7

EXEGESIS[1]

Michael E. Pregill

Scriptural exegesis of one form or another has been a critical aspect of religious, intellectual, and social activity in the Muslim community since the time of its foundation. According to the traditional account, revelation and community were intertwined from the beginning: the Prophet gathered his earliest followers from among his family and close associates after the revelation of the Qurʾān began in 610 CE, and over the years, both the body of material that would eventually constitute the canonical Qurʾān and the body of believers who would constitute the first *umma* grew together. (Processes of revelation and communogenesis had not been so closely conjoined previously in the case of either the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament.) Under these circumstances, the Companions of the Prophet – the first individuals to accept Muḥammad's message and recognize the authority of the Qurʾān he revealed to them during his mission – had ample opportunity to discuss what they heard, puzzle over its implications, argue over its significance, and inquire directly with Muḥammad about its meaning.

Thus, exegesis of the Qurʾān – the proto-Qurʾān, the Qurʾān as an emergent discourse and incipient scripture, the verses and chapters Muḥammad recited to the community in stages as Gabriel brought them to him piecemeal over the course of more than twenty years – actually commenced years before the complete canonical Qurʾān, "the codex between two covers" (*al-muṣḥaf bayn lūḥayn*), had come into being.[2] Here a comparison between the Qurʾān and the Jewish and Christian Bibles is more apt, since in all three cases, canons were established long after processes of exegetical engagement had begun. What some have called "inner-biblical exegesis" – the inclusion of the products of interpretation of earlier revealed materials alongside those materials within a single corpus – is a widely observed and studied phenomenon in Biblical Studies.[3] Similarly, as Neuwirth and others have noted, in the chronological development of the Qurʾān, certain passages appear to refer to those that preceded them in the revelatory process, recontextualizing or revising them significantly. Thus, in Islam, as in Judaism and Christianity, processes of interpretation are not external and secondary to scripture; rather, they are central to the formation of scripture itself.

Aside from this "inner-Qurʾānic" exegesis, copious oral traditions dealing with the interpretation of the Qurʾān were handed down from the first Believers and circulated orally among their descendants and followers alongside the transmission of the Qurʾān itself. These traditions played a crucial role in the process through which the religion of Islam took shape during the imperial expansion of Arab Muslim rule under the Rāshidūn or "rightly guided" caliphs. These

traditions also circulated among the masses of converts who swelled the ranks of the *umma*, who then made substantial contributions of their own to the growth of exegetical lore in response to their experience of the Qurʾān and reflection upon its meaning.[4] Thus, significant amounts of material from a wide variety of sources were brought to bear in the interpretation of the Qurʾān as the teachings of the Prophet and the lore of the early community mingled with the cultures and traditions of the far-flung communities drawn into the caliphal empire. In the rich synthesis that resulted, the discipline of Qurʾān interpretation, most often called *tafsīr*, became one of the major Islamic religious sciences, central to what came to be known as the "sciences of the Qurʾān" (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*), along with other disciplines such as the techniques of proper recitation (*tajwīd*) and the conservation and study of variant reading traditions (*qirāʾāt*).[5]

Today, hundreds of works of *tafsīr* in Arabic from the first several centuries of Islam's history are extant, comprising thousands of volumes and hundreds of thousands of printed pages and manuscript folios devoted to the interpretation of the Qurʾān.[6] Many of the works produced during the early and classical periods of the tradition's development (from the later 8th to the 12th century) purport to represent the views of Muslims who lived during the age of the Prophet, Companions, and Successors – the *Salaf* or "pious predecessors" whose example Muslims frequently strive to emulate. Much of the content of these works does plausibly date to the 7th and early 8th centuries, though it can be extremely difficult to discern what is authentically ancient and what later invention within them, due in large part to the dearth of surviving sources from the early period. When we adduce works in languages other than Arabic and widen the remit of our inquiry to embrace commentaries written from the high Middle Ages up to the present day, the number of texts of *tafsīr* available to the student of the Qurʾān becomes even more vast, reaching into the thousands, and the page count into the millions.[7] What ties this massive literary corpus together is that, across the centuries, one of the most consistent features of Qurʾān commentary as a genre has been the symbolic appeal to the example of past generations as the basis of an authentic understanding of the Qurʾānic text. Alongside jurisprudence and the science of ḥadīth, exegesis has almost always been rooted in the precedent set during Islam's prophetic age – although the meaning of that precedent has often been contested.[8]

The history of *tafsīr*'s development as both a discourse and a literary genre is complex. During the early centuries of Islamic history, *tafsīr* was not an isolated discipline or a specialist enterprise. Rather, even after the earliest comprehensive commentaries were composed, *tafsīr* overlapped considerably with other genres. Reports on the interpretation of Qurʾānic verses are found not only in Qurʾān commentaries *per se* – *tafsīr* proper – but in ḥadīth collections, historical and biographical sources, works on jurisprudence and theology, *belles-lettres* (*adab*), and so forth. This is because the Qurʾān has been a touchstone of significance in virtually all cultural activities in which Muslims have engaged, at least before the modern period – a fact that should encourage the would-be student of exegesis to approach Qurʾān interpretation as a broad cultural phenomenon and not a narrow scholastic discipline.[9]

The diffusion of exegesis through multiple genres is also due to the fact that both the religious sciences that coalesced into formal disciplines in the classical period and more "secular" branches of literature drew on a common pool of orally transmitted material handed down from the formative period of Islam's development. Genre divisions were not hard and fast at this stage, though some distinct genre conventions did emerge relatively early; further, even after such divisions had emerged, there was still considerable cross-fertilization between genres.[10] *Tafsīr*, most often manifest in the form of sequential, verse-by-verse commentary on the sacred text, became the preeminent literary genre in which Muslims engaged the text of the Qurʾān, but significant traces of genuinely early Muslim interpretation of scripture are to be found in works in a variety of different genres. Further, due to the impact of considerations of orthodoxy

on *tafsīr*, sometimes it is actually those works outside of the field of Qurʾān commentary that preserve authentically early ideas and claims that disappeared from (or were suppressed within) the discourse of exegesis proper, especially after the consolidation of *tafsīr* as a formal scholastic discipline primarily practiced in the setting of the madrasa.

The legacy bequeathed by early Muslims in their engagement with the Qurʾān was not entirely unproblematic for later generations. With the rise and consolidation of the madrasa system in the 12th through 14th centuries, *tafsīr* came to be institutionalized; well before this point, Sunnī commentators on the Qurʾān had reached a basic consensus regarding both the methods of exegesis and the range of possibilities of meaning of the Qurʾānic text, at least in its broad contours. However, this consensus was perennially challenged by other communities within the Islamic fold, particularly various schools of Shīʿī exegetes. Moreover, already by the later Middle Ages, some Sunnīs had begun to look back to the early period with an attitude of skepticism, seeking to reevaluate the legacy of early engagements with the Qurʾān with fresh eyes, and casting doubt on the integrity of at least some of the material that had been handed down from older interpreters. Thus, they accused some exegetes of the formative period of corrupting the pure knowledge of the Qurʾān's meaning handed down from the Prophet and his Companions, particularly by adducing the lore of Jews and Christians in the interpretation of scripture. The Salafī quest for authenticity – which resonates throughout Muslim communities to this day – led to questionable attempts to discern and transmit only the "purest," most quint-essentially "Islamic" exegesis of the Qurʾān, free of corrupting influences that tarnish the true meaning of scripture as originally revealed by the Prophet to his Companions. Salafī debates over authority continue to inflect much contemporary Muslim reflection on the legitimate methods and results of interpretation.

In what follows here, we will first examine the traditional account of the origin of exegesis in the early community among the Companions, subsequently handed down across the centuries and eventually collected in literary works of scriptural commentary. We will then address the coalescence of *tafsīr* as the predominant genre of scriptural exegesis among Sunnīs in particular in the classical period, taking note of dissenting approaches to the Qurʾānic text as well. Here it will be necessary to examine the emergence of the critique of received tradition articulated among those medieval commentators who accused their predecessors of transmitting so-called *isrāʾīliyyāt* or corrupting Jewish traditions. Finally, we will proceed to examine the implications of some contemporary revisionist critiques of Islamic history and tradition for our understanding of exegesis and its role in early Islamic culture.

Overall, we will find that differing approaches to exegesis of the Qurʾān and conflicting accounts of how traditions of interpretation originated and evolved are commonly grounded in competing images of the Islamic past, particularly the role the formative community is held to have played in shaping the understandings of the Qurʾān that were handed down across the centuries to posterity, as well as which individuals or groups within the community are seen as providing authoritative guidance in matters of faith. Major changes in hermeneutics have tended to entail (or at least imply) a commensurate change in the image of the early Islamic period and its significance for later Muslims – a shift in the conception of how the past relates to the present and informs the way the sacred text should be interpreted. Strikingly, it is not only Muslim commentators whose understandings of the nature and role of scriptural exegesis are informed by particular conceptions of or investments in the Islamic past. This holds true of contemporary Western scholars as well, whose ideas about Islam's origins and development, though often quite different from the conventional Muslim account, have similarly impacted their notions about how traditions of Qurʾānic interpretation evolved and how they relate to the Qurʾānic text.

The traditional account of the origins of exegesis (and its shortcomings)

As we have already noted, according to the traditional sources, the interpretation of the Qurʾān was a subject of debate among the Companions of the Prophet, its first audience. These sources attest to the various ways that Muḥammad clarified the meaning of the Qurʾān for his followers, or showed them how its rulings and precepts were to be applied. This so-called "prophetic *tafsīr*" usually constitutes commentary of a concise and sometimes obscure sort. Unsurprisingly, some of these traditions serve to gloss opaque references, as in this tradition on a peculiar episode alluded to in Q 2:58–59. In the midst of a long address to the Jews recounting the transgressions of their ancestors the Israelites, the Qurʾān asserts:

> And then We said, "Enter this town, and consume as much of its plentiful provisions as you wish; enter the gate prostrating, and say *ḥiṭṭa*, and We will pardon your sins, and make those who do good increase." But the wrongdoers changed the word from what they had been told, so We sent a plague from heaven down upon them on account of their transgression.

The Qurʾānic passage leaves both the literal meaning of the term *ḥiṭṭa* and the nature of the purported exchange that the Israelites made that provoked God unclear. One tradition found in the canonical ḥadīth does not gloss the word explicitly (which appears only here and in the parallel passage at Q 7:161–162), but it does serve to shed light on the situation by illustrating the character of the Israelites' deed:

> Abū Hurayra reported from the Prophet: "When it was said to the Jews, *Enter the gate prostrating, and say* ḥiṭṭa, *and We will pardon your sins*, they changed things around, and entered the gate dragging their backsides, saying, '*Grain on the stalk!*'"[11]

This tradition may seem to only compound the obscurity, but its import becomes clear through closer consideration. While the Israelites were instructed to act reverentially, bowing as they entered the town and speaking a word of respect or gratitude to God, they instead did the opposite, acting comically and saying something that distorted the term they were originally told to utter into something ridiculous. The odd reference to grain here suggests that the Israelites made a kind of punning joke based on God's command, in specifically changing the word *ḥiṭṭa*, which may have meant something like "Forgive our sins" (perhaps connected somehow to Hebrew *ḥaṭṭah*, "sin") into a similar-sounding word: *ḥinṭa*, that is, "wheat" (see Rubin 1999: 83–99). God, we may surmise, was not amused.

Not surprisingly, given the nature of the *tafsīr* material found in the ḥadīth corpus and its *Sitz im Leben*, some of these traditions depict how the verses of the Qurʾān were received in their immediate context in an extremely vivid way, as in another tradition that addresses the immediate repercussions of the changing of the *qibla* or direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca (as Q 2:142–145 is conventionally understood to legislate). Here there is no prophetic intervention in the form of a literal explanation of the pertinent verses; rather, the tradition appears to establish that the Prophet's personal example served as an authoritative illustration of how the verse was to be obeyed in practical terms by everyone in the community:

> Some people were performing the morning prayer at Qubāʾ when someone came along and said: "A new revelation came down to the Messenger of God last night ordering him to face the Kaʿba when he prays, so you should do the same." At that

moment they were turned in the direction of Syria, but they immediately turned to face the Kaʿba instead.

(al-Bukhārī n.d.: no. 4490)[12]

At the same time, this anecdote does presuppose implicit *tafsīr*, insofar as the verses commanding the change of *qibla* refer only to "the *qibla* you [the Muslims] had before" (*al-qibla allatī kunta ʿālayha*) and "a [new] *qibla* that you will find pleasing" (*qibla tarḍāhā*), with the latter specified as *al-masjid al-ḥarām*. While it is universally held in the tradition that the former *qibla* was Jerusalem and the latter was (and remains) Mecca, the tradition about the Muslims reorienting themselves in the midst of the morning prayer at Qubāʾ underscores this, for the very reason that these identifications are *not* explicit in the Qurʾān. Thus the reference to the community's turning in prayer from Syria (al-Shām, where Bayt al-Maqdis or Jerusalem is located) to the Kaʿba at Mecca serves implicitly to clarify something that is uncertain in scripture – *tabyīn al-mubham* or "specification of the unknown" traditionally being understood as one of the primary functions of *tafsīr*.

Still other traditions preserved in the ḥadīth corpus show the Prophet arbitrating disputes about the meaning of passages among his Companions, or otherwise seeking to guide their understanding of the Qurʾān's general import. However, overall, prophetic *tafsīr* constitutes only a very small portion of extant Muslim commentary on the Qurʾān. In contrast to the relatively scant traces of Muḥammad's own reflections on the meaning of the Qurʾān, the tradition much more frequently preserves what purports to be the opinion of the Companions, who heard the Qurʾān directly from him, as to how various passages of the Qurʾān should be interpreted – the tacit understanding being that their interpretations must have come from Muḥammad himself. Thus, while the most authoritative – and rather sizeable – collections of Sunnī ḥadīth, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (both compiled in the mid- to late 9th century) each contain only a few dozen unique reports classified as *tafsīr* (a very small percentage of the thousands of unique reports found in both; see Melchert 2017), much shorter commentaries collecting exegetical traditions transmitted from Companions and Successors may contain thousands and thousands of unique reports.

There are different ways to explain the disjunction between the explosion of Companion and Successor reports pertaining to exegesis and the relative paucity of traditions of prophetic *tafsīr*. One might simply conclude that the Prophet had been more concerned to guide the practical affairs of his followers than to school them in the proper interpretation of scripture, except in cases when it directly impinged upon practical matters; as we have already seen, some of what was gathered as prophetic *tafsīr* is really about the Qurʾān's relevance for practice rather than constituting explicit commentary *per se*. Alternatively, one might focus on the transmitters and collectors of prophetic ḥadīth, and speculate that it was *they* who were more concerned with practical matters than exegesis.[13]

However, a more skeptical-minded observer of this phenomenon might reach a different conclusion, inferring that this disparity appears because there was simply much less at stake in the realm of exegesis than there was in ritual and juridical matters. Some have conjectured that the *isnād*s attached to traditions cited in juristic disputes over questions of practice were commonly subjected to tampering to elevate their ultimate sources from Companions and Successors to the Prophet himself. Hypothetically, exegetical traditions on the Qurʾān seldom merited similar tampering because they usually dealt with more abstract or recondite matters. That is, the vast majority of Companion and Successor reports commenting on the Qurʾān retain their attribution to Companions and Successors because they did not merit being transmuted into prophetic *tafsīr* at a later date.[14]

The necessity of policing the exegesis of scripture, in particular of preventing overly fabulous or imaginative interpretations from overwhelming more sober approaches to the Qurʾān, is a concern reflected in many accounts of disputes between Companions. The ḥadīth corpus preserves another tradition in which Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 680), the fifth caliph and founder of the Umayyad dynasty – and a Companion – refers to another Companion, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, a Muslim convert from Judaism who was a well-known transmitter of pre-Islamic lore: "Truly, [Kaʿb] was among the most reliable of those who related traditions from the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the 'People of Scripture'); but even so, despite this, we used to test him for falsehood" (al-Bukhārī n.d.: no. 7361).[15] As if to elaborate on the test mentioned by Muʿāwiya here, another account portrays him quizzing Kaʿb about a fantastic interpretation of a particular Qurʾānic verse: "Muʿāwiya said: 'Kaʿb, have you been telling people Alexander could hitch his horse to the Pleiades?' Kaʿb replied: 'Well, God Almighty does say: *We have given him a rope that can reach anywhere …*'!" (Ibn Kathīr 1997:V 190)

The conventional interpretation of this verse (Q 18:84), from the Qurʾānic narrative of Dhū al-Qarnayn (commonly interpreted as Alexander the Great), is "We have provided for him means (*sabab*) to accomplish anything," seemingly an allusion to Alexander's supernatural, God-given knowledge. However, the critical term *sabab* here, "means" or "way," can also be interpreted literally as a rope, and so the verse can be read as a seeming allusion to Alexander's miraculous ability to hitch his famous horse Bucephalus to the stars.[16] This tradition is quoted in the *tafsīr* of the 14th-century commentator Ibn Kathīr as an illustration of how even those traditions that were handed down through reliable chains of transmitters from informants like Kaʿb may be suspect because the material was intrinsically spurious to begin with due to its origins among the scriptural communities that preceded Islam, especially the Jews. As we shall see, Ibn Kathīr was instrumental in initiating a comprehensive attack on such material, which he designated *isrāʾīliyyāt*, in a critique that has far-ranging ramifications even today.[17]

The concern to police not only specific traditions of interpretation but particular types of exegesis is extremely prominent in some traditional accounts. This led Ignaz Goldziher, the foremost scholar of Islamic tradition of the later 19th century, to argue in his groundbreaking study *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* that exegesis of the Qurʾān was effectively prohibited well into the 8th century, specifically because of the excesses of storytellers in advancing fabulous interpretations like that ascribed to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār above (1920: 55–65; 2006: 42–53). However, already in 1955, when he devoted a monograph to this subject, Birkeland recognized that traditions criticizing exegesis, or at least certain *kinds* of exegesis, actually emerged relatively late, but had been put into the mouths of earlier authorities and thus projected backward in time (a phenomenon with which Goldziher himself was entirely familiar). This occurred as traditionists sought to assert their dominance in the realm of commentary, insisting that *tafsīr* be disciplined according to the same rules and strictures that governed the transmission of juristic ḥadīth. Collectively, those traditions that Goldziher misread as representing a blanket prohibition on exegesis can instead be recognized as an attempt by the ḥadīth collectors to widen the scope of their authority, intervene into the discourse of Qurʾān commentary, and limit the parameters of exegesis.

In any event, at least according to the thinking that has generally prevailed among Sunnīs for many centuries, mainstream Qurʾān interpretation rests upon the foundation of oral reports transmitted by reliable authorities from the early community, just as the legal and biographical-historical traditions do. Reports such as that cited above about Muʿāwiya and Kaʿb al-Aḥbār serve to drive home the point that just a few short years after the Prophet's passing, Muḥammad's Companions sought to maintain the bounds of proper interpretation in his absence, if not always explicitly in his name. Their actual historicity aside, such traditions were undoubtedly

compelling for later generations of Muslims who transmitted them because of their symbolic power: they project the idea that the true meaning of the Qurʾān had been safeguarded by the Companions, and that the traditions they passed down represented the most reliable approach to the interpretation of scripture, endowed as they were with the sanctity of Muḥammad's inspired example.

However, paradoxically, even concise Qurʾān commentaries preserve evidence of a vast array of completely contradictory opinions on the meaning of the Qurʾān recorded by the classical tradition. Exegetical diversity, what the tradition labels *ikhtilāf* or difference of opinion, is a central characteristic of Islamic scholarly discourse in general. Although in principle one can accept the general idea that the soundest interpretation of the Qurʾān is that which later generations received from the *Salaf*, in practice, *ikhtilāf* implicitly calls into question the idea of a core body of truth preserved in the tradition that goes back to Muḥammad and his closest associates.

The principle of *tafsīr* being securely grounded in the religious knowledge or *ʿilm* handed down from the Companions of the Prophet is epitomized by the attribution of vast amounts of exegetical material to one Companion in particular: ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās, the cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad. As many scholars have noted, Ibn ʿAbbās is the symbol of authoritative interpretation in Sunnī tradition *par excellence*, and thousands upon thousands of exegetical traditions are linked to his name in the extant sources.[18] Here the specter of *ikhtilāf* rears its head again, as this massive corpus is every bit as diverse and contradictory as the *tafsīr* tradition in general. As Berg and others have shown, there is hardly enough internal consistency within the traditions associated with this figure's name to justify understanding them as anything but pseudepigraphic. This should not be misunderstood as forgery, or as proof of fraud or conspiracy on the part of early Muslim traditionists and transmitters. Rather, it indicates the importance of Ibn ʿAbbās as a symbolic figurehead in the tradition, as well as the broader significance of the idea of prophetic warrant for exegesis of the Qurʾān in Muslim collective memory. The invocation of the name of Ibn ʿAbbās is not mendacious, but rather reflects the sincere conviction that if a given interpretation had the ring of truth, it naturally must have been passed down from Ibn ʿAbbās on account of his close relationship with the Prophet.[19]

We have emphasized the origin (or putative origin) of Qurʾān exegesis among the Companions and Successors here on account of the general predominance of what we might call a ḥadīth-centric approach in the historiography of *tafsīr*, at least until relatively recently. According to the traditional model of the *tafsīr* genre's development, the interpretation of the Qurʾān that came to be enshrined in literary sources by the later 8th century (that is, almost 200 years after the death of the Prophet) accurately represents the genuine views of the *Salaf*, who transmitted what was essentially the exegesis of the Qurʾān authorized by Muḥammad himself in the form of discrete reports handed down through chains of trustworthy transmitters. The same, or nearly the same, standards of probity that ensured the survival of sound ḥadīth across the generations safeguarded the interpretation of the Qurʾān, at least in broad terms. Thus, despite significant difference of opinion, we may be sure that the classical and medieval commentaries that now fill to overflowing the library shelves of modern scholars of this tradition basically preserve the authentic understanding of the Qurʾān that had prevailed in the time of Muḥammad himself – just as we may be sure that the text of the Qurʾān itself is that which was compiled a few short decades after Muḥammad's death.

Reflecting this basic understanding of the origins of Qurʾān exegesis, until quite recently it was standard for scholars to casually repeat the claim that exegesis naturally falls into one of two categories: *tafsīr bi-al-maʾthūr*, or exegesis according to sound tradition, and *tafsīr bi-al-raʾy*, or exegesis according to personal opinion – the latter being implicitly understood (or explicitly decried) as intrinsically inferior and insufficient for attaining a reliable interpretation of

the sacred text. Some early Qurʾān commentators like Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Muḥammad b. Ṣāʾib al-Kalbī (both d. *c.* 750) cited their sources only sporadically or not at all, leading many Sunnīs to abandon works like theirs in favor of those that did, ensuring the fidelity of the transmission of interpretations of the Qurʾān over time.[20] Some would argue that even the commentaries of Muqātil and Ibn al-Kalbī were based on exegetical ḥadīth channeled from the *Salaf*, and that these works were not truly based on their authors' mere opinion, but rather stemmed from sound sources in the previous generations – meaning that these early exegetes, whose works were later criticized on account of lacking *isnād*s, were at most guilty of a procedural shortcoming. We may be justifiably skeptical about such apologetic claims, which have not had much traction in conservative circles anyway; most traditionalist scholars have avoided relying on the *tafsīr* of Muqātil in particular (which fortunately for historians survives to the present day despite its marginalization) out of anxiety about the unreliability or heterodoxy of his views.

This is the basic view of the foundations of *tafsīr* promoted by many modern scholars. It is that Goldziher presents in his classic *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (1920). It is also that which dominates in what is undoubtedly the single most important Arabic-language treatment of the subject in the 20th century, al-Dhahabī's three-volume *al-Tafsīr wa-al-mufassirūn* (1976–1989). More recently, in response to the many incursions against this perspective made in some circles in contemporary scholarship, Abdul-Raof's study attempts to renovate the claim that *tafsīr bi-al-maʾthūr* actually was predominant in the early and classical tradition of exegesis, or should have been (2010).

However, this tradition-based model of *tafsīr*'s origins reflects above all the value system of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, whose point of view regarding legitimate religious knowledge began to be disseminated as early as the later 8th and early 9th century, and eventually came to dominate modern historiography on *tafsīr*, especially due to its aggressive promotion in Salafī circles. While some exegetes of the classical period surely would have preferred to rely on "pure" and authentically prophetic traditions in their interpretation (at least ideally), as Saleh has shown in a number of provocative studies, the distinction between authentic tradition and individual judgment is an artificial one that modern ideologues have projected back into history, thus radically oversimplifying the complexities of *tafsīr*'s development as a genre and discourse.[21] The distinction between *tafsīr bi-al-maʾthūr* and *tafsīr bi-al-raʾy* can thus be recognized as a secondary imposition that is mainly ideological in nature, with little authentic connection to how approaches to Qurʾān exegesis actually evolved in the early centuries of Islamic history.[22]

The problem, in essence, is that the ideal of reliance on pure tradition, the claim that exegesis is legitimate only when it proceeds on the basis of prophetic precedent, has become – and remains in the minds of many – an historical concept, a conviction that exegesis had *always* necessarily proceeded in this way, transmuted into indisputable fact. Yet another analogy may be drawn here with both Jewish and Christian tradition, for the notion that exegesis is rooted in the quasi-apostolic authority of the Companions parallels similar claims of rabbinic or patristic interpretation having been handed down across the generations until committed to writing centuries later. However, in Islam, as in Judaism and Christianity, the truth of the origins of the exegetical material handed down over the centuries is likely to be much more complicated and less streamlined.

The most obvious critique of the traditionalist model of the sources of Qurʾān interpretation is that it privileges a sanitized view of the emergence and development of scriptural exegesis in the community and ignores the fact of the organic and natural growth of tradition in general. The lines between securely transmitted and authorized ḥadīth and more diffuse sources of meaning assigned to the Qurʾān, including adaptations of *kitābī* material, assimilations of folklore, popular exegesis, homilies and entertaining narratives of storytellers, and so forth, simply

cannot have been cut and dried in the early community. The milieu of the storytellers or *quṣṣāṣ* in particular no doubt provided fertile soil for narrative expansions, impassioned sermons, creative glossing of obscure passages, folksy false etymologies, and tales of bygone days based on the Qurʾān.

Classical commentators openly assimilated some of this material: for example, both the *tafsīr* and chronicle of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), the most renowned exegete of his time, preserve extensive quotations of narrative and other types of traditions from an individual named Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. *c.* 745), typically called al-Suddī because of his tendency to frequent the threshold or *suddah* of his local mosque, engaging with the faithful and regaling them with narratives based on passages from the Qurʾān. His inclusion in classical religious sources as a trustworthy transmitter of ḥadīth indicates his acceptance as an orthodox source of reliable traditions, though this is exactly the type of activity that would later come under suspicion by scholars who saw these storytellers as transmitting spurious tales, and thus endangering orthodoxy.[23]

Early exegesis of the Qurʾān unfolded along diverse paths, but the mosque was undoubtedly the origin point for a vast amount of the material that was eventually conserved in the literary sources of the *tafsīr* genre. The mosque was the primary locus for conversion and socialization of populations drawn through conquest and settlement into the Arab-Islamic empire. It was also the locus for the emergence of the religious sciences, as it was the main venue in which learned men of the community would congregate, their casual gatherings gradually evolving into the more formally constituted circles in which the scholars known as *ʿulamāʾ* taught and transmitted their knowledge. Thus, this social setting produced a variety of traditions of commentary – long narrative complexes anchored to the exegesis of one or another Qurʾānic verse; concise glosses of a historicizing, contextualizing, or lexical sort; and the more refined doctrinal and linguistic reflections that would eventually coalesce into the disciplines of theology and grammar, as well as being absorbed into formal Qurʾānic exegesis.[24]

This is not to suggest that some distinctions in approaches to the Qurʾān did not emerge early on. It appears that one of the oldest discrete genres of Qurʾān commentary was that of philological analysis of the text. The Qurʾān was central to early attempts to systematize the rules of Arabic grammar and usage: being the literal Word of God, it was seen as the definitive exemplar of Arabic, and so formalization of the rules of Arabic reflected the promotion of the Qurʾān as the definitive linguistic standard. The linguistic sciences and grammatical analysis of the Qurʾān were thus deeply intertwined from the beginning. Some of the oldest genuine works of commentary on the Qurʾān are philological in nature and tend to focus primarily on technical or "scientific" linguistic matters. At the same time, as this genre developed, it came more and more to exhibit a more ecumenical or interdisciplinary disposition, precisely that embrace of narrativistic, historicizing, and homiletic reflection on the sacred text that is characteristic of classical *tafsīr* more broadly.[25]

In any event, given the clear diversity of the sources of early Qurʾān interpretation, the traditionist-Salafī conception of "authentic" Qurʾān exegesis as stemming from the Companions and Successors – from the apostolic origins of Islam itself – simply cannot withstand critical scrutiny. This means that scholars can hardly be justified in repeating the *tafsīr bi-al-maʾthūr/ tafsīr bi-al-raʾy* distinction presented in Salafī discussions of proper approaches to the Qurʾān, as if it was objectively meaningful or an accurate representation of the early development of the tradition. Nor can we accept accounts of the origins of exegesis in Islam that privilege Arabian (let alone prophetic or apostolic) sources at the expense of recognizing the propensity for diverse materials to be absorbed into the commentary tradition during the period of Islam's expansion into the Near East and Mediterranean, especially by being rendered into "orthodox" ḥadīth through ascription to Companions and Successors.

It is also important to note here that the generally prevalent conception of the origins of exegesis we have presented here is not only Salafī, as Saleh has argued, but even more fundamentally, it is tacitly Sunnī in orientation. Various schools of Shīʿa approached the Qurʾān with a radically different hermeneutic, as well as promoting dissenting interpretations of specific passages in the Qurʾān, even contesting the "orthodox" account of the canonization process.[26] Even within the Sunnī fold, schools other than the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, especially the rationalist Muʿtazila, likewise often advanced radically dissenting interpretations of Qurʾānic terms and passages.[27]

The consolidation of classical *tafsīr* (and its discontents)

The turn of the 10th century marked a critical stage in the history of Qurʾān interpretation. Throughout the 800s, some exegetes had sought to conform their works to the model promoted by the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, shaping commentary in a tradition-based mode; the oldest genuine example that survives today is likely the *tafsīr* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 827), though *tafsīr*s organized according to other principles and guided by other methodologies continued to be produced. Over time, the weight of accumulated tradition and the need to organize the massive amounts of information that had been handed down over the decades and centuries led to attempts at producing authoritative compilations of *tafsīr* that would conserve the entire received tradition – or at least what was judged to be its indispensable core – for future generations.

These two tendencies converge in the massive commentary of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), the *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*. Volumes could be (and have been) written about al-Ṭabarī's groundbreaking achievement in this work, which presents tens of thousands of exegetical traditions on the Qurʾān in sequential order, typically furnished with full *isnād*.[28] The total effect of this encyclopedic text – which survives today as a primary, though not unproblematic, witness to the exegetical tradition as it was known in al-Ṭabarī's day – was to present *tafsīr* as an enterprise solely grounded in authentic ḥadīth handed down from the time of the *Salaf*. Hundreds of authorities in the realm of *tafsīr* are included in the work, but only insofar as they serve as chains linking the prophetic era to al-Ṭabarī's day; many of the great exegetes who actually authored discrete works that survive whole or in part from the centuries preceding al-Ṭabarī are excluded, or mentioned primarily or exclusively as transmitters.[29] By design, the work communicates the idea that after the time of the *Salaf*, individual insight, innovation, or achievement in commentary on the text of scripture was irrelevant; all that mattered was an exegete's solicitude in learning and transmitting the received tradition properly, and thus in serving as a direct conduit to the prophetic age. (Ironically, much later, al-Ṭabarī himself would be accused of improperly handling the traditions he selected in his work by transmitting unreliable ḥadīth, using methods other than relying on sound tradition, promoting the spread of *isrāʾīliyyāt*, and so forth.)

In the centuries after al-Ṭabarī, numerous other exegetes continued to develop *tafsīr* in a variety of different directions. Mention must also be made here of another compendious commentary, the *Kashf al-bayān* of Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035), whose work was deliberately intended to serve as a counterpart to that of al-Ṭabarī, but expanding the encyclopedic remit of his predecessor significantly. Thus, al-Thaʿlabī explicitly grounds his exegesis in ḥadīth transmitted from the *Salaf*, as al-Ṭabarī had; however, he acknowledges the significant contributions of preceding generations of interpreters who authored literary works as well. He not only draws on works of the century intervening between al-Ṭabarī and himself, but on earlier works al-Ṭabarī had neglected. Finally, and most significantly, he extends the scope of material drawn into the orbit of *tafsīr* to include new genres.[30]

The impact of the work of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī on future exegesis was decisive. Sunnī exegetes were now liberated from the necessity of comparing reports and conserving unwieldy chains of transmitters to validate the authority of the interpretations they presented. For centuries after, exegetes could telescope vast amounts of earlier tradition into a few short lines by simply making brief reference to al-Ṭabarī's summary statements; the exegetes of the school of Nishapur, the students of al-Thaʿlabī, and then their students in turn did the same with his work, often not even bothering to cite him explicitly. Even when a later exegete sought to bear down on a specific textual problem and display their command of the full range of early debates on the matter in all their maddening granularity, reliance on the compendious collections of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī allowed him to navigate a dizzying variety of opinions and relate them in abridged form with relative ease.[31]

By the early Middle Ages, the composition of ḥadīth-based works of *tafsīr* died out, at least for a time, with new approaches coming to dominate the field. A stunning variety of other Sunnī commentaries of astonishing sophistication and breadth were composed between the 10th and the 13th centuries: among the most important, we might mention those of al-Māturīdī (d. 944), al-Qushayrī (d. 1074), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), and al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273). The authors of these works often favor one or another method of approach to the text – philosophical, dogmatic-theological, mystical, linguistic, juristic – while incorporating a number of other methodologies as well. They commonly bring an extremely subtle and profound engagement with the intellectual and doctrinal debates of their day to their work as commentators.[32] Explicit reference to political or social issues is far rarer, but these concerns can at times be detected in the great commentaries of this era as well. At the same time, shorter, more readily navigable works were produced for scholastic purposes – for example, as teaching tools for the training of lower- and mid-level ʿulamāʾ who might require serious but less specialized exposure to exegetical debates, as *tafsīr* would be only one of many disciplines of the religious sciences that they would be required to master before being certified for employment as a *qāḍī* or to serve some other official religious function.[33]

The account of the growth of exegesis from the earliest period to the Middle Ages we have provided here is the one that generally prevails in modern scholarship. However, it unduly privileges Sunnī *tafsīr* as the presumptive norm for exegesis of the Qurʾān, and tradition-based Sunnī *tafsīr* at that. However, among the Shīʿa, alternative approaches to the Qurʾān were proposed and developed in their communities for some time. The various schools of Shīʿa hold the ʿAlid imāms to have possessed knowledge indispensable for the proper understanding of matters pertaining to individual and communal salvation; they received this knowledge either through private transmission from their predecessors (and thus, ultimately, from ʿAlī and the Prophet Muḥammad himself) or through direct inspiration from God. Thus, in the Shīʿī view, God has safeguarded the true interpretation of the Qurʾān by bestowing it upon the imāms, from whom it is passed on to their spokesmen and loyal followers.

One distinctive method of Shīʿī Qurʾān interpretation is not called *tafsīr* at all; rather, among the early Shīʿa, an exegetical method called *taʾwīl* was preferred. *Taʾwīl* is a form of figurative or allegorical reading of scripture, frequently of an explicitly political and sectarian nature, grounded in esoteric knowledge derived from the ʿAlid imāms.[34] Among the Ismāʿīlīs or Sevener Shīʿa, particularly the scholars and spokesmen of the Fāṭimids (who reigned as Shīʿī caliph-imams in North Africa and Egypt for 200 years), *taʾwīl* persisted as a significant genre of Qurʾān exegesis for some time.[35] In contrast, in the period after the onset of the *ghayba* or "occultation" of the Twelfth Imām in 873, the exegetes of the Imāmī or Twelver community adopted a form of exegesis that mimicked the ḥadīth-based commentaries of Sunnīs, collecting exegetical traditions transmitted not from the Companions and Successors, but rather from the inspired imāms

of the family of the Prophet, especially the Fifth and Sixth Imāms, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 743) and Jaʿfar al-Sādiq (d. 765). Thus, although the theology and ecclesiology that inform them are completely different, the *tafsīr*s of such Imāmī authors as al-ʿAyyāshī (d. 932) and al-Qummī (d. 980) formally resemble the commentaries of their Sunnī contemporaries quite closely.

In terms of content, the traditions found in later Shīʿī commentaries are largely indistinguishable from those in Sunnī works, except in the case of interpretation of Qurʾānic passages that were of particular sectarian concern. It should also be noted that there are many examples of Qurʾān interpretation maintained by Sunnīs and transmitted along conventional *isnād*s reaching back to the *Salaf* that nevertheless almost certainly originated among the Shīʿa, or else emerged in direct response to Shīʿī claims. Sectarian interpretation thus constitutes a subliminal strand in Sunnī exegesis, its true source and nature unacknowledged, but its sectarian contours and implications still dimly visible.

Another such strand of tradition subsumed within the Sunnī mainstream is that of the Muʿtazila, a school that flourished in major centers in Iraq from the 8th to the 10th century that promoted a rationalist approach to theology and exegesis. The Muʿtazila exerted a huge impact on the formulation of what became the dominant doctrinal current of Ashʿarism in Sunnism; yet they were eventually deemed extreme and heretical by Sunnīs, and so their works fell into disuse and their views dropped out of circulation. Major Sunnī commentators such as Zamakhsharī were massively influenced by the Muʿtazila, but for the most part the commentaries written by Muʿtazila during the early and classical period of the *tafsīr* tradition's development were not actively transmitted, and so survive only in fragments or quotations in later works, particularly by Twelver Shīʿī authors.

Most significantly, the exegetical views of the Muʿtazila were not authorized through reference to received tradition, prophetic precedent, or the esoteric knowledge of inspired guides. Rather, the Muʿtazila approached issues of dogmatic concern in the Qurʾān through the lens of individual rational judgment, the only authoritative precedent cited being that of the esteemed thinkers of previous generations of the Muʿtazilite school itself. Although scholars have generally denied the presence of a Muʿtazilite strand in classical traditionist *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī's time, it is likely that their approach to scripture had at least an indirect influence on the approach to theological questions raised by the Qurʾān found in al-Ṭabarī and other Sunnī commentators. Muʿtazilite exegesis is marked on the one hand by an attempt to interpret away the clear anthropomorphism and determinism of the Qurʾān, and on the other by a distinctly common-sense approach to certain issues that became doctrinally significant for Sunnī orthodoxy only later on. Further, the Muʿtazila served as both a model and a foil for certain later exegetes like Fakhr al-Rāzī who approached exegesis through deploying philosophy as the primary means through which to effect a renovation of orthodoxy.[36]

In the 14th century, the attempt to develop an approach to the Qurʾān that relies predominantly or exclusively on authentic tradition was revived with the work of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373). These scholars lived in a time of considerable social and political tension. The Mamluk Empire in which they lived was ruled by a military oligarchy of converted Turkic slave soldiers of seemingly questionable religious integrity; moreover, the Mamluks were threatened by the Mongol empire of Iran, the Il-Khanate, whose leaders had an even more tenuous claim to authentic Muslim credentials, though the dynasty had officially converted to Islam in the time of the khāns Ghazan and Öljeitü at the beginning of the 14th century. In an atmosphere of crisis, in which moral standards seemed (at least to them) to be lax and subversion by Jews, Shīʿa, and heretics seemed rampant, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr sought to revive and reenergize what they saw as traditional or foundational Islam. Their quest to purge the received tradition of what they saw as an inordinate amount of unreliable material, particularly of Jewish

and Christian origin, and thus of questionable interpretations of doctrine, law, and scripture, would exert an unparalleled impact upon modern constructions of Salafism.[37]

Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr are of particular relevance for our concerns here because of their profound dissatisfaction with what they saw as the dilution of the pure tradition of apostolic Islam, a process they saw as beginning even in the time of the *Salaf* themselves. These exegetes were the first to articulate a full-throated critique of the so-called *isrāʾīliyyāt* preserved in major works of *tafsīr* and other sources. Muslim interpreters of earlier periods had drawn freely upon the traditions of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* in elaborating upon the Qurʾān; such reliance had even been given prophetic warrant in the form of a widely circulated ḥadīth in which Muḥammad enjoined his followers to "relate traditions from Banū Isrāʾīl, for there is no harm in it" (*ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-lā ḥaraja*). This injunction had been formerly understood to authorize transmission of traditions from the Bible and lore of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* as long as they are consonant with the Qurʾān and the Prophet's own teachings.[38]

In contrast to the earlier attitude to such traditions, in the view of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathīr, and their followers – and their work has been massively influential with the rise and global spread of modern Salafism – the influx of lore from the scriptures and traditions of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* was corrosive, slowly undermining pure Islam from within, eventually leading to the corruption of Muslim beliefs, practices, and morals. While scholars sometimes use the word *isrāʾīliyyāt* as if it were a neutral term for "borrowed" traditions drawn from biblical, Jewish, or Christian sources, it is clear that the term was employed unsystematically and only attested sporadically until the time of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr, in whose works it suddenly occurs with significant frequency and a distinctly negative connotation. Thus, in the passage of his commentary in which he discusses the aforementioned tradition about Kaʿb al-Aḥbār's claim about Alexander, Ibn Kathīr describes *isrāʾīliyyāt* as the collective tradition passed down from *Ahl al-Kitāb*, "most of which is altered, distorted, falsified, and fabricated; no proof is provided to us from reports coming from God or the Messenger of God for anything at all deriving from them; truly, they have been the source of great evil and widespread decline" (Ibn Kathīr 1997: V 190).[39]

The use of the term *isrāʾīliyyāt* by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr to condemn a vague category of "foreign" traditions of a suspect nature that lack the authority of the authentic Sunna did not catch on immediately. But beginning at the turn of the 20th century, the polemic against corrupting *kitābī* traditions was naturalized and radicalized by modern authors who took up and popularized the ideals of ideological Salafism. Central in this regard was a lineage of Egyptian revivalists and scholar-activists: Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905), Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1940), Maḥmūd Abū Rayya (d. 1970), and Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (d. 1977). For them, the promotion of Islamic revival and polemic against pernicious foreign influences went hand in hand: they saw the cultural, religious, and political threat posed by colonizing powers in their own day as basically similar to, or even a continuation of, the insidious infiltration of the Muslim community by Jewish, Christian, and Persian "influences" in the time of Islam's origins. For Abū Rayya and al-Dhahabī in particular, the critique of *isrāʾīliyyāt* takes on a specifically anti-Zionist guise (see Nettler 1998).

Despite the now-common aversion to supposed foreign influences in the received tradition of *tafsīr*, for which many authorities of the early and classical period were condemned (including al-Ṭabarī himself, as well as earlier authorities, even some among the Companions and Successors), the scope and essential characteristics of *isrāʾīliyyāt* remain vague and poorly defined. The assimilation of traditions from the *Ahl al-Kitāb* was so pervasive and so fundamental in the growth of Islam, especially in the early period, that the call for a discourse of Qurʾān interpretation free of such influences can only be a symbolic gesture. The identification of

traditions of purportedly *kitābī* origin by Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathīr, and their followers is often quite arbitrary, reflecting most of all the modern imperative to sharpen boundaries between Muslims and others and cast Jews and Christians as contaminating and impure – a predictable result of colonial intrusion, imperial domination, and, most recently, the pervasive infiltration of a globalizing Western culture and neoliberal political order into Islamic societies. Under such conditions, the quest for a direct and unmitigated line of continuity with Islam's golden age – especially in the realm of approaches to the sacred text – is wholly understandable, albeit quixotic.

Revisionist accounts of Islamic origins and their implications for exegesis

In evaluating the origins, nature, and role of scriptural interpretation in Islamic culture, it is important to take a number of trends in contemporary scholarship on Islamic origins into account. We might begin by considering, at least briefly, the profound implications of current approaches to the question of how the Qurʾān and Muslim exegesis of the scripture relate to the biblical, Jewish, and Christian traditions – how both the Qurʾān and its exegesis fit into the larger cultural and religious landscape of their time.

Since the early 19th century, the thesis of a thoroughgoing influence of Arabian Jews learned in rabbinic tradition on Muḥammad advanced by Geiger (d. 1874) has had an enormous impact on modern approaches to the Qurʾān.[40] The countervailing argument that it was some variety of late antique Christianity that had percolated into pagan Arabia before the time of the Prophet that exerted the necessary stimulus for the emergence of Islam has had less purchase in the field, though the pioneering work on this subject by Mingana (d. 1937) and Andræ (d. 1947) in the early 20th century has recently been revisited and revived.[41] Today, most scholars reject the reductionist and narrowly mechanistic conceptions of debt and derivation that pervades older scholarship, regardless of whether it is Jewish or Christian vectors of influence, or some combination of the two, that are emphasized.

It is clear that the relationships between the Qurʾān and formative Islam on the one hand and other scriptural traditions of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era on the other must be framed as a tripartite conversation between Jews, Christians, and the community of Believers (*muʾminūn*) who eventually came to call themselves Muslims. It is also clear that the monotheistic scriptural traditions of Late Antiquity and the proto-Islamic period cannot be judged to have been totally foreign to the pre-Islamic Arabs and the early Muslims. Rather, pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia had a far more complex relationship to other communities of the Near East than earlier generations of scholarship imagined.

Scholars now commonly recognize the numerous continuities between the religion, culture, politics, and society of Late Antiquity and that of early Islam. Islam's emergence in Late Antiquity was a consequence of the imperial conflicts and intercommunal rivalries of its day; in this arena of conflict and convergence, both the pre-Islamic Arabs and the early Muslims were often quite close to, and implicated in, the debates, disputes, and struggles of the age. Their ideas, idioms, ideals, and aspirations were quite close to those of their Jewish and Christian neighbors, although ironically, each religious community used similar language, concepts, and symbols to assert its uniqueness and difference as sole claimant to the status of God's chosen people.

In this light, it is abundantly clear that the once-regnant assumption that both the Qurʾān and Muslim tradition are generally products of imitation of foreign borrowings from more developed scriptural cultures, and that Muslims' relationship to other monotheist communities in their ambit was generally marked by a position of cultural inferiority and dependence, simply cannot withstand close scrutiny. Much contemporary research reinforces

the idea that the Qurʾān stands in close proximity to the Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions of its day, but most scholars now working in this field prefer to understand Qurʾānic discourse as the result of an active and deliberate engagement with those traditions.

Moreover, as contemporary scholarship seeks to investigate the literary horizons of the Qurʾān and its place in late antique society and culture, it has also become clear that certain "classical" sources and traditions long believed to provide indisputable evidence of the Jewish influences on Islam in particular that were so meticulously catalogued by Geiger and his followers are likely to be later than previously thought, and thus may actually preserve textual artifacts of Jewish engagement with the Qurʾān and Islam rather those seminal traditions that had impacted the Qurʾān itself. Rather than taking for granted that the Qurʾān and later Muslim tradition are necessarily derived from and posterior to the more or less unified corpora of biblical tradition and post-biblical Jewish and Christian exegesis, many scholars now approach the shared stories of the Bible, Qurʾān, midrash, and *tafsīr* as closely interwoven threads of a gradually unfolding narrative tapestry; within this tapestry, individual threads must be carefully disentangled in order to discern the precise relationships between them. Thus, while the question of how both Qurʾān and *tafsīr* fit into the terrain of post-biblical Jewish elaborations of biblical narratives has engendered a number of different approaches in recent years, few scholars would now simplistically attribute the resemblances between them to a unidirectional "copying" of rabbinic traditions by Muslim exegetes or the Prophet himself.

The tendency for "biblical" material in both Qurʾān and *tafsīr* to be wrongly construed as the product of largely passive processes of incorporating "influences" channeled through Jewish and Christian informants is further exacerbated by a short-sighted conception of what the Bible represented in Late Antiquity. Some contemporary scholars have challenged approaches to the transmission, reception, and reworking of narratives stemming from the patrimony of the ancient Israelites as "rewriting" or "reinterpretation" of the Hebrew Bible, since this encourages a common misconception of "the Bible" as a static, fixed text already in antiquity. A number of factors militate against a simple, monolithic conception of "the Bible" as it existed at the time of the rise of Islam: the relatively late date of the Masoretic text, often mistakenly privileged as the main and best witness to the canonical Hebrew Bible as it was supposedly universally known in the pre-Islamic period; the fluidity of both the verbatim text of individual books within the canon and the canon itself; and the messy and frequently shifting boundaries between the "original text" and exegetical tradition. Given all these factors, it is arguably better to understand "Bible" as a genre rather than a fixed corpus, at least during the long centuries between antiquity and modernity.[42]

We must recognize that Qurʾān and *tafsīr* alike represent not mere borrowings or calques of older Jewish and Christian interpretations of a single, monolithic canonical text, but rather meaningful and deliberate contributions to the long development of the legacy of ancient Israel, particularly its distinctive traditions on cosmology, eschatology, prophetology, and communology, manifest in a variety of discourses and textual registers. These contributions are surely anchored in, inspired by, or otherwise presuppose manifold witnesses to that legacy, but "our" Bible is only one of them, and Qurʾānic and Islamic elaborations on these themes should not be dismissed as "borrowings" of Bible. Rather, in their own way, they constitute a new phase of the development of that genre – which in turn stimulated further elaborations and rearticulations of their older scriptural patrimony by Jews and Christians. Untangling the threads that connect Bible and Qurʾān, we may even discover that exploration of the latter allows us to illuminate previously misunderstood or unrecognized aspects of the former.[43]

Thus, conceiving of the relationship of the Qurʾān to the traditions of other contemporary communities as secondary, derivative, and passive is problematic for a number of reasons. It

is simply not plausible to think of the richness of Qurʾānic discourse, which so often engages contemporary biblical, Jewish, and Christian traditions with great subtlety, reframing those traditions into coherent and rhetorically effective forms, as the result of a haphazard borrowing of scattered foreign traditions and themes. It is also unrealistic to imagine that the Jewish and Christian communities whose religious discourse was so formative for the Qurʾān could somehow have remained unaffected by reciprocal processes of "influence," especially as the Qurʾān and formative Islamic traditions spread and supplied the foundation of the dominant culture of the Near East and Mediterranean in the centuries after the Arab conquests.

In turn, in accepting the notion that dynamic and reciprocal exchange between communities in the late antique and early Islamic periods was the norm rather than the exception, we must also recognize that the growth of Islamic tradition (ḥadīth, history, law, exegesis, and other forms of cultural and religious expression) in the centuries after the Arab conquests could itself not have been isolated from broader cultural currents either. The close intertwining of the culture of the proto-Muslim community with that of the contemporary Jews and Christians with whom they intermingled continued after the time of the Prophet, and so Jewish and Christian lore had a significant impact in shaping Muslim tradition in the course of its growth during the expansion of the caliphal state. Just as the Qurʾān should not be seen as solely the by-product of Jewish and Christian influence, the result of borrowings of foreign elements, neither can early Muslim discourse, including the tradition of Qurʾān interpretation, be seen as wholly insulated from processes of exchange and interaction either.

One consequence of this insight is that the claim that *tafsīr* could or should have originated solely or primarily on the basis of orally transmitted reports from the early community, mainly the Companions of the Prophet and their followers, may be recognized as specious. There is simply no criterion available to allow us to cleanly distinguish "pure" Arab or Islamic tradition handed down from the *Salaf* from the lore of *Ahl al-Kitāb*, at least not in the early period. Just as an isolationist approach to the Qurʾān can no longer be accepted as legitimate, neither can it be legitimate to view the emergence of the exegetical tradition in this fashion. Both were the results of a new scripturalist community coming into being in a complex and socially and religiously diverse environment.

This is not to say that what survives of early Muslim tradition contains no genuine traces of the prophetic period; the early generations who first received and promulgated the scripture are quite likely to have sought to understand and explain it through reference to what Muḥammad and the Companions said about it. The problem, however, lies in our inability to distinguish material that is genuinely early. Though the veracity of specific reports is always debatable, traditions depicting Companions inquiring with the Prophet concerning the exegesis of particular revelations, or the Companions fielding such questions from their students and followers, are broadly plausible. At the same time, the emergence and establishment of ḥadīth culture in the 8th and 9th centuries – and its eventual predominance as a major cornerstone of Sunnī identity in particular – decisively shaped the development of *tafsīr* as a literary genre, in that exegetes sought to discipline received material according to the same professional and intellectual standards that prevailed among ḥadīth scholars.

This meant in particular that the collective lore handed down from previous generations had to be sifted and reshaped, and at least some part of it elevated to the status of pure prophetic tradition transmitted through a conduit of reliable individuals of largely unimpeachable integrity. Although exegetical traditions were not subjected to the same level of scrutiny and criticism, the popularization of the ideals of the *Ahl al-Sunna* led to the application of the ethos of the ḥadīth scholar to the enterprise of Qurʾān interpretation, and so to the composition of commentaries embodying the traditionalist approach. This encouraged the impression that

exegesis of scripture achieved through the consultation and comparison of received reports from the *Salaf* or early generations of Muslims was inherently superior to or more authoritative than other approaches, and that the core task of the exegete was not the rational apprehension of scripture and its implications, but rather the gathering, collation, and evaluation of lore handed down across the generations from the prophetic period.

The claim that *tafsīr* as a genre was founded primarily on the basis of authenticated traditions traceable back to the Prophet and his Companions, and that material in the tradition that originated in other ways is somehow inferior, alien, and corrupting – the basic critique of *isrāʾīliyyāt* – is self-evidently political and ideological in nature, and does not stand up to a strictly historical analysis. It is clear that ideas and claims about the Qurʾān originated among early Muslims in a variety of settings and contexts, and were handed down over the generations in a variety of forms, and not just in the form of impeccably documented units of tradition from the *Salaf*. For example, as already noted, much material in the *tafsīr* corpus likely originated with the *quṣṣāṣ* or popular preachers, while other material came from circles of thinkers who attempted to grapple with the doctrinal implications of the sacred text such as the rationalist sect of the Muʿtazila, whose works were often shunned by Sunnīs, though many of their insights impacted mainstream Sunnī *tafsīr*.[44]

Some of the exegetical material in circulation in the early community was undoubtedly of Jewish and Christian origin, though it may not have been perceived as such at the time when it began to circulate among Muslims. The tradition records instances of members of the early community consulting learned men among the *Ahl al-Kitāb* concerning the interpretation of scripture; though these portrayals inform the polemic against *isrāʾīliyyāt*, narratives of this sort arguably originated both as a way to account for material perceived as *kitābī* on account of having a certain biblical ambience and to validate such material as basically legitimate – the exact kind of lore the Prophet had authorized his community to transmit in the *ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla* tradition.[45] Just as Jews, Christians, and others provided the human resources for the growth of the Muslim community (often in tangible ways, especially through physical labor, conversion, and slavery and concubinage), these groups also provided the cultural resources for the initial growth and development of Islamic tradition.

Notably, there are instances in which the Qurʾān actually differs in its understanding of a particular theme or story from its biblical, Jewish, or Christian predecessors in significant ways, but *tafsīr* traditions subsequently reinforced the formerly dominant reading of the *topos* in question, sometimes adducing Jewish or Christian exegetical material in the process. A noteworthy example is the fall of Adam and Eve; the Qurʾān actually departs from the common misogynist reading of the Genesis account found in Christian sources, but this reading is reasserted in various ways in the *tafsīr*, in narratives that echo biblical, Jewish, and Christian tradition yet are cast as coming from Arab Companions. Thus, the assimilation of older exegetical material originating from outside the Muslim community far exceeds the boundaries of the discourse of *isrāʾīliyyāt*, pervading emergent *tafsīr*; the attempt to distinguish "native" and "foreign" material that informs Salafī criticism of the received tradition is, in the final analysis, about the construction of authority rather than an objective attempt at apprehending the past.[46]

Another area in which developments in contemporary scholarship directly impact our understanding of the role of exegesis in the early Muslim community pertains to questions of composition, canonization, and contradiction in the Qurʾān. At the beginning of this chapter, we noted the striking conjunction of the emergence of both revelation and community at the dawn of Islam. Thus, the traditional view of the origins of Muslim engagement with the Qurʾān recognizes that it stimulated attempts at interpretation by the Companions as it was revealed, long before the canonical text was assembled. However, it is more problematic from

a traditional perspective to apply the basic premise that drives the study of inner-biblical exegesis to the Qurʾān: the idea that passages of the Qurʾān that were revealed later were shaped by audience response to earlier passages implies, essentially, that the audience participated directly in the process of the scripture's composition, which seems to clash with the idea that the Qurʾān represents the eternal Word of God.

Among contemporary scholars, Angelika Neuwirth has perhaps been the most consistent advocate of the necessity of understanding the Qurʾān as an evolving discourse. In her view, what appear to be developmental strata visible within the Qurʾān are signs of diachronic growth, providing us with direct evidence that later materials engage exegetically with older materials. (This approach serves, in part, as a corrective to a polemical strain in older Western scholarship that saw inconsistency or vacillation in the Qurʾān as evidence that it is not genuine revelation, a sign of Muḥammad's "confusion," and so forth.) In numerous studies, Neuwirth has described the development of Qurʾānic discourse as a dynamic and dialogical process of revelation, audience response, and reformulation, often entailing a concomitant revision or even reversal of older rulings. Though Neuwirth remains characteristically agnostic regarding the nature of the Qurʾān's origins in her work, her approach suggests that the message developed in direct response to both changing circumstances and audience feedback, which at first glance appears to be incompatible with the theological principles of the Qurʾān's eternity and immutability.[47]

That said, as paradoxical as it may seem, Muslim tradition actually accommodates such a conception of the origins of the Qurʾān on some level, for it acknowledges quite openly that the divine message did develop dialogically through the process of its serial revelation through Muḥammad to the early community. Many Qurʾānic passages are understood as replies to questions posed to the Prophet by his contemporaries – figures such as ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr, the Prophet's favorite wife, or ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, a prominent Companion and future caliph. The questions of the Companions, like the changing circumstances of the Prophet's mission, thus effectively served to stimulate the growth of the Qurʾān in the very process of its revelation.[48]

Moreover, the tradition has long dealt with the problem of apparent contradiction in the corpus through the mechanism of *naskh* or abrogation. Primarily a juristic device, *naskh* implies that different rules were necessary at different times according to the changing circumstances of the community; the exegete informed with the proper understanding of the chronology of revelation of different passages of the Qurʾān can thus assign the status of *nāsikh* (abrogating) or *mansūkh* (abrogated) to conflicting statements in the scripture. Therefore, what seem to the outside viewer to be the Qurʾān's contradictory policies on significant practical questions are actually rendered into artifacts of the process of revelation – however impossible this may seem when speaking of scripture as an immutable and coeternal aspect of God, as the classical theology accepted by most Muslims holds. According to this principle, then, the Qurʾān was not only subjected to interpretation in the very process of its emergence into history, but the contours and contents of revelation actually developed in response to its audience's changing needs. The classic example is the Qurʾān's gradual prohibition on wine: according to the traditional chronology of the pertinent revelations, consumption of intoxicating beverages was initially tolerated, then strongly discouraged, then eventually prohibited outright.[49]

If one posits an omniscient deity who foresaw the growth of the early community from a dedicated few who hearkened to the Prophet's warnings of eschatological destruction to a proto-state governed by divine law and poised to spread its rigorously monotheistic faith beyond the Ḥijāz, then one can discern within (or impose upon) the Qurʾān a particular trajectory of development that explains not only contradictory rulings but the variety of literary genres exhibited by the scripture. That is, the different shapes Qurʾānic material takes – apocalyptic

and oracular, hortatory, narrativistic, juristic, and so forth – can be construed as the consequence of historical exigencies, and even – as with the various legal problems in the Qurʾān explained through the device of *naskh* – attributed to Providence.

This is not the only way to account for contradictions within the canon of scripture, however. Beginning in the 1970s, a number of scholars of a radically revisionist bent began to cast doubt on the reliability of the traditional sources for reconstructing Islamic origins and called into question many of the field's most fundamental assumptions about where Islam came from and under what circumstances. Some of the most radical aspects of the revisionists' arguments have been critiqued severely, but the enduring legacy of those scholars who first turned a skeptical eye towards the *sīra*, ḥadīth, and other sources – Wansbrough, Crone, Cook, Hawting, Burton, Calder, Rippin – is the infusion of a pervasive sense of caution into historical research into the proto- and early Islamic periods.[50]

There have been a number of consequences to the widespread uncertainty about the reliability of the traditional sources on the life of Muḥammad – indeed, to the suspicion that our whole frame of reference for the emergence of Islam may largely be fictitious, Muslim sources on the revelation of the Qurʾān and the life of the Prophet serving primarily as *Heilsgeschichte*, a sacred myth of origins, and not as objective history. One is the recognition that the tradition's use of *naskh* to account for contradiction within the Qurʾānic corpus, and the assignment of a specific sequential order upon the chapters of the Qurʾān in general, serves to naturalize a chronological scheme of development of the early community and the revelation of the scripture that may, in the final analysis, not correlate to objective historical reality at all. That is, attempting to resolve apparent contradictions in the Qurʾān by assigning them to different points in time in the community's early history, according to a timeline anchored to the conventional biography of Muḥammad, implicitly asserts a specific frame of reference for Qurʾānic material along one particular trajectory, deliberately obscuring other possibilities.

This has many implications for our understanding of the Qurʾān and how it should be interpreted – or rather, it allows us to see more clearly how the tradition of exegesis native to the Muslim community actually functions and what it achieves, and thus enables new insights about the historical background to Islam. One example is Firestone's groundbreaking study of the Qurʾānic passages dealing with jihad. Here, he conjectures that the apparent diversity of positions exhibited in the Qurʾān pertaining to the treatment of outsiders to the community does not represent the evolution of the Prophet Muḥammad's position on the question over the twenty-two years of his ministry, as tradition holds; rather, the seemingly contradictory passages on this question express a plurality of positions originally held by different constituencies *within* the Qurʾānic community. That is, the different verses pertaining to outsiders correspond to the positions of different groups, which implies, quite evidently, that the Qurʾān stems from multiple points of origin and is the result of corporate authorship or redaction of diverse materials into a document that can only tendentiously be claimed to represent a solitary voice (Firestone 1999).[51]

The obvious conclusion that follows upon such a thesis is that the real function of exegesis in the early community is not simply to uncover the context that informed the text and unpack the allusions embedded in it, but rather to justify, normalize, and explain away contradictions between different passages in the scripture as a means of effacing what constitutes rather conspicuous evidence of composite authorship. Historicizing exegesis – one of the main varieties of exegesis found in *tafsīr* – disguises that evidence and cloaks the marks of synchronic diversity of perspective within the community that generated Qurʾānic material as indicative of diachronic evolution of the message revealed to Muḥammad instead. The original diversity of

opinion expressed in seemingly contradictory passages is thus reduced to a temporal passage from a period in which the Prophet acquiesced in the face of strong opposition to one in which he actively resisted and eventually conquered those who rejected his message.

Even if one cannot accept the radical proposal that the Qurʾān was collated from different sources representing different factions within the proto-Islamic community, the fundamental insight we may glean from Firestone's study is valid: the traditional correlation of Qurʾānic verses to their specific revelatory context during the twenty-two years of Muḥammad's prophetic career quietly but decisively delimits the interpretive options the would-be interpreter can bring to the text. Thus, the instrument of *naskh* functions to alleviate the tensions surrounding contradiction in sacred writ, making an implicit argument for the unity of scripture not only as the product of the divine mind but of specific historical moments. This is the only logical conclusion that can follow upon the notion that scripture reflects the direct experience of the Prophet and his community's interactions with its various interlocutors and opponents during their struggle to establish their community and found the first Islamic state.

This leads us to what is perhaps the most profound insight of revisionist approaches to the Qurʾān as they pertain to exegesis. Exegetes' attempt to distinguish abrogating from abrogated verses is part of a larger enterprise of systematically embedding the Qurʾān in specific moments of revelation during the Prophet's career. While actual works wholly dedicated to charting the *asbāb al-nuzūl* or "occasions of revelation" are rare, the overarching tendency they embody is one that appears to go back to the earliest period of the Islamic tradition's coalescence.[52] In the end, the attempt to distinguish abrogating from abrogated verses and the cataloguing of *asbāb al-nuzūl* are only facets of a much broader attempt to anchor the ambiguous verses of the Qurʾān in an unambiguous (but at least partially constructed) context that both associates it with the historical Muḥammad and locates it in the pagan Arab milieu. In this sense, virtually *all* Muslim exegesis of the Qurʾān serves this historicizing function, which has been an ubiquitous imperative in *tafsīr* since the foundation of the tradition.[53]

Given the revisionists' insights about the actual uncertainty of the Qurʾān's relationship to the historical milieu described in the traditional sources, we can recognize that *tafsīr* quite clearly functions to embed understandings of the Qurʾān in the circumstances of the life and career of Muḥammad, to constrain interpretation of its verses so that they can only be understood as addressing a particular time, place, and social setting. Apart from the main theses advanced in revisionist historiography (e.g. that the proto-Islamic movement may have been much more deeply embedded in the monotheistic cultures of Late Antiquity than the portrayal of its *jāhilī* setting may lead one to believe), acknowledging this function grants us new insights into the nature of exegetical activity in the Muslim community, particularly in the early period.

As noted previously, the genres of *tafsīr*, ḥadīth, and *sīra* initially all drew from the same pool of oral traditions as the disciplines of exegesis, jurisprudence, and biography began to emerge as discrete fields of inquiry. Some scholars have therefore posited that traditions about the life of Muḥammad preserved and presented in works of supposed biography do not represent genuine historical memories about the Prophet, even hagiographically embellished ones, but rather developed to explain the Qurʾān, providing a largely fictional framework for interpreting the many obscure references found in scripture.

Thus, some scholars (in particular G.R. Hawting) have postulated that the emphasis in the early sources of *tafsīr* and other genres on Islam's origins in a pagan environment is ideological and not properly historical, the insistence that the Prophet's opponents were idolaters being a form of polemic against fellow monotheists (Hawting 1999). If the circumstances under which the Qurʾān was revealed were in fact somehow significantly different from those described in the received tradition, then the portrayal of the Jāhiliyya as the primary setting for the Qurʾān

functions to reconstrue those circumstances in keeping with the needs of a later time – in particular, the needs of an audience living in rather different circumstances, under conditions in which it was necessary to articulate starker differences between Muslims and others. This served to conceal Islam's original proximity to other communities through the construction and promotion of a myth of a pagan Arab past.

Although they may appear to corroborate each other, to the skeptic, there appears to be a circular relationship between *tafsīr* and *sīra*: *tafsīr* builds upon the biographical traditions of *sīra* to concretize obscure references in scripture and tie them to circumstances that help define their meaning, but the origins of *sīra* traditions may actually lie in early attempts at *tafsīr*, at providing a context for the revelation of the Qurʾān that makes it meaningful in terms later generations of Muslims could understand. The relationship between Qurʾān and *tafsīr* here may thus be compared to that between the early sayings of Jesus and the emergence of the gospel genre: an early core of orally transmitted material came to be embedded in narratives that established a context for the teachings of Christ in keeping with the emerging community's understanding of the founder's life and the theological significance of his message; quite possibly the basic framework for knowledge of that context may itself have been built on the foundation of exegetical traditions that provided a (partially or totally fabricated?) basis for interpreting the original sayings, granted revelatory status by an emerging (and rapidly evolving) community.

Thus, the most far-reaching conclusion one might draw from revisionist understandings of Islamic origins is that the very historical tradition that is so often invoked to provide the context to the Qurʾān that permits it to be understood *may itself have been exegetically generated*. If one is inclined to accept that the Qurʾān presupposes a context radically different from the one described in classical Islamic tradition – and it can hardly be denied that they are on some profound level incongruous – then the whole attempt to discern an overarching historical trajectory to the evolution of the canon that informs the distinction between abrogating and abrogated, or allows Qurʾānic passages to be correlated to specific moments in the career of Muḥammad and the life of the early community, is exposed as nothing more than a hermeneutic tool imposed on the canonical text *a posteriori*. If one is *not* inclined to accept the premise that the Jāhiliyya as we know it from classical sources is a fabrication, however, at the very least, one might still acknowledge the degree to which the emphasis on the mission of Muḥammad in pagan Arabia as the exclusive locus for revelation of the Qurʾān serves to shape the possibilities for interpretation or even foreclose upon certain alternatives.

Conclusion

Perhaps in reaction to the revisionist dismissal of *tafsīr* and related discourses of classical Muslim tradition as largely fictitious and of no value for understanding the actual historical context in which the Qurʾān emerged, in recent years the study of *tafsīr* as a discipline in its own right has advanced by leaps and bounds. Once the relationship between Qurʾān and *tafsīr* was complicated and the latter no longer upheld as an objectively verifiable guide to the circumstances under which the former was revealed (and thus to its "true" meaning), *tafsīr* was, in a sense, liberated. That is, absent a universal consensus about how Qurʾān and *tafsīr* actually relate to one another, *tafsīr* can be seen as an autonomous literary tradition of value for understanding Muslim thought, culture, politics, and religion in all its diversity and particularity – a valuable vehicle for communicating Muslim perceptions of the past, as opposed to a direct and unmediated historical witness to that past.

As some scholars attempt to foster a truly historical-critical approach to the sacred text modeled on (or at least analogous to) the well-established methodologies for analysis of the Hebrew

Bible and New Testament, advancing an idea of the Qurʾān as an artifact of Late Antiquity that precipitated the emergence of a new religious community, others may focus on the Qurʾān's place as an object of study and devotion by Muslims over the course of many centuries as the global community grew and developed. Today, both Qurʾāns – the Qurʾān of the late antique "proto-Islamic" community and the Qurʾān of the global Muslim community during the phases of its formative, classical, medieval, and modern history – amply reward scholarly investigation.

Thus, over the last ten years or so, academic inquiry into both the Qurʾān's background and origins and the rich diversity of Muslim engagements with it has flourished. As De Gifis has notes in reviewing one of several recent publications on *tafsīr*, it seems to be a universal truism of texts that "the more beholders they have, the more complex, sometimes contested, and ultimately enriched their meanings become" (De Gifis 2014). Arguably, no text embodies this principle more than the Qurʾān. When viewed through the lenses provided by modern comparative and historical-critical methodologies, it offers us one perspective onto the background to the rise of Islam. Viewed through the lenses provided by traditional exegesis, however, it offers us a different but complementary perspective on how Muslims have seen and portrayed their tradition's origins from their own vantage point. Neither sort of interpretation can be deemed irrelevant or inferior; both are crucial for understanding the Qurʾān in all its richness.

Notes

1 I thank Andrew Rippin for graciously reading and commenting upon an early version of this chapter. For a comprehensive survey of scholarly resources in English for the study of the Islamic exegetical tradition, see Rippin (2011).

2 *Al-muṣḥaf bayn lūḥayn* and similar phrases appear in traditions describing the process whereby the various early written witnesses to the revelations taught by Muḥammad to his Companions were gathered together and arranged in order to produce the canonical Qurʾān as it has come down to us today. The complexity of *qurʾān* as a term within Qurʾānic discourse itself, particularly the tension between its meaning as a particular manifestation of a dynamic and responsive process of oral-aural revelation and the Qurʾān's own self-consciousness of its status as a written book and emergent canon, has been discussed by numerous scholars. See the classic study by Daniel Madigan (2001) and the essays collected by Stefan Wild (2006).

3 See the groundbreaking work of Michael Fishbane (1985).

4 Richard Bulliet's elegant description of the impact of converts' questions about the proper practice of Islam on the growth of what became orthodox ḥadīth (1994) has seldom been mined for its possible implications for the growth of exegetical lore, though the parallel is obvious. See my comments below on the assimilation of *kitābī* lore into *tafsīr* through a variety of means, including transmission by (or at least ascription to) converts.

5 For a comprehensive survey of traditional approaches to the Qurʾān, see Ahmad von Denffer (2004). The foremost medieval treatise on the subject is now available in English translation (al-Suyūṭī 2011).

6 This is to say nothing of the massive amounts of Qurʾān commentary accessible online, with the availability of searchable databases compiling major and minor works of *tafsīr* effecting a revolution in the way researchers approach and handle this material. For the issues surrounding use of optical-disc forerunners to contemporary web-based *tafsīr* resources, Andrew Rippin's concise discussion (1999) remains trenchant. The unsurpassed guide to authors and works of *tafsīr* remains Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī's *al-Tafsīr wa-al-mufassirūn* (1976–1989). Serviceable and convenient guides in English can be found in Helmut Gätje (1976) and Feras Hamza et al. (2010: 21–65).

7 This is not to say that Muslims conducted *tafsīr* exclusively in Arabic in the early period, only engaging the Qurʾān in the medium of other languages in later centuries; Travis Zadeh's seminal study (2012) has now corrected a number of longstanding misconceptions about the relationship of Persian to the study and translation of the Qurʾān in the early centuries AH.

8 This is true even for iconoclastic modernists, who break from tradition and the conventional imitation of scholarly precedent (*taqlīd*) but do so in order to revive what they see as the original spirit of the Qurʾān and the Prophet's mission and example. Thus, a deeply "Protestant" impulse informs a variety of

modern commentators on the Qurʾān ranging – despite the stark differences in their values and ideology – from Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) to Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), which is hardly surprising given that their approaches to the reinterpretation of the traditional sources of Islam were driven by the need to confront Western claims, thinking, and social patterns. It is perhaps only some contemporary feminist exegetes whose hermeneutics jettison claims to capture an original understanding of the Qurʾān, though there is significant diversity of opinion on this issue, some feminist or woman-centric readings being grounded in an idea of reclaiming a liberationist impulse that lies at the core of the text. For a recent survey of this genre, see Aisha A. Hidayatullah (2014).

9 This point is made vividly in McAuliffe (2003). The study of the Qurʾān as it appears in Muslim discourses aside from the genre of formal commentary is still in its infancy. For contemporary explorations of this phenomenon, see, e.g., Wadad Kadi (1993: 285–313), Vanessa De Gifis (2014); Bilal Orfali (2016: 498–527), and the edited volume by Nuha Alshaar (2017).

10 On the complex interrelationships between the articulation of different literary genres, the transition from oral to written literature, and the emergence of the ʿulamāʾ as a professional scholarly class, see Gregor Schoeler (2009). For a recent reflection on *tafsīr*'s place in its larger intellectual landscape, see Karen Bauer (2011), as well as the collection by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (2014).

11 Literally "a grain in hair" (*ḥabba fī shaʿaratin*), seemingly a reference to the kernels embedded in the "beard" or cluster of threads that grow in the wheat spike at the end of a stalk of grain (Muslim n.d.: no. 3015). In ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *tafsīr* a similar tradition appears *ad* Q 2:58, but with somewhat different wording (ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī 1989: I 47).

12 The setting of the tradition, Qubāʾ, is significant: on the outskirts of Medina, this was the location of the first prayer by the Prophet when he arrived there after his emigration from Mecca, and he remained there for several days waiting for ʿAlī to arrive after he escaped Mecca as well. Note that this is part of a whole complex of traditions on the changing of the *qibla*, with numerous parallels found in al-Bukhārī and elsewhere.

13 In the aforementioned article, Melchert emphasizes that al-Bukhārī's main concern in the section on *tafsīr* in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* is to demonstrate the compatibility of the prophetic Sunna with the Qurʾān. This invites a comparison with a Jewish juristic-exegetical analogue, insofar as the halakhic midrashim function similarly to demonstrate (however implausibly at times) the Bible as the ultimate source of rabbinic law.

14 The idea that ḥadīth were forged to advance one or another legal argument or partisan cause in the 8th century, well after the deaths of Muḥammad, the Companions, and most Successors, was first advanced by Goldziher (1967–1971). Subsequently, it was the meticulous work of Schacht that demonstrated the frequency of *rafʿ* or the "raising" of *isnād*s in legal sources: what appears as a Successor tradition in one source of the early 8th century may resurface as a Companion tradition one or two generations later, eventually being cited in the name of the Prophet by 9th and 10th century authorities (1967).

15 The tradition is the first one in the section entitled "Chapter regarding the statement of the Prophet, prayers and peace be upon him, not to consult the *Ahl al-Kitāb* about anything." See discussion by G.H.A. Juynboll (1969: 123–130).

16 On Dhū al-Qarnayn, his identification with Alexander, and the complex relationships between the Qurʾān, *tafsīr*, and the fabulous narratives of the Alexander Romance tradition, see Brannon Wheeler (2002: 10–36). On the Qurʾānic *asbāb al-samawāt*, see Kevin van Bladel (2007b).

17 Ibn Kathīr explicitly designates Kaʿb's fantastic story as *isrāʾīliyyāt* here, complaining that it is "unsound and has no factual basis, for no mortal being has any way of accomplishing anything of the sort, certainly not to ascend to the tent-cords of the heavens in order to do such a thing" (1997:V 190).

18 See the classic treatment of Ibn ʿAbbās (referred to as the "superman" – *Übermensch* – of *tafsīr*!) by Goldziher (2006: 42–53).

19 The conception of Ibn ʿAbbās as a cipher or symbolic figurehead validating authentic exegesis was first articulated in a sophisticated way by Claude Gilliot (1985); see also the concluding remarks by Herbert Berg (2000).

20 Muqātil's commentary includes an introduction in which his sources among the *Salaf* are listed, though this is often said to have been added by his student and primary transmitter, Hudhayl b. Ḥabīb, as a way to validate the contents of the *tafsīr* against Muqātil's critics. On Kalbī, see Michael E. Pregill (2013).

21 Walid Saleh has expressed this critique vigorously in a number of publications (2010b, 2011, 2012).

22 Thus, the idea that the works of early exegetes such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān and al-Kalbī were shunned because they were based in the opinion of the authors and not in reliable traditions handed down

through well-known chains of transmitters is largely anachronistic, since the convention of the *isnād* was at most only beginning to be widely adopted in the mid-8th century, the time at which both exegetes worked.

23 The paradigmatic example is Ibn al-Jawzī's treatise criticizing the excesses of the preachers (1971).

24 The most influential discussion of the different types of exegetical engagement with the Qurʾān has been that of John Wansbrough (2004 [1977]). Wansbrough's evolutionary scheme of the sequential development of different types of exegesis in the Muslim community has been much critiqued in recent years, with most scholars agreeing that the different types likely evolved simultaneously or at least that they overlapped considerably in the development of the genre.

25 On early Arabic lexicology and lexicography and their relationship to *tafsīr*, see the classic study of C.H.M.Versteegh (1993); the current state of the field is explored from numerous perspectives in S.R. Burge's collection (2015), though here the relationship between the technical study of Arabic and *tafsīr* in the early Islamic period is hardly explored. Overall, one cannot fail to notice the increasing penetration of non-linguistic material into works on Qurʾānic lexicology and lexicography across the later 9th and 10th centuries.

26 The classic and still-unsurpassed survey of early Shīʿī exegesis is by Meir M. Bar-Asher (1999). The magisterial new study by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (2016) vividly demonstrates how different Shīʿī approaches have been not just to particular passages, but to broader conceptions of revelation, community, and tradition.

27 Because of the stigma that came to be attached to the school among Sunnīs, early and classical Muʿtazilī commentaries on the Qurʾān by and large survive only in quotation, or at most in partial manuscripts. Attempts to reconstruct Muʿtazilī *tafsīr* over the last twenty years have fundamentally changed our understanding of the school and how different its approach to the Qurʾān could be from that enshrined in mainstream Sunnī commentaries.

28 There has been significant scholarly interest in al-Ṭabarī, but his activity as a historian and historiographer has been much more widely explored than his work as a commentator. The indispensable treatments of his exegesis remain those by Claude Gilliot (1990) and Berg (2000). See also the special issue of the *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* edited by Marianna Klar (2016) devoted to the topic.

29 On Ṭabarī's informants and *isnād*s, see the systematic discussion of Heribert Horst (1953).

30 Walid Saleh observes that al-Thaʿlabī's citation of previous commentators by name, as well as his inclusion of a list of hundreds of works he consulted (often in multiple recensions) at the beginning of his work is invaluable for contemporary scholars attempting to write the history of the tafsīr genre (2004).

31 This is not to say that these or other encyclopedic collections are merely assemblages of transmitted material providing an unmediated window onto the past. Rather, as many scholars have recognized, collections such as those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī offer deliberately constructed models of tradition that must be scrutinized carefully by contemporary scholars who wish to draw upon the resources they preserve.

32 Most of the great exegetes of this period have yet to receive the scholarly attention they deserve. Tariq Jaffer's monograph on Fakhr al-Rāzī carefully analyzes this commentator's drawing upon different disciplines to forge a new methodology for interpreting the Qurʾān that incorporates not only traditional hermeneutics but such branches of knowledge as philosophy and science (2015).

33 On the distinction between "encyclopedic" and "madrasa" commentaries, see Saleh (2004: 16–22). See also Rippin's discussion of the background and composition of the so-called *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* as a forerunner of the madrasa commentary produced as a kind of epitome of the *tafsīr* of Kalbī (1994: 62–71) and compare my discussion (Pregill 2013: 402–409).

34 It is important to note that the term *taʾwīl* did not have exclusively sectarian connotations until the Middle Ages; in the 10th century the Sunnī exegete al-Māturidī (d. 944) entitled his commentary *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, and distinguished between *tafsīr* as authoritative exegesis handed down from the *Salaf* of a basically semantic sort and *taʾwīl* as the attempt to uncover the text's deeper implications.

35 See David Hollenberg's monograph (2016).

36 Compare, for example, the question of miracles (Jaffer 2015: 104–117).

37 On the context of Ibn Taymiyya's thought, see Yossef Rapaport and Shahab Ahmed (2010); on his exegesis, see Walid Saleh (2010a); on the complex relationship between Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr, see Younus Mirza (2014).

38 See the classic discussion by M.J. Kister (1972).

39 The term *isrāʾīliyyāt* is often deployed even by well-meaning scholars as if it is a category that can be rehabilitated, but it is impossible to extricate it from its polemical roots in the tradition. The concept

first began to be problematized in the 1990s; see Norman Calder (1993). Roberto Tottoli (1999) demonstrates that the term was not current in the early Islamic period and only began to circulate widely with the popularization of the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr.

40 For a concise treatment, see Michael E. Pregill (2007). There has long been debate over the specific cultural and religious disposition of the Jewish informants who apparently "influenced" Qurʾānic discourse; scholars have sometimes been overly confident that we can extrapolate concrete historical conclusions about Arabian Jews of the Prophet's time based on the Qurʾān's implicit or explicit allusions to Jewish tradition (Mazuz 2014; Pregill 2016).

41 For a concise overview of the recent revival of interest in Syriac literature as a major – perhaps even unparalleled – source for comparanda for the Qurʾān, see Emran Elbadawi (2014).

42 On this, see James E. Bowley and John C. Reeves (2003) and Reeves (2010).

43 See John C. Reeves (2015), which provocatively demonstrates that a close examination of "later" textual traditions, including the Qurʾān, suggests that the prototype of the story of Cain and Abel may have been radically different from that now extant in the canonical book of Genesis – despite our assumptions about the absolute priority of the latter as a witness to narratives about the antediluvian age.

44 On the ambiguous status of the *tafsīr* of al-Zamakhsharī as a "Muʿtazilī" commentary, see Andrew J. Lane (2006). It is generally claimed that the positions of the Muʿtazila had little impact on Sunnī commentaries lacking a philosophical focus (e.g. that of al-Ṭabarī), but close examination of various theological issues in traditional *tafsīr*s often yields the impression that the Muʿtazilī critique of the exegesis of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* lurks somewhere in the background.

45 As Marion Holmes Katz notes, regarding specific juridical issues, it seems that Muslim traditionists deliberately located orthodox Muslim positions in relation to or juxtaposition with Jewish and Christian positions specifically in order to efface the resemblances between their practices and those of Zoroastrians. Here too attribution is a device employed symbolically: the "borrowings" are, if anything, Iranian, but the fiction of "influence" is directed at Jews, at least as a negative foil (2002: 1–28). For a systematic treatment of Jews as a negative foil for Muslim practice, see Zeʾev Maghen (2006).

46 For more on the problematic nature of the conception of *isrāʾīliyyāt* as it continues to be deployed in contemporary scholarship, see Michael E. Pregill (2008: 237–241); on the specific question of the portrayal of Eve in *tafsīr* see Catherine Bronson (2014).

47 Neuwirth's scholarly output pertaining to the processes of composition, reception, and canonization of the Qurʾānic text has been massive. See the recent synthesis of her major insights (2014).

48 For ʿUmar as "an active partner in the revelation of the Qurʾān," see Avraham Hakim (2006).

49 On the prohibition of wine and its broader cultural and religious context, see Kathryn Kueny (2001).

50 For a convenient overview of revisionist ideas, see Harald Motzki (2006). In light of the energetic growth of Qurʾānic Studies over the last decade, a new concise survey of recent developments in the field is a clear desideratum.

51 Reuven Firestone is not the only contemporary scholar to suggest that the Qurʾān is the product of composite authorship. As with the problem of internal contradiction within the corpus, the sheer diversity of material contained in the Qurʾān, hearkening back to a variety of literary precursors, as well as the different genres represented therein, suggests the possibility of composite origins for the final recension of the canonical text. At least two studies from the last decade have frankly asserted that the Qurʾān contains material that can be dated to after the traditional reckoning of Muḥammad's *floruit* (Shoemaker 2003; van Bladel 2007a).

52 On the genre, see Andrew Rippin (1988).

53 There are countless examples of specific details of Muḥammad's biography that shifted over time to accommodate not only developments in the exegesis of the Qurʾān but also dogmatic considerations and dialogue with biblical, Jewish, and Christian traditions: see Uri Rubin (1995).

Bibliography

ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī. 1989. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Muḥammad, M.M. ed. 3 vols. Riyadh: Maktaba al-rushd.

Abdul-Raof, H. 2010. *Schools of Qurʾānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*. London: Routledge.

Alshaar, N. ed. 2017. *The Qurʾan and Adab: The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Amir-Moezzi, M.A. 2016. *The Silent Qur'an and the Speaking Qur'an: Scriptural Sources of Islam between History and Fervor*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bar-Asher, M.M. 1999. *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*. Leiden: Brill and Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

Bauer, K. 2011. "I Have Seen the People's Antipathy to This Knowledge": The Muslim Exegete and His Audience, 5th/11th–7th/13th Centuries. In: Ahmed, A.Q., Sadeghi, B., and Bonner, M. eds. *The Islamic Scholarly Tradition: Studies in History, Law, and Thought in Honor of Professor Michael Allan Cook*. Leiden: Brill, 293–314.

Berg, H. 2000. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*. Richmond: Curzon.

van Bladel, K. 2007a. The *Alexander Legend* in the Qurʾān 18:83–102. In: Reynolds, G.S. ed. *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context*. London: Routledge, 175–203.

——. 2007b. Heavenly Cords and Prophetic Authority in the Quran and its Late Antique Context. *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* 70(2):223–246.

Bowley, J.E. and Reeves, J.C. 2003. Rethinking the Concept of "Bible": Some Theses and Proposals. *Henoch* 25:3–18.

Bronson, C. 2014. Eve in the Formative Period of Islamic Exegesis: Intertextual Boundaries and Hermeneutic Demarcations. In: Görke, A. and Pink, J. eds. *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 27–61.

al-Bukhārī, M.b.I. n.d. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Khan, M.M. trans. http://sunnah.com/bukhari.

Bulliet, R. 1994. *Islam: The View from the Edge*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Burge, S.R. ed. 2015. *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Qur'anic Exegesis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Calder, N. 1993. *Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham. In: Hawting, G.R. and Shareef, A.-K.A. eds. *Approaches to the Qurʾān*. London: Routledge, 101–140.

De Gifis, V. 2014. *Shaping a Qurʾānic Worldview: Scriptural Hermeneutics and the Rhetoric of Moral Reform in the Caliphate of al-Maʾmūn*. London: Routledge.

——. 2015. The Sound of Meaning: Review of Karen Bauer, ed. *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis*. *Marginalia*. September 1, 2015. http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/the-sound-of-meaning-by-vanessa-de-gifis.

von Denffer, A. 2004. *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān: Introduction to the Sciences of the Qurʾān*. 2nd ed. Markfield, Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation.

al-Dhahabī, M.Ḥ. 1976–1989. *Al-Tafsīr wa-al-mufassirūn*. 3 vols. Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-ḥadītha.

Elbadawi, E. 2014. The Impact of Aramaic (Especially Syriac) on the Qurʾān. *Religion Compass* 8:220–228.

Firestone, R. 1999. *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fishbane, M. 1985. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gätje, H. 1976. *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*. Welch, A. trans. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gilliot, C. 1985. Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn ʿAbbās. *Arabica* 32:127–184.

——. 1990. *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam: l'exégèse coranique de Tabari (m. 311/923)*. Paris: Vrin.

Goldziher, I. 1920. *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

——. 1967–1971 [1889–1890]. *Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien)*. Stern, S.M. ed. Barber, C.R. and Stern, S.M. trans. 2 vols. London: George Allen and Unwin.

——. 2006. *Schools of Koranic Commentators*. Behn, W.H. ed. and trans. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Görke, A. and Pink, J. eds. 2014. *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Hakim, A. 2006. Context: ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. In: Rippin, A. ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 205–220.

Hamza, F., Rizvi, S., and Mayer, F. eds. 2010. *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries*, vol. 1: *On the Nature of the Divine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Hawting, G.R. 1999. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hidayatullah, A.A. 2014. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hollenberg, D. 2016. *Beyond the Quran: Early Ismaili Taʾwil and the Secrets of the Prophets*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Horst, H. 1953. Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar aṭ-Ṭabarīs. *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 103:290–307.

Ibn al-Jawzī, A.F.ʿA.R. 1971. *Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb quṣṣāṣ waʾl-mudhakkirīn*. Schwartz, M. trans. Beirut: Dar el-Machreq.

Ibn Kathīr, A.F.I. 1997. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*. al-Salāmah, S.b.M. ed. 8 vols. Riyadh: Dār ṭayyibah.

Jaffer, T. 2015. *Rāzī: Master of Qurʾānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Juynboll, G.H.A. 1969. *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Kadi, W. 1993. The Impact of the Qurʾān on the Epistolography of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd. In: Hawting, G.R. and Shareef, A.–K.A. eds. *Approaches to the Qurʾān*. London: Routledge, 285–313.

Katz, M.H. 2002. *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunnī Law of Ritual Purity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kister, M.J. 1972. *Ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-lā ḥaraja*: A Study of an Early Tradition. *Israel Oriental Studies* 2:215–239.

Klar, M. ed. 2016. *Exegetical Facets of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)*. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 18(2).

Kueny, K. 2001. *The Rhetoric of Sobriety: Wine in Early Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lane, A.J. 2006. *A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhshārī (d. 538/1144)*. Leiden: Brill.

McAuliffe, J.D. 2003. The Genre Boundaries of Qurʾānic Commentary. In: McAuliffe, J.D., Walfish, Barry D., and Goering, Joseph W. eds. *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 445–461.

Madigan, D. 2001. *The Qurʾān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Maghen, Z. 2006. *After Hardship Cometh Ease: The Jews as Backdrop for Muslim Moderation* Berlin: De Gruyter.

Mazuz, H. 2014. *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina*. Leiden: Brill.

Melchert, C. 2017. Bukhārī's *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 1:149–172.

Mirza, Y. 2014. Was Ibn Kathīr the "Spokesperson" for Ibn Taymiyya? Jonah as a Prophet of Obedience. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 16:1–16.

Motzki, H. 2006. Alternative Models of the Qurʾān's Formation. In: McAuliffe, J.D. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Qurʾān*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 59–75.

Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj. n.d. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Siddiqui, A.H. trans. http://sunnah.com/muslim.

Nettler, R.L. 1998. Early Islam, Modern Islam and Judaism: The *Isrāʾīliyyāt* in Modern Islamic Thought. In: Nettler, R.L. and Taji-Farouki, S. eds. *Muslim–Jewish Encounters: Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1–14.

Neuwirth, A. 2014. *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Orfali, B. 2016. In Defense of the Use of Qurʾān in *Adab*: Ibn Abī l-Luṭf's *Rafʿ al-iltibās ʿan munkir al-iqtibās*. In: Pomerantz, M.A. and Shahin, A.A. eds. *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning: Studies Presented to Wadad Kadi*. Leiden: Brill, 498–527.

Pregill, M.E. 2007. The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish "Influence" on Islam. *Religion Compass* 1(6):643–659.

——. 2008. *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, Myth, and Pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the Early Islamic Versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34:215–284.

——. 2013. Methodologies for the Dating of Exegetical Works and Traditions: Can the Lost *Tafsīr* of Kalbī be Recovered from *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* (also known as *al-Wāḍiḥ*)? In: Bauer, K. ed. *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis (2nd/8th–9th/15th c.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 393–453.

——. 2016. Review of Haggai Mazuz's *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina*. *Review of Qur'anic Research* 2(2). http://members.iqsaweb.org/page-18174.

Rapaport, Y. and Ahmed, S. 2010. Introduction. In: Rapaport, Y. and Ahmed, S. eds. *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3–20.

Reeves, J.C. 2010. Problematizing the Bible … Then and Now. *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100:139–152.

——. 2015. Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135:817–842.

Rippin, A. 1988. The Function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qurʾānic Exegesis. *Bulletin of the School of Oreintal and African Studies* 51:1–20.

——. 1994. *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* and Criteria for Dating Early *Tafsīr* Texts. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18:38–83.

——. 1999. The Study of Tafsīr in the 21st Century: E-Texts and their Scholarly Use. *MELA Notes* 69/70(1999):1–13.

——. 2011. *Tafsir: Oxford Bibliographies Online Research Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rubin, U. 1995. *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*. Princeton: Darwin Press.

——. 1999. *Between Bible and Qurʾān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image.* Princeton: Darwin Press.

Saleh, W.A. 2004. *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qurʾān Commentary of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1135)*. Leiden: Brill.

——. 2010a. Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of *An Introduction to the Foundations of Qurʾānic Exegesis*. In: Rapaport, Y. and Ahmed, S. eds. *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 123–162.

——. 2010b. Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of *tafsīr* in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12:6–40.

——. 2011. Marginalia and Peripheries: A Tunisian Historian and the History of Qur'anic Exegesis. *Numen* 58:284–313.

——. 2012. Review of Hussein Abdul-Raof's *Schools of Qurʾānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23:85–87.

Schacht, J. 1967. *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Schoeler, G. 2009. *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*. Toorawa, S.M. trans. New York: Columbia University Press.

Shoemaker, S.J. 2003. Christmas in the Qurʾān: The Qurʾānic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28:11–39.

al-Suyūṭī, J.D. 2011. *The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qurʾān: Al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*. Algar, H., Schub, M., and Abdel Ḥaleem, A. trans. Reading: Muḥammad bin Hamad Al-Thani Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization in association with Garnet Publishing.

Tottoli, R. 1999. Origin and Use of the Term *Isrāʾīliyyāt* in Muslim Literature. *Arabica* 46:193–210.

Versteegh, C.H.M. 1993. *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Wansbrough, J. 2004 [1977]. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Rippin, A. ed. and trans. New ed. Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books.

Wheeler, B.M. 2002. *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Wild, S. ed. 2006. *Self-Referentiality in the Qurʾān*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag.

Zadeh, T. 2012. *The Vernacular Qur'an: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK ON EARLY ISLAM

Edited by Herbert Berg

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group