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AMERICAN JOURNAL  
*of* ISLAM AND SOCIETY

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VOLUME 40 NO. 1-2 • 2023

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VOLUME 40 2023 NUMBERS 1-2

# AMERICAN JOURNAL *of* ISLAM AND SOCIETY

A double-blind and peer-reviewed  
interdisciplinary and international journal

Previously published as  
*American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

American Journal of Islam and Society (AJIS p-ISSN 2690-3733, e-ISSN 2690-3741) is a double-blind, peer-reviewed interdisciplinary and international journal published by the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). AJIS publishes a wide variety of scholarly research on all facets of Islam and society: anthropology, economics, history, philosophy and metaphysics, politics, psychology, and law. The journal was previously published (1984-2019) as American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS p-ISSN 0887-7653, e-ISSN 2642-701X).

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ISSN 2690-3733 (print)

ISSN 2690-3741 (online)

# Contents

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## Editorial

Editorial Note	2
<i>Ovamir Anjum</i>	

## Articles

Cosmographical Readings of the Qur'an	8
<i>Adrien Chauvet</i>	
The Non-Crucifixion Verse: A Historical, Contextual, and Linguistic Analysis	39
<i>Louay Fatoohi</i>	
Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Jurisprudence of Priorities: A Critical Assessment	77
<i>Murie Hassan</i>	

## Review Essays

Recasting the Religious Architecture of Islam	122
<i>Tammy Gaber</i>	
Review of Recent Works in Maturidi Theology	138
<i>Martin Nguyen</i>	

## Book Reviews

Female Religious Authority in Shi'i Islam, Past and Present (by Mirjam Künkler and Devin J. Stewart, eds)	144
<i>Carimo Mohomed</i>	
Shariah and the Halal Industry (by Mohammad Hashim Kamali)	150
<i>Betania Kartika</i>	

Beyond the Divide: A Century of Canadian Mosque Design (by Tammy Gaber) <i>H. Masud Taj</i>	157
Islamic Law and Ethics (by David R. Vishanoff, ed.) <i>Saheed Ahmed Rufai</i>	163
<b>Forum</b>	
Time in the Qur'an: An Introductory Overview <i>Enes Karić</i>	172
Extremism and Islamophobia Against the Muslim Minority in Sri Lanka <i>Muhammad Saekul Mujahidin</i>	213

# EDITORIAL

# Editorial Note

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OVAMIR ANJUM

In your hands is the 40<sup>th</sup> volume of the *American Journal of Islam and Society*, which began its publication as the *American Journal of Islamic Studies*, and was published for many years as the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*. The journal has, by God's grace, played a pioneering role over this period in bringing together Islamic and Western academic realms of scholarship. As part of the commemoration of the 40th anniversary, we are pleased to announce three initiatives. First, a special issue that will feature the most cited/read articles over the life of the journal under the editorship of our esteemed former editor, Dr. Katherine Bullock. In addition, we would also like to announce our new Call for Papers that you will find on the next page, with details on our website [ajis.org](http://ajis.org). Finally, as an additional incentive, we are offering special honorarium for accepted articles by early career scholars, as announced on our website.

We also have the pleasure to welcome Dr. David H. Warren as the new assistant editor and say farewell to Professor Basit Kareem Iqbal, whose contribution to improving the quality of our journal has been immeasurable. We pray for his success in what promises to be a bright and fruitful career. Dr. Warren's appointment is a great win for the journal. He received his PhD from the University of Manchester in 2015 and is currently Lecturer of Middle East Studies & Arabic at Washington



University in St. Louis. His research considers how the Muslim scholarly elite in the modern day have engaged with authoritarian regimes in the Arab World, and some of the different ways this has impacted their intellectual production. He has authored several influential articles, and his first book, *Rivals in the Gulf: Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Abdullah Bin Bayyah, and the Qatar-UAE Contest Over the Middle East and the Gulf Crisis* was published by Routledge in 2021.

In this issue, you will find three peer-reviewed articles and two forum essays. Adrien A. P. Chauvet's "Cosmographical readings of the Qur'an" is a trained physicist's probing, multidisciplinary inquiry about a topic of great interest to the recent generations of Muslims about the compatibility of Islam and science, and about the obvious exuberance Muslims feel when some modern discoveries point to the Qur'anic truth. As a trained physicist, he wonders whether and how we can be sure that the scientific paradigms endorsed today will endure, and therefore, more pertinently, "how can the text stay scientifically relevant across the ages, while science itself is evolving?" It thus advances the scholarship on the scriptures' relevance to past and present scientific paradigms, reviewing multiple ancient cosmographical paradigms (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hebraic, Greek, Christian, Zoroastrian and Manichean) as well as modern ones, while being grounded in Islamic theology and philosophy of science. It manages to advance a novel thesis in the growing field of Islam and science, advocating for a multiplicity of correspondences between both past and modern scientific paradigms, even if these paradigms conflict with one another.

Louay Fatoohi's erudite contribution "The Non-Crucifixion Verse: A Historical, Contextual, and Linguistic Analysis" carefully examines the evidence supporting the consensus Muslim view that the Qur'an denies the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and challenges the fringe view that calls this into question. In the process, our author, a trained scholar in applied historical astronomy and a widely published author in Islamic and biblical studies presents a range of classical and modern views to support the established view.

In "Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Jurisprudence of Priorities: A Critical Assessment," Murie A. Hassan of the University of Melbourne, Australia,

assesses a key and widely employed, but scantily examined legal innovation by our era's most influential Muslim legal authority, al-Qaradawi (d. 2022). The distinguished Egyptian jurist had proposed and for decades applied the idea of "the jurisprudence of priorities" (*fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*) to mitigate what he saw as excess and negligence in legal reasoning. This article examines this principle in light of the foundational sources of Islamic law and argues that the fundamental principles of the jurisprudence of priorities indeed find a strong echo in the sources of Islamic law and possess the potential to mitigate excess and negligence in legal reasoning.

In our forum section (i.e., non-reviewed scholarly essays), we include two contributions, one timely and the other about time itself. Well-known Bosnian intellectual Enes Karić explores the notion of time in the Qur'an, touching on the semantic richness of the vocabulary of the Qur'an and inviting further philological, theological, and philosophical studies in this vein. In the second forum essay, Indonesian intellectual Muhammad Saekul Mujahidin warns that Sri Lanka has witnessed many examples of anti-Muslim sentiment and violence since the end of the civil war, especially in 2014 when ethnic unrest affected many, and Sinhalese monks and Buddhists appear to have played an important role in the unrest. The recent rise in Sri Lankan Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment is suggested by campaigns against halal products on food, Muslim women's clothing, the slaughter of livestock in Muslim religious rituals, and attacks on mosques and Muslim-owned businesses, the push toward mandatory cremation for all Sri Lankans regardless of the religion during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the closure of Islamic schools.

OVAMIR ANJUM

IMAM KHATTAB ENDOWED CHAIR OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

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# Call for Papers

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Special Issue Celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Journal of Islam and Society (est.1984)

## The Study of Islam and Society in the Modern Academy

The American Journal of Islam and Society, previously the American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, showcases a wide variety of scholarly research on all facets of Islam and the Muslim World (e.g., anthropology, economics, history, philosophy and metaphysics, politics, psychology, law etc.) and publishes scholarship that pertains to the myriad ways in which Islam and human societies interact.

The Journal is delighted to be celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its founding in 1984. In recognition of this milestone, AJIS is pleased to announce a special call for papers critically examining the study of Islam and society in the modern academy.

We invite submissions in a wide range of fields that reflect on the ways that the study of Islam and society has changed over the course of this period, be it within the North American academy, Europe, or the Muslim World writ large. Scholars working on these broad themes are warmly invited to submit abstracts for consideration. For details, please consult our website [www.ajis.org](http://www.ajis.org).



# ARTICLES

# Cosmographical Readings of the Qur'an

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ADRIEN CHAUVET

## Abstract

The Qur'an is the primary source of inspiration for Muslims across the ages. As Muslims, the task is to make the Qur'an relevant to our own context. That task is however challenged every time the conception of the world changes. The change from a medieval Aristotelian to a modern heliocentric view of the world represented just such a challenge. But regardless of

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Dr. Adrien Chauvet is a Muslim, interdisciplinary, French scientist. His scientific expertise bridges the fields of Physics, Biology, Chemistry and Engineering. He started his career studying fundamental Physics in Strasbourg (France) and in 2012 obtained his PhD in Biophysics at Purdue University (USA). He is currently Assistant Professor of Physical Chemistry at the University of Sheffield, UK. In parallel to his scientific training, he studied Arabic and the fundamentals of the classical Islamic sciences with local scholars (in the USA and Switzerland) as well as through intensive courses. Benefiting from his scientific and Islamic upbringing, Adrien is invested in the field of science and religion, and, for the past decade, is dedicated to writing, delivering lectures, and organising events on the topic.

Chauvet, Adrien. 2023. "Cosmographical Readings of the Qur'an." *American Journal of Islam and Society* 40, nos. 1-2: 8-38 • doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3175  
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the differing worldviews, the Qur'an's descriptions of natural phenomena remained relevant. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to demonstrate the correspondence between the Qur'anic description of natural phenomena and various scientific paradigms. It claims that the Qur'an is relevant to both past and present scientific paradigms, even if these paradigms conflict with one another. This claim is illustrated through the example of cosmographies. It shows that the Qur'an's cosmographical verses can be read considering both ancient and modern paradigms. This multiplicity of correspondences is achieved: (1) by means of subjective descriptions, which are open to interpretation, (2) by means of negative affirmations, which allude to certain paradigms without fully endorsing them, and (3) through a silence about key elements that would unambiguously validate or refute a specific scientific paradigm. The Qur'an's interpretatively open cosmographical verses also include particularly apt word choices and morphology when it comes to considering them in the light of modern scientific paradigms. The philosophical and theological consequences of this multiplicity of correspondence are also discussed.

The Qur'an is regarded by Muslims as the words of God conveyed through the Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). The Qur'an is thus considered as the primary source of Divine knowledge. More specifically, the Qur'an is regarded as a source of "guidance for all of mankind" (Qur'an 2:185) that "contains no ambiguities" (Qur'an 18:1). Hence, the Qur'an is a guide for all people, including those that are scientifically inclined. People inclined to a scientific worldview can certainly relate to the few descriptions of natural phenomena that are recounted in the Qur'an, and can read the text in the light of modern science. A reader can look for affinities between the Qur'anic descriptions of the material world and modern scientific theories. These affinities make the text relevant: the more the reading of the verses reflect the reader's lived experiences and perception of the world, the more relevant the text becomes. However, to read the text considering modern science

poses the question of scientific realism: how can we be sure that the scientific paradigms endorsed today will endure? Left without answers, another question must be asked: how can the text stay scientifically relevant across the ages, while science itself is evolving? One could simply assume a non-overlapping magisterial position and claim that religion has nothing to do with science. But today, modern science is used to evaluate every aspect of our lives, including religion, and the possibility that a religion could withstand scientific scrutiny is significant. Indeed, the opportunity to reconcile a text that is more than fourteen hundred years old with sciences that were developed only in the last century would be a decisive argument in favour of one's faith.

Driven by the desire to reconcile their work with their beliefs, modern Muslim scientists have continuously revised their reading of the text. Within this lineage of modern scientists, the Professor M. Bucaille is to be acknowledged for being one of the most prominent figures with his comparative work titled *The Bible, The Qur'an and the Sciences*.<sup>1</sup> However, Bucaille was neither the first nor the last.<sup>2</sup> The Professor M. J. El-Fandy, for example, also belongs to this lineage.<sup>3</sup> The work of El-Fandy was written before the Big Bang theory was confirmed and before the geophysics of the earth crust was established. To be more specific, El-Fandy's universe was continually expanding because of the spontaneous production of hydrogen; and it was the slow rocking motion of the earth's tectonic plates that alternatively promoted their edges upward, forming mountains, and downward, resulting in deep oceans. It is important to note that these now-outdated conceptions were, at the time of El-Fandy, considered to be scientifically valid alternatives. In his work, El-Fandy was able to correlate Qur'anic verses to these scientific paradigms that are now considered obsolete. While modern science has proven El-Fandy's conception of the cosmos false, it does not change the fact that he was able to relate his mistaken conception to the Qur'an. Certainly, if an accusation is to be made, it is El-Fandy who should be accused of mistakenly interpreting the text, and not the text for having misguided El-Fandy. Nonetheless, as a believer, it was El-Fandy's duty to relate to the Qur'an with whatever scientific conception he was holding to be true. And the Qur'an's description of natural phenomena adequately enabled him to do so.



Science has evolved since the time of El-Fandy, and it has led to novel insights about the mechanics of the natural world. Later scientists have in turn taken the challenge of reconciling their updated scientific worldviews with the Qur'an, and this approach has been, to some extent, successful. For example, Professor Z. El-Naggar<sup>4</sup> and Z. Naik<sup>5</sup> were both able to read in the Qur'an elements of modern scientific theories, including allusions to the Big Bang theory and to modern geology. These correlations between the Qur'an and modern scientific theories have been increasingly popular<sup>6</sup> and, as an example of their increasing popularity, these correlations are now appearing in appendices of translated copies of the Qur'an.<sup>7</sup> But, regardless how sound these scientific conceptions are, these different works show that the Qur'an can be successfully read in the light of various scientific conceptions.

The goal of the present study is to evaluate how the Qur'an can be made relevant to various scientific conceptions, both past and present. In this aim, the first section describes why such a multiplicity in correspondences is in fact expected from the Qur'an. Although this correspondence is expected with respect to all branches of sciences, the present study confines itself to cosmographies, as justified in the second section. The third section discusses this study's focus on the Qur'an only, leaving the Hadith aside. The fourth section will evaluate the Qur'an with respect to ancient cosmographies, then, in the fifth section, with respect to modern cosmography. Finally, the linguistic elements that allow for such a multiplicity of correspondence will be considered in a sixth section, along with a discussion of some of the theological and philosophical implications.

## The Qur'an's Eternal Correspondence

The objective of this section is to explain why a correspondence between the Qur'an and scientific paradigms is to be expected. The goal is to be explicit about the different assumptions, theological and intellectual standpoints, and expectations that frame the present study.

The first assumption pertains to the correspondence between the Qur'an and the material world. With respect to the Qur'an, one of the primary objectives of revelation is to guide the believer toward God.

Indeed, the Qur'an describes itself as a "Book, in which there is no doubt, a guide for those who are reverentially fearful of God" (Qur'an 2:2). While the guidance mentioned in this verse is left open to interpretation, the subsequent verses indicate that it refers to religious guidance. However, the Qur'an further specifies that knowledge (*'ilm*), in itself, also guides toward God. Indeed, knowledge is supposed to make one fearful of God: "Only those who have knowledge, from among His servants, fear God." (Qur'an 35:28). By extension, fearfulness of God implies consciousness of God, and, accordingly, the one who is more conscious of God is also closer to Him. Thus, the implication is that knowledge is also supposed to guide toward God. Although the word "*'ilm*," when used in the Qur'an, often alludes to religious knowledge or revelation, its meaning can encompass all types of knowledge, including that of the natural world.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Qur'an is presented as a "clarification for all things" (Qur'an 16:89), and as a "register for all things" (Qur'an 6:38), without restriction on what those "things" entail. The only condition to this extension of meaning, from religious to all types of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is to view the world as an expression of God.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, scientific knowledge becomes a mean to understand God through His creation. Scientific knowledge is thus expected to increase one's consciousness of God, and to bring one closer to Him. Therefore, believers are presented with two guides, both leading to God: revelation and knowledge of the material world. Interestingly, both revelation and the material world are intertwined given that the revealed Qur'an describes aspects of the material world. Although the Qur'an is not a book of science, it does contain descriptions of natural phenomena. Hence, if we agree that both revelation and this material world have the ability to guide toward God, then a divine agreement between the two is expected.

The second assumption pertains to the notion of incommensurability of scientific paradigms. This notion, initially developed by Professor T. Kuhn,<sup>10</sup> implies that scientific concepts, once they are grounded in experimentation and accepted by a community, become the frame through which the members of the scientific community, and by extension the wider society, see, interact with, and value the world. In other words,

this scientifically based worldview becomes a paradigm. Kuhn also suggests that the scientific endeavour develops as a succession of scientific paradigms. Hence, a novel scientific paradigm does not emerge from an older one, but rather it replaces the previous one. Kuhn calls these shifts of paradigms “revolutions” because each new paradigm is based on a different set of values that overthrow the previous set. The term “values” means that a theory should, for example, be explanatory, accurate in its predictions, consistent, simple, socially beneficial, etc. Different set of values means that even if most values are shared, they will not be hierarchised in the same way. And consequently, if two competing paradigms are valued differently, there is no common ground upon which to compare them. Typically, the two competing paradigms remain valid until one of them is proven to be superior through practice. It is said that the paradigms are incommensurable because proponents of each do not talk to each other’s but talk through each other’s. The present work endorses and extends this notion of incommensurability by using a post-modern approach to review scientific realism. Post-modern, here, implies that our experience of the material world is mediated by instruments and ultimately, by our senses. Our experience of the material and its interpretation are thus subjective and influenced by pre-conceived ideas and contexts. Scientific realism refers to the belief that current science corresponds to the – true – description of the world.<sup>11</sup> Merging these different notions together results in the idea that each scientific paradigm has a relative truth value, even if these different paradigms contradict one another. In other words, at any given point in time, the scientific paradigm that is endorsed corresponds to the truth through which people experience their world. And by extension, at any given point in time, the endorsed scientific paradigm is the truth through which the scriptures are read. According to this notion of contextual scientific truths and, given that the Qur’an is a perpetual source of guidance, both outdated and currently upheld paradigms must be considered when looking at a scientific correspondence between the Qur’an and the material world.

The third assumption pertains to the context of revelation. It is assumed that it would have been counterproductive for the Qur’an to directly contradict the worldly perception of the contemporaries of the

Prophet (PBUH). For example, if the Qur'an were explicit about the earth revolving around a central Sun at a speed far greater than that of an arrow, this statement would have been a clear contradiction to the contemporaries of the Prophet (PBUH), who used to uphold a totally different view. As a direct consequence, such a contradiction would have cast doubt over the entire message of the Qur'an. It would have jeopardized the main objective of revelation, which is to correct people's belief and morals. This assumption would have been all the more relevant in the initial stages of Prophethood, when hearts and minds were to be gained. The Prophet's (PBUH) Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and beyond, illustrates this argument.<sup>12</sup> Because such travel was materially impossible, people doubted him, and his opponents took it as an opportunity to defame him. Defamation lasted until he was able to give a full description of Jerusalem. The Prophet's (PBUH) description of Jerusalem (and of the incoming caravans) became the supporting argument for his truthfulness. Because the Night Journey was contrary to people's lived experiences, they were not ready to accept it without proof. It is worth mentioning that the correspondence between revelation and scientific paradigms is only required for those elements that are part of people's worldly material perception. For example, the Qur'an also talks about Angels and other elements from the unseen world about which, science had, and still has, no say (e.g., Paradise, the Pen, the Throne). Hence, the correspondence between revelation and the material world only refers to descriptions of material objects and physical phenomena that are perceived and are integral to a specific scientific paradigm.

Following this assumption, one could further argue that revelation is contextual, meaning that it speaks only to the people to whom it was revealed. Such views have been suggested regarding the Old and New Testament and their cosmological descriptions.<sup>13</sup> According to these views, the correspondence between the scriptures and science should be restricted to ancient scientific paradigms that were contemporary of the prophets and/or of the scriptures' authors. Consequently, only the moral teachings would remain relevant across the ages. However, such a view is not satisfying with respect to the Qur'an. Indeed, the Qur'an explicitly describes Islam as the ultimate version of God's revealed religions: "This

day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion” (Qur'an 5:3). From a theological point of view, the Qur'an is the direct words of God, and not only a Divine inspiration translated and phrased by the messenger to make it comprehensible to his followers. Accordingly, it is to be expected that all descriptions of natural phenomena remain relevant across the ages.

From this last argument follows the fourth assumption, which pertains to the timelessness of the Qur'an. It appears that the Qur'anic verses previously mentioned regarding the guiding abilities of the Qur'an and the guiding abilities of knowledge are written in an authoritative and atemporal style that implies perpetual validity. Furthermore, from a thematic point of view, the affirmations in Qur'an 2:2 and Qur'an 35:28 mentioned above are not linked to any specific stories about past communities. Hence, there is no direct element that would require these verses to be restricted to their context of revelation. Additionally, from a grammatical point of view, Qur'an 2:2 is a nominal sentence and Qur'an 35:28 is written in the imperfect tense. Thus, both verses imply that the statements made are continuously valid and not bound to the past. Accordingly, if a Divine agreement is expected between the Qur'an descriptions of material phenomena and the ancient scientific paradigms, then a similar agreement is to be expected with modern and future scientific paradigms.

In summary, if the Qur'anic descriptions of natural phenomena are expected to correspond to modern scientific paradigms, then ancient scientifically minded people must have had the same expectations with respect to their, now outdated, scientific paradigms. Hence, a Divine agreement between the Qur'an and both, past and present scientific paradigms is expected, even if these paradigms contradict each other's. This multiplicity of correspondences will be illustrated through the specific example of cosmography, as justified subsequently.

## The Specific Case of Cosmography

Having justified and framed the expectations that underpin the claim for correspondences, the objective here is to illustrate this multiplicity

of correspondences. For this purpose, the present study focuses on cosmography. Cosmography deals with the present features of the universe. Here, cosmography is distinguished from cosmogony, which deals with the coming into being of the universe. Together, cosmogony and cosmography form cosmology, which refers to the general study of the universe (i.e., its origins and present features).<sup>14</sup> This choice lies in the fact that most of the Qur'anic descriptions of natural elements pertain to this field. Furthermore, cosmography (and its parent-discipline cosmology) is one of the fields along with mathematics and anatomy, for example, that reached the status of mature science early in antiquity, if not before. According to Kuhn, a mature science is defined as a field which is dominated by a theory that is widely accepted within a community and upon which subsequent practitioners rely to build their specialisations.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, pre-mature sciences are characterised by a lack of standards, where each practitioner is developing the field anew from its foundations. Following this definition, examples of pre-mature sciences include alchemy, before the advent of chemistry, or electricity, before the eighteenth century. By following Kuhn's classification of mature versus pre-mature sciences, the goal is not to devalue knowledge that is developed subjectively (like spirituality, which requires every individual to start from its foundations) but only to benefit from the existence of a restricted body of literature that serves as foundation. Such reference manuals include, for example, Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in the field of classical mechanics,<sup>16</sup> or Einstein's *Special and General Theory* in the field of relativity.<sup>17</sup> These reference manuals provide a concise source of information, which greatly facilitates the study of each of these fields. Accordingly, ancient and modern cosmographies are described in great detail in both primary and secondary sources, which in turn facilitates the aim of this work, that is, evaluating the material correspondence of the Qur'an with past and modern cosmographies.

With respect to modern literature, the study of the cosmographical relevance of the Qur'an has garnered interest in recent decades. However, most recent works take a Bucaillist approach. Although Bucaille's work<sup>18</sup> is not the first work of its kind, it is by far the most popular book in the field of Islam and science. This approach typically seeks to demonstrate

the divine nature of the Qur'an by claiming that modern theories have their root in the Qur'an. However, such works often lack the critical depth required for modern scientific enquiry and lack a holistic reading of all the related verses.<sup>19</sup> But, the literature also includes more academic pieces, which can be classified into two broad categories: that which is produced by authors who consider the Qur'an an historical account, and those who acknowledge its divine nature.

With respect to authors who consider the Qur'an an historical account, their approach often consists in relating the Qur'an to previous paradigms. The work of D. Janos or T. Tesei, for example, provide a detailed comparison between the Qur'an's cosmographical elements and Babylonian, Judean, and Christian conceptions, as well as with local folklores.<sup>20</sup> Their aim is to establish a lineage between the Qur'an and previous cosmographies. In these works, similarities between successive cosmographies are explained following a syncretic approach. Accordingly, the similarities are interpreted in terms of inherited traits instead of proof for a common divine origin. But regardless of the truth value of these different interpretations, these works demonstrate that the Qur'an can be made relevant to pre-Islamic cosmographical paradigms.

With respect to authors who hold the Qur'an as sacred, their work often focuses on the purpose rather than on the physical nature and dynamics of the celestial and terrestrial elements. The work of M. Iqbal, for example, takes such a teleological approach.<sup>21</sup> In his works, the emphasis is given to elements of the unseen world (the Throne, the Footstool, the Tablet, the Pen) and to the metaphysical dimensions and purpose of the visible/material elements (e.g., the symbolism and role of the mountains, stars, winds, water). Understandably, the cosmographical elements are described in relation to God, with little discussion about their relevance to science. But, when material elements are discussed in relation to sciences, it is with the tacit assumption that modern scientific paradigms are closer to the truth than ancient ones. Such work reinforces the idea that the Qur'an can be made relevant to modern science.

Although the vast majority of published work adopts one of the three approaches (Bucaillist, syncretic, or teleological), the work of M.A. Tabataba'i and S. Mirsadri is unique in the sense that it aims at

establishing the distinctiveness of the Qur'an with respect to older cosmographies.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the authors seek to recreate a cosmography solely based on Qur'anic descriptions. The assumption is that a unique cosmography can be derived from the "literary meaning" of a unique text. In other words, the assumption is that most cosmographical descriptions can be understood without context. However, the very existence of "literary meaning" is a challenged notion, especially with respect to ancient texts.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the present study will demonstrate that context is essential when trying to derive the shape or the nature of every cosmographical element reported in the Qur'an. Another assumption made by the authors is that "every single word in the Qur'an is chosen with intended caution as to repudiate, endorse, or modify the existing ideas and/or ideologies of the sociocultural environment in which it appeared."<sup>24</sup> While this claim is true with respect to the theological and moral teachings of the Qur'an, it is not necessarily true with respect to other topics. The in-depth discussion presented by Tabataba'i and Mirsadri about the shape of the universe, contrary to the authors' standpoint, demonstrates that the Qur'anic cosmographical descriptions are ambiguous. Their work thus indirectly reinforces the idea that some verses can be interpreted in multiple ways.

In summary, much work has already been done in evaluating the Qur'an's correspondence with both ancient and modern cosmological paradigms. However, each analysis has focussed either on ancient or modern paradigms but never evaluated both simultaneously. The present study builds upon these previous works and proposes a new outlook by revising the Qur'an's relevance to both ancient and modern cosmological paradigms. Interestingly, most of these works restrict their evaluations to the Qur'an only, and leave the Hadith corpus aside. Similarly, before discussing the Qur'an's relevance to specific cosmographies, the following section justifies why this study also focuses on the Qur'an.

## Evaluating the Relevance of the Qur'an Only

Both the Qur'an and the Hadith together form the central Islamic scriptures and, with respect to cosmography, the Hadith corpus provides us



with more numerous and more detailed descriptions than the few given in the Qur'an. The compilation of al-Suyuti, for example, in his "Radiant Cosmography" provides us with thorough descriptions of the shape, nature and function of the different cosmic elements.<sup>25</sup> The decision to leave these descriptions aside stems from the differences in nature and objectives of the Qur'an and of the Hadith. With respect to the Qur'an, it was previously argued that the Qur'an is a perpetual source of guidance that can be directly applied in all contexts. By contrast, the Hadith, and more specifically, the actions and sayings of the Prophet (PBUH), correspond to the contextual application of these Qur'anic teachings. Hence, while the Qur'an provides us with general guidelines, the Prophet (PBUH) embodied the Qur'an by putting it into practice in his specific environment.<sup>26</sup> To illustrate this point, the Prophet (PBUH) was known for his intelligibility,<sup>27</sup> which implies that he spoke at the level of understanding of his interlocutors. This care for intelligibility also implies that the Prophet (PBUH) took into consideration the paradigms in which his interlocutors were living. Moreover, when it comes to ancient cosmographical paradigms, as pointed out by Walton with respect to the Hebraic and Christian scriptures,<sup>28</sup> and by Chittick with respect to the Islamic sources,<sup>29</sup> the main objective was not to render a factual account of the shape of the universe. Instead, the primary concern was to put into perspective the relationship between the human, the cosmos, and God. Accordingly, these descriptions focus on metaphysical elements and allegories, with little concern about their correspondence with the material world. Hence, while the cosmographical Hadith are more numerous and more detailed than their Qur'anic counterparts, they pertain to a domain that is beyond the limited scope of the present study.

## The Qur'an and Past Cosmographies

Having clarified all assumptions and restrictions, we can now evaluate the Qur'an's correspondence with particular scientific paradigms. This section is dedicated to evaluating the relationship between the Qur'an's description of physical elements and ancient paradigms. The term ancient paradigm here corresponds to the cosmographical paradigms

that were contemporary of the Prophet (PBUH) and the area in which he lived. Accordingly, the present study will not cover the illustrious ancient Indian and Chinese paradigms, as well as the many African cosmographical conceptions, since they are assumed to have had limited influence in the Meccan region at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). The first step, then, is to ascertain which were the prevalent cosmographies in sixth century Arabia. Unfortunately, little is known about cosmographies in the Meccan region at that time. This region was, from a scientific point of view, literally ostracized by the neighbouring Byzantine, Sassanid, and Aksumite empires. However, the Qur'an does provide us a couple of clues. In verse 17:92, according to exegetes, it is reported that the Meccans challenged the Prophet (PBUH) by asking him to make the sky fall upon them in pieces.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in verse 42:5 the Heavens are described as almost breaking apart from their uppermost part. Accordingly, this community saw the sky as a hard shell. Such a belief coincides with ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian cosmographies<sup>31</sup> as well as with Hebraic,<sup>32</sup> Zoroastrian,<sup>33</sup> Christian,<sup>34</sup> and Manichean ones.<sup>35</sup> In all these cosmographies, the sky was a solid metallic or stone-like roof or dome. It either served as the support for the stars, as illustrated by the Egyptian goddess Nut,<sup>36</sup> protecting the earth from the cosmic water, as in the Old Testament's firmament,<sup>37</sup> or simply represented the boundary between the heavenly bodies and the divine realm, as in the Mesopotamian,<sup>38</sup> Zoroastrian,<sup>39</sup> and Manichean cosmographies.<sup>40</sup> The Sun and the Moon were described as evolving in this interstitial space until they reached the horizon where they would then plunge into the underworld, either in the waters or underneath the Earth. The Earth itself was a vast plane centred on the people's respective kingdom and floating or surrounded by waters. It is worth noting for later discussion that in Zoroastrian cosmology, the mountains had roots, like plants, and grew via a deep-rooted rhizome-like system.<sup>41</sup>

To see the sky as a hard shell also corresponds to the latest development of Greek scientific thoughts in classical antiquity, which culminated with Ptolemy's mathematical model of the universe.<sup>42</sup> Although the Greeks provided various alternatives (from Aristarchus's heliocentrism to Epicurus's infinite universe), Ptolemy's paradigm is

taken as representative of that of the Greeks, unless specified otherwise. Indeed, Ptolemy's work crystalizes Aristotle's conception of the world, and became the point of reference for most early Muslim astronomers.<sup>43</sup> For Aristotle, the universe was spherical and centred around a spherical Earth.<sup>44</sup> The sub-lunar (the Earth and atmosphere) was the realm of change, imperfection, and corruption. It was comprised of four elements: earth, water, air and fire.<sup>45</sup> This was in opposition to the celestial spheres that were seen as perfect, incorruptible, immutable, and made of aether.<sup>46</sup> According to this school of thought, the Moon, the Sun, and the different planets were all held by crystalline spheres rotating around the Earth, and the whole universe was encapsulated by the outer sphere of the stars. It is noteworthy for the later discussion that, across the different sixth century empires, the cycles of the stars, the Sun and the Moon were already well calculated. They were the source for the different calendars, were commonly used for navigation and, most importantly, for astrology. The trajectories and cycles of the planets, on the other hand, remained problematic (until Kepler's advances in the seventeenth century) and subject to constant adjustments. Because of the planets' unwillingness to conform to any mathematical models, they were called the "wanderers."<sup>47</sup>

We can now read the Qur'an in the light of these ancient cosmographies and evaluate its relevance. Starting with the sub-lunar realm, the Qur'an mentions on multiple occasions that God had spread the earth<sup>48</sup> and made it as a cradle.<sup>49</sup> Such descriptions intuitively correspond to a flat Earth. The conception of a flat Earth coincides with all ancient cosmographies, except that of the Greeks, at least after the fifth century BC.<sup>50</sup> But, the Qur'an does not explicitly state that the Earth is flat, nor does it state that it possesses edges, limits, or a centre. For example, in the story of *Dhū al-Qarnayn* it is mentioned that he first "reached the setting" before reaching "the rising of the Sun,"<sup>51</sup> which could be interpreted as referring to each end of the world. However, those verses do not give any indications about what lies beyond that natural barrier, and as a result, does not provide any specific indications about the overall shape of the Earth. Hence, while it alludes to the flatness of the Earth, the Qur'an is silent about its actual shape. Through this silence, these verses can also be adequately read in relation to the Greek's spherical Earth.

Within the terrestrial realm, the Qur'an also mentions fresh and salty bodies of water.<sup>52</sup> These verses are commonly read as referring to the earthly fresh and salty waters, because food and ornaments can be extracted from each.<sup>53</sup> However, other interpretations exist. These same verses have also been interpreted, considering the Book of Genesis, as referring to the distinction between the cosmic (fresh) waters above the firmament and the terrestrial (salty) waters below the firmament.<sup>54</sup> The latter interpretation suggests a possible correspondence between the Qur'anic, Hebraic and Christian cosmographies. This opposition between fresh and salty waters also echoes the Greek myth of Alpheus who crossed the Ionian (salty) sea by transmuting into sweet water.<sup>55</sup> Obviously, from an Islamic perspective, the world cannot be read as being the playfield of different gods. Nevertheless, the myth indicates that coexisting bodies of sweet/fresh and salty water was already part of the Greek imaginary. As such, the Qur'an can be read as correcting the theology while alluding to elements of Greek imaginary.

With respect to the mountains, the Qur'an mentions that they have been implanted in the earth, like pegs,<sup>56</sup> firmly anchored,<sup>57</sup> in a way that stabilizes the earth.<sup>58</sup> This imagery brings to mind the Zoroastrian conception of the mountains, which grew out of the earth like plants, firmly rooted in the soil.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, if the roots of plants can hold the soil steady and prevent it from eroding, it would have been intuitive to imagine that the mountains' roots are similarly keeping the earth steady. Accordingly, these verses can be read as referring to the Zoroastrians' plant-like mountains. However, while the Qur'an alludes to a part of the mountain that extends beneath the surface, it is silent about the mountain's actual nature, shape and coming into being.

Progressing toward the celestial realm, the Qur'an describes the Sun and the Moon as being subservient to a continuous rule.<sup>60</sup> It is commonly understood that this subjugation corresponds to their trajectories.<sup>61</sup> The Qur'an further alludes to the regularity of the Sun's and Moon's cycles for calendar and time keeping purposes.<sup>62</sup> The stars also are described as being subservient,<sup>63</sup> and the regularity of the stars' cycle is implied when the Qur'an points to their use for navigation in land and sea.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the explicitly mentioned trajectories of the Sun, Moon and

stars, the Qur'an is silent about the possible motion of the Earth. The Qur'an thus alludes to a geocentric model of the universe in which the Earth is fixed at the centre. This reading of the verses is in agreement with all major ancient cosmographies. It is recorded that heliocentric models of the universe existed since Aristarchus of Samos in antiquity. However, heliocentrism remained marginal until the seventeenth century. Heliocentrism remained marginal because it was considered unnecessarily complicated compared to the more intuitive and equally accurate geocentric model.<sup>65</sup> The correspondence between the Qur'an and heliocentrism will be discussed later when comparing the Qur'an and modern paradigms.

It is worth emphasizing that the planets are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an,<sup>66</sup> although their existence was well known in the sixth century. The planets Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn played significant roles in astrology, and astrology was a valued science at that time.<sup>67</sup> The contrast created between the elusive mention of the planets and the explicit precision and regularity of the Sun and the Moon's cycles can be read as referring to the difficulties faced by all ancient paradigms in accurately modelling the planets. Accordingly, the silence about the planets can be read as referring to the impossibility of properly modelling the planets' trajectories while using a geocentric model of the universe. Hence, this silence further alludes to geocentrism. It is also interesting to note that the Qur'an does not endeavour to give any precision about the relative locations of the Sun, the Moon, nor the stars with respect to the Earth. Therefore, it can also be read relation to the Zoroastrian and Manichean cosmographies, in which the stars were located below the Sun and the Moon.<sup>68</sup>

With respect to the shape of the sky, the Qur'an refers to it as a canopy<sup>69</sup> that was built<sup>70</sup> and raised.<sup>71</sup> More precisely, the sky is described as having been "raised without pillars that you can see."<sup>72</sup> The reference to pillars reminds us of the Egyptian's conception of the four pillars of the Earth,<sup>73</sup> as well as the Hebraic, Christian, and Manichean conception of a temple-like universe sustained by pillars and/or walls.<sup>74</sup> However, because the verse uses the word "without" (*bi-ghayr*), it raises the following question: are there invisible pillars; or no pillars at all?

Hence, the verse can also be read in the light of the Greek conception of the celestial spheres that are not directly supported by pillars. The sky is also described as being retained from falling onto the Earth.<sup>75</sup> The Qur'an further mentions that God could have made fragments fall from the sky,<sup>76</sup> and that the sky has no cracks.<sup>77</sup> All these descriptions allude to a hard-shell sky. To picture the sky as a solid vault or roof agrees with most ancient cosmologies. The only exception being the Epicurean sphere-less universe which was mostly empty and infinite.<sup>78</sup> However, similar to the mention of the pillars, the mention of a solid sky is only suggested but never explicitly stated. Accordingly, the related verses permit the following question: Does God retain the sky from falling by making it solid, or by making it diffuse? Does the fact that God could have made fragments fall from the sky imply that the sky is currently not fragmentable? Does the affirmation that the sky has no cracks imply that it is not a solid shell, but something fluid like air or simply empty? Accordingly, the verses can also be read in the light of the Epicurean worldview and its mostly empty and infinite universe. The conception of a boundless universe could come into conflict with the mention of the "ceiling of the sky."<sup>79</sup> But, the Qur'an uses the same word "sky" (*samā'a*) to refer to the lower and higher atmospheres, that is, to the space that contains the stars as well as to the six other skies which we apparently do not perceive. Hence, by not specifying which sky it refers to, the verse is justifiably open to interpretations. Interestingly, when the word "sky" is used in the singular form it refers most often to the part from which rain comes, that is, the lower atmosphere, or troposphere in today's classification. Consequently, the ceiling can readily refer to the clouds themselves, as it is commonly used to in today's aviation. To raise the "ceiling of the sky" would thus mean that the clouds are generally out of reach from a human perspective. With respect to the six other skies mentioned in the Qur'an, if they are understood as being material, then a material boundary between them is implied. Such boundary would conflict with the Epicurean infinite universe. However, the Qur'an does not detail the nature of these six other skies. Hence, if the six other skies belong to different dimensions, then the potential conflicts with Epicurean, and more generally with the Greek worldviews, are avoided.

It is worth recalling that the objective here is not to evaluate the superiority of one interpretation over another. Rather, it is to show the possible correspondences between the Qur'anic cosmographical descriptions and ancient paradigms.

Continuing with the descriptions of the universe, the Qur'an often refers to "the skies and the Earth." This sentence construction echoes the idiom "Heaven and Earth" which is common in Mesopotamian<sup>80</sup> as well as Hebraic and Christian<sup>81</sup> scriptures. This idiom alludes to a sharp distinction between the earthly and the heavenly regions and echoes the Greek distinction between the sub-lunar and celestial realms. Furthermore, while the Qur'an is explicit about the Earth's corruption,<sup>82</sup> it only hypothesizes that of the skies: "But if the Truth had followed their inclinations, the Heavens and the Earth, and whoever is in them would have been corrupted."<sup>83</sup> In that verse, the conditional statement alludes to the current perfection of the skies. This distinction between the corrupted Earth and the apparently pristine skies corresponds to the Aristotelian view of the universe described earlier. Accordingly, these verses can be read in the light of Aristotelian science. But again, the incorruptibility of the Heavens is only alluded to, rather than stated explicitly. Consequently, these verses can also be read in relationship to all other cosmographies which are not as explicit about the Heavens' incorruptibility. For example, the lower sections of the Manichean firmaments contain imprisoned demons.<sup>84</sup> However, it is not clear whether these corrupted beings influence the firmaments in any way.

Regarding the elements that compose the universe, the Qur'an refers to earth, water, wind, and fire, which again echoes the Greeks' categorization of earth, water, air, and fire. And all the Greeks' cosmographies, except that of the Epicureans, describe the celestial realm as being made of aether, the fifth and purest element.<sup>85</sup> However, on the nature of the skies the Qur'an is silent. It only mentions the light of the Sun and the Moon,<sup>86</sup> which as a result are filling the space between Earth and the lowest sky. Similarly, the Qur'an does not discuss the nature of any of the celestial bodies, nor does it detail the nature of that interstitial space. Consequently, the Qur'an avoids any direct conflict with all aether-based cosmographies.

In summary, these examples demonstrate that the Qur'anic descriptions of the material world can be adequately read in relation to all the ancient cosmographies selected here. Furthermore, these descriptions allude to elements that are specific to some of these cosmographies (e.g., the flattening of the Earth, the roots of mountains, the pillars of the sky). However, these references remain mere insinuations. In each case, interestingly, the Qur'an stays silent on details that would indisputably endorse or refute one or the other cosmographies (e.g., the shape and trajectory of the Earth, the nature of the seven skies). Accordingly, these descriptions can be read in relation to multiple ancient cosmographies without resulting in direct conflicts with any of them.

## The Qur'an and Modern Cosmography

This section evaluates the correspondence between the Qur'an and modern conceptions of the universe. The first step is to describe modern cosmography. Today, the Earth is pictured as a rugged sphere slightly flattened at the poles. Human life developed on the Earth's crust and more specifically on the surface of continental lithospheres that are slowly drifting on top of the Earth's mantle.<sup>87</sup> The mountains correspond to either uplifted parts of lithospheres or have volcanic origins.<sup>88</sup> Above the surface, the Earth's atmosphere is differentiated in multiple layers, each characterised by a specific composition, temperature, and pressure.<sup>89</sup> The Earth, along with other planets (and their trojans) revolve around the Sun. The solar system itself moves through the local interstellar medium of our galaxy. Our galaxy rotates on itself and is part of the Laniakea supercluster, which, along with other superclusters, forms the observable universe.<sup>90</sup> In terms of the nature of the universe, it is mostly empty from visible matter, but "filled" with radiations, dark matter, and dark energy.<sup>91</sup>

Here, the second step is to read the Qur'an in relation to this modern cosmographical paradigm. Starting with the firmly anchored mountains,<sup>92</sup> current scientific models agree that the bulk of the mountains are an integral part of the lithosphere. More specifically, most mountains, with the exception of volcanoes, correspond to uplifted parts of



continental lithospheres.<sup>93</sup> The Qur'anic description of peg-like mountains thus agrees with current models in the sense that mountains are integral to the landmass. The stabilization effect of the mountain, however, deserves further discussion. The Qur'an explicitly states that mountains have been cast into the ground "lest it would shake or swing, and the people with it."<sup>94</sup> Intuitively, this notion of shaking and swinging, designated by the verb *māda*, could refer to earthquakes. But in modern science, mountains are almost always associated with zones of higher seismic activity. Consequently, the description of mountains as inherently preventing earthquakes would be contradictory. Interestingly, the Qur'an refers to physical earthquakes by using a different word.<sup>95</sup> Hence, the shaking and swinging that is prevented by mountains could be of another kind, potentially slower and larger in amplitude. It is worth recalling that most mountains are an integral part of the continental lithospheres, and continental lithospheres distinguish themselves by their longevity, dating back a few billion years; the Earth being about 4.5 billion years old.<sup>96</sup> This longevity contrasts with the oceanic lithospheres, which are continuously produced at the mid-ocean ridges and recycled at the subduction zones. Consequently, oceanic lithospheres are no more than 200 million years old. The exceptional longevity of the continental lithospheres (in contrast to oceanic ones) can be explained in terms of their specific physical and mechanical properties, such as density and viscosity.<sup>97</sup> These same properties, along with tectonic considerations, are currently the only explanations for the uplift of mountains. Accordingly, even if modern geology did not assign specific functions to the mountains, the mountains are inherently linked, through their physical and mechanical properties, to the longevity of continental lithospheres. Reading the Qur'an in the light of modern geology would imply that the swinging of the earth mentioned in the verses corresponds to the plate tectonics. If this were the case, then the Qur'an rightly links the presence of mountains to the stability and longevity of continental lithospheres.

With respect to the shape of the Earth, we have seen that, while flatness is implied,<sup>98</sup> the actual shape of the Earth is not specified. Consequently, all allusions to flatness can be read as referring to a subjective description of a local perception of the Earth. Indeed, looking

from the hill-top toward the horizon, the Earth looks flattened. These verses can therefore be taken as referring to the relative smoothness of the Earth's surface.

Taking a closer look at the Qur'an's syntax, when the Qur'an describes the Earth as being wide,<sup>99</sup> the past tense is used. The past tense implies that the act of spreading took place in the past. The Qur'an further specifies that the Earth is potentially in the process of reducing in size.<sup>100</sup> The description of an Earth that has already reached its maximum size, and that it is now potentially decreasing is in agreement with current scientific models.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, God calls Himself "the Preparer" or "the One who makes even" (*al-māhidūn*).<sup>102</sup> The word used is an active participle, which is not bound to specific time (past-present-future). Therefore, the use of the active participle implies that the Earth is continuously smoothened. It is thus possible to interpret this verse, in relation to modern geology, as referring to the continuous erosion and renewal of the lithosphere.

This potentially shrinking Earth contrasts greatly with the sky. The Qur'an describes the sky as being vast, also using an active participle the "Expenders" (*mūsī'ūn*).<sup>103</sup> Being freed from time, the active participle alludes not only to the current state of affairs (i.e., that the sky is vast) but to the continuous expandability of the sky. Accordingly, it is possible to interpret this verse as signifying that, in accordance with modern astronomy, the universe is expanding. Continuing with the description of the Heavens, the Qur'an states that the Sun and Moon are "swimming in an orbit."<sup>104</sup> However, by being silent about the centre of these orbits, these verses are open to interpretation. Consequently, the text can be read in accordance with modern heliocentrism, since both the Sun and the Moon are known to have their own trajectories.<sup>105</sup> Note that the verb *yasbahūn*, which translates as "swimming" or "sailing without full immersion,"<sup>106</sup> implies the stability of an object whose density is between that of water and air. In today's cosmology, there is no such interface through which the Sun and the Moon travel. However, a "stable" orbit (or more durable orbit) implies constraints on the mass-speed ratio of the celestial bodies. In other words, the orbital stability of celestial bodies depends upon the bodies' intrinsic physical characteristics, in the same manner that the

floating ability of a boat also depends upon its intrinsic physical characteristics. While a relation between the physical characteristics of an object and its behaviour might seem evident today, the establishment of a relation between the celestial bodies' intrinsic physical properties and their trajectories is one of the major achievements of the seventeenth century.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, through the use of the word "swimming," these verses can be taken as referring to a region of space that allows a stable orbit, and which is directly related to the intrinsic physical characteristics of both the Sun and the Moon.

The Qur'an further describes the Heavens as being "raised without pillars that you can see,"<sup>108</sup> and as being devoid of any cracks.<sup>109</sup> It has been shown in the previous section that these verses could be read considering an Epicurean universe, which is mostly empty. Similarly, the same verses can be read in the light of modern astronomy since both the Epicurean and the standard model agree on a mostly empty universe. Alternatively, the pillars can be read metaphorically as something that holds the universe together. The pillars can thus be taken as referring to gravitational forces. Indeed, gravitational forces are invisible to the human eye, and they are currently believed to govern the universe at the cosmic scale. The lack of "crack" would then refer to the smooth and continuous gravitational force field that governs the universe. Accordingly, these verses can also be read in relation to modern gravitational physics. In summary, the Qur'anic descriptions of the material world can be effectively read considering modern cosmography without direct conflict. More specifically, the word choice, morphology, and syntax used in each description can be adequately linked to modern scientific concepts.

## Literary Devices used and their Consequences

The above discussion demonstrated that the Qur'an can be read through multiple ancient and modern cosmographical paradigms without resulting in any direct contradictions, even if these paradigms conflict with one another. The objective of this last section is to rehearse the methods used to achieve this multiplicity of readings, as well as to discuss some of the philosophical and theological implications of this approach.

Understandably the Qur'an, because it speaks to a diverse audience, most of whom are not scientists, often describes nature and natural phenomena from the perspective of a common human being living on Earth. For example, to see the Sun and the Moon rotating around the Earth is evident, and in the Qur'an, the Sun and the Moon are rightly described as having cyclic motions. Contrastingly, to imagine the Earth moving around the Sun at high speed might be scientifically correct but is counter intuitive. The first literary method, then, is to describe the world from a subjective point of view, and these subjective descriptions often resonate with ancient paradigms. The second method is to describe nature by what it is not, thereby alluding to certain paradigms without giving them explicit credit. For example, to describe the sky as being supported without visible pillars, nor having any cracks, alludes to a solid dome supported by pillars. However, the verses in question make no claim about the actual nature or shape of the sky. By describing the world through its opposites, the Qur'an here alludes to certain paradigms without specifically endorsing them. The third method is to be silent about key elements that would distinguish between competing paradigms. For example, the Qur'an does not state the actual shape of the Earth nor the centre of rotation of the Sun and Moon. This silence leaves room for multiple interpretations, and as a result the verses can be read considering multiple paradigms.

These three methods could suggest that the Qur'an only contains vague and evasive descriptions of natural phenomena. However, one can appreciate the aptness of these descriptions when it comes to reading the Qur'an with respect to modern paradigms. Indeed, the nuances implied by the chosen words and their morphology can be aptly related to modern scientific notions. To allow multiple readings, however, implies that the Qur'an cannot be the source of scientific knowledge. The Qur'an can certainly guide and inspire scientists, but given the multiple levels of interpretations allowed, it can hardly be taken as an argument in support for specific scientific theories. Hence, one must be cautious to speak of miracles as soon as a verse can be read in the light of modern science. The fact that a verse can be better read in relation to current paradigms is not a scientific proof for the verse's divine origin. Instead, to look

for correlations between the verses and modern science is a subjective endeavour. Another problem with this approach to miracles is that it ultimately lends to contemporary science the authority to define what is and is not a miracle, and science is unfit to deal with the supernatural. Nevertheless, the fact that the Qur'an has remained relevant across the ages by allowing multiple readings, is in itself a literary feat that deserves awe.

The fact that the cosmographical Qur'anic descriptions allow for multiple readings suggests that other topics might also be susceptible to the same interpretative moves. This assumption is relevant for all topics about which the Qur'an is ambiguous, and more specifically topics that were once part of historical norms and are now challenged in modern societies. For example, the Qur'an is ambiguous about the role of women in society. The Qur'an is equally ambiguous about how proactively one should call others to the faith or invest oneself in this world. The Qur'an is not explicit about the organisation of the state nor about the definitions of masculinity and femininity. Because these topics are liable to interpretation, their implementation is likely to differ for every individual. Although this variability can be seen as departure from an idealised Islam (i.e., that of the Prophet PBUH in his lifetime) it allows for the core theological message to be shared more effectively. Indeed, the more the verses can reflect the reader's lived experiences and perception of the world, the more relevant the message becomes.

## Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the Qur'an can be read with respect to multiple cosmographical paradigms, past and present. In so doing, the assumption is that each scientific paradigm forms a relative truth through which a community experiences their world and reads their scriptures. Accordingly, the more relevant the scripture is to the lived experiences of an individual, the more effective are its teachings. The fact that the Qur'an can be made relevant to multiple conflicting scientific paradigms is achieved by using specific literary methods. First, the Qur'anic descriptions of natural phenomena are often written from a

subjective point of view, and as such, they are intuitively open to interpretation. Reading these subjective descriptions in their most evident or usual meanings often corresponds to the more intuitive and ancient paradigms. The second method is to describe phenomena through negative affirmations. Hence, by mentioning what does not exist, the Qur'an alludes to specific paradigms without endorsing them. The third method is to be silent about key elements that would unambiguously differentiate between conflicting paradigms. All three literary devices could leave the Qur'an with only elusive descriptions of natural phenomena. However, this elusiveness is promptly brushed away when it is read in the light of modern sciences. Indeed, the nuances that emerge from the word choice and morphology of the Qur'an's descriptions can all be made relevant to modern scientific paradigms. One major consequence of this multiplicity of readings is that the Qur'an cannot be taken as the source of scientific knowledge; at least not in the field of cosmography. It will thus be interesting to pursue similar evaluations on the origin and formation of the universe, and about the origins and development of humans. Beyond the physical sciences, it will be also be valuable to pursue similar evaluations on topics that are today socially relevant such as gender, nationalism, and activism.

## Endnotes

- 1 Maurice Bucaille, *La Bible, Le Coran Et La Science: Les Écritures Saintes Examinées À La Lumière Des Connaissances Modernes* (Paris: Seghers, 1976).
- 2 Sheikh Jawahir Tantawi could be described as having produced the first reading the Qur'an in the light of modern science. However, as a non-scientist, his understanding of the sciences is superficial and erroneous at times. For example, in his tafsir of verse 27:88 with respect to Einstein's theory of relativity, when alluding to mountains being mere oscillations, he does not seem to differentiate between the distinct nature of sound waves, of electromagnetic waves, and the De Broglie wavelength of moving objects. M. Daneshgar, *Tantawi Jawhari and the Qur'an: Tafsir and Social Concerns in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2017), 159-161.
- 3 Muhammad Jamaluddin El-Fandy, *On Cosmic Verses in the Quran*, ed. Shawski Sukkary, volume 3. (Cairo: The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Ministry of Waqfs, 1961).
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- 8 Sayyid Wahid Akhtar, "The Islamic Concept of Knowledge," *Al-Tawhid: A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Thought & Culture* 12, no. 3 (1997).
- 9 William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013) 55-57.
- 10 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
- 11 J. Quadri, *Transformations of tradition: Islamic law in colonial modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) 155-156.
- 12 See in Sahih al-Bukhari 3886; In book ref.: Book 63, Hadith 226; USC-MSA ref.: Vol.5, Book 58, Hadith 226. <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3886>.
- 13 Keith Augustus Burton, "The Faith Factor: New Testament Cosmology in Its Historical Context," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (2004): 5; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009) 14-15.
- 14 Note that cosmography includes geology, which corresponds to the study of the Earth, as well as astronomy, which corresponds to the study of what lies beyond the

Earth's atmosphere. This is not to be confused with astrology, which corresponds to the divinatory practice.

- 15 Kuhn, *Structure*, 13-14.
- 16 Isaac Newton, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (n.p.: A. Strahan, 1802).
- 17 Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory, a Popular Exposition. Authorised Translated by Robert W. Lawson*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010 [first published in 1920]).
- 18 Bucaille, *La Bible, Le Coran Et La Science*.
- 19 Stefano Bigliardi, "The "Scientific Miracle of the Qur'an," Pseudoscience, and Conspiracism," *Zygon* 52, no. 1 (2017): 146-71; Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2010) 161-164.
- 20 Damien Janos, "Qur'anic Cosmography in Its Historical Perspective: Some Notes on the Formation of a Religious Worldview," *Religion* 42, no. 2 (2012): 215-31; Tommaso Tesei, "Some Cosmological Notions from Late Antiquity in Q 18:60-65: The Quran in Light of Its Cultural Context," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 1 (2015): 19-32.
- 21 Muzaffar Iqbal, "In the Beginning: Islamic Perspectives on Cosmological Origins-II," *Journal of Islamic Sciences* 4, no. 2 (2006).
- 22 Mohammad Ali Tabataba'i and Saida Mirsadri, "The Qur'ānic Cosmology as an Identity in Itself," *Arabica* 63, no. 3-4 (2016): 201-234.
- 23 Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld Publication, 2014), 89-91.
- 24 Tabataba'i and Mirsadri, "The Qur'ānic Cosmology," 201-234.
- 25 Anton M. Heinen, *Islamic Cosmology: A Study of as-Suyūṭī's Al-Hay'a as-Sanīya Fi L-Hay'a as-Sunniya with Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Beirut: F. Steiner Verlag, 1982).
- 26 The following Hadith shows that the Prophet (PBUH) was known for embodying the teachings of the Qur'an: "[...] [Hakim] said [to Aisha]: Mother of the Faithful, tell me about the character of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him. She said: Don't you read the Qur'an? I said: Yes. Upon this she said: The character of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, was the Qur'an. [...]." Sahih Muslim, 746a; In-book ref.: Book 6, Hadith 168; USC-MSA web ref.: Book 4, Hadith 1623. <https://sunnah.com/muslim:746a>.
- 27 As reported by Aisha: "The speech of Messenger of Allah, peace and blessing may be upon him, was so clear that all those who listened to it would understand it." In *Riyad as-Salihin*, 696; In book ref.: Book 1, Hadith 17. <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:696>.
- 28 Walton, *Lost World*, 21-34.
- 29 Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos*, 5-8.



- 30 See the exegesis in Seyyed Hossein Nasr et. al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).
- 31 John Albert Wilson et. al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) 45-46.
- 32 Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Hebrew Astronomy: Deep Soundings from a Rich Tradition," in *Astronomy across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Astronomy*, eds. Helaine Selin and Sun Xiaochun (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2000), 555-584 (564).
- 33 Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism: The Early Period*, Vol. 1, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 132-133.
- 34 Walton, *Lost World*, 55-56.
- 35 Zsuzsanna Gulácsi and Jason Beduhn, "Picturing Mani's Cosmology: An Analysis of Doctrinal Iconography on a Manichaean Hanging Scroll from 13th/14th-Century Southern China," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 25 (2011): 55-105.
- 36 Wilson et. al., *Intellectual Adventure*, 45-48.
- 37 Walton, *Lost World*, 27-28.
- 38 Nicholas Campion, "Babylonian astrology: Its origin and legacy in Europe," in *Astronomy Across Cultures*, 509-553 (542).
- 39 Boyce, *History*, 141.
- 40 Gulácsi and Beduhn, "Mani's Cosmology," 55-105.
- 41 Boyce, *History*, 133.
- 42 Rosemary Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2013) 42-43.
- 43 Thomas Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 86-87; George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 131-135; Dallal, *Islam*, 54-89.
- 44 Wright, *Cosmology*, 241.
- 45 Ibid., 103.
- 46 Ibid., 114-115.
- 47 Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, 45.
- 48 The Qur'an uses multiple synonyms for "spread", each having their own connotations. Broadly speaking, it refers to stretching, using *madda* in verse 13:3, *madadnā* in verses 15:19 and 50:7, and by using *ṭaḥā* in verse 91:6. It also refers to flattening, using *farashnā* and *al-māhidūna* in verse 51:48, using *mahhadttu* in verse 74:14, using *daḥāhā* in verse 79:30 and by using *suṭīḥat* in verse 88:20.
- 49 The Qur'an implies that the Earth was made flat and comfortable, using *firāshan* in verse 2:22, and using *farashnā* in verse 51:48; like a bed, using *mahdan* in verses

20:53 and 43:10, or a resting place using *mihādan* in verse 78:6; that is secured, using *qirāran* in verses 27:61 and 40:64.

50 Wright, *Cosmology*, 41.

51 See verse 18:86-90.

52 See verses 25:53, 27:61, 35:12 and 55:19.

53 See verse 35:12.

54 Tesei, "Some Cosmological Notions from Late Antiquity," 19-32.

55 Tomislav Bilić, "The Myth of Alpheus and Arethusa and Open-Sea Voyages on the Mediterranean—Stellar Navigation in Antiquity," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 38, no. 1 (2009): 116-32.

56 The Qur'an refers to pegs by using *awtādan* in verse 78:7.

57 The Qur'an refers to the firmness of the mountain by calling them *rawāsiya* in verses 13:3, 15:19, 16:15, 21:31, 27:61, 31:10, 41:10, 50:7 and 77:27, as well as by using *arsāhā* in verse 79:32 and *nuṣibat* in verse 88:19.

58 See Qur'an, verses 16:15, 21:31 and 30:10.

59 Boyce, *History*, 133.

60 The sun and the moon's subjugation are implied in the Qur'an by using *sakhkhara* in verses 13:2, 16:12, 29:61, 31:20, 31:29, 35:13, 39:5, 45:13, and using *musakhkharāt bi-amrihi* in verses 7:54 and 16:12. The subjugation is further described as being continuous by using *dā'ibay* in verse 14:33.

61 The Qur'an refers to the motion of the sun and moon by using *yasbahūna* in verses 21:33, 36:39, and 55:5 and by using *tajrī* in verse 36:38.

62 The use of the sun and moon for computational purposes is referred in the Qur'an by using *ḥusbānan* in 6:96 and 55:5. It is then explicitly mentioned in 10:5 and 17:12.

63 The stars' subjugation is implied in the Qur'an by using *sakhkhara* in verses 31:20 and 45:13, and by using *musakhkharāt bi-amrihi* in verses 7:54 and 16:12.

64 The Qur'an explicitly refers to the stars' guiding ability in verses 6:97 and 16:16.

65 Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, 42-43.

66 It is possible to read *al-khunnas* in verse 81:15, meaning "those who retreat," as a reference to the planets because of their disappearance during the day or because of their retrograde motion. See Nasr et. al., *The Study Quran*. However, this verse is also translated as referring to the stars, as in Sahih International's translation. Hence, the verse is prone to interpretations. If we interpret the verse as referring to the planets, the verse can be taken as an allusion to their deviation with respect to the ecliptic. This apparent unwillingness to conform to any geocentric models corresponds to ancient paradigms who were unable to accurately describe and predict the planets' trajectories.

- 67 Dallal, *Islam*, 114.
- 68 Boyce, *History*, 133-134; Gulácsi and Beduhn, "Mani's Cosmology".
- 69 The Qur'an refers to the sky as a protected ceiling, using *saqfan mahfūẓan* in verse 21:32, but also refers to the ceiling of the sky, using *samkahā*, in verse 79:28.
- 70 The Qur'an refers to the sky as being built like a solid structure, using *binā'an* in verses 2:22 and 40:64, *banaynā* in verses 50:6, 51:47, 78:12 and *banā* in verses 79:27 and 91:5.
- 71 The Qur'an mentioned that the sky was raised using *rafa'a* in verses 13:2, 55:7, 79:28 and 88:18, and by using *marfū'* in verse 52:5.
- 72 See verses 13:2 and 31:10.
- 73 Wilson et. al., *Intellectual Adventure*, 46.
- 74 Edward Adams, "Graeco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, eds Jonathan T Pennington and Sean M McDonough, (London: T&T Clark International, 2008), 5-27 (20); Gulácsi and Beduhn, "Mani's Cosmology" .
- 75 See Qur'an 22:65.
- 76 See Qur'an 34:9.
- 77 See Qur'an 50:6 and 67:3-4.
- 78 Wright, *Cosmology*, 23.
- 79 See Qur'an 79:27-28.
- 80 Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (n.p.: Eisenbrauns, 1998), xiv.
- 81 Joel White, "Paul's Cosmology: The Witness of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians," in *Cosmology and the New Testament Theology*, 90-106 (93-94).
- 82 See, for example, Qur'an 30:41.
- 83 See Qur'an 23:71.
- 84 Gulácsi and Beduhn, "Mani's Cosmology".
- 85 Wright, *Cosmology*, 114-115.
- 86 In Qur'an 71:16, a distinction in intensity is made between the light from the sun and that from the moon. This difference can be interpreted as a difference in the way each light is produced.
- 87 Edward J. Tarbuck et. al., *Earth: An Introduction to Physical Geology* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 36-42.
- 88 Cliff Ollier and F. Colin Pain, *The Origin of Mountains* (London: Routledge, 2000)13-20, 186.
- 89 Roger Graham Barry and Richard J Chorley, *Atmosphere, Weather, and Climate* (London: Psychology Press, 2003), 32-37.

- 90 R. Brent Tully et. al., "The Laniakea Supercluster of Galaxies," *Nature* 513, no. 7516 (2014): 71-73.
- 91 Kenath Arun et. al., "Dark Matter, Dark Energy, and Alternate Models: A Review," *Advances in Space Research* 60, no. 1 (2017): 166-86.
- 92 See for example verses 78:6-7 and 16:15.
- 93 Ollier and Pain, *Origin*, 18-19.
- 94 The Qur'an refers to the shaking and swinging of the earth by using *tamida* in verses 16:15, 21:31, and 31:10.
- 95 The Qur'an refers specifically to earthquakes by using *al-rajjah* in verses 7:78, 7:91, 7:155 and 29:37. In contrast, it refers to the emotional effect of earthquakes by using *zulzilū* in verses 2:214, 33:11 and 99:1.
- 96 Tarbuck et. al., *Earth*, 59.
- 97 Adrian Lenardic et. al., "Longevity and Stability of Cratonic Lithosphere: Insights from Numerical Simulations of Coupled Mantle Convection and Continental Tectonics," *Journal of Geophysical Research: Solid Earth* 108, no. B6 (2003).
- 98 See footnotes 48 and 49.
- 99 The Qur'an alludes to a wide earth by using *wāsi'ah* in verses 4:97, 29:56 and 39:10.
- 100 The passage in Qur'an 21:44 reads as follows: "[...] Do they not consider how We come upon the land, reducing it of its outlying regions? [...]" This passage is commonly taken as referring to the loss of territory to an enemy, as well as to the loss of people of knowledge. See Nasr et. al., *The Study Quran*. However, when taken in its most evident meaning, the verse refers to the shrinking of landmasses.
- 101 With respect to the modern sciences, the shrinking of the earth could, for example, refer to the raising of sea levels, which started at the end of the last ice age.
- 102 See Qur'an 51:48.
- 103 See Qur'an 51:47.
- 104 See Qur'an 21:33 and 36:40.
- 105 Tully et. al., "The Laniakea Supercluster of Galaxies," 71-73.
- 106 See Lane's *Lexicon*.
- 107 Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, 252-265.
- 108 See Qur'an 13:2 and 31:10.
- 109 See Qur'an 67:3.

# The Non-Crucifixion Verse: A Historical, Contextual, and Linguistic Analysis

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LOUAY FATOOHİ

## Abstract

Over the centuries, there has been almost a consensus among Muslims and non-Muslims that the crucifixion of Jesus is denied in the Qur'an, mainly because of al-Nisā' 4:157. This overwhelmingly accepted interpretation has been challenged in recent times, albeit by a small minority of scholars, by suggesting novel interpretations of 4:157 and seeking support from history and

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Fatoohi, Louay. 2023. "The Non-Crucifixion Verse: A Historical, Contextual, and Linguistic Analysis." *American Journal of Islam and Society* 40, nos. 1-2: 39–76 • doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3143  
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other verses. This study first reviews how, from the early days of Islam, denying the crucifixion of Jesus was always seen by both Muslims and non-Muslims as the established Islamic view. It analyses the theological arguments of the minority view, promoted by some early Ismā'īlī scholars and modern scholars, that the Qur'an does not deny Jesus' crucifixion. A new attempt, which has been gathering some support, linking 4:157 to the Talmud is then critiqued. This study shows that the immediate context of 4:157 and the broader Qur'anic narrative also refute the new interpretation. A detailed linguistic analysis of the verse in question further shows that it cannot be reasonably read to mean anything other than rejecting that Jesus was crucified. In summary, history and a detailed study of 4:157 and related verses show that there is hardly any basis to justify challenging the centuries-long semi-consensus that the Qur'an denies the crucifixion of Jesus.

## The Consensus of Early Muslim Sources

There is only one verse in the Qur'an that directly addresses the crucifixion of Jesus:

And their saying, "We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah." They did not kill him (*wa-mā qatalūhu*), nor did they crucify him (*wa-mā ṣalabūhu*), but it was made to appear so to them. Those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of conjecture. They did not kill him with certainty.<sup>1</sup> (Al-Nisā' 4:157)

From the early days of Islam, scholars of all persuasions—Sunnī, Shī'ī, Mu'tazilī, and Sufī—have accepted that this verse accuses the Jews of trying to crucify Jesus and *unambiguously denies* that they succeeded in doing that. The earliest meta-exegetical work of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), for example, reflects this consensus. This is seen even in his commentary on the rather ambiguous root *w-f-y*,

which appears twice in the forms *mutawaffika* (Āl ‘Imrān 3:55) and *tawaffaytanī* (al-Mā’ida 5:117) with reference to Jesus. While another twenty-one occurrences of the root *w-f-y* in the Qur’an refer to death, the overwhelming majority of scholars have maintained that Jesus did not die. They have argued that his *wafāt* was a *wafāt nawm* (*wafāt* of sleep), rather than a *wafāt mawt* (*wafāt* of death). This interpretation derives support from two verses, al-An‘ām 6:60 and al-Zumar 39:41, where *w-f-y* refers to sleep.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, even the minority opinion that Jesus experienced *wafāt mawt*, that is, he “died”, which al-Ṭabarī attributes to Ibn ‘Abbās and unnamed others, presumes that this death was not caused by the crucifixion.<sup>3</sup>

In his historical tome *Tārīkh al-umam wal-mulūk*, al-Ṭabarī quotes Wahb Ibn Munabbih (d. 114/732) on the crucifixion. The latter is known for introducing Jewish and Christian narratives into Islamic tradition. Indeed, his rather detailed narrative of the crucifixion is unambiguously a retelling of the Gospel story, although al-Ṭabarī does not note that when quoting it. It starts by mentioning Jesus’ anguish at the news that he was going to be killed (Matt. 26:39), before moving on to cover the Last Supper (Mark 14:17-25), Jesus’ prediction that Peter would deny him three times (Mark 14:29-31), the fulfilment of this prediction (Mark 14:66-72), Judas’ betrayal of Jesus for thirty Dirhams (Matt. 26:14-16), and details of Jesus’ arrest and the abuse he received as he was being led to be crucified (Matt. 27:27-38). Yet even this Gospel-inspired account concludes that “when they brought him to the wood log that they wanted to crucify him on, Allah raised him to Himself, and they crucified whoever was made to appear to them so”. When Mary and another woman were crying next to the crucified man, Jesus appeared to them and reassured them, “Allah raised me to Himself, and I did not experience other than good. This is something that was made to appear so to them.” So, even when al-Ṭabarī states that Ibn Munabbih said, “Allah *tawaffā* Jesus for three hours at daytime, then He raised him to Himself”, these words should be understood in the context of Ibn Munabbih’s claim that Jesus was not crucified.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī also mentions an obscure account about a tomb at the top of a mountain in Medina that someone claimed belonged to Jesus. The

headstone or footstone was written in an unfamiliar language that some Persians managed to read. It stated that it was the tomb of Jesus, son of Mary, whom God had sent as a messenger to the people who lived there. Significantly, even in this case, Jesus is said to have died, not been killed, so they buried him.<sup>5</sup>

If Muḥammad, and accordingly the early Muslims, had considered the possibility that verse 4:157 could mean that Jesus was crucified, we would have found at least a trace of this view. Yet there is none in Ḥadīth or exegetical, theological, or historical works. Had such evidence existed, there would have been no need for later Muslims to change this understanding anyway. After all, the killing of prophets is mentioned several times in the Qur'an, so the event itself would not have created any particular theological difficulty. This is not to mention the practical impossibility of removing all references to such an interpretation of 4:157.

## Muslim Consensus in Early Christian Sources

That Muslims denied the crucifixion of Jesus is also confirmed in early Christian sources. This is particularly significant because the Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have debated with Christians and Jews. For instance, on one occasion a delegation of approximately twenty Christians visited him in Mecca and the two parties discussed the old and new religions.<sup>6</sup> The Prophet and early Muslims must have regularly interacted and debated with people from the other two Abrahamic faiths, particularly in Medina. Had the Prophet and early Muslims entertained the possibility of Jesus' crucifixion, they would have shared this critical information with the Christians and the Jews. Such a major belief by Muslims about how Jesus' life ended would have been preserved in non-Muslim writings, as both Jews and Christians already considered the crucifixion an indisputable fact. The crucifixion is at the heart of Christian theology, so Christians would have been particularly keen on recording the slightest indication that Muslims may accept that Jesus was crucified. It would have been impossible for this historical Muslim belief and compromise to have gone unmentioned by early Christian writers



and polemicists. Yet, all surviving early Christian writings presume that Muslims denied Jesus' crucifixion.

The earliest *possible* Christian reference to the Muslim belief about the crucifixion comes from Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Writing around 636/637 CE, he criticised the Saracens for many reasons, asking, "Why is the cross mocked?"<sup>7</sup> Probably the earliest unambiguous account is found in the short pseudonymous text *The Apocalypse of Shenute*, which may be dated to 690 CE. This document refers to the "children of Ishmael" as "those who deny my sufferings, which I accepted upon the cross."<sup>8</sup>

A much more detailed early Christian account of the Muslim belief about the crucifixion comes from the monk John of Damascus, around a century after Muḥammad's time. Having accused the Prophet of authoring the Qur'an by plagiarising the Old and New Testaments with help from an unnamed Arian monk, he goes on to say the following:

And he says that the Jews wanted to crucify Him in violation of the Law, and that they seized His shadow and crucified this. But the Christ Himself was not crucified, he says, nor did He die, for God out of His love for Him took Him to Himself into heaven.<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, John of Damascus' statement mirrors the double denial in 4:157, that is, of the killing and the crucifixion of Jesus. He is also aware of the Qur'anic confirmation that God raised Jesus to Himself, which is mentioned in the verse that immediately follows 4:157, "Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. Allah is invincible, wise", as well as in Āl 'Imrān 3:55.

Christian writings from the eighth century, such as *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* and *On the Triune Nature of God*, confirm that Muslims denied Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>10</sup> The same position is found in the exchanges of the Catholicos of the (Nestorian) Church of the East, Timothy the Great, with the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī, a century and a half after the death of the Prophet. Significantly, when the latter cited 4:157 as proof that Jesus escaped the crucifixion, Timothy did not respond by denying this meaning of the verse. Instead, he cited another verse

19:33, in which Jesus mentions that he will die, and 3:55, which mentions God's *tawaffi* and raising of Jesus. Al-Mahdī retorted by explaining that Jesus was not dead yet but that he would die in the future, and the debate continued.<sup>11</sup>

Acceptance that the Qur'an denies the crucifixion is also found in the writings of other ninth-century writers, such as the Melkite bishop Theodore Abū Qurra, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Ḥabīb Abū Rā'īta al-Takrītī, and Nestorian ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī.<sup>12</sup> Even though early Christian-Muslim polemics showed at times reconciliation of viewpoints, this never extended to the crucifixion, in the same way it could never include the trinity.<sup>13</sup> Simply put, like early Muslim sources, early Christian writings do not provide any evidence that the first generation(s) of Muslims ever understood 4:157 as anything other than denying that Jesus was crucified.

In accepting the natural and spontaneous interpretation of the Qur'anic statement as a denial of the crucifixion of Jesus, non-Muslim scholars have seen the Qur'an's assertion as nothing more than a historical fallacy. Conversely, Muslim scholars have maintained that it corrects a popular, yet false claim.

## Breaking with the Consensus in Ismāʿīlī Sources

Notwithstanding the consensus of Islamic sources, there are a handful of relatively early Ismāʿīlī scholars who treated the crucifixion of Jesus as a historical fact.

The earliest of these scholars is Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933). He wrote a polemical book, *Aʿlām al-Nubuwwa*, in which he refuted various atheistic claims by the famous philosopher and physician Abū Bakr Ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī whom he met and debated many times. In one chapter, Abū Ḥātim responded to the claim of Abū Bakr, whom he referred to as "the atheist," that the prophets of various faiths contradicted each other, which undermined the veracity of religion in general. One example used by Abū Bakr was that "Muḥammad claimed that Jesus was not killed whereas both Jews and Christians reject that and claim that he was killed and crucified."<sup>14</sup>

Abū Ḥātim responded by saying that some scholars claimed that verse 4:157 does not deny that Jesus was crucified but rather means that the Jews did not truly kill him. God raised Jesus to Himself where he is alive, just like the martyrs who are killed in the cause of Allah whom the Qur'an also describes as "alive" (al-Baqara 2:154; Āl 'Imrān 3:169). Abū Ḥātim then went on to liken this interpretation to the Gospels' story that "Jesus died in the body but is still alive in the spirit." He also quoted verses 3:55 and 5:117, which use the root *w-f-y* to describe what happened to Jesus, for further support.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond citing those four verses, Abū Ḥātim did not engage with the Qur'anic text to show how it might accommodate the crucifixion of Jesus. The scholars that he claimed adopted this view are left unnamed, so it is not possible to identify them. Abū Ḥātim's focus was simply on refuting Abū Bakr's criticism.

Significantly, in a separate, exegetical work, *al-Iṣlāḥ*, Abū Ḥātim agreed with the majority interpretation that the Qur'an denies the crucifixion of Jesus. Furthermore, he adopted the claim common among Muslim exegetes that the person who led the Jews to Jesus was made to look like Jesus, misleading the Jews into killing him, thinking that they killed Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. 331/942) authored a book in which he detailed his disagreement with *al-Iṣlāḥ* by his contemporary, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī. However, in his book *al-Yanābi'*, al-Sijistānī seems to accept that Jesus was crucified. In this work on his esoteric philosophy, al-Sijistānī interprets the crucifixion and the cross according to his Ismā'īlī understanding of the roles of the Imams and the Qā'im/Mahdī. For instance, he notes that the declaration of faith in Islam, *lā ilāha illā Allah*, consists of an affirmation and a negation and that the cross consists of one wood log that stands on another. Al-Sijistānī also emphasizes that it is significant that the declaration of faith consists of four words and that the cross has four endings. Al-Sijistānī does not quote the Qur'an or any other Islamic tradition in support of his views on the crucifixion.<sup>17</sup>

Half a century after Abū Ḥātim and Sijistānī, Ja'far Ibn Mansūr al-Yaman (380/990) reiterated the view that Jesus was crucified in a biographical work of prophets. This account of Jesus' life is broadly based on the Gospels

but many of its details conflict with them. It is not clear whether these details are derived from other Christian traditions. The author links the story to the Ismā'īlī concept of Qā'im. Again, this work does not make any effort to show how the Qur'an may confirm the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

The historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus was also confirmed by the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'). This group, which appeared in the fourth century AH (tenth century CE), considered all religions authentic and combined Greek philosophy with Islamic thought and is believed to have had close links to Ismā'ilism. One of their fifty-two epistles discusses Jesus and illustrates their view that it was his human body that was crucified, while his soul survived the crucifixion.<sup>19</sup> Like the Ismā'īlī works reviewed here, the writings of the Brethren of Purity are not interpretations of the Qur'an, contrary to what some have claimed.<sup>20</sup> Their account of Jesus' crucifixion and other events of his life makes no reference to any Islamic tradition, Qur'anic or otherwise.

## The Crucifixion in Modern Muslim Scholarship

The overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars down the centuries have continued to believe that the Qur'an unequivocally denies that Jesus was crucified. However, two relatively new, relevant trends that have developed deserve to be mentioned here.

First, some scholars have begun to argue that Jesus was indeed put on the cross, but he survived the ordeal and went on to die a natural death later. It looks like this was first proposed in the second half of the nineteenth century by the Indian reformer Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Ahmad Khan wrote:

Crucifixion itself does not cause the death of a man, because only the palms of his hands, or the palms of his hands and feet are pierced. The real cause of death is that when someone is hanged on the cross for four or five days, he dies because of the pains of the pierced hands and feet, combined with the endured hunger, thirst and exertion... When we bring the whole event into historical connection, it is clear that Christ did not die on

the cross, but something happened there which caused people to believe that he died... After three or four hours Christ was taken down from the cross, and it is certain that at that moment he was still alive. Then the disciples concealed him in a very secret place, out of fear of the enmity of the Jews... and they spread the rumour that Christ ascended to heaven.<sup>21</sup>

Ahmad Khan adopted a strict rationalistic approach to reading scriptures. For instance, he also interpreted the virginal conception and Jesus' miracles as natural events that did not involve any supernatural elements. He was also influenced by Western scholarship, which is where the non-fatal crucifixion theory first appeared.

The earliest form of the non-fatal crucifixion theory was proposed by the German theologians Karl Friedrich Bahrdt, late in the eighteenth century, and Heinrich Paulus, early in the nineteenth century. Advocates of the theory of non-fatal crucifixion often cite a report by Josephus about someone who survived a crucifixion.<sup>22</sup> Versions of this theory include the suggestions that Jesus fell into a deep swoon on the cross, pretended to have died, or put himself in a state of self-hypnosis. It is claimed that he was treated in the tomb, or that he managed to gather whatever energy he had left after his ordeal to escape the tomb. Surviving the crucifixion is then used to explain the emptiness of Jesus' tomb and his appearances to his disciples. These theories have been roundly rejected on medical grounds and due to their failure to explain post-crucifixion events. While surviving a crucifixion is not impossible, it is highly unlikely.<sup>23</sup>

One person that seemed to have been influenced by Ahmad Khan was his contemporary Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement. The latter first held the standard Muslim belief regarding the crucifixion, but he changed his view in 1891 claiming that God informed him that Jesus had died.<sup>24</sup> Ahmad maintained that Jesus was put into a swoon that was mistaken for death. A terrible earthquake happened that made the Jews fearful about their homes and families, so they rushed to take Jesus down from the cross, thinking that he had died when he had not. Jesus later went on to live in India.<sup>25</sup> He is said to have later died a natural death and his tomb is in Kashmir.

The second trend that contradicts the majority Muslim belief regarding what happened to Jesus was begun by the twentieth-century Egyptian reformer Muḥammad ‘Abduh. ‘Abduh claimed that Jesus died a natural death and denied that he will return.<sup>26</sup> This view was adopted by prominent Arab scholars who were influenced by ‘Abduh, some of whom were his students. These include Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa, who compiled ‘Abduh’s views, Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī,<sup>27</sup> Maḥmūd Shaltūt,<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad Ibn ‘Āshūr,<sup>29</sup> Muḥammad Abū Zahra, and Muḥammad al-Ghazālī.<sup>30</sup> This view is based on reading the Qur’anic *wafāt* of Jesus as being a *wafāt* of death, not of sleep. Yet, significantly, this view still argued that Jesus was not crucified.<sup>31</sup>

While there is a growing minority of Muslim scholars that accepts that Jesus was crucified, the overwhelming majority continue to argue that he avoided the crucifixion.

## The Qur’an’s Account in Western Scholarship

In recent years, there has been a growing tendency among a minority of scholars to go against the centuries-long consensus to argue that the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus is not rejected in the Qur’an. These scholars suggest that the majority consensus is based on a misunderstanding of the Qur’an, which Muslims have failed to correct for fourteen centuries.<sup>32</sup> One work that appears to have been particularly influential in promoting this view, including in general public polemics, is Todd Lawson’s *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an*, which is based on a two-part paper by the same author published three decades earlier, itself derived from his 1980 MA thesis. He seeks support for his argument by noting that not all early Muslim scholars understood 4:157 as denying the crucifixion.<sup>33</sup> The interpretation of the overwhelming majority of scholars, Lawson argues, is a product of tafsīr, rather than the unambiguous text.

Lawson draws on Ismā‘īlī writings to support his argument. Yet, as already explained, in addition to being relatively late and few, these sources do not engage with the Qur’anic text in any significant way. This point is often overlooked by scholars who highlight Ismā‘īlī texts to downplay the significance of the Muslim scholarly consensus on this issue. For instance, when citing Abū Ḥātim’s earlier work to confirm

his acceptance that Jesus was crucified, these scholars do not seem to be aware of his more significant, exegetical book that denies the crucifixion outright,<sup>34</sup> or they simply explain it away.<sup>35</sup> While exaggerating the significance of Ismā'īlī writings on the crucifixion of Jesus, Lawson also acknowledges that those authors used the crucifixion for doctrinal purposes, namely for “propagating their own typologically iterative view of salvation and eschatology.”<sup>36</sup>

The primary modern alternative to the ubiquitous interpretation of 4:157 is that it denies the ability of man, represented by the Jews, to defeat the will of God, represented by his agent Jesus, even though the latter is said to have been killed. Jesus was crucified, it is argued, so the verse only denies that it was *the Jews* who killed him, as it was *God* who took his soul.<sup>37</sup> Another version of this view is that the verse confirms that it is God who gives life and death, so had He not permitted the killing of Jesus, it would not have happened.<sup>38</sup>

While this alternative interpretation has been promoted by mainly Christian theologians, it has also been advocated by a few historians and Muslim scholars. Two different objectives could be seen as giving impetus to this new interpretation of 4:157, at times explicitly and at others more subtly. The first objective is the seeking of a rapprochement between Islam and Christianity. Mainly Christian theologians, although some Muslims as well, have argued that the denial of the crucifixion of Jesus by Muslims, because of their understanding of 4:157, is a major obstacle to a closer and more amicable relationship between the two faiths. As one Christian theologian articulated this view:

Q 4:157-58 has become an important exegetical site for repairing the broken relationship between Christianity and Islam. Typically, authors with this goal have hoped to shift attention away from the Qur'an's supposed denial of the crucifixion in Q 4:157 and instead attempt to find common ground in its affirmation in Q 4:158 that God raised Jesus to Godself. Christian scholars, hoping to present the Qur'an in a more positive light to Christian readers, have labored to prove that these verses need not be interpreted as a denial of the crucifixion.<sup>39</sup>

This alternative interpretation suggests that verses 4:157-158 affirm “the death and resurrection of Christ.”<sup>40</sup> More broadly, it confirms “the story of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension as told in the New Testament.”<sup>41</sup>

Ironically, if this theological approach were effective in achieving Islam-Christianity rapprochement, then it could only do the opposite to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Paul (1 Cor 1:23) stated that the concept of a *crucified Christ* was a “stumbling block to Jews.”<sup>42</sup> But, while Paul’s statement may have certainly been true in the past, theological considerations arguably have much less impact than worldly matters on the state of the relationship between the three great Abrahamic faiths in today’s world. I agree with one assessment that “the attempt of some Christian apologists to circumvent the Qur’anic denial of the crucifixion is disingenuous in the extreme.”<sup>43</sup>

The second objective, which is that of some Islamic apologetics, is to protect the Qur’an against the accusation that it contains incorrect historical information. The late Mahmoud Ayoub, who is often cited as proof of a growing trend among Muslim scholars to not read the Qur’an as denying the crucifixion, has argued that the ubiquitous Muslim interpretation of the Qur’an would not “answer convincingly the charge of history.”<sup>44</sup> Ayoub goes beyond asserting that the Qur’an does not contain a denial of Jesus’ crucifixion to make the sweeping and unsupported statement that the Qur’anic account of Jesus, in general, is theological, rather than historical (*italics are mine*):

Why then, it must be asked, does the Qur’an deny the crucifixion of Christ in the face of apparently overwhelming evidence? *Muslim commentators have not been able convincingly to disprove the crucifixion.* Rather, they have compounded the problem by adding the conclusion of their substitutionist theories. The problem has been, we believe, one of understanding. Commentators have generally taken the verse to be a historical statement. This statement, like *all the other statements concerning Jesus in the Qur’an, belongs not to history but to theology in the broadest sense.*<sup>45</sup>



If the crucifixion of Jesus is accepted as historical, then the view that the Qur'an denies it would mean that it makes a historically false claim. It cannot, therefore, be the Word of God, the Omniscient. The suggestion that the Qur'an can be read as confirming, or at least not denying, the historicity of Jesus' death on the cross would then help in protecting its credibility and status as divine revelation.

Ayoub claims that the Gospel narratives of the crucifixion are historical while the Qur'an's account of Jesus is not historical but theological. One pointer to the arbitrariness of this apportioning of history and theology is that the crucifixion is the cornerstone of the theology of the New Testament but it would have no theological significance whatsoever in the Qur'an. Furthermore, Judaism never knew of a suffering Messiah, so it is not a historical concept either.<sup>46</sup>

Away from the two main goals of seeking Islam-Christianity rapprochement and protecting the credibility of the Qur'an, some historians have found rejecting that the Qur'an denies the crucifixion useful in supporting their reconstruction of history. One scholar, for example, has placed 4:157-158 in a historical setting whereby the Qur'anic text is said to be rejecting the Sasanian accusation of the Jews that they killed Jesus because it was demoralising to the Christians who worshipped Jesus. Denying that they killed Jesus, it is also argued, was necessary for the Prophet to have any chance of creating the ecumenical union of monotheists that he sought.<sup>47</sup>

In some way, those who challenge the consensual meaning of 4:157 try to address a question that is ignored by those who see a historical mistake in the Qur'an. Presuming that Muḥammad is the author of the Qur'an, there is no convincing explanation for his rejection of the crucifixion of Jesus. He had nothing to gain from denying it and much to lose. The human nature of Jesus is repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an and his divinity is rejected in unambiguous terms. The doctrine of atonement also would not have been admissible even if the crucifixion were not denied in the Qur'an because it is incompatible with its theology. There was absolutely nothing that Muḥammad could have gained by going against the dominant consensus of both Jews and Christians that Jesus died on the cross. This observation equally applies to the suggestion that 4:157 is ambiguous, as this ambiguity would have harmed the Prophet's

mission. Furthermore, any ambiguity about this particular issue could not have been left without explanatory comments from the Prophet, not least in his debates with Jews and Christians. It looks like he had no say on the Qur'an's verdict that Jesus was not crucified, which then goes against the starting assumption of his authorship of the Qur'an.

Reading a denial of the crucifixion of Jesus from the Qur'an also poses a challenge to the popular view that the text was much influenced by the Jews and Christians of Arabia and their sources. This is what we will address next.

## The Qur'an and the Talmud

Western scholars have long believed that the Prophet Muḥammad had knowledge of Jewish scriptures, including the Talmud,<sup>48</sup> and that "very much of the Qur'an is directly derived from Jewish books, not so much from the Old Testament Scriptures as from the Talmud and other post-Biblical writings."<sup>49</sup> This conclusion is based on similarities between some Qur'anic passages and Talmudic texts.<sup>50</sup>

Significantly, even works that claim that the Talmud was a major source for the Qur'an have had to accept that the Qur'an's unique statement on the crucifixion cannot be linked to the Talmud.<sup>51</sup> Yet an attempt has recently been made by Ian Mevorach to claim that it is a direct response to the Babylonian Talmud,<sup>52</sup> which has been firmly endorsed<sup>53</sup> or considered possible.<sup>54</sup> The ultimate goal of this approach is to show that 4:157 is a counterargument to the *Jewish claim of responsibility* in that tradition, not to the *Christian tradition* that Jesus was crucified, even when not linked directly to the Talmud.<sup>55</sup> This is the Bavli passage in question:

*On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf". But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover! (b. Sanhedrin 43a).<sup>56</sup>*

Mevorach argues that “the sequence of events in Jesus’ execution in the Talmud, first stoning and then hanging, can be read as corresponding to the Qur’an’s double-denial that the Jews ‘did not kill him, nor did they crucify him’”.<sup>57</sup>

One objection to linking 4:157 to the Talmudic passage is that the verse does not refer to stoning even though this term appears in several other verses (Hūd 11:91; al-Kahf 18:20; Maryam 19:46; Yāsīn 36:18; al-Dukhān 44:20). Even more telling, there is no mention in the Qur’an of any of the other details in the Bavli passage, including its second part, which claims that “Yeshu had five disciples, Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni and Todah,” before proceeding to justify why each had to be executed. It is unconvincing in the extreme to claim that the four-word pronouncement in 4:157 is a response to a substantive Talmudic narrative, which is made up of nearly 370 words according to one English translation, only because the latter states that *a Yeshu was hanged*.

This claim is one result of the excessive focus on tracing Qur’anic texts to Jewish and Christian sources. The weakness of the attempt to link 4:157 to the Talmud becomes even clearer when we consider other passages from that book that are said to talk about Jesus and his mother, accusing Mary of adultery and making Jesus an illegitimate son. These claims seem to be intended to refute the Christian story of the virginal conception.<sup>58</sup> This accusation is also relevant to discuss here because one verse leading to 4:157 that we will discuss later deals with regard to this particular Jewish accusation of Mary.

Writing around the end of the second century, the Christian author Tertullian mentioned this Jewish accusation in his depiction of a hypothetical future scene in which he mocks the damned Jews after Jesus’ return:

“This is he,” I shall say, “*the son of the carpenter or the harlot*,” the Sabbath-breaker, the Samaritan, who had a devil. This is he whom you bought from Judas; this is he, who was struck with reed and fist, defiled with spittle, given gall and vinegar to drink. This is he whom the disciples secretly stole away, that it might be said he had risen—unless it was the gardener who

removed him, lest his lettuces should be trampled by the throng of visitors!”<sup>59</sup>

The Talmudic passages in question, as is the case with other defamatory references to Jesus, use coded names for him, presumably to avoid Christian persecution. The two main coded references to Jesus are “Ben Pandira/Pantera” (son of Pandira/Pantera) and “Ben Stada” (son of Stada), who is said to have been born out of an adulterous relationship. The following passage continues a discussion of making alterations to the skin as a way of invoking magical power:

It was taught. R. Eliezer said to the Sages: But did not Ben Stada bring forth witchcraft from Egypt by means of scratches [in the form of charms] upon his flesh? He was a fool, answered they, and proof cannot be adduced from fools. [Was he then the son of Stada: surely he was the son of Pandira? – Said R. Hisda: The husband was Stada, the paramour was Pandira. But the husband was Pappos b. Judah?—His mother was Stada. But his mother was Miriam the hairdresser?—It is as we say in Pumbeditha: This one has been unfaithful to (lit., ‘turned away from’—*satath da*) her husband]. (b. Shabbat 104b)

The passage shows rabbis agreeing that Ben Stada and Ben Pandira were one and the same, although there is disagreement on whether Stada was the name of his father or his mother.<sup>60</sup>

One particularly interesting passage in the Talmud, which was censored from other manuscripts from the era of Christendom, suggests that Yeshu, Ben Stada, and Ben Pandira are the same person. Repeating almost word for word a part of b. Shabbat 104b and borrowing from b. Sanhedrin 43a the reference to the hanging on the eve of the Passover, this passage identifies Ben Stada as the victim:

And this they did to Ben Stada in Lydda, and they hung him on the eve of Passover. Ben Stada was Ben Padira. R. Hisda said: “The husband was Stada, the paramour Pandira. But was not the

husband Pappos b. Judah? – His mother’s name was Stada. But his mother was Miriam, a dresser of woman’s hair? As they say in Pumbaditha, this woman has turned away from her husband, (i.e. committed adultery)”. (b. Sanhedrin 67a)

The Talmud has other passages that confirm the stoning of Ben Stada for deceiving people.<sup>61</sup>

Some scholars have accepted that Ben Pandira and Ben Stada are both pseudonyms for Jesus,<sup>62</sup> but others dismiss most claimed coded names, including Ben Stada, and accept only Ben Pandira.<sup>63</sup> The latter was a very common Roman name and was widely used in the Roman armies, with various epitaphs of Roman soldiers carrying it.<sup>64</sup> This name in the Talmud is said to be reasonably identifiable with Jesus because of external evidence.<sup>65</sup> The third-century Christian theologian Origen quotes Celsus, the Greek critic of Christianity, writing around 180 CE, who cited Jewish stories accusing Jesus’ mother of having an adulterous relationship with a Roman soldier:

When she was pregnant she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera.<sup>66</sup>

This early use of Ben Pandira has made some consider it the oldest reference to Jesus in Talmudic literature.<sup>67</sup>

Now, linking the simple and clear statement in the Qur’an that rejects the Jewish accusation of Mary to any of these confused passages, not to mention the uncertainty about their intended characters, is highly speculative and lacks any evidence. This same observation has to be made of the claim linking 4:157 to its alleged Talmudic target.

Also, if 4:157 is to be linked to the known claim that the Jews killed Jesus, then the logical source of choice should be the Gospel narratives, not a passing and vague reference in the Talmud. This is certainly even more so the case considering that the latter contradicts the main, much more detailed, and far more known accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus, of the Gospels.

To state the obvious, the Qur'an did engage with the beliefs of the Jews and Christians, as it did with those of the Quraysh and the Arabs of the Peninsula in general and even ancient peoples. In the Qur'an, though, there is little interest in how and when *false* beliefs appeared, what their historical development was, or whether they were traceable to oral or written tradition. When certain beliefs are rejected in the Qur'an, this comes in the form of asserting that these were not communicated by God through prophets but distortions of the revelations and/or total fabrications by people. This is the most fundamental distinction in the Qur'an between truth and falsehood when it comes to beliefs. Claiming that the Qur'an responded to the Talmud specifically is unjustified without producing evidence.

Furthermore, whatever the Jews believed about Jesus and his mother goes back to his time, when most of his Jewish audience rejected his mission. This rejection and its natural development into various accusations against him and his mother predate the Talmud. The latter only codified such beliefs; it is not their origin. To be sure, even scholars who are particularly generous in accepting which passages refer to Jesus and Mary accept that they "appear only in the Babylonian Talmud and can be dated, at the earliest, to the late third-early fourth century CE."<sup>68</sup> It is very hard to justify the view that the Qur'an's rejection of centuries-long common Jewish beliefs about Jesus targeted tiny, hard-to-find passages buried in the huge Talmudic tradition that Muḥammad was supposedly well familiar with! Indeed, even those who argue for a significant Talmudic influence on the Qur'an have to concede that there is no evidence that Muḥammad had seen a Talmud or ever heard its name.<sup>69</sup>

We can be certain that the average Jew in Arabia at the time of Muḥammad would not have been familiar with such minor, not to say ambiguous and confusing, stories in the Talmud. It sounds unrealistic and farfetched to think that if an average Jew at the time was asked why they thought that the Christian Messiah was false, they would have pointed to one of those few passages in a polemical book that they probably had never read any part of! That is effectively the implication of suggesting that the Qur'an's discourse is targeted at the Talmud. The Jews believed, for example, that the Messiah would come as a victorious

leader, not as a lowkey teacher whose humiliation would be completed by his crucifixion. It is also worth noting that those passages do not belong to the Mishnah, i.e. the oral law, in the Talmud, but they are part of its detailed commentary.

But such specific linking of a Qur'anic statement to the Talmud has an even more fundamental problem. It is based, as one scholar has pointed out, on multilayered assumptions, none of which have been proven:

(1) That we know who these Arabian Jews actually were and just what type of Judaism they practiced; (2) that we comprehend the nature of the contact between these Jews and the earliest Muslims; and (3) that we can somehow show the interconnection between the Qur'an and the religious ideas that circulated among these Arabian Jews and others.

The reality, however, is that very little is known about any of this because of "the paucity of sources, the overlooking of other sources, and the excesses of Orientalism."<sup>70</sup> We do not have any evidence that the Jews of Arabia possessed the emerging normative rabbinic writings. In fact, for some unclear reasons, the Jews of Arabia are not even mentioned in the Mishnah and Talmuds!

It should also be noted that both the Torah and the Injil are mentioned in the Qur'an, at times with a challenge to the Jews and the Christians to consult them. Yet there is no mention whatsoever of the Talmud. Had the Qur'an engaged with the Talmud, it would have probably attacked it and accused the Jews of creating a book that was not revealed by God.<sup>71</sup>

## The Crucifixion and Other Verses

Scholars who deny the Qur'an's denial of the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus have also called on verses other than 4:157 for support. This is one such verse,<sup>72</sup> which is traditionally believed to refer to a specific incident in the battle of Badr:

You [O you who have believed] did not kill them, but it was Allah who killed them. You [O Muḥammad] did not throw when you threw, but it was Allah who threw that He might test the believers with a good test. Indeed, Allah is hearing and knowing. (Al-Anfāl 8:17)

There are serious flaws with this specific attempt. First, 8:17 makes its point by allegorically replacing the believers with God as the true actor. Likening 4:157 to 8:17 wrongly *implies* that the former has a similar metaphor. Second, 8:17 reports those human actions as essentially good because they are taken by believers to defend themselves against aggressive unbelievers. But the attempt to crucify Jesus is described as evil, so attributing it to God is theologically untenable. Third, the denial of the crucifixion in 4:157 is followed in 4:158 by a second action that is *explicitly attributed to God*, which is raising Jesus. There is no such attribution when it comes to the crucifixion.

Another creative interpretation to get around the clear meaning of 4:157 that Jesus was not killed likens him to martyrs, who are described in the Qur'an as alive with God (also Āl 'Imrān 3:169):<sup>73</sup>

Do not say about those who are *killed* in the way of Allah, "They are dead". Rather, they are alive, but you do not perceive it. (Al-Baqara 2:154)

This attempt ignores the fundamental fact that 2:154 and 3:169 explicitly talk about believers who were "killed," whereas Jesus is described as having been saved.<sup>74</sup> That martyrs are alive with God is unambiguously confirmed in both verses, but so is the fact that they have been killed. Like 2:154 and 3:169, 4:157 and many other verses are meant to be statements of facts. Such verses should not be confused with rhetoric, allegories, euphemisms, and other such linguistic devices. This confusion would seriously undermine the intelligibility of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an's confirmation of Jesus' mortality has also been called upon as evidence that he was crucified.<sup>75</sup> This assertion occurs in these words that are attributed to Jesus:



Peace is on me the day I was born, the day I will die (*amūtu*), and the day I am brought back alive. (Maryam 19:33)

Significantly, this verse refers to *death* not *killing*, so it could not refer to the crucifixion or any other form of murder. The Qur'anic text contains a clear distinction between the two ways of losing one's life, as in this verse:

Muḥammad is not but a messenger before whom the messengers have passed on. So if he dies (*māta*) or be killed (*qutila*), would you turn back on your heels [to unbelief]? (Āl 'Imrān 3:144)

It is also worth noting that in 19:33 Jesus speaks about experiencing one death and one resurrection, so the Gospels' assertion that he was raised from the dead after the crucifixion is implicitly denied.

On the other hand, other verses indirectly indicate that Jesus was not crucified. The following verse confirms that God foiled the Jews' attempt to harm Jesus:

They (the Children of Israel) planned, and *Allah planned; Allah is the best of planners*. (Āl 'Imrān 3:54)

That God rescued Jesus is made even clearer in the following verse in which God first reminds Jesus of the miracles he granted him, before making this statement:

And [remember] *when I restrained the Children of Israel from you* when you came to them with clear proofs. (Al-Mā'idā 5:110)

As it is preceded by a verse about the Day of Judgement, most exegetes think that this verse describes a dialogue that will happen on the Day of Judgement, with only a small minority arguing that it happened at some point after the attempt to crucify Jesus.<sup>76</sup> Either way, God's reminder to Jesus would make no sense if he later abandoned him or was going to abandon him to the fatal ordeal of the crucifixion. Similarly, for an audience six centuries after Jesus' time, the reminder of 5:110 that God rescued Jesus and the

confirmation of 3:54 that God's plan foiled the Jewish attempt would have made sense only if they were informing the audience or confirming to them that Jesus was not crucified. In other words, 3:45 and 5:110 would make sense only if 4:157 was understood to mean that Jesus escaped the crucifixion.

## The Non-Crucifixion Verse in Focus

In this section, I aim to show that both the language and context of 4:157 repeatedly and unambiguously indicate that this verse can only be a denial of both the killing and the crucifixion of Jesus. This is what underpins the consensus of Muslim exegetes in their understanding of this verse. Conversely, rejecting this ubiquitous interpretation is driven by a priori views and convictions, which I have already quickly reviewed, that are extraneous to the Qur'anic text.

To fully appreciate the clarity of the meaning of 4:157, we need to also study related verses. More specifically, we will focus on the four verses leading to 4:157 and the verse that follows it, as they provide immediate contextual information that is useful for avoiding any misunderstanding of 4:157. We will start with verse 4:153 as it commences a new context in which the Jews, and later Jesus, are the main subject:

The People of the Book ask you [O Muḥammad!] to bring down to them a book from heaven. They had asked of Moses greater than that and said, "Show us Allah plainly." So, the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing. Then they took the calf [for worship] after clear proofs had come to them. We pardoned that. We gave Moses a clear authority. (Al-Nisā' 4:153)

We raised over them the mount for their covenant and We said to them, "Enter the gate while prostrate." We said to them, "Do not transgress on the Sabbath," and We took from them a solemn covenant. (Al-Nisā' 4:154)

[We cursed them] for breaking their covenant, rejecting the signs of Allah, killing prophets unjustly, and saying, "Our hearts are

covered.” Rather, Allah has sealed them because of their disbelief, so they do not believe except for few. (Al-Nisā’ 4:155)

And for their disbelief and their saying against Mary a grave slander (Al-Nisā’ 4:156)

And their saying, “We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.” They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear so to them. Those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of conjecture. They did not kill him with certainty. (Al-Nisā’ 4:157)

Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. Allah is invincible, wise. (Al-Nisā’ 4:158)

Verse 4:153 first criticises the Jews at the time of Muḥammad for demanding that he show them a book descended from heaven, which they asked for as proof of his claim that the Qur’an was revealed to him by God. It points out that their fellow Jews at the time of Moses made an even greater demand of their prophet to make it possible for them to see God so that they could believe him. This transgression is referenced in another verse in the Qur’an that addresses the Jews directly:

[Recall] when you said, “O Moses, we will never believe you until we see Allah plainly”. So the thunderbolt overtook you as you looked on. (Al-Baqara 2:55)

The closest reference to this event in the Old Testament seems to be the following:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people not to break through to the Lord to look; otherwise many of them will perish”. (Exod. 19:21)

Having gone up to Mount Sinai as instructed by God, Moses was ordered to go down to warn his followers against bypassing some physical boundaries to see God. The Qur'anic text, on the other hand, talks about a demand that Moses' followers made of him. The ending of 2.55 suggests that they carried out whatever they meant to do in anticipation of seeing God, but they were instead struck by a thunderbolt.

Verse 4:153 goes on to make another criticism of Moses' followers, which is taking a calf for a god. This grave sin is mentioned several times in the Qur'an (al-Baqara 2:51-54, 92-93; al-Nisā' 4:153; al-A'rāf 7:148-150). The episode of the golden calf is also found in the Old Testament (Exod. 32:1-33).

Verse 4:154 references other events that reflect the failure of Moses' followers to honour their covenant with God, including keeping the Sabbath (also al-Baqara 2:65; al-Nisā' 4:47). The sanctity of the Sabbath and the command to cease work on it is mentioned in many places in the Old Testament, the first of which is in Exodus (16:23). It also reports several violations by the whole community and by individuals (e.g. Exod. 16:27; Num. 15:32-36).

Verse 4:155 confirms God's condemnation of the Jews for breaking their solemn covenant, rejecting His signs, killing prophets without justification, and claiming that their hearts are "covered." The seriousness of the killing of prophets, who are not named, is underlined by its mention in several verses (al-Baqara 2:61, 87, 91; Āl 'Imrān 3: 21, 112, 181, 183; al-Mā'idā 5:70). This charge needs to be discussed in detail because of its particular relevance to the account of the crucifixion in the Qur'an.

The Old Testament describes the killing of the priest Zechariah, son of Jehoiada (2 Chron. 24:17-22), who is called a "prophet" in rabbinic writings (b. Gittin 57b), and the prophet Uriah, son of Shemaiah (Jer. 26:20-24). They are thought to have lived in the ninth century and the end of the seventh century BCE, respectively. The prophet Jeremiah, who was contemporary to Uriah, also came close to facing death (Jer. 26:11). We also find passing references to the killing of *multiple prophets* in the ninth century BCE. Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, King of Israel, is said to have been involved in "killing the Lord's prophets" (1 Kings 18:4). These

multiple murders are also mentioned by the prophet Elijah who, after running for his life, complained to God:

The Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and *killed your prophets* with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away. (1 Kings 19:10)

There is also a fifth-century BCE mention of the mass murder of prophets, which may be referring to the same killings mentioned by Elijah. Several inhabitants of Judah are reported to have complained to God about their Israelite ancestors:

They were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their backs and *killed your prophets*, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. (Neh. 9:26)

The Jews' killing of many prophets is also reported in the New Testament. Paul (1 Thess. 2:15) accuses the Jews of killing "both the Lord Jesus and the prophets." Significantly, this accusation is repeatedly mentioned in a scathing attack by Jesus in a speech to the public (also Luke 11:49, 13:34; Acts 7:52):

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in *shedding the blood of the prophets*." Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who *murdered the prophets*. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, *some of whom you will kill and crucify*, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood

of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that *kills the prophets* and stones those who are sent to it!” (Matt. 23:29-37)

Zechariah son of Barachiah is not the Zechariah son of Jehoiada mentioned earlier. He is the prophet to whom the Old Testament’s Book of Zechariah is attributed. This seems to be a misidentification by Matthew, while Luke (11:51) does not name Zechariah’s father.<sup>77</sup> The charge against the Jews of killing many prophets is also found in Jewish and Christian writings.<sup>78</sup>

The other accusation against the Jews in verse 4:155 is that they claim that their hearts were “covered.” This has been interpreted in two different ways. First, the Jews claimed that their hearts were already full of knowledge, so they did not need the teaching of prophets. Second, they claimed that their hearts were closed to the prophets’ teaching. This interpretation seems to mirror a criticism of the Jews by the Christian Stephen of being “uncircumcised in heart” (Acts 7:51). The concept of the circumcision of the heart is also found in the Old Testament (Jer. 9:26) and Paul’s writings (Rom. 2:29). The first interpretation seems more plausible for two reasons. The Qur’an uses different terminology for the state of the heart described in the second interpretation, calling it “sealed” (*khatama*) (e.g. Q al-Baqara 2:7; al-Jāthiya 45:23). Also, it does not sound reasonable to say that the Jews confessed to an irrational rejection as their defence argument! Rather, claiming that their hearts do not need further knowledge sounds more like an argument that they would have used to reject the teaching of new prophets.

Verse 4:156 moves from the Jews’ transgression against unnamed prophets to their specific rejection of and hostility towards Jesus, including his mother. Given that they rejected his claim that he was sent by God, let alone that he was the awaited Messiah, it is no surprise that they did not believe in Mary’s virginal conception—a miracle that the Qur’an confirms in more than one place (Āl ‘Imrān 3:42-47; Maryam 19:16-22). The Jews accused Mary of becoming pregnant with Jesus illegitimately, as we discussed earlier.

We now come to the main verse of interest, 4:157. It starts by adding the Jews' boast that they killed Jesus to the sinful acts listed in the previous verses. The description "the messenger of Allah" has been attributed by some exegetes to God and by others to the Jews. In the former case, it would be a confirmation of Jesus' status by God. If, instead, it is a part of the Jews' claim, it is a sarcastic ridiculing of Jesus' claim to having been sent by God. I am inclined to this reading because it is aligned with the fact that the title "Messiah" is used by the Jews derisively in their claim. Their use of the title "Messiah" sarcastically contrasts their boast that they killed Jesus with their longstanding belief that the awaited Messiah was going to be an invincible and victorious military leader, thus deriding Jesus' claim to messiahship. Also, it seems a more natural reading of the text to consider the response to the Jewish claim to be starting with the refutative retort that "they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him."

Condemning the Jews for "saying" (*qawlihim*) that they killed Jesus is preceded by two other claims they made that are described using this very term. The first claim is that their hearts are covered and the second is of their slander against Mary, both of which are rejected by the Qur'an as being false. There is no justification, then, to suggest that the third condemned "saying," which is about killing Jesus, is presented as anything other than a false claim too.

Also, two verses earlier, in 4:155, the Jews are condemned for the *actual* "killing" of prophets, yet in the case of Jesus, the Jews are denounced for "saying" that they killed him. Had 4:157 meant that they truly killed him, this condemnation would also have been of the *killing*, not of *bragging about the killing*. From the Qur'anic perspective, killing Jesus would have been far graver than failing to accept that his death was ultimately God's prerogative, which is the alternative interpretation of 4:157.

Additionally, the Qur'an had just condemned the Jews for killing prophets, as it does in other verses, and no one would suggest those verses meant to imply that it was God who killed them. There is no justification for treating the supposed murder of Jesus differently.

It is difficult to see how 4:157 could have been clearer in rejecting that the Jews killed Jesus, in particular when it goes on to equally emphatically deny that they crucified him. By following its denial of the

killing with *specifically* rejecting that he was crucified, any claim that Jesus suffered a non-fatal crucifixion is also dismissed. The verse unambiguously states that Jesus was not killed or even non-fatally crucified.

When boasting that they killed Jesus, the Jews did not lie but *mistakenly thought* that they killed him. This is made clear when their claim is contrasted, using the word “but” (*lākin*), with the corrective statement “it was made to appear so to them.” This indicates that there was some ground for the Jews’ belief that they crucified Jesus. As already discussed, verses 3:54 and 5:110 indicate that they unsuccessfully tried to harm Jesus.

Another significant observation about the wording of 4:157 is its use of the construct “*mā* (did not) ... *lākin* (but) ...”. In all of the tens of verses in which this form appears (e.g. al-Baqara 2:102; Āl ‘Imrān 3:67, 79; al-Anfāl 8:17; al-Tawba 9:56), whatever follows “*mā*” is presented as false, because it is negated by “*mā*,” while whatever follows “*lākin*” is given as a true statement that is contrasted with the former. This is one example:

And they did not wrong Us, but they were wronging themselves.  
(Al-Baqara 2:57)

Again, there is nothing to justify reading this form in 4:157 in a different way. We must conclude that the verse denies the killing and crucifixion of Jesus while affirming that it *appeared* to the Jews so.

Most Muslim scholars have taken the *appearance* statement to mean that someone who looked like Jesus was crucified instead of him. Al-Ṭabarī has preserved several variations of the substitution theory, which he attributes to the Successors Wahb Ibn Munabbih, Qatāda Ibn Dī‘āma (d. 117/735), and Ismā‘īl al-Suddī (d. 127/744).<sup>79</sup> Some of these narratives may be labelled *voluntary substitutionism*, as they involve one of Jesus’ disciples, who was made or offered to be made to look like him, volunteering to be crucified instead of his master. Al-Ṭabarī attributes to “some Christians” a version of *punishment substitutionism* whereby the person who betrayed Jesus is punished by involuntarily being made to look like him and being crucified in his stead. Some contemporary scholars have alternatively proposed that this was a case of misidentification, arguing that circumstances would have made it possible for the wrong



person to be arrested and executed.<sup>80</sup> Such differences within Muslim scholarship, it should be noted, are all within the consensus that Jesus escaped the crucifixion.

The Muslim exegetical of *substitutionism* has been confused with what may be termed *docetism substitutionism* by Western scholars who try to trace the Qur'an's denial of the crucifixion to this early Christian doctrine.<sup>81</sup> Docetism is the doctrine that Jesus only seemed to have a physical body, which effectively denies his human nature. His crucifixion and suffering, it follows, were only an illusion, as both are experiences that only a body can undergo. Reports of the existence of this belief among some Christians go back as early as around 110 CE when bishop Ignatius of Antioch, Syria, wrote a letter to the Christians of Smyrna (today's Izmir in Turkey) in which he complains that, "Some unbelievers say that his Passion was merely in semblance."<sup>82</sup> He criticises docetists who did not accept that Jesus suffered the crucifixion.<sup>83</sup> Docetism is also found in the teachings of the second-century Egyptian Christian gnostic Basilides,<sup>84</sup> as well as three of the Nag Hammadi books.<sup>85</sup> Yet this concept is not a concept that is recognised in any form in the Qur'an.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, using docetism to undermine the standard understanding of the earlier part of 4:157 is a case of reverse causation, whereby a cause and its result are mistaken for each other. The substitution theory was introduced to *explain* the clear statement of the verse that Jesus escaped the crucifixion, in the absence of any historical reports of a different interpretation. It is not the *cause* for understanding 4:157 as meaning that Jesus was not crucified, but it is its *result*. To be sure, denying the crucifixion is derived from the statement "They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him," whereas the speculations about substitutionism attempt to interpret the appearance statement, "it was made to appear so to them," which is thought to explain how the Jews wrongly thought that they crucified Jesus. The substitution theory, then, is an attempt to explain how this confusion happened. Had there been any historical report available to the first generation of Muslims or had they had any doubts that 4:157 did not deny Jesus' crucifixion, exegetes would have introduced relevant narratives to explain the appearance statement. No such narratives exist.

Verse 4:157 then goes on to say, “Those who differ over it are in doubt about it.” The subject of this difference is the clarification just mentioned in the verse, i.e., that Jesus was not killed or crucified but that the claimants wrongly thought so. The verse explains that the Jews’ claim is not based on certainty, suggesting that they did not ascertain that they did indeed kill him. They tried to kill him, but they failed; their claim to the contrary was not based on sufficient evidence. The non-crucifixion verse concludes by reiterating its earlier statement that Jesus’ enemies failed to kill him.

Breaking verse 4:157 up into its constituent statements further shows that it explicitly and unambiguously denies the historicity of this event:

- 1 The Jews’ claim is stated: “We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah”.
- 2 The claim is unambiguously denied: “They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him.”
- 3 The Jews’ confusion is explained: “But it was made to appear so to them.”
- 4 Those who argue that Jesus was crucified are not certain about their claim: “Those who differ over it are in doubt about it.”
- 5 Their claim is not based on factual information but guessing and speculation: “They have no knowledge of it except the following of conjecture.”
- 6 The verse concludes with another firm confirmation that the claim is false and is not based on certainty: “They did not kill him with certainty.” (4:157)

Statements 1, 2, and 3 have this general structure, respectively: *they claim they did X; they did neither X nor Y; but it appeared to them that they did*. This simple breakdown of the structure of the first half of the verse further shows that it could not have been any clearer in denying the substance of the Jewish claim. If these three *negations* of the claim that the Jews killed or crucified Jesus are somehow read as *confirmation* of his crucifixion, as some have claimed, then there would be hardly any verse in the Qur’an that cannot be claimed to mean the exact opposite of what it appears to say. I would argue that such disregard for the basics

of Arabic would make the Qur'an unintelligible. It is difficult to think of another Qur'anic verse that has been subjected to such astonishing reversing of meaning.

Finally, I should add a note about the Arabic word root *ṣ-l-b*, which is ubiquitously translated as “crucify.” This word appears in the Qur'an in a verbal form six times (al-Nisā' 4:157; al-Ma'ida 5:33; al-A'rāf 7:124; Yūsuf 12:41; Ṭāhā 20:71; al-Shu'arā' 26:49). In one instance, Pharaoh makes this threat to the magicians who accepted Moses' claim to being God's messenger:

I will surely cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides,  
and I will crucify you (*uṣallibannakum*) on the trunks of palm  
trees. (Ṭāhā 20:71)

This use may indicate that *ṣ-l-b* means some kind of execution by suspension. There is some debate about how Jesus was crucified, whether he was nailed to a cross, and what shape it had, or was suspended until he died. One scholar has argued that the popular image of Jesus nailed on a cross formed by a horizontal beam affixed at a right angle to an upright post is a Christian interpretation of the sparse descriptions in the Gospels of Jesus' execution by suspension, various forms of which existed in antiquity.<sup>87</sup> This claim of ambiguity, however, is rejected by others. One study points out that Greco-Roman texts of crucifixion share many similarities with the Gospel narratives of the crucifixion of Jesus, although the latter are more detailed than other surviving crucifixion accounts.<sup>88</sup> A third approach that falls between these two extremes states that crucifixion on a cross was likely one specific form within the broader category of human bodily suspension. The author argues that “this dynamic goes a long way to explain how general references in the Hebrew Bible to suspended bodies could later be associated more specifically with crucifixion terminology.”<sup>89</sup>

By the time of the Qur'an, the classical interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus using a T-shaped cross or a variation of it was already long established. So, the crucifixion that is rejected in 4:157 seems to be the commonly accepted image of the execution of Jesus.

Following on from the confirmation of 4:157 that Jesus was not killed or crucified, verse 4.158 goes on to explain what happened to him: “Allah raised him to Himself.” Using the word “rather” (*bal*) to describe God’s raising of Jesus as a corrective fact to the Jews’ misconception that they killed him is another confirmation that 4:157 indicates the failure of their attempt on Jesus’ life. The word “but” is used in 4:157 to contrast the fact that the Jews did not kill Jesus with their contrary claim, and “rather” is used in 4.158 to contrast God’s raising of Jesus with the Jews’ uncertain claim of having killed him. The verse’s use of “invincible” to describe God may also be read as another confirmation that the divine will to rescue Jesus prevailed over the scheming of those who wanted to crucify him.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

Over the centuries, Muslim and non-Muslim writers have shown an almost total consensus that the Qur’an denies the crucifixion of Jesus. There is no indication whatsoever that the Prophet or early Muslims thought otherwise. This is explained by the fact that verse 4:157, its context, and the broader Qur’anic narrative can only indicate that Jesus was not crucified. Any suggestion that the Qur’an is neutral on, let alone confirms, the historicity of Jesus’ crucifixion, as a minority of early Ismā‘īlīs and modern scholars have suggested, would have to not only present convincing evidence to this effect but also explain away the many different textual and historical indications that seem to reject it. Additionally, any such attempt would also make the text look open to completely contradictory and random interpretations, making it effectively incomprehensible. The recent suggestion that 4:157 is a response to the Talmud lacks any evidence while having strong counterarguments. The same is true of the attempts to trace the Qur’an’s denial of the crucifixion to docetism.

The attempt to deny the Qur’an’s rejection of the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus is partly the result of the dominant trend that Angelika Neuwirth has identified and rightly criticised, which is the overfocus on the development process of the Qur’an from its presumed sources at the cost of paying due attention to the text itself. As she has put it, the focus should be “not the circumstances of the event of the Qur’an, but the text itself.”<sup>91</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 The text of 4:157 is identical in all fourteen canonical and non-canonical readings (qirā'ās) of the Qur'an.
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- 13 Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic terms: A Study of theodore Abu Qurrah's theology in its Islamic context*, (ed.) Patrice Brodeur et al., vol. 3, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – Tension, Transmission, Transformation*, (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 268-269.
- 14 Abū Ḥātim Al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-Nubuwwa*, ed. Salah Al-Sawy and Gholam-Reza Aavani; Iran: Mu'assasat Bazuhshi, 2002), 69.

- 15 Abū Ḥātim Al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-Nubuwwa*, 168-170.
- 16 Abū Ḥātim Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Islāh*, ed. Ḥasan Minūchahar and Maḥdī Muḥaqqaq; Tehran: Mu'assasat Muṭāla'āt, 2004), 243-246.
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- 42 All Biblical translations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible.
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# Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Jurisprudence of Priorities: A Critical Assessment

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## Abstract

According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi – a prominent Muslim jurist of the contemporary period, the jurisprudence of priorities is intended to mitigate excess and negligence in legal reasoning. This article examines the fundamental principles of the jurisprudence of priorities as propounded by Yusuf al-Qaradawi in relation to the foundational sources of Islamic law. The purpose of this article is to dissect the constituent legal principles of the jurisprudence of priorities and critically evaluate their validity and coherence against the textual and rational evidences of Islamic law. This article argues that the fundamental principles

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Hassan, Murie. 2023. "Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Jurisprudence of Priorities: A Critical Assessment." *American Journal of Islam and Society* 40, nos. 1-2: 77–120 • doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3190  
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of the jurisprudence of priorities are validated in the sources of Islamic law, and do facilitate the mitigation of excess and negligence in legal reasoning.

**Keywords:** Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Islamic law, jurisprudence, *ijti-had*, *fiqh*, shariah

## Introduction and a Review of Literature

A prominent contemporary Muslim jurist – Yusuf al-Qaradawi (d. 2022) posits that Muslims have become complacent and stagnant in the modern period.<sup>1</sup> In important respects, al-Qaradawi considers Muslims themselves to be responsible for their own failings. One such failing, according to him, is the negligence of what he considers to be the Islamic priorities. Following a long line of prominent premodern and modern scholars,<sup>2</sup> al-Qaradawi is credited with reviving a discourse known as the jurisprudence of priorities (*fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*) in the contemporary period in order to address the prevalent imbalances of priorities and disorder<sup>3</sup> in legal reasoning (*ijtihād*). For al-Qaradawi, the jurisprudence of priorities is:

...of the utmost degree of importance, for it treats – from an Islamic legal perspective – the problem of disorder and imbalance in evaluating and arranging thoughts and acts. It tackles the issue of prioritising matters; what should be considered primary and what is relegated to a secondary position in the scale of the divine commandments and prophetic teachings.<sup>4</sup>

According to al-Qaradawi, the objective of his thesis is to, “serve the purpose of moderating thought, correcting attitudes and laying down the basis”<sup>5</sup> for the jurisprudence of priorities. The underlying principle of the jurisprudence of priorities (i.e., the principle of priority) was advocated (without its designated term of *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*) by a number of earlier scholars – such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) and Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) in the premodern period, and Muhammad

‘Abduh (d. 1905) and Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1996) in the modern period.<sup>6</sup> However, it was Yusuf al-Qaradawi who took a particular interest in the form and function of the jurisprudence of priorities in the modern period.<sup>7</sup>

Al-Qaradawi's work in Arabic, *Fī Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt: Dirāsah Jadīdah fī Daw' al-Qur'ān wa-al-Sunnah*,<sup>8</sup> translated in English as *Jurisprudence of Priorities*<sup>9</sup> is the first book written to address this concept of prioritisation using the specific term of *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* (the jurisprudence of priorities). In this work, al-Qaradawi aims to lay down "the basis"<sup>10</sup> of the jurisprudence of priorities and briefly articulate its fundamental principles (*uṣūl*). The second work by al-Qaradawi that treats the jurisprudence of priorities (to a lesser degree than the former) is in Arabic titled, *Awlawiyyāt li-l-Ḥarakah al-Islāmiyyah*,<sup>11</sup> and translated into English as *The Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*.<sup>12</sup> In both works, al-Qaradawi advances principles of the jurisprudence of priorities in brief and evaluates various priorities of Islamic thought, such as devotional matters, mundane matters, education, propagation, and the Islamic polity. Nonetheless, al-Qaradawi asserts in his primary work, "I cannot claim that this is a comprehensive study. Rather, it only opens the door and paves the way for more work."<sup>13</sup>

The literature concerning the jurisprudence of priorities written in the English language remains rather scarce. According to a group of Malaysian scholars,<sup>14</sup> al-Ghazali is credited with reviving the jurisprudence of priorities concerning devotional practices in his magnum opus, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā' ‘Ulūm al-Dīn)*.<sup>15</sup> Another group of Malaysian scholars have attempted to provide a definition:

Fiqh of Priorities means the most appropriate way of understanding the rulings that are in conformity with the objectives of the religion through achieving the most important and beneficial benefits [*sic*], warding off the evils or the lesser harm of them [*sic*], as well as observing the results that maybe caused by these rulings.<sup>16</sup>

Despite being far from comprehensive, the definition depicts the jurisprudence of priorities primarily in relation to the securing of the

objectives of Islamic law (Shariah). However, in comparison to literature in the English language, the treatment of the jurisprudence of priorities in the Arabic language is relatively advanced, yet also remains somewhat scant. Arab scholars appear to have extracted the general principle of priority (as a theoretical framework) and applied it to various aspects of Islamic law.

A sampling of current writing in Arabic on the jurisprudence of priorities shows a range of approaches to the subject, and different authors foreground different elements. Muhammad al-Wakili in *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt: Dirāsah fī al-Ḍawābiṭ*<sup>17</sup> studies the jurisprudence of priorities in the perspective of legal parameters (*ḍawābiṭ*) within the genre of legal maxims (*qawā'id fihiyyah*), which delineates circumscriptions to legal variables of Islamic law. Al-Wakili notes that sources of Islamic law (*maṣādir al-sharī'ah*) and their legal evidence (*adillah shar'iyyah*) concerning their evidentiary value (*ḥujjiyyah*) ought to be prioritised in the order of the Qur'an, Sunnah (the prophetic precedent), *ijmā'* (scholarly consensus) and *qiyās* (analogical deduction). Another scholar, 'Abd al-Salam 'Iyadah 'Ali al-Karbuli, in his *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt fī Ḍalāl Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*<sup>18</sup> argues that higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) as an independent legal theory (or as a source of Islamic law in its own right) ought to have priority over other rational sources of Islamic law such as analogical deduction (*qiyās*). Here, al-Karbuli emphasises the prioritisation of various benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) and harms (*mafasid*), such as public benefit/harm having priority over individual benefit/harm and collective benefit/harm having priority over independent benefit/harm. By contrast, Hassani Muhammad Nur Muhammad in his *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt fī al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah: Dirāsah fī al-Qawā'id wa-al-Ḍawābiṭ wa-al-Taṭbiqāt al-Mu'āṣirah*<sup>19</sup> focuses on the jurisprudence of priorities in relation to the ranking of acts (*marātib al-a'māl*), and argues for the prioritisation of acts according to the precedent of the pious-predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). He argues that benefits and harms also should be gauged and prioritised according to the precedent of the first three generations of Muslim scholars in the formative period of Islam. Another example is the work of Muhammad Hammam 'Abd al-Rahim Malham, who in his *Ta'ṣīl Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt:*

*Dirāsah Maqāṣidiyyah*<sup>20</sup> broadly addresses the priorities of the higher objectives of Islamic law. In *Ta'ṣīl Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt wa-Taṭbīqātuḥu fī Majāl Ḥifẓ al-Ḍīn fī al-Siyāsah al-Shar'īyyah*<sup>21</sup> he argues that among the five universal objectives (*al-kulliyyāt al-khams*) of Islamic law, the preservation of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*) has priority under the Islamic judiciary policy (*al-siyāsah al-shar'īyyah*). A cursory glance suggests that most contemporary literature, including those referenced above, if not all works on the jurisprudence of priorities are based on al-Qaradawi's theoretical framework found in his primary work *Jurisprudence of Priorities*.

An analysis of the existing literature on the jurisprudence of priorities further shows that, although there is a substantial application of the principle of priority in areas of Islamic thought, there is a lack of research into the fundamental principles underpinning the jurisprudence of priorities itself. This raises a number of questions including: What are the constituent legal principles of the jurisprudence of priorities in the first place? Is each constituent legal principle of the jurisprudence of priorities congruent with the sources of Islamic law? Are they substantiated by textual sources of Islamic law? In order to answer these questions, this article evaluates the validity and coherence of key principles of the jurisprudence of priorities as propounded by Yusuf al-Qaradawi in the light of the sources of Islamic law. The goal of this article, then, is to explore the legal-theoretical (*uṣūlī*) nuances of the jurisprudence of priorities to a further degree than previous research. At the same time, this analysis does not concern itself with the application of the jurisprudence of priorities to any particular legal issue (*mas'alah fiqhiyyah*) within the ancillaries of jurisprudence (*furū' al-fiqh*), but rather focuses on dissecting the fundamental principles of the jurisprudence of priorities (*uṣūl fiqh al-awlawiyyāt*).

Primarily from al-Qaradawi's writings, this article isolates six fundamental principles of the jurisprudence of priorities. *First*, the concept of priority (*al-awlawiyyah*) where a variable is prioritised over another according to the sources and principles of Islamic law. *Second*, the concept of rank (*al-marātib*) where a variable outranks another (according to criteria of merit accredited in the sources of Islamic law) while the out-ranking variable has priority over the outranked variable in value. *Third*,

the concept of sequence (*al-tartīb*) indicates a series of actions necessary to accomplish a particular objective where the preceding action has priority over the succeeding action in accomplishing the objective. *Fourth*, the concept of gradualism (*al-tadarruj*) indicates a succession of stages necessary to advance from the lesser to the greater in progress where the preceding stage takes priority over the succeeding stage in accomplishing the desired result. *Fifth*, the concept of centrism (*al-wasaṭiyyah*) proposes to assume the middle position between two opposing extremes where the middle position has priority over the two extreme positions in harmonising extremism. *Sixth*, the concept of balance (*al-muwāzanah*) indicates weighing out two variables and prioritising either the most beneficial or the least harmful out of the two. The culmination of these six principles consolidates the fundamental principles of the jurisprudence of priorities, which advocates argue mitigates excess and negligence in legal reasoning. The following is an evaluation of each of these principles in connection to the jurisprudence of priorities as conceived of by Yusuf al-Qaradawi.

### **The Principle of Priority (*awlāwiyyah*):**

The precedence between two things

Al-Qaradawi claims that the purpose of the jurisprudence of priorities is to “reconcile or control the two opposing extremes of excessiveness and negligence.”<sup>22</sup> Al-Qaradawi elaborates on the functions of the jurisprudence of priorities:

The unimportant is not preferred over the important, nor is priority given to the less important over the more important, the outweighed over the preponderant, or the less noble over the noble or best. Instead, that which deserves priority should be given its due primary status, and that which is secondary is to be relegated to a secondary position. The small should not be magnified; nor should the significant be belittled. Everything should be put in its position with a straight balance, without excess or negligence.<sup>23</sup>



In simpler terms, according to al-Qaradawi the function of the jurisprudence of priorities is: "It tackles the issue of prioritising matters; what should be considered primary and what is relegated to a secondary position in the scale of the divine commandments and prophetic teachings."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the principle of priority, which is the underlying theorem of the jurisprudence of priorities concerns prioritising one variable over another in relation to importance, calibre, urgency, utility and suitability. The key Qur'anic text that requires analysis in this regard is:

Those of the believers who sit still, other than those who have a (disabling) hurt, are not on an equality with those who strive in the way of God with their wealth and lives. God hath conferred on those who strive with their wealth and lives a rank above the sedentary. Unto each God hath promised good, but He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary. (Q 4:95 trans. Pickthall.<sup>25</sup>)

In the above verse, the activist is ranked above the sedentary even though both are believers. However, while the activist is praised as being "a rank above," the sedentary is not criticised for being a rank below. Rather, the sedentary is a rank lower in comparison to the activist. This is indicated clearly by the statement, "Unto each God hath promised good, but He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary." The verse does indicate that activism, which takes a maximalist approach is superior to quietism, which is a minimalist approach. However, it is noteworthy that religious minimalism is not blameworthy according to this verse. This assertion is supported by the agreed-upon (*muttafaq 'alayhi*) report in which a man from Najd questions the Prophet Muhammad about the bare-minimum requirements of the religion, to which the Prophet's response was to guard the five pillars of Islam. The man then replies, "By God! I will neither do less nor more than this. God's Messenger said, "If what he said is true, then he will be successful" (Bukhari: 46).<sup>26</sup> Hence, the principle of priority relegates through legal reasoning two related or comparable legal variables<sup>27</sup> into primary and secondary positions. In other words, the principle of priority relegates through a process of legal

reasoning two legal variables in order and/or rank, one above the other while what was relegated to a secondary position is neither trivialised nor dismissed. Subsequently, what immediately comes to mind concerning the principle of priority is its similarity to the concept of outweighing (*tarjīh*) of evidence in Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*).

Muhammad Hashim Kamali (b. 1944) explains that “conflict (*taʿāruḍ*) occurs when each of two evidences of equal strength requires the opposite of the other. This means that if one of them affirms something, the other negates it at the same time and place.”<sup>28</sup> However, logically, a genuine conflict can only occur between two probable evidences (*adillah ḥāẓiriyah*), and only seeming conflict occurs between definitive evidences (*adillah qaṭʿiyyah*).<sup>29</sup> Consequently, outweighing (*tarjīh*) of evidence occurs in legal reasoning when there is conflict and contradiction of two evidences between which there is a distinguishable feature of rank.<sup>30</sup> If there is no distinguishable feature of rank between two evidences, this situation is considered one of equivalence (*taʿādul*) and therefore devoid of the possibility of reconciliation, and this logically cannot occur between two definitive evidences or between two probable evidences.<sup>31</sup> Equivalence cannot logically occur between two definitive evidences because objectively there cannot be duality in proof (*ḥujjah*) on a single matter (*masʿalah*). Similarly, equivalence cannot logically occur between two probable evidences because all probable evidences are indefinite and must have a distinguishing feature of rank. Outweighing, on the other hand, distinguishes evidence into one that outweighs (*marjūh*) the other evidence, that is, the outweighed (*rājih*). The evidence that outweighs is stronger than the outweighed in terms of evidentiary value determined through legal reasoning. Moreover, outweighing and the preference of a particular evidence over another in legal reasoning occurs after exhausting all means of reconciliation. However, what is evident here is that the concept of outweighing is not equivalent to the principle of priority. Outweighing is preferring one evidence over another due to a conflict between them which results ultimately in discarding the outweighed evidence. According to al-Qaradawi, “preference [outweighing] entails neglecting one of the two texts and giving priority to the other over it.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike outweighing, the principle of priority ranks and prioritises

legal variables into primary and secondary positions while what is relegated to a secondary position is neither trivialised nor discarded. While outweighing is restricted to legal evidence, the principle of priority is unrestricted and versatile, and deals not only with legal evidences but with a variety of legal variables. Notwithstanding, prioritisation of legal variables can only be achieved according to a certain criterion of values.

### The Principle of Ranks (*marātib*):

Designating variables according to their merit

Al-Qaradawi claims:

I have earlier...called it *fiqh marātib al-a'māl* [jurisprudence of ranking acts], by which I mean putting everything, whether rules, values, or acts, in its due status... based on the correct legal criteria derived from the light of divine revelation and sound intellect.<sup>33</sup>

I once titled this study *fiqh marātib al-a'māl* [jurisprudence of ranking acts], and a few years ago I chose to title it as *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* [jurisprudence of priorities], for the latter is a wider, more comprehensive, and expressive title.<sup>34</sup>

From the above statements, we can deduce that the jurisprudence of priorities encompasses the principle of ranks, and the latter is a constituent principle of the former. The interrelationship between the principle of priority and the principle of rank is a straightforward one, and the objective is:

[D]istinguishing between what Islamic Law gives priority to and what it considers secondary or less important, between what it emphasizes and what it makes optional, and between what Islam assigns great value to and what it degrades.<sup>35</sup>

*Marātib*, in the context of jurisprudence indicates 'ranks' in the sense that it is a hierarchy of things (*ashyāʾ*) according to their due status or

merit. What is meant by ‘due status or merit’ is a benchmark, that is, a grading deduced according to the Qur’an, the prophetic precedent and sound intellect. The Qur’an and Hadith speak of rankings (of something better in comparison to another) with regards to certain matters of which most cases are recommendations (*mandūbāt*). For example, Moses reasoned with the Jews of his time saying: “Would you exchange what is better for what is less?” (Q 2: 61 trans. Saheeh Intl.<sup>36</sup>), and, in a supplication of optimism: “Perhaps our Lord will substitute for us [one] better than it” (Q 68:82 trans. Saheeh Intl.). The Qur’an contains many sentences and phrases of rankings inclusive of *asmā’ al-tafḍīl* (comparative nouns) in the morphological pattern of *aḥḍu* which indicates a comparison of two while ranking one above the other. The English equivalent is the suffix ‘er’ in the sense of ‘better,’ ‘truer,’ or ‘righter’ compared to another thing.

In the following examples of Qur’anic texts, the comparative noun *khayr* (better) is used to distinguish and rank one thing above another. The Qur’an considers those who participate in battle and spend their wealth in circumstances of difficulty and necessity to be higher in rank than those who go into battle and spend their wealth in circumstances of ease and want: “Those who spent and fought before the victory are not upon a level (with the rest of you). Such are greater in rank than those who spent and fought afterwards” (Q 57:10 trans. Pickthall). In another verse, the activist (who struggles) is ranked above the quietist: “God hath conferred on those who strive with their wealth and lives a rank above the sedentary. Unto each God hath promised good, but He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary” (Q 4:95 trans. Pickthall). Charity in secret is ranked above charity in public: “If you disclose your charitable expenditures, they are good; but if you conceal them and give them to the poor, it is better for you” (Q 2:271 trans. Saheeh Intl.). The Qur’an asserts that, in the choice of marriage, “a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you.” (Q 2:221 trans. Saheeh Intl.).

The Prophet Muhammad also reportedly ranked the characteristics of an extrovert Muslim above that of an introverted Muslim: “Indeed when the Muslim mixes with the people and he is patient with their

harm, he is better than the Muslim who does not mix with the people and is not patient with their harm” (Tirmidhi: 2507; Ibn Majah: 4032). The popular (*mashūr*) report that is recorded in major Hadith collections indicates that there are ranks in faith: “Faith has some seventy odd branches, the most virtuous of which is saying *lā ilāha illā llāh* (no deity but God), and the least of which is removing bones from the road” (Abu Dawud: 4676). Reportedly, the Prophet Muhammad further ranked the easier option in matters. As Aishah bint Abi Bakr (d.58/678) the wife of the Prophet Muhammad reports: “The Messenger of God was never given the choice between two things but he would choose the easier of the two, so long as it was not a sin” (Muslim: 6045). With regards to the primary sources of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad reportedly said: “I have left two things with you. As long as you hold fast to them, you will not go astray. They are the book of God and the Sunnah of his Prophet” (al-Muwatta’: 2640). Scholars concur that the order in which the sources are mentioned is indicative of their respective ranks.

Islamic legal theoreticians (*uṣūliyyūn*) are unanimous in ranking the Qur’an above the Sunnah of the Prophet.<sup>37</sup> This ranking is not only in the authenticity of their transmission (*thubūt*) but as sources of Islamic jurisprudence. The ranking of transmitted-textual evidence (*adillah naqliyyah*) follows the hierarchy stipulated above, which is texts of the Qur’an followed by texts attributed to the prophetic precedent.<sup>38</sup> Next to the Qur’an and the prophetic precedent, the majority of Islamic legal theoreticians rank scholarly consensus followed by analogical deduction as secondary sources of Islamic law. Secondary sources of Islamic law – both scholarly consensus and analogical deduction are considered rational evidence (*adillah ‘aqliyyah*). Therefore, Islamic legal evidence is ranked in the order of primary sources followed by secondary sources and transmitted-textual evidence followed by rational evidence.

Al-Qaradawi argues that equivocal texts (*mutashābihāt*) should be understood in light of unequivocal texts (*muhkamāt*), where the latter has priority over the former.<sup>39</sup> Al-Qaradawi’s emphasis is not on the theological connotations of *mutashābihāt* in contrast to *muhkamāt*, but rather concerning the priority of clear texts (*wāḍihāt*) over unclear texts (*mubhamāt*) in the legal-theoretical perspective of clarity and ambiguity

of expressions (*al-wuḍūḥ wa-al-ibhām fī al-alfāz*). This implies that definitive texts (*qaṭʿiyyāt*) should be prioritised over probable texts (*zan-niyyāt*) in legal interpretation. The Qurʾanic texts are ranked according to their clarity (*wuḍūḥ*) and ambiguity (*ibhām*). Clear texts are ranked variously according to their measure of clarity, while unclear texts are ranked variously depending on their measure of ambiguity.<sup>40</sup> The prophetic precedent as an independent source of Islamic law is ranked in the order of legislative Sunnah (*sunnah tashrīʿiyyah*) followed by non-legislative Sunnah (*sunnah ghayr tashrīʿiyyah*).<sup>41</sup> The prophetic precedent in its transmission (*riwāyāt*) is further ranked in the order of recurrent (*mutawātir*), popular (*mashūr*) and solitary (*āḥād*) – reports (sing. *khbar* pl. *akhbār*) and normative conventions (*aʿmāl*). In terms of authenticity (*ṣiḥḥah*), reports are ranked in the order of *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasan* (good) and *ḍaʿīf* (weak). Especially with regards to the legal interpretation of Hadith, al-Qaradawi argues that consolidation and reconciliation (*al-jamʿ wa-al-tawfīq*) should assume priority over outweighing (*tarjīḥ*).<sup>42</sup> This implies the priority of understanding the generality and specificity (*al-ʿumūm wa-al-khuṣūs*) of a report through other independent reports and related transmissions over the enactment of individual reports. The reports of the four rightly-guided caliphs (*al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn*) i.e. Abu Bakr ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿUthman (d. 13/634), ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab (d. 23/644), ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan (d. 35/656) and ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (d. 40/661) are ranked above the reports of other Companions (*ṣaḥābah*)<sup>43</sup> as the Prophet Muhammad reportedly said: “adhere to my precedent (Sunnah) and the precedent (*sunnah*) of the rightly-guided caliphs” (Tirmidhi: 2676; Abu Dawud: 4607; Ibn Majah: 42).

Sunni Muslims are unanimous that the address ‘rightly-guided caliphs’ include the four rightly-guided caliphs. However, Shiʿi Muslims consider only the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, ʿAli, as the legitimate rightly-guided caliph among the four rightly-guided caliphs recognised by Sunnis. Nevertheless, Sunnis and Shiʿa both agree on the report in question (Tirmidhi: 2676; Abu Dawud: 4607; Ibn Majah: 42) despite the disagreement on the legitimacy of individual caliphs. Sunnis consider most Companions of the Prophet Muhammad to be rightly guided and their legal opinions to be a precedent authoritative in Islamic

law.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the reports of prominent Companions, inclusive of ten select Companions,<sup>45</sup> are ranked above other Companions due to their stature and seniority. Earlier scholars, that is, the Predecessors (*al-salaf*) are ranked in the order of the Companions, Successors (*tābi'ūn*) and Followers (*tabi' tābi'ūn*) due to their moral superiority and proximity to the prophetic tenure, as the Prophet Muhammad reportedly said: "The best of people are my generation, then those who come after them, then those who come after them" (Muslim: 6472).<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the earlier scholars (*al-salaf*) are ranked above the later scholars (*al-khalaf*) in scholarly authority.

According to al-Qaradawi, the principle of rank must be according to the Qur'an, the prophetic precedent and 'sound intellect,' as already stipulated. The Qur'an and the prophetic precedent are transmitted sources (*riwāyah*) while 'sound intellect' refers to rational sources (*dirāyah*). Transmitted sources are transmitted texts (*naql*) while rational sources indicate the use of the intellect ('*aqal*) through logical means. Reasoning inculcates scientific ('*ilmī*), philosophical (*falsafī*) and logical (*manṭiqī*) analysis, and inference (*istidlāl*) through deductive reasoning (*istinbāt*) and inductive reasoning (*istiqrā'*).<sup>47</sup> Deductive reasoning includes analogical deduction and consolidation and reconciliation of Qur'anic texts and Hadith. Inductive reasoning includes extracting general principles (*qawā'id kulliyyah*) such as the objectives of Islamic law. Necessary objectives (*ḍarūriyyāt*), exigent objectives (*ḥājīyyāt*) and enhancive objectives (*taḥsīniyyāt*) are ranked in descending order of importance where the preceding objective has priority over the succeeding one.<sup>48</sup> Hence, 'sound intellect' concerns legal reasoning through transmitted sources as well as rational sources. However, the ubiquitous contention posable against the principle of ranking (or any objective deduction for that matter) is the philosophical argument of subjectivity and relativity in the determination of what is better than another. The ubiquitous philosophical contention is – how can one objectively determine the rank of one matter over another?

From a legal-theoretical point of view, the need to rank matters (or legal variables) according to a certain benchmark is a necessity for legal reasoning. However, from a pragmatic point of view, postmodernist

philosophical contentions regarding subjectivism and/or relativism are difficult to counter through objective responses, given that subjectivism and relativism are based on the hypothesis that one objective truth does not exist.<sup>49</sup> However, al-Qaradawi's benchmark according to "legal criteria derived from the light of divine revelation and sound intellect,"<sup>50</sup> may nevertheless impose some objectivity in legal reasoning. Despite Muslims in general being united around some fundamental sources and principles of Islamic law, while differing in subsidiaries, what constitutes "sound intellect" is untenable in definitive terms. Notwithstanding, for the majority of Muslims the well-established benchmark of 'according to the Qur'an, the prophetic precedent and the scholarly consensus'<sup>51</sup> in this order may establish a commonly agreeable formula to determine what is better than another (beyond that which may be indefensible legal-theoretically). If scholarly consensus is also objectively untenable, as argued by some scholars,<sup>52</sup> then, 'according to the Qur'an and the prophetic precedent' may be the agreeable yardstick of objective truth and reality for Islamic legal reasoning. However, legal reasoning is not confined to ranking sources of knowledge in connection to epistemology, but it also inculcates procedure and sequence in analysing sources of knowledge in connection to methodology.

### **The Principle of Sequence (*tartīb*):**

Series of actions to accomplish a particular objective

Legal reasoning does not only concern the ranking of legal variables, but includes the execution of actions ('*amal*') according to a sequence (*tartīb*) that is appropriate (*munāṣib*) to achieve a particular juristic objective. Islamic legal theoreticians considered 'appropriate' to mean "that which brings benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) according to the objectives of Islamic law."<sup>53</sup> However, it is noteworthy that 'appropriate' in connection to sequence is not equivalent to 'better' in connection to rank. Rather, sequence purports an appropriate succession in the execution of acts, whereas rank purports a hierarchy of things according to their value. Simply defined, sequence indicates the appropriate order in which actions are executed. Nonetheless, the precedent for Muslims



in both rank and sequence of acts ought to be according to the Qur'an and the prophetic precedent.

The very first chapter of the Qur'an teaches to supplicate: "It is You we worship and You we ask for help" (Q 1:5 trans. Saheeh Intl). In this, the appropriate sequence of action is to demonstrate devotion before imploring for aid. This demonstrates the appropriate sequence of action through which the objective of imploration is achieved. Moreover, the Qur'an consistently maintains the sequence of transcendental success – which is to consolidate faith before doing good works: "who believe and do good works" (Q 2:25; 103:3). This recurring sequence in the Qur'an does not appear in its reverse order. Despite the specific theological implication of this text, the general implication is that discernment (*ma'rifah*) precedes action (*'amal*) in an appropriate sequence. Diya' al-Din al-Juwayni (d. 478/1085) defines jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as "the discernment of legal rulings ascertained through the exercise of legal reasoning" (*ma'rifat al-aḥkām al-shar'iyyah alladhī tharīqu-hā al-ijtihād*).<sup>54</sup> Hence, the competence to exercise legal reasoning and the understanding of Islamic jurisprudence is a prerequisite to issuing legal opinions (*iftā'*). Arguably, if an inappropriate sequence of legal reasoning is exercised, it may lead to excess and negligence in legal opinions. One way in which excess and negligence in legal reasoning can occur is when an inappropriate sequence is applied to resolve conflict (*daf' al-ta'āruḍ*) between two probable evidences (*adillah ḡanniyyah*).

All four traditional legal schools agree on the implementation of four procedures to resolve conflict of evidence.<sup>55</sup> The majority of legal theoreticians inclusive of Malikis, Shafi'is and Hanbalis agree upon a particular sequence in the implementation of those agreed-upon procedures for the resolution of two conflicting evidences (*ta'āruḍān*).<sup>56</sup> The sequence according to the majority is as follows. The first procedure, the consolidation and reconciliation between two conflicting evidences (*al-jam' wa-l-tawfīq bayna al-ta'āruḍayn*) includes: specification of the general (*takhṣīṣ al-āmm*), qualification of the absolute (*taqyīd al-muṭlaq*), clarification of the cryptic (*bayān al-mujmal*), elaboration of the concise (*tafṣīl al-mujmal*) and augmentation (*tazīd*) of related texts. The second procedure, the outweighing of one evidence over another (*al-tarjīḥ bayna*

*al-dalīlayn*) can occur either due to one evidence having a high probability (*ghalabat al-ẓann*) or due to the availability of supplementary evidence from another source in the form of supporting evidence of the primary evidence. The third procedure, the abrogation of one evidence to the retention of the other (*naskh aḥad al-dalīlayn*), where the latest operative ruling (of one evidence) abrogates the older obsolete ruling (of the other evidence). The fourth procedure is the suspension of both evidences (*tasāquṭ al-dalīlayn*), which is applicable when all objective methods of conflict resolution have failed and the abandonment of both conflicting evidences to seek other means of legal reasoning has become necessary. While Hanafis agree with the aforementioned four procedures of conflict resolution, they differ only in the sequence of their execution.

According to Wahbah Mustafa al-Zuhayli (d. 2015), the Hanafis only differ in the sequence of execution i.e., outweighing as the first procedure instead of reconciliation, followed by abrogation and suspension.<sup>57</sup> However, the Hanafi giving of precedence to outweighing over reconciliation seems to be an exception rather than the norm according to Hanafi inclined works of legal theory such as that of ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Khallaf (d. 1956)<sup>58</sup> and Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (b.1945),<sup>59</sup> which fail to mention this exception. Upon closer examination, Hanafis give precedence to outweighing over reconciliation only when there is an exception to outweigh a solitary report (*khābar al-āḥād*) by another solitary report based on the consideration of general principles such as “repelling injury” (*daf‘ al-ḍarar*) and “securing benefits” (*jalb al-manāfi‘*).<sup>60</sup> According to al-Zuhayli, Hanafis would outweigh the report containing a prohibition (*muḥarram*) over the report containing a permissibility (*mubīḥ*) and the report containing an inhibition (*māni‘*) over the report containing a requisition (*muqtaḍī*).<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, it is safe to conclude that, in normal circumstances, the four schools seem to agree on both the procedures in conflict resolution of legal evidence and the sequence of their execution. However, al-Qaradawi reemphasises the well-established priority of reconciliation over outweighing specifically in the case of conflict between two sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) reports owing to their superior evidentiary value. According to his epistemological position on the credibility of Hadith, two *ṣaḥīḥ* reports can only complement or supplement one another and

cannot conflict with each other because two facts, or factual reports, cannot contradict each other.<sup>62</sup> Al-Qaradawi reasons:

When it is possible, without artifice and arbitrariness, to do that by combining and reconciling the two texts so that one can act according to both together, then it is better than recourse to preference [outweighing] between the two. It is better because preference [outweighing] entails neglecting one of the two texts and giving priority to the other over it.<sup>63</sup>

It is noteworthy that the implementation of a systematic legal procedure in the conflict resolution of legal evidence according to an appropriate sequence can mitigate excess and negligence in legal reasoning while enhancing the utility thereof. However, apart from following proper procedure, legal reasoning also involves implementation in successive stages.

### The Principle of Gradualism (*tadarruj*):

Successive advancement from the lesser to the greater

Al-Qaradawi explains: “what we mean by ‘jurisprudence of priorities’ is the relegation of each thing [or matter] to its due status; neither postponing what deserves preponement nor preponing what deserves postponement.”<sup>64</sup> The purpose of gradualism is to avoid detriments arising from both extremes of undue haste and undue delay in executing actions. It is well-established in the Islamic tradition that the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad gradually, in successive stages, and not all at once, so that the Shariah is received, disseminated, and implemented at the most appropriate juncture.

And those who disbelieve say, “Why was the Qur’an not revealed to him all at once?” Thus [it is] that We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have spaced it distinctly”; “And [it is] a Qur’an which We have separated [by intervals] that you might recite it to the people over a prolonged period. And We have sent it down progressively.” (Q 25:32; 17:106 trans. Saheeh Intl.)

The interrelation between gradualism and the principle of priority is that the preceding stage has priority over the succeeding stage with respect to time. In other words, a steady advancement toward a desired outcome, progressing stage by stage without delay or haste is gradualism. Gradualism is connected to the principle of sequence specifically in relation to the appropriate and suitable time at which matters ought to be executed and implemented. The relationship between the principle of gradualism and the principle of ranks (and the principle of priority) is that what should be postponed or preponed based on what is ranked higher or lower according to the sources of Islamic law. In other words, what is ranked higher should be preponed (and prioritised) over what is ranked lower and what is ranked lower should be postponed over what is ranked higher. Furthermore, recommended matters should be postponed over obligatory matters, while permissible matters should be postponed over recommended matters. In the perspective of legal objectives classified according to their demand; necessary objectives (*darūriyyāt*) should be preponed (and prioritised) over exigent objectives (*hājiyyāt*) while exigent objectives should be preponed (and prioritised) over enhancive objectives (*taḥsīniyyāt*). Exigent objectives should be postponed over necessary objectives, while enhancive objectives should be postponed over exigent objectives.

Hashim Kamali explains that, “Gradualism is pragmatic and is in line also with the Qur’anic principle of removal of hardship” (*rafʿ al-ḥaraj*), and the Qur’an affirms that “God intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship” (Q 2:185 trans. Saheeh Intl.). Facilitating ease (*taysīr*) and alleviating hardship was the prophetic precedent according to numerous Hadith, such as “verily, the religion is of ease,” “you have been sent to make things easy and not to make them difficult,” “Make things easy for the people and do not make things difficult for them” (Bukhari: 39, 220 & 4314). Aishah reportedly said:

Verily, the first verses to be revealed were from the shorter chapters at the end of the Qur’an. In them is mentioned Paradise and Hellfire, until people were firmly established upon Islam and verses of lawful and unlawful were revealed. If the first verse

to be revealed was 'do not drink wine,' they would have said, 'we will never stop drinking wine.' And if the first verse to be revealed was 'do not commit adultery,' they would have said, 'we will never stop committing adultery'. (Bukhari: 4993)

According to Jasser Auda, the prophetic methodology (*minhāj al-nabī*) was to implement religious matters gradually in order to facilitate ease and not impose difficulty (*mashaqqah*) upon people.<sup>65</sup>

As traditionally understood, the prohibition of intoxicants was supposed to have been imposed gradually according to a weak (*daʿīf*) report with multiple chains (Tirmidhi: 3049, Nasa'i: 5542). Despite the weakness of this report, the logic of gradualism thereof is acceptable with some level of certainty. Accordingly, the first stage; is an acknowledgement that there is some benefit in the source of intoxicants: "And from the fruits of the palm trees and grapevines you take intoxicant and good provision" (Q 16:67 trans. Saheeh Intl). The second stage is an admonition that the harm caused by intoxicants exceeds that of its benefit: "They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say: In them is great harm, and a benefit for mankind; but their harm is greater than their benefit" (Q 2:219 trans. The Monotheist Group). The third stage is an admonition to refrain from praying in a state of drunkenness and mal consciousness. However, it is also an exhortation to pray while in a state of God-consciousness: "O you who have believed, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying" (Q 4:43 trans. Saheeh Intl.). The fourth stage is an advancement of a rationale for the categorical prohibition of intoxicants:

O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than God], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful. Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. So will you not desist? (Q 5:90-91 trans. Saheeh Intl.).

According to Hashim Kamali, a primary objective (*maqṣad*) of the principle of gradualism is the alleviation of hardship through which turmoil (*fitnah*) is mitigated.<sup>66</sup> The word *fitnah*, which could mean trial, test, tribulation, turmoil, and hardship can have different connotations depending on its context. Nonetheless, *fitnah* can arise due to negligence caused by hastiness. The Qur'an claims that "Man was created of haste," "and man is ever hasty" (Q 21:37; 17:11 trans. Saheeh Intl.). Therefore, the Qur'an suggests that exercising patience ought to be the first response to *fitnah*: "And We have made some of you [people] as a trial (*fitnatan*) for others – will you have patience?" (Q 25:20 trans. Saheeh Intl.); "Rather, your souls have enticed you to something, so patience is most fitting" (Q 12:83 trans. Saheeh Intl.) and the Prophet Muhammad reportedly said: "Verily, patience is at the first stroke of a calamity" (Bukhari: 1283). Hence, Kamali posits that gradualism facilitates the means (*fath al-dharā'i'*) to benefits and inhibits the means (*sadd al-dharā'i'*) to harms.<sup>67</sup> Kamali further explains:

[I]n the formative stages of Islam, the rules of prayer and alms-giving (*ṣalāh*, *zakāh*), fasting, and many of the penalties were revealed gradually. The Qur'anic revelations on wine drinking illustrate gradualism in their three separate stages: it was discouraged during the performance of prayer (*ṣalāh*) to begin with, and then through persuasive advice that drew attention to its harmful effects generally, and it was finally prohibited altogether. Most of the prescribed penalties, known as *ḥudūd*, were similarly revealed after due preparation to facilitate a congenial environment for their reception.<sup>68</sup>

Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d. 790/1388) writes in connection to addressing the Lawgiver's intent (*ḥukm al-shāri'*) in evading *fitnah* by exercising gradualism in the implementation of penalties for infringements:

It is related from 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Aziz that his son 'Abd al-Malik said to him, "Why is it that you do not implement the rules (of the Shariah)? By God, it will not bother me if in matters of truth the pots begin to boil between you and me." 'Umar said to

him, "My son, do not be in such haste. God condemned *khamr* (wine) twice in the Qur'an, and then prohibited it the third time. I am afraid of imposing the truth on the people all at once for they will reject it all at once, and this will lead to a trial (*fitnah*)"<sup>69</sup>

Another objective of the principle of gradualism is to successively pursue truth and perfection even if one will fall short of ascertaining it. Concerning the objective pursuit of truth, the Qur'an urges to "say: It may be that my Lord guideth me unto a nearer way of truth than this" (Q 18:24 trans. Pickthall). Since knowledge of absolute truth and reality is consigned to God, the Qur'anic philosophy of pursuing truth and reality seems to align with post-positivism and critical realism in modern Western philosophy, which advocates objectivism in the pursuit of truth and reality even though absolute truth and reality are unascertainable.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the principle of gradualism inclines towards 'probabilism' rather than 'relativism'. Regarding objective pursuit towards perfection, the Prophet Muhammad reportedly said: "...so, do not be extreme! and (yet) seek near-perfection!" (Bukhari: 39). The pursuit of 'that which is better' is addressed in multiple Qur'anic verses (Q 16:125, 41:34, 6:152, 17:34) with the phrase "*bi-llatī hiya aḥsanu* (with that which is better) and Q 17:9 which reads "*li-llatī hiya aqwamu* (for that which is righter).<sup>71</sup> The comparative nouns (*aḥsanu* and *aqwamu*) indicate a comparison of two, where their English equivalent could be the suffix 'er' in the sense of 'better', 'truer' or 'righter'. Hence the objective of the principle of gradualism, a key component of the jurisprudence of priorities as advanced and articulated by al-Qaradawi, is to advance from a former state to a better state consistently and persistently and is affirmed in the Islamic legal sources and tradition. However, perhaps the most well-known principle associated with al-Qaradawi is that of centrism, discussed next.

### The Principle of Centrism (*wasatīyyah*):

Occupying the middle position between two opposing extremes

The concept of centrism is both generic and specific. The generic aspect is understood to be Islamic centrism (*al-wasatīyyah al-islāmīyyah*), which

implies moderation (*i'tidāl*) against all forms of excessiveness (*ghulūw*) or extremism (*taṭarruf*). By contrast, the specific aspect is understood as the centrist methodology (*minhāj al-waṣaṭiyyah*), which endeavours to occupy a theoretical midpoint (*waṣaṭ*) between opposing extremes in the methods of extracting legal rulings (*ṭuruq istinbāṭ al-aḥkām al-shar'īyyah*) and argued to be the better course of legal reasoning.<sup>72</sup> The generic concept of centrism, which indicates moderation in matters, is a general principle (*qā'idah kulliyyah*) well-established through definitive evidence from textual and rational sources.<sup>73</sup> By contrast, what constitutes moderation in a technical or ideological sense, and how it is specifically applied in legal reasoning is a scholarly concern.<sup>74</sup> Here, the analysis is primarily concerned with the specific and the legal-theoretical aspect of centrism, that is, the concept of occupying the middlemost (*tawassuṭ*) position between two opposing extremes in legal reasoning where “the farthest point from the two extremes”<sup>75</sup> that is argued by al-Qaradawi to be the best position in jurisprudence.

The main Qur'anic verse (Q 2:143) advanced in support of centrism, in three well-known English translations is as follows: “Thus We have appointed you a middle nation” (Marmaduke Pickthall); “And thus we have made you a just community” (Sahih International); “And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way” (Muhammad Asad). The implication “a community of the middle way” is attributed to the Arabic phrase ‘*ummatan waṣaṭan*’ which literally means ‘a middlemost nation’.

According to the exegetical prophetic report (Bukhari: 4487) concerning the verse Q 2:143, the idiomatic meaning of the word ‘*waṣaṭan*’ in the phrase ‘*ummatan waṣaṭan*’ received (*samā'ī*) by the convention (*waḍ'*) of the Arabs primarily signifies ‘*adl*’ (justice, equitability, fairness) and *khayr* (better, choicest).<sup>76</sup> By the convention of the Arabs, the phrase ‘*ummatan waṣaṭan*’ can mean ‘a just nation’, ‘an equitable nation’ or ‘a choicest nation’ indicative of a praiseworthy community.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the interpretation of ‘*ummatan waṣaṭan*’ to allude to ‘a middle path’, ‘centrism’ or more specifically, to a situation between two extremes is speculative (*ẓanni*) and not definitive (*qaṭ'ī*). Kamali further explains that: “It is not necessary perhaps that there must be two extremes or two sides



to a mid-most position.”<sup>78</sup> However, it is a matter of fact that Q 2:143 lies exactly in the middle of its chapter (2) – *al-Baqarah* which consists of 286 verses. According to Kamali, although the verse of centrism being the ‘middle verse’ is coincidental to non-Muslims, for Muslims it may be an indication for inductive reasoning.<sup>79</sup>

The Qur’anic verse “And those who, when they spend, are neither prodigal nor grudging; and there is ever a firm station between the two” (Q 25:67 trans. Pickthall) discourages opposing extremes of extravagance and niggardliness, while encouraging to choose the middle position, because “there is ever a firm station between the two” and “generosity comes in the middle of stinginess and extravagance.”<sup>80</sup> Among premodern scholars,<sup>81</sup> the exegete Muhammad al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273) comments on Q 2:143:

The middle avoids excess and falling short and is praiseworthy... In a Hadith we find, “The best of matters is the middlemost of them.” ‘Ali said, “You must take the middle way. The high descend to it and the low rise to it.” Someone who is from the middlemost of his people is one of the best of them.<sup>82</sup>

Among modern scholars, Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i (d. 1981) comments on the verse:

They were made a “medium nation” to “be witnesses for the people”. What does it mean? “Medium” is a thing in the centre, neither to this side nor to that”; “God has made this *ummah* a “medium”, by giving them a religion which leads them to the straight and upright path, in the middle – inclined neither to this side nor to that”; “This *ummah* then is the medium and well-balanced one; it is a criterion to judge and weigh both sides of extremes. It is, therefore, the witness for all the people who have deviated from the middle way going to this side or that.”<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, al-Qaradawi argues that the Qur’an points to the middle path of moderation between extremes in all its teachings. For example,

moderation between: the empirical and the metaphysical (2:3-4), revelation and reason (4:82; 38:29), conjecture and gullibility (2:111), physicalism and pantheism (3:191-190), atheism and polytheism (25:3), determinism and fatalism (13:11), idealism and realism (91:7-10), individualism and communalism (3:104), materialism and spiritualism (28:77), stagnation and haste, the vociferate and the mute (31:19), prohibition and permission (16:116; 5:87), jurisprudence and asceticism (chap. 107), polygamy and celibacy (4:3), exaggeration and underestimation (4:171), indulgence and abstinence (7:31-32), extravagance and miserliness (25:67), cowardice and aggression (2:190), unwary and tyranny (42:39-40).<sup>84</sup> Notwithstanding, al-Qaradawi is considered to be the primary disseminator of the concept of centrism in the modern period.

Al-Qaradawi claims that in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century he “came to this concept after establishing unshakable evidence that it represents the essence of Islam.”<sup>85</sup> Al-Qaradawi explains *wasatiyyah* to “mean moderation of being in the middle of two parallel sides so that none of these two sides will have more impact and cause harm or injustice to the other.”<sup>86</sup> Al-Qaradawi argues for a broad spectrum of centrism (*wasatiyyah*) i.e., the middle path of moderation in all matters concerning Islam,<sup>87</sup> which he calls Islamic centrism (*al-wasatiyyah al-islāmiyyah*). He believes that it is an obligation upon Muslims to apply centrism to all matters of Islamic sciences, be it theology, jurisprudence, or other disciplines. He calls his method of legal reasoning the centrist methodology (*minhāj al-wasatiyyah*).<sup>88</sup> Al-Qaradawi also advocates adopting the middle position between ‘the emulators of the old’ (*fi’ah tashabbahat al-qadīm*) and ‘the embracers of the new’ (*fi’ah tabannat al-jadīd*).<sup>89</sup> Al-Qaradawi further argues that, when issuing legal opinions, a legist (*mujtahid*) must assume the middle position between the inclination to extreme liberalism (*ittijāh al-ghulūw fī al-tawī*) of the deconstructionists (*al-mutaḥallilūn*) and the inclination for constriction and austerity (*ittijāh al-taḍyīq wa-al-tash-dīd*) of the puritans (*al-mutazammitūn*).<sup>90</sup> He argues that Muslims must persist to become “a nation (*ummah*) occupying a position between the extremist deviations to the right and left,”<sup>91</sup> by which he means to consciously avoid both puritanical and liberal extremisms. Therefore, the centrist methodology advocates consciously occupying the middle

course of moderation in Islamic thought which would mitigate excess and negligence (*al-ghulūw wa-al-taqṣīr*) in Islamic jurisprudence.

Al-Qaradawi calls his approach to jurisprudence the centrist jurisprudence (*al-fiqh al-waṣaṭī*).<sup>92</sup> Al-Qaradawi reasons that there are two prevalent schools of Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>93</sup> The first school excesses towards particular textual injunctions (*al-nuṣūṣ al-juz'iyyah*) while neglecting their universal objectives (*kulliyyāt*) by which he means an ultra-textualist methodology. The second school, according to al-Qaradawi, excesses toward universal objectives seeking “the spirit of the religion” (*rūḥ al-dīn*) while neglecting particular textual injunctions which prescribe particular rulings (*aḥkām juz'iyyah*).<sup>94</sup> For al-Qaradawi, both these methods are excessive and negligent of the cumulative objectives of Islamic law which counterbalance both universal and particular rulings. Therefore, according to him, a third school, the school which occupies the middle position “between universal objectives and particular textual injunctions (*bayna maqāṣid al-kulliyyah wa-al-nuṣūṣ al-juz'iyyah*)” is “the school of moderation (*al-madrasah al-waṣaṭiyyah*).”<sup>95</sup> To al-Qaradawi, the centrist methodology of jurisprudence:

[N]ever overlooks the partial texts of the Qur'an or Sunnah on the supposition of maintaining the spirit of Islam and the objectives of the Shariah. On the other hand, it does not disregard the collective objectives of the Shariah by adopting the literal meanings of the texts.<sup>96</sup>

Jasser Auda argues that centrism can be perceived as an antithesis of dualism.<sup>97</sup> As per the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “dualism considers reality to consist of two irreducible elements or modes.” In our case, according to Auda:

It simply involves that any philosophical question maybe presented as a choice between two logical conclusions and there can be no third alternative. Debate ensues between two extreme opposites and each debater tries hard to prove their point and refute their opponent's argument.<sup>98</sup>

From the formative period to the modern period, the Islamic legal tradition is laden with such dualism. This dualism in the legal tradition is characterised by the distinction between the methodology of the jurists (*ṭarīqat al-fuqahāʾ*), that is, the methodology of the Hanafi school (*ṭarīqat al-ḥanafīyyah*) and the methodology of the theologians (*ṭarīqat al-mutakallimīn*), that is, the methodology of the Shafiʿi school (*ṭarīqat al-shāfiʿīyyah*).<sup>99</sup> The jurists' method is distinguished by their extrapolation of practical rulings of law (*furūʿ al-fiqh*) from the Kufic legal tradition of Iraq. On the other hand, the theologians' method emphasised formulating the general theory of law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) through a theoretical and philosophical study of law.<sup>100</sup> The Hanafi school derived their legal principles (*uṣūl*) from legal precedents (*furūʿ*) of Kufa where legal principles are subsequent and subservient to legal precedents. On the contrary, the Shafiʿi school formulated legal principles in order for legal rulings to be derived therefrom where legal rulings are subsequent and subservient to legal principles.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, Hanafis would give preponderance to the induction (*istiqrāʾ*) of general principles from the Qurʾan and Sunnah which coincided with Kufic legal precedents while restrained from deducing legal rulings directly from the Qurʾan and Sunnah. In contrast, Shafiʿis would give preponderance to the deduction (*istinbāt*) of legal rulings directly from the Qurʾan and Sunnah according to formulated legal principles while refraining from adhering to any particular regional legal tradition and its legal precedents.<sup>102</sup>

Hanafis are considered rationalists or proponents of opinion (*ahl al-raʾy*) owing to their giving preponderance to analogical deduction and inductive reasoning of textual injunctions, whereas Shafiʿis are considered textualists (*ahl al-naql*) or proponents of reports (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) owing to their giving preponderance to Hadith studies and deductive reasoning of textual injunctions. A specific example of dualism is the outright rejection of normative conventions (*ʿamal*) by the Shafiʿis and the outright rejection of the divergent implicature (*mafhūm al-mukhālafah*) in textual implications (*al-dalālāt*) by the Hanafis.<sup>103</sup> The fact of the matter is that dualism in legal reasoning can be based on subjectivity and partisanship. Therefore, it may be possible to objectively adopt a

middle path of moderation by integrating divergent approaches to legal reasoning which may increase the efficacy and utility of legal opinions.

Since what was perceived as the maturity and the saturation of Muslim legal schools (*madhāhib*) in the premodern period, breaking the shackles of partisanship, several legal theoreticians and their respective works attempted to combine the methodology of the jurists and the methodology of the theologians into one unifying legal methodology i.e., “the later scholars’ methodology of integrating the two [earlier] methodologies (*ṭarīqat al-muta’akhhirīn bi-al-jam‘ bayna al-ṭarīqatayn*).”<sup>104</sup> By unifying the two methodologies, the theoretical conception of law through its sources is integrated with legal precedents transmitted via legal traditions and, specific rulings (*aḥkām*) and legal causes (*‘ilal*) of textual injunctions derived from deductive reasoning are integrated with their applicable general principles derived through inductive reasoning. The point of note here is that adopting a middle path of moderation in legal reasoning may be achieved by integrating two legal methodologies (*al-jam‘ bayna al-ṭarīqatayn*) from which scholarly disagreement (*ikhtilāf al-‘ulamā’*) may be reconciled.

As per al-Qaradawi, scholarly disagreement is a natural phenomenon,<sup>105</sup> and the most objective and accurate approach to legal reasoning is by adopting the middle path between extreme legal opinions. In a case of difference of opinion on a particular issue where both opposing opinions are permissible (*mubāḥ*), the centrist opinion between the two opposing opinions should fall under recommendation (*mandūb*). In other words, if the centrist opinion which takes a middle course between the two opposing opinions brings benefit or prevents harm then it is recommended in Islamic law. Hence, Armando Salvatore postulates that, according to al-Qaradawi, both the means (*wasīlah*) and the end (*maqṣad*) of centrism is the principle of welfare (*al-maṣlahah*) [which includes both securing benefit and preventing harm].<sup>106</sup> For al-Qaradawi, then, centrism appears to be a universal principle comparable to the principle of welfare. Legal-theoretically what follows is that the determination of a centrist legal opinion is subject to legal principles: “the alleviation of hardship and the facilitation of ease” (*raf‘ al-ḥaraj wa-al-taysīr*) and “the prevention of harms and the securement of benefits” (*dar‘ al-mafāsīd wa-jalb al-manāfi‘*)

according to the sources of Islamic law. Therefore, for al-Qaradawi the objectives (*maqāṣid*) of centrism include the alleviation of hardship, the facilitation of ease, the prevention of harm and the securing of benefit by avoiding extremisms in legal reasoning. Inversely, the aforementioned legal principles are the means or the instruments (*wasā'il*) in actualising centrist legal opinions. Since “prevention of harms” is a necessary objective (*darūriyyah*), “the alleviation of hardship” is an exigent objective (*hājiyyah*) and “facilitation of ease” is an enhancive objective (*taḥsīniyyah*),<sup>107</sup> centrism should serve to actualise the higher objectives of Islamic law. Theoretically, by its very purpose of mitigating extreme disagreements, centrism aspires to actualise unity instead of uniformity.

According to al-Qaradawi, “*wasatīyyah* is the centre for unity.”<sup>108</sup> He elaborates:

The centre of the circle in its middle allows for all lines to meet at it. The idea that is *wasat* provides the meeting points which is the point of balance and moderation. Hence, whenever there is extremism, we are bound to find intellectual disagreement. The intensity of this disagreement depends on the intensity of extremism. On the other hand, *tawassuṭ* and *i'tidāl* (moderation) provides the centre for intellectual disagreement. Thus, extremist groups and ideas create disagreements and difference among members of the one *ummah*, whereas moderate ideas do not usually cause that.<sup>109</sup>

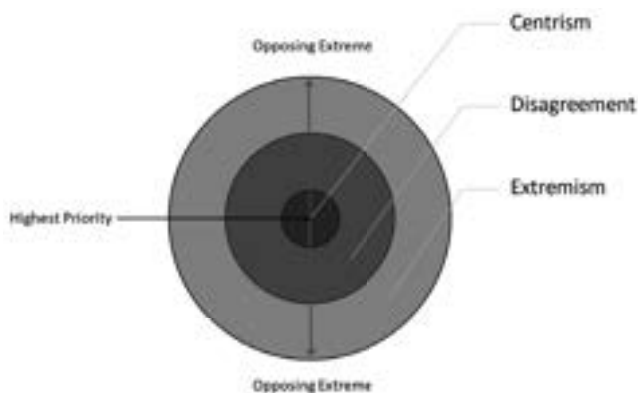


Figure 1 – Centre of Unity

As depicted in *figure 1*, centrism or the middle path of moderation is the median of opposing extremes. Hypothetically, at the midmost point – extremisms, dichotomies, and disagreements are minimal, reconciled, harmonised, or compromised. The farther from the centre, the farther from centrism, hence, the increase in disagreement. The outer extremity of the circle represents the farthest point away from the centre/centrism – the highest point in disagreement. Therefore, the middle position [of moderation] represents the optimum point of unity. Theoretically, legal opinions at this station will facilitate benefit and ease and inhibit harm and difficulty. In other words, centrism by evading all forms of extremism is purported to secure maximal benefits while incurring minimal harm in line with the objectives of Islamic law. A legal opinion at this juncture is facilitating and moderating against each opposing opinion. Theoretically, certain knowledge (*‘ilm al-yaqīn*) such as of scholarly consensus of legal opinions and definitive evidence will situate in this quadrant. Therein lie the strongest evidence which is most facilitating of ease and benefit. Further from this midmost point is predominantly the realm of probable knowledge (*‘ilm al-ẓann*) such as valid differences of scholarly opinion and probable evidence. Therein lie strong evidence of relatively less facilitating of ease and benefit. The furthest quadrant from the midmost point consists of doubt (*shakk*) and hypothetical knowledge (*‘ilm al-wahm*) such as that of minority (*aqalliyyah*) opinions and hypothetical evidence (*adillah wahmiyyah*). Therein lie weak evidence which is the least facilitating of ease and benefit. Therefore, the centrist opinion has the highest priority among legal opinions.

From a legal-theoretical point of view, there are three primary contentions against the principle of centrism. The first contention is that centrism in its technical sense is not supported by definitive textual evidence.<sup>110</sup> The above analysis finds that the concept of centrism purported as the ideal position which lies between two opposing extremes is a definitive principle that is derived (*mushtaq*) from, induced (*mustaqra*) from, and accredited (*muṭabar*) in – the sources of Islamic law. Moreover, the principle of centrism in its legal-theoretical sense is arguably a universal principle applicable to the entire Muslim population rather than a particular principle (*qā‘idah juz’iyyah*) applicable to a

segment of the Muslim population, even though the practical determination of the opposing extreme is a subjective deduction prone to disagreement and error. The second contention is that the enactment of textual injunctions of the Qur'an and the prophetic precedent by default facilitates centrism. Moreover, Islamic law is argued to function independently, through which the end result is purported to be centrism. This is also the primary argument advanced against the principle of welfare as an independent legal principle.<sup>111</sup> It is conceivable that Islamic law would function independently of the principle of centrism, and that centrism in its technical sense, may not be mandatory to be incorporated in legal reasoning. However, there is strong evidence to suggest that it is recommendable to achieve a better course of legal reasoning. The third contention is that centrism opens the door to compromising the enactment of textual injunctions in favour of a derived principle (i.e., centrism).<sup>112</sup> This analysis finds that compromising textual injunctions in favour of derived principles is by definition not centrism, rather, legal reasoning through textual injunctions and derived principles in a balanced way without excessively inclining towards one or the other is centrism because centrism facilitates opposing extremes of neither textualism nor rationalism, of neither deductive reasoning nor inductive reasoning. The principle of centrism, as advocated by al-Qaradawi in his schema for the jurisprudence of priorities, also relates closely to his understanding of balance.

### The Principle of Balance (*muwāzanah*):

Weighing out the preponderant between two variables

Yusuf al-Qaradawi claims that the jurisprudence of balancing interests (*fiqh al-muwāzanāt*) is not only closely related to the jurisprudence of priorities, but the former is a constituent legal principle of the latter:

The *fiqh* of priorities is related to the *fiqh* of balances, and in certain domains, the two overlap or run parallel to each other, as a counterbalance that may lead to a certain priority, and thus fall under the *fiqh* of priorities.<sup>113</sup>



However, this segment of the analysis is focused on dissecting the principle of balance which is the underlying theorem of the jurisprudence of balancing interests. Al-Qaradawi claims that the principle of balance is supported by Qur'anic texts.<sup>114</sup>

The Qur'an indeed elucidates in multiple verses (Q 101:6-10; 23:101-103) that on the judgement day human works are weighed and measured according to a scale of comparison:

And the weighing [of deeds] that Day will be the truth. So those whose scales are heavy – it is they who will be the successful. And those whose scales are light – they are the ones who will lose themselves for what injustice they were doing toward Our verses. (Q 7:8-9 trans. Saheeh Intl.)

In the context of this verse, the word *mawāzīnu* (scales) akin to the subject terminology *muwāzanāt* (balances) of the same root (*w-z-n*) means a weighing scale that compares two things to determine the greater of the two. The two things compared in this context are good deeds and evil deeds.<sup>115</sup> Tabataba'i elaborates:

What will be weighed on scales are the actions of the people based on the following verses: (1) *We shall set up the scales of justice on the Day of Resurrection, and no soul will be wronged in the least. Even if it be the weight of a mustard seed, We shall produce it and We suffice as reckoners* (21:47). Based on this verse, "scales" are part of God's "reckoning," and reckoning pertains to actions. (2) *So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it* (99:7-8). These verses are even clearer evidence, because they talk about the weight of *'amal* (action, work, deed), both good and bad.

Tabataba'i further points out that weighing does not necessarily imply that individual good deeds and evil deeds are equivalent in weight as if one good deed is equal to one evil deed.<sup>116</sup> So what this implies is 'relative weight' of which deeds are weighed both qualitatively according

to their magnitude and quantitatively according to divine determination. As the Qur'an states: "If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden, We will remove from you your lesser sins" (Q 4:31 trans. Saheeh Intl.) and "God will replace their evil deeds with good [deeds]" (Q 25:70 trans. Saheeh Intl.). Moreover, the prophetic reports state that: "Verily, the good deeds remove the evil deeds" (Bukhari: 526) and "good deeds will be rewarded ten times to seven hundred times for each good deed and a bad deed will be recorded as it is" (Bukhari: 41 and 42; different wording in multiple reports in Muslim: 334-338).

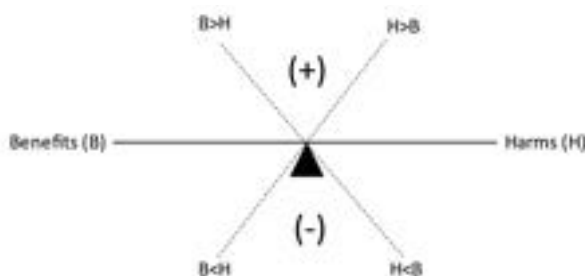
The principle of balance and scaling can be found in human nature, which consists of both good and evil. Thus, human beings consist of a combination of good and evil residing in themselves on varying scales. However, the good person is not he who has all but good within himself, nor is the evil person who has within himself all but evil. Rather, the distinction between a good person and an evil person (according to the divine scale) depends on which deed (good or evil) outweighs the other in comparison (good vs. evil). The indication in this verse is that, on the day of judgement, the victors are those whose good deeds outweigh their evil deeds, while the losers are those whose evil deeds outweigh their good deeds on the scale of divine determination. In the above example, the discussion is about the good and bad that reside within animate objects, though the Qur'an also speaks of weighing out the good and bad that reside within inanimate objects.

To elaborate, the Qur'an puts the indulgence in gambling and intoxicants through a pros and cons analysis – in theory, a cost-benefit analysis. The Qur'an states: "They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say: In them is great harm, and a benefit for mankind; but their harm is greater than their benefit" (Q 2:219 trans. The Monotheist Group<sup>117</sup>). The rationale of this verse indicates that indulgence in gambling or intoxicants consists of both benefits and harms. However, according to the Qur'an, their harm outweighs their benefit. Firstly, it is imperative to vindicate this claim to deduce the reason why the Qur'an isolates these two indulgences, especially as a pair.

Scientific and statistical "studies confirm that gambling and alcohol consumption co-occur"<sup>118</sup> and "concurrent gambling and drinking may

lead to greater negative consequences than either behavior alone.”<sup>119</sup> Indulgence in both intoxicants and gambling is addictive by definitive scientific evidence which shows that they lead to alcoholism and pathological gambling.<sup>120</sup> Indulgence in gambling and intoxicants are shown to increase patterns of violent behaviour.<sup>121</sup> The probability and reality of losing money in gambling are significantly higher than the probability and reality of earning money from it. In other words, the losers in gambling are significantly higher than the successful thereby. Similarly, intoxicants are shown to cause more harm than benefit physiologically and psychologically. Studies leading to this conclusion are too numerous to reference. Thus, the harm caused by indulging in alcohol and gambling supersedes that of its benefits – is nearly a scientific and statistical consensus.

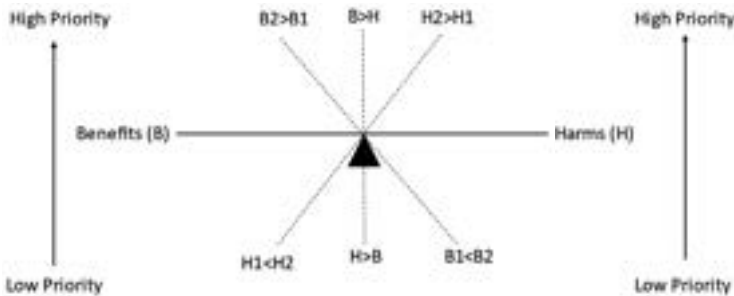
Consequently, if we examine the principle of balance in the aforementioned Qur’anic verse (2:219), within the variable (intoxicant or gambling) are two inherent opposing qualities of negative and positive. The negative qualities are harms and the positive qualities are benefits. The priority of the principle of balance, in this case, is to avoid the variable within which harms outweigh benefits. Therefore, the recommendation in legal reasoning is to adopt the variable within which benefits outweigh harms. However, the determination of benefit and harm and their prioritisation ought to be according to the benchmark of the Qur’an, the prophetic precedent and scholarly consensus.



**Figure 2 – Scale of Balance**

In reference to *figure 2*, the solid horizontal line sitting perpendicular to the triangular fulcrum represents the neutral position of a variable

within which benefits and harms are equivalent (1:1 ratio). Benefits and harms equalling is a hypothetical, logically impossible scenario. The favourable decision is of which the benefits are greater than its harms ( $B > H$  &  $H < B$ ), and the unfavourable decision with regards to a variable is of which the harms are greater than its benefits ( $H > B$  &  $B < H$ ). Moreover, the harms and benefits of a variable are determined both quantitatively and qualitatively. In other words, a variable can be determined to be benefit-dominant due to its quantity or a variable can be determined to be harm-dominant due to its quality. For example, with regards to the final judgement (Q 7:8-9), the judgement can be said (for illustration purposes) to be predominantly a quantitative one weighing good deeds against evil deeds quantitatively. Whereas, with regards to alcohol and gambling (Q 2:219), the judgement can be said (for illustration purposes) to be predominantly a qualitative one weighing against benefits and harms qualitatively. Nonetheless, theoretically, the principle of balance is both textually and rationally substantiable.



**Figure 3 – Priority in Maintaining Balance**

In reference to *figure 3*, the Benefits (B) and the Harms (H) of a legal variable are hypothetically higher and lower depending on its inherent or acquired qualities. In the unlikely event where benefits and harms are equivalent, “harm may not be eliminated by its equivalent (*al-ḍararu lā yuzālu bi-mithlihi*)”<sup>122</sup> because “preventing harms has priority over securing benefits (*dar’ al-mafāsīd awlā min jalb al-manāfi*)”.<sup>123</sup> Here there are three possible scenarios to consider. First, the balance between the benefits and harms of a given legal variable. Second, the balance between

harms against harms of a given legal variable. Third, the balance between benefits against benefits of a given legal variable. With reference to the first scenario represented by axis (B, H), the legal variable in which benefits are greater than harms (B>H) has priority over the variable in which harms are greater than benefits (H>B). In the second scenario represented by axis (H1, H2), the legal variable in which harms are greater has priority (H2>H1) because “harm must be eliminated (*al-ḍararu yuzāl*)”<sup>124</sup> and “a greater harm is eliminated by [tolerating] a lesser one” (*al-ḍarar al-ashadd yuzālu bi-al-ḍarar al-akhaff*).<sup>125</sup> In the third scenario represented by axis (B2, B1), the variable in which benefits are greater has priority due to the necessity of securing benefit. In al-Qaradawi’s jurisprudence of priorities, the principle of balance is articulated more fully as a jurisprudence of balancing interests (*fiqh al-muwāzanāt*).

## The Jurisprudence of Balancing Interests (*fiqh al-muwāzanāt*)

The jurisprudence of balancing interests is the juristic methodology of prioritising benefits and harms according to the objectives of Islamic law.<sup>126</sup> The jurisprudence of balancing interests includes inhibiting the means of harm and facilitating the means to benefit. The jurisprudence of balancing interests has three fundamental prioritisations. *First*, the prioritisations between harms, where that which has greater harm has priority over that which has lesser harm. *Second*, the prioritisations between benefits, where that which has greater benefit has priority over that which has lesser benefit. *Third*, the prioritisations between benefits and harms, where that which forfeits greater harm has priority.<sup>127</sup>

The legal maxim “harm must be eliminated” is unanimously accepted as a primary objective of Islamic law. The Qur’an advocates thus, “repel evil with that which is better” (Q 23:96 trans. Pickthall). Even though eliminating harm is a primary objective of Islamic law, eliminating harm should not cause equal or greater harm as a result. When ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab suspended the application of a prescribed Qur’anic penalty<sup>128</sup> for theft due to famine,<sup>129</sup> he enacted the legal maxim “a greater harm is eliminated by [tolerating] a lesser one.”<sup>130</sup> The harm that is inflicted or forfeited to eliminate another harm must be proportionately less in

magnitude. On this basis, a series of legal maxims have been established, such as “harm may not be eliminated by its equivalent,” “harm and retaliation by harm is not allowed (*lā ḍarar wa-lā ḍirār*)”<sup>131</sup> and “harm is to be eliminated within reasonable bounds” (*al-ḍarar yudfa‘u bi-qadr al-imkān*). Moreover, if we are confronted with two harms, as the legal maxims state “the lesser of two harms is chosen (*yukhtār ahwan al-sharrayn aw akhaff al-ḍararayn*),”<sup>132</sup> and “to repel a public harm a private harm is preferred (*hutaḥammalu al-ḍarar al-khāṣṣ al-daf‘ ḍararin al-‘amm*).”<sup>133</sup> In this sense, a series of priorities within harms can be inferred. Imminent harm is given priority over eventual harm. Public harm is given priority over private harm. Collective harms have priority over individual harms. Sizable harm is given priority over minuscule harm. Lasting harm has priority over temporary harm. Regular harm has priority over irregular harm.

As far as the ranking of benefits is concerned, Muhammad al-Tahir ibn ‘Ashur (d. 1973) categorises benefits (*masāliḥ*) into public benefit (*maṣlaḥah ‘ammah*) and private benefit (*maṣlaḥah khāṣṣah*) where the former has priority over the latter, and evident benefit (*ḥaẓẓ ḡāhir*) and obscure benefit (*ḥaẓẓ bāṭin*) where the former has priority over the latter.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, religious benefit has priority over worldly benefit, an imminent benefit is given priority over an eventual benefit, collective benefit has priority over individual benefit, a sizable benefit is given priority over a minuscule benefit, long-term benefit has priority over short-term benefit and regular benefit has priority over irregular benefit.

Al-Shatibi further observes that “induction through the *sharī‘ah* implies that there is no *maṣlaḥah* in which there is no *mafsadah*, and vice versa.”<sup>135</sup> What this implies is that, in most cases of the real world, variables consist of a combination of both benefits and harms as in the Qur’anic example of gambling and alcohol already analysed. Nonetheless, the norm (*‘āzimah*) is that “preventing harm has priority over securing benefit.” However, al-Shatibi argues that “when the interest turns out to be predominant under normal circumstances if compared to the *mafsadah* (injury), then it is desirable in the eyes of the law (*shar‘*).”<sup>136</sup> In other words, if the benefit of a variable far exceeds that of its harm or if the harm is insignificant compared to its benefit, it “is desirable in the eyes

of the law.” Therefore, the exception (*rukḥṣah*) to the norm is by way of another legal maxim that states “small and incidental harm is tolerated for the sake of a great and lasting benefit, and a certainly guaranteed benefit must not be wasted for fear of an illusory harm.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, according to al-Qaradawi, “if the benefit is predominant and greater than the harm, the matter will then be permissible and legalised, regardless of the small harm it causes.”<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

Dissecting the jurisprudence of priorities, as advocated by al-Qaradawi, into its constituent underlying principles enables the understanding of its legal-theoretical nuances. The principles of the jurisprudence of priorities are substantiated by definitive textual evidence of the Qur’an and the prophetic precedent. Legal-theoretically, principles of the jurisprudence of priorities are definitive, accredited and universal principles. The principles of the jurisprudence of priorities can not only fall under the genre of legal maxims but can also fall under the genre of legal-theoretical maxims (*qawā’id uṣūliyyah*) due to their pertinence to legal theory in addition to their applicability to jurisprudence. The objectivity of the jurisprudence of priorities may be achieved through prioritising legal variables according to the Qur’an, the prophetic precedent and scholarly consensus. Each principle of the jurisprudence of priorities has an evident relationship to each other in securing the objectives of Islamic law. Legal principles of the jurisprudence of priorities cumulatively seem to facilitate ease, secure benefit and repel harm – aligned with the objectives of Islamic law. Thus, from a legal-theoretical perspective, this analysis finds the jurisprudence of priorities with its constituent legal principles to be a recommendable procedure to mitigate excess and negligence in legal reasoning.

## Endnotes

- 1 Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*, trans. S. M. Hassan Al-Banna (Swansea, UK: Awakening, 2002), 2–4.
- 2 Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh of Priorities*, trams. Khaled Wady (Cairo, Egypt: New Vision, 2012), 270–311; Al-Qaradawi, *The Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*, 30–32.
- 3 Al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh of priorities*, 9–11.
- 4 al-Qaradawi, vii.
- 5 Al-Qaradawi, vii.
- 6 Al-Qaradawi, 270–311.
- 7 Al-Qaradawi, vii.
- 8 Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fī Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt: Dirāsah Jadīdah fī Ḍaw’ al-Qur’ān wa-al-Sunnah*, 2nd ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabah Wahbah, 1996).
- 9 Al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh of Priorities*.
- 10 Al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh of Priorities*, vii.
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- 27 Legal variables are anything that which pertains to Islamic law, such as in al-Qaradawi’s words “everything, whether rules, values or acts” Al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh of Priorities*, 3.
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- 33 Al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh of Priorities*, 3. The original translator had translated the Arabic word ‘*marātib*’ into English as ‘order’. However, the appropriate translation of *marātib* in this context would be ‘ranking’ in the sense of ‘hierarchy’. From the same root *r-t-b* the Arabic word *tartīb* is the conventional word for ‘order’ in the sense of ‘sequence’. An example is the title *Asrār Tartīb al-Qur’ān* (Secrets of the Order of the Qur’an) by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 977/1505) – a book elucidating the miraculous nature of the sequence within the texts of the Qur’an.
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- 38 Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 78–81.

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- 43 A Companion (*ṣaḥābī*) of the Prophet Muhammad for Muslims is the Christian equivalent of an Apostle of Jesus. There is record of around 3000 names of Companions in Muhammad al-Qurtubī's *Istī'āb fī ma'rifat al-Aṣḥāb*. However, every Companion was neither a *ḥadīth* transmitter (*rāwī*) nor a jurist (*faqīh*), and prominent Companions who are authoritative transmitters (*ruwāh*) and jurists (*fuqahā'*) are less than 100 in number.
- 44 Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, 313–22.
- 45 Prominent Companions include the ten select Companions i.e., The Ten Granted Paradise (*al-ʿashrah al-mubashshirūn bi-al-jannah*) whose authority is reported have been attested by the Prophet Muhammad himself. They include the four rightly-guided caliphs, Talhah ibn ʿUbayd Allah (d. 36/657), al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwvam (d. 36/656), ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn ʿAwf (d. 34/654), Saʿad ibn Abi Waqqas (d. 55/674), Saʿid ibn Zayd (d. 52/671), Abu ʿUbaydah ibn al-Jarrah (d. 18/639). This attestation is transmitted in two reports: (Abu Dawud: 4649; Tirmidhi: 3747).
- 46 Another report supposes the Prophet Muhammad to have said: “The Fire shall not touch the Muslim who saw me, or saw one who saw me” (al-Tirmidhi: 3858). However, this report is *ḥasan gharīb* – good syet an odd report according to the conditions of al-Tirimidhi, where even though the chain is intact (*muttaṣil*), it is only narrated by a single Companion Musa ibn Ibrahim al-Ansari. Therefore, this report is used as supplementary evidence only.
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# REVIEW ESSAYS

# Recasting the Religious Architecture of Islam

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THE RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE OF ISLAM I - ASIA AND AUSTRALIA

TURNHOUT: BREPOL'S PUBLISHING, 2021. Hbk. 488 PAGES

EDITED BY HASAN-UDDIN KHAN AND KATHRYN BLAIR MOORE

THE RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE OF ISLAM II -  
AFRICA, EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS

TURNHOUT: BREPOL'S PUBLISHING, 2022. Hbk. 357 PAGES

EDITED BY HASAN-UDDIN KHAN AND KATHRYN BLAIR MOORE

TAMMY GABER

This most recent, and comprehensive compendium, on the subject of the architecture of Islam sheds light on the subject materials. New information on well-known historical examples, the inclusion of historical examples not usually (if ever covered) in such scholarship and an expansion of analysis with respect to modern and contemporary case studies of Islamic religious spaces all underscore the scholarly contribution of this two-volume set. By including such a range of buildings examined, by



a large number of scholars from various backgrounds, the compendium effectively recasts the direction of scholarship in this field in a manner that is neither linear or hierarchical.

This two-volume set includes 58 essays on a range of regionally-specific examples of architecture from the Islamic world. The first volume of *The Religious Architecture of Islam* focusses on Asia and Australia, and the second volume focusses on *Africa, Europe and the Americas*. The volumes are organized in a non-chronological manner, with essays grouped by geographical region covering materials directly related the understanding of religious architecture of Islam.

In Volume I, there are four sections with a total of 32 essays written by 29 different scholars. The four sections are: Background themes, West and Central Asia, South and East Asia and Australia.

In Volume II, there are four sections with a total of 26 essays written by 20 different scholars. The four sections are: Al-Andalus and the Maghrib, Africa and Sicily, Europe and the Americas.

## Volume I

In the **first section**, Background Themes the five essays (about 10 pages each with images) effectively set the tone for both volumes of the compendium.

‘Locating the Sacred in Early Islamic Architecture’ by Heba Mostafa, examines the sacred role of nature and contextual setting in Islam’s earliest dedicated spaces and the types of architecture created for faith including the most sacred sites (in Mecca, Jerusalem and Medina), places of prayers such as mosques and commemorative funerary structures.

‘The Mosque in the Urban Context’ by Nezar AlSayyad and Ipek Türeli, outlines the history and development of mosque architecture including examples of the early conversions of spaces in various regions. The essay continues with an examination of the location of mosques in the urban contexts, both as cities grew and as insertions into dense urban fabrics. Modern place-making of mosques is examined as state-funded projects in Muslim-majority countries and as hallmarks of identity in the diaspora.

‘Gardens as Places of Piety and Faith’ by D.Fairchild Ruggles surveys the portray and expression of gardens in the Qur’an, literature and in design. Ruggles specifies that confluence of meanings between ‘paradise’ and ‘garden’ by some is a result of the same Arabic word used for both, ‘jannat’, thus context is imperative. The essay includes a succinct historical outline of the design and development of gardens in the Islamic world and some examples in mosques and tomb areas. Ruggles also outlines the manifestation of the garden ideal in material arts associated with mosques such as prayer rugs, wall mosaics, mihrab surface elaboration.

‘Complex Patterns and Three-Dimensional Geometry in Islamic Religious architecture’ by Imdat As reviews the history and origins of geometric design, dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> C, which paralleled developments in mathematics and geometry. As surveys the range of geometric motifs and physical expressions in various architectural materials both as 2D surface elaboration and in 3D expression such as muqarnas, in vaulting and column capital with specific historical examples. As surveys contemporary analytical literature on the subject and positions the questions regarding the potential roles of geometry in contemporary design in and for the Islamic world.

‘Archives and Archival Documents in the Study of Islamic Religious Architecture by Matthew Saba and Michael A.Toler examines the types of materials in historical, colonial, national, NGOs and contemporary archives with contents ranging from patronage texts (especially *waqf* deeds), legal documents written on various materials to images and other visual media. The chapter surveys materials and contents in major archival collections across the world related to Islamic religious architecture and digital archival collections such as Archnet.org and the Aga Khan Documentation Center in the MIT Libraries.

The **second section** ‘West and Central Asia’ includes 19 essays. ‘The Holy Mosque of Mecca’ by Abeer Hussam Eddin Allahham opens this section with an examination of the history, significance, elements (architectural and ritual) and reconstruction of the Holy Kaaba and the Meccan precinct, including contemporary expansions.

The second essay in this section, ‘The Mosque of the Prophet at Medina’ by Akel Ismail Kahera succinctly reviews the historical

development and expansions of the mosque as well as the major contemporary changes. Kahera has covered some of this in previous scholarship<sup>1</sup> and in this chapter focusses on the additions to the architecture and surrounding area of the Mosque of the Prophet at Medina. The paradigmatic importance of the mosque frames the conclusion.

Following the two most important spaces of worship in Islam, the third essay in this section, 'The Dome of the Rock through the Centuries' by Kathryn Blair Moore, surveys the historical significance of the site, the original historical construction and subsequent modifications concluding with 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture documentation and relevance to contemporary scholarship.

Mattia Guidetti has written the fourth and fifth essays, respectively 'The Great Mosque of Damascus through the Medieval Period' and 'Early Islam and Byzantine Churches'. Guidetti, in 'The Great Mosque' summarizes the historical foundation and developments of this mosque space including the decorative program (with extensive mosaics reviewed), concluding with a discussion of the social and religious importance of the mosque. In 'Early Islam' Guidetti continues his scholarship with a study of the architecture in the Byzantine territories conquered by Muslim armies in the seventh century. Several case studies are assessed, revealing the relationship between sacred spaces of both faiths at this time in Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Guidetti argues that a coexistence of competing sacred spaces established a type of dialogue between the communities that was impactful in both visual cultures.

'Early Mosques in Iran and Central Asia' by Melanie Michailidis identifies the causal links from several pre-Islamic traditions (including Zoroastrian, Sassanian, Nestorian Christianity) to the eventual development of the seminally important four-iwan hypostyle structure of the 12<sup>th</sup> century great mosque of Isfahan. Michailidis analyzes examples of converted pre-Islamic worship spaces into mosques, the use of temporal materials such as unbaked brick amongst other factors to underscore the eventual, later, adoption of the 'hypostyle Arabic mosque' type. The chapter profiles this broad argument supported with specific examples and an analysis of existing literature on the subject.

'Funerary Architecture in Iraq under the Abbasids and their Successors, 750-1250' by Matthew Saba traces the development of tomb and mausoleum construction under the Abbasids by (and for) both Shi'ite and Sunni groups, from 'simple domed cubes' to the regionally innovative exposed muqarnas domes that have a near tower-like appearance. Saba underscores the patronage of the prolific number of funerary structures by members of the ruling elite include Caliphs' building programs that initiated construction, modified existing structures or intentionally destroyed them.

'Muslims, Byzantines and Western Christians on the Haram al-Sharif' by Megan Boomer and Robert Ousterhout summarizes existing scholarship on the various Abrahamic layers of construction in the most venerated area of Jerusalem. Understood contextually, the various Judaic, Christian and Muslim holy places that were constructed and modified have such intertwined histories and contemporary experiential qualities which necessitate an understanding of the whole.

'Mosques under the Ayyubids' by Stephanie Mulder succinctly summarizes scholarship on the subject and outlines variations in forms and materials of various extant Ayyubid mosques and the madrasas and mausolea used at the time for various purposes. In addition to the various forms, Mulder notes the influence of patronage and the role of these spaces within their urban contexts.

'Shrines in the Central Islamic Lands' is an excellent summary of this building type also by Stephanie Mulder. Specific historical examples are included from Iraq and the Levant. Mulder outlines scholarship on the subject and the range of programming and usage associated with these sites. As many of the historical sites examined are in active continued use, the restoration and renovations represent the 'living form of architecture'.

'Shrines and Mausolea in Iran and Central Asia' by Melanie Michailidis examines early funerary architecture, the mausolea of the Samanid period and the tomb towers of the Ziyarids and the Bavandids.

'The Ilkhanids and their Successors' by Sheila Blair includes an succinct survey of historical structures constructed during this period identifying key patterns and external influences on design with a focus on funerary complexes.

‘Religious Architecture of Central Asia under the Timurids and their Successors’ by Bernard O’Kane focusses on key historical structures of this era. O’Kane,<sup>2</sup> author of several books on the subject, provides a detailed examination of architectural form and surface elaboration through the lens of contextual development.

‘Religious Architecture of Safavid Iran’ by Farshid Emami examines the saints and shrines, the mosque and Sufi sanctuary and the imperial Friday Mosque. This chapter in particular includes a range of architectural drawings, and includes a study of the experiential qualities through ritual and use.

‘Islamic Architecture in Medieval Anatolia, 1150-1450’ by Oya Pancaroğlu surveys the mosques, tombs, and complexes with multiple functions of this era with a range of well-known and lesser-known examples.

‘Three Sufi Shrines under the Ottomans’ by Zeynep Yürekli focusses on the shrine of Ibn ‘Arabi in Damascus, the Shrine of Rumi in Konya, and the Shrine of Haji Bektash Hacibektas near Kirsehir. Through this specific analysis, Yürekli reviewed influences beyond the immediate context in a multi-disciplinary fashion.

‘Seljuk and Ottoman Mosques’ by Ali Uzay Peker examines mosques in pre-Ottoman Anatolia, the early Ottoman period after the conquest of Constantinople, the mosques of the famed, and prolific, architect *Mimar Sinan* and late Ottoman mosques. The chapter includes an ample number of drawings, comparatively analyzed chronologically and in terms of formal development.

‘Kocatepe: The Unbuilt State Mosque of Turkey’ by Imdat As reviews the winning design for the design competition for the Kocatepe State Mosque in Anakara held in 1957, organized by the Foundation of Religious Affairs. The rationalist-modernist design by Vedat Dalokay reinterpreted typical elements of historical Ottoman Mosque architecture but was abandoned in early stages of construction and in 1967 a new competition was held with a winning neo-classical Ottoman mosque constructed instead. The original design by Dalakay was implemented in the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and in Pakistan (Kind Faisal Mosque). The chapter, with detailed drawings, outlines Dalakoy’s original design, and images from a digitally modeled version by As.

‘Regionalist Expressions of the Mosque in the Arabian Peninsula and Middle East’ by James Steele examines the works of several prominent architects reinterpreting historical idioms in modern and contemporary mosque designs in the region. The chapter includes a review of Hassan Fathy’s mosques and Abdel Wahid El-Wakil’s expansion of Fathy’s principles, and Rasem Badran’s alternative reading of Fathy. The chapter concludes with a brief review of Mohammed Saleh Makiya’s work in Iraq and the Gulf region.

The **third section** of the first volume, ‘South and East Asia’ includes seven essays. ‘The Sultanates in South Asia, 700-1690’ by Alka Patel reviews nearly a millennia of sacred spaces designed for/under Islamic rule in the region. The chapter is divided into two parts, with a summary of early Islam in south Asia (700-1150 CE) followed by an examination of the Sultanates (1190-1690). Throughout the chapter specific examples, with photographs, are analyzed.

‘Mughal Religious Architecture’ by Laura E. Parodi focusses on the works of the Indian Timurids, also known as the Mughals who ruled between 1494-1858 CE. With a consideration of specific examples, the chapter is divided into two sections: congregational mosques and funerary complexes. Parodi argues that the architecture of this period continued practices in design prior to their rule and included references to Timurid approaches.

The following two chapters are both written by Kamil Khan Mumtaz. In ‘Badshahi Masjid, Lahore’ this specific mosque is examined in detail. Constructed by Aurangzeb in 1674 the chapter examines the Badshahi Masjid in comparison to other major mosques constructed in Fatehpur Sikri by Akbar (1571) and in Delhi by Shah Jahan (1644-58). Comparative architectural drawings and photographs are utilized throughout the chapter. In ‘The Architecture of Sufi Shrines in Pakistan’, Mumtaz considers examples with ample historical text materials and images to analyze both the development of the architectural forms dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but also the experiential qualities in the various buildings which have been in continued use for centuries.

The last three chapters of this section cover material not normally included in compendiums on architecture of the Islamic world and certainly serves to address some gaps in scholarship on the subject.

'Pre-Islamic and Vernacular Elements in the Southeast Asian Mosques of Nusantara' by Imran bin Tajudeen is a comprehensive summary of factors influencing and developed qualities of mosque architecture in the Nusantara region which includes present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei as well as some areas of Singapore, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Beginning with the region's earliest extant mosque, the chapter aptly outlines pre-Islamic influences in the region and summaries vernacular types of mosques, various roof structures that have specific local meanings, structural methods and ornamentation with several case studies. Tomb architecture and ancillary spaces are also discussed. The chapter wraps up with regional examples of mosque design in the eighteenth and subsequent centuries leading to 'indo-saracenic', modernist and neo-vernacular mosques.

'The Mosque in China' by Nancy S. Steinhardt outlines the long history of architecture for Islam in China, dating back 1400 years and covers the influence of other religious architecture in the region. Steinhardt notes that there are more than 39,000 mosques in China today, 70 of which have extant historical architecture or inscriptions. The chapter synthesizes the history of China's first Muslims and the earliest worship spaces with a focus on two early mosques. The chapter outlines mosques designed under Mongol rule in China, the most prominent mosques in various regions of the country and concludes with notes on contemporary Chinese mosque design.

'The Great Mosque of Xi'an (Qing Zhen Si) by Hasan-Uddin Khan focuses specifically on this historically notable and large mosque in China constructed in 1392 CE. The chapter includes architectural drawings and photographs and an analysis of the historical development of the large complex and focuses on architectural elements including structure and ornamentation. Khan traces the addition of structures, repair and modifications since the construction to present day.

The **final section** of the book 'Australia' includes one essay 'New Australian Mosques' by Tammy Gaber which begins with a brief history of the presence of Muslims in Australia dating back three centuries. The earliest mosques are analyzed, including visual documentation and a survey of notable mosques constructed in the major cities are

evaluated with respect to programming, orientation and gender allocations. The focus of the chapter are two new mosques, the Newport Mosque in Melbourne designed by Glenn Murcutt and Hakan Elevi and the Punchbowl mosque in Sydney designed by Angelo Candalepas. The chapter with reflections on the power of new image making in the diaspora by Muslims.

Most of the sections covering historical examples refer to established scholarship on the subject, with a range of descriptive summaries of specific buildings to identifying patterns in particular regions. Throughout the volume there are ample colour photographs, however, only a few chapters include architectural drawings.

## Volume II

This volume could easily stand alone for the quantity of original content, however the structure presumes its pairing with the previous volume as it does not include its own introduction and launches immediately into the impressive content divided into four sections: Al-Andalus and the Maghrib; Africa and Sicily; Europe; and the Americas. The sections are further divided, and in total include 22 chapters.

The **first section** of this volume, Al-Andulas and the Maghrib' (historic Arabic terms for Iberia and North Africa respectively) includes seven essays. The first two chapters are written by Glaire D. Anderson, in 'Early Mosque Architecture in Al-Andalus and the Maghrib', Anderson outlines the establishment of nascent Muslim communities in these regions. The chapter focusses on the architecture constructed in the subsequent centuries with an emphasis on specific congregational mosques and neighbourhood mosques from present-day Spain, Tunisia and Morocco. In the following chapter, 'Islamic Religious Spaces in Secular Monuments in the West Through the Caliphal Period', Anderson studies the religious spaces built within royal cities and palaces (termed as 'secular monuments') between the 9-11<sup>th</sup> century in Iberia and North Africa. Attention is paid to examples in present-day Tunisia, Spain and Algeria with an examination of extant ruins and historical materials.



‘The Mosque of Cordoba’ by Susan Calvo Capilla is a focussed study of a monumental mosque in Spain originally constructed in 785-6 CE and expanded several times in the subsequent centuries. This chapter reviews the historical sources, pre-existing structures, excavations, and traces the historical development of mosque in its various expansions, wrapping up with an account of the final expansion in 987-8 CE.

‘The Mosque of Cordoba and Iberia’s Christians’ by Jan Carlos Ruiz Souza continues the story of the mosque discussed in the previous chapter with a study of the influences and role of the Mosque of Cordoba on the subsequent construction of worship spaces by Iberia’s Christian population. The chapter includes examples of several churches that demonstrate these influences in the structure, detailing and design elements.

‘Almohad Religious Spaces’ by Jessica Renee Streit traces the history of the Almohad Empire (1130-1269 CE) and surveys religious spaces constructed during the early Almohad movement, as well as the typology and characteristics of Almohad mosques. This chapter focusses on examples in Seville, Spain and from Tinmal, Marrakesh, and Rabat in Morocco.

‘The Taifa-period Mosques of Al-Andalus’ by Susana Calvo Capilla surveys the mosques constructed during the Taifa period in the eleventh century in al-Andalus with a focus on mosques from Toledo, Almeria, Zaragoza, Seville, Granada and the Palatine Oratories. Many of the examples are of smaller mosques overlooked in general surveys and the chapter outlines the causal connections in their designs.

The last chapter in this section, ‘The Rural and Urban Mosques of Al-Andalus’, by Susan Calvo Capilla, effectively follows with a study of rural and urban mosques in al-Andalus focussing on the examples in Cordoba, Toledo, Lorca, Huelva, Seville in present-day Spain and in Mertola in present-day Portugal.

The **second section** of this volume, ‘Africa and Sicily’ includes 11 essays. ‘Fatimid Mosques’ by Jonathan M. Bloom comprehensively outlines the geographical extent and impact of the Fatimids who reigned from 909-117 CE and surveys mosques and religious monuments in Tunisia and Egypt. Bloom has written significantly on the subject<sup>3</sup> and his analysis in this chapter includes a study of general features, ornament and epigraphy.

‘Religious Spaces in Islamic and Norman Sicily’ by Kristen Strehle studies the extant architecture and textual materials of these spaces. The chapter begins with a review of the Aghlabid conquest of Sicily during the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE and historical sources describing this and the nature of the settlement tracing influences on the architecture from throughout the region. With a focus on the Aghlabid capital of Palermo and the independent emirate of Bari on the mainland established in the same era. The chapter then outlines the rule of Sicily under the Kalbid dynasty late in the 9<sup>th</sup>, early tenth century and the influence of the Fatimids. The extant physical remains of the Islamic spaces constructed during this time are minimal, as many Islamic structures were either destroyed by or subsumed within Christian monuments. Examples in the chapter focus on remnants of these buildings. The Islamic cemeteries in Palermo and the Jewish quarter are reviewed in addition to smaller mosques in Sicily, within and outside of Palermo.

‘The Ribats of North Africa’ by Lara Tohme briefly notes the historical fortress structures termed as ‘ribat’ in various cities in North Africa. Two examples are illustrated within the three page chapter, in present-day Tunisia.

‘The Almoravid Religious Spaces of Marrakesh and Fez’ by Mariam Rosser-Owen utilizes ample historical textual materials and extant architecture to outline a history of this period in these two Moroccan cities with a focus on mosque architecture. The chapter is impressively filled with architectural and detail drawings and photographs.

‘The Great Mosque of Tlemcen’ by Cynthia Robinson is a focussed study of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century Al-Andalusian Mosque. With architectural drawings and ample photographs the author summarizes historical records and extant evidence of the spatial qualities and modifications of the building.

‘The Mosque of Hassan II, Casablanca’ by Hasan-Uddin Khan is a focussed analysis of the 1950’s Moroccan mosque and the historical precedents utilized to guide the design of the surface elaboration. The chapter includes architectural drawings and photographs to further underscore the analysis of the mosque and its qualities serving as an expression of identity.

In the following two chapters, Amira K. Bennison examines the social role of two types of structures in the Maghrib: religious schools *madrasas* and mosques. In 'Madrasas in the Maghrib' Bennison studies several religious school structures in Morocco and a few from Tunisia. In addition to the architectural qualities and historical research, the author outlines the social role and impact of these religious schools. In 'Mosques and Society in the Maghrib' Bennison similarly analyses examples in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Al Andalus.

'Mamluk Religious Architecture' by Stephennie Mulder is the only chapter with an analysis of religious spaces for Islam in Egypt, a surprising decision given the construction of mosques in the country for over a millennium. This chapter focuses on the three centuries of Mamluk rule in the region (1250-1517 CE) and summarizes histories and descriptions of examples from Egypt with mention of examples in Damascus and Jerusalem.

'The Earth Mosques of West Africa' by Nnamdi Elleh covers important academic territory not adequately addressed in contemporary scholarship. The author reviews precedents in other African regions, historical sources and perspectives and outlines the features of the mosque in West Africa, exterior appearance and materials, interior organization, construction and structure and current conservation efforts. Specific examples are illustrated and analyzed from South Africa, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.

'Coral Stone Mosques in East Africa' by Vera-Simone Schulz also covers important academic territory in this study of mosques in the region dating back more than a millennium. The author outlines the seaborne connections, Indian Ocean connections and the arrival of the Portuguese. Extant mosques from Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania are analyzed in terms of material culture and context. The author also studies material artifacts from regional mosques which are now located in European and North American museum collections.

The **third section** of the volume, Europe includes four essays. 'Religious Landscape in the Balkans in the Early Ottoman Period' [noted with a slightly different title in the table of contents] by Jelena Bogdanović outlines a textual and architectural history of this period.

The chapter includes a summary of the conversion of churches into mosques in Constantinople and the Balkans, establishing recognisably Ottoman mosques in Constantinople and the Balkans and discusses churches and synagogues in the Balkans during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The chapter is amply illustrated with architectural drawings and photographs of structures from Turkey, Macedonia, Greece and Serbia.

‘The Šerefudin White Mosque’ by Jelena Bogdanović and Vladimir Kulić is a focussed study of the mosque designed by Zlatko Ugljen in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1979. The chapter outlines the design process, drawing on archival drawings from the architect and photographs of the space. As well, the authors note connections and influences from the region and beyond on the design.

The following two chapters are written by Nebahat Avcioğlu with contextual analysis of architecture and an outstanding critique of contextual scholarship on European mosques, and a focussed study of the first mosque in the United Kingdom. In ‘The Modern and Contemporary Mosque in Europe, Russia and Turkey’, Avcioğlu begins with a critique of scholarship on European modernist architecture and religious architecture. Avcioğlu notes the focus on a select few and the omission of analysis beyond the formal and argues that ‘the modern mosque has never been just about a question of critiquing modernism, for it is also a question of imperialism, postcolonialism, secular republicanism, Islamophobia and identity politics’ (p.254). The author delineates four key chronological architectural phases: the ‘orientalist tradition’; ‘nationalist mosques’; the ‘diasporic mosques’; and the ‘emancipated mosques’. Mosques from United Kingdom, France, Russia, Turkey, Italy, Holland, Ireland and Germany are examined with images throughout. In the following chapter, ‘Britain’s First Mosque: Woking’, Avcioğlu continues with an in-depth analysis of the first purpose-built mosque in England and reviews the historical context, patronage and design. The author also notes the overriding imperialist nature of the mosque, and the relationships between the surface embellishment details at the mosque and historical artifacts in the nearby Oriental University Institute museum.

The **final section** of the volume, the Americas, includes four essays. 'North American Mosques' by the late Omar Khalidi, a pioneering scholar of the subject, focuses on the history of mosques in the United States (not 'North America'): both in converted spaces and purpose built. The chapter covers Islamic identity in relation to architectural expression and focuses on an examination of nine purpose-built mosques throughout the country.

'Canadian Mosques' by Tammy Gaber outlines a century of mosque construction in Canada and identified regional patterns in design including pioneering of mosque spaces in the prairies, converted mosques in Quebec, purpose-built mosques in British Columbia, mosque as hubs of community space in the Maritimes, orienting mosques to Mecca in Canada and the extreme north, and the gendering of mosques in Ontario. Throughout the chapter, specific mosques from across the country are analysed with ample images, textual and primary data.

The final two chapters are written by Caroline "Olivia" Wolf and cover mosques in Latin America and an analysis of a mosque in Argentina. In 'Modern and Contemporary Mosques in Latin America', Wolf studies the role of mosque spaces in Latin America, often with transnational patronage and impact. The author analyzes mosques in Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia, Argentina and Chile. In 'Argentina's King Fahd Islamic Cultural Center', Wolf studies the largest mosque in Latin America, constructed in 1986. Wolf briefly outlines the history of Islam in Argentina, the impetus for construction of the mosque and the spatial qualities.

## Conclusion

The two-volume set has colour throughout with excellent photography and architectural drawings for some of the buildings. The compendium would have benefited from an introduction in the second volume and a conclusion to wrap up the extent of work surveyed and potential new directions in scholarship. This recast telling of the multi-valent histories of religious architecture of Islam is a visually compelling collection complemented by heterogenous scholarship written clearly; allowing for

experts, students and non-specialists interested in the subject to easily access the content.

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doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3239

## Endnotes

- 1 *Design Criteria for Mosque and Islamic Centers: art, Architecture, and Worship* written by Akel Kahera, Latif Abdulmalik and Crag Anz – see review in AJISS Volume 27, Issue 3.
- 2 *The Mosques of Egypt* written by Bernard O’Kane – see review essay ‘Timeless or Timely’ in AJISS Volume 34, Issue 3.
- 3 *Architecture of the Islamic West North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, 700-1800* written by Jonathan M. Bloom – see review essay ‘Filling the Gaps: Understanding Architecture in Historical and Contemporary Islamic Communities’ in AJISS Volume 38, Issue 1-2.

## Review of Recent Works in Maturidi Theology

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RAMON HARVEY. *TRANSCENDENT GOD, RATIONAL WORLD:  
A MĀTURIDĪ THEOLOGY*. EDINBURGH: EDINBURGH  
UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2021. XV + 280 PAGES.

LEJLA DEMIRI, PHILIP DORROLL, AND DALE J. CORREA,  
EDS. *MĀTURĪDĪ THEOLOGY: A BILINGUAL READER*.  
TÜBINGEN: MOHR SIEBECK, 2022. IX + 246 PAGES.

MARTIN NGUYEN

Within Islamic studies, the subfield of theology has been one of steady growth over the decades. With respect to the Māturīdī school of theology, indebted to the eponymous Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), a noticeable increase in publications, scholarly monographs, and peer-reviewed journal articles has appeared in recent years. Joining this expanding scholarly effort are the following two works: an Arabic-English reader entitled *Māturīdī Theology* edited by Lejla Demiri, Philip Dorroll, and Dale Correa and Ramon Harvey's scholarly monograph *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology*, which is both analytical and constructive in its approach.

The reader begins with an impressively thorough survey of the field as part of its three-part introduction. Each of the volume's editors



contributes to this important opening. Correa opens with a clear, careful, and insightful review of literature entitled “An Overview of the Current Scholarship on Māturīdī Kalām in Arabic, Persian and European Languages,” which is complemented well by Philip Dorroll’s following essay examining the immense academic contributions made in Turkish over the last two decades, or what Dorroll names “The Māturīdī Renaissance” (Demiri, Dorroll & Correa 16). Closing the introduction is Demiri’s piece that introduces the chapters and texts of the reader itself. What the editors have provided at the outset of their reader is a highly detailed map of the scholarly field, in both its analytical studies and critical editions, that will prove a foundational reference point for future researchers interested in extending and deepening our scholarly understandings of the Transoxanian Ḥanafis and the Māturīdīs that would emerge afterwards.

As for the reader’s content, rather than the work of a few translators, the reader brings a more novel, but ultimately suitable approach. Scholars from across the subfield of Māturīdī studies have been invited to introduce key texts from across the school that address a specific theological subject or theme. Preceding every thinker and their text is a concise, but insightful introductory essay. Then the selected passage is provided in Arabic and then English translation. The figures and passages are divided into five parts based on the theological subject matter being address. The reader begins with “Epistemology and Ontology” before turning to “Metaphysics,” “Prophethood,” “Faith, Knowledge and Acts,” and “Free Will, Predestination and the Problem of Evil,” an ordering chosen to mirror classical works of scholastic theology. While Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī is naturally featured thrice in the reader, with selections drawn from his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, the other selections come from a wide array of theologians introduced by an equally impressive array of contemporary scholars who furnish annotated translations in English. The theologians featured run the full historical gamut including contemporaries of al-Māturīdī like the Mu‘tazilī scholar Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) and the more obscure Abū Salama Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (c. 4th/10th cent.) and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Bushāghiri (c. 4th/10th cent.) to scholars from later centuries like the

Ottoman *şeyhülislam* Kemalpaşazâde (d. 940/1534) and Ismail Gelenbevi (d. 1205/1791). In the end, the reader is an achievement for the expansive window that it provides into the complex richness still waiting to be plumbed from those scholars related, affiliated, or close to the Mâturîdî school of theology.

Before moving onto the next work, it is noteworthy that Dorroll identifies in his introduction to “Mâturîdî Studies in Turkish” three major areas of scholarly contribution. The first two are expected genres of scholarly work, namely historical studies and critical editions and Turkish translation. The third area, however, he terms “systematic theological contributions” describing such works as “constructive theological projects and theological analysis based on Mâturîdî texts” (20). Methodologically, these works follow one of two approaches. An author either assumes a “constructive” approach where Mâturîdî theology is brought to bear upon contemporary issues or adopts an “analytical” approach that seeks to adapt Mâturîdî thought to figure within an imagined greater Sunnî whole. Harvey’s monograph, in English, is a similarly spirited foray into constructive theology that applies both approaches at different times. For example, in the introduction, Harvey describes his book as an undertaking in *kalâm jadîd* or “renewed theology.” (Harvey 3-5). More concretely, he aims to place key concepts from al-Mâturîdî and the broader “Mâturîdî tradition in conversation with contemporary philosophical and theological thought, to see how well it holds up and what further modifications may be required” (Harvey 6).

The author admirably pursues this end over the course of seven chapters. The first chapter opens with an insightful look into the dyad of reason and tradition in Mâturîdî epistemology before furnishing a historical survey of the school that also aims to couch Harvey’s current project, which also engages with modern European thinkers like Husserl, Gadamer, and MacIntyre (among many others), as a contemporary outgrowth of that continuously unfolding tradition. In chapter two “Rational Reality,” Harvey’s deep philosophical engagement continues as he traces how al-Mâturîdî’s epistemology and ontology map against other sophisticated systems of rational discernment. These comparisons, however, are not always raised to demonstrate congruence, but also for sharp critique

for the sake of contradistinction or as adaptive refinements in Harvey's own theological theorizing.

A critically comparative analysis of al-Māturīdī's arguments for God's existence constitutes chapter three "Natural Theology," while chapter four "Divine Nature" explores that subject through al-Māturīdī's theological understanding of time and eternity, necessity via modality, and the nature of God. On this last point, Harvey argues that al-Māturīdī's notion of God's *dhāt* differs from latter conceptions that conceive of it as an "essence" distinct from the attributes. Rather, the Central Asian theologian appears to conceive of it in a more Aristotelian manner "as a complete 'subject' who possesses attributes" (Harvey 142). From here the remaining three chapters turn to particular attributes: chapter five "Omniscience and Wisdom," chapter six "Creative Action," and chapter seven "Divine Speech and the Qur'an." The work ends with a summative conclusion that reviews the major arguments of Harvey's analytic study, while also delineating both the contours and principles of his own constructive theological endeavor with the enticing prospect of more to come.

In the end, *Transcendent God, Rational World* is a careful and thought-provoking analysis of al-Māturīdī's theology that places this sophisticated premodern system of thought in conversation with contemporary discourses of philosophical theology. Throughout its chapters, critical attention is brought back to conceptions supposedly eclipsed by later Māturīdī theologians and important interventions are made concerning al-Māturīdī's originality (or perhaps ingenuity) as well as his abiding relevance, such as his contribution concerning the divine attribute of *ḥikma* or wisdom or the mediating role and limitations of human language (or human reasoning for that matter). Indeed, both the *Māturīdī Theology* reader and the monograph study of al-Māturīdī carry far more insights than can be sufficiently or justly enumerated in the span of this review. Rest assured that a careful and patient reader will be richly rewarded in exploring the numerous strands of thought presented in both books. Advanced students and researchers of the wider field will find both works indispensable in broadening their appreciation for what al-Māturīdī and the many other theologians of his eponymous school

have to offer for our understanding of Islamic theology both past and present.

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doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3253

# BOOK REVIEWS

# Female Religious Authority in Shi'i Islam, Past and Present

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EDINBURGH: EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2021, XIV + 402 PAGES.

MIRJAM KÜNKLER AND DEVIN J. STEWART (EDS.)

Islamic religious authority is conventionally understood to be an exclusively male purview. Yet when dissected into its various manifestations – leading prayer, preaching, issuing fatwas, transmitting hadith, judging in court, teaching law, theology, and other Islamic sciences and, generally shaping the Islamic scholarly tradition – nuances emerge that hint at the presence of women in the performance of some of these functions. This collection of case studies, covering the period from classical Islam to the present, and taken from across the Twelver Shi'i Islamic world, reflects on the roles that women have played in exercising religious authority across time and space. Comparative reflection on the case studies allows for the formulation of hypotheses regarding the conditions and developments – whether theological, jurisprudential, social, economic, or political – that enhanced or stifled the flourishing of female religious authority in Twelver Shi'i Islam.

As the editors acknowledge, the idea for this volume was born several years before in Qom when Mirjam Künkler was conducting field research on the women's *hawza* Jāmi'at al-Zahrā'. Keiko Sakurai of Waseda University and Mirjam Künkler then set out to convene a

conference on female religious authority in modern Iran, which was held at Princeton University in 2015. The work also benefited from the graduate course 'Female Religious Authority in Islam' that Mirjam Künkler taught on the topic at Princeton University. The volume set out to take stock of the research developments in the field of female religious authority in Shi'ism, to identify lacunae requiring further research, and to further the development of comparative and interdisciplinary research projects incorporating the findings developed there.

Mirjam Künkler (Senior Research Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study) and Devin J. Stewart's (Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Emory University) edited book presents the forgotten history of female religious authority in Islam, providing essential first-hand materials for researchers of Islamic religious authority, Twelver Shi'ism, and especially the role of women in the Islamic tradition. Its key features are case studies of women exercising religious authority, including hadith transmitters, jurists, scholars of religion, women acting as representative for a leading ayatollah, and women judges; addresses the classical, medieval and modern periods; brings together scholars from Islamic Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Anthropology, History and Art History; provides insight into contemporary debates about female religious authority in Islam; and questions assumptions about the inherently progressive agenda of female religious authorities.

This volume comprises, in addition to the introduction, a general overview of the issue of female religious authority in Islamic history and eleven focused studies that treat specific instances or aspects of female religious authority in Twelver Shi'i contexts, bringing together twelve original contributions – chapter 10 (p. 271-297) had already been published and was here reprinted in slightly edited form – that not only enhance our understanding of female religious authority in Twelver Shi'i Islam across time and space but also address wider conceptual debates in Islamic Studies. It is a complement to recent growth in scholarship on female religious authority in Sunni Islam, and by providing opportunity for comparative analysis, it is of equal interest to scholars and students working on Shi'i and non-Shi'i contexts. This book is the first study (not only in English but also in Middle Eastern languages) on the role

of female religious authority in the Twelver Shi'i tradition from Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, and Umm Salama, one of the Prophet's wives, to contemporary female authorities such as Nuṣrat Amīn (1886-1983), and Amina Bint al-Huda (1937-1980), sister of the renowned Iraqi scholar Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935-1980), both executed by the Iraqi authorities, as well as the Twelver Shi'i legal tradition on women.

In 'Forgotten Histories of Female Religious Authority in Islam' (p.18-46), Mirjam Künkler presents a survey of various instances in which Muslim women, both Sunni and Shi'i, have become learned in the Islamic religious sciences and wielded religious authority, concentrating on women hadith experts and women jurists, although she refers as well to women rulers such as Gawhar Shad Bigum (d. 1457), the sovereign famous for the construction of Herat's Friday Mosque. Overall, she makes the point that the frequent near-complete neglect of women as religious authorities throughout the Islamic world during the various historical periods is belied by an objective consideration of the evidence on the ground, whether historical or contemporary. Rather than a general absence of the phenomenon, there is great diversity across time and space regarding the question of whether women were regarded as religious authorities, and if so, in what function precisely and to what effect. She ends with a plea for the programmatic examination of the factors that enable women to wield authority in some Islamic contexts but not in others.

The remaining chapters of the volume address specific episodes, instances, or portrayals of female religious authority in the Twelver Shi'i tradition, organized in approximate chronological order. The essays included in this volume cover a wide range in terms of time, space, source material investigated, and forms of religious authority. Chronologically, they cover all Islamic history, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the nascent Muslim community until the present day. Geographically, they are concentrated in what are considered as the central lands of the Islamic world, treating historical episodes that unfold in the Hejaz, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, drawing on hadith literature, biographical works, anthologies, legal compendia, polemical texts, dedicated treatises, modern institutional records, participant observation,



and paintings. They treat women members of the Family of the Prophet, other women who are associated with the households of the Imams, companions of the Imams, women as hadith-transmitters, judges, jurists, and theologians, women as royal members of Shi'i dynasties, women as religious teachers and guides, and women as agents of leading jurists. Overall, the studies assembled here demonstrate that Twelver Shi'ism presents a long and variegated tradition of prominent women figures, whether revered religious icons, historical personages, fictional characters, or combinations of all three, that played important roles regarding religious authority. Like their male counterparts, these women fall into several societal categories that have claimed and wielded different types of religious authority, except the Imamate itself. The studies in this volume also bring out the important point that even within one mode of authority, subsidiary authorities exist, as shown by Liyakat Takim with 'Female Authority in the Times of the Shi'i Imams' (p.105-120).

The book was also an opportunity to convene a virtual talk on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2023, hosted by The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (ACMCU), which brought one of the editors, Mirjam Künkler, to speak on the topics covered in the book and the research that went into the volume, a virtual talk which can be accessed online.<sup>1</sup>

To conclude this review, it must be stressed that the volume is heavily dependent on Iran and/or Ithna 'Ashari (Twelver) Shi'ism, which is understandable considering its historical and contemporary importance (a more adequate title for the book would have been *Female Religious Authority in Twelver Shi'i Islam*) but reinforces a reified idea of Shi'ism. The work could have been enriched with case studies from India and Pakistan, which are the second and third largest countries in terms of Muslim population both including considerable Shi'a minorities, not to mention the fact that throughout its history India had important Shi'a centers of culture and government, such as the Deccan Sultanates, Bengal, or Awadh. It would also have been a plus if the book had dealt with other Shi'a denominations or branches, namely Isma'ilism, and its different ramifications, including the Fatimids and their offspring, the Bohras and the Nizaris, a community which is known for its egalitarian stance

regarding women. Sometimes the reading is encumbered by lengthy and excessive footnotes which, in some cases, are redundant (but this a general problem in the Social Sciences and Humanities). Nonetheless, this book is a substantial and welcome contribution to a growing body of literature on female religious authority in Islam. The introduction and individual chapters, covering a wide temporal and geographical range, address some of major unanswered questions, such as how particular contexts affect women's religious authority. This volume is of importance not just to scholars of gender or Shi'ism, but of religious authority broadly construed. And as the editors remind the reader, only once we have a better account of the variations in female religious authority across space and time, as well as in comparison to their male counterparts in a given context, will we be able to formulate hypotheses as to which conditions and developments – theological, jurisprudential, social, economic, political – particularly enhanced, promoted, or, conversely, stifled the phenomenon.

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doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3252

## Endnotes

- 1 See <https://acmcu.georgetown.edu/2023/03/08/female-religious-authority-in-shii-islam-past-and-present/>

# Shariah and the Halal Industry

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OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2021, 340 PAGES.

MOHAMMAD HASHIM KAMALI

The book is comprehensively written for the general reader. The chapters begin with a series of explanations that are followed by additional readings on ijtiḥad-related aspects of shariah relevant to the halal industry. Part I concludes with a chapter on “Islam and Science,” which examines ways in which scientific research can be incorporated into shariah. Part II states that the Department of Standards Malaysia has issued sixteen halal standards since 2004. Halal pharmaceuticals are a significant component of the halal industry’s growth. The establishment of halal parks in Malaysia’s various states and strategic locations aims to facilitate the country’s development as well. Part III of the volume analyses regional and international developments in the ASEAN region’s halal industry. Following that, a brief history, development, and diversification of the industry in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey are discussed. The book closes with a summary of the book’s findings and a number of actionable recommendations.

The book describes the global halal market as a potential growth area, while highlighting religion and culture as the primary reasons Muslims follow a halal lifestyle. For example, religion’s influence on food consumption is determined by the nature of its teachings and their

attempt to regulate a particular area or subject, by people's customary practises, and how their religion's teachings are understood and interpreted. Two key shariah principles that have influenced legal opinion are manifest harm (*darar*) and natural repulsiveness (*khubth*).

In response to a growing consensus among industry practitioners and others that the halal industry in Malaysia and elsewhere is shaped by rapid market developments, with shariah input receiving little attention, part I aims to strengthen shariah compliance within the rapidly growing global halal industry, which is devoted to the exposition and review of principles of shariah.

Halal is a broad shariah value and concept that encompasses not only food and beverages, but also medicine, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and hotels and resorts, and its scope appears to be expanding, particularly in its contemporary interpretation, which takes a holistic approach to halal. When discussing halal and the halal industry, three primary focuses emerge: Fiqh, Shariah, and Maqasid al-Shariah. It is critical to understand these three domains and their differences in order to prevent the growing halal industry from being misunderstood and practised.

Fiqh is composed of detailed rules, whereas *maqasid* refer to the purposes for which those rules exist. The fiqh rules make provisions, their purpose/*maqasid* is to safeguard the values. The five fundamental purposes (*daruriyyat*) are to protect religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), rationality and intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), property (*hifz al-mal*), and lineage (*hifz al-nasab* – also known as *hifz al-nasl*). Similarly, according to fiqh, at least one of the two countervalues in exchange contracts, such as sale and purchase, must be present at the time of contracting. This ruling is intended to safeguard property from excessive uncertainty (*gharar*), destruction, and loss. Whereas the fiqh rules on halal express rule-based jurisprudence, the *maqasid* perspective considers the broader picture, namely that the free flow of the marketplace and the production of safe, clean, and lawful food substances should be encouraged and made available to the public. In this way, the *maqasid* approach the rules of fiqh and shariah differently: whereas fiqh is rule-based, the *maqasid* are more purpose-oriented. Additionally, *maqasid al-shariah* safeguards the fiqh/shariah from distortion, manipulation, and abuse.

For it is possible to adhere to fiqh rules while distorting or even violating their intent, most notably in financial transactions that ostensibly adhere to fiqh requirements but are frequently structured in ways that seek to secure the prohibited usury/*riba*.

However, it should be noted that shariah, fiqh, and *maqasid* all expound distinct dimensions of the same reality: fiqh and *maqasid* arise, as they must, from shariah, implying that there can be no substantive distinction between them. The author further explains the 5 values in Islam, namely the prohibited (*haram*), reprehensible (*makruh*), the obligatory (*wajib*), the commendable (*mandub*), and the permissible (*halal*, *mubah*, and *ja'iz*), and highlights the meaning of *ibahah* permissibility (*halal*), as it is the main concern of the discussion. When the shariah declares something either halal or haram (unlawful/impermissible), it is for reasons primarily due to their inherent benefits or harm, respectively, but in regard to matters and objects on which the shariah has remained silent, they are all permissible. The principle of permissibility thus extends to all objects, foods and drinks, animals, acts, and transactions that are not considered to be harmful. The discussion of the concept of 'being silent' is particularly interesting. The author mentions a supportive legal maxim, which states: "when there is total silence [in shariah] on the permissibility or prohibition of something, it is exonerated." This is an endorsement, again, of the original principle of permissibility, and a manifestation of God's expressed desire to bring ease to the people. In support of this principle the Qur'anic verse that reads, in the relevant part, that "Your Lord is never forgetful" (Maryam, 19:64) is also quoted, which evidently means that His silence is purposeful and can never be attributed to His forgetfulness. It is stated by way of explanation that God Most High and his Messenger have identified the permissible and the prohibited, but when they have chosen to remain silent over something, it is an indication of its permissibility. To this effect, it is provided in an elevated (*marfu'*) hadith on the authority of Abu al-Darda': "What God has made permissible in His Book, it is halal, and what He has prohibited is haram, and what He has remained silent about, it is exonerated. So accept from God what He has exonerated, for He never

forgets anything, [and then the aforementioned verse is cited] “and your Lord is never forgetful.”

Another important concept that the author discusses is that of something being *tayyib*, as in *halalan tayyiban* mentioned in Qur'an 2:168, and the author discusses how being *tayyib* in the halal industry is now recognised as an extension of the fundamental concept of halal. The concept of *halal tayyib* comprises two components, one categorizing something that one is legal and the other being fundamentally moral, while transcending the rank of virtue. If one chooses to aim at *tayyib*, that would be preferable, better, and more morally virtuous. However, in the context of the halal industry and contemporary standards of cleanliness and hygiene, it is perfectly acceptable, and even more in keeping with the letter of the Qur'an, to read *tayyib* as an extension of halal and as an integral part of the scale of five values, in the present writer's opinion.

In the context of the global halal industry, this entails supplying products that are “sustainable, non-disruptive to the environment, and based on ethical, responsible, and non-exploitative business models.” With this comprehensive understanding of halal and *tayyib*, one can integrate the halal industry with Islamic banking and finance in order to create a wholesome or *tayyib* business and supply chain that work in unison.

Additionally, the author discusses the role of fatwas and their enactment in the halal industry, particularly in the Malaysian context. In Kuala Lumpur, the National Fatwa Committee (NFC) is headed by the King (Yang Dipertuan Agong) and the Conference of Rulers. There is no appointment of a Grand Mufti, and the NFC is composed of state muftis representing the country's fourteen states, including the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan. The NFC's primary functions are to standardise the various fatwas issued by state muftis and to respond to national security concerns as they arise. Since the 1970s, the Malaysian public has witnessed the NFC issue fatwas on a variety of issues, including beauty pageants, e-cigarettes, vaping, yoga, and shishah smoking, as well as issues affecting society, youth, and women, as well as food-related issues. Several examples of fatwas issued in connection with the Halal industry include the following:

- Concerning the permissibility or otherwise of consuming nesting birds, the 79th NFC Conference (September 6–8, 2007) issued a fatwa stating that “consuming [nesting birds] is permitted (*mubah*) in Islam.”
- On the use of prohibited animal parts or organs for cosmetic purposes other than those of dogs and pigs, the NFC issued the following fatwa during its 74th session (July 25–27, 2006): Islam places a premium on cleanliness and safety, and thus any cosmetic product that contains ingredients or elements that are not halal or are harmful to humans is completely unlawful (*haram*).
- In response to another question regarding the status of fish fed non-halal food, the 76th session of the NFC (April 4, 2006) issued the following fatwa: fish raised in ponds are not halal for consumption if they are purposefully kept in unclean water and fed pork, carrion, or the like.

The book concludes with some valuable recommendations, which consist of two main parts: Halal Standardization and Environmental Concerns.

Greater uniformity and standardization in the halal industry may be attempted by recourse to the principle of selection. As an accepted method of Islamic jurisprudence, *takhayyur*, is premised on the recognition that the leading schools of Islamic law have accepted one another as providing equally valid interpretations of the shariah.

Another method of selection that may be useful for standardisation purposes is the *fiqh* method of piecing together (*talfiq*) certain aspects of different schools or jurists’ rulings. *Talfiq* is distinguished from *takhayyur* in that the latter chooses a ruling from a different madhhab than one’s own, whereas *talfiq* attempts to combine portions of various rulings and interpretations from numerous madhhabs.

Another possibility is to establish an authoritative halal council in each Muslim-majority country and jurisdiction. This council should ideally bring together a diverse group of learned figures from various disciplines, such as shariah scholars, science experts, community leaders, and market specialists. Additionally, the proposed council should include representatives from each country’s Muslim minority in the West, as well as eminent industry experts and market analysts.



A set of procedural guidelines should be drafted to govern the proposed council's decision-making process and fatwa issuance.

Governments and industry participants should take proactive measures to standardise halal practises at both the macro and micro levels. The aforementioned halal council should propose ideas and formulas for necessary changes and reforms, as well as practical policies and procedures that promote standardisation in the halal industry; in this way, ambiguity and malpractice in the issuance and identification of halal logos and their certifying authorities will be reduced, if not eliminated entirely.

There is a need to supplement proposed shariah and scientific research efforts with adequate input from countries and regions' customary practises. These efforts should be included in the research initiatives proposed. Potential benefits for Industry 4.0 (i.e. the "fourth industrial revolution") include increased safety and security, global expansion of the halal sector, and significantly increased human capacity building.

Halal finance is a natural extension of halal food and lifestyle, as they both stick to halal principles. It is therefore proposed that a joint working committee comprised of representatives from both sides be established, perhaps in each country, to develop work plans and an agenda for resolving the disconnect in ways that add value and actualize profitable cooperation for both parties.

International cooperation between Muslim countries should address and combat halal phobia on regional and international levels. This can be overcome through concerted public awareness campaigns over the medium and long term, as well as through careful planning. If halal products and services are to expand their market share in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries, it will take the combined efforts and resources of multiple countries.

Cost-effective and competitively priced halal products and services should be developed. If they are slightly more expensive than their other available alternatives, this should be addressed, minimised, or eliminated. Effective resource pooling and specialisation across national borders may help keep prices attractively competitive.

Halal is an Islamic value and principle, which suggests that Muslim-majority countries should take the lead in halal industry research and

development. The halal industry should be viewed as a socially responsible sector that fosters inclusivity on a grassroots level. New projects can be conceptualised around how marginalised countries with a high potential for healthy livestock and other supplies can be assisted in gaining easier market access for their products, as well as in gaining easier credit for investment and productive purposes.

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doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3094

# Beyond the Divide: A Century of Canadian Mosque Design

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MONTREAL: MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022, 304 PAGES.

TAMMY GABER

Muslim immigrants first pray in each other homes, and later in the basement of churches and rented premises. They progress to buying an existing building and repurpose it to serve as a mosque. Finally, the fledgling community raises the funds to buy land and build a mosque that reflects both their native nostalgia and aspirations as new Canadians. A century of mosque-building by Muslim immigrants to Canada is such an expatriate phenomenon. However, the “Divide” in the title refers not to crossing the oceans but to another telling subtitle from the author’s earlier paper with the same title: “Women’s Spaces in Canadian Mosques.” The two subtitles, one documentary (book) and the other didactic (paper), vie for the reader’s attention, crossing the genre divide.

An SSHRC funded research project resulted in Gaber spending two and a half years documenting half of the far-flung mosques in fifty-three cities across all the Canadian provinces and territories (save Yukon), photographing the exterior and interiors, drawing architectural floor plans and interviewing members of governance, users and architects. She leaves future researchers indebted to her for this pioneering fieldwork.

In the introductory chapter, she well situates the book among nine others such as Barbara Daly Metcalf's *Making Muslim Spaces in North America and Europe* and Akel Kahera's *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender and Aesthetics*. Given that gendering is such a prominent aspect of her research, one could add a tenth book: Jasser Auda's *Reclaiming the Mosque: The Role of Women in Islam's House of Worship*. The Prophet's original mosque of Medina is introduced as the "hub of the community" (p.3); a theme that is a strength throughout the book. Gaber eschews the term Islamic Architecture and prefers "architecture for Islam" (p.9) for mosques. However, as Islam does not worship (Muslims do), "architecture for Muslims" might be preferable. Exterior designs of the mosques are classified as anonymous, neo-historicist, abstracted historical, and contemporary. The latter category makes it to the cover of the book, and the reviewer fondly recalls its architect Charles Correa discussing its mihrab with him in one of their annual meetings in Bombay.

Gaber notes that while the exterior design "is universally privileged in surveys of mosque design," however, it is the interior design that is "not as celebrated in surveys, but fleshes out a more complete story of how the mosque is used" (p.11). That story is complete only if the architectural promenade is delineated, as the worshipper moves from the street (that may be askew from the Qibla direction of prayer), via verandah, entrance hall, ablutions (a transition that is as essential as it is sensuous) stairways etc. It is in such literal turnings of collateral architecture that the architect hopes the metaphorical "turn to God" takes place. However, the drawings in the book are colour coded with merely two shades denoting destinations (men and women's area of prayer), and not the journey. While this is welcome, the complete story of how the mosque is used by its worshippers, awaits telling with many more colours.

Chapter two, "Pioneering Communities and Mosques in the Prairies" includes Canada's first mosque, Al Rashid, built by the contribution of both Muslim and non-Muslim Canadians and open to both groups for their community activities. As in the Prophet's pioneering mosque, men and women prayed together in the same hall without barriers (but clearly

gendered, with men in front and women behind, in consideration of the Muslim postures for prayer). Among the other mosques included is the exemplary Edmonton Islamic Academy by Gulzar Haider, a pioneer architect of mosques in North America. The main hall includes prayer spaces for each gender and the façade is a large-scale epigraphy of the *shahada* (Islamic proclamation of faith).

Significantly, over a third of the mosques in the book are recycled buildings—former churches, houses, retail shops, banks, restaurants, a funeral hall and even a nightclub. The paramount province is Quebec, which is the subject of Chapter Three: “The Potential of Converted Spaces in Quebec Mosques.” The chief craftsman, Abdel Ali Benlamine, makes his mark with a dramatic before/after transformation in the repurposing of a mundane automobile repair garage with a large skylight with intricate woodwork and Moroccan decorative motifs. From serving the internal combustion engine to sequestering carbon and reducing GHG emissions in its present reincarnation, the repurposed mosque has much to offer to Canadian architecture.

In contrast to the traditional craftsman, is a contemporary one, the windsurfer, snowboarder and dedicated eco-activist and devout Muslim, Sharif Senbel with his repertoire of four mosques in Chapter Four: “The Promise of Purpose-Built Mosques in British Columbia.” Senbel’s mosque designs are “of the place, for the place and for the people” (Ulrike Al-Khamis). The architect works closely with the community. In the Masjid al Salaam, Burnaby, where women were a part of the participatory design process, they still preferred a separate prayer space albeit with a view of the *mihrab*. Their prayer space in the balcony does not impede their participation in the community as they are a part of the governance of the mosque. Indeed, it is the all-male, and all-adult governance that needs to be challenged before architect even comes into consideration.

In Chapter Five: “Mosques as Hubs of Community Space in the Maritimes” begins with the first mosque being built in 1971. Remarkably, all the maritime mosques are predated by a Muslim Cemetery established in Truro in 1935, the oldest in Canada. Typically, the mosques serve as educational centres, sites for celebrations and fundraisers in the gymnasium (the most coveted space for mosque management). The

Ummah Mosque in Halifax has regular open houses, ‘police luncheons’, food drives etc. The Cape Breton Muslim Society Mosque loans out its ample parking lot to the school and daycare as well as, for events, to the neighbouring church (that in turn reciprocates). These are moves typical across Canadian mosques, to a greater or lesser degree. All the maritime mosques played a role in welcoming and orientating new Syrian refugees settling in their new homeland.

Chapter Six: “Orienting Mosques to Mecca in Canada and the Extreme North” gives the history of orienting mosques in Canada from the Mercator southeast to the Geodesic northeast as immigrants on a vast land attempted to face Mecca. The chapter is aptly illustrated with two mosques in the extreme north. The Inuvik Mosque was constructed in Winnipeg and transported across a 4500 km distance via trailer and barge. It has a food bank supported by Muslims across Canada that supports many people in the larger community. The Iqaluit Masjid had its materials brought in by Sealift and constructed on site. The evocative view from the mosque, facing Frobisher Bay, is “seemingly infinite.” (p.161).

The shortest chapter in the book is followed by Chapter Seven, which is the longest and necessitated by the fact that it covers a province with half the mosques of Canada, and also deals with the theme that is the focus of the book, “Women and the Gendering of Mosques in Ontario.” The author classifies gendered mosque spaces as having a full view of the main prayer area, a partial view, or no view while contending that having a direct “visual and auditory access to the main space is arguably the most important architectural aspect of any worship space” (p. 169). This categorization is puzzling. Auditory access is indeed paramount, but not so the visual aspect for an aniconic religion that eschews visual icons. The mosque is devoted to listening (al-Qur’an, after all, comes from *qara’a* meaning to recite). In the realm of invocation, not depiction, vision detracts and hearing engages. God in the Qur’an is always referred to as “the All Hearing and the All Seeing” and “the All Hearing and the All Knowing”. In each instance, hearing precedes seeing and knowing. The single instance in the Qur’an of seeing preceding hearing is in the negative instance of viewing doomsday! (Q32:12). Little wonder then that, while the majority of worshippers in the 1,144 mosques in Mumbai,

for instance, do *not* have a view to the main floor, that has never been an issue as the mosque is regarded as an acoustic receptacle for God's word.

Among the Ontario mosques is one with a dramatic change in usage: a nightclub in Ottawa was turned into Assalam Mosque by the local Somali community. The complex includes educational classes and also halal shops (providing revenue for maintenance). While the women's prayer space has a lattice screen, the women themselves are among the most active members of the Assalam community, in charge of various committees including the one that organises the Friday Prayers that attract 1500 to 2000 worshippers each Friday. They also hold weekly classes and have their own get-togethers at the mosque. Ontario also has several Ismaili *jamatkhanas* (and their derivatives like the Noor Cultural Centre) with their own version of gendered spaces: Muslim men on one side, women on the other, and the imam facing the gap between them. They are exemplars of a sect that worldwide ranges from 0.002 to 0.007 percent of the Muslim population, and consequently has little or no bearing on the trajectory of gendered spaces for the majority of other mosques of Ontario, and indeed the rest of Canada. But the followers of the Aga Khan certainly lead the way in their sensitivity to landscaping, which has traditionally been an *ayat* (a sign of God), and indeed is the term for verses of the Qur'an. A pioneer of such sensitivity was architect Bruno Freschi's *jamatkhana* in Burnaby.

While Gaber's analytical criteria is problematic, she provides insights that need to be taken seriously viz. the more physically cut off the women are from the main hall, the more cut off they are from community interactions; ironic in the Canadian context where genders freely intermingle outside the mosque. The simplest solution remains the gendered space without visual barriers, exemplified by the Prophet's pioneering Mosque in Medina that Gaber too hearkens back to with men in the front and women behind. After all, gender equality in Islam is more of essence than appearance. While theologically asserting gender equality, in practice Islam maintains a distinction. The solution lies as much with mosque governance as it does with the involvement of women at the design stage (regardless of the degree to which the resulting architecture consents to separate spaces). As the author rightly states in the concluding chapter,

“the design of mosques has depended *on the people who gather there*, their needs and their aspirations for their mosque” (p. 223).

The book is copiously illustrated with 306 photos of the exteriors and interiors of mosques along with 135 drawings (including 4 exquisite collages by the author) and 23 pages of endnotes. A map of Canada denoting the mosques would convey at a glance the immense range of Gaber’s architectural journey both as an architect and as a Canadian, and the next edition could include the Whitehorse Mosque in Yukon to complete the Gaber ‘Grand Slam.’ Minor errors could be then corrected, by noting that the oldest Muslim cemetery in Canada is not the oldest in the continent (p. 129), but rather is preceded by the 1928 Assyrian Muslim Cemetery in North Dakota; the restoration of a missing sentence(s) between pages 122 and 123; reversing A4.5 to A5.4 (p. 137) and correcting the leaning on the knees posture in Fig 1.5 so that a “drop of water on the back does not slide” (Muslim: Bk.4, No.1005). Finally, the women worshippers that chose to initiate separate, or curtained spaces, remain nameless in the book, and are not quoted from directly (e.g., Prince George Islamic Centre; IAOS Regina). By contrast, the views of those women that presumably coincide with the author’s views, who object to the separate spaces, are named and have their views elaborated upon (e.g., at the Pioneer Mosque, Winnipeg; IAOS Regina). The unexpressed views of those women in the former group remains a lacunae that could be filled in a future edition.

Given its coverage of Canada-wide mosques and the stories of the communities that built them along with drawing attention to gender issues, Gaber’s offering needs to be in every university and college library, as well in the offices of architects. This is a seminal text of Canadian Mosques and the mosaic of Canadian architecture.

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# Islamic Law and Ethics

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HERNDON: IIIT, 2020, XIV+207 PAGES.

DAVID R. VISHANOFF (ED.)

Continuing engagement with Islamic legal scholarship does not seem to have resulted in satisfactory attention being paid to the interplay of philosophical considerations and theological principles in relation to the ethical component of Islamic Law. This explains why any scholarly and properly guided attempt to extend the frontiers of knowledge on the subject of Islamic Law and Ethics is always welcome. David Vishanoff's edited volume examines Islamic ethics in the context of Islamic law. The book comprises an introduction by the editor, a foreword by the publishers, followed by the chapters contributed by the editor and no fewer than six other eminent scholars on various aspects of the subject, which are presented in an elegant, lucid, and highly intelligible prose. The editor's introduction, *Islamic Law and Ethics: From Integration to Pluralism* (pp. ix-xiii) provides the rationale for the book, exposes the gap that the book seeks to fill, and offers a panoramic picture of the central theme as addressed by the various contributors in their respective chapters.

The editor's introduction is followed in immediate succession by his own chapter entitled "The Ethical Structure of Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni's Legal Theory" (pp. 1-31). This chapter underscores the ethical dimension of al-Juwayni's legal theory and relies on his definition of law

(*fiqh*) as knowledge of legal values (*aḥkām*), his interpretive principles, and others which expose the ethical implications of various Islamic legal provisions. The author demonstrates an excellent grasp of the subject as well as remarkable familiarity with the scholarship of al-Juwayni. This is evident in his engagement with the text of al-Juwayni's *Kitāb al-Waraqāt*, whose translation and analysis he handles with the dexterity of a thorough scholar, especially with regard to the legal and ethical implications of the book, as contrasted with another notable work by al-Juwayni, namely *Kitāb al-Burhān*. However, the author's claim that "one remains unsure whether it is the phrase *uṣūl al-fiqh* that is divided into two parts, the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* itself, or the *Kitāb al-Waraqāt fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, deserves some attention. Relying on Ibn al-Firkah's reconstruction of the text and Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli's commentary, the author argues that "this ambiguity may be deliberate, because all three are composed of two parts in some sense: the first word in the phrase, the first part of the discipline, and the first half of the book all have to do with the roots or sources of the law – the stuff or material of revelation – while the second part of each deals with the construction of law by reasoning based on those sources" (p. 6).

While the author's attempt at a critical engagement with this aspect of the text of *al-Waraqāt* is applauded, it should be noted that a careful look at the text in question in its original Arabic version reveals that the question of ambiguity does not arise, as the reference to "Uṣūl al-Fiqh" could not have been to do with anything other than the subject or discipline of Uṣūl al-Fiqh. *Hādhihi waraqāt tashtamilu 'alā fuṣūl min uṣūl al-fiqh wa-huwa lafẓ mu'allaf min juz'ayn mufradayn...* that may be concisely translated as "Here are pages comprising sections of The Roots of Islamic Jurisprudence (the roots of legal science)", without prejudice to its translation by the author as, "Here are some pages encompassing information on various subdivisions of 'the roots of 'legal science'" (p. 5). Besides, the author repeatedly refers to the text as *Kitāb al-Waraqāt fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, whereas it is captured in the literature as *Matn al-Waraqāt*. Indeed, it is only described as *Kitāb* in two instances, namely where reference is made to its commentary, as is the case in *Kitāb Sharh al-Waraqāt*, or where *Matn* is preceded by the word, *Kitāb* as is the case

in *Kitāb Matn al-Waraqāt*. Thus, the author's characterization of the text is not consistent with the tradition and practice. Also of interest is the author's claim that "the chapter does not look beyond legal theory" while claiming at the same time that "the chapter attempts to imagine what the discipline might look like if it were structured around different ethical categories" some of which he identifies. One is therefore tempted to ask how logically sound is the conclusion that a chapter that casts an imaginative look at ethical concerns over a discipline has not really crossed the boundaries of legal theory.

In Chapter Two, "Neither Desiring It, nor Transgressing Its Limits:" Ethical Hierarchy in Islamic Law", Samy Ayoub examines the interconnectedness of hardship (*mashaqqah*), relaxation of requirement (*taysir*) and necessity (*ḍarūrah*) in the late Hanafite juridical tradition. He highlights the central place accorded to moral considerations with regard to the concept of lesser evil in the Hanafite legal formulations concerning hardship and necessity. In this chapter, two issues seem to have earned the most attention, and the author himself has not equivocated in identifying them. These are the boundaries of hardship and necessity, as well as the place of individual and collective rights in such circumstances (p. 35). The author demonstrates throughout his analysis how necessitous circumstances permit the unlawful, how hardship brings about relaxation of a requirement and the hierarchy of hardship, the levels of relaxation of requirement, as well as the moral dilemmas involved. The author is at his best where he alludes to Ibn Nujaym's *al-Ashbāh wa-al-Nazā'ir*, which forms the basis of significant parts of the author's analysis in the chapter. While the specific details and relevant examples provided by the author in his analysis, especially on how *mashaqqah* (hardship) is examined and considered in the absence of textual evidence constitute a major strength of the chapter, the author's excessive reliance on Ibn Nujaym whose views he often presents uncritically (pp. 39-43) leaves much to be desired. An attempt to subject Ibn Nujaym's views to comparative evaluation alongside other leading authorities on the subject, would have been more deserving of plaudits.

Chapter Three, "Structural Ijtihad: A Radical Paradigm Shift in Twelver Shi'i Legal Theory" was contributed by Hamid Mavani, whose

main argument is that though *Ijtihād* is generally regarded as a useful tool for a meaningful response to the challenges of modernity, this optimism and confidence cannot be accepted as valid altogether. The reason he gives for this concern is that “the traditional *ijtihād* paradigm that is in current usage to deal with present-day challenges has reached its limits and is unable to deal methodically with contemporary contingencies” (p. 52). He argues that the perturbing nature of these challenges has compelled the traditional *ijtihād* system to formulate secondary juridical devices such as public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), imperative necessity (*ḍarūrah*), distress (*ḥaraj*), and averting difficulty (*‘usr*). The high points of the chapter are the relevant, practical examples cited by him in demystifying the various technical concepts involved in his analysis. However, there is a verbatim production on page 55 of content from page 52, to the tune of almost one full page. There also is a reproduction on page 62 of a statement from pages 52 and 55, concerning “the risk of providing only partial, patchy, and petty formal modifications to existing legal rulings”. Nonetheless, these observations are not sufficient to mar the quality of the sophisticated chapter.

In Chapter Four, “The Application of Maqasid al-Shari‘ah in Islamic Chaplaincy”, Kamal Abu-Shamsieh discusses the scope of Islamic spiritual care services and the understanding of the theological foundations which, according to him, “remain in their infancy, despite the emergence of Islamic chaplaincy training programs and professional associations in the United States” (p. 76). In articulating the rationale for the chapter, the author argues that chaplaincy remains non-existent, underdeveloped, or misunderstood in Muslim countries. He finds this strange in view of the enormous provisions for caring, for care seeking, healing, worship obligations, legal considerations during sickness, as well as ethics of care, in the rich sources of the Islamic heritage. The author engages critically and analytically with the sources and purposes of Shariah in the context of the theory of *Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah*, with a view to exposing the interplay of Islamic law and ethics. In this chapter, the author’s contribution to scholarship lies in the key Islamic legal terminologies that shape and give directions to the services provided by the chaplain to patients. He is systematic in his approach to the issues involved in the subject of his

chapter as he addresses related questions in separate clusters, and the greatest strength of this chapter lies in the author's successful analysis of the practices and activities of chaplaincy in the context of the goals of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, Islamic jurisprudence, and the *Qawā'id al-Sharī'ah* principles of ethics.

Chapter Five is entitled, "The Developmentalist Ethic in Islamic Charity: *Fiqh al-Zakāh* and the Applied Ethics of Muslim Charity Organizations in India", and contributed by Christopher B. Taylor. The chapter discusses the emerging face of *zakāh* as a developmentalist framework for Islamic charity in India. The author addresses the concern involved in the gradual shift from the Islamic teaching that charity is best given in secret and argues that "this shift to *zakāh* as development is not merely the result of Western influence and imported NGO practices replacing authentic Islamic rituals, nor is it to be seen as the kind of inexorable rationalization of religion..." (p. 109). He analyses the place of *zakāh* as a major feature of Muslim social practice in India. Yet, he argues that more Muslims give *zakāh* worldwide (76%) than perform daily ritual prayers, even though the researchers who conducted surveys that reveal such findings did not survey Muslims in India, probably due to the lack of "political" permission. Nonetheless, Islamic charity remains central to public discourse in India and has earned considerable attention. The author deserves plaudits in his analysis of such *zakāh* related variables as purification, secrecy, contexts for the purity ethic, as well as the developmental ethic in *zakāh*, which covers work ethic (pp. 120-123), public institutionalization (pp. 123-125), and debating the developmentalist ethic in the *madrasah* (pp. 126-129). There is no denying that this chapter is an excellent piece that makes an interesting read.

"The Concept of *Riḍā* in the Qur'an: Popular Misunderstanding and the Westernization of Jews and Christians" is the title of Chapter Six and contributed by Asaad Alsaleh. The author makes it clear that the chapter seeks to investigate the multiplicity of representations associated with the injunction contained in chapter 2, verse 120 of the Qur'an. He identifies the Arabic concept of *riḍā*, which he renders into English as "approval" as the subject involved in the Qur'anic injunction in question. It may not be inaccurate to characterize this chapter as an attempt by

the author to challenge the popular representations of *riḍā* (approval) in the verse which has largely promoted the perception that the Qur'an is not favourably disposed to a Muslim's friendship or cordial relationship with a Jew or Christian. According to the author, "both the verse and the concept of *riḍā* therein have been taken out of context and misunderstood as part of a reactionary discourse against the West" (p. 136). He demonstrates the growing instrumentality of the popular view of the verse to misrepresentations, which have contributed to the contemporary disapproval of the West among some Muslims, as well as the implications of the growing practice of quoting the Qur'an as a political reaction. His extensive analysis in that regard is followed by an exegetical look at the concept, which is contextualized in the corpus of Qur'anic exegesis. The author's versatility becomes visible in the section entitled 'Contextualizing *Riḍā* where he draws on on relevant scholarship from such disciplines as philosophy, psychology, history, Arabic language, Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis and others (pp. 146-153). The various questions raised by the author in this section receive attention later, where he asks, "Is *Riḍā* a Universal and Timeless Reality?" (p. 153). Through a rigorous analysis, the author notes that "some latter exegetes, not the first-generation ones", posit that it is only the second part of the verse that is addressed to the Prophet and all Muslims. Yet, he maintains that al-Baghawi, al-Khazin, Ibn Kathir, and al-Qurtubi are of the view that the message is for the Prophet and, by extension, the ummah (p.154).

The final chapter is titled, "Social Justice and Islamic Legal/Ethical Order: The Madinah Constitution as a Case Study from the Prophetic Period' is contributed by Katrin Jomaa. The chapter addresses the perception of social justice from the Islamic perspective and its implementation in a legal setting. The chapter examines the 47 decrees of the Madinah Constitution and situates them in the modern context, especially with regard to how to legally and politically handle or relate to the question of diversity in a pluralistic society. With special attention to the Qur'anic ethical understanding of diversity, the chapter pursues a line of argument that offers a new perspective on social justice and that the public manifestation of difference does not affect social harmony, even though they are not hidden in private. The author challenges John Rawls'

theory on interaction based on the “veil of ignorance”, which advocates that people’s public interaction in the political realm pay attention only to their commonalities, while disregarding or ignoring their differences to avoid conflict. The author argues that despite the general acceptance and recognition accorded to the theory in the West, the fact that it lacks a sense of community, social cohesion, and social justice for minorities makes it deficient. The author contrasts such a theory with the Madinah charter, which is replete with provisions for religious and ethnic diversity in public through the constitution and legal pluralism, and maintains common standards among diverse communities. The author compares and contrasts the Madinah Constitution with Western Thought under various subheadings such as Community versus Ummah (pp. 164-170), Decrees Addressing the Believers (pp. 170-173), Individual versus Collective Responsibility (pp. 173-175), Majority versus Minorities or Elite versus Marginalized (pp. 175-178), Public Norm and Individual Choice (pp. 178-180), Decrees Addressing the Jews (pp. 181-185), as well as Decrees Addressing *Ahl al-Ṣaḥīfah* (the People of the Constitution). The author’s insights are remarkable. For instance, she highlights that the Madinah Constitution implies that the Jews were an ummah ‘alongside’ the Muslims (p. 164), and that the inclusion of Jews and their law in the ummah and in the constitution is a reflection of Islam’s desire to interact with earlier traditions rather than break away from them. This just one instance of the author’s sophisticated analysis, which makes her contribution a masterpiece. However, there are several avoidable repetitions with potential to mar the sophisticated nature of the chapter. For instance, the first three lines on p.162 are repeated verbatim in the first three lines of paragraph 2 of p.163. Also, lines 8-11 of page 162 are repeated verbatim in lines 6-8 of paragraph 2 of p.163. Also, lines 11-14 of p.162 are repeated verbatim in lines 11-14 of paragraph 2 of page 163. There is a pattern of textual repetition in this highly valued book.

Ultimately, the edited volume deservedly earns the status of a very useful reference work for scholars of Islamic Law and Ethics. However, more generally speaking, it has two minor weaknesses for which the editor might ultimately be held responsible. The first is that each chapter is replete with long sentences, which have to be read and re-read in order

to have a grasp of the central idea or message involved. The second one is a weakness that may also pass for a strength: the fact that despite the interlinked nature of the chapters that make the work a harmonized whole as they are conceptually interconnected, each of the seven chapters has a clearly defined specialized audience for which it is of direct interest. The edited volume is therefore recommended to scholars in those interconnected specialized disciplines, and general readers with a voracious appetite for modern Islamic learning.

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doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3123



FORUM

# Time in the Qur'an: An Introductory Overview

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## Abstract

This essay is written with the aim of presenting, in an informative way, the main words of the Qur'ān relating to time or some aspect of time. The essay begins with a study of Qur'anic vocabulary on time done by Muḥammad b. Mūsā Bābā'ammī in his work *Maḥmūd al-Zamān fī-l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. However, in the essay we have sought to present the semantic richness of the vocabulary of the Qur'ān that relates to time. The essay can serve as a starting point for other philological, theological, and philosophical studies of the terminology of Islam relating to time. God created time (*al-zamān*).

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Karić, Enes. 2023. "Time in the Qur'an: An Introductory Overview." *American Journal of Islam and Society* 40, nos. 1-2: 176–216 • doi: 10.35632/ajis.v39i3-4.3195  
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No time existed before that.  
 And God created place (*al-makān*).  
 No place existed before that.  
 The Absolute (*al-Ḥaqq*), the Magnificent, He was there  
 although there was no place or time.  
 He is Supreme, no place reaches Him,  
 Nor is He owned by time!

(AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *LAṬĀ'IF AL-ISHĀRĀT*, 3:145)

## Introduction

The objective of this essay is to concisely present the ways in which the Qur'ān speaks about time. This scripture contains many spectra of different words for time, as well as terms linked to time, and they are intertwined. As Muḥammad b. Mūsā Bābā'ammī wrote in his book *The Notion of Time in the Qur'ān* (*Maḥmūd al-Zaman fī-l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*), “the subject of time flows in the Qur'ān just as time does in magnificent existence” (Bābā'ammī 2000, 19).

If we turn to works like this one by Bābā'ammī (which we relied upon heavily when writing this essay), we will see that the pages of the Qur'ān contain different verses about various aspects of time. A careful reading of the Qur'ān shows that its chapters refer to the times and eras of people but also other creatures and nature such: a) biological time, b) time measured out, c) weather changes throughout time, d) sacred time, e) cosmic time, f) divine times, g) times of communities and societies, and h) people themselves as time, etc. Specific topics within the Qur'ān regarding time include: eternity, transience, the day and night cycle, the sequence of moments, the present time that is fading away, time that destroys, the annual or regular (“calendar”) time of days, months, years, and more.

Examining the subject of time in the Qur'ān requires careful examination of verses, consultation of many commentaries from different epochs, as well as insight into specialized studies on time written by authors from different parts of the world. In this essay we will briefly point to how the Qur'ān treats this topic.

## 1. Weather in the Qur'ān: Its Nature and Changes (*aṭ-ṭaqṣ wa-taqallubātuh*)

A structural reading of the Qur'ān shows that weather phenomena (rain, thunder, lightning, drought, windstorms, floods, earthquakes...) are an important subject in how they affect people, their societies, communities, as well as their natural environment, animals that they have domesticated, settlements and habitats in which they live, and the fields where they sow crops.

Thunder (*al-ra'd*) is mentioned in the eponymous chapter of the Qur'ān (13:13). The thunder itself "glorifies His praises" (*wa-yusabbiḥu l-ra'du bi-ḥamdiḥi*). Q. 2:19 mentions "rainstorm from the sky" (*ṣayyibun mina l-samā'i*), which people fear and dread immensely because storms bring along "darkness" (*ẓulumāt*), "thunder" (*ra'd*), and "lightning" (*barq*). The Qur'ān points out that humankind has "fear of death" because of this weather (*ḥadhara l-mawt*), emphasizing that out of fear of the "sound of every thunder-clap" (*aṣ-ṣawā'iq*), "they put their fingers into their ears" (*yaj'alūna aṣābi'ahum fī ādhānihim*).

The motif of human fear of weather (of thunder, lightning, storm, rain, flood, strong winds etc.) is visible on the pages of the Qur'ān for a range of reasons and in different contexts. There is a reference to the *fragility of people* confronted with forceful changes of weather. On the pages of the Qur'ān one can read of God warning and declaring that people cannot defend themselves from the nature of time. In these parts of the Qur'ān, weather appears as a visible *form of destiny* that greatly surpasses and transcends people and their strength.

The poet al-Buḥturī describes how weather appears a little at a time, until it becomes unstoppable:

*Wa-awwalu l-ghaythi qaṭrun thumma yansakibu*  
*rain begins with a single drop / and then it turns into a downpour!*

With all their buildings, devices, and construction ingenuity, people cannot stop devastating weather from befalling them. All these human techniques and technologies turn out to be in vain in the end, as is a

frequent message in the Qur'an. In this regard the parable of Noah's son is particularly important. Sūrah *Hūd* mentions that he shouted before the Great Flood began: "I will take refuge on a mountain, which will protect me from the water" (11:43). But his father Noah, the messenger of God (peace be upon him), told his son: "Today, no one is protected from Allah's decree!" (*lā 'āšima l-yawma min amri 'llāh*). The Qur'an then warns that "the waves came between them, and his son was among the drowned" (11:43).

Weather and its changes, especially those with catastrophic consequences on society or civilization, represent an especially striking motif on the pages of the Qur'an. There are pages of the Qur'an that clearly illustrate that, throughout the existence of humans, weather has, in fact, served as God's means of disciplining humanity. The Qur'an attests that every year ("once or twice"—*marratan aw marratayni*, cf. Q. 9:126) weather attacks humankind, often with fatal consequences. Q. 69:7 speaks of the destruction of people by furious, bitter winds (*bi-rīḥin ṣarṣarin 'ātiyah*) which destroyed the civilization of 'Ād long ago. People were killed, lying dead on the ground like "trunks of uprooted palm trees" (*ka-annahum a'jāzu nakhlin ḥāwiyah*). This horrifying image resurfaces each year after devastating storms, tornadoes, tsunamis.

There are some who believe that words of the Qur'an—"the seven often-repeated verses" (*sab'an mina l-mathānī*)—which are mentioned in Q. 15:87, refer to the seven frequent punishments that are often mentioned in the Qur'an (Rubin 2003). Az-Zamakhsharī himself claims that the Qur'an contains many "recurring lessons/warnings" (*al-mawā'izu l-mukarrarah*) (*al-Kashshāf* 2:549).

Taken as a whole, different parts of the Qur'an allude to and reference punishment by water, rain, flood, storm, perishing at sea, drowning. There are also punishments by wind or air, sandstorms, etc. Also mentioned are punishments by earth, earthquakes, tearing down hills on settlements, punishments that include sending animals against people – such as locusts, lice, frogs – then punishments by wars, conflicts between people, infectious diseases, etc.

As we can see, a great number of these punishments are related to *weather* which is always "lurking" and attacking people. In this regard,

it is important to mention Sūrah *Hūd* (Q. 11) which serves as a striking reminder of different kinds of downfalls of ancient societies and civilizations because they were, among other things, struck by some form of destructive punishment by weather. Indeed, the Qurʾān always reminds us that punishment by weather never ensues without a reason. It is the result of immoral behavior of people who crossed the line in some way, etc. It is therefore important to know that the Qurʾān often mentions and alludes to the fact that *moral behavior of people* assures that storms, floods, earthquakes will not befall them.

## 2. Daily Plan of Affairs, Deeds, Actions (*al-barmaja al-yawmiyya*)

The Qurʾān offers an immense abundance of many spectra of these aspects of time. For instance, the word *al-sāʾah* literally means *clock*, or *hour*, or *moment*, but also means *time*, and that includes the time of *the Day of Judgment*, the period of *the End of the World*. The Qurʾān clearly points out that the word *sāʾah* also means “part of the day”. Sūrah 46, *The Wind-Curved Sandhills* (*al-Aḥqāf*, 46:35) thus mentions illusion among sinful people, who will on the Day of Judgment or Day of Resurrection say that in their graves and under the mounds of earth (or in this world) they stayed only for “an hour of a day” (*sāʾatan min nahārin*). This is not the only place in the Qurʾān that illustrates *variability of time*, and its “relativity”, or the “subjective” perception of time. The Qurʾānic syntagm *sāʾatu l-ʿusrah* also denotes “difficult time,” “the time of hardship” (cf. *The Repentance/al-Tawbah*, 9:117).

Furthermore, the Qurʾān mentions *morning/daybreak* (*al-ṣubḥ*). In 11:81 there is a question directed to the Prophet Lot: *Is the morning not near?* It is clear that here the *morning* indicates *salvation*. In the Qurʾān, those who decide to *get up early* and to *do something early*, or to *do it at dawn* are called *muṣbiḥūn* (*The Pen/al-Qalam*, 68:17): *The owners of the garden—when they swore they would surely harvest [all] its fruit in the early morning*. One very similar usage is that of the Qurʾānic word *mushriqūn*, which denotes people who exactly at sunrise (*mushriqīn*) were faced with calamity and cataclysm (cf. 15:73).

The word *ishāʾan* means to do something *in the evening*. Ibn Manẓūr (IV:788) defines the word thus: “That is the early twilight. And it is also said

that *‘ishā’un* lasts from evening until complete darkness.” In 12:16 it is said that brothers of the Prophet Yūsuf returned *in the evening* (*‘ishā’an*) *to their father, weeping*. Another similar usage is found in the Qur’anic word *laylan*, namely to do something *at night, during night-time*. Sūrah *The Man* (*al-Insān*, also called *Time/ad-Dahr*) 76:26 reads: *and glorify Him long at night*.

Also mentioned in the Qur’ān is *tomorrow* (*ghadan*). For instance, in Sūrah *Luqmān* (31:34) it is proclaimed *No soul knows what it will earn for tomorrow*. At several points in the Qur’ān, words with that same root are mentioned, in the sense of *to be early* (for instance *The Pen/al-Qalam* 68:25 reads: *they proceeded early*). The Qur’anic word *al-guduww* means *morning*. For example, *an-Nūr/The Light* 24:36 proclaims: *He [God] is glorified there morning and evening!*

Ibn Manẓūr (IV:962) defines words that have the *g-d-w* root (meaning *morning/tomorrow*) as “signs for time” (*‘alamun li-l-waqt*). Also significant is the word *dawn* (*al-fajr*), which is mentioned in the Qur’ān as a type of “weather,” as well as *dawn, the time of daybreak, dawning*. There is a Sūrah in the Qur’ān that has this title – *al-Fajr/The Dawn* (89) – and in its first line God swears by the daybreak: “By the daybreak!” Arabic linguists offer several definitions of the word *dawn* (*al-fajr*). For example, it is “the light of the morning, namely the redness of the sun in the blackness/darkness of the night!” (cf. Ibn Manẓūr (IV:1053). In the Qur’ān, the so-called “right now” or *al-āna* is also mentioned for different reasons to describe the time when someone said or did something. For instance, it is written that, when he began drowning and when he started believing in God, Pharaoh (Sūrah *Yūnus*, 10:90) was told: *āl-āna wa-qad ‘aṣayta min qablu* “Now you believe? But you always disobeyed and were one of the corruptors?!”

At many points in the Qur’ān *ba‘da* “after” is mentioned – as a preposition as well as an adverb. Also significant is the one and only Qur’anic usage of the word *ānifan*, meaning “just” (cf. Sūrah *Muḥammad*, 47:16 “What did he just say?” (The hypocrites used this question to mock the Prophet Muhammad, pbuh). The Qur’anic usage of the word *aẓ-ẓahīrah* is also very significant, and it signifies the middle of the day or the *noontime rest* [of the ancient Arabs] when the scorching of the sun was the strongest. Sūrah *The Light/an-Nūr* (24:58) warns “[let them] ask for your permission [to come in] ...when you take off your [outer] clothes

at noon.” With the distinctive construct *laylan wa-naharan*, “day and night,” the Qur’ān refers to the words of Prophet Noah (in Sūrah *Nūḥ*, 71:5) who called on his people to worship “day and night.”

There are other parts of the Qur’ān in which parts of day and night are referenced, as well as people’s acts in them. For instance, in the Qur’ān “dawn prayer” (in which the Qur’ān is recited) is literally termed “Qur’ān dawn” (*wa-qur’āna l-fajr*) (cf. *The Night Journey/al-Isrā*, 17:78). In the Qur’ān, the actual “break of dawn” or “time when it begins to grow light” is called *maṭla’u l-fajr*, cf. Sūrah *The Power/al-Qadr* (97:5). The times of prayers (or “glorification of God” or “Muslim prayers”) are mentioned as specific parts of day/night in Sūrah *ṬāHā* (20:130). For instance, the time “before sunrise” (*qabla ṭulū’i sh-shamsi*), then the time “before sunset” (*wa-qabla gurūbihā*), “in the hours of the night” (*wa-min ānā’i l-layli*), and “at both ends of the day” (*wa-aṭrāfa n-nahhāri*) – all of these are specific daily prayer times in Islam. In this regard there is one part of Sūrah *The Night Journey/al-Isrā* (17:78) in which three times for observing prayer (performing *ṣalāh*) are defined:

- 1 “from the decline of the sun” (*li-dulūki sh-shamsi*), then
- 2 “until the darkness of the night” (*ilā gasaki l-layli*), and, finally
- 3 “the dawn prayer” or “recitation of Qur’ān at dawn” (*wa-qur’āna l-fajr*).

The parts of the day as specific times for prayer (in Persian: *namāz*) are also mentioned in Sūrah *Hūd* (11:114): *Ṭarafayī n-nahāri*, which literally means “both ends of the day” (i.e. morning and evening), while *zulafan mina l-layli* means “early part of the night” or the time after the evening.

Of course, the Qur’anic syntagm “at the beginning of the day” or “in the morning” (*wajha n-nahāri*) also refers to the acts/affairs/deeds of people which are done at the beginning of the day (cf. *Family of Imrān/Āli ‘Imrān*, 3:72).

### 3. Qur’anic Reflections on “Historical Times” (*at-ta’rīkh*)

It can be indirectly inferred from the Qur’ān that it is the “eternal Book” or “eternal Word of God.” This is the reason why in the Qur’ān there is



no reference to any particular historical era that is based on time measurements created by people. The Qur'anic text does not contain any information about "historical time" or about dates, or when, for example, one of the prophets lived, or when some people or some empire existed. Within the Qur'ān not a single date is mentioned that can be found on the timeline specified as a certain era by people. For instance, in the Qur'ān (2:213) it is written: "Humanity had once been one community!" (*kāna n-nāsu ummatan wāhidatan*), but it does not state when that was exactly; it does not say how many thousands of years passed before the arrival of, for example, Prophet Mūsā or Prophet 'Īsā. The Qur'ān also mentions Romans/Byzantines in Sūrah *The Romans* (*ar-Rūm*). The second verse of the Sūrah reads: *gūlibati r-rūmu* "The Romans have been defeated!" However, the Qur'ān does not contain a *historical specification of time* as to when exactly were "the Romans defeated". Furthermore, the Qur'ān does not seem to aim to present information about the life of Prophet Muhammad, pbuh, in the way of doxographic reference to a certain historical era that was defined by people.

As Babā'ammī said (2000: 227), the Qur'ān does not present things in the way of showing "a sequence of historical events" (*tartību l-ḥawādithi t-tārīkhiyyah*), because the Qur'ān does not say: this and this happened that year. Nevertheless, commentary and commentators of the Qur'ān reveal "historical times" which are, indirectly or implicitly, alluded to in the Qur'ān by using exegetical methods, one of which is "man exists within time". And we know this from Sūrah *ad-Dahr*, *Time*, which is also titled *al-Insān/The Man*. This is Sūrah 76 in the Qur'ān. The word *ad-dahr* is perhaps best translated as "the time that destroys," "the time in which everything passes." In this regard the meaning of *ʿaṣr* is similar to the word *ad-dahr*. As we will see, *ʿaṣr* is also the time (or *century*) that destroys, in it the people succumb, countries succumb, as do constructions and buildings. The name of the Sūrah *ad-Dahr* (which is also titled *al-Insān*) indicates that everything is transient, especially people, and it begins with the following words:

"Is there not a *period of time* when each human is nothing yet worth mentioning?"

From this *āyah*/verse of the Qur'ān we see that *ad-dahr* is divided into its *hīn-s*, or periods, because it clearly states *hīnun mina d-dahri*. The poet Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī said in one of his poems that “yesterday,” “today,” “tomorrow,” are just parts of the time (*ad-dahr*) in which everything disappears and passes:

*Three days – there, that is the time entire,  
Yesterday, today, tomorrow – nothing else!*

The message of the Qur'ān about *hīnun mina d-dahri* or “the period of time when a human being is nothing yet worth mentioning,” leads us to think that, although the Qur'ān never mentions fixed dates, historical epochs or eras, everything related to humans that was mentioned in the Qur'ān by itself signifies those epochs, those numerous histories, or numerous parallel times (*al-awqāt*) on earth.

The root (i.e. *w-q-t*) signifies time as specific human *time in the sequence* of certain events. In other words, that time which humans spend in “historic terms or periods” is mentioned in the Qur'ān at several points. If we go one by one, the word that is the closest to signifying “historical time” in the Qur'ān is *al-waqt*. This word in particular is mentioned at two points related to Satan/shayṭān Iblīs. Sūrah *al-Ḥijr* (15:38) claims that Satan has been able to make use of (historical or earthly) time to lead people astray “until the appointed Day” (*ilā yawmi l-waqtī l-ma'lūmī*). In Sūrah *Ṣād* (38:80) this identical point is mentioned. Sūrah *The Heights* (*al-A'rāf*, 7:187) also announces that at a certain *waqt* the Day of Judgement will be revealed, i.e. “He alone will reveal it when the time comes” (*lā yujallihā li-waqtihā illā hūwa*), which clearly implies the end of “historical times.” Moreover, one (eschatological) scene from Sūrah *The Emissaries* (*al-Mursalāt*, 77:11) shows that God's messengers (*ar-rusul*) will all be gathered to testify according to their *waqt* or time (in the order in which they appeared on earth), i.e. they will be *uqqitat*. At several points the Qur'ān also mentions *mīqāt*, or testifying for different events in this word that *happened in chronological order*, and in which people participated, in different contexts. The Qur'ān also mentions testifying in the hereafter, eschatological *testifying* on the appointed Day, e.g. in Sūrah

*The Inevitable (al-Wāqī'ah, 56:50, ilā miqāti yawmin ma'lūmin)* when people will be gathered (before God). Certainly, another very significant Qur'anic term is *mawāqīt*, signifying (many) times, or many appointed times. And Sūrah *The Cow (al-Baqarah, 2:189)* links time with new moons or *crescent moons (al-ahillah)*, stating that new moon can be used to determine time [of historical events], as well as the time for pilgrimage:

They ask you [O Prophet] about the phases of the moon.  
Say, 'They are a means for people to determine time and pilgrimage.'

The Qur'an (3:140) also precisely addresses "days" (*al-ayyām*) which are, in fact, *God's days*, although when combined with human action these *days become history*. The Qur'an says (3:140):

*Wa-tilka l-ayyāmu nudāwiluhā bayna n-nāsi*  
We alternate these days [of victory and defeat] among people.

When the Qur'an is read through the prism of this line/āyah, it is clear that civilizations and people of the past that the Qur'an speaks of are just "occurrences of God's days/time." Sūrah *Qāf* (50:12-14) mentions stepping on the stage of this life of many people, for example the people of Noah (*qawmu nūḥ*), then the people of ar-Rass (*wa-aṣḥābu r-rassi*), Thamūd, 'Ad, Pharaoh, the kinfolk of Lot (*wa-ikhwānu lūṭ*), the people of Shu'ayb (*wa-aṣḥābu l-aykah*), the people of Tubba' (*wa-qawmu tubba'i*). All of these examples are people, civilizations, generations who serve to make the point that it is they themselves define "periods," certain "times" and "epochs." As it is said on the pages of the Qur'an (e.g. 2:134), "that was a community that had already gone before" (*tilka ummatun qad khalat*). Sūrah *al-Hāqqah (The Reality, 69:24)* mentions "the days gone by," "the past" (*al-ayyāmu l-khāliyah*), and places emphasis on human transience.

The Qur'anic word *ummatun* is worthy of particular consideration. In addition to its most common meaning of a *nation* or *community*, also signifies *time*, an *epoch* in which people appear. We will see below that the Qur'an often mentions *qarn* or *qurūn* meaning *era*, or perhaps

century, but also as a word denoting *generation*, etc. For example, in Sūrah ṬāHā (20:51) “previous peoples” (*al-qurūnu l-ūlā*) are mentioned. Within the Qur’ān there are many words and sentences that signify times that are long gone, or epochs that are now lost in the depths of the past. Commentators of the Qur’ān often mention “people covered with dust” (*al-umamu l-gābirah*). The Western scholar of Islam, Franz Rosenthal, in his treatise *History and the Qur’ān* was among the first to note that in the Qur’ān it is usual to point to historical events as a warning to people about God and moral living. From the Qur’ān we indirectly see that its original listeners referred to the Qur’ān as ancient stories (*asāṭīr*), and blamed Muḥammad (pbuh) for telling them about these stories now. The syntagm *asāṭīru l-awwalīn* is mentioned, for example, in Sūrah The Cattle (*al-An‘ām*, 6:25) denoting “*ancient* fables or the tales of the *former* people.” According to Rosenthal, the Arabic word *asāṭīr* is equivalent to the Greek word *historia*. However, although these two words are similar, etymological similarity cannot be absolutely established. When the Qur’ān mentions *ancient times*, it mentions *antiquity* as a type of warning or reminder to humankind about transience. On the pages of the Qur’ān we see quite clearly that the very mentioning of the “long ago days” (*al-ayyāmu l-khāliyah*) serves as the warning for people about the nature of their actions, and encourages them to do moral deeds.

The specific references to *people of the past* in the Qur’ān includes negative stances toward “mythical” perceptions of the past, because “stories of ancient people” (*asāṭīru l-awwalīn*) are always mentioned in the Qur’ān with disapproval. However, the Qur’ān also mentions *qaṣaṣ* or “stories,” “storytelling,” which have moral messages in a mostly positive light. Sūrah Yūsuf (12:3) is thus deemed to be one of the most beautiful stories/narratives (*aḥsanu l-qaṣaṣ*) in the Qur’ān. Etymologically, the Qur’anic word *qaṣaṣ* is rooted in *qaṣṣa – yaquṣṣu*, which means “following a trace” that leads into *ancient past*. Also, the Qur’anic word *ḥadīth*, which means news about *the past*, or narratives, or stories about the past, is positively referred to as opposed to telling *legends*, *pointless tales* and *myths* (*asāṭīr*). The Qur’ān (e.g. in ṬāHā, 20:9) mentions “the story/news” about Musa (*ḥadīthu mūsā*), then the Sūrah *aḍ-Ḍāriyāt* (51:24) mentions the story/news about “Abraham’s honoured guests” (*ḥadīthu ḍayfi ibrahīma*) etc.

From the Qur'ān commentaries we sometimes learn about the ways of *historical* concretization of certain Qur'anic terms for time, i.e. we learn about context that “historically” explains a certain part of the Qur'ān. For instance, “the day when the two armies met” (*yawma l-taqā l-jam'āni*) is mentioned in Sūrah *Family of Imrān/Āli 'Imrān* (3:155), and it refers to the Battle of Uḥud (in year 625 since the birth of ʿĪsā al-Masīḥ). This is suggested by aṭ-Ṭabarī, and az-Zamakhsharī is unambiguous about it as well (I:457) when he says *yawma uḥud*, “that was at the Battle of Uḥud.”

The Qur'ān (Sūrah *The Spoils of War/al-Anfāl*, 8:41) also mentions *yawmu l-furqān*, and az-Zamakhsharī (II:211) claims that those words refer to the Battle of Badr (*yawmu badr*). Therefore, in this context *yawm* literally means *war* or *battle*. It is not uncommon for historians to translate ancient the Arabic syntagm *ayyāmu l-'arab* as “Arab battles,” or “Arab wars.”

The proof that the Qur'ān makes its readers and listeners aware of historical times and epochs is by way of the syntagm *aṣ-ṣuḥufu l-ʿulā* which is, for instance, mentioned in Sūrah *TāHā* (20:133). *Aṣ-ṣuḥufu l-ʿulā* literally translates to “ancient scriptures” or “God’s Scriptures delivered to the early peoples.” The Qur'ān refers to the Books of God delivered to Ibrāhīm and Mūsā with term *ṣuḥuf*.

The Qur'ān encourages people to have the right perception of ancient times when it mentions that “the examples of [their] predecessors disappeared (*maḍā mathalu l-awwalīn*), e.g. in the Sūrah *The Ornaments of Gold* (*az-Zuḥruf*, 43:8). Also interesting is the Qur'anic reference to the fact that “the practice of the former people” (*maḍat sunnatu l-awwalīn*) is gone, i.e. they were destroyed because of the way they behaved (cf. Sūrah *The Spoils of War/al-Anfāl*, 8:38). The Qur'anic syntagm “the tradition/custom of our predecessors” (*khuluqu l-awwalīn*) is also noteworthy (cf. Sūrah *The Poets/ash-Shu'arā'*, 26:137). Therefore, the Qur'ān does not always present the ancient peoples with approval. On the contrary, “examples” (*mathal*), “practices” (*sunnat*) and “traditions” (*khuluq*) of those people are subjected to fierce condemnation and “criticism” in the Qur'ān. What can be safely said is that the Qur'ān praises some individuals among the ancient peoples, it praises honorable families – some of those were families of prophets. Within the Qur'ān there is a number of

stories about peoples: *qawmu nūḥ*, *qawmu fir'awn*, *qawmu mūsā*, *qawmu ibrahīm*, *qawmu yūnus*, *qawmu hūd*, *qawmu lūṭ*, *qawmu ṣāliḥ*, etc., and all of these are, in fact, also stories about specific times that the Qur'ān is referring to.

However, it is also clear that one period from the past of the human-kind is emphasized by the Qur'ān, the period of *jāhiliyyah*, though its beginning and end is not demarcated (doxographically) in the Qur'ān. There are a number of those who tried to translate that word (*jāhiliyyah*) adequately. English translators say it is “the age of Arab pagan ignorance, or simply “Age of Ignorance.” German translations of the Qur'ān translate that word as *der Zeit der Unwissenheit*, while Latin dictionaries usually translate the word *jāhiliyyah* as *paganismus Arabum* while sometimes also offering an explanation – “the period/time before Muḥammad” (*tempus ante Muhammedem*). In the Qur'ān, this period of *jāhiliyyah* is something that is fiercely condemned and rejected. For instance, Sūrah *Family of Imran* (Āli 'Imrān, 3:154) mentions “the thoughts of [pre-Islamic] ignorance” (*ẓannu l-jāhiliyyah*) as something that should be rejected. Also, Sūrah *The Table Spread* (*al-Mā'idah*, 5:50) mentions “the judgment of [pre-Islamic] ignorance” or “pagan judgment” (*ḥukmu l-jāhiliyyah*) with indignation, while Sūrah *The Victory* (*al-Faṭḥ*, 48:26) mentions “the pride of [pre-Islamic] ignorance” (*ḥamiyyatu l-jāhiliyyah*) with condemnation. Sūrah *The Combined Forces* (*al-Aḥzāb*, 33:33) mentions “old” or “pre-Islamic *jāhiliyyah*” (*al-jāhiliyyatu l-ūlā*) as something that should be discarded, and something not to be followed.

As it is visible from several points in the Qur'ān, the times of the past are irretrievable, and the only thing left to do is to draw a *moral lesson* from those times. In this regard one Arab poet said:

*I've become such that I cannot bring back the past,  
Just as a milker cannot bring the milk back into the udder!*

#### 4. Calendar (*at-taqwīm*) as the Time of People's External Duration

When it comes to the calendar in the Qur'ān, Sūrah *The Repentance* (*at-Tawba*, 9:36) announces “the number of months (*ash-shuhūr*) ordained

by God is twelve—in God’s Record...” Furthermore, the Qur’ān indicates that this *time in the calendar* is related to humans, and in a way human beings are, somehow biologically, in the time of the calendar. For example, the Qur’ān points out in the Sūrah *The Wind-Curved Sandhills* (*al-Aḥqāf*, 46:15) that “[the period of] bearing and weaning” of people “is thirty months.” *Ḥamluhū* (the time a person spends in the mother’s womb) and *fiṣāluhū* (the period of *breastfeeding*) are the first or earliest two human *durations* in time, and the Qur’ān mentions them in a distinctive way, by saying that their time span covers the period of thirty months. Additionally, the Qur’ān mentions *summer* (*aṣ-ṣayf*) as well as *winter* (*ash-shitā’*) in the part of the Sūrah *Quraysh* (106:2) about the travels of the Quraysh, compatriots and contemporaries of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) who traveled in the winter and in the summer (*riḥlata sh-shitā’i wa-ṣ-ṣayfi*). When it comes to the calendar, the Qur’ān also mentions day (*yawm*), two days (*yawmayn*) or days (*ayyām*) many times. Ibn Manẓūr (*Lisānu l-‘arab*, 6:1021) provides the following definitions of the word *yawm* (day):

Firstly, day is the time lasting from sunrise to sunset (*al-yawmu min ṭulū’i sh-shamsi ilā gurūbihā*).

Secondly, day means time in general – time in the absolute sense (*wa-l-yawmu huwa l-waqtu muṭlaqan*).

Thirdly, day signifies the period from noon until noon (*wa-huwa kadhālika mina l-hājirati ila l-hājiri*).

The Qur’ān also, at multiple points, refers to *year* as a period of time in the calendar. There are several Qur’ānic words that signify year, such as *‘ām*, *sanah*, and *ḥawl*. Thus, *‘ām* indicates “the change of time/year that comes with its periods/parts,” cf. Ibn Manẓūr (4:933). In the Sūrah *The Cow* (*al-Baqarah*, 2:259) there is a parable about a man whom “Allah caused to die for *a hundred years*, and then brought him back to life.” This reference to “hundred years” in fact denotes one turning point of *hundred years* that the Qur’ān also refers to with the word *qarn*, as we will see later on.

The Qur'anic word *sanah* also means *year*, but this word itself also has/includes the meaning of *aging*, *passing*, etc. The Qur'ān mentions (*al-Baqarah*, 2:96) how each human “wishes to live a thousand years” (*law yu'ammuru alfa sanatin*). Also, in the Sūrah *The Spider* (*al-'Ankabūt*, 29:14) the period of “a thousand years, less fifty” is mentioned, which is how long Noah/Nūḥ remained among his people. The Sūrah *The Ascending Stairways* (*al-Ma'ārij*, 70:4) also mentions one impressively long and indescribably long-lasting “God's Day” which lasts fifty thousand years:

*The angels and the [holy] spirit will ascend to Him on a Day fifty thousand years in length.*

The Qur'anic word *ḥawlun* also means *year*, and etymologically (cf. Ibn Manẓūr, I:758) this word refers to the passage of time:

“The word *ḥawlun* means year (*sanatun*), because it passes, i.e. it is running out...”

The Qur'anic word *qarn*, or its plural form *qurūn*, which means “ten years” and “century or hundred years,” can also signify time in the calendar (cf. Ibn Manẓūr, V:74). However, according to Ibn Manẓūr, the main semantic determinant of the word *qarn* is human “generation.” Thus, what the word *qarn* essentially signifies is that new generations are appearing over the time: *Al-Qarnu al-ummatu ba'da l-ummati*. In the Sūrah *ṬāHā* (20:51) the word *qurūn* has precisely this meaning:

*“And what about previous peoples?” – Pharaoh asked.*

The important day of the week that the Qur'ān mentions (62:9) is *Friday* (*yawmu l-jumu'ah*). Moreover, chapter 62 of the Qur'ān is also titled “Friday” (*al-Jumu'ah*). The Qur'ān also mentions *Saturday* (*as-sabtu*), for example, in 2:65.

The month of Ramadan (*shahru ramaḍān*) is mentioned only once (2:185), while four *sacred months* (*minhā arba'atun ḥurum*) are mentioned



in the Sūrah *Repentance/at-Tawbah* (9:36), but the sacred months are not listed by name in the Qur'ān.

## 5. Movement in Time (*al-ḥarakah fī z-zaman*), Time as a Dynamic Part of Eternity

The Qur'ān describes the movement of time and movement of natural phenomena and celestial bodies using impressive and vivid words. According to the Qur'ān, dawn breathes – “the dawn takes its first breath” (*wa-ṣ-ṣubḥi idhā tanaffas*), cf. *The Overthrowing (at-Takwīr, 81:18)*. And the dawn “brightens”, i.e. it “appears,” “shows” (*wa-ṣ-ṣubḥi idhā asfara*), as it is described in the Sūrah *The Cloaked One (al-Muddaththir, 74:34)*. The Qur'ān (81:17) also describes the image of the night “as it falls” (*wa-l-layli idhā 'as'asa*) or as it passes, etc. Essentially, the space and universe that the Qur'ān describes are in the state of abundant movement.

But, just as the things in the sky *appear*, they also *pass* and *disappear*. And that affects time. One parable about the spiritual maturation of the Prophet Abraham/Ibrāhīm indirectly addresses cosmic time that is passing. Specifically, according to the Qur'ān (6:75-78) “wonders of the heavens and the earth” (*malakūtu s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*) were shown to Ibrāhīm. When the night grew dark, he saw a star and thought “this is my Lord,” but “when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set’” (*lā uḥibbu l-āfilīn*). Then the moon appeared, but it also set (*afala*) and Ibrāhīm was disappointed. And when he saw the sun shining, he hoped that its greatness and brightness will last, but, eventually, the sun set (*afalat*) as well. This was the sign for Ibrāhīm that idolatry or astrolatry cannot inform people about the Eternal Source, about God, The One and Only, who is present in the occurrences, but also surpasses and transcends them. It is clear from this parable that the transience of time is particularly visible in the sky that humans are able to look at each day and each night and immerse themselves into its mysteries, and into the mysteries of time.

After all, in the Sūrah *The Beneficent (ar-Raḥmān, 55:26)* the Qur'ān says: “Every being on earth is bound to *perish (fān)*.” And, the following verse reads: “Only your Lord Himself will remain [forever]” (*wa-yabqā wajhu rabbika*). Let us remember that *al-Bāqī*, meaning *The Everlasting*,

is one of the names of God. Additionally, in the Qur'ān *transience* of everything on earth is clearly shown through *passage of time*, as well as through different transience or movement of space.

Movement in the Qur'ān is mentioned in relation to weather occurrences, such as the alternate *movement of wind* and *movement of clouds* (*taṣrīfu r-riyāḥi wa-s-saḥābi*) in Sūrah 2:164, as well as in relation to the movement of the moon and the sun. Sūrah *The Beneficent/ar-Raḥmān* (55:5) mentions the movement of the sun and the moon according to *ḥusbān* or *precise timing* – time calculated in advance – across the appointed paths of the sun and the moon (*ash-shamsu wa-l-qamaru bi-ḥusbānin*).

At different occasions the Qur'ān mentions the sun and the moon, and in the Sūrah *The Cattle (al-An'ām, 6:96)* there is a particularly significant and direct indication that the sun and the moon are like the hands of two clocks in the large sky (*wa-sh-shamsa wa-l-qamara ḥusbānan*): “And he [made] the sun and the moon [to travel] with precision.”

In the same verse the Qur'ān indicates that God “has made the night for rest” (*wa-ja'ala l-layla sakanan*), and that very same verse contains vivid words about God being the one who “causes the dawn to break” (*fāliq l-iṣbāḥi*). This portion of the Qur'ān moves the reader to reflect on the “creation of time.” Notably, the same word – *fāliq* – is used to refer to God who causes seeds to sprout, as in, God is “the One who causes seeds and fruit stones to sprout” (*fāliq l-ḥabbi wa n-nawā*), cf. Sūrah 6:95. The message of the Qur'ān in these portions appears self-evident: time itself is created and moves, just like seeds and fruit stones are created, and with their growth (i.e. ripening and aging) they are moving through periods of time. It is via the movement of time, that is, by movement of celestial bodies that are the closest to the Earth – Islamic “prayer” phases during the day and night are determined. The Qur'ān mentions the sun and the moon in relation to *ritual* obligations of people, and this Qur'anic demand is clearly stated (41:37):

“Do not prostrate to the sun or the moon, but prostrate to God!”

Regarding the *movement of time*, this contains a monotheistic message of the Qur'ān to people: The very movement of the sun and the

moon is “their (solar and lunar) prayer” to God. When people perform prayer (*ṣalāh*), when they pray, they do it *with* the sun, *with* the moon, and not because of the sun or because of the moon. People perform an exceptional kind of congregational prayer *with* them – before God. In other words, the sun and the moon are praying along with people, and people are praying with them.

As previously mentioned, according to the Qur’ān, the sun and the moon are, among other things, also divine (or heavenly) ‘instruments’ for measuring *time and hours*. Specifically, according to the movement of the sun (that is, according to the movement of the Earth around the sun) the time of the five daily prayers is determined, and according to the movement of the moon the beginnings of Ramadan and the two Eids (Bayrams) are determined. The *movement of time* in the Qur’ān is primarily linked to the movement of the sun (or of the Earth) and the moon.

“As for the moon, We have ordained [precise] phases (*manāzil*) for it!” – (*Wa-l-qamara qaddarnāhu manāzila...*)

In Sūrah Yāsīn (36:39), there is a reminder that the movement of time is actually visible from the Earth itself “because of the surface of the moon.” And “the sun travels for its fixed term.” (*wa-sh-shamsu tajrī li-mustaqarrin lahā*). Sūrah Yāsīn (36:38) also points to the positions of the sun in relation to the Earth as a distinct *source of the movement of time* on the Earth. In the Qur’ān, the entire universe is described as a type of continuous movement. Sūrah Yāsīn (36:40) says that “each is travelling in an orbit of their own” (*wa-kullun fī falakin yasbaḥūn*), i.e. everything is moving in space, and the space itself is moving, and so does the time. Furthermore, the Qur’ān (51:47) clearly announces: “We built the universe with [great] might, and We are certainly expanding [it].” (*Wa-innā lamūsi’ūn*). However, in the end there will be *the end of the time, as well as the end of space*, and the end of the movement in them.

In Sūrah *The Prophets* (*al-Anbiyā’*, 21:104) the Qur’ān speaks further about this by describing a fascinating image that illustrates that God will, in *one day* (*yawma*), “roll up the heavens” (*naṭwī s-samā’a*), just like “a scroll of writings” (*ka-ṭayyi s-sijilli li l-kutubi*)! The end of the universe

as we know it will come, but this ending, according to the same verse of the Qur'ān, will in fact represent a new beginning:

“Just as We produced the first creation, [so] shall We reproduce it.”

The Qur'ān repeatedly talks about *ephemerality* as a fundamental feature of time. Human beings are particularly reminded that they and their societies and civilizations are visited by time that brings changes. There are highs and lows, time brings along prosperity, but it also brings great misfortunes, and poor circumstances.

Sūrah *Joseph* (Yūsuf, 12:47 and further) mentions planting “[grain] for seven consecutive years” (*tazra'ūna sab'a sinīna da'aban*) or the times of prosperity of communities of people. The same part of the Qur'ān also talks about some kind of cyclical change that results in “seven years of great hardship” (*sab'un shidādun*). That *great hardship* practically depletes and exhausts all things of culture and civilization that have been secured during the times of prosperity. During “difficult epochs” human society abandons many moral principles. Indeed, just like elsewhere, the tone of the Qur'ān here is hopeful and optimistic. After “difficult times and years” good times will come again, that is “a year in which people will receive abundant rain” (*'āmun fihi yugāthu n-nāsu*), a year in which people “will press [oil and wine]” (*wa-fihi ya'sirūn*). Obviously, “pressing wine” is a reference to *prosperous epochs* that a society goes through. Indeed, the entire Qur'ān can be read as a warning to people and their communities that time is affecting them with its changes and unpredictability. The commentators of the Qur'ān refer to the ephemerality of time as *ṣurūfu d-dahr*.

## 6. Eschatological Time (*zamanu l-ākhirah*)

As the eternal book, the Qur'ān contains many terms and expressions for the time of the Afterlife, eschatological periods (or *eschatological age*), or for Future Time of the Hereafter, which will (according to the Qur'anic “order of things and times”) ensue after the end of the world. Here, we again find numerous “days” here, i.e. numerous references to God's “days of the Qur'ān.” The most dominant term or a way of referring to “the time of

hereafter” is “The Last Day” or *al-yawmu l-ākhir*. In the Qur’ān, *al-yawmu l-ākhir* is mentioned very frequently (it appears more than 20 times), and it is usually translated as “the next life” (English translators mostly opt for *the hereafter*, *the world to come*, *the last day*, while German translators translate it as, for example, *der jüngsten Tag*). Those commentators who translate syntagm *al-yawmu l-ākhir* as “the last day,” understand that all the existing time can be divided into two general portions: a) The Time of This World, b) The Time of the Next World. In other words, there are only two, long or large days: the Day of This World, and the Day of the Next World. However, when the textual record of the Qur’ān is analyzed, it becomes clear that in contrast to the expression *al-yawmu l-ākhir* (which is mentioned frequently), the Qur’ān does not mention the expression *al-yawmu l-awwal* which could, for example, describe this world or the life before death.

What is mentioned in the Qur’ān, in the sense of the general division of all the time into two parts (the time of this world and the time of the next world), is very interesting, and there is specific reference to: a) *al-‘ulā* and b) *al-ākhirah*. *Al-‘ulā* literally means “the first world,” while *al-ākhirah* means “the next world,” that is, “the life to come.” In Sūrah, *The Morning Hours* (*aḍ-Ḍuḥā*, 93:4) it is clearly said:

“And the next life is certainly far better for you than this one!”  
(That is: “the next world (the future world) is better for you than the first world (this world”).

Az-Zamakhsharī (IV:447) offers an interpretation of these “two great days.” The first day is considered to be “the period of life in This World” (*al-yawmu l-ladhī huwa muddatu ‘umri d-dunyā*). And the second day is the Day of Resurrection (*wa-l-ākharu yawmu l-qiyāmyah*), according to az-Zamakhsharī. According to the Qur’ān, between this life and next life comes *death*, or *ajal*. The Qur’ān mentions the word *ajal* in the sense of some *period*, *epoch*, for example Sūrah *The Thunder* (*ar-Ra’d*, 13:38) announces: “Every destined matter has a [set] time!” (*li-kulli ajalīn kitāb*). This can mean that every human period has Divine Revelation (in the book), but it can also mean that every period is determined, predefined, written. Additionally, at several points in the Qur’ān *ajal* is mentioned

in the sense of reaching a certain *term*. For instance, procedures pertaining to divorce include certain *terms* that the Qur'ān calls *ajal*, and the same goes for *appointed terms* for paying off debts, etc. According to the Qur'ān, each person individually has their own *appointed term* (or predetermined time) at which their life will end in this world, and every society or community also has their time at which their life in this world will end. Specifically, according to the Qur'ān (3:145), people die at the destined time (*kitāban mu'ajjalan*). The same goes for communities, each has its own end or *ajal* (*wa-li-kulli ummatin ajal*), cf. Sūrah *al-A'rāf* (7:34). Furthermore, from the Sūrah *The Thunder* (*ar-Ra'd*, 13:2) it is inferred that everything in the sky will die – that is also the case with the sun and the moon, which are orbiting for their appointed *ajal* (until their death, end, appointed term).

*Barzakh* is also an important Qur'anic term that is related to eschatology (eschatological times). It is particularly distinctive because in the Sūrah *The Believers* (*al-Mu'minūn*, 23:100) *barzakh* is mentioned as a partition, but also as a state, a place, as well as eschatological time or time of afterlife,

“And there is a barrier behind them until the Day they are resurrected.”

When interpreting this point in the Qur'ān, Ismā'il Ḥaqqī Burūsawī (VI:106) offered the possibility of interpreting *barzakh* as a *period of time*. He referred to the work *at-Ta'wīlātu an-Najmiyyatu* by 'Alā'u d-Dawlat as-Samnānī (654/1255), which states that *barzakh* “lasts from the death until the Resurrection, that is [*barzakh* is some time] between this world and next world.” Ismā'il Ḥaqqī Burūsawī also added that this is not the only *barzakh*, because there is also *barzakh* that lasts between the world of pre-images/pre-characters/ideas in which souls of this world of material genesis also reside.

The mosaic of eschatological aspects of time that the Qur'ān mentions also includes *yawmu l-qiyāmah*, cf. *al-Baqarah*, 2:85. *Yawmu l-qiyāmah* actually means “the Day of Resurrection,” but it is also interpreted as “the Day of Reckoning” at the time of God's judgment, or the Day of Judgment.

However, the God's judgment is more specifically referred to with another *eschatological day* in the Qur'ān, it is termed *yawmu d-dīn*, which literally means "the day of faith." And that is in fact the day when everyone's faith will be clearly judged and seen. *Yawmu l-ba'th*, which is mentioned in the Sūrah *The Byzantines/The Romans/ar-Rūm* (30:56), literally means "the Day of Resurrection." The Day of Judgment is also mentioned in the Qur'ān (*Hūd*, 11:84) as "an overwhelming Day" (*yawm muḥīt*), i.e. the day when everything will be subjected to Divine Judgment. The Qur'ān also mentions a *time of preexistence* (cf. *al-A'rāf*, 7:172), when God heard humankind testify that He is their Only Creator and Lord.

"Am I not your Lord?"

They replied, "Yes, You are! We testify."

## 7. The Time of Communities or Epochs of the People (*zamanu l-umam*)

At first glance, it is as if throughout the Qur'ān there is one constant reminder: You, people, are *ephemeral*, all that is yours is *fleeting*. Only God is everlasting. In the Qur'ān *ephemerality* is also pointed out with the word which is derived from the *z-w-l* root, meaning *to pass, disappear, cease*. For instance, the Qur'ān declares (cf. *Originator/Fāṭir*, 35:41) that God keeps the entire earth and the sky from *disappearing*, from *coming to an end*, from *ceasing* to exist:

"Indeed, God [alone] keeps the heavens and the earth from *falling apart*."

"If they were to *fall apart*, none but Him could hold them up."

The aforementioned Sūrah *The Heights* (*al-A'rāf*, 7:34) says that "for each community there is an appointed term" (*wa-li-kulli ummatin ajal*) and,

"When their time arrives, they can neither delay it for a moment, nor could they advance it."

The usage of the word *ummatun* in the Qur'ān is especially noteworthy, in its primary meaning of *community*, but also in other meanings – and one of these is the meaning of *time*. We have only listed some of the meanings of the word *ummatun* in the Qur'ān that are referring to time. *Ummah* denotes one long period of time: “[Finally,] the surviving ex-prisoner remembered [Joseph] after a long time...” (*Yūsuf*, 12:45).

Furthermore, *ummaḥ* also denotes determined, appointed time: “And if We delay their punishment until an appointed time...” (*Hūd*, 11:8).

## 8. Time in Nature (*zamanu ṭ-ṭabī'ah*)

On multiple points, and for different reasons, the Qur'ān mentions changes in nature caused not just by change of seasons, but also by weather – by changes that are brought by wind, storm, rain, floods, etc. As it is evident, the Qur'ān mentions (*Sūrah Quraysh*, 106:2) *winter* (*ash-shitā'u*) and *summer* (*aṣ-ṣayfu*), and traveling during these seasons. The relationship between people and the seasons is thus addressed directly. Certainly, at different points on the pages of the Qur'ān (e.g. *al-Hajj*, 22:5) we find lines about the emergence of *spring*, about how “the earth begins to stir [to life] (*ihtazzat*) and “swell” (*rabat*), producing different kinds of plants.

The *Sūrah al-Kahf* (18:45) mentions dried plants or “chaff”, which is then “scattered by the wind” (*hashīman taḍrūhu r-riyāḥ*). In the parts of the Qur'ān such as this one the images of *fall* are both conspicuous and impressively striking. Time in nature is also addressed in *Sūrah The Cattle* (*al-An'ām*, 6:99), where it is emphasized that rain, which God “sends down from the sky—causing all kinds of plants to grow” (*anzala mina s-samā'i mā'an*), is in fact the main cause of changes in nature. With the help of rain green stalks (*khaḍīran*) emerge, and from them “clustered grain” (*ḥubban mutarākiban*) is brought forth. Other examples include palm trees (*an-nakhl*), clusters of dates (*ṭal'uhā*), and bountiful gardens (*jannāt*), with all kinds of yield – grapes (*a'nāb*), olives (*az-zaytūn*) and pomegranates (*ar-rummān*). And people are urged to look at the change of time visible on this very fruit:

“Look at their fruit as it yields and ripens!”



Briefly, *time in nature* in the Qur'ān is described like intense movement of nature and its phenomena. In other words, even in nature everything is fleeting, disappearing and starting again. In the middle of nature's time communities and civilizations appear and disappear – that is the message of the Qur'ān. In this regard it should be mentioned that Sūrah 46 in the Qur'ān is titled *al-Aḥqāf* which means “wind-curved sandhills,” “sand dunes.” This title is a constant reminder that everything that is human on earth resembles sand dunes that are shaped by invisible wind constantly and anew. *Invisible wind* is like the *invisible time* in which communities of people and civilizations appear and disappear. At many points the Qur'ān says that the good deeds of people are that which is everlasting, e.g. in Sūrah *Mary* (*Maryam*, 19:76) good deeds are mentioned (*al-bāqiyātu ṣ-ṣāliḥātu*).

## 9. Time of Rituals and Orders (*zamanu l- 'ibādāti wa l-aḥkāmī*)

The Qur'ān also mentions, in different contexts, the time for performing religious (Islamic) rituals. Sometimes the pages of the Qur'ān contain entire clusters of *āyāhs*, or their parts, which are referring to “times for rituals” in Islam. In this regard one very distinctive place in the Qur'ān is 2:187. According to this *āyah*, people have to “complete the fast until nightfall” (*atimmū ṣ-ṣiyāma ilā l-layli*). In addition, *daybreak* is mentioned like the boundary up until which it is allowed to eat during the nights of Ramaḍān before starting a fast:

“[You may] eat and drink until you see the light of dawn breaking the darkness of night!”

Also, this *āyah* (2:187) mentions that the nights of Ramaḍān, or the nights of the month of fasting (*laylata ṣiyām*), are the time in which it is allowed to be intimate with spouses. In the previous parts of this discussion, we have seen some parts of the Qur'ān that refer to the movement of the sun and the moon. The Qur'ān clearly indicates that the movement of the sun (i.e. the movement of the Earth), and positions of the sun in the sky relative to the Earth, are used to determine the time of *namāz*

(or Islamic prayers), while according to the movement of the moon the beginning and the end of the month of Ramaḍān is determined.

## 10. Time of the Cosmos, Time of the Magnificent Universe (*zamanu l-kawn*)

In different contexts and for different reasons the Qurʾān refers to the universe or cosmos, and to the magnitude of the image that it evokes in people. One of the indirect messages of the Qurʾān is: *Cosmic time* is best measured according to the movement of the celestial bodies. The Qurʾān itself mentions the universe multiple times, and it also includes Sūrahs: “The Star” (*an-Najm*), “The Mansions of the Stars” (*al-Burūj*), “The Sun” (*ash-Shams*), “The Moon” (*al-Qamar*), “The Nightcommer” (*aṭ-Ṭāriq*).

Also, the Qurʾān mentions “heavenly paths” or “space paths.” “[And] by the heavens in their marvellous design/with their marvellous orbits!”, as it is said in the Sūrah *The Winnowing Winds* (*aḍ-Ḍāriyāt*, 51:7). It is also significant that the Qurʾān mentions the Sirius star (*ash-Shiʿrā*) in the Sūrah *The Star* (*an-Najm*, 53:49).

Sūrah *The Inevitable* (*al-Wāqīʿah*, 56:75) contains one magnificent Divine oath, where God swears by “the positions of the stars” (*bi-mawāqīʿi n-nujūm*) or by “the setting places of the stars.” Humankind has used those positions since ancient times, and continues to use them today, to look for their spacial paths in this world (in the Arabic language this orienting by using stars is described by the word *ihtidāʾ* or “guiding according to the movement of the stars,” which is taken from the Qurʾān: “...the stars as your guide through the darkness of land and sea” (*li-tahtadū bihā fī ḡulumāti l-barri wa-l-baḥri* cf. *al-Anʿām*, 6:97). Orienting oneself by the stars actually means orienting by different times that are perceived from the sky. There are reasons for that and the Qurʾān (in Sūrah *al-Maʿārij*, 70:40) thus mentions many easts (*al-mashāriq*), many wests (*al-maḡārib*).

Practically, in the Qurʾān all of this serves to point out inconceivably and incredibly long time periods, which cannot be measured and expressed in units of time that people are used to (i.e. those that are conventionally used to measure time). Thus, in Sūrah *Family of Imran* (*Āli ʿImrān*, 3:30) the Qurʾān speaks of *amad* or “a long span of time”

(*amadan ba'īdan*). The word *ḥuqub* in the Qur'ān also signifies a “long time,” or a “very long period of time” (cf. *The Cave/al-Kahf*, 18:60).

## 11. Time of Angels, Jinns and of Other Worlds (*zamanu l-malā'ikati wa-l-jinni wa-l-'awālimi l-ukhrā*)

In the Qur'ān, the time of spiritual worlds is mentioned only indirectly. In contrast to the news about the creation of people, on the pages of the Qur'ān there is no detailed “information” about the creation of spiritual worlds (*malā'ikah*, *jānn*, *shayāṭīn*, etc). It is as if the Qur'ān is telling us: Spiritual worlds are there, with you and around you, just like sky, earth, stars etc. are there around you. And just like the sky, the stars, the earth last longer than people, spiritual worlds last longer than them as well. Certainly, at several points in the Qur'ān we can see that the time of spiritual worlds is associated with the movement of those worlds. Therefore, the angels and Jibril (Gabriel) are “ascending to God” on the day which lasts fifty thousand years (cf. *al-Ma'ārij*, 70:4)! The words “fifty thousand years” (*khamṣūna alfa sanah*) refer to the years in a sense in which people count them here, on the earth. Sūrah *al-Qadr* (97:1-5) also links one “human” night with one thousand months (*alfu shahr*), and, at the same time, it says that “the angels and Gabriel” descend to the earth in that night which is worth more than “thousand months.” Other examples of time being mentioned in the Qur'ān are clearly indicating that the Qur'ān acknowledges a countless number of time perceptions and perspectives. And just as the measurements of movements of celestial bodies differ in billions of ways, so do their times differ in billions of ways.

## 12. Blessed Times, Chosen Times, Special Days and Nights (*az-zamanu l-mubāraku*)

The Qur'ān mentions blessed times, for instance the reference to “the blessed night” (*laylatun mubārakatun*) when the Qur'ān was revealed (cf. *The Smoke/ad-Duḥān*, 44:3) is certainly important. In addition to this, the Qur'ān also mentions “The Night of Power or Glory” (*laylatu l-qadr*) which is described in the Sūrah *al-Qadr* (97). This chapter contains

explicit gradations of value of different times when it says that “the night of *qadr* is better than a thousand months” (*khayrun min alfi shahrin*).

In addition to these parts of the Qur’ān that mention “blessed night,” as well as the night *al-Qadr*, it is necessary to remember a reference to “the month of Ramaḍān” (*shahru ramaḍān*), cf. *al-Baqarah* (2:185), and to the sacred months (*al-ashhuru l-ḥurum*), cf. *The Repentance (at-Tawbah)*, 9:5). Certainly, *yawmu l-ḥajji l-akbar*, which represents a direct reference to “the day of the greater pilgrimage” or Eid al-Aḍḥā (cf. *at-Tawbah*, 9:3), is also one of the blessed times that the Qur’ān mentions.

### 13. Time of Interpersonal Business, Appointed Terms of Interpersonal Relations (*zamanu l-mu’āmalāt*)

Time (especially that measured by the calendar) is an important factor in interpersonal relations, business, and communication. On the pages of the Qur’ān there is a great deal of moral advice, instructions, as well as directly given commands, that people – both women and men equally – have to comply with different appointed terms in their interpersonal relations and communication. For instance, Sūrah *al-Baqarah* (2:282) clearly proclaims: debts and loans must be committed to writing (*fak-tubūh*), and what also has to be stated is the precise *deadline* for paying debt(s) (*ilā ajalin musammā*). In addition, in the part of the Qur’ān from which the commandments regarding ritual obligations are derived it is said those who did not fast for a valid reason (such as illness, journey, etc.) should be “[fasting] an equal number of days [after Ramadan]” (*fa-’iddatun min ayyāmin ukhar*) (cf. 2:185).

Furthermore, a woman whose husband dies is ordered to observe a *waiting period* (*’iddah*) “of four months and ten days” (*arba’ata ashhurin wa-’ashran*) before getting married again, cf. 2:234.

These and other appointed terms in interpersonal relations and business – which are specified by the Qur’ān – are thoroughly covered in fiqh books. Certainly, the pages of the Qur’ān are showing that it is very important to comply with the appointed terms. For instance, the Prophet Shu’ayb (cf. *The Stories/al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:27-28) suggested to the Prophet Mūsā, his future son-in-law, to stay in his service “for eight

years” (*thamāniya hijaj*), and added that if he completes ten, it will be fine! In this part of the Qur’ān, it is clear that Mūsā carefully considers “the two terms” (*al-ajalayn*) which are suggested to him by Shu’ayb.

## 14. Appointed Times/Places – Agreed Upon Times That Will Occur at Certain Places (*zamanu l-maw’id*)

This is a special category of time that is referred to in the Qur’ān. Specifically, several parts of this book mention the times that are pre-arranged between people, and those times/terms are to take place at predetermined places. There is one very strong suggestion that this is the matter of merging of holy times/terms with holy places.

Sūrah *The Heights* (*al-A’rāf*, 7:143) reminds us that Mūsā “came at the appointed time” (*wa-lammā jā’a mūsā li-mīqātinā*), that is, Mūsā showed up to this holy *appointment* (*mīqāt*). The same Sūrah (7:155) mentions that Mūsā was once found at a sublime appointment with “seventy men from among his people” (*wa-khtāra mūsā qawmahū sab’īna rajulan li-mīqātinā*). As we can see plainly, here the word *mīqāt* (*appointment*, meeting at the specific time) is mentioned again. According to the Qur’ān, one of such *appointed times* is also the time of Hajj. It is clearly pointed out in Sūrah *The Cow* (*al-Baqarah*, 2:197): “[Commitment to] pilgrimage is made in appointed months.” – (*al-ḥajju ashhurun ma’lūmāt*). Let us note once again that appointed time in the Qur’ān is almost always mentioned along with holy place, e.g. in 2:198 the time of “returning from Arafat” toward Mecca, is immediately followed by a duty of pilgrims to “praise God near the sacred place” (*inda l-mash’ari l-ḥarām*). Also significant is the example of one of the Prophet Mūsā’s appointments, which took place (according to Sūrah *ṬāHā*, 20:12) in “the sacred valley of Ṭuwā” (*bi-l-wādi l-muqaddasi ṭuwan*). As we can clearly see, here *holy time* is again linked with *holy place*.

## 15. Relative Time (*az-zamanu n-nisbiyyu*)

Of course, when turning the pages of the Qur’ān we should accept, and know, that the Qur’ān speaks about time not just from a human perspective

of *time in the calendar*, but also from a “Divine perspective.” Human existence in time is impermanent, the days that dawn for people are not the result of their work, their mind or mental and spiritual efforts. Those days, just like time in general, simply come to them from the depths of the Divine creation, from the movement of the sun, the moon, the earth, the stars, etc. “God’s days” that are mentioned in the Qur’ān are said to have different lengths. For instance, in Sūrah *The Pilgrimage (al-Ḥajj, 22:47)* it is quite clear what that means – how long “a day with your Lord” (*yawman ‘inda rabbika*) is:

“But a day with your Lord is indeed like a thousand years by your counting.”

Also, “all ascends to Him on a Day whose length is a thousand years by your counting” (cf. *The Prostration / as-Sajda, 32:5*). From this example it is evident that the length of “God’s day” (or a day “for God”) is a thousand years (*alfu sanah*) by people’s counting of days. However, in Sūrah *The Ascending Stairways (al-Ma‘ārij, 70:4)* it is clearly stated that there is a “God’s Day” *fifty thousand years* in length. It is true, this day is not associated with people, but with angels (*malā’ikah*) or Jibril (the Holy Spirit):

“The angels and the [holy] spirit will ascend to Him on a Day fifty thousand years in length.”

It is clear that these Qur’anic messages about time also offer different perspectives about duration of time. The time that is mentioned in relation to people in the Qur’ān is often described from different perspectives. For instance, Sūrah *al-Baqarah (2:259)* describes one man whom “God caused to die for a hundred years” (*fa-amātahu llāhu mi’ata ‘āmin*), and then “brought him back to life” (*thumma ba’athah*). When asked “How long have you remained?” (*kam labithta*) in a state of death, the resurrected man replied “a day or part of a day” (*yawman aw ba’da yawmin*). While he was dead, his conception of time was entirely shaped by the perception of the parts of the day that we, people, are used to. We can also see in the story told in Sūrah *The Cave (al-Kahf, 18:18-26)* that the so-called *relative (nisbiyy) time* – the time depending on those subjects/objects that are

experiencing it – can be found and justified in the Qur’ān. Namely, according to the words of the Qur’ān, young men (*fityah*) slept in the cave for 309 years (*thalātha mi’atin sinīna wa-zdādū tis’an*). However, when they were awakened and asked how long they remained asleep, they replied: “Perhaps a day, or part of a day” (*labithnā yawman aw bā’da yawmin*).

It is interesting to point out that these Qur’anic parables that we mentioned in a way suggest how people resurrected on the Day of Judgment will experience time. Specifically, Sūrah *The Night Journey* (*al-Isrā*, 17:52) contains one eschatological testimony that on the Day of Judgment resurrected people will believe that they remained in their graves “only for a little while” or “only for a short while” (*in labithtum illā qalīlan*). Of course, the style of the Qur’ān’s discourse often reminds us of the passage of time with terms that people are used to. Sūrah *The Bee* (*an-Naḥl*, 16:77) thus mentions “blink of an eye” (*lamḥu l-baṣar*), and claims that “bringing about the Hour would only take the blink of an eye, or even less.”

We have already seen that the angelic perspective (or perception) of time is different from the human one; there are angels who participate in “a day that lasts fifty thousand years.” And the story or parable about the Queen of Sheba mentions spiritual creatures that can cover great distances “in the blink of an eye,” and “in the twinkling of an eye.” In the Sūrah *The Ant* (*an-Naml*, 27:40) it is said that one being with special knowledge told the Prophet Sulaymān that it can bring to him the throne of the Queen of Sheba “in the blink of an eye” (*qabla an yartadda ilayka ṭarfuka*).

## 16. Spiritual Time (*az-zamanu n-nafsiyyu*)

Spiritual time is mentioned in a number of places in the Qur’ān, which is not linked with the sun and the moon, nor with their movement across the sky (i.e. time on the clock). Furthermore, *spiritual time* in the Qur’ān is not linked with the weather. In brief, spiritual time applies to the soul, or the experience of soul. That experience goes beyond time as a vector, weather changes, historical or ritual time and place. *Az-zamanu n-nafsiyyu*, or spiritual time is, in fact, time relating to a certain feeling that the soul gains in the afterlife or in special states of spiritual inspiration.

According to the Qur'ān, at the hour of resurrection on the Day of Judgement the soul will feel as if this time was brief, as if the life after death (until the Resurrection) lasted “for a short while.” The Qur'ān reminds people (cf. *The Night Journey/al-Isrā*, 17:52) that on the Day of Resurrection they will think that they “remained [in the world] only for a little while” (*wa-tazunnūna in labithtum illā qalīlan*). In relation to how this “time of the soul” or “spiritual time” might be experienced is evident in Sūrah *The Romans* (or *The Byzantines/ar-Rūm*, 30:55), which states that people who are sinners/criminals will swear that they “did not stay [in this world] more than an hour” (*mā labithū gayra sā'atin*).

At some places in the Qur'ān, like in the Sūrah *The Wind-Curved Sandhills (al-Ahqāf*, 46:35), this “soul time” that the soul spends under the ground or in the grave, is comparable with “an hour of a day.” It is said that on the Day of Resurrection people will think that they stayed in the grave only for “an hour of a day” (*lam yalbathū illā sā'atan min nahār*). Then, there are places in the Qur'ān where this “soul time,” i.e. the perception of time that the soul has in the grave, is compared with “one evening” (*'ashiyyan*), or with “one morning” (*ḍuḥāhā*). One typical example of this is the Sūrah *Those who drag forth (an-Nāzi'āt*, 79:46). Certainly, when the Qur'ān illustrates this “soul time,” that is, the soul's existence *in the grave*, or under the *mound of earth*, the Qur'ān uses those words, terms, and categories that are usually used for time in this world and in daily communication between people. Moreover, how the Qur'ān talks about the *soul's experience of time* after death shows that God is the Only One who creates time, and the Only One who, in some Omnipotent way of His, gives the feeling of time itself to His creatures.

## 17. Swearing by Time, Time as a Subject of Divine Vow (*al-qasamu bi-z-zamanī*)

Divine oaths are very common in the Qur'ān. God swears by the Mount *aṭ-Ṭūr*, cf. the Sūrah titled *The Mount* (52:1), then by the fig *at-tīn*, cf. the Sūrah named after it (95:1), etc. Also, according to the textual evidence of the Qur'ān, God swears by those celestial phenomena which are most visible to people from the Earth, for example by the sun (*wa-sh-shamsi*),



the moon (*wa-l-qamari*), the star (*wa-n-najmi*), etc. Another thing that is notable is when God swears by the star/planet – the nightly star (*aṭ-Ṭāriq*), cf. the Sūrah named after it (86). From the Divine oaths by celestial bodies, it is evident that they boil down to *swearing by time*. Because, people always measured time by the movement of the sun, the moon, and also the nightly star, as well as that of many stars. It seems that the most interesting form of Divine oath in the Qurʾān is the one where it is visible that God takes *time* as a subject of His guarantee. Sūrah *al-ʿAṣr* (103:1) is especially interesting in this regard. Its first verse says *wa-l-ʿaṣr*, “By the [passage of] time!” or “by the passage of centuries!” Etymologically, the Qurʾān suggests that the root ‘a-ṣ-r has the original meaning in the word “pressing,” i.e. time is *pressing* people, and all creatures. For instance, in Sūrah *Joseph* (*Yūsuf*, 12:36) one prisoner says that he dreamt that he was “pressing wine” (*innī arānī aʿṣiru khamran*). Furthermore, in the Qurʾān “rain clouds pouring water” are called *al-muʿṣirāt*, cf. *The Tidings* (*an-Nabaʾ*, 78:14). It is striking when God swears by *night* (*wa-l-layli*) in the Sūrah *The Night* (*al-Layl*, 92:1), and this oath is immediately followed by His swearing by *day* (*wa-n-nahāri*). Swearing by the promised Day [of Judgment] (*al-yawmu l-mawʿūd*), cf. *The Mansions of the Stars* (*al-Burūj*, 85:2), actually represents swearing by the Day of Judgement or the Day of Resurrection.

The forms of Divine swearing by time in the Qurʾān clearly indicate the great value of time. One Arabic proverb also says: “Time cannot be bought – not even with jewels!”

## 18. God and Time (*Allāhu wa-z-zamanu*)

According to the Qurʾān, time is not something that “externally” or “outwardly” concerns God and people. Just like He created worlds, God created time. Moreover, just like worlds do not represent a rival to God, neither does time, nor is time something that “escaped from God.” The Qurʾān does not support a “subject-object” relation between God on the one hand, and the world and time on the other. According to the Qurʾān, neither world nor time act (or exist) outside of God’s will. This is evident in the magnificent words of the Qurʾān about *light* (*The Light/*

*an-Nūr*, 24:35), that is, *glass* is mentioned here along with the light. The message of the Qur'ān is clear: Just like light is present in every part of the glass, God is omnipresent in every place and time as well. And a further message is: People should not worship places or times, but God who created them!

The words of the Qur'ān, for instance in Sūrah *The Beneficent* (*ar-Raḥmān*, 55:29), contain one far-reaching message: “Day in and day out He has something to bring about (i.e. He creates and acts incessantly).” (*kulla yawmin huwa fī sha'nin*). This part of Sūrah *ar-Raḥmān* was translated by German translator Max Henning as follows: *Jeden Tag manifestiert Er sich neu!* (Every day he manifests Himself in yet another way). This Divine *sha'n*, or “Divine omnipresence or presence in everything” can also be translated as *moment*. But *sha'n* is also matter. Contemporary Arabic has retained this meaning of the word *sha'n*, for example in the phrase *ash-shu'ūn ad-dakhiliyyah*, or “internal affairs.” Practically, these Qur'ānic words should be perceived in connection with the oft-repeated Qur'ānic messages that “God is omnipotent – Allah is Most Capable of everything” (*wallāhu 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr*); and, for example, that “Allah has [perfect] knowledge of all things” (*wallāhu bi-kulli shay'in 'alīm*), etc.

As Ibn 'Arabī observed, this means that there is “Divine presence” in creation and existence, in all manifested and hidden worlds, evenly and simultaneously. It is pointed out in the Qur'ān (cf. *The Ornaments of Gold/az-Zukhruf*, 43:84) that God is God everywhere (“in the heavens and on the earth”). He encompasses everything, but none of that encompasses Him. Ibn 'Arabī says:

“Glorified is He Whom *no moment* distracts from *another moment*, and Whom no *matter* distracts from another *matter*...”

The Qur'ān clearly states that God is the One who is “Lord of time.” Interestingly, in this regard is God's threat in the Qur'ān; namely God tells about one possibility of the arrival of one *eternal day*, as well as of the arrival of one *eternal night*. Interesting too in this regard is the word *sarmad*, which denotes one unending course of time, but also eternity.

Mentioned in two places in the Qur'ān is the adverb *sarmadan* which means *incessantly/permanently/eternally*. It is significant then, as we have seen, that the word *sarmadan* is used to threaten humankind in a way, and that threat consists of the terrible image of the ending of the calendar, or the ending of the cycle of day and night. For example, in Sūrah *Qaṣaṣ* (28:71) it is said:

“Ask [them, O Prophet], “Imagine if God were to make the night *perpetual* for you until the Day of Judgment, which god other than God could bring you sunlight?”

Also, the same thing is said about the day (*Qaṣaṣ*, 28:72):

“Ask [them also], “Imagine if God were to make the day *perpetual* for you until the Day of Judgment, which god other than God could bring you night to rest in?”

When addressing eternity (or aspects of eternity) in different ways, the Qur'ān contains many words that have captured much attention among the commentators of the Qur'ān. It is worth highlighting that in the Qur'ān (*ar-Ra'd/The Thunder*, 13:35) the word *dā'im* is mentioned; it means everlasting paradise and it is said that “eternal is its fruit as well as its shade.” But, the Qur'ān does not contain the word *ad-dā'im* which, according to linguist Ibn Manẓūr, represents one of the God's names (*ad-dā'imu huwa 'llāhu ta'ālā*). *Ad-Dā'im* simply means *The Permanent, The Everlasting*. However, the verb *dāma / yadūmu* is mentioned in several forms in the Qur'ān, in different contexts, denoting continuous existence, or persistent performance of some action. Ibn Manẓūr (I:265) says that the fundamental intention of the verb *dāma / yadūmu* is expressed in these meanings: *to preserve, to resist (thabata), to endure (imtadda), or to live on (istamarra)*. For instance, *dā'imūn* are those who perform their prayers persistently, which is how they are termed in the Qur'ān, i.e. they are *those performing their prayers consistently* (cf. Sūrah *al-Ma'ārij/The Ascending Stairways*, 70:23). In the Qur'ān, *eternity* is described with the word *khuld*. As it is clear from the meaning of

this word, *khuld* is that permanent time that people are yearning for, which people desire, so that they could last (live) as long as possible. For example, the Qur'an warns people (*ash-Shu'arā/The Poets*, 26:129), i.e. it reveals that people love long life, which is why they seek different means of protection on earth:

“And construct castles, as if you are going to live forever (*takhludūn*)!”

Regarding this desire for permanent life, there is a Qur'anic verse mentioning wealth/money and eternity (*al-Humaza/The Traducer*, 104:2-3): *Who amasses wealth [greedily] and counts it [repeatedly], thinking that their wealth will make them immortal (akhladah)!* This addressing of eternity in the Qur'an in the form of *khuld* is sometimes distinctly related to people, as is known from the Qur'anic story about Iblīs and Ādam. Sūrah ṬāḤā (20:120) mentions *the Tree of Immortality (shajaratul-l-khuld)*, when Iblīs asked Ādam: *O Ādam! Shall I show you the Tree of Immortality and a kingdom that does not fade away?* There are also tales which, in a deeply metaphorical way, state that God “is” time. Likewise, the saying “Do not curse time, for God is time” (*lā tasubbū d-dahra fa-innallāha huwa d-dahru*) is often cited in Islamic works in order to emphasize the importance of time.

## 19. Phases/Stages of Life (*marāḥilu l-'umr*)

The phases or stages of human life are often mentioned in the Qur'an with a lesson.

Practically, people are exposed to time's continuation from the time of their conception. It is said to people: *when He truly created you in stages [of development]!* (71:14). Q. 23:12-16 clearly indicates that man is created from “an extract of clay” (*min sulālatin min ṭīn*), then he becomes “a sperm-drop” (*nuṭfah*), in a secure place, and then the drop becomes “a clinging clot [of blood]” (*an-nuṭfah 'alaqatan*), then the clot is developed into “a lump [of flesh]” (*al-'alaqah muḍgatan*), after that comes the stage when “the lump” grows into “bones” (*al-muḍgata 'izāman*), and then God, our Creator, “clothes the bones with flesh” (*fa-kasawna l-'izāma lāḥman*), etc.

An important stage of human life is that of *maturity* (*ashudd*); for instance, in 12:22 *ashudd* is the period immediately after turning fourteen. Q. 16:70 indicates the phase that is termed *ardhalu l-'umur*, *the most feeble stage of life*. Mary/Maryam 19:8 says that the Prophet Zakariyyā cried out to dear God that he became “extremely old” (*mina l-kibari 'itiyyā*). Indeed, the Qur’ān often (e.g. 23:15) reminds people that they are mortal – that they will die (*la mayyitūn*). All of this indicates that human life itself, in a way, consists of time’s course divided into several stages. People are given very little power to change those life stages, and they are certainly unable to avoid them.

## 20. Time Dimensions or Time Ranges (*al-maqādīru z-zamaniyyah*)

Thus far in this essay we have seen that people are faced with dimensions of time and organize their lives according to them. Hour (*sā'ah*), day (*yawm*), month (*shahr*), year (*sanah*, *'ām*), century (*'aṣr*) etc. All of these terms denote time ranges of a single time that last diversely, that represent the measure of movement of the visible sides of the universe. People perceive some time ranges or dimensions, and do not perceive others. Many messages of the Qur’ān are focused on people, revealing the fact that humans are affected by the changes of time, that they are born, growing, living and, in the end, dying. And, in the Afterlife, they will be resurrected. People are imperceptibly being chased by *ad-dahr*. As Ḥusamuddīn al-Ālūsī says in his work *Az-Zamānu fī l-fikri d-dīniyyi wa-l-falsafiyi l-qadīm* (p. 14): “*Ad-dahr* is the time that destroys!”

## 21. Perception/Awareness of Time (*wa 'yu z-zaman*)

These are the great plans of the Qur’ān on the subject of time; many works have been written about them, and it is obvious that this essay cannot deal with all the details. Nevertheless, here we have endeavored to convey just a few instances of the surprisingly large number of references to time (and its different aspects) in the Qur’ān. Although it should already be clear from the existing graveyards that people are

transient and mortal, the Qur'ān reminds people and humankind of this fact of mortality. This awakens the consciousness of time in people. A great number of Islamic works discuss time; one poet says that "time has no color so that you can see it" (*wa-mā lahā lawn yuḥassu*), nor does it have "physical form" (*wa-lā ḥajm*) so that you can touch it." Numerous passages of the Qur'ān make people aware of time and increase their sense of it: God is the one who creates time, the nature of time is that in it everything disappears, except God. Moreover, time itself disappears with that which disappears in it. Time is like fire; just like fire disappears with wood (coal, grass, a house...) as it burns, so does time disappear with that which is passing. A leaf disappears, so does its time. A leaf disappears, and its time runs out. A drop of water disappears, so does its time. A drop of water disappears, and its time runs out... However, time is also irreversible. As al-Ma'arrī said:

*amsi lladhī marra 'alā qurbihi*  
*ya'jazu ahlu l-arḍi 'an raddihi*

Yesterday which is gone – although it is near,  
 All the citizens of the world cannot bring it back!

If we briefly examine the textual evidence of the Qur'ān, we will see that the Qur'ān does not contain terms for time such as *zamān* (time in the sense that existence appears in it and disappears in it) and *qidam* (one of the aspects of eternity: eternity as continuous). Moreover, the Qur'ān does not describe time as *extended* (*muddah*), although the verb *to extend* does appear (*madda*, *yamuddu*; the root of this verb encompasses the idea of extending, expanding of matter, but also, for example, stretching of time) in the sense of, for example, extending shade. Sūrah al-Furqān (Q. 25:45) says this clearly: *Have you not seen how your Lord extends the shade—He could have simply made it [remain] still if He so willed—then We make the sun its guide*. It is obvious that here, by pointing to the movement or extension of shade (*tamdīdu z-ẓill*), the Qur'ān indicates matter. The Qur'ān is clearly saying: Shade exists there where there is *light* and where something is *illuminated*. Moving and extending over

the illuminated is the shade. In Classical Arabic, matter is *māddah*, or that which can extend, *extending matter*, or, that which extends in time and space.

In addition, the Qur'ān does not mention *eternal time* (time from the very beginning, *azal*), nor does it contain the word *abad* as a noun, i.e. the sense of eternal time (or 'forever') in the form of a noun. Namely, only God is *The Beginning-less* (*azaliyy*), and only God is *The Endless* (*abadiyy*). That is why eternal time as something independent of God does not exist, nor is there *forever* as something independent of God. Al-Qushayrī, a commentator of the Qur'ān, thus interprets *forever since the beginning* or *endless time*, as entities or existences that are coexisting with God and otherwise do not exist, because God is the One who creates time.

In his commentary *Laṭā'ifu l-ishārāt* (vol. III,145) al-Qushayrī says:

God created time (*al-zamān*).

No time existed before that.

And God created place (*al-makān*).

No place existed before that.

The Absolute (*al-Ḥaqq*), the Magnificent, He was there although there was no place or time.

He is Supreme, no place reaches Him,

Nor is He owned by time!

Certainly, the Qur'ān contains the word *abadan* in the adverbial sense of *always* or *never*, depending on whether the context in which that word appears is affirmative or negative. The root *a-b-d* is abundant on the pages of the Qur'ān, so we should briefly describe it here. In the chapters of the Qur'ān, in different contexts, it means to be (in heaven/hell) forever, "to stay somewhere for a long time." Derived from the verb *abada* ("to be constantly," "to be permanently," "to be eternally") not mentioned in the Qur'ān is the adverb *abadan*, meaning *forever*, *eternally*, *endlessly*, as in 98:8: *to stay there* (in Gardens of Eternity) *for ever and ever*. In many places in the Qur'ān the negative form *abadan* means *never*, *absolutely not*; for example, in 2:95 it is said, *But they will never wish for that [death] (because of what their hands have done)...*

Because of the Qur'ān, the phrase *abada l-ābād* spread in the Arabic language denoting *for ever and ever*, or, in negative form, *never*. For example, az-Zamakhsharī (in the work *Asāsu l-balāgha*, 9) uses the phrase: "I will never (*abada l-ābād*) do that!" Al-Iṣfahānī (2) says the following: "*Al-abad* is the term for a period of continuous time which is not divisible like *az-zamān* is divisible." According to the same author, one can say *zamān of something*, but not *abad of something*. In addition to that, in the Arabic language the characteristic of the word *abad* is that it does not have duality and it cannot be added (to another *abad*), because the existence of another *abad* which could be added to the first *abad* and doubled cannot be perceived. However, al-Iṣfahānī claims that *ābād* can be said in certain exceptional and specific contexts.

In Classical Arabic many interesting phrases and idioms explain the meaning of these terms. "Something has been immortalized" (*ta'abbada sh-shayy*), i.e. it stayed or lasted forever (*baqiya abadan*) (al-Iṣfahānī, 2). Its derivatives are also noteworthy: *al-ābidah* is a "wild cow," *awābid* are "wild animals." When applied verbally to a person, it means "his forehead furrowed," i.e. he got angry, "went wild" (Iṣfahānī, 2). Al-Zamakhsharī explains (*Asās*, 9) that *abbadati d-dawwābu* means the animals "went wild" (*tawahḥashat*).



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# Extremism and Islamophobia Against the Muslim Minority in Sri Lanka

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MUHAMMAD SAEKUL MUJAHIDIN

## Abstract

Sri Lanka has witnessed many examples of anti-Muslim sentiment and violence since the end of the civil war, especially in 2014 when ethnic unrest affected many. Sinhalese monks and Buddhists appear to have played an important role in the unrest. The long war and ethnonationalist ideology have resulted in a political-religious shift associated with “Buddhist extremism,” which has an association with rioting and aggression against Muslims. The purpose of this study is to investigate how the attitude of Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka towards Muslim minorities varies from time to time. This study uses the “library

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Mujahidin, Muhammad S.. 2023. “Extremism and Islamophobia against the Muslim Minority in Sri Lanka.” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 40, nos. 1-2: 217–246 • doi: 10.35632/ajis.v40i1-2.3135  
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research” method where the main data includes books, journals, articles, and references related to research. Sri Lankan Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment is manifested in several dimensions: such as campaigns against halal labels on food, Muslim women’s clothing, the slaughter of livestock in Muslim religious rituals, attacks on mosques and Muslim-owned businesses, mandatory cremation for all Sri Lankans regardless of the religion during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the closure of Islamic schools. Consequently, the government at the very least needs to enforce law and order in a fair and balanced manner for all citizens and ensure policies of multiculturalism and tolerance between religious communities are maintained.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, Extremism, Muslim, Sri Lanka

## Introduction

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country where several ethnic, linguistic groups have lived together for centuries. But that coexistence is not always without tension, and sometimes violence. The current ethnic conflict involves the Sinhalese Buddhist majority in Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) minority known as the Tamil Tigers, which have their roots in British colonial rule from 1815 to 1948.<sup>1</sup> After the civil war, militant Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists such as Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Urumaya Sinhala, and Rahwana Balaya began to spread Islamophobic propaganda and engage in violence, particularly in Aluthgama and Kota Dharga, against the Muslim community that makes up about 10% of Sri Lanka’s population.<sup>2</sup>

After the civil war, anti-Muslim sentiment and violence continued to escalate in various forms, targeting the ethnic and religious aspects of Islam and Muslim livelihoods. The main anti-Muslim sentiments that have been expressed by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist forces include: hate speech questioning the history and ethnic origins of Muslims, destruction of places of worship and religious teaching centers, denial of halal certificates for Muslim food, restrictions on the slaughter of

animals, and criticism of Muslim cultural practices such as the wearing of the burqa and closing Islamic schools.<sup>3</sup> Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sri Lankan government run by extremist leaders ordered the cremation of all those who died from Covid-19 regardless of religion.

Although the impact of religious radicalism and violence by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist forces is clear and has received attention from local and international human rights activists and forums, the Sri Lankan government's response to controlling or stopping violence and anti-minority campaigns have been unsuccessful, particularly those directed against Muslims. In addition, there is still a large gap in terms of action taken against perpetrators of religious violence to ensure tolerance and inter-religious harmony in Sri Lanka.

## History of Islamophobia in Sri Lanka

"Islamophobia" and anti-Muslim hatred are used interchangeably in Sri Lanka. Muslims in Sri Lanka make up about 10% of Sri Lanka's population, which is often maligned by the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.<sup>4</sup> Incidents of violence and anti-Muslim attacks tend to vary, such as traffic accidents, harassment of those wearing the burqa, suspected food contamination, and terrorist attacks carried out by certain groups. The widespread perception is that such violence always targets Muslims.

Hatred and violence against Muslims occurred in the early twentieth century in Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon). The anti-Muslim pogroms of 1915 marked the deadliest violence to target a Muslim community spanning five provinces, and resulted in at least 25 deaths, four rapes, and attacks on more than 4,000 Muslim properties. This incident is largely forgotten in Sri Lankan history, but it is the most heartbreaking for Muslims. Sinhalese hatred of Muslims was mainly directed at Muslim shopkeepers and businessmen from India who arrived in Sri Lanka as the result of British colonial capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

Islamophobia was a factor in 1915 when people were killed, shops burned and mosques burned, although the riots were a symptom of the dislocation of the economy, rising prices of goods, and the political turmoil of the time. There is no denying that a politicized and popularized

Buddhist consciousness rallied the masses to identify Muslims as targets. The development of Muslim traders was, and still is, considered very detrimental to the economic growth of the people in Sinhala.<sup>6</sup>

Sri Lanka's largest Muslim population is known as the Moors: a term inherited from the Portuguese occupation of Sri Lanka and also used by the Dutch from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. The Moorish Muslim population at that time represented about 6.5% of Sri Lanka's Muslim population. The Moors consist of two groups: 5.7% Ceylon Moors (Ceylon Moors were Arab traders who arrived in Sri Lanka around the eighth century), and 0.8% Moorish Indians (Indian Moors were more recent immigrants from South India in the eighteenth century).

The events that sparked the 1915 pogrom involved a Buddhist ritual called the "Perahera" that traditionally took place past the site of the Castle Hill Street Mosque in Kandy. A group of Moorish Coast Muslims who were at the mosque cited a colonial law ordering musical instruments to be silenced within 100 meters of an all-faith place of worship. They claimed that the noise from the "Perahera" Buddhist procession disturbed those worshipping in the Mosque. The colonial police's decision to divert the Buddhist procession from the Castle Hill Street Mosque in Kandy sparked an inevitable outbreak of violence between Muslims and Buddhists.

By the seventh day, violence against the Moorish Muslim community had spread across 165 miles. Although the death toll is lower than that of pogroms elsewhere in Sri Lanka, the target of the violence was Muslim-owned commercial enterprises, which suggests that Sinhala Buddhist antagonism was directed primarily at symbols of Muslim livelihood and economic success. Various interpretations were offered regarding the 1915 pogrom, while the governor of Ceylon, Robert Chalmers, briefly stated that the main factors behind the violence were "economics and religion."<sup>7</sup>

Since the late nineteenth century, hatred of the Indian Moors, who competed with Sinhalese merchants in urban areas, had grown. In addition, the First World War had contributed to the increase in the prices of essential goods whose sales were largely controlled by Muslim traders. In this context, the Moors were thought to have taken advantage of the shortage of goods during the First World War. In addition, different

religious practices, such as the use of musical instruments by Buddhists during their processions, and the practice of silence during Muslim worship in mosques have brought Sinhalese Buddhists and Muslims into conflict since the early twentieth century. Therefore, the dispute on May 29, 1915, was only a continuation of the same series of problems. However, British colonial law and order policies also contributed to friction between Sinhalese Buddhists and Moors.

In February 1915, the Supreme Court overturned a district court decision regarding the Buddhists' right to the (*perahera*) ritual to pass by the mosque on Ambagamuwa street in Gampola. During the "Perahera" of May 1915, the issue of the procession route became highly politicized. The colonial state failed to anticipate the escalation of Muslim and Buddhist tensions in May 1915 despite tensions arising from the February 1915 decision, which was seen as favoring the Muslim minority over the Sinhalese Buddhists. Indeed, the Islamophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric now embodied by the BBS is just an extension of the slander of the past.<sup>8</sup> For example, several years before Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, Muslims were sometimes referred to as "barbarians" when compared to Sinhalese,<sup>9</sup> and Anagarika Dharmapala, a prominent Buddhist revival leader in Sri Lanka, claimed that Muslims were "foreigners".

## Rejection of Halal Certification and Logos on Food by the Bodu Bala Sena Community (BBS)

The refusal to consume halal food and the labeling of halal certifications on food has become a serious threat to Muslims in Sri Lanka after the civil war. One of the main foundations of Islam is its teaching that Muslims are only allowed to consume halal food in accordance with religious law. The All Ceylon Jamiatul Ulama (ACJU), the theological body responsible for making key decisions for Sri Lankan Muslims, was given responsibility for monitoring and issuing halal certificates, a move that caused no serious problems until BBS started its hate campaign in 2012.

Since then, hardline Sinhalese Buddhists have vehemently rejected the use of the halal logo in food and sold in shops and markets. Although marketing food as halal is a universal strategy for food producers to

attract Muslim consumers, the BBS group strongly opposes and rejects it on the grounds that it incurs additional costs for producers in Sri Lanka. As a result, propaganda against such halal logos led the ACJU to stop issuing halal logo certifications to many food-producing companies. The BBS also demanded that shops be cleared of halal meat in April 2013. This opposition to the halal logo also has economic implications for Sinhalese producers, although some producers are unwilling to incur additional costs for halal certificates for their production.<sup>10</sup> Coupled with the anti-Islam campaign, slogans, and placards with pictures of pigs written in Arabic letters, this activity is considered to have offended and hurt Muslims in Sri Lanka. In addition, the campaign against halal certification is considered an attack on the fundamental identity of Muslims. Many Muslims in the area and elsewhere in Sri Lanka regard the protesters' actions and demonstrations as part of a wider, global Islamophobia.<sup>11</sup>

As time has gone by, BBS has turned from a group into a mass movement by engaging the wider Sri Lankan population in their ultra-nationalist endeavors. In its propaganda campaigns, BBS falsely claims that it has tacit support from the government to legitimize its aims. BBS' ten-point resolutions include the abolition of halal certification and a ban on Sri Lankan women working in the Middle East and beyond.<sup>12</sup> BBS did not stop there. The Buddhist separatist group also objected to the slaughter of sacrificial animals, which made it difficult for Muslims to carry out their religious rituals. This is especially true during the Hajj season, during which time Muslims slaughter animals such as camels, cows, buffalo, and goats. This is not only a religious obligation, but also strengthens social solidarity among human beings through the distribution of meat to relatives, friends, and the poor.<sup>13</sup>

Reports claim that some Muslim youths want to avenge the actions of BBS, but the majority of Muslims do not approve of retaliation, and are praised for their patience in the face of such provocations. The main reason for not reacting to the protests stems not only from the sense of vulnerability Muslims experience in areas where Sinhalese Buddhists are the main majority, but also because it is widely believed that BBS is a very influential minority on the ground.

The rise of BBS is something that cannot be ignored. A report shows that many parts of the North-West Province of Sri Lanka have



recently become hotbeds of BBS activity, including areas such as the cities of Kuliyaipitiya, Dambadeniya, Mawathagama, Narammala, and Kurunegala. These areas have witnessed anti-Muslim protests including violence, demonstrations, and poster campaigns, the sending of threatening letters to some Muslim businesses, with some shops also being attacked at night, as well as other activities such as the carrying of placards depicting Allah as a pig and then burning it.<sup>14</sup> BBS then expanded its anti-Muslim campaign to focus on Muslim attire. The BBS leader Ven Kirama Vimalajothy Thera stated that BBS will announce in Kandy the start of a new campaign against the long body covering worn by many Muslim women variously known as the “Abaya” or the “Burqa”.

## Sinhalese Buddhist Extremists view Muslims as Enemies

The rise of extremism and violence against Muslims after the civil war is not a new development. The two major riots against Muslims that occurred before independence in 1915 were the result of economic competition between Muslim traders and Sinhalese Buddhists.<sup>15</sup> The second was after independence. In 1973 anti-Muslim sentiment began to spread among the Sinhalese, who began to feel that Muslims were superior in education over them. Many clashes occurred between the communities. The clashes that occurred in early 1975 in Puttalam, a Muslim stronghold in the northwest of the island, constituted the worst communal violence “in which 271 Muslim families were left homeless, 44 shops were looted and burned, and 18 Muslims were shot inside a mosque by the police”.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1980s, Sinhalese Buddhist extremist groups were involved in anti-Muslim campaigns, especially in the national media. These campaigns took the form of news, articles, newspapers, and letters to the editors on issues such as the slaughter of cattle during the hajj, disturbances caused by the call to prayer, and the construction of new mosques. Following the end of Sri Lanka’s three-decade armed conflict between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the campaign of hatred toward Muslims has continued to escalate widely. The perpetrators of Islamophobic campaigns are Buddhist extremist groups such as the Sinhala Ravaya, BBS, and Mahasen Balakaya, which takes on various

forms of expression including in the mainstream media, on social media, at public gatherings, religious gatherings, and in public posters. Since then, the Muslim issue was taken to a new level by Patali Champika Ranawaka who, in his polemic text “Al-Jihad Al-Qaeda,” placed Muslims in Sri Lanka within the context of the global discourse of Muslim political radicalization. The author not only hinted at the emergence of alleged “Muslim extremism” in Sri Lanka, but also the radicalization of Muslim politics, and linked it to the armed Tamil separatist movement led by the LTTE.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that incidents between Sinhalese Buddhists and Muslims occur frequently. On September 9, 2011, a Muslim temple, which had stood for 300 years in Anuradhapura, was demolished by a mob led by monks. Although police were present at the site, they did not interfere. Then on 20 April 2012, at a mosque named Kairiya Jumma in Dambulla, an area that many Buddhists consider a Buddhist holy city located in Matale District, Sri Lanka, about 2000 Buddhists including monks marched towards the mosque and started demonstrating to demand the demolition of the mosque. Shortly after the demonstration, firebombs targeted the mosque, worshipers were evacuated, and Friday prayers were canceled. TV footage showed that monks were involved in the violence, and two days after the mass demonstration in Dambulla, a monk took off his robes and displayed himself in front of the mosque.<sup>18</sup>

Following the Dambulla Mosque attack, there were also attacks and anti-Muslim demonstrations against the construction of a mosque and an attack on a madrasa in Dehiwala in May 2012, along with the Jumma Mosque arson incident in Unnichai village in August 2012, which caused some damage to the loudspeakers and the sound system at the Mohideen Jumma Kohilawatte Mosque in Wellampitiya. In August 2012 in Colombo there was also a fire inside the Thakkiya Mosque on the Malwathu Malwathu Oya Line, Sinha Kanuwa, Anuradhapura.<sup>19</sup>

Among the tragedies reported in 2013, the worst were the demolition of the walls of the Meera Makkam Mosque in Kandy in the early hours of the morning, the forced closure of the Masjid (Masjithul Araba) in Mahiyangana after pigs and stones were thrown into the mosque during Friday prayers on 18 July 2013 (during the month of holy Ramadan), and the attack on the Grandpass Mosque in August 2013. Following these

incidents, anti-Muslim sentiment and violence received international attention, including from the United Nations (UN), who opposed and criticized Sri Lanka for violating the rights of religious minorities.

The United States Department of State, Human Rights, and the United States Bureau of Democracy prepared and released a report on International Religious Freedom for 2013. The report included a 2013 sample of religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims in Sri Lanka. The report said there were reports of harassment and social discrimination based on religious beliefs, that hardline Buddhist groups had attacked churches and mosques. The report also said that the constitution and policies and laws included provisions to protect religious freedom in Sri Lanka. In practice, however, local authorities have failed to take action against communal violence, including attacks on religious minorities such as Muslims, and perpetrators have gone unpunished.<sup>20</sup>

Anti-Muslim sentiment and acts of violence occurred in major incidents in Sri Lanka in June 2014, November 2017, February 2018, and March 2018.<sup>21</sup> The ongoing campaign against minorities, especially Muslims, eventually erupted into communal riots on 12 June 2014 around Poson Poya (a celebration of the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka). An Alabama Samitha monk and his driver were confronted by a group of Muslims in Dharga City, responding to the incident. Then, the Aluthgama Police were surrounded by monks and their supporters demanding immediate action. Three Muslims were detained until June 25, 2014.<sup>22</sup>

There was then an eruption of violence in ethnic riots targeting Muslims, worse than the anti-minority hate incidents that occurred a few years earlier. The main areas affected were Aluthgama, Beruwala, and Dharga Town in Kalutara District on the Southwest island, on opposite ends of the country from the civil war areas in the North and East. About 10,000 people were displaced by the riots, 80% of them were Muslim. Four people were killed, 80 others were injured, and a large number of homes and businesses were destroyed. The violence attracted international attention, partly because of the prevalence of Islamophobia as in Myanmar, and partly because of widespread incitement by Buddhist monks. For years, hardline Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka were notorious

for attacking religious peace demonstrations, demonstrations of opposition political parties, and religious minorities.<sup>23</sup>

While the anti-Muslim campaign is led by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist forces, there is strong criticism of the ineffectiveness of government actors in failing to control the violence. Politicians (and administrators also) directly and indirectly support these extreme Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist forces. For example, In March 2013, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who was secretary of the then defense ministry, signaled his open support for BBS by attending the opening ceremony of its Buddhist leadership academy. In his remarks, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa said that he decided to attend the event after realizing its importance. According to him, Buddhist religious leaders who carry out this important national task need not be feared or doubted by anyone.

It is noteworthy that with the change of Gotabhaya Rajapaksa's regime in early 2015, anti-Muslim and anti-Christian sentiment and violence have diminished. This clearly shows the close relationship between the Gotabhaya Rajapaksa regime and the ineffectiveness of the state in overcoming violence and anti-religious minority campaigns.<sup>24</sup>

There is an argument to be made that the case of Sinhalese Buddhist sentiment towards Muslims in Sri Lanka is part of a wider trend in anti-Muslim sentiment that has developed in many other countries in recent years, especially toward those who live as minorities and face serious challenges in practicing their religion and culture. India's version of anti-Muslim sentiment and violence, for example, is motivated by the power of Hindu nationalism aimed at consolidating a stronger Hindu community. Even in the case in Myanmar, most of the Rohingya Muslims are marginalized citizens, who demand recognition of their citizenship status from the Myanmar government, and an improvement of their role in the socio-economic and political fields, which is also limited.<sup>25</sup>

## The 2019 Easter Sunday Bombing

On April 21, 2019, the Easter Sunday suicide bombings occurred at three churches on the outskirts of the capital Colombo. Four large hotels in the city center were also hit by suicide bombings that killed at least

259 people, including 45 foreign nationals, and injured hundreds more. Two other bombs were detonated hours later as bomb disposal squads attempted to defuse them. Nine suicide bombers, including a woman, have been identified via CCTV footage, and one of the bombers was reportedly educated in the UK. They blew themselves up in three overcrowded churches and four hotels, and a hospital in the capital Colombo was also targeted. In a national hunt, numerous explosive devices were found and in the largest haul 83 explosive devices were unearthed near a bus station in Colombo.<sup>26</sup>

The bombing was the first large-scale terrorist attack since the end of the civil war 10 years earlier.<sup>27</sup> After the bombings, the Sri Lankan government immediately blocked access to all social media networks and messaging services to reduce the spread of misinformation or calls for retaliation, but this also impeded the government's ability to locate the victims' family members.

The Islamic State group (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the attack, according to the BBC. The report said that ISIS had targeted "members of the US-led coalition and Christians in Sri Lanka."<sup>28</sup> Although Muslims in Sri Lanka are aware of ISIS ideology and its political mobilization in the Middle East, there are no clear signs of ISIS military mobilization in Sri Lanka. One reason why Sri Lanka was singled out by ISIS is the growing Islamophobia and marginalization felt by Muslims in Sri Lanka as the result of Sinhalese Buddhist anti-Muslim attacks. ISIS has been able to attract Muslims around the world for its global campaign so that it turned into a transnational Islamic movement. It turns out that several suicide bombers could have traveled to ISIS strongholds in the Middle East, but although none have done so, the anti-Muslim sentiment that has continued to surge in Sri Lanka since 2012 is arguably enough to radicalize Sri Lankan Muslims.

Sri Lankan authorities remain unconvinced of the group's involvement even though ISIS has claimed responsibility, and authorities are investigating whether foreign militants advised, funded, or mentored the local bombers. Sri Lankan authorities have blamed a local extremist group: the National Towheed Jamaat (NTJ), whose leader (alternately Mohammed Zahran or Zahran Hashmi), became known to Muslim

leaders three years ago for his impassioned speeches online. The eight bombers were local Sri Lankan Muslims, including the 34-year-old NTJ leader Mohamed Zahran who “was one of the two suicide bombers who blew themselves up at the Shangri-La hotel.”

On 23 April 2019, politician Ruwan Wijewardene stated that the government viewed the bombing as retaliation for the March 2019 massacre of Muslims at the Christchurch Mosque, New Zealand. However, this statement was refuted, given that the Easter Sunday bombings were clearly planned long before the massacre of Muslims in Christchurch and there was no concrete evidence. Then, on 26 April 2019, the Sri Lankan Army and the Special Task Force, a police paramilitary unit that specializes in counter-terrorism, carried out a search operation in Sainthamaruthu, a city on the east coast. There, there were three explosions, and a gun battle broke out as security forces stormed the Jihadi headquarters. Three suicide bombers blew themselves up, killing at least nine family members, six of them children, and three other Islamist militants were shot dead by security forces.<sup>29</sup>

The Sri Lankan government was praised for its handling of post-bombing tensions, as they avoided mass killings and reprisals. A small number of violent revenge attacks took place, but these were isolated and apparently uncoordinated. The main immediate response was an outpouring of shock and sadness at the national level. In a positive development, the post-bomb political environment was marked by calls for peace from senior government leaders, and though there were a few isolated retaliatory attacks against Muslims, there was no ethnic unrest on previous scales. This could be an indication of how much influence the government has on the potential to inflame ethnic-religious violence. Indeed, nearly a year and eight months later, the truth is starting to come out showing that the Muslim community had nothing to do with the Easter Sunday bombings of 2019.

## The Prohibition of Wearing the Burqa

Most of the countries that have so far banned the burqa are from continental Europe.<sup>30</sup> In Russia, the hijab has been banned in schools and universities in two regions, namely the Stavropol region in 2013 and the

Republic of Mordovia in 2014, both of which have been upheld by the Russian Supreme Court. Several regions in Spain, including Barcelona, had also imposed a form of the burqa ban in 2010, but this was overturned by Spain's Supreme Court in 2013. A burqa ban was also implemented in Italy in the regions of Lombardy in 2015 and Liguria in 2017. Ticino was the first Swiss canton to approve a total burqa ban in 2013.<sup>31</sup>

As of March 13, 2021, Sri Lanka has taken significant steps to ban the burqa and other face coverings in public places, citing national security. Public Security Minister Sarath Weerasekara told the BBC that he had signed a cabinet order which now needed approval from parliament. Officials said they hoped the ban would be issued soon and fully implemented. All of this was done on the grounds of national security. The move comes nearly two years after the 2019 Easter Sunday hotel and church bombings. Suicide bombers targeted a Catholic church and a hotel frequented by foreign tourists that killed more than 250 people in April 2019.

Now, the government is trying to impose the ban permanently. Sarath Weerasekara told reporters that, "In the past, Sri Lankan Muslim women and girls never wore the burqa. It is a sign of the religious extremism that is emerging today, so the permanent ban should be fully implemented, so I have signed it and the regulation will be implemented immediately."

This prohibition violates Sri Lankan Muslims' right to freedom of expression, belief, and religion. Many Sri Lankans have expressed disapproval and concern over the move, with some claiming it is a way to please the Buddhist majority and will create lasting divisions among the religious communities.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it can lead to greater marginalization and create rifts between some Muslim groups and society at large.<sup>33</sup>

Some have argued that the ban hints at the underlying undertones of racism, Islamophobia, and an inability to understand other cultures. For some Muslim women wearing the burqa is an integral part of one's faith, as it is a means to be closer to the Prophet. When someone wearing a burqa is harassed, the onus is on the perpetrator, not the victim.

Responses from various quarters emerged about the burqa ban in Sri Lanka, one of which was from Pakistan's Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Saad Khattak, writing that the ban would only hurt the feelings of Sri Lankan Muslims and those around the world. The UN special rapporteur

on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, wrote that “the ban on the burqa is incompatible with international legal guarantees of the right to manifest one’s religion or belief & freedom of expression.”<sup>34</sup> From Indonesia, the Deputy Chair of the Indonesian Ulema Council, Anwar Abbas said the burqa ban in Sri Lanka was “offensive to Muslims around the world.” According to Anwar Abbas, it would be unfair if the Sri Lankan state banned the burqa just because of incidents involving a few people. Abbas cited the Sri Lankan government’s stance as one of the “radical and terrorist acts committed by the state against Muslims in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Muslims in Indonesia urge the Sri Lankan government to respect the rights of Muslims to practice their religion.”<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the Social Justice Party asked the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to intervene to resolve the situation. Sri Lankan government authorities also plan to close 1,000 Islamic schools on the grounds of national security. PKS, through the chairman of the Central Executive Board Bukhari Yusuf stated: “The Indonesian government, as the largest country in ASEAN, should take steps to eliminate colonialism and injustice wherever it is.” Bukhari asked the Sri Lankan government to immediately stop the plan. This is because the ban on the burqa and the closure of Islamic schools are considered discriminatory actions against Muslims. Bukhari believes that the use of the burqa cannot be associated with extremism or terrorism.

## Closure of 1000 Muslim Schools

Sarath Weerasekara also said the Sri Lankan government plans to ban more than 1,000 Islamic schools, which he said violated the national education policy: “no one can open schools and teach children whatever you want. Schools must comply with educational policies that have been set by the government. Most schools that are not registered under the government’s policy only teach Arabic and the Koran, so that’s bad.”

The government also wants to close about 1,000 madrasas that are not registered with the government. Students enrolled in madrasas generally come from poor and economically marginalized families and struggle to obtain secondary education qualifications. Muslim students from low-income



families living in rented houses, especially in urban areas, and are often rejected from public schools due to intense competition. In Colombo alone, nearly 5000 children fail to attend public schools. Muslim students' access to public and private schools in order to continue their secondary education is significantly lower than that of their non-Muslim counterparts due to socio-economic and cultural reasons since Sri Lanka's independence.

Private madrasas have targeted economically weak students from Muslim societies where many children have few options for receiving education. Many Muslim children drop out of school because they cannot afford the expensive tuition fees. Since economically vulnerable Muslim children are being targeted by madrasa schools, the Sri Lankan government needs to appoint Muslim scholars and fund them to regulate the curriculum in educational activities. The country has a responsibility to regulate religious schools including madrasas. Educational assistance from foreign countries should be carefully monitored by the state, but not necessarily limited. The religious school syllabus must be prepared by a community-approved cleric who has a deep understanding of religious and secular education.<sup>36</sup>

Hilmi Ahmed, who is president of the Muslim Council of Sri Lanka, told the BBC that if officials had problems identifying a person wearing a burqa "the person wearing the burqa will not have a face covering for identity checking purposes." However, he also said that everyone has the right to the freedom to wear a face-covering regardless of their faith. This perspective needs to be understood from a human rights point of view, and not only from a religious or cultural point of view. Regarding the issue of madrasas, Ahmed said most Muslim schools are registered with the government, "maybe there are about 5% that have not complied and of course that can be handled."<sup>37</sup>

## Covid-19 and Negative Stigmatization of Muslim Minorities

Before the onset of the pandemic, Muslims had been the target of Islamophobia in the mass media by Sinhalese Buddhists. The Covid-19 pandemic sparked stigmatization and panic that impacted several categories of society in Sri Lanka. Electronic media, and social media in

particular, play a very important role in the stigmatization process, and government officials are also involved in stigmatization. Two popular Sinhala private TV channels tend to target Muslims as the mastermind behind the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak.<sup>38</sup>

The Sri Lankan government has taken several steps in its fight against Covid-19 that have harmed or stigmatized its Muslim minority. This is a continuation of the majority policy which has recently shifted from a focus on ethnicity to religion.<sup>39</sup> In response to Covid-19, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, declared a red signal and a state of emergency, which made many people worried about their rights as citizens. The appointment and delivery of the message from the government were less than encouraging regarding the rights of minorities in Sri Lanka, notably Muslims. For example, the government's response to Covid-19 has recently made a statement suggesting that Covid-19 has always been associated with Sri Lankan Muslims.

Many Covid-19 conspiracies and restrictions are disproportionately directed against Muslims. Examples include:

- 1 Human rights groups are concerned that the government issued an order on 1 April 2020 to arrest those who criticize officials or spread what they perceive as fake news about the pandemic, which impacts Muslims and other minorities.
- 2 The existence of anti-Muslim propaganda that attacks ethnic minority communities who are not responsible for their behavior during the pandemic, as well as allegations of the organized spread of Covid-19.
- 3 Attacks on Muslim websites have not been stopped by government security forces and have continued during Covid-19.
- 4 Two Muslim figures who have spoken out against anti-Muslim discrimination to the government have been detained without due process.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the role played by the mainstream media in spreading hate across Sri Lanka, the BBC reports: "Since the death of the first Sri Lankan Muslim from Covid-19 on 31 March 2020, some media in Sri Lanka have publicly blamed the ethnic Muslim community for spreading the epidemic Covid-19 disease, although only 11 deaths have been officially recorded in the country."

One incident was on TV channel B that, in its news broadcast, showed a large gathering at a mosque, which reportedly violated the ban on public gatherings at the time. The news was then shared on a Facebook group of more than 70,000 people as an anti-social activity that was carried out by the Muslim group in question. Then the news was disseminated further to create a narrative that Muslims were the mastermind behind the spread of Covid-19 in Sri Lanka. However, subsequent investigations revealing that Muslims were behind the spread of Covid-19 were shown to be a lie and the meeting at the mosque had been approved by the health authorities in the area.<sup>41</sup>

In another social media post, a middle-aged Muslim from the city of Akurana claimed that he brought Covid-19 from India. He then says he went to get supplies and spread the Covid-19 outbreak further in the cities of Kurunagala, Gampola, and Galagedera, which he also visited. He states his travels from India to cities in Sri Lanka was a deliberate move to spread Covid-19 in Sri Lanka. These anecdotal examples illustrate a general trend of mass media and social media in Sri Lanka targeting the Muslim community in their coverage of Covid-19. Media reports of this kind have no factual basis. The Covid-19 pandemic has furthered the spread of stigmatization and deepened inequality in relation to ethnicity, religion, and class. The ongoing pandemic in Sri Lanka has also given rise to a pandemic of fear and stigmatization resulting in several social problems and public health crises especially among Muslims in Sri Lanka.

## Cremation for Muslims who died due to Covid-19

Nihal Abeysinghe, Senior Virologist and Government Epidemiologist explained that coronavirus bodies can be buried or cremated. He said there was no question of germs spreading through the water in graves and causing harm to human health. The advice of the World Health Organization (WHO) has been followed by countries around the world. However, Sri Lanka rejected the WHO's advice and insisted on cremating Muslims who died of Covid-19. Notably, Professor Tissa Vitarana said that there were no virologists in the committee formed to deal with this issue.

Even India, a country currently governed by leaders who are generally hostile to Muslim minorities, has allowed burials for minorities. For Muslims around the world, burying their dead is a religious obligation and Islamic tradition has dictated how it should be done. For every Muslim death is the end of life in this world and the beginning of life in the hereafter. Until now the Muslims who died of Covid-19 were forcibly cremated by the Sri Lankan government, and no one else dared to comment on it. There is also a report circulating that many people who died naturally were also forced to be cremated.

In other countries there has been strong criticism of the Covid-19 cremation of corpses, and Muslims claim that this policy has nothing to do with health or medical reasons, but was only to insult and provoke Muslims. This was taken up in Parliament by Muslim and non-Muslim members and both asked President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the government to change this policy, though there was no response from the government.

The Muslim and Christian communities are grateful for the outpouring of support they have received from various religious leaders, medical personnel, and civil society activists, but the government remains firm in its decision not to bury the bodies infected with Covid-19. One last hope in accessing this basic right to bury the dead is the Supreme Court. After the mandatory cremation policy was introduced, Muslim leaders, civil society groups, and some Muslim families who were cremated petitioned the Supreme Court.<sup>42</sup>

The team, led by former DPR member Ali Zahir Moulana, took the case to the Supreme Court and it was rejected without clear reasons. We as citizens do not know why the Supreme Court rejects petitions from minorities. We do not know whether the petitioners have violated the rules of the Constitutional Court when applying. In the midst of all this came the shocking fact of a 20-day old baby who was admitted to the hospital at 10.45 am on 7 December 2020. The baby died at 16:15 the next day on 8 December 2020 and was cremated at 4 pm, then on December 9, 2020, the hospital failed to notify the parents when the baby died, who were only notified of his death when the parents contacted the hospital. The father of the dead baby desperately wanted to do a PCR test at a private hospital, but the hospital staff refused and forced his father to sign

a waiver to allow the cremation. Then they were told to go to Borella's cemetery to cremate the baby without their consent. When the father asked why he was in such a hurry to cremate the baby's body, while several other bodies were waiting to be cremated and there was no answer from the doctor and others. "I couldn't say anything and the doctors and other people didn't even bother to answer my questions but all went out to cremate the baby without any sense of human conscience," the baby's father said in a video interview.<sup>43</sup>

In another video circulating on Wednesday, December 16, 2020, a Sri Lankan Muslim complained that his wife had died at Kalubowila Hospital and was not allowed to see the body and not allowed to do a PCR test in person. They were forced to allow a cremation. Meanwhile, the cremation of the 20-day-old baby received wide attention around the world. Sri Lankan Muslims living in European countries staged demonstrations in front of the Sri Lankan High Commission in London to protest the cremation of Muslims who have died during the pandemic.

At first glance, the Sri Lankan government insists that the bodies of all Covid-19 victims should be cremated, regardless of religion, which may seem reasonable. However, upon further examination, it is clear that the decision to impose cremation on Muslims is against WHO guidelines. Dr. Channa Perera, Consultant Forensic Pathology with Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health, told the BBC World Service: "The government is not against Muslims, but they have a bit of fear about whether the virus can be used for illegal activities. Maybe unwanted people can gain access to the body and it can be used as a biological weapon." Later, the opposition leader in Sri Lanka, Sajith Premadasa, also stated that "the act of racism being perpetrated against our Muslim brothers and sisters is disgusting and must be faced by everyone."<sup>44</sup>

The amendment to the Gazette for cremation in Sri Lanka read as follows:

61A. Burial of the Bodies of People Who Have Died Due to Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19)

- 1 Regardless of the provisions of regulations 61A the bodies of people who have died or are suspected to have died, due to Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) will be cremated.

- 2 at a temperature of 800 to 1200 degrees Celsius for a period of at least forty-five minutes to one hour for complete combustion, to prevent potential biological threats; and
- 3 at a cemetery or a place approved by the competent authority under the supervision of that authority, following the instructions issued by the Director-General of Health Services.
- 4 No one may hand over the body of a person who has died or is suspected of having died due to Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) to anyone except for the person who takes the necessary action. cremation officer, nominated by the appropriate authority.
- 5 Clothing and personal protective equipment that cannot be reused by people who handle corpses at the cemetery or such place must be burned by placing them with the coffin at the time of cremation.

The new regulation was quickly incorporated into the Minister of Health Regulation's "Provisional Guidelines for Clinical Practice in Suspected and Confirmed Covid-19 Patients"; this was the introduction of a controversial mandatory cremation policy that is still in effect today. The Notice Sheet above was issued on April 11, 2020.

Negative publicity from Sri Lanka has reached the African continent. Are extremists, who think the world is part of Sri Lanka and not Sri Lanka is part of the world, realize the devastating impact of this negative publicity on Sri Lanka? After the end of the civil war, the Sri Lankan government severed ties with Muslim countries and forged close ties with anti-Muslim countries such as the United States, Israel, India, and China who allegedly implemented their criminal agendas against Muslims. The Sri Lankan agenda with them is to promote hatred against Muslims and divide Sri Lankan Muslim society.

## Conclusion

Prior to Sri Lanka's independence there several interreligious dynamics that fostered Islamophobia among particular groups from the Sinhalese Buddhist majority, including those among the government. The suicide bombings on Easter Sunday at the three churches on the outskirts of

Colombo spread a deeply negative image of Islam in Sri Lanka among the Sinhala Buddhist community. These attacks also prompted the government to ban the wearing of the burqa for Muslim women, as this form of dress was worn by those involved in the terrorism incidents. Government repression of Muslims after the attacks culminated in the closure of 1,000 madrasas.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Muslims have been increasingly marginalized in Sri Lanka due to government policies that are Islamophobic, most notably the requirement that those who die from coronavirus must be cremated regardless of their religion. In addition, electronic media and social media also play a very prominent role in the process of stigmatizing Muslims by, for example, Muslims as the mastermind behind the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak.

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# In this Issue

## Editorial

## ARTICLES

Cosmographical readings of the Qur'an | **Adrien Chauvet**

The Non-Crucifixion Verse:  
A Historical, Contextual, and Linguistic Analysis | **Louay Fatoohi**

Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Jurisprudence of Priorities:  
A Critical Assessment | **Murie Hassan**

## Review Essays

Recasting the Religious Architecture of Islam | **Tammy Gaber**

Review of Recent Works in Maturidi Theology | **Martin Nguyen**

## Book Reviews

## Forum



ISSN 2690-3733 (PRINT)  
ISSN 2690-3741 (ONLINE)