



The Second Coming of the Book: Rethinking Qur'anic Scripturology and Prophetology

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**The Second Coming of the Book:
Rethinking Qur'anic Scripturology and Prophetology**

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Committee on the Study of Religion

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

The Study of Religion

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

March 2018

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to reassess the character of the Prophet Muhammad's movement by rethinking major aspects of the Qur'anic worldview. Specifically, the dissertation proposes a new interpretation of the Qur'an's conception of scriptural and prophetic history, which may be called respectively its "scripturology" and "prophetology." Previous scholarship often considers the Qur'an to espouse a monotonous historical vision in which God sends a series of prophets with essentially identical messages to various human communities. Furthermore, it is often claimed that the Qur'an depicts Muhammad and his scripture as the culmination of this history and thereby as representing a final dispensation destined for humankind.

In contrast to this prevailing interpretation, I contend that the Qur'an envisages history primarily in a bi-modal way, i.e. as having two towering moments: the revelation of the Torah to Moses, and the sending down of the Qur'an to Muhammad. This contention is based on a hypothesis that forms the analytical core of the dissertation: I argue that the Qur'an, in its discourse on revelations, uses the term *kitāb* not as a label for all scriptures but as an exclusive appellation for the Torah and the Qur'an. That the Qur'an applies the term *kitāb*

to the Mosaic and Muhammadan scriptures alone, I further argue, reflects its estimation of the Torah and the Qur'an as the only scriptures that embody *consummate* divine guidance on account of their *comprehensive* historical and legal instruction. Moreover, I show that the Qur'an ties the revelation of these two *kitābs* to God's special regard for the descendants of Abraham: the Torah was sent down for the benefit of Israelites, and the Qur'an is meant primarily for the guidance of Ishmaelites. By recognizing and underlining the Qur'an's Abrahamic exceptionalism, the dissertation recasts the significance of the Prophet Muhammad's mission. In the qur'anic view, the mission of Muhammad does not represent the end of a universal history of dispensations so much as it constitutes the realization of the "Abrahamic dream" for Ishmaelites and thus the second major act in the drama of the Abrahamic covenant.

The two-*kitāb* hypothesis and its corollaries enable fresh interpretations of many qur'anic passages, a process that has far-reaching implications for our understanding of the Qur'an. The dissertation's final chapter outlines some of these implications. For example, I argue that the Qur'an regards not only Jews but also Christians to be Israelites, that it labels both communities as *ahl al-kitāb* because it considers the Torah definitive to both, and that early Islam gradually lost its genealogical focus on Abraham's descendants during the Umayyad period.

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Acknowledgments

Doctoral students in the humanities often lead their many years of graduate work under the shadow of an exciting yet daunting task, namely, the writing of a dissertation. The completion of this task therefore brings a sense of relief and contentment. In reaching this station of *riḍā*, I have benefited from the support and friendship of many teachers and colleagues. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor William Graham, my *Doktorvater*. That I had a rewarding experience in writing my thesis owes much to Professor Graham's unflagging support and encouragement. In particular, I am thankful to him for his vital and detailed feedback on multiple drafts of my dissertation. Beyond his invaluable support and advice, I have found Professor Graham to be a veritable *uswa ḥasana*, an excellent example, for scholarly imitation—in the depth of his philological and comparative erudition, and in the magnanimity and conscientiousness that he brings to teaching and advising. I would also like to thank Professor Roy Mottahedeh, who has graciously supported my various academic and professional ventures. I was fortunate to take Professor Mottahedeh's *History of the Near East* courses the last time he taught them, and ever since have appreciated the vast learning and unique sense of humor that he brings to the study of Islamic history.

One of my best decisions at Harvard was to enroll in Professor Charles Stang's *Early Christian Thought*, undoubtedly the most stimulating course I took as a student of humanities and a closet *mutakallim*. In our very first conversation, Professor Stang encouraged me to learn Syriac, an advice that proved formative for the subsequent direction of my studies. Even though I was not an official advisee of his, Professor Stang has always been most generous with his time and a constant source of academic *baraka*, the latest of which was his willingness to join my dissertation committee. I am truly grateful to him. I also owe immensely to the fourth member of my committee, Professor Behnam Sadeghi, who has been my mentor for an entire decade. When I began my studies at Stanford in 2008 under his supervision, I had the formidable challenge of making linguistic and academic transitions before me. I would have certainly failed had it not been for Professor Sadeghi's resolute dedication to my academic salvation, which went far beyond the call of duty. Even after I moved to Harvard in 2010, Professor Sadeghi has continued to be the pillar on which I have leaned for support, and has spared no effort in helping me succeed. For that and much else, I will be ever thankful to him.

My first advisor at Harvard was the late Shahab Ahmed, whose broad erudition and trenchant acumen were matched by his wit and conviviality. Professor Ahmed was the first to read a term paper that eventually morphed (beyond recognition) into the present dissertation. While he had qualms about the radical nature of my proposal, he was highly supportive and

convinced that I should see it through. His absence is keenly felt and lamented by many, myself included.

While one's dissertation supervisors are the academic equivalent of one's parents, doctoral study is an arduous path on which one can certainly benefit from godparents. I have been very fortunate to have a virtual academic godfather in Professor Parimal Patil. I have sought Professor Patil's advice at many critical junctures and have immensely benefitted from his penetrating recommendations and political savvy, not to mention his instrumental support for many of my decisions. Professor Shaye Cohen has also been most caring and generous, always willing to listen and to offer astute advice. I learned much as a Teaching Fellow for his course, *The Hebrew Bible*—from his impeccably-delivered and engaging lectures to well-structured assignments and exams. I also cherish the time that I spent in the presence of Professor Ahmad Mahdavi-Damghani. It was a unique fortune to benefit from his oceanic knowledge of Arabic literature, his passion for poetry, and his grandfatherly care for students. I would also like to thank Professors Ali Asani and Khaled El-Rouayheb and for many helpful conversations and encouragements in various stages of my studies.

Somewhat paradoxically, obtaining a PhD in the humanities is not exactly conducive to socializing with other humans, as excessive immersion in texts is an occupational hazard of would-be scholars. But even sporadic conversations with friends can be rejuvenating and, no

less important, help maintain one's sanity. In both regards, I am thankful for the constancy and kindness of the following friends: Latifeh Aavani, Nicholas Boylston, Hadel Jarada, Lidia Gocheva, Neelam Khoja, Josh Mugler, Avigail Noy, Arafat Razzaque, Mira Schwerda, Shahradsahvand, Adam Stern, and John Zaleski. I have also learned much from them and look forward to continue our friendship as we move to other pastures.

Prior to my decade-long academic journey in the United States, I was fortunate to benefit from the enormous erudition and love of knowledge of a number of my teachers in Iran. Among the latter, I am particularly thankful to Dr. Ruzbeh Tusserkani. In addition to providing electrifying lectures on discrete mathematics, Dr. Tusserkani had a fascinating series of Qur'an sessions—both of which I avidly attended. With discerning eyes for textual nuance and unusually broad learning in continental and analytic philosophy (not to mention sheer brilliance), Dr. Tusserkani's qur'anic reflections were packed with compelling observations and intriguing hypotheses. Listening to these reflections was inspiring and intensified my own preoccupation with the Qur'an. I would also like to thank Professor Siavash Shahshahani, whose courses on continuous mathematics and philosophy of mathematics were the most exciting and instructive courses I took in college, and whose support was crucial in enabling me to begin a new academic chapter in the United States.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge the immeasurable debt that I owe to my immediate family. My parents and parents-in-law have supported us in every conceivable way and endured years of separation to make sure we succeed. It is hard to fathom, let alone thank in word or deed, such unconditional love and generosity. The birth of our daughter, Sara, has not only brought much joy into our lives but has also made me aware of the unique gravity of raising a child—a realization that has made me more appreciative of the selfless affection of my two sets of parents. I am also grateful to other members of my family, in particular my aunts, for their care and love throughout all these years. My deepest thanks go to Narges, my wife and steadfast friend. Nothing that I have done would have been possible or even worth the effort without her unwavering love, unshakable faith, and genial presence.

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my late grandmother, Masoumeh Shahnazari, who was the first to encourage me as I took my early steps towards the study of the Qur'an twenty-five years ago.

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Introduction

‘Abdallāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ¹ said:

“I saw in a dream that I had ghee on one of my fingers and honey on the other, and I was licking them.

Next morning, I related this [dream] to the Prophet—may God’s blessings and peace be upon him.

He said: ‘you will read the two books: the Torah and the Qur’an.’”

Indeed, he [i.e. ‘Abdallāh] was wont to read them.²

The Qur’an is a source of unique value for historians of Islam’s origins. While the Islamic scripture contains few concrete details about contemporaneous events and individuals, it affords us access to the preaching and the intellectual world of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. By attending to the ideas that are assumed, embraced, and promoted in the Qur’an, therefore, we may gain insight into the values, aims, and ambitions of the Prophet’s religious movement. To this end, qur’anic references to prophets, revelations, and scriptures are of particular significance. That is to say, we can learn much about the worldview of the

¹ A Companion of the Prophet, and son of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (also a Companion) who led the conquest of Egypt and governed the province. ‘Abdallāh died ca. 65 A.H. (Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghābah*, 3:345).

² Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 11:638. A number of other reports similarly claim supra-Islamic erudition for ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ. He was able to read Aramaic/Syriac (*al-suryāniyyah*), and a party of men from ‘Irāq knew that he had read “the first book” (*al-kitāb al-awwal*), a likely reference to the Torah (Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 4:202). Another report has ‘Abdallāh meet Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, a Jewish scholar who is said to have converted to Islam. In order to test ‘Abdallāh’s wisdom, Ka‘b asked how he deals with an evil omen. When ‘Abdallāh shared the formula he utters in such circumstances, Ka‘b was impressed, saying: “you are the most learned of the Arabs! Indeed, the same phrase is found in the Torah” (*ibid.*, 4:203).

Qur'an by investigating how it envisions God's past revelatory interventions. The self-reflexive aspects of qur'anic discourse are similarly of paramount importance. For the Qur'an's historical vision is reflected in, and is in turn influenced by, its portrayals of the message and mission of Muhammad. To understand the character of the early Islamic movement, therefore, we need to attend to the Qur'an's conceptualization of the past and its perception of the unfolding present.

These issues have been naturally of considerable interest to previous students of the Qur'an. In these prior discussions, the Qur'an is often seen to advance a monotonous and repetitive conception of history: God has sent to various communities prophets who have borne an essentially-similar message of monotheism and righteousness.³ History is thus punctuated by a long series of prophets and revelations, a pattern that is exemplified in the qur'anic stories of figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. As for Muhammad and his

³ According to Fazlur Rahman, for example, "different prophets have come to different peoples and nations at different times, but their messages are universal and identical" (*Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 163). Similarly, Joseph Lumbard claims that "[a]ccording to the Quran, prophet have been sent at different times to all human collectivities with revelations in different tongues, but their message was one: *lā ilāha illa'LLāh*—there is no god but God" ("The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions," 1765). In Uri Rubin's estimation, the fact that the Qur'an mentions the Torah and the Gospel as having been sent down "implies that all monotheistic scriptures represent the same divine revelation" ("Prophets and Prophethood," *EQ*). Rubin further emphasizes that "all scriptures represent identical links in the same successive chain of revelations" (*ibid.*). In Fred Donner's similar view, "The Qur'an makes clear that God has revealed His eternal Word to mankind many times, through the intermediacy of a series of messengers (singular, *rasul*) or prophets (singular, *nabi*)" (*Muhammad and the Believers*, 59). See also A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: its genesis and historical development*, Cambridge University Press, 1932, 203.

Qur'an, they are seen as representing the final iteration of this same historical schema. In the dominant reading of the Qur'an, therefore, the function of Muhammad is fundamentally similar to those of previous prophets and his revelation contains the same message⁴—although his being “the seal of prophets” endows his message with finality and makes his dispensation the definitive form of the divine guidance repeatedly vouchsafed to humanity.⁵

In what follows, I challenge this dominant account of what we may call the scripturology and prophetology of the Qur'an.⁶ While some qur'anic passages highlight the

⁴ Arthur Jeffery believes that the Prophet “declares that [the Qur'an's] message is substantially what was in the earlier Books” (Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture*, 70; cf. 28, 64). In the words of Rudi Paret, “der Prophet glaubte, zur selben Botschaft aufgerufen zu sein, die seinerzeit – *im wesentlichen identisch* – im Judentum und Christentum verkündet worden war” (*Mohammed und der Koran*, 62-3; emphasis added). In the words of Sydney Griffith, “the Qur'ān insists that it is an Arabic Qur'ān, addressing the prophetic messages of the past anew, in good, clear Arabic to a new, Arabic-speaking community” (“Al-Naṣārā in the Qur'ān: A Hermeneutical Reflection,” 322). According to Fred Donner, Muhammad “claimed to be ... a prophet bringing a revealed scripture, just as earlier prophets had done” (*Muhammad and the Believers*, 76).

⁵ According to Arthur Jeffery, “If [Muhammad] is the seal of the prophets his religion must obviously be victorious over the other religions (IX.33,cf.LVIII,22), and consequently his Scripture superior to theirs” (*The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 83; cf. 70). In Geo Widengren's opinion, “Muḥammad's being the seal of prophets singles him out as the culmination of all previous prophetic messengers, and as the bringer of *the definite form* of heavenly revelation” (*Muhammad, the Apostle of God*, 12; emphasis added). Similarly, Sydney Griffith describes the Qur'an as “an inter-textual scripture, responding to, critiquing and reprising the scriptural tradition which it claims to present in *its final form* as willed by the one God” (“Al-Naṣārā in the Qur'ān: A Hermeneutical Reflection,” 322; emphasis added). According to Daniel Madigan, the Qur'an attests to a transformation of the self-perception of the Prophet's followers from “merely participants in the same historical memory as the Christians and the Jews ... to an awareness that God was making his *definitive* address to *humanity* in the person and ministry of their Prophet” (*The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 89; emphasis added). In Joseph Lumbard's view, the Qur'an presents “itself as the culmination of all revelation” (“The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions,” 1765). See also Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 27f.

⁶ As far as I know, the term “scripturology” has not been used in previous scholarship, but it provides a useful shorthand for designating the Qur'an's understanding of the history and significance of various revealed texts.

basic similarities of prophetic missions, I argue that the Qur'an's prevailing portrayal of prophetic history valorizes two moments above all others: the sending down of the Torah to Moses, and the sending down of the Qur'an to Muhammad. The dominant conception of history in the Qur'an is therefore not cyclical but *bimodal*, that is to say, characterized by two peaks. I further argue that these two acmes of prophetic history reflect the Qur'an's view of the distribution of divine guidance. Even though the Qur'an indicates that this guidance reaches all human communities, it suggests that Abraham's descendants have received a far greater share of God's attention than others. In particular, because Abraham's progeny comprises two main branches—Israelites and Ishmaelites—God has given His supreme guidance twice: once to Israelites in the form of the Torah, and a second time to Ishmaelites in the form of the Qur'an.

My reconsideration of Qur'anic scripturology and prophetology is predicated on an original interpretation of the key concept of *kitāb*. Previous scholarship has proposed a number of definitions for the numerous appearances of *kitāb* in the Qur'an's discourse on revelations: most scholars take this term to mean “book” or “scripture,” while some have suggested that *kitāb* characterizes all revelations in so far as they are transcripts from the heavenly book or because they symbolize access to God's knowledge and power. Despite differences on the precise meaning of *kitāb*, scholars agree that the Qur'an uses it as a label for

all scriptures or even all revelations. I contend, however, that the Qur'an deliberately reserves *kitāb* for itself and the Torah because this term signifies "comprehensive scripture." Just as the heavenly book—the *kitāb par excellence*—is an all-encompassing repository of God's knowledge, the two scriptures that are named *kitāb* are similarly envisioned as comprehensive packages of divine guidance addressing matters of belief and practice.

The proposed rethinking of the pervasive concept of *kitāb* departs radically from previous understandings of this concept and from related readings of numerous qur'anic passages. As such, the viability and merit of my hypothesis need to be established not only by analyzing pertinent qur'anic texts but also through detailed examination of previous understandings of these texts and associated ideas. Because my hypotheses have bearing on central aspects of the qur'anic worldview, scholarly discussions that are relevant to my investigation constitute a vast literature, comprising numerous works written in a variety of languages over more than twelve centuries. Out of practical considerations, I have focused on two specific corpora among the available literature. First, because this study belongs to the tradition of modern scholarship in the Western academy, I have paid particular attention to significant contributions of the past two centuries in English, German, and French. Second, I have engaged extensively with the Islamic exegetical tradition. In particular, for passages that are vital to an assessment of the two-*kitāb* hypothesis, I have consulted twenty-eight works of

exegesis (see below) that cover the *tafsīr* tradition’s temporal span as well as its confessional and methodological diversity. For convenience, throughout this work I will be referring to the first group as (modern) “academics” or (modern) “scholars” and the second group as (Muslim) “exegetes” or (Muslim) “commentators”—even though *tafsīr* is not an exclusively pre-modern or non-academic enterprise, nor would it be inaccurate to describe modern academics as commentators. At any rate, the surveyed writings of exegetes and academics embody a rich variety of perspectives from some of the most learned and astute readers of the Qur’an.

The commentaries that I have consulted extensively are as follows:

- 1) Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), *Tafsīr Muqātil*
- 2) Abū Zakariyya al-Farrā’ (d. 207), *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān*
- 3) Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Huwwārī (fl. 3rd cent.), *Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘azīz*
- 4) Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*
- 5) ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. ca. 330/941), *Tafsīr al-Qummī*
- 6) Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. ca. 333/944), *Ta’wīlāt ahl al-sunnah*
- 7) Abū al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971), *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*
- 8) Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. ca. 373/983), *Baḥr al-‘ulūm*
- 9) Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*
- 10) Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), *Ma‘ālim al-tanzīl*
- 11) Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*
- 12) Ibn ‘Aṭīyya (d. 541/1147), *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-‘azīz*
- 13) Abū ‘Alī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153-4), *Majma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*
- 14) Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*

- 15) Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*
- 16) Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 700/1300), *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wīl*
- 17) ‘Imād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm*
- 18) Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā‘ī (d. 885/1480), *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar*
- 19) Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥalli (d. 864/1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*
- 20) Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi-l-ma’thūr*
- 21) Abū al-Su‘ūd (d. 982/1574), *Irshād al-‘aql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-kitāb al-karīm*
- 22) Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī al-Burūsawī (d. 1137/1724), *Rūḥ al-bayān*
- 23) Ibn ‘Ajībah (d. 1224/1809), *Al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*
- 24) Badr al-Dīn al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834), *Fathḥ al-qadīr*
- 25) Maḥmūd b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1853), *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘azīm*
- 26) Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935), *Tafsīr al-Manār*
- 27) Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386/1966), *Fī zilāl al-Qur’ān*
- 28) Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (d. 1402/1981), *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*

That this list is dominated by “exoteric” commentaries has two reasons: these works are comparable in approach to my own investigation and also form the background in which—and against which—the modern field of Qur’anic Studies has developed.

In reinterpreting qur’anic texts and concepts, I have relied primarily on clues from the Qur’an itself, paying close attention to the broader context of each passage as well as its intra-qur’anic parallels. This is not a novel strategy in and of itself. Already the earliest Muslim

exegetes recognized that some parts of the Qur'an may clarify others.⁷ The unique value of Qur'anic data to exegesis was also explicitly theorized by the Ḥanbalī thinker, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), who asserted that the best method of scriptural interpretation is “to interpret the Qur'an by the Qur'an” (*an yufassir al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*).⁸ However, the theoretical priority accorded to the Qur'an seldom resulted in a rigorous and systematic attempt on the part of pre-modern commentators to consider the context and intertexts of each individual passage. Moreover, while some modern works of *tafsīr* and much of the academic literature routinely undertake such systematic investigations, in key respects both bodies of scholarship have remained under the heavy influence of pre-modern exegesis—a fact that I shall illustrate extensively in the following chapters. Finally, just as detailed biographical reports about the Prophet have exerted much influence on the interpretations of Muslim exegetes, dependence on pre-Islamic sources (especially from the Jewish and Christian traditions) has often

⁷ According to a report attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, for example, the Qur'an is a book where “some parts explain others” (*yufassir ba'ḍuhu ba'ḍan*) (al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-'uyūn* [ad Q 39:32]). A similar understanding is operative in those discussions of the terms *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* (in Q 3:7) that take the former to refer to unambiguous verses of the Qur'an and argue that these verses should serve as guides for interpreting the *mutashābihāt*, i.e. the equivocal passages of scripture. For instance, al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-bayān* (5:227, ad Q 3:7) attributes a statement to Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. al-Zubayr (a grandson of the Companion, al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām) to the effect that the proper way of understanding the Qur'an involves “interpreting ambiguous verses by reference to what is known from the interpretation of clear verses, so that they cohere on a single meaning” (*radd ta'wīl al-mutashābih ilā mā qad 'urifa min ta'wīl al-muḥkam hattā yattasiqā 'alā ma'nan wāḥidan*).

⁸ *Muqaddimah fi uṣūl al-tafsīr*, 93. For a discussion of the significance of this work, see Walid Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An analysis of *An Introduction to the Foundations of Qur'ānic Exegesis*.”

conditioned the readings of academic scholars. However, while it is neither possible nor desirable to ignore pre-qur'anic and post-qur'anic sources, we must consciously avoid adopting their epistemological frameworks. In the case of the concept of *kitāb*, its numerous attestations in the Qur'an represent a sizable textual corpus that—if understood so far as possible in its own terms—can enable us to think outside of the box and arrive at a more accurate understanding of this core concept.

My interpretative decision to rely predominantly on the Qur'an stems from the following premises: the qur'anic corpus represents the proclamations of *one person*, namely Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh, and it is the only substantial literary text to reach us from Islam's first two decades. If various qur'anic passages embody the assumptions, beliefs, and positions of the Prophet Muhammad, and if there is no other contemporaneous literary document that reflects his life and teachings, then it follows that the best way of understanding a particular qur'anic concept or text would be to situate it within the broader universe of qur'anic ideas and statements. That we do not possess, apart from the Qur'an, major writings that go back to the Prophet's lifetime is not a controversial remark in modern scholarship.⁹ As for the Qur'an,

⁹ The so-called "Constitution of Medina" is the only other document that is considered by most scholars to go back to the Prophet's lifetime, but this text is neither extensive nor of particular relevance for the investigation at hand. For a study of this document, see Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's first legal document*.

it has sometimes been suggested that it is the work of multiple authors or that it kept developing and growing for many decades after Muhammad.¹⁰ Advances in the field of Qur'anic Studies, however, have rendered both of these claims tenuous. In particular, the study of manuscripts and variant readings of the Qur'an has strengthened the case for its antiquity,¹¹ while Behnam Sadeghi's pioneering research on qur'anic stylometry has undermined the notion of multiple authors behind the Qur'an.¹² Hence, given the absence of substantial evidence in favor of revisionist proposals such as those of John Wansbrough, it is reasonable to take the Qur'an as a meaningful textual unit with unique significance for the study of Islam's emergence.

¹⁰ Both ideas were formulated by John Wansbrough in his *Qur'anic Studies*.

¹¹ The following studies are of particular significance in this regard: 1) Michael Cook, "The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran"; 2) Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet"; 3) François Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview*; 4) Michael Joseph Marx and Tobias J. Jocham, "Zu den Datierungen von Koranhandschriften durch die ¹⁴C-Methode"; 5) Nicolai Sinai, "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part I"; and 6) *idem*, "When did the consonantal skeleton of the Quran reach closure? Part II."

¹² See his "The Chronology of the Qur'ān: A Stylometric Research Program." Using a division of the qur'anic text into 194 blocks, Sadeghi builds a stylistic profile for each block by considering its average verse length, its utilization of the Qur'an's 28 most common morphemes as well as its 114 medium-frequency morphemes, and finally its utilization of 3693 uncommon qur'anic words. Sadeghi then investigates whether there is a way to bundle these blocks into larger groups so that the four "independent markers of style vary in a relatively continuous fashion over a particular ordering" of these groups (*ibid.*, 218). Sadeghi succeeds in finding such a pattern for an arrangement that divides the blocks into seven distinct groups. The fact that independent stylistic criteria vary concurrently over these groups indicates that the latter capture different phases in *the same author's* textual composition. The Qur'an, in other words, is unlikely to have had multiple authors (*ibid.*, 288).

The lynchpin of this study is the idea that the Qur'an applies the term *kitāb* to the revelations of Moses and Muhammad but *not* to the revelations of other prophets. If we accept this hypothesis, then we need to re-read and re-interpret much of the Qur'an anew—because *kitāb* is a pervasive concept that lies at the very heart of the Qur'an's worldview and is *definitive* to its conceptualization of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It may seem preposterous to advocate such a drastic rupture this late in the history of qur'anic interpretation. If *kitāb* really is an exclusive label for the Torah and the Qur'an, why has this fact not been recognized in previous scholarship? After all, the Muslim scripture has been subject to intense study and scrutiny for some thirteen centuries, including considerable academic interest in the past two-hundred years. Surely, one might reason, some of the countless readers of the Qur'an would have already realized the true meaning of such a central concept as *kitāb*.

In order to address this objection, I have to first make the following clarification: by advocating the two-*kitāb* hypothesis, I do *not* claim that the dominant understanding of *kitāb* as a label for all scriptures is untenable. Rather, I argue that my interpretation offers a *more plausible* reading of the qur'anic text than the previously dominant interpretation.¹³ Indeed, the widespread understanding of *kitāb* would not have held such sway if it were patently

¹³ Ultimately, each interpretation can marshal some qur'anic passages in its favor, while at the same time remaining in tension with other verses of scripture.

incongruent with the Qur'an's relevant references. It is the absence of such incongruence that explains why readers of the Qur'an have not felt an urgent need to search for alternative understandings. In order to illustrate my point about these two competing interpretations of qur'anic data, it may be helpful to discuss the example of a so-called Necker Cube, which can be perceived in two different manners. In the first, the observer sees a cube where the lower left panel is closest to her, while in the second percept it is the upper right panel that is closest. If a viewer is immersed in a geometric discourse predicated on the first percept—e.g. a discussion of the distances of the “closer” lower left panel's vertices from the viewer—it may not occur to them that the cube can be seen in a different light as well. When a certain idea or understanding makes sense, intellectual inertia can guarantee its continuity and dominance.

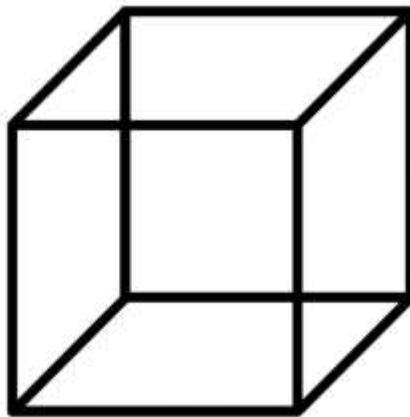


Figure 1 - A Necker Cube

One might still ask that if the two-*kitāb* hypothesis is more plausible than the currently widespread understanding, then why did the Qur'an's interpreters adopt the latter instead of

the former? The analogy of the Necker cube can shed light on this question as well. Because even though both percepts of this cube are tenable, in their first observation most people take the lower left panel of the cube to be closest to them. This may be attributed to a “view-from-above” bias, that is to say, the assumption that we are looking down at the cube—because this angle characterizes most of our visual experience.¹⁴ Similarly, an intrinsic bias existed in favor of the dominant understanding of *kitāb*. In normal Arabic usage, this term referred (and still refers) to writings in general, so there was a tendency to extend such a generic understanding to the qur’anic occurrences of *kitāb*. Moreover, the reality that Muslims faced outside Arabia did not favor a conception of history that privileged the Torah and the Qur’an above all other scriptures. Muslims found their most formidable counterparts and interlocutors in Christians, for whom the New Testament was decidedly more foundational than the Torah. It would therefore have been counterintuitive to disqualify the Gospel as a *kitāb* and deny it the status of a major scripture.

This study comprises five chapters. The first chapter surveys previous discussions of the notion of *kitāb* found in the Islamic exegetical tradition and modern academic writings, paying particular attention to the development and consolidation of the dominant understanding of this concept. The second chapter highlights and analyzes ten passages that

¹⁴ Nikolaus Troje and Matthew McAdam, “The viewing-from-above bias and the silhouette illusion.”

suggest *kitāb* is a label only for the Torah and the Qur'an, showing that previous scholarship has not appreciated the implication of these passages or their connections with each other. The third chapter examines seventeen texts that may seem to undermine the "two-*kitāb* hypothesis" because they could be taken to suggest that the Qur'an posits the existence of a plurality of *kitābs*. I offer plausible interpretations of these passages that are in fact consistent with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis, in the process examining and critiquing their previous readings.

Chapter Four takes the existence of two *kitābs* as its point of departure and examines the semantics of this term in the Qur'an. I show that the distinctions accorded to the Torah and the Qur'an reflect the characteristics of the heavenly *kitāb* in qur'anic discourse. Just as the latter is an all-embracing text that represents God's wisdom and might, the Mosaic and Muhammadan *kitābs* are comprehensive scriptures that offer their recipients a pathway to intellectual and practical enlightenment. In more concrete terms, the chapter highlights the significance of legislation and historical information to the concept of *kitāb*, aspects that help make sense of its exclusive application to the Torah and the Qur'an. The last chapter samples some of the implications of this sweeping reevaluation of qur'anic scripturology. In particular, I show the genealogical rationale behind the revelation of the two *kitābs* as tokens of God's special regard for Abraham's children. Representing supreme divine guidance, the first *kitāb* is sent down for the sake of Israelites while the second one is given primarily for Ishmaelites (if

also secondarily for Israelites). This recognition is followed by a reassessment of the following questions: the portrayal of Christians in the Qur'an, the meaning of the term *ummī*, and the scope of the Prophet Muhammad's mission.

Chapter One:

Literature Review

Revealed Writings in the Qur'an

One of the remarkable features of the Qur'an is its self-identification as direct divine speech. Qur'anic texts are not *reports* of the Prophet Muhammad's divine communications. Rather, they are told primarily from the perspective of God and His angels. "O Prophet! We have sent you as a witness, a bringer of good tidings, and a warner" (33:45), declares one text.¹ "When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am near" (2:186), another passage informs the Prophet. Yet a third text scolds the unbelievers and threatens them that "Our command [of punishment] is but one [word], like the twinkling of an eye!" (54:50). That the Prophet's charge consists of nothing but relaying divine words, and that he is not integral to the process of crafting God's message, are driven home by a statement that directly addresses the unbelievers: "if [Muhammad] were to attribute [his own] sayings to Us, We would take him by the right hand, and then sever his life-vein" (69:44-46). Whether narrating stories, laying out

¹ Compare with Ezekiel 2:3: "He said to me: 'Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel'" (NRSV). Here the divine address is framed and recounted by Ezekiel. It is he who speaks to the reader, not God.

legislation, or delivering instructions for individual and social conduct, qur'anic revelations are framed as unmediated emanations from the divine pulpit.²

While representing spontaneous communications of the word of God, qur'anic revelations were preserved after their initial proclamation, resulting in a growing body of authoritative texts. New revelations were therefore participants in an ongoing project and only the latest members of a larger whole. Consciousness of the integrity of qur'anic revelations is particularly evident in reflexive and cross-referential passages that utilize certain labels, or simply demonstrative pronouns, to transcend their immediate context and signify the qur'anic corpus as a whole. For instance, after narrating a series of stories about past nations, Sūrat al-Shu'arā' (26) suddenly pivots to what seems to be a reflection on the qur'anic text: “indeed it is (*innahu*) a revelation from the Lord of all, which the Faithful Spirit has brought down to your heart” (vv. 192-4). Similarly, Q 17:9 appears to refer to the incipient canon of the Prophet's revelations in the following words: “indeed this *qur'ān* guides to that which is most upright.”³ There are also indications of the importance of the qur'anic corpus to

² For an extensive discussion of this feature of the Qur'an, see Ludwig Ammann, *Die Geburt des Islam: Historische Innovation durch Offenbarung*.

³ On the significance of the term *qur'ān*, see William Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qur'ān’,” *Die Welt des Islams* 23-24 (1984), 361-377. Graham enumerates three meanings for the qur'anic occurrences of the term *qur'ān*: “(1) as the act of reciting God's words ..., (2) as the whole Revelation that God is giving to be proclaimed/recited ..., and (3) as any particular revelation given to be recited” (369; original emphasis). Crucially, Graham notes that “[i]t is often possible to read *qur'ān* in any one of these three senses in a given passage” (*ibid.*).

personal and communal piety. Thus, the Prophet’s followers are exhorted to “recite as much of the *qur’ān* as possible” (73:20) and asked to appreciate, heed, and study their blessed *kitāb* (6:155-7).

The Qur’an not only takes its own divine origin for granted but attributes the same status to other texts. In particular, the Qur’an makes reference to the Torah (*al-tawrāh*), the Psalms (*al-zabūr*), and the Gospel (*al-injīl*) as prior instances of divine revelation. There is a certain similarity, therefore, between the Qur’an and those New Testament books that refer to Judaism’s sacred library in terms such as “sacred writings” (γραφᾶς ἁγίας, e.g. Romans 1:2). However, this similarity should not mask an important difference between Muhammad and the authors of the New Testament: the latter were addressing a primarily Jewish audience who revered the scriptures of Judaism, so at stake was the affirmation and interpretation of a community’s own revelatory heritage. In contrast, the Prophet’s main audience—pagan Arabs—had no such relationship with books like the Torah, so by referring to these books the Qur’an was validating the sacred writings of *other* religious communities.⁴ In light of this, the

⁴ It is thus not surprising that these writings were not incorporated in the Islamic canon of scripture, unlike the Hebrew scriptures that became part of the Christian canon. Of course, as Christians continued to chart an independent path from Judaism, their Jewish scriptural asset increasingly turned into liability. For a history of this difficult if generative relationship, see Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, tr. J. A. Baker.

Qur'an's emphatic recognition of the Torah, Psalms, and the Gospel appears all the more significant.

Muslim Exegetes on Qur'anic Scripturology

The importance of being scripture

The Islamic exegetical tradition places much emphasis on the Qur'an's presentation of itself as divine speech and its references to the revelation of other sacred writings in the past. Yet, according to Muslim exegetes, the Qur'an's cognizance of the phenomenon of scripture goes even further. In the view of these scholars, the very concept of scripture is internal and integral to the Qur'an. That is to say, they believe that the Qur'an consciously subsumes all the writings sent down by God to His prophets under one overarching category—roughly corresponding to the modern concept of scripture—and makes this category a fulcrum of its entire worldview. Muslim exegetes locate this category primarily in the Qur'anic term *kitāb*, a verbal noun that appears more than 250 times in the Qur'an. While *kitāb* is a common substantive that can designate any written document, in the Qur'an it occurs overwhelmingly in the context of divine revelations.⁵ For such occurrences, virtually all scholars agree that the

⁵ Outside of this context, the Qur'an uses *kitāb* to denote a letter (27:29), a manumission contract (24:33), and the record of deeds laid out before each person on the Day of Judgment (69:19). The noun *kitāb* is also sometimes used in the sense of "prescription" or "law" (Q 4:24, 4:103), a usage related to the prepositional verb *kataba 'alā* ("to prescribe").

Qur'an applies *kitāb* to all revealed writings. In other words, the Qur'an consciously places itself and books such as the Torah, Psalms, and the Gospel under the overarching category of scripture that is often signified by the term *kitāb*. Thanks to the prominence of this term in Qur'anic discourse, this means that *scripture as such* is a fundamental and pervasive concept in the Qur'an.

***Kitāb* as a concrete signifier**

In the commentaries, the idea that *kitāb* captures the concept of scripture is asserted and affirmed in a number of ways. Obviously, on a basic level this means that any individual scripture can be labelled a *kitāb*. Qur'an commentaries accordingly disambiguate some occurrences of *kitāb* based on contextual indications. Thus, discussing the phrase “We gave Moses *al-kitāb*” in Q 2:87, Muslim commentators often gloss *al-kitāb* simply as *al-tawrah*, because the scripture given to Moses was the Torah.⁶ Similarly, when the Qur'anic Jesus declares that God “has given me *al-kitāb*” (19:30), commentators explain *al-kitāb* as *al-injil*, because elsewhere the Qur'an informs us that God gave the Gospel (*al-injil*) to Jesus (5:46).⁷ What this suggests is that the Qur'an deliberately emphasizes the “scripturality” of individual books. These passages could have been “We gave Moses the Torah” and “[God] has given me the Gospel,”

⁶ See for instance Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī, Abū al-Su'ūd, and Ibn 'Ajibah.

⁷ See the commentaries mentioned in the previous footnote.

respectively. However, if we accept the explanations of Muslim commentators, the use of the common noun *al-kitāb* in these passages serves to highlight the fact that individual revealed books are instances of the broader category of scripture and, as such, fundamentally similar in their origin and function.

***Kitāb* as a generic noun**

A locus for “scripture as such” consists of certain occurrences of *kitāb* in definite singular form. According to a rule of classical Arabic, a substantive in this form can serve as a genus or generic noun (*ism al-jins*). Based on this rule, commentaries on the Qur’an take some definite occurrences of *kitāb* to be a generic noun, thereby espousing the view that *kitāb* may represent the *category* of scripture and consequently all scriptures. A *locus classicus* for discussions of this issue is Q 2:285, which contains a formulaic expression enumerating the objects of faith. According to this expression, true believers are those who have faith in “God and His angels and His *kitāb/kutub* and His messengers.” The third item in this list is written as كتبه, which has been read both as a plural (*kutubihī*) and a singular (*kitābihī*).⁸ In the case of the plural reading, the verse seems to suggest that believers must have faith in divine scriptures. However, according to al-Ṭabarī, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 68) preferred the singular reading here. Yet, this did not mean that Ibn ‘Abbās considered only one particular scripture to be a

⁸ *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 1:432-3.

necessary object of faith. Rather, Ibn ‘Abbās is reported to have said: “*al-kitāb* is numerically larger (*akthar*) than *al-kutub*.”⁹ What Ibn ‘Abbās meant by this phrase, al-Ṭabarī clarifies, is that *kitāb* here denotes *jins al-kitāb*, that is to say, the category of scripture. As such, for Ibn ‘Abbās *kitābihi* is all-encompassing and signifies all scriptures, a fact that makes it appear even “more plural” than *kutubihi*, which may refer to any subset of divine scriptures with more than two members.

The problem of singularity

Deeming *al-kitāb* a generic noun is particularly helpful in addressing what we may call “the problem of singularity.” This problem manifests itself in those passages that use the singular term *kitāb* when the commentators would have expected the plural *kutub*. For instance, according to Q 57:26 God “sent Noah and Abraham, and established prophecy and *al-kitāb* among their descendants.” If *kitāb* means scripture, then one would have expected the plural *al-kutub* in this verse, because Abraham’s descendants—particularly the Israelite branch who seem to be the subjects of this verse—had received several books from God. To circumvent this problem, some commentators interpret *al-kitāb* as a generic noun or, presuming this interpretation, simply gloss the singular *al-kitāb* as the plural *al-kutub*. For

⁹ Al-Rāzī contributes to this debate by considering a potential objection. Normally, for a word to function as *ism al-jins* it needs to be preceded by the definite article, which is not the case here. However, al-Rāzī argues that a name can serve as *ism al-jins* in the construct state as well, citing as an example Q 14:34: “If you count God’s bounty (*ni‘mat allāh*), you won’t be able to number it.” Here the singular “bounty” (*ni‘ma*) appears in a construct position and clearly denotes bounty in general.

example, according to al-Ṭabarī, God’s establishing of *al-kitāb* among the progeny of Noah and Abraham means that “the *kutub* were sent to them: the Torah, the Gospel, Psalms, the Furqān (i.e. the Qur’ān), and the other known books (*al-kutub al-ma‘rūfah*).” Al-Ṭabarī does not justify this move from the singular *al-kitāb* to the plurality of scriptures, presumably because he expects his audience to be familiar with the notion that *al-kitāb* sometimes serves as a generic noun in the Qur’an.¹⁰

The previous adherents of the *kitāb*

Arguably the most important case of the problem of singularity involves the following designations of Jews and Christians in the Qur’an:

- 1) *ahl al-kitāb*, “the people of the *kitāb*,” which appears 31 times. In particular, *yā ahl al-kitāb* (“O people of the *kitāb*”) is the most common qur’anic phrase for addressing Jews and/or Christians, appearing twelve times in this function.¹¹
- 2) *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*, “those who were given the *kitāb*,” occurring 18 times.¹²

¹⁰ Similarly, Muqātil b. Sulaymān states that *al-kitāb* in this verse refers to “the four scriptures” (*al-kutub al-arba‘ah*), which he goes on to specify as “the Torah, the Gospel, Psalms, and the Furqān.” See also the explanations of al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī, and Jalālayn. Another interpretation, which al-Zamakhsharī attributes to Ibn ‘Abbās, is that *al-kitāb* means “writing with pen” (*al-khaṭṭ bi-l-qalam*). In other words, the verse might mean that God promoted the art of writing or literacy among Abraham’s descendants.

¹¹ Of these twelve cases, six appear in sūra 3 (vv. 64, 65, 70, 71, 98, 99), one in sūra 4 (v. 171), and five in sūra 5 (vv. 15, 19, 59, 68, 77). Half of these cases are preceded by *qul* (“say”), which means God is asking the Prophet to address Jews and/or Christians. The second most common form of addressing Jews and/or Christians is *yā banī isrāʾīl*, used four times by the Qur’an itself (2:40, 2:47, 2:122, 20:80), and attributed twice to Jesus (5:72, 61:6). Apart from these instances, the Qur’an once uses “*yā ayyuhā alladhīna hādū*” for addressing the Jews (62:6).

3) *alladhīna ātaynāhum al-kitāb*, “those to whom We gave the *kitāb*,” attested 8 times.¹³

4) *alladhīna ūtū naṣīban min al-kitāb*, “those who were given a share in the *kitāb*,” appearing three times (3:23, 4:44, 4:51).¹⁴

Sometimes these phrases seem to refer only to Jews or to Christians, in which case the commentators may explicitly gloss *al-kitāb* as *al-tawrāh* or *al-injīl*.¹⁵ However, many instances of these constructs are understood to designate both Jews and Christians. In these cases, the use of the singular *al-kitāb* is less than straightforward. Would it not have been more natural for the Qur’an to call Jews and Christians *ahl al-kutub* because of the plurality of books in their scriptural canons? Alternatively, why not label them *ahl al-kitābayn*, “people of the two books,” in reference to their respective valorization of the Torah and the Gospel?

¹² Q 2:101, 2:144, 2:145, 3:19, 3:20, 3:100, 3:186, 3:187, 4:47 (for addressing Jews and Christians), 4:131, 5:5 (twice), 5:57, 9:29, 57:16, 74:31 (twice), 98:4.

¹³ Q 2:121, 2:146, 6:20, 6:89, 6:114, 13:36, 28:52, 29:47.

¹⁴ See also *alladhīna ūrithū al-kitāb* (“those to whom the *kitāb* was bequeathed,” Q 42:14) and *alladhīna yaqra’ūn al-kitāb min qablīka* (“those who recite the *kitāb* before you,” Q 10:94).

¹⁵ For example, Q 4:153 says to the Prophet that “the *ahl al-kitāb* ask you to send down to them a book from heaven.” According to some early exegetical reports, the group who asked this of the Prophet were Jewish. As a result, al-Ṭabarī clarifies that *ahl al-kitāb* here means *ahl al-tawrāh*, “the people of the Torah.” (See also Q 3:19, where al-Ṭabarī glosses *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb* as *alladhīna ūtū al-injīl*.) Alternatively, sometimes *al-kitāb* in these phrases is understood to refer to the Gospel. For instance, Q 28:52 asserts that “those to whom We gave the *kitāb* before it [i.e. the Qur’an] believe in it.” According to Muqātil b. Sulaymān, this verse refers to a forty-strong group of Christians who accepted Islam. Therefore, he glosses “those to whom We gave (*ātaynāhum*) the *kitāb*” as “[those] on whom We bestowed the Gospel (*aṭaynāhum al-injīl*),” and goes on to refer to the subjects of the verse as *ahl al-injīl*. These cases are similar to those texts, mentioned above, where the Qur’an mentions the giving of the *kitāb* to Moses or (much less frequently) Jesus. If we accept the interpretations of the commentators, in all of these passages the Qur’an could have been more specific and used either *al-tawrāh* or *al-injīl* instead of *al-kitāb*.

Muslim commentators indeed frequently gloss *ahl al-kitāb* as *ahl al-kutub* or *ahl al-kitābayn*, on the assumption that *al-kitāb* may function as a generic noun in the above constructs. This assumption is often taken for granted but sometimes spelled out, for example in al-Qurṭubī's comments on Q 5:15: "O *ahl al-kitāb*, our messenger has come to you. He makes clear for you much of what you conceal from the *kitāb* and pardons much [besides]." Al-Qurṭubī believes that this verse concerned a group of Jews and Christians, so he asserts that in the phrase *ahl al-kitāb* the second term is a generic noun that effectively means *al-kutub*. He provides the same interpretation for the second occurrence of *al-kitāb* in this verse.¹⁶ Such explanations of the singularity of *al-kitāb* are the exception rather than the rule, however, showing that the idea of *al-kitāb* serving as a generic noun is thoroughly ingrained in the exegetical tradition.

In sum, Muslim exegetes understand *kitāb* to mean "revealed book" when it appears in the Qur'an's discourse on revelations. As a result, they disambiguate some occurrences of *kitāb* by specifying which scripture is meant (e.g. the Torah or the Gospel). Moreover, they often understand *kitāb* to refer to the category of scripture, and thereby to a plurality of scriptures. These interpretive moves suggest that scripture as such is a central qur'anic theme. If instead

¹⁶ See also al-Bayḍāwī. Al-Zamakhsharī similarly interprets *al-kitāb* as a generic noun that thereby refers to all scriptures when discussing the phrase *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb* in Q 4:131, while al-Jalālayn glosses *al-kitāb* in this verse as *al-kutub*.

of “We gave Moses the Torah” the Qur’an opts for “We gave Moses the scripture,” and if instead of calling Jews and Christians “people of the Torah and the Gospel” the Qur’an labels them “people of scripture”—then it means that the Qur’an has a particular affinity for the abstract concept of scripture. Through these formulations, so the interpretations of the commentators suggest, the Qur’an emphasizes that the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an are first and foremost instances of a larger phenomenon. The Gospel may differ from the Qur’an in terms of its language or some of its stipulations, but they both exemplify a category that is beyond and behind each of its individual instances.

The heavenly book

The conceptual unification of revealed writings under the category of scripture is significantly corroborated and concretized by another notion in qur’anic scholarship: the idea of a heavenly book as the source of all scriptures. This idea is based on passages that suggest that the Qur’an, though promulgated orally and piecemeal, nevertheless exists in a secure, transcendental record. The following passages seem to refer to this record in different terms:

- 1) “Nay, but it is a reminder; ... *in honored leaves (ṣuḥuf)*; exalted and pure; by the hands of scribes” (80:11-15).
- 2) “It is indeed a noble Qur’an; *in a hidden book (kitāb)*; which none but the pure touch” (56:77-80)

3) “Nay, it is a sublime Qur’an; *in a guarded tablet (fī lawḥin maḥfūzin)*” (85:21-2).¹⁷

4) “We have made it an Arabic Qur’an so that you might reflect; and it is *in the mother of the book (umm al-kitāb)* with Us, exalted and wise” (43:3-4).

According to the commentators, the various labels used in these texts—“leaves” (*ṣuḥuf*), “book” (*kitāb*), “preserved tablet” (*lawḥ maḥfūz*), and “mother of the book” (*umm al-kitāb*)—all designate the secure, celestial, and complete record that is the source of the Prophet’s qur’anic revelations.

In line with the concern of these passages with the Qur’an itself, exegesis of these texts focuses on the Qur’an’s own (pre-)existence in the heavenly book. Early interpretations of Q 43:4 are a case in point. According to a tradition of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), for example, this verse means that “the Qur’an is in the *umm al-kitāb* that is with God; it [i.e. the Qur’an] was transcribed from that [*umm al-kitāb*].”¹⁸ Two other reports, ascribed to Qatādah b. Dī‘āmah (d. ca. 117/735), explicitly describe the *umm al-kitāb* as “the source of the *kitāb*” (*aṣl al-kitāb*) and “the totality of the *kitāb*” (*jumlat al-kitāb*).¹⁹ If we understand the *kitāb* to be the Qur’an, these explanations suggest that the *umm al-kitāb* contains the entirety of the Qur’an—

¹⁷ A variant reading of this verse (*fī lawḥin maḥfūzun*) yields “guarded in a tablet” instead of “in a guarded tablet” (*Mu‘jam al-qirā’āt*, 10:373).

¹⁸ Mentioned by al-Suyūṭī. Al-Ṭabarī attributes the same view to ‘Aṭīyyah b. Sa‘d. For an assessment of the legacy of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in the fields of theology and Sufism, see Suleiman A. Mourad, *Early Islam Between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

those portions already sent down as well as those to be revealed to the Prophet in the future—and serves as the source from which angels bring these revelations to the Prophet. Another tradition, attributed to ‘Ikrimah (d. ca. 105/723), simply identifies the *umm al-kitāb* with the Qur’an.²⁰ This seems to suggest that the *umm al-kitāb*’s contents are limited to the Qur’an. In other words, the *umm al-kitāb* does not include anything beyond the Qur’an, so instead of saying “it contains the Qur’an” it is possible to say it is the same as the Qur’an.

While these exegetical reports delineate the relationship between the Qur’an and its source,²¹ other traditions define the heavenly book in broader terms. These traditions are cited in the commentaries in relation to Q 21:105, which contains the following statement:

“Indeed We wrote in *al-zabūr/al-zubūr* after *al-dhikr* that My righteous servants shall inherit the

²⁰ See al-Ṭabarī’s discussion of Q 43:4.

²¹ This relationship finds further elaboration in a tradition that is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās and appears in several different variants in al-Ṭabarī’s commentary (in discussing Q 2:185, 17:106, 56:75-80, Q 97:1). These variants are all concerned with a central qur’anic conundrum: on the one hand, the Qur’an refers to itself as if it is a fully-formed text, and even mentions specific, limited timeframes in which it was revealed. For example, Q 2:185 states that the Qur’an was sent down during the month of Ramaḍān, while Q 97:1 seems to suggest that the Qur’an was sent down “in the night of *qadr*.” These texts may be taken to imply that the entirety of the Qur’an has already been sent down. On the other hand, both the Qur’an itself and Muslim historical writings take it for granted that the Qur’an was given to the Prophet over a long period of time. To resolve this apparent contradiction, the above-mentioned report of Ibn ‘Abbās provides a solution with the following outline: the Qur’an was first sent down—at once and in its entirety—from God’s presence to the lowest heaven (*al-samā’ al-dunyā*). Then, it was further sent down to the Prophet piecemeal, over the course of his mission and as suitable to contemporary circumstances. Crucially, in some versions of this report (e.g. those mentioned by al-Tha‘labī in discussing Q 2:106) the source from which the Qur’an was sent down to the lowest heaven is explicitly identified as the *umm al-kitāb* or the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*). This description of the process of the Qur’an’s revelation, and the identification of its source with the *umm al-kitāb* or the Preserved Tablet, is found in virtually all commentaries (e.g. al-Zamakhsharī’s on Q 44:3 and al-Bayḍāwī’s on Q 97:1).

earth.” The first untranslated word (الزبور) is read as *al-zabūr* or as *al-zubūr*, the latter being a plural of the former or of the synonymous singular *al-zabr*.²² The meaning of this verse hinges on the referents of *al-zabūr/al-zubūr* and *al-dhikr*. Different, incompatible interpretations of these terms are attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās in the commentaries.²³ According to one of these interpretations, the first term (presumably read as the plural *al-zubūr*) refers to “the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur’an,” and *al-dhikr* designates the original (*aṣl*) from which these books were transcribed.²⁴ While this tradition does not identify *al-dhikr* in precise terms, a number of other reports—attributed to Mujāhid b. Jabr, Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, and Ibn Zayd—explicitly specify *al-dhikr* as the *umm al-kitāb*. Taken together, the two sets of reports suggest that the *umm al-kitāb* is the source not only of the Qur’an but of *all revealed scriptures*. This understanding endows Q 21:105 with a universal significance: the verse means that God has proclaimed the eventual vindication of the righteous *in all of His scriptures*, after stipulating this promise in the heavenly source of these scriptures, viz. the *umm al-kitāb*.

It is not hard to guess why the Qur’an’s source—designated variously as “the mother of the book” (*umm al-kitāb*), a “preserved tablet” (*lawḥ maḥfūz*), or simply a “book” (*kitāb*)—came

²² A third reading reported for this word is *al-zubur*, which is synonymous with *al-zubūr* (*Mu‘jam al-qirā‘āt*, 6:66).

²³ The remainder of this paragraph is based on traditions adduced by al-Ṭabarī and al-Suyūṭī.

²⁴ The term *al-dhikr* appears as a proper name for the source of the Qur’an in another tradition attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās that discusses the revelation of the Qur’an in the night of *qadr*. See al-Suyūṭī on Q 97:1.

to be understood as the origin of all divine scriptures: two of these designations, namely, *kitāb* and *umm al-kitāb*, appear elsewhere to refer to a heavenly document that epitomizes divine knowledge and authority. The term *umm al-kitāb* appears once in this sense, in Q 13:38-9, which appears to suggest that there exists a written decree (*kitāb*) for the time of each nation's destruction (*ajal*). The text then notes that "God erases what He wills and establishes what He wills, and with Him is the *umm al-kitāb*." According to a common interpretation of these two verses, the *umm al-kitāb* mentioned here is a heavenly record that contains every divine judgment that is going to be carried out until the end of time.²⁵ God may change some of His announced decisions, but some are unalterable, and a complete record of these unalterable rulings, or perhaps of all divine rulings and their potential alterations, exists in the *umm al-kitāb*. Because this verse describes the *umm al-kitāb* as being "with" God (*'indahū*), it is highly reminiscent of the above-mentioned Q 43:4, which describes the Qur'an's repository as the *umm al-kitāb* and adds that it is "with" God (*ladaynā*). Likely as a result of these similarities, Muslim commentators came to see the two instances of *umm al-kitāb* as referring to one and the same document: the book that is the source of the Qur'an is also a thorough record of God's decisions about the fate of nations and individuals.

²⁵ See al-Ṭabarī's discussion of a wide range of interpretations for these two verses, and cf. al-Bayḍāwī's concise comments that reflect the post-classical exegetical consensus.

As mentioned before, apart from the construct *umm al-kitāb* the Qur'an uses the term *kitāb* to describe its heavenly repository. At the same time, many qur'anic passages employ *kitāb* in relation to the comprehensive record of God's knowledge. For example, Q 22:70 makes the following declaration: "did you not know that God knows what is in heaven and on earth? That [knowledge] is indeed in a *kitāb*." In other words, God knows everything and His all-encompassing knowledge is recorded in a book. Another verse appears to provide a more elaborate description of the contents of this same book: "with Him are the keys to the unseen. None knows them but He. He knows what is on land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls down but He knows it. Neither is there a seed in the depths of the earth nor a moist or dry thing except that it is in a clear *kitāb*" (Q 6:59). Judging by the surviving exegetical reports, this heavenly book was identified early on with the Qur'an's transcendental repository, and thus labelled as "the preserved tablet" or "the mother of the book."²⁶ Now, because God's knowledge is all-encompassing, it stands to reason that the heavenly record of His knowledge should be the source not only of the Qur'an but of other scriptures as well. It was likely based on this logic that the exegetes conceptualized the *umm al-kitāb* as the origin of all scriptures.²⁷

²⁶ See the traditions adduced by al-Ṭabarī, al-Baghawī, and al-Suyūṭī on Q 22:70, in addition to Muqātil's commentary on this verse.

²⁷ We may also guess why the idea of a common source of scriptures was proposed in relation to Q 21:105. This verse is a direct divine address: "indeed We wrote in *al-zabūr/al-zubūr* after *al-dhikr* that My righteous servants shall inherit the earth." In this statement, God announces an unalterable judgment: He has decided that the

While this broad conceptualization of the *umm al-kitāb* seems quite ancient, it does not appear to have gained prominence in the exegetical tradition. A rough sense of the prevalence of this idea may be gained by searching the terms *umm al-kitāb*, *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*, and *al-kutub* in the commentaries of Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī, and al-Jalālayn. This would allow us to assess how commonly these commentators describe God’s heavenly book as the repository of all revealed books. The results of this investigation suggest that this description is infrequent. For example, such a characterization does not appear in any of the examined passages of Muqātil’s commentary. As indicated above, this description appears in al-Ṭabarī’s discussion of Q 21:105, but elsewhere he mainly emphasizes the *umm al-kitāb*’s inclusion of information about past and future occurrences (e.g. *ad* Q 17:58, 22:70, and 36:12). The contemporaneous al-Māturīdī mentions the idea of the *umm al-kitāb* as the source of all scriptures only in regard to Q 13:39. As for the works of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī, and the Jalālayn, they all reproduce this idea only in their comments

righteous shall eventually prosper and prevail. Moreover, the verse specifies that this preordained destiny has been written (*katabnā*) “in *al-zabūr/al-zubūr* after *al-dhikr*.” Now, on the one hand, it stands to reason that this decision about the fate of the righteous (and by implication also the wicked) would be recorded in the *umm al-kitāb*, which contains a record of everything—in particular the fate of humans. On the other hand, by virtue of its inclusion in the Qur’an, this announcement is also written in one of God’s scriptures. It was probably to accommodate both of these facts that some exegetes mapped *al-zubūr* and *al-dhikr* respectively to scriptures and the *umm al-kitāb*. This explanation accommodates the basic sense of *al-zubūr* as “writings” or “books,” which can therefore designate divine scriptures. In addition, the proposed interpretation is compatible with the suggested sequence of writing: God first wrote in *al-dhikr* and only later in *al-zubūr*, a sequence that would be respected if one considers *al-dhikr* the source of all scriptures, each of which came into reality at the time of its revelation.

on Q 43:4 and Q 21:105, while al-Bayḍāwī also alludes to it in interpreting Q 2:4. If these commentaries are representative of the exegetical tradition, then it seems that the heavenly book was *not* primarily characterized as the source of all scriptures. Rather, it appears that it was mainly understood as the source of the Qur’an and the record of all occurrences.

Theoretical and Practical Confirmation

The exegetical tradition projects an image of qur’anic discourse whereby the notion of scripture is foundational and pervasive: the Qur’an, according to its Muslim commentators, frequently uses the term *kitāb* in relation to individual scriptures as well as the very category of scripture, and posits a common source for all scriptures. Exegetes attribute a third doctrine to the Qur’an that suggests scripture is central to its worldview. The Qur’an, so the commentators suggest, posits that each scripture confirms other scriptures, and in particular emphasizes the fact that it is itself a confirmation of all previous scriptures. In other words, individual revealed books are aware of their connection to a broader category, and affirm their fellowship in this category by supporting each other.

Above all, the idea that the Qur’an confirms the previous scriptures permeates the exegetical tradition. Commentators often invoke this idea in discussing the twelve passages that describe the Qur’an as *muṣaddiq*. An active participle from the verb *ṣaddaqa* that means “to deem true” or “to confirm,” *muṣaddiq* can be translated as “confirmer.” None of the

passages that feature this term explicitly declares that the Qur'an confirms all the previous scriptures. Nevertheless, the exegetes often find precisely this meaning in the qur'anic text, for example in their discussions of Q 6:91-2. This passage criticizes those who deny the possibility of divine revelation to humans, and cites the *kitāb* of Moses as evidence for the existence of such revelation. The text then describes the Qur'an as "a blessed *kitāb* We sent down, confirmer of that which is before it (*muṣaddiq alladhī bayna yadayhi*)" (v. 92). The Qur'anic text does not make the object of confirmation entirely clear. However, because the text uses the singular pronoun *alladhī* ("that which"), and since the previous verse mentions the *kitāb* of Moses, it would seem that the Prophet's *kitāb* is being portrayed as a confirmer of the Mosaic *kitāb*. Notwithstanding these indications, most commentators opt for a broader interpretation that considers all previous scriptures to be the objects of the Qur'an's endorsement. For example, al-Ṭabarī speaks of the Qur'an's confirmation of "God's previous *kitābs*, which He sent down to His prophets" (*mā qablahu min kutub Allāh allatī anzalahā 'alā anbiyā'ihī*). Similar statements are found in other commentaries.²⁸

Just as the Qur'an confirms previous revealed books, so the exegetes suggest, those books in turn confirm the Qur'an. A key venue for the expression of this idea is discussions of

²⁸ See those of Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Māturidī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrasī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Biqā'ī, the Jalālayn, al-Shawkānī, and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Al-Bayḍāwī (and following him Abū al-Su'ūd) is one of the few examined commentators who considers the object of confirmation to be the Torah, although he does not rule out the possibility that all the previous books are intended.

Q 26:192-9. Apparently a reflection on the Qur'an itself, this passage claims that "it is indeed in the writings of the ancients" (*wa-innahu la-fi zūbur al-awwālīn*, v. 196). According to a common exegetical view, this phrase means that previous scriptures make reference to the Qur'an. For example, al-Zamakhsharī takes Q 26:196 to mean that information (*dhikr*) about the Qur'an is embedded in the earlier books sent down from heaven (*al-kutub al-samāwiyyah*).²⁹ In other words, pre-qur'anic books such as the Torah and the Gospel contain prophecies about the future revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad. The mutual confirmation of the Qur'an and other scriptures means that a true follower of one book must accept all of them as divine revelation. As Max Müller declared about religions that "he who knows one, knows none," the qur'anic view on scriptures can be formulated as "he who recognizes (only) one, recognizes none."³⁰ A critical implication of this view for exegetes is that Jews and Christians, who supposedly know about the Qur'an from their own scriptures, have no legitimate excuse for denying the divine origin of the Prophet's revelations.

According to most commentators, the relationship between the Qur'an and other scriptures goes beyond reciprocal acknowledgement. In the view of these exegetes, the Qur'an

²⁹ A similar view can be found in the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, the Jalālayn, Abū al-Su'ūd, Ibn 'Ajibah, al-Ālūsī, and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

³⁰ *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 15-6. In expressing this sentiment, Müller was inspired by Goethe, who had earlier remarked that "he who does not know foreign languages is ignorant of his very own" (*wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiss nichts von seiner eigenen*; in Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 18).

and previous revealed texts also overlap in terms of their contents. By imparting similar teachings, scriptures confirm each other not only in theory but also in practice. In fact, the idea of similarity between scriptures often appears in discussions of the just-examined Q 26:196 (“it is indeed in the writings of the ancients”). The interpretation mentioned in the previous paragraph assumes that the pronoun “it” (*hu*) in this verse refers to *information about* the Qur’an. However, the pronoun may signify the Qur’an itself, in which case Q 26:196 means that “the Qur’an is in the writings of the ancients.” According to those who entertain this reading, its implication is that the substance and meanings (*ma‘ānī*) of the Qur’an are to be found in previous scriptures.³¹

While the idea of overlap between scriptures is widespread in the exegetical tradition, there is no consensus on the extent of this overlap. Some exegetes offer a minimalist perspective. For example, al-Qurṭubī (*ad* Q 6:92) points to the “rejection of polytheism and affirmation of monotheism” (*nafy al-shirk wa-ithbāt al-tawḥīd*) as the common teaching of all scriptures.³² Others suggest that a larger set of common principles is enshrined in revealed texts. For instance, Muqātil b. Sulaymān (*ad* Q 3:7) claims that every scripture contains the laws found in Q 6:151-3. These laws can be considered a qur’anic version of the Decalogue, so

³¹ See, for example, the comments of al-Māturīdī and al-Zamakhsharī.

³² Ibn Kathīr (*ad* Q 5:48) makes similar remarks, and in fact explicitly speaks of legal divergence between religions (*wa-ammā al-sharā’i‘ fa-mukhtalifah fī al-awāmīr wa-l-nawāhī*).

Muqātil is effectively asserting that certain fundamental commandments are timeless and obligatory for all nations.³³ A still broader overlap is envisioned by Abū al-Su‘ūd. In his comments on Q 26:196, the Ottoman Grand Mufti states that the qur’anic content found in previous scriptures includes not only timeless injunctions “such as monotheism and those teachings pertaining to [God’s] essence and attributes” but also of “admonitions and stories” (*al-mawā‘iẓ wa-l-qaṣaṣ*).³⁴ In other words, scriptures overlap in terms of binding as well as non-binding instructions. The most expansive view is that the contents of the Qur’an are wholly included in previous scriptures. Al-Suyūṭī endorses this position in his collection of responsa, *al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwī*.³⁵ In support of this view, al-Suyūṭī points to some early interpretations of Q 26:196, according to which what is “in the writings of the ancients” is the Qur’an itself. By taking this interpretation literally, al-Suyūṭī claims that whatever the Qur’an contains can also be found in previous scriptures (*kull mā fī al-qur’ān muḍamman fī jamī‘ al-kutub al-sābiqah*).³⁶

³³ Cf. al-Rāzī’s comments on Q 6:92. For an analysis of Q 6:151-3, see Joseph Lowry, “When Less is More.”

³⁴ He provides similar comments on Q 2:41, which largely reflect al-Bayḍāwī’s remarks on that verse.

³⁵ *Al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwī*, 2:192. Cited and discussed in Kister’s informative study, “Ḥaddithū ‘an banī isrā’īla wa-lā ḥaraja,” 225-6. However, because of the multiplicity of views found in the exegetical tradition, I take issue with Kister’s description of al-Suyūṭī’s view as “a common belief” (225).

³⁶ *Al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwī*, 2:192.

Partitioning Scriptures

The commentators depict scripture as a dominant and coherent Qur'anic category that is embodied in a heavenly source and manifested in a number of concordant scriptures. However, the exegetical tradition occasionally undermines the uniformity of this category. In particular, Muslim commentators sometimes make a distinction between two classes of revealed texts: the four books mentioned by their proper names in the Qur'an—the Torah (*al-tawrāh*), the Psalms (*al-zabūr*), the Gospel (*al-injīl*), and the Qur'an itself (*al-qur'ān* or *al-furqān*)—and the writings revealed before the Torah. This bifurcation is based on an early report, found in texts of diverse genres and attributed to different authorities, which enumerates the scriptures sent down by God to His prophets.³⁷ This report is sometimes ascribed to the early historian Wahb b. Munabbih, but it is also cast as a prophetic tradition narrated by the Companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī.³⁸ According to this tradition, God revealed 104 writings (*miʿat kitāb wa-arbaʿat kutub*) in the course of prophetic history.³⁹ The first hundred writings to

³⁷ For a discussion of these iterations and a list of some relevant studies, see Emily Cottrell, “Adam and Seth in Medieval Arabic Literature: The Mandaean connections in al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik’s *Choicest Maxims* (11th ce.) and Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī al-Ishrāqī’s *History of the Philosophers* (13th c.),” 514-6. See also Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 18-21. I thank Liran Yadgar for the latter reference.

³⁸ This tradition does not appear in any of the early, prestigious collections of *ḥadīth*, likely because its *isnād* was deemed problematic. However, it was considered sound by the critic Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) and thereby included in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.

³⁹ *Al-Iḥsān fī taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿūṭ (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risālah, 1988), 2:77-9. Following Ibn Ḥibbān’s judgment of this tradition as sound, it was also included in a number of later collections such as al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī’s (d. 404/1014) *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (2:652; which quotes the beginning of the *ḥadīth*)

be sent down were “leaves” (sg. *ṣaḥīfah*), of which fifty were given to Seth, thirty to Enoch (identified as the qur’anic Idrīs), ten to Abraham, and ten to Moses. In addition to these leaves, God sent down the Torah, Psalms, the Gospel, and the Qur’an. In effect, therefore, this report uses the term *kitāb* in two senses, first to denote an individual leaf or an otherwise short text (fifty of which are attributed to Seth alone) and then to signify an independent book. The report differentiates the pre-Torah writings not only by describing them as collections of “leaves” but also by suggesting that they consisted primarily of non-binding exhortation. In particular, the report has the Prophet assert that the “leaves of Abraham” contained proverbs (*amthāl*) and those of Moses consisted of admonitions (*‘ibar*). The overall impression is that these pre-Torah writings were not essential elements of scriptural history and, as such, were insignificant compared to the four scriptures named in the Qur’an.

These reports appear to capture attempts to make sense of three qur’anic passages that use the term *ṣuḥuf*, the plural of *ṣaḥīfah* (“leaf” or “sheet”) that appears in the just examined tradition. The first of these passages refers to “the ancient leaves” (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*) and indicates that the contents of these writings were available to the Prophet’s contemporaries (20:133). The second text implies that the Qur’an’s message is already present in “the ancient

and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 430/1038) *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘ādah, 1974, 1:18; which includes only a small portion of the *ḥadīth*). For these and other references, see al-Zayla‘ī’s (d. 762/1360) *Takhrīj al-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*, 2:388-391, 4:196. The Ḥanbalī scholar, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200-1), also included this tradition in his universal history, *al-Muntaẓam fī ta’rīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, 1:272-3.

leaves, the leaves of Abraham and Moses” (87:18-9). Finally, a third passage mentions “the leaves of Moses, and [of] Abraham, who was faithful” (53:36-7), again suggesting that their contents should be known to the Qur’an’s audience. The laconic nature of these references provokes at least two questions. First, what is the relationship between the “ancient leaves” and the “leaves of Abraham and Moses”? Do these phrases have the same referent, or is the latter’s referent a subset of the former’s? Moreover, what is the relationship between “the leaves of Moses” and the Torah? The tradition quoted above provides clear answers to these questions: “the ancient leaves” are broader than “the leaves of Abraham and Moses” because they include certain writings given to Seth and Enoch. Moreover, “the leaves of Moses” are different from the Torah as they were given to him before the latter. Other versions of this report provide slightly different answers to these questions, but overall it is clear that they are meant to shed light on the Qur’an’s allusions to the writings revealed in the past.⁴⁰

The significance of the cited tradition of Abū Dharr and similar reports lies in the following fact: they reflect and legitimate a division of revealed writings into what we may call

⁴⁰ A variant of this report opens Wahb b. Munabbih’s *Kitāb al-Tijān*. According to this text, God had sent down 136 writings to His Prophets, and Wahb claims to have studied 93 of these writings. Positing 32 more writings (*kitābs*) than the above-cited *ḥadīth*, this report attributes leaves (*ṣuḥuf*) not only to Seth, Enoch/Idris, and Abraham, but also to Adam, Noah, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ. Moreover, this version does not differentiate between the Torah and earlier leaves given to Moses. Instead, it claims that Moses received 50 leaves and identifies these with “the tablets” (*al-awāḥ*), which probably refers to the Torah. See *Kitāb al-Tijān fī mulūk ḥimyar*, 9. Cf. another version attributed to Wahb preserved in a papyrus fragment (Oriental Institute No. 14046) edited by Nabia Abbott (“An Arabic Papyrus in the Oriental Institute Stories of the Prophets,” 171-5).

“major” and “minor” scriptures. In other words, they provide a basis for the commentators to divide the overarching category of scripture into two distinct subcategories: substantial books that are explicitly named in the Qur’an and play a foundational role in the lives of their respective communities, and somewhat obscure writings revealed in the distant past that were less integral to scriptural history and of less religious significance to their followers.⁴¹ Such a division undercuts the integrity of the category of scripture, because it suggests that there is a fundamental difference between the “leaves” revealed in the primordial past and the books sent down to Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad.

The *locus classicus* for exegetical citations of the Abū Dharr tradition is Q 87:18-9, which uses the noun *ṣuḥuf* twice: “this is indeed in the ancient *ṣuḥuf*, the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham and Moses.” The juxtaposition of “the ancient *ṣuḥuf*” with “the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham and Moses” raises the question of the precise relationship between the two. Probably because of the inherent ambiguity of the text, this passage became a convenient venue for deeper exegetical reflection on the referent of “the ancient *ṣuḥuf*.” Interestingly, early commentaries do not adduce the

⁴¹ The nature of scriptures—whether they are legislative or merely exhortatory—was of practical relevance to Muslim jurists, whose opinions on the rights and obligations of non-Muslims depended in part on the latter’s relation to scriptures. In general, those considered as recipients of a *kitāb* were accorded more rights and prestige, but some jurists believed that such privileges depend on the contents of the said *kitāb*. According to the Shafi‘ī jurist al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), for example, if an individual community’s foundational scripture does not include a sufficient measure of legislation and instead comprises mainly “admonitions and proverbs” (*mawā‘iẓ wa-anthāl*), it does not have the same sanctity (*ḥurmah*) as the Torah and the Gospel and, therefore, its adherents may not keep their own religion by paying the non-Muslim poll-tax (*jizyah*). See *al-Ḥāwī al-kabīr*, 14:288.

Abū Dharr tradition (or related reports) in discussing this passage. For instance, Muqātil b. Sulaymān glosses *ṣuḥuf* as *kutub*, claims that the “leaves of Abraham” are no longer extant (*rufi‘at*), and identifies the *ṣuḥuf* of Moses with the Torah. Al-Ṭabarī similarly explains *ṣuḥuf* as *kutub* and does not mention any person before Abraham as having received revealed writings. Further, he cites a tradition that suggests the *ṣuḥuf* of Moses are identical with the Torah.⁴² Al-Tha‘labī’s *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān* is the first examined commentary to mention this tradition.⁴³ Many exegetes after al-Tha‘labī cite this *ḥadīth* or allude to it. In particular, al-Zamakhsharī mentions the Abū Dharr *ḥadīth ad Q 87:18-9* and alludes to it *ad Q 7:62*. Probably in part because of al-Zamakhsharī’s enormous influence on the subsequent exegetical tradition, this *ḥadīth* came to be a staple in later commentaries.⁴⁴

⁴² In fact, al-Ṭabarī does not use the tradition of Sethian or Enochic writings anywhere in his commentary, although he is certainly aware of it and cites parts of it in his *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.), 1:152-3, 1:171 (explicitly linked with Q 87:18-9), 1:312-3. However, elsewhere in his commentary (*ad Q 5:46*), al-Ṭabarī seems to suggest a more crowded scriptural landscape by his somewhat awkward description of the Gospel as “confirming God’s previous *kutub*, which He had sent down to every nation to whose prophet was sent down a *kitāb* in order for the performance of what was sent down to their prophet in that *kitāb*.”

⁴³ Perhaps spurred on by Ibn Ḥibbān’s validation of this *ḥadīth* as sound. See fn. 36, above.

⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabrisī (*ad Q 87:18-9*), al-Rāzī (*ad Q 87:18-19*), al-Qurṭubī (*ad Q 2:4*), al-Bayḍāwī (allusion *ad Q 7:62*), Ibn Kathīr (*ad Q 4:163-4*), Abū al-Su‘ūd (*ad Q 87:18-9*), Ibn ‘Ajībah (*ad Q 87:18-9*). A younger contemporary of al-Tha‘labī, al-Māwardī mentions similar information about the number of revealed scriptures (*ad Q 87:18-9*), but instead of using the Abū Dharr tradition he draws on a report found in Wahb b. Munabbih’s *al-Mubtada’*.

On the other hand, some exegetes seem to recognize as recipient of scripture only those prophets who are explicitly mentioned as such in the Qur’an. For example, Muqātil refers several times to the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham, and in some of these cases explicitly suggests that there were no scriptures before him. Al-Ṭabarī also sometimes suggests that there were no written revelations apart from those mentioned in the Qur’an, e.g. *ad Q 42:15*. He also

While the tradition attributed to Abū Dharr embodies a distinction between the scriptures named in the Qur'an and those revealed before the Torah, in general commentators do not dwell on this distinction when discussing Q 87:18-9. This is not surprising, because the qur'anic passage itself does not seem to posit a distinction between revealed scriptures. However, two other passages do seem to divide revealed texts into two different categories, and thereby provide the context for many commentators to utilize the bifurcation of scriptures found in the Abū Dharr tradition. According to Q 3:184 and 35:25, God's messengers brought their people the following three items: *al-bayyināt* ("the clear signs"), *al-zubur* ("the writings"), and *al-kitāb al-munīr* ("the illuminating book"). While the first item may refer to prophetic miracles, the latter two seem to refer to revealed texts. By employing two textual designations, these verses suggest that pre-qur'anic scriptures are of two kinds: God sent down "the writings" and also "the illuminating book," the latter presumably more important because of its singularity and description as "illuminating."

Early commentators provide a number of theories for the Qur'an's juxtaposition of *al-zubur* ("the writings") with *al-kitāb al-munīr* ("the illuminating book"). One theory posits no particular distinction between these terms, taking both of them to designate all previous scriptures. For instance, al-Ṭabarī (*ad* Q 35:25) glosses *al-zubur* as *al-kutub* and cites a tradition

mentions the tradition about the five scriptures being sent down in different days of Ramaḍān (*ad* Q 2:185 & 44:3 & 87:18-9).

of Qatādah to the effect that *al-kitāb al-munīr* is coterminous with *al-zubur*.⁴⁵ Al-Ṭabarī does not explain how the singular *al-kitāb* has the same denotation as the plural *al-zubur*, but presumably he is operating under the assumption that *al-kitāb* is a generic noun that can denote all scriptures. Another approach is to distinguish between *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb al-munīr*. For instance, according to Muqātil b. Sulaymān (*ad Q 3:184*) *al-zubur* refers to the prophets' historical-cum-sapiental teachings (*ḥadīth mā kān qablihim wa-l-mawā'iz*) while *al-kitāb* is that which contains God's commands and prohibitions (*amruhu wa-nahyuhu*). A similar view is attributed to al-Kalbī, who reportedly interpreted *al-kitāb al-munīr* as “the lawful and the unlawful” (*al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām*) and *al-zubur* as the books (*kutub*) of the prophets.⁴⁶ These explanations suggest that *al-kitāb al-munīr* characterizes divine legislation but do not specify its referent with precision. Does *al-kitāb* refer to a specific book containing such legislation, for example?⁴⁷ Or does it simply mean “prescription” in this context, and thereby refers to God's rulings in general, however and wherever they might be delivered and recorded? The referent

⁴⁵ Al-Huwwārī (*ad Q 3:184*) attributes a similar interpretation to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. This view is mentioned also by al-Māturīdī (*ad Q 3:184*), al-Baghawī (*ad Q 35:25*), al-Thaʿlabī (*ad Q 35:25*), and al-Qurṭubī (*ad Q 35:25*).

⁴⁶ Cited by al-Huwwārī (*ad Q 3:184*). Another tradition of al-Kalbī—quoted by al-Samarqandī (*ad Q 3:184*)—explains *al-zubur* as the prophetic pronouncements of messengers (*aḥādīth al-anbiyāʾ ... bi-l-nubuwwah ʿalā mā yakūn*). A similar explanation is attributed to the fifth Shīʿī Imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, by al-Māturīdī (*ad Q 3:184*) and al-Qummī (*ad Q 3:184*). See also al-Ṭabarānī (*ad Q 3:184*).

⁴⁷ If so, then al-Kalbī's explanation would be reminiscent of the division of Jewish scriptures into “the Law” and “the Prophets,” the former designating the Pentateuch and the latter signifying the Nevi'im (or more broadly Nevi'im and Ketuvim).

of *al-zubur* is similarly unclear. In Muqātil's explanation, it is not even clear if *al-zubur* refers to texts, because he uses the term *ḥadīth*, which may refer to a historical account regardless of whether it is recorded in writing or not.

Al-Zamakhsharī appears to effect a turning point in the exegetical discussions of *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb al-munīr*. In his brief comments, he glosses *al-zubur* as *al-ṣuḥuf* and explains *al-kitāb al-munīr* as “the Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms.” By assigning specific referents to *al-kitāb al-munīr* and using the term *ṣuḥuf*, al-Zamakhsharī seems to invoke the above-mentioned Abū Dharr *ḥadīth*. Based on this tradition, pre-qur’anic scriptures consist of the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospel, as well as 100 *ṣuḥuf* sent down before the Torah. Al-Zamakhsharī’s comment appears to map this division into the text of Q 3:184 and 35:25 by identifying the pre-Torah *ṣuḥuf* with *al-zubur* and assigning the three pre-qur’anic books to *al-kitāb al-munīr*. This reading of al-Zamakhsharī’s explanation finds corroboration in his discussion of Q 66:12. This verse praises Mary for her faith in God’s *kalimāt* and *kutub*. According to al-Zamakhsharī, here *kalimāt* may refer to the *ṣuḥuf* that God “sent down to Idrīs and others” while *kutub* may refer to “the four books,” meaning the Torah, Psalms, the Gospel, and the Qur’an. The fact that al-Zamakhsharī mentions the name Idrīs makes it almost certain that he has the Abū Dharr tradition in mind. Considering the similarity of his explanations for

these verses, it seems safe to assume that he is thinking of the same tradition when he glosses *al-zubur* as *al-ṣuḥuf*.

Post-Zamakhsharī commentators often adopt his identification of *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb al-munīr* with two different sets of scriptures, but also attempt to justify this division by utilizing pre-Zamakhsharī views on the meanings of *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb*. In particular, the idea of *al-kitāb al-munīr* as legislative revelation features prominently in these discussions. For example, according to al-Bayḍāwī (*ad* Q 3:184) *al-kitāb al-munīr* refers to books that contain “laws and regulations” (*al-sharāʿiʿ wa-l-aḥkām*) while *al-zubur* signifies scriptures that “are confined to sapiential teachings (*al-ḥikam*).” Al-Bayḍāwī elsewhere (*ad* Q 35:25) mentions specific referents for these terms, glossing *al-zubur* as “like Abraham’s *ṣuḥuf*” and explaining *al-kitāb al-munīr* as “like the Torah and the Gospel.” Many commentators who wrote after al-Zamakhsharī (and al-Bayḍāwī) provide similar explanations for Q 3:184 and 35:25, showing the influence of these two commentators.⁴⁸ Thus, reports such as the Abū Dharr *ḥadīth* that may have originated in attempts to interpret laconic qur’anic references to *ṣuḥuf* proved useful also in making sense of the somewhat puzzling juxtaposition of *al-zubur* with *al-kitāb al-munīr*. As a result, in interpreting the verses in question, post-classical commentaries came to associate

⁴⁸ Such as al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, the Jalālayn, Abū al-Suʿūd, Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī, Ibn ʿAjībāh, al-Shawkānī, al-Ālūsī, and Sayyid Quṭb.

the terms *ṣuḥuf* and *zubur* with scriptures revealed in antiquity, reserving *kitāb* for the books named in the Qur'an and of continued relevance to Muslims, Jews, and Christians.⁴⁹

Abiding uniformity of scripture

While the association of *zubur/ṣuḥuf* and *kitāb/kutub* respectively with minor and major scriptures became a staple in post-classical commentaries, it is important to note that this division was invoked only infrequently. That is to say, the treatment of *zubur/ṣuḥuf* and *kitāb/kutub* as terms with different, technical connotations generally appears only in discussions of the just-examined Q 87:18-9, 3:184, and 35:25. In explaining other passages featuring the same terms, the exegetes typically understand *zubur*, *ṣuḥuf*, and *kitāb/kutub* to refer to scriptures in general, not to a specific subset that lacks or contains legislation. For example, as already pointed out, another occurrence of *ṣuḥuf* appears in Q 20:133, which makes reference to “the ancient leaves” (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*) without mentioning Moses or Abraham in this connection. The same commentators who understand *ṣuḥuf* in Q 87:18-9 in a narrow sense (as designating pre-Torah scriptures) interpret it broadly in Q 20:133. Al-Zamakhsharī, for

⁴⁹ This division of scriptures into *ṣuḥuf/zubur* and *kutub* resurfaces in many postclassical texts. For instance, al-Qūnawī's (d. 673/1274) commentary on sūrat al-Fāṭiḥah alludes to this bifurcation by characterizing previous scriptures as “the *ṣuḥuf* sent down to the prophets as well as the *kutub*” (*al-ṣuḥuf al-munazzalah 'alā al-anbiyā' wa-l-kutub*) (*Ijāz al-bayān fi ta'wīl Umm al-Qur'ān*, 4). Similarly, in his famous biography of the Prophet, Nūr al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī (d. 1044/1635) claims that the scriptures before the Torah are properly called *ṣuḥuf* because they contained a minimal set of teachings, namely, belief in God and monotheism (*Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1:309). According to al-Ḥalabī, labelling these scriptures *kutub* is an instance of metaphorical usage (*majāz*). Al-Ḥalabī thereby implies that *kitāb* in the Qur'an is a technical term meaning “legislative scripture.”

instance, glosses “the ancient leaves” as “the other revealed books” (*sā’ir al-kutub al-munazzala*), while al-Bayḍāwī explains it as “the Torah and the Gospel and the other heavenly books” (*al-tawrāh wa-l-injil wa-sā’ir al-kutub al-samāwiyya*). Similarly, when Q 26:196 makes reference to “the *zūbur* of the ancients,” both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī understand this phrase to designate the entirety of pre-qur’anic scriptures, not to what I have termed “minor scriptures.” Broad interpretations of *kitāb* and *kutub* are similarly ubiquitous in the commentaries.

To summarize the preceding analysis, Muslim exegetes believe that the category of scripture is fundamental to the qur’anic worldview. In their understanding, the Qur’an consciously subsumes all the writings revealed by God under a single category and suggests that individual scriptures are manifestations of this overarching concept. This concept is located primarily in the term *kitāb*, which thus not only designates individual scriptures but also often denotes the category of scripture itself. Such is the case, according to exegetes, in those instances of the expression *ahl al-kitāb* (or similar phrases) that refer to Jews and Christians, as a result of which *ahl al-kitāb* means “people who are endowed with a scripture.” Furthermore, in the view of most exegetes the close relationship between various scriptures is exemplified in the fact that they all stem from the same source, the so-called “mother of the book” or the “preserved tablet”—although this heavenly book is primarily conceptualized as

the source of the Qur'an itself and, more importantly, as the record of God's knowledge. The coherence of *kitāb* as a unifying category for all scriptures comes under some strain in the post-classical exegetical tradition. In particular, several commentators divide scriptures into two classes: 1) writings with primarily admonitory content revealed before the Torah and designated as *zūbur* or *ṣuḥuf*, and 2) the four books named in the Qur'an, which are labelled *kutub* or *kitāb*. However, commentators generally invoke this distinction in a few qur'anic passages and do not pursue it with consistency for other attestations of the terms *zūbur*, *ṣuḥuf*, and *kitāb/kutub*. As a result, the exegetical tradition is dominated by a broad understanding of the concept of *kitāb* and a concomitant vision of individual scriptures as documents with a largely similar source, message, and function.

Modern Academics on Qur'anic Scripturology

As is evident from the Islamic scripture itself, non-Muslim engagement with the Qur'an goes back to the lifetime of the Prophet. In particular, Christians within and without the borders of Islamdom have produced an enormous literature on the Qur'an.⁵⁰ While these writings were primarily polemical and thereby of limited value for assessing and understanding the Qur'an, the rise of Europe gradually changed this state of affairs. For one,

⁵⁰ For a concise overview of this literature, see Hartmut Bobzin, "Pre-1800 Preoccupations of Qur'anic Studies," *EQ*.

from the sixteenth century onwards European universities expanded their philological range by establishing chairs of Arabic, the first of which was instituted in Paris at the Collège de France in 1539.⁵¹ For another, thanks to Western economic and political clout, an increasing number of Europeans travelled to the Islamic world and a stream of Islamic manuscripts began flowing to the continent—thus enabling Europeans to utilize Muslim learning in their academic efforts. Finally, thanks to the intellectual transformations of the Renaissance, European scholars began approaching the Qur’an with less hostility than before, privileging comprehension over condemnation.⁵² By the nineteenth century, Western orientalism in general and the professional study of the Qur’an in particular were in full swing.

Early continuity with post-formative exegesis

One of the earliest European studies of the Qur’an to combine a reasonable measure of linguistic competence, access to Islamic literary sources, and scholarly objectivity was George Sale’s *The Koran*, published in 1734. The first direct translation of the Qur’an from Arabic to English, Sale’s work boasted an extensive introduction (titled “Preliminary Discourse”) as well as copious annotations on the Qur’anic text. Its success can be gleaned from the fact that it

⁵¹ Daniel Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, 87.

⁵² A pioneering figure in this movement was the English physician and scholar Henry Stubbe (d. 1676), whose annotated biography of the Prophet was the first study to offer “a positive and historically accurate presentation of the beginnings of Islam” (Nabil Matar, *Henry Stubbe and the Beginnings of Islam*, 48).

enjoyed wide circulation for two centuries and remains in print to this day. It is a testament to Sale's erudition that, in contextualizing the emergence of Islam and the teachings of the Qur'an, he makes extensive use of classical and Hellenistic literature as well as Jewish and Christian scriptures and writings. In addition, Sale draws on an impressive array of primary sources in Arabic, in particular the Qur'an commentaries of Yaḥyā b. Salām al-Baṣrī (d. 200/815),⁵³ al-Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī, and the Jalālayn. By standing on the shoulders of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, Sale produced a learned study of the Qur'an and foreshadowed the methodology and results of subsequent academic scholarship.

In terms of scripturology, there is remarkable continuity between Sale and the Islamic exegetical tradition. Like Muslim commentators, Sale suggests that *kitāb* is a label for individual scriptures as well as the category of scripture. Thus, he translates the phrase *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb* sometimes as “they to whom the scripture hath been given” and other times as “those to whom the scriptures were given.”⁵⁴ As he renders *al-kitāb* interchangeably as “the scripture” and “the scriptures,” it appears that in these instances Sale takes *al-kitāb* as designating the category of scripture and, as such, all divine scriptures—a view pervasive in the commentaries. Moreover, Sale fully endorses the idea that the Qur'an confirms all

⁵³ See Fuat Sezgin, *GAS*, 1:39.

⁵⁴ For the singular translation, see *The Koran*, p. 13 (*ad* Q 2:101). For the latter, p. 18 (*ad* 2:144-5). Cf. “they who had received the scriptures” on p. 36 (*ad* Q 3:19).

previous scriptures. This is reflected in his translation of Q 2:89, a verse that describes the Qur'an as confirming "that which" (*mā*) is with the Jews. While the qur'anic text uses the relative pronoun *mā* in relation to the object of confirmation, Sale uses "the scriptures" as an explanatory gloss in place of *mā*, thereby describing the Qur'an as "confirming *the scriptures* which were with them."⁵⁵ As shown above, Muslim exegetes provide a similar interpretation of this and similar verses, disambiguating the object of confirmation to include all pre-qur'anic scriptures. Presumably based on such interpretations, Sale asserts in his "Preliminary Discourse" that "*Mohammed ... often appeals to the consonancy of the Korân*" with previous scriptures.⁵⁶

On the notion of the heavenly book, Sale exhibits a subtle shift of emphasis from the exegetical tradition. As noted before, Muslim commentators describe the heavenly book primarily as a source of the Qur'an and a record of divine knowledge. This is indeed how Sale characterizes the "preserved table" in his introductory comments.⁵⁷ Yet, in his annotations Sale describes the heavenly book above all as the source of all scriptures, a description that is marginal in the commentaries. Thus, in explaining Q 13:39, Sale defines the *umm al-kitāb* as

⁵⁵ *The Koran*, 12. The italics are from the original text and indicate Sale's interpretive additions to the text.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

“the *preserved table*, from which all the written revelations which have been from time to time published to mankind ... are transcripts.”⁵⁸ Sale makes similar remarks for the occurrence of *umm al-kitāb* in Q 43:4, identifying it as the “preserved Table” and describing it as “the original of all the scriptures in general.”⁵⁹ By privileging this description of the heavenly book, Sale anticipates subsequent academic scholarship that similarly conceptualizes the heavenly book primarily as the source and archetype of all scriptures.

Finally, it is worth noting that Sale does not reproduce the post-classical exegetical tradition’s bifurcation of scriptures into major and minor ones. He *is* aware of the tradition that puts the number of scriptures at 104, and in fact considers this to be the standard Islamic view.⁶⁰ However, he does not seem to appreciate this tradition’s assumed distinction between *ṣahīfah* as a leaf and *kitāb* as an independent book. Perhaps as a result, he does not map this distinction onto the juxtaposition of *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb al-munīr* in Q 3:184 and 35:25, despite his reliance on the commentaries of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī that endorse such a distinction. Sale translates *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb al-munīr* respectively as “the scriptures” and

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

“the book which inlighteneth *the understanding*,”⁶¹ and does not explain the relation of these two terms in his annotations.

Muir’s bublicization of *kitāb*

The next major European study with significant bearing on qur’anic scripturology appeared more than a century later in 1856. Penned by Sir William Muir (1819-1905), a prominent Scottish “scholar-administrator,” *The Testimony borne by the Coran to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures* is a systematic investigation of all qur’anic references to the sacred writings of Jews and Christians.⁶² Muir was a colonial officer in the British East India Company and later in the British Raj, eventually becoming the lieutenant-governor of the North-West Provinces of India (modern Uttar Pradesh).⁶³ In his interactions with Muslims, Muir was disquieted by the fact that they would “lavish abuse upon the Jewish and Christian Scriptures” by calling their texts corrupted and falsified.⁶⁴ He believed that this view is against the teachings of the Qur’an. Therefore, Muir set out to demonstrate the true qur’anic view to Muslims and

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58; italics are original.

⁶² Muir published a revised edition of this work (in slightly amended form and supplemented by a general introduction to the Qur’an) in 1878 as *The Corân: Its composition and teaching; and the testimony it bears to the Holy Scriptures*.

⁶³ Wolfgang Behn, *Concise Biographical Companion to Index Islamicus*, 2:634. For a detailed study of William Muir and his older brother, the Sanskritist John Muir (1810-82), see Avril A. Powell, *Scottish Orientalists and India: The Muir Brothers, Religion, Education and Empire*.

⁶⁴ *The Testimony*, ix. For a study of the broader historical context of religious polemic and competition in Northern India, see Avril A. Powell, *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India*, London: Routledge, 1993.

Christians alike.⁶⁵ His chief contention was that “the believer in the Corân is bound to be equally a believer in the Old and in the New Testaments *as now extant*.”⁶⁶ Examining pertinent Qur’anic passages in what he considered their rough chronological order, Muir argued that even though the Qur’an’s view on previous scriptures underwent discernible developments, the Muslim scripture never came to question the validity of the Old and New Testaments found in the hands of Jews and Christians.⁶⁷

Muir’s determination to vindicate the Bible is amply reflected in his interpretations, which often posit the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or the entire Bible behind the Qur’an’s scriptural references. He believes, for instance, that “the ancient leaves” (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*) mentioned in 87:18 is “an express reference to the Bible.”⁶⁸ As for the term *kitāb*, Muir asserts that often “the word is obviously used in its widest sense, and intends the Scripture in

⁶⁵ Muir hoped that his pamphlet would not only educate Muslims as regards the true teaching of their own scripture but also be “of use to the advocates of Christianity both here [in Northern India] and elsewhere” (ix). The missionary impetus behind the work is especially clear in its closing paragraph, where Muir declares that if Muslims follow the Qur’an’s advice and read the Old and New Testaments, they will recognize the truth of the Christian faith and admit that “Jesus is ‘the Way, the Truth, and the Life’” (112).

⁶⁶ Viii; emphasis mine. In order to drive home his point, Muir sometimes quotes the Qur’an’s warnings at Muslims who question the Bible’s veracity. For instance, after discussing Q 4:150-3—originally a warning to Jews and Christians who rejected the Prophet—Muir utilizes part of this text to put defiant Muslims on notice: “the Mahometans who reject [the Bible],—THEY ARE THE TRUE INFIDELS, AND GOD HATH PREPARED FOR THE INFIDELS AN IGNOMINIOUS PUNISHMENT” (72; original emphasis).

⁶⁷ Notwithstanding this assessment, Muir believes that “in the final step of triumph ... it seems likely that in practice the Corân was considered, not simply as explaining and modifying, but as absolutely *superseding* all previous Scripture” (viii).

⁶⁸ *The Testimony*, 4.

use both amongst the Christians and Jews.”⁶⁹ Thus, when the Qur’an mentions “those to whom We gave *al-kitāb*,” Muir believes that *al-kitāb* refers to “the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.”⁷⁰ Muir provides broad interpretations even for passages that seem to use *kitāb* in relation to an individual book. For example, Q 6:154 recounts that God “gave Moses *al-kitāb*.” While most scholars interpret *al-kitāb* here to be the Pentateuch, Muir suggests that it designates the “previous Scriptures.”⁷¹ In a similar way, Muir takes *al-injīl* to refer not just to the Gospel(s) but to the New Testament.⁷² Focused on defending the actual texts available to Jews and Christians, Muir nowhere refers to the heavenly book or the category of scripture as potential referents for the term *kitāb*.

Sprenger’s celestialization of *kitāb*

While Muir posited expansive terrestrial referents for the Qur’an’s scriptural references, one of his contemporaries had a more transcendental approach and believed that the Qur’anic term *kitāb* often refers to the heavenly book. The scholar in question was the Austrian Aloys Sprenger, who, through his thirteen-year sojourn “in the East,” vastly opened the scholarly horizons of European researchers by collecting more than two-thousand works

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22. Muir applies this understanding to occurrences of *al-kitāb* in Q 40:53 (p. 18), Q 29:27 (p. 38), Q 29:47 (p. 39), Q 2:101 (p. 53), Q 2:13 (p. 54), Q 57:25 (p. 62), and Q 4:54 (p. 69).

⁷⁰ *The Testimony*, 27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28. See his similar treatment of Q 6:154 (p. 28)

⁷² *Ibid.*, 91, 93, 94, 100, and in particular 101.

of Islamic learning and bringing them back to the continent.⁷³ Using sources hitherto-untapped by European scholars, Sprenger produced a major, three-volume biography of the Prophet, titled *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad* (published 1861-1865). Like Muir in his *Life of Mahomet*, Sprenger's biography translated and discussed much of the Qur'an in what he considered to be its chronological order of promulgation. In these discussions, Sprenger dedicated special attention to the Qur'an's teachings on previous prophets and scriptures, because he believed these teachings can shed light on early Islam's relationship with previous religious movements of the Near East.

Specifically, Sprenger believed that the concept of the heavenly book is pivotal to the Qur'anic worldview. Therefore, he endowed this concept with far more significance than it had enjoyed in previous exegetical and academic scholarship. According to Sprenger, not only the label *umm al-kitāb* but also most instances of the term *kitāb* also designate the heavenly book.⁷⁴ Sprenger proposed this interpretation even for those passages that mention the giving

⁷³ For a description of Sprenger's "Oriental library," see *A Catalogue of the Bibliotheca Orientalis Sprengeriana*. Sprenger relates that in India, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Muscat, and the island of Qeshm, "I visited every library, public or private, to which I could obtain access, I examined every book I could lay hold of, I spared no expense to secure a good manuscript, ... and I had agents in various parts of the country, through whom I obtained books even from Mecca and Mádynah. Only a fortnight ago I received a list of 531 Arabic manuscripts, which are for sale at Basrah on the banks of the Tigris" (*ibid.*, iii). Sprenger confesses that, in his view, "the literature of the East has very little intrinsic value" (*ibid.*, iv). Nevertheless, he attributes his zeal in collecting this literature to "a sense of duty" to preserve foundations of historical inquiry (iv), because owing to "apathy and imbecility" the Muslims are "no longer able to take care of their own literary treasures" (v).

⁷⁴ *Das Leben und die Lehre*, 2:286.

of *al-kitāb* to Moses (such as 41:45, 25:35, 11:110, 28:43, 23:49, 37:117), as well as the two texts that single out John and Jesus as recipients of *al-kitāb* (19:12, 19:30).⁷⁵ Thus, when Jesus declares that God has given him *al-kitāb*, this is not a direct reference to the Gospel or the New Testament. Rather, in the first instance it means that Jesus has been initiated into the rank of prophets and thereby given access to the heavenly source of revelation.⁷⁶

Sprengr's promotion of the concept of the heavenly book reflected his views of Islam's origins. In particular, he argued that the Prophet was under the significant influence of Jewish-Christian ideas, especially in the early phase of his preaching.⁷⁷ Relying on the Clementine Homilies as an extant repository of Jewish-Christian teachings, Sprengr highlighted the following idea as pivotal: belief in the existence of a primordial religion (*Urreligion*), the principles of which have been revealed to true prophets via a primordial spirit

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:286-296. Other passages for which he proposes the same interpretation are Q 45:2, 46:2, 2:2, 6:155-7, 35:31, 32:22-25 (which he believes should immediately be followed by 35:32), 6:91, 6:154-155, Q 45:16 and 40:53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:290.

⁷⁷ This hypothesis stemmed as much from historical learning as from racial theories current at the time. In Sprengr's view, Arabs were Semites who, living in relative isolation from the settled societies to their north and south, exemplified the Semitic spirit in a form unadulterated by the sophistications and complications of the civilized world. Sprengr believed that this spirit was not compatible with normative forms of Judaism and Christianity, as the former was too exclusivist and impractical while the latter was too theologically recondite (*Das Leben*, 1:16-7). But Arabs could embrace sects such as the Essenes, Ebionites, and Nazarenes, which contained the basic tenets of Judaism and Christianity in a much simpler way (*ibid.*, 1:19-22). For centuries, these sects had lived on the fringes of the settled societies of the Fertile Crescent, flourishing among Semitic peoples whose distinguishing characteristic was religious zeal and enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) as opposed to theoretical learning (*ibid.*, 1:18ff). The Prophet's movement was the result of the penetration of these sects into the Ḥijāz.

(*Urgeist*).⁷⁸ Crucially, Sprenger believed that the qur’anic notion of the heavenly book is a descendant of this Jewish-Christian idea. That is to say, the book that is preserved in heaven performs the same function in the Qur’an as the primordial spirit plays in the Clementine Homilies: both are sources or embodiments of an eternal divine revelation that is given to true prophets.⁷⁹ Because of this presumed relation between the *Urgeist* and the *Urschrift*, Sprenger conceptualizes the heavenly book primarily as a source of revelation, attaching little significance to its function as the record of God’s knowledge and decrees.⁸⁰

It is critical to emphasize that Sprenger associates the heavenly book with the phenomenon of revelation in general, not scripture in particular. In his view, the heavenly book is “the fountain of truth” (*der Urquell der Wahrheit*), and it is the privilege of every prophet to receive the contents of this book through “divine illumination” (*göttliche Erleuchtung*).⁸¹ Thus, all prophets receive inspirations from the heavenly book. Because Sprenger describes the heavenly book as the embodiment of an eternal revelation given to prophets, he suggests that in the qur’anic view divine scriptures are basically identical. While the contents of these “earthly books” (*irdischen Schriften*) are “adapted to temporal circumstances” (*den*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:23.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:24, 2:254.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:288, fn. 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2:254.

Zeitumständen angepaßt), they all nevertheless reflect the primordial message of their common celestial source.⁸² Both of these ideas—conceptualizing the heavenly book as the source of *revelations*, and considering all revelations and scriptures essentially identical—were to exert significant influence on the following generations of scholars.

Admittedly, Sprenger does not suggest that all prophets had the same level of access to the heavenly book. Indeed, he recognizes perceptively that the Qur'an explicitly mentions the bestowal of *al-kitāb* only upon four prophets: Moses, John, Jesus, and Muhammad. According to Sprenger, this fact is a sign of these prophets' distinction as founders of independent religions: Moses of Judaism, John of Sabianism, Jesus of Christianity, and Muhammad of Islam.⁸³ Sprenger also notes that Moses in particular is strongly associated with the heavenly book (*al-kitāb*). In Sprenger's view, this is because Muhammad considered Moses to be the only prophet to have received the heavenly book in its entirety,⁸⁴ a privilege that Muhammad would eventually come to appropriate for himself.⁸⁵ From all earthly scriptures prior to the Qur'an, therefore, only the Torah could be fully identified with the heavenly book, as other scriptures were only partial reproductions of this document. Indeed, Sprenger uses this

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2:288.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2:184, fn. 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:295-6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:296-7, 2:300, 3:42.

distinction to suggest a bifurcation of pre-qur'anic scriptures reminiscent of the division found in Muslim commentaries. According to Sprenger, when the Qur'an speaks of the revelation of "the writings" (*al-zubur*) and "the illuminating *kitāb*" to previous prophets, the latter term designates the Torah as a complete manifestation of the heavenly book, while the former denotes all the other scriptures.⁸⁶

While Sprenger emphasizes the role of the heavenly book in qur'anic discourse, he also qualifies this role in a significant way. Specifically, Sprenger believes that Jewish-Christianity in general, and the idea of the heavenly book in particular, gradually lost their appeal to the Prophet. In Sprenger's view, this change was the result of the Prophet's increasing contact with normative forms of Christianity and Judaism as a result of the partial migration to Abyssinia and the complete relocation to Yathrib.⁸⁷ It was thanks to these developments that the Prophet began using the terms *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* in the Medinan period, for the Pentateuch and the Gospels were available to and cherished by the Jewish and Christian communities of Abyssinia and Medina.⁸⁸ Sprenger suggests that the term *kitāb* accordingly

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:297-8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:182, 2:285.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:285. Sprenger's distinction between the Meccan and Medinan Muhammad is reminiscent of Gustav Weil's efforts to vindicate the Meccan prophet as an ethical reformer with a universal, eternal religious message, who eventually succumbed to worldly trappings in Medina. In Weil's words, Muhammad "appears to us as a prophet only so long as he was a persecuted man in Mecca. ... [There he] may have believed that God revealed himself to him by means of angels, visions and dreams. But upon his arrival at Medina self-deception ceased, and

underwent a transformation, from designating the heavenly book to denoting the Bible in later texts. Thus, in discussing the phrase *ahl al-kitāb*, Sprenger claims that at first this label was applied to Jews, Christians, and Sabians because they had received the primordial revelation from the heavenly book. However, he suggests that in later passages *al-kitāb* in this phrase should be understood as referring to the Bible.⁸⁹

Grimme's valorization of the heavenly "archetype"

Another major study on the life and teachings of the Prophet is Hubert Grimme's two-volume monograph, *Mohammed* (1891-5), the second volume of which is dedicated to the Qur'an. In important ways, Grimme stands in continuity with Sprenger's understanding of the qur'anic worldview. For example, Grimme depicts the concept of the heavenly book as absolutely central to qur'anic theology. In this vein, he describes the heavenly book as the source not only of scriptures but more generally of revelation (*Offenbarung*).⁹⁰ Compatible with this broad understanding, Grimme maintains that the contents of the heavenly book were

at best he could have only justified himself in deceiving others by the maxim "The end justifies the means" ("An Introduction to the Qur'an. II," 286; original emphasis). Weil also asserts that early Meccan sūras contain "moral precepts which form the kernel of every religion" ("An Introduction to the Qur'an. III," 352). Johnston-Bloom argues that Muhammad served as a mirror for the aspirations of Weil himself ("Oriental Studies and Jewish Questions," 115ff). As she notes, Weil's insistence on the Meccan-Medinan "bifurcation of the prophet can be compared to the way in which nineteenth-century Reform Judaism valorized the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible over and against the legalistic aspects of the Jewish tradition" (103). Indeed, Nöldeke directly compares the earliest sūras of the Qur'an with the discourse of Israelite prophets (*Geschichte* 1860, 59).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:288, fn. 2.

⁹⁰ *Mohammed*, 2:25.

given to “Muhammad as well as numerous other men of the remote past” (*Mohammed wie an zahlreiche andere Männer der Vorzeit*).⁹¹

However, Grimme differs from Sprenger in his portrayal of the relationship between various scriptures. While Sprenger suggests that various scriptures embody the same core message, he also emphasizes their different ways of relating to the heavenly book. In his reading of the Qur’an, the Torah (and then the Qur’an) are complete manifestations of this celestial book while the other scriptures are merely partial reproductions. But Grimme does not posit such a distinction between scriptures. Crucially, he describes the heavenly book not just as a source but as an archetype (*Archetypus*) for revelation.⁹² In accordance with this archetypal understanding, Grimme asserts that the various scriptures are almost identical in terms of their content (*ungefähr inhaltsgleich*).⁹³ Any difference between the various *kitābs*, therefore, is of a formal character and “for the purpose of clarification and confirmation of the obscure points of an earlier *kitāb*” (*zum Zwecke der Erläuterung (bajjana) und Bestätigung (ṣaddaqa) dunkler Stellen eines früheren Kitābs*).⁹⁴ In short, various prophetic messages are largely

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 2:73.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2:74.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

identical in so far as they are contextually-adapted reproductions of the same celestial original.

In addition to conceptualizing the *umm al-kitāb* as an archetype, Grimme provides a new interpretation for the term *kitāb*. He maintains that towards the middle of the Meccan period the Prophet increasingly used *kitāb* not only in reference to the heavenly book but also to designate individual scriptures and revelations.⁹⁵ In Grimme's view, *kitāb* does not signify the earthly existence of these revelations in written form but rather their status as transcripts (*Abschriften*) from the archetypal heavenly book.⁹⁶ That is to say, the textuality of any revelation—its *kitāb*ness—is of a metaphysical nature. Indeed, Grimme believes that codification of divine revelations into a physical text was decidedly secondary and suspect to the Prophet, who therefore did not prepare a copy of his own qur'anic revelations in his lifetime.⁹⁷ Grimme extends this ethereal understanding of the term *kitāb* to the “Medinan” phrase *ahl al-kitāb*. According to Grimme, this construct does not signify the possession of physical books by Jews and Christians but rather depicts them as “descendants of those who had heard the word of God from their prophets” (*Nachkommen solcher, die das Wort Gottes von*

⁹⁵ Indeed, Grimme also maintains that before using the term *kitāb* in relation to the heavenly book, the Prophet employed terms such as *ṣuḥuf* (“pages”), *zūbur* (“writings”), and *lawḥ* (“tablet”) for this purpose (*Mohammed*, 2:44).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:72-3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:73.

ihren Propheten hörten).⁹⁸ The term *kitāb*, therefore, is not an exclusive label for physical scriptures but a broad label for all prophetic messages.

Emerging scholarly consensus

By the early twentieth century, academic scholarship on the Qur'an had already reached a critical mass and certain ideas were emerging as points of consensus. Specifically, the idea of the archetypal heavenly book as a source of essentially-identical scriptures or revelations had come to serve as a bedrock and an organizing principle for research into the Qur'anic worldview. The influence of this idea is evident in the seminal *Geschichte des Qorāns*. Originally published by Theodor Nöldeke in 1860, this work was later reworked and expanded by Nöldeke and his student, Friedrich Schwally—resulting in a two-volume second edition that appeared in 1909 and 1919. While Nöldeke and Schwally do not focus on thematic issues, they give pride of place to the concept of the heavenly book in their discussion of the Qur'an's teachings.⁹⁹ According to them, the Qur'an posits “a document that exists in heaven and is the fountain of all true revelation” (*eine im Himmel vorhandene Urkunde, die der Urquell aller wahren Offenbarung ist*).¹⁰⁰ This characterization bears an uncanny resemblance to Sprenger's

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:74.

⁹⁹ The first German edition of this work has little to say about Qur'anic scripturology. The only pertinent remark I could find was Nöldeke's explanation of *ahl al-kitāb* as “possessors (or knowers) of the holy scripture” (*Geschichte des Qorāns*, 10).

¹⁰⁰ *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:80.

description of the heavenly book as “the fountain of truth” (*der Urquell der Wahrheit*).¹⁰¹ The implication of this characterization is that the *umm al-kitāb* is the source not only of scriptures but of all divine revelations. In particular, Nöldeke and Schwally specify that the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic revelations all originate from the heavenly book.¹⁰² Furthermore, like Grimme, Nöldeke and Schwally describe the heavenly book as an “archetype” (*Archetypus*).¹⁰³ Accordingly, they believe that the Prophet considered Jews and Christians to have “the same revelation” (*die gleiche Offenbarung*). As for the Prophet’s own mission, Nöldeke and Schwally claim that he considered it to involve the recitation of “the text of the ancient revelation from the heavenly tablets” (*den Wortlaut der alten Offenbarung von den himmlischen Tafeln*).¹⁰⁴ In other words, as already suggested by Sprenger and advocated by Grimme, Nöldeke and Schwally believe that the Prophet viewed various scriptures as essentially-identical manifestations of the same heavenly archetype. Consistent with this view and similar to Grimme, Nöldeke and Schwally do not posit any distinction between the various scriptures mentioned in the Qur’an.

¹⁰¹ *Das Leben*, 2:254.

¹⁰² *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:80.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2:1. Before Nöldeke and Schwally, Hartwig Hirschfeld’s *New Researches into the Composition of the Qoran* (published in 1902) describes the celestial source of the Qur’an as its “heavenly archetype” (57), a description that is absent from his earlier *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korān* (published in 1886).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:121.

Pedersen: Knowledge (*‘ilm*), Will (*ḥukm*), and Assyriology

The primacy of the concept of the heavenly book is similarly in display in a 1914 book review by Johannes Pedersen (d. 1977), a Danish Semiticist.¹⁰⁵ In this brief yet oft-cited essay, Pedersen discusses the mechanics of revelation to Muhammad as depicted in the Islamic tradition. As part of this discussion, Pedersen emphasizes the centrality of the notion of the heavenly book.¹⁰⁶ Writing after major advances in Assyriology, Pedersen suggests that the roots of this qur’anic notion can be traced back to ancient Babylonia. There we find belief in an assortment of heavenly archives containing the fate of humans, the record of good and evil deeds, and information about past, present, and future occurrences—the same functions that the Qur’an attributes to the heavenly book.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Pedersen subsumes the contents of this book as follows: “the heavenly book contains not only God’s knowledge but also his will” (*Im himmlischen Buch ist nicht nur Gottes Wissen, sondern auch sein Wille gebucht*).¹⁰⁸ In qur’anic terms, this means that the heavenly book is a repository of divine *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *ḥukm* (judgment/decreed).¹⁰⁹ This is a felicitous identification on Pedersen’s part, for *‘ilm* and *ḥukm*

¹⁰⁵ Behn, *Concise Biographical Companion*, 3:92-3.

¹⁰⁶ “Review of Eduard Meyer: *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen. Mit Exkursen über die Anfänge des Islâms und des Christentums*,” 114.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* Pedersen does not produce a Babylonian parallel for what he considers to be a key aspect of the heavenly book in the Qur’an, namely, theological and ethical teachings.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

are indeed a qur'anic couple: they appear together in four passages, apparently signifying the knowledge, wisdom, and authority given to a prophet.¹¹⁰ Pedersen does not mention this fact, but he insists that the heavenly book is the only source of divine knowledge, will, and guidance.

In addition to these two contributions—tracing the ancient roots of the heavenly book, and noting the correspondence of its contents with the qur'anic pair of *'ilm* and *ḥukm*—Pedersen reproduces the same general understanding that we already find in Sprenger's study. Thus, he believes that not only *umm al-kitāb* but also the term *al-kitāb* itself refers primarily to the heavenly book. Furthermore, Pederson notes that the Qur'an mentions the bestowal of *al-kitāb*—the heavenly book—upon Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus.¹¹¹ The followers of these prophets are accordingly termed *ahl al-kitāb* in the Qur'an, a phrase that signifies their access to the heavenly book—not their possession of physical scriptures.¹¹² Moreover, because all revelations stem from this book, they must be identical (*identisch*).¹¹³ This assumption explains why the Prophet expected Jews and Christians readily to recognize the veracity of his

¹¹⁰ Q 12:22 (for Joseph), 21:74 (for Lot), 21:79 (for Solomon), and 28:14 (for Moses). Cf. Q 13:37.

¹¹¹ "Review of Eduard Meyer," 115.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

teachings. Pedersen thereby further promotes the idea of the heavenly book as the common source of identical revelations given by God to various human communities.

Horovitz's reinforcement of the scholarly consensus

Just how firmly entrenched the scholarly understanding of qur'anic scripturology had become can be seen in Joseph Horovitz's *Koranische Untersuchungen* (in 1926). Similar to several scholars before him, Horovitz conceptualizes the heavenly book in broad terms, as a source not only of scriptures but of the "heavenly truth" (*himmlischen Wahrheit*) revealed to prophets.¹¹⁴ Naturally, the heavenly book is the source of the Qur'an, for the Islamic scripture is "the form in which the revelation was given to Muhammad" (*die Form, in welcher die Offenbarung Muhammad zuteil wurde*).¹¹⁵ However, according to Horovitz, the Qur'an recognizes that the heavenly book was sent down to previous prophets as well.¹¹⁶ Indeed, he states that phrases such as *alladhīna ātaynāhum al-kitāb*, *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*, and *ahl al-kitāb* refer to those who possess the heavenly book "in the form in which it was revealed to previous prophets" (*in der den früheren Propheten offenbarten Form*).¹¹⁷ While there are formal differences between the teachings of various prophets, these teachings ultimately represent the same message—

¹¹⁴ *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 65. He also notes that this book contains a record of human deeds and indeed divine knowledge in general.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 66, 68.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

labelled revelation (*Offenbarung*), heavenly revelation (*himmlische Offenbarung*), or heavenly truth (*himmlische Wahrheit*)— that is recorded in God’s heavenly book.¹¹⁸ This is why Muhammad believed that his own teachings could be found in the scriptures of Abraham and Moses (*ṣuḥuf Ibrāhīm wa-Mūsā*).¹¹⁹

Bell: *kitāb* as a communal document

Horovitz’s *Koranische Untersuchungen* provided a synchronic view of the Qur’an and in some ways epitomized and consolidated the already secure scholarly consensus on qur’anic scripturology. The same year, however, a study appeared that took a decidedly diachronic approach and significantly diverged from the received scholarly wisdom. Penned by Richard Bell (d. 1952), a prominent Scottish Arabist, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* was an attempt to place the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad in their historical context, particularly by highlighting the expansion of Christian communities around and inside the Arabian Peninsula.¹²⁰ In Bell’s view, the Prophet’s eventful career had dramatically

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66, 68. Horovitz thereby describes scriptures as the heavenly book’s “irdische Wiedergabe” (67). Reflecting an understanding of the heavenly book as the origin of all divine teachings, Shelomo Goitein describes it as “the source of all religions” (“The Birth-Hour of Muslim Law?” 26). Goitein also emphasizes that these religions are variations of “the message which was contained in one Heavenly Book, but was sent in different forms to different peoples” (*ibid.*, 28).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-9. In effect, therefore, the Qur’an “wollte den Arabern — oder zunächst den Mekkanern und ihren Nachbarn ... — das bieten, was die ahl al-kitāb bereits hatten, das Wort Allahs in ihrer Sprache” (76).

¹²⁰ Earlier in 1925, Bell had delivered “a severely compressed” version of this work to the Gunning Foundation at the University of Edinburgh (*The Origin of Islam*, v).

transformed his convictions. Bell's main task, therefore, was to chart the trajectory of this transformation. To this end, he used the fruits of previous research on qur'anic chronology, amending these results based on his own findings.¹²¹

On some points, there is considerable overlap between Bell's understanding of the qur'anic worldview and that of Sprenger or Grimme. Most importantly, like his predecessors Bell claims that the Prophet believed in the existence of an original revelation given by God to various human communities. This revelation could take different forms in individual historical contexts, "but the actual content of the Revelation must always be the same."¹²² While some communities—like Arab idolaters—had forgotten this teaching, the Prophet was convinced that the monotheistic communities who lived around Arabia had preserved it.¹²³ Therefore, at the beginning of his mission Muhammad was in pursuit of this revelation, "or the Scripture which he soon discovered was regarded as the record of it,"¹²⁴ for he aimed to communicate its divine teachings to his countrymen. Bell notes that this historical conception

¹²¹ Of course, qur'anic chronology had been a major preoccupation of nineteenth-century scholars—including William Muir, Aloys Sprenger, Theodor Nöldeke, and Hubert Grimme. On this subject, these scholars were preceded by Gustav Weil, who produced the first such modern ordering in his 1844 *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in den Koran*.

¹²² *The Origin of Islam*, 101.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

changed as the Prophet came into indirect and then direct contact with Jews and Christians. Nevertheless, in Bell's view the Prophet eventually "arrived at a philosophy of religion something like that from which he started, but more comprehensive."¹²⁵ Thus, Medinan portions of the Qur'an also assume that "there was an original pure religion to which all men belonged."¹²⁶ When people neglected this religion, "the prophets were sent to call men back to the pure religion," bringing with them the revelation that God had originally given to mankind.¹²⁷ In sum, belief in an Ur-religion, embodied in an Ur-revelation that was given to different communities, was fundamental to much of the Prophet's preaching.¹²⁸

Notwithstanding his substantial agreements with Sprenger and Grimme, Bell diverges from previous scholars in crucial ways. In particular, he argues that for virtually all the Meccan period, Muhammad believed that the monotheists living around Arabia constituted one unified community. In other words, Muhammad did not yet distinguish between Jews and Christians.¹²⁹ Moreover, in Bell's view the Prophet believed that this one community had received the primordial revelation through the book given to Moses. Bell bases this assertion

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 131; in reference to Q 2:213.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁸ A similar formulation is offered in William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, 3rd ed., 147f.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 123, 127.

on the claim that, for much of the Meccan period, “Moses is said to have received ‘the Book’ and none of the other prophets have.”¹³⁰ Making an *e silentio* argument, Bell interprets this exclusive association of Moses with *al-kitāb* to mean that he was considered the *only* recipient of the Book for the neighboring monotheists. Thus, Bell claims that Muhammad viewed Moses as “the founder of this great monotheistic religion which was all around Arabia, practically world-wide.”¹³¹ In contrast to previous scholars who saw the phenomena of revelation and scripture as frequent, this narrative envisions a rather sparse scripturology.

However, Bell asserts that around the time of the migration to Medina a crucial development took place: the Prophet discovered that the neighboring monotheists are actually two distinct communities—Jews and Christians.¹³² Concurrently, Muhammad realized that Jesus had also been a great prophet and a messenger to the Children of Israel. It was this realization that prompted Muhammad to describe Jesus also as a recipient of the Book (in Q 19:30).¹³³ Thus, in Medina the Prophet discarded the Meccan notion of Moses as the exclusive recipient of the Book. In line with his new discovery, the Prophet began using the terms *al-*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 138.

¹³³ Previous scholars had assigned this part of sūra 19 (Maryam) to the middle of the Prophet’s Meccan activity (see, e.g., Nöldeke-Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 1:130), but Bell argued that even if the sūra had been disseminated at that point, the reference to Jesus receiving the *kitāb* must be a later insertion (*Origin of Islam*, 139).

tawrah and *al-injil* respectively for the scriptures of Moses and Jesus (140). While the Prophet came to recognize the existence of two separate monotheistic communities with two distinct scriptures, he still insisted that the contents of these scriptures were essentially identical with each other and also with the Prophet's own developing scripture. Because he continued to believe in the existence of a primordial religion, he insisted that "the message of the *Taurāt* and the *Injil* must have been the same as his own."¹³⁴

Bell's understanding of qur'anic scripturology is founded on the premise that *al-kitāb*, which translates as "the Book," marks an independent religious community. In Mecca, the Prophet believed that the neighboring monotheists belonged to the same group, so he posited one *kitāb* for all of them.¹³⁵ Even when he realized that prophets other than Moses had been sent to this community, he still "connected [them] with the Book of Moses."¹³⁶ After all, why should God provide multiple records of His primordial revelation to the same community? In Medina, however, the situation changed as Muhammad found out that the neighboring monotheists are actually of two kinds: Jews and Christians. It was this realization that prompted him to attribute the Book to Jesus as well. Although it is difficult to reconcile all of

¹³⁴ *The Origin of Islam*, 157.

¹³⁵ Indeed, Bell contends that at an earlier point the Prophet had thought that "each people had their own prophet and only one" (127).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

Bell's statements on the subject, it seems that he is operating under the following assumption: a *kitāb* is the transcript of the teachings of God's Ur-religion that is given to each individual human community.

This reading of Bell finds corroboration in his later study, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, which was published in 1953 soon after his passing. In this work, Bell divides the Prophet's career into two major, if somewhat overlapping, phases: the Qur'an period, and the Book period. According to Bell, the first stage started in Mecca after Muhammad had gained some following.¹³⁷ He knew that Jewish and Christian services involved the recitation of scriptural readings, called *qeryānā* in Syriac. Muhammad therefore began producing a corresponding body of texts in Arabic, a *qur'ān*, so that his own followers could similarly worship the one true God.¹³⁸ However, according to Bell, the Prophet's ambitions grew after the migration to Medina. In particular, thanks to closer contact with the Jews, Muhammad came to realize that their scripture contained far more than the Qur'an he has so far produced. Moreover, victory at the decisive battle of Badr had convinced the Prophet that his followers are an independent

¹³⁷ More precisely, Bell believes that the Qur'an period began "at the same time as the institution of *ṣalāt*" (130).

¹³⁸ *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 129. According to Bell, the Prophet's Qur'ān contained various kinds of material: warnings about the last judgment, descriptions of heaven and hell, parables, ethical teachings, and, finally, stories found in the previous "Scripture" (*ibid.*, 130-1).

community on a par with the previous monotheists.¹³⁹ Thus, “it was essential that that community should, like the others, have its Book.”¹⁴⁰ Hence, Muhammad set out to craft the Book as “something wider and more inclusive” than the Qur’an, incorporating and extending some of the latter’s material but also adding new compositions to produce a veritable scripture.¹⁴¹ The Book was to be the sum total of the teachings that the Prophet had communicated to his community.¹⁴² In other words, the Book was a label for “the complete revelation.”¹⁴³

Bell conceptualizes *kitāb* as the foundational text of an independent religious community, a thorough record of divine revelation. Alongside this understanding, however, Bell attributes a second meaning to the term *kitāb*: he claims that *al-kitāb* (“the Book”) may designate “revelation in general.”¹⁴⁴ Because revelation is the *sine qua non* of prophecy, reception of “the Book” is an inevitable aspect of prophetic office. In Bell’s words, “[t]o be

¹³⁹ *Introduction to the Qur’ān*, 135, 137.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* According to Bell, the Prophet never managed to complete his Book, leaving his community—and us—with the present text of the Qur’an that is without a coherent structure (135).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

given the Book is the prerogative of a prophet.”¹⁴⁵ Bell uses this understanding to explain the attribution of *al-kitāb* to John the Baptist. Karl Ahrens (and long before him, Sprenger) had suggested that John’s portrayal as a receiver of *al-kitāb* may reflect Mandaean influence.¹⁴⁶ However, despite his emphasis on the communal aspect of the *kitābs* of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, Bell rejects any Mandaean origin for John’s depiction: “Any Christian informant might call John a prophet, and that title would to Muhammad’s mind imply that he had been given the Book.”¹⁴⁷ Bell’s understanding of *al-kitāb* as “revelation” is especially puzzling because he does not think that Muhammad believed in the existence of a heavenly book as the source of all revelations.¹⁴⁸ If one rules out the idea of the heavenly book, it is not clear why the Qur’an should use *al-kitāb* to signify revelation. Unfortunately, Bell does not comment on the relationship between the two meanings of the term *kitāb* or on the criteria that decide which one should be preferred in any given context.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁴⁶ Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, 131.

¹⁴⁷ *Introduction to the Qur’ān*, 148.

¹⁴⁸ In *The Origin of Islam*, Bell argues that the notion of the heavenly book emerged only after the Prophet heard of the revelation of scripture to Moses on Mount Sinai (120). However, in *Introduction to the Qur’ān* Bell claims that the idea of a heavenly book is a later Muslim doctrine that should not be read back into the Qur’an (150, 152).

Jeffery's universalization of scripture

As demonstrated by the preceding discussion, modern academics have sketched the relationship between the concepts of *kitāb* and prophecy in various ways. Sprenger had already suggested that all prophets have access to the heavenly book, the *kitāb par excellence*, as the latter is the source of all revelation. Grimme had endorsed the same view, superimposing the theory that *kitāb* also designates individual revelations, which are ethereal transcripts from the heavenly book. Each prophet stood in association with two *kitābs*—the heavenly book and its transcript—regardless of whether this transcript was subsequently codified as written scripture. Bell similarly considered some instances of *kitāb* (“Book”) to signify revelation, which is perplexing because he rejected the notion of the heavenly book. Despite their differences, none of these scholars had suggested that, in the qur’anic view, every prophet is a recipient of an independent scripture.

The idea that scripture is a *sine qua non* of prophecy found an advocate in Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959), an Australian Islamicist who studied at Edinburgh University and taught at the AUC, Union Theological Seminary, and Columbia University.¹⁴⁹ In a 1952 work titled *The Qur’ān as Scripture*, Jeffery set out to investigate the Qur’an’s—and therefore Muhammad’s—understanding of the phenomenon of scripture. To this end, Jeffery begins by examining

¹⁴⁹ Behn, *Concise Biographical Companion to Index Islamicus*, 2:180.

Qur'anic prophetology. According to Jeffery, this prophetology underwent a significant development. In Mecca, Muhammad had viewed his prophetic endowment largely as an inspiration from within, in continuity with local Arab ideas about poetry and soothsaying.¹⁵⁰ This view changed in Medina as the Prophet came into contact with Yathrib's Jewish communities. Influenced by the Jewish tradition, the Prophet came to understand prophecy as involving revelation from without.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, because the post-biblical Jewish tradition had developed the idea that "to every prophet must be ascribed a book,"¹⁵² Muhammad thought that his prophecy necessitates the possession of scripture.¹⁵³ In sum, Muhammad's view of his proclamations "expanded from this limited concept of *inspiration* to a fuller concept of *revelation* connected with a Scripture."¹⁵⁴

Crucially, Jeffery suggests that—at least in its Medinan portions—the Qur'an makes no real distinction between revelation and scripture. These phenomena are two sides of the same coin, for "revelation is connected with a mission from the Unseen and is involved with

¹⁵⁰ *The Qur'ān as Scripture*, 51-63.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵³ In other words, "[t]o every prophet a Book, therefore Muhammad must have a Book" (*Ibid.*, 27). Similarly, Jeffery claims that in Muhammad's view "it was part of the office of a messenger to be sent with Scripture" (63).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 63; original emphasis.

Scripture.”¹⁵⁵ In other words, prophetic revelations are as a rule codified into scriptures. The entwinement of the two phenomena is reflected in the fact that “the terms used for Allah’s process of revealing His message to His messengers are precisely the same as those used for the revealing of Scripture.”¹⁵⁶ The claim that all messengers were recipients of scripture has a radical corollary. As the Qur’an asserts that God sent messengers “to every nation,”¹⁵⁷ Jeffery’s contention implies that every nation received a scripture from God. In short, revealed scripture is a universal phenomenon.

Jeffery’s identification of revelation and scripture—and the resulting universality of scripture—is not stated explicitly in the Qur’an. Indeed, Jeffery admits that “we are not expressly told of each messenger or prophet mentioned in the Qur’ān that he had a Book.”¹⁵⁸ As indicated above, of all the prophets in the Qur’an, only four are said to have received a/the *kitāb*: Moses, John, Jesus, and Muhammad. Nevertheless, Jeffery notes that “we have the general statement that when Allah sent prophets ... He sent down Scripture with them” (33).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 53; see also pp. 54, 63. Conversely, “Scripture ... was mediated through human messengers sent from God, the prophets to whom God had given revelation” (46).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30, citing Q 16:36.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

Jeffery cites three passages in support of this statement: Q 2:213, 35:25, and 57:25.¹⁵⁹ We have already encountered the second verse, which states that previous messengers were sent with “*al-zubur* (‘the writings’) and the illuminating *kitāb*.” The third adduced verse (Q 57:25) also mentions divine messengers, adding that God sent down with them “the *kitāb* and the balance.” Finally, Jeffery’s last piece of evidence (Q 2:213) describes prophets as “bringers of glad tidings and warners” and asserts that God sent down with them “the *kitāb*.” While these texts use *kitāb* in singular definite form, Jeffery believes that they show the indispensability of scripture to each individual prophetic mission. In other words, these verses establish that every prophet or messenger brought a scripture to his community.¹⁶⁰

Apart from conceptualizing scripture as a universal phenomenon, Jeffery agrees with previous scholarship in assigning particular significance to the idea of the heavenly book. According to Jeffery, in the Medinan phase of his activity the Prophet posited a “celestial archetype” of scripture.¹⁶¹ Moreover, the Prophet believed that “Scripture is really the same

¹⁵⁹ He also cites Q 40:70, but this verse hardly has the implication that Jeffery attributes to it. See also p. 63, where he adduces a few other relevant texts.

¹⁶⁰ Jeffery also makes reference to Q 13:38, which proclaims that “for every *ajal* is a *kitāb*.” The commentators generally understand this verse to concern divine decrees for the punishment of rebellious nations, but in Jeffery’s view this verse means that “each age had its Scripture” (64). This interpretation would seem to validate the idea of universal scripture, although for this purpose one would need to posit an independent “age” for each human community.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15-6. See also p. 15. Unlike most scholars before him, however, Jeffery does not consider this book to be the same heavenly document that contains a record of human deeds and divine knowledge and judgment.

message revealed from the archetypal Book through the succession of prophets.”¹⁶² In other words, every prophet received and disseminated the same revelation. Because Muhammad viewed the heavenly book as the archetype of revelation, as embodying a primordial message that was given to all prophets, he also believed that “the content of his own message was in Scriptures of former peoples.”¹⁶³ While Jeffery thereby espouses the essential identity of scriptures in terms of substance, he adopts a position that seems to undermine this pan-scriptural identity. Specifically, he describes individual scriptures as “portions” of the heavenly book that together constitute “the entire Book.”¹⁶⁴ If each scripture constitutes a distinct portion, then it is not clear why the various scriptures must be considered essentially identical. The contrasting descriptions of scriptures as copies of the same original and portions from the same source is sometimes encountered in subsequent scholarship.¹⁶⁵

Indeed, apart from the heavenly source of scripture, he believes the Qur’an posits three separate books: “the Record Books of human deeds, the celestial Book of Inventory, and the great Book of Decrees” (12)—although he doesn’t rule out that the latter two could be identical (11).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15, citing Q 26:196. Later on, Jeffery adduces this verse as well as Q 87:18, 42:13, and 4:26 to conclude that the Prophet’s “message is substantially what was in the earlier Books” (70). After all, the Prophet “was reproducing something he had learned from” Jewish scriptures (71). On the other hand, citing Q 16:36, Jeffery provides a more limited interpretation, arguing that “the one element common to all the messages was that Allah alone should be worshipped and idolatry shunned” (35).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁵ Jeffery also claims that the Prophet characterizes the Qur’an as “the final revelation” that supersedes previous scriptures (*ibid.*, 70, 75, 78).

Widengren: “Apostles” as recipients of scripture

A similar conceptualization of scripture as a ubiquitous phenomenon was proposed by Georg “Geo” Widengren (d. 1996), a Swedish Semiticist and Iranist who taught at Uppsala University.¹⁶⁶ Widengren’s contribution to qur’anic scripturology was part of a broader project on religious history. His aim was to trace what he considered an axiomatic religious idea: belief in the existence of a class of divine messengers—whom he termed “Apostles” or “Sent Ones”—whose mission involves the ceremonial reception of a book from God(s) in order to validate the prophet’s mission and to guide and save human communities. According to Widengren, this idea was pivotal to Near Eastern religious thought from the Sumerian era to the Islamic period. In the first installment of his project, published in 1950 as *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*, Widengren focused on pre-Islamic literature, in particular the Israelite and Jewish traditions. In the more extensive, second volume, published in 1955 as *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*, Widengren turned his attention to Islamic sources, in the process commenting on qur’anic scripturology.¹⁶⁷

According to Widengren, the Qur’an believes in the existence of elect men, “apostles,” who received copies of a primordial heavenly book for the task of saving human communities.

¹⁶⁶ Behn, *Concise Biographical Companion to Index Islamicus*, 3:643.

¹⁶⁷ These volumes had been originally delivered, in compressed form, as lectures at the University of Copenhagen in 1948 (*The Ascension of the Apostle*, preface). Incidentally, they were preceded by a related investigation, *The Great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God*, which was published in 1945.

Specifically, Widengren considers the qur'anic terms *mursal* and *rasūl* (especially when occurring in the phrase *rasūl Allāh*) to be technical designations for such apostles.¹⁶⁸ As the Qur'an explicitly mentions the bestowal of a *kitāb* to Moses, John, Jesus, and Muhammad, Widengren includes these prophets among the apostles who received scriptures drawn from the heavenly book. However, he adds that "conceivably all the Apostles were sent out with the heavenly message written in *al-kitāb*."¹⁶⁹ While Widengren does not provide a list of these apostles, he suggests that their mission covered every era and every human community.¹⁷⁰ Specifically, Widengren attempts to establish this universality by adducing Q 13:38, according to which "for every *ajal* is a *kitāb*." In Widengren's view, this phrase means that "every Apostle brings a Book to each epoch."¹⁷¹ Thus, each human community was given the chance of guidance and salvation by receiving a "terrestrial edition" of God's heavenly book.¹⁷² Of

¹⁶⁸ *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*, 15.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁷⁰ Widengren opens his monograph by commending Wensinck's study of the concepts of *rasūl* and *nabī* in the Qur'an, namely, "Muhammed und die Propheten." Wensinck believes that "ein rasūl je ein Volk repräsentiert, dem er die göttliche Botschaft überbringt" (172). Furthermore, Wensinck claims that the Qur'an recognizes only nine *rusul*: Noah, Lot, Ishmael, Moses, Shu'ayb (Jethro), Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Jesus, and Muhammad (*ibid.*, 172). However, Widengren probably has a more expansive list in mind, for he considers John to be a *rasūl* as well.

¹⁷¹ *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*, 116.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 117, where he uses this phrase in relation to the Qur'an. A similar statement is made by H. U. Stanton, who asserts that the qur'anic deity "was pleased to grant every *ummah* a special apostle and a scripture and observances of its own" (*The Teaching of the Qur'an*, 72). However, it is important to note that Stanton does not use the term "apostle" in a technical sense.

course, it is conceivable that several prophets were sent to a certain community, in which case only one of them—the elect apostle—would have received a scripture.¹⁷³ Unlike Jeffery, therefore, Widengren does not suggest that scripture is envisaged in the Qur’an as a necessary component of prophecy.

Madigan’s allegorization of *kitāb*

The latest study to propose an original understanding of qur’anic scripturology is Daniel Madigan’s *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*. Published in 2001, this work is the most comprehensive investigation to date of the qur’anic concept of *kitāb*. Madigan’s chief hypothesis is that the Qur’an uses *kitāb* primarily in a metaphorical way. In particular, he considers *kitāb* to be a symbol of divine knowledge (*‘ilm*) and judgment (*ḥukm*). Thus, when the Qur’an characterizes the Prophet’s revelations as a *kitāb*, it is not suggesting that they constitute a “static and fixed” book.¹⁷⁴ Rather, the Qur’an’s point is that these revelations represent the will and wisdom of God, they are the “emblem of access to [the divine] realm of *‘ilm* and *ḥukm*.”¹⁷⁵ In effect, for Madigan *kitāb* denotes not the product but the *process* whereby God’s knowledge and authority are made manifest. This processual, metaphorical

¹⁷³ By suggesting a one-on-one correspondence between apostles and nations, Widengren’s theory comes close to Bell’s hypothesis, which similarly implies that possession of the Book is the hallmark of an independent religious community.

¹⁷⁴ *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*, 191.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

understanding of *kitāb* has the advantage, in Madigan’s view, of unifying the apparent multiplicity of *kitāb* in the Qur’an.¹⁷⁶ The revelations of Muhammad and previous messengers, and the celestial writings that represent divine omniscience and omnipotence, do not form a library of distinct and disparate volumes. Rather, they are manifestations of the same fundamental reality and channels through which God communicates His wisdom and judgment to humanity.¹⁷⁷

Madigan notes that his symbolic reading of *kitāb* counters a restrictive understanding of this term as “book” in the sense of a bounded volume. He deems such an understanding “dangerous” in so far as it can lead to the unjustified identification of a specific text as the complete record of divine guidance, a process that is conducive to “fundamentalism.”¹⁷⁸ Madigan’s rejection of a physical understanding of *kitāb* is of course not entirely novel. As discussed before, Sprenger much earlier believed that *kitāb* refers primarily not to earthly books but to the heavenly source of revelation. Indeed, Grimme attributed to the Prophet an aversion to the writing of revelation and, much like Madigan, highlighted the Prophet’s disinterest in preparing an official version of the qur’anic text. Moreover, Grimme argued that individual revelations are termed *kitāb* because they are “transcripts” (*Abschriften*) from the

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-7.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

archetypal heavenly archetype, not because they are “books” in the literal sense of the term. More specifically, Madigan’s challenge to a restrictive understanding of *kitāb* as a concrete written text is inspired by William Graham, whose seminal *Beyond the Written Word* demonstrates the oft-neglected but significant oral and aural dimensions of scriptural texts in religious history.¹⁷⁹

While Madigan is similar to these scholars in rejecting a concretized interpretation of *kitāb*, he does not replace that interpretation with a metaphysical one grounded in the heavenly book. Madigan does not reject the notion of the heavenly book outright, but he believes that the concept of *kitāb* “transcends any particular canonical text—even a preexistent heavenly canon.”¹⁸⁰ In other words, what is at stake in the term *kitāb* is not so much the origination of the Prophet’s revelations from a specific celestial source but their generation as God’s active address to humanity. Hence, “[t]he *umm al-kitāb* ... is not just some larger, primordial book from which each of the scriptures derived; it is the very essence of God’s universal knowledge and authoritative will.”¹⁸¹ Ultimately, therefore, *kitāb* is the symbol

¹⁷⁹ Another work of William Graham that is repeatedly referenced by Madigan is “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qurʾān’,” cited above (see n. 3).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

of God's authority and wisdom, not an earthly or celestial repository of His messages. *Kitāb* is a metaphor, not a metaphysical reality.

Madigan's broad, metaphorical understanding of *kitāb* effectively turns it into a byword for revelation, because he suggests that any divine communication can be labelled a *kitāb* in so far as it represents God's knowledge and will. This turns *kitāb* into a diffuse, even universal phenomenon. Accordingly, Madigan does not limit *kitāb* to a specific group of prophets, instead associating it with "what has been given to Muḥammad and the other messengers"¹⁸² or what is "revealed through the prophets."¹⁸³ In what smacks of a universal conception, Madigan describes the term *kutub* as signifying "the successive interventions made by God in history in order to guide humanity."¹⁸⁴ Consequently, Madigan defines *ahl al-kitāb* in a broad way as designating "those who through their prophets have already been given guidance as to the nature of God's decrees and the extent of God's knowledge."¹⁸⁵ In addition to attributing *kitāb* to prophets in general, Madigan does not suggest that the Qur'an affords any preferential

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 122. See also p. 53, where Madigan refers to Muhammad as well as "Moses, Jesus and others."

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 122; see also p. 8 for a similar definition.

treatment to certain prophets in terms of their access to *kitāb*. In their association with this fundamental symbol, all revelations are created equal.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

As is evident from this chapter, Muslim exegetes and academic scholars of the Qur'an have advanced a host of theories, perspectives, and methodologies in their attempts to comprehend the Qur'an's doctrine of scripture. Notwithstanding this heterogeneity, certain ideas have played a dominant role in the scholarly discourse on qur'anic scripturology. To wit, Muslim exegetes and modern academics commonly consider the category of scripture to be native and integral to the Qur'an, and locate this category in the term *kitāb*. In the exegetical tradition, this term is often assigned a concrete referent—such as the Qur'an or the Torah—in line with *kitāb*'s basic Arabic meaning as “writing” or “book.” At the same time, the exegetes agree that in several instances *kitāb* designates the generic category of scripture and by extension a plurality of scriptures. Finally, the commentators take some instances of *kitāb* to

¹⁸⁶ A more recent study that similarly rejects a translation of *kitāb* as “book” is Samir Arbache, “Le terme *kitāb* (Écriture) dans le Coran et dans une ancienne version arabe des Évangiles.” Arbache's main contribution concerns the Sinai Arab 72 (S 72) manuscript, the oldest work to preserve a complete Arabic translation of the four Gospels, likely based on a mid-eighth century translation from Greek. According to Arbache, in the text of S 72 terms for “book” proper (βίβλος and βιβλίον) are rendered as *sifr* (10 times) and *muṣḥaf* (once), whereas all 23 instances of γραφή and its plural form (the technical terms for “scripture(s)” in the Gospels) are translated as *kitāb* or *kutub* (330). Pairing this observation with a brief survey of qur'anic data, Arbache concludes that the Qur'an uses *kitāb* similarly in a technical sense to refer to scripture as a phenomenon originating in heaven, not to the actual manifestations of this phenomenon (327)—although he believes that the Qur'an considers itself to be the “only authentic manifestation” of this “absent scripture” (332). Unfortunately, Arbache barely mentions previous research on the notion of *kitāb*, and thereby provides little clarity as to how his own understanding relates to those of earlier scholars.

refer to the heavenly book, which they often designate as the *umm al-kitāb* or *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*. While they occasionally describe the heavenly book as the source of all scriptures, the exegetes primarily conceptualize it as the record of God’s knowledge and the source of the Qur’an itself.

If Muslim commentators sporadically acknowledge a common source for scriptures, they frequently insist that these books confirm each other. However, the exegetes are not in agreement over the implications of this view for the contents of scriptures. Some commentators suggest that the various scriptures are essentially identical in substance, while others hold that these books agree only on a limited set of fundamental tenets. The exact number of scriptures is not a key concern for the commentators. Some of them evince a conservative approach and refer only to scriptures that are explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an, namely, the “leaves” of Abraham and Moses, the Torah, Psalms, the Gospel, and the Qur’an. Other exegetes, in particular those writing in the post-formative period, refer to a tradition that mentions not only these five prophets but also earlier figures such as Seth and Enoch/Idrīs as recipients of scripture. Indeed, the same tradition is used by al-Zamakhsharī and many subsequent commentators to divide scriptures into two groups: those (such as the leaves of Seth) often termed *ṣuḥuf* or *zubur* and seen to be chiefly exhortative in nature, and others (such as the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an) labelled as *kutub* and understood to have significant legal content. While this distinction is found in many post-classical commentaries,

it does not seem central to the exegete's understandings of scripture. Distinction among scriptures and comments on the number of scriptures are marginal themes in the commentaries.

There is considerable overlap between modern academics and their counterparts from the exegetical tradition. For one, academic scholars commonly interpret *kitāb* as signifying particular scriptures, the category of scripture, and the heavenly book. For another, they maintain that the Qur'an confirms all previous scriptures. In addition, modern scholars agree that all scriptures—in the qur'anic view—resemble each other, at least in their fundamental tenets. However, from the beginning academic scholarship charted an independent path. Thus, the idea of the heavenly book in general, and its conceptualization as the source of all scriptures, came to be far more prominent in modern scholarship. In addition, many academics have understood the heavenly book to be a source not only of scriptures but more broadly of all revelations. Finally, modern academics often describe the heavenly book as the “archetype” of all scriptures (or revelations), as the “original” or *Urtext* from which individual scriptures are copied. These descriptions suggest a great degree of similarity, even identity, among various scriptures. As a result, modern scholars often understand the Qur'an to deem all scriptures essentially identical, notwithstanding some formal differences. These

divergences from the exegetical tradition emerged quite early, as seen from the above examination of the works of Sprenger and Grimme.

Another area of difference between academic and exegetical scholarship concerns the pattern and number of scriptures. Neither body of scholarship is especially preoccupied with this question, but the commentaries are generally more specific on this matter. Some commentators seem to think that the Qur'an's references to previous scriptures are exhaustive, while others entertain a larger set of revealed texts by relying on non-qur'anic reports (such as the Abū Dharr tradition discussed before). Academic studies, however, rarely discuss the number of scriptures. Perhaps this is because modern scholars often take the Qur'an's historical vision to be parochial and in constant development. The Prophet was learning on the job, many scholars assume. Therefore, they suggest that Muhammad made reference to what he was (becoming) familiar with, implying that he did not aim to provide a thorough account of scriptural history. As a result, academics often speak of the revelation of scripture to previous messengers without providing a list of such messengers. The Torah, the Gospel, and Psalms are often presented as examples that demonstrate the Prophet's interaction with Jews and Christians, not as a complete set of pre-qur'anic scriptures.

Modern scholarship is therefore characterized by preoccupation with the heavenly book, presentation of this document as the archetype of all scriptures (or revelations), and

reluctance to comment on the exact number of scriptures. Together, these ideas and tendencies have resulted in the common attribution to the Qur'an of a rather monotonous and repetitive vision of prophetic history. According to this vision, God sent prophets and scriptures to many, perhaps most or even all, human communities. Because scriptures and revelations are essentially identical, prophets preached essentially the same message. God's numerous revelatory interventions reflected human diversity and the frequent distortion of prophetic teachings, which necessitated new divine guidance. Scholars also often attribute a progressive understanding to the Qur'an, whereby new scriptures and revelations build on and advance previous ones. In this context, scholars commonly mention the succession of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an as examples of such historical progression, with the Qur'an and Muhammad representing the culmination of scripture and prophecy. A recent version of this account can be found in an essay by Joseph Lumbard in *The Study Quran*:

According to the Quran, prophets have been sent at different times to all human collectivities with revelations in different tongues, but their message was one: *lā ilāha illa'LLāh*—there is no god but God. From this perspective, the history of humanity is a history of forgetting and being reminded again and again of this eternal truth. ... Presenting itself as the culmination of all revelation, the Quran expands upon the theme of religious continuity more extensively than previous revelations. The unity of revelation as such is implicit throughout the Quran ... From a Quranic perspective, every prophet has confirmed what the previous prophets brought, which is first and foremost an essential message of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*). ... Each phase of the Abrahamic tradition, and implicit [*sic*] other religious traditions, can thus be seen as the continuation of a single stream of revelation beginning with Adam and ending with the Prophet Muhammad. The forms of the message change ... But the content remains the

same. ... From this perspective, each revelation is a formal manifestation of an eternal formless truth.”¹⁸⁷

The present study proposes a fundamental rethinking of qur’anic scripturology and prophetology. In my view, the Qur’an considers scripture to be exclusive to the descendants of Abraham. Moreover, the Qur’an does *not* view scriptures as essentially similar. In particular, I argue that the Qur’an distinguishes itself and the Torah from all other scriptures by applying the term *kitāb* only to these two scriptures. Thus, *kitāb* is not a label for all revelations or scriptures but the exclusive designation of the Mosaic and Muhammadan books. By means of a thorough examination of relevant qur’anic passages, I show that *kitāb* is best understood as a technical term denoting the scripture *par excellence*, i.e. a comprehensive record of divine teachings imparting *historical* and *legal* knowledge. In other words, *kitāb* represents consummate divine guidance, a writing that contains extensive accounts of (sacred) history as well as detailed laws for proper conduct. The Qur’an’s exclusive association of the term *kitāb* with itself and the Torah means that it considers only these two scriptures as providing comprehensive divine instructions for their respective communities. By virtue of their extensive historical and legal content, the Torah and the Qur’an are *paradigmatic* scriptures, that is, they are necessary and sufficient for instituting full-fledged religious paradigms. To

¹⁸⁷ “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions,” in *The Study Quran*, 1765-6.

the best of my knowledge, the “two-*kitāb* hypothesis” is without precedent in qur’anic scholarship.

A corollary of this view is that the contents of the Qur’an are largely similar to those of the Torah, but not to other scriptures. In this vein, I argue that the Qur’an’s description of itself as a “confirmer” (*muṣaddiq*) has as its object the Torah exclusively, not all previous books. The duality of comprehensive scripture—the fact that there are two of them as opposed to one or three or more—reflects the division of Abraham’s descendants into Israelites and Ishmaelites, two communities distinguished from each other on geographic and linguistic grounds. The Torah was revealed for Israelites, while the Qur’an was sent down for Ishmaelites. This recognition has a crucial corollary: *ahl al-kitāb* means “the people of the Torah” and refers to Israelites. By using this label in relation to Jews *and Christians*, the Qur’an depicts the latter as Israelites whose foundational scripture is (or at least must be) the Torah, not the Gospel. These and similar implications profoundly affect our understanding of the qur’anic worldview as a whole, as will be discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Two:

The textual foundations of the two *kitāb* hypothesis

As the previous chapter demonstrates, Muslim exegetes and modern academics alike treat the qur'anic concept of *kitāb* as a label that is applicable to all scriptures (or even revelations). However, if we bracket the common Arabic meaning of *kitāb* as “writing” or “book” and analyze the qur'anic use of *kitāb* on its own, there is a strong case to be made that *kitāb* is a label for the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad to the exclusion of other scriptures and revelations. In other words, the Qur'an posits two earthly *kitābs*, one given to Moses and another given to Muhammad. If this “two-*kitāb*” hypothesis is valid, then the Qur'an does not use *kitāb* in the plain meaning of “book” or “scripture.” Rather, the Qur'an would be assigning a more restrictive, technical sense to *kitāb*, the connotations of which need to be investigated thoroughly. This chapter shows that there is a strong case to be made for the two-*kitāb* hypothesis, first by enumerating and analyzing qur'anic passages that lend support to this theory and then by discussing interpretations of these passages in exegetical and modern scholarship. 857-500-3233

A:1) Sūrat al-Mu'minīn (23):23-52. This sūra provides a bird's eye view of pre-Muhammadan prophetic history that singles out Moses as the recipient of a *kitāb* from God.

The narrative begins with a condensed account of Noah’s ministry, highlighting his monotheistic preaching and the catastrophic flood that destroyed his obstinate people (vv. 23-30). Then follows the story of an anonymous “generation” (*qarn*) who lived after the flood. Their unnamed messenger’s exhortations to believe in God and resurrection fell mostly on deaf ears, resulting in divine punishment yet again (vv. 31-41). This generation gave way to other generations (*qurūn*), also left anonymous, who similarly rejected their messengers and met the same calamitous fate. The text then turns to the mission of Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his council (*mala’ih*), whose arrogance would cost them their lives. The vicious cycle of sin-preaching-rejection-punishment seems to come to an end with the following crucial statement: “and We gave Moses *al-kitāb*, so that they might be guided” (v. 49). This statement is in stark contrast with the historical snippets of the preceding messengers. Although they urged their people to believe in God and the Last Day, none of these messengers, not even Noah, is said to have received a *kitāb* from God. Furthermore, Moses’s distinction does not appear to be only in relation to his predecessors. Immediately after mentioning the bestowal of *kitāb* to Moses, the text turns to Jesus. While the passage extols Jesus and his mother—describing them as “a sign” (*āyah*)—it makes no reference to Jesus receiving a *kitāb* from God. Rather, it goes on to comment on divisions among those who received guidance from God. This brief sketch of prophetic history suggests that Moses was

the only pre-Muhammadan messenger to receive the *kitāb* from God, a suggestion that finds corroboration in several other qur’anic texts.

A:2) Sūrat al-Baqarah (2):87-89. This passage is a brief reflection on Israelite prophetic history, in which the revelation of *kitāb* is mentioned only once, in relation to the mission of Moses. The verses preceding this passage criticize the transgressions of “the Children of Israel” (*banū isrā’īl*) and repeatedly remind them of their exceptional divine blessings (vv. 40-84). After mentioning several of the travails of the Israelites, the sūra provides a condensed account of their prophetic history in v. 87:

ولقد اتينا موسى الكتب وقفينا من بعده بالرسول واتينا عيسى ابن مريم البينت وايده بروح القدس افلكما جاكم رسول
بما لا تهوى انفسكم استكبرتم ففريقا كذبتم وفريقا تقتلون¹

And indeed We gave Moses the *kitāb*, and caused [Our] messengers to follow after him; and We gave Jesus, son of Mary, the clear proofs (*al-bayyināt*), and aided him with the Holy Spirit. Is it not so that whenever a messenger brought you what you did not desire, you grew arrogant, branding some liars and slaying some [others]?

This verse thus projects a tripartite historical vision: The first part concerns the mission of Moses and highlights his reception of the *kitāb*; the second part refers to the succession of messengers after Moses, without commenting on their identities or activities; and the third part focuses on Jesus, underscoring his reception of *al-bayyināt* (“the clear/clarifying proofs”)

¹ For Arabic citations of the Qur’an, I use the Egyptian edition in wide use across the world today, without supplying vowels or other signs (such as the *hamza* or the dagger *alif* representing *ā*) that are superimposed on its bare ‘Uthmānic *rasm*.

and his association with the Holy Spirit. The point of this historical reminiscence is made in the second half of the verse, which takes the Israelites to task for their ungrateful attitude towards God's favors. When they did not like a divine message, they would repudiate or even kill the messenger. All of this is a background for explaining their current behavior. For now there has come to them another *kitāb*, "confirming what is with them," but they reject it all the same (v. 89). The *sūra* continues to condemn the Israelites for their unbelief, adducing further episodes from their rebellious past (vv. 92-93).

The crucial point about this passage is that it does not attribute a *kitāb* to any of the Israelite prophets after Moses. Neither the anonymous "messengers" nor Jesus are said to have received a *kitāb* from God. If Jesus had brought a *kitāb* to the Children of Israel, it would have been only natural for the passage to refer to it. While the text makes no mention of any such *kitāb* for Israelite prophets after Moses, it immediately proceeds to refer to the Prophet's own *kitāb*. It claims, in fact, that the Israelites do recognize the Qur'an, presumably on account of its similarity to "what is with them," namely, their own *kitāb*. Yet, they still reject it, as its recipient is not one of their own (vv. 89-90). The fact that the passage mentions only Moses and Muhammad as recipients of a *kitāb* corroborates the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

One might object to my interpretation by surmising that the passage may be addressed to the Jews. If they are the target audience of this verse, the objection might proceed, then it

would make sense for there to be reference to the Torah and not to the Gospel. But this line of reasoning is moot, because if the passage had aimed to mention only what the Jews consider authoritative, why does it mention Jesus in the first place? Furthermore, the entire point of the passage is to condemn the Jews for rejecting God's messengers and revelations. Reference to a *kitāb* given to Jesus would have strengthened this point by highlighting yet another instance of Jewish disdain for God's guidance. Therefore, the absence of any reference to Jesus receiving a *kitāb* is significant and lends support to the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

A:3) Sūrat al-Aḥqāf (46):29-30. This sūra reports that a group of *jinn* approached the Prophet, listened attentively to the Qur'an, and then reported back their experience to their people. Utterly convinced of the veracity of the Prophet's message, these *jinn* stated that they "have heard a *kitāb* that was sent down after Moses, confirming what is before it." The fact that these *jinn* describe the Prophet's revelations as "a *kitāb* sent down after Moses" suggests that Muhammad is the only prophet to receive the *kitāb* since Moses. If David and Jesus were recipients of *kitābs*, for instance, the *jinn* should have described the Qur'an as "a *kitāb* sent down after Jesus." As it stands, their statement seems to disqualify Psalms or the Gospel as *kitābs*, again corroborating the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

A:4-5) Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3):184; Sūrat Fāṭir (35):25. These verses are virtually identical but appear in different contexts. The first one belongs to a polemical discourse against some

of the *ahl al-kitāb* as well as pagan unbelievers, while the second one is part of an exhortation that seems to address primarily the Prophet’s pagan contemporaries.² The verses in question invoke the past to mitigate the Prophet’s disappointment in the rejection of his message.

فان كذبوك فقد كذب رسل من قبلك جاو بالبينات والزبر والكتب المنير

Q 3:184: If they denied you, messengers before you were [also] denied. They came with the clear proofs, the writings, and the illuminating *kitāb*.

وان يكذبوك فقد كذب الذين من قبلهم جاتهم رسلهم بالبينات وبالزبر وبالكتب المنير

Q 35:25: If they deny you, those before them [also] denied. Their messengers came to them with the clear proofs, with the writings, and with the illuminating *kitāb*.³

In describing the mission of previous messengers, these verses highlight three items: 1) “the clear proofs” (*al-bayyināt*), perhaps referring to their miracles or instructive teachings; 2) “the writings” (*al-zubur*); and 3) “the illuminating *kitāb*.” The last two items seem to represent a bifurcation of pre-qur’anic scriptures. One of them is highlighted as “the illuminating *kitāb*,” while the others are subsumed under the term *al-zubur*. Given the strong association between

² Sūrat Fāṭir initially uses the term *al-nās* in reference to its hearers, but there are several indications that suggest its audience is the Prophet’s pagan detractors. For one, v. 40 explicitly criticizes the assignment of partners (*shurakāʾ*) to God, a charge often levelled against pagan Meccans. For another, the sūra characterizes the Prophet as a warner (*nadhīr*) sent to his community (vv. 23-24), later on criticizing this community for rejecting their warner and increasing in hatred and pride (vv. 42-3).

³ As reflected in the translation, one difference between Q 3:184 and 35:25 is that the latter has the preposition *bi-* before the nouns *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb* (thus, *wa-bi-l-zubur wa-bi-l-kitāb*), whereas the former does not (*al-zubur wa-l-kitāb*). According to some reports, the codices of Syria (presumably descended from the codex sent by ‘Uthmān to Ḥimṣ) had *wa-bi-l-zubur wa-bi-l-kitāb* in Q 3:184 as well (al-Dānī, *al-Muqniʿ*, 572f, 597). Other reports state that Syrian codices only had *bi-* before *al-zubur*, not before *al-kitāb* (*ibid.*, 574). See also al-Khaṭīb, *Muṣjam al-qirāʾāt*, 1: 638f. For an analysis of reports of such differences between the codices sent to various cities by ‘Uthmān, see Michael Cook, “The Stemma of the Regional Codices of the Koran,” *Graeco-Arabica* 9-10 (2004), 89-104.

the term *kitāb* and Moses in the Qur'an, it seems reasonable to assume that “the illuminating *kitāb*” refers to the Torah. In this case, *al-zubur* would signify pre-qur'anic scriptures other than the Torah. This interpretation of *al-zubur* is consistent with the Qur'an's designation of David's Psalms as (*al-*)*zabūr* (4:163, 17:55, 21:105), which is the singular of *al-zubur* and a key scripture alongside the Torah.⁴

Identification of “the illuminating *kitāb*” with the Torah finds support in a latter passage of *Sūrat Fāṭir*. In this text, God assures the Prophet that “the *kitāb* that We revealed to you is the truth, confirming what is before it” (v. 31).⁵ Describing the Prophet's proclamations as a *kitāb* that confirms “that which is before it,” this passage is highly reminiscent of Q 2:89 (discussed above), which characterizes the Prophet's revelations as “a *kitāb* from God [that] confirms what is with them.” Because this latter verse is preceded by reference to the *kitāb* of Moses (2:87), it seems even more likely that “the illuminating *kitāb*” mentioned in Q 35:25 is similarly a reference to the Mosaic *kitāb*. In sum, Q 35:25 and 3:184 seem to put forward a conceptualization of pre-Islamic scriptural history in which one book—the Torah—is given

⁴ It is indeed tempting to match, in reverse order, the three items mentioned in this verse to the tripartite vision of prophetic history found in Q 2:87. In this case, *al-bayyināt* would refer specifically to the miracles and teachings of Jesus, *al-zubur* would characterize the scriptures sent down to messengers between Moses and Jesus (especially that of David), and *kitāb* would refer to the Torah of Moses.

⁵ The Arabic phrase is *wa-lladhī awḥaynā ilayka min al-kitāb*, and the above translation is based on taking *min* to be explicatory (*li-l-tabyīn*). The preposition may also be understood to be partitive (*li-l-tab'īd*), in which case the translation would be “that which We revealed to you from the *kitāb* is the truth.”

pride of place and labeled “the illuminating *kitāb*,” while the others are lumped together as “the writings.”

It is necessary to address some potential objections to my reading of Q 3:184 and 35:25. One objection might draw on similar phrases in two other passages, namely, Q 16:44 and 57:25. The former verse states that messengers before the Prophet came with “the clear proofs and the writings (*al-zubur*),” without any reference to “the illuminating *kitāb*.” On the other hand, according to Q 57:25 God sent His messengers with “the clear proofs,” and also sent down with them “the *kitāb* and the balance.” Leaving aside “the balance,” what is significant is the absence of “the writings” (*al-zubur*) from this verse. In all, we have two verses that couple “the clear proofs” with both *al-zubur* and “the illuminating *kitāb*” (3:184, 35:25), one verse that adds only *al-zubur* (16:44) to “the clear proofs”, and a fourth verse that adds only *al-kitāb* (57:25). This combination might be taken to suggest that *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb* have the same denotation.⁶ For example, perhaps *al-zubur* refers to all scriptures, while “the illuminating *kitāb*” refers to the heavenly book that scholars posit as the source of scriptures. In this case, the two verses under consideration may be attempting to convey both the multiplicity and

⁶ Thus, after noting the appearance of *zubur* alongside or close to *al-bayyināt*, *al-kitāb*, *al-dhikr*, and *tanzīl* (Q 26:192-6), Joseph Horowitz suggests that *zubur* “refer[s] in general to revealed books” (*Zabūr, Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition).

unicity of prophetic messages: the messengers brought different “books” (*al-zubur*), but these were all manifestations of the same heavenly book, “the illuminating *kitāb*.”

In a nutshell, the answer to this objection is that *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb* signify distinct aspects of scriptural history that can be utilized together or separately depending on the purpose of a particular passage. The term *al-zubur* refers to “minor” scriptures, or perhaps to all scriptures in a general way, conveying the multiplicity of revealed texts and the similarities in their core theological messages. On the other hand, *al-kitāb* signifies the pinnacle of scriptural history before the Prophet. It denotes the Torah as the sole pre-qur’anic scripture to outline articles of faith and rules of conduct in a comprehensive way. Thus, depending on the aim and rhetorical context of each passage, these terms appear individually or together. A detailed analysis of Q 16:44 and 57:25 corroborates this view by revealing some of the potential reasons for the absence or presence of *al-kitāb* and *al-zubur*.

It is helpful to discuss Q 16:44 first, with attention to its larger context, i.e. Sūrat al-Naḥl. This sūra is essentially a sustained protrepsis directed to the Prophet’s people, and a lengthy apologia for monotheism and belief in the Last Day. As part of this appeal, the sūra tells the hearers that, like the Prophet, former messengers were also mere mortals. This is presumably in response to the claim that messengers should be (accompanied by) angels (see e.g. Q 17:94-5, 25:7), although here this demand is not stated explicitly.

وما ارسلنا من قبلك الا رجالا نوحي اليهم فسلوا اهل الذكر ان كنتم لا تعلمون ﴿٤٣﴾ بالبينت والزيبر وانزلنا اليك
الذكر لتبين للناس ما نزل اليهم ولعلهم يتفكرون

And We did not send before you [as Our messengers] other than men to whom We communicated; ask the *ahl al-dhikr* if you do not know (43). [We sent them] with the clear proofs and the writings; and We sent down to you *al-dhikr* so that you explain to people that which has been sent down to them, and that haply they may reflect (44).

In any case, in order to prove that messengers have always been ordinary men, the *sūra* has recourse to a group of people called *ahl al-dhikr* (lit. “the people of the remembrance”). It suggests that the hearers ask the *ahl al-dhikr* about the characteristics of previous messengers, presumably expecting the *ahl al-dhikr* to confirm the mortality of said messengers (v. 43). It is at this moment that the passage refers to “the clear proofs and the writings (*al-zubur*)” brought by God’s messengers.

The identity of the *ahl al-dhikr* is key to the interpretation of this passage. In my view, the noun *al-dhikr* here refers to the Torah, as is the case in Q 21:48 and 21:105.⁷ Therefore, just like “the people of the *kitāb*,” the phrase “the people of the *dhikr*” refers to Jews and Christians in light of their possession and study of the Torah. If we accept this reading, then it becomes clear why verse 44 mentions “the clear proofs” and “the writings” but not the *kitāb*: the phrase *ahl al-dhikr* already alludes to the Torah. By suggesting that the Prophet’s people turn to “the people of the remembrance,” verse 43 acknowledges the existence of the Torah and its

⁷ For a full discussion of *dhikr*, see Chapter Four. Cf. Q 40:54.

authoritative status. Therefore, the next verse does not need to state the fact that the Torah was also sent down to God's messengers. It suffices to mention the other, "minor" scriptures, a goal that is accomplished by using the term *al-zubur*.⁸

Interestingly, this interpretation leads to a correspondence between the Torah and the Qur'an that is similar to the one found in the above-discussed Q 2:87-9 and Q 35:25-31. This correspondence results from the fact that, immediately after commenting on the previous messengers, Q 16:44 refers to "the remembrance" given to the Prophet himself. In other words, while "the people of the remembrance" in v. 43 highlights the status of the Torah as the first remembrance (*al-dhikr*), the next verse notes that the Prophet's own revelations constitute the second remembrance. The same terminological consonance between the Torah and the Qur'an appears in Q 21:48-50, which highlights the bestowal of "a *dhikr*" upon Moses and Aaron, presumably referring to the Torah. This passage then turns to the Prophet's own revelations and describes them as "a blessed *dhikr* that We have sent down." The simultaneous characterization of the revelations of Moses and Muhammad as *dhikr* in this text further

⁸ Incidentally, some commentators provide a similar interpretation for Q 21:105, which mentions *al-dhikr* alongside *al-zabūr/al-zubūr*: "Indeed, We wrote in *al-zabūr/al-zubūr*, after *al-dhikr*, that my righteous servants shall inherit the earth." According to some exegetical reports mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, *al-dhikr* here refers to the Torah, while *al-zabūr/al-zubūr* designates post-Mosaic scriptures.

corroborates the theory that the passage under consideration (Q 16:43) makes an oblique reference to the Torah when it urges consultation with “the people of the remembrance.”⁹

With regard to Q 57:25, it is important to note that it does not mention *al-kitāb* immediately after “the clear proofs.”

لقد ارسلنا رسلنا بالبينت وانزلنا معهم الكتب والميزان ليقوم الناس بالقسط وانزلنا الحديد فيه باس شديد ومنفع للناس
وليعلم الله من ينصره ورسله بالغيب ان الله قوى عزيز

Indeed We sent Our messengers with the clear proofs. And We sent down with them *al-kitāb* and the balance, so that people establish justice. And We sent down iron, in which there is great force and benefits for people. And [We did all this] so that God may know those who help Him and His messengers at heart. God is truly strong and invincible.

This verse first mentions that God sent His messengers with “the clear proofs.” It then adds that God also “sent down with them *al-kitāb* and the balance,” later on mentioning “iron (*al-ḥadīd*)” as well. The balance and iron are apparently mentioned because of their crucial roles in the development of human civilization. The balance allows people to enforce fairness in economic transactions (cf. Q 55:9), while iron enables the manufacture of weaponry and agricultural tools, among other things. Given this context, it is plausible for *al-kitāb* to refer to

⁹ Even if there were no mention of *al-dhikr* in v. 43, the absence of *kitāb* from Q 16:44 would not have challenged my reading of Q 3:184 and 35:25. For my argument is *not* based on a categorical association between *al-zubur* and “minor” scriptures. Perhaps the Qur’an considers *zabūr* to be an appropriate appellation for all scriptures, including the Torah, in which case *al-zubur* may broadly designate the scriptures sent down before the Qur’an. Be that as it may, my contention is that only the Torah (and the Qur’an) can be called *kitābs*. Therefore, “the illuminating *kitāb*” highlights the unique importance of the Torah, regardless of whether or not it is already signified by *al-zubur*.

the Torah, because it represents a similar civilizational advance. Just as the first passage discussed in this section indicates (Q 23:23-52), God sent many messengers to serve as warners and to promote belief in monotheism and resurrection. But the mission of Moses was distinguished from all others because he received the *kitāb*, i.e. the Torah, containing an unprecedented, complete package of teachings for the Israelites. Bearing these points in mind, Q 57:25 is a reflection on some of the most exceptional moments in human history: the giving of a comprehensive law-code in the Torah, the (divinely-inspired) invention of the balance, and use of iron for agriculture and warfare.¹⁰ It therefore makes sense for this verse to omit reference to what I have called “minor scriptures,” as they do not hold similar civilizational significance. In short, the logic of each passage explains why one (Q 57:25) juxtaposes “the clear signs” only with *al-kitāb* and the other (Q 16:44) only with *al-zubur*.

¹⁰ The association of civilization with laws and agriculture was of course widespread in the ancient world, as texts from ancient Egypt and Greece demonstrate. For a brief overview of some of these texts, see Pieter van der Horst, “The Myth of Jewish Cannibalism: a chapter in the history of antisemitism,” in *Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, 180-5.

On the other hand, it is important to note the negative role assigned to metalworking in some works. For example, according to a Greek version of the *Book of Watchers*, the fallen angel Azazel showed men “metals, and the art of working them,” technologies that change the world and lead to “great impiety” (*The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: a new edition in the light of the Aramaic Dead Sea fragments*, by Michael A. Knibb, Oxford University Press, 1978, vol. 2 (Introduction, Translation, and Commentary), 80f).

Table 2.1 – Comparative Outline of Q 3:184, 35:25-31, 16:43-44, and 57:25

Q 3:184		“messengers before you ... came with the clear proofs and the writings and the illuminating kitāb ”	
Q 35:25-31		“their messengers came to them with the clear proofs and with the writings and with the illuminating kitāb ”	“the <i>kitāb</i> that We revealed to you is the truth, confirming what is before it”
Q 16:43-4	“We sent before you only men” “ask the people of <i>al-dhikr</i> ”	[Our messengers came] “with the clear proofs and the writings ”	“We sent down to you <i>al-dhikr</i> ”
Q 57:25		“We sent our messengers with the clear proofs ” “and sent down with them the kitāb and the balance ” “and We sent down iron ”	

The above discussion argues for the plausibility of understanding “the illuminating *kitāb*” (*al-kitāb al-munīr*) as a reference to the Torah. The question remains, however, as to whether “the illuminating *kitāb*” may designate the heavenly book that is often considered the source of all scriptures. A positive answer to this question does not undermine the two-*kitāb* hypothesis, because it does not imply that scriptures other than the Torah and the Qur’an can be called *kitābs*. Nevertheless, there are two main issues with taking *al-kitāb* in the above verses as a referent to the heavenly book. First, it is doubtful whether the Qur’an believes in a common, heavenly source for all revelations. As discussed in the previous chapter, qur’anic passages that speak of “a (guarded) tablet” or “the mother of the book” are concerned with the

Qur'an's own preservation in a heavenly form, not with other scriptures. The stipulation of a heavenly source or archetype of all revelations is largely a post-qur'anic development wrought by Muslim commentators and accepted and emphasized by modern academic scholars.

Second, identification of "the illuminating *kitāb*" with the Torah is more congruent with the totality of references to the term *kitāb*, such as the *jinn*'s remark and other references discussed in this chapter. Put simply, while "the illuminating *kitāb*" might refer to a common, celestial source of all scriptures, the entirety of our qur'anic data suggests that the Torah is a more plausible referent for this phrase.¹¹

A:6) Sūrat al-Nisā' (4):136. Another verse supportive of the two-*kitāb* hypothesis appears in Sūrat al-Nisā' ("Women"). This sūra begins with a substantial amount of legislation on social, ritual, and especially family matters (vv. 1-43). It then discusses extensively the relations between the Prophet's followers ("the believers," *al-mu'minūn*) on the one hand and "the hypocrites" (*al-munāfiqūn*) and "the people of the *kitāb*" (*ahl al-kitāb*) on the other. It is in

¹¹ Another possibility is for "the illuminating *kitāb*" to be a generic construct that designates the category of scripture. However, as this dissertation demonstrates, the two-*kitāb* hypothesis eliminates the need for positing a generic use of *kitāb* in the Qur'an, in this passage as well as in others that are interpreted as such in the exegetical literature.

this context that v. 136 appears, presumably as a warning to those followers of the Prophet who might waver in their faith:¹²

يا ايها الذين آمنوا آمنوا بالله ورسوله والكتب الذى نزل على رسوله والكتب الذى انزل من قبل

O you who believe! Believe in God and His messenger and the *kitāb* that He sent down to His messenger and the *kitāb* that He sent down before.

Addressing the believers, the verse asks them to have faith in “God and His Messenger and the *kitāb* that [God] sent down to His Messenger and the *kitāb* that He sent down before.” The crucial phrase here is “the *kitāb* that He sent down before.” By speaking of the (one) *kitāb* revealed before the Prophet, the verse implies that God has sent down only two *kitābs*: one to the Prophet, and one before him—presumably to Moses.

A:7) Sūrat al-An‘ām (6):91-2. This passage reports that the Prophet’s opponents claimed: “God has sent down nothing to a human being.” In response to this claim, the Qur’an asks of them: “who sent down the *kitāb* that Moses brought?” The answer, of course, is that it was God Himself. After condemning the opponents for their senseless intransigence, the next verse immediately turns to the Prophet’s *kitāb*: “and this is a blessed *kitāb* We sent down, confirming what is before it.” Presumably, “what is before it,” which utilizes the singular pronoun *alladhī*, refers to the *kitāb* of Moses. The passage’s rhetorical maneuver accomplishes

¹² Cf. v. 137-8.

two things. First, in order to counter the “no-revelation” claim, it refers to the *kitāb* of Moses, thereby suggesting that it is the most important and widely-known of all pre-qur’anic revelations. Second, by immediately describing the Qur’an as a *kitāb* that confirms “what is before it”—presumably the Torah—the text establishes correspondence between the Mosaic and Muhammadan revelations. The passage thus reinforces the special relationship between the Torah and the Qur’an, even though it does not necessarily imply that the Torah is the *only* pre-Muhammadan *kitāb*.

A:8) Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28):48-49. These verses report that the Prophet’s opponents rejected his revelations, asking “why has he not been given the like of what Moses was given”? It seems from the context that the opponents were referring to the tablets received by Moses. In response, the text notes that they have also rejected the revelations of Moses: “did they not disbelieve also in what Moses was given before? They said: ‘A pair of sorceries supporting each other.’ And they said: ‘we disbelieve in all.’” The point of the text is that the unbelievers are opposed to the contents of revelation regardless of its medium or form. If the Prophet had received divinely-inscribed tablets, the unbelievers would have still rejected his message.¹³

The next verse makes a crucial statement: “Say: bring a *kitāb* from God that gives better

¹³ The word translated as “a pair of sorceries,” i.e. *sihrān*, is also read as *sāḥirān*, meaning “a pair of sorcerers” (*Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 7:53f). In this reading, the unbelievers would be speaking of Moses and Muhammad instead of their scriptures.

guidance than these two (*ahdā minhumā*), so that I may follow it, if you speak truly.” The Prophet, who believes in his own *kitāb* and that of Moses, will not abandon these two *kitābs* in favor of his opponents’ erroneous beliefs. If they want to win over the Prophet, they need to produce a *kitāb* from God that is superior to the Torah and the Qur’ān. Of course, the opponents have no such *kitāb* in support of their convictions. That is why their rejection of the Prophet is absurd.

Like the previous text (6:91-2), this passage does not necessarily preclude the existence of *kitābs* other than those of himself and Moses. However, it suggests a bi-modal scripturology in which the Torah and the Qur’an represent the two climaxes of scriptural history, the two scriptures than which there is no “better guidance.” This bi-modal conception undermines a progressive scripturology in which the Gospel is superior to the Torah or even on a par with it. Because if the Gospel was accorded such a status, the Prophet could have used his opponents’ rejection to pivot to a progressive formulation that featured the Gospel or perhaps all scriptures in general. The fact that the response focuses on the Torah and the Qur’an, however, corroborates their distinction vis-à-vis other scriptures.¹⁴

¹⁴ Perhaps to avoid this implication, Fazlur Rahman translates the passage under discussion in a way that posits correspondence between the Qur’an and *the Bible* as a whole: “Say to them [O Muhammad], Then you bring another Book from Allah which would give better guidance than these two [the Bible and the Qur’ān] and I will follow that one, if you are speaking the truth” (*Major Themes of the Qur’an*, 134).

A:9-10) Sūrat Hūd (11):17, Sūrat al-Aḥqāf (46):10-12. These two texts are similar in a number of respects, including the fact that they reflect on the Qur'an and note that "before it is the *kitāb* of Moses." This statement suggests that the Mosaic *kitāb* was the only *kitāb* preceding the Qur'an. For if David and Jesus (and perhaps other prophets) had also received *kitābs*, one would expect their *kitābs* to be mentioned or at least acknowledged in these verses. The expression "before it is the *kitāb* of Moses" is reminiscent of the statement of the *jinn* in Q 46:30 (discussed above), who describe the Qur'an as "a *kitāb* sent down after Moses." Both phrases imply that no prophet between Moses and Muhammad received a *kitāb*. Before probing the full significance of the two texts under consideration, however, it is necessary to discuss them in detail and address some of their ambiguities.

The first verse (Q 11:17) appears to be a response to the claim that the Qur'an is a human forgery, the Prophet's own speech disguised as divine communication (vv. 13-14). Against this claim, the verse aims to establish the divine credentials of the Prophet and the Qur'an:

افمن كان على بينه من ربه ويتلوه شاهد منه ومن قبله كتب موسى اماما ورحمه اولئك يؤمنون به ومن يكفر به من الاحزاب فالنار موعده فلا تك في مرية منه انه الحق من ربك ولكن اكثر الناس لا يؤمنون

Is one who stands upon a *bayyinah* from his Lord [an impostor], when a witness from Him recites it, and before it is the *kitāb* of Moses as a guide and a mercy? They believe in it. And whosoever of the partisans rejects it, the fire shall be his appointed place.

So have no doubt concerning it! It is the truth from your (sing.) Lord, but most people do not believe.

The first part of the verse is an incomplete, rhetorical question that marshals three facts in defense of the Prophet and his revelations. First, he “stands upon a *bayyinah* from his Lord.”¹⁵ The noun *bayyinah* can have either an intensive (“something that is very clear”) or causative (“something that makes clear”) meaning.¹⁶ In the present context it seems to refer to the Qur’an, or perhaps to the monotheistic teachings embedded therein.¹⁷ The next two facts seem to concern the Qur’an itself. The text states that it is “recited by a witness from him” (*yatlūhu shāhid minu*)—the personal pronoun presumably referring to God, who is described as the Prophet’s Lord (*rabbihī*) in the preceding phrase. The identity of this witness is not specified, perhaps because it was known to the Qur’an’s audience. Finally, the verse points to the existence of a precursor to the Qur’an, namely, the Mosaic *kitāb*, in order to buttress the Qur’an’s claim to veracity. Perhaps what is meant is the confirmation that the Torah lends the Qur’an by virtue of their similar contents. The Torah thus serves as a precedent, showing that

¹⁵ The idea that “one who stands upon a *bayyinah* from His Lord” refers to the Prophet is a reasonable assumption, because the remainder of the sūra uses a very similar expression in relation to Noah, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ayb. Each of these prophets asks of his people: “if I stand upon a *bayyinah* from my Lord ...” (vv. 28, 63, 88). Prophets convey a similar divine message to similarly-obstinate people, so it is only natural for them to address their people in similar terms. In the verse under consideration, it is God who addresses the Prophet’s people, therefore referring to the Prophet with the third-person relative pronoun *man* (cf. Q 6:57, 47:14).

¹⁶ Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:286.

¹⁷ See especially Q 35:40, which speaks about the Prophet’s pagan opponents in the following way: “have We given them a *kitāb* so that they are supported by a *bayyinah* from it?” The implication is that *unlike* them, the Prophet does have a *kitāb* which underlies his claims. Cf. Q 6:57, 47:14.

the Prophet is not fabricating ideas of his own but operating according to a well-known, ancient paradigm. (This appeal to the Torah is somewhat reminiscent of Q 6:91 discussed above.) Overall, the incomplete question of this verse conveys that the Prophet has solid evidence in support of his claims, unlike his unbelieving opponents, or perhaps unlike other delusional claimants to prophecy. In short, “is Muhammad a false prophet?” or perhaps “is Muhammad like you?” This rhetorical question has a negative answer, of course, which is assumed rather than given.

A major ambiguity of this verse concerns the identity of the mentioned “witness” (*shāhid*). Here the second passage, Q 46:10-12, may be of some help:

قل ارايتم ان كان من عند الله وكفرتم به وشهد شاهد من بني اسريل على مثله فامن واستكبرتم ...
ومن قبله كتب موسى اماما ورحمه وهذا كتب مصدق لسانا عربيا لينذر الذين ظلموا وبشرى للمحسنين

Say: have you considered if it is from God but you disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel bears witness to its likeness, then he has believed while you show arrogance? ... And before it is the *kitāb* of Moses as a guide and a mercy, and this is a *kitāb* that confirms, in the Arabic tongue, in order to warn the iniquitous and as glad tidings to the righteous.

This passage similarly follows the accusation that the Prophet’s revelations are human fabrications (v. 8). In fact, the accusation is introduced in exactly the same terms: “Or do they say: ‘he has invented it?’” The Qur’an answers this similarly with a question: “Say: have you considered if it is from God but you disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel bears witness to its likeness?” The question engenders doubt in the minds of the unbelievers,

asking them to reflect on the possibility that they may be mistaken. The verse attempts to show the likelihood of their error by reference to an outsider, “a witness from the Children of Israel,” who testifies to the existence of a “likeness” (*mithl*) for the Qur’an.¹⁸ This “likeness” is probably the Torah, which is not mentioned in this verse, but appears just after in verse twelve, when the description of the Prophet’s revelations is resumed: “And before it is the *kitāb* of Moses, as a guide and a mercy.” Immediately after this reference to the Mosaic *kitāb*, the passage turns to the Qur’an itself: “and this is a *kitāb* that confirms, in the Arabic tongue” (v. 12). This phrase highlights the correspondence between the Torah and the Qur’an by describing each as a *kitāb*, and by emphasizing that the Qur’an confirms the Torah. It also draws attention to the Qur’an’s distinct, Arabic form. In sum, God is according the Prophet’s community access to a treasure trove of teachings by sending down the Qur’an in their own language. Furthermore, a learned Israelite testifies that these teachings match those given to Moses. But alas, the Prophet’s people still refuse to believe.

Given the unmistakable similarities between Q 11:17 and 46:10-12, it is likely that they reflect a similar state of affairs. If so, then their “witness” may be one and the same person.

¹⁸ According to al-Jurjānī (cited in al-Qurṭubī), *mithl* here is a redundant element (*ṣilah*), so the witness is not testifying to the Qur’an’s like but to the Qur’an itself, i.e., to its being a revelation from God. According to another reading, proposed by al-Rāzī, the pronoun after *mithl* does not refer to the Qur’an but to the claim that it is sent down by God. Thus, the meaning is that the said witness makes the same claim as the Prophet, arguing that the Qur’an is of divine origin.

That is, the “witness” mentioned in Q 11:17 is also probably “from the Children of Israel.” The identification of the two witnesses finds support in a further similarity between the two passages: both seem to contrast the attitude of this witness with the rejectionism of the Prophet’s own people. Q 46:10 states, immediately after referring to the said witness, that “he has believed while you show arrogance.” A similar dynamic is present in Q 11:17: “those believe in it, and whosoever of the partisans rejects it, the fire shall be his appointed place.”¹⁹ These statements highlight the irony of the situation: the Prophet’s own people, who have no solid basis for their pagan beliefs (cf. Q 46:4), confidently reject the Prophet’s revelations, while some Israelites with access to previous divine revelation confirm the Prophet.²⁰

The examined passages clearly highlight the close correspondence between the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad. In the entire Qur’an, there is no text that posits such correspondence between the Qur’an and Psalms or the Gospel—the latter are not juxtaposed

¹⁹ The use of the plural pronoun “those” is somewhat unexpected here, given the earlier reference to “witness” in the singular. Perhaps “those” refers to a group of people associated with that witness, who similarly accepted the Prophet’s claims. See the next footnote for verses that suggest the existence of such a group from the *ahl al-kitāb*.

²⁰ Several other passages point to the acceptance of the Prophet’s message by some of the *ahl al-kitāb* in order to strengthen his claim to prophecy. For example, Q 26:197 asks, “is it not a sign for them that the learned of the Children of Israel know it?” Q 17:107-9 invokes similar support while showing frustration with the Prophet’s people: “Say: ‘believe in it or believe not! Those who were given the knowledge (*al-ilm*) before it fall down upon their faces, prostrating, when it is recited to them.’” Two verses in Sūrat al-Ra‘d (Q 13) provide a similar description: “And those to whom We gave the *kitāb* rejoice in what is sent down to you, while some from the partisans reject some of it” (v. 36); and “the unbelievers say you are not sent [by God]. Say: ‘God suffices as a witness (*shahīd*) between me and you, and [also] one who possesses knowledge of *al-kitāb*’” (v. 43). Finally, according to Q 28:52: “those to whom We gave the *kitāb* before this, they believe in it.” Cf. Q 29:47.

exclusively with the Qur'an, nor is any one of them considered a "like" of the Qur'an.

Admittedly, the phrase "before it is the *kitāb* of Moses" does not necessarily suggest the existence of only two *kitābs*. Moreover, if we assume that the two passages speak of the same witness, and if we further assume that this witness "from the Children of Israel" was Jewish, then perhaps the *kitāb* of Moses is mentioned as a nod to that witness's confessional background: he was testifying that the Prophet's revelations resemble the Torah's teachings (and he did not believe in the Christian scriptures), hence the exclusive mention of the Mosaic *kitāb* in these passages. While this possibility cannot be ruled out, it is significant that the Qur'an would confirm such a testimony without attempting to reframe it in order to incorporate other scriptures into its argument. For example, when Q 46:12 describes the Qur'an as *muṣaddiq*, it could have specified the object of this confirmation as *al-kutub allatī bayna yadayhi* ("the books that are before it"). Yet, never in the entire Qur'an is the Islamic scripture placed in such a relationship with a plurality of *kitābs*. The frequent juxtaposition of the *kitābs* of Moses and Muhammad, therefore, seems quite deliberate and meant to highlight their profound similarity and correspondence.

Discussions of the above verses in previous scholarship

While the connections between the above-examined passages or their implications for scripturology are not appreciated in qur'anic scholarship, many writers have grappled with these texts on an individual basis in order to clarify their unexpected formulations.

Specifically, because the genre of *tafsīr* necessitates discussion of all verses in the Qur'an, there is much pertinent analysis of these verses in the exegetical literature. What follows is a discussion of these engagements as well as those I have been able to locate in modern academic scholarship.

B:1-2) Q 23:23-52; 2:87-89. Although these texts pose a challenge to the common understanding of *kitāb* as a label for all scriptures, their bearing on the meaning of *kitāb* has not received attention in the exegetical and academic literature. However, the implications of other passages examined in this chapter have been discussed relatively extensively, and it is to these discussions that I now turn.

B:3) Q 46:30. This verse reports that a party of *jinn* described the Qur'an as "a *kitāb* sent down after Moses," a phrase that implies that no prophet between Moses and Muhammad had received a *kitāb* from God. Such a formulation poses a problem for the common understanding of *kitāb* as "book" or "scripture," because it seems to disqualify Psalms and the Gospel from being considered *kitābs*. This problem is recognized by the commentators, whose most

common explanations are that 1) the *jinn* in question were Jewish;²¹ or that 2) they were not aware of the coming of Jesus.²² Both explanations seem to be *ad hoc* theories invented to solve the problem encountered in this particular verse, do not answer why Psalms is not mentioned, and are in fact criticized by several commentators for their implausibility.²³

A rather unique interpretation of this verse is provided by the Syrian scholar Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), who is above all concerned with the absence of Jesus from the statement of the *jinn*. According to Ibn Kathīr, this absence has to do with the nature of Jesus’s scripture, i.e. the Gospel. Ibn Kathīr notes that the Gospel consists primarily of “admonitions and edificatory advice” (*mawā’iz wa-tarqīqāt*), and thereby contains little legal material. This means that the Gospel does not embody a new religious law (*sharī‘ah*). Rather, it is “in reality like a supplement to the law (*sharī‘ah*) of the Torah,” representing a minor reformation of the latter. Now, because the Qur’an represents a complete and independent legal dispensation, of all the previous scriptures it is the Torah that stands in close correspondence with the Qur’an. This is

²¹ This view is attributed to ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/115). It is adopted by Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Baghawī, and the *Jalālayn*, and mentioned as a possibility by al-Bayḍāwī, al-Rāzī, Abū al-Su‘ūd, and Ibn ‘Ajībah. Al-Ālūsī, however, deems it of defective transmission. Al-Rāzī ascribes the same interpretation to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

²² Attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās and mentioned by al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī, and Abū al-Su‘ūd.

²³ Ibn ‘Ajība, Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, al-Ālūsī, and al-Ṭanṭāwī reject the view that these *jinn* were not familiar with Jesus. Abū Ḥayyān notes that this report has no sound *isnād* reaching back to Ibn ‘Abbās. He also argues that the mission of Jesus must have been well-known because of his huge following, and considers it far-fetched that the *jinn* could have been unaware of it. Al-Ālūsī makes a similar argument.

why, Ibn Kathīr argues, the *jinn* referred to Moses but not to the prophets after him. They realized that in terms of significance and function, only the Torah matches the revelations of the Prophet.

In effect, Ibn Kathīr classifies scriptures based on their legal contents, suggesting that those with substantial legislation are foundational while others are supplemental. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a similar classification is proposed by al-Bayḍāwī and followed by many exegetes after him in explaining the above-discussed Q 3:184 and 35:25. However, the difference is that these exegetes consider not only the Torah and the Qur’an but also the Gospel (and sometimes even Psalms) as foundational scriptures. For most commentators, the Gospel represents an independent *sharī‘ah* of its own. But Ibn Kathīr makes the rare observation that the Gospel contains little by way of legislation, therefore concluding that it is not a paradigmatic scripture on a par with the Torah and the Qur’an.²⁴ Despite this departure from the exegetical consensus, it is important to note that Ibn Kathīr does *not* provide a new interpretation of the term *kitāb*. He does not understand the phrase “a *kitāb* after Moses” as disqualifying the Gospel from being a *kitāb*. In his view, the *jinn* referred to Moses because the Torah was the most important—but certainly not the only—*kitāb* before the

²⁴ Ibn Kathīr makes similar remarks about the Torah-Qur’ān correspondence in commenting on Q 28:51, 48:28, and in his massive historical work, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nihāyah*, 2:114. In both places, he lists several qur’anic passages that juxtapose the revelations of Moses and the Prophet Muhammad (*ibid.*, pp. 113f).

Qur'an. Ibn Kathīr is in fact firmly committed to a broad understanding of *kitāb* as “book,” as seen in his additional comments on this verse.²⁵

Ibn Kathīr’s divergent approach to qur’anic scripturology does not seem to have had much influence on later commentators. However, it is worth noting that another Syrian thinker, the modern reformist Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), promoted a similar perspective. In his Qur’an commentary, titled *Tafsīr al-Manār* (which he developed based on the lectures of Muḥammad ‘Abduh [d. 1905]), and in his *al-Waḥy al-Muḥammadī*, Riḍā frequently highlights the correspondence between the Torah and the Qur’an.²⁶ Riḍā notes that each book constitutes “a consummate, independent law (*sharī‘ah*) in its rulings on devotional, social, political, and military matters.”²⁷ Furthermore, he asserts that Jesus was a follower of the *sharī‘a* of Moses, despite his abrogation of some Mosaic regulations.²⁸ Riḍā makes similar remarks time and again in his commentary on the Qur’an.²⁹ To confirm Jesus’s commitment to Mosaic Law, Riḍā refers several times to Matthew 5:17: “I have not come to abolish [the Law or the Prophets],

²⁵ Thus, Ibn Kathīr explains “what is before it” (*mā bayna yadayhi*) in the present verse as “the *kutub* sent down to earlier Prophets” (*ibid.*). The implication is that all the scriptures are *kitābs*.

²⁶ On *al-Manār*, see Jacques Jomier, *Le commentaire coranique du Manār*.

²⁷ *Al-Waḥy al-Muḥammadī*, 145; fn. 2.

²⁸ *Al-Waḥy al-Muḥammadī*, 101.

²⁹ See e.g. comments on Q 2:113, 3:3, 3:64, 4:171, 5:14, 5:46, 7:156, 9:29, and 10:2. Some of these statements seem to go back to Muḥammad ‘Abduh himself.

but to fulfill them.”³⁰ Indeed, the charge that Christians abandoned Mosaic Law is one of Riḍā’s key criticisms of Christianity.³¹

Ibn Kathīr and Rashīd Riḍā emphasize the special relationship between the Torah and the Qur’an, and discount the Gospel as an independent source of religious law. They thus diverge from the dominant approach in the Muslim exegetical tradition, which promotes the essential identity of all scriptures, and which considers the Gospel to be a major scripture alongside the Torah and the Qur’an. This divergence may partly stem from the relatively close familiarity of both thinkers with the Bible, a quality that is rare among Muslim commentators. Ibn Kathīr’s engagement with the Bible is well known. He displays an impressive command of the biblical text in several of his works—in his *Qaṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (*Stories of the prophets*), his historical magnum opus *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nihāyah*, and in his commentary on the Qur’an. He not only quotes the Bible in several places, but also engages in critical analysis of its text, even attempting to reconstruct the original form of a Biblical passage prior to its “falsification” by Jews.³² Norman Calder, who exhibits much disdain for Ibn Kathīr, nevertheless admits that he

³⁰ *Tafsīr al-manār*, comments on Q 4.171, 5.14, 5.46, 7.157, 9.29, 9.33.

³¹ Another scholar who seems to echo Ibn Kathīr is al-Ālūsī, who notes that Moses’ *kitāb* is the most important of the scriptures revealed before the Qur’an, adding that even Jesus was obligated to follow most or all of the Torah.

³² In his comments on Q 37:103, Ibn Kathīr argues that the text of Genesis 2:2 had originally made no reference to Isaac, and that the Jews later added his name to the text in order to displace Ishmael and make their own ancestor the object of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice. Norman Calder calls this “a creditable piece of textual analysis” (*“Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story*

was “one of the most assiduous readers of the Bible.”³³ Another feature of Ibn Kathīr, also despised by Calder, is his willingness to reject the received wisdom of the exegetical tradition in favor of his own conclusions.³⁴ Both of these qualities are amply attested in Rashīd Riḍā as well. His *Tafsīr al-manār* is permeated with quotations from the Bible and critical analysis of Jewish and Christian beliefs. Riḍā was in fact much more thoroughly steeped in Bible study than was Ibn Kathīr. In addition, Riḍā was also a reformer who did not have qualms about challenging traditional scholarship.³⁵ Both men were students of radical thinkers—Ibn Kathīr of Ibn Taymiyyah, and Rashīd Riḍā of Muḥammad ‘Abduh—whose forceful critiques and reevaluations of Islamic tradition have left indelible marks on Islamic intellectual history.

While Ibn Kathīr and Rashīd Riḍā espoused an atypical understanding of the Gospel, neither scholar grounded his views on a new assessment of qur’anic terminology. Specifically, both submitted to a generic understanding of the term *kitāb* as meaning “book” or “scripture.”

of Abraham,” in G. R. Hawting, A. A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur’ān*, London, 1993, 124). For a discussion of another Bible quotation by Ibn Kathīr, see Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, “An Arabic-Muslim Quotation of a Biblical Text: Ibn Kathīr’s *al-Bidāyah wa-l-Nihāyah* and the Construction of the Ark of the Covenant,” in Rifaat Ebied and Herman Teule (eds.), *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage, Offered in Honor of Father Samir Khalil Samir S. I., at the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, Leuven, 2004, 263-78.”

³³ “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 137 (fn. 37).

³⁴ According to Calder, “Ibn Kathīr has little respect for the intellectual tradition of Islam as expressed in the literature of *tafsīr*, or indeed in any of the scholastic disciplines” (*ibid.*, 120).

³⁵ See for example his introduction to *Tafsīr al-manār*, where he delineates the inadequacies of Muslim exegetical literature.

As for classifying scriptures and distinguishing the Torah and the Qur'an from other revealed books, our authors used the term *sharī'ah* as their chief analytical category, placing it in special association with the Torah and the Qur'an.³⁶ This term, however, is not prominent in qur'anic discourse, appearing only once in the entire text,³⁷ with a meaning that is doubtless different from the classical understanding of *sharī'ah* as programmatic religious law. As we saw in the previous chapter concerning Q 3:184 and 35:25, the exegetical tradition had already produced a classification whereby the very term *kitāb* signified those scriptures that contained substantial legislation. In other words, the possibility was available to Ibn Kathīr and Rashīd Riḍā to use the eminently qur'anic term *kitāb* instead of *sharī'ah* for differentiating between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scriptures. Both authors were probably aware of this possibility, and we can only speculate as to why they opted not to use it.

While the description of the Qur'an as "a *kitāb* sent down after Moses" poses a problem for the exegetes' understanding of qur'anic scripturology, the remainder of the verse presents an opportunity for them to reaffirm their assumptions. To wit, the *jinn* continue their

³⁶ Riḍā also frequently uses the term *al-nāmūs* in the same sense, no doubt owing to his familiarity with Arabic translations of the Bible that translate the Greek term νόμος ("law," often used as a proper name for the Pentateuch) *nāmūs*.

³⁷ Q 45:18. A second potential occurrence is in Q 5:48, a variant reading of which has *sharī'ah* instead of *shar'* (*Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 2:286).

statement by characterizing the Qur'an as "confirming what is before it" (*muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi*). The ambiguity of the pronoun *mā* ("what") in this phrase provides an opening for many exegetes to pivot to a broad understanding of *kitāb* as "scripture." For instance, according to al-Ṭabarī "what is before it" refers to "God's previous *kutub*, which he had sent down to His messengers" (*mā qablahu min kutub Allāh allatī anzalahā 'alā rusulih*).³⁸ Even Ibn Kathīr sees in the relative pronoun a reference to "the *kutub* sent down to previous prophets" (*al-kutub al-munazzalah 'alā al-anbiyā' qablah*). Thus, even though context suggests that *mā* refers to the Mosaic *kitāb*, Muslim exegetes attempt to validate the status of other scriptures as *kitābs* and to portray the Qur'an as the confirmer of all these scriptures.

B:4-5) Q 3:184; 35:25. These verses attribute three items to previous Messengers: "the clear proofs" (*al-bayyināt*), "the writings" (*al-zubur*), and "the illuminating *kitāb*." By using the singular noun *al-kitāb* alongside the plural *al-zubur*, these verses suggest that *kitāb* applies only to one of the pre-qur'anic scriptures—a suggestion that lends support to the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. As discussed in the previous chapter, the exegetical tradition provides at least three explanations for the juxtaposition of *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb*:

- 1) The two terms are coterminous. This explanation takes *al-kitāb* to be a generic noun that denotes all scriptures, which are also seen to be already signified by *al-zubur*. In

³⁸ See also al-Samarqandī and al-Ṭabrisī.

this reading, the presence of *al-kitāb* alongside *al-zubur* represents a repetition for the purpose of emphasis. In short, this theory assigns a plural meaning to the singular *al-kitāb*, and attributes the same signification to two separate terms while positing a distinct meaning for the third mentioned item, namely, *al-bayyināt*. The two-*kitāb* hypothesis requires no such exegetical stretch: it assigns an individual referent to the singular *al-kitāb*, and attributes separate meanings to the three items mentioned in this verse.

2) *Al-kitāb* and *al-zubur* signify respectively legislative and non-legislative revelations. Proponents of this theory seem to base it on three assumptions: a) *kitāb* means “prescription” instead of “writing”; b) *al-kitāb* is a generic noun that designates divine prescriptions in general; and c) *al-zubur* is the antithesis of *al-kitāb* and thereby denotes the non-binding teachings of prophets. The last two assumptions are infelicitous because they attribute a plural meaning to the singular *al-kitāb* and assign a non-textual signification to *al-zubur*, even though elsewhere in the Qur’an this term and its singular (*zabūr*) designate divine records (as in Q 54:52) or earthly scriptures (e.g. Q 26:196 and 4:163).

3) *Al-kitāb* and *al-zubur* signify major and minor scriptures. As shown in the previous chapter, this interpretation seems to presuppose that *kitāb* is a technical term meaning “legal scripture.” Moreover, most commentators seem to understand *al-kitāb* to be a generic noun designating all such scriptures, for they consider it to signify the Torah and the Gospel (and sometimes even Psalms³⁹). This “pluralization” of *al-kitāb* is, again, an unnecessary departure from the apparent form of the text. Interestingly, however,

³⁹ The image of David as a recipient of an independent legislation is also found in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwī*, 2:190.

two commentators assign a singular referent to “the illuminating *kitāb*”: while discussing Q 35:25, al-Ṭabarānī and Sayyid Quṭb suggest that this phrase designates the Torah. By endorsing this suggestion, these commentators imply that *kitāb* is a technical term for labelling the Torah and the Qur’an to the exclusion of all other scriptures. In so doing, al-Ṭabarānī and Sayyid Quṭb foreshadow the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. However, this interpretation seems almost accidental, for these two commentators provide a different explanation for the exact same wording found in Q 3:184. There, Sayyid Quṭb glosses “the illuminating *kitāb*” as “like the Torah and the Gospel,” while al-Ṭabarānī explains it as the book that “clarifies the lawful and the forbidden,” without further explanation. Needless to say, these two commentators follow other exegetes in assigning a non-technical meaning to *kitāb* in its occurrences elsewhere in the Qur’an.

It is instructive to examine Ibn Kathīr’s interpretation of the verses under consideration. We saw that he emphasizes the preeminence and legal character of the Qur’an and the Torah in his discussions of Q 46:30. The wordings of Q 3:184 and 35:25 afford a convenient opportunity to promote just such an understanding, where “the illuminating *kitāb*” refers to the Torah as the only legislative scripture before the Qur’an. Curiously, however, Ibn Kathīr does not pursue this line of interpretation. In commenting on Q 3:184, he explains *al-zubur* as “the *kutub* received from heaven, like the *ṣuḥuf* sent down to the messengers.” He thus uses both *kutub* and *ṣuḥuf* as synonyms for *zubur*, thereby suggesting that it refers to all the scriptures. As for “the illuminating *kitāb*,” Ibn Kathīr merely glosses *al-munīr*

(“illuminating”) as “clear/clarifying, lucid, plain” (*al-bayyin al-wāḍiḥ al-jaliyy*). His remarks on Q 35:25 are even shorter. There he glosses *al-zubur* as *al-kutub*, and explains *al-munīr* as “lucid, clear/clarifying,” (*al-wāḍiḥ al-bayyin*). Ibn Kathīr thus suggests that *al-zubur* refers to all scriptures, but he is completely silent about the signification of “the illuminating *kitāb*.”

Neither does he comment on the relationship between *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb*.⁴⁰ It is almost as if Ibn Kathīr is consciously avoiding the possibility that *al-kitāb* is a reference to the Torah alone.

Modern scholarship

Some academic discussions and translations of Q 3:184 and 35:25 do not specify the precise meanings of *al-zubur* and “the illuminating *kitāb*” or their exact relationship with each other. For instance, these two terms are translated by George Sale respectively as “the scriptures” and “the book which inlighteneth,”⁴¹ by William Muir as “writings” and “the enlightening book,”⁴² by Regis Blachère as “les Écritures” and “l’Écriture lumineuse,”⁴³ by Rudi

⁴⁰ Rashīd Riḍā does not discuss Q 3:184 or Q 35:25. The latter verse is not included in his commentary, which ends with Sūrat Yūsuf (12). The former falls within that part of *Tafsīr al-Manār* which is primarily based on Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s lectures.

⁴¹ *The Koran*, 58.

⁴² *The Testimony*, 14. Muir adds that the verse concerns the “Jewish and Christian Prophets and Scriptures.”

⁴³ *Le Coran*, 101, 465. In the latter instance, Blachère identifies “the illuminating *kitāb*” with the Gospel, alleging that this is based on Muslim commentators. As far as I know, the only Muslim scholar to provide such an interpretation is Muḥammad ‘Abduh, who entertains the possibility that *al-kitāb al-munīr* might refer to the Gospel (*Tafsīr al-manār*, 4:269). This is presumably on the assumption that the verse might refer to Jews in particular, who rejected the Gospel (but not the Torah).

Paret as “die Bücher” and “die erleuchtende (Offenbarungs)schrift,”⁴⁴ and by A.T. Khoury as “die Schriften” and “das erleuchtende Buch”⁴⁵ (the German originals in each case being in the dative case governed by the preposition *mit* [with]). Even though these scholars do not elaborate on the significance of these terms, their use of roughly synonymous words to render *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb* may be taken to suggest that the two terms have the same referent.⁴⁶ Another possible interpretation of these translations is that *al-zubur* refers to scriptures while “the illuminating *kitāb*” signifies the heavenly book.⁴⁷

Some translations are more specific as to the referent of *al-zubur*. For example, *al-zubur* and *al-kitāb al-munīr* are rendered as “the Psalms” and “the Scripture giving light” by Marmaduke Pickthall,⁴⁸ as “Psalms” and “the illuminating Book” by Richard Bell,⁴⁹ and as “the

⁴⁴ *Der Koran*, 62, 360.

⁴⁵ *Der Koran*, 4:305. Khoury adds that *al-kitāb al-munīr* refers above all to the Torah and the Gospel, but does not comment on the meaning of *al-zubur*.

⁴⁶ Indeed, some studies explicitly advocate this interpretation (e.g. Dawid Künstlinger, “Die Namen der ‘Gottes-Schriften’ im Qurān,” 74).

⁴⁷ See, e.g. Bell, *A Commentary on the Qur’ān*, 2:130.

⁴⁸ *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, 77, 313.

⁴⁹ *The Qur’ān: Translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs*, 1:63. But Bell also notes that *al-zubur* may be translated as “Scriptures” (*The Qur’ān*, 2: 431; cf. 1:253). Similarly, in his *Introduction to the Qur’ān*, Bell opines that perhaps in Q 3:184 *al-zubur* “is used in the general sense of Scriptures” (149).

Psalms” and “the Book Illuminating” by Arthur Arberry.⁵⁰ These scholars’ translation of *al-zubur* as “Psalms” is presumably based on the Qur’an’s mention of its singular, *al-zabūr*, in relation to David (4:163, 17:55). Yet, the singular *al-zabūr* seems to refer in the Qur’an to the Book of Psalms in its entirety, not to an individual psalm. Therefore, translation of its plural (*al-zubur*) as “Psalms” is somewhat problematic.⁵¹ Moreover, at least in one text the Qur’an seems to use *zubur* in a broader sense: when Sūrat al-Shu‘arā’ mentions “the *zubur* of the ancients” (*al-zubur al-awwalīn*), it does not seem to be making a reference to Psalms specifically, but more generally to previous scriptures. Apart from *al-zubur*, the meanings assigned to *al-kitāb* are often not clarified. In his posthumously published annotations, Bell suggests that *al-kitāb* could “refer to the Torah and revealed books in general” (2:130). But if this is the case, then it is not clear why Psalms should have been listed separately, not to mention the fact that the singular *al-kitāb* is more likely to designate an individual book than a plurality of scriptures.

Perhaps the most specific interpretation of Q 3:184 and 35:25 is provided by Alfred-Louis De Prémare, who suggests that the triplet *al-bayyināt*, *al-zubur*, and *al-kitāb al-munīr* could

⁵⁰ See also Emran El-Badawy, *The Qur’an and the Aramaic Gospels Tradition*, 169, where the two terms are rendered as “the Psalms” and “enlightening scripture.”

⁵¹ Unless we read the three qur’anic occurrences of زبور not as *zabūr* but as *zubūr*, which is a plural form of *zabūr* and therefore synonymous with *zubur*.

reflect the tripartite division of the Hebrew Scriptures into “les livres des Prophètes, les ‘Ecrits’ – *ketuvim* – et la Tora.”⁵² Although De Prémare does not elaborate on this statement, he seems to understand *al-zubur* as signifying the third portion of the Hebrew Bible (“the writings”; Heb. *ketuvim*), while taking *al-kitāb* to refer to the Torah. This interpretation agrees with my hypothesis on the referent of the term *al-kitāb*. However, the specific significations that De Prémare attaches to *al-bayyināt* and *al-zubur* seem unwarranted, as they do not match other occurrences of these terms in the Qur’an. For example, when the Qur’an refers to “the *zubur* of the ancients,” it is not likely that *zubur* should be understood as referring to the third section of the Hebrew Bible. Similarly, the many occurrences of *al-bayyināt* in the Qur’an—for example, those attributed to Moses (2:92) and Jesus (2:87)—are too diverse to be understood as referring to the Prophetic books (Nevi’im) of the Hebrew Bible.

Finally, Aloys Sprenger suggests that *al-kitāb* in Q 3:184 and 35:25 designates the Torah insofar as it is a full manifestation of the heavenly book (the *kitāb* par excellence), while *al-zubur* denotes the other pre-qur’anic scriptures. This reading assigns a single referent to the singular *al-kitāb*, assigns a separate referent to *al-zubur*, and agrees entirely with my interpretation of the verse. While Sprenger does not base his explanation on a new theory

⁵² “Les textes musulman dans leur environnement,” *Arabica* 47.3 (2000), 401.

about the meaning of the term *kitāb*, he comes very close to formulating the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. His insight, however, was ignored in subsequent academic scholarship.

B:6) Q 4:136. This verse exhorts the Prophet’s followers (the believers) to have faith in “the *kitāb* that [God] sent down to His messenger” as well as “the *kitāb* that He sent down before.” The latter phrase implies the existence of only one *kitāb* before the Qur’an, thereby corroborating the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. The commentators provide several explanations in order to avoid this implication. The most common exegetical strategy is to construe the second occurrence of *al-kitāb*—appearing in “the *kitāb* that [God] sent down before”—as a generic noun (*ism al-jins*), and thereby taking it to refer to all the pre-qur’anic scriptures. Effectively, this interpretation is a variant of Ibn ‘Abbās’s dictum, proposed in the interpretation of Q 2:285, that declares *al-kitāb* to be “numerically larger (*akthar*) than *al-kutub*.”⁵³ Indeed, Muslim scholars report that for the verse under consideration ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās (d. 68) explained “the *kitāb* that [God] sent down before” as “the previous books, [i.e.] the Torah, the Gospel, Psalms, and the other books [revealed] before.”⁵⁴ Many commentators follow this view and explicitly describe the second instance of *al-kitāb* as a generic noun.⁵⁵

⁵³ See the discussion of the previous chapter.

⁵⁴ Mentioned in al-Tha‘labī’s *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*.

⁵⁵ Al-Baghawī interprets the *kitāb* sent down before as referring to the Torah, the Gospel, Psalms, and other *kutub*. Presumably, he is taking *kitāb* to be a generic noun. Al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr,

This interpretation is popular not only because it is consistent with dominant understandings of the term *kitāb* but also because it seems better suited to the second half of the verse. In order to clarify this point, the verse needs to be quoted in full:

يا ايها الذين امنوا امنوا بالله ورسوله والكتب الذى نزل على رسوله والكتب الذى انزل من قبل
ومن يكفر بالله وملئكته وكتبه ورسوله واليوم الاخر فقد ضل ضلالا بعيدا

O you who believe! Believe in God and His messenger and the *kitāb* that He sent down to His messenger and the *kitāb* that He sent down before.
Whoever disbelieves in God and His angels and His *kutub* and His messengers and the Last Day has truly wandered far astray.

As al-Zamakhsharī points out, the second half of the verse warns the unbelievers about their rejection of God’s *kutub* (plural). Since the noun *kutub* in the second half should denote more than two books, al-Zamakhsharī argues, the first half of the verse must similarly concern more than two books. Therefore, al-Zamakhsharī concludes, “the *kitāb* that He sent down before” is best understood as a generic noun that denotes all pre-qur’anic scriptures.

It should first be noted that the word *كتبه* in the second half of this verse is also read in a variant reading (*qirāʾah*) as *kitābihi*, i.e. in the singular.⁵⁶ Therefore, it is not necessary to take

Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, Abū al-Suʿūd, Ibn ʿAjībah, al-Ālūsī, and al-Ṭanṭāwī consider *al-kitāb* to be a generic noun. Al-Qurṭubī states that the *kitāb* refers to “*kull kitāb unzila ʿalā al-nabiyyīn.*” *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* endorses the same idea by glossing *kitāb* as *kutub*. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī does not explicitly address the phrase under consideration, but nevertheless refers to belief in all of the *kutub* several times in his commentary on this verse. Sayyid Quṭb also considers the *kitāb* sent down before as referring to all the books sent down by God, and emphasizes the unity of these *kutub*, perhaps to justify the use of the singular *kitāb*.

⁵⁶ *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 2:174-5.

the verse as being concerned with multiple *kitābs*. Al-Zamakhsharī acknowledges this variant reading, but claims that in that case, too, the singular *kitāb* should be taken as a generic noun. However, his insistence is not based on the wording of the verse, but rather reflects al-Zamakhsharī's prior commitment to understanding *kitāb* as scripture.

In fact, even if we take *kutubihi* to be the original reading of كتبه in the second half of this verse, this plural form may have a dual significance. The key to this claim is the fact that *kutubihi* appears in a *list* of items in which the Qur'an demands faith. The list runs as follows: "God and His angels and His *kutub* and His messengers and the Last Day." The presence of the term *rusulihi*, "His messengers," is especially crucial. Featuring a broken plural on the paradigm *fu'ul*, this word has an identical vowel pattern to *kutubihi*. Thus, even if the text aimed to refer to the two *kitābs* mentioned in the first half of the verse, the existence of *rusulihi* incentivizes the use of the similarly plural form *kutubihi* over the dual *kitābayhi*—because *kutubihi wa-rusulihi* yields a more elegant text than *kitābayhi wa-rusulihi*. There are many instances of such rhetorical and poetic license in the Qur'an. In fact, the very phenomenon of using a plural form with a dual significance is attested in the qur'anic text. For instance, Q 41:11 describes the heaven and earth as telling God that they will come to Him willingly (*ṭā'i'in*). Even though the subject is a pair, the adverbial condition has the plural form *ṭā'i'in* instead of the dual *ṭā'i'ayn*, apparently in order to continue the rhyme pattern of the previous

two verses, which end in *in*. Similarly, Q 66:4 uses the plural *qulūb* in referring to the hearts of two wives of the Prophet (i.e. *qulūbukumā* instead of *qalbākumā*).⁵⁷ Considering the precedent of such passages and reference to two *kitābs* in the first half of the verse, it is entirely reasonable to assign dual significance to *kutubihi*.

The two-*kitāb* hypothesis is not only consistent with the second half of the verse, it is a more straightforward reading of its first half. This is because it takes both occurrences of *al-kitāb* to be substantives. By contrast, the interpretation of exegetes such as al-Zamakhsharī assumes that the first instance of *al-kitāb* is a substantive while the second one is a generic noun. However, this interpretation is unlikely because of the proximity and parallelism of the two instances of *kitāb*. If the text had intended to refer to all the books sent down before the Prophet, it could have used the plural form *kutub*, resulting in the phrase *wa-l-kutub allatī anzala min qabl*. The fact that it uses the singular form suggests that the second occurrence of *kitāb* is also a substantive referring to one *kitāb* rather than a generic noun denoting a plurality of *kitābs*.

The towering scholar, al-Ṭabarī, provides another interpretation for explaining away the problem of singularity in “the *kitāb* that He sent down before.” In al-Ṭabarī’s view, the

⁵⁷ On such departures from linguistic norm in the Qur’an, see Devin Stewart’s “Poetic License in the Qur’an: Ibn al-Ṣā’igh al-Ḥanafī’s *Iḥkām al-rāy fi aḥkām al-āy*,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 11.1 (2010), 1-56.

verse's addressees are *not* Muslims but rather Jews and Christians. This view results in a subtle but profound change: addressing the older communities of Jews and Christians, “the *kitāb* that He sent down before” means “the *kitāb* that He sent down before *to you*.” Accordingly, this phrase functions as a reference to the Torah for Jews and the Gospel for Christians, making its use of the singular *al-kitāb* understandable. That Jews and Christians are asked to believe in their own scriptures is, according to al-Ṭabarī, effectively a call for them to accept the prophethood of Muhammad, because his coming is foretold in the Torah and the Gospel. A similar interpretation is provided by al-Ṭūsī. Suggesting that the verse may be addressed only to Jews, al-Ṭūsī notes that in that case the verse is inviting Jews to accept the two scriptures that they have rejected, namely, the Qur’an (“the *kitāb* that He sent down to His messenger”) as well as the Gospel (“the *kitāb* that He sent down before”).⁵⁸ Neither al-Ṭabarī’s view nor that of al-Ṭūsī is common among later commentators.

The hypotheses of al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭūsī are problematic, however. If the verse were directed at the Jews and Christians, or only the Jews, one would expect it to address them by phrases such as *ahl al-kitāb* or *alladhīna ūtū l-kitāb*—a form of address that in fact appears in this very sūra (vv. 47, 171). Yet, the verse uses the phrase *alladhīna āmanū*, which would be an

⁵⁸ However, al-Ṭūsī’s preferred position is to take the addressees of the verse to be the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*). In this case, he interprets “the *kitāb* that He sent down before” as both the Torah and the Injīl. Al-Ṭabrisī largely reproduces al-Ṭūsī’s commentary.

unlikely choice for addressing Jews and Christians. This is because when used as a proper name in relation to a specific social group, *alladhīna āmanū* seems to designate specifically non-Jewish, non-Christian followers of the Prophet. For example, several verses use *alladhīna āmanū* (or the cognate *al-muʾminūn/al-muʾmināt*) alongside labels that refer to Jews (*alladhīna hādū* [2:62, 5:69, 22:17], *yahūd* [5:51]), Christians (*al-naṣārā* [2:62, 5:51, 5:69, 22:17]), or both groups (*alladhīna ūtū l-kitāb* [5:5, 74:31]).⁵⁹ Indeed, only four verses before the verse under consideration, *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* posits a similar dichotomy: “And We have enjoined those who were given *al-kitāb* before you, as well as you yourselves, to be mindful of God” (v. 131). There is thus a clear distinction in this context between the addressees, who are called *alladhīna āmanū* soon afterwards (v. 133, 134), and Jews and Christians as recipients of the previous *kitāb*. In short, the address *alladhīna āmanū* does not even seem to be a label inclusive of Jews and Christians, let alone a label exclusive to them.

One of the only substantive academic discussions of Q 4:136 appears in Daniel Madigan’s *The Qurʾān’s Self-Image*. When examining this text, Madigan’s aim is to demonstrate

⁵⁹ This is despite the fact that in some of these same verses the verb *āmana* is used in relation to Jews and Christians (Q 2:62, 5:69, 22:17; see also 3:110, 4:55, 5:65). This shows that when used as forms of address, *alladhīna āmanū* or *muʾminūn/muʾmināt* are used as proper nouns. However, when used descriptively, e.g. in Q 4:57, the emphasis is on the *activities* of a group, not their identity. Thus, not everyone who believes in the Prophet’s message is a Believer. (To use a modern analogy, not everyone who believes in democratic principles is a Democrat.) Even when they are praised, the *ahl al-kitāb* are still mentioned as a separate group from the Prophet’s followers (e.g. Q 4:162). Bell makes a similar point in *The Origin of Islam*, 148.

that “the *kitāb*, for all the complexities of its manifestation, is a unity.”⁶⁰ Madigan considers Q 4:136 to be the most significant challenge to this unitary understanding, because it posits a clear distinction between the Prophet’s *kitāb* and “the *kitāb* that He sent down before.”⁶¹ Madigan assumes that this latter phrase denotes “all the revelations prior to that given to Muḥammad.”⁶² He then considers whether the qur’anic text aims to highlight the essential identity of previous revelations by subsuming them under “the *kitāb* that He sent down before.”⁶³ Yet, Madigan rejects this interpretation on the grounds that the Qur’an, too, has a claim to being essentially identical with previous revelations—even though this verse seems to separate the Prophet’s *kitāb* from “the *kitāb* that He sent down before.”⁶⁴ Without providing a clear solution, Madigan eventually notes that a unitary understanding of *kitāb* is so integral to the Qur’an’s claim to authority that it cannot be questioned on the basis of “the uncertain readings of a few verses.”⁶⁵ He does not note that several other qur’anic passages—all included

⁶⁰ *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*, 171.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 175-177.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

in this chapter—similarly mention two *kitābs* and in several instances specifically attribute them to Moses and Muhammad.

Madigan’s discussion of this verse is criticized by Nicolai Sinai, who suggests that “the *kitāb* that He sent down before” refers to the Torah.⁶⁶ According to Sinai, the verse alludes only to the Torah because it was “the most important of the pre-qur’ānic revelations.”⁶⁷ Sinai’s explanation is therefore similar to Ibn Kathīr’s justification for why the *jinn* refer to the Qur’an as “a *kitāb* after Moses” (in Q 46:30). Both attribute these statements to the singular importance of the Torah and Moses, without providing a new understanding of the term *kitāb*.⁶⁸ While Sinai’s explanation is not implausible, the primary purpose of the present study is to show that the two-*kitāb* hypothesis provides a more elegant and convincing explanation for the text under discussion, for the similar qur’anic passages that are discussed in this chapter, and indeed for the totality of qur’anic references to *kitāb*.

B:7) Q 6:91-2. As mentioned above, this passage begins by reporting the claim that “God has sent down nothing to a human being.” Aiming to refute this claim, the passage invokes the

⁶⁶ “Qur’ānic self-referentiality as a strategy of self-authorization,” 130 (n. 103).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ In fact, even though the first half of the verse refers only to two *kitābs*, Sinai describes it as positing a “multiplicity” of scriptures (*ibid.*).

kitāb of Moses as a precedent for divine communication to humans. The text then turns its attention to the Prophet's own revelations, describing them as "a blessed *kitāb* We have sent down, confirming what (*alladhī*) is before it"—the latter being presumably a reference to the Mosaic *kitāb*. This passage therefore highlights the Torah as the foremost revelation before the Qur'an and emphasizes the consonance of the Mosaic and Muhammadan scriptures. Nevertheless, qur'anic scholarship often diminishes these implications by considering the text addressed to Jews—what we may call the "Jewish hypothesis." If this passage is a polemic against the followers of Moses, then its exclusive reference to the Mosaic *kitāb* is not necessarily an endorsement of its preeminent status or special relationship with the Qur'an. However, a close reading of the text shows that there is no solid basis for this "Jewish hypothesis." On the contrary, there are strong reasons to consider the text to be addressed to pagans, a fact that makes its reference to the Mosaic *kitāb* quite significant.

The Jewish hypothesis likely stems from two textual considerations. First, the very fact that Q 6:91 appeals to the authority of the Torah may suggest that it is addressing the Jews, for this appeal would not have been compelling for pagans who did not accept the Torah in the first place. A second point in favor of the Jewish hypothesis appears immediately after reference to the Mosaic *kitāb*, where the text adds: "you make it into scrolls, which you [partly]

show, but much [of it] you hide” (*taj‘alūnahu qarāṭīsa tubdūnahā wa-tukhfūna kathīran*).⁶⁹ Given that Jews were the only group to make and use Torah scrolls, this phrase seems to establish that they are the addressees of the polemic. These indications are supplemented with imagined historical circumstances that further entrench the Jewish hypothesis. According to a story commonly cited in the commentaries, Q 6:91-92 concerns a certain “fat Rabbi,” named Mālik b. al-Ṣayf,⁷⁰ who reportedly came to the Prophet and disputed with him, presumably questioning his prophetic credentials. Knowing Mālik’s polemical intention, the Prophet was dismissive towards him: “I adjure you by the One who sent down the Torah to Moses, do you not find in the Torah that God despises fat Rabbis?”⁷¹ This derision incensed Mālik, whereupon he said: “By God, God has sent down nothing to a human being!” His Jewish companions shockingly told him: “Woe unto you! Not even Moses?” Uninhibited, Mālik repeated his blasphemous assertion. It was as a response to this denial that God sent down the text under

⁶⁹ One wonders if this is in part a reference to a logistical fact: when reading from a scroll, only a small portion of the text is visible at any given time. Not to mention the fact that the Torah was often recorded on a number of separate scrolls. So the text as a whole is not immediately accessible.

⁷⁰ Ibn Ishāq lists him as a member of the Banū Qaynuqā‘ (*Sīrah*, 1:514), though a tradition of ‘Ikrimah in al-Ṭabarī’s commentary on Q 6:91 claims that Mālik was from the Banū Qurayzah. Ibn Hishām notes that his patronymic was also given as Ibn Ṣayf and Ibn Ḍayf (*Sīrah*, 1:514). According to the *Sīrah*, Q 2:100 (1:547-8), Q 5:68 (1:568), and Q 9:30 (1:570) were also sent down about him or a group of Jews to which he belonged.

⁷¹ There is a reference to fat Rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud (B. Baba Metzia 84a), but it is not made disapprovingly. For a treatment of this story, see Daniel Boyarin’s “Hellenism in Jewish Babylonia.” See also his *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis*.

discussion.⁷² Other, similar stories are mentioned as possible occasions for the revelation of this verse concerning the Jews.⁷³

Putting aside such stories—which are of questionable historical value—the textual foundations of the Jewish hypothesis are fragile. As to the text’s appeal to the Torah, a plausible scenario is that the verse is using some of the pagans’ tactics against themselves. In their denial of Muhammad’s prophethood, the pagans may have argued that his prophetic *modus operandi* diverges from the pattern claimed for previous messengers: his revelations are oral and piecemeal whereas previous scriptures—most notably the Torah—were supposedly sent down in writing and wholesale. Indeed, the opening verses of the sūra appear to allude to precisely such a criticism, for they note that “had We sent down to you a writing in a scroll so that they would have touched it with their hands, the unbelievers would have said: ‘this is nothing but manifest sorcery!’” (v. 7).⁷⁴ It is possible that in countering the pagans’ denial of divine revelation to humans, Q 6:91 is reminding the pagans of such an earlier exchange, noting that the very Torah that they had used to deride the Qur’an was sent down by God to a

⁷² The translation provided here is based on al-Ṭabarī’s version of the story.

⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī includes a few other stories. In one of them, the Jews seem merely to reject the Prophet’s reception of revelations. That is, they deny revelation *for the present time*. Presumably, then, we should understand Q 6:91 as rejecting this denial on the basis that God has sent down revelations before, and that therefore He can do so again *now*.

⁷⁴ See also vv. 109, 111, and 124 of this sūra.

human being. A similar altercation is captured in Q 28:48. According to this verse, some who rejected the Prophet's revelations said: "why has he not been given the like of what Moses was given?" Presumably, they meant that Moses received physical tablets from God, whereas the Prophet was receiving merely verbal messages. The verse responds: "did they not disbelieve also in what Moses was given before? They said: 'A pair of sorceries supporting each other.' And they said: 'we disbelieve in all.'" ⁷⁵ The pagans wanted to eat their cake and have it too. They would argue that they cannot accept the Prophet as a divine messenger unless he performs miracles and brings an inscribed book from heaven, like "what Moses was given." Yet, the pagans also rejected the Torah, showing that their real problem was with the contents of these revelations, not the form or manner of their delivery.

The text's reference to the makers and users of Torah scrolls is similarly inconclusive, because instead of being a second-person plural address, it may very well be a the third-person plural description. That is to say, the text may be read as *yaj'alūnahu qarāṭisa yubdūnahā wa-yukhfūna kathīran* ("they make it into scrolls, which they [partly] show, but much [of it] they hide"). This reading is in fact reported in the *qirā'āt* literature. ⁷⁶ In this case, the verse takes the following steps: 1) criticizes the pagans for denying divine-human communication; 2)

⁷⁵ For a similar appeal to previous revelations, see Q 20:133.

⁷⁶ *Muḥjam al-qirā'āt*, 2:484.

adduces the Mosaic *kitāb* as a prime counterexample to this denial; 3) notes that its possessors put it down in writing in the form of scrolls, thereby implying that this form is secondary to the character of the Torah as divine revelation.

While there is no strong reason in favor of the Jewish hypothesis, several indications point toward the “pagan hypothesis”—meaning, they suggest that the text is addressed to Meccan pagans. First, this sūrah is for the most part a sustained critique of the Prophet’s *pagan* adversaries: they associate partners with God (v. 19), describe the Qur’an’s stories as “fables of the ancients” (v. 25), reject the resurrection (v. 29), demand that the Prophet bring miracles (v. 37), mock those of their community who have joined the Prophet’s movement (v. 53), and of course reject the Prophet’s revelations.⁷⁷ In fact, apart from one negative hint (v. 146), the sūra portrays the *ahl al-kitāb* as a positive counterweight to pagan rejectionists, and as witnesses who confirm the veracity of the Prophet’s message (v. 20, 87-90, 114). Therefore, it would be unusual for verse 91 alone to cast the Jews in a highly negative light.⁷⁸

Second, the charge imputed to the opponents is not consistent with Jewish beliefs.

Why would the Jews, who believe in the reality of revelation and prophecy, claim that “God

⁷⁷ For an analysis of the structure of the sūra, see Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 290f.

⁷⁸ Perhaps to address this problem, some commentators consider Q 6:91 to be a Medinan insertion into this Meccan sūra (Tilman Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe in mekkanischen Suren*, 20). However, there is no need to posit such an interruption in the text because it is not necessary to consider Q 6:91 addressed to Jews in the first place.

has sent down nothing to a human being”? Denying revelation from God is more likely to have come from the Prophet’s pagan adversaries.⁷⁹ Third, after commenting on the Mosaic *kitāb* and its preservation in scrolls, the verse addresses the opponents again: “and you were taught what neither you nor your fathers knew.”⁸⁰ This statement is more likely to concern the Prophet’s pagan foes, who had no access to divinely-revealed knowledge prior to the Prophet’s coming (cf. Q 36:6). As for the Jews, they had already received divine guidance through their patriarchs and prophets—a fact amply made clear a few verses before the passage under consideration (vv. 83-90). All these points suggest that this verse concerns the Prophet’s own people, the pagans of Mecca, not the Jews.⁸¹

⁷⁹ It is of course possible that the sentence “God has sent down nothing to a human being” was uttered by a group of Jews, who could have meant only that revelation and prophecy have ended. However, the denial seems to focus not on revelation as such but on God’s power to communicate revelations to human beings. This is consistent with the response “Say: it was God,” which seems more concerned with the originator of revelation than with its reality.

⁸⁰ Cf. Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses addresses the Israelites about the blessing of Manna, “which you knew not, neither did your fathers know.”

⁸¹ The exegetical tradition is divided between these two hypotheses, though the Jewish option is more popular. For instance, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Māturīdī, al-Samarqandī, al-Zamakhsharī, the Jalālayn, Abū al-Su‘ūd, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī, and al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī consider the verse addressed to Jews, while al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and Sayyid Quṭb see it addressed to pagans. Al-Qummī considers the verse addressed *both* to Jews and pagans. Al-Rāzī discusses the verse extensively, enumerating the advantages and disadvantages of both interpretations. However, he does not deliver a final verdict. Al-Ālūsī mentions both readings, but prefers the majority (*al-jumhūr*) view, that is, the Jewish hypothesis.

Among modern scholars, Tilman Nagel endorses the Jewish hypothesis because “[d]er Vorwurf der Unterdrückung eines Teils der göttlichen Rede kann sich nicht auf die Mekkaner, sondern nur auf die medinensischen Juden beziehen” (*Medinensiche Einschübe*, 24). It seems, therefore, that Nagel was unaware of the

If we accept the pagan hypothesis, the passage’s reference to the Torah takes on more significance. Because what makes the text logical and intelligible is precisely mutual agreement—by the Prophet and his pagan adversaries, none of whom are adherents of the Torah—on the preeminence of the Mosaic *kitāb*. But the text simultaneously highlights the relative inaccessibility of the Torah. The followers of the Torah possess an invaluable source of guidance, yet they are jealous and protective, “hiding much” of it from others. The Prophet’s people should be envious no more, however, because God has decided to send down a similar scripture for their sake, teaching them what they and their fathers knew not before. Former pagans have a second Torah at their disposal in their own Arabic language, a golden opportunity for them to rectify their errors and find their way to the Right Path.

As noted above, previous scholarship often downplays the significance of the verse’s mention of the Torah by considering the text addressed to Medinan Jews. Indeed, many scholars sideline the Torah even further in their discussions of the following verse, which describes the Prophet’s revelations as a *kitāb* that confirms “what (*alladhī*) is before it.” The use of the singular masculine pronoun *alladhī*, and reference to the Mosaic *kitāb* in the previous

third-person reading of the pertinent verbs. By contrast, Arthur Jeffery considers the verse addressed to “the Arabs” (*The Qur’ān as Scripture*, 28).

verse, imply that *alladhī* refers to the Torah.⁸² Despite these indications, only a few commentators consider the Torah to be the sole referent of *alladhī*.⁸³ Most commentators take *alladhī* to refer to the Torah and the Gospel,⁸⁴ or to these two as well as Psalms,⁸⁵ or, much more frequently, to all the books sent down by God.⁸⁶ Several modern translators of the Qur'an promote this latter, expansive implication.⁸⁷ Of all the examined studies, only the commentary of al-Ālūsī attempts to explain how the singular masculine pronoun *alladhī* could refer to all pre-qur'anic scriptures. These interpretations show that the dominant understanding of *kitāb*

⁸² Similar to the above-discussed Q 4:136, which speaks of “the *kitāb* that He sent down to His messenger and the *kitāb* that (*alladhī*) He sent down before.”

⁸³ Abū al-Su‘ūd, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī, and al-Ālūsī. However, Abū al-Su‘ūd and al-Ālūsī state the possibility that *alladhī* refers to all pre-qur'anic scriptures.

⁸⁴ Al-Hawwārī.

⁸⁵ Al-Qummī.

⁸⁶ Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī, Māturīdī, al-Ṭabarānī (though he also mentions the view that “what is before it” may refer to resurrection), al-Samarqandī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, Jalālayn, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn ‘Ajībah, Sayyid Quṭb, and al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī.

⁸⁷ For example, Sprenger translates *alladhī bayna yadayhi* as “die früheren (Bücher)” (*Das Leben*, 2:295). Richard Bell renders the phrase literally as “that which is before it,” but has a footnote that explains this as “[t]he revelation already given to others” (*The Qur’ān*, 1:124). Ahmed Ali opts for “the earlier (revelations),” while Asad has “whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations].” Régis Blachere translates the phrase as “les messages antérieurs” (*Le Coran*, 162), while Houry reproduces it as “was vor ihm vorhanden war,” explaining this as “die Torah und das Evangelium” (*Der Koran*, 6:298). According to Nicolai Sinai, this passage and Q 46:10-12 “are concerned with ranking the Qur’ān among a class of mutually supportive scriptures from which the *kitāb Mūsā* stands out most conspicuously” (“Qur’ānic self-referentiality,” 130; emphasis added). Sinai therefore subjects these texts to the familiar paradigm of the multiplicity of *kitābs*, even though the passages themselves do not refer to any scriptures beyond those of Moses and Muhammad. For the similar Q 10:37, Walid Saleh translates *alladhī bayna yadayhi* as “previous Scriptures” (“A Piecemeal Qur’ān,” 50).

and its dependent scripturology are so ingrained in exegetical and academic scholarship that they reassert themselves at every possible turn, even when there are explicit textual clues that undermine these deeply held assumptions.

There is no need to investigate previous interpretations of the remaining three passages discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Qur'anic scholarship considers the first of these, Q 28:48-49, to involve the pagan opponents of the Prophet, so its characterization of the *kitābs* of Moses and Muhammad as benchmarks of divine guidance is unqualified and its significance evident. As for the last two verses, Q 11:17 and 46:10-12, I argued previously that they both concern a certain Israelite advocate of the Prophet. Even though it is not necessary for an Israelite to be Jewish (on which see the final chapter), this possibility cannot be ruled out either. In such a case, reference to the Mosaic *kitāb* does not necessarily mean that it is the only, or even the most eminent, pre-qur'anic scripture or *kitāb*. However, the text's apparent description of the Torah as a "likeness" (*mithl*) of the Qur'an is quite significant, as is the absence of any qur'anic passage that posits such exclusive correspondence between the Qur'an and another scripture.

Taking Stock

This chapter has highlighted ten passages that associate the term *kitāb* exclusively with the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad, thereby challenging the generic understanding of *kitāb* as “book” in qur’anic scholarship. The first text, a reflection on prophetic history from Noah to Jesus, highlights Moses alone as the recipient of *al-kitāb* (23:49). The second text is a brief precis of Israelite prophetic history that notes the bestowal of *al-kitāb* to Moses but does not make a similar statement about the unnamed messengers after him or Jesus (2:87). The third passage contains a quotation attributed to a group of *jinn*, who describe the Qur’an as “a *kitāb* sent down after Moses” (46:30). The fourth and fifth texts describe the messengers before Muhammad as having brought “the clear proofs, the writings, and the illuminating *kitāb*” (3:184, 35:25). Juxtaposing the singular *kitāb* with the plural *zūbur* (“writings”), these two texts seem to posit a deliberate distinction between the Torah and the other pre-qur’anic scriptures. The sixth examined passage urges the Prophet’s followers to believe in “the *kitāb* that [God] sent down to His messenger” as well as “the *kitāb* that He sent down before” (4:136), thereby strongly suggesting that there is only one *kitāb* before the Qur’an.

The last four texts do not establish that *kitāb* is an exclusive appellation for the Torah and the Qur’an, but nevertheless imply that there is special affinity between these two scriptures. The first passage in question describes the Mosaic *kitāb* as divine revelation and

then characterizes the Qur'an as "a blessed *kitāb*" that confirms "what (*alladhī*) is before it" (6:91-2), a likely reference to the Torah. The second passage highlights the Prophet's commitment to his own *kitāb* as well as the *kitāb* of Moses, presenting them as God's foremost scriptures: "Say: bring a *kitāb* from God that gives better guidance than these two (*ahdā minhumā*), so that I may follow it, if you speak truly" (28:49). Finally, the last two texts defend the Qur'an's divine pedigree, noting that "before it is the *kitāb* of Moses" (11:17, 46:12). These passages portray a scriptural landscape that is defined by the preeminence of the Torah and the Qur'an and their special relationship. There are no qur'anic texts that suggest such exclusive correspondence between the Qur'an and the Gospel or Psalms.

To the best of my knowledge, no scholar of the Qur'an has recognized the potential implication of these passages for the pivotal concept of *kitāb* and qur'anic scripturology more broadly. Nevertheless, some scholars have taken note of the unexpected features of some of these texts and attempted to account for them in a quasi-systematic way. As discussed previously, the post-classical exegetical tradition developed a bifurcation of scriptures into legal/major and non-legal/minor ones in order to account for the juxtaposition of *al-kitāb* and *al-zubur* in Q 3:184 and 35:25—even though this strategy remained local and did not lead to a wider rethinking of the concept of *kitāb*. Moreover, Ibn Kathīr and Sayyid Quṭb utilized a similar insight to distinguish the Torah from all other pre-qur'anic scriptures in order to

explain its strong association with the Qur'an in several of the passages discussed in this section. Yet, these scholars also fell short of, or perhaps deliberately refrained from, undertaking a broader reassessment of the notion of *kitāb* and its consequences for qur'anic scripturology and prophetology.

A number of modern academics have similarly noted the strong association of Moses and Muhammad with the concept of *kitāb*. For example, Aloys Sprenger believed that at least in the Meccan period the term *kitāb* referred primarily to the heavenly book. Because he considered the heavenly book to be the qur'anic equivalent of the Clementine *Urgeist* and therefore the source of all revelations, Sprenger believed that all prophets had access to this celestial document. However, Sprenger noted that the Qur'an explicitly names only four prophets as recipients of *al-kitāb*: Moses and Muhammad, as well as John and Jesus (in Q 19:12 and 19:30).⁸⁸ Sprenger believed that this reflects the qur'anic conception of these prophets as founders of independent religions, namely, Judaism, Sabianism, Christianity, and Islam. Yet, Sprenger recognized that the notion of *kitāb* is far more strongly associated with Moses and Muhammad than with John and Jesus. According to Sprenger, this is because the Qur'an considered initially the Torah and then itself as uniquely complete manifestations of the

⁸⁸ See the next chapter for the implications of Q 19:20 and 19:30 for the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

heavenly book.⁸⁹ The Torah and the Qur'an were, therefore, more worthy than other scriptures for being identified with the heavenly book and labelled as *kitābs*.

Bell similarly differentiated the scripturologies of the Meccan and Medinan periods. According to Bell, in the Meccan passages of the Qur'an "Moses is said to have received 'the Book', and none of the other prophets have."⁹⁰ In Bell's view, this is because in Mecca the Prophet believed that the monotheists living around Arabia had one and the same book, which they had received through Moses.⁹¹ However, Bell argued that the exclusive association of Moses with "the Book" ended in Medina. There, the Prophet realized that Jews and Christians are separate communities, and also came to know of the foundational status of Jesus to Christianity.⁹² Therefore, he posited a book for Jesus (in Q 19:30), became preoccupied with producing a book of his own, and began using two distinct names for the scriptures of Moses

⁸⁹ *Das Lebel und die Lehre*, 2:295-7.

⁹⁰ *The Origin of Islam*, 120.

⁹¹ *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 151f.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 68, 138-9.

and Jesus, namely, *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*.⁹³ Variants of this theory were later provided by Fazlur Rahman⁹⁴ and Patricia Crone.⁹⁵

Apart from the absence of any substantive textual analysis in its support, Bell's claim is inconsistent with a number of clear qur'anic indications. First, passages that are deemed Meccan in most chronologies (including Bell's) attribute certain "leaves" (*ṣuḥuf*) to Abraham, and also refer to David's Psalms (*al-zabūr*).⁹⁶ If we accept commonly-used qur'anic chronologies, it follows that already in Mecca the Prophet viewed at least Moses and David (and

⁹³ *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, 135, 152.

⁹⁴ Like Bell, Fazlur Rahman translates *kitāb* as "Book" and asserts that this word "is used and is applied almost exclusively throughout the Meccan period to the 'Book of Moses' as a forerunner of the Qur'ān. ... Jesus (19:30) and other New Testament personalities ... appear from the second [Meccan] period onward, while the gospel is mentioned only once in Mecca" (*Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 135-6). According to Rahman, the prominence of the *kitāb* of Moses, and the absence of the Gospel from the sūras considered Meccan, is "a problem for which there is no satisfactory explanation so far, given the fact that Christianity was widespread in Arabia" (*ibid.*, 136).

⁹⁵ Understanding *kitāb* as "book," Crone notes the existence of "verses which could be taken to imply that the only recipient of a book before the Messenger himself was Moses," adducing the above-discussed Q 23:49-50 and 2:87 ("Jewish-Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One)," 236). However, Crone rejects this implication based on the fact that other qur'anic passages refer both to the Torah and the Gospel. These verses mean that the Prophet must have viewed Jesus also as a recipient of scripture. Nevertheless, similar to Bell, Crone adds that proper terms for the Torah and the Gospel (*al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*) occur only in Medinan verses, thereby leaving open the possibility that the Prophet's position on this issue evolved (*ibid.*). Indeed, already in Hagarism, Crone and Cook had contemplated a similar hypothesis. While discussing the relationship between scripture and oral tradition in early Islam, they take the phrase *ahl al-kitāb* as an indication that "the early Muslims recognised only one book which was not their own" (38). Presumably, this is because *ahl al-kitāb* uses the term *al-kitāb* in the singular. It is interesting, however, that in her latest article the late Crone did not adduce *ahl al-kitāb* to support the "one book" theory.

⁹⁶ *The Origin of Islam*, 94. Bell takes these references to mean that the Prophet's early "sources of information were very restricted and imperfect" (*ibid.*).

perhaps also Abraham) as recipients of scripture. Therefore, a more nuanced explanation is needed for the strong association of Moses with *al-kitāb*. Bell's developmental scheme runs into a second problem. He claims that in Mecca the Prophet was chiefly occupied with the production of a lectionary, a *qur'ān*, while in Medina he embarked on composing a book (*kitāb*) to rival the scriptures of Jews and Christians. Yet, as we have seen in this chapter, references to the Prophet's *kitāb* appear precisely in those texts that attribute a *kitāb* to Moses and depict the Mosaic and Muhammadan scriptures as corresponding to and confirming each other—several of these texts being “Meccan.” Neither element of Bell's developmental theory, therefore, withstands scrutiny.

Chapter Three:

Apparent Plurality

As the previous chapter demonstrates, Muslim exegetes and modern academics agree on a fundamental point about the notion of *kitāb*: whether it is a common noun for writings in general (per the commentators), a label used primarily for the heavenly book (per Sprenger and Pedersen), or a term signifying God’s will and wisdom (per Madigan), the Qur’anic concept of *kitāb* characterizes all scriptures or even revelations. Given that the Qur’an mentions a plurality of prophets as recipients of scripture, it follows that there are a plurality of *kitābs*. In a testament to the dominance of this view, no scholar of the Qur’an has suggested that it systematically applies the term *kitāb* to some—but not all—scriptures.

This “plurality-of-*kitāb*” perspective owes its hegemony in part to a number of Qur’anic texts that seem to use *kitāb* in relation to more than two scriptures. For instance, the Qur’an sometimes uses the plural term *kutub* in apparent reference to revealed writings. Moreover, the Qur’an names John and Jesus as recipients of a *kitāb* alongside Moses and Muhammad. The present chapter surveys all the key passages—seventeen in total—that seem to undermine the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. As I shall demonstrate, there are compelling interpretations of these texts that do not necessitate the existence of any *kitābs* beyond those of Moses and

Muhammad. In addition to detailed analysis of these passages, I shall discuss the treatment of each by both the commentators and modern academics, especially when the latter go beyond what is found in the exegetical tradition.

Appearances of *kutub*

It is best to begin by examining the occurrences of the plural noun *kutub* in the Qur'an. From the outset, an important point needs to be borne in mind: the skeletal text (*rasm*) of the 'Uthmānic Qur'an does not distinguish between *kutub* and *kitāb*, as both are written as كُتُب.¹ Because of this ambiguity, an instance of كُتُب can be read both as *kitāb* and as *kutub*—not to mention several other words that match this grapheme (*kataba*, *kutiba*, *kātib*, etc.),² although grammatical and semantic context often significantly limit the range of tenable readings.³ A detailed perusal of the reported variant readings shows that whenever there are good reasons to take an instance of كُتُب as *kutub* (instead of *kitāb*), the plural noun appears as a possible

¹ According to the Andalusian scholar al-Dānī (d. 444/1053), the original 'Uthmānic codices used the spelling كُتَاب (with the *mater lectionis*) only for four occurrences of the singular *kitāb*: Q 13:38 (*li-kulli ajalīn kitābun*), 15:4 (*illā walahā kitābun ma'lūmun*), 18:27 (*min kitābi rabbika*), and 27:1 (*wa-kitābin mubīnin*). See *al-Muqni'*, 250f. However, the later 'Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (d. 643/1245) questions this claim, noting that in some "ancient codices" (*al-maṣāḥif al-atīqah*) he saw the same four instances also without an *alif*, i.e. written as كُتُب (see *al-Wasilah ilā kashf al-'Aqīlah*, 286; quoted in fn. 4 of *al-Muqni'*, 251).

² In fact, because early scribes used consonant-distinguishing marks sparingly, what was written would often be كُتُب, which is still more ambiguous than كُتُب.

³ For example, in Q 4:136 both instances of كُتُب are followed by the relative pronoun *alladhī*. Therefore, neither can be read as *kutub*, which would have required the feminine pronoun *allatī*. Similarly, Q 3:187 notes that those given كُتُب were charged to make it clear (*la-tubayyinnahu*) for the people. Here, the masculine object pronoun *hu* after *la-tubayyinnanna* likewise eliminates the reading *kutub*.

reading in the *qirāʾāt* literature. Therefore, for our purposes it is sufficient to consider those instances of كُتُب for which the plural reading is attested in the tradition. There are only nine such instances in the entire Qurʾan, six of them present in the now dominant reading of Ḥafṣ from ʿĀṣim.⁴ (To put this in perspective, there are more than 250 instances of كُتُب which are read *unanimously* as *kitāb*.) Of these nine instances, only seven are relevant to our discussion, because the other two do not concern written revelations.⁵ The singular reading *kitāb* is attested for six of these seven instances, while only one of them (Q 98:3) is read as *kutub* in all the reported reading. Analysis of these seven instances shows that they can be harmonized with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

1-2) Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (4):136; Sūrat al-Baqarah (2):285. These verses feature an identical formulaic expression that uses the noun *kutub*: Q 4:136 denounces those who reject “God, His angels, His *kutub* (*kutubihi*), and His messengers (*rusulih*),” while Q 2:285 states that believers (*al-muʾminūn*) have faith in “God, His angels, His *kutub* (*kutubihi*), and His messengers (*rusulih*).”

⁴ Daniel Madigan also discusses the occurrences of *kutub* in the Qurʾan (*The Qurʾān’s Self-Image*, 172-7). However, while he notes that كُتُب can be read as both *kitāb* and *kutub*, he only analyzes the six occurrences of *kutub* in the Ḥafṣ reading.

⁵ One of these attestations appears in Q 4:24 (*Muʾjam al-qirāʾāt*, 2:49), where *kutub/kitāb* does not refer to scriptures but to prescription(s). The second instance is Q 21:104 (*ibid.*, 6:65), which foretells that on Judgment Day God will roll up heaven “as the rolling of a scroll for writings” (*ka-ṭayyi l-sijilli li-l-kutubi*). Here *kutub* seems to refer to written documents in general. Cf. a similar phrase in Isaiah 34:4: “and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll”; see also Isaiah 45:12.

The first point to mention is that in both cases the word كُتِبَ is also read by some readers as *kitābihi* (singular).⁶ As there is no contextual ground for excluding this reading, one can adopt it and evade the implications of the plural *kutubihi*.⁷ However, the plural reading appears more likely, because in both verses كُتِبَ is sandwiched between two plural terms (“His angels” [*malāʾikatihī*], and “His messengers” [*rusulihī*]).⁸

One of these texts (Q 4:136) was discussed extensively in the previous chapter. As mentioned there, the first half of this verse makes reference to only two *kitābs*: one sent down to the Prophet, and another one sent down before. Given this formulation, the term *kutubihi* in the second half may have a dual significance despite its plural form. This is a reasonable suggestion on account of the presence of *rusulihī* (“His messengers”), because even if the text intends to reference only two *kitābs*, there is an incentive to use *kutubihi* instead of *kitābayhi* in order to achieve assonance with *rusulihī*. Given that there are other qurʾanic passages that use plural forms with dual meaning for similar rhetorical purposes, it is entirely plausible to take

⁶ *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 1:433, 2:174-5.

⁷ See Q 2:177 where in a similar formula الكُتِبَ is read unanimously as the singular *al-kitāb*: “righteousness [belongs to] he who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the *kitāb*, and the prophets.” According to Daniel Madigan, this verse “seems to support the feasibility of a singular reading in Q 2.285” (*The Qurʾān’s Self-Image*, 174).

⁸ Al-Ṭabarī provides a similar argument in discussing Q 2:285.

kutubihi in Q 4:136 as denoting two *kitābs*. This argument applies to Q 2:285 as well, which uses *kutubihi* in the exact same list of items that appears in Q 4:136.

3) Sūrat Yūnus (10):94. This verse speaks of “those who read the *kitāb/kutub* before you.” While the majority of readers have adopted the singular reading, two readers are reported to have chosen the plural.⁹ However, there is no contextual ground for favoring the plural *al-kutub* over the singular *al-kitāb*. Only if one already believes that several *kitābs* preceded that of the Prophet does the reading *kutub* seem more appropriate.

4) Sūrat al-Bayyinah (98):2-3. These verses describe the Prophet’s preaching among pagans as well as the *ahl al-kitāb*. According to the text, God sent these communities a messenger who recites “purified leaves” (*ṣuḥūfan muṭahharatan*) that contain “sound *kutub*” (*kutubun qayyimatun*). The “purified leaves” seem to be a reference to the Qur’an’s heavenly original, which is safeguarded from any loss or damage that befalls earthly documents (cf. Q 80:11-6). Given that the *kutub* included in these leaves are promulgated by the Prophet, they cannot refer to several distinct scriptures. Perhaps *kutub* here has the general meaning of “writings,” denoting the variegated textual corpus that is recorded in the purified, heavenly

⁹ *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 3:624.

leaves.¹⁰ Alternatively, *kutub* may mean “prescriptions” in this context, in which case it signifies the Qur’an’s teachings and commandments. Both of these readings are consistent with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

The exegetical tradition provides a number of explanations for this occurrence of *kutub*. Most commonly, the commentators interpret *kutub* as “written things” (*maktūbāt*) or “prescriptions” (*farā’id* or *aḥkām*), possibilities that I have already noted.¹¹ Al-Māturīdī offers two other explanations that are worth mentioning. First, he suggests that the verse may be using both *ṣuḥuf* and *kutub* in a singular sense—i.e. synonymous respectively with *ṣaḥīfa* and *kitāb*—but employing the plural form for the purpose of intensification (*mubālaghah*). In this case, the Qur’an would be highlighting the gravity of the heavenly document that contains the Prophet’s scripture by characterizing the former as *ṣuḥuf* and the latter as *kutub*. This explanation is compatible with the two-*kitāb* theory. Al-Māturīdī’s other interpretation considers that the noun *kutub* may in fact refer to all scriptures. That is, perhaps Q 98:2-3

¹⁰ In a similar vein, *kutub* might refer to different qur’anic sūras, each of which is a semi-independent document (hence a *kitāb*) in its own right. Tilman Nagel also mentions this possibility (*Medinensiche Einschübe*, 193, fn. 49).

¹¹ For the first explanation, see al-Ṭabarānī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī, al-Shawkānī, al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī. In an attempt to account for the plural form, Muqātil b. Sulaymān notes that the Qur’an contains *umūr shattā kathīrah* (many subjects of various kinds). Al-Qurṭubī and Sayyid Quṭb mention similar explanations.

For the second explanation, see al-Māturīdī, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, the Jalālayn, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī, al-Shawkānī, and al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī.

describes the Prophet as reciting all the books sent down by God. This reading is reasonable, al-Māturīdī argues, because divine books carry the same basic message. By virtue of reciting the Qur’an, therefore, the Prophet is effectively also reciting the Torah and the Gospel and Psalms, because “this Qur’an is in those books, and those books are in this [Qur’an].”¹² Several other commentators mention this interpretation of *kutub* as a possibility without recapitulating al-Māturīdī’s argument.¹³ While this theory is not necessary implausible, it is not a straightforward reading of the Qur’anic text and offers no advantage vis-à-vis the other mentioned readings, so it does not represent a real challenge to the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

5) Sūrat al-Isrā’ (17):4. According to this verse, God had decreed/revealed (*qaḍaynā*) to the Israelites in the *kitāb/kutub* that they “shall do corruption in the earth twice and shall become exceedingly arrogant.” Here the majority of the readers have opted for the reading *kitāb*, which the commentators usually understand to designate either the Torah or God’s book of decrees.¹⁴ Only two readers have read this word as *kutub*.¹⁵ However, there is no reason to

¹² To support this interpretation, al-Māturīdī adduces two passages discussed in the first chapter—namely, Q 26:192-7 and 87:18-9—and refers also to texts that describe the Qur’an as a confirmer (*muṣaddiq*) of what is sent down before (such as Q 2:91 and 2:97). He also cites Q 21:24, where the Prophet is asked to say: “this is the remembrance (*dhikr*) of him who is with me, and the remembrance (*dhikr*) of him who is before me.”

¹³ Al-Huwwārī, al-Ṭabrisī, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī, Ibn ‘Ajībāh, al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī.

¹⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Samarqandī, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, and the Jalālayn understand the *kitāb* to be the Torah. Al-Qurṭubī takes it to be the Preserved Tablet.

¹⁵ *Mu‘jam al-qirā’āt*, 5:9.

choose the plural reading over the singular. On semantic grounds, *kitāb* seems the more plausible option: If one understands the verb *qaḍaynā* as signifying God’s decree for an occurrence in the future, then the mentioned *kitāb* is likely to signify the *one* book that, according to the Qur’an, contains a record of divine decrees (cf. Q 57:22). On the other hand, if one interprets *qaḍaynā* in the sense of revealing or informing, then it is likely that the locus of this revelation was the *kitāb* of Moses, which appears immediately before this verse in Q 17:2.¹⁶ Therefore, it seems that the dominant singular reading is preferable to *kutub*. Consequently, this verse does not undermine the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

6) Sūrat Saba’ (34):44. This verse appears in the context of criticizing the pagans’ blind attachment to their erroneous traditions. They have the audacity to call the Prophet’s revelations “manifest sorcery” (v. 43), but they do not stand upon firm ground, for God “has not given them *kutub* which they would study” (*wa-mā ātaynāhum min kutubin yadrusūnahā*). Here the term *kutub* seems to signify scriptures, because it is placed in association with the verb “study” (*yadrusūnahā*).¹⁷ Nevertheless, this reference to *kutub* does not establish the

¹⁶ Both meanings of *qaḍaynā* (“We informed/revealed” and “We decreed”) are reported in traditions ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās (mentioned by al-Ṭabarī).

¹⁷ Daniel Madigan seems to ignore the significance of *yadrusūnahā* when he surmises that *kutub* in this verse “implies not a multiplicity of canons but rather a multiplicity of divine commands or of individual moments of revelation” (*The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*, 172-3).

existence of several scriptures, because it concerns a counterfactual: *if* the pagans possessed and studied divine scriptures, their rejection of the Qur'an could be taken seriously. But they enjoy no such education, instead following on the footsteps of their ignorant fathers (v. 43).

Still, one may ask why the verse does not use the singular form *kitāb*. If the revelation of *kitāb* is an exceptional phenomenon in prophetic history limited to Moses and Muhammad, would it not have been more fitting for the Qur'an to say "we have not given them a *kitāb*"? While such a formulation would have been felicitous, the context of this passage may help explain the use of the plural *kutub*. Specifically, the verse under consideration seems connected to what appears earlier in the sūra: "the unbelievers say, 'We will not believe in this Qur'an, nor in what (*alladhī*) is before it'" (v. 31). The unbelievers reject not only the Qur'an but apparently also another revelation—"what is before it," a possible reference to the Torah. The situation is therefore similar to the previously-discussed Q 28:48-49, according to which the unbelievers reject the Torah and the Qur'an by calling them "a pair of sorceries supporting each other." Considering this context—namely, the pagan rejection of the Qur'an and "what is before it"—the use of *kutub* may serve a polemical purpose in raising the bar for the pagans: if they are going to reject two divine *kitābs*, then they better rely on something superior for their beliefs and conduct. *Surely*, given their confident rejection of the Qur'an and "what is before it," they must be blessed with a number of *kutub*. Of course, they possess no such blessing and

are merely blind imitators of their fathers (v. 43). The use of *kutub* thus highlights the large gap between what the pagans currently have (their traditions) and what they ought to have (a plurality of *kitābs*) in order credibly to challenge the Qur'an and "what is before it."¹⁸

7) Sūrat al-Taḥrīm (66):12. This verse furnishes the seventh and last pertinent occurrence of *kutub*. While praising Maryam as a paragon of piety, this passage describes her as accepting the truth of "her Lord's *كلمت* and *كتب*." The two items in which Maryam believes are read both as plurals (*kalimāt* and *kutub*) and singulars (*kalimah* and *kitāb*).¹⁹ The phrase

¹⁸ Incidentally, it bears mentioning that the word *كتب* in this verse has in fact been read as *kitāb* by two readers (*Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 7:387). This reading seems incompatible with the feminine pronoun *hā* at the end of *yadrusūnahā*, although *kitāb* is occasionally treated as a feminine noun (Lane, 1:2590). The singular reading may have been chosen on the basis that the Qur'an usually uses a singular noun after the emphatic *min* in negative constructs (for more on this use of *min*, see Zeinab Ahmed Taha, "Ṣila," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*). In fact, this common construct appears at the end of the very verse under consideration, in the phrase *min nadhīrin*.

¹⁹ *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 9:532-3. For *كلمت*, the plural *kalimāt* is the majority reading, perhaps because the word features a final *tā'* (*tā' mabsūṭah/ṭawīlah*) instead of a final *hā'* (*tā' marbūṭah*). However, the presence of *tā' mabsūṭah* does not preclude the singular reading *kalimah*, and there are several places where the standard qur'anic *rasm* uses *tā' mabsūṭah* for singular forms (such as *nī'mat* [Q 2:231], *al-tābūt* [Q 2:248, 20:39], and *jannat* [56:89]). See the third volume of the *Geschichte des Qorāns* (by Gotthelf Bergstrasser), 27, for more examples. In addition, early Arabic papyri frequently attest a similar usage of *tā' mabsūṭah*, especially for singular nouns in construct position. See, for example, the phrase *mawlāt Umm Hunaydah* written as (مولت ام هنيده) in a quittance dated 88 A.H. (Michaelides P. B 744 papyrus), published in Geoffrey Khan, "An Arabic Legal Document from the Umayyad Period," 358). For further analysis of this orthographic feature in early Arabic papyri, see Simon Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic*, 47 (cited in Khan, "An Arabic Legal Document," 358).

Incidentally, the early Egyptian traditionist, Ibn Wahb (d. 197/812), records in his *al-Jāmi'* a number of traditions that frame the choice between *tā' marbūṭah* and *tā' mabsūṭah* for the word *al-tābūt* (in Q 2:248 and 20:39) as reflecting political rivalry between the Medinan Helpers and the Meccan Quraysh. These traditions suggest that the Medinans preferred to use a *tā' marbūṭah* for singular forms (thus التابوه) whereas the Quraysh insisted on a *tā' mabsūṭah* (e.g. التابوت). It was thanks to 'Uthmān siding with his fellow Qurashīs that the first official codices of the Qur'an came to feature the latter reading (*al-Ġāmi': Die Koranwissenschaften*, 275-7.)

under discussion thus consists of three items: the verb *ṣaddaqat bi-* (صدقته بـ), which means to accept or affirm the truth of something,²⁰ and the two objects of this verb, which are described as God's "كلمت and كتب." Even though the latter term is of primary interest to this discussion, it is worth investigating the potential meanings of both items, as they seem related to each other.

As for *كلمت*, if read in the singular, the phrase would mean that Maryam accepted God's *kalimah* ("Word"). The only other verse to use the root *ṣ-d-q* in relation to *kalimah* is Q 3:39, which describes John the Baptist as "confirming (*muṣaddiqan*) a *kalimah* from God." This *kalimah* is most likely Jesus, because he is explicitly labelled as such in a following verse (Q 3:45), which recounts that the angels gave Maryam the glad tidings of "a *kalimah* from Him, whose name is al-Masīḥ (the Messiah)." Given the similar wording of this passage to the verse under consideration and the presence of Maryam in both texts, it is possible that Q 66:12 features *kalimah* in reference to Jesus. If so, the verse is praising Maryam for her belief in and support of Jesus as God's *kalimah* (Word).

On the other hand, the story of the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke provides another potential frame of reference for interpreting *كلمت* in Q 66:12. Specifically, Luke 1

²⁰ Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:1667.

contrasts the reactions of Zachariah and Maryam to the respective messages they receive from Gabriel. When the angel informs Zachariah that Elizabeth will soon bear a son, Zachariah is incredulous. As a result, Gabriel reproaches him, saying “you did not believe my words (τοῖς λόγοις μου)” (v. 20).²¹ However, Luke portrays Maryam in a completely different light. Even though she is initially perplexed about the notion of virgin birth (v. 34), she expresses her full faith and willingness immediately thereafter: “let it be to me according to your word (τὸ ῥῆμά σου)” (v. 38). Her faithfulness is later highlighted by Elizabeth, who praises Mary as “she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of *what was spoken* (τοῖς λελαλημένοις) to her from the Lord” (v. 45). Now, as a number of scholars have pointed out, the Qur’anic retelling of the Annunciation in Sūrat Maryam bears remarkable resemblances to the corresponding narrative in the Gospel of Luke.²² Therefore, it is possible that Q 66:12 alludes to the portrayal of Maryam in this account, using *كلمت* to refer to the promise of the Annunciation.²³ In other words, the

²¹ The Peshitta translates this passage thus: “*de-lā hayment le-mellei hālein.*”

²² See, e.g., Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’ān*, 57, 68; Suleiman Mourad, “On the Qur’anic Stories about Mary and Jesus,” 17ff; *idem*, “Mary in the Qur’ān,” 166-172. While Mourad highlights the similarity of this account of the Annunciation with the Gospel of Luke, he argues that the other account—in Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān—resembles most closely the narrative found in the second-century apocryphal *Protoevangelium of James*. Cornelia Horn believes that even the story of Sūrat Maryam bears parallel to that found in the *Protoevangelium of James* (“Intersections: The Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* in Sources from the Christian East and the Qur’ān”). However, Horn’s discussion is highly conjectural and is ultimately based on an even more conjectural emendation of Q 19:24 by Christoph Luxenberg. On the significance of the *Protoevangelium of James* for eastern Christian communities, see Horn, “Mary Between Bible and Qur’an.”

²³ This is not to say that the Qur’an is responding directly to the Lukan text. Rather, the Qur’an may be addressing a narrative (transmitted orally or in written form) that ultimately derives from Luke’s account, whether directly

verse may be referring to Maryam’s faithful attitude toward the word(s) of God, as she wholeheartedly believed in the promise of the Annunciation.²⁴ In short, *كلمت* may designate Jesus (the Word of God) or the promise of Annunciation (the prophecy or word(s) of God delivered to Maryam).

The second object of the verb *ṣaddaḡat bi-* is read both as *kitābihi* and *kutubihi*.

Elsewhere in the Qur’ān, the root *ṣaddaḡa* appears frequently in reference to divine revelations, sometimes designated precisely by the term *kitāb*. For instance, after noting the revelation of *al-kitāb* to the Children of Israel through Moses, Q 2:87-9 describes the Qur’an as “confirming what is with them” (*muṣaddiqun li-mā ma‘ahum*), an apparent reference to the Mosaic *kitāb*. The Prophet, Jesus and the Gospel are also described as confirmers (*muṣaddiq*) elsewhere in the Qur’an (Q 2:101, 3:50, 5:46). Given the linguistic parallels between these verses and the passage

or through other sources such as Tatian’s *Diatessaron*. See Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 19, where he notes Maryam’s response in Q 19:20 (and Q 3:47) is closer to Tatian’s text than that of Luke 1:34. Mourad also refers to *Diatessaron* in a later essay, where he states that the qur’anic account of the Annunciation in *Sūrat Maryam* “derives from the *Gospel of Luke* 1-2 or the corresponding sections in Tatian’s *Diatessaron*” (“Mary in the Qur’ān,” 166). For an extensive, if speculative, treatment of potential parallels between the qur’anic accounts and the *Diatessaron*, see Jan van Reeth, “l’Évangile du Prophète.”

²⁴ Against this hypothesis, it might be objected that in the qur’anic accounts of Annunciation Zachariah and Maryam have nearly identical reactions to the words of the angel(s), both expressing incredulity about the divine promise (3:40 and 19:8 for Zacharia versus 3:47 and 19:20 for Maryam). Yet, Zachariah’s hesitation seems more problematic. For one, Zachariah is the one who prays to God for a son (3:38, 19:2-6), not Maryam. For another, Zachariah does not seem convinced by the angel’s assurance and asks to be given a sign (3:41, 19:10), whereas Maryam makes no such demand.

under consideration, perhaps *kitāb/kutub* in the present passage also refers to divine scriptures. In this understanding, only the singular reading *kitāb* is consistent with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. This fact is not problematic, however, because there is no reason for excluding *kitāb* in this context. If we adopt this reading, the verse means that Maryam had complete faith in the Mosaic *kitāb*, which was a pillar of religious life in her Judean community.

Alternatively, the term *kitāb/kutub* may be translated as decree(s). If we choose the singular reading, perhaps *kitāb* refers to God's decree that Jesus will be born from a virgin. In this respect, it is interesting that both qur'anic retellings of Annunciation make reference to God's decree concerning Jesus. In Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (v. 45), when Maryam asks how she will conceive without having been touched by a mortal, the response is that "when [God] decrees (*qaḍā*) something, he says unto it 'be!' and it is." Similarly, in Sūrat Maryam (v. 21), Gabriel tells Maryam that Jesus's birth is "a matter decreed" (*amran maqḍiyyan*). If we take the term *kitāb* in Q 66:12 to be a reference to such a decree, then both *kalimah/kalimāt* and *kitāb* in this verse concern Jesus: the latter referring to the divine decree that brings Jesus to life, and the former designating Jesus or the angelic word(s) communicating this decree to Maryam. This latter interpretation fits the narrative of Luke 1, in which Maryam not only believes Gabriel's announcement but also submits herself to God's decree, saying "let it be to me according to your word" (v. 38). Alternatively, *kitāb/kutub* might refer to God's prescription(s) in general, in

which case the verse means that Maryam was an obedient servant who followed divine commandments. For all of these possibilities, one can adopt the singular or the plural readings of *كلمت* and *كتب*. As there is no decisive indication for excluding any of these possibilities, the passage does not represent a strong case for or against the two-*kitābs* theory. Suffice it to say that there are several reasonable understandings of *كتب* that are consistent with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

While the interpretations of *كلمت* considered above are relatively common in the commentaries,²⁵ almost all the exegetes understand *كتبه* to refer to divine scripture(s). In the case of the singular reading, most commentators understand *kitāb* to refer to the Gospel or take it to be a generic noun that designates all scriptures.²⁶ In this view, the verse means that Maryam believed in her son's scripture (the Gospel) or in all revealed scriptures. Similarly, most exegetes understand *kutub* to refer to revealed books.²⁷ Alternatively, al-Zamakhsharī

²⁵ Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī, al-Huwwārī, and al-Samarqandī take *kalimah* to refer to Jesus. The same interpretation is mentioned as a possibility by al-Ṭabarānī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, Abū al-Su‘ūd, Ibn ‘Ajībah, al-Shawkānī, and al-Ālūsī. On the other hand, the idea that *kalima* refers to the words of God communicated by Gabriel to Maryam is also attested. Al-Māturidī prefers this view, noting that Maryam accepted those words as truly stemming from God, without suspecting that they might be Satanic insinuations. This view is endorsed by al-Qurṭubī, and also mentioned by al-Samarqandī, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī, and al-Shawkānī.

²⁶ Muqātil understands *kitāb* to refer to the Gospel, a possibility that is mentioned by al-Māturidī, al-Huwwārī, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Samarqandī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, Abū al-Su‘ūd, Ibn ‘Ajībah, and al-Ālūsī. However, al-Ṭūsī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Bayḍāwī, and al-Shawkānī understand the singular reading as denoting the genus of scripture, and thereby as equal in meaning to the plural reading. Al-Ālūsī also mentions this possibility.

²⁷ See al-Huwwārī, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Shawkānī.

and some commentators after him propose that *kalimāt* and *kutub* signify respectively minor and major scriptures, an explanation already mentioned in the previous chapter.²⁸ While these explanations of كُتُب undermine the two-*kitāb* hypothesis, they are not based on any textual indications from the passage under consideration. Rather, these explanations reflect the commentators' general assumptions about the term *kitāb*. Therefore, they do not pose a challenge to the suggestions I have advanced, namely, that كُتُب refers to the Torah or perhaps to the divine decree(s) or commandments(s) relayed to Maryam.

The preceding analysis reveals a number of important facts that bear recapitulation. First, it is worth repeating that only one occurrence of كُتُب in the Qur'an (in 98:3) is read as *kutub* by all the readers. At eight other places, كُتُب is read both as *kitāb* and *kutub*, while some 250 appearances of كُتُب are read unanimously as *kitāb*. Given that the reported readings usually reflect grammatical and semantic indications, the meager showing of *kutub* in the *qirā'āt* literature demonstrates that only a handful of qur'anic passages contain potential cues for the

²⁸ Apart from al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī and al-Ālūsī accept this interpretation. Abū al-Su'ūd and Ibn 'Ajībah appear to have the same idea in mind when they suggest that *kalimāt* refers to the "leaves (*ṣuḥuf*)" sent down by God. Indeed, Ibn 'Ajībah explicitly notes that *kutub* may refer to "the four books," i.e. the major scriptures (the Torah, Psalms, the Gospel, and the Qur'an). Ismā'il Ḥaqqī also mentions the possibility of *kalimāt* referring to the ancient leaves, but he understands *kutub* as denoting "all of His books that were sent down, including the leaves and other divine books."

plural reading. If the Qur'an considered *kitāb* to be a label for all scriptures, one would expect a completely different picture—one in which the plural noun *kutub* had a stronger presence, appearing in constructs that unambiguously concerned several scriptures. Yet, such unequivocal uses of *kutub* are conspicuously absent from the Qur'an. By contrast, the commentators frequently use phrases such as *al-kutub al-munazzalah* (“the revealed books”), *al-kutub al-samāwiyyah* (“the heavenly books”), or *al-kutub allatī unzilāt min qabl* (“the books that were sent down before”), leaving no doubt that the authors of these works subscribed to a generic understanding of *kitāb* as “book” or “scripture.” The marked terminological difference between the Qur'an and the commentaries supports the hypothesis that they espouse different visions of scriptural history—the Qur'an privileges itself and the Torah as the only revealed *kitābs*, while the commentators understand *kitāb* to be applicable to all scriptures.

Beyond Moses and Muhammad

Apart from the attestations of *kutub*, another set of qur'anic passages that may undermine the two-*kitāb* hypothesis are those that, either implicitly or explicitly, attribute the *kitāb* to prophets other than Moses and Muhammad. It is to a discussion of these passages that I now turn.

A *kitāb* for every age?

Sūrat al-Ra‘d (13):38-9. This text addresses the Prophet and reminds him of two facts about previous messengers: 1) they had wives and families; and 2) they were unable to bring a sign (*āyah*) to their people except with God’s permission.

ولقد ارسلنا رسلا من قبلك وجعلنا لهم ازوجا وذرية وما كان لرسول ان ياتي بايه الا باذن الله لكل اجل كتاب
يمحوا الله ما يشاء ويثبت وعنده ام الكتاب

Indeed We sent messengers before you, and gave them wives and posterity, and it was not for any messenger to bring a sign, except with God’s permission. Every appointed time has a *kitāb* ☐ God effaces what He wills and confirms what He wills, while the mother of the book is with Him.

In calling attention to these facts, the text emphasizes the human characteristics and limitations of previous messengers, thereby reminding the Prophet that he is not the first apostle to encounter obstacles in his mission or to feel powerless in countering his opponents.

After commenting on the previous messengers, the passage declares that “for every appointed time (*ajal*) is a *kitāb*.” Muslim commentators have proposed a number of interpretations for this phrase. According to some, the term *kitāb* here signifies a revealed book. In this view, the statement means that God has assigned a specific scripture to each epoch in human history. When the appointed time arrives for an epoch to end, some of the laws of its corresponding scripture (*kitāb*) become obsolete, and a new book is revealed to address the circumstances of the following era. Usually, in this view the Torah and the Gospel are mentioned as characterizing epochs of their own, while the Qur’an is presented as ushering

in the final era of human history. This means that there are at least three *kitābs*, a view that contradicts the two-*kitāb* theory.²⁹

A similar interpretation of *kitāb* as scripture is endorsed by some modern scholars and translators of the Qur'an. As discussed in the first chapter, Geo Widengren understands this verse to concern revealed books. In fact, Widengren claims that the number of epochs equals the number of "Apostles," an elite group of Prophets who receive the contents of the heavenly book directly from God in order to act as saviors for their communities. The passage under consideration implies, therefore, that "every Apostle brings a Book to each epoch."³⁰ A number of Qur'an translators similarly understand *kitāb* in the sense of scripture. For instance, George Sale translates this phrase as "Every age hath its book of revelation,"³¹ while Arberry reproduced it as "Every term has a Book."³² This understanding likely reflects reference to

²⁹ Among early exegetical authorities, al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim reportedly held this view (see al-Ṭabarī and al-Suyūṭī). Muqātil b. Sulaymān also adopts this interpretation. According to him, the phrase in question means that "no book is sent down from heaven except with a [pre-ordained] term." Following the same line of interpretation, Muqātil glosses the verb *yamḥū* ("effaces") in the next verse as *yansakh* ("abrogates"). Similarly, Sayyid Quṭb understands *kitāb* to mean "scripture," and emphasizes the Qur'an's prerogative to abrogate the rulings of previous scriptures on the ground that it is "the latest scripture" (*al-kitāb al-akhīr*). Several other commentators mention this interpretation as a possibility.

³⁰ *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*, 116.

³¹ *The Koran*, 204; emphasis is original and indicates an explanatory insertion.

³² *The Koran Interpreted*, 1:272. See also Asad ("Every age has had its revelation," *The Message*, 411), Yusuf Ali ("For each period is a Book (revealed)"), Blachère ("A chaque terme une Écriture," *Le Coran*, 278), and *The Study Quran* ("for every term there is a Book," 626).

umm al-kitāb (“the mother of the book”) in the following verse. If the *umm al-kitāb* is the source of all scriptures, then *kitāb* in Q 13:38 should be understood as signifying an individual revealed text.

While *kitāb* can mean “writing” or “book,” it can also signify a prescription or decree. Accordingly, some scholars suggest that Q 13:38-9 is a general statement about the transient nature of some divine injunctions: God reserves the right to revoke a ruling (*kitāb*) when it has served its term (*ajal*), without this in any way impinging on His wisdom and omniscience.³³ More commonly, the commentators suggest that *kitāb* denotes a divine decree (or the record thereof) about the occurrence of a certain event at a predetermined time. In particular, because in Classical Arabic *ajal* often designates an individual’s appointed time of death, some commentators believe that Q 13:38-9 is a statement about the fate of individuals. In this understanding, the text means that “for each [person’s] appointed time [of death] is a [recorded] decree.” Every person’s death date is preordained, although it is subject to change

³³ Pursuing this line of interpretation, al-Zamakhsharī notes that revealed laws (*sharāʿi*) conform to public interest (*maṣlaḥah*, pl. *maṣāliḥ*)—which can change from one era to the next—and indirectly glosses the term *kitāb* as “*ḥukm yuktab ʿalā l-ʿibād*” (“a ruling that is prescribed for [God’s] servants”). Abū al-Suʿūd similarly understands *kitāb* as “a specific ruling that is prescribed for [God’s] servants in accordance with the requirements of [His] wisdom.” Like al-Zamakhsharī, he proceeds to point out that revealed laws (*sharāʿi*) can change from one era to the next, as necessitated by developments in outside circumstances. Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī and al-Ālūsī make similar remarks.

as God sees fit.³⁴ These understandings of *kitāb* as “ruling” or “decree” are arguably more common in exegetical and academic scholarship.³⁵

In fact, there are strong reasons to suggest that Q 13:38-9 pertains to divine decrees, especially those involving the punishment of nations. In particular, the broader context of this text is heavily concerned with the issue of punishment. Thus, verse 32 explicitly threatens the unbelievers with chastisement: “Messengers were indeed mocked before you, yet I respited the unbelievers, and thereafter I seized them. How, then, was My retribution?” In other words, no matter how long the reprieve, sinful nations will be punished. Verse 34 affirms the idea of worldly punishment, adding that a similar fate awaits the unbelievers in the next world: “For them is punishment in the present life; and the punishment of the hereafter is yet more grievous; they shall have no one to defend them from God.” The verses following vv. 38-9 also hint at divine punishment: “whether We show you some of what We have promised them, or

³⁴ The following commentators understand *kitāb* broadly as a divine decree for the occurrence of an event or the record of such decree: al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Shawkānī, and al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī. By contrast, al-Ṭabarānī and al-Samarqandī take *kitāb* to concern specifically the appointed time for a person’s death.

³⁵ For instance, Richard Bell translates the phrase in question as “for every term there is a book” (*The Qur’ān*, 1:234), but proceeds to explain in a footnote that the noun “book” (*kitāb*) is used here “in the sense of a written, fixed decree” (*ibid.*). According to Pickthall, the phrase means that “[f]or everything there is a time prescribed.” Paret renders the phrase as “[j]ede (den einzelnen Menschen oder ganzen Völkern gesetzte) Frist hat eine Bestimmung (w[örtlich] Schrift) (durch die sie von vornherein festgelegt ist)” (*Der Koran*, 205). Similarly, Khouri translates it as “[j]ede Frist steht fest in einem Buch” (*Der Koran*, 8:320), and elaborates that “[j]ede Angelegenheit kommt zu ihrer Zeit zur Ausführung, wie es Gott festgeschrieben hat.” The verb *festschreiben* is in fact very apt in this context, as it captures both the literal and metaphorical senses of *kitāb* as “writing” and “decree.”

whether We cause you to die [before its fulfillment], your duty is only to deliver the message, and the reckoning is Ours.” This statement ties in well with the notion of God’s control over signs as mentioned in v. 38. The Prophet may like to witness the actual fulfillment of God’s word against pagan Meccans, but it is not for him—or for any messenger—to set the wheels of divine wrath in motion. Rather, punishment comes only “with the permission of God” (v. 38). If they persist in their unbelief, the Prophet’s opponents will face destruction sooner or later. Finally, verse 41 affirms God’s omnipotence: “God judges, none repels His judgment; He is swift in reckoning.” If God decides to chastise a nation, there is no one to stop Him. These repeated references to the subject of punishment corroborate the idea that v. 38 concerns the same theme.³⁶

A second reason to think that Q 13:38-9 is related to divine punishment is the evidence of other, similarly-worded qur’anic passages. In several texts using the terms *kitāb* and *ajal* (or its cognates), *kitāb* clearly signifies a divine decree, *not* a revealed book. An especially close example is Q 15:4-5: “We never destroyed a city unless it had a known *kitāb* (*kitābun ma‘lūmun*).” Here *kitāb* refers to a decree for wiping out a sinful city. The next verse continues:

³⁶ Admittedly, the two verses immediately preceding v. 38 reflect on the Qur’an, which may suggest that vv. 38-9 are concerned with the phenomenon of scripture. Yet, vv. 36-7 focus not on the Qur’an itself but on its status as a token of the Prophet’s differentiation from his unbelieving—and thereby punishment-prone—adversaries. This is why these verses strongly reject polytheism and remind the Prophet of his duty to disregard the whims (*ahwā’*) of others and remain committed to the knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) that has come to him.

“No nation can bring its appointed time (*ajal*) forward, nor can they delay it.” This makes it clear that *ajal* is the predetermined time of destruction. Another similar passage is Q 3:145, which declares that “no soul can die except with God’s permission.”³⁷ This means that a person’s time and circumstance of death are under full divine control. The verse supplements this statement with the following description: *kitāban mu’ajjalan*. An apparent gloss on the preceding claim about God’s control over death, this phrase signifies that there is a decree (*kitāb*) bearing a specific time-stamp (*mu’ajjal*), in which a person’s divinely sanctioned death is stipulated. The time of death is not up to random events, therefore, but pre-ordained by God.³⁸ The close similarity between these verses and the passage under consideration further bolsters the hypothesis that the latter concerns the downfall of the Prophet’s rebellious opponents. Consequently, the term *kitāb* in Q 13:38 is not likely to mean “scripture.” The passage, therefore, is not inconsistent with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

An abundance of *kitābs*?

Sūrat al-An‘ām (6):83-9. As mentioned previously, Sūrat al-An‘ām is a sustained critique of pagan beliefs and practices as well as an elaborate defense of monotheism and

³⁷ Incidentally, this phrase is similar in structure to “no messenger can bring a sign except with God’s permission,” which occurs in Q 13:38.

³⁸ See also Q 2:235, where the term *kitāb* seems to signify the decreed term of waiting for widowed women before they can re-marry. Cf. Q 7:34, 6:67, and 2:282. The examined commentaries seldom draw attention to these parallels passages

resurrection. To accomplish its objectives, the sūra furnishes not only arguments but also remembrances of the past, in particular drawing on the figure of Abraham as the pure monotheist. In this context, the sūra recounts Abraham’s rejection of idol-worship and his realization that heavenly luminaries are not worthy of veneration (vv. 74-81). The passage of interest to us follows this story by dwelling on Abraham’s legacy. As the longest list of proper names in the Qur’an, this passage mentions the divine election of seventeen righteous individuals: Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elijah (Ilyās), Ishmael, Elisha (al-Yasaʿ), Jonah, and Lot. These men of God were “preferred above all people” (v. 86), the Qur’an tells us, along with some “of their fathers, their posterity, and their brethren” (v. 87). Then follows a crucial statement in v. 89: “Those are they to whom We gave *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥukm* (judgment) and *al-nubuwwah* (prophethood).” If God gave these three items to each of the named individuals, then that could imply that at least seventeen prophets were recipients of *kitābs* before Muhammad. Such an interpretation would obviously undermine the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

While some academics adopt this expansive interpretation of the verse,³⁹ none of the examined commentaries suggests that God gave a separate scripture to each of the mentioned prophets. In fact, some commentators explicitly note that reception of *al-kitāb* can entail

³⁹ Notably Arthur Jeffery, who considers scripture to be a universal phenomenon (*The Qur’ān as Scripture*, 27, 33).

either the revelation of a new scripture or inheritance of a previously revealed scripture (i.e. being taught and given authority over its interpretation and application).⁴⁰ This means that only some of the named prophets received new *kitābs* from God. The question of which ones were so blessed is sometimes settled by recourse to other qur'anic texts, yielding a familiar list of scriptures. For instance, according to al-Ṭabarī, *al-kitāb* alludes to “the leaves of Abraham and Moses, the Psalms of David, and the Gospel of Jesus.”⁴¹ Some other commentators do not provide a specific list, instead simply explaining *al-kitāb* as a generic noun or, presumably based on the same rationale, glossing it as *al-kutub*.⁴²

While the commentators do not attribute an independent *kitāb* to each of the seventeen named prophets, they still suggest that more than one of these prophets received independent *kitābs*, a view that undermines the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. However, a close textual analysis suggests a different interpretation than that which is found in the commentaries. To begin, it is important to take a step back and read Q 6:89 anew: “Those (*ulā'ika*) are they to whom We gave *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥukm* (judgment) and *al-nubuwwah* (prophethood).” The first point in need

⁴⁰ See the comments of al-Rāzī, Abū al-Su'ūd, and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

⁴¹ Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Ibn 'Aṭīyyah provide a similar list.

⁴² Al-Zamakhsharī states that *al-kitāb* is a generic noun, an explanation adopted by several other commentators (such as al-Bayḍāwī, Ibn 'Ajibah, and al-Shawkānī). On the other hand, al-Tha'labī and the Jalālayn gloss *al-kitāb* as *al-kutub*.

of clarification is the referent of the pronoun “those” (*ulāʾika*) at the beginning of the verse. While it may seem that this pronoun refers to the prophets named in vv. 84-86, it is more likely to refer to (righteous) Israelites as a whole. This is because after naming individual prophets in vv. 84-86, the text broadens the scope of divine election to include not only these men of God but also some “of their fathers, their posterity, and their brethren” (v. 87). The named figures are thus representatives of a larger group of people, who henceforward become the subjects of discussion. It is only after this broadening of scope that the bestowal of *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥukm*, and *al-nubuwwah* is mentioned. Therefore, in the absence of indications to the contrary, it is reasonable to assume that the pronoun “those” refers to all God-fearing Israelites, or perhaps to Israelites as a whole. In this case, Q 6:89 means that God gave the Children of Israel *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥukm*, and *al-nubuwwah*. The plausibility of this view is corroborated by Q 45:16, which attributes the same exact three items to Israelites: “Indeed We gave the Children of Israel *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥukm* and *al-nubuwwah*, and We nourished them with the good things, and We favored them above all [others].” Thus, Q 6:89 is also likely about the granting of *al-kitāb* to the community of Israelites, not to a specific set of individuals.

With this clarification in mind, what is the meaning of God granting *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥukm*, and *al-nubuwwah* to the Children of Israel? Leaving aside the somewhat ambiguous *al-ḥukm*, the Israelites’ reception of *al-nubuwwah* seems to reflect the numerous prophets that were

raised among them. Does Q 6:89 mean, therefore, that the Israelites similarly received many *kitābs* from God? This is not likely, because elsewhere the Qur'an highlights Moses alone as the conveyor of a *kitāb* to the Children of Israel. For instance, Q 17:2 and 32:23 state that God gave the *kitāb* to Moses and made it a "guidance" (*hudā*) for the Children of Israel, while according to Q 40:53 God gave "the guidance" (*al-hudā*) to Moses and "made the Children of Israel to inherit the *kitāb*." Apparently using the terms *hudā* and *kitāb* coterminously (perhaps to avoid repetition), these passages depict Moses as the only prophet to impart a *kitāb* to Israelites. The latter verse in particular signals the post-Mosaic, intergenerational relevance of the Torah by using the language of "inheritance." No other prophet is described in this way as bringing and bequeathing a *kitāb* to the Children of Israel.

The concept of inheritance appears also in Sūrat al-A'rāf, which recounts the giving of the Tablets of the Law to Moses, describing them as containing "of everything an admonition and an explanation of everything" (v. 145). After reviewing some rebellious episodes of early Israelite history, the text states: "and there followed them a successor [generation] who inherited (*warithū*) *al-kitāb*" (v. 169). This passage also demonstrates the abiding importance of the Mosaic *kitāb* as the source of religious authority for the Children of Israel. Considering these statements, Q 6:89 appears to allude to the lasting relevance of the Torah and its

symbolization of the preferential treatment given by God to the Children of Israel.⁴³ If *al-nubuwwah* signifies the spirit of prophecy that animated many individual Israelites, *al-kitāb* denotes the one and only scripture that was carefully preserved, enacted, and studied through the ages by the Children of Israel.⁴⁴ Backed by the pertinent Qur’anic intertexts, this interpretation is fully consistent with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

A new *kitāb* for Jesus?

Perhaps the most radical implication of the two-*kitāb* hypothesis is the exclusion of the Gospel from the ambit of divinely-sent *kitābs*, because in the eyes of Muslim exegetes as well as modern academics the Gospel forms a triumvirate of foundational Abrahamic scriptures alongside the Torah and the Qur’an.⁴⁵ This scholarly elevation of the Gospel to the same scriptural rank as the Torah and the Qur’an is consistent with an undeniable reality: Just as the Jews cherish the Torah and Muslims treasure the Qur’an, so do Christians honor the

⁴³ In this context, one is reminded of the statement of James in Acts 15:21: “in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues” (NRSV).

⁴⁴ Moreover, this reminiscence of the past segues into a text that was discussed in the previous chapter. This ensuing passage criticizes the unbelievers for saying that “God has sent down nothing.” The Qur’an counters this claim by mentioning Moses’s reception of the *kitāb*, describing it as “a light and a guidance for the people” (v. 91). This exclusive mention of the Mosaic *kitāb* reinforces the view that the collective statement of Q 6:89 concerns the *one* book given to Moses.

⁴⁵ For example, in the words of Sidney Griffith, “[a]ccording to the Qur’ān, the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’ān itself are on a par as records of divine revelation (Q 9:111)” (“The Gospel, the Qur’ān, and Jesus in al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Ta’rīkh*,” 133-4).

Gospels over all the other books in their scriptural canon. How, then, could the Qur'an *not* consider the Gospel a *kitāb*? It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the two-*kitāb* hypothesis stands or falls by its ability to account for qur'anic references to the Gospel.

Evaluating the explanatory power of the two-*kitāb* hypothesis in relation to the Gospel requires a holistic approach: not only do we need to discuss those texts that employ the term *al-injīl*, we must also consider the entirety of qur'anic references to the mission of Jesus. What role does the Qur'an posit for Jesus in its conceptualizations of prophetic history? What aspects of his mission are highlighted in the Qur'an? How do the different elements of his mission relate to each other? And, finally, what are the potential developments in the Qur'an's depiction of Jesus and Christianity? A satisfactory understanding of the place of the Gospel in qur'anic scripturology requires addressing all of these questions.

It is convenient to begin the analysis by going through all passages that may have a bearing on the scriptural and revelatory aspects of the mission of Jesus. To begin, it is useful to offer a brief summary of the items said to be "taught" or "given to" Jesus.

- I. *al-bayyināt*. According to two qur'anic passages, both in Sūrat al-Baqarah, Jesus was given *al-bayyināt* (vv. 87, 253; cf. v. 213). Another verse that uses *al-bayyināt* in relation to Jesus is Q 61:6. Reflecting on his mission to the Children of Israel, this text depicts Jesus as expressly confirming the Torah and announcing the future

- coming of a messenger “whose name is most praised (*aḥmad*)”. “Yet,” the verse concludes, “when [Jesus] came to them with *al-bayyināt*, they said this is a manifest sorcery.” Here what is emphasized is not Jesus’s reception of *al-bayyināt* from God but his presentation of *al-bayyināt* to the Israelites.
- II. *al-ḥikmah*. This term appears in a fourth qur’anic passage that employs *al-bayyināt* in relation to Jesus. According to this text, “when Jesus came to [the Children of Israel] with *al-bayyināt*, he said: ‘I have come to you with *al-ḥikmah*’” (Q 43:63). Here it is not clear whether *al-ḥikmah* and *al-bayyināt* refer to the same thing or whether they characterize different aspects of the mission of Jesus.
- III. *al-kitāb*. In Q 19:30, the infant Jesus states that God has given him *al-kitāb*. Most scholars of the Qur’an understand this *kitāb* to be the Gospel, a reading that flatly contradicts the two-*kitāb* hypothesis as it brings the number of *kitābs* to at least three. A similar verse (Q 3:79) seems to have Jesus in mind when it refers to God granting a mere mortal (*bashar*) the three items of *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥukm*, and *al-nubuwwah*. If we take Jesus to be the subject of this statement, then we must also add *al-ḥukm* to the list of items granted by God to Jesus.
- IV. *al-injīl*. Two verses mention Jesus’s reception of *al-injīl* from God (Q 57:27, 5:46), the latter adding that Jesus confirmed *al-tawrāh*.

V. Finally, two passages state that God taught Jesus the following four items: *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥikmah*, *al-tawrāh*, and *al-injīl* (Q 3:48, 5:110). Similar to the aforementioned Q 61:6, Q 5:110 adds that Jesus brought the Children of Israel *al-bayyināt* but those Israelites who disbelieved said: “this is nothing but manifest sorcery.” Perhaps the most important interpretive challenge posed by Q 3:48 and 5:110 is their apparent redundancy: if *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* refer to the Torah and the Gospel, as is commonly understood, then what do *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* signify? This problem is seldom addressed in modern scholarship.

We have therefore at least six items that potentially relate to the scriptural or revelatory aspects of the mission of Jesus: *al-bayyināt*, *al-ḥikmah*, *al-ḥukm*, *al-kitāb*, *al-tawrāh*, and *al-injīl*. In the course of discussing the significance of these terms, a key hermeneutical question has to serve as a backdrop: does the Qur’an present a coherent image of the scriptural-cum-revelatory aspects of the ministry of Jesus? In other words, are the above-mentioned passages reconcilable and, if so, are their terminological differences reflective of their broader contexts? Or is it more plausible to attribute their different formulations to significant developments in the qur’anic portrayal of Jesus? For instance, as Richard Bell suggests, is it possible that the Prophet was initially unaware of the Christian scriptural “surplus,” i.e. the New Testament, and therefore did not use the term *al-injīl* in his earlier qur’anic

pronouncements? To answer such questions, we need to consider the potential impact of context and chronology on the language used in each pertinent passage.

I. *Al-bayyināt*

While the Qur'an uses *bayyināt* only four times in relation to Jesus, it uses this term and its singular (*bayyinah*) dozens of times in reference to other prophets. In many cases, it seems that *al-bayyināt* refers to the miracles performed by the messengers, which are otherwise described simply as *āyāt* (sing. *āyah*), i.e. "signs." For instance, in Sūrat al-A'rāf (7), the messenger Ṣāliḥ tells his people that "there has come to you a *bayyinah* from your Lord; this is the she-camel of God, as a sign (*āyah*) for you" (v. 73). The words *bayyinah* and *āyah* therefore seem to signify the same thing, namely, the miraculous she-camel that emerged from the mountain.⁴⁶ In fact, just as the term *āyah* in the Qur'an refers not only to miracles but also to prophetic teachings, so does *bayyinah* occasionally appear to have this latter meaning. For example, when Noah (Q 11:28) and Shu'ayb (11:88) state that they are "supported by (lit. "upon") a *bayyinah*" from God, this seems to be a reference to their teachings, for there is no

⁴⁶ In another story in the same sūra, Moses declares to Pharaoh that he has brought him a *bayyinah* (v. 105). Upon hearing this, Pharaoh states: "if you have come with an *āyah*, produce it!" (v. 106). This passage also suggests that *bayyinah* and *āyah* are synonymous. The following verses clarify that these terms denote the two miracles of Moses, namely, the staff that turns into a serpent and his shining hand. While these miracles established the credentials of Moses beyond doubt, Pharaoh and his people rejected them as mere sorceries (7:109). Cf. Q 17:101, 28:36, 40:23-4 in relation to Moses. See also Q 3:184, 7:101, 10:13, 10:74, 14:9, 16:43-4, 30:9, 40:22, 40:50, 40:82-3, 57:25, and 64:5-6. This analysis shows that Daniel Madigan is incorrect in claiming that *bayyinah/bayyināt* is "always [used] as an expression for revelation" (*The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 154).

Qur'anic mention of these messengers having performed miracles. This usage of *bayyinah* as prophetic teaching is especially evident in relation to Muhammad, whose revelations are frequently described as *bayyinah*.⁴⁷ As for the plural form *bayyināt* referring to prophetic revelations, this usage seems to be reserved for Muhammad himself, whose revelations are described as *bayyināt*⁴⁸ or, more commonly, *āyāt bayyināt*.⁴⁹

In the case of Jesus, it seems that *bayyināt* may characterize his miracles as well as his teachings. The first possibility is suggested by Q 3:49-50, where Jesus tells the Israelites that “I have come to you with a sign (*āyah*) from your Lord,” and then enumerates his miracles in his own words. Given the aforementioned equivalence of *āyah* and *bayyinah* in some Qur'anic texts, this passage strengthens the possibility that his coming to the Israelites with *al-bayyināt*

⁴⁷ Q 6:57, 6:157, 11:17, 47:14, 98:1-2. The previous scriptures are also said to contain *al-bayyinah*, e.g. Q 20:133. Cf. 35:40

⁴⁸ Q 2:159, 2:185, 2:209, 3:86, 40:66.

⁴⁹ Q 2:99, 10:115, 19:73, 22:16, 22:72, 24:1, 29:49, 34:43, 45:25, 46:7, 57:9, 58:5; cf. Q 24:34, 24:46, 65:11. Interestingly, just as the miraculous *bayyināt* of former messengers were rejected as mere works of magic, the Prophet's revelatory *bayyināt* were similarly disparaged as such by his pagan opponents. For example, in Q 34:43, the Prophet's revelations are described as *āyāt bayyināt*, but the pagans are quoted as deriding these revelations as “mere sorcery.” Several other verses—none of which uses the terms *bayyinah/bayyināt*—record the same disparaging characterization of the prophet's revelations as sorcery (Q 21:3, 43:30, 74:24-25; cf. 28:48). In some texts the charge of sorcery is directed against the fundamental tenets of the Qur'an, i.e. belief in monotheism (38:4) and the resurrection of the dead (11:7, 52:14-5). What did it mean for the pagans to describe Muhammad's teachings as sorcery? Given that they characterized the Prophet both as a sorcerer (*sāḥir*; 10:2, 38:4) and as bewitched (*mashūr*; 17:47, 25:8), perhaps they were above all conveying their incredulity at the Prophet's teachings. His preaching had disrupted the status quo, so they felt there must be some sorcery involved.

(per Q 43:63 and 61:6) could similarly signify his miracles. This reading is corroborated by Q 2:87-92, which opens by mentioning the bestowal of *al-kitāb* on Moses and proceeds to highlight the granting of *al-bayyināt* to Jesus. In verse 89, the text describes the Qur'an as another *kitāb* from God, thereby establishing parallelism between the missions of Moses and Muhammad. The text then proceeds to a flashback to Mosaic times: "And Moses came to you with *al-bayyināt*, [but] then you took the calf [as a deity] after that" (v. 92). Here Moses is credited with *al-bayyināt*, similar to Jesus in v. 87. What do the Mosaic *bayyināt* refer to? Given that the episode of the Golden Calf is said to have *followed* the bringing of these *bayyināt*, it seems safe to assume that *al-bayyināt* does not refer to the Torah, because the worship of the Golden Calf happened simultaneously with Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law, not subsequent to it. The Mosaic *bayyināt* may thus refer to his miracles, either those that saved the Israelites from Egyptian captivity or those that sustained them in the desert after the Exodus. Similarly, then, Q 2:87 may have the miracles of Jesus in view when it refers to his *bayyināt*.

While the *bayyināt* of Jesus mentioned in Q 2:87, 43:63, and 61:6 may refer to his miracles, those mentioned in Q 2:253 and 43:63-5 seem to signify his prophetic preaching. This is because the latter texts concern the disagreements among the *ahl al-kitāb*. In statements that bring to mind the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians, these texts suggest

that discord among the *ahl al-kitāb* emerged even though, and indeed only after, Jesus had brought *al-bayyināt*.⁵⁰ Importantly, elsewhere in the Qur'an similar verses use the term *‘ilm* instead of *bayyināt*. According to these verses, the *ahl al-kitāb* developed disagreements “only after knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) had come to them, out of jealousy among themselves” (*baghyan baynahum*)” (3:19, 42:14, 45:17; cf. Q 10:93). Both sets of passages insist that there was no legitimate ground for schism among the *ahl al-kitāb*. Given the close similarities between these texts, the terms *bayyināt* and *‘ilm* may have the same referent. Moreover, because of the epistemological connotations of *‘ilm*, it is reasonable to identify this referent as the illuminating teachings of Jesus, not his miracles. Thus, the qur'anic association of *al-bayyināt* with Jesus seems to signify his unprecedented signs as well as his prophetic kerygma.⁵¹

The characterization of Jesus as a bringer of *bayyināt* superimposes the qur'anic paradigm of past rebellious nations on the otherwise-unique history of Israelites. Just as God had sent His messengers with the *bayyināt* to previous communities—who rejected their messengers and met with divine punishment—so did God send the *bayyināt* to Israelites via

⁵⁰ Cf. Q 2:213 and 3:105, which do not name a specific prophet as a bringer of the *bayyināt*.

⁵¹ Geoffrey Parrinder similarly explains that Jesus's *bayyināt* (“Evidences”) are “his teachings as well as his miracles” (*Jesus in the Qur'an*, 90). He believes that this interpretation is “made clear” by Q 43:63, where Jesus describes himself as bringing Wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and “to make clear” to the Israelites some of their disagreements. Parrinder continues by stating that the “Evidence that Jesus had was the Gospel (Injil)” (90).

Jesus, a mission that also had a bitter ending. Of course, Israelites had received *al-bayyināt* before, from Moses (Q 2:92, 4:153), and in general from the many messengers sent them by God (Q 5:32; cf. 2:211). However, it is only with Jesus that the Qur'an describes them fully in the mold of other disobedient communities. For instance, it is only when Jesus performed his miracles that "the unbelievers among them said: 'this is nothing but manifest sorcery'" (Q 5:110)—a statement reminiscent of the Egyptians' charge against Moses (e.g. Q 40:24). The examined passages, therefore, serve as a stern warning against Israelites and suggest that their covenantal relationship with God has been compromised.

II. *Al-ḥikmah*

The Qur'an attributes *al-ḥikmah* to Jesus only once. According to the just-examined Q 43:63, "when Jesus came to [the Children of Israel] with *al-bayyināt*, he said: 'I have come to you with *al-ḥikmah*.'" One ambiguity of this phrase concerns the relation between *bayyināt* and *ḥikmah*: do they refer to the same thing? If so, the third-person description of the mission of Jesus at the beginning is effectively an explanatory gloss on his first-person statement. In other words, Jesus said "I have come to you with *al-ḥikmah*," by which he was referring to *al-bayyināt*. In this interpretation, the verse lends further support to the idea that the *bayyināt* refers (at least primarily) to Jesus's teachings, because *al-ḥikmah* captures the wisdom that he imparted to the Israelites. However, it is not necessary to posit equivalence between *al-*

bayyināt and *al-ḥikmah*. Perhaps *al-bayyināt* refers to the miracles of Jesus that established his Prophetic credentials and thereby set the stage for his teaching of *al-ḥikmah* to the Children of Israel.

Alternatively, regardless of the meaning of *al-bayyināt*, “I have come to you with *al-ḥikmah*” may be a reference to Jesus’ *mode* of preaching, not to its content. That is, “with *al-ḥikmah*” may signify that Jesus approached the Israelites and preached among them in a fair and judicious manner, his style of interaction being characterized by wisdom. Such an interpretation recalls a text such as Q 16:125, which advises the Prophet Muhammad to conduct his preaching “with wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) and fair admonition.” Here the phrase “with wisdom” (*bi-l-ḥikmah*) seems to signal a desirable mode of comportment for the Prophet as opposed to designating the subject matter of his preaching. In this reading, reference to Jesus’s wise comportment might serve as a subtle allusion to the notion of the stubbornness of the Israelites. The passage may be hinting that Jesus did nothing to provoke the Israelites into disbelief. He displayed no enmity or harshness toward them, approaching them instead with compassion and lenience. Further, as the remainder of the verse notes, Jesus did not demand a radical break from their past. “I have come to you with *al-ḥikmah*,” he said, “and to make clear

to you some of that in which you differ” (43:63).⁵² Because these diverging interpretations are all plausible, this verse does not furnish strong support for a particular view regarding the terms *al-ḥikmah* and *al-bayyināt*.

III. *Al-kitāb*

While the above texts attribute *al-bayyināt* and *al-ḥikmah* to Jesus, two qur’anic verses depict him as a recipient of *al-kitāb*. The first verse does not name Jesus, but the context suggests that he is the subject of the statement: “It is not for a human being that God should give him *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥukm* and *al-nubuwwah*, and then he should say to men: ‘be servants to me apart from God’” (Q 3:79). The verse appears to reject the divinity of Jesus, insisting that he could never have made such a claim after being chosen as a prophet and having received *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥukm*. The idea of his divinity is therefore a later heresy, the blame for which lies squarely on the shoulders of Christians themselves. It is noteworthy that the three items attributed to Jesus—*al-kitāb*, *al-ḥukm*, and *al-nubuwwah*—are precisely the same entities that are elsewhere attributed to Israelites. The verse thereby suggests that Jesus was heir to the entire prophetic legacy of Israelites and fully committed to the monotheistic teachings of his venerable predecessors.

⁵² The image of prophets being especially lenient not to provoke their audience occurs elsewhere in the Qur’an, though without using the term *ḥikmah* (7:79, 11:88, 20:44).

Sūrat Maryam (19):30. While Q 3:79 does not mention Jesus by name,⁵³ this passage attributes *al-kitāb* to him in an unambiguous way. This passage is part of the speech of the infant Jesus in defense of his mother’s chastity. In this text, which reports the speech of the infant Jesus in defense of his mother’s chastity, Jesus declares to the slandering crowd: “I am God’s servant. He has given me the *kitāb* and made me a prophet” (19:30). Here Jesus is placed in an unequivocal relationship to the *kitāb*. Because the Qur’an elsewhere mentions the Gospel (*al-injīl*) as the scripture bestowed on Jesus, most commentators and scholars understand *al-kitāb* in this verse to refer to the Gospel. This understanding would imply that at least three Prophets—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—received different *kitābs* from God, thereby undermining the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

However, a detailed textual analysis suggests that *al-kitāb* in Q 19:30 should be identified with the Torah. In the broader context of the sūra, the story of Jesus is preceded by an account of Yaḥyā (John the Baptist), who is depicted in very similar terms to Jesus. Both

⁵³ Thereby, some scholars doubt if it has the divinity of Jesus in mind. For instance, al-Ṭabarī cites a tradition of Ibn Ishāq according to which this verse was sent down when a Christian delegation from Najrān, along with some Jewish scholars, had come to the prophet. In a swipe at both Christians and Muslims, a member of the Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayṣa (Abū Rāfi‘ al-Qurazī) asked the prophet whether he desires to be worshipped “just as the Christians worship Jesus son of Mary.” Muhammad categorically rejected this insinuation, and the present verse was sent down to reinforce his position. This tradition implies that the verse concerns the Prophet Muhammad more than it does Jesus. However, the idea that this verse is a rebuttal of Christian views of Jesus is more prominent in the commentaries. As for modern academics, *inter alia*, Henri Michaud (*Jésus selon le Coran*, 41, 77, 89) and Daniel Madigan (*The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*, 103) share this interpretation.

figures are described as being born in miraculous circumstances (John from very old parents, Jesus without a biological father). Their parents, Zachariah and Mary, react in a similar way to the news that they will have sons. John and Jesus are said to have received divine favor from their infancy or childhood. The parallels between the two stories are so strong that verses 13-14 about John are virtually identical with verses 32-33 about Jesus. The crucial point of this parallelism for our discussion occurs in verse 12, which appears to be divine or angelic speech: “O John, take the *kitāb* with force. And We gave him judgment (*al-ḥukm*) when [he was] a child.” Like Jesus, therefore, John was made a prophet as a child and given the *kitāb*.

There are two strong reasons to identify the *kitāb* given to John with the Torah. First, the idea of John as a recipient of the Mosaic *kitāb* is consistent with Zachariah’s prayer quoted earlier in the *sūrah*, where he asks God for an heir who would “inherit from me and inherit (*yarithu*) from the house of Jacob” (v. 6). The miraculous birth of John is in fulfillment of his father’s prayer. John is going to inherit not only from Zachariah but also from “the house of Jacob” (*āl ya‘qūb*), that is to say, the Israelites. As already mentioned, the Qur’an emphasizes the enduring significance of the Mosaic *kitāb* as a source of guidance for the Israelites, in particular using the language of inheritance in this regard. Thus, according to Q 40:53 God gave the “guidance” (*al-hudā*) to Moses and “made the Children of Israel to inherit (*awrathnā*) the *kitāb*,” while Q 7:169 remarks that the Israelites “inherited (*warithū*) the *kitāb*” after an

account of the revelation of tablets to Moses (7:145). Like the Qur'an, Deuteronomy 33:4 describes the Torah as "the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob," using the noun *mōrāshā* (מורשה, "inheritance"), which is of the root *yārash* (ירש), cognate to *waritha* in Arabic. These qur'anic and para-qur'anic intertexts corroborate the interpretation that Q 19:12 refers to John's reception of the Mosaic *kitāb*.

A second factor in support of this interpretation is the phrase "take with force" (*khudh ... bi-quwwah*) that the verse uses in relation to John's reception of the *kitāb*. This is because every other appearance of this imperative form in the Qur'an concerns the revelations of Moses. Thus, in Q 7:145 Moses is commanded to take his Sinai revelations with force (*fa-khudhhā bi-quwwah*), while in three other passages (Q 2:63, 2:93, 7:171) the Children of Israel are advised to do the same after the Sinai epiphany (*khudhū mā ātaynākum bi-quwwah*). Considering this evidence, it seems plausible that the *kitāb* given to John in Q 19:12 was the Torah. John's reception of the Torah signals both his divine cultivation and his authority in Israelite religious affairs.

If John is making his prophetic debut by receiving the Torah from God, a kind of baptism through scripture, then the strong parallels between the stories of John and Jesus suggest that the latter's *kitāb* also denotes the Torah. In other words, "God has given me the *kitāb* and made me a prophet" is not a reference to a new scripture that Jesus was to share with

the Israelites. Rather, it refers to the Mosaic *kitāb* and signals that after John Jesus was appointed by God to explain and enact the Torah’s precepts. John had inherited the mantle of authority from his father, and Jesus was to take it over from John. This interpretation finds further support in a joint examination of Q 19:12 and 19:30. While both verses make reference to *al-kitāb*, they diverge in their second elements. Verse 12 notes that John was given *al-ḥukm*, while v. 30 has Jesus declare that God has made him a prophet (*nabiyyan*). Taken together, these verses invoke the triplet of *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥukm*, and *al-nubuwwah*, which we saw previously as being attributed to the Children of Israel (6:89, 45:16) as well as Jesus (3:79).⁵⁴ As argued before, this triplet denotes the prophetic heritage of Israelites. Effectively, therefore, in Sūrat Maryam both John and Jesus are presented as heirs to this illustrious legacy and as culminations of the Israelite prophetic tradition.⁵⁵ It is because of the paramount importance

⁵⁴ Indeed, while only two of these three items are explicitly attributed to John (*al-kitāb* and *a-ḥukm*) and Jesus (*al-kitāb* and *al-nubuwwah*), both of them should be recipients of the third item as well. For although John is not said to be a prophet in v. 12, he is described as such elsewhere in the Qur’an (3:39). Moreover, the terms *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥukm* are juxtaposed only three other times in the Qur’an—in the just mentioned Q 3:79, 6:89, and 45:16—in all instances immediately followed by the term *al-nubuwwah*. Thus, it seems perfectly plausible to see *al-nubuwwah* also in the background of v. 12. The absence of this term may stem from rhetorical considerations, such as maintaining a short verse length. Similarly, even though v. 30 does not mention *al-ḥukm* with regard to Jesus, it may very well be lurking in its background—especially considering the attribution of *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥukm wa-l-nubuwwah* to Jesus in Q 3:79.

⁵⁵ As Holger Zellentin notes, “Joachim Gnilka has pointed out that the prophetology of the Qur’ān resembles that of the Clementine Homilies, which features Jesus as its culmination (*Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2007) 109-10” (*The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, 95, fn. 26). Based on this section’s analysis, it is possible to suggest that both John and Jesus represent the culmination of Israelite prophecy in the Qur’an.

of the Torah within this legacy that the text portrays John and Jesus as recipients of the Mosaic *kitāb*.

As mentioned before, exegetical discussions of Q 19:30 often identify the *kitāb* of Jesus with the Gospel. However, several commentators consider the idea that *al-kitāb* may not refer (exclusively) to the Gospel. For instance, al-Baghawī draws attention to the possibility that *al-kitāb* may refer to the Torah, by citing a tradition of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, according to which “the Torah was communicated [to Jesus] (*ulhima l-tawrāh*) while he was in his mother’s womb.”⁵⁶ The implication seems to be that the Gospel, unlike the Torah, was revealed to Jesus later in his life—which means that the infant Jesus’ reference to *al-kitāb* could refer only to the Torah.⁵⁷ While this interpretation is relatively rare, several commentators consider both the Gospel and the Torah as possible referents of *al-kitāb* in Q 19:30.⁵⁸ However, most commentators,⁵⁹ and

⁵⁶ Al-Rāzī also mentions the identification of *al-kitāb* with the Torah and its textual basis.

⁵⁷ However, al-Ṭabarānī (*ad* Q 3:48) cites the opinion that “God taught [Jesus] the Torah in his mother’s womb, and [taught him] the Gospel after his coming forth [from the womb].” If one interprets “after his coming forth” as *immediately* after his birth (and therefore before Mary’s questioning), this tradition can be reconciled with the idea that *al-kitāb* in Q 19:30 refers to the Gospel.

⁵⁸ For example, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah and al-Tha‘ālibī identify the *kitāb* with the Gospel, but say that it may denote both the Torah and Gospel. Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī and al-Ṭanṭāwī state that the *kitāb* may signify the Gospel, the Torah, or both. Al-Fīrūzābādī also glosses *al-kitāb* as “the Torah and the Gospel.” Ibn al-Jawzī cites the views that *al-kitāb* signifies either the Torah or the Gospel, but seems to consider both of them simultaneously as referents.

⁵⁹ The following commentators take the *kitāb* to refer to the Gospel: Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Samarqandī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qurtubī, the Jalālayn, Ibn ‘Ajibah, al-Bayḍāwī, al-Shawkānī, al-Ālūsī, and al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī. Ibn Abī

virtually all academic scholars,⁶⁰ understand *al-kitāb* to refer to the Gospel. While this reading is not inconsistent with the text, it creates a rupture between the interpretation of this verse and that of the parallel text about John. For it means that the *kitāb* given to John was the previously revealed Torah, while the *kitāb* given to Jesus was a new scripture, the Gospel. This interpretive rupture is seldom addressed in modern scholarship, because many academic discussions of Q 19:30 simply ignore the parallel verse about John.

Indeed, even studies that do consider both stories together, and translations that necessarily have to deal with both passages, still mostly fail to take their strong parallelism into account. For example, William Muir discusses Q 19:12 and 19:30 next to each other. While he takes *al-kitāb* in the first verse to signify “the Jewish Scriptures,” he sees in the second verse’s invocation of *al-kitāb* a “mention of the divine origin of the Gospel.”⁶¹ Angelika Neuwirth also examines the two verses together. Initially, Neuwirth emphasizes the

Ḥātim’s *Tafsīr* cites a report from Anas b. Mālik, in which Jesus’ claim to have been given the *kitāb* is interpreted as his studying the Gospel in his mother’s womb.

⁶⁰ For instance, Henri Michaud seems to understand *al-kitāb* to be a reference to the Gospel (*Jésus selon le Coran*, 26-7). See also Martin Bauschke, *Der Sohn Marias*, 52.

⁶¹ *The Testimony*, 14-5. In the same way, regarding the Johannine *kitāb*, Rudi Paret’s view is that it probably refers to “die mosaische Gesetzesoffenbarung” (*Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, 322). However, when discussing the *kitāb* of Jesus, Paret suggests that it refers to the Gospel: “Daß Jesus seinen Zeitgenossen eine Offenbarungsschrift übermittelt hat, wird auch sonst im Koran erwähnt oder vorausgesetzt” (*ibid.*, 324). Edouard Montet’s translation of the Qur’an similarly suggests that John’s *kitāb* refers to the sacred scriptures of the Jews (*Le Coran*, 196, fn. 4) while taking the *kitāb* given to Jesus to be the Gospel (*ibid.*, 199, fn. 4).

similarities between the accounts of John and Jesus, including the fact that they “will have access to Scripture (Q 19:12/30).”⁶² However, when discussing Q 19:30 she makes no mention of the parallel verse about John. Instead, she points out:

With the reference to the book that he has been given (Q 19:30) we do ... enter a field of interreligious differences. According to later Qur’ānic texts there are not four accounts about Jesus’ accomplishments written down under divine inspiration by the four canonical evangelists, but Jesus himself is credited with a revelation which is on a par with the Qur’ān and the Torah.⁶³

While Neuwirth does not explicitly identify “the book” mentioned in Q 19:30 with the Gospel, she highlights the fact that some Medinan passages speak of Jesus receiving *al-injil* instead of positing the existence of a plurality of *injils* written by his followers. Although she is somewhat hesitant, therefore, Neuwirth implies that the attribution of *al-kitāb* to Jesus in Q 19:30 foreshadows the explicit ascription of *al-injil* to him in the Medinan period.⁶⁴

⁶² “Imagining Mary – Disputing Jesus,” 391

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁶⁴ More heightened hesitation characterizes Geoffrey Parrinder’s treatment of Q 19:12 and 19:30. Apparently recognizing the frequent interpretive disconnect between the two verses, Parrinder notes that Q 19:12 “might seem to suggest that John had a special revealed book, but there is no other reference to this and the commentators consider that the book here mentioned is the Torah, for John’s mission was to confirm the word of God” (*Jesus in the Qur’an*, 58). He thus seems to endorse the identification of John’s *kitāb* with the Torah. As for Q 19:30, Parrinder notes that it is a “Meccan” verse, thereby distinguishing it from the “Medinan” verses that attribute the Gospel to the Jesus. While Parrinder does not explain Q 19:30 directly, he avoids identifying its *kitāb* with either the Torah or the Gospel. Instead, he seems to suggest that it refers to “the sacred books,” for he speaks of “the sacred books, the Torah and the Wisdom” in an apparent reference to *al-kitāb*, *al-tawrāh*, and *al-ḥikmah* that appear in Q 3:48 and 5:110.

Considering the Mosaic *kitāb* as the referent of the two instances of *al-kitāb* in Q 19:12 and 19:30 avoids an interpretive disconnect between these two parallel texts. Another way to evade such a disconnect would be to posit independent scriptures for both John and Jesus. In other words, perhaps *al-kitāb* in v. 30 refers to the Gospel, while in v. 12 it denotes an independent Johannine scripture. Apparently based on this reasoning, Karl Ahrens considered the possibility that the image of John as recipient of an independent scripture could be an influence from Mandaeism, as Mandaean literature portrays John as the recipient of a holy writ, the so-called Letter of Ẹūshṭā.⁶⁵ However, Ahrens himself admitted the remoteness of this possibility by noting that “the Mandaean Book of John emerged only after Muhammad’s time.”⁶⁶ The absence of any other qur’anic reference to such an independent scripture further diminishes this possibility. Indeed, as my analysis shows, the wording of Q 19:12 and 19:30, the broader context of Sūrat Maryam, and the relevant qur’anic intertexts strongly suggest that in both verses *al-kitāb* is a reference to the Mosaic Torah.

John and Jesus are the only prophets portrayed in the Qur’an as recipients of the *kitāb* alongside Moses and Muhammad. This is no accident. By describing John and Jesus as

⁶⁵ *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, 131. See also Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, 94. For a discussion of this passage, see Jennifer Hart, “Yahia as Mandaean Rasul?,” 174-7.

⁶⁶ “[D]as Johannesbuch der Mandäer erst nach der Zeit Muhammeds entstanden [war]” (*Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, 131).

inheritors of the Mosaic *kitāb*, the Qur'an emphasizes their continuity with previous prophets and at the same time endorses the legitimacy of their reform movement. Thanks to their divine election and education, John and Jesus were the rightful leaders of all Israelites. In effect, the Qur'an is staking a clear position concerning tensions between Jewish authorities on the one hand and John and Jesus on the other. As amply attested in early Christian literature (including in the New Testament), the status of Mosaic Law was at the heart of such tensions between competing Jewish groups. The Qur'an suggests that John and Jesus had exclusive divine authority to adjudicate such disputes. It was thanks to this authority that Jesus could address the disagreements that had emerged among the Israelites (Q 43:63). While this is a jab at the Prophet's Jewish contemporaries (who rejected Jesus), it may also be a veiled criticism of Christians. For the qur'anic narratives emphasize the continued relevance of Mosaic law, countering the claim that "the Law and the Prophets were until John" (Luke 16:16; cf. Rom. 10:4). Moreover, it is possible that God's direct bestowal of the Mosaic *kitāb* on John and Jesus signals the renewal of His covenant—which was predicated on the Israelites' adherence to the Mosaic *kitāb* (Q 2:63, 2:93, 7:169, 7:171)—with the Israelites through the missions of John and Jesus, and its continuation in their followers (see Q 5:14). This idea would further challenge the credibility of the Prophet's Jewish contemporaries by implying that they have a defective covenantal relationship after rejecting John and Jesus (cf. Q 4:154-160).

Other aspects of the presentation of John and Jesus in the sūra corroborate the hypothesis that it signals the transference of Israelite authority to John and Jesus. In particular, the sūra presents Zachariah and Mary as primarily priestly figures, while emphasizing the prophetic and messianic credentials of their sons. As the text tells us, Zachariah is in the sanctuary (*miḥrāb*) when he receives the promise of John’s birth (v. 11). This statement calls attention to the fact that Zachariah was a priest in the Jerusalem Temple. Zachariah’s priestly role is further emphasized when the sūra depicts him as wielding authority over cultic prayer, as he exhorts people to praise God “in the morning and the evening” (v. 11). Mary is similarly associated with the Temple. While the sūra does not dwell on her upbringing in the sanctuary, it notes that when she brought her infant to the people, they called her the “sister of Aaron”—a likely allusion to her descent from the priestly line of Aaron and her dedication to the Temple.⁶⁷ In contrast to Zachariah and Maryam, John and Jesus are presented first and foremost as prophets. John not only receives the Mosaic *kitāb* directly from God, but he is also given judgment (*al-ḥukm*) as a child. The fact that John

⁶⁷ The association of Mary with Aaron or Amram is present in the two other qur’anic discussions of Mary (sūra 3, and the brief reference to her in sūra 66, discussed above). Importantly, this flagging of Mary’s Aaronide genealogy appears to be one of the distinctive elements of the qur’anic accounts vis-à-vis the similar accounts in Christian canonical and apocryphal sources. See Michael Marx, “Glimpses,” 540f. Marx believes that the absence of Moses from such associations is equally meaningful: “the intention appears to be to revive memories of the Temple tradition founded by Aaron rather than to recall memories of the Mosaic covenant” (*ibid.*, 547). See also Gabriel Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, 144-7.

receives these prerogatives at a young age emphasizes their prophetic character and divine origin. His father, on the other hand, is a mature, public official with priestly duties which cannot be laid on the shoulders of a child, no matter how divinely gifted. The prophetic image of Jesus is even more pronounced than that of John. As his mother stays silent towards the questioning crowd, the infant Jesus lectures them from the cradle. He boldly asserts his authority over the Mosaic scripture and declares himself a prophet. Jesus proceeds to inform the crowd of what God has demanded and commanded concerning him (vv. 31-33).⁶⁸ The culmination of this narrative in the outspoken, prophetic image of Jesus, and its contrast with the silent characters of Zachariah and Mary further corroborates the theory that the account is meant to signal the status of Jesus as the bearer of ultimate authority over Israelites.

IV. *Al-injil*

The discussion of Jesus so far has examined his qur'anic association with the terms *al-bayyināt*, *al-ḥikmah*, and *al-kitāb*. The fourth term to examine is *al-injil*, which reflects the Greek word *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον), lit. "good news."⁶⁹ While *euangelion* was used initially in

⁶⁸ The fact that Jesus speaks about himself in the first person thus sets him apart from John, who is spoken of and described, but not given a voice of his own. The sūra therefore accords a clear advantage to Jesus over John, contrary to Michael Marx's assertion that the sūra "does not distinguish Jesus as being in any way superior to John" ("Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'ān," 535).

⁶⁹ There has been much debate about the derivation of the Arabic *injil*. According to Nöldeke, this term likely reproduces the Ethiopic *wangēl*. See the references in Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 71f.

reference to the central message of Christ and his followers—the arrival of the kingdom of God, and the redemption of mankind through Jesus—in time it also came to refer to a particular genre of Christian writings, namely, the accounts of Jesus’ life, the Gospels. Even though the Christian tradition does not attribute any of these written accounts to Jesus himself, the Qur’an appears to hold that Jesus received “the Gospel” (*al-injīl*) from God. Whether the qur’anic *al-injīl* refers to the core teachings of Jesus later included in the Gospels or to an actual book promulgated by Jesus is subject to debate. What is of foremost interest in the present context is not the precise meaning of *al-injīl* in the Qur’an but its relationship with the other terms associated with the mission of Jesus. In particular, the key question is whether the Qur’an considers *al-injīl* to be a *kitāb*.

Sūrat al-Ḥadīd (57):26-7. This is one of only two qur’anic passages that mention God’s bestowal of *al-injīl* to Jesus.

ولقد ارسلنا نوحا وابراهيم وجعلنا في ذريتهما النبوه والكتب فمنهم مهند وكثير منهم فسقون ﴿٥٧﴾ ثم قفينا على اثرهم
 برسلا قفينا بعيسى ابن مريم واتينه الانجيل وجعلنا في قلوب الذين اتبعوه رافه ورحمه ورهبانيه ابتدعوها ... فاتينا
 الذين امنوا منهم اجرهم وكثير منهم فسقون

And indeed We sent Noah and Abraham, and established *al-nubuwwah* and *al-kitāb* among their progeny. Some of them are guided, while many of them are iniquitous ﴿٥٧﴾ Then We caused Our messengers to follow in their footsteps, and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and We gave him *al-injīl*, and We placed in the hearts of his followers kindness and mercy, and monasticism they invented ... so We gave those of them who believed their reward, yet many of them are iniquitous.

While the first verse mentions the establishment of prophecy (*al-nubuwwah*) and the *kitāb* among the descendants of Noah and Abraham, the second verse refers to God's giving of *al-injil* to Jesus. The key point in need of clarification is the relation between *al-kitāb* and *al-injil*, for which two contrasting interpretations are possible. First, *al-kitāb* may refer to the Mosaic *kitāb*. In this scenario, the verse first refers to the giving of the Torah to the Children of Israel, who are descendants of Abraham and Noah. It then mentions the many messengers who appeared after Moses, finally highlighting the mission of Jesus—the last Israelite prophet—and his reception of *al-injil*. In this reading, *al-injil* is clearly separate from—and posterior to—the *kitāb*. A second possibility is to consider *al-kitāb* as a generic noun or perhaps the heavenly source of scriptures. Based on this interpretation, v. 27 would *exemplify* (not complement) the statement made in v. 26. In other words, God gave the descendants of Noah and Abraham the gifts of prophecy (*al-nubuwwah*) and scripture (*al-kitāb*). *Specifically*, He sent many messengers to them, and also sent Jesus, giving him *al-injil*. In this reading, *al-injil* is a manifestation of the *kitāb*, not separate from it.

There are two strong reasons for favoring the first interpretation, namely, the idea that *al-kitāb* refers to the Torah. First, consideration of a parallel passage, the already examined Q 2:87, lends strong support to this reading: “And indeed We gave Moses *al-kitāb*, and caused Our messengers to follow after him; and We gave Jesus, son of Mary, the clear proofs (*al-bayyināt*),

and aided him with the Holy Spirit.” Notwithstanding a number of differences between this verse and Q 57:26-7, these two texts share striking similarities in terminology and in presenting a tripartite vision of prophetic history. They both speak of *al-kitāb*, then use the verb *qaffaynā* (“We caused to follow”) in reference to God’s messengers, and finally mention the ministry of Jesus. Given their close resemblance, it is reasonable to interpret them in light of each other. The key takeaway from a comparative analysis is that the giving of *al-kitāb* to the descendants of Noah and Abraham in Q 57:26 corresponds to the revelation of the *kitāb* to Moses in Q 2:87. Therefore, the missions of the anonymous messengers and Jesus, who came after the initial phase, is clearly separate from the bestowal of *al-kitāb*. As a result, *al-injīl* should be understood as distinct from and later than the revelation of *al-kitāb*.

This comparative analysis also allows identifying more precisely the subjects of Q 57:26. Given that Q 2.87 is clearly about the Children of Israel, it is likely that Q 57:26 is also primarily concerned with the Israelites. To be sure, the descendants of Noah and Abraham encompassed other, non-Israelite communities. Moreover, prophethood does not seem to have been exclusive to Abraham’s descendants: “Indeed We communicated [revelations] to you, as We communicated [revelations] to Noah *and the prophets after him*, and We communicated [revelations] to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac” (Q 4:163). This verse implies that there were prophets between Noah and Abraham, a potential reference to figures such as Hūd and Šālīḥ

(11:50-68; 25:37-8). However, while God raised prophets among Noah’s non-Abrahamic descendants, the Qur’an indicates that the gift of prophecy was given in abundance only to the family of Abraham, specifically, to the Israelite branch of this family.⁷⁰ As for *al-kitāb*, the Qur’an never refers to its revelation before Muhammad to a group other than the Children of Israel. Thus, it is reasonable to consider the Israelites as the main subjects of Q 57:26.

Some textual cues in Q 57:26-7 itself also support the view that *al-injīl* is to be distinguished from *al-kitāb*. Specifically, the passage suggests that there is a significant temporal gap between the bestowal of *al-nubuwwah* and *al-kitāb* on the one hand and the coming of Jesus on the other. The opening phrase of v. 27 is particularly clear in this regard: “then (*thumma*) We caused our messengers to follow in their footsteps (*āthārihim*).” Importantly, the pronoun “their” is plural in form, not dual. Thus, it probably refers not to Noah and Abraham but to their descendants. By using the conjunction *thumma* (“then”) and the verb *qaffaynā* (“cause to follow”), the passage suggests that the anonymous messengers were sent to the descendants of Noah and Abraham—the Children of Israel—*after* the latter had

⁷⁰ Another cue that suggests this verse refers to Israelites is its final phrase, which comments that many of the descendants of Noah and Abraham are unrighteous (*kathīrun minhum fāsiqūn*). The same exact phrase is used earlier in the sūra in relation to “those who were given the *kitāb* before” (v. 16). Outside of this sūra, similar expressions (using the term *fāsiqūn* and a noun from the root *k-th-r*) are applied four times to the *ahl al-kitāb* (3:110, 5:49, 5:59, 5:81), once to the pagans (Q 9:8), and once to the iniquitous inhabitants of other lands (*ahl al-qurā*) destroyed through divine punishment (7:102).

already received *al-nubuwwah* and *al-kitāb*. Put differently, the gifts of *al-nubuwwah* and *al-kitāb* were already realized before the coming of these messengers.⁷¹ While the post-Mosaic messengers represent a later stage than the bestowal of *al-nubuwwah* and *al-kitāb* to the Israelites, the mission of Jesus is itself subsequent to these anonymous messengers. Thus, the text strongly implies that *al-injīl* represents a scripture later than and separate from the Mosaic *kitāb*.

Sūrat al-Māʿida (5):45-7. This is the second and only other qurʿanic passage to mention the giving of *al-injīl* to Jesus. Because it is longer than the previous text and more central to dominant scholarly understandings of qurʿanic scripturology, it is necessary to examine this passage in greater detail:

انا انزلنا التوراه فيها هدى ونور يحكم بها النبيون الذين اسلموا للذين هادوا والربنيون والاحبار بما استحفظوا من كتب الله وكانوا عليه شهدا ... ومن لم يحكم بما انزل الله فاولئك هم الكفرون () وكتبنا عليهم فيها ان النفس بالنفس والعين بالعين والانف بالانف والاذن بالاذن والسن بالسن والجروح قصاص ... ومن لم يحكم بما انزل الله فاولئك هم الظلمون () وقفينا على اثرهم بعيسى ابن مريم مصدقا لما بين يديه من التوراه واتيناه الانجيل فيه هدى ونور ومصدقا لما بين يديه من التوراه وهدى وموعظه للمتقين

Indeed We sent down *al-tawrah*, containing guidance and light. By it the prophets who submitted [to God] gave judgment for the Jews, as likewise the rabbis and scholars, according to that with which they were entrusted from the *kitāb* of God and to which

⁷¹ One might object that *al-nubuwwah* cannot be considered as sufficiently realized within the Israelites before the coming of post-Mosaic messengers. But the Qurʿan seems to take a different position. For instance, in Q 5:20 Moses says the following to the Israelites: “remember God’s blessings on you, when He established among you the prophets (*jaʿala fikum anbiyāʾ*),” using the same verb (*jaʿala*) that appears in Q 57:26. The statement of Moses indicates that God had raised (many?) prophets among Israelites already before him. Perhaps the idea behind this assertion is that the patriarchs were prophets—reflected in the fact that they received revelations from God (Q 2:136, 3:84, 4:163). Thus, although many prophets undoubtedly post-dated Moses, it is possible to say that by the end of his mission both *al-nubuwwah* and *al-kitāb* were established among Israelites.

they were witnesses ... those who do not judge by what God has sent down, they are the unbelievers ﴿ And We prescribed for them in [*al-tawrāh*]: ‘A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and retribution for wounds ... those who do not judge by what God has sent down, they are the iniquitous ﴿ And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming *al-tawrāh* before him. And We gave him *al-injīl*, containing guidance and light, and confirming *al-tawrāh* before it, and a guidance and admonition for those mindful [of God].

This passage begins by reference to *al-tawrāh*, a term that is absent from Q 57:26-7 (and 2:87).

Scholars usually understand *al-tawrāh* as designating the Torah proper, i.e. the Pentateuch, although it is likely that in some qur’anic passages *al-tawrāh* denotes Jewish scriptures as a whole.⁷² The emphasis of the verse on the divine origin of the Torah reflects the wider context of the *sūra*, which insists on the importance of observing the revealed laws of God. The opening verse continues by pointing out the reliance of Israelite prophets and scholars on the Torah: “by it the prophets who submitted [to God] gave judgment for the Jews, as likewise

⁷² For more on this point, see below.

[did] the rabbis and scholars.”⁷³ Presumably, this is meant to establish that contemporary Jewish religious authorities must continue to defer to the Torah in their judgments.⁷⁴

Then follows an ambiguous dependent clause that seems to pertain to Jewish scholars and rabbis, although it may also apply to the aforementioned prophets: The text suggests that Jewish authorities passed judgment “according to that with which they were entrusted (*bi-mā stuḥfiḏū*) from the *kitāb* of God and to which they were witnesses.” If the “*kitāb* of God” denotes the Torah, then perhaps this phrase is meant to explain why Jewish scholars (and prophets) ruled on the basis of the Mosaic scripture: God had entrusted the Torah to them and had taken them as witnesses to its divine origin, so they were bound to uphold its teachings.

Alternatively, if we understand *al-tawrāh* broadly as encompassing all Jewish scriptures, perhaps “the *kitāb* of God” refers specifically to the Pentateuch, the Mosaic *kitāb*. In this scenario, the text depicts the Pentateuch as the foremost source of Jewish law. Jewish

⁷³ The non-ʿUthmānic lower text of the Ṣanʿāʾ palimpsest attests to an interesting variant of this phrase. Instead of having the Prophets judge *for* the Jews, it states that the Prophets (using *al-anbiyāʾ* instead of *al-nabiyyūn*) judge according to *al-tawrāh*, and then adds that the Jews also judge according to *al-tawrāh*. Thus, instead of *li-lladhīna hādū* (“for the Jews”) in the ʿUthmānic text, Ṣanʿāʾ 1 has *wa-lladhīna hādū yaḥkumūna bi-mā nazzala llāhu fihā* (“and the Jews judge by that which God sent down therein”). Given that the verse also mentions that Jewish scholars and rabbis judge according to the Torah, the Ṣanʿāʾ 1 text seems to introduce a redundancy by having the Jews themselves also judge, in addition to their Prophets, scholars, and rabbis. See Sadeghi and Goudarzi, “Ṣanʿāʾ 1 and the Origins of the Qurʾān,” 49.

⁷⁴ The reference to the prophets (*al-nabiyyūn*), rabbis (*al-rabbāniyyūn*), and scholars (*al-aḥbār*) is reminiscent of Matthew 23:34, where Jesus criticizes Israelites for their persecution of “prophets and wise men and scribes” (*προφήτας και σοφούς και γραμματεῖς*). The corresponding passage in Luke 11:49 refers to “prophets and apostles” (*προφήτας και ἀποστόλους*).

authorities turned to their scriptural canon to pass judgment, the text tells us, primarily on account of the presence of the Pentateuch—the Law *par excellence*—in this canon. Finally, “the *kitāb* of God” might designate the heavenly source of the Torah. Thus, “that with which they were entrusted from the *kitāb* of God” may be a description of the Torah meant to emphasize its divine origin. Under this scenario, the phrase in question adds information about the Torah but not about Jewish religious authorities or their relation to the Torah. It merely points out that the Torah was that portion of the heavenly book that was entrusted to Jewish prophets, scholars, and rabbis.⁷⁵ Whatever the precise denotations of *al-tawrāh* and “the *kitāb* of God,” the verse closes by encouraging commitment to God’s revealed words: “Those who do not judge by what God has sent down, they are the unbelievers.”

The next verse enumerates some of the contents of the Torah, specifically the laws of retaliation (the so-called *lex talionis*), suggesting that the *sūra* addresses a controversy that

⁷⁵ A fourth, less likely possibility is to see in the phrase a hint that only portions of the Torah have survived in the post-prophetic age of the Israelites. This interpretation is based on understanding استحفظوا not as the passive *istuhfiẓū* with the meaning of being entrusted, but as the active *istahfazū* signifying “had preserved.” Adopting the active voice results in the following translation: “according to that which they had preserved from the *kitāb* of God and [to which they] were witnesses.” Israelite prophets had access to the entire Torah and ruled accordingly, but Jewish scholars have only portions of the holy book available to them. Thus, they rule according to such portions as they have managed to preserve and known to be of divine origin. Among modern scholars, Rudi Paret mentions this possibility (*Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, 122f). However, this option is not likely because the Qur’an does not claim elsewhere that the Torah has survived partially. Indeed, the logic of some Qur’anic passages seems to depend on the Torah’s full preservation (e.g. Q 3:93).

involved these regulations.⁷⁶ The following verse discusses the role of Jesus: “And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps.” The pronoun “their” seems to refer to the prophets (and perhaps also rabbis and scholars), mentioned in v. 44, who judged among the Jews according to the Torah. By describing Jesus as having come “in their footsteps,” the passage signals the temporal and structural separation of the messianic mission from the initial phase of Israelite history. Despite this separation, the text immediately makes clear that Jesus was committed to the Torah by describing him as “confirming the Torah before him.” Then, the text refers to God’s giving of *al-injīl* to Jesus, describing it as “containing guidance and light,” the exact same expression used in relation to the Torah in v. 44. Finally, the verse adds that like Jesus, *al-injīl* was also “confirming the Torah before it.”

The crucial point that emerges from the foregoing discussion is that the term *kitāb* appears in the context of a discussion of *al-tawrah* but is absent from the subsequent discussion of Jesus and his *al-injīl*. Whether one understands “the *kitāb* of God” in v. 44 to be the Torah or its heavenly source, it is clear that the Torah is related to the divine *kitāb*. However, the passage does not provide any indication that *al-injīl* is related to this *kitāb* as well. The absence of association between *kitāb* on the one hand and Jesus or *al-injīl* on the other is made even

⁷⁶ Thus, despite reports in the exegetical tradition, it does not seem likely that this passage involves a case of adultery and the associated punishment of stoning. For further discussion of this issue, see the final chapter.

more conspicuous by the following verse, which immediately uses the term *kitāb* in relation to Muhammad: “And We sent down to you the *kitāb* with the truth” (v. 48). By describing the Prophet’s revelation as *al-kitāb*, the passage establishes direct correspondence between Muhammad’s mission and the original phase of Israelite prophetic history: both involved the revelation of God’s *kitāb*. The text further consolidates this correspondence by describing the Prophet’s revelations as “confirming the *kitāb* before it.” Sandwiched between two occurrences of *kitāb* in relation to the Torah and the Prophet’s revelations, *al-injīl* stands out for *not* being associated with this term.

Both qur’anic passages that mention the giving of *al-injīl* to Jesus, therefore, also feature *al-kitāb* and strongly suggest that *al-injīl* is different from and posterior to *al-kitāb*. As noted previously, there are significant similarities between the first of these texts, Q 57:26-7, and Q 2:87-9. Indeed, the correspondence between Q 2:87-9 and the second text, Q 5:44-48, is even more pronounced. Both texts use the term *kitāb* in reference to the origins of Israelite prophetic history and separate this original moment from the mission of Jesus. Moreover, both texts proceed to use the term *kitāb* in relation to the mission of Muhammad. Q 5:48 describes his revelations as the *kitāb* that confirms “the *kitāb* before it,” while Q 2:89 similarly

characterizes the Prophet’s scripture as “a *kitāb* from God, confirming what is with them,” the pronoun referring to the previous recipients of the *kitāb*, namely, the Children of Israel.

The remarkable structural and terminological similarities between Q 2:87-9, 5:44-8, and 57:26-7 are evident in the following table:

Table 3.1 - Textual overlaps between Q 2:87-89, Q 5:44-48, and Q 57:26-27

Q 2:87-89	Indeed We gave Moses <i>al-kitāb</i>	and [We] caused Our messengers to follow (<i>qaffaynā</i>) after him	And We gave Jesus, son of Mary, <i>al-bayyināt</i>	there came to them a <i>kitāb</i> from God confirming what is with them
Q 5:44-48	We sent down <i>al-tawrah</i> ... that with which they were entrusted from the <i>kitāb</i> of God	by it the prophets who submitted [to God] gave judgment for the Jews	We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow (<i>qaffaynā</i>) in their footsteps ... and We gave him <i>al-injil</i>	We sent down to you the <i>kitāb</i> ... confirming the <i>kitāb</i> before it
Q 57:26-7	Indeed We sent Noah and Abraham, and established prophecy and <i>al-kitāb</i> among their progeny	Then We caused Our messengers to follow (<i>qaffaynā</i>) in their footsteps	We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow (<i>qaffaynā</i>), and We gave him <i>al-injil</i>	

By virtue of their significant family resemblances, these three passages seem to give expression to the same qur’anic vision of Israelite prophetic history—although each passage expresses this vision in a unique way by highlighting different aspects of this history. All three texts feature verbs in the first-person plural form with God as the subject, thereby suggesting divine control over the unfolding of history. An important similarity between the passages is their use of the verb *qaffaynā*, translated above as “We caused to follow.” In fact, these texts

are the only passages in the Qur'an to use the verb *qaffā*. Q 2:87 (Passage 1) employs this verb in reference to "Our messengers," Q 5:46 (Passage 2) in relation to "Jesus, son of Mary," and Q 57:27 (Passage 3) in reference to both "Our messengers" and "Jesus, son of Mary." Passages 1 and 3 use the term *rusul* ("messengers"), while passage 2 uses *al-nabiyyūn* ("prophets"), probably to denote the same group. Passages 2 and 3 use the phrase "in their footsteps" immediately after *qaffaynā*, while passage 1 utilizes "after him [Moses]" with a similar meaning and in the same place. Passages 1 and 2 refer to *al-kitāb*, while passage 3 uses "*al-tawrāh*" and then "the *kitāb* of God." All three texts mention "Jesus, son of Mary," and use the verb *ātaynā* ("We gave") in reference to what was given him by God: *al-bayyināt* in Passage 1, and *al-injīl* in Passages 2 and 3. Passages 1 and 3 begin with the phrase "and indeed" (*wa-laqad*). All three passages deliver similar verdicts on people who reject divine guidance: Passage 1 is followed by this statement: "little do they believe" (2:88); Passage 2 by "many of the people are unrighteous (*la-fāsiqūn*)" (5:49; cf. v 5:47); and Passage 3 similarly by "many of them are unrighteous (*fāsiqūn*)" (57:27).

Considering the unmistakable similarities among these three passages, it appears that they are variant expressions of the same historical vision, which consists of three main stages: an initial revelation of *al-kitāb* or *al-tawrāh*, a subsequent phase of the activity of messengers or prophets who are left anonymous, and a third stage heralded by the ministry of Jesus.

Admittedly, there are important differences among these texts, such as the fact that passage 1 mentions Moses specifically as the recipient of *al-kitāb*, whereas passages 2 and 3 do not name Moses at all. However, the three texts are completely consistent. Their differences may be due to their contrasting contexts or potential conceptual and terminological developments in the Qur'an—or perhaps a combination of both. For our purposes, the crucial fact is that these texts suggest that *al-injīl* is distinct from and subsequent to *al-kitāb*. Indeed, they imply that *al-kitāb* and *al-injīl* straddle Israelite prophetic history, the former standing at the origins of this tradition and the latter representing its terminal stage. The comparative analysis of these passages corroborates the theory *kitāb* is a label for the Torah and the Qur'an but not for the Gospel.

V. *Al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah wa-l-tawrāh wa-l-injīl*

Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3):48; Sūrat al-Mā'idah (5):110. While Q 5:46 and 57:27 mention God's "giving" of *al-injīl* to Jesus (using the verb *ātā*), Q 3:48 and 5:110 speak of God's "teaching" him *al-injīl* (employing *ʿallama*). The first text (3:48) appears in the account of the Annunciation, when the angels inform Mary that God will give her a son and "teach him *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* and *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*." The second passage (5:110) is part of God's address to Jesus, apparently after he has been taken up to heaven. Counting the many divine blessings showered upon him, God bids Jesus to remember "when I taught you *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* and

al-tawrāh and *al-injīl*.” Among the four items mentioned in these two verses, the last two are proper nouns, and as such seem easier to identify. Scholars usually take *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* to refer respectively to the Torah and the Gospel. However, the terms *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* seem somewhat elusive. What do they signify?

The meaning of *al-tawrāh*

If *al-kitāb* refers to a scripture, then the two-*kitāb* hypothesis suggests that it should be identified with the Torah. This identification seems to create a redundancy, however, because both verses mention the term *al-tawrāh* as well. The solution to this problem may lie in reevaluating the meaning of *al-tawrāh*. While scholars of the Qur’an commonly understand *al-tawrāh* to refer to the Mosaic Torah, i.e. the Pentateuch, the Qur’an in fact never attributes *al-tawrāh* to Moses.⁷⁷ This significant fact is often overlooked in Qur’anic scholarship.⁷⁸ The noun *al-tawrāh*, which occurs 18 times in the Qur’an, appears in relation to the *ahl al-kitāb*, the Jews, and Jesus—but never in reference to Moses, even though at 136 times he is the most

⁷⁷ For instance, Abraham Geiger translates *al-tawrāh* as “das Gesetz” and believes that in the Qur’an the Prophet “hierunter bloss den Pentateuch verstanden haben will” (*Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, pp. 44-45). Similarly, Henri Michaud glosses *al-tawrāh* as “la Loi de Moïse” (*Jésus selon le Coran*, 34, fn. 4). See also Walid Saleh, “The Psalms in the Qur’an and in the Islamic Religious Imagination,” 285. According to Jane D. McAuliffe, *al-tawrāh* denotes “[t]he first five books of the Hebrew Bible, traditionally ascribed to Moses” (*The Qur’ān*, 32, n. 2).

⁷⁸ Daniel Madigan notes the lack of association between Moses and *al-tawrāh*, but he continues to interpret *al-tawrāh* as a proper name for the Pentateuch, thereby asserting that “the disjunction between [Moses’s] name and the revelation he received is perplexing” (*The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*, 132, fn. 26). Richard Bell also makes reference to this point: see note 80 below.

frequently-mentioned person in the Qur'an. Conversely, while fourteen passages point out the giving of *al-kitāb* to Moses,⁷⁹ no passage describes him as the recipient of *al-tawrāh*. Given its close association with *ahl al-kitāb*, the Jews, and Jesus, the qur'anic *al-tawrāh* may refer primarily to Jewish scriptures as a whole, a suggestion already made by several scholars.⁸⁰

Assigning a broad signification to the term *al-tawrāh* would by no means be a radical move on the Qur'an's part, for the Jewish tradition itself uses the corresponding Hebrew term *tōrā* (and the cognate Aramaic *oraytā*) in a similar sense. In this context, it is worth examining the different meanings of the word *tōrā* in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish literature. In a basic sense, *tōrā* can be translated as "instruction," "teaching," "law," or the "direction" provided regarding a certain subject.⁸¹ For example, Leviticus 6:2 speaks of "the *tōrā* of the burnt offering" when stipulating how the priests should handle offerings wholly burnt on the

⁷⁹ Q 2:53, 2:87, 6:91, 6:154, 11:17, 11:110, 17:2, 23:49, 25:35, 28:43, 32:23, 41:45, 46:12, 37:117.

⁸⁰ For example, William Muir asserts that "the 'Tourât,' spoken of in the Corân, is the entire Old Testament;—the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets" (*The Testimony*, 65), although elsewhere he suggests that *al-tawrāh* sometimes signifies "only the Pentateuch" (*The Testimony*, 101). Similarly, Joseph Horowitz states that "perhaps, as the Jews themselves sometimes do, [Muhammad] meant by Tawrāt the whole of their holy scripture" ("Tawrāt," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed.). (Interestingly, however, this view is not found in Horowitz's *Koranische Untersuchungen*. See especially 71f.) See also Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, 142; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tawrāt," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed; and Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Return to the Scriptures," 332. According to Richard Bell, the lack of association in the Qur'an between Moses and *al-tawrāh* "may be mere accident, or it may be that the Torah, the distinctive Jewish Scripture, was regarded as associated with the differences which had arisen regarding the [Mosaic] Book" (*Introduction to the Qur'an*, 152).

⁸¹ *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 435f.

altar.⁸² While *tōrā* can thus serve as a common noun, it came in particular to refer to the teaching *par excellence*, the revelations of Moses, consisting of the laws he received on tablets on Mount Sinai as well as on other occasions during his prophetic career (e.g. Num 27:1-11). Among the books of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy in particular uses the definite *ha-tōrā* to refer to the Mosaic teachings laid out in Deuteronomy (e.g. 1:5, 4:44, 33:4) as well as to the written record of these teachings (e.g. 28:58, 31:9).⁸³ When the idea developed that the entire Pentateuch was disseminated by Moses, the Pentateuch came to be known as “the Torah.”⁸⁴

The strong association between the term *tōrā* and the Pentateuch has endured for more than two millennia until the present day. The towering figure of Moses, the prophet whom “the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10), ensured that his revelations were distinguished from those of later Israelite prophets. The scriptural canon of the Hebrew Bible was thus often divided between the Torah of Moses—the Pentateuch—and the rest of the sacred books,

⁸² In fact, because of the preponderance of cultic teachings in Leviticus, it is sometimes called “the *tōrā* of the priests” (e.g. Mishnah Megillah 3:5; cited in Jacob Neusner, *Torah: From scroll to symbol*, 22).

⁸³ There is much debate as to whether in some passages of Deuteronomy (such as 17:18) the term *tōrā* refers to the Deuteronomic Code, Deuteronomy, or a broader textual corpus. See Barnabas Lindars, “Torah in Deuteronomy.”

⁸⁴ In some passages of the late Biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah (e.g. Neh 8:1, 8:2, 9:3), it appears that “the Torah” may already designate the Pentateuch—although the matter is still debated among scholars (Timothy Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 62-73). A less ambiguous use of “the Torah” in the sense of the Pentateuch is found in the prologue to the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (Neusner, *Torah: From scroll to symbol*, 10).

designated variously as “the prophets,” “the prophets and the writings,” etc.⁸⁵ However, even though the *tōrā* often referred only to the teachings promulgated by Moses, sometimes it was given a broader denotation, referring to the entirety of Israelite prophetic teachings. This usage already appears in some later books of the Hebrew Bible. For example, in 2 Kings 17:13 God speaks to the Israelites of “all the *tōrā* which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants, the prophets.”⁸⁶ Here it is not only Moses in particular but the prophets in general who are conduits for God’s *tōrā*. This means, conversely, that the *tōrā* refers to prophetic teachings as a whole. In the same vein, some postbiblical writings use *tōrā* to designate the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁸⁷ In five New Testament passages, the Greek term *nomos*—which corresponds to the Hebrew *tōrā*—is used in reference to non-Pentateuchal passages, suggesting that it designates the Jewish scriptures as a whole.⁸⁸

Finally, Rabbinic literature provides us with a different expansion of the signification of *tōrā*. This expansion is related to the status of Mishnah in subsequent rabbinic writings.

Beginning especially with the Talmud of the Land of Israel, the Mishnah attained an

⁸⁵ See Timothy Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon*, 18.

⁸⁶ For further references, see Alex Jassen, *Meditating the Divine*, 39, n. 4.

⁸⁷ Jacob Neusner, *Torah: From scroll to symbol*, 10.

⁸⁸ The texts in question are John 10:34, 15:25, 12:34; Romans 3:10-19; and 1 Corinthians 14:21. See Willis Beecher, “*Torah*: A Word-study in the Old Testament,” 1.

authoritative status approaching that of the Torah.⁸⁹ In a broad sense, therefore, *tōrā* began to apply not only to Scripture but also to Mishnah and subsequently to other authoritative Rabbinic writings, such as the Tosefta and the Talmuds.⁹⁰ This semantic expansion is reflected in the doctrine of the dual Torah: when God sent down Scripture—described in many Rabbinic works as the Written Torah (*tōrā she-bi-khtav*, lit. “the Torah that is in the book”)—to Moses at Mount Sinai, He simultaneously gave Moses the Oral Torah (*tōrā she-be-‘al pe*, lit. “the Torah that is in the mouth”)—encompassing authoritative teachings of the Rabbis. In this view, Rabbinic teachings were handed down orally from Moses, “our Rabbi,” to successive generations of Rabbis, who eventually codified it in the landmark works of formative Judaism, namely, the Mishnah and its associated compilations. In this conception, the Torah encompasses the entirety of Jewish authoritative writings.⁹¹

Considering the variety of meanings attached to the term *tōrā*, the idea that the Qur’anic *al-tawrāh* refers to the Pentateuch cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, because the

⁸⁹ Neusner, *Torah*, 67ff.

⁹⁰ For example, *Leviticus Rabbah* 15:2 classifies the words of the Torah into the categories of “Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, law, and lore” (Neusner, *Torah*, 110).

⁹¹ For a brief overview of this topic, see Steven Fraade, “Concepts of Scripture in Rabbinic Judaism: Oral Torah and Written Torah.” Hartwig Hirschfeld projects this expansive understanding of *tōrā* into the Qur’an, claiming that “[d]er Begriff ‘Tôrâ’ ist im Korân bekanntlich möglichst weit zu fassen, so dass auch Mišnâh, Talmûd, Midrâsch und Gebetbuch darunter zu verstehen sind” (*Beiträge zur Erklärung*, 65).

Qur'an never attributes *al-tawrāh* to Moses, and since the term is often associated with the Children of Israel and Jesus, it is perfectly plausible that at least in some passages *al-tawrāh* may refer to the entirety of Israelite prophetic teachings. If we accept this interpretation for Q 3:48 and 5:110, their reference to *al-kitāb* and *al-tawrāh* at the same time means that God taught Jesus the revelations of Moses as well as those of all other Israelite prophets. In this reading, the appearance of *al-kitāb* in the opening position is for the purpose of emphasis: *al-tawrāh* already includes the Mosaic *kitāb*, but the verse singles out this *kitāb* in order to highlight its privileged status in the revealed heritage of Israelites.⁹² As a whole, then, the verse refers to (1) the Pentateuch, (2) the entirety of Israelite prophetic revelations, and finally (3) the Gospel. This three-fold division of revelations recalls the framing of Israelite prophetic history in the just-examined Q 2:87: "We gave Moses *al-kitāb*, and after him sent succeeding messengers, and We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear signs" (cf. Q 57:26-7). Israelite salvation history is bracketed by the imposing figures of Moses and Jesus, between whom God sent many messengers to the Israelites. This tri-partite conception of prophetic history appears to undergird the two verses under discussion, which portray Jesus as the *summa* of this prophetic

⁹² This interpretation finds support in the wording of Q 3:50, which mentions *al-tawrāh* as the only object of Jesus's confirmation, omitting reference to *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* that have just been mentioned alongside *al-tawrāh* in Q 3:48,

tradition: God taught him the revelations of Moses and all other Israelite prophets, in addition giving him the Gospel as a unique revelation of his own.

The meaning of *al-ḥikmah*

So far, the discussion has accounted for the terms *al-kitāb*, *al-tawrāh*, and *al-injīl* in Q 3:48 and 5:110, but these verses also mention that God taught *al-ḥikmah* to Jesus. While the Qur'an's conception of *al-ḥikmah* is not entirely clear, this term does not seem to denote a body of knowledge additional to that contained in the *kitāb*. This is suggested by the two occasions where the Qur'an specifically designates some teachings as *ḥikmah*. In the first instance, accounts of past nations are described as *ḥikmah* (Q 54:4-5). In the second case, the qur'anic text lays out a set of fundamental teachings similar to the Ten Commandments, describing these teachings as "the *ḥikmah* that your Lord has communicated to you" (Q 17:22-39).⁹³ Both historical and legal teachings, however, are presented elsewhere as belonging to the Prophet's *kitāb*. *Sūrat Maryam*, for example, suggests that its reflections on prophetic history are part of the *kitāb* being sent down to Muhammad (e.g. Q 19:16). Similarly, the other qur'anic version of the Decalogue is followed by a verse that describes the Prophet's revelations as a *kitāb*,

⁹³ A comparable understanding of *al-ḥikmah* seems reflected in Q 31:12-19, where Luqmān—described as having received *al-ḥikmah* from God—imparts a similar set of teachings to his son.

implying that such laws are part of his *kitāb* (6:151-155).⁹⁴ Therefore, qur'anic (*al-*)*ḥikmah* does not seem to signify information or instructions beyond those included in the *kitāb*.⁹⁵

Another pertinent fact for the meaning of *al-ḥikmah* is that the Qur'an uses the adjective *ḥakīm* four times in relation to the Prophet's revelations, twice in the construct *al-kitāb al-ḥakīm* (Q 10:1, 31:2), once as *al-qur'ān al-ḥakīm* (36:2), and once as *al-dhikr al-ḥakīm* (3:58). The description of the Prophet's *kitāb* as *ḥakīm*, i.e. characterized by *ḥikmah*, further indicates that *al-ḥikmah* does not denote something separate from this *kitāb*. Rather, *al-ḥikmah* seems to signify a specific aspect of its teachings, highlighting the fact that this *kitāb* is a source of wisdom. If this is the case, then *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* is effectively synonymous with *al-kitāb*, although it emphasizes the wisdom imparted through the *kitāb*.⁹⁶ Indeed, the fact that elsewhere the Qur'an attributes *al-ḥikmah* to a relatively minor figure such as Luqmān (Q 31:12) seems to suggest that *al-ḥikmah* characterizes a more limited body of divine instruction than is included in *al-kitāb*.

⁹⁴ For an analysis of these and other lists of commandments, see Joseph Lowry, "When Less is More," 30-37. See also Angelika Neuwirth, "A Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an? Revisiting Qur'anic Versions of the Decalogue in the Context of Pagan Arab Late Antiquity."

⁹⁵ The one difference between Q 17:22-39 and 6:151-5 is that the former provides the rationale behind its commandments and is therefore more elaborate.

⁹⁶ Daniel Madigan arrives at a similar conclusion in his discussion of *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*, suggesting that this phrase is probably a hendiadys and therefore synonymous with *al-kitāb al-ḥakīm* (*The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 94).

The attribution of *al-ḥikmah* to Jesus in Q 3:48 and 5:110 thus likely represents an emphatic addition, not a substantive one, to what is already signified by *al-kitāb*, *al-tawrāh*, and *al-injīl*. This interpretation finds support in the immediate contexts of Q 3:48 and 5:110, as well as in the six qur'anic passages that juxtapose *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* in reference to Muhammad's revelations, because these texts tend to emphasize God's beneficence towards the recipients of divine revelation:

A) Q 3:48. In this account of the Annunciation, the angel informs Mary that she will bear a son, and underlines God's special interest in this child by noting that He will teach him *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah wa-l-tawrāh wa-l-injīl*.

B) Q 5:110. Here God addresses Jesus and expressly reminds him of His blessing (*ni'matī*) to Jesus, partly exemplified in His teaching him *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah wa-l-tawrāh wa-l-injīl*.

C) Q 4:113. This verse reminds the Prophet that "God sent down to you *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*, and taught you what you did not know," adding that God's bounty (*faḍl*) towards him has been "great" (*ʿaẓīman*).

D) Q 2:128-9. This passage recounts the prayer of Abraham and Ishmael for a submitting community (*ummatan muslimatan*) among their progeny, presumably a reference to Muhammad's followers. Wishing divine favors for their descendants, Abraham and

Ishmael ask God to send to this future community “a messenger from among themselves who shall recite to them Your signs (*āyāt*) and teach them *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* and purify them.”

E) Q 2:151. Preceded by reference to God’s blessing (*ni‘mah*) on the Prophet’s followers, this verse reminds them that God has sent down to them “a messenger from among yourselves who recites to you Our signs and purifies you and teaches you *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*.” Similar to Q 4:113 (“C” above), this verse adds that God thereby “taught you what you did not know.” The following verse then asks the Prophet’s followers to be grateful towards God.

F) Q 2:231. After stipulating some guidelines for divorce, this verse advises the believers to heed these guidelines earnestly and to “remember God’s blessing (*ni‘mah*) to you and *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* that He has sent down to you.”

G) Q 3:164. Describing the Prophet’s mission in nearly identical terms to Q 2:129 and 2:151 (“D” and “E” above), this verse notes that thereby God has been truly benevolent (*laqad manna*) towards the believers.

H) Q 62:2. This verse provides a similar characterization of the Prophet’s mission to Q 2:129, 2:151, and 3:164 (“D”, “E”, and “G” above), adding that prior to Muhammad’s coming his people were in “manifest error” (*dalālin mubīnin*). The text then notes that

“that is God’s bounty (*faḍl*), which He gives to whomever He so wills, and He is greatly bounteous (*dhū al-faḍl al-‘aẓīm*)” (v. 4).

Because these passages highlight the blessing (*ni‘mah*), bounty (*faḍl*), and benevolence (*mann*) of God, their inclusion of *al-ḥikmah* after *al-kitāb* seems to serve the purpose of emphasis. By featuring *al-kitāb* as well as *al-ḥikmah*, these texts enhance their rhetorical force and better impress the exceptional value of divine revelation upon their hearers and readers.⁹⁷

Q 3:48 and 5:110 in the commentaries

Muslim commentators provide a different set of explanations for the appearance of *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* in the two verses under consideration. The most commonly-cited explanation for *al-kitāb* is that it is a verbal noun denoting the ability to write, and as such effectively synonymous with *kitāba*.⁹⁸ In this view, God’s teaching of *al-kitāb* to Jesus means that He made Jesus literate through divine pedagogy, not human schooling. Several exegetical traditions historicize this understanding by narrating how Jesus, as a child, outperformed his teacher at school, causing the latter to say: “how can I teach someone who is more learned

⁹⁷ Apart from this emphatic function, the inclusion of *al-ḥikmah* in Q 3:48 and 5:110 may serve a formal purpose, creating a rhetorical balance between the pair *al-tawrāh-al-injīl* and *al-kitāb-al-ḥikmah*. Indeed, this rhetorical balance may hint at a semantic parallelism between the elements of these pairs. That is to say, perhaps the Qur’an envisages a similar type of relationship between *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah* on the one hand and *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* on the other, with the first elements being more extensive and foundational than the second ones.

⁹⁸ Given by Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Ṭabarī, al-Huwawārī, al-Ṭabarānī, Ibn ‘Aṭīyah, al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, the Jalālayn, Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī, and Ibn ‘Ajībāh.

than I?”⁹⁹ While this view strips *kitāb* of its usual revelatory significance, it imparts a certain progression to the four terms mentioned in the verse: Jesus first learned to read and write (*al-kitāb*), then obtained wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*), then gained understanding of the teachings of the major scripture(s) revealed before (*al-tawrāh*), and finally received a new scripture of his own, namely, the Gospel (*al-injīl*).¹⁰⁰

A second frequently cited explanation is the idea that *al-kitāb* is a generic noun denoting all scriptures.¹⁰¹ By stating that God taught Jesus *al-kitāb*, so this theory goes, the verse depicts Jesus as a totalizing prophetic figure who had mastered the entirety of revealed scriptures. Because this view implies that *al-kitāb* already signifies the Torah and the Gospel, among other books, the question arises as to why the verse also refers to *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*. The usual response of the commentators is that the qur’anic texts mention the Torah and the Gospel to signal their exceptionally important status among revealed books.¹⁰² A third

⁹⁹ See al-Suyūṭī (*ad* Q 3:48) for a relatively comprehensive enumeration of these traditions (Q 3:48).

¹⁰⁰ Al-Rāzī in particular emphasizes the progressive aspect of the mentioned quartet (*ad* Q 3:48). See also Sayyid Quṭb’s discussion of Q 5:110. In this understanding, *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* is somewhat reminiscent of the biblical phrase *koll-sēpher vā-ḥokhma* (כָּל־סֵפֶר וְחִכְמָה), which occurs in Daniel 1:17. Translated as “every aspect of literature and wisdom” (NRSV), this phrase designates the learning of Babylonians, specifically, their writings and scientific knowledge (cf. Daniel 1:4). Similar to Q 3:48 and 5:110, it is God who imparts this learning to Daniel and his compatriots.

¹⁰¹ See al-Ṭabarānī (*ad* 5:110), al-Zamakhsharī (*ad* Q 5:110), Abū al-Su‘ūd (*ad* Q 5:110), Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī (*ad* Q 5:110), and al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (*ad* Q 3:48).

¹⁰² See al-Bayḍāwī (*ad* Q 3:48), Abū al-Su‘ūd (*ad* Q 5:110), Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī (*ad* Q 5:110), and al-Ālūsī (*ad* Q 5:110).

understanding of *al-kitāb*, mentioned by a few commentators, is that it denotes a book other than the Torah and the Gospel. Given the status of Psalms as a major pre-qur'anic scripture, some exegetes suggest that *al-kitāb* may refer to Psalms, while others do not name a particular candidate as the potential referent of *al-kitāb*.¹⁰³

As for the term *al-ḥikmah*, many commentators gloss it as *al-sunnah* in the sense of paradigmatic, binding prophetic conduct.¹⁰⁴ Other interpretations variously explain *al-ḥikmah* as special insight in matters of religion, intellectual and legal knowledge, or refinement of character, all of which can be subsumed under the rubric “wisdom.”¹⁰⁵ However, some commentators understand *al-ḥikmah* specifically in relation to revealed books, for example as “knowledge of what is in these books,”¹⁰⁶ or perhaps as the wisdom and knowledge that exists

¹⁰³ According to al-Ṭūsī, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī considered the *kitāb* to refer to “a book other than the Torah and the Gospel, such as Psalms” (*ad* Q 3:48). Al-Ṭabrisī (*ad* Q 3:48) believes that this interpretation best fits the context. See also al-Ṭabarānī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Ālūsī (*ad* Q 3:48). Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah (*ad* Q 3:48) rejects this view as an unsupported assertion (*da‘wā lā ḥujjah ‘alayhā*).

¹⁰⁴ See for example al-Ṭabarī (*ad* Q 3:48), which attributes this view to Qatādah and Ibn Jurayj. Incidentally, when discussing Q 5:110, al-Ṭabarī provides a different explanation for *al-ḥikmah*, interpreting it as “understanding (*al-fahm*) of the meanings of the book that I [i.e. God] sent down to you, that is, the Gospel.” This inconsistency in explaining *al-ḥikmah* is also found in Muqātil’s commentary. While for Q 3:48 he interprets *al-ḥikmah* as “the lawful and the forbidden and the *sunnah*,” for Q 5:110 he glosses *al-ḥikmah* as “understanding and knowledge” (*al-fahm wa-l-‘ilm*). Some later commentators mention both of these possibilities. See for example al-Huwwārī (*ad* Q 3:48).

¹⁰⁵ Al-Ālūsī enumerates the common interpretations of *al-ḥikmah* (*ad* Q 3:48).

¹⁰⁶ Thus formulated by al-Ṭūsī (*ad* Q 5:110).

separately from these books but is also exemplified in each of them. In this latter view, *al-ḥikmah* can be considered a generic noun that designates all the revealed books insofar as they represent the wisdom that God's prophets impart to humans.¹⁰⁷

The fundamental problem with the above interpretations is that they do not take the formulaic character of *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* into account. This formulaic nature creates the expectation that, absent evidence to the contrary, the qur'anic text conveys a similar idea in all of its juxtapositions of *kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. Yet none of the interpretations of the commentators conform to this expectation. For example, an understanding of *al-kitāb* as “literacy” cannot be applied to Q 4:113 and 2:231, which speak of the “sending down” (*anzala*) of *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* on the Prophet and the believers. Neither can *al-kitāb* in these verses be a generic noun signifying all scriptures, because that would create the untenable reading that God has sent down all scriptures to the Prophet or to his followers. Finally, the idea that the *kitāb* taught to Jesus is a book different from the Torah and the Gospel is also implausible, because again it does not fit the other passages in which *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* appears.

With regard to *al-ḥikmah*, it may be defined in various ways as long as these definitions do not posit a sharp contrast between *al-ḥikmah* and *al-kitāb*. Those that do entail such a

¹⁰⁷ See for example al-Zamakhsharī (*ad* Q 5:110), al-Ṭabrisī (*ad* Q 5:110), Abū al-Su'ūd (*ad* Q 5:110), and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (*ad* Q 3:48).

contrast, like the view that *al-ḥikmah* refers to non-qur'anic prophetic *sunnah*, are not consistent with the qur'anic uses of the term. As mentioned before, the Qur'an attributes relatively concrete referents to *ḥikmah* only twice, once in relation to fundamental monotheistic teachings, and once in reference to historical narratives (17:39, 54:4-5). These passages, as well as descriptions of the Prophet's qur'anic revelations as *ḥakīm*, militate against the idea that *al-ḥikmah* signifies the non-qur'anic teachings that came to be designated as *al-sunnah* in Islamic learning.

Q 3:48 and 5:110 in modern scholarship

Perhaps because of puzzlement at the wording of these verses, many modern studies that reference Q 3:48 and 5:110 shy away from discussing the precise meanings of *al-kitāb* and *al-ḥikmah*. There are a few attempts at explaining these terms, however, which should be examined. One interpretation is provided by Joseph Horowitz, who suggests that in its various occurrences *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* is a reference to pre-Mosaic revelations.¹⁰⁸ While Horowitz does not spell out the reasoning behind this theory, he seems to base it on three facts: 1) *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* are mentioned *before* the Torah and the Gospel, so they must refer to revelations sent down before Moses; 2) Q 2:129 portrays Abraham and Ishmael as praying that God send a messenger to some of their descendants to “teach them *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*,”

¹⁰⁸ *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 71f.

suggesting that already Abraham and Ishmael were familiar with these revelations; and 3) Q 4:54 attributes *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* to the family of Abraham (Āl Ibrāhīm).¹⁰⁹ Horovitz also notes that this interpretation matches the Medinan Qur'an's emphasis on the identity of the Prophet's message with that of Abraham. If *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* refers to pre-Mosaic revelations, then together with *al-tawrah* and *al-injil* these terms constitute "a fourfold division of holy scriptures" (*eine Vierteilung der heiligen Bücher*).¹¹⁰

There are two problems with Horovitz's suggested interpretation. First, none of the Qur'anic passages featuring *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* state that Abraham himself had received these revelations. In Q 4:54, it is "the family of Abraham" i.e. his descendants, who are the recipients of this gift. Q 2:129 has the same implication, because it is a community from among the "progeny" (*dhurriyyah*) of Abraham and Ishmael who are going to receive *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*. Admittedly, the mere fact that Abraham and Ishmael are aware of the existence and significance of *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* might be taken to suggest that they have received it. However, this conclusion is not necessary, because their prophetic status means that they can know about a future occurrence, person, or object without having direct experience with the said entity in advance. After all, Abraham and Ishmael are both presented as predicting the

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Horovitz mixes the citations here, taking Q 4:113 as referring to the family of Abraham.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

Prophet's mission some two millennia before it happened. The second problem with Horovitz's hypothesis is that it finds no corroboration in other Qur'anic passages. Nowhere does the Qur'an depict Abraham, Ishmael, or other pre-Mosaic figures such as Jacob and Joseph as recipients of *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*.

A second scholar to hazard an interpretation of Q 3:48 and 5:110 is Sidney Griffith. Like Horovitz, Griffith seems to view the terms *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥikmah*, *al-tawrah*, and *al-injil* as referring to distinct scriptures. Thus, for example, Griffith states that Muslims collected the Qur'an in book form similar to "the Torah, the Psalms, and the Wisdom of the Jews, and the Gospel of the Christians (cf. III *Āl 'Imrān* 48 and V *al-Mā'dah* [sic] 110)."¹¹¹ Given his reference to Q 3:48 and 5:110, the four items mentioned by Griffith appear to refer to the four terms that appear in these verses. In particular, he seems to understand *al-kitāb* to designate "the Psalms"—a solution proposed by some Muslim commentators—while he translates *al-ḥikmah* as "the Wisdom of the Jews." Griffith does not elaborate whether this Wisdom corresponds to a specific book known from the biblical tradition or not. Elsewhere in the same monograph, Griffith suggests that the idea of a book called *al-ḥikmah* is present in post-Qur'anic Muslim sources as well. He makes this suggestion in reference to a passage from the *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* of Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), which suggests that the early Baṣran preacher Mālik b.

¹¹¹ *The Bible in Arabic*, 109.

Dīnār (d. ca. 130 AH) was familiar with “not only the Torah, but also *al-Ḥikma* and the Psalms of David.”¹¹² Commenting on this statement, Griffith states: “The Qur’ān mentions *al-Ḥikmah*, along with the Torah and the Gospel, as one of God’s scriptures,” again adducing both Q 3:48 and 5:110.¹¹³ Griffith thus seems to think that both the Qur’an and the later Islamic tradition support the idea of *al-ḥikmah* as designating a specific scripture, which he translates as “the Wisdom of the Jews.”

In my view, Griffith’s interpretations of the qur’anic and post-qur’anic data are problematic. With regard to the latter, the pertinent report in Abū Nu‘aym’s *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* attributes the following statement to Mālik b. Dīnār: “I read in *al-ḥikmah* that God despises every fat rabbi/scholar (*ḥabr*).”¹¹⁴ This statement should be familiar to the reader from the analysis of Q 6:91 in the previous chapter. In discussing that verse, many commentators quote a tradition that recounts an altercation between the Prophet and a Jewish scholar (*ḥabr/ḥibr*), namely, Mālik b. al-Ṣayf, who happened to be fat. According to this tradition, the Prophet said

¹¹² Griffith does not cite or discuss this passage directly, but relies on a study by Rami Khoury (“Quelques réflexions sur les citations de la Bible,” 275f; cited in Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 108).

¹¹³ Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 108, fn. 36. Similarly, Geoffrey Parrinder speaks of “the Wisdom, *ḥikmah*, which is given to prophets in the sense of a revealed book, but not identified with particular writings” (*Jesus in the Qur’ān*, 142). Unlike Griffith, however, Parrinder seems to think that *al-kitāb* in Q 3:48 and 5:110 refers to “the sacred books” in general (*ibid.*, 144).

¹¹⁴ “*qara’tu fi al-ḥikmah anna Allāh yubghid kull ḥabr samīn*” (*Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, 2:362). Mālik’s point is that asceticism and self-restraint are necessary for those who pursue religious learning.

the following to Mālik: “do you not find in *al-tawrāh* that God despises the fat Rabbi?”

Crucially, here this statement is attributed to *al-tawrāh*, probably meant to denote the Pentateuch or Jewish scriptures in general, whereas in Mālik b. Dīnār’s tradition the same statement is described as written in *al-ḥikmah*. It seems, therefore, that in Mālik’s tradition *al-ḥikmah* is used synonymously with *al-tawrāh*. This is corroborated by the fact that sometimes Mālik describes the source of a certain statement as “a certain part of *al-ḥikmah*” (*ba‘ḍ al-ḥikmah*) and other times as “a certain book” (*ba‘ḍ al-kutub*), suggesting that *al-ḥikmah* designates Jewish or Christian scriptures in general, not a specific book.¹¹⁵

Griffith’s interpretation of the qur’anic data is similarly implausible. The notion that *al-ḥikmah* refers to a particular book distinct from the Torah, Psalms, and the Gospel may not appear inconsistent with Q 3:48 and 5:110, but it cannot be applied to other instances of *al-ḥikmah* in the Qur’an, especially those that appear next to *al-kitāb*. This is evident in all the six instances where *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* appears in relation to the Prophet and his community, because it is not reasonable to suggest that God sent down “the Wisdom of the Jews” to the Prophet. Similarly, when the Qur’an states that God gave David “dominion and *al-ḥikmah*”

¹¹⁵ Mālik claims to have read the following in “a certain part of *al-ḥikmah*” (*ba‘ḍ al-ḥikmah*): “It is of no use to you—nor against you—to learn what you do not know, when you do not act on what you already know. For [the one doing] this is like a man who collected some firewood and made it into a bundle, then attempted to lift it up and failed, yet attached another [bundle] to it” (*ibid.*, 2:375). For another reference to *ba‘ḍ al-ḥikmah*, see *ibid.*, 2:378. For *ba‘ḍ al-kutub*, *ibid.*, 2:378.

(2:251), it does not seem likely that *al-ḥikmah* refers to a specific scripture different from the Torah and Psalms. In sum, neither the Qur'an nor the later source cited by Griffith suggest that *al-ḥikmah* is the title of a certain book in the Judeo-Christian scriptural canon.

The third and final view to consider appears in Rudi Paret's comments on Q 3:48.¹¹⁶ Paret first refers to Horowitz's discussion of this verse, but he is not convinced that *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* refers to a specific set of scriptures or revelations. Paret believes that one should not posit too sharp a distinction between *al-kitāb* on the one hand and *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* on the other. Translating *al-kitāb* as "die Schrift," Paret asserts that the terms *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* are meant to delineate the contents of *al-kitāb*. While he does not elaborate what "die Schrift" exactly means, two possibilities seem likely. First, "die Schrift" may denote scripture as such, not a specific book. If so, then by referring to the Torah and the Gospel, the verse clarifies the meaning of God teaching scripture (*al-kitāb*) to Jesus. In other words, God taught Jesus scripture, namely, the Torah and the Gospel.¹¹⁷ This interpretation of *al-kitāb* (and its relation to *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*) is effectively the same as taking it to be a generic noun, a view found in the Islamic exegetical tradition and discounted above. The second possible interpretation for "die Schrift" is that it signifies the so-called heavenly book, which is often viewed in modern

¹¹⁶ *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, 68.

¹¹⁷ In a similar way, Muhammad Asad translates *al-kitāb* in Q 3:48 as "revelation" (*The Message of the Qur'an*, 88).

scholarship as the archetype or source of all scriptures. In this view, God’s teaching of *al-kitāb* to Jesus means that He imparted to Jesus the contents of the heavenly book.¹¹⁸ Thus, reference to *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* specifies and exemplifies the meaning of God teaching *al-kitāb* to Jesus. Similar to Paret, several translations of the Qur’an render *al-kitāb* in these verses as “the Scripture” or “the Book” (or their equivalents in French and German).¹¹⁹ None of the consulted works elaborate on the meaning of “Book” or “Scripture” or how it relates to *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*.¹²⁰ However, because they capitalize the first letter of the word, it seems that at least the English and French translations may have the so-called heavenly book in mind.

The identification of *al-kitāb* with the heavenly book is not inconsistent with the wording of Q 3:48 and 5:110. In fact, in support of this interpretation we may point to 1) the two qur’anic verses that simultaneously apply the labels *kitāb* and *qur’ān* to the Prophet’s

¹¹⁸ As for *al-ḥikmah*, Paret holds that it does not refer to a specific book but to the contents of divine revelations as far as they embody wisdom. Thus, *pace* Horowitz, the four terms mentioned in Q 3:48 and 5:110 do not represent a neat division of revealed books but “eine ziemlich unsystematische Aufzählung von verschiedenen Gnadengaben” (*Der Koran*, 68).

¹¹⁹ The term *al-kitāb* is translated as “the Scripture” by Pickthall (*The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, 66, 106), as “the Book” by Bell (*The Qur’ān*, 1:49, 1:110) and Arberry (*The Koran Interpreted*, 1:80, 1:145), as “l’Écriture” by Blachere (*Le Coran*, 82, 149) and Berque (*Le Coran*, 75, 138), as “le Livre” by Montet (*Le Coran*, 115), and as “Das Buch” by Khoury (*Der Koran*, 4:98). In translating Q 3:48, Holger Zellentin omits *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*, merely referring to “the Book and the wisdom” (*The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, 134).

¹²⁰ In his notes, Khoury refers to the commentators’ explanation of *al-kitāb* as “das Schreiben.” He seems to disagree with this explanation, noting that elsewhere when the Qur’an uses *al-kitāb* in relation to a Prophet, it means “eine heilige Offenbarungsschrift” (*Der Koran*, 4:110). But Khoury does not explain his own understanding of *al-kitāb*.

revelations (Q 15:1, 27:1),¹²¹ and 2) the two texts that describe the *qurʿān* as an exposition (*tafṣīl*) of the *kitāb* (Q 10:37, 41:3). In these four passages, the term *kitāb* may signify the celestial source of the Prophet’s *qurʿān*. If so, then perhaps *al-kitāb* in Q 3:48 and 5:110 similarly refers to the heavenly origin of the scriptures that God taught to Jesus, namely, the Torah and the Gospel.

Even if we take *al-kitāb* to refer to the heavenly book, however, it does not seem reasonable to assume that both *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* are equally manifestations of this heavenly document. This is because, as mentioned before, the two passages that speak of God’s “giving” (*ātaynā*) of *al-injīl* to Jesus depict the revelation of *al-injīl* as the final stage of Israelite prophetic history, while associating the sending down of *al-kitāb* or *al-tawrāh* with the inception of this prophetic tradition. Thus, if *al-kitāb* primarily designates the heavenly book in Q 3:48 and 5:110, it is more plausible to see it exemplified in *al-tawrāh* alone—by virtue of the latter’s identification with or inclusion of the Pentateuch, the prime manifestation of *al-kitāb*. In this reading, it might be more appropriate to associate *al-injīl* with *al-ḥikmah* instead of *al-kitāb*. After all, elsewhere the qur’anic Jesus declares to the Israelites that he has “come to

¹²¹ Cf. 2:53, which appears to describe the Torah as *al-kitāb wa-l-furqān*.

them with *al-ḥikmah*” (Q 43:63).¹²² While it is difficult to arrive at a conclusive judgment on the merits of this line of interpretation, it is important to emphasize that it is consistent with the two-*kitāb* theory, because it maintains the distinction of Torah and the Qur’an as the only “earthly” scriptures that exemplify the heavenly book.

A new *kitāb* for David?

Sūrat Ṣād (38):29. Two qur’anic passages use the phrase “We gave David a *zabūr*” (4:163, 17:55), thereby suggesting that *zabūr* (lit. “writing”) is a reference to the Book of Psalms. Yet, some scholars have claimed that one qur’anic text uses the very term *kitāb* in relation to the Psalter. The text in question is Q 38:29, which is sandwiched between the accounts of David and Solomon in Sūrat Ṣād. After some short historical notes on David as ruler and judge, the sūra relates a second-person divine address to David: “O David, We have made you a viceroy on earth, so judge between people in truth and do not follow [your] whim” (v. 26). Then follows a brief reflection on God’s own justice, which ends with this statement: “A blessed *kitāb* We have sent down to you (*ilayka*), in order for them to contemplate its signs, and so that the intelligent may take admonition” (v. 29). This verse then gives way to a reminiscence of Solomon’s eventful and colorful life. Because the quoted verse mentions the sending down of a *kitāb* “to

¹²² Perhaps the prominence of parables in the Gospels is another fact that supports the association between *al-injil* and *al-ḥikmah*, because since ancient times parables were an essential mode of expression in wisdom literature.

you” (*ilayka*), which matches the second-person address to David in verse 26, a number of scholars have suggested that the “blessed *kitāb*” cited there is a reference to the Book of Psalms.¹²³

However, there are at least two reasons why verse 29 likely addresses *not* David but Muhammad. First, while verse 26 is directed at David, it is followed by two verses that are *not* related to his story. These verses mention God’s creation of heaven and earth, and warn the unbelievers of a dreadful fate that awaits them in the world to come. It is only after these statements that the text mentions the sending down of a “blessed *kitāb*,” which may therefore be a reflexive reference to the Qur’an itself. The structure of the *sūra* supports this interpretation. The *sūra* begins each of its historical reminiscences with a second-person command to the Prophet. The story of David begins thus: “be patient over what they say, and mention our servant, David” (v. 17). The text also asks the Prophet to “mention our servant, Job” (v. 41), “mention our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (v. 45), and finally “mention Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhū al-Kifl” (v. 48). The only account that is *not* preceded by such an imperative is the account of Solomon, which begins in verse 30 as “We gave Solomon to David.” Thus, it seems that the second-person address of the preceding verse, which mentions

¹²³ Julius Augapfel “Das كتاب im Qur’an,” 389; Dawid Künstlinger, “‘Kitāb’ und ‘ahlu l-kitābi’ im Qur’an,” 238; Arthur Jeffery, *The Qur’an as Scripture*, 66. See also Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblische Erzählungen*, 376 (but following Nöldeke-Schwally, *Geschichte*, 1:131, Speyer [381, fn. 1] notes that the phrase might refer to the Qur’an itself).

the sending down of a *kitāb* “to you” (*ilayka*), compensates for the absence of the second-person imperative “mention.” As this imperative is addressed elsewhere to Muhammad, it is probable that verse 29 is also directed to the Prophet. This understanding of the verse means that the “blessed *kitāb*” is a reference to the Qur’an, a view that is dominant in the commentaries.¹²⁴ Indeed, none of the examined commentaries even considers the possibility that *kitāb* may be a reference to the Book of Psalms.

Implied Plurality

The preceding analysis focused on qur’anic passages that seem to contradict the two-*kitāb* hypothesis directly—such as those texts that feature the plural term *kutub* in relation to divine scriptures, or those that describe prophets other than Moses and Muhammad as recipients of *kitāb*. There are, in addition, two passages that seem to pose an indirect challenge to the two-*kitāb* theory. The final segment of this chapter discusses these passages.

Sūrat al-An‘ām (6):155-7. This passage admonishes the Prophet’s people that their *kitāb* is a blessing as well as a grave responsibility. If they had not received this revelation, they could have attributed their errors to divine inattention instead of human negligence. In excusing their misdeeds, for example, they could have lamented that “the *kitāb* was sent down

¹²⁴ See Muqātil b. Sulaymān, al-Huwwārī, al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, the Jalālayn, Abū al-Su‘ūd (who states that *kitāb* refers either to the Qur’an or to Sūrat Ṣād), and al-Shawkānī.

to two parties before us, and we were not acquainted with their study.” Here the “two parties” seems to refer to Jews and Christians, whom the Qur’an often labels *ahl al-kitāb*. The Prophet’s community, in other words, could have used their scriptural destitution vis-à-vis Jews and Christians as a pretext to justify their own transgressions.¹²⁵ Indeed, had they not received a *kitāb*, the Prophet’s people might have even claimed (presumably on Judgment Day) that a *kitāb* would have enabled them to be “more rightly guided” (*ahdā*) than Jews and Christians. Now, however, there is no room for any excuse or vainglory, because God has sent down His *kitāb* to Muhammad’s community, and would accordingly punish those who reject it and continue in their erroneous ways.

For our purposes, the key point of the passage lies in the following expression: “the *kitāb* was sent down to two parties (*tāʾifatayn*) before us” (v. 156). While the use of the singular *al-kitāb* suggests the existence of one *kitāb* prior to the Qur’an, reference to this *kitāb*’s bestowal upon “two parties” implies two *separate* acts of revelation and hence two *kitābs*. Following this latter indication, Muslim exegetes understand this phrase to involve the Jews’ reception of the Torah as well as the Christians’ reception of the Gospel. Al-Zamakhsharī, for example, glosses

¹²⁵ The inverse relation between scriptural learning and viable excuse is also pointed out by Josephus in *The Life, Against Apion*: “For ignorance [Moses] left no pretext. He appointed the Law to be the most excellent and necessary form of instruction, ordaining, not that it should be heard [just] once for all or twice or on several occasions, but that every week men should desert their other occupations and assemble to listen to the Law and to obtain a thorough and accurate knowledge of it.” This is quoted in *Targums: A Critical Introduction*, p. 4.

“the two parties before us” as “the people of the Torah and the people of the Gospel.” Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī uses the same phrase and, in addition, provides an explanation for the appearance of the singular *al-kitāb*. According to Abū Ḥayyān, *al-kitāb* is here a generic noun and therefore signifies both the Torah and the Gospel.¹²⁶ Several other commentators provide similar interpretations,¹²⁷ as do some modern academics.¹²⁸ These views imply that there are at least three *kitābs*—namely, the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an—a conclusion that obviously undermines the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

While this reading is not inconsistent with the wording of Q 6:155-7, the immediate context of this passage suggests a different interpretation. The text under consideration is preceded by a relatively detailed polemic against pagans and their elaborate dietary taboos (vv. 136-150). From their animals and agricultural crops, for example, they claim that certain portions belong to Allāh and others belong to lesser deities—thereby prohibiting these for

¹²⁶ Of course, the skeletal text is also consistent with the plural reading (*al-kutub*), but no such reading is reported in the *qirāʾāt* literature and Muslim commentators operate under the assumption that the text features the singular *al-kitāb* (*Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 2:590).

¹²⁷ The following commentators explicitly mention the Torah and the Gospel, use the terms *kitābayn* or *kutub*, or refer to Moses and Jesus as bringing *kitābs* to their communities: al-Māturidī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Bayḍāwī, Abū al-Suʿūd, Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī, al-Shawkānī, al-Ālūsī, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, and Sayyid Quṭb.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Walid Saleh, “A Piecemeal Qurʾān,” 40. Saleh takes the statement attributed to pagans as factual, concluding that it means the pagans thought “the Qurʾān was not a book like the two others” (*ibid.*, 40). However, the Qur’an presents the pagan position within the context of a *counterfactual*—the pagans *would have* made such an objection if they *had not received* the Qur’an. Saleh’s conclusion, therefore, is incorrect.

human consumption (v. 136). The Qur'an rejects these polytheistic practices, inviting the pagans to observe a far smaller number of food prohibitions (v. 145). Moreover, the text asks them to heed a set of fundamental moral commandments that resembles the Decalogue (vv. 151-2). Immediately afterwards, the passage harkens back to the revelation of the Mosaic *kitāb*, describing it as “an explanation of everything” (v. 154). Finally, the text addresses the pagans again, noting their reception of “a blessed *kitāb*” and exhorting them to follow its precepts (v. 155). It is in this context that the passage mentions the pagans' lack of excuse for their continued intransigence. Having received a *kitāb*, they cannot claim that “the *kitāb* was sent down to two parties before us, and we were not acquainted with their study” (v. 156). Because the preceding verses mention only two *kitābs*—those of Moses and Muhammad—it seems reasonable to conclude that the *kitāb* “sent down to two parties before us” refers to the Mosaic *kitāb*.¹²⁹ If Q 6:156 were a reference to the Torah and the Gospel, one would expect the preceding text to mention Jesus alongside Moses and Muhammad. But there is no such allusion to Jesus or a separate Christian *kitāb*.

¹²⁹ In this reading, Q 5:156 is reminiscent of Q 2:113: “the Jews say: ‘the Christians stand on nothing,’ and the Christians say: ‘the Jews stand on nothing,’ though they [both] recite *al-kitāb*.” This text deems the antagonism between Jews and Christians absurd, because they read the same scripture yet attribute profoundly different teachings to it.

The idea that the *kitāb* that is “sent down to two parties before us” refers to the Torah might be questioned on the grounds that the Torah was not given to “two parties,” for the Jewish-Christian divide did not exist at the time of Moses. God revealed the Torah to one community, namely, the Children of Israel. While this objection is not unreasonable, a similar problem exists with the prevalent interpretation of this verse. That is to say, it is not accurate to say that the Torah was given to Jews and the Gospel to Christians as a separate community from Jews.¹³⁰ In the qur’anic view, Jesus was a messenger to the Children of Israel, who had previously received the Torah. Thus, the Gospel was intended for all Israelites, the *ahl al-tawrah*, not to a neatly distinct community. As another qur’anic passage reports, it was only in response to the mission of Jesus that “one party (*tā’ifah*) of the Children of Israel believed and another party (*tā’ifah*) disbelieved” (61:14). The reference in Q 6:156 to “two parties” is therefore likely meant to capture this division, which was a centuries-long reality in the qur’anic milieu. In addition to indicating this rift, speaking of the revelation of *al-kitāb* to “two parties” may have the rhetorical purpose of depicting pagan Meccans as hyperbolic: in

¹³⁰ In fact, as al-Māturīdī points out, “there were no Jews at the time of the Torah’s revelation, nor Christians at the time of the Gospel’s revelation.” He believes that what the hypothetical statement means is that “among all people, the revelation of *al-kitāb*—i.e. the Torah and the Gospel—is evident for two parties before us, who are called Jews and Christians” (“*ḡahara nuzūl al-kitāb - al-tawrah wa-l-injīl - ‘ind al-khalq bi-ṡā’ifatayn min qablinā summū yahūd wa-naṡārā*”; *Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 5:261). That is to say, the statement refers to “two parties” because that was the contemporary reality for the pagans. The logic of this explanation also accommodates the idea that *al-kitāb* refers to the Torah alone.

portraying themselves as victims of divine apathy, they would have surely noted that there are not just one but two communities with access to the Torah's consummate religious instruction. In short, the broader context of this passage, its use of the singular *al-kitāb*, and its polemical character justify the view that the *kitāb* mentioned in v. 156 designates the Torah alone.

Sūrat al-Shūrā (42):15. The last text to consider in this chapter is a divine address to the Prophet. After asking Muhammad to remain committed to his prophetic mission, this verse bids him to “say (*qul*): I believe in *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin*.” According to Muslim exegetes and modern translators and scholars of the Qur’an, the untranslated Arabic phrase is a reference to all of God’s scriptures, acceptance of which was incumbent on the Prophet and his followers. Arberry, for example, renders this statement as “I believe in whatever Book God has sent down.” This understanding reflects the juxtaposition of the relative pronoun *mā* and the preposition *min*, a common construct where *min* and its following genitive noun clarify, specify, or restrict the broad signification of *mā*. In the verse under consideration, for instance, without *min kitābin* the Prophet’s belief would seem to encompass everything that God has ever sent down (“*mā anzala Allāh*”). However, the addition of *min kitābin* shows that what is at stake is in particular anything that can be deemed a *kitāb*.¹³¹ Because this construct

¹³¹ Grammatically speaking, *min kitābin* is a case of *bayān al-jins*, specifying the *type* of object that is intended. In terms of syntax, *min kitābin* can be considered a circumstantial phrase (*ḥāl*) for *mā* or for an omitted object pronoun that would have functioned as a referent of *mā*. That is to say, the phrase could be reconstructed as *bi-*

is generally used to signify all members of a certain category, it normally implies the existence of a plurality of objects. As a result, the phrase under consideration seems to imply that there are a plurality of *kitābs*, an implication at odds with the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.

The dominant understanding of this phrase is certainly admissible. As already mentioned, one fact in support of this understanding is the widespread use of the *mā ... min ...* construct in relation to a plurality of objects. In fact, this construct appears four times in Sūrat al-Shūrā itself: There is *mā khtalaftum fīhi min shay’in* (“whatever you disagree on,” v. 10), *mā baththa fīhimā min dābbatin* (“all the living creatures that [God] has scattered in [heaven and earth],” v. 29), *mā aṣābakum min muṣibatīn* (“whatever affliction befalls you,” v. 30), and *mā ūtītum min shay’in* (“whatever you have been given,” v. 36).¹³² Clearly, each of these phrases concerns a plurality of objects. Apart from grammatical considerations, two similar qur’anic passages (2:136, 3:84) emphasize the importance of belief in a host of prophetic revelations, a fact that may seem to support the common understanding of Q 42:15.¹³³ These passages are nearly identical and, like the phrase under consideration, start with the imperative “say.” The

mā anzalahu Allāhu min kitābin, where *min kitābin* is a *ḥāl* for the pronoun attached to *anzala*. For explanation of a similar construct in Q 8:60, see Al-‘Ukbarī, *Al-Tibyān fī i’rāb al-Qur’ān*, 630.

¹³² See also vv. 13 and 21, where *mā* is preceded by *min al-dīn*, which again provides clarity and specificity to the referent of *mā*. See also v. 52, where the personal pronoun *man* is followed by *min ‘ibādīnā*, yielding “whomever ... of our servants”).

¹³³ Cf. Q 4:162-4.

former is as follows: “Say: we believe in God and what has been sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord.” Because this verse and the expression under discussion both start with “say” (*qul/qūlū*), follow with the verb “believe”

(*āmantu/āmannā*), and then refer to what God has sent down (*mā anzala Allāh/mā unzila*), the extensive list of Q 2:136 (and 3:84) has a similar clarificatory function to *min kitābin* in Q 42:15. This correspondence may be taken to imply that *min kitābin* signifies the existence of a number of *kitābs*, just as the lists of Q 2:136 and 3:84 cover a long span of prophetic history and mention seven figures by name.

While the common understanding of *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin* is justified, it is neither conclusive nor the only plausible reading of this phrase. For one, none of the texts that enumerate prophetic revelations (Q 2:136, 3:84, and 4:162-4) claim that these revelations amount to independent *kitābs*. In Q 2:136, for example, the text could have easily spoken of “the *kutub* given to Moses and Jesus and the prophets,” but there is no such expression here or elsewhere in the Qur’an. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, of the two places that mention *kutub* as objects of faith, one of them begins by explicit reference to two *kitābs*: “the *kitāb* that [God] sent down to His messenger” and “the *kitāb* that He down down before” (4:136). Just as the term *kutub* that follows these two phrases in Q 4:136 seems to have a dual

signification, *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin* in Q 42:15 may also refer only to two *kitābs*. In this case, the use of the *mā ... min ...* construct could have an emphatic purpose, underlining the Prophet's unconditional and unqualified acceptance of God's *kitābs* in their entirety, even if only two of them actually exist in reality.

Some contextual indications seem to support this reading of Q 42:15. This verse is preceded by reference to divisions among the communities previously guided by God. In this context, Q 42:14 uses the phrase *alladhīna ūrithū al-kitāb*—"those who were made to inherit the *kitāb*"—in apparent reference to contemporary Jews and Christians. As argued before, the Qur'an uses the notion of inheritance in relation to the abiding importance of the Torah for the Children of Israel.¹³⁴ If Q 42:14 is a reference to Jews and Christians as possessors of the Mosaic *kitāb*, then the presence of this reference and the absence of allusion to any other *kitāb* supports the idea that Q 42:15 concerns only the Mosaic and Muhammadan *kitābs*. This interpretation finds corroboration in Q 11:110-12, which is remarkably similar to Q 42:14-5. Both passages concern strife among Jews and Christians, noting *in the same terms* that "had it not been for a Word that had preceded from your Lord [until an appointed time],¹³⁵ judgment would have been carried out between them." Furthermore, against this backdrop of

¹³⁴ See Q 40:53, 17:2, and their discussion in the previous chapter.

¹³⁵ The phrase in brackets appears only in Q 42:14.

unresolved division, both texts exhort the Prophet to “stand firm as you have been commanded.” Crucially, while Q 42:14 merely describes Jews and Christians as “those who were made to inherit the *kitāb*,” Q 11:110 explicitly notes that “We gave Moses *al-kitāb*, then disagreement arose concerning it.” This explicit reference suggests that the *kitāb* mentioned in Q 42:14 (in the phrase “those who were made to inherit the *kitāb*”) also denotes the Torah of Moses. When both texts note that Jews and Christians “are confounded in grave doubt concerning it,” therefore, they suggest that the sectarian divisions of Jews and Christians are rooted in their different understandings of the Mosaic *kitāb*.¹³⁶ Both texts, in other words, seem preoccupied with the Torah. If Q 42:15 was about belief in a plurality of *kitābs*, one would have expected a different formulation in the preceding verse, for example one where Jews were taken to task for their rejection of the Gospel. The absence of such a formulation suggests, therefore, that Q 42:15 refers not to the Prophet’s belief in all scriptures but to his absolute acceptance of the contents of the Mosaic and Muhammadan *kitābs*.

There is a second understanding of Q 42:15 that similarly does not imply the existence of a plurality of *kitābs*. This understanding rests on reinterpretation of the indefinite *kitāb*. In previous scholarship and my first proposed reading, *kitāb* is considered a common noun that

¹³⁶ See also Q 41:45, which is identical with 11:110 and is preceded by a description of the Qur’an as the indefinite *kitābun ‘azīzun* (41:41).

may denote all *kitābs*—whether there is two of them or more. Yet, the indefinite *kitāb* may have an individual reference. Specifically, *kitāb* may refer to the Qur’an or to the heavenly document whence both the Qur’an and the Torah originate. If so, the phrase *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin* does not mean “whatever *kitāb* God has sent down.” Rather, it means “whatever God has sent down from a *kitāb*,”¹³⁷ where the syntactically indefinite *kitāb* is pragmatically identifiable. Such uses of the indefinite form are attested elsewhere in the Qur’an. For instance, Q 15:1 invokes the signs (*āyāt*) of *al-kitāb wa-qur’ānin mubīnin*, while Q 27:1 mentions the signs of *al-qur’an wa-kitābin mubīnin*. While *kitāb* is definite in the first verse and indefinite in the second, in both cases it seems to have an identifiable referent—the Qur’an or its heavenly source. The same referent may be behind the indefinite *kitāb* in the verse under consideration.

That *kitāb* in Q 42:15 could refer to a specific book is suggested by the existence of a number of qur’anic texts that use the definite *al-kitāb* in a similar context. For instance, Q 3:119 notes that the Prophet’s followers “believe in all of the *kitāb*” (*tu’minūna bi-l-kitābi kullihī*), presumably in contrast to others who believe only in parts of it. The latter approach is condemned in Q 2:85, which criticizes the Children of Israel for disregarding some of God’s

¹³⁷ Perhaps reflecting this understanding, *The Study Qur’an* translates this phrase as “that which God has sent down from a Book” (1177).

commands. Accordingly, the verse asks them, “do you believe in part of *al-kitāb* and disbelieve in (another) part?,” where *al-kitāb* seems to refer to the Mosaic *kitāb*, which is explicitly mentioned in Q 2:87.¹³⁸ In Q 42:15, similarly, the verse may be concerned that the Prophet remain committed to every injunction communicated to him.¹³⁹ It is perhaps for this reason that he is warned “not to follow their whims,” a phrase that is explicitly tied to rejection of “part of what God has sent down to you” elsewhere in the Qur’an (Q 5:49).¹⁴⁰ Consideration of these intertexts suggests, therefore, that *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin* may refer to the totality of revelations that constitute the Prophet’s own *kitāb*, not to a plurality of *kitābs* sent down from God.

In sum, while *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin* may denote a plurality of *kitābs*, this is not its only plausible reading. Contextual indications and related intertexts suggest two other interpretations: *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin* may be an emphatic reference to the *kitābs* of Moses and Muhammad, or it may denote the entirety of the Prophet’s own revelations. In this latter case, the use of the indefinite *kitāb* instead of *al-kitāb* might be intended to signal the

¹³⁸ Cf. Q 2:174 (*mā anzala Allāh min al-kitāb*) and 18:27 (*mā uḥīya ilayka min kitābi rabbika*), which feature the noun *kitāb* in definite form.

¹³⁹ See Q 7:2-3, where a command to Believers to “follow what has been sent down to you” (*mā unzila ilaykum*) is preceded by a description of the Qur’an as “a *kitāb* sent down to you” (*kitābun unzila ilayka*).

¹⁴⁰ In Q 2:120, 5:48, and 13:37 also the “whims” (*ahwā’*) of others are contrasted with the knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) or truth (*al-ḥaqq*) that has come to the Prophet.

transcendence and/or gravity of the *kitāb* communicated to the Prophet. Such uses of the indefinite form for the purpose of honoring (*taʿzīm/tafkhīm*) an object are common in qurʿanic and Classical Arabic, and discussed extensively in the Medieval manuals on semantics and rhetoric (*al-maʿānī wa-l-bayān*). An oft-cited qurʿanic example of this phenomenon is the already mentioned Q 27:1, which makes reference to the signs of *al-qurʿān wa-kitābin mubīnin*. In discussing this phrase, al-Zamakhsharī glosses the indefinite *kitābin mubīnin* as the definite *al-kitāb al-mubīn* and suggests that it could refer to the Preserved Tablet, the Qurʿan, or Sūrat al-Naml itself. According to al-Zamakhsharī, the qurʿanic text uses the indefinite form instead of the definite “in order to equivocate (*li-yubhima*)” and therefore render the *kitāb* more honored (*afkham*).¹⁴¹ A similar explanation may be offered for Q 42:15, where *kitāb* may have been defamiliarized precisely in order to draw heightened attention to its significance.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ On al-Zamakhsharī’s understanding of the various uses of the indefinite form (*tankīr*) in the Qurʿan, see Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Abū Mūsā, *al-Balāghah al-qurʿāniyyah fī Tafsīr al-Zamakhsharī wa-atharuhā fī al-dirāsāt al-balāghiyah*, 259-263. For elaborate discussions of the potential connotations of the indefinite form by leading pre-modern theorists of Arabic rhetoric, see *Shurūḥ al-Talkhīṣ*, 1:347-366. As is clear from this volume, al-Zamakhsharī’s exegetical reflections exerted significant influence on al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī’s (d. 739/1338) *Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ* as well as its glosses and commentaries. I am very grateful to Avigail Noy for pointing me to these references and for discussing some of their statements.

¹⁴² Similarly, Daniel Madigan takes *mā anzala Allāhu min kitābin* to refer to the Prophet’s own revelations, translating this phrase as “whatever God has sent down in the way of *kitāb*” (*The Qurʿān’s Self-Image*, 168). Instead of providing an argument in support of this reading, however, Madigan surveys other qurʿanic texts that use *kitāb* in indefinite form or in partitive constructs, concluding that the best way to make sense of the “apparent confusion of definites, indefinites and partitives” is to posit a “unitary concept of *kitāb*” as referring to God’s authoritative knowledge (*The Qurʿān’s Self-Image*, 171).

Chapter Four:

The Meaning of *kitāb*

The foregoing analysis has questioned several aspects of the widely-held scholarly interpretation of qur'anic scripturology. In particular, focusing on the pervasive concept of *kitāb*, I have contended that the Qur'an does *not* use this term as a general appellation for all scriptures, arguing instead that the Qur'an deliberately reserves *kitāb* as a designation for itself and the Torah. Having discussed this formal aspect of the qur'anic text, it is now time to address a more conceptual question: what is the precise meaning of *kitāb* in the Qur'an's discourse on revelations? That is, what specific connotations does the Qur'an attach to the basic sense of *kitāb* as "writing" that make it suitable as a label for the Torah and the Qur'an but not for other scriptures such as Psalms or the Gospel? Answering this question necessitates two overlapping lines of investigation: first, surveying qur'anic usages of the term *kitāb*; and second, examining qur'anic descriptions of the missions and revelations of Muhammad and Moses, whether or not the term *kitāb* appears in these descriptions. The latter exercise may reveal characterizations unique to the Mosaic and Muhammadan revelations that, in turn, help explain why the Qur'an singles them out as worthy of the label *kitāb*. Primarily, this is an exercise in textual excavation, in uncovering the underlying assumptions

and ideas of the qur'anic text by collecting relevant data such as the etiologies provided for the revelation of the Torah and the Qur'an, functions ascribed to them, adjectives attributed to them, and events associated with them.

Previous scholarship on the meaning of *kitāb*

In common Arabic usage, the term *kitāb* applies to texts of varying length, format, and genre—from inscriptions to contracts to books.¹ Accordingly, *kitāb* is often understood and translated as “writing” or “book.” Scholars of the Qur'an have generally taken it for granted that this broad understanding of *kitāb* holds true for its qur'anic occurrences as well.² Thus, when faced with these occurrences, scholars are mainly interested *not* in the meaning of *kitāb*—which is assumed to be obvious—but in its precise denotation. For example, does *al-kitāb* at the beginning of Sūrat al-A'raf refer to the sūra itself, to the Qur'an, or to the heavenly book? In the phrase *ahl al-kitāb*, is *al-kitāb* a generic noun signifying all scriptures, a label for the Bible, or a reference to the heavenly book? While such questions have dominated scholarly debates, comparatively little attention has been paid to the semantics of *kitāb* in the

¹ For a concise survey of the pre-modern uses of *kitāb*, see Manfred Ullmann, *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*, 1:40-2.

² In *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-ân* (published in 1873), for example, John Penrice provides the following translations for *kitāb*: “[a] book, writing, Scripture, written revelation” (p. 123). He also mentions “decree” and “letter,” which are not directly related to the scriptural uses of *kitāb*. Writing 110 years later, Hanna Kassis offers a similar set of meanings in *A Concordance of the Qur'an*: “a book, the Book, the Scriptures; (*ahl al-kitāb*) People of the Book” (663).

Qur'an. If *kitāb* simply means “book,” after all, it would be banal or even unsuitable as a subject of conceptual analysis.

***Kitāb* as legislative scripture**

While previous scholarship has tended to see *kitāb* as a transparent signifier of written texts, there has been occasional recognition that such a generic understanding does not do full justice to the Qur'an's uses of this term. The classical exegetical tradition, for example, developed the idea that some occurrences of *kitāb* function practically as technical terms, designating only those scriptures that contain a substantial measure of legislation. In discussing one of these occurrences, al-Bayḍāwī goes as far as claiming that “in common Qur'anic usage, *kitāb* signifies that [scripture] which includes laws and regulations.”³ Al-Bayḍāwī's remark is motivated by the juxtaposition of the terms *al-kitāb* and *al-zubur* in Q 3:184, both of which have the basic sense of “writing” and thus create an apparent redundancy when placed next to each other. It is the desire to remove this redundancy that leads al-Bayḍāwī to posit a more restrictive—and hence specialized—meaning for the term *kitāb*. Notwithstanding such occasional reflection, as a rule *kitāb* remains a signifier of all scriptures in Muslim exegetical literature.

³ “*Al-kitāb fī ‘urf al-Qurʾān mā yataḍamman al-sharāʿi wa-l-aḥkām*” (*Anwār al-tanzīl*, ad Q 3:184).

***Kitāb* as covenantal scripture**

Like Muslim commentators, modern scholars have generally understood *kitāb* to have the sense of “book” or “writing” when it appears in the Qur’an’s discourse on revelations. However, a number of scholars have sketched a more nuanced semantic portrait of the term *kitāb*. In an incisive essay published in 1926, Dawid Künstlinger (a Polish Semiticist) attempted to shed light on the concept of *kitāb* by examining some of the corresponding designations of scriptures in Jewish and Christian literature. Künstlinger acknowledges that Hebrew/Aramaic terms such as *sēfer* and *ketāb* can be used in reference to various kinds of writings, including books. However, he argues that these terms developed this “literary sense” (*literarischer Sinn*) only at a later stage in their usage. According to Künstlinger, *sēfer* and *ketāb* were originally employed in “practical, mercantile” contexts, often referring to edicts or binding documents such as marriage contracts.⁴ When ancient texts use *sēfer* and *ketāb* in relation to scriptures, therefore, Künstlinger claims that these terms signify not only the written character of scriptures but also their binding nature, which places their recipients in “a mutual relationship” with God.⁵ Thus, as appellations of Jewish scriptures, *sēfer* and *ketāb* act as virtual synonyms of *berīt*, the biblical term *par excellence* for “covenant.”

⁴ “‘Kitāb’ und ‘ahlu l-kitābi’ im Ḳuran,” 244.

⁵ *Ibid.*

In Künstlinger's view, a similar understanding of scripture informed the decision of early Christians to call their scripture "the New Covenant/Testament" (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη).⁶ According to Künstlinger, Muhammad had the same vision when he defined Islam as well as Judaism and Christianity in terms of the concept of *kitāb*.⁷ That is to say, the Prophet used *kitāb* as a label for "the mutual contract and the joint relationship that was fixed in writing between God and those acknowledging Him."⁸ It was precisely this contractual vision, Künstlinger claims, that gave birth to the idea of the heavenly *kitāb*, because as party to the covenant God was naturally seen to possess a copy of its text with Him in heaven.⁹ Thus, while post-formative commentators sometimes interpreted *kitāb* as a scripture with binding injunctions on humans, Künstlinger saw *kitāb* as a written agreement between God and humans with mutual obligations and responsibilities.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 245. Of course, διαθήκη is the term with which the LXX renders the Hebrew *berit*, including in Jeremiah 31:30-3 (38:31-4 in the LXX), which speaks of a "new covenant" to be established with Israel and Judah. For a critique of the common understanding of *berit* and διαθήκη as "covenant," see Ernst Kutsch, *Neues Testament, Neuer Bund? Eine Fehlübersetzung wird korrigiert*.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁸ "... den gegenseitigen Vertrag und das beiderseitige Verhältnis, das schriftlich zwischen Gott und seinen Bekennern fixiert wurde" (*ibid.*). The *ahl al-kitāb* refers to Jews and Christians, therefore, in so far as they "possess a contract by virtue of which their relations with God are regulated" ("*im Besitze des Kontraktes sind, kraft dessen ihre Verhältnisse zu Gott reguliert sind*") (*ibid.*, 246).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

***Kitāb* as a metaphor**

By far the most extensive semantic analysis of *kitāb* is offered by Daniel Madigan in *The Qurʾān's Self-Image*. As this work is the only detailed discussion of the denotations and connotations of *kitāb*, it will serve both as a point of departure and frame of reference for my own analysis in the present chapter. Madigan starts his investigation of the concept of *kitāb* by dwelling on an apparent qurʾanic paradox. The Qurʾan calls itself a *kitāb*, which often signifies a book or another kind of written document such as a letter. However, Madigan asserts that the Qurʾan cannot be considered a *kitāb* on these terms. It was not given to the Prophet as a closed corpus of divine statements, but as a stream of oral communications that were not committed to writing in a systematic way during the Prophet's lifetime.¹⁰ Hence, Madigan asserts, the Qurʾan confronts us with "the intriguing phenomenon of something that remains unwritten and yet insists on calling itself *kitāb*—a writing."¹¹ Madigan's investigation is an attempt to make sense of this supposed enigma. To this end, he surveys qurʾanic occurrences of the term *kitāb*, the verb *kataba*, and some related terminology of revelation. His conclusion is that the Qurʾan considers itself a *kitāb* because it exemplifies God's activity of writing.

Attribution of this activity to God, in turn, is a qurʾanic *metaphor* for God's expression of His

¹⁰ Indeed, when the Prophet's followers compiled the Qurʾan and turned it into book form, they initially referred to the resulting, static text "not as a *kitāb* but as a *muṣḥaf*" (*The Qurʾān's Self-Image*, 36).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

knowledge (*ilm*) and authority (*ḥukm*). When God “writes,” therefore, He makes known His wisdom and will to humans. It follows that the Qur’an is a *kitāb* not because it is a written, finished product, but because it is an unflagging expression of divine omniscience and omnipotence.

In advocating a symbolic understanding of *kitāb*, Madigan adopts a simple strategy of persuasion. He repeatedly faces the reader with two main interpretive options: 1) *kitāb* as a written, finished, *earthly* product, and 2) *kitāb* as a symbol. By arguing against the first choice, therefore, Madigan portrays a metaphorical understanding of *kitāb* as the only compelling alternative. This dilemmatic logical structure is misleading, however, because there is in fact a *third* way that has been well-trodden in previous scholarship: the idea that the Qur’an calls itself a *kitāb* because it is a manifestation, albeit oral and piecemeal, of the heavenly book. This idea reflects explicit qur’anic references to its celestial preservation, such as the following statement: “Nay, it is a noble *qur’ān*; in a hidden *kitāb*; which none but the pure can touch” (56:77-9). While beyond the hands of humans, therefore, the Qur’an was a book in the eyes of God from the beginning. There is thus nothing baffling about the Qur’an’s references to itself as a *kitāb*. The Qur’an’s subsistence in a literal heavenly book renders a metaphorical

understanding of *kitāb* both unnecessary and unjustified.¹² Yet, instead of meeting the challenge of the heavenly book to his hypothesis head-on, Madigan skirts it. Qur’anic references to its heavenly preservation play cameo roles in Madigan’s monograph: he acknowledges their relevance on occasion, but then downplays their significance and swiftly pivots to other subjects. This conspicuous analytical aversion invites scrutiny and ultimately leads to a deconstruction of Madigan’s key hypothesis.

At the beginning of his investigation, Madigan invokes the Qur’an’s references to a heavenly source of itself and other scriptures as well as other celestial records such as a book of decrees and an inventory of all objects and events. He points out that some scholars have seen these to constitute separate documents, while others have suggested that there is one book that contains God’s revelations, decrees, and knowledge.¹³ Madigan cautions against the former approach that posits “a heavenly library or archive,”¹⁴ arguing that there is underlying unity behind the heavenly writings mentioned in the Qur’an. Unexpectedly, however, he does

¹² Discussing the Qur’an’s references to its celestial preservation, Nicolai Sinai concludes that such references constitute “a decisive objection against Madigans [*sic*] ethereal reading of *kitāb* as a mere ‘symbol’” (“Qur’ānic self-referentiality as a strategy of self-authorization,” 114-5, fn. 37).

¹³ *Self-Image*, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

not proceed to endorse the option of one totalizing heavenly book.¹⁵ Instead of taking a clear position on this issue, Madigan seeks unity by shifting attention to God's *act* of writing and the content and purpose of this activity instead of its product(s).¹⁶ In this vein, he chooses to translate *kitāb* as "writing" instead of "book" or "document"—thus casting *kitāb* as a verbal noun that denotes an activity, not an object. He thereby bypasses the question of the number of heavenly records, focusing instead on issues that do not suggest a reified understanding of *kitāb*.

Madigan not only seems undecided about the number of heavenly records, but he also equivocates about their very existence. This equivocation is clear in his discussion of the phrase *ahl al-kitāb*. He notes that some scholars have taken *al-kitāb* in this construct to be a generic noun that refers to the category of scripture, thereby understanding *ahl al-kitāb* as a label for those who have a scripture. However, Madigan is more sympathetic to Pedersen's view, according to which *al-kitāb* in this phrase denotes the heavenly book, with the *ahl al-kitāb* being the possessors ("die Besitzer") of this celestial scripture. While Madigan thus seems to take the existence of the heavenly book for granted, he criticizes Pedersen's use of the language of possession. Madigan points out that "the Qur'an uses partitive expressions in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

connection with *kitāb*,”¹⁷ such as when it refers to the Prophet’s revelations not as *al-kitāb* but as “what has been sent down to you from your Lord’s *kitāb*” (Q 18:27). Such constructs show, in Madigan’s view, that neither the *ahl al-kitāb* nor Muslims are “fully in possession of the *kitāb*.”¹⁸ This characterization is neither novel nor controversial, and is often accommodated by understanding *ahl al-kitāb* as those who possess scriptures that *originate from* and *represent* (but do not fully reproduce) the heavenly book.¹⁹ However, without considering this common understanding, Madigan uses the occurrence of partitive expressions to undermine the existence of the heavenly book. Instead of Pedersen’s interpretation, Madigan suggests that the *ahl al-kitāb* are those who have “*access to and insight into* the knowledge, wisdom, and sovereignty of God, for which the very fluid term *kitāb* serves as a symbol.”²⁰ From denying full possession of the heavenly book, therefore, Madigan suddenly leaps to ignoring its reality altogether and embracing a symbolic understanding of the concept of *kitāb*.

Two more examples of Madigan’s vacillation on the idea of heavenly record(s) bear mentioning. In the context of discussing the collection of the Qur’an, Madigan cites three

¹⁷ *Self-Image*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See, e.g. Sinai, “Qur’ānic self-referentiality,” 120-1, fn. 66. Sinai also cites the same view from Nagel in p. 123, fn. 81.

²⁰ *Self-Image*, 7.

passages that describe the Qur'an's celestial source as "purified leaves" (98:2), "noble, exalted, and purified leaves" (80:13-4), and "a hidden *kitāb*, which none but the pure can touch" (56:78-9).²¹ Without discussing the actual referent of these phrases, however, Madigan simply notes that they speak of the Qur'an's "revelations and preservation in quite *exalted terms*."²² He thereby implies that the "purified leaves" or the "hidden *kitāb*" have no concrete denotation but are merely figures of speech meant to glorify the Qur'an.²³ Barely ten pages later, however, Madigan seems to accept the existence of the Qur'an's heavenly source, because he refers to the "preserved tablet" (*lawḥ mahfūz*) mentioned in Q 85:22 as signifying "the heavenly archetype" of the Qur'an. But instead of noting the implications of such an archetype for his hypothesis, Madigan simply makes the point that the Qur'an cannot be an "accurate transcript" of this document. In a rare instance of translating *kitāb* as "book," he asks: "Can God's Book really be as fragmentary, haphazard, specific, and, one might even say, parochial as the text of the *muṣḥaf*?"²⁴ Deeming this view as unacceptable, Madigan insists that "God's

²¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²² *Ibid.*, 37; emphasis added.

²³ Madigan makes this clear in a later chapter, where he claims (incorrectly) that even Muslim commentators considered the "purified leaves" of Q 98:2 to be "a metaphor for the divine origin and composition" of the Qur'an's content (*Self-Image*, 138). However, even here Madigan remains undecided, because he closes by saying that the *ṣuḥuf* ("leaves") "take their name, perhaps, from a celestial source (Q 80:13), but in human experience they remain words recited by the prophets and those who follow them" (*ibid.*).

²⁴ *Self-Image*, 48.

Book” should not be “too closely identified” with the Qur’an.²⁵ He then uses this point to escape the relevance of the heavenly book altogether and to resume belaboring the oral and ongoing character of the Prophet’s revelations. Madigan concludes by asserting that for the Prophet’s followers, his qur’anic revelations represented not “a clearly defined and already closed textual corpus” but rather “the pledge of God’s relationship of guidance with them.”²⁶

Madigan therefore takes inconsistent positions on the number and existence of heavenly writings and skirts their relevance by noting that the heavenly *kitāb* is not “fully in [Muslims’] possession” or that it should not be “too closely identified” with the Qur’an. Apart from this diversionary approach, he also offers some positive evidence in favor of a symbolic conceptualization of *kitāb*. Above all, Madigan’s metaphorical understanding rests on the claim that the Qur’an uses the verb *kataba* chiefly in a metaphorical way.²⁷ In his analysis of this verb, Madigan first notes that most of its 58 occurrences have “God or God’s agents” as their subjects.²⁸ Madigan further shows that these cases can be divided into two distinct but overlapping categories: those that concern “the exercise of the divine authority,” and others

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁷ According to Madigan, “it is precisely in the so clearly metaphorical verbal uses of the root *k-t-b* that we find warrant and support for a similarly metaphorical approach to the noun *kitāb*” (*Self-Image*, 108).

²⁸ *Self-Image*, 107.

that involve “the recording of the divine knowledge.”²⁹ Crucially, Madigan claims that in both these groups the verb *kataba* refers to writing figuratively, not literally. Thus, when the Qur’an threatens evildoers, saying that “We shall write down” their statements and actions (Q 3:181), Madigan insists that such recording involves no documents but pertains to God’s “*knowledge of the secret thoughts and actions of humanity.*”³⁰ What this expression really means, therefore, is that “‘We shall keep in mind’ or ‘We shall take note of’” their behavior.³¹ Madigan argues that the same holds true for cases that pertain to God’s exercise of His authority. For example, when the Qur’an uses the verb *kataba ‘alā* to signify the imposition of punishments or obligations, it does not follow that such imposition involves actual writing. Rather, *kataba ‘alā* means to “‘to write against,’ that is, as a claim or punishment for someone,”³² a figurative usage. In Madigan’s view, the Qur’an’s metaphoric use of *kataba* to describe divine will and wisdom supports the case that the noun *kitāb* is similarly a metaphor for God’s knowledge and authority.³³ In short, by highlighting the Qur’an’s oral and developing character, and by

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 113; emphasis mine.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 114-5.

³² *Ibid.*, 108.

³³ *Ibid.*, 108.

offering a metaphorical interpretation of the verb *kataba*, Madigan builds a case for a symbolic understanding of *kitāb*.

Just like his analysis of the orality of the Qur'an, Madigan's metaphorical readings of the verb *kataba* suffer from inattention to the heavenly book. When the Qur'an refers to God writing down the utterances and actions of sinful Jews (e.g. in Q 3:181), for example, this is not just a metaphor of God taking note, as Madigan suggests.³⁴ Rather, it is most likely a reference to the same comprehensive book that, according to Q 18:49, on Judgment Day instills terror in the hearts of evildoers, who say: "woe unto us! What is with this book? It has left out nothing small or great" (18:49).³⁵ There is no evident reason to believe that the Qur'an provides these vivid descriptions as metaphorical figures of speech.³⁶ The heavenly book also undermines a

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 114-5. In discussing this verse, Madigan refers to al-Zamakhsharī's comments and mistranslates part of them. According to al-Zamakhsharī, the verb "We shall write" (*sa-naktub*) in this verse involves either writing "in the leaves of the guardian angels" (*fi ṣaḥā'if al-ḥafazah*) or taking note of the evildoers' words/deeds and registering them in God's knowledge. However, Madigan translates *fi ṣaḥā'if al-ḥafazah* as "pages of vengeful memory" (*Self-Image*, 115, n. 8), a translation that conforms to his metaphorical understanding of "We shall write."

³⁵ Other Qur'anic passages speak of a separate record for each individual, put in the right hands of the righteous and the left hands (or behind the backs) of the wicked (17:71, 69:19, 69:25, 84:7, 84:10). The reality of these registers is further confirmed by the fact that the Qur'an explicitly refers to "scribes" (*kātibīn*) who watch over humans and know all that they do (82:10-12). Indeed, Madigan himself seems to acknowledge this reality in an earlier chapter, where he suggests that a heavenly record of human deeds is the only instance of "the Qur'ān's talk of *kitāb* [that] has to do with storage" (*Self-Image*, 75).

³⁶ As it happens, Julius Augapfel claims that verses that use the term *kitāb* in relation to God's knowledge must be using this term figuratively ("*im übertragenen Sinne*") ("Das كتاب im Qur'ān," 390). However, he does not provide an argument to this effect. Moreover, later on he suggests that the Qur'an considers this *kitāb* to be a literal book,

metaphorical understanding of *kataba* when it pertains to God's judgments and punishments. This is especially apparent from a juxtaposition of Q 9:51 and 57:22. The first of these two verses asks the Prophet to say the following to those who complain about afflictions: "nothing befalls us save what God has written for us (*mā kataba 'llāhu lanā*)."³⁷ That this writing is not figurative is implied by Q 57:22, which asserts in similar terms that "no affliction befalls the earth or yourselves save that it is in a *kitāb* before We bring it to pass."³⁷ The phrase "what God has written" in Q 9:51, therefore, seems to refer to the same thing that is described as being "in a *kitāb*" in Q 57:22.³⁸ Madigan is thus incorrect to suggest that "it is doubtful whether one could find any written form" for divine prescriptions.³⁹ These cases strongly suggest that the Qur'an considers divine determinations and recording of events and actions to involve real

because he derides as "naïve" the view that a book could facilitate God's job of remembering His creation on the Day of Judgment (attributing this view to Q 22:70; *ibid.*, 392).

³⁷ Cf. Q 17:58. Indeed, Madigan refers to 18:49 in an earlier chapter and places it next to Q 19:79, which uses the verb *kataba*. Yet even there, Madigan attempts to downplay the sense of this *kitāb* being a specific document with an independent role. He describes it as "nothing more than storage" for God's "record-keeping" (73).

³⁸ In an earlier chapter, Madigan makes reference to Q 9:51 and, without considering Q 57:22 or similar verses, claims that with respect to God's "act of composition" in Q 9:51 and similar verses, "There is no implication that [it] has been displayed anywhere in writing" (74).

³⁹ *Self-Image*, 75.

writing—metaphysical but not metaphorical. Unfortunately, Madigan provides no discussion of the Qur'an's ample references to celestial documents in his analysis of the verb *kataba*.⁴⁰

The Significance of *‘ilm* and *ḥukm* to *kitāb*

While Madigan's insistence on a metaphorical understanding of *kitāb* is problematic, his semantic analysis of this term is illuminating. In particular, Madigan shows that just as the verb *kataba* often involves the expression and exercise of divine omniscience and omnipotence, the noun *kitāb* is closely associated with God's knowledge (*‘ilm*) and authority (*ḥukm*). He begins his analysis of *kitāb* with a heuristic discussion of four qur'anic passages that use the phrase *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* in relation to Muhammad's revelations (2:129, 2:151, 3:164, 62:2). These passages all describe the Prophet as "teaching *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah*" to his people, reciting to them God's signs (*āyāt*), and purifying them. In Madigan's view, these four texts hold "special significance" on account of their formulaic character as well as their use of

⁴⁰ A more basic problem involves Madigan's analysis of the verbs *kataba ‘alā* and *kataba li-*. When Q 2:216 uses *kataba ‘alā* to signify the imposition of fighting as incumbent upon Muhammad's followers, for instance, Madigan argues that this figurative use of *kataba* shows the Qur'an's metaphorical understanding of *kataba* and *kitāb* in general. However, this is an unwarranted conclusion. While *kataba ‘alā* may be construed as a figurative use of *kataba*, this is not a particularly significant observation. After all, phrasal verbs in general involve metaphorical uses of their basic verbs. To provide an example, the Qur'an uses *dhahaba bi-* to signify the taking away of something (e.g. Q 4:19), but this does not establish that it has a metaphorical understanding of *dhahaba* ("to go") in principle. After all, such prepositional verbs as *dhahaba bi-* and *kataba ‘alā* are not qur'anic inventions but Arabic constructs. Thus, the Qur'an's uses of the latter construct do not support the claim that the Qur'an espouses a figurative understanding of *kataba* in principle, let alone corroborating a metaphorical understanding of the noun *kitāb*.

“some of the most characteristic words of the Qur’ân’s vocabulary.”⁴¹ As such, he believes that they represent a uniquely valuable starting point for a semantic analysis of the term *kitāb*.⁴² Because these passages juxtapose *al-kitāb* with *al-ḥikmah* and *āyāt*, Madigan undertakes an analysis of the latter two terms in order to sketch the key aspects of the qur’anic concept of *kitāb*.

In his discussion of the qur’anic concept of *ḥikmah*, Madigan establishes two points. First, he claims that *ḥikmah* in the Qur’an has more to do with outward authority than inward wisdom.⁴³ According to Madigan, this view is corroborated by the proximity of *ḥikmah* to *ḥukm*, a term that signifies judgment and is similarly juxtaposed with *al-kitāb* in three qur’anic passages (Q 3:79, 6:89, 45:16). Moreover, as I have argued before, Madigan asserts that *ḥikmah* does not represent a separate phenomenon from *kitāb*. The phrase *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* is likely a hendiadys, he suggests, and as such is synonymous with *al-kitāb al-ḥakīm*—an expression that appears twice in the Qur’an (10:1, 31:2).⁴⁴ As for *āyāt* (signs) and its singular *āyah*, Madigan notes that the Qur’an uses these terms to signify natural phenomena as well as historical

⁴¹ *Self-Image*, 92.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ “To the extent that it does connote wisdom,” Madigan asserts, *ḥikmah* refers to “the wisdom of *authority* that comes from being guided by God” (93; emphasis mine).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

events and legal injunctions. Providing an incisive survey of the constructs and verbs that employ *āyāt/āyah*, Madigan shows that these terms have strong intellectual undertones and represent the knowledge that God grants humans in order for them “to reflect and to respond in faith.”⁴⁵ It is precisely because of the intellectual character and purpose of *āyāt*, Madigan argues, that the four qur’anic texts under discussion use the verb *‘allama* (“to teach”) in relation to the Prophet’s *kitāb*.⁴⁶ The upshot of his analysis is that *ḥikmah* and *āyāt* represent the centrality of divine authority (*ḥukm*) and knowledge (*‘ilm*) to the notion of *kitāb*.

Having used *ḥikmah* and *āyāt* as conduits respectively for *ḥukm* and *‘ilm*, Madigan next undertakes a direct analysis of the latter two concepts. First he provides a semantic analysis of *ḥukm* and *‘ilm* by enumerating all the qur’anic roots that are related conceptually to these terms. For *ḥukm*, for example, he lists all the roots pertaining to “decision, command, prohibition, permission, power, judgment, punishment, forgiveness, separation, control, and the like.”⁴⁷ Then, he includes “the most important and frequently occurring” of these roots in a diagram with *ḥukm* at its center, resulting in a pictorial representation of the “semantic field” of *ḥukm*. After carrying out a similar analysis for *‘ilm*, Madigan chooses four roots

⁴⁵ *Self-Image*, 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

common to both semantic fields (*h-d-y*, *b-y-n*, *ḥ-q-q*, *f-ṣ-l*) and another belonging only to the field of *‘ilm* (*n-w-r*) to see if they are also strongly associated with *kitāb*. He obtains a positive answer to this question, whence he concludes that “*kitāb* functions as a key-word linking the fields of knowledge and authority.”⁴⁸ This conclusion, he maintains, corroborates the idea that *kitāb* serves chiefly as a symbol of God’s *ḥukm* and *‘ilm*.

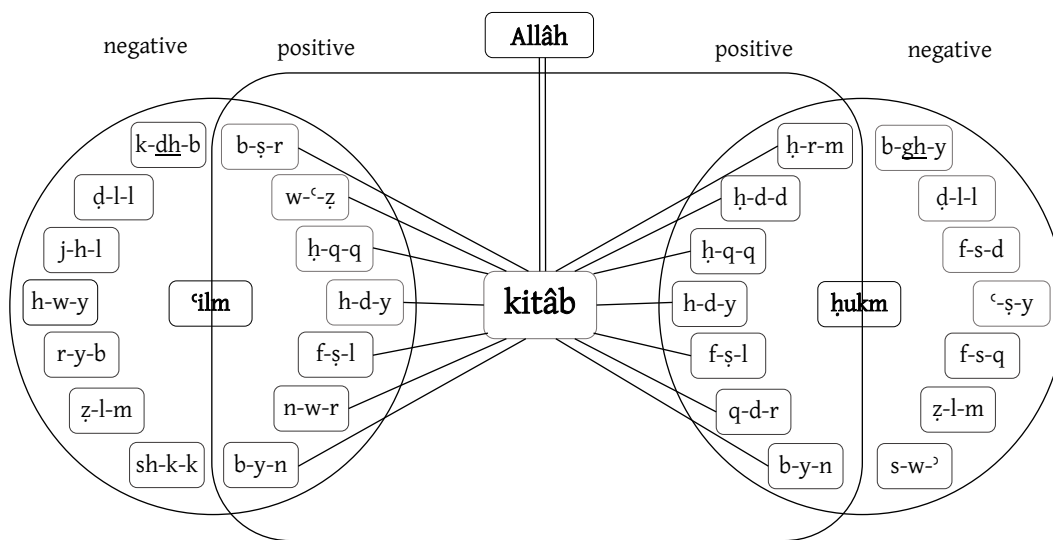


Figure 4.1. The semantic field of *kitāb*⁴⁹

Madigan makes a compelling case for the centrality of *‘ilm* and *ḥukm* to the qur’anic concept of *kitāb*. There is in fact a degree of inevitability to this conclusion. After all, the fundamental purpose of revelation is guidance, which involves the communication of a body of

⁴⁸ *Self-Image*, 164.

⁴⁹ A replication of Figure 6.3 (in *Self-Image*, 151), with minor adjustments.

knowledge (*‘ilm*) that establishes articles of belief and enjoins norms of conduct (*ḥukm*).⁵⁰ Still, it is significant that the Qur’an explicitly emphasizes the importance of *ḥukm* and *‘ilm* to divine revelation. That *ḥukm* and *‘ilm* form a genuine qur’anic couple is evident in the fact that they signify the guidance given to various prophets.⁵¹ The proximity of these two concepts is also reflected in the frequent juxtaposition of *‘alīm* and *ḥakīm* as divine attributes.⁵² Nevertheless, Madigan’s metaphorical understanding of *kitāb* is problematic, primarily because it ignores qur’anic references to a reified, celestial *kitāb* as the source of the Qur’an. Even though the qur’anic corpus was primarily oral and growing during the Prophet’s lifetime, it still had the integrity and stability of a book thanks to its existence in the heavenly realm.

The Heavenly Book and the Two-*kitāb* Hypothesis

The subsistence of the qur’anic text in the heavenly book removes the need for a figurative understanding of the Qur’an’s self-appellation as *kitāb*. At the same time, the use of the term *kitāb* in relation to the heavenly book prompts a question about the two-*kitāb* hypothesis: if the Qur’an uses the label *kitāb* as an exclusive label for no earthly scripture

⁵⁰ The same twin aspects can be attributed to the term *tōrā*, which can simultaneously carry the meanings of teaching, instruction, and law.

⁵¹ Lot (21:74), Joseph (12:22), Moses (28:14), and Solomon (21:79); noted by Madigan on p. 105.

⁵² According to Madigan, *‘alīm* appears 136 times in relation to God, chiefly in verse-ending position, where it is most commonly juxtaposed with *ḥakīm* (33 times), and after that with *samī‘* (29 times) and *wāsi‘* (6 times) (*The Qur’an’s Self-Image*, 105).

other than those of Moses and Muhammad, why does it use the same label in reference to the heavenly book? Are there shared characteristics between the Torah, the Qur'an, and the heavenly book that justify the description of each as *kitāb* in the Qur'an? Should my hypothesis be renamed the "three-*kitāb* theory" to reflect the application of *kitāb* to the heavenly book in addition to the Torah and the Qur'an?

Before investigating the relationship between the Torah, the Qur'an, and the heavenly book, it is necessary to have a closer look at the Qur'an's use of the term *kitāb* in relation to Moses and Muhammad. The first observation to make is that, in some passages that attribute the *kitāb* to Moses or Muhammad, it seems that we can bypass any reference to the Torah or the Qur'an, and consider *kitāb* as a direct reference to the heavenly book. For example, when the Qur'an states that "We gave Moses *al-kitāb*," the noun *al-kitāb* may refer not to the Torah as such but to the heavenly book—a suggestion made long ago by Sprenger. A similar interpretation can be provided for texts that speak of the "sending down" of *al-kitāb* to Muhammad. Indeed, according to Nicolai Sinai, "[t]here appear to be no passages in the Qur'ān where the expression *al-kitāb* without a qualifying relative clause unequivocally denotes the qur'ānic corpus rather than its transcendent source."⁵³ As Sinai further observes,

⁵³ "Self-referentiality," 129. Sinai believes that even some instances of *kitāb* that lack the definite article, such as Q 7:1, 11:1, and 14:1, also refer to the heavenly book. These verses use the indefinite form of *kitāb*, argues Sinai, "in

some passages (assigned by Nöldeke to the Second and Third Meccan periods) consciously distinguish the terms *kitāb* and *qurʿān*, using the former in relation to the Qurʿan’s transcendental source and the latter in reference to its actual form as oral recitations. These passages use the noun *tafṣīl* or the verb *faṣṣala* to designate the process that renders the heavenly *kitāb* into an Arabic *qurʿān*. In Sinai’s view, *tafṣīl* signals not only the transformation of the (metalinguistic) celestial *kitāb* into Arabic recitations but also the addition of explanatory glosses that address the “expectations, convictions and questions of the target audience.”⁵⁴ On this count, therefore, the Prophet’s qur’anic recitations are not literal translations of the heavenly book but oral and interpretive renderings of its content.

Yet the distinction between *al-kitāb* and the qur’anic corpus should not be overemphasized. Sinai himself notes that the latter is “in a certain respect identical with *the* (celestial) *kitāb*” (130). This is why the Qurʿan often speaks of the revelation of the *kitāb* itself (not merely its *tafṣīl*) to the Prophet (e.g. Q 3:7), just as it refers to the revelation of *al-qurʿān* (e.g. Q 20:2). After all, even if *al-kitāb* in some passages refers to the celestial book, Moses and Muhammad are described as its recipients by virtue of, respectively, their torahic and qur’anic

order to allow for the attachment of an asyndetic relative clause providing additional information about the *kitāb*” (116, fn. 41).

⁵⁴ “Self-referentiality,” 123.

revelations. Moreover, while this book may be the referent of some occurrences of the term *kitāb* that appear in relation to Moses and Muhammad, in other such instances *kitāb* seems to characterize the Torah and the Qur'an themselves. This is the case, for example, when Q 4:136 speaks of “the *kitāb* that was sent down to His messenger and the *kitāb* that He sent down before” as two separate objects of faith. Referencing such passages, Nicolai Sinai concludes that the Qur'an considers itself as “forming a (terrestrial) *kitāb* in its own right.”⁵⁵ In Sinai's estimation, this usage is ultimately an extension of the Qur'an's “genetic” relationship with the heavenly book.⁵⁶ That is to say, the Qur'an may be considered a *kitāb* because it “derive[s] from *al-kitāb*” and hence has a claim to integrity, canonicity, and consistency with previous revelations.⁵⁷

Even though Sinai rejects Madigan's metaphorical understanding of the term *kitāb*, his genetic definition is similar to Madigan's in a key respect: it suggests that *kitāb* can be applied to every revelation in so far as it stems from the heavenly book.⁵⁸ However, as I have shown in

⁵⁵ Sinai, “Qur'ānic self-referentiality,” 130.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 104, 111.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 131. In the words of Sinai, “since [Muhammad's recitations] 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” (“Qur'ānic self-referentiality,” 132).

⁵⁸ Thus, just as Madigan asserts that “[t]he Qur'ān understands Muḥammad to be a bringer of the *kitāb* in the same way as the earlier messengers were” (*The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 196), Sinai claims that “all revelations constitute, at different times, ways of access to the *kitāb*” (*ibid.*, 126).

the previous chapters, the Qur'an uses the label *kitāb* for no revelation other than the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad. The exclusive association of the term *kitāb* with the Mosaic and Muhammadan revelations suggests that they are uniquely *representative* of the heavenly *kitāb*. In other words, the Torah and the Qur'an not only stem from the heavenly book but also manifest this book in a special way, making them earthly counterparts of the celestial *kitāb*. To account for this observation, we need to go beyond the recognition of *ilm* and *ḥukm* as hallmarks of the heavenly book and its revelatory manifestations. As I shall demonstrate, comprehensiveness is a third, and arguably the foremost characteristic, of the heavenly book in qur'anic discourse. Therefore, I argue that the Qur'an dubs itself and the Torah as *kitābs* because like the heavenly book they are *comprehensive* guides to God's will and wisdom.

***Kitāb* as Comprehensive Text**

More than a dozen qur'anic passages refer to a heavenly writing that is the textual embodiment of God's knowledge and control over His creation. In most of these passages, the Qur'an asserts the all-encompassing character of this celestial text in emphatic terms. According to Q 6:59, for example, there is "not a seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, except that it is [recorded] in a clear *kitāb*." Another verse notes that the contents of this *kitāb* include the lair and resting-place of every beast that walks on earth

(11:6). The heavenly *kitāb* also contains knowledge of what shall happen in the future, for “no affliction befalls the earth or yourselves save that it is in a *kitāb* before We bring it to pass” (57:22). In short, “We have enumerated everything in a *kitāb*” (78:29).⁵⁹ This emphasis on the all-inclusive character of the heavenly *kitāb* mirrors the Qur’an’s preoccupation with God’s omniscience and omnipotence. Indeed, in some two-thirds of its 121 qur’anic appearances, the construct “everything” (*kull shayʿ*) appears as the object of the knowledge and power of God, who is described as “powerful” (*qadīr*), “knowledgeable” (*ʿalīm*), “witness” (*shahīd*), and “guardian” (*wakil*, *ḥafīẓ*) over everything.⁶⁰ It is no wonder, then, that the Qur’an places much emphasis on the comprehensive character of the heavenly book that exemplifies God’s wisdom and authority.

If the Torah and the Qur’an are especially representative of the heavenly book, one would expect the Qur’an to envision them similarly as comprehensive documents. This is indeed what we find in the Qur’an. Four texts, in particular, describe the revelations of Moses or Muhammad as “an exposition/elucidation of everything”:

⁵⁹ For further references, see Q 10:61, 17:58, 18:49, 20:52, 22:70, 27:75, 34:3, 35:11, and 50:4.

⁶⁰ The phrase “powerful over everything” (*ʿalā kulli shayʿin qadīr*) alone appears 35 times. In terms of frequency, it is followed by “the knower of everything” (*bi-kulli shayʿin ʿalīm*) at 20 times. In addition, eight passages describe God as “witness” (*shahīd*) over everything, while five verses portray Him as “guardian” (*wakil*, *ḥafīẓ*) over everything. There are also five texts where God’s knowledge is said to encompass (*wasiʿa*, *aḥāṭa*) everything.

1-6:154) Then We gave Moses *al-kitāb*, complete for he who does good (*tamāman ‘alā alladhī aḥsana*), and an exposition of everything (*wa-tafṣīlan li-kulli shay’in*).⁶¹

2-7:145) And We wrote for [Moses] in the tablets an admonition with respect to everything (*min kulli shay’in maw‘izatan*), and an exposition of everything (*wa-tafṣīlan li-kulli shay’in*).

3-12:111) It [the Qur’an] is not a forged text, but a confirmation of what is before it and an exposition of everything (*tafṣīla kulli shay’in*).

4-16:89) We sent down to you *al-kitāb* as an elucidation of everything (*tibyānan li-kulli shay’in*).⁶²

The Qur’an also describes itself four times as containing “every kind of similitude” (*min kulli mathalin*) for people.⁶³ No other scripture besides the Torah and the Qur’an is described in such terms. The Mosaic and Muhammadan scriptures are therefore the only revelations that constitute comprehensive guides to correct belief and righteous behavior.

When it comes to divine guidance, of course, comprehensiveness makes all the difference. Admittedly, each revelation discloses something of God’s knowledge and power. Thus, Shu‘ayb’s invitation of the people of Madyan to monotheism and fair economic exchange (Q 7:85-7) reflects the will and wisdom of God. Yet, like many “warners” (sing. *nadhīr*) before him, Shu‘ayb’s preaching remained limited to a specific social and temporal setting, and his

⁶¹ Surprisingly, Holger Zellentin takes 6.154 to be about “the Bible” as opposed to the Torah specifically (*The Qur’an’s Legal Culture*, 57, n. 3).

⁶² Cf. Q 6:38 and 17:12.

⁶³ Q 17:89, 18:54, 30:58, and 39:27. On the meaning of *kull* in the Qur’an, see Thomas Bauer, “Relevance of Early Arabic Poetry for Qur’anic Studies.”

people perished after stubbornly rejecting their prophet's exhortations. The comprehensiveness of the Torah and the Qur'an, by contrast, allows these scriptures to transcend their immediate revelatory contexts. The Torah was not just a set of instructions for Israelites who followed Moses from Egypt to the Promised Land, but an extensive programme for the foundation and administration of an enduring religious community. Hence, the Torah outlasted Moses and retained its relevance for subsequent generations of Israelites, who were "made to inherit" the Mosaic *kitāb* (Q 40:53). Unlike previous revelations, the Torah was meant to be permanent, paradigmatic, and epoch-making. The same holds true for the Qur'an, which envisages itself to be the corresponding scriptural endowment of the children of Ishmael. Both the Torah and the Qur'an owe their paradigmatic and programmatic status to the fact that they are explanations of "everything" and as such reflective of God's *omniscience* and *omnipotence*.⁶⁴

Beyond *ʿilm* and *ḥukm*

While the Qur'an sometimes defines revelatory guidance in terms of knowledge (*ʿilm*) and authority (*ḥukm*), these broad categories provide little specific insight into the content of

⁶⁴ Descriptions of the Torah as containing "everything" are attested before the Qur'an. For instance, the Damascus Document, a text likely written by members of the Qumran community, urges its readers to turn to the Torah of Moses, "wherein everything is specified (בה הכל מדויק) (16:1-2). For a recent edition and translation of this text, see *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, 2:12-57.

divine revelations. More specificity may be gleaned by analyzing the term *āyah* and its plural *āyāt*, common qur’anic nouns that designate the miracles and teachings of various prophets.⁶⁵

Corresponding to the Hebrew *ōth* and the Aramaic/Syriac *āthā*, the Arabic *āyah* has the basic meaning of mark, token, or sign.⁶⁶ The *āyāt* mentioned in the Qur’an almost always have a

divine pedigree, serving as “‘tokens’ or even ‘proofs’ of God’s engagement in the world.”⁶⁷

Specifically, the Qur’an considers nature and history to be brimming with God’s *āyāt*, that is to say, instructive examples of His indispensable and indomitable wisdom and might.⁶⁸ Like

everything else, the divine *āyāt* are recorded in the heavenly *kitāb*, whence they are revealed to

the Prophet. In proclaiming his qur’anic revelations, therefore, the Prophet is reciting the *āyāt*

of the heavenly *kitāb* to his people (e.g. Q 2:129, 12:1-2, 41:3). By distilling the lessons of these

āyāt, qur’anic revelations themselves approach a similar status and therefore can be

⁶⁵ The plural form occurs 295 times, while the singular is attested 87 times.

⁶⁶ *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. The Hebrew term is also reflected in the verb *āvā* (אָוָּ), which appears only once—in the Hithpael form—in the sense of “to demarcate” in the Hebrew Bible (Numbers 34:10).

⁶⁷ William Graham, “The Qur’ān as a Discourse of Signs,” 265.

⁶⁸ For uses of *āyah/āyāt* in historical contexts, see Q 2:252, 3:13, 10:92, 12:7, 25:37, 26:67, 26:103, 26:121, 26:139, 26:158, 26:174, 26:190, 27:52, 48:20. There are also several *sūras* that begin by reference to the *āyāt* of the *kitāb* and continue narrating stories of past nations and Prophets (12:1, 26:2, 27:1, 28:2, 31:2). The noun *dhikrā*, often translated as “reminder,” plays a similar role to *āyah* in the following passages: Q 11:120, 21:84, 26:209, 38:43, 50:37.

considered divine signs in their own right.⁶⁹ To capture the Qur'an's unremitting attempts to draw attention to God's signs, William Graham has described it as "*semiological* in the most basic sense of the term" and thereby "*fundamentally a discourse of signs.*"⁷⁰

The fact that *āyah/āyāt* in the Qur'an denote natural phenomena and historical events has long been recognized in Qur'an scholarship.⁷¹ However, in several instances the *āyāt* seem to refer to legal stipulations.⁷² In particular, the legislative sections of Sūrat al-Baqarah and Sūrat al-Nūr are repeatedly punctuated with phrases such as the following: "Thus God makes His *āyāt* clear to you." An *āyah* is thus best understood as something that is instrumental to human guidance, whether it be a fact of nature, a historical narrative, or a legal injunction. As a collection of *āyāt*, the Qur'an exhibits God's knowledge and authority by contemplating nature, recounting history, and imparting a set of rules for proper conduct to its recipients.

⁶⁹ On the question of whether *āyah* in the Qur'an ever refers to individual units ("verses") of the text itself, see Graham, "The Qur'ān as a Discourse of Signs," 267ff. According to Graham, "[i]t is not hard in many individual passages to give preference to the specific sense 'verse' or 'pericope' (although the general sense of 'signs' cannot ever be wholly ruled out)" (*ibid.*, 268).

⁷⁰ "The Qur'ān as a Discourse of Signs," 270; original emphasis.

⁷¹ See, for instance, Arthur Jeffery, "*āya*," *EI2*; John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 5-7; William Graham, "The Winds to Herald His Mercy and Other 'Signs for Those of Certain Faith'"; *idem.*, "The Qur'ān as a Discourse of Signs," 264 *et passim*.

⁷² Q 2:187, 2:219, 2:221, 2:231, 2:242, 5:44, 5:89, 9:11, 24:18, 24:34, 24:58, 24:59, 24:61. Daniel Madigan has noted this legal usage (*The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 97).

Thus, the examination of *āyah/āyāt*—the building blocks of the Prophet’s *kitāb/qur’ān*—concretizes the relevance of the concepts of *‘ilm* and *ḥukm* for the Qur’an.

***Kitāb* as a Source of (Historical) Knowledge**

In portraying Muhammad and the previous prophets as recounting God’s *āyāt*, the Qur’an emphasizes the pragmatic benefits of reflection on these *āyāt*. By promoting constant mindfulness of God and His boundless mercy and devastating wrath, such reflection brings about a transformation in its subject, from a state of ignorance and negligence to piety and righteousness. In about 250 verses, the Qur’an uses nouns and verbs from the root *dh-k-r* to describe various aspects of this desired mindfulness. The terms that are used most frequently in this context are *tadhkirah* (9 times), *dhikrā* (23 times), and *dhikr* (76 times). The noun *tadhkirah* is used exclusively in relation to the Qur’an among all revelations (20:3, 69:48, 73:19, 74:49, 74:54, 76:29, 80:11), while it is used twice in reference to natural phenomena that should occasion the remembrance of God (56:73, 69:12). The noun *dhikrā* has a similar profile. It is used six times in relation to natural phenomena and historical facts and events, presumably because reflection on them occasions awareness of God and His might and mercy (21:84, 26:209, 38:43, 39:21, 50:8, 50:37). Apart from these cases, *dhikrā* is used most frequently in relation to the Quran, its contents, the very fact of its revelation, and more broadly the Prophet’s preaching (6:90, 7:2, 11:114, 11:120, 29:51, 51:55, 74:31, 80:4, 87:9). While one passage

uses *dhikrā* to describe the Mosaic *kitāb* (40:54), no other revelation or scripture is associated with this term in the Qur'an.

Like *tadhkirah* and *dhikrā*, the term *dhikr* also captures the idea of mindfulness towards God. In this sense, *dhikr* is used as a label for the revelations of several prophets. For instance, a qur'anic account of the ministry of Noah relates that he urged his people to believe in the one true God and abandon the worship of other deities (7:59). Facing rejection and criticism, Noah responded that he is merely delivering "my Lord's messages" (*risālāti rabbī*), and asked his people: "do you deem it strange that a remembrance/reminder (*dhikr*) from your Lord has come to a man from among yourselves?" (7:63).⁷³ Here the term *dhikr* seems to refer to the monotheistic preaching of Noah, the "messages" (*risālāt*) that he relayed to his people from God. The account of Noah is followed by the story of Hūd (the prophet of ʿĀd), which uses *dhikr* in precisely the same way to denote his revealed teachings (7:69). In another sūra, it is the revelations of Ṣāliḥ (the prophet of Thamūd) that are described as "the remembrance/reminder" (*al-dhikr*) by his people (54:25). The application of the label *dhikr* to the preaching of Noah, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ seems to capture the primary aim of such preaching, which is to turn people's attention away from other deities and make them devote themselves to God alone. This use of *dhikr* is attested for the Prophet's revelations as well. For instance, a

⁷³ Cf. Q 10:71, where Noah refers to his "reminding (*tadhkir*) [people] of the signs of God."

passage in Sūrat al-Zukhruf warns that turning away from “the remembrance of the Merciful” has disastrous consequences in this world and the next (43:36-42). The text then bids the Prophet to “hold fast to what is revealed (*ūḥiya*) to you” (43:43), and proceeds to describe this revelation as “a remembrance” (*dhikr*) for the Prophet and his people. Here “a remembrance” seems to reflect “the remembrance of the Merciful” mentioned earlier, because it is by clinging to his revelations that the Prophet and his community can avoid the fate of those who abandon the remembrance of God.

However, in some contexts the Qur’an seems to use the noun *dhikr* and the related verb *dhakara* to denote *not* the remembrance of God *per se* but the recollection of specific figures or accounts from the past. This usage appears almost exclusively in relation to the Qur’an and, to a lesser extent, the Torah. For instance, the Qur’an begins a brief account of Dhū al-Qarnayn in the following way: “And they ask you concerning Dhū al-Qarnayn. Say: ‘I will recite to you a remembrance (*dhikr*) of him’” (18:83; cf. 18:70). In this context, *dhikr* refers to a specific historical narrative that is the immediate focus of attention, even if reflection on this narrative occasions the remembrance of God. This historical concern is particularly evident in Sūrat Maryam and Sūrat Ṣād. The first of these sūras begins with an account of Zachariah and John, which is termed “the remembrance (*dhikr*) of the mercy” of God towards Zachariah (19:2). This account is followed by similar recollections about Maryam (and Jesus), Abraham (and Isaac and

Jacob), Moses (and Aaron), Ishmael, and Idrīs. Crucially, each of these recollections opens with the command *wa-dhkur fī al-kitāb*, which can be translated as “recall in the *kitāb*” or perhaps “make mention in the *kitāb*.” By using the term *dhikr* and then the imperative *udhkur*, this sūra emphasizes that the Prophet’s *kitāb* encompasses narratives about the past.

A similar emphasis on the commemorative quality of the Qur’an is on display in Sūrat Ṣād, which opens with the following oath: “By the Qur’an that possesses remembrance” (*wa-l-qur’āni dhī al-dhikr*). The sūra then proceeds to make note of David (and Solomon), Job, Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob), and Ishmael (and Elisha and Dhū al-Kifl)—each time beginning their brief notices by the imperative “make mention” (*udhkur*).⁷⁴ Another passage suggests that the Prophet’s *kitāb* includes not only stories about bygone communities but also about the Prophet’s people: “And We have sent down to you a *kitāb* wherein is your *dhikr*; will you not reflect?” (21:10). The recipients of the Qur’an are at the center of divine attention and experience God’s heightened presence and involvement (cf. 21:24). Precisely because of this involvement, their lives are now significant and instructive elements of sacred history—and as such, worthy of discussion and inclusion in the new *kitāb*.

⁷⁴ Vv. 17, 41, 45, 48.

Consonant with this emphasis on the historical function of the Prophet’s *kitāb*, sometimes *dhikr* seems to characterize not individual stories revealed to the Prophet but the qur’anic corpus as a whole. For example, Sūrat ṬāHā concludes an extensive account of the life of Moses with the following remark: “Thus do We relate to you of the accounts (*anbā’*) of what has gone before, and We have given you a remembrance from Us” (20:99). Considering the preceding narrative and the explicit reference to “accounts of what has gone before,” the characterization of the Prophet’s revelations as a *dhikr* seems to highlight above all their historical content. Similarly, a narrative in Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (3:33-57) recounts the story of Mary and Jesus, including a conversation between Jesus and God, and is capped with the following statement: “This We recite to you of the signs and the wise remembrance” (3:58).⁷⁵ A comment on the preceding narrative, this verse describes the qur’anic revelations or perhaps the heavenly source whence they originate as “the wise remembrance” (*al-dhikr al-ḥakīm*)—because through these revelations, God conveys crucial historical information otherwise unavailable to the Prophet and his community.

By using the adjective “wise” (*ḥakīm*) to qualify “the remembrance,” Q 3:58 ties this noun to the two most common designations of the Prophet’s revelations, namely, *kitāb* and

⁷⁵ As Mathias Zahniser has pointed out, a similar self-reflection appears in the middle of this narrative, in v. 44, which describes the included accounts as “information from the unseen” (*anbā’ al-ghayb*) (“The Word of God and the Apostleship of ‘Īsā,” 93f).

qurʿān. This is because apart from characterizing God (in 93 instances), “wise” is used in the Qurʿan only in relation to the Prophet’s revelations—twice in the phrase “the wise *kitāb*” (10:1, 31:2), once as “the wise *qurʿān*” (36:2), and once as “the wise *dhikr*” (3:58). These parallels suggest that just like the terms *kitāb* and *qurʿān*, *dhikr* functions as a title for the Prophet’s developing scripture, capturing not only its function in promoting mindfulness of God but also its strong focus on remembrance of the past. The only other passage that features the adjective *ḥakīm* reinforces this point. This text opens by invoking “the clear *kitāb*” (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*) that is sent down to the Prophet, and then mentions the manifestation of this *kitāb* as “an Arabic recitation” (*qurʿānan ʿarabiyyan*) (43:2-3). Next, the passage points to the *umm al-kitāb*, the heavenly source of the Prophet’s *kitāb*, describing this source or perhaps the *kitāb* itself as *ḥakīm*. Finally, the next verse refers to the Prophet’s scripture as “the remembrance” (*al-dhikr*) and threatens that its revelation may cease because of the obstinacy of the Prophet’s people (43:5). The terms *kitāb*, *qurʿān*, and *dhikr* thus appear consecutively as coterminous labels for the Prophet’s revelations.

The same constellation of terms appears in Q 41:41-4, which first establishes a strong association between the term *dhikr* and *kitāb*: “those who disbelieved in *al-dhikr* when it came to them, though it is a sublime *kitāb*.” Similar to Q 43:2, this text goes on to characterize the Prophet’s *dhikr/kitāb* as a *qurʿān* sent down in the Arabic language. These three labels appear

also in Q 15:1-6. After pointing to “the signs of the *kitāb* and the manifest *qurʿān*,” this passage reports a taunt of the Prophet’s opponents, who said: “O you unto whom the *dhikr* has been sent down, truly you are possessed (*majnūn*)” (v. 6).⁷⁶ The appearance of the terms *kitāb*, *qurʿān*, and *dhikr* in these passages, and the exclusive juxtaposition of these terms with the adjective “wise,” suggests that just like *kitāb* and *qurʿān*, *dhikr* functions as a proper name for the Prophet’s emerging scripture, capturing its focus on the remembrance of God and human history.⁷⁷

If *dhikr* is one of the names of the Prophet’s scripture, it also seems to serve as a label for the Mosaic *kitāb*. In particular, this use of *dhikr* seems to underlie the phrase *ahl al-dhikr*, which appears twice in different sūras but in identical verses: “We sent before you not (any) but men to whom We gave revelation. Ask the *ahl al-dhikr* if you do not know!” (16:43, 21:7). This statement insists that previous messengers were mere mortals—probably a response to those who questioned the Prophet’s claim to messengerhood on account of the fact that he is a mere human, that is to say, neither an angel nor accompanied by one (e.g. 6:8, 11:27). In order to corroborate its description of previous messengers as mortals, the Qur’an refers the

⁷⁶ See also Q 36:69, which refers to the Prophet’s revelations as “a *dhikr* and a manifest *qurʿān*.”

⁷⁷ According to al-Ṭabarī, God has bestowed four names on the Prophet Muhammad’s revelations, viz., *al-qurʿān*, *al-kitāb*, *al-dhikr*, and *al-furqān* (*Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:89).

Prophet's detractors to the *ahl al-dhikr*, presumably expecting that they would confirm the Qur'an's position. The key assumption here is that the *ahl al-dhikr* are knowledgeable about prophetic history. But what is the referent of *al-dhikr* and who are the *ahl al-dhikr*?

It is reasonable to suggest that *al-dhikr* in these two instances refers to the Mosaic *kitāb*. As for Q 16:43, its acknowledgment of the authority of *ahl al-dhikr* is followed by reference to the Prophet's own scripture: "And We sent down to you the remembrance (*al-dhikr*), so that you explain to the people what has been sent down to them and so that they reflect" (16:44). By using the name *al-dhikr* for the Prophet's scripture, this passage connects the Prophet to the *ahl al-dhikr*. While the latter are "the people of the remembrance," the Prophet is a direct recipient of "the remembrance" from God.⁷⁸ This parallelism is highly reminiscent of passages that make reference to both "the people of the *kitāb*" (or similar phrases that designate the previous recipients of *al-kitāb*) and the Prophet's own *kitāb* (5:15; 29:47; cf. 35:31-2). Just as these texts indicate that there are two *kitābs*, Q 16:43-4 implies that there are two instances of *al-dhikr*: one bestowed upon the Prophet, the other already in possession of another community. This structural similarity, coupled with the resemblance of the phrase *ahl al-dhikr*

⁷⁸ The other appearance of "the people of the remembrance" is similarly followed by the just discussed Q 21:10, which refers to the Prophet's *kitāb* and the fact that it contains the *dhikr* of the Prophet's people. discussed before).

to *ahl al-kitāb*, suggests that like *al-kitāb* in the phrase *ahl al-kitāb*, *al-dhikr* in the construct *ahl al-dhikr* designates the Torah.

The second instance of *ahl al-dhikr* appears in Q 21:7. As this verse is virtually identical with the just-discussed Q 16:43, it stands to reason that Q 21:7 uses *al-dhikr* also to refer to the Torah. This hypothesis finds support in a later passage in the same *sūra*, which describes the revelation given to Moses and Aaron as “a remembrance (*dhikr*) for the pious” (Q 21:48).⁷⁹ Interestingly, just like Q 16:43, Q 21:48 is followed by a reference to the Qur’an characterized as “a blessed remembrance” (21:50). By labelling the Mosaic and Muhammadan revelations as *dhikr*, this passage establishes correspondence between them and thereby reflects the same parallelism embedded in Q 16:43-4 between the *ahl al-dhikr* and the Prophet as possessors of two *dhikrs*. Moreover, Q 21:48-50 is similar to texts that juxtapose the Mosaic and Muhammadan *kitābs* (e.g. 2:87-9, 6:91-2, 6:154-5), further supporting the idea that the Mosaic *dhikr* and the phrase *ahl al-dhikr* have the same significations respectively as the Mosaic *kitāb* and the *ahl al-kitāb*. Finally, there is another passage, also in *Sūrat al-Anbiyā’* (21), that seems to use *al-dhikr* in relation to the Torah: “And We wrote in Psalms (*al-zabūr*), after *al-dhikr*, that My righteous servants shall inherit the land” (21:105). This verse is an apparent reference to Psalms 37, which repeatedly claims that God will eventually destroy the evildoers and allow

⁷⁹ Cf. Q 37:117, which also envisions both Moses and Aaron as the recipients of *al-kitāb*.

the righteous to live in the land in peace and security (vv. 3, 9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34; cf. Daniel 7:2, Matthew 5:5).⁸⁰ Because the Qur’anic verse portrays *al-dhikr* to be anterior to the Book of Psalms, it seems reasonable to see *al-dhikr* as a reference to the Torah, particularly because earlier in the same *sūra* the label *dhikr* designates the Torah and the Qur’an (vv. 48-50).⁸¹ In sum, it seems that just like *kitāb*, *dhikr* also serves as a label for the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad in the Qur’an.

As mentioned before, when denoting the Qur’an *dhikr* seems to highlight not only its emphasis on mindfulness towards God but also its focus on remembering the past. While fewer instances of *dhikr* refer to the Torah, its two attestations as part of the phrase *ahl al-dhikr*

⁸⁰ In particular, it is the text of verse 29 that is close to the Qur’anic statement: “the righteous (*tsaddīqīm*) shall inherit the land and dwell in it forever.”

⁸¹ This understanding of *al-dhikr* is attested in the early exegetical tradition and is endorsed by several commentators, including al-Bayḏāwī (following whom Muir translates *al-dhikr* here as “the Law”; *Testimony*, 33). Another opinion, held by Muqātil (among others), is that *al-dhikr* refers to the heavenly source of revelations, the *umm al-kitāb*. Incidentally, the term *al-zabūr* in this verse is alternatively read as *al-zubūr* and *al-zubur*, both of which are plural forms of *al-zabūr* (*Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 6:66). Apparently on the basis of this plural reading, some exegetes interpret *al-zubūr/al-zubur* as a reference to all scriptures (while taking *al-dhikr* to signify the heavenly source of these scriptures), or as a designation for all scriptures apart from the Torah (taking *al-dhikr* to denote the Torah) (see al-Ṭabarī’s discussion of this verse). Cf. Walid Saleh’s analysis of this verse, which emphasizes its theological afterlife in the early Islamic period (“The Psalms in the Qur’an and in the Islamic Religious Imagination”). In Saleh’s view, the phrase “after *al-dhikr*” is “enigmatic” and its “Arabic is not clear” (*ibid.*, 282, 290). He surmises that perhaps *al-dhikr* refers to the warning that also occurs repeatedly in Psalms 37, namely, the promise that God will destroy the wicked (*ibid.*, 296). Saleh does not consider the possibility that *al-dhikr* may refer to the Torah, and does not mention this opinion in his survey of the exegesis of this verse in Muslim commentaries. George Sale renders the verse thus: “And now have we written in the psalms, after *the promulgation of the law*, that my servants the righteous shall inherit the earth” (273).

seem to indicate the same concern for historical knowledge. This is because passages that feature *ahl al-dhikr* are concerned with the past. In these two texts, the Qur'an is making a historical claim. It is asserting that previous messengers were mere mortals, apparently to reject the notion that God sends angels to human communities. It is for the purpose of validating this historical assertion that the Qur'an refers potential skeptics to the *ahl al-dhikr*. This strategy is predicated on the assumption that the *ahl al-dhikr* are recognized as knowledgeable about previous messengers and communities. Thus, if *al-dhikr* denotes the Torah, it likely captures the Torah's substantial historical content. Indeed, the fact that these two verses use the phrase *ahl al-dhikr* instead of the far more common *ahl al-kitāb* may be a deliberate choice for highlighting the abundant historical information embedded in the Mosaic *kitāb* and available to its adherents.

***Kitāb* as a Source of Judgments**

The Torah and the Qur'an thus represent paradigmatic guidebooks that impart extensive historical information to their recipients. By recounting many instructive episodes from the past, the Mosaic and Muhammadan "remembrances" (*dhikrs*) enable their hearers and readers to learn from God's interactions with humans and from the fate of figures and communities who lived aforesaid. While many qur'anic passages emphasize the pedagogical benefits of historical reflection, others are interested in its doctrinal and legal implications for

the present. This is what we find in Sūrat Maryam, for example, which recounts the stories of the Annunciation to Mary and the birth of Jesus. Immediately after these narratives, the sūra pivots to theological considerations:

That is [the account of] Jesus, son of Mary, a statement of the truth wherein they doubt.
It is not for God to take a child. Glory be to Him! ...
[Jesus only said:] “God is my Lord and yours, so worship Him. This is the straight path.”
Yet the parties differed among themselves, and woe unto the disbelievers from the
meeting of an awesome day! Q 19:34-37

Having recounted the story of the conception and birth of Jesus, the sūra here rejects the notion that he was God’s Son. The story of Jesus therefore serves as a means to settle the contest over Jesus between “the parties” (*al-aḥzāb*), likely a reference to various Jewish and Christian communities whose estimation of Jesus ran the gamut from impostor to divine. This passage demonstrates the Qur’an’s interest in narrative as a means for rejecting, defending, and articulating theological convictions. Indeed, the Qur’an elsewhere claims to “recount to the Children of Israel most of that wherein they differ” (Q 27:76).⁸²

If truthful historical information has doctrinal value, it is also of legal significance. This is evident in the Qur’an’s polemic against Jews and Christians on such issues as Sabbath observance and food prohibitions. In particular, the Qur’an forcefully rejects the extensive

⁸² See also Q 5:15-19, which similarly emphasizes the expository character of Muhammad’s *kitāb* in settling doctrinal matters.

dietary restrictions of the Jewish tradition, proposing instead a smaller set of constraints. To defeat the Jews' competing legal vision, the Qur'an engages in historical revisionism. Thus, Q 6:146 claims that God imposed stringent restrictions on the Jews only to "punish them for their disobedience" (cf. Q 4:160)—mirroring a Christian view that considers some of Mosaic law as a yoke imposed for Jewish transgressions, in particular the worship of the Golden Calf.⁸³ In this vein, the Qur'an claims that "all food was permissible to the Children of Israel, except that which Israel [Jacob] forbade himself, before the Torah was sent down. Say, bring the Torah and recite it, if you are truthful!" (3:93). The Qur'an therefore seems to reject the vision that extends the genealogy of Jewish dietary restrictions back into patriarchal times.⁸⁴ By contesting Jewish claims about history and scripture, the Qur'an seeks to make room for its own position on the legal question of permissible and prohibited foods.

While these passages emphasize the value of historical knowledge in addressing doctrinal and legal disagreements, other texts present dispute-resolution as the very *raison*

⁸³ This sentiment is already found in the New Testament (e.g. Galatians 3:19). For an informative discussion of the Qur'an's position on dietary restrictions, see Holger Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, especially 140-174.

⁸⁴ For a review of exegetical discussions of these verses, see Brannon Wheeler, "Israel and the Torah of Muḥammad." Wheeler also surveys some of the pertinent biblical and post-biblical evidence. The drive to push back the origin of halakhic injunctions to the time of the patriarchs (or even earlier) can already be seen in the Book of Jubilees. See, for example, Abraham's extensive advice to Isaac—including detailed cultic regulations such as the necessity of burning the entire fat of peace offerings on the altar (21:5-9; in James Vanderkam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 2:121-2). See also Gary Anderson, "The Status of the Torah Before Sinai: The Retelling of the Bible in the Damascus Covenant and the Book of Jubilees."

d'être of the revelation of *kitāb*. According to Q 16:64, for example, “We have not sent down the *kitāb* to you except for you to clarify (*li-tubayyina*) to them what they differ about, and as a guide and a mercy for a people who believe.” By virtue of receiving the *kitāb*, this verse suggests, the Prophet can shed light on subjects of disagreement and thereby help in their resolution. A similar text describes the Prophet’s function in judicial terms: “We have sent down the *kitāb* to you with the truth so that you judge (*li-taḥkuma*) between people by what God has shown you” (4:105). Highlighting the practical utility of the Prophet’s *kitāb*-based insight, this verse notes that he has the power of judgment among people. Ultimately, of course, following the *kitāb* means nothing but submission to divine arbitration. “Should I seek a judge (*ḥakam*) other than God,” the Prophet asks his community, “while He is the One who has sent down to you the *kitāb*, expounded?” (Q 6:114). This is a natural corollary of the Prophet’s *kitāb* being divine revelation. Should skeptics doubt this fact, the verse refers them to the adherents of the previous *kitāb* (“those to whom we gave the *kitāb*”), who know that the new *kitāb* “is sent down from your Lord in truth.”

Like Muhammad’s *kitāb*, the previous *kitāb* was also meant to address people’s disagreements: “God sent forth the prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and He sent down with them the *kitāb* with the truth, so that He may judge (*li-yahkuma*) between the people regarding their disagreements” (2:213). Apparently a description of the Mosaic *kitāb*,

this verse goes on to lament a failure of historical proportion. Instead of helping to resolve differences, the first *kitāb* became a subject of disagreement itself, even though (and indeed only after) “clear proofs” (*al-bayyināt*) were given to its recipients.⁸⁵ Considering this state of affairs, one of the functions of Muhammad’s *kitāb* is to address the bitter discord among the recipients of the previous *kitāb*: “have you not seen those who were given a share in the *kitāb*, [who are] called to God’s *kitāb* so that it may judge (*li-yahkuma*) between them, yet a group of them turn away?” (3:23). Having turned the blessing of their own *kitāb* into a curse, the adherents of the previous *kitāb* must seize the second chance given them in the revelation of God’s *kitāb* to Muhammad. Instead of being grateful, however, some of them reject divine guidance and insists on their erroneous ways.

The capacity of God’s *kitāb* to serve as a basis for adjudication is not only due to its historical content. Two qur’anic texts in Sūrat al-Nisā³ demonstrate that *kitāb* is inclusive of specific injunctions that directly enshrine God’s judgment (*ḥukm*). This is particularly evident in Q 4:127, which opens by noting that some Believers have sought a ruling from the Prophet (*yastaftūnaka*) concerning women. The verse responds that it is God Himself who shall provide a ruling for them (*Allāh yuftikum*). It then refers the Believers to “what is recited to you in the

⁸⁵ Given the association of Jesus with *al-bayyināt* elsewhere in the Qur’an (e.g. 2:87), the verse may be alluding to the division of the *ahl al-kitāb* into Jews and Christians after the coming of Jesus.

kitāb concerning the orphan women,” likely a reference to the laws at the beginning of Sūrat al-Nisā’ (vv. 2-12). Rules for the treatment of orphan women, therefore, are constitutive of the Prophet’s *kitāb*. Similarly, Qur’an 4:140 reminds the Believers that God “has revealed to you in the *kitāb* that when you hear God’s signs being rejected and derided, do not sit with them [who do this] until they engage in some other conversation.” This verse also shows that the *kitāb* contains a specific decree—perhaps the one found in Q 6:68—and that this decree must be followed by the Believers.⁸⁶ That the previous *kitāb* is similarly a source of legislation is perhaps most evident in Q 5:43-5, which explicitly notes the existence of “God’s judgment” (*ḥukm Allāh*) in *al-tawrāh* and then mentions the laws of retaliation found in the Pentateuch (e.g. Leviticus 24:19-20). This passage goes on to mention the revelation of the *kitāb* to the Prophet and emphasizes, twice, his responsibility to “judge between [the followers of the previous *kitāb*] by what God has sent down” (5:48-9).

Defining *kitāb*

The foregoing discussion reveals the remarkable coherence of qur’anic discourse on revelations and, in particular, the concept of *kitāb*. In the first instance, *kitāb* serves as a label for the heavenly book, which is a textual embodiment of God’s knowledge and power vis-à-vis His creation. That the Qur’an considers knowledge and authority to be intertwined is captured

⁸⁶ Cf. Q 8:75 and 33:6.

in its juxtaposition of *‘ilm* and *ḥukm* and the simultaneous description of God as *‘alīm* and *ḥakīm* in dozens of qur’anic passages. The two-dimensional nature of the heavenly book is also mirrored in qur’anic attestations of the verb *kataba*, which often involve the transcription of divine knowledge and the imposition of divine decrees. Finally, the Qur’an’s emphasis on the all-embracing character of the heavenly book meets its counterpart in the many texts that describe the objects of God’s knowledge and power as nothing short of “everything” (*kull shay’*).

Just as the heavenly *kitāb* is an exhaustive source of God’s wisdom and judgment, the two scriptures named as *kitābs* in the Qur’an—the Torah and the Qur’an—are also envisaged as extensive scriptures that reveal God’s knowledge and will to their recipients. Appearances of the terms *āyah/āyāt* confirm and concretize this picture, suggesting that the Qur’an’s function is fundamentally to encourage reflection on natural phenomena and historical events and to impart injunctions for righteous conduct. The special importance of historical insight to the Qur’an and the Torah is reflected in the Qur’an’s application of the label *dhikr* to these two scriptures. Their judicial function, on the other hand, is apparent in their presentation as sources of God’s *ḥukm* and bases for the resolution of doctrinal and legal questions. Concepts and themes that are scattered across dozens of qur’anic passages, therefore, fit together as pieces of a puzzle and form a picture that is at the same time coherent and compelling.

Diachronic Reflection

The emergence of a coherent qur'anic scripturology is all the more significant given the synchronic approach of the investigation so far. That is to say, without compartmentalizing qur'anic texts into distinct chronological categories, they seem to yield a consistent and intelligible picture as a whole. In particular, there is no verse in the entire Qur'an that clearly contradicts the two-*kitāb* hypothesis. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring whether a diachronic perspective can enrich or complement the image obtained via a synchronic analysis. For example, does this image stand in tension with those parts of the qur'anic corpus at the chronological margins, i.e. texts considered early Meccan and late Medinan? In addition, is it possible to discern clear developments within the two-*kitāb* paradigm itself? Before answering these questions, a foray into the subject of chronology is necessary.

When nineteenth-century European scholars began to focus on the Qur'an in earnest, they were chiefly interested in its potential for verifying and complementing what was known about Muhammad from Muslim historiographic sources.⁸⁷ Without having the temporal

⁸⁷ In his four-volume *The Life of Mahomet* (1861), for example, William Muir asserted that the Qur'an is "the ground-work and the test of all inquiries into the origin of Islam and the character of its founder ... illustrating his religious views, his public acts, and his domestic character" (1:xxvii). *The Life of Mahomet* was a republication of

sequence of qur'anic passages, however, it was impossible to make sense of the different theological, legal, and political positions found in the Qur'an. Was Muhammad's community, for example, first friendly to the Jews and later hostile to them, or did the two parties begin on negative terms and then gradually developed an amicable relationship? For qur'anic scholarship to bear historical fruit, it was necessary to impose annalistic order on the qur'anic text.⁸⁸ Leading scholars such as Gustav Weil, William Muir, Alroy Sprenger, Theodor Nöldeke, and Hubert Grimme therefore all attempted to discern the sequence in which the Prophet had promulgated the qur'anic text—using information from Muslim literary sources as well as internal qur'anic indications. Like some Muslim scholars before them, European researchers began with assigning precise dates to individual sūras or even passages of the Qur'an. As skepticism towards Muslim literary sources grew in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, a precise sequence of qur'anic passages seemed unattainable. Twentieth-century scholars therefore largely settled on a periodization of sūras into four successive categories—early Meccan, middle Meccan, late Meccan, and Medinan—which was supplemented by more

eleven essays that Muir had originally published, from 1853 to 1855, in *The Calcutta Review*. See the Bibliography for a list of these essays.

⁸⁸ Muir noted that “the real drawback to the inestimable value of the Coran, as a contemporary and authentic record of Mahomet's character and actions, is the want of arrangement and connection which pervades it” (*Life of Mahomet*, 1:xxvi-xxvii). In recounting the story of Muhammad's prophetic mission, therefore, Muir “sought to illustrate the statements of tradition by the *contemporaneous* revelations of the Coran” (*ibid.*, v; emphasis added).

confident dating of specific sūras and passages. Initially proposed by Weil,⁸⁹ this quadripartite classification was refined by Nöldeke and finally enshrined in the second edition of his *Geschichte des Qorāns*, published jointly with Friedrich Schwally.⁹⁰ It was a compromise between order and chaos, between positivism and skepticism—one that has seemed expedient and judicious to many subsequent scholars.⁹¹

While Nöldeke’s periodization has maintained its popularity, it was by no means the last word on the question of chronology. A number of scholars, most notably Richard Bell and Régis Blachère, attempted to improve Nöldeke’s system through revising its methodology and

⁸⁹ First briefly in a tome of some 450 pages, titled *Muhammed der Prophet, sein Leben und sein Lehre* (1843), and then extensively in *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (published originally in 1844, then revised for a second edition in 1878). Weil’s chronology was largely based on the chronological list he had found in *Ta’rikh al-khamis fi ahwāl anfas nafis* by al-Diyārbakrī (d. 1574). For a biography of Weil and an assessment of the significance of his scholarship, see Ruchama Johnston-Bloom, “Oriental Studies and Jewish Questions: German-Jewish Encounters with Muhammad, the Qur’an, and Islamic Modernities,” 45-125.

⁹⁰ For an insightful contextualization and critique of this arrangement, see Emmanuelle Stefanidis, “The Qur’an Made Linear: A Study of the *Geschichte des Qorāns*’ Chronological Reordering.” As Stefanidis notes, already Weil had remarked that “an exact chronological order” of qur’anic chapters is not possible “due to their similarity in content and form” (Weil, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung*, 59; translated and cited in Stefanidis, “The Qur’an Made Linear,” 17, n. 25). Still, both Weil and Nöldeke after him use data from the Prophet’s biography to assign specific dates and partial orderings to many sūras and passages. This is evident in the second edition of the *Geschichte des Qorāns* as well, even after Schwally’s attempts to dilute this tendency towards specificity (see, e.g., *Geschichte des Qorāns* [1909], 91, 172).

⁹¹ Nöldeke’s system is so established that countless studies use it without introducing it in detail or even acknowledging its source. For an example, see A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 4-5, where references to “the earliest parts of the Koran” and “the second and third periods of Muhammad’s preaching in Makka” invoke Nöldeke’s periodization of Meccan passages.

rethinking its analysis of Muslim sources.⁹² More importantly, the tide of radical skepticism that began with John Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies* (1977) rendered chronology a moot subject for many scholars. William Muir's painstaking chronological efforts were motivated through the conviction that "every verse in the Coran is the genuine and unaltered composition of Mahomet himself."⁹³ Wansbrough, however, suggested that the Qur'an was a collective work, a distillation of a vast corpus of communal "prophetic *logia*" finalized no earlier than the ninth century. This conception made a chronological scheme meaningless. While few scholars were willing to accept Wansbrough's position, many submitted to paler shades of skepticism that still dampened the prospects of chronological investigation. Even if Muhammad was the original author of the Qur'an, for example, how could we know that the text was not significantly reworked and revised after him? What if the *sīrah-maghāzī* literature is primarily mythical and hagiographical, and thereby of little value for establishing even basic facts about Muhammad's life?⁹⁴ Without faith in the broad outlines of Muhammad's biography, there would be no historical scaffolding to support a chronological structure.

⁹² Richard Bell, *The Qur'an: Translated, with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs* (2 vols., 1937-9); Régis Blachère, *Le Coran: Traduction selon un essai de reclassement des sourates* (2 vols., 1949-50).

⁹³ *The Life of Mahomet* (1st ed.), 1:xxvii.

⁹⁴ Contrast this with Nöldeke's assessment of Muslim sources on the biography of the Prophet: "In [the Meccan period], only a few reliable memoirs from a small circle are available, with uncertain chronology and many

This is not the place to discuss, much less settle, the fundamental historiographic questions of the first Islamic century.⁹⁵ Instead, I propose to conduct an analytical experiment. If we assume that Nöldeke’s periodization is an approximate estimation of true qur’anic chronology, then does there emerge meaningful thematic or terminological developments in qur’anic scripturology? If this exercise yields a coherent and compelling narrative of development, then we should recognize the likelihood of such development and reflect on its implications—all the while acknowledging the uncertain nature of the assumptions that underlie and enable this entire analytical experiment.

I: First Meccan Texts

The term *kitāb* is attested in all four groupings of Nöldeke’s chronology. However, the functions associated with this term differ from one group to the next. In First Meccan sūras, *kitāb* appears eight times in three different passages in reference to *individual* records of human deeds (Q 69:19,25; 83:7,9,18; 84:7,10), a function that it assumes in only one other sūra, viz., in the Second Meccan Q 17 (vv. 13, 14, 71).⁹⁶ Additionally, in one First Meccan passage (Q

legends, whereas in [the Medina period], pure history predominates, enabling us to trace the events from year to year. We can thus establish a chronology of the Medinan sūras with accurate details” (*History of the Qurʾān*, 141).

⁹⁵ For recent studies that tackle the subject of chronology with attention to these questions, see Nicolai Sinai, “The Qur’an as Process”; Behnam Sadeghi, “The Chronology of the Qurʾān: A Stylometric Research Program”; Gabriel Reynolds, “Le problème de la chronologie du Coran”; Joseph Witztum, “Variant Traditions, Relative Chronology, and the Study of Intra-Quranic Parallels.”

⁹⁶ In the interest of a less cluttered text, I will not give references to Nöldeke-Schwally’s datings in the *Geschichte des Qurāns*, unless a specific verse is given a date different from that of the sūra in which it appears. The new

78:29) *kitāb* may signify the comprehensive heavenly book where everything is recorded.⁹⁷ In Q 52:2, also First Meccan, *kitāb* seems to signify the Torah, although its referent might be the heavenly book instead, while in another First Meccan text (56:78) *kitāb* appears to denote the celestial source of the Qur'an.⁹⁸ Finally, one First Meccan text notes that the pagans do not have a *kitāb* in support of their positions (Q 68:37), thus implying that the Prophet's revelations constitute a *kitāb*.⁹⁹ Apart from this one text, however, the qur'anic corpus does not seem to be labelled a *kitāb* in First Meccan sūras, instead designated by terms such as *tadhkira* and *tanzīl*—which are also attested in the Second Meccan group.

In addition to *kitāb*, the First Meccan group of sūras contains the only qur'anic attestation of the term *lawḥ*, which designates the source of the Qur'an (Q 85:22). More importantly, First Meccan sūras use *ṣuḥuf* as a designation for previous scriptures, the source of the Qur'an, and the celestial records of human deeds. There are five such references. Two

translation of *Geschichte des Qorāns*, titled *The History of the Qur'an*, conveniently adds section headings that enumerate all the sūras that are discussed by Nöldeke-Schwally in each given section, hence making it easy to find a specific sūra's dating discussion.

⁹⁷ This is based on the premise that the accusative word *kitāban* in this verse is a second object of the verb *aḥṣaynā*, denoting the heavenly *kitāb* where everything is recorded. Alternatively, *kitāban* may denote the *manner* of *aḥṣaynā* (not its place), in which case the verse should be translated as “We have counted everything in writing.”

⁹⁸ *The History of the Qur'an*, 87. Nöldeke notes that vv. 75-96 may form a second, later portion of the sūra.

⁹⁹ Nöldeke suggests that verses 17-33 and 48-60 of this sūra are Second Meccan (*The History of the Qur'an*, 79). But there are only 52 verses in the sūra, so perhaps v. 37 fell in what he had considered a Second Meccan section.

passages, already mentioned in Chapter One, speak of “the leaves (*ṣuḥuf*) of Moses, and [of] Abraham, who was faithful” (Q 53:36-7) or “the ancient leaves (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*), the leaves (*ṣuḥuf*) of Abraham and Moses” (Q 87:18-9)—which according to the Qur’an confirm its own warnings and ethical exhortations. Apart from these passages, one First Meccan text describes the Qur’an as being preserved in certain leaves: “Nay, it is truly a reminder (*tadhkirah*) ... in honored leaves (*ṣuḥufin mukarramatin*), exalted and purified (*muṭahharatin*), in the hands of scribes, noble and virtuous” (80:11-6). Resembling a hymn, this passage seems to celebrate the Qur’an’s preservation in celestial leaves that were transcribed by angelic scribes. The fourth First Meccan reference suggests that Muhammad’s adversaries demanded to receive such heavenly leaves themselves before they accepted Muhammad’s claims about revelation: “every man among them wishes to be given leaves unrolled (*ṣuḥufan munashsharatan*)” (Q 74:52). Finally, the fifth passage uses similar language in apparent relation to records of human deeds. In the context of describing apocalyptic events, this passage speaks of a time “when the leaves shall be unrolled (*al-ṣuḥuf nushirat*)” (Q 81:10). There are only two other occurrences of *ṣuḥuf* in the Qur’an. One is a Second Meccan reference to “the ancient leaves” (Q 20:133), an expression already seen in Q 87:18. The other reference appears in a Medinan text that describes Muhammad as “a messenger from God who recites purified leaves (*ṣuḥufan muṭahharatan*)”

(98:2), a phrase reminiscent of the First Meccan Q 80:13-4. *Kitāb* (in the singular) and *ṣuḥuf* (in the plural) thus dominate the textual landscape of First Meccan sūras.

II: Second and Third Meccan Texts

The sūras that Nöldeke assigns to the remainder of Muhammad's Meccan activity share significant similarities in scriptural terminology. As a result, it is convenient to discuss these sūras together. In general, *kitāb* becomes much more prominent in Second and Third Meccan texts. For one, *kitāb* appears at the beginning of five (out of 21) Second Meccan sūras and fourteen (out of 21) Third Meccan sūras in reference to the heavenly book or perhaps the Qur'an itself, giving rise to what Nöldeke calls "formal headings" ("*förmliche Überschriften*").¹⁰⁰ Such a heading is not found in First Meccan sūras, and is attested only once in a Medinan sūra, namely, Sūrat al-Baqarah—which Nöldeke considers the earliest of Medinan sūras.¹⁰¹ In addition to its prefatory role, *kitāb* unequivocally designates the comprehensive heavenly book eleven times in Second and Third Meccan texts,¹⁰² a referent it takes three more times in

¹⁰⁰ The following Second Meccan sūras feature such headings: 15, 26, 27, 43, 44. Cf. the Second Meccan sūras 36, 38, and 50, which begin by reference to the *qur'ān* alone. Headings that reference *kitāb* also appear at the beginning of Third Medinan Q 32, 41, 45, 11, 14, 12, 40, 28, 39, 31, 10, 7, 46, and 13 (*The History of the Qur'ān*, 118, 126).

¹⁰¹ *The History of the Qur'ān*, 141.

¹⁰² Q 17:58, 18:49, 20:52, 23:62, 27:75, 50:4, 10:61, 11:6, 34:3, 35:11, 6:59.

Medinan passages.¹⁰³ *Kitāb* is also explicitly ascribed to the Prophet four times in Second Meccan texts and eight times in Third Meccan ones.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, *kitāb* is attributed to Moses in four Second Meccan texts and ten Third Meccan texts,¹⁰⁵ a purpose it serves only three times in Medinan texts.¹⁰⁶ Incidentally, of the ten passages adduced in Chapter Two in support of the two-*kitāb* hypothesis, one (Q 23:49-50) is Second Meccan while five are Third Meccan (11:17, 46:10-12, 46:30, 35:25, 28:48-9)¹⁰⁷ and the other three (2:87-9, 3:184, 4:136) are Medinan.

Just as *ṣuḥuf* is strongly associated with First Meccan sūras, *zūbur* and *zabūr* are correlated with Second and Third Meccan texts. *Zabūr* seems to designate the Book of Psalms in Q 21:105 and 17:55, both considered Second Meccan. The expression in the latter verse, “We gave David a *zabūr*,” appears also in the Medinan Q 4:163. As for *zūbur*, it appears seven times,

¹⁰³ Q 8:75, 9:36, 57:22.

¹⁰⁴ Second Meccan: 18:1, 18:27, 21:10, 38:29 (cf. 43:21); Third Meccan: 7:2, 14:1, 35:31, 39:2, 39:23, 39:41, 41:41, 46:4.

¹⁰⁵ Second Meccan: Q 17:2, 23:49, 25:35, 37:117. Third Meccan: Q 6:154, 11:17, 11:110, 28:43, 28:48-9, 32:23, 40:53, 41:45, 46:12, 46:30. According to Nöldeke, verses 21-32 of Q 46 “certainly were not in this place originally, as they interrupt the continuity” between the preceding and following sections (*The History of the Qurʾān*, 130). Nevertheless, Nöldeke still considers vv. 21-32 to “belong to the same period” as the rest of the sūra (*ibid.*).

¹⁰⁶ Twice in Sūrat al-Baqarah (vv. 53, 87), and once as a Medinan insertion into the Third Meccan Sūrat al-Anʿām (v. 91). For the latter dating, see *The History of the Qurʾān*, 131.

¹⁰⁷ Another text, Q 6:91-2, also appears in a sūra that Nöldeke considers Third Meccan (*The History of the Qurʾān*, 130-1). However, Nöldeke separates verse 91 from 92 by arguing that the former (but not the latter) is a Medinan insertion, because “the direct charge against the Jews of writing down their holy books (and thereby suppressing a great deal, including the passages referring to Muḥammad) is more likely to have been made at Medina than at Mecca” (*ibid.*, 131).

four of which are in Second Meccan passages. For example, Q 26:196 claims that the qur’anic message already exists “in the *zibur* of the ancients,” a phrase reminiscent of “the ancient *ṣuḥuf*.” According to Q 54:52-3, which follows an account of previous nations, “everything they did is in *al-zubur*, and everything great and small is inscribed.” Here *al-zubur* seems to refer to heavenly registers, where human deeds and other matters “great and small” are recorded.¹⁰⁸

There are also two Third Meccan attestations of *zibur* (Q 16:44 and 35:25) and a Medinan one (Q 3:184). In Q 35:25 and 3:184 *zibur* is juxtaposed with *al-bayyināt* and *al-kitāb*, while in Q 16:44 it appears alongside *al-bayyināt* alone—although sandwiched between two occurrences of *dhikr* in relation to the Torah and the Qur’an. These instances are therefore somewhat similar to the Second Meccan Q 23:49-53, which begins by mentioning the Mosaic *kitāb* and ends with reference to *zibur*. It is noteworthy that, even though some of the occurrences of *zibur*

¹⁰⁸ Earlier in the same *sūra*, the text asks the Prophet’s community whether “their unbelievers are better than those [of previous nations], or have you an exemption [from punishment] in *al-zubur*?” In this context, *al-zubur* seems to refer to previous scriptures—although it may alternatively denote the records of divine decrees, which contain information about the fate of nations and individual. The final Second Meccan text (Q 23) uses *zibur* in a similar context to Q 54:52-3, that is, after a historical reflection that begins with the story of Noah and ends with the fate of Pharaoh and his people (vv. 23-48). In contrast to Q 54, however, Q 23 goes on to mention the bestowal of *al-kitāb* to Moses and the miraculous character of “the son of Mary and his mother,” finally ending with what seems like a lamentation on the state of humanity or perhaps Jews and Christians specifically: “but they split their affair between them over scriptures (*zuburan*)” (v. 53). If concerning Jews and Christians, this verse may be a reference to their sectarian fragmentation that is coupled with differences over scriptural canon, despite their common adherence to the Mosaic *kitāb*. On the other hand, *zibur* here may mean “pieces” and therefore simply serve to emphasize the many religious and sectarian divisions of Israelites or humanity in general. In fact, *زبرا* in this verse has also been read as *zubaran*, the plural of *zubra* in the sense of “fragment” and “piece.” See *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, 6:183f.

resemble those of *ṣuḥuf* (cf. “the *zūbur* of the ancients” vs. “the ancient *ṣuḥuf*”), *zūbur* is not attributed to Abraham or Moses or any other specific prophet for that matter.

A related feature of Second and Third Meccan *sūras* is their significant historical content, a long-recognized fact that has been recently highlighted by Angelika Neuwirth.¹⁰⁹ According to Neuwirth, most Second Meccan *sūras* and several Third Meccan ones are characterized by a tri-partite structure, where a formulaic prologue and epilogue frame a central historical section.¹¹⁰ Neuwirth observes that these “history suras” often begin by invoking *al-kitāb*, which she takes to denote the heavenly scripture.¹¹¹ Neuwirth interprets this to mean that, in the conception of these *sūras*, the transcendental scripture was being sent down to the Prophet piecemeal, with individual revelations “constituting the *dhikr* – made up predominantly of recollections of history.”¹¹² In other words, these *sūras* portray the heavenly book primarily as a repository of historical information (*dhikr*) that is extracted in coherent segments and sandwiched with an appropriate introduction and conclusion, which constitute

¹⁰⁹ Initially in the 1996 essay titled “Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon: Zu Entstehung und Wiederauflösung der Surenkomposition im Verlauf der Entwicklung eines islamischen Kultus.” This essay has been translated and updated in “From Recitation through Liturgy to Canon: Sura Composition and Dissolution during the Development of Islamic Ritual.”

¹¹⁰ “From Recitation,” 143.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 149. As she notes in the conclusion, “History – or the interpretation of history (in the case of the late Meccan suras which do not contain narratives) – is clearly the backbone of these suras” (*Ibid.*, 156).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 150.

divine speech but do not stem from the heavenly book itself. Neuwirth believes that this scriptural conception is modelled after contemporaneous Jewish and Christian liturgical service, “at the heart of which is the recollection of salvation history” as recounted in the Bible.¹¹³ Indeed, Neuwirth assigns ritual significance to this literary parallelism, claiming that Second and Third Meccan sūras represent a kind of liturgy of the Word that was recited in an incipient but abortive Islamic service.¹¹⁴ While Neuwirth’s liturgical hypothesis is open to question, she admirably underlines the historical focus of Second and Third Meccan sūras and their repeated employment of the term *dhikr* in relation to the Qur’an’s historical reflections.¹¹⁵

III: Medinan Texts

If Second and Third Meccan sūras are preoccupied with history, Medinan texts are often concerned with regulating the affairs of the Prophet’s community, in particular through legislation. Accordingly, much of the Qur’an’s legal content appears in Medinan sūras, especially in al-Baqarah, al-Nisā’, and al-Mā’idah. The three verses that explicitly link certain rulings with the Prophet’s *kitāb* or *al-tawrah* are Medinan (Q 4:127, 4:140, 5:43-9), as are three of the five verses that describe the *kitāb* as an instrument for resolving disagreements and

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹¹⁵ The term *dhikr* appears most frequently in sūras 19 and 38, both of which are Second Meccan (*The History of the Qur’ān*, 106-7).

arriving at judgments (2:213, 3:23, 4:105).¹¹⁶ In the same vein, most instances of the verb *kataba* ‘*alā* (“to prescribe”) appear in the Medinan Sūrat al-Baqarah (vv. 178, 180, 183, 216, 246) and Sūrat al-Nisā’ (vv. 66, 77, 127). Thus, while Second and Third Meccan sūras focus on the past, Medinan texts often discuss issues of more immediate concern to the present.

As for terminology, the nouns *ṣuḥuf*, *zibur*, and *zabūr* each appear only once in the Medinan corpus (Q 98:2, 3:184, 4:163). By contrast, *kitāb* remains pervasive in Medinan passages, often attributed to the Prophet, his community, or to Jews and Christians. In addition, Medinan sūras witness the introduction of the terms *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*, which occur eighteen and twelve times respectively. In all but one of its attestations (Q 57:27), *al-injīl* appears in juxtaposition to or connection with *al-tawrāh*. Moreover, in four of these cases mention of *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* is followed by reference to the Qur’an. This includes Q 5:44-48, which highlights the significance of *al-tawrāh* for the Jews, refers to the revelation of *al-injīl* to Jesus, and lastly mentions the Prophet’s own *kitāb* as a source of authoritative judgments. The point of this passage seems recapitulated in two nearly-identical statements later in the same sūra, which exhort the *ahl al-kitāb* to uphold “*al-tawrāh*, *al-injīl*, and what has been sent down to them/you from their/your Lord” (vv. 66-8)—this last phrase apparently denoting the Qur’an. Finally, the fourth case is a text that assures entry to Paradise for those who fight in God’s way,

¹¹⁶ The other two verses (Q 6:114 and 16:64) are Third Meccan.

noting that this promise is to be found in “*al-tawrāh, al-injīl, and al-qurʿān*” (Q 9:111). This verse is the only qurʿanic text that mentions these three scriptures together by name.

Scholars of the Qurʿan often invoke its few simultaneous references to *al-tawrāh, al-injīl,* and the Prophet’s scripture in order to validate the dominant understanding of qurʿanic scripturology. In this understanding, the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qurʿan form a triumvirate of foundational scriptures for the three distinct dispensations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The prevalence of this vision has already been documented in Chapter One. Further evidence of its currency may be found in various contributions to the recent *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʿān*. According to Sidney Griffith, for example, “in the Qurʿanic view, the Gospel is a scripture that God gave to Jesus, on the order of the Torah that God gave to Moses (q.v.), and even on the order of the Qurʿān that God gave to Muḥammad (cf. Q 9:111).”¹¹⁷ The idea that the Gospel is of the same caliber as the Torah and the Qurʿan of course has the benefit of matching historical reality: Christians prize the Gospels above other elements of their scriptural canon, just as Jews particularly cherish the Torah and Muslims treasure the Qurʿan.

While it is appealing to imagine the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qurʿan as comparable scriptures that embody the fundamental tenets respectively of Judaism, Christianity, and

¹¹⁷ Sidney Griffith, for example, points to the appearances of *al-injīl* in Medinan passages and writes that “(“Gospel,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʿān*).

Islam, such a vision is not an accurate representation of the Qur'an's discourse on scriptures. As shown in the previous two chapters, the Qur'an repeatedly invokes the Mosaic *kitāb* alone as the precedent and counterpart of the Prophet's own revelations, and suggests that this *kitāb* was critical to the missions of John and Jesus as well. Moreover, the appearance of *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* in Medinan sūras does not signal the abandonment of this "two-*kitāb*" paradigm in favor of a "three-scripture" vision. For one, the mere juxtaposition of *al-injīl* with *al-tawrāh* does not mean that the Qur'an considers them of equal significance. The fact that the Qur'an distinguishes *al-injīl* from *al-tawrāh* and the Qur'an is evident in Q 5:44-48, one of the four texts to mention these three scriptures together. As shown in the previous chapter, this passage deliberately refrains from characterizing *al-injīl* as a *kitāb*, even though it uses *kitāb* in relation to *al-tawrāh* as well as the Prophet's own revelations. The distinction of *al-injīl* from the one *kitāb* previously revealed to Israelites can also be seen in 57:26-27 (also discussed in Chapter Three). In other words, notwithstanding its juxtaposition with *al-tawrāh* (and less frequently the Qur'an), *al-injīl* does not join the exclusive club of paradigmatic scriptures.

Moreover, *kitāb* continues to be the dominant concept of Qur'anic scripturology even after the introduction of *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*. While there are eighteen instances of *al-tawrāh* and twelve occurrences of *al-injīl*, the Medinan corpus features more than a hundred references to *kitāb*. Although Moses (and thereby his association with *kitāb*) fades in Medinan

texts,¹¹⁸ his *kitāb* is repeatedly invoked through designations of Jews and Christians as *alladhīna ātaynāhum al-kitāb*, *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*, and *ahl al-kitāb*. Indeed, these labels remain the Qur'an's terms of choice for addressing Jews and Christians, even when only one party is the referent.¹¹⁹ In fact, in the entire Qur'an there is only one instance of *ahl al-injīl* (Q 5:47) and no instance of *ahl al-tawrāh*, even though there are many passages that seem to address only Jews or only Christians.

The continued presence and relevance of the term *kitāb* is particularly evident in the two sūras of Āl 'Imrān and al-Mā'idah, which together contain some two-thirds of the occurrences of *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*.¹²⁰ When commenting on the life of Jesus, for example, both chapters assert that God taught him *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah wa-l-tawrāh wa-l-injīl* (Q 3:48 and 5:110). As argued in the previous chapter, *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikmah* in these verses likely refers to the Pentateuch—just as it refers elsewhere, including in Q 3:164, to the Prophet's qur'anic revelations. *Al-tawrāh*, on the other hand, may designate the broader canon of Jewish scriptures. By mentioning the Mosaic revelation alongside *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*, therefore,

¹¹⁸ The attribution of *al-kitāb* to Moses is found twice in the Medinan Sūrat al-Baqarah (vv. 53, 87).

¹¹⁹ For example, Q 4:171 condemns the attribution of divinity to Jesus and the resulting jeopardization of monotheism. While the verse's polemic is thus intended for Christians, it addresses them as *ahl al-kitāb*, not *ahl al-injīl*.

¹²⁰ Āl 'Imrān includes six references to *al-tawrāh* and three to *al-injīl*, while al-Mā'idah features seven instances of *al-tawrāh* and five of *al-injīl*.

both sūras emphasize its particular importance within the scriptural endowment that Israelites received through their prophets (including Jesus). In a similar vein, it is possible that the enigmatic *al-furqān*—mentioned in Q 3:4 after reference to the Prophet’s *kitāb* as well as *al-tawrah* and *al-injil*—refers to the Mosaic *kitāb*, which is described as *al-furqān* in two other passages (Q 2:53, 21:48).

Additionally, Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān speaks of *al-kitāb wa-l-ḥukm wa-l-nubuwwah* in apparent reference to Jesus (v. 79). As shown in Chapter Three, the same items are attributed elsewhere to Israelites (Q 45:16, 6:89) as well as to John and Jesus (Q 19:12-13, 19:30). Crucially, all of these other attributions appear in Meccan sūras. Similar to these Meccan texts, therefore, the Medinan Āl ‘Imrān highlights the significance of the Mosaic *kitāb* to the prophetic legacy of Israelites and notes that God vouchsafed this legacy to Jesus.¹²¹ Another continuity of Āl ‘Imrān with the Meccan discourse on scriptures is evident in Q 3:184, which notes that previous messengers brought *al-bayyināt*, *al-zubur*, and *al-kitāb al-munir* to their people. The same phrase can be found in the Meccan Q 35:25. Both texts set the singular (Mosaic) *kitāb* apart from the other scriptures revealed in the past.¹²² That *al-kitāb* is not a generic noun in Q

¹²¹ Not to mention Q 19:12-13 and 19:30, also Meccan texts, which together attribute *al-kitāb*, *al-ḥukm*, and *al-nubuwwah* to John and Jesus (see the discussion of these verses in the previous chapter).

¹²² See the discussion of these two verses in Chapter Two.

3:184 (*pace* Muslim commentators) finds support in a following verse (v. 187), which reminds the *ahl al-kitāb* that they were obliged to “make it clear” (*latubayyinannahu*) and to “not conceal it” (*lā taktumūnahu*)—expressions that feature the singular masculine object pronoun in reference to *al-kitāb* and therefore imply that its referent is *one* specific scripture, which qur’anic intertexts strongly suggest to be the Mosaic Torah.

Apart from the above-mentioned Q 5:110, Sūrat al-Mā’idah also evinces commitment to the two-*kitāb* perspective in its exchanges with Jews and Christians. It has already been pointed out that Q 5:44-48 mentions *al-tawrāh*, *al-injīl*, and the Prophet’s own revelations but uses *kitāb* only in relation to the first and third scriptures. An earlier text in this sūra also seems to operate within the two-*kitāb* paradigm. Qur’an 5:15 (which is highly reminiscent of the just-discussed Q 3:187) reminds the *ahl al-kitāb* that a messenger has come to them who sheds light on much of what they have concealed from *al-kitāb*. The verse then notes that now there has come to them “a light and a manifest *kitāb*.” By virtue of bringing a “manifest *kitāb*,” therefore, the Prophet can counteract the concealment of the previous *kitāb*. The logic of this passage is dependent on the essential similarity and correspondence between the Prophet’s *kitāb* and the *kitāb* that is in the hands of Jews and Christians. In their repeated references to the *ahl al-kitāb*, therefore, both sūras invoke and reinforce this correspondence between Jews

and Christians on the one hand and Muslims on the other as possessors respectively of the first and second *kitābs*.

Wherefore *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*?

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the introduction of *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* in Medinan sūras does *not* supplant but only supplements the Qur'an's emphasis on the defining significance of the Mosaic *kitāb* for Jews and Christians and the correspondence of this *kitāb* with the Prophet's own scripture. Having shown the abiding influence of the two-*kitāb* perspective, it is worth reflecting on the Qur'an's potential motivations for using the nouns *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* in Medinan texts. As mentioned in the first chapter, Richard Bell attributed the introduction of these terms to the Prophet's better knowledge of Jewish and Christian scriptures in Medina. In Mecca the Prophet had thought that previous monotheists are one community who have received a single scripture through Moses, but in Medina he realized that they are two distinct groups with different scriptures. However, this claim does not square with the attribution of *zabūr* to David in Meccan texts, which therefore could not have considered Moses as the only recipient of a scripture. Moreover, Meccan sūras exhibit extensive knowledge of biblical lore on account of their detailed historical narratives about previous prophets (especially Moses and Joseph). It is difficult to believe that the Prophet could recount such elaborate stories and yet had no knowledge of the actual names of the

Torah and the Gospel. Indeed, if anything, Meccan texts contain *more* biblical information than Medinan sūras. Thus, it does not seem plausible to attribute the utilization of *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* to the Prophet's better knowledge of Jewish and Christian traditions.

A purpose, or at least an effect, of the introduction of *al-injīl* may be to elevate the status of Jesus and Christians. In the absence of *al-injīl*, Meccan texts credit Moses, and less frequently Abraham and David, with an independent scripture. Jesus is therefore portrayed either as an inheritor of the Mosaic *kitāb* (like John, in Q 19:12,30) or a prophetic teacher who worked miracles (Q 43:63). As for Christians, they are subsumed under rubrics such as *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*, which portray the Mosaic *kitāb* as foundational to Jews and Christians alike. The Medinan attribution of *al-injīl* to Jesus, therefore, grants some legitimacy to the autonomy of Christians vis-à-vis Jews. Christians may hold heretical beliefs about Jesus, but they are also the sole possessors and guardians of a divinely-sent scripture. Therefore, perhaps a desire to “balance” Jews and Christians may be one reason for the introduction of *al-injīl*.

As for *al-tawrāh*, it was pointed out in the previous chapter that it may sometimes refer to Jewish scriptures as a whole, not to the Pentateuch alone. Its utilization in Medina may thus amount to the explicit recognition of a scriptural canon that is more expansive than the Torah proper. In this view, *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl* together designate all the scriptures revealed to Israelites through Moses, Jesus, and the prophets in between—a canon that may be the

referent of another Medinan phrase, namely, “what was given to Moses and Jesus and the prophets” (Q 2:136, 3:84). Repeated Medinan references to this broader canon may reflect the changing context of the Prophet’s community. In the Meccan phase, the Qur’an’s primary concern is to establish the credentials of the Prophet and to counter his pagan adversaries. By focusing on the Mosaic *kitāb*, Meccan sūras adduce the perfect precedent that vindicates the reality of the Prophet’s revelation and confirms its contents (cf. Q 6:91-2). In texts assigned to the Medinan period, pagans become less prominent and instead the *ahl al-kitāb* become major actors who regularly interact with Muhammad and his followers. It is thus no surprise that the Qur’an would sometimes refer to their larger scriptural canon, all the while maintaining its emphasis on the seminal status of the Mosaic *kitāb* and its correspondence with the Prophet’s own revelations. On the other hand, if *al-tawrāh* refers to the Pentateuch alone, its use instead of *al-kitāb* may be a concession to Jewish terminology and would reflect the fact that the Medinan Qur’an regularly addresses the Jews of Yathrib.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to discover the logic behind the Qur’an’s exclusive application of the term *kitāb* to the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad. The restrictive use of *kitāb* in relation to these scriptures seems related to the Qur’an’s conception of the heavenly *kitāb*. The Qur’an portrays this *kitāb* as an all-encompassing text that embodies and manifests divine

knowledge and authority. In a similar way, the Qur'an's descriptions of the Mosaic and Muhammadan *kitābs* suggest that these scriptures are comprehensive texts that impart knowledge (including historical learning) and laws to their recipients. A diachronic analysis reveals potential developments in the vocabulary and concerns of qur'anic scripturology, but overall this scripturology exhibits a remarkable degree of stability and consistency. In particular, while Medinan texts begin using the terms *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*, they also maintain and frequently invoke the correspondence between the Prophet's *kitāb* and the *kitāb* that is shared between Jews and Christians. Considering its strong presence throughout both Meccan and Medinan texts, therefore, the postulate of the revelation of two *kitābs* serves as an abiding organizing principle with which the Qur'an orders the past and the present and makes sense of the protagonists of human history.

Chapter Five (Conclusion):

Rethinking Muhammad's Movement

Many qur'anic passages use *kitāb* to designate the scriptures of Moses and Muhammad or otherwise imply that the Prophet's *kitāb* stands in a special relationship with the Mosaic *kitāb* that is in the hands of Jews and Christians. These passages suggest that *kitāb* may be an exclusive label for the Torah and the Qur'an as opposed to a generic designation of all scriptures. Proceeding from this possibility, detailed examination of the qur'anic evidence suggests that *kitāb* signifies the Torah and the Qur'an as the only comprehensive scriptures to embody substantial historical and legal content. Such a fundamental rethinking of the concept of *kitāb* has major implications for other aspects of qur'anic ideology. This chapter briefly surveys some of these implications.

The Shape of History: Cyclical or Bi-modal?

The first point to make concerns the Qur'an's historical conception. As shown in the first chapter, previous scholarship on the Qur'an—from the exegetical tradition to modern academic writings—has laid much emphasis on the essential identity of all scriptures and revelations. Moreover, because the Qur'an posits a universal scope for prophecy and

apostleship,¹ it follows that God has given all human communities access to the same basic package of divine teachings. Crucially, this framework of successive, fundamentally similar revelations has been used in previous scholarship to interpret the Qur'an's references to itself alongside the Torah and the Gospel. In Fred Donner's reading of the Qur'an, for example, "God has revealed His eternal Word to *mankind* many times."² Following this overarching historical conception, Donner asserts that the Prophet's movement "enjoined all monotheists to live in strict observance of the law that God had *repeatedly* revealed to *mankind*—whether in the form of the Torah, the Gospels, or the Qur'an."³ Far from being special cases, therefore, the three mentioned scriptures *exemplify* the broader pattern of history that consists of the successive revelation of identical messages.

The Torah, the Gospel(s), and the Qur'an are thus routinely characterized as specimens in God's broader project of distributing guidance to every human community. At the same time, however, exegetical and academic writings often distinguish the Qur'an from all previous scriptures. Believing that the Qur'an considers itself the last scripture and Muhammad the last Prophet, scholars portray the qur'anic dispensation as the culmination of prophetic history.

¹ "Indeed We sent forth in every nation a messenger, [saying:] 'worship God and eschew idols'" (Q 16:36). See also Q 10:47.

² *Muhammad and the Believers*, 59; emphasis added.

³ *Ibid.*, 75; emphasis added. See also *ibid.*, 204 for a similar formulation.

This notion is often coupled with the corollary idea that the Qur'an supersedes previous revelations and thus enjoys universal scope. For example, Fred Donner claims that by virtue of its chronological position the Qur'an "obviously supersedes earlier revelations."⁴ In Geo Widengren's similar assessment, "Muhammad's being the seal of prophets singles him out as the culmination of all previous prophetic messengers, and as the bringer of the definite form of heavenly revelation."⁵ At least in its most mature phase, therefore, the Qur'an is seen to espouse a prophetic history whose progressive arc bends towards divine justice in the form of a final revelation destined to guide all humans to the right path.

The two-*kitāb* hypothesis suggests a radically different historical vision. To be sure, some Qur'anic passages emphasize the similarity of all prophets, especially as regards their monotheistic preaching (e.g. Q 16:2). By no means does this mean, however, that prophetic history consisted of the repetition of the same cycle. Alongside its cyclical depictions of history, the Qur'an sketches a clearly *bi-modal* conception that emphasizes the revelation of the Mosaic and Muhammadan *kitābs* as exceptional and defining moments. More than exemplifying a timeless pattern of divine revelations, the Torah and the Qur'an *disrupt* this pattern. For instance, as discussed in the first chapter, Q 23:23-54 mentions Noah and a serious

⁴ *Muhammad and the Believers*, 60.

⁵ *Muhammad, the Apostle of God*, 12.

of subsequent messengers who urged their communities to believe in God and the Last Day. Every community rejected their messenger and therefore perished in the flames of divine wrath. The Egyptians who rejected Moses met with a similar fate and became “among the destroyed” (v. 48). Yet, when the text turns to the revelation of *al-kitāb* to Moses, the narrative clearly departs from the previous pattern. After referring to Jesus and other messengers, who were presumably sent to the community of Israelites, the text laments the divisions that emerged within this community. But this very lamentation reveals the stark contrast between the Israelites, who do not perish despite their ingratitude, and the previous communities who have been turned into historical reminiscences. The same sense of a new start is clear in Q 28:43: “We gave Moses *al-kitāb* after We had destroyed the former generations.” The revelation of *al-kitāb* thus halts the destructive cycle of history and ushers in a new era of long-term divine engagement with an individual human community.

Abraham and the (Unequal) Distribution of Guidance

The Qur’an’s promotion of a bi-modal history is predicated on its view of divine election. In particular, the Qur’an is deeply committed to what we may call “Abrahamic exceptionalism,” namely, belief in the idea that Abraham and his descendants are the chief protagonists in the drama of human history. The centrality of Abraham and his progeny is of course rooted in the Hebrew Bible’s narratives of election. However, just as Christians

reinterpreted this idea in line with their own developing ideology, the Qur'an casts Abraham's election in a new mold. The qur'anic accounts of Abraham emphasize neither land nor fruitful progeny but rather divine guidance as the special privilege of Abraham's descendants. Moreover, while recognizing the importance of Israelites as the branch that has been formerly and repeatedly addressed through prophets, the Qur'an portrays Ishmaelites also as partaking in the gift of consummate guidance—through the ministry of Muhammad and specifically the revelation of the Qur'an itself. The bi-modality of qur'anic scripturology and prophetology reflects precisely this bifurcation of Abraham's descendants: God's *kitāb* is given once to Israelites through Moses, and it is being given for a second time to Ishmaelites through Muhammad.

That the Qur'an considers the first *kitāb*'s revelation as defining for Israelite history is evident in several passages, which have already been noted in the course of this investigation. After recounting Abraham's heroic dedication to monotheism, for example, Sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt notes that God “bestowed” (*wahabnā*) Isaac and Jacob on Abraham and “placed prophecy and *al-kitāb* in his progeny” (Q 29:27). The election of Abraham and his descendants, which here seems to signify only Israelites, is thus chiefly manifested in their immense spiritual endowment. This endowment is elsewhere characterized as “the *kitāb*, judgment (*ḥukm*), and prophecy” (6:89, 45:16), which are inherited by John and Jesus as the last Israelite prophets (Q

19:12, 19:30, 3:79). That the Israelites received the *kitāb* through Moses has been discussed extensively before (especially in Chapter Three), and is particularly evident in passages that invoke the concept of “inheritance.” According to Q 40:53, for example, “God gave Moses the guidance (*al-hudā*) and made the Children of Israel to inherit the *kitāb*,” while Q 17:2 and 32:23 assert that He “gave Moses the *kitāb*” and “made it a guidance (*hudā*) for the Children of Israel.” The Mosaic *kitāb* represents consummate divine guidance, and it was given not only for the contemporaries of Moses but also for future generations of Israelites.

In a similar way, the Qur’an traces Muhammad’s mission to the Abrahamic roots of the Prophet and his followers. Addressing the Prophet’s community, the Qur’an tells them that Muhammad’s monotheistic teachings represent nothing but “the creed of your father, Abraham” (22:78). The significance of lineage is particularly evident in Q 2:125-129, which portrays Abraham and Ishmael as builders of the Meccan sanctuary. After founding “the house” (*al-bayt*), the patriarchs pray that out of their progeny (*dhurriyyah*) God might create a community of *muslims*, i.e. those who would worship and submit to God alone. Crucially, this is how Abraham and Ishmael end their supplication: “our Lord, send among them a messenger, *one of them*, who shall recite to them your signs, and *teach them the kitāb* and wisdom, and purify them” (1:129). Muhammad’s prophethood is the answer to this prayer. The Qur’an is a *kitāb* sent down for the benefit of Ishmaelites to a prophet who is “one of them,” that is to say,

also an Ishmaelite, so that they learn about the signs of God and attain wisdom and purity. In short, the *kitāb* of Muhammad is the scriptural birthright of Ishmaelites.

While the Qur'an's primary purpose is to guide Ishmaelites, it is also heavily concerned with the salvation of Israelites. According to the Qur'an, God had revealed the Mosaic *kitāb* for the sake of their guidance but instead the *kitāb* turned into a subject of bitter strife and disagreement (Q 2:176, 11:110, 41:45). The Qur'an offers a similar assessment of the mission of Jesus. He had come to introduce some reforms and to resolve the disagreements that had emerged among Israelites, but the latter became further divided in Jesus's wake.⁶ The Qur'an thus attempts to mitigate the damage by discussing some of these theological and legal disagreements, including the question of the status of Jesus (e.g. Q 19:34ff). The fact that the Qur'an addresses the *ahl al-kitāb* is of course amply reflected in Medinan passages, which routinely engage in discourse and polemic with Jews and Christians.⁷ The Qur'an's concern with Israelites is also clear from Q 27:76-7: "This Qur'an recounts to the children of Israel most of that wherein they differ, and it is a guide and a mercy to the believers." While the Qur'an extends the gift of comprehensive guidance to Ishmaelites, it also represents a final chance for the *ahl al-kitāb* to rectify their misperceptions and misinterpretations.

⁶ This vision is explicit in Q 2:253, 19:37, and 43:63-5, and appears implicitly in Q 3:19, 10:93, and 45:16-7.

⁷ See in particular Q 5:15 and 5:19.

The Qur'anic Portrayal of Christians

Recognizing the genealogical *raison d'être* of the two *kitābs* has significant implications for the Qur'an's worldview. Specifically, if the Torah was revealed for the guidance of the Children of Israel, then both Jews and Christians—as the two communities who are defined in terms of their possession of the Mosaic *kitāb*—are to be counted primarily, if not exclusively, as Israelites. Such an understanding is in fact consistent with the Qur'an's references to Jesus and Christians. For example, the Qur'an depicts the mission of Jesus as having been aimed at Israelites alone, not at Jews and gentiles alike. In this vein, one qur'anic verse describes Jesus as “a messenger to the Children of Israel” (Q 3:49), while another text has Jesus proclaim to the Children of Israel that “I am God's messenger to you” (61:6). That the division of the *ahl al-kitāb* into Jews and Christians is an intra-Israelite affair is suggested by the previously-discussed Q 61:14 (see Chapter Three), which notes that after the preaching of Jesus “one party (*tā'ifah*) of the Children of Israel believed and another party disbelieved.” Even in rebuking those who attribute divinity to Jesus, the Qur'an notes that “the Messiah said: ‘O Children of Israel, worship God, [who is] my Lord and yours’” (5:72). In the qur'anic view, therefore, the monotheistic message of Jesus was delivered to Israelites, not to all nations.⁸

⁸ That the Qur'an situates Jesus and Christians within the context of Israelite history is not widely recognized in modern scholarship, but it has been noted by a number of scholars before, most recently in the last study of the late Patricia Crone (“Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One),” 229-35). See also Charles Torrey, *Jewish*

Indeed, one encounters similar portrayals in Muslim scholarship, perhaps as a result of the Qur’anic depiction of Christians. A number of relevant reports can be found in the *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī, in a section titled “Arab Christians” (*naṣārā al-‘Arab*).⁹ The accounts mentioned in this section are meant to ascertain whether Arab Christians are *real* Christians, that is to say, whether they should be treated in the same way as non-Arab (presumably Israelite) Christians. The first report mentions the view of ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ, who believed that (true) Christians are Israelites in the same way as Jews.¹⁰ As a result, ‘Aṭā’ was of the opinion that the Qur’an’s permission for Muslims to marry Christians and consume their meat (Q 5:5) did not extend to Arab Christians.¹¹ In his discussion of Q 5:5, al-Ṭabarī similarly notes the view of some scholars who interpreted “those who were given the *kitāb*” in this verse as a reference to “those to whom the Torah and the Gospel were sent down, from the Children of Israel and their descendants.” According to these scholars, who included no less an

Foundations of Islam, 38; and Shlomo Pines, “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity,” 135-8.

⁹ For a discussion of the historicity of this work’s traditions, see Harald Motzki, “The *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī as a Source of Authentic *aḥādīth* of the First Century A.H.”

¹⁰ “*wa-kāna lā yarā yahūd illā banī isrā’īl qaṭṭ, wa-idhā su’ila ‘an al-naṣārā fa-kadhālik*” (*al-Muṣannaf*, 6:72).

¹¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq mentions other views, however. For example, ‘Aṭā’’s legal opinion was apparently rejected by Ibn ‘Abbās, who based his own position on Q 5:51, which advises Muslims against befriending Jews and Christians and notes that “whoever of you befriends them is [thereby] one of them” (*ibid.*, 6:73). If an Arab adopts the religion of Christians and associates with them, therefore, s/he shall be counted as “one of them,” i.e. as one of the Christians and therefore treated in the same manner.

authority than al-Shāfi‘ī, the permissions of the verse do *not* extend to those who “entered their [i.e. Israelites’] ranks from other nations and adopted their religion, while being non-Israelites.” The idea that Christians are primarily Israelites was of course incompatible with the realities that Muslims encountered on the ground after their conquest of Byzantine territories, so it is not surprising that it remained marginal in the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Modern scholars who have noted the Israelite character of qur’anic Christians have generally done so in support of a broader assertion, namely, the claim that the Qur’an bears the imprint of Jewish-Christian ideas. This assertion has deep historical roots. It was first made by the prolific Irish writer, John Toland (1668-1722), and found a learned advocate in Aloys Sprenger.¹² Here is not the place for an assessment of the Jewish-Christian hypothesis. However, it is evident that the two-*kitāb* theory significantly strengthens similarities between the qur’anic worldview and some of the ideas associated with Jewish-Christian communities. In particular, by portraying the Mosaic *kitāb* as the comprehensive scripture of Israelites, by discounting the Gospel as a paradigmatic scripture, and by presenting Jesus as a reformer operating *within* the Mosaic paradigm laid down in the Torah, the two-*kitāb* hypothesis suggests that Christians are Israelites who must continue to adhere to Jewish ordinances. This

¹² John Toland, *Nazarenus: Or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*. See Chapter One for a discussion of Sprenger’s work.

accords closely with Jewish-Christian groups such as Ebionites, whose hallmark was continued observance of Jewish observances and rites.

Notwithstanding this enhanced similarity, it is not clear that the Qur'an's valorization of the Mosaic *kitāb* and its depiction of Christians reflects the presence of Jewish-Christian groups or ideas in the early Islamic milieu. The Qur'an's portrayal of past and contemporary Christians may stem from its own assumptions and priorities, especially those that find expression in its scripturology and prophetology as reinterpreted in the present study. In this regard, particular attention should be devoted to the idea that the Prophet's followers are recipients of the gift of comprehensive scripture because they are descendants of Abraham. It would therefore be natural for the Qur'an to consider the previous recipients of this gift to be at least primarily descendants of Abraham. If Christians had been portrayed as a predominantly gentile community, that would have meant that gentiles were ahead of Ishmaelites, Abraham's own children, in gaining access to consummate divine guidance. This would not be a fair outcome in light of the Qur'an's conviction of Abrahamic exceptionalism. Moreover, the Qur'an's fundamental interests—such as its concern with monotheism, and its valorization of historical and legal knowledge—do not align with the then dominant conception of Christianity that emphasized the redemptive role of Jesus as the sacrificed Son of God. It is quite natural, then, that the Qur'an privileges Moses and his Torah and refuses to

present the mission of Jesus as breaking the mold of Israelite prophecy. At least as far as these aspects of qur'anic worldview are concerned, therefore, it does not seem necessary to posit the actual existence of Jewish-Christian communities or texts behind the Qur'an.

Constricting *Ummī*: from Gentile to Ishmaelite

The genealogical dimension of the revelation of the two *kitābs* has implications for the much-discussed term *ummī*. The Qur'an attributes this adjective twice to the Prophet (Q 7:157-8) and uses its substantivized plural form (*ummiyyūn/ummiyyīn*) four times in apparent reference to the Prophet's community. As Sebastian Günther notes, Muslim exegetes and theologians have attributed a variety of significations to *ummī*: Meccan, Arab/Arabian, bereft of scripture, and unable to read.¹³ The last sense in particular has played a key role in theological writings that, deeming the Prophet illiterate, point to the eloquence and wisdom of the Qur'an as proof of its miraculous nature and divine origin. Modern scholars have been generally suspicious of this latter interpretation, understanding *ummī* more commonly in the senses of Arab/Arabian, untaught in scripture, or pagan/gentile.¹⁴ The ideas of *ummī* as "not possessing a scripture" and "gentile" hold especial sway in academic writings. According to Theodor Nöldeke, for example, in the Qur'an *ummī* "is used everywhere to mean the opposite

¹³ "Muhammad, the Illiterate Prophet," 9-11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

of أهل الكتاب.”¹⁵ When the Qur’an uses this term in relation to Muhammad, therefore, *ummī* “must mean that he was not familiar with ancient divine texts.”¹⁶ On the other hand, Charles Torrey believes that *ummī* in the Qur’an means “[g]entile” and denotes “any and all *who were not of the Israelite race.*”¹⁷ The two meanings are of course connected, because a marked contrast between Jews and gentiles was the former’s scriptural learning.¹⁸ At any rate, if *ummī* signifies *all* non-Israelites or *all* communities without scripture before Muhammad, then it follows that Muhammad was a messenger to mankind as a whole, because he was sent to Jews and Christians (Q 5:15) as well as to the *ummiyyūn* (Q 62:2).¹⁹

¹⁵ *History of the Qur’ān*, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *The Jewish Foundations of Islam*, 38; original emphasis. Torrey bases his understanding on the idea that *ummī* is “simply the transfer into Arabic of the Hebrew *gōi, gōyīm*” (*ibid.*). For other studies that interpret *ummī* as gentile, see Aloys Sprenger, *The Life of Mohammad: From Original Sources*, 101; John Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, 53; Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad: Prophet of Islam*, 240; and Uri Rubin, “Muḥammad,” *EQ*. Angelika Neuwirth similarly considers *ummī* as a designation for “the non-Jewish, the heathen peoples” (“From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant,” 71).

¹⁸ This connection is sometimes explicitly mentioned. Thus, in his translation of the Qur’an John Rodwell notes that “*ummiy* is derived from *ummah*, a nation, and means Gentile; it here [Q 7:157] refers to Muhammad’s ignorance, previous to the revelation of Islam, of the ancient Scriptures. It is equivalent to the Gr. *laic, ethnic*, and to the term *gojim*, as applied by the Jews to those unacquainted with the Scriptures” (*The Koran*, 386; *ad* Q 7:157).

¹⁹ This argument was already made by al-Shāfi‘ī, who claimed that the Prophet was “sent to the [whole of] creation, for they [creation] consist of either People of the Book [Jews and Christians] or *ummīs* [pagans including Arabs]” (translated and cited in Norman Calder, “The *Ummī* in Early Islamic Juristic Literature,” 112-3). A recent example of this deduction is made by Holger Zellentin, who suggests that “the Qur’ān conceptualizes the ‘covenant’ laws God gave to Moses on Sinai as universal and as applying to both Israelites and to its own community” (*The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, 166). This is on the assumption that the Prophet’s community represent gentiles in the broad sense of the term. See also *ibid.*, 58f, and 157.

The two-*kitāb* hypothesis and its corollaries suggest ways to modify and then bridge these various interpretations. To begin with, if the *ahl al-kitāb* (including Christians) are the same as Israelites, then contradistinction to Israelites or the *ahl al-kitāb* conveys the same idea about *ummiyyūn*. Moreover, because the Prophet's mission was directed primarily at Abraham's descendants, by distinguishing the *ahl al-kitāb* from the *ummiyyūn* the Qur'an does not mean to use the latter as a label for *all* gentiles but rather for Ishmaelites in particular. The identification of *ummiyyūn* with Ishmaelites finds corroboration in the near identity of Q 62:2 and the already-discussed Q 2:129: in the latter verse, Abraham and Ishmael pray for their progeny (*dhurriyyah*) and ask that God "send among them a messenger, *one of them*, to recite to them Your signs, and teach them the *kitāb* and wisdom, and purify them." The term "one of them" (*minhum*) here clearly emphasizes the Ishmaelite pedigree of the future messenger. Qur'an 62:2 uses virtually the same expression, praising God who "sent among the *ummiyyūn* a messenger, *one of them*, to recite to them His signs, and purify them and teach them the *kitāb* and wisdom." The similarities between the two verses strongly suggest that the *ummiyyūn* are descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. The contrast of the *ummiyyūn* with the *ahl al-kitāb*, their scriptural poverty, and their genealogical profile thus fall into place when we accept the

Qur'an's bi-modal scripturology and its structural connection with the election of Abraham's descendants.²⁰

The Aims and Ambitions of the Qur'an

This reassessment prompts a broader discussion on the audience that the Qur'an assumes for itself and thereby for the mission of Muhammad. As mentioned before, Muslim scholars routinely consider Islam to supersede all previous religions and thereby have global scope. Modern scholarship is divided on this issue. Many believe that the Prophet adopted a universalist, supersessionist stance at least in his final years, while some are of the opinion that his missionary ken never extended beyond Arabia.²¹ The currency of the universalist reading

²⁰ This re-interpretation of *ummī* as "Abrahamic gentile" (hence Ishmaelite) has a bearing on an informative study by Mehdy Shaddel, which surveys the attestations of *ummī* in the *ḥadīth* literature and concludes that this term "indeed originally denoted 'gentile'" and thus came to mean illiterate "through more than one stage of semantic shift" ("Qur'ānic *ummī*," 3). It seems to me that in some of the surveyed traditions, *ummī* should in fact be understood as "Ishmaelites" or Arabs instead of gentiles (e.g. nos. 15-6). However, in other contexts *ummī* indeed seems to denote gentiles more broadly (or perhaps all those who did not possess scripture), such as when the Prophet is described to have belonged to an *ummah ummiyyah*, a gentile (or non-scriptural) nation ("Qur'ānic *ummī*," 9 [no. 9]). If *ummī* did signify "gentile" in early Islamic literature, then this meaning would already represent some semantic development whereby the qur'anic sense of "Ishmaelite" was broadened to include all non-Israelites. Such an extension would reflect the rapid socio-political expansion of Islam from the boundaries of Arabia to much of the known world.

²¹ For a brief but incisive analysis of this issue, with references to earlier scholars from both campus, see Frants Buhl, "Fasste Muḥammed seine Verkündigung als eine universelle, auch für nichtaraber bestimmte Religion auf?," *Islamica* 2 (1926):135-49. For a defense of the universalist view, see T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (2nd ed.), 27-31. A few decades after Buhl, Richard Bell summarizes the scholarly opinions as follows: "It has indeed been generally recognised that [Muhammad] began as a messenger to his native town of Meccah, and that his conception of the scope of his mission extended to include the Arabs, if not mankind as a whole" (*Introduction to the Qur'an*, 27).

depends in part on the cyclical conception of history that imagines Muhammad to be the final link in a long chain of similar prophetic missions. According to Uri Rubin, for example, the universalist tendency of the Qur'an is connected with the following idea: "The book that was revealed to the Prophet is not unique to him ... as other prophets were also sent with 'the book' that was designed to guide them and resolve their disputes (Q 2:213)."²² It is this presumed identity of scriptures that provides the Prophet with a "universal link" to previous prophets and, because he is the last messenger, makes the entirety of mankind his audience. After all, if the Prophet's preaching is the same as that of all previous prophets, there is no reason why this final message should remain limited to a specific historical context.²³ Against such a line of analysis, the bi-modal scripturology and prophetology that stem from the two-*kitāb* hypothesis highlight the absolute centrality of Abraham's descendants to Muhammad's mission and his promulgation of the second *kitāb*. If we also accept that the term *ummī* refers

²² "Muḥammad," *EQ*.

²³ Patricia Crone promotes a similar perspective in her last study. In Crone's view, the Prophet "plainly had a concept of religion in the sense of a system of beliefs and laws *separate from ethnic and civic affiliation*" ("Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part I)," 230; emphasis added). Crone believes that this concept resulted from the (putatively qur'anic) idea that "all genuine messengers preach the same message" (*ibid.*, 231). Because Muhammad's message was the same as that of previous prophets, he "never addressed his audience as Arabs, only as believers and unbelievers" (*ibid.*, 231). See also T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (2nd ed.), 30; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 60.

not to all gentiles but only to Ishmaelites, then we are faced with the erosion of much of the Qur'anic basis for a universal conception of the mission of Muhammad.

If the Qur'an exhibits a fundamentally bi-modal historical vision intertwined with the election of Abraham's descendants, does that leave any space for universal aspirations on the part of the Islamic scripture? Put differently, if the Prophet's primary and secondary concerns were the guidance respectively of Ishmaelites and Israelites, did he have a tertiary interest in the salvation of mankind as a whole? Having eliminated much of the supporting evidence routinely marshalled in favor of a universalist reading of the Qur'an, there still remain a few passages that seem to exhibit a universalist outlook. In particular, seven texts cast the Prophet's mission and message as directed at *al-ʿālamīn* (lit. "worlds"), a term that seems to signify all beings or perhaps specifically humans and the *jinn*. In Q 12:104, 38:87, 68:52, and 81:27 the Qur'an is described as *dhikr li-l-ʿālamīn* ("reminder for the worlds") while in Q 6:90 it is termed *dhikrā li-l-ʿālamīn*, apparently in the same sense. Moreover, Q 21:107 labels the Prophet as *rahmatan li-l-ʿālamīn* ("mercy for the worlds"), while Q 25:1 characterizes him (or perhaps the Qur'an itself) as *li-l-ʿālamīn nadhīran* ("a warner to the worlds"). Another text that is often seen to posit a universal scope for the Prophet's mission is Q 7:158, where Muhammad is bid to address "people" (*al-nās*) and proclaims that "I am God's messenger to you all (*jamī'an*)."²⁴

²⁴ Cf. Q 4:79, 74:36.

These texts seem to suggest that the Qur'an postulated a global role for itself as well as the Prophet.

Despite apparent indications, the precise meaning of these texts has been a matter of dispute in academic scholarship. While most writers seem to understand these passages as embodying a universal perspective, some have urged caution in adopting such an expansive interpretation. Snouck Hurgronje argues, for example, that in the Qur'an *al-nās* does not mean "mankind" as such but carries the sense of "everybody" in a more limited fashion.²⁵ As for *al-ʿālamīn*, Hurgronje suggests that it may have been "misused" to satisfy the exigencies of rhyme.²⁶ If so, then *al-ʿālamīn* should be understood in a non-literal way and perhaps assigned the same sense as *al-nās*. Advocating a similar understanding, Frants Buhl notes that most of the texts that feature *al-ʿālamīn* in relation to the Qur'an or the Prophet hail from the Meccan period, when the Prophet was concerned only with the guidance of his own countrymen.²⁷ It is difficult to arrive at a conclusive verdict on the interpretation of these texts, and at any rate the verdict has no bearing on the merits of the bi-modal historical vision advocated in this study. However, one point is clear: the two-*kitāb* hypothesis and its concomitant

²⁵ *Mohammedanism*, 46, n. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, in particular with reference to Q 15:70, where "mankind" does not seem to be a good translation for *ʿālamīn*.

²⁷ "Fasste Muḥammed," 144.

reinterpretation of qur'anic worldview substantially raise the standard of proof for universalist readings of the Qur'an. If we are to accept that in the final analysis the Qur'an did (come to) consider itself as a scripture for all mankind, then we need a compelling analysis that establishes this view beyond a reasonable doubt.

Conquest and Regeneration: From Ishmaelite Believers to Cosmopolitan Muslims

Because the two-*kitāb* hypothesis and its implications reshape our view of the origins of Islam, they also cast a new light on Islam's subsequent transformation. To sketch the contours of this new understanding of early Islam's development, it is useful to set it against Fred Donner's comparable attempt in *Muhammad and the Believers*. The central thesis of this work is that Muhammad and his close followers did not aim to found "a new or separate religious confession" but were interested primarily in bringing all righteous monotheists under a unified banner.²⁸ This movement, which Donner calls "the Believers' movement," was thus a pan-monotheistic campaign concerned above all with belief in God and resurrection as well as righteous conduct. Because the fundamental tenets and demands of this movement were "in no way antithetical to the beliefs and practices of some Christians and Jews," the latter could be members of this community alongside new monotheist converts from Arabian paganism.²⁹

²⁸ *Muhammad and the Believers*, 69.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Moreover, while these converts had to follow “Qur’anic law,” Jewish and Christian Believers could continue observing their own laws as set down in the Torah and the Gospel.³⁰ When the Umayyad Empire consolidated its rule, however, the “confessionally open” gates of the Believers’ movement began to close. In particular, after the Second Civil War (60–73/680–692), faith in Muhammad and the Qur’an became increasingly central to the Believers’ identity.³¹ Henceforth, any Jew or Christian hoping to remain in this community had to abide by Qur’anic law and thereby effectively renounce their past religious affiliation. The ecumenical movement of Believers thus gave way to the exclusivist religion of Islam.

In emphasizing the Believers’ monotheistic fervor, Donner repeatedly portrays them as militants who harbored global ambitions. These ambitions, according to Donner, were already present in the later years of Muhammad’s leadership.³² Resenting the sinful world around them and following the Qur’an’s encouragements, the Believers wanted to “vanquish unbelief *in the world*” and found “a God-guided, righteous order *on Earth*.”³³ Through their attempts to subjugate far-flung lands, Donner claims, the Believers hoped to bring “*all of mankind* to

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 11f, 205.

³² *Ibid.*, 87.

³³ *Ibid.*, 82, 169; emphasis added.

salvation” before what they thought to be the impending Last Day.³⁴ In Donner’s opinion, the Believers viewed their polity as distinct from its predecessors above all on account of its ironclad commitment to God’s law, “whether in the form of Qur’anic injunctions or, for Jews or Christians, in the form of Jewish or Christian religious laws.”³⁵

While Donner makes sense of the Believers’ militancy by attributing to them universal aspirations, he claims that their ecumenical outlook explains why their conquests were not very violent. The Believers’ animus was directed chiefly at the wicked empires of the Sasanians and the Byzantines.³⁶ As for the subject populations, the Believers simply wanted them to “affirm their belief in one God and in the Last Day, and to affirm their commitment to living righteously and to avoid sin.”³⁷ Because the majority of the residents of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq were already monotheists, they were “eligible in principle for inclusion in the Believers’ movement.”³⁸ Even Iran’s Zoroastrians, claims Donner, “may have been integrated in some way with the community of Believers.”³⁹ Donner therefore depicts the Believers as zealous

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 142f.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 109f.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 110f.

monotheists who were, nevertheless, all too content to accommodate trinitarian Christians and dualist Zoroastrians.

Like many scholars before him, Donner's universalist reading of the Believers' movement is tied to his understanding of the Qur'an's discourse on revelations and prophets. According to Donner, the Qur'an posits that "God's word had been revealed numerous times in history to various prophets, of whom Muhammad was the most recent."⁴⁰ Because Muhammad relayed the same message as the previous prophets in its final form,⁴¹ his followers did not see his preaching as confined to a specific community but aimed at "establishing the hegemony of God's law over the whole world."⁴² That the Prophet's movement originated in Arabia was merely an "historical accident."⁴³ Donner admits that the Qur'an sometimes describes itself as an "Arabic Qur'an," but he claims that this is just a "linguistic designation" that has no bearing on the identity of the Believers.⁴⁴ Indeed, according to Donner, "being a Believer was *not* related to ethnicity."⁴⁵ In categorical terms, Donner asserts that "[n]owhere does the Qur'an

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 88; emphasis added.

advance, or even hint at, any kind of collective identity other than that of the Believers—an identity squarely based in faith and righteous action, not in ethnic or ‘national’ or even cultural affiliation.”⁴⁶ By rejecting the role of ethnic factors, Donner seeks to counter interpretations that posit a distinct “‘Arab’ political identity” for the Believers and thus offer “‘Arab national’ or ‘nativist’” readings of the beginnings of Islam.⁴⁷ In Donner’s view, such readings are anachronistic and smack of modern Arab nationalism. Donner believes that neither political considerations nor economic or social factors can adequately explain the main impetus behind the Believers’ activities, for religious ideology was “the most important characteristic of the Believers’ movement.”⁴⁸

My reconceptualization of qur’anic scripturology and prophetology challenges Donner’s portrayal of the Believers’ movement, in particular his interpretation of qur’anic ideology. While the Qur’an places much emphasis on correct belief and righteous conduct, it does not envisage history as a repetition of similar prophetic cycles. As I have shown, the Qur’an singles out Moses and Muhammad as bringers of comprehensive divine guidance for Abraham’s descendants. The term *ahl al-kitāb* is therefore *not* a designation of former

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 218f; emphasis added.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 218f.

monotheists (pace Donner),⁴⁹ but rather a label for Israelites, who had received religious learning chiefly through the Mosaic *kitāb*. As for the Prophet and his followers, the importance of genealogy for their identity is visible in the Qur'an's references to their descent from Abraham and Ishmael, in their description as *ummiyyūn*, and in the qur'anic encouragement that they should follow "the creed of your father, Abraham" (22:78). The Qur'an therefore posits two comprehensive, legislative scriptures that are sent down primarily for the benefit of Abraham's descendants, not a "law that God had repeatedly revealed to mankind."⁵⁰

While this is not the place for a thorough assessment of Donner's arguments, it is worth noting that his other attempts to ground universalism in the Qur'an are similarly questionable. In claiming that the Believers sought to establish "God's kingdom on Earth," for example, Donner makes reference to a text in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (Q 33:27) that describes a victory of Believers over the unbelievers and their allies from the *ahl al-kitāb*.⁵¹ At the end of this description, the passage notes that God "made you inherit their land and abodes and possessions." While this expression pertains to a specific case, Donner claims that the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

Believers must have seen this as an “example” of the apocalyptic events whereby they were to conquer the whole world.⁵² He thus claims in a later passage that “[t]he Qur’an, as we have seen, promised the Believers that they would ‘inherit the earth’ (Q. 33:25-27).”⁵³ Needless to say, the cited passage makes no such claim and only pertains to the land of a specific community. Indeed, there is no unequivocal promise or encouragement for global supremacy in the entire Qur’an.

If we accept that the Prophet was concerned chiefly with the guidance of Abraham’s descendants, then we must also revisit Donner’s narrative of a gradual loss of inclusivity in the decades after Muhammad. There is no denying that many of Islam’s distinctive rites and institutions developed in the course of time, and that the boundaries between Islam and other religions were delineated in more detail.⁵⁴ However, at the same time that various Muslim communities debated and outlined the contours of Islam in ever more precise intellectual terms, the genealogical requirements of belonging to Muhammad’s movement were being relaxed. In the Umayyad period, it seems that Arab identity was a precondition for full membership in the early Islamic community, which is why non-Arabs could join only by

⁵² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁴ For a study that follows this development in Syriac Christian writings, see Michael Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*.

attaching themselves as inferior clients (Ar. *mawālī*) to Arab figures or tribes. It took until the Abbasid revolution for the institution of clientage to break down, paving the way for non-Arabs to convert to Islam without needing a patron.⁵⁵ The post-prophetic Muslim *ummah* thus eventually came to welcome all non-Arabs as equal members, just as it articulated ever sharper boundaries to separate itself from Jewish and Christian communities. On balance, Islam shed its ethnic exclusivity while it consolidated its confessional boundaries.

The starting point of this investigation has been a new interpretation of the pervasive concept of *kitāb* in the Qur'an. By means of a detailed analysis of some three dozen passages, I have challenged the dominant exegetical and academic understandings of *kitāb* as a label applicable to all scriptures. Instead, I have argued that the Qur'an's discourse on revelations uses *kitāb* as a technical term signifying *comprehensive, paradigmatic* scripture—a category that has the Mosaic and Muhammadan scriptures as its only instantiations. I have further demonstrated that the duality of *kitāb* is deeply connected with the Qur'an's focus on Abraham's children—Ishmaelites as well as Israelites—as the primary recipients of supreme divine guidance. This chapter has provided a brief discussion of some of the implications of this constellation of ideas for other aspects of the qur'anic worldview, such as the

⁵⁵ On the background and transformations of this institution, see Patricia Crone, "Mawlā," *EI2*, and Daniel Pipes, "Mawlas: Freed Slaves and Converts in Early Islam."

conceptualization of Christians in the Qur'an, the significance of the term *ummī*, and the transformation of Islam from an Arabian movement to a world religion. There are many other elements of qur'anic ideology that should be revisited in light of the new scripturology and prophetology proposed in this study—a task that is relegated to future research. The two-*kitāb* hypothesis and its corollaries represent a drastic rethinking of the macrostructure of qur'anic discourse. As such, the revisionist interpretations advanced in this study have important ramifications for our understanding of the worldview of the Qur'an and thereby of the character of the Prophet Muhammad's movement.

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