ḥanbalī position. Abū Ya'la's views are more nuanced than this and need not be misrepresented.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 44.

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In terms of the analytical framework of revelation used throughout this dissertation, in Abū Ya'ālā's thought, the Revelatory Principle is the eternal uncreated Speech of God, an essential attribute of God that consists of eternal nonsequential sounds and letters; the Revelatory Product is the Arabic Qur'ān in the form of sequential sounds and letters in recitation, hearing, writing, and memorization. The Revelatory Principle and Revelatory Product are ontologically identical: God's eternal uncreated Speech is the Arabic Qur'ān and vice versa. But there remains an elusive formal distinction between the Revelatory Principle and the Revelatory Product, a distinction that one cannot precisely pin down but simply affirm. The Revelatory Process thus entails God reciting His uncreated Speech as Arabic sounds, letters, and words to Gabriel and Gabriel reciting it verbatim to Muhammad. What Gabriel and Muhammad each hear and recite is the Speech of God itself, not merely a created expression or recitation of it. In this way, Abū Ya'ālā made use of the *kalām* methods and staked out a position on the Qur'ān as God's Speech that differs from both the Mu'tazilīs, who affirmed that God's Speech is temporally created sounds and letters identical to the Arabic Qur'ān, and the Ash'arīs who affirmed that God's Speech is an uncreated and eternal non-verbal speech that remains distinct from its created expression as the Arabic Qur'ān.

Hermeneutical Implications:

Abū Ya'ālā's position on Qur'ānic Revelation, which views the Arabic Qur'ān as ontologically identical to God's uncreated and eternal speech leads to a "maximalist" and "law-oriented" hermeneutic of the Qur'ān. The various commands and prohibitions in the Arabic Qur'ān are themselves identical to God's eternal address to all rational creatures across time and space,

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leading to the imposition of legal obligations upon humans.⁶⁸³ For example, Abū Ya'ālā believed that the qur'ānic use of the term “fornicator” also included sodomites because they share certain attributes; therefore, everything the Qur'ān says about fornication applies equally to sodomy.⁶⁸⁴ Like the Mu'tazilīs, he interpreted general expressions in the Qur'ān in the most expansive way. Thus, the qur'ānic command to “kill the polytheists wherever you find them (Q. 9:5) would apply to all polytheists in every place and time by default, unless other evidence limits its scope. Abū Ya'ālā also held that the type of evidence required to particularize a general meaning of a qur'ānic command was quite vast – it could be another qur'ānic verse, rational evidence, analogy, consensus, a prophetic report, etc.⁶⁸⁵ Unlike Mu'tazilī minimalism and Ash'arī ambiguity, Abū Ya'ālā took a maximalist approach to qur'ānic obligations – where any command to perform an action entails the obligatory nature of that action for all times and also necessitating the prohibition of the opposite action.⁶⁸⁶

4.5 Māturīdī Positions on Qur'ānic Revelation: Abū l-Yusr al-Pazdawī (d. 493/1100) and Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (ca. 438-508/1046-1115)

Two eminent and influential accounts of fifth/eleventh-century Māturīdī views of Qur'ānic Revelation come from Abū l-Yusr al-Pazdawī (al-Bazdawī) (d. 493/1100) and Abū l-Mu'īn Maymūn b. Muḥammad al-Nasafī (ca. 438-508/1046-1115). Both models are noteworthy for their kinship with and difference from contemporary Ash'arī positions. As it will be seen, al-Pazdawī

⁶⁸³ Vishanoff, *The Formation*, 249.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 244-245.

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and al-Nasafī conceive the Revelatory Principle along the same lines but differ with respect to the Revelatory Process and the theological status of the Revelatory Product. Al-Pazdawī's positions synthesize al-Māturīdī's theology of God's attributes and actions, Ash'arī theologies of God's Speech, and classical *tafsīr* models of the Revelatory Process. Meanwhile, al-Nasafī's model brings together Māturīdī theology, both Ḥanafī and Ash'arī theologies of God's Speech, and contemporary Ash'arī formulations of the Revelatory Process.

4.5.1 Abū l-Yusr al-Pazdawī (d. 493/1100): The Uncreated Speech of God and its Created Composition (*manzūm*)

Abū l-Yusr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Pazdawī (al-Bazdawī) hailed from the prominent Pazdawī family of Bukhara.⁶⁸⁷ His great grandfather 'Abd al-Karīm b. Mūsā al-Pazdawī (d. 390/999) studied with al-Māturīdī. Al-Pazdawī received his great grandfather's teachings about al-Māturīdī through his own father Muḥammad.⁶⁸⁸ In his famous work, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, al-Pazdawī refers to al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* and Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*) and extolls them over above his other writings.⁶⁸⁹ Al-Pazdawī went on to become a famous *qāḍī* of Samarqand and, in the words of Madelung, a "highly authoritative representative of Transoxanian Ḥanafism".⁶⁹⁰ What one encounters in his *Uṣūl al-dīn* is an accommodating attitude towards Ash'arī theology, even though he stakes out distinct Ḥanafī-Māturīdī positions on various issues. A key example of al-

⁶⁸⁷ I must thank Dr. Ramon Harvey of Ebrahim College for bringing this scholar and his important views to my attention in our personal correspondence via Twitter.

⁶⁸⁸ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 44-45.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁶⁹⁰ Wilferd Madelung, "The Spread of Māturīdism and the Turks," in *Actas do IV Congresso des Estudos Arabes et Islamicos, Coimbra-Lisboa 1968* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 109-168: 125.

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Pazdawī's unique views is his position on Qur'ānic Revelation, which stands out from both earlier Ḥanafī and contemporary Ash'arī teachings while synthesizing aspects of both.

God and His Attributes:

Al-Pazdawī's *Uṣūl al-dīn* presents responses to some 96 theological questions and issues.⁶⁹¹ Each discussion follows a standard format, where the author first states what he regards as the orthodox position of the *Ahl al-Sunna* or the *Ahl al-Qibla*, followed by a statement and critique of alternate views, and then an exposition of his orthodox Sunni position. On the matter of God's Essence and Attributes, al-Pazdawī began by arguing that God is one without partners, has no semblance to anything within creation, and has no direction (*jihā*). God is one, living, powerful, knowing, hearing and seeing as per the revealed texts (*al-nuṣūṣ*).⁶⁹² God's eternal attributes of essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) include knowledge, life, will, power, and strength. Al-Pazdawī held that "God is eternal (*qadīm*) with all of His attributes and the attributes of God are neither temporally occurring (*bi-ḥāditha*) nor temporally generated (*muḥdath*)."⁶⁹³ Accordingly, all temporal occurrences (*al-ḥawādith*) take place by God's will (*mashī'a*), intention (*irāda*), and decree (*ḥukm*).⁶⁹⁴ In line with other Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theologians, al-Pazdawī took the view that God's attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-fi'l Allāh*) like existentiatio (*al-ījād*), making (*al-takwīn*), creation (*al-takhlīq*), compassion (*al-rahma*), beautification (*al-iḥsān*), sustenance (*al-rizq*), and forgiveness (*al-maghfira*) are non-

⁶⁹¹ Abū l-Yusr Muḥammad al-Pazdawī (al-Bazdawī), *Uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Hans Peter Linss (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhāriyya li l-Turāth, 2002).

⁶⁹² Ibid., 43.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., 52.

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temporal (*ghayr ḥādīth*) and eternal (*azalī*) in the same manner as His knowledge and power. Meanwhile, the effects of God's attributes of action, such as what is existent (*al-mawjūd*), made (*al-mukawwan*), or created (*al-makhlūq*) are created and by no means identical to God's acts.⁶⁹⁵ The above theological principles set the context for al-Pazdawī's position on God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation.

The Nature of God's Speech:

Al-Pazdawī began his chapter on God's Speech with the following summary of his own position:

The People of the Sunna and the Community say that God speaks with Speech and He is eternal (*qadīm*) with His Speech just as He is eternal with all of His attributes. His Speech is uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*) and it is neither created, nor temporally occurring, nor temporally generated.⁶⁹⁶

He then went on to summarize the views of several other groups including the Mu'tazilīs, Shi'īs, Karāmīs, and certain *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. In these discussions, al-Pazdawī showed familiarity with the different definitions of speech (*kalām*) prevailing amongst the Mu'tazilīs, such as the concept of speech as articulate and arranged sounds and letters, or the idea that God's Speech subsists in the Guarded Tablet.

Against these positions, al-Pazdawī defined *kalām* as something that negates silence and muteness and is heard (*masmū'*) and understood (*mafḥūm*).⁶⁹⁷ He employed the traditional Sunni argument for God's Speech being uncreated by referring to the Qur'ānic verses about God saying "Be" to bring something into existence and concluded that God's word (*qawl*) must be uncreated

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., 76-82.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 63.

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to avoid an infinite regress.⁶⁹⁸ In responding to the Mu'tazilī claim that speech can only subsist in a body, al-Pazdawī stated that “God established a speech with His Essence (*athbata li-nafsihi kalāman*).”⁶⁹⁹ He further explained that God can only be commanding, forbidding, informing, and inquiring if He is a speaker (*mutakallim*).⁷⁰⁰ Al-Pazdawī then stated more clearly that “God’s Speech subsists in His Essence and it is likewise the case for the speech of every speaker.”⁷⁰¹ On this point, his position on the nature of *kalām* is identical to the Ash‘arīs and reflects an incorporation of their ideas. Thus, for al-Pazdawī, the Revelatory Principle is God’s eternal and uncreated Speech, which transcends sounds and letters and consists of command, prohibition, information, and interrogation – a position very much in line with the Ash‘arīs.

Al-Pazdawī’s distinctive position comes through when he deals with questions about the theological status of the Arabic letters, words, and verses of the Qur’ān. After quoting the views of his Mu'tazilī opponents, who claimed that God’s Speech consists of chapters and verses, al-Pazdawī replied that:

These *sūras* that have beginning, end, divisions, and partitions are not the Speech of God in reality (*‘alā al-ḥaqīqa*), but rather, they are a composition (*manẓūm*) that God composed (*naẓamahū*) and they point to (*dālla ‘alā*) the Speech of God, just as the composition (*manẓūm*) of Imru’ al-Qays...points to [his] speech but is not his speech. Likewise, the address (*khutba*) of every speaker and the message of every messenger is a composition indicating his speech but is not identical to his speech. In this way, what subsists in God is one without partition or division, and it does not have any beginning or end, but rather God is eternal with His Speech and enduring with His Speech.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 65-66.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

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In a rather bold way, al-Pazdawī squarely admitted that the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* verses and chapters is “not the Speech of God in reality (*‘alā al-ḥaqīqa*).” Thus, he clearly drew an ontological distinction between God’s uncreated Speech and the created Arabic Qur'ān. The latter is what al-Pazdawī calls a composition (*manẓūm*), which only indicates (*dālla*) or points to God’s Speech while remaining different from it. In the subsequent discussion, al-Pazdawī addressed a question about the theological status of this *manẓūm*. He replied that the composition (*manẓūm*) is the effect of God’s act of composing (*naẓm*). In accordance with al-Pazdawī’s theology, God’s *naẓm* is one of His eternal divine attributes of action. The *manẓūm*, however, is the product of God’s *naẓm* and is therefore created (*makhlūq*). From these formulations, al-Pazdawī evidently regards the Revelatory Product as the Arabic Qur'ān consisting of sounds, letters, words, and verses. The Revelatory Product is a created composition (*manẓūm*) indicating to the uncreated Revelatory Principle.

As to the precise relationship between the uncreated Speech of God and the created composition, al-Pazdawī affirmed the creedal statement that “the Speech of God is written in our codices, memorized in our hearts, heard in our ears, and recited with our tongues without dwelling within any of them, but rather, it subsists in the Essence of the Creator.”⁷⁰³ He also offered a lucid explanation of what it means to say that God’s Speech is written, memorized, heard, and recited: “The writing of this composition (*al-manẓūm*) is a writing (*kitāban*) for the Speech of God, so the Speech of God is written (*maktūb*) through the writing of this composition, and this is in reality (*ḥaqīqa*) not metaphorically (*bi-majāz*).”⁷⁰⁴ Likewise, al-Pazdawī explained that “the

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., 70-71.

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memorization of the Speech (*hiḏ al-kalām*) [of God] is to memorize what indicates (*dālla 'alā*) the Speech and this is the composition (*al-manzūm*).” In other words, whenever the created composition (*manzūm*) of God’s Speech – this being the Arabic Qur’ān – is written, recited, memorized, or heard, it is tantamount to the Speech of God being written, recited, memorized, and heard: “Whomever recites this composition indicating the Speech of God, becomes a reciter of the Speech of God and this is reality and not metaphorical.”⁷⁰⁵ These comments of al-Pazdawī frame the relationship between the Revelatory Principle and Revelatory Product in terms of both an ontological and formal distinction. The Revelatory Principle is God’s uncreated eternal Speech and the Revelatory Product is its created composition as the Arabic Qur’ān. The uncreated-created binary points to an ontological difference between them. At the same time, since reciting the Revelatory Product (Arabic Qur’ān) is tantamount to reciting the Revelatory Principle, the latter is immanent within the former without being materially incarnate. One important way that al-Pazdawī differs from al-Māturīdī is his claim that God’s Speech is recited, written, and heard “in reality” (*ḥaqīqa*) and not metaphorically with the recitation, writing, or hearing of the Arabic Qur’ān. As it may be recalled from Chapter 3, al-Māturīdī himself only allowed that God’s Speech is heard metaphorically when one hears the Arabic Qur’ān.

To underscore this ontological distinction, al-Pazdawī explained that the word *qur’ān* alone refers to the created recitation (*qirā’a, tilāwa*) and composition of God’s Speech. On this point, he was in concordance with the early Māturīdī scholars, Abū Bakr al-‘Iyādī and Abū Salama, whose ideas were surveyed in Chapter 3. Accordingly, it is not required for someone to say: “the Qur’ān is uncreated”. Rather, it is required for one to say “the Qur’ān, the Speech of God is uncreated”

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid, 71.

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because it is the Speech of God that is uncreated while the term *qur'ān* by itself usually refers to the created recitation or utterance (*lafẓ*). He interpreted verses like “verily We made it an Arabic *qur'ān*” as references to the created composition (*manẓūm*) and not the eternal Speech of God. However, if one said absolutely that “the Qur'ān is uncreated”, then it is fine and not harmful as long as one understands that one's recitation, reading, and utterance of the Qur'ān is created.⁷⁰⁶ Thus, al-Pazdawī upheld the standard Māturīdī view on what the word *qur'ān* means and how it should be used in theological statements. But his allowance quoted above brings him closer to the Ash'arī scholars (al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī), who all held that the word *qur'ān* is an equivocal term and may refer to God's Speech or its created recitation (*qirā'a*), depending on the context.

The Revelatory Process of God's Speech:

In another set of comments, al-Pazdawī described the Revelatory Process by which God's Speech is revealed as the Arabic Qur'ān. First, he admitted that God may have created the composition (*manẓūm*) of His Speech in the Guarded Tablet or in an angel. When people speak of the Qur'ān or the Book of God, these terms truly refer to the created composition that is the Revelatory Product: “This composition, while being other than the Speech of God, is called the Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*) and the Qur'ān by way of metaphor (*bi-ṭarīq al-majāz*) on account of its being an indicator (*dāllan*) of His Speech.”⁷⁰⁷ Al-Pazdawī then addressed the popular belief that the Arabic Qur'ān pre-existed in the Tablet before its sending down (*inzāl*) from heaven to earth:

As for the sending down (*al-inzāl*) from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven, and from the heaven to the earth, this also pertains to this composition (*al-manẓūm*). God said: “*Hā Mīm. And*

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., 68.

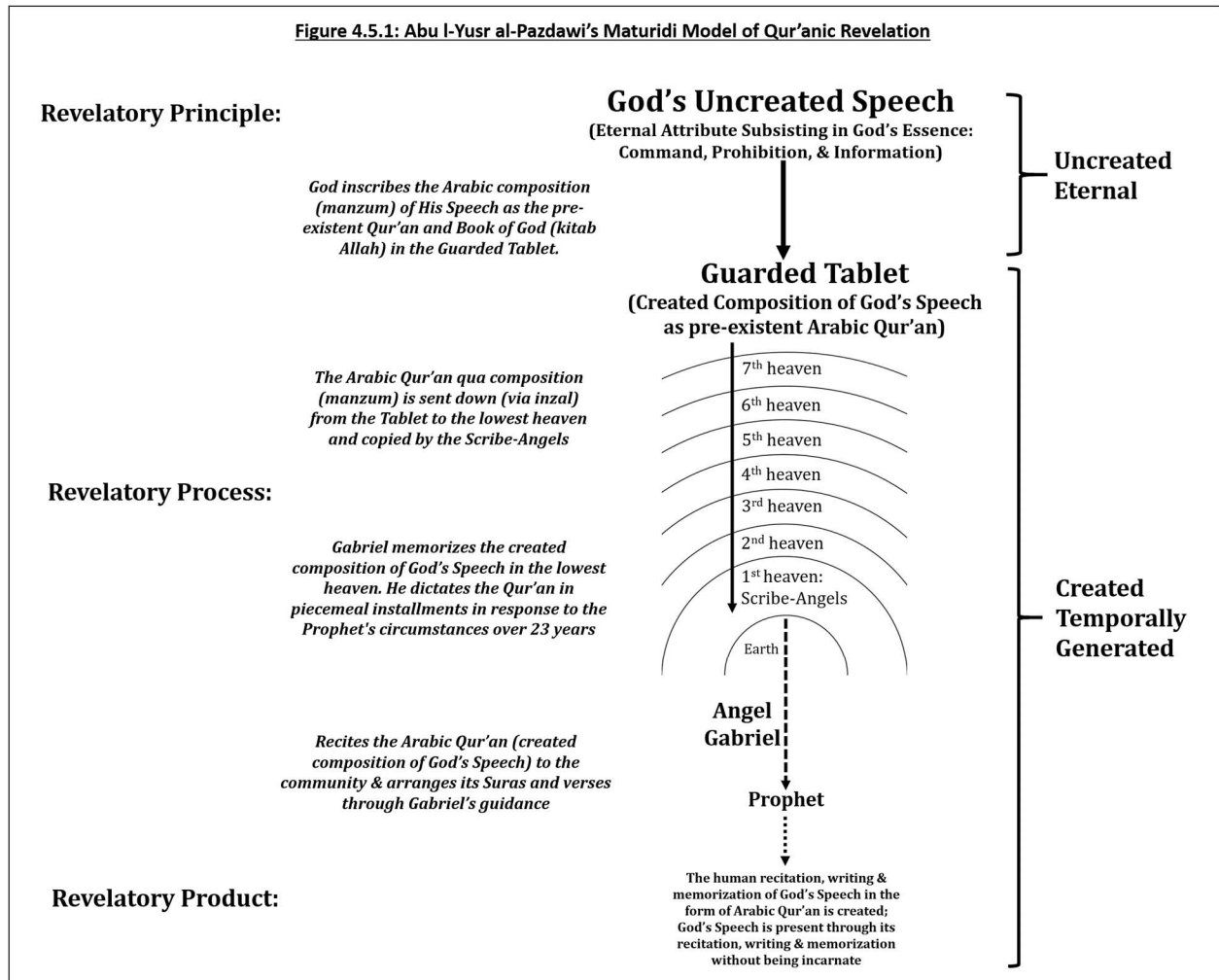
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the Clear Book. Verily, We sent it down in a Blessed Night" (Q. 44:1-3). He designated the Book (*al-kitāb*) as something sent down (*munzalan*), and the Book is a name for this composition. This is because *kitāb* is a name for what is written (*al-maktūb*) and the composition (*al-manzūm*) is written. Thus, He permitted the name "sending down" (*inzāl*) for the Speech of God with the sending down (*bi-inzāl*) of this composition that indicates it. Thus it is said: "Such and such deputy brought down the speech of the commander from the fort" when he brought down his book.⁷⁰⁸

The noteworthy part of this passage is how al-Pazdawī integrated the Sunni *tafsīr* model where the Revelatory Principle is the pre-existent Qur'ān inscribed in the heavenly Guarded Tablet with the *kalām* model where the Revelatory Principle is God's eternal Speech that transcends sounds and letters. His solution was original and systematic: what is written in the Guarded Tablet and subsequently sent down (*munzal*) to earth is not God's Speech itself, but merely the created composition (*manzūm*) of God's Speech in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* Book (*kitāb*). In this respect, al-Pazdawī agreed with the Sunni exegetes on the meaning of *inzāl* as a literal and material sending down of the Qur'ān. As seen earlier, the Ash'arīs firmly rejected this reading and proposed their own interpretation where *inzāl* means *i'lām* and *ifhām*. Al-Pazdawī's model entails a three-stage Revelatory Process: God first inscribes His uncreated Speech in the Guarded Tablet through His eternal act of composing (*naẓm*) a composition (*manzūm*) consisting of Arabic verses and chapters; this manifestation of God's Book from God's Speech is the first stage of the Revelatory Process. In the second stage, the angels (either Gabriel or scribe angels) physically brought down the Arabic Qur'ān in its entirety to the lowest heaven on the Night of Power. Subsequently, in the third stage, Gabriel orally dictated the Arabic Qur'ān – the created composition of God's uncreated Speech – to Muhammad in a piecemeal fashion over the duration of the Prophet's mission.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 69.

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Al-Pazdawī further understood the physical compilation of the Qur'ān by the early Caliphs to be a necessary extension of the Revelatory Process. In the below passage, he attempted to reconcile the historical process of compilation and canonization with the idea that the contents of the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* are identical to the composition (*manzūm*) that God created for His eternal Speech.

The scholars say that that Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and then 'Uthmān compiled the Qur'ān. What they mean is that Abū Bakr and 'Uthmān put together the arrangement or collected the *sūras*. But the Qur'ān is the composition (*manzūm*) of God (*manzūm Allāh*), and the *sūras* are the compilation (*majmū'*) of God. Gabriel would bring down verses and *sūras* to the Messenger of God and explain to him that this verse is from such and such *sūra*, and that this *sūra* comes after that *sūra*. But [after the Prophet died], the verses and *sūras* were scattered among the people – some here and some there. So Abū Bakr compiled them in a codex after the death of the Prophet. Then 'Uthmān resolved to

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order the writing of the codices, presented them with the codex that Abū Bakr compiled and sent them to the districts.⁷⁰⁹

In sum, al-Pazdawī formulated a unique synthesis of traditional Ḥanafī theology, Ash'arī approaches to God's eternal Speech, his own views on the theological status of the Arabic Qur'ān, and the classical *tafsīr* model of the Revelatory Process. Like his Ḥanafī predecessors, al-Pazdawī regarded God's attributes of the essence and attributes of the act as eternal attributes, in contrast to the Ash'arīs, who considered the latter attributes to temporally generated. His position on the nature of speech generally and God's Speech matched the Ash'arī view. However, al-Pazdawī's framing of the Arabic Qur'ān as a created *manẓūm* (composition) indicating toward God's uncreated Speech was distinctive, as was his view that the *manẓūm* is the product of God's creative act of *naẓm*. Accordingly, al-Pazdawī saw the Revelatory Principle and the Revelatory Product as being ontologically and formally distinct, the former being uncreated and the latter being created. His explanation of God's Speech being truly recited, written, memorized, and heard by means of people reciting, writing, memorizing, and hearing its created composition is quite explicit and implies that God's Speech is present through its created compositions without being incarnate. Al-Pazdawī's account of the Revelatory Process is an integration of *kalām* and classical *tafsīr* approaches to Qur'ānic Revelation. By reframing the pre-existent heavenly Qur'ān, featured so prominently in *tafsīr*, as the created written composition of God's eternal Speech, al-Pazdawī was able to affirm the heavenly and earthly sending down (*inzāl*) of the Arabic Qur'ān while remaining true to his *kalām* theology.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 72- 73.

4.5.2 Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (d. ca. 508/1115): The Uncreated Speech of God and its Created Expression (*ibārā*)

Besides the fact that he was born and died in Nasaf, classical sources provide little biographical information about his life. A great deal more can be known about al-Nasafī's theology as presented in three of his major works: *Baḥr al-kalām fī 'ilm al-tawḥīd* (Ocean of Discussions on the Knowledge of God's Unity), *al-Tamhīd fī qawā'id al-tawḥīd* (Introduction to the Principles of God's Unity), and *Tabṣīrat al-adilla* (Instructing the Evidences).⁷¹⁰ Al-Nasafī drew heavily on the teachings of Abū Maṣ'ūr al-Māturīdī and could be reckoned as one of the earliest "Māturīdī" *kalām* theologians. During his period of activity, Ash'arī *kalam* had become well established in Nišāpūr and popular in Baghdad while Mu'tazilī *kalam* had begun to wane.⁷¹¹ In this context, al-Nasafī defended Māturīdī teachings and contended with both Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī positions.⁷¹² But, as Madelung has observed, al-Nasafī's attitudes toward these two groups greatly differed. He often treated Mu'tazilī views with great contempt while showing a respectful and conciliatory tone toward Ash'arī teaching. In Madelung's words, "substantial differences are minimized, concealed, or reduced to verbal issues."⁷¹³ As we will see, al-Nasafī's teaching on the nature of the Qur'ān as God's Speech and its Revelatory Process presented in his *Tabṣīrat al-adilla* and *Baḥr al-kalām* comes very close to fifth/eleventh century Ash'arī teachings as well as the Ḥanafī teachings of al-

⁷¹⁰ Muammar Iskenderoglu, "Nasafī, Abū l-Mu'īn (c. 438-508 / c. 1046-1115)," in Oliver Leaman (ed.), *The Biographical Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), accessed on 1/20/2018: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199754731.001.0001/acref-9780199754731-e-301>.

⁷¹¹ Wilferd Madelung, "Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī and Ash'arī Theology," in Carole Hillenbrand (ed.), *Studies in Honour of C. E. Bosworth, The Sultan's Turret: Studies in the Persian and Turkish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 318-330: 318.

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, 319.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 320.

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Samarqandī examined earlier. But it is first important to summarize al-Nasafī's views on God's attributes in general.

God and His Attributes:

Following al-Māturīdī and other Ḥanafī scholars, al-Nasafī distinguished between God's attributes of essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) and His attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-fi'l*): “The attributes of the essence are life, power, hearing, seeing, knowledge, speech, will (*mashi'a*), and desire (*irāda*). The attributes of the act are creation (*takhlīq*), sustenance (*tazrīq*), preference (*ifḍāl*), favor (*in'ām*), beautifying (*iḥsān*), mercy (*rahma*), and forgiveness (*maghfira*).”⁷¹⁴ Like al-Māturīdī, al-Nasafī held that all of God's attributes are eternal; this differs from the Ash'arī teaching that the attributes of God's action are temporally generated (*muḥdath*). Like al-Pazdawī, the attribute of creation (*takhlīq*, *khalq*) or existentionation (*takwīn*) is eternal according to al-Nasafī; thus God is eternally a creator (*khāliq*).⁷¹⁵ Despite these differences, al-Nasafī still employed stock Kullābī-Ash'arī expressions to frame the relationship between God and His eternal attributes, such as what follows: “God is eternal (*qadīm azalī*) with all of His attributes and names. The attributes of God and His names are not He and not other than He.”⁷¹⁶ Accordingly, al-Nasafī affirmed the eternity of God's Speech, a position that has bearing on his conception of Qur'ānic Revelation.

The Nature of God's Speech:

⁷¹⁴ Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām fī 'ilm al-tawḥīd*, ed. W. M. Ş. Al-Farfūr (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Farfūr, 1997), 90.

⁷¹⁵ For details on this attribute of *takwīn*, see Madelung, “Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī,” 327-328.

⁷¹⁶ al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām*, 90.

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Al-Nasafī devoted a short section of his *Baḥr al-kalām* and a lengthy chapter of *Tabṣirat al-adilla* to the topic of God's Speech. In the latter work, al-Nasafī summarized his own position on God's Speech before launching into a highly detailed summary and critique of various Muslim theological positions from the third/ninth century to his own time.⁷¹⁷ Following his critical analysis of these other views, al-Nasafī finally presented his own Māturīdī stance on the status of God's Speech and its various revealed expressions in the Qur'ān, Torah, and Gospels:

The Speech of God is an attribute subsisting in God's Essence (*qā'im bi-dhāt Allāh*). It is not of the genus of sounds and letters and it is a single attribute. It is a command by which He commands, a prohibition by which He prohibits, and an information by which He informs, and it is an eternal attribute (*ṣifa azaliyya*). Then, these expressions (*al-'ibārāt*) in Arabic, Hebrew, or Syriac are expressions of it (*'ibārāt 'anhu*) and it [God's Speech] is conveyed by them. These expressions are letters and sounds and they are temporally generated (*muḥdath*) and created (*makhlūq*) in their loci. They indicate the Speech that is the eternal attribute (*al-ṣifa al-azaliyya*) of God, and they are partitioned, segmented, divided into halves, divided into tenths, etc. They are themselves created (*makhlūqa*). The Speech of God is one without being divided or differentiated and it is neither Arabic, nor Hebrew, nor Syriac just as the Essence of God is one and is called through many formulas and in diverse languages.⁷¹⁸

Similar to the Ash'arīs and his co-religionist al-Pazdawī, al-Nasafī conceives God's Speech, the Revelatory Principle, as an eternal uncreated attribute subsisting in God's Essence, comprising command, prohibition, and information. His position here follows from his general definition of *kalām* as "the meaning subsisting in the soul" (*al-ma'nā al-qā'im bi l-nafs*).⁷¹⁹ To support his view that the Speech of God is eternal and uncreated, al-Nasafī provided a summary *kalām* argument in his *Baḥr* and a detailed version of the same argument in his *Tabṣira*.⁷²⁰ Like his contemporaries, he argued that if God's Speech is created, it is either created in a created being or within God's

⁷¹⁷ Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Huseyin Atay (Ankara: Diyanat Isleri Baskanligi, 1993). The chapter on God's Speech is found on pp. 339-399.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 345-351.

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Essence. Al-Nasafī dismissed the first possibility by noting that the speaker is the name of “one in whom the attribute of speech is established” (*man qāma bihi ṣifat al-kalām*); thus, if God created speech in some essence, then this created essence would be the speaker of that Speech. He refuted the second option on the grounds that God’s Essence cannot be a substrate for temporal occurments (*al-ḥawādith*). This argument is significant because it was used by al-Ash‘arī in his *al-Ibāna*, by his successors like al-Bāqillānī, and by Abū Ya‘lā; its employment by al-Nasafī is another example of Ash‘arī influence in his thought.

Accordingly, al-Nasafī believed that the verbal utterances in Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, or other languages are the expressions (*‘ibārāt*) of God’s uncreated Speech, and these constitute the Revelatory Product. These verbal expressions are essentially created (*makhlūq*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*) because they consist of sounds and letters, are divisible into parts, and become differentiated into various languages. Accordingly, scriptural designations like Qur’ān, Torah, or Gospel refer primarily to these created expressions of God’s uncreated Speech: “If He expresses it in Arabic, it is [called] *qur’ān*; if it is expressed in Syriac, it is [called] Gospel (*injīl*); and if it is expressed in Hebrew, it is [called] Torah (*tawrāt*).”⁷²¹ On these grounds, al-Nasafī addressed qur’ānic verses such as “We made it an Arabic *qur’ān*” (Q. 43:3), which the Mu‘tazilīs used to argue for the createdness of God’s Speech. Against this reading, Al-Nasafī interpreted Q. 43:3 to mean “We made an expression of it in the Arabic language and We made the meaning understood through it and decreed it in the Arabic language.”⁷²² In other words, al-Nasafī

⁷²¹ Ibid., 339.

⁷²² Ibid., 391.

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maintained that God created an Arabic expression (*ibāra*) of His Speech in order to make His Speech known and understandable to His creatures.

Based on his framing of God's Speech as eternal (*azalī*) and its verbal linguistic expressions as created, al-Nasafī evidently affirmed an ontological and formal distinction between the Revelatory Principle (God's Speech) and the Revelatory Product (the Arabic Qur'ān, Hebrew Torah, Syriac Gospel). The terminology that al-Nasafī employed here matches exactly that of Ibn Kullāb and Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, who likewise used *ibāra* to designate the verbal linguistic recitations of God's Speech. However, by the fifth/eleventh century, al-Ash'arī's successors including al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, and al-Ghazālī rejected the appropriateness of the term *ibāra* (along with *lafẓ* and *ḥikāya*) and instead resorted to *qirā'a* (recitation) and *dalla* (indicator). Thus, if al-Nasafī was adapting Ash'arī ideas into his own positions, he was not drawing on contemporary Ash'arī theologians. It is also noteworthy that al-Nasafī's *ibāra* terminology differs from his Māturīdī contemporary al-Pazdawī, who used *manẓūm* (composition) to designate the Arabic Qur'ān.

In a manner mirroring the older Ḥanafī creeds and other Sunni theologians, al-Nasafī described the relationship between the Speech of God and the human recitation, writing, and memorization of the Arabic Qur'ān as follows:

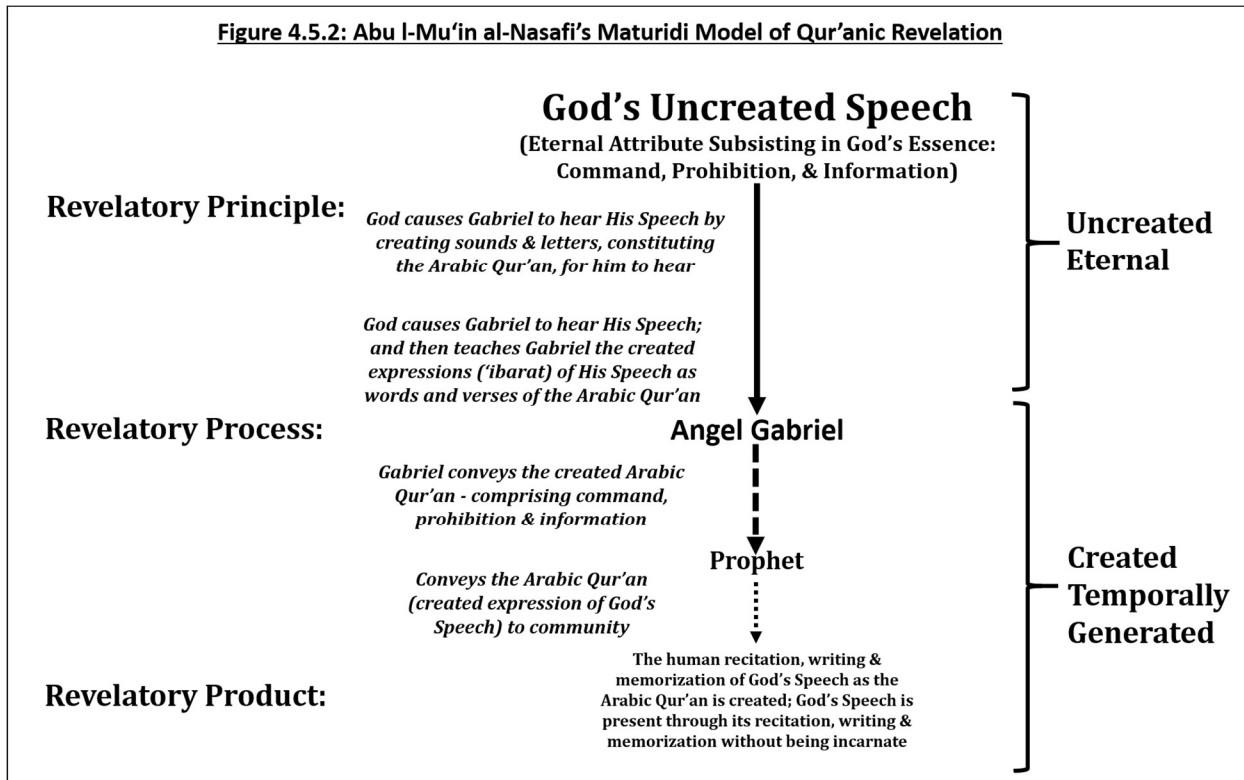
It [the Speech of God] is recited by our tongues, memorized in our hearts, and written in our codices, but it is not located in the codices (*laysa bi-mawḍū' fī l-masāḥif*) and it is not subject to addition or subtraction – such as when someone has burned the codices, he does not burn the Qur'ān. This is akin to how God said, “those who follow the Messenger, the Gentile Prophet whom they find written in what is with them of the Torah and the Gospel”: it is only his story and description [that is in the prior scriptures] not his person, and likewise, Paradise and Hellfire are mentioned among us but their essences are not among us. This is entirely the way of the People of the Sunna and the Consensus.⁷²³

⁷²³ al-Nasafī, *Bahr al-kalām*, 131.

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In the above statement, al-Nasafī affirmed the immanence or presence of God’s uncreated Speech with the human acts of reciting, memorizing, and writing of the Qur’ān. But he denied the physical indwelling or incarnation of the Speech of God within created substrates. If anything, the created tongues, hearts, and codices merely contain something like a description of God’s Speech just as how the Torah and Gospel contain the description of Prophet Muhammad without his person being physically located in these two scriptures.

The Revelatory Process of God’s Speech:



Al-Nasafī’s account of how God’s Speech was revealed to Gabriel, the Prophet, and the community appears in his *Baḥr al-kalām*:

The Qur’ān is the Speech of God and His attribute and God is eternal (*qadīm*) with all of His attributes. [His Speech] is neither temporally generated (*ghayr muḥdath*) nor created (*lā makhlūq*). It is without letters, sounds, syllables, or sections. It is neither He nor other than He. He caused

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Gabriel to hear it by means of sounds and letters (*bi l-ṣawt wa l-hurūf*); so He created sounds and caused him to hear it by means of those sounds and letters (*bi-dhālika l-ṣawt wa l-hurūf*). Then Gabriel memorized it, stored it, and transmitted it to the Prophet through the sending down of inspiration (*bi-inzāl al-wahy*) and the prophetic message (*al-risāla*), not the sending down of [corporeal] persons and forms.⁷²⁴ He [Gabriel] recited it to the Prophet and the Prophet memorized it and storied it and recited it to the companions. The companions memorized it and recited it to the followers, the followers to the righteous, and so on until it reached us.⁷²⁵

Al-Nasafī's stated description of how God's Speech is communicated from God to Gabriel and from Gabriel to Muhammad is generally in accordance with the views of al-Ḥākim al-Samarqandī (d. 342/953) seen in Chapter 3. While God's Speech, in and of itself, is beyond sounds and letters, God caused Gabriel to perceive His Speech by creating sounds and letters for him to hear. This idea is also close to the views of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī; but al-Māturīdī held that God's Speech is only heard metaphorically through sounds and letters whereas the latter are heard in reality. Gabriel then brought down God's Speech in the form of sounds and letters by reciting the Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad, who recited it to his companions. Al-Nasafī also specified that Gabriel's "bringing down" (*inzāl*) the Qur'ān should not be understood in the sense of how material persons or forms come down. On this point, he echoed the interpretations of the Ash'arī thinkers seen above.

In the following passage, al-Nasafī provided a more detailed and somewhat different account of the Revelatory Process: God first conveys His Speech to Gabriel in a hidden way and then teaches him the Qur'ān, after which Gabriel conveys it to Muhammad.

God spoke to Gabriel from behind the veil (Q 42:51) just as the Messenger of God heard the Speech of God on the Night of Ascension (*laylat al-mi'rāj*) from behind the veil. God spoke to Moses from behind the veil. All of what Gabriel brought to the Prophet was by the command of God. God taught

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 130 states "*lā inzāl al-hurūf wa l-ṣawt*" (not the sending down of letters and sounds). The older edition of this work has the words *lā inzāl al-shakhs wa l-sūra* (not the sending down of persons and forms), see Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām fī 'ilm al-tawḥīd* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Kurdistān al-'Ilmiyya, 1911), 32. I have gone with the older edition as it seems more consistent with the overall passage which says that Gabriel recited the Qur'ān to the Prophet, which clearly implies sounds and letters. This is also more consistent with al-Samarqandī's position that al-Nasafī seems to be drawing on.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., 130-131.

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the Qur'ān to Gabriel and then, subsequently, commanded him to bring down such and such verse and chapter to Muhammad. All of what He commanded Gabriel to bring down as a verse of the Qur'an or a word upon Muhammad was that expression of the Eternal Speech [of God] (*'ibāra 'an al-kalām al-qadīm*) and it [the Eternal Speech] is not temporally generated (*lam yakun muḥdath*) because the Speech of God is not temporally generated (*ghayr muḥdath*).⁷²⁶

The above passage from al-Nasafī betrays several Ash'arī overtones. First, it specifies that God communicates His Speech as “from behind the veil” mentioned on Q. 42:51 and which most theologians and exegetes associated with the cases of God speaking directly to Moses. In this respect, al-Nasafī's view comes close to al-Ash'arī himself, al-Bāqillānī, and al-Ṣiqillī, who described the cases where God speaks to Gabriel, Moses, and Muhammad directly as the same mode of revelation. But al-Nasafī's mention of God speaking to Gabriel in this description lacks any mention of God causing Gabriel to hear His Speech through sounds and letters as he stated in an earlier passage. Instead, the implication is that Gabriel perceived God's Speech without the mediation of a created medium – which is close if not identical to the classical Ash'arī position of al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, and al-Ṣiqillī seen earlier in this chapter. Al-Nasafī then went on to say that God would teach Gabriel specific verses of the Qur'ān and then command him to descend and recite them to Prophet. This appears to match al-Bāqillānī's description of how God taught Gabriel the recitation (*al-qirā'a*) of His Speech in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān followed by Gabriel reciting it to the Prophet. The Arabic Qur'ān that Gabriel recites to Muhammad in the form of verses and chapters is what al-Nasafī again called the expression (*'ibāra*) of God's eternal Speech.

In summary, al-Nasafī's theology of Qur'ānic Revelation seems to be a fusion of both Ḥanafī teachings and Ash'arī ideas. This is not surprising given his rather conciliatory tone towards Ash'arī theology in general as noted by Madelung. In common with the Ash'arīs and consistent with al-Samarqandī and al-Māturīdī, al-Nasafī regarded Revelatory Principle as God's Speech –

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

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an eternal uncreated attribute of God that is beyond sounds, letters, and multiplicity. Like the Ash'arīs, he defined the Qur'ān and other verbal linguistic Revelatory Products as created (*makhlūq*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*) expressions (*'ibārāt*) of God's uncreated Speech. However, al-Nasafī described the Revelatory Process of God communicating His eternal Speech to Gabriel in two ways: according to his first account, God caused Gabriel to hear His Speech by creating sounds and letters for Gabriel to hear; this view is faithful to the Ḥanafī teaching of al-Samarqandī and in line with al-Māturīdī's view that God's Speech cannot be heard without a created medium for the recipient to hear. Meanwhile, al-Nasafī's second account of the Revelatory Process features God communicating His Speech to Gabriel from behind a veil, and subsequently, God teaching Gabriel the Qur'ān in a piecemeal fashion and sending him to recite the verses to the Prophet; this nearly matches al-Bāqillānī's and al-Ṣiqillī's Ash'arī account of the Revelatory Process. In either case, whatever Gabriel recited to Muhammad as Arabic verses, according to al-Nasafī, was the created expression (*'ibāra*) of the Speech of God.

Al-Nasafī's understanding of the Revelatory Principle matched the ideas of his fellow Māturīdī scholar al-Pazdawī, but their respective takes on the Revelatory Process and Revelatory Products differed both in form and substance. First, the two thinkers used different terminology in describing the Revelatory Products in Arabic, Hebrew, or Syriac. Al-Nasafī used the term *'ibāra* (expression), which al-Ash'arī preferred but his successors dropped. Al-Pazdawī referred to the Revelatory Product as a *manzūm* (composition). But apart from terminology, both thinkers appear to have the same concept in mind. A more substantial difference lies in their understanding of the Revelatory Process. Al-Nasafī adhered to a Ḥanafī-Ash'arī synthetic understanding where God communicates His Speech to Gabriel and teaches the Qur'ān to him (either in one act or in two separate acts), while al-Pazdawī believed that God created the Arabic sounds and letters of the pre-

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existent Qur'ān as a written composition (*manẓūm*) in the Guarded Tablet. Al-Pazdawī then affirmed the *tafsīr* model of the revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) of the entire Qur'ān to the lowest heaven on the Night of Power. This shows that even among late fifth/eleventh-century Māturīdī theologians, there was no singular official understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation.

4.6 Qur'ānic Revelation and the Prophetic Sunna

While the focus of the chapters comprising Part 2 has been Qur'ānic Revelation, it is important to register that Sunni Muslim exegetes, theologians, and traditionists also affirmed the existence of “extra-qur'ānic inspiration”, that is, modes of God's communication to the Prophet that result in Revelatory Products in addition to the Arabic Qur'ān. In the Sunni tradition, two important manifestations of extra-qur'ānic inspiration to the Prophet are the Sunna (*sunnat al-nabī*) and the Divine Saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*).⁷²⁷ While a detailed study of the development of these two ideas in Muslim thought remains beyond our scope, it is necessary to present how specific proto-Sunni and Sunni thinkers conceived the Prophetic Sunna as the expression of God's revelation.

⁷²⁷ The most extensive analysis of the Divine Saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) in the Sunni tradition remains Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word*. His conclusion is that the Divine Saying goes back quite early in the sources and is consistently presented in various Sunni works as a divinely revealed discourse that is both God's Speech and prophetic speech. I will not be dealing with the Divine Saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) in this section. For the latest research on this topic, see Graham, “Ḥadīth qudsī,” in Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Three, consulted online on 10/1/2019: https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/hadith-qudsi-COM_30166?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-3&s.q=kudsi.

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4.6.1 Origins of the Concept of Sunna

The term and concept of *sunna* in general originated from pre-Islamic times, referring to “normative behavior or practice of revered ancestors”,⁷²⁸ and to practices established by exemplary individuals.⁷²⁹ The term Sunna of the Prophet (*sunnat al-nabī*) is not found in the Qur'ān, nor is there reference to the general concept of the believers imitating the personal conduct of Muhammad. The Qur'ān only speaks of the *sunna* of God with respect to God's sending messengers in the past and dealing with certain disobedient peoples.⁷³⁰ Nowhere does the Qur'ān actually prescribe the emulation of Muhammad's behavior and way of life; while the Qur'ān (Q. 33:21) refers to Muhammad as a “beautiful example” (*uswa ḥasana*) for the believers, the earliest commentaries related the verse to Muhammad's example of marching out to fight the Meccan-alliance forces during the Battle of the Trench.⁷³¹ The contextual nature of this term being used for Muhammad is evidenced by how Q. 60:4 uses the very same word, *uswa ḥasana*, in reference to Abraham and those with him when they disassociated from those who worship idols.

Nevertheless, the Qur'ān grants an elevated status to Muhammad. As recalled from Chapter 1, the Prophet carries authority on behalf of God to the extent that obedience and allegiance to the Messenger is obedience and allegiance to God. The Qur'ān makes it obligatory for the believers to submit to Muhammad's judgments and decisions; Muhammad is tasked with explaining the meanings of the Arabic *qur'āns*; he teaches *kitāb* and *ḥikma* (whose meaning is broader than the

⁷²⁸ G. H. A. Juynboll, “Some New Ideas on the Development of the *Sunna* as a Technical Term in Early Islam,” in G. H. A. Juynboll, *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Varorium, 1996), 97-118: 98.

⁷²⁹ Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, “The Concept of *sunna* Based on the Analysis of *sīra* and Historical Works from the First Three Centuries of Islam,” in Adis Duderija (ed.), *The Sunna and Its Status in Islamic Law*, 13-38: 15.

⁷³⁰ Juynboll, “Some New Ideas on the Development of the *Sunna*,” 101.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

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qur'āns) to the believers. The scope of prophetic inspiration (*wahy*) according to the Qur'ān evidently extends beyond the Qur'ānic recitations and embraces the Prophet's teaching, guidance, judgments, and personal conduct. The integral relationship between God, Muhammad, and the Arabic *qur'āns* was manifested in what Graham called a unitary "prophetic-revelatory event." Thus, there are enough grounds to suppose that many of his followers reckoned Muhammad as occupying a special status before God and an exalted rank among human beings – and this surely contributed to idea of the prophetic Sunna after his death.

After the death of Muhammad, the term *sunna* was associated with Muhammad as well as Abū Bakr and 'Umar.⁷³² After the Battle of Şiffīn, the term *al-sunna al-ādila al-jāmi'a ghayru l-mufarriqa* (the *sunna* which is righteous, binding the people together rather than leading them into disunity) was used in the Arbitration Agreement.⁷³³ Until the end of the second century, the term *sunna* was used for the Prophet's practice along with that of many others including the companions, the first four Caliphs, or any well-known or established practice held to have originated with Muhammad or his companions.⁷³⁴ While the concept of the Sunna of the Prophet seems to appear quite early, its actual content consisted of what the community deemed to be correct, just and established practice and subject to varying interpretations. According to Crone and Hinds, the content of the term *sunnat al-nabī* was deemed to be "good practice in general and that of the caliphs and prophets in particular" without a concrete set of injunctions.⁷³⁵ By the end of the Umayyad Caliphate, the Sunna of the Prophet had become differentiated from the *sunna* of

⁷³² Ibid., 98-101.

⁷³³ Ibid., 103.

⁷³⁴ Boekhoff-van der Voort, "The Concept of *sunna*," 15.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., 16.

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the Caliphs in the view of many Islamic scholars outside the Umayyad establishment. In the second century, there appear to have been different *sunnas* in the concrete sense: the normative practice and conduct of the Prophet, the practices of his companions, the practices of the people of Medina, and the practices of the Muslims as a whole.⁷³⁶ Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort's study of the usage of the terms *sunna*, *sunan*, and *sanna* in early *sīra* and historical works revealed that these sources speak of eight different kinds of *sunna* and that early *sīra* works do not contain many references to the Sunna of the Prophet. But the number of references to the Sunna of the Prophet increased in latter half of the second century.⁷³⁷

4.6.2 The Sunna of the Prophet as Revealed Wisdom: Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 205/820)

During the first two centuries, the idea of the Sunna of the Prophet was still distinct from the concept and content of *ḥadīth*. Adis Duderija refers to the former as the “non-*ḥadīth*-dependent concept of *sunna*.”⁷³⁸ The eventual conflation of the two, by which the *ḥadīth* became seen as the sole vehicle for the Sunna of the Prophet, was constructed and argued through the later second and third century. This process, termed the “*ḥadīthification* of the *sunna*”, took place as a result of a variety of factors including the immense proliferation of *ḥadīth* and their rising importance; the increased application of *ḥadīth* to jurisprudence (*fiqh*), *tafsīr*, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*; and the emergence of textual hermeneutical methods (deferring to Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*) over non-textual methods like

⁷³⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., 33-34.

⁷³⁸ Duderija, *The Sunna and its Status in Islamic Law*, 2.

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ra'y (opinion) and *ijtihād*.⁷³⁹ Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī was the main architect of the claim that the Sunna of the Prophet, as accessed through sound *ḥadīth*, is the primary source of divinely revealed guidance alongside the Qur'ān. In his works, *Kitāb Jamā' al-'ilm* and *Risāla*, al-Shāfi'ī took on opponents who believed that the Qur'ān alone was a legitimate source of divine guidance and normative truth; he argued for the necessity of following the Sunna of Muhammad as conveyed in prophetic reports (*akhbār*) or *ḥadīth* because the Prophetic Sunna is the product of divine inspiration (*wahy*) from God: “Indeed, God the Most High has made accepting reports from God’s messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) obligatory for us and for those before and after us.”⁷⁴⁰ To be sure, al-Shāfi'ī’s motives were primarily legal as opposed to theological. Against prevalent concepts of Sunna rooted in legal custom as upheld by the Ḥanafīs and Mālik b. Anas, al-Shāfi'ī specified the Qur'ān and Sunna as the exclusive sources for legal norms.⁷⁴¹ One of al-Shāfi'ī’s main arguments for the authority of the Prophetic Sunna was based on Q. 62:2 and other verses that mention the Prophet’s mission of “teaching the *kitāb* and the *ḥikma*.” By the second century, as we saw in Chapter 2, the terms *al-kitāb* and *kitāb Allāh* were widely equated with “the Qur'ān”. Therefore, al-Shāfi'ī directed his opponents to the mention of “wisdom” (*al-ḥikma*): “We already know that ‘the Book’ is the Book of God. But what is ‘the wisdom’?” He argued that the wisdom refers to the Sunna of the Prophet in terms of what Muhammad explained to his community about matters like prayer, fasting, etc. that the Qur'ān only spoke generally.⁷⁴² In his

⁷³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁴⁰ Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *Kitāb Jamā' al-'ilm*, in *Kitāb al-umm*, ed. Maḥmūd Maṭrajī (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), 460, quoted in Aisha Y. Musa, *Ḥadīth as Scripture* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 34.

⁷⁴¹ Ahmed El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 69.

⁷⁴² Musa, *Ḥadīth*, 40.

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Risāla, al-Shāfi'ī made the same argument concerning the meaning of wisdom in the Qur'ān; he cited seven qur'ānic verses mentioning wisdom and offered the following comments:

So God has mentioned the Book, which is the Qur'ān, and He has mentioned Wisdom. I have heard those with whom I agree among the people who have knowledge of the Qur'ān say the Wisdom is the Sunna of God's Messenger. This seems to be what He has said—but God knows best—because the Qur'ān is mentioned and Wisdom is put after it; and God has mentioned His favoring His creatures by teaching them the Book and Wisdom. So, it is not possible—but God knows best—that the Wisdom here can be said to be other than the Sunna of God's Messenger.⁷⁴³

Al-Shāfi'ī's argument concerning the meaning of *ḥikma* appears to have been novel or at least uncommon in his time. Both Juynboll and Aisha M. Musa found that hardly any exegete before him interpreted the wisdom mentioned, for example, in Q. 33:34, as the Sunna of the Prophet.⁷⁴⁴ Another argument he put forth relied on several qur'ānic verses that enjoin obedience to the Messenger such as Q. 4:59 and 33:36. As noted in Chapter 1 and 2, the immediate and contextual meaning of the qur'ānic calls to obey and submit to the judgment of the Messenger would have meant, during his own lifetime, to obey Muhammad in person and submit to his commands and guidance as he conveyed them in real time. Al-Shāfi'ī interpreted the obedience to the Messenger in these qur'ānic verses as obedience to his Sunna as conveyed in prophetic *ḥadīth*.⁷⁴⁵ This interpretation itself represents a shift from the original meaning of the verses. Al-Shāfi'ī supported his claim for the divine authority of the Prophetic Sunna by arguing that all of Muhammad's words and deeds were the result of prophetic inspiration (*wahy*). To this effect, in both *Kitāb Jimā' al-ilm* and *Risāla*, he quoted several qur'ānic verses that speak about the Prophet following *wahy* from God on various matters beyond his recitation of the Qur'ān such as: "I follow nothing except

⁷⁴³ al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risāla*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1940), 78, quoted in Musa, *Ḥadīth*, 57.

⁷⁴⁴ Juynboll, "Some New Ideas," 106-107; Musa, *Ḥadīth*, 41.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

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what is inspired in me” (Q. 10:15); “Follow what is inspired in you from your Lord” (Q. 33:3); “Even so We have inspired in you a Spirit of Our Command” (42:52).

Al-Shāfi'ī's arguments on a whole established what Musa calls the “duality of revelation”. In a certain way, what he set forth was a partial restoration of the original qur'ānic and early Islamic concept of the unitary prophetic-revelatory event – in which the Prophet was intimately involved in the Revelatory Process, the Arabic *qur'āns* were prophetically mediated, and the boundaries between qur'ānic discourse and Muhammad's prophetic guidance were blurred. However, as seen in Chapter 2, the canonization and theological reification of the Qur'ān into the Book of God invested it with a divine authority and revelatory status independent of the Prophet's authority. Al-Shāfi'ī's proposals partially reconstituted the unitary prophetic-revelatory event by reviving the idea that the Prophet's extra-qur'ānic words and deeds were expressions of divine inspiration (*wahy*). Nevertheless, al-Shāfi'ī's concept of revelation still presupposed the post-qur'ānic idea of a reified Qur'ān as a verbally dictated Book of God and it is for this reason that he had to resort to the concept of the Sunna as the vehicle for this idea.

Al-Shāfi'ī's dual-revelation doctrine was immensely successful and laid the groundwork for the integration of prophetic *ḥadīth* into Muslim jurisprudence. It is no coincidence that the authoritative collections of Sunni *ḥadīth* were compiled in the generations following al-Shāfi'ī. The concept of dual revelation, embodied in the Qur'ān and the Sunna of the Prophet conveyed through *ḥadīth*, had profound implications for the general interpretation of Islam and the formation of Sunni jurisprudence and canon as noted by Musa:

The success of the doctrine of duality of revelation in overcoming the objections to *Ḥadīth* as an authoritative source of religious law and guidance in mainstream Islam further confirms the view that the objection to *Ḥadīth* was about using something other than divine revelation as an authoritative source of religious law and guidance. Once the *Ḥadīth* had the status of divine revelation, they came to be seen as the means God used to explain the Book—through the words of his prophet. After that idea gained widespread acceptance, the *Ḥadīth* became the second authoritative source of religious law and guidance for the vast majority of Muslims from at least the

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third/ninth century until now. For that majority, the issue was settled by al-Shāfi'ī. The *Ḥadīth* represent the inspiration God gave to His chosen Messenger, along with the Qur'an. As such, they are not only authoritative, but also necessary as an authoritative source of religious law and guidance.⁷⁴⁶

The duality of revelation put forth by al-Shāfi'ī had important hermeneutical implications for the construction of Islamic law in terms of the derivation of legal norms from revealed sources. As Ahmad El Shamsy argues in his study of Islamic law, al-Shāfi'ī believed that the language of the Revelatory Products revealed by God must possess “clarity” (*bayān*), meaning “the inherent capacity to express its communicative intentions.”⁷⁴⁷ Accordingly, the primary function of the Revelatory Products that God sends down is to express the intention of God. While al-Shāfi'ī may not have been a *kalām* theologian, his theory of hermeneutics pre-supposes God's intention or will as a transcendent Revelatory Principle, which both the Qur'ān and the prophetic Sunna are meant to disclose. As El Shamsy explains further, the Qur'ān, the prophetic Sunna contained in the prophetic *ḥadīth*, and the contexts and circumstances of the Prophet's Sunna found in the *ḥadīth* constitute three layers of the Revelatory Products that God sent down for the guidance of human beings:

The Quran and the Sunna form the two principal layers of revelation; the first consists of direct divine speech and the second of the wisdom (*ḥikma*) embodied in the example of God's Prophet as clarification for God's speech. The third and final layer of information that bears upon the interpretation of revelation is provided by the occasions (*asbāb*) that caused the Prophet to act or to speak, and that therefore represent the context within which the prophetic tradition manifested itself. Knowledge of this context is important, since “a man might relate a saying from [the Prophet] having caught the answer but not the question, which could have indicated to him the true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of the answer through knowledge of the occasion (*sabab*) from which the answer sprang.” It is the context provided by the occasion that allows the jurist to extract normative Sunna from the textual form of a Hadith report.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁶ Musa, *Ḥadīth*, 80.

⁷⁴⁷ El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law*, 76.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

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Al-Shāfi'ī adopted a contextualist approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. If the Qur'ān provides clear expressions about a matter, then the interpreter can stop find what he requires and stop there. However, if the Qur'ān only mentions certain obligations in a general way, then further clarification is needed. The interpreter finds this further clarification in the prophetic Sunna recorded in prophetic *ḥadīth* since “God’s Messenger clarified (*bayyana*) on God’s behalf” the precise details and circumstances related to those obligations. But the function of the Sunna also goes beyond merely clarifying the Qur'ān; the prophetic Sunna itself provides knowledge of God’s intention concerning His revealed guidance with respect to obligations not even mentioned in the Qur'ān. Thus, the Sunna, possesses independent status as a Revelatory Product disclosing God’s intention, just as the Qur'ān does.⁷⁴⁹ The presence of the prophetic *ḥadīth* as a source of God’s revealed guidance is therefore indispensable in al-Shāfi'ī’s hermeneutics.

4.6.3 Arguments for the Revelation of the Prophetic Sunna: al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1072)

Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Thābit, popularly known as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (392-463/1002-1071), was a prominent scholar of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* in fifth/eleventh-century Baghdad. He is famous for several works including his famed *Ta'rikh Baghdād* (History of Baghdad). According to Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Baghdādī was initially a Ḥanbalī but came into conflict with other Ḥanbalī scholars because of his theological positions. After this dispute, al-Baghdādī adopted Shāfi'ī *fiqh* going forward. Various later biographical accounts paint al-Baghdādī as the center of some controversy while giving different versions of the details.⁷⁵⁰ In any case, one of his important works is *al-Faqīh*

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁵⁰ Fedwa Malti Douglas, “Controversy and Its Effects in the Biographical Tradition of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī,” *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977): 115-131.

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wa l-mutafaqqih, in which al-Baghdādī lays out his understanding of the root-principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*).⁷⁵¹

In several sections of *al-Faqīh*, al-Baghdādī furnished evidence from various sources to argue that the Prophet's Sunna is the product of God's revelation and inspiration. His argument logically proceeded through three stages: first grounding the very concept of the Prophetic Sunna in the Qur'ān; second, demonstrating a similarity between the Sunna and the Qur'ān *qua* Book of God as Revelatory Products; third, showing that whatever the Prophet established as *sunna* was by means of *wahy* granted to him by God.

In one section about the “possessors of authority” (*ulū l-amr*) being the ‘*ulamā*’ and *fuqahā*’ in Q. 4:59 (“Obey God, and obey the Messenger and the Possessors of Authority”), al-Baghdādī related a statement attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās purporting to be an exegesis of this verse: “Obeying God is following His Book (*kitābihi*) and obeying the Messenger is following his Sunna.”⁷⁵² In a later section devoted to expounding the Sunna as the second root-principle (*asl*) of jurisprudence, al-Baghdādī constructed a series of proof-texts consisting of qur'ānic references to show the divine authorization of the Sunna. He first explained that “the Sunna is what the Prophet ordained (*shara'a*) for his community and it is necessary to follow it because God required the people to obey him.” He then quoted several qur'ānic verses that command people to obey the Messenger of God (Q. 3:132, 4:69, 4:80), such as “whoever who obeys the Messenger obeys God”

⁷⁵¹ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Faqīh wa l-mutafaqqih*, 2 Vols. ed. ‘Abd al-Rahmān ‘Ādil b. Yūsuf al-‘Azzāzī (Damman: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1996).

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 126.

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(Q. 4:80).⁷⁵³ He also quoted statements of al-Shāfi'ī to the effect that *al-kitāb* means the Qur'ān and *al-ḥikma* means the Sunna of the Prophet.⁷⁵⁴ Through these scriptural arguments, al-Baghdādī sought to ground the definition and authority of the Sunna in the Qur'ān like earlier scholars.

In the next section, al-Baghdādī presented another set of proof-texts to establish that the Sunna of the Prophet was both like the Qur'ān in being sent down by God but different because of its non-scriptural form. In one place he quoted a statement of the Follower Sa'īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/713-14), who said: “The Sunna is what the Messenger established (*sanna*) in religion as something not sent down as scripture (*kitāb*). As for what is explained in the Book (*al-kitāb*), that is the command of God and His decree.”⁷⁵⁵ According to a report from the follower al-Miqdām b. Ma'dī-Karib (d. 87/706), a reported associate of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 86-96/705-715), the Prophet Muhammad himself said: “I was given the Book and something similar (*mithlahu*) with it” and “I was given the Qur'ān and something similar with it.”⁷⁵⁶ The voices of other notable followers and companions were marshalled to reinforce the theological status of the Sunna alongside the Qur'ān. Al-Baghdādī quoted Abū l-Mu'tamir Sulayman b. Ṭarkhān (d. 46-143/666-760), who reportedly said that “the narrations (*ahādīth*) of the Messenger of God are akin to the revelatory sending down (*ka l-tanzīl*) [of the Qur'ān].” He also produced a statement attributed to the companion Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. ca. 56/672) that: “The Sunnas (*sunan*) of the Messenger of God according to us are similar to the Speech of God.”⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵³ Ibid., 258.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 259-260.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., 257.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 263.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 265.

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In the following section, al-Baghdādī sought to demonstrate that the Sunna, like the Qur'ān, was based on a mode of *wahy* that God communicated to the Prophet. He began by quoting the people of knowledge (*ahl al-ilm*) saying:

The Messenger of God only establishes (*yasunna*) a *sunna* by means of *wahy*. He who says this relies on the apparent meaning (*bi-zāhir*) of God's saying (Q. 53:3-4): "He does not speak of his own desire. Verily, it is only an inspiration inspired [to him] (*wahyyun yuhā*)."⁷⁵⁸

Al-Baghdādī then reported similar words from 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāwus b. Kaysān al-Hamdānī (d. 132/749-750) to clarify that *wahy* came to the Prophet in two forms, recited and non-recited:

The Messenger of God does not ever establish (*lam yasunna*) anything as a *sunna* except through the *wahy* of God. So from *wahy* there is what is recited and [also] what is a *wahy* to His Messenger, so he establishes it as a *sunna* (*yasunnu bihi*).⁷⁵⁹

By the fifth/eleventh century, as seen above, Sunni theologians and exegetes agreed that the verses of the Qur'ān had been verbally dictated to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel. In other words, the *wahy* that resulted in the Qur'ān was a verbal dictation. To suppose that the Sunna too was the product of *wahy* raises the question of how God precisely communicates the Sunna to the Prophet. Accordingly, al-Baghdādī presented statements speaking to this latter issue. One viewpoint was expressed in a famous statement of Ḥassān b. 'Atīyya (d. 120-30/738-748) that: "Gabriel would bring down the Sunna to the Prophet in the same way that he brought down the Qur'ān. He would teach [the Sunna] to him just as he taught him the Qur'ān."⁷⁶⁰ According to the above report, Gabriel verbally dictated the Sunna to the Prophet in the same manner that he verbally dictated the Qur'ān.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 266.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 267.

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Al-Baghdādī also quoted other reports about the Prophet Muhammad that suggest a different revelatory process for the Sunna. In the following explanation, the Sunna of the Prophet is said to be the product of Muhammad's personal insight (*ra'yy*):

Among them is one who said: "God appointed His Messenger to establish as *sunna* (*yasunna*) what he considers beneficial to the people, and he deduced it with His saying: "Verily We sent down to you the Book in truth, so judge between the people by what God shows you" (Q. 4:105). Thus, God only specified him to judge by his personal insight (*bi-ra'yyihi*) because he is divinely protected (*ma'sūm*) and there is divine help (*al-tawfīq*) with him.⁷⁶¹

According to this opinion, the Sunna was not exactly the result of a separate mode of *wahy*, but rather, came from the personal insight of *ra'yy* of the Prophet. However, the Prophet's personal insight was divinely sanctioned because he was protected (*ma'sūm*) from sins and continually receiving God's help (*al-tawfīq*).

Finally, al-Baghdādī expounded on differences of opinion among Sunni scholars with respect to the content of the Sunna in comparison to the Qur'ān. Some of these opinions entailed different understandings of how the Sunna was revealed by God. The scholars, he explained, agree on two points about the Sunna's content. The first is that the Prophet explained as Sunna something which was already sent down by God as a clear text (*naṣṣ*) in the Qur'ān. In this case, "the Messenger expounded something similar to the clear text (*naṣṣ*) of the Book." The second is that the Prophet explicates as Sunna a matter that God sent down in the Qur'ān as a summation (*jumla*) without details. In this case, "the Messenger explained from God the meaning of what God intended." Disagreement, however, exists concerning whether the Prophet established a *sunna* about what is not a clear text in the Qur'ān. On this matter, al-Baghdādī reported several views. One opinion was that the Prophet only established *sunnas* that have a clear root-principle (*aṣl*) in the Qur'ān, where his guidance or actions like setting number of prayers or engaging in trade are

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 267-268.

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matters mentioned in the Qur'ān without clear guidance. Another opinion was that the Prophet could and did establish *sunna* concerning what is not found in the Qur'ān. Proponents of the latter view maintained that the Prophetic Sunna in its entirety was revealed by God directly to the Prophet: “All of what he [the Prophet] established as *sunna* was cast (*ulqiyya*) into his heart. His Sunna is the wisdom (*al-ḥikma*) that was cast into his heart from God.”⁷⁶²

In sum, al-Baghdādī's discourse demonstrates a focused effort to establish and elaborate on the revelatory nature of the Sunna. In continuity with prior Sunni thinkers, al-Baghdādī marshalled scriptural proof-texts to first define the Sunna in terms of the obedience to Muhammad mandated in the Qur'ān. He then presented various statements on the authority of prominent companions and followers of the Prophet to the effect that the Sunna of the Prophet constitutes a Revelatory Product akin to the Arabic Qur'ān but in a non-scriptural form. This is underscored by the quotations referring to the Sunna as something similar to (*mithl*) the Qur'ān or God's Speech. Finally, al-Baghdādī furnished another set of statements attributed to early Muslim figures that designate the Revelatory Process of the Sunna as *wahy*. This material left the possibility open as to whether the *wahy* of the Sunna came to the Prophet as verbal dictation or as a nonverbal “casting” (*ilqā'*) into his heart.

4.6.4 The Revelatory Process of the Qur'ān and Sunna: al-Juwayni (d. 478/1085) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)

Sunni *kalām* theologians in the fifth/eleventh century incorporated the revealed status of the Sunna into their theories of Qur'ānic Revelation. Important examples of these formulations are found in the ideas of Ibn Ḥazm and the Ash'arī theologians al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 272.

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If both the Qur'ān and Sunna are the result of *wahy*, what truly distinguished them? For his part, Ibn Ḥazm equated the Qur'ān and the Sunna as Revelatory Products but differentiated them with regard to their theological status and function in religious practice:

The revelation (*wahy*) from God Almighty to His Messenger, peace and blessing be upon him, is divided into two types: One of the two is (ritually) recited revelation (*wahy matlū*), an inimitably arranged written composition, and that is the Qur'ān. The second is revelation of transmitted sayings, not an inimitably arranged written composition; it is not (ritually) recited (*la matlū*), but it is read: and that is reports that have come from God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him).⁷⁶³

The above remarks of Ibn Ḥazm, however, do not disclose the relationship of the Qur'ān and Sunna to the Revelatory Principle of God's Speech. Did the Qur'ān become manifest from a different aspect of God's Speech than the Sunna? These questions were taken up by Ash'arī theologians.

Like many Sunni thinkers, al-Juwaynī regarded the Sunna of the Prophet as a Revelatory Product alongside the Qur'ān, as is apparent in his *Kitāb al-Waraqāt fī uṣūl al-fiqh*.⁷⁶⁴ However, he held that the Qur'ān and Sunna were the result of two distinct Revelatory Processes resulting from God's communication of His Speech to Gabriel. In the statement below related by al-Suyūfī, al-Juwaynī described how God's Speech is transmitted through Gabriel to the Prophet in two different ways:

The Speech of God was sent down in two ways: the first way is that God said to Gabriel: "Say to the Prophet to whom you are sent that God says 'do so and so' and 'command so and so'." Gabriel understood what His Lord said to him and then brought that down to the Prophet and conveyed to him that which His Lord said. But the expression (*al-'ibāra*) [of Gabriel] was not this expression [of God]. This is similar to what the king says to the person he entrusts: "Say to so and so that the King says to you: 'Strive in service and gather your army for battle.'" So if the messenger said: "The King said, 'do not ignore my service, and do not leave the army scattered, and arouse them to battle,'" there is neither falsification nor abridgement in the conveyance of the message. The second way is that God said to Gabriel: "Recite this book to the Prophet," so Gabriel brought down the word from God without any alteration. This is like the king writing a letter and entrusting it to a

⁷⁶³ Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, Vol. 1, ed. Aḥmad Shākir (Cairo: Maṭb'at al-Imām, nd), 87, quoted in Musa, *Hadīth*, 5.

⁷⁶⁴ See al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Waraqāt fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. and tr. David R. Vishanoff, *A Critical Edition, English Translation, and New Commentary on Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī's Leaflet on the Sources of the Law*, Section 9 of Commentary, published online on May 1, 2018: <https://waraqat.vishanoff.com/>.

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trustee and saying: "Recite it to so-and-so." Thus, it is without alteration in terms of words or letters.⁷⁶⁵

In al-Juwaynī's view as reported here, God reveals His Speech to Gabriel in two modes. In the first mode, what God communicates to Gabriel is intended to be transmitted to the Prophet according to its meaning and not according to the literal words used by God. This implies that Gabriel conveys the Speech of God to Muhammad in words or phrases that differ from what God communicated to Gabriel (the precise modality of God's Speech is not explained here). Accordingly, in this first mode, Gabriel plays the role of an active agent in the Revelatory Process because he chooses the precise words to express God's Speech according to its meaning. In the second mode, what God communicates to Gabriel is intended to be transmitted verbatim or word-for-word to the Prophet. Thus, Gabriel communicates this expression of God's Speech to the Prophet like passing on a dictated letter written by God. However, al-Juwaynī did not actually specify in this quotation whether these two forms of revelation relate to the Qur'ān or the Sunna specifically. The implication is that the first form of transmitting God's Speech according to its meaning describes the Prophetic Sunna while the second form of verbatim transmission describes the Arabic Qur'ān. However, al-Juwaynī's theory of Qur'ānic Revelation noted earlier describes how, even in the case of the Qur'ān, Gabriel heard and understood God's eternal Speech and caused the Prophet to understand what he himself had understood; his description might allow that Gabriel plays some role in composing the actual Arabic words of the Qur'ān that he dictated to Muhammad as an indication of God's Speech.⁷⁶⁶ Without al-Juwaynī's own clarification, we will

⁷⁶⁵ al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, 102.

⁷⁶⁶ See the comments on this passage in van Ess, "Verbal Inspiration," 189-190.

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never really know. This did not prevent other scholars from interpreting al-Juwaynī's ideas in their own way.

Al-Suyūfī explicated the above statement of al-Juwaynī in terms of the dual revelation of the Qur'ān and the Sunna as follows:

The Qur'ān is the second form [of revelation] and the first form is the *sunna*, according to what has come [in the reports] that Gabriel would bring down the *sunna* just as He brought down the Qur'ān. From this, it is permissible to narrate the *sunna* according to the sense because Gabriel conveyed it according to the sense. But it is not permissible to recite [the Qur'ān] according to the sense (*bi-ma'nā*) because Gabriel conveyed it verbatim (*bi-lafẓ*), and God did not permit him [Gabriel] to communicate it according to the sense. The secret in this is that the intent here is to worship according to the verbal expression [of the Speech of God] and with its miraculous inimitability. Thus, it is not possible for anyone to bring forth expressions to take its place, and that under each letter are meanings that the multitude cannot comprehend, and no one can produce anything that indicates toward what they encompass. It is an alleviation of a burden for this community that He made what is sent down upon them into two parts: one part transmitted verbatim according to its communicated expression and another part transmitted according to the sense. If He had made all of it transmitted verbatim, it would be burdensome and if He had made all of it transmitted according to the sense, it would not be believed in due to alterations and changes, so ponder this!⁷⁶⁷

For al-Suyūfī, the Revelatory Process for the Sunna is one in which Gabriel conveys the revealed Speech of God according to its sense or essential meaning (*bi-ma'nā*) while altering its verbal utterance (*lafẓ*). However, his interpretation still entails that Gabriel conveys the Sunna (whatever its verbal expression) to the Prophet through an auditory dictation akin to his dictation of the Qur'ān; the Prophet then conveys the Sunna to the community according to its sense as opposed to a verbatim enunciation. Thus, the community is permitted to narrate the Prophetic Sunna according to its meaning rather than its exact wording. Meanwhile, Gabriel concurrently transmits revealed Speech of God in the form of the Qur'ān in a verbatim manner (*bi-lafẓ*) without altering its verbal utterance in any way; here it should be kept in mind that al-Suyūfī subscribed to the Sunni *tafsīr* model of the Revelatory Process in which God inscribed the entire Arabic Qur'ān within the Guarded Tablet, sent it down in its entirety to the lowest heaven, and Gabriel dictated

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

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it to the Prophet in installments. In this schema, the Prophet conveys the Qur'ān verbally as he heard it from Gabriel without modification just as the Qur'ān can only be transmitted by the community in a verbatim manner, lest it suffer from alteration.

An important *kalām* perspective on the dual-revelation of the Qur'ān and the Sunna of the Prophet is found in the works of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111). It is important to first note that al-Ghazālī's precise views concerning prophetic revelation in general have been subject to various interpretations in modern scholarship. Frank Griffel and M. Afifi al-Akiti have argued that al-Ghazālī's theory of prophetic revelation as presented in his *Fayṣal al-tafriqa, Munqidh min al-dalāl*, and several of his later works was heavily influenced by Ibn Sīnā's psychology, including the latter's three properties of prophethood.⁷⁶⁸ Meanwhile, I have argued that al-Ghazālī's view of prophetic revelation, regardless of the Avicennian influence, also incorporated several Ismaili elements from Nāṣir-i Khusraw.⁷⁶⁹

In any case, al-Ghazālī still presented Ash'arī theological positions on Qur'ānic Revelation in his *kalām* work, *al-Iqtisād fī l-itiqād*, and his later legal work *al-Mustasfā fī 'ilm al-uṣūl*. In *al-Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī's positions on God's Speech paralleled the views of his teacher al-Juwayni and prior Ash'arī teachers. In this same work, al-Ghazālī rejected the Avicennian view of prophecy as incoherent and presented his own view of God's Speech against the former.⁷⁷⁰ As for the revealed

⁷⁶⁸ Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Concept of Prophecy: The Introduction of Avicennian Psychology into Ash'arite Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 101-144; M. Afifi al-Akiti, "The Three Properties of Prophethood in Certain Works of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī," in Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman (eds.), *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 189-212. See p. 196 for al-Akiti's table tracking the three properties through al-Ghazālī's works.

⁷⁶⁹ Khalil Andani, "The Merits of the *Bāṭiniyya*: Al-Ghazālī's Appropriation of Isma'ili Cosmology," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 29/2 (2018): 181-229.

⁷⁷⁰ al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī's Moderation in Belief*, 114-126. He presents his view on prophecy in p. 188-195 where he takes Ash'arī positions and not Avicennian positions.

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status of the Sunna, al-Ghazālī did not speak to the issue in *al-Iqtiṣād*. However, al-Ghazālī went on to expound the relationship between the Qur'ān, the Sunna and the eternal uncreated Speech of God in *al-Mustasfā*, to which we now turn.

Al-Ghazālī's *al-Mustasfā* is not a focused theological treatise, but a work dealing with the principles of jurisprudence. In many places, however, al-Ghazālī explained the nature of the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and legal rulings derived from them with reference to a theological framework of Qur'ānic Revelation. We find these expositions in the section of the text about the root-principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). He began the discussion on how the Qur'ān (Book of God) is the first source for the law with the following remarks:

The root-principle (*aṣl*) of the legal rulings (*aḥkām*) is one: it is the Word (*qawl*) of God, since the word (*qawl*) of the Messenger is not a source of rulings or obligations. But rather, he [the Messenger] is the one who informs [us] about [the fact that] God has decreed such and such thing. Thus, the ruling (*al-ḥukm*) is God's alone. The consensus (*al-ijmā'*) indicates the Sunna, and the Sunna indicates the ruling (*ḥukm*) of God, may He be exalted.... When we consider the manifestation of the ruling in relation to us, it does not manifest except by the word of the Messenger of God, for we hear speech neither from God nor from Gabriel. Thus, the Book appears to us by the word of the Messenger.⁷⁷¹

Al-Ghazālī's heading for the above passage mentioned the Book of God as the first root-principle and he immediately stated that God's Word is the root-principle (*aṣl*) of all legal rulings. Right after, al-Ghazālī mentioned the Prophet and asserted that Muhammad's words, insofar as they comprise his Sunna, likewise disclose the ruling (*ḥukm*) of God. Al-Ghazālī concluded this section by observing how even the Qur'ān, which is God's Book, is only heard through the mediation of the Prophet and not directly from God. In a later section, al-Ghazālī asserted the "dual revelation" of the Qur'ān and Sunna based on the fact that whatever the Prophet uttered, Qur'ān or not, was by virtue of divine inspiration (*wahy*): "He does not speak from his desire – it is inspiration (*al-*

⁷⁷¹ Abū Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā fī 'ilm al-uṣūl*, Second Edition, 2 Vols. (Qum: Dār al-Dhakhā'ir, 1368/1948), Vol. 1, 100.

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wahy) inspired [in him]. Some of the inspiration (*wahy*) is recited, so it is called 'Book' (*kitāb*), and some of it is not recited, so it is called 'Sunna'."⁷⁷²

In a section dealing with the issues of abrogation (*naskh*), al-Ghazālī provided a detailed explanation as to why the Prophet's commands in the Sunna can abrogate statements in the Qur'ān. Al-Ghazālī was quite aware that this legal principle appears to entail that the Prophet's speech supersedes God's Speech revealed in the Qur'ān. To answer this charge, al-Ghazālī resorted to the Ash'arī position that God's Speech is uncreated, eternal and non-verbal and also distinct from its "indicators" (*dalāla*) in the Arabic Qur'ān.⁷⁷³ In doing so, al-Ghazālī integrated the concept of the divinely revealed Prophetic Sunna with the Ash'arī doctrine of God's uncreated Speech manifesting as a created Arabic recitation to explain how the Sunna may abrogate the Qur'ān:

We say: there is no disagreement regarding the fact that he [the Messenger] does not abrogate [the Qur'ān] by himself, but rather, [he only abrogates] through the inspiration inspired in him – but it is not in the arrangement of the Qur'ān. But if we permit [for the Prophet] to abrogate [the Qur'ān] by [his] interpretive effort (*ijtihād*), then [his] permission for interpretive effort (*ijtihād*) is from God. The reality is that it is God who abrogates upon the tongue of His Messenger – meaning that it is not a condition that He abrogates a ruling of the Qur'ān [only] by means of the Qur'ān, but rather, [He can abrogate it] upon the tongue of His Messenger through a divine inspiration (*wahy*) that is not the Qur'ān. The Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) is one: it is what abrogates in one perspective and what is abrogated in another perspective. He does not possess two Speeches – one of them being the Qur'ān and the other not being the Qur'ān. The difference is only in the expressions. Sometimes He indicates His Speech by a composed verbal utterance (*bi-lafẓ manzūm*) which He commanded us to recite – called Qur'ān; sometimes He indicates His Speech by an unrecited utterance – called Sunna. All [of them] are heard from the Messenger while the Abrogator is God in every situation.⁷⁷⁴

According to Ash'arī *kalam* theology, the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sounds, letters, words, verses, and chapters is the created recitation (*qirā'a*) and indicator (*dalāla*) of the eternal uncreated Speech of God, and not identical to God's Speech itself. In the above passage, al-Ghazālī applies this same doctrine to assert the revelatory status of the Sunna of the Prophet. On one hand al-Ghazālī

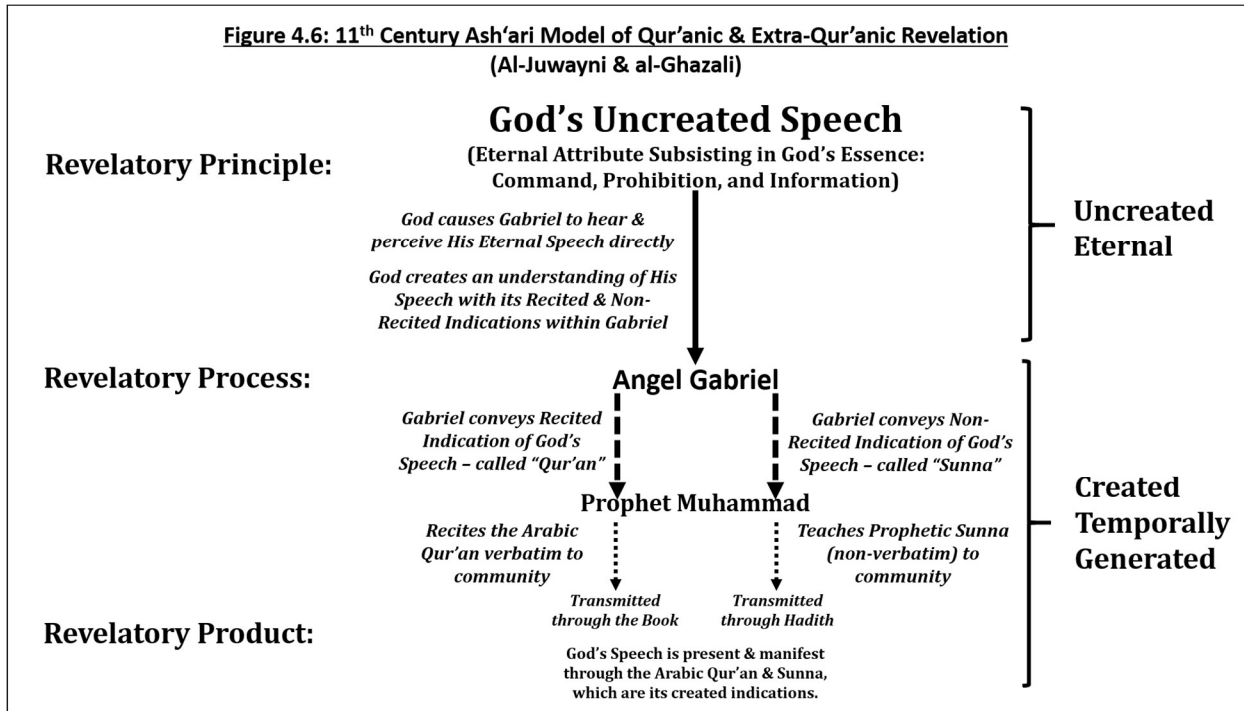
⁷⁷² Ibid., 129.

⁷⁷³ Al-Ghazālī defines God's Speech according to Ash'arī doctrine in p. 101 of the text.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., 125.

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affirmed – in agreement with prior Sunni thinkers like al-Shāfi'ī, al-Baghdādī, and al-Juwayni – that the Prophet's guidance and conduct is the result of divine inspiration (*wahy*) different from that of the Qur'ān. But he went a step further in arguing that the Prophet's Sunna expresses or points to God's eternal uncreated Speech in the same way that the Arabic Qur'ān indicates it: "Sometimes He indicates His Speech by a composed verbal utterance (*bi-lafz manzūm*) commanding us to recite it – called Qur'ān; sometimes He indicates His Speech by an unrecited utterance – called Sunna."



This is a significant development because it fuses the Sunni dual-revelation doctrine with the Ash'arī theological discourse on God's uncreated Speech and its created manifestations. As a result, al-Ghazālī effectively presented the Prophetic Sunna as a manifestation of God's Speech, a view that surely elevates the status of the Sunna for legal and theological purposes. Accordingly, God's Speech is immanent and present both through the Qur'ān and the Sunna; although al-

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Ghazālī does not put it in such terms, his proposal entails that God's Speech is read, heard, memorized and written through the Prophet's words and actions in the same way that God's Speech is recited, heard, memorized, and written through the Arabic Qur'ān's sounds and letters. The consequence of al-Ghazālī's interpretation for legal hermeneutics is that regardless of whether the Sunna abrogates the Qur'ān or vice versa, at the end of the day, it is God's Speech in both cases – verbatim in one form and non-verbatim in the other. When the Sunna is viewed as an expression of God's Speech, there is no issue as to whether the Sunna abrogates the Qur'ān; it is simply a case where one expression of God's Speech abrogates another expression of it.

In conclusion, the dual-revelation doctrine that the Qur'ān and the Sunna of the Prophet are both Revelatory Products indicating God's Speech played an important theological and hermeneutical role in the development of Sunni Islam. The doctrine as formulated by al-Shāfi'ī provided the theological basis for the equation of the Sunna with the content of prophetic *ḥadīth*. Still later, the doctrine was further developed and used to ground the theological legitimacy of the root principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) as seen in the works of al-Baghdādī, al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī.

4.7 Chapter Conclusion

The three chapters comprising Part 2 of this Dissertation have provided an intellectual history of proto-Sunni and Sunni understandings of God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation from the first/eight century to the fifth/eleventh century in both the *tafsīr* and *kalām* traditions. I have shown that the idea of the Qur'ān as God's Scripture sent down from heaven and its status as God's Speech in the form of Arabic words and verses dictated to Muhammad – ideas so often presupposed and evoked in virtually all discussions concerning Islam – are the outcome of

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historical processes and theological debates spanning several centuries. As it turns out, the Sunni traditions of *tafsīr* and *kalām* theology feature fundamentally different and often mutually contradictory visions of the Qur'ān's status as God's Book or God's Speech and how it was revealed to the Prophet. The three chapters showcased at least three minimally distinct Sunni *tafsīr* models and four significantly different Sunni *kalām* models that developed over three centuries.

The earliest concept of what the Qur'ān is and how it was revealed, a vision chiefly stemming from the Qur'ān itself, was not that of a closed scripture but a prophetic-revelatory event: the Qur'ān was a dynamic process of oral piecemeal *qur'āns* addressing situations as they arise and revealing *kitāb*, meaning God's knowledge and authoritative decree, to its situated audiences. These situated *qur'āns* were the expressions of a non-verbal prophetic inspiration (*wahy*), to which the Prophet gave linguistic form, and were complemented by the Prophet's inspired verbal guidance. Following Muhammad's demise, the Arabic *qur'āns* were physically canonized and hermeneutically reified into a scripture. Their compilation into an official closed written scripture in the mid-seventh century led to a hermeneutical and theological shift in how the Qur'ān came to be conceived by many in the nascent Muslim community: a shift from an oral "Qur'anic Discourse" as an open-ended series of revelatory recitations to a scripturalized "Qur'ān between the two covers" as the definitive and authoritative "Book of God" providing divine guidance generalizable to all situations. As part of this shift, key terms like *kitāb Allāh* and *qur'ān* took on new meaning: whereas the intra-qur'ānic meaning of *kitāb / kitāb Allāh* is "God's decree" and that of *qur'ān* is "recitation" in the context of a communication process, the physical and theological canonization of the Qur'ān redefined the concepts of *kitāb* and *qur'ān* into designations for the entire Qur'ān in its canonized form as a scriptural object. In other words, *al-kitāb / kitāb Allāh* was identified with *al-Qur'ān*, and *al-Qur'ān* was defined as what is between the two covers of the

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compiled codex (*muṣḥaf*). As the Book of God (*kitāb Allāh*), the Qur'ān as a scriptural text came to hold the highest degree of divine authority for proto-Sunni and Sunni Muslims – a divine authority superior to and independent from the authority of the Prophet. In its new usage as a scripture, the Qur'ān was subject to various forms of exegesis resulting in the discourses of *tafsīr*, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and *kalām* theology.

The idea of the Qur'ān as a divinely authored, closed, and physical Book of God was taken up in classical Sunni *tafsīr*. Projecting the notion of a canonized and written Qur'ān into their cosmological speculations, the Sunni *mufasssīrūn* developed models of Qur'ānic Revelation that feature the heavenly pre-existence of the Arabic Qur'ān as a transcript in the Guarded Tablet, its spatial descent (*nuzūl*) from the heaven either in annual portions or “all at once”, and Gabriel's verbal dictation of its verses to the Prophet in installments. In this model of Qur'ānic Revelation, the role of Gabriel and the Prophet is purely mechanical and instrumental – consisting of simply memorizing and conveying an already-complete Qur'ān that exists in heaven.

Concurrent with developments within the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition, a different conception of the Qur'ān emerged among the various Sunni *kalam* schools. In the course of debates from the second century onward and during the Inquisition (*miḥna*) of the Abbasids, there emerged a theological concept of the Qur'ān as the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), in reference to the Qur'ān's oral recitational form, which seems to have developed from an earlier idea of the Qur'ān coming from and expressing the Knowledge of God. This concept was subject to numerous developments and refinements by Sunni *kalām* theologians from the third/ninth century to the fifth/eleventh century. These included early Mu'tazilī speculations over the Qur'ān's created nature as a body or accident and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's stance that the Qur'ān was uncreated due to being part of God's uncreated knowledge. Affirming the Qur'ān as God's Speech raised numerous issues, including:

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a) the nature of God's Speech as a Revelatory Principle – its modality and its relationship to God's Essence; b) the Revelatory Process by which God's Speech is revealed as the Arabic Qur'ān; c) the nature of the Qur'ān as the Revelatory Product and its ontological relationship to the Revelatory Principle. Sunni Muslim theologians from the Ḥanbalī, Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, and Ḥanafī-Māturīdī traditions proposed several mutually conflicting responses to these problems.

The Mu'tazilī 'Abd al-Jabbār conceived the Speech of God as a created (*makhlūq*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*) action of God and identified God's Speech with the Arabic sounds and letters of Qur'ān (Revelatory Product) on the grounds that speech in general consists of arranged sounds and letters. 'Abd al-Jabbār also critically engaged the teachings of his Mu'tazilī forebears, holding that God's created Speech was an expression of God's justice and will (Revelatory Principle). Differing with his co-religionists and the *tafsīr* tradition, 'Abd al-Jabbār rejected the pre-existence of the Arabic Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet and maintained that God produced the Qur'ān in time in response to historical events by dictating His Speech to the angels, who in turn dictated it to the Prophet through the course of his prophetic mission (Revelatory Process). Meanwhile, Ibn Kullāb, al-Ash'arī, and several classical Ash'arī theologians – al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, al-Ṣiqillī, and al-Ghazālī – conceived God's Speech (Revelatory Principle) as an eternal uncreated divine attribute subsisting in God's Essence based on speech in general being a meaning subsisting in the soul. They drew a clear ontological differentiation between the uncreated Speech of God (Revelatory Principle) and the Arabic Qur'ān (Revelatory Product) – which they defined as the created expression (*ibāra*), recitation (*qirā'a*) or indication (*dalāla*) of God's Speech through which the latter is present but not incarnate. Accordingly, the Ash'arīs understood the Revelatory Process in terms of God's Speech “becoming known” (*i'lām, ifhām*) to recipients instead of literal descending (*nuzūl*) to earth. They also posited the Angel Gabriel as an

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intermediary revelatory agent: God caused Gabriel to perceive His uncreated Speech and then created the knowledge of the miraculous linguistic arrangement (*nazm*) of the Arabic Qur'ān within him; Gabriel then recited the Arabic Qur'ān to Muhammad in a piecemeal fashion (Revelatory Process). The Ḥanbalī Abū Ya'ālā, following the view of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, maintained that the Arabic Qur'ān as recited sounds and letters (Revelatory Product) is ontologically identical to God's eternal and uncreated Speech (Revelatory Principle); however, he noted that God's Speech consists of eternal sound and letters without any sequence and does not resemble human speech. Accordingly, Abū Ya'ālā held that God's Speech was orally dictated by God to Gabriel and then by Gabriel to Muhammad (Revelatory Process). The Arabic Qur'ān, whether in recitation, writing, memorization, or hearing by humans, is essentially identical to God's eternal uncreated Speech in all cases. The Māturīdī scholars al-Pazdawī and al-Nasafī synthesized the teachings of earlier Ḥanafī and Māturīdī theologians (al-Samarqandī, al-Māturīdī, al-'Iyāḍī, Abū Salama) with emerging Ash'arī positions in formulating their views. Like the Ash'arīs, they defined God's Speech as an eternal uncreated attribute of God that is beyond sounds and letters (Revelatory Principle). They also framed the actual sounds, letters, and verses of the Arabic Qur'ān as the created composition (*manzūm*) or created expression (*'ibāra*) of God's uncreated Speech. Al-Pazdawī, in a nod to Sunni *tafsīr* teachings, believed that God first manifested His uncreated Speech in the Guarded Tablet as the text of the Arabic Qur'ān, which is a created composition (*manzūm*) of His Speech, before it was sent down to earth by the angels (Revelatory Process). Meanwhile, al-Nasafī's account of the Revelatory Process specified that God first caused Gabriel to hear His Speech either directly or through the mediation of the sounds and letters, which Gabriel then recited to the Prophet (Revelatory Process).

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Figure 4.7: Fifth/Eleventh-Century Sunni Theological Positions on Qur'ānic Revelation

Theological School	Ontology of God's Speech as Revelatory Principle	Ontology of Arabic Qur'ān as Revelatory Product	Revelatory Process of God's Speech manifesting as the Arabic Qur'ān	Relationship of God's Speech to Arabic Qur'ān
Mu'tazilī Abd al-Jabbār	God's Speech is a Created & Generated Arrangement of Sounds & Letters; God's Speech Comprises Command, Prohibition & Information Indicating God's Just Will	The Arabic Qur'ān is the Created Reproduction (<i>hikāya</i>) of God's Created Speech	God creates Arabic Sounds & Letters; Angels hear & reproduce it for the Prophet; Prophet recites it verbatim	God's Created Speech is Reproduced as the Recitation of the Arabic Qur'ān
Ash'arī al-Bāqillānī al-Juwaynī al-Ṣiqillī al-Ghazālī	God's Speech is an Uncreated & Eternal Attribute Subsisting in God's Essence God's Speech Comprises Command, Prohibition & Information	The Arabic Qur'ān is the Created Recitation (<i>qirā'a</i>) or Indicator (<i>dalāla</i>) of God's Uncreated Speech The word <i>qur'ān</i> , in and of itself, is equivocal and refers either to God's Uncreated Speech or to the Created Recitation of God's Speech	God causes Gabriel to hear His Eternal Speech God creates the understanding of the qur'ānic composition (<i>naẓm</i>) within Gabriel; Gabriel recites Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet; Prophet recites verbatim	God's Uncreated Speech is Recited and Heard with the Recitation of the Arabic Qur'ān
Māturīdī al-Pazdawī al-Nasafī	God's Speech is an Uncreated & Eternal Attribute Subsisting in God's Essence God's Speech Comprises Command, Prohibition & Information	The Arabic Qur'ān is the Created Composition (<i>manẓūm</i>) or Expression (<i>'ibāra</i>) of God's Uncreated Speech The word <i>qur'ān</i> , in and of itself, refers to the Created Composition or Expression of God's Speech	God composes Arabic Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet / or God causes Gabriel to hear His Speech with Sounds & Letters; Gabriel recites Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet; Prophet recites verbatim	God's Uncreated Speech is Recited and Heard through the Recitation of the Arabic Qur'ān
Ḥanbalī Qādirī Creed Abū Ya'lā	God's Speech is an Uncreated & Eternal Attribute of Sounds & Letters Subsisting in God's Essence God's Speech Comprises Command, Prohibition & Information	The Arabic Qur'ān is Ontologically Identical to God's Uncreated Speech, but contains order and sequence	God recites Uncreated Arabic Qur'ān to Gabriel; Gabriel recites Uncreated Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet; Prophet recites verbatim	God's Uncreated Speech is identical to the Recitation of the Arabic Qur'ān & heard from the Reciter

A high-level comparison of the Sunni *kalām* positions on Qur'ānic Revelation provides some important and surprising results in terms of how they agree and diverge:

- All the Sunni theological schools describe the content of God's (uncreated or created) Speech as command, prohibition, and information.
- All the Sunni theological schools agree that the Angel Gabriel verbally dictated the Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet Muhammad.
- The Mu'tazilīs, Ash'arīs, and Māturīdīs agree that the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* linguistic arrangement (*naẓm*) of sounds, letters, verses and chapters in the form of recitation, writing, and memorization is created and temporally generated and therefore not eternal.
- The Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs agree on the ontology of speech in general, the nature of God's Speech, and the created status of the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* recitation/writing/memorization using different terminologies.

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- The Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs only differ over the meaning of the term *qur'ān*; the Ash'arīs interpret *qur'ān* in an equivocal sense as designating either the uncreated Speech of God or the created Arabic recitation while the Māturīdīs generally hold that the term *qur'ān* by itself refers to the created Arabic recitation or arrangement of God's Speech.
- The Ḥanbalīs and Mu'tazilīs agree on the ontological identity between God's Speech and the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* arrangement (*nazm*) of sounds, letters, and verses.
- The above Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, Ḥanbalī, and Māturīdī theologians generally excluded the pre-existence of the Arabic Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet in their models of revelatory descent (*inzāl*).
- The Ḥanbalīs alone assert the uncreatedness of God's Speech in terms of sounds and letters, although these eternal sounds and letters lack the qualities of human speech such as materiality or sequence.
- Only the Ḥanbalī view meets the typical description of Muslim belief prevalent in academic and educational literature – that the Qur'ān is the eternal literal speech or words of God dictated verbatim to the Prophet.

Finally, the Sunni *kalām* theories of Qur'ānic Revelation integrated the Sunni doctrine of the revelatory status of the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. While the earliest form of this doctrine was laid out by al-Shāfi'ī in the context of his legal hermeneutics, later Sunni thinkers including al-Baghdādī, al-Juwaynī, and al-Ghazālī came to view both the Arabic Qur'ān and Sunna as the Revelatory Products of two different forms of divine communication (*wahy*) – called recited (*matlū*) and non-recited (*lā matlū*) respectively. In particular, al-Ghazālī argued that both the Arabic Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunna are created indications (*dalāla*) of God's uncreated Speech, which makes them the two principal sources for jurisprudence.

It is now clear that the various Sunni theories of Qur'ānic Revelation concerning the nature of the Revelatory Principle, Revelatory Process, and Revelatory Product are a combination of theological premises and hermeneutical arguments that were constructed and consolidated over several centuries. This can only give rise to a question: what if one or more of these claims – the reification of the Arabic *qur'āns* into a canonized scripture, the pre-existence of the Qur'ān as a book in heaven prior to its revelation, the idea of the Qur'ān as God's Speech (as an uncreated divine attribute or created divine act), or the notion that Gabriel verbally dictated the Qur'ān to Muhammad – were denied or conceived differently? Then surely, one would end up with vastly different visions of Qur'ānic Revelation, which would lead to different theories of hermeneutics.

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Such alternative visions of Qur'ānic Revelation can and do exist. They chiefly stem from Shi'i Ismaili interpretations of Islam that developed alongside and in competition with the Sunni theological traditions already examined. The final part of this dissertation is devoted to Shi'i, Imami, and Ismaili visions of revelation, with a focus on how these visions offer a radically different conception of Qur'ānic Revelation in terms of the Revelatory Principle, Revelatory Process, and Revelatory Products.

Part 3: Revelation in Imami and Ismaili Shi'ism

The third part of this dissertation provides an intellectual history and analysis of Shi'i positions on Qur'ānic Revelation as they developed from the late first/seventh century to the end of the fifth/eleventh century. While the thematic focus of this analysis is Shi'i Ismaili thought, there is also coverage of early Shi'i, Imami, and Twelver sources from these periods. The following three chapters analyze Shi'i thought through the following historical periods: 1) proto-Shi'ism in the late first/seventh century as reflected in some early *ḥadīth* and historical reports; 2) Imami Shi'ism in the second/eighth and third/ninth century based on the contents of the early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus; 3) early Ismaili Shi'ism in the late third/ninth century as depicted in pre-Fatimid Ismaili texts; 4) Ismaili Shi'ism in the fourth/tenth century using Ismaili *da'wa* literature with comparative consideration of Twelver Shi'i positions; 5) Ismaili Shi'ism in the fifth/eleventh century as reflected in Ismaili *da'wa* literature.

Shi'i views on revelation emerged and evolved in conversation and competition with the Sunni positions examined in Part 2. But the topic of revelation in Shi'i Islam merits a separate treatment for two reasons. First, the Imami Shī'a existed as a distinct community – possessing a ritual and theological orientation differing from other Muslim groups – from the early second/eighth century onward. This Imami community then evolved and segmented into different Twelver and Ismaili factions by the late third/ninth century. Both Shi'i groups operated in socio-political contexts quite different from those of Sunni thinkers: the Ismailis from the third/ninth century onward engaged in political activism leading to the Fatimid Caliphate and operated a vast *da'wa* network under the central leadership of a lineage of living Imams. Meanwhile, the Twelvers were a politically quiescent and scholarly active minority based mainly in Abbasid territory, under

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the leadership of fiscal agents and jurist-scholars following the disappearance of their twelfth and final Imam. Second, Shi'i thinkers in general and Ismaili *dā'īs* in particular prioritized different theological concerns than the Sunnis. For example, one does not find Shi'i thinkers fixated on the question of whether God's Speech is uncreated or created, or the issue of whether God's Speech is ontologically identical to or distinct from the Arabic sounds and letters of the Qur'ān in the manner of Sunni theologians. Instead, one of the key issues voiced in Imami and Ismaili Shi'i material was the relationship between the divine inspiration of the Prophet Muhammad and the divine inspiration of the Imams. In the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, the Ismailis theologized Qur'ānic Revelation using a Neoplatonic framework and espoused epistemic, theological, and cosmological principles that directly conflict with Sunni theologies. In doing so, the Ismailis explicitly challenged the models of revelation espoused in Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām* and offered an original alternative vision. The Twelvers followed a vastly different theological path from the Ismailis over the same period. This was due in large part to the Twelver community's leadership consisting of jurist-scholars and theologians deeply influenced by Mu'tazilī thought. Furthermore, the major centers of Twelver scholarship were within Sunni dominated areas under Abbasid political rule. Thus, Shi'i visions of Qur'ānic Revelation deserve to be studied on their own terms before being brought into comparative conversation with Sunni views.

Overall, these three chapters demonstrate that Imami and Ismaili teachings present a unique paradigm of Qur'ānic Revelation whose parameters and contents greatly differ from Sunni positions in several respects. The general outlines of these Shi'i revelatory models stated in terms of this dissertation's analytical framework of revelation are as follows:

1. The Revelatory Principle is a transcendent domain of reality encompassing all divine knowledge and guidance; it functions as the archetypal source of both cosmic creation and

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prophetic revelation. Shi'i thinkers variously conceive the Revelatory Principle as the *kitāb Allāh* similar to the Qur'ān's Transcendent Kitāb, the creative Word of God that produces and sustains all existents, or a Neoplatonic realm constituted by God's Word, the Universal Intellect, and Universal Soul. In all these cases, God's Speech is modulated through multiple levels of manifestation, including the corporeal world itself.

2. The Revelatory Process consists of various types of divine communication mediated by different revelatory agents including Neoplatonic hierarchies, the Holy Spirit, angels, and special human figures. Shi'i thinkers variously recognized the Prophet and the Imams as recipients of divine inspiration mediated by the Holy Spirit; verbal dictations mediated by corporeal angels; or non-verbal inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*) mediated by Neoplatonic entities. Ismaili thinkers stressed the Prophet Muhammad's role of prophetic composition (*ta'līf*) where he translates non-verbal inspiration (*wahy*) into the symbols and parables that constitute the Arabic Qur'ān; they also expounded the Imam's act of "revelatory hermeneutics" (*ta'wīl*) in which he discloses the real-truths (*haqā'iq*) of the Revelatory Principle concealed behind the prophetic and qur'ānic symbols.
3. The Revelatory Products include the Arabic Qur'ān, the *sharī'a*, and Imams' *ta'wīl* in the sense of "revelatory exegesis". The Arabic Qur'ān is an example of *tanzīl* – verbal revelatory expressions created by the Prophet whose contents symbolize the truths of the Revelatory Principle; the *sharī'a* consists of commandments and prohibitions designed by the Prophet to ensure his community's wellbeing within their temporal, social, political, and cultural context and convey revelatory truths in symbolic form; *ta'wīl* in the form of revelatory exegesis is a teaching of the Imams and their higher *dā'īs* that discloses the correspondence between the symbolic truths of the *tanzīl* and *sharī'a* and the real-truths of

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the Revelatory Principle. The figure of the Imam functions as a Revelatory Product in himself insofar as he is the “speaking *kitāb*” and the “speaking Qur'ān”.

The major finding of this investigation is that Shi'i Ismaili thinkers regarded the Arabic Qur'ān as the divinely inspired words of the Prophet Muhammad, not the verbatim Speech of God. Ismaili *dā'īs* rejected Sunni theologies of God's Speech as a divine attribute or divine act and refuted the notion of the Qur'ān's verbatim dictation to the Prophet. For Ismailis, the Arabic Qur'ān is the symbolic manifestation of a transcendent Revelatory Principle that also serves as the archetypal source of all created reality. The *ta'wīl* as understood and taught by the Ismaili *da'wa* is best conceived analytically as a divinely inspired form of “revelatory hermeneutics” and “revelatory exegesis” as opposed to mere “esoteric interpretation” or “commentary”; accordingly, *ta'wīl* is also a manifestation of the Revelatory Principle. Based on these ideas, the Imam – who is God's speaking *kitāb* and the speaking Qur'ān – is given higher theological status and greater authority than the Arabic Qur'ān in its recitational and scriptural format.

Chapter 5: The Speaking *Kitāb* and the Silent Qur'ān: Qur'ānic Revelation in Proto-Shi'i, Imami and Early Ismaili Thought (Second/Eighth and Third/Ninth Century)

5.0 Introduction: Qur'ānic Revelation in Shi'i Islam

*When the people of Syria wanted to make the Qur'ān a judge at Şifḫīn, the Imam (ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib) said: “I am the Speaking Qur'ān (al-qur'ān al-nāṭiq).”*⁷⁷⁵

Some accounts of the Battle of Şifḫīn report that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), revered as a divinely appointed Imam by Shi'i Muslims and the fourth rightly-guided Caliph by Sunnis, uttered the above words when the army of Mu'āwiya hung parchments (*maṣāḥif*) of the Qur'ān on their lances. Mu'āwiya's forces had loudly declared, “this is the *kitāb Allāh* between us and you”, to convince ʿAlī's army to cease fighting a battle that they were poised to win. As many of his own men inclined to lay down their arms in the face of this display, ʿAlī urged them keep up the fight and replied: “The only reason I have fought against them was so that they should adhere to the authority of this *kitāb*.”⁷⁷⁶ However, ʿAlī was compelled to stop fighting and agree to arbitration. Shortly after, the same faction who urged ʿAlī to stop fighting, later known as the Khawārij, seceded from ʿAlī's army on the grounds that judgment should be left to the Qur'ān and not human arbitrators. ʿAlī reminded his former men that *they* had wished to resolve the conflict by resorting to arbitration and that he had told them before that Mu'āwiya's men were “without religion or *qur'ān*.”⁷⁷⁷ The Khawārij accused ʿAlī of granting divine judgment to men instead of the Qur'ān. In response, ʿAlī said: “But this *qur'ān* is merely a writing set down between two covers. It does not speak; it is

⁷⁷⁵ As quoted in Sulaymān b. Ibrāhīm al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-mawadda lī-dhawqī l-qūrbā* (Beirut: Al-A'lamī, 1997), 82.

⁷⁷⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 17, 78-79.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

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merely men who speak through it.”⁷⁷⁸ According to later renditions of the event that reflect more developed Shi'i belief, 'Alī actually declared: “I am the Speaking Qur'ān” while referring to what Mu'āwiya's army displayed on their spears as being merely “the silent Qur'ān.”⁷⁷⁹ According to another version, the Imam pointed to the Arabic Qur'ān and said: “This is the silent *kitāb Allāh*, and I am the speaking *kitāb Allāh*.”⁷⁸⁰

Whatever their precise historicity, 'Alī's purported statements that the Qur'ān “between the two covers” does not speak and that he himself is the “Speaking Qur'ān” bear witness to a radically different idea of Qur'ānic Revelation from the Sunni Muslim views seen in the prior chapters. In the view of 'Alī and many of his partisans (*shī'a*) during his own lifetime and in later centuries among the Ismailis and the Twelvers, the Qur'ān in its scriptural form evidently does *not* possess a supreme self-contained divine authority as the Book of God or the Speech of God; instead, the authority of the Qur'ān is subservient to and vectored through the divine authority of certain divinely inspired persons whom God appointed as His vicegerents and the Qur'ān's guardians (*qayyim*) – the Prophet Muhammad and the divinely-inspired Imams from the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*), of whom 'Alī was the first and most exemplary.

In this chapter, I historically survey and analyze various conceptions of Qur'ānic Revelation within proto-Shi'ism (first/late seventh century), Imami Shi'ism (second/eighth

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁷⁹ Al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī'*, 82.

⁷⁸⁰ As reported in Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-'Amilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, vol. 27 (Beirut: Mu'assasah Ahl al-Bayt li-Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1413 A.H.), ḥadīth no. 33147, 34, as quoted in Aun Hasan Ali, “The Book of God and My Family Shall Never Part Ways,” *al-Sidrah*, 15 May 2008, consulted online on 10/1/2019: <http://www.aiseminary.org/al-sidrah/book-god-family-shall-never-part-ways/>.

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century to the end of the third/ninth century) and early Ismaili Shī'ism (late third/ninth century).⁷⁸¹ I begin by providing an account of how the Qur'ānic material about the family of Muhammad, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, supported a cluster of proto-Shi'i beliefs in the first/late seventh century termed the *Dīn 'Alī*. In this context, I argue that two famous statements attributed to Muhammad in later Sunni and Shi'i sources – known as the Ghadīr Khumm and Thaḳalayn (two weighty matters) traditions – date to the first/late seventh century and embody a proto-Shi'i concept of Qur'ānic Revelation. The Thaḳalayn tradition in its first-century context expresses a proto-Shi'i belief that God's *kitāb* (*kitāb Allāh*) in the broader sense of God's prescribed guidance and decree continues through the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muhammad. This idea is corroborated in the proto-Shi'i beliefs of 'Alī's most ardent followers, who regarded 'Alī and certain members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* as divinely guided leaders worthy of absolute obedience.

I then analyze Imami Shi'i views of Qur'ānic Revelation as presented in the earliest extant Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* compilations. I thereby demonstrate how numerous reports – whose content dates anywhere from the late second/eighth century to the late third/ninth century – present the Shi'i Imams as recipients of continuous divine inspiration through the Holy Spirit and having access to a higher realm of divine knowledge and decrees called *kitāb Allāh* whose contents and ontological status transcends the Arabic Qur'ān as recitation or scripture. I then turn to early Ismaili

⁷⁸¹ I use the term “proto-Shi'i” to refer to a diverse cluster of beliefs revering the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*), 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and his descendants as divinely guided figures and legitimate successors of the Prophet. These beliefs were prevalent among some Muslims in the late first/eighth century without the theology of Imamate that developed in the following century. I use the term Imami to refer to the distinctive form of Shi'ism that began in the early second/eighth century and which recognizes a Ḥusaynid lineage of 'Alid Imams appointed by *naṣṣ* (divine designation). The Imami Shī'a were followers of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in contrast to Zayd b. 'Alī and the Hasanid line; the Imami tradition later split into what would become Twelver Shi'ism and Ismaili Shi'ism. According to Najam Haider, a distinctive Imami Shi'i identity as something different from Zaydism and proto-Sunnism began in the early second/eighth century. See Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shī'a* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). My usage of the term Imami is in line with the description given in Haider, 14. For the shift from Imami to Twelver (Ithnā-'Asharī), see Etan Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'Ashariyya,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39/3 (1976): 521-534.

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views about Qur'ānic Revelation presented in two pre-Fatimid Ismaili texts (dated to the late third/ninth century) that were situated within an early Ismaili gnostic cosmology. I show that the early Ismailis understood the Prophet Muhammad to have a creative role in “rendering” God’s Speech into a symbol-filled discourse that constitutes the Arabic Qur’ān; they also explicitly claimed that the divine inspiration (*wahy*) granted to the Prophets continues through the Imams in what appears to be a partial challenge to the doctrine of the “finality” of Prophethood. In the view of early Ismaili thinkers, the hereditary Imam who succeeds the Prophet Muhammad is divinely-supported (*mu'ayyad*) and inspired from the Speech of God; he possesses the esoteric authority to reveal the Qur’ān’s true meaning through *ta'wīl*, which is best conceived as a “revelatory hermeneutics” that also expresses God’s Speech. In this respect, the Ismailis accord the Imam priority in divine authority and revelatory function over the Arabic Qur’ān – an idea most aptly illustrated by the Ismaili designation of the Imam as the “Speaking *kitāb Allāh*”. Accordingly, the early Ismailis identified virtually every Qur’ānic mention of *kitāb* with the Imam as opposed to the canonized Qur’ān between the two covers.

5.1 Proto-Shi'ism as the Religion of 'Alī (*Dīn 'Alī*): Pre-Islamic, Qur'ānic, and Historical Foundations

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi has traced the occurrence of the phrase *dīn 'Alī* (the Religion of 'Alī) in a number of reports about 'Alī's Caliphate, where several individuals express their adherence to “'Alī's Religion”.⁷⁸² The “content” of this *dīn 'Alī* was a cluster of early beliefs, ideas, and convictions held by some Muslims in the first century affirming the status of 'Alī as

⁷⁸² Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Reflections on the Expression *dīn 'Alī*: The Origins of the Shi'i Faith,” in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 4-44: 4-8.

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“the best of men after Muḥammad, his legatee (*waṣī*), and as such most entitled to lead the Community.”⁷⁸³ As documented by Wilferd Madelung and Amir-Moezzi, ‘Alī saw himself as the person most entitled to the spiritual and political leadership of the believers after the Prophet Muhammad and pressed his claim by evoking his familial closeness (*qarāba*) to the Prophet as a member of his *Ahl al-Bayt*, and his precedence (*sābiqa*) in being the first to respond to Muhammad’s summons.⁷⁸⁴ ‘Alī also criticized the first three Caliphs – Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān – for usurping and seizing the leadership office that was his by divine right.⁷⁸⁵ Amir-Moezzi summarizes the overall basis for ‘Alī’s leadership claims as such:

Adopted at a very young age by his paternal uncle Abū Ṭālib, before the advent of Islam, Muḥammad was ‘the adopted brother’ of his cousin ‘Alī. This *qarāba*, as well as the spiritual links between them were such that ‘Alī did not hesitate to embrace the religion proclaimed by Muḥammad. Friend and no doubt blessed confidant of the latter, his constant companion, ‘twinned’ with him by virtue of the *mu’ākhāt* ritual, during which there may have been an exchange of blood, an intrepid warrior fighting for his Cause, ‘Alī married Fāṭima, Muḥammad’s daughter and became the father of the only male descendants of the Prophet, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Some Companions had the privilege of one or many of these kinds of relations with Muhammad, but none of them apart from ‘Alī had all these kinds of relationship with him.... Thus ‘Alī had cogent reasons, confirmed in his opinion by the Qur’an and even more so by ancient beliefs, for believing in his own divine election and that of his progeny by Fāṭima later on. Surely it is this ‘election’ that constituted the essential core of what his contemporaries would have called *dīn ‘Alī*.⁷⁸⁶

In connection with such ideas, the Sunni historian al-Ṭabarī cited reports where several individuals, including Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (d. 38/658), described ‘Alī during his lifetime as the *waṣī* (legatee) of Muhammad and the closest related person to him.⁷⁸⁷ It is important to analyze how these proto-Shi‘i beliefs, termed *dīn ‘Alī*, are rooted in the Qur’ān, in pre-Islamic discourses, and

⁷⁸³ This phrase is from Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 178-179, quoted in *ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁸⁵ Madelung, *The Succession*, 180-181, 213-215.

⁷⁸⁶ Amir-Moezzi, “Reflections on the Expression *dīn ‘Alī*,” 39.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

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in early Muslim history – as these beliefs indirectly speak to an idea of Qur'ānic Revelation intertwined with the “Holy Family” (*ahl al-bayt*) of the Prophet Muhammad.

As Madelung has rightly noted, the historical Muhammad would have understood the status of his own family and the succession to his prophetic authority in accordance with how the Qur'ān describes the succession, inheritance, and familial relationships of prior Prophets. The Qur'ān presents many past Prophets in its narratives as “types” whose missions, experiences, and successions prefigure and parallel the career of Muhammad. As Michael Zwettler concluded in his study of qur'ānic prophethood in *Sūra 26*:

I hold that the qur'ānic accounts of prior messengers and prophets, as they are set forth in this *sūra* and many others, are expressly intended to be understood as typological prefigurements or *representations* of which the person and career of Muḥammad, Prophet and Messenger of God, provide the corresponding *recapitulation* and *fulfillment* – the *antitype*.... Modern scholars have frequently noted that in many parallel features of their careers, especially the consistent hostility and rejection with which their missions were received, these messenger-prophets of old are presented within the Qur'ān as precursors of Muḥammad or, more precisely, adumbrations of his persona, deeds, and situation.⁷⁸⁸

Since the Qur'ān is a documentary source from the prophetic career of Muhammad, it must certainly represent Muhammad's own beliefs and attitudes (and possibly those of his contemporaries) about the nature of his prophetic career and the manner of his succession. An accurate representation of these beliefs can be found by surveying the qur'ānic depiction of prophetic authority, family, and succession.

There is no shortage of qur'ānic material awarding special status, authority, and sanctity to the family and direct descendants of various Prophets. According to S. M. Jafri, “the total number of verses that mention special favor requested for and granted to the families of the various

⁷⁸⁸ Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto,” 97-98.

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prophets by God runs to over a hundred in the Qur'ān.”⁷⁸⁹ In general, the Qur'ān affirms blood relations as having greater nearness than the believers and the emigrants (Q. 33:6, 8:75). In the case of Prophets, their family members function as their protectors and often become their temporal and spiritual successors in the Qur'ānic narrative. Adam, Noah, the House (*āl*) of Abraham, and the House (*āl*) of 'Imrān succeed one another in the status of God's chosen people as direct descendants (*dhurriyya*) in an unbroken lineage (3:33-34). The fathers, brethren, and descendants of several Prophets are selected by God to bear His guidance and thereby given the *kitāb*, the judgment (*ḥukm*), and prophethood in succession (6:84-89). Abraham is specifically appointed by God as the *imām* of the people and this leadership (*imāma*) is extended to those of his descendants (*dhuriyya*) who are free of misguidance (2:124). God grants the *kitāb*, judgment (*ḥikma*), and a great kingdom to the House (*āl*) of Abraham (4:54); the descendants of Noah and Abraham are given the *kitāb* and prophethood (29:27, 57:26). These Abrahamic covenants apply to both of Abraham's sons: God accepts Abraham and Ishmael's prayer that He establish a lineage of Abraham's descendants through Ishmael who are protected from idol worship and who establish prayer and that He causes hearts of men to incline towards them (14:35-39); these Ishmaelite descendants of Abraham are divinely-ordained as a nation (*umma*) submitting to God among whom God sends Muhammad as His messenger (2:124-129); they are later described as those whom Abraham named *muslims* (submitters to God) and as witnesses over humankind while the Messenger witnesses over them (22:78); their description as just witnesses is also evoked in the Qur'ānic mention of the “Middle Nation” (2:143). The progeny of Abraham through Isaac is

⁷⁸⁹ S. H. M. Jafri, *The Origins and Development of Shia Islam* (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 1976), accessed on 8/8/2018: <https://www.al-islam.org/the-origins-and-early-development-of-shia-islam-sayyid-jafari/chapter-1-conceptual-foundations>.

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blessed with numerous Prophets (19:58); Isaac and Jacob are appointed as both Prophets (19:49) and *imāms* who guide by God's command (21:71-73). Joseph is favored by God as part of His favor to the House (*āl*) of Jacob (12:6). God appoints Moses' brother Aaron to share in his mission, bear his burden, and serve as his deputy (20:29-36; 21:48-49, 25:35); the Ark of the Covenant, the sign of the Israelite kingship, contains God's *sakīna* and the remnant (*baqiyya*) from the House (*āl*) of Moses and the House of Aaron (Q. 2:248). God appoints *imāms* to guide the Children of Israel according to His command and His *kitāb* (32:23-24). David was appointed by God as His vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on earth (38:26) akin to Adam (2:30); his son Solomon inherited (*waritha*) his leadership and prophetic wisdom by divine decree (27:16, 38:30). God answers the prayer of Zakariyya to appoint him a son to inherit from him and from the House of Jacob (19:6).

According to Madelung's estimation, the Qur'ānic discourse on prophetic succession and inheritance entails that the historical Muhammad likely intended a member of his own family to succeed him:

Insofar as the Qur'an expresses the thoughts of Muhammad, it is evident that he could not have considered Abu Bakr his natural successor or have been pleased by his succession... He could not have seen his succession essentially other than in the light of the narrations of the Qur'an about the succession of earlier prophets, just as he saw his own mission as a prophet, the resistance of his people with which he met, and his ultimate success by divine grace in light of the experience of the former prophets as related in the Qur'an. These earlier prophets considered it a supreme divine favour to be succeeded by their offspring or close kin for which they implored their Lord... In the Qur'an, the descendants and close kin of the prophets are heirs also in respect of kingship (*mulk*), rule (*hukm*), wisdom (*hikma*), the book and the *imamate*. The Sunni concept of the true caliphate itself defines it as a succession of the Prophet in every respect except his prophet-hood. Why should Muhammad not be succeeded in it by any of his family like the earlier prophets?... The Qur'an advises the faithful to settle some matters by consultation, but not the succession to prophets. That, according to the Qur'an, is settled by divine election, and God usually chooses their successors, whether they become prophets or not, from their own kin.⁷⁹⁰

In sum, the Qur'ānic image of the prophetic mission describes prior Prophets being aided by their family during their lifetime and succeeded by their descendants – with the latter becoming

⁷⁹⁰ Madelung, *The Succession*, 16-17.

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Prophets themselves or inheriting other forms of divine authority like the kingdom (*mulk*), judgment (*ḥukm*), wisdom (*ḥikma*), the *kitāb*, and leadership (*imāma*). Given the various parallels the Qur'ān establishes between Muhammad and prior prophets, the implications for the succession to Muhammad are clear. It is likely that 'Alī himself and his partisans drew on the above qur'ānic material to advance his claims for possessing divine authority after Muhammad.⁷⁹¹ All of this implies a special status for the family of Muhammad during his own lifetime as testified by the Qur'ān; it also grants Muhammad's family strong claims to post-prophetic revelatory authority in the midst of the emerging idea of the Qur'ān as a scripture among the first century community.

Muhammad's own family background was also significant for his contemporaries prior to and during his prophetic mission. Prior scholarship has found that Muhammad's tribe of the Quraysh and his clan of the Banū Hāshim were regarded as a "holy family" within the pre-Islamic Arabian milieu.⁷⁹² Hereditary leadership and theocratic authority were directly linked to *nasab* or noble lineage. Irfan Shahid's monumental study on the history of the Arabs demonstrated how at least three centuries before Islam certain pre-Islamic Arabian tribes, including the forefathers of the Quraysh, regarded themselves as descendants and heirs of Ishmael son of Abraham. In his words, all the evidence testifies to "Ishmael as a living figure in the consciousness of the fourth- or fifth-century Arabs, as their eponymous ancestor whom they revered and from whom they were proud to be descended."⁷⁹³ Uri Rubin has critically mined early Muslim reports and found that the

⁷⁹¹ Amir-Moezzi, "Reflections on the Expression," 16.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁷⁹³ Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 155. He discusses the Greek and Latin witness to the Arab belief in their descent from Ishmael in pp. 148-180 and then uses this data to corroborate what Arabian sources had to say on the subject in pp. 233-404. See also p. 177-78 for his analysis of the Christian sources: "The Arabs of Koranic times in the seventh century believed that they were descended from Ishmael, and so they are the sons of Ishmael. Thus it is the cultural concept that is important here, not

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pre-Islamic Arabs in general and the Quraysh in particular saw themselves as inheritors of a *ḥanifiyya* religious heritage (*dīn*) transmitted from Abraham through Ishmael.⁷⁹⁴ They believed the Ka'ba to have been established by Abraham and practiced what they regarded as Abrahamic rituals at the site including circumcision.⁷⁹⁵ The Quraysh claimed to possess a special sanctity and authority in their direct descent from Abraham through Ishmael and styled themselves as “the Family of God” (*ahl Allāh*). Muhammad's grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib reportedly uttered the verses: “We are the people of Allāh in His town” (*nahnu ahlu llāhi fī baldatihī*) / “this has always been according to Abraham's covenant” (*lam yazal dhāka 'alā 'ahdi Ibrāhīm*).⁷⁹⁶

Arabian tradition maintained that Muhammad's forefather Quṣayy was the guardian of the holy sanctuary in Mecca and that his descendants inherited various responsibilities in relation to it. Some early traditions also report that Muhammad himself designated the Banū Hāshim and the Banū Muṭṭalib as a special family, an association echoed in a number of later *ḥadīths*. Drawing on the portrayal of the Banū Hāshim in the poetry of al-Kumayt b. Zayd (d. 126/743), Amir-Moezzi believes that the historical Muhammad would have designated his own family as *Ahl al-Bayt*.⁷⁹⁷ Thus, in general, there is a convergence between the pre-Islamic and the Qur'ānic reverence for hereditary descent. The pre-Islamic Arabs' veneration of their Ishmaelite pedigree and Abrahamic

the historic reality of Ishmaelite descent. That this belief in the descent of Ishmael among the Muslim Arabs of the seventh century does go back to pre-Islamic times has been established by the examination of some ecclesiastical texts.”

⁷⁹⁴ Uri Rubin, “Ḥanafiyya and Ka'ba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of Dīn Ibrāhīm,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 85-112.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁹⁷ Amir-Moezzi, “Reflections on the Expression,” 24-25.

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religious heritage are clearly mirrored in the Qur'ānic discourse concerning the special status of Abraham's descendants including the Ishmaelites and the Israelites.

Turning to the Qur'ān, several verses speak of Muhammad's family in the broader and specific sense. The Qur'ānic command for the Prophet to "warn your nearest clan" (26:214-215) seems to refer to the Quraysh.⁷⁹⁸ In connection to this verse, there is an early account reported by Ibn Ishāq on the authority of 'Alī himself that Muhammad gathered his clan and asked who would serve as his helper, executor and successor. After 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib alone volunteered, Muhammad reportedly said to him in front of his family: "This is my brother, my executor (*waṣī*), and my successor (*khalīfa*) among you. Harken unto him and obey him."⁷⁹⁹ Other Qur'ānic verses mention the right of Muhammad's relatives to one fifth (*khums*) of the war spoils (8:41), referring to the descendants of Muhammad's great grandfather Hāshim b. 'Abd Manāf and his brother al-Muṭṭalib while excluding descendants of 'Abd Shams (the progenitor of the Umayyads) and Nawfal.⁸⁰⁰ As a testament to their purity, the Banū Hāshim were apparently prohibited from handling or receiving the *ṣadaqa* (offerings) that the believers submitted to the Prophet for their purification (Q. 9:99-103).⁸⁰¹ On this point, Madelung observed that "this state of purity, which distinguished the family of Muḥammad from common Muslims, agreed with the elevated rank of the families of earlier prophets."⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁸ Madelung, *The Succession*, 12-13.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibn Ishāq, tr. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 118.; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol. 6, tr. W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 91.

⁸⁰⁰ Madelung, *The Succession*, 13.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*

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The strongest qur'ānic testimony to the purity and special status of Muhammad's family is found in Q. 33:33:

Stay in your houses (*buyūtikunna*), and do not show yourselves in spectacular fashion like that of the former times of ignorance. Perform the prayer, give alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God only desires to keep away all impurity from you (*li-yadhhibu al-rijs 'ankum*), O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and to purify you (*yuṭahhirakum*) with a thorough purification (*taṭhīran*).

This verse has been subject to some controversy with respect to the identity of the *Ahl al-Bayt* because the first part of the verse is evidently addressing the wives of Muhammad while the latter part of it addresses another group called *Ahl al-Bayt*. The evidence that the *Ahl al-Bayt* in the second part of the verse is a different group from the Prophet's wives is the shift in the pronoun gender: the wives are addressed with the feminine second person plural (*kunna*) while the *Ahl al-Bayt* are addressed with the masculine second person plural (*kum*). Modern scholars of the Qur'ān have speculated about the original meaning of *Ahl al-Bayt* within the Qur'ān's historical context and reached different results.

It is reported that the term *ahl al-bayt* in the general and neutral sense was already used in pre-Islamic Arabia "to specify the noble and influential family of a tribe or a similar community, Arab and non-Arab alike." The title was reportedly used to designate the families of the early Caliphs as well.⁸⁰³ Rudy Paret believed that the *Ahl al-Bayt* in the context of Q. 33:33 refers to the adherents of the Ka'ba, which is frequently referred to as the *bayt* (house) throughout the Qur'ān. Paret therefore held that the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Q. 33:33 refers to the Quraysh tribe or even the Muslim community in general. However, the harsh criticism of the Quraysh within the Qur'ān given their opposition to Muhammad calls this interpretation into question. Madelung's view accords the term *Ahl al-Bayt* in Q. 33:33 a more specific meaning: "The *ahl al-bayt* of Muḥammad meant, as was

⁸⁰³ Moshe Sharon, "Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 169-184: 180-183.

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consistent with the general usage of the term at the time, primarily his blood relations, the same Banū Hāshim who were forbidden to receive alms in order that their state of purity not be soiled and, in second place, the wives.”⁸⁰⁴ According to various studies by M. Sharon, the status of *Ahl al-Bayt* in the following centuries was appropriated and claimed by various religio-political parties and families including the ‘Alids, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids.⁸⁰⁵ In summarizing much of the scholarship on the issue, Amir-Moezzi observes that the ‘Alids made the earliest claim to being the *Ahl al-Bayt* before the end of the first/seventh century and that the “popular opinion” in the first century was that the *Ahl al-Bayt* consisted of the Hāshimids in general and the family of ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib in particular. In this context, the claims of the Umayyads and Abbasids to this title were both modeled after and reacting to the ‘Alid claims, which were the earliest.⁸⁰⁶ This is evidenced, for example, by the Abbasids re-orienting their claims in the figure of al-‘Abbās, the Prophet’s uncle, as opposed to Abū Hāshim, the grandson of ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib.⁸⁰⁷

As is well known, the Imami Shi'i Muslim position on Q. 33:33 is that the *Ahl al-Bayt* purified by God are Muhammad, his cousin and son-in-law ‘Alī, his daughter Fāṭima, and their

⁸⁰⁴ Madelung, *The Succession*, 15.

⁸⁰⁵ Sharon, “*Ahl al-Bayt*”; idem, “The Umayyads as *Ahl al-Bayt*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991): 115-152. See a the summary of Sharon’s conclusions in idem, “People of the House,” in McCauliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, consulted online on 9/9/2017: https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/people-of-the-house-EQSIM_00323?s.num=1&s.rows=20&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-the-quran&s.q=ahl+al-bayt.

⁸⁰⁶ Amir-Moezzi, “Reflections on the Expression *dīn ‘Alī*,” 40-42. The idea that the Shi'i notion of the *Ahl al-Bayt* as the family of ‘Alī is also compatible with Sharon’s revisionist account of early Muslim history per which there were multiple “believer” communities in various places including Hijāz, Kufa and Syria prior to the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. See Sharon, “*Ahl al-Bayt*”, 127: “During the formative period of the various *mu’minūn* communities, that is to say most of the seventh century, the Kūfite community, at least, had no problem in identifying ‘Alī and his male offspring as the true and only representatives of the Prophet’s family.”

⁸⁰⁷ Sharon, “The Umayyads as *Ahl al-Bayt*,” 151-152. On these pages, Sharon reconciles his argument with that of Madelung.

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sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, who are Muhammad's grandsons. This interpretation coincides with the majority opinion within Sunni exegesis as well. The classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition recognized two interpretations: in the first, the *Ahl al-Bayt* in Q. 33:33 refers to Muhammad's wives; in the second, the *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to Muhammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn in general agreement with the Shi'is.⁸⁰⁸ The Sunni exegete al-Ṭabarī furnished more evidence including several prophetic reports in favor of the second view, despite its Shi'i inclination. Furthermore, several reports in proto-Sunni *ḥadīth* compilations, including at least three narrations in the *Muṣannaḥ* of Abū Bakr 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba al-Kūfī (159-235/849) and seven narrations in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) identify the *Ahl al-Bayt*, who are purified by God in Q. 33:33, as 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.⁸⁰⁹ Meanwhile, several reports show the wives being present when the Prophet indicates the identity of his *Ahl al-Bayt* as these four persons. In one narration from the *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/875), 'Ā'isha herself reports that Muhammad gathered the same four persons in his cloak and then recited the verse about their purification;⁸¹⁰ in three reports from the *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), Umm Salama narrates that the Prophet wrapped 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn in his cloak; he then prayed echoing Q. 33:33: "O God, these are my *Ahl al-Bayt*. So keep away all impurity from them and purify them completely."⁸¹¹ In these

⁸⁰⁸ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 33:33; Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 19, 104-107; Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 8, 382 – 386.

⁸⁰⁹ Abū Bakr 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba al-Kūfī (Ibn Abī Shayba) (159-235/849), *al-Muṣannaḥ Ibn Abī Shayba*, 23 Vols., ed. Muḥammad 'Awwāma (Beirut: Dār al-Qurṭuba, 2006), Vol. 19, 117-118, Ḥadīth No. 32765 and No. 32766; 214, Ḥadīth No. 32938; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 6 Vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭba al-Maymaniyya, 1895), Vol. 3, 259, 286; Vol. 4, 107; Vol. 6, 292, 298, 304, 323.

⁸¹⁰ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 4, Ḥadīth No. 91: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/91>.

⁸¹¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4156: <https://sunnah.com/urn/636700>; Book 47, Ḥadīth No. 3510: <https://sunnah.com/urn/642360>; Book 47, Ḥadīth No. 3511: <https://sunnah.com/urn/642370>.

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accounts, the verse never applies to the Prophet's wives and his wife Umm Salāma herself admits to being excluded from the cloak. Thus, even if the identity of the *Ahl al-Bayt* remains unclear from Q. 33:33 itself, the Muslim historical memory expressed within Sunni and Shi'i traditions accepts that this *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to the Prophet, his cousin, his daughter, and his two grandsons.

Irrespective of the identity of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in Q. 33:33, the precise meaning of God's purification in this verse merits further analysis. The words used for God's acts of purifying the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muhammad are the Form IV *adhhaba* ("God only desires to keep away all impurity from you") and the Form II *tahhara* ("and to purify you with a thorough purification"), which indicate two important divine favors mentioned in the verse. Firstly, the *Ahl al-Bayt* have been granted an ethical protection by God against all *rijs* – evil, pollution, and abomination that the Qur'ān associates with Satan (Q. 5:90) and idol worship (22:30). Secondly, the *Ahl al-Bayt* have been purified by God in a spiritual or inner sense as indicated by the verb *tahhara* and the adverb *ṭahīran*. The Form II transitive verb *tahhara* refers to a purification performed by an agent upon some object; it is to be distinguished from the reflexive Form V verb *ṭatahharā*, which is a reflexive "self-purification" most often associated in the Qur'ān with ritual ablutions (Q. 2:222, 5:6, 9:108). The Qur'ān also uses *ṭaharra* to describe God and His Prophets like Abraham and Muhammad purifying something or someone: God purifies Mary (Q. 3:42) and the believers in general (Q. 5:6, 5:41, 8:11); Abraham and Ishmael purify God's House (*bayt*) by divine command (Q. 2:125, 22:26); the Prophet Muhammad purifies believers when they submit their *ṣadaqa* to him as a means of atoning for their sins (Q. 9:103). All of these examples can help clarify the meaning of the purification of the *Ahl al-Bayt* in Q. 33:33. God's purification of Mary (Q. 3:42), which the prior verses (Q. 3:36-37) describe as Mary and her progeny being divinely protected from Satan, is also linked to Mary being "chosen above the women of the worlds". This language of divine

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election (*iṣṭafa*) also appears in Q. 3:33-34 where God has “chosen” Adam, Noah, the progeny of Abraham, and the progeny of ‘Imrān “above the worlds.” The purification of the Ka‘ba, referred to as *al-bayt* (“the house”) or *baytī* (“My house”), also seems to have a connection to the purification of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. As mentioned previously, Paret associated the term *Bayt* in *Ahl al-Bayt* with the Ka‘ba and led him to interpret *Ahl al-Bayt* as “the adherents of the Ka‘ba”. But the more likely connection is that the purification of the *Bayt* parallels that of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, with both the “house” and its “people” possessing spiritual sanctity. Finally, the Prophet Muhammad’s act of purifying the believers of their sins (fully described in Q. 9:100-104) indicates that God’s purification of the *Ahl al-Bayt* immunizes them from the inward spiritual pollution accrued by committing sins. In sum, Q. 33:33 means that God has protected the *Ahl al-Bayt* from both the outward corruptions of Satan and the resulting inner corruptions caused by sins. The *Ahl al-Bayt* are essentially those “purified” (*al-muṭahharūn*) by God. As we will see further, the Qur’anic image of the *Ahl al-Bayt* as the “purified ones” (*al-muṭahharūn*) directly ties into other Qur’anic verses concerning the process of revelation.

This same *Ahl al-Bayt* were reportedly involved in the famous event of “mutual imprecation” (*al-mubāhala*) between Muhammad and the Christians of Najrān in 10/631-2 over their disagreement about Jesus. The Qur’ān (3:61) instructed both groups to take “our sons”, “our women”, and “our selves” (*anfusanā*) and invoke the curse of God upon whomever is lying. Various accounts report that Muhammad again gathered ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn for the ritual. Despite some skepticism by Orientalist scholars about the event, Madelung notes that there is no real alternative view to the claim that Muhammad included al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn as his “sons” in the *mubāhala*; this further entails the inclusion of their parents, ‘Alī and Fāṭima, as well.

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Based on all of the above data, Madelung concludes that “the Qur’ān thus accorded the *ahl al-bayt* of Muḥammad an elevated position above the rest of the faithful, similar to the position of the families of the earlier prophets. God desired to purify them of all defilement.”⁸¹² The pre-Islamic and qur’ānic discourse concerning the exaltation and purity of Muhammad’s family (*ahl al-bayt*) is pivotal to the nature of early debates about the succession to Muhammad and the formation of nascent Shi’i positions on the concept of revelation in general.

5.2 The *Walāya* of ‘Alī, *Kitāb Allāh*, and the *Ahl al-Bayt*: Ghadīr Khumm and the Two Weighty Matters in Proto-Shi’ism (First/Seventh Century)

The most famous prophetic tradition used to ground Shi’i claims for the status of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as Muhammad’s divinely designated successor is the tradition of Ghadīr Khumm. Coming a close second is another tradition popularly known as *al-thaqalayn* (the two weighty matters). Both traditions are heavily referenced across Sunni and Shi’i sources and form the foundational basis for the Shi’i doctrine of Imamate. But, in addition to Shi’i leadership claims, the contents of both traditions also speak to certain ideas of revelation either implicitly or explicitly – in a similar manner as the Sunni traditions attributed to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb examined in Chapter 2. It is therefore important to examine both the Ghadīr Khumm and the Thaqalayn traditions bearing the issue of revelation in mind.

5.2.1 The Tradition of Ghadīr Khumm: Historicity and Significance

⁸¹² Madelung, *The Succession*, 16.

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Several Western scholars have examined the history, reception, and transmission of the Ghadīr Khumm tradition in some detail.⁸¹³ L. Veccia Vaglieri relates the core content of the Ghadīr tradition as follows:

On his return from the Farewell Pilgrimage, Muḥammad stopped at Ghadīr Khumm on 18 Dhu l-Hijja 10/16 March 632. As he wanted to make an announcement to the pilgrims who accompanied him before they dispersed, and as it was very hot, they constructed for him a dais shaded with branches. Taking 'Alī by the hand, he asked of his faithful followers whether he, Muḥammad, was not closer (*awlā*) to the Believers than they were to themselves; the crowd cried out: "It is so, O Apostle of God!"; he then declared: "He of whom I am the *mawlā* (the patron?), of him 'Alī is also the *mawlā* (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa- 'Alī mawlāhu*)".⁸¹⁴

As to the sources of the tradition, it is glaringly absent from major Sunni historical works like the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām and the writings of Ibn Sa'd and al-Ṭabarī. It appears in Umayyad era Shi'ī sources such as the poetry of Kumayt b. Zayd and the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*.⁸¹⁵ The historicity of the Ghadīr Khumm declaration has been endorsed over the last two decades by various Western scholars, among whom Vaglieri is most emphatic: "It is, however, certain that Muḥammad did speak in this place and utter the famous sentence, for the account of this event has been preserved, either in a concise form or in detail.... the *ḥadīths* are so numerous and so well attested by the different *isnāds* that it does not seem possible to reject them."⁸¹⁶ Lalani follows

⁸¹³ See L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Ghadīr Khumm," in Peri Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 993-994, consulted online 6/18/2019: https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ghadir-khumm-SIM_2439; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Ghadīr Khumm," in Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Three (Brill, 2014), consulted online on 6/4/2018: https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ghadir-khumm-COM_27419?s.num=0&s.rows=50; Arzina R. Lalani, "Ghadīr Khumm," in Natana J. DeLong-Nas (ed.), *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (Oxford University Press, 2011), accessed on 12/13/2017: <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0105.xml>.

⁸¹⁴ Vaglieri., "Ghadīr Khumm".

⁸¹⁵ Maria Masse Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 36. It is reported that al-Ṭabarī composed another work about the merits of 'Alī in relation to the Ghadīr Khumm tradition.

⁸¹⁶ Vaglieri., "Ghadīr Khumm".

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Madelung's opinion that 'Alī himself was responsible for publicizing the Ghadīr Khumm tradition when he called for witnesses to testify to it in Kufa in defense of his right to lead the community.⁸¹⁷

Maria Masse Dakake observes that the Ghadīr Khumm tradition circulated among the Muslims of Medina during the early Caliphate and was evoked in a more sectarian sense during the First Civil War. She also finds that the tradition began circulating more widely during the Umayyad period despite efforts to suppress it. Dakake argues that the tradition cannot be a Shi'i forgery since key elements of later Imami Shi'i doctrine like the term *imām* or the idea of hereditary leadership are absent; at the very least, the tradition must predate the Shi'i doctrine of *imāma* from the period of Muḥammad al-Bāqīr in the early second/eighth century.⁸¹⁸

The major disagreement among later Sunnis and Imami Shi'is concerned the precise meaning of the word *mawlā*, upon which the theological significance of Muhammad's statement rests. As Amir-Moezzi observes, the word *mawlā* and related words like *walī*, *walāya*, *tawallī*, convey a range of semantic meaning including "authority, power, governance, friendship, love, and closeness but also religious and theological meanings referring to prophetic charisma, divine election, and the covenant with God in an almost biblical sense."⁸¹⁹ The Imami Shi'is interpreted the Prophet's statement as an explicit designation (*naṣṣ*) of 'Alī as his successor in both temporal and spiritual matters while the later consolidated Sunni position saw these same words as an expression of affection for 'Alī. Without aiming to resolve a centuries old disagreement, it is helpful to consider the context of the term *mawlā* in the Prophet's reported statement.

⁸¹⁷ Lalani, "Ghadir Khumm".

⁸¹⁸ Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 34-35.

⁸¹⁹ Amir-Moezzi, "Ghadīr Khumm".

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In many of the reports, prior to declaring 'Alī as the *mawlā*, the Prophet asked those gathered: “Am I not closer (*awlā*) to the believers than they are to themselves?” These words clearly invoke Q. 33:6, which reads: “The Prophet is nearer to [or has more authority over] the believers than their selves (*al-nabī awlā bi l-mu'minīn min anfusihim*); his wives are their mothers.” Alternate readings of the same verse add the words “and he is a father for them” after the description of the Prophet.⁸²⁰ The verse establishes that the Prophet has a paternal responsibility and authority over the believers who were to show him paternal devotion and reverence akin to their own fathers; in other words, the Prophet is the “spiritual father” of his followers and they are his “spiritual children”. Many other Qur'ānic verses about the Prophet's authority over the believers seen in Chapter 1 establish the Prophet's relationship to the believers in terms of their absolute obedience and devotion to the Prophet in matters of pledging allegiance, guidance, judgment, purification, atonement for sins, etc. where the Prophet wields authority on God's behalf. By evoking Q. 33:6, the Prophet reaffirmed the comprehensive spiritual and temporal relationship between him and his followers; by declaring “he whose *mawlā* I am, 'Alī is his *mawlā*”, the Prophet invested 'Alī with the same level and scope of authority as himself. The polemical claim that the Prophet simply declared 'Alī as a “friend” of the believers in the everyday or ordinary sense must be rejected. This reading implies that Muhammad's relationship to each believer was merely that of a mundane “friend”; but we saw in Chapter 1 that the Prophet possessed a very lofty status and authority over the believers as far as the Qur'ān is concerned. The Ghadīr declaration at minimum, in Dakake's words, implies that Prophet “confers on 'Alī a kind of

⁸²⁰ Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 34-35.

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spiritual distinction that sets him apart from the other close companions of the Prophet.”⁸²¹ At maximum, the Prophet has declared ‘Alī as possessing the same spiritual and temporal authority over the believers that the Prophet himself commanded – a divinely-bestowed authority that extends to matters of allegiance, obedience, judgment, guidance, purification, intercession, etc.⁸²²

‘Alī’s followers within the first-century Muslim community exhibited a range of orientations concerning his authority. The most intense forms of devotion to ‘Alī portrayed him as the bearer of a divinely ordained authority over the believers, a recipient of divine inspiration, and a guide directing his followers according to God’s will. Indeed, several of ‘Alī’s followers expressed this sort of belief during the First Civil War. As noted by Dakake, “both Sunni and Shi’ite accounts of the Battle of Ṣiffīn give evidence that loyalty to ‘Alī among a certain segment of his followers was exceptionally strong and beginning to develop absolutist tendencies.”⁸²³ For example, some of the pledges of loyalty to ‘Alī by his supporters mirrored the pledges between the Medinan “helpers” and Muhammad prior to his emigration. Saḥl b. Ḥunayf declared to ‘Alī that “we are at peace with the one with whom you make peace, and we are at war with the one with whom you make war.”⁸²⁴ Some reported statements about the person of ‘Alī referred to him as someone who is “upon clear guidance from the Lord” – a description used for several Prophets (Muhammad, Moses, Shu‘ayb, Ṣāliḥ, Noah) in the Qur’ān: “The use of this phrase in connection with ‘Alī suggests a certain knowledge, on his part, of the divine will, and perhaps even access to

⁸²¹ Ibid., 35.

⁸²² Ibid., 104.

⁸²³ Ibid., 57.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 57-58.

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divine inspiration, and gives him a standing that approaches that of the prophets.”⁸²⁵ Other statements, describing ‘Alī as a *mahdī* (rightly-guided by God) and calling people to right guidance (*rushd*), emphasized ‘Alī’s access to and execution of God’s guidance.⁸²⁶ Overall, some segment of ‘Alī’s partisans certainly regarded him as “an absolute and divinely guided leader who could demand of them the same kind of loyalty that would have been expected for the Prophet.”⁸²⁷

Finally, mention must be made of the famous “second *bay‘a*” where ‘Alī’s most ardent supporters – a group called “his *shī‘a*” numbering in the tens of thousands – re-affirmed their loyalty and allegiance to ‘Alī when the Khawārij broke ranks from his army. These supporters emphatically declared before him: “We are the friends (*awliyā’*) of the one you [‘Alī] befriend (*man walayta*) and the enemies (*a‘dā’*) of the one whom you make your enemy (*man ‘adayta*).”⁸²⁸ Far from being a mere statement of political support, the second *bay‘a* expressed a sense of commitment that went beyond obedience to the *kitāb Allāh* and *sunna* (a common first-century slogan), but was a pledge to follow and obey ‘Alī personally in terms of *walāya*. Thus, the second *bay‘a* attested to the belief that ‘Alī was guided and inspired by God in all of his actions: “It was an oath of unconditional and unquestioning allegiance, indicating that they would surrender their own will to that of their leader, whom they considered to be acting under divine guidance and sanction.”⁸²⁹

⁸²⁵ Ibid., 58.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

⁸²⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

5.2.2 The Tradition of the Two Weighty Matters (*al-thaqalayn*): Historicity and Significance

While the Ghadīr Khumm tradition has been subject to historical and critical analysis in Western scholarship, the Thaqalayn tradition has not.⁸³⁰ The Thaqalayn tradition, in which the Prophet tells his community that he is leaving behind the *kitāb Allāh* and his *Ahl al-Bayt*, has been massively transmitted in minimally different versions across both Sunni and Shi'i *ḥadīth* compilations dating from the late second century onward. In prominent proto-Sunni and Sunni works compiled in the period up to the end of the third century, the Thaqalayn tradition is found as follows:

- one narration in the *Musnad* of 'Alī b. al-Ja'd (d. 230/845);⁸³¹
- one narration in the *Tabaqāt* of Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Sa'd (168-230/784-845);⁸³²
- three narrations in the *Muṣannaḥ* and *Musnad* of Ibn Abī Shayba al-Kūfī (159-235/775-849);⁸³³
- seven narrations in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164-241/780-855);⁸³⁴
- one narration in the *Musnad* of 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī (181-255/797-869);⁸³⁵
- four narrations in the *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (202-261/821-875);⁸³⁶

⁸³⁰ The tradition is briefly discussed in Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 93-98. See also Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Speaking Qur'ān and the Silent Qur'ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imami Shi'i *tafsīr*," in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 177-198.

⁸³¹ 'Alī b. al-Ja'd, *Musnad 'Alī b. al-Ja'd*, ed. 'Abd al-Mahdī b. 'Abd al-Qādir (Kuwait: Maktabah al-Falāḥ, 1985), 972.

⁸³² Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Sa'd (Ibn Sa'd), *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubra*, 2 Vols., ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Atā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub 'Ilmiyya, 1990), Vol. 2, 150.

⁸³³ Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ Ibn Abī Shayba*, Vol. 15, 491 (narrated by Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī; but the mention of *Ahl al-Bayt* is cut out of this edition); Vol. 16, 426-428 (narrated by Zayd b. Thābit); idem, *Musnad*, 2 Vols. ed. 'Ādil b. Yūsuf a-Ghazzāwī and Aḥmad Farīd a-Mazyadī (Riyād: Dār al-Waṭan, 1997), Vol. 1, 352 (narrated by Zayd b. Arqam).

⁸³⁴ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, Vol. 3, 14, 17, 26, 69; Vol. 4, 366-67; Vol. 5, 181-82, 189-190.

⁸³⁵ 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī, *Musnad al-Dārimī*, 4 Vols., ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Riyād: Dār al-Mughnī, 2000), Vol. 1, 2090-2091.

⁸³⁶ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 55: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/55>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 56: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/56>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 57: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/57>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 58: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/58>.

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- eight narrations in the *Kitāb al-Ma'rifa wa l-tārīkh* of Ya'qūb b. Sufiyān al-Fasawī (d. 77/890);⁸³⁷
- one narration in the *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* of Aḥmad b. Yaḥya al-Balādhurī (ca. 183-279/ca. 800-892);⁸³⁸
- two narrations in the *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī (209-279/824-892);⁸³⁹
- nine narrations in the *Sunna* of Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Amr b. Abī 'Āṣim (206-287/822-900);⁸⁴⁰
- five narrations in the *Musnad* of Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Amr al-Bazzār (210-292/825-905);⁸⁴¹
- one narration in the *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* of Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb b. 'Alī al-Nasā'ī (214-303/829-915);⁸⁴²
- three narrations in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. al-Muthannā al-Tamīmī Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī (210-307/826-919);⁸⁴³
- one narration in *al-Dhurriyya al-Ṭāhira* of Abū Bishr al-Dūlābī (d. 310/923);⁸⁴⁴
- fifteen narrations in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr* of Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. Ayyūb al-Ṭabarānī (260/873-360/971).⁸⁴⁵

Throughout the above Sunni *ḥadīth* collections, the Thaqaalayn tradition is mostly transmitted from the Prophet Muhammad through four companions: Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45/655), Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. ca. 74/693), Jābir b. 'Abdullāh (d. 78/697), Zayd b. Arqam (d. 68/687-88).

⁸³⁷ Ya'qūb b. Sufiyān al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-Ma'rifa wa l-tārīkh*, 3 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), Vol. 1, 294-296.

⁸³⁸ Aḥmad b. Yaḥya al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 13 Vols., ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ Zarkalī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), Vol. 2, 356-357.

⁸³⁹ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4157: <https://sunnah.com/urn/736710>; Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4155: <https://sunnah.com/urn/736690>.

⁸⁴⁰ Aḥmad b. 'Amr b. Abī 'Āṣim, *Al-Sunna*, 2 Vols., ed. Bāsim Fayṣal al-Jawābira (Riyadh: 1998), Vol. 1, 509; Vol. 2, 1021-1027.

⁸⁴¹ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Amr al-Bazzār, *Al-Baḥr al-Zakḥkhār al-ma'rūf bi musnad al-Bazzār*, 20 Vols., ed. Maḥfūz al-Raḥmān Zayn Allāh (Medina: Maktabat al-'Ulum wa-Ḥikam, 2003-2009), Vol. 3, 89-90; Vol. 10, 231-232, 240-241.

⁸⁴² Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb b. 'Alī al-Nasā'ī, *Kitāb al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 12 Vols., ed. Ḥasan 'Abd al-Mun'im Shiblī (Beirut: Mu'assassa al-Risāla, 2001), Vol. 7, 436-437.

⁸⁴³ Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. al-Muthannā al-Tamīmī Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī, *Musnad Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī*, Second Edition, 15 Vols., ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Damascus, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'mūn li l-Turāth, 1990), Vol. 2, 297-298, 302-303, 376.

⁸⁴⁴ Abū Bishr al-Dūlābī, *Al-Dhurriyya al-Ṭāhira* (Cairo: Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, n.d.), 230-231.

⁸⁴⁵ Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. Ayyūb al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, 11 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2012), Vol. 2, 196-197 No. 2612, 197 No. 2613-2615, 198 No. 2617; Vol. 3, 276 No. 4789-4791, 286 No. 4836, 286-287 No. 4837, 289 No. 4846-4847, 299 No. 4885-4887, 300-301 No. 4888.

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According to our *isnad-cum-matn* analysis of the Thaḳalayn tradition's transmission chains provided in Appendix A, the Thaḳalayn tradition most probably dates to the second half of the first century at the latest. For example, an early report of the Thaḳalayn tradition narrated from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī is found in the *Musnad* of 'Alī b. al-Ja'd (d. 230/845) as follows:

The Prophet said: "Verily, I will soon be summoned [to my Lord] and I will answer [that call]. Verily, I am leaving behind for you two weighty matters (*al-thaḳalayn*): the *kitāb Allāh* is a rope extending from heaven to earth, and my descendants ('*itratī*), my *Ahl al-Bayt*. Verily, the Gracious (*al-laṭīf*), the Aware (*al-khabīr*) informed me that the two of them will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pool. So be mindful of how you treat them after me."⁸⁴⁶

The *isnad-cum-matn* analysis in Appendix A shows that all transmissions from Abū Sa'īd are narrated through Abū l-Ḥasan 'Aṭīyya b. Sa'd b. Junāda al-'Awfī (ca. 40-111/ca. 661-729), who is a "common link" for the Thaḳalayn tradition. This 'Aṭīyya was a reputed early Shi'i traditionist and Qur'ān commentator and reportedly made a pilgrimage to Karbala with Jābir b. 'Abdullāh to pay homage to the memory of Imam al-Ḥusayn. Ibn Sa'd related that 'Aṭīyya's father was a partisan of Imam 'Alī b. Abī Tālib and that 'Aṭīyya was even named by 'Alī himself. 'Aṭīyya also took part in the failed rebellion of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Ash'ath (d. 83/702) in 82/701 against the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj, for which he was flogged some 400 times for refusing to curse 'Alī.⁸⁴⁷ 'Aṭīyya was the most prominent transmitter of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī and chiefly responsible for communicating his teachings in Kufa.⁸⁴⁸ A number of 'Aṭīyya's Qur'ān

⁸⁴⁶ This report is from 'Alī b. al-Ja'd, 972. Other versions narrated from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī include: Ibn Sa'd, Vol. 2, 150, *al-Muṣannaḳ Ibn Abī Shayba*, Vol. 15, 491 (mention of *Ahl al-Bayt* is cut out of this edition but is part of the original); Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Vol. 3, 14, 17, 26, 69; al-Fasawī, Vol. 1, 295-296; al-Tirmidhī, Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4157: <https://sunnah.com/urn/736710>. Abī 'Āṣim, Vol. 2, 1023-1024, 1024; Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī, Vol 2, 297-298, 302-303, 376; al-Ṭabarānī, Vol. 2, 196-197.

⁸⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 39, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater and tr. Ella Landau-Tasserion (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 228-229.

⁸⁴⁸ Scott C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 336.

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commentaries appear in *tafsīr* works.⁸⁴⁹ As the tradition's common link, 'Aṭīyya may have invented the entire Thaḳalayn tradition from scratch, invented parts of the Thaḳalayn tradition, or faithfully heard and transmitted the tradition from Abū Sa'īd (or perhaps another person from the generation of the companions). In any case, the Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī version of Thaḳalayn dates to the lifetime of 'Aṭīyya b. Sa'd (d. 111/729-730) in the second half of the first century at the latest. The analysis of other transmission lines for the Thaḳalayn tradition shown in Appendix A also supports a late first-century dating. It remains possible that the Thaḳalayn dates earlier to the mid-first century and the generation of the Prophet Muhammad's companions.

A First-Century Interpretation of the Thaḳalayn Tradition:

Given the first-century provenance of the Thaḳalayn tradition, let us consider its meaning with respect to the issue of Qur'ānic Revelation, keeping in mind our findings on the evolution of the Qur'ānic concepts of *kitāb* and *kitāb Allāh* in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 and the preceding analysis of the concept of *Ahl al-Bayt* in the pre-Islamic and Qur'ānic contexts. For most Shi'is of later periods, the two weighty matters that the Prophet leaves behind are the Qur'ān as a scripture and the lineage of Shi'i Imams descended from 'Alī. Indeed, many Muslims from the second century onward would have naturally read the word *kitāb Allāh* to mean the Qur'ān in its scriptural form. However, a different meaning of the term *kitāb Allāh* emerges when the Thaḳalayn tradition is read in a first-century (or early second-century) historical and theological context. As shown in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, from the time of the Qur'ān's emergence up to the early second century, the concept of *kitāb Allāh* still conveyed the broader meaning of "God's decree" or "God's

⁸⁴⁹ See the remarks of Shahab Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 32-34, 55, 72.

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writing” as an active process of divine guidance; a process that found concrete expression in the Arabic *qur'āns* and Muhammad's extra-qur'ānic guidance but which is certainly not exhausted by them. This older pre-scriptural meaning of *kitāb Allāh* is found throughout the Qur'ān and reflected in some first-century statements as summarized in Chapter 2.

When read in this context, the *kitāb Allāh* that the Prophet speaks about in the Thaḳalayn tradition certainly means God's decree and prescribed guidance in general; the Arabic *qur'āns* and Muhammad's prophetic guidance are particular instances of *kitāb Allāh* but the concept of *kitāb Allāh* in the first century remains broader than a discrete scriptural text. This reading of *kitāb Allāh* is informed by Madigan's findings that *kitāb* in the Qur'ān conveys the active sense of God's continuous, responsive and interactive guidance, not the static scriptural content of what is contained and fixed between two covers: “The claim that something is *kitāb* is a claim to authority and knowledge, not a statement about the form in which it is kept.”⁸⁵⁰ This earlier qur'ānic meaning of *kitāb Allāh* as “an open-ended process of divine engagement with humanity in its concrete history”⁸⁵¹ as opposed to a closed scripture better resonates with the various Thaḳalayn reports where Muhammad describes this *kitāb Allāh* as: “a rope extended from heaven to earth” (*ḥabl mamdūd min al-samā' ilā l-'arḍ*; *ḥabl mamdūd bayna l-samā' wa l-'arḍ*); “the rope of God” (*ḥabl Allāh*); “a chain connected from heaven to earth” (*sabab mawṣūl min al-samā' ilā l-'arḍ*); or “a chain one end of which is with God and the other end of which is with you” (*sabab ṭarfuhu bi-yad Allāh wa-ṭarfuhu bi-aydikum*). This rope/chain imagery associated with the *kitāb Allāh* in these Thaḳalayn narrations certainly does not suggest a closed scriptural corpus on earth, but rather

⁸⁵⁰ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 178.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

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depicts an ongoing relationship of interactive divine guidance between God and His servants – an image very much in line with the Qur'ānic meaning of *kitāb*. The Prophet's declaration of his descendants, identified with his *Ahl al-Bayt*, as the second weighty matter is equally significant given the elevated theological status and spiritual purity that both pre-Islamic Arabian tradition and the Qur'ān assign to the families of Prophets generally and the family of Muhammad in particular. At the end of the tradition, the Prophet's widely reported statement that the *kitāb Allāh* and his *Ahl al-Bayt* “will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pond” frames these “two weighty matters” as functionally conjoined or unified. Rather than presenting two physically separate objects – a reified Qur'ān in scriptural form and a lineage of scriptural exegetes who merely interpret the scripture⁸⁵² – the descriptions of the *kitāb Allāh* and the *Ahl al-Bayt* declared in the Thaqaalayn tradition (“the two shall never separate”) suggests that the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* are the very locus of the divine authority and guidance called the *kitāb Allāh*; this *Ahl al-Bayt* henceforth will function as the human medium through which the Prophet's community may access the *kitāb Allāh* as a continuous divine guidance or “rope” issuing from heaven after Muhammad's passing. Again, this reading of the Thaqaalayn tradition takes the term *kitāb Allāh*, in Madigan's words, “primarily as a symbol for the knowledge and authority of God... as the token of access to that totality and as the locus of continuing divine address.”⁸⁵³

⁸⁵² This is how later Twelver Shi'i thinkers like Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) understood the tradition. He evoked it to prove that the Qur'ān as a canonized scripture must always be present on earth and cannot disappear – an argument he used to counter other Shi'i claims that the 'Uthmānic codex of the Qur'ān was corrupted. See Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 96; idem, “Shi'ism and the Qur'ān,” in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, consulted online on 6/7/2018: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00181.

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 182.

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That the *kitāb Allāh* conjoined to the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* in the Thaḳalayn tradition conveys something much broader than a canonized qur'ānic scripture finds further confirmation in how the Qur'ān describes God's *kitāb* in relation to the descendants of prior Prophets. The Qur'ān speaks about God selecting the fathers, progeny, and brethren of several Prophets and giving them the *kitāb*, the judgment (*ḥukm*), and prophethood (6:84-89); God grants the *kitāb*, the judgment (*ḥikma*), and a great kingdom (4:54) to the House (*āl*) of Abraham; the descendants of Noah and Abraham are given the *kitāb* and prophethood (29:27, 57:26). Thus, the idea that God vests His *kitāb* with the family and descendants of a Prophet stems directly from the Qur'ān; its application to Muhammad's family and descendants in the Thaḳalayn tradition is very much consistent with this qur'ānic principle and may have been constructed based on this qur'ānic data.

The qur'ānic language concerning God's purification of the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muhammad also coincides with qur'ānic descriptions of the Transcendent Kitāb and the contents of the Thaḳalayn tradition. As noted earlier, Q. 33:33 states that “God desires only to keep away all impurity from you (*li-yadhhibu al-rijs 'ankum*), O *Ahl al-Bayt*, and to purify you (*yutaḥhirakum*) with a thorough purification (*tathīran*).” In other words, the Qur'ān is stating that the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* are *muṭahharūn* (direct object of the Form II verb *ṭahhara*) – meaning “purified” by God. Interestingly, the qur'ānic term *muṭahhar* is also used to qualify the Transcendent Kitāb when the Qur'ān mentions the celestial source of the Arabic *qur'āns*. As may be recalled from Chapter 1, three qur'ānic verses use the term “purified” (*al-muṭahhar*) to speak about the transcendent celestial origin of the Arabic *qur'āns*:

No, indeed; it is a Reminder,
and whoso wills, shall remember it,
upon pages high-honored (*fī ṣuḥufin mukarrama*),
uplifted, purified (*mutahhara*)
by the hands of scribes
noble, pious (Q. 80:11-16)

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It is surely a noble recitation (*qur'ān*)
in a hidden *kitāb* (*kitāb maknūn*)
none but the purified (*al-muṭahharūn*) shall touch
a sending down from the Lord of all Being. (Q. 56:77-80)

A Messenger from God, reciting pages purified (*suhufan muṭahhara*), containing firmly established
decrees (*kutub qayyima*) (Q. 98:2-3)

The above qur'ānic verses all speak of the Arabic *qur'āns* issuing from a transcendent Revelatory Principle variously described as “purified sheets” (*ṣuḥuf muṭahhara*) or “a hidden *kitāb* that none but the purified (*muṭahharūn*) shall touch.” Thus, in the Qur'ānic perspective, only the “purified ones” (*al-muṭahharūn*) have access to the “purified sheets” of God's Transcendent Kitāb. If the Qur'ān has declared the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* as purified by God (Q. 33:33), then these *Ahl al-Bayt* are among the *muṭahharūn* who enjoy direct access to the *ṣuḥuf muṭahhara* of the Qur'ān's transcendent archetype. When read intertextually with the qur'ānic material, the Thaḳalayn tradition is an elaboration of the qur'ānic view that the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* are purified (*muṭahharūn*) and have privileged access to the Transcendent Kitāb. The famous phrase that the *kitāb Allāh* and the *Ahl al-Bayt* will never separate until the end of the world means that the *Ahl al-Bayt* are the human loci of the *kitāb Allāh* and will henceforth communicate it to the community.

This reading of the Thaḳalayn tradition in which God's *kitāb* continues to be expressed through Muhammad's *Ahl al-Bayt* in the form of an ongoing revelatory event of divine guidance seems to have been the operative principle in late first-century proto-Shi'i movements.⁸⁵⁴ Various members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* including 'Alī, his sons al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya, and the Hashimids in general were described by their supporters as “rightly guided”

⁸⁵⁴ See David S. Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), especially Chapter 4. The author quotes various sources including Sunni *ḥadīth* and early *tafsīr* that acknowledge the possibility of a Prophet after Muhammad, particularly his son Ibrāhīm who died in infancy. He also notes several claimants of the prophetic office during the first century.

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(*maḥdī*) and the bearers of “right guidance” (*hudā*).⁸⁵⁵ The Imam al-Ḥusayn presented his leadership claims in language reminiscent of the Thaḳalayn tradition. His letters invoked the broader meaning of the *kitāb Allāh* as divinely ordained guidance, truth, and justice alongside his special status as *Ahl al-Bayt* as the basis of his leadership: “What is the *imām* except one who acts according to the *kitāb*, one who upholds justice, one who professes truth, and one who dedicates himself to God;”⁸⁵⁶ “I summon you to the *kitāb Allāh*, the Sunna of His Prophet;”⁸⁵⁷ “God gave preference to Muhammad before all His creatures.... We are his family (*ahl*), those who possess his authority (*awliyā'*), those who have been made his trustees (*awṣiyā'*), and his inheritors (*wurathā'*); we are those who have more right to his position among people than anyone else.”⁸⁵⁸ As we will see later, certain Imami Shi'i theological ideas found in early Twelver *ḥadīth* and pre-Fatimid Ismaili treatises present an understanding of both Qur'ānic Revelation and the divine inspiration of the Imams that is very much in line with this proposed reading of the Thaḳalayn tradition.

Taken altogether as expressions of proto-Shi'i beliefs held by a segment of the first-century community and perhaps the views of Muhammad himself, the Ghadīr Khumm and Thaḳalayn tradition convey the sense that God's revelatory guidance continues, in some manner, through the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt*, including the figure of 'Alī. The Ghadīr Khumm tradition, according to a maximalist reading of the Prophet's statement, entails that 'Alī possesses the same level of divinely

⁸⁵⁵ On this theme of “right guidance” and its connection to 'Alī and al-Ḥusayn, see Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 57-58, 81-97, 270.

⁸⁵⁶ Quoted from al-Ṭabarī in Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 29.

⁸⁵⁷ Quoted from al-Ṭabarī in Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 30.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

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ordained authority as Muhammad and implies that 'Alī is also privy to divine inspiration and guidance. In fact, a number of 'Alī's followers harbored such beliefs about him and submitted their absolute loyalty to him. Various statements from his partisans portray 'Alī as a divinely guided leader aided by divine inspiration and summoning people to God's guidance. The Thaḳalayn tradition, when interpreted in accordance with the intra-qur'ānic and first-century meaning of *kitāb*, conveys the idea that God's dynamic responsive guidance – in whatever form the *kitāb Allāh* may appear – continues through the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muhammad as an ongoing revelatory event; this idea seems to be echoed in the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their partisans characterized their leadership as expressions God's *kitāb*, justice, and right guidance (*mahdī, rushd, hudā*). Of course, these ideas also raise a host of related questions such as: what is the nature of the divine inspiration granted to 'Alī and the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* and how does it compare to the Prophet's divine inspiration that he expressed as the Arabic *qur'āns*? It is unlikely 'Alī or his supporters had the time or means to formulate the answers, but one does find 'Alī's lineal descendants, the early Shi'i Imams, addressing them in the following century.

5.3 Divine Inspiration, *Kitāb Allāh* and the Shi'i Imams: Imami Shi'i Views of Qur'ānic Revelation (Second/Eighth Century to Third/Ninth Century)

In this section, we will examine how Qur'ānic Revelation was understood among the Imami Shī'a, whose distinct identity and beliefs date to the early second/eighth century and likely grew out of the proto-Shi'i veneration of 'Alī and his sons. The assassination of 'Alī was followed by the accession of his son al-Ḥasan (d. 50/670) as the next caliph and leader of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. 'Alī had stated on many occasions that only the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* were entitled to lead the community

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and had appointed his son al-Ḥasan as his legatee (*waṣī*).⁸⁵⁹ There are also reports that 'Alī's followers regarded his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (d. 60/680) as his natural successors already within his lifetime. One of them reportedly said to 'Alī that: "You are an *imām*, and if you die, then after you will be these two [referring to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn]." Another declared to 'Alī at Ṣiffīn: "If you die, these two, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, will be our *imāms* after you."⁸⁶⁰

At the mosque in Kufa, al-Ḥasan announced the death of his father and proclaimed his own spiritual status before a weeping congregation: "I am al-Ḥasan, the son of Muhammad. I am the son of the bringer of good tidings, the son of the warner, the son of the summoner to God, powerful and exalted, with His permission; I am the shining lamp. I am of the Family of the Prophet from whom God has removed filth and whom He has purified."⁸⁶¹ Following this moving speech, the people pledged allegiance to him with a *bay'a* that included the promise "to make war on whomever al-Ḥasan declared war on and to keep the peace with whomever he made peace." Notably, this *bay'a* clearly mirrored the second *bay'a* that 'Alī's most devoted supporters had pledged to him and the *bay'a* given to Muhammad by the Medinans.⁸⁶² While al-Ḥasan had little appetite to continue the Civil War with Mu'āwiya, he exchanged letters with him and reasserted his claims as the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* to lead the Muslim community. However, as al-Ḥasan harbored a desire to avoid more bloodshed, faced superior enemy forces, and confronted an internal revolt among his own men, he abdicated the Caliphate to Mu'āwiya on several conditions.

⁸⁵⁹ Madelung, *The Succession*, 311.

⁸⁶⁰ As quoted Rasul Ja'fariyan, *Tārikh-i tashayyu' dar irān az āghāz tā qarn-i dahum-i hijrī*, 2 Vols. (Qum: Anṣarīyān, 1996); English translation of Volume 1 published online and accessed on 5/12/18: <https://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/general-al-tawhid/shiism-and-its-types-during-early-centuries-part-1-rasul-jafariyan-0>.

⁸⁶¹ Madelung, *The Succession*, 311.

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, 312-313.

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When Mu'āwiya broke this agreement and was succeeded by his son Yazīd, people looked to 'Alī's second son al-Ḥusayn, the new leader of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, to rise against the Umayyad Caliph. Following the brutal massacre of al-Ḥusayn, his family, and supporters in the Battle of Karbalā', his only surviving son and heir, 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn, remained politically quiescent. Popular Shi'i movements centered around other family members of 'Alī; one movement led by al-Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd al-Thaqafī (d. 67-8/687-688) rallied around 'Alī's third son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (d. 81/700). After al-Ḥanafīyya's death, some of his supporters believed him to still be alive and that he would reappear as a messianic *mahdī* – this belief gave rise to the Kaysāniyya movement.⁸⁶³

Meanwhile, over the next half century, the Umayyad Caliphs through their court discourse presented themselves as God's vicegerents (*khulafā'*) on earth, the legatees of the Prophets, “the *qibla* through which every erring person is guided away from error”, “*imāms* of guidance (*hudā*)”, “guidance and light”, “the light of the land”, “beacon of guidance”, and the dispensers of rain who revive the land and souls, *mahdī* (rightly-guided), a refuge from error (*iṣma*), the rope of God (*ḥabl Allāh*), and “*imāms* of justice”.⁸⁶⁴ The Umayyad Caliphs were said to be recipients of “a superhuman insight” (*ra'y yafūqu ra'y al-rijāl*) from God, protected (*ma'sūm*) from idle chatter and slips in behavior, and responsible for conveying the guidance of God Himself.⁸⁶⁵ The Abbasids, following their overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty, presented themselves with many of the same epithets used by the defeated dynasty: God's trustees, *imāms* of guidance and justice,

⁸⁶³ Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 32-34.

⁸⁶⁴ See Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 24-40.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

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rightly guided (*al-mahdī, al-ḥadī, al-amīn*), the best of creation, heirs of Prophet Muhammad, the rope of God, a refuge (*‘iṣma*) against error, and the holders of divine authority to whom obedience was due as a matter of faith and salvation.⁸⁶⁶ The Umayyad and Abbasid self-presentation demonstrates that a segment of Muslims in the first three centuries believed in the idea of God ordaining hereditary dynasties of leaders to carry His authority and convey His guidance on earth as something additional to the divine authority of the Qur’ān as scripture. It is noteworthy that many of the above titles continued to be used by Sunni Caliphs and Sultans, including the famous “shadow of God on earth”. This title was frequently employed in Ottoman caliphal discourses and was understood by some thinkers as indicating the Caliph’s status as God’s image, acts, and attributes as well as his cosmic authority over God’s creation.⁸⁶⁷

Over the same period, multiple Shi’i factions clustered around several Hāshimid candidates including the descendants of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya, the descendants of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, and the descendants of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī. It was in such an environment, with the rightful spiritual and temporal leadership of the Muslim community being contested by various religio-political groups, that the Imams of the Ḥusaynid lineage – Muḥammad al-Bāqir (57-114/677-733) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (83-148/702-765) – put forth leadership claims of their own and amassed a diverse following. Their scholarly repute attracted an entourage of Muslim jurists, theologians, traditionists, and scholars including the likes of Mālīk b. Anas and Abū Ḥanīfa. At the same time, both Imams commanded a devoted Shi’i following known as the Imamīs, who recognized the

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., 80-82.

⁸⁶⁷ On the title “shadow of God” (*zillullāh*) in the Ottoman era, see Huseyin Yilmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 97-217, in which he discusses the different meanings attached to this term by Ottoman thinkers.

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Ḥusaynid Imams as divinely elected leaders to the exclusion of other 'Alid candidates.⁸⁶⁸ The purported teachings of al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq are reported in early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* compilations such as the *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* of al-Šaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902-903) and the *al-Kāfi* of Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) as well as certain Ismaili texts.⁸⁶⁹

Generally speaking, Imami Shi'i teaching holds that the Prophet Muhammad was succeeded by divinely appointed hereditary Imams from his *Ahl al-Bayt* beginning with 'Alī, followed by his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and continuing through the direct descendants of al-Ḥusayn. Each Imam appoints the succeeding Imam by a clear designation (*naṣṣ*) that reveals God's selection of the Imam. The Imam in his own time is the friend (*walī*) of God and His Prophet, the legatee (*waṣī*) of the Prophets, the proof of God (*ḥujjat Allāh*), divinely protected (*ma'ṣūm*) from sins and errors, the possessor of God's authority (*walī al-amr*), and the vicegerent of God (*khalīfat Allāh*) on earth. In addition, Imami Shi'is from the second/eighth century onward variously subscribed to a spectrum of beliefs concerning the ontological status and spiritual powers of the Imams.⁸⁷⁰ Amir-Moezzi has analyzed the Twelver *ḥadīth* corpus (focusing on al-Šaffār al-Qummī and al-Kulaynī) in great detail through several publications and emphasized the “maximalist” perspectives of Imami Shi'i epistemology, theology, and Imamology. In the maximalist view, the

⁸⁶⁸ Haider, *The Origins*, 14.

⁸⁶⁹ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Farrukh al-Šaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt fī faḍā'il āl Muḥammad*, ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Najal Ayatullāh al-Murtaḍā al-Muwaḥḥid al-Abṭahī al-Iṣfahānī (Qum: Mu'assasa al-Imām al-Mahdī, n.d.), <http://alfeker.net/library.php?id=2495>, (accessed 11/15/2018), hereafter cited as *Baṣā'ir*. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Fajr, 2007), <http://alfeker.net/library.php?id=1443>, (accessed 11/20/2018), hereafter cited as *Uṣūl al-kāfi*.

⁸⁷⁰ Modarressi labels the two ends of this spectrum as the *Mufawwiḍa* (“the delegators” who “delegate” some of God's attributes to the Imams) and the *Muqaṣṣira* (“the shortcomers” who “fall short” in their recognition of the Imams' true status). But Modarressi passes theological judgments on the former group, whom he frequently calls “the extremists” while portraying the latter group as the official Imam-endorsed orthodoxy. See Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1993).

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Imams are the Gate of God (*bāb Allāh*), the Face of God (*wajh Allāh*), the Hand of God (*yad Allāh*), and the living Names of God. The Imam is in possession of a divinely bestowed science (*ilm*), which includes knowledge of the outward or legal dimensions of Islam such as the permissible and the forbidden, the esoteric exegesis (*bāṭin, ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ān, and various occult sciences. The lineage of the Imams traces back before Muhammad and includes the legatees of prior Prophets as well as the Arab ancestors of Muhammad going back to Abraham. The Imam's ontological essence pre-exists the creation of the world; God created the Imams as a primordial spiritual light (*nūr*) or celestial Intellect (*'aql*) before all things – a cosmic entity that Amir-Moezzi calls the “ontological Imam”. Ultimately, the Imam is the revelation or manifestation of God and represents whatever humans can know of God while God's Essence remains ultimately transcendent and indescribable.⁸⁷¹ Meanwhile, the “minimalist” conceptions of Imami Shi'i belief regarded the Imams as “righteous and pious learned men” (*'ulamā' abrār atqiyā'*), who merely serve as “true interpreters of the Book of God and heirs to the Prophetic knowledge.”⁸⁷² The minimalist view eschewed any notion of the Imams pre-existing as spiritual cosmic lights, possessing divine attributes, or being privy to divine inspiration.⁸⁷³ As we will see, the minimalist and maximalist positions entail different ideas of Qur'ānic Revelation in an Imami Shi'i context.

⁸⁷¹ All of these features of early Imami Shi'i doctrine have been presented and analyzed by Amir-Moezzi through a series of studies. See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994); idem, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam*.

⁸⁷² This is the description of Modarressi in *Crisis and Consolidation*, 30.

⁸⁷³ Some Imami scholars espousing the “minimalist” trend in Imami Shi'i belief were Hishām b. al-Hakam (d. 179/795), Yūnus b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 208/823), Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīshāpūrī (d. 260/874), and Abū Ja'far b. Qiba al-Rāzī (d. ca. 317/929). On these figures and their ideas, see Tamima Bayhom-Daou, “Hishām b. al-Hakam (d. 179/795) and His Doctrine of the Imām's Knowledge,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 48/1 (Spring 2003): 71-108; idem, “The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīshāpūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64/2 (2001): 188-207; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*.

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Following the death of the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Imami Shi'ī community split into multiple factions over claims to the identity of al-Ṣādiq's successor to the Imamāt. Most sources indicate that al-Ṣādiq had designated his son Ismā'īl (d. after 138/755) to succeed him as the Imam. However, Ismā'īl reportedly died prematurely during al-Ṣādiq's lifetime, leading to a succession crisis. Upon al-Ṣādiq's death, several groups formed, each following the Imamāt of one of al-Ṣādiq's sons including 'Abdullāh (the eldest son), Muḥammad, and Mūsā al-Kāẓim. Several groups continued to uphold the Imamāt of Ismā'īl and some of them traced the Imamāt to his son Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl and the latter's descendants. The various Ismaili groups eventually rallied around the descendants of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, who clandestinely directed an underground religio-political Ismaili *da'wa* that became prominent in the mid third/ninth century. At the same time, many of the followers of Mūsā traced the Imamāt in his progeny in the next few generations until the death of their eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-Askarī (d. 260/873). Al-Askarī apparently died without leaving an apparent male heir, leading to many different schisms among his following over the status of the Imamate after him. After several decades, the most dominant group, known as the Twelvers (*ithnā 'ashariyya*), maintained that al-Askarī left behind a minor son who became the twelfth Imam and went into occultation (*ghayba*).⁸⁷⁴ Members of the pre-Twelve Imami community began to compile narrations reporting the teachings of the Shi'ī Imams in the late third/ninth century.

⁸⁷⁴ The most recent study of the historical aftermath of al-Askarī's death, the claims of his various relatives over the existence or non-existence of his male heir, and the resulting factions, is Edmund Hayes, "Envoys of the Hidden Imam: Religious Institutions and the Politics of the Twelver Occultation Doctrine," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2015).

5.3.1 Two Models of Qur'ānic Revelation: Spiritual Inspiration and Angelic Audition

The above picture of Shi'ī Imamology presupposes certain conceptions of revelation – both Qur'ānic Revelation and post-qur'ānic modes of revelation to which the Shi'ī Imams are privy. The issues can be expressed through three questions: What is the Revelatory Process by which the Qur'ān is revealed to Muhammad and by which God inspires the Imams? What is the Revelatory Principle of the Arabic Qur'ān and the divinely inspired knowledge of the Imams? What is the relationship between the Imams and the Arabic Qur'ān? On the first question, the Twelver Shi'ī *ḥadīth* compilations report that the Imams taught at least two different models of divine inspiration in relation to the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams: a spiritual inspiration model and an angelic audition model.⁸⁷⁵

The spiritual inspiration model is heavily attested in the *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, which provides some fifty-five narrations spread through six chapters describing how both Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'ī Imams are continuously guided and inspired by God through the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-quḍus*), whereby they have access to whatever knowledge they require and are protected from sins and errors.⁸⁷⁶ Drawing on Qur'ān 56:7-10, the Imam al-Ṣādiq spoke of the Prophets and the Imams as the “Foremost Ones”, who carry five hierarchical spirits: the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) by which God supports, guides and informs them; the Spirit of Faith (*rūḥ al-īmān*) by which they fear God; the Spirit of Power (*rūḥ al-quwwa*) by which they practically obey God; the Spirit of Desire (*rūḥ al-shahwa*) by which they desire obeying God and detest disobeying Him, and the

⁸⁷⁵ These two models are discussed in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) (Aspects de l'imamologie duodecimaine XII),” *Journal Asiatique* 302/2 (2014): 411-438; idem, “Les cinq esprit de l'homme divine’ (Aspects de l'imamologie duodecimaine XIII),” *Der Islam* 2015, 92/2: 297-320.

⁸⁷⁶ See *Baṣā'ir*, Section 9, Chapter 15, 798 to Section 9, Chapter 20, 824.

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Spirit of Movement (*rūḥ al-madraj*) by which they come and go.⁸⁷⁷ The Imam went on to explain that the People of the Right are the believers in possession of four spirits – the Spirit of Faith, the Spirit of Power, the Spirit of Desire, and the Spirit of Movement. The People of the Left, meanwhile, are disbelievers only possessing three of these spirits. The Holy Spirit is the distinctive power or capacity that endows the Imams with knowledge beyond ordinary humans, as stated by Imam al-Ṣādiq: “By the Holy Spirit they know what is below the Throne and what is under the surface (of the earth)... Indeed these [four] spirits are subject to misfortunes but the Holy Spirit is not distracted and does not trifle.”⁸⁷⁸

In another section, the Imams explained that they always judge legal cases correctly according to the judgment (*ḥukm*) of God, the Prophet Muhammad and the House of David. The Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked: “By what do you judge when you give a judgment?” The Imam replied: “By the judgement of God and the judgment of David. When a matter comes to us that we do not know, the Holy Spirit inspires us with it (*tatalaqqānā bihi rūḥ al-quḍus*).”⁸⁷⁹ In three narrations the Imam explained that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, when sent by the Prophet Muhammad to Yemen to judge between the people, was being guided by the Holy Spirit in all of his judgments.⁸⁸⁰ These reports present the Imams as being continuously inspired by God without having need to consult external sources like the Qur’ān, the teachings of the Prophet, or consultation with others to arrive at divinely authorized judgments.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 15, No. 1, 798.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 15, No. 4, 801.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 16, No. 3, 806.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 16, No. 8-10, 807-810

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In the next set of narrations, the Imams stressed that the Spirit with which God inspired the Prophet Muhammad is greater than and different from the angels like Gabriel and Michael, and continues to be present with the Imams, guiding and inspiring them. When the Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about the meaning of the Spirit in Q. 42:51-52, he replied: “By God, it is a creature greater than Gabriel and Michael. And it was with the Messenger of God, informing him and guiding him. And it is with the Imams, informing them and guiding them”.⁸⁸¹ In a similar commentary, the Imam al-Ṣādiq made the following comment about the Spirit mentioned in Q. 42:52: “It was with the Messenger of God and it is with the Imams, guiding them.”⁸⁸²

The Imams further clarified that the Prophet Muhammad and they themselves are informed by the Holy Spirit with a kind of knowledge that transcends physical books, transmitted oral reports, or even scriptures. In the below report, the Imam cited Q. 42:51-42 to provide an account of how God inspires the Prophet Muhammad with *wahy*:

‘Abdullāh b. Ṭalḥa said: I asked Abū ‘Abdullāh (Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq): “O son of the Messenger of God, inform me about the knowledge which you convey to us. Is it from the scrolls you possess or from narrations which one of you narrates from the other? What is the state of the knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) you possess?” He [the Imam] said: “O ‘Abdullāh! The matter is greater and loftier than that. Do you not recite the Book of God?” I said: “Yes.” He said [after reciting 42:52]: “Do they recite that he was in a state not knowing what is the *kitāb* and the faith? I said: “They recite it in this manner.” He said: “Yes, he had been in a state of not knowing what is the *kitāb* and the faith until God sent that Spirit, then He taught him knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) and understanding (*al-fahm*) through it. And likewise that Spirit flows. When God sends it to His servant, He teaches him knowledge and understanding through it.”⁸⁸³

The Imam al-Ṣādiq further stated that “when the Prophet died, the Holy Spirit was transferred and came to be in the Imam.”⁸⁸⁴ The Imam confirmed that the Prophet Muhammad, prior to receiving

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 17, No. 1, 811.

⁸⁸² Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 17, No. 6, 813.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 18, No. 1, 816.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 16, No. 13, 811.

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the Holy Spirit, was in a state of ignorance as the Qur'ān seems to indicate, and that the Prophet only reached knowledge and understanding through the Spirit. The Imam's remark also implies that the Spirit that God originally sent to Muhammad can also be extended to whomever He selects among His servants. Another narration in this chapter is more explicit in which the Imam al-Ṣādiq told one of his disciples that "the Spirit of the Messenger of God is within us."⁸⁸⁵ While the Imams' narrations do not state this explicitly, their statements imply that the Imams like the Prophet are recipients of *wahy* from the Holy Spirit. The only difference seems to be that the Spirit passes to the Imams from the Prophet Muhammad, who seems to mediate the transmission of the Holy Spirit to the Imams.

In general, a great deal of narrations in the early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus present the Holy Spirit as the medium of God's non-verbal inspiration (*wahy*) to the Prophet Muhammad by which the Prophet gained knowledge and understanding of God's *kitāb*. These reports depict the Imams as special human beings who are divinely-guided through the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Prophet; thus, the Imams are privy to a form of continuous revelation and inspiration by virtue of which they are able to convey divine guidance without recourse to scripture or external sources. Amir-Moezzi has situated these Holy Spirit narrations within a Late Antique context, drawing parallels with material found in biblical, gnostic, Manichean, and Syriac sources.⁸⁸⁶ He concludes that the Holy Spirit material originated from the circles of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and perhaps from the very teachings of these two Imams.⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., Section 9, Chapter 18, No. 4, 817.

⁸⁸⁶ Amir-Moezzi, "Les cinq esprit," 304-306.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., 310

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The Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus contains other narrations that present an “angelic audition” model of divine inspiration. These narrations emphasize the difference between Messengers, Prophets, and the Imams in terms of how they perceive the angel of revelation.⁸⁸⁸ The first narration states:

The Messenger (*rasūl*) is he to whom the angels come (and he sees them) and they convey to him from God. The Prophet (*nabī*) is he who sees (the angels) in his sleep, so it is like what is seen in a dream. The *muḥaddath* is he who hears the speech of the angels. His ear is pierced and his heart is marked.⁸⁸⁹

In all five narrations of this chapter the Imam is called *al-muḥaddath* (“one who is spoken to or informed”) who hears the speech of the angels while he is awake.⁸⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the Messenger (*rasūl*) is described as one who hears and sees the angel while awake and the Prophet (*nabī*) is said to either hear the angel’s speech while awake or see the angel in his sleep without hearing speech. The angelic audition model means that the Messengers, Prophets, and Imams do not participate in the Revelatory Process in the same way and draws clear borders between the spiritual abilities of each figure. For his part, Amir-Moezzi believes that the spiritual inspiration model reflects the historical and insider teachings of the Shi'i Imams on the matter of divine inspiration while the angelic audition model is a form of *taqiyya* (tactical dissimulation) intended to obscure the clear conclusion that divine inspiration (*wahy*) continues, in some form, through the Imams.⁸⁹¹ To complicate matters further, al-Qummī provided fifty-two narrations over six consecutive chapters detailing how the Imams continually receive knowledge from God through several other mediums.

⁸⁸⁸ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 8, Chapter 1, No. 1-5, 669-71.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Section 8, Chapter 1, No. 1, 669. Attributed to Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir.

⁸⁹⁰ On this term *muḥaddath*, see Etan Kohlberg, “The Term *Muḥaddath* in Twelver Shī'ism,” *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata* (Jerusalem, 1979): 39-47.

⁸⁹¹ See Amir-Moezzi, “Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*).”

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These include the “piercing in the ear” (*naqr fī'l-udhun*), the “marking in the hearts” (*nakt fī'l-qulūb*), “casting in the hearts” (*qadf fī'l-qulūb*), being informed (*muḥaddathūn*) by the angels in a manner similar to figures like Dhū'l-Qarnayn and the companions of Moses and Solomon, knowledge inherited from the Prophet Muḥammad and Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, non-verbal inspiration (*ilhām*), and a *wahy* distinct from the *wahy* of the Prophets.⁸⁹²

5.3.2 The Shi'i Imams and the *Kitāb Allāh* beyond the Arabic Qur'ān

The notion that the Prophets and the Imams are recipients of divine information – either through the Holy Spirit, the angels, or other suprasensory means – raises the question of the source or Revelatory Principle of their revelatory knowledge. It also implies that the Imams' verbal teachings parallel the Qur'ān and the teachings of Muhammad in revelatory theological status – a conclusion that Amir-Moezzi succinctly conveys as follows:

The sayings of the imams are by nature as sacred as are those of the Prophet; indeed, they are even as holy as are the words of God; this is explicitly expressed in a tradition that goes back to Ja'far, a tradition the importance of which various commentators have emphasized: “*My speech is identical to that of my father, his speech is identical to that of my grandfather, that of my grandfather identical to his father al-Ḥusayn, his identical to that of al-Ḥasan, his identical to that of the Prince of believers [amir al-mu'minīn, i.e., the first imam, 'Alī], his identical to that of the Prophet, and his identical to the Word of God.*”⁸⁹³

⁸⁹² *Baṣā'ir*, Section 7, Chapter 3, No. 1-13, 559-63: “On what occurs to the Imams among the marking, piercing and casting in their hearts and ears”; Section 7, Chapter 4, No.1-3, 563-64: “The Imams' explanation of the three aspects of their knowledge and the *ta'wīl* of that”; Section 7, Chapter 5, No. 1-8, 564-69: “The Imams are *muḥaddathūn* and *mufahhamūn*”; Section 7, Chapter 6, No. 1-12, 569-73: “On the manner of the quality of the *muḥaddath*, how he acts, and how the Imams are informed”; Section 7, Chapter 7, No. 1-12, 574-76: “What is conveyed to the Imams is thing by thing, day by day, and hour by hour”; Section 7, Chapter 8, No. 1-12, 577-80: “The Imams inherit knowledge from the Messenger of God and from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and wisdom is cast into their breasts and their ears are marked”; One narration in Section 9, Chapter 16, No. 9, 809 states that the Imams are *muḥaddathūn* by the Holy Spirit: “Indeed, the Legatees (*awṣiyā'*) are *muḥaddathūn*. The Holy Spirit informs them without their seeing it. [Imam] 'Alī submitted to the Holy Spirit whatever he was asked about. So he ('Alī) would get the sense in his soul that ‘you have come upon the answer.’ So he is informed with it and it is as he said.”

⁸⁹³ Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 24.

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According to this view, which is a maximalist position within Imami Shi'i tradition, the Imams are divinely inspired guides and not merely exegetes who explicate a reified Qur'ānic scripture. In fact, various reports in the early Twelver Shi'i *hadīth* corpus prioritize the knowledge and authority of the Imams over that of the Qur'ān in its scriptural format. Some narrations place the teachings of the Imams on par with that of the Qur'ān; others emphasize that the divine knowledge bestowed upon the Imams exists independent of the Qur'ān and other scriptures; another group of narrations attack the integrity of the 'Uthmānic Qur'ān through accusations that it is incomplete or has been altered.

One chapter of the *Baṣā'ir* contains several narrations where the Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq narrate the Thaḳalayn tradition and offer commentary.⁸⁹⁴ As seen earlier, the core content of these reports matches what is found of the tradition in Sunni literature. The Imams' renditions of the Thaḳalayn tradition describe *kitāb Allāh* as a rope whose higher end is in heaven and whose lower end is on earth (similar to the Sunni narrations of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī). In one of these narrations, the Imam related the Thaḳalayn tradition and added that “we are the Ahl al-Bayt.”⁸⁹⁵ In the sixth narration, the Imam commented that “the *kitāb Allāh* will never cease and our guidance is according to it until they both return to the Paradisal Pond.”⁸⁹⁶ In none of these Thaḳalayn narrations or the ensuing commentaries did the Imams specifically identify the *kitāb Allāh* with the Arabic Qur'ān in its recited or canonized scriptural format. This is significant considering that

⁸⁹⁴ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 8, Chapter 17, No. 1-6, 745-749,

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Section 8, Chapter 17, No. 4, 748.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Section 8, Chapter 17, No. 6, 748.

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the process by which the concept of *kitāb Allāh* became wholly identical to the scriptural Qur'ān gradually took place through the early second century.

In many statements reported in the early Twelver *ḥadīth* works, the Imams pushed back against the popular idea that the *kitāb Allāh* is identical to the Arabic Qur'ān; they often described the God's revelatory *kitāb* mentioned in the Qur'ān as a divinely inspired knowledge that transcends the qur'ānic corpus contained in the *muṣḥaf*. One set of narrations present Imam al-Bāqir's commentary on Q. 29:47-49 which reads as follows:

Even so We have sent down to you the *kitāb*. Those to whom We have given the *kitāb* believe in it; and some of these believed in it; and none denies Our signs but the unbelievers. Not before this did you recite any *kitāb*, or inscribe it with your right hand, for then those who follow falsehood would have doubted. Nay; rather it is clear signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge; and none denies Our signs but the evildoers. (Q. 29:47-49)

The Imams quoted the verse that says the *kitāb* sent down to Muhammad is “clear signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge” and then presented themselves as those people in whose hearts this *kitāb* truly resides.⁸⁹⁷ Sometimes, the Imams used this verse to refute the belief that God's revelatory *kitāb* is found within the 'Uthmānic codex (*muṣḥaf*). In one such narration, Imam al-Bāqir remarked to his companion Abū Muḥammad after he recites the above verse: “By God, He does not say ‘between the two covers of the codex (*al-muṣḥaf*)’.” Abū Muḥammad responds: “May I be your ransom, who are they?” The Imam replied: “Who can they be other than us?”⁸⁹⁸ Likewise, in another narration, the Imam al-Ṣādiq told his companion Abū Baṣīr after he recited the same verse: “By God, He does not say ‘in the codex (*al-muṣḥaf*)’.” Abū Baṣīr then asked: “Are they (those given knowledge) you?” The Imam replied: “who else can they be?”⁸⁹⁹ In

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., Section 4, Chapter 12, 367-373.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., Section 4, Chapter 12, No. 3, 368.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., Section 4, Chapter 12, No. 9, 370.

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this way, the Imams positioned themselves as the true repositories or bearers of God's revelatory *kitāb* and downplay the value of the scripturalized Qur'ān within the *mushāf*.

In several other narrations, the Imam al-Ṣādiq spoke of a higher realm of divine knowledge called *kitāb Allāh* from which the Imam has access to all knowledge “of all things” – including the contents of heaven, earth, paradise, hell, past, present, and future. It suffices to present two examples among six such statements:

By God, I know what is in the heavens and in the earth, what is in the garden and in the hellfire, what was, and what will be until the establishment of the Hour. I know it from the *kitāb Allāh* as if I am looking at it like this (opening his palm). Verily God says (Q. 16:89): “*We sent down to you the kitāb as an explanation for all things.*”⁹⁰⁰

The Imam said: “By God, we know what is in the heavens, what is in the two earths, what is in the garden, what is in the hellfire and what is between them.” [The narrator Ḥammād] said: I looked at him in amazement. He [the Imam] then said: “O Ḥammād, verily this is in the *kitāb Allāh*! Verily this is in the *kitāb Allāh*!” Then he recited this verse (Q. 16:89): “*And the Day We will raise up among each nation a witness over them from themselves and we bring you as a witness over those, and We sent down to you the kitāb as an explanation of all things, and a guidance, mercy, and good tidings for those who submit.*” Verily, this is in the *kitāb Allāh*, within it is the explanation of all things.”⁹⁰¹

The Imam's claim to possess knowledge of “all things” from the *kitāb Allāh* speaks to a notion of *kitāb* that goes far beyond the contents of the Arabic Qur'ān. In other narrations, the Imams identify this all-encompassing *kitāb Allāh* with the *kitāb mubīn* and *umm al-kitāb* mentioned in the Qur'ān as containing knowledge of all things and repeat the claim that they have access to this knowledge.⁹⁰² The Imams' various descriptions of the *kitāb Allāh* encompassing all things strongly

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., Section 3, Chapter 9, No. 2, 241; *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 2 (*kitāb al-'ilm*), Section 20, No. 8, 36. This claim is repeated in several narrations within this section. A similar tradition is quoted in Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 79, but he translates *kitāb Allāh* as “the Qur'ān”. However, Amir-Moezzi speculates that the *kitāb* mentioned here must be the complete version of the Qur'ānic Text that only the Imams possess. I disagree with him on this point – since he has not considered the earliest and multidimensional meaning of the term *kitāb* and the Qur'ānic concept of the Transcendent Kitāb that contains all divine decrees and knowledge as mentioned in Chapter 1.

⁹⁰¹ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 3, Chapter 9, No. 3, 241-242.

⁹⁰² Ibid., Section 3, Chapter 1, No. 3, 220-221.

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point toward the Qur'ānic concept of the Transcendent Kitāb delineated in Chapter 1. As one may recall, the Transcendent Kitāb designated as *kitāb mubīn* (and various other names) in the Qur'ān is the metaphysical repository of all divine decrees, guidance, and knowledge. In the Qur'ān, the Transcendent Kitāb functions as the Revelatory Principle: it is the source of all prophetic revelation and divine guidance including the Arabic *qur'āns* recited by Muhammad and it is manifested in various prophetic specifications (*tafṣīl*).

In other reports, the Imams claimed to possess the revelatory knowledge that God sent as inspiration to prior Prophets; this includes what the Qur'ān variously refers to as *kitāb*, scrolls (*ṣuhuf*), and tablets. The Imam al-Ṣādiq stated: “Every *kitāb* that He sent down is with the people of divine science (*ahl al-ilm*) and that is us.”⁹⁰³ “Solomon inherited David and Muhammad inherited Solomon and we inherited Muhammad. With us is the knowledge of the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms, and the explanation of what is in the tablets (of Moses).”⁹⁰⁴ “Verily, with us are the scrolls of Abraham and the tablets of Moses.”⁹⁰⁵ But even more noteworthy is how the Imam described the ontology of the *kitāb*, *ṣuhuf*, and tablets of the prior Prophets. In a lengthy narration the Imam al-Ṣādiq provided an account of how the prophetic legacy (*waṣīyya*) was transmitted through various Prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, down to Muhammad. In doing so, the Imam invoked the Qur'ānic verses about God sending down the *kitāb* to the Prophets and explained the meaning of *al-kitāb* as follows:

The Greatest Name (*al-ism al-akbar*) is the *kitāb* by which the knowledge of all things is known, [the *kitāb*] that was with the Prophets. God says: “*We sent Our Messengers with the clear proofs and We sent down with them the kitāb and the balance*” (56:25). The *kitāb* is the Greatest Name and only it is recognized among what is called the *kitāb*, the Torah, the Gospel, the *Furqān*, the *kitāb* of

⁹⁰³ *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 4 (*kitāb al-ḥujja*), Section 90, No. 6, 134.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Section 90, No. 3, 134.

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, Section 90, No. 4, 134.

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Noah, the *kitāb* of Ṣāliḥ, Shu'ayb, and Abraham. God informed that: “*Verily this is in the ancient scrolls, the scrolls of Abraham and Moses.*” So where are the scrolls of Abraham? The scrolls of Abraham are only the Greatest Name; the scrolls of Moses are the Greatest Name. The *waṣiyya* (testament) continues in knower after knower until its being surrendered to Muhammad.⁹⁰⁶

In his above commentary on the word *kitāb*, the Imam al-Ṣādiq reportedly disclosed that God's revelatory *kitāb* inspired and transmitted to the Prophets – including what the Qur'ān calls Torah, Gospel, Psalms, the Qur'ān – does not at all consist of physical material scriptures. Rather, the single and essential revelatory *kitāb* revealed to all Prophets is “the knowledge of all things”. Thus, what God bestows upon every Prophet and every Imam through divine inspiration is not a physical scripture but direct access to the comprehensive *kitāb Allāh*. The primary symbol of this all-encompassing *kitāb Allāh* is the “Greatest Name of God” (*ism Allāh al-akbar; ism Allāh al-a'zam*) which is said to contain “seventy-two letters” (*ḥarfān*) that each Prophet and Imam teaches to his successor and to certain disciples in the form of an oral teaching.⁹⁰⁷ To underscore the absurdity of taking the *ṣuḥuf* of Moses and Abraham as material scriptures, the Imam rhetorically asked “where are the scrolls of Abraham?” before answering that all these *ṣuḥuf* refer to one and the same *kitāb* symbolized by the Greatest Name. In other words, the prophetic legacy (*waṣiyya*) bequeathed from Prophet to Prophet and from Imam to Imam is not a physical book but an oral esoteric teaching comprising the Greatest Name of God, which facilitates their access to the all-encompassing *kitāb Allāh*.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., Book 4 (*kitāb al-ḥujja*), Section 122, No. 3, 176-177. For other statements from the Imams about the term *al-kitāb*, see *Baṣā'ir*, Section 1, Chapter 26, No. 1-15, 101-106. For example, in Ḥadīth No. 2 and 3 the Imams say: “By God, with us is knowledge of the entire *kitāb*.”

⁹⁰⁷ To be precise, the reports say that the Greatest Name of God contains seventy-three letters, of which seventy-two are known by the Imams and one letter is only known to God. See Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 79; *Baṣā'ir*, Section 4, Chapter 14, 373-377. See also 379ff for a set of narrations linking *al-ism al-a'zam* with *al-kitāb*.

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Taken altogether, the above reports on *kitāb Allāh* and its link to the Imams represents a historical and theological extension of the qur'ānic concept of the Transcendent Kitāb whose contents are conveyed through divine inspiration to the Prophet; Imami Shi'i teaching has the additional notion that the Imams too are inspired from the Transcendent Kitāb as well. In other words, the Imams are divinely inspired from the same Revelatory Principle that serves as the ontological archetype of the Arabic *qur'āns*. Effectively, the Revelatory Process according to Imami Shi'ism continues through the line of Shi'i Imams in perpetuity. This implies that the Imams' teachings carry a divine revelatory authority that is theologically parallel to and practically independent of the Arabic Qur'ān and the Prophet's teachings. In other words, whatever the Imams teach to others is a Revelatory Product with the theological status of *kitāb Allāh* because it ultimately issues from the transcendent *kitāb Allāh* or Revelatory Principle. When the Imam al-Ṣādiq is asked: "Is everything you say in the *kitāb Allāh* and His Sunna? Or do you speak by your personal opinion (*ra'y*)?", he replies: "No, everything we say is in the *kitāb Allāh* and His Sunna."⁹⁰⁸ Such statements remain consistent with the finding in Chapter 2 that the terms *kitāb Allāh* and Sunna initially carried the wider meaning of God's prescribed decree and justice as opposed to merely designating the Arabic Qur'ān in the material codex.

Finally, according to a number of traditions found in early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* and qur'ānic commentaries, the Imams attacked the integrity and completeness of the 'Uthmānic codex (*muṣḥaf*) of the Qur'ān, claiming that it has been altered and that the integral Qur'ān is much longer

⁹⁰⁸ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 6, Chapter 15, No. 1, 536. See also No. 2.

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and only possessed by the Imams.⁹⁰⁹ Without going into the details, Amir-Moezzi summarizes the early Twelver Shi'i view of the matter as follows:

According to the imams, the original integral Qur'an is nearly three times the length of the official Vulgate. True Revelation contained "everything" regarding the past, the present, and the future. Only 'Alī, the only true initiate and inheritor designated by God and the Prophet, had a copy of this Qur'an. The principal Companions of the Prophet and the most powerful members of the Quraysh, with Abū Bakr and 'Umar at their head, rejected and falsified the original Text, since it contained a number of verses that spoke disparagingly of them or that specifically named 'Alī and Muhammad's family as the models and leaders of the Community. Rejected, the integral Qur'an was hidden by 'Alī; it was secretly passed from imam to imam until the twelfth imam took it with him into Occultation. No one other than the hidden imam knows its contents, the totality of which will be revealed only at the time of his Return. Between now and then, Muslims are to make do with the censured, falsified, and deformed version of the 'Uthmānic Vulgate that resulted from the treasonous behavior of the Companions who, through their impious pride, are responsible for the decline of the great majority of the Community.⁹¹⁰

There are numerous examples found in the *ḥadīth* compilation of al-Kulaynī where the Imams make corrections to a Qur'ānic verse, alter its wording, or modify its reading to the "correct version".⁹¹¹ There are also several clear statements where the Imams openly accuse the Muslim community of falsifying the Qur'ān.⁹¹²

In response to those who ascribe the highest religious authority in the Qur'ān, al-Kulaynī presented an argument that the Qur'ān itself cannot function as a *ḥujja* (proof or argument) of God over the people since various groups contend and debate one another using the same Qur'ān and end up in disagreement: "The Qur'ān is not a *ḥujja* except through a *qayyim* (guardian) and whatever he says about a matter regarding it is the truth." The only person who fully knew the Qur'ān after the Prophet, the argument continues, was 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; and there must always be

⁹⁰⁹ A detailed analysis of examples is found in Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 79-91; see also Meir M. Bar-Asher, "Shī'ism and the Qur'ān," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, consulted online on 7/14/2018: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00181.

⁹¹⁰ Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 89.

⁹¹¹ See *ibid.*, 84-85 for examples.

⁹¹² See *ibid.*, 86-87 for quoted sayings of the Imams to this effect.

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a *qayyim al-Qur'ān* (guardian of the Qur'ān) present on earth after him.⁹¹³ In another statement that al-Kulaynī traced back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the Imam speaks of the passive position of the “silent” Qur'ān in relation to his active role as its expounder: “If you ask it [the Qur'ān] something, it does not speak to you; so ask me about it. Within it is knowledge of the past, knowledge of what will occur until the Day of Resurrection, the judgment of whatever is between you, and the explanation of what your associates differ about. So if you question me about it, then I will inform you.”⁹¹⁴ The idea that the Qur'ān itself cannot speak when it is asked a question necessitates the existence of someone who encompasses its divine knowledge and speaks on its behalf – a position that 'Alī himself pledges to fulfill. The above words of 'Alī mirror the statement attributed to him by al-Ṭabarī (quoted earlier): “This *qur'ān* is merely a writing set down between two covers. It does not speak; it is merely men who speak through it.” Both statements, whether presented by al-Kulaynī or al-Ṭabarī, speak to the secondary status of the “silent” scriptural Qur'ān to the figure of the Shi'i Imam, who practically functions as the “Speaking Qur'ān” for his followers.

Finally, the Shi'i Imams situated the Arabic Qur'ān as a revelatory discourse whose true meaning revolves around the onto-cosmological religious authority (*walāya*) of the Imams. As related in the *tafsīr* of al-'Ayyāshī (d. 320/932), the Imam al-Ṣādiq declared: “Verily, God made our *walāya*, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the pole (*quṭb*) of the Qur'ān and the pole of all revelatory scriptures (*kutub*).”⁹¹⁵ According to this perspective, every verse in the Arabic Qur'ān is directly or indirectly about the Imams: “The Qur'ān was sent down in four parts: one fourth is about us; one fourth is

⁹¹³ *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 4 (*kitāb al-ḥujja*), Section 1, No. 2, 97.

⁹¹⁴ *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 2 (*kitāb al-'ilm*), Section 20, No. 7, 36.

⁹¹⁵ Abū l-Naṣr Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd b. 'Ayyāsh (al-'Ayyāshī), *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 2 Vols., ed. al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Rasūlī al-Maḥallatī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Alamī li l-Maṭbū'āt, 1991), 16. This passage also includes a version of the Thaḳalayn tradition. A longer version of Thaḳalayn is on p. 15.

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about our enemies; one fourth concerns obligations and rulings; and one fourth is ordinances and parables. The most important parts pertain to us.”⁹¹⁶ As reported in early Twelver Shi'i *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* compilations, numerous qur'ānic verses that seem to have generic meaning on the surface are actually references to the Shi'i Imams. The following qur'ānic expressions are said to refer to the Imams: the holders of God's command (*ulū l-amr*) (Q. 4:59);⁹¹⁷ God's vicegerents (*khulafā'*) in the earth (Q. 2:30, 24:55, 38:26);⁹¹⁸ the people of remembrance (*ahl al-dhikr*) who should be asked questions (Q. 16:43, 21:7);⁹¹⁹ those whom God causes to inherit the *kitāb* that He inspired to Muhammad (Q. 35:31-32);⁹²⁰ the people of knowledge (*'ilm*) (Q. 3:18, 12:76, 29:43);⁹²¹ the guide (*hādī*) of every community (Q. 13:7);⁹²² the pure tree (*shajara ṭayyiba*) whose branches are in heaven and gives its fruit at every season (Q. 14:24-25);⁹²³ God's signposts (*'alāmāt*) by which people are guided (Q. 16:16) and God's signs (*āyāt*);⁹²⁴ God's proof, God's face (2:115, 28:88), God's gate, God's eyes;⁹²⁵ God's witnesses over His creatures (Q. 2:143, 16:89, 22:78) and the

⁹¹⁶ Imam al-Bāqir quoted in *ibid.*, 20. A similar version claiming that the Qur'ān was sent down in three parts is on p. 21.

⁹¹⁷ *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 108-111, 165-166, 172.

⁹¹⁸ *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 114.

⁹¹⁹ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 1, Chapter 24, 87ff; *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 125-126.

⁹²⁰ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 1, Chapter 26, 101ff; *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 127-128.

⁹²¹ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 1, Chapter 30, 120ff; *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 126-127.

⁹²² *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 112.

⁹²³ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 2, Chapter 2, 127ff.

⁹²⁴ *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 122-123.

⁹²⁵ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 2, Chapter 3-5, 131ff; *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, Book 4, 97ff.

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guardians of His command (Q. 4:59);⁹²⁶ those who know possess the knowledge of the *kitāb* (Q. 13:43);⁹²⁷ God's favor (*ni'mat Allāh*);⁹²⁸ the possessors of God's Greatest Name (*ism Allāh al-a'zam*) (Q. 56:74);⁹²⁹ the masters of the earth whom God inspires with His decrees in the Night of Destiny (Q. 97, Q. 44:1-5);⁹³⁰ the divinely appointed *imāms* from the descendants of Abraham (Q. 2:124) and the heirs of the "great kingdom" that God bestowed upon them (Q. 4:54);⁹³¹ divinely appointed *imāms* who guide by God's command (Q. 21:73, 32:24);⁹³² those whom God taught the names that He gave to Adam (2:31);⁹³³ those whom God aids and inspires through the Holy Spirit; the men of the heights who recognize the inhabitants of paradise and hellfire (Q. 7:48);⁹³⁴ and the light of God (*nūr Allāh*) that He sent down with the Prophet (Q. 7:157, 25:35, 64:8).⁹³⁵ In the *tafsīr* of al-Qummī (d. after 307/919) and al-'Ayyāshī, this "Imamological Qur'ān exegesis" appears from the very beginning of the commentary, where they both interpret "that *kitāb* in which there is no doubt" (*dhālika l-kitāb lā rayba fīhi*) mentioned in Q. 2:2 to mean Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.⁹³⁶

⁹²⁶ *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 4, 111-112; *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 81-82.

⁹²⁷ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 5, Chapter 1, 379ff.

⁹²⁸ *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 4, 129.

⁹²⁹ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 5, Chapter 2, 387ff.

⁹³⁰ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 5, Chapter 3, 392ff.

⁹³¹ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 8, Chapter 1, 679; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, Book 4, 101-102, 119-122; *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 273-275.

⁹³² *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 4, 128.

⁹³³ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 9, Chapter 1, 755ff.

⁹³⁴ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 10, Chapter 16, 882.

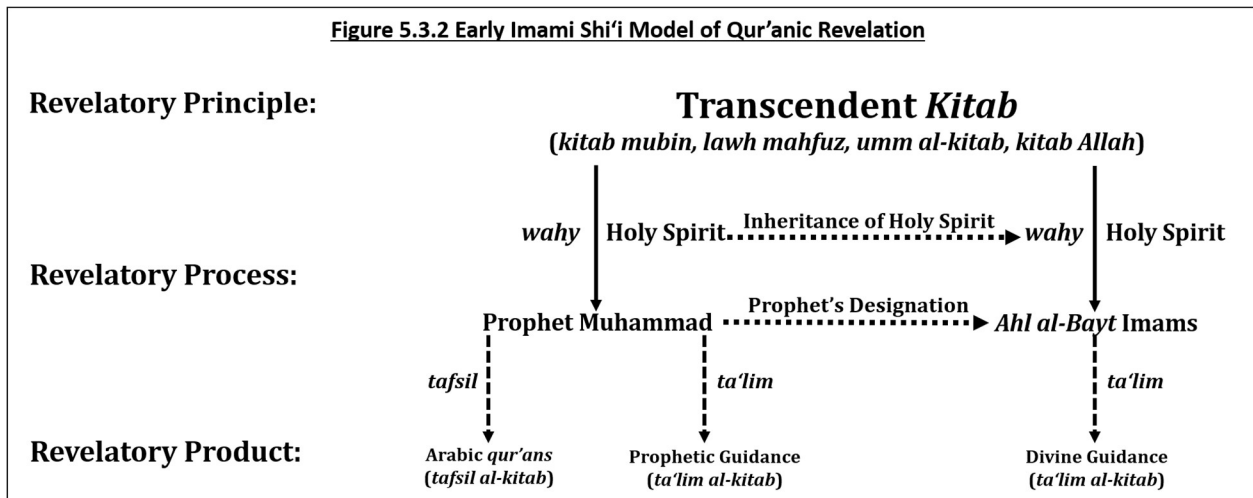
⁹³⁵ *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Book 4, 114-115.

⁹³⁶ 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, accessed 6/12/2018 online at <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=4&tTafsirNo=38&tSoraNo=2&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>; *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 44.

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Overall, Imami Shi'i teaching re-contextualizes the Qur'ān from being a seventh-century process of piecemeal divine guidance into a revelatory testament to the *walāya* of the Shi'i Imams; consequently, the Imams function both as the fountainheads of the Qur'ān's correct interpretation and the human channels of the Revelatory Principle that the Qur'ān ultimately indicates toward.

The Imami Shi'i discourses examined above speak to a coherent and consistent model of Qur'ānic Revelation that extends to the divine inspiration of the Imams. This model entails that the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams are inspired by God through the Holy Spirit or angelic intermediaries (Revelatory Process), have continuous access to the knowledge of all things in the *kitāb Allāh* (Revelatory Principle), and that their verbal teachings (Revelatory Product) hold the revelatory status of *kitāb* and Sunna. In one respect, these claims are a historical extension and elaboration of the earliest qur'ānic model of revelation proposed in Chapter 1 and the idea of a continuous manifestation of the *kitāb Allāh* through the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* illustrated in the early part of this chapter. The resultant model of Qur'ānic Revelation that emerges from a synthesis of various narrations in the early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus looks like the following:



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While the above ideas circulated in early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth*, certain specimens of the Sunni *tafsīr* models of Qur'ānic Revelation found their way into early Twelver Shi'i *tafsīr*. The *tafsīr* of al-Qummī presented Sunni interpretations of the revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) of the Qur'ān. For example, in his exegesis of Q. 85:21-22, al-Qummī took the view that God inscribes whatever He speaks as *wahy* in the Guarded Tablet before He sends it down with Gabriel: "The Guarded Tablet has two edges: one edge is to the right of the Throne and the other edge is on the forehead of Isrāfīl. When the Lord speaks inspiration (*wahy*), he strikes the Tablet at the forehead of Isrāfīl; then he [Isrāfīl] looks in the Tablet and reveals what is in the Tablet to Gabriel."⁹³⁷ In his interpretation of Q. 97:1 about the Night of Destiny, al-Qummī explained that "the Qur'ān was sent down all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) to the *Bayt al-Ma'mūr* (the Frequented House, heavenly prototype of the Ka'ba) in the Night of Destiny and [sent down] to the Messenger of God in the period of twenty-three years."⁹³⁸ The *tafsīr* of al-'Ayyāshī on Q. 2:185 presented the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition of Ibn 'Abbās regarding the revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) of the pre-existent Qur'ān in its entirety in the Night of Destiny, but attributed it to the Imam al-Ṣādiq: "The Qur'ān descended all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) in the month of Ramaḍān to the *Bayt al-Ma'mūr*. Then it was sent down from the *Bayt al-Ma'mūr* in twenty years."⁹³⁹ These interpretations of Qur'ānic Revelation match the views of the Sunni *tafsīr* tradition examined in Chapter 2. In taking these positions, al-Qummī and al-'Ayyāshī seem to have relied on material circulating among

⁹³⁷ 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, published online at [altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=4&tTafsirNo=38&tSoraNo=85&tAyahNo=22&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1) at: <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=4&tTafsirNo=38&tSoraNo=85&tAyahNo=22&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

⁹³⁸ 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, published online at [altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com) at: <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=4&tTafsirNo=38&tSoraNo=97&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>

⁹³⁹ *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 99.

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contemporary Qur'ān commentators. It is also possible that the Shi'i Imams endorsed the Sunni *tafsīr* models of the Qur'ān's pre-existence and singular descent as a form of tactical dissimulation (*taqiyya*), thereby allowing this Sunni teaching on the Qur'ān to conceal a deeper meaning. For example, in other Shi'i sources, the Imam al-Ṣādiq claims to be the *Bayt al-Ma'mūr*: "We are the Oft-Frequented Abode (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*; Q 52:4) where the one who enters, enters in safety."⁹⁴⁰ In either case, as we will see in Chapter 6, later Twelver scholars like Shaykh al-Mufid were highly critical of the Sunni models of Qur'ānic Revelation espoused in these early Shi'i *tafsīr* works.

To conclude this section, it needs to be emphasized that early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* collections of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī and al-Kulaynī reported teachings from the Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq describing the Prophet and the Shi'i Imams as recipients of two modes of inspiration including: a) spiritual inspiration through the Holy Spirit and b) the auditory dictation of angels. While Amir-Moezzi has argued that this material about the Holy Spirit dates to the lifetime of the Imams, these ideas could have originated anytime from the mid-second/eighth century to the late third/ninth century (when the *ḥadīth* books were compiled). Numerous reports also presented the Imams as having continual access to the *kitāb Allāh* – a transcendent unitary *kitāb* that contains all divine knowledge and ontologically encompasses the contents of the Qur'ān and prior prophetic revelations. Consequently, the teachings of the Shi'i Imams are expressions of God's *kitāb* and Sunna as opposed to their personal interpretations. At the same time, various early Twelver Shi'i narrations attacked the integrity of the 'Uthmānic codex (*muṣḥaf*) and, at the very least, relegated its status to a "silent" scripture that requires the Imam to speak for it. Even then, the primary purpose of the Arabic Qur'ān was re-contextualized in early Twelver texts to primarily function

⁹⁴⁰ Quoted in Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality*, 252.

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as a discourse indicating to the *walāya* of the Imams. As it turns out, the early Twelvers were not the only Shi'i group to harbor such ideas; similar notions were taught by the early Shi'i Ismaili *da'wa* of the third/ninth century as we will now see.

5.4 The Speaker Prophet and the Speaking *Kitāb*: Early Shi'i Ismaili Views of Qur'ānic Revelation (Late Third/Ninth Century)

While the Twelver Shi'is constitute the majority branch of the Imami Shi'i tradition, the Ismaili Shi'īs comprise the second largest group and were equally if not more active than the Twelvers both politically and theologically from the third/ninth century to the end of the thirteenth century.⁹⁴¹ The early history of the Ismailis in the latter half of the second/eighth century is shrouded in obscurity, mostly due to the lack of extant documentary sources. It was not until the mid-third/ninth century when a unified underground Ismaili movement, self-styled as *da'wat al-ḥaqq* (the Summons of Truth), found success in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and North Africa. The Ismaili *da'wa* was executed and propagated by a network of Ismaili “summoners” (*dā'īs*) – learned individuals who fused the roles of theologian, philosopher, preacher, and political leader. According to what can be reconstructed from various Ismaili and non-Ismaili sources, these *dā'īs* presented a Shi'i messianic vision – that the rightful leader of the Muslims was an Imam descended from the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* through the lineage of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and that this Imam would soon emerge to establish justice and displace the Abbasids.

⁹⁴¹ The most authoritative and updated narrative of Ismaili history is Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). The below historical summary is drawn from my survey article, see Khalil Andani, “A Survey of Ismaili Studies Part 1: Early Ismailism and Fatimid Ismailism,” *Religion Compass* 10/8 (2016): 191-206.

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The Ismaili *da'wa*'s message was multilayered and included teachings concerning the outer meaning (*ẓāhir*) of Islam and its inner meaning (*bāṭin*); the former comprised the outward revelatory expression (*tanzīl*) of the Qur'ān and the religious law (*sharī'a*); the latter consisted of theological, cosmological, and hermeneutical teachings highly suffused with numerological patterns, letter symbolism, and the esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ān. These esoteric teachings were only revealed in private and secretive settings as mediated through various protocols of spiritual initiation including the pledge of a special oath (*'ahd, mīthāq*) by a disciple. The Ismaili *da'wa* was led and directed by a hereditary line of leaders, who operated from Salamiyya during the latter half of the third/ninth century. There is some debate and confusion with respect to the religious function and status of these leaders. One interpretation, which became the official Fatimid account of history, was that they were the Imams descended from Muhammad b. Ismā'īl who concealed their identity as Imams to all except their most trusted *dā'īs*, and instead assumed the title of *ḥujja* (proof) – a term which could be synonymous with the Imam, the successor of the Imam, or the representative of the Imam. Another interpretation held by the Qarmatīs (*qarāmita*) was that Muhammad b. Ismā'īl was the hidden Imam who would literally return in flesh and blood and that these leaders were merely his representatives. In fact, it is quite probable that the Ismaili movement harbored a diverse range of beliefs concerning these issues and both positions genuinely co-existed within the *da'wa*.⁹⁴²

In any case, it is certain that a group of Ismaili *dā'īs* attempted to establish a political base for the Ismaili Imam in Salamiyya, Yemen, and North Africa and indeed accepted the authority of

⁹⁴² A survey of the earliest Ismaili beliefs concerning the Imamate is provided in Wilferd Madelung, "Das Imamatum in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre," *Der Islam* 37/1-3 (1961): 43-135. The English version of this article translated by Patricia Crone was published as "The Imamate in Early Ismaili Doctrine," *Shii Studies Review* 2 (2018): 62-155.

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this living Imam whose orders they were carrying out. In either case, the first Fatimid Imam-Caliph 'Abdullāh al-Mahdī who succeeded to the leadership of the *da'wa* in 268/899, publicly claimed the Imamate for himself and his ancestors and his claims were accepted by a large segment of the Ismailis. Following the establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate (297-567/909-1171), the structure of the Ismaili *da'wa*, the role of the *dā'īs*, and the content of Ismaili theology, cosmology, and hermeneutics underwent several important shifts as the Fatimid Imam-Caliph publicly became the supreme leader of both the Ismaili *da'wa* and the Fatimid *dawla*. But what concerns us here is the pre-Fatimid Ismaili doctrine taught by the *dā'īs* and their account of Qur'ānic Revelation and the divine inspiration of the Prophets and the Imams.

The contents of pre-Fatimid Ismaili doctrine may be gleaned from extant pre-Fatimid texts, such as *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām* (*The Master and the Disciple*) and *Kitāb al-Kashf* (*The Book of Unveiling*).⁹⁴³ The Fatimid Ismaili tradition attributed both treatises to Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 349/960), a high ranking *dā'ī* known as the “Gate of Gates” (*bāb al-abwāb*) and second only to the Imam himself. But the contents of both works strongly suggest that the real author was Ja'far's father, al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥawshab Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 302/914), an important figure in the Ismaili *da'wa* and founder of the Ismaili community of Yemen. James W. Morris and Wilferd Madelung both argue for the pre-Fatimid provenance of this text on the basis of internal evidence and its contrast with Ja'far's later Ismaili works composed during the Imamate of the fourth Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz (r. 341-365/953-975).⁹⁴⁴ Ja'far had emigrated to the court of the

⁹⁴³ Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām*, ed. and tr. James W. Morris, *The Master and the Disciple* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000), hereafter cited as *The Master and the Disciple*; Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-Kashf*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Dār Andalus, 1984). Hereafter cited as *Kitāb al-Kashf*. My translations from *Kitāb al-Kashf* have benefitted from consulting an unpublished translation of the same text by my late friend Seth 'Abd al-Hakeem Carney (d. 2007), *The Book of Unveiling* (2007).

⁹⁴⁴ James W. Morris, *The Master and the Disciple*, Translator's Introduction 8, 24, 44, 51, 55.

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second Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Qā'im (b. 893; r. 934-946) in North Africa after some of his family apostatized from the *da'wa*.⁹⁴⁵ *Kitāb al-Ālim* presents a spiritual and pedagogical dialogue between an Ismaili *dā'ī* and his disciple and the disciple's subsequent dialogues with others he invites to the *da'wa*. The *Kitāb al-Kashf* consists of six separate treatises dating back to the pre-Fatimid era – as evident in the way the text speaks of a messianic Imam in hiding whose parousia was imminent. The most extensive analysis of this work is by Jamel Velji, who studied it as a major specimen of Ismaili apocalyptic and eschatological discourse.⁹⁴⁶ Together, both texts reflect the contents of Ismaili doctrine from the latter half of the third/ninth century. The below analysis of the early Ismaili doctrine of revelation will analyze the contents of both works in conjunction, given their time period and their joint attribution to the same author.

5.4.1 The Early Ismaili Cosmogonic Myth

Before turning to the topic of revelation, it is necessary to lay out the theological and cosmological worldview through which the early Ismailis interpreted reality and situated their religious interpretations. The early Ismaili cosmology, being a fusion of gnostic, mythic, early Shi'i, and hermetic ideas, presents a worldview quite different from Sunni *kalām* theology.⁹⁴⁷ To begin in very general terms, the early Ismailis divided created reality into two hierarchical realms: a spiritual world (upper world) and a corporeal world (lower world). God is the “Originator” (*al-*

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁴⁶ Jamel A. Velji, *An Apocalyptic History of the Early Fatimid Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). See pp. 42-60 for his analysis of *Kitāb al-Kashf*.

⁹⁴⁷ This early Ismaili cosmogonic myth is discussed and partially translated in Samuel M. Stern, “The Earliest Cosmological Doctrines of Isma'ilism,” in Samuel M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), 3-29; Heinz Halm, “The Cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Ismā'īliyya,” in Farhad Daftary (ed.), *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 75-84.

mubdi) of both worlds and totally transcends the attributes of these two created realms. God is beyond matter, space, time, bodies, spirits, time, eternity, and even existence itself.



The most robust version of the early Ismaili cosmogonic myth is found in a sermon given by the Fatimid *dā'ī* of Egypt, Abū 'Īsā al-Murshid (mid-fourth/tenth century), in which he claims to relate the teachings of the fourth Fatimid Imam-Caliph Abū Tamīm Ma'add al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh (r. 341-365/953-975). This cosmology describes the unfolding of created being from God's creative act as follows: in pre-eternity, the absolute transcendent God conceived an intention

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(*irāda*) and a will (*mashī'a*), resulting in His creation of a spiritual light (*nūr*). This created light – later called Kūnī – remained inactive for some duration, not knowing whether it was a creature or the creator.⁹⁴⁸ During this duration, Kūnī conceived the idea that she was alone in existence and had no creator. Upon her thinking this, God caused six spiritual dignitaries (*ḥudūd*) to emanate into existence out of Kūnī. This led Kūnī to realize that her own existence depends upon a transcendent creator whose nature lies beyond her capacity to know; Kūnī's intellectual realization took the form of the Shahāda: “there is no god except God.” Of these six spiritual dignitaries, three are above Kūnī and three are below her.⁹⁴⁹ One of the six dignitaries refused to acknowledge Qadar's rank; this entity was Iblīs; he was cast out of the pleroma and later manifested in human history in the form of various adversaries who oppose the Prophets.⁹⁵⁰

God then breathed a spirit into Kūnī and communicated His Word or Command “Be” (*kun*) to her, thereby actualizing Kūnī's existence. All things are originated (*mubda'*) by God within the being of Kūnī; the name Kūnī itself comes from the two letters *kāf* and *nūn* which form the word “Be” (*kun*). God is “the one who brings-into-being”, His Command is “bringing-into-being”, and the first creature, Kūnī, which contains the originated beings (*mubda'āt*), is what is “brought-into-being”.

The Command of God, even after producing Kūnī, is continuous and was perceived by Kūnī as a divine order for her to create another creature out of her own light to serve as her helper and deputy. So Kūnī executed the Command of God and created a second being called Qadar.

⁹⁴⁸ Stern, “The Earliest Cosmological Doctrines,” 17-18.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., 25.

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These two primordial entities, Kūnī and Qadar – also called the Preceder (*al-sābiq*) and the Follower (*al-tālī*) – are the intermediaries by which God creates, sustains, and governs all creatures in the spiritual and corporeal worlds: “Through Kūnī God brought into being (*kawwana*) all things and through Qadar He determined (*qaddara*) them.”⁹⁵¹ This cosmogony entails that various statements, attributes, or acts of God mentioned in the Qur’ān properly apply to Kūnī and Qadar. For example, the “Lord Most High” mentioned in Q. 87:1-4 refers to Kūnī who governs, raises, collects, and sends forth all created beings; and to Qadar who determines and guides them.⁹⁵²

This early Ismaili gnostic myth goes on to describe how Kūnī created Seven Cherubim (*karūbiyya*) from the spiritual light between herself and Qadar. These Seven Cherubim all have esoteric names whose meanings are known only to the Prophets and the Imams; their seven names are represented by the attributes of might (*‘aẓama*), glory (*‘izza*), guidance (*hudā*), splendor (*bahā’*), mercy (*ra’fa*), command (*amr*), and counsel (*mu’tamar*).⁹⁵³ In effect, these seven attributes represent the very being of Kūnī-Qadar, whose two names are seven letters in total (*kāf, waw, nūn, yā’, qāf, dāl, rā’*). Qadar then created Twelve Spiritual Entities (*rūḥāniyya*) from his own light; these twelve are called: *al-jadd, al-faṭḥ, al-khayāl, al-naṣr, riḍwān, mālik, malakūt, munkar, nakīr, al-jabarut, al-kibriyā’*. The Seven Cherubim and the Twelve Spiritual Entities play the role of spiritual intermediaries. The former mediate between Kūnī and the Speaker Prophets (*nuṭuqā’*) while the latter mediate between Qadar and the Speaker Prophets.⁹⁵⁴

⁹⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁵² Ibid., 20.

⁹⁵³ Ibid., 20

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., 22.

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As for the physical world, God through the mediation of Kūnī and Qadar created air and water – known as the Throne and the Footstool. Then He created corporeal light and darkness. He created smoke from the water, mud (earth) from the darkness, and fire from the light. Together, the air, water, light and darkness, earth, smoke, mud, and fire constitute seven created principles. From the smoke, He created the seven heavens and from the mud it created the seven earths.⁹⁵⁵ In general, the lower corporeal world was created in the image of the upper spiritual world. From the earth and the sphere, He created the twelve constellations of the zodiac: “This indicates that all that has been created in the upper world has something corresponding to it in the lower world.”⁹⁵⁶ The physical Sun and Moon symbolize Kūnī and Qadar; the five planets represent the five dignitaries created out of Kūnī; the seven heavens, seven earths, and seven seas represent the Seven Cherubim created by Kūnī and twelve signs of the zodiac represent the Twelve Spiritual Beings created by Qadar.⁹⁵⁷

5.4.2 God's Speech, Prophethood, and Qur'ānic Revelation:

The *Kitāb al-‘Ālim* and *Kitāb al-Kashf* provide further information on the nature of God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation. The early Ismailis identified God's Speech (*qawl Allāh, kalām Allāh*) with God's Word or creative act, “Be” (*kun*), which grants existence to all things. God's Word manifests His command (*amr*) and will (*irāda, mashī'a*) as explained in the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim*:

God is the Originator (*mubdi'*) of things (2:117 etc.) and the Giver of their existence. He created them (6:101) and then He initiated them (10:4, 34 etc.), without any preceding source of creation that He might have referred to (as a model) for what He created... Therefore He initiated the creation of what He created from a Light (*min nūr*), with three words (*kalimāt*) branching from that: the first

⁹⁵⁵ *The Master and the Disciple*, 81.

⁹⁵⁶ Stern, “The Earliest Cosmological Doctrines,” 23.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

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of those words was will (*irāda*); from the will derived the command (*al-amr*); and from the command came the word (*al-qawl*) to whatever He wills “Be!,” so it comes to be (36:82, etc.). So the beginning of creation was the willing (*irāda*) of a command (*amr*) through a word (*qawl*). Now from those first three words there came “Be!,” which is two letters and “so it comes to be” (36:82), which is five more letters.⁹⁵⁸

Thus, for the Ismailis, God’s Word (*qawl, kalima*) is an act of command (*amr*), through which all things are created, sustained, and governed. The essence of God’s Command or Word is a spiritual light (*nūr*) without any material qualities like verbal sounds or letters – which only belong to the lower corporeal world. While God’s Command originates at the highest level of being, it flows through the spiritual and corporeal realms as it gives rise to various created things. For example, through the mediation of Kūnī, God’s command produces various spiritual entities such as the six spiritual dignitaries, Qadar, and the Seven Cherubim. Thus, God’s Word or Command is a single eternal action with multiple effects or manifestations in the spiritual and corporeal realms. Early Ismaili theories of Prophethood and Qur’ānic Revelation tie back into this understanding of God’s Word or Command: the Prophets and Imams receive God’s Command in the form of divine inspiration (*wahy*) and, in turn, enunciate His Command as divine guidance in the form of symbolic signs, prescriptions, prohibitions, and their esoteric meanings.

As related in the *Kitāb al-‘Ālim*, the early Ismailis conceived the status of Prophets within a tripartite epistemic and cosmic hierarchy. Accordingly, there are three levels of religion (*dīn*), knowledge, and creation: the exoteric dimension (*zāhir*) comprises the religious laws consisting of ritual and ethical actions, the physical world, and the cosmic rank of animals; the esoteric dimension (*bāṭin*) comprises the spiritual paths of religion, the domain of the Ismaili *da‘wa*, and cosmic rank of human beings; the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) comprises the spiritual essence of God’s religion, the eternal spiritual truths (*ḥaqā’iq*), and the cosmic rank of the spiritual

⁹⁵⁸ *The Master and the Disciple*, English text, 80; Arabic text, 14. I have slightly modified Morris’ translation.

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angels.⁹⁵⁹ A Prophet is a human being whose soul and knowledge is at the cosmic rank of the angels while also possessing an embodied physical form: “He is spiritual (*rūhānī*) in knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) and corporeal (*jismānī*) in body.”⁹⁶⁰ A Prophet carries divine authority as the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of God; obedience to him determines whether one merits entry to Paradise or ends up in Hell.

The early Ismailis depicted the history of Prophethood according to a cyclical model in which they projected the Shi'i belief in continuous divine guidance through the Imams into past prophetic dispensations described in the Qur'ān and the Bible. They divided human history since the time of Adam into seven periods throughout which God instituted an interrupted series of Prophets and Imams to convey His revelatory guidance to humanity. Each of these seven periods began with the appearance of a major Prophet called the Speaker Prophet (*nāṭiq*), who enunciates divinely-prescribed guidance (*kitāb*) in the form of symbol-filled revelatory expressions (*tanzīl*) and practical legislation (*sharī'a*). Every Speaker Prophet was accompanied by a second divinely inspired figure called the Legatee (*waṣī*) or Founder (*asās*), whose function was to teach the inward meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Speaker Prophet's *tanzīl* and *sharī'a* in the form of a revelatory exegesis (*ta'wīl*) to those capable of understanding it. The Legatee became the successor of the Speaker Prophet and inherited his religio-political authority over the community. The Legatee was succeeded by a series of divinely guided infallible Imams from his descendants who interpreted the Speaker Prophet's *tanzīl* and *sharī'a* and taught their *ta'wīl* to the community. The Imams were also assisted by minor Prophets who held lower ranks of religious authority, like *hujjas* (proofs)

⁹⁵⁹ *The Master and the Disciple*, 92-95.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 95; Arabic text, 118.

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or *dā'īs*. The succession of hereditary Imams continues until the end of one historical period and the appearance of the next Speaker Prophet from the progeny of the Imams. For example, Adam was the first Speaker Prophet, his Legatee was his son Seth, and Seth was succeeded by a series of Imams in hereditary succession, until the accession of Noah as the next Speaker Prophet. According to various Ismaili texts, the six Speaker Prophet/Legatee (*nāṭiq-wāṣī*) pairs were: Adam and his son Seth, Noah and his son Shem, Abraham and his son Ishmael (with Isaac appointed as Trustee Imam), Moses and his brother Aaron (replaced by Joshua after his premature death), Jesus and his disciple Simon Peter, and Muhammad and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. The era of Islam was the sixth cycle and the early Ismailis anticipated its conclusion and the commencement of the seventh cycle. They believed that one of the Imams of Muhammad's cycle – variously called the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* (Resurrector of the Resurrection), al-Mahdī, or Master of the Seventh Cycle – was to become the Speaker Prophet of the seventh cycle; he does not bring a new legislation but instead unveils the inner meaning (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) and real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of all prophetic teachings, abrogates the religious laws, and dispenses spiritual reward and punishment to human souls. This event is what the Ismailis understood to be the *qiyāma* (resurrection) or Day of Judgment. As noted above, the early Ismailis diverged about the precise number of Imams to come between Muhammad and the Master of the Seventh Cycle. Some believed in precisely seven Imams between each Speaking Prophet and expected Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl to return as the Master of the Seventh Cycle; others believed in a continuous succession of Imams from Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl to the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs and expected the Master of the Seventh Cycle to come in the distant future.

The Prophet's knowledge, by which he is distinguished from other human beings, is the result of God's inspiration (*wahy*) and support (*ta'yīd*). The *Kitāb al-Kashf* depicted the Prophets

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and Imams as the houses (*buyūt*) and temples (*ḥayākil*) of God: “The houses and temples are the repositories of the Command of God and His inspiration (*wahy*): they are the Messengers and the Imams to whom descends God’s blessing (*baraka*) and His support (*ta’yīd*).”⁹⁶¹ The Ismaili usage of the word *wahy* follows directly from its broader qur’ānic usage; the verbal noun *ta’yīd* comes from the qur’ānic verses describing how God “supported” (*ayyada*) Jesus with the Holy Spirit (Q. 2:87, 2:253, 5:110). Thus, the concept of *ta’yīd* in Ismaili thought seems to be more or less equivalent to the Imami Shi’i doctrine of divine inspiration through the Holy Spirit examined in the prior section. The early and later Ismailis used the terms *wahy* and *ta’yīd* interchangeably to describe a continuous non-verbal inspiration that God bestows upon the Prophets and Imams.

The *Kitāb al-Kashf* stressed that God communicates His Speech to the Prophets only through spiritual intermediaries and not physical intermediaries, which makes the Prophet the primary corporeal intermediary between the spiritual and corporeal realms. Thus, God conveys His Speech to a Prophet only by means of the spiritual angels (*malā’ika rūḥāniyyīn*) or the Holy Spirit:

Some of God’s servants among mortal humans are intermediaries for others between Him and their community with respect to rank according to the determination of their stations in the hierarchies, up to the Messenger who becomes the intermediary between God and human beings. There is no one among them higher than him [the Messenger] in rank. The only intermediaries between God and the intermediary causes (*asbāb*) flowing to him [the Messenger] are the spiritual angels, Gabriel and Michael, and whomever God appoints as an intermediary between Him and His Messengers. The proof for that is God’s saying to His Prophet Muhammad while he is His Messenger to human beings: “*And ask those We sent before you among Our Messengers. Did We ever appoint anyone other than the Infinitely Compassionate as a god to be worshipped?*” (Q.43:45). This means: “ask the one We sent before you from among the angels We sent to the Messengers We appointed whether We ever appoint anyone other than the Infinitely Compassionate as a god to be worshipped?” By this, He means that there is no god except He and [there is no god] other than Him to be worshipped. The angels worship Him just as mortal humans worship God, the Lord of the Worlds. Thus there is no intermediary between you, O Muhammad, and God except the messengers worshipping [Him] among the spiritual angels.⁹⁶²

⁹⁶¹ *Kitāb al-Kashf*, 100.

⁹⁶² *Kitāb al-Kashf*, 129.

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This early Ismaili position is noteworthy because it significantly differs from the *tafsīr* and *kalām* theories of Gabriel physically ascending and descending between heaven to earth like a king's messenger to verbally dictate the Qur'ān or other scriptures to the Prophets. Unlike the classical *kalām* theology framework in which all created beings are corporeal and only God is incorporeal, the early Ismaili worldview posits the existence of an incorporeal spiritual domain beyond the physical realm in which the Prophets participate through their pure immaterial souls. The Prophet's reception of *wahy* and *ta'yīd*, occurring through the mediation of the spiritual angels or the Holy Spirit, is spiritual and not material. In specific, these spiritual angels include the Seven Cherubim and the Twelve Spiritual Beings, which are the powers of Kūnī and Qadar. They make contact with the spiritual souls of the Prophets and transmit God's Speech to them in the form of non-verbal inspiration called *wahy*: "*Wahy* is what the [spiritual] angels communicate to the Messengers from the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), so by this He speaks to human beings."⁹⁶³

The principal function of a Prophet (whether a Speaker Prophet or minor Prophet) is to receive non-verbal divine inspiration and render it into human linguistic utterances containing signs and symbols. The *Kitāb al-Ālim* described the Prophet as the "signifier of divine inspiration and its translator (*rāmūzu al-wahy wa-tarjumānuhu*) for the children of Adam."⁹⁶⁴ In another place, the *Kitāb al-Ālim* further designated the Prophets as "the treasurers of His knowledge and His wisdom and the translators of His inspiration" (*khazā'īnu 'ilmīhi wa ḥikmatīhi wa tarājīmatu wahyīhi*).⁹⁶⁵ In other words, the function of a Prophet is to signify (*ramaza*) and translate (*tarjama*)

⁹⁶³ Ibid., 130.

⁹⁶⁴ *The Master and the Disciple*, 95; Arabic text, 118. My translation of *rāmūz* is "signifier" while the translator's was "exemplar".

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid., 82, para 90; Arabic text, 16.

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the divine inspiration (*waḥy*) he receives through the spiritual angels or Holy Spirit into verbal linguistic discourse. The *Kitāb al-Ālim* elaborated on how God's Speech was converted into human audible speech in the below passage:

As for *al-ḥawl*, it [refers to] God's Speaking Prophet (*al-nāṭiq*), His trustworthy vicegerent, and the master of the twelve chiefs, just as *al-ḥawl*, which is the year, is not complete except with twelve months. The Imam is only called a *ḥawl* because he "transforms" (*ḥawwala*) the Speech of the Creator (*kalām al-Khāliq*) according to the subtlety (*laṭīf*) of its essence into the speech of human beings (*kalām al-ādamiyyīn*) so it may be recognized. So it becomes outward speech (*kalāman zāhiran*): the words of wisdom becomes its corporeal and bodily dimension and the Speech of the Creator becomes the spirit of life (*rūḥ al-ḥayāt*) and light of salvation for it. Thus, the nobility of the words of wisdom over the rest of speech is due to the nobility of the Speech of God, which is its inner aspect (*bāṭin*). Thus, the Imam is called *al-ḥawl* by his "transforming" (*taḥwīl*) of the Speech [of the Creator], and he does not transform it except by the permission of God.⁹⁶⁶

In the above passage, the Ismaili *dā'ī* explained to his student that the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*) of the word *ḥawl* is the Speaking Prophet and the Imam after him – because they both "transform" (*ḥawwala*) the incorporeal Speech of God into corporeal human speech. As noted above, the early Ismailis conceived God's Speech or Command as the eternal incorporal divine act that both creates and reverberates through the spiritual and corporeal worlds. The Command of God reaches the Prophet in the form of *waḥy* and *ta'yīd*, and the Prophet "translates" or "transforms" it into verbal speech. The *Kitāb al-Kashf* advanced the same idea when it described the Prophets as "the houses of the inspiration (*waḥy*) of God to the extent that each one among them in his time is with the ruling of God (*bi-ḥukm Allāh*) and His Command (*amrihi*)... they are the dwelling places (*mustaqarr*) of His inspiration (*waḥy*) and the repositories (*ma'ādin*) of His Command and His

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., 98-99, para 179; Arabic text, 32. This is my own translation which slightly differs from the published translation. The passage mentions the *nāṭiq*, the technical term for the Speaking Prophet in Ismaili thought, and then mentions the Imam. This is because the Speaker Prophet and the Imam both transform God's Speech into human discourse and the Imam is the successor of the Speaker Prophet.

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prohibition.”⁹⁶⁷ In other words, the Prophets express God’s ontological or generative Command into concrete laws, prescriptions, and prohibitions.

This early Ismaili concept of revelation entails that the Arabic Qur’ān *qua* verbal linguistic discourse consists of outward signs and symbols that represent God’s transcendent non-verbal Speech. The Qur’ān, along with all other prophetic revelatory discourses, consists of “words of wisdom” (*kalām al-ḥikma*), whose ultimate signified essence is God’s Speech or Command. The actual Arabic words and verses of the Qur’ān consist of signs (*rumūz*) constructed by the Prophet as opposed to being verbally dictated to him by God or angelic intermediaries. The technical Ismaili term for the symbolic verbal expressions enunciated by the Prophets is *tanzīl*. While the Sunni *mufasssīrūn* described *tanzīl* as a process of God spatially sending down the Qur’ān, and the Ash‘arī theologians defined *tanzīl* to mean God causing a recipient to understand (*ifhām*) His Speech, the early Ismailis defined *tanzīl* as the Prophet’s act of verbalizing divine inspiration (*waḥy*) into symbolic expressions. Thus, *tanzīl* in an Ismaili context is best rendered as “revelatory expression” as opposed to its literal meaning of “sending down”.

The theory of Qur’ānic Revelation professed by the early Ismailis explicitly allows for the creative agency of Muhammad in composing the Arabic Qur’ān *qua* sounds, letters, and words. In the early Ismaili framework, the Arabic Qur’ān is the Revelatory Product composed by the Prophet while the Command or Speech of God is the transcendent Revelatory Principle and the source of all divine inspiration. God’s Command or Speech is His eternal act that both transcends and gives existence to the spiritual and corporeal domains while also becoming manifest within them. The Revelatory Process consists of two stages: the first stage is the spiritual emanation of God’s

⁹⁶⁷ *Kitāb al-Kashf*, 102-103.

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Command to the Prophets through the incorporeal spiritual intermediaries (consisting of the spiritual angels) as a non-verbal inspiration or divine support called *wahy*, *ta'yīd* or Holy Spirit; the second stage is the Prophet's molding or transformation of this non-verbal inspiration into symbolic verbal utterances. The exoteric words enunciated by the Prophets, consisting of wisdom-filled words and signs (*rumūz*) in the form of commands and prohibitions, comprise the exoteric aspect (*ẓāhir*) of God's Speech or Command; while God's Speech in its spiritual essence constitutes the unitary esoteric dimension (*bāṭin*) of various prophetic revelatory discourses: "The Command of God is connected (*mutaṣṣal*) from the first of His Prophets, Messengers, and Imams of His Religion to the last of them, and whoever obeys the last of them has obeyed the first of them. God's Command continues from the first one, to the next one, and to the last one."⁹⁶⁸ This early Ismaili position marks a significant departure from Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām* models of Qur'ānic Revelation in several ways: God's Speech is His eternal creative act instead of His eternal divine attribute (per Ash'arīs, Māturīdīs, Ḥanbalīs) or a created temporal action (per Mu'tazilīs); there is no pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān (as in Sunni *tafsīr*) in the Guarded Tablet; *wahy* is an incorporeal non-verbal inspiration in contrast to verbal dictation from God (per Ḥanbalīs) or Gabriel (per Sunni *tafsīr*, Ash'arī and Māturīdī theology); and the Prophet is the creative agent who composes the Arabic Qur'ān instead of God (per Ḥanbalī and Mu'tazilī theology) or Gabriel (per Ash'arī and Māturīdī theology). This Ismaili theory of Qur'ānic Revelation has far-reaching consequences in terms of post-prophetic authority, Imamology, and hermeneutics.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid., 28.

5.4.3 Continuous Qur'ānic Revelation: The Imams, *Ta'wīl*, and the Speaking *Kitāb*

One of the most strongly argued claims throughout the *Kitāb al-Ālim* is the notion that God's inspiration (*wahy*) and support (*ta'yīd*) continues *after* Prophet Muhammad through the Imams and their appointed teachers in the Ismaili *da'wa*. However, the presentation of this claim comes very close to challenging the doctrine of the finality of Prophethood. In general, early Ismaili works seem to blur between Prophets (*anbiyā'*) and Imams (*a'imma*), both in function and in terminology. This ambiguity is most pronounced within discussions about post-prophetic *wahy*.

The *Kitāb al-Ālim* featured a debate between a newly trained Ismaili *dā'ī* and a Mu'tazilī scholar, where the former argues that God's justice necessitates the continuation of divinely inspired vicegerents of God after Muhammad to dispense divine guidance. Basing himself on the Mu'tazilī concept of divine justice, the Ismaili *dā'ī* explains that God's imperceptibility requires that He convey His commands and prohibitions to human beings through human intermediaries, "His just witnesses" (Q. 7:181), such that obeying God's witnesses is tantamount to obeying God. Once the Mu'tazilī scholar assents to this viewpoint, the Ismaili *dā'ī* asks him whether God "should impose a command upon some of His creatures and point it out to them through one of His *just witnesses*, and then impose precisely the same command upon others, but not point it out to them through one of His *just witnesses*, as He had done with the first group?"⁹⁶⁹ The Mu'tazilī scholar accepts this reasoning and admits that God's just witnesses were the Prophets of prior ages and communities. He also concedes that God's witnesses must always be present among humanity. However, he soon displays confusion as to how the people of his own time could ever access God's

⁹⁶⁹ *The Master and the Disciple*, 153.

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guidance and poses the following question: “How can we come to know God's intermediaries, or even one of them, since we can't go back to their time, while in this time of ours there are no longer any Prophets or Messengers, as there once were among the communities before us.” Upon hearing this, the Ismaili *dā'ī* expresses astonishment and accuses his Mu'tazilī interlocutor of contradicting the concept of God's justice due to his claim that “the time of the prophets has already passed you by and that there is no longer any Prophet nor Messenger in this time of yours.”⁹⁷⁰ The Ismaili *dā'ī* instead asserts that the very idea that God no longer sends Prophets or Messengers after a particular Prophet is nothing but a lie promulgated by the scholars of every religious community including Magians, Jews, and Christians;⁹⁷¹ today this lie is propagated by the religious scholars of Muhammad's community “exactly as was said by those before them among *those who led astray* the (religious) communities before them. For every community claims that there is no prophet after their own.”⁹⁷²

The Ismaili *dā'ī* goes on to explain that religious scholars only advanced this teaching out of hypocrisy and self-interest, thereby appropriating the prophetic legacy and authority for themselves:

Since by saying this [that there would be no more prophets] they wanted to cut off *the outward traces* (43:22-23) of the prophets from the real and distinctive qualities of (genuine) prophecy, and to use those outward traces *as a commodity among themselves* (59:7), they could only accomplish that once *they had imbued the hearts* (2:93) of their respective communities with the saying to each community that God hadn't sent anyone superior to their own prophet, and *there would not be any prophet after him* (40:34), nor any (divine) *warners*. So *they quietly insinuated* (7:20, etc.) that to them, *without their really being aware of that* (2:171; 8:21-22, etc.), and they did away with them (seeking the true religion) *without their even knowing that* (7:182, etc.). So each community became greatly attached to their own prophet, while denying whoever came after him, and they even imagined that in doing so they were drawing near to their own prophet. Thus every community claimed that *every prophet after their own prophet was a liar* (43:23-24). By means of such words,

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid., 163.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid., 159-160.

⁹⁷² Ibid., 158.

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*all of the (religious) communities became cut off from the very memory of prophecy and the legacies of the prophets, and because of that they did not even seek after what they were missing, nor did they accept it as true if they were seeking.*⁹⁷³

In response to this Ismaili argument, Mu‘tazilī scholar remarks that the scholarly consensus of the Muslims is that Muhammad is the final Prophet and Messenger. However, the Ismaili *dā‘ī* observes that if scholarly consensus actually indicates to truth, then the joint consensus of the Magians, Jews, and Christians that their own respective Prophets were the last Prophets and that Muhammad is *not* a true Prophet trumps the consensus of the Muslims that Muhammad is the last Prophet.⁹⁷⁴ He further lays out how this belief in the finality of Prophethood became the pretext for the religious scholars’ oppression of the Prophets and their true successors. It is for this reason – to avoid persecution and oppression from the tyrants and scholars of the Muslim community – that God’s witnesses who came after Prophet Muhammad chose to remain hidden. Even still, there has never been any time that God’s witnesses have been absent from the earth both before and after Muhammad: “The earth is never without a just witness from God for a single blink of the eye, either publicly and openly, or in fear (78:18, 21) and concealment.”⁹⁷⁵

The above Ismaili claim – that God continues to dispatch His just witnesses and His friends to humankind as His deputies on earth even after Prophet Muhammad – has three major theological consequences. The first is that divine inspiration (*wahy*) continues to descend upon God’s just witnesses, namely the Shi‘i Imams, who succeed Muhammad. The second consequence is that the verbal teaching of an Imam is a divinely inspired revelatory speech and manifests the Speech of God. The third is that the Imams also convey God’s *kitāb* – in the sense of God’s prescribed

⁹⁷³ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid., 165.

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guidance – on a continuous basis due to which the Imam himself is the “speaking *kitāb* of God”. Indeed, one finds all three of these positions asserted in the *Kitāb al-Ālim* and the *Kitāb al-Kashf*.

The former work contains a section where the Mu'tazilī scholar asks whether God's just witnesses are ranked in certain levels. The Ismaili *dā'ī* replies in the affirmative and specifies that God's witnesses include both “superiors” and “subordinates” since the latter obey the former. The Mu'tazilī scholar then asks how the “subordinate” witnesses of God are distinguished from other humans, since God does not send down a revealed book to them. The Ismaili *dā'ī* offers the below response:

If the superior (*al-fāḍil*) has clearly distinguished himself from others through his knowledge of the unseen (*bi-ilm al-ghayb*) in the *tanzīl*, then the subordinate (*al-mafḍūl*) also clearly distinguishes himself from others through his knowledge of the unseen (*bi-ilm al-ghayb*) in the *ta'wīl*. For both the *tanzīl* and the *ta'wīl* are from what is with God (*min inda Allāh*), and no one can attain what is with God except through *wahy* (42:51; 53:4; etc.).⁹⁷⁶

The Mu'tazilī scholar is shocked at the above idea and exclaims: “Then the subordinate also receives *wahy!*”; to which the Ismaili *dā'ī* retorts: “Yes, which is why *obedience to him is obedience to God* (40:80).”⁹⁷⁷ The Ismaili *dā'ī* further explains that the *wahy* received by the Imams is mediated through the Prophet and cites cases in the Qur'ān where a particular Prophet was superior to other Prophets contemporary with him (the case of Abraham being superior to Lot, Ishmael, and Isaac). In effect, God's justice requires that “the *wahy* from God is continuously connected (*mutaṣṣal*) to *His just witnesses* (7:181) on His earth, to the extent of their different (spiritual) levels.”⁹⁷⁸ It follows from this that the Prophets (“superiors”) and the Imams

⁹⁷⁶ *The Master and the Disciple*, para. 493, 155-56; Arabic text, 80. I have added transliterations and left the terms *wahy*, *tanzīl* and *ta'wīl* untranslated. The translator translated *wahy* as “revealed inspiration”, *ta'wīl* as “inspired interpretation” and *tanzīl* as “sending down”.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 499, 156; Arabic text, 81.

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(“subordinates”) who succeed them are God’s just witnesses, His vicegerents, and the recipients of His *wahy*. The difference between them chiefly pertains to the precise form and function of their revelatory speech: the Prophets verbalize this *wahy* in the form of *tanzīl* – a divinely inspired discourse consisting of signifiers and symbols; while the Imams convey *wahy* in the form of *ta'wīl*, a divinely inspired discourse that reveals the inner meaning of the symbols and signs in the *tanzīl*.

The term *ta'wīl* is often used in qur'ānic commentary and *kalām* theology to designate a form of allegorical interpretation, speculative reading, or esoteric exegesis with respect to scriptural passages whose surface meaning is unclear, multivalent or problematic. For some Qur'ān commentators, *ta'wīl* is synonymous with *tafsīr*; for others, *ta'wīl* is a speculative attempt to arrive at an elusive meaning of key terms. For example, *kalām* theologians in the Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, and Māturīdī traditions allegorically interpreted the anthropomorphic verses about God possessing a face, hands, or a side in the Qur'ān and this was called *ta'wīl*.⁹⁷⁹ The *Kitāb al-Ālim* presents numerous examples of *ta'wīl* in an Ismaili context. In these examples, the Ismaili *dā'ir* presents an esoteric reading of numerous qur'ānic terms that are not usually subject to *ta'wīl* in other Muslim discourses. According to this Ismaili *ta'wīl*, objects like the seven heavens, the seven earths, the sun, moon, and stars, the rivers, the mountains, the twelve months, and the prayer formula “there is no power and strength except through God”, etc. are explained as exoteric symbols (*amthāl*) for the ranks (*ḥudūd*) of the Ismaili *da'wa* and the angelic intermediaries of the spiritual world. Such *ta'wīl* is grounded in the authority of the Ismaili Imam, whom, as we saw above, is said to possess the knowledge of *ta'wīl* from divine inspiration (*wahy*). Thus, I propose here that *ta'wīl* in the Ismaili context is more accurately rendered as “revelatory hermeneutics”

⁹⁷⁹ For a summary description of *ta'wīl* in Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām*, see Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān*, 36-39.

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consisting of “revelatory exegesis” precisely because it *reveals* the correspondence between the symbolic contents in the *tanzīl* (Revelatory Product) and the Cosmos and the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of the higher domains of the Revelatory Principle. The Ismaili *dā'ī* in the *Kitāb al-Ālim* “reveals” to his Ismaili disciple that the sun and moon mentioned in the Qur'ān and in the corporeal world are the outward indicators for the Imam and the Imam's supreme *ḥujja*; that the stars symbolize the Imam's *ḥujjas* and *dā'īs*; and that the seven heavens and seven earths stand for the seven Speaker Prophets and the seven Imams. In all these cases of *ta'wīl*, the real significance and value belongs to the religious dignitaries that the various qur'ānic and natural objects signify.⁹⁸⁰ In this manner, the *ta'wīl* taught by the Imams and their *dā'īs* is a divinely authoritative “unveiling” for the Ismaili initiate and thereby functions as “revelatory exegesis” as opposed to mere speculative commentary. In the words of Hollenberg: “As the *ḥaqā'iq* (noumena) behind all scriptures, rituals, and realia, *ta'wīl* is not merely commentary, but divinely aided revelation (*kashf*).”⁹⁸¹

The concept of “revelatory exegesis” was coined by Alex P. Jassen in his study of prophetic revelatory models in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism, and Dead Sea Scrolls.⁹⁸² Revelatory exegesis properly describes a phenomenon where “prophet-like” individuals receive divine inspiration in “their ability to *interpret* properly earlier prophetic oracles and pronouncements.”⁹⁸³ Jassen registers several examples of these figures in the Hebrew Bible, who convey divinely inspired teachings and disclose the true meaning of Israel's scriptures but are

⁹⁸⁰ *The Master and the Disciple*, para. 90-91, 82.

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹⁸² Alex P. Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah Vol. 68 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007).

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 204.

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never called Prophets. Such persons include Amasai (1 Chronicles 12:19), Azariah b. Oded (2 Chronicles 15:1–8), Jahaziel the Levite (2 Chronicles 20:14–17), Zechariah the priest (2 Chronicles 24:17–22), and Pharaoh Neco (2 Chronicles 35:20–22).⁹⁸⁴ Jassen observes that these figures are guided through the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Prophets of Israel but their revelatory teachings take on the form of “inspired interpretation” instead of prophetic oracular speech: “[T]he spirit guides them in their inspired interpretation of earlier prophetic and revelatory literature.... These four individuals testify to the emergence of a new form of revelation in post-exilic Israel – the inspired interpretation of earlier prophetic biblical literature.”⁹⁸⁵ Another such figure is Ezra whom the Book of Ezra describes using the phrase “the hand of YHWH his God was upon him”; but again Ezra is never called a Prophet in the Hebrew Bible. Regarding this phrase, Jassen observes that “within prophetic literature, this expression as applied to the prophet emphasizes the divinely guided character of the individual’s inspiration.”⁹⁸⁶ Interestingly, the term “Hand of God” (Hebrew: *yod*; Arabic: *yad*) shares the same trilateral root with the Arabic verb *ayyada* (to support) that the Qur’ān links to the Holy Spirit (Q. 2:53, 2:287, 5:110, 58:22). The verbal noun of the verb *ayyada* is the term *ta’yīd* (divine support), which the Ismailis use to describe God’s inspired support of the Prophets and Imams. The body of revelatory teaching enunciated by the above biblical personages like Azaria, Zecharia and Ezra – who are not Prophets – merits the title “revelatory exegesis” for the following reasons outlined by Jassen:

As inspired readers of Scripture, these later interpreters are not merely asserting that they possess a ‘correct’ understanding of the earlier traditions. Rather, as inspired interpreters, they can now contend that they are presenting the ‘true’ meaning of these ancient prophecies as they relate to the present circumstances. This secondary exegetical process is now understood as an equally viable,

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid., 208.

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid., 209.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid., 211.

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sometimes the only viable, realization of the prophetic experience.... For this reason, this experience is referred to as revelatory exegesis. The use of the latter term underscores the careful reading and interpretation of Scripture that characterizes the process that will be examined. The choice of 'revelatory' as an appropriate explanation for this exegetical experience is conditioned by its ability to identify this entire process as revelation. I contend that the interpretive process was understood by its practitioners as a revelatory experience.... In the majority of cases, the later interpreter is not classified as a prophet. Rather, the interpreter is identified by other terminological categories which preclude the designation as a prophet, yet underscore the role as a mediator of the revealed divine word in continuity with the ancient prophets.⁹⁸⁷

The phenomenon studied by Jassen has direct parallels in the Ismaili view of the Imams and their *ḥujjas* as the dispensers of *ta'wīl*. As we saw earlier, the Imams acquire *ta'wīl* only through divine inspiration (*wahy*), which God also sends to the Speaker Prophets. Yet the Imams are not called Prophets and are given a subsidiary status to Prophet Muhammad. Nevertheless, the Imams' *ta'wīl* is not mere scholarly "interpretation" and is always framed as the authoritative disclosure of the true meaning of the Arabic Qur'ān – a meaning that directly pertains to the higher truth of the Revelatory Principle. Thus, *ta'wīl* in the Ismaili context is best conceived as a "revelatory hermeneutics" that manifests as "revelatory exegesis" in a similar way to the Jewish examples studied by Jassen. In sum, both the prophetic *tanzīl* and Imams' *ta'wīl* in early Ismaili thought are Revelatory Products that disclose the truths of the Revelatory Principle.

The *Kitāb al-Kashf* contains two explicit discussions asserting that the *tanzīl* of the Prophet and the *ta'wīl* of the Imams are both expressions of God's *wahy* and manifestations of the Speech of God, to the extent that each of these discourses may simply be called "God's Speech" (*kalām Allāh*). In one section, the author presented a commentary on Q. 26:193-195, which speaks of the Trusted Spirit bringing down divine inspiration to the Prophet's heart:

This means that the *kitāb* and the inspiration (*wahy*) descended upon the heart of Muhammad. What is in the heart is concealed by the body surrounding it just as the house conceals what is within it. There is no reaching what is in the house except from its gate, and [likewise] there is no reaching what is in the heart of the Messenger except from his tongue by which he enunciates it (*bi-mā yanṭaqa bihi*) and through what he designates of its hearing to his Legatee (*waṣī*). This is just as our

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid., 205-206.

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master Muhammad said: "I am the City of Knowledge (*madīnat al-ʿilm*) and ʿAlī is its Gate (*bābuha*). So whoever desires the city, let him enter the gate."...The Messenger of God metaphorically coined the house as a metaphor for his soul and its gate as a likeness for his Legatee and his Proof (*hujja*) in whom is concealed the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of his knowledge, just as God concealed His inspiration (*wahyahu*) in His veils (*hujub*) – His Messengers in whom He established His inspiration until it is enunciated by them.⁹⁸⁸

This passage describes how the *wahy* that Muhammad receives from God exists in the form of esoteric knowledge concealed in his heart. There are two ways that Muhammad discloses the contents of this *wahy*: 1) by enunciating the *wahy* as speech in the form of *tanzīl*; and 2) by appointing his Legatee (*waṣī*), Imam ʿAlī, to teach the *wahy* in the form of *taʿwīl*, which serves as the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Prophet's *tanzīl*. This formulation speaks to the idea of "dual revelation" where God's Speech is spiritually communicated to the Prophets and Imams through *wahy*, and then expressed through two different but complementary verbal discourses of *tanzīl* and *taʿwīl*. This also means that the Prophet and the Imams have productive agency over the precise verbal content that make up their *tanzīl* and the *taʿwīl*.

In another important passage from *Kitāb al-Kashf*, the author provided a commentary about the meaning of *wahy* in Q. 42:51 and the *kalām Allāh* in Q. 9:6:

God said: "God does not speak to any human being except by *wahy*, or from behind a veil, or that He sends a Messenger to inspire by His permission what He wills" (Q. 42:51). So *wahy* is what the angels communicate to the Messengers from the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), and He speaks to human beings by that. Then He said, "or from behind a veil", meaning what the Messenger communicates of the Speech of God to his Legatee (*waṣī*) and the knowledge of the inner meaning (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*), because the Messenger is the veil between God and between humanity. So the *tanzīl* is the Speech of God and its *taʿwīl* is the Speech of God. This is just as God said: "If one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant it to him until he hears the Speech of God. Then deliver him to his place of safety" (9:6). So this is with respect to the *tanzīl* and it is the Speech of God, meaning the Qurʾān, and likewise, the *taʿwīl* is the Speech of God. His saying, "or He sends a messenger to inspire by His permission what He wills" means what the Legatee conveys of the *taʿwīl* to human beings by the permission of God and the permission of His Messenger, and it (the *taʿwīl*) is the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*). In this way, He speaks to human beings if they hear His Speech by His permission. The meaning of the word of God with respect to this verse in the inner meaning (*fi l-bāṭin*) in His saying, "If one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant it to him." (9:6), is that the "polytheists" mean those without the permission of God and His Messenger who associate a [false] imam who summons to the Fire with the [true] Imam whom God and His Messenger chose as Imam, so they associate the choice of their own souls with the choice of God

⁹⁸⁸ *Kitāb al-Kashf*, 102-103.

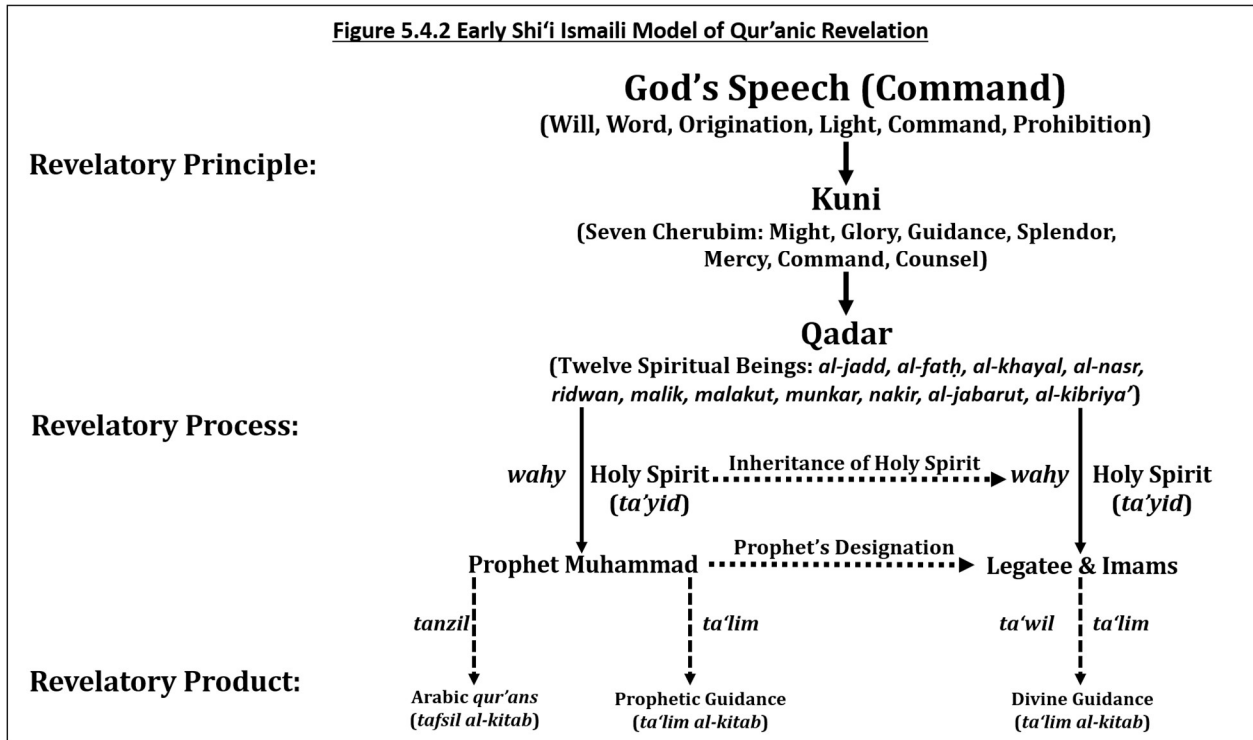
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and follow their own desires. So His saying, “*If one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant it to him until he hears the Speech of God*, [means that if] one of those polytheists seeks your protection from misguidance, then grant it to him through the oath (of allegiance) and the covenant and indicating to the true path of guidance. This verse is addressed to the Messenger in his age and to every Imam in each time.⁹⁸⁹

Based on the above passage, the Ismaili understanding of the three modes of God's communication in Q. 42:51 starkly differs from the interpretations of Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām*. The first mode, God speaking through *wahy*, refers to God communicating His Speech as non-verbal inspiration to the Prophet via the spiritual angels. The Prophet then enunciates this *wahy* through the symbols and signifiers that make up the *tanzīl*. The second mode “from behind a veil” means that the Prophet communicates this *wahy* in the form of esoteric knowledge (*ilm al-bāṭin*) to his Legatee, Imam ‘Alī. Finally, the third mode of divine communication consists of the Imam's communication of the *ta'wīl* to others – identified as God sending a messenger by His permission to communicate His will; the implication is that the Imam is the “messenger” sent by God. The passage also explicitly identifies the *ta'wīl* taught by the Imams with the Speech of God: “The *tanzīl* is the Speech of God and its *ta'wīl* is the Speech of God.” The Qur'ān's command for the Prophet to grant protection to the polytheists until they hear the Speech of God is said to apply to every Imam in the succeeding generation in the following way: if someone who follows a false imam seeks protection from error with the true Imam, then the true Imam should take the covenant from him and convey to him the *ta'wīl*, through which that person may “hear the Speech of God” (Q. 9:6). Thus, the early Ismailis identified both the Prophet's *tanzīl* and the Imams' *ta'wīl* as verbal manifestations of God's Speech. Based on the above, the early Ismaili model of Qur'ānic Revelation can be visualized as follows:

⁹⁸⁹ *Kitāb al-Kashf*, 130.

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Finally, a major and far-reaching consequence of this early Ismaili theory of Qur'ānic and post-qur'ānic revelation is the theological status of the Imam in relation to the Qur'ān. The Arabic Qur'ān according to early Ismaili theologies of revelation is the *tanzīl* or Revelatory Product that the Prophet composed under *wahy* and symbolizes the transcendent Revelatory Principle that is God's Speech, Word, or Command. After the Prophet, this Arabic Qur'ān *qua tanzīl* was compiled and transmitted as a recitation inscribed between the two covers of the qur'ānic codex (*muṣḥaf*). The Imam, however, functions as a source of continuous responsive revelation in the form of *ta'wīl*, which also represents God's Speech. On this basis, the early Ismailis referred to the Imam as *al-kitāb al-nāṭiq* (speaking book) or speaking *kitāb* while the Qur'ān between the two covers is the silent *kitāb*. When the Qur'ān's discourse on *kitāb* is read through this Ismaili hermeneutic, the word *kitāb* throughout the Qur'ān refers to the living Imam instead of the Qur'ān in its recited or canonized form. For example, the author of the *Kitāb al-Kashf* interpreted the word *kitāb* in

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numerous qur'ānic verses to be the Imam instead of the qur'ānic scripture. The following qur'ānic references to both the Transcendent Kitāb and the revealed *kitāb* in the form of the Qur'ān or the *kitāb* of Moses were variously identified with the person of the Imam: the “clear *kitāb*” containing God’s knowledge (6:59), “that *kitāb* in which there is no doubt” (2:2);⁹⁹⁰ the *kitāb* given to John the Baptist (19:12), “Our *kitāb* that speaks the truth against you” (45:29), and the *kitāb* that records every person’s needs “omitting nothing, big or small, without enumerating it” (18:49);⁹⁹¹ the *kitāb* God sent down that comprises clear signs and ambiguous signs and the *umm al-kitāb* (3:7);⁹⁹² the *kitāb* given to prior communities who were ordered to “explain it to the people and do not conceal it” (3:187);⁹⁹³ the *kitāb* that the Messenger is sent to teach to his unlettered people (62:2);⁹⁹⁴ the *kitāb* of Moses that is confirmed by a *kitāb* in Arabic (11:14, 46: 12);⁹⁹⁵ and the *kitāb* recited with a true recitation (2:121).⁹⁹⁶

This early Ismaili reading of the qur'ānic *kitāb* in terms of the Imam is highly significant in both theological and historical terms. Firstly, it is one of the earliest attestations in Shi'i sources of the theological claim that the Imam is the “speaking” *kitāb* of God; it is only Ismaili sources in the next two centuries that continued to elaborate and refine this idea, as we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7. Second, the identification of the Imam with God’s *kitāb* implies that the Imam’s oral

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁹⁹¹ Ibid., 126-127.

⁹⁹² Ibid., 120-121.

⁹⁹³ Ibid., 143.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., 145-146.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid., 148-149.

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teachings and guidance have the revelatory status of *kitāb* in the sense of divine prescription, decree, and guidance and comprise a Revelatory Product that manifests the Transcendent Kitāb or Revelatory Principle. Thirdly, this Ismaili interpretation of *kitāb* as the living Imam, appearing as it were in a late third/ninth century and continuing thereafter, indicates that the qur'ānic meaning of the term *kitāb* continued to be semantically flexible enough to accommodate such an interpretation. Fourthly, it is instructive to compare the Ismaili identification of the qur'ānic *kitāb* and the living Imam to the proto-Sunni equation of *kitāb Allāh* and the scripturalized Qur'ān as presented in Chapter 2. If proto-Sunni and Sunni scholars theologically and physically reified the piecemeal *qur'āns* into a static scripture and equated it to *kitāb Allāh*, the early Shi'is and the Ismailis theologically and historically reified the revelatory authority of Muhammad into the figure of the Imam and equated him to *kitāb Allāh*. Consequently, the Qur'ān as a scriptural text plays a secondary role to the person of the Imam in the Imami Shi'i and early Ismaili theology. Folkert's categories of Canon I and Canon II scriptures provide a useful framework to conceptualize the function of the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* scripture in the Ismaili tradition. As outlined in Chapter 2, a Canon I scripture derives its revelatory authority from another institution or source – what Folkert calls a “vector”. Accordingly, the Qur'ān holds a Canon I status in the Ismaili tradition because its authority is “vectored” in the figure of the Imam, just as it was vectored and mediated by the Prophet during his lifetime.

Overall, the Ismaili account of Qur'ānic Revelation in the late third/ninth century featured several distinctive positions. Grounding their ideas in a gnostic cosmology featuring spiritual and corporeal realms, the early Ismailis conceived God's Speech, the Revelatory Principle, as God's eternal Word or Command that originates all being and manifests within it. They regarded the Prophet as a possessor of divinely inspired esoteric knowledge, whose spiritual soul ranked at the

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level of the spiritual angels. They conceived a two-level Revelatory Process: God communicates His Speech in the form of non-verbal inspiration called *wahy* and *ta'yīd* to the Prophet's soul through the medium of spiritual angels; second the Prophet "signifies" or "transforms" this spiritual inspiration into human language consisting of signifiers and symbols. The Prophet's verbal revelatory discourse is called *tanzīl* and constitutes a Revelatory Product; it is the exoteric dimension (*ẓāhir*) of the Speech or Command of God, which is the Revelatory Principle. The Arabic Qur'ān in its verbal linguistic form is the composition of Prophet Muhammad and not a divine dictation. Muhammad is succeeded by Imams, who are also recipients of *wahy* and *ta'yīd*, albeit mediated by the Prophet's authority; such an idea is partial rebuke to the popular idea of the finality of Prophethood. The Imam also transforms the divine inspiration he receives into a verbal discourse called *ta'wīl*, which discloses the esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Prophet's *tanzīl*. Thus, both the Prophet's *tanzīl* and the Imam's *ta'wīl* constitute Revelatory Products and function as verbal manifestations of the Speech of God. This means that the Imams convey God's *kitāb* or divine guidance on an ongoing and responsive basis for the duration of history in what may be regarded as a perpetual Revelatory Process; the Imam functions as the speaking *kitāb* of God and various Qur'ānic mentions of *kitāb* refer to the Imam instead of a codified Qur'ān existing in the *muṣḥaf*. In sum, the early Ismaili theory of Qur'ānic Revelation elevates the theological status of the Prophet and the Imam over the Arabic Qur'ān, whose outward form (*ẓāhir*) is very much the product of prophetic agency.

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

The concept of Qur'ānic Revelation in Shi'i Islam during the first/seventh, second/eighth, and third/ninth centuries evolved along a very different trajectory from contemporary developments in

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what became known as the Sunni traditions of Islam. The proponents of Sunni *tafsīr*, *kalām* and jurisprudence, reified the Arabic *qur'āns* enunciated by Muhammad into a closed scripture and theologially conceived their status in terms of God's Knowledge and God's Speech. Meanwhile, the early Shi'is, Imamis, and early Ismailis accorded greater priority and divine authority to the Prophet Muhammad and the Shi'i Imams than the Arabic Qur'ān in its recitational and scriptural formats.

The early Shi'i Muslims of the first century understood divine guidance to continue through members of the Prophet's family beginning with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and certain members of the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt*. The basis for these proto-Shi'i beliefs, termed *Dīn 'Alī*, may be found in the qur'ānic and pre-Islamic exaltation of the families of Prophets in general and the family of Muhammad in particular. The early proto-Shi'i understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation was expressed by the famous Thaqalayn tradition where the Prophet tells his community to hold fast to the *kitāb Allāh* and his *Ahl al-Bayt*, which will never separate until the end of time. After *isnad* and *matn* analysis, this tradition was found to date to the second half of the first century; when read against the qur'ānic discourse on *kitāb* and the first century discourse about *kitāb Allāh*, the Thaqalayn tradition asserts that God's responsive guidance and decree – indicated by the term *kitāb Allāh* – continues through the *Ahl al-Bayt* of Muhammad, who will serve as the medium of divine guidance for the community going forward.

These seminal Shi'i understandings developed further in second/eighth century among the Imami Shi'a who recognized the Imamate of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. According to various teachings attributed to these Shi'i Imams, the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams of his *Ahl al-Bayt* are the recipients of continuous divine inspiration through the Holy Spirit; they also benefit from the verbal address of angels and a host of other supra-sensory mediums of divine

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knowledge. The Imams further claimed to have divinely supported access to the *kitāb Allāh*, whose contents go far beyond the Arabic Qur'ān; they describe this *kitāb Allāh* as encompassing all of God's knowledge and decrees. They also described their knowledge of the *kitāb Allāh* as being inclusive of all prior revelatory discourses including the Torah, Gospels, scrolls of Moses, scrolls of Abraham, and the *kitāb* of every Prophet. The Imams' conception of the *kitāb Allāh* is theologically equivalent to the Transcendent Kitāb described in the Qur'ān as *kitāb mubīn* and *umm al-kitāb*, which is the Revelatory Principle of Qur'ānic Revelation. As for the Arabic Qur'ān in its recited or scriptural form, the Imams presented themselves as the “guardians” (*qayyim*) of the Qur'ānic scripture, which itself remains silent and requires the Imam to “speak” for it. They further situated the Arabic Qur'ān as a revelatory text whose true meaning and final cause is to disclose the *walāya* (onto-cosmological and religious authority) of the Shi'i Imams.

The Shi'i Ismailis of the third/ninth century, sometime prior to the rise of the Fatimids, propounded their own vision of Qur'ānic Revelation and its concomitant Imamology within an esoteric gnostic cosmology. As related in extant pre-Fatimid Ismaili treatises, God's Speech is God's creative Word or Command, which produces a spiritual pleroma consisting of different ranks of angelic beings, followed by a corporeal realm that reflects and is informed by the spiritual realm. Ismaili authors portrayed the Prophet as a pure human being whose soul resembles the spiritual angels while being embodied in the physical world. God's Speech emanates as divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*) through spiritual angels to the Prophet's soul; the Prophet is the “signifier” (*rāmūz*) and “translator” (*tarjumān*) of divine inspiration, which he renders into symbol filled expressions called *tanzīl* and legislation called *sharī'a*. Accordingly, the Ismailis regarded the Arabic Qur'ān as a product of prophetic *tanzīl* and an exoteric representation of God's Speech, the Revelatory Principle, where Muhammad played a creative role in formulating

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its words, verses, and *sūras*. The Ismailis further maintained that the Prophet was succeeded by a lineage of Imams who also receive *wahy* and *ta'yīd* from the spiritual world; this doctrine partially challenged the idea of the finality of Prophethood. The Imams provide *ta'wīl*, a divinely inspired revelatory exegesis or hermeneutic, to complement the *tanzīl* of the Prophet. Accordingly, the Imams' *ta'wīl* is a Revelatory Product and expresses God's Speech. This means that the Imams are divinely inspired from the same Revelatory Principle that was revealed as the Arabic Qur'ān; consequently, the Imam's teachings have the theological status of *kitāb*. Therefore, the Ismailis revered the Imam as "the speaking *kitāb Allāh*" or "speaking Qur'ān" and interpreted various mentions of the qur'ānic word *kitāb* as references to the living Imam as opposed to the qur'ānic scripture.

Over the next two centuries, Ismaili perspectives on Qur'ānic Revelation evolved further through the incorporation of Neoplatonic theology and cosmology, the influence of *falsafa*, and responses to Sunni polemics. The fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries saw some of the most sophisticated Ismaili theories of revelation emerge in direct conversation with contemporary Sunni discourses in the *kalām* tradition. We will analyze these developments over the next two chapters.

Chapter 6: The Speech of God and the Words of His Messenger: Qur'ānic Revelation in Shi'ī Ismaili Neoplatonic Philosophy (Fourth/Tenth Century)

6.0 Introduction: The Ismaili *Dā'īs* and Their Philosophical Theology

This chapter analyzes conceptions of Qur'ānic Revelation according to various Ismaili thinkers and *dā'īs* active in the fourth/tenth century.⁹⁹⁷ The label “Ismaili” in the context of the classical period of Islam does not signify a single doctrine, ideology, or community. Rather, the “Ismaili” designation as used in this and the following chapter is an umbrella term encompassing various religio-political claimants, intellectuals, missionaries, and communities with different theological visions. The major Ismaili *dā'īs* of the fourth/tenth century may generally be classified into three groups: 1) a group of Ismaili philosophical theologians known as the “Persian School” or “Iranian School” consisting of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 332/943) in Transoxania, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/943) in Rayy, and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. 361/971) in Sistān and Khurāsān, who independently led their local Ismaili communities; 2) the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*) (fl. early fourth/tenth century) in Iraq whose precise Ismaili affiliations remain uncertain but whose cosmological and hermeneutical ideas share much in common with the Persian School; and 3) Ismaili *dā'īs* who recognized the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs as their Imams, such as Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. 348/960) and Abū Ḥanīfa al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) in North Africa and later Cairo.⁹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, all these Ismaili groups happened to converge in their beliefs concerning key philosophical and theological points, the general idea of revelatory hermeneutics or *ta'wīl*, the

⁹⁹⁷ For a historical overview of these Ismaili *dā'īs*, see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 223-237.

⁹⁹⁸ On the organization of the Fatimid *da'wa*, see *ibid.*, 211-222.

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recognition that the divinely ordained Imamate belongs to the lineal descendants of Ismā'īl b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, and the practical leadership and teaching role of the Ismaili *dā'īs*. Later in the fifth/eleventh century, when most Ismaili communities had come to recognize the Imamate of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs, the Fatimid Ismaili *dā'īs* retroactively recognized and “canonized” figures like al-Nasafī, al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī, and the Brethren of Purity – despite their lack of explicit allegiance to the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs – as legitimate Ismaili *dā'īs* and authorities within the Ismaili tradition. On this basis, it remains legitimate to speak of the above groups as “Ismaili” in the broader sense of the term. As this chapter will demonstrate, various Ismaili thinkers and *dā'īs* – even amidst their various theological and doctrinal divergences – agreed on their core claims concerning Qur'ānic Revelation such that one may speak of distinctively “Ismaili” positions on revelation during this period.

By the fourth/tenth century, Arabic translations of Plotinus' Enneads and other Neoplatonic material from the circle of al-Kindī, known as *The Theology of Aristotle*, had become quite popular in many intellectual circles.⁹⁹⁹ Many Ismaili *dā'īs* creatively adapted Neoplatonic metaphysics and cosmology with earlier Ismaili *da'wa* teachings to produce a remarkable Ismaili Neoplatonic synthesis: an integral worldview encompassing metaphysics, theology, cosmology, anthropology, epistemology, Imamology, soteriology, and hermeneutics. The Ismailis were neither *mutakallimūn* (*kalām* theologians) nor *falāsifa* (Peripatetic philosophers), but their intellectual project technically amounted to a “philosophical theology”. While the above Ismaili *dā'īs* certainly merit the titles of “theologian” and “philosopher” from a contemporary perspective, it will suffice to call them Ismaili thinkers, scholars, or *dā'īs* (their preferred title) so as to not confuse them with the *kalām*

⁹⁹⁹ On the relationship between Ismaili Neoplatonism and the Arabic Neoplatonic sources, see Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 39-45.

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theologians and the Peripatetic philosophers whose ideas the Ismailis vehemently opposed. In general, the Ismailis designated their body of metaphysical, theological, and hermeneutical teaching as “the root-principles of religion” (*uṣūl al-dīn*) and “esoteric knowledge” (*‘ilm al-bāṭin*) in contrast to the Qur’ān’s outward meaning and the practices of the *sharī‘a* which constitute exoteric knowledge (*‘ilm al-zāhir*).

Nearly all fourth/tenth-century Ismaili models of Qur’ānic Revelation were situated within Ismaili Neoplatonic philosophical theology. The rise of the Fatimid Caliphate, whose leaders claimed to be divinely ordained Imam-Caliphs from the Prophet’s *Ahl al-Bayt*, prompted several Ismaili *dā‘īs* to elucidate an “Imamology” (theology of the Imamate) to account for contemporary religio-political developments.¹⁰⁰⁰ Accordingly, many Ismaili theories of Qur’ānic Revelation also account for the ontological status, divine inspiration, and revelatory authority of the living Ismaili Imams and the Ismaili *da‘wa* hierarchy. These processes of philosophical integration combined with theologizing about a living Ismaili Imamate often led to differences in opinion among Ismaili thinkers: al-Nasafī, al-Rāzī, and al-Sijistānī debated several issues such as the proper articulation of God’s oneness, the relationship between the Neoplatonic hypostases, the relationship between the human soul and the Universal Soul, the status of the religious law, and the finer points of the history of the Prophets;¹⁰⁰¹ Ismaili *dā‘īs* loyal to the Fatimids disagreed with their Persian counterparts on various theological matters as well. It is important to note that the Brethren of Purity and the above mentioned Persian Ismaili *dā‘īs* did not recognize (or did not explicitly

¹⁰⁰⁰ On the rise and rule of the Fatimids, see Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 126-127, 137-237; Heinz Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids*, tr. Michael Bonner (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: the World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

¹⁰⁰¹ For an overview of these disagreements, see Ismail K. Poonawala, “An Early Doctrinal Controversy in the Iranian School of Isma‘ili Thought and Its Implications,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 5 (2012): 17-34.

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recognize) the Fatimid Caliphs as their Imams and some of them awaited the literal or symbolic return of the seventh Ismaili Imam, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, as the messianic *Qā'im* who abolishes the exoteric religious laws and reveals their inner meaning. Al-Sijistānī gave his allegiance to the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs in the latter part of his career, recognizing them as the vicegerents (*khulāfā'*) of the awaited *Qā'im* until the latter's manifestation.

This chapter argues that the Ismaili *dā'īs* of the fourth/tenth century, even amidst their diverse views and disagreements, propounded the following framework of Qur'ānic Revelation:

a) The primary Revelatory Principle is God's creative and existentiating Word/Command that eternally causes the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul, which function as secondary Revelatory Principles

b) The Revelatory Process consists of three revelatory stages:

1) Neoplatonic emanation from the Universal Intellect and Soul that is accessible in various degrees to a special class of human beings (Speaker Prophets, Founders, and Imams) as a non-verbal divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*);

2) Prophetic composition called *ta'līf* in which the Prophet Muhammad creatively verbalizes the real truths of the Revelatory Principles received as divine inspiration into a revelatory discourse of symbols called *tanzīl* and a set of divine commandments called *sharī'a*;

3) Revelatory hermeneutics called *ta'wīl* in which the Founder, the Imams, and certain high ranking *dā'īs* disclose the true meaning of the Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* with reference to truth contents of the Revelatory Principles including the ranks of the Ismaili *da'wa* and the Neoplatonic realm;

c) The Revelatory Products include the Arabic Qur'ān (called *tanzīl*), the *sharī'a*, the revelatory exegesis (*ta'wīl*) produced by the Imams through their teaching hierarchy of *dā'īs*, and the Imam

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himself. The Arabic Qur'ān and *sharī'a* consist of symbols (*rumūz*) and parables (*amthāl*) representing the higher truths of the Ismaili *da'wa* structure and the Neoplatonic Revelatory Principles; the *ta'wīl* is a divinely inspired exegesis that reveals the correspondence between the symbolic truths of the Revelatory Products and the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of the Revelatory Principles; the Imam himself is a virtual Revelatory Product in his function as the “Speaking Qur'ān” and the “Speaking *kitāb Allāh*”. To underscore the distinctiveness of the above Ismaili positions from other Muslims, the chapter concludes by noting how Twelver Shi'i positions on revelation developed more along Mu'tazili lines and diverged from Ismaili views. Subsequently, we end off by documenting how Ismaili views of Qur'ānic Revelation had proliferated widely enough among Muslim circles to provoke harsh polemical responses from Sunni and Mu'tazili theologians, who evidently perceived these Ismaili ideas as a threat to the viability of their own theological systems.

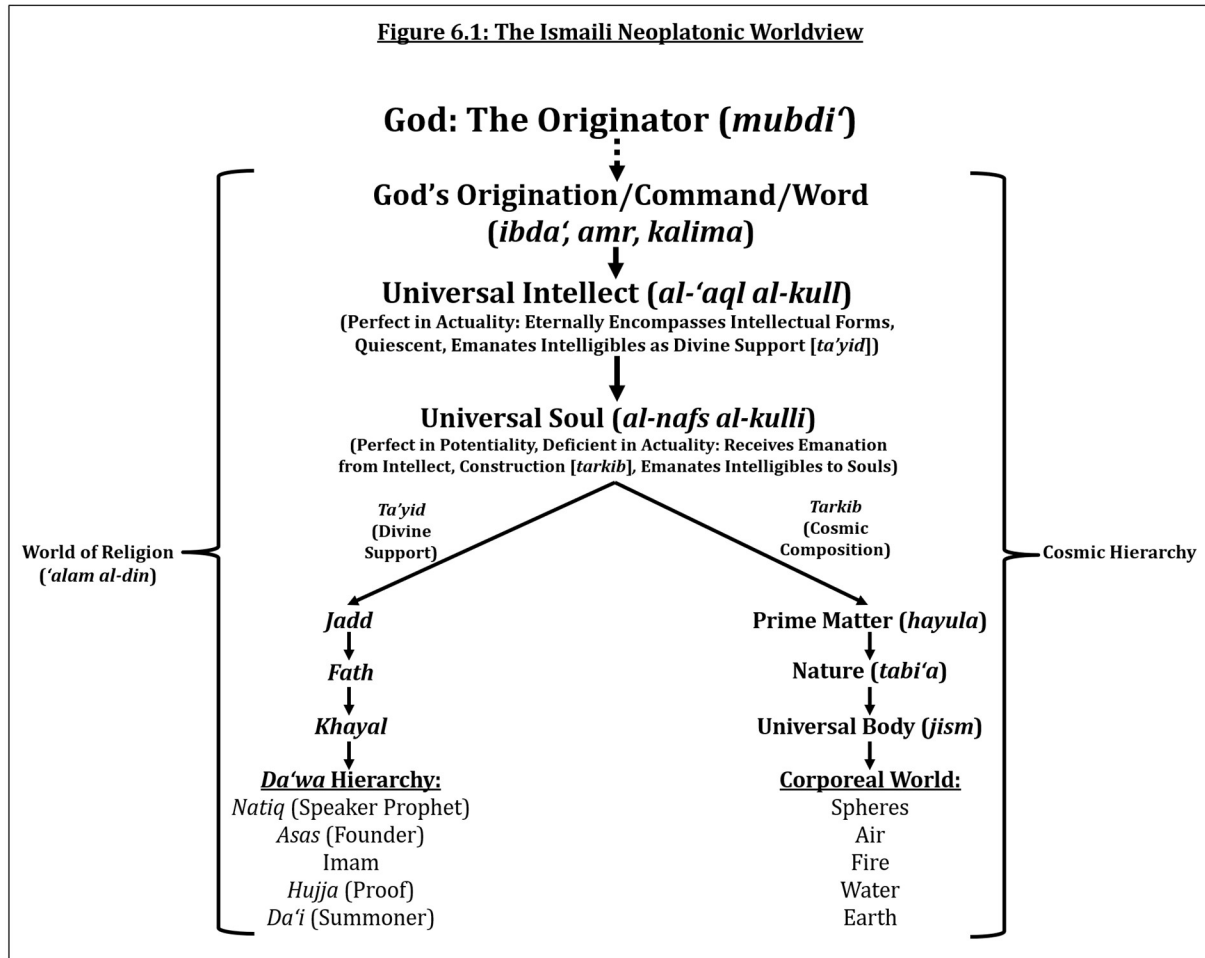
6.1 The Worldview of Ismaili Neoplatonism: Spiritual and Corporeal Hierarchies

The new “Ismaili Neoplatonism” originated by Persian Ismaili thinkers became very popular and was eventually adopted by prominent Ismaili *dā'īs* loyal to the Fatimids. The precise cause for this incorporation remains unclear. One theory given by Madelung is that the adoption of Neoplatonism was a concession on the part of the Fatimids in order to win the allegiance of Ismaili groups in Persia and Iraq; a more recent theory by Hollenberg holds that the Fatimid *dā'īs* actively and selectively appropriated Neoplatonic concepts to demonstrate the superiority of their teachings over the eastern Ismaili *da'wa*.¹⁰⁰² In either case, by the end of the fourth/tenth century, the earlier

¹⁰⁰² David Hollenberg, “The Empire Writes Back: Fatimid Ismaili *Ta'wīl* (Allegoresis) and the Mysteries of the Ancient Greeks,” in Daftary and Miskinzoda, *The Study of Shi'i Islam*, 135-145. See also idem, “Neoplatonism in Pre-

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Ismaili gnostic cosmology outlined in the prior chapter had been superseded by the emerging Ismaili Neoplatonism. What follows is an outline of the Ismaili Neoplatonic worldview that these different Ismaili thinkers generally espoused, notwithstanding their disagreements on specific points. This worldview constitutes the background to the discussions of Qur'ānic Revelation surveyed in this chapter.



The Ismaili Neoplatonic framework was rooted in a hyper-negative theology centering upon God's absolute unity (*tawhīd*). In the Ismaili understanding, God is absolutely simple and

Kirmānian Fāṭimid Doctrine: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Prologue of the *Kitāb al-Fatarāt wa-l-Qirānāt*,” *Peeters* 122/1-2 (2009): 159-202.

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necessarily transcends all the multiplicities entailed by the metaphysical categories upheld in the theological systems of *kalām* and *falsafa*. God is beyond names (*asmā'*), attributes (*ṣifāt*), the categories of eternal (*qadīm*) and temporally generated (*muḥdath*), cause (*'illa*) and effect (*ma'lūl*), substance (*jawhar*) and accident (*'araḍ*), and even existence (*ays*) and non-existence (*lays*).¹⁰⁰³ In the words of Henry Corbin: “The supreme Godhead is unknowable, inaccessible, ineffable, unpredictable – ‘that to which the boldest thought cannot attain’.”¹⁰⁰⁴ The only way to speak about God is through a series of self-negating negations: “We establish the absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*) of our Originator through the use of these phrases in which a negative and a negative of a negative apply to the thing denied.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Thus, God does not exist and does not not exist; God is not powerful and not not powerful; God is not corporeal and not not corporeal.

God creates and sustains all being through a single and eternal creative act, upon which all existents depend. Drawing on older Ismaili teachings, the Ismaili Neoplatonists described God's creative action as His existentiating Word, “Be” (*kun*), that brings all things into existence (*ays*) from non-existence (*lays*) and maintains them in being. This divine creative act is variously called God's Origination (*ibdā'*), Command (*amr*), Word (*kalima*), Will (*irāda*), Knowledge (*'ilm*), Power (*qudra*), Munificence (*jūd*), or Oneness (*waḥda*) – where all of these terms have the same referent.¹⁰⁰⁶ In cosmological terms, God's Command plays the role of the “first cause” in the chain

¹⁰⁰³ Walker discusses each of these negations in *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 72-80.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Times and Ismaili Gnosis* (London: Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications Ltd. 1983), 85.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Al-Sijistānī, quoted in Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 78.

¹⁰⁰⁶ For the doctrine of God's Command or Word, see Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābī'*, translated by Paul E. Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's Kitāb al-Yanābī' including a complete English translation with commentary and notes on the Arabic text* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 50-52, 55-56, 57-58, 100, 103-104, 107-109. See also Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 81-86. For the Arabic edition see Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābī'*, ed. Mustafa Ghalib (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī, 1965).

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of causes and effects. The immediate product or effect of God's Command is the Universal Intellect (*al-'aql al-kull*) or the Preceder (*al-sābiq*), the first and most perfect being in all of existence. Thus, God is the Originator (*al-mubdi'*), His Command is His act of Origination (*al-ibdā'*), and the Intellect is the First Originated Being (*al-mubda'*).

God's Command is united with the Intellect's substance and constitutes the Intellect's higher unitary aspect (akin to how blackness is united with black). The Intellect is an eternal incorporeal being that radiates intelligible light and encompasses all that can exist; he is literally the "thingness of all things", in the sense of containing the essences or forms of all things.¹⁰⁰⁷ Intellect is the least complex entity within originated being and lacks any internal disparity; he is likened to the number one and the center of a circle. Through his union with God's Command, the Intellect is eternal, self-sufficient, perfect, living, intellecting, truth, and perpetually in a state of absolute bliss. The Intellect does not know or contemplate God; he only contemplates God's Command as something internal to his own being and thereby recognizes that his own existence depends upon a transcendent Originator that forever eludes his knowledge. The primary activity of the Intellect, resulting from his self-contemplation, is the emanation of spiritual lights and intelligibles – a process which the Ismailis identified with *ta'yīd* (divine support).¹⁰⁰⁸ This emanation causes a second incorporeal being to "draw forth" (*inba'atha*) from the Intellect: this second hypostasis is the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kullī*) or Follower (*al-tālī*).

The Soul, unlike Intellect, is not wholly perfect; she is perfect only in potentiality and cannot fully encompass the Intellect's emanations. She therefore seeks to attain the perfection of

¹⁰⁰⁷ My use of gendered language – "he" and "she" – to refer to the Intellect and Soul is in keeping with how these Ismaili thinkers spoke of them.

¹⁰⁰⁸ For the doctrine of the Intellect, see al-Sijistānī, *Wellsprings*, 47-49, 52-61, 68-70, 100, 107-109; Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 87-94.

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the Intellect and engages in an act of spiritual motion. The Soul's motion emanates Prime Matter (*hayūla*) and her quiescence emanates Form (*ṣūra*).¹⁰⁰⁹ The combination of Prime Matter and Form produces Nature (*al-ṭabī'a*), which marks the beginning of the "natural order". Nature serves as a sort of surrogate hypostasis for the Universal Soul's creative activity, by which she projects the intelligible forms and benefits emanating upon her from the Intellect into Prime Matter and thereby generates a corporeal Cosmos as a likeness of the Intellect.¹⁰¹⁰ Through the mediation of Nature, the Universal Soul produces the corporeal world with the seven planetary spheres and the four elements. The mixing of the elements, in turn, generates the natural kingdoms (*al-mawālīd*): minerals, plants, animals, and human beings.

Through humanity, the Universal Soul produces human souls that resemble her and share in her attributes.¹⁰¹¹ The corporeal world is a locus of manifestation of the Universal Intellect produced and continuously governed by the Universal Soul through the mediation of Nature; the corporeal world is "intellectual benefits corporealized" (*al-fawā'id al-'aqliyya al-mujassama*) or "embodied intellect" (*'aql mujassam*).¹⁰¹² The spiritual and corporeal realms are ontologically distinct but qualitatively and causally related: the corporeal domain is a reflection of the spiritual domain and continuously informed by it. To state this cosmology in different terms, the corporeal

¹⁰⁰⁹ Al-Sijistānī, *Wellsprings*, 64-66; Paul E. Walker, "Cosmic Hierarchies in Early Ismā'īlī Thought: The View of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī," *The Muslim World* 66/1 (1976): 14-28: 22.

¹⁰¹⁰ The Universal Soul's creative activity of generating and sustaining the corporeal world is described in *Wellsprings*, 74-76. For example, al-Sijistānī writes (p. 74): "The Universal Soul lacks nothing she might want for the sphere to be at its utmost perfection and limit in its movements, and she arranges them however she wishes, determining according to what she learns from her own cause, which is the intellect...The Preceder emanated to the Follower a facility that makes it free, in organizing the physical world, from having to renew its original determination."

¹⁰¹¹ Al-Nasafī and al-Sijistānī held that the human soul is a part (*juz'*) of the Universal Soul and shares the same essence as the latter; while al-Rāzī held that the human soul is merely a trace (*athar*) of the Universal Soul.

¹⁰¹² Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 92, 104.

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world is “within” the Universal Soul, and the latter is “within” the Universal Intellect. The telos of creation is for the Universal Soul to attain the rank of the Universal Intellect. It accomplishes this feat through generating human souls, which undergo a journey towards spiritual perfection. Since human souls are created from the Universal Soul, the latter comes closer to achieving her perfection as human souls actualize their own perfection. In total, the “cosmic hierarchy” consists of the following ranks: God’s Command or Word, Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, Matter and Form, Nature, Spheres, Elements, and Natural Kingdoms.

In this Ismaili Neoplatonic schema, individual human souls left to their own devices cannot reach perfection. A second channel necessarily exists whereby the intellectual benefits and perfection of the Universal Intellect reach human beings to facilitate their perfection. It is on this point that the Ismailis moved beyond the confines of Neoplatonism and integrated their Shi'i notion of continuous divine guidance through God’s deputies with Neoplatonic cosmology. All Ismaili thinkers posited the existence of a special channel of divine guidance called the “World of Legislation” (*‘ālam al-waḍ’*) or “World of Religion” (*‘ālam al-dīn*). The World of Religion has an upper domain and a lower domain, each of which contains numerous hierarchical ranks or degrees called *ḥudūd al-dīn* (the ranks of religion). The upper domain of the World of Religion coincides with the highest levels of the cosmic hierarchy. The root principle of the World of Religion is the Command or Word of God, which is the ontological foundation of both the cosmic order and the divinely revealed guidance (the latter meaning is very much connoted by the term *amr*). The Universal Intellect and Universal Soul are the two highest ranks of the World of Religion, designated as the two root-principles (*aṣlān*). The World of Religion extends downward under the Universal Soul through a spiritual hierarchy existing parallel to the natural hierarchy described above. Emanating from the Soul in this spiritual hierarchy are three successive spiritual ranks

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(*ḥudūd*) called *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl* – which Ismaili thinkers variously identified with Gabriel, Michael, and Seraphiel.¹⁰¹³ The precise functions of these angelic ranks were subject to different interpretations among the Ismaili *dā'īs*. But in general, *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl* are channels and powers through which a special human being like the Prophet accessed the intellectual emanations and divine support (*ta'yīd*) of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul.

The lower domain of the World of Religion consists of the high-ranking dignitaries of the Ismaili *da'wa* – who exist in the corporeal world through their bodies while being connected to the spiritual domain through their souls. This Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy was often presented as an idealized schema of ranks and functions; the actual names, titles, and grades of Ismaili *dā'īs* shifted throughout history. But the idealized *da'wa* hierarchy is important because it functions as an intermediary world that Ismaili thinkers saw reflected in the Qur'ān, the *sharī'a* rituals, and the natural world. The Speaker Prophet (*nāṭiq*) is the highest rank in the terrestrial World of Religion, followed by the Legatee (*waṣī*) / Founder (*asās*), the Imam / Completer (*mutimm*), the *ḥujja* (proof) / *lāḥiq* (adjunct), and the *dā'ī* (summoner) / *janāh* (wing). Ismaili authors drew a harmonious correspondence between the five upper ranks or *al-ḥudūd al-'ulwī* (Intellect, Soul, *Jadd*, *Fath*, *Khayāl*) and the five lower ranks or *al-ḥudūd al-sufī* (Speaker Prophet, Founder, Imam, *ḥujja*, and *dā'ī*). In line with earlier Ismaili doctrine, the Speaker Prophet enunciates a verbal revelatory discourse called *tanzīl* and legislates a *sharī'a*. The first six Speaker Prophets were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, each of whom commenced a major cycle of sacred history. The Founder teaches the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the *tanzīl* and *sharī'a* in the

¹⁰¹³ The precise identification between the names of these Archangels and *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl* differs among fourth/tenth century and fifth/eleventh century Ismaili thinkers. The former group equated Gabriel with *Jadd* and Seraphiel with *Khayāl*, while the latter identified Seraphiel with *Jadd* and Gabriel with *Khayāl*.

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Speaker Prophet's lifetime and inherits his authority upon his death; the hereditary Imams succeed the Founder and continue to interpret the *tanzīl* and convey the *ta'wīl* for subsequent generations; they appoint the lower ranks of *ḥujja* and *dā'ī* to assist and teach others on their behalf.¹⁰¹⁴ The seventh Speaker Prophet, who was still expected to come, is the Lord of Resurrection (*ṣāhib al-qiyāma*) or Resurrector (*qā'im*), who brings the spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) and universal *ta'wīl* of all prophetic revelatory expressions and inaugurates a millennial age of history without religious law or exoteric (*zāhir*) forms of religion. In theory, the Imam was present in every time period as the leader of the *da'wa*, but various Ismaili groups disagreed about the status of the Imam after Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl: the Qarmaṭīs awaited the literal return of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as the Lord of Resurrection; others like al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī anticipated the coming of the Lord of Resurrection following an interim period in which he is represented by special deputies (*khulāfā'*), who lead the *da'wa* in his absence; many Ismailis saw the Fatimids as divinely-appointed Imams in continuous succession from Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl and/or the special deputies of the *Qā'im*.¹⁰¹⁵

The formidable fusion of Neoplatonic cosmology and Ismaili theologies of Prophethood led to novel understandings of Qur'ānic Revelation among fourth/tenth-century Ismaili thinkers, whose various positions are examined in this chapter.

¹⁰¹⁴ See Walker, "Cosmic Hierarchies."

¹⁰¹⁵ These different theologies concerning the precise rank of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs are outlined in Madelung, "Das Imamāt" and "The Imamate".

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6.2 Eastern Ismaili Positions on Qur'ānic Revelation: al-Rāzī (d. 322/943), Brethren of Purity (fourth/tenth century), and al-Sijistānī (d. 361/971)

6.2.1 From Neoplatonic Principles to the Miraculous Qur'ān: Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/943)

Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān al-Rāzī was an important Ismaili *dā'ī* who led the Ismaili *da'wa* in Rayy during the first half of the fourth/tenth century.¹⁰¹⁶ While he did not recognize the Imamate of the Fatimids, later Ismaili authorities retroactively regarded him as a high-ranking Ismaili scholar. His views on Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation are found in two major works: *A'lām al-nubuwwa (Proofs of Prophecy)* and *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ (The Book of Correction)*.¹⁰¹⁷ The former treatise preserves al-Rāzī's account of a debate between him and the reputable scientist and philosopher Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d. 312/925) (whom we will call Rhazes) that took place in the Samanid court. *Proofs of Prophecy* presents al-Rāzī's arguments on numerous issues relating to Prophethood including the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān and the modes of divine inspiration; these arguments were couched in general terms without recourse to technical Ismaili vocabulary. *The Book of Correction*, on the other hand, was a treatise that al-Rāzī wrote for other members of the Ismaili *da'wa*, in which he sought to correct some of the ideas of his fellow *dā'ī* al-Nasafī. *The Book of Correction* focuses on intra-Ismaili topics like the status of the religious law, the relationship between the Speaker Prophets and the spiritual ranks of the World of Religion, the proper way to speak about God and the Neoplatonic hypostases, and the history of prior Prophets and Imams. To analyze al-Rāzī's views on Qur'ānic

¹⁰¹⁶ For information on al-Rāzī's life and activity, see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 111-112.

¹⁰¹⁷ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, ed. and tr. Tarif Khalidī, *Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī. The Proofs of Prophecy* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2011); *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, ed. Hasan Minuchihr and Mahdi Muhaqqiq (Tehran: University of Tehran and McGill University, 2004). The latter text was extensively studied in Shin Nomoto, "Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy According to the Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934-5)," (Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 1999), in which I located many key references for material in the *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*.

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Revelation and divine inspiration in general, I will examine the contents of both works in tandem with respect to al-Rāzī's understanding of Prophethood in general, divine support (variously called *ta'yīd*, *mādda*, and *jārī*), the Prophet's access to the Revelatory Principle, the nature of divine inspiration (*wahy*), and the Prophet's composition of the inimitable Qur'ān.

The Necessity of Prophets:

In the opening section of his *Proofs of Prophecy*, al-Rāzī argued for the necessity of Prophethood based on his empirical observation that human beings possess disparity (*tafāwwūt*) and hierarchical merit (*tafāddul*) in numerous affairs including intelligence, philosophy, crafts, sciences, business, politics, etc.; this necessitates that certain people are leaders and teachers while others are followers and students. Thus, people generally require the guidance and instruction of teachers to attain knowledge in various mundane and religious matters. Teaching and instruction, therefore, is required for humans to obtain divine guidance. Within this context, al-Rāzī argued that God's wisdom and justice requires Him to select one class of human beings, the Prophets, whom He teaches "through divine inspiration (*bi-wahy*) what the rest of mankind cannot come to know...in order that they teach mankind, guide them toward what benefits them in the religious and worldly affairs."¹⁰¹⁸

To answer Rhazes' claim that God should have inspired all human beings equally with the prophetic message, al-Rāzī observed that this is only the case for animals who lack reason and responsibility. God inspired every species of animals with the same knowledge they require to find food and procreate; had this been the case for human beings as well, then humans would differ

¹⁰¹⁸ Al-Rāzī, *The Proofs of Prophecy*, 4. I have consistently translated *wahy* as divine inspiration which sometimes differs from the published translation.

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little from animals. Al-Rāzī further argued that the sheer fact that humans require teachers and instruction in mastering crafts and other skills proves that God in His justice and mercy chose not to directly inspire all human beings with equal knowledge – except in those capacities that humans share with animals.¹⁰¹⁹

The Revelatory Process: The Word of God and the Spiritual Intermediaries

In al-Rāzī's cosmic framework, the ultimate source of cosmic existence and divine inspiration is the Word of God, which is God's creative act that originates existence. The direct effects of God's Word are the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul, described as "the two roots united with the Word of the Creator."¹⁰²⁰ For al-Rāzī, the Universal Intellect as the First Originated Being (*al-mubda' al-awwal*) and the Word of God as God's act of Origination (*al-ibdā'*) are virtually one and the same thing: "The First Originated Being and the Origination are one, since there was no time before the Origination; rather, it and the Origination are one existent (*ays wāḥid*).... The Creator originated all existents at once. The First Originated Being is the entirety of existents and it is complete (*al-tamām*)."¹⁰²¹ The Universal Soul is an emanation from the Universal Intellect and she resembles the Intellect in its essence and nobility. Together, the Intellect and Soul constitute the highest realm of existence: "The Creator made them [the Intellect and Soul] the mines of nobility, the complete light, the complete compassion, and the complete knowledge.... They both came to exist as the highest world which is the mine of purity, holiness, and life."¹⁰²²

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid., 132-134.

¹⁰²⁰ Nomoto, "Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy," 180.

¹⁰²¹ Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, 24-25.

¹⁰²² Ibid., 29-30.

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Thus, the Revelatory Principle in al-Rāzī's worldview consists of the Word of God, the Universal Intellect, and Universal Soul, which constitute the summit of all being and encompass the entirety of existence.

Al-Rāzī's theory of divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*), which is fundamental to his theory of Qur'ānic Revelation, was expounded in his *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ* using distinctive Ismaili terminology. In this text, al-Rāzī described how the upper ranks of the World of Religion – the Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, *Fath*, *Jadd*, and *Khayāl* – send down and convey divine support to the lower ranks of the Speaker Prophet, Founder, Imam, *ḥujja*, and *dā'ī*.¹⁰²³ Al-Rāzī used four terms from early Ismaili thought to describe this divine support – *ta'yīd* (support), *jārī* (stream), *baraka* (blessing), and *mādda* (sustenance).¹⁰²⁴ These descriptions all together suggest a continuous “stream” or “flow” of divine support, guidance, and soul-nourishing knowledge that benefits its recipients. In Nomoto's words, divine support is “a soul-feeding substance or spiritual nourishment...a metaphor for knowledge and guidance transmitted through the celestial and earthly hierarchies; or spiritual, supernatural energy flowing down from the upper hierarchy to its earthly counterpart.”¹⁰²⁵ The term *wahy* features more prominently in al-Rāzī's *Proofs of Prophecy* as will be seen later.

In al-Rāzī's view, the highest rank in the earthly World of Religion at any given period of history is the Speaker Prophet, his Founder, or an Imam in their own times. They each possess the

¹⁰²³ Al-Rāzī employed older Ismaili terminology to describe these hierarchical ranks. For example, he uses the terms “the two roots” (*al-aṣlān*) or the Preceder and Follower to speak of the Intellect and Soul; he used the terms *mutimm*, *lāḥiq*, *janāh* to refer to the Imam, *ḥujja*, and *dā'ī*. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, I will use the latter set of terms. The intermediary called *Fath* does not seem to play any role in al-Rāzī's system.

¹⁰²⁴ Nomoto, “Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy,” 194-196.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

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“rank of completeness” (*ḥadd al-tamāmiyya*) – the spiritual station in which a person receives divine support (*ta'yīd, jāri, baraka, mādda*) directly from the upper spiritual ranks of the World of Religion without any human intermediary. Those under the rank of completeness, specifically the *ḥujjas*, only receive divine support through the spiritual mediation of the Speaker Prophet, Founder, or Imam in their respective eras. The ranks below the *ḥujjas* cannot receive divine support; they can only access this knowledge in the form of instruction (*ta'līm*) from the *ḥujjas*.¹⁰²⁶

Al-Rāzī devoted careful attention to the question of whether a Speaker Prophet receives divine support directly from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul or through celestial intermediaries. Initially, before reaching the rank of completeness (*ḥadd al-tamāmiyya*), every Speaker Prophet starts at the bottom of the spiritual ladder and must undergo initiation and training at the hands of the *da'wa* hierarchy that exists in the world before him; then he himself must ascend to the top of this hierarchy.¹⁰²⁷ The spiritual journey of Abraham, allegorically depicted in the Qur'ānic story of his worshipping the star, the moon, and the sun (Q. 6:75-79), actually consisted of his spiritual initiation by a *dā'ir* symbolized by the star, a *ḥujja* symbolized by the moon, and the Imam of his time symbolized by the sun. Abraham exceeded the spiritual rank of each of them and finally reached the “rank of completeness” (*ḥadd al-tamāmiyya*), thereby becoming the new Speaker Prophet. At this highest level, Abraham received divine support from the spiritual ranks of the World of Religion without human intermediaries.¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²⁶ Ibid., 211-213, 217.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid., 217-219.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid., 229-231; al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, 189-191.

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This same model was applied by al-Rāzī to the case of Prophet Muhammad. He depicted the gradual spiritual development of Muhammad through an esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of Q. 33:45-46 where Muhammad is described as “a witness (*shāhid*), a bearer of good news (*mubashshir*), a warner (*nadhīr*), a summoner (*dā'ī*) to God by His permission, and as a radiant lamp (*sirāj munīr*).” According to al-Rāzī, this verse means that Muhammad “was given five stations and was made to ascend from station to station: the rank of the authorized teacher (*al-ma'dhūn*), the wing (*al-janāh*) [i.e. *dā'ī*], the adjunct (*al-lāhiq*) [i.e. *hujja*], the completer (*al-mutimm*) [i.e. Imam], and the Speaker Prophet (*al-nāṭiq*).”¹⁰²⁹ Muhammad, like the Speaker Prophets before him, ascended the earthly ranks of the World of Religion, one by one, until he reached the rank of completeness and became a Speaker Prophet.

Even when the Speaker Prophet attains to the spiritual rank of completeness, he still cannot receive divine support directly from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul; he only accesses what emanates from the Universal Intellect and Soul through two spiritual intermediaries called *Jadd* and *Khayāl*. In al-Rāzī's esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ānic story where God's angelic messengers visit Abraham and appear as “honorable guests” (Q. 51:24-28), the two guests stand for *Jadd* and *Khayāl*; this very story symbolizes how Abraham connected to the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul and received their divine support (*ta'yīd, jāri*) by the mediation of *Jadd* and *Khayāl*.¹⁰³⁰ Al-Rāzī provided a similar reading of the celestial ascent (*mi'rāj*) of Prophet Muhammad as described in Q. 17:1: “Glorified is He who carried His servant on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque whose environs We have blessed, that We

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid., 222; al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, 123.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid., 196, 217; al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, 180.

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might show him some of Our Signs.” Most Muslim interpreters portrayed Muhammad riding upon the mythical horse *Burāq* from the Ka‘ba (the Sacred Mosque) in Mecca to the Dome of the Rock (the Furthest Mosque) in Jerusalem and subsequently ascending the heavens to the presence of God. According to the Ismailis, the *mi‘rāj* story allegorically depicts Muhammad’s spiritual journey to the rank of Speaker Prophet (*martabat al-nuṭq; ḥadd al-nāṭiqiyya*) and his ascent to the spiritual station of the Universal Intellect. As al-Rāzī explained, before Muhammad reached the rank of Speaker Prophet, he was spiritually connected to and supported by the Universal Soul through the mediation of *Khayāl*; Muhammad’s “night journey” from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque means that “he was elevated from conjunction with the Follower [Universal Soul] to conjunction with the Preceder [Universal Intellect] and attained the station of the Speaker Prophet (*martabat al-nuṭq*), which is the furthest of the ranks (*aqṣā al-ḥudūd*).”¹⁰³¹ Thus, the Sacred Mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) means the Universal Soul and the Furthest Mosque means the Universal Intellect (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*). Attaining the rank of the Speaker Prophet entails that Muhammad spiritually connected to the Universal Intellect through the mediation of *Jadd*. The mythical story that Muhammad rode the *Burāq* from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque means that “he connected to the *Jadd* from the direction of what ‘shone’ (*baraqa*) upon him through the *Khayāl* of the Follower [Universal Soul].”¹⁰³² Likewise, the story that Muhammad ascended the heavens means that “the *Jadd* connected him to the Preceder [Universal Intellect] until he was established in the rank of the Speaker Prophet.”¹⁰³³

¹⁰³¹ Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, 120; see also Nomoto, “Early Ismā‘īlī Thought on Prophecy,” 223.

¹⁰³² Ibid.

¹⁰³³ Ibid.

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In sum, the Speaker Prophet in al-Rāzī's theology receives divine support (*ta'yīd, jāri, baraka, mādda*) from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul through the mediation of *Jadd* and *Khayāl*; he connects to the Intellect through *Jadd* and connects to the Soul through *Khayāl*. Al-Rāzī interpreted a well-known *ḥadīth* in the Sunni canon – whose content suggests the verbal dictation theory of revelation – as an allegorical account of his Ismaili revelatory framework. According to one version of this *ḥadīth* discussed in Chapter 2, the Prophet was asked how divine inspiration (*wahy*) comes to him and he replied as follows:

Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell and this is the most difficult for me. Then it passes from me and I have retained what He said. Sometimes the Angel appears to me in the form of a man. Then he speaks to me so I grasp what he says.¹⁰³⁴

While Sunni exegetes understood the above tradition according to its literal meaning, al-Rāzī read it according to his Ismaili framework as follows: what the Prophet describes as receiving *wahy* like the ringing of a bell - which is “most difficult” (*ashaddu-hu*) for him – refers to his reception of divine inspiration from the Universal Intellect through the mediation of *Jadd*; he described it as “most difficult” because the Intellect is the highest rank in the spiritual hierarchy. The second experience, which the Prophet describes as the angel of revelation taking human form and speaking to him, refers to an imaginal vision received from the Universal Soul through the mediation of *Khayāl*. In al-Rāzī's words, the Speaker Prophets “attain visions with [their] body through *Khayāl* and attain to *Jadd* with their pure souls without their bodies.” He also read Q. 29:193-195, which refers to the Trusted Spirit bringing divine inspiration to Muhammad's heart, as an allusion to Muhammad being inspired in his heart through *Jadd* without any bodily component.¹⁰³⁵ Thus, al-

¹⁰³⁴ Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 1, Ḥadīth No. 2: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/1/2>.

¹⁰³⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, 187; see also Nomoto, “Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy,” 228-229. There is a similar discussion of these two modes of divine inspiration in *Proofs of Prophecy*, 214-218.

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Rāzī understood two forms of divine inspiration for the Speaker Prophets – non-verbal inspiration from the Universal Intellect through *Jadd* and imaginal vision that includes seeing bodily figures and hearing verbal speech from the Universal Soul through *Khayāl*. He further believed that the Speaker Prophet, Founder, or Imam could transmit and extend this divine inspiration to their *ḥujjas* through the power of *Khayāl*.¹⁰³⁶

The Revelatory Products: The Miraculous Qur'ān and its Revelatory Hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*)

The above ideas constitute the theological background to al-Rāzī's remarks on Qur'ānic Revelation found in his *Proofs of Prophecy*. His presentation was among the earlier expositions of the inimitability of the Qur'ān (*i jāz al-Qur'ān*) argument in Muslim literature. Al-Rāzī's rendition dates midway between the earliest scholars who used rudimentary versions of the argument – Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 230/845), al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869), and Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) – and the first Sunni scholars who elaborated on Qur'ānic inimitability in detail – Abū l-Ḥasan al-Rummānī (d. 386/994) and Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 338/998).¹⁰³⁷ There are similarities and differences between al-Rāzī's inimitability argument and what became the stock argument in Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī thought. The latter frames the inimitability of the Qur'ān as a miracle that God produced as a suspension of the habitual course (*kharq al-'āda*) of events in the physical world, thereby demonstrating the truthfulness of the Prophet. Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī perspectives differed over what precisely is inimitable about the Qur'ān because they subscribed to different definitions of speech (*kalām*) as noted in Chapter 4. The Mu'tazilī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 425/1025) held that

¹⁰³⁶ Nomoto, "Early Ismā'īlī Thought on Prophecy," 211-213, 217.

¹⁰³⁷ Vasalou, "The Miraculous Eloquence of the Qur'an," 24.

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Qur'ānic inimitability pertained to “the arrangement of the verbal expressions” (*tartīb al-alfāz*) and, more specifically, the degree of eloquence (*faṣāḥa*) in terms of “clarity of expression and excellence of content.”¹⁰³⁸ The Ash'arī scholar al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1081) argued that the Qur'ān's inimitability lies in its literary arrangement (*nazm*) – which refers to how the words are arranged in order to convey specific meanings and ideas; in other words, the inimitability of the Qur'ān pertains to the arrangement of both words and meanings.¹⁰³⁹

Writing over a century before them, al-Rāzī argued that the Qur'ān has four characteristics or qualities that make it inimitable and miraculous. First, the Qur'ān surpasses all the merits of poetry, prose, and oration while encompassing them all and yet cannot be classified as any of them because its literary genre is unique: “The Qur'ān...includes all these elements that are to be found in poetry, eloquent oratory, and rhymed prose, when examined in a formal sense, to say nothing about all the other elements included in it.” To support this, he referred to the accounts of how the Arabs of Muhammad's time could not classify the Qur'ān according to any Arabic speech form and were unable to recite anything like it. He also referred to the accusation of the Quraysh that Muhammad's words were sorcery as evidence of the Qur'ān's uniqueness in their eyes.¹⁰⁴⁰ Second, al-Rāzī argued that the teachings of the Qur'ān pertaining to the affairs of religion (*dīn*), the world (*dunyā*), and governance (*siyāsa*) are necessary to keep the world in order. These include a range of matters like the oneness of God, prayer, charity, teachings on virtue, rules that safeguard

¹⁰³⁸ Margaret Larkin, “The Inimitability of the Qur'an: Two Perspectives,” *Religion & Literature* 20/1 (1988): 31-47: 37-38.

¹⁰³⁹ *Ibid.*, 39-43.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Al-Rāzī, *The Proofs of Prophecy*, 174-175.

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property, punishments for adultery and theft, etc.¹⁰⁴¹ Third, the Qur'ān contains historical reports of the past and future as well as parables conveying moral truths – which the Prophet could only know about through divine support (*ta'yīd*) and inspiration (*wahy*) since he himself lacked the ability to read or write.¹⁰⁴²

Al-Rāzī's fourth argument is his most unique and has bearing upon his theory of Qur'ānic Revelation. He argued that there exists “a power hidden throughout the Qur'ān that penetrates into the hearts of people and ties them together through the support of God (*bi-ta'yīd min Allāh*).”¹⁰⁴³ It was due to this divine spiritual power manifesting through the Qur'ān that people answered Muhammad's call, obeyed him, committed themselves to him, and sacrificed their lives and properties to follow his guidance.¹⁰⁴⁴ For al-Rāzī, the Qur'ān's effect on human beings – evident to him through the expansion of Islam amongst numerous peoples and vast territories – signifies a hidden spiritual power operating within and through the Qur'ān.¹⁰⁴⁵ As he went on to explain, the divine power manifesting in and through the Qur'ān is nothing else but divine inspiration (*wahy*) itself, which he called the Holy Spirit (*al-rūh al-qudus; al-rūh al-muqaddasa*). Muhammad received this Holy Spirit through his individual sensory spirit and his rational soul because of his spiritual purity and virtue:

Muhammad was the purest of men in soul and the most noble in spirit. His rational spirit and sensory soul were better prepared to receive the impression of divine inspiration (*āthār al-wahy*) and more attuned to the Holy Spirit (*al-rūh al-muqaddasa*) by which God supported His Prophets and Messengers than all the souls and spirits of mankind. That divine inspiration (*al-wahy*) thus imprinted itself on his soul because of its purity from the pollution of the spiritual diseases (*al-*

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰⁴² Ibid., 177.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid., 184.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid., 186.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid., 190.

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'awāriḍ al-naḥsānīyya) that darken the soul, such as caprice, envy, arrogance, greed, miserliness, tyranny, pride, and such like, all of which harm and corrupt the human soul. He was thus the most pure in soul of all God's creatures and the most unsullied by the filth that corrupts the soul. This Holy Spirit imprinted (*aththarat*) upon his sensory soul and intermingled with his pure rational spirit free from all taint and filth.¹⁰⁴⁶

According to the above explanation, Muhammad received divine inspiration (*wahy*) in the form of the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-muqaddasa*) – which is what al-Rāzī calls divine support (*ta'yīd*), stream (*jārī*), blessing (*baraka*) and spiritual sustenance (*mādda*) from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul in his Ismaili works. Muhammad's soul – comprising his rational soul and sensory soul – was able to accept the Holy Spirit because it was pure and devoid of various spiritual pollutions that corrupt human souls. Thus, in al-Rāzī's view, the transmission of divine inspiration and prophecy to a human being is not merely an arbitrary choice by God, but very much dependent on the spiritual receptivity and capacity of the recipient's soul to receive and accept the Holy Spirit. Muhammad's soul, being at the highest level of virtue and purity, became “imprinted” and “intermingled” with the Holy Spirit. The direct consequence of the Holy Spirit imprinting upon his soul was that Muhammad came to know God's oneness and grandeur, attained certainty with respect to God's promises and commands, and harbored steadfast faith in God's guidance.¹⁰⁴⁷

Al-Rāzī then explained how Muhammad received the divine inspiration (*wahy*) and rendered it into the verbal discourse that is the Qur'ān: “When that divine inspiration (*al-wahy*) imprinted upon his soul (*aththara fī naḥsihi*) and he accepted it with his heart (*qabalahu bi-qalbihi*) and depicted it in his thought (*ṣawwarahu fī fikrihi*), he manifested it through his discourse (*bi-nuṭqihī*).”¹⁰⁴⁸ This statement speaks to the two modes of divine inspiration that al-Rāzī discussed

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibid., 179. My translation differs in minor ways from the published translation. I have consistently translated *naḥs* as “soul”, *rūḥ* as “spirit”, and *wahy* as “divine inspiration” instead of “revelation”.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ibid., 179.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Ibid., 180.

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in his Ismaili writings: Muhammad's reception of divine inspiration with his soul (*nafs*) and heart (*qalb*) is the non-verbal spiritual inspiration of the Universal Intellect mediated by *Jadd*; his depiction (*taṣwīr*) of the divine inspiration within his thought (*fikr*) is the imaginal vision of the Universal Soul mediated by *Khayāl*. The last stage of the Revelatory Process consists of Muhammad himself verbalizing divine inspiration in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān, which is a verbal discourse (*nuṭq*) signifying this divine inspiration in an accessible form.

In the Ismaili thought of al-Rāzī, the Arabic Qur'ān is a verbal discourse produced by Muhammad to convey what he receives as divine inspiration from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul to his people, who are otherwise incapable of perceiving it. In other sections of the *Proofs of Prophecy*, al-Rāzī explained that the speech of the Prophets consists entirely of symbols (*rumūz*) and parables (*amthāl*), which contain inner truths not apparent to most people. The true meaning of these parables is only known to the spiritual elite of the community. The outward (*zāhir*) or literal meaning of these prophetic verbal discourses – such as the Gospels and the Qur'ān – greatly differ but their inner meanings are one and the same.¹⁰⁴⁹ Thus, what the Prophet Muhammad conveyed as the Qur'ān in terms of Arabic letters, words, and verses is symbolic of the higher level truths contained in the divine inspiration. Even still, the Arabic Qur'ān in its external recited form is capable of conveying the power of divine inspiration to others. According to al-Rāzī, the speech of Muhammad “impressed” upon the souls of those who accepted his words in a manner similar to how the Holy Spirit impressed upon Muhammad's soul:

What Muhammad brought forth resembled a light shining upon the world, which lit up the hearts of men. Those nearest to him in innocence and purity accepted him, but not necessarily those nearest in terms of kinship. By “nearness” is intended spiritual nearness – that is say, those who were nearest to him in purity of the souls and security from filth, and the nearness, similarity, and harmony of such souls one with another. Thus, his speech imprinted on the souls of those who accepted him and intermingled with them, just as the Holy Spirit had intermingled with the soul of Muhammad. His

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ibid., 52-56.

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distinction (*faḍluhu*) over the person who receives it [divine inspiration] from him as his speech was akin to the distinction of what the person who receives it [divine inspiration] through the mediation of the spiritual angels (*al-malā'ika al-rūḥāniyyīn*) in the rank of spiritual subtlety (*ḥadd al-liṭāfa*) over the person who receives it through [both] the mediation of the angels and from him by way of verbal discourse (*al-nuṭq*). Those among them who had a purer soul were better prepared to accept that speech and to be influenced by its power in their hearts... The effect on their spirits varied with their purity. Murky and villainous souls, corrupted by the spiritual diseases mentioned above and thus prevented from purity, recoiled from it [divine inspiration].¹⁰⁵⁰

Al-Rāzī thus considered a person's reception of divine inspiration from Muhammad in the form of his speech (the Qur'ān and his prophetic guidance) to be a degree lower in spiritual merit than Muhammad's reception of divine inspiration in a purely spiritual manner. Nevertheless, Muhammad's enunciation of divine inspiration into verbal discourse and its hearing by others amounts to a partial re-enactment of the divine inspiration that he received from the spiritual hierarchy. For this reason, a person's acceptance of Muhammad's speech and its effect upon that person's soul directly depends on the recipient's degree of purity and his soul being free of spiritual defilements. When such conditions obtain, Muhammad's speech imprints and influences the souls of its hearers due to the power of divine inspiration within it.

Al-Rāzī's held that God's support and inspiration continues flowing upon the Founder and the Imams who succeed Muhammad. In his words, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was "the leader of the sages" (*ra'is al-ḥukamā'*) in the community after the Prophet: "He was not a Prophet, but he was inspired through his heart and was a man addressed by God (*muḥaddath*). Such [divinely] inspired and addressed individuals in our community are equivalent to the Prophets among other nations."¹⁰⁵¹ Thus, the Revelatory Process continues to take place through the Imams from the family of the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ibid., 180. My translation slightly differs from the published translation.

¹⁰⁵¹ Ibid., 220.

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Al-Rāzī presented his understanding of how divine inspiration extends to the Founder and the Imams through his esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the *Sūrat al-Qadr* about the famous Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*). As we saw in Chapter 2, most Sunni exegetes and some Twelver scholars believed that God sent down the entire pre-existent Qur'ān from the Tablet to the lowest heaven on the Night of Destiny, and that Gabriel subsequently delivered portions of the Qur'ān to Muhammad over the twenty years of his prophetic mission. Al-Rāzī invoked this popular understanding of the Night of Destiny and interpreted it as a symbolic description of how divine support flows from the Neoplatonic Revelatory Principle to the Founder and the Imams (called “Completers”). His exegesis of *Sūrat al-Qadr* was as follows:

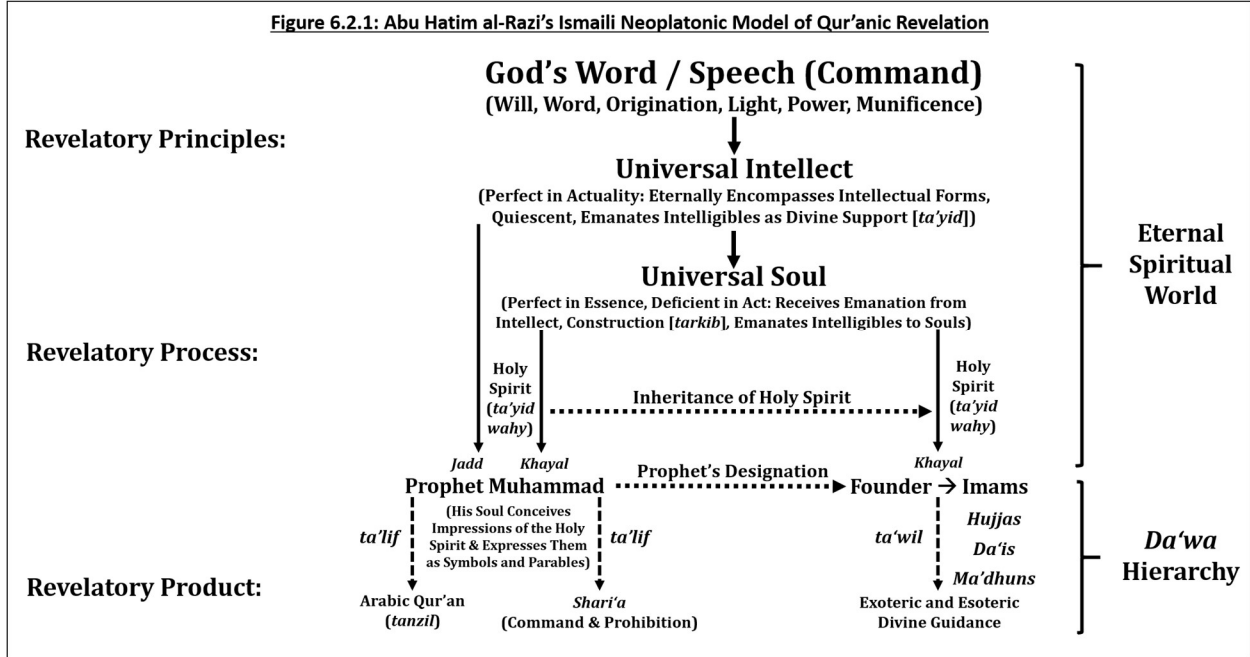
“Indeed We sent it down in the Night of Destiny.” The “Night of Destiny” refers to the Founder and “Destiny” (*al-qadr*) refers to the Follower [Universal Soul]. This means that the station (*maqam*) of the Founder in the lower world is the station of the Follower in the higher world, just as the station of the Speaker Prophet in the lower world is the station of the Preceder in the higher world.... They say the Qur'ān was sent down in the Night of Destiny to the lowest heaven and then came down in installments to the Messenger. This means that the Founder acquired blessing (*al-baraka*) from the Speaker Prophet because he is lower in rank than him and he [Speaker Prophet] causes it [the blessing] to be near to him, so he [the Founder] is divinely supported with all of it. Then his allotment was divided to each Completer through his *Khayāl*. It is the installment that descended to each Completer standing in the station of the Messenger of God.¹⁰⁵²

According to al-Rāzī's commentary, the Qur'ānic Night of Destiny is a symbolic description of the Prophet's Legatee and Founder 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. The “Destiny” (*al-qadr*) that characterizes this night is the Universal Soul in the Neoplatonic realm. The meaning of God sending down the Qur'ān on the Night of Destiny is that divine support, inspiration, and blessing emanate from the Universal Soul upon the soul of the Founder; this occurs through the Prophet's authority and mediation. The Founder then relays and transmits this divine support and inspiration to the Imams of his progeny through the spiritual power of *Khayāl*; this is the true meaning of the claim that the Qur'ān was sent down to the Prophet in installments. In this way, the Founder and the Imams

¹⁰⁵² Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ*, 129-130.

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continue to receive divine support and inspiration after the Prophet Muhammad and function as his successors in dispensing divine guidance.



Conclusion:

Al-Rāzī's framework of Qur'ānic Revelation was quite different from earlier Ismaili ideas in the prior century as well as the positions in Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām*. He regarded divine inspiration – variously described as *wahy*, *ta'yīd*, *jārī*, *mādda*, and *baraka* – as a non-verbal spiritual influx of divine guidance, knowledge, and spiritual nourishment flowing from the Revelatory Principle – the Word of God, Universal Intellect, and Universal Soul – to the soul of the Speaker Prophet. Al-Rāzī argued for the inimitability of the Qur'ān in a manner partly akin to Sunni *kalām* arguments. He presented the Arabic Qur'ān as a miraculous discourse transcending all forms of Arabic speech (poetry, prose, rhyming speech, soothsayer speech) in its literary form and merit. But al-Rāzī did not situate the inimitability of the Qur'ān as a “break” in the natural course of physical events – such an idea is incompatible with the Ismaili Neoplatonic worldview where the Universal Soul

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produces and governs the corporeal world without the need to alter its activity. Al-Rāzī's most unique argument for the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān focused on the spiritual power of divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*) within the Qur'ān. In framing this argument, al-Rāzī put forth his own theory of Qur'anic Revelation: divine inspiration in the form of the Holy Spirit flowed upon Muhammad's pure virtuous soul and "impressed" and "intermingled" with it. Muhammad received this divine inspiration with his soul and heart, visually depicted it in his thought (*fikr*), and then verbalized it as inimitable Arabic speech consisting of symbols and parables constituting the Qur'ān. Within al-Rāzī's Ismaili terminology, the Revelatory Process of the Qur'ān is three-fold, consisting of 1) spiritual inspiration from the Universal Intellect to Muhammad's soul through *Jadd*, 2) imaginal vision from the Universal Soul to Muhammad's thought through *Khayāl*, and 3) verbal enunciation by Muhammad. The Qur'ān as the Revelatory Product is the verbal composition of Muhammad symbolizing the higher truths emanating from the Revelatory Principle. Muhammad's inimitable Qur'anic speech also impresses upon the souls of his most virtuous followers – thereby replicating Muhammad's own spiritual experience of receiving the Holy Spirit at a lower degree. For al-Rāzī, the divine inspiration manifesting through the Qur'ān and kindling other human souls is the greatest proof of Muhammad's Prophethood. Following Muhammad, the divine inspiration and support continues - through the intermediary of *Khayāl* – to the souls of the Founder and the Imams, who interpret the Qur'ān and dispense its revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) to the believers through the Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy. Al-Rāzī's contributions on Qur'anic Revelation stands among the earliest Ismaili Neoplatonic formulations on the topic.

6.2.2 From God's Creative Speech to Muhammad's Miraculous Utterances: The Brethren of Purity (fl. fourth/tenth century)

The “Brethren of Purity and the Loyal Friends” (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa-khullān al-wafā'*) were an anonymous brotherhood of Muslim intellectuals organized into an esoteric initiatic order. They were based in Basra and Baghdad and active sometime in the fourth/tenth century. The Brethren were devoted to the natural, intellectual, and religious sciences and composed a famous encyclopedia of their collective knowledge in 52 epistles (plus two summary epistles) known as the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. The Epistles had a wide readership in Muslim societies and greatly influenced the development and transmission of Islamic science and philosophy. The Brethren's identities, religious affiliation, and precise date of activity remains subject to widespread disagreement among modern scholars. Paul Casanova had maintained that the Epistles were written between 418/1027 and 427/1035. But this view has been revised in more recent scholarship. Abbas Hamdani supports an early dating between 260/873 and 297/909 and views the Brethren as the intellectual wing of the Ismaili *da'wa* providing the intellectual impetus for the Fatimid Caliphate. Other scholars including Samuel Stern, and Madelung push for a later date around the mid fourth/tenth century and see the Brethren as an Ismaili movement not aligned with the Fatimids.¹⁰⁵³

The uncertainty over their time period and religious identity does not diminish the fact that the Brethren's Epistles exerted considerable influence among later Ismaili thinkers including Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the Ṭayyibī Ismaili *da'wa*, with the latter ascribing the authorship of the

¹⁰⁵³ A short review of these proposals is given in Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 28-32. A fuller account of various proposals concerning the dating of the Epistles and the religious affiliation of the Brethren is provided Carmela Baffioni, “Ikhwān al-Safā',” in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), accessed on 12/13/2018: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/ikhwan-al-safa/>.

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Epistles to one of the pre-Fatimid concealed Ismaili Imams.¹⁰⁵⁴ How the Brethren deal with the issue of Qur'ānic Revelation remains paramount when charting the intellectual history of Ismaili positions through the third/ninth, fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. In what follows below, I consider their views on the following interrelated topics: God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*), God's Writing (*kitāb Allāh*), divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*), and the revealed prophetic speech of Muhammad.

God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) and God's Writing (*kitāb Allāh*): Neither Created nor Uncreated

The Brethren presented their understanding of God's Speech in the context of the *kalām* debates taking place in the late third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries. They began by observing how both the "Qur'ān is created" and the "Qur'ān is not created" positions flow from conflicting ideas about the nature of speech in general. These Brethren identified the concept of speech among the "root principles" (*uṣūl*) of the entire debate:

This ruling [the createdness of the Qur'ān] is constructed upon [the fact] that speech is only letters and sounds which the speaker produces in the air. Therefore, this root-principle (*al-aṣl*) necessitates that the Qur'ān is created (*makhlūq*). As for the root-principle of the person who realizes that letters and sounds are only signs and instruments and that speech is only that meaning which is in the thoughts of the soul, this root-principle necessitates that the Qur'ān is not created (*lā yakūn al-qur'ān makhlūq*), because God eternally knows that meaning which is within His knowledge and that meaning is eternally known to Him.¹⁰⁵⁵

¹⁰⁵⁴ Carmela Baffioni, "Nāsir-i Khosrow, translator of the Ikhwān al-Safā'?" in Verena Klemm and Nuha al-Sha'ar (eds.), *Sources and Approaches across Disciplines in Near Eastern Studies: Proceedings of the 24th Congress, Union Européenne des Arabisants et des Islamisants* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 215), (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies), 319–331; Daniel De Smet, "L'auteur des *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* selon les sources ismaéliennes ṭayyibites," *Shii Studies Review* 1/1-2 (2017): 151-166.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa-khullān al-wafā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 4 Vols., ed. Buṭrus al-Bustānī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), Vol. 3, Ep. 42, 517.

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The above positions, while not being specific, generally conform to the Mu'tazilī and Kullābī/Ash'arī views on the nature of God's Speech. The Mu'tazilīs, as recalled from Chapter 3 and 4, defined speech as a combination of sounds and letters and asserted the createdness of the Qur'ān on this basis. Meanwhile, the Kullābīs and Ash'arīs regarded speech as a quality or meaning subsisting in the soul and argued the eternity of God's Speech on this principle. The reference to the meaning of the Qur'ān eternally existing in God's Knowledge echoes some mid third/ninth-century views associated with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and others.

After demarcating the two main views in the debate, the Brethren then presented a third position about God's Speech, which turns out to be their own view of the matter:

Among them are those who regard the speech of every speaker as his [act of] "causing another to understand" (*ifhāmuḥu ḡhayrahu*) a meaning through any language, expression or indication. Thus, the Speech of God to Gabriel is His causing [him] to understand that meaning, and likewise, [the speech of] Gabriel to Muhammad [is his causing him to understand that meaning], and likewise, [the speech of] Muhammad to his community [is his causing them to understand that meaning], and likewise some of the community [cause] others [to understand that meaning], and all of them are created.¹⁰⁵⁶

The Brethren thus took the position that all speech is *ifhām* – an action of the speaker in which he causes the recipient to understand a meaning or intention. They applied this definition to every level of speech – including God's Speech, Gabriel's speech, and the Prophet's speech. As seen earlier in Chapter 3 and 4, the term *ifhām* in connection to Qur'ānic Revelation was used by Ibn Kullāb, al-Ash'arī, and later Ash'arī theologians to describe how God communicates His Speech to Gabriel and how Gabriel recites it to Muhammad. It is even possible that the Brethren derived this position from Ibn Kullāb's circle, although this would need to be confirmed by further evidence.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid.

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In any case, by defining speech as an action instead of an attribute, the Brethren appeared to regard all speech as “created” (*makhlūq*). However, they understood God’s Speech, i.e. God’s act of *ifhām*, to be different in nature from other acts of speech. According to the Brethren, God’s Speech is not created:

As for God’s causing understanding for Gabriel (*ifhām Allāh li-Jibrīl*), it is not created (*laysa makhlūq*) because God’s [act of] causing understanding (*ifhām Allāh*) is an origination (*ibdā'*) from Him, and the origination is not the originator just as knowledge is neither the knower nor the instructor. Many among those disputants (*mujāddila*) do not recognize the difference between what is created (*al-makhlūq*) and what is originated (*al-mubda'*) or between creation (*al-khalq*) and origination (*al-ibdā'*). Know that creation (*khalq*) is the bringing something into existence from something else, just as God said: “*We created you from dust.*” As for origination (*al-ibdā'*), it is bringing something into existence from nothing, and the Speech of God is the origination (*al-ibdā'*) by which He originated the originated beings (*al-mubda'āt*), just as He said: “*Our word to a thing when We desire it,*” i.e. Our origination, “*is that We say: ‘Be (kun), and it is.*”¹⁰⁵⁷

While the Brethren denied the view that God’s Speech is created, they did not take the opposite position that God’s Speech is “uncreated” (*ghayr makhlūq*). Instead, the Brethren resorted to a classical Ismaili teaching that God’s Speech is His creative act of Origination (*al-ibdā'*). God’s Origination brings the Universal Intellect into existence from non-existence; this is an act of existentiation *ex-nihilo*. The Brethren reserve the technical term “creation” (*khalq*) for the action of bringing a physical thing into existence from matter and form: “Creation (*khalq*) is ordaining (*taqdīr*) each thing from something else: a production (*al-maṣnū'*) is nothing else than the coming to be (*kawn*) of a form into a matter.”¹⁰⁵⁸ Thus, the Brethren conceived reality as consisting of a spiritual world and a physical world and defined God’s Speech as His act of originating (*al-ibdā'*) the spiritual world all at once from non-existence; meanwhile, creation (*khalq*) is a secondary process of bringing the corporeal world into existence from the spiritual world.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid., 472-473.

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It follows from the above discussion that the Revelatory Principle in the Brethren's cosmological system is God's Speech, which is otherwise called God's Command (*al-amr*), Word (*al-kalima*), Will (*al-irāda*), and Origination (*al-ibdā'*). In the Brethren's worldview, God's Speech plays both cosmological and prescriptive functions in relation to the spiritual and corporeal worlds. The content of God's Speech, first and foremost, is onto-cosmological and encompasses everything that exists: "The whole world, with what is in it, is within God's Command (*amr*), be He praised, not outside it, and cannot escape it; it is within its handful and under its volition, and it is the first and the highest."¹⁰⁵⁹ In this respect, God's Speech ontologically prefigures all existents in a primordial metaphysical station of inclusive oneness (*waḥda*). God's Speech also grounds the existence of the spiritual and corporeal worlds and continuously sustains them: "Origination and invention are not like construction and composition... The existence of the world from God is like the existence of speech from the speaker. If He refrains from speaking, the speech ceases to exist."¹⁰⁶⁰ For this reason, the Brethren described God's Speech as "the reality by means of which the world was created" (*al-ḥāqq al-makhlūqa bihi l-dunyā*) – a term that the famous Andalusian mystics Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141) and Ibn al-'Arabī (560-638/1164-1240) employed throughout their mystical works to talk about the source of all creation in God's All-Merciful Breath (*al-nafas al-raḥmān*).¹⁰⁶¹

God's Speech "flows" or "reverberates" down through the entire cosmological hierarchy of the spiritual and corporeal words.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Risāla al-jāmi'a*, tr. Carmela Baffioni in "The Role of the Divine Imperative (*amr*) in the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and Related Works," *Ishraq* 4 (2017): 46–70: 58-59. I translate *amr* as "Command" instead of "Imperative".

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 3, 351. See also Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 47 for a discussion of this passage.

¹⁰⁶¹ Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 54. For Ibn Barrajān's view, see Gerhard Bowering and Yousef Casewit (eds.), *A Qur'ān Commentary by Ibn Barrajān of Seville (d. 536/1141)* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

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The Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*) is continuously connected to [the world], reinforcing it with abundance (*ifāda*) and benevolence in order that it be complete and continue existing. [The Word] begins its flow (*ḥayāḥ*) through its unification with the First Originated Being (*al-mubda' al-awwal*), the Active Intellect, then, through the mediation of the Intellect, [the Word reaches] the Universal Soul, the passive intellect; then through the mediation of the Universal Soul, [it reaches] Prime Matter; then, through the mediation of Prime Matter, the Absolute Body.¹⁰⁶²

The Brethren also attributed a prescriptive function to God's Speech; it maintains the order (*nizām*) of the world, which would disintegrate without its continual emanation.¹⁰⁶³ In all cases, God's Speech functions as a command (*amr*) for its recipients including the Intellect, Soul, the angels, and God's human servants who are divinely supported (*mu'ayyadūn*):

The Creator is not Himself in direct contact with bodies, nor does He undertake actions by His Essence, but rather, He commands His entrusted angels and His divinely supported servants, so they perform what they are commanded [to do]. This is akin to how the kings, who are the vicegerents of God in His earth, command their servants, attendants, and subjects and do not perform those actions themselves – [the kings] being too noble and majestic. Likewise, God [only] commands, intends, wills, or speaks: "Be and it is."¹⁰⁶⁴

Within the corporeal world, God's Speech is "scattered throughout the world through its time and it distinguishes, among virtuous human persons, the Prophets and the Messengers and the righteous worshippers."¹⁰⁶⁵ God's Speech emanates upon certain human beings in the form of divine support (*ta'yīd*) and divine inspiration (*waḥy*). As we will see later, the Prophets translate God's Command into concrete commands and prohibitions for their communities.

In addition to God's Speech, the Brethren expounded a distinctive understanding of *kitāb*, widely understood in their time as "book" or "writing", that differs greatly from the views of Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām*. The Brethren specified that their knowledge stems from four books: 1) the books

¹⁰⁶² Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Risāla al-jāmi'a*, quoted in Ebstein, 49. I have re-translated the passage from Ebstein's Arabic transliteration with minor differences from Ebstein's translation.

¹⁰⁶³ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Risāla al-jāmi'a*, tr. Baffioni, "The Role of the Divine Imperative," 58-59.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 2, 128. See also the translation by Baffioni in "The Role of the Divine Imperative," 50.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Risāla al-jāmi'a*, quoted in Ebstein, 49. I have re-translated the passage from Ebstein's Arabic transliteration with minor differences from Ebstein's translation.

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of the sages and philosophers concerning mathematical and natural sciences; 2) the revealed books (*al-kutub al-munazzala*) brought by the Prophets like the Torah, Gospels, and the Qur'ān – whose meanings the Prophets received through divine inspiration (*wahy*) from the angels and contain hidden secrets; 3) the natural books (*al-kutub al-ṭab'iyya*), which are the forms of the existents composed of form and matter including the spheres, the divisions of the Zodiac, the movements of celestial and sublunar bodies, the elements, the living kingdoms, and the productions of humans; and 4) the divine books (*al-kutub al-ilāhiyya*), which are the substances of the souls as well as their genii, species, particulars, and their manifestations within bodies.¹⁰⁶⁶

The Brethren went on to describe the archetypal forms (*ṣuwar*) of the spiritual and corporeal worlds that the Universal Intellect (Pen) emanates or “inscribes” upon the Universal Soul (Guarded Tablet) as the celestial “writing” (*kitāb*) of God:

The Divine Circle (*al-dā'ira al-ilāhiyya*) and the intelligible supernal forms (*al-ṣuwar al-'aqliyya al-'ulwiyya*) are a book (*kitāb*), whose lines are signed [and] written by the Pen of [Divine] Will (*qalam al-irāda*) and preserved in the Tablet of [Divine] Will (*lawḥ al-mashī'a*) – such that it [the Tablet] preserves them. By means of them, its word emanates in what is under it until spiritual and simple things come to be among them, luminous and apparent from them, through their being in the Circle of the Universal Soul. So all of them are straightened in place without departing, like letters arranged in their ordered lines and well-traced scripts, arranged in their divisions, uniform in their order and without leaving one another.¹⁰⁶⁷

The Brethren thus regard the “intellectual heavenly forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-'aqliyya al-ulwiyya*) to be an archetypal or celestial *kitāb* within the higher spiritual realm of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. These intellectual forms first exist in a unified manner within the Universal Intellect; the Intellect emanates the intellectual forms upon the Universal Soul in which they are differentiated akin to scripted letters. According to the Neoplatonic cosmology of the Brethren, the intellectual forms of this cosmic *kitāb* are manifested in the natural corporeal world and within

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 41-42, 167-68.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 203. See also the translation by Baffioni in “The Role of the Divine Imperative,” 67-68.

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human souls. Thus, the spiritual world, the corporeal world and the human being could each be called a *kitāb* or “cosmic writing” from the Brethren’s perspective.¹⁰⁶⁸

Prophethood, Divine Inspiration (*wahy*) and Divine Support (*ta'yīd*):

The Brethren generally situated *wahy*, *ilhām*, and *tay'īd* as the summit of different ways of knowing by which humans apprehend objects of knowledge (*ma'lūmāt*). In one epistle, the Brethren described this epistemic hierarchy as including the senses, the transmission of narrations and reports, faculties of the innate intellect such as reflection, vision and contemplation, acts of the acquired intellect like analogy and deduction, and finally, *wahy* and *ilhām*.¹⁰⁶⁹ In another Epistle, they wrote that “the highest rank that the human being attains from the aspect of his soul and the noblest degree he reaches through the purity of its substance is the reception of *wahy* by which humanity is elevated over the rest of the children of his genus.”¹⁰⁷⁰ The Brethren put forth a somewhat different categorization of knowledge in the *Risāla al-jāmi'a*, where they divided knowledge into speculative (*nazarī*) and reported (*khabarī*). The latter category they also subdivided into reports about physical matters and reports about metaphysical matters. Metaphysical knowledge derives from “higher divine supports” (*ta'yīdāt 'ulwiyya*) and is available to the Prophets and others who have attained a similar spiritual level. Those who are divinely supported through lordly supports (*al-mu'ayyadūna bi l-ta'yīdāt al-rabbāniyya*) receive this knowledge “from what the angels have cast to them, from the holy spirit by which they were

¹⁰⁶⁸ The Brethren also refer to the Universal Intellect, which encompasses all spiritual exists, as “His Book that He wrote with His own hand”, *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 206. They similarly speak of the human being as “the book which Allah has written with His own hands”, see Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 176.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 3, 303.

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 83.

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supported (*mimmā laqqanahu ilayhim al-malā'ika wa-mā'uyyidū bihi min rūḥ al-qudus*) and from that which is contained in the revealed books.”¹⁰⁷¹ The Brethren thus used the terms *wahy*, *ilhām*, and *ta'yīd* to refer to divine inspiration.

As for the actual experience of *wahy* for human beings, the Brethren provided more detailed descriptions in one of their Epistles. For human beings in general, “*wahy* is information about affairs hidden from the senses alighting in the soul of the human being without his intention or effort.”¹⁰⁷² They went on to outline three different modes of divine inspiration based on their reading of Q. 42:51. The first mode of *wahy* occurs in dreams when the soul does not use its physical senses. In such a state, the soul's dream-vision is “the soul's conception of the impressions of the sensibles within its essence and its imagining of the affairs of what exists before their coming to be through its power of reflection in the state of sleep and the quietude of the senses.”¹⁰⁷³ The second form occurs in the state of waking where the senses are quiet. This latter mode is subdivided into two forms: the recipient of *wahy* either hears sound in the form of indications without seeing any figure or hears speech (*kalām*) without seeing any figure. The argument for the human beings receiving divine inspiration in these modes is that the soul is spiritual (*rūḥānī*) and has spiritual faculties – besides the physical senses and bodily organs – through which it can perceive knowledge.¹⁰⁷⁴

The Brethren then offered specific information on how the Prophets receive *wahy* and *ta'yīd* while they are awake and active in the world. First, they situated the status of Prophets

¹⁰⁷¹ Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 69.

¹⁰⁷² *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 84.

¹⁰⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 85-86.

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among human beings within a more general theory of the gradation of species. This framework of species gradation conceives all creatures from minerals to human beings to angels as members of a hierarchy based on their physical form and spiritual qualities. Within the species hierarchy, some species constitute “borders” or “intermediaries” that connect one level to the next. For example, based on spiritual qualities like beauty and intelligence, the Brethren regarded red gold as the noblest mineral standing between minerals and lowest kinds of plants; moss stands at the lowest level of plants and borders the noblest rank of minerals; the palm tree, which has sex, is at the noblest level of plants and borders the animal kingdom; the snail is the lowest rank of animal and borders the plants. Finally, the elephant, the most intelligent of animals, is the noblest of the animal kingdom and closest to human beings.¹⁰⁷⁵

In accordance with this framework, human beings exist in a hierarchy of knowledge (*‘ilm*, *ma‘rifa*) and spiritual merit, ranging from the ignorant (*jāhil*) to the intelligent (*‘āqil*); the latter group is likewise arranged in a knowledge hierarchy with respect to physical matters (*ma‘lūmāt jismāniyya*) and spiritual matters (*ma‘lūmāt rūḥāniyya*). The possessors of spiritual knowledge rank supreme among human beings because they are closer to the rank of angels. The human hierarchy of knowledge reaches its apex in the persons of the Prophets:

Every knower whose knowledge is more spiritual comes closer to resembling the angels. Because of this, God appointed a community among the children of Adam to be intermediaries (*wāsiṭa*) between humanity and the angels since the intermediary is what resembles one of the two boundaries in one respect and [resembles] the other boundary in another respect. These are the Prophets, who resemble the angels through their souls and the purity of their substance and from another aspect they resemble human beings through the coarseness of their bodies.¹⁰⁷⁶

¹⁰⁷⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Revised Edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 69-70. See also *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 116, for examples.

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 121.

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The Brethren speak of the angels as pure souls or spiritual powers (*quwwāt*) emanating from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul, which perform specific functions for the maintenance of the spiritual and corporeal realms of the Cosmos.¹⁰⁷⁷ The Prophets are the most spiritually refined humans serving as intermediaries between spiritual angels and corporeal human beings by virtue of their spiritual souls resembling the pure substance of the angels and their dense bodies resembling the coarse corporeality of human beings. Thus, the superiority of the Prophets over other human beings and the basis of their resemblance to the angels is the purity of their souls and their spiritual knowledge – according to the principle that spiritual knowledge resembles the angels.

The mediating status of the Prophets means that they receive divine inspiration and support directly from the spiritual angels. The Prophet is “the holy soul supported by the power of the Divine Word” (*al-nafs al-qudsiyya al-mu'ayyada bi-quwwat al-kalima al-ilāhiyya*).¹⁰⁷⁸ Divine support both emanates from and conveys God's Speech; it emanates downward through the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. From the Universal Soul, the divine support descends through three spiritual angels – Seraphiel, Michael, and Gabriel – through whom it reaches the souls of the Prophets.¹⁰⁷⁹ The Prophets perceived this divine inspiration in a manner quite different from audible sounds and letters. This is because the speech of angels is not like human speech but

¹⁰⁷⁷ For the Brethren's understanding of the angels, see Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect Part 1: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of EPISTLES 32-36*, ed. and tr. Paul E. Walker, Ismail K. Poonawala, David Simonowitz, Godefroid De Callatay (New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015), 32, 34-36, 45, 57, 84, 89, 90, 100.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 68.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect*, 34-36.

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consists of the spiritual substances of the soul.¹⁰⁸⁰ The Brethren's account of the Prophets' perception of *wahy* from the spiritual angels is as follows:

O brother, know that the speech of the angels is only indications (*ishārāt*) and signs (*īmā'*) while the speech of human beings is expressions (*'ibārāt*) and utterances (*alfāz*). As for the meanings, they are common to all of them. The Prophets would take divine inspiration (*al-wahy*) and information (*al-anbā'*) from the angels as indications and signs through the spiritual subtlety of the quick perception of their souls (*bi-laṭāfa dhakā' nufūsihim*) and the purity of their substance. They would express those meanings for the people through the tongue, which is an organ of the body, to each community through their language and expressions well-known among them.¹⁰⁸¹

Divine inspiration (*wahy*) takes the form of spiritual indications and hints, which the Prophets perceive through the subtlety of their souls' power of quick perception. The Brethren's language here, albeit imprecise, suggests that they understood the concept of *wahy* along the lines of its earliest meanings in Muslim thought – as a non-verbal and instantaneous inspiration. As seen in Chapter 1, *wahy* in pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'ānic discourse denotes a private, mysterious or “coded” communication that is very quick, akin to a flash, which is intelligible only to its direct recipient and no one else. The Brethren contrasted the non-verbal nature of *wahy* with the verbal form of what the Prophets enunciate to their communities. Only the latter consists of verbal expressions (*'ibārāt*) and audible utterances (*alfāz*), which the Prophets constructed using “well-known expressions” (*al-alfāz al-ma'rūfa*) in the language of their respective nations. The terms *'ibāra* and *lafz*, which refer to the Arabic linguistic sounds and letters of the Qur'ān, figured heavily in contemporary Sunni *kalām* debates. The Brethren thus drew a clear distinction in the Revelatory Process between the non-verbal divine inspiration (*wahy*) granted to the Prophets and the verbal linguistic expressions (*'ibārāt*) that the Prophets coined to address their communities. Most notably, they framed the Prophets as creative agents who compose the linguistic expressions

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 3, 142.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 122.

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for their own people in a form tailored to them. In this respect, their position was consistent with earlier Ismaili teachings and the Qur'ānic concept of revelation seen in Chapter 1 while remaining vastly different from Sunni theories of verbal dictation found in *kalām* and *tafsīr*.

The Brethren stressed the prophetic function of *tanzīl*, the act of composing verbal expressions to symbolize the contents of divine inspiration, when discussing the case of Prophet Muhammad specifically. They went as far as to describe Muhammad's act of verbalizing divine inspiration into a discourse accessible to various people as the Prophet's inimitable miracle (*mu'jiza*). Baffioni analyzed their Epistle dealing with language and found that the Brethren regarded the Prophet's power of linguistic expression to be his main miracle.¹⁰⁸² As the Brethren described it:

The Prophet answered the person from his community (*ummatihi*) who asked questions in his own idiom (*bi-lughatihi*), and imposed obligations on him and spoke to him in his own language (*bi-lisānihi*). As for others, he spoke to them in their own speech (*bi-kalāmihim*), as he was only sent (*mab'ūth*) to them and resided among them. He taught and guided them, made expressions easy for them (*sahhala 'alayhim al-alfāz*), coined meanings for them (*ḍaraba lahum al-ma'ānī*), and treated them with kindness, until they understood the religion and learned the Qur'ān in a pure language (*lisān faṣīḥ*) in which there is neither mistake, alteration, nor modification when there is sound memory and perfect direction.¹⁰⁸³

It is not clear whether the Brethren regarded the Prophet speaking in multiple languages to address the needs of his audience or whether the terms *lughā*, *kalām*, and *lisān* refer to people's linguistic idioms, cultural discourses, and style of communication. Another passage from the same section suggests that the Brethren intended the latter meaning:

Among the Prophet's miracles (*mu'jizāt*) and distinctions was that he would address each people with what they [could] understand according to their own situation, and according to what they [could] conceive in their souls and [what] their intellects (could) perceive. Because of this, the

¹⁰⁸² Carmela Baffioni, "The 'language of the Prophet' in the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā," in Daniel De Smet, Godefroid de Callatay, J.M.F. Van Reeth (eds.), *Al-Kitab. La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam. Actes du Symposium International tenu à Leuven et Louvain-la-Neuve du 29 mai au 1 juin 2002* [Acta Orientalia Belgica Subsedia III], (Bruxelles-Louvain-la-Neuve-Leuven: Brepols, 2004), 357-370.

¹⁰⁸³ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 3, 167. My translation here is indebted to Baffioni's translation, see "The 'language of the Prophet' in the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā," 360.

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traditions [of the Prophet] diverged, the religious schools multiplied, and they disagreed about the successor (*khalīfa*) of the Messenger and this was one of the main causes of disagreement in the community until the present time.¹⁰⁸⁴

These passages offer a distinctive understanding of the Qur'ān as an inimitable miracle (*mu'jiza*) as conceived by the Brethren. Rather than attributing this miracle to God and situating it as a break in God's habit, the Brethren instead presented the Prophet as the productive agent of both Qur'ānic and non-Qur'ānic guidance and attributed the performance of this miracle to him. It is Muhammad who “made expressions easy for them (*sahhala 'alayhim al-alfāz*)”, “coined meanings for them (*ḍaraba lahum al-ma'ānī*)” and “addressed each people with what they [could] understand according to their situation.” It follows from this that the Prophet coined the actual words of the Arabic Qur'ān as a symbolic representation of the spiritual indications and signs that he received from the spiritual angels. The Brethren also believed that the different expressions coined by the Prophet to communicate with his different audiences was the cause of religious and political disagreement within his community.

The theory of Qur'ānic Revelation espoused by the Brethren has major implications with respect to how one hermeneutically engages the Revelatory Product, i.e. the Qur'ān and other prophetic discourses like the Torah or Gospels. In the below passage, the Brethren explained how the Revelatory Products enunciated by the Prophets are multilayered and ambiguous in meaning:

O brother know that the Prophets use expressions of ambiguous meaning (*alfāz mushtaraka*) in their address (*khiṭābihim*) to the people, but what every person understands is according to what his intellect can bear. This is because those who listen to their verbal utterances (*alfāzihim*) and recite the revelatory expression of their books (*tanzīlāt kutubihim*) are diverse in the ranks of their intellects: they include the elite and the masses and whatever is between them. The masses understand one meaning from those expressions and the elite understand another meaning which is more subtle, more wondrous and more beneficial than all of them with respect to that. This is because it is said regarding wisdom: “Speak to the people according to the measure of their intellects.”¹⁰⁸⁵

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 3, 153. My translation is again indebted to Baffioni's translation, see *Ibid.*, 361.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Rasā'il*, Vol. 4, 122.

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The Prophets are thus responsible for rendering the divine inspiration they receive in the spiritual form of indications and signs into verbal expressions that are equivocal or ambiguous (*mushtaraka*). These revelatory expressions, termed *tanzīl*, are pregnant with multiple levels of meaning; their verbal forms are specially tailored to the audience and are open to many interpretations. The ambiguous language ensures that people at different levels of intellect will interpret the revelatory expressions differently based on their intellectual capacity. The Brethren thus situated the role of the Prophets as making spiritual truths accessible to a multitude of people possessing various levels of understanding. This position entails the existence of a hermeneutical gap between the symbolic truths of the Revelatory Product – consisting of ambiguous verbal expressions – and the real truths of the Revelatory Principle conveyed to the Prophets as divine inspiration. Only the spiritual elite among the Prophets' audience grasp the true meaning which is “more subtle, more wonderful, and more beneficial.”

The above framework of Qur'anic Revelation and hermeneutics results in what the Brethren have described as a tripartite knowledge hierarchy among human beings, consisting of the commoners (*al-‘amma*), the elite (*al-khāṣṣa*), and an intermediary level in between the two. The commoners understand only the outward meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the affairs of religion consisting of rituals of worship (prayer, fasting, almsgiving) and knowledge by way of reports, narrations, and stories. The people of the intermediary level exert themselves in the religious sciences like jurisprudence, theological speculation (*naẓar*), (*tafsīr*), Qur'anic sciences like commentary (*tafsīr*), the revelatory expression (*tanzīl*), and allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*), and the knowledge of argument (*ḥujja*) and demonstration (*burhān*). As for the elite, they contemplate the secrets of religion and the inner meanings (*bawāṭin*) of hidden affairs – which remain hidden for all who are not purified from vain desire and impurity. The knowledge of the elite includes the

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subtle indications (*ishārāt laṭīfā*) that the Prophets received from the angels and symbolized in the religious laws. This knowledge includes the revelatory exegesis (*ta'wīl*) and the true meaning (*ḥaqīqa*) of what exists in the Torah, the Gospels, the Psalms, the Qur'ān, and the scrolls of the Prophets. The elite possessors of this highest level of knowledge are divinely-inspired persons (*al-mu'ayyadūn*) – the Imams and others who have reached a similar spiritual status, such as the highest members of the Brethren.¹⁰⁸⁶

To conclude, the Brethren elucidated their own distinctive theories of Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation based on their Neoplatonic conception of God's Speech and God's Writing. Their solution to the created versus uncreated Qur'ān debate was to take a middle position: that God's Speech is neither created nor uncreated, but rather is His Origination (*ibdā'*) of all existents, beginning with the Universal Intellect. They regarded God's Speech as an eternal existentiating act that continuously creates and sustains the spiritual and corporeal realms of the Cosmos. Accordingly, they defined the Neoplatonic forms of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul which manifest through the Cosmos as God's Writing (*kitāb Allāh*). They classified all creatures in the Cosmos according to a gradation of species that begins with the minerals and ends with the angels. Among these degrees of excellence, the Prophets stand at the summit of humanity and constitute the border between corporeal human beings and spiritual angels. Resembling humans in their body and the angels in their pure souls, the Prophets receive non-verbal divine inspiration, termed *wahy*, *ta'yīd*, and *ilhām*, in the form of spiritual indications and signs from the incorporeal angels. Every Prophet expressed this divine inspiration to his community in the form of verbal expressions (*'ibārāt*) and utterances (*alfāz*) using the most effective words in the idiom of the

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 68-69.

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audience. The qur'ānic miracle of Prophet Muhammad specifically lies in his ability to communicate his divinely inspired knowledge to his audiences in a manner appropriate to their situation, context, and intellectual capacity. The Brethren thus regarded the Qur'ān and other revelatory discourses (*tanzīlāt*) like the Torah and Gospels as verbal productions of the Prophets as opposed to words dictated by God. The hermeneutical implication of their beliefs is that most people cannot directly apprehend the higher spiritual truths of the Revelatory Principle that is symbolically disclosed in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān. The common people perceive the ritual duties and the literal meaning of the Qur'ān, which is at the level of symbolic truth. Only the elite understand the revelatory exegesis (*ta'wīl*) and the spiritual allusions (*ishārāt*) of God's Speech which the Qur'ān's literal discourse symbolizes. The Brethren, like other Ismaili thinkers, regarded the Imams and their appointed teachers – which includes the Brethren themselves – as necessary teaching authorities to guide people toward recognizing the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the Revelatory Principle that is God's Speech or Command.

6.2.3 God's Speech (*Kalām Allāh*), Universal Intellect, and the Prophetic Composition (*Ta'wīf*): Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971)

Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī is remembered as a great Ismaili *dā'ī* and philosophical theologian and his legacy exerted great influence among later Ismaili thinkers in the Fatimid and post-Fatimid periods. His ideas seem to have been commented upon by al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī and parts of his works are quoted or paraphrased by Nāṣir-i Khusraw. The Ṭayyibī *da'wa* of Yemen and India transmitted many of his works and still revere them.¹⁰⁸⁷ Very little is known of Sijistānī's actual

¹⁰⁸⁷ This introduction to Sijistānī is based on Paul E. Walker, "Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī in Modern Scholarship," *Shii Studies Review* 1 (2017): 167-174. A literature review of scholarship on Sijistānī is found in Andani, "A Survey of

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life. From his own writings, it may be gleaned that Sijistānī went on pilgrimage and returned in 322/934 through Iraq and that he composed his *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* in 361/971, which was one of his last writings. Sijistānī may have been a disciple of the earlier eastern Ismaili *dā'ī* al-Nasafī, whose defense Sijistānī took up when al-Rāzī criticized him. It is worth noting that Sijistānī was among the first eastern Ismaili *dā'īs* to recognize the Fatimid Caliphs as the rightful Ismaili Imams whereas his predecessors like al-Nasafī and al-Rāzī continued to await the reappearance of the seventh Imam Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. It is perhaps due to his recognition of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs as divinely authorized leaders that Sijistānī's legacy found a home in the Fatimid Ismaili *da'wa*.

In any case, it is necessary to provide an account of Sijistānī's understanding of Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation in order to chart any further developments in medieval Ismaili philosophical theology after him. Sijistānī's ideas on these subjects are discussed over various remarks throughout six of his major works: *Kitāb al-Maqālīd* (*The Book of Keys*),¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa* (*The Proof of Prophethood*),¹⁰⁸⁹ *Kitāb al-Yanābī'* (*The Book of Wellsprings*),¹⁰⁹⁰ *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* (*The Book of the Boast*),¹⁰⁹¹ *Kitāb Sullam al-najāt* (*The Book of*

Ismaili Studies (Part 1).” The most detailed account of Sijistānī's philosophical theology is Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*. A more accessible account of Sijistānī's ideas is given in Walker, *Intellectual Missionary*.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maqālīd al-malakūtiyya*, ed. Ismail K. Poonawala (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2011).

¹⁰⁸⁹ Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Paul Walker (Tehran: Miras-e-Maktoob, 2016). Special thanks to Paul Walker for making this text accessible to me for my project.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom*.

¹⁰⁹¹ Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, ed. Ismail K. Poonawala (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2000).

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the Ladder of Salvation),¹⁰⁹² and *Kashf al-mahjūb (The Unveiling of the Hidden)*.¹⁰⁹³ Of al-Sijistānī's works, the *Proof of Prophethood* provides the most detailed expositions of Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation.

The Word of God as the Primary Revelatory Principle:

Al-Sijistānī's vision of both cosmology and divine guidance centers on his understanding of God's Command or Word. As mentioned early, the Command of God in Ismaili Neoplatonic thought refers to God's eternal originating command (*amr, ibdā'*) by which He creates and maintains all of existence beginning with the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul. Al-Sijistānī depicted God's Command both as the cosmogonic Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*) and the revelatory Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*). God's Word transcends all creaturely qualities and perceptions, including sounds and letters, while being the ontological principle through which all things exist: "It is the cause of all creatures among the subtle (*laṭīf*) and the dense (*kathīf*), and the spiritual and the corporeal."¹⁰⁹⁴ God's Word is also God's Speech which the Prophets convey to their communities in human language. Al-Sijistānī summarized the ontological, cosmological, and revelatory aspects of God's Word as follows:

The cause of all existents (*'illat al-aysiyyāt*) is only the Word of God and the subsistence of every existent (*ays*) according to its existence (*aysiyya*) and its rank (*martaba*) came to be through what it contains of the power of the Word. Whatever does not receive an impression of the Word does not exist according to [its] existence (*aysiyya*). Then the Speaker Prophet is found to be a locus (*mahāll*) for the Word of God in the corporeal world and is designated by its names. As He [God] said [about

¹⁰⁹² Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb Sullam al-najāt*, ed. Mohammad Alibhai in "Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and Kitāb Sullam al-Najāt: A Study in Islamic Neoplatonism," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1983).

¹⁰⁹³ Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, ed. Henry Corbin (Tehran and Paris: 1949); partial translation by Hermann Landolt in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (eds.), *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, Vol. 2 (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), 74-129.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 238.

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Jesus]: “the word of God” (*kalimat Allāh*) and He said similarly regarding the description of Jesus: “the Spirit of God and His word” (*rūḥullāh wa-kalimatuhu*).¹⁰⁹⁵

As to its ontological function, al-Sijistānī's remarks suggest that the Word of God is sheer existence (*aysiyya*), through which every existent (*ays*) subsists in being. Somewhat in common with the Ash'arīs, al-Sijistānī regarded the Word of God as above the created realm. At the same time, every Speaker Prophet is a “locus” (*maḥāll*) of God's Word because whatever he conveys to his community is an expression of God's Word. In other words, the Prophet Muhammad in his very person is the human reflection or manifestation of the Word of God; he is not merely a passive conveyer or translator of God's Speech. This is how al-Sijistānī understood the qur'ānic designation of Jesus as the “word of God” (*kalimat Allāh*), but he applied this status to all the Speaker Prophets. Thus, in al-Sijistānī's thought, the onto-cosmological Word of God is the Revelatory Principle of the Arabic Qur'ān and other prophetic-revealed discourses while also being manifested through the person of the Speaker Prophet.

On these grounds, al-Sijistānī framed the Prophets or Messengers of God as “translators” of the Word of God into human language: “They became those who express (*mu'abbirūn 'anhu*) it – sometimes as command, sometimes as prohibition, and sometimes as speech (*kalām*) – since it is the Word of God (*kalimat Allāh*).”¹⁰⁹⁶ When Prophets express God's Word in the form of commands and prohibitions, the resulting expression of the Word of God is called *sharī'a*; when they express God's Word as a verbal discourse (*kalām*) such as the Torah, Gospels, Psalms, or the Qur'ān, the resultant expression is called *tanzīl*. The Prophets only called these revelatory discourses “God's Speech” (*kalām Allāh*) because they are verbal symbolic expressions of the

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Ibid., 213.

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transcendent ontological Speech of God.¹⁰⁹⁷ Thus, both the Arabic Qur'ān and Muhammad's extra-qur'ānic teachings (what the Sunnis call the Prophetic Sunna) are Revelatory Products expressing God's Speech. It is important to register that the *kalām Allāh* – *'ibāra* distinction featured prominently in fourth/tenth-century Kullābī-Ash'arī circles as seen in Chapter 4, where several thinkers distinguished between God's uncreated Speech (*kalām Allāh*) and its created expressions (*'ibārāt 'anhu*). Similarly, al-Sijistānī maintained a distinction between God's Speech as Revelatory Principle and its various *'ibārāt* (expressions) composed by the Prophets throughout his writings. It remains an open question whether al-Sijistānī was appropriating terminology from Sunni *kalām* theology and reorienting its meaning within his Ismaili framework.

As to the topic of revelation, al-Sijistānī devoted a section of his *Proofs of Prophecy* to discussing six “aspects”, “faces” (*wujūh*), or manifestations of God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*). The first aspect is God's creative act of command (*amr*), which is God's Speech itself as the transcendent ontological principle of all that exists.¹⁰⁹⁸ The second aspect is from the Universal Intellect, through which God's Speech manifests as “the speech of divine support” (*al-kalām al-ta'yīdī*) consisting of pure intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) without sound or letter described as “spiritual colors” (*aṣḥāgh rūḥāniyya*) and “intellectual forms” (*ashkāl 'aqlīyya*) encompassing knowledge of many things.¹⁰⁹⁹ The third aspect is from the Universal Soul, through which God's Speech manifests as “the speech of cosmic construction” (*al-kalām al-tarkībī*). This consists of the intelligibles from the Intellect being diffused through the Soul as cosmic inscriptions (*nuqūsh*) and

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid., 238.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., 236.

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spiritual motions (*ḥarakāt nafsāniyya*) manifested in the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, the activities of Nature, and the composition (*naẓm*) of corporeal bodies.¹¹⁰⁰ These first three aspects of God's Speech are supra-verbal and lack sounds or letters. They may be described, respectively, as the ontological, intelligible, and cosmic aspects of God's Speech. The fourth aspect is the "the speech of revelatory composition" (*al-kalām al-ta'līfī*), which is produced by the Speaker Prophet when he perceives the divine support (*ta'yīd*) of the Universal Intellect and the cosmic construction (*tarkīb*) of the Universal Soul. The Prophet communicates this knowledge to his community in their own language in a speech form consisting of sounds, letters, arrangement (*naẓm*), and allusion (*ishāra*) and by way of his *sharī'a*.¹¹⁰¹ This prophetic composition is a discourse that overpowers all other discourses and cannot be imitated by anyone else; the Qur'ān is one example of it. The fifth aspect is "the speech of revelatory hermeneutics" (*al-kalām al-ta'wīlī*), which the Founder and the Imams teach as an explanation (*bayān*) of the hidden and real meaning of the Prophet's verbal composition (*tanzīl, ta'līf*) and *sharī'a*.¹¹⁰² The fourth and fifth manifestations of God's Speech, being *ta'līf* (revelatory composition) and *ta'wīl* (revelatory hermeneutics) consist of sounds and letters in the world of creation. Finally, the sixth aspect of God's Speech is what the eschatological *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* (Lord of the Resurrection) radiates through his pure soul as pure intelligible emanation transcending sounds and letters. This emanation radiates upon souls of human beings, beginning with the Qā'im's Vicegerents (*khulafā'*), whom al-Sijistānī identified with the Fatimid Caliphs.¹¹⁰³

¹¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid., 237.

¹¹⁰² Ibid.

¹¹⁰³ Ibid., 238.

The Spiritual Messenger of God: Intellect as Secondary Revelatory Principle

After the Word or Speech of God, the Universal Intellect is the most important cosmic principle in al-Sijistānī's Ismaili Neoplatonic worldview. The Intellect, at both the cosmic and human levels, is the primary substance through which God's Speech is manifested as the Cosmos and as various Revelatory Products. For this reason, the Intellect functions as a secondary Revelatory Principle within al-Sijistānī's framework of Qur'ānic Revelation. Speaking to its exalted cosmic and theological status, al-Sijistānī described how God originated the Intellect as the "Lord of Lords" and "the wellspring of all corporeal and spiritual light." God, transcending all being and all relationships, delegated the governance (*tadbīr*) of the spiritual and corporeal realms of creation to the Universal Intellect.¹¹⁰⁴

The Intellect is a luminous, spiritual, and self-intellecting substance encompassing all existents with respect to their intelligible essences. Nothing is hidden from the Intellect's knowledge and there exists no corruption or deficiency within it. The Intellect is perfect (*kāmil*), complete (*tāmm*), eternal (*azalī*), and quiescent (*sākin*). Neither lacking nor desiruous of anything beyond itself, the Intellect eternally and ecstatically contemplates the entirety of intelligibles contained within its substance. The Intellect is also united (*mutaḥḥada*) to the Word of God, which is its cause and ontological principle.¹¹⁰⁵ The unity of the Intellect and the Word of God is a highly intricate and subtle matter within Ismaili Neoplatonic metaphysics. It suffices to say that the relationship between the two is often conceived as the relation between blackness and black or

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁰⁵ On this statement, see *ibid.*, 25, 218.

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oneness and one. The Word of God is neither a substance, nor object, nor a thing; it is a supra-substantial reality through which all things exist. Thus, it may be more appropriate to think of the Word of God as sheer existence or pure being (*aysiyya, wujūd*) issuing directly from God and Intellect as the first existent or first being (*ays, mawjūd*) – the first receptacle or manifestation of the Word.¹¹⁰⁶

As the first and highest locus of the Word of God, the Universal Intellect is the wellspring from which divine support (*ta'yīd*) pours forth and manifests both through the cosmic construction (*tarkīb*) of the Universal Soul and the divine inspiration (*wahy*) given to the Prophets.¹¹⁰⁷ This means that the manifestation of God's Speech at all levels of the Cosmos is initially modulated and mediated by the Intellect. For al-Sijisānī, every human soul has partial access to the Universal Intellect through a faculty called the innate intellect (*al-'aql al-gharīzī*), which is the soul's power of intellectual discernment (*al-tamyīz al-'aqlī*). On these grounds, Universal Intellect turns out to be a secondary Revelatory Principle in al-Sijisānī's thought. This is most apparent in al-Sijisānī's argument that the human intellect is God's "first messenger" (*awwal rasūl*) and the "spiritual messenger" (*rasūl rūḥānī*) of God to human beings while a historical Prophet (such as Jesus or Muhammad) is His "last messenger" (*ākhir rasūl*) and "corporeal messenger" (*rasūl jismānī*).¹¹⁰⁸ The intellect within human beings recognizes and corroborates what the Prophets command and forbid, because both the human intellect and prophetic revealed guidance issue from the same Revelatory Principle – the Universal Intellect. While this view may resemble Mu'tazilī claims that

¹¹⁰⁶ See al-Sijisānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābī'*, 71-72 for further comments on the relationship between the Word of God and the Intellect.

¹¹⁰⁷ Al-Sijisānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 8.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

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humans can judge the ethical value of actions independent of revelation, Mu‘tazili cosmology lacks a transcendent Universal Intellect that informs both the human intellect and the Prophets. Al-Sijistānī further argued that the innate human intellect functions as the “first messenger” because people must use their intellects to interpret and understand what the Prophets – the “last messenger” – convey to them as speech (*kalām*). Without an innate intellect present within the receiver of the prophetic message, what the Prophets teach would be unintelligible.¹¹⁰⁹ Thus, al-Sijistānī framed both the innate human intellect and the historical Prophet as God’s Messengers who communicate His Speech to humanity. This also means that human beings already have some limited access to the Universal Intellect *qua* Revelatory Principle by way of their innate intellects, even without the guidance of the Prophets.

The Intellect’s status as Revelatory Principle is further illustrated in al-Sijistānī’s account of the cosmic status of the Prophets. In his worldview, the Prophets function as the creaturely image and vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of the Universal Intellect in the corporeal world. Al-Sijistānī even understood the claim of the Prophets to deliver God’s Speech to their people as an allegorical description of the Universal Intellect modulating the supra-cosmic Word of God to all levels of existence:

The summons of the Prophets was that Prophethood is the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of the Intellect in the corporeal world. They invited people to the Word of God sent down to them, because they knew that the Intellect appeared from the Word of God without intermediary. They related Prophethood and the prophetic message (*al-risāla*) to the Speech of the Creator (*kalām al-khāliq*) and Prophethood became the cause of whatever comes after it among the executorship (*waṣīyya*), Imamate, the guides, and the bearers of knowledge, just as the Intellect became the cause of whatever comes after it among the Follower, Matter, Form, and Cosmic Construction (*tarkīb*).¹¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 71-72.

¹¹¹⁰ Ibid., 194.

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There is a cosmic correspondence between the Intellect as the cause of all spiritual and corporeal creatures and the Prophet as the cause of the ranks below him in the *da'wa* hierarchy. Based on the cosmic syzygy between the Universal Intellect and the Prophets, al-Sijistānī described the Prophet as a “corporealized intellect” (*'aql mujassam*) or a “speaking intellect” (*'aql nāṭiq*) and his *sharī'a* as a “prophetically composed intellect” (*'aql mu'allaf*).¹¹¹¹ All of this means that the Prophet as a human person is the manifestation of the Universal Intellect within the human species in which the Intellect's attributes are reflected. As we will see below, this means that the Prophet Muhammad himself is a “living revelation” or a “revelatory agent”, who is theologically and logically superior to the Revelatory Products that he himself composes.

Overall, the Universal Intellect as Revelatory Principle is disclosed through four different but interrelated Revelatory Products: the innate human intellect, the person of the Speaker Prophet, the *sharī'a* instituted by the Speaker Prophet embedded in the Qur'ān and prophetic teachings, and the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ān and the *sharī'a*. The proper human response to revelation entails recognizing and acting according to all four Revelatory Products. For example, relying upon one's individual intellect alone leads to *ta'ṭīl* – denying the reality of God; using one's intellect and recognizing the Prophet without practicing his *sharī'a* and its revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) leads to misguidance and error; going as far as practicing the Prophet's *sharī'a* but remaining heedless of its revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) leads to *tashbīh* – assimilating and likening God to His creatures.¹¹¹² Only the person who yields to and engages all four Revelatory Products is a true believer.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid., 72, 95.

¹¹¹² Ibid., 72.

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Of these four manifestations of the Universal Intellect, the first is innate in every person while the latter three are only accessible through external figures such as the Prophets and the Imams. Having framed God's Speech and the Universal Intellect as the primary and secondary Revelatory Principles, we can now examine how al-Sijistānī conceived the Revelatory Process by which God's Speech manifests through the Prophet, the *sharī'a*, and revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*).

The Revelatory Agents: The Supra-Human Species of the Prophets

In a manner akin to his Ismaili contemporaries, al-Sijistānī situated the Prophets within a gradational framework of species encompassing minerals, plants, animals, humans, and angels. This hierarchy is constituted by the existence of different powers (*quwwāt*) within each species, by virtue of which a given species ranks higher than others and dominates them. For example, plants dominate minerals because they possess the power of growth; animals dominate plants due to possessing the power of sense.¹¹¹³ In the same way, “humanity with respect to their reception of rational discourse (*al-nuṭq*), discrimination (*al-tamyīz*), reflection (*fīkr*), and thinking (*khāṭir*) possesses merit (*al-faḍl*) and nobility (*al-sharf*) over animals incapable of receiving those powers.”¹¹¹⁴ As a result, the human is “the mortal rational speaker” (*al-ḥayy al-nāṭiq al-mayyit*) and is able to subjugate the animal species. However, ranking even above human beings is a higher species that al-Sijistānī variously refers to as “the divinely supported rational speaker” (*al-ḥayy al-nāṭiq al-mu'ayyad*), “the possessors of holiness” (*aṣḥāb al-quḍus*), or the “divinely supported

¹¹¹³ Ibid., 52.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

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persons” (*al-mu'ayyadūn*). This species includes the Prophets who, “through the power bestowed upon them from holiness (*al-quds*) and the divine support (*al-ta'yīd*)”, become the leaders of humanity.¹¹¹⁵

Holiness (*al-qudus*) is the intellectual power from the Universal Intellect. The Enclosure of Holiness (*ḥazīrat al-qudus*) is “the substance of the Preceder united to the Word of God.”¹¹¹⁶ Divine support (*al-ta'yīd*) is the emanation or outpouring of holiness (*qudus*) from the Universal Intellect upon the Universal Soul; through the mediation of the Universal Soul and Nature, holiness emanates into the Cosmos and upon human souls. Al-Sijistānī equated this divine support to the mercy of God mentioned in the Qur'ānic verse: “My Mercy encompasses all things (Q. 7:156).”¹¹¹⁷ Thus, divine support (*al-ta'yīd*) is the very process by which holiness emanates and descends from the Universal Intellect through the levels of the Cosmos and eventually reaches the Prophets' souls.

By presenting the Prophets as the summit of the species hierarchy, al-Sijistānī seemingly “naturalized” both Prophethood and the Revelatory Process. He situated Prophethood as a natural teleological phenomenon “built-in” to the Cosmos as opposed to the outcome of isolated divine actions or interventions. The Prophets represent the culmination and end goal of the Universal Soul's creative activity, because they are the greatest receptacles of the emanation of the Universal Intellect within the Cosmos. In creating and governing the Cosmos, the end goal of the Universal Soul was to produce a form capable of receiving the emanation of the Intellect, these being the special human beings who possess holiness and divine support. But her production of this form

¹¹¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid., 218.

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

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required intermediary creations of minerals, plants, animals, and humans: “The [Universal] Soul knew that the manifestation of the form receptive to rational discourse and holiness cannot occur except through two other powers resembling them and these are growth and movement.”¹¹¹⁸

In al-Sijistānī's cosmology, God's selection of an individual for Prophethood is not an arbitrary divine choice; it is something actualized through a Neoplatonic cosmogonic process by which the Universal Soul produces individual human souls. The Universal Soul receives intellectual benefits from the Universal Intellect according to her capacity and projects these intelligibles into her cosmic construction (*tarkīb*) of the natural world. These intellectual benefits are scattered within the human species and manifest as virtuous individuals (*al-ashkhāṣ al-khayrāt*) with various degrees of purity (*ṣafwa*) and turbidity. All individual human souls, in imitation of the Universal Soul, seek to grasp the Intellect's benefits through the Soul's mediation. These intellectual benefits imprint upon each human soul to the extent (*miqdār*) of its purity. At a given time, many human souls are impeded from receiving these benefits due to imbalances in temperament and psychic pollution. However, there is always a pure human soul possessing the most harmonious temperament (*i'tidāl*) and greatest receptivity for the intellectual benefits emanating from the Universal Intellect via the Universal Soul: “This pure soul selected to receive the influences of the Follower becomes a substantial receptacle chosen by God from among the servants of God to be a Messenger to the souls held back from receiving those [intellectual] influences.”¹¹¹⁹ The person of the Messenger or Prophet receives the intellectual emanations through his soul and communicates it to others through audible speech:

The person who is incapable of receiving those [intellectual] influences in his heart is not incapable of receiving them by way of hearing the verbal expression (*ibārā*) of the Messenger. Thus, this

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid., 61-62.

¹¹¹⁹ Ibid., 72.

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Messenger is selected by the choice of God to verbally express what the Trusted Spirit informed (*ṣawwara*) in his heart from the sciences of the spiritual kingdom (*al-malakūt*) in the language of the nation of those impeded from receiving them.¹¹²⁰

According to the above exposition of al-Sijistānī, most human souls at a given time are impeded from receiving the intellectual emanations from the Universal Soul because of their impurity and imbalances in temperament. Only one individual human soul possesses the requisite degree of purity and balanced temperament to accept the intellectual benefits of the Universal Soul that flow upon all human souls; God's choice falls upon him and he becomes a Prophet or Messenger of God. He is charged with the duty to verbally communicate this intellectual emanation to other souls, who are incapable of its direct reception. In this respect, this person is chosen by God as His Messenger through the mediation of the Universal Intellect's emanation and the Universal Soul's cosmic construction. Thus, the office of Prophethood arises as a built-in measure within the Cosmos to ensure that the intelligible emanations of the Universal Intellect eventually reaches all human souls. The Prophet, who continuously receives the holiness emanating from the Universal Intellect is imbued with the latter's benefits and virtues, to the extent that the Prophet functions as the human reflection of the Universal Intellect. In theological terms, the Prophet is the perfect receptacle of God's Word and God's vicegerent on earth.

The Revelatory Process: The Prophet's Perception and Composition of Divine Inspiration

The power of holiness present within the Prophets and the power of rational discourse present within human beings are best understood as developmental stages of the human intellect, which is innate to the human soul and connects each human soul to the Universal Intellect. At the stage of

¹¹²⁰ Ibid., 72.

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rational discourse (*nutq*), human beings possess various powers like discrimination (*al-tamyīz*), thinking (*khāṭir*), and reflection (*fikr*). By using these powers, human beings acquire knowledge of intelligibles through deduction (*istidlāl*) and express their knowledge through articulate speech. This way of knowing is still indirect because it depends on the processes of deduction and reflection. Meanwhile, the possessors of holiness (*qudus*) access intelligibles directly without using any discursive or deductive processes due to the divine support (*al-ta'yīd*) continuously illuminating their souls. Al-Sijistānī explained the cognitive difference between a scholar (*ālim*) employing deductive methods and a divinely supported person (*al-mu'ayyad*) as follows:

The beginning of divine support in the divinely supported person (*ta'yīd bi l-mu'ayyad*) is when he becomes capable of discovering things not by way of the senses, which are the root-principles for the deduction (*al-istidlāl*) of hidden matters through apparent things. But rather, he finds his soul existing among sensory things but detached from them, desiring intelligibles which material things are not connected to. The difference between the scholar (*ālim*) and the divinely supported person (*al-mu'ayyad*) is that the scholar is compelled [to use] material sensory things in the preservation of his sciences and his ruling whereas the divinely supported person is independent of them. He conceives in his mind (*khāṭir*) what the scholar is incapable of extracting by way of deduction through sensory indicators.¹¹²¹

The recipient of divine support perceives pure intelligibles without relying on sense perception and without recourse to deductive reasoning. He has continuous access to these intelligibles without requiring any sensory props. In this respect, he may directly apprehend what a scholar requires sensory and deductive methods to learn. Furthermore, the divinely supported person attains to knowledge that the discursive scholar cannot reach through deduction. Overall, the Prophets and other divinely supported persons are cognitively superior to other human beings.

Al-Sijistānī pitted this Ismaili understanding of Prophethood and divine inspiration against contemporary Sunni and Twelver models. In at least three treatises, al-Sijistānī offered a targeted refutation of the Sunni verbal dictation theory. In his opinion, the masses of Muslims “consider

¹¹²¹ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābī'*, 171-172.

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the revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) of the angels upon the Messenger to be like the descent (*nuzūl*) of the birds from the heaven by traversing space; and [consider] the communication (*mukhāṭiba*) between them to be like communication amongst yourselves through sound and hearing – sound on the part of the angel and hearing on the part of the Messenger.”¹¹²² Despite its polemical overtones, this is an accurate rendition of how classical Muslim *tafsīr* and *kalām* theology portray Gabriel’s descent to the Prophet. While various exegetes and *kalām* theologians differed about the higher domains of the Revelatory Process – such as the nature of God’s Speech and how it reaches the Angel Gabriel – there was general agreement that Gabriel orally recited the Qur’ān to Muhammad. One may recall the claims of classical *tafsīr* according to which Gabriel brought down installments from a pre-existent Qur’ān or certain views in Ash‘arī and Māturīdī *kalām* where Gabriel brought down the Arabic Recitation of God’s uncreated Speech and recited it to the Prophet. According to this widespread belief among Muslims, al-Sijistānī argued, “the spiritual angel is incapable of proclaiming the messages of God except by sounds and letters, and the Chosen Messenger is incapable of receiving it except by hearing.”¹¹²³ In assessing this doctrine, al-Sijistānī observed that Muhammad would hear the Qur’ān from Gabriel in the very same way that the community would hear the Qur’ān from Muhammad. Therefore, there is no real difference between the Prophet and his community as far as their reception of the prophetic message is concerned, since both perceive it through hearing sounds. If the Prophet hears the Qur’ān in the very same manner as the community, then the Prophet is a wholly dispensable middle man: “The

¹¹²² Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Ifṭikhār*, 138.

¹¹²³ Ibid.

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community to whom the Messenger is sent has no need for the Messenger, since the hearing of the community is [likewise] constrained to the reception of composed sounds.”¹¹²⁴

In the *Proofs of Prophecy*, al-Sijistānī presented a second argument against the verbal dictation theory of revelation. In these remarks, he referred to the production of human rational speech. In a manner somewhat similar to the Ash‘arīs, al-Sijistānī understood rational speech to consist of meanings within the human soul which a person expresses through sounds and letters formed by the physical instruments of the human body. He likened the case of human speech in the heart to the Prophet’s perception of divine inspiration:

Likewise, the prophetic message (*al-risāla*) is something substantial to the innate nature (*al-gharīza*) of the Messenger and his expression for that prophetic message comes to be as something resembling what is conceived in his heart from the inspiration (*wahy*) of God prior to the conveyance of the meanings of the prophetic message. It is impossible to imagine that what the Messenger conveyed as articulate composition (*bi l-ta’līf al-mantiqī*) from the Command of God existed prior to that conveyance as a verbal composition (*ta’līf*) in his heart. If speech was a verbal composition (*ta’līf*) in the heart before its expression, then its emergence would have been from a single place. But when it is found that the emergence of speech is from numerous different places [in the human body], it is evident that Nature – with respect to what it intended of the manifestation of the speech as verbal composition – directed toward the correction of the places of the emergence of articulate sounds. So it made an instrument for every letter that makes its expression possible. Just as things exist as essential forms (*ashkāl dhātiyya*) with respect to their essences, things have mental forms (*ashkāl wahmiyya*) in the mind (*wahm*). Due to this, it is neither possible to imagine that there are forms (*ashkāl*) composed (*al-ta’līfa*) in the heart nor [possible] to imagine that there are spiritual forms (*ashkāl nafsiyya*) with respect to articulate sounds (*al-ṣawt al-mantiqī*). When spiritual forms are impossible with respect to articulate speech, it is likewise impossible that composite audible forms exist in the mind (*al-wahm*) or within the essences of mental forms.¹¹²⁵

The above argument relies upon a certain theory of human psychology, epistemology, and language. Al-Sijistānī took the view that verbally composed discourse (*ta’līf, mantiq*) is a corporeal expression of subtle meanings within the human soul (*nafs*), mind (*wahm*), or heart (*qalb*). In his Neoplatonic vision, all things in their intelligible essences exist in the Universal Intellect as essential forms (*ashkāl dhātiyya*) or intellectual forms (*ashkāl ‘aqliyya*). In the human mind or

¹¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹¹²⁵ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 80.

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heart, knowledge exists as mental forms (*ashkāl wahmiyya*). Al-Sijistānī thus argued that what the Prophet received as divine inspiration (*wahy*) existed in his heart as mental forms (*ashkāl wahmiyya*) and certainly not as a verbal articulate composition (*al-ta'rif al-manṭiqī*). He considered the latter to be the creation of the human body when a person enunciates audible letters using various body parts like the tongue, lips, chest, etc. to generate the appropriate sounds – all of which issue from different parts of the mouth. Verbal articulate speech consisting of corporeal sounds and letters constitutes the outward expression (*'ibāra*) of the mental forms within the human soul. Since there are neither spiritual nor mental forms for articulate sounds (*al-ṣawt al-manṭiqī*), it is impossible for the Prophet's heart to perceive or retain the prophetic message (*risāla*) as Arabic sounds and letters. Thus, what the Prophet receives as *wahy* are intelligible forms without sounds or letters and his heart retains them as mental forms.

A third argument against the verbal dictation theory of revelation appears in a later section of *The Proofs of Prophecy*. Here, al-Sijistānī began by observing that: “The reception [of the prophetic message] consists of two modes of reception: a reception of audition (*sam'*) and a reception of thought (*wahm*). The auditory reception exists through speech (*kalām*) and the mental reception (*al-qabūl al-wahmī*) exists through ideas (*bi l-khaṭirāt*).”¹¹²⁶ Al-Sijistānī then argued that if the Prophets heard the prophetic message as something auditory, then they must have been addressed by a speaker who expressed his own mental ideas through verbal speech using human verbal symbols and shapes. That speaker either received the prophetic message from someone else as something auditory or mental. At some point, either in the first speaker or somewhere in the chain of speech transmission, the form of the prophetic message will have to be something mental.

¹¹²⁶ Ibid., 227.

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Auditory transmission is also subject to corruption and error because of its indirect nature. Al-Sijistānī thereby concluded that mental reception of the prophetic message is the only logical and viable viewpoint: “The reception of the Messengers is a mental reception conceiving what they are sent with in their hearts. Then they convey it to the communities in their tongues and their languages. The word of God confirms this: ‘The heart did not lie in what it saw’ (Q. 53:11). This means that there is no lie in what the eyes of the heart saw of the divinely inspired ideas (*al-khaṭirāt*).”¹¹²⁷

Having clarified what divine inspiration does not consist of, al-Sijistānī went on to describe the Prophet’s reception of “divinely-supported speech” (*al-kalām al-ta’yīdī*) from the Universal Intellect as follows:

The speech of divine support (*al-kalām al-ta’yīdī*) occurring from the direction of the Preceder [Universal Intellect], who possesses majesty, and connected (*al-mutaṣṣal*) to the Speaker Prophet is only the spiritual colors (*aṣbāgh rūḥāniyya*) united to the soul of the Speaker Prophet. Among each spiritual color is an intellectual form (*shakl ‘aqlī*), which combines many spiritual (*naḥsānī*) things. These colors have a spiritual composition (*ta’līf rūḥānī*). When they are cast into the soul of the receiver, it becomes aware of the recognition (*ma’rifā*) of many things.¹¹²⁸

What emanates from the Universal Intellect to the Prophet consists of “spiritual colors” (*aṣbāgh rūḥānī*) comprising various intellectual forms (*ashkāl ‘aqliyya*). Combining this account with what was seen earlier, it appears that al-Sijistānī understood divine support to consist of intellectual forms (*ashkāl ‘aqliyya*), which the Prophet’s soul and heart retained as mental forms (*ashkāl wahmiyya*). Al-Sijistānī also recognized a second channel of divine support that the Prophet receives from the Universal Soul. This was based on his reading of Q. 42:51, which tells of God speaking to a person by *wahy*, from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger. In al-Sijistānī’s

¹¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹¹²⁸ Ibid., 236.

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interpretation, *wahy* from God refers to the divine support emanating from the Universal Intellect to the Speaker Prophet. The speaking “from behind a veil” means that the Speaker Prophet receives divine support from the Intellect through the mediation of the Universal Soul, which is the veil between the Intellect and the corporeal world. In other words, al-Sijistānī recognized one mode of divine inspiration coming from the Intellect and another mode from the Soul. Al-Sijistānī further explained that the “Speech of Cosmic Construction” (*al-kalām al-tarkībī*) emanates from the Universal Soul and consists of the various cosmic motions, revolutions, and inscriptions that manifest in the corporeal world. This knowledge is inspired to the Speaker Prophet and manifested through his speech and his *sharī'a*.¹¹²⁹ Finally, the sending of a messenger refers to the Speaker Prophet himself who is sent by God to express the knowledge of the real truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) that the Holy Spirit cast upon his heart in his people's language.¹¹³⁰

In terms of how the Prophets perceive divine inspiration, al-Sijistānī provided an elaborate account of this issue centered on the term *khaṭīra* (pl. *khaṭīrāt*), which could be translated as “thoughts” or “ideas”. As noted above, he characterized the mental reception of the prophetic message as occurring by means of *khāṭīrāt*. Other Ismaili thinkers did not employ this term and its usage seems to be unique to al-Sijistānī. In the classical Sufi tradition, *khaṭīrāt* or *khawāṭir* are ideas that are cast or prompted into the soul from an outside agent, such as God, an angel, or a Satan.¹¹³¹ However, al-Sijistānī's employment of the term appears to differ from the Sufi usage. First, al-Sijistānī explained that the ideas (*khaṭīrāt*) of the Prophets differ significantly from the

¹¹²⁹ Ibid., 234.

¹¹³⁰ Ibid., 232.

¹¹³¹ Abū l-Qāṣim al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*, tr. Alexander Knysh (Reading, UK: Garnett Publishing, 2007), 106.

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ideas of the community they are sent to. The latter's ideas are polluted by impurities and corruption from evil temperament and subject to fatigue and emotion, which interfere with their thinking process. Meanwhile, the ideas of the Prophets are sanctified above corruption due to their harmonious temperament and the divine protection (*'iṣma*) of their souls. The Prophets think clearly and do not grow tired or wary of the movement of thoughts.¹¹³²

Second, in contrast to the Sunni and Twelver Shi'i belief of a corporeal Angel Gabriel spatially ascending and descending from the highest heaven to deliver verbal messages from God to the Prophet, al-Sijistānī argued that the intermediary between God and the Prophet is a spiritual entity called the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudus*) mentioned in the Qur'ān (Q. 42:52, 26:193): "The meaning of this is that the intermediary between him [the Messenger] and the Sender [i.e. God] is only a spiritual creature (*khalq rūḥānī*) that does not resemble anything of the body.... The Wise informed us after that that the divine inspiration (*wahy*) to our Speaker Prophet is only by *wahy* and that the intermediary between him and Him is only the Spirit."¹¹³³ Given the terminological connection between the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudus*) and what al-Sijistānī calls the faculty of holiness (*quwwat al-qudus*) present in the souls of the Prophets, the Holy Spirit is the channel that transmits holiness and divine inspiration from the Universal Intellect and Soul to the Prophet's soul. In the moments of receiving divine inspiration, the Prophets' ideas (*khāṭirāt*) are illuminated by a spiritual light that al-Sijistānī described as follows:

When the ideas (*khāṭirāt*) [of the Prophet] ascend and attain to the space of pure subtlety (*al-laṭāfa al-maḥḍa*), their reception of the emanation from a shining light alighting within their aspects is akin to [the light] addressing them with a spiritual address pointing him what is above him. The idea (*khāṭira*) ascends by that light to what the light indicates to him until it reaches its level determined for it. Then the ideas recede and return to the soul of the thinker (*khāṭir*). Then the soul of the thinker (*khāṭir*) presents what came upon it to the reflective faculty and the reflective faculty (*al-fikr*) stores

¹¹³² Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 228.

¹¹³³ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

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it in the repositories of memory (*al-hifz*) until the time of its conveyance and communication.... That light which alights within the reception of their ideas (*khaṭirāt*), they named it “*Jibra’īl*” (“Gabriel). The *īl* (“El”) is God, meaning that this light is compelled (*majbūr*) from overriding what God determined for them of its reception.¹¹³⁴

The Prophet’s mental reflections and ideas (*khaṭirāt*) ascend to higher World of Holiness (‘*ālam al-quḍus*), the presence of the Universal Intellect and Soul, where these ideas are illumined by a spiritual light (*nūr*). This light facilitates contact between the Prophet’s ideas and the higher levels of the World of Holiness through a spiritual address. The ideas then descend and return to the Prophet and are retained by his soul’s faculties of reflection and memory in preparation for his communication of them to others. Al-Sijistānī held that the Prophets used the symbolic term “Gabriel” to designate this spiritual intelligible light that illuminated their ideas.

In several works, al-Sijistānī also spoke of three spiritual intermediary beings called *Jadd*, *Faṭḥ*, and *Khayāl* who mediate the divine support of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul to the Speaker Prophet, the Founder, and the Imams. *Jadd* is a spiritual power of “fortune” (*al-bakht*) that attaches to the Prophet from his birth and empowers him throughout life. It enables the pure soul of the Prophet to reach the spiritual world (*malakūt*), become a leader over the people of his time, and guide them to God’s good pleasure through legislating the *sharī‘a* and enunciating the *tanzīl* in his community’s language.¹¹³⁵ *Jadd* is also a spiritual power (*quwwa rūḥāniyya*) symbolized by *Būrāq*, the mythical horse that Muhammad rode to the highest heaven in the *mi‘rāj* accounts. *Jadd* illuminates the Prophet’s understanding (*fahm*) with respect to whatever he conceives in his heart of divine inspiration and divine support. The divine inspiration received

¹¹³⁴ Ibid., 230.

¹¹³⁵ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Ifṭikhār*, 117-118.

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through *Jadd* is summative (*mujmal*) without interpretation or elucidation.¹¹³⁶ The Prophet also referred to *Jadd* by the name Gabriel.¹¹³⁷ Therefore, *Jadd* is the spiritual light called Gabriel and identical to what al-Sijistānī otherwise describes as the Holy Spirit and the intelligible emanation from the Universal Intellect and Soul.

The spiritual intermediary called *Fath* is another spiritual power that enables the Prophet to understand the inner or hidden wisdom of things through *ta'wīl*. Al-Sijistānī equated *Fath* to Michael and added that *Fath* opens and clarifies the summative knowledge that the Prophet receives through *Jadd*.¹¹³⁸ The power of *Fath* also allows the Prophet or a divinely supported person (*al-mu'ayyad*) to receive inspired “openings” during his daily activities and interactions with people:

Sometimes the conjunction of divine support with the divinely supported person occurs when he is contemplating a person, an animal, a tree, or something else. So his contemplation “opens” (*fataḥa*) up for him the realities of knowledge of the unseen (*ḥaqā'iq min 'ulūm al-ghayb*) and he becomes aware of the secrets of hidden matters. So the divine support becomes established in this form. Sometimes a man is speaking about something before the divinely supported person the meaning of which he does not recognize. Then a wondrous divine support “opens” (*fataḥa*) for the divinely supported person from [the man's] speech. What is opened for him becomes a fundamental divine law (*nāmūs aṣḥlī*) obligatory for people to perform during this period.¹¹³⁹

In the above remarks, al-Sijistānī indicated that divine support and divine inspiration are a dynamic and continuous process for a Prophet. This ability derives from the “holy power” (*quwwa qudsiyya*) of *Fath*.¹¹⁴⁰ Whenever the Prophet needs to know the meaning of something – an utterance or an object – a divine support and inspiration “open” this knowledge for him.

¹¹³⁶ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, 119.

¹¹³⁷ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Mawāzīn*, in *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, 328.

¹¹³⁸ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, 119.

¹¹³⁹ *Kitāb al-Yanābī'*, 171-172.

¹¹⁴⁰ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Mawāzīn*, in *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, 329.

The Revelatory Products: Revelatory Expression (*tanzīl*), *Sharī'a* and Revelatory Hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*)

In the case of the Prophet Muhammad specifically, the Revelatory Products consist of his revelatory expression (*tanzīl*) called the Qur'ān, the *sharī'a*, and the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) taught by the Founder and the Imams succeeding Muhammad. As we saw earlier, *tanzīl* is a symbolic representation of the Revelatory Principles (God's Speech and the Universal Intellect) in the form of speech (*kalām*), while the *sharī'a* is a symbolic expression of the same Revelatory Principles in the form of commands and prohibitions. In both cases, the Prophet is the composer (*mu'allif*) of the Arabic Qur'ān and his extra-qur'ānic prophetic guidance; they are not verbally dictated by God or the Angel Gabriel.

The Prophet composes the *tanzīl* based on the symbolic correspondence between the divinely illuminated ideas (*khaṭīrāt*) he conceives through divine support and the target language he uses to communicate with his own people.

Between ideas (*khaṭīrāt*) and the languages are spiritual relationships (*munāsibāt rūḥāniyya*) and psychic correspondences (*mushākilāt nafsāniyya*). He may express the relationships for some people in Syriac, for others in Hebrew, and for others in Arabic. Not every possessor of an idea can convey ideas to others in what contains sweetness and wisdom if they [the ideas] are removed from their resemblance, relation, and associate in a language. It becomes difficult for the one honored with [the prophetic message] to express what lacks a resemblance in language. [For example], if the idea is what was composed (*ta'līf*) as the *Shahāda*, no God but God, it is likewise the case that it was shaped as Arabic and harmonizes with it. If it were moved from Arabic to Syriac and Hebrew, its establishment with [this] configuration and form would not occur. He [God] said as demonstration of this: “*And indeed, We have made the qur'ān easy in your tongue that they might be reminded.*” (44:58), meaning We made the thought easy in your heart, meaning with its communication to your community in your language and your tongue of what contains wisdom and explanation.¹¹⁴¹

The process of composing (*ta'līf*) the *tanzīl* and the *sharī'a* seems to depend upon what al-Sijistānī calls spiritual relationships (*munāsibāt rūḥāniyya*) and psychic correspondences (*mushākilāt*

¹¹⁴¹ Ibid., 231.

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nafsaniyya)” between the ideas (*khaṭirāt*) of a Prophet and the target language he must communicate them in. The Prophet must forge the most appropriate symbolic relationship between his divinely inspired idea and its linguistic expression – in Arabic, Syriac, or Hebrew, or some other language. On this point, al-Sijistānī observed that a Prophet will not be able to express certain ideas if the target language lacks the semantic structure required to symbolize the idea.

To illustrate this point, al-Sijistānī evoked the example of the Islamic *Shahāda* (*lā ilāha illa Allāh*); this is a symbolic expression which, if transferred into another language like Hebrew or Syriac, would have to take on an entirely different structure from how it looks in Arabic; it cannot merely be linguistically translated since that would destroy the spiritual correspondence between the verbal expression and the spiritual ideas. According to al-Sijistānī, the *Shahāda* was composed by the Prophet to encapsulate a divinely inspired idea (*khaṭira*) about the structure of God’s creation consisting of natural bodies and spiritual beings.¹¹⁴² Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad composed everything in the Arabic Qur’ān and the *sharī‘a* as a symbol for spiritual ideas (*khaṭirāt*) that he envisioned in his heart: “It is likewise for every idea (*khaṭira*) which the Messengers designate as divinely sent down speech (*kalām munazzal*) or institute as law (*nāmūs*) among their communities. These contain wonders of explanation (*ajā’ib al-bayān*) and symbols of revelatory hermeneutics (*rumūzāt al-ta’wīl*) that the community’s ideas are incapable of.”¹¹⁴³

The Prophet’s *tanzīl* appears as a verbal discourse quite unlike ordinary human speech. Since the Prophet’s words are a verbal expression of divinely supported ideas and informed by the

¹¹⁴² Ibid., 229.

¹¹⁴³ Ibid., 230.

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holiness emanating from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul, his resultant speech is inimitable and miraculous:

When the spiritual and intellectual colors [of the Universal Intellect] unite to him and he becomes aware of the movements of the [Universal Soul's] cosmic construction (*tarkīb*), his speech (*kalām*) possesses forcefulness, nobility, elegance, and loftiness such that no one is capable of producing anything like it in his language and his tongue. So his speech is dominant over every speech, popular in every time period, and an exemplar in every place.¹¹⁴⁴

On this point, al-Sijistānī's view was similar to other Muslims among the Sunnis and Twelver Shi'is, who affirmed the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Arabic Qur'ān. But the key difference is that al-Sijistānī understood the inimitable Qur'ān to be the production of the Prophet Muhammad:

The Qur'an is the product of Muḥammad's role as *nāṭiq* (speaker prophet) and, as such, is of less sanctity than its original which is the universal form of truth and reason. Muḥammad had the benefit of timeless intellect. Accordingly, what he knew and what he based the Qur'an on, was itself sublime. As he formed his knowledge into words – Arabic words – it became earthly, mundane, fixed in time and place by its language and linguistic conventions. The scripture tended to become worldly, especially without the author who created and first explained it. The legislator of Islamic law is usually understood to be God; God and only God makes law. However, in the Ismaili Shiism of al-Sijistānī, this is the role of the Speaking-Prophet.¹¹⁴⁵

There is no break in God's habit or the laws of nature; the very existence of Prophets possessing the power of holiness is a natural feature of the Cosmos. God does not literally recite the Arabic Qur'ān, nor does He create and then dictate its recitation to the Prophet. The Arabic Qur'ān, in al-Sijistānī's vision, is the inimitable discourse of Muhammad and it verbally symbolizes the transcendent Speech of God.

As for the Prophet's construction of the *sharī'a*, this is something he undertakes in response to the prevailing temporal, cultural, and socio-political conditions of his own time. The end goal or purpose of the *sharī'a* created by the Prophet is the well-being (*maṣlaḥa*) of his community. Al-Sijistānī compared the *sharī'a* to medicine and explained the reasons for different Prophets

¹¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 236.

¹¹⁴⁵ Walker, *Intellectual Missionary*, 48.

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composing differing and diverging *sharī'as* along the same lines as the existence of different medicines to treat different diseases.

The *sharī'a* is religious governance (*siyāsa dīniyya*) for the well-being (*maṣlahā*) of [God's] servants in their worldly life and their afterlife, just as medicine is bodily governance for the benefit of the servants in the preservation of their well-being and warding off sickness from them... Likewise, every Messenger diversifies his governance (*siyāsatahu*) and his *sharī'a* on account of his time period, his location, and the people to whom he is sent.¹¹⁴⁶

What this means is that the *sharī'a* of any given Speaker Prophet contains contextual elements tailored to prevailing circumstances as well as universal elements that constitute its core: “Each *sharī'a* is a part of an absolute *sharī'a* that regulates both realms (*al-dārayn*) but then the absolute *sharī'a* is found to have its particular conditions diversified – that is, each single *sharī'a* relates to the period that occasioned it according to what existed at that time.”¹¹⁴⁷ The *sharī'a* is also filled with symbols, including rituals like prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, that represent spiritual and metaphysical truths. However, as time passes and circumstances change, a particular *sharī'a* stops functioning in the intended manner and the Spirit (*rūḥ*) departs from it, reducing it to a dead carcass. At this point, a new Speaker Prophet emerges and composes a new *sharī'a* as a renewed expression of the Spirit.¹¹⁴⁸ Eventually the *sharī'a* of Muhammad will be partly abolished with the appearance of the Lord of Resurrection.¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹⁴⁶ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 251.

¹¹⁴⁷ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maqālīd*, quoted in Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 186.

¹¹⁴⁸ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 101.

¹¹⁴⁹ Al-Sijistānī divided the *sharī'a* into two parts: the rational (*'aqlī*) and the imposed (*wad'ī*). The former consists of laws that human society cannot dispense with, such as laws for marriage, preservation of life, and trade. The latter consists of worship rituals like prayer, fasting, ablution, or pilgrimage, which are temporally contingent and only useful in their esoteric symbolized meanings. In al-Sijistānī's view, the imposed *sharī'a* of Muhammad would be abolished with the coming of the Qā'im. See *Ithbāt*, 276-282.

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After the *tanzīl* and the *sharī'a*, the third Revelatory Product is revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*). As noted earlier, *ta'wīl* is an explanation (*bayān*) of the *tanzīl* and the *sharī'a* that makes their meaning consistent with what intellect knows without changing the outward expressions (*zāhir*) found in the former. Both the Qur'ān and *sharī'a* consist of symbolic structures that stand for higher level truths, which Muhammad perceived in his soul and heart and communicated in his people's language. In this respect, *ta'wīl* is necessary in order to recover the original meanings of the Revelatory Products and unveil the contents of the Revelatory Principles, the Word of God and the Universal Intellect. In other words, *ta'wīl* for al-Sijistānī is an explanatory discourse that utilizes the three Revelatory Products – the human intellect, *tanzīl*, and *sharī'a* – to reveal the higher truths of the Revelatory Principles by way of correspondence:

The *tanzīl* is similar to raw materials while the *ta'wīl* resembles the manufactured goods... Similarly, the *tanzīl* consists of putting things together in words. Beneath those words lie the treasured meanings. It is the practioner of *ta'wīl* who extracts the intended meaning from each word and puts everything in its proper place."¹¹⁵⁰

While the *tanzīl* and the *sharī'a* are Revelatory Products composed by the Speaker Prophet, the *ta'wīl* is taught by the Founder, the Imams, and the *hujjas* whom the Imam teaches either verbally or spiritually. This *ta'wīl* is articulated in the form of an explanation (*bayān*) of the *tanzīl* and the *sharī'a* while also being a manifestation of the Speech of God.¹¹⁵¹ “The Speech of Revelatory Hermeneutics (*al-kalām al-ta'wīl*)”, al-Sijistānī remarked, “is the placement of speech in a position verifying what is known through the intellect without removing the speech from its outward aspect

¹¹⁵⁰ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Maqālīd*, quoted in Poonawala, “Ismā'īlī *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān,” 206.

¹¹⁵¹ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*, 138.

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(*'an zāhirihi*)...This [*ta'wīl*] is the act of divine support (*ta'yīd*) bringing together the exoteric names used in the ambiguous verses.”¹¹⁵²

Ta'wīl for al-Sijistānī (as for other Ismaili thinkers) is best described as “revelatory hermeneutics” or “revelatory exegesis” as opposed to mere “commentary”, “exegesis”, or “allegorical interpretation” for two reasons. First, *ta'wīl* is articulated as an exegesis of the symbols found in the Revelatory Products such as the *tanzīl* and the *sharī'a*. This exegesis is always presented as an unveiling (*kashf*) of the truth contents of the Revelatory Principles, including the Neoplatonic realm and the idealized Ismaili *da'wa* using the text of the Qur'ān as the starting point. For example, al-Sijistānī observed that many Qur'ānic verses, including the ambiguous verses (*al-mutashābihāt*), the narratives about the Prophets, and Qur'ānic verses about the “earth”, “mountains”, “light”, “heaven”, “water”, “days”, “trees”, etc. are such that a literal reading defies rationality. These verses require *ta'wīl* to be decoded so that the human intellect may realize the original meanings behind the symbols, such that these verses become rationally acceptable. For example, the meaning of “light” (*nūr*) in Q. 24:35, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth,” is not natural light, but rather, a spiritual and intellectual light emanating from God's Word, the Intellect, and the Soul. Similarly, the meaning of the word “earth” (*arḍ*) in many Qur'anic verses, according to *ta'wīl*, is “knowledge” or “the possessor of knowledge”; various Qur'anic descriptions of God stretching, reviving, and quaking the earth, or granting it as an inheritance to His servants only accord with the intellect when read through this *ta'wīl*. Likewise, when the Qur'ān says that “We shall roll up heaven as a scroll” (Q. 21:105), the *ta'wīl* of “heaven” is the *sharī'a* and not the

¹¹⁵² Ibid., 237.

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physical heavens.¹¹⁵³ In one respect, *ta'wīl* for al-Sijistānī amounts to a “reversion” of the prophetic act of *tanzīl*; the goal of *ta'wīl* is not so much to disclose the meaning of the Qur'ān as a self-contained text, but to reveal the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of the Revelatory Principles.

Second, al-Sijistānī situated *ta'wīl* as a revelatory discourse flowing from divine support (*ta'yīd*) and inspiration (*wahy*), just as the early Ismailis believed. This divine inspiration, which flows to the Founder, the Imams, and the *hujjas*, discloses the truths of the Neoplatonic Revelatory Principles. It will be recalled that al-Sijistānī spoke of three spiritual powers – *Jadd*, *Fath* and *Khayāl* – that adorn the human soul of the Speaker Prophet in his reception of divine support and inspiration. The powers of *Fath* and *Khayāl* are also present in the Founder and the Imams respectively.

The *Fath* is a holy power (*quwwa qudsiyya*) specific to the Founder of every Speaker Prophet, [and] summons to the *Jadd* that comes above him by what it opens of it within his soul. “*Fath*” has three letters indicating that it [the *Fath*] is begotten from the two root-principles (Intellect and Soul) and that the *Jadd* is above it. *Khayāl* is the power which carries the two aforementioned powers – the *Jadd* and the *Fath* – to the Completers [Imams] in the cycles of the Speaker Prophets, just as the Imamate is a leadership office issuing from the two Founders [Speaker Prophet and Founder].¹¹⁵⁴

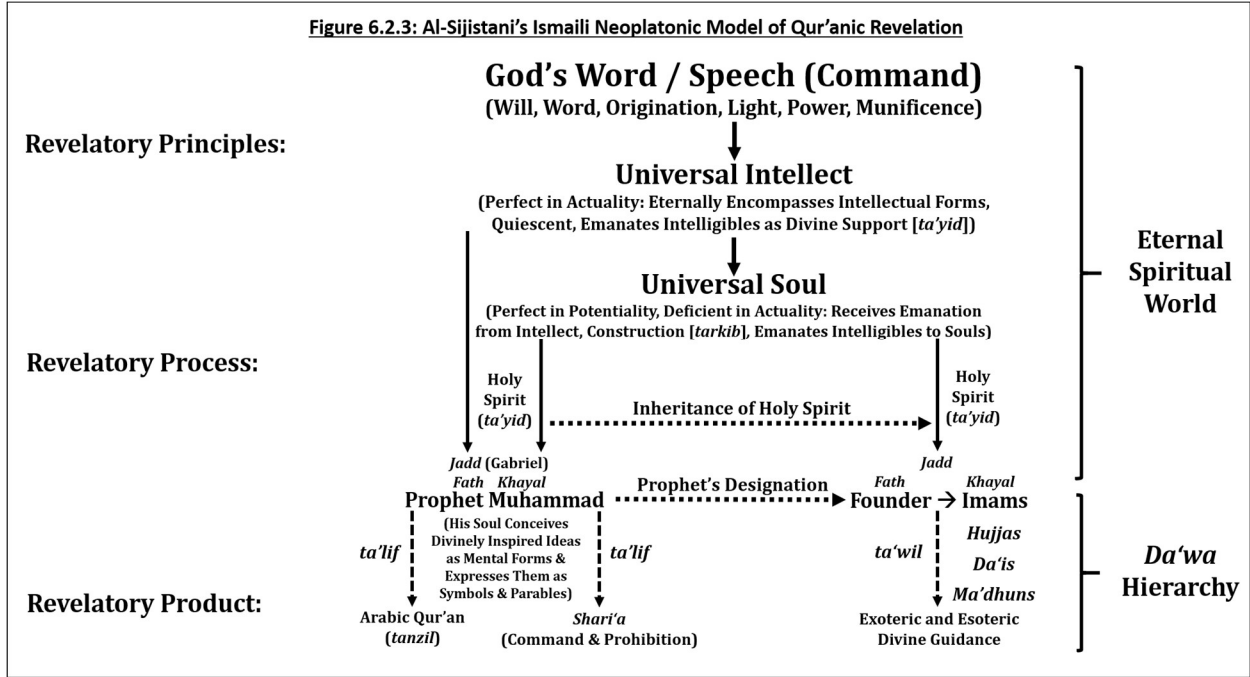
In sum, the Speaker Prophet's soul is divinely supported through the intermediary spiritual power variously called the Holy Spirit, Gabriel and *Jadd* (encompassing whatever powers are under it); this *Jadd* is an intelligible light that illumines the Prophet's ideas with divine support from the Intellect and Soul. The Founder's soul is divinely supported through the intermediary spiritual power called *Fath*, which mediates the power of *Jadd* and facilitates “openings” of divine support for him. Likewise, the Imams' souls possess the power of *Khayāl*, which mediates both *Jadd* and *Fath* to them and grants them access to divine support. In this way, the Founder and Imams are

¹¹⁵³ For a discussion of these examples, see Poonawala, “Ismā'īlī *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān,” 210-219.

¹¹⁵⁴ Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Mawāzīn*, in *Kitāb al-Ifṭikhār*, 328-329.

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divinely supported and the revelatory exegesis (*ta'wīl*) they teach to the community is a Revelatory Product alongside the Prophet's revelatory expression (*tanzīl*).



Conclusion:

Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's Ismaili Neoplatonic philosophy marked an important turning point in Ismaili intellectual history. His fusion of Neoplatonism and Ismaili esotericism included a highly systematic theory of Prophethood and Qur'anic Revelation. According to al-Sijistānī's ontocosmological vision, the Word of God is both the cosmic principle and the Revelatory Principle. All existence flows from and is sustained by God's Word, which al-Sijistānī identified with the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) revealed through the Prophets. The Speech of God manifests as the divine support (*ta'yīd*) of the Universal Intellect, the cosmic construction (*tarkīb*) of the Universal

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Soul, the composition (*ta'līf*) of the Prophets resulting in the revelatory expression (*tanzīl*) and *sharī'a*, the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Imams, and the purely spiritual emanation of the Lord of Resurrection (*ṣāhib al-qiyāma*). In this system, the Universal Intellect functions as a secondary Revelatory Principle since it mediates the emanation of God's Speech to all lower levels. The divine support (*ta'yīd*) of the Intellect manifests through four revelatory mediums: the innate intellect (*al-'aql al-gharīzī*) of human beings, the person of the Speaker Prophet, the *sharī'a* of the Speaker Prophet, and the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Imams. The Prophets exist on earth as members of a special species called the "possessors of holiness" (*aṣḥāb al-quḍus*), who rank higher than the human species and whose existence is the product of the teleological activities of the Cosmos sustained by the Universal Soul. The Prophets along with possessors of holiness, such as the Founder, the Imams, and the *ḥujjas*, possess the spiritual faculty of divine support (*ta'yīd*), through which they receive intellectual benefits from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul in the form of divine inspiration (*wahy*). This effectively renders the Prophets as the human reflections and manifestations of the Universal Intellect and the Word of God. Al-Sijistānī took great pains to stress that the Prophet Muhammad's reception of *wahy* does not at all entail the Angel Gabriel descending from heaven to earth and orally dictating the Qur'ān to him, as maintained by most Muslims. On the contrary, al-Sijistānī specified that Muhammad's reception of divine inspiration is purely mental (*wahmī*) and intellectual (*'aqlī*). The Universal Intellect emanates intelligible forms (*ashkal 'aqliyya*) and spiritual colors (*aṣbāgh rūḥāniyya*) upon the Prophet's soul, which retains these as psychic mental forms (*ashkal wahmiyya wa nafsiyya*). In this Revelatory Process, the Prophet conceives spiritual ideas (*khaṭirāt*), which are illuminated by an intelligible light (*nūr*) emanating from the Universal Intellect and Soul. The names for this spiritual light are the Holy Spirit in the Qur'ān, Gabriel in most Islamic theological discourse, and

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Jadd in Ismaili vocabulary. When contemplating these divinely supported ideas within his soul, the Prophet also benefits from the spiritual powers of *Fath* and *Khayāl* that emanate from *Jadd*. The Prophet then employs human language and idiom to compose (*ta'lif*) symbolic structures that represent these divinely inspired ideas and convey them to his community in a form tailored to their capacities. Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammad produced two Revelatory Products: the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a*, each consisting of verbal linguistic symbols tailored to his community. The Arabic Qur'ān, therefore, is the divinely inspired words of the Prophet Muhammad and not the literal words of God or the Angel Gabriel. A third Revelatory Product is *ta'wīl*, which is taught by the Founder and the Imams. *Ta'wīl*, described here as revelatory hermeneutics, consists of disclosing the meaning of the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* in harmony with the human intellect, by showing the correspondence between the symbolic truths of the Revelatory Products and the real truths in the Revelatory Principle. The Founder and the Imams perform *ta'wīl* through divine support (*ta'yīd*) from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul through the mediation of *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl*. In this respect, the Revelatory Process for al-Sijistānī is an ongoing event through the Imams and their *hujjas*.

6.3 Fatimid Ismaili Positions on Qur'ānic Revelation: Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz (r. 341-365/953-975), al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), and Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 349/960)

The Ismaili positions on Qur'ānic Revelation discussed thus far are all from eastern Ismaili *dā'īs*, who expounded their interpretations without recourse to the teaching authority of the Fatimid Ismaili *da'wa* based in North Africa and later Cairo. Thanks to the religious policies and outreach efforts of the Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz (r. 341-365/953-975), many eastern Ismaili communities began to establish ties with the Fatimid *da'wa* in the latter half of the fourth/tenth century, as

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evidenced by reported visits of eastern Ismaili *dā'īs* to the Imam and al-Sijistānī's eventual recognition of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs and al-Mu'izz specifically as the rightful Imams and deputies of the Lord of Resurrection.¹¹⁵⁵ In the midst of these efforts, Fatimid Ismaili *dā'īs* began incorporating Neoplatonic metaphysics, cosmology, and hermeneutics into their teachings. As stated earlier, the precise reasons for this remain unclear to modern scholars, but it resulted in naturalization of Neoplatonic thought into Ismaili *da'wa* discourse, where it was situated as the esoteric kernel of Ismaili teaching. This becomes more apparent in how Fatimid *dā'īs* discussed the issue of Qur'ānic Revelation, of which two pertinent examples will be considered below.

Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), known as al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, was one of the foremost Ismaili scholars and *dā'īs* of the entire Fatimid era. He is often discussed in modern scholarship as the founder of Ismaili jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which he consolidated over several decades under the guidance of four Fatimid Imam-Caliphs, and the composer of historical works and etiquette manuals. The culmination of his legal works was the official Fatimid legal manual *Da'ā'im al-Islām (The Pillars of Islam)*. Sumaiya Hamdani argues that al-Nu'mān's legal, historical, and protocol writings indicate that “the Fatimids began to further develop a *ẓāhirī* or public discourse acceptable to the Sunni majority, to function alongside the *bāṭinī* or esoteric canon that continued to be disseminated to the Ismaili community.”¹¹⁵⁶ Al-Nu'mān was equally grounded in the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ān and *sharī'a*, about which he composed important treatises such as *Asās al-ta'wīl (The Foundations of Revelatory Hermeneutics)* and *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im al-Islām (The Revelatory Hermeneutics of the Pillars of Islam)*. Another major esoteric

¹¹⁵⁵ On al-Mu'izz and the eastern Ismaili communities, see Stern, “Heterodox Ismā'ilism at the time of al-Mu'izz,” in *Studies in Early Ismā'ilism*, 257-288.

¹¹⁵⁶ Sumaiya A. Hamdani, *From Revolution to State* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006), 31.

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work from al-Nu'mān's corpus is the *Ta'wīl al-sharī'a* (*The Revelatory Hermeneutics of the Law*), which is currently being edited, translated, and studied by Nadia E. Jamal. According to her preliminary evaluation, this text was compiled by al-Nu'mān under the authority of the Imam al-Mu'izz and contains many of this Imam's recorded statements about theological matters. She also observes that the *Ta'wīl al-sharī'a* became a major teaching text for the Fatimid *da'wa* in later periods, with the goal of preparing Ismaili *dā'īs* to participate in major intellectual debates among Muslims during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century. On these grounds, Jamal argued that the Ismaili hermeneutic presented in this work is not merely an insider discourse for Ismailis only but deploys Ismaili doctrines to address wider Muslim theological questions.¹¹⁵⁷ Most relevant to our topic, the *Ta'wīl al-sharī'a* contains two statements of the Ismaili Imam himself about the nature of Qur'ānic Revelation and the theological status of the Qur'ān.

6.3.1 The Speech of God and the Word of His Messenger: The Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz (r. 341-365/953-975)

In one section of *Ta'wīl al-sharī'a*, al-Nu'mān reported that Imam al-Mu'izz was asked about a Qur'ānic verse referring to the Qur'ān as “the light (*nūr*) that We sent down”. The questioner stated that “light contains neither audible letters nor connected expressions, so in what modality was the state of the Qur'an?”. The Imam responded as follows:

God only sent down the Qur'ān upon His servant and His Messenger, Muhammad, as a light (*nūr*) that the faculty of prophecy bore and that the perfect and purified soul accepted. When the Prophet wished to convey the light to the ranks of human beings (*tabaqāt al-nās*), he realized that their dense natures and their turbid souls do not perceive that subtlety (*al-laṭāfa*). So he molded (*kayyafa*) that subtle light (*al-nūr al-laṭīf*) with connected utterances (*bi-alfāz majmū'a*), coined parables (*amthāl maḍrūba*), and understandable allusions (*ishārāt maḥmūma*) in order establish them in their souls

¹¹⁵⁷ Nadia E. Jamal, “Esoteric Explorations of the Sharī'a, the path to the Divine: A Fatimid Exposition,” Paper Presented at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, November 2014. Abstract accessed online on September 15, 2018: <https://ismailimail.blog/2014/11/21/esoteric-explorations-of-the-sharia-the-path-to-the-divine-a-fatimid-exposition-nadia-eboo-jamals-presentation-at-mesa-2014-conference-washington-dc/>.

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according to the intention of the revealed wisdoms, since the ranks [of the people] do not possess pure souls receptive to that lordly universal light.¹¹⁵⁸

The above remarks contain the most authoritative exposition on the Ismaili view of Qur'ānic Revelation as far as the Fatimid Ismailis are concerned, because these are the words of an Ismaili Imam considered to be infallible in his religious teachings. The Imam's explanation significantly lacks the Neoplatonic framework and terminology that the eastern Ismaili scholars surveyed above. But, in common with other Ismaili scholars, the Imam's account of Qur'ānic Revelation portrays divine inspiration (*wahy*) as "subtle light" (*al-nūr al-laṭīf*), which means that *wahy* is non-verbal and non-material. He then affirmed that Muhammad "molded" (*kayyafa*) the light of *wahy* into "connected utterances (*bi-alfāz majmū'a*), coined parables (*amthāl maḍrūba*), and understandable allusions (*ishārāt mafhūma*)", which together constitute the Arabic Qur'ān. This was necessary because the Prophet's audience was incapable of perceiving *wahy* with their souls. In sum, the Ismaili Imam identified the "lordly universal light" as the Revelatory Principle and the Arabic Qur'ān as the Revelatory Product, while depicting a two-level Revelatory Process consisting of a non-verbal divine inspiration to Muhammad and the latter's composition of Arabic letters and words.

Recognizing the agency of Muhammad in producing the Qur'ān may seem to call into question the status of the Qur'ān as the Speech of God. Accordingly, a second statement from the same Imam reported in the *Ta'wīl al-sharī'a* leaves no doubt that the Ismaili Imamate recognized the Arabic Qur'ān both as the "word of the Messenger" (*qawl al-rasūl*) and the "Speech of God" (*kalām Allāh*). In this report, the Imam al-Mu'izz was asked about the meaning of the qur'ānic

¹¹⁵⁸ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-sharī'a*, Chapter 4, Section 4. Nadia E. Jamal provided me with her edited Arabic text in a personal communication. The translation is my own. A different translation and discussion of this passage is provided in Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān*, 81-82.

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verses that say, “Verily, it is the word of an honorable messenger” (Q. 81:19, 69:40). After quoting this verse, the questioner observed that “according to the majority, [the Qur’ān] is the Speech (*qawl*) of God, while according to the mention of this verse, the Qur’ān is the Speech (*kalām*) of the Messenger.” The Imam responded by saying:

Verily, God sent down the light (*nūr*) which He mentioned in the Qur’ān upon the heart of Muhammad. The Prophet did not send down that divine lordly light upon the hearts of the believers because they lacked the capacity to bear it, due to the disparity between the Prophet and the believers among the common people. He only conveyed the meanings of the inspiration (*wahy*) and the light – its obligations, rulings and allusions – by means of utterances composed with arranged, combined, intelligible, and audible letters (*bi-alfāz mu'allafa bi-ḥurūf muḥarrafa murakkaba mafhūma masmū'a*). When Prophet combined (*rakkaba*) these utterances and letters and enclosed the meanings that the inspiration contained within them, the Recitation (*al-qur'ān*) constructed according to the light – which is the inspiration (*al-wahy*) sent down [to him] – became the word of the Messenger (*qawl al-rasūl*). Thus, the construction (*al-tarkīb*), the expressions (*al-alfāz*), and the composition (*al-ta'liḥ*) belong to the Prophet (*li l-nabī*). So it [the Qur’ān] is the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) as well as the word of the Messenger of God (*qawl rasūl Allāh*).¹¹⁵⁹

This statement certainly overlaps with the same Imam’s remarks as discussed above. God sent down a “divine lordly light” upon Muhammad, who expressed this light in the form of “utterances composed with arranged, combined, intelligible, and audible letters (*bi-alfāz mu'allafa bi-ḥurūf muḥarrafa murakkaba mafhūma masmū'a*). But here, the Imam is much more explicit that the Arabic Qur’ān was authored by Muhammad because he enclosed the spiritual contents of *wahy* within Arabic utterances and letters: “The construction (*al-tarkīb*), the expressions (*al-alfāz*), and the composition (*al-ta'liḥ*) belong to the Prophet (*li l-nabī*).” In this respect, the Imam concluded that the Arabic Qur’ān is simultaneously the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) and the word of the Messenger of God (*qawl rasūl Allāh*). The implication of this Ismaili formula is that God’s Speech is a spiritual light (*nūr*) transcending sounds and letters; this being the Revelatory Principle. The Arabic Qur’ān *qua* sounds, letters, and words is a Revelatory Product composed by the Prophet in

¹¹⁵⁹ Ibid., Chapter 5, Section 49. Nadia E. Jamal provided me with the Arabic text in a personal communication. The translation is my own.

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which the Speech of God is manifest. Yet, God's Speech and the Arabic Qur'ān as the word of the Messenger remain distinct either ontologically or formally – the Imam does not truly define their precise relationship in his discourse.

The Ismaili Imam's position directly opposes contemporary Sunni understandings of Qur'anic Revelation in *tafsīr* and *kalam*: he rejects the pre-existence of the Arabic Qur'ān in a heavenly tablet as well as its verbatim dictation to Muhammad by Gabriel. His description that God inspired Muhammad with a spiritual light contradicts Mu'tazilī claims that God's Speech is essentially sounds and letters. Meanwhile, the Imam's position partially agrees with the Ash'arī view that God's Speech transcends sounds and letters. Likewise, the Imam's distinction between God's Speech as incorporeal light and the Arabic Qur'ān as the word (*qawl*) of the Prophet partially correlates with the teaching of al-Bāqillānī and other fifth/eleventh-century Ash'arīs, for whom the Arabic Qur'ān in its words and letters was the word (*qawl*) of Gabriel. But unlike these Ash'arī theologians, the Ismaili Imam did not frame God's Speech as an uncreated divine attribute; he also accorded real agency to Muhammad as the author (*mu'allif*) of the Arabic Qur'ān. Despite the absence of Neoplatonic concepts, the Ismaili Imamate's position on Qur'anic Revelation accords with the general views of the Ismaili Neoplatonic philosophers in asserting the non-verbal, spiritual, and luminous nature of *wahy* and emphasizing Muhammad's role as the actual “author” of the Arabic Qur'ān.

6.3.2 From the Simple World to Verbal Prophetic Speech: Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 349/960)

In addition to the teachings of Imam al-Mu'izz, we also find important Fatimid *dā'īs* like Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 349/960) writing on the topic of Qur'anic Revelation. Ja'far held the spiritual rank of “Gate of Gates” (*bab al-abwāb*) and his spiritual authority was second only to the

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Imam himself. His views on revelation are briefly outlined in his work titled *Sarā'ir wa asrār al-nuṭuqā'* (*The Secrets and Mysteries of the Speaker Prophets*), a treatise that presents an Ismaili hiero-historical reading of the stories of the Qur'ānic Prophets.¹¹⁶⁰ *The Secrets* depicted how the Prophets, the Imams and the Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy receive divine inspiration (*waḥy*) – variously called divine support (*ta'yīd*), spiritual sustenance (*mādda*), the spiritual stream (*jārī*), or the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudus*) – from the Neoplatonic realm of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul.

In the introductory section of this text, Ja'far described how divine support (*ta'yīd*) conjoins to the souls of the Speaker Prophets from the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul through the mediation of *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl* without any corporeal intermediaries.¹¹⁶¹ In doing so, Ja'far contrasted his Ismaili understanding of divine inspiration with the views of the “masses” (*al-awāmm*) among the Muslims, who hold to the verbal dictation theory of Qur'ānic Revelation. As Ja'far described it, the common Muslims believe that “what comes as sounds and speech is called *waḥy* and *tanzīl* – that an angel brings it down from the presence of God with composed and arranged letters resembling the speech of human mortals according to the measure of what we find in ourselves.”¹¹⁶² Ja'far believed that this view was ultimately misguided and was only believed by most Muslims “due to the shortcomings of their knowledge of the hierarchical ranks (*al-ḥudūd*) and the deficiency of their knowledge about the ranks and stations of the Speaker Prophets.”¹¹⁶³ Arguing against the verbal dictation theory, Ja'far emphasized that “the Simple World has neither

¹¹⁶⁰ Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarā'ir wa asrār al-nuṭuqā'*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Dār Andalus, 1984).

¹¹⁶¹ *Sarā'ir*, 24.

¹¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 25.

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sound nor speech with composed letters through which utterances and compositions appear. Intelligible utterance (*al-qawl a-mafhūm*) and naturalized speech (*al-kalām al-maṭbūʿ*) is only part of the corporeal natural world through the natures.”¹¹⁶⁴ In other words, it is impossible for a Prophet to receive divine inspiration in the form of audible speech because the spiritual world wholly transcends corporeal natural phenomena like sound. Jaʿfar instead explained the Revelatory Process as follows:

This [*wahy* and *tanzīl*] is from the power of the Word (*min quwwat al-kalima*) through the conjunction of the [spiritual] stream (*al-jārī*) and the impressions (*nuqūsh*) of the Simple World in sound intellects and chaste minds through imaginings in sound thoughts and pure intellects... When intellects are purified and souls are refined, the spirits are cleansed from the turbidities of the natural world and connect to the Simple World. Then they return to their abode, which is the body, and purify it from the filth of the natures and its turbidities and cleanse the brain of foul vapors and filthy mixtures. The intellect is purified and glows and the resources of the Spirit (*māddat al-rūh*) strengthen it. At that moment, the impressions of the Simple World impress upon the intellect just as the stamp impresses upon what it seals. With that, all of what occurs in the Simple World and what is higher and lower is reported through composed corporeal language as articulate utterances. The common people call it *wahy* and *tanzīl* (sending down) and they designate the three intermediaries connecting the Universal Intellect to the particular intellect as “angels” (*malāʾika*) due to the station of their dominion (*tamlīk*). The people of the *sharīʿa* call them Gabriel, Michael, and Seraphiel, and the lords of wisdom call them *Jadd*, *Faṭḥ*, and *Khayāl*.¹¹⁶⁵

In Jaʿfar’s view, the Revelatory Principle is the “Simple World” (*ʿālām al-baṣīt*) constituted by Word of God, Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. Divine inspiration (*wahy*) comes from the Word of God and flows as a spiritual “stream” (*jārī*) conveying the divine support (*taʿyīd*) and spiritual resources (*māddat al-rūh*) of the Neoplatonic hypostases. These spiritual contents “impress” (*naqasha*) upon the Prophet’s pure intellect and soul: “The impressions of the Simple World impress upon the intellect just as the stamp impresses upon what it seals.” Following this, the Prophet reports what he comes to know in the form of corporeal utterances that his community

¹¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 24-25.

¹¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 24-25.

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can understand. The “angels” in religious terminology stand for the powers of *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl*, which are spiritual imaginings (*takhyīl*) internal to the Prophet’s faculty of thinking (*fikr*).

Ja‘far b. Maṣūūr’s view of Qur’ānic Revelation comes very close to the ideas of the eastern Ismaili Neoplatonists, particularly al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī. Ja‘far spoke of the “impression” (*naqsh*) of divine support upon the Prophet’s intellect in the same way that al-Rāzī described divine inspiration (*waḥy*) and the Holy Spirit “impressing” (*aththarat*) in the Prophet’s soul. Like al-Sijistānī, Ja‘far affirmed the intermediary role of *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl* as spiritual powers facilitating the Prophet’s reception of divine inspiration. Overall, Ja‘far’s ideas of Qur’ānic Revelation reflect the adoption of the eastern Ismailis’ Neoplatonic formulations into the Fatimid Ismaili *da‘wa*.

6.3.3 The Ismaili Imam as the Speaking *Kitāb* and Living Qur’ān: Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974)

One major difference between the eastern Ismaili and Fatimid Ismaili theories of Qur’ānic Revelation lies in the emphasis given to the role of the Imams. Al-Sijistānī certainly recognized the authority of the Ismaili Imams but most of his writings were focused on Prophethood. Meanwhile, the Fatimid Ismaili *dā‘īs* often stressed the living Imam’s authority to disclose the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) of the Arabic Qur’ān; they also elucidated *ta’wīl* themselves in which they presented the figure of the Imam as the signification (*mamthūl*) of specific Qur’ānic terms or ritual practices. On the former point, al-Nu‘mān framed the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) of the Qur’ān as the divinely inspired and inimitable miracle (*mu‘jiza*) of the Ismaili Imams. Thus, the Imams are also recipients of divine support (*ta’yīd*) through which they disclose the *bāḥin* of the Arabic Qur’ān in the form of *ta’wīl*: “He [God] made its outward aspect (*ẓāhir*)

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the inimitable miracle of His Messenger and its esoteric aspect (*bāṭin*) the inimitable miracle of the Imams of his *Ahl al-Bayt*.... Just as it is not possible for anyone to bring the exoteric of the Book (*zāhir al-kitāb*) except Muhammad the Messenger of God, no one can bring its esoteric aspect other than the Imams of his progeny.”¹¹⁶⁶

In another esoteric work, al-Nu'mān interpreted the Qur'ānic term *kitāb* in expressions like *ahl al-kitāb* as the Imam of the time: “The *Ahl al-Kitāb* are the followers of every master of the time (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) and the symbolic likeness of the *kitāb* (*mathal al-kitāb*) is the symbolic likeness of the one who is a Prophet or an Imam.”¹¹⁶⁷ Al-Nu'mān also depicted the Imam as the symbolic counterpart (*mathal*) of the Arabic Qur'ān, to the extent that even reciting the Qur'ān in prayer is a symbolic reference to the Imam: “The Qur'ān according to what was presented in the explanation of its revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) is the Master of the time, whether he is a Prophet or an Imam. This is because he [the Imam] is the one through whom [the Qur'ān's] explanation, rulings, permissions, and prohibitions subsist and he is its owner, equivalent, semblance, and counterpart.”¹¹⁶⁸ In effect, al-Nu'mān's interpretations frame the Ismaili Imam as the speaking living Qur'ān.

In support of this idea, al-Nu'mān referred to the famous Thaḳalayn tradition (examined in Chapter 5) in which the Prophet says he is leaving behind the *kitāb Allāh* and his *Ahl al-Bayt* for the guidance of his community. Al-Nu'mān quoted a version of Thaḳalayn where the Prophet describes the *kitāb Allāh* as “a rope extended from heaven to you, one end of which is with God

¹¹⁶⁶ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān, *Asās al-ta'wīl*, ed. Ārif Tāmīr (Beirut: Dār al-Thaḳāfa, 1960), 31.

¹¹⁶⁷ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, 3 Vols., ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-A'zamī (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-A'lāmī li l-Maṭbū'āt, 2006), Vol. 1, 124.

¹¹⁶⁸ Al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, Vol. 1, 355.

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and the other end among you.” Al-Nu‘mān then explained that the *kitāb Allāh* being a rope refers to God’s guidance as manifested and conveyed through the Ismaili chain of hereditary Imams: “That [rope] is an example coined for the Friends of God...its origin is with God and it is He who connects it to them. Its end among the people is the Master of every time period among them.”¹¹⁶⁹ Al-Nu‘mān’s interpretation of the Thaqalayn tradition resembles what may have been its earliest meaning as argued in Chapter 5, where the term *kitāb Allāh* stands for continuous divine guidance in general coming through the channel of Muhammad’s *Ahl al-Bayt*. The difference is that al-Nu‘mān defined the *Ahl al-Bayt* as the Ismaili lineage of Imams.

This equation between *kitāb*, Qur’ān, and the Imam pervaded al-Nu‘mān’s exegesis of other Qur’ānic verses. Al-Nu‘mān applied these principles to his elucidation of Q. 17:106, “A *qur’ān* We have divided so that you may recite it to the people while you are among them.” As seen in Chapter 1, this verse speaks to the piecemeal format of the Arabic *qur’āns* that Muhammad recites as continuous guidance for his people. Al-Nu‘mān explained the verse by transferring its meaning and significance to the Imams:

The symbolic likeness (*mathal*) of the Qur’ān is the symbolic likeness of the Master of the time. His saying “*We divided it*” means that He divided its symbolic likeness among the Imams; “*in order that you recite it to the people while you are among them*” means that the Imams establish it age after age such that they are its symbolic likenesses.¹¹⁷⁰

According to the above explanation, the piecemeal serial nature of the Qur’ān during its revelatory phase symbolizes the serial order of the chain of Imamate, in which every Imam dispenses responsive guidance in his own time. In one respect, the interactive real-time guidance provided by the Imams amounts to a continuation of the piecemeal dynamic guidance that the Arabic

¹¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 355-356.

¹¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 358.

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qur'āns provided during Muhammad's lifetime. Through these interpretations identifying the Imam, the *kitāb*, and the *qur'ān*, the Fatimid Ismailis framed the Ismaili Imamate as a vehicle of continuing divine inspiration and revelation. This idea is consistent with early pre-Fatimid Ismaili interpretations, seen in Chapter 5, where the Imam was equated to the qur'ānic *kitāb*.

Conclusion

The Fatimid Ismaili teaching on Qur'ānic Revelation given by Imam al-Mu'izz was generally a simpler formulation than the Neoplatonic models of the eastern Ismaili thinkers. According to the former view, the Prophet receives divine guidance and inspiration (*wahy*) as a spiritual light beyond sounds and letters. Faced with the task of communicating this divine guidance to his people, Muhammad molded this spiritual light into composite sounds, letters, words, and verses – thereby constructing what would later be called the Arabic Qur'ān. Meanwhile, the Imam's highest ranking *dā'īs*, Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, taught a Neoplatonic model of Qur'ānic Revelation that resembled the ideas of the eastern Ismaili thinkers. The differences between the Imam's far more simple teaching and Ja'far's Neoplatonic elaborations show how Ismaili *dā'īs* were free to adapt and expand a core teaching from an Ismaili Imam in light of the needs, terminologies, and theological issues of their intellectual milieu. Despite these differences, Fatimid Ismaili *dā'īs* like al-Nu'mān greatly emphasized the revelatory authority of the Ismaili Imam as the fountainhead for the exoteric and esoteric meaning of the Qur'ān. This idea was most effectively conveyed by portraying the Imam as God's speaking *kitāb* and the living Qur'ān.

6.4 Twelver Shi'i Views of Qur'ānic Revelation: Between Shi'i Esotericism and Mu'tazilī Kalām

In order to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the Shi'i Ismaili positions examined above, it is helpful to survey the Twelver Shi'i formulations of Qur'ānic Revelation that developed over the same period. In particular, we will consider the views of two major Twelver scholars – Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī, known as Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991-992), and Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, known as Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022). Al-Ṣadūq's views are provided in his creedal work *Risālat al-I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* (*Epistle on the Beliefs of the Imāmīs*) while al-Mufīd penned his positions in a credal treatise titled *Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* (*Emendation of the Beliefs of the Imāmīs*), which comments on and corrects al-Ṣadūq's ideas. Given that the latter work was composed to amend the former, it suffices to discuss the contents of both treatises on the topic of Qur'ānic Revelation side by side.¹¹⁷¹ We will also consider al-Mufīd's views as stated in his other writings.¹¹⁷²

Al-Ṣadūq affirmed the reality of the divine attributes and divided them into the attributes of God's Essence and attributes of God's actions. The essential attributes of God, such as hearing, seeing, knowing, wise, living, or powerful, simply entail the denial of the opposite of these attributes from God; they are not distinct entities super-added to God's Essence. Meanwhile, the attributes of action pertain to God as creator, agent, willer, intender, and speaker. Thus, al-Ṣadūq

¹¹⁷¹ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābawayh al-Qummī (Shaykh al-Ṣadūq), *al-I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya* (Qum: Mu'assassa al-Imām al-Hādī, 2011). My translations of this work are my own but have benefitted from the translation in *A Shi'ite Creed*, tr. Asaf A. A. Fyzee (Calcutta: Oxford University Press for the Islamic Research Association, 1942); Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ghumān b. al-Mu'allim Abī 'Abdullāh al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqādāt al-Imāmiyya*, ed. Ḥusayn Dargāhī (Qum: Al-Mu'tamar al-'Ālamī li-Alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1992). For this work I consulted the Arabic text but used the translations in *The Emendation of a Shi'ite Creed*, tr. 'Irfān 'Abdu l-Ḥamīd (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Sciences, 2006).

¹¹⁷² For this, I am consulting Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of Al-Shaikh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022)* (Beirut: Dar El-Mashreq, 1978).

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frames God's Speech as one of the attributes of action in line with Mu'tazilī theology.¹¹⁷³ Al-Mufid's made the same distinctions and was generally consistent with the ideas of Ṣadūq.¹¹⁷⁴

Al-Ṣadūq presented his summative position on the Qur'ān as follows: "The Qur'ān is the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), His inspiration (*wahy*), His sending down (*tanzīl*), His word (*qawl*), and His Book (*kitāb*)...God is its Producer (*muḥaddith*), its Sender (*munazzil*), its Lord (*rabb*), and its Preserver (*ḥāfiẓ*)."¹¹⁷⁵ This statement rejects the Ḥanbalī, Ash'arī, and Māturīdī belief that God's Speech is an uncreated divine attribute and comes closer to the Mu'tazilī position that the Arabic Qur'ān itself is God's Speech. However, al-Ṣadūq does not actually say the Qur'ān is created (*makhlūq*). He only went as far as to call God the "producer" (*muḥaddith*) of the Qur'ān, which implies that the Qur'ān as God's Speech is *muḥdath* (temporally generated). In comparison, al-Mufid conceived God's Speech similarly but also used Mu'tazilī ontology. He defined speech in general as sounds: "Speech is the articulation and ordering of vocal sounds so as to convey intelligible meanings. And I hold that vocal sounds are a kind of accident."¹¹⁷⁶ He based his definition of the Qur'ān as God's Speech on these principles: "The Qur'ān is God's Speech and *wahy*, and it is produced in time (*muḥdath*), as God Himself described it. And I refuse to say unreservedly that it is created (*makhlūq*)."¹¹⁷⁷ In asserting that God's Speech is the Arabic Qur'ān and *muḥdath*, al-Mufid's views came close to his predecessor.

¹¹⁷³ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt*, 30.

¹¹⁷⁴ Al-Mufid, *The Emendation*, 26.

¹¹⁷⁵ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt*, 244; Fyze translation, 84-85.

¹¹⁷⁶ Al-Mufid, *Awā'il al-maqālāt fī l-madhāhib al-mukhtārāt*, ed. 'Abbāsquḷī Ṣ. Wajdī with notes and introduction by Faḍl Allāh al-Zanjānī, Second Edition (Tabriz: Charandābī, 1371 AH), 106, as quoted in McDermott, *The Theology*, 89.

¹¹⁷⁷ Al-Mufid, *Awā'il*, 18-19, quoted in McDermott, *The Theology*, 90.

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Al-Ṣadūq then addressed the topic of the Qur'ān's revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven. The below remarks show that he endorsed the pre-existence of the Qur'ān in heaven prior to its angelic communication to the Prophet:

There is a Tablet between the two eyes of Seraphiel. Whenever God wishes to speak by way of revelation (*wahy*), the Tablet strikes the forehead of Seraphiel. He then looks into it and reads what is in it. Seraphiel then casts it upon Michael; and Michael casts it upon Gabriel, and Gabriel casts it upon the Prophets. As for the fainting fit which would come upon the Prophet, it used to take place at the time of God addressing him alone by reason whereof he would also feel a heaviness and perspire. As for Gabriel, he would never enter upon the Prophet until he sought permission out of respect for him, and he used to sit before him (the Prophet) in the manner of a slave... The Qur'ān was sent down all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) to the Frequented House in the month of Ramaḍān on the Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*). Then it was sent down from the Frequented House over a span of twenty years.¹¹⁷⁸

Some of al-Ṣadūq's statements above about the revelatory descent of the Qur'ān are identical to the views of 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr*, as we saw in Chapter 5. The reports concerning the Tablet between the eyes of Isrāfīl and the singular descent of the Qur'ān on the Night of Destiny formed part of al-Qummī's commentary on specific Qur'ānic verses. Al-Ṣadūq also upheld the Sunni *tafsīr* belief that the Qur'ān descended all at once (*jumla wāḥida*) on the Night of Destiny to the Frequented House – a belief that also found its way into early Shi'i *tafsīr*. At the same time, al-Ṣadūq specified another mode of divine communication where God speaks to the Prophet directly, resulting in Muhammad perspiring and fainting. This idea seems to be an interpretation of the Sunni *ḥadīths* seen in Chapter 2 where the Prophet would perceive *wahy* like the ringing of a bell and sweat profusely. Al-Ṣadūq further suggested that the Angel Gabriel in conveying the Qur'ān to the Prophet was subservient to him “in the manner of a slave” in what is a partial reversal of the Sunni view that the Prophet passively hears Gabriel recite the Qur'ān to him. Overall, al-Ṣadūq's views of Qur'ānic Revelation and prophetic inspiration appear to be a

¹¹⁷⁸ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt*, 225-230; Fyzee translation, 82-83.

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synthesis of several older ideas from third/ninth-century and fourth/tenth-century Sunni and Shi'i sources.

Meanwhile, al-Mufīd took issue with these teachings of al-Ṣadūq and rejected them. He dismissed the tradition concerning the Guarded Tablet between the two eyes of Isrāfīl by noting that it is an irregular (*shādhah*) tradition and therefore not accepted. He also provided a detailed explanation of *wahy*, in which he noted that “*wahy* means hushed speech; it might also bear the meaning of any speech which is intended to be understood by the hearer privately and by no one else, and directed at him and to no one else.”¹¹⁷⁹ Al-Mufīd cited various Qur'ānic mentions of *wahy* involving non-humans and humans generally. On this point, al-Mufīd was in full agreement with the pre-Islamic and Qur'ānic meaning of *wahy* noted in Chapter 1. However, al-Mufīd further noted that if God is the agent of *wahy*, then the *sharī'a* of Islam mandates that the term *wahy* exclusively refers to what God communicated to His Messengers. He admitted, however, that God continues to communicate with His creatures via speech or illumination, but that these communications cannot be called *wahy* in the language of the *sharī'a*. As for the *wahy* that God gives to the Prophet Muhammad, al-Mufīd said that either God conveys it to the Prophet directly without an intermediary or He sends it upon the lips of the angels.¹¹⁸⁰ He also affirmed that Gabriel brings *wahy* to Muhammad as a verbal recitation of the Qur'ān based on Q. 20:114 where Muhammad is told not to hasten with the recitation until its *wahy* is completed: “The Prophet used to follow Gabriel in his recitation, word by word, hence God commanded him not to do so, but to hearken to what was brought to him by Gabriel, or to what was sent down to him without intermediary till

¹¹⁷⁹ Al-Mufīd, *The Emendation*, 78.

¹¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

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it came to an end; and when revelation was completed, to recite it and give it utterance and declare it.”¹¹⁸¹ In this way, al-Mufīd upheld the popular doctrine of Gabriel’s verbal dictation of the Qur’ān to the Prophet as asserted in Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām* theology.

Al-Mufīd strongly rejected the belief that the Qur’ān pre-existed in the Tablet and then descended to the nearest heaven on the Night of Destiny. He observed that this belief was based on an isolated report and should not serve as the basis for belief or practice. Al-Mufīd instead maintained that the Qur’ān was generated in time in response to circumstances and needs as they arose. He observed that the Qur’ān itself testifies to its piecemeal revelation. For example, the Qur’ān’s past-tense statements evidence that these verses were revealed only after those events took place. He reasoned that it makes little sense for God to reveal Qur’ānic verses about something in Medina before such events took place. He compared belief in a pre-existent Arabic Qur’ān to the Ḥanbalī belief in the eternity of the Qur’ān.¹¹⁸² Al-Mufīd’s arguments on this issue are very similar to those of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s as seen in Chapter 4, where the latter also rejected the pre-existence of the Qur’ān in the Tablet for the same reasons. Based on this argument, al-Mufīd reinterpreted the tradition about the Qur’ān descending “all at once” (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*) in the Night of Destiny by re-wording its content to say that “a piece of it” (*jumlatur minhu*) was sent down in the Night of Destiny.¹¹⁸³

Al-Ṣadūq maintained that the Qur’ān as it exists in between the two covers of the *muṣḥaf* is exactly what God sent down to the Prophet in terms of its completeness and integrity: “It [the

¹¹⁸¹ Ibid., 82.

¹¹⁸² Ibid., 81.

¹¹⁸³ Ibid.

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Qur'ān] is that which is in the hands of the people and is not greater in extent than that.... And he who asserts that we say that it is greater in extent than this is a liar.”¹¹⁸⁴ This statement is a reversal of early Twelver Shi'i traditions from al-Kulaynī and others stating that the 'Uthmānic Qur'ān codex is incomplete, altered, and missing verses about the Prophet's family. However, al-Ṣadūq added that “there was *wahy* sent down that is not the Qur'ān, such that if it were collected with the Qur'ān, its extent would reach the measure of seventeen thousand verses.¹¹⁸⁵ Al-Ṣadūq was speaking here about “extra-Qur'anic inspiration” which corresponds to what the Sunnis refer to as the revelatory Prophetic Sunna. As al-Ṣadūq explained further, this *wahy* consisted of divine guidance brought by Gabriel to Muhammad, including maxims of wisdom and real-time guidance for specific situations. These extra-qur'anic inspirations include the revelation that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is the Commander of the Faithful and the command for the Prophet to marry his daughter Fāṭima to 'Alī: “There are many things like this and all of them are a *wahy* that is not the Qur'ān. If they were *qur'ān* then they would be in our recitation of it.”¹¹⁸⁶ Thus, al-Ṣadūq affirmed two forms of prophetic *wahy*: qur'anic and extra-qur'anic, with the latter not forming part of the qur'anic corpus.

With respect to the Qur'ān that is recited by Muslim communities in the present time, al-Mufīd differentiated between the original Qur'ān as the Speech of God and what the people recite and write of it, which is the reproduction (*ḥikāya*) of God's Speech. On this point, his view again matches that of 'Abd al-Jabbār. Nevertheless, al-Mufīd affirmed that the name “*qur'ān*” can still

¹¹⁸⁴ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt*, 251; Fyzee translation, 85.

¹¹⁸⁵ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt*, 252; Fyzee translation, 86.

¹¹⁸⁶ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt*, 259-260; Fyzee translation, 86-87.

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be used for its reproduction (*ḥikāya*): “The reproduction (*ḥikāya*) of the Qur'ān may have the name ‘*qur'ān*’ applied to it, even though it [the term reproduction] is evidently different in meaning from what is reproduced (*al-maḥkī*). And thus the reproduction of all speech is simply called by its name.”¹¹⁸⁷ As for the integrity of the qur'ānic text, al-Mufīd maintained that “beyond doubt, what is contained between the covers of the Qur'ān is God's word and revelation, and none of it is the word of man.”¹¹⁸⁸ Like al-Ṣadūq, al-Mufīd affirmed that the Prophet Muhammad and the Imams received extra-Qurānic revelatory inspiration beyond the qur'ānic text: “The remainder of what God sent down is in the hands of the one put in charge of the Law for making judgments [i.e. the Imam of the Time]. Nothing has fallen out.”¹¹⁸⁹ But he admitted that the shortcoming of the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* is that the chapters and verses of the Qur'ān are out of order and missing the authentic interpretation and commentary given by the Prophet: “He who has collected what is [now] between the covers did not include it in his redaction. The reasons that motivated him to that were: his lack of understanding of some of it, his doubt and lack of certitude about it, and also what he intentionally excised from it.”¹¹⁹⁰ According to al-Mufīd, the Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib had indeed compiled the Qur'ān according to the proper chronological order, but the community rejected it. Until the time of the Mahdī's return, Muslims can make do with the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf*, which the Shi'i Imams still ordered their followers to recite. Meanwhile, al-Mufīd cautiously rejected the charge that the 'Uthmānic *muṣḥaf* contains additions or omissions due to suppression.

¹¹⁸⁷ Al-Mufīd, *Awā'il*, 100-101, quoted in McDermott, *The Theology*, 91. I have re-translated *ḥikāya/maḥkī* as reproduction/what is reproduced

¹¹⁸⁸ Al-Mufīd, *al-Masā'il al-sāghāniyya fi l-radd 'alā Abī Ḥanīfa* (Najaf: Maktabat al-'adl al-islāmī, n.d.), 59, quoted in McDermott, *The Theology*, 94.

¹¹⁸⁹ Al-Mufīd, *al-Masā'il*, 59, quoted in McDermott, *The Theology*, 95.

¹¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

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He admitted that it is quite possible, rationally speaking, that some verses or words are missing from the present-day Qur'ān. However, he quoted Q. 20:114 and concluded that the true interpretation of the Qur'ān is also called “*qur'ān*” and it is this interpretation that is missing. Likewise, al-Mufīd conceded the possibility that a few words or letters could have been added to the Qur'ān as it exists today without compromising its inimitability. But according to his Mu'tazilī logic, God must inform humans that this alteration occurred and this has not happened.¹¹⁹¹

In summary, late fourth/tenth-century Twelver Shi'i discussions of Qur'ānic Revelation followed a different trajectory from contemporary Shi'i Ismaili thinkers. According to Amir-Moezzi, Imami Shi'i thought evolve from an originally “esoteric nonrational Imamism” worldview into a “theological-juridical rational Imamism” heavily influenced by Mu'tazilī *kalām* over the fourth/tenth century.¹¹⁹² While Amir-Moezzi based his assessment on Twelver ideas of intellect (*'aql*) and Imamology, the above discussion registers a similar development in theologies of Qur'ānic Revelation. It may be recalled from Chapter 3 that the Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq reportedly said that the Qur'ān was neither created nor the creator. Many narrations in the early fourth/tenth-century Twelver *ḥadīth* books presented the qur'ānic *wahy* given to Muhammad as the Holy Spirit, which continues to be present in the Imams, and cast doubt on the integrity of the 'Uthmānic codex. By the latter half of the fourth/tenth century, some of these ideas had undergone modification with Shaykh al-Šadūq. He fully embraced the originally Sunni idea of the Arabic Qur'ān pre-existing in the Guarded Tablet and being sent down to the lowest heaven on the Night of Destiny. He accepted the verbatim theory of *wahy* per which Gabriel dictated the Qur'ān to the Prophet,

¹¹⁹¹ Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁹² Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 6-19.

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although a basis for this could be found in the early Twelver *ḥadīth* corpus. He also affirmed that the Qur'ān in the present-day *mushḥaf* was complete and uncorrupted – a reversal of the earlier Twelver position. Shaykh al-Mufīd was heavily influenced by Mu'tazilī teachings and held views in common with 'Abd al-Jabbār. Like the latter, al-Mufīd defined God's Speech as an accident produced by God; he also parted with al-Ṣadūq in that he wholly denied the pre-existence of the Arabic Qur'ān and its singular descent on the Night of Destiny. Overall, the above Twelver Shi'i expositions of Qur'ānic Revelation have very little in common with contemporary Ismaili positions. The Twelvers of this period did not adopt Neoplatonic metaphysics nor do they seem to be influenced by Ismaili views. Instead, the major elements that al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd engaged with seem to be ideas of Qur'ānic Revelation within Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām* theology.

6.5 Sunni Responses to Ismaili Views of Revelation: Reactions and Refutations

Before concluding this chapter surveying Ismaili positions on Qur'ānic Revelation in the fourth/tenth century, it is important to register how non-Ismaili Muslim theologians reacted to these Ismaili views. The polemical reaction of prominent Sunni and Mu'tazilī scholars to Ismaili views demonstrates that the Ismaili exposition of Qur'ānic Revelation was perceived as a major threat to the theological claims of Sunni law and theology due to its stark departure from Sunni views.

Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (247-333/861-944) was among the earliest scholars to respond to Ismaili teachings about prophetic inspiration. In his *tafsīr* of Q. 26:193-195, al-Māturīdī elucidated his view that the Angel Gabriel descended to the Prophet Muhammad and verbally dictated the verses of the Qur'ān. Following his exposition, al-Māturīdī addressed the views of the Ismailis whom he termed as the *Bāṭiniyya* as follows:

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The *Bāṭiniyya* say that He sent it to His Messenger as thought (*khayal*) without being qualified by language and that His Messenger then conveyed it in his clear Arabic language, meaning he expounded it. However, such was not the case because He [God] said in another verse: “Verily, We sent it down as an Arabic *qur'ān*” (Q. 12:2), so this invalidates their claim that he [the Prophet] conveyed in his clear Arabic language what was [otherwise] not sent down in this manner.”¹¹⁹³

Al-Māturīdī rejected the Ismaili idea that God conveys non-verbal inspiration because, in his estimation, this view lacked textual basis in the Qur'ān. Al-Māturīdī noted that many verses say that God “sent down” (*nazzala, anzala*) revelation as an Arabic *qur'ān*. Like other Qur'ān commentators in the Sunni tradition, al-Māturīdī interpreted the qur'ānic *nazzala/anzala* verb as a literal description of prophetic revelation. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, the verb *nazzala/anzala* does not necessarily convey this interpretation and can be read in more general and symbolic ways. For their part, Ismailis like al-Sijistānī read *tanzīl* to mean the Prophet's act of expressing God's non-verbal divine inspiration in the Arabic language.

In the following century, the Zaydī scholar Abū l-Ḥasan al-Mu'ayyad billāh al-Hārūnī (d. 411/1020) took great issue with Ismaili teachings about Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation. He was at pains to refute these Ismaili beliefs and did so by composing an entire treatise titled *Ithbāt nubuwwat al-nabī* (*The Proof of the Prophethood of the Prophet*). His refutations of Ismaili doctrine occurred alongside several *kalām* arguments to prove the truth of Muhammad's Prophethood. This development is significant because it demonstrates how popular and influential the Ismaili ideas had become through the fourth/tenth century, to the point where proving the veracity of Muhammad's Prophethood and the Qur'ān went hand in hand with refuting the Ismailis. Al-Hārūnī speaks to this popularity in the opening pages of his treatise, where he refers

¹¹⁹³ Al-Māturīdī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. 8, 85.

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to the Ismailis as heretics: “I saw the scum of the heretics and their mob working hard in order to introduce doubt into the miracles of our Prophet.... They deny all Prophethoods.”¹¹⁹⁴

According to al-Hārūnī's judgment, the Ismaili belief that the Prophets including Muhammad were recipients of divine support (*ta'yīd*) and non-verbal inspiration (*waḥy*) as opposed to a verbally dictated message consisting of sounds and letters was a travesty and amounted to the denial of Prophethood altogether:

They say that Muhammad only had divine support (*al-ta'yīd*) and had no equivalent to *waḥy*, prophetic commission (*al-irsāl*), and the revelatory descent of Gabriel (*nuzūl Jibrīl*). And with the divine support (*al-ta'yīd*) they point to the superiority (*al-maziyya*) that is reached by any poet, doctor, jurist, theologian or astrologer who stands out in his profession.¹¹⁹⁵

Based on such evidence, it is probable that various fifth/eleventh-century *kalām* theologians like 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Hārūnī, and al-Bāqillānī were preoccupied with proving the Prophethood of Muhammad primarily in order to defend against Ismaili Muslim theologies of revelation. This was the conclusion reached by Eva-Maria Lika: “It seems plausible that the threat posed by the Ismā'īlī propaganda and their concept of prophecy and prophetic law is one reason for the continuous interest of the *mutakallimūn* in prophetological debates.”¹¹⁹⁶

Abū l-Qāṣim al-Bustī (d. 420/1029), a Mu'tazilī scholar who was familiar with Ismaili theological ideas, authored his own treatise against the Ismailis called *Min kashf al-asrār al-Bāṭiniyya* (*Among the Unveiling of the Secrets of the Esotericists*).¹¹⁹⁷ In one section of this work,

¹¹⁹⁴ Abū l-Ḥasan al-Mu'ayyad billāh al-Hārūnī, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwa al-nabī*, ed. Eva-Maria Lika, *Proofs of Prophecy and the Refutation of the Ismā'īliyya* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 74 (editor's translation). I have slightly modified Lika's translation.

¹¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹⁹⁷ Abū l-Qāsim Ismā'īl b. Aḥmad al-Bustī, *Min kashf al-asrār al-Bāṭiniyya wa-iwār madhhabihim*, ed. 'Ādil Sālim al-'Abd al-Jādir in *al-Ismā'īliyyūn: kashf al-asrār wa-naqd al-afkār* (Kuwait, 2002). Lika summarizes parts of al-

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al-Bustī presented his Zaydī-Muʿtazilī model of Qur'ānic Revelation and then contrasted it with Ismaili positions to show the incoherence of the latter. He particularly targeted the Ismaili teaching that through divine support (*ta'yīd*), Muhammad was given “knowledge of the real-truths of the Cosmos and its cosmic construction from the [Universal] Intellect through the mediation of the [Universal] Soul” (*ilm ḥaqā'iq al-ʿālam wa-tarkībīhi ʿan al-ʿaql bi-wāsiṭa al-nafs*).¹¹⁹⁸ For al-Bustī, this Ismaili model of revelation wholly undermined the epistemic foundation of the Qur'ān being a miracle that validates the Prophethood of Muhammad. In his view, unless God's angelic messenger has physical form, spatially descends to earth, and conveys miraculous speech to Muhammad, there is no way for anyone to truly recognize God's address to human beings. Al-Bustī believed that his own theory of Qur'ānic Revelation was necessitated by the dictates of reason. He therefore branded the Ismaili view of revelation as sheer unbelief (*al-kufr al-zāhir*) and the first step to total atheism (*ta'īl*), which he saw as the climax of Ismaili teaching.¹¹⁹⁹ Ismaili teachings severely undermined the rationalist methods of Sunni *kalām* because they posit a realm of supra-rational knowledge available to the Prophets and the Imams. The Ismailis also denied miracles as breaks in the habitual course of nature, which threatens the dialectical arguments of *kalām* theology, since these theologians relied on miracles to prove the divine commission of Prophets. For *kalām* theologians, miracle are signs that any reasonable person may recognize and verify in principle; but the supra-rational inspiration of the Prophets contained in the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of the Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* is not attainable to the unaided human intellect without instruction from a class of the spiritual elite.

Bustī's criticisms of Ismaili doctrine throughout her book. See also Samuel M. Stern, “Abu'l-Qāsim al-Bustī and his refutation of Ismā'īlism,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 93/1-2 (January 1961): 14-35.

¹¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 269.

¹¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 270.

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Writing at the end of the fifth/eleventh century, al-Ghazālī singled out the Ismaili teachings on Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation in his famous anti-Ismaili polemical work *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyya*.¹²⁰⁰ He described the Ismaili belief that a Prophet is a person upon whom a “pure holy power” emanates from the Universal Intellect through the Universal Soul, as a result of which “the Prophet perceives universal intelligibles with the shining of that light and the purity of the prophetic power.”¹²⁰¹ Al-Ghazālī saw this doctrine as denying the existence of Gabriel and denying the Qur'ān's status as God's Speech:

They claim that [the word] Gabriel is an expression for the intellect emanating upon him and a symbol of it; he [Gabriel] is not a corporealized individual composed from subtle or dense bodies compatible with location such that he relocates from a high place to a low place. As for the Qur'ān, according to them it is Muhammad's expression of the cognitions that emanate upon him from the intellect designated by the name Gabriel. It is only called the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*) metaphorically since it is composed from his [the Prophet's] direction. What emanates to him from God by the mediation of Gabriel is simple without any composition and it is inward (*bāṭin*) without possessing any externality (*ẓuhūr*), while the speech of of the Prophet is an expression of it externally without interiority.¹²⁰²

Al-Ghazālī situated the above Ismaili conception of Qur'ānic Revelation alongside the ideas of the Muslim Peripatetic philosophers such as al-Farābī and Ibn Sīna. Later in the same treatise, al-Ghazālī specified that these views make the Ismailis guilty of unbelief (*kufr*). He specifically observed that the Ismaili view entails that the Prophet received spiritual knowledge through divine inspiration and only articulated it to his community in the form of allegories and symbols as a form of partial or lower level truth. This means that many Qur'ānic notions such as Paradise, Hellfire, angels, etc. affirmed by the community are symbols for a higher knowledge that the Prophet did not convey. For al-Ghazālī, the Ismailis thereby accused the Prophet of being a liar: “It is to plainly

¹²⁰⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'ih al-bāṭiniyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya li l-Ṭibā'at wa l-Nashr, 1964).

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁰² *Ibid.*

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give lie to the master of the religion and all the words of the Qur'ān from the first to the last of it.”¹²⁰³

In summary, a survey of reactions to the Ismaili theories of Qur'ānic Revelation from Sunni and Mu'tazilī scholars shows that the latter both understood Ismaili teachings on the topic accurately and comprehensively rejected it. Al-Harūnī, al-Bustī, and al-Ghazālī assessed the Ismaili theory of non-verbal divine inspiration, entailing the denial of Gabriel verbally dictating the Qur'ān to Muhammad, as a negation of both Qur'ānic miraculous inimitability and its status as God's Speech. Al-Harūnī and al-Bustī took the Ismaili ideas of divine support (*ta'yīd*) and prophetic composition (*ta'līf*) as negating the reality of prophetic miracles, which people require to verify the claims of a Prophet. Al-Ghazālī assessed Ismaili views of the Qur'ān as amounting to a denial of the Qur'ān as God's Speech since the Ismailis really view the Qur'ān as Muhammad's words. He also judged the Ismaili belief that the words of the Qur'ān are symbols for inner meanings as an outright denial of Qur'ānic truths and a rejection of the veracity of the Prophet Muhammad. The urgency and frequency of these polemical responses to the Ismaili doctrine of Qur'ānic Revelation by both Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī theologians is noteworthy. These hostile rejoinders demonstrate that Ismaili teachings achieved wide circulation and growing popularity by the end of the fourth/tenth century.

6.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter surveyed how several fourth/tenth-century Ismaili *dā'īs* conceived the nature and process of Qur'ānic Revelation within the synthetic Ismaili Neoplatonic system that emerged

¹²⁰³ Ibid., 153.

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during this period. While each Ismaili *dā'ir* displayed unique ideas and theological perspectives in his formulations, these Ismaili models shared several common facets. First, the Ismailis envisioned the Revelatory Principle as a transcendent Neoplatonic realm consisting of the Word or Speech of God, Universal Intellect, and Universal Soul. For al-Rāzī and Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, the whole Neoplatonic realm was emphasized while al-Sijistānī hierarchically framed God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) and the Universal Intellect respectively as the primary and secondary Revelatory Principles. Meanwhile, the Imam al-Mu'izz taught a revelatory model where the Revelatory Principle consists of God's spiritual universal light (*nūr*) that transcends sounds and letters. In comparison to the *kalām* tradition, the Ismailis agreed with the Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs that God's Speech is eternal and transcends corporeal sounds and letters. However, the Ismailis understood God's Speech or Word as God's creative act that is reflected in its immediate spiritual emanations – the Intellect and Soul – and the Cosmos at large. In other words, the Ismailis framed the Revelatory Principle as the spiritual archetype and ontological foundation of both divine guidance consisting of command and prohibition and the created cosmos. Meanwhile, the Sunnis generally believed that the contents of the Revelatory Principle were commands, prohibitions, and information without any cosmological dimension. This cosmological dimension of God's Speech is an important feature that distinguished Ismaili views of Qur'ānic Revelation from those of Sunni *kalām* positions. In other words, for the Ismailis, God's Speech is primarily reflected and manifested in the spiritual and corporeal realms of the Cosmos, from which the Prophets and Imams are divinely inspired and supported. This idea of the Cosmos in its fullness being a revelatory expression of the Revelatory Principle features in Ismaili thought as well as many other Muslim discourses including *falsafa* and Sufism. The late Shahab Ahmed observed that this belief

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demonstrates that Muslims in general conceived the phenomenon of Qur'ānic Revelation as something transcending the historical revelation of the Arabic Qur'ān:

The crucial fact for us here is that the Revelation to Muḥammad has, as a human and historical fact, been conceived of and engaged with by Muslims, not merely as Revelatory Product (the Text) but also as Revelatory Premise (the Pre-Text); that is, not merely as the event of Text as Revelation-in-the world to Muḥammad, but also as the phenomenon of Revelation-in-the-cosmos that lies behind and beyond the Revelatory event to Muḥammad—a phenomenon that renders the whole cosmos (including the world beyond the Text) a source for Revealed Truth.¹²⁰⁴

Second, the Ismaili *dā'īs* described the Revelatory Process in a manner wholly opposed to the prevalent understandings in Sunni *kalām* theology and *tafsīr*. In affirming their position, the Ismailis contradicted the popular belief that a corporeal angel, Gabriel, descended to earth and verbally dictated the Qur'ān to Muhammad in the Arabic language, which the Prophet merely recited verbatim to his community. Al-Rāzī taught that the Prophet received divine inspiration in the form of spiritual impressions (*āthār*) from the Holy Spirit, which intermingled with the Prophet's soul; the Prophet then verbalized these spiritual truths as his speech, which consisted of the miraculous Arabic Qur'ān. Al-Sijistānī dismissed the verbal dictation theory of inspiration as an error of the masses; he offered his own account of divine inspiration where the Prophet, as a possessor of holiness, conceives spiritual ideas through illumination from the Universal Intellect and Soul by means of a spiritual intermediary called the Holy Spirit, *Jadd*, or Gabriel; subsequently, the Prophet enunciated these divinely inspired ideas through carefully curated symbols in the Arabic language. In al-Sijistānī's formulations, the Prophet himself is not merely the convey of God's Speech; he is also the human manifestation of God's Speech and the vicegerent of the Universal Intellect on earth. The Imam al-Mu'izz described how God sent down the spiritual light of *wahy* to the Prophet's pure heart, through which Muhammad understood

¹²⁰⁴ Ahmed, *What is Islam*, 355.

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meanings without sounds or letters; recognizing his community's inability to perceive that light, the Prophet molded and composed the sounds, letters, and verses of the Arabic Qur'ān and enclosed the spiritual meanings of *wahy* within them. Ja'far b. Manṣūr explained that *wahy* and *tanzīl* is a spiritual power from God's Word that streams upon the Prophet's soul and imprints the contents of the Neoplatonic Simple World upon his intellect; the Prophet subsequently gives verbal linguistic expression to these spiritual imprints engraved upon his soul.

The above perspectives demonstrate a broad Ismaili consensus that the Arabic Qur'ān is both the divinely inspired production of Muhammad and a verbal manifestation of God's Speech as opposed to God's Speech itself. This means that the Prophet Muhammad exercises creative agency when he verbally composes (*ta'līf*) the divine inspiration he perceives in his soul. More importantly, the Prophet Muhammad himself, as the locus of divine inspiration and illumination from God's Word, functions as the human reflection of the Speech of God on earth. The Revelatory Products of Muhammad's composition include both the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a*. The former was also termed *tanzīl* (revelatory expression) because it contains symbols and parables expressing the realities the Revelatory Principle. The *sharī'a* consists of commandments and prohibitions – which also function as symbols for higher truths – whose precise contents are conditioned by temporal and cultural factors. Finally, another dimension of the Revelatory Process is revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*). *Ta'wīl* is a divinely inspired hermeneutic through which the Founder, the Imams, and the teaching hierarchy disclose how the symbolic truth content of the *tanzīl* and the *sharī'a* correspond to the real or higher truths of the Revelatory Principle. This *ta'wīl* takes form as a divinely inspired exegesis of the Arabic Qur'ān, due to which it can validly be described as “revelatory exegesis” as opposed to mere interpretation and registers as a Revelatory Product. As the divinely inspired successor of the Prophet and the fountainhead of revelatory hermeneutics,

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the Imam was often described by the Fatimid Ismaili *dā'īs* as the speaking *kitāb* of God and the living Qur'ān, whose authority takes priority over the “silent” Qur'ān in its scriptural format.

The above positions on the nature of Qur'ānic Revelation were unique to the Ismailis in the fourth/tenth century. We saw that contemporary Twelver Shi'i scholars like Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and Shaykh al-Mufīd adhered to a different set of beliefs about the nature of the Qur'ān. These Twelver thinkers did not incorporate any Neoplatonic notions and their theology instead integrated aspects of Imāmī thought, Mu'tazilī theology, and Sunni *tafsīr*. Al-Ṣadūq upheld the belief in the pre-existence and singular descent of the Qur'ān in the Night of Destiny, affirmed multiple modes of divine inspiration to Muhammad including the verbal dictation of the Qur'ān, and recognized extra-qur'ānic divine inspiration to the Prophet and the Imams. Meanwhile, al-Mufīd took positions close to 'Abd al-Jabbār by framing God's Speech as temporally generated speech *qua* accident and situating what humans recite and write as a reproduction (*hikāya*) of God's Speech. He disputed the pre-existence of the Qur'ān and instead claimed that God created qur'ānic verses at the moment of their revelation. Al-Mufīd adhered to the verbal dictation theory of qur'ānic inspiration to Muhammad while also recognizing extra-qur'ānic inspiration occurring for the Prophet and the Imams. Overall, latter fourth/tenth century Twelver Shi'i views of Qur'ānic Revelation were much closer to Sunni *kalām* positions than Ismaili views.

Non-Ismaili theologians in the late fourth/tenth century reacted strongly and swiftly to Ismaili doctrines of Prophethood and the Qur'ān; their refutations evidence both the distinctive nature of these Ismaili ideas as well as their popularity among non-Ismailis. With its emphasis on the non-verbal nature of divine inspiration, the agency of the Prophet in composing the Arabic Qur'ān, and the necessity of revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) taught by the Imams, the Ismaili view of Qur'ānic Revelation directly threatened the theological and epistemic foundations of Sunni

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kalām, exegesis, and jurisprudence. Zaydī scholars espousing Mu'tazilī theology like al-Hārūnī and al-Bustī and the Ash'arī scholar al-Ghazālī (with the support of the Abbasid Caliph) portrayed these Ismaili positions as the rejection of Prophethood and the denial of the Qur'ān as God's Speech. Contemporary scholarship even suggests that fifth/eleventh century "proof of prophethood" literature produced by *kalām* theologians was generally intended to stem the tide of the Ismaili *da'wa*. This all goes to show that Ismaili views on Qur'ānic Revelation were persuasive enough among contemporary Muslims to provoke harsh polemical responses.

The Ismaili models of Qur'ānic Revelation seen in this chapter display important continuities and divergences from the qur'ānic model of revelation elucidated in Chapter 1. The qur'ānic distinction between the Transcendent Kitāb and the piecemeal Arabic *qur'āns* – corresponding to the Revelatory Principle and Revelatory Product – resonates with Ismaili formulations that ontologically distinguish the Neoplatonic hypostases (God's Word, Universal Intellect and Universal Soul) and the Arabic Qur'ān composed by the Prophet. The Ismaili use of Neoplatonic concepts to theorize the nature of the Revelatory Principle is a major evolution from the qur'ānic idea of a Transcendent Kitāb and, in its own way, parallels how Sunni thinkers theologized the Transcendent Kitāb into God's Speech and Knowledge. The major exception to this is the teaching of the Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz, whose non-Neoplatonic Ismaili account of revelation follows the qur'ānic description of God sending down a light (*nūr*) to the Prophet very closely. With respect to the Revelatory Process, the Ismailis seem much closer to the qur'ānic view than Sunni theologians and exegetes, who framed qur'ānic *wahy* as verbal dictation. The Ismaili view of *wahy* as non-verbal inspiration and divine support (*ta'yīd*) mediated by the Holy Spirit comes very close to the qur'ānic concepts of *wahy* and *rūh*, which also imply a non-verbal communication to the Prophet. The Ismailis explicitly stressed the creative agency of the Prophet

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Muhammad as the agent of *tanzīl* or revelatory expression and the composer of the Arabic Qur'ān; the Qur'ān, instead of being direct divine speech, is actually divinely inspired prophetic speech according to the Ismaili thinkers. The Ismaili view of the living Imam as the speaking *kitāb* of God and the living Qur'ān is an innovative extension of the Qur'ān's expansive idea of *kitāb* as God's decree and prescription. Likewise, the Qur'ānic idea of real-time and dynamic divine guidance manifested through evolving piecemeal recitations is somewhat paralleled by the notion of a chain of Imams that provide divine guidance that evolves and updates through different time periods. The novel element in these ideas, in comparison to the Qur'ān, is the figure of the Imam himself. In a certain respect, the Ismailis have effectively replaced the original prophetic-revelatory event centered in the Prophet Muhammad with the institution of the Imamate, through which God's Word is manifested in human form and the revelatory event is perpetuated indefinitely into the future. This partially parallels how the created Qur'ānic recitation, for Sunni traditionalists, theologians, and exegetes, continues to function as the surrogate and substitute for the initial Qur'ān recited by the Prophet as a manifestation of God's Speech. Likewise, the Ismaili concept of *ta'wīl* as revelatory hermeneutics and exegesis dispensed by the Imam and his teaching hierarchy is a novel teaching as compared to the Qur'ānic model of revelation. *Ta'wīl* in the Ismaili context amounts to a new kind of Revelatory Process and Revelatory Product and is not merely allegorical interpretation or esoteric commentary. The Ismaili stress on the absolute necessity and divine authority of the *ta'wīl* implies that the Arabic Qur'ān in and of itself was never adequate in revealing the truths of the Revelatory Principle to various communities; the *tanzīl* must always be completed by *ta'wīl* without which it remains ineffective.

In the following century, as the Ismaili *da'wa* was further consolidated under the religious-political authority of the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs in Cairo and made further inroads into Abbasid

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territory, several Ismaili *dā'īs* in Iraq, Cairo, and Persia developed and refined Ismaili teachings in the face of Sunni opposition and the growing popularity of Muslim Peripatetic philosophy (*falsafa*). In the next chapter we will see how three major Ismaili *dā'īs* integrated *falsafa*, prior *da'wa* teachings, and certain ideas from Sunni *kalām* into more systematic and sophisticated models of Qur'ānic Revelation.

Chapter 7: From God's Celestial *Kitāb* to His Speaking *Kitāb*: Qur'ānic Revelation in Shi'ī Ismaili Neoplatonic Philosophy (Fifth/Eleventh Century)

7.0 The Fatimid Caliphate and Ismaili *Da'wa* in the Fifth/Eleventh Century

The Ismaili *da'wa* and the Fatimid Caliphate together experienced turbulent times over the fifth/eleventh century, having been affected by internal *da'wa* controversies, anti-Fatimid revolts, shifts in the Imam-Caliph's public policy, bitter factionalism in the Fatimid court, political upheavals brought upon by Fatimid-Abbasid rivalry, and a military takeover of Fatimid Egypt. The reign of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Ḥākīm bi-amr Allāh (r. 386-411/996-1021) marked a turning point in the history of the Fatimid Caliphate, as this Imam-Caliph's personal involvement in both political and religious affairs proved controversial among his detractors.¹²⁰⁵ Many of his policies aroused some fierce opposition from specific groups even while the Imam-Caliph enjoyed a great deal of popularity amongst his Fatimid subjects and non-Fatimid populations. In the first decade of the eleventh century, the Fatimids confronted a major neo-Umayyad revolt. This political threat, which aimed to attract the support of Egypt's Sunni majority, prompted al-Ḥākīm to reverse several pro-Ismaili/anti-Sunni public policies. The Imam-Caliph accordingly enacted several reconciliatory measures to quell tensions between Ismailis, the Fatimid Caliphate, and its Sunnis subjects. While it is all too common for contemporary scholars to vilify the Imam-Caliph's destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in 400/1009 or ridicule his prohibitions on the sale of alcohol, gambling, the public movement of women, or the sale of certain foods, these

¹²⁰⁵ There are several studies on al-Ḥākīm's life and reign, including Heinz Halm, "Der Treuhänder Gottes: Die Edikte des Kalifen al-Ḥākīm," *Der Islam* 63 (1986): 11-72; Paul E. Walker, *Caliph of Cairo* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2012). The following summary of his rule is primarily based on the findings of Jennifer Pruitt, "Method in Madness: Recontextualizing the Destruction of Churches in the Fatimid Era," *Muqarnas* 30 (2013): 119-140.

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decrees were by and large seen by Sunni populations as examples of “commanding the good and forbidding the bad.” Such measures also earned al-Ḥākim a positive reputation among non-Ismaili Muslims living beyond the Fatimid Caliphate. Mention has already been made of rioting crowds in Baghdad chanting “Yā Ḥākim, Yā Maṣṣūr” in 389/1007-1008 to the great alarm of the Abbasid Caliph and the recognition of al-Ḥākim’s Caliphate in 401/1010 by the Mazyadid and ‘Uqaylid principalities in the heart of Abbasid territory. As mentioned in Chapter 4, these Fatimid incursions prompted the Abbasid Caliph al-Qādir to issue the Baghdad Manifesto as a denunciation of Fatimid claims to ‘Alid lineage. At the same time, several Ismaili *dā’īs* wrote treatises defending the Imamate of al-Ḥākim against criticisms while also attempting to win over new converts. These developments, overall, indicate that the Fatimid Imam-Caliph was attempting to consolidate Sunni support inside the Fatimid empire and win over Muslims in Abbasid territory with the ultimate goal of supplanting the Abbasid Caliphate entirely.

The Ismaili *da‘wa* in Egypt during al-Ḥākim’s rule was also shaken by internal fissures when several *dā’īs* began to revere al-Ḥākim as the human appearance or epiphany of the absolute transcendent God. Led by the *dā’īs* Ḥamza b. ‘Alī (d. 411/1021) and Ismā‘īl al-Tamīmī, these independently minded *dā’īs* publicly preached the divinity of the Imam and announced the beginning of the era of *qiyāma* (resurrection) starting in 408/1017. They believed that God has a divine nature (*lāhūt*) and a human aspect (*nasūt*), with the latter appearing on earth throughout history and finally reaching its climactic manifestation in the person of al-Ḥākim. Their message also proclaimed that both the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) teachings of Islam had been abrogated since the ultimate truth of God’s unity had been unveiled through al-Ḥākim. This

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became known as the Druze movement and eventually split off into the Druze religion.¹²⁰⁶ In the years leading up to the public emergence of the Druze movement, the Imam summoned the *dā'ī* Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020) in 405/1014-15 to refute the Druze claims about the Imam's divinity and help address the general confusion concerning proper doctrine and practice among Cairo's Ismaili community.¹²⁰⁷

The latter half of the fifth/eleventh century, during the long reign of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Abū Tamīm Ma'add al-Mustanşir billāh (b. 420/1029, r. 427/1036-487/1094 or 488/1095), consisted of several major political developments within the Fatimid empire and beyond the Fatimid domain with the rise of the Saljūqs.¹²⁰⁸ The Fatimid court was constantly a site of political turbulence with various factions vying for power; these rival groups included the entourage of the Imam-Caliph's mother who ruled as queen regent for a period, Berbers, Turks, Persians, Arabs, Sudanese slaves, the descendants of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, and a series of power hungry viziers. The Persian Ismaili *dā'ī* al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077), who had made a valiant but failed attempt to win over the Buyid prince Abū Kālījār to the Fatimid cause, fled to Cairo during this period and directly witnessed these court intrigues. In 448/1056, al-Mu'ayyad was sent by the Imam-Caliph to lead a Fatimid religio-political campaign in Syria and Iraq with the goal of ousting the Saljuqs and capturing Baghdad. These efforts bore some fruit as he convinced the ousted Abbasid general al-Basāsīrī to take up the Fatimid banner. Al-Basāsīrī seized Abbasid Baghdad on behalf of the Fatimids in 450/1058 and had the *khutba* read in the name of the Imam-Caliph al-

¹²⁰⁶ On the Druze belief and doctrine, see Daniel De Smet, "The Druze Epistles of Wisdom and Early Ismā'īlism: A Neo-Carmathian Revolt against the Fatimids," *Ishraq* 4 (2013): 272-285.

¹²⁰⁷ On al-Kirmānī's role in the Ismaili *da'wa*, see Paul E. Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī: Ismaili Thought in the Age of al-Ḥākim* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1999), 47-61.

¹²⁰⁸ The below summary of these political developments is drawn from Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 193-199.

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Mustanşir for one year. However, Fatimid control of the Abbasid capital was not to last and al-Basāsīrī was forced to flee as the Saljuqs retook Baghdad one year later. From this point onward, Fatimid political and socio-economic power rapidly declined as the dynasty lost influence and control over the Ḥijāz, Syria, and Palestine. In Fatimid Egypt, the racial rivalries within the Fatimid armies came to a head in the 450s/1060s with massive infighting, which severely destabilized the Caliphate. A Turkic faction seized control of Fatimid Egypt in 459/1067 and reduced the Fatimid Imam-Caliph to a prisoner in his own palace. Egypt experienced a major economic crisis and famine from 457-464/1065-1072, which further exasperated an already tenuous socio-political situation as Turkic troops looted and pillaged Fatimid palaces and libraries. Left with little choice, the Imam-Caliph al-Mustanşir summoned the Armenian general Badr al-Jamālī (d. 487/1094), who defeated the Turkic troops, restored order throughout Egypt, and assumed control over all Fatimid civil, religious, judicial, and military institutions including the position of vizier. By the end of al-Mustanşir's reign in 487/1094, Badr had established himself as the effective ruler of the Fatimid Caliphate and passed on the vizierate to his son al-Afḍal (d. 515/1121). This proved decisive when al-Afḍal led a coup against al-Mustanşir's designated successor to the Fatimid Caliphate and Ismaili Imamate, Abū Maṣṣur Nizār (d. 488/1095). Contrary to al-Mustanşir's appointment, al-Afḍal installed Nizār's much younger half-brother, Aḥmad al-Musta'ī (d. 495/1101), on the Fatimid throne.¹²⁰⁹ Nizār's brief revolt was unsuccessful but this event divided the Ismaili community into the Nizārīs (primarily based on Persia and Syria) and the Musta'īs (based in Egypt and Yemen).¹²¹⁰ The Musta'ī Imams soon retreated into a state of concealment (*satr*) that carries

¹²⁰⁹ Peter Wiley, *Eagle's Nest: Ismaili Castles in Syria and Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 16.

¹²¹⁰ On this schism and its aftermath, see Paul E. Walker, "Succession to Rule in the Shiite Caliphate," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 32 (1995): 239-264.

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into the present day, at which time several lineages of chief *dā'īs* claim to represent the concealed Imam. Meanwhile, the Nizārī Imamate continued in Persia and has endured until the present day in the person of the forty-ninth Imam, Prince Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Aga Khan (Āqā Khān) IV (b. 1936).

One major intellectual current that deeply influenced fifth/eleventh century Islamic thought was the intellectual tradition of Muslim Peripatetic philosophy known as *falsafa*. *Falsafa* developed concurrently and in competition with both *kalām* theology and Ismaili philosophical theology. *Falsafa* integrated elements of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy including Neoplatonic emanation, the immateriality of the human intellect and soul, form and matter, and the Aristotelian ideas of causation, potentiality and actuality, and substance and accident, etc. One may define *falsafa*, in the words of John McGinnis and David C. Reisman, as “a continuation and refinement, undertaken at least initially in the Arabic language, of the Greek philosophical and scientific tradition.”¹²¹¹ The Muslim Peripatetic philosophers, called *falāsifa* (sing. *faḥsūf*), believed that their philosophical investigations attained to the same truths embedded in prophetic revealed religion, albeit in a more direct manner of expression. By the early fifth/eleventh century, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) had become one of the most reputable proponents of *falsafa* and his work deeply influenced the thought of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (370-428/980-1037), who is perhaps the most influential Islamic philosopher in history. Ibn Sīnā himself hailed from an Ismaili family: “My father was one of those who responded positively to the *dā'ī* of the Egyptians (i.e. the Fatimids) and he was reckoned to be one of the Ismailis.” But Ibn Sīnā rejected the Ismaili Neoplatonic cosmology in favor of al-Fārābī's Aristotelian cosmology of ten celestial

¹²¹¹ John McGinnis, David C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2007), xvii.

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intellects.¹²¹² Through the intellectual influence of Ibn Sīnā, both *kalām* theology and *falsafa* where decisively transformed such that post-classical Muslim *kalām* theologians and philosophers increasingly adapted Ibn Sīnā's teachings into their own ontological and theological frameworks. In what Wisnovsky calls "the Avicennian turn in Sunnī theology", several Avicennan philosophical positions – namely the idea of God as the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*), the distinction between necessary and possible existents, and the immateriality of the human soul – began to penetrate Sunni theological circles in the latter half of the fifth/eleventh century.¹²¹³ The rising popularity of *falsafa* also presented a challenge to the Ismaili *da'wa*'s Neoplatonic worldview and doctrines of Prophethood and Imamate. The Peripatetic philosophers rejected the Ismailis' hyper-negative theology and instead framed God as the First Cause of Neoplatonic emanation. They also claimed that a person could gain direct access to revelatory truths through mastering Peripatetic philosophy without the mediation of the Prophets and the Imams. For example, al-Fārābī held that a self-realized philosopher may perfect his theoretical and practical intellectual powers to the point that his intellect receives intelligible emanation or divine inspiration from the Active Intellect – the tenth intellect of the cosmic system that directly governs the world – and thereby receives revelatory truths directly without human teachers. When a person has perfected his imagination, he also receives the emanation from the Active Intellect within his imaginal faculty where its contents are expressed in the form of symbols.¹²¹⁴ Thus, the Prophets

¹²¹² On Ibn Sīnā's Ismaili family members, see Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 122-123.

¹²¹³ Robert Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology." See also idem, "Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition," in Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 92-136.

¹²¹⁴ See c), 244-245. See also Richard Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77/1 (1957):142-148.

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like Moses and Muhammad communicated philosophical truths through corporeal symbols and laws while the true philosopher attains to these same truths more or less directly through actualizing his or her own intellect.¹²¹⁵ The philosophical sciences and ethical practices of *falsafa*, therefore, offered a spiritual path towards knowing God and perfecting the soul that effectively dispenses with the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* revealed by Prophet Muhammad.¹²¹⁶

The socio-political and intellectual developments described above decisively affected how three major fifth/eleventh century Ismaili *dā'īs* – Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1020), al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077), and Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 1088) – understood and expounded their positions on Qur'ānic Revelation. First, all three thinkers detailed their models of revelation within robust Ismaili Neoplatonic theological frameworks that were in conversation with Sunni *kalām* theology, *tafsīr*, *falsafa*, and prior Ismaili *da'wa* teachings. Their carefully argued expositions of the Ismaili position on revelation was no doubt prompted by the onslaught of polemical discourses against Ismaili teachings produced by Sunni and Mu'tazilī theologians as seen in Chapter 6. Second, these *dā'īs* offered arguments to show that the Prophets and Imams, as divinely supported souls (*al-mu'ayyadūn*), possess an ontological distinction over other humans and thereby framed the Prophets and Imams as members of a species that is naturally superior to mortal humanity; this claim was an implicit rejoinder to the Peripatetic idea of the parity between

¹²¹⁵ Azadpur, *Reason Unbound*, 67; al-Farābī, *Tahṣīl al-sa'āda*, quoted in Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 57. See also Mohammad Azadpur, "Prophetic Philosophy as a Way of Life: On Imagination and Religious Law in Abrahamic Peripateticism," *The Maghreb Review*, 40/3 (2015): 260-279; Frank Griffel, "The Muslim Philosophers' Rationalist Explanation of Muḥammad's Prophecy," in Jonathan E. Brockopp (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Muḥammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 158-179; idem, "Philosophy and Prophecy," in Richard C. Taylor and Luis Xavier Lopez-Farjeat (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2016), 385-398.

¹²¹⁶ This is precisely how al-Kirmānī assessed the claims of the *falāsifa*. See Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 50-54, 118-124.

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Prophets and self-realized philosophers. Thirdly, these *dā'īs* emphasized the theological necessity of the Ismaili Imamate by defining the Imam as “God’s speaking *kitāb*” and stressing the superiority of the Imam’s revelatory authority over that of the Arabic Qur’ān, which is merely a “silent *kitāb*”. In making such claims, they also situated the Imam as the human manifestation of the Revelatory Principle that includes the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. Thirdly, in contrast to the claims of the Peripatetic philosophers, the *dā'īs* argued that human perfection could only be attained by *both* practicing the *sharī'a* and acquiring the science of *ta'wīl* from the Imam and his *da'wa* hierarchy – neither of which could be learned from *falsafa*. In this respect, the Ismaili concept of *ta'wīl* or revelatory hermeneutics took on a soteriological dimension. It was framed as the means through which the Ismaili practitioner intellectually attains to real-truths and existentially re-integrates his soul with the Revelatory Principle. Finally, all the Ismaili thinkers featured in this study posited and eagerly anticipated a future revelatory event – called the Resurrection (*qiyāma*) – in which an eschatological figure known as the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* or Lord of Resurrection (*ṣāhib al-qiyāma*) would fully unveil the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of the Revelatory Principle to humankind at large, disclose the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of all prior Revelatory Products including the Arabic Qur’ān, and execute God’s judgment and recompense for human souls. Several Ismaili thinkers interpreted the qur’ānic *Laylat al-Qadr* (Night of Destiny) as a symbolic prophecy about the manifestation of the Lord of Resurrection through the mission of his *Hujja* (proof).

7.1 Qur'ānic Revelation from the Ten Intellects: Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020)

Ḥamīd al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. 'Abdullāh al-Kirmānī likely hailed from Kirmān and served as the head of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Iraq during the reign of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Ḥākim bi-amr Allāh (d. 411/1021).¹²¹⁷ In around 405/1014-15, the head of the Ismaili *da'wa* in Cairo, Khatkīn al-Ḍayf, summoned al-Kirmānī to assist in dealing with the internal Ismaili doctrinal controversy that led to the beginning of the Druze. In this capacity, al-Kirmānī held the rank of *ḥujja* while his master Khatkīn was chief *dā'ī* (administrative head of the *da'wa*) and *bāb* (gate) – the spiritual rank second to the Imam. While he authored several treatises during his career, al-Kirmānī's *Rāḥat al-'aql* (*The Comfort of the Intellect*) was his magnum opus.¹²¹⁸ The major influences on his theological thought were the writings of his Ismaili predecessors such as Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, Abū Ḥātim al-Razī, and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'; the doctrines of the Mu'tazilīs on *tawḥīd* whose debt al-Kirmānī readily acknowledged; and thirdly, the cosmology and epistemology of the Muslim Peripatetic philosophers (*falāsifa*), particularly, al-Fārābī.¹²¹⁹

Al-Kirmānī's philosophical system was systematically presented in *The Comfort of the Intellect* which he completed following his return to Baghdad sometime after 408/1017. His cosmology was a fusion of Ismaili Neoplatonism and al-Fārābī's Peripatetic cosmology of ten celestial intellects. *The Comfort of the Intellect* also provides a robust account of al-Kirmānī's understanding of Prophethood, the various modes of divine inspiration, and the relationship

¹²¹⁷ For the general introduction to Kirmānī's life and works see Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*. For a detailed look at his philosophical worldview and influences, see Daniel De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*.

¹²¹⁸ Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1983).

¹²¹⁹ For details on Kirmānī's influences, see Chapter 6 of De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect*.

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between the Arabic Qur'ān and the Ismaili Imams. Following his Ismaili forebears, al-Kirmānī affirmed the absolute transcendence of God beyond all attributes and categories – including the divine names posited in *kalām* theology and the ontological categories employed in *falsafa* (being, cause, substance, intellect). God is the Originator (*al-mubdi* ') of all existence through His act of Command (*amr*) or Origination (*ibdā* ').¹²²⁰ However, al-Kirmānī conceived the worlds of intelligible and corporeal existence more along the lines of al-Fārābī's system.¹²²¹ The First Originated Being (*al-mubda* ') and the First Existent (*al-mawjūd al-awwal*) that God brings into being is the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*). Unlike the prior Ismaili thinkers, al-Kirmānī did not logically distinguish God's Command from the First Intellect; for him, the Command and Intellect are two names for the same reality. The First Intellect is eternal, living, intellecting, actual, and the summit of all perfections: "It [the First Intellect] is living (*ḥayy*) in its entirety, powerful (*qādir*) in its entirety, knowing (*'ālim*) in its entirety, intellecting (*'āqil*) in its entirety, eternal (*azalī*) in its entirety, all-encompassing (*muḥīṭ*) in its entirety, and perfect (*kāmil*) and complete (*tāmm*) in its entirety."¹²²² In sum, Kirmānī's First Intellect possesses many of the names and attributes that Peripatetic philosophers and *kalām* theologians ascribe to God Himself.

As for the order of emanation, the First Intellect ecstatically contemplates its own essence and recognizes its contingent nature as the product of God's creative act. This contemplation of the First Intellect gives rise to a double emanation. From its higher unitary aspect as God's Origination (*ibdā* '), the First Intellect emanates a Second Intellect, which is an actual Intellect

¹²²⁰ For al-Kirmānī's understanding of the concept of God, see Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, "The Concept of *Tawḥīd* in the Thought of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī," (Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 1986).

¹²²¹ This is fully documented in Daniel De Smet, "Al-Fārābī's Influence on Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's Theory of Intellect and Soul," in Peter Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of al-Fārābī* (London: Warburg Institute, 2008), 131-150.

¹²²² *Rāḥat*, 188-189. My translations from this text have greatly benefited from the input of Khaled El-Rouayheb.

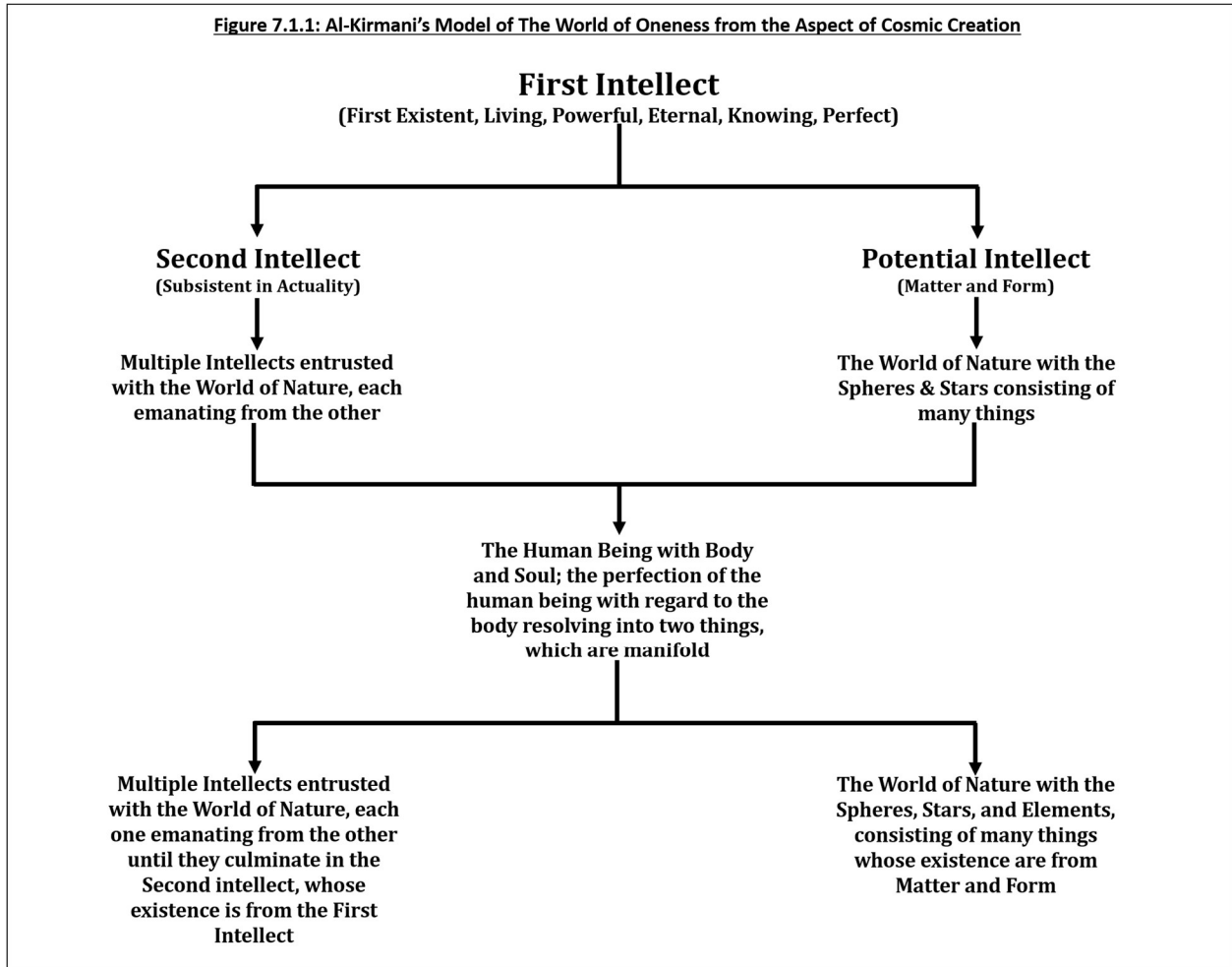
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subsisting in actuality (*al-qā'im bi l-fi'l*). From its lower dual aspect of being both intellecting (*āqil*) and intellected (*maqūl*), the First Intellect emanates a Potential Intellect, that is an Intellect subsisting in potentiality (*al-qā'im bi l-quwwa*) – which consists of Prime Matter and Form. The Second Intellect then intellects its own essence and the essence of the First Intellect and this results in the double emanation of a Third Intellect and a hylo-morphic sphere – the Sphere of Fixed Stars. The double-emanation process repeats until there are a total of ten actual Intellects corresponding to the World of Nature containing eighth spheres and the earth (Sphere of Fixed Stars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Earth). The Tenth Intellect is a demiurge that creates and governs the sublunar world composed of form and matter.¹²²³ Al-Kirmānī's depiction of his cosmology is presented in the Figure 7.1.1 below.¹²²⁴

¹²²³ Al-Kirmānī visually depicts his cosmology in *Rāḥat*, 168, where the First Intellect is depicted at the top, the Second Intellect at the lower right and the Potential Intellect at the lower left. The separate Intellects called angels are then listed below the Second Intellect while the World of Nature consisting of the spheres and stars is listed below the Potential Intellect. There is disagreement among modern scholars concerning the “Potential Intellect *qua* Matter and Form”, which is a second emanation from the First Intellect. Both De Smet and De Cillis argue that this Potential Intellect is the “Third Intellect” of al-Kirmānī's system and thus belongs to the world of the ten Intellects. De Smet believes al-Kirmānī secretly holds that this Third Intellect fell to the rank of Tenth Intellect, based on what later Ṭayyibī Ismaili thinkers believed. However, this interpretation turns out to be untenable based on al-Kirmānī's actual statements and writings. For the basis of my cosmological interpretation that I have laid out above, see Tatsuya Kikuchi, “Some Problems in De. De Smet's Understanding of the Development of Ismā'īlism,” *Orient* 34 (1999): 106-120; Daniel C. Peterson, “Cosmology and the Separated Intellects in the ‘Rāḥat al-‘aql’ of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1990).

¹²²⁴ This is a reproduction and translation of al-Kirmānī's diagram presented in *Rāḥat*, 168.

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The entire cosmic system is sustained and organized by divine providence (*ināya*) emanating from First Intellect through the hierarchy of Intellects and influencing the natural world. The Tenth Intellect generates human souls, which exist as the first perfection of the body and as the likenesses of the actual Intellects. The human soul, as in al-Fārābī’s thought, has four faculties: the nutritive (*ghādhīyya*), sensitive (*ḥāssa*), imaginal or representational (*mutakhayyila*, *mutaṣawwira*), and the rational (*nāṭīqa*).¹²²⁵ Human souls reach felicity when they are perfected

¹²²⁵ De Smet, “Al-Fārābī’s Influence,” 47.

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through purification and intellectual actualization, thereby achieving their “second perfection” (*al-kamāl al-thānī*).¹²²⁶

The Revelatory Principle and Revelatory Process: Intellect and Emanation

The above Ismaili-Farābian cosmology of al-Kirmānī plays a major role in his understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation because he conceived the Revelatory Process as a “mirroring” of the cosmogonic process. Likewise, he depicted the Ismaili *da'wa* as the homologue or reflection of the celestial world of the ten separate Intellects and the natural world of ten spheres. Central to al-Kirmānī's worldview is his idea of divine providence (*al-'ināya al-ilāhīyya*):

We say that if divine providence nourishes the affairs of all existents, then it is what preserves (*al-ḥāfiẓa*) their coming together according to an established order so that no things can escape it; it is that on which the existence of the whole depends; it is what establishes the whole for each one in as an assistance either through a single intermediary or through many, in order to lead each existent towards its purpose, its perfection and its limit.¹²²⁷

As De Cillis observes, divine providence performs two functions: regulation of the arrangement of existents and assisting the actualization of all things toward their *telos*, perfection, and purpose.¹²²⁸ This divine providence emanates from the First Intellect upon the nine Intellects below it.¹²²⁹ From the World of Holiness (*'ālam al-quḍus*) comprised of the celestial Intellects, divine providence flows upon the Potential Intellect and the celestial spheres; it then proceeds into the

¹²²⁶ A summary of this metaphysics is found in Walker, *Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī*, 80-117. See also Sayeh Meisami, *Knowledge and power in the Philosophies of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī and Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹²²⁷ *Rāḥat*, 417. For divine providence in al-Kirmānī, see also De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'intellect*, 347-351. For another translation of this passage, see Maria De Cillis, *Salvation and Destiny in Islam: The Shi'i Ismaili Perspective of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2018), 76.

¹²²⁸ De Cillis, *Salvation and Destiny*, 76-77.

¹²²⁹ *Rāḥat al-'aql*, 269.

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sublunary realm, influencing the four elements and the natural kingdoms.¹²³⁰ At the human level, this divine providence manifests from the Tenth Intellect, which governs the sublunary world and conveys divine support (*ta'yīd*) and divine inspiration (*wahy*) to perfect human souls. Al-Kirmānī defined *ta'yīd* as “the transmission of divine power from the celestial world (*'ālam al-malakūt*) within the arisen soul existing within the world of nature.” This *ta'yīd* comes in the form of the Holy Spirit, which is the intelligible emanation from the First Intellect: “The Spirit is the blessing of holiness and celestial world (*malakūt*) emanating from [God's] Command, which is the First Originated Being and the First Existent.”¹²³¹

The First Intellect, as the source of cosmic emanation and divine inspiration, constitutes the Revelatory Principle in al-Kirmānī's thought. Like al-Sijistānī before him, al-Kirmānī stressed the analogy or correspondence between the First Intellect in the World of Origination and the Speaker Prophet in the world of humanity.

The Speaker Prophet (*al-nāṭiq*) in the World of Religion is a likeness (*mathal*) of the First Intellect in the Abode of Origination. His being the cause for the existence of the World of Religion entails that the Origination, which is the First Originated Being and the First Intellect, is a cause for the existence of the Emanated Intellects in the World of Holiness. [The Prophet], who exists within perfection according to the upper limit by which he dispenses with the need for human parables (*amthāl*) in the expansion of blessing, divine governance, and bringing souls to the Enclosure of Holiness entails that the First Intellect is within perfection according to the upper limit by which it dispenses with requiring anything else in establishing wisdom.¹²³²

The Speaker Prophet is the human manifestation of the First Intellect in the World of Religion and reflects the Intellect's attributes and functions among human beings. Just as the First Intellect is originated through God's unique act of Command, the Speaker Prophet's knowledge comes through divine support (*ta'yīd*) emanating from the higher Intellects in the World of Holiness. How

¹²³⁰ Ibid., 228.

¹²³¹ Ibid., 511.

¹²³² Ibid., 213.

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the Prophet's soul receives this intelligible emanation was the subject of an entire section in al-Kirmānī's *Rāḥat al-'aql*, which will be considered below.

Al-Kirmānī presented his understanding of divine support (*ta'yīd*) and inspiration (*wahy*) by way of commentary upon Q. 42:51: "God does not speak to any human being except by *wahy*, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to inspire by His permission what He wills." He took this verse as describing the states of any divinely supported soul (*al-mu'ayyad*), which could be the Speaker Prophet, the Founder, an Imam, and to a lesser degree, the *bāb* (gate) and the *ḥujjas* (proofs) of the Imam. Most human souls remain incapable of receiving the light of divine support from the Abode of Holiness due to imbalances in their temperament and spiritual impurities. However, the motions of the celestial bodies and the lights emanating from the Abode of Holiness converge according to God's determined measure (*qadr*) to bring about the existence of a "noble soul" within the natural world, a soul that is purified and receptive to divine support: "These noble souls from the direction of nature and its states always succeed in receiving from the principle of their existence what glorifies their existence until they grow so that the divine lights, which are the Holy Spirit, connect to them due to their being empty of the obstacles that hinder them from their reception of it."¹²³³ This type of human soul is effectively a mirror reflecting the virtues and attributes of the First Intellect and serves as a receptacle (*qābila*) for its emanations: "The divinely supported soul through its being in essence a life, power, knowledge, and a substance in actuality, is distinguished by the virtues (*faḍā'il*) through which the First [Intellect] is distinguished."¹²³⁴ At the practical level, this pure soul is immaculate (*ma'ṣūm*) and sinless; it is free of natural desires

¹²³³ Ibid., 552.

¹²³⁴ Ibid., 550-551.

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and always inclines toward goodness: “The pure soul is a configuration of nature due to its temperament which exists according to a most harmonious affair, like tinders configured for the reception [of fire] empty of what hinders it, such that sparks neither exceed nor skip over them.”¹²³⁵

Al-Kirmānī specified three modes of divine inspiration (*wahy*) through which a divinely-supported soul – the Speaker Prophet, the Founder, or the Imam – receives knowledge from the World of Holiness. He linked these three modes to the description given in Q. 42:51 and creatively drew on past Ismaili ideas. He delineated the first mode of *wahy* as follows:

As for *wahy*, it is the name of what he [the divinely supported person] learns entirely without commentary or elucidation and it is divided into two types: the first is what he learns without a sensory intermediary which occurs through the exaltedness of the *Jadd* and it obtains for the soul by what comes from the light of the Abode of Holiness from the aspect of the angel similar to the tinders of fire. This is the highest of all stations among what is known.¹²³⁶

The first and highest mode of *wahy* is what al-Kirmānī called *Jadd*, depicted as one of the spiritual intermediaries between the celestial Intellects in the World of Holiness and the souls of the Speaker Prophets, Founders, and Imams. He portrayed the soul’s acceptance of divine inspiration through *Jadd* as its reception of the Holy Spirit or intelligible light – where the soul is compared to tinders prepared for the reception of fire.¹²³⁷

There occurs the obtainment of those lights which is the Holy Spirit and their circulation within the soul, which we likened to the sparks of the fire and sound. Its obtaining with respect to the tinders of fire or hearing is a likeness for the divine inspiration (*wahy*) which comes upon it. [This *wahy*] always occurs and connects to it [the soul], producing the light of knowledge in its essence continuously. This does not occur in the state of its sleep while the ability of the sensory instruments depart from it but rather, [it occurs] in the state of its being awake.¹²³⁸

¹²³⁵ Ibid., 553.

¹²³⁶ Ibid., 559.

¹²³⁷ Ibid., 562.

¹²³⁸ Ibid., 554.

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The highest rank of divine inspiration through *Jadd* is one where the soul of the divinely supported person comes to know “perceptible meanings divested of matter” (*al-ma'ānī al-mujarrada al-mudraka*) and “universal cognitions” (*ma'ārif kullīyya*) without any psychic or sensory intermediaries. This mode of *wahy* occurs continuously while the recipient is awake and amounts to a purely intellectual illumination.¹²³⁹ On this point, al-Kirmānī's explanation of the *Jadd* as a purely spiritual or intelligible mode of perception comes close to the positions of al-Rāzī and al-Sijistānī, both of whom described *Jadd* along similar lines.

The second mode of divine inspiration is what al-Kirmānī called *Fath* (“Opening”), which he equated to God speaking “from behind a veil” (Q. 42:51): “*Fath* is what exists from the aspect of the establishment of the traces of [God]’s creation (*al-ṣan'a*) within existents, similar to the divine address through symbols (*bi l-amthāl*).”¹²⁴⁰ This means that *Fath* is a mode of perception whereby the divinely supported person contemplates the various existents in the Cosmos and perceives the divine wisdom concealed within them. In this respect, God’s creative productions are a divine discourse (*khiṭāb ilāhī*) to the one who reflects upon them: “The heavens and the earth and whatever is between them is a [divine] communication (*mukhāṭiba*) for the one who reflects on them with respect to what is within them of the traces of God’s wisdom.”¹²⁴¹ In other words, the *Fath* is a power allowing the divinely inspired soul to “read” the Cosmos as God’s communication and discover its hidden wisdoms and meanings akin to how a person reads writing and realizes the meanings of the words.¹²⁴² Al-Kirmānī’s idea of the *Fath* is very similar to al-

¹²³⁹ See *ibid.*, 557-551, for these various descriptions of the highest rank of *wahy*.

¹²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 563.

¹²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴² *Ibid.*, 562.

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Sijistānī's account of a how a divinely inspired person can contemplate a person, an animal, or a tree, and thereby experience an "opening" (*fath*) of divine support.

The third mode of *wahy* is mediated through *Khayāl* (Imagination), which al-Kirmānī described as follows:

As for what he learns through a sensory intermediary, it is divided into two types: one of them is specific and it is what he learns from an aspect particular to the arisen soul, as a form (*ṣūra*) that [the soul] perceives alone as something sensory without anyone else participating in it. This is like the angel being represented as a form from the actualization of the universal meaning divested of matter from outside of it as a *wahy* in the essence according to what we mentioned. It [the soul] sees it through sense and it [the form] addresses her [the soul] while others neither see nor sense it, and this is *Khayāl*.¹²⁴³

The perception of *wahy* through *Khayāl* involves the divinely supported soul conceiving a form (*ṣūra*) or an image within itself – a form that helps clarify the universal meanings that are otherwise free of corporeal features. In al-Kirmānī's account, *Khayāl* seems to be a complementary mode of inspiration that the soul resorts to when it cannot immediately apprehend the intelligible meanings received in the highest mode of *wahy* through the *Jadd*. Al-Kirmānī described the soul's ability to "imaginalize" the *wahy* cast into it as a mirror reflecting external objects as images and experience these images through its sensory faculties.¹²⁴⁴ As an example of divine inspiration through *Khayāl*, al-Kirmānī referred to the qur'ānic story of the Holy Spirit assuming the likeness of a perfect human to Mary the mother of Jesus (Q. 19:17). In his interpretation, only Mary saw this image because it was internal to her soul and not an external event of the corporeal world.¹²⁴⁵ Similarly, the soul of the Speaker Prophet interprets and represents the contents of the universal *wahy* through images based on sensory things in order to convey this knowledge to his followers in the form of

¹²⁴³ Ibid., 559.

¹²⁴⁴ Ibid., 554.

¹²⁴⁵ Ibid., 555.

laws and religious practices. Al-Kirmānī explained the well-known story of Muhammad receiving the first verses of the Qur'ān from the Angel Gabriel while he was meditating in the cave of Hira as his reception of divine inspiration mediated by *Khayāl*.¹²⁴⁶ This is also how al-Kirmānī read Q. 20:114: “Do not hasten with the recitation (*qur'ān*) before its inspiration (*wahy*) is completed to you and say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge”, which is often interpreted in terms of verbal dictation. For al-Kirmānī, this verse shows that the Prophet would receive *wahy* at the highest level through *Jadd* and then seek its interpretation or explanation through the lower mode of *wahy* mediated by *Khayāl*.¹²⁴⁷ *Khayāl* corresponds to what the Qur'ān and the Prophet call “Gabriel”, which is the human image that the Holy Spirit assumes within the Prophet's soul in order to converse with him.¹²⁴⁸ In one respect, al-Kirmānī may be affirming the verbal dictation doctrine of Sunni scholars. But it must be noted that al-Kirmānī understood the appearance of the *Khayāl* and its verbal discourse as a phenomenon internal to the Prophet's soul that he experiences through his imagination. This is similar to the view of al-Fārābī, who maintained that the Prophet's faculty of imagination represents the intelligibles emanating from the Active Intellect as images and transmits these images to his sensory faculties. Likewise, al-Kirmānī's idea of *Khayāl* follows along the same lines as al-Rāzī, who referenced the Sunni *ḥadīth* about the Prophet conversing with the Angel Gabriel in human form when discussing the faculty of *Khayāl*.

The Revelatory Products: The Imam, the Qur'ān and *Sharī'a*, and the Revelatory Hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*)

¹²⁴⁶ Ibid., 556.

¹²⁴⁷ Ibid., 557.

¹²⁴⁸ Ibid., 566.

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In common with other Ismaili thinkers, al-Kirmānī regarded the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* as Revelatory Products constructed by the Prophet Muhammad. As explained in his *al-Maṣābiḥ fī ithbāt al-imāma* (*The Shining Lamps for the Establishment of the Imamate*), the Prophet Muhammad coined “sensory similitudes” (*al-amthāl al-maḥsūsa*) to symbolize real truths about the corporeal and spiritual worlds and make them accessible to human beings. These sensory expressions and symbols coined by the Prophet, in which he depicted realities that ultimately transcend language and ordinary human thought, make up the Arabic Qur'ān and are called *tanzīl*. The rituals commanded in the Qur'ān including prayer gestures and pilgrimage rites were likewise constructed as symbols of revelatory wisdom.¹²⁴⁹ The Prophet Muhammad also legislated rules of conduct that comprise the *sharī'a* to bring about the perfection of human souls. The *sharī'a* instills the development of virtues in human souls by promoting the performance of good works; it creates a worldly environment that is orderly, peaceful, safe, and free of chaos by providing laws for the regulation of property and social relations; and it also allows human souls to indirectly participate in the esoteric knowledge of the spiritual and natural worlds that emanates to the souls of the Prophets by symbolizing this knowledge through ritual gestures of worship.¹²⁵⁰

What remains truly distinctive about al-Kirmānī's vision is how his theological account of these Revelatory Products directly corresponds to the Revelatory Principles in his Ismaili-Farabian cosmology. As it may be recalled, the First Intellect is the principle of both cosmology and revelation. Its activity results in a two-fold emanation: the First Intellect's higher aspect, which is its existence as God's Origination, causes the emanation of the Second Intellect. The Second

¹²⁴⁹ Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age*, ed. and tr. Paul E. Walker (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007), 62-70. I have modified Walker's translation of this Arabic term.

¹²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-62. This is where al-Kirmānī explains the purposes and benefits of the prophetic *sharī'a*.

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Intellect resembles the First Intellect in being an actual, eternal, and immaterial intellect “subsisting in actuality” (*qā'im bi l-fi'l*). The First Intellect's lower aspect, which is its multiplicity of being intellecting (*'āqil*) and intellected (*ma'qūl*), causes the emanation of the Potential Intellect, an “intellect subsisting in potentiality” (*qā'im bi l-quwwa*). This Potential Intellect is Prime Matter/Form and serves as the substrate for all corporeal existents. The Second Intellect recognizes the intelligible essence of the First Intellect and itself, and thereby emanates another actual Intellect – the Third Intellect – and the celestial sphere of fixed stars. Likewise, the Third Intellect emanates the Fourth Intellect and the sphere of Saturn. The cosmogonic process continues up to the Tenth Intellect, which emanates human souls and the sublunary world. The spheres, stars, and sublunary world together constitute the World of Nature ultimately grounded in the Potential Intellect of Prime Matter and Form. Likewise, the Tenth, Ninth, Eighth, Seventh, Sixth, Fifth, Fourth, and Third Intellects are called “angels” and are ultimately grounded in the Second Intellect. Each Intellect – from the Second Intellect to the Tenth Intellect – acts upon and influences its corresponding celestial sphere. The First Intellect does not act upon any sphere but simply emanates both the Second Intellect and the Potential Intellect (see Figure 7.1.1 above).

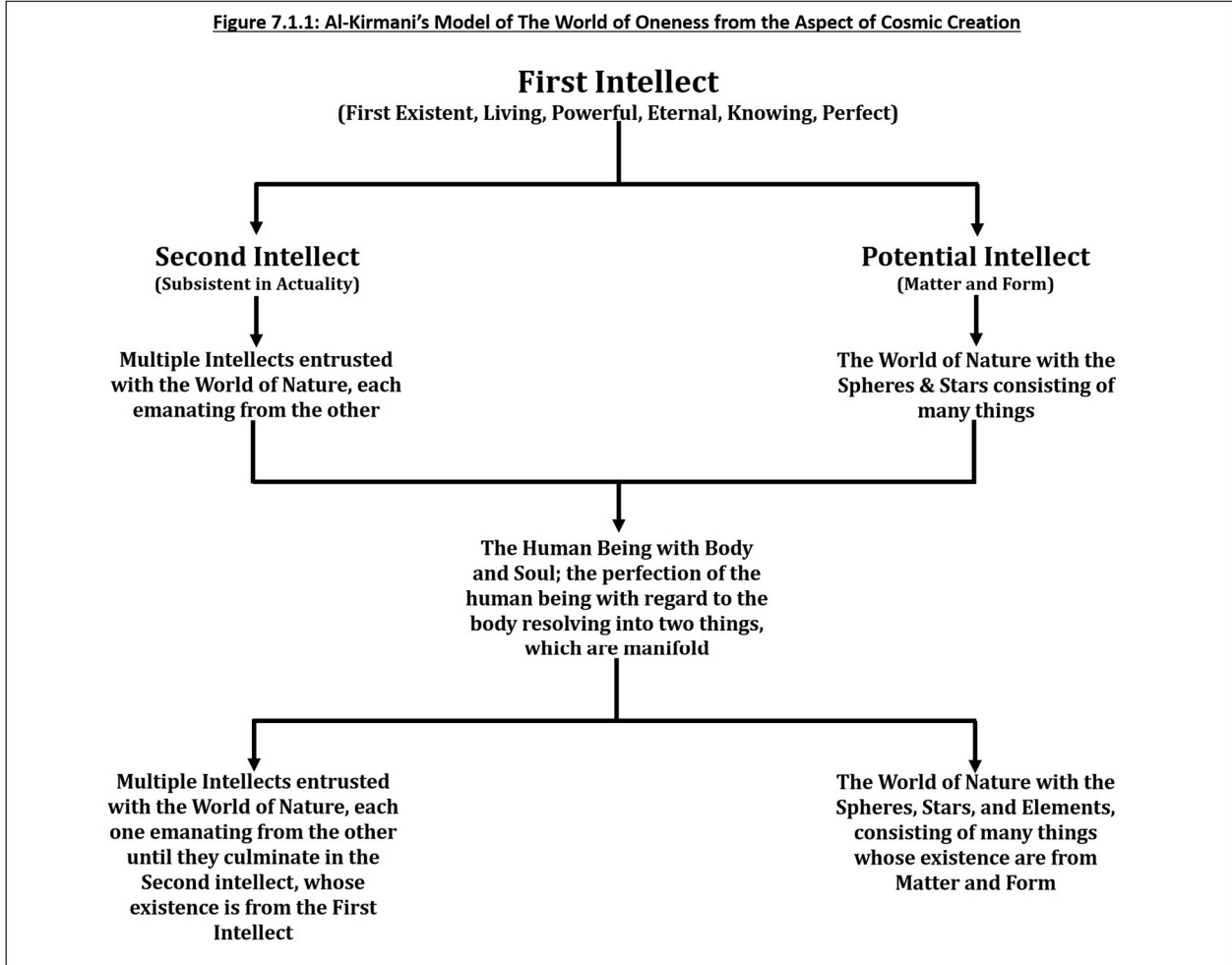
Al-Kirmānī laid out the structure of the World of Religion as a recapitulation of the above cosmogonic relationships. Just as the First Intellect has two aspects – its higher aspect as an intellecter and its lower aspect of being intellected – the Speaker Prophet has two relationships: “a relationship to the World of Holiness and a relationship to the World of Nature.”¹²⁵¹ Likewise, the Speaker Prophet produces two distinct Revelatory Products just as the First Intellect emanates two different existents. The Prophet Muhammad's two Revelatory Products are his Legatee Imam 'Alī

¹²⁵¹ *Rāḥat al-'aql*, 213.

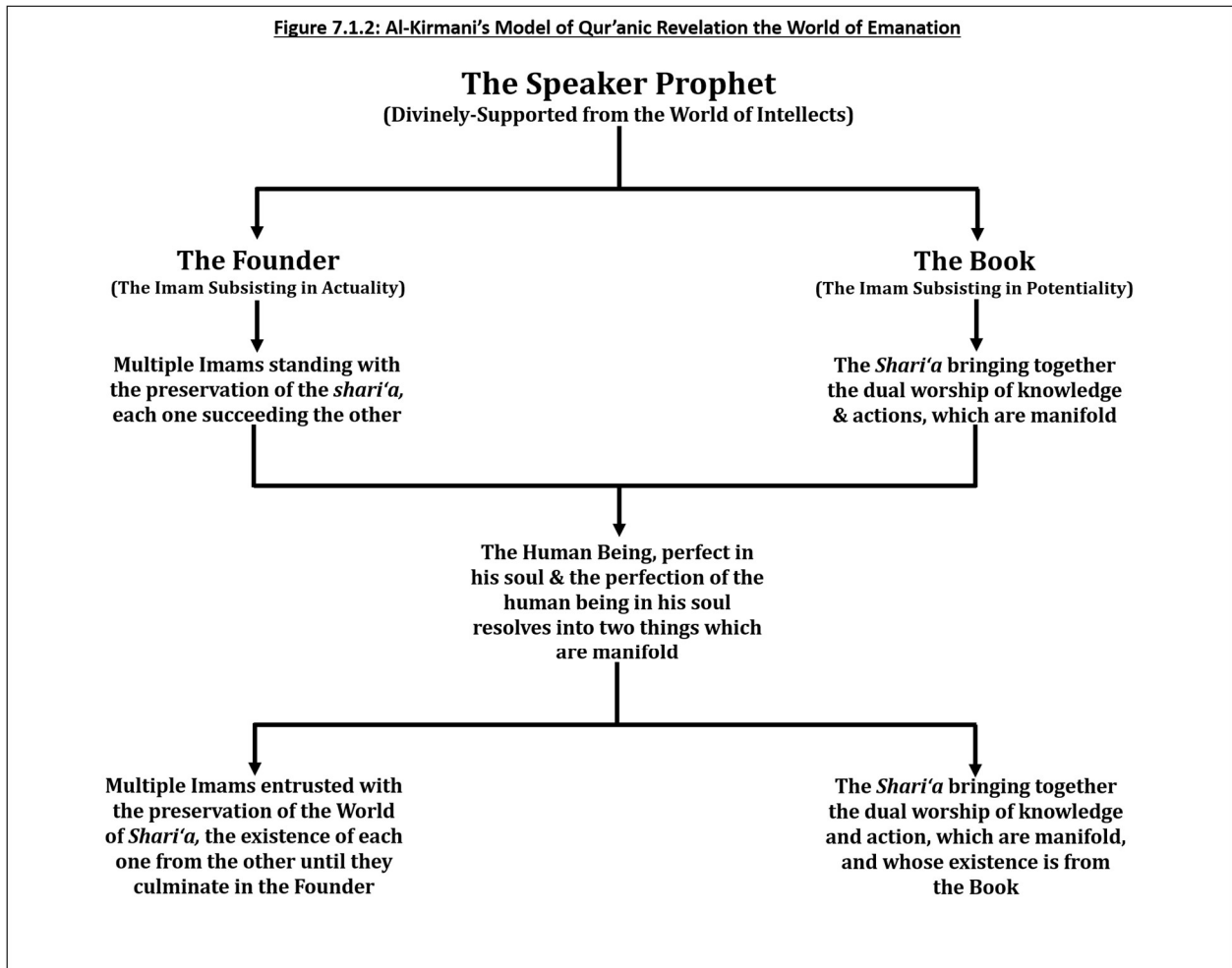
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b. Abī Ṭālib and the Arabic Qur'ān/*sharī'a* as depicted in Figures 7.1.1 (show again) and 7.1.2

below:



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What exists from the Origination, that is the First Originated Being...are two primordial emanations – a first and a second: the Second Intellect subsisting in actuality and the Intellect subsisting in potentiality, which is Matter and Form. What exists from the Speaker Prophet is likewise two things: the Legatee (*al-waṣī*) standing in his place in actuality and the Book (*al-kitāb*), which is an Imam subsisting in potentiality. It is in the station of Matter and Form which are the materials (*mādda*) enclosing each thing.... The Second Intellect is greater and nobler than the other, which is Matter [and Form] subsisting in potentiality and being acted upon by it. Likewise, the Legatee standing in the place of the Speaker Prophet is nobler than the Book that is enacted by him.¹²⁵²

Most significantly, al-Kirmānī likened the Prophet’s Legatee/Founder – the first Imam – to the Second Intellect which exists in actuality. He compared the Arabic Qur’ān (the Book) and the *sharī’a* to Matter and Form, which merely constitute an Intellect in potentiality. This means that the Speaker Prophet and the Founder, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, are the human reflections of the First

¹²⁵² Ibid., 241-242.

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Intellect and Second Intellect respectively and their souls are perfect in actuality, resembling the actual Intellects: “God informed [us] that his soul [‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib] is like the soul of Muhammad in the [Qur’ānic] verse of mutual imprecation (*āyat al-mubāhila*), due to his being in perfection and completeness like him.”¹²⁵³ The implication of this position is that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, as the Prophet’s Legatee, is superior to the Arabic Qur’ān: “The Legatee standing in the place of the Speaker Prophet is nobler than the Book that is enacted by him.” This is because the Legatee is an Imam “in actuality” while the Arabic Qur’ān is merely an Imam “in potentiality”, just as Prime Matter and Form are merely an “intellect in potentiality.” Thus, ‘Alī acts upon the Arabic Qur’ān which is like passive matter before him.

Al-Kirmānī pressed this analogy further when delineating the relationship between the Shi'i Ismaili Imams and the Arabic Qur’ān. The Imams are the human analogues of the actual Intellects that emanate from the Second Intellect since they issue from the progeny of the Founder, who mirrors the Second Intellect. Meanwhile, the ordinances embedded in the Arabic Qur’ān, such as rules of worship and conduct comprising the *sharī‘a*, correspond to the corporeal spheres and stars that make up the World of Nature composed of Matter and Form. Each actual Intellect, from the Third Intellect to the Tenth Intellect, acts upon the celestial spheres through divine providence; in the same way, every Imam in his time is divinely inspired and acts upon the Arabic Qur’ān by extracting the *sharī‘a* and the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*). When explicating this idea elsewhere, al-Kirmānī quoted the Prophet’s famous Thaḳalayn tradition: “I have left among you two weighty matters: the *kitāb Allāh* and my descendants.” Al-Kirmānī glossed this tradition by observing that: “He [the Prophet] connected the silent one (*ṣāmit*) to the speaking one (*nāṭiq*)....

¹²⁵³ Ibid., 213.

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The descendants function, with respect to the Book and the *sharī'a*, as does the soul with respect to the world of the individual, and as do the angels with respect to this world.”¹²⁵⁴ In this statement, al-Kirmānī evoked the classical Ismaili idea of the Imam as the “speaking (*nāṭiq*) Qur'ān” and framed the Qur'ān in its scriptural form as the “silent (*ṣāmit*) Qur'ān”. His comparison of the Imam-Qur'ān relationship to the relationships between souls and bodies or angels and physical matter establish that the Imam is superior to the Qur'ān.

Al-Kirmānī considered the *ta'wīl* of the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* as an indispensable manifestation of revelation that complements whatever the Prophet brought as *tanzīl*. His lengthy remarks on the nature of *ta'wīl* are found in *The Shining Lamps*. The divine mandate for the Imams to disclose *ta'wīl*, in the sense of “revelatory exegesis”, arises from al-Kirmānī's Ismaili understanding that the Prophet Muhammad produced the Arabic Qur'ān as a translation of divine inspiration and emanation. For example, the Prophet coined sensory similitudes (*al-amthāla al-mahsūsa*) to depict the spiritual truths and realities of the next world. These sensory similitudes in their outward meaning are sometimes contrary to what is known by reason or common sense. These include qur'ānic stories about Adam's progeny speaking while still within his loins (Q. 7:172), God speaking to the heaven and the earth (Q. 41:11), or prophetic statements like “between my grave and my pulpit is one of the gardens of paradise.” Likewise, the prophetic and qur'ānic accounts of Paradise, Hellfire, and the next world are filled with corporeal imagery like gardens, fire, cups, women, pearls, fruit, boiling water, chains, etc. In other cases, the Prophet constructed sensory similitudes in the form of ritual gestures, which appear to have no rational purpose at face value. Key examples of this are the pilgrimage rituals that include addressing the Black Stone,

¹²⁵⁴ Al-Kirmānī, *Master of the Age*, 79. I have modified Walker's translation.

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running back and forth, throwing pebbles, and shaving one's head. The Qur'ān itself confirms that it contains ambiguous verses that have *ta'wīl* (Q. 3:7), which is only known by a select group called "those firmly rooted in knowledge" (*rāsikhūn fī l-ilm*). The only way that the Prophet's verbal and ritual revelatory discourse could be amenable to the human intellect is if their true meaning is deeper and concealed; this deeper true meaning is what *ta'wīl*, the revelatory exegesis, discloses.¹²⁵⁵

The *ta'wīl* is taught by the Imams through their *da'wa* hierarchy and ultimately issues from divine inspiration: "The Imam, who is divinely supported from heaven, expounds the religion and the explanation of its symbols (*al-rumūz*) for you through his hierarchy of dignitaries (*hudūd*)."¹²⁵⁶ Only by practicing the Prophet's *tanzīl* and *sharī'a* and learning the *ta'wīl* from the Imams and the *da'wa* can a believer actualize their soul's perfection and attain to spiritual felicity. Since this *ta'wīl* is taught to believers by different ranks of the Ismaili *da'wa*, such as the Imam, *hujjas*, and *dā'īs*, al-Kirmānī admitted that actual contents of a *ta'wīl* exegesis may differ from teacher to teacher based on their rank in knowledge: "It is possible for one *ta'wīl* to be clearer and more evident than another depending on the purity of the nature of the *mu'awwil* (one who does *ta'wīl*) and his power in knowledge and in deduction."¹²⁵⁷ This is why, for example, one often finds two Ismaili *dā'īs* providing a different revelatory exegesis or *ta'wīl* of the same qur'ānic verse or Muslim ritual. The believer's journey through *ta'wīl* (literally "to return something to its origin")

¹²⁵⁵ Ibid., 63-67.

¹²⁵⁶ Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, 238.

¹²⁵⁷ Al-Kirmānī, as quoted in Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, "The Concept of Knowledge According to al-Kirmānī," in Todd Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy, and Mysticism in Muslim Thought. Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 127-141: 136.

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seems to resemble the climbing of a ladder, in a way almost reversing the process of *tanzīl* (literally “to send something down”) performed by the Prophet. Ultimately, the contents of *ta'wīl* lead toward the celestial Intellects and the First Intellect, which is the Revelatory Principle: “The words in conveying the meanings of *ta'wīl* are different, but their meanings, despite the difference in words, are in agreement. Every *ta'wīl* is adequate and satisfactory so long as it does not raise a *ḥadd* above its limit or lower another below its rank.”¹²⁵⁸ In this respect, *ta'wīl* functions as a revelatory exegesis that necessarily complements the revelatory expression (*tanzīl*) of the Prophet.

Conclusion:

Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī crafted a distinctive Ismaili theory of Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation based on his new Ismaili cosmology incorporating the ten Intellects model of al-Fārābī. Having identified God's Command and the First Intellect, al-Kirmānī's thought renders the First Intellect as God's Speech and the Revelatory Principle manifested in the Cosmos and through prophetic revelation. The divine providence flowing through the First Intellect and the emanated Intellects reaches the souls of the Prophets, Legatees, and Imams as divine support (*ta'yīd*) and inspiration (*wahy*). Their souls stand at the rank of perfection and function as mirror-like receptacles for the First Intellect's intelligible lights called the Holy Spirit. In terms of the Revelatory Process, al-Kirmānī recognized three modes by which the soul of the Prophet receives *wahy* from the World of Intellects based on his exegesis of Q. 42:51. First, there is the mode of *Jadd*, where the divine inspiration comes to the Prophet's soul as pure intelligible light comprising universal meanings divested of matter. This is a non-verbal emanation reflecting the very essence of *wahy*. In the

¹²⁵⁸ Ibid.

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second mode of reception called *Fath*, various created phenomena become transparent to the Prophet's vision such that he perceives a divine address embedded within them – akin to the Prophet “reading” God's creation like a book. The third mode of receiving divine inspiration is *Khayāl*, through which the Prophet's soul visually represents or “imaginalizes” the contents of *wahy* as a image (*ṣura*) internal to his soul that others cannot perceive. This imaginal representation within the Prophet's soul takes on the appearance of a human figure who verbally addresses the Prophet. For this reason, Muhammad referred to *Khayāl* as “Gabriel” who would sometimes appear to him in human form. The divine inspiration in the mode of *Khayāl* assists the Prophet's soul in understanding what was not immediately comprehensible to him from the purely intelligible inspiration received through *Jadd* and aids him in expressing divine inspiration into the symbolic forms found in the Qur'ān and the *sharī'a*. Al-Kirmānī's understanding of divine inspiration was similar to prior Ismaili thinkers in asserting the non-verbal and purely intelligible nature of *wahy*. However, al-Kirmānī's interpretation of *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl* is distinctive and seems to be a creative synthesis of the ideas of al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī, and al-Fārābī. In the particular case of the Prophet Muhammad, the Revelatory Products are his Founder or Legatee (the first Imam of a cycle) and the Book (the Arabic Qur'ān including the *sharī'a*). However, al-Kirmānī situated the Legatee as the human analogue of the actual Second Intellect and the Book as the earthly analogue of the Potential Intellect comprised of Matter and Form. This grants the Legatee and the Imams superiority over the Arabic Qur'ān and *sharī'a*. The relationship between the Imam and the Qur'ān/*sharī'a* is akin to the relationship between the actual Intellects and the material spheres they act upon. By depicting the Revelatory Process as a reflection of the cosmogonic process, al-Kirmānī reasserted the primacy of the Ismaili Imams over the Arabic Qur'ān; he situated the former as the “Speaking Qur'ān” who explicate the true meaning of the “silent

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Qur'ān.” Like earlier Ismaili thinkers, al-Kirmānī affirmed the necessity of *ta'wīl* as a divinely inspired revelatory hermeneutics that the Imam of every age teaches to the believers through his *da'wa* hierarchy.

7.2 Qur'ānic Revelation through the Absolute Human: Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077)

Al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, whose full name was Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh b. Mūsā b. Abī 'Imrān b. Dāwūd, hailed from a Persian Daylamī family whose forefathers served as loyal *dā'īs* for the Ismaili Imams since before the rise of the Fatimids.¹²⁵⁹ Al-Mu'ayyad succeeded his father as the Fatimid Ismaili *dā'ī* of Fārs and migrated to Fatimid Cairo in 436/1045 after his *da'wa* activities attracted persecution and threats to his life. During his tenure in Cairo, the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mustanṣir billāh appointed al-Mu'ayyad to the Ismaili *da'wa* station of *bāb al-abwāb* (“gate of gates”), the figure ranked immediately under the Imam who serves as the spiritual “gatekeeper” to the Imam’s divinely inspired knowledge.¹²⁶⁰ After al-Mu'ayyad served in the Fatimid court and led an important Fatimid expedition to Syria, the Imam appointed him to the administrative

¹²⁵⁹ For al-Mu'ayyad's life and career, see Verena Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission: The Ismaili Scholar, Statesman and Poet al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2003). For his poetry, see Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid Da'wa Poetry*.

¹²⁶⁰ Al-Mu'ayyad's status as the *bāb* of the Imam is evidenced by how the Ismaili philosopher-poet and *dā'ī* Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 462-481/1070-1088) describes his person and spiritual functions. Khusraw himself arrived in Cairo in 439/1047 after a two-year journey from Balkh. Khusraw stayed in Cairo for three years (439/1047-442/1050) during which time he was spiritually educated and initiated by al-Mu'ayyad into the higher ranks of Ismaili doctrine and practice. Khusraw referred to al-Mu'ayyad as the person who offered him spiritual medicine to address all his intellectual doubts, the “Warden of the Gate” of Paradise, the Angel Riḍwān (the angelic guardian of paradise), and the “door of the Ka'ba”, who has no equal in knowledge and wisdom. This means that al-Mu'ayyad had been the Imam's *bāb* since at least 439/1047 when he began instructing Nāṣir-i Khusraw. See Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, the Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000), 62-68; Qutbuddin, *al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 87-88.

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position of *dā'ī al-du'āt* (chief missionary) in 451/1059.¹²⁶¹ Except for a brief interruption, al-Mu'ayyad held this position until his death. As chief *dā'ī*, al-Mu'ayyad delivered weekly lectures to Ismaili initiates known as the *majālis al-ḥikma* (sessions of wisdoms). These sermons contained the private esoteric teachings of the Ismaili *da'wa* and functioned as a compendium of Ismaili Qur'ānic exegesis. Al-Mu'ayyad prepared and delivered about eight hundred sermons, later compiled under the title of *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, each of which contained the Fatimid Imam-Caliph's signature of approval.¹²⁶² Given al-Mu'ayyad's religious status as the Imam's *bāb*, his administrative role as Fatimid chief *dā'ī*, and the Imam's seal on each *majlis*, one may suppose that his sermons contained authoritative Ismaili teachings during this period.¹²⁶³ The Fatimid chief *qāḍī* and vizier Abū l-Qāsim al-Malījī (active: 450-461/1058-1068) was also responsible for delivering the weekly *majālis* in 451/1059, which were compiled under the title *al-Majālis al-Mustanširiyya*.¹²⁶⁴ Therefore, the sermons attributed to both al-Mu'ayyad and al-Malījī will be analyzed to ascertain al-Mu'ayyad's understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation and those of the contemporary Fatimid *da'wa* more generally. The only thematic study of al-Mu'ayyad's sermons

¹²⁶¹ The caliphal letter announcing al-Mu'ayyad's investiture as chief *dā'ī* is quoted in Qutbuddin, *al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 83. It is important to note that the spiritual *da'wa* rank of *bāb al-abwāb* is different from the rank of chief *dā'ī*, which is a political administrative rank. The latter position seems to have started in the Fatimid court as late as the early fifth/eleventh century and has also been held by non-Ismailis, which include those who held it before al-Mu'ayyad. The difference is well explained in Qutbuddin, *al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 80-83.

¹²⁶² Al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, Vols. 1 & 3, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Dār Andalus, 1974-1984). The other volumes of these sermons were not directly available to me. Therefore, I have supplemented these two volumes with information from secondary literature. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from Vols. 1 and 3 of this text are from the Ghālib edition.

¹²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹²⁶⁴ Abū l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Ḥākim b. Wahb al-Malījī, *al-Majālis al-Mustanširiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1947).

in terms of their theological content is a monograph by Elizabeth R. Alexandrin, in which she focuses on his concept of *walāya* (the onto-cosmological and spiritual authority of the Imams).¹²⁶⁵

The Revelatory Principle and Revelatory Agent: Universal Intellect and the Absolute Human Being

Al-Mu'ayyad did not adhere to al-Kirmānī's Ismaili-Farabian cosmology of ten intellects and ten celestial spheres. Instead, he subscribed to the "classical" Ismaili Neoplatonic cosmology espoused by al-Sijistānī and other fourth/tenth century Fatimid *dā'īs*. According to this classical Ismaili cosmology, God originates the Universal Intellect through His Command; the Intellect emanates the Universal Soul; and the Universal Soul generates Form and Matter, constructs the corporeal world, and emanates human souls. In this cosmological model, the Universal Soul strives towards perfection by accepting the intellectual benefits of the Universal Intellect and endeavoring to produce perfect human souls. The Soul's creation of the corporeal world and human souls reflect its own spiritual movement from potential perfection to actual perfection. The divinely supported souls of the Speaker Prophets, Legatees, and Imams are the end result of the Soul's efforts to create a spiritual form that is perfect in actuality; the process of revelation as mediated by these perfect souls is what facilitates the perfection of other human souls who are only potentially perfect in their initial creation.¹²⁶⁶

Following his Ismaili predecessors, al-Mu'ayyad framed the Universal Intellect or First Intellect as the ontological principle of both creation and revelation; God remains altogether

¹²⁶⁵ Elizabeth Alexandrin, *Walāyah in the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī Tradition* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017).

¹²⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, 175-177 for further description of the Universal Soul's production of perfect human souls.

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transcendent, beyond all names and attributes, and exalted above all spiritual and corporeal existence. The Universal Intellect “holds together” and “preserves” all existence and is united to God’s creative act of Command or Origination.¹²⁶⁷ The Intellect is God’s Pen (*qalam*) through which the archetypal impressions (*nuqūsh*) of all existents come into being. Theologically, al-Mu’ayyad identified the Intellect with the “Face of God” (*wajh Allāh*) mentioned in the Qur’ān (Q. 28:88) and in the reported statements of Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in which he said: “I am the Face of God, I am the Hand of God spread forth upon the earth, I am the Side of God.” As the Face of God, the Universal Intellect is the wellspring of all divine support (*ta’yīd*) that emanates upon the souls of the Prophets, Legatees, and the Imams:

The Face of God in reality (*‘alā al-tahqīq*) is the First Originated Being from whom and from whose face is the soundness (*saḥa*) of knowledge (*al-ma’ārif*). The spiritual resources (*al-mādda*) conjoin [from him] to the spiritual ranks below him, which descend to the Prophets, Legatees, Imams, and the sages of religion. He [the Intellect] is the Face of God in the highest rank as indicated with the negation of the external face.¹²⁶⁸

As the source of the divine support granted to human beings, the Universal Intellect is the Revelatory Principle in al-Mu’ayyad’s worldview. Those souls that receive its divine illumination occupy a special cosmological position in the metaphysical and natural order.

One of the distinctive ideas in al-Mu’ayyad’s theology is the “absolute human being” (*al-insān al-muṭlaq*).¹²⁶⁹ This refers to a spiritual and cosmic status occupied by perfect human souls who are pure and directly connected to the Universal Soul and Universal Intellect. In the corporeal world, the absolute human is superior to normal mortal humans in the same way that mortal

¹²⁶⁷ Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 140.

¹²⁶⁸ Al-Mu’ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 372-373.

¹²⁶⁹ The most detailed treatment of the “absolute human being” in al-Mu’ayyad’s thought is found throughout Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, which first brought this theme to scholarly attention.

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humans are superior to animals. The Prophet Muhammad and his successor Imams each occupy the status of *al-insān al-muṭlaq* in their respective eras:

The absolute human being (*al-insān al-muṭlaq*) is the Messenger and the one standing in his place after him. He is the human being of that [spiritual] world who subjugates the genera of mortal humans (*anjās al-bashar*) through the power of divine support (*quwwat al-ta'yīd*) which he has from that [spiritual] world. This is similar to mortal humanity's subjugation of the genera of animals.... [The absolute human] is configured with the configuration of the angels from the standpoint of the substantiation of their [angelic] substance through its subtlety even though he is mortal in his [bodily] density. Through these virtues gathered for him, the Prophet deserves to "ride *Burāq*" – which is the light shining (*nūr al-bāriq*) on him from the World of the Intellect and the Soul.¹²⁷⁰

Similar to al-Sijistānī's formulations, the absolute human being dominates mortal humans because he possesses the faculty of divine support (*ta'yīd*); similarly, mortal humans dominate animals because of their powers of reason and intellect. Al-Mu'ayyad described this divine support as a light shining (*al-bāriq*) from the Universal Intellect and Soul. He equated this light to the mythical *Burāq*, which Sunni sources describe as the winged horse that the Prophet rode up the heavens during his famous ascension (*mi'rāj*). In al-Mu'ayyad's view, the horse *Burāq* is symbol for the spiritual illumination granted to the absolute human being. Cosmologically speaking, the absolute human being is a microcosm and a mirror of both the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. Accordingly, mortal human beings can become "more human" by coming closer to the absolute human being of their time – the Prophet, the Legatee, or the Imam – through obeying his guidance and refining their souls to resemble him.¹²⁷¹ Every Speaker Prophet in his time period, including the Prophet Muhammad, is the manifestation of the Universal Intellect and reflects the authority and attributes of the Intellect in the world of humanity. In other words, the Prophet as revelatory agent is the human reflection of the Revelatory Principle.

¹²⁷⁰ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 307. See also Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 175 for a slightly different translation of this passage.

¹²⁷¹ Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 177.

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For most topics including Qur'ānic Revelation, al-Mu'ayyad's comments are scattered in the form of “thematic clusters” throughout his hundreds of sermons.¹²⁷² In one discussion, he critically responded to the widespread belief among Sunni exegetes that the entire Arabic Qur'ān prior to its revelation was materially inscribed in the Guarded Tablet – widely understood by Sunnis to be a material tablet created before the world. Before looking at al-Mu'ayyad's critique of this belief, it is necessary to register that al-Mu'ayyad identified the mythical Pen and the Guarded Tablet, mentioned in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, with the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul:

It is related from the Prophet that: “*God wrote everything that exists in the creation of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them with His Pen upon His Tablet.*” Verily, the Tablet mentioned in the language of religion is called the Universal Soul (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*) in the language of the intellect. The impressions and the inscriptions are established upon it and they shine forth from it, so it is called the Tablet.¹²⁷³

Therefore, from the outset, Ismaili thinkers subscribed to a wholly different understanding of the Pen and Tablet from the beliefs of various Sunni exegetes and theologians. The latter saw the Pen and Tablet as physical creations of God where God used the Pen to inscribe corporeal letters in the Tablet, including the letters of the pre-existent Qur'ān in Arabic. Meanwhile, for the Ismailis, the Pen and Tablet – being the Universal Intellect and Soul – are eternal, incorporeal, and intelligible existents; they contain neither sounds, letters, nor ink. When al-Mu'ayyad speaks of the “impressions” (*nuqūsh*) and “writing” (*kitābāt*) within the Tablet, he is referring to spiritual archetypes that constitute the intelligible forms (*ṣuwar*) of the spiritual and corporeal worlds:

Concerning the spiritual cosmic construction (*al-tarkīb al-naḥsānī*) we state that the Universal Soul (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*) is the intermediary between Intellect and the Form (*al-ṣūra*) that is the cosmic

¹²⁷² This is a term coined by Alexandrin to describe how al-Mu'ayyad deals with particular subjects in his sermons. See Alexandrin, *Walayah*, 79.

¹²⁷³ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 177-178.

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construction (*tarkīb*) of the world, for it is supported by the Intellect and the bearer of the world, related to the Intellect on one of its sides, and to the cosmic construction on the other.¹²⁷⁴

Al-Mu'ayyad referenced several qur'ānic verses (Q. 6:38, 6:59) that speak of God knowing and recording all things in a *kitāb* – these verses all referring to the qur'ānic concept of the Transcendent Kitāb explained in Chapter 1.¹²⁷⁵ In one place al-Mu'ayyad quoted Q. 50:4, “We know what the earth diminishes of them; with Us is a recording *kitāb* (*kitāb ḥafīẓ*)”, and identified this *kitāb* with the Guarded Tablet and Universal Soul: “The recording *kitāb* with respect to the root-principle is the Guarded Tablet that establishes all the impressions (*al-nuqūsh*) and inscriptions (*al-kitābāt*).”¹²⁷⁶

Keeping the above Ismaili cosmological understanding of the Pen and the Tablet in mind, we can better appreciate al-Mu'ayyad's response to the Sunni belief that the Arabic Qur'ān pre-existed in the Guarded Tablet prior to its revelation. Al-Mu'ayyad presented his rejoinder to this belief as follows:

The Tablet is only called a “*lawḥ*” because of what “shines” (*lawāḥa*) within it of the traces of writing; so God's Preserved Tablet is that in which He preserved all of what He created from the beginning of the creation of the world to the establishment of the Hour. Everything that manifests into existence step by step and day by day is among the traces of the inscription shining in what is preserved of His Tablet. O brother, where were you to [even] know that the “inscribed Qur'ān” (*al-qur'ān al-marqūm*) appeared from the impressing (*naqsh*) of the Pen just like the Guarded Tablet? It [the Qur'ān] contains all the impressions (*jamī' nuqūsh*) and inscriptions of what God created for the Abode of the Hereafter (*dār al-ākhirā*), just as all the Guarded Tablet contains all the impressions and inscriptions of what God created for the Abode of the World (*dār al-dunyā*). There is no existence in the Abode of the World for what does not exist as something [already] impressed (*manqūshan*) in the Guarded Tablet. Likewise, there is no existence in the Abode of the Hereafter for what does not exist as something impressed (*manqūshan*) in ‘this’ guarded tablet (i.e. the Qur'ān). The Guarded Tablet is like dust (*turba*) and the creatures of the world are its seeds. The Qur'ān, in corresponding to it (*bi-muqābalatihi*), is like dust and the creatures of the Hereafter are its seeds.¹²⁷⁷

¹²⁷⁴ Ibid., 45. See also the translation of this passage in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 136. This is how I learned of this passage.

¹²⁷⁵ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 56.

¹²⁷⁶ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 3, 235.

¹²⁷⁷ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 56.

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In al-Mu'ayyad's view, as argued above, the Guarded Tablet contains the spiritual archetypes of everything that comes to exist in the corporeal world (*dār al-dunyā*). The verb *lawaha*, from which the word "tablet" (*lawh*) derives, means "to shine" or "to glow" and this entails that the contents of the Guarded Tablet are luminous non-corporeal realities. These archetypes "shine" (*lawaha*) in the Tablet or Universal Soul from the "impressing" (*naqsh*) of the Pen or Universal Intellect. Therefore, all existents are ontologically prefigured in the Pen, intellectually impressed upon the Tablet, and creatively manifested into existence in the spiritual and corporeal worlds from the Tablet. This Neoplatonic cosmogony precludes any notion of a pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān being materially inscribed in the Tablet. Thus, al-Mu'ayyad rhetorically asked the person who believes in such a pre-existent Qur'ān: "O brother, where were you to [even] know that the 'inscribed Qur'ān' (*al-qur'ān al-marqūm*) appeared from the impressing (*naqsh*) of the Pen just like the Guarded Tablet?" The Qur'ān as a Revelatory Product does not *physically* pre-exist in the Guarded Tablet; it does, however, correspond to (*bi-muqābala*) the Guarded Tablet in that the Qur'ān contains the divine guidance that human souls require to be actualized in the Abode of the Hereafter (*dār al-ākhirā*) just as the Tablet contains the celestial impressions that manifest in the Abode of the World (*dār al-dunyā*). In other words, al-Mu'ayyad situated the Arabic Qur'ān as an earthly revelatory manifestation or symbol of the Guarded Tablet, as opposed to a text that literally pre-exists within it. Therefore, the Guarded Tablet in al-Mu'ayyad's thought amounts to a secondary Revelatory Principle after the Universal Intellect or Pen.

Al-Mu'ayyad further related his Neoplatonic vision of the Guarded Tablet to his concept of the absolute human being (*al-insān al-muṭlaq*). As he explained, the Speaker Prophets, Legatees, and Imams are the perfect image or "child" of the Universal Soul and thereby function as the manifestations of the "Guarded Tablet" in the world:

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When it is established that the human being is the child of the Universal Soul in which the traces of the higher and lower world subsist, then the true human being and the true child of the Universal Soul is the Messenger of God and the Commander of the Faithful.... The Prophet and the Legatee in the cycle of their time periods, who belong to the Afterlife configuration, are in the position of the Tablet and the Pen belongs to the first configuration.¹²⁷⁸

In contrast to the Sunni idea of the Arabic Qur'ān's pre-existence in a material Guarded Tablet, al-Mu'ayyad framed the Speaker Prophet and his Legatee as the human form of the incorporeal Guarded Tablet on earth in the sense of being receptacles for the intelligible forms emanating from the Pen or Universal Intellect. Although he does not spell it out, al-Mu'ayyad's view implies that the spiritual archetypes of the Qur'ān exist within the souls of the Prophets and the Imams prior to its verbal enunciation as recitations. This leads to the topic of how the Prophets and the Imams receive divine support (*ta'yīd*) and divine inspiration (*wahy*).

The Revelatory Process: Divine Inspiration and Prophetic Expression

Al-Mu'ayyad maintained that the Prophets receive divine support and inspiration through the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of other humans due to the purity and perfection of their souls. To illustrate this, he employed the imagery of gemstones (*al-ḥajar*), likening the Prophets to the red ruby (*al-yāqūt al-ḥamar*) and other humans to “dense dark stones” (*al-ḥajar al-kathīf al-muẓlam*):

Within the genus of dark dense stones, we find something called the red ruby. God distinguished it among stones. Even though it was a stone, He bestowed upon it color and light from the power of the influence (*ta'thīr*) of the sun. From this, we deduced the stations of the Prophets whom God distinguished from mortal humanity (*al-bashar*). Even though they are mortal humans, He colored them with the color of His religion and bestowed upon them the power of His messengership and the bearing of His trust.¹²⁷⁹

Just as the ruby possesses a unique constitution capable of receiving and reflecting the light of the sun, al-Mu'ayyad inferred that the souls of the Prophets are most receptive to the divine support

¹²⁷⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1, 177-178.

¹²⁷⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1, 87. See Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 178 for a translation and discussion of this passage.

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emanating from the Universal Intellect and Soul due to their purity. In this respect, the Prophets and their successors are the peak (*ghāya*) of the human species, for which reason they are called the absolute human being.

Furthering this analogy, al-Mu'ayyad described the medium of divine support to the Prophets as the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-quḍus*), which is akin to the light of the sun. He specifically referenced Q. 97:4 and Q. 42:52, which mention the descent of the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) in relation to Qur'ānic Revelation:

The faculty of divine support (*ta'yīd*) connected to them and the divine sustenance (*mādda*) flowed in them: this is the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) by which God distinguishes the Prophets, Legatees, and Imams.... And He said to His Prophet: “*And thus We have inspired in you a spirit (rūḥ) from Our Command.*” So He alludes to the Qur'ān by [the word] “Spirit” (*al-rūḥ*) because the Qur'ān is from divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*).... And His saying: “*By the permission of their Lord,*” since it is their Lord who emanates the powers from the World of Intellect upon them.¹²⁸⁰

In the above passage, al-Mu'ayyad employed the same technical terms for divine support as al-Rāzī, al-Sijistānī, and al-Kirmānī. Evidently, the concepts of *ta'yīd*, *mādda*, *wahy*, and *rūḥ al-quḍus* seem to be aspects of one and the same process of divine inspiration, which is the spiritual illumination of what will become the Arabic Qur'ān.

Within his framework of divine inspiration through the Holy Spirit, al-Mu'ayyad provided an account of how the Prophets perceive God's inspiration (*wahy*) and convey it to others. He began by again specifying what makes the souls of the Prophets different from the souls of non-prophets.

Regarding the belief about the modality of the revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) of divine inspiration (*al-wahy*) to the Prophet [Muhammad] and other Prophets, we say that the difference between us and between them [the Prophets] is that our subtle souls are in service to our natural dispositions; meaning that our subtle souls are in service to our desires, our pleasures, and our corporeal and worldly opinions. But [the Prophets'] souls are the opposite of that: their natural dispositions are in

¹²⁸⁰ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 3, 10-11.

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service to their souls and subservient to their command. From this aspect, our souls become dependent upon their own [sensory] awareness which is the five senses in conveying knowledge of things to them and we cannot conceive affairs without difficulty except what unites to them (our souls) from the five senses.¹²⁸¹

In other words, the souls of ordinary humans are fixated upon and subject to their corporeal bodies and therefore dependent upon the senses to gain knowledge. In this state, human souls are easily misled by their carnal desires, whims, and personal opinions. In contrast, the soul of a Prophet properly governs his body and is free from the corrupting influence of physical desire and fallible opinion. As a result, the Prophets can perceive knowledge without the use of their corporeal senses:

The Prophets conceive the cognitions of religion and the afterlife (*ma'ālim al-dīn wa l-ākhirah*) through their pure souls without the intermediary of the senses, which they report to us. We ourselves convey it to our souls by means of hearing. Through the power of the relationship between them and the angels, which pertains to the subtlety (*al-laṭāfa*) from the substance of the soul, the Prophets see the angels, receive from them, and take from them. Then they convey to us what they took [from the angels] through corporeal articulate expressions (*al-'ibārah al-jismāniyyah al-manṭiqiyyah*) with what causes us to understand [them].¹²⁸²

Consistent with his Ismaili predecessors, al-Mu'ayyad maintained that the Prophets come to know the “cognitions of religion and the afterlife” (*ma'ālim al-dīn wa l-ākhirah*) in a non-corporeal manner without the physical senses. Through the subtlety (*al-laṭāfa*) of their souls, the Prophets connect directly to the spiritual angels. Subsequently, the Prophets convey this divinely inspired knowledge in the form of corporeal articulate expressions (*al-'ibārah al-jismāniyyah al-manṭiqiyyah*). This means that the verbal linguistic words and phrases found in the Torah, Gospel, or Qur'ān are created by the Prophets. The Arabic Qur'ān is the composition of the Prophet Muhammad and amounts to a verbal symbolic expression of the higher truths contained in divine inspiration (*waḥy*), which itself emanates as divine support (*ta'yīd*) from the Universal Intellect and Soul.

¹²⁸¹ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 83. My translation here was aided by the translation in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 180-181.

¹²⁸² Ibid.

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To further support his views, al-Mu'ayyad evoked qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth* accepted by Sunnis. First, he quoted Q. 26:193-195: “The Trusted Spirit brought it down upon your heart, so you may be among the warners in clear Arabic language.” As seen earlier, al-Sijistānī quoted this verse several times to argue that the Prophet received divine inspiration through the Holy Spirit as a mental reception (*qabūl wahmī*) as opposed to an auditory reception (*qabūl sam'ī*). Al-Mu'ayyad glossed the phrase “the Trusted Spirit brought it down upon your heart” by noting that “He (God) did not say ‘upon your hearing’.” He then explained the words “so you may be among the warners in clear Arabic language” to mean “he [the Prophet] embodied it through shapes and letters.” In other words, the Prophet first received divine inspiration and then “incarnated” it as sounds and letters. Al-Mu'ayyad furnished further evidence by reference to the famous *ḥadīth* where the Prophet describes the onset of divine inspiration (*wahy*) as something very difficult that comes with the sound of the ringing of a bell or where others report seeing the Prophet sweating profusely when experiencing divine inspiration. Al-Mu'ayyad observed that “when divine inspiration (*al-wahy*) enveloped the Prophet, it penetrated him with great difficulty and reached him with immense discomfort. He used to perspire and become removed from himself as a someone overwhelmed in his state.”¹²⁸³ Al-Mu'ayyad saw these reports as proof that Muhammad played an active role in “corporealizing” God's non-verbal divine inspiration into the Arabic words of the Qur'ān.

The Revelatory Products: The Silent Kitāb, the Speaking Kitāb, and Revelatory Hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*)

¹²⁸³ Ibid.

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Like al-Kirmānī writing decades earlier, al-Mu'ayyad presented both the Arabic Qur'ān and the figure of the Imam, which includes 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his successors in the Ismaili Imamate, as the Revelatory Products. Al-Mu'ayyad's position on the nature of the Arabic Qur'ān is reflected in certain sermons refuting the ideas of the infamous Ibn al-Rāwandī (Abū l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Iṣḥāq al-Rāwandī, d. 289/911).¹²⁸⁴ As observed by De Smet, al-Mu'ayyad's rebuttal to Ibn al-Rāwandī's attack on Prophethood was a characteristically Ismaili response whose premises and effectiveness depend upon Ismaili theories of revelation. There, we can discover al-Mu'ayyad's view of the Arabic Qur'ān as Muhammad's miracle by analyzing his discourse.¹²⁸⁵

Al-Mu'ayyad presented his counter-arguments as the work of an anonymous Ismaili *dā'ī* but Kraus and De Smet believe that these are the ideas of al-Mu'ayyad himself. Ibn al-Rāwandī spoke of intellect (*'aql*) as the greatest gift of God to human beings. In his view, a human being using his or her intellect is capable of discerning good and evil and acquiring the knowledge required to live in the world. The Prophets are not only useless, Ibn al-Rāwandī maintained, but their teachings are opposed to the dictates of human intellect and must be actively combatted. Accordingly, the so-called miracles of Prophets were mere tricks and the Arabic Qur'ān brought by Muhammad was not a true miracle. The Qur'ān, he argued, only overpowered the Arabs of Muhammad's region and is also full of contradictions. Al-Mu'ayyad was prompted to respond to Ibn al-Rāwandī's attack because it undermined the Islamic and specifically Ismaili position on Prophethood and Qur'ānic Revelation, which served as the foundation for the religious authority

¹²⁸⁴ These sermons were edited and translated into German in Paul Kraus, "Beiträge zur islamische Ketzergeschichte. Das Kitāb az-Zumurrud des Ibn ar-Rāwandī," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 14/2 (August 1933): 93-129. The edited Arabic text is found in pp. 96-109. I have relied mainly on the Arabic text for my analysis.

¹²⁸⁵ Daniel De Smet, "Al-Mu'ayyad fī d-Dīn aš-Šīrāzī et la polémique ismaélienne contre les 'Brahmanes' d'Ibn ar-Rāwandī," in Urbain Vermeulen and Daniel De Smet (eds.), *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras* Volume I (Louvain: Peeters, 1995), 85-99: 89-90.

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of the Ismaili Imamate. In his response, al-Mu'ayyad accepted the centrality of the human intellect but countered that this human intellect, in and of itself, was insufficient in reaching ultimate truths. The intellect in its initial state is like a blank slate or *tabula rasa* and requires an external agent to actualize it through knowledge; he drew analogies with how fire must be ignited by a lighter or how musical instruments require a musician to play them.¹²⁸⁶ For al-Mu'ayyad, this external agent intellect who actualizes the human intellect is none other than the Prophet or the Imam in their respective eras. He also likened the role of the Prophet and Imam to that of parents responsible for raising a child, cultivating their human habits to replace animal habits, and teaching them the difference between good and evil: “God sent the Messenger to raise the Afterlife formation (*al-nashā'a al-ākhirā*) just as the physical parents raise their children in the first (initial) formation (*al-nashā'a al-awwal*).”¹²⁸⁷

As for prophetic miracles, al-Mu'ayyad admitted that the masses (*al-‘āmm*) repeat many implausible stories, but the elite (*al-khāṣṣ*) accept the Prophet Muhammad's claims on purely rational grounds: “The verifiers of truth only authenticate Prophethood from intellectual miracles (*al-mu'jizāt al-‘ilmiyya*).”¹²⁸⁸ While the Prophets' souls are capable of miracles that manipulate the natural world, the most noble miracles of the Prophets consist of evidential signs (*nuṣūṣ*) – such as the prophecies about Muhammad in prior scriptures.¹²⁸⁹ In response to Ibn al-Rāwandī's claim that there were Arab tribes more eloquent than Muhammad's tribe, who could have challenged the Qur'ān's eloquence (*faṣāḥa*), al-Mu'ayyad responded by delineating the precise

¹²⁸⁶ De Smet, “Al-Mu'ayyad fī d-Din aš-Šīrāzī et la polémique ismaélienne,” 92-93.

¹²⁸⁷ Al-Mu'ayyad, in Kraus, “Beitrag zur islamische Ketzergeschichte,” 99.

¹²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

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nature of the Qur'ān's inimitability (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*) within his general Ismaili worldview. First, he defined speech (*al-kalām*) as “utterances (*alfāz*) determined according to a meaning in harmony with them. Speech is like the body and the meaning within it is like its spirit.”¹²⁹⁰ At the level of the utterances, which are bodily, speech does not have much disparity; but at the level of meaning, which pertains to souls, there is disparity in terms of literary excellence (*al-imtiyāz*). Likewise, al-Mu'ayyad maintained that the Qur'ān has two levels – its outward utterances and its spiritual meanings, which are like body and soul. The spiritual meanings of the Qur'ān constitute wisdom (*al-ḥikma*), which is the basis for the Qur'ān's inimitability: “The Qur'ān is speech with the establishment of the body and its meaning is its spirit which God designated as wisdom (*al-ḥikma*). There was no place where He mentioned *al-kitāb* where He did not connect it to *al-ḥikma*.”¹²⁹¹ Thus, the Qur'ān's inimitability depends upon the inner meanings that are expressed through its Arabic expressions. In al-Mu'ayyad's framework, the true meaning of the Qur'ān consists of the higher truths contained in the Holy Spirit that shines from the Universal Intellect and Soul.

On the topic of the integrity of the Qur'ān, al-Mu'ayyad addressed the beliefs of certain Shi'i groups, who maintained that the Qur'ān's words and verses had been corrupted or altered. As recalled from Chapter 5, certain Twelver Shi'i exegetes and *ḥadīth* alleged that some verses and words in the Qur'ān were changed to conceal the rights of the family of Muhammad. In response to these ideas, al-Mu'ayyad took the position that the Qur'ān is textually preserved with respect to its verbal expressions but that corruption (*tahrīf*) can and has entered into the Muslim community's understanding of the Qur'ān's true meaning: “Alteration (*al-tahrīf*) entered into it

¹²⁹⁰ Ibid., 102.

¹²⁹¹ Ibid.

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[the Qur'ān] from the aspect of the meaning which is the goal and the signified, not from the aspect of the verbal utterance (*al-lafẓ*).”¹²⁹² In other words, while the Qur'ān may be textually preserved, it can still suffer intellectual corruption through wrong interpretation. As an example of this intellectual corruption, al-Mu'ayyad cited a Qur'anic verse (Q. 2:143): “Likewise We have made you a middle nation (*umma wasat*) so you may be witnesses over humankind and the Messenger may be a witness over you.” The early Twelver Shi'i *tafsīr* of 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī alleged that this verse originally was revealed as: “Likewise We have made you mediating Imams” (*a'imma wasat*)”, implying that the word *a'imma* was changed to *umma*.¹²⁹³ According to al-Mu'ayyad, however, the verse was truly revealed as “*umma wasāt*”, but it still indicates to the Imams: “The meaning of the ‘middle nation’ (*umma wasat*) is the Imams (*a'imma*) from the progeny of the Prophet and they are the witnesses over humankind. Each one of them is a witness over the people of his time and the Messenger is a witness over all of them.”¹²⁹⁴ Thus, al-Mu'ayyad upheld the textual integrity of this verse, but he observed that the masses misinterpreted it by viewing the entire Muslim community as the “middle nation”. This is an example of how the true meaning of the Qur'ān had become corrupted amongst the non-Ismaili Muslims despite the integrity of the Qur'ānic words themselves: “The verbal utterances of the Qur'ān (*alfāẓ al-qur'ān*) are outwardly preserved...while corruption (*tahrīf*) has only entered into them from the aspect of their meanings.”¹²⁹⁵

¹²⁹² Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 88.

¹²⁹³ See *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, at <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=4&tTafsirNo=38&tSoraNo=2&tAyahNo=143&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>.

¹²⁹⁴ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 88.

¹²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

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Al-Mu'ayyad's emphasis on the Qur'ān's inner meaning as *ḥikma* necessitates a second Revelatory Product in addition to the Arabic Qur'ān, which ensures that the true meaning of the Qur'ān remains uncorrupted and accessible to human beings. This Revelatory Product is the person of the Imam, who exists in every time period as God's "speaking" *kitāb*. Al-Mu'ayyad situated the function of the Imam within his exposition of the meaning of the word *kitāb* as used in the Qur'ān. In one of his sermons, al-Mu'ayyad provided a commentary on the opening verses of *Sūrat al-Baqara*: "Alīf. Lām. Mīm. That is the *kitāb* in which there is no doubt" (Q. 2:2). As noted earlier in Chapter 2, classical Sunni exegetes glossed *dhālika al-kitāb* as *hādhā l-kitāb*, meaning "this book" referring to the Qur'ān as it exists between the two covers of the *muṣḥaf*. Even today, many Qur'ān translators and lay Muslims, as they read the Qur'ān as a bounded text, cannot help but take *dhālika l-kitāb* as the qur'ānic scripture whose pages lie open before them.

Meanwhile, many early Twelver and Ismaili exegetes interpreted *dhālika l-kitāb* to be the person of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. To support this Shi'i reading, al-Mu'ayyad first challenged the dominant Sunni exegesis. He observed that the remote demonstrative pronoun *dhālika* is only used for what is absent (*ghā'ib*) from the speaker, not what is immediately present (*ḥāḍir*). If the *kitāb* mentioned in Q. 2:2 was the Arabic Qur'ān, he argued, then the verse would have said *hādhā l-kitāb*.¹²⁹⁶ Thus, al-Mu'ayyad was hinting that *dhālika l-kitāb* refers to something other than the Arabic Qur'ān. He then defined *kitāb* at the human level as "words and utterances, some of which are joined to others and some of which are connected to others, conveying meanings that are in the

¹²⁹⁶ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 221.

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soul of the writer who expresses them through writing (*kitāba*).”¹²⁹⁷ Based on this definition, al-

Mu'ayyad elucidated his notion of *kitāb Allāh* as follows:

Likewise, the *kitāb Allāh* is utterances and words expressing the intentions (*maqāsid*) of God with respect to His creatures' worship of Him, their obedience to Him alone; concerning what He promised the God-fearing of reward and the sinners of punishment; His informing them about what was in the cycles of the Prophets and former communities and what will occur until the Day of Resurrection. This *kitāb Allāh* that we mentioned consists of two kinds: the silent (*ṣāmit*) *kitāb* is that which is between two covers connected through suspended inanimate letters. The speaking (*nāṭiq*) *kitāb* is the Legatee (*waṣī*) of the Messenger of God who stands forth with the interpretation of its meanings, opens its locks, expounds it, and interprets it for others.¹²⁹⁸

Al-Mu'ayyad generally defined the *kitāb Allāh* as the expression of God's decrees and prescriptions for His creatures concerning their duties to Him as well as the knowledge of the past and the future. His description of *kitāb Allāh* here very much resembles the qur'ānic concept of the Transcendent Kitāb seen in Chapter 1 and the Shi'i Imams' expansive idea of the unitary and revelatory *kitāb Allāh* seen in Chapter 5. As we already noted, al-Mu'ayyad equated the qur'ānic *kitāb mubīn/kitāb ḥafīẓ* that contains God's knowledge and records with the Universal Soul or Guarded Tablet that contains the archetypal impressions (*nuqūsh*) and inscriptions (*kitābāt*) of all things. Therefore, the *kitāb Allāh* is essentially identical to his concept of the Universal Soul. Accordingly, this *kitāb Allāh* manifests in the world of humanity in two concrete forms: the Arabic Qur'ān or “silent *kitāb*” and the living Imam or “speaking *kitāb*”. Therefore, the phrase *dhālika l-kitāb* in Q 2:2 refers to God's “speaking *kitāb*” who is the Imam and the Prophet's Legatee, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and not the Arabic Qur'ān between two covers. To further underscore this argument, al-Mu'ayyad stressed that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib possessed the knowledge of the past and future: “Just as the silent *kitāb* gathers information about what was and what will occur to the Day of Resurrection, it has been related from the Commander of the Faithful that he said from the pulpit:

¹²⁹⁷ Ibid., 222.

¹²⁹⁸ Ibid.

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'Ask me before you lose me. Ask me about what was and what will be until the Day of Resurrection'.¹²⁹⁹

One finds similar arguments concerning the Imam as the speaking *kitāb Allāh* in the *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya* attributed to the Fatimid *qāḍī* Abū l-Qāsim b. al-Malījī (fl. fifth/eleventh century), although it is possible that these sermons were also the work of al-Mu'ayyad himself. The interpretation in this source is important because it goes somewhat further than the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* in elucidating this concept. Similar to al-Mu'ayyad, the author of the *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya* argued that *dhālika l-kitāb* (Q. 2:2) does not refer to the Arabic Qur'ān. After defining the contents of the *kitāb Allāh* as command, prohibition, and information about the past and future, the author stated the following:

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, was once reciting some of the verses of the Qur'ān. When he completed its recitation, he reached [God's] saying: "This is Our *kitāb* that speaks against you with the truth." He placed the *muṣḥaf* upon his head and said to it: "O *kitāb Allāh* speak! O *kitāb Allāh* speak! O *kitāb Allāh* speak!" By saying this he indicated that he himself is the speaking *kitāb Allāh* and that the Qur'ān is the silent *kitāb Allāh*. . . . The speaking *kitāb* (*al-kitāb al-nāṭiq*) who is the Imam and the silent *kitāb* (*al-kitāb al-ṣāmī*) that is the Qur'ān are in the position of the potter and the clay, the blacksmith and the iron, and the carpenter and the wood.¹³⁰⁰

Once again, the Imam is described as the speaking *kitāb Allāh* and the Arabic Qur'ān is called the silent *kitāb Allāh*. The *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya* explicitly framed the Imam's function as superior to the Qur'ānic scripture: the Imam is likened to the active potter, blacksmith, or carpenter while the Qur'ān is likened to the passive clay, iron, or wood upon which the Imam acts. To further illustrate these concepts, the author then quoted the Prophet's words in the Thaqalayn tradition as follows: "Verily I am leaving behind for you two weighty matters: the *kitāb Allāh* and my descendants, my *Ahl al-Bayt* (*'itratī ahl al-baytī*). If you hold fast to both of them you will never

¹²⁹⁹ Ibid., 223.

¹³⁰⁰ Al-Malījī, *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 175-176. I read the word *āyyām* as *āyāt* in the first sentence of the quote.

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go astray. The two of them will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pool.” He interpreted the last statement to mean that “there is only a *kitāb* insofar as there are the descendants and there are only descendants insofar as there is the *kitāb*.”¹³⁰¹

The Imam as the speaking *kitāb* is not only a Revelatory Product alongside the Arabic Qur'ān, but also the guarantor for the revelatory status of the Arabic Qur'ān. To demonstrate this point, the author of the *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya* further argued that the revealed recitations that make up the Arabic Qur'ān only merit the name *qur'ān* due to their association with the living Imam. In a highly interesting and perhaps controversial set of remarks, the author presented a commentary on the verse “We have given you the seven repeated and the sublime Qur'ān (*al-qur'ān al-‘aẓīm*)” (Q. 15:87):

The “sublime Qur'ān” (*al-qur'ān al-‘aẓīm*) is this honorable *kitāb* and its “twin” (*qarīn*) according to the revelatory exegesis (*ta'wīl*) is the sage, the Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, because he in his time was the “twin” (*qarīn*) of the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān was his twin. The *kitāb* is only called a “*qur'ān*” due to its being “twinned” (*li-iqtirānihi*) with the descendants (*al-‘itra*) [of the Prophet]. The Messenger of God explained this in his saying: “*I am leaving behind for you two weighty matters: the kitāb Allāh and my descendants, my Ahl al-Bayt. The two of them will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pool.*” Thus, the Qur'ān is the twin (*qarīn*) of each of the pure Imams of the progeny of the Trustworthy Messenger in his own time. [The Imam] summons to its rulings, endeavors to manifest its signposts, and explains its permissions and prohibitions for the people. It is known that each member of a twin pair (*al-qarīnayn*) only deserves to be called “twinned” because of its being “twinned” (*li-iqtirānihi*) to its companion; thus, the revealed *kitāb Allāh* was designated as the “*qur'ān*” due to its being “twinned” (*li-iqtirānihi*) with the Imam of every time since the noble Qur'ān does not speak about what it contains, so God “twinned it” (*qaranahu*) to the person who enunciates it and explains its hidden meanings.¹³⁰²

In the above passage, the etymology of the word *qur'ān* is derived from *qarana* (to connect) and *qarīn* (twin, double). This is partially similar to al-Ash‘arī’s explanation in Chapter 3 that the Speech of God is called a “*qur'ān*” because some of its expressions (*ibārāt*) are “connected” (*qurina*) to others. However, the above Ismaili explanation differs significantly when it claims that

¹³⁰¹ Ibid., 176

¹³⁰² Ibid., 29-30.

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the term *qur'ān* derives from *qarīn*, based on which the Arabic Qur'ān is the *qarīn* of the Imam and vice versa. In its wider pre-Islamic sense, *qarīn* referred to a person's spiritual "double" or "twin", which could be a *jinn*, an angel, or some other celestial entity. According to the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, "the root of the word *qarīn* connotes the idea of a 'double' — it is an adjectival form that indicates being one of a pair. This human 'double,' the companion or twin spirit, takes life upon the birth of a human being."¹³⁰³ The word *qarīn* was used to describe pre-Islamic poets and was sometimes used to designate the Angel Gabriel's role in relation to Muhammad: "*Qarīn* in old Arabia was also the *djinn* who accompanied a poet and brought the poet's verses; this use has been transferred in Islam to the angel who was with the Prophet and who brought him his revelations."¹³⁰⁴ The above passage from the *Majālis al-Mustanshiriyya* depicts the living Imam and the Arabic Qur'ān as spiritual "twins" in the sense of *qarīn*: "The Qur'ān is the *qarīn* of each of the pure Imams of the progeny of the Trustworthy Messenger in his own time." Accordingly, the silent *kitāb Allāh* only merits the name "*qur'ān*" because of its connection with the speaking *kitāb Allāh* who is the Imam: "The revealed *kitāb Allāh* was designated as the '*qur'ān*' due to its being 'twinned' (*iqtirān*) with the Imam of every time as the Noble Qur'ān does not speak about what it contains; so God 'twinned it' (*qaranahu*) to the person who enunciates it and explains its hidden meanings." This interpretation makes the revelatory status of the Qur'ān wholly contingent upon its connection to the Imam.

¹³⁰³ Stefania Cunial, "Spiritual Beings," in McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), consulted online on 8/1/2019: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00402.

¹³⁰⁴ Armando Salvatore, "The 'Implosion' of *Sharī'a* within the Emergence of Public Normativity," in Baudouin Dupret (ed.), *Standing Trial: Law and Person in the Modern Middle East* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 116-169: 153.

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The theological basis for the Imam being the speaking *kitāb Allāh* lies in the notion that the Imams are divinely supported (*mu'ayyadūn*) with the Holy Spirit along the same lines as the Prophets. The presence of the Holy Spirit is what distinguishes the legitimate Imam at any time from false claimants: "The spiritual faculty (*al-quwwat al-nafsāniyyah*) called the Holy Spirit is that by which he [the Imam] speaks, intellects, and hears from the Abode of the Hereafter while the leaders of misguidance and those who follow them are unlike that."¹³⁰⁵ The Revelatory Process therefore continues through the Imams, an idea that al-Mu'ayyad depicted as the transmission of the Holy Spirit from Muhammad to the hereditary Imams in direct succession:

The Messenger of God was the first in his time and cycle in whom God breathed the Spirit of True Life by His saying: "And We have inspired you with a Spirit from Our Command" (Q. 42:52). Thus, the divine inspiration (*waḥy*) from God to him is the Spirit (*ruh*) in him [the Prophet]. He designated 'Alī with the Spirit after him; 'Alī designated al-Ḥasan with the Spirit after him; Al-Ḥasan designated al-Ḥusayn with the Spirit after him. It is likewise transmitted in Imam after Imam until the establishment of the Hour. They are the possessors of holy spirits (*aṣḥāb al-arwāḥ al-muqaddasah*) attaining to the Faithful Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) who communicates (*mubligh*) from the Lord of the Worlds.¹³⁰⁶

While the Prophet expressed the divine inspiration (*waḥy*) of the Holy Spirit as the Arabic Qur'ān and *sharī'a*, the Imams convey it as the explanation and the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Prophet's *tanzīl*.

Ta'wīl is central to al-Mu'ayyad's understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation. We have already seen how *ta'wīl* in the framework of several Ismaili *dā'īs* functions as a divinely inspired hermeneutics taking the form of a revelatory exegesis concerning the Qur'ān, the *sharī'a* and the corporeal world. While retaining all these features, al-Mu'ayyad's understanding of *ta'wīl* includes dimensions of ethical and spiritual development on the part of the Ismaili practitioner. To

¹³⁰⁵ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, ed. Hātim Ḥamīd al-Dīn, Vol. 1-2 (Mumbai and Oxford, 1975-1986), Vol. 2, 199, as transliterated in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 295. This is my own translation. Alexandrin translates the passage into English on p. 170.

¹³⁰⁶ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1, 124-125.

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underscore its practical aspect, al-Mu'ayyad equated *ta'wīl* to the Qur'ānic concept of *ḥikma*. In a manner somewhat similar to al-Shāfi'ī's arguments for the Prophetic Sunna, al-Mu'ayyad quoted Qur'ānic verses that mention *kitāb* and *ḥikma* (such as Q. 2:151, 4:54, etc.) and argued that if the *kitāb* is the Qur'ān that all people have access to, then the *ḥikma* must be the science of *ta'wīl* possessed exclusively by the Imams. He further specified that *ḥikma*, and therefore *ta'wīl*, entails both knowledge and action and consists of restraining one's whims and desires in order to follow the command of God.¹³⁰⁷ He then offered the following definition of *ta'wīl*:

It is said that *ta'wīl* is “to return something to its origin (*awwalihī*)” whereas its opposite “*ta'kḥīr*” is “to drive it to its end.” Since *ta'wīl* is to return affairs to their true reality (*ḥaqīqatiha*), which is the origin of the existents (*awwalī min al-mawjūdāt*), and the origin (*awwal*) of existents from the Real is the originated beings (*al-mubda'āt*), then he who learns the science of *ta'wīl* (*yaqtabisu min 'ilm al-ta'wīl*) acquires the form of the originated beings (*ṣūrat al-mubda'āt*) and joins the source (*yalḥaqu bi al-manba'*) from which the essence of life flows (*'ayn al-ḥayāt*).¹³⁰⁸

In the above passage, al-Mu'ayyad began with the etymology of the word *ta'wīl*, which means “to return something to its origin” in order to frame *ta'wīl* as an ontological movement: its first dimension consists of learning the “science of *ta'wīl*” (*'ilm al-ta'wīl*) that discloses the meaning of the symbols within the Revelatory Product in terms of its reality (*ḥaqīqa*) in the Revelatory Principle; the second dimension consists of the human soul existentially returning to and joining the spiritual ranks of the “originated beings” (*al-mubda'āt*) – the Universal Intellect and Soul – that comprise the Revelatory Principle.

The science of *ta'wīl* (*'ilm al-ta'wīl*) is a revelatory exegesis that discloses the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of the similitudes (*amthāl*) of the Qur'ān, *sharī'a*, and corporeal world. Numerous instances of such *ta'wīl* occur in the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, which is really a case study in

¹³⁰⁷ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis* (Ḥamīd al-Dīn), Vol. 2, 302. My special thanks to Elizabeth R. Alexandrin for sending me a copy of this passage.

¹³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

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Ismaili *ta'wīl* pedagogy. The standard method in most Fatimid Ismaili *ta'wīl* works, which is exemplified in al-Mu'ayyad's sermons, is to first focus on a symbolic object (*mathal*), such as the sun, moon, heavens, earth, the Ka'ba, or the Ark of Noah; the symbolic object (*mathāl*) is then analyzed and deconstructed etymologically, conceptually, and symbolically using extra-qur'ānic knowledge to disclose its symbolized referent (*mamthūl*), which is its reality (*ḥaqīqa*) and root-principle (*aṣl*). In most cases, the various symbolized objects (*mamthūlāt*) turn out to be hierarchical figures in the Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy (the Speaker Prophet, Legatee, Imam, *ḥujja*) or a celestial beings like the Universal Intellect and Soul.¹³⁰⁹ A prime example is al-Mu'ayyad's *ta'wīl* of the famous Verse of Light (Q. 24:35), which is as follows: the “heavens and the earth” are the spiritual and corporeal ranks of religion (*ḥudūd al-dīn*); “God's Light” is the Command of God and the Universal Intellect; the “lamp” (*miṣbā*) describes the holy lights of the Prophet Muhammad; the “lamp in a glass” refers to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; the “stars” are the Imams; and the “blessed tree” refers to Imam al-Ḥusayn from whose lineage all the Ismaili Imams descend.¹³¹⁰ Al-Mu'ayyad's exegesis of Q. 4:1, “O humankind, be mindful of your Lord who created you from a single soul (*naḥs wāḥida*) and created its mate (*zawj*) from it, and from two of them spread forth many men and women,” greatly contrasts with its interpretation in traditional *tafsīr*. According to his *ta'wīl*, the “single soul and mate” are the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul in the upper World of Religion and Prophet Muhammad and his Legatee Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the lower World of Religion. The creation of the mate (*zawj*) from the single soul describes the Neoplatonic emanation of the Universal Soul from the Intellect and Imam 'Alī being spiritually initiated by

¹³⁰⁹ An explanation of the *mathal-mamthūl* binary with examples is given in Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 105-110.

¹³¹⁰ This is al-Mu'ayyad's *ta'wīl* as summarized in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 105.

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Prophet Muhammad in the sense of acquiring esoteric knowledge from him; the many “men and women” refer to the teachers and students who are spiritual born from the Speaker Prophet and his Legatee in terms of being their disciples.¹³¹¹ Al-Mu'ayyad's *ta'wīl* also stresses the correspondence between the corporeal world, the human being, and spiritual and corporeal ranks of the World of Religion: the Universal Intellect and Soul in the upper World of Religion are symbolized by the sun and moon in the corporeal macrocosm, the heart and brain in the human body, the intellect and soul in the human soul, and the Speaker Prophet and his Legatee in the lower World of Religion.¹³¹² In learning this revelatory exegesis from the Imams and their appointed *dā'īs*, the Ismaili practitioner “becomes illuminated by the lights of their *ta'wīl* and, with respect to the dark shadows of similitudes and symbols, perceives their significances, their realities, and the aim in everything from them.”¹³¹³

As the Ismaili adept learns the science of *ta'wīl*, he concurrently cultivates a spiritual form within his own soul: “He who learns the science of *ta'wīl* (*yaqtabisu min 'ilm al-ta'wīl*) acquires the form of the originated beings (*ṣūrat al-mubda'āt*)”.¹³¹⁴ The term *mubdā'* (originated) is from *'ibdā'* (origination) – the Ismaili technical term for God's Command that brings the Neoplatonic hierarchy into being. Therefore, the *mubda'āt* here refer to the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. Thus, the end goal of *ta'wīl* on the part of the Ismaili initiate is to make his or her soul formally identical to the Universal Intellect and Soul; this being the spiritual rank of the angels

¹³¹¹ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 1 (Ghālib edition), 79-84 and explained in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 117, 180-185.

¹³¹² This is al-Mu'ayyad's *ta'wīl* as summarized in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 141-142.

¹³¹³ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis*, Vol. 2 (Ḥamīd al-Dīn Edition), 149-150, as translated in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 154.

¹³¹⁴ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis* (Ḥamīd al-Dīn), Vol. 2, 302–303. My special thanks to Elizabeth R. Alexandrin for sending me a copy of this passage.

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(*rutba al-malā'ika*).¹³¹⁵ As al-Mu'ayyad has explained throughout his sermons, such an attainment requires a person to engage in “the twofold intellectual and practical worship” (*al-'ibādatayn al-'ilmiyya wa al-'amaliyya*)¹³¹⁶ comprising the science of *ta'wīl*, ritual practice, virtuous action, and spiritual exercises (*riyādāt*). Every human being born in the corporeal world begins as a “potential angel” through their soul and an “actual animal” through their body.¹³¹⁷ When a person submits to the authority of the Imams and obeys them through their *da'wa* hierarchy, they begin a journey of spiritual development where the potential angelhood that is their soul progresses by acquiring different “forms” (*ṣuwar, ashkāl*). Al-Mu'ayyad described an ascending hierarchy of forms that include: the beginning stage of corporeal forms (*al-ṣuwar al-jismāniyya*) acquired from physical parents; the intermediary stage of “human forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-insāniyya*) developed through obeying the teachings of the Imam and his *dā'īs*; the higher stage of “Adamic forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-ādamiyya*) perfected through actualizing the Imam's teaching through knowledge and action; and the ultimate stage of “divine forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-malakūtiyya*) or “afterlife forms” (*al-ṣuwar al-ākhirā*), through which the soul formally unites with God's Command through the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul and becomes an angelic substance.¹³¹⁸

Overall, al-Mu'ayyad's concept of *ta'wīl* is a double-sided revelatory movement as Alexandrin explains: “The individual can only move from the corporeal to the spiritual through *ta'wīl*, which is an aspect of *walāyah* in practice. Attaining to the ranks of the ‘angels’ necessitates

¹³¹⁵ Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 277.

¹³¹⁶ Ibid.

¹³¹⁷ Ibid., 279.

¹³¹⁸ Alexandrin discusses al-Mu'ayyad's conceptions of this hierarchy of forms throughout her study. See Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 120-128, 139-145, 150-158.

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the ranks of religion that provide the allegorical and esoteric interpretations of *ta'wīl* to those individuals who are from the lower ranks.”¹³¹⁹ One facet consists of the “science of *ta'wīl*”, which consists of a revelatory exegesis in which the symbolic truths in the Revelatory Products (Qur'ān, *sharī'a*, natural world) are “returned” to the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of the Revelatory Principle (the upper and lower ranks of the World of Religion). The second facet of *ta'wīl* is a reintegration by which the soul of the Ismaili adept “returns” to the Revelatory Principle – the Universal Intellect and Soul – by spiritually developing the “form” of its celestial origin. To borrow Shahab Ahmed's words, the holistic practice of *ta'wīl* in the Ismaili context involves a “hermeneutical engagement” with the science of *ta'wīl* that radically transforms one's own soul: “Hermeneutical engagement is, in other words, to invest one's Self in the making of meaning (that is, in the making of consequential truth), and concomitantly to invest or attach that truth and meaning in the making of one's Self.”¹³²⁰

Conclusion:

Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī's theory of Qur'ānic Revelation essentially revolved around his notion of the absolute human being (*al-insān al-muṭlaq*) – who is exemplified by the Speaker Prophet, the Legatee, and the Imam in their respective eras. Within the classical Ismaili Neoplatonic metaphysical model, al-Mu'ayyad envisioned the dyad of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul – equated to the qur'ānic Pen and Tablet – as the Revelatory Principle. He identified the Guarded Tablet or Universal Soul, which contains the archetypal impressions of all existents, with

¹³¹⁹ Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 193.

¹³²⁰ Ahmed, *What is Islam*, 345.

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the qur'ānic *kitāb* of divine knowledge and records. Accordingly, al-Mu'ayyad described the Speaker Prophet and his Legatee as the human manifestations of Guarded Tablet on earth and the receptacles of its divine emanations. In agreement with his Ismaili predecessors, al-Mu'ayyad understood divine support (*ta'yīd*) and inspiration (*wahy*) as non-verbal inspiration that the Prophets perceived with their subtle souls without any sensory manifestations. The Prophets, including the Prophet Muhammad, were responsible for expressing this non-verbal divine inspiration as corporeal revelatory expressions (*tanzīl*) such as the Arabic Qur'ān. Accordingly, al-Mu'ayyad located the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān in its inner meaning (*bāḥin*) or *ḥikma* (wisdom) that the Prophet enclosed within the Qur'ān's verbal utterances (*alfāz*). The Arabic Qur'ān in al-Mu'ayyad's worldview is merely the “silent *kitāb Allāh*” while the living Imam, exemplified by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, is the “speaking *kitāb Allāh*” on account of being divinely supported from the Universal Intellect and Soul. Al-Mu'ayyad's comments on this idea, along with those of his contemporary *dā'ī* al-Malījī, indicate that the Imam *qua* speaking *kitāb* is superior in revelatory authority to the Qur'ān *qua* silent *kitāb*. In al-Malījī's formulation, the revelatory recitations are only called “*qur'ān*” due to their being “pairing” (*iqtirān*) with the Imam, who is the *qarīn* (spiritual twin) of the Arabic Qur'ān. Finally, al-Mu'ayyad framed *ta'wīl* as a double-faceted process combining the science (*'ilm*) of revelatory exegesis with the spiritual return of the human soul to the Neoplatonic realm of the Revelatory Principle.

7.3 Qur'ānic Revelation as Divine Writing and Prophetic Reading: Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 1088)

Abū Mu'īn Nāṣir b. Khusraw b. Ḥārith al-Qubādiyānī (d. ca. 1088) – popularly known as Nāṣir-i Khusraw – was the last major Ismaili *dā'ī* of the fifth/eleventh century and a premier Persian poet.

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Having been born into a noble family residing in the Qubādiyān district of Balkh in 394/1004, Khusraw served as a treasury official under the Ghaznavids and the Saljuqs for several years. In his early forties, he renounced his current lifestyle and undertook a famous seven-year journey (437-444/1045-1052) during which he spent three years (439-439/1047-1050) in Fatimid Cairo, embraced Shi'i Ismaili Islam, and was trained as an Ismaili *dā'ī* under al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī. Having reached the *da'wa* rank of *ḥujja* (proof) of the Imam, Khusraw returned to hometown in 444/1052 to lead the regional Ismaili *da'wa* as the *ḥujja* of the Khurāsān region and also extended his preaching to Nīshāpūr and elsewhere. Due to harsh persecution by local Sunni scholars, he and his brother fled their home and found refuge in the valley of Yugman, located in present-day Afghan Badakhshan, under the protection of a local Ismaili *amīr* named 'Alī b. al-Asad. During this exile, Khusraw composed many theological and philosophical Persian prose works and a great deal of didactic and devotional poetry. He made original and significant contributions to Ismaili thought, Islamic philosophy, and Persian poetry, and earned himself an enigmatic reputation in wider Muslim circles.¹³²¹ There are six extant prose works of Nāṣir-i Khusraw that have been edited and published in Persian critical editions: *Zād al-musāfir* (*Provisions for the Traveler*),¹³²² *Gushāyish va-rahāyish* (translated in 1998 as *Knowledge and Liberation*),¹³²³ *Khawān al-ikhwān*

¹³²¹ For the most accessible and recent account of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's life, see Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw*. For the textual history on the hagiographies and biographies of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, see Daniel Beben, "The Legendary Biographies of Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Memory and Textualization in Early Modern Persian Ismā'īlism," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Indiana, 2015); Shaftolo Gulamadov, "The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw in the Ismā'īlīs of Badakhshān," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2018).

¹³²² Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfirīn*, ed. Sayyed Isma'īl Emadi Haeri and Sayyed Mohammad Emadi Haeri, Second Edition, (Tehran: The Institute of Ismaili Studies and Miras-e Maktoob, 2014) – hereafter cited as *Zād al-musāfir*. My thanks to my advisor Ali Asani and Daryoush Mohammad Poor for obtaining a copy of this edition for me.

¹³²³ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology*, ed. and tr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1998). Hereafter cited as *Knowledge and Liberation*.

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(*The Feast of the Brethren*),¹³²⁴ *Shish faṣl* (translated in 1949 as *Six Chapters*),¹³²⁵ *Wajh-i dīn* (*The Face of Religion*),¹³²⁶ and *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* (*The Reconciliation of the Two Wisdoms*, translated in 2012 as *Between Reason and Revelation*).¹³²⁷ Among contemporary Ismaili and non-Ismaili Muslim communities in Central Asia, Nāṣir-i Khusraw continues to be revered as a charismatic God-friend (*walī*), eminent person (*buzurgvār*), great king (*shāh-i buzurgvār*), the proof of the God-friends (*burhān al-awliyā'*), and sage (*ḥakīm*).¹³²⁸ His shrine is a major pilgrimage site for Sunnis and Shi'is. Central Asian Muslim sources in the form of poetry and various hagiographies credit Khusraw with the conversion of the peoples of Badakhshan to Islam and recognize him as the patron saint of the region. The Ismailis of Badakhshan revere Khusraw's writings as sacred literature and read them in ritual and devotional contexts. For example, one contemporary poet has described Khusraw's treatise on Ismaili hermeneutics, *The Face of Religion*, as "the meaning of

¹³²⁴ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Khawān al-ikhwān*, edited by Yahyā al-Kashshāb (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ma'had al-Ilmī al-Firansī, 1940).

¹³²⁵ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Six Chapters or Shish faṣl*, edited and translated by Wladimir Ivanow (Leiden: E.J. Brill for the Ismaili Society, 1949). For the latest edition based on better manuscripts, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw *Rawshanā'ī-nama*, ed. Taḥsīn Yazījī and Bahman Ḥamīdī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1373/1994). Hereafter cited as *Six Chapters*.

¹³²⁶ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, edited by Ghulām Rezā Avānī, introduction by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Anjūman-i Shāhanshāhī-i Falsafah-i Iran, 1977), accessed on 1/22/2018:

<https://ebookshia.com/books/pdf/7030/%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%87+%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%86>. A forthcoming translation of this text is *The Face of Religion: Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Spiritual Hermeneutics*, edited and translated by Faqir Hunzai (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Forthcoming). Persian text hereafter cited as *Wajh-i Dīn* and partial English translation as published in secondary literature cited as *The Face of Religion*. I thank Faqir Hunzai for sharing with me his translation of a few passages from *Wajh-i Dīn*, where I was able to check my translation against his.

¹³²⁷ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, tr. Eric Ormsby (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012), 179-80. Hereafter cited as *Between Reason and Revelation*. The Persian edition is *Kitab-e Jāmi' al-Hikmatayn. Le livre réunissant les deux sagesses, ou harmonie de la philosophie Grecque et de la théosophie Ismaélienne*, ed. Henry Corbin and Muḥammad Mu'īn (Bibliothèque Iranienne, 3. Tehran: Department d'Iranologie de l'Institut Franco-Iranien; Paris: A Maisonneuve, 1953), hereafter cited as *Hikmatayn*.

¹³²⁸ Gulamadov, "The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw," 6.

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the Qur'ān (*ma'nā-yi qur'ān*), “the kernel of the Qur'ān” (*maghz-i qur'ān*), and “the foundation of religion” (*pāya-yi dīn*).¹³²⁹

Compared to the extant works of prior Ismaili thinkers, Nāṣir-i Khusraw seemingly wrote more material about Qur'ānic Revelation, suggesting it was a major issue during his time. He discussed the subject in one large chapter and several subsections of *Zād al-musāfir*, two sections of *Gushāyish va Rahāyish*, two full chapters and several areas throughout *Wajh-i dīn*, four chapters in *Khwān al-ikhwān*, one short chapter in *Shish faṣl*, and several subsections of *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*. The philosophical thought of Nāṣir-i Khusraw remains understudied Western scholarship; the relevant analyses of his ideas include two edited volumes of conference proceedings, book chapters, and a few articles.¹³³⁰ My recent work indicates that Nāṣir-i Khusraw's ideas most likely influenced the philosophical theology of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 528/1153) with respect to Ismaili Neoplatonic cosmology and Qur'ānic Revelation.¹³³¹ Thus, examining Khusraw's views on Qur'ānic Revelation may be valuable in tracking the evolution and appropriation of his ideas among subsequent Muslim thinkers.

¹³²⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

¹³³⁰ See Henry Corbin, “Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Iranian Ismā'īlism,” in Richard N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 520-542. Alice C. Hunsberger, “Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Doctrine of the Soul: From the Universal Intellect to the Physical World in Ismaili Philosophy,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1992); Sarfaraz Niyozov and Tamazon Nazariyev (eds.), *Nosiri Khusrav: Dirūz, Imrūz, Fardo* (Khujand: Noshir, 2005); Alice C. Hunsberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nasir-i Khusraw* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012); Khalil Andani, “Reconciling Religion and Philosophy: Nāṣir-i Khusraw's (d. 1088) *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*,” in Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 169-190.

¹³³¹ Andani, “The Merits of the *Bāṭiniyya*”; idem, “Reconciling the Two Wisdoms (*al-ḥikmatayn*): The Source of Shahrastānī's Ismaili Teachings in Nāṣir-i Khusraw,” Paper Presented at the 2018 Biennial Association for Iranian Studies Conference, August 15, 2018, University of California Irvine, Irvine, CA.

The Revelatory Principles: God's Speech (*Qawl-i Khudā*) and God's Writing (*Kitābat-i Khudā*)

In his *Provision for the Travelers*, Khusraw presented his distinctive understanding of God's Speech and God's Writing by way of analogy with human speech and writing. At the human level, "speech (*qawl*) is the reproduction (*hikāyat*) of whatever is in the soul of the knower; and writing is the representation of whatever is in his speech."¹³³² Speech consists of "words (names) arranged according to meanings"¹³³³ where the words are like matter (*hayūla*) and meanings are like form (*ṣūrat*): "Writing is the reproduction of the reproduction (*hikāyat-i hikāyat*) of whatever is in the soul of the possessor of knowledge."¹³³⁴ Speech and writing each serve a different epistemic context: speech is a form of communication tailored to those present with the teacher while writing is for those people who are absent from the teacher. In this respect, speech is superior to writing because its recipients can always ask the speaker for clarification of what he said in real time while those who read the writing of an absent person cannot do this.¹³³⁵ The instruments of speech are the living organs of the human being – the lungs, chest, throat, mouth, etc. while the instruments of writing are "dead" inanimate objects such as the pen, ink, and paper.¹³³⁶ From the perspective of human capacity, however, reading and writing is a superior craft. While both humans and

¹³³² Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 8.

¹³³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

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animals share some ability to speak, the skill of writing is particular to humanity.¹³³⁷ The human ability to read the written word stems from an intellectual power to discern meaning represented by physical signs. In this respect, the ability to read is like an intellectual “sight”, in addition to corporeal eyesight, that envisions and discovers the meaning within corporeal signs.¹³³⁸

Having discussed corporeal speech and writing as expressions of knowledge that humans perceive both through their physical senses and their intelligence, Khusraw went on to argue that humans also have internal senses in their souls, which perceive the meanings of corporeal speech and writing. For example, following the perception of corporeal speech or writing with the five external senses, the human soul’s internal faculties begin to abstract meaning from this sensory data. This begins with the faculties of common sense (*ḥiss*), estimation (*wahm*) and reflection (*fikr*), which successively discern whatever is initially perceived.¹³³⁹ Subsequently, the soul’s faculty of imagination (*mutakhayyila, takhayyul*) “abstracts forms that are perceived within sensibles from matter and preserves them.” The imagination thus isolates meanings or “forms” from sensory perception and then transfers them to the faculty of memory (*ḥifz, ḥāfiẓa*), which preserves these meanings.¹³⁴⁰ Later, the faculty of recollection (*dhikr, dhākira*) will recall these forms and bring them to mind again. Khusraw’s point in illustrating this theory of internal perception is to argue that there is a “spiritual writing” existing within the human soul based on the activities of its internal senses. In particular, the “abstracted forms” that are retained in the

¹³³⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹³³⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

¹³³⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹³⁴⁰ Ibid.

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faculty of memory (*hifz*) are the meanings indicated by corporeal writing. The human soul, using its faculty of recollection, can “read” this spiritual writing whenever it wishes:

Whatever is actualized within the memory (*hifz*) of the human being is a spiritual writing (*kitābatī naḥsānī*), which is “written” upon the soul by the pen of imagination upon the paper of memory.... So we say that the soul, by the power of memory (*dhākira*), is able to read that spiritual writing which was written in the memory by the power of imagination – without there being anything of sounds or audible letters proceeding out of that writing. This is like our memorization of a *sūra* of the Qur'ān or a *qaṣīda* of poetry.¹³⁴¹

Khusraw's drew an important conclusion from the above framework: “Just as there is a writing and a book in the outward sense, for the human soul there is also a writing and a book in the esoteric sense. Similarly, just as there is a speaking and a speech in the exoteric sense, there is also a speaking and a speech in the esoteric sense.”¹³⁴² By positing both exoteric and esoteric forms of speech and writing respectively, Khusraw was integrating both the Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī/Māturīdī positions on the nature of speech. His exoteric speech/writing corresponds to the Mu'tazilī notion of speech being an arrangement of sounds and letters while his idea of esoteric or spiritual speech/writing correlates to the Ash'arī/Māturīdī concept of inner speech (*kalām naḥsī*). This framework sets the stage for Khusraw's doctrine of God's Speech and Writing.

Khusraw generally adhered to the same Neoplatonic cosmogony as al-Sijistānī and al-Mu'ayyad. Khusraw, however, re-staged certain principles of this cosmology toward the theme and symbolism of Qur'ānic Revelation. He identified God's Speech (*kalām Allāh, qawl-i Khudā*) with the creative Command or Word of God. As explained in *The Face of Religion*, God's Word or Speech is both the ontological principle that embraces all of existence and the unitary source of all knowledge:

Knowledge means to perceive things as they are. And that which perceives things as they are is the intellect, while knowledge is in the Pearl of Intellect. The Pearl of Intellect is the Word of God,

¹³⁴¹ Ibid., 27.

¹³⁴² Ibid., 28.

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which subsumes all spiritual and physical existents. It is inappropriate to refer to that which is not subsumed by knowledge as existent. Thus, whatever knowledge encompasses is other than God.... Hence, we say that pure knowledge is God's Command. Those who have been endowed with greater knowledge are closer to God's Command, have a greater acceptance of it and are more obedient.¹³⁴³

Ontologically, God's Speech is Pure Being in that it bestows, maintains, and subsumes the existence of all things. Epistemically, God's Speech is the Pure Knowledge of all things as they are. All possessors of knowledge partake in a share of God's Speech, through which they obey God. According to Khusraw, the Arabic Qur'ān revealed through the Prophet Muhammad is only called the "Speech of God" (*kalām Allāh*) because the Qur'ān is an earthly manifestation or expression of God's Word through the intermediaries of the Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, and the Prophet:

We call the Qur'an "the Speech of God" because the Qur'ān is from the divine support (*ta'yīd*) of the Universal Intellect through the mediation of the Universal Soul, and the Intellect and Soul have come into existence from the Command (*amr*) of God, and the Command of God is the Word (*kalima*) and that Word has been designated by the term "Be" [in the Qur'ān].¹³⁴⁴

Thus, the primary Revelatory Principle in Khusraw's thought is God's Speech, variously called the Word, Command, Will, and Oneness of God. On this matter, Khusraw's ideas correlate with al-Sijistānī and the Brethren of Purity. The ontological and archetypal source of the Qur'ān is God's Speech or Command. On this basis, Khusraw seemed to accept some of the Ash'arī/Māturīdī notions that it is permissible to refer to the Qur'ān as "God's Speech" and as "uncreated" as long as one keeps in mind that the Arabic Qur'ān is really an earthly created expression of God's uncreated eternal Word.

¹³⁴³ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, ed. and tr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, in Hermann Landolt, Samira Sheikh, Kutub Kassam (eds.), *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), 199-200.

¹³⁴⁴ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, 72.

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Where Khusraw differed from prior Ismaili thinkers and other Muslim theologians was his elucidation of a secondary Revelatory Principle called “God’s Writing” (*kitābat-i khudā; kitāb Allāh*) or the “Divine Writing” (*nibishta-yi ilāhī*). Khusraw described his idea of Divine Writing using Qur’ānic terms and the Ismaili Neoplatonic concepts of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. Following the Brethren of Purity, he defined the Universal Intellect as “a simple luminous substance in which the forms (*ṣūrat-hā*) of all things are present.”¹³⁴⁵ The “form” of an existent is its intelligible essence which makes it unique and by which it can be distinguished from other things. The totality of intelligible forms within the substance of the Universal Intellect constitute the Divine Writing:

God’s *kitāb* in its reality is the very substance of the Intellect (*jawhar-i ‘aql*) since all existents are within its essence at the level of seed. The Intellect’s knowledge of things stands as proof of the rightness of our statement, “the Intellect is all things”.¹³⁴⁶

God’s Writing, consisting of intelligible forms or universal archetypes within the Universal Intellect, is the real and original *kitāb Allāh*. The Intellect emanates the Divine Writing upon the Universal Soul and the latter reflects it according to its own spiritual capacity. The Universal Soul then projects the *kitāb Allāh* into Prime Matter, and it becomes manifest in the corporeal world through the activity of Nature.

Based on this cosmology, Khusraw equated the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul with the Pen and Tablet of the wider Islamic tradition. Accordingly, God’s Writing manifests hierarchically from the Pen of the Intellect to the Tablet of the Soul, and from the Tablet of the Soul upon the Universal Body. The various natural phenomena that arise in the corporeal world constitute the primary manifestation of God’s Writing or the *kitāb Allāh* in the corporeal world.

¹³⁴⁵ Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 88.

¹³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 76. I have slightly modified the published translation.

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The pen provides information to the tablet, in the same way that the Intellect informs the Soul... For this reason the Prophet of God has called Universal Intellect 'God's Pen' (*qalam-i khuday*), for everything that is in the mind of the writer comes first to the pen, then from the pen it goes to the tablet: without the tablet nothing would be revealed. And this world itself is in the likeness of a book written by God the Exalted. Just as Universal Intellect stands in relation to Universal Soul in the same way as the pen to the tablet, and just as intelligible forms become manifest within the Soul from the Intellect, so too the Universal Soul is the pen with respect to matter: corporeal forms become manifest in its substance through the pen of the Universal Soul. This is analogous to God's calligraphy on this universal tablet which is the body's essence, through thousands of different forms and divine scripts on this bodily tablet which is the world, all of it green.¹³⁴⁷

In recasting the Pen and the Tablet of Muslim tradition as Neoplatonic hypostases, Khusraw was de-familiarizing popular beliefs in Sunni *tafsīr* and *kalām* and reworking them into his own alternative revelatory-cosmological framework. It emerges from these claims that Khusraw's did not understand the *kitāb Allāh* to mean the Arabic Qur'ān as a scriptural book, even though the Qur'ān as scripture was popularly called *kitāb Allāh* in the fifth/eleventh century. Nevertheless, the *kitāb Allāh* for Khusraw refers to the Divine Writing manifest within the Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul, and the corporeal world itself, which he called "the likeness of a book written by God." Furthermore, Khusraw's ideas about God's Writing manifested in the Universal Intellect, Soul, and the corporeal world bear some kinship with the positions of al-Mu'ayyad seen in the previous section.

In Khusraw's revelatory framework, God's Writing is the primary medium of divine guidance for human beings. To support this claim, Khusraw back referenced his explanation of human speech and writing, observing that speech is a communication medium for those spatially and temporally present with the speaker while writing is more appropriate for those who are absent from him. By analogy, Khusraw reasoned that God must communicate with human beings through writing and not through speech because humans are not temporally or spatially present with God.

¹³⁴⁷ Ibid., 203.

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He also argued that God and His angels cannot utter corporeal speech because they are not themselves corporeal.

It is necessary that God's speaking (*guftan*) to humanity is by means of writing and not by means of sounds and letters because God and His angels are not bodily, whereas sound only comes forth from the body. We also said that writing is speech for those spatially and temporally absent from the speaker. Human beings – who are present in the world by their ensouled bodies while God is the Creator of bodies and spirits – are symbolically spatially absent from God Who is neither in place nor time. Furthermore, those human beings who have not yet come into existence are absent temporally from Him due to the passage of time. Since God's speaking is through these two types of absences, and the speech by which absent ones are distinguished is writing, then it must be the case that God speaks with humankind by means of writing and not by means of sound. Since it is necessary for every human being to hear the Speech of God, it becomes necessary that the Divine Writing is always present within the world. Therefore, this Writing – which is the Speech of God – has been actual and present in the world before the coming (into being) of humankind.¹³⁴⁸

In other words, God's Writing as manifest in the Universal Intellect, the Soul, and the corporeal world conveys God's guidance to His creatures, including humanity. To substantiate this claim, Khusraw pointed to various natural processes in the Cosmos, the human body, and the human soul as examples of divine guidance. He further quoted several Qur'ānic verses (Q. 51:20-21, 41:53) stating that God's Signs are present in the external world and human souls.¹³⁴⁹ The *āyāt Allāh* constitute “the Divine Writing that is within the horizons and the souls.”¹³⁵⁰ Accordingly, God's Writing in the corporeal world consists of God's Signs in nature, history, and human souls.

God's Writing contains and communicates what Khusraw calls divine providence (*ināyat-i ilāhī*) or divine guidance (*hidāyat-i ilāhī*) – a cosmic process directed toward the wellbeing (*ṣalāḥ*) of all creatures: “These two substances, the [corporeal] natures and the souls, are preserved through the divine guidance connected to them from the greatest sphere, which the sages call the

¹³⁴⁸ Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 205-206.

¹³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 108, 414.

¹³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 421.

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God's footstool (*kursī-yi khudā*).”¹³⁵¹ Everything in the world continually receives its share of divine guidance or providence without which it would cease to exist or flourish.¹³⁵² Divine guidance preserves the physical forms of minerals through keeping the four elements correctly configured;¹³⁵³ it enables plants to obtain nourishment and grow; and it empowers animals to seek out food, abstain from what harms them, and reproduce to preserve their species.¹³⁵⁴ At the human level, God's guidance takes the form of the innate human intellect and the primary (*awwalī*) intelligibles that a person can know without being taught – such as the whole being greater than its parts.¹³⁵⁵ In fact, all human sensory and spiritual faculties are a guidance from God for human beings to “use these powers” to ensure the well-being of their bodies while in this world and, ultimately, the well-being of their souls: “All of these things which we learn are the Divine Writings upon this earth. Within this [Divine] Writing, there are clear audible and perceptible things for the human being relating to his wellbeing (*ṣalāḥ*) after the corruption of his bodily frame with the death of the body.”¹³⁵⁶

Khusraw's concept of God's Writing (*kitāb Allāh, nibishta-i ilāhī*), despite its Neoplatonic aspects, comes very close to the qur'ānic and early Shi'i concept of the Transcendent Kitāb seen in Chapters 1 and 5 respectively and is perhaps his way of restoring a more qur'ānic framework of revelation. The qur'ānic Transcendent Kitāb is the cosmic repository of all divine decrees,

¹³⁵¹ Ibid., 251.

¹³⁵² Ibid., 253.

¹³⁵³ Ibid., 251-253.

¹³⁵⁴ Ibid., 253.

¹³⁵⁵ Ibid., 254.

¹³⁵⁶ Ibid., 202-203.

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guidance, records, and knowledge. Likewise, Khusraw's Divine Writing encompasses God's guidance, His originated intelligible forms, and His decrees that He has "written" in the spiritual and corporeal worlds. Khusraw elucidated his idea of God's Writing through citing Qur'ānic verses that say God "wrote" (*kataba*) in the sense of both decreeing and recording events.¹³⁵⁷ Khusraw's emphasis on the centrality of God's Writing is perhaps most explicit in his reading of Q. 2:2, "*Alif, Lām, Mīm*. That is the *kitāb* in which there is no doubt." In Khusraw's interpretation, the letters *alif*, *lām*, and *mīm* stand for "length, width, and depth" and "that *kitāb*" with its remote demonstrative pronoun refers to God's Writing manifest in creation, not the Qur'ān:

If by "that *kitāb*" God had meant the Qur'ān, He would have said "this *kitāb*", since this verse stands at the very beginning of the Book. Since He does say "that *kitāb*", and not "this *kitāb*", this indication is proof to anyone with intelligence that God is not referring to the Qur'ān here but rather, is referring to the creation itself.¹³⁵⁸

In other words, "that *kitāb*" mentioned in Q. 2:2 and in other verses of the Qur'ān employing a remote demonstrative *dhālika* or *tilka* when referring to God's *kitāb* or its signs do not refer to the Arabic Qur'ān, but are actually describing God's Writing manifest throughout the created realms. Khusraw's reading of Q. 2:2 reverts to what would have been the earliest first century understanding of the verse prior to the Qur'ān's compilation into the *muṣḥaf*.¹³⁵⁹

If God's Writing or *kitāb Allāh* contains divine guidance for the corporeal and spiritual wellbeing of humanity, then humans must have a way to access the entirety of this guidance in any given time. The person through whom humans attain to God's guidance from the Divine Writing is the Prophet.

¹³⁵⁷ Ibid., 197.

¹³⁵⁸ Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 204. I have left the word *kitāb* here untranslated.

¹³⁵⁹ See also Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 226-227.

Revelatory Agents and Revelatory Process: The Prophet as the “Reader” of God’s Writing

While Khusraw offered several arguments for the existence of Prophets in the world throughout his writings, his most innovative argument proceeds from his concept of Divine Writing. If God indeed communicates to humanity through the Divine Writing, Khusraw reasoned, then God must have also established one person within the species of humanity who is capable of “reading” God’s Writing; a person who fully recognizes the divine guidance and divine intent that the Divine Writing expresses. Such a person would then have the duty of communicating God’s guidance to the “illiterate” humans who lack the intellectual power to read God’s Writing and teach them to read it as well: “This necessitates that one person among the species of animals, who is the ‘speaker’ (*sukhan-gūy*), is distinguished in reading the Divine Writing in order that His Writing be read for those who are illiterate (*ummiyyān*). The speech of that one person is the Speech of God because the ‘reader’ of writing is a person among those to whom the ‘writer’ conveys whatever he speaks, in order that the illiterate ones may hear that speech and see that writing.”¹³⁶⁰ To establish the actual existence of such a person, Khusraw drew an analogy between the existence of literacy within the humanity, who are the only species of the animal genus with the capacity to read corporeal writing, and the existence of the Prophet among humanity:

The demonstration that there must be one person among humankind who reads the Divine Writing for the people and not many persons is that we explained before that writing is a special capacity [for human beings] while speech is a general capacity [common to humans and animals].... It is impossible that no one ever attains to the reading of the Divine Writing because we [already] demonstrated that God speaks to humankind by way of writing and does not speak through an instrument that no one perceives. When speech is through writing, the [existence of] the “reader” of that writing is necessary. Within the animal genus – which contains many species – since speech by way of writing is [only] with one species, which is humankind, it necessarily follows that the “reader” of this [Divine] Writing within this one [human] species is this one person [and] not many [persons], because the individual within the species, which consists of multiple individuals, is in the same position as the species within the genus, which consists of multiple species. Thus, we say that

¹³⁶⁰ Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 207.

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that single person who reads the Creator's Writing for the people is the Prophet of God to the people.¹³⁶¹

In other words, just as there exists only one species within the entire animal genus that possesses the capacity to read earthly writing, there likewise exists only one individual within the human species who is capable of reading God's Writing; this single individual is the Prophet. According to this argument by analogy, the Prophet's rank within the human species is equivalent to the rank of the human species within the animal genus.

As for how someone like the Prophet comes to exist in the corporeal world, Khusraw offered an explanation similar to that of al-Sijistānī seen in the prior chapter. In Khusraw's Neoplatonic cosmology, the Universal Soul receives the Divine Writing in the form of intelligible emanations from the Universal Intellect. The Soul then impresses these intellectual emanations upon individual souls, based on their degrees of purity and turbidity. Human souls possessing a greater degree of spiritual and bodily temperament receive a greater share of the Soul's emanations than those with a less harmonious temperament.

When the soul becomes established in the body with a harmonious temperament far removed from darkness and the turbidities of nature, it becomes receptive to the influences of the Universal Soul which have poured down upon Nature as an essential and substantial reception. [This soul] becomes the Messenger of the Universal Soul amongst other souls to those souls who remain incapable of accepting the influences of the Universal Soul. The name of this reception which the soul of the Prophet receives from the influences of the Universal Soul is the prophetic message (*risālat*).¹³⁶²

The Prophet, whose soul receives the greatest share of the Universal Soul's intelligible emanations, is the technically the "Messenger of the Universal Soul" since the Universal Soul, as the Guarded Tablet, contains the spiritual forms of God's Writing. In several texts, Khusraw framed the Universal Soul as the proximate agent of the divine inspiration of the Prophets. He described the

¹³⁶¹ Ibid., 207-208.

¹³⁶² Khusraw, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, 231.

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Universal Soul in *The Face of Religion* as “the lord of the composition of the world (*khudāvand-i tarkīb-i ālam*) and “the sender of divine support (*firistanda-i ta'yīd*) from the Intellect to the Speaker Prophet.”¹³⁶³ In his *Knowledge and Liberation*, Khusraw stated that “all the Messengers who came brought the message of the Universal Soul by the divine support of the Universal Intellect from Creator’s Word (*payghām-i nafs-i kull bi-ta'yīd-i 'aql az kalimat-i bārī*). The Messenger is called ‘speaker’ (*nātiq*) meaning ‘one who speaks’ (*sukhan-gūy*) [or enunciates], and the speech (*sukhan*) belongs to the Universal Soul by whom the *nātiq* is sent.”¹³⁶⁴ In the same work, Khusraw described the Prophets as the “delegates of the [Universal] Soul” (*gumāshdigān-i nafs*).¹³⁶⁵ Through such arguments about the necessity and nature of Prophets, Khusraw – like al-Sijistānī before him – “naturalized” Prophethood as a teleological or “built-in” feature of the natural world without requiring any sort of divine intervention or miracles to ground it.

Having established the necessary existence of Prophethood in the world, Khusraw went on to consider the nature of divine inspiration (*wahy*). By initially arguing that God only communicates to humanity by means of a cosmic Divine Writing, which is neither sound nor letter, Khusraw sought to undercut claims in Sunni *kalām* and *tafsīr* that Gabriel verbally recited the Qur’ān in Arabic to Muhammad. Khusraw described this belief in verbatim dictation, quite popular among most Muslims of his day, as absurd: “They further say that Gabriel flew down upon the Chosen Messenger and spoke to him with sounds and letters and subsequently flew back to heaven.”¹³⁶⁶ In several passages, Khusraw dismissed the Sunni doctrine of the Qur’ān’s verbatim

¹³⁶³ Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, 96.

¹³⁶⁴ Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 107.

¹³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 102. Persian text, 65.

¹³⁶⁶ Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 163.

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communication to the Prophet by referring to Q. 26:192-194 and Q. 2:97, both of which say that the Trusted Spirit or Gabriel brought divine inspiration to Muhammad's heart.

The imaginings of the masses who lack discernment are absurd. They are those who say that the angels write the deeds of humanity upon scrolls and at the Resurrection, for every person, there will be a book (*nāma*) set upon his hand. What they say – that Gabriel came to the Messenger of God and conveyed the verses of the Qur'ān as sound such that the Messenger heard them with his physical ears – is absurd. This is because sound does not come into existence except from the external palpitation of air between two bodies. Angels are not corporeal, but rather, they are spirit, and the spirit does not take up place – so there is no space for the body in order that the air goes inside it and comes out. The conception of the ignorant of the community regarding this meaning contrasts with the Speech of God because God says that the one who brings the Qur'ān to the Messenger is the Spirit, and the Spirit is not a body. Sound does not come from that which is not corporeal. Thus, sound does not come from the Angel. He [God] said that Gabriel descended upon the heart of the Messenger; He did not say that he came to his ear and conveyed sound.¹³⁶⁷

Khusraw argued that the “heart” of the Prophet mentioned in the Qur'ānic account of prophetic inspiration refers to the inner faculties of the Prophet's soul, not the external ears of his body. In his *Six Chapters*, Khusraw concluded that the Prophet's “learning of the knowledge of the higher world was done through his luminous soul, and not through his physical ears as in the way we hear (*āmūkhtan-i u az 'ālam-i 'ulvī būd bi-nafs-i rawshān na bi-gūsh-i kathīf chunīn ki mā shinavīm*).”¹³⁶⁸ This general theme that Gabriel or the Holy Spirit conveys divine inspiration to Muhammad without sound or letter is present throughout Khusraw's works.

Having set aside the popular Muslim doctrine of verbatim revelation, Khusraw then explicated his own position on the meaning and nature of Qur'ānic *wahy*. He began by describing the human innate intellect as the lowest degree of *wahy*; this intellect is a “hidden and weak divine inspiration” (*wahy-i pūshīda va da'if*).¹³⁶⁹ This must be the case, he argued, because other species within the animal genus lack the power of intellect; thus, the intellect must be a divine gift bestowed upon the

¹³⁶⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

¹³⁶⁸ Khusraw, *Six Chapters*, 72 (translation); 23 (Persian text). I have retranslated this passage.

¹³⁶⁹ Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 211.

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human species and not innate to their animal genus. Accordingly, God communicates His guidance to each person in the form of this intellect that is naturally predisposed to seeking knowledge: “Hidden and weak divine inspiration (*wahy-i pūshīda va da'īf*) comes to each person from His Creator and He sends the inspiration, which is the intellect, with [the message]: ‘Seek to understand why He made this world, why it has been brought forth in this place for you and what will be your state after you leave this abode’.”¹³⁷⁰ Accordingly, the intellect within each person, as a mode of *wahy*, is the power by which he or she “reads” God’s Writing and thereby intuits God’s guidance:

The Divine Writing is upon the earth and that [earth] is this sensory world. Thus, it became necessary for every person to read this Divine Writing. This weak divine inspiration (*wahy-i da'īf*), which is the innate intellect (*'aql-i gharīzī*) that has come to every person, is differentiated with respect to luminosity and darkness, strength and weakness, such that one person hears few words, recognizes many meanings, and becomes aware through an allusion (*isharatī*) to many intentions. Whereas another person is such that many expressions do not even indicate a single meaning and he does not reach that meaning. One person recognizes the intention of the writer from the writing, and another person reads the writing with distortion. Most people themselves are those who do not recognize the writing.¹³⁷¹

Practically speaking, most people are unable to “read” God’s Writing and recognize its divine guidance because their share of *wahy* is too weak. But from Khusraw’s prior argument and the general law of disparity, it necessarily follows that one person in the world is fully cognizant of the Divine Writing by virtue of his complete intellect – this being the Prophet Muhammad in his own time. If God bestows weak divine inspiration upon each person taking the form of an intellect seeking knowledge of one’s purpose and wellbeing, then God must also establish another person in the world who already possesses the very knowledge being sought by others:

Now we say that the person who reads this Divine Writing, which is the creation of the world is the Prophet of God and the speech of that person is the Speech of God. That person is closer to God than all people. His becoming informed of this Divine Writing is the divine inspiration (*wahy*) to him: a power that has come to every person as weak divine inspirations (*wahy-hā-yi da'īf*). By that power, he [the Prophet] is more powerful than others and the soul of that one person who reads this [Divine] Writing among the souls of other human beings in the same position that the human soul

¹³⁷⁰ Ibid., 211-212.

¹³⁷¹ Ibid., 212-213.

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occupies among the souls of other animals. That soul [of the Prophet] reaches that place of luminosity, purity, and vision such that when he looks upon this Divine Writing, which is the form of the world, he recognizes the intention of the Creator from this [Divine Writing]... When it is clear that the power of seeking knowledge emanates to one species amongst the entire animal genus, it necessarily follows that the power of bestowing knowledge (*quvvat-i dahanda-yi- ilm*) emanates to one person amongst this [human] species. This is because that [one] person [with the power of bestowing knowledge] is in that position which is [like] the [human] species among the [animal] genus.¹³⁷²

After observing the diversity of levels in people's intellectual capacities, Khusraw argued by analogy that if God has provided only one species within the entire animal genus with a knowledge-seeking intellect (weak divine inspiration), then God must have also granted the knowledge-bestowing intellect as a complete divine inspiration to only one individual within this human species. This individual, the Prophet, is alone capable of fully "reading" the Divine Writing, which is the secondary Revelatory Principle and the manifestation of the primary Revelatory Principle that is God's Speech. In other words, the Prophet reads God's Writing through his complete share of divine inspiration (*wahy*) and whatever he conveys of this knowledge to others is a manifestation of God's Speech or the primary Revelatory Principle.

As shown earlier, Khusraw saw the Universal Soul as the proximate agent of Prophethood and the immediate source of the divine inspiration emanating to the Prophet's soul. Khusraw described the channel or medium of this divine inspiration as the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quddus*) or the Trusted Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) mentioned in the Qur'ān: "For this one person who makes knowledge reach these seekers, there is also a spirit higher than these [growing, sensory, and rational] spirits; the name of that [higher] spirit is the Faithful Spirit (*rūḥ al-amīn*) or the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*)."¹³⁷³ In support of this claim, he quoted Q. 42:52, which states: "And likewise We have inspired in you (*awḥaynā ilayka*) a spirit (*rūḥ*) from Our Command; you did not know

¹³⁷² Ibid., 214.

¹³⁷³ Ibid., 214-215.

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what is the *kitāb* and the faith, but We made it a light by which We guide whom We will among Our servants.” The presence of the Holy Spirit, as the instrument of *wahy*, is what differentiates the Prophet from other human beings: “When the Holy Spirit (*nafs-i qudsī*) becomes connected to a person, that person becomes a Prophet. The Holy Spirit with respect to the Prophet has the position of the rational soul with respect to human beings.”¹³⁷⁴ Khusraw read Q. 42:52 through his Ismaili Neoplatonic cosmology and interpreted the word *kitāb* throughout its qur'ānic usage as God's Writing. He further explained that the *wahy* conveyed to the Prophet consists of non-verbal spiritual allusions (*ishārāt*) that allow the Prophet to perceive and understand God's Writing:

Within this verse it is evident that the divine inspiration (*wahy*) to the Messenger was spiritual (*rūhānī*) and not corporeal (*jismānī*). Sound (*āwāz*) comes from the body, not from the spirit. So it is clear by the wisdom of this verse that *wahy* is allusion (*ishārātī*) and not sound (*āwāzī*). If this speech is not a sound, then it is by an allusion (*ishārātī*) toward this Divine Writing which is the world. This is because the transmission of knowledge to humanity is only by two ways [of speech and writing]. The Creator's display of His own Writing to that single person is through the illumination of his insight through the divine inspiration (*wahy*) which He sends to him from His own Command such that he gazes upon the [Divine] Writing of the world within creation, becomes cognizant of what others are unaware of, and sees what others do not see. This is like when person becomes aware of something that was previously hidden to him through a luminous conception (*andisha-yi rawshān*) which appears to [that] person [alone] among other people.¹³⁷⁵

In the above passage, Khusraw presented his alternative to the Sunni idea of verbatim auditory inspiration – the notion of *wahy* being a non-verbal “allusion” (*ishāra*) to God's Writing. In this understanding, *wahy* is a spiritual visionary inspiration or illumination by which the Prophet's soul or heart perceives the Divine Writing through a “luminous conception” (*andisha-yi rawshān*). Khusraw's language here stresses the visionary nature of divine inspiration as opposed to an

¹³⁷⁴ Khusraw, *Khawān al-ikhwān*, 223. In other places, Khusraw names the spiritual intermediaries of divine inspiration to the Prophet as the Ismaili triad *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl*. But he does not specify any distinctive roles for these three intermediaries when discussing *wahy* or *ta'yīd*.

¹³⁷⁵ Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 215.

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auditory communication as understood by most Sunni thinkers. In a later section of his *Provision for the Travelers*, Khusraw offered a more vivid account of how the Prophet experiences this *wahy*:

The divine inspiration (*wahy*) from God to the Messenger is an allusion (*ishāratī*) from Him to [the Prophet] towards the creation through a divine support (*ta'yīd*) that emanated upon his illumined heart, so that he [the Messenger] may read the Divine Writing through the light (*nūr*) of that divine support (*ta'yīd*). There is no speech quicker (*bi-shitābtar*) than what is by allusion (*bi-ishārat*) because vision can grasp it instantly. This is because God conveys speech to the Messenger through *wahy* and *wahy* occurs with quickness (*bi-shitāb*). That allusion (*ishārat*) was through divine support (*ta'yīd*) such that he looks within the creation in order to “read” the intention (*gharaḥ*) of the Creator from this Eternal (*abadī*) Writing without alteration (*tabdīl*) – which is the world and its parts.¹³⁷⁶

In defining *wahy* as an “allusion” (*ishārat*), Khusraw seems to agree with the pre-Islamic and Qur'ānic usage of *wahy* and certain ideas from the Brethren of Purity seen in Chapter 6. Khusraw stressed the Prophet's experience of *wahy* as a luminous vision occurring with great quickness (*bi-shitāb*). His interpretation is equally grounded in the etymology of the *w-h-y* root, which contains the meaning of “quickness” or “haste”. All of this suggests that Nāṣir-i Khusraw conceived *wahy* as a “quick vision” or “flash” of inspiration that provides the recipient with direct visionary access to God's Writing. Based on this understanding of God's Writing and *wahy*, Khusraw offered his unique reading of Q. 18:27 as follows:

“And recite what has been inspired in you from the *kitāb* of thy Lord. There is none who can change His Words (*li-kalimātihi*), and you will not find any refuge besides Him” (Q. 18:27). Since He says in this verse: “Read whatever is indicated to you from the Divine Writing with quickness (*bishitāb*) and there is no alteration for His Words,” it is clear for the wise person that this is a command from God to His Messenger to read from the Divine Writing. Writing is speech which He has impressed upon earthly things of wood, dust, and similar things; the world and whatever is within it is informed through the Divine Informing (*tashkīl-i ilāhī*). Thus, it is clear that the Divine Writing is none other than this world and it is also clear that whatever His Messenger spoke and recited is from this Divine Writing that he read.... When this divine support (*ta'yīd*) reaches the illumined heart of the Messenger and he reads this Divine Writing without altering the words (*mutabaddil-i kalimāt*) and all of the people are unaware of that [Divine Writing], he [the Messenger] realized that he perceived a providential grace (*ināyatī*) from the Creator of the world by which he, among all created beings, reached that station which is closer to God than all created beings.¹³⁷⁷

¹³⁷⁶ Ibid., 422.

¹³⁷⁷ Ibid., 422-423.

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In Khusraw's reading, the *kitāb* and the *kalimāt Allāh* (God's Words) mentioned throughout the Qur'ān refer to God's Writing manifest in the Universal Intellect, Soul, and the corporeal world; these terms do not refer to God's Speech, nor do they refer to the Qur'ān in its recitational or scriptural format. Accordingly, the Prophet being told to "recite what has been inspired to you from the *kitāb* of your Lord" is a command for the Prophet to read God's Writing through a quick spiritual vision. Likewise, the *kalimāt Allāh* that no one can change or alter refer to God's Writing that never changes. Khusraw also interpreted the Words of God that the Qur'ān says will never be exhausted (Q. 31:27, 18:109) as a description of God's Writing.¹³⁷⁸ Thus, the *kalimāt Allāh* that never alter and never run out are not the Arabic words of the Qur'ān but the Neoplatonic forms or essences that God has "written" or "inscribed" upon the Universal Intellect, the Soul, and the corporeal world. Accordingly, the *wahy* granted to Muhammad is a divine support (*ta'yīd*) and divine providence (*ināyat*) – a spiritual illumination of his heart by which the Prophet "reads" God's Writing. It may be recalled that the idea of *wahy* as a "reading" of otherwise indecipherable or mysterious writing has antecedents in pre-Islamic poetry, where the faded encampments in the desert were called *wahy*. As Neuwirth explained, as quoted in Chapter 1, this original meaning of *wahy* was then restaged in the Qur'ān to refer to the Prophet's "reading" of the Transcendent Kitāb. Thus, Khusraw's interpretation of *wahy* as the Prophet's visionary power to "read" God's Writing harkens back to the earliest qur'ānic ideas.

The above understanding of *wahy* as a spiritual vision of God's Writing informed Khusraw's interpretation of the qur'ānic description of the Prophet Muhammad as *ummī* (unlettered). The Qur'ān refers to both Muhammad and his Arabian community as *ummī* (Q. 3:20,

¹³⁷⁸ Ibid., 220.

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3:75, 7:157-158, 62:2). A historical-contextual reading of the Qur'ān shows that the term *ummī* in the term *al-nabī al-ummī* primarily means “gentile” (i.e. a non-Jewish Gentile Prophet).¹³⁷⁹ But many Muslims also came to read *ummī* as “not possessing scripture”, “not being learned in scripture”, or “illiterate”.¹³⁸⁰ Khusraw, however, took *ummī* to mean “illiterate” in the sense of lacking the ability to read God’s Writing. He described this illiteracy with respect to God’s Writing as a veil or cover over someone’s intellect or inner eye of the heart.

Thus we say that the people are wholly “illiterate” (*ummiyyān*) with respect to the Divine Writing and the Chosen Messenger was also “illiterate” (*ummī*) with respect to this [Divine] Writing before the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quddus*) reached him. When he became a “reader” of the Divine Script through divine support (*ta'yīd*), he [also] became independent of human writing. The community, who are “illiterate” (*ummiyyān*) with respect to the Divine Script, are in need of human writing and destitute on account of that... When the veil was lifted from the Messenger’s eye of insight (*chishm-i baṣīrat*), he read and recognized this Divine Writing.¹³⁸¹

Initially, the Prophet and his community were *ummī* or incapable of reading God’s Writing. Through the Holy Spirit or intelligible emanation upon his soul, the Prophet Muhammad was transformed from an “illiterate” (*ummī*) person into a “reader” of the Divine Writing. Thus, the primary function of the Prophet was to “read” God’s Writing and communicate its contents to those who remain “illiterate” (*ummiyyān*).

Based on his idea of divine inspiration and Divine Writing, Khusraw interpreted the term “Messenger of God” (Ar. *rasūl*, Pers. *payghāmbār*, *payāmbār*) in a most expansive way to mean that whatever the Prophet says and does is an expression of God’s Writing, which in turn is the manifestation of God’s Speech. In effect, the Prophet always speaks on God’s behalf:

¹³⁷⁹ This is the conclusion of the most recent study on the subject. See Mehdy Shaddel, “Qur’ānic *ummī*: genealogy, ethnicity, and the foundation of a new community,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 43 (2016): 1-60.

¹³⁸⁰ For a survey of these meanings in post-Qur’ānic Muslim literature, see Sebastian Günther, “Muḥammad the Illiterate Prophet: An Islamic Creed in the Qur’an and Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 4/1 (2002): 1-26. See also Norman Calder, “The Ummī in Early Islamic Juristic Literature,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990): 111-123.

¹³⁸¹ *Zād al-musāfir*, 217-218.

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When the “reader” of the writing from the “writer” is a “speaker” (*sukhan-gūī*), his speech (*qawl*) is the speech (*qawl*) of the “writer”; and when the “writer” is God and the “reader” is Muhammad al-Muṣṭafā, the latter’s speech is the Speech of God. The person whose speech is the Speech of God is the Messenger of God. Thus, Muhammad al-Muṣṭafā is the Messenger of God.¹³⁸²

In Ismaili theology more generally, Muhammad as the Messenger of God does not mean that he is a passive transmitter of God’s Speech. Rather, the Prophet in his very person is the human manifestation of God’s Speech. In Khusraw’s model, God’s Messenger functions broadly as God’s vicegerent, deputy, agent, or “substitute” among human beings on earth. For this reason, Khusraw even applied the term “king (*pādishāh*) of the two worlds” to both God and the person of the Prophet Muhammad:

He [the Messenger] comes to be the king (*pādishāh*) over the world of rational speakers (i.e. humanity) by virtue of his own person, just as the human being has become the king over the corporeal world by virtue of his own species. In reality, this one person holds the station (*manzilat*) of God amongst all human beings: his speech is the speech of God and his act is the act of God.... God is the king of the two worlds – the subtle world and the dense world. The subtle world is humanity and the dense world is the corporeal world. The Prophet [standing] in the place of God is the king of the two worlds.¹³⁸³

In framing the Prophet as God’s representative on earth, Khusraw invested the person of Muhammad with maximal authority and situated him as the locus of manifestation of God’s relationship to creatures. In effect, to obey Muhammad is to obey God and the actions of Muhammad are to be reckoned as the acts of God. God communicates and interacts with humanity through His Prophets: “God has bestowed the Prophets: He has spoken through their tongues; He has killed His enemies through their hand; He has become pleased through their pleasure with the people; and He has become angry through their anger with the people.”¹³⁸⁴

¹³⁸² Ibid., 225-226.

¹³⁸³ Ibid., 487-488.

¹³⁸⁴ Ibid., 490.

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In depicting the figure of the Prophet in such lofty terms, Khusraw's ideas mirror the portrayal of Muhammad in the Medinan Sūras, where the Prophet is depicted as God's authoritative representative, as well as developments in the Sunni tradition in which Muhammad's extra-qur'ānic authority was conceptualized as his divinely-revealed Sunna. Sinai described the qur'ānic exaltation of Muhammad to an almost God-like status in Medina as a significant development: "Medinan texts closely link the Messenger with God by calling not only for obedience to 'God and His Messenger' but also by demanding 'belief in God and His Messenger' (Q. 49:15, 57:7.19.28, 64:8), as opposed to 'belief in God and the Last Day'. Such bracketing induces what David Marshall has described as a "godward movement of the Messenger". Q. 9:128 goes so far as to ascribe to the Messenger two attributes (kindness and mercy) that are otherwise reserved for God and thus implies the Messenger's "participation in divine characteristics."¹³⁸⁵ In this respect, Khusraw's portrayal of the Prophet in general and Muhammad in particular as God's deputy among humans amounts to a maximalist interpretation of qur'ānic prophetology. This exaltation of the Prophet Muhammad raises further questions about the theological status of Muhammad's speech, including the Arabic Qur'ān and his prophetic guidance, and their ontological relationship to God's Speech and God's Writing.

Revelatory Products: The Prophetic Composition of the Arabic Qur'ān and the *Sharī'a*

According to Khusraw's theory of Qur'ānic Revelation, the Revelatory Process is hierarchical and multi-layered. The Neoplatonic process of emanation and cosmic construction comprises the first stage of the Revelatory Process through which God's transcendent and unitary Speech manifests

¹³⁸⁵ Nicolai Sinai, "The Unknown Known: Some Groundwork for Interpreting the Medinan Qur'an," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 66 (2015-2016): 47-96: 70-71.

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as God's Writing consisting of celestial archetypes manifest in the Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, and the corporeal world. The second stage of the Revelatory Process consists of divine inspiration (*wahy*) and divine support (*ta'yīd*) emanating from the Universal Intellect through the Universal Soul to the soul of the Prophet, by which Muhammad reads God's Writing and recognizes the divine guidance within it. In the third stage of the Revelatory Process, the Prophet Muhammad enunciates verbal speech: he "recites" or "translates" God's Writing, which is the content of divine inspiration, into the oral Arabic recitations that comprise the Arabic Qur'ān; he also verbalizes this divine inspiration in the form of extra-qur'ānic prophetic guidance. Khusraw described Muhammad's verbalization of God's Writing into human language and idiom as a process of "reading" (*bar khwāndan*), *tanzīl* (revelatory expression), and *ta'līf* (composition). The latter two words are technical Ismaili terms inherited from al-Sijistānī and others. Khusraw believed that this act of prophetic "translation" was necessary because the Qur'ān "passed [as] divine support (*ta'yīd*) from the Universal Intellect through the mediation of the Universal Soul and reached the pure soul of the Prophet with the meaning of the words, which today are written in the codices (*maṣāḥif*)... before the Prophet expressed the Qur'ān in Arabic, it was accepted by his pure soul and was simple (*basīṭ*) without letters and words."¹³⁸⁶

In *The Provision for Travelers*, Khusraw framed the Prophet's translation of non-verbal inspiration into Arabic words as his "reading" (*bar khwāndan*) of God's Writing. In this view, Prophet Muhammad "sees" and "reads" God's Writing through this non-verbal inspiration and then "recites it aloud" to his community as an Arabic recitation (*qur'ān*):

When the veil was lifted from the Messenger's eye of insight (*chishm-i baṣīrat*), he read and recognized this Divine Writing. He read to the people whatever they were in need of [from] these signs [in the Divine Writing] and concealed each one of these Divine meanings within them in the Arabic language by means of similitudes (*mathal-hā*) and symbols (*ramz-hā*), neither stipulated nor

¹³⁸⁶ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 72.

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detailed, in a way that no one is able to surpass it such that it became necessary out of wisdom.... Thus, the Messenger was speaking according to a decree of this [Divine] Writing and would say: “*The speech that I convey is God's Speech.*” He spoke correctly because everything he spoke was from the Divine Writing and writing is speech from the writer. The reader of a book has spoken only what he reads from the writing, [which is] is from the speech of the writer. Thus, we have verified that whatever the Messenger spoke from God was the Speech of God. This is without us saying that there is any voice, palate, or language for God in the way as the ignorant say.... The Creator of the world is the writer, the world and everything within it is His Writing, and His Messenger is the “reader” of this [Divine] Writing. The speech of the Messenger is the expression (*ibārat*) of the Speech of God which He has spoken by way of Writing.¹³⁸⁷

When the Prophet “reads” the Divine Writing for his community, he formulates symbols and coins parables in the Arabic language to convey the meanings of the divine guidance embedded in God’s Writing. Khusraw’s description is very similar to Neuwirth’s account of the Qur’ānic concept of recitation (*qirā’a*) and *qur’ān* as seen in Chapter 1. As she observed, the act of reciting (*qirā’a*) immediately follows the Prophet’s reception of *wahy* and amounts to his translation of the contents of the Transcendent Kitāb for his Arabic speaking audiences. Khusraw’s account also states that whatever the Prophet enunciates in Arabic is a created expression (*ibāra*) of God’s Speech on the grounds that the Prophet’s speech is a verbal translation of God’s Writing, which in turn expresses God’s Speech. This *ibāra* terminology may be Ash‘arī language that Khusraw adapted to specify the ontological relationship between the Prophet’s Qur’ānic speech and God’s transcendent creative Speech. In this way, Khusraw both denied that God speaks in Arabic sounds and letters and negated the verbal dictation theory of revelation, while still framing Revelatory Products composed by the Prophet Muhammad as the expression of God’s Speech and Writing.

As seen in Chapter 1, the concept of *tanzīl* in the Qur’ān itself is a symbolic way of stressing God’s benevolent, authoritative, and decisive action towards His creatures. In classical Sunni *tafsīr* literature, *tanzīl* was understood as the literal spatial descent of the Qur’ān from heaven to earth as seen in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 and 4, we saw that for Sunni Ash‘arī and Māturīdī theologians

¹³⁸⁷ Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir*, 218-219.

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interpret *tanzīl* to mean a process of making God's Speech "understood" or "known" to Gabriel and the Prophet in the form of its created Arabic recitation, while the Ḥanbalīs understand *tanzīl* as God's eternal act of reciting the Qur'ān. As explained in Chapter 5 and 6, prior Ismaili *dā'īs* spoke of *tanzīl* as the act of revelatory expression where the Prophet "depicts" God's Speech in symbol filled human discourse. Drawing from prior Ismaili positions, Khusraw explained that "*tanzīl* is a discourse spoken to make intelligible things resemble sensory things according to the example of the leaves of the tree that formally resemble the fruit but in which there is no further resemblance with its seed."¹³⁸⁸ In other words, *tanzīl* is a process of "symbolic revelatory expression" – coining words and statements about corporeal things to convey and symbolize the content of intelligibles. In his *Knowledge and Liberation*, Khusraw also defined *tanzīl* as "to make the subtle into the dense" where the spiritual world is *laṭīf* (subtle) and the corporeal world is *kathīf* (dense).¹³⁸⁹ The Universal Soul's creation of the corporeal world through inscribing God's Writing *qua* intelligible forms upon Prime Matter is the initial process of converting the subtle into the dense. The prophetic act of *tanzīl*, in which subtle spiritual knowledge is conveyed through dense corporeal symbols, is a recapitulation of the Universal Soul's cosmogonic action:

[T]he Universal Soul brought forth the world on Prime Matter, the subtle form of which was at first in the Soul whose work condensed it (*kathīf gardānīd*) [in a form] perceptible to the senses... The Messengers, who were delegated by the [Universal] Soul with the divine support (*ta'yīd*) of the [Universal Intellect], acted in the same manner. They gave people the *tanzīl* which consists of the exoteric and general (*'āmm*) aspect of the *sharī'a* (religious law).¹³⁹⁰

Thus, the Prophet's verbal composition of Revelatory Products in the form of symbols mirrors the Universal Soul's cosmic construction (*tarkīb*) of the corporeal world: "Cosmic construction

¹³⁸⁸ Ibid., 416.

¹³⁸⁹ Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 102.

¹³⁹⁰ Ibid., 101. I adjusted some transliteration for consistency.

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(*tarkīb*) and *tanzīl* resemble one another. The speech of the lord (*khudāvand*) of *tanzīl* is unlimited in allegory (*ramz*) and parable (*mathal*).”¹³⁹¹

The third term Khusraw employed to describe the Prophet Muhammad's production of the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* is *ta'līf*. In his usage, *ta'līf* is the Prophet's activity of composing words, phrases, stories, prescriptions, and proscriptions to symbolically express the divine support and inspiration he receives from the Universal Soul: “The Speaker Prophet's rank is such that he can compose (*ta'līf kardan*) the divine support (*ta'yīd*) he has received for the people through his speech, this being the Book and the *sharī'a*.”¹³⁹²

Overall, Khusraw's understanding of the prophetic reading, *tanzīl*, and *ta'līf* clearly position the Prophet Muhammad as the active revelatory agent and creator of the Arabic Qur'ān and the regulations of the *sharī'a*. In one passage of *The Face of Religion*, Khusraw explained that the preacher ascending to the pulpit of the mosque and delivering the sermon (*khutba*) symbolizes the Prophet rendering the spiritual communications of the Universal Intellect and Soul into an Arabic linguistic discourse:

The preacher delivering the sermon from the pulpit signifies the discourse (*mukhāṭaba*) of the Speaker Prophet with the Universal Intellect. The first sermon signifies the Speaker Prophet's recognition of the First [Universal Intellect] and the second sermon signifies his recognition of and benefitting from the Universal Soul. The preacher's descent from the pulpit after the two sermons signifies the Speaker Prophet giving corporeal form (*bar jismānī gardānīdan*) to those spiritual addresses (*mar ān mukhāṭib-hā-yi rūḥānī*) that he perceived (*yāfi*) from the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul, rendering them accessible (*nazdik gardānīdan*) to the listeners in the Arabic language (*bar zabān-i tāzī*).¹³⁹³

¹³⁹¹ Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, 137.

¹³⁹² Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, 219. For al-Sijistānī's view of *ta'līf*, see Chapter 6 and Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, 122, 185; idem, *Intellectual Missionary*, 48-51.

¹³⁹³ Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, 187. Special thanks to Faquir Muhammad Hunzai for discussing the translation of this passage with me.

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In the above passage, as in other places in *The Face of Religion*, Khusraw used the Persian verb *gardānīdan* to speak about the Prophet's "transformation" of spiritual discourses (*mukhātib-hā-yi rūhānī*) into corporeal symbols, parables and expressions in the Arabic language. These contextualized symbols and parables comprise the Qur'ān and the *sharī'a*. Based on this revelatory model, Khusraw concluded that the Prophet Muhammad himself created the Arabic Qur'ān as a discourse of sounds, letters, verses and *sūras*. In making this claim, Khusraw evoked standard Mu'tazilī arguments for the createdness of the Qur'ān:

Today what is written [of the Qur'ān] in the codices (*maṣāḥif*) consists of chapters (*sūras*) composed of verses (*āyāt*), which are composed of words, which in turn are composed of letters. Something composed of many things is created. Thus, today what is written in the codices (*maṣāḥif*) is created. However, when it was revealed to the heart of the Prophet it was uncreated. However, when he expressed it in the Arabic language, according to God's Command, it became created, because he was created and the created has no power except over the created. Were the Qur'an uncreated, today people would not have power over it and would not have become aware of it.¹³⁹⁴

Khusraw agreed with Ash'arīs, Māturīdīs, Mu'tazilīs, and the Brethren of Purity regarding the fact that the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sounds, letters, words, and verses is created. In fact, Khusraw maintained that can call the Qur'ān uncreated or created, depending on what one takes the term *qur'ān* refers to. If *qur'ān* means the Arabic sounds, letters, verses and chapters, then it is created. However, if by *qur'ān*, one is speaking of the spiritual inspiration or the Revelatory Principles (God's Speech and Writing), then the Qur'ān is not technically created, since the term "created" only applies to corporeal things. As it will be recalled, the Ash'arīs held a similar view about the meaning of the term *qur'ān* – it may be used to designate the Arabic recitation (*qirā'a*) or the uncreated Speech of God. In either case, however, the distinctively Ismaili dimension of Khusraw's view is that the Prophet Muhammad created the Arabic Qur'ān.

¹³⁹⁴ Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, 72.

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Khusraw found further evidence for the creative role of the Prophet Muhammad in producing the Arabic Qur'ān within the Qur'ān's frequent authorial voice shifts between first person plural, first person singular, and third person singular. In his view, the Qur'ān employs the first-person plural "We" voice because the Prophet is intimately involved in the formation of the Qur'ān's discourse and, therefore, his prophetic agency finds expression in "We" pronoun. As Khusraw explained, "the Messengers invited people to the Oneness of God. They conveyed to them the message of the Universal Soul by the divine support of the Universal Intellect from the Divine Word (*payghām-i naḥs-i kull bi-ta'yīd-i 'aql az kalimat-i bārī*). Therefore, it became necessary for the Messengers [to use the expressions] 'We said so' and 'We created so,' in order that it may not be a lie."¹³⁹⁵ This means that the Qur'ānic "We" is not the direct voice of God, but is an address mediated through multiple spiritual and corporeal agents in the Revelatory Process – such as the Universal Intellect, Universal Soul, the Speaker Prophet, and the Founder.

Wherever in the Qur'an God says "We did such" or "We created such" or "We said such", in all these cases it must be known that God speaks about two spiritual *ḥudūd* [the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul] or two physical *ḥudūd* [the *nāṭiq* and the *asās*]. Take for instance [the verse] where God says: "When We said to the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves to Adam,'" (2:34) the expressions "we said" and "we did" are only permissible [for] a group. The masses use it for themselves [and] as an expression of reverence, as when a king says "we command such" or "we say such" to [demonstrate] his greatness, even though he is no more than one person. The possessors of truth say that when one person speaks he should say "I did so", but if he says "we did so," he would have uttered a lie. [Similarly], he who says that God refers to His ipseity by using the word ["We"] which is used for a group, he would have lied against Him.¹³⁹⁶

In making this argument, Khusraw entirely rejected the most prevalent view, common in his day and in modern times, that the Qur'ān's "We" voice is the voice of God in the royal plural. He believed it was illogical to maintain that the Qur'ān truly described God, who is absolutely one and simple, in the plural. Instead, he maintained, the "We" voice refers to the hierarchical ranks

¹³⁹⁵ Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 108. Persian text, 70. I have slightly modified the published translation.

¹³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

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(*ḥudūd*) of the World of Religion. Along the same lines, when the Qur'ān uses the second person singular “I” or the third person singular (“God, “your Lord”, He”, etc.), the essential content of those words belongs to one rank (*ḥadd*) in the World of Religion. For example, Khusraw maintained that the entity who Moses saw in the burning bush and told him “I am your Lord” was the Universal Soul: “And [in those verses] where God says ‘I said so,’ He speaks about only one rank (*ḥadd*), as [in the verse]: ‘*Verily I, I am your Lord, so take off your shoes*’ (Q. 20:12). This is the speech of the Universal Soul to Moses, because the Lord (*parvardīgār*) of the Speaker Prophets is the Universal Soul.”¹³⁹⁷ In another example, Khusraw said that “the Sustainer” (*al-rabb*) in Q. 6:30 is the Universal Intellect.¹³⁹⁸

All Ismaili thinkers affirmed that the Qur'ān is miraculously inimitable (*mu'jiz*) with respect to its literary arrangement (*naẓm*) and inner meaning, while also attributing its composition to the Prophet Muhammad. This claim, however, obscures the difference between the Prophet Muhammad's Qur'ānic speech transmitted in the Qur'ānic *muṣḥaf* and his extra-Qur'ānic speech transmitted as prophetic reports (*khābar*): if both the Qur'ān and prophetic speech are the divinely inspired words of Muhammad, how are they different? Prior Ismaili thinkers did not explain this difference apart from specifying that the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a* are different Revelatory Products. Khusraw, however, directly addressed the all-important distinction between the Qur'ān and Muhammad's prophetic speech in a chapter of his *Feast for the Brethren*.¹³⁹⁹ He was perhaps prompted by developments in Sunni *kalām* that we saw in Chapter 5, where Sunni theologians

¹³⁹⁷ Ibid., 108. Persian text, 70. I have slightly altered the translation.

¹³⁹⁸ Ibid., 109. Nāṣir-i Khusraw generally interprets various Qur'ānic divine names as references to the Universal Intellect and Soul. This is the subject of an unpublished paper of mine.

¹³⁹⁹ Khusraw, *Khawān al-ikhwān*, 220-226, “On the difference between the Qur'ān and the reported speech (*khābar*) of the Messenger.”

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drew clear lines between the Arabic Qur'ān as inimitable, verbatim, and recited revelatory discourse and the Prophetic Sunna as non-recited and non-verbatim revelatory speech.

Khusraw began by observing that the human speech produced by the rational soul is comprised of different levels or ranks, culminating in the most polished utterances: “The *telos* of the rational soul is that it utters meaningful discourse in polished expressions without excess – either in rhyming prose like the orations of the Arabs or rhyming and metered such as poetry, which is weighed with the scales of the intellect.”¹⁴⁰⁰ Khusraw ranked poetry as a higher and nobler form of speech than prose. For him, poetic speech is the highest form of discourse that human beings can produce with their rational soul. To illustrate this, Khusraw likened poetry and prose to the fruits and leaves of a tree. The fruit and leaves have similar features outwardly but the fruit is internally sweet and is therefore superior. Due to its high status, even the best poets cannot utter in poetry all the time and will often need to speak in prose – since composing poetry is a “peak performance” of the human soul and nothing in the corporeal world can always exist at its peak.¹⁴⁰¹ Khusraw then explained the difference between the Prophet's divinely inspired speech forms – the Arabic Qur'ān and his extra-qur'ānic speech called prophetic report (*khabar*) – by analogy with human poetry and prose:

Thus, by analogy, the Speech of God from the soul of the Prophet is in the same rank as poetry from the rational soul, and likewise the reported prophetic speech (*khabar*) from the soul of the Speaker Prophet is in the rank of the other discourses from the rational soul. The Speech of God from the soul of the Messenger is in the same rank as the fruit from the fruit tree, where the leaves have same form as fruit but not its scent and taste and it is likewise that the reported prophetic speech of the Messenger [is in the rank of the leaves of the fruit tree]. This means that it [prophetic speech] is the Speech of God, even though the souls of the people do not have the same desire to preserve the reported prophetic speech that they do to preserve the Speech of God. The Speech of God from the Holy Spirit is in the same rank as meaning bearing discourse conveyed in letters and words from

¹⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 223.

¹⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 224.

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the rational soul, whereas the reported prophetic speech of the Messenger from the Holy Spirit is in the rank of human sounds from the rational soul.¹⁴⁰²

In the above quote, Khusraw referred to the Arabic Qur'ān as the Speech of God and the teachings of the Prophet as *khabr* (prophetic report); yet he maintained that both the Qur'ān and the prophetic speech come from “the soul of the Prophet”. Khusraw accepted the miraculous inimitability (*i jāz*) of the Arabic Qur'ān on Ismaili terms, based on his teacher al-Mu'ayyad's views seen earlier. In his view, the prophetic miracles (*mu'jizāt*) including the Qur'ān are inimitable for other humans in the same way that human crafts and rational speech are inimitable for animals. The inimitability of the Qur'ān outwardly demonstrates the superiority of the Prophet's divinely supported soul over other human souls.¹⁴⁰³ Drawing on various analogies, Khusraw specified that the Qur'ān is nobler in literary status than the prophetic speech in the same way that poetry superior to prose among human beings. Likewise, if the Prophet's soul is like a tree, his speech that takes the form of the Qur'ān is his fruit and his prophetic speech is his leaves. If the Prophet's soul and speech forms are analogized with normal human speech, the Qur'ān is like rational discourse while the prophetic speech is like non-rational sounds that humans can also utter but which lack meaning. In sum, Khusraw differentiated the Prophet Muhammad's qur'ānic speech and extra-qur'ānic speech by situating them respectively as superior and inferior speech forms of divinely inspired prophetic discourse.

In summary, we can see that Khusraw envisioned the primary Revelatory Principle as God's Speech (*kalām Allāh; qawl-i Khudā*) – which is God's eternal creative act of Command (*amr*) or Origination (*ibdā'*) – and the secondary Revelatory Principle as God's Writing, which is

¹⁴⁰² Ibid., 224-225.

¹⁴⁰³ Ibid., 229.

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the manifestation of God's Speech in the form of archetypal essences or intelligible forms originated in the Universal Intellect, emanated upon the Universal Soul, and reflected within the corporeal world. He identified God's Writing as the Transcendent Kitāb described throughout the Qur'ān as well as the qur'ānic *kalimāt Allāh* that are never exhausted or altered. Khusraw situated the Prophets as revelatory agents who receive non-verbal divine inspiration (*wahy*), divine support (*ta'yīd*), and illumination and thereby "read" God's Writing for others. The Prophet Muhammad read the Divine Writing and recited its contents for his community in the form of symbol filled Arabic recitations that comprise the Arabic Qur'ān. He also conveyed the Divine Writing in the form of extra-qur'ānic prophetic guidance that includes his *sharī'a*. Thus, the Qur'ān and the prophetic speech (*khobar*) of Muhammad are both Revelatory Products that manifest God's Writing.

The Imam as the Speaking *Kitāb* and his Revelatory Hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*):

Nāṣir-i Khusraw presented his general argument for the necessity of the Imam as the successor to the divinely inspired authority of the Prophet Muhammad in the first two chapters of *The Face of Religion*. In articulating his position, Khusraw rejected the theological legitimacy of the Qur'ān existing in a scriptural format and instead pressed the case for the continuous and real-time guidance of a living Imamate. In doing so, he emphasized how the Qur'ān's original format was that of a piecemeal recitation mediated by and interpreted by the Prophet – which necessitates a similar model of divine guidance for all believers in future periods:

Is it possible that God sent the Messenger to the people in order that he guide them to His Pleasure and that the Messenger in his own time guides those who are present in his time-period and [then] when he departs from the world, *abandon* people without guidance? If they answer that the Book of God is the guide of the people, we say to him that the Book does not speak without a speaker. If he says that the Book is sufficient without an expounder, he rejects the Speech of God as He said in His saying: "*And We sent down to you the Reminder so that you may explain to the people what has been sent down to them in order that they may reflect*" (16:44). Thus we say that He commanded

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them to reflect upon that so they realize that – when in the time of the Messenger, the Messenger was the expounder of the Book (*bayān-kunanda-yi kitāb*), today it must also be the case that [there is an expounder of the Book]. God commanded the Messenger to recite the Book to the people in intervals, meaning according to the time, and He did not command giving the Book to them so that they read it [themselves], just as He said: “*And a qur'ān (recitation), which We have divided (into parts) in order that you may recite it to people at intervals*” (17:106).¹⁴⁰⁴

Khusraw's above statement looks like a clear riposte to the Sunni *ḥadīth* of the “Pen and Paper” examined in Chapter 2; this is the account in which 'Umar rejected the Prophet Muhammad's request to leave a written will for the guidance of his community. 'Umar proclaimed that “we have the Qur'ān, the Book of God is sufficient for us.” In contrast to 'Umar's claim that “the Book is sufficient”, Khusraw argued that God must appoint a person after the Prophet Muhammad to serve as the expounder of the Qur'ān to the people in the same way that the Prophet both recited and expounded it for his community in real-time. Khusraw also voiced his opposition to the compilation of the Qur'ān into a physical scripture: “God commanded the Messenger to recite the Book to the people in intervals, meaning according to the time, and He did not command giving the Book to them so that they read it.” From Khusraw's perspective, the compilation of the Qur'ān into an authoritative scripture not only lacked a divine mandate, but it also undermined the religious authority of the Imam who succeeds the Prophet Muhammad.

In contrast to Sunni scripturalist models where the Arabic Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunna as contained in sound *ḥadīth* hold supreme religious authority, Khusraw recognized the Imam descended from the Prophet Muhammad's *Ahl al-Bayt* as the divinely appointed person who practically continues the Prophet's guidance and intercessory functions among future generations as a matter of logical necessity. To this effect, he quoted Q. 7:69, “Are you not surprised that there has come to you a reminder from your Lord through a man amongst you, so that he may warn

¹⁴⁰⁴ Khusraw, *Wajh-i Dīn*, 22-23.

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you”; in Khusraw’s view, this verse describes the mandates of the Prophet and the Imams equally: “Thus, we say that this single individual is the Prophet in his own era, his Legatee (*waṣī*) in his own era, and the Imam of the Time in every time-period. As long as the world exists, the human species will never be without one individual who is distinguished by this rank, just as the animal genus does not subsist without the human species.”¹⁴⁰⁵

Like his Ismaili predecessors, Khusraw depicted the Imam as the living and speaking *kitāb Allāh* and grounded this claim in his metaphysics of Qur’ānic Revelation. We have already seen how both al-Mu’ayyad and Khusraw designated the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul respectively as God’s Pen and Tablet where the latter is the celestial receptacle of God’s Writing (*kitāb Allāh*) and the archetypal impressions (*nuqūsh*) of all existents. In the eternal spiritual world, the Intellect as Pen inscribes the Divine Writing upon the Universal Soul. As Khusraw explained, this process is repeated and mirrored in the earthly World of Religion where the Speaker Prophet “inscribes” the spiritual form of the Qur’ān from divine inspiration upon the soul of his Legatee, Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: “Just as the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul are the Pen and the Tablet of God, in the world of religion the Prophet is also God’s Pen, who has written on this page of the body, as we see. And the Noble Qur’an too is the *kitāb* of God written by this pen, which is the Prophet, on this tablet, which is his Legatee.”¹⁴⁰⁶ In Khusraw’s framing, the Prophet Muhammad and Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib function in the world as the mirrors of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul; they are the human manifestations of the *kitāb Allāh* and the *kalimāt Allāh*. On the basis of this mirroring, Khusraw identified Imam ‘Alī as the *Umm al-Kitāb* – a Qur’ānic name for the Transcendent Kitāb

¹⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 203.

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that later became a name for *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* – and described every Imam from 'Alī's progeny as the living *kitāb* in his time: “Outwardly, the *Umm al-Kitāb* is [*Sūrat*] *al-Ḥamd* and esoterically, it is 'Alī the Favorite (*al-murtaḍā*); this because the *kitāb* is the Imams.”¹⁴⁰⁷

The principal function of 'Alī as the Prophet's Legatee and the Imams who succeed him is to unveil the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Arabic Qur'ān, the *sharī'a*, and the corporeal world. While Khusraw fully affirmed the nature of *ta'wīl* as a revelatory exegesis in common with prior Ismaili thinkers, his remarks on the subject also featured two distinctive elements. First, Khusraw framed *ta'wīl* as a hermeneutics of reconciling differences and inconsistencies within the Qur'ān, the *sharī'a*, the religious scriptures of other faith communities, natural science and Greek philosophy, and Ismaili *da'wa* teachings. Second, he situated the Ismaili believer's acquisition of *ta'wīl* as a spiritual practice that facilitates the return and assimilation of his human soul to the Universal Soul.

Khusraw formally defined *ta'wīl* by situating the word's etymological meaning of “returning something to its origin” within his revelatory framework: “*Ta'wīl* is to return the word back to the origin. The origin of all existents is the Origination (*ibdā'*), which is united to the Intellect, and the Intellect is that which divinely supports all of [God's] Messengers (*ta'wīl bāz burdan-i sukhan bāshad bi-avval va avval-i hama-yi mawjūdāt ibdā' ast kū bi-'aql mutahhad-ast va mu'ayyid-i hama-yi rasūlān 'aql ast*).”¹⁴⁰⁸ This means that *ta'wīl* is a hermeneutical method of “returning” the symbolic truths of the Revelatory Products to the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of the Revelatory Principle. The Revelatory Principles are God's act of Origination (God's Speech) and the Universal Intellect and Soul (the loci of God's Writing), which are the “origin” (*avval*) of all

¹⁴⁰⁷ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 165. See also p. 333 for the Imams being called *kitāb*.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 112. I have re-translated the passage based on the Persian edition in *Hikmatain*, 116.

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existents. The Prophets perceived the Revelatory Principles through divine support (*ta'yīd*) and “condensed” their contents into revelatory expressions (*tanzīl*). The revelatory discourse produced by Muhammad consists of symbols and parables that he tailored to his community’s temporal and cultural contexts; these similitudes have an inner meaning that constitute the spiritual truths of divine inspiration.¹⁴⁰⁹ As a hermeneutical act, *ta'wīl* “decodes” the revelatory symbols so as to unveil the original spiritual meanings that the Prophets had “encoded” in the first place: “Thus, *tanzīl* is to make the subtle into the dense, and *ta'wīl* means to make the dense into the subtle.”¹⁴¹⁰ In this context, much of the *ta'wīl* that Khusraw elucidated throughout his writings is a revelatory exegesis of major Qur'ānic verses and objects, ritual gestures in the *sharī'a*, and various natural phenomena like celestial bodies, precious metals, or the human body in which they are explained as symbols for the qualities or contents of the Revelatory Principles (God’s Word, Universal Intellect, Universal Soul) and the idealized Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy (the Speaker Prophet, Legatee, Imam, *ḥujja*, *dā'ī*). In *The Face of Religion*, Khusraw explained that prayer gestures like prostration (*sujūd*) and genuflection refer to the believer’s recognition of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul in the spiritual world and his obedience to the Imam and his *bāb* or supreme *ḥujja* in the corporeal world;¹⁴¹¹ he presented the ritual of fasting for the thirty days in the month of Ramaḍān as the believer’s witnessing to the cosmic status of thirty ranks of the World of Religion – the Intellect, Soul, *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl*, the seven Speaker Prophets, seven Legatees, seven Imams, and the *bāb*, *ḥujja*, *dā'ī*, and *ma'dhūn*;¹⁴¹² and he explained the numerical structure

¹⁴⁰⁹ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 61-62.

¹⁴¹⁰ Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 102.

¹⁴¹¹ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 202-203.

¹⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 189.

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of the *Shahāda* – with its two sections (negation and affirmation), three distinct letters (*alif, lām, hā*), four words (*lā, ilāha, illā, Allāh*), seven syllables, and twelve letters (in total) – as a symbolic representation of the ranks of the World of Religion, consisting of the pair of the Universal Intellect and Soul, the three celestial intermediaries of *Jadd, Faṭḥ*, and *Khayāl*, the four highest earthly ranks of the Speaker Prophet, Legatee, Imam, and *ḥujja*, the seven Imams of a minor cycle, and the twelve *ḥujjas* under each Imam.¹⁴¹³

Khusraw mostly employed *ta'wīl* to reconcile inconsistencies and contradictions that appear when one reads the Qur'ān literally and when one compares the various Revelatory Products composed by prior Prophets as transmitted among other religious communities: “Only through *ta'wīl* can the differences of opinion as well as the ambiguities which are in the Book be reconciled.”¹⁴¹⁴ For example, Khusraw rightly observed that taking everything that the Qur'ān says about God at face value results in contradiction, anthropomorphism, and the negation of God's oneness: on one hand, the Qur'ān says that “nothing is like Him”; on the other hand, it speaks of God as possessing a face, hands, a side, and various human qualities like anger, vengeance, pleasure, etc. The qur'ānic discourse about God requires *ta'wīl* in order to avoid the contradictory notion that God is both absolutely unique and similar to His creatures.¹⁴¹⁵ Khusraw also cited the examples of qur'ānic punishment stories where God destroyed the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shu'ayb, and Lot for their disobedience to His Messengers and their various misdeeds. As Khusraw explained, the literal meaning of these qur'ānic stories is illogical and must be rejected

¹⁴¹³ Ibid., 111-113.

¹⁴¹⁴ Khusraw, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 64.

¹⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 64-65.

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on the grounds that everyone dies including God's Prophets; if God's punishment merely entails physical bodily death, then one must conclude that God must have punished His Prophets too: "God caused these peoples, as well as their Prophets – Hūd and Shu'ayb and Ṣāliḥ – to suffer bodily death. What then was the difference between the death of a *kāfir* and that of the Prophets?" These stories must be understood through *ta'wīl*, through which their true meaning emerges – that God punished these communities by allowing them to die spiritually and intellectually not physically: "We hold that the destruction which God pronounces over 'Ād, Thamūd, and the people of al-Rass is no bodily destruction or physical death, rather, it is the death of ignorance and error which makes eternal punishment inescapable." The story of Noah's flood and the construction of the Ark must be understood similarly through *ta'wīl*: "God does not desire the destruction of sinners through physical death.... Noah's Ark is not a thing of wood but the Prophet's household; Noah's flood is not of water but, instead, of ignorance and waywardness."¹⁴¹⁶

Khusraw also framed *ta'wīl* as a direct expression of the essential truth and unitary essence of all Revelatory Products composed by the prior Prophets. To this effect he quoted Q. 3:184/35:25 – "And if they belie you, then surely those before them had also belied their Prophets who had come to them with proofs, writings, and the luminous *kitāb*." Khusraw observed that this qur'ānic verse mentions the Prophets in the plural because their Revelatory Products are all different with respect to the outward meaning (*zāhir*). However, the Qur'ān here speaks of the Imams, who are the lords of revelatory hermeneutics (*khudāvand-i ta'wīl*), by using the singular word "*kitāb*" because "the meaning of the *kitābs* (*kitāb-ha*) and the composition (*ta'līf*) of the religious laws is one however

¹⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 47.

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much their actions and forms mutually differ in expression (*bi-lafẓ*).”¹⁴¹⁷ In other words, the luminous *kitāb* refers to the higher level truths of the unitary Revelatory Principle that are symbolically encoded within various Revelatory Products. Khusraw drew forth an important implication of his universalist idea of revelation as follows:

The subsistence of humanity depends upon the subsistence of the Qur'ān. This is because every person in the world is the proprietor of his own possessions due to the Qur'ān and due to the rulings (*aḥkām*) which are within it.... If someone said that we see many people in a beneficial state among whom there is no Qur'ān – such as the Romans, the Russians, the Indians, and others – then we respond to him saying that for every group of people among whom there is a divinely ordained authority (*sultān*), it must be known that God's *kitāb* is among them and that all of God's *kitābs* are the Qur'ān without any difference. Whatever the ignorant recognize as differences within the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an are not differences with respect to meaning, but differ only with respect to the exoteric aspect (*ẓāhir*) of the expressions (*lafẓ*), the similitudes (*mathal*) and symbols (*ramz*). Thus, the Gospel is with the Romans, the Torah is with the Russians, and the Scrolls of Abraham are with the Indians.¹⁴¹⁸

Since there is only one *kitāb* at the level of the Revelatory Principle, which is the essence of all Revelatory Products, Khusraw claimed that every religious community has access to the spiritual essence of the Qur'ān through their own scripture. This allowed Khusraw to take an ecumenical approach to other religious traditions, because they have some access to the real-truths of the Revelatory Principle through whatever they possess of the divine guidance brought by prior Prophets. It is the science of *ta'wīl* or revelatory exegesis, in Khusraw's view, that brings these universal revelatory truths to light.

Finally, in a manner quite similar to his teacher al-Mu'ayyad, Khusraw situated the believer's acquisition of *ta'wīl* as a necessary religious practice in the perfection of his or her soul and its journey to the Universal Soul. This spiritual movement is initiated at the level of the Revelatory Principle through the Universal Soul: “The Universal Soul, by its creation of this world, has made its subtle

¹⁴¹⁷ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 64.

¹⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

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knowledge dense, and then commanded the Messengers to give spiritual knowledge to people through speech, by way of the dense *sharī'a* and concrete parables.”¹⁴¹⁹ The Universal Soul's creation of the corporeal world is the primordial revelation through which God's Writing is manifested in the form of natural existents and human souls. In dispensing divine inspiration to the Prophets, who translate it into Revelatory Products, the Universal Soul facilitates the perfection of the human souls that it creates. This process of “soul making”, however, is something that every believer undertakes individually – by practicing the *sharī'a* and acquiring the science of *ta'wīl*:

When man strives to put the *sharī'a* into practise, attains [understanding of] the science of *ta'wīl*, transforms the dense into the subtle, and uses both his organs, the body and the soul, which are given to him [to attain knowledge], he becomes like the Universal Soul. The Universal Soul had the knowledge, then it worked; man works, then acquires the knowledge, thus becoming like the Universal Soul.... Thus, when man does work with knowledge, according to the command (*farmān*) of the Messenger of his cycle, and obeys the lord [Imam] of his time, he becomes like the Universal Soul, and when his soul leaves the body, it returns to the higher world, where it becomes sovereign over this world and rules it.¹⁴²⁰

In the above passage, Khusraw depicted how *ta'wīl* plays into the individual Ismaili practitioner's spiritual and existential journey towards the Universal Soul. The believer must learn the science of *ta'wīl* while also practicing the *sharī'a* – this being a marriage of knowledge and action (*ilm va 'amal*). Through undertaking this double worship (*ibādatayn*), the believer molds and constructs his or her individual human soul into a microcosmic image of the Universal Soul, thereby returning to the Universal Soul. Seen in this way, the process of *ta'wīl* – which literally means “to return something to the origin” – turns out to be a two-fold revelatory hermeneutic with an exegetical and existential dimension. As a science of revelatory exegesis, *ta'wīl* “returns” the symbols of the Revelatory Products to the realities of the Revelatory Principles; as a spiritual practice, *ta'wīl* “returns” the human soul to the Universal Soul from which it emanated by

¹⁴¹⁹ Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation*, 103.

¹⁴²⁰ Ibid.

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rendering the human soul into the likeness of its origin (*awwal*). In other words, *ta'wīl* in the fifth/eleventh century Ismaili thought of al-Mu'ayyad and Khusraw is a hermeneutical engagement with Qur'ānic Revelation through which the interpreter both epistemically and existentially “returns” to the Revelatory Principle.

Conclusion:

In summary, Nāṣir-i Khusraw developed a model of Qur'ānic Revelation that was generally in line with those of prior Ismaili *dā'īs* while also displaying a number of distinctive features. Khusraw distinguished between God's Speech or Word as the primary Revelatory Principle and God's Writing as the secondary Revelatory Principle. He defined God's Writing as the real *kitāb Allāh* consisting of intelligible archetypes that exist in the Universal Intellect and hierarchically manifest in the Universal Soul and the corporeal world. He described the Divine Writing as the source of all divine guidance and decrees that God communicates to His creatures. Khusraw's idea of God's Writing very much echoes the earliest qur'ānic ideas of *kitāb* as divine prescription and the Transcendent Kitāb as the locus of God's knowledge, guidance, records, and decrees. He explicitly identified the qur'ānic terms *kitāb* and *kalimāt Allāh* with this Divine Writing. In line with this framework, Khusraw situated the Prophets as the “readers” of God's Writing and depicted the existence of the Prophet among humanity as being analogous to the existence of the human species within the animal genus. In terms of the Revelatory Process, Khusraw dismissed the Sunni idea of the Qur'ān's verbatim dictation by Gabriel as erroneous; he instead defined *wahy* as a non-verbal divine inspiration that all human beings receive partially as their innate human intellect and that the Prophet receives fully as divine support (*ta'yīd*) through the Holy Spirit. The divine inspiration is akin to a visionary apprehension or luminous perception through which the Prophet “reads”

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God's Writing and understands God's guidance. In other words, the Prophet apprehends the secondary Revelatory Principle in a direct way. In the second stage of the Revelatory Process, the Prophet conveys and translates the contents of God's Writing into the Arabic language by encoding divine guidance and real-truths through symbols and parables that constitute his Revelatory Products – the Arabic Qur'ān and the *sharī'a*. This means that the Prophet Muhammad is a revelatory agent and plays a formative role in producing the Arabic Qur'ān, which is the divinely inspired words of Muhammad while also being the created expression (*ibāra*) of God's Speech and Writing as opposed to the verbatim Speech of God. The creative agency of Muhammad is something that Khusraw saw as reflected in the Qur'ān's use of the first person plural voice where the "We" includes the person of the Prophet as a speaker. Following from this model of revelation, Khusraw depicted the Ismaili Imam as the divinely inspired expounder of the Arabic Qur'ān, which was never meant to be compiled into a publicly accessible scripture. As the speaking *kitāb* of God, the Imam is responsible for unveiling the *ta'wīl* (revelatory hermeneutics and exegesis) of the Revelatory Products through his hierarchy of *hujjas* and *dā'īs*. In Khusraw's revelatory framework, the function of *ta'wīl* is two-fold. The intellectual dimension of *ta'wīl* entails a revelatory exegesis in which the contents of the Qur'ān, *sharī'a*, and the natural world are shown to symbolize one of the ranks (*hudūd*) of the Revelatory Principles – God's Speech, the Intellect and Soul, and the idealized Ismaili *da'wa*. The spiritual dimension of *ta'wīl* pertains to the actualization of the human soul towards perfection. When the believer acquires the science of *ta'wīl* and enacts the *sharī'a*, then this *ta'wīl* transforms his soul into a manifestation of the Universal Soul and facilitates the soul's "return" to its celestial origin (*awwal*).

7.4 From the Night of Destiny (*Laylat al-Qadr*) to the Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al-Qiyāma*): The “End” of Qur'ānic Revelation

The Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyaama*), from very early on, was one of the most prominent and frequently mentioned motifs in the Qur'ān (see Q. 64:9, 40:32, 37:21, 7:14, 1:4, 50:44, 70:43, 40:18, 30:12, 14:4, 6:30, 6:40, 7:187). In many qur'ānic creedal statements, the Last Day (*yawm al-ākhir*) appears alongside the mention of God, the Prophets, the *kitāb*, and the angels as an object of faith (see Q. 2:8, 2:62, 2:126, 2:177, 2:185, 2:228, 2:232, 2:264, 3:114, 4:38,-39, 4:59, etc.).¹⁴²¹

The predominant understanding of the Day of Resurrection among qur'ānic exegetes, *ḥadīth* folk, and *kalām* theologians is a more or less literal reading of the qur'ānic data alongside certain *ḥadīths*. In this account, the Resurrection (*qiyaama*) is preceded by several prophetic and cosmic signs such as the quaking of the earth, the dispersion of the stars and planets, the merging of the sun and moon, and the pouring forth of the seas. The Angel Isrāfīl then blows the trumpet and thereby kills all the creatures in the earth. This is followed by a second blast of the trumpet, which “resurrects” all creatures in bodies – this being the Resurrection (*qiyaama*) proper. God then gathers His creatures and executes His final judgment.¹⁴²²

The concept of Resurrection has been a central feature of Ismaili theology and hermeneutics throughout the formative, classical, and post-classical periods. In contrast to the literalistic understanding of the *yawm al-qiyaama* prevalent among many Muslims, the Ismailis conceived *qiyaama* as the spiritual culmination of a cosmic, revelatory, and historical process.

¹⁴²¹ For this summary of the Qur'ānic mentions of *qiyaama*, see Faquir Muhammad Hunzai, “Salient Aspects of the Doctrine of the Qā'im according to Nāṣir-i Khusraw,” *Ishraq* 4 (2013): 304-325.

¹⁴²² Louis Gardet, “Qiyāma,” in Peri Bearman et al., (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (Leiden: Brill, 2010), consulted online on 5/23/2019: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0526.

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According to al-Sijistānī, “every condition of ‘the Hour’ described in the Book is a spiritual and intellectual matter.”¹⁴²³ In the Ismaili view, the Resurrection is the ultimate spiritual and revelatory event that God accomplishes through a messianic eschatological figure called the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* (Resurrector of the Resurrection) or Lord of Resurrection (*ṣāhib al-qiya'ma; khudāvand-i qiyāmat*). This figure, the “*Qā'im* from the progeny of Muhammad” (*qā'im āl Muḥammad*), was believed to be a future personality from the lineage of Shi'i Ismaili Imams. Many of the early Ismailis, as mentioned earlier, regarded their seventh Imam Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl as the *Qā'im* and awaited his re-appearance. But most Ismailis from the late fourth/tenth century onward accepted a continuous lineage of Ismaili Imams through the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs. The Resurrection, in their view, was still a future revelatory event and the *Qā'im*, who would be born from the lineage of Ismaili Imam-Caliphs, was still being awaited.

Jamel Velji has recently shown that Ismaili *qiyāma* discourses belong to the discursive genre of “apocalyptic” or “apocalypse” literature.¹⁴²⁴ Given that the Greek word *apokalypsis* means “unveiling” or “revelation”, I argue in this final section that the Ismaili Muslim vision of Resurrection is that of a consummate revelatory event that discloses the real-truths of the Revelatory Principle to humanity at large. The appearance of the *Qā'im* or Lord of Resurrection and his execution of the Resurrection is the completion of all Revelatory Processes in general and Qur'ānic Revelation in particular. Therefore, analyzing how Ismailis in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century understood the revelatory nature of Resurrection and the function of the Lord of Resurrection is essential to delineating the Ismaili understanding of Qur'ānic Revelation.

¹⁴²³ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt*, 240.

¹⁴²⁴ Velji, *An Apocalyptic History of the Early Fatimid Empire*.

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The distinctive feature of early Imami Shi'i and Ismaili eschatology is the direct identification of the figure of the *Qā'im* with the qur'ānic Day of Resurrection. For example, various specimens in early Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* straightforwardly identify the person of the *Qā'im* or *Mahdī* with “the Hour” (*al-sā'a*) (Q. 7:187, Q. 43:85, 47:18, 54:1, 33:63), the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyaama*), the Light of God (Q. 39:69), the descent of God within clouds (2:210, 89:22), the blowing of the Trumpet (74:8), the command (*amr*) of the Lord (16:33), the Day of the Appointed Time (*yawm al-waqt al-ma'lūm*) (Q. 15:38, 38:31), the Day of Decision (*yawm al-faṣl*, *yawm al-dīn*) (Q. 70:26, 74:46), and many other eschatological verses.¹⁴²⁵ The early Ismaili treatise *Kitāb al-Kashf*, whose authorship predates the rise of the Fatimid Caliphate, equally read various qur'ānic verses about the Day of Judgment as being descriptions of the awaited *Qā'im*. The “Last Day” (*yawm al-ākhir*) mentioned throughout the Qur'ān is declared to be the *Qā'im* himself: “And the Last Day is the *Mahdī*, the master of the age, blessings be upon him (*al-yawm al-ākhir al-mahdī ṣāhib al-zamān*).”¹⁴²⁶ Likewise, the *Qā'im* is the “Day of Decision” (*yawm al-faṣl*) through whom human beings are judged: “The Day of sorting is the *Mahdī*, may he be blessed, through whom God sorts between truth and falsehood, believer and denier. He is the appointed time of God's command and its fulfilment, and [he is] the seventh of the seven Speaker Prophets.”¹⁴²⁷ Interpreting the verse, “And your Lord shall come and the angels, rank upon rank (Q. 89:22), the *Kitāb al-Kashf* states: “‘And your Lord shall come’ means the *Qā'im*, God's blessings be upon

¹⁴²⁵ Omid Ghaemmaghami, “And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord” (Q 39:69): *Qā'im* and *qiyaama* in Shi'i Islam,” in Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson (eds.), *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 605-649.

¹⁴²⁶ *Kitāb al-Kashf*, quoted in Jamel Velji, “Apocalyptic Rhetoric and the Construction of Authority in Medieval Isma'ilism,” in Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson (eds.), *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 675-688: 678.

¹⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 679. Also quoted in Jamel Velji, *An Apocalyptic History*, 47.

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him, the Master of the age.”¹⁴²⁸ Another pre-Fatimid Ismaili work, *Kitāb al-Rushd wa l-hidāya* offers similar readings of qur'ānic eschatology. “God’s judgment” in Q. 16:1 “signifies the seventh Speaker Prophet...that is the time of his manifestation.”¹⁴²⁹ The “Hour” mentioned throughout the Qur'ān (7:187, 33:63, 79:42-6) is the *Qā'im*: “The Hour is the manifestation of the *Mahdī*, the Speaker Prophet, the seventh of the Speaker Prophets. God has concealed the time of his manifestation from His Prophet and the people.”¹⁴³⁰

For all the Ismaili *dā'īs* covered in the present study, the role of the Lord of Resurrection is primarily spiritual and metaphysical as opposed to merely political and worldly. The person of the *Qā'im* essentially accomplishes two revelatory acts – he unveils the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) from the domain of the Revelatory Principle consisting of God’s Speech, the Universal Intellect, and the Universal Soul to humanity at large; and he carries out God’s judgment (*faṣl*) or reckoning (*ḥisāb*) by dispensing spiritual reward and punishment to every human soul. The revelatory nature of the *Qā'im*’s role is evident in how the Ismaili *dā'īs* situated his earthly manifestation in relation to the prior Prophets and the Revelatory Principle. The predominant Ismaili exegesis of the biblical and qur'ānic story that God created the world in six days and rested or established His Throne on the seventh day is that the six days refer to the six Speaker Prophets and their respective historical cycles (*adwār*), each containing a succession of their respective Founders and Imams; the anticipated the seventh day of God’s Throne refers to the Lord of Resurrection and the special Cycle of Resurrection (*dawr al-qiyaama*) that he commences. The *Qā'im* is therefore positioned as

¹⁴²⁸ *Kitāb al-Kashf*, quoted in Velji, *An Apocalyptic History*, 54.

¹⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

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the climax of all prophetic revelation since Adam. Accordingly, the *Qā'im* mediates a Revelatory Process that is greater and fuller than what was revealed through the prior Speaker Prophets, who all foretold and warned about *Qā'im*'s appearance. According to al-Sijistānī and Khusraw, the *Qā'im* is the telos (*ghāya*) and perfection (*nihāya*) of the Prophets and the Imams and is, therefore, ontologically superior to them; he is also the Seal of the Imams (*khatam al-a'imma*).¹⁴³¹ As explained by al-Mu'ayyad, Friday – which is the “the day of assembly” – symbolizes the mission of Prophet Muhammad because his *sharī'a* “gathers” the laws of his predecessors while the holy day of the Sabbath symbolizes the Lord of Resurrection: “Saturday is the symbol (*mathal*) of the *Qā'im* of his descendants who is the completer of their powers and the perfecter of their allotments of divine support. He is the lord of the pure and majestic intellectual *da'wa* and his cycle is the cycle of peace (*rāḥa*), favor (*ni'ma*) and compassion (*raḥma*).”¹⁴³² Likewise, Nāṣir-i Khusraw described the *Qā'im*'s arrival on earth as “the Great Day (*rūz-i buzurḡ*) in which subtle souls are awakened and hidden forms become manifest through the appearance of the Lord of Resurrection (*khudāvand-i qiyāmat*).”¹⁴³³ Khusraw also framed the Lord of Resurrection as the ultimate manifestation of the Revelatory Principle that is the Word of God: “We say that the completion of the manifestation of the Creator's Word (*kalimat-i bārī*) must occur through the Lord of Resurrection.”¹⁴³⁴ According to al-Sijistānī, the *Qā'im* is responsible for the total unveiling (*kashf*) of the hidden truths behind all revelatory discourses revealed by the former Prophets. In doing so, the *Qā'im* unifies all the otherwise conflicting and disparate Revelatory Products in light of their

¹⁴³¹ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt*, 259-262.

¹⁴³² Al-Mu'ayyad, *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, Vol. 2 (Ḥamīd al-Dīn Edition), 448.

¹⁴³³ Khusraw, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, 214.

¹⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

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single Revelatory Principle: “The *Qā'im* brings together the scattered, divergent, and differentiated religious laws through unveiling their real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) and through their bringing together they become like one *sharī'a* and their communities become like one community.”¹⁴³⁵ Likewise, the qur'ānic verse, “the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord”, means that “the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīlāt*) and real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) shall shine in the souls” through the light of the *Qā'im*.¹⁴³⁶

The actual form of the *Qā'im*'s revelation of the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of God's Speech consists of spiritual emanation and divine support (*ta'yīd*) as opposed to a verbal teaching or public doctrine. In other words, the *Qā'im* does not deliver a body of codified teachings or laws, but rather, opens up the flow of divine inspiration to all human souls, so they may each recognize real-truths directly. According to al-Sijistānī's account, the greatest allotment of God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) belongs to the *Qā'im*, who discloses it to human souls as “pure emanation” (*al-ifāda al-mahḍa*) by means of his own “pure soul” (*al-naḥs al-zakiyya*).¹⁴³⁷ Through his spiritual unveiling, the *Qā'im* allows human souls to connect to the “spiritual form” (*al-ṣūra al-rūḥāniyya*) that is the Universal Soul in the spiritual world.¹⁴³⁸ As Nāṣir-i Khusraw explained, the *Qā'im*'s light allows the believers living during his Cycle (*dawr*) to access the spiritual emanations from the Universal Intellect and Soul through the three spiritual intermediaries of *Jadd*, *Fath*, and *Khayāl*. For this reason, the *Qā'im*'s person and mission are symbolized by the *Īd al-Aḍḥā*, the festival of sacrifice, when the believers gather in public and openly rejoice:

¹⁴³⁵ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt*, 260.

¹⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 262.

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This 'Īd indicates the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* because through him the esoteric dimension (*bāṭin*) of the *sharī'a* will be manifest and the believers will be delivered from the torment of ignorance.... The *tawhīd* and grandeur of God will become manifest to the believers through him and the five *tabbīrs* [recited in the 'Īd *al-Adhā* prayer] mean that the believers in this world will receive benefits from the five spiritual ranks [Intellect, Soul, *Jadd*, *Fath*, *Khayāl*] in his time and will reach that [spiritual] world through the power of his light.¹⁴³⁹

If the *Qā'im*'s light allows the believers to receive knowledge from the Universal Intellect and Soul through the spiritual intermediaries, this effectively means that the stage of the Revelatory Process usually reserved for the Prophets is extended to others as well. In this respect, the *Qā'im*'s function is revelatory in nature because the real-truths and spiritual benefits of the Revelatory Principles become available to non-Prophets through his mediation. As al-Mu'ayyad recounts in one of his treatises, “the *Qā'im* overflows all of created beings (*al-khalā'iq*), from state (*hāl*) to state, and from degree to degree, whether concerning the uppermost ranks or those below him.”¹⁴⁴⁰

The *Qā'im*'s revelatory activity inaugurates a new dispensation or “Cycle” (*dawr*) – a thousand-year period of prophetic history on earth – in which the conditions of human life are radically different from the prophetic Cycles. Al-Sijistānī framed the Lord of Resurrection as the person who effects the transition from the “Cycle of Concealment” (*dawr al-satr*) to the “Cycle of Unveiling” (*dawr al-kashf*). Humanity prior to the Prophet Adam (who appeared some 6,000 years ago) lived in a Cycle of Unveiling when the spiritual knowledge and real-truths were directly perceptible by human beings without the need for exoteric symbols and religious laws. The prophetic mission of Adam began a Cycle of Concealment lasting thousand of years when real-truths and esoteric sciences are concealed through symbolic discourses and laws revealed by the Speaker Prophets. The *Qā'im*, however, returns humanity to its pre-Adamic access to unmediated

¹⁴³⁹ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 260-261.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 203.

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spiritual knowledge and inaugurates another Cycle of Unveiling in human history.¹⁴⁴¹ In the view of al-Mu'ayyad, the Lord of Resurrection ends the “Cycle of Practice” (*dawr al-'amal*) in which believers are required to practice the *sharī'a* and receive instruction from the Ismaili *da'wa* ranks of religion (*hudūd al-dīn*) and commences the “Cycle of Knowledge” (*dawr al-'ilm*). In the latter era, the *Qā'im*'s divine support (*ta'yīd*), as channeled through the Imam, reaches humanity at large, thus nullifying the need for the *sharī'a* and the Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy.¹⁴⁴² During the Cycle of Unveiling, the esoteric and philosophical sciences of religion, consisting of *ta'wīl* and metaphysical teachings, can be disclosed openly by the believers without the fear of persecution.¹⁴⁴³ On this point, the Brethren of Purity wrote that “the resurrection (*al-ba'ṭh*) is the emanation (*inbi'ath*) of sciences with neither secrecy nor concealment (*satr*) and their coming out from the Cycle of Concealment (*dawr al-satr*) into the Cycle of Unveiling (*dawr al-kashf*).”¹⁴⁴⁴

The *Qā'im*'s revelatory activity also includes his execution of divine judgment and recompense. Al-Sijistānī identified the *Qā'im* with the Day of Reckoning (*yawm al-ḥisāb*) and the Day of Decision (*yawm al-faṣl*).¹⁴⁴⁵ He also interpreted various qur'ānic verses about God executing His judgment as references to the *Qā'im*: “‘God shall judge between them on the Day of Resurrection’ (Q. 22:71) through the manifestation of the *Qā'im*.”¹⁴⁴⁶ “‘This is the Day of

¹⁴⁴¹ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt*, 289-290.

¹⁴⁴² See Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 202-203.

¹⁴⁴³ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt*, 279.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *al-Risāla al-jāmi'a*, quoted in Michael Ebstein, “Secrecy in Ismā'īlī Tradition and in the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-'Arabī,” *Journal Asiatique* 298.2 (2010): 303-343: 327-328. I have retranslated this phrase from the Arabic text provided by Ebstein.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt*, 258-262.

¹⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

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Decision; We have joined you with the ancients' (Q. 77:38) means the rank of the Qā'im."¹⁴⁴⁷

Nāṣir-i Khusraw described the six Speaker Prophets who bring *tanzīl* and *sharī'a* to their people as “commanders to action” like managers that order employees to perform physical work and likened the Lord of Resurrection to the owner who assesses everyone’s work and pays their wages. In this analogy, the six Speaker Prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad) correspond to the six directions of the corporeal world (above, below, right, left, front, back) due to the corporeal nature of their Revelatory Products while the *Qā'im* brings a non-corporeal reward and punishment:

Therefore, we say that when there are six directions for human beings with respect to the body, and the body performs action, and a commander of action came from each one of the (six) directions, from the wisdom of the intellect, it necessarily follows that nobody will come after who commands humankind to perform action. By the wisdom of the intellect from this demonstration that we have correctly shown, it follows that after Muhammad al-Muṣṭafā, no more Prophets will come. Since it is the habit or custom of human beings is that they perform work and they receive retribution from the commander, it necessarily follows that after [the Prophets], by God’s command, someone comes who gives the wages to the workers according to the measure of every one’s work: this is the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma*, who is not¹⁴⁴⁸ the lord of the *sharī'a*, but rather, he is the lord of reckoning who judges the deeds performed and gives recompense to the workers.¹⁴⁴⁹

In explaining the nature of the *Qā'im*’s distribution of reward and punishment, Khusraw explained that the spiritual light of the Lord of Resurrection resembles the nature of fire: “Both light and smoke come from fire, burning as well as comforting warmth. Warmth and light are the share of believers, and burning and smoke are the share of sinners.”¹⁴⁵⁰ Based on this analogy, the *Qā'im* emanates one and the same spiritual light upon all human souls. The more perfect souls whose spiritual form (*ṣūra*) resembles the Universal Soul will experience the *Qā'im*’s light as “warmth

¹⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 139.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Read *ast* as *nīst* for the sentence to make sense.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 62-63.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Khusraw, *Six Chapters*, English Text 85, Persian Text 66-67. I have slightly modified Ivanow’s translation.

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and light”, meaning tranquility (*rāḥa*) and divine support; the less spiritually developed souls, who are the sinners, will experience the same light of the *Qā'im* as “burning and smoke”, meaning torment and regret.

Several Ismaili *dā'īs* emphasized two major signs or indications of the Resurrection within the earthly World of Religion that indicate the arrival of the *Qā'im* and his spiritual unveiling (*kashf*): 1) the abolishment of the *sharī'a* of Prophet Muhammad, and 2) the discontinuation of the Ismaili *da'wa* ranks (*hudūd*) that provide religious instruction (*ta'līm*). According to al-Nu'mān, the *Qā'im* “abrogates all laws, he reveals their meaning and translates them” and, through the *Qā'im*, “God seals the era of works and opens the era of knowledge and requital.”¹⁴⁵¹ The Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu'izz, as recorded in the “Seven Day Prayers” attributed to him, likewise spoke of God abrogating the exoteric dimension (*zāhir*) of the *sharī'a* of Muhammad through the Lord of Resurrection.¹⁴⁵² In the *Ta'wīl al-sharī'a*, the same Imam explained that “the *Qā'im* repeals all preceding laws with his own law. But he does not create a new law; rather, he brings the inner meaning of the laws and the scriptures, pure and without admixture.”¹⁴⁵³ At the same time, however, the Ismailis distinguished between two types of *sharī'a*: 1) the rational (*'aqlī*) or ethical laws consisting of necessary prohibitions and prescriptions that human wellbeing depends on, like burying the dead, marriage, property laws, and laws against murder and theft; and 2) the imposed (*waḍ'ī*) laws consisting of rituals like ablution, prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage that are composed of symbolic gestures representing higher level truths and must be interpreted through revelatory

¹⁴⁵¹ Al-Nu'mān, quoted in Madelung, “The Imamate,” 106.

¹⁴⁵² Al-Mu'izz, quoted in Madelung, “The Imamate,” 108.

¹⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 110.

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hermeneutics.¹⁴⁵⁴ The Lord of Resurrection only abrogates the latter laws, the imposed *sharī'a* of ritual obligations, while the rational laws remain in place. According to Imam al-Mu'izz, God “by the *Qā'im*, will abrogate all the laws imposed by the prior Prophets with the exception of the rational laws (*al-'aqliyya*).”¹⁴⁵⁵ In other words, the *Qā'im* will inaugurate a new era free from the requirement to observe the worship rituals of the *sharī'a*, since believers will have access to the real-truths symbolized by this *sharī'a*.

The second major manifestation of the Resurrection enacted by the *Qā'im* is the disappearance of the ranks of religion (*ḥudūd al-dīn*) that make up the Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy. With the dawn of the Cycle of Resurrection, the Lord of Resurrection abolishes the formal Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy of *bābs* (gates), *ḥujjas* (proofs), and *dā'īs* (summoners) responsible for instructing the lower ranks of the Ismailis and summoning people to the Imam. According to al-Kirmānī, “the Great Resurrection (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) will arrive when the gates of teaching, *ta'līm*, will be closed and the *da'was* suspended by the Lord of the Resurrection because by that time the *da'wa* will attain its completion. He, the *Qā'im*, will suspend the hierarchy (*ḥudūd*) from their ranks due to the occurrence of instruction dispensing from them.”¹⁴⁵⁶ Likewise, Khusraw wrote that “the *da'wa* will not be severed from the *ḥujjas* – whose forelocks are the *dā'īs* – until the manifestation of the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma*.”¹⁴⁵⁷ He further added that “in the age of Resurrection, the people will

¹⁴⁵⁴ For this distinction, see al-Sijistānī, *Ithbāt*, 278 and Daniel De Smet, “Loi rationnelle et loi imposée. Les deux aspects de la Šarī'a dans le chiisme ismaélien des Xe et XIe siècles,” *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 61 (2008): 515-544.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Al-Mu'izz, quoted in De Smet, “Loi rationnelle et loi impose,” 532.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Al-Kirmānī, quoted in Wladimir Ivanow, *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill for The Ismaili Society, 1948), 157. I have adjusted the transliteration for consistency.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 286.

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dispense with honoring the ranks (*hudūd*) in the corporeal world except for the honor of the Lord of Resurrection.”¹⁴⁵⁸ In other words, with the appearance of the Lord of Resurrection, the Imam's divine guidance and instruction are no longer mediated by the Ismaili *da'wa* teachers and believers will instead be guided by the Imam directly.

The coming of the *Qā'im* and the initiation of the Cycle of Resurrection formed the backdrop to the Ismaili Muslim exegesis of the *Laylat al-Qadr* (Night of Destiny), one of the most revered and enigmatic themes in the Qur'ān (Q. 44, 97) and the *ḥadīth* literature. As seen in earlier chapters, the *Laylat al-Qadr* (Q. 97) was widely interpreted by Sunni exegetes and *kalām* theologians as a holy night within the month of Ramaḍān on which God sent down the pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān – either in its entirety (*jumla wāḥida*) or in annualized installments – from the Guarded Tablet to the lowest heaven; it was also said to be an annual night in which God determines His decrees for the coming year. The Ismaili revelatory exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the Night of Destiny, on the other hand, proclaims the true meaning of *Laylat al-Qadr* based on an entirely different set of premises. Rather than describing the Qur'ān's initial revelatory descent (*nuzūl*) from heaven, the Qur'ānic material on the Night of Destiny according to Ismaili thinkers is a symbolic account of consummation of the Cycle of Prophet Muhammad and the beginning of the Cycle of Resurrection. The Night of Destiny, in its esoteric reality, properly describes a special and unique Imam through whom the *Qā'im* accomplishes the Resurrection in the corporeal world and the World of Religion. This reading of the Night of Destiny follows directly from the Ismaili exegesis of the “seven days of creation” – which refer to the six Speaker Prophets and the Lord of Resurrection. If the “seventh day” – the Sabbath Day, the Last Day, the Day of Resurrection, and

¹⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 176.

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the greatest of all “days” – is the person of the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma*, then the “Night of Destiny” – being “greater than a thousand months” – must be the greatest of all Imams who serves as the herald and forerunner of the *Qā'im*. As al-Nu'mān explained in the below quotation, the Night of Destiny is the august Imam who serves as the “Proof” (*ḥujja*) and “Gate” (*bāb*) of the Lord of Resurrection:

The symbolic likenesses (*amthāl*) of the “days” in the esoteric dimension are the likenesses of the Speaker Prophets, who are the “Days of God” as He has said. [Similarly], the likenesses of the “nights” are the likenesses of the *ḥujjas* (proofs). This is because it is necessary for each “day” to have a “night” just as it is necessary for every Speaker Prophet to have a *ḥujja*. Thus, the symbolic likeness of the Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*) is the likeness of the *Hujja* of the Seal of the Imams (*ḥujjat khātim al-a'imma*), whose *Hujja* arises before him to warn the people of his rising and give them news about him and urge them to righteous works before his [the *Qā'im*'s] manifestation.¹⁴⁵⁹

Just as the night precedes the day, the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* is the divinely guided Imam who appears in the corporeal world *before* the Lord of Resurrection and prepares the world for the latter's manifestation. In this regard, the *Qā'im*'s mission differs from that of the prior Speaker Prophets and Imams. Each of the six Speaker Prophets appointed a Legatee or Founder, who functioned as the *ḥujja* (living proof) of that Prophet during his lifetime and subsequently served as his successor. Likewise, every Imam appoints his own successor from among his sons and this successor serves as the *ḥujja* (proof) of the Imam during his lifetime. However, as several Ismaili *dā'īs* indicated, the situation is actually reversed for the *Qā'im* (the seventh Speaker Prophet) and his Founder (*asās*), who serves as his *Hujja* (proof). In this respect, al-Nu'mān specified that “every Imam establishes his *ḥujja* after him, except the *Qā'im*, the Lord of Resurrection, who establishes his *ḥujja* before him or with his own rising; he [the *ḥujja*] suspends the performance of works and closes the gate of repentance.”¹⁴⁶⁰ The author of the *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya* stated that “the *ḥujja*

¹⁴⁵⁹ Al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, Vol. 3, 137.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, Vol. 2, 255.

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of every Speaker Prophet is after him but the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* precedes him because he is the Seal of the Prophets, the Imams, and the worlds.”¹⁴⁶¹ Khusraw likewise wrote that “the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* will come into the world before him and he is the Night of Destiny (*shāb-i qadr*)...the *Qā'im* is among the children of the Founder.”¹⁴⁶² In other words, the *Qā'im*'s *Hujja* and Founder (*asās*) will be his own father (his predecessor) instead of his son (his successor).

Based on this framework, the Ismaili *dā'īs* interpreted the Qur'ānic and prophetic language about the *Laylat al-Qadr* as descriptions of the grandeur of the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im*, who executes the deeds of the Lord of Resurrection in the corporeal world. With respect to Q. 97:1, which the Ismailis read as “Verily, We sent *him* down in the Night of Destiny”, al-Nu'mān commented as follows:

The rising of the *Hujja* of the Seal of the Imams is before him because there will be no one upholding the *da'wa* after him. He establishes the Resurrection¹⁴⁶³ and cuts off the performance of deeds. The *Hujja* of the Seal of the Imams is the last of those who uphold the *da'wa* and he cuts off the authority of the leaders (*nuqubā'*) [of the *da'wa*]. He and the one who establishes him uphold the *da'wa* for all the people of the world. This is the saying of God: “Verily, We sent him down in the Night of Destiny,” meaning that the Seal of the Imams arises in the final *da'wa* of his *Hujja*.... He [the *Qā'im*] will dispense wisdom within the earth from the direction of the *Hujja* of the Seal of the Imams during his time and blessings will embrace the people.¹⁴⁶⁴

According to al-Nu'mān's reading, Q. 97:1 is stating that God will reveal the Lord of Resurrection through the deeds and summons of his *Hujja*. The *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* will carry out the *Qā'im*'s revelatory mission in the corporeal world, such as ending the formal Ismaili *da'wa*, abolishing the ranks (*hudūd*) of the religious hierarchy, and spreading divine wisdom among the people of the

¹⁴⁶¹ Al-Malījī, *al-Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 32.

¹⁴⁶² Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 176.

¹⁴⁶³ Read *qīma* as *qiyāma*.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, Vol. 3, 137-138.

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world. Writing a century after al-Nu'mān, al-Mu'ayyad presented a very similar reading of Q. 97:1 in reference to the *Qā'im*'s *Hujja*:

Al-Qadr is the symbolic likeness (*mathal*) of the *Qā'im* of the progeny of Muhammad who is the lord of reward and punishment.... The Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*) is the symbol of his *Bāb* (Gate) and *Hujja* (Proof) who comes before him. He [God] alludes to the revelatory descent of the Qur'ān in him, meaning the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the Qur'ān and the science of revelatory hermeneutics (*'ilm al-ta'wīl*) as explained before. Thus, the *Bāb* (Gate) of the *Qā'im* is the lord of universal explanation (*ṣāhib al-bayān al-kullī*) and the true unveiling (*al-kashf al-ḥaqīqī*).¹⁴⁶⁵

For al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Qadr* is the Lord of Resurrection whose spiritual power and greatness is revealed in the person of his *Hujja* – the *Laylat al-Qadr*.¹⁴⁶⁶ The descent of the Spirit and the angels (Q. 97:4) in the Night of Destiny means that the science of revelatory hermeneutics (*'ilm al-ta'wīl*) will be revealed through the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im*, who is “the lord of universal explanation (*ṣāhib al-bayān al-kullī*) and the true unveiling (*al-kashf al-ḥaqīqī*).” Thus, the Lord of Resurrection's role of unveiling (*kashf*) and manifesting the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of all Revelatory Products is accomplished in the corporeal world by his *Hujja*.

The Ismailis likewise read the qur'ānic declaration that “the Night of Destiny is greater than a thousand months” as an attestation to the superior status of the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* over all of his predecessors among the Prophets and the Imams. According to al-Nu'mān, “*the Night of Destiny is greater than a thousand months,*” means that he is better than a thousand leaders and if they had arisen in the earth they would not rise to his station.”¹⁴⁶⁷ Al-Mu'ayyad also argued that this verse speaks to the superiority of *Hujja* of the *Qā'im*:

¹⁴⁶⁵ Al-Mu'ayyad, *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, Vol. 2 (Ḥamīd al-Dīn edition), 612.

¹⁴⁶⁶ See also the interpretation of al-Kirmānī in his *Kitāb al-riyāq*, as quoted in De Cillis, *Salvation and Destiny*, 159: “As for *qadar*, it signifies firstly the *Qā'im* (the Resurrector), who has been promised and celebrated with good news since [the time of] Adam (blessings of God be upon him), and signifies his actual mission for whose preservation and elevation there are the Imams and the Messengers.”

¹⁴⁶⁷ Al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, Vol. 3, 138.

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His saying, “*The Night of Destiny is greater than a thousand months*” indicates that the *Bāb* (Gate) of the *Qā'im* is greater than all those who arose with the manifestation of the ranks of the intellects among the Legatees of the masters of the *sharī'as* and the most radiant of them in degree because of his proximity to the Master of the Seventh Cycle [the *Qā'im*], who is the perfection of the Prophets and the *qibla* of their souls and intellects.¹⁴⁶⁸

In other words, the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* holds a greater spiritual rank than all the prior Legatees of the Speaker Prophets due to his association with the Lord of Resurrection. Khusraw was perhaps most explicit about this matter, writing that “the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* is greater than a thousand Imams in knowledge even though their ranks are collectively one.”¹⁴⁶⁹ Khusraw also described how this *Hujja* of the *Qā'im*, who functions as the Founder (*asās*) for the Lord of Resurrection (just as Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was the Founder for the Prophet Muhammad), will be publicly recognized and known beyond the esoteric circles of the Ismaili *da'wa* when the *Qā'im* arrives in the world: “The status of the Founder (*asās*) will become manifest (*zāhir*) to the people of the exoteric (*zāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*) in the time when the Seventh Rank, that is the *Qā'im*, appears, just as the status of the Speaker Prophet had become manifest to all the people of the exoteric and the esoteric before the Seventh Rank.... The Founder and his status will become manifest at the time of the appearance of the Seventh.”¹⁴⁷⁰ Finally, the Ismaili exegesis of the final verse of *Sūrat al-Qadr* centers around the arrival of the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* in the corporeal world and the spiritual lights that shine forth through him and illuminate the “earth” of the World of Religion. According to al-Mu'ayyad, “in His saying, ‘*Until the rising of the dawn,*’ the ‘dawn’ (*al-fajr*) is the overflow (*infjār*) of light from the fissures of darkness and it is the manifestation of

¹⁴⁶⁸ Al-Mu'ayyad, *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, Vol. 3, 8.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 260-261.

¹⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

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God's Light who is the Lord of Resurrection (*ṣāhib al-qiyāma*) in the world of nature, which is the abode of turbidities and darkness.”¹⁴⁷¹

Several Ismaili *dā'īs* hinted about when the Resurrection would take place within the chain of Imamate. Al-Kirmānī declared that the total number of Imams in the Cycle of Prophet Muhammad until the arrival of the Lord of Resurrection is forty-nine Imams, who are arranged in heptads (groups of seven).¹⁴⁷² In his words, the *Qā'im* appears as the fiftieth figure in relation to the forty-nine Imams that precede him: “‘*The Day when the Spirit and the angels stand forth in ranks*’ (Q. 78:38) is the Lord of Resurrection as the fiftieth rank among the lords of the heptads within the seven cycles, [whose number] is seven multiplied by seven.”¹⁴⁷³ Likewise, the Syrian Ismaili *dā'ī* Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ṣūrī (d. ca. 487/1094) wrote, in a poem enumerating the lineage of Imams since Adam, that the seventh heptad of Imams during the Cycle of Muhammad is the greatest among the heptads because it directly precedes the Lord of Resurrection; this means that the *Qā'im* will appear after the coming of forty-nine Imams.¹⁴⁷⁴ The author of the *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya* further specified that within the last heptad or cycle of seven Imams immediately preceding the Lord of Resurrection, the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* would be the seventh Imam of that heptad and the *Qā'im* himself shall appear after him as the eighth figure: “The *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* is distinguished due to divine support and honor. When his cycle arrives, his rising and his station

¹⁴⁷¹ Al-Mu'ayyad, *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, Vol. 3, 11. My translation of this passage is informed by the translation in Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 214.

¹⁴⁷² Madelung, “The Imamate”, 141-142.

¹⁴⁷³ Al-Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-'aql*, 578-579. On the bottom of p. 578, al-Kirmānī indicates that the phrase “the angels and the Spirit” refer to Prophet Muhammad and the ranks (*hudūd*) of his cycle.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ḥasan al-Ṣūrī, *Risālat Ismā'īliyya Wāḥida: al-Qaṣīda al-Ṣūrriyya*, ed. Arif Tamir (Damascus, 1955), 68.

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require that the seventh of the Imams connected to his cycle be is *Hujja*, while the *Qā'im* is the eighth among the honorable Imams because the beginning of the week is Saturday among the days.”¹⁴⁷⁵ According to the Fatimid enumeration of the Imams articulated in the *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, the first Imam was ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the second Imam was al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, the third Imam was al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, and the eighth Fatimid Caliph al-Mustanṣir billāh was the nineteenth Imam in the Cycle of Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴⁷⁶ Overall, these allusive Fatimid predictions indicate that the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* will be the greatest and most publicly prominent Imam in all of the prophetic cycles; he will appear as the forty-ninth Imam in the Cycle of Muhammad in a long series of Imamate whose first three Imams were ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. Accordingly, the *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* will be the son of this forty-ninth Imam and the fiftieth figure to appear after Prophet Muhammad.

The Lord of Resurrection, according to how his station is described in the Ismaili literature of this period, holds a spiritual station and function that differs from all other Prophets and Imams. Khusraw distinguished the *Qā'im* from the Speaker Prophets, Legatees, and the Imams by observing that the latter comprise a total of eighteen ranks (six Speaker Prophets, six Legatees, and six Imams in each of the six prophetic cycles) while the Lord of Resurrection stands apart from them as the seventh figure in relation to each group of six and the nineteenth figure overall. While the Speaker Prophets, Legatees, and Imams are all “commanders” for their communities, the *Qā'im* will not command anyone to perform any deeds, but rather, he will judge and

¹⁴⁷⁵ Al-Malījī, *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, 32.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

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recompense the people for their work.¹⁴⁷⁷ Khusraw further specified that the Lord of Resurrection holds the three offices of Prophethood, Legateeship, and Resurrection, but *not* the office of Imamate that the Speaker Prophet, Legatee, and Imam possess.¹⁴⁷⁸ Khusraw also indicated that the *Qā'im* will not openly declare himself to others: “The Lord of Resurrection (*khudāvand-i qiyāmat*) prevents the community from the exoteric *da'wa* and when he appears, he will not perform the *da'wa*.”¹⁴⁷⁹ He went on to clarify that the Lord of Resurrection cannot be recognized directly, but only through intermediaries: “The *Qā'im* cannot be recognized except from the direction of five ranks: the Founder, the Imam, the *bāb*, the *ḥujja*, and the *dā'ī*.”¹⁴⁸⁰ Similarly, al-Nu'mān wrote that the Lord of Resurrection, being symbolized by the *Īd al-Adhā*, is recognized through three adjunct figures symbolized by the Days of *Tashrīq* (three days following *Īd al-Adhā*). These three figures are the *Ḥujja* of the *Qā'im*, the *Bāb* (gate) of the *Ḥujja* of the *Qā'im*, and the *Dā'ī* of the *Ḥujja* of the *Qā'im*. The *Bāb* of the *Ḥujja* of the *Qā'im* will be the deputy and successor of the *Qā'im*'s *Ḥujja* and hasten the people towards the recognition of the *Qā'im*. The *Dā'ī* of the *Ḥujja* of the *Qā'im* will be “the greatest of his *dā'īs*” inviting the people to the recognition of the *Qā'im*: “These three [persons] will exist with the *Qā'im* and will be connected to him.... They are called the Days of *Tashrīq* because of the radiance (*ishrāq*) of the *Qā'im*'s light upon them. Thus, they are the ones enlightened by his radiance and the believers are illumined from their light through

¹⁴⁷⁷ Khusraw, *Khawān*, 72. See also Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 62-63.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 176. Elsewhere on p. 132, Khusraw states that the Speaker Prophet, the Founder, and the Imam each possess the office of Imamate: “These four obligations are symbols for the Speaker Prophet who has four ranks: Prophethood, Legateeship (*waṣāyat*), Imamate, and Gateship (*bābiyyat*).... The Founder has three ranks: Legateeship, Imamate, and Gateship.”

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

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which they are assisted.”¹⁴⁸¹ According to Khusraw, the Lord of Resurrection is succeeded on earth by a special class of Imams called the Vicegerents (*khulafā'*) of the *Qā'im* who lead and guide the believers on his behalf during the Cycle of Resurrection and nourish them with knowledge.¹⁴⁸²

In sum, various remarks of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century Ismaili *dā'īs* depict the ultimate and consummate revelatory event as the Resurrection – in which the Lord of Resurrection or *Qā'im al-Qiyāma* unveils the real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) of the Revelatory Principles and the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of all prior Revelatory Products directly to human souls. In doing so, the *Qā'im*'s spiritual light bestows reward and punishment to every human soul according to its spiritual progress and capacity. In the corporeal world, the Lord of Resurrection appears at the end of the Cycle of Prophet Muhammad and is both preceded and represented by the exalted Imam who serves as his *Hujja* (proof) and *Bāb* (gate). This *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* carries out the functions of the Lord of Resurrection in the corporeal world and the World of Religion, namely, the unveiling of esoteric wisdom to people at large, the abrogation of the *sharī'a* of Prophet Muhammad, and the dissolution of the Ismaili *da'wa* and its hierarchical ranks (*ḥudūd*). The *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* will be the finest Imam in prophetic history, due to which he is symbolically described in the Qur'ān as the Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*); he shall be nobler than all the Legatees of the prior Prophets and greater than a thousand Imams in knowledge. He will appear as the forty-ninth Imam after the Prophet Muhammad and as a publicly renowned figure whose Imamate will be known to humanity at large. The son of the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* will be the Lord of Resurrection himself, who will illuminate the World of Religion with the light of

¹⁴⁸¹ Al-Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, Vol. 2, 274.

¹⁴⁸² Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, 248-249.

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spiritual unveiling and divine judgment. At the time of the Lord of Resurrection, the believers will be able to recognize his person and spiritual status through the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* (the Founder), the *Bāb* of the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* (the Imam after the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im*), and the *Dā'ī* of the *Hujja* of the *Qā'im* (the last and greatest of the *dā'īs* before the dissolution of the Ismaili *da'wa* hierarchy). With the establishment of the Lord of Resurrection and his successors, humanity will at last be ushered into the Cycle of Unveiling (*dawr al-kashf*) and the Cycle of Knowledge (*dawr al-'ilm*) and enjoy access to the science of *ta'wīl* and the real-truths of the Revelatory Principle.

7.5 Chapter Conclusion

The Ismaili Muslim models of Qur'ānic Revelation espoused by al-Kirmānī, al-Mu'ayyad, and Nāṣir-i Khusraw in the fifth/eleventh century featured several important theological and cosmological developments. These individuals were among the highest ranked Ismaili *dā'īs* of their time: al-Kirmānī and Khusraw held the rank of *hujja* while al-Mu'ayyad was the *bāb* (gate), second only to the Imam. Overall, what we see from these Ismaili thinkers are cosmologically rooted visions of revelation in which both the Arabic Qur'ān and the Ismaili Imamate are understood as complementary manifestations of Neoplatonic Revelatory Principles. Furthermore, the concept of *ta'wīl* as elucidated by these thinkers went beyond the idea of revelatory exegesis and became a spiritual practice necessary for the actualization and perfection of the human soul.

Al-Kirmānī synthesized his own distinctive cosmology by integrating al-Fārābī's Peripatetic ten intellect framework with classical Ismaili Neoplatonism. His model featured the First Intellect – which is God's eternal act of Origination and the First Originated Being in a celestial hierarchy of ten intellects – as the creative and Revelatory Principle. The First Intellect is the source of emanation of World of Intellects and the corporeal spheres that culminate in the

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sublunary world. The First Intellect also radiates divine providence upon all levels of God's creation. The emanations of the First Intellect take the form of divine support (*ta'yīd*) and divine inspiration (*wahy*) – called the Holy Spirit – that only perfect human souls are capable of receiving. These perfect divinely supported human souls are the Speaker Prophets, the Legatees, the Imams, and the Lord of Resurrection (*ṣāhib al-qiyāma*), who exemplify the First Intellect's attributes and virtues. The divinely supported soul receives *wahy* from the World of Intellects in three hierarchical modes: a non-verbal spiritual light containing universal meanings divested of matter called *Jadd*; a non-verbal inspiration experienced through the contemplation of originated and created existents called *Fath*; and a semi-verbal inspiration in the form of images within the soul called *Khayāl*. The Prophet Muhammad, as the human manifestation of the First Intellect, produces two Revelatory Products: 1) he fashions and encodes the contents of this divine inspiration into the “sensory similitudes” (*amthāl maḥsūsa*) that comprise the Arabic Qur'ān and *sharī'a*; and 2) he appoints 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as his Legatee (*waṣī*) and as the first Imam of his cycle. Together, the Legatee-Imam and the Qur'ān/*sharī'a* are the earthly manifestations of the Second Intellect and Potential Intellect in al-Kirmānī's cosmic framework where the Imams function as the “speaking Qur'ān” with authority over the “silent Qur'ān” *qua* scripture. The Imam has the indispensable and continuous role of interpreting the *sharī'a* of the Prophet and disclosing the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ān and *sharī'a* for the believers. In sum, al-Kirmānī's model of Qur'ānic Revelation partially reconciled the Aristotelian cosmology of al-Fārābī with his inherited Ismaili teachings, laid out how the Prophets and Imams remain ontologically distinct from other humans due to the perfection of their souls, and upheld the necessity of observing the *sharī'a* of Muhammad while also learning its *ta'wīl* from the Imam's authorized teachers.

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While al-Kirmānī experimented with al-Fārābī's more popular Aristotelian ten intellects cosmology, al-Mu'ayyad remained faithful to the classical Ismaili Neoplatonic cosmology from the latter half of the fourth/tenth century. Al-Mu'ayyad presented his model of Qur'ānic Revelation through various remarks scattered among his sermons delivered in the weekly Ismaili "sessions of wisdom" (*majālis al-ḥikma*) that took place on Thursdays in the Fatimid palace. In his framework, the primary and secondary Revelatory Principles are the Universal Intellect/Pen and the Universal Soul/Tablet, which contain the intelligible archetypes of all cosmic existence as well as the revelatory contents of prophetic inspiration. Al-Mu'ayyad elucidated his concept of the "absolute human being" (*al-insān al-muṭlaq*) as the human manifestation of the Universal Intellect and Soul and as a human revelatory agent who mediates divine inspiration and guidance. In particular, the absolute human in any given time is the Speaker Prophet, Legatee, or Imam who perfectly mirrors the Universal Soul/Guarded Tablet in being the receptacle for the divine support of the Universal Intellect. In continuity to prior Ismaili *dā'īs*, al-Mu'ayyad stressed the non-verbal nature of *wahy* using language similar to al-Sijistāni and the Brethren of Purity and affirmed the creative agency of Prophet Muhammad in composing the Arabic Qur'ān. He also upheld the miraculous inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān based on Ismaili premises, according to which the Qur'ān's outward utterances (*alfāz*) together with their meanings (*ma'ānī*) constitute the inimitable production of the Prophet Muhammad. Al-Mu'ayyad stressed the status of the Imam as "God's speaking *kitab*", which means the Imam is the human manifestation of God's celestial *kitāb* that is the Guarded Tablet. In contrast, the Arabic Qur'ān as a recitation or scripture is "God's silent *kitab*" which can only be known and understood through the speaking *kitab*. The author of the *Majālis al-Mustanṣiriyya*, who was contemporary to al-Mu'ayyad, made the same argument and went even further, stating that the Arabic Qur'ān's revelatory status as a divinely revealed *qur'ān*

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derives from its pairing (*iqtirān*) with the living Imam in every time. In this respect, for al-Mu'ayyad, the Arabic Qur'ān and the living Imam are Revelatory Products in which the Imam has a higher revelatory status than the Qur'ān. Finally, al-Mu'ayyad presented his concept of *ta'wīl* both as a revelatory exegesis of the Revelatory Products (the Qur'ān, *sharī'a*, the Cosmos) that correlates their symbolic content to the real-truths of the Revelatory Principles and as the means by which the Ismaili practitioner constructs his own soul into the image (*ṣūra*) of the Universal Intellect and Soul and thereby “returns” his soul to its celestial origin in the Revelatory Principle.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw, the last of the major Ismaili philosophers and *dā'īs* of the fifth/eleventh century, expounded what was perhaps the most original concept of Qur'ānic Revelation in comparison to prior Ismaili thinkers. Khusraw's revelatory framework featured God's Speech or Word as the primary Revelatory Principle and God's Writing as the secondary Revelatory Principle. He defined God's Writing as the celestial archetypes present within the Universal Intellect, reflected in the Universal Soul, and manifested throughout the spiritual and corporeal realm. Within God's Writing is divine guidance (*hidāyat-i ilāhī*) for the wellbeing of humanity in both spiritual and corporeal matters. Khusraw's idea of God's Writing also shared much in common with the Qur'ānic concept of *kitāb* as divine prescription and Qur'ānic idea of the Transcendent Kitāb. Khusraw argued for the necessity of the Prophet as the “reader” of God's Writing in every age and its conveyer to the human species. He accordingly defined *wahy* as non-verbal inspiration experienced as spiritual visionary illumination by which a person can “read” God's Writing. Whereas every human being has been endowed with a small share of *wahy* in the form of his or her individual intellect, the Prophets possess a complete share of *wahy* called the Holy Spirit. By virtue of this Holy Spirit, which is the medium of divine support and inspiration, the Prophet Muhammad was sole “reader” of God's Writing among the human beings of his own

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time period just as humanity is the only species within the animal genus that can read corporeal writing. The Prophet then translated or “condensed” whatever he read from God’s Writing into two Revelatory Products – the Arabic Qur’ān and his extra-qur’ānic guidance. Khusraw’s understanding of *ta’līf* and *tanzīl* – the prophetic activity of composing Revelatory Products tailored to his contexts – bears striking resemblance to the qur’ānic idea of *tafṣīl*, the adaptation of the Transcendent Kitāb to situated audiences, seen in Chapter 1. Furthermore, Khusraw rejected the legitimacy of the scriptural compilation of the Prophet’s qur’ānic discourse into a physical book on the grounds that the Qur’ān’s original format was oral, piecemeal, and responsive divine guidance. On this basis, Khusraw envisioned the Ismaili lineage of Imams as the means of continuous and evolving divine guidance for human wellbeing and presented the Imam as the speaking *kitāb Allāh*. Khusraw affirmed the necessity of *ta’wīl* as a revelatory hermeneutic through which one may find alethic coherence in the Qur’ān, the *sharī’a*, and the Cosmos. Accordingly, *ta’wīl* alone can resolve the ambiguities and doubts within the Revelatory Products, such as the contradictions that exist in the Qur’ān at the level of its literal meaning. *Ta’wīl* also reveals the unitary real-truths (*ḥaqā’iq*) of the Revelatory Principle that are symbolically expressed in the Revelatory Products such as the Qur’ān, the Torah, and the Gospel that conflict at the level of the exoteric or literal meaning. According to Khusraw, the believer who learns the science of *ta’wīl* and combines its comprehension with adherence to the *sharī’a* will be able to mold his soul into a likeness of the Universal Soul and thereby unite with it.

Underlying all Ismaili Muslim theories of Qur’ānic Revelation through the eleventh century was their unique understanding of Resurrection (*qiyāma*). The Ismailis envisioned the Resurrection as the ultimate revelatory event that would take place at the conclusion of the era of Prophet Muhammad through the person of the Lord of Resurrection (*ṣāhib al-qiyāma*) or *Qā’im*

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al-Qiyāma. Upon his arrival in the corporeal world, which Ismaili thinkers estimated would take place in the period of the forty-ninth Imam after Prophet Muhammad, the Lord of Resurrection as the seventh Speaker Prophet and the Seal of the Imams will emanate spiritual lights upon all human souls, thereby unveiling the truths of the Revelatory Principle to humanity at large and bestowing eschatological reward and punishment. With the *Qā'im's* spiritual resurrection and unveiling, the Qur'ānic Revelation reaches its glorious completion and humanity is ushered into a new era of knowledge and enlightenment.

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Conclusion: Rethinking Revelation in Islam

It is now appropriate to weave together the findings of the past seven chapters (summarized in Appendix B), draw forth some broader conclusions about Muslim concepts of Qur'ānic Revelation, and consider their relevance to post-classical and contemporary debates around revelation in Islamic thought. There are several broader conclusions that emerge from the present study:

1. The most obvious finding is that there is no single Muslim understanding of the nature of the Qur'ān as divine speech, divine writing, divine inspiration, revelatory recitation, or scripture. Among the various models of revelation that developed in the formative and classical periods, Muslims greatly differed about the source of revelation, the modes of revelation, and the theological status of the earthly manifestations of revelation – the Arabic Qur'ān, the Prophetic Sunna, the Imamate, etc. The oft-repeated claim made in academic literature that Muslims generally regard the Arabic Qur'ān as God's literal eternal speech or words, at best, only speaks to Sunni Ḥanbalī beliefs – according to which God's Speech as eternal sounds and letters is ontologically identical to the Arabic Qur'ān; even then, the Ḥanbalī position contains certain nuances and cannot be reduced to such a simple formulation.

2. The different Qur'ānic Revelation models surveyed in this study can be broadly classified into four “types”:

1) the “Qur'ānic model” of revelation in which the Prophet recites Arabic *qur'āns* as the manifestation of God's Transcendent Kitāb (Chapter 1);

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- 2) the “scriptural models” of revelation most prevalent in Sunni *tafsīr* that center around the Qur'ān as God's Book that pre-exists in heaven (Chapter 2);
- 3) the “theological divine speech models” of revelation in Sunni and Twelver *kalām* theology that center on God's Speech and its revelatory manifestation as the Arabic Qur'ān and/or the Prophetic Sunna (Chapter 3);
- 4) the “divine inspiration models” of revelation found in early Twelver *ḥadīth* and Shi'i Ismaili philosophical theology that frame the Qur'ān as a divinely inspired discourse of the Prophet Muhammad that manifests God's transcendent Word and cosmic Writing and requires the Imams' divinely inspired revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) to unveil its real-truths (Chapters 5-7).

Two other types that were not covered in this study are the Muslim Peripatetic models of al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā and later Sufi models of revelation, which merit further investigation. In any case, the idea of written scripture was not the primary category through which many Muslims of different periods conceived Qur'ānic Revelation; instead, the Qur'ān's oral recitational format was much more prominent in the Qur'ānic, Sunni theological, and Shi'i Ismaili divine inspiration models of revelation.

3. An analytical framework that distinguishes between the Revelatory Principle, Revelatory Process, and Revelatory Product better captures and coheres with the diverse and distinctive features of the Qur'ānic, scriptural, theological, and divine inspiration models of Qur'ānic Revelation than prior frameworks like “inlibration” or verbatim divine speech that reduce the phenomenon of Qur'ānic Revelation to the recited or written text of the Qur'ān. More specifically, the analytical distinction between a Revelatory Principle and one or more Revelatory Products is absolutely warranted by the theological ideas featured in this study. The Qur'ān itself distinguishes between God's Transcendent Kitāb and the Arabic recitations that manifest it; Ash'arī and Māturīdī *kalām* theologians argued for the uncreated and transcendent nature of God's Speech and

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the createdness of the Arabic Qur'ān *qua* sounds, letters, verses, and *sūras*; and Ismaili thinkers framed the transcendent Word of God and its Neoplatonic emanations as the archetypal source of both revelation and creation, which the Prophet only communicated through an Arabic Qur'ān that he himself composed. Mu'tazilīs like 'Abd al-Jabbār, who affirmed the createdness of God's Speech, still understood the Speech of God as being subject to and determined by God's Justice and Will. Even Ḥanbalī theologians stressed that God's uncreated Speech – while ontologically identical to the Arabic Qur'ān – is still formally distinct from it due to lacking sequence, temporality, and all other features of created mortal speech. Overall, it seems that most Muslim visions of Qur'ānic Revelation necessarily reach beyond the Qur'ān *qua* Arabic recitation or scripture to an ontologically prior and transcendent archetype – the Revelatory Principle; it is the latter that grounds the revelatory status of the Arabic Qur'ān.

4. Competing Muslim visions of the Revelatory Principle and Process are rooted in distinct epistemic, theological, and cosmological frameworks; the difference between Sunni *kalām* and Shi'i Ismaili models of revelation is perhaps the clearest example of this. *Kalām* cosmology and Ismaili Neoplatonic cosmology represent two vastly different visions of reality and thereby yield contrasting concepts of Qur'ānic Revelation. The cosmic vision of classical *kalām* theology features God as the sole eternal and incorporeal being, divine speech as His attribute or action, and all creation as temporal and corporeal; in such a framework, divine communication or inspiration must be expressed as corporeal audible expressions at the created level before reaching the Prophet. Meanwhile, various Ismaili cosmologies feature a God beyond attributes, divine speech as His eternal creative action, a spiritual realm, and a corporeal realm, where all creation reflects the contents of God's Speech. In this vision, the Revelatory Process includes both spiritual and

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corporeal forms of communication, in which the Prophet participates in the spiritual realm through his incorporeal soul and thereby receives non-verbal inspiration.

5. There are connections and correlations between a given theory of Qur'ānic Revelation and a theory of Qur'ānic hermeneutics. For example, the Ash'arī claim that the Arabic Qur'ān is a created expression, recitation, or indication of God's Speech – as opposed to being strictly identical to God's Speech – necessitates a legal hermeneutic featuring ambiguity concerning the precise scope and meaning of Qur'ānic terms and phrases. Likewise, the Ismaili claim that the Arabic Qur'ān is the Prophet Muhammad's symbolic articulation of the real-truths of the Revelatory Principle initially received as non-verbal divine inspiration – an articulation conditioned by his time, culture, and conditions – necessitates the Ismaili form of hermeneutics known as *ta'wīl* or revelatory exegesis that effectively “returns” the symbolic truths of the Revelatory Products to the real-truths of the Revelatory Principle.

6. The ideas of speech and writing play different roles in Muslim models of Qur'ānic Revelation, depending on whether one considers the Revelatory Principle or the Revelatory Products. For example, the Qur'ān's discourse on revelation is an interplay of the written and the oral: it describes the Revelatory Principle as a transcendent or celestial divine writing by various *kitāb* terms (*kitāb mubīn*, *umm al-kitāb*, *kitāb makhnūn*) but frames the Revelatory Product as eminently oral by calling it “an Arabic *qur'ān*”. The classical Sunni *tafsīr* tradition overwhelmingly emphasizes the written conceptions of revelation by speaking of the Guarded Tablet containing a heavenly transcript of the Arabic Qur'ān as the Revelatory Principle. The *tafsīr* tradition relegates the oral dimension of the Qur'ān to its piecemeal delivery to the Prophet while emphasizing the

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centrality of the Qur'ān's written form in the *muṣḥaf* as God's Book (*kitāb Allāh*). On the other hand, the *kalām* tradition is mainly focused on the oral recitational form of the Qur'ān by conceiving it in terms of God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*) as opposed to God's Book. This emphasis on the orality of the Qur'ān for theological purposes is further evidenced by how various theologians define God's Speech using a more general definition of speech (*kalām*) and ontologically frame the Arabic Qur'ān as the "Recitation" (*qirā'a*) of God's Speech. Ismaili formulations of Qur'ānic Revelation featured a synthesis of the oral and the written; they gave priority to oral symbolism by describing God's creative act as God's Speech (*kalām*) or Word (*kalima*) but also emphasized the written in characterizing the spiritual archetypes of creation as God's Writing (*kitāb Allāh*).

7. The Ismaili paradigm of Qur'ānic Revelation is unique in framing the Prophet Muhammad and every Imam succeeding him as the human locus of manifestation of God's Speech and the revelatory agent who constructs the Revelatory Products – the revelatory expression (*tanzīl*) and/or the revelatory hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) – of the Revelatory Principle. This is most obvious in the consensus Ismaili position that the Arabic Qur'ān is the divinely inspired words of the Prophet Muhammad and that the Imam is the speaking *kitāb* of God and the speaking Qur'ān, to whom the oral and written manifestations of the Qur'ān remain subordinate. In sum, the Ismaili visions call us to acknowledge a format of Qur'ānic Revelation that stands beyond the oral and the written – this being the "living personal" form of revelation that is the Prophet or the Imam. This principle is perhaps best described by Shafique N. Virani: "Ismailism, for all its love of books, gave primacy

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not to the recorded word, but to the living Word.... it is a person, and not a bound volume, that liberates the believer.”¹⁴⁸³

While the present study covered various Muslim perspectives from the first/seventh century, the topic of Qur'ānic Revelation remained a live theological issue in later periods. Some of the classical Muslim positions were highly significant in determining later developments in the Sunni, Sufi, and Shi'ī Ismaili traditions. Sunni *tafsīr* scriptural models of revelation continue to be reiterated and affirmed in contemporary *tafsīr* and Qur'ānic hermeneutics, by traditional al-Azhar scholars like Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zurqānī (1948-2000) and modernist Muslim scholars like Abdullah Saeed.¹⁴⁸⁴ The Sunni theological divine speech models of revelation continued to be debated and commented upon by post-classical scholars in credal works and theological treatises. The creed of the Māturīdī theologian Najm al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), which was famously commented upon by the Ash'arī theologian Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd b. 'Umar al-Taftāzānī (722-793/1322-1390), included a section on the nature of God's Speech and its distinction from the Arabic Qur'ān.¹⁴⁸⁵ The Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) took up the task of critiquing many of the classical formulations of God's Speech and proposed his own theory that seemed to synthesize ideas from Ḥanbalī *kalām* theology and Avicennan

¹⁴⁸³ Shafiqe N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93.

¹⁴⁸⁴ See al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-'irfān*, 37ff, previously quoted and referenced in the Introduction. See also Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 39-40.

¹⁴⁸⁵ See Earl Edgar Elder (tr.), *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam, Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950).

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philosophy.¹⁴⁸⁶ The Kurdish mystic and scholar of Medina, Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690), tried to reconcile Ḥanbalī and Ash'arī views of the nature and relationship between God's Speech and the Arabic Qur'ān, and formulated an intermediate position influenced by Ibn al-'Arabī's worldview of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.¹⁴⁸⁷ As seen earlier, the al-Azhar scholar Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Faḍālī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 1236/1831) and Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Bājūrī (1189-1276/1784-1860), the rector of al-Azhar, each authored credal works and commentaries in which they argued for highly sophisticated Ash'arī positions concerning God's Speech and its revelatory manifestation as the Arabic Qur'ān.¹⁴⁸⁸ The modern Muslim reformist Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) articulated his position on the Qur'ān's nature by seemingly combining both Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī beliefs.¹⁴⁸⁹ The debates about Qur'ānic Revelation continue to be vibrant in traditional Sunni scholarship, as shown in the work of the Kurdish-Turkish Sunni Muslim theologian Ṣāliḥ al-Ghursī (d. 1953) and his teacher Muḥammad Sharīf al-'Arabkindī al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1987). These two scholars mined pre-modern Muslim theologians and mystical philosophers to uncover a “third

¹⁴⁸⁶ For Ibn Taymiyya's view of God's Speech and Qur'ānic Revelation, see John Hoover, “Perpetual Creativity in the Perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith Commentary on God's Creation of this World,” *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* 15/3 (2004): 287-329.

¹⁴⁸⁷ For surveys of al-Kūrānī's views of God's Speech and its relationship to the Arabic Qur'ān, see Basheer M. Nafi, “Taṣawwuf and Reform in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture: In Search of Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī,” *Die Welt des Islams* 42/3 (2002): 307-355; Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 272-284.

¹⁴⁸⁸ See al-Bājūrī, *Hāshiyat al-Bājūrī 'alā Kifāyat al-'awāmm*. For al-Bājūrī's life, works, and intellectual context, see Spevack, *The Archetypal Sunnī Scholar*.

¹⁴⁸⁹ For a survey of 'Abduh's views on the Qur'ān, see Ammeke Kateman, *Muḥammad 'Abduh and His Interlocutors: Conceptualization Religion in a Globalizing World* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019), 148-150.

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way” concerning the ontology of God’s Speech and the Arabic Qur’ān that stands in between the Ḥanbalī and Ash‘arī viewpoints.¹⁴⁹⁰

While the Mu‘tazilīs no longer exist as a Muslim theological group today, several modernist Muslim intellectuals, some of whom self-identify as “Neo-Mu‘tazilīs”, have drawn inspiration from their ideas and methodologies. These Muslim thinkers include Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammad Arkoun, Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, Muhammad Mujtahed Shabestari, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar. The proposals of Rahman, Abu Zayd, Shabestari, and Soroush all argue for a new model of Qur’ānic Revelation where the verbatim dictation of the Qur’ān by Gabriel is outright rejected and the Prophet Muhammad has agency in determining the contents of Arabic Qur’ān relative to his time and place. Their respective models, in various degrees, resemble the “divine inspiration” models of the Ismailis and move away from Ḥanbalī and Ash‘arī positions concerning the eternity of God’s Speech. These modernist “neo-Mu‘tazilī” models of revelation entail a qur’ānic hermeneutics that is quite different from pre-modern *usūl al-fiqh* methodologies. For example, the idea that some of the qur’ānic laws and commands were constructed by the Prophet for his own cultural, temporal and social context means that these divine injunctions have an expiry date and no longer apply in later times and places. These modern examples prove that a coherent Muslim reformist project must be grounded in internally consistent theories of Qur’ānic Revelation and hermeneutics.¹⁴⁹¹

¹⁴⁹⁰ Aaron Spevack, “The Qur’an and God’s Speech According to the Later Ash‘arī-Māturīdī Verifiers,” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 11 (2019): 45-94.

¹⁴⁹¹ For these thinkers and their proposals, see Jahanbaskh, “Introduction”, in Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*; Amirpur, *New Thinking in Islam*; Akbar, *Contemporary Perspectives on Revelation and Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*; Cancian, *Approaches to the Qur’an in Contemporary Iran*.

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The Shi'i Ismaili positions on Qur'ānic Revelation articulated in the fourth-fifth/tenth-eleventh century significantly influenced developments in Ismaili philosophical theology, communal doctrine, ritual practice, and devotion over the duration of Ismaili history and well into modern times. At the level of philosophical theology, the Neoplatonic cosmology and hermeneutical principles of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and perhaps al-Mu'ayyad and al-Sijistānī were adapted by the famous Muslim theologian and heresiographer 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), who formulated a synthesis of Ash'arī, Ḥanbalī, and Ismaili positions on Qur'ānic Revelation and hermeneutics in his famous Qur'ān commentary.¹⁴⁹² The Ismaili Neoplatonic cosmology of the Brethren of Purity and the Fatimid *dā'īs* has also been documented as a major influence upon the Sunni mystical thinkers of Andalusia, such as Ibn Masarra (269-313/883-931), Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/1141), and Ibn al-'Arabī (560-638/1165-1240).¹⁴⁹³

The ideas of the later Fatimid Ismaili *dā'īs* and al-Shahrastānī contributed to key developments in Nizārī Ismaili thought and practice. In 559/1164, the Nizārī Ismaili Imam Ḥasan 'alā *dhikrihi al-salām* (d. 561/1166) declared the arrival of the Resurrection (*qiyāma*). In concordance with prior Ismaili expectations, the Ismaili Imam abolished parts of the *sharī'a* of Muhammad and directed the Nizārī Ismaili community towards the ultimate revelation of real-truth (*ḥaqīqa*) in the person of the Imam, who functioned as the *Qā'im* or Lord of Resurrection. The Nizārī Ismaili doctrine of the Resurrection and its related doctrine of the Imamate stressed the divine revelatory authority of the Imam as the human locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) or “mirror”

¹⁴⁹² See Toby Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2009); idem, “The Cosmogonic Word in al-Shahrastānī's Exegesis of *Sūrat al-Baqara*,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 16/2 (2014), 1-41.

¹⁴⁹³ For this documentation, see Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*; Yousef Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

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of God's Word, Speech, or Command; practically speaking, this meant that the Imam has the divine authority and autonomy to prescribe, prohibit, disclose, and interpret real-truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) directly from God's Word *qua* Revelatory Principle for his community in a manner that is virtually independent of the authority of the Qur'ān *qua* scripture.¹⁴⁹⁴ Such ideas, however, were clearly prefigured in the discourses of the classical Ismaili *dā'īs*, who described the Speaker Prophet as the human manifestation of God's Word on earth and the Imam as the speaking *kitāb Allāh*. This Nizārī doctrine of the Imam as the human manifestation of God's Word continued to prevail in the post-classical period. For example, the thirty-third Nizārī Ismaili Imam, Shāh 'Abd al-Salām b. al-Mustanṣir billāh (d. 899/1494) once declared in a famous ode (*qaṣīda*) addressed to his Ismaili disciples: "Harken ye who quest for union, who boasts that he seeks. Heed my words, for I am the Book of God that speaks!"¹⁴⁹⁵

The contemporary Nizārī Ismaili Imams selectively invoke classical Ismaili doctrines about revelation to articulate their authority and respond to their modern contexts. The Imamate of Sir Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Aga Khan III, the forty-eighth Imam of the Nizārī Ismailis, was a watershed moment in Ismaili history consisting of great changes in the religious governance, ritual practices, and socio-economic outlook of the Nizārī Ismailis. Aga Khan III exercised his authority as the Imam to the maximal degree: he abolished the Ismaili communal practice of *sharī'a* rituals like pilgrimage, Ramaḍān fasting, the traditional exoteric prayer form of *ṣalāt*, and ablutions; he

¹⁴⁹⁴ For the Nizārī Ismaili doctrines of *qiyāma* and the Imam as *maẓhar* of God's Word, see Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Spiritual Resurrection in Shi'i Islam*, tr. S. J. Badakhchani (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017); Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *The Paradise of Submission*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005); idem, *Contemplation and Action*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1998).

¹⁴⁹⁵ Imam 'Abd al-Salām, *Qaṣīda*, translated and quoted in Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, 169.

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suspended the Ismaili *da'wa* religious hierarchy (*ḥudūd al-dīn*) including the *ḥujjas* and *dā'īs*, patronized the publication of esoteric Ismaili literature, and thoroughly modernized the community's way of life while also serving as a public figure on the world stage. In modern times, the religious directives and decrees that the Nizārī Ismaili Imams orally convey to their communities are called *farmans* (sing. *fīrmān*, pl. *fīrāmīn*).¹⁴⁹⁶ In certain *farmans*, Aga Khan III greatly emphasized the necessity of divine guidance of the “present Imam” (*ḥāḍir imām*, Hazar Imam) as the heir and successor to the Prophet Muhammad in direct contrast to the idea of a written scripture being the source of divine guidance. Some of his remarks seem to echo Nāṣir-i Khusraw's denunciation of the written format of the Qur'ān:

You know that in the present times human life and the world have been changing every moment. Everything keeps on changing and in such circumstance only Hazar Imam can give proper guidance. There is no written book on guidance for Ismailis but they have a “Living Imam.”¹⁴⁹⁷

Books and written words are not enough as guidance in religion. For guidance ought to be according to the change of time and therefore it would be found that a Living Prophet in every period had come on earth to guide people. During my time of Imamate, I have made many changes in Firmans and am still altering them according to the times.¹⁴⁹⁸

Accordingly, the Imam's *farmans* serves as the authoritative source for daily temporal and spiritual guidance for the Nizārī Ismailis as opposed to the Qur'ānic text. While delivered orally, the *farmans* are transcribed by the Imam's institutions and read daily to the community as part of the Nizārī Ismaili prayer services in their Jamatkhana. Thus, the *farmans* of the Imam constitute a separate

¹⁴⁹⁶ For Aga Khan III's career, the role of his *farmans*, and a samples of his guidance, see Malise Ruthven, “Aga Khan III and the Isma'ili Renaissance,” in Peter B. Clarke (ed.), *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam* (London: Luzac Oriental, 1998): 371-395; Michel Boivin, *La Rénovation du Shi'isme Ismaélien en Inde et au Pakistan* (London, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

¹⁴⁹⁷ *Farman* delivered in Bombay, 28 December 1945, published in Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, *Precious Pearls* (Karachi: Ismailia Association Pakistan, 1961).

¹⁴⁹⁸ *Farman* delivered in London, 11 June 1951, published in *Precious Pearls*.

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corpus of revelatory guidance for the Nizārī Ismailis.¹⁴⁹⁹ In a certain respect, Aga Khan III's contemporary Ismaili model of continuously updating oral *farmāns* issuing from the Imam *qua* God's speaking *kitāb* mirrors the original qur'ānic format of ever-evolving, responsive, and piecemeal oral *qur'āns* mediated by the Prophet.

In his published memoirs, Aga Khan III described Qur'ānic Revelation as “the final and consummate appearance of the Divine Will granted to mankind” and “the Divine Word's revelation to Muhammad himself, a man like others, of God's person and of his relations to the Universe which He had created.” In the same section of his memoirs, Aga Khan III defined God's Will – which was revealed through the Prophet as the Qur'ān – as God's creative act that sustains all being: “God supports and sustains all existence at every moment by His will and His thought. Outside His will, outside His thought, all is nothing.... Allah alone wishes: the Universe exists; and all manifestations are as a witness of the Divine will.”¹⁵⁰⁰ These remarks are highly significant because they allude to, if not outright reiterate, the classical Ismaili Neoplatonic teachings of the Ismaili *dā'īs* concerning God's Word, Command, or Will as the cause of all existence and the Revelatory Principle as discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Interestingly, Aga Khan III never spoke of the Arabic Qur'ān as God's literal speech dictated verbatim to Muhammad. He instead mentioned the human soul and its relation to the “Universal Soul” and further described the latter as “the Soul that sustains, embraces and is the universe” that also sends forth “specially inspired messengers”, including Muhammad, to guide humanity.¹⁵⁰¹ Such formulations recall the classical

¹⁴⁹⁹ On the role of *farmans* and the Arabic Qur'ān for contemporary Nizārī Ismailis, see Asani, “Nizari Ismaili Engagements.”

¹⁵⁰⁰ Aga Khan III, *Memoirs of the Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (London: Cassel, 1954), 174-175.

¹⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

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teachings of al-Sijistānī and Khusraw, who both described God's Prophets as "Messengers of the Universal Soul" since the direct source of the non-verbal divine inspiration and support granted to the Prophets is the Universal Soul. Aga Khan III also repurposed certain Ismaili ideas concerning the manifestation of the Revelatory Principles in the corporeal world as God's signs and various natural processes being expressions of divine guidance. In a public message from the 1950s, Aga Khan III urged his Muslim co-religionists to harness science and technology on the basis of the physical world and its laws of nature being the manifestations of God's command, intelligence, and guidance:

Nature is the great daily Book of God whose secrets must be found and used for the wellbeing of humanity. Islam is essentially a natural religion, the miracles quoted in the Qur'an are the great phenomena surrounding us and we are often told that all these manifestations can be used and should be, with intelligence, for the service of man.¹⁵⁰²

Aga Khan III's designation of the natural world as "the Book of God" is a direct nod to the views of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who referred to the corporeal world as the manifestation of God's Writing or God's Book and the locus of God's providence and guidance for the wellbeing of humanity .

Contemporary Ismaili discourses feature renewed emphasis on the Qur'ān as a historical and literary text, a source of ethical and artistic inspiration, and a symbol of divine guidance subject to the religious authority of the Ismaili Imamate. The present Nizārī Ismaili Imam, Prince Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Aga Khan IV, has evoked classical Ismaili teachings on Qur'ānic Revelation while also heavily funding and promoting the academic study of the Qur'ān in its historical, theological, artistic, and ethical dimensions. The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), which was founded by the Aga Khan in 1977, houses a Quranic Studies Unit dedicated to facilitating academic

¹⁵⁰² Aga Khan III, "A Broadcast Message on Radio Pakistan, Build up that free Islamic state mentality," Karachi, Pakistan, 19 February 1950, NanoWisdoms Archive, last accessed 8/8/2019: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10452>.

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research and publications on the history and interpretation of the Qur'ān across Muslim societies. The overall aim of the IIS Quranic Studies unit is “promoting scholarship on the plurality of traditions inspired by the Qur'an and developed throughout Muslim history.”¹⁵⁰³ The pluralist orientation of the IIS Quranic Studies unit is directly inspired by the Aga Khan's own stated position that “the discourse of the Qur'an-e-Sharif, rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations. This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which the Qur'an confers upon all believers.”¹⁵⁰⁴ In recent decades, the Aga Khan has grounded his vision of pluralism by quoting Qur'ānic verses like Q. 4:1 and 49:13, both of which speak to God's creation of human diversity from a “single soul”.¹⁵⁰⁵ The daily Ismaili prayers called *Dū'a*, which were introduced and standardized in the early 1950s, contain the recitation of selected qur'ānic verses that Ismailis historically used to support the authority of the Imamate.¹⁵⁰⁶

With respect to his view of revelation, Aga Khan IV made the following remarks at the inauguration of the Aga Khan University in Karachi:

The Divine Intellect, *'Aql-i Kull*, both transcends and informs the human intellect. It is this Intellect which enables man to strive towards two aims dedicated by the Faith: that he should reflect upon the environment Allah has given and that he should know himself. It is the light of the intellect

¹⁵⁰³ The Institute of Ismaili Studies, “Quranic Studies,” accessed on 10/30/2019: <https://iis.ac.uk/research/quranic-studies>.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Aga Khan IV, Address at “Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions,” The Ismaili Centre, London, October 19, 2003. Accessed on 11/20/2019: <https://iis.ac.uk/content/word-god-art-man-qur-and-its-creative-expressions>.

¹⁵⁰⁵ On the Aga Khan's quotations from the Qur'ān, see Asani, “Nizari Ismaili Engagements.” On his view of pluralism in relation to the Qur'ān, see Khalil Andani, “Divine Diversity: The Aga Khan's Vision of Pluralism,” *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 4/1 (2019): 1-42.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Tazim R. Kassam, “The Daily Prayer (Du'a) of the Shi'a Isma'ili Muslims,” in Colleen McDannell (ed.), *Religions of the United States in Practice*, Volume 2 (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 23-32.

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which distinguishes the complete human being from the human animal and developing that intellect requires free enquiry.¹⁵⁰⁷

The present Aga Khan's words reiterate the classical Ismaili position on the Universal Intellect as the Revelatory Principle that is partially accessible to human beings through one's individual intellect – which al-Sijistānī and Khusraw respectively called the “God's spiritual messenger” and “hidden weak divine inspiration”.

Aga Khan IV has also drawn upon the earliest Qur'ānic meaning of God's *kitāb* and classical Ismaili interpretations of *kitāb* in his *farmans* and public interviews to illustrate the deeper unity and spiritual kinship of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in light of the concept of *ahl al-kitāb*. In a series of *farmans* made to Ismailis living in North America and Europe in 1983, the present Ismaili Imam reminded his community that Christians are the “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*) and that this warrants warm relations between Ismailis and their Christian neighbors. Throughout these *farmans*, the Aga Khan shared his interpretation of “the Book” (*al-kitāb*) as follows: “The Book is the revelation which Allah has given to man through His Prophets and through the last and final prophet, Prophet Muhammad”,¹⁵⁰⁸ “That Book is the totality of Allah's revelation to mankind.”¹⁵⁰⁹ It is highly significant that the present Imam of the Nizārī Ismailis understands “the Book” or *al-kitāb* as “the totality of Allah's revelation” or “the revelation which Allah has given to man” through all of the Prophets, as opposed to discrete physical scriptures like the Bible or Qur'ān.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Aga Khan IV, Address at the Inauguration of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Aga Khan University Hospital, 11 November 1985, quoted in M. Ali Lakhani, *Faith and Ethics: The Vision of the Ismaili Imamate* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2018), 16. Also accessed online on 8/8/2019: <https://www.aku.edu/about/chancellor/Pages/inauguration-fhs-and-akuh-khi.aspx>.

¹⁵⁰⁸ *Farman* made in New York, 14 June 1983.

¹⁵⁰⁹ *Farman* made in Houston, 8 November 1986. See also the Imam's *farmans* made in Los Angeles on 15 June 1983, London on 5 July 1983, and Paris on 9 July 1983. These *farmans* are not published and I was given access to them through my Ismaili informants.

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His remarks speak to the unitary Qur'ānic idea of *kitab* as divine decree and prescription and allude to the Qur'ānic and Ismaili understandings of *al-kitāb* as the transcendent Revelatory Principle. The Aga Khan repeated this idea when asked about the relationship between Islam and other religions in an interview in Syria shortly after the events of September 11: "Islam is a faith that recognises the preceding monotheistic interpretations, Judaism and Christianity, called the 'People of the Book.' It is one Book. So for me there is no doubt whatsoever."¹⁵¹⁰ In perhaps what is an allusion to Q. 2:2 ("that is the *kitab* in which there is no doubt") – which refers to "that" Transcendent Kitāb as the Revelatory Principle – the Aga Khan appealed to the idea of "one Book" revealed in different monotheistic traditions as a basis for his pluralistic outlook. The Ismaili Imam's strategy of evoking the unity of God's *kitab* as a way of linking different religious traditions seems to follow directly from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's remarks that the "luminous *kitab*" is the esoteric unity that underlies differing prophetic revelatory discourses and religious traditions.

In his guidance to Nizārī Ismaili students about religious education, the Aga Khan underlined the importance of Ismailis learning the "esoteric meaning" or *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān:

Do not forget that our branch of Islam is an esoteric branch of Islam... And it is important, therefore, that if you learn parts of the Qur'an, you should be able to explain the esoteric meaning of those parts... If you recite parts of the Qur'an, certain words must represent to you a concept. If you study the Qur'an-e-Sharif, this concept will become well known to you and through you to the Jamat at large. This takes many years of study.¹⁵¹¹

The Ismaili Imamate's ideas about the nature of revelation, the concept of *kitāb*, and the importance of *ta'wīl* are further reflected in the official and authorized religious education curriculum of the present day Nizārī Ismailis. In general, this religious education curriculum fuses the conclusions of

¹⁵¹⁰ Aga Khan IV, "Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International Interview," Aleppo, Syria, 8 November 2001, NanoWisdoms Archive, accessed on 7/11/2017: <http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6073/>.

¹⁵¹¹ *Farmān* made in Bombay, 22 November 1967, published in Aga Khan IV, *Precious Gems* Vol. 1 (Vancouver: His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Association for Canada, n.d.), 45-46.

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some critical-historical scholarship with normative Ismaili theological ideas. The curriculum includes a textbook titled *The Qur'an and Its Interpretations*, which focuses on the history of the Qur'ān, the concept of revelation, the diversity of qur'ānic interpretation, and the qur'ānic concept of prophetic authority and succession in a manner suitable for Ismaili Muslim high school students.¹⁵¹² *The Qur'an and Its Interpretations* advances several positions about Qur'ānic Revelation that match some of the qur'ānic and Ismaili ideas surveyed in this study. For example, the textbook specifies early on that Qur'ānic *wahy* means “divine inspiration” and *tanzīl* means “sending down” while stressing the existence of “a variety of views in Islamic traditions for understanding the descent of the Qur'an and the ascent of the Prophet.”¹⁵¹³ In a brief section about the Qur'ān as God's Speech, the text briefly mentions the Mu'tazilī view and presents the Ismaili position of al-Sijistānī according to which the Prophet “translates” God's Speech into the language of his own people.¹⁵¹⁴ The curricular text also disassociates the term *kitāb* from the idea of physical scripture and instead defines it as revelation, the symbol of God's all-encompassing knowledge, God's prescription, and the archetypal source of revelation.¹⁵¹⁵ For example, the textbook argues that the meaning of *kitāb* in Q. 29:45-81 (“Recite what has been inspired to you from the *kitāb*...”) and elsewhere is the source of prophetic revelation as opposed to a physical scripture: “The revelation given to the Prophet has its source in a *kitāb*, and that what he has been given is from this *kitāb*. *Kitāb*, as referred to in this *āya*, therefore stands for the source of revelation.... This

¹⁵¹² The Institute of Ismaili Studies, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretations*, Volume 1 (London: Islamic Publications Limited for The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017).

¹⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25-26, 84-89.

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meaning appears to be more appropriate than *kitāb* as a physical book.”¹⁵¹⁶ This interpretation of *kitāb*, found in the Ismaili religious education literature and the Aga Khan's own statements, is strikingly similar to findings of Chapters 1, 5, 6, and 7 concerning the Qur'ānic, Imami, and classical Ismaili concepts of the Transcendent Kitāb as the Revelatory Principle and seems to be informed by the latest Qur'ānic studies scholarship. Finally, the textbook highlights the importance of the *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān and the notion of post-prophetic authority by specifying the role of the Ismaili Imam as the “Speaking Qur'ān” through quoting statements from prior Ismaili *dā'īs*, including those featured in Chapter 7.¹⁵¹⁷

Finally, there are contemporary Nizārī Ismaili scholars who are reformulating classical Ismaili teachings on revelation to address modern debates. The most prolific writer among them is 'Allāma Naṣīr al-Dīn Naṣīr (Ḥubb-i 'Alī) Hunzai (1917-2017), who has authored and published hundreds of books on Ismaili philosophical mysticism and hermeneutics in which he revives and repurposes classical Ismaili Neoplatonic thought and unveils a great deal of Ismaili revelatory exegesis in a way manner to prior Ismaili *dā'īs*. Some of his remarks about Qur'ānic Revelation in light of the theological status of the Imamate in the Nizārī Ismaili tradition are noteworthy. In one such passage, Hunzai argued against the popular belief that God's revelatory guidance primarily takes the form of heavenly scriptures inscribed in a material Guarded Tablet by reiterating classical Ismaili Neoplatonic positions on Qur'ānic Revelation:

[U]ndoubtedly, the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet from the Guarded Tablet, but it is necessary to know how it was revealed and what the Guarded Tablet is. Thus it should be known that the Qur'ān was revealed to the blessed heart of the Prophet as a living spirit.... In short, whatever is revealed to the heart takes the form of knowledgeable and intelligible things and its scope expands gradually until it embraces the entire universe and the existents in it. Thus the spirit of the Qur'ān which was revealed to the Holy Prophet had come to him in the form of the angelic world, or the

¹⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 87.

¹⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 118-120.

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world of angels. It was a luminous, living and wakeful world of knowledge and wisdom and unveiling of reality, the observations and experiences of which were expressed by the Holy Prophet in the Arabic language and thus the Holy Qur'an was compiled in the written form.¹⁵¹⁸

[T]he light of 'Alī is the manifest Imam, the manifest Book, the Mother of the Book and the Guarded Tablet, which contains everything. And other than the light of the Imam, nothing can be the Guarded Tablet. For, if due to the literal concept of the Tablet, it is supposed that there is a huge Tablet of God on which is written everything, then it can be argued that the physical writing cannot contain everything.... Thus it is clear that the Guarded Tablet is the name of the light of the Imam, which comprises and embraces the exterior and interior of the universe and existents.

Hunzai's above remarks concerning Qur'ānic Revelation is a reformulation of ideas previously conveyed by al-Mu'ayyad and Khusraw – that the Guarded Tablet is the celestial archetype of the Arabic Qur'ān and the Prophet received non-verbal inspiration and expressed it in the Arabic language. While Hunzai clearly affirmed the classical Ismaili position – “that the Qur'ān was revealed to the blessed heart of the Prophet as a living spirit” – he also went a step further by stressing that the Guarded Tablet, the Manifest Book, or the Mother of the Book (Qur'ānic terms for the Transcendent Kitāb) is the spiritual light (*nūr*) of the Ismaili Imam: “And other than the light of the Imam, nothing can be the Guarded Tablet.” In other words, Hunzai identified the pre-existent cosmic light of the Imams – called the Light (*nūr*) of Imamate – with the Revelatory Principle of Qur'ānic Revelation. In this respect, both the Arabic Qur'ān and the living Imam are the loci of manifestation (*maẓāhir*) of the same Revelatory Principles – God's Speech, the Universal Intellect (Pen), and the Universal Soul (Tablet). Overall, the classical Ismaili Neoplatonic views of revelation – first articulated over a thousand years ago – continue to have a life in the contemporary period.

This dissertation endeavored to provide an intellectual history of the origins and development of Muslim conceptions of Qur'ānic Revelation from the first/seventh century to the

¹⁵¹⁸ 'Allāma Naṣīr al-Dīn Naṣīr (Ḥubb-i 'Alī) Hunzai, *Recognition of the Imam*, tr. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai and Rashida Noormohamed-Hunzai (London: Institute for Spiritual Wisdom and Luminous Science, 2014), 16.

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fifth/eleventh century. In doing so, the dissertation demonstrated how the Qur'ān and various Sunni and Shi'i thinkers envisaged revelation in terms of a Revelatory Principle, a Revelatory Process, and Revelatory Products. The results of the present study were then categorized in terms of four distinct types of revelation models: 1) the Qur'ānic model, 2) the scriptural models of *tafsīr*, 3) the divine speech models of *kalām* theology, and 4) the divine inspiration models of Shi'i Ismaili philosophy. Among these models, the Shi'i Ismaili positions stand out as truly distinctive because they explicitly affirm the agency of the Prophet Muhammad as the divinely inspired composer of the Arabic Qur'ān and the person of the Imam is the speaking and living form of revelation. The Ismaili models not only contrast with the more well-known Sunni positions, but they also echo something of the earliest Qur'ānic model of revelation. Divine inspiration models of the Qur'ān are also growing in popularity among Muslim modernists. Overall, the diversity of revelation models covered in the present study demonstrate that Muslims since the origins of Islam have entertained metaphysically multilayered and theologically sophisticated visions of Qur'ānic Revelation. Most Islamic revelation models posit a Revelatory Principle and/or Revelatory Products that transcend the Arabic Qur'ān as a material text or auditory recitation. Regardless of whether one frames it as God's Speech, God's Writing, or the Guarded Tablet, all Islamic models of revelation feature a higher, unitary, and ontologically transcendent Revelatory Principle partially unveiled through the Arabic Qur'ān. Likewise, the Qur'ān only amounts to a single instance among several Revelatory Products, which include the Prophetic Sunna, the Shi'i Imamate, and many other revelatory manifestations, that serve to "reveal" the Revelatory Principle. Simple descriptions of the Qur'ān as God's literal words or analogies with the Christian doctrine of incarnation are unable to capture the theological breadth and depth of these Islamic views of revelation. It is therefore hoped that this dissertation has shed greater light on the

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phenomenon of revelation as understood by Muslims with a greater degree of precision and clarity. For at the end of the day, every Muslim's vision of Qur'ānic Revelation directly determines their construction and experience of the hermeneutical phenomenon that we call "Islam".

Appendix A

Appendix A: Dating the *Thaqalayn* Tradition through *Isnād* and *Matn* Analysis

The *Thaqalayn* tradition, in which the Prophet tells his community that he is leaving behind the *kitāb Allāh* and his *Ahl al-Bayt*, has been massively transmitted in minimally different versions across both Sunni and Shi'i *ḥadīth* compilations dating from the late second century onward. In prominent proto-Sunni and Sunni works compiled in the period up to the end of the third century, the *Thaqalayn* tradition is found as follows:

- one narration in the *Musnad* of 'Alī b. al-Ja'd (d. 230/845);¹⁵¹⁹
- one narration in the *Tabaqāt* of Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Sa'd (168-230/784-845);¹⁵²⁰
- three narrations in the *Muṣannaḥ* and *Musnad* of Ibn Abī Shayba al-Kūfī (159-235/775-849);¹⁵²¹
- seven narrations in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164-241/780-855);¹⁵²²
- one narration in the *Musnad* of 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī (181-255/797-869);¹⁵²³
- four narrations in the *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (202-261/821-875);¹⁵²⁴
- eight narrations in the *Kitāb al-Ma'rifa wa l-tārīkh* of Ya'qūb b. Sufiyān al-Fasawī (d. 77/890);¹⁵²⁵

¹⁵¹⁹ 'Alī b. al-Ja'd, *Musnad 'Alī b. al-Ja'd*, ed. 'Abd al-Mahdī b. 'Abd al-Qādir (Kuwait: Maktabah al-Falāh, 1985), 972.

¹⁵²⁰ Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubra*, 2 Vols. ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub 'Ilmiyya, 1990), Vol. 2, 150.

¹⁵²¹ Abū Bakr 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Abī Shayba b. 'Uthmān al-'Absī al-Kūfī (Ibn Abī Shayba), *al-Muṣannaḥ Ibn Abī Shayba*, Vol. 15, 491 (narrated by Abū Sa'id al-Khudrī; but the mention of *Ahl al-Bayt* is cut out of this edition); Vol. 16, 426-428 (narrated by Zayd b. Thābit); idem, *Musnad*, 2 Vols., ed. 'Ādil b. Yūsuf a-Ghazzāwī and Aḥmad Farīd a-Mazyadī (Riyād: Dār al-Waṭan, 1997), Vol. 1, 352 (narrated by Zayd b. Arqam).

¹⁵²² Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, Vol. 3, 14, 17, 26, 69; Vol. 4, 366-67; Vol. 5, 181-82, 189-190.

¹⁵²³ 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dārimī, *Musnad al-Dārimī*, 4 Vols., ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Riyād: Dār al-Mughnī, 2000), Vol. 1, 2090-2091.

¹⁵²⁴ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 55: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/55>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 56: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/56>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 57: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/57>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 58: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/58>.

¹⁵²⁵ Ya'qūb b. Sufiyān al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-Ma'rifa wa l-tārīkh*, 3 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), Vol. 1, 294-296.

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- one narration in the *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* of Aḥmad b. Yaḥya al-Balādhurī (ca. 183-279/ca. 800-892);¹⁵²⁶
- two narrations in the *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī (209-279/824-892);¹⁵²⁷
- nine narrations in the *Sunna* of Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Amr b. Abī 'Āṣim (206-287/822-900);¹⁵²⁸
- five narrations in the *Musnad* of Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Amr al-Bazzār (210-292/825-905);¹⁵²⁹
- one narration in the *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* of Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb b. 'Alī al-Nasā'ī (214-303/829-915);¹⁵³⁰
- three narrations in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. al-Muthannā al-Tamīmī Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī (210-307/826-919);¹⁵³¹
- one narration in *al-Dhurriyya al-Ṭāhira* of Abū Bishr al-Dūlābī (d. 310/923);¹⁵³²
- fifteen narrations in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr* of Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. Ayyūb al-Ṭabarānī (260/873-360/971).¹⁵³³

Throughout the above Sunni *ḥadīth* collections, the Thaqaalayn tradition is mostly transmitted (with a few exceptions) from the Prophet Muhammad through four companions: Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45/655), Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. ca. 74/693), Jābir b. 'Abdullāh (d. 78/697), Zayd b. Arqam (d. 68/687-88).

¹⁵²⁶ Aḥmad b. Yaḥya al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, 13 Vols., ed. Suhayl Zakkār and Riyāḍ Zarkalī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), Vol. 2, 356-357.

¹⁵²⁷ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4157: <https://sunnah.com/urn/736710>; Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4155: <https://sunnah.com/urn/736690>.

¹⁵²⁸ Aḥmad b. 'Amr b. Abī 'Āṣim, *Al-Sunna*, 2 Vols., ed. Bāsim Fayṣal al-Jawābira (Riyadh, 1998), Vol. 1, 509; Vol. 2, 1021-1027.

¹⁵²⁹ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Amr al-Bazzār (d. 292/905), *Al-Baḥr al-Zakḥkhār al-ma'rūf bi musnad al-Bazzār*, 20 Vols., ed. Maḥfūz al-Raḥmān Zayn Allāh (Medina: Maktabat al-'Ulum wa-Ḥikam, 2003-2009), Vol. 3, 89-90; Vol. 10, 231-232, 240-241.

¹⁵³⁰ Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb b. 'Alī al-Nasā'ī, *Kitāb al-Sunan al-kubrā*, 12 Vols., ed. Ḥasan 'Abd al-Mun'im Shiblī (Beirut: Mu'assassa al-Risāla, 2001), Vol. 7, 436-437.

¹⁵³¹ Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. al-Muthannā al-Tamīmī Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī, *Musnad Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī*, Second Edition, 15 Vols., ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Damascus, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'mūn li l-Turāth, 1990), Vol. 2, 297-298, 302-303, 376.

¹⁵³² Abū Bishr al-Dūlābī, *Al-Dhurriyya al-Ṭāhira* (Cairo: Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, n.d.), 230-231.

¹⁵³³ Sulaymān b. Aḥmad b. Ayyūb al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, 11 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2012), Vol. 2, 196-197 No. 2612, 197 No. 2613-2615, 198 No. 2617; Vol. 3, 276 No. 4789-4791, 286 No. 4836, 286-287 No. 4837, 289 No. 4846-4847, 299 No. 4885-4887, 300-301 No. 4888.

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An early report of the Thaḡalayn tradition from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī is found in the *Musnad* of 'Alī b. al-Ja'd (d. 230/845) as follows:

The Prophet said: “Verily, I will soon be summoned [to my Lord] and I will answer [that call]. Verily, I am leaving behind for you two weighty matters (*al-thaḡalayn*): the *kitāb Allāh* is a rope extending from heaven to earth, and my descendants (*'itratī*), my *Ahl al-Bayt*. Verily, the Gracious (*al-laṭīf*), the Aware (*al-khabīr*) informed me that the two of them will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pool. So be mindful of how you treat them after me.”¹⁵³⁴

In terms of their content, all the reports coming from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī share the following common elements with little variation: 1) the Prophet announces that he is leaving behind two weighty matters (*al-thaḡalayn*) for his community; 2) they are identified as the *kitāb Allāh* and “my descendants (*'itratī*)”, defined as “my *Ahl al-Bayt*”; 3) the *kitāb Allāh* is described as a rope extended between heaven and earth; 4) the *kitāb Allāh* and the *Ahl al-Bayt* are declared to never separate until they return to the Prophet in Paradise. The different reports do contain minor additions in content, but the statements above constitute the “core content” of the Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī version of the Thaḡalayn tradition.

An examination of all Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī reports shows that every transmission goes back to Abū Sa'īd only through Abū l-Ḥasan 'Aṭīyya b. Sa'd b. Junāda al-'Awfī (ca. 40-111/ca. 661-729). 'Aṭīyya transmits the tradition to four different individuals: Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-A'mash al-Kufī (61-147/680-764), Zakariyya b. Abū Zā'id (d. 147-149/764-766), 'Abd al-Malik b. Abī Sulaymān al-Kulfi (d. 145/762) and Abū Isrā'īl Ismā'īl b. Khalīfa al-Malā'ī (d. 169/786). This 'Aṭīyya b. Sa'd al-'Awfī is the “common link” for all Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī transmissions. 'Aṭīyya was a reputed early Shi'i traditionist and Qur'ān commentator; his father was a partisan of 'Alī b.

¹⁵³⁴ This report is from 'Alī b. al-Ja'd, 972. Other versions narrated from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī include: Ibn Sa'd, Vol. 2, 150, *al-Muṣannaḡ Ibn Abī Shayba* Vol. 15, 491 (mention of *Ahl al-Bayt* is cut out of this edition but is part of the original); Aḡmad b. Ḥanbal, Vol. 3, 14, 17, 26, 69; al-Fasawī, Vol. 1, 295-296; al-Tirmidhī, Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4157: <https://sunnah.com/urn/736710>. Abī 'Āṣim, Vol. 2, 1023-1024, 1024; Abū Ya'lā al-Mawṣilī, Vol 2, 297-298, 302-303, 376; al-Ṭabarānī, Vol. 2, 196-197.

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Abī Tālib. Ibn Sa'd reported that 'Aṭīyya was even named by 'Alī himself. 'Aṭīyya also was part of the failed rebellion of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Ash'ath (d. 83/702) in 82/701 against al-Ḥajjāj, for which he was flogged some 400 times for refusing to curse 'Alī.¹⁵³⁵ A number of 'Aṭīyya's Qur'ān commentaries also appear in *tafsīr* works.¹⁵³⁶ 'Aṭīyya is the most prominent transmitter of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī and mainly responsible for communicating his teachings in Kufa.¹⁵³⁷ As the common link, 'Aṭīyya would have either invented the entire Thaḳalayn tradition from scratch, invented parts of the Thaḳalayn tradition, or faithfully heard and transmitted the tradition from Abū Sa'īd (or perhaps another companion). In the former two cases, the Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī version of Thaḳalayn dates to the lifetime of 'Aṭīyya b. Sa'd (d. 111/729-730) in the late first century; in the latter case, this version of Thaḳalayn dates to the mid-first century to the generation of the Prophet Muhammad's companions.

We can also consider the Zayd b. Thābit version of the Thaḳalayn tradition. This report typically has the Prophet say the following: "Verily, I am leaving behind among you two caliphs (*khalīfatayn*) after me: the *kitāb Allāh* and my progeny, my *Ahl al-Bayt*. Verily the two of them will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pool."¹⁵³⁸ Almost all reports of the Zayd b. Thābit version contains the words *khalīfatayn* instead of *thaḳalayn*. Apart from minor variations, the core content of this version matches the above report. All the transmissions of the Thaḳalayn tradition from Zayd b. Thābit are narrated from him through al-Qāsim b. Ḥassan (late first – early

¹⁵³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *A History of al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 39, tr. Ella Landau-Tasseron, 228-229.

¹⁵³⁶ See the remarks of Ahmed, *Before Orthodoxy*, 32-34, 55, 72.

¹⁵³⁷ Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 336.

¹⁵³⁸ This version is found in *al-Muṣannaḳ Ibn Abī Shayba*, Vol. 16, 426-428. Other versions narrated from Zayd b. Thābit are found in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, Vol. 5, 181-182, 189-190; Abī 'Āṣim, Vol. 1, 509; Vol. 2, 1021, 1021-1022; al-Ṭabarānī, 276.

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second/eighth century), al-Rukayn b. al-Rabī' al-Kufī (d. 131/748), and Sharīk b. 'Abdullāh (d. 177/793). Sharīk, a well-known jurist and *qāḍī* of Kufa in the late second/eighth century, narrates the tradition to several individuals: Abū Dāwūd 'Umar b. Sa'd al-Ḥafarī (d. 203/818), Abū Bakr b. Abū Shayba, al-Aswad b. Āmir (d. 205/820), and Abū Aḥmad Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh al-Zubayrī (d. 203/818), 'Ubaydullāh b. Mūsa al-'Absī (d. 213/828), al-Haytham b. Jamīl (d. 213/828), 'Iṣma b. Sulaymān al-Khazzāz, and Yaḥyā b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥimmānī (d. 228/843). Thus, Sharīk b. 'Abdullāh (d. 177/793) is the common link for the Zayd b. Thābit version of Thaḳalayn. This means that Sharīk either invented this tradition himself or heard it from his teachers. According to Van Ess, Sharīk became the *qāḍī* in Kufa in the year 150 and temporarily held the post of governor; he also reportedly did not accept Shi'is or Murji'īs as witnesses.¹⁵³⁹ Given his anti-Shi'i ideological background, it seems impossible that Sharīk simply invented the Zayd b. Thābit version of the Thaḳalayn tradition. It is much more likely that he heard it from his own teacher al-Rukayn b. al-Rabī' al-Kufī (d. 131/748) or someone else from that generation. Furthermore, seeing how the Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī version of the Thaḳalayn tradition goes back at least to the late first century with 'Aṭīyya al-Awfī, it is reasonable to suppose that the Zayd b. Thābit version of the tradition dates to the first quarter of the second century or earlier. However, Sharīk may be responsible for the unique wording of *khalifatayn* instead of *thaḳalayn* in the Zayd b. Thābit transmission.

As for the Thaḳalayn version reported from Jābir b. 'Abdullāh, his report has the Prophet say: "O people, I have left among you that which if you hold fast to it, you will never go astray

¹⁵³⁹ Van Ess, *Theology and Society*, Vol. 1, 246-247.

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after me: the *kitāb Allāh* and my descendants, my *Ahl al-Bayt*.”¹⁵⁴⁰ The transmission for this version seems to be a solitary chain in the Sunni sources examined here. But the Shi'i Imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir (57-114/677-733) and Ja'far al-Šādiq (83-148/702-765) feature as immediate transmitters in the Jābir b. 'Abdullāh chain. Jābir is famously reported to have met the young Muḥammad al-Bāqir and conveyed the Prophet's greetings to him.¹⁵⁴¹ The Thaḳalayn tradition is heavily narrated from al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq in the early Shi'i sources through transmitters that do not feature in Sunni texts. These sources include the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, whose core content dates to the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik (r.105–125/724–743),¹⁵⁴² and the *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* of al-Šaffār al-Qummī as related by al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq in six narrations (respectively through Shu'ayb b. A'yan al-Ḥaddād, Ishāq b. Ghālib, Dhāriḥ b. Yazīd, Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī, Khālid b. Mādd al-Qalānisī, Sa'd al-Iskāf).¹⁵⁴³ In one report in *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, Imam al-Bāqir reports the Thaḳalayn tradition from Jābir b. 'Abdullāh.¹⁵⁴⁴ The core content of al-Bāqir's version (the Prophet leaving behind two weighty matters called *kitāb Allāh* and *Ahl al-Bayt* that never separate until they return to the Prophet as the Paradisal Pond) is generally the same as the version of Jābir b. 'Abdullāh in Sunni sources.¹⁵⁴⁵ The three reports of the Thaḳalayn tradition attributed to Imam al-Bāqir in *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* differ only minimally

¹⁵⁴⁰ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi' al-Šaḥīḥ*, Book 49, Ḥadīth No. 4155: <https://sunnah.com/urn/736690>; al-Ṭabarānī, Vol. 2, 197.

¹⁵⁴¹ The fact that Jābir and Muḥammad al-Bāqir were contemporaries is stressed in both Twelver and Ismaili sources. See Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, 38-40.

¹⁵⁴² For the dating and authorship of this work see Tamima Bayhom-Daou, “*Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays Revisited*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 78/1 (2015): 105-119: 105.

¹⁵⁴³ Al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir*, Section 8, Chapter 17, No. 1 to No. 6, 745-749; See also *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, Vol. 1.

¹⁵⁴⁴ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 8, Chapter 17, No. 5, 748.

¹⁵⁴⁵ See *Baṣā'ir* Section 8, Chapter 17, No. 3, No. 5, No. 6, 747-748.

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from Jābir's version in the Sunni sources.¹⁵⁴⁶ Furthermore, two versions of the Thaḳalayn tradition reported from Imam al-Ṣādiq include the core contents of Jābir's version.¹⁵⁴⁷ This transmission and content overlap between Sunni and Shi'i *ḥadīth* compilations is noteworthy because it is otherwise quite rare. This material evidences a genuine transmission of the Thaḳalayn tradition from Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir who registers as the common link if one accounts for both Sunni and Shi'i transmissions. This means that the Jābir b. 'Abdullāh version of the Thaḳalayn tradition dates to the lifetime of Muḥammad al-Bāqir in the second half of the first century.

The Zayd b. Arqam version of the Thaḳalayn tradition differs from the other transmissions because it has multiple versions. Almost all the reports from Zayd b. Arqam situate the Thaḳalayn statement as part of the Prophet Muhammad's farewell guidance delivered at Ghadīr Khumm. The various Thaḳalayn reports from Zayd are transmitted through Yazīd b. Ḥayyān (late first/early eighth century), Abū Ṭufayl 'Āmir b. Wāthila (3-100/624-718), and Abū l-Ḍuḥā Muslim b. Ṣubayḥ (d. 100/718).¹⁵⁴⁸ The contents of the Thaḳalayn tradition transmitted from Zayd differ according to the first-level transmitter. Yazīd b. Ḥayyān transmits the tradition to Abū Ḥayyān Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Taymī al-Kufī (d. 145/762), Sa'īd b. Masrūq (d. 126/743), and Sulaymān al-A'mash b. Mihrān al-Kufī (d. 61-147/680-764), each of whom gave rise to one or more transmission lines.¹⁵⁴⁹ This

¹⁵⁴⁶ No. 3 as cited above. Al-Bāqir then adds more content but his rendition of the Thaḳalayn statement is nearly identical to Jābir's version found in al-Tirmidhī.

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Baṣā'ir*, Section 8, Chapter 17, No. 1, No. 4.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Yazīd is also called Yaḥyā b. Ḥayyan. He was originally from Khurasan and lived in al-Madā'in during first half of the eighth century as per al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol. 39, 313. For information on Abū l-Ṭufayl, see Abū'l Ḥasan Dianat and Rahim Gholami, "Abū Ṭufayl", in Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Islamica* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), consulted online on 7/18/2019: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-9831_isla_SIM_0224. For Abū Ḍuḥā, see *The History of al-Tabari*, Vol. 1, 201.

¹⁵⁴⁹ For information on Abū Ḥayyān, see Asma Afsaruddin, "Early Competing Views on Jihad and Martyrdom," in Elizabeth Kendall and Ewan Stein (eds.), *Twenty First Century Jihad* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 70-81: 79. For information on Sulaymān b. Mihrān, see Haider, *The Origins*, 221-227.

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means that Yazīd b. Ḥayyān is at least a partial common link. One early report from Zayd b. Arqam transmitted through Yazīd b. Ḥayyān and Abū Ḥayyān reads as follows:

O people, I am a mortal human being. Soon the messenger of my Lord will come to me and I will answer (that call). Verily, I am leaving behind for you two weighty matters (*al-thaqalayn*): the first of them is the *kitāb Allāh* which contains guidance and light; so adhere to the *kitāb Allāh* and hold fast to it," [Zayd says: So he encouraged us to the *kitāb Allāh* and emphasized it. The Prophet's words continue] "and my *Ahl al-Bayt*. I remind you by God regarding my *Ahl al-Bayt*. I remind you regarding by *Ahl al-Bayt*. I remind you regarding my *Ahl al-Bayt*."¹⁵⁵⁰

It is important to note that the above report still presents the Prophet leaving behind "two weighty matters" (*al-thaqalayn*) and ordering his community to "hold fast to the *kitāb Allāh* and my *Ahl al-Bayt*", even though the narrator interrupts and obscures this key phrase. The Zayd b. Arqam/Yazīd b. Ḥayyān/Abū Ḥayyān transmissions all refer to the *kitāb Allāh* as "containing guidance and light" (*fīhi al-ḥudā wa l-nūr*) and present the Prophet as repeating the words "I remind you by God about my *Ahl al-Bayt*" three times. In several narrations, Yazīd then asks Zayd about the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* and inquires whether the Prophet's wives are included in his *Ahl al-Bayt*. Zayd replies in the negative and defines the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* as: 'Alī and the progeny (*āl*) of 'Alī, 'Aqīl and the progeny of 'Aqīl and the progeny of Ja'far and the progeny of 'Abbās." He also describes them as "those for whom the acceptance of the *ṣadaqa* is forbidden." The Zayd b. Arqam/Yazīd b. Ḥayyān/Sa'īd b. Masrūq version is very similar but defines the *kitāb Allāh* as the "rope of God" (*ḥabl Allāh*). Overall, the common contents for all Zayd b. Arqam/Yazīd b. Ḥayyān transmissions are as follows: 1) the Prophet is leaving behind two weighty matters; 2) the first of them is the *kitāb Allāh* defined as "containing guidance and light" or "the rope of God"; 3)

¹⁵⁵⁰ This report is from Ibn Abī Shayba, *Musnad*, Vol. 1, 352; other reports from Zayd b. Arqam through Yazīd b. Ḥayyān are as follows: Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Vol. 4, 366-367; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 55: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/55>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 56: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/56>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 57: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/57>; Book 44, Ḥadīth No. 58: <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/58>; al-Dārimī, Vol 1, 2090-2091; al-Fasawī, Vol. 1, 294; al-Bazzār, Vol. 10, 231, 240-241, al-Ṭabarānī, Vol. 3, 299, 300-301, Ibn Abī 'Āṣim, *al-Sunna*, Vol. 2, 1022, 1023.

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the Prophet urges the community to “hold fast to the *kitāb Allāh* and my *Ahl al-Bayt*”; 4) the Prophet reminds the people of his *Ahl al-Bayt* three times. Therefore, we can date this core content to the figure of Yazīd b. Ḥayyān in the late first century.

The transmissions of the Thaḳalayn tradition from Zayd b. Arqam through Abū Ṭufayl are also worthy of consideration. Abū Ṭufayl ʿĀmir b. Wāthila al-Kinānī (3-100/624-718) was a companion of the Prophet and the early Shi'i Imams including ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. He was a direct witness to the last several years of Muhammad's prophetic career. As he transmitted *ḥadīths* from the Prophet and the early Imams, he is one of the few personalities to feature in Sunni and Shi'i *ḥadīth* compilations. Like ʿAṭiyya al-Awfī, Abū Ṭufayl participated in the al-Ash'ath rebellion against the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj. One version of Thaḳalayn is transmitted from Zayd through Abū Ṭufayl, Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit (d. 119/737 or 122/740), and Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-A'mash. An early version of this report recorded by al-Fasawī (d. 277/890) is as follows:

I am leaving behind for you two weighty things. The *kitāb Allāh* is a rope extended from heaven to earth; and my descendants, my *Ahl al-Bayt*. Be mindful of how you treat them after me. For the two of them will never separate until they return to me at the Paradisal Pool.¹⁵⁵¹

Some versions of the Thaḳalayn tradition through these transmitters add the Prophet's famous statement about ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib made at Ghadīr Khumm (which will be examined below). Irrespective of this additional content, all the Abū Ṭufayl/Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit/Al-A'mash versions of Thaḳalayn share core content as follows: 1) the Prophet announces that he is leaving behind two weighty things for his people; 2) they are the *kitāb Allāh* and his progeny or *Ahl al-Bayt*; and 3) the two of them will never separate until they return to the Prophet in Paradise. The Abū Ṭufayl version's core content is nearly the same as the core content of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī's version

¹⁵⁵¹ This report is from Al-Fasawī, Vol. 1, 295. Other versions of the report transmitted from Zayd b. Arqam through Abū Ṭufayl/Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit/Al-A'mash are found in al-Balādhūrī, Vol. 2, 356-357; Abī Āṣim, Vol. 2, 1025; al-Nasā'ī, Vol. 7, 436-437; al-Ṭabarānī, Vol. 3, 286.

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examined earlier. The common link in the Abū Ṭufayl/Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit/al-A'mash transmissions is Sulaymān b. Mihrān al-A'mash, who transmits the report to three different people. Al-A'mash was a Kufan transmitter with a generally positive reputation as a *ḥadīth* transmitter among both Sunni and Shi'i traditionists. But it is highly unlikely that al-A'mash invented the tradition wholesale because the same Thaḳalayn content dates to 'Aṭīyya al-Awfī (late first century) and similar content dates back to Yaḥyā b. Ḥayyān (late first century). Therefore, it is more likely that the core content of the Abū Ṭufayl/Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit/Al-A'mash transmissions dates to Abū Ṭufayl 'Āmir b. Wāthila (3-100/624-718) in the mid-first century. This conclusion is partly corroborated by the fact that there are three other reports of the Thaḳalayn tradition coming through Abū Ṭufayl (two reports from Zayd b. Arqam and one report from Ḥudhayfa b. Usayd al-Ghifārī) where the formal features of the report differ but the same core content of the Abū Ṭufayl/Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit/Al-A'mash version is present.¹⁵⁵²

There is nothing in the content of the Thaḳalayn tradition that suggests it was forged later on to buttress Shi'i doctrines; there is no mention of Imami Shi'i terminology like *imām*, *naṣṣ*, or *'isma*. Later Twelver and Ismaili Shi'i sources often name the members of the *Ahl al-Bayt* or restrict them to the line of al-Ḥusayn; but the Thaḳalayn tradition leaves the Prophet's *Ahl al-Bayt* unspecified; had it been forged by the Umayyads, Shi'is or Abbasids in the second century, then one would expect the term *Ahl al-Bayt* to be defined accordingly. Based on the content alone, one surmises that the Thaḳalayn tradition is very early; the lack of distinctive Shi'i or Abbasid terminology means that it likely pre-dates the elucidation of early Shi'i Imamate theology expounded in the first half of the second/eighth century by Muḥammad al-Bāqir.

¹⁵⁵² For the two other transmission lines from Zayd b. Aram through Abū Ṭufayl, see al-Ṭabarānī, Vol. 2, 197; Vol. 3, 286-287; for the transmission from Ḥudhayfa via Abū Ṭufayl, see *ibid.*, Vol. 2, 198.

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In summary, the Thaḳalayn tradition is widely attested across Sunni and Shi'i sources compiled in the late second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. In Sunni sources, it is transmitted in four minimally different versions from Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45/655), Jābir b. 'Abdullāh (d. 78/697), Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. ca. 74/693), and Zayd b. Arqam (d. 68/687-88). The various transmission lines and core contents of the Thaḳalayn tradition feature common links who lived in the late first century or the early second century:

1. **Common Link:** Aṭīyya b. Sa'd al-Awfī (ca. 40-111/ca. 661-729) from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. ca. 74/693)
Core Content: The Prophet says he is leaving behind two weighty matters; they are the *kitāb Allāh* and his descendants; the *kitāb Allāh* is a rope extended from heaven to earth and his progeny is his *Ahl al-Bayt*; the two will never separate until they return to the Prophet in Paradise.
2. **Common Link:** Sharīk b. 'Abdullāh (d. 177/793) from Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45/655)
Core Content: The Prophet says he is leaving behind two caliphs after him; they are the *kitāb Allāh* and his descendants, his *Ahl al-Bayt*; the two will never separate until they return to the Prophet in Paradise.
3. **Common Link:** Muḥammad al-Bāqir (57-114/677-733) from Jābir b. 'Abdullāh (d. 78/697)
Core Content: The Prophet says he is leaving behind two weighty matters that the people will never go astray if they hold fast to them; they are the *kitāb Allāh* and his descendants, his *Ahl al-Bayt*.
4. **Common Link:** Yazīd b. Ḥayyān (early eighth century) from Zayd b. Arqam (d. 68/687-88)
Core Content: The Prophet says he is leaving behind two weighty matters; the first one is the *kitāb Allāh* which contains guidance and light; he tells the people to hold fast to the *kitāb Allāh* and his *Ahl al-Bayt*; he reminds them thrice about his *Ahl al-Bayt*.
5. **Common Link:** Abū Ṭufayl 'Āmir b. Wāthila al-Kinānī (3-100/624-718) from Zayd b. Arqam (d. 68/687-88)
Core Content: The Prophet says he is leaving behind two weighty matters; they are the *kitāb Allāh* and his descendants, his *Ahl al-Bayt*; the two will never separate until they return to the Prophet in Paradise.

Overall, given the above common links reporting its core contents from four different companions, the Thaḳalayn tradition can be reasonably dated to the mid to late first century. This means that a

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number of individuals contemporary with the Prophet's companions (or the companions themselves) believed that Muhammad was leaving behind two weighty matters for the guidance of his community, the *kitāb Allāh* and his *Ahl al-Bayt*, which would never separate until the end of the world. This conclusion, in turn, raises the real possibility that the overall gist of the Thaqalayn tradition was uttered by the Prophet Muhammad himself in some form or another. The existence of four companion versions of a single prophetic teaching suggests that Muhammad himself is the common link. Even if this latter hypothesis is rejected, it seems reasonable to surmise that the Thaqalayn tradition dates to the followers or companions of Muhammad and that segments of the late first century community certainly believed that the Prophet had uttered these words.

Appendix B: Table of Qur'ānic Revelation Models

Revelation Model (Period)	Revelatory Principle	Revelatory Process	Revelatory Products
Qur'ānic (1st/7th century)	Transcendent Kitāb (divine writing) containing God's knowledge, records, guidance & decrees;	<i>Wahy</i> : The Prophet "reads" the Transcendent Kitāb through non-verbal divine inspiration conveyed by the Holy Spirit; <i>Tafṣīl</i> : The Prophet "translates" & "adapts" the contents of the Transcendent Kitāb into Arabic discourses tailored to his audiences;	The Prophet recites Arabic <i>qur'āns</i> & conveys extra-Qur'ānic guidance, as manifestations of the Transcendent Kitāb, in response to circumstances.
Formative & Classical Sunni <i>Tafsīr</i>: Mujāhid, Muqātil, Ṭabarī, Māturīdī, Tha'labī, Zamakhsharī, Rāzī, Zarkashī, Suyūfī (2nd/8th century onward)	Guarded Tablet containing God's knowledge of all things, including the pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān as a material transcript;	<i>Tanzīl & Inzāl</i> : God sends down the pre-existent Arabic Qur'ān from the Tablet to the lowest heaven (either in annualized portions or all at once) with the angels on the Night of Destiny; <i>Wahy & Tanzīl</i> : Gabriel descends to earth & verbally dictates the Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet in installments over each year; Gabriel conveys the Sunna to the Prophet according to its sense;	The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān, which is identical to the pre-existent Qur'ān, verbatim to his community; he also teaches the Prophetic Sunna according to its sense.
Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (early 3rd/9th century)	God's Uncreated Eternal Knowledge (<i>'ilm Allāh</i>)	<i>Wahy</i> : God eternally recites His Speech as the Arabic Qur'ān; Gabriel hears & recites God's Speech to the people of heaven, descends to earth & recites it to the Prophet; Gabriel also teaches the Sunna to the Prophet;	The Prophet recites God's Uncreated Speech as the Arabic Qur'ān to his community & teaches them the Sunna.
Mu'tazilis of Basra & Baghdad (early 3rd/9th century)	God's Created Speech	<i>Kalām</i> : God creates His Speech as the Arabic Qur'ān either in the form of a body (Ja'far b. Mubashshir, al-Nazzām)	The Prophet either recites a reproduction (<i>ḥikāya</i>) of the Qur'ān (the two Ja'fars), the recitation (<i>qirā'a</i>) of the Qur'ān (al-

Revelation in Islam: Qur'ānic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives

Appendix B: Table of Qur'ānic Revelation Models (Continued)

		<p>or an accident (Ja'far b. Ḥarb, Abū l-Hudhayl, Mu'ammār);</p> <p>God either creates the Arabic Qur'ān in the Guarded Tablet (the two Ja'fars, Abū l-Hudayl), in the air (al-Nazzām), or in a creature (Mu'ammār);</p> <p>Gabriel either recites a reproduction (<i>ḥikāya</i>) of the Qur'ān (the two Ja'fars), the recitation (<i>qirā'a</i>) of the Qur'ān (al-Nazzām), or the original Qur'ān (Abū l-Hudhayl, Mu'ammār) to the Prophet;</p>	<p>Nazzām), or the original Qur'ān (Abū l-Hudayl, Mu'ammār) to his community.</p>
<p>Ibn Kullāb (early 3rd/9th century)</p>	<p>God's Uncreated, Eternal & Non-Verbal Attribute of Speech (<i>kalām Allāh</i>) transcending command & prohibition;</p>	<p><i>Tanzīl & Inzāl = I'lām:</i> God causes Gabriel to understand His Uncreated Speech;</p> <p>Gabriel descends & recites the Created Expression (<i>'ibāra</i>), Recitation (<i>qirā'a</i>), & Impression (<i>rasm</i>) of God's Speech, in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān containing commands, prohibitions, and information related to historical circumstances, of the Prophet;</p>	<p>The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān, as the Created Expression, Recitation, & Impression of God's Speech, to his community.</p>
<p>Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (early 4th/10th century)</p>	<p>God's Uncreated, Eternal & Non-Verbal Attribute of Speech (<i>kalām Allāh</i>) containing command, prohibition, & information;</p>	<p><i>Tanzīl & Inzāl = I'lām:</i> God causes Gabriel to understand His Uncreated Speech as either writing in the Guarded Tablet, audible sounds & letters, or direct understanding;</p> <p>Gabriel descends & recites the Created Expression (<i>'ibāra</i>) or Recitation (<i>qirā'a</i>) of God's Speech, in the form of the Arabic Qur'ān containing command, prohibition, and</p>	<p>The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān, as the Created Expression and Recitation of God's Speech, to his community.</p>

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Appendix B: Table of Qur'ānic Revelation Models (Continued)

		information, to the Prophet;	
Samarqandī (mid 4 th /10 th century)	God's Uncreated, Eternal & Non-Verbal Attribute of Speech (<i>kalām Allāh</i>) without any time, space, or modality;	God causes Gabriel to hear and understand His Uncreated Speech through created verbal sounds & letters in Arabic; <i>Tanzīl & Wahy</i> : Gabriel descends and recites God's Uncreated Speech by means of the created sounds & letters of the Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet;	The Prophet recites God's Uncreated Speech by means of the created sounds & letters of the Arabic Qur'ān to his community.
Mu'tazilī: ʿAbd al-Jabbār (early 5 th /11 th century)	God's Justice and Will directed to the wellbeing of His creatures;	<i>Kalām</i> : God creates His Speech as an Arabic Qur'ān expressing His Will in response to historical events; <i>Tanzīl & Wahy</i> : The Angels hear God's Created Speech & Gabriel descends & verbally dictates the reproduction (<i>ḥikāya</i>) of God's Speech to the Prophet over twenty years;	The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān, an identical reproduction of God's Created Speech, to his community;
Ash'arī: Bāqillāni, Juwaynī, Ṣiqillī, Ghazālī (5 th /11 th century)	God's Non-Verbal, Uncreated & Eternal Attribute of Speech (<i>kalām Allāh</i>) containing command, prohibition, information;	<i>Tanzīl & Inzāl = I'lām</i> : God causes Gabriel to understand His Uncreated Speech; God teaches Gabriel the Created Arabic Recitation (<i>qirā'a</i>) of His Speech & the Prophetic Sunna as a created indication of His Speech; <i>Wahy & Tanzīl</i> : Gabriel descends & verbally dictates the Arabic Recitation of God's Speech to the Prophet; Gabriel conveys the meaning of the Prophetic Sunna to the Prophet over twenty years;	The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān, the Created Recitation of God's Speech, & teaches the Prophetic Sunna, created indication of God's Speech, to his community.
Māturīdī: Pazdawī, Nasafī	God's Non-Verbal, Uncreated & Eternal	<i>Tanzīl & Inzāl = I'lām</i> (Nasafī): God causes	The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān, the

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Appendix B: Table of Qur'ānic Revelation Models (Continued)

<p>(late 5th/11th century)</p>	<p>Attribute of Speech (<i>kalām Allāh</i>) containing command, prohibition, information;</p>	<p>Gabriel to understand His Uncreated Speech; God teaches Gabriel the Arabic Expression (<i>'ibāra</i>) of His Speech;</p> <p><i>Tanzīl & Inzāl</i> (Pazdawī): God creates the composition (<i>manzūm</i>) of His Speech in the Guarded Tablet, and sends it down to the lowest heaven on the Night of Destiny;</p> <p><i>Tanzīl & Wahy</i>: Gabriel descends & dictates the Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet over twenty years;</p>	<p>Created Expression or Composition of God's Speech, to his community.</p>
<p>Ḥanbalī: Qādīrī Creed, Abū Ya'la' b. Farrā' (5th/11th century)</p>	<p>God's Verbal, Uncreated & Eternal Attribute of Speech (<i>kalām Allāh</i>) as Eternal Sounds & Letters containing command, prohibition, information;</p>	<p><i>Tanzīl, Inzāl & Wahy</i>: God recites His Uncreated Speech as the sounds & letters of the Arabic Qur'ān to Gabriel;</p> <p>Gabriel descends & recites God's Uncreated Speech as the sounds & letters of the Arabic Qur'ān to the Prophet; (Gabriel also teaches the divinely revealed Sunna to the Prophet);</p>	<p>The Prophet recites God's Uncreated Speech as the Arabic Qur'ān to the community; (the Prophet also teaches the Sunna to the community).</p>
<p>Imami Shi'i: Twelver Shi'i Ḥadīth attributed to the Imams (2nd/8th century to 3rd/9th century)</p>	<p>God's all-encompassing knowledge, guidance, records, & decrees called <i>Kitāb Allāh</i>, verbally symbolized by God's Greatest Name (<i>al-ism al-a'zam</i>);</p>	<p><i>Wahy & Ta'yīd</i>: God inspires the contents of the <i>Kitāb Allāh</i> through the Holy Spirit to the souls of the Prophets & Imams;</p> <p>Each Prophet & Imam transmits the Supreme Name of God containing the knowledge of the <i>Kitāb Allāh</i>, to his successor;</p> <p>The Imams receive knowledge through non-verbal <i>wahy</i>, angelic audition, piercing of the</p>	<p>The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān & conveys prophetic guidance to his community;</p> <p>The Imams convey divine guidance & divine science (<i>'ilm</i>) to the community;</p>

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Appendix B: Table of Qur'ānic Revelation Models (Continued)

		ear & marking of the heart;	
Pre-Fatimid Ismaili: Maṣū' al-Yaman (late 3rd/9th century)	God's Creative, Incorporeal & Eternal Speech, which is His creative command (<i>amr</i>) manifest in Kūnī & Qadar and reflected in the spiritual and corporeal worlds;	<i>Wahy & Ta'yīd</i> : The Holy Spirit & Spiritual Angels convey God's Speech as non-verbal divine inspiration to the souls of Prophets & Imams; <i>Tanzīl</i> : The Prophet translates God's Speech from the divine inspiration into symbolic words & commands in Arabic; <i>Ta'wīl</i> : The Imams express God's Speech from the divine inspiration as a revelatory exegesis unveiling the correspondence between the Prophet's <i>tanzīl</i> & <i>sharī'a</i> and the real-truths of God's Speech;	The Prophet recites the Arabic Qur'ān & legislates the <i>sharī'a</i> as the exoteric expression (<i>ẓāhir</i>) of God's Speech; The Founder & Imam are the speaking Qur'ān & speaking <i>kitāb Allāh</i> , who teach the <i>ta'wīl</i> of the Arabic Qur'ān & <i>sharī'a</i> as the esoteric expression (<i>bāṭin</i>) of God's Speech.
Non-Fatimid Ismaili Neoplatonic: Rāzī, Brethren of Purity, Sijistānī (4th/10th century)	God's Creative, Incorporeal & Eternal Speech, which is His creative command (<i>amr</i>) manifest in the Universal Intellect & Universal Soul, and reflected in the spiritual and corporeal worlds;	<i>Wahy & Ta'yīd</i> : The Universal Intellect & Universal Soul emanate non-verbal inspiration through the Holy Spirit mediated by <i>Jadd, Faṭḥ & Khayāl</i> to the Prophet's soul & mediated by <i>Faṭḥ & Khayāl</i> to souls of Founder & Imams; <i>Ta'līf</i> : The Prophet renders & expresses God's Speech from the divine inspiration as symbolic words (<i>tanzīl</i>) & commands (<i>sharī'a</i>) in Arabic; <i>Ta'wīl</i> : The Founder & Imams express God's Speech from the divine inspiration as a revelatory exegesis unveiling the correspondence between the Prophet's <i>tanzīl</i> & <i>sharī'a</i> and the real-truths of God's Speech;	The Prophet, as the locus of manifestation of God's Word & Universal Intellect, recites the Arabic Qur'ān & legislates the <i>sharī'a</i> as exoteric expression (<i>ẓāhir</i>) of God's Speech; The Founder & Imam, as the locus of manifestation of the Universal Soul, teach the <i>ta'wīl</i> of the Qur'ān & <i>sharī'a</i> as the esoteric expression (<i>bāṭin</i>) of God's Speech;

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Appendix B: Table of Qur'ānic Revelation Models (Continued)

<p>Fatimid Ismaili: Imam Mu'izz & Nu'mān (4th/10th century)</p>	<p>God's Creative, Incorporeal & Eternal Speech as a Divine Universal Light reflected in the spiritual and corporeal worlds;</p>	<p><i>Wahy & Ta'yid</i>: God conveys His Speech & Light as non-verbal inspiration to the souls of the Prophet & Imams;</p> <p><i>Ta'rif</i>: The Prophet encodes God's Speech from the divine inspiration as symbolic Arabic words & commands;</p> <p><i>Ta'wil</i>: The Founder & Imams express God's Speech from the divine inspiration as a revelatory exegesis unveiling the correspondence between the Prophet's <i>tanzil</i> & <i>sharī'a</i> and the real-truths of God's Speech;</p>	<p>The Prophet, as the locus of manifestation of the Universal Intellect, recites the Arabic Qur'ān & legislates the <i>sharī'a</i> as exoteric expression (<i>zāhir</i>) of God's Speech;</p> <p>The Founder & Imam, as the speaking Qur'ān & speaking <i>kitāb Allāh</i>, teach the <i>ta'wil</i> of the Arabic Qur'ān & <i>sharī'a</i> as the esoteric expression (<i>bāṭin</i>) of God's Speech.</p>
<p>Ismaili Neoplatonic: Kirmānī (early 5th/11th century)</p>	<p>God's Creative, Incorporeal & Eternal Speech as the First Intellect & reflected in the spiritual and corporeal worlds;</p>	<p><i>Wahy & Ta'yid</i>: The Celestial Intellects emanate non-verbal inspiration through the Holy Spirit to the souls of the Prophet, Founder & Imams as mediated by <i>Jadd, Fath & Khayāl</i>;</p> <p><i>Ta'rif</i>: The Prophet expresses God's Speech from the divine inspiration as symbolic words (<i>tanzil</i>) & commands (<i>sharī'a</i>) in Arabic;</p> <p><i>Ta'wil</i>: The Founder & Imams express God's Speech from the divine inspiration as a revelatory exegesis unveiling the correspondence between the Prophet's <i>tanzil</i> & <i>sharī'a</i> and the real-truths of God's Speech;</p>	<p>The Prophet, as the locus of manifestation of the First Intellect, recites the Arabic Qur'ān & legislates the <i>sharī'a</i> as exoteric expression (<i>zāhir</i>) of God's Speech;</p> <p>The Founder & Imam, as the locus of manifestation of the Second Intellect, the speaking Qur'ān & speaking <i>kitāb Allāh</i>, teach the <i>ta'wil</i> of the Arabic Qur'ān & <i>sharī'a</i> as the esoteric expression (<i>bāṭin</i>) of God's Speech.</p>
<p>Ismaili Neoplatonic: Mu'ayyad, Khusraw (late 5th/11th century)</p>	<p>God's Creative, Incorporeal & Eternal Speech manifest in the Universal Intellect &</p>	<p><i>Wahy & Ta'yid</i>: The Intellect & Soul emanate non-verbal inspiration through the Holy Spirit to</p>	<p>The Prophet, as the locus of manifestation of the Universal Intellect/Pen, recites the Arabic Qur'ān</p>

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Appendix B: Table of Qur'ānic Revelation Models (Continued)

	<p>Universal Soul as God's Writing & reflected in the spiritual & corporeal worlds;</p>	<p>the souls of the Prophet, Founder & Imams as mediated by <i>Jadd, Faḥ</i> & <i>Khayāl</i>; they "read" God's Writing in the Intellect, Soul & Cosmos;</p> <p><i>Ta'rif</i>: The Prophet expresses God's Speech from the divine inspiration as symbolic words (<i>tanzīl</i>) & commands (<i>sharī'a</i>) in Arabic;</p> <p><i>Ta'wīl</i>: The Founder & Imams express God's Speech from the divine inspiration as a revelatory exegesis unveiling the correspondence between the Prophet's <i>tanzīl</i> & <i>sharī'a</i> and the real-truths of God's Speech;</p>	<p>& legislates the <i>sharī'a</i> as exoteric expression (<i>ẓāhir</i>) of God's Speech;</p> <p>The Founder & Imam, as the locus of manifestation of the Universal Soul/Tablet, the speaking Qur'ān & speaking <i>kitāb Allāh</i>, teach the <i>ta'wīl</i> of the Arabic Qur'ān & <i>sharī'a</i> as the esoteric expression (<i>bāṭin</i>) of God's Speech.</p>
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