QUR'ANIC NARRATIVE AND ISRĀ'ĪLIYYĀT IN WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP AND IN CLASSICAL EXEGESIS

by

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'The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.'

Dedicated to my wife

Abstract

The main subject of this thesis is twofold. On the one hand it analyses how the Qur'an presents stories, on the other hand it examines the classical Muslim commentators' response to the Qur'anic narration.

In part one we remark that the theory that the Qur'an borrowed extensively from the Bible has clouded the vision of many Western scholars. They explained the Qur'anic narratives in accordance with their preconceptions; only a few emancipated themselves from this prejudice, but some of these scholars were sensitive to the literary qualities of the Qur'anic narrative. Adopting their general approach to the Qur'anic narrative we analyse the Qur'anic narrative of the 'golden calf' episode. Here we invite the reader to step into the textual world of the Qur'an in order to appreciate its otherness. At the same time we try to show the internal coherence among the verses (and also among the surahs) to remove the assumption of the incoherence of the Qur'an which has veiled much of its literary excellence from view. In addition, this study gives us an opportunity to appreciate one of the most neglected aspects of the Qur'anic narratives, namely the relationship between the oral recitation and the written characters of the Qur'an. The written text lacks the contextual richness provided by the oral dimension for it cannot convey intonation, emphasis, and so on, but the transcription of the spoken word displays the relationship of sound and meaning within the surahs or verses together with special emphasis upon phonological effects.

The first chapter of part two is designed to provide a general overview of the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*, taking into account the opinions held by both Muslim and non-Muslim authorities. We raise two important questions regarding this technical term

When did the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt* come into general use?

Who first used it critically?

To answer these questions we analyse the commentaries of eight exegetes together with some *qiṣaṣ* works on the 'golden calf' and 'heavenly table' episodes. It is clear that, in contrast to the view held by many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, the technical usage of this term is a late development. Another important conclusion derived from our analysis of classical exegesis is that the commentators who use this term themselves depend on *isrā'īliyyāt* in several respects. In other words, their theory

is not in agreement with their practice. Furthermore, there are commentators who do not use the term *isrā'īliyyāt* and consistently seek to distance themselves from these reports. They also try to minimise the amount of these reports in their *tafsīr*. According to this research, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya was the first to pay more attention to the implausibility of this type of report, two centuries before Ibn Kathīr's critical exegesis.

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Table of Contents

Part One
Qur'anic Narrative

Chapter One
Qur'anic Studies in Western Scholarship

Chapter Two
The Qur'anic Narrative of the Golden Calf Episode

Part Two
Isrā'īliyyāt and the Analysis of Classical Muslim Commentaries

Chapter Three
Isrā'īliyyāt

The Classical Exegetes' Comments on the Calf with a Hollow Sound

Chapter Four
The Analysis of 20:83-85

Chapter Five
The Analysis of 20:86-89

Chapter Six
The Analysis of 20:92-97

Chapter Seven
The Explanation of the Golden Calf Episode in the Surahs Aᶜrāf and Baqara

Chapter Eight
The Classical Exegetes' Commentaries on the Heavenly Table

List of Abbreviations

CE	common era
BCE	before common era
b.	date of birth
d.	date of death
EI[1]	Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st ed.
EI[2]	Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed.
ft.	footnote
h.	the year of Hijra
nd.	no date
np.	no place
puh	peace be upon him

Note on Translation and Transliteration

The translations from the Qur'an are based substantially on Marmaduke Picktall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, A. J. Arberry's *The Koran: interpreted* and M. Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilāli/ M. Muḥsin Khan's *Interpretation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*. The system for numbering the Qur'anic verses is that of the standard Egyptian text. The Penguin publication of *The New English Bible With The Apocrypha* is the Biblical translation which is quoted.

When transliterating Arabic words we follow the system of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new ed., 1960-), but with the following modifications: *q* is used for *ḳ, j* for *dj*, and *tā marbūṭah* is rendered *-ah*, not *-a*, thus giving 'surah', not 'sura'. 'Muhammad', 'Qur'an', and *ḥadīth* appear in these forms; fuller transliteration is reserved for less familiar names and words, and for direct quotation from the Qur'an.

When transliterating Hebrew words we follow the system of *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, in Willem A., VanGemeren (ed.), Cumbria: Paternoster Press 1991.

Introduction

It has become apparent recently that there is a growing interest in Islamic studies in both the East and the West. However, the term Islamic studies cover many subjects from anthropology to theology, and each subject contains several sub-subjects. One of the most important and central branches of this study is Qur'anic studies. Muslims and non-Muslims alike have written extensively on the Qur'an. In fact it is almost impossible to imagine any Islamic study independent of the Qur'an, which is a unique phenomenon in human religious history. Muslims, first and foremost, acknowledge its divine origin *a priori*. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the unaltered, eternal and immutable Word of God, a Glorious Qur'an (preserved) in well-guarded Tablets 85:21-22. It is also an earthly Book whose history is intimately tied to the life and history of an earthly community. For Muslims, it is a Book of remembrance, *kitāb-u dhikr*, a Book of contemplation, *kitāb-u fikr*, a Book of ritual, *kitāb-u ᶜibādah*, a Book of prayer, *kitāb-u duᶜā*. To expect to do justice to the Qur'an within a single piece of work is to expect the impossible. This does not mean, however, that we should cease studying the Qur'an, for it is our constant striving to understand the Qur'an which will bring new insights into Qur'anic studies. The main motive behind this thesis reflects this concern: to try to derive new benefits from the Qur'an by examining the interpretations of its classical readers.

The thesis consists of two main parts, each subdivided into several chapters and sections. The first part deals with two topics. The first chapter is devoted to the Western approach to the Qur'an and its narratives. We will try to summarise their primary contribution to Qur'anic studies. Due to the language barrier we will generally use secondary sources in the analysis of the works of early Byzantine and Latin polemicists.

Naturally, 'scholars do not work in historical abstraction; their minds are formed by the culture of their age and previous ages, and they bring to the task of interpreting what they have extracted from their sources, principles of selection, emphasis and arrangement derived from the ideas and convictions their lives have taught them.'[1] In this chapter we will show how the roots of the European tradition of Qur'anic studies have fed their ideas about its narratives. In particular, we will try to show how the

European approaches to Qur'anic studies developed under the shadow of certain ideas from the Middle Ages up until the twentieth century. The selection of names is not arbitrary. Generally speaking, attention will be given to the main figures, in historical sequence, of Islamic scholarship in the West. However, we do have to admit that we have excluded many great scholars who have left their stamp on Islamic studies in Europe due to the limited amount of space in this work.

The earlier modern Western literature on the Qur'an mainly concentrates on two issues. The first group try to seek to trace the influence of Jewish and Christian ideas in the Qur'an while the second group pay more attention to the reconstruction of the chronological order of the Qur'an. Unfortunately, the zealots of the first group, who treat the Qur'an as a Book which is no more than an echo of Judaism (or Christianity), tend to exaggerate the importance of their methods and to attempt to show that the Qur'an is the product of the prophet, and that the prophet was no more than student of one or more Jewish or Christian mentors of that time.[2] Therefore the aim of the first part of this thesis is to respond to convictions of this kind held by Western scholarship. We also believe that the understanding of the Qur'an in the West has often been contaminated by the belief that it is entirely the result of Jewish and Christian influences. The first chapter is intended to summarise the perspective of the West (including Byzantine polemicists) in their historical sequence. We believe that the theory of influence/ borrowing constitutes the main obstacle to the understanding of the Qur'an in Western world, where this classical approach, from John of Damascus to today's scholars, has been kept alive. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries in particular saw many publications which sought to prove that the Qur'an had grown out of a Jewish or Christian background. It has also been observed that many Jewish and Christian scholars have studied the Qur'an in order to find Jewish and Christian materials. The Qur'an is the battlefield of Jewish and Christian scholars. Instead of looking deeply into the content, presentation, structure and so forth, they prefer to find materials with which to invalidate the opinion of their opponents. They are more concerned with the origin of the Qur'an than with its content and presentation. Two works show this approach at its most extreme: Richard Bell's *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment* and Charles C. Torrey's *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*. We devote a lengthy analysis to these two works in the second section of the first chapter

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[1] Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, 1

of part one. This analysis is followed by an examination of the later development of Qur'anic studies in the West. This analysis is not comprehensive. Rather, considerable attention is given to a few significant figures, such as A. Jeffery, J. Wansbrough, W. M. Watt, K. Cragg, and A. H. Johns.

In chapter two we will focus on Qur'anic narratives. At this stage it is important to note that the historical discourses of the Qur'an are linked together thematically rather than chronologically. For this reason students of Islam whose view of the scripture is based on Judaeo-Christian models are likely to be confused or even repelled by what at first seems to be an incoherent or inconsistent scattering of Biblical accounts and Apocrypha. If, however, the text of the Qur'an is read according to its own thematic unities, its lack of historical detail and absence of chronological order, as Mir has pointed out, becomes unproblematic. Chapter two of the first part is intended to display this unity. It should be pointed out that it is not an apologetic defence of the text of the Qur'an against Western scholars' criticism of its coherence. It is rather an attempt to find an internal relation between different surahs. We will analyse the 'golden calf' episode in the Qur'an. The scriptural account of this episode exists in two complete versions: 7:147-155 and 20:83-98, and two short versions, 2:51, 54, 92-93, 4:153. Our approach is mainly literary and we will employ the rich resources of modern and classical literary theory to discover the nuances in the episode. From time to time we will also make brief references to the Biblical narrative of the same episode in order to show some fundamental differences between the two scriptural narratives.

In applying literary analysis to the Qur'an we run the risk of opening ourselves to criticism for treating the Qur'an as literature, since it functions primarily as a religious and theological work. As it is considered by Muslims the source of the truth about God, man and the universe, Muslims are reluctant to work in this way. Nonetheless, our recognition that any approach to the Qur'an must acknowledge its primarily religious nature is no obstacle to our narrative analysis, in which the Qur'an itself will be our main source of inspiration. We will explain and comment on the 'golden calf' episode in the light of the Qur'an, thereby distancing ourselves from the danger zone. A similar discussion has characterised Biblical scholarship; many have

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[2] Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, 17-8

uttered severe strictures against those who wanted to treat the Bible as literature.[3] Despite many such objections Biblical scholars during the last fifty years have produced excellent works on Biblical narratives. As a result one is safely able to speak about significant gains on the literary front regarding the Bible.[4] Unfortunately, literary analysis of the Qur'an has not progressed very far although the Qur'an has been described as a structuralist dream text.[5]

There are other impediments to the literary analysis of the Qur'an besides the reason mentioned above. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the literal rendering of the Word of God, and God's speech is superb, perfect and inimitable. Early Muslim scholars discussed the superlative literary merit of the Qur'an on various grounds. Nonetheless, the inimitability of the Qur'an is partly related to its aesthetic effectiveness on the verbal level. In order to show the literary eloquence of the Qur'an Muslim scholars have compared the Qur'an with profane speech such as poetry, proverbs and so forth. The implications of the advantages and disadvantages of this comparison are enormous. Treating the Qur'an as pure literature means putting it on the same plane as all other literary productions.[6] In other words we close (or at least we narrow) the gap between literature in general and the Qur'an. Because of the implications of this decision the Muslim approach to the Qur'an has always involved setting it above all other literary creations, paying homage to its divine origin.[7] Bearing this in mind, Muslim scholars have expended great efforts to demonstrate its eloquence. But, as Mustansir Mir has pointed out, most of their productions are, in respect of their orientation, premises and structure, works of theology rather than literary analysis.[8] Our intention in our analysis of the 'golden calf' episode is similar to that of the authors of *balāgha* (rhetorical success of the Qur'an), who show the aesthetic effectiveness of the Qur'an, but without confining ourselves to exclusively theological concerns, because a systematic literary study of the Qur'an, as Mir has stated, should be conducted in accordance with the principles of literary criticism and

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[3] James Barr, 'Reading the Bible as Literature,' *Bulletin of John Ryland Library*, 56 (1973) 10-33

[4] Mustansir Mir, 'The Qur'an as Literature', *Religion and Literature*, 20 (1988) 49

[5] Andrew Rippin, 'The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects,' *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*, 10 (1983) 38

[6] *Ibid.*, 38

[7] *Ibid.*, 40

[8] M. Mir, *op. cit.*, 1988, 49

to some extent independently of theological considerations.[9] According to Mir, the issue of the relationship between the theological and the literary aspects of a scripture is a very difficult one. The two aspects are linked, but not integrally, which makes it possible, and even desirable, to study them independently of each other.[10] On this point we are in agreement with Mir and we will not disregard the link between these two aspects .

For non-Muslims there are some major difficulties in appreciating the Qur'an. The first is the Qur'anic style. On the basis of a superficial reading many non-Muslims appear not to see any logical arrangement, or thematic, historical and didactic unity in the Qur'an. The Qur'an comprises 114 surahs. These surahs, apart from the first, are arranged approximately in decreasing order of length. Although many shorter surahs may consist of a single pericope and are thematically easy to understand, the longer ones contain material on a wider range of themes and topics: lyrical and devotional passages relating to the Power of God and the wonders of the universe, poetic incantations introducing warnings of the Resurrection and Last Day of Judgement, denunciation of polytheism and injustice, pleas for compassion for the poor and downtrodden, stories of the prophets, prescriptions relating to ritual, family and criminal law and so on.[11] This style is radically different from the Biblical way of presentation. In addition, the question of scriptural authority is an equally important factor in the understanding of the Qur'an. According to Muslims, the Qur'an is a book not written by the prophet but revealed to him gradually over a period of twenty-three years. The Bible is a compilation extending over a millennium, and comprises the work of a number of authors and editors. From the Christian point of view, Jesus is usually seen as the counterpart of the Qur'an. So the Qur'an for Muslims and Jesus for Christians are ultimate revelations, and therefore on scriptural level the authority of the Qur'an is different from the authority of the Bible.[12]

A second difficulty is that the Qur'an is a transcription of the spoken (recited) Word. The written text lacks the contextual richness of the oral composition for it cannot convey intonation, emphasis, and so on, to the same degree. The reading

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[9] *Ibid.,* 50

[10] *Ibid.,* 50

[11] A. H. Johns, 'In Search of Common Ground: The Qur'an as Literature?', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation,* 4 (1993) 194

[12] *Ibid.,* 193-4

(recitation) of the Qur'an on the other hand displays the relationship of sound and meaning within the surah or verses together with special emphasis upon phonological effects. We will make frequent reference to this last point. At this juncture it is also important to note that a related problem derives from the semantic structure of Arabic, which is radically different from that of the English language in a way that makes it difficult in many cases for an English equivalent fully to express the connotations of Arabic. In other words, many Arabic words rendered in English (or any other language) lose much of their various dimensions and meanings.[13] A brief look at the Western translations of the Qur'an displays this fact clearly. We should also note that there is some literary bias against the Qur'an which does not accurately reflect its content, especially its narratives. The centrality of narratives in the Qur'an is often overlooked by Western scholars for the same reasons.[14] Many apparently cannot, or do not want to, see differences in the Qur'anic presentation. Although these narratives show a great degree of uniformity there are certainly differences in each of the versions. The identification of these differences, however, needs intensive reading and contemplation on the Qur'an itself. This chapter is the product of these activities; despite its brevity its content is rich. It should also be noted that besides the analysis of the 'golden calf' episode we will give a brief outline of two surahs in which this episode occurs in a complete version, namely A‘rāf and Ṭā-Hā. Our aim will be to show some contextual and structural similarities. This chapter is followed by the first chapter (chapter three) of part two.

The first chapter (chapter three) of the second part explains the intertwining ideas in a particular reconsideration of the notion of isrā'īliyyāt in Muslim commentaries, tafsīr. The purpose is to present general opinions and deal with a few important questions rather than to go into great detail. Although some significant researches have been published on the subject of isrā'īliyyāt,[15] the topic ought to be reopened in order to illuminate several obscure aspects of the issue, and to shed light upon certain traces which have not been touched upon by previous researches.

The term isrā'īliyyāt usually refers to early literature of various types attributed by Muslim scholars to Jewish and Christian sources. They were seen as alien and containing fantastical and irrational materials. Despite the continual and pervasive

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[13] *Ibid.,* 195

[14] *Ibid.,* 202

negative regard for *isrā'īliyyāt*, however, a massive amount of this material has been utilised by Muslim commentators in their commentaries throughout Islamic history.

First of all it should be mentioned that the Qur'an sees itself as a confirmation of these earlier revelations. In addition, the Qur'an also serves a correcting function, providing believers with a view of the other scriptures. It talks about the scrolls of Abraham and Moses, the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David and the Gospel of Jesus. The Qur'an sometimes retells stories found in the Bible in a recognisable form but the accounts are generally different from the Biblical narrative context. Frequently the Qur'anic narratives are shortened and so many Muslim commentators feel free to embellish these stories with reference to the Biblical sources.[16] It is also a well-known fact that Jewish and Christian communities existed in Arabia before Islam. They spoke the native language of the Arabs and appear to have been deeply integrated into the culture of the Arab communities. They naturally brought their own religious traditions and legends with them. Furthermore, some missionaries are said to have been active there together with the people who entered the region for the purpose of trade.[17]

In addition to this, certain Arabs living before and during the lifetime of the prophet are said to have chosen either Judaism, Christianity or some kind of monotheism as their religious belief. While they increased their knowledge of their religious vocation they also taught the people what they had learned about their new faith.[18] We believe that it is important to emphasise at this point that the prophetic stories constituted a great part of this communication. Briefly, the existence of these people directly or indirectly indicates the familiarity of Jewish and Christian materials. With the advance of Islam throughout the Middle East, many Christians converted to Islam. Naturally, it is very unlikely that after such a conversion they at once totally forgot their previous religious tradition. Many continued to explain the Qur'anic narratives using their Biblical information. Though the *isrā'īliyyāt* materials lived in *tafsīr* tradition comfortably, the early Muslims discussed whether it was permissible to read Jewish and Christian Scriptures or other materials, and to transmit reports from the People of the Book. It is clear that the study of *ḥadīth*, tradition concerning what

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[15] We will give detailed information about these works in *isrā'īliyyāt* chapter.
[16] Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1990, 5-6
[17] *Ibid.*, 7
[18] *Ibid.*, 5-6

the prophet said or did, has been one of the prime constituents of Muslim commentaries. A short survey of the traditions dealing with *isrā'īliyyāt* is presented both to acquaint the reader with this basic source material and to attempt a general summary of the understanding of the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt* as expressed in prophetic tradition. The *isrā'īliyyāt* chapter will give equal consideration to detailed information about the reports of the companions and the followers. It will also summarise what is known concerning another important religious group in the distribution of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports, namely *quṣṣāṣ*, the storytellers. The major concern of this chapter is to raise the following important questions:

i. When did the technical word *isrā'īliyyāt* come into general use?

ii. Who first used it critically?

iii. Were there any other commentators who, while not using the technical term, reduced significantly the number of these types of reports in their commentaries?

iv. What is the relation between *isrā'īliyyāt* and Muslim theology?

Though we will also summarise the general opinion about the usage of this technical term we will deal with questions iii and iv in the chapters following our discussion of *isrā'īliyyāt*. Here the importance of *tafsīr* becomes very significant for our analysis.

As in the Qur'anic narrative part, in that on *isrā'īliyyāt* part we will be dealing with the Qur'anic narrative of the 'golden calf' episode, and with the 'heavenly table', *mā'idah*, and their interpretations in classical exegesis. The selection of episodes is deliberate: the 'golden calf' episode deals with matters relating to Jewish tradition while the 'heavenly table' episode concentrates on issues relating to Christian tradition. We will try to show how Muslim exegetes have interpreted these verses, the difficulties they encountered and how they overcame all of these challenges, also what were their main hermeneutic devices and, most importantly, their attitudes towards the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*. The value of this investigation lies in the discovery that even within the highly structured confines of Qur'anic exegesis certain discernible changes in understanding have taken place. We list below some major Muslim commentators and their works, which we will be referring to frequently. It must be noted that governing the principles of selection is the attempt to choose those *tafsīrs* most widely read and highly esteemed by Muslims through the ages.

Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (225/839-310/923), *Jāmʿi al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*

Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (385/995-460/1056), *al-Tibyān al-Jāmʿi li ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*

Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Masʿūd b. Muḥammad b. al-Farrā al-Baghawī (436/1044-516/1122), *Maʿālim al-Tanzīl*

Jār Allāh Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (467/1075-538/1144), *al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl wa ʿUyūn al-Aqāwil fī Wujūh al-Taʾwīl*

Ibn ʿAṭiyya al-Andalūsī (481/1088-541/1146), *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ʿAzīz*

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (543/1149-606/1209), *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*

Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr b. Farḥ al-Qurṭubī (?-671/1273), *al-Jāmʿi li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*

Abū al-Fidā Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr (701/1301-774/1373), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*

Ṭabarī's commentary is one of the earliest examples of exegesis which we will refer to as a major source. His era is considered by many as the end of the formative period of *tafsīr*.[19] In other words his commentary is pre-classical in date and in spirit.[20] It contains a compilation and methodological arrangements from the first two and a half centuries of Muslim exegesis. Ṭabarī quotes a great number of exegetical *hadīth* combined with his own personal opinion in his commentary. Ṭabarī is very important because he is used by later exegetes as an authority in *tafsīr*.

Ṭūsī is our only Shiʿīte commentator; he is considered as a 'jurist of Shiʿa'[21] and quotes from many Shiʿīte Imams in his exegesis. Although it is quite difficult to separate Ṭūsī's commentary from those of his Sunni counterparts we will, at least, have an opportunity to evaluate the Shiʿīte approach to *isrāʾīliyyāt*. Furthermore, Ṭūsī uses Ṭabarī's commentary - sometimes in a critical manner - and draws on earlier philologists and reciters of the Qurʾan, so that his work permits us to make some fruitful comparisons between Shiʿīte and Sunni exegesis. It is also important to note that Ṭūsī, under the influence of the Mutazilites (we will refer to this point in

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[19] J. Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾanic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, 21

[20] Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qurʾan and the Classical Muslim Commentaries*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd 1991, 76

[21] İsmail Cerrahoğlu, *Tefsir Tarihi*, Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları 1988, I.450

subsequent chapters analysing the commentators), makes many rational comments on the Qur'an and has had a great impact on later Sunni and Shi'ite exegetes. In order to understand the nature of his influence we will frequently refer to him in our analysis.

Baghawī's commentary is the third work of exegesis which we will examine in our analysis. The reason for the selection of his *tafsīr* is twofold. Firstly, as Brockelman has pointed out, this *tafsīr* is more widely used by Muslim commentators than many others.[22] Secondly, Baghawī summarises Tha'labī's commentary *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, which contains an enormous number of *isrā'īliyyāt*. Although it is believed[23] that Baghawī excludes these materials from his *tafsīr*, our analysis will try to find out to what extent he is successful in doing so.

Zamakhsharī is the fourth commentator whom we have selected. Despite being influenced by the Mutazilite school of thought, he is respected and referred to by Sunni commentators. Zamakhsharī's main concern in the interpretation of the Qur'an is philology. He gives precise grammatical explanations together with different possible readings of the Qur'an and an abundance of poetic citation is included in his works. In addition, he condenses the number of the reports in his *tafsīr*; this has led many people to assume that he is deliberately distancing his commentary from *isrā'īliyyāt* reports.[24] To understand the exact nature of this judgement we will need to refer to his commentary regularly in our analysis.

Keeping to chronological order, the next commentary of importance is that of Ibn 'Atiyya, the Andalusian contemporary of Zamakhsharī. His commentary is highly esteemed by classical exegetes. Qurtubī, Abū Hayyān and Ālūsī are important figures who make extensive use of Ibn 'Atiyya's *tafsīr*. Because of its late edition many of today's scholars have not paid enough attention to this commentary. Goldziher,[25] quoting from Ibn Khaldūn, refers to Ibn 'Atiyya's work briefly. Jeffery has edited a book under the title *Two Muqaddimas to the Qur'anic Sciences: al-Muqaddima to the Kitāb al-Mabānī*[26] *and the Muqaddima of Ibn 'Atiyya to his Tafsīr* in 1954.[27]

[22] C Brockelmann, 'Baghawī', *EI'*, II.562
[23] Ibn Taymiyya, *An Introduction to the Principles of Exegesis*, (tr.) by M. 'Abd al-Haqq al-Anṣārī, al-Hidāyah Press 1993, 9
[24] İsmail Cerrahoğlu, *op. cit.*, I.385
[25] Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, Cairo 1955, 112, (no publisher)
[26] The author of this *Muqaddima* is not known.
[27] Arthur Jeffery, *Two Muqaddimas*, Cairo-Berlin: Khanjī Publication 1954.

Nonetheless, we have not come across any detailed study of this *tafsīr*[28] and therefore devote considerable space to Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's commentary in our analysis.

Another important commentary is Rāzī's *tafsīr*, which has been both highly praised and strongly criticised, but this is not the issue we want to deal with. What we are interested in is how he parts company from traditional exegesis. He interprets the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an, he cites prophetic tradition and draws on opinions from many disciplines such as grammar, philology and jurisprudence. Besides citing many earlier exegetes he quotes from Kalbī (146/763-4) and Muqātil b. Sulaymān's (150/767) commentary, which Ṭabarī does not make use of.[29] In addition, he enlightens us regarding the Mutazilite exegesis of Abū Muslim (322/934), ᶜAbd al-Jabbār (415/1024) and Zamakhsharī.[30] Although it is difficult to summarise his methodology within the space of two sentences it is not incorrect to say that his main method is applying rational argument to the exegesis of the verses. Regarding *isrā'īliyyāt*, it is highly possible to conclude that his dependence on reason itself leads to the elimination of many reports in his commentary. The primary objective of our analysis is to see to what extent Rāzī's methodology succeeds. We will also try to show some of the motives behind his specific interpretation together with possible influences in his works.

Like Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, Qurṭubī is a well-known Andalusian commentator. He relies on many disciplines to comment on the Qur'anic text. Despite the fact that his exegesis concentrates on the legal verses he has never neglected the detailed interpretation of the Qur'anic narrative. Qurṭubī's comprehensive presentation of past authorities, citing of variant readings, and the use of grammatical and rhetorical devices urge many scholars to consult his *tafsīr*. Even today Oriental and Occidental scholars regularly refer to him. His work could be described as a dream book of polemicists who repeatedly try to justify their own views. Our selection of Qurṭubī is influenced by his employment of various reports and interpretations.

Finally, we shall make a number of references to Ibn Kathīr's commentary, which is considered a rigid example of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*. In the introduction Ibn Kathīr describes the method which should be employed by any commentator, i.e., in

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[28] Jeffery has noted in the preface to *Two Muqaddimas* that Nöldeke used Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's *Muqaddimah* in his *Geschichte des Korans*.

[29] N. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 72

order of importance: the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition, and the sayings of the Companions. Moreover, the exegete, according to Ibn Kathīr, should separate authentic interpretations of the companions from the reports which the companions themselves received from the People of the Book. Ibn Kathīr's radical and firm stance constitutes an important stage in the history of the interpretation of the Qur'an. His primary importance for our analysis is therefore indisputable.

Our analysis as a whole is not limited to the above-mentioned exegetes; we will also make reference to a number of Sunnī, Shiʿīte, and Mutazilite commentators, such as Mujāhid (103-104/721-722), Muqātil b. Sulaymān (150/767), Qummī (381/991), ʿAbd al-Jabbār (415/1025), Ṭabarsī (548/1153), Firuzabādī (817/1415), Ālūsī (1854). We will also quote from some modern commentators such as Sayyid Quṭb, Mawdūdī and Ṭabaṭabā'ī. Furthermore, we will make some reference to the *qiṣaṣ* (history of the prophets) books, such as Kisā'ī's *qiṣaṣ*, Ṭabarī's *tārīkh*, Thaʿlabī's *qiṣaṣ*, Ibn Kathīr's *qiṣaṣ* and Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-Arab*.

Methodology

The first chapter of part one is partly a historical description of the Western approach towards the Qur'an and its narrative together with a brief analysis. Similarly, chapter three of part two is more or less descriptive and contains a short analysis of the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*. The remaining chapters are mostly based on analytic methods. In addition, by means of a comparison between different approaches provided by classical commentators on selected topics, some assessment and criticism are offered.

Sources

As we have mentioned above, the main sources we will use are the Qur'an, classical commentaries both Sunni and Shiʿīte, and related books; articles written in Arabic, English, German, and Turkish, including a few unpublished Ph.D theses. We have done our utmost to collect and use most recent publications (up until 1999).

Structure

After establishing the scope of the research, the structure of the thesis will be as follows: the first chapter of part one is designed to give a brief explanation of the Western understanding (from early Byzantine to recent Qur'anic scholarship) of the

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[30] *Ibid.*, 72

Qur'an and its narrative. The importance of this explanation lies in its demonstration of how the stereotypical understanding of the Qur'an and its narrative is deeply rooted in Western culture. We will also note some significant developments which have fundamentally affected the Western concept of the Qur'an.

Chapter two, having employed the rich resources of literary methods, explores the meaning, structure and sound units of the Qur'anic narrative of the 'golden calf' episode. Here the reader is invited to see and appreciate the differences in the Qur'anic narrative.

Chapter three of part two deals with the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*. Its meaning, sources, and historical development; the major participants in its dissemination; and related problems and questions will be covered in this chapter.

The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters are exclusively devoted to the analysis of the classical commentaries on the interpretation of the Qur'anic narratives of the 'golden calf' episode. These chapters, together with following chapter (chapter eight), will examine the hermeneutical devices employed by Muslim exegetes in the explanation of the Qur'anic narratives. This will give us an opportunity to find answers to questions which we have raised in the first chapter of part two regarding the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*.

Chapter eight will concentrate on the analysis of the Qur'anic narrative of the 'heavenly table' episode. It will provide some valuable information about the various concepts of *isrā'īliyyāt* held by the classical commentators.

The final chapter summarises and concludes the research and discusses the limitations and contributions of this study.

Part One

The Qur'anic Narrative

This part consists of two lengthy chapters. The first chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section we will present a brief overview of the history of the non-Muslim approach to the Qur'an and its narratives which will cover the period from the early Byzantine writers up to and including the first half of the twentieth century. In the second section we will analyse Jewish and Christian approaches to the Qur'anic narrative. For our discussion of the Jewish perspective we will use Charles C. Torrey's *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* as a source and, for the Christian view point Richard Bell's famous book *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*. We will also refer to other works by these two authors. In the final section of the chapter we will present the development of European scholarship in Qur'anic studies after the Second World War.

The second chapter will focus on an analysis of the Qur'anic episode of the 'golden calf'. This episode occurs in four separate surahs of the Qur'an but we will mainly deal with the narrations of surah Ṭā-Hā and surah Aᶜrāf. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section we will give a brief outline of these two Qur'anic surahs, and then attend to their structural analysis. In the second section we will examine the 'golden calf' episode itself. In our analysis we will frequently point to certain narrative aspects of the Qur'anic presentation and also show how it differs from its Biblical counterpart. The Qur'an will be our primary source in this chapter; we will not draw on any other Muslim sources such as classical commentaries.

Chapter One

Qur'anic Studies in Western Scholarship

1.1. The Non-Muslim Approach to the Qur'an and its Narratives

As has been mentioned above, the first chapter of this part consists of three sections; furthermore, these three sections are further divided into subsections. The first section comprises three subsections: the first subsection will deal with the early period, which covers the early Byzantine authors up to the Medieval West. The second subsection will present the period from the Medieval West up until the Enlightenment. The last subsection will summarise developments during the Enlightenment and afterwards. The second section will concentrate on the works of Charles C. Torrey and Richard Bell; the discussion will be followed by some brief concluding remarks. The last section will introduce a new era in which European scholarship is witnessing many changes. This period starts before the Second World War and continues up to the current developments in Qur'anic studies. It has proved impossible to deal with every significant individual; we will, however, attempt to refer to some of the main figures who have played leading roles in Qur'anic studies.

1.1.1. The Early Period

It would be fair to say that approximately a quarter of the Qur'an is devoted to telling the stories of the previous prophets who are mentioned in the Bible. Also it is a well-known fact that the Qur'anic narratives are brief and straight to the point and tend not to go into much detail concerning chronological, historical, and environmental details,[1] as opposed to the Bible, which tends to elaborate. Nonetheless, as M. R. Waldman has pointed out, when non-Muslims study a Qur'anic surah containing a story which they have already seen in other scriptures, they naturally assume that the Qur'an derives from those other scriptures.[2]

Waldman's remarks represent the general opinion held by non-Muslims regarding the Qur'anic narrative. When the Qur'an was revealed, the first people to hear the revelations opposed them by calling them 'fairy tales of the ancients', *asāṭīr*

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[1] Kate Zebiri, *Muslim and Christian Face to Face,* Oxford: One World Press 1997, 18
[2] M. R. Waldman, 'New Approaches to Biblical Materials in the Qur'an', *The Muslim World* 65 (1985) 1

al-awwalīn;[3] the Qur'an counteracted this by the verses in surah Furqān which show the unbelievers' attitude towards the Qur'an: 'The unbelievers say, this is nought but a lie that he hath invented, and other folk have helped him with it, so that they have produced a slander and a lie. And they say: Fables of the men of old which he hath had written down so that they are dictated to him morn and evening', 25:4-5. The following verse contains the Qur'anic rejection of their attitude: 'Say (O Muhammad): He (Allāh) sent it down, who knows the secret in the heavens and earth, He is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate' 25:6. In addition to this, *siyar* and *maghāzī* works give more detail regarding the individuals who mocked and opposed the Qur'an and its narratives. It is not our purpose here to deal with these issues, but we will discuss the later developments of non-Muslims' attitudes towards the Qur'an in their historical contexts.

The names of early polemicists are mentioned in some sources.[4] We will begin with John of Damascus (probably died in 752 CE). In his book entitled *Sources of Knowledge*, he considers Islam to be a heretical religion deriving from Christianity and places it one hundred and first in his section concerning heresies. John believes that the prophet's knowledge of the Old and New Testaments developed after his close association with an Arian monk.[5] Clearly, John insists on the Qur'anic dependence on previous scriptures. John's approach had a great influence on later polemicists. Scholars such as D. B. Macdonald, even after the passage of twelve centuries, would consider Islam as a second-hand Arian heresy.[6]

Kindī further develops John's theory that the prophet was influenced by a Christian monk. He says that many of the stories found in the Qur'an were taught him by a Nestorian monk and two Jews, ᶜAbdallah and Kaᶜb. Kindī also accuses the Muslims of disregarding many discrepancies and variants in pre-Othmanic versions of

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[3] This phrase occurs eight times in the Qur'an; 6:25; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:68; 46:17; 68:15; 83:13

[4] The first account is, in order of date, the colloquy or the discussion which took place in Syria between ᶜAmr b. al-ᶜĀṣ and the monophysite Patriarch of Antioch, John I, in 639 AD. Others, such as the Patriarch of Solecuia, Isho'yahb III, in 647 AD, and John Bar Penkāyā in 680 AD, are mentioned; however their knowledge of the Qur'an is questioned by Mingana. (Quoted in A. Mingana, 'The Transmission of the Qur'an', *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian & Oriental Society*, 1915-6, 35-38); A. Jeffery has noted that a correspondence between ᶜUmar II, who reigned from AD 717-720 and Leo III, who reigned from AD 717-741 took place around 717-720. (A. Jeffery, 'Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between ᶜUmar II and Leo III,' *Harvard Theological Review*, 37 (1944) 269-332)

[5] John W. Voorhis, 'John of Damascus on the Moslem Heresy', *The Moslem World* 24 (1934) 392

[6] D. B. Macdonald, 'Whither Islam?', *The Moslem World*, 23 (1933) 2

the Qur'an. The language of the Qur'an is also criticised by Kindī on the ground that the existence of many loan words shows that the Arabic of the Qur'an is not perfect.[7]

A contemporary of Kindī, Nicetes of Byzantium (d.850), composed a 'Refutation of the Qur'an'. His attitude towards Islam was even more negative than John's.[8] Almost all of these early writers on Islam tried to prove the authenticity of Christianity (the Gospels), at the same time objecting to the Muslims' belief in the Qur'an. There are obviously signs that some first-hand sources were used in their works, however they also relied on many secondary sources. The main purpose of their activities and efforts is clear: they were trying to discredit the prophet and the Qur'an.

1.1.2. From the Medieval West to the Enlightenment

In contrast to the Byzantine polemicists, their contemporaries in Europe knew nothing about the Qur'an or the Muslims. Southern argues that between AD 700 and 1100 in Europe the Bible was consulted to discover the origin of the Saracens (Muslims). He adds that, although they knew of the Qur'an, there is no evidence that European Christians knew the name of the prophet.[9] It has also been stated that for a long time Europeans did not have the capacity to distinguish between the Qur'an and the tradition of the prophet, and the *qiṣaṣ* collections. The general medieval belief was that the Muslims were idolaters.[10] The opportunity to grasp the true understanding of Islam during the first Crusades period was lost because, as N. Robinson has argued, the sources were infiltrated by a mixture of legend and folk-tale.[11]

Peter the Venerable, the Abbot of Cluny, was the first person in Europe to take the initiative in translating the Qur'an. Under his supervision the Latin translation of the Qur'an was completed by Robert Ketton in 1143. Peter, who was influenced by Kindī, also believed that the prophet had informants among the Nestorians (Sergius) and the Jews when compiling the Qur'an. Peter was convinced that Satan gave power to the prophet; he therefore owed his success to Satan, who thus made error (Islam)

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[7] James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1964, 105

[8] Neal Robinson, 'Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion', *Islam & Christian and Muslim Relations*, 2 (1991) 185

[9] R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1962, 14-15; Before 1100, with the exception of Italian and Spanish sources, there is only one source which mentions properly the name of the prophet.

[10] Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West,: The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press 1980, 36, 309

[11] N. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 2 (1991) 187

triumph over the truth (Christianity). Peter's activities were largely destructive and hostile; the reason for his interest in Islam was that his knowledge would better equip him to reject the Muslim Scripture as an enemy of the Gospels.[12] So, as Arberry has pointed out, the inspiration for this translation originated from the enmity of the Latin Christian world.[13] Consequently, this translation on the one hand introduced the Qur'an to the Europeans and on the other hand paved the way for misinterpretations.

After Peter the Venerable another influential name is Ricoldo of Montecroce (1243-1320), the author of the famous *Confutatio Alcorani*. Like Ketton's translation, the *Confutatio* was not superseded for centuries in the West. Ricoldo puts forward a number of arguments, mainly directing his criticism to the Qur'an. According to him, the silence of the Bible about the Qur'an and the Qur'an's general disagreement with the Bible, together with many so-called contradictions in the Qur'an, rule out the possibility of its being divine revelation. Ricoldo also severely criticises the Qur'anic style and mocks it: for him the Qur'anic presentation is too low to meet God's standard.[14] His remarks on the Qur'an are not limited to the above-mentioned issues. Moreover his knowledge of the Arabic language distinguishes him from the other polemicists.

During the 14th and 15th centuries Europe took a radical step in Qur'anic studies. Although many thinkers of this age preserved the traditional Western approach to the Qur'an, others were more open to the Qur'an and brought a fresh understanding to it. The main figures of these times are Roger Bacon (1320?-1384), John of Segovia, and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). According to information given by M. Rodinson, John of Segovia made his own translation of the Qur'an, which corrected the errors made by Ketton in his Latin translation.[15] Similarly to John of Segovia, Nicholas of Cusa, who studied the history and style of the Qur'an, claimed that there were three main sources: a Nestorian monk, the Jewish advisor of the prophet Muhammad and, after the prophet's death, some interpolations by his Jewish enemies.[16] Rescher has drawn attention to the point that Nicholas, in his *Cribratio Alchorani*, tried to

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[12] James Kritzeck, *op. cit.*, 129

[13] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran: Interpreted*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1983 (first published 1955), 7

[14] J. Windrow Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, London: Lutterworth Press 1955, II.118, 158-9

[15] M. Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, (tr.) by Roger Veinus, Washington: University of Washington Press 1991, 32

distinguish 'the sound grains of the truth from the chaff of falsity in the Qur'an'. In other words he did not reject the Qur'an totally but only partly, especially those parts which contradicted the Gospels.[17] Compared to their contemporaries both John of Sergovia and Nicholas of Cusa are quite modest in their approach to the Qur'an. The earlier polemical attitude tends to be modified by an apologetic tone. The Crusaders' failure, a lack of confidence in the Church, Muslim Spain's contribution to the rationalisation of Europe, the success of the Ottomans in the Balkans,[18] and the invention of the printing system[19] were among the factors that caused this change in attitude. But despite these changes negative attitudes towards the Qur'an remained very strong indeed.

One of the most controversial figures of the following period was Martin Luther (1483-1546). He translated Ricoldo's treatise into German in 1542. Although Luther esteemed it highly, Bobzin says that his use of this Latin text is rather arbitrary; he shortened some passages and added others to stress certain important matters.[20] Luther believed in the satanic origin of the Qur'an and was of the opinion that no Christian could be influenced from his faith by reading its text.[21] In fact his attitude towards the Qur'an was powerfully affected by his social and political views. He had two enemies: Islam, in the form of the Turks, and the Papal Church. Relying on the eschatological visions in Daniel 7:2-8 and Revelation 20:8, he cursed the Muslims.[22] As regards his view of the Qur'an, it can be said that, like Ricoldo, he questioned its authenticity. Basing his conclusion on the information given by Ricoldo, Luther writes 'The Qur'an is uncertain and one cannot be certain which is the real Qur'an'.[23] In respect of the Biblical material in the Qur'an, Luther was convinced that the main mistakes derived from the prophet himself.[24] One of his important achievements was his encouragement of his close friend, Bibliander, to publish Ketton's Latin translation of the Qur'an. Despite great opposition, Bibliander succeeded in this enterprise; the translation was

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[16] R. W. Southern, *op. cit.*, 93-4

[17] Nicholas Rescher, 'Nicholas of Cusa on the Qur'an', *The Muslim World* 55 (1965) 199

[18] M. Rodinson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 31

[19] W. M. Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1994, 173

[20] H. Bobzin, 'A Treasury of Heresies', in Stefan Wild (eds.), *Qur'an as Text*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1996, 167

[21] G. Simon, 'Luther's Attitude Towards Islam', *The Moslem World*, 21 (1931) 259

[22] Grislis Egil, 'Luther and the Turks', *The Muslim World*, 64 (1974) 184; H. Bobzin, *op. cit.*, 167

[23] H. Bobzin, *op. cit.*, 169

[24] G. Simon, *op. cit.*, 260-1

published at Basle in 1543. It is also worth noting that Luther did not neglect to use his polemic against the Qur'an to strengthen his fellow Christians' belief in the Bible. As Matar has pointed out, eschatology had been used in anti-Islamic polemic since the Middle Ages, but during the Reformation, it became widely prominent among both theologians and preachers. William De Worde (1519) is cited as saying 'The reason why Islam is victorious in the world is because of the godless lives of the Christians.'[25] In other words, the Muslims' success is nothing to do with their belief in their scripture but is a consequence of the Christians' lack of faith in their own. Be that as it may, the Qur'an was now available to some European Christian circles and was used for a variety of purposes.

The Ottoman Empire's proximity to Western Europe generated multiple interactions between the Muslims and the West. Travellers, ambassadors, and merchants all experienced direct contact with Muslim culture. Consequently, many in the West sought to obtain more reliable information about the Muslim world and its belief system. In 1587 regular teaching of Arabic began at the Collége de France in Paris. In 1613 a chair of Arabic was created at the University of Leiden. In England, chairs were created at Cambridge in 1632 and at Oxford in 1634.[26] In 1647 Andrew du Ryer, the French Consul in Egypt, published in Paris a translation of the Qur'an into French. Daniel describes this first vernacular translation of the Qur'an as popular rather than academic and detects in it many polemical aspects.[27] Because of its priority and influence on later translations, du Ryer's translation is very important. Alexander Ross, a Scottish polemicist, relying on this translation, translated the Qur'an into English in 1649. In his explanation of the main motives behind Ross' translation, Matar argues that John Gregory's (1646) praise of the Qur'anic text occupies a prominent place. Ross tried to prove that the Christian scriptures were beyond challenge. In order to support his view, Ross exposed the Qur'an and the life of the prophet to ridicule, and Matar finds his style extremely offensive.[28]

[25] N. Matar, *Islam in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, 121
[26] A. Hourani, *op. cit.*, 12-13
[27] N. Daniel, *op. cit.*, 1980, 284; S. M. Zwemer, *Studies in Popular Islam*, London: The Sheldon Press 1939, 84
[28] N. Matar, 'Alexander Ross and the First English Translation of the Qur'an', *The Muslim World*, 78 (1998) 81-85

A similar attitude is observed in the writings of William Bedwell, the father of Arabic scholarship in England,[29] who expended much effort to show that the Qur'an is inadequate for mankind's salvation. Hamilton has pointed out that a clear indication of his attitude towards Islam can be seen in the title: *Mohammedis Imposturae*, in the first edition, and *Mohamet Unmasked*, in the second edition, with the recurrent subtitle *A discovery of the manifold forgeries, falsehoods, and horrible impieties of the blasphemous seducer Mohammed: with a demonstration of the insufficiencies of his law, contained in the cursed Alkoran.*[30]

A new standard of Western scholarship, however, was reached by the Italian cleric Ludovici Maracci, who in 1698 produced a text of the Qur'an based on a number of manuscripts and accompanied by a careful Latin translation.[31] Islamic studies were not limited to the specialist on the Qur'an; many scholars studied different subjects such as grammar, dictionaries, and the history of Islam and the Muslims. In fact Oriental studies were mainly linguistic and many texts were edited (or translated) and published in Europe. Simon Ockley stated that competence in the Arabic language was a prerequisite to the understanding of the Muslims' scripture. He also warned students that the Qur'an should only be read in order to contradict or refute it.[32] It has also been emphasised that the approach of the Medieval West towards Islam was apologetic and polemical, though scholars had access to a vast quantity of primary sources to help in their research.[33] It should also be remembered that there were some Jewish scholars who studied the Qur'an in medieval Europe; compared to the Christian writers, however, they constituted the minority. Therefore the Jewish response to the Qur'anic claim of falsification, *taḥrīf*, was not as strong as that of their Christian counterparts. Nonetheless, it has been noted that there were scholars like Jehuda Halevi (d.1141), who rejected the Qur'anic *iᶜjāz* (inimitability of the Qur'an) but ascribed it to the

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[29] A. J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays: Portraits of Seven Scholars*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1960, 12

[30] Alastair Hamilton, *William Bedwell, The Arabist (1563-1632)*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1985, 67-8

[31] W. M. Watt, *op. cit.*, 174; A. Badawī has noted that the German Abraham Hinckelman (1652-1695) published the first Arabic Qur'an in 1694. (A. al-Badawī, *Mawsūᶜāt al-Mustashriqīn*, Beirut: Dār al-ᶜIlm al-Malāyīn 1984, 303)

[32] A. J. Arberry, *op. cit.*, 1960, 14; S. Ockley, the author of a *History of the Saracens*, several times stated that there are many contradictions in the Qur'an and that Muslims had invented the doctrine of abrogation to reconcile them. He also believed that many narratives (history) had been taken from other scriptures, but the prophet had falsified these with fabulous additions; the other narratives were wholly false, had no foundation in fact. (Simon Ockley, *History of Saracens*, London: Henry G. Bohn Pub. 1848, 5th Edition, 64-65)

Mishna.[34] In brief it is safe to say that the main Jewish scholarly contribution to Qur'anic studies began in the early nineteenth century.

1.1.3. From the Enlightenment to the First Half of the Twentieth Century

The withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire began with its last appearance at the gates of Vienna in 1683. In the following years it ceased to be a political and military threat in Europe. In addition to this, in the sixteenth century discoveries by the Western countries led Europeans to reassess their epistemology. A gradual shift from revelation (the hegemony of a literary canon: the Bible, Church Fathers, ancient authors) to reason, and from interpretation to observation (empirical study) started to take place.[35] These discoveries had not only paved the way for the development of European civilisation from agricultural communities to commercial societies, they had also opened up the possibility of greater communication between a number of different races in the world.[36] It should also be mentioned that during these years a considerable reduction in tension between Catholic and Protestant states had been achieved by important measures for toleration.[37] These treaties encouraged mutual understanding of Christian factions. The consequences of these developments found a place in Islamic studies in the West. As Rodinson has pointed out, rationalist authors welcomed the new approach to Islam and defended it against medieval intolerance and polemical disparagement. The French theologian Richard Simon (1638-1712) and the Dutch Arabist Adrian Reland (1676-1718) are given as outstanding examples of this intellectual trend.[38]

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[33] Rudi Paret, *Study of Arabic and Islam at German Universities*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH 1968, 23

[34] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1992, 16; The possible reasons for the lack of Jewish response to the Qur'an are summarised by Lazarus-Yafeh as follows: i. Jewish reluctance to offend the powerful majority, ii. Pact of ᶜUmar which forbade them to study the Qur'an and Arabic language, iii. Maimonides' prohibition of the Jews from teaching Muslims the tenets of Judaism. (H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *op. cit.*, 7-8)

[35] Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1993, 98-99

[36] *Ibid.*, 112

[37] Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995, 33; One should not disregard the effect of Ottoman power in these toleration treaties. It has long been admitted by Western scholars that Ottoman pressure in the sixteenth century forced the Hamburg to grant concessions to the Protestants and was a factor in the official recognition of their belief. (Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: the Classical Age 1300-1600*, London: Phoenix 1994, 37)

[38] M. Rodinson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 45-6

From the point of view of Qur'anic studies the most fruitful figure of this age is the English lawyer and Arabist, George Sale (d.1736). Though he largely relied on the Latin version of Maracci, his translation served as the basis for virtually all other translations into European languages until the nineteenth century. He had a great influence on Rodwell's (1861) and Palmer's (1880) translations. It has also been noted that his translation was rendered into the German language by Theodor Arnold in 1746.[39] In his introduction, Sale regards the Qur'an to be the conscious production of the prophet Muhammad and at variance with Christianity. Nevertheless, the prophet's attempt to bring the pagan Arabs to a belief in God was a very noble act.[40] Unlike his predecessors and some of his contemporaries, Sale wanted to explain the Qur'an in a moderate way rather than using the text for polemical purposes. Therefore, his translation is considered by many modern writers as one of the most interesting steps taken in the history of the European treatment of the Qur'an and the Muslims. According to Lewis, Sale's translation marks a major advance in the progress of the knowledge of Islam in Europe and was for a long time by far the most widely read and best known translation.[41] Nonetheless, it should be remembered that, despite his relaxed attitude towards the Qur'anic criticism of the People of the Book, he is sometimes critical of some aspects of the Qur'anic teaching. W. G. Shellbear, however, is convinced that Sale's translation fairly represents the meaning of the language of the Qur'an as it is interpreted by such commentators as Bayḍāwī and Jalālayn.[42]

Sale was not alone in this new approach to the Qur'an, but there was another attitude which was taken up by later intellectuals towards Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular. Islam and the Qur'an were still seen as rivals of Christianity (or Judaism) and the Bible. During the nineteenth century one of the most important developments which contributed to the growth of Qur'anic studies was the application of the critical-historical method, which was first developed and applied in Germany by Barthold George Niebuhr (d.1831).[43] Before analysing this approach to the Qur'an, it is important to mention another development which had an indirect effect but was

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[39] W. G. Shellbear, 'Is Sale's Koran Reliable?,' *The Moslem World*, 21 (1931) 126: S. M. Zwemer, *op. cit.*, 85
[40] George Sale, *The Koran: Commonly Called the Alcoran of Muhammed*, London-New York: Frederick Warne and Co. 1888, 28
[41] Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, 88
[42] W. G. Shellbear, *op. cit.*, 142

nevertheless very influential on Qur'anic studies in the West. This was Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, first published in 1859. In 1872 this book reached its sixth edition.[44] The relationship between science and orthodox religion was complicated and exacerbated on the one hand by Darwin's theories and on the other by discoveries in the fields of geology and physics which challenged traditional Christian understandings of the creation of the universe. The extreme confidence in reason gave rise to serious critical studies of religion. Scientific sceptics even suggested that theology was not a proper subject for study in universities.[45] Be that as it may, in the light of Darwin, scholars made great efforts to find the origin of everything. The Qur'an also received its fair share of interest owing to this new development. Although for many researchers the origin of the Qur'an was not to be found in the Bible alone, they looked first and foremost to the Jewish and Christian scriptures to find its sources (origin).

It is traditional among Western scholars to begin with Rabbi Abraham Geiger. In his *What did Muhammad Retain from Judaism?*[46] Geiger, as the title implies, tried to find the extent of the Biblical influence on the Qur'an. He explained 'what' and 'how' the prophet took from Judaism. Geiger believed that some of the Qur'anic narratives were not to be found in any source except Judaism. Besides the Bible, according to Geiger, the prophet used many post-Biblical Jewish materials. Interestingly, Geiger's thesis, which is described by Moshe Pearlman as epoch-making, was translated into English in 1896 to help Christian missionaries in India.[47]

Following Geiger, many scholars dealt with the problem of dependence in the Qur'an. Academics in newly established institutions discussed and produced fresh theories and published them in journals. Borrowing and influences were their prime interest. What exactly did the prophet borrow from Jewish and Christian materials? How much did he deliberately or even unconsciously modify his sources? Is the so-

[43] Baber Johansen, 'Politics and Scholarship: The Development of Islamic Studies in the Federal Republic of Germany', in Tareq Y. Ismael (ed.), *Middle East Studies: International Perspective on the State of the Art*, New York: Praeger Press 1990, 79

[44] G. Beer, 'Charles Darwin', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, V.495

[45] Hugh Goddard, *Christians and Muslims: From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding*, Richmond: Curzon Press 1995, 149; Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*, Richmond: Curzon 1999, 56-57

[46] Geiger's study was originally composed in Latin and submitted to the University of Bonn in 1832 in response to a contest announced by the Faculty of Philosophy. In 1835 Geiger published this work in German under the title *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*

[47] Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, (tr.) by F. M. Young and (ed.) by Gerson D. Cohen, New York: KTAV Publication House 1970, viii

called Qur'anic distortion of the Biblical narratives recognisable or not? In response to these questions both Jewish and Christian scholars came to debate and disagree with each other. Tryggve Kronholm has summarised the main figures together with their ideas in his excellent article.[48] Jewish factors were demonstrated by Hartwig Hirschfeld, J. Horovitz, Z. Hirschberg, Israel Schapiro, and C. Torrey, while the Christian factors were shown by Julius Wellhausen, Tor Andrae, K. Ahrens and R. Bell. They were convinced that the Qur'an is entirely a production of the earlier religious systems. Hirschfeld argues as follows

> There is yet another reason which makes the Qur'an appear familiar to its reader, viz., its close relation to the Bible. It is that ancient Book which speaks through the mouth of the 'seal of the prophets!' With all his shortcomings, he has *mutatis mutandis* something of the self-abnegation and enthusiasm of the prophets of the Old Testament. If one reads the addresses of the Qur'an, particularly those of the later surahs, at every word one is tempted to say: This is Biblical.[49]

In another place he expresses his main concerns: 'One of the principal difficulties before us is to ascertain whether an idea or expression was Muhammad's spiritual property or borrowed from elsewhere, how he learnt it and to what extent it was altered to suit his purposes.'[50] Clearly, Hirschfeld, judging by this remark, tried to present the Qur'anic text as a mere collection of inventions and borrowings and wanted to persuade his readers that it was certain that the Qur'an owed its composition to foreign elements, but the mission of the prophet in this achievement is unclear.

St. Clair Tisdal, whose main area of interest was the origin (sources) of the Qur'an, attempted to trace parallels between the Qur'an and various materials, including Jewish (Rabbinic tradition), Christian (some heretical groups and apocryphal writings) and pagan. Writing as a representative of the Christian approach, he makes the following remarks:

> Certain English writers (Thomas Carlyle and Bosworth Smith) of the present time, led astray by the false liberalism of the present day, have gone so far as to term Muhammad as a very prophet of God. But even such writers as those would readily acknowledge that the Muhammadan idea that their Qur'an is entirely of Divine origin not

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[48] Tryggve Kronholm, 'Dependence and Prophetic Originality in the Qur'an', *Orientalia Suecana*, 31-32 (1982-3) 47-70

[49] H. Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qur'an*, London: Royal Asiatic Society 1902, 1-2

[50] *Ibid.*, 2

human authorship is erroneous. Muhammad borrowed his material from previous religions.[51]

Furthermore, Tisdall, in his main work *The Original Sources of the Qur'an*, identified every single Qur'anic passage with ancient religions and concluded that 'although Muhammad borrowed religious practices, belief and legends from various different sources, yet he combined them in some measure into a more or less consistent whole... But it certainly does not contain a single new or lofty religious conception...'[52]

Though concentrating on similar problems, Western scholars have often adopted different criteria for determining solutions. In the 1920s Alphonse Mingana called on his fellows to subject the text of the Qur'an to the same criticism as that to which they subjected the Jewish and Christian scriptures.[53] He seriously challenged the entire historical framework summarised in the Muslim tradition. He criticised many scholars, including Nöldeke, who had built too much on the classical Muslim information about the Qur'an. He believed the Qur'an to be the first Arabic book; consequently, its author had contended with immense difficulties. The style of the Qur'an, according to Mingana, developed under the influence of an older and more fixed literature, predominantly Syriac.[54] He goes on to say that Qur'anic narrative (the legendary Biblical elements in the Qur'an) emanates from scores of apocryphal books circulating among the members of the Syrian Churches of South Syria and Arabia rather than Jewish folklore.[55] This conviction leads Mingana to attribute many Qur'anic proper names, religious terms, common words, foreign historical references, and even sentence construction, to Syriac influence. This attitude inspired later scholars to widen the scope of this influence. The scheme was put into practice by Jeffery in his *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*.

Another important question was raised in Qur'anic studies by Mingana's hypothesis that the Qur'an, as we have it today, was finally standardised at a much later date than is usually supposed, under the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān and

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[51] W. St. Clair Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent; Being the James Long Lectures on Muhammadanism*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1906, 126

[52] W. St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'an*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 1911, 280 (first published in 1905)

[53] Alphonse Mingana, 'Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kuran', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 11 (1927) 77

[54] *Ibid.*, 78

[55] *Ibid.*, 79-80

his powerful governor Ḥajjāj.[56] He supports his contention partly by assuming that since the early Christian writers do not mention a Muslim book there could not have been one for them to mention, and partly by supposing that a strong political need existed for a written Qur'an during the reign of caliph ᶜAbd al-Malik b. Marwān. Furthermore, referring to the Syriac version of the Qur'an, which the West Syrian writer Barṣalībi (d.1171) quotes, Mingana argues that this text offers verses not found in today's Qur'an, and various readings not mentioned by any Muslim commentator or reader; he concludes that this indicates the existence of different texts of the Qur'an. His views about the compilation of the Qur'an have since been discredited, Abbot's counter-argument being particularly persuasive.[57] We should note at this point that in the 1970s John Wansbrough, whom we will discuss later, went much further. He concludes, on the basis of textual and linguistic analysis (his approach is different from Mingana's subjective use of external sources), that there is no evidence that the Qur'anic text as we know it today existed before the end of the second century of Islam.[58]

These attitudes may be seen as representing the dominant approach to Qur'anic studies from the eighteenth to the first half of the twentieth century. This approach was to reach its peak in two important works which will be studied in detail in section two: Richard Bell's *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment* and Charles Torrey's *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*. Before dealing with these, together with their authors' other works, it is important to note that there were different approaches to Qur'anic studies during this time.

Another important group who studied the Qur'an were the missionaries. Their approach to the Qur'an is largely negative. They use the classical method of refuting Islam on the basis of scriptural comparison, attempting especially to try and prove that Muhammad was not foretold in the Bible.[59] Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and

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[56] A. Mingana, 'An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Qur'an Exhibiting New Verses and Variants', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 9 (1925) 189-190, 199

[57] Nabia Abbot, *Rise of the North-Arabic Script*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1939, 47-49; The discussion about the existence of variant texts in recent discovery of early Qur'an manuscripts in Ṣanᶜā has been held by Gerd-R Puin. However, it does not shed considerable light on the topic under discussion. (Gerd-R Puin, 'Observations on Early Qur'an Manuscripts Ṣanᶜā, in Stefan Wild (ed.), *Qur'an as Text, Leiden*: E. J. Brill 1966, 107-111)

[58] Estelle Whelan, 'Forgotten Witness: Evidence For the Early Codification of the Qur'an', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 118 (1998) 2

[59] J. I. Smith, 'Christian Missionary Views of Islam in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 9 (1998) 358

the British occupation of Mysore, the last active Indian Muslim stronghold, accelerated the ascendance of the European powers.[60] The years which followed witnessed the rise of imperialism and the consolidation of European power over the greater part of the Muslim world, which thus became an easy target for Christian missionaries; they were convinced that they would be able to convert many Muslims to Christianity.[61] One of the greatest enthusiasts was a famous missionary, Henry Martyn (1812). In many of his claims against Islam, he tried to prove that the Qur'an is not a miracle.[62] His method involved using Christian criteria to evaluate the Qur'an. As Raisanen has noted, Emanuel Kellerhals, having adopted the same methodology, at the end of the Second World War, explicitly expressed his dissatisfaction with much of the Qur'anic data. He drew attention to the Qur'anic account of Jesus and concluded that the Qur'anic portrait of Jesus reveals Islam to be a form of Satanic anti-Christianity, devised by the father of lies. On the surface, Christ is accepted and honoured, but all this is mere cunning and calculation.[63] Following them, many missionaries showed the same extremely sceptical attitude in their debates with Muslims and taught their ideas in their schools in Muslim lands. It is interesting that, although they believed that there is nothing in the Qur'an which is purely original, many of them tried to find in the Qur'an major Christian doctrines, such as the divinity of Jesus, the Holy Trinity, and Original Sin. They even questioned the Quran's literary quality and some pointed out alleged grammatical errors, though some of them did not know the Arabic language and made false claims out of ignorance.[64] In their studies the main concern and occupation of the missionaries was to deal with Qur'anic stories, which they believed departed from the Biblical accounts. Almost all of them believed that the Qur'an distorted the Biblical narrative and made many historical mistakes. Unfortunately, these half-hearted attempts to defend the Gospels against the Qur'an were actually misrepresentati ns which presented Islam in a distorted manner.

Besides missionaries, there were other scholars who mainly based themselve on linguistic studies in their investigation of the Qur'an. The difference between them and the missionaries lay in their methodology. They were not prepared to debate with

[60] Philip Lewis, Unpublished lecture notes on Muslim-Christian Re at on in Leeds in 1999
[6] J. I. Smith, *op cit.*, 359
[62] Albert Hourani, *op. cit.*, 17-8
[63] H. Raisanen, The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an: Reflections of a B b ca Scholar *The Muslim World*, 70 (1980) 122
[64] K. Zebiri, *op. cit.*, 107

Muslims. Rather they equipped themselves with enough linguistic ability to understand the history, development and structure of the Qur'an. At this juncture, Gustav Weil's (1889)[65] *Historische-kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (*Historical-Critical Introduction to the Qur'an*) and T. Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Korans* (*History of the Qur'an*) should be mentioned. Weil's division of the Meccan period into three stages was adopted by Nöldeke, whose chronology is still in use. His analysis is based on various themes in the Qur'an. As Robinson has pointed out, despite all its faults the Nöldeke-Schwally surah classification, occasionally modified in the light of Bell's insights, is a better working hypothesis than the standard Egyptian chronology.[66] It should be noted that Nöldeke saw the Qur'an as the product of the prophet. He believed that after the poetic style of the early Meccan surahs, the prophet's creative powers gradually declined and consequently the style became progressively more prosaic.[67] Obviously, he does not pay enough attention to social changes and the Muslims' needs as a community in Madina. Be that as it may, Nöldeke opened a new era for Qur'anic studies and it is safe to say that in his overall approach he tends to treat the surahs as a unity, implying that they always existed as such.[68] Therefore his works became for every Western scholar of the Qur'an a primary source of reference. There are of course other notable scholarly works on the Qur'an, but it is impossible to discuss them all here. In the next sections we will analyse C. C. Torrey's and Richard Bell's approaches to the Qur'an and its narratives.

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[65] According to Lewis, the appearance of Weil's *Mohammed der Prophet* in 1843 marked the beginning of an entirely new era in Islamic studies in Europe. (B. Lewis, *op. cit.*, 1993, 90

[66] Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Ve led Text*, London: SCM Press Ltd. 1996, 95

[67] *Ibid.*, 96

[68] It should be stated that although Nöldeke dealt with the theory of borrowing, he did not p ace great emphasis on it as others had done. His general opinions about Jewish and Christian influence on the Qur'an is available to English readers in his article *The Qur'an: An Introductory Essay* which is edited by N. A. Newman. (Theodor Nöldeke, *The Qur'an. A 1 Introductory Essay*, in N. A. Newman (ed.), Hatfield: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute 1992, 9-14

1.2. Modern Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Qur'anic Narratives

As we have already noted, in this section we will analyse the writings of C. C. Torrey and Richard Bell.

1.2.1. Charles C. Torrey's Concept of the Qur'an and its Narratives

The Jewish Foundation of Islam was originally given as five lectures by C. C. Torrey in 1931 and was published in 1933. First of all, Torrey, following the fashion of his time, provides a lengthy explanation of the milieu in which the Qur'an was received. Although he accepts that there is uncertainty about the Mecca of that day, he suggests that Jewish settlements were to be found in northern Arabia after the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 586 BC. He believes that among the many scattered Jews some groups migrated to more remote lands, especially to those cities (Theima, Khaibar, Yathrib, and Mecca) where they established a chain of trade settlements.[1] Torrey insists that these were real Israelite communities and rejects any possibility that there were no genuinely Jewish settlements in Mecca and Madina. Torrey explains that the theory of the 'loss of the Ten Tribes' is a most important key to the identification of Jewish people in Arabia. In other words, the Jews who settled in Arabia were Israelite in origin but remained unknown to many Jews at that time. As to the question of when they came to Arabia, Torrey puts the date at around 7 BC on the basis of his conjecture.[2] Furthermore, Torrey, in contrast to many Western scholars, is convinced that most of what the prophet had learned of Jewish material was acquired in Mecca. As he has argued in several places, the reason for this conclusion lies in the Qur'anic data. According to Torrey, the prophet received at least the Biblical and haggadic narratives (which occupy a large part of the Qur'an) in his hometown. So the existence of much Jewish material in the Qur'an during the Meccan period indicates the presence of an important Jewish settlement in Mecca.[3]

Torrey also explains why the tradition is silent about the existence of the Jews at Mecca. Having seen what happened to their fellows in Madina they departed from Mecca during the prophet's lifetime and thus disappeared from history before they

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[1] Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York: KTAV Publishing House 1967 (first pub. in 1933), 12
[2] *Ibid.*, 9
[3] *Ibid.*, 13

came to the attention of the historians.[4] He maintains that Muhammad's personal contact with the Jews was closer (and more sustained) before the *Hijra* than after it. Thus, Torrey holds the opinion that there was Jewish opposition to the prophet in Mecca.[5]

Due to his strong conviction that there was a large Jewish community in Mecca, Torrey avoids the theory of interpolation of Madinan verses in the Meccan surahs by making them refer to the Jews in Mecca. This point is interesting and he rejects in this regard many modern scholars' approach to Qur'anic studies. He has noted that there are some Qur'anic passages which deal with Jewish affairs and the hypocrites in the Meccan surahs.[6] Torrey's unusual attitude, however, should be questioned. Like many Western scholars, Torrey does not rely on the Muslim tradition; on the contrary, he sees it as a strong obstacle to understanding the Qur'an. He asserts that the only safe course is to leave it out of account. Moreover, he states that the Christian and Pagan historians and geographers contribute nothing to our knowledge of this particular time.[7] However, there is one important difference between Torrey's reluctance to use tradition and that of other scholars. As Rosenthal has pointed out, Torrey is always ready to accept the opposite of what the tradition says and tries to establish it as a historical verity.[8] In other words, he believes that only the opposite of tradition makes sense, and so his preference is always predictable. Because of this total rejection of tradition he is obliged to depend mainly on conjecture, and confesses as much at various points in his works. Conjecture, however, is not dependable concrete evidence, so most of his explanations can be categorised as exceptional. It seems strange that Newby, while drawing attention to Torrey's atypical approach, fails to refer to his extreme dependence on conjecture. Having emphasised the distinction between the questions 'how' and 'what', Newby says that Torrey is among the few scholars who seek to answer both 'what' and 'how' Muhammad borrowed from Judaism, Christianity and pre-Islamic paganism.[9]

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[4] *Ibid.,* 97
[5] *Ibid.,* 97
[6] *Ibid.,* 96-97
[7] *Ibid.,* 8
[8] *Ibid.,* xix
[9] G. Newby, 'Observation about an Early Judaeo-Arabic', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 5 (1969-70) 213

Another important point on which Torrey places great emphasis is the question of Muhammad's teacher or teachers. He believes that not only the Qur'anic vocabulary and chief characters but also the teachings and cult details flow from Jewish sources. The major doctrines and practical teachings concerning alms, fasting and prayer are clearly rooted in Judaism. According to Torrey some Qur'anic verses such as 16:105 and 25:5 refer to a mentor whose Arabic was not native but who was acquainted with Biblical tradition. Torrey says that both passages are Meccan and provide evidence to suggest that the prophet had been consulting other people. These mentors, Torrey says, were learned Jews in Mecca. The prophet learned from many people, and in many ways.[10]

Nonetheless, Torrey does not deny the prophet's originality. In his doctoral dissertation in 1892, Torrey had asserted that Muhammad was not original; indeed, lack of originality might almost be considered his chief characteristic when comparing him with other founders of religious systems.[11] Forty-one years later Torrey rectified his previous ideas about the originality of the prophet, conceding that the prophet was not only thoughtful, but also a man of very unusual originality and energy.[12] But although he accepts that the Qur'an is the product of the prophet's mind and bears to some extent the brand of his personality, he never ceases to emphasise the contribution of Judaism. For Torrey, Muhammad was both sincere and wise in his effort to establish a new religious system, but the main ideas which awakened him and changed his whole view of life were not his own discovery, but were the fruits of his intercourse with the Jews of Mecca. Without this personal experience, seeing the actual example with his own eyes and observing it for a considerable time, he could not possibly have conceived Islam.[13]

Torrey even goes so far as to say that Muhammad's idea of the 'People of the Book', as regards their influence in Arabia and their importance to his cause, does not appear to have been changed by his migration from Mecca to Madina. He also adds that the prophet certainly could not cut his ties with the Jews by adopting Abraham when he moved to Madina and suffered his great disappointment. So he concludes that

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[10] Torrey, *op. cit.*, 1967, 45, 74, 43, 78
[11] Charles C. Torrey, *The Commercial-Theological Terms In The Koran*, Leyden: E. J. Brill 1892
[12] Torrey, *op. cit.*, 1967, 7

the prophet never attempted to emancipate Islam from Judaism. The Qur'anic evidence, according to Torrey, shows that the prophet not only leant heavily on Moses, but openly professed to do so.[14] Torrey tries to prove by these arguments on the one hand that Islam in general, and the Qur'an in particular, are derived from the Jewish tradition, and on the other that Christianity has nothing to do with Islam and the Qur'anic materials. For instance, when he discusses the identification of the so-called mentor (or mentors) of the prophet he raises a very interesting question: have we any good reason for supposing that he also received personal instruction from a Christian? Torrey's answer is predictable to those familiar with his writings. Before dealing with the precise answer to this question it is well to recall that Torrey, like many Occidental scholars, states that the prophet seems to have known very little about the Christians during the early years in Mecca, and considered the Jews and the Christians essentially as a single class, namely the Israelites.[15] After the prophet's break with the Jews in the Madinan period, he gave some particular attention to the Christians. However, most of his knowledge about Christianity came at second hand. Torrey also notes that the information about Christian history and doctrines is suprisingly slight and superficial.[16] This, Torrey suggests, is evidence that the prophet received nothing directly from a Christian source. Furthermore, Torrey asserts that the prophet never saw Christian scripture.[17] Torrey is also convinced that it is unsafe to seek the origin of the Qur'an outside Arabia. Therefore he rejects any suggestion that the prophet may have discovered religious sources abroad, during his sojourn in Syria, for example.[18]

If we return to Torrey's question concerning subject matter, it can be seen that there are two main sources for the information about the Christians in the Qur'an. One is undoubtedly the Jews and the other is the common materials to be found among the Arabs.[19] For Torrey, the former is very important because he believes that, although Judaism and Christianity had much in common, most of Muhammad's information about Christianity came through Jewish channels. The doctrines of the resurrection of man, the Day of Judgement, the reward of paradise and the punishment of Hell, those

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[13] *Ibid.*, 64-5
[14] *Ibid.*, 88-9
[15] *Ibid.*, 73, 76-8
[16] *Ibid.*, 8
[17] *Ibid.*, 50, 57
[18] *Ibid.*, 41
[19] *Ibid.*, 73

concerning angels and evil spirits, and so on, were obtained by the prophet from Judaism.[20] Torrey even asserts that three passages in the Qur'an: 7:38, 57:13 and 19:1-15, which clearly deal with Christian narratives, were delivered to the prophet by his Jewish teachers. He says that the story of the birth of John the Baptist together with his father, the aged priest, Zachariah, in 19:1-15 is a fine example of purely Jewish narrative in the style of the Old Testament.[21]

Torrey was deeply preoccupied with Jewish sources and tried to disregard any other possibilities. The main motive behind this extreme approach probably lies in his attempt to respond to those Christian authors such as Wellhausen, Ahrens and Rudolph, whose primary concern was to prove that the dominant influence on the prophet came directly from Christianity. Torrey closes his eyes to any influence other than Judaism on the creation of Islam. Guillaume, in his review of Torrey's *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, criticises his attempt to narrow the scope of Islam:

> I feel misgivings about the author's emphasis on Jewish influence. One might pass a title such as The Jewish Foundation of the Qur'an, which after all is what the author deals with, but the foundation of Islam is something larger than Judaism.[22]

If Torrey encounters anything in the Qur'an alien to Judaism he concludes that Muhammad's own imagination (or his long meditation) is the main source for this verse (or verses). For example, regarding chapter 19, which is concerned with Jesus and his Mother, Torrey says that these passages are the result of Muhammad's ignorant conclusion, since nobody could have told him to make a connection between Mary and the sister of Aaron.[23]

Furthermore, Torrey gives his opinion about the personality of the prophet to explain the nature of the revelation. Having accepted that every great genius, to be sure, is more or less of a mystery, he rejects the idea that the prophet is deliberately mystifying the people. However, he believes that the prophet obtained the revelation through self-hypnotism, learning to produce this abnormal mental condition in times of most urgent need.[24] He also adds that this phenomenon (self-hypnotism) agrees

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[20] *Ibid.*, 60
[21] *Ibid.*, 57-8
[22] A. Guillaume, 'Review of C. C. Torrey, The Jewish Foundation of Islam,' in *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 1935, 207
[23] Torrey, *op. cit.*, 1967, 58
[24] *Ibid.*, 59

strikingly with the description of the prophet's 'fits' given by his biographers.[25] The difference between the self-hypnotism suggested by Torrey and the hysterical epilepsy suggested by Weil[26] is small. In the former situation the message is under the control of the prophet; in the latter the prophet is out of control. Be that as it may, both insist on the human origin of the Qur'anic revelation.

Another important point Torrey deals with is the prophet's literacy; whether he could read and write, or use writing materials. He holds the opinion that *ummī* (illiterate) referred to those who do not have (or know) the ancient holy scriptures, whereas traditional Islam accepts the normal meaning of the word, 'unable to read and write'.[27] For Torrey, the attitude of the mainstream (orthodox) Muslim is chiefly influenced by dogmatic considerations. Therefore, the Muslims' belief in the illiteracy of the prophet enhances the miracle of the Qur'an: that it should have been delivered by one entirely unlettered. Although he briefly refers to the existence of the Muslim tradition which allows the prophet the ability to read and write, Torrey never tries to make use of these materials. Instead, as is his usual habit, he prefers to rely on conjecture. First of all, the grammar, i.e. the forms of literary language, had long been completely developed in the pre-Islamic poems. In other words, the structure of the Arabic language which the prophet learned was already clear. Secondly, the prophet, according to Torrey, did not learn to read and write during his prophethood but during his childhood. His grandfather ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib and his uncle Abū Ṭālib, in whose care he was brought up, might certainly have been expected to give him some of the education which Meccan boys of good family were wont to enjoy. In addition, Torrey says that even the prophet's selection by Khadīja (whom he afterwards married) shows his acquaintance with writing and reading.[28] Above all, for Torrey, the Qur'an is conclusive evidence of the prophet's literacy. The Qur'an, Torrey continues, not only gives no ground whatever for supposing Muhammad unlettered but contains several indications to the contrary. Basing his opinion on 87:6, Torrey concludes '...when all the evidence is taken into account, that Muhammad did write down the whole of the Qur'an with his right hand.'[29]

[25] *Ibid.*, 60
[26] T. Kronholm, *op. cit.*, 62
[27] Torrey, *op. cit.*, 38
[28] *Ibid.*, 39
[29] *Ibid.*, 36

Strangely, Torrey goes further and says that the probability that the prophet had learned to read Hebrew or Aramaic with any competence may nevertheless seem remote. These two languages, however, in both vocabulary and grammar, bear enough resemblance to Arabic to enable one who is accustomed to read and write the latter to labour through the sentences of a Jewish document after a comparatively short period of study with the aid of Jewish instructors.[30] He also says that it is known that Hebrew and Aramaic writings were numerous in Mecca and Madina. However he provides no evidence to support this supposition, and the conclusion may be drawn that he is still relying exclusively on conjecture.

As regards the Qur'anic narrative, Torrey has several suggestions. First of all, he expresses his dissatisfaction with those who claim that the sources of Muhammad's knowledge of Biblical characters and events owe less to the Bible than to extra-canonical literature. Torrey believes that even in the stories where the prophet makes greatest use of the haggadah there is frequent evidence that he also knew the canonical account. The Qur'anic silence on Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets (except Jonah), according to Torrey, is not due to the absence of these books in Mecca or the prophet's lack of knowledge about them, but because they are utterly outside his interest.[31] Nonetheless, Torrey has pointed out that there are some Qur'anic narratives, such as the incident of the breakers of the Sabbath (2:61, 4:50, 5:65, 7:166), David's invention of coats of mail (21:80) and Job's producing a spring of cool water by stamping on the ground (38:41-43), for which no Biblical or haggadic source is known, despite the fact that they sound like Jewish lore.[32]

The prophet, says Torrey, wanted to give the new Arabian religion a clear and firm connection with the existing monotheistic religions, and especially with the Hebrew Bible. In addition, the prophet, using the Biblical narrative, tried to show his countrymen how the earlier prophets had been received in the former time; and how the religion which they preached was carried on from age to age, while the successive generations of men who rejected it were punished.[33] In the beginning, the Qur'an contained no sustained narrative, but by the time the prophet started putting forth

[0] *Ibid.*, 39-40
[1] *Ibid.*, 67
[32] *Ibid.*, 68
[3] *Ibid.*, 105

longer narratives, the size of the Qur'an grew rapidly. The main part of the narrative was produced by the prophet in his last years at Mecca and at the beginning of his career in Madina. According to Torrey, these periods gave satisfaction to the prophet in the thought that the Qur'an was beginning to attain the dimension of a sacred book, the scripture of the new revelation in the Arabic tongue.[34]

The question of whether the prophet, who appears to use predominantly Jewish sources, was successful or not, occupies a prominent place in Torrey's discussion. He does not answer it clearly, but he implies in several places that the prophet spoils the Biblical narrative. Before discussing Torrey's comment on the Qur'anic narrative, it is important to note that he tries to evaluate it from the perspective of the Biblical narrative. In his analysis of the differences between the Qur'anic and Biblical narratives, Torrey explains that the Biblical narratives were the product of consummate literary art, written at various times, for religious instruction, by men who were born story-tellers. They were preserved and handed down by a process of selection. The matter in the Qur'anic narrative is completely different. In Torrey's words, the creation of the Qur'anic narrative was the most forbidding undertaking: the production of narrative as divine revelation, to rate from the first as inspired scripture; narrative, moreover, which had already been given permanent form in the existing sacred books. The prophet's dilemma, according to Torrey, was to decide whether he would reproduce the Biblical narrative or tell the stories with an essential difference. For if he did the former he would be charged with plagiarism, but if he did the latter he would be accused of falsifying.[35] Torrey argues that a skilful narrator might have escaped this difficulty by his literary art, but Muhammad was very far from being a skilful narrator.

> His imagination is vivid, but not creative. His characters are all alike, and they utter the same platitudes. He is fond of dramatic dialogue, but has very little sense of dramatic scene or action. The logical connection between successive episodes is often loose, sometimes wanting; and points of importance, necessary for the clear understanding of the story, are likely to be left out. There is also the inveterate habit of repetition, and a very defective sense of humour.[36]

In short, the Qur'anic narrative, for Torrey, lacks most of the qualities which the typical story ought to have. As regards the experiences of Noah in 11:27-51, Torrey

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[34] *Ibid.*, 105-7
[35] *Ibid.*, 107-8
[36] *Ibid.*, 108

says that the narrative contains very little incident but consists chiefly of the same religious harangues which are repeated scores of times throughout the Qur'an, uninspired and uniformly wearisome.[37] Torrey's dissatisfaction with the Qur'anic narratives is not limited to their style and presentation. He also criticises the motives behind them. Some of the Qur'anic narratives, Torrey maintains, were produced by the prophet out of his imagination. Muhammad wanted to attract as well as convince his people; therefore, he adorned his Qur'an with extended narratives. Furthermore, these narratives delighted him too.

Torrey believes that the prophet showed some freedom in his retelling of the stories of the early life of Moses. Because of this, Torrey thinks, the prophet omitted many haggadic materials necessary for the understanding of the story. Thus many things made plain in the Midrash or Hebrew Bible are presented abruptly in the Qur'an. The narrative of Joseph in chapter 12 is a good illustration. In his analysis of this surah, Torrey declares that the prophet spoils a good story. Regarding 12:31-34, Torrey notes that it is not evident what the episode of the banquet has to do with the course of events, nor why the ladies are provided with knives; nor even why Joseph is put in prison. These things are all made clear in the Midrash, however.[38] In addition, Torrey points out that after a religious discourse of some length in 12:37-40, Joseph gives the two prisoners the interpretation of their dreams; and it is implied, though not definitely said, that his prediction was completely fulfilled. The dream of Pharaoh in 43, however, is then introduced abruptly.[39] Clearly, Torrey is still reading the Qur'an from his Biblical perspective. Concerning the occasion when Joseph makes himself known to his brothers, Torrey concludes that the scene is not as effective in the Qur'an as in the Hebrew story.[40]

One interesting suggestion forcefully made by Torrey is that some of the Qur'anic narratives are not religiously oriented. Those concerning Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Dhū al-Qarnayn and Joseph in Egypt are given as examples.

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[37] *Ibid.*, 108; In another place Torrey says 'His colourless scraps of history were hooted at as 'old stories'; and we happen to be told on more than one occasion he suffered from competition with a real raconteur. The Meccans, like St. Paul's auditors at Athens (Acts 17:21), were ready to hear 'some new thing', if only to laugh at it, but their patience was easily exhausted.' (*Ibid.*, 106)

[38] *Ibid.*, 111

[39] *Ibid.*, 111

[40] *Ibid.*, 112

Torrey also argues that the prophet is particularly interested in the episodes in which women figure prominently, for example the accounts of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Joseph and Potiphar's wife and the two ladies in Midian in 28: 23-24. The last, according to Torrey, is very important. Here the prophet doubles the romance in the story, patterning it, in a general way, upon the Biblical account of Jacob and Rachel.[41] Torrey's argument reflects the general view among Western scholars of the prophet's personality. Torrey attempts to persuade the reader that the prophet has a lively interest in those episodes in which women are the major figures. In 28:23-26 the prophet, Torrey says, neither names the father of the girls nor shows the least interest in him. This means that the prophet is interested in the girls. Torrey fails to note, however, that the Qur'anic narrative does not give the name of the girls either. If this scene is read carefully it will be seen that it contains no romance. The presentation is pure in its characterisation. The main theme is Moses' need of his Lord's blessing (help). It should also be remembered that the Qur'anic language shows harmony and homogeneity in its presentation of intimate issues, such as a couple's sexual relations, fornication and so on. It also speaks of such figures as the wife of Pharaoh, the mother of Jesus and Moses' mother. It is therefore not difficult to see the religious orientation of Qur'anic narrative in which women figure prominently, and to dismiss Torrey's point as implausible.

In his comment on 2:247, the narrative of Ṭālūt and Jālūt (Saul and Goliath), Torrey says that the prophet's memory failed him: this narrative is obviously confused with the tale of Gideon and his three hundred chosen men (Judges 7:4-7).[42] Regarding the identification of the boy who is rescued from the sacrificial knife by divine intervention, however, Torrey criticises those scholars who claim to show that the prophet is confused and uncertain in regard to this story. Torrey is convinced that the prophet, far from being confused, shows here both his acquaintance with the Old Testament narrative and his practical wisdom.[43] 'Practical wisdom' in Torrey's terminology, however, means that the prophet himself manipulates this story. In other

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[41] *Ibid.*, 118
[42] *Ibid.*, 116
[43] *Ibid.*, 99

words, whoever reads through the Qur'an must feel that he has the prophet before him in every verse.[44]

Besides prophetic confusion and manipulation, Torrey also suggests that the prophet derived some of the Qur'anic narratives from folk-lore. Khiḍr (the wise man) in 18:65-82 is a good illustration. Like many others, Torrey does not neglect to refer to certain ancient Arabian religious and social influences which are the property not merely of the Hijaz, but of the Arabian Peninsula. Apart from the customs and ceremonies connected with the Kaᶜba and Mecca, there are many commercial terms in the Qur'an which are characteristically Arabic. Torrey's principal conclusion is that Muhammad's idea of God, as exemplified in the Qur'an, is in its main features of a somewhat magnified picture of a Meccan merchant; it could hardly have been otherwise.[45] Keeping in mind the mercantile background of the prophet Torrey tries to prove that the Qur'an itself infers that the prophet himself produced the Qur'an. In other words these terms are not acquired from other languages. As for the mathematical accounting on the Day of Judgement in the Qur'an, Torrey claims that this is alien to Judaism and Christianity, though he admits in a footnote, 'I have been informed by Professor Dümichen that the balance plays an important part in Egyptian Eschatology from earliest times.'[46] Be that as it may, Torrey believes these materials show the dependence of the prophet on his native community.

In *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* Torrey deals with many issues. His interest in the Qur'an goes beyond the narrative sections. He believes that many rituals such as prayer,[47] the manner of fasting,[48] almsgiving,[49] *shahādah*,[50] *tawḥīd*,[51] the ethics in the Qur'an,[52] and even other institutions such as the mosque, are derived from Judaism. The number of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an, according to Torrey, is a fair indication of the prophetic dependence. Twenty-five are named; among them are the three Arabian prophets: Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shuᶜaib, and three only from the Gospels:

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[44] *Ibid.*, 95
[45] Torrey, *op. cit.*, 1892, 15
[46] *Ibid.*, 14, 17 ftn.3
[47] Torrey, *op. cit.*, 1967, 46, 82
[48] *Ibid.*, 138
[49] *Ibid.*, 14, 42
[50] *Ibid.*, 133
[51] *Ibid.*, 134
[52] *Ibid.*, 6, 140

Zachariah, John the Baptist and Jesus. All the rest are from the Old Testament.[53] In addition, Torrey is also convinced that the majority of the loan words in the Qur'an are derived from Judaism. He criticises Jeffery for his disinclination to recognise many borrowings from Jewish sources.[54] As an example he gives the Qur'anic term *raqīm*. Torrey suggests that *raqīm* is a corruption of the name of the Emperor Decius, which in the Hebrew alphabet would be spelled *dqys*. The Hebrew *s* is mistaken for *m*, and *d* for *r*, by Muhammad's informant, who read or recited the story to him.[55] Jeffery rejected Torrey's suggestion on the basis that the two words do not resemble each other very closely in the Syriac scripture.[56] Here, Torrey's dissatisfaction with Jeffery's comment is related to his approach to the story. The story of the *Asḥāb al-Kahf* (Seven Sleepers) according to Torrey, is also based on Jewish sources. Any suggestion contradicting this confession is unacceptable to him. In sum, it is clear that Torrey is intent on showing that Judaism was the primary historical antecedent of the Qur'an.

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[53] *Ibid.*, 67

[54] C. C. Torrey, Review of A. Jeffery, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an, in *The Moslem World*, 29 (1939) 359-363

[55] C. C. Torrey, 'Three Difficult Passages in the Koran,' in *A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented to Edward G. Browne*, (ed) by T. W. Arnold and R. A. Nicholson, Cambridge 1922, 458; A. James Bella, 'Brief Communications: Al-Raqīm or al-Ruqūd? A Note on Surah 18:9', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, 111 (1991) 115

[56] A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Baroda: Oriental Institute 1938, 144

1.2.2. Richard Bell's Concept of the Qur'an and Its Narratives

Richard Bell devoted himself mainly to Qur'anic studies, producing significant works which are still being used by many researchers. His first book, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*,[1] written in 1926, was the fruit of a determination to explore Islam, and paved the way for a profound study of the Qur'an. *The Origin* consists of seven lectures; two of a preliminary nature: (i) on the Eastern Church and the Christian environment of Arabia and (ii) on Christianity in Southern Arabia and its influence on the Arabs in general. Three lectures follow on Muhammad: (iii) his religious activity, (iv) his moulding as a prophet, (v) his attitude to Christianity. Two deal with Islam after Muhammad: (vi) the Christian population during the Arab conquest and (vii) Christian influences in early Islam. According to D. B. Macdonald, some of these lectures were primarily intended to give an idea of the circumstances of the origin of Islam to theological students.[2] Patrick O'hair Cate accepts the importance of the book but states that it is not an especially astonishing or original piece of work.[3] Nevertheless, because it is a seminal work and allows us to follow the development of Bell's thought concerning Qur'anic studies *The Origin* remains a very important contribution.

The second work which we will make frequent references to is Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'an*.[4] As Jeffery has pointed out, this is not a Qur'anic introduction in the strict sense of the word but a somewhat revised form of the introduction to his translation of the Qur'an published in 1937-39.[5] Bell divides his *Introduction* into eight chapters: (i) is devoted to the religious environment of Arabia, (ii) discusses the origin of the Qur'an, (iii) deals with the form of the Qur'an, (iv) investigates the structure of the Qur'an, (v) gives information about the compilation of the surahs, (vi) focuses on the chronological order of the Qur'an, (vii) presents an

[1] Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*, London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1926

[2] D. B. Macdonald, 'Review of Richard Bell, The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment', in *The Moslem World* 16 (1926) 309

[3] Patrick O'hair Cate, *Each Other's Scripture: the Muslim's views of the Bible and the Christian's views of the Qur'an*, The Hartford Seminary Foundation 1974 (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.), 227

[4] Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1953

[5] Arthur Jeffery, 'Review of Richard Bell, Introduction to the Qur'an', in *The Muslim World* 44 (1954) 254

argument concerning the stages of growth of the Qur'an and finally (viii) discusses the contents and sources of the Qur'an.

Bell's main concern in the first chapters of both works is to deal with the religious environment, which affected how the prophet thought about delivering his message in seventh century Arabia. Briefly, Arabia was encircled by the Christians of Syria in the north west, Mesopotamia in the north east and Abyssinia in the west. Though Bell accepts that, because of internal conflict (doctrinal dispute) among the Christians the Church gained no truly independent footing among the Arabs, he believes that an indirect influence was exerted from these Christian surroundings.[6] According to Bell, this influence stemmed from Syria (or the Ghassanids on the Roman-Syrian borders) and also made the South and West borders of Arabia (Abyssinian) monophysite. The Church of Hira in Persian territory had spread westwards to the confines of the Arabian desert.[7] In addition, trade between the Arabs and neighbouring Christians enabled people in the desert to learn something of Christianity.[8] Whatever the source, it is assumed that the Arabs did have some knowledge about Christianity; Bell considers the existence of references to Christianity in pre-Islamic poetry as evidence of such knowledge.[9] Furthermore, he refers to the ḥanīfs, whose existence, Bell argues, clearly shows the influence of Christianity upon the Arabs.[10]

Bell devotes pages to an explanation of the word ḥanīf in the Qur'an, where it occurs several times and denotes one who follows a pure religion, i.e. not a polytheist. Therefore, the Qur'an refers to Abraham as being ḥanīf and *muslim*. As regards the etymology of the word, Bell is convinced that it is derived from Syriac ḥanpā (heathen), but it is not linguistically equivalent to the Qur'anic ḥanīf.[11] In brief, the prophet's use of the term implies that it is used to denote a class of religious men who are known and respected. Bell, in his article entitled 'Who were the Ḥanīfs?', summarises his opinion about them as follows: 'The ḥanīfs were the followers of the

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[6] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 16-17
[7] *Ibid.*, 26, 36
[8] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 11
[9] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 43-45
[10] *Ibid.*, 58
[11] *Ibid.*, 58

ideal original of Arab religion. They were no sect or party of historical people, but the product of Muhammad's unresting mind.'[12]

Furthermore, Bell says that in his prophetic journey Muhammad did not stand alone and was not the only individual upon whom Jewish and Christian ideas exerted an impetus towards prophetism. He gives Elkasāī as an example. Regarding the founder of the Elkasāites, he says that he was an Arab upon whom Jews and Christians had an unequivocal influence. Bell mentions some similarities between the religion of the Elkasāites and that of the prophet of Islam, such as the belief in One God and the Day of Judgement, and the claim of Elkasāī to have received a book sent down to him from Heaven.[13] The most interesting thing in Bell's evaluation is the connection of the Elkasāites with the Qur'anic Sābiūn. Bell suggests that Sābiūn were a remnant of the Elkasāites subsisting in the north-west of Arabia, and distinct from the Christians of the north of Arabia.[14] Here Bell simply implies that Christianity was the main influence upon the prophet.

According to Bell's view, there are two main difficulties concerning the development of Muhammad's ideas and the influences which affected him. The first is that the traditions of his early life are so unreliable as to be practically negligible in this regard. The second is related to the Qur'an itself. Although the Qur'an was collected together very soon after the prophet's death, Bell believes it is almost impossible to arrange it in chronological order. For Bell, this lack of chronological sequence is the main cause of its confusion.[15] Although this is not our main topic, we should note that, unlike Weil and Nöldeke, Bell believes that dating the Qur'anic revelation involves not whole surahs but rather consistent units, individual pericopes. Therefore he first identifies a single unit of revelation and then tries by a variety of methods to date the pericope.[16] However, this re-arrangement of the Qur'an is idiosyncratic. Bell seems prompted by a personal mission to decide where the verses should be situated, and the result is unsound.

As regards the first difficulty mentioned above, Bell accepts that the tradition is very unsafe. Therefore he argues that what may be reliably known about Islam, the

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[12] Richard Bell, 'Who were the *Ḥanīfs*?', *The Moslem World*, 20 (1930) 124
[13] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 13; Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 59-60
[14] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 60
[15] *Ibid.*, 66
[16] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *op. cit.*, 1991, 33

prophet, and even the Qur'an, must come through a study of the Qur'an itself. He insists that because of the discrepancies in many traditions one should not attach great weight to them.[17] Bell also expresses his dissatisfaction with the theories of his predecessors, Weil, Sprenger, Muir, Margoliouth, and Nöldeke, who sought to prove that epilepsy, hysteria, Satan, deliberate mystification of the people and overpowering fits of emotion, led Muhammad to believe that he was divinely inspired. According to Bell, they have paid more attention to the tradition than to the Qur'anic evidence.[18] He points out that in the Qur'an the Meccan pagans accuse the prophet of being *majnūn* (crazy) but not diseased.[19] Consequently, he concludes that there is no need to investigate any Islamic source other than the Qur'an.

Bell, like many European scholars, is excessively concerned with the attempt to discover the external elements in the Qur'an.[20] He believes that it is easy to see the presence of Jewish and Christian materials in the Qur'an almost at first glance.[21] Although his aim in *The Origin* is to present the origin of Islam in the context of the Christianity which encircled Arabia, he accepts the difficulty of determining which elements came from Judaism and which from Christianity.[22] The main obstacle to this identification, according to Bell, lies in the prophet's personality and his gradual knowledge of Jews and Christians. At this juncture, it should be remembered that Bell believes that there are all sorts of reminiscences of Biblical phrases even in the earliest portions of the Qur'an, although it is an error to attribute to Muhammad a too direct acquaintance with Christianity or Judaism at the beginning of his career.[23] Moreover, Bell maintains that the prophet did not distinguish between Jews and Christians at the beginning of his prophecy.[24] The direct borrowing of Biblical, or what the prophet believed to be Biblical, materials belongs mainly to his late Meccan and early Madinan

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[17] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 20, 39; Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 92
[18] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 30
[19] *Ibid.*, 31
[20] For instance, as regards the vocabulary sources of the Qur'an, Bell notes that Jeffery collected some 275 words regarded as being of foreign origin. The majority of these, however, can be seen in pre-Islamic Arabic, and many of them had become regular Arabic words. Of only about 70 can we say that the use was new. Of these 70, half came from Christian languages, many from Syriac and a few from Ethiopic, some 25 came from Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic, and the rest came from Persian, Greek and unidentified sources. (Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 80-1)
[21] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 67
[22] *Ibid.*, 67
[23] *Ibid.*, 67
[24] *Ibid.*, 111

period.[25] Bell nonetheless considers these materials to have had an indirect influence, giving as his reason the prophet's independent personality. In Bell's opinion Muhammad is an opportunist who adopts what suits his own purposes at the moment and passes over what does not suit them; when he has attained some immediate object he drops what he has previously adopted.[26] He puts his own stamp even on his borrowings. In other words, Bell speaks of the Qur'an as the product of the prophet's conscious mind:

> ...what we have to do with is the brooding religious genius and man of great native mental power, but very limited knowledge, striving to find out what others more enlightened than his own Arab people knew, which might be of use to him in his own enterprise; perhaps, too, restricted in his inquiries by the necessity of avoiding too open association with, or borrowing from, those who professed an alien faith.[27]

The prophet of Islam, according to Bell, began his mission with an appeal to the gratitude owed by man and an exhortation to recognise God's bounties in creation. However, his appeal produced little effect among the Meccans.[28] The Qur'anic passages of this kind are called 'signs passages' by Bell. There are a considerable number, dealing with such matters as the phenomenon of the creation of heaven and earth; the creation of man; animals and various other benefits which men utilise in their daily life; the alternation of night and day, the sun, moon and stars.[29] For Bell, these different passages serve various purposes, but if they are taken as a whole they express the idea of an exalted, powerful and beneficent deity. It is also important to note that Bell believes that the sign passages occur throughout the Qur'an and do not belong to any one period of its composition.[30]

As regards the generation of life, Bell concedes that Muhammad describes the process of formation of the embryo in the womb with a detail which implies considerable knowledge. What is important for Bell is the prophet's independence of the Biblical account. However, Bell notes that the prophet subsequently refers to the creation of man from clay as described in the Old Testament.[31] In his *Introduction to*

[25] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 140
[26] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 101
[27] *Ibid.*, 111
[28] *Ibid.*, 102
[29] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 115
[30] *Ibid.*, 115-6
[31] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 76-7

the Qur'an Bell is more careful in his evaluation of these verses. However, he conjectures that, because of the mention of *iblīs* (Satan) in three of these passages, Muhammad must have derived them from a Christian source.[32]

After that the prophet, Bell continues, developed the idea that God will punish the disobedience of his servants. Bell calls the punishment stories of this period *al-mathānī*. The word occurs in 15:87 and 39:23-24. Bell believes that many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars do not give a satisfactory account of *al-mathānī*. Nonetheless, he seems to favour the meaning 'stories which resemble one another' and explains it as referring to the stories of punishment in the Qur'an. He mentions fourteen stories: those of ᶜĀd, Thamūd, the man of al-Ḥijr, The people of Midian, The man of the Grove, the man of al-Rass, the people of Tubbaᶜ, Saba', Noah, Abraham, Lot, al-Mu'tafikāt, Pharaoh, Korah. Eight of them, according to Bell, derive from Arab traditions, but there are others which parallel Biblical stories.[33] It is clear that although the prophet uses some of these stories separately, he sometimes forms them into groups, and that the groups tend to take a schematic form, the stories being connected to each other by introductory phrases and refrains. Bell goes on to claim that it is possible to trace the growth of the main groups of these stories in the Qur'an. He points out that the stories of Noah, ᶜĀd and Thamūd are constant elements, and are frequently conjoined elsewhere. He also asserts that those of Abraham and Moses are later additions.[34] Furthermore, he notes that although the number of the stories is more than seven, there appear to be only seven main ones, *sabᶜ al-mathānī*: those of Noah, ᶜĀd, Thamūd, Abraham, Lot, Midian and Moses. The others, as W. M. Watt has stated, are either duplicates of these main stories or brief references rather than full stories, such as those of the people of Tubbaᶜ and the man of Rass.[35]

Be that as it may, Bell maintains that the lesson of each story is applied to Muhammad's own situation among his unbelieving and unresponsive contemporaries. He also places stress on the purpose of these stories:

> These stories are not given for their narrative or entertainment value. The prophet's purpose in narrating these stories, which occupy considerable space in the Qur'an, was not purely historical. He did so because they seemed to him to have a bearing on the situation with

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[32] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 118
[33] *Ibid*, 119-21: Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 123
[34] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 126-7
[35] W. M. Watt, *op. cit.*, 1994, 131-132

which he himself was faced, and to contain instruction for the people to whom he was addressing himself. It is natural therefore to assume that he saw in the sending of these messengers something analogous to his own.[36] But they are not stories of eschatological punishment.[37]

The last point is criticised by David Marshall, who argues that though the main thrust of Bell's argument is correct, he has oversimplified the situation by his claim that early punishment narratives have nothing to do with the Last Day. Marshall suggests that it is better to say that the worldly punishment of unbelievers is the primary reference of the early punishment narratives, while acknowledging that they can serve as a warning of the punishment of the Last Day.[38]

The next stage of the prophet's development, according to Bell, occurred when he learned about the scripture lessons used in the service of worship. Bell named this period the Qur'an period. This period, partly Meccan and partly Madinan, lasted up to the change of the *qiblah*. Bell is convinced that the verb *qara'a* and the related word *qur'ān* belong to the religious vocabulary of Christianity. In the Syriac church the scripture reading or lesson was designated *qeryānā*, and it is probably from this that the word and the idea are taken. Interestingly, Bell suggests that the beginning of the Qur'an period falls about the same time as the institution of the *ṣalāt* (the ritual prayer). For Bell, *ṣalāt* is also a borrowed Christian word.[39]

With his growing knowledge of earlier monotheistic religion, Muhammad began to produce his own Qur'an, or collection of religious stories. Most of the Qur'anic narratives of former peoples and their prophets belong to this period. In contrast to punishment stories, great stress is placed on the proclamation of the coming Judgement, in which, of course, resurrection, punishment and reward in a future life are implied. It is during this period that the idea of *furqān* (deliverance or salvation) came to the fore. Bell associates *furqān* with the Syriac *purqānā* (salvation) and refers it to the beginning of the revelation to Muhammad, or to the sending down of the heavenly Qur'an from the presence of God to the nearer heaven so that it should be available for

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[36] As an example he discusses briefly the different aims of the Biblical and Qur'anic versions of the Moses story: '…the object of Moses' mission in the Bible story, namely the deliverance of the Children of Israel from Pharaoh's oppression, while it does appear in the story told by Muhammad, 7:103 and 26:16, occupies quite a subordinate position.' (R. Bell, 'Muhammad and Previous Messengers', *The Moslem World*, 24 (1934) 333)

[37] R. Bell, 'Muhammad and Previous Messengers', *The Moslem World*, 24 (1934) 331; Introduction, 127

[38] David Marshall, *God, Muhammad, the Unbelievers*, Richmond: Curzon 1999, 50

[39] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 90-91, 129

the Christian influences limited to these narratives. Bell maintains that the prophet used Apocalyptic materials in his descriptions of the end of the world, the Judgement Day, the pains of hell and other matters. Bell points out that although all these materials are also preserved in the Apocalyptic books, Muhammad did not derive them from either source, relying instead upon oral information. At this stage it should be remembered that Bell explains what he means by Apocalyptic: the Apocalypse is found in popular Christianity rather than Judaism.[45] So the apparent influence comes directly from Christianity. Bell also mentions some narratives in the Qur'an which do not depend on any real acquaintance with the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The legend of *ashāb al-kahf* (the Seven Sleepers), the stories of Moses and *al-khiḍr*, and the reference to the story of Alexander the Great are very good illustrations. For Bell, this is important evidence that the prophet was dependent upon lay informants (at third or fourth hand) whose memories were not always clear concerning what was actually in the scriptures. Despite his introduction of this theory, Bell does not develop it satisfactorily. With the exception of a few possibilities, he does not seek to discover precisely what the prophet learned, or from whom, how, and where he obtained his information. Briefly, he asserts that these stories are connected with a widespread religion (Eastern Christianity) which surrounded Arabia.[46] Bell is convinced that his suggestion is confirmed by the accusation of the prophet's opponents reported in 25:5: 'These are but tales of the ancients, which he has transcribed for himself. They are recited to him morning and evening'.

In several places Bell reminds the reader that the prophet was in a better position to learn the content of the Jewish and Christian scriptures at Madina. In fact Bell believes that the Qur'an took its shape during the Madinan period rather than the Meccan.[47] Although Bell believes that the prophet seems never to have gained any intimate knowledge, he proposes that one of the effects of his increasing acquaintance with the content of the revelation is the introduction of *amthāl* (similes) or parables into the Qur'an.[48] According to Bell, some of these parables are mere similes or similitudes, and it is possible that they arose in the Qur'an spontaneously. Others, however, are stories of some length and richness. Bell therefore suggests that the Gospel parables

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[45] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 103-5
[46] Bell, *op, cit.*, 1953, 164-5; Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 112
[47] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 125
[48] Bell, *op, cit.*, 1953, 165; Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 114

transmission to him. In addition, Bell holds the view that the prophet began to re-edit the short didactic pieces, which might include 'sign' passages and even an occasional punishment story, in this period. He also sought the origin of the utilisation of the word *sūrah* in this period. This period came to a close at about the time of Badr (624 CE), *yawm al-furqān* (the day of salvation).[40] Bell attaches much importance to the battle of Badr as a turning point, as regards not only the external success of Islam but also Muhammad's own assurance that he was truly a prophet. Bell concludes that the battle of Badr corresponds with a great change in the prophet's attitude to earlier monotheists.[41]

The final stage comes in Madina, when the prophet announced the establishment of the newly independent religious community. According to Bell, his purpose was to prepare a new Book for the new community. Bell believes that this period (the Book period) was never completed. However, it is clear that in this period Muhammad's sense of prophetic mission had intensified. Therefore it was essential that this new community should, like the others, have its own Book. This Book is different from the Qur'an in that it is designated as *kitāb* (writing) rather than as *qur'ān* (recitation).[42] This indicates the transition from Muhammad's office as a messenger to that of a prophet. As regards some of the punishment stories in chapters 7 and 11 Bell says that it is easy to see traces of Madinan revision. The reason, according to Bell, is that these stories were also adapted for the same purposes.[43] So it is safe to conclude that during the Book period, besides laying down many legal regulations, the prophet dealt with some narratives. This indicates that Muhammad's 'brooding' mind was not static but always active. As a result of his own enquiries, the prophet tells and retells the stories of the previous prophets in growing detail, as he learns more of them.

Bell believes that the New Testament contributes much less material than the Old Testament. Nevertheless, there are many Gospel narratives in the Qur'an. The story of Zacharias and the birth of John, *Yaḥyā*, according to Bell, come from the Gospel of Luke. The narratives of Jesus' birth and Annunciation, however, show the influence of Apocryphal Gospels, particularly the Infancy Gospel of James.[44] Nor are

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[40] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 130-3
[41] *Ibid.*, 132
[42] *Ibid.*, 134-5
[43] *Ibid.*, 135
[44] *Ibid.*, 163

could have been Muhammad's sources. Furthermore, Bell mentions some similarities between 36:12, where the prophet received the command 'coin a *mathal* for them...' and a distorted account of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, mixed up with the story of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra; between 18:31 and the parable of the rich fool in the Gospels; and between 24:34, the famous Qur'anic verse of *nūr* (light), and the light of a monk's cell.[49] Despite these proposed similarities or indirect influences, Bell accepts that few of the Gospels' parables find any echo in the Qur'an. The reason for this, Bell explains, is that Muhammad never had the opportunity to have close contact with Christians such as he had with the Jews of Madina.[50] Though Bell mentions other sources from which he claims the prophet derived information, he is reluctant to go into detail.

As regards the theory of the prophet's experience of inspiration and revelation, Bell's approach is quite different. He believes that the prophet's mind was occupied with the thought of the One God and the tension of persuading his own people to worship Him.[51] For Bell, the prophet's first enterprise was the reform of religion in Mecca.[52] But elsewhere he notes that even Muhammad himself does not know the impulse which urges him on.[53] Therefore, the prophet should not be blamed for giving different accounts of the revelation at different times. In other words, in the Qur'an, the reader can hear the speech of Muhammad's 'brooding' soul as it tries to understand and to adapt his growing knowledge of previous messengers, and of the beliefs of those who already had the book, which gradually came to him.[54] The key term in this procedure, according to Bell, is *waḥy*. Bell holds the opinion that *waḥy* means 'suggestion'. He explains that the fundamental sense of the word as used in the Qur'an seems to be the communication of an idea by some quick suggestion or prompting, by a flash of inspiration.[55] Basing his argument on 75:1-2, 'O thou who has taken up thy burden stay up all night except a short while', Bell tries to show how and when the prophet composed the Qur'an: it should have been after meditation, when he was most susceptible to suggestion. Bell is sure that the prophet chose the night hours as being

[49] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 114-115
[50] Bell, *op, cit.*, 1953, 165
[51] R. Bell, 'Muhammad's Vision', *The Moslem World*, 24 (1934) 154
[52] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1926, 91
[53] Bell, *op. cit.*, 1934, 154
[54] *Ibid.*, 154
[55] Bell, *op, cit.*, 1953, 33

conducive to the strongest impression and the most just speech, the time when ideas appear in their clearest form.[56]

Nonetheless, the process does not end with meditation. According to his own words 'the prophet must not press, but wait for the inspiration which will bestow the words without his impatient effort to find them. When his mind has calmed and the whole has taken shape, the words will come, and when they do come, he must take them as they are given him.'[57] The disjointedness of the Qur'an, Bell suggests, must be sought in this explanation. In addition, God's guidance after meditation is as important as the inspiration itself. Once the prophet had become accustomed to the idea of being guided in this way, he cultivated his receptivity to the extent that he often mistook his own enthusiastic reaction to events for the divine afflatus, *wahy*.[58] Although Bell does not question Muhammad's sincerity, he believes that the prophet, in his later life, when events pressed upon him and decision was imperative, had no doubt to try to force the revelation in order to obtain the answer which he desired. Therefore Bell accepts to some extent the view that the prophet was guilty of practising a certain degree of mystification regarding his communication from God. Bell also adds that the prophet's claim to inspiration and authority grew as he measured himself against Jewish and Christian ideas.[59] So Bell believes that the Qur'an is not originally the word of God but rather the product of Muhammad's brooding religious genius.

Curiously enough, in his explanation of Muhammad's vision in surah Najm. Bell makes a suggestion which is uncommon among non-Muslims, when he says that

> the prophet saw an Angel, God's messenger. Here was the possibility of the reality of what he had seen after all. It was not God, but God's messenger who had appeared to him. The fact that he went back after all, and reasserted in Chapter 71 that he had seen the messenger on the clear horizon, is I think and indication that something of the sort had really happened to him, though for a time he himself seems to have been doubtful of the possibility of its having been real.[60]

Clearly, Bell's attitude here contradicts his above-noted explanation of *wahy*. Although he is more careful in his later works and maintains that the idea of Gabriel's bringing the revelation down upon the prophet's heart with the permission of God is a

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[56] Bell, *op cit*, 1926, 97, Bell, *op, cit.*, 1953, 34
[57] Bell, *op, cit*, 1953, 34
[58] *Ibid*, 36
[59] *Ibid.*, 29, 36
[60] Bell, *op cit*, 1934 154, P O Cate, *op cit*, 233-4

Madinan phenomenon, Bell contends that when the prophet realised the impossibility of the vision of God he re-interpreted the event, saying that it was Gabriel who had appeared in visible form.[61] Be that as it may, the central source of revelation is the prophet's own 'great native mental power' enlightened, as he believed, by the divine guidance which came through reflection and meditation.[62] It should not be neglected that the last point made by Bell shows his great effort to understand the Qur'an in the light of Qur'an.

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[61] Bell, *op, cit.*, 1953, 31

[62] Patrick O'hair Cate, *op. cit.*, 235

1.2.3. Concluding Remarks

This analysis has highlighted the remarkable similarity between Torrey's and Bell's understanding of the Qur'an. The debate on Jewish and Christian elements in the Qur'an is generally very intense in their works. Torrey, who is also well-known for his extremist convictions as a Biblical scholar,[1] believed that it was certain fact that the main historical source of the Qur'anic teaching was Arabian Judaism, which was both learned and authoritative, and altogether worthy of its Palestinian and Babylonian ancestry. Thus the prophet of Islam is regarded as mainly a disciple of the synagogue, and especially of the Jewish community at Mecca. Torrey was less concerned with the message (the Qur'anic verses themselves) than with the origin of the Qur'an, and maintained that there was a large colony of Jews in Mecca despite the lack of any hard evidence. In fact, Torrey's arguments appear to derive from intelligent guesswork. This is not a satisfactory way of identifying the Qur'anic sources.

Bell, however, insists that Christianity was the chief historical antecedent of the Qur'an and that Muhammad was a pupil of the church, though he sometimes admits Jewish influence, particularly on the Qur'anic narratives. In addition, Bell, unlike Torrey, suggests that Muhammad had only third-hand contact with the Bible and depended more on apocryphal writings. In contrast to Torrey's notions concerning self-hypnotism, Bell prefers the idea that the prophet's inspiration derived from his creative 'brooding' mind. Having admitted the sincerity of the prophet, Bell did not ascribe any divine origin to his message, namely the Qur'an. Although belief in sincerity does not necessarily entail acceptance of divine origin of message, A. L. Tibawi considers such an approach as to be self-contradictory.[2] Be that as it may, the value of Bell's overall contribution lies in his viewing the prophet's career in relation to his increasing knowledge of and contact with Christianity.[3]

Both Torrey and Bell disclose their dissatisfaction with the Muslim tradition, and acknowledge their exclusive reliance on the Qur'anic data. Nonetheless, in practice their analysis marries understanding to value judgement or classical non-Muslim bias. According to Bell, one of the most important obstacles to the understanding of the

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[1] Zev Garber, 'C. C., Torrey', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XV.1267; Kronholm, T., *op. cit.*, 56

[2] A. L. Tibawi, 'English Speaking Orientalists: A Critique of their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism', *The Islamic Quarterly*, 7 (1963) 35

Qur'an is its present arrangement. Thus, in his later works he attempts to reorder the short sections within the surahs in order to remove this obstacle. Certain themes developed by Bell show how the rearrangement would be done. Torrey, on the other hand, is more interested in finding the borrowed Jewish material in the Qur'an. He rarely refers to issues related to the Qur'anic order, preferring mainly to analyse the Qur'an through his own Jewish eyes. As has already been stated, Torrey's main aim was to respond to Christian scholars whereas Bell, to some extent, kept his study of the Qur'an (especially in his later works) and his polemic against Jewish scholars separate.

Following the fashion of their time, both authors dealt with such matters as the question of the prophet's literacy, the identification of the *ḥanīfs*, the existence of foreign vocabulary in the Qur'an, and the explanation of *al-furqān*. Despite the fact that their conclusions are quite different, the way they work is similar. However, of the two, only Bell strove to understand the event of the Qur'an by his rearrangement of the revelations. He was critical of its current order and believed that it is jumbled. His view was that without rearrangement the Qur'an is often unintelligible. Both scholars assented to the dominant opinion of their time: that the Qur'an is little more than an echo of the Bible.

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[3] A. Rippin, 'Reading the Qur'an with Richard Bell', *Journal of the American Oriental Studies*, 112 (1992) 640

1.3. Recent Developments in Qur'anic Studies

Despite the undoubted advances made towards an unbiased academic approach, it is clear that the Qur'an was still considered to have been, at least in part, the product of external influences. The early image of the Qur'an remained substantially unaltered before and after the Second World War; many believed that Judaism or Christianity had planted the seeds of knowledge which prepared the way for the prophet of Islam.

One hundred years after Geiger, Joshua Finkel in the journal entitled *Moslem World*, founded and edited by the Christian Samuel Marinus Zwemer, tried to prove that Geiger's long list of the prophet's debts to Judaism was a very successful achievement needing only slight emendation.[1] Apart from Judaism, according to Finkel, there were a few Christian and Samaritan materials which were ignored by Geiger. Calverley, basing his opinion on the remark of Goldziher, 'The dependence of Muhammad upon his Jewish teachers or upon what he heard of the Jewish haggadah and Jewish practices is now generally conceded', advised students of Islam to accept the conclusion that concurs with this fact.[2] Two decades later, Abraham I. Katsh, in his work *Judaism in Islam*, analysed the Biblical and Talmudic backgrounds of the Qur'an and its commentaries. In his analysis of surahs Baqara and 'Āl 'Imrān, he devoted his energy to relating many Qur'anic verses to Jewish sources. According to him, the prophet never intended to establish Islam as a new religion.[3] The prophet considered himself the rightful custodian of the Book sent by God to confirm the earlier scriptures, therefore it is highly probable there are Jewish and Christian sources in the Qur'an. Briefly, Katsh's work suggests that the Qur'an is a Jewish sacred text.

Western scholars never tire of going over the same ground in the attempt to find the original sources of the Qur'an and its narratives. Two distinguished names can be mentioned: Alfred Guillaume and John Bowman. Guillaume, a scholar and Anglican clergyman, makes a number of comparisons between the Qur'an and the Gospels and

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[1] Joshua Finkel, 'Old Israelitish Tradition in the Koran', *The Moslem World*, 22 (1933) 170
[2] E. Calverley, 'Sources of the Qur'an', *The Moslem World*, 22 (1932) 66-68
[3] Abraham I. Katsh, *Judaism in Islam*, New York: New York University Press 1954, xvii

concludes that Islam is an imperfect form of Christianity.[4] He complains that the Christian influence on the text of the Qur'an has been consistently neglected by scholars. He goes even further and tries to find an allusion to the Qur'anic debt to Christianity in the figures depicted on the walls of the *Ka^cba*.[5] In line with Guillaume, Bowman insistently draws attention to the materials of Syriac Christianity in the Qur'an. Following Bell, Andrae and Guillaume, he seeks to show that the Biblical material in the Qur'an is entirely derived from the Syrian Church's interpretation of the Old Testament as seen through the eyes of the New Testament.[6]

Recent scholarship in Islamic studies, and particularly Qur'anic studies, has witnessed various approaches. Some authorities, though they represent a minority, have raised very interesting questions and tried to change or reshape the direction of Qur'anic studies in the West. The works produced in this contemporary period are very innovative. One might seek the reason for these various interpretations in, for instance, the collapse of imperialism; the rise of independent Muslim nation states, which has brought about a significant change in perspective; the immigration of millions of Muslim workers to Western countries; or one might even take into consideration some Western scholars' call for their colleagues to reconsider the aim and direction of Islamic studies in the West.[7] It is also plausible to suggest that Muslim participation in the academic life of Western institutions is playing a significant role. Be that as it may, it is clear that there are many reasons, direct or indirect, for these changes. It should be remembered that there is no single type of Western scholarship and there is no one type of methodology in Islamic studies. For the sake of simplicity we will deal with these different approaches in four categories. The scholars selected for discussion in this section have been chosen to illustrate the contemporary views of the Qur'an among these different groups. Although the selection is quite artificial, this division will definitely help us to see in what ways these views of the Qur'an have changed from those of earlier periods.

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[4] Alfred Guillaume, *Islam*, Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark Ltd. 1962 (first pub. 1954) 194-199

[5] A. Guillaume, 'The Pictorial Background of the Qur'an', *The Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society*, 3 (1961-62) 45

[6] John Bowman, 'The Debt of Islam to Monophysite Syrian Christianity', in E. C. B. Machaurin (ed.), *Essays in Honour of Griffithes Wheeler Thatcher (1863-1950)*, Sydney: Sydney University Press 1967, 192

[7] J. D. J. Waardenburg, 'Mustashriḳūn', *EI²*, VII.748-49

The first figure we will present is Arthur Jeffery, whose works build on earlier historical and philological studies. We will then devote a lengthy analysis to the views of John Wansbrough, who advocates extreme historical scepticism. The third group consists of a few Christian writers who combine a more cautious historical approach with religious empathy. Outstanding figures of this group are Louis Massignon, William M. Watt, William C. Smith, Kenneth Cragg and Hans Küng. Finally we will briefly discuss those scholars whose approaches are more sensitive to the literary qualities of the Qur'anic narratives. Emphasis will be placed on the general outlook of Anthony H. Johns, Marilyn R. Waldman, Neal Robinson, Jane D. McAuliffe, Michael Sells and A. H. Mathias Zahniser. We will try to present their differences while acknowledging the fresh insights they bring to Qur'anic studies. We will also draw attention to their general remarks on the Qur'anic narratives. It should be noted that it is not the aim of this section to give a detailed analysis of these approaches.

1.3.1. Arthur Jeffery

The most important figure of this period is the Australian scholar Arthur Jeffery, whose *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* is considered an epoch-making work. Possessing an extraordinarily wide linguistic knowledge, Jeffery provides much interesting information about the Qur'anic vocabulary. According to Jeffery, the religion the prophet preached was new among the Arabs. It was not likely, therefore, that the native Arabic vocabulary would be adequate to express all its new ideas, so the obvious policy of the prophet would have been to borrow and adapt many technical and religious words.[8] Jeffery finds three distinct kinds of Qur'anic vocabulary: (i) words which are entirely non-Arabic, such as *istabraq, zanjabīl* and *namāriq*, (ii) words which are Semitic and whose trilateral root may be found in Arabic, but which nevertheless are used in the Qur'an not in the Arabic sense of root, but in a sense which developed in one of the other languages, such as *fāṭir, ṣawāmiʿ* and *bāraka*, (iii) words which are genuinely Arabic and commonly used in the Arabic language, but which as used in the Qur'an have been coloured in their meaning by the use of the cognate languages; for example, *nūr* means 'light' in Arabic, but is used to mean 'religion' in 9:32 due to the influence of Syriac usage. Similarly, the words *rūḥ,*

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[8] Arthur Jeffery, *op. cit.,* 1938, 38-9

kalimah and *kitāb* can be included in this category.[9] The existence of foreign vocabulary, Jeffery says, did not cause any problem for the earlier exegetes, who noted the various origins of many words in their commentaries. Only a little later, however, when the dogma of the eternal nature of the Qur'an was being elaborated, this was strenuously denied. Then the Qur'anic language became the most limpid Arabic.[10]

Furthermore, as a result of his linguistic studies, Jeffery held the opinion that not only the greater part of the religious vocabulary but also most of the cultural vocabulary of the Qur'an is of non-Arabic origin. It is safe to say that Jeffery, building on his analysis of the Qur'anic vocabulary, tried to prove that the existence of so many foreign words suggests the existence of foreign ideas.[11] In other words, Jeffery believed that during the period of his religious vocation the prophet made use of many vocabularies together with what these vocabularies conveyed, and justified his notion of prophetic dependence on the previous religious systems by reference to the existence of many foreign vocabularies. He also believed that the prophet himself invented many words to puzzle his listeners.[12] Therefore Jeffery saw the Qur'an as a record of the prophet's own experience rather than revelation from God.

Jeffery believed that although the Qur'an is distinctive it has certain ideas in common with other religious texts. Jeffery's approach to the Qur'anic narrative is twofold: to contrast and compare it with other scriptures. One of the most striking features is the Qur'an's consciousness of the existence of earlier religious books.[13] The implication of this feature is very simple: the Qur'an, as a later compilation, must imitate the previous Holy Books. Jeffery widens the scope of the influence on the Qur'an, identifying many Qur'anic passages, narratives, dogmas, religious beliefs and ideas with former religious systems. He says that the Jews in Arabia knew the Rabbinic writings better than the Old Testament. Some of the Jewish materials used by the prophet came via common information and Christian channels rather than any systematic teaching. The prophet mainly received his inspiration, however, from the monotheistic religions in the north:

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[9] *Ibid.*, 39-40
[10] *Ibid.*, 5
[11] *Ibid.*, 2
[12] *Ibid.*, 39
[13] Arthur Jeffery, 'The Qur'an as a Scripture', *The Moslem World*, 40 (1950) 44-45

...even a cursory reading of the Book makes it plain that Muhammad drew his inspiration not from the religious life and experiences of his land and his own people, but from the great monotheistic religions which were pressing down into Arabia in his day.[14]

Clearly Jeffery looks at the Qur'an through the method of contrasting and comparing the text with other scriptures. He also deals with the sources of the Qur'anic vocabulary in a way quite different from traditional approaches. His main conclusion is that the prophet did not receive any systematic teaching from Christians or Jews. What he learnt came through the oral tradition. Although Jeffery's conclusion has not been welcomed by many Muslims, his great effort to understand the Qur'an through its own words has merit.

1.3.2. John Wansbrough

John Wansbrough is a major figure whose radical scholarship has exerted great influence in the last two decades in the field of Qur'anic studies. His two books, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, have become classics. Wansbrough argues that the Qur'an contains several different kinds of materials and that the different parts of the Qur'an therefore originated in different communities. The canonisation of the Qur'an is a most important point, which has attracted many researchers' attention. He holds that there was no general agreement among the Muslims about the Qur'anic text until the late second or early third Islamic century (800 CE).[15] This was also the time when a general consensus was emerging on a number of important matters: the collection of *ḥadīth*, the principles of jurisprudence, and the major tenets of Islamic theology.[16] According to Wansbrough, their canonisation and stabilisation go hand in hand with the formation of the community. In other words, a final fixed text of the Qur'an was not required, nor was it totally feasible, before political power was firmly controlled. Like Goldziher and Schacht, who dissociated *ḥadīth* from the prophet, claiming that the greater

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[14] Arthur Jeffery, *op. cit.*, 1938, 1

[15] C. Adam, 'Wansbrough's Theory on the Origins of the Qur'an', in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Early Islam*, Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997, 82 (Special Issue in Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, 9 (1997); John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977, 47-51

[16] Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, 52, C. Adam, *op. cit.*, 82

part of *ḥadīth* should be considered the result of the religious, historical, and social development of Islam during the first two centuries,[17] Wansbrough goes even further and severs both the Qur'an and the biography of the prophet from the prophet himself and even from Arabia.[18] Thus the Qur'an is the product of what he has called 'the sectarian milieu'. The main motive derives from the establishment of a separate and distinctive identity for the Muslim community. In these inter-confessional and political polemics Muslims found their own uniqueness vis-à-vis other communities that rivalled Islam, especially the Jewish community, after the great conquest. Therefore, Wansbrough believes that this competition (confrontation) did not take place in Mecca or Madina, where relatively few non-Muslims lived, but rather in the countries of the fertile crescent where there were many Jews, active Rabbinic schools, and Christians, and where the Muslims were in the dominant position as rulers of the Abbasid state in Iraq and Syria.[19]

It should be noted here that Wansbrough, unlike his predecessors, is not concerned to find the sources of the Qur'an. He does not speculate about the prophet's contact with Jews or Christians in Arabia. He does not talk in terms of influences on the prophet and distances himself from familiar discussions of the origin of Islam and the Qur'an.[20]

The methods he uses for his analysis are mainly literary criticism, redaction criticism and form criticism. He, like many others, does not depend on traditional Muslim sources. Furthermore, he strongly believes that traditional materials do not give any reliable information about the circumstances of events in the early stage of Islam, because none of them is contemporary with the happenings they claim to record and none is

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[17] I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, (tr.) by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd 1971, II.19; Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*: Oxford: Clarendon Press 1950, 224

[18] Herbert Berg, 'The Implication of, and Opposition to, the Methods and Theories of John Wansbrough', in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Early Islam*, Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter 1997, 4; J. Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, 1977, 47-50

[19] Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, Princeton: The Darwin Press 1998, 36; Adams, C., *op. cit.*, 82; J. Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, 1977, 47-51

[20] G. R. Hawting, 'John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism', in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Early Islam*, Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter 1997, 34

neutral.[21] So no written source can tell us what really happened, but only what the author(s) thought had happened or wanted to believe had happened. They are, according to Wansbrough, literature. Therefore the study of them is not history, but literary criticism.[22] He analyses several aspects of the Qur'an: its thematic units, vocabulary, structure, variant traditions and languages and concludes that no one original text existed before the end of the eighth century. Wansbrough also believes that there is no Muslim literature besides the canon which can be dated, in the form in which it is available today, earlier than about 800 AD. His main evidence is an *argumentum ex silentio*. His rejection of any kernel of historical fact recovered from before the eighth century leads him to consider the entire corpus of early Islamic documentation as 'salvation history'. This extreme scepticism distinguishes Wansbrough from others. Nonetheless, his literary approach to the sources demonstrates not only the existence of the polemical situation but also the specific matters at issue and the techniques of argument as well as the motives of the Muslim writers who addressed them.[23]

Recently many scholars have questioned Wansbrough's late dating of the Qur'anic text. They rightly ask what happened during the two centuries before the canonisation of the Qur'an. Wansbrough holds that there was in existence a body of what he calls prophetic *logia*, which were units of material of diverse kinds allegedly originating with the prophet, and whose status as being, or not being, revelation,[24] and therefore, authoritative for the community, was not decided. Though he says that there was no Qur'an existing as a closed canon of text until the end of the second Islamic century or even later, he admits that there were materials out of which the Qur'an would emerge.[25] He suggests that these *logia* developed as a series of uncoordinated pericopes to meet the liturgical and didactic needs of a group and communities in a sectarian milieu within mainstream Semitic monotheism.[26] This comment allows Wansbrough to speculate about

[21] A. Rippin, 'Literary Analysis of the Qur'ān, Tafsīr and Sīra: The Methodology of John Wansbrough, in Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam and Religious Studies*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press 1985, 151-163
[22] J Koren, and Y. D. Nevo, 'Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies', *Der Islam*, 68 (1991) 89-90
[23] C. Adams, *op. cit.*, 79
[24] J. Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, 1977, 1, 44, 51; C. Adams, *op. cit.*, 82
[25] J. Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, 1977, 1, 44, 51; H. Berg, *op. cit.*, 8
[26] J. Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, 1977, 2, 50-51; H. Berg, *op. cit.*, 8 fn.

the early documents which quote from the Qur'an. As Donner has pointed out, for Wansbrough, for example, Qur'anic verses found in a first-century inscription cannot be considered as evidence of the Qur'an's existence as scripture at an early date; rather, they are evidence of separate collections of *logia*.[27] As a result of his approach to this issue Wansbrough expends great effort trying to re-date anything which would seem to contradict his theory, denying, for example, the authenticity of the treatise on *qadar* which is attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (110/728), though many scholars accept its authenticity and attribution. Wansbrough argues that the exclusive use of Qur'anic verses is not necessarily the consequence of early composition. He therefore concludes that this *risālah* is the product of the late second/eighth century.[28]

In his analysis of the development of the scripture, prophetology, and sacred language, he demonstrates four major themes of the Qur'anic message: retribution, sign, exile, and covenant. The literary forms of these motifs are apodictic, formulaic, supplicatory formulae, and narrative. Wansbrough comments, 'Taken altogether, the quantity of reference, and the mechanically repetitious employment of rhetorical convention, and the stridently polemical style, all suggest a strongly sectarian atmosphere in which a corpus of familiar scripture was being pressed into the service of as yet unfamiliar doctrine'.[29] At this juncture, critics of Wansbrough may ask why the evaluation (and evolution) of the variants took two centuries, though it is possible for the development Wansbrough posits to have taken place within thirty years?[30]

Another objection that has been raised to Wansbrough's thesis hinges on the fact that certain early Islamic texts mention the recitation or reading of the Qur'an as a duty, and quote a variety of Qur'anic passages in various contexts, evidently from the author's memory. Both facts suggest that the Qur'an was already available as a scripture at the time the texts were compiled.[31]

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[27] F. M. Donner, *op. cit.*, 37
[28] A. Madigan, 'Reflections on Some Current Directions in Qur'anic Studies', *The Muslim World*, 85 (1995) 357
[29] H. Berg, 8: J. Wansbrough, *op. cit.*, 1977, 20
[30] F. M. Donner, *op. cit.*, 37
[31] *Ibid.*, 37

It is also worth noting another weakness in Wansbrough's case: nowhere does he suggest who might have been responsible for deciding what did, or did not, belong to the Qur'anic canon. To pin the responsibility for such a process simply on 'the community' or 'the scholars' is too vague. Instead of giving a clear explanation Wansbrough prefers to remain silent on this question. Similarly, he fails to explain how the eventual Qur'anic vulgate was, in the late second Islamic century, imposed on Muslims from Andalus (Spain) to central Asia, who may have been using different texts for a long time.[32] If the Qur'anic narrative were problematic or gave inadequate information about rival religious traditions why, it must be asked, could the confusion or mistake not be corrected by others among a group of persons allegedly well versed in Jewish matters?[33] An important question regarding this issue is raised by Burton. He says that Wansbrough conceded that the Qur'an exhibits stylistic homogeneity that would be difficult to sustain in a social product. Moreover, the Qur'an displays internal coherence, unity of temperament and singleness of purpose.[34]

It has also been observed that Wansbrough does not deal with the question of why the content of the Qur'an is so different from that of the other materials, though Wansbrough calls the *ḥadīth* and various passages in the early normative sources sub-canonical versions of Qur'anic material.[35] In addition to this, the discrepancy between the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* on the question of political leadership is striking, and suggests that the two bodies of material are not the product of a common 'sectarian milieu' but come from a somewhat different historical context.[36]

Estelle Whelan, in a recent article, questions previous interpretations of the inscription on the Dome of the Rock. According to Whelan the main inscription is taken from various parts of the Qur'an but is concerned with a single theme: challenging Christian dogma in the main Christian pilgrimage city.[37] She observed that with minor

[32] *Ibid.*, 38

[33] C. Adams, *op. cit.*, 88

[34] John Burton, 'Rewriting the Timetable of Early Islam', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 115 (1995) 455

[35] F. M. Donner, *op. cit.*, 39; J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978, 5

[36] Fred. M. Donner, *op. cit.*, 39

[37] Estelle Whelan, *op. cit.*, 4

variations these passages reflect the Qur'anic text as known from the standard Cairo edition.[38] Furthermore, she says that such minor variants (or small alterations) of the standard Qur'anic text, if altered to express a particular theme, have always been acceptable in Islamic inscriptions, although Muslims are very rigid concerning the actual recitation of the Qur'an. More interestingly, the same practice is observed by Whelan in the inscriptions which are dated much later, when there is no question about the canonical text of the Qur'an. In brief, what she suggests is that one should not take these variations as a significant deviation from the Qur'anic text.[39]

Although Wansbrough's view of the Qur'an and its narrative is not limited to the issues noted above, it is impossible to do justice to the variety of his opinions here. It should be remembered that Wansbrough's approaches to Qur'anic studies have been welcomed by some scholars who have developed his outlook further. Because of his great influence on his followers, today's scholars refer to the 'school of Wansbrough'. In this connection two names are worth mentioning: Andrew Rippin and Norman Calder. With minor differences, they apply Wansbrough's methodology to the analysis of the Qur'an and its narrative. Thus their conclusions are, generally speaking, identical with his. Therefore we will not go into detail or summarise their views. Suffices it to say that despite the controversial nature of Wansbrough's conclusions both express their perfect satisfaction with Wansbrough's argumentation.

1.3.3. Sympathetic Christian Writers

The third group, as we have already stated, consists of leading Christian scholars who combine a more cautious approach with religious empathy. Before briefly presenting their approaches it is worth remembering that, although we mention them together, there are many differences in their attitudes. Be that as it may, the insights they bring to Qur'anic studies have paved the way for a sympathetic understanding of the Qur'an. At this juncture it is worth mentioning the French scholar L. Massignon, who was the first to take such a step in the history of Western scholarship of Islam. He sees Islam as part of the Abrahamic legacy and tries to bring it together with Judaism and specifically Christianity.

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[38] *Ibid.,* 5
[39] *Ibid.,* 6

It is he who influenced the transformation of the Catholic view of Islam, and of Christian-Muslim relations.[40] He pleaded for the conditional authority of the Qur'an and sought the partial recognition of the prophet of Islam.[41] His early personal experience in the Middle East and his acquaintance with the great mystic al-Ḥallāj led him to find the mysteries of passion and compassion which he was unable to see in the Qur'an. He believed that the lack of compassion in the Qur'an was completed by the mysticism in Islam. So he became convinced that Muslims receive salvation. He encouraged many of his students and fellows to deal with Islam with an open mind.

In line with Massignon, some Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) have been struck by the spiritual value of Muslim religious experience and disturbed by the historical injustices of their own people towards Islam and its scripture.[42] Peter Ford, in his excellent article, gives some information about the most important figures. He mentions Smith, Watt, Küng, Cragg and many others. Although the main concern of most of these figures is dialogue between Christians and Muslims rather than pure Qur'anic studies, the insights they have brought into Qur'anic studies cannot be denied. Despite the differences among them they generally agree that the Qur'an must be evaluated in terms of the function it fulfils within its community. On the other hand they are careful not to regard the Qur'an as having any particular significance for Christians.[43] In addition, they also argued that while there may be many areas of overlap, there is an inherent and fundamentally irreconciliability of thought between the two scriptures.

The approaches of individuals towards these problems are often distinct. As Ford has noted, Smith believes that differences exist at the level of belief, but there is a fundamental agreement between the two religions at the level of faith.[44] Watt and Cragg follow a different path to the solution of this dilemma: both attempt to correct traditional Muslim interpretation of the Qur'an. Their aim in this process is obvious: while promoting

[40] C. Troll, 'Changing Catholic Views of Islam', in Jacques Waardenburg (ed.), *Islam and Christianity: Mutual Perspectives Since the mid 20th Century*, Peeters Pub. 1998, 28

[41] J. Waardenburg, 'Massignon: Notes for Further Research', *The Muslim World*, 56 (1966) 164

[42] M. Rodinson, 'The Western Image and Western Studies of Islam', in J. Schacht, and C. Bosworth, (eds.), *The Legacy of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1979, 59

[43] P. Ford, 'The Qur'an As Sacred Scripture: An Assessment of Contemporary Christian Perspectives', *The Muslim World*, 83 (1993) 144-147

[44] *Ibid.*, 146

an objective analysis of the text they wish to remove some of the obstacles that have historically barred the way to constructive Muslim-Christian dialogue.[45] Bearing in mind the increasing numbers of Muslims living in the West one should not minimise the practical importance of this attempt. These three are major figures, who have played a prominent role in the changing of the classical belief of the Church: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the Church). Islam, they believe, can no longer be ignored by Christians. They urge Christians to take seriously the status of the Qur'an as the sacred text of Islam and ask for a new approach to Muslims, calling for a stress on common elements, mutual recognition and understanding. They themselves attempt to understand the Qur'an from within without making many value judgements and in the works of Watt and Cragg we can see this attitude in practice. For example, Watt, a partisan of contemporary relativistic rationalism, says that each religious system is true because the ultimate universal truth cannot be known. The Qur'an in particular is true in this sense.[46] His desire to promote one world religion is clear in his approach, although his comment on the Qur'anic text distances him from theologically biased scholarship.

Despite the fact that Smith, Watt and Cragg tried to free themselves from medieval modes of thinking, their strong Christian backgrounds led them to draw some conclusions which are not accepted by many Muslims.[47] For instance, Smith made great efforts to show the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam, the Bible and the Qur'an. His emphasis on theology is very strong and several resemblances noted by him[48] are somewhat exaggerated. The status of the prophet, however, is always neglected and whenever the Biblical account is compared with the Qur'an the conclusion drawn is almost always to the disadvantage of the latter. Apparently the Qur'an distorts the original narrative which appeared in the previous scriptures; even the most sympathetic student of Islam could not but make a similar remark. For example, Watt, despite his relativist approach and persistent avoidance of any value judgement, says that Islam would have to

[45] *Ibid.*, 149

[46] W. M. Watt, *op. cit.*, 1994, 183-84

[47] Interestingly enough, in her recent book K. Zebiri says that these outstanding scholars (Watt, Smith, Küng) keep the thought in their agenda that there might be a single unified world religion in the future. (K. Zebiri, *op. cit.*, 187)

admit as a fact of its origin the historical influence of the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition.[49] Although he believes that the study of sources does not explain away the ideas whose sources are found,[50] his treatment of the origins as established fact shows the importance of the 'theory of influence' among modern sympathetic scholars of Islam. On the other hand, Küng, after expressing his opinion on the dependence of the prophet on sectarian Judaeo-Christianity,[51] asks why we do not apply historical criticism to the Qur'an. He says

> if the Christians do not dispute the transcendent religious character of the Qur'an, yet we may be allowed to pose the question of its historically contingent qualities, despite the fact that traditional Muslims feel threatened by this problem as traditional Christians feel threatened by parallel issues concerning the Bible.[52]

The central weakness in the works of these scholars is the interpolation of their Christian understanding into their attempt to understand the Qur'an. But they do not deny the high religious themes and quality of its messages. It is safe to say that their concern with the presentation of Christian ideas in the Qur'an leads them to philosophical interpretations and to several dubious conclusions. Generally speaking, especially after Vatican II, they have softened the previously biased approach to the Qur'an and nobody can deny the significant contribution which has been made by these prominent scholars.

1.3.4. The Literary Approach to the Qur'an

In our previous sections we have shown that Western scholarship has found the Qur'anic text extremely confusing; many scholars believe that the Qur'an offends both their historical and their literary sensibility. However, recent Western scholarship has witnessed very important shifts in Qur'anic studies, especially in the literary study of the Qur'an. First of all the scholars in question have reacted against an approach which sought to establish the Jewish and Christian influences on the Qur'an. As McAuliffe has

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[48] W. C. Smith, 'Some Similarities and Differences Between Christianity and Islam', in J. Kritzeck, B. Winder (ed.), *The World of Islam: Studies in honour of Philip K. Hitti*, London: Macmillan 1959, 47-59

[49] W. M. Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society*, London: Routledge 1961, 275

[50] W. M. Watt, *op. cit.*, 1994, 184

[51] Hans Küng, 'Christianity and World Religions: The Dialogue with Islam as One Model', *The Muslim World*, 67 (1987) 92

[52] C.Troll, *op. cit.*, 58

explained, their works are primarily concerned with narratology and oral formulaic language use and they are very sensitive to the literary qualities of the Qur'an. Having analysed various Qur'anic narratives, they suggest that it is not helpful to think them as versions of the Biblical ones.[53] Although they accept the existence of some affinities between the two narratives, their analyses show that the narrative structuring of each tells a quite different thematic, moral, and theological story. Through their skill in literary analysis they attempt to prevent non-Muslim readers from taking a simplified view of the Qur'anic narration, which may proceed differently from their expectation of narrative. They consider the Qur'an as a religious text and generally appear to argue that each scripture reveals its own natural unity or coherence. Furthermore, they examine the interrelation between the structure and the sound units of the Qur'anic surahs. They also deal with the problem of translation, rightly pointing out that the spirit of the Qur'anic verses is lost when they are translated into any other language. Attempting to rectify various mistakes made by the previous translators, they offer their own translations. An important point in this procedure is to take the overall Qur'anic context into consideration, which is a difficult but more secure method. It is also worth noting that besides modern literary theories they also use many Muslim commentaries in their analyses. This is a very important achievement. In contrast to their predecessors they do not hesitate to use these sources. The articles and books of Johns, Waldman, Robinson, McAuliffe, Abdel Haleem, Sells, Zahniser, Mir and some others are good examples of this new development. The next chapter is intended to follow a similar line. We will analyse the 'golden calf' episode in the Qur'an, focusing on those narratives which deal with the episode. The terminology used in structuring the related surahs is taken from N. Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text.*

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[53] J. D. McAuliffe, 'The Qur'anic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation*, 7 (1996) 142

Chapter Two

The Qur'anic Narratives of the Golden Calf Episode

2.1. General Introduction

In the preceding chapter we have discussed the Western approaches to the Qur'an and its narratives. Our conclusion was that many have seen the Qur'anic narratives as distorted versions of Biblical ones. Furthermore, some have held the view that without reference to the Bible the majority of the Qur'anic narratives make no sense. This attitude is the main obstacle to understanding the Qur'an and its narratives. Recently, however, some scholars have taken a quite different approach, namely seeing the Qur'an as independent. Instead of searching for the origins of the Qur'an, they try to understand the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an itself. From time to time they have also sought to benefit from Muslim commentaries. In this chapter we will attempt to put a similar approach into practice in our analysis of the Qur'anic narrative of the 'golden calf' episode.

The 'golden calf' episode is discussed in the verses 83-98 of surah Ṭā-Hā and 148-151 of surah Aʿrāf. The same topic also appears in the Bible in *Exodus* 32. Though the two scriptures' accounts have some points in common they vary in their approaches; the main purposes of the story, the style and tone adopted by the Narrator, its time-span and so on are quite different. Surah Ṭā-Hā consists of 135 verses while surah Aʿrāf consists of 206 verses. It is also worth mentioning that surah Aʿrāf is by far the longest of the Meccan surahs. According to Nöldeke, surah Ṭā-Hā belongs to the second Meccan period and surah Aʿrāf to the third Meccan period.[1] Süleyman Ateş notes in his translation of the Qur'an that according to some Muslim authorities 20:130-131 and 7:163-170 belong to the Madinan period.[2] Both begin with detached letters; *ṭā-hā* and *alif-lām-mīm-ṣād* respectively. Surah Ṭā-Hā ends with a rhetorical question concerning guidance and addresses the unbelievers, warning that time will inevitably show that the truth was with the messenger of God and those who follow him: 'Say each one is waiting, so you wait too, and you shall know who are they that are on the straight and even path, and who are they that have let themselves be guided.'

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[1] Quoted in Neal Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, London: SCM Press 1996, 148

[2] Süleyman Ateş, *Kuran-ı Kerim ve Yüce Meali*, Ankara: Kılıç Kitabevi 1988, 311, 150

Surah Aʿrāf, however, ends with the praise of the Angels' qualities of obedience: 'Surely, those who are with your Lord are never too proud to perform acts of worship to Him, but they glorify His praise and prostrate before Him.' Nevertheless, if we take 7:203-205 together with 7:206 into consideration, it will be seen that Divine guidance has been made available to us, just as it has been to all our predecessors throughout history, and that it is our responsibility to follow the prophet who brought it by paying careful attention to every aspect of the Qur'an and remembering our Lord and fulfilling our purpose as human beings by praising and worshipping Him.[3] Surah Ṭā-Hā may be divided into eight sections and surah Aʿrāf into nine sections.

Surah Ṭā-Hā begins with a brief introduction vv.1-8. The next section, vv.9-79, is devoted to God's speech to Moses and Moses' experience of the prophecy; God's sending him to announce the divine unity to Pharaoh; his confrontation with Pharaoh and his magician; and finally God's giving Moses the mission to bring the Israelites forth through the sea. Despite God's benefactions to the Children of Israel, vv.80-82, they are seduced into worshipping a calf, vv.83-98. Then the Qur'an draws attention to the Day of Resurrection, vv.99-114. In vv.115-123 the Qur'an talks about primordial time; how Satan seduced Adam and his spouse against their Lord. Then the Qur'an breaks off this narration to again describe the Day of Resurrection, vv.124-129, and ends with advice and reassurance for the prophet of Islam, vv.130-135. The story of Moses is mentioned several times in the Qur'an; however, the version in surah Ṭā-Hā, as has been shown by the above brief division into sections, is a particularly full account of Moses' life and takes up the main part of the surah Ṭā-Hā (vv.1-98).[4]

Likewise, surah Aʿrāf begins with a brief preamble, vv.1-10, in a slightly different form from surah Ṭā-Hā. In vv.11-25 the narratives about primordial time appear. After a long exhortation, vv.26-44, vv.44-58 and vv.59-93 present detailed stories of the people of Aʿrāf (Ramparts) and of five previous prophets: Nūḥ (Noah), Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿaib, and Lūt (Lot) to convey in considerable detail that the whole history of mankind is one of the constant renewal of Divine guidance and the recurrent rejection of it by the unbelievers. In vv.94-102 the main theme is the Qur'anic response

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[3] Muḥammad Ghazālī, *A Journey Through the Qur'an: Themes and Messages of the Holy Qur'an*, (tr.) by ʿĀisha Bewley and (ed.) by ʿAbdalḥaqq Bewley, London: Dār al-Taqwā 1998, 101

[4] This division is mainly taken from Halperin's analysis. (David J. Halperin, 'Can Muslim Narrative Be Used As Commentary On Jewish Tradition?', in R. L. Nettler (eds.), *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, Oxford: Horwood Academic Pub. 1995, 76)

to Meccans. The following verses, vv.103-168, deal with various issues, mainly concentrating on Moses' experiences with Pharaoh and the Israelites, including *ru'yat Allāh/ visio beatifica* and accounts about the Sabbath. In vv.169-171 stress is placed on the ritual prayer, while vv.172-174 present Adam's descendants' response in the primordial Covenant. God's parable about humankind's unbelief is dominant in vv.175-179. The Chapter ends with the presentation of God's knowledge and guidance together with the messenger's dependence on divine revelation, questions about the time of the Day of Judgement, and God's absolute sovereignty.

Before passing on to the episode of the 'golden calf' which we will be focusing on, some preliminary observations will be useful. It is necessary to point out that the surah's heading, A^{c}rāf, means the place of the people who are between Heaven and Hell, mentioned in 7:44-50,[5] while the title Ṭā-Hā is derived from its occurrence at the beginning of the surah Ṭā-Hā as detached letters. As has been shown in the brief analysis of these surahs' content, there are striking structural parallels between them. Despite the fact that the order of narratives is reversed in the two surahs, if the narrative materials 7:44-50 and 7:59-93 were removed from surah A^{c}rāf the structure of both would be almost identical. A quick look at *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* of Rudi Paret[6] reveals that there are a number of identical verses, expressions, and topics which are shared by both surahs. Whether it is sound methodologically to depend extensively on the homonymous as well as the synonymous in order to show the interrelation among the verses and surahs or not, is not the issue here.[7] The interesting point is the result which can be derived from Paret's list. He groups together thirty-four expressions which are closely related to each other and some of these groups comprise more than one verse,[8] which is a fair indication of the strong similarities between the two surahs.

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[5] The surah takes its name from the men of the Ramparts: 7:46, 'Some people whose good and evil deeds would be equal in scale will wait for time on a barrier screen and on a wall, A^{c}rāf, with elevated places. Then they have a word with the people of paradise and hell.' These are the people whose good and evil actions are equal and who are waiting for their fate to be decided. There is, however, another interpretation, which sees these people as those very sincere believers who worked in their life for the sake of God; therefore they will be given a position to overlook the destinies of the Garden and see the terrible end of the people of Hell.

[6] Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz: Kolhammer 1971, 330-340

[7] W. A. Bijlefeld, 'Some Recent Contributions to Qur'anic Studies: Selected Publications in English, French, and German, 1964-73', *The Muslim World*, 64 (1974), 79-102

[8] 7:115-117; 20:65-69, 7:120-122; 20:70, 7:107; 20:19-21 and 7:104-105; 20:47.

In the introductory section and others in surah Ṭā-Hā the emphasis on God's Sovereignty and Singularity is evident. The Qur'anic expression *lā ilāha illā hū* (there is no God but He) is mentioned in 20:8, 14 and 98. In surah Aʿrāf the same formula occurs once in the middle of 7:158, together with a number of references to God's Omnipotence in different narrative units. So this remarkable usage of the formula and frequent references to God's Unity suggest that *tawḥīd* occupies a prominent position in both surahs. Two phenomena which are directly related to the content of these surahs are the Most Beautiful Names of God 7:180; 20:8 and God's rising over the (Mighty) Throne: 7:54; 20:5. The minor difference in the latter is the description of God in surah Ṭā-Hā as the Most Beneficent, *raḥmān*, and in surah Aʿrāf as Lord, *rabb*. In line with these two phenomena there is another which concentrates on the limitless knowledge of God: 7:89; 20:98. The phrase *wasiʿa kulla shay^{in} ʿilmā*, which occurs several times in the Qur'an, is strongly present in these two surahs. On the one hand, God, who has full knowledge of all things, on the other hand, the people, who do not know what they have done. In surah Aʿrāf the gap between two opposite conditions (terms), knowledge and ignorance, is depicted repeatedly: *ghāfilīn*,[9] *jāhilīn*,[10] *lā yaʿlamūn*,[11] *lā taʿlamūn*,[12] *lā taʿqilūn*.[13]

The intriguing similarities between Moses' prayer, 'my Lord open my breast for me' in 20:25 and what is said to the prophet Muhammad in 7:2, 'this Book is sent down unto you, so let not your breast be narrow therefrom' is quite apparent. To make them strong for their task God guarantees at the beginning of their mission that they will be able to deliver their warning and resist the disbelievers' verbal or physical attacks. Robinson draws attention to the similarities between the prophet Muhammad and the prophet Moses.[14] Both prophets delivered their oppressed people from tyrants who refused to submit to God's will. In Moses' case, Pharaoh is the antagonist who refuses to believe the message which Moses brings him, while in the prophet Muhammad's case the recalcitrant ones are the pagan leaders and Meccan idolaters. Both surahs devote lengthy explanations to Moses' encounter with Pharaoh, 7:107-130; 20:43-56, and end with some warning against the Meccans. In fact their similarities are

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[9] 7:136, 146, 172, 179, 205
[10] 7:119, 138
[11] 7:180, 182, 187
[12] 7:28, 33, 38, 62, 123
[13] 7:169

not limited to their deliverance of the believers, for both of them received God-given legislation for their communities: 7:144; 20:13, 41 highlight by the use of similar vocabulary, *iṣṭafaytuka*, *ikhtartuka*, *iṣṭanaᶜtuka*, the chosen position of Moses and contains implicit reference to the prophet Muhammad who has been sent for the deliverance of mankind, *raḥmat^{an} li al-ᶜālamīn*, 21:107.

In 20:114 the prophet Muhammad is told not to be in haste with the Qur'an, *lā taᶜjal*, before its revelation is completed, while in 7:204 the addressees of the Qur'an are told to listen to the Qur'an and be silent when it is being recited. Although these verses have many implications two are perhaps particularly important: that they are invitations concerning Qur'anic recitation and hint at 75:16-19: 'Do not move your tongue to hasten the revelation...'.

Furthermore, it is observed that surah Aᶜrāf includes more accounts of the series of past events which contain contrasting pictures of the rewards of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked. For instance, 7:73-79 deal with the people of Ṣāliḥ. According to the Qur'anic account they are in a hurry to slaughter the she-camel, like the Children of Israel who rush to worship the calf. So haste is blameworthy, the strong didactic notion contained in these episodes invites the reader's rational argument.

Another episode which occupies a prominent place in these surahs is devoted to Adam. It is the first narrative section in surah Aᶜrāf, which comprises six subsections. God's commanding the angels to prostrate themselves in Adam's presence and *Iblīs'* refusal to comply, 7:12; God's admonishment of Satan, Satan's request for permission to work corruption among the children of Adam, God's granting of that permission and God's guarantee that He would fill hell with whoever obeyed Satan, 7:13-18; God's setting Adam and his spouse in a well-provisioned garden with a warning not to approach a certain tree, 7:19; Satan's causing them to stumble, 7:20-22; both Adam and his spouse realising their mistake and asking for forgiveness of God 7:23; the section ends with the expulsion of Adam, his wife and Satan, 7:24-25.

The same story in surah Ṭā-Hā is narrated in less detailed form but offers more important clues regarding its relationship with the 'golden calf' episode. The narrative section about Adam in surah Ṭā-Hā occurs after the narratives of Moses. The section

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[14] N. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 1996, 156-158; He also gives detailed information about the similarity between the prophet Muhammad and the prophet Noah.

comprises five subsections: God's declaration of Adam's failure to fulfil the Covenant with Him, 20:115-116 is the same as 7:12; *20:117-119 is similar to 7:19*; *20:120-122 is* similar to 7:20-22 and 20:123 is similar to 7:19. The importance of the story lies in its relation to the 'golden calf' episode. As Halperin has pointed out,[15] it is wise to compare Sāmirī's seduction of the Israelites with Satan's seduction of Adam and his spouse. Furthermore, the introductory sentence of the Adam episode in 20:115: 'And indeed We made a Covenant with Adam, but he forgot and We found in his part no firm will-power' has an apparent link with 20:88: 'This is your lord and lord of Moses, but he has forgotten.' Although the worshippers of the calf blame Moses for his forgetting, the Qur'anic presentation makes it clear that it is the Israelites who forget their Lord. So the position of the Israelites is worse than that of Adam and his spouse because they are neutral whereas the Israelites, having sinned, deny their sin and accuse Moses. In brief, the gist of the comparison is simple: like Adam, the Children of Israel, together with Sāmirī, forget the Covenant with God.

Besides this mutual relation between Adam and the Israelites there is another important one: 20:126 '...because our signs came to you and you forgot them, and thus shall you be forgotten this day' brings both previous Covenants before the Meccans. The connection is very vivid; from primordial (Adam) to the world (the Israelites), from the world (the Israelites) to the hereafter (Day of Judgement). In addition, in order to locate the episode within the historic framework of the Muslims (the companions of the prophet) it is important to note that this episode contains an implicit warning for the Meccan Muslims, who were preparing to migrate to Madina. For example, chapters 20 and 7 have been regarded traditionally as middle and late Meccan surahs; therefore God is reminding them on the eve of their migration not to make the same mistake as the Israelites, who worshipped the calf after escaping from Pharaoh. It may again be noted from the verses of these two surahs that God wants the people to remember Him. 'Remembrance' is a constant theme of the Qur'an as a whole and is a special theme of these surahs, in which the matter of remembrance is mentioned in twenty-three places[16] and its opposite, forgetfulness, is mentioned in nine.[17]

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[15] David J. Halperin, *op. cit.*, 77

[16] 7:2, 3, 26, 57, 63, 69, 69, 69, 74, 86, 130, 165, 171, 201, 204; 20:3, 14, 34, 42, 44, 99, 113, 124

[17] 7:51, 51, 53, 165; 20:52, 88, 115, 126, 126. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, the author of *A Journey Through the Qur'an*, draws attention to this point in his analysis of surah Ṭā-Hā, but he fails to make any reference to it in his analysis of surah Aʿrāf (218-9). It can be seen that through their

As regards the sound units in these surahs, there are some differences. The verses of surah Aᶜrāf, which Nöldeke ascribed to the last Meccan period, are long and quite similar to Madinan verses in their rhyme composites. However, the verses of surah Ṭā-Hā, which Nöldeke ascribed to the second Meccan period, are short and have a different rhyme scheme from the verses of Aᶜrāf. The majority of the verses in surah Aᶜrāf end with -īn/-ūn. Interestingly, both occur 92 times in this surah. The exceptions are v.1 (ād), v.134 (il), and vv.16, 59, 73, 112, 116, 141, 153, 167, and 200 end with (īm). In surah Ṭā-Hā the dominant rhyme is (ā), however, there are also other rhymes, such as (rī) in vv.14, 25-26, 31-32, 42, 85, 93, 95, (nī) in vv.27-28, 39, (hī) in v.30, (dī) in v.86, (sī) in vv.41, 96, (lī) in vv.29, 94, (ūm) in v.78, finally (lū) in v.92. It is also important to note that after verse 97 the rhyme (ā) does not change. In this Chapter, a number of rhyme words occur more than once: Mūsā in vv.9, 11, 17, 19, 32, 40, 49,57, 67, 70, 83, 91, hudā in vv.10, 47, 50, 79, 82, 122, 135, abqā in vv.71, 73, 127, 131, dhikrā in vv.14, 42, 99, 113, amrī in vv.26, 32, 90, 93, ūlā in 4, 64, 68, 75, ukhrā in vv.18, 22, 37, 55, y(t)ashqā in vv.2, 117, 123, Sāmirī in vv.85, 87, 95, ᶜilmā in vv.98, 110, 114, ᶜulā in vv.21, 51, 133, takhshā in vv.3, 44, 77, nasiya in vv.52, 88, 126, taᶜsā in vv.15, 20, 66, yūhā in vv.13, 38, abā in vv.56, 116, nuhā in vv.54, 128, atā in vv.60, 69, tarḍā in vv.84, 130, nasfā in vv.97, 105, taḍḥā in vv.59, 119, nafsī in 41, 96. Furthermore, many of the rhyme words have the same grammatical form; for example, a) present tense: yakhshā in vv.3, 44, 77, tashqā in vv.2, 117, 123, taᶜsā in vv.15, 20, 66, tarḍā in vv.84, 130, taḍḥā in vv.59, 119, taqwā in v.132: b) simple past tense; taghā in vv.24, 45, 43, abā in vv.56, 116, atā in vv.60, 69, ghawā in v.121; c) adjective: kubrā in v.23, ulā in vv.21, 51, 133, ᶜulā in vv.4, 64, 68, 75, nuhā in vv.54, 128, ukhrā in 18, 22, 37, 55.

Divine names which are paired with another name or form occur in rhyme clauses at the end of verses of Aᶜrāf. Their combinations are as follows: rabb al-ᶜālamīn in vv.7:54, 104, 121, khayr al-fātiḥīn in v.7:89, khayr al-ḥākimīn in v.7:87, rabbuka al-ᶜaẓīm in v.7:141, arḥamu al-rāḥimīn in v.7:151, ghafūr al-raḥīm in vv.7:154-167, khayr al-ghāfirīn in v.7:155, samīᶜun ᶜalīm in v.7:200. Although every combination has a different function, the frequent usage of the form ism tafḍīl (superlatives) reveals the Unity of God and His Omnipotence.

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entire length surah Ṭa-Ha and surah Aᶜraf are concerned with the danger of the heedlessness of God and with calling the people back to the remembrance of God.

In addition, the occurrence of the name 'the Merciful', *raḥmān, raḥīm*, and their derivatives in both narratives establishes a balance between God's Sovereignty and His Mercy; *raḥīm* in vv.7:153,167; *raḥmān* in vv.20:5. 93,108, 109, *arḥam* in v.7:151, *raḥmat* in vv.7:48, 51, 55, 56, 71, 151, 154, 156, 203, *yarḥam* in v.7:149, *tarḥam* in v.7:23. In other words the tone adopted by the Narrator in the punishment stories is softened by reference to His Mercy. So it is safe to assume that as Adam and his spouse, after being misguided by Satan, are forgiven by God, likewise God is willing to accept or forgive the Children of Israel after their repentance.

Here is an analysis of Chapter 7 and 20 together with the rhymes of their verses:

2.2. The Structure of Surah A‘rāf

<u>Revelation/ Messenger</u>

v.1   detached letters {*-ād*}

v.2   Address to the Messenger about the revelation: a) affirmation concerning the status of the revelation. b) Solace to the prophet {*-īn*}

vv.4-5   Destruction of generation. {*-ūn/-īn*}

vv.6-7   Warnings: Messenger depends on divine inspiration, dramatic disclaimer. {*-īn*}

<u>Eschatology</u>

vv.8-9   Diptych {*-ūn*}

<u>Sign</u>

vv.10   Concerning the bounties of the Creator. {*-ūn*}

<u>Narratives</u>

vv.11-25   Narratives about primordial time

vv.11-18   Concerning *iblīs* superior creation, his rebellion and his influence. {*-īn*, only v.14 *-ūn*}

vv.19-25   Adam and his spouse, their being cheated by *iblīs* and finally their expulsion from the Garden. {*-īn*, only v.25 *-ūn*}

<u>Sign/ Messenger</u>

vv.26-36

v.26   Reminder of God's favour, Sign controversies. {*-ūn*}

v.27   Exhortation. {*-ūn*}

v.28   Reproaches (Their excuse and God's response to them.) {*-ūn*}

v.29   confession of faith, warnings. {*-ūn*}

v.30	Humankind's disposition, guided and misguided. {-ūn}
v.31	Commandments, exhortation. {-īn}
v.32	God's provisions. {-ūn}
v.33	Refusal against misdeed. {-ūn}
v.34	Eschatology. {-ūn}
v.35	Believing in Messenger and what he has brought. {-ūn}

v.36   Against refusal to believe the messenger and the message which he brought. {-ūn}

Parabolic Narrative I/ Polemic/ Eschatology

vv.37-45

v.37	Rhetorical question, denial of the unbelievers. {-īn}
v.38	The punishment of the unbelievers. {-ūn}
v.39	Criticism of the unbelievers. {-ūn}
vv.40-45	Diptych

vv.40-41   The impossibility of deniers' admission to paradise, punishment of the deniers, hell. {-īn}

vv.42-43   The believers go to paradise, believers reliance on God and His guidance. {-ūn}

v.44	Curse on the unbelievers. {-īn}
v.45	Unbelievers' denial of the judgement. {ūn}

Parabolic Narrative II

vv.46-51

v.46	The position of the people of Aʿrāf. {-ūn}
vv.47-48	Their denial of the unbelievers and their reliance on God. {-īn/-ūn}
v.49	Admission to paradise. {-ūn}
v.50	Their refusal to accept unbelievers' demand. {-īn}
v.51	Narrative conclusion; justice has been done. {-ūn}

Revelation/ Sign

v.52	Revelation; the Book of God contains guidance to the believers. {-ūn}
v.53	Prolepsis. {-ūn}
v.54	Sign; God's Power. {-īn}
v.55	Bidding. {-īn}
v.56	Warnings/ reassurance. {-īn}
v.57	Sign; God's sending of rain. {-ūn}

v.58   Sing/ Polemic

Narratives

vv.59-64   Narrative concerning Noah and his people.

v.59   Noah's mission. {-*īn*}

v.60   Some people's denial to accept his Noah's prophecy. {-*īn*}

v.61   Noah's response to them. {-*īn*}

vv.62-63   Messenger's dependence on divine inspiration. {-*ūn*}

v.64   The punishment of Noah's people

vv.65-72   Narrative concerning Hūd and his people

v.65   Hūd's mission. {-*ūn*}

v.66   His people's rejection of his prophecy. {-*īn*}

v.67   Hūd's response to them. {-*īn*}

vv.68-69   Messenger depends on divine inspiration, God's favour. {-*īn*/-*ūn*}

v.70   Their response to the prophet; they would not worship neither One God
nor they would leave their forefathers' gods. {-*īn*}

v.71   Against refusal to accept the Unity of God and human messenger. {-*īn*}

v.72   The punishment of Hūd's people. {-*īn*}

vv.73-79   Narrative concerning Ṣāliḥ and his people.

v.73   Ṣāliḥ's mission and Sign (she-camel). {-*īn*}

v.74   Ṣāliḥ's account of sign controversy. {-*īn*}

v.75-76   Diptych; believers' acceptance of Ṣāliḥ's prophethood and unbelievers'
rejection of his prophecy. {-*ūn*}

v.77   The unbelievers rebel against God's order. {-*īn*}

v.78   The punishment of his people. {-*īn*}

v.79   Narrative conclusion. {-*īn*}

vv.80-84   Narrative concerning Lot and his people

vv.80-81   Lot's mission and his complaint. {-*īn*/-*ūn*}

v.82   His people's sarcastic reaction to Lot. {-*ūn*}

v.83   God's favour to his family except his wife. {-*īn*}

v.84   The punishment of his people. {-*īn*}

vv.85-93   Narrative concerning Shuʿayb and his people

vv.85-86   Shuʿayb's mission and some ethical inferences. {-*īn*}

v.87   Diptych; believers and unbelievers. {-*īn*}

v.88   People's reaction to Shuʿayb. {-*īn*}

v.89   Shuᶜayb reliance on God and his prayer. {-īn}

v.90   Unbelievers' warning the believers. {-ūn}

v.91   The punishment of Shuᶜayb's people. {-īn}

vv.92-93   The conclusion. {-īn}

Messenger

vv.94-95   God's warning ; sending a messenger necessitates the test. {-ūn}

vv.96-100   Warnings addressed to *ahl al-qurā*, Meccans. {-ūn}

vv.101-102 Concluding remarks. {-īn}

Narratives Concerning Moses

v.103   Moses' mission. {-īn}

vv.104-105 Moses and Pharaoh. {-īn/-īl}

v.106   Pharaoh's request for miracle. {-īn}

vv.107-108 Moses' performance of two miracles. {-īn}

vv.109-112 Pharaoh and his people's refusal to believe in miracles and seeking for magicians' help. {-īm/-ūn/-īn/-īm}

vv.113-114 Pharaoh and magicians. {-īn}

vv.115-116 Moses and Magicians. {-īn/-īm}

vv.117-118 God's help. {-ūn}

v.119   Magicians are defeated. {-īn}

vv.120-122 The magicians prostrate themselves and declare their faith in Moses' God. {-īn/-ūn}

vv.123-126 Pharaoh and Magicians. {-ūn/-īn/-ūn/-īn}

v.127   The chief of Pharaoh's people call Pharaoh to take some firm measure against Moses and his people. {-ūn}

vv.128-129 Moses and his people. {-īn/-ūn}

vv.130-135 Flashback; God's test of Pharaoh and his people and their disobedience. {-ūn/-ūn/-īn/-īn/-īl/-ūn}

vv.136-137 Conclusion; the Israelites are favoured and Pharaoh and his people destroyed. {-īn/-ūn}

v.138   The Israelites ask for idols. {-ūn}

vv.139-140 Moses' response to them. {-ūn/-īn}

v.141   God's reminding of His blessing. {-īm}

v.142   Moses and Aaron. {-īn}

vv.143-145 God and Moses; the Book is given to Moses. {-īn}

vv.146-147   Criticism and warnings of sceptics. {-*īn*/-*ūn*}

vv.148-153   Golden Calf Episode; they fell into idolatry and worshipped the Calf. {-*īn*, only v.153 ends with -*īm*}

v.154   Moses took the Tablets. {-*ūn*}

v.155   He confessed the ignorance of some people. {-*īn*}

v.156   He asked for forgiveness. {-*ūn*}

vv.157-158   The prophet is assured that who follows him and his message will gain safety. {-*ūn*}

vv.159-162   Narrative concerning Moses and the Israelites

v.159   Introduction to the narrative. {-*ūn*}

vv.160-161   God's favour to Moses and the Israelites. {-*ūn*/-*īn*}

v.162   They disobeyed. {-*ūn*}

v.163   Narrative about *sabt*, Saturday. {-*ūn*}

vv.164-166   Criticism and punishment of the unbelievers. {-*ūn*/-*ūn*/-*īn*}

v.167   Eschatology. {-*īm*}

v.168   Diptych. {-*ūn*}

v.169   Criticism of later generation who do not take the Covenant seriously. {-*ūn*}

v.170   The people who take the Covenant firmly and pray sincerely are assured that their efforts are not in vain. {-*īn*}

v.171   Warnings with a miracle. {-*ūn*}

vv.172-174   Narrative concerning the primordial time.

v.172   God spoke to future human race without using an intermediary and warn them. {-*īn*}

v.173   Criticism of humankind. {-*ūn*}

v.174   Concluding remarks. {-*ūn*}

v.175   Warnings. {-*īn*}

vv.176-177   Parabolic narrative. {-*ūn*}

v.178   God's guidance. {-*ūn*}

<u>Messenger/ Revelation</u>

vv.179-188   Concerning prophet's contemporaries.

v.179   Punishment of the unbelievers. {-*ūn*}

v.180   Truthful people among Meccans. {-*ūn*}

v.181-182   Punishment waiting unbelievers. {-*ūn*}

v.183   God has an absolute Power. {-*in*}

v.184   Messenger dependence on God. {-*in*}

v.185   Warnings. {-*ūn*}

v.186   Only God guides. {-*ūn*}

v.187   Question about the time of Day of Judgement. {-*ūn*}

v.188   Messenger dependence on God. {-*ūn*}

Polemic

v.189-190   God's Knowledge, human ignorance and impatience. {-*in*/-*ūn*}

v.191   Rejection of idols. {-*ūn*}

vv.192-195   The idols have nothing to do with humankind and criticism of the unbelievers. {-*ūn*, only v.194 ends with -*in*}

vv.196-198   Diptych; believers and unbelievers together with their idols. {-*in*/-*ūn*/-*ūn*}

Messenger/Revelation

vv.199-200   Address to the prophet 'do not mix with them' and seek refuge to God from Satan. {-*in*/-*īm*}

v.201   Believers seek refuge to God from Satan. {-*ūn*}

v.202   Unbelievers are friend of Satan. {-*ūn*}

v.203   Reliance on God. {-*ūn*}

v.204   Instruction concerning the Qur'anic recitation. {-*ūn*}

v.205   Address to the prophet. {-*in*}

v.206   Concluding directive. {-*ūn*}

2.3. The Structure of Surah Ṭā-Hā

Messenger/Revelation

v.1   Detached letters. {-*ā*}

vv.2-4   The status of revelation. {-*ā*}

Sign

vv.5-8   Biddings, reminder. {-*ā*}

Narratives

vv.9-37   Moses is given revelation

v.9   Narrative introduction. {-*ā*}

v.10   Moses and his family. {-*ā*}

vv.11-12   God addressed Moses. {-*ā*}

vv.13-14   Moses is chosen as a prophet and addressed by God. {-*ā*/-*i*}

v.15	Eschatology. {-ā}
v.16	Warnings. {-ā}
v.17	God's question. {-ā}
v.18	Moses' response to God's question. {-ā}
vv.19-23	Moses' performance of some miracles by the help of God. {-ā}
v.24	Moses is told to go to Pharaoh. {-ā}
vv.25-35	Moses' prayer. {-ī/ vv.33-35 end with -ā}
v.36	Moses' prayer is accepted. {-ā}

Narratives

vv.37-38	Flashback; narrative introduction. {-ā}
v.39	Moses' mother is instructed by divine inspiration. {-ī}
v.40	Moses' sister and God's bounties. {-ā}
vv.41-48	Moses and Aaron are given instruction by God
v.41	Moses is chosen by God. {-ī}
v.42	Both are called for mission. {-ā}
vv.43-44	Both are given instruction. {-ā}
v.45	Moses and Aaron express their anxiety. {-ā}
vv.46-48	God's reassurance. {-ā}
vv.49-52	Dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh. {-ā}

Sign controversies. {-ā}

vv.53-56	
vv.57-58	Pharaoh's accusation of Moses and his challenge to produce. {-ā}
v.59	Moses identification of meeting day with festival day. {-ā}
v.60	Pharaoh and his followers come to meeting place. {-ā}
v.61	Moses' accusation of the magicians. {-ā}
vv.62-64	The magicians discussed the issue secretly and gain the support of the Copts {-ā}

vv.65-70   Moses and magicians

vv-65-66	Magicians start performing their tricks. {-ā}
vv.67-68	Moses' anxiety and God's reassurance. {-ā}
v.69	The magicians are defeated. {-ā}
v.70	They prostrate themselves and declared their faith in Moses and Aaron's God. {-ā}

vv.71-73   Dialogue between Pharaoh and magicians

v.71   Pharaoh refuse to accept the miracle and he threat the magicians by torture. {-ā}

vv.72-73   The magicians' steadfastness in their belief. {-ā}

    vv.74-76   Eschatology; diptych

v.74   Unbelievers. {-ā}

vv.75-76   Believers. {-ā}

vv.77-79   Reassurance of Moses and the Israelites and the punishment of Pharaoh and his followers. {-āl-huml-ā}

vv.80-82   Narrative about salvation; address to the Israelites in time of Moses. {-a}

vv.83-99   The Episode of Golden Calf. {-āl-āl-īl-īl-īl-īl-āl-īl-āl-ūl-īl-īl-īl-īl-āl-āl-ā}

    vv.100-112   Eschatology; diptych

vv.100-111 Unbelievers. {-ā}

v.112   Believers. {-ā}

    vv.113-114   Revelation. {-ā}

    vv-115-123   Narrative about primordial time.

v.115   Adam's failure to keep the Covenant firmly. {-ā}

v.116   God's commandment the angels to prostrate Adam and *iblīs*' rebellion. {-ā}

vv.117-119 God's warning Adam and his spouse. {-ā}

v.120   They are cheated by Satan. {-ā}

vv.121-122 They fail and God accept their repentance. {-ā}

v.123   Their expulsion from the Garden. {-ā}

vv.124-129 Reproaches for unbelievers. (Polemic) {-ā}

    vv.130-132   Messenger. {-ā}

vv.133-134 Reproaches. {-ā}

v.135   Messenger. {-ā}

2.4. The Golden Calf Episode

Before starting our analysis of the story of the 'golden calf' we will consider the remark made by Richard Bell; 'in surah Ṭā-Hā more space is occupied by the spoken words of the actors than by actual narrative.'[18] Whilst agreeing with Bell's observation, we are of the opinion that the narrative of the 'golden calf' episode, which is the focus of surah Ṭā-Hā, contains many things yet to be discovered. Although surah Aʿrāf also

covers the 'golden calf' episode and God's speech to Moses, because of surah Ṭā-Hā's long narration of the episode specific attention will be paid to its account. We will, however, also make references to surah Aᶜrāf to assist in the understanding of the Qur'anic presentation of the 'golden calf' episode. surah Ṭā-Hā's account of the calf apostasy runs as follows:

Section I.

83. 'And (it was said): What hath made thee hasten from thy folk, O Moses?

84. 'He said: They are close upon my track. I hastened unto Thee that Thou mightest be well pleased.'

Section II.

85. 'He said: Lo! We have tried thy folk in thine absence, and al-Sāmirī hath misled them.'

Section III.

86. 'Then Moses went back unto his folk angry and sad. He said: O my people! Hath not your Lord promised you a fair promise? Did the time appointed then appear too long for you, or did ye wish that wrath from your Lord should come upon you, that ye broke tryst with me?'

87. 'They said; We broke not tryst with thee of our own will, but we were laden with burdens of ornaments of the folk, then cast them (in the fire), for thus al-Sāmirī proposed.'

88. Then he produced for them a calf, of saffron hue, which gave forth a lowing sound. And they cried; This is your God and the God of Moses, but he hath forgotten.'

89. 'See they not , then, that it returneth no saying unto them and possesseth for them neither hurt nor use?'

Section IV.

90. 'And Aaron indeed had told them beforehand: O my people! Ye are but being seduced therewith, for lo! Your Lord is the Beneficent, so follow me and obey my order.

91. 'They said: We shall by no means cease to be its votaries till Moses return unto us.

92. 'He (Moses) said: O Aaron! What held thee back when thou didst see them gone astray,'

93. 'That thou followedst me not? Hast thou then disobeyed my order?'

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[18] R. Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 78

94. 'He said: O son of my mother! Clutch not my beard nor my head! I feared lest thou shouldst say: Thou hast caused division among the Children of Israel, and hast not waited for my word.'

<u>Section V.</u>

95. '(Moses) said: And what has thou to say, O Sāmirī?

96. 'He said: I perceived what they perceive not, so I seized a handful from the footsteps of the messenger, and then threw it in. Thus my soul commended to me.'

97. '(Moses) said: Then go! And lo! In this life it is for thee to say: Touch me not! And lo! There is for thee a tryst thou canst not break. Now look upon thy god of which thou hast remained a votary. Verily we will burn it and will scatter its dust over the sea.'

98. 'Your God is only Allah, than Whom there is no other God. He embraceth all things in His knowledge.'

<u>Conclusion</u>

99. 'Thus relate who unto thee (Muhammad) some tidings of that which happened of old, and We have given thee from Our presence a Reminder.

2.5. Introduction to the Episode

Though the story proper begins at 20:86, the episode is introduced in 20:83-85, which serve as a prelude that sets the scene for what unfolds in the following verses. The central point in 20:83-4 is Moses' haste. The tone adopted by God in 20:83 displays authority towards the prophet Moses; however, Moses' specific usage of the word *rabbī* (my Lord) in the next verse tends to direct our attention to what happened to the Children of Israel rather than to Moses' haste. It is also worth noting that Moses' insistence on using the second person singular to refer to God, together with the word *rabb*, emphasises *tawḥīd* (Oneness of God). Since *rabb* is related to *rabbā* (to bring up, care for), His Lordship is caring Lordship. Having compared these verses with the following ones one may infer that God's question, which first sets these events in motion, has been less focused on. Nonetheless, the persuasive and frequent usage of the first and second person pronouns 'what made <u>you</u> hasten from <u>your</u> people O Moses. He said; 'they are close on <u>my</u> footsteps, and <u>I</u> hastened to You O <u>my</u> Lord...' gives a variety of expression and keeps the reader interested.

One of the most striking points in 20:83 is a sudden shift in the nature of the discourse. Up until this verse (from 20:74 to 82) the conversation has been one-sided.

God is the Omniscient Narrator. God narrates in these verses how He will deal with the polytheists and the believers; Moses is presented as being inspired by God to escape the clutches of Pharaoh with the Children of Israel by night and to travel towards the sea with full trust in God and without fear of the obstacles in their way. God also reminds them that He has saved them from their enemies and has sent manna and quails to them. Finally He warns the people not to commit oppression and promises that whoever repents and does good deeds will be forgiven and rewarded. Then suddenly the style of the narrative changes with God questioning Moses regarding his haste. The question at first appears to confuse him as he has great expectations of this meeting. Interestingly, this phrase in 20:83 reminds us of 20:17, 'what is then in your hand, O Moses?', which appears at the beginning of the first dialogue in this surah. This question is asked immediately after Moses is made a prophet in 20:13: 'And I have chosen you, so listen carefully to what is being revealed to you'. In his response to God Moses identifies the staff in his hand and goes on to describe its different uses. As Mustansir Mir points out, God's question is not meant to prompt Moses to detail the uses of the staff but to prepare him to receive the miracle of the staff. So, the drop from the sublime to the mediocre, from the highly spiritual to the utterly mundane, is only too obvious, and creates a humorous effect.[19] We fully agree with Mustansir Mir's approach and we can observe a similar attitude of Moses in 20:83-84. As with the first instance, 20:17, we see a clash between what we might call the real intent of the question Moses has been asked and his response to this question. Some of the classical exegetes (both Zamakhsharī and Rāzī discuss this topic in depth whereas Qurṭubī deals with it more briefly) have drawn attention to the discrepancy between God's question and Moses' answer. Still they do not give a detailed analysis of these verses. One explanation for this may be the pressure of dogma (prophetic immunity from sin) which limits the commentators. Be that as it may, if we return to our subject matter we see an interesting difference between Moses' first response in 20:17 and his second response in 20:84. In contrast to his previous conversation, Moses seems to be more precise in his answer; this suggests that Moses has little time to waste although he realises the supreme importance of speaking to God. What he really desires is the divine manifestation of God. There are also other implications of Moses' answer. Firstly, contrary to the previous occasion in 20:17, he is now adjusting with experience

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[19] M, Mir, 'Humor in the Qur'an', *The Muslim World*, 81 (1991) 183, 187, 189

to the office of prophethood and is therefore more careful not to go into detail when speaking to God. Secondly, the Qur'anic presentation in 20:83-84 enables us to understand Moses' character from his speech.

Before mentioning Mir and our analysis of Moses' character it is important to note that there are in this regard two types of actions; these are one-time actions (non-routine) and the habitual actions. The former tends to evoke the dynamic aspect of the character, whereas the latter is the habitual action which tends to reveal the character's unchanging side or static aspect.[20] In this case we are dealing with those of Moses' habitual actions which have a comic and ironic effect. According to Mir, humour in this sense is used by the Qur'an for the purpose of characterisation. Having analysed the passages about Moses in 20:17-18; 18:60-82 he concludes that these passages contain some clues to Moses' personality. The verses about Moses and his staff, for example, show his natural warmth and simplicity.[21] Likewise, 20:84 reveals his naturalness (habitual) and on the other hand his hastiness and anxiety which are traits found in all human beings.[22]

2.6. God's Test, 20:85

This verse, as we will point out in our discussion of *isrā'īliyyāt* part, confuses some classical exegetes because of the particular words God uses 'He tested Moses' people and Sāmirī misguided them' at the beginning of the meeting between God and the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, where God spoke to him only. Furthermore, the use of the past tense in God's statement makes it difficult for the exegetes to understand this verse. We will give detailed information in part two, therefore there is no need to rehearse them here. What is more important here is that God, immediately after Moses' reply, announces two terrible truths in this verse. Firstly, He tested the people; secondly, they failed to past this test. Clearly, the sin of the Israelites is mentioned at the beginning of the episode. At first glance this verse implies that they were no longer believers, that they had lost their faith at the very beginning. The verse makes it clear, however, that what happened to the Children of Israel is in accordance with God's Will. It is not pure chance that brought Moses to the Holy Mountain and left the Israelites with Sāmirī.

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[20] Rimmon-Kenan Shlomith, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, London and New York: Methuen Co. Ltd. 1988 (First pub. 1983), 61

[21] M. Mir, *op. cit.*, 1991, 191

Nevertheless, the following verse and the specific usage of the word *rabb* has an optimistic connotation; God is once again ready to accept their excuses when they repent. The attribution of *fitna* (test) to God and *ḍalāl* (misguidance) to Sāmirī is another matter of dispute among the classical Sunni and Shiʿite exegetes. Under the influence of Mutazilite scholars they produced remarkable discussions centring on these two Qur'anic terms. Nevertheless, we observe that few pay sufficient attention to the internal relationship of the verses in the two major Qur'anic versions of this episode. God's description of the test 'We have tested them/ *innā fatannā qawmaka'* is put in the mouth of Moses in 7:155: 'it is only Your trial/ *in hiya illā fitnatuka.'* In addition Aaron's saying to the Children of Israel in 20:90, 'O my people you are being tried in this/ *innamā futintum bihi'* strengthens this interrelationship. The main conclusion which can be drawn from this is that Moses never denies the guilt of the people, though God, the All Powerful, will lead astray whom He wills and will guide whom He wills. In addition, in the same chapter, 20:40, God explicitly states how He has saved Moses from great distress and has tried him with a heavy trial, *wa fatannāka futūnā*. The repeated reference to the *fitna* (trial) indicates that the sequence of events followed a Divine plan. Bearing in mind the principle that different parts of the Qur'an explain one another, the dogmatic problem can be solved more easily than has been thought.

Another important point in this verse is that Moses is granted special knowledge (foreknowledge pertaining to his people) through God's revelation 'We have tested your people...', though the guilt of the Israelites has not been spelled out by Him explicitly but only suggested in the verb *ḍalāl*, misguidance.[23] God by this statement implicitly summons Moses to a mission. As far as we can ascertain, Sayyid Quṭb is the only exegete who has pointed out this nuance in the interpretation of this verse.[24] According to Sayyid Quṭb, God has not given Moses *tafṣīlāt al-fitna* (detailed information of the test) due to the fact that Moses was anxious and impatient to go back to his people.[25] After God's sudden revelation to Moses of what happened to the Israelites the prophet does not attempt to return, instead he waits patiently (to complete his term). However, the Qur'anic narrative of surah Ṭā-Hā skips all these stages and

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[22] 'Man is created of haste, *ʿajal* in 21:37 and 'Man is over hasty, *ʿajūlan* in 17:11.

[23] Moses is pictured in Exodus 32:8 to be more aware of the sin of the Israelites.

[24] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq 1987, IV.2347

has Moses go back as soon as possible, and it might be argued that it is only through this omission that the episode gains its dynamism. This dynamism is presented to the reader in order to bring into play his own faculty for establishing connections and for filling gaps left by the verse itself. The time between God's address to Moses and the prophet's return to his people can be described as follows: Moses' speaking to God, his taking the holy Tablets and his leaving the place where he met God. These events (catalysers) are still functional, insofar as they enter into correlation with cardinal function, but their functionality is attenuated, parasitic, in this episode. As a result it is not difficult to see that the verse provides a special clue in the timescale with which actions are conveyed.

If we turn to the beginning of the verse it will be observed that the start of the statement of God is powerfully expressed. The particle-pronoun combination *innā* is untranslatable; however, it introduces very powerful elements that accord with the dramatic nature of the language of the Qur'an. These elements are the acoustical effects of the *ghunna* (nasalisation) and (*a*) vowel combination in *innā*. Furthermore, the continued sequence of long and short open syllables (*a*) forces the reciter and hearer to dwell upon the aural aspects of the sound-unit.[26] *Nā* is a first person plural pronoun in Arabic, but it is often used to designate the One God. In line with this explanation it is clear that the voice speaking this narration is that of God as Narrator. Thus on the one hand there is God, who speaks using the plural pronoun, and on the other we have Sāmirī, about whom there is no explanation with the exception of his initiative in misguiding. The information that Sāmirī misled the people is the first reminder that the narrative is not simply a story but is also a discourse, a communication between the text and the reader. Here the text presents two important enigmas: who is Sāmirī, and how did he misguide the people? We know that the Narrator knows Sāmirī's identity and He has the power to solve the enigmas, but these two enigmas are not explicitly presented and unveiled by the Narrator. In fact the Narrator tells us nothing about who Sāmirī is. This ambiguity gives to this narrative an extraordinary ability to incite the curiosity of the reader (or hearer). The second enigma needs adequate discussion in its proper place. From the point of view of this episode

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[25] He also notes that the following part of this episode refers to details, *tafṣīlāt*. (S. Qutb, *op. cit.*, IV.2347)

[26] Michael Sells, 'Sound, Spirit and Gender in *Surat al-Qadr*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1991) 247

this is very important because, as we have seen the truth must not be revealed prematurely. That is why the Qur'anic narrative solves the enigma at the end of the episode. In other words the Qur'an has Sāmirī himself speak about this enigma.

In addition, attention must be drawn to the fact that during the appointment on the mountain Moses is told by God that Sāmirī has misguided the Israelites. There are two ironies in this presentation. First of all God mentions Sāmirī's sin directly after His speech to Moses, but He spells out the punishment for Sāmirī at the end of the episode. The second irony of the story is that while the crowd is howling for an ilāh (god) at the base of the mountain, God has just finished speaking to Moses and giving the sacred Tablets to him.[27] Finally, before leaving this issue in 20:85 mention must be made of two related interpretations. First of all, Moses' going up the mountain to meet God belongs to the symbolic field. To be high on the mountain is to be an elevated place and Moses' going up implies a spiritual ascension on his part. By contrast, the crowd's worship of the calf implies the descent and degeneration of the people. 7:179 points out this fall clearly: '...they have hearts wherewith they understand not, they have eyes wherewith they see not, and they have ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay even more astray, bal hum aḍall, they are the heedless ones'. The Qur'anic verse reduces them to the lowest of the low. Following the principles of R. Barthes,[28] we will refer to antithesis in our second point. The contrast of the Children of Israel (idol-worshippers) in the valley and Moses (monotheist) on the mountain has all the starkness of the antithesis of belief and unbelief which are eternally opposites. Interestingly, despite the fact that the beginning of the verse has a potent emphasis, God does not curse the people who are misguided, but simply explains the facts. Nonetheless, in 7:152 there is more focus on their curse than there is in chapter 20. So the two narratives of the same story complement each other in some sense.
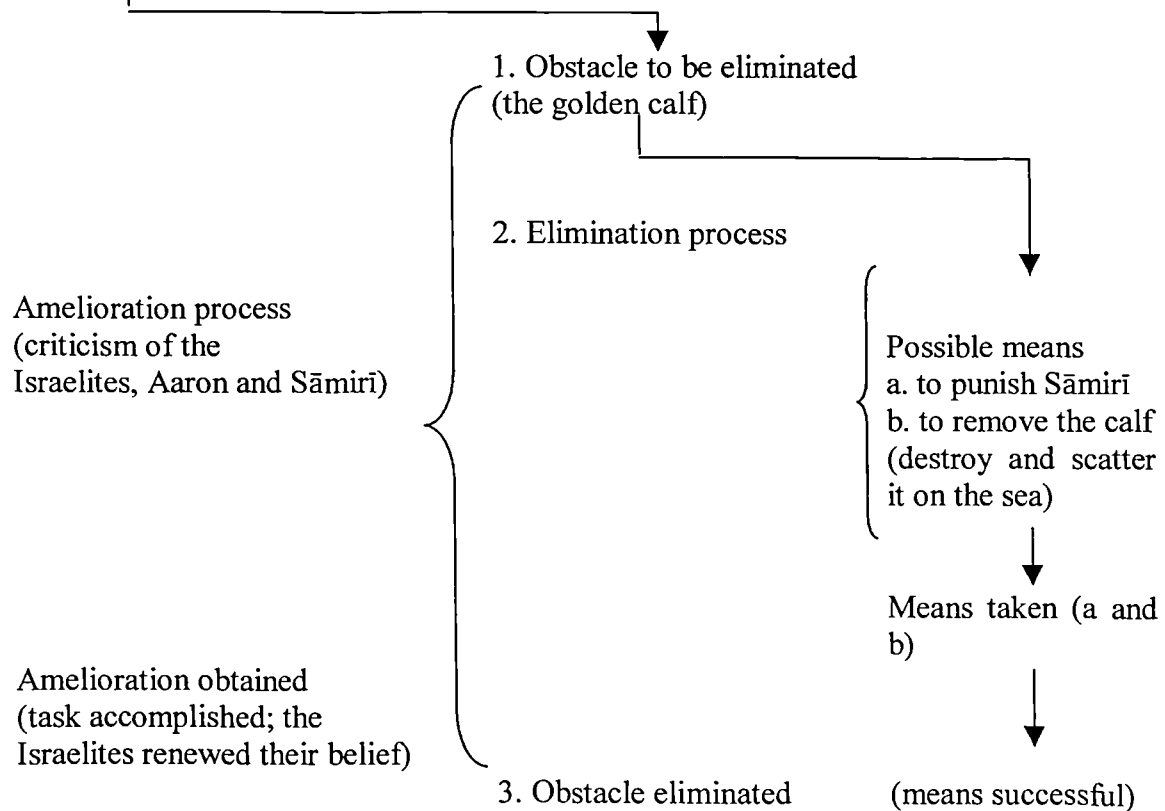
2.7. Moses and the Israelites, 20:86-89

In 20:86 the Narrator, in the characteristic rush of the Qur'anic narrative to the essential moment, catapults Moses from the mountain into the presence of the people.

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[27] Leivy Smolar, and Moshe Aberbach, 'The Golden Calf Episode in Post Biblical Literature', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 39 (1968) 114; John C. Holbert, 'A New Literary Reading of Exodus 32, The Story of the Golden Calf', *Quarterly Review* 10/3, 1990, 48

[28] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, (tr.) by Richard Miller, London: Jonathan Cape 1975, 21-22

Within four verses the conjunction[29] and disjunction are completed: the conjunction is given in 20:83 and the disjunction in 20:86. The quick use of the conjunction/disjunction and the temporal distortion of the chronological order of the events indicate the importance of the crime committed by Sāmirī and the Children of Israel. Before going into detail there is another point which must be made here. Moses' return to his people symbolically represents a new beginning (renewed belief). Literally speaking, the beginning of the episode presents a deficiency affecting the Children of Israel in the form of disbelief. Moses' return brings a modification towards amelioration. Although we have not finished the analysis of the episode we present here the overall schema of the process of amelioration in order to summarise the events taking place within it.

Amelioration to be obtained
(to bring the
Israelites to monotheism)

1. Obstacle to be eliminated
(the golden calf)

2. Elimination process

Amelioration process
(criticism of the
Israelites, Aaron and Sāmirī)

Possible means
a. to punish Sāmirī
b. to remove the calf
(destroy and scatter
it on the sea)

Means taken (a and b)

Amelioration obtained
(task accomplished; the
Israelites renewed their belief)

3. Obstacle eliminated   (means successful)

Bearing in mind the schematic summary of the episode, it is time to turn to our discussion of 20:86. When Moses returns he reproaches the Israelites. Interestingly, the

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[29] The framework usually includes a function which serves to bring the characters together and another which allows them to make their exit. The former is called the 'conjunction' and the latter the 'disjunction'. (N. Robinson, *French Structural Analysis and Its Application to the*

Narrator presents Moses in anger, 20:86, shortly after 20:81[30]; He also has described Himself in the same way. The word *ghaḍab* occurs fourteen times in the Qur'an and five of these occurrences are found in surahs Aʿrāf and Ṭā-Hā.[31] The word *ghadbāna* together with *asifā* is used by the Qur'an twice: in 7:150 and 20:86. *Asafā* occurs three times.[32] Besides these there are two other forms of this word in the Qur'an; *āsafūnā* in 43:55 and *asafā* (with *y* at the end) in 12:84. Although the word *asafā* has different meanings in Qur'anic usage it consists both of grief and sorrow and of anger. So it is likely that Moses' anger includes sorrow, grief, compassion, and religious awe also. The main reason for this conclusion is the Qur'anic usage of *ghadbāna asifā*, as if to show Moses' emotion by the combination of these expressions. Nevertheless, all of Moses' statements are rational in his first encounter with his people. He opens his speech with a set of criticisms. Having used a rhetorical question he invites the Israelites to rethink what has happened to them. The overall theme of his speech is their ignorance. The transitions from narration to dialogue in one verse, 20:86, provides an implicit measure of what is deemed essential and what is conceived to be secondary to the main topic. Thus Moses' haste and his coming back are reported very rapidly through narration and with brief dialogue; whereas the Israelites' failure to keep themselves on the straight path is rendered at much greater length through dialogue. One may infer that the Narrator means to direct our attention to what happened to the Israelites rather than to why Moses is quick to go to God. The function of Moses' direct speech in this narrative is to make the episode more immediate and dramatic. More interestingly, Moses' criticism does not contain anything about the golden calf either in Ṭā-Hā or in Aʿrāf. Despite Moses' severe accusation his silence about the Israelites' present sin makes the narrative more powerful than has often been thought. It should be remembered also that the Narrator stresses their sin frequently in other verses: 7:148, 2:51, 93 and 4:153.

In 7:150 the Narrator mentions that Moses threw down the Tablets when he came back. This anecdote is absent in surah Ṭā-Hā and is found in surah Aʿrāf just after Moses' accusation of his people. So the throwing down the Tablets refers to the

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Gospel Narratives of St. Luke's Gospel, Birmingham: Dept. Of Theology (Unpublished PhD Thesis) 1976, 162

[30] '...My Anger should justly descend on you. And he on whom My Anger descends, he is indeed perished.'

[31] 7:71, 152, 154; 20:81

[32] 7:150; 18:6; 20:86

tacit threat which plays a key role in reminding the Israelites (worshippers of the calf) to worship the One God alone whom Moses worships. Before moving on to the Israelites' defence of themselves in 20:87 we want to present some structural analysis of 20:86. Compared with the previous three verses this verse is quite long, and therefore Bell suggests two solutions which might clarify the position of this verse in this episode: it can be divided at $hasan^{an}$, or it is just possible that the rest of the verse is an addition.[33] Having considered the full context it is difficult to justify Bell's conclusion. Furthermore, using Neuwirths's criteria of colometric analysis[34] we can lay out the verse into sentences and show the relationship of semantic units in this verse by transliteration:

86a: *fa raja^{c}a mūsā ilā qawmihī ghaḍbāna asifā*

b: *qāla yā qawmi*

c: *a lam ya^{c}idkum rabbukum wa^{c}d^{an} hasan^{an}*

d: *fa ṭāla ^{c}alaykum al-^{c}ahd*

e: *am aradtum an yaḥilla ^{c}alaykum ghaḍab^{un} min rabbikum*

f: *fa akhlaftum maw^{c}idī*

Clearly 86d-e-f are subordinate to 86c though all the units are themselves sentences. That is why 86d-e-f should not be separated from 86b-c. Attention should be paid to the fact that although cola are to be defined as breath units of speech, Moses' criticism in this narrative has something of breathlessness. A leader, who has been preoccupied for a long time with his people's straying from the true path, wants to remind them of God's bounty and their response to it. Therefore Moses' speech is heavily prophetic, moving with weight and dignity. So his statement reinforcing his order an elegant balance of promise and threat. The balance (God's bounty and their misguidedness) is achieved by this section, 86c-d-e-f of verse 86, which is syntactically loose but acoustically very rapid. So Bell's suggestion that the later part of the verse is an addition is not justifiable on the basis of the semantic units of the verse.

The event involving the Children of Israel and Moses is communicated through dialogue in chapter 20. Moses speaks to them individually but they address him in

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[33] C. E. Bosworth, and M. E. J. Richardson, (eds.), *A Commentary on the Qur'an Prepared by Richard Bell*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1991, I.530

[34] A. H. Mathias Zahniser, 'The Word Of God And The Apostleship Of ^{c}Īsā: A Narrative Analysis of 'Āl ^{c}Imrān 3:33-62, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 37 (1991) 104

unison. The solo/chorus[35] utterances demand intensive evaluation of the speech by the reader/hearer. In response to Moses' rhetorical questions the Israelites, in a desperate effort to protect themselves, appear to lay responsibility on the ornaments rather than on Sāmirī, though one would expect them to accuse him (Sāmirī). However, that their defence transfers the responsibility for their action away from themselves towards the ornaments makes them appear more foolish than a direct accusation of Sāmirī would have done. Thus their accusation of the ornaments carries significant irony in this verse. They are neither aware that the ornaments beside them have the ability to misguide them nor that they know what Sāmirī actually did during this process. Again, their avoidance of a direct condemnation of Sāmirī and their haste to condemn the ornaments show their initial bewilderment together with a sense of guilt at Moses' question. In opposition to the active Sāmirī they are totally passive, acted upon by Sāmirī and his tricks. It is also important to note that Sāmirī's impiety paradigmatically corresponds to the Israelites' superstition. This paradigm is actually tragic. The figure of the calf has suddenly contaminated the hearts of the chosen people, whose exodus is supposed to represent recreation (purity of heart). It should not be forgotten that the use of the word *ḥummilnā* which is intensive and implies *takthīr* (frequency/multiplication) suggests that they have been bewitched by the ornaments so that they do not realise these trinkets could lead them astray. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the specific use of the expression *malkinā*. In the Qur'an this occurs only once in this form, in this verse. This excuse is not convincing, given the great number of the Israelites. So this discrepancy reinforces the image of disorder. It can only be achieved by the expression of *malkinā*. Something is wrong with this people. The inability of the Children of Israel to recognise the nature of the calf (it should not be a god) need not cause the reader any difficulty because in the Qur'an blindness is frequently a symbol for failure to understand. Be that as it may, the employment of the word *malkinā* in their description of their sin suggests that they implicitly accept their fault. This acceptance marks the transition from unbelief to belief which is explicitly stated in surah Aᶜrāf.

Furthermore, they also confirm that Moses has told them the truth about the length of his term at the mountain. Interestingly, there are a number of words which are

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[35] A. H. Johns, 'The Qur'anic Presentation of the Joseph Story: Naturalistic or Formulaic Language?' in G. R. Hawting and Abd al-Kader A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur'an*, London: Routledge 1993, 51

directly related to the time such as *maw^{c}id*, *wa^{c}d*, *ya^{c}idu*, *qadar*, *mīqāt* and others, which recur so often in surah Ṭā-Hā as to indicate some kind of unifying principle. One might assume that Moses' life from Egypt to Midian, Midian to Egypt, and Egypt to Palestine was arranged beforehand according to a very precise plan. In other words, Moses is a man of method and program, and the Qur'anic expression makes it clear that besides their awareness of the time of appointment the Israelites also know Moses' punctuality. Contrary to the exegetical materials, the Qur'an does not say anything about their confusion regarding the exact account of the time of appointment. Despite the suggestion made above (concerning their knowledge of the length of the term and Moses' punctuality) they do not prevent themselves from worshipping the calf. Consequently, the unbelief of the Children of Israel led to their failure to recognise what exactly Sāmirī did. Although Moses does not appear convinced by their excuse, the Qur'anic narrative records nothing about Moses' further response to them. The more common Qur'anic practice, as we shall have the opportunity to see below, is simply to cut off a speaker in a dialogue without comment, leaving us to ponder the reason for this silence. So the reader, who sees much unfinished business in the episode, calls upon his imagination to complete it. There is a marvellous irony in the Qur'anic presentation of this verse. Here we wish simply to draw attention to the intriguing similarities between the Israelites' defence, 20:87, and God's decree against the unbelievers of Mecca in 20:100-101: 'Whoever turns away from it (the Qur'an), verily, they will bear a heavy burden on the Day of Resurrection, *yaḥmilu wizrā*, they will abide in that and evil indeed will it be that load for them on the Day of Resurrection, *ḥimlʸᵃⁿ*.' The link between *awzār-ḥummilnā* in 20:87 and *wizrā-yaḥmilu-ḥimlʸᵃⁿ* in 20:100-101 indicates that the weights (ornaments) which the Israelites bear represent sin itself. Moreover, 20:111 deals with the position on the Day of Judgement of those people who disbelieved in God and ascribed partners to Him. According to this verse, he who carried a burden of wrongdoing became indeed a complete failure, *wa qad khāba man ḥamala ẓulmā*. So what they carry is the *ẓulm* itself. Metaphorically, the Children of Israel by their unfaithful action carry the sin of Pharaoh (and his host) together with the ornaments of the Egyptians. We may note in passing that because of this strong internal relationship among the verses the classical exegetes' explanation of the word *awzār* as *āthām* should not be considered naive. It should also be remembered that the predominant Qur'anic narrative style is not to give details about what people are eating, wearing and carrying unless it constitutes a

necessary link in the narrative. It is therefore needless to comment further on the importance of the ornaments in this episode.

Nonetheless, their words in 7:145: 'When they regretted and saw that they had gone astray, they said; if our Lord have not mercy upon us and forgive us, we shall certainly be of the losers' are very rich in dramatic effect. Here they are motivated by distress, not by greed. This is highlighted by their plea for the Mercy and Sovereignty of God. It is a time of reconciliation. Interestingly, this is the first time they make a plea based purely on religion. In addition we should note that although this brief repentance, which is eventually given in 7:145, is first and foremost a communication of the Israelites addressed to God, the use of the first person plural invites every sinner to repent his sin.

As regards, 20:88-89 some consider them too problematic for a clear interpretation; some even claim that they have been interpolated out of their original context.[36] However, our first impression of these verses is that, compared with the previous verses, the tempo slows down. Instead of dialogue there is narrative, except in the second part of 20:88. In 20:88 a flashback points out the Israelites' rejection of God and their proclamation of a false god. The Narrator, using narration and speech, gives some information about the background of the event. This is the first occasion when we learn of their guilt. In surah A^{c}rāf their sin is depicted quite early and 7:148 matches completely with 20:88-89. As the Qur'an says in 20:88, 'he took out for them a statue of a calf with hollow sound and they (in unison) said 'this is your lord and the lord of Moses.' The appearance of the calf among the Israelites already dramatises their and Sāmirī's fate, however remotely. The Qur'anic term ^{c}ijl^{an} jasad^{an} lahū khuwār is used, rather than the biblical idiom bull-calf, to refer to the idol. It is worth pointing out that the Qur'an always couples jasad^{an} lahū khuwār with ^{c}ijl.[37] As has been pointed out by the classical exegetes who maintain that there is an obligatory link between sound and worship, many of the Israelites were confused because of the calf's sound. Clearly, sound has an effect utterly different from sight. The hollow sound that continued for some time like an echo penetrated their ears, causing them to fall under the spell of the calf and its sound. Their state of absorption is formulated in ^{c}ijl^{an} jasad^{an} lahū khuwār. Thus the calf depicted in the Qur'an is more attractive than its Biblical counterpart.

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[36] C. E. Bosworth, op. cit., 1991, I.530

[37] The Qur'an issues it twice, 7:148; 20:88

Another point which can be made here concerns *khuwār* (hollow). It means literally space inside an object; the opposite to solid. It refers here to the emptiness of the calf, and this image adds the connotation of default. Symbolically speaking, the hollow sound of the calf represents emptiness of belief. It is also worth drawing attention to the semantic contrast between *khuwār* in 20:88 and *ṣamad* in 112:2. The Qur'anic word *ṣamad* occurs only once in the Qur'an and it is quite difficult to translate it into English. The classical exegetes give several meanings in their explanations; the generally accepted meaning is that 'all persons (or things) are dependent on God in their need', *alladhī yaṣmudu ilayhi al-khalā'iqu fī ḥawā'ijihim*. This comment is made by Ibn ᶜAbbās. The word has been also explained as *sayyid* (master) by ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, *al-dā'im* (Ever-Lasting) and *al-bāqī* (Eternal) by anonymous scholars. Some people, however, consider the verse 'He begetteth not, nor is He begotten', 112:3, as the explanation of *ṣamad*. Finally, *al-ṣamad* means 'he who has no emptiness in his belly', *lā jawfa lahū*. Muslim commentators give it as second, third and sometimes fourth option in their interpretations. This explanation is mainly given by Ḥasan, Ikrima, Ḍaḥḥāk, Ibn Jubayr, Suddī, ᶜAṭā Ibn ᶜAbī Rabaḥ, and ᶜAṭiyya al-ᶜŪfī. For the Muslim the meaning of *lā jawfa lahū* is equivalent to 'not to eat and to drink'. However, keeping in mind the emptiness (hollowness) of the fabricated gods (in this case a golden calf) we need a more elaborate explanation. As far as we are concerned, the best argument related to the above noted point is made by Rāzī. He glossed it as (solid), the opposite of emptiness.[38] Rudi Paret, in his article on the explanation of *ṣamad*, points out Rāzī's explanation and then offers two possibilities. According to the first, the prophet, having used this word, planned to attack the Christians' belief in the Trinity described in 5:116. In other words, this word was originally produced by the prophet for polemical purposes against the Christians. The second possibility is related to the reference to God's Absolute Unity which cannot be divided. Therefore, Paret translates *Allāh al-ṣamad* into German as 'Gott, durch und

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[38] The most systematic explanation of this term is given by Rāzī. He offers two *mas'ala* and divides the first *mas'ala* into three *wajhs*. Furthermore, he divides some of these *wajhs* into different *nawᶜ*. He mainly makes a connection between *ṣamad* and other Attributes of God, and he accepts these different interpretations as true. As regards the explanation of *lā jawfa lahū*, Rāzī says that some people thought that the meaning of *lā jawfa lahū* implies that Allah is *jism*. Rāzī expresses his dissatisfaction with this opinion, and suggests that we should understand it metaphorically. In other words, according to Rāzī, the meaning of *lā jawfa lahū* is to say that God is free from any change, influence, *ᶜadam al-infiᶜāl, al-ta'aththur wa mumtaniᶜ al-taghyīr*. (Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr 1995, XVI.182-183

durch (er Selbst)'.[39] While appreciating Paret's translation we are not fully in agreement with his explanation, and we strongly believe that the symbolic context of *khuwār* (hollow), sheds light on the meaning of the word *ṣamad* and, of course indirectly, *ṣamad* explains the meaning of *khuwār*. Briefly, *ṣamad* ('solid' in English and 'kompakt' in German, the opposite of empty) represents the perfection of the belief in Absolute, Eternal God. Furthermore, it also gives us some clues regarding how to understand the prophet's authentic saying that the reciting of surah Ikhlāṣ (consisting of fifteen words only) is equivalent to reading a whole one third of the Qur'an. We do not need lengthy discussion to uncover the content of the prophetic message. However, it is safe to suggest that, as A. Sīd has pointed out, the truth of the matter is that the prophet simply meant that the hermeneutical function of that very short chapter is equal to what one might get from reading one third of the whole Qur'an. That is because in its shortness it asserts God's Oneness, His Eternity...[40]

As regards the meaning of *ʿijl*, it is defined by Ṭabarī, reporting from Mujāhid, as the child of a cow (literally). According to Ṭūsī, it is a baby calf which is born before it is due. The lexicographical explanation is in line with the attitude of the Children of Israel, who were in a hurry to make it before Moses returned to them.[41] Besides this semantic similarity it is also worth noting that there is a very strong acoustic and emotive similarity in the usage of the term *ʿijl* in these two chapters. However, we have to admit that this is generally lost in translation. Bearing in mind frequently used words such as *ʿajala, ʿajiltum*, it is easy to see the pun on *ʿijl*. Whether the Qur'anic pun is natural or is due to Arabic tri-literal roots and so forth does not affect what the puns convey to the reader and what they contribute to the Qur'anic discourse.[42] Accepting the suggestion that puns work by associating words through the use of sound we see that this narrative makes us feel that there is a strong link between the rapidity of the presentation and the Israelites' haste to form the calf and worship it. The best way to show the unexpected appearance of the calf, we think, is through the

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[39] Rudi Paret, 'Der Ausdruck *ṣamad* in Surah 112:2', *Der Islam*, 56 (1979) 294-5

[40] Muhammad ʿAṭā Sīd, *The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'an in Islamic History*, Temple University (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis) 1975, 101

[41] Ṭabarī, *Jāmʿi al-Bayān ʿan Tafsīr Āy al-Qur'ān*, Egypt 1373/1954, IX.67; Ṭūsī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Ḥasan, *Al-Tibyān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Najaf: al-Maktab al-Qaṣīr 1379/1960, IV.578

[42] A. Rippin, 'The Poetics of Qur'anic Punning', *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, 57 (1994) 192-3

wordplay[43] of *ᶜajala* and *ᶜijl*. Furthermore, this word play implicitly contains the tension of the narrative. In addition, the continuous *iẓhār* (guttural manifestation) in *ᶜajiltum amra rabbikum wa* in 7:150 shorten the time and accelerate the tempo, which indicate their haste in the Qur'anic recitation. The Children of Israel, though they escaped from the oppression of Pharaoh, are not yet ready to live freely. Indeed their newly won freedom creates some serious problems for them. Sociologically and psychologically speaking, they are still slaves in their consciousness. Their ignorance is as great as their immaturity; they cannot yet breathe the new atmosphere of freedom. Their weakness is indicated clearly in 7:138. Just after crossing the sea they come upon a people devoted to the cow and ask Moses to make for them a god like theirs.[44] Even the regular pulse (beat) perceived by the reader of this Qur'anic narrative reflects this situation in its recitation.

The cry 'this is your god and the god of Moses' makes it clear that they wanted a substitute for God whom they had earlier thought of as the Creator who brought them up out of the land of Egypt in 7:138. Error is reduced to a simple alternative by the idol-worshippers. Besides its explicit meaning there is an important implicit explanation of their cry. Having regarded it as a sufficient substitute for God they equally consider it as a sufficient substitute for the absent Moses, whom they had followed up to now. Here again we have an example of the difference in presentation between the Qur'an and the Bible. The Bible places stress on the leadership of Moses who brought them out of the land of Egypt,[45] while the Qur'an persistently insists on God's initiative. So it is safe to conclude that the Qur'anic presentation gives preference to the spiritual aspect of the verse rather than its historic sequence. It should be noted that the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh in surah Ṭā-Hā, Pharaoh asks Moses what happened to the generation of old, *famā bāl al-qurūn al-ūlā*, 20:51. In his reply Moses says 'the knowledge thereof is with my Lord in a Record, *fī kitāb*. My Lord is neither unaware nor does He forget, *lā yaḍillu rabbī walā yansā*, 20:52. Attention must be paid to the words *yaḍillu* and *yansā*. Sāmirī misguides the people and the idol-worshippers are wrongdoers who forget God. Moses, being under the protection of God who never forgets and knows everything, does not forget his Lord. This interrelation suggests that the Israelites' claim (Moses has forgotten his Lord)

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[43] The pun on these words is indicated by Ṭabarī and some later exegetes.
[44] Said Nursi, *Sözler*, İstanbul: Sözler Yayınevi 1993, 392
[45] Exodus, 33:1

actually reflects their own desperate situation. Furthermore, their calling the calf 'this is your god and the god of Moses' is a sarcastic use of the demonstrative pronoun, a recurring stylistic device the Qur'an uses to refer to unbelievers' common attitudes. So the significance of 20:88-89 lies in the contribution it makes to the characterisation of the people. On the one hand there are the ancient people who lack awareness of divine purposes. On the other hand the ambiguity[46] in the Qur'anic presentation includes not only the Children of Israel but the unbelieving and ungrateful contemporaries of the prophet of Islam to whom and for whom the story is being recited. In brief, the Qur'anic narrative addresses two communities in the middle of the episode; the first is already known, the second is implicit. It is particularly interesting in that it contains a tacit invitation to the Meccan pagans, whose situation was not very different from the Israelites' regarding the worship of idols. It is also worth noting that the demonstrative pronoun (shifter) enables us to detect the Narrator's discourse, which prompts the reader to cast his mind back over the event already being narrated. Nevertheless, Moses continues his discussion with Aaron in the next five verses but we are not actually told that the Children of Israel are present during the Moses' following discussion.

2.8. Moses and Aaron, 20:90-94

In 20:90 God's voice as Narrator continues and a new character, Aaron, Moses' brother, is introduced. Aaron's entry completes this narrative's characters: Moses, Sāmirī, the Children of Israel and Aaron. This and the following verse take us back to the scene in which the Israelites were misguided. The picture of Aaron, their temporary leader, is not negatively delineated in the Qur'an. The Narrator in this flashback does not tell the whole of the story but shows it; that is, the characters tell it by means of dialogue and action. What we can deduce from this dialogue is that Aaron is aware of the danger. He warns the people, reminding them that this is a test, and calls them to the worship of the Most Merciful God. Aaron's warning at this stage is very important because to give the Israelites a warning implies their future punishment. Not only is what they are doing dangerous; whom they are dealing with is also dangerous. In addition, Aaron himself is aware of his main task among the Israelites. When Moses asks for a helper to increase his strength, God tells him that He has granted his request, 20:29-32. In 7:142 Moses explicitly states that Aaron will replace him among his

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[46] The destination of the words in 20:89 is less specific though they are primarily addressed to the contemporaries of the prophet Muhammad (puh).

people by ordering them to worship God. So he is the second in command, who will lead the Israelites after Moses. There are, however some fine distinctions to be drawn between Moses and Aaron. In fact Aaron is a second Moses but not the first, a leader who is a follower and not a founder. A central concern of the verse is the question of leadership. The two men, though they belong to the same biological class (brotherhood) and spiritual leadership (prophethood), do not have the same symbolic role. Some classical exegetes have referred to this distinction. Nonetheless, Aaron's instruction contains every element of prophethood. On the one hand he opens the door of repentance for his people in his effective use of the word *raḥmān*; on the other hand he invites them modestly to obey him, 20:90. Despite Aaron's warm welcome and closeness to them, the Israelites do not want to listen to him. They openly reject his authority and say 'We will not stop worshipping the calf until Moses returns to us.' At first glance, it seems that their words express their stubborn attitude.

Be that as it may, the main tension is created in the following verses, 20:92-4. This part of the episode deals with Moses' anger towards and criticism of Aaron. It is ambivalent because the relationship between events and characters is not explicit. The reader must infer it from the tension which motivates the characters. However, as the episode proceeds it becomes clear that there are different reasons for Moses' anger.

First of all, it should be noted that there is no mention of the calf in Moses' criticism in either episode. The Qur'anic expression is 'O Aaron! What stopped you when you saw them going astray', 20:92. Obviously, the Qur'an attributes *ḍalāl* (misguidance) to the Children of Israel and excludes Aaron from misguidance. Furthermore, in rejecting the Children of Israel in 7:150, Aaron rejects their sinful act also. However, Moses has the last word in his speech to Aaron: 'O Aaron! What stopped you...'. At this juncture, there is another point which needs to be referred to. In 20:25-30 Moses prayed to God to open his breast, make his affairs easy and loose a knot from his tongue; finally he asked God to grant that someone from his family should help him. God agreed to appoint his brother Aaron. The original word used for Aaron's position in 20:29 is *wazīr*. English translators of the Qur'an have given the meanings helper,[47] counsellor,[48] familiar,[49] henchman,[50] and minister.[51] Although they

[47] Muḥammad Taqī-ud-Dīn al-Hilālī and M. Muḥsin Khan, *Interpretation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, Riyāḍ: Dār-us-Salām 1995, 579
[48] Rev. J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd 1950, 95; N. J. Dawood, *The Koran*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1979, 227

are close to each other the translators miss one of the most important internal points, namely the relationship between *wazīr* and *wizr*. Robinson translates this word as 'someone to bear my (Moses') burden'[52] to show, it seems, the difficulties Aaron is subjected to. In 20:92-94 we see that despite Aaron's great effort in carrying this heavy burden,[53] he has not prevented the Children of Israel from worshipping the calf. The implication is that Aaron has been criticised by Moses for his failure to follow him. The tone adopted by Moses in his abrupt criticism of Aaron indicates that he wants to take the initiative, commanding not only Aaron but all the Israelites. In this way he, at first, consolidates his authority, confidence and security. The last is important because Aaron's plea in 7:150, 'so make not the enemies rejoice over me...', implies that there were some people or factions among the Israelites who seriously opposed both Aaron and Moses, though they were not as strong as the majority. It is also worth noting that Aaron's use of the expression 'the people' in 7:150 and 'the Israelites' in 20:91 objectifies them and distances them, together with their action, from himself. This is a fair indication that the repetition of the verses in the narratives of two different surahs provides a certain unity of details, besides the obvious unity of theme.

If we turn again to Moses' criticism it will be seen that on the surface of the dialogue, his criticism is concerned with the reproach of Aaron. However, it is also used to describe the relationship between the two brothers. On the one hand, Moses, who is angry with his people, seeks to be reconciled with his brother. Furthermore, Aaron's naming of Moses as 'my mother's son' reflects his readiness and eagerness to calm Moses. It should be remembered that when a particular descriptive detail is mentioned in the Qur'an the reader must be alert for consequences, immediate or eventual. Specific stress is placed on the expression 'O my mother's son' in both narratives, which makes it clear that after the dialogue with Aaron, Moses' temper has cooled. So it can be deduced from it that Moses' main motivation is sorrow not revenge. And it is also evident that Aaron, in his activities among the Israelites, remains loyal to his brother Moses. The two narratives depict Aaron's attitude with

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[49] A. J. Arberry, *op. cit.*, 312

[50] M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New York: Dorset Press nd, 229

[51] Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an: Translation and Commentary*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr nd., 795

[52] N. Robinson, *op.cit.*, 1996, 159

[53] The meaning of *wizr* in Arabic is *al-ḥiml al-thaqīl*, heavy burden. (*Al-Muʿjam al-Wasīṭ*, in I. Muṣṭafā, A. H. al-Zayyāt, H. A. al-Qādir and M. A. al-Najjār (eds.), İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları 1986, II.1028

very subtle differences. Surah Ṭā-Hā reveals the distressed leader, sharpening the more general political aspects of Moses' criticism and trying not to separate Moses from his people. In surah Aᶜrāf, he emphasises the unjust treatment meted out to him and the imminent danger threatening his position in the community. In brief, whereas he focuses on his and his people's attitude in surah Ṭā-Hā, he tries to prove his innocence by the fullest dramatic and psychological justification in surah Aᶜrāf. So the episode makes clear that Aaron is spiritually fit to be the vehicle of Divine election. Seeing this, Moses makes an impassioned intercession on behalf of Aaron and himself, asking for Mercy from God in 7:151,[54] and he pronounces judgement on the Israelites and Sāmirī in 7:152.[55]

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is a very important ambiguity in Aaron's reply; it is unclear whether he answers Moses' question. He both does and does not. What Aaron does is to explain the situation which arose during Moses' absence. However, he does not answer Moses' question at all; he merely refers to the Israelites' activities. The Narrator, through all this dialogue, continuously refrains from comment, allowing the dynamics of the relationship between Moses and Aaron, and Aaron and the Israelites, to be revealed solely through their words, and leaving the reader to think in particular about Aaron's performance in Moses' absence. The reader keeps in mind the prophetic mission of Aaron, thinking of not only related verses but also other verses of the same chapter and of different chapters. Having done this, he can conclude that Aaron had two objectives in his mind. One was his own position, the other was that of the Israelites. He, like the prophet Noah,[56] had been overcome by his opponents. All his effort in both narratives is directed to explaining this fact.

2.9. Moses and Sāmirī, 20:95-97

The last part of the episode deals mainly with Moses' reproach of Sāmirī. After Moses has spoken to Aaron the Qur'anic presentation brings Moses to Sāmirī and Moses speaks with him face to face. This is the first time Moses addresses Sāmirī although the Qur'an mentions his name at the beginning of the episode. Some classical exegetes, such as Ibn ᶜAṭiyya and Rāzī, draw our attention to where this dialogue takes

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[54] 'Moses said: 'O my Lord! Forgive me and my brother, and make us enter into Your Mercy, for You are the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.'

[55] 'Certainly, those who took the calf (for worship), wrath from their Lord and humiliation will come upon them in the life of this world. Thus do We recompense those who invent lies.'

[56] 54:10 'Then he (Noah) invoked his Lord (saying): I have been overcome, so help (me)!'

place; whether Moses comes to Sāmirī later or whether Sāmirī is already present while Moses is speaking to his brother. We are not told of Sāmirī's presence when we hear of Moses' return. We are also not told whether Sāmirī is there during Moses' speech to his people and his brother. However, it is clear that Moses knows Sāmirī very well. Moses' simple and brief question (investigation), in contrast to his previous inquiry of the Children of Israel and Aaron, is a fair indication of his foreknowledge about Sāmirī: 'what is the matter with you O Sāmirī?'[57] Throughout the episode in surah Ṭā-Hā, Sāmirī is called the Samaritan, both by the Narrator and the characters. This insistence on naming Sāmirī's nationality reveals the negative connotation of Sāmirī and of the Samaritans to whom he belongs. The reason is simple: Sāmirī is the prime manipulator and the calf, as Sāmirī's vehicle in misguiding the people, is secondary. But it must be kept in mind that Moses' attitude towards Sāmirī is not openly declared by the Narrator. The beauty of this narrative lies in its context (set). God has initiated the plot through Sāmirī's misguidance in 20:85 and this plot then reaches a climax and resolution with the punishment of Sāmirī and the destruction of his device (the golden calf). It is also important to note that many Western scholars find problem in the absence of Sāmirī's name in surah Aʿrāf;[58] whereas in surah Ṭā-Hā he is mentioned three times. Some of the classical commentators briefly refer to this nuance but none of them see a problem, since this episode appears in two separate narratives. Our suggestion, prompted by comparing these two episodes, is simple. Basing our argument on the characters' speech we find it safe to conclude that the surah Ṭā-Hā narrative concentrates on Sāmirī's role whereas the surah Aʿrāf narrative's main concern is that, despite God's constant warning, the Israelites flock to worship the calf. Sāmirī is the major actor from beginning to end in surah Ṭā-Hā; he is responsible for forming the calf. While surah Ṭā-Hā places great stress on Sāmirī's response and his punishment, surah Aʿrāf lays emphasis on the punishment of the Children of Israel. The question form mā khaṭbuka and the vocative yā sāmirī, each with a long ā, in 20:95, is phonologically parallel to mā and yā in wa māʿajalaka ʿan qawmika yā mūsā, 20:83. The tension in this phonological cohesion does not create any confusion on the part of Sāmirī whereas Moses, who is the first of the two to be addressed by God, is quite shocked. This aspect of the narrative requires careful study. Sāmirī's response to

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[57] The Arabic expression is wa mā khaṭbuka yā sāmirī. When Moses escaped from Egypt and came to Midian he found two women who were keeping back (their flocks). When he talked to them he used the same expression, wa mā khaṭbukumā, in 28:23.

Moses reveals that he is ready to answer him. It seems he is prepared and even, to some extent, happy about what he has achieved. Nonetheless he does not attempt to buy time with verbosity. He also offers no self-defence in contrast to the Children of Israel. His quick reply expresses his lack of regret.

He begins his statement with the words 'I saw what they saw not, so I took a handful from the hoof print of the messenger and threw it. Thus my inner self suggested to me.' The existence of the homonyms *baṣara* (*ra'ā/* see) and *baṣara* (*ᶜalima* or *faṭina/* know) is mentioned by the classical exegetes; however, none of them indicates that in this context the verb may have a third meaning (*ẓanna/* think or assume), which leads us to enquire whether we are dealing with Sāmirī's interior experience or with the real sense of the verb 'see'. We are, to some extent, convinced that the meaning of *baṣara* here is the metaphorical 'think' or 'know' as some of the classical commentators have pointed out. We do not wish to defend the superiority of either meaning; we rather wish to show that they offer alternative possibilities of interpretation. The significance of this difference lies in its consequences. The classical exegetes present a mass of information concerning how, what, where and when Sāmirī saw when he formed the calf. This extensive information is basically derived from earlier authorities and anonymous reports. For the time being we will leave aside this detailed explanation and look exclusively at the Qur'anic narrative of surah Ṭā-Hā episode to draw our conclusion. First of all, we need to divide the verse into small units and deal with them one by one:

> 96a: I saw what they saw not
>
> b: I took a handful from the hoof print of the messenger
>
> c: and I threw it
>
> d: Thus my inner self suggested

Here we are not sure whether Sāmirī is defending the virtue of his action or explaining his misconduct, but the words *baṣartu* and *qabaḍtu* stress the apparent authority of his position. The term *baṣar* is used in the Qur'an a number of times to show the Creator's limitless knowledge of his creatures' activities. He sees everything, in all its manifold aspects, perfectly and completely. Sāmirī, having attributed the action of seeing to himself, pretends to take upon himself the mission of God; nobody but he saw.

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[58] J. David Halperin, *op. cit.,* 78

However, the implication of the verse is more complex than this basic explanation. What Sāmirī has seen remains obscure; however, the heart of the verse is expressed in 96b, which sheds some light on the matter. *Qabaḍtu qabḍat^{an}* contains a pun which acts to stress certain aspects of the meaning of the words. First, the recurrence of the word *qabḍa* makes the expression more forceful. What he took and how he took it is emphasised. Derivatives of this word are used of God, who took the earth in His hand, *wa al-arḍa jamf an qabḍatuhū yawm al-qiyāma(h)*...39:67. Likewise, Sāmirī held something firmly. From where he obtained it is not clear. The exegetes identify it with the dust of the hoof print of Gabriel's horse; and they identify the place with Gabriel's footprints. Disregarding this identification, we want to demonstrate the striking parallels between 20:84, *hum ulā'i ^{c}alā atharī* and 20:96, *min atharī al-rasūl*. There is a certain internal relationship in the usage of this word. We think the previous usage of the word not only clarifies the meaning of *athar* in the former but also the *rasūl* of the latter. The Qur'anic Sāmirī is an opportunist whose actions are deceptive. While Moses is quick to go to God Sāmirī is quick to form the calf. At this juncture it should be remembered that the classical exegetes' insistence on Sāmirī's claim regarding the divinity of the calf rather than his assertion of his prophecy should not be seen as absurd, because he has put all his effort into creating a new god for the Israelites within a limited time. As we have stated before it is difficult to define what he saw and took but the Qur'anic narrative implies that he did not make the calf with careful design and slow workmanship. These suggestions apart, there is one important fact in Sāmirī's case; he has a clear intent at the beginning. Also his main inspiration comes not from Gabriel, but from Moses, if we associate *rasūl* (the messenger) with Moses rather than Gabriel, which we think is the more appropriate explanation of the verse.

There is another suggestion, which is more speculative than the previous one. *Samara*, according to the definition of E. William Lane, denotes night: 'he held a conversation, or discourse <u>by night</u>' or 'he stayed without sleeping <u>at night</u> (continuing wakeful)'[59] Furthermore, 23:67, 'talking evil about it (the Qur'an) <u>by night</u>', *sāmir^{an} tahjurūn*, indicates powerfully evil activities during the night. Above all, contrary to the Bible, the Qur'an always uses specifically the word night to describe the term (forty or thirty and ten). All these considerations strengthen the assumption that Sāmirī

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[59] William E. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Edinburgh 1867, II.1425-6

deceives the people during the night time. Sāmirī is a cunning man, and has the capacity to sense the people's inclination. All his speech in the Qur'an shows that he is self-confident, in contrast to the Israelites. The Israelites are anxious, hasty and impatient. They have waited sleeplessly for a long time, they are tired because they are carrying the Egyptians' things as well as their own. These conditions make Sāmirī's work very easy. When they are questioned by Moses, they, having blamed the ornaments, say confusedly 'we cast and likewise Sāmirī did'. This expression implies that they really do not know what Sāmirī has done. Maybe they even do not see what he has cast. It should be remembered that there is a relation between the Qur'anic expression *wa kadhālika alqā al-sāmirī* in 20:87 and 20:20, 69 which shows that when Moses throws his stick it becomes a snake, moving quickly. Sāmirī is aware of this miracle but almost certainly does not comprehend it. What he has done is to attempt to imitate Moses; in other words he follows the *atharī al-rasūl*. As the Qur'an explicitly informs its readers in 7:27, '...verily Satan and his friends see you from where you cannot see them.' As a friend of Satan, Sāmirī sees, thinks, feels, observes something that other people do not see... So he, through this satanic ability, is able to cheat the people. Here there is a great irony. Accepting the difference between 'seeing', which is a non-perceptible action and 'looking'[60] we can explain the dilemma that Sāmirī is experiencing. Sāmirī is clever enough to manipulate the people, who are weak. On the other hand, Sāmirī is powerless to understand the stratagem set by Divine Will because he himself, like the Israelites, is blinded by love of the calf. Ironically, he is setting a snare not only for the Israelites but also for himself. In referring to his blindness implicitly, the discourse presents the reader with clues to solve the question of what happened to Sāmirī and the Israelites. In brief, the Israelites escape from Pharaoh at night, 2:77: 'We inspired Moses; travel by night with My slaves...'; also they are mislead by Sāmirī at night, and most probably the conversation between Moses and the Israelites, Aaron and Sāmirī also takes place at night.

The last part of 96d, 'thus my inner self suggested', echoes what is said by Jacob regarding his sons' plot against Joseph and his brother in 12:18, 83, and Satan's work in 47:25. Sāmirī, after summarising what he has done, ironically concludes that his 'inner self' has prompted him to act. He does not blame himself directly, though his

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[60] Mieke Bal, 'Focalization', in Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia Landa (eds.), *Narratology*, London-New York: Longman 1996, 125

'inner self' is part of him. The brevity of this conclusion is expressive of his openness as well as his shamelessness. In addition, his response betrays no sign of worry about his future. His specific words, together with his deeds, are therefore the essential means of his characterisation.[61] Sāmirī's speech makes his listeners keenly conscious of him as a figure asserting the rightness of his actions without hesitation and using language which produces a certain effect on the Israelites. In this way attention is focused on Sāmirī himself rather than on anything he has done. Finally he tries by this means to attract the attention (or win the respect) of the Israelites, presenting himself as a knowledgeable person. There is a possibility that in spite of his self-assurance Sāmirī is not in fact feeling confident. Up to this point the Qur'an has presented the different characters' speech in the context of dialogues with Moses. It is important to note that in these dialogues we are shown how differently the various characters view the same fact. For instance, the Israelites do not see much since they are totally absorbed in their worship of the calf; however, Sāmirī sees more.

20:97 is devoted to the punishment of Sāmirī and the destruction of the calf. Moses, without accusing Sāmirī openly, condemns him to return to the wilderness to live alone. At this juncture, the reader might ask why the action (sin) of Sāmirī inspired such a response on the part of Moses when the sin committed by his people did not. The exact answer to this question is bound to remain a matter of conjecture, therefore we merely suggest some possibilities. First of all it is safe to say that the decision of Moses to punish Sāmirī in this way for his sin indicates that individual sins have a profound and lasting impact on the entire community within which they are committed. Qur'anic narrative always draws a sharp distinction between good and bad people. Although Sāmirī is an individual, what he has done symbolises human failing. Sāmirī, who is unnamed in the Qur'an, could be taken as a representative figure for the *shirk* (the greatest sin in Islam) itself. He has had a great influence on the people. This unusual[62] punishment makes the reader ready to delve into Moses' and Sāmirī's minds and imagine what is hidden behind their conversation.

Secondly, Sāmirī acts inappropriately, outside the norms, and transgresses the limits of his nature. He is an immoral person whose false inspiration urges him to act differently from others. Put another way, his own actions take him beyond the bounds

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[61] N. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 1976, 277

of human society. Sāmirī's punishment is in accordance with his action; he is an unsociable man and must therefore remain forever outside society. Furthermore, Moses' banishment of Sāmirī also has the effect of turning the reader away from the transgressor. While Sāmirī is being thus isolated from any communication the reader is also being isolated from him and his doings. This is very important because Moses' speech in 20:97 looks like an assertion rather than part of ordinary conversation between two people. In addition, while the Narrator gives us Moses' direct speech to Sāmirī, He does not record Sāmirī's response, if indeed there was one. So, the reader is insistently invited to draw inferences about the characters and their relationship. On the other hand the omission of the expected response shows the gravity of the sin of idolatry. The accursed man has no right to make any attempt to speak when the truth is revealed.

Before moving to Sāmirī's future punishment it is worth noting that the verbal echoes which are created in *sawwalat lī nafsī* and *lā misās*[63] have a profound effect on the reader's ears. It is as if the reader can hear the whispers made by the recurrence of *s* in 20:96 and 20:97.

The future punishment of Sāmirī which is spelled out by Moses is stronger than his worldly punishment. The frequent emphasis and the unidentified nature of the punishment make the reader aware that Sāmirī's eventual fate will be worse than his remaining earthly life. The reader wonders what kind of punishment Sāmirī will be subjected to. However, he is not given a precise answer except that it will be a dreadful end. One might also see a similar emphasis in the destruction of the calf. The episode ends with Moses' obliteration of the main obstacle which stands in the way of the Israelites. In this verse Moses uses a number of emphases, *nūn al-tawkīd*, together with the particle of oath *l* to make the most striking impression on contemporary and later readers. The sudden shift from singular to plural in 'then he (Moses) said: Go away, and verily your (punishment) in this life will be that you will say touch me not, you have a promise that will not fail. And look at your god, to which you have been devoted: we will certainly burn it, and scatter its particles in the sea'[64] signifies that

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[62] Many Muslim commentators show their curiosity about Moses' choice of this kind of punishment and try to find some explanation for it.

[63] This expression occurs once in the Qur'an.

[64] Interestingly, in 28:40 and 51:40 God punished Pharaoh and his people in a similar way to Moses' punishment of the calf: 'We seized him and his host, and We threw them all into the sea', 28:40.

they are the rightful people and, depending on God, they will severely punish Sāmirī and his people and their invention. Furthermore, this shift in personal pronouns gives the expression freshness.[65]

There is a striking similarity between 20:91, 'they said: we will not stop worshipping (*ᶜakifīnā*) the calf until Moses return to us' and 20:97, 'look at your *ilāh* to which you have been devoted, *ᶜākifā*' suggests that, despite the laconic presentation of the Qur'an, the similarity in the description of Sāmirī shows that on the one hand his portion in this sin is equal to that of the Children of Israel and on the other he is addressed as a representative of his party. Attention must therefore be paid to the word *ᶜakifīnā/ᶜākifā*. It suggests that both Sāmirī and the Children of Israel are very sincere in their devotion to the calf and not a single word is wasted in dramatising this episode. The last word of Moses in this episode serves to remind and emphasis that only God, the One, has a right to be worshipped and that He alone has full knowledge of all things. Here we have another story of excuse that ends with punishment of the unbelievers and the success of the believers. It should be remembered that Moses' first step after the punishment of Sāmirī is to remove this man-made god (the golden calf) from the scene and that his second step, taken in 2:67-71,[66] is to remove a real calf -or, more precisely, a cow- from among the Israelites, who had been living in the agricultural Egyptian society. Suffice it to say that they now needed cattle to facilitate their life. That is why these animals had a prominent place in the life of the people. The main purpose in the Qur'an's unceasing emphasis on God's Sovereignty and rejection of false gods is to create a monotheistic society. It is also worth noting that the removal 'killing' of the golden calf signifies the making of the new contract. It is an irreversible action which marks the renewed relationship between God and the Children of Israel. The Qur'anic presentation shows how the Israelites achieved this salvation and in doing so it also strongly implies that by the same token the Meccans can achieve this salvation. So the Qur'anic narrative has its own characteristic presentation and achievement. As Mazharuddin Siddiki has pointed out, the Qur'anic stories bring out most clearly the spiritual and moral element at work in the shaping of history.[67]

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[65] M. S. A. Abdel Haleem, 'Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: *iltifāt* and Related Features in the Qur'an', *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies*, 55 (1992) 410

[66] 2:71, '(Moses) answered: Lo! He saith: Verily she is a cow unyoked; she plougheth not the soil nor watereth the tilth; whole and without mark. They said: Now thou bringest the truth. So they sacrificed her, though almost they did not.'

[67] Mazharuddin Siddiki, *History in the Qur'an*, Karachi 1968, 97 (no publisher)

Finally, having stated the most important feature of the Qur'anic narratives, we want to raise our objection to Alan Jones' view that there is a strong similarity between the episode of the golden calf in chapter 20 and A^{c}shā's poem (*qiṣṣat al-samaw'al*)[68]. Although he accepts that the Qur'anic passage achieves much more, he suggests that the general ideas of the two narratives are not dissimilar.[69] This in our opinion is a personal value judgement. In fact, it is very difficult to find a meaningful connection between the Qur'anic passages and the poems of A^{c}shā, which present from beginning to end the *ḥamiyya* (patriotism) and *ḥamāsa* (heroism) of Samaw'al. The style, content, characters, development of ideas and so on are all different. The Qur'anic narratives about the past are intended as warning and example, not as biography, history or entertainment.[70] So it is safe to conclude that this anecdote in the poetry of A^{c}shā has nothing to do with the Qur'anic narrative of the golden calf episode. The next part will examine the classical Muslim commentators' understanding of this episode. After a brief introduction discussing the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt* we will present a detailed analysis of their interpretations of 'golden calf' and 'heavenly table' episodes.

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[68] Al-A^{c}shā, *Dīwān*, in Rudolf Geyer (ed.), London: Messeg Press 1928, 126-127
[69] Alan Jones, 'Narrative Technique in the Qur'an and in Early Poetry', *The Arabic Budapest Studies*, 8 (1994) 51-52
[70] H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, New York: Octagon Books 1972, 74.

Part Two

Isrā'īliyyāt and the Analysis of Muslim Classical Commentaries

Part two comprises six chapters and a long concluding section. The first chapter (chapter three) will deal primarily with the term *isrā'īliyyāt*. Particular attention will be given to the development of this term among the Muslims. We will discuss the related reports concerning *isrā'īliyyāt* and analyse in detail the Western scholarship regarding it, as well as the activities of *quṣṣāṣ* in the promotion of the *isrā'īliyyāt* reports.

The four succeeding chapters will contain the classical exegetes' comment on 'the calf with a hollow sound (the golden calf)'; a full account of surah Ṭā-Hā 20:83-98, and an examination of some verses of surah Aᶜrāf.

The last chapter (chapter eight) will deal with the classical exegetes' comments on the account of *mā'idah* regarding the 'heavenly table'.

Chapter Three

3.1. Introduction to the Notion of *Isrā'īliyyāt*

Isrā'īliyyāt is the plural of the word *isrā'īliyyāt*. The Qur'an generally uses the term *banū isrā'īl* when it refers to the Jews; it occurs forty-three times.[1] In the Hebrew language, according to Naʿnāʿa, the meaning of *isrā* is servant and *'īl* is God.[2] However, this definition seems unreliable. The root *s'rh* occurs only three times in the Old Testament, all in reference to Jacob's wrestling with the divine being, as noted in Genesis 32: 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but *Israel*, because you struggled (*s'ārīīā*) with God and with men and have overcome.' So the meaning of *s'rh*, some would argue, is to contend, struggle, and persist.[3] As regards the meaning of *'ēl* there is a consensus; *'ēl* is a common generic Semitic appellative for the deity. It has also been noted that this term may refer to the name of the high god in some cultures.[4] In a restricted sense, *isrā'īliyyāt* applies to the traditions and reports that contain elements of the legendary and religious literature of the Jews, but more inclusively and more commonly it also refers to Christian, Zoroastrian and other Near Eastern elements including folklore. In other words, every foreign element in exegesis is called *isrā'īliyyāt*.[5] Besides this broad definition there are some more specific aspects discussed by Western scholars. Some consider *isrā'īliyyāt* a subdivision of the generic term *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* (tales of the prophets), which cover three different categories: legends about the creation, legends about the prophets and stories which specifically deal with the Children of Israel and their rulers from the death of Moses to their entry

[1] Muhammad Fu'ād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-Mufahras li Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları 1987, 33

[2] Ramzi Naʿnāʿa, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt wa Atharuhā fī Kutub al-Tafsīr*, Beirut and Damascus: Dār al-Qalam and al-Diyah 1390/1970, 72. Naʿnāʿa also notes that the Israelites were named *yahūd* after they had repented for their sin of idolatry (worshipping the golden calf), 73.

[3] John M. Bracke, 'Israel', in Willem A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Cumbria: Paternoster Press 1991, III.1273; *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, in Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press 1929, 975.

[4] Terence E. Fretheim, 'El', in Willem A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Cumbria: Paternoster Press 1997, I.400. It has been pointed out that *El* (with compounds) is used over two hundred times in the Old Testament.

[5] Gordon Newby, 'Tafsir Isrā'īliyyāt', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Thematic Issue S 47/4 (1979) 686; Abdullah Aydemir, *Tefsirde İsrailiyat*, Ankara: Beyan Yayınevi 1985, 29

into the promised land.[6] On the other hand, other scholars take *isrā'īliyyāt* to be the generic term and consider *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* as one of its subdivisions. There are also those scholars, such as R. G. Khoury, who try to soften this distinction by suggesting some reports may belong to both *isrā'īliyyāt* and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* proper.[7] It seems that this compromise is more plausible than a clear-cut division of the subject matter according to genres. The specific usage of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* to denote these different elements is, however, due to the Arabic rule of *thaghlīb*, which prescribes that the term is appropriate when material obtained from Jewish sources greatly predominates.[8]

Having given the general definition of the term it is important to note that several questions arise concerning the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*. Among the main questions are: when and how did they emerge, who brought them into the corpus of exegetical literature, why is there a need to make reference to those materials and are there any objections to them; if so, when and by whom were they raised?

First of all, it is worth mentioning that the Qur'an contains many narrative passages concerning the prophets and sages, but these are usually in an allusive style and frequently mention an event once only or refer briefly to a person who does not appear again. These passages are not intended as biography, history or entertainment.[9] As Shaḥḥāta has stated, the objective of Qur'anic narrative is guidance and warning rather than story-telling in detail.[10] Although this style may presuppose that the hearer already has some knowledge of the story or is at least familiar with the broad topics being discussed, the transmitters of these tales aimed at widening the scope of the stories to include details that their listeners might wish to know such as the colour of the dog of the people of the cave, the length of Moses' staff, and so on. In addition, from the sociological point of view, as Ibn Khaldūn has pointed out, the illiteracy of the masses and the way of life in the desert forced people to reflect on the secrets of the universe, the creation and so forth.[11] Consequently, this interest in details has

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[6] Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabbān to Ibn Ḥazm*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1996, 9

[7] G. Vajda, 'Isrā'īliyyāt,' *EI²*, IV.211; Lewis Bernard, *The Jews of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984, 70; C. Adang, *op. cit.*, 9

[8] R. Naʿnāʿa, *op. cit.*, 73

[9] H. A. R. Gibb, *op. cit.*, 74

[10] ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shaḥḥāta, *al-Qur'ān wa al-Tafsīr*, Egypt 1974, 248

[11] Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, Cairo nd., 439 (no publisher)

contributed greatly to the growth of exegesis.[12] It should also be noted that some Western scholars have sought the origin of *tafsīr* (exegesis) in the rendition of these stories.[13] Although it is difficult to accept this view, it can be said that the existence of these tales allows exegesis to penetrate a vast literary corpus.

3.2. Discussion of *Isrā'īliyyāt* Reports

There are various traditions regarding *isrā'īliyyāt* reports. Muslim scholars have expressed a variety of opinions about the implications of these traditions. The main discussion centres on whether or not it is permissible for a Muslim to read the People of the Book's religious texts and whether or not it is permissible for Muslims to transmit from them. Some of the traditions forbid questioning. Others, however, adopt a more moderate approach, according to which the questioning of Jews and Christians seems to be permitted. Before going further we need to note some of these traditions.

3.3. The Avoidance of Information from Jewish and Christian Sources

According to the report narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayra, the People of the Book read the Torah in Hebrew and explained it in Arabic. On this matter the prophet said 'Do not confirm the People of the Book, and do not accuse them of falsehood,' but say that 'we believe in God and what He has revealed to us.'[14]

Similarly, Ibn Mas'ūd reports a command of the prophet 'Do not ask the People of the Book because they will not guide you having already led themselves astray.' He also counselled the companions, saying 'If the People of the Book tell you something do not either accept it as true or reject it as false for they may tell you something which is false but you may accept it is true.'[15] As W. M. Watt has stated, these reports suggest that Muslims are told to adopt a non-committal attitude to what they hear.[16]

A third report, narrated on the authority of Jābir, states that 'Umar wrote some part of the Torah in Arabic and brought it to the prophet. When he started reading what

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[12] Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1984, 32; W. M. Watt, *op. cit.*, 1994, 185; M. J. Kister, 'Legends in Tafsīr and Ḥadīth Literature: Creation of Adam and Related Stories', in Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988, 83; R. Firestone, *op. cit.*, 9

[13] Andrew Rippin, 'Tafsīr', in Mircea Eliade (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York-London: Macmillan Publishing Company 1987, XIV.238

[14] Abū 'Abd Allāh Muhammad b. Ismā'īl Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī nd., IV.374 (Bāb 25, no: 7362)

[15] Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth*, Cairo 1971, 70-71

he wrote, the face of the prophet changed. Then one of the Madinians told ᶜUmar: 'Shame on you O ᶜUmar! Look at the face of the messenger of God.' The Prophet said 'Do not ask the People of the Book about anything, because they will not show you the right path, having already led themselves astray. Otherwise you accuse the truth of falsehood and confirm the wrong; I swear that even if Moses was alive among you nothing would be opened to him but to follow me.'[17] This report shows an extremely strict attitude towards any knowledge deriving from the People of the Book. Muslims are explicitly discouraged from questioning them. But the following report, narrated by Ibn ᶜAbbās, is more critical of the People of the Book than any other:

Ibn ᶜAbbās warned the community of Muhammad, 'O community of Muslims! Why do you ask the People of the Book about anything while you have the final and undistorted Book, which is revealed to the prophet of God?' He added 'Did God not inform you in His Book that the People of the Book have altered their book with their hands?' He recited 2:79: 'Then woe to those who write the book with their own hands and then say this is from God so that they may take for it a small price.' He continued, 'Does God not forbid you the knowledge that comes to you from questioning the People of the Book about what He has sent to you? By God we never saw any of them asking you about what God revealed to you.'[18] On the one hand, it is shown that the People of the Book altered their own books, deliberately corrupted the scriptures, on the other hand, as Watt has pointed out, it is implied that all the sound knowledge of religious matters necessary for Muslims can be gained from the Qur'an.[19]

There are two more anecdotes which indicate that strong prohibitions have been placed on Muslims regarding *isrā'īliyyāt*. In the first anecdote ᶜUmar is alleged to have voiced his objections to Kaᶜb al-Aḥbār: 'Refrain from transmitting from your ancestor, otherwise I will send you back to the land of monkeys, *'arḍ al-ghiradah* (Yaman).'[20]

The second anecdote is noted by al-Muttaqī al-Hindī: 'A man came to ᶜUmar and informed him about a wonderful book which he had found in Madā'in after Muslims had conquered the city. ᶜUmar asked, 'Is it from the Book of God, the

[16] W. M. Watt, 'The Muslim Attitude to the Bible', *Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 16 (1955-56) 60

[17] Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları 1992, III.338, 387

[18] Bukhārī, IV.375 (Bāb 25, no: 7365)

[19] W. M. Watt, *op. cit.*, 1955-6, 61

[20] Dhahabī, *Siyar Aᶜlām al-Nubalā*, Egypt: Dār al-Maᶜārif nd, II.433; R. Raᶜnāᶜa, *op. cit.*, 87

Qur'an?' 'No' said the man. ʿUmar began to beat him with his whip, reciting the first four verses from surah Yūsuf.[21]

Muslim scholars have discussed this topic broadly. Not only Muslim scholars forbid transmission from the scriptures of the Peoples of the Book but they also forbid the study of these scriptures. Kattānī mentions that the scholars agreed that it is unlawful to read, investigate and deal with the books of the People of the Book.[22] The only purpose that would justify the reading of their book would be to answer the Jews.[23] It is also worth noting that Muslim scholars have written individual books about the status of the transmission of *isrā'īliyyāt*. Hājī Khalifā mentions Sakhāwī's *al-aṣl al-aṣīl fī taḥrīm al-naql min al-tawrāt wa al-injīl*.[24] Although Sakhāwī's book may be considered a late contribution it might still reflect quite accurately the prevailing attitude held by earlier authorities.

3.4. The Granting of Permission to Muslims to Ask the People of the Book

Although Muslims are apparently forbidden to study and copy Jewish or Christian scripture or to learn their religious practices, there are reports which suggest the contrary. One of the most significant in paving the way for *isrā'īliyyāt* is narrated by ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ: 'There is no objection to transmitting from the Children of Israel, but when you transmit from me, do not lie about me.'[25]

There are numerous debates about the validity of this tradition. Alqamī, according to Kister's information, considers this report to be an utterance abrogating an earlier prohibition. Furthermore, Kister records two views of Muʿāfā about the meaning of this report. According to the first opinion, *lā ḥaraja* is a predicate and it means there is nothing objectionable in telling these stories. The other view considers this phrase as denoting a prohibition. In other words, it is equivalent to *lā taḥrujū* (do not commit sin by telling stories when you know they are lies).[26] There are other interpretations of this report. For example, in the beginning Muslims considered the prophetic expression *ḥaddithū* to be a commandment. Consequently they began

[21] M. J. Kister, 'Ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja: A Study of an Early Tradition', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 2 (1972) 235

[22] ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Kattānī, *Niẓām al-Ḥukūmat al-Nabawiyya al-Musammā al-Tarātib al-Idāriyya*, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī nd, II.429

[23] M. J. Kister, *op. cit.*, 1972, 231

[24] Hājī Khalifā, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn*, Maʿārif Matbaası 1941, I.107

[25] Bukhārī, II.493 (Bāb 50, no: 3461); Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, II.202

[26] M. J. Kister, *op. cit.*, 1972, 217

narrating stories from the Children of Israel. The prophet then has made it clear that 'there is no objection to not transmitting from the Children of Israel', *lā ḥaraja fī tark al-taḥdīth ʿanhum.*[27] However, according to the second interpretation there is no opposition to the transmission from the People of the Book, as long as they do not contradict the Qur'an and tradition. A third comment, made by ʿAynī, suggests that the prohibition of questioning the People of the Book is applicable to those people who had not embraced Islam.[28] The last opinion, which is not very plausible, is that the term *banī isrā'īl* refers only to the story of Jacob and his sons.[29] Despite the variety of interpretations of this report the apparent meaning is that transmission is lawful. However, the existence of different reports and interpretations have encouraged Western scholars to conclude that there was a controversy among the early Muslims about the transmission of Jewish lore,[30] but that these contradictory reports indicate the attitude of the transmitter(s) rather than the prophet's own view.[31] Muslim scholars, on the other hand, explain that after Islam had been established the transmission of *isrā'īliyyāt* could no longer do any harm.[32] As a result of this interpretation many *isrā'īliyyāt* found a place in classical exegesis.

Besides this report there are five individual anecdotes (reports) which show that some of the earlier personalities dealt with the Torah and the Gospels in the same manner.

i. It is narrated that the convert ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Salām said that the prophet had suggested to him that he should read the Qur'an one night and the Torah the following night. Dhahabī considers this report, if it is true, as indicating permission to reflect on the Torah, whereas Suyūtī is doubtful: 'One of the transmitters of this report is very weak.'[33]

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[27] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī, bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Beirut: Iḥyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī 1988, VI.338

[28] Badr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ibn Aḥmad ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-Qārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Beirut nd, XI.507

[29] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, VI.338

[30] M. J. Kister, *op. cit.*, 1972, 215

[31] C. Adang, *op. cit.*, 8

[32] G. H. A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussion in Modern Egypt*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1969, 121; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, VI.338

[33] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb Tadhkirāt al-Ḥuffāẓ*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 1955, I.27; Kattānī, II.427; *fa hādhā fa in saḥḥa fīhi rukhṣa fī takrīr al-tawrāt wa tadabburihā*

ii. Ka'b al-Aḥbār stated, 'I have not seen anybody who is more familiar with the Torah than Abū Hurayra among the people who could not read the Torah.[34]

iii. Qāsimī, in his long comment on isrā'īliyyāt, mentions Ibn Kathīr's explanation of the position of Ibn 'Abbās regarding isrā'īliyyāt: 'Ibn 'Abbās learnt the knowledge of isrā'īliyyāt.'[35]

iv. It is narrated that Ibn 'Umar found two pieces of the Torah and used them.[36]

v. This last anecdote is mentioned by Ibn Hishām: al-Aws and al-Khazraj were more knowledgeable about the prophet than the Meccans because they used to listen to Jewish rabbis.[37] This anecdote also supports the view that isrā'īliyyāt began with the migration, hijra.[38] Interestingly, when the Meccan pagans were challenged by the new religion they sent Naḍr Ibn al-Hārith and 'Uqba Ibn al-Mu'ayṭ to consult the Jewish rabbis in Madina.[39]

These reports suggest that there was a close relation between the Arabs and the People of the Book at an early stage of Islam. However, there is no consensus among Muslim scholars about the engagement in isrā'īliyyāt during the time of the companions. Some hold the view that isrā'īliyyāt began during the companions' time,[40] while others maintain that there were no isrā'īliyyāt during the time of the companions of the prophet.[41] The second view is due, to some extent, to theological commitment rather than factual analysis of the narrated reports. Non-Muslim scholars, however, hold generally the view that, throughout the first and the beginning of the second Islamic centuries, Muslims were encouraged to learn about the Biblical and extra-Biblical pre-Islamic prophets. One important reason for this, according to Western scholars, came about from Muslims' having difficulty in making sense of significant portions of the Qur'an.[42] The second reason lies in the activities of the new converts to

[34] Dhahabī, Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā, II.432

[35] Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, Maḥāsin al-Ta'wīl, Cairo: Dār al-Iḥyā 1957, I.43

[36] Ibid., I.44

[37] Ibn Hishām, al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyya, Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth 1996, I.232

[38] M. Akif Koç, Bir Kadın Müfessir: Aişe Abdurrahman ve Kur'an Tefsirindeki Yeri, İstanbul: Şule Yayınları 1998, 91.

[39] Ibn Hishām, op. cit., I.247

[40] Shaḥḥāta, op. cit., 243

[41] Ramzi Na'nā'a, Bid' al-Tafsīr fī'l-Māḍī wa'l-Ḥāḍir, Amman 1970, 29-30 (no publisher)

[42] R. Firestone, op. cit., 8-9; Rudi Paret, 'The Qur'an as Literature', in A. F. L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant and G. R. Smith (eds.), Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 209; M. J. Kister, op. cit. 1972, 215-39

Islam. When they accepted Islam they brought with them their old religious tradition and legends.

According to Goldfeld and Newby, their contribution was not limited to the expanding of the Qur'anic stories but also included the development of the techniques of interpretation of the Qur'an.[43] Perhaps suprisingly, it is mentioned that they were consulted by Muslims about disagreements on the reading of the Qur'an.[44] Be that as it may, many materials which are found in exegesis, the history of the prophets, and tradition, function as narrative exegesis of the Qur'an.[45] The key personalities who were frequently asked to comment on the verses which deal with Biblical personalities are ᶜAbd Allāh b. Salām, Kaᶜb al-Aḥbār and Wahb b. Munabbih. They were highly regarded by early scholars; for instance, Kaᶜb was considered the most learned of the People of the Book.[46] Moreover, it is said that Wahb had read ninety-two Books revealed by God.[47] They found confirmation of the Qur'anic stories in the Jewish and Christian sources. The majority of their explanations are primarily based on Midrash, Rabbinic exegesis on the Pentateuch or the Apocrypha, and the hagiographic writings of eastern Christianity, rather than on the Bible.[48] Later, some scholars questioned their authority. Before dealing with the serious criticism of isrā'īliyyāt it is appropriate to discuss another class of people who had disseminated these reports, namely quṣṣāṣ (story-tellers).

3.5. Quṣṣāṣ, Story-tellers

One of the important groups of religious people who played a significant part in the compilation of isrā'iliyyāt are the preachers and story-tellers. In his Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa al-Mudhakkirīn, Ibn Jawzī points out that there are three designations concerning this branch of learning; qaṣaṣ, tadhkīr and waᶜẓ. Those who engage in these activities

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[43] Yeshayahu Goldfeld, 'The Development of Theory on Qur'anic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship', Studia Islamica, 67 (1988) 8, 14; G. Newby, op. cit., 1979, 685

[44] Tabari, XVI.11: A subject matter report related to the exact recitation of the words fī ᶜaynⁱⁿ ḥami'atⁿ in surah Kahf. According to this report, despite Ibn ᶜAbbās' opposition Muᶜāwiya read it fī ᶜaynⁱⁿ ḥamiyatⁿ. Consequently Ibn ᶜAbbās sent someone to call Kaᶜb al-Aḥbār to solve this problem. When he came he explained the meaning of ḥami'atⁿ and supported the reading of Ibn ᶜAbbās.

[45] R. Firestone, op. cit., 14

[46] Bukhārī, IV.374, (Bab 25, no: 7361)

[47] Ibn Saᶜd, Ṭabaqāt, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1905, V.395

[48] Ilse Lichtenstadter, 'Qur'an and Qur'an Exegesis', Humaniora, 2 (1972) 12

are called *qāṣṣ*, *mudhakkir* and *wāʿiẓ* respectively.[49] The *qāṣṣ*, according to Abbot, is one who fashions tales with a moral around Biblical and Qur'anic stories and legends, in which the stories of the prophets loom large, and are supplemented by other legends from ancient stories and folklore.[50] He is not to be condemned in and of himself, for in relating narratives of the pious people of old he points out the lessons to be learned from these stories, which give warning, and admonish and rebuke, and contain examples of righteousness which should be followed. Ibn Jawzī cites Qur'anic support for the function of the *qāṣṣ*: 'We shall narrate to you the best of the stories', 12:3.[51] Having given a similar definition, Abbot states that such story-tellers, both Arab and non-Arabs, appeared on the scene spontaneously and informally and were readily accepted by the community.[52] As regards the other two activities, *tadhkīr* is a teaching about God's benefactions towards His creatures, an appeal for thankfulness and a warning against opposing Him, and *waʿẓ* denotes the inspiration of listener through fear, by which the heart becomes sensitive.[53]

According to the Muslim account, the development of this profession (story-telling) reaches back to the earliest period of Islam. Ibn Jawzī says that the messenger of God joined with the people while a *qāṣṣ* was narrating stories to them, and also that he listened to ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Rawāḥa narrating stories. However, he adds that these were not common occurrences.[54] ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb is said by some to have given permission to tell stories to the people, either to the pious Tamīm al-Dārī or (according to others) to ʿUbayd Ibn ʿUmayr.[55] A dissenting opinion is given by Ibn ʿUmar: 'Stories were neither narrated in the time of the prophet nor during the reign of Abū Bakr or ʿUmar; the practice was not introduced after the reign of ʿUthmān (but only at the time of civil war, *fitna*).[56]A similar comment is made by Ibn ʿAdiyy on the authority of Aʿmash: 'The first person to introduce *qaṣaṣ* was Muʿāwiya, at the time of

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[49] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa al-Mudhakkirīn*, (ed.) by Merlin S. Swartz, Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq 1986, 96

[50] Nabia Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri: Qur'anic Commentary and Tradition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1967, 14-15

[51] Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, 1986, 96

[52] N. Abbot, *op. cit.*, 1967, 14-15

[53] Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, 1986, 97; J. Pedersen, 'The Islamic Preacher: Wāʿiẓ, Mudhakkir, Qāṣṣ', in Samuel Löwinger and Joseph Somogyi (eds.), *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume 1*, Budapest: 1948, 243

[54] Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, 1986, 107

[55] *Ibid.*, 108

[56] *Ibid.*, 108

fitna.'[57] It should be noted, however, that a severe criticism was made by Ibn Sīrīn, who discredited the very origins of their profession by assigning them to the Khārijites.[58] Khalīl Athamina believes that the linking of *qaṣaṣ* to the *fitna* or *khawārij* periods was intended to repudiate such story-telling by implying that it is negative in nature and not rooted in Islamic tradition. So these allegations have nothing to do with the precise date of their emergence. Furthermore, Athamina suggests that *qaṣaṣ* developed as an essential necessity of Islamic society at least one generation before the outbreak of the first civil war in 657 AD.[59] According to Abbot, however, Muᶜāwiya is credited with formalising the position of the *quṣṣāṣ* and the caliph ᶜAbd al-Mālik Ibn Marwān is credited with confirming their official position and further regulating the activities of the officially appointed *quṣṣāṣ* in the mosque services.[60]

Besides these various opinions, some Western scholars have sought their origin in ancient Arabian daily life, while others have tried to find a connection between the Islamic penitential sermon and the corresponding Christian sermon. The first view is held by Pedersen, who places great stress on the art of the spoken word. There are two practitioners of this art in *jāhiliyya*: the poet, and the rhetorician, *khaṭīb*. The latter, according to Pedersen, obtained a position as the one who continued the prophet's function during the Friday service. Besides this official preacher, the congregation was addressed by another pulpit orator, who was not an official of the mosque and who exerted considerable influence on the people during the early period.[61] Pedersen associates his position with that of the preacher, *wāᶜiẓ*. The second opinion, proposed by C. H. Becker, is not completely rejected by Pedersen; however, Becker warns the reader that it must not be overlooked that the fundamental idea of *qaṣaṣ* can be traced back to the Qur'an and thence to ancient Arabic poetry.[62]

As regards the activities of these *quṣṣāṣ*, three functions are mentioned: reciting the Qur'an, leading the prayer, and giving a speech after prayer.[63] The last point is quite important. As Abbot has stated, they accelerated the popularisation of the

[57] Suyūtī, *Taḥdhīr al-Khawāṣṣ min 'Akādhib al-Quṣṣāṣ*, Cairo: Matbaᶜa al-Muᶜahad 1351H, .63
[58] Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, 1986, 211
[59] Khalīl Athamina, 'al-Qaṣaṣ: Its Emergence, Religious Origin and its Socio-Political Impact on Early Muslim Society', *Studia Islamica*, 76 (1992) 58-59
[60] N. Abbot, *op. cit.*, 1967, 15; K. Athamina does not accept this opinion. For him, Muᶜāwiya simply utilised the *quṣṣāṣ* in order to promote his own political aims. (Khalīl Athamina, *op. cit.*, 65)
[61] J. Pedersen, *op. cit.*, 226
[62] *Ibid.*, 231

emotion-laden theme of reward and punishment in this life and the hereafter, *targhīb wa tarhīb*. Much of the material on this theme was soon incorporated into the body of tradition and Qur'anic exegesis.[64] To support this point it is worth mentioning the suggestion of Birkeland: 'A great deal of *tafsīr* actually found are performed by *quṣṣāṣ* and Mutazilite philologists.'[65] Newby considers *quṣṣāṣ* intermediaries between Jewish and Islamic materials, particularly in the transmission of *isrā'īliyyāt*.[66] It should be remembered that in early times the title of *qāṣṣ* did not apparently carry the unfavourable connotation which it gained in the course of further development. As Ibn Jawzī's list indicates, the *quṣṣāṣ* of early times were generally reputable judges and traditionalists who functioned as preachers through the medium of the story.[67] Ḥasan al-Baṣrī considers story-telling as an innovation but adds, 'how wonderful is that innovation!'[68] They were left undisturbed to do their pious work, and official theology gladly tolerated their activities in the mosques.[69] Furthermore, Goldziher's comment indicates the degree to which they were influential in the community: 'Their lectures were attended much better than those of trained theologians.'[70] Qāsimī records Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal's saying: 'When we narrate the law we are very cautious, but when we talk about *faḍā'il* (virtues) we take it easy (show compliance to it, *tasāhalnā*); we are especially flexible in telling of stories.'[71] So it is clear that at first the *quṣṣāṣ* had a good reputation and were very influential among the laymen of early Muslim cities. As Massignon has noted, the second century was, specifically in Basra, the century of preachers.[72]

However, this did not last long. Ibn Jawzī notes a tendency among jurists to look down on the *quṣṣāṣ* and to avoid their meetings.[73] In order to satisfy the curiosity of the people story-tellers invented tales about Biblical persons. As Goldziher remarks, they left no question unanswered because any admission of ignorance would have damaged

[63] *Ibid.*, 235
[64] N. Abbot, *op. cit.*, 1967, 15; M. J. Kister, *op. cit.*, 1988, 83
[65] Harris Birkeland, *Old Muslim Opposition Against Interpretation of the Koran*, Oslo: Norske Videnskaps-Akademi Oslo, Kommisjon has J. Dybwad 1955, 17, fn.2
[66] Gordon Newby, 'The Sīrah as a Source for Arabian Jewish History', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 7 (1986) 129
[67] Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, 1986, 126-170; I. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, II.152; N. Abbot, *op. cit.*, 1967, 9
[68] Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, 1986, 103
[69] I. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, II.153
[70] *Ibid.*, II.157
[71] Qāsimī, *op. cit.*, I.41
[72] C. Pellat, 'Ḳāṣṣ', *EI²*, IV.734

their reputation among the populace. A *qāṣṣ*, for example, was able to give the name of the golden calf.[74] Their store of detail also penetrated into more serious exegetical works. Though his comment is a late one, the mystic Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī attacks story-telling as a heretical innovation.[75] Despite the fact that there were a number of *salaf* and *khalaf* who criticised the story-tellers and preachers, as Merlin L. Swartz says, it is misleading to assume that these criticisms were directed against *quṣṣāṣ* and *wuʿʿāẓ* as such or against the *quṣṣāṣ* and *wuʿʿāẓ* as a class. This was not the intention of this criticism. Men of this class were attacked only because they became so completely engrossed in *qaṣaṣ* that they were distracted from the study of the Qur'an, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. So it is safe to conclude that some of them contributed to the distribution of *isrā'īliyyāt*, especially those *quṣṣāṣ al-kudyā* (indigent preachers) who used these materials in a shortened form;[76] whether their intentions were good or bad is not the issue. However there were always some knowledgeable people among them who confined themselves to the religious sciences and would have nothing to do with the *isrā'īliyyāt*.

3.6. The Emergence of the Technical Term *Isrā'īliyyāt*

Early Muslim scholars give the names of some of those who made free use of non-Islamic materials in Qur'anic interpretation. Mujāhid and Muqātil b. Sulaymān are two of them.[77] Dāwūdī relates, 'A man asked Aʿmash, 'why do men avoid the *tafsīr* of Mujāhid?' He answered, 'Because they think that he used to ask the People of the Book.'[78] Furthermore, it is said that because of his personal curiosity Mujāhid went to *Ḥaḍra-mawt* to see the well of *Hūd*.[79] As for Muqātil, Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Ḥayyān mentions that he was taught by both Jews and Christians.[80] Apart from these reports, Ḥājī Khalifā mentions Wahb's *Kitāb al-Isrā'īliyyāt* and states that 'he applied himself to transcribing the old works known as *al-isrā'īliyyāt*.'[81] Nevertheless, nowhere in the ancient sources do we find evidence of the usage of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* and

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[73] Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd Raḥmān al-Jawzī, *Talbīs-u Iblīs*, Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth 1995, 123; In fact they not only avoided *quṣṣāṣ*' meetings but also those of *muḥaddithūn*.

[74] I. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, II.157

[75] Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, 1986, 57

[76] Khalīl Athamina, *op. cit.*, 55

[77] M. Plessner and A. Rippin, 'Mukātil B. Sulaymān', *EI²*, VII.509

[78] Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmī 1983, II.308

[79] *Ibid.*, II.308

[80] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, Egypt: Matbaʿa al-Saʿādah 1948, IV.343

[81] Ḥājī Khalifā, *op. cit.*, II.1390

serious criticism of this type of exegesis. Khoury confirms that the word *isrā'īliyyāt* is never mentioned in connection with Wahb in historical writings.[82] However, it is not difficult to find some reference to Wahb's *Kitāb al-Isrā'īliyyāt* in later works. According to Kister, the first book entirely devoted to *isrā'īliyyāt*, *Akhbār-u Banī Isrā'īl*, was compiled by Ḥammād b. Salama (d.167/783), a contemporary of Ibn Isḥāq; but Kister has little to say about it.[83] In a recent article, however, R. Tottoli has contributed enormously to the study of the emergence of this term in Muslim writings. He mentions that Masʿūdī (d.345/956) was the first person to use the term *isrā'īliyyāt* in his *Murūj al-Dhahab*, but not in the sense of a technical term or as the title of a particular book. He adds that Masʿūdī's use of this term has already been noted by Goldziher.[84] Regarding Ibn Murajja's collection, Tottoli says that it is certain that Ibn Murajja cites directly from the book titled *Kitāb al-Isrā'īliyyāt*, which is related to traditions circulating under the name of Wahb Ibn Munabbih.[85] The present writer came across the attribution of *Kitāb al-Isrā'īliyyāt* to Wahb ibn Munabbih in Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's (d.387/996) *Qūt al-Qulūb*.[86] Two other important figures who used the term *isrā'īliyyāt* are Ghazālī (d.505/1111) and Ṭurṭūshī (d.520/1126). According to Tottoli, Ṭurṭūshī seems to use a book of *isrā'īliyyāt* as his direct source.[87] However, none of these authors use *isrā'īliyyāt* as a technical term and their references to it are far from critical. As Tottoli explains, their use of the term is not systematic; whether they use it to allude to the title of a book or to designate the corpus of tradition is not clear.[88] Finally, Tottoli mentions the Andalusian commentator Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d.543/1148), the pupil of Ṭurṭūshī, who used the term in his *tafsīr* to define a kind of tradition which was regarded as unreliable for the exegete. It should be noted that apart from Ibn al-ʿArabī none of the above-mentioned Muslim scholars are commentators. Therefore Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* is extremely important for our discussion. Tottoli gives four examples from Ibn al-ʿArabī's exegesis; the first two probably imply

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[82] R. G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, Teil 1: Der Heidelberger Papyrus PSR Heid Arab 23 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1972), 247-57

[83] M. J. Kister, 'The Sirah Literature,' in A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant and G. R. Smith (eds.), *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983, 354

[84] Roberto Tottoli, 'Origin and Use of the Term Isrā'īliyyāt in Muslim Literature,' *Arabica*, 46 (1999) 194

[85] Ibid., 196

[86] Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, Beirut 1995, I.197-8

[87] R. Tottoli, *op. cit.*, 196

[88] *Ibid.*, 200

the title of a book while the other two explicitly criticise *isrā'īliyyāt* reports. The following quotation shows the title:

> It is reported in the *isrā'īliyyāt* that Yaḥyā (John) was asked when he was a child, 'Why do you not go and play?' In reply he said, 'I am not created for play', *mā khuliqtu lī al-luʿb*.[89]

As regards Ibn al-ʿArabī's criticism of *isrā'īliyyāt*, Tottoli notes his statement concerning *qaṣaṣ al-qur'ān*: 'These Qur'anic narratives are the most beautiful and reliable stories, while *isrā'īliyyāt* include groundless additions or misleading omissions.'[90] Although Ibn al-ʿArabī's commentary only deals with legal verses this approach to the interpretation of the Qur'anic narrative is very original. He explicitly criticises this report. However, it must be noted that because of his interpretation of a limited category of verses and restricted use of *isrā'īliyyāt* in his few comments on the Qur'anic narrative it is safe to conclude that his *tafsīr* does not represent a clear-cut approach to *isrā'īliyyāt*. So the following questions remain valid: when did the *isrā'īliyyāt* become a technical term in Muslim commentaries and when did Muslim commentators start seriously criticising these reports?

These are two different questions and neither Muslim nor non-Muslim scholars have come to any agreement. First of all it should be stated that there is a criticism of *isrā'īliyyāt ab initio*. In order to show the negative attitudes towards the use of *isrā'īliyyāt*, the anecdote mentioned by Birkeland in his work *Old Muslim Opposition Against the Interpretation of the Qur'an* is worth noting: *kāna al-qāsimu lā yufassiru, yaʿnī al-qur'ān* means, according to Birkeland, that neither Biblical material nor pagan Arab poems could be recognised as a means of understanding the Qur'an.[91] Despite some classical exegetes' critical approaches to these reports there are also a number of *isrā'īliyyāt* which were used by Muslim commentators *ab initio*. Unfortunately, modern Muslim scholars do not pay enough attention to the technical origin and use of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* and the amount of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports in classical exegesis, instead they prefer to give a number of *isrā'īliyyāt* examples in their evaluation of the classical commentaries. A few Western scholars, on the other hand, have placed great emphasis on the usage of the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt*. Newby, for instance, in his many writings about *isrā'īliyyāt*, states that this term was in general use after the first Islamic

[89] Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, np and nd, III.197; R. Tottoli, *op. cit.*, 197
[90] R. Tottoli, *op. cit.*, 197
[91] H. Birkeland, *op. cit.*, 10

century, the period of the greatest activity in the collection of *isrā'īliyyāt*. These materials, however, lost their popularity in the following centuries due to the definition of *sunna* by jurists.[92] In other words, *isrā'īliyyāt* failed to meet the scholarly standard of this new approach to Qur'anic interpretation. Only the *qiṣaṣ* genre has been a favourable soil for the continuation of these materials. As regards the Qur'an they no longer have solid ground on which to stand. *Isrā'īliyyāt* preserved in Ṭabarī's exegesis are the only remains of this kind.[93]

A similar point of view may be found in Abbot and Firestone. They reach the conclusion that the criticism of *isrā'īliyyāt* began when Muslims established the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad.[94] In addition, W. R. Taylor openly states that increased attention to *ḥadīth* and fanatical hostility to the Jews and the Christians coincided with the establishment of Abbasid or orthodox Islam.[95] So, according to Taylor, the Muslims rejected not only these materials but also the non-Muslims themselves. A similar opinion is held by Guillaume.[96] While the Western scholarship takes the Abbasid period as one of reaction against *isrā'īliyyāt*, Muslims accuse the People of the Book of damaging Islam with *isrā'īliyyāt* reports because of their enmity. Technically speaking, however, neither of them help in determining when the term *isrā'īliyyāt* was used and which exegetes paid considerable attention to these materials.

Khoury, Johns and Calder have discussed whether Ibn Kathīr was the first to introduce the term *isrā'īliyyāt* to summarise material of this kind, although in practice he only uses the term when faced with narrative details to which he objects.[97] Johns' and Calder's constructive contribution to the understanding of *isrā'īliyyāt* cannot be denied: they fail, however, inasmuch as they restrict this notion to the realm of theology and disregard pre-Ibn Kathīr *tafsīr* works in general. What Ibn Kathīr does is

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[92] G. Newby, *op. cit.*, 1979, 694-5; Newby explicitly states that the circulation of non-Islamic materials for use as the basis for Qur'anic commentary was present during the prophet Muhammad's lifetime and saw a considerable increase in the two generations after his death. (Gordon Newby, 'The Drowned Son: Midrash and Midrash Making in the Qur'an and Tafsīr', in William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic And Judaic Traditions*, Georgia: Scholars Press 1986, 20)

[93] *Ibid.*, 695

[94] R. Firestone, *op. cit.*, 9

[95] W. R. Taylor, 'Al-Bukhārī and the Aggada', *The Moslem World*, 33 (1943) 195

[96] A. Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1924, 64

[97] R. G. Khoury, op. cit., 247-57; A. H. Johns, 'David and Bathsheba: A Case Study in the Exegesis of Qur'anic Story-telling', *Mélanges Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire*, 19 (1989) 263; N. Calder, 'Tafsir from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description

to place some limitations on these reports. He himself clarifies the matter by stating that *isrā'īliyyāt* are quoted *li al-istishhād* (for supplementary attestation) not *li al-iᶜtiḍād* (for full support.)[98] The categories of *isrā'īliyyāt* which Ibn Kathīr proposed are still in use. They are three in number:

i. those which are known to be true because they are attested to in the Qur'anic revelation

ii. those whose falsehood is certified from the Qur'an

iii. those which fall into neither of the other classes.

It should also be stated that Ibn Taymiyya, the mentor of Ibn Kathīr, had used this technical term in his brief introduction to the science of exegesis,[99] but this does not mean that they were the first scholars to draw attention to *isrā'īliyyāt* reports and criticise them explicitly. Shaḥḥāta, quoting from Kawtharī, states that Ṭūfī[100] (d.716/1316) discusses the use of *isrā'īliyyāt* in exegesis in his small book *al-'Iksīr fī Qawāᶜid al-Tafsīr*. Unfortunately, we have not had the opportunity to see this book; however, on the basis of Shaḥḥāta's information it seems likely that Ṭūfī's approach was apologetic. It is also important to note that he had an enormous influence on Ibn Kathīr. According to Ṭūfī, classical exegetes cannot be blamed as long as they use *isrā'īliyyāt* for explanation and not as absolute truth.[101] It is also a pity that our inability to procure this book has prevented us from making any comparison between it and Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. Ṭūfī died before Ibn Taymiyya but we have no evidence to decide whose work takes precedence. However, we know that Ibn Taymiyya and Ṭūfī met in Damascus.[102] This secondary evidence leads us to the conclusion that *isrā'īliyyāt* were discussed in classical exegesis, even before Ibn Kathīr, but we cannot claim to know the exegetes' attitude towards them. As we will see later, *isrā'īliyyāt* reports have a long history. Their utilisation is testified to with regret by Muslim scholars; however, these materials are still being used in many Muslim religious circles. The effect of these reports is more beneficial than that of some others, and therefore it is believed that the stories may be viewed as *junūd* (warriors) of God.

of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham', in G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur'an*, London: Routledge 1993, 137 fn.37

[98] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ᶜAẓīm*, Cairo: Turāth Publication nd, I.7-8

[99] Ibn Taymiyya, *op. cit.*, 50-51

[100] Najm al-Dīn Abū al-Rabᶜī Sulaimān b. ᶜAbd al-Qāwī b. ᶜAbd al-Karīm b. Sājid al-Ṭūfī al-Sarsarī.

[101] Shaḥḥāta, *op. cit.*, 273

Dihlawī (d.1762 CE) accepts their importance: 'Qur'anic narratives can be understood easily only with the knowledge of these expansions.'[103]

Obviously, the rejection of isrā'īliyyāt did not become a major concern of Qur'anic exegesis until the reformist movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. This, of course, was carried out under the influence of historical criticism as a result of intellectual links with Europe.[104] For instance, Muhammad ᶜAbduh, Rashīd Riḍā, Abū Rayya and ᶜĀisha ᶜAbdurrahmān[105] are generally considered foremost scholars among those who engaged in the debate about isrā'īliyyāt in modern times. They considered isrā'īliyyāt alien material and very dangerous for Islam, taking the view that the majority of these reports consist of irrational ideas and traditions. The information given by Nettler shows that Riḍā and, following him, Abū Rayya, questioned the reliability of the main figures in the transmission of isrā'īliyyāt. For instance, Abū Rayya accused Kaᶜb of being a hypocrite and wrote an article under the title 'Kaᶜb, the first Zionist' to show the link between Kaᶜb and many conspiracies committed against early Muslims. Juynboll and Nettler provide detailed information about these main figures and their critics' arguments,[106] however, most of these (Riḍā's and Abū Rayya's) arguments seem to be devoted to political discussion rather than scientific investigation of the development of the notion of isrā'īliyyāt in tafsīr. It is also important to note that Muslim tradition has regarded these converts as reliable.[107] For these reasons the recent discussion does not help us very much in our analysis of the notion of isrā'īliyyāt in the classical period. It should also be remembered that criticism of isrā'īliyyāt is not limited to the reformist movement. During the last two centuries there have been many Muslim scholars who in various places have pronounced their dissatisfaction with these reports in tafsīr. For instance, writing of developments in the

[102] Ibn ᶜImād, Shajarāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab, Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr 1996, VIII.72
[103] Qāsimī, op. cit., 40
[104] H. A. R. Gibb, op. cit., 73; A. H. Johns, op. cit., 1989, 263
[105] She expresses her dissatisfaction with every kind of isrā'īliyyāt reports. Detailed information about her approach to isrā'īliyyāt is found in her book entitled al-Qur'ān wa Qaḍāyā al-Insān, Beirut: Dār al-Malāyīn 1982, 296-310;
[106] G. H. A., Juynboll, op. cit., 120-138; R. L. Nettler, 'Early Islam, Modern Islam and Judaism: The Isrā'īliyyāt in Modern Islamic Thought', in Nettler, R. L. and Taji-Faruki Suha (eds.), Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations: Muslim-Jewish Encounters; Intellectual Traditions and Modern Polities, Oxford: Harwood Academic Publications 1998, 1-14
[107] Said Nursi, Muḥākemāt, İstanbul: Sözler Yayınevi 1991, 16

Malay world, Johns points out that there is a serious move to simplify the exposition of the Qur'an, including reducing the number of *isrā'īliyyāt* and *qirā'āt*.[108]

If we scrutinise the classical commentaries in their chronological order it will be seen that the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt* is by no means static, but has undergone a substantial evolution. If Newby is right we should not be able to see any appreciable change after Ṭabarī, but many elaborated reports occur after Ṭabarī in classical commentaries. Furthermore, if classical exegesis is compared with the *qiṣaṣ* genre it will be seen that in many details they agree with each other, and sometimes one has what the other lacks in the narration of many stories. If the statement that the term was not used before Ibn Kathīr is right, what is the significance of Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī's comment on the interpretation of the Qur'an *with isrā'īliyyāt*? In short, classical exegesis does not close the door to these kinds of reports; on the contrary, we observe countless similar materials in the post-Ibn Kathīr period. Apart from a few exceptions, the attitudes of classical and post-classical exegetes to these reports are essentially similar. So both approaches to *isrā'īliyyāt* need to be rectified. Moreover, when we consider the amount of these reports and the effort of some individuals to eliminate them from their commentaries we find that some of the above-mentioned proposals are not very convincing. The justification of our own proposal requires the careful presentation of relevant case studies together with comprehensive comparisons. The following chapters are intended to put this into practice.

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[108] A. H. Johns, 'Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988, 274

Classical Exegetes' Comments on the Calf with a Hollow Sound

In this section we will deal with one of the most striking Qur'anic narratives and its interpretation in classical exegesis. The subject of our discussion is the 'golden calf' episode, which students of the Bible are familiar with, although the Qur'anic narrative is not as long as its Biblical counterpart. The Qur'anic account of the golden calf exists in two complete sections, 7:147-155 and 20:83-98, and in addition to this there are two short versions, 2:51, 54, 92-3, 4:153. We will focus primarily on the verses from surah Ṭā-Hā and will then attempt to show how the Muslim exegetes interpreted these verses; we will discuss the difficulties they encountered, their success in overcoming these challenges, their main hermeneutic devices, and most importantly, their attitude towards the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*. We give below the names of those major Muslim commentators -together with their most pertinent works- to whom we will refer frequently.

Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (225/839-310/923), *Jāmᶜi al-Bayān ᶜan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*

Abū Jaᶜfar al-Ṭūsī (385/995-460/1056), *al-Tibyān al-Jāmᶜi li ᶜUlūm al-Qurʾān*

Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Masᶜūd b. Muḥammad b. al-Farrā al-Baghawī (436/1044-516/1122), *Maᶜālim al-Tanzīl*

Jār Allāh Maḥmūd b. ᶜUmar al-Zamakhsharī (467/1075-538/1144), *al-Kashshāf ᶜan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl wa ᶜUyūn al-Aqāwil fī Wujūh al-Taʾwīl*

Ibn ᶜAṭiyya al-Andalūsī (481/1088-541/1146), *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ᶜAzīz*

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (543/1149-606/1209), *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*

Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr b. Farḥ al-Qurṭubī (?-671/1273), *al-Jāmᶜi li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*

Abū al-Fidā Ismāᶜīl b. ᶜUmar b. Kathīr (701/1301-774/1373), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ᶜAzīm*

Chapter Four

The Analysis of 20:83-85

In this chapter we will discuss four main topics relating to the verses 20:83-85. The first of these is found in 20:83 to 20:84: God questions Moses regarding his haste and Moses replies to God. We will try to analyse the commentators' understanding of these verses, and we will also present our own opinions to help clarify the explanation of these verses.

Secondly we will analyse 20:85, which speaks of the testing of the Children of Israel by God, and try to explain the commentators' concerns regarding the understanding of the nature of the test. Furthermore, we will evaluate the extent of *isrā'īliyyāt* materials used in these exegeses and examine some of the exegetes' theological concerns.

The third topic under discussion concerns Sāmirī's personality as seen from the perspectives of both Muslim commentators and modern Western scholarship; we will also briefly compare the two approaches.

Finally, we will consider the number of the worshippers of the calf as reckoned by the classical commentators in the light of *isrā'īliyyāt* traditions, which we hope will result in a clearer understanding of this topic.

4.1. Moses' Haste

'And what made you hasten from your people, O Moses', 20:83

In this verse God asks Moses why he has come so quickly, leaving his people behind. The question is answered by the Qur'an: 'I hastened to You O my Lord to please You', 20:84. Ṭabarī, in dealing with these verses introducing the story, gives some brief information. Having quoted from Ibn Ḥumayd, Salama and Ibn Isḥāq, he says:

> After having destroyed Pharaoh and his people and saved Moses and the Children of Israel, God appointed for Moses thirty nights, then added to the period ten more, thus completing the term of forty nights. So Moses had charged Aaron to follow him with the Children of Israel.[1]

Ibn ʿAṭiyya[2] explains that Moses was eager to be close to God as soon as possible. So, after having charged his brother Aaron to assume leadership among the

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[1] Ṭabarī, XVI.195-6

[2] ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ghālib ʿAbd al-Ra'ūf b. Tammām b. ʿAṭiyya b. Khālid b. ʿAṭiyya b. Khālid b. Khufāf b. Aslam b. Mukrim al-Muḥāribī. Dhahabī writes 'I confine myself to calling him Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib because of the

Children of Israel, Moses decided to go on before them. The decision made by Moses depends on his *ijtihād* (personal opinion).[3] Moses' opinion is linked by Ibn ʿAṭiyya with the legal dimension of Islam: he endeavours to prove that there is nothing unlawful in the attitude of Moses, who acted according to his *ijtihād*: therefore no one has the right to criticise or blame Moses' action.

According to Zamakhsharī, the question posed by God to Moses is rhetorical. Like Ibn ʿAṭiyya, he holds the view that Moses' haste depends on his personal judgement, *ijtihād*, because he thinks that 'going to the Lord alone' is the best way to please Him.[4] However, he raises an interesting question which had not been asked by the earlier Sunni exegetes:

> (if you say) 'what made you hasten' is a question asked to investigate the reason for Moses' haste, why did Moses say, in response to it, 'they are close on my footsteps...'? He was supposed to say 'I came early in order to please You, to fulfil Your appointment and because I desired to speak to You.' Obviously, Moses' answer is not consistent with the question of God.[5]

Zamakhsharī solves this dilemma as follows: 'There are two points here: one is to show disapproval of Moses' haste; the other is to explain the reason for this haste.'[6] The most important of these two is Moses' effort to provide a justification for his action. That is why he first says 'they are close on my footsteps...' and only then answers the real question. One assertion Zamakhsharī makes in connection with the interpretation of this verse is of particular interest: he explains that God accuses Moses of being over-hasty, and Moses, taken by surprise, is unsure how to respond.[7]

uncertainty regarding his death.' (Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, Cairo 1381/1961, I.238). He was born in 481/1088 in Granada. The date of his death is a matter for dispute. According to Ibn Bashkuwāl and Maqqarī he died in 542/1147; Ibn Farḥūn believes that he died in 546/1151. The generally accepted date of his death is 541/1146 (Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Abū Bakr Ibn al-Akhbār, *Muʿjam fī Aṣḥāb al-Qāḍī Abī ʿAlī al-Ṣadafī*, Matrits: 1885, 261 (no publisher). The commonly used title of his commentary is *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ʿAzīz*. Besides his commentary on the Qurʾan he wrote two other books, namely *al-Ansāb* and *Barnāmaj*. (Suyūṭī, *Bughyat Wuʿāt fī Ṭabaqāt al-Naḥwiyyīn wa al-Nuḥāt*, Egypt: Matbaʿāt al-Maʿrifah 1965, 295; Shihāb al-Dīn ʿAbbās b. 'Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqqarī, *Nafkh al-Ṭīb*, Egypt: Matbaʿat al-Saʿādah 1946, II.527).

[3] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ʿAzīz*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya 1413/1993, IV.57

[4] Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl wa ʿUyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Taʾwīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah nd, II.548

[5] *Ibid.*, II.548

[6] *Ibid.*, II.548

[7] *Ibid.*, II.548; One of the most interesting comments on this verse is made by Ālūsī: 'The reason for God's question is to teach Moses the *adab* (manner) of journeying. The leader is supposed to follow his people in order to gain complete control over them, like the prophet Lot, about whom the Qurʾan says '...walk in their rear and let none of you turn round...', 15:65.

Zamakhsharī devotes particular attention to the dogmatic interpretation of these verses. We also observe that he puts forward a psychological explanation. It is also safe to assume that the doctrine of prophetic immunity fiom sin causes him no serious problem.

In commenting on these two verses Rāzī begins with a short anecdote. He deduces from 20:83 that Moses went before his people but the details of his journey remain somewhat unclear. Referring to this difficulty, Rāzī mentions two Qur'anic accounts without comment: '...We made a covenant with you on the holy mountain's side...', 20:80, and 'And when We did appoint for Moses thirty nights, and added to them ten...', 7:142.[8]

After this brief introduction he poses seven questions to widen the scope of the interpretation of these verses. First of all he considers God's question about Moses' haste; that God should ask a question to learn something is *muḥāl* (impossible), so what is its meaning? According to Rāzī this is an *inkār* (expression of disapproval) but it is put in the form of a question so that there should be no escape from it.[9] Rāzī's second point pursues the matter further: the question is whether Moses' haste was forbidden or not. If Moses went to Sinai early, in spite of God's ban, he would be sinful. Here Rāzī suggests that if one accepts this interpretation, he also accepts the possibility that prophets can sin.

According to the second option, if Moses was not forbidden to hurry the disapproval of God is not at issue. Rāzī, like Ibn ʿAṭiyya and Zamaksharī, finds the solution by appealing to *ijtihād*;[10] however, Rāzī's explanation is far richer than that of his predecessors. It amounts to the conclusion that Moses did not find any *naṣṣ* (evidence) about his haste, therefore his personal judgement determined his decision to go early. Nevertheless he acted wrongly, and so deserved God's warning.

The third question centres on the verb *ʿajala*, 'to be in a hurry'. Religiously speaking, *ʿajala* is blamed, therefore the classical commentators felt obligated to explain the meaning of *ʿajala* in Moses' case. Rāzī's answer is short and precise: *ʿajala*

(Maḥmud Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm wa al-Sabʿa al-Mathānī*, Beirut 1270h, XVI.242, no publisher).

[8] Rāzī, XXII.98

[9] *Ibid.*, XXII.98

[10] Johns notes that Rāzī holds the view that the prophets are not capable of *ijtihād*, because *ijtihād* proceeds on the basis of *ẓann*, which is the procedure of a person who cannot acquire

is praised in religious affairs. He also offers evidence from the Qur'an to back up his argument: 'and vie one with another for forgiveness from your Lord...', 3:133.[11] Furthermore, Rāzī draws our attention to the nuance between *ʿajala* and *surʿa* in the interpretation of another verse, 'Did you hasten and go ahead as regards the matter of your Lord...', 7:150. Although there seems to be no clear indication of how the meanings of *ʿajala* and *surʿa* differ, according to Rāzī this is not a minor semantic problem. He takes the issue seriously and goes on to find in the distinction between these two words a complex intellectual nuance. Based on the account of Wāḥidī, Rāzī says that the meaning of *ʿajala* is to do something before its proper time; that is why *ʿajala* is blameworthy. On the other hand, *surʿa* (rapidity) does not warrant blame because it means doing something at the very beginning of its due time. At this stage, Rāzī reminds us that some say that if *ʿajala* is blameworthy, why is it attributed to Moses in the surah Ṭā-Hā? Rāzī does not give a clear answer to this problem. However, he relates a number of reports from earlier authorities to explain the meaning of *ʿajiltum* in 7:150.[12] This nuance is very important for Rāzī's purpose. Rāzī accepts the literal meaning of the verb *ʿajala* when it is attributed to the Children of Israel, 7:150. He also generalises its meaning and condemns haste of all kinds; however, he gives the gloss *surʿa* (rapidity, used in a positive sense) when *ʿajala* is attributed to Moses, 20:82-3.[13] Qurṭubī, like Rāzī, draws attention to this nuance; however, unlike Rāzī, he fails to cite the connection between Moses' and his people's haste. It is safe to conclude that Rāzī's treatment of these verbs is much more extensive and sophisticated than Qurṭubī's.[14]

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certain knowledge, *yaqīn*. However, this interpretation of Rāzī is contrary to his above-mentioned suggestion (A. H. Johns, *op. cit.*, 1989, 265, fn.59)

[11] Interestingly, Ālūsī tackles the same problem from a different angle. Ālūsī, having stated that *ʿajala* is a fault and cannot apply to Moses, one of the great prophets, accuses the people who were supposed to follow Moses. Although Ālūsī accepts that Moses was commanded to come with his people, he says that his people were not ready to go with him at that time. He concludes that the Children of Israel did wrong, not Moses. (Ālūsī, XVI.241)

[12] Rāzī, XVI.10-11

[13] This point shows that Rāzī is so preoccupied with prophetic immunity from sin that he is sometimes ready to depart from the literal meaning of the word while at other times providing only a literal explanation. (Rāzī, XXII.98); The author of the article 'Rāzī' in *EI²* notes that Goldziher was convinced that Rāzī, under the influence of the Mutazilites, held the opposite view to the orthodoxy concerning the prophets' immunity from sin (G. C. Anawati, 'Rāzī', *EI²*, II.752.) However, a number of proofs throughout Rāzī's commentary contradict Goldziher's observation. It is also important to note that Rāzī accepts that the prophet may be guilty of a lapse.

[14] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmʿi li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, Cairo: Maktaba al-ʿArabiyyah 1967/1387, VII.288

Rāzī's fourth question is concerned with the expression *li tarḍā* (to please you). He rejects the reason for Moses' haste -to obtain the pleasure of God- which is central to the interpretations of his predecessors. He says that if this argument is accepted it must also be accepted that an attribute of God is subject to renewal or that it can be thought that God, before Moses' appeal, was not only angry with Moses but was also displeased with him. This is not appropriate in case of the prophets. After gradually developing these suggestions Rāzī concludes that the intended meaning of the expression is *taḥsīl-u dawām al-riḍā* (the obtaining of the continuance of the pleasure of God). In support of it he cites another Qur'anic verse: 'And lo! Verily I am Forgiving toward him who repents and believes and does good, and afterward walks aright', 20:82. The meaning of *thumma ihtadā* is 'continuance of guidance.'[15] Clearly, Rāzī is determined to establish his position and defend it against all others.

The fifth question is related to the second, so there is no need to examine it here. The sixth question concentrates on the preposition *ilā* (to, towards) with the pronominal suffix *kaf*, *ilaika*. The usage of this preposition necessitates God's being in a specific place because *ilā* indicates the direction (until the last point). Rāzī does not identify whom he addresses but he simply states the meaning of 'to You' *ilā makāni waᶜdika* (the meeting place of You).[16] By this gloss Rāzī saves himself from the dogmatic burden of the interpretation of this verse, namely God cannot be confined to any place or time and is exempted from any unworthy thing, *munazzah* (deanthropomorhism).

Rāzī, in his seventh discussion, refers to the inconsistency between God's question and Moses' answer. Rāzī's explanation largely depends on Zamakhsharī: 'there are two points: one concerns the disapproval of haste and the other the explanation of what lies behind this haste because of its importance for Moses.' At this juncture it should be noted that Rāzī makes a significant point which indicates his essential difference from Zamakhsharī. In contrast to Zamakhsharī, Rāzī does not accept the explanation that Moses' awe made him forget how to respond to God. It is clear that although Rāzī uses Zamakhsharī's commentary he eliminates all traces of Mutazilite influence. The last point is a very good illustration of this. Rāzī also deals with the significance of the expression 'your people'. Briefly, he points out, without

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[15] Rāzī, XXII.98
[16] *Ibid.*, XXII.99

stating his preference, that some say the expression refers to the chosen seventy while others associate them with the Israelites who stayed with Aaron. He closes the discussion by considering the different readings of the word *athari* (on my footsteps.)[17]

Clearly, although he treats all of the above-mentioned expressions and words in isolation, he finds remarkable connections between them. Dogmatic exegesis is dominant, frequent references to the other Qur'anic verses are common, but the naming of authorities is generally minimal.

Qurṭubī, in his interpretation of these verses, first focuses on the identification of the people whom Moses preceded. He mostly depends on anonymous reports in his proposals concerning this question: 'It is said that the word *qawm* in 20:83 refers to the Children of Israel as a whole while others hold that it refers to the chosen seventy.[18] The preference is left to the reader. He then goes on to make a very interesting comment on 20:83: 'The verse does not say the Children of Israel are following Moses; on the contrary, it says that the Children of Israel are close to Moses and awaiting his return to them.'[19] Although Qurṭubī cites other options such as 'Aaron was commanded to follow Moses together with the people who obeyed him' he gives primacy to the first interpretation.

After this brief discussion on the position of the Children of Israel Qurṭubī deals with Moses' haste. He begins with an unauthoritative and considerably embellished report:

> Moses was in a hurry to go to Sinai to meet God as soon as possible. Because of his strong desire the distance grew longer. The situation annoyed him and put him in a quandary. Consequently, he tore his shirt and he went early without waiting for his people. When he arrived at the place God addressed him with this question, 20:83.

Having been thus perplexed, Moses, in response to God's question about his haste, says 'they are close on my footsteps'. Although Qurṭubī draws attention to the nuance between God's question and Moses' answer, his presentation is essentially different from those of Zamakhsharī and Rāzī. While the latter stresses God's disapproval of Moses' haste, Qurṭubī uses it as a springboard for the interpretation of the following verse: 'I hastened to You O my Lord to please You', 20:84. On another occasion

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[17] *Ibid.*, XXII.99
[18] Qurṭubī, XI.232
[19] *Ibid.*, XI.232

Qurṭubī draws on Ibn ʿAbbās' report to explain the verse: 'Although God knows everything He asks Moses why he is quick in coming, leaving his people behind him. The reason for this question is to show that God is merciful, generous and comforting towards Moses.'[20] Curiously, before Qurṭubī, no previous commentator had cited this important interpretation of Ibn ʿAbbās, or had mentioned a chain of isnād for Ibn ʿAbbās' comment. It is also important to note that the key word shawq (desire) plays a very significant role in the explanation of this verse. Moses is motivated by the desire to seek God's pleasure. Qurṭubī lists three reports, naming their narrators, to support this comment. The last one is worth noting: Sufyān Ibn Misār relates, on the authority of ʿĀisha, that 'the prophet (puh) used to take off his shirt when it was raining. When the rain touched him he said that this was the word which his Lord had promised him.' Qurṭubī says that here the prophet is drawing attention to the importance of shawq (desire). In connection with this, the qudsī ḥadīth is mentioned: 'they desire me yet My desire for them is even greater than theirs.'[21]

Qurṭubī is concerned to connect Moses' haste with the strong desire which emanated from him. Although the reports mentioned in support of this interpretation are not directly related to the verse, he is quite content with this interpretation.[22] Finally he closes the section with lengthy grammatical and lexical interpretations of some words. Most are reminiscent of earlier exegetes' explanations.

Ṭūsī's comment on these verses is precise. Baghawī adds nothing to their interpretation, merely referring to the semantic explanation. Ibn Kathīr does not mention either of the traditional interpretations found in his predecessors, nor does he hint at any theological problem, with the sole exception of the identification of the people who followed Moses with the Israelites who were left with Aaron. It is also worth mentioning that Ṭabarsī is one of the few commentators who does not take the

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[20] *Ibid.*, XI.232

[21] *Ibid.*, XI.233

[22] Similar observation is made by S. Calderini in her analysis of Muslim commentaries on the fall of Adam and Eve. She says 'Medieval exegetical literature, while providing an abundance of details, departs from the Qurʾanic accounts on several points'. (S. Calderini, 'Woman, 'Sin' and 'Lust': The Fall of Adam and Eve According to Classical and Modern Muslim Exegesis', *Roehampton Institute London Papers*, 4 (1998) 53

verse literally. According to him, 'they are close on my footsteps' means they believe in my religion, follow my way. He traces this interpretation to Ḥasan.[23]

4.2. God's Test

'We have tested your people in your absence, and Sāmirī had led them astray', 20:85

Ṭabarī explains that the meaning of Sāmirī's misguidance is that he was merely an instrument in the worship of the calf.[24] What Ṭabarī is specifically trying to say here is that they were misguided without the leadership of Sāmirī. Ṭabarī gives more detail about it elsewhere. Although he does not give any *isnād*, he says that Moses came and asked 'O my Lord! This Sāmirī ordered the people to adopt the calf. Tell me, who breathed the soul into it (calf)?' The Lord answered 'I did.' Then Moses said 'So O my Lord, You have misled them.'[25] Bearing the theological aspect of this in mind, Ṭabarī indicates that God sends astray only whom He wills and He guides to the straight path whom He wills. This explanation of Ṭabarī does not set dogma against narrative; it is the result of Ṭabarī's attempt to show their interconnection. This example is a very good illustration. It is also important to note that most commentators omit this report. Those who do narrate it place stress on the sound of the calf instead of referring to the soul breathed into the calf by God, the rationale being, it seems, to remove any doubt about the calf's being alive.

[23] Ṭūsī,VII.196; Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-Tanzīl*, Beirut: Dār al- Maʿārif 1983, III.227; Ibn Kathīr, III.161; Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan Ṭabarsī, *Majmʿa al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, Qūm: Maʿārif al-Islāmiyya 1403H, VII.24

[24] Ṭabarī, XVI.196

[25] *Ibid.*, II.65; Ṭabarī omits some of the details; however, the same story is mentioned twice by Qurṭubī at some length. Moses asked 'O my Lord! This Sāmirī forged a calf for them from their ornaments, but who really made its body and sound?' God's reply is brief: 'I did.' Then Moses says; 'for Your Excellency, Glory and Eminence only You misguided them.' Consequently God closes the dialogue by addressing Moses with praise: 'You are right O wise among the wise, *yā ḥakīm al-ḥukamāʾ* (Qurṭubī, XI.235). As regards *isrāʾīliyyāt* reports, it is very important to note that both exegetes narrate from unknown authorities; however, Qurṭubī's addition of three Attributes of God to the story makes his presentation stronger than Ṭabarī's. The concluding remarks made by God also confirm the plausibility of the narrative. Needless to say, the theological anxiety which is woven into the commentaries is clearly present in the minds of the commentators; they conclude that only God misguided. According to Qummī, when God saw the people worshipping the calf He made it bellow in order to increase their temptation. (Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAli b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, (ed.) by Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazāʾirī, 1386H, II.96, no publisher); Muqātil b. Sulaymān narrates a similar report and points out that God tested them thorough the sound of the calf. (Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, Egypt 1979, I.104, no publisher)

Baghawī's and Qurṭubī's comments on this verse closely follow the pattern set by Ṭabarī. Theological anxiety still prompts both commentators. The reason for mentioning Sāmirī's name as the subject of the verb is to emphasise that the Children of Israel were misguided because of (through, not by) Sāmirī, *bi sababi sāmirī*. Both commentators consider Sāmirī as mediator. Interestingly, like Ṭabarī, neither Baghawī nor Qurṭubī mention the alternative reading of the verse, namely *wa aḍalluhum al-sāmirī* (the most misguided one is Sāmirī) instead of *wa aḍallahum al-sāmirī* (Sāmirī misguided them). Why do they fail to mention this variant? One possible answer to this question lies in their nice judgement between accepting the above-mentioned anonymous report and the deliberate omission of this variant. In other words, having securely expressed their view about God's creation of everything they do not need further evidence, namely a variant reading, to promote this idea. However, other exegetes who do not record this anonymous report freely note this variant. Furthermore, Qurṭubī cites another verse to support this approach: '...this is only Your trial, *fitnatuka*, by which You lead astray whom You will, and keep guided whom You will.'[26]

According to Ibn ᶜAṭiyya it is reasonable that the meaning of the verse is 'We put them in the *fitna* because of their inclination to sin with *shahāwāt* (bad desire) and their tendency towards dispute.'[27] At this juncture it is worth noting that Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, in contrast to his predecessors, does not seem very interested in the theological approach to 20:85. He simply mentions two different readings of the word *aḍalla(u)*. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is convinced that the first reading, *aḍallahum* (Sāmirī misguided them), sees Sāmirī's sin as more serious than the second reading. The reason for this explanation is clear: Sāmirī is a passive agent in the second reading but is active in the first (he not only misguides himself but others too). In his commentary on this verse, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's failure to mention the report (who breathed the soul into the calf...) found in many exegetes and which gives a theological justification for the verse suggests that he rejected it.

With Zamakhsharī the interpretation of the verse takes a new turn. First of all, basing his remarks on the anonymous report, he raises a question: '(if you say) in the story it is mentioned that the Israelites counted each night a day, and each day also a

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[26] Baghawī, III.227; Qurṭubī, VII.155; The same verse is also used by Rāzī, XXII.101
[27] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, IV.57

day, on the twentieth day they thought that forty nights were completed, then the calf was formed.' At this point Zamakhsharī asks how we might harmonise this report with the word of God 'We have tested...' at the beginning of the appointment. Zamakhsharī confidently lists two interpretations of the question:

> First, God informed Moses of the test which would come soon as if it had occurred (in the form of the past tense) as is His usual style in the Qur'an. Second, Moses' absence gave Sāmirī an opportunity. So, after Moses' departure, he attempted to mislead the Children of Israel; that is why Sāmirī started taking measures for this purpose. We may conclude the test had already existed at the beginning.[28]

Zamakhsharī tries to justify this report on the basis of a rational explanation; his philosophical investigation concentrates mostly on the interpretation of the background to the event.

Ṭūsī, in his brief comment, states that the meaning of 'We have tested...' is 'We have treated them like one who imposes a test, by making worship difficult for them, in that God instructed them, after they produced the calf, that the calf could not be a deity and that a deity could not be incarnate in it. The essence of this test is making worship difficult for the Children of Israel.'[29] He makes a very important point by equating the *fitna* (test) with *tashdīd al-ʿibādah* (excessiveness in worship). Later exegetes, like Ṭabarsī and Rāzī, were inspired by this approach to be more enthusiastic in discussing different opinions, which they viewed in the light of Ṭūsī's explanation. The gist of this discussion is that Ṭabarsī, like Ṭūsī, accepts the attribution of *ḍalāl* (misguidance) to Sāmirī because of his call to the Israelites to worship the calf.[30] God's role, according to Ṭūsī and Ṭabarsī, is not to interfere with man's own choice, not to lead him directly towards evil. But it should be noted that, according to Rāzī, this interpretation belongs to the Mutazilites. He therefore rejects it and attributes the creation of the misguidance directly to God on rational grounds.[31] It is clear that, while both Ṭūsī and Ṭabarsī place stress on the autonomy of free will in connection with responsibility, Rāzī concentrates on God's creation of everything in the world, both good and evil. In other words Ṭūsī

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[28] Zamakhsharī, II.549
[29] Ṭūsī, VII.196; *ʿāmalnā bi muʿāmalat al-mukhtabir bi annā shadadnā ʿalayhim fī al-taʿabbud bi an alzamnāhum ʿinda ikhrāj al-ʿijl an yastadillu ʿalā annahū la yajūzu an yakūna ilāhᵃⁿ walā yaḥillu al-ilāh fīhi fa haqīqat al-fitna tashdīd al-ʿibādah.*
[30] Ṭabarsī, V.24
[31] Rāzī, XXII.100

and Ṭabarsī give primary importance to Sāmirī's injunction but Rāzī gives it secondary importance.

However, to grasp Rāzī's deep theological and philosophical investigation comprehensively we need to look at his complete analysis of this topic. According to Rāzī this verse is a reminder from God, showing what happened to the Israelites when Moses left them. If Moses had not left them they would not have worshipped the calf. Rāzī, after this brief conditional statement, summarises the opinions of the Mutazilites and engages in debate with them on a number of issues in the presentation of his first *mas'ala*. He begins by mentioning that the Mutazilites do not accept that God creates *kufr* (unbelief) in people for two reasons. First, it cannot rationally be held that God acts in this way (The Mutazilites held that man is the creator of his acts, so he is to be judged in accordance with them.) Second, if God creates *ḍalāl* (misguidance) it cannot be the work of Sāmirī, despite the strong evidence in the Qur'an, which says 'Sāmirī misguided them.'[32]

Besides presenting this scriptural and rational evidence, Rāzī goes further and cites certain points, relevant to these two considerations, noted by the Mutazilites. Basing their opinion on 20:86[33] the Mutazilites rejected the view that the Israelites worshipped the calf because they were moved to do so by God. If so they would have confessed it to excuse themselves but they do not even mention it. This approach is further strengthened by another explanation: 'If God had created misguidance in them the meaning of the verse '...wrath should descend from your Lord on you...' would have been nonsense, because by this admission God accuses Himself.' The substance of the Mutazilites' proposal is that the word *fitna* in this verse would need to be understood as having a different sense from its literal meaning. Rāzī mentions some of the Mutazilites' lexical considerations regarding the word *fitna*. The word sometimes means *imtiḥān* (test), thus it is said that gold is tested with fire to distinguish good from bad. By this word God presses responsibility on the Israelites, because when Ṣāmirī brought the calf they already knew that the nature of all phenomena (which come into existence at God's command) in this world signifies that God is not a *jism* (body), so it

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[32] Similarly, Rāzī, like Zamakhsharī, discusses another point elsewhere. Rāzī inquires the reason for the Qur'anic pronouncement that the people of Moses made the calf in 7:148 although the real maker of the calf is Sāmirī himself in 20:85. In his response Rāzī adds nothing substantial to Zamakhsharī's interpretation. (Rāzī, XVI.6)

[33] 'Did then the promise seem to you long in coming, or did you desire that wrath should descend from your Lord on you?'

is clear that the calf cannot be divine (because the calf is *ḥādith*, which means it came into existence after God's command). God therefore made the Israelites' responsibility for their worship of the calf difficult, *tashdīt fī al-taklīf. Tashdīt* and *fitna* lie in *taklīf* (they already exist in *taklīf*) and the Mutazilites support this view by reference to another Qur'anic verse: 'Do men imagine that they will be left because they say, we believe, and will not be tested with affliction?' 29:2.[34] At this point it is important to note ᶜAbd al-Jabbār's comment on this verse, which sheds great light on this endless discussion. He asks 'What is the meaning of the test to those who have come to believe in God?' In his reply he makes the following point, on which, it seems, he intends to base his clarification of this dispute:

> The test of a community becomes harder when the prophet of this community passes away than when he was alive among them. Likewise the test of the Israelites became very much harder in the absence of their prophet than when he was present among them.[35]

However, this explanation does not satisfy Rāzī. In order to attack the Mutazilites' explanation, he establishes his points by rational argument. He says that *the sun and moon are more suitable to be venerated as gods than the calf. In other words, the rejection of the divinity of the calf is easier than the rejection of the divinity* of the sun and moon. There is no *tashdīt* in the appearance of the calf so it is necessary to attribute the creation of misguidance in the people to God.[36] At this juncture, Rāzī reminds us of the Mutazilites' concern about the connection of the misguidance with Sāmirī. His response to this question is two-sided. On the one hand he says that although the Creator is God, all the *al-musabbabāt al-ᶜādiyah* (customary causes) are attributed to their secondary *asbāb* (causes). On the other hand he brings forward the variant reading of the verse (*wa aḍalluhum al-sāmirī*, Sāmirī is the most misguided one) as evidence against the Mutazilites.[37] Rāzī clearly considers this reading to be an important interpretative gloss which sheds light on the understanding of the meaning of

[34] Rāzī, XXII.100; A similar point is made by Ṭabarsī in the interpretation of the same verse. According to Ṭabarsī, the meaning of the verse is that 'We had tested them and We made the responsibility very difficult for them, *wa shadadnā ᶜalaihim al-taklīf*, because of the object of their worship, the calf, and led them to realise that the calf could not be God.' Likewise, Ṭabarsī quotes 29:2 to indicate that when Moses left them Sāmirī called, *dᶜā*, them to worship the calf. Consequently, they accepted Sāmirī's invitation. Because of this fact God attributes the *fitna* (test) to Himself and *ḍalāl* (misguidance) to Sāmirī to make a distinction between the *ḍalāl* and *fitna* (Ṭabarsī, VII.24.)
[35] Qāḍī al-Ḥasan ᶜAbd al-Jabbār, *Tanzīh al-Qur'ān ᶜan al-Maṭāᶜin*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa nd, 257
[36] Rāzī, XXII.100
[37] *Ibid.*, XXII.100

the verse and he uses it (though this is not the generally preferred reading of the verse) to invalidate the Mutazilites' proposal; however, he does not mention any report in support of his argument which is found in Ṭabarī and Baghawī.

In *mas'ala* four, Rāzī mentions the same story, *ruwiya fī al-qiṣaṣ*, as is found in Zamakhsharī's commentary about the Israelites' miscalculation of the time of appointment. Rāzī, like Zamakhsharī, shows his preoccupation with the discrepancy between the Qur'anic narrative and this story. Rāzī's solution accords almost exactly with that of Zamakhsharī.'[38] Furthermore, attention should be paid to the expression *ruwiya fī al-qiṣaṣ*. Although he calls it a story to reduce its credibility, Rāzī's approach shows that in this context he does not reject the report explicitly, however he disregards it elsewhere in a very determined manner.[39]

4.3. Sāmirī's Personality

Sāmirī is the major actor in the story of the 'golden calf', and so many exegetes give what they consider to be necessary information about his background and personality. Although there are some discrepancies among the reports which give the name of the tribe or home town of Sāmirī, three names are commonly mentioned. A well-known biographical sketch of Ṣāmirī, presented by Ṭabarī and Qurṭubī on the authority of Qatāda, states that Sāmirī was one of the prominent persons among the Israelites. He came from the tribe Sāmira, but after passing the sea with the Children of Israel he pretended to be a believer although he was not.[40] Rāzī confirms this identification and says that the majority hold this interpretation.[41] This narrative depicts Sāmirī as a deeply religious man who, like other believers, is content with the message of Moses at the beginning. Zamakhsharī's report contains more specific information about the tribe Sāmira; he does not, however, cite any authority for his opinion: 'Sāmirī belonged to one of the tribes of Israelites, namely Sāmira, (it is said that) Sāmira was one of the Jewish groups who opposed the mainstream Jews in some of their religious beliefs.'[42] Zamakhsharī associates him with the enemies of the Jews. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, basing his view on an anonymous authority, situates Sāmira in Egypt while Qurṭubī, by

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[38] *Ibid.*, XXII.101

[39] *Ibid.*, XXII.202

[40] Ṭabarī, XVI.206; Qurṭubī, XI.239

[41] Rāzī, XXII.101

[42] Zamakhsharī, II.549; R. J. Coggins gives valuable information about Samaritan's separation from the Jews in his book, *The Origin of Samaritanism Reconsidered*, Oxford: Blackwell 1975, 7, 63, 102, 143, 162.

the same token, locates it in Damascus.[43] Another report, which comes from Ibn ᶜAbbās, states that Sāmirī was a man of Bājarmā, of a people who worshipped cows, and that therefore the love of cow-worship remained deeply ingrained in his soul.[44] According to Ibn Kathīr, he came from Bājar (not Bājarmā; however, there might have been an *error scripti*) and he was accused not only of keeping in his heart the love of the worship of the calf but also of hypocrisy. This report is traced back to Ibn ᶜAbbās (Ibn Isḥāq, Ḥakīm b. Jubayr, Saᶜīd b. Jubayr).[45] In a long narrative derived from unknown authorities, Baghawī states that Sāmirī was a goldsmith from Bājarmā. He adds that Sāmirī's actual name was Mīkha.[46] Furthermore, Baghawī relates another report from Said b. Jubayr, who describes Sāmirī's fellow countrymen as a people of Kirmān.[47] With the exception of Ṭabarī almost all of the classical exegetes including Ṭūsī mention this name with minor differences; however, neither Ibn ᶜAṭiyya nor Zamakhsharī attribute it to any authority.[48] There is also another consensus among the exegetes over Sāmirī's personal name, Mūsā b. Ẓafar.[49] Although the Qur'an does not specify his name the exegetes accept this as Sāmirī's real name. Besides these common materials there is some uncommon information about Sāmirī, such as that he was a

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[43] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, IV.61; Qurṭubī, XI.233-4

[44] Ṭabarī, II.66

[45] Ibn Kathīr, III.163

[46] Baghawī, I.72; some commentators read it as Mincā (Ālūsī, XVI.244); Western scholars have discussed possible influences and have made connection between Micah, the idol maker described in chapters 17-18 of the Book of Judges, and Sāmirī of the Qur'an, 20:95. (David J. Halperin, *op. cit.*, 83)

[47] Baghawī, I.71

[48] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, IV.57; Zamakhsharī, II.549

[49] According to Newby, the existence of another Moses allows Aaron to be less culpable of idol worship because the Samaritan Moses, after casting the dust from Gabriel horse's hoof into the fire to make the calf, remarks that the calf is the god of Moses, 20:88; of course he means himself, but Aaron mistakenly thinks that the Samaritan Moses means Aaron's brother, Moses the son of ᶜImrān (G. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad*, Carolina: University of South Carolina Press 1989, 116.) It is implied that the Samaritan Moses is entirely to blame for the idol worship. From the Qur'anic point of view it is difficult to justify Newby's explanation, because the Qur'an does not identify Aaron as the person who formed the calf. Halperin also considers this explanation excessively awkward. (David J. Halperin, *op. cit.*, 81.) On the other hand the Biblical narrative, however, identifies Aaron as the calf maker. Interestingly, although Biblical commentators, in contrast to their Muslim counterparts, had little tendency to exonerate the prophets from their faults, the biblical version of the golden calf received their severest censure due to its dogmatic ambiguity. Josephus deliberately omits the entire golden calf story from his account of the Israelites' wanderings in the desert. (J. Windrow Sweetman, *op. cit.*, II.219; L. Smolar and M. Aberbach, *op. cit.*, 92); A similar comment is made by Geza Vermes, who points out that this episode is a rare exception, as the commentators refrain from interpreting it despite their general reluctance to remain on any issue (G. Vermes, 'Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis', in P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Euans (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From Beginning to Jerome*, Cambridge (London-New York): University Press 1980, 218.)

Copt, a close neighbour of Moses[50], or an infidel.[51] One of the most interesting comments is made by Ibn Kathīr, who says 'in the books of *isrā'īliyyāt* the name of Sāmirī is mentioned as Hārūn (Aaron).'[52] It is difficult to say whether Ibn Kathīr is alluding to *Exodus* xxxii or not, but he explicitly admits by labelling it as *isrā'īliyyāt* that this identification has its source in legend. As far as we can ascertain, none of the classical exegetes associates this name with Sāmirī before Ibn Kathīr; because of its originality it can be considered as one of his most important contributions.

The attitude of Ṭabarī to these reports, generally speaking, is neutral, though he sometimes criticises some of them. He only narrates them with their complete chain of narrators as secondary information. Qurṭubī and Baghawī, with the exception of some minor details, repeat Ṭabarī's narrations almost verbatim. In Ṭūsī's commentary many details about Sāmirī are missing. However, in his precise explanation, he gives equal weight to Sāmirī's positive and negative qualities. Ibn ʿAṭiyya and Zamakhsharī ingeniously reduce the credibility of these reports by using the passive voice, *qīla* (it is said) or *qāla qawm* (one 'unidentified' group said), however despite its brevity Zamakhsharī's presentation contains many details. Ibn Kathīr summarises every report with its *asānīd*, however with the exception of the name 'Aaron' he adds nothing new to the interpretation of the verse. It is clear, then, that despite their use of several reports the commentators cannot agree either about Sāmirī's actual name, his place of origin, his occupation or the time of his leaving his native land.

It is possible to find a number of opinions about the origin and meaning of the word Sāmirī in the works of both Oriental and Occidental scholars. Because of the importance of these views we mention some of them here: According to Yusuf ʿAlī, the root of Sāmirī comes from the old Egyptian word *shemer*, meaning 'stranger' or 'foreigner'. The word *shemer* was known to Hebrews from the Bible, I Kings xvi.24.[53] Mawdūdī, having analysed the structure of the word *al-samiriy*, suggests that it is obvious from the final *y* that Sāmirī was not the proper name of a person and that *al* (definite article) denotes that Sāmirī was merely a particular man among many others

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[50] Rāzī, XXII.101; Qurṭubī, XI.233-4

[51] Zamakhsharī, II.549

[52] Ibn Kathīr, III.161; Masʿūdī and Ibn Ḥazm give some information about the Biblical story and draw attention to the employment of Aaron's name. (Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, (ed.) by Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, Beirut 1966, II.83; Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Aḥwāl wa al-Niḥal*, Beirut 1996, I.187-88, no publisher)

[53] Yusuf Alī, *op. cit.*, 807 fn.2605

of the same race or clan. After this brief argument Mawdūdī accuses the Western scholars who criticise the Qur'anic narrative of absurdity as regards the association of Sāmirī's name with the formation of the calf in the Qur'an. Furthermore, he says that it is wrong to think that in ancient times only one person would bear a particular name in a clan or place and that there is absolutely no possibility of another person having the same name. At this point, he refers to the people called *sumer* (shemer) who previously lived in Samaria. He also takes the name of Aaron into consideration. He states that it is possible that the real name of Sāmirī was Aaron: later, this might have misled the Israelites to attribute the making of the golden calf to the prophet Aaron. So he concludes that the Qur'an exonerates their prophet (Aaron) from sin, but Western Orientalists still insist that the Qur'an is guilty of anachronism and that the calf was made by a holy prophet of the Israelites.[54] J. M. Rodwell, in his translation of the Qur'an, says that probably the origin and meaning of the word Sāmirī is to be found in the prolonged hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, because Samaritans were called *al-limshashit*, the people who say 'touch me not'. In addition, Rodwell, quoting from Selden, mentions that Selden supposed that Sāmirī was Aaron himself, the *shomer* or keeper of Israel during the absence of Moses. Sāmirī is also associated with the *Michā* of Judges xvii who is said to help in forming the calf.[55] Geiger, in the course of numerous explanations, identifies the word as a corruption of *Samael*.[56] St. Clair Tisdall holds that the word Sāmirī is a corruption due to a misunderstanding of the word *Sammāā*. Although the prophet Muhammad seems to have understood most of the Jewish legend correctly, this word puzzles him. According to Tisdal, it is the Jewish name of the Angel of Death and the prophet's main mistake stems from the pronunciation of the word which is similar to Sāmirī meaning Samaritans.[57] Jeffery basing his opinion on Frankel's explanation, suggests that the confusion is probably due to some Jewish Midrash in which later enmity towards the Samaritans led pious Jews to blame all their calamities and lapses of faith on that people.[58] Frankel also alludes to Hosea 8:5 and says that the Jews used the verses as a proof to support the view that the Samaritans worshipped the golden calf. In addition, A. S. Yahuda suggests that the Jew who related the story to the prophet Muhammad, told him that

[54] Abū Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, in (tr. and ed.) Muḥammad Akbar and A. Kamāl, Lahore: Islamic Publication Ltd., 1977, VII.115-6
[55] J. M. Rodwell, *op. cit.*, 99 fn.1
[56] A. Geiger, *op. cit.*, 131
[57] W. St. Clair Tisdall, *op. cit.*, 1911, 113

Jeroboam also made two calves of gold and declared them to be the gods that had brought the Israelites out of Egypt (1 Kings 12:28). In telling Muhammad this story the Jew would have called Jeroboam Sāmirī because he was king of Samaria. Yahuda also notes that according to Lieberman the origin of the story stems from a Midrash of Yemenite provenance.[59] A similar opinion is shared by Finkel and by Bell who both hold that Sāmirī mentioned in surah Ṭā-Hā is probably a reminiscence of Jeroboam, who induced the Israelites to sin by setting up calf-worship in Samaria.[60] Horovitz, after giving some information about the matter, concludes that 'accordingly no conclusion with regard to the origin of the narrative can possibly be arrived at on the ground of the form of the name Sāmirī'.[61] Clearly, like the Muslim classical commentators, modern scholarship has not reached any agreement on the identity of Sāmirī.

4.4. The Number of the Worshippers

The final point which concerns the classical exegetes in the interpretation of this verse is the number of the people who worshipped the calf and that of those who did not. Without citing their source, three exegetes (Baghawī, Zamakhsharī and Rāzī) state that there were six hundred thousand people besides Aaron and, with the exception of twelve thousand, all of them worshipped the calf.[62] Apart from this report, Baghawī quotes two reports from both known and unknown authorities regarding the number of the worshippers. The first of these says that eight thousand people worshipped the calf, but Aaron and another twelve thousand did not. According to Baghawī, this is an authentic report. The second report is narrated on the authority of Ḥasan, who says that with the exception of Aaron all the people worshipped the calf.[63] Clearly, while some exegetes have made an effort to be consistent, others apparently have not been disturbed by inconsistency.

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[58] A. Jeffery, op. cit., 1938, 159

[59] A. S. Yahuda, 'A Contribution to the Qur'an and Ḥadīth Interpretation', in Samual Lowinger and Joseph Somugyi (eds.), Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume, Budapest: 1948, I.286-88

[60] Joshua Finkel, 'Jewish, Christian, and Samaritan Influence on Arabia, in The Macdonald Presentation Volume, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1933, 162; R. Bell, op. cit., 1953, 162

[61] Joseph Horovitz, 'Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran', in David Philipson (ed.), Hebrew Union College Annual II (1925), New York: KTAV Pub. 1968, 177; Arthur J. Arberry translated the word al-samiriy as a Samaritan (A. J. Arberry, op. cit., 1983, 318

[62] Baghawī, III.227; Zamakhsharī, II.549; Rāzī, XXII.101

[63] Baghawī, III.229

Chapter Five

The Analysis of 20:86-89

This chapter contains nine sub-headings and discusses mainly the interpretation of 20:86-89. First of all, we will present the classical exegetes' accounts of Moses' anger in 20:86. We will go on to analyse two related topics, namely the main reason, according to the exegetes, for Moses' throwing down the tablets -under the sub-heading of the community of Aḥmad (puh), and the nature of the Tablets. We will then focus on the meaning of fair promise in 20:86. In our analysis of 20:87 we will discuss the excuse of the Israelites together with the Egyptians' ornaments, and will examine in detail how the calf is formed. Here, particular stress will be placed on the explanation of four Qur'anic terms: ḥummilnā, awzār, jasad and khuwār. In the eighth sub-sections we will argue concerning the subject of the verb nasiya in 20:88. This will be followed by an analysis of the disapproval of the Children of Israel in 20:89 and 7:148.

5.1. Moses' Anger or Sorrow

'Then Moses returned to his people in a state of anger and sorrow. He said: O my people! Did not your Lord promise you a fair promise? Did then the promise seem to you long in coming? Or did you desire that wrath should descend from your Lord on you, so you broke your promise to me (i.e. disbelieving in Allah and worshipping the calf)', 20:86

'When Moses came back to his people, angry and grieved he said; 'evil it is that you have done in my absence. Would you hasten the retribution of your Lord?' He threw down the Tablets...',[1] 7:150

In his explanation of the expression ghaḍbānā asifā in 20:86, Ṭabarī lists five reports together with their isnād. Moses was angry with the Israelites as well as sorrowful and sad because of what they had done in his absence. The word al-asaf, according to Ṭabarī, means ḥazīn (sorrow) and ghaḍab means anger. To support his argument Ṭabarī says that in the book of Zukhruf it is mentioned that fa lammā āsafūnā

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[1] Yusuf Ali translates the expression alqā al-alwāḥ into English as 'he put down the Tablets' in order to point out that we are not told the Tablets were broken. Briefly, he does not accept that Moses broke the Tablets in an incontinent rage (Yusuf Ali, op. cit., 385 fn.1116). His main objection is directed against the Biblical narrative, and he holds that it is very difficult to reconcile Moses' infallibility with his action.

means *aghḍabūnā*.[2] In spite of these two meanings of *al-asaf* four of the five reports concur that the meaning of *ghaḍbāna asifā* is *ḥazīn*. Ṭabarī, in his interpretation of 7:150, gives some additional information. He quotes two extra reports, one from ᶜImrān b. Bakkār who considers *al-asaf* more severe than *al-ghaḍab*, and one from Naṣr b. ᶜAlī who paraphrases *ghaḍbāna asifā* as *ghaḍbāna ḥazīn*.[3] It seems Ṭabarī puts equal weight upon 'anger' and 'sorrow', while in 20:86 his preference for 'sorrow' is clear.

For Ṭūsī, *ghaḍab* is the opposite of *riḍā* (consent or pleasure) and necessitates punishment. The word *asaf* means *ashadd al-ghaḍab* (severe anger). In support of this interpretation he, like Ṭabarī, mentions 43:55.[4] It is safe to assume that Ṭūsī favours 'anger' over 'sorrow' although he does not fail to record the latter (alternative) explanation. A similar interpretation can be seen in his comment on 7:149. Here he gives equal weight to both meanings. Moreover, he mentions some derivatives of *ghaḍab* and *asaf*, and gives the semantic elucidation of them.[5]

The meaning of the word *al-asaf*, according to Zamakhsharī, is *al-ghaḍab*; this interpretation is supported by a saying of the prophet.[6] In contrast to Ṭabarī, he devotes only one line to this word and, pays no significant attention to the meaning of *al-ḥazīn*, except that he mentions it in the passive form. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya suggests two meanings: first, if a powerful person feels anger against someone weaker, it means *ghaḍab* (anger); second, the anger a weak person feels against the powerful is called sorrow, *ḥazīn^{an}*. Apart from this interpretation he adds nothing new to the semantic aspect of the word, except for summarising reports which are found in Ṭabarī's commentary.[7]

Rāzī deals with the meaning of the word *al-asaf* in *mas'ala* six. He cites three different meanings together with their nuances. First of all it means *shiddat al-ghaḍab*, severe anger. Then, according to the majority of interpreters, it means sorrow, *ḥazīn^{an}* and impatience, *jazī^{can}*. It is also noteworthy that one group argues that the meaning of *āsif* is *mughtāẓ* (enraged) and they distinguish between *ightiyāẓ* and *ghaḍab*, saying that God cannot be described by *ghayẓ* but He can be characterised by the word *ghaḍab*.

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[2] The phrase *aghḍabūnā* does not occur in the Qur'an.
[3] Ṭabarī, IX.64
[4] 'So when they angered Us, We punished them and drowned them every one.'
[5] Ṭūsī, VII.197; IV.581
[6] Zamakhsharī, II.549
[7] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, IV.59

The main idea lying behind this semantic nuance is to show that *ghayz* is related to the activities of creatures, like smiling and crying, whereas *ghaḍab* can only be attributed to God.[8] Rāzī's above-mentioned authorities are anonymous; however, some of the meanings provided by them are original. When Rāzī deals with the same topic elsewhere he seems ready to accept that two different meanings, *ghaḍab* and *ḥazin*, are valid due to their closeness: 'Moses was angry with them because of their worship of the calf and he also felt deep sadness because of God's test.' If we look closely at Rāzī's presentation of both we can easily see the distinctiveness of Rāzī's treatment of these glosses. Bearing in mind the theological consideration (prophets are free from sin) Rāzī balances *ghaḍab* with *ḥazīn*. The opinion of the majority is also consistent with Rāzī's preference. It seems likely that Rāzī is directing his remarks at Zamakhsharī, who lays great stress on the meaning *ghaḍab* and attaches little importance to *ḥazīn*.

Qurṭubī says nothing by way of comment on the expression *ghaḍbāna asifā* in 20:86, but he devotes a very lengthy elucidation to it in 7:150. He begins with the grammatical exposition of the phrase *ghaḍbāna asifā*, then gives the semantic explanation of *asifā* as 'severe anger' together with the opinion of Abū Dardā, who considers *ghaḍab* less severe than *asaf*. Qurṭubī does not neglect to present an alternative meaning of the word, namely *ḥazīn* (sorrow), which is supported by the report related from Ibn ᶜAbbās and Suddī: 'Moses came back with sorrow due to what his people did.'[9] After this introduction to the gloss of the word, Qurṭubī lists a number of reports which justify his preference. Concerning the meaning of *ghaḍab*, he first offers Ṭabarī's explanation: 'God informed Moses about what the Israelites had done before his return; that is why he was angry'. This quotation from Ṭabarī is carefully chosen, because of Ṭabarī's six interpretations, four concur in supporting the meaning 'sorrow.' The second interpretation is traced back to Ibn ᶜArabī, who exaggerates the anger of Moses: 'Moses is one of the most ill-tempered persons amongst the people; however, he quickly calms down.' Qurṭubī also records the similar but more extreme narration of Ibn Qāsim from Mālik: 'When Moses became angry smoke came out from

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[8] Rāzī, XXII.101; According to Ghazālī, anger is the ebullience of one's heart's blood caused by the desire to gratify one's heart by revenge. Imperfection and pain are inherent in this attitude, therefore these scholars hold that anger cannot be attributed to God. What they did is to interpret it in sensible way. (Iysa A. Bello, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy Between Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1989, 57)

[9] Qurṭubī, VII.286-7

his cap and his hair came out from his clothes.'[10] In order to emphasise this anecdote, Mālik adds that *ghaḍab* is a burning coal which is lit in the heart. Qurṭubī then highlights the moral by quoting from various prophetic *ḥadīths*. The prophet says 'whoever becomes angry should lie down. If he is still angry he should perform the ablution, because lying down appeases his anger and ablution extinguishes it.'[11] After this *ḥadīth*, Qurṭubī goes further and says that his sudden anger provokes Moses to fight the Angel of death. He shakes the angel and pokes out his eye. This action of Moses is justified by the explanation of Tirmidhī: 'Moses thinks that it is permissible for him to do these kinds of things because he speaks to God.' Clearly, Moses is given a unique privilege, and himself uses his status on one occasion against the Angel of death: 'He asks rhetorically from where the Angel would take his soul: from his mouth, which has spoken to God; from his hands, which have taken the Tablets; from his feet, which have stood in front of God at Sinai; from his eyes, which have seen the radiance of the Lord's light.'[12]

The final point in Qurṭubī's presentation is worth mentioning. He says that 'it is related from the story-teller Abū Wā'il, who said that

> we came to ʿUrwa b. Muḥammad al-Saʿd; one man was speaking to him and he made ʿUrwa angry. He suddenly stood up and went out to perform ablution. When he came back he said that his father had related to him, on the authority of his grandfather, that as anger came from Satan and Satan was created from fire, only water extinguished it; therefore whoever became angry should perform the ablution.[13]

Qurṭubī's appeal to the authority of many sources (*ḥadīths*, sayings of pious *salaf*, anecdotes from earlier exegetes) makes his presentation unusually colourful and interesting. The hortatory style is dominant; on the one hand the negative aspect of anger is shown, on the other the importance of ablution is underlined. Qurṭubī frequently engages in moral polemic. He brings super-abundant details to support one meaning of the word *asaf*, namely *ghaḍab* (anger). It should be noted that the attribution of anger to Moses causes no significant problem in Qurṭubī's exegetical

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[10] Thaʿlabī relates a similar report from the father of ʿAbd Allāh b. Zayd b. Aslam, who says that Moses anger caused his cap catch fire. (Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā*, Egypt 1340H, 144); In *Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer* it is said that '...and Moses anger waxed hot, and he cast the Tablets out of his hand...' (*Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer*, (tr.) by Gerald Friedlander, New York: Herman Press 1965, 356)

[11] Qurṭubī, VII.287

[12] *Ibid.*, VII.287

[13] *Ibid.*, VII.287

work. Indeed, nowhere do the exegetes indicate that the two meanings (anger/ sorrow) are irreconcilable.

Ibn Kathīr explains the meaning of *ghaḍbāna asifā* as *shadīd al-ghaḍab*,[14] severe anger. In another place he uses the superlative form, *ashadd al-ghaḍab*.[15] He also quotes from Mujāhid, who glosses it as *jaziʿan*[16] (impatience) and from Qatāda, who glosses it as *ḥazīnan*, sorrow.[17] Although he favours the first meaning, 'severe anger', he does not disregard these two meanings of the expression. He bases his explanation of the last part of the verse on rational grounds. In this case also none of the exegetes hold that the two meanings (anger/ sorrow) are irreconcilable.

5.2. The Community of Aḥmad

Ṭabarī states that there is a dispute among *ahl ʿilm* (the people of knowledge) concerning the reason why Moses threw down the Tablets. He cites two reports from Ibn ʿAbbās, the first of which says that while Moses was coming back to the Israelites he heard their voices, realised that they were worshipping the calf and disporting themselves and he threw down the Tablets so that they were broken. The second report from Ibn ʿAbbās explains that Moses' anger was the main reason for his throwing down of the Tablets.[18] Ṭabarī then gives a lengthy elucidation of Moses' action. He sometimes does not name his source, except to say that 'others said that'. As this section of his commentary is of particular interest, we shall translate it in full:

> According to unknown people, Moses threw down the Tablets because he saw on them that some people had a good quality (virtue) but his own people did not; that is why he was emotionally upset and this hurt his feelings.[19] It is notable that the more fantastic traditions in this series are associated with Qatāda,[20] who added another report saying

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[14] Ibn Kathīr, III.162

[15] *Ibid.*, II.248

[16] The quotation of Ibn Kathīr from Mujāhid is identical to the account in *Tafsīr Mujāhid* in the edition of Muḥammad Surty (Mujāhid, *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, (ed) by ʿAbd Raḥmān al-Ṭāhir Muḥammad Surty, Qatar: np 1396/1976, 399) However, Ṭabarī's quotation from Mujāhid (*al-asaf* means *ḥazīn*) is not identical to the account in this edition of Mujāhid's commentary. (Ṭabarī, XVI.196)

[17] Ibn Kathīr, III.162

[18] Ṭabarī, IX.64

[19] *Ibid.*, IX.64

[20] According to Heribert Horst, the *isnād* of this report (Bishr b. Muʿādh, Yazīd b. Zuraj al-Baṣrī, Saʿīd b. ʿArūb al-Baṣrī, Qatāda b. Diʿāma) occurs eight times in Ṭabarī's commentary. (H. Horst, 'Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar at-Ṭabarīs', *Zeitschrift Derdeutschen Morgenlöndischen Gesellschaft*, 1953, 292-301); The early Shiʿite exegete Qummī (d. 317/939) presents a lengthy elaboration of this report on the authority of the sixth imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d.148/765.) Quoted in. J. D. McAuliffe, *op. cit.*, 1996, 150

that when Moses took the Tablets he said, 'O Lord, I am seeing the best community ever raised up among mankind; they enjoin *ma'rūf* (right conduct) and forbid *munkar* (indecency). I want these people to become my community.' God answered him: 'This is the community of Aḥmad.'[21] Moses said, 'I am seeing a community who come later but they are in front of all preceding communities. They have been created later but they will enter paradise first. I see this community in the Tablets; their books are in their heart, *anājīluhum fī ṣudūrihim*. The people who lived before them read their book from sheets of paper, and when it was lost they forgot everything in it, because they had not memorised their book.' Qatāda said that God bestowed on this community a very strong memory which had not been bestowed on any community before. Moses said, 'O Lord, make my community like them', but God told him: 'This is the community of Aḥmad.' Again Moses said, ' O Lord, I find in these Tablets a community who believe in a previous book and in the last book; they fight against unbelievers, they even fight against the one-eyed liar (anti-Christ). Make them my community'. God said to him: 'They are the community of Aḥmad.'[22] Moses said, 'I am seeing a community in these Tablets who are allowed to eat their charitable gifts themselves and even so they gain reward. However the people who lived before them could not eat their gifts and charities. When they gave charity, if it was accepted by God, God threw fire upon it and the fire ate this charity. If it was rejected, it was abandoned and birds would eat this charity. But among this community God takes charity from the rich people and gives it to the poor people; Moses said, O my Lord, make them my community.' God said: 'They are the community of Aḥmad'.[23] Moses said, 'O my Lord, I am seeing a community in these Tablets who if they intend doing a good deed but cannot carry it out, still they are rewarded; if they fulfil their intention, the reward of their deeds will be ten times to seven hundred times. Make them my community.' God said to him: 'No, they are the community of Aḥmad.' Similarly Moses said to the Lord: 'I am seeing a community in these Tablets who may intend to do an evil deed, but cannot in fact do it. That is why they do not sin. Even if they do carry it out, the evil deed will be recorded as it is. [24] Make them my community.' But God said: 'They are the community of Aḥmad.'[25]

Ṭabarī mentions another report from Qatāda (Muhammad b. 'Abd al-A'lā from Muḥammad b. al-Thawr from Ma'mar from Qatāda)

Moses said, 'O my Lord, I am seeing the people whose prayer is acceptable when they pray, whose intercession is acceptable when they intercede.' There are similar reports narrated from Qatāda by different

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[21] Ṭabarī, IX.65

[22] *Ibid.*, IX.65

[23] *Ibid.*, IX.65

[24] In the original version of the *ḥadīth* it is mentioned that if a person intends to do an evil deed but does not put his intention into action he is rewarded (Nawawī, *Sharḥ Mutun Arba'īn al-Nawawī*, Lebanon: Dār al-Qalam nd., 123)

[25] Ṭabarī, IX.64-65

routes but there is no need to mention them again. Finally, Moses himself asks God to make him one of the members of Muhammad's community. This is the first and last time the name of the prophet 'Muhammad' is mentioned.[26]

Having transmitted all these rather similar reports, Ṭabarī himself comments: 'The main reason for Moses' throwing down the Tablets is his anger at their worshipping the calf, because God forbids polytheism in the scripture.'[27] Suprisingly perhaps, Ṭabarī's presentation is very interesting. He rejects the reports, basing his view on the Qur'anic account, nevertheless he seems compelled to narrate them and he also makes no comment on isnād. It suffices to say that Ṭabarī prefers to present the reports rather than insist on authenticity; however, when the need arises he frequently expresses his own opinion. The predicatory nature of the above-mentioned reports is obvious and, needless to say, in preaching or manāqib (legendary narrative), the message, faṣl, is more important than its authenticity, 'aṣl. These reports were designed to encourage their listeners and arouse strong feelings. From the religious point of view, according to the generally accepted tradition, there is nothing wrong with their transmission. The prediction of the community of Aḥmad reflects a powerful polemical approach.

In contrast to Ṭabarī, Baghawī is ready to accept all these reports without any criticism, though he presents them in a slightly abbreviated form. At this point it is worth mentioning that there are differences between these two exegetes' narratives of the same story. Some of Ṭabarī's statements have not been included in Baghawī's commentary. Baghawī also adds new information to the narrative which is missing in Ṭabarī's commentary, such as God's sympathy for Moses' impossible request,[28] Moses' witnessing that he finds in the Tablets a community whose books, maṣāḥifuhum (in Ṭabarī anājīluhum), are in their heart; they wear the colour of the people of paradise's dress, they stand side by side and form a continuous row in their

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[26] Ṭabarī, IX.65; Kisā'ī narrates the same story on the authority of anonymous sources. (Kisā'ī, Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā, (ed) by Isaac Eisenberg, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1922-23, 221); Nuwayrī, on the other hand, relates this story on the authority of Jāḥiz. (Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab, Cairo 1938, XIII.218, no publisher). Interestingly, Nuwayrī's narration contains detailed information not found in classical exegesis, such as the creation of the name of Muhammad two thousand years before the creation of the earth, Moses' request to hear the voices of the community of Muhammad and God' permission of this, etc.

[27] Ṭabarī, IX.65; Ālūsī gives the following formula to justify Moses' action: 'The good deeds of the pious may be the sins of the elect' (Ālūsī, IX.67)

[28] Baghawī, II.199

ritual prayer like a row of Angels...'[29] Attention should also be paid to the changing of the words in the two narratives.

In his evaluation of the questionable report which concerns Moses' witnessing that the community of Muhammad was better than his own people, and so begging God to make him a member of this promised prophet's community and throwing down the Tablets, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is critical, saying that it is inappropriate to attribute it to Moses.[30] This statement shows Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's awareness of the presence in the classical commentaries of superfluous information based on unreliable reports.

Ibn Kathīr does not hesitate to offer his own comments regarding the soundness of certain traditions and their chains of authorities. First of all, he states that the majority of the *salaf* (predecessors) and *khalaf* (successors) held that Moses threw down the Tablets due to his anger at his people. Then he adds that Ṭabarī cites a strange report allegedly from Qatāda, but which it is difficult to accept as actually being related by him; here he refers to the report which says that 'Moses saw the virtue of the community of Aḥmad on the Tablets...'. He states that Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is one of the distinguished commentators who reject this report. After this short anecdote Ibn Kathīr mentions the *ḥadīth* from the Prophet, who says 'May God forgive Moses because seeing with the eyes is not like hearing.' When God informed him that his people were being tested after his departure, Moses did not throw down the Tablets, but did so when he saw his people worshipping the calf with his own eyes.[31]

According to Ibn Kathīr, there is no need to use this unreliable report (Moses' witnessing the virtue of Aḥmad) to explain this verse. One page later, however, we observe that while Ibn Kathīr is dealing with the question of whether the Tablets were broken or not when Moses threw them, he cites the same report from Qatāda in his exegesis without any apparent criticism.[32] In this case, Ibn Kathīr appears to give credence to this story as having a kind of authenticity. Although he generally presents minimal versions of the stories he devotes nearly half a page to this report. It is very difficult to reconcile these two opposing attitudes. At this juncture we should point out another complex adopted by Ibn Kathīr regarding the Tablets. Basing his arguments on the accounts of earlier commentators, Ibn Kathīr concludes that it is evident that the

[29] *Ibid.*, II.199
[30] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, II.457
[31] Ibn Kathīr, II.248

Tablets were broken when Moses threw them.[33] However, in his *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* he discusses what Muslims and the People of the Book think of the Tablets. In brief, the People of the Book believe the Tablets were broken but the Muslims hold that God changed them and indeed there is no expression in the Qur'an which refers explicitly to the breaking of the Tablets.[34] The discrepancies in these reports do not bother Ibn Kathīr very much. His frequent reference to the tradition of the prophet strengthens his position, and he is quite content to discuss a variety of reports.

Finally, we want to mention one of Rāzī's significant contributions to the interpretation of the Qur'an. We remember that Ṭabarī, Baghawī, and even –with reservation- Ibn Kathīr, have narrated the questionable report regarding Moses' witnessing the virtue of the community of Aḥmad on the Tablets. The report is traced back to Qatāda. It is also worth recalling that Ibn ʿAṭiyya finds it inappropriate to attribute this report to Moses. This report is missing in Rāzī's comment on these passages. However, we encounter a very interesting comparison made by Rāzī in his explanation of the expression *thumma ittakhadhtum al-ʿijl* (then you choose the calf for worship). Briefly, he says that this story indicates that the community of Muhammad is the best community, and Rāzī then attempts to determine from what point of view they are the best. He gives five possible explanations: first, although the community of Muhammad needs strong evidence to accept the miracle of the Qur'an there is no doubt in their mind. This shows that the Muslims are better and wiser than the Children of Israel. Second, the prophet of Islam relates this story without learning it from anyone. This indicates that he has obtained it by revelation. Third, the story prevents us from imitating the Israelites, for if they had known God with a clear proof they would not have been in doubt. Fourth is the consolation of the prophet, *tasliyat-u al-nabiyy*. Fifth, the people who are most against the prophet are Jews. This story shows their ancestors' situation. Rāzī refers to their stupidity and leaves the comparison with the Jews of Madina to the reader.[35] These points are apparently polemical. Moreover if we look at them closely we will see the affinity between them and Qatāda's report. What is new in Rāzī's approach is that while he does not mention or refer to the report he purposely tries to rationalise its content. The merit of Rāzī must be sought in this procedure;

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[32] *Ibid.*, II.249

[33] *Ibid.*, II.249

[34] Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā*, Beirut: Dār al-Qalam nd, 381

[35] Ibn Kathīr, II.76

bearing in mind the sinlessness of the prophets he does not make any explicit reference to the incident of Moses' throwing down the Tablets after seeing the virtue of the community of Aḥmad. Instead, Rāzī establishes the virtue of the community of Aḥmad by a process of rationalisation without recourse to any report.

5.3. The Nature of the Tablets

Classical exegetes are very concerned to draw their readers' attention to minute details which are often unrelated to the Qur'anic narrative. The nature of the Tablets, their number, length, and weight, the number and names of the readers of the whole Tablets (Torah) and so on are good examples. Ṭabarī cites a number of reports from both known and unknown sources to indicate what the Tablets are made of: *zumrud* (green emerald), *yāqūt* (ruby), *barad* (hailstone) and *zabarjad* (chrysolite) from paradise.[36] To these valuable materials Ṭūsī and Baghawī add *khashab* (wood).[37] In spite of his careful criticism of these unsound reports, Ibn ʿAṭiyya sometimes does not refrain from narrating them, and in his commentary most of them are traced back to some early authorities. The mere citation of them, however, does not mean that he takes them all into account when commenting on the Qur'an. It seems that Ibn ʿAṭiyya, by attributing them to their narrators without adding anything new to them, relieves himself of some of the burden of these reports. To put it another way, he is content not to go further in the transmission of these reports; for example, he mentions from what materials the Tablets are made but he does not record any detail.[38] Many exegetes, however, are willing to give details. The report on the authority of Ibn Juraij specifically mentions that God commanded Gabriel to bring emerald from the paradise of *ʿadn*.[39] Jaʿfar's report, on the other hand, explains that the Tablets are made of ruby and the writing on them is in gold.[40] At this juncture, it should be remembered that Ṭūsī provides interesting lexicographical information about the word *lawḥ* (tablet). Having connected the word *lawḥ* with *lamʿa* (brightness or shining) he concludes that

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[36] Ṭabarī, IX.66; II.62; Sayyid Quṭub clearly states that these are transmitted from *isrā'īliyyāt*; that is why believers have to limit themselves to the Qur'anic account. (Sayyid Quṭub, *op. cit.*, III.1370); Ṭabaṭabā'ī, having explained that there are a number of reports transmitted by Shiʿite and Sunni authorities regarding the Tablet's nature, shows some reluctance to narrate them. He says that most of these reports are not confirmed by any decisive evidence, *qarā'in al-qaṭʿiyyah*. (Ṭabaṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Lebanon: ʿAlamī nd., VIII.261)
[37] Ṭūsī, IV.583; Baghawī, II.199
[38] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, III.449
[39] Baghawī, II.199
[40] Ṭabarī, IX.66; II.199

the Tablets shine while being written.[41] It is also worth mentioning that according to a report narrated on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih, God commanded the Tablets to be cut from the stone of $sam^c\bar{a}$ and, after softening them, cut them with His hand.[42] While God was writing Moses heard the scratching of the pen. All this happened on the first day of $dh\bar{u}$ $al\text{-}qa^cdah$.[43] Another report goes further and states that besides Moses the residents of heaven also heard the sound of the pen.[44] The report which is related on the authority of Abū al-ʿĀliya notes that Moses never urinated as long as he stayed on Sinai.[45]

There are disputes over the question of the number of the Tablets. The exegetes give different numbers: for example, ten[46], nine[47], and seven[48]. As regards the number two, the commentators present some important information. Ṭabarī says that some people assumed that the Tablets were formed in two[49] parts, and it is explained that the meaning of $alw\bar{a}h$ (Tablets) in 7:150 is $lawh\bar{a}ni$ (two Tablets), just as 'he had $ikhwat^{un}$' (brothers) means $akhaw\bar{a}ni$ (two brothers).[50] Obviously, the exceptional disputable report is made clear on the basis of grammatical elucidation. It is also important to note that Ṭabarī's presentation 'some people assumed that...' shows, to some extent, his disapproval of this interpretation. A similar comment is made by Ṭūsī on the authority of Zajjāj.[51] Ibn Kathīr, in his $qi\d{s}a\d{s}$ $al\text{-}anbiy\bar{a}$, says that according to the People of the Book the number of the Tablets is two; however, the meaning of $alw\bar{a}h$ in the Qur'an is 'many', $muta^caddadah$.[52] It is safe to deduce from this approach that Ibn Kathīr, basing his method on Qur'anic usage, apparently does not accept any report which gives definite information about the Tablets. It is also important to note that while he is not concerned about being consistent with the Biblical narrative, this comment displays Ibn

[41] Ṭūsī, IV.572-3; Ibn Nadīm describes the Tablets as green and the writing on them as red like the light of the sun. He also relates from Ibn Isḥāq that the Jews do not know this feature of the Tablets. (Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad b. Abī Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq Ibn Nadīm, al-Fihrist, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 1996, 36)
[42] The exegetical narrative appears to be quite conscious of the Bible, Exodus xxxii:16-18
[43] Baghawī, II.199; Zamakhsharī, II.116
[44] Ṭabarī, IX.66
[45] Ibid., II.62; Rāzī, II.74
[46] Zamakhsharī, II.116; Ibn Nadīm, op. cit., 36
[47] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, II.62
[48] Ṭabarī, IX.66; Zamakhsharī, II.116; Ṭūsī, IV.572; Firuzabādī, Tanwīr al-Miqbās min Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās, Cairo 1962/1382, 108
[49] Exodus xxxi:18 mentioned two Tablets of stone written with the finger of God.
[50] Ṭabarī, IX.67; The word ikhwat^{un} occurs seven times in the Qur'an and only the verses of 4:11, 176 are close to the above-mentioned meaning; but they do not exactly fit this rule.
[51] Ṭūsī, IV.572
[52] Ibn Kathīr, qi\d{s}a\d{s}, 381

Kathīr's familiarity with the scriptures of the People of the Book. It is also narrated that when Moses threw down the Tablets, God removed six-sevenths of them and left but one seventh. Ṭabarī, in order to support this report, cites 7:145 'And in their inscription, there is guidance and mercy for those who fear their Lord'.[53] In addition, the majority of exegetes explain that the Torah is a very large collection which is why it is carried by seventy camels. To read one of its parts requires at least one year and the Torah was read from beginning to end by only four men: Moses b. ʿImrān, Jesus, Ezra, and Joshua b. Nun.[54] Clearly, this report reveals that the Torah could be read only by those who had a prophetic mission. Apart from them nobody had the capacity to carry out this great task. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, having mentioned this report in passive form, concludes that it is an extremely weak transmission.[55] The same report is narrated by Ṭabarī on the authority of Rābiʿa b. Anas. Ibn ʿAṭiyya's approach indicates that he rejects this report on the basis of its context; this is significant because he does not limit himself to the *asānīd*.

5.4. A Fair Promise

Another expression on which the exegetes concentrate is *waʿdan ḥasan^{an}* (a fair promise) in 20:86. In commenting on this expression Ṭabarī cites two Qur'anic verses to point out what these promises are: 20:82 '...but he that repents and believes in Me, does good works and follows the right path, shall be forgiven, and 20:80 '...We made a covenant with you on the right flank of the Mountain.'[56] Ṭabarī explains the Qur'anic term in the light of the Qur'an and adds nothing to it.

Ṭūsī discusses this expression at length. First of all he offers three interpretations: God promised Moses to save the Israelites from their enemies, to bring them near Sinai, and finally God's promise is associated with 20:82. Apart from these three comments he mentions two more reports for the identification of 'a fair promise'. According to Ḥasan, the addressees of this promise are the people who believe in and keep the religion of God in the world. However, the fair promise will be fulfilled only in the hereafter. The anonymous comment given by Ṭūsī associates the promise with the revelation of the Torah in which are contained *nūr* (light), guidance, and the duties

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[53] Ṭabarī, IX.66; Nuwayrī, XIII.224; Ibn Nadīm describes these two parts as *lawḥ al-shahādah* and *lawḥ al-mīthāq*. (Ibn Nadīm, *op. cit.*, 36)

[54] Ṭabarī, IX.66; Zamakhsharī, II.116

[55] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, II.457

[56] Ṭabarī, XVI.196

which the Israelites are supposed to perform to gain their reward.[57] Ṭūsī does not attempt to reconcile the various interpretations of the promise, he simply tries to show the relation between them. Although Ṭūsī has borrowed these interpretations from Ṭabarī, he develops them further. Rāzī and Qurṭubī also pay attention to the meaning of this expression, and it may be observed that there are a number of important points on which they appear to be in agreement with Ṭūsī regarding the understanding of 'promise'.[58]

Furthermore, both Rāzī and Qurṭubī make a passing reference to the interpretation of the second part of the verse: 'did then the promise seem to you long in coming or did you desire that wrath should descend from your Lord on you?' The meanings of ṭūl al-ʿahd, according to Rāzī, are various. The first option he puts forward is 'the promise seems to you long after your Lord saved you from Pharaoh.' There are also other graces of God which Rāzī mentions in this context.[59] His second option is related to the miscalculation of the nights by the Children of Israel, but he rejects this unauthoritative report. In analysing his third option he touches upon a very important point. He connects the extra ten nights with the Qur'anic expression ṭūl al-ʿahd. This is a very logical link. Rāzī, having removed the traditional materials, explains the Qur'an in the light of another Qur'anic verse.

In addition, Rāzī does not accept the apparent meaning of the verse 'did you desire that wrath should descend from your Lord on you?' The reason is again theological anxiety, because nobody could desire the wrath of God but the sin which the people commit requires it.[60] Clearly, Rāzī, whenever the opportunity presents itself, is ready to see the Qur'anic verse from the theological point of view. Finally, he ends the interpretation of the verse with the identification of the promise which was broken by the Israelites. According to Rāzī there are two points: one is their promise to follow Moses, the other is their promise to fulfil their religious obligations until Moses' return.[61] Rāzī clearly gives equal weight to both the explicit and implicit meanings of

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[57] Ṭūsī, VII.197
[58] Rāzī, XXII.102; Qurṭubī, XI.234
[59] Rāzī, XXII.102
[60] *Ibid.*, XXII.102
[61] *Ibid.*, XXII.102

the verse.[62] Qurṭubī also draws attention to the theological aspect of the verse. He does not see 'the wrath of God' as an arbitrary exercise of Divine power, but as being the result of the Israelites' sin.[63] Other exegetes, like Ṭabarī, place stress on the Children of Israel's sin, but theological anxiety is absent or not explicit in their commentaries.

5.5. The Excuse of the Israelites

'They said: we broke not the promise to you as far as lay in our power. But we were made to carry the weights of the ornaments of the people, and we threw them (into the fire), Sāmirī did the same', 20:87.

'Then he took out (of the fire) for them a statue of a calf which seemed to low. They said: this is your Lord and the Lord of Moses, but he has forgotten', 20:88.

The first verse contains the Israelites' defence, which is extremely weak, especially after they have been so severely reprimanded. Ṭabarī draws our attention to the word *malkinā*. God informs us that they accepted that they had made a mistake. Ṭabarī notes that readers do not agree about the reading of the word *malkinā* and its interpretation. He mentions three variant readings of the word, namely *malkinā*, *mulkinā*, and *milkinā* and explains that the majority of the Madinan reciters read *malkinā*, the majority of the Kufan reciters read *mulkinā*, and finally some of the Baṣran reciters read *milkinā*. Ṭabarī then clearly states that every reading system is valid and that meanings such as *ṭāqatinā*, *amrinā* and *hawānā* are close to each other. Preference for one or another is therefore not an important issue.[64] His explanation of the word mostly depends on semantics. Although some people, according to Ṭabarī, do not accept the reading *mulkinā* because of the Children of Israel's weakness in Egypt, he concludes that there is a considerable uniformity in their interpretations.[65]

Unlike Ṭabarī, Ṭūsī openly declares that the speakers in this verse are the people who did not worship the calf. The reason for this identification lies in their failure to prevent the worshippers from committing a sin (worshipping the calf).[66] Interestingly, although he discusses the meaning and variant readings of the expression *malkinā* he fails to mention the opinions of other commentators, who generally hold that the speakers in the verse are mainly the worshippers of the calf. It should be noted that Ṭūsī's preference regarding this expression is also to be found in Sunni commentaries,

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[62] The implicit meaning of the verse is also found in Ṭabarsī's exegesis. It is related on the authority of al-Ḥasan: *hum ʿalā dīnī wa minhājī*, 'they follow my religion and my path.' (Ṭabarsī, VIII.24)
[63] Qurṭubī, XI.235
[64] Ṭabarī, XVI.197
[65] *Ibid.*, XVI.198
[66] Ṭūsī, VII.198

and if his interpretation of 'a fair promise' in the previous passage is taken into consideration it will be seen that Ṭūsī's identification of the believers as the subject of this expression is not absurd.

Following Ṭūsī, Rāzī and Qurṭubī also try to identify the speakers in this verse. Rāzī gives two obvious opinions without stating his preference: they may be the people who worshipped the calf or those who did not. Although the first identification is close to the meaning of the verse Rāzī does not disregard the second; the reason he gives is the same as that proposed by Ṭūsī. In order to support this interpretation Rāzī quotes another verse: 'and when you slew a man, *qataltum*,...', 2:72, and concludes that it does not mean that everyone of the people addressed had killed someone.[67] Likewise, it should not be understood that every Israelite broke the promise. It should also be remembered that in explaining this verse Rāzī asks a very interesting question: 'How is it possible that nearly six hundred thousand people suddenly left the true religion and started worshipping the calf?' It is also interesting to note that when Moses came back and warned them, this people again embraced their true religion. In response to his own question, Rāzī briefly says that it is not impossible, because sometimes this kind of foolishness happens to people.[68]

There is no substantial difference in Qurṭubī's explanation from those of his predecessors with an exception of the anecdote to which he draws our attention: it is said that the verb *qālū* (they have said) is *ʿāmm* (general) but it is meant to be *khāṣṣ* (particular). The essence of this statement is that the subject of the verb is the people who are firm believers in God, because they are the minority among the worshippers of the calf.[69] Zamakhsharī glosses it as 'We had no capacity to control ourselves, we were defeated by Sāmirī and his tricks'. Baghawī and Ibn ʿAṭiyya limit themselves to the variant of the expression together with its readers.[70]

5.6. The Ornaments

Two other terms, *awzār* and *ḥummilnā*, have demanded clarification within the exegetical tradition concerning 20:87, though the situation with regard to the first term is somewhat more complicated. Ṭabarī, basing his view on some reports narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid and Suddī, says that the meaning of $awzār^{an}$ is $athqāl^{an}$.[71] The variant readings of *ḥummilnā*, doubling the letters *mīm* and *ḥamalnā*, are again reconciled by Ṭabarī on the basis of semantics. He briefly comments 'both readings are

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[67] Rāzī, XXII.102
[68] *Ibid.*, XXII.103
[69] Qurṭubī, XI.234
[70] Zamakhsharī, II.550; Baghawī, III.228; Ibn ʿAṭiyya, IV.59
[71] Ṭabarī, XVI.199: Mujāhid glosses it as *anfāl* while Fīrūzābādī associates this word with *ajrām, jurm*. (Mujāhid, 400; Fīrūzābādī, 197)

commonly used and their meanings are similar to each other, whether the people carried the weight of the ornaments or Moses had them carry the ornaments.'[72] Every classical exegete draws attention to these variant readings and none of them sees any serious problem in their readings and meanings, although some of them are more informative while others are precise.

Zamakhsharī, without going into details, examines the position of the ornaments in the hands of the Israelites:

> These ornaments were loaned from the Copts and the meaning of *awzār* was *athām* (sin) or *tabiʿāt* (prosecution) because they were the people who sought protection in the enemy's country, *dār al-ḥarb*. So it was not appropriate for them to take the possessions of *ḥarbī* (the enemy) due to the fact that to take booty was not permissible at that time.[73]

Thus narrative and law are intertwined by Zamakhsharī in his elucidation of the verse.

Qurṭubī on the other hand, after repeating two reports about the expression *ḥummilnā*, concentrates on the word *awzār*. The meaning of *awzār* is *athqāl*. To support this argument Qurṭubī provides a narrative: when the Children of Israel wanted to flee from Egypt they borrowed the ornament of the Copts, who thought that the Israelites would gather for a festival and therefore gave them the ornaments. Qurṭubī also gives an alternative report: the ornaments of Pharaoh's people were thrown outside near the sea. The Israelites collected the ornaments but they were spoils and spoils were not permitted to them. Because of this *awzār* is called *athām* (sin).[74] Bearing in mind this gloss, later exegetes provide similar narratives. In other words the gloss itself becomes an exegetical tradition, which commentators are supposed to take account of.

5.7. How the Calf was Formed

The question of how the calf was formed is of special interest. The Qur'anic expression is precise in describing this process: '...we threw, Sāmirī did the same.' Traditional exegetes specify several factors that may have triggered this crisis. In typical fashion, Ṭabarī lays out the largest number and greatest variety of opinions from among the many traditions he cites in his comprehensive work. He lists three reports to explain that the meaning of the verb *alqinā* is 'threw'. But there is a dispute among the *ahl al-ta'wīl* about the forming of the calf. Some say Sāmirī formed it: he threw the dust which he took from the hooves of Gabriel's horse into the calf's

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[72] Ṭabarī, XVI.199
[73] Zamakhsharī, II.550

mouth.[75] After giving this first interpretation Ṭabarī cites a number of explanations from different authorities. Two reports are traced back to Qatāda by different routes. The first treats the episode as follows:

> God appointed for Moses thirty nights and added to the period ten more. When the thirty days had passed, the enemy of God, Sāmirī, said that the main reason for the misfortune that happened to you was the ornaments which you had, the ornaments that were borrowed from the people of Pharaoh, come here, bring them. They walked together with him and then threw the ornaments. Sāmirī made out of their ornaments the image of a calf. He kept the handful of dust from the footprint of Gabriel's horse in his cap or clothes. He threw it with the ornaments and image. It bellowed like a cow.[76]

In the second report it is stated that;

> when Moses was late, Sāmirī told them he was kept away from them because of the ornaments which they took as a loan from the followers of Pharaoh. They collected them and brought them to Sāmirī. He formed a calf and threw the dust inside the calf. He had taken this dust from the hoofprints of the *faras al-malak* (messenger's horse). That was the calf with a hollow sound. They said that this was your god, and Moses', but Moses forgot his Lord, *hadhā ilāhukum wa ilāhu mūsa fa-nasiya.*[77]

Three differences exist between these two reports. While the first report refers to the horse of Gabriel the second does not identify the messenger. Secondly, in the first report it is not clear who tells the Israelites 'this is your god, and Moses'.' However, in the second report the people of Moses themselves seem to tell one another that the calf is their –and Moses'- god, although it is more plausible that the speakers are Sāmirī and his followers. This identification also fits the Qur'anic narrative. Finally the first report shows that Sāmirī threw dust on its abdomen. One of the conclusions which can be drawn is that the second report, with the exception of the clarification of the abdomen of the calf, is more loyal to the Qur'anic narrative than the first one. The last report introduces new information:

> Moses charged his brother, Aaron, to assume leadership among the Israelites and told them he would be back after thirty nights. Then he went away; but God supplemented them with ten more. In the absence of Moses, Aaron told them: 'O Children of Israel, the ornament of the Copts is booty and booty is not lawful for you, so gather it together and

[74] Qurṭubī, XI.235
[75] Ṭabarī, XVI.200
[76] *Ibid.,* XVI.200
[77] *Ibid.,* XVI.200

dig a pit for it and bury it; if Moses comes, he may declare it lawful for you to take, otherwise it will be something you cannot spend lawfully.' When they gathered the jewellery together in this pit, Sāmirī came with this handful of dust and flung it in, and God brought forth a calf's body with a hollow sound. Similarly, the Children of Israel calculated the appointed time of Moses; they counted each night a day, and each day a day. When it was the twentieth day Sāmirī came and formed the calf. When they saw it, Sāmirī told them: 'This is your Lord and the Lord of Moses, but he has forgotten.' They worshipped it; the calf was walking and lowing.[78]

In contrast to the above-mentioned reports there are others elsewhere which show that Aaron, Moses and Sāmirī had different motivations in collecting the ornaments; however, the main theme remains the same. According to a report based on the authority of Suddī, 'Moses himself commanded the Israelites to borrow jewellery from the Copts when God commanded Moses to leave Egypt with the Israelites.' Ibn Isḥāq adds that Moses said to them; 'I consider this ornament booty for you.'[79] Ṭabarī mentions another report from Ibn ᶜAbbās:

It was cast into Sāmirī's mind: 'You may throw this on to anything saying 'become this or that', and what you wish will happen.' So the handful of dust remained with him in his hand until he had passed through the sea... There was with the children of Israel some jewellery of the people of Pharaoh which they had taken on loan, and it was as if they shunned the evil of it, so they took it out for the fire to come down and consume. But when they had gathered it together, Sāmirī lifted up the handful of dust which was in his hand and flung it into it and said 'Be a calf's body which lows.' And it became a calf's body which lowed...[80]

Ibn Isḥāq's sequence of the Sāmirī story begins with Gabriel's appearance. Interestingly, Ṭabarī cites another report which is traced back to Abū Bakr b. ᶜAbd Allāh al-Huzalī:

When Moses went to Sinai, Sāmirī came to Aaron and said, 'O messenger of God, we borrowed the ornaments of the Copt when we left Egypt. Now, people are buying and selling them. We knew that the ornaments were only a loan (temporary present) from the followers of Pharaoh but we could not give the ornaments back to them because

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[78] *Ibid.*, XVI.200; Mawdūdī does not accept the opinion which considers the ornaments as spoil taken from the Copts. He suggests that the classical exegetes have deduced this interpretation from the Bible (*Exodus* 3:14-22' 11:2-3), therefore it is unacceptable; it is also absurd to explain Qur'anic verses in the light of the Bible. In his own comment on the verse he says: 'When the people tired of carrying their ornaments on their bodies, they decided by mutual consultation that all the ornaments should be gathered one place and it should be noted down how much gold and silver belonged to each of the owners. Then it should be melted into bars and rods and placed on the backs of the beasts of burden.' (Mawdūdī, *op. cit.*, VII.116)

[79] Ṭabarī, II.65-6

[80] *Ibid.*, II.64

they were dead. We had no idea that your brother Moses might have had an opinion about what to do with them, such as burning all of them or giving them to poor people'. Aaron liked his suggestion and sent the public crier to tell the people to bring whatever they had from the jewellery of Pharaoh. Then they brought the ornaments and Aaron appointed Sāmirī as a guardian to look after the affair of these ornaments. Sāmirī was a sā'igh^{an} (goldsmith) and he made out of the ornaments the image of a calf, then he threw the dust on it which was taken from the hoof print of the messenger. This calf lowed once.[81]

The lack of consistency regarding the order and main personalities of the event is evident from the reports; each emphasises different aspects of the main figures, but the complexity of the reports does not deter Ṭabarī. His attitude to these reports, generally speaking, is neutral, and he does not show any explicit interest in these reports, being content merely to transmit them with their complete chain of transmitters.[82] At many points the authorities differ, expounding opposing views, but he leaves the task of evaluation and criticism to the reader.

For Ṭūsī the Qur'anic expression 'we threw the ornaments...' is of primary importance. Ṭūsī first cites the report related on the authority of Ḥasan, Qatāda and Suddī: 'Sāmirī threw what he had from the ornaments of the Egyptians. Then he brought out for them a statue of a calf. Finally Sāmirī threw something which he took from the footsteps of Gabriel, and suddenly the statue become an animal with a hollow sound.'[83] It seems that Ṭūsi uses the shortest form of the tradition to explain how the calf was formed. However, he gives more information regarding it in another place. He relates from Ḥasan that Sāmirī had taken dust from the footsteps of Gabriel's horse on the day when they passed through the sea and he threw it in the calf's mouth. The calf changed into flesh and blood.[84] Despite his recounting these narratives we observe that he does not show any preference for this report. In his further discussion Ṭūsī lays great stress on the terms jasad (statue) and khuwār (hollow sound): the meaning of jasad is the jism (body) of the animal; it consists of rūḥ (soul) and jasad (statue).[85] In addition, he describes the soul as laṭīf (thin) and the statue as thick. Khuwār is the

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[81] Ibid., IX.49

[82] It is important to bear in mind that this does not mean that he never criticises any report or that his selection of reports is always accidental. He has his own hermeneutic method and tries to justify himself within this exegetical frame. There is valuable information in J. D. McAuliffe, op. cit., 1991, 38-45; N. Robinson, op. cit., 1991, 71

[83] Ṭūsī, VII.198

[84] Ibid., IV.578

sound a cow makes, like *ju'ār* (lowing). Strangely, Ṭūsī does not record *ju'ār* as a variant reading of *khuwār*, although most of the Sunni exegetes make reference to the reading of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, who reads it as *ju'ār*. The question of how the calf could have lowed though it was made of ornaments is solved by Ṭūsī with the help of the above-mentioned report from Ḥasan. The same report also confirms that this kind of event is not an instance of *kharq al-ʿādah* (the violating of the usual course of nature) which occurred commonly at that time; it is also permissible for God to act in this way in order to introduce a custom.[86] One unauthoritative report is specifically germane to the sound of the calf. It says that the sound of the calf is a miracle such as was allowed at the time of the prophets. Ṭūsī is quick to reject it because the performing of a miracle by *mubṭil* (wrongdoers) is not permissible even in the time of the prophets.[87] He supports his argument with two anecdotes. According to Mujāhid the sound of the calf stems from the wind inside the calf. The more elaborate version cited by Jubbā'ī is that 'having shaped the calf Sāmirī made holes in the calf. Because of the penetration of the wind through these holes the people around Sāmirī thought that the calf bellowed.'[88] These two interpretations serve to justify the fact that the miracle originally belonged to the prophets. Ṭūsī is aware of the dogmatic aspect of the verse. Therefore he feels obliged to make a clear distinction between the acts of the prophets and those of wrongdoers. He closes the topic with the anonymous report: 'It is said that the calf bellowed once.'[89] It is clear that Ṭūsī depends heavily on the reports. He mentions alternative views, and does not neglect to compare the reports. It is also obvious that his theological concerns are conveyed more vividly than Ṭabarī's, although the sheer diversity of suggestions and absence of reliable reports prevents him from expressing himself clearly concerning this matter.

Zamakhsharī, after his previous attempt to evaluate the essence of the story, succinctly presents one principal scenario and advances through the realm of theology:

> Sāmirī dug a ditch and lighted a fire then asked them to throw the ornaments upon it. Sāmirī showed them that he also would throw the ornament in his hand like them. However, he threw the dust which he

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[85] Earlier exegetes like Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Firuzabādī gloss the term ʿ*ijl* as *la rūḥa lahū* or *bilā rūḥ* (with no soul) which indicates that they favour the idea that the calf was not alive. (Muqātil, III.38; Firuzabādī, 197)

[86] Ṭūsī., IV.578

[87] *Ibid.*, VII.199

[88] *Ibid.*, VII.199

[89] *Ibid.*, VII.199

had taken from the hoofprints of the horse of Gabriel, *ḥay-zūm*. He was inspired by his friend, Satan. When this dust mixed with the dead thing it suddenly became alive. So Sāmirī took out (of the fire) the statue of a calf, which was created by God from the ornaments. The calf bellowed like a cow. In addition to all of the above, if you asked how this dust affected or caused the lifeless thing to become alive...?[90]

Here again we observe that the theological dimension of the verse seems very important to Zamakhsharī. By means of this rhetorical question, he carefully manipulates its interpretation. In response to this question, he compares this situation to the creation (birth) of Jesus without a father. God employs the *rūḥ al-quds* (Holy Spirit) for such purposes. Zamakhsharī's extensive theological approach to the verse goes further and he asks the reader 'Why did God create the calf from the ornaments in order to test the Israelites and lead them astray?' He states that this is not the first test which God has given to his servants to confirm those who believe with the sound word, in the present life and in the world to come, and God leads astray the evildoers, and God does what He wills. The last portion of his answer is quoted from 14:27. After reinforcing his answer with the Qur'anic verse he concludes that the creation of Satan is more important than the creation of the calf, so people should rather ponder upon the creation of Satan.[91] Zamakhsharī's Mutazilite background prompts him to investigate the theological aspect of the verses, and his tone does not change. He gives equal importance to the questions of how and why the calf was formed. He himself asks and answers these questions in order to prepare for a discussion of the dogmatic dimension of the verse.

Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, at the beginning of his narration of the Sāmirī story, clearly states that 'this is only a story' and continues

> Sāmirī was a hypocrite and had some magical power. He grasped something from the footsteps of Gabriel and knew that God would enable him to tempt the Israelites to sin. So Sāmirī prepared this handful to do what he wanted, because God permitted it to him. However if he had proclaimed prophecy due to this calf it would have not been permitted to bellow and Sāmirī would not have performed his forgeries. If he claimed the divinity of this calf, the test would be true

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[90] Zamakhsharī, II.550; In his comment on this verse, Qummī, one of the earliest Shiᶜite exegetes, says that *Iblīs* (Satan) asked Sāmirī to bring the dust to him, and when Sāmirī brought it he threw it on the calf. Qummī also adds that there were hairs on the skin of the calf. (Qummī, II.96)

[91] *Ibid.*, II.550; The interpreters agree that Jesus' creation in Mary's womb is an instance of *kharq al-ᶜādah*; however, with the sole exception of Zamakhsharī, nobody compares this event with Sāmirī's invention of the calf.

and come into existence like the story of *dajjāl*. This kind of event is *kharq al-ᶜādah*. *Dajjāl* proclaimed his divinity, not his prophecy; if he had proclaimed his prophecy nothing would have happened. When Sāmirī saw Moses announcing God's divinity and the stupidity of the Children of Israel asking Moses to make a god for them while they were passing people who were worshipping idols in the shape of cows, then Sāmirī realised that he could mislead them in this manner.[92]

Ibn ᶜAṭiyya lists five reports without quoting any authority in order to explain how Sāmirī formed the calf. However he states his preference for the last report, which was closest to being the correct one:

> The Israelites threw the ornaments in the ditch and Sāmirī also threw what he grasped, then the calf was formed. This was the test of God for them. For this reason it could be said that because of his throwing the dust an unusual thing happened to Sāmirī, *'inkharaqat li al-sāmirī ᶜādatᵘⁿ*. In terms of forming the calf there was no unusual thing.[93]

In rejecting the other four reports Ibn ᶜAṭiyya introduces a very delicate issue, *kharq al-ᶜādah*. In this way he attempts to show that with the help of dust which Sāmirī took from elsewhere the calf was formed; this unusual work was carried out by God and sometimes God acted in this way in order to test the people. Contrary to his predecessors, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya explicitly states that the calf was not formed by Sāmirī.[94] He deduces this conclusion from the Qur'anic expression 'We were made to carry the people's ornaments and throw them into the fire. Sāmirī did the same.' It appears from this that the people, including Sāmirī, brought their ornaments and threw them down on to the heap, the people being absolutely unaware of what was going to be done by Sāmirī. There is one aspect of Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's interpretation which deserves attention. He tries to interpret the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an instead of relying freely on the various reports. It is easy to understand why Ibn ᶜAṭiyya rejects the reports concerning the forming of the calf. Furthermore, he does not mention any authority for these reports.

Likewise, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya provides information about the calf without furnishing any details, mentioning three reports from unnamed authorities. One group said that this calf used to bellow and walk, another group said that it bellowed once, and the last group said that the wind entered through its bottom and went out as a sound.[95] Ṭabarī

[92] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, IV.57
[93] *Ibid.*, IV.57
[94] *Ibid.*, IV.59
[95] *Ibid.*, IV.59

gives no less than ten reports and almost all of them are traced back to early authorities. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya gives merely two lines of explanation. The style of presentation implies that there was nothing more to report.

Rāzī, in his interpretation of the last part of 20:87, poses a question similar to his predecessors': 'On what did they throw?' He records three interpretations: on the ditch which Aaron commanded them to dig; on the spot designated by Sāmirī; and on the place on which the fire was lit.[96] Rāzī constantly tries to link not only the verses one to another but also most of the Qur'anic expressions or individual words. In the light of this he explains and justifies the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. His discussion develops sequentially and he himself conducts the direction of the discussion. He is reluctant to base his conclusion merely on the reports and mostly he disregards the *asānīd* in the few reports which he does give.

Rāzī's treatment of 20:88 is much more elaborate. Like Ṭūsī, he draws attention to the word *jasad* (statue.) He records the dispute over the nature of this statue; whether it was alive or not. He offers two interpretations. According to the first interpretation the calf was not alive because it is not permissible for an unbeliever to perform extraordinary things, *kharq al-ᶜādah*. In fact Sāmirī, having shaped the calf, made some holes in it so that the wind would blow through them, producing a sound like that of a cow.[97] The second view is the opposite of the first: the calf was alive and bellowed like a cow. The proof put forward by those who held this opinion can be presented in three stages: first, if it was not alive, what is the meaning of the verse 'I took a handful of dust from the hoof print of the messenger', 20:96? This seems to imply that the verse necessitates belief in the calf being alive. Second, God names it an *ᶜijl* (calf) and in reality it is an animal. God also mentions the word *jasad* to indicate that it is alive.[98] Third, it is the sound of the calf which has attracted the most attention. Rāzī, having stated these three points, evaluates them as follows: the performance of extraordinary things by a person who claims divinity is possible. Interestingly, Rāzī, in this connection, mentions the prayer of Aaron on meeting Sāmirī while Sāmirī was shaping the calf. According to this famous report, Aaron was asked to pray although he knew

[96] Rāzī, XXII.103
[97] Rāzī said elsewhere that the majority of Mutazilites held that Sāmirī hollowed out the calf and put some pipes in it. The sound came from these pipes. (*Ibid.*, XV.5)
[98] Interestingly, Ṭabaṭabā'ī, one of the Shiᶜite exegetes of this century, used the same term, *jasadᵃⁿ*, to prove that the calf was not alive. (Ṭabaṭabā'ī, VIII.248)

nothing of Sāmirī's intention. After Aaron's departure Sāmirī wished the calf to bellow. Basing his argument on this account, Rāzī comes to the conclusion that the formation of the calf happened due to the miraculous prayer of Aaron.[99] Here his primary source seems to be Ibn ᶜAṭiyya although he does not name an authority. His approach to the second and third points is based on rational argument. Besides his rationality, he also places stress on semantics. His effort to provide an alternative view and show the positive and negative aspects of every opinion is evident. What we deduce from Rāzī's overall interpretation is that he is not really interested in finding an answer to whether the calf was alive or not. His main concern is rather to explain the impossibility of this calf's being a god because it cannot speak, guide or command.[100] The diversity of suggestions may also support this conclusion.

Qurṭubī lists two possibilities regarding the interpretation of this verse. First, 'the ornaments were so heavy that carrying them was difficult for us, so we threw them on the fire to melt.' The second comment is introduced by the formula 'it is said' 'that we brought them to Sāmirī and waited to see what he would do with them.' After this brief introduction, Qurṭubī summarises the whole range of what has been said about the forming of the calf. He cites a number of explanations by different authorities. He also deals with the same topic in surah Aᶜrāf. One of the most striking points is that repetition is quite frequent. He begins his elucidation with a report which is traced back to Qatāda: 'When Moses was late Sāmirī told them he was kept away from them because of the ornaments which they had taken as a loan from the followers of Pharaoh. They collected the ornaments and brought them to Sāmirī. He formed a calf and threw the dust inside the calf. He had taken this dust from the hoofprints of the messenger's horse -namely Gabriel's-. That was the calf with a hollow sound'. A similar report is found in Ṭabarī's commentary; however, Qurṭubī, in his presentation of this report, adds two pieces of information. One is related on the authority of Maᶜmar: 'The name of Gabriel's horse is ḥayāt.'[101] The second is the identification of the messenger with Gabriel.[102]

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[99] Rāzī, XXII.104; In Mujāhid's commentary it is mentioned that the calf bellowed due to the prayer of Aaron. (Mujāhid, 401)

[100] This conclusion derived from Rāzī's interpretation of the same topic in another place. (Rāzī, V.6-7)

[101] Zamaksharī called it ḥayzūm, (II.550)

[102] Qurṭubī, XI.235

The report related from Ibn ᶜAbbās goes on to say that when the ornaments melted in the fire Sāmirī came to Aaron and asked him a question: 'O prophet of God! Could I throw what I kept in my hand?' Aaron thought that he was carrying ornaments like the others. Then Sāmirī threw what he kept in his hand, wishing it to be a calf. Finally, what he wished would happen, did happen. At the end of this report it is also noted that the calf bellowed once. [103] Qurṭubī then discusses whether it was alive or not. What puzzles him is the sound of the calf. In connection with this Qurṭubī records different reports to reflect two opinions. It is said that the reason for its sound is that there were some holes in it, and when the wind entered these it caused the calf to bellow. Therefore, it was not alive. This interpretation was held by Mujāhid. The idea that it consisted of flesh and blood was accepted by Ḥasan, Qatāda and Suddī. Qurṭubī's narrative, however, is not complete. He relates another report with full *isnād*: Ḥammād relates from Simāk and Simāk relates from Saᶜīd ibn Jubair on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās that while Sāmirī was forming the calf Aaron came and asked him what he was doing. Sāmirī told him that he was making a thing which had no power either to harm or to do good and he asked Aaron to pray to God on his behalf. Aaron said: 'O my Lord, give him what he kept in his soul.' Then Sāmirī asked God to make it bellow. When it bellowed the Israelites bowed down.[104] Although Qurṭubī presents these reports slightly differently all of them are mentioned by earlier exegetes several times in their exegeses. The only original note is his inclusion of an anecdote from unknown source which describes a motive for Sāmirī's forming the calf which we have not encountered before:

> Sāmirī heard the words of Moses when he employed two waxen images
> of horses in order to find Joseph's grave, which was in a stone coffin
> sunk in the Nile. The horses brought the coffin on their horn. Sāmirī
> also muttered the exact words of Moses and threw the dust inside the
> calf and it started bellowing.[105]

Ibn Kathīr cites different reports with their *asānīd*. Most of these reports had already been mentioned by his predecessors. However, we observe that he places particular stress on those reports which point out Aaron's part in this procedure. It is also worth mentioning that he associates the sound of the calf with *istidrāj*

[103] *Ibid.*, XI.235
[104] *Ibid.*, XI.235
[105] *Ibid.*, XI.240

(pervasiveness), *imhāl* (concession of a delay), *ikhtibār* (test), *miḥna* (trial, test).[106] In addition, he gives the name of the calf as *bahmūt* on the authority of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.[107] Attention should be paid to this identification. The Hebrew word *bᵉhema* is used to refer to both domestic and wild animals, but mostly to domestic. Its plural form is *bᵉhēmōt*, which appears with a special nuance in Job 40:15.[108] The word *bahmūt* seems to be an Arabization of *bᵉhēmōt*. Interestingly, at the end of the Book of Job, Yahweh challenges Job to show his mastery over the great creatures, *bᵉhēmōt* and *leviathan*, which are symbolic of cosmic forces that at times are hostile to Yahweh's rule.[109] By the same token Sāmirī had used the calf as an alternative to God. Be that as it may, we may infer from Ibn Kathīr's approach to the interpretation of the verses that the reports are valid as long as they were transmitted on the authority of reliable narrators, so their diversity does not cause any serious problem.

5.8. The Subject of the Verb *Nasiya* (He has forgotten)

An issue that preoccupies virtually all of the commentators on this verse is the precise specification of *nasiya*, 'who has forgotten?' Classical exegetes of the Qur'an have usually interpreted its subject as Moses, but occasionally as Sāmirī. According to Ṭabarī there is a dispute among the *ahl al-ta'wīl* about the subject and meaning of the verb *nasiya*, 'he has forgotten'. Ṭabarī tells us that some have thought that God described the attitude of Sāmirī in this verse, that he disregarded the religion that was revealed to Moses by God, namely Islam. The subject is Sāmirī, he is the forgetful person. This opinion, supported by the tradition from Ibn ᶜAbbās, asserts that Sāmirī left the religion of Islam. On the other hand, Ṭabarī lists eight reports which indicate Moses as the subject of the verb, then he concludes that Sāmirī said that Moses forgot his lord here and went to seek him in another place. This is the best interpretation because there is a consensus among the *ahl al-ta'wīl* about it and the verb *nasiya*,

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[106] Ibn Kathīr, III.162

[107] *Ibid.*, III.162; Thaᶜlabī also mentions this name in his *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*, 146; Ibn Abī Ḥātim records a report from ᶜAlī b. al-Ḥusain, Hishām b. ᶜAmmār, Ṣadaqa b. ᶜAmr al-Ghassānī, ᶜIbād b. al-Maysar; the name of the calf which the Israelites worshipped is *yahbūth*. (Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ᶜAẓīm*, in Asad M. Ṭayyib (eds.), Riyāḍ-Mecca: ᶜArabiyya Saᶜūdiyya 1997, V.1571)

[108] N. Kiuchi, 'Bᶜhema', in Willem A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis,* Cumbria: Paternoster Press 1997, I.612-3; Job 40:15 'Consider the chief of the beasts, the crocodile, who devours cattle as if they were grass.' This beast has been variously identified as hippopotamus, crocodile, elephant, and whale. (N. Kiuchi, *op. cit.*, I.612)

[109] J. Paul Maarteen, 'Leviathan', in Willem A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Cumbria: Paternoster Press 1997, II.779

placed after Moses, supports this view. Out of eight reports only two, which are traced back to Mujāhid, identify the person who says 'he has forgotten his lord' with the people of Moses rather than Sāmirī.[110] Ṭabarī bases his opinion on the mainstream tradition. The conclusion of the majority guides his preference. He favours the explicit meaning and significance of the text.

With the exception of Baghawī,[111] all the exegetes mention both subjects, though their presentation is not as long as Ṭabarī's. However, Rāzī brings forward two interesting anecdotes which are worth mentioning. One group believed that this calf was the creator of the earth and heavens. It was also believed that the people around the calf were mad, and so not responsible for what they did. Rāzī is determined to reject this interpretation on rational grounds. He considers it impossible for a multitude of men to become insane simultaneously. In his interpretation of related passages in the verse of Baqara, Rāzī brings in extra information. He says that it is not possible to accept that a whole people endowed with reason agreed upon the divinity of the calf. The main cause of their belief in this calf was Sāmirī's tricks. The Children of Israel were familiar with the miracles of Moses. Sāmirī told them 'Moses had a *ṭilsīm* (talisman) which had a great effect on the world. Moses did much work with the help of this talisman. I also have a talisman like Moses.'[112] The second step taken by Rāzī is to identify this people with the *ḥulūliyya*,[113] who hold it legitimate for God to be incarnate or for His attributes to descend into bodies. Clearly, he is against every kind of anthropomorhic interpretation. He also points out that the sound of the calf does not suit divinity.[114] Besides this identification, Rāzī attempts to determine the object of the same verb; 'what did Moses forget?' Rāzī's answer is brief: 'the time of return'.[115] He makes no further comment.

5.9. The Disapproval of the Action of the Children of Israel

'Did they not see that it could not return them a word (for answer), and that it had no power either to harm them or to do them good?' 20:89.

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[110] Ṭabarī, XVI.200-201
[111] Baghawī, III.229
[112] Rāzī, II.75
[113] In another place he also adds the name of the group as *mujassima*. (Razī, II.75)
[114] Rāzī, XXII.104; Qurṭubī also makes a similar comment on this verse. (Qurṭubī, XI.236)
[115] Rāzī, XXII.104

'And the people of Moses made in his absence, out of their ornaments, the image of a calf. It had a sound. Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to the way? They took it for worship and they were wrong-doers', 7:148.

These verses are concerned with some aspects of the calf. Ṭabarī, as is his usual style, mentions some reports and says that the main reason for this test is to distinguish the people who had a correct faith from those in whose hearts there was the disease of doubt.[116] This interpretation of Ṭabarī adds nothing new or unusual to the original meaning of the verses.

Ṭūsī considers that 20:89 refers to a sudden awakening of the Israelites to a realisation of their fault[117] but he makes no further comment on it. A similar approach is found in his treatment of 7:147. Ṭūsī says that God's questions are rhetorical and contain a denial of what the Israelites did, as if He was asking how they could worship the calf while witnessing its inability to speak and lead them to good. Ṭūsī closes the discussion by glossing the expression 'they took (ittakhazū) the calf and they were wrongdoers' as 'they directed their worship to the wrong place.'[118] This is a very important point, because if the word ittikhāz is understood as ʿibādah (worship), the share of the people in forming the calf becomes very limited. What he is trying to say is that the Children of Israel are passive agents and have no effective role in the formation of the calf. So the absence of Sāmirī's name in surah Aʿrāf does not cause any significant problem because this gloss shows that there is no discrepancy between these two Qur'anic accounts. It should be noted that Zamakhsahrī explicitly draws attention to this nuance in his commentary and glosses the expression ittakhazūhu as ʿabadūhu. It is safe to assume that Zamakhsharī's primary source is Ṭūsī and it is also reasonable to argue that Ṭūsī has this nuance in mind although he does not express it explicitly. Zamakhsharī also claims that the attribution of this action to the people as a whole is due to their acceptance, because although perhaps only one man among them did or said something, his action or words were seen generally accepted, such as the 'banū tamīm said or did this or that means that only one among them did or said; however, all the people were content with his actions...[119] He reaches this conclusion by a rational and semantic explanation of the verse.

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[116] Ṭabarī, XVI.202
[117] Ṭūsī, VII.199
[118] *Ibid.*, IV.578-9
[119] Zamakhsharī, II.117-8

Rāzī considers 20:89 as a cornerstone for the rejection of the divinity of the calf. In order to support his claim Rāzī quotes another verse '...O my father! why worship you that which hear not nor see, nor can it aught avail you', 19:42, with the anecdote that Moses mostly used to apply to the *dalāil-u ibrāhīm* (proofs of Abraham.)[120]

Furthermore, Rāzī, having stressed this verse, makes a very interesting point 'this verse indicates the necessity of inspection of the knowledge of God.'[121] He feels free to bring the verse to a new dimension. He cites other verses to support his suggestion. He also narrates one polemical anecdote: some Jews came to ᶜAlī and said, 'You did not bury your prophet until you disputed among yourselves.' ᶜAlī, in his response to them, said 'We only differed upon it, we did not dispute about it;[122] but, you asked your prophet to make a god for you before your feet had dried after passing the sea.'[123] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is precise, while Qurṭubī is more interested in grammatical than in lexical explication. Moreover Qurṭubī also refers to the omission of the letter *ha* after *an* in *an lā yarjiᶜu*. To justify it he quotes two poems by anonymous poets.[124]

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[120] Rāzī, XXII.104

[121] *Ibid.*, XXII.104

[122] *innamā ikhtalafnāᶜanhu wamā ikhtalafnā fīhi.*

[123] Rāzī, XXII.105

[124] Qurṭubī, XI.236

Chapter Six

The Analysis of 20:92-97

This chapter is divided into four sub-sections. The first sub-section is devoted to the interpretation of 20:92-94 and 7:150. Here we will extensively analyse the exegetes' various attitudes towards the dialogue between Moses and Aaron. In the second sub-section we will focus on the explanation of 20:95-96. Here our main subject matter is the reports concerning Sāmirī's childhood. In the remaining sub-sections we will discuss Sāmirī's punishment here and hereafter, together with the fate of the calf in 20:97.

6.1. Dialogue between Moses and Aaron

'(Moses) said: O Aaron! What held you back, when you did see them gone astray', 20:92

'That you followed me not? Have you then disobeyed my order?' 20:93

'Aaron replied; O son of my mother! Clutch not my beard nor (the hair of) my head. Truly I feared you should say; you have caused a division among the Children of Israel and you did not respect my word', 20:94

'...(Moses) seized his brother by the head, dragging him toward him. Aaron said; Son of my mother! The people did judge me weak and almost killed me. Oh make not my enemies to triumph over me and place me not among the evil-doers! 7:150

Having spoken to his people, Moses directed his speech to his brother. Both of these widely separated passages of the Qur'an, 7:150 and 20:92-94, refer to the same episode, namely the dialogue between Aaron and Moses. There is no inconsistency in the reply of the two brothers as some Western scholars[1] allege, and it is also shown that Aaron did his utmost to stop the people from committing the sin of worshipping the calf and to maintain the unity of the Children of Israel.

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[1] According to Halperin, there is a contradiction in Aaron's reply and the verses are unintelligible with the exception of reference to *Exodus* 32. (Halperin, *op. cit.*, 81)

180

Ṭabarī remarks on the existence of a dispute over the reason why Moses should have blamed his brother. The report from Ibn ᶜAbbās makes it clear that Aaron took his place among the people who did not worship the calf, while the worshippers were adoring it, but he was afraid of taking the believers away with him and leaving the unbelievers there. The second report regarding this verse is attributed to Ibn Zayd, who explains the words *allā tattabiᶜani* as 'leave them'. According to the third report, which is narrated on the authority of unknown individuals, Aaron was accused of failing to protect the people from dissension.[2] Another report, from Ibn Jurayj, goes further, putting forward the view that Moses commanded Aaron to come to aid of the Children of Israel but Aaron was not able to do so and therefore was blamed.[3] In addition, Ṭabarī points out that there is a dispute among the *ahl* ᶜ*ilm* about the meaning of Aaron's separation of the people. According to Ibn Zayd's understanding, Aaron was concerned that although some of them obeyed him others did not. In the opinion of some, Aaron was afraid of a clash between believers and unbelievers and sought to prevent them from killing each other.[4] In addition to these traditional commentaries, Ṭabarī provides his own commentary, basing his opinion on the report from Ibn ᶜAbbās: 'Moses blamed his brother due to Aaron's neglecting to follow Moses with those believers who obeyed him.'[5] Clearly, Ṭabarī's conclusion, in contrast to those of later exegetes, does not take prophetic immunity from sin very much into consideration.

Baghawī starts by questioning the reason for Aaron's silence while he witnessed the Children of Israel going astray: 'Aaron was afraid that the Children of Israel would become divided into two groups and fight one another if he took the believers and followed Moses.' Therefore he was faced with Moses' accusation, as he took hold of Aaron's beard and a lock of his hair.[6] Clearly, Baghawī's comment looks like an Arabic paraphrase of the Qur'anic verse. Elsewhere, two definitions of the kinship between Aaron and Moses are offered by Baghawī: 'Aaron and Moses were brothers with the same father and mother, and Aaron was three years older than Moses. The Israelites liked Aaron because he was less ill-tempered (than Moses), *layyin al-*

[2] Ṭabarī, XVI.203
[3] *Ibid.*, XVI.203
[4] *Ibid.*, XVI.204
[5] *Ibid.*, XVI.204
[6] Baghawī, III.229; Interestingly, none of the classical exegetes refers to the anecdote narrated by Ibn Hishām on the authority of Saᶜīd b. al-Khudrī, who says that the prophet Muhammad mentioned his meeting with Aaron (during *miᶜrāj*) and described him as a person with white

ghaḍab.' The opposite report is also cited: '(it is also said) that they had the same mother but different fathers.'[7] Baghawī fails to mention any authority for these reports, but he enumerates the details without censuring the different interpretations. It is fair to say that like Ṭabarī, Baghawī allows the reader to select which report he prefers although he presents fewer choices than Ṭabarī. On the other hand, the presence of large quantities of reports, as Peter Heath explains, reveals that the exegetical narrative has been arranged to answer the question, 'what happened?' rather than 'what does it mean?'[8]

Ṭūsī, before dealing with 20:91, begins by examining the expression 'O son of my mother...' in 20:94. He devotes nearly one page (including the accounts of Aʿrāf) to the interpretation of this verse, which indicates his considerable interest in this expression. He mentions different readings of the word *umm* and includes its grammatical explanations. He also adduces evidence from unnamed poets. Regarding the interpretation of 7:149 he mainly tries to explain why Aaron addressed Moses specifically with the expression 'O my mother's son' instead of some other expression. In his reply Ṭūsī relates from Ḥasan that Moses and Aaron had the same mother and father; however, Aaron referred to the mercy of their mother to gain his brother's forgiveness, like today's Arabs who use the same expression in their speech.[9]

After giving this information Ṭūsī turns back to make a brief comment on 20:91. This verse deals with those Children of Israel who want to wait for Moses' return to see what he would do with the calf. Ṭūsī is content with the semantic explanation of two key words, *nabraḥa* and *ʿākifīn*, in this verse without going into any detail.

The interpretation of the following verse merits attention due to Ṭūsī's undeniable influence on many Shiʿite and Sunni exegetes. The verse deals with Moses' enquiry about Aaron's failure to fulfil his command. In order to interpret 20:92-3, Ṭūsī cites two reports which are traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Jurayj: according to Ibn ʿAbbās it means 'what stopped you from following me and bringing those people who

hair and a long beard (Ibn Hishām, II.16); however it is reasonable to assume that they were aware of it.
[7] Baghawī, II.202
[8] Peter Heath, 'Creative Hermeneutics', *Arabica* 36 (1989) 187
[9] Ṭūsī, IV.583; VII.200; Before Ṭūsī, Ṭabarī also refers to the same topic. He interpreted it as Aaron's attempt to gain forgiveness from Moses by appealing to the mercy of their mother (Ṭabarī, IX.68). This psychological approach of Ṭabarī's is pure interpretation which depends on reason.'

have confessed their faith?' Ibn Jurayj's explanation is connected with the worshippers of the calf: 'What stopped you acting to prevent their disbelief?'[10] Like many exegetes Ṭūsī is at pains to solve the lexical difficulty in *allā* (*an+lā*) *tattabiʿani*. Having judged it grammatically *zāʾid* (excessive) he indicates another passage in the Qurʾan where a similar construction is employed: '(Allāh) said: What prevented you (O Iblīs) that you did not prostrate', *mā manaʿaka allā tasjuda...* 7:12.

A similar approach is evident in the interpretation of 'you then disobeyed my order', 20:93. Ṭūsī states that although it looks like a question it is in fact not. The purpose of it is *taqrīr* (establishing the issue) because Moses definitely knows that Aaron would not disobey his commandment.[11] Bearing in mind the prophetic immunity from sin, Ṭūsī disapproves of the attribution of disobedience to Aaron. So it must not be taken literally. Furthermore, the interpretation of Aaron's reaction to his brother when Moses took hold of his beard and head is clearly strongly influenced by Ṭūsī's theological understanding of these verses. He lists two interpretations which explain that Moses' seizing his brother's beard is not to be seen as humiliation. According to the first comment, it was customary at that time for men to grasp each other's beards upon meeting. Ṭūsī compares this custom with the custom of his day, the shaking of hands when meeting. In his second comment Ṭūsī briefly states that Moses dealt with Aaron as if dealing with himself, so there is no blame in his action.[12] In another place Ṭūsī provides information which more fully explains the second comment. Quoting from Abū Bakr Ikhshīd, he says that the people of the time of Moses used to practise this custom when they wanted to complain about someone, and not for the sake of humiliation, although later this custom changed. According to Ṭūsī, this explanation is put forward by Jubbāʾī.[13] Likewise, Ṭūsī records another interpretation which explain the reason for Moses' behaviour towards Aaron: He (it is not clear who 'He' is) said that Moses took hold of Aaron's head to tell him secretly what he wanted to tell.[14]

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[10] Ṭūsī, VII.201

[11] *Ibid.*, VII.201; Ṭabarsī also makes the same point in his exegesis and most probably derives it from Ṭūsī's commentary. It should be noted that Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār raises a very interesting question regarding the interpretation of this verse. He asks how can it be permissible for the prophet whom God has educated to treat Pharaoh in a very polite way and to behave rudely towards his brother? In response he says that the literal meaning of the verse does not indicate that Moses misbehaved towards his brother. Even, if we take the verse literally it does not show that Moses is angry with his brother; his anger is directed against his people. (ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *op. cit.*, 257)

[12] Ṭūsī, VII.201

[13] *Ibid.*, IV.581

[14] *Ibid.*, IV.582-3

We find that there is an extreme scarcity of traditional material regarding this matter, which is why many exegetes bring forward rational explanations to clarify Moses' and Aaron's position. It is evident that both Aaron and Moses are decisively vindicated by the above comments. Ṭūsī goes further, again examining the same topic in connection with 7:151 'Moses said: O my Lord! Forgive me and my brother...'. In the verse Moses asks forgiveness for himself and his brother. Ṭūsī's possible interpretations are as follows: first, the verse '...the people judged me weak and were about to kill me...', 7:150 implies that Aaron does not fall short, *taqṣīr*,[15] of denying the people who worshipped the calf. So he is not blameworthy. The second comment belongs to Abū ʿAlī, who points out that the Children of Israel understood that Moses did not take hold of Aaron's head out of anger but dealt with his brother the way he would have dealt with himself. Besides giving these two interpretations Ṭūsī explicitly states that Moses did not pray to God to forgive him and his brother because they had committed a minor or a major sin, but because of his desire to become closer to God. At this juncture, it should be understood that Ṭūsī has certain opponents in mind, those who claimed that a prophet may commit a minor sin. Ṭūsī is determined to reject this proposal: 'The prophets commit neither minor nor major sin.' The reason, according to Ṭūsī, is very logical: 'Committing a sin leads the people to scorn the prophets' call. They are far from this kind of scorn'.[16] Ṭūsī places great stress on the prophetic immunity from sin. It is also remarkable that Ṭūsī's presentation heavily depends on rational argument, or some accounts of earlier Mutazilites, together with continual reference to other Qur'anic verses. It is also not difficult to see the traces of his methodology and comments in later Sunni and Shiʿīte exegetes such as Rāzī and Ṭabarsī.

According to Zamakhsharī, Moses blamed Aaron, though Aaron had warned the Children of Israel. It is worth noting here that Zamakhsharī uses a number of adjectives to show that Moses was an ill-tempered man. In religious matters he could not tolerate anything but the true way. Therefore, when he saw his people worshipping the calf, he threw down the Tablets and went to his brother and seized his hair and beard. On the other hand, Aaron also gave a reason in order to explain why he avoided taking any

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[15] Qurṭubī also makes a similar point in his work, but it is not clear whether he has derived it from Rāzī's or from Ṭūsī's commentary.

[16] Ṭūsī, IV.584

action against the people.[17] Zamakhsharī devotes six lines to explaining Moses' character and the situation. If we disregard the anecdote that Aaron was bold, most of them can be considered rational explanations of the verse. However, we observe that while Zamakhsharī is narrating the event he seems content to exaggerate the story. It is possible that he merely wishes to impress the reader with his literary style. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's analysis of 7:150 is pertinent. Having taken the Qur'anic expression 'Moses seized his brother by the hair...' literally he considers metaphorical explanations to be weak.[18]

Rāzī provides a far more extensive commentary on 20:90 than any of his predecessors. He devotes two pages to this verse. One of the most characteristic features of his presentation is his hortatory style. Unlike previous explanations there is no division or subdivision in the interpretation of this verse. First of all, he places stress on the compassion of Aaron, *shafqatu hārūn*, which moved him to warn the people. If he had not warned the people he would have disagreed with God, and it is not permissible for any prophet to take such an attitude. Rāzī then includes material from the sayings of the prophet to show the importance of *amr bi al-maᶜrūf* (enjoining right conduct) and sympathy for the people when they are suffering. Furthermore, he adds some information from the life of the companions and the followers. It seems that most of these reports derive from works of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* (encouraging the people to do good and preventing them from doing bad), which are the *sine qua non* of exhortation. At this point we can mention only two examples: first, God revealed to Joshua b. Nun that he was going to destroy forty thousand good men and sixty thousand wicked men from among his people. Joshua b Nun asked 'O my Lord, they are the wicked, they deserve it, but what about the good people?' God answers: 'They do not warn the people whom I am against.'[19] The second example deals with compassion. According to a report, when the prophet and the companions saw a young person beside the door of the mosque the prophet said 'Whoever wants to see a person from hell should look at this man.' The young man heard what the prophet said and then he went away and cried, 'O my Lord this is Your messenger declaring that I am from the people of hell. I know that he is truthful, and so I beg You to free the community of Muhammad from hell, by keeping me there. Suddenly Gabriel came to the prophet and told him how this

[17] Zamakhsharī, II.551
[18] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, II.457
[19] Rāzī, XXII.105

young man prayed. Because of his compassion it was declared that he was forgiven.[20] The point Rāzī wishes to make is that Aaron did what the prophet could be expected to do. Thus he ends on a religious note, emphasising the practical applications that could be made of the subject with which he has dealt: 'It is obligatory upon the Muslim to warn the people and feel sympathy for the weak.'

One assertion he makes in connection with this verse is of particular interest. In fact his argument is polemical in nature, but decorated with the elegance of the verse. His target is the Rāfiḍa (a Shiʿīte group) who considered the prophetic *ḥadīth* "ʿAlī's place in relation to me is like Aaron's place in relation to Moses', as crucial for the caliphate of ʿAlī.[21] Rāzī's response to them is remarkable: If ʿAlī had thought that the people were doing wrong he would definitely have fought against them. He would have gone and proclaimed what he believed. Likewise, the hostile crowds did not prevent Aaron from telling the truth and he did not conceal his opinion. At this stage, it should be noted that, before Rāzī, Ibn ʿAṭiyya also discussed a similar issue in his exegesis. His argument is based on 7:142: 'take my place among my people, do what is right and do not follow the path of the wrongdoers.' Ibn ʿAṭiyya says that the Arabic expression *ukhlufnī* is rendered 'be my caliph.' Basing his judgement on this verse Ibn ʿAṭiyya rejects the Shiʿīte claim that ʿAlī was appointed as a caliph by the prophet. Ibn ʿAṭiyya explains that Aaron led the Israelites only temporarily, not forever. When Moses came back Aaron was removed from his office. Similarly, ʿAlī was the successor of the prophet only in the temporary absence of the prophet; when Muhammad died Alī's leadership did not continue.[22]

In commenting on the same verse Rāzī, like Ibn ʿAṭiyya, renders the Arabic expression *ukhlufnī* as 'be my caliph' and *wa aṣliḥ* as 'to become a reformer, *muṣliḥ*.' Furthermore, he debates the question whether Aaron was actually a prophet in the same sense as Moses or not. Once again the richest formulation is found in the commentary of Rāzī, who discusses some speculative interpretations: if it is said Aaron shares the prophethood with Moses how can Moses make Aaron his caliph, for Aaron's position in sharing the prophethood is better than being a mere caliph of Moses. When, as a result of Aaron's action, Moses charges his brother with the duties of caliph, he humiliates him. Rāzī's reply to this objection is that both share the prophecy; however

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[20] *Ibid.*, XXII.106
[21] Shiʿīte exegesis and hagiography have recognised strong affinities between Aaron and ʿAlī.

Moses is the *aṣl* (principal). Rāzī sheds further light on this aspect of the problem by discussing a related dilemma, namely if it is said that Aaron was a prophet and by definition a prophet only does what is right and good, then Moses' instruction to Aaron that he should do good implies a certain weakness in Aaron's character, for it is nonsense to instruct a man who is already righteous to become righteous. The answer according to Rāzī is simple: Moses' command is only for the purpose of emphasis. This is in line with what is said elsewhere in the Qur'an, 'And when Abraham said (unto his Lord): My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead, He said: Do you not believe? Abraham said: Yea, but (I ask) in order that my heart may be at ease...', 2:160.[23] It is worth mentioning that Ṭūsī and Ṭabarsī record a similar interpretation; however, Ṭabarsī's main concern in his explanation is different from that of Ṭūsī and Rāzī. In brief, having compared Moses (as a leader) with Aaron, Ṭabarsī draws a radically different conclusion, in that he makes a distinction between the offices of the 'prophethood' and the 'imāmate'.[24] So whilst Ṭabarsī's commentary is clearly weighted in favour of a Shiʿīte interpretation, Rāzī is determined to eliminate all traces of Shiʿīsm in his presentation.[25]

Finally Rāzī separates the messages of the verse from each other and deals with them individually to show the logic behind them. First, Aaron restrains them from falsehood by using the expression 'you are being tried in this.' After that he invites them to the knowledge of God: 'and verily, your Lord is the Most Beneficent.' At the third stage he invites them to the knowledge of prophecy with the command 'follow me.' Then he calls on them to abide by the law, saying 'obey my order.' Rāzī concludes 'this is a suitable classification because we must begin by removing harmful things from the road, which in this context means the removing of doubt. The second step is the knowledge of God, which is the main root, then the prophecy and the law follow the root.' Rāzī also pays special attention to the use of the word *raḥmān* in this verse. Due to this *ṣifāt* (Attribute of God) God saved the people from Pharaoh, but in spite of Aaron's marvellous presentation they preferred blind imitation and denied all

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[22] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, II.450

[23] Rāzī, XIV.227

[24] Ṭabarsī, IV.473; Ṭūsī, IV.565

[25] Rāzī, XIV.227; Ālūsī makes a clear distinction between the offices of Moses and Aaron. Although Aaron is three years older than Moses, Moses is higher, *martabaṭ*ⁿ, than Aaron because he holds *risālah* and *riyāsah* while Aaron is his vizier. Quoting the philosopher Ibn al-ʿArabī Ālūsī says that Aaron is the *nabī* (prophet) as *bi ḥukm al-aṣāla* (principal) and *rasūl* (messenger) *bi ḥukm al-tabaʿiyya*, who follows the *sharīʿah* (law) of Moses. (Ālūsī, IX.44, 67)

187

four steps, saying 'we will not stop worshipping it until Moses returns to us', as if they rejected Aaron's order. This is, according to Rāzī, the common habit of imitators.[26] This statement is Rāzī's concluding remark, however, the above-mentioned excellent arguments he employs to support his presentation show his concern to uncover extraordinary ranges of meaning by seeking out every possible perspective of coherence in the sequence and selection of words or phrases in the Qur'an.

Rāzī's comments on 20:92-93 are long and complex. Being convinced that the prophets are free from sin he proposes a number of questions and offers detailed responses to them. Each of these is provided with carefully subdivided possibilities and arguments, at least half of which bear the stamp of his intellectuality. He begins with the rhetorical question whether Moses commanded Aaron to follow him or not. According to Rāzī, those who take the first view have two options, depending on whether Aaron obeyed or disobeyed. If Aaron obeyed him, Moses' blaming him would be a sin because to blame a person who is not guilty is wrong. If Aaron did not fulfil Moses' command, Aaron would be a sinner. On the other hand, if we hold the notion that Moses did not command Aaron to follow him and bring with him the Children of Israel, it is nonsense to blame Aaron for his disobedience. So from every viewpoint the sin must be attributed to either Aaron or Moses.[27]

After tackling these questions in their logical order, Rāzī concentrates in the second stage of his argument on the expression of the verses to clarify the above-mentioned issues. First, he discusses the meaning of the verse '...you then disobeyed my order.' If it is true, Aaron is the sinner and if not, Moses is telling a lie. Second, 'O son of my mother! Seize me not by my beard...' shows that Aaron did what must be done, so if Moses seized his brother's beard before investigating the situation, Moses committed a sin; if Moses seized his brother's beard after investigating what Aaron did in his absence, Moses is again the sinner. On the other hand, if seizing the beard is permissible, Aaron's objection to it is a sin; if it is not permissible, what Moses did is a sin. All these points are rejected by Rāzī, who insists that the prophets could not have been guilty of a sin.[28] He then argues in more detail; First, he makes a distinction between disobedience and the abandonment of the better one, *tark al-awlā*. What Rāzī

[26] *Ibid.*, XXII.106-7
[27] Rāzī, XXII.107
[28] *Ibid.*, XXII.107-8

is trying to say is that one of them did better while the other abandoned doing better.[29] Second, Rāzī explains why Moses seized his brother's beard although Aaron requested him not to do so. Moses dealt with Aaron as he would have dealt with himself. When one is angry he bites his nails or seizes his beard, however, Aaron prevents Moses from acting in this way in order that his people do not misunderstand Moses' action. Although this interpretation does not originate with Rāzī, he develops it and connects it with Aaron's pure religious intention.[30] The third point is similar to the second that there was an intense bias against Moses among the Children of Israel, whereas they showed particular favouritism towards Aaron. In one instance, when Aaron was absent quite a long time, they came to Moses and accused him, saying 'you killed Aaron.' So when Moses returned after forty nights he wanted to inform his brother secretly about what had happened. Aaron was afraid of this because the people might think about Moses what he did not deserve. The final interpretation is, as Rāzī states, Zamakshari's. Moses was an ill-tempered person and when he saw his people worshipping the calf anger seized him, prompted by his religious consciousness; he then threw down the Tablets and directed himself against his brother.[31] At this juncture, Rāzī raises a very interesting question together with alternative answers. The question is simple: whether Moses remained conscious and responsible or not after this incident. If he was responsible, his anger should be considered a sin. But no one would accept that Moses was not responsible because he was a prophet.[32] Evidently Rāzī is not in favour of Zamakhshari's explanation. While placing stress on the theory of the sinlessness of the prophets, Rāzī leaves the preference to the reader.

Qurṭubī's treatment of 20:90 is quite brief and is merely a paraphrase of the verse. In his remarks on the following verse Qurṭubī argues that the Children of Israel wanted to wait for Moses to see whether he would worship like them. According to Qurṭubī, they assumed that Moses worshipped the calf. Qurṭubī's exegesis is derived from the Qur'anic presentation. In order to expand the scope of the Qur'anic narrative he brings in some reports on such matters as how many people did not worship the calf and Moses' witnessing their test.

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29 *Ibid.*, XXII.108
30 *Ibid.*, XXII.108
31 *Ibid.*, XXII.108
32 *Ibid.*, XXII.108

The brief conclusion of the interpretation of 20:91 is the first step in the lengthy explanation of 7:150 and 20:92-4. Because of the fact that Qurṭubī gives more space to the interpretation of this topic in 7:150 than in 20:92-4 we begin by dealing with 7:150.

Qurṭubī offers two general interpretations, the second of which is more specifically polemical, the first being more general and not necessarily related to a particular group or event. Bearing in mind the arguments and activities of some of his opponents, Qurṭubī first mentions the custom in his own locality which allows people to take off their clothes or pierce them when they are in an ecstatic trance. They are unconscious and nobody has the right to blame them for their actions; this is also the case of Moses, who threw the Tablets without knowing what he did. Qurṭubī severely criticises the people who distort the meaning of this verse for their own ends. Qurṭubī goes on to provide some information which supplements the above approach:

> Abū al-Faraj al-Jawziyya remarked 'who said that Moses threw the Tablets to break them? The Qur'an only says "he threw", so from where do we conclude that he broke the Tablets deliberately? If it is believed that they were broken purposely how do we know this? So how could the behaviour of these ignorant people be compared with the attitude of the prophets?'

Furthermore, Qurṭubī grasps another dimension of the verse. He points out the legal dimension of their action on the authority of ʿUqayl: 'The Prophet prohibited the damage of possessions.'[33] In the following pages Qurṭubī presents various details to show the lack of understanding of these degenerate mystics. However it is important to concede that, although most of his information is not directly related to the interpretation of the subject matter of the verse, it is interesting that he brings some of the unacceptable religious practices of his contemporaries into his exegesis. This at least indicates Qurṭubī's concern with the daily life of the Muslim communities of his time.

In dealing with Moses seizing his brother's head and pulling him towards himself, Qurṭubī heavily relies on the earlier exegetes. He begins by giving some unauthoritative information about Aaron's personality. Generally speaking almost all of his explanations derive from Rāzī and Ṭūsī. There is no need to repeat them here. However, there are some additional points worth mentioning, for example he records a strange report: 'Moses' treatment is motivated by the belief that Aaron inclined

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[33] Qurṭubī, XI.286

towards worshipping the calf together with the Children of Israel.' Qurṭubī is very quick to reject this: 'It is not permissible for the prophets.' It is also important to note that he pays attention to Moses' asking forgiveness for himself and his brother.[34] At this juncture, Qurṭubī makes a very interesting point: 'Moses asks forgiveness for himself because of his anger and he asks forgiveness for his brother.' The meaning of the latter request for forgiveness is to say 'O my Lord, forgive my brother if he falls short of performing his duties.' Qurṭubī uses the verb *qaṣṣara* in order to remove any doubt about the sinless status of the prophets. In connection with it Qurṭubī mentions 20:92-3: 'O Aaron, what stopped you when you saw them going astray, that you followed me not.' In response to this question, Aaron states that he left them because he feared he would be killed. Qurṭubī again derives from this verse a legal point which explains that silence is permitted to a man who is afraid of being killed. According to the jurist Ibn al-ʿArabī this verse is also a proof that the presence of anger cannot change the judgements, because Moses' anger does not change any of his actions, all of which, such as throwing the Tablets, seizing his brother's beard and fighting against the Angels, are consistent. Qurṭubī closes his discussion of the topic by quoting from Mahdawī: 'Moses' anger is for the sake of God and Aaron's silence about what the Israelites did is due to fear of their use of force against each other'.[35] So neither Moses nor Aaron committed sin.

Qurṭubī, like many exegetes, solves the lexical problem in *allā tattabiʿani* (the usage of *lā* after *an*), 20:93, by considering it *zā'id* (grammatically excessive). So the precise meaning of the verse is 'What stopped you from obeying me?' In addition, however, Qurṭubī offers three exegetical meanings. First, what stopped you from obeying me by denying them? Second, you should have known that you should have fought against them because if I were here I would fight against them. Third, what stopped you from following me? All of them are narrated with the formula 'it is said that'.[36]

The approach to the last part of the verse, 'You then disobeyed my order', 20:93, is similar. Qurṭubī's sentence 'the person who stays among the sinners is not a sinner unless he is content with their acts' sheds new light on the issue. Briefly, there is

[34] *Ibid.*, VII.289
[35] *Ibid.*, VII.290, Similar ideas are found in Ṭūsī 's commentary.
[36] *Ibid.*, XI.237; It seems Qurṭubī copies Ṭūsī's interpretation regarding the explanation of this expression.

nothing wrong with Aaron's attitude and the attribution of disobedience to Aaron should not be taken literally; his disobedience in fact consists in his staying with them only.[37] Then Qurṭubī again launches into a fiery polemic against the degenerate mystics. Although his argument is not directly related to the interpretation of the verse he is determined to reject the path of the mystics. He says

> Once Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭushī was asked about the permissibility of staying with the people who came together, mentioned the name of God and His messenger and then stood on the leather carpet with their sticks and danced until they lost consciousness. He criticised the mystics' way and associated them with misguidance and ignorance. The only way was the book of God and His messenger's path. The dance and the sense of being overwhelmed by the intensity of one's feeling was first introduced by Sāmirī and his people. They danced around the calf and lost their consciousness; this was the religiosity of the unbelievers.[38]

To point out the similarity between the worshippers of the calf and the degenerate mystics was an effective strategy designed to prevent people from associating with these mystics. Like every exegete, Qurṭubī was a child of his age. He paid great attention to his fellow countrymen's religious morality. Furthermore, he sent a message to the Muslim leaders to prevent the mystics from attending the mosques. He concluded that the action taken against them was approved by the four Imams.[39] After gaining the support of the authorities he used the relevant verses against his targets on every possible occasion.

Qurṭubī, in his comment on 20:94, explains Aaron's excuse: 'Aaron felt that they would shed blood in his absence; then Moses came and blamed him.' To support this interpretation Qurṭubī makes reference to 7:150. He lays great stress on the explanation of the expression lā tushmit (make not them rejoice). First of all he draws attention to the legal conclusion which is derived from this verse: 'It is forbidden to show delight about a Muslim's religious and worldly problems.' This point is backed up by two poems from unidentified poets. Qurṭubī uses them in his advocacy of religious piety. The hortatory style is dominant in his presentation. Besides this advice

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[37] *Ibid.*, XI.237

[38] *Ibid.*, XI.237; The dance around the calf in this narrative's rendition probably reflects the Biblical account of *Exodus*, xxxii:17-19.

[39] Qurṭubī, XI.237

Qurṭubī also puts forward a number of lexical, morphological explanations and different opinions about various readings of the expression.[40]

Commenting on 20:92-4, Ibn Kathīr connects these verses with 7:150-1. Repetition is frequent, and he tries to prove that there is nothing wrong with the attitude of Aaron. He explains the reason for Aaron's failure to follow Moses. Ibn Kathīr's concluding remark is worth mentioning: 'Ibn ᶜAbbās said that Aaron was a fearful and obedient person,[41] that is why Moses asks God to forgive him and his brother.'[42] So there is no need for further questioning.

6.2. Sāmirī's Childhood

'(Moses) said; what then is your case, O Sāmirī? He replied; I saw what they saw not, so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the messenger, and threw it (into the calf). Thus did my soul suggest to me. (Moses) said; get you gone! But your punishment in this life will be that you will say 'touch me not' and moreover you have a promise that will not fail. Now look at your god, of whom you have become a devoted worshipper, we will certainly (melt) it in a blazing fire and scatter it broad cast in the sea.' 20:95-97

Ṭabarī first concentrates on the meaning of the expression *famā khatbuka*.[43] He discusses two definitions of the word, namely *mā sha'nuka* or *amruka* and *mā laka*: 'What is the matter with you, O Sāmirī!' Ṭabarī attributes these two readings to earlier authorities.[44] Ṭūsī, like Ṭabarī, considers two standard interpretations of the expression. He adds that the origin of *khaṭab* is the greatness of the matter. In other words the meaning of the verse is to say 'what great thing causes you to do it?'[45] Although he does not give details his interpretation includes two general definitions of the Qur'anic

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[40] *Ibid.*, VII.291; XI.239

[41] Ibn Kathīr, III.163

[42] *Ibid.*, II.248

[43] The translations of the expression vary considerably: Yusuf Ali (Yusuf Ali, *op. cit.*, 809) translated it 'what than is your case, O Sāmirī?; A. J. Arberry (A. J. Arberry, *op. cit.*, 1983, 318) 'and you Sāmirī, what was your business.'; J. M. Rodwell (J. M. Rodwell, *op. cit.*, 100) 'what was your motive O Sāmirī.'; N. J. Dawood (N. J. Dawood, *op. cit.*, 230) 'Sāmirī, cried Moses, what had come over you?'; M. Pickthall (M. Pickthall, *op. cit.*, 232) 'what have you to say, O Sāmirī?' With the exception of Pickthall's translation, the translations are close to each other and agree with the traditional information. Although it is contrary to the generally accepted meaning, Pickthall's translation is original because he deduces the meaning of the expression from the verb *khaṭaba*, meaning 'make or deliver a speech', instead of the idiom 'what is your case or trouble?' A similar translation was made by Yahuda (A. S. Yahuda, *op. cit.*, 287 fn.24): 'what have you to say in making the golden calf', not 'what was your object.'

[44] Ṭabarī, XVI.204-5

expression. It should be noted that Ṭūsī deals with a number of points regarding the interpretation of this verse; however, most of his information is reminiscent of Ṭabarī's comment, though Ṭabarī's presentation is more elaborate than Ṭūsī's explanation. It is, however, important to acknowledge that Ṭūsī is very generous in his grammatical exposition.[46] Zamakhsharī and Rāzī equate the meaning of the expression *mā khaṭbuka* with *mā ṭalabuka* (what are your wishes). Furthermore, they explain that this expression indicates Moses' disapproval and Sāmirī's sin.[47] Having glossed the expression Ṭabarī begins to examine the following verses. Special attention is given to the meaning and the variant readings of the phrase *baṣurtu bimā lam yabṣurū*. The meaning of the verse 'I saw what they saw not' is equal to *ᶜalimtu bimā lam yaᶜlamū*. Ṭabarī then deals with the figure of Sāmirī and the miraculous events surrounding his birth and childhood:

> When Pharaoh killed the boys, Sāmirī's mother said that she would send him away from her in order not to see him and not to know about his death. Then she left him in a cave and closed it up on him. Gabriel came to him and fed him with his fingers; in one of his fingers there was milk, in another honey. And he continued to feed him until he had grown up. So when he saw him by the sea he recognised him, because of these past events, and he said 'I saw what you saw not.'[48]

Similar information is given by Baghawī, although he is reluctant to go into detail. The main stylistic feature of his presentation is to ask a question (generally in the passive form) and answer it (again in the passive), for example, 'if it is asked' how Sāmirī recognised Gabriel among the others, 'it is said that' at the time of his birth, all the other infant boys were being killed by Pharaoh; therefore out of fear her mother put him in a cave. Then God sent Gabriel to look after him.[49] The existence of elimination and addition in this brief narrative and others shows that there are some differences between Baghawī's presentation and Ṭabarī's. Furthermore, Baghawī frequently eliminates some common variant readings of the verses in his commentary. However,

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[45] Ṭūsī, VII.202
[46] *Ibid.*, VII.204-5
[47] Zamakhsharī, II.551; Rāzī, XXII.110
[48] Ṭabarī, XVI.204-205; There is another story about Sāmirī related to the same topic elsewhere on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās: 'When Pharaoh and his companions made for the sea, Pharaoh was mounted on a black stallion with a full tail. And when he made for the sea, the stallion was afraid to leap into the sea. Then Gabriel appeared before him on a mare in heat, and when the stallion saw her, he began chasing her. (...) But then Sāmirī knew Gabriel, because when his mother had been afraid that he would be slaughtered she had left him in a cave and had closed it up on him. Then Gabriel had come to him and fed him...' (Ṭabarī, II.64)
[49] Baghawī, III.229

by concurring on this anecdote both exegetes accept that Sāmirī, like Moses, was brought up by special care. Besides this special care, the absence of their parents bound them strongly together in a joint image of loneliness. However, Sāmirī fared better than Moses because Moses was looked after by Pharaoh's servant (an earthly creature) whereas Sāmirī was looked after by an angel (a heavenly creature). Gabriel, like Ḥayy b Yaqẓān's nurse mother (a doe),[50] represents the archetype of nature's bounty (God's favour). It nourishes Sāmirī on pure milk and honey, and raises him... It can also be said that its care is not limited to Sāmirī's physical needs, for it becomes the object of his hopes. Many years later he is still able to recognise it. This anecdote also supports the comment that Sāmirī was initially a believer, but later became a hypocrite.[51]

Ṭabarī also mentions a report from Sufyān concerning the reading of 20:96. Sufyān says that Ibn Masʿūd used to read this verse *faqabaḍtu qabḍaṭ⁽ᵃⁿ⁾ min athar faras al-rasūl* with the addition of *faras*.[52] All the reading systems are used by Ṭabarī to show nuance in meaning or as a hermeneutic device to extend the meaning of the verse. Ṭabarī does not stop here; he cites, on the authority of unknown persons, that the meaning of *baṣurtu* is *abṣartu*.[53] However, this does not make a significant difference. Following his usual procedure, Ṭabarī, after mentioning the verse 'I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the messenger', systematically lists three reports together with their *isnāds*. Two reports define *athar al-rasūl* as the footstep of Gabriel's horse while the other equates it plainly with the footprint of Gabriel.[54] Ṭabarī begins again by stating that the readers differed over the reading of the verse *baṣurtu bimā lam yabṣurū bihī*. Some people read it *lam tabṣurū* with a *t*. The difference between these two readings affects the meaning. If it is read with *y* it means the Children of Israel did not see or know, but if with *t* it means 'I saw what you (Moses) and your people did not see.' According to Ṭabarī both of them are acceptable because they are correct and

[50] Lenn Evan Goodman, *Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, New York: Twayne Publisher 1972, 61

[51] Ālūsī quotes a poem from an anonymous poet which indicates that he is an unbeliever at the beginning:

> if the person is not created as a believer
> he astonishes his guardians
> Mūsā b. Ẓafar (Sāmirī) who had been looked after by Gabriel became an infidel
> Mūsā b. ʿImrān (the prophet Moses) who had been looked after by Pharaoh became a messenger. (Ālūsī, XVI.244)

[52] Ṭabarī, II.64; Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾan*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1937, 61

[53] Ṭabarī, XVI.205

[54] *Ibid.*, XVI.205

well-known readings. If the first one is read it is possible that Moses did not know about the dust and this therefore does not affect the status of Moses.[55]

Ibn ᶜAṭiyya begins the interpretation of 20:96 with the identification of the words *rasūl* and *athar*. He says that *rasūl* refers to Gabriel while *athar* refers to the hoofprint of the horse of the messenger (Gabriel). Then he asks how Sāmirī could recognise Gabriel. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is not convinced by the traditional arguments of the classical exegetes. In fact, he does not accept the narration of Sāmirī's childhood, how his mother put him in a cave and how the Angel Gabriel used to feed and protect him.[56] Obviously Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is very determined to disbelieve these baseless reports, and this interpretation gives us a good understanding of his general attitude towards them. He does not give them more than a minimal place in his commentary. On the contrary, he favours a straightforward explanation of the verse.

In his interpretation of the verse 'I saw what you saw not', Zamakhsharī proposes two similar meanings of the verse: first, 'I know what they know not' which is familiar to us from Ṭabarī's commentary. Second, Zamakhsharī uses the verb *faṭina* in order to explain the verb *baṣara*.[57] Particular attention should be paid to the lexicographical aspect of this verb, because his selection is deliberate and aims to show how comprehensively Sāmirī knew (saw) what they did not. On the other hand he adds nothing substantial to the meaning and reading of the word with the exception of the explanation of the word *rasūl*. Following his usual procedure, Zamakhsharī poses the question (if you asked) why is he called *rasūl* instead of *jibrā'īl* (Gabriel) or *rūḥ al-quds* (Holy Spirit)? The point made by Zamakhsharī is as follows:

> God sent Gabriel to Moses to take him to Sinai for the appointment. Gabriel came riding the horse, *ḥayzūm*, *faras al-ḥayāt*. Sāmirī saw it and he felt there was something in it so he took the dust from the footprints of the horse of the messenger. It was also possible that he did not know Gabriel. When Moses asked him about his story he said 'I grasped ...'[58]

It is important to note that this interpretation indicates that Zamakhsharī on the one hand accepts the traditional materials about the dust taken from the hoofprints of the

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[55] *Ibid.*, XVI.205

[56] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, IV.61

[57] Zamakhsharī, II.551; Interestingly, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, one of the earliest exegetes, equates *baṣara* with *faṭana,* connoting a comprehensive knowledge. (Muqātil b. Sulaymān, III.40)

[58] Zamakhsharī, II.551

messenger's horse, but on the other disapproves of the reports regarding Sāmirī's childhood, though he does not say so explicitly.

Rāzī gives a summary of the various traditions concerning the reading and meaning of the word $qabḍat^{un}$ in his first *mas'ala*. In the second *mas'ala* he notes that all the exegetes have been unanimous on the meaning of *rasūl*, namely Gabriel, and that of *athar*, meaning the dust taken from the hoofprint of Gabriel's horse. However, the time and place of this event are a matter of dispute. According to the majority, Sāmirī saw it when the sea divided. On the other hand, ᶜAlī, holds that Sāmirī saw it when Gabriel came down to take Moses to Sinai.[59] Rāzī at this point asks an important question: 'Why has Sāmirī, alone among the Israelites, been granted the vision of Gabriel?'[60] The question is answered by the report related by Kalbī on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās: 'He recognised it because he saw Gabriel when he was a child.' Attention should be paid to this report, as it is evidently fundamentally different from similar reports in other exegeses. According to Rāzī's presentation of this report, it is said that when women gave birth they put their infants in caves out of fear of Pharaoh. These children were protected by angels as long as they stayed there. Sāmirī was taken and looked after by Gabriel. Clearly, Sāmirī was given exceptional treatment and was privileged over other newly born children. That is why Ibn Jurayj accepts two different meanings of the verse: 'I saw what they saw not' and 'I knew what they knew not.' Although he favours the first meaning he paraphrases the second as follows: 'I knew that the dust of the hoofprint of Gabriel's horse had a special feature,' namely 'to give life to things.'[61]

In connection with this interpretation Rāzī reminds us of Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī's objection to it. For Abū Muslim, the Qur'an does not identify the *rasūl* with Gabriel. On the contrary, the *rasūl* is Moses himself, while the meaning of *athar* is more general: the path, custom or Moses' way of life, which is seen by Sāmirī as a false direction.[62] It should be understood that Rāzī is aware of the advantages and disadvantages of this approach; however, he appreciates it to some extent and is ready to tolerate it. Nevertheless it is clear that Rāzī believes that the main reason behind Abū

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[59] Rāzī, XXII.110
[60] A similar question is found in Thaᶜlabī's *qiṣaṣ* and Baghawī's exegesis: how does Sāmirī recognise Gabriel? (Thaᶜlabī, 145; Baghawī, III.229) Also the affinity between Thaᶜlabī's comment and Rāzī's explanation is quite obvious.
[61] Rāzī, XXII.110; Nuwayrī also noted the same report. (Nuwayrī, XIII.224)
[62] Rāzī, XXII.111

Muslim's objection is his desire to be in disagreement with the majority of exegetes for the sake of disagreement. Despite this, however, he considers Abū Muslim to be closer to the truth than his Sunni counterparts for several reasons.[63] First of all, it is not customary to name Gabriel as a *rasūl*. According to a second explanation it is said that the implied meaning of *athar ḥāfir faras al-rasūl* is contrary to this identification. Thirdly, the reason why Sāmirī was singled out among the people and how he knew the virtue of the hoofprint of Gabriel's horse should be discussed. The narrative about Gabriel's taking care of Sāmirī in his childhood is not plausible. Furthermore, Rāzī argues that if Sāmirī had recognised Gabriel he would also have realised that Moses was God's messenger. The final comparison is also interesting. If it is permissible for non-believers to see or understand the virtue of the dust it can also be said that Moses had seen the virtue of the dust; furthermore, it can also be said that Moses had seen the virtues of certain other things, through which he performed miracles. So what is the difference between true miracles produced by prophets and non-believers' actions?[64] Obviously, Rāzī's rationality is always at work. It is safe to deduce from the above exegesis that Rāzī disapproves of the reports about the childhood of Sāmirī on rational grounds. Although he sometimes deals with unrelated issues his logical investigation leads him to this conclusion. His approach is significantly different to some of his predecessors' attitudes. However, we must admit that it is very difficult to evaluate the materials used by Rāzī in the interpretation of this verse. On the one hand, he accepts Ibn ʿAbbās' report in order to justify the comment that Sāmirī was brought up by Gabriel, while on the other he rejects the report on the basis of rational argument derived from one of the Mutazilite scholars.

Qurṭubī, like Rāzī, explains by various reports what, how, why, when and where Sāmirī saw and formed the calf. These reports are mostly related on the authority of unknown individuals. According to ʿAlī (may God be pleased with him) when Gabriel came to take Moses to the mountain Sāmirī saw him and took a handful of dust from the footprint of the messenger. It is also said that according to Sāmirī's description, the space between two steps of Gabriel's horse is as far as the eye can reach.[65] Another report, preceded by the formula 'it is said', says that Sāmirī saw Gabriel riding on a female horse in heat. He brought her near Pharaoh's stallion, and he smelled her. When

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[63] It seems Mawdūdī also appreciates this interpretation. (Mawdūdī, VII.117)
[64] Rāzī, XXII.111
[65] This story is narrated by Thaʿlabī on the authority of Kalbī. (Thaʿlabī, 144)

he smelled her, Gabriel made her advance, and the stallion advanced with Pharaoh on his back.[66] Pharaoh's troop saw that he had entered the sea, and they entered with him. The report with which we are familiar contains the anecdote about Sāmirī's mother, who had been afraid that Pharaoh would slaughter her son and therefore left him in a cave.[67] An anonymous report places 'Gabriel's appearance' before their passing the sea, whereas ᶜAlī's report places it afterwards. However, no matter how much they differ over details, there is some agreement on the general meaning of the verses. Although Qurṭubī presents these reports slightly differently all of them are mentioned by earlier commentators several times in their exegeses.

One final point with regard to the reading of the verse *faqabaḍtu qabḍat^{an}* needs to be explained. The information provided by Ṭabarī is as follows: 'contrary to the readers in different regions, *qurrā al-amṣār*, the letter *ḍat* in the verse is read as *ṣad* by Ḥasan, Qatāda and others.' Ṭabarī explains the differences between the two readings: '*qabaḍtu* means grasping with the palm of the hand while *qabaṣtu* means grasping with the fingers.'[68] In fact, most of the classical exegetes refer to the details of the variant readings of some of the verbs and other words. The nuances they detect are the same as in Ṭabarī's account.[69]

6.3. The Punishment of Sāmirī

According to the Qur'anic narrative, the punishment of Sāmirī is that he is condemned to say for the rest of his life 'touch me not'. Moses told him, go away and verily you will say in this life 'do not touch me' meaning 'I do not touch you and you, touch me not', *lā amassu wa lā umassu*. Sāmirī therefore suffered for his bad deeds. It was incumbent on the Children of Israel not to eat with, talk to, buy from or sell to him. He was to live isolated in his community.[70] Obviously, Moses' words are to be understood as a strong rebuke. This was Sāmirī's worldly punishment. Besides dealing with his punishment in this world, Ṭabarī deals with his future punishment: Sāmirī was told 'you have a promise that will not fail.' The Arabic version of the Qur'anic verse is *wa inna laka mawᶜid^{an} lan tukhlafahū*. Ṭabarī informs us of the two different ways of

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[66] Halperin has pointed out that this detail occurs in Midrashim on Song 1:9, which has God Himself riding the horse instead of Gabriel. (Halperin, *op. cit.*, 82)
[67] Qurṭubī, XI.239-40
[68] Ṭabarī, XVI.206
[69] Ṭūsī, VII.203; Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, IV.61; Rāzī, XXII.110; Qurṭubī, XI.240; Ibn Kathīr, III.123
[70] Ṭabarī, XVI.206

reading the verb *tukhlafa*. Readers of Madina and Kūfa read it *lan tukhlafa*, meaning 'because of your bad deeds Allāh did not fail to fulfil your punishment.' On the other hand Abū Nuhayk read it *lan tukhlifahū anta* meaning 'your punishment will not fail to catch you.' Bishr, Yazīd, Saʿīd and Qatāda also supported the second reading and the meaning *lan taghība ʿanhu*. Ṭabarī reconciles both these reading systems, saying that 'both were famous and their meanings are also close to each other, because God never fails to fulfil his promise and the creature of God also never escapes from it; both the readers would be rewarded.'[71] Putting it another way, as Adrian Brocket has stated, Ṭabarī willingly accepts two major readings as equally valid as long as the meanings remain unaltered.[72]

Baghawī's explanation of the *lā misās*, touch me not, is of special interest because it contains some additional information. Baghawī cites two reports: one from Ibn ʿAbbās, who says that Sāmirī lived among the wild animals, and the other from an unknown person which explains that if Sāmirī had touched someone or vice versa, both of them would have caught a fever and they would have to say continuously 'touch me not'.[73]

Ibn ʿAṭiyya's presentation of the interpretation of 20:97 is slightly different from those of the earlier exegetes. He says that Moses did not kill any of the Children of Israel except when imposing *ḥadd* (punishment) or in obedience to the revelation of God. However, Sāmirī's punishment was result of Moses' personal decision, for it was Moses who forbade the Children of Israel to have social or commercial relations with Sāmirī or any of his descendants.[74] Ibn ʿAṭiyya's main concern is to explain why Moses passed judgement upon Sāmirī in this way. Although he is not very successful in his dealing with this question, at this point it seems appropriate to consider the

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[71] *Ibid.*, XVI.206-7

[72] A. Brockett, 'The value of the Ḥafṣ and Warsh Transmission for the Textual History of the Qur'an', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988, 45

[73] Baghawī, III.230; Mawdūdī commented on the verse as follows: 'Sāmirī was perhaps actually afflicted with leprosy as punishment for his misdeed, if not, he was to be treated in this extreme way because of his moral leprosy.' Charles J. Adams considered this interpretation as a modern scientific exegesis. (C. J. Adams, 'Abū Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī, Tafhīm al-Qur'ān,' in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988, 319; Mawdūdī, VII.120) Although Baghawī's comment does not refer to moral leprosy, it is more original than Mawdūdī's interpretation because of its priority. It should also be noted that there are many anecdotes in Jewish tradition which mention that there had been no disease among the Israelites prior to the golden calf, but when they committed this sin many diseases appeared among them. (L. Smolar and M. Aberbach, *op. cit.*, 104)

[74] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, IV.61

career of Ibn ᶜAṭiyya. We know that Ibn ᶜAṭiyya was a judge in *Andalus* for a long time. His unusual interpretation might have been influenced by his way of life. There is one other explanation of Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's approach: 28:15 talks about a quarrel between two men to which Moses was a witness. One of the men belonged to his party while the other was of his enemy's party. When the Israelite appealed for Moses' help against his enemy, Moses came and struck the enemy with his fist and killed him. Then Moses realised that he had made a mistake, and so asked God to forgive him; consequently God forgave him. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya claims that whatever Moses did he did within the confines of religion, so he is not to blame.

The story of the punishment of Sāmirī and the destruction of the calf encourages Rāzī to present some important points. He lays great stress on the expression *lā misās*. Having discussed various readings of it, he begins with the first interpretation: 'whoever touches Sāmirī has a fever and because of his fear Sāmirī always cries out 'touch me not'.' The second is that Moses sends him away from the people, saying 'you should live alone.' Rāzī notes and rejects Wāḥidī's objection to this comment (according to Wāḥidī a person who lives alone cannot say 'touch me not' but he may be told 'touch me not.') The third point is concerned with the interpretation of Abū Muslim; briefly, 'Sāmirī's descendants would be cut off, so he would not be able to find anyone with whom to socialise or console himself.' In order to promote this interpretation, another verse is mentioned: 'wealth and children are an ornament of the life of the world', 18:47. Rāzī notes that this explanation is permissible.

Sāmirī's future punishment is found in the word *mawᶜidⁿ* (promise). According to Rāzī *mawᶜid* means *waᶜd*. The promised punishment will seize him in the hereafter and it will not fail. Rāzī again deals with some variants of the verb *tukhlifu* and the morphology of the verb *ẓalta*.[75] He attributes these different readings to their readers. He also points out that the meaning of the words changes according to the reading system. He supports some of these readings by bringing evidence from Ibn Masᶜūd's *muṣḥaf*.

Qurṭubī, having stated the command of Moses for his people not to socialise with, talk to or be close to Sāmirī, summarises a number of opinions regarding Sāmirī's punishment with the supplement 'God knows best': According to Ḥasan, neither

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[75] Rāzī, XXII.112

Sāmirī nor any other offender were to touch each other: both Sāmirī and the people who worshipped the calf should suffer this punishment until the end of world.[76] Furthermore, it is also narrated that Sāmirī was affected with the fear of doubt, *waswasa*. Another report on the authority of Qatāda records that if Sāmirī or one of his companions had touched someone or vice versa both of them would have had fever and would have had to say continuously 'touch me not'.[77] The last report is reminiscent of Baghawī's presentation: however, Baghawī does not record any authority for it. According to these two reports not only Sāmirī but also his close friends were subject to the punishment. Apart from these accounts Qurṭubī mentions another report from unknown individuals: 'Moses intended to kill Sāmirī but God prevented Moses because of the generosity of Sāmirī.'[78] Finally, Qurṭubī points out where Sāmirī lived after his punishment: 'It is said that he escaped and lived among the wild animals. He could not find anyone to speak to because of his abstinence from social life; he always said 'touch me not.'[79]

Interestingly, Qurṭubī, in contrast to many exegetes, tries to associate Qur'anic narrative with a legal proposal. According to Qurṭubī, this verse is evidence that the innovators and sinners should be banished and denied. It is also important that nobody socialises with them. Besides adducing Qur'anic evidence, Qurṭubī supports this judgement by the tradition; the prophet did the same thing against Ka°b b. Mālik and the other three who stayed at Madina during the expedition of *Tabūk*.[80] At this juncture it must be admitted that it is very difficult to evaluate Qurṭubī's hermeneutic; his use of scriptural and traditional materials is deliberate, and he readily to connects narrative with the legal dimension of Islam. Be that as it may, Qurṭubī launches into a very lengthy morphological explanation of the word *lā misās*. He devotes a whole page to it and tries to mention every minute detail about the expression *lā misās*.[81] In his explanation of Sāmirī's future punishment Qurṭubī spells out what Ṭabarī has noted before.[82]

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[76] Qurṭubī, XI.241
[77] *Ibid.*, XI.241
[78] The same comment is made by Qummī (II.97); Tha°labī (147); Ṭabarsī (VII.29); and Ālūsī (XVI.256)
[79] Qurṭubī, XI.241
[80] *Ibid.*, XI.241
[81] *Ibid.*, XI.242

6.4. The Fate of the Calf

The story of Sāmirī ends with '...We will certainly (melt) it in blazing fire and scatter it broadcast in the sea', 20:97. The problematic readings of the word *lanuḥarriqanna* lead Ṭabarī to a number of explanations. He mentions three different readings: *lanuḥarriqanna, lanuḥriqanna* and *lanaḥruqanna*. The first reading is supported by the readers of Iraq and the Ḥijāz; there is a report which attributes the second reading to Ḥasan al-Baṣra; the last reading belongs to a prominent *qārī* (reader), Abū Jaᶜfar. His selection is justified by Ṭabarī on the basis of the meaning of the verse. Ṭabarī also adduces evidence from the poetry of al-Mufaḍḍal.[83] After presenting all the evidence, Ṭabarī delivers his own opinion and the reasoning behind it: 'the correct reading is *lanuḥarriqanna*; it comes from 'burning in the fire'. His preference is supported by two reports traced back to Ibn ᶜAbbās by two different routes. Furthermore one of the reports states that there is unanimity among the readers on the reading of *lanuḥarriqanna*.[84] Ṭabarī connects the last report with the report narrated from Suddī, which sheds more light on the understanding of the verse: 'Moses took the calf, cut it with a file, and strewed it upon the water, and all the seas of the world contained pieces of the calf at that time.'[85] Ṭabarī reminds us that in some readings it is mentioned that the order of the words is *lanadhbaḥannahū thumma lanuḥarriqannahū...* The report from Qatāda states that in the *muṣḥaf* of Ibn Masᶜūd it is written that 'he slaughtered it then burned it...'[86] Ṭabarī considers most of these readings to be exegetical rather than of textual origin. The relation between the readings and the reports which support the meaning of the verse is very important for the topic under discussion, because more reading systems necessitate more and different reports.

Finally, Ṭabarī focuses on the Qur'anic expression *lanansifannahū fī al-yammi nasfᵃⁿ*, 'scatter it broadcast in the sea.' Having equated the word *nansifanna*

[82] *Ibid.,* XI.242
[83] Ṭabarī, XVI.208
[84] *Ibid.,* XVI.208
[85] *Ibid.,* XVI.208; In his *tarīkh* (Ṭabarī, *The History of Ṭabarī,* in Ehsan Yar-Shater (eds.) and (tr.) by William M. Brinner, (The History of the Children of Israel), New York: New York State University Press 1991, III.78) Ṭabarī notes that Ibn Isḥāq said 'I heard some scholars saying that *iḥrāq* (burning it) is really filing it; then he scattered it on the sea.' God knows best.
[86] Ṭabarī, XVI.208

with *tadhriyanna*, Ṭabarī lists four reports unanimously explaining the word *yamm*[87] as *baḥr* (sea).[88]

Baghawī presents similar information;[89] however, he does not criticise any of the reports he puts forward. He sometimes traces them to their narrators (not through the complete chain of transmitters) or transmits them in the passive form. What exactly lies behind this attitude is unclear. We suggest that either he considers whatever he narrates as an authentic report, or shows that he does not give much credence to these reports by tending to write in the passive, and without naming his source.

Ṭūsī, like Ṭabarī, mentions three variant readings of the verb *ḥaraqa*; *nuḥarriqanna*, *nuḥriqanna* and *naḥruqanna*. According to the first reading, the meaning of the verse is that the calf is burnt. According to the second the meaning is that it was cut with a file.[90] Ṭūsī tries to combine these two meanings in their logical order. Ṭabarī achieved it with the help of different reports and gave precedence to the first reading. However, Ṭūsī provides no report and shows no preference among the variant readings.

Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, having listed the variant readings, notes that the meaning of the verse changes according to the different readings. He also mentions the reading of Ubayy and Ibn Masᶜūd; *lanadhbaḥannahū thumma lanaḥruqannahū thumma lanansifannahū*. According to this reading, the calf consists of flesh and blood. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya rejects this interpretation in surah Aᶜrāf. He states that this is an unacceptable account because Moses cut it with a file and threw it upon the sea.[91] He denies it on the basis of other reports and with the help of the following verse, *lanansifannahū.* Elsewhere he says that the calf remained gold and that this is the view of the majority,

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[87] The Qur'anic word *yamm* is used only in the Moses story, and refers sometimes to the Nile, sometimes to the Red Sea. The normal Arabic word for sea is *baḥr*. The classical Muslim commentators under discussion do not give any indication about the origin of this word, but Jeffery has noted that some scholars have dealt with the origin of this word in the Qur'an. According to Jeffery, this word came from Syriac; Jawāliqī and Ibn Qutayba had the same opinion. Suyūṭī, however, reported that Ibn Jawzī said it was Hebrew. It was also reported that some held the view that the word was Coptic in origin. In addition to this, the term occurred occasionally in Ugarit texts in a literal sense, 'the shore of the sea'. This term with various combinations occurs abundantly in Exodus, Joshua, Ezekiel, and Psalms. (A. Jeffery, *op. cit.*, 1938, 293; Michael A. Grisanti, 'Yām', in William A. VanGemeren (ed.), *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Thelogy & Exegesis*, Cumbria: Paternoster Press 1997, II.461-465)

[88] Ṭabarī, XVI.208

[89] Baghawī, III.230

[90] Ṭūsī, VII.205

[91] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, II.455

although he offers no evidence or reports to support his claim. On the other hand Ḥasan b. Abī Ḥasan states that the calf became flesh and blood, but Ibn ᶜAṭiyya finds the first to be the most authentic interpretation.[92] If it were flesh and blood it would be burned. He considers the concept of its being melted in the sea to be purely metaphorical.[93]

Zamakhsharī is quite precise. He considers this verse as a third punishment, in that the object of the test (the calf) is removed. He interprets the verse by another verse, namely 'and they (the unbelievers) schemed, and God schemed against them...', 3:54.[94]

Rāzī repeats previous discussions regarding the nature of the calf, namely whether it consisted of flesh and blood or not. What is new in his work is the attempt to reconcile different opinions: after presenting the two opinions (either it is alive or it is not) he closes the topic by saying that it is also possible to say that the calf became flesh and was slaughtered, and then its bones were cut by a file. Finally its particles were scattered in the sea.[95]

Although the exegetes are not in total agreement regarding the exact nature of the destruction of the calf, Ibn Kathīr makes the most interesting point about its punishment. He begins with the identification of the thirty and ten nights. He states that there is a dispute about the ten nights among the exegetes though we have not been able to discover any noteworthy dispute. Basing his opinion on the majority view he concludes that the thirty nights are dhū al-qaᶜdah and the ten are dhū al-ḥijja. So the appointment ends on the day of naḥr (sacrifice.)[96] The same day God sent the revelation 5:3 to the prophet Muhammad saying '...this day have I perfected your religion for you as Islam...'[97] This coincidence is explicitly pointed out by Ibn Kathīr. There is an implicit coincidence, however, which he does not mention, namely at the end of his appointment Moses came back and, according to some reports, slaughtered the golden calf. These reports are supported by the reading of Ibn Masᶜūd, lanadhbaḥannahū thumma lanansifannahū fī al-yammi nasfā (he slaughtered it then he threw it...) The substance of Ibn Kathīr's statement is that the day on which Moses slaughtered the calf is that of the feast known as ᶜīd al-aḍḥā (the sacrificial feast.) So

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[92] *Ibid.*, I.13
[93] *Ibid.*, IV.62
[94] Zamakhsharī, II.551
[95] Rāzī, XXII.113
[96] Ibn Kathīr, II.243
[97] *Ibid.*, II.243

his identification is not only based on the opinion of the majority but also on the coincidence which ties the end of the calf to the day of the sacrificial feast. He concludes by saying that the day of *nahr* is not only the day on which Moses completed his term; it is also the day on which the religion of Islam, brought by the prophet Muhammad, was perfected by the revelation. In this case, Ibn Kathīr appears to give credence to *isrā'īliyyāt* as a kind of authentic though non-canonical authority regarding traditions. So the association of the forty nights with the Arabic months of *dhū al-qaʿdah* and *dhū al-ḥijja* means more to Ibn Kathīr than one might think.

Chapter Seven

The Explanation of the Golden Calf in the Surahs Aᶜrāf and Baqara

The Qur'anic narrative of the 'golden calf' recounted in the verses of surah Ṭā-Hā ends as described in the previous chapter, but information about the calf with a hollow sound is not found only in the verses of Ṭā-Hā; we have already pointed out that it is also mentioned in some detail in surah Aᶜrāf. There is, however, a third Qur'anic surah, Baqara, which treats the identical episode, though in a less detailed manner than the other two. It should be noted that there is no explicit reference to Sāmirī in surahs Baqara and Aᶜrāf. We have already shown some of these references in our previous chapters but some reports need to be addressed again. Here we will deal with some isolated topics related to the 'golden calf' episode. The first section is concerned with the interpretation of 7:142 and 2:51, which discuss the exact term' of Moses stay on the Holy Mountain. Particular emphasis will be placed on the Qur'anic term waᶜada and wāᶜada to indicate that the classical commentators take endless pains to solve a dogmatic problem. In the second section we will present various reports in order to identify the origin and meaning of Moses' name, mūsā. Section three presents an analysis of the punishment of the Children of Israel in 2:54. Section four deals with verse 2:93, which is understood metaphorically by many exegetes. Finally, we will make some concluding remarks regarding this episode.

7.1. The Exact Term

'We appointed for (Moses) thirty nights and added (to the period) ten (more) and completed the term, appointed by his Lord, of forty nights...', 7:142, and 'And when We appointed for Moses forty nights, and (in his absence) you took the calf (for worship) and you were wrong doers', 2:51.

Moses was asked to go to the mountain. The Qur'an uses the verb wāᶜadnā, with *alif* after *waw*, for this appointment. As the very beginning Ṭabarī introduces a theological problem and we also observe frequently that the exegete bears this in mind before commenting on the text. The main problem is the reading of the verb 'We appointed'; whether it is with *alif* or without *alif*. The difference between these two readings is minimal but its theological implication is far-reaching. According to Ṭabarī, some read it without *alif* in order to show a one-sided promise: God is alone in making

the promise and Moses has no share in it. He should simply obey the commandment of God, and so God uses the verb *waᶜada* in 14:22 and 8:7 instead of *wāᶜadnā*. On the other hand if it is read with *alif* it means that there were two parties to this promise and so there must be two sides, God and Moses. It is difficult to understand how Moses could enter into partnership with God vis-à-vis this promise. Ṭabarī tries to simplify this issue:

> The correct opinion about this is that they are two readings which the community has accepted and which the reciters recite, and the reading of neither of them invalidates the meaning of the other, although in one of them there is more meaning than in the other with respect to the ostensive wording and the recitation, but with respect to what is understood from them both are in harmony, so there is no need to make a distinction between people's promises and the promise of God. In both there are two sides and they do not harm the uniqueness of God. This is a generally accepted view.[1]

Ṭabarī's approach is extremely rational.[2] He does not support his argument with other Qur'anic verses or by bringing evidence from poems, even though the verb in question occurs three times in the Qur'an: 2:51, 7:142 and 20:80. Relying on his general understanding of the contents of the Qur'an, Ṭabarī reaches the conclusion that there is no difference between the two readings of the verb.

Baghawī deals with the interpretation of the verb *wāᶜada* in verses 7:142 and 2:51 in a very precise way. The verb is in the form of *mufāᶜala* but refers to a single subject such as in *ᶜāqabtu al-liṣṣa* (I punished the thief) or *ᶜāfāk Allāh* (God restore your health).[3] Baghawī emphasises by these examples that the form of *mufāᶜala* is not restricted to a dual subject; it can also be used to denote a singular one. This opinion is supported by the statement of Zajjāj: 'The promise is from God and the fulfilment of it is from Moses'.[4] Moses is therefore the passive agent, he has no share in the Lord's authoritative promise. Baghawī also mentions the alternative reading for the verb *wāᶜada*, which he refrains from commenting on except to attribute it to its readers.

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[1] Ṭabarī, II.60
[2] As R. Marston Speight has pointed out Ṭabarī can be labelled *tafsīr al-ra'y*. To some extent we agree with him in this respect. Ṭabarī maintains a good balance between *ra'y* (opinion) and *naql* (report) in his exegesis and it is not difficult to witness both methods when scrutinising Ṭabarī's work. (R. M. Speight, 'The Function of Ḥadīth as a Commentary on the Qur'ān as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988, 68)
[3] Baghawī, I.72
[4] *Ibid.*, I.72

Rāzī displays great ability in organising the contribution of previous commentators. He enumerates the differences between the two verbs. Although he adds nothing new, he leaves no room for further speculation.[5] Qurṭubī, on the other hand, spends a great deal of time discussing the subject matter of the verb. He quotes many sources, giving also the names of the authors and closes his discussion with Ibn ʿAṭiyya's comment: 'The preference of Abū ʿUbayda (without *alif*) is not correct, because Moses' acceptance and obeying of the promise is *muwāʿada*.'[6] So there is no need for further discussion on this matter. Although Qurṭubī does not reveal his preference, it is evident from his presentation that he considers *wāʿada* a more authentic reading than *waʿada*. The method of solving narrative and theological problems with the help of grammar or rhetoric was pioneered by his predecessors but Qurṭubī attaches more importance to it than they did.

As regards the identification of the thirty and ten nights, Baghawī, like Ṭabarī, is sure that thirty is *dhū al-qaʿdah* and ten is *dhū al-ḥijja*.[7] Moreover, Baghawī concentrates on the word 'night' and asks the question, why it is not noon?[8] The reason, according to Baghawī, is that Arabic months are arranged according to the movement of the moon, and since the moon only appears during the night, darkness comes before light and night was created before noon.[9] It is not clear on which source Baghawī bases this opinion but he provides no evidence to support it. Furthermore, Baghawī brings a number of details into his commentary in order to widen these sorts of reports; for example, when Moses fasted thirty days he felt disturbed by the unpleasant smell of his mouth, and consequently cleaned his teeth with a *miswāk* (toothbrush) made from the *khurnub* (carob tree). According to Abū al-ʿĀliya, Moses

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[5] Rāzī, II.73

[6] Qurṭubī, I.393

[7] Baghawī, II.195; Abū Layth al-Samarqandī narrates that some people said that these forty nights were days of *dhū al-ḥijja* and ten days of *muḥarram* (Abū Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Irshād 1405/1985, I.351); On the other hand, Muqātil b. Sulaymān identifies the day on which the Israelites travelled through the sea with the tenth of *muḥarram* and the day on which Moses took the Tablets with the day of *naḥr*, tenth of *dhū al-ḥijja*. (Muqātil b. Sulaymān, II.61)

[8] Abraham I. Katsh makes a very interesting point about the Qurʾanic usage of the night instead of Biblical usage of day and night in *Exodus* 24:18. He furthermore notes Rashi's comment on *Exodus* 32:1, which is, according to Katsh, taken from early Midrashic sources: 'when Moses went up the mountain within the first six hours of the day they thought that the same day that he went up was part of the number of forty, but he had said to them whole days, (i.e.) forty days and their nights together with it...' (A. I. Katsh, *op. cit.*, 49). Katsh concludes that this is the main reason for the Qurʾanic usage of forty nights only, since it was on the fortieth night that the Israelites sinned (*Ibid.*, 50)

[9] Baghawī, I.72

chewed the bark of the tree; he was told by angels, however, that the odour of his mouth used to be wonderful but he had spoilt it by cleaning it with the *miswāk*. God then commanded him to fast an extra ten days.[10]

Qurṭubī mentions the same report as Baghawī. In addition, he draws attention to another dimension of a similar report: '(It is said that) when Moses cleaned his teeth God said that He would not speak to Moses until his mouth regained its former smell. God also addresses Moses, saying 'You (Moses) do not know how fasting is dear to me!' This is the main reason why God requested Moses to fast.' Qurṭubī adds further observations: 'In fact, this fast saved Ismāʿīl from being slaughtered and this fast again made Muhammad complete his pilgrimage.'[11] Qurṭubī is not concerned whether such reports contain a kernel of historical truth or whether they are merely later literary devices; but by recording them he somewhat neglects the subject matter of the Qur'anic verse and is moved to put great stress on fasting. Suffice it to say that the Qur'anic presentation of thirty and ten nights does not contain any mention of fasting or the identification of these nights.

In connection with the word 'night' Qurṭubī raises a question which is reminiscent of Baghawī's, and like Baghawī, he provides no evidence for this interpretation.[12] In addition, Qurṭubī notes the interpretation of Naqqāsh, who says that the specific occurrence of night in the verse is to remove any doubt that Moses did break his fast. If noon had been mentioned it would have been thought that Moses broke his fast during the night.[13] Qurṭubī also says that this verse is used by mystics as evidence for the *ṣawm wiṣāl* (uninterrupted fast).[14]

Qurṭubī's reconciliation of 7:142 and 2:51 deserves attention because of its originality. The important difference between these two verses is that in the first God says 'thirty and ten nights' while in the second He says directly 'forty nights' without dividing the term into thirty and ten. Qurṭubī narrates a report from unknown authorities which calls this division *badā*. Qurṭubī, basing his opinion on the accounts

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[10] *Ibid.*, II.195

[11] Qurṭubī, VII.275

[12] *Ibid.*, I.396

[13] *Ibid.*, I.396

[14] *Ibid.*, I.396; The number forty and the uninterrupted fast are the common theme among the classical Muslim scholars who seek to show the piety of their predecessors or well-known figures. The same theme is also used by Muslims to describe pious Christians and Jews. (D'Ibn

of unidentified authorities, rejects this approach on grammatical grounds; there is no *badā* here because thirty plus ten and forty are the same thing and there is no disagreement; the case is similar to *ᶜashara arbaᶜa* (fourteen) means *arbaᶜa ᶜashara* (fourteen). This is a common usage in the language of the Arabs. He adds that measuring time is a long established custom and God is its originator. To prove it he cites 'and indeed We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in six days and nothing of fatigue touched us', 50:38.[15]

Ṭūsī, in the introduction to his interpretation of the verse, asks in passive form why God did not mention forty clearly and without division. In response, Ṭūsī lists three explanations: this division helps us to identify the thirty and ten nights. If an unqualified figure of forty had been given we would not know whether the beginning of the month was referred to or not. Ṭūsī traces back this interpretation to al-Farrā and notes that Mujāhid, Ibn Jurayj, Masrūq, Ibn ᶜAbbās and the majority of exegetes held this opinion. According to the second interpretation Moses was in complete solitude for thirty nights, devoting himself to the worship of God alone. Then ten nights were added during which he spoke to God. Ṭūsī refers to another point in this second interpretation, made on the authority of unknown personalities: 'the Torah was revealed in this additional period, which is therefore mentioned separately.'

The final explanation is speculative. Moses, before leaving his people, says that he would be back after thirty nights to make the period of his absence simple to grasp. But then ten nights were added and he spent altogether forty nights away. It is clear that there is no question of a lie here because, by staying away forty nights, Moses obviously spends thirty nights away, thus fulfilling his promise. This interpretation implies that the ten extra nights were not planned beforehand. Ṭūsī, however, relates another report from Ḥasan, who says that the forty nights existed from the beginning and are mentioned in 2:51 without division. The division into thirty and ten in 7:142 is simply for the sake of emphasis.[16] He also argues that the mention of thirty and ten (separately) invalidates the assumption that the ten might be incorporated in the thirty, so that one might think that the total consisted of twenty and ten nights.[17]

Batoutah, *Voyages*, in C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti (eds.), Paris: Société Asiatique 1949, 359-60)
[15] Qurṭubī, VII.273
[16] Ṭūsī, IV.565
[17] *Ibid.*, IV.565

7.2. The Origin of the Name of Moses

Many exegetes give detailed information about the origin of Moses' name and his genealogical tree. Ṭabarī carefully investigates why Moses is named *mūsā*. Unlike the Qur'anic narrative, exegesis drawing on the tales of the prophets provides considerable detail about the background to the events. Most of this information, however, is not related to the topic and generally is insignificant for the interpretation of the Qur'an. Ṭabarī places stress on both the origin of Moses' name and his forefathers. Although Ṭabarī denies the existence of loan words in the Qur'an, he says that 'Moses' is composed of two Coptic words. The full account is as follows:

> *mū* corresponds to *mā* (water) and *sā*[18] corresponds to *shajar* (tree). According to what has reached us, he was so called because when his mother put him into the basket, fearing the threat to his safety from Pharaoh, and cast him onto the sea as God had inspired her to do -it is said that the sea into which she cast him was the Nile- the waves of the sea carried him along until they pushed him among trees/reeds by Pharaoh's house. And the maids of Āsiya, the wife of Pharaoh, came out to bathe and found the basket and took it out of the water. Then he was called by the name of the place where he landed.

The story is brief and consistent. Quoting from Ibn Isḥāq, Ṭabarī describes Moses' genealogy as follows; Mūsā b. ʿImrān b. Yashūr b. Qahith b. Lawī b. Yaʿqūb Isrāʾīl b. Isḥāq *dhabīḥ Allāh* (God's slaughtered one) b. Ibrāhīm *khalīl Allāh*.[19] In comparing this list, besides identifying Isḥāq as a victim, he shows great sympathy with an old Arabian custom, namely the deep interest in genealogical trees. It is also clear that Ṭabarī's explanation of Moses' identity is close to the Biblical genealogy.

In contrast to Ṭabarī, Baghawī argues that the name *mūsā* is a Hebrew noun which was later arabicised.[20] Clearly the development of the story in the commentaries is still in progress. Regarding the details of the meaning of the word, Baghawī repeats Ṭabarī's narration almost verbatim.

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[18] Ibaḍī Shaykh Aḥmad al-Khalīlī explains the word *mū* as water and *sā* (*shā*) as 'to be saved', *munqadh al-mā*. According to him the word has its origin in the Hebrew language. (Aḥmad b Ḥamūd al- Khalīlī, *Jawāhir al-Tafsīr Anwār min Bayān al-Tanzīl*, Oman: Maktabat al-Istiqāmah 1988/1409, III.321

[19] Ṭabarī, II.61

[20] Baghawī, I.72; Baghawī's position on the foreign vocabulary in the Qur'an is similar to that of taken by Ṭabarī. Basing his opinion on the majority view, Baghawī says that there are no loan words in the Qur'an, 'so we can accept that this kind of word might occur in both languages, *wifāq*.'

Rāzī's comment on this topic is interesting. He makes three points: two are concerned with the etymology of the word and the third is related to the historical perspective. The word *mūsā* derives from the verb *māsa, yamīsu*, meaning 'walking proudly'. According to the second view, it derives from the verb *awsiya*, which means 'when the leaf of a tree drops', *awsiyat shajarat^{un}*. The reference here is to Moses' baldness. The last point is well-known; the name is a composite of two Hebrew words, namely *mū*, water and *sā*, tree. The explanation is therefore the same as that provided by the previous exegetes.[21]

The anecdote noted by Qurṭubī about the genealogical tree of Moses and the origin of his name is similar to Ṭabarī's presentation with the exception of his omission of the name of Abraham's son, Isḥāq (God's slaughtered one), who is mentioned in Ṭabarī's commentary[22] because, for him, the only possible candidate for such a title is Ismāʿīl. It is also worth mentioning that Qurṭubī identifies the person who found Moses among the bushes with the name *sabūth*.[23]

7.3. The Punishment of the Children of Israel

The Israelites' punishment is mentioned or assumed in 2:54: 'And when Moses said to his people: O my people! You have wronged yourselves by your choosing of the calf (for worship) so turn in penitence to your Creator, and kill (the guilty) yourselves. That will be best for you with your Creator and He will relent toward you. Lo! He is the Relenting, the Merciful,'[24] but a full picture can be found only in the exegetical literature. Ṭabarī cites reports from different authorities such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, Ibn Shihāb, Abū al-ʿĀliya, Suddī and Ibn Isḥāq. It is worth mentioning that the Ibn ʿAbbās version is the most complete and occurs many times throughout the sources:

> Moses commanded his people to slay one another. So those who were devoted to the calf sat down with their cloaks gathered around them, while those who were not devoted to the calf stood up and took a dagger in their hands. An intense darkness fell upon them and they set about killing one another. Then the darkness lifted away from them,

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[21] Rāzī, II.73

[22] Qurṭubī, I.395

[23] *Ibid.*, I.395

[24] *faqtulū anfusakum* is translated into English as 'slay the culprits' (N. J. Dawood, *op. cit*, 337); 'slay the guilty among you' (J. M. Rodwell, *op. cit.*, 343); 'slay one another by (A. J. Arberry, *op. cit.*, 7); 'kill (the guilty) yourselves' (M. Pickthall, *op. cit.*, 37); and 'slay yourselves (wrong doers)' (Yusuf Ali, *op. cit.*, 30)

and they had left seventy thousands slain. All those who had been killed had done their penance, and all those who survived had done their penance.[25]

In the report narrated from Suddī it is explained that God refused to accept the repentance of the Children of Israel, except on a condition that they were averse to, that they should fight one another when they had worshipped the calf. So Moses commanded them to slay one another, and so they drew up in two rows and fought one another with swords. People who were killed became martyrs, and in this battle seventy thousand were killed. The Children of Israel were about to be annihilated. Moses and Aaron called out; 'O our Lord, the Children of Israel have perished! Our Lord, spare the rest.' Then He ordered them to lay down their arms.[26] Ibn Isḥāq added that Moses wept, and the women and children gathered around him to seek forgiveness. Furthermore, father, son and brother did not refrain from killing each other.[27] Clearly each report has a fundamental feature which distinguishes it from others but there is a common similarity, which is that the punishment of the worshippers is a physical not a spiritual one.

Ṭūsī devotes nearly five pages to the interpretation of 2:54. He begins with an explanation of the individual words, introduces a number of definitions and shows the usage of the words in various contexts. His presentation resembles an old classical Arabic dictionary. He divides his presentation into two parts, lugha (philology) and maʿnā (semantics). In the first part he lays great stress on the words al-bārī, qatl and khāyr. Although the reason for this attention to detail remains obscure, there might be some kind of connection between the glosses and Ṭūsī's interpretation, namely the second part of his classification (semantics). Unlike Ṭūsī, Rāzī states this relation explicitly in his commentary. Be that as it may, what concerns us here is Ṭūsī's comment on the punishment of the people. First of all, dealing with the word qatl, he says that although qatl, dhabḥ and mawt are naẓā'ir[28] there are nuances among them. Ṭūsī does not discuss the nuances with the exception of the gloss on these three

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[25] Ṭabarī, II.73-4; According to Katsh, this explanation has a counterpart in Rabbinic literature. The Talmud states that the tribe of Levi did not worship the golden calf and therefore was told to kill the sinners (A. I. Katsh, op. cit., 52). It should be also remembered that the number of the dead in the Jewish tradition is 3000 (Exodus xxii:28-9; Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer, 357)

[26] Ibid., II.73-4

[27] Ibid., II.75, 77

[28] Although the use of the technical word naẓā'ir varies, the meaning of the word is generally given as 'synonym': a word having a similar meaning to another word. (Ibn ʿImād, Kashf al-Asrār, np and nd, 5)

corresponding words: *qatl* is the destruction of the life of the body, *dhabḥ* is to cut the jugular vein and *mawt* is the opposite of life.[29] Ṭūsī's play with this terminology is to key to his complex understanding of the punishment. After giving the above information Ṭūsī mentions a different form of the verb *qatala* and notes the change of meaning. In support of his argument he cites poems by anonymous poets. In the first part of his presentation, *lugha*, Ṭūsī states that the meaning of *qatl* is generally understood as an immaterial notion such as 'to obey' or 'to mix.' However in *maꜥnā* (semantics) Ṭūsī lists two major interpretations. According to the first interpretation 'they killed each other'. This comment is made by Ibn ꜥAbbās, Said Ibn Jubayr, Mujāhid, al-Ḥasan and others among the earlier interpreters.[30] The second interpretation concerns the obedience of the Israelites, in other words their acceptance of the commandment of God to kill one another because of the Mercy of God upon them. This is mentioned by Ibn ꜥAbbās, Ibn Isḥāq and preferred by Abū ꜥAlī. Then Ṭūsī records a very strange report narrated by unknown authorities: the chosen seventy were commanded by Moses to kill those people among the Israelites who wanted to see God.[31] There are others which describe the scene of repentance, but as they are similar to Ṭabarī's narrative there is no need to repeat them here. According to Ṭūsī, the reason for their punishment is that the people who did not themselves worship the calf knew that the calf was *bāṭil* (falsehood) but nevertheless they did not prevent the worshippers from adoring the calf because they feared death; therefore God commanded them to kill one another.[32]

Interestingly, no report, with the exception of the first, makes a clear distinction between the killer and the one killed. However, similar reports narrated by Sunni exegetes always understand that this verse implies that those who refuse to worship the calf are the killers and the worshippers are the victims. It should be remembered that a certain range of disagreement has always been accepted in exegetical traditions; that is why no commentator raises any critical objection to this unusual identification. It is also important to note that some details are absent in Ṭūsī's presentation of these reports.

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[29] Ṭūsī, I.245
[30] *Ibid.*, I.246
[31] *Ibid.*, I.246
[32] *Ibid.*, I.246

Having mentioned these reports Ṭūsī passes to the speculative explanation of the repentance of the Children of Israel. In his introduction to the topic he records the statement of Rummānī, who says that there must be *luṭf* (blessing) in the commandment of God for both those who are commanded and others; and so the submission of the killer is a blessing for him and for others. Here Ṭūsī raises a question: how could killing themselves be a blessing from God (although after death there are no responsibilities) when there can be no meaning in the blessing after life is over? In response, Ṭūsī compares this situation with the commandment of God which praises the killer and the killed in the cause of God: '...they fight in God's cause, so they kill (others) and are killed...', 9:111. To support this interpretation Ṭūsī quotes from an *ahl al-siyar*, who says that the people who worshipped the calf were commanded to kill the people who did not; consequently, the people who were killed became martyrs and the people who remained alive were those whose repentance was accepted.[33] In his comment on this verse Ṭūsī places stress on the term 'obedience'. If to kill themselves is not a good thing they cannot be commanded to do so. Then he refers to the situation when prophets face the threat of death. Ṭūsī declares that it is not permissible for prophets and imams to accept being killed as long as they have the ability to defend themselves. He also notes that the prophets and imams are only killed through *ẓulm* (injustice), so to defend themselves is *ḥusn* (good) and the reverse is *qubḥ* (bad).[34] But although an unjust death is clearly bad according to the judgement of reason, it can be good in some respects. It is very difficult to relate Ṭūsī's last comment to the explanation of the verse, though it is possible to place it in some kind of historical context; but it needs further clarification before we can connect it with the commentary on the present verse. Attention should nevertheless be paid to Ṭūsī's use of the theological terms *ḥusn* and *qubḥ*. What he means to say by employing these technical terms is that there may be a *luṭf* (blessing) in certain kinds of killing and inevitably *luṭf* is good.

Rāzī deals at length with the interpretation of 2:54, devoting nearly four pages to it. Like Ṭūsī, he begins by trying to find an answer to how the Israelites' killing themselves could be God's blessing, *niʿam Allāh*. He offers four solutions: first, it is a blessing because the Children of Israel had committed a very grave sin, so God saved

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[33] *Ibid.*, I.247
[34] *Ibid.*, I.247

them from its consequences in the hereafter by His command. Second, God stopped them killing one another before they were totally annihilated. The third explanation is germane to the virtue of the community of Muhammad. Having cut short this repentance (killing each other) God facilitates the repentance of the community of Muhammad. And finally there is a great encouragement for the community of Muhammad in this event.[35] After this explanation Rāzī focuses on the verse and systematically analyses all likely references and their support before offering his own solution. First, the Qur'anic expression 'turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves' can be considered by some people as an explanatory sentence, *mufassirah*. The verse explains itself; that is, 'killing themselves' indicates how they should carry out their repentance. Rāzī is not convinced by this approach. For him the verse does not explain the repentance but simply shows it, *bayān*. Their repentance was complete when they killed themselves. Second, the existence of the name *al-bāri* enables Rāzī to draw the following inferences: firstly it indicates that there should be no hypocrisy in their repentance; secondly the question arises, why is the name *al-bāri* singled out? In response, Rāzī quotes the verse '...you can see no fault in the Beneficent One's creation...', 68:3. Briefly he says that God created his creatures free from difference and He also distinguished them from one another in some respects. Third, what is the difference between the *f* in *fatūbū* and the *f* in *faqtulū*? The first *f*, according to Rāzī, signifies the cause, that the sin causes the repentance, while the second *f* implies that the action and its links are consecutive; the killing shows the completeness of the repentance.[36] Fourth, Rāzī disputes with those who disregard the *zāhir* (literal) meaning of the verse. Rāzī insists that the word 'killing' is to be taken literally and rejects any speculation about 'killing' meaning in this context 'damage' instead of 'death.'[37] He also provides a summary of the reports of how the Children of Israel killed each other.[38] Fifth, Rāzī asks why they were commanded to kill each other although they repented of their sin. He discusses the problem openly by noting that it may have been legal in Moses' law for killing after repentance.'[39]

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[35] Rāzī, II.79
[36] *Ibid.*, II.80
[37] *Ibid.*, II.81
[38] *Ibid.*, II.82
[39] *Ibid.*, II.82

Zamakhsharī deals with the worldly punishment of the worshippers of the calf; however, his narration is quite short and is presented without naming any authority. [40] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is one of the few exegetes who do not launch into detail. He gives some precise grammatical information and adds that the people who were killed became martyrs and those who survived were forgiven.[41]

In his comment on this verse Qurṭubī notes the symbolic interpretation of *arbāb al-maᶜānī* and *khawāṭir* (the followers of rhetoric and those who are careful in their religious life): *al-ᶜijl* (the calf) represents the self or *nafs* (ego); if one does not obey it he saves himself from *ẓulm*. In addition, the meaning of 'slay yourselves' is 'show humbleness in obeying the commandments of God and avoid *shahawāt* (bad desire).' Despite Qurṭubī's recording of these interpretations, he declares his preference for the literal meaning of the verse.[42]

After these two metaphorical explanations, Qurṭubī cites the report on the authority of Sufyān that repentance is one of the favours of God bestowed upon the community of Muslims. The repentance of the Israelites consists in the killing of one another. He goes on to give some details concerning the manner of the killing. Most of his narration is close to the above-mentioned reports; however, there are some different accounts such as '(it is narrated) that Joshua b. Nun came to them while they were creeping and said, cursed be he who tries to protect himself from his killer by using his hands and feet.'[43] Qurṭubī's explanations, with some nuances, are similar to Ṭabarī's accounts. We may conclude from them that Qurṭubī, like others, considers the punishment physical not spiritual.

Ibn Kathīr devotes one and a half pages to the reports relating to the Israelites' repentance. He does not fail to mention the minutest detail: how they were divided into two groups, how they killed each other, what happened to the people who were alive and who were dead after the massacre, how many people died, the physical description of the place (dark clouds so on), how the children and women begged Moses to intercede with God, and so forth.[44] Ibn Kathīr traces all these reports to their narrators:

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[40] Zamakhsharī, II.116-117
[41] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, I.14
[42] Qurṭubī, I.401
[43] *Ibid.*, I.401
[44] Ibn Kathīr, I.93

he mostly gives a full chain of transmitters. He holds that the punishment was physical and each report he cites supports this conclusion.

7.4. The (Love of the) Calf is Drunken into Their Hearts

Finally, it is worth quoting one separate verse of the Qur'an related to the story of the golden calf. 'They were made to drink the calf into their hearts because of their faithlessness', 2:93.[45]

Ṭabarī records a disagreement among the *ahl al-ta'wīl* regarding this phrase. There are two main opinions which explain the verse. First, it is said that it was the love of the calf that was drunk by their hearts. This view is supported by three reports from Qatāda, Abū al-ʿĀliya and Rabīʿ.[46] The second view, Ṭabarī notes, is advocated by Suddī:

> When Moses came back and saw them worshipping the calf he seized the calf, filed it down and scattered it into the sea. There was no flowing sea into which it did not fall. Then Moses said to them, 'Drink some of the water'. They drank it; the gold in the water would show itself on those who loved the calf.'[47]

Ṭabarī disregards the second interpretation on the grounds that Arabs do not speak of water being drunk 'into the heart'. He favours the first opinion, which conforms to the usage of the Arabs. The Qur'anic presentation of this event is metaphorical and the reason for the omission of the word *ḥubb* (love) is explained by Ṭabarī as follows: 'The reader has already understood the meaning of the verse, as when we read 'ask the village' we understand it to mean 'ask the people of the village'. He quotes from the poetry of Zuhayr in order to provide evidence of the common usage of the expression among the Arabs;

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[45] Yahuda, having considered 2:93 and 20:97 '...we will burn it to cinders and scatter its ashes over the sea', reaches the conclusion that the prophet of Islam has two contradictory versions which, however, go back to two different informants who drew their knowledge from different versions in the Pentateuch, namely *Deut.* 9, 21 and *Exodus* 32, 20, though there is no contradiction in the Biblical account because, according to Yahuda, these verses complement each other (Yahuda, *op.cit.*, 288-289). Viewed from the Qur'anic perspective it is impossible to justify Yahuda's conclusion. As can be seen in the following explanation, almost all of the classical exegetes interpret 2:93 allegorically, therefore there is no explicit or implicit contradiction between these two verses.

[46] Ṭabarī, II.357-8

[47] *Ibid.*, II.358; In Rabbi Eliezer it is mentioned that 'Moses burnt the calf with fire, and powdered it, like the dust of the earth, and he cast its dust upon the face of the waters, as it is said, 'and he took the calf which they had made'. He made the Israelites drink the water, everyone who had kissed the calf with all his heart, his upper lip and his bones became golden... (*Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer*, 356-7)

I came to myself after being intoxicated with love

Because the love which was drunk into your heart is remedy[48]

It appears that Ṭabarī did not admit any kind of dual understanding. In other words, he rejects the idea that the literal and metaphorical meanings of the verse can both be valid. A similar attitude is observed in his successors. However, many of them do not refrain from narrating Suddī's report. For instance, Baghawī, having said that the love of the calf was established in their hearts, repeats Suddī's account as given in Ṭabarī's commentary with the formula 'in the tales', wa fī al-qiṣaṣ,[49] implying that this report is only a story and it does not matter whether it is authentic or not.

Ṭūsī, like Ṭabarī, insists that the verse is not to be taken literally. His reason for the omission of ḥubb (love) before ʿijl (calf) is the same as Ṭabarī's explanation.[50] He then attempts to determine the grammatical subject of the verb. He notes that the occurrence of the passive form of the verb ushribū does not indicate that any made them drink (the love of the calf); they did it themselves. Ṭūsī gives another example to make it easier to understand: 'One is given knowledge' means he possessed it himself.[51] This is a very important point because of its theological implications. If the subject of the verb is the Israelites it means they misguided themselves because of their strong love for the calf.

It should be noted that Rāzī, having said that this is a metaphor, takes up the question about the subject of the verb, puts it centre stage and argues it vigorously. According to Rāzī the subject is God, while the Mutazilites consider the Israelites to be the subject. Rāzī mentions the Mutazilites' two arguments: first, due to their eagerness and extreme love, the subject of the verb is not stated. Second, the verb ushriba needs to be understood in the sense of zuyyina (adorned). Both these opinions are rejected by Rāzī as unjustified departures from the literal sense of the Qur'anic word.[52] Bearing these two interpretations in mind it is safe to conclude that Ṭūsī, like the Mutazilites, gives more freedom and responsibility to the individual and reduces the extent of God's interference. Ṭūsī, furthermore, draws attention to the function of the preposition b attached to word kufr (disbelief) in the verse. He favours 'they became infidels by

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[48] Ibid., II.358-9
[49] Baghawī, I.95
[50] Ṭūsī, I.354
[51] Ibid., I.356
[52] Rāzī, II.187-8

drinking the love of the calf' instead of 'they drank the love of the calf due to their disbelief.' Another way of putting this is that they were not punished for disbelief but for their idolatrous love, of which disbelief was the result, because the love of the calf was already a great sin and God does not create disbelief in His servants.[53]

Zamakhsharī explains 2:93 on the basis of other Qur'anic verses. He says briefly:

> They are impregnated with love and eagerness towards the calf like cloth which is impregnated with colour. The description of the heart as a place for drink is the same as the word of God, 4:10: '...they do but swallow fire into their bellies, and ...' (because of their ignorance).[54]

It is evident that Zamakhsharī, like others, sees allegorical meaning in the Qur'anic utterance; consequently, he has little interest in legendary material. His omission of alternative explanations and reports indicates his extremely rational approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an.

Similarly, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, having mentioned Suddī's report (in fact he does not refer directly to Suddī, saying merely *qāla qawm*; however, this report is narrated by Ṭabarī and other exegetes on the authority of Suddī), says that the Qur'anic expression *fī qulūbihim* (in their hearts) negates the validity of this report.[55] Basing his approach on the Qur'anic usage, he explains that it is impossible to imagine that the heart could drink anything except the love of the calf.

Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr consider the meaning of this verse as *majāz* and *tashbīh* (metaphorical and allegorical)[56]: 'the love of the calf is firmly fixed in their hearts.' This explanation is supported by prophetic *ḥadīth*[57] and a famous poem of Zuhayr.[58] They also refer to the actual meaning of the verse.[59] It is worth mentioning, however, that Qurṭubī notes two reports from unknown authorities which describe what happened to the Israelites after drinking the water: according to the first report, they

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[53] Ṭūsī, I.356; According to Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, both interpretations are permissible (Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, I.180)
[54] Zamakhsharī, I.297
[55] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, I.180
[56] These terms were used by Ibn ᶜAṭiyya before Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr. (Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, I.180)
[57] The extreme love of thing makes you blind and deaf.
[58] Qurṭubī, II.31
[59] Qurṭubī, II.31; Ibn Kathīr, I.126

became mad; the second explains that the stomach of whoever drank it became larger due to the pressure within it.[60]

Ibn Kathīr repeats almost all of the reports which have been already mentioned with the exception of Said b. Jubayr's; 'their faces became like saffron, $za^cfarān.^{.61}$ Furthermore, he quotes from Qurṭubī and Qurshayrī and cites the first report mentioned above. However, in contrast to Qurṭubī, he is not neutral in his comment on the report: he rejects its interpretation; for him the meaning of 'drink' is connected to the love of worshipping the calf. He also adduces evidence from the eulogy[62] of Nābigha written in praise of his wife, Athmah: 'the love of Athmah penetrates into my heart.' Qurṭubī's position, unlike Ibn Kathīr, is not very clear, because Qurṭubī relies on various sources and differing opinions. Therefore sometimes it is quite difficult to discern his preference among these several reports. On the one hand he considers this verse allegorical but on the other, if we look at his statement in the light of his citing the reports from unknown authorities, it appears that he has, to some extent, a kind of dual understanding of the punishment.

Our analysis of the story of the golden calf ends here; however, there are a few points which need to be made regarding this story. The Biblical episode of the 'golden calf' used to be used by the Church as historical evidence that the covenant between God and the Jews had been severed at the beginning of Jewish national history.[63] During the dialogue between Justin Martyr and Trypho the Jew, Justin Martyr connects the falsification of the scriptures with the sin of worshipping the calf.[64] As we know, this episode played a very important role in the religious polemic between the Christians and the Jews. In fact, as Hava Lazarus-Yafeh has pointed out, religious polemic is an indispensable part of the continuous competition between great civilisations.[65] The same is true for Muslims. Many Muslim scholars have used the Qur'anic episode of the 'golden calf' against the irreligious life of the Jews. For instance, Abū Faḍl al-Sa°ūdī says that the verses of Jeremiah 5:15-16 point forward to

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[60] *Ibid.*, II.31; I.126
[61] Ibn Kathīr, I.126
[62] *Ibid.*, I.126
[63] L. Smolar and M. Aberbach, *op. cit.*, 96
[64] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *op. cit.*, 63
[65] *Ibid.*, 4

the Arab victory over the Jews, Christians and others, because God empowered Arab monotheists over those who denied God, worshipping the calf and idols.[66]

Furthermore, various Muslim sects have used the same episode for internal polemics. The episode was used by the early Shiʿites in their anti-Umayyad propaganda. According to the Shiʿites, the history of the Muslim community is similar to that of the Israelites during Moses' lifetime, the Shiʿites being the equivalent of those few who did not apostatise from the true faith when Moses was on Mount Sinai.[67] On the other hand the Bāb (Abū Muḥammad Shirāzī), commenting on 2:51: 'We appointed Moses forty nights then you took to yourself the calf after him and you were evildoers' says

> The word 'nights' alludes to the concealment of the glory of the Imams by the darkness of disbelief. One of the signs of disbelief is the choosing of the calf, which was actually Abū Bakr, al-awwal, as a legatee, al-wāṣī. Therefore the evildoers are those who gave their bayʿa (allegiance) to him.[68]

Poets also use this episode in their personal satire. The following lines of Jarīr are a good illustration:

> You have gone astray from the way
>
> Like the Samaritan and his folk
>
> Who went on cleaving to a calf.[69]

It is also worth noting that besides its polemical utilisation there are some mystical interpretations of this episode, which we have not referred to in our analysis. In order to give some idea of these we will cite Qāshānī on the interpretation of the episode. For him, the meaning of ʿijl is the soul, al-nafs al-haywāniyya an-nāqiṣa.[70] As regards Sāmirī, he says that God tested the Israelites through Sāmirī to distinguish the people who have an ability to achieve perfection from those who are unable to leave

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[66] Ibid., 89

[67] T. Nagel, 'Ḳiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā', EI², V.180

[68] B. Todd Lawson, 'The Commentary of the Bāb', in Andrew Rippin (ed.), Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾan, Oxford: Clarendon Pub. 1988, 237

[69] A. M. Zubaidi, 'The Qurʾan and Arabic Prose', in by A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant and G. R. S. Smith (eds.), Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983, 324

[70] Qāshānī, Muḥy al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī's Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm, Beirut: Dār al-Yaqaẓa 1968, I.49

their bodies and who therefore stay in an imperfect state: these are mere imitators who cannot achieve reality, *taḥqīq*, and so on.[71]

A similar attitude is observed in the commentary of Sahl al-Tustarī. Commenting on the verse 'And the folk of Moses chose a calf for worship', 2:35, Tustarī says that anything which keeps man from God is his own 'golden calf'. It can be one's family, business, ambitions, property and so forth. The only way man can rid himself of that calf is to renounce lust in all its forms, as the original worshippers of the 'golden calf' were required to renounce themselves.[72]

As regards contemporary exegesis it is fair to say that many modern Muslim exegetes dismiss any kind of narrative exegesis as *isrā'īliyyāt* tales. To give an example of the general outlook the interpretation of Maḥmūd Jawwād al-Maghniyya can be mentioned. Commenting on the formation of the calf he says

> the apparent meaning of the Qur'an suggests that Sāmirī misguided the Children of Israel with the calf but we are not supposed to know how Sāmirī formed the calf. That has nothing to do with our belief and life.[73]

In the next chapter, the final one of this part, we will discuss the *mā'idah* (heavenly table) episode in surah Mā'idah.

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[71] *Ibid.*, II.56

[72] Quoted from Muḥammad ʿAtā Sīd, *op. cit.*, 307

[73] Maḥmūd Jawwād al-Maghniyya, *al-Tafsīr al-Kāshif*, Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm al-Malāyīn 1990, V.240

Chapter Eight

The Classical Exegetes' Commentaries on the Heavenly Table

In this chapter we will discuss the narrative of 5:111-115 and its interpretation in classical exegesis. Our specific topic is the 'heavenly table'; that is, *al-mā'idah* in Arabic. As in our previous analysis of the episode of the 'golden calf' we will try to show how the Muslim commentators interpreted these verses; what their main hermeneutic devices were; how they solved dogmatic problems and, most importantly, what their attitude towards the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt* was.

This chapter consists of nine sub-sections. In the first three of these we will focus on the interpretation of the words *ḥawarī* and *waḥy* and give a grammatical exposition of the word *ʿīsā*. In section four we will present the relationship between verse 111 and verse 112. The following section is devoted to the explanation of the word *istiṭāʿa*. Here our main concern is with dogma and therefore we will give detailed information about the variant readings, meanings and understanding of the word. In sections six and seven we will examine the meaning of the *mā'idah* and the request of Jesus' disciples concerning the 'heavenly table'. The day of *ʿīd* (festival) and *rizq* (sustenance) will be discussed in section eight. Finally, we will consider whether or not the 'heavenly table' was sent together with its contents.

Surah Mā'idah's account of the 'heavenly table' runs as follows:

'And when I inspired the disciples, (saying): Believe in Me and in My messenger, they said: We believe. Bear witness that we are muslims[1] (have surrendered unto Thee)', 5:111.

'When the disciples said: O Jesus, son of Mary! Is your Lord able to send down to us a table spread with food from Heaven? He said: fear God, if you are indeed believers', 5:112.

'They said 'we wish to eat thereof and to be stronger in faith, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth and that we ourselves are its witnesses', 5:113.

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[1] Mawdūdī draws attention to the use of the word 'muslims' for the disciples and says that it means that their religion is Islam not Christianity without going into any detail. (Abū Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī, *op. cit.*, VII.82

'Jesus, son of Mary, said; 'O God, our Lord! Send us from heaven a table spread (with food) that there may be for us -for the first and the last of us- a festival and a sign from You; and provide us with sustenance, for You are the Best of sustainers', 5:114.

'God said: I am going to send it down unto you, but if any of you after that disbelieves, then I will punish him with a torment such as I have not inflicted on anyone among all the *ꜥālamīn* (mankind and jinns)', 5:115.

8.1. *Ḥawāriyyūn* (Disciples/Apostles)

Having given a brief Arabic paraphrase of 5:111, Ṭabarī glosses the term *ḥawārī* as *wuzarā-u ꜥīsā* (viziers of Jesus or ministers, helpers, assistants)[2] and says 'We have already talked about this term elsewhere, therefore there is no need to repeat it here'. More information about this term is found in the interpretation of 'when Jesus became conscious of their disbelief, he cried: who will be my helpers in the cause of God? The disciples said: we will be God's helpers...', 3:52. Referring to the dispute over why they are called *ḥawāriyyūn* among the *ahl al-ta'wīl*, Ṭabarī lists seven reports and traces four of them back to earlier traditionalists. Four out of the seven agree that the word denotes a person who wears white cloth.[3] In addition, some of the reports explain that they are named *ḥawārī* because of the whiteness of their garments and because they were launderers, *ghassālūn*. The glosses of two reports are fundamentally different from that of the majority. The first report is related by Rūḥ b. al-Qāsim, who says that Qatāda described one of the companions of the prophet as a *ḥawārī*. When asked what a *ḥawārī* is, he replied 'he who is suitable to become caliph'. The second report is narrated on the authority of Ḍaḥḥāk, who associates *ḥawārī* with *aṣfiyā* (true friends).[4] Ṭabarī, having considered these meanings, concludes that the most plausible gloss is that given by those people who say that the disciples are called *ḥawārī* because of their white clothes. Ṭabarī gives various usages of the word and on every occasion he connects them with the majority's preference. He also notes that this term became customary to designate a friend or helper as Jesus' apostle/disciple. This opinion is supported by the prophetic tradition: 'For every Prophet there is a *ḥawārī* (helper) and my *ḥawārī* is Zubayr.'[5]

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[2] Ṭabarī, XI.217
[3] The author of the article on the *ḥawāriyyūn* in *EI²* considers it as an erroneous gloss. For him, the word is originally borrowed from the Ethiopian language. (A. J. Wensinck, 'Ḥawārī', *EI²*, III.285)
[4] Ṭabarī, VI.449-50
[5] *Ibid.*, VI.450-1

Another exegete who deals with the same word is Ṭūsī. Drawing on the account of Ḥasan he says that *ḥawārīyyūn* are the helpers of Jesus. There are two other glosses given by Ṭūsī from unknown individuals: it is said that the *ḥawārīyyūn* are the viziers of Jesus; and they are the chief men of Jesus, *khulaṣā*. The similarity between these two glosses is obvious. Interestingly, with the exception of a very brief note which says that the *ḥawārī* are *qaṣṣārūn* (those who whiten their clothes) Ṭūsī does not mention any report about why they are called *ḥawārī*.[6]

Ibn Kathīr's opening definition of *ḥawārīyyūn* is short and precise. According to him, they are the followers of Jesus. His gloss indicates that the disciples of Jesus are true believers who have no doubt about God's Oneness and Jesus' prophecy.[7] However, in Ṭabarī's commentary more than four reports make it clear that they are called *ḥawārīyyūn* because of their white clothes. Ṭūsī and Ibn Kathīr, then, are stricter than Ṭabarī towards these reports. It is important to note that Ibn Kathīr makes a very interesting point at the beginning of his interpretation of this verse, although it is not related to the word *ḥawārīyyūn*. He mentions that some scholars state that this story is not found in the Gospel (not Gospels) and adds 'the Christians do not know anything about the table unless the Muslims tell the story to them.' He closes this preface with the expression 'God knows best'.[8] Clearly, this verse is incorporated into his list of polemics by Ibn Kathīr to show that the People of the Book are unaware of their own traditions.

8.2. *Waḥy*, (Revelation)

Ṭabarī draws attention to another key word in 5:111 *awḥā* (inspired) in 5:111. He notes that although *ahl al-ta'wīl* are unanimous about the *maʿnā* (meaning of the verb) they do not reach agreement about the interpretation of it. He spells out two interpretations: one from Suddī, who explains the subject matter of the verb as *qadhafa fī qulūbihī* (I put (threw) into his heart) and the second from an unidentified source, which glosses it as *alhamtuhū* (I inspired him). Ṭabarī reconciles these two explanations with his own interpretation: 'the meaning of the word is *alqaytu* (to inspire).'[9]

[6] Ṭūsī, IV.61
[7] Ibn Kathīr, II.116
[8] *Ibid.*, II.116
[9] Ṭabarī, XI.217-8

While commenting on 3:44[10] Ṭabarī gives more information about the meaning of *waḥy* together with scriptural and poetic proofs. Having used the same gloss, *alqā,* he concludes that it means 'I put the knowledge of it unto him by inspiration.' In support of his conclusion he quotes one line from a poem by Rājiz:

(God) inspired it (the sky) to settle and (consequently) it settled.[11]

Ṭūsī offers two standard meanings and one unauthoritative one. The two standard meanings are *alhama* and *alqā,* both mean 'to inspire'. To support the second gloss he cites a poem from an unidentified poet.[12] The last gloss of the verb is *amara* (to command). Then Ṭūsī, following his usual practice, comments on the nuances of the verbs *awḥā* and *waḥā.* The main difference between them results from their lexical usage: *awḥā* is transitive while *waḥā* is intransitive. In addition, he notes that one group considers them as dialect variants,[13] and it is probably safe to assume that this explanation plausibly closes the gap between their nuances, and that these two forms are interchangeable.

Ibn ʿAṭiyya gives two explanations which are also cited by Ṭabarī: *ilhām* (inspiration) and *waḥy-u amr*[in] (direct command to the addressee). In support of the second meaning he records a poem from an anonymous poet. According to Ibn ʿAṭiyya both are close to each other: 'God's inspiration of the meaning of things in the soul of the disciples.'[14] In addition, having identified Jesus as the *rasūl* in 5:111, he leaves the reader to decide whether it is God or Jesus whom they call upon to 'bear witness'.[15]

8.3. Grammatical Position of the Name of Jesus, ʿĪsā

Unlike the above-mentioned exegetes, Zamakhsharī begins his explanation with a brief grammatical note on the vocalisation of the last letter of the word *ʿīsā.* He offers two interpretations: first, having taken into consideration the *fatḥa* of *ibn* (son) in this verse, he reads *ʿīsā* as accusative. Second, he states that it is also permissible to read it as nominative, *ḍamma.* In order to demonstrate the usage of this second reading he

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[10] 'This is of the tidings of things hidden We revealed unto thee (Muḥammad)...'
[11] Ṭabarī, VI.405
[12] Ṭūsī, IV.61; The same poem is quoted by Ṭabarī from Rājiz. (Ṭabarī VI.405)
[13] Ṭūsī, IV.61
[14] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, II.259
[15] *Ibid.,* II.259

provides a poem from an unidentified poet.[16] Without going into detail he leaves the reader free to prefer one of these two approaches.

8.4. The Relationship Between 5:111 and 5:112

` Another important point emphasised by classical exegetes is the connection between 5:112 and the preceding verse. It should be remembered that this relation is not confined to grammar or lexical affinity; it is directly connected with coherence and theological dogma. For instance, Ṭabarī, in his first attempt to unite these verses, explains that 5:111 is the main sentence and 5:112 is an independent sentence connected to the main sentence by the relative pronoun *idh* (second *idh* in 5:112). He then gives a new paraphrase of the verses according to the above mentioned combination: 'Remember My blessing O Jesus when I inspired the disciples, saying 'believe in Me and My messenger' when they said to Jesus, son of Mary, is your Lord able to send down for us a table spread with food from Heaven?'[17] Ṭabarī uses this elucidation to justify his further comments on the verses on the grounds of the coherence of the Qur'an. For the time being he does not give any details but later he makes his position clearer.

Ṭūsī, on the other hand, begins his explanation with the virtual, *taqdīr*, sense of the verse. According to him, at the beginning of the verse there is a hidden verb, *udhkur* (remember or mention). By reference to this *taqdīr* he connects this verse with a previous verse, 5:109, in which the verb *udhkur* actually appears. Furthermore, Ṭūsī quotes from Balkhī, who interprets the verse 'I inspired the disciples...' as 'I inspired you (Jesus) or one of the previous prophets to inform the people...'. This explanation sheds light on Ṭūsī's understanding of the verse. Briefly, there are two opinions about the meaning of the verse. *The first interpretation derives from the comment of Abū* ᶜAlī, who says 'Remember (O Jesus) my blessing upon you (Jesus) when I inspired the disciples...'. The second interpretation is related from unknown authorities: 'Remember (O Jesus) my blessing on the disciples...'. He also points out that the elimination of the verb *udhkur* (remember) in this verse makes it more beautiful and powerful. In support of this view he cites two lines of a poem from Aᶜshā to indicate that the absence of the predicate is common in Arabic:

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[16] Zamakhsharī, I.653; he derives this poem from Ibn Tammām. (Zamakhsharī, IV.402)
[17] *Ibid.*, XI.218

(In the world) there is a place (for us) to dwell and to prepare for (the hereafter)

In the journey there is a victory for (those who came to go to the hereafter)[18]

8.5. The Meaning of *Istaṭāʿa*

The situation with regard to the term *istaṭāʿa* is somewhat more complicated. Every classical exegete had to grapple with the precise meaning of *hal yastaṭīʿu rabbuka* (is your Lord able to...) in 5:112. Once again Ṭabarī examines different readings of the expression: firstly, a group of companions and followers (Ṭabarī does not identify these companions and successors, but almost all post-Ṭabarī commentators mention the names of these people, who prefer the variant *hal tastaṭīʿu*) read it *hal tastaṭīʿu rabbaka* (accusative). According to this reading the meaning of the verse can be stated as follows: 'Can you (Jesus) ask your Lord (to send down for us a table)?', or 'can you invoke your Lord and are you able?' or 'see (if it is permitted to you) to invoke your Lord'. Ṭabarī also notes that the companions and followers said that the disciples of Jesus never doubted God's power to send the table down for them.[19] So the rationale behind this view is to exonerate the disciples from any insincere action. In support of this interpretation Ṭabarī lists two reports on the authority of earlier traditionalists. Both reports emphasise that the disciples have a strong belief in God.[20] As regards the other reading of the expression Ṭabarī says that the majority of the readers of Madina and Iraq read it *hal yastaṭīʿu rabbuka* (nominative), which means 'is your Lord able to send down...'. To clarify and reduce the dogmatic concern, Ṭabarī compares this gloss with the ordinary communication of people who might ask their friends to stand by saying 'can you stand?' Although they are perfectly aware of their friends' ability to stand, they get their friends to stand up with them by using such a phrase. Furthermore, Ṭabarī records an alternative gloss within the confines of the second reading: it is also permissible for a reader to mean 'does your Lord answer what you want (ask) and does He also accept your request to send...(or obeys -*yuṭīʿuka*- you to send...?)[21] After this exposition Ṭabarī states that the better of these two readings is *hal yastaṭīʿu rabbuka*. The main reason for this preference, according to Ṭabarī, lies in the relation of the two verses (5:111 and 5:112). Although he has already dealt with it he again argues it on rational grounds: 'It is clear that God expresses His dislike of

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[18] Ṭūsī, IV.61; Aʿshā, *op. cit.*, 155
[19] Ṭabarī, XI.218-9
[20] *Ibid.*, XI.219
[21] *Ibid.*, XI.219

their demand and commands them to repent what they have asked, to return to their previous strong belief in God and his messengers, and to acknowledge that God is able to do everything.' Furthermore, Ṭabarī considers the words of Jesus crucial evidence of God's disapproval; 'fear God, if you are indeed believers.' Stressing the grievous nature of their demand, he reaches the conclusion that the above-mentioned statements clearly indicate the sufficiency and correctness of the reading *hal yastaṭīʿu rabbuka*. Obviously, Ṭabarī devotes much energy to solving the variant reading problems. He first brings together two independent verses to contextualize their meanings, then deals with individual expressions to support his own interpretation. His effective use of reports and reason shows his great competence in achieving a solution.

Ṭabarī goes further and discusses some purely dogmatic explanations. First of all he distinguishes between the demands of Jesus' disciples, who are believers in God and in His messengers, from the demands of unbelievers, who ask their prophets to perform miracles, so that they might believe. He provides information about the communities of the prophets Muhammad, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb. So the fundamental difference between these two groups lies in their conviction: on the one hand the disciples who believe in God, and on the other hand the disbelievers who need to witness a miracle to be persuaded. Ṭabarī insists that the miracle asked for by Jesus' disciples is not comparable with the unbelievers' demands for miracles from the prophets to determine whether they are true prophets or not. Pursuing his analysis, Ṭabarī says that whoever associates the demand of the disciples with the disbelievers' demand for a miracle by using the variant reading *hal tastaṭīʿu rabbaka* is badly mistaken, because by doing so they worsen the situation even more than those who hold that the disciples want Jesus to ask his Lord to send down a table to them even though they believe in Jesus and confirm his prophecy. According to Ṭabarī, the latter group at least assume that they are not charging God with imperfection. Ṭabarī does not name any early authority who espoused this mistaken interpretation but he is still reluctant to give up the discussion. He lays stress on the last group's interpretation, which apparently simplifies the theological aspect of the verse. What Ṭabarī says is that the disciples' demands are similar to a poor person's demand that his prophet asks God to make him rich. The disciples do not ask Jesus to perform a miracle; they merely ask Jesus to ask his Lord to meet their needs. That is why Ṭabarī immediately denies the validity of the variant reading and the reports which support it on the basis of Jesus'

statement in 5:112, 'fear God, if you are indeed believers' and then the disciples' response, 5:113 'We wish to eat thereof and to be stronger in faith, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth...'. The conclusion Tabarī derives from these verses is clear: they are not certain that Jesus is telling the truth, and their hearts are not entirely satisfied with his prophecy. In short, there is doubt in their hearts about their religion. Accordingly, they only ask for *ikhtibār* (test).[22]

After prolonged dogmatic speculation Tabarī mentions two reports. Both reports are in agreement with Tabarī's view. The first report is narrated on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās, the second on the authority of Suddī. According to Ibn ᶜAbbās' narration, Jesus asked the Children of Israel to fast thirty days in order to gain what they wanted. They did as Jesus told them and then came to him and said, 'O teacher of goodness, you said that we would be rewarded according to our work. We have fasted thirty days, and the person for whom we have worked thirty days is supposed to give us food. So is your Lord able to send down to us a table?' Jesus warned them, 'fear God, if you are indeed believers.' Then they said, 'we wish to eat thereof and to be stronger in faith...'. At the end of this conversation Angels came forth flying in the air with the table, on which there were seven fishes and seven loaves of bread. When the Angels came near to them they put the table in front of them. Everybody ate from it.[23]

The second report is precise: the meaning of the verse is 'Does your Lord obey you when you ask Him to send a table? Then He sent down a table on which there were all kinds of food except meat, they ate the food'.[24] Although Tabarī is sure that these reports support his preference, the most important evidence on which he depends is that of the Qur'anic presentation of the narrative.

Tūsī states briefly that Kisā'ī and Aᶜshā read it with *ta, hal tastaṭfu* and *rabbaka* in the accusative. He also adds that the rest read it with *ya, yastaṭfu* and *rabbuka* in the nominative. Tūsī then deals with the meaning of the verse. He lists three interpretations: the first explains that it can be rendered as 'is your Lord able, *yaqduru*, to do it?' The association of the word *yastaṭfu* with *yaqduru*, according to Tūsī, is as inevitable as it is problematic. In order to remove the theological problem created by this interpretation, Tūsī feels obliged to give this additional information: 'They said

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[22] *Ibid.*, XI.220-2
[23] *Ibid.*, XI.222
[24] *Ibid.*, XI.222

that they asked for the table at the beginning of their mission.' In other words their request was made before the knowledge of God was established firmly in their hearts. Otherwise it is not permissible to say this or attribute it to God. Because of this the prophet denied their suggestion saying '...fear God if you are indeed believers'.[25]

The second comment is made on the authority of Ḥasan. The meaning of 'is your Lord able to send down...' is similar to one's asking his friend 'can you get up?' meaning, 'will you get up?' The same interpretation is mentioned by Ṭabarī; however, he does not record any authority for it. Then Ṭūsī turns to philosophical analysis to explain this second interpretation: 'because an impediment in respect of motivation or volition may have the same effect as inability.' The disciples did not, therefore, question God's ability, but merely wondered whether He would send the table down or not.'[26].

Ṭūsī, in his last interpretation, largely depends on Suddī. 'Does your Lord answer your request or does He obey you if you ask Him?' At first glance the literal meaning of the expression seems unacceptable; however, Ṭūsī is eager to play with the words to show an interrelation among them and allow for the variant *tastaṭfuʿ: istaṭāʿa* and *aṭāʿa* have the same meaning as *istijāba* and *ajāba*, so the word *istiṭāʿa*, 'to be able to', must be understood as 'to give'. This last opinion was held by Sibawayh. The meaning of the reading of Kisā'ī, *tastaṭfu*, is 'can you ask your Lord to answer you?' Moreover, Ṭūsī notes another aspect of the understanding of the verse: 'are you able, *taqduru,* to ask your Lord?'[27] Ṭūsī gives a clear linguistic analysis of the several forms of the verb, indicating both possible and probable meanings. He, in contrast to Ṭabarī, does not disregard the variant *tastaṭfu*. His logical survey ends with the explanation of the nuance separating *istiṭāʿa* and *qudra*. According to Ṭūsī, God is certainly not described by *istiṭāʿa*[28] because His Power never depends on any secondary agency; obviously, *qadīr* (Absolute Power) necessitates the ability to do all things without assistance.[29] Concerning Jesus' warning, Ṭūsī simply glosses it, 'Do not ask again for a

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[25] Ṭūsī, IV.62

[26] *Li anna al-mānʿi min jihat al-ḥikmat aw al-shahwāti qad yufʿalu bi manzilat al-munāfī li al-istiṭāʿa*

[27] *Ibid.,* IV.62-3

[28] Interestingly, Qurṭubī says that Ibn al-ʿArabī considered *al-mustaṭfu* to be a name of God. He also notes that this name is not mentioned in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah of the prophet explicitly (as an *ismᵃⁿ*) but it occurs *fiʿlᵃⁿ* (as an action). (Qurṭubī, VI.365)

[29] Ṭūsī., IV.63

sign; do not ask for food, because you do not know what God will do with your
request.'[30]

In his comment on 5:112 Zamakhsharī raises a very interesting question: 'How
can the disciples say 'Is your Lord able to send a table...' after coming to believe in
God and purifying themselves from inappropriate acts?' In response, he points out that
God does not characterise or describe them as sincere believers, He only narrates their
claim to be sincere believers. The distinction made by Zamakhsharī indicates that
genuine belief is different from a mere description of oneself as a believer. He tries to
solve this theological problem within a Qur'anic context. According to Zamakhsharī it
is not possible for a real believer, who glorifies his Lord, to ask a question such as 'Is
your Lord able to send a table...'. In addition, Zamakhsharī says that Jesus' warning to
the disciples in 5:112 is conclusive evidence of their doubt. So the meaning of Jesus'
warning, 'fear God', is 'Do not have any doubt about the ability and the power of God,
do not pass a judgement on God without regard for justice if your claim to be a sincere
believer is true.'[31]

Besides this interpretation, Zamakhsharī also records another which stems from
the variant reading of the verb *yastaṭīʿu*, namely *tastaṭīʿu*: 'Can you ask your Lord to
send a table down...'. Although many commentators mention the same variant,
Zamakhsharī's elucidation of it is precise and quite different from their explanation:
'Can you ask your Lord without any obstacle which prevents you from asking it...'[32]
Strangely, Zamakhsharī uses this variant together with his own interpretation to
support his previous explanation. In other words, as regards the meaning there is little
difference between these two variants. In both cases what the disciples did indicates
that they are not strong believers. It is clear that Zamakhsharī is not convinced to show
the piety of the disciples. It is also worth noting that he does not make any reference to
the standard explanation of this verse, which equates the request of the disciples with
that of a person who asks his friend (about his ability) to stand up. So Zamakhsharī's
negative interpretation of the disciples' position together with their question suggests

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[30] *Ibid.*, IV.63
[31] Zamakhsharī, I.654
[32] *Ibid.*, I.654

the possibility that his explanation was influenced by the fluctuating relationship between the Islamic states and Christendom.[33]

Like many exegetes, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya places stress on the interpretation of the disciples' request for the table. He states that, Kisā'ī being excepted, the remaining seven readers read the verse as *yastaṭfu rabbuka*. The obvious reason for the disciples' question is not their doubt about the Power of God but their desire to know whether He will accept their request. At this point, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya makes a comparison between the disciples' question and the request of the people who came to ᶜAbd Allāh b. Zayd to ask him to show them how the messenger of God performed his ablution. That is, they wanted to know whether ᶜAbd Allāh was willing to show how the prophet performed ablution.[34]

Because of the majority's acceptance of it, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is in favour of the reading *yastaṭfu*; however, he does not deny the fact that there is, to some extent, a deformity in the disciples' question. The main reason for this comment is the Qur'anic warning by Jesus in 5:112, due to which Ibn ᶜAṭiyya says, 'a group of the companions and successors tend to read it as *tastaṭfu rabbaka*.' ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Muᶜādh b. Jabal, Ibn ᶜAbbās, ᶜĀisha, and Saᶜīd b. Jubayr are among those who prefer this reading. He also records ᶜĀisha's comment on the disciples, whom she has vindicated from any sin: 'They are more knowledgeable than to say 'is your Lord able to send...'.'[35] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya considers ᶜĀisha's comment as an attempt to prevent the Lord from being defiled by the deformity of the style of the question; however, that the disciples are aware of the capacity of God is implicit in the previous reading, *yastaṭfu*. Basing his opinion on the literal meaning of the verse, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya reaches the conclusion that the disciples are believers. Clearly, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya includes both readings side by side with the traditional interpretation. It is as if the two approaches, the favoured and unfavoured, stand with equal authority. So his inclusion of the variant readings of this verse may represent what, in Rippin's words, is a conscious attempt to come to grips with a

[33] This point has been proposed recently by N. M. El Cheikh in his analysis of the first five verses of surah al-Rūm. (N. M. E. Cheikh, 'Sūrat al-Rūm: A Study of the Exegetical Literature', *Journal of the American Oriental Studies*, 118 (1998) 363)
[34] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, II.259
[35] *Ibid.*, II.259

(theologically)[36] obscure passage by studying alternative grammatical constructions and lexical variations.[37] Interestingly, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya goes further and compares God's warning with the ordinary speech of a man who says to his friend 'do this, do that if you are a man'; he then narrates from an anonymous group who held the opinion that the disciples made this request at the beginning of Jesus' mission. They had yet to witness any miracle of Jesus; that is why they were warned in the Qur'an. So a reading with *y* involves either deformity or the rejection of their demand for a miracle. On the other hand whoever reads the verse with *t* does not reject their demand completely but implies their lack of certainty and suggests that they should not ask this kind of question.[38] The last point made by Ibn ᶜAṭiyya is purely grammatical. In order to reduce the dogmatic burden of the question *hal yastaṭfu rabbuka* Ibn ᶜAṭiyya suggests that the verse can be reconstructed, *taqdīr*, as *hal yastaṭfu an yunazzila rabbuka bi duᶜāika*: 'Is your God able to send it because of your prayer...'[39] In brief, in contrast to Ṭūsī's semantic approach Ibn ᶜAṭiyya prefers to use grammar in his attempt to solve the dogmatic problem caused by the variant readings.

Rāzī devotes a lengthy discussion to the question of whether the disciples have doubts about the Oneness of God and the prophecy of Jesus. The first step taken by Rāzī is to introduce the reading of the celebrated companions, such as ᶜAlī, Ibn ᶜAbbās, and ᶜĀisha: *hal tastaṭfu rabbuka*. In addition, Rāzī records an anecdote from Muᶜādh b. Jabal, who said that the messenger of God taught him to read this verse as *hal tastaṭfu rabbaka*.

As regards the rival reading, Rāzī, without naming any authority, states that others read *hal yastaṭfu rabbuka*. The difference between these two readings is significant. Rāzī, quoting from unknown personalities, says that according to the first reading, with *t*, Jesus' ability, *istiṭāʿa*, to ask his Lord is judged, while in the second reading, with *y*, the ability of God Himself is judged. Rāzī therefore concludes that there is no doubt of the worthiness of the first reading but that the obscurities of the second reading still remain. This being so, the major question confronting Rāzī is how

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[36] This is our addition. The Qur'anic verse in its ordinary form is not problematic; however, many commentators bring their own dogmatic convictions to the explanation of this verse, which consequently becomes quite obscure.

[37] Andrew Rippin, 'Qur'an 21:95: A Ban is Upon any Town', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 24 (1979) 44

[38] Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, II.260

[39] *Ibid.*, II. 260

is it permissible for to the disciples to be described as being doubtful about the Power of God, though God narrates that they have believed and have wanted to bear witness to their belief?[40] In order to clarify these questions Rāzī gives a summary of various interpretations. Some of these explanations are original. He begins by stating that God has not described them as sincere believers but has only narrated their claim to having become sincere believers. This distinction, first made by Zamakhsharī, indicates that genuine belief is different from one's claiming to be a believer. So it is not possible for the believer who glorifies his Lord to ask 'is your Lord able...'.[41] Rāzī quotes this interpretation from Zamakhsharī almost verbatim and gives precisely the same impression -that the disciples are not very sincere believers- although he does not explicitly prefer it.

In his second explanation, he compares their request to that of the prophet Abraham when he asked God to show him how He gives life to the dead. Like Abraham they want to see proof in order to obtain certainty and increase their belief.[42] Rāzī's appeal to Abraham's argument would have been worthless if the disciples were not sincere in their request. This interpretation is reminiscent of Ṭūsī's explanation of related passages.

The third point is very sophisticated and is also quite controversial. Rāzī comments 'What is meant by this statement is interrogative, whether it is permissible or not, because God's commandments are based on observing logic and reason. In some instances when no reason is known the action is impossible. Likewise, when the reason is not known the *qudra* (ability) is questionable'.[43] This approach is in line with the Mutazilites' interpretation. Rāzī continues, 'according to our opinion the statement can be set down as follows:

i. Did God ordain the action?

ii. Did God know when it would happen?

If He did not ordain the action and did not know when it would happen, then that is impossible and inexcusable because what cannot be known cannot be done'.[44] Clearly, Rāzī's proposal is not very different from the Mutazilites' opinion, and so it is difficult

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[40] Rāzī, III.694

[41] *Ibid.*, III.694

[42] *Ibid.*, III.694

[43] Ṭūsī made a similar interpretation but Rāzī does not refer to him.

to evaluate what Rāzī offers by way of explanation on this point. It seems that Rāzī and the Mutazilites approach the issues differently but explain them in a similar vein. However, there is one minor point which needs clarification. Rāzī places stress on action while the Mutazilites emphasise reason (or wisdom).

In his fourth explanation he largely depends on the account of Suddī, who considers the letter s in istiṭāʿa to be zāʾid (grammatically excessive) and renders istiṭāʿa (ability) as ṭāʿa (obey). So the meaning of the verse is 'Does your Lord obey you if you ask him ...?'

In the fifth explanation Rāzī offers a strange interpretation: it is possible to think that the word rabb here refers to the Angel Gabriel. According to Rāzī it is reasonable to hold this view because of the etymological consideration behind it. Gabriel looks after Jesus, educates him and helps him on several occasions. To support this possibility, Rāzī cites 5:110 '...O remember My Favour to you and to your mother when I supported you with rūḥ al-quds (Holy Spirit, Gabriel) so...'. To put it other way, Jesus has been given great importance by Gabriel; due to his close relation to Gabriel, he is able to send a table to him.[45]

The final elucidation is intended to show the purity of the disciples. According to this explanation there is no question of their doubt being insincere, but their demand is like the demand of a friend who holds his poor friend's hand and says 'can the governor give him food?'[46] It seems Rāzī has taken the idea from Ṭabarī but illustrates it with a different example. So far he has presented six explanations and the majority of them prove that the disciples are not insincere in their faith. Though he does not explicitly reject the second interpretation he does not prefer it either. In the third explanation he openly rejects the Mutazilites' exegetical assumption in the interpretation of wisdom, however he does not present his own opinion clearly. It is also interesting to note that Rāzī, while objecting to the Mutazilite view, fails to make any reference to one of the strongest supporters of this interpretation, namely Ṭūsī.

Another point which Rāzī concentrates on is the last part of 5:112. Certain features of his argument deserve attention. He lists two interpretations. The first explains Jesus' concern for the disciples' specification of the miracle. In other words

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[44] Rāzī, III.695
[45] Ibid., III.695

the disciples not only ask for a miracle; they go further and specify the kind of miracle they want (the heavenly table). This is a very interesting contribution to the exegesis of this verse. According to Rāzī, the manner of the people should be criticised, not the people themselves or the miracle. This approach represents quite a liberal attitude to the interpretation of Jesus' warning.

Rāzī is more moderate in his second interpretation. He solves the controversy within the Qur'anic context by citing two verses from the Qur'an: 'Whoever fears God, He will make a way for him to get out (of every difficulty), 65:3, and 'O you who believe! do your duty to God and fear Him. Seek the means of approach to Him...', 5:35. By quoting these verses Rāzī argues that if the disciples truly believe in God's ability to send down a table, and fear Him, then their fear becomes the means of achieving what they have asked.[47] This seems to imply that the text of the Qur'an necessitates belief in this result. Both interpretations are interesting and original.

Ibn Kathīr does not mention either of the traditional interpretations found in Ṭabarī nor does he hint that there may be a theological problem in the reading of the expression *hal yastaṭʿu rabbuka*. He simply states that this is the majority's reading and that others read it as *hal tastaṭʿu rabbaka*, which means 'can you ask your Lord...?'[48] Strangely, he prefers to give the meaning of the alternative reading rather than that of the generally accepted reading. Suffice it to say that, in spite of some ambiguity, the way in which he deals with the verse suggests that he accepts both readings. His approach is also consistent with his gloss of the word *ḥawāriyyūn*.

8.6. The Meaning of *Māʾidah*

The final point in the interpretation of 5:112 concerns the elucidation of the word *māʾidah*. Most Muslim commentators deal with this word from a linguistic point of view. Ṭabarī takes it to be a form of *fāʿilāt^{un}* from *māda*;[49] *māda fulān^{un} al-qawma*

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[46] *Ibid.*, III.695
[47] *Ibid.*, III.695
[48] Ibn Kathīr, II.116
[49] Jeffery argues the improbability of the explanation of Muslim grammarians of the morphology of this word. He also notes that Nöldeke held that the verses 5:112-115 are a confusion of the Gospel story of the feeding of the multitude with that of the Lord's Supper. (A. Jeffery, *op. cit.*, 1938, 225); According to Bell, this episode does not go back to literary sources, but is based on some meagre answer to an enquiry regarding the origin of the rite. (R. Bell, *op. cit.*, 1953, 163). Robinson considers this episode the most puzzling feature of surah Māʾidah. For him, a typological fusion of the New Testament with the Old may be the key to the understanding of the episode. (N. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 1991, 18)

means 'one feeds, or brings food to, the people.' He also adduces evidence from the poems of Ruʿba. The meaning of *maʾidah* is a table with food upon it. Ṭabarī explains that the word *khiwān* has the same meaning.[50] *Al-maʾid* is a person who suffers sea sickness.[51] Ṭūsī and, and following him, Rāzī, adds that Abū ʿUbayda mentions that *maʾidah* is in the form of *fāʿil* (noun agent) but its meaning is *mafʿūl* (passive). He makes explicit reference to the Qurʾanic parallels to this usage: *ʿīshat al-rāḍiyah* in 102:7 means *marḍiyyah* (pleasant life).[52] Moreover, Ṭūsī, like Ṭabarī, cites a poem of Ruʿba to support this meaning.[53] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr are more precise than Rāzī, who devotes five lines to a lexicographical explanation of this word. Rāzī, quoting from Anbārī, says that it is called *maʾida* because it is a gift, *ʿaṭiyyah*.[54]

8.7. The Request of the Disciples of Jesus

In commenting on 5:113 Ṭabarī provides an anecdote. His interpretation is uniquely based on rational grounds. He states simply that in response to Jesus' warning them to 'fear God, if you are indeed believers' when they asked for food, the disciples said 'We made this request in order to know the Power of God for a certainty, *yaqīn^{an}*, and so that our hearts may be put at rest, the oneness of God may be strongly established in our hearts and we may know that you (Jesus) have spoken the truth.'

He closes his comment with an explanation of the word *shāhidīn* (witnesses).[55] Ṭabarī's interpretation has two aspects. On the one hand, due to the miraculous proof of the *maʾidah*, the disciples bear witness to the Oneness of God and His power; on the other hand, through this same miracle, they bear witness to the prophethood and the truthfulness of Jesus.

Ṭūsī's first discussion revolves around the meaning of *irāda* (wish) in this verse. He presents two opinions: one glosses it as *muḥabbah* (we will be happy if we see), others consider it an inward action (belief). In Ṭūsī's opinion, the question put forward by the disciples can be read in this way: 'Our request is for that which we have previously asked; that is, to eat from the table.' This desire was present before the sending down of the table. Therefore their desire cannot be described as an action

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[50] Lane draws attention to a nuance between these two words: '*khiwān* refers to a table without food upon it while *maʾidah* refers to a table with food.' (E. W. Lane, *op. cit.*, IV.2746)

[51] Ṭabarī, XI.223

[52] Ṭūsī, IV.63; Rāzī, III.695

[53] Ṭūsī, IV.63

[54] Rāzī, III.695

(determinism), *ʿazm*. In other words, the meaning of their question is that 'they want to ask due to some reason they have already mentioned.'[56] The second point made by Ṭūsī is related to the explanation of the expression 'to be stronger in faith'. For Ṭūsī it is permissible to understand by it that they wish to observe their religious duties and that their request is similar to Abraham's: 'my Lord, show me how You give life to the dead. He said: Do you not believe? Abraham replied: yes but I wish to be stronger in faith', 2:260. In brief, they, like Abraham, ask for a sign to increase their faith and certainty, *yaqīn*. So he concludes that true knowledge can only be achieved by perfect confidence and more proofs being about greater knowledge.[57]

From Ṭūsī's point of view there is no harm in their request for the *māʾidah*, since they only want to increase their faith. The end of the verse, as Ṭūsī interprets it, parallels this conclusion: having seen this proof they will be witnesses to the Oneness of God and his (Jesus') prophethood.[58]

One of the most striking interpretations given by Zamakhsharī relates to 5.113. He maintains that the disciples justify themselves to Jesus by saying either 'We will bear witness to this heavenly table among the Children of Israel who have not seen this miracle', or 'Because of the heavenly table we will bear witness to the Oneness of God and your prophethood.' Basing his opinion on rational grounds, Zamakhsharī thus provides two interpretations. It is interesting that he connects the disciples' claim to be sincere believers in 5:112 with their wish to be strong in faith and know that Jesus has indeed told them the truth. Zamakhsharī still has some doubt about the sincerity of the disciples and holds that God mentions their claim to be believers and does not endorse the genuineness of their belief. Furthermore, Zamakhsharī thinks that Jesus' fulfilling their request and God's sending the table down are the proper proofs to satisfy their demand. Therefore if they do not believe the miracle they will be punished. This comment supports Zamakhsharī's previous explanation.[59] He also makes a brief comment on the variant reading of the verb *naʿlamu*. Although he does not mention any authority he says that this verb is read *yaʿlamu* and *taʿlamu*. According to the latter

[55] Ṭabarī, XI.224
[56] Ṭūsī, IV.64
[57] *Ibid.*, IV.64
[58] *Ibid.*, IV.64
[59] Zamakhsharī, I.654

reading the subject of the verb is the hearts, *qulūbunā*, in 5:113. The grammatical explanation of the expression *allāhumma* is precise and brings no new information.[60]

Ibn °Aṭiyya, basing his argument only on the Qur'anic verse 'they said, we wish to eat thereof and to be stronger in faith ...' explains the reason for their demand for the table: 'The meaning of eating in this verse is not to eat sufficient food but to be stronger in faith.' In other words they say 'Our minds need to be completely satisfied regarding your prophethood by seeing this table with our eyes.' According to Ibn °Aṭiyya, they are not content with deduction; they desire to confirm Jesus' truthfulness by seeing with their own eyes. The Qur'anic verb *na°lamu* is clear evidence for their demand. Therefore Ibn °Aṭiyya is content to accept the opinion of those who say that the disciples wanted to witness this miracle before seeing any miracle of Jesus. Besides the Qur'anic expression *wa na°lamu*, he also considers the Qur'anic command *an āminū* as concrete evidence for this interpretation. In brief, the disciples raised this question at the beginning of Jesus' mission. This conclusion, according to Ibn °Aṭiyya, is supported by the Qur'anic verses themselves.[61]

Obviously, Ibn °Aṭiyya's explanation largely depends on the Qur'an itself. After making his preference clear he also briefly refers to the report narrated from anonymous transmitters who say that Jesus told the disciples 'If you fast thirty days your request will be fulfilled.' Having fasted thirty days, they came to Jesus and said to him, 'Whoever works for someone is supposed to be served food; can your Lord do this for us?'[62] This narrative indicates that the table was sent down due to their fast. Although Ibn °Aṭiyya does not express an opinion, his version of the report is the shortest of all: he eliminates every single embellishment and narrates it with the formula *ruwiya*, 'it is narrated'. Having considered previous commentators' interpretations and their presentations of this report it is quite safe to assume that he is unwilling to accept it. He records it as no more than an anecdote.

Commenting on this verse, Rāzī repeats some earlier points and adds that the disciples' request to see a miracle is not motivated by mere curiosity, but is connected to a number of important issues. He lists four explanations: first, they want to eat from the table due to their hunger; second, although they know the Power of God, when they

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[60] *Ibid.*, I.654
[61] Ibn °Aṭiyya, II.260
[62] *Ibid.*, II.260

witness this miracle their certainty increases and their faith becomes stronger than before. The third is similar to the second, and the last is particularly interesting; it probably bears the stamp of Rāzī himself: 'They say 'All previous miracles have been earthly miracles, but this miracle is heavenly and is greater than others. If we see it we will bear witness to the table, to the people who are not present here, to the Power of God and to your (Jesus') prophethood'.[63]

Ibn Kathīr first notes an anonymous comment that the disciples asked for the table because of their need and poverty. They requested it in order to have food to eat and by eating the miraculous food they would devote themselves to the worship of God.[64] Parallel to this, Ibn Kathīr paraphrases Jesus' warning as follows: 'Fear God, do not ask for a table. You will perhaps fail to obey if it is a test for you, and become subject to punishment. Trust in God for your sustenance if you are a believer.' Their response to Jesus' warning is 'We wish to eat thereof and to be stronger in faith...'. Ibn Kathīr gives a rather similar interpretation: they said 'We need to eat from it, when we see it coming down as sustenance from heaven. Our hearts will be put at rest and our knowledge and faith in your prophecy will increase.'[65] Ibn Kathīr's elucidation deserves close attention. Obviously, he sees nothing unusual in the disciples' request. On the one hand he accepts that hunger was their major motive; on the other he skilfully minimises the dogmatic effect of the verse. To put it another way, unlike his predecessors he does not make any reference to the result of their request, namely 'the increase of their belief in God', 'knowing God's Power with a certainty', or 'the Oneness of God is strongly established in their hearts'. What he does is to introduce Jesus and say that the miracle is a sign from God which indicates Jesus' prophethood. In short, the central question is not how can we know God, His Power and so on, but how can we serve Him, *ʿubūdiyyah*.

8.8. The Day of Festival, *ʿĪd*, and Sustenance, *Rizq*

Having expressed the opinion that this is a report from God and informed the reader that Jesus was persuaded to ask God about his people's request for food from heaven, Ṭabarī mentions the scholars' dispute over the meaning of 'that it may be a feast for us, for the first of us and for the last of us'. According to him, there are two

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[63] Rāzī, III.696
[64] Ibn Kathīr, II.116
[65] *Ibid.*, II.116

main interpretations: first, the disciples consider this as a festival day which they and their descendants will hold in high respect forever. This comment is supported by four reports related from earlier traditionalists. In these reports it is also said that they pray on this day. The second interpretation is traced back to Ibn ᶜAbbās, who informs us that all the disciples, from the first to the last among them, eat from the table.[66] Ṭabarī also cites another interpretation on the authority of unknown personalities whose concerns are limited to a lexicographical explanation: God speaks (here) of an $^c\bar{\iota}d$, by which is meant (not a festival, but) a benefit which God grants to us, as well as a *ḥujjah* (argument) and *burhān* (proof and evidence).[67] Having explained these different approaches, he explicitly states his preference: 'the best one is the first interpretation because they want a festival day on which to pray and to worship like other people who worship on their special festival days. Thus, the meaning which we affirm corresponds to the usual meaning that people associate with (the word) $^c\bar{\iota}d$ in their speech...' He rejects the third interpretation, saying 'The meaning contained in the *kalām Allāh* (the Speech of God) is to be interpreted as lying closer to the usual manner of speaking of the one who makes the request, than to something inaccessible and unknown to him.'[68]

In the interpretation of the expression 'for the first and the last of us' he favours the comment made by Ibn Jurayj: 'for those of us who are living today and for those who will come after us.' The reason for this selection, according to Ṭabarī, is based on the same linguistic argument he cited for God's Words 'that shall be for us an $^c\bar{\iota}d$ (festival)', since the meaning adopted (in each case) is the most used one.[69] His preference is both logical and reasonable. As we have seen before, Ṭabarī is quite willing to express what he thinks or holds and he frequently rejects or disregards other interpretations by an explicit statement of preference.

As Ṭabarī did before, Ṭūsī first states that God narrates that Jesus asked Him to send food from heaven as his people requested. He then deals with the grammatical exposition of the verse. Having identified the verb *takūnu* as a qualifying *mā'idah* he explains that therefore it is to be considered to be nominative. He also gives another

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[66] Ṭabarī, XI.225
[67] *Ibid.*, XI.225
[68] *Ibid.*, XI.226
[69] *Ibid.*, XI.226

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example from the Qur'an to show a similar usage: ...so give me from Yourselves an heir who shall inherit from me, *yarithunī...*', 19:5-6.[70]

In his subsequent discussion Ṭūsī focuses on the expression 'for the first and the last of us'. According to him, there are two opinions on the meaning of this expression. The interpretation made by Suddī, Qatāda, Ibn Jurayj, and Abū ʿAlī explains that the disciples considered the day on which the food was sent down as a festival day; they and the people who would come later would honour this day. The second interpretation is mentioned on the authority of unknown personalities who say that the meaning of ʿīd is ʿā'idah, the favour and grace of God. After giving this brief exposition, Ṭūsī notes that the first meaning is more appropriate.[71] In his comments on this expression Ṭūsī adds nothing new. Although his presentation is shorter than Ṭabarī's it is difficult to distinguish either their explanations or their preferences. What is new in his interpretation is the identification of the day on which the *mā'idah* was sent down: (it is said that) it was sent down on Sunday, *yawm al-aḥad*.[72] We have not discovered any criticism of Ṭūsī regarding this identification. He goes on to make a brief comment on the word *āyah* (sign/ proof): *al-āyah* is strong evidence for the persuasion of the heart of the servants to confirmation and confession of the truth. He concludes that this is proof of the Oneness of God and the truthfulness of His prophet.[73]

Ṭūsī places particular emphasis on the term *rizq*, which occurs in the last part of the verse. He is quite willing to use this opportunity for theological purposes. In his introduction he simply mentions two meanings of the verse: firstly, 'make it sustenance, *rizq*, for us'. The second is favoured by Jubbā'ī, who explains the verse as follows: 'Provide us *shukr* (thankfulness) as a sustenance'. So *shukr* becomes *rizq* because there is grace in it, like a property which we possessed but have not created. Basing his argument on the expression 'You are the Best sustainers' Ṭūsī goes on to state that this verse is clear evidence that the ʿibād (servants) provide sustenance for each other, *yarzuqu baʿḍuhum baʿḍ*. He contends that it is pointless to say 'You are the Best of sustainers' if it is not true. It is also meaningless to say 'You are the Best of deities' if there is no other deity. He places stress on similar structures such as the Most Merciful one, *arḥam al-rāḥimīn*; God is the Best of the judges, *aḥkām al-ḥākimīn*; The

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[70] Ṭūsī, IV.64
[71] *Ibid.*, IV.65
[72] *Ibid.*, IV.65
[73] *Ibid.*, IV.65

Quickest of the reckoners, *asra^ca al-ḥāsibīn*; The Best of the creators, *aḥsan al-khāliqīn*.[74] Besides presenting the Mutazilite view of the nature of *rizq* (i.e. that it is created), he tries to invalidate the Sunni approach using this Qur'anic verse.

When Zamakhsharī moves on to explain 5:114 he first concentrates on the elucidation of the meaning of '...that it may be a feast for us...'. He cites two interpretations. According to the first, the day on which the table was sent down became a festival day. He also mentions that (it is said that) this day coincided with Sunday, therefore the Christians consider Sunday a festival day. The second interpretation is from unknown personalities and glosses *^cīd* as the day of joy and delight. Interpreting the expression 'for the first and the last of us' he gives the meaning, 'for those who are alive among us (our brothers in religion) today and who will come after us'. He also cites the alternative explanation of this verse: 'only the people who were alive at that time ate from the table'.[75] It should be noted that Zamakhsharī records an interesting variant from Zayd, who reads *awwalinā wa ākhirinā* in the feminine form; *ūlānā wa ukhrānā*. The significance of this variant is worth mentioning. The feminine form refers to the group or community, *ummah or jamā^cah*, so the meaning is that 'we are the pioneers and our descendants will eat from the table'.[76]

According to Ibn ^cAṭiyya 5:114 is a report from God informing the people that Jesus accepted the request of the disciples about the table. Having said that he makes a very brief reference to the reports concerning how Jesus prayed to God. It is narrated that he wore hairy garments, stood up to pray and wept.[77] Ibn Kathīr devotes one and a half pages to this report but Ibn ^cAṭiyya's narration consists of nine words without naming any authority. After this narration Ibn ^cAṭiyya deals with the morphological explanation of the expression *allāhumma*: 'The origin of it is *yā Allāh* and the two *mīms* in *humma* are a substitute for *yā* in *yā Allāh*. *Rabb* is the second vocative.' Furthermore, he mentions the majority's view of the reading of the verb *takūnu*. They, *jumhūr*, consider *takūnu* as an adjective of the word *mā'idah*; therefore it is considered to be nominative. Besides this common reading there is another variant of the verb

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[74] *Ibid.*, IV.65
[75] Zamakhsharī, I.655
[76] *Ibid.*, I.655
[77] Ibn ^cAṭiyya, II.261

takūnu, namely *takun*. Ibn Mas°ūd and A°mash read the verb as *takun*, regarding it as a conditional mood of the verb *anzil* in the same verse.[78]

Regarding the interpretation of the term *°īd* Ibn °Aṭiyya is quite precise: *°īd* means meeting, the day on which the people come together and see each other, *al-yawm al-mashhūd*. He adds that some argue that this word comes from *°āda, ya°ūdu* (turn) and means to 'return' in a year or month, like *jum°a* (Friday). Ibn °Aṭiyya rejects this interpretation and states that here *°īd* does not mean 'to turn'. As to the meaning of the expression 'for the first and last of us', it is easy to understand his objection. He offers two explanations. The first comment, made by Suddī, Qatāda, Ibn Jurayj and Sufyān explains that 'the first of us' refers to the people who were alive at that time and 'the last of us' refers to the people from their community who would come later and consider this day as a festival day. The second interpretation, reported from Ibn °Abbās, says that all the people -the first and the last- came together on this day at that time. Ibn °Aṭiyya's preference also moves him to reject the report which identifies this day with Sunday. He also does not neglect to mention variant readings of the words *awwal* and *ākhir*, namely *ūlā* and *ukhrā*.[79]

Rāzī begins his comment with a grammatical explanation of the words *allāhumma* and *takūnu* or *takun*. Because he gives extensive information elsewhere, he says only that *allāhumma* is the first vocative and *rabbanā* is the second. As regards the verb *takūnu* he gives more detail. According to him, there is no connection between the imperative *anzil* and *takūnu* (adjective qualifying *mā'idah*). To support this view he cites 19:5: 'Give me, then a successor of Thine own choice, who shall be my heir, *fa-habl^ī min ladunka waliyy^{an} yarithunī*'. Here, *yarithu* is qualitative and cannot be the apodosis. Despite his preference, Rāzī does not neglect the alternative opinion; some read *takun*, regarding it as the apodosis to *anzil*. He also notes that °Abd Allāh read (he does not precisely identify °Abd Allāh, but it is safe to assume that he is referring to °Abd Allāh Ibn Mas°ūd) the word as *takun*. He closes his explanation with Farrā's interpretation: 'In some cases, as it happens here, it is permissible to read it either in the indicative or in the jussive mood, *jazm*.'[80]

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[78] *Ibid.*, II.261
[79] *Ibid.*, II.261
[80] Rāzī, III.696

Rāzī's other major concern regarding this verse is the determination of the meaning of ^{c}*īd*. The disciples say 'We consider this day as a festival day; we ourselves and our successors will honour this day forever.' He also notes that the table was sent down on Sunday, therefore the Christians consider it a festival day. In fact it is the general consensus that the day about which the verse speaks is Sunday. In his lexicographical explanation of ^{c}*īd* he says that this word is a noun which means 'something which returns to one in a specific time.' Its past and present form are ^{c}*āda ya*^{c}*ūdu* and the origin of the word is ^{c}*ūd*. It is called ^{c}*īd* because this day returns every year with renewed joy.[81]

Rāzī deals with two other terms which have demanded clarification within the exegetical tradition concerning this verse. The first of these is *āyah* (sign or proof) while the other is *rizq* (sustenance). His explanation is precise: *āyah* means the proof of God's Oneness and the truth of Jesus' prophecy. The meaning of 'provide us sustenance' is 'give us food to eat; You are the Best of sustainers.' This brief comment is used by him as a springboard for his next step, in which he advances more rational arguments. In order to show the consistency between the verses and the order of the words in the verse he gives an elaborate explanation. It is also interesting to note that for the first time in the section examined here we find Rāzī exhibiting a type of mystical tendency. In addition some of his interpretation contains a strong element of religious piety and he often adopts a hortatory style. In order not to lose any detail of Rāzī's message we give here a full translation of his second *mas'ala*

> Reflect on the order of the phrases used by the disciples in asking for the table. They first mentioned worldly affairs (their wish to eat from this table) and only later came to the religious purposes. As regards Jesus, when he asked for the table, 'provide us sustenance', he first stated the religious purposes and postponed the worldly aims (to eat etc.). At this stage the rank of souls, *darajāt al-arwāh*, appeared to you: some of the souls were spiritual, others corporeal, *jismānī*. When Jesus (Peace be upon him), being religiously pure and spiritually radiant, mentioned sustenance he did not stop there but transferred from sustenance to Sustainer. His specific citation of the name of the Lord using the word *rabbanā* (O our Lord) at the beginning and his request for the table, 'send us a table...', pointed out the transfer from *dhāt* (essence) to *ṣifāt* (attribute). The verse '...there may be for us -for the first of us and the last of us- a festival day...' showed the joy of the soul in grace. This grace should not be understood in the sense of its mere being *ni*^{c}*mah* (grace) but of its being given by *mun*^{c}*im* (Sustainer). The

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[81] *Ibid.*, III.696

expression *āyat^{un} minka* referred to the fact that this table was a proof for the man of wisdom. 'Provide us sustenance' signified the portion of the soul, *ḥiṣṣat al-nafs*. All came from Glorious God. Look how it was presented: He began with the noblest one and came down to the lower and lower, then ended with 'You are the Best of sustainers'. This last phrase indicated another ascent from the creatures to the Creator. Now it appeared to you how the pure and bright souls ascended and descended; 'O my Lord, make us one of them.'[82]

In his last *mas'ala* regarding this verse he, like his predecessors, notes Zayd's variant readings of the words *awwal* and *ākhir* which use the feminine form.

Ibn Kathīr lists five reports. With one exception, they are all traced back to earlier authorities; Suddī says that we are to consider this day as a festival day which the disciples and their successors honour. Sufyān al-Thawrī describes this day as a special day on which they pray. According to Qatāda, this day will be a festival day for the people who come after the disciples. The most interesting explanation is that of Salmān al-Fārisī: 'this day is an *ʿiẓah* (exhortation) for them and those who come after them.' The anonymous report elucidates it as 'enough for the first and the last of us.'[83] It is also worth noting that Ibn Kathīr describes the table as a sustenance, *rizq*,[84] without engaging in any polemic. The reason for this deliberate statement is clear: he is trying to say that this food is sustenance from God, and only God gives sustenance. Bearing in mind the statement of Ṭūsī, who openly expresses the view that man can give sustenance to his friends, and Jubbā'ī's effort to equate the word *rizq* in this verse with a *shukr*, Ibn Kathīr's commentary contains an implicit response to the these interpretations without launching into any dogmatic discussion.

8.9. The Sending Down and Contents of the Table

The issues that preoccupy virtually all of the commentators on 5:115 are whether the table was sent or not and the precise specification of the contents of the table. Ṭabarī's treatment of the question of whether God sent the table or not, and what constitutes its contents, are much more extensive than any of his interpretations of the related verses. That he devotes nearly six pages to its interpretation is a fair indication of its importance. Ṭabarī records twenty-four reports; nineteen of them accept that God actually sent the table and four of them hold the opposite opinion. With the exception

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[82] *Ibid.*, III.696-7
[83] Ibn Kathīr, II.116
[84] *Ibid.*, II.116

of a few reports most of them go back to earlier authorities. The names of the authorities are as follows: Sulamī (2), ᶜAṭiyya (2), Abī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān (1), Ibn ᶜAbbās (2), Mundhir b. Nuᶜmān from Wahb (1), ᶜAbd al-Simāk b. Maqāl from Wahb (1), Mujāhid (4), Isḥāq b. ᶜAbd Allāh (1), Simāk b. Ḥarb from ᶜAmmār b. Yāsīn (1), ᶜAmmār b. Yāsir (2), Qatāda (1), Maysara (1), Maysara and Zādhān (2), and Ḥasan (2). There are many important affinities among the reports but there are also many additional individual details.

According to the majority, their food consisted of bread and fish. Some reports go further and say that there was every kind of food on the table. The report which is narrated on the authority of Isḥāq b. ᶜAbd Allāh notes the number of fishes and leaves, namely seven. Two reports from ᶜAmmār and Qatāda explicitly record that they were food of paradise, *thamar al-jannah*. On the other hand the report related from Maysar and Zādhān does not reveal the precise quantity of fish and bread. After some speculation on the contents of the table, Ṭabarī turns to the question of what happened to the table after it had been sent down. One report from Simāk b. Ḥarb is worth mentioning in order to answer what happened to the disciples after the descent of the heavenly table: '...ᶜAmmār asked a man what he knew about the heavenly table. In response, he stated his lack of knowledge about it. Then ᶜAmmār told him that the disciples asked Jesus for food which they might eat for ever. They were told that as long as they did not conceal any of the food they would continue to be given it, but if they concealed anything they would be punished severely. Unfortunately, they hid something from the table the very day on which it was sent, and consequently the table was lifted up.' After this narrative ᶜAmmār turned towards the Arabs and addressed them: 'O community of Arabs, you have been following the tails of camels and sheep. God sent you a prophet from among yourselves, and you knew his position and genealogy; he warned you not to store treasures of gold and silver, but before the end of the day you began storing them.'[85] This report emphasises that the followers' behaviour (hiding some of the food and returning to unbelief) is the reason for God's taking the table away from them. There are also others which point out the same reason, but none connects the attitude of people towards the table with the attitude of the Arabs of the Ḥijāz. Strangely enough, a similar report from ᶜAmmār explains that

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[85] Ṭabarī, XI.228

due to their putting the miraculous food in store God turned them into apes and pigs.[86] It is fair to assume that the diversity of the suggestions may indicate the absence of reliable reports on the matter. It is also very difficult to decide whether or not the story contains a historical kernel.[87]

Those authorities (Ḥasan and Mujāhid), who hold an alternative opinion concentrate on the allegorical, *mathalu ḍarb*, aspect of the verses. According to them, when the disciples were threatened with severe punishment, in 5:115, they sought to be freed from their responsibility; briefly, they changed their mind and no longer asked for the table.[88] Ṭabarī, however, rejects this approach on the basis of *ḥadīth* literature and the opinion of the many knowledgeable authorities who narrate it. In addition, God recounts this narrative in His Book explicitly and it is an undeniable fact that He never breaks His promise and there cannot be any contradiction in what He announces. God proclaims in the Qur'an 'I will send it down to you...'; this is clear evidence of God's promise. Ṭabarī suggests that if it is not to be taken literally then the verse which deals with the threat of punishment should not be taken literally either. It is not in the nature of God to make a promise and not to fulfil it.[89]

After mentioning many reports that seek to discern the various delicacies the table may have held, Ṭabarī firmly states: 'As for the correct view about what was on the table, it is said to be something to eat. Maybe it was fish or bread, maybe it was fruit from paradise. There is no advantage in knowing what it was; neither is there any harm if one does not know, so long as the conclusions drawn from the verse correspond with the external wording of the revelation.'[90]

Ṭabarī's point is very important. In making this statement, he politely criticises all the reports which provide tedious and unnecessary detail. This, and previous examples, indicate that he is not passive in his narration of the reports. He lists various reports which he then invalidates in his concluding remarks. Furthermore, he considers this verse to be a response to the disciples' requesting Jesus to ask God to send them

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[86] *Ibid.*, XI.229

[87] Although Muslim commentators see no connection, one might find a possible link between these reports and verse 3:49 'And will make him (Jesus) a messenger unto the Children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird and I breath...I inform you too of what you eat, and what you store up in your houses...'

[88] *Ibid.*, XI.231

[89] *Ibid.*, XI.232

food, and to be conclusive evidence of God's sending the table. The verse also affirms that the disciples did indeed eat this food. Furthermore, the expression 'but if any of you after that disbelieves, then I will punish him...' indicates that some of them did not believe the miracle and denied the prophecy of Jesus and the Oneness of God. To explain the nature of this severe punishment Ṭabarī says that one account states that the disbelievers metamorphosed into apes and pigs. In support of this comment he cites a report from Qatāda: 'it is mentioned that they were changed into pigs.'[91] Pursuing the matter, Ṭabarī attempts to show how severely they were punished. He lists three reports, two of them from ᶜAbd Allāh Ibn ᶜAmr and one from Suddī. According to the first report the people who will be punished severely are classified as follows: the hypocrites, the people who refused to believe in the mā'idah, and the family (relatives) of Pharaoh. The second report is a different version of the first, but the order is changed and the first place is given to the disbelievers in the mā'idah.[92] The last report places great stress on the severity of the punishment of the people who did not believe in the mā'idah. In his recitation of the verse fa innī uᶜadhdhibuhū ᶜadhāb^{an}... Ṭabarī adds the expression ghayr ahl al-mā'idah, meaning that apart from the disbelievers in the mā'idah nobody was punished severely. Curiously enough, at the beginning of his interpretation of the verse Ṭabarī explicitly states that God punished them with a torment which He did not inflict on any other person among all those alive at that time, ᶜālami zamanihī. The reason for this interpretation is at first glance not very clear; however, it is safe to assume that Ṭabarī has in mind the Qur'anic punishment of Pharaoh's people, 40:46, and of the hypocrites, 4:145.[93] In order to reconcile these two different warnings concerning the punishment, he feels obliged to record this condition, ᶜālami zamanihī.

In his treatment of the contents of the table Ṭūsī skilfully summarises Ṭabarī's lengthy reports into three basic interpretations: according to Ibn ᶜAbbās and Abū ᶜAbd Rahmān, the table contained bread and fish. This report was narrated by Abū Jaᶜfar and Abū ᶜAbd Allāh. In addition, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya draws attention to an interesting

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[90] Ibid., XI.232
[91] Ibid., XI.232
[92] Ibid., XI.233
[93] 40:46, 'They are exposed to the fire, morning and afternoon, and on the Day when the Hour will be established (it will be said to the angels): 'Cause Pharaoh's people to enter the severest torment!'
4:145, 'Verily, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the fire; no helper will you find for them'.

interpretation: 'they found the smell of every kind of food in the fish.' The second comment is made by ᶜAmmār b. Yāsir, who associates this food with the food of paradise. The last interpretation notes the exception: 'Zādhān and Abū Maysara said that with the exception of meat there is every kind of food on it.'[94] The obvious decrease in the amount of the reports in Ṭūsī's presentation is clear evidence of his attitude towards unnecessary detail; however, he does not explicitly make any negative remark against this clarification.

As his next step Ṭūsī, like Ṭabarī, explains this verse as a response to Jesus' request to God to send food to the disciples. He then turns to the statement 'I will punish them with a ...torment such as I have not inflicted on anyone among all the ᶜālamīn...', 5:115. Ṭūsī offers three interpretations: the first comment, made by Qatāda, says that the disbelievers metamorphosed into apes and pigs. In this comment Ṭūsī also notes that it is related from Abū ᶜAbd Allāh that, apart from the guilty, nobody was changed into a pig. The second interpretation is not very clear and Ṭūsī does not give any authority for it. He simply says that only the leaders of that time were subjected to the punishment which the Qur'anic verse describes. The last explanation does not identify any specific punishment or group to be punished. It is concerned with a more general interpretation and is close to the Qur'anic narrative. The significance of the punishment, according to this interpretation, is that it was a kind of punishment which had never been imposed before, because the guilty ones, having seen the proof, nonetheless denied it and for their denial they deserved this unique punishment.[95]

Ṭūsī tries to clarify the logic or wisdom which necessitates this punishment: it is just 'because they were warned before'. But he also mentions an alternative opinion: 'the mā'idah was not sent down.' The supporters of this opinion are Ḥasan and Mujāhid, who say that the disciples asked to be released from the responsibility of witnessing the miracle of the mā'idah when they heard about the severe punishment. So God did not send the table down. Ṭūsī's first reaction to this interpretation is to record the words of some people, qāla qawm: 'They said it is incorrect because God promised to send it down and there is no contradiction in His Word.' Having rejected it, he notes the consensus of the people of knowledge, ahl ᶜilm, who say that the table was definitely sent down. He depends heavily on reports narrated on the authority of

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[94] Ṭūsī, IV.65
[95] *Ibid.*, IV.66

Ammār b. Yāsir and others. He also cites the Qur'anic expression 'I will send it...' as conclusive evidence. It is worth mentioning that Ṭūsī's brief elucidation is derived from Ṭabarī's speculative interpretation, though he does not give the reader as much choice as Ṭabarī.

Zamakhsharī, having equated ^{c}adhāb with ta^{c}dhīb, gives a number of details about the table. His presentation is interesting enough to merit quotation in its entirety. It is narrated that when Jesus wanted to pray he put on a woollen garment and said 'O my Lord, send down a table'. Then while the people were looking at the sky the table descended between two clouds. There was a red cloth on the table. When Jesus saw the table he wept and said

> O my Lord, place me among the people who acknowledge their thankfulness to You; make the table a blessing for us, not a punishment.' He then turned to his people and told them 'Let the best of you stand, uncover the table, mention the name of God and then eat from it'. In response to Jesus, Simon, the head of the disciples, said, 'You are the best of us, you should do it'. Jesus stood up, performed ablution, prayed and wept. Then he uncovered the cloth upon the table and mentioned the name of God who was the Best of the sustainers.[96]

After this introduction he presents still more elaborate information about the contents of the table:

> ...it was a roasted fish without scales or bones; on the head of the fish there was salt and on its tail there was vinegar, and around the vinegar there was every kind of vegetable except dates. There were also five cakes and upon each of them there were respectively olives, honey, butter, cheese and meat cut in slices and dried in the sun. Simon asked Jesus about the origin of these foods, whether they were from this world or the hereafter. In reply Jesus told them that they were from neither place; God had created, ikhtara^{c}a, them with His Glorious Power; and he said to them, 'Eat what you want to eat, and thank God because of His great Blessing upon you.' Then the disciples said, 'O Spirit of God, is it possible to show us another miracle (proof) from this miracle (table) which you have already performed.' Jesus suddenly addressed the fish: 'Be alive with the permission of God'. After Jesus' command this fish started to move; then Jesus told it to return to the table. The fish became a roasted fish again and returned to the table. Even after having seen these miracles some of the people disbelieved and so they were changed into apes and pigs.[97]

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[96] Zamakhsharī, I.655
[97] Ibid., I.655

The description of the table occupies a substantial place in the interpretation of this verse, and Zamakhsharī never questions the authenticity of this anecdote. His explanation ends with the interpretation of Ḥasan, who says that when the disciples were threatened with severe punishment they said that in that case they did not want the heavenly table, so it was not sent down. Had it been sent, however, it would have associated a festival day celebrated by the people until the Day of Judgement.

Like many exegetes, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya concerns himself with the question of whether the table was sent down or not. Although he first mentions the authorities who do not accept that it was not actually sent down, namely Mujāhid and Ḥasan b. Ḥasan, he states that the *jumhūr* (majority) hold the view that it was sent down. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya cites eight reports in an extremely abridged form to show the majority's preference. Most of these reports contain only three words or less. What is interesting here is Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's own comment: 'People have increased the stories about the table; however, I prefer to shorten them because of the lack of proper *isnāds* in them.' The brevity of the reports and his particular emphasis on their questionability are a fair indication of his attitude towards them. It should also be mentioned that, rather than use reports, he generally prefers philological devices to explain the Qur'anic verses. It is also worth noting that he objects to the opinion that it is false to hold that the table was sent down, because God reports that He sent it in the Qur'an. The reason for his objection is simple: he links God's Word 'I will send it down' with the condition 'If any of you after that disbelieves then I will punish...'. Clearly, Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, using the Qur'anic verse, tries to invalidate the opinion of the group who used this Qur'anic verse to prove that God did not send the table. Finally, he gives some brief information about the contents of the table. It is narrated that apart from garlic, leek, and onion there was every kind of vegetable on the table. It is said that there were olives, dates, cereal and pomegranates on the table.[98]

Rāzī, in his opening phrase, states that there are a number of issues involved in the interpretation of this verse. He offers six points for discussion; moreover, he subdivides some of these points. The first argument is concerned with the reading of the words *nazzala* and *anzala, munazziluhā* or *munziluhā*. Ibn ᶜĀmir and ᶜĀsim read it with a doubled *z, munazzilu,* while others read it without, *munzilu.* Although Rāzī does not spell out his preference it is clear that these readings are important. Whoever reads

with doubled z means that the table was sent down several times, but whoever reads it within the form of *muf'il* means that was sent down only once.[99] The same distinction is discussed at length by Ṭūsī but his presentation is not as clear as Rāzī's.

The second *mas'ala* centres on the identification of the punishment of those who did not believe the miracle. Rāzī, quoting from Ibn ʿAbbās, says that they metamorphosed into pigs. Besides this report he cites others from anonymous authorities: 'It is said that God has punished them with a specific torment which He has not inflicted on anyone before.' This interpretation is given on the authority of Zajjāj, who offers two alternatives: either they have been punished in this life or they are going to be punished hereafter. Like Ṭabarī, Rāzī also explains the Qur'anic expression *ʿalamīn* as *ʿālami zamanihī* (the people who lived at that time).[100] Clearly, he, like Ṭabarī, opts for a chronological distinction. The period in question is not, in his view, all time but only over the disciples' own time. The choice also saves him from the burden of 4:15 and 40:46.

The third *mas'ala* deals with an uncommon interpretation of the verse. Rāzī again narrates on the authority of unidentified individuals: 'It is said that they asked for the table while they were in the desert without water and food.' This comment indicates that the disciples' request was motivated by a need for food. Theologically speaking there is no harm in their request.

In *mas'ala* four, Rāzī raises another dogmatic issue: 'It is not certain whether Jesus requested the table for himself or for the people.' According to him, 'both are possible, although Jesus apparently asks for the table for himself, God knows best'.[101] As far as the Qur'anic verse is concerned, the request for the table is attributed to the plural (the people), and for this reason Rāzī's comment regarding Jesus' requesting the table for himself is not very clear.

The fifth *mas'ala* notes some dispute over the question of whether the table was sent down or not. According to Mujāhid and Ḥasan the table was not sent down. In justification they offer two interpretations: when the people heard of the severe punishment of God they decided that they did not want the table to be sent down. The

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[98] Ibn ʿAṭiyya, II.262
[99] Rāzī, III.697
[100] *Ibid.*, III.697
[101] *Ibid.*, III.697

second comment relies on the Qur'anic account 'there may be for us -for the first and the last of us- a festival and sign from You'. This verse explains that although this day will remain a festival until the Day of Judgement, today is not a festival day. At this point, Rāzī first mentions the consensus of the majority, who hold that the table was sent down. The reason for this conclusion is the Qur'anic verse 'I will send it down...'. God never breaks His promises. Rāzī himself provides two explanations in response to these two alternative interpretations. First he says that there is no connection between 5:115, '...any of you who after that disbelieves, I will punish him...' and 5:115, 'I am going to send it down unto you...'. However, there is an internal connection between 'whoever disbelieves...' and 'I will punish...'. Secondly this festival is still observed by the followers of Jesus.[102] By providing this information Rāzī accepts that this custom is still valid and is content with the identification of Sunday as a festival day. This comment implicitly authenticates the reports which support this identification.

In the last *mas'ala* Rāzī reports Zamakhsharī's long narration; how Jesus dressed, prayed and so forth, therefore there is no need to repeat it here. However, it should be noted that he does not raise any objection to this tradition; this is clear evidence that Rāzī considers the report to be authentic.

Ibn Kathīr notes that the meaning of '...I have not inflicted on anyone among all mankind...' refers only to the people who were alive at that time. Being aware of other verses such as 4:145 and 40:46 the classical exegetes feel obliged to be precise in order to call attention to the fact that other severe punishments are mentioned in the Qur'an. In support of this interpretation he quotes a report from Ṭabarī's exegesis on the authority of ꜤAbd Allāh b. ꜤUmar: 'Three groups will be punished severely on the Day of Judgement: the hypocrites, the people who disbelieve the *mā'idah*, and the people of Pharaoh.'[103]

Ibn Kathīr devotes half a page to an interpretation of 5:112-115. In his explanations, as has been shown above, he is very selective; and in the first section there are no details, alternative opinions or glosses. However, he gives many details in the second section of his interpretation, under the heading 'the citation of the reports related from *salaf* about the table sent down to the disciples'. In contrast to his reticence in the previous section he is very generous in his presentation of a number of

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[102] *Ibid.*, III.697

reports, recording even minute details. The section contains twenty-three reports, the majority of which are traced back to earlier authorities. It should be mentioned that he is largely dependent on Ṭabarī in his presentation of the reports, the main difference between the two exegetes being confined to their content. Some of Ibn Kathīr's reports are quite long and add considerable detail. He begins his narration with Ibn ʿAbbās' report, which deals with the reason for the disciples' request for the heavenly table. According to this report Jesus told the Children of Israel to fast for thirty days and asked God to give them whatever they wanted after this period, because workers' salaries should be paid by the person who employs them. Having fasted for thirty days they came to Jesus and told him what they had done, reminding him of what he had said about their reward. They added 'We never worked for anyone for thirty days without being given food when we finished the work, so is your Lord able to send us a table from heaven?'[104] The report ends with the Qur'anic verses. After this opening report Ibn Kathīr records seven more which explain that the food consisted of bread and fish. Four out of the seven specifically mention the number of fish and loaves, namely seven. Two reports, from ʿAmmār b. Yāsir and Wahb b. Munabbih, explicitly state that they are food of paradise. Furthermore, in his report Wahb b. Munabbih says that God sent it daily, and on each occasion four thousand people ate from it. In order to explain what happened to these people, Ibn Kathīr mentions ʿAmmār's speech, which is also found in Ṭabarī. Simāk b. Ḥarb related this from a person who came from the tribe of ʿijl; his account is as follows: 'I prayed beside ʿAmmār; when he finished his prayer he asked me, 'do you know the condition regarding the table?' I said 'no', and then he told me that as long as the people did not conceal anything from it they would be given this table forever, but if they hid something they would be punished severely. Unfortunately, they hid something from the table within a day of its being sent; consequently the table was not given to them anymore and they metamorphosed into pigs and apes.'[105] Having established a correspondence between the disciples' attitude and that of the Arabs, ʿAmmār also warned his contemporaries: 'O community of Arabs, you were following the tails of the camels and sheep; God sent you a prophet from among yourselves, and you knew his position and genealogy; he warned you not to store treasures of gold and silver, but before the end of the day you began to store

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[103] Ibn Kathīr, II.116

[104] Ibid., II.116

[105] Ibid., II.117

them'.[106] Although this narrative, which describes the people's concealing or stealing food from the table is not unique, it is clear that it is the longest narrative about their attitude. Two reports, from Sa°īd b. Jubayr and Zādhān-Maysara, exclude meat from the contents of the table while Ikrima's report specifically explains that the bread was made of cedar flour.[107]

The longest report presented by Ibn Kathīr is related on the authority of Salmān al-Khayr. The full chain of *isnād* consists of eight narrators: Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ja°far b. °Alī, Ismā°īl b. Abī Uways, Abū °Abd Allāh °Abd al-Quddūs b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī °Ubayd Allāh b. Mirdās al-Abdarī Mawlā Banū °Abd al-Dār, Ibrāhīm b. °Umar, Wahb b. Munabbih, Abī °Uthmān al-Nahdī, and Salmān. The short version of this report is mentioned by Zamakhsharī and Rāzī; however, neither of them records any authority for this report. Also they devote less than half a page to the report while Ibn Kathīr devotes one and half pages. The story begins with Jesus' warning the people 'be content with what God provides you on earth...'. He reminded them of the punishment of Thamūd and tried to persuade them not to ask for the table. Although he failed to convince them, he never neglected to pray on their behalf. Ibn Kathīr's description of Jesus' clothes, his prayer and so on, is perhaps worth noting. He says that Jesus took off his woollen clothes and put on a garment made of black hair.[108] According to Zamakhsharī's and Rāzī's narratives he was always dressed in a woollen though frankly such details make little difference. Ibn Kathīr also mentions what he put on his head. More importantly, he goes on to provide details about Jesus' prayer.

> He first performed both ablutions, then he went to the place where he prayed, turned towards the *qibla*, straightened his feet, placed his anklebones together, put his feet side by side, put his right hand on his left hand over his chest, closed his eyes and in his sincerity he bowed his head. Then he wept. His tears came down his cheeks and through his beard; the tears of Jesus wet the earth, whose level increased until it reached his face. When he saw this situation he prayed, 'O God, send down a table spread for us...'[109]

Unlike the accounts in Zamakhsharī and Rāzī, the motive for weeping here is clearly stated, and the specification of minute actions goes far beyond Zamakshari's and Rāzī's laconic form. It is also evident that Ibn Kathīr is drawing an image of an

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[106] *Ibid.*, II.117
[107] *Ibid.*, II.117
[108] *Ibid.*, II.117
[109] *Ibid.*, II.117

ideal man who prays in a perfect manner. His description fits the exact nature of prescribed prayer in Islam. The wet earth caused by Jesus' tears has some legendary features. It is very difficult to determine whether Ibn Kathīr is narrating these details from different sources or is himself placing them with in the context of the story.

The narrative continues by giving information about the table, Jesus' and the people's position, and what happened after the table came down. Ibn Kathīr's description of the table's coming down and Jesus' reaction to it is similar to the presentations of Zamakhsharī and Rāzī though Ibn Kathīr provides more minor details. At first glance two additions and one difference are observed in Ibn Kathīr's narrative. The first addition concerns a very pleasant odour that the people around the table smelled, while the second concerns the Jews' attitude towards the miracle. According to this report, when the Jews saw the table they went away out of resentment at the miracle. As regards the difference, Ibn Kathīr identifies the people who asked Jesus to uncover the cloth on the table with the disciples, while Zamakhsharī and Rāzī mention only Simon, the head of the disciples.[110] According to Ibn Kathīr, Jesus, in order to be able to uncover the cloth on the table, performed another ablution, went to pray several *rakʿāts* and wept.

The middle section of the story deals with the description of the fish on the table, Simon's question whether this food was from paradise or from this world, and the disciples' request to see another miracle based on the previous miracle the table. The first two points are the same in all three works; however, the last point is dealt with differently in Ibn Kathīr's commentary. Ibn Kathīr narrates that when Jesus commanded the fish to become a snake it suddenly became a snake which licked its lips with its tongue and its eyes became like a lion's eyes... seeing they were scared by this, Jesus ordered the snake to become a roasted fish and it did so.[111]

The answer to the question of who ate first is similar in all three exegetes, but their style is quite different. Ibn Kathīr's presentation is very close to the hortatory style. He lays stress on how Jesus commanded the disciples to begin by mentioning the name of God and to offer praise at the end of the meal. He draws attention to this religious observance to make the reader aware of Islamic *adab* (politeness) in various

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[110] *Ibid.*, II.118
[111] *Ibid.*, II.118

issues. He also frequently points out the blessing of the *razzāq* (Sustainer) and teaches the reader how he should respond to Him.

One of the interesting aspects of Ibn Kathīr's narrative is his record that 1300 people ate this food and that whoever ate became rich if he was poor, healthy if he was sick and so on, when they stopped eating, the table was exactly the same as when it came down first, nothing had increased or decreased. It is also pointed out that when the disciples saw that Jesus himself did not eat they kept away from the table. Later they regretted not having partaken of the miraculous food.[112]

As regards the timing of the appearance of the table, he says that the table's coming down continued for forty days; it came as the sun rose and in the evening it was taken away by the permission of God. The people saw its shadow as it was taken away.

The long report ends with another narrative. God commanded Jesus to confine His sustenance to the poor and orphans. When the rich people heard God's command they started disseminating doubt among the people. When they questioned the nature of the table Jesus warned them, saying 'you have asked for this miracle and now you are doubtful about it...'. The next day God punished the unbelievers by changing them into apes and pigs. At the end of this report Ibn Kathīr comments 'This is a *gharīb* report segmented by Ibn Abī Ḥātim but I have compiled it in one sequential form to make it more consistent and eloquent, God knows best.' Although he dutifully mentions these reports and adds a sceptical 'God knows best' to indicate his own doubt as to their credibility, he does to some extent consider reports as proof of the contents and the actual sending of the table and accepts the literal meaning of the Qur'anic expression '...I will send it down to you...'.[113]

After presenting this long narrative Ibn Kathīr cites an alternative view: the table was not sent down. First he mentions who held this opinion. It seems that his information about the source of this opinion derives directly from Ṭabarī. The main reports are narrated on the authority of Mujāhid and Ḥasan, who say that when the disciples were threatened with severe punishment in 5:114 they sought to be freed from the responsibility for actions which might cause it, and so they no longer wanted the

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[112] *Ibid.,* II.118
[113] *Ibid.,* II.119

table. Ibn Kathīr authenticates the *isnād* of these reports and he also admits that the absence of the story in the Gospel strengthens the correctness of this opinion (that the table was not sent down). If it had been sent, an account would be found in their books or even as an *āḥād* report in their tradition.[114]

In spite of the fact that he gives some importance to the second interpretation it is not safe to conclude that he favours this comment. Bearing in mind the authentic transmission of the second opinion he avoids rejecting these reports, but feels obliged to provide some intellectual argument. The reason for Ibn Kathir's implicit duality regarding these reports lies in his sincere desire to accept the opinion of the majority of *salaf* (predecessors). It is worth mentioning that having stated the majority's opinion he notes that historians record that Mūsā b. Nuṣayr found Solomon, the son of David's table decorated with precious stones in Andalus. The table was sent back to the caliph in Damascus and the people came and looked at it in astonishment.[115]

Finally, Ibn Kathīr ends this section with the report narrated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās, who says that the Quraysh asked the prophet to pray to God to convert the mountain *ṣafā* into gold. They added 'if you do this we will believe you.' In reply the prophet asked 'would you become Muslims?' They said 'yes'; then he prayed. The Angel Gabriel came, gave him the Lord's greeting and suggested two alternatives: 'if you wish mount *ṣafā* will become gold and then whoever denies will be punished severely' and 'if you wish I (the Lord) will open the door of repentance and mercy for them.' The prophet preferred the second one.[116] Interestingly, most of the details Ibn Kathīr provides are already mentioned in various commentaries, but he recounts these reports in even greater detail in order to place the reader within the frame of a complete tale, and so it is fair to conclude that Ibn Kathīr's story is the most interesting and, we suggest, the most sophisticated of the six accounts. He is also professedly the narrator, and this in itself adds an extra dimension to this narrative.

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[114] *Ibid.*, II.119
[115] *Ibid.*, II.119
[116] *Ibid.*, II.119

Concluding Remarks (Golden Calf and Mā'idah Episodes)

In order to appreciate the approach of the commentators towards the *isrā'īliyyāt* reports analysed in the preceding chapters, we shall review some of their major points.

As regards Ṭabarī's interpretation of the verses about the story of Sāmirī (the golden calf) and *Mā'idah* (heavenly table) in his commentary, our first impression is that he feels free to add details to the original Qur'anic narrative and also that he refrains, to some extent, from censuring different versions of the events or the reports. For example, an instruction about the fasting given by Jesus to his disciples in the interpretation of 5:112 is presented by Ṭabarī in some detail. Ṭabarī also gives some information about the identification of thirty and ten nights in 2:51 and 7:142, namely *dhū al-qaᶜdah* and *dhū al-hijja*. Regarding the Tablets, Ṭabarī mentions that it is a large collection; this is why it is carried by seventy camels. Furthermore, he notes that only four men were able to read the Torah (the content of the Tablets). He then concludes with the anecdote that Moses never urinated as long as he remained on Sinai. These reports were frequently supported by chains of transmitters, though sometimes they were narrated without citing the name of sources. Some of his authorities (narrators) are suspect due to their relation to the People of the Book or their unreliability among the people of knowledge.

We encounter some reports related on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih, who says that God commanded that the Tablets should be cut from a specific stone and that He Himself softened the Tablets and then cut them with His hand. Ṭabarī's merit is his skilful use of many reports to establish the meaning of the Qur'anic text. However it should also be remembered that Ṭabarī did not collect everything available to him on related subjects. He had his own criteria and was mostly dependent on orthodox sources. His silence on the alternative reading of *wa aḍallahum al-sāmirī* is a very good illustration of this. Amongst his reports there are divergent opinions on one topic, word or phrase, but we observe that he is sometimes reluctant to solve these contradictions. He leaves readers free to choose between the reports of earlier scholars. As we have already shown in our analysis, Ṭabarī does not give us a consistent picture concerning reports about the formation of the calf.

The reports regarding the punishment of the Israelites are dramatised by Ṭabarī in detail. He also provides diverse reports about Sāmirī's childhood without any critical evaluation. We have also observed that Ṭabarī, from time to time, not only transmits and analyses traditions but also discusses, whenever necessary, and brings in many variant readings and grammatical points to elucidate the meaning of the verses. For example, he argues that there is a dispute about the reading of the word *malkinā* (*mulkinā, milkinā*) in 20:87. Having attributed these variants to their readers he rejects the claim that some of these readings are unacceptable on semantic grounds. For Ṭabarī, every reading system is valid as long as their meanings are close to each other. We observe the same attitude in Ṭabarī's explanation of the word *waᵃada/ waᶜada*. After minimising the theological implication of the variant readings he says that two readings are accepted by the community and recited by the reciters. So reading either of them does not invalidate the meaning of the other. His lengthy discussions are frequently based on a general understanding of the contents of the Qur'an without using any poetry or reports.

He sometimes ventures further and gives his own interpretation of the verses with a serious criticism of the reports (generally on the basis of the chain of transmitters). It is also not unusual for Ṭabarī to reject these reports and to give his own explanation of how the verse should be understood. For example, while he is explaining the reason behind the throwing down of the Tablets by Moses, Ṭabarī first mentions a long report from Qatāda about Moses' witnessing the virtue of the community of Aḥmad/ Muhammad, but he then concludes 'the main reason for Moses' throwing down the Tablets is his anger at his people's worshipping the calf, because God forbids polytheism in the Holy Book'. Clearly, he did not label this report as *isrā'īliyyāt* but his concluding remarks indicate an indirect rejection of the reports. By the same token he also questions the validity of many reports regarding the content of the heavenly table by pointing out the gist of the Qur'anic verse: 'as for the correct view about what was on the Table, it is said to be something to eat. Maybe it was fish or bread, maybe it was fruit from paradise. There is no benefit in knowing and no harm in not knowing.' For an assessment of the status of the *isrā'īliyyāt*, this is a very important point. What Ṭabarī does in his commentary is to evaluate whether the reports contain a kernel of historical truth or are merely a later literary device.

Unfortunately, many of the post-Ṭabarī exegetes have not shown the same attitude towards these reports. It should be stated that Ṭabarī shows his dissatisfaction with some reports by his deliberate preference of other reports or interpretations. Regarding Moses' criticism of Aaron, Ṭabarī, without taking the prophetic immunity from sin into consideration, says that Moses blamed his brother for his neglecting to follow Moses with the believers who obeyed him (Aaron). Obviously, this remark indicates that he rejects other reports or interpretations. We have observed that Ṭabarī's way of presentation indicates his attitudes towards certain reports. In his explanation of the number of Tablets he says 'some people assume, ẓanna, that the number of the Tablets is seven'. The absence of identification of these people and a deliberate use of the verb ẓanna (to conjecture/ to assume/ to think) reflects the uncertainty of the reports. Ṭabarī seemingly disassociates himself from this report (interpretation) and its transmitters. However, we do not encounter the technical word isrā'īliyyāt in his commentary although his hortatory style and a number of other details documented by him pave the way for these kinds of reports.

Baghawī's approach to exegesis is narrative-based. His style, from time to time, is less hortatory than Ṭabarī's because of its brevity, although some of his explanations are presented in a predicatory style. He does not interpret at great length; he also repeats some polemical reports which were found in Ṭabarī's commentary. Moses' witnessing the virtue of the community of Aḥmad (Muhammad) is a good illustration of this. Theological anxiety is still in the mind of the exegete. For instance, discussing the verse 'Sāmirī misguided them', he argues that they are misguided because of Sāmirī and that it is wrong to say that Sāmirī himself misguided them. The relationship between theology and grammar is very explicit in Baghawī's commentary. In order to explain the correct reading and meaning of the Qur'anic word wāʿada in 7:142 and 2:51 he provides the necessary grammatical exposition. His aim in this explanation is to show that the form of mufāʿala does not need two subjects; it sometimes takes only one. Thus Moses has no share in the Lord's authoritative promise.

We have also seen that Baghawī supports his many arguments and ideas with statements by earlier authorities. Although Baghawī sometimes criticises some reports, this does not prevent him from narrating a number of unreliable reports. An interesting point in his presentation is that he sometimes gives two contradictory explanations without specifying his preference. Regarding the number of deaths among those who

worshipped the calf, he gives different numbers, but does not attempt to reconcile them. Similarly, in his dealing with 2:93, 'the love of the calf was made to sink into their hearts', he says that the love of the calf was established in their hearts and then adds that 'in the tales' it is mentioned '...Moses came back...seized the calf, filed it down and scattered it into the sea...they drank it...' Unlike Ṭabarī he appears to have some kind of dual understanding of the punishment, unless we consider his passive narration as an implicit rejection of the story. It is also important to note that some essential information is absent from his commentary; for instance, he does not mention the alternative reading of *wa aḍallahum al-sāmirī/ wa aḍalluhum al-sāmirī*. In addition, he is the only commentator who does not note both subjects of the verb *nasiya* in 20:88, namely Moses and Sāmirī.

Ibn Taymiyya, in his introduction to the principles of *tafsīr*, describes Baghawī's commentary as a summary of Thaʿlabī's commentary. He distinguishes Baghawī from Thaʿlabī however, because, according to him, Baghawī, distanced himself from narrating fabricated reports.[1] In the light of our studies of Baghawī's commentary, Ibn Taymiyya's judgement is subject to dispute, because there are many such reports and details in Baghawī's commentary on the 'golden calf' and 'heavenly table' episodes, such as Sāmirī's recognising of Gabriel, the origin of the Tablets (according to Baghawī they are emeralds from paradise), Moses' fasting during his stay at Mount Sinai so on. It should also be stated that we have not come across the technical word *isrā'īliyyāt* in Baghawī's commentary.

Ṭūsī does not use the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt* explicitly in his commentary. However, despite its early compilation, in comparison with Ṭabarī's voluminous exegesis we clearly see a visible decrease of the number of these reports in his work. He does not mention the reports which describe the virtue of the community of Aḥmad, the identification of the actual calf maker (who breathes the soul into the calf), or some additional details about the Tablets (how many people can read them from beginning to end, the Tablets' weight and length, the accounts about Sāmirī's childhood, etc.). The reports concerning the content of the heavenly table are quite brief compared with the lengthy narrative of Ṭabarī and that of Ibn Kathīr. One of the most important reasons for this attitude lies in his greater concern with dogmatic issues rather than with the

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[1] Ibn Taymiyya, *op.cit.*, 40-1

narrative exposition. His extensive reference to earlier Mutazilite *Imams* can be considered clear evidence for this.

As regards his discussion about the misguidance of Sāmirī in 20:85 Ṭūsī presents several rational arguments to prove that it is acceptable to attribute *ḍalāl* (misguidance) to Sāmirī because of his calling the Israelites to worship the calf. For Ṭūsī, God's role is not to interfere with man's own choice, nor to lead him directly towards evil. Ṭūsī's belief in man's creation of his own actions encourages him to comment quite differently from his Sunni counterparts on many issues. In his analysis of the food on the Table he gives detailed information about how the people provide *rizq* (sustenance) for each other. He also explains Moses' criticism of his brother on rational grounds. Briefly, he states that this verse should not be taken literally because pulling Aaron's hair and beard is not humiliation; there are a number of reasons behind Moses' action. To prove prophetic immunity from sin, Ṭūsī again brings to bear many rational arguments. Similarly, in the explanation of 2:93 he attempts to determine the subject of the verb *ushribū* (they were made to drink the love of the calf). According to Ṭūsī, the occurrence of the passive voice does not necessarily indicate that someone made them drink it (the love of the calf); they drank it of their own accord. Clearly he places stress on the autonomy of free will in connection with responsibility and rejects the Sunni view of God's creation of everything, both good and evil. Although his extreme preoccupation with dogmatic issues prevents him from narrating many baseless reports, some of his analyses are presented in a vague manner. Be that as it may, his competence and skill in combining theological issues in his exegesis led him to have considerable influence on succeeding generations: the Shiʿite Ṭabarsī and Sunnī Rāzī are outstanding examples. We have made brief reference to this in our analysis. Interestingly, although Ṭūsī is known as a Shiʿite commentator, we have not noted any distinctive sign of this in his commentary, with the exception of his brief reference concerning the interpretation of 2:54, whether the prophets and imams are permitted to submit to be killed when they face the threat of death. His conclusion is predictable: 'The prophets and imams are only killed by the way of *ẓulm* (injustice), so to defend themselves is *ḥusn* (good) and the reverse is *qubḥ* (bad).' Because of this lack of Shiʿite characteristics, Sunni exegetes freely use Ṭūsī's commentary.

It should be remembered that Ṭūsī's influence is not confined to his theological outlook; his extensive linguistic analysis has also contributed greatly. As has been

mentioned before, he places great stress on morphological, lexical, and grammatical exposition and semantic nuances among synonyms, for instance, the difference between ^{c}ajala and sur^{c}a or waqt and mīqāt, introduced by him and developed by later commentators. Similarly, he devotes five pages to the interpretation of 2:54. He explains individual words and uses a number of definitions to show the usage of the words in various contexts, for example qatl, dabḥ, and mawt. To utilise them in further analysis, he notes many nuances among the synonyms. He is very interested in playing with the words and in the key terminology which constitutes his complex understanding of the verses. The interrelation between the phrases istaṭā'a/ aṭā'a and istajāba/ ajāba is a very good illustration. Furthermore, quotations from earlier poets are frequently included in his commentary.

It is also worth noting that in spite of his rationality he does not neglect the reports from earlier authorities or those from unidentified personalities; In this regard the reports on the formation of the calf and those concerning the punishment of the Children of Israel can be mentioned. With the exception of a few instances, variant versions of the reports are generally missing in his commentary. One of the most interesting aspects of Ṭūsī's analysis is his use of logical exercises, backed up by the reports, in his interpretation of the verses. What we mean by this is that Ṭūsī sometimes goes beyond the text to explain the Qur'anic verses. For example, regarding the question why God does not mention forty nights as such, he says that this division (thirty and ten nights) helps us to identify the thirty and ten nights; it also helps us to know them as the beginning and end of a month. He adds that the Torah was sent in the last ten nights and also that Moses spoke to God in the last ten nights.

Similarly, in his interpretation of the disciples' request, he brings in many arguments to prove that they are sincere believers. For instance, he notes that they make the request at the beginning of Jesus' mission, though the Qur'anic narrative contains no hint which might justify this comment. In another place he says that their request is similar to that of the prophet Abraham when he says 'my Lord show me how You give life to the dead...' in 2:260. So, Ṭūsī solves this problem by his formula 'more proofs necessitate more knowledge which leads the yaqīn'. Interpretation of the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an is another important principle advocated by Ṭūsī in these early stages of tafsīr tradition. In conclusion we can say that some isrā'īliyyāt reports are to be found in Ṭūsī's exegesis, but generally in their brief form. Although

he does not explicitly criticise these reports, the reduction of their amount in his work indicates that he has reservations concerning their reliability.

The main feature of Zamakhsharī's commentary is his framing of wisely considered questions. It is he who shapes the presentation. Most of these questions deal with the theological aspect of the verse. He brings new approaches to the verses, which is not very common in the classical Sunni commentaries. It should be remembered that Zamakhsharī is the first commentator who, when interpreting 20:83-4, draws our attention to the implicit discrepancy between God's question and Moses' answer. The formula he uses is to raise a question: 'if you say...', then to give his own explanation. We also observe that he generally provides rational arguments and answers in response to the questions he has raised. Regarding the disciples' request concerning the table, Zamakhsharī attempts to reconcile their question 'is your Lord able to send...?' with their having declared their absolute belief in God. He solves this dogmatic problem on rational grounds within the Qur'anic context. He argues that the Qur'an does not characterise them as sincere believers and that the Qur'an simply narrates their claim to be sincere believers. So genuine belief is different from a mere assertion of belief. Finally he adds that Jesus' warning them in 5:112 indicates that they were not sincere. Although he is alone in this interpretation it is clear that Zamakhsharī does not limit himself to the information to be derived from the classical *tafsīr* tradition. He uses theological questions to widen the scope of his interpretation. Nonetheless, we have observed that sometimes he does not present his argument clearly or with certainty. His explanation of 'how dust which Sāmirī took from the hoof-print of the horse of the Angel Gabriel caused the lifeless thing to become alive' is a very good illustration of this. Zamakhsharī compares the formation of the calf with the creation (birth) of Jesus. God, according to Zamakhsharī, employs *rūḥ al-quds* for this purpose, but he does not produce a clear explanation. How was *rūḥ al-quds* employed? Was the calf alive or not? What is Sāmirī's function in this process? It is interesting to note that, with the exception of Zamakhsharī, none of the classical commentators mention this interpretation.

Another important feature of his commentary is his effort to balance rational argument with traditional materials and vice versa. Having accepted traditional information (mainly reports from earlier generations), Zamakhsharī brings his own rational argument to strengthen both traditional data and the explanation of the Qur'an.

For example, he uses this method to show excellent effect in the harmonisation of the report '(if you say) in the story it is mentioned that the Israelites counted each night a day, and each noon a day, when it was the twentieth day they thought that forty nights were completed...' and God's Words 'We have tested them' at the beginning of Moses' appointment. Basing his interpretation on rational argument, Zamakhsharī concludes: 'Moses' absence gave Sāmirī an opportunity. After Moses' departure Sāmirī attempted to mislead the Children of Israel, so the test had already existed at the beginning.' Clearly, this method (balancing traditional reports with rational argument) enables Zamakhsharī to reduce the amount of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports in his *tafsīr*.

Apart from his dogmatic interpretation he frequently gives grammatical expositions which support his explanation of the verses. He pays slight attention to the tradition and his few examples are not traced back to any earlier authority. He uses *isrā'īliyyāt* materials but avoids most of the detailed reports which are used by Ṭabarī and Baghawī. For instance, we do not encounter any report about Moses, witnesses to the virtue of the community of Aḥmad, or any narrative about Sāmirī's childhood. However, he gives some detailed information about the heavenly table, its content, Jesus' prayer together with a brief note about the numbers of the people who worshipped the calf and who did not, the name of Gabriel's horse, Aaron's boldness so forth. At this stage it is worth mentioning that the information about Sāmirī's tribe is the best explanation, which indicates certain knowledge about the Samaritans. Like many commentators, his identification of the festival day in 5:114 with Sunday suggests his knowledge of the Christian holy day. It is also important to note that Zamakhsharī manipulates the reports in his exegesis. With the exception of a few reports, different versions of the events under consideration are missing in his work. The point Zamakhsharī apparently wishes to emphasise is that these reports are not very important. However, we concede that in spite of his rationality, dogmatic exegesis, and stress on lexicography, grammar and rhetoric, he never criticises explicitly any report mentioned in his commentary. He does not use the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt*, but there is a visible reduction in the amount of detailed reports in his work.

It is not easy to evaluate every aspect of Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's methods of interpretation. However, regarding our subject matter he provides valuable insights. We also observe that he refrained from relying extensively on inauthentic reports in

order to explain the Qur'anic narratives. This is perhaps the most important contribution made by Ibn ʿAṭiyyah to the understanding of the Qur'an. Ibn Taymiyya, in his brief work *al-Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, ventures a similar opinion when comparing Ibn ʿAṭiyya with the Mutazilite exegete Zamakhsharī, although he also criticises his defects:

> the commentaries of Ibn ʿAṭiyya and others like him are more faithful to the views of *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamāʿah* and free from misconceived innovations as compared to the commentary of Zamakhsharī. However if Ibn ʿAṭiyya had limited himself to quoting from the comments of the *salaf* on the Qur'an as it has come down from them, it would have been better. But unfortunately he quotes only a few things from the commentary of Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, which is one of the most outstanding commentaries based on the traditions of the *salaf*.[2]

We agree fully with Ibn Taymiyya's observation regarding Ibn ʿAṭiyya. However, Ibn ʿAṭiyya's failure to transmit from Ṭabarī's commentary cannot be considered a weakness. Ibn ʿAṭiyya eliminates many contradictory reports accepted by other commentators. We do not find any report concerning God's test of the Israelites in Ibn ʿAṭiyya's *tafsīr*. In order to emphasise God's misguidance both Ṭabarī and Qurṭubī mention a long report about the real maker of the calf, namely 'Sāmirī forged the calf... but who breathed the soul in it...' As regards the reports about the virtue of the community of Aḥmad, Ibn ʿAṭiyya explicitly states his dissatisfaction with them: 'it is not appropriate to attribute this to Moses'. He rejects this report on the basis of its content. By the same token he rejects related reports about Sāmirī's childhood. This very important achievement was carried out in the late fifth and early sixth centuries of Islam.

An equally important achievement of Ibn ʿAṭiyya's commentary is to reduce the number of reports or to give the shortest version of them. He himself remarked: 'People increase the stories about the content of the table; however I prefer to shorten them because of lack of *isnād*.' He explains the report about the description of Jesus in nine words, whereas Ibn Kathīr devotes one and a half pages to it. Ibn ʿAṭiyya's version of the reports about the sending of the table is also the shortest. The same is true for the thirty days' fast according to Jesus' instruction. Ibn Khaldūn, in his celebrated work *al-Muqaddimah*, expresses this fact as follows: 'Ibn ʿAṭiyya is the first person to investigate these reports and summarise the early exegesis, and then he puts only

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[2] Ibn Taymiyya, *op. cit.*, 50-51

authentic materials in his commentary.'[3] His denial of many reports indicates that he was stricter in his definition of authenticity than most of the classical exegetes. Despite his great care over these reports we have not encountered any reference to the technical word *isrā'īliyyāt* in Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's commentary. To explain why he did not mention it in his *tafsīr* is very difficult. Since Abū Bakr Ibn al-ᶜArabī, his contemporary, mentions this term in his commentary, it is very unlikely that Ibn ᶜAṭiyya did not know it. Be that as it may, it is important to note that he made a clear distinction between authentic and baseless reports. He is probably the first person to adopt a truly critical approach to the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that no inauthentic reports are to be found in his commentary. He mentions, for example, from what material the Tablets are made. He names the people who were capable of reading the Torah, though he notes that this is a weak report. An important aspect of his explanation is his interest in the interpretation of the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an. He deduces many of his conclusions directly from a study of the Qur'an. For example, he argues, without the help of any report, that the calf was not alive because the Qur'an mentions that Moses cut it with a file and scattered upon the sea. Similarly, he insists that God, not Sāmirī, formed the calf, on the basis of 20:87: '...we were made to carry the people's ornaments and throw them into the fire...' He suggests that the people were passive and unaware of what Sāmirī was going to do. So everything was planned by God; He Himself formed the calf.

It should also be mentioned that his *tafsīr* contains many philological analyses as well as rational arguments. Both enabled him to reduce the number of the reports in his commentary. He considered Moses' haste and Sāmirī's worldly punishment as Moses' *ijtihād*. Thus he did not feel the need to bring more information in to help to explain those verses which were already clear. From time to time he used some verses for polemical purposes. We have already noted that he refuted the Shiᶜite's claim that ᶜAlī was appointed by the prophet in his interpretation of Moses' charge to his brother to take care of the Israelites. Be that as it may, we can conclude that his evaluation of the materials is generally different from that of his predecessors and also of many of his successors.

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[3] Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddimah*, Cairo nd, 440 (no publisher)

Rāzī is regarded as one of the distinguished exegetes of the classical period. His commentary *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* is known as a work on a monumental scale. It is so encyclopaedic that Ibn Taymiyya remarks critically that it contains everything but *tafsīr*.[4] He discusses a myriad of arguments to support his interpretations. Each of these discussions is further subdivided into yet more hypotheses and arguments. Various rationales lie behind these arguments, but sometimes it is difficult to evaluate them within the confines of a single topic. Rāzī frequently establishes his point on rational grounds. Bearing in mind the number of his opponents, he usually directs some of his arguments at them. Rāzī sometimes identifies these opponents but sometimes does not. However it is not difficult to find out whom he is addressing. In his interpretation of 5:114 he says the meaning of 'provide us sustenance' is 'give us food to eat' and he then gives an excellent interpretation to prove that only God can be *mun^cim*, the Sustainer. The reason for his semi-mystical, semi-philosophical explanation is his determination to reject the Mutazilites' view about the understanding of *rizq*. Regarding the explanation of 20:84, he focuses on the proposition *ilā* in *ilaika* and says that the meaning of *ilaika* is that *ilā makāni wa^cdika* 'the meeting place of You (God)' affirms that God is not to be bound by space. In this way Rāzī rejects the idea of *mujassima*. By the same token in the interpretation of 20:88 he criticises *ḥulūliyya* who hold the view that it is legitimate to believe God to be incarnate or that His attributes may descend into bodies. He also delivers frequent polemics against the Shi^cīte groups, especially Rāfiḍa, concerning the interpretation of various verses. He also wrote polemics against the Jews; however, he mainly directs his criticism against the Mutazilites.

Rāzī often interprets the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an to justify his views on the grounds of coherence. This method is very important for it enables Razi to reach a reliable conclusion in his explanation of the Qur'an. In order to justify the disciples' request he compares it with the request of the prophet Abraham when he asked God to show him how He gives life to the dead. By the same token he explains the Qur'anic expression *^cālamīn* in 5:115 as *^cālami zamanihī* to save himself from the burden of explaining 4:15 and 40:46. Furthermore, Rāzī sometimes establishes coherence by separating the messages of the verse from each other. 20:90 is a very good illustration.

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[4] Quoted in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thoughts and Society A Festchrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns*, (ed.) by Peter G. Riddell and Tony Street. Leiden: E. J. Brill 1991, 11

In order to prove that there is nothing wrong with Aaron's action he deals with the words of this verse in the fourth stage, showing the logic behind them and then gives a comprehensive conclusion on the basis of the coherence of the verse. This intellectual method is one of the most important features of his presentation.

Most of his grammatical explanations are derived from Zamakhsharī. He also brings in a number of variant readings of the verses, although they are generally mentioned by earlier commentators. Apart from the above-mentioned points, he sometimes highlights the moral by quoting *ḥadīths* or anecdotes from the life of earlier generations. Almost all of these reports are religiously motivated. While he summarises different traditions he generally disregards the *isnāds*. Rāzī draws attention to the semantic nuances of the words and solves some theological problems by playing with words such as *ghaḍab-ghayz*, *ᶜajala-surᶜa*, *mīqāt-waᶜd*, *nazzala-anzala*, and *bayān-mufassara*. He even pays attention to individual letters such as *f* or *b*. At this point, it should be remembered that Ṭūsī's influence on Rāzī is apparent. He is also quite eager to express his preference but sometimes leaves the work of evaluation to the reader.

One of the most important points on which Rāzī puts weight is the prophets' immunity from sin. A strongly rationalist element in his thought leads him to formulate intellectual criteria by which to assess the validity of information passed on by tradition. This attitude underlies his intellectual defence of the sinlessness of the prophets. This concept, according to Johns, leads Rāzī to exclude stories of Jewish provenance from Qur'anic interpretation.[5] In other words, he finds them detrimental to the status and authority of the prophets. Therefore, in Johns' view, it is not wrong to say that Rāzī's commentary is to some extent free from *isrā'īliyyāt* reports.

There are two objections to Johns' conclusion: first of all we should remember that the *isrā'īliyyāt* reports are not confined to the prophets themselves but concern other matters which are not directly related to prophetic status. We observe that Rāzī is quite content to narrate these kind of reports in his *tafsīr*, such those about the killing of the Children of Israel when they repented, Moses' extra fast when he cleaned his teeth after realising that his mouth smelt, Moses' not urinating during his stay on Sinai, and Jesus' prayer and request for the heavenly table.

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[5] A. H. Johns, *op. cit.*, 1989, 260

Our second objection is related to the process of reasoning which Rāzī brings to the reports. Although it is admitted that there is a significant decrease in the quantity of the reports in Rāzī's *tafsīr* we find the core of these reports in his rational argument. For example, in contrast to many commentators who narrate at length the report concerning the virtue of the community of Aḥmad, Rāzī does not mention any report. However, he gives detailed information about the virtue of the Muslim community on the basis of rational argument (he gives five reasons why the community of Aḥmad is superior). Similarly, he does not mention the reports concerning who breathed the soul into the calf but concludes whether the calf is alive or not on rational grounds. Some of his discussions imply knowledge of the above-mentioned reports. Because of his interest in rational arguments he sometimes puts forward very unusual explanations in his *tafsīr*, such as the identification of the word *rabb* in 5:112 with the Angel Gabriel. Nonetheless, Rāzī's process can be considered one of the greatest achievements in the history of classical exegesis. At this juncture it should be remembered that Rāzī was indebted to his Mutazilite opponents for many of the ideas expressed in his commentary.

It is also interesting to note that Rāzī sometimes works on the basis of narrative and rational argument together. For example, he rejects the *kharq al-ᶜādah* which happened to the unbelievers, on the basis of reports and rational argument. One of the disadvantages of this approach, however, is the complexity of the presentation. Sometimes it is almost impossible to tell what Rāzī is trying to say. In addition, it is not clear whether he accepts or rejects the reports he uses to complement his rational arguments. One outstanding example of this approach is his interpretation of Sāmirī's childhood. In all Rāzī's great work he nowhere uses the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt*. However there is a visible reduction in the amount of these reports in his exegesis, mostly controlled by the concept of the sinlessness of the prophets.

Qurṭubī is one of the most colourful representatives of the classical exegetes due to his frequent appeal to various authorities. First of all his frequent recourse to a number of *ḥadīth* can be mentioned among his primary sources. He combines traditions with anecdotes representing popular piety in the Muslim community. The prophetic tradition he mentions regarding Moses' anger is a very good illustration. Having summarised why Moses is angry he highlights the moral by quoting from the prophet: 'whoever becomes angry...perform ablution'. Furthermore, he makes many

connections between anger-Satan-fire and water-ablution. He also lays great stress on linguistic considerations to clarify the meaning of the verse. These are not confined to lexical explanations or semantic nuances but include many grammatical expositions and morphological details, as well as various rhetorical and stylistic elucidations. We have already pointed out his linguistic explanations, therefore there is no need to repeat them here. Qurṭubī's commentary displays his competence in Arabic. In addition, he feels free to use variant readings of the verses.

There are many references to theological ideas intertwined with the legal implications of the verses, but priority is given to law rather than theology. In his interpretation of Moses' throwing down the Tablets Qurṭubī suddenly shifts to a polemic against degenerate mystics. What we observe here is simply his preoccupation with legal matters, which moves him to give detailed information about the activities of these mystics. Having proved the immunity of Moses from sin he says that when these mystics are in an ecstatic trance they unconsciously take off their clothes and pierce them. The prophet, however, prohibited the damage of possessions. So their action is unlawful.

· Similarly, Qurṭubī associates Sāmirī's punishment with the prophet Muhammad's judgement about the people who stayed behind at Madina during the expedition of Tabūk. Using these two anecdotes he concludes that the innovators and sinners should be punished and denied, and that no believer should associate with them. Clearly, his deduction is a very deliberate one; furthermore, he unceasingly tries to find legal implications in the interpretation of every verse. We have also seen that Qurṭubī, in his interpretation of Aaron's attitude during Moses' absence, says, unlike many exegetes, that the permission of silence is given to a person who is afraid of being killed. Legally speaking therefore, there is nothing wrong with Aaron's action among the Israelites.

Qurṭubī, in contrast to Rāzī, is not interested in philosophical explanations in his commentary, with the exception of his polemic against the degenerate mystics. As we have briefly noted above, Qurṭubī was quite interested in what was going on in his locality. In order to criticise and reject the innovators' activities he established a strong similarity between the worshippers of the calf and the degenerate mystics. According to Qurṭubī, dance and the sense of being overwhelmed by intense experience were

introduced by Sāmirī and his people. So it was necessary to prevent ordinary people from being influenced by these heretics. Obviously, he was holding fast to a key theological principle and therefore drew upon a collection of traditions and stories to illustrate the particular theological issue which he wished to address. It should be noted that Qurṭubī is not anti-sufism. He is against unorthodox activities among some mystics. It has been seen in our analysis that he quotes mystical interpretations of the Qur'an without any criticism. Concerning the punishment of the Israelites he says that for some mystics *ᶜijl* is the *rūḥ* (soul) or *nafs* (ego) and the meaning of 'slay yourself' is that one should develop humility. He also mentions that the mystical doctrine concerning the Qur'anic usage of night in 2:51, and Moses' fast on Mount Sinai, is that they are evidence for the *ṣawm wiṣāl* (uninterrupted fast).

From the narrative point of view Qurṭubī sometimes recounts similar reports and stories in greater detail, and sometimes with more precision, than his predecessors. Although he minimises the importance of these reports in a few instances, he mentions many details which are to be found in earlier exegetes. For example, the narratives of the formation of the calf is very rich in Qurṭubī's commentary. The punishment of the Israelites is dramatised by him in great detail. Apart from these long narratives he provides strange reports which seem quite illogical, such as the narration of Ibn Qāsim from Mālik: 'When Moses became angry smoke came out from his cap, and his hair came out from his clothes.' An unauthoritative report which Qurṭubī relates contains more embellishment '...because of Moses' strong desire to go to his Lord the distance grew longer. This situation annoyed him... he tore his shirt and went early...' It has been observed that from time to time he includes minute details. According to Qurṭubī the name of Gabriel's horse is *ḥayāt* whereas Zamakhsharī names it *ḥayzūm*. The person who found Moses among the bushes when his mother left him in the river is called *sābūh*. Furthermore, he notes that Sāmirī was affected with the illness of *waswasa*. In his explanation of why Moses did not kill Sāmirī, Qurṭubī says 'Moses wanted to kill him but God prevented him due to the generosity of Sāmirī.' The most interesting anecdote given by Qurṭubī is his explanation of the main motive behind Sāmirī's misguidance. According to Qurṭubī, Sāmirī heard the words of Moses when Moses employed two waxen images of horses to find Joseph's grave in the Nile...Sāmirī also uttered the same words. We have not encountered many of these

details in other exegeses. Qurṭubī uses some arguments of Ibn ᶜAṭiyya but he is not very successful in avoiding these dubious reports.

Interestingly enough, the author of the article, 'Ḳurṭubī,' in EI^2 asserts that Qurṭubī makes very little use of the *isrā'īliyyāt*, unlike Ṭabarī and Rāzī.[6] Having considered Qurṭubī's comment on 20:83-96 it is quite difficult to justify this claim, at least in the case of Rāzī. Although the technical word *isrā'īliyyāt* is absent from his commentary, like Ṭabarī, his hortatory style and the number of details documented in his encyclopaedic work paved the way for these kinds of reports.

As stated earlier, Ibn Kathīr is the first to use the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt* in his exegesis. In his preface he provides extensive information about these types of reports. However we observe that many reports regarding the golden calf and *mā'idah* (table) are narrated by Ibn Kathīr without much criticism. Although he omits the stories about Sāmirī's childhood (his mother put him in a cave and Gabriel came and fed him...), other reports are included in detail by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary. For example, he devotes one and a half pages to reports concerning the Children of Israel's repentance in the 'golden calf' episode. He does not fail to mention the minutest detail. Also, of all the accounts provided by the classical commentators, one of the most dramatic is given by Ibn Kathīr. Similarly, the reports related from *salaf* about the 'heavenly table', its contents and the description of Jesus' clothes and prayers are memorable. Interestingly, although some of his narrations are not noted by earlier exegetes, Ibn Kathīr's versions are the lengthiest. Unlike his predecessors he provides a full chain of *isnād* to these reports. Sometimes the impression is unavoidable that he, as a commentator and storyteller, puts religiously oriented and legendary details in the context of these stories.

As regards the reports which explain how Moses witnesses the virtue of the community of Aḥmad and then throws down the Tablets, we observe that Ibn Kathīr holds two different opinions simultaneously. First of all, he notes that Ṭabarī mentions a strange report from Qatāda which, he, following Ibn ᶜAṭiyya, rejects because there is no need to use an unreliable report. Curiously, on the following page he cites the same report from Qatāda without any apparent criticism. Clearly, his silence appears to give this story a kind of authenticity. There are also some other contradictory reports

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[6] R. Arnaldez, 'Ḳurṭubī', EI^2, V.513

concerning these episodes but we have not noted a serious attempt either to reconcile or reject them. His comment on whether the Tablets were broken or not is a good illustration. In his *tafsīr* he says that they were broken when Moses threw them, but in his *qiṣaṣ* he says that they were not.

Because of this fact it is not safe to consider his exegesis as a major turning point in the development of the *tafsīr* genre as argued by Calder.[7] It is true that Ibn Kathīr's use of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports is controlled by his theological conviction but the same is also true of Rāzī. The main difference lies in their use of materials. Rāzī relies heavily on rational interpretation whereas Ibn Kathīr exclusively depends on the *ḥadīth* literature from the prophet. Ibn Kathīr, in the interpretation of the term *istaṭāʿa* (to be able to do), Moses' haste, Sāmirī's misguidance, and Moses' criticism of his brother (the prophet Aaron), does not even hint at the existence of any dogmatic problem. The reason for this is Ibn Kathīr's religious conviction: he was intent on encouraging piety. His concluding remark in the analysis of Moses' criticism of his brother is worth mentioning: 'Ibn ʿAbbās narrated that Aaron was a fearful and obedient person'. We witness this attitude in several places in his *tafsīr*. Instead of discussing heavily dogmatic topics, he prefers to give religious instruction. He frequently reminds the reader of the blessings of God. In his interpretation of the disciples' request he points out that the focal point is not how we can know God, His Power and so on, but how we can serve Him, *ʿubūdiyyah*.

At this juncture, it should be remembered that it is implausible to say that Ibn Kathīr is unaware of theological discussion. Although he does not give detailed explanations, he regularly hints at these kinds of discussions. Furthermore, implicitly or explicitly, he puts forward his own view. He says, for example, the Heavenly Table is a *rizq*, sustenance, and God is only *razzāq* without further explanation. If we remember Ṭūsī's remark 'creatures provide sustenance for each other', it is clear that Ibn Kathīr implicitly rejects this idea. It is also noteworthy that he balances some reports with his own comments that acknowledge the insufficiency of the available information. Dhahabī describes him as a reliable traditionalist and good exegete who narrates what he believes to be an authentic *ḥadīth*.[8] Dhahabī's testimony shows that

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[7] N. Calder, *op. cit.*, 101
[8] İ. Cerrahoğlu, *op. cit.*, II.207

Ibn Kathīr places great stress on the tradition. But this does not mean that every source used by Ibn Kathīr is authentic.

As far as we are concerned, one of the most striking features of his presentation is his knowledge of Jewish and Christian sources. Although there is a dispute about his firsthand familiarity with the Bible our analysis shows that his Biblical knowledge came from sometimes primary and, on other occasions, secondary sources. Unlike other exegetes he holds that some scholars said 'the story of the heavenly table is not found in the Gospels. Christians learnt it from Muslims.' Ibn Kathīr does not identify these scholars; he simply narrates what they have said about the story. As regards the number of Tablets, he says in his *qiṣaṣ* 'according to the People of the Book, the number of Tablets are two; however the Qur'an says *alwāḥ* (*mutaᶜaddadah/* several in number)'; therefore because of this he does not accept any explanation or report about the number of the Tablets. Another interesting comment made by Ibn Kahtīr is his brief note concerning the name of Sāmirī. He says 'in the books of *isrā'īliyyāt* the name of Sāmirī is mentioned as Aaron, *hārūn.*' It is difficult to say whether he is aware of the Biblical episode or not, but he explicitly admits by his identification of the source that this is not authentic. In contrast to his reliance on the prophetic tradition he gives minimal attention to the grammar, lexical aspects and variant readings of the verses. From time to time he interprets Qur'anic verses by other Qur'anic verses. It should also be remembered that he does not neglect to interpret the Qur'an on the basis of his own opinion.

Finally, we must say that our analysis has given us the opportunity to see and judge the differences among the classical exegetes with regard to their approaches to interpretation. The exegetical traditionalism is obvious; however, that there are also a number of new approaches to the explanation of the verses is undeniable. Therefore we find Harris Birkeland's judgement that 'it is absolutely superfluous to consult other commentaries than Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī and Rāzī'[9] unfair, at least in the case of Ṭūsī[10] and Ibn ᶜAṭiyya. We wish only to draw attention through this study to some neglected aspects of the use of *isrā'īliyyāt* in classical exegesis which might be of some importance for further work in this field.

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[9] Harris Birkeland, *The Lord Guideth: Studies on Primitive Islam*, Oslo: I Kommisjon Hos H. Aschehoug Co. 1956, 136

[10] We do not accept Ṭūsī distinctively as Shiᶜīte exegete.

Closing Comments

This thesis has explored various topics that are directly or indirectly related to one another. The first part has been devoted to a historical analysis of the non-Muslim approaches to the Qur'an and its narratives, after which we have examined the Qur'anic narratives of the 'golden calf' episode.

The Qur'an has been studied by non-Muslims for many centuries. Religious polemic (or sometimes apologetic defence) on the basis of scripture is very common among the earlier Christians in the Middle East. Their encounters with Muslims and familiarity with the Arabic language enabled them to produce counter-attacks in reply to Muslims' criticism of the Bible. They did not accept that the Qur'an is the eternal Word of God, therefore they were mainly concerned to explain how the Qur'an was created. At this point it is necessary to note that their time, place and social and political situations were important factors in determining their attitudes towards the Qur'an. What we mean by this is that some, living under Muslim rule, were more cautious in their writings about the Qur'an than others who did not have such a problem and therefore felt free to propagate their own ideas. It is equally important to note that some had more knowledge of the Qur'an than others, as we have seen in the correctness of their references to Qur'anic verses, and it is undeniable that some of them expended great effort in the attempt to understand the events surrounding the Qur'an during this early period. For example, Kindī included a detailed account of the history of the compilation of the Qur'an though some of his information is not based on any historical evidence. In order to invalidate the authority of the Qur'an some, like John of Damascus, produced theories concerning the sources of the Qur'an through the influence of Christian monks. John's theory in particular has had a powerful effect down the centuries, influencing some to believe that the prophet Muhammad was about to convert to Christianity. Others believe that Judaism played a definitive role in the formation of Islam. Polemicists, like Kindī, said that after the death of the prophet the Jews interpolated many things into the Qur'an. Such thinkers concluded that the Qur'an owes its existence to Christians and Jews rather than to divine revelation. Obviously, their central attitude towards the Qur'an is critical, negative, and extremely polemical.

This study has shown that a remarkable parallel exists between the early Christian writers' understanding of the Qur'an and the Medieval Europeans' understanding of it. Bearing in mind the fact that many of the Christian writers in the Middle Ages used the works of these early Christians this parallel becomes very natural. It is apparent in the works and activities of Peter the Venerable who was strongly influenced by Kindī. He gave information almost identical to Kindī's about the accounts of the prophet's informants. In their monasteries these diligent Christians learned Arabic, translated the Qur'an and read it carefully then used it for various purposes. They primarily aimed at saving Christians from conversion to Islam. Another important reason for their study of the Qur'an was that they hoped to convert Muslims to Christianity.[1] Our examination of some of their ideas has shown that their general approach to the Qur'an is an example of one way to read a sacred text: with the intent of undermining the claim of the Qur'an to be a scripture and the prophecy of the prophet.

To the Christians of the Medieval West, Muslims were the great enemy; the study of scripture was therefore vital for the discovery of the Muslims' weaknesses. During their struggles in Spain and the Levant they produced many works to show that the Muslim scripture is full of illogical ideas. The reason for this, according to many Medieval Western writers, is the influence of Satan and his minions on the prophet. This was a new idea and is not found among the early Christians. One significant difference between the early Christians in the Middle East and the Medieval Europeans is the latter's enormous emphasis on Qur'anic borrowings from the Bible, which continues to affect many scholars up until our own time. The Bible is, according to them, a major element among the sources of the Qur'an. Instead of using any concrete evidence they generally based their views on speculation and sharp emotionalism. Luther's ideas are a very good illustration of this approach. Furthermore, they believed that the Qur'an contains many inconsistencies as well as numerous unreasonable conceptions. For them, the Qur'anic presentation is a mixture of Jewish and Christian materials combined in a vague way.

With a few exceptions, this attitude continues even today in many missionary and theological circles. Their understanding of the Qur'an, as Lewis has pointed out, based on *a priori* theoretical principles and directed to practical purposes, resembles

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[1] B. Lewis, *op. cit.*, 1993, 17-18

that emanating from the monasteries of the Medieval West.[2] They have been obsessed with finding the sources of the Qur'an. Reading the Qur'an with purely Christian eyes has prevented them from seeing any coherence in it. They were convinced that the prophet's acquaintance with the Bible was very scant and as a result he distorted the Biblical (original) version of these narratives in the Qur'an. The examples taken from Tisdal's works are good illustrations of this attitude.

Alongside the missionary works we also briefly noted that the Qur'an has attracted the attention of several independent academics in the last two centuries. The signs of change in fact began with the Enlightenment but the significant development took place in the nineteenth century. The control of the European powers over the greater part of the Muslim world enabled many researchers to learn Arabic, to live among Muslims and, above all, to use many first-hand sources. In addition, the influence of positivism and the application of historical criticism to Qur'anic studies paved the way for many scholarly works. Although they did not dwell on the polemical aspect of the scriptures it has been observed that neither Jewish nor Christian scholars were able to free themselves completely from examining the alleged Biblical influence on the Qur'an. They studied the Qur'an, but the theory of borrowings clouded their vision. They explained the Qur'anic narratives in accordance with their preconception, namely that since the Bible is earlier than the Qur'an the Qur'an must therefore imitate and distort the original narratives of the Bible. Thus to some extent they overlooked the Qur'anic presentation of the prophetic stories, which was in many ways different from that of the Bible. The intense rivalry between Christian and Jewish scholars concerning the major sources of the Qur'an worsened the situation. The Jewish scholars unceasingly tried to find numerous affinities between not only the Bible but also voluminous Rabbinic sources, whereas Christian scholars mainly focused on the Apocryphal writings to show the real sources of the Qur'anic narrative. We have pointed out that this attitude is to be found in the works of Torrey and Bell.

An unwillingness to recognise the nature of the Qur'an as a different scripture persists in their writings although there are some nuances between them. Unlike Bell's Torrey's approach was idiosyncratic. He selected, evaluated and interpreted many Qur'anic verses according to his own whim. One of his basic theories is that the Muslim tradition is completely unreliable, therefore to know the religious vocation of

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[2] *Ibid.,* 18

the prophet we are obliged to look only at the Qur'an. Torrey, in contrast to Bell, believed that the direct borrowing of what the prophet thought were the Jewish materials came from the early Meccan period. His conviction that there was a big Jewish settlement in Mecca enabled him to conclude that some of the prophet's knowledge of Christianity came through Jewish channels. The central weakness in Torrey's Qur'anic study is his frequent interpolation of Jewish understanding into the Qur'anic presentation.

Bell, however, kept his Qur'anic study and his Christian commitment separate in his later works. For Bell, like Torrey, Muslim tradition is unreliable, therefore the Qur'an is a unique source for the understanding of Islam. He also makes a clear distinction between the Qur'an and *tafsīr*, because it is not reasonable to read into the Qur'an thoughts that have been developed and elaborated by later commentators. The second difficulty which Bell emphasised is the chronological confusion of the Qur'an. Although he modified and added new principles to Nöldeke's classical-division (Bell divides the composition of the Qur'an into three periods: Sign, Qur'ān and Kitāb) many of his suggestions for arranging the chronology of Qur'anic verses within surahs results in complexity rather than removal of confusion. We briefly noted this issue in our analysis of the 'golden calf' episode. Bell, particularly when compared with Torrey and his tendency to make personal value judgements, makes on the whole a more honest effort to see what the Qur'an means. As regards the influence of Christian and Jewish materials he held the view that the prophet borrowed freely from Jewish and Christian sources while putting his own stamp on the material to enrich what he borrowed. For Bell, the direct borrowing from the Biblical material comes from the late Meccan and early Medinan period. We have also noted that although Bell generally disregarded the Jewish influence in *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*, he made room for it in his other works. He was also convinced that some of the Jewish narrations came to the Qur'an through Christian channels. Clearly, this view is an implicit response to Jewish scholars. It is interesting to note that both Torrey and Bell rejected the idea that epilepsy, hysteria, Satan, heathens, and so on are sources of the Qur'an. Bell explained the prophet's inspiration by referring to his 'brooding mind' whereas Torrey preferred to call it self-hypnotism. Obviously, their approaches differ from their predecessors'; however, because of their various comments on the origin of many words, and ideas and so forth in the Qur'an, we must conclude that their opinions

are not very reliable. The theory of borrowings continued to exert an influence after these scholars but not as strongly as before.

Modern Qur'anic scholarship in the West is quite different from that of the nineteenth-century scholars though many of recent scholars have included sources of the Qur'an in their works. The reasons for this change are not easy to cover here, but one should not deny the efforts of some studious individuals. We have also noted that the increase in primary materials has forced many academics to draw a different picture of the Qur'an. It is also worth mentioning that changing relations between the West and the East during the post-colonial era affected European scholarship regarding the Qur'an.

For the sake of simplicity we have summarised recent scholarship in four categories. First of all we have focused on Jeffery, who builds on earlier historical and philological works. Our second writer is Wansbrough, who advocates extreme historical scepticism. Then we have discussed a group of scholars under the title of sympathetic Christian writers. And finally we have given some brief information about the general outlook of those scholars who are particularly sensitive to the literary qualities of the Qur'an. Each group brings a new outlook and makes different contributions to the elucidation of the Qur'an. This plurality, we think, is the main difference between today's Qur'anic scholarship and earlier studies.

Having accepted the Qur'an as a text written at the time of the prophet by the instruction of the prophet, Jeffery focuses on the text and undertakes several analyses. He discusses the history, interpretation, and chronology of the Qur'an. He deals with the foreign words and names mentioned in the Qur'an. Despite some differences Jeffery's works represent the classical orientalist's approach to the Qur'an pioneered by Nöldeke. Jeffery argues that the prophet made use of many vocabularies, together with what these vocabularies conveyed, and justifies his notion of prophetic dependence on the previous religious systems by reference to the existence of many foreign vocabularies. Therefore, Jeffery's theory of influence, unlike those of Torrey and Bell, covers an extremely broad spectrum. It is also worth noting that he believed that what the prophet learnt came through the oral tradition.

The second group is, as Donner called them, the sceptics. As the name implies they are known for their mistrust of the Muslim tradition. A significant representative

of this group is Wansbrough, about whom we have presented much detailed information. Basing his argument on the form criticism he concludes that the Qur'an was compiled two centuries after the prophet; so the Qur'an is nothing to do with Muhammad. Interestingly, for Wansbrough the milieu where the Qur'an took shape is not the Hijāz but the prosperous lands of Syria and Iraq. Thus this isolated text is of no help in tracing the life of the prophet. In addition, Wansbrough, unlike his predecessors, talks about a general influence on the Qur'an rather than dealing with particular topics. Obviously, this radical approach is fundamentally opposed to the classical tradition of scholarship in the West. As we have already pointed out, the sceptics' extremism in questioning the authenticity of a large part of the Muslim sources has darkened rather than lightened the obscurity. Several criticisms of Wansbrough's tentative approach are still awaiting an answer.

Sympathetic Christian writers, with a few exceptions, do not devote their works exclusively to Qur'anic studies. Although, directly or indirectly, some of them refer to the theory of influence, their scholarly contribution to the Qur'an is different from that of other groups. First and foremost they justly draw attention to the impact of the Qur'an on the community of believers, which has been long neglected among Western students of Islam. Being well aware of the function of the text among Muslims they place great stress on the common elements shared between Muslims and Christians in order to pave the way for mutual understanding. But despite the fact that they have softened the previously biased approach to the Qur'an their frequent interpolation of their Christian perspective into their attempts to understand the Qur'an still constitutes a great obstacle.

The last group consists of various scholars who have placed equal emphasis on the importance of the Qur'an and the classical commentaries. They have made great efforts to understand the Qur'an without dealing with its sources. They have employed the rich resources of Western literary theory to explicate for the reader the differences in the Qur'anic text, so that the reader can appreciate it without denying or confirming the message of the Qur'an. We have found their methodology extremely helpful in our attempt to understand what the Qur'an is saying and what it means. One of the greatest advantages of their works is that they try to find many links among the verses and surahs. In addition, their attempts to elucidate the structure of surahs, the list of themes and so on make the understanding of the surahs easier. Although we have given some

brief information about their approaches to the Qur'an in the related chapter we have built our narrative analysis of the golden calf episode on their works.

In the second chapter of part one we have followed this last group to see the Qur'anic narrative in all its otherness. Having shown some similarities and differences between surahs Ṭā-Hā and Aʿrāf, and the relevance of the previous prophets' activities to the prophet Muhammad, we have focused on the Qur'anic narratives of the 'golden calf' episode. This chapter has explored a dimension of Qur'anic narrative neglected in many scholarly circles in both the West and the East. The Qur'anic narratives of the 'golden calf' episode reveals that the main events of the story (generally speaking) are the same in both the Bible and the Qur'an, but the function of the story is very different. In addition, its tone, its time-span, its characterisation are also different. This is not a simple retelling of Biblical stories; however, to see the differences it is not necessary to know about the sources. It is also equally important to understand that to grasp many of the nuances in the Qur'an one needs more reading than has been supposed. Compared with the Biblical narrative the Qur'anic presentation is quite short but still has many things to tell us.

In this chapter we have pointed out several issues concerning the Qur'anic narrative of this episode, such as the importance of the characterisation, the sudden shift in the Qur'anic narrative, the relation between dialogue and narration, the importance of the usage of the words, the tempo created by the narration, flashback, word play (punning), the humour and irony created by the direct speech of the characters, the understanding of the verses in a symbolic field and finally the relation between the two major narratives of the 'golden calf' episode.

We can briefly summarise some of our findings concerning Qur'anic narrative as follows; first and foremost this study has suggested some crucial distinctions among the Qur'anic characters. The Qur'an draws a very sharp line between good and bad. We have also noted that the characters in the Qur'an are not symbolic but are real human characters. The analysis of 20:83-85, for example, has revealed the prophet Moses' naturalness and anxiety, whereas Sāmirī appears in 20:96 to be more arrogant, even shameless. It has also been deduced from his speech that he has an absolute self-confidence, a trait found in all 'Pharaoh-minded' people. When we look at the Israelites, however, we see quite different characters. They appear to be unable to

protect themselves from Moses' severe criticisms. According to the Qur'an, they lay the responsibility on the ornaments, which have no ability to do good or bad. The narration explicitly portrays them as very foolish. They are totally passive, acted upon by Sāmirī. The specific use of the words *ḥummilnā* and *malkinā* constitutes the key element to support this characterisation. It should be noted here that one of the important features of Qur'anic narrative is that with a few exceptions it does not name individuals. This does not necessarily make the narration difficult to follow, because its verbal connection and sentence structure give enough clues for the episode and message to be understood.[3] As M. Abdel Haleem has pointed out, the Qur'an is above all a Book of guidance.[4]

Another important feature of the Qur'anic presentation which we have dwelled on in our analysis is that it skips some secondary stages to help the episode gain its dynamics. For example, the period between God's sudden revelation to Moses about what happened to the Israelites and Moses' return to his people is narrated within two verses; however, the dynamism created through this omission helps the reader to fill the gaps left by the verse itself. We have also noted a similar style in Moses' address to the Israelites, Aaron, and Sāmirī respectively. So it is incorrect to see the Qur'anic presentation as disorganised.

As regards word play, the Qur'anic narration of this episode is extremely vivid. The best way to show the hastiness of the Israelites and the unexpected appearance of the calf is the pun created by the use of the terms *ᶜijl*, *ᶜajala* and *ᶜajiltum*. No translation can do justice to the narrative tension that is carried by these semantically, acoustically, and emotionally similar words.

This analysis has also given us an opportunity to see a general coherence between different narrations of the same episode. Furthermore, this in turn has enabled us to solve the dogmatic problems which caused a great deal of difficulty for many classical commentators. The absence of Sāmirī's name in the narrative of surah Aᶜrāf is a good example. Without going into detail we have shown that it is easy to solve this dilemma with a brief look at the each narrative's emphasis. Surah Ṭā-Hā, as the characters' speech indicates, concentrates on Sāmirī's role, whereas surah Aᶜrāf's

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[3] M. Abdel Haleem, 'The Qur'an', *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*, London-New York: I. B. Tauris 1999, 13
[4] *Ibid.*, 13

narrative is concerned with the people who continue to worship the calf. The nature of the test in 20:85 is also worth mentioning. Although the concept of the test is basic to Qur'anic thought, many commentators have confused God's test and Sāmirī's misguidance in this verse. As we have noted in our analysis, the main reason for their confusion is their lack of interest in the context of the episode and the surahs. We have pointed out that great tension is created by this verse. God announced the test and consequently the Israelites' failure. God several times reminds them of His test, *fitna*. Even Moses is not exempt from being tested, 20:40. All these incidents repeatedly indicate that the test, their failure and so on, are in accordance with Divine plans. Unfortunately, the atomic approach to the specific narration prevents many from seeing the multi-faceted relation among the verses.

Similarly, we have drawn attention to the identification of *rasūl* and *athar* in 20:96. Some commentators' preoccupation with many contradictory reports caused them to fail to see the Qur'anic usage of the term in the same narrative, but it is clear that *rasūl* is Moses not Gabriel.

Similar errors have been made by Western scholars who are at a loss to explain the dialogue between Moses and Aaron in both surahs. Their failure to see the coherence and complementary aspect of these two narratives leads them to confusion. Again, this analysis has outlined the strong link between these narratives; Aaron's defence in both is the same but presented in quite different words.

Finally, our analysis has noted several ironies together with their interpretation in the symbolic realm. As a good illustration we refer to the Israelites' haste to form a god for themselves at the base of the Holy Mountain while God has just finished speaking to Moses and giving the Tablets to him. The contrast between Moses and the Israelites goes beyond the surface level to the symbolic field. The Israelites' worship of the calf indicates the descendent (degeneration) of the people into idolatry while Moses' stay on the elevated place (Sinai) implies spiritual ascension on his part. This contrast, furthermore, has all the starkness of the antithesis of belief and unbelief that are eternal opposites. To support this approach we have brought forward the Qur'anic evidence in 7:179. We have also pointed out the symbolic relation between the Qur'anic words *ṣamad* and *khuwār*. Briefly, this link suggests the emptiness of disbelief (hollowness) and the strong nature of belief. We are sure there are many such

symbolic contrasts which the Qur'an eloquently delineates but it requires a patient and skilful reader to elucidate them. The Qur'an has its own style and structure, however, this does not mean it is an isolated text whose meaning is almost impossible to grasp. Using both classical exegetical sources and modern literary methods gives us a great advantage in the discovery of different meanings in this hidden treasure.

The extensive summary and conclusion of part two has already been given at the end of the classical commentaries' analysis of the 'golden calf' and the 'heavenly table' episodes, therefore here we will only draw attention to some important points.

The first chapter of part two has focused on the explanation of the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt* in both Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship. The short survey of traditions dealing specifically with *isrā'īliyyāt* has been presented both to acquaint the reader with the basic source material and to attempt to give a general summary of the understanding of the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt* as explored both in prophetic traditions and the narrations of subsequent generations. The result is interesting. There are two types of reports which support two different approaches; namely, one allows the use of non-Muslim materials, the order does not permit it. Although there have been many arbitrary attempts to solve this dilemma the existence of contradictory reports prevents our reaching a clear-cut conclusion. Nonetheless, new converts have succeeded in bringing their own traditions to Muslim traditions. The brevity of the Qur'anic narrative has encouraged them to produce a large number of stories, which have readily found a place in classical *tafsīr*. Storytellers, on the other hand, have served as powerful catalysts who speed this *isrā'īliyyāt* process onwards. At this point stress must be placed on the fact that the storytellers are not the originators or sources of *isrā'īliyyāt*; however, it is safe to say that they have embellished and dramatised many existing reports.

This investigation has not sought primarily to find the originators of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports. Its main concern has been to concentrate on the identification of the commentators who use the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt* in their commentaries. Neither classical nor modern Muslim scholarship has dealt with this question properly. As regards Western scholarship, there are diverse opinions. Some of them are helpful, some are not. We believe that a most important contribution has been made by Khoury, Johns, and Calder, who all suggest that the technical term *isrā'īliyyāt* was not used

before Ibn Kathīr. We have seen, however, that this word was used as a technical term by an Andalusian exegete, Abū Bakr Ibn al-ᶜArabī. Ibn Taymiyya, the mentor of Ibn Kathīr, and Ibn Taymiyya's contemporary Ṭūfī discussed *isrā'īliyyāt* before Ibn Kathīr. In line with Khoury, Johns and Calder, our analysis has shown that the first systematic user of this term was Ibn Kathīr, but this conclusion cannot solve all the problems we have raised at the beginning of this thesis. His using *isrā'īliyyāt* purely in a technical sense does not mean that Ibn Kathīr was unique in not dealing with this type of report. The value of our investigation lies in the discovery that even within the highly structured, repetitive confines of the classical Qur'anic commentaries certain discernible changes in presentation and understanding have taken place. We have seen that there are some commentators who, without using this technical term, clearly reduced the number of *isrā'īliyyāt* in their commentaries. Pride of place in this respect belongs to Ibn ᶜAṭiyya. Following him, Ṭūsī and Rāzī also to some extent distanced themselves from *isrā'īliyyāt*. Ibn ᶜAṭiyya worked on the basis of *isnād* and the content of the reports. He questioned openly many reports, discussed their meaning, dwelled on the authenticity of their transmission. Finally he either explicitly rejected them or sometimes gave the shortest version without any embellishment. Interestingly, despite Ibn ᶜAṭiyya's demand that the invasion of these reports to be halted, very little has been achieved after him. Ṭūsī and Rāzī, however, chose a different way to reduce *isrā'īliyyāt* in their *tafsīr*. They mainly worked on rational grounds. The rationalisation of the content of the reports without appealing to their authority gave the exegetes room to present their interpretations very powerfully and in a complex way. But in the end this style prevented them from dealing with many lengthy reports. Nevertheless, we have observed that their linguistic competence also helped them to reduce these types of reports in their *tafsīr*.

Another important conclusion derived from this study is to see the notion of *isrā'īliyyāt* in classical commentaries as an ongoing development. The same story in the hands of skilful commentators takes different shapes. They sometimes add something, sometimes take out other things from the same report to make it more attractive. This observation is also supported by the idea that the rigid criterion of *ḥadīth* is not applicable to the reports used in *tafsīr*. This does not mean, however, that the *tafsīr* tradition has no rules. In fact the process of interpretation in the classical period was a game with many rules and commentators had to play according to those

rules. Exegetical traditionalism was given primacy in this game. The commentator had to be careful to propose his suggestion within the exegetical tradition, otherwise what he said would be dismissed by the community as an innovation. The main reason for the rejection of the Mutazilite commentator Abū Muḥammad al-Isfahānī's comment on the identification of *rasūl* with Moses instead of Gabriel is the self-control of this exegetical tradition. It is easy to play within this tradition but very difficult to play outside it. A similar attitude is more explicit in the interpretation of the word *istafā'a*; *yastaffu* or *tastaffu*. What we have observed is that each commentator, when dealing with several constituent elements, has reflected a remarkable unity of understanding, although there has been a change in the expression of this unity. In no case, however, have they indicated that the two, *yastaffu* and *tastaffu*, are irreconcilable. It is simply that nobody wants to break a rule.

This investigation has also helped us to see how effective has been the use of *isrā'īliyyāt* in *tafsīr* tradition. In the definition of *ḥawāriyyūn* (disciples of Jesus), for example, *isrā'īliyyāt* has played an important role. Briefly, they are sincere believers. By the same token, basing their opinion on *isrā'īliyyāt* reports, many exegetes place the initiative and the power of performance with God in the interpretation of God's test in 20:85: God allows the Israelites to worship the calf. Besides the above-mentioned issues *isrā'īliyyāt* have also played an important role in various dogmatic and theological problems. Classical commentators have even used *isrā'īliyyāt* to support variant readings.

Regarding sectarian or polemical interpretations, classical commentators generally did not use *isrā'īliyyāt* reports. Instead they preferred to use the Qur'anic verses or bring forward rational arguments. One reason for this preference is the appeal to strong evidence. The Qur'anic verses are easy to use for this purpose.

Finally, it is safe to note that with a minor difference, classical exegetes exhibit no interest in the Jews and Christians of whom they must have had some contemporary knowledge. Again, with very few exceptions such as Ibn Kathīr and Zamakshari, reference to the varieties of Jewish and Christian belief and practice find no place in the classical commentaries. On textual grounds, classical commentators give us no evidence that they are familiar with Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Further suggestions

Considering the existence of so many published and unpublished *tafsīrs*, it is virtually impossible to identify the commentator who was the first user of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* in a technical sense. Although we have examined various commentaries, there are of course others, which we have not been able to deal with, and we have to admit that this study is not exhaustive. Nonetheless, the questions we have raised at the beginning are still valid: who first used this technical term critically and who paid enough attention to reduce the number of these reports in his commentary?

As regards the Qur'anic narrative, we can say that this aspect of Qur'anic studies is still in its infancy. What we have done is basically experimental and is an invitation to both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars to devote some of their energies to this aspect. Western scholars, who have the advantage of a very rich literary tradition in their Biblical studies, are well able to study the literary qualities of the Qur'an. Such works will certainly help them to appreciate different aspects of the Qur'anic narrative and they will be protected from the many errors made by their predecessors. In addition, the literary study of the Qur'an will give them the opportunity to understand their own scripture better. Muslims on the other hand should free themselves from dogmatic anxiety and begin working on the literary aspects of the Qur'an in order to see many aspects of it which are missing in classical and modern commentaries.

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