

Routledge Studies in the Qur'an

STRUCTURAL DIVIDERS IN THE QUR'AN

Edited by
Marianna Klar



Structural Dividers in the Qur'an

This volume showcases a wide range of contemporary approaches to the identification of literary structures within Qur'anic surahs. Recent academic studies of the Qur'an have taken an increasing interest in the concept of the surah as a unity and, with it, the division of complete surahs into consecutive sections or parts.

Part I presents a series of case studies focusing on individual Qur'anic surahs. Nevin Reda analyzes the structure of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (Q 3), Holger Zellentin looks at competing structures within Sūrat al-'Alaq (Q 96), and A.H. Mathias Zahniser provides an exploration of the ring structures that open Sūrat Maryam (Q 19). Part II then focuses on three discrete aspects of the text. Nora K. Schmid assesses the changing structural function of oaths, Marianna Klar evaluates how rhythm, rhyme, and morphological parallelisms combine in order to produce texture and cohesion, while Salwa El-Awa considers the structural impact of connectives and other discourse markers with specific reference to Sūrat Ṭāhā (Q 20). Part III juxtaposes contrasting attitudes to the discernment of diachronic seams. Devin Stewart examines surah-medial oracular oaths, Muhammad Abdel Haleem questions a range of instances where suggestions of disjointedness have historically been raised, and Nicolai Sinai explores the presence of redactional layers within Sūrat al-Nisā' (Q 4) and Sūrat al-Mā'idah (Q 5).

Bringing a combination of different approaches to Qur'an structure into a single book, written by well-established and emerging voices in Qur'anic studies, the work will be an invaluable resource for academics researching Islam, religious studies, and languages and literatures in general.

Marianna Klar is currently a post-doctoral researcher at Oxford University. Her publications focus on the Qur'an's structure, its narratives, and its literary context. She has also worked extensively on the medieval Islamic historiographical tradition and on Qur'anic exegesis.

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1 Structural Dividers in the Qur'an

Preliminary Remarks and Suggestions for Supplementary Reading*

Marianna Klar

Preliminary Remarks: On the Question of the Segmented Qur'anic Surah

In June 2016, I convened a workshop, hosted and fully funded by the Centre of Islamic Studies, SOAS, on the theme of “Structural Dividers in Qur'anic Material.”¹ The premise of the workshop—to investigate the plausibility and the implications of a number of possible methods for understanding the flow of argument within a Qur'anic surah in accordance with a set of structurally informed rules—was prompted by research undertaken for an article published shortly thereafter in the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*.² In this two-part publication, I sought to rationalize a number of approaches to the structure of Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2), among them the inductive analyses of Neal Robinson,³ Mathias Zahniser,⁴ and Nevin Reda,⁵ the ring-based study of Raymond Farrin,⁶ and the diachronic breakdown of the surah suggested by Mehdi Bazargan (d. 1995).⁷ It seemed to me that such apparently conflicting structural indicators as thematic concerns, semantic repetitions, thematic repetitions, envelope structures (*inclusios*), shifting verse rhythms, alternating rhyme patterns, and variations in verse length could feasibly be utilized, not in order to argue for competing structures within Sūrat al-Baqarah, but in order to produce a more nuanced and rounded understanding of the surah as a whole,⁸ one in which a patchwork of both minor and major caesurae were viewed as adding deliberate and valuable texture to an entity that, in its final form, presents itself as a discrete literary unit.⁹

The appropriate division of Qur'anic surahs into sequential verse-group clusters is very much a modern concern.¹⁰ The medieval exegetes had two principal objectives in their approach to the text. They sought, on a word-by-word and verse-by-verse basis, to understand and explain the lexical, grammatical, and distinct rhetorical features of the Qur'an. They also utilized sophisticated hermeneutical arguments and stratagems in order to harmonize the Qur'an's many theological and doctrinal statements, and the multiple reports that had accumulated regarding these matters, with the prevailing intellectual currents of their day.¹¹ Despite the occasional inclusion of brief discussions of the relationship between adjacent verses and neighboring surahs (*tanāsuh al-āy wa-l-suwar*) in the classical Islamic tradition,¹² therefore, an exposition of the form and structure, as individual and

self-contained literary units, of the 114 surahs that make up the Qur'anic corpus was not on the medieval exegetical agenda. With the onset of the twentieth century, this situation began to change.¹³

The Egyptian exegete and literary critic Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) is the first author credited with a division of Qur'anic surahs into a series of verse-group clusters (in this case *maqāṭi* ' , sg. *maqṭa* '), rotating around a pivotal axis (Quṭb favors the term *miḥwar*),¹⁴ an idea that was simultaneously being developed—and later expanded—in the Indian subcontinent by the Islamic scholar 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Fārāhī (d. 1930) and his student Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī (d. 1997).¹⁵ Translators of the Qur'an, too, began to show a decided preference for breaking Qur'anic surahs up into a series of consecutive paragraphs or linked sections. The British-Indian barrister Abdullah Yusuf Ali (d. 1953), for example, divided Sūrat al-Baqarah into forty parts.¹⁶ The Indian intellectual Abdul Majid Daryabadi (d. 1977),¹⁷ who acknowledges the commentary of Yusuf Ali as one of the sources upon which he drew in undertaking his own translation of the text,¹⁸ does the same.¹⁹ Régis Blachère (d. 1973) suggested that al-Baqarah should be separated into forty-five sections,²⁰ while the contemporary translation completed in 2013 by Arthur Droge breaks the surah up into fifty-three consecutive parts.²¹

Recent academic studies of the Qur'an have likewise shown an increasing interest in the concept of the surah as a unity and, with it, the division of complete surahs into sequential sections or parts. Early attempts by the Austrian orientalist David Heinrich Müller (d. 1912) to break a selection of Qur'anic surahs along what he termed to be "strophic" lines were thoroughly incorporated and expanded into Angelika Neuwirth's 1981 *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*.²² Neuwirth declared an ambition to illustrate the clear presence of "an effective compositional purpose" in the Meccan Qur'an,²³ and took upon herself the task of dividing—into mathematically symmetrical and thematically defined verse-group clusters—eighty-five of the surahs classified by Theodor Nöldeke as stemming from the Meccan phase of Muḥammad's ministry.²⁴ Alongside thematic considerations, Neuwirth included reference to a number of possible structural indicators—devices that I am referring to for the purposes of the present volume as "structural dividers"—that might influence the location of plausible surah-internal borders. These incorporated shifts in the prevailing rhyme pattern, verse length, or verse structure, the presence of syntactic parallelisms, antithetically opposed pairs, or formulaic opening and closing phrases, and changes in speaker/addressee.²⁵ Neal Robinson, who looked to "develop the pioneering work of Angelika Neuwirth,"²⁶ refined these indicators further in the late 1990s and early 2000s, adding into his astute analytical mill the suggested surah breakdowns of Iṣlāhī and the influential text-linguistic analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews undertaken by the Biblical scholar George Howard Guthrie.²⁷ A.H. Mathias Zahniser, whose three insightful surah studies were published almost concurrently with the works of Robinson,²⁸ also takes Neuwirth as his inspiration in focusing his attention on both divisive and cohesive elements in Q 2 (al-Baqarah), Q 3 (Āl 'Imrān), and Q 4 (al-Nisā').²⁹ Zahniser supplements his

understanding of Neuwirth with a methodological framework informed by the writings of Henry Van Dyke Parunak,³⁰ and also engages heavily with the work of *Islāhī* as presented by Mustansir Mir,³¹ and with the thought of Robinson himself.³² A belief in the compositional logic of Qur'anic surahs, as expounded by the likes of Neuwirth, Robinson, Zahniser, and Mir, now undergirds the bulk of close textual scholarship on the literary structure of the Qur'an.³³

At the same time, scholars such as Michel Cuypers and Raymond Farrin have in recent decades been systematically applying to Qur'anic material the hypotheses of Roland Meynet.³⁴ Building on the work of the “founders of rhetorical analysis”—John Jebb (d. 1833), Thomas Boys (d. 1880), John Forbes (d. 1898), and especially Nils Wilhelm Lund (d. 1954)—Meynet argues that words, themes, or grammatical forms that occur in the first half of an expanse of Biblical text often recur, in reverse or in parallel order, in the second half of the same expanse of Biblical text.³⁵ This creates a non-linear structure, Meynet proposes, and the accurate placement of the lines of demarcation in such a chiastically organized text has implications both for the perceived intratext of any one statement (which may reside many verses away from the original declaration) and for pinpointing the location of rhetorical emphasis.³⁶ Meynet compares the center of a chiastic structure to the central branch of a seven-branch candlestick, explaining that:³⁷

[I]f the central branch may be recognized as “the most important one” it is because it is the one that keeps all the others together, the one that provides the cohesion and coherence of everything. If any of the six other branches were removed, the candlestick would certainly be unbalanced but it would still be standing and would remain a candlestick; if, however, the central branch were removed, there would only be detached pieces left and the candlestick would be destroyed.

There are apparent, if basic, similarities between Meynet's understanding of Biblical structure and work done by *Qutb* and *Islāhī* in identifying the “pivotal axes” of Qur'anic surahs. The intricacies of rhetorical analysis, nonetheless, far outstrip any interest modern Muslim exegetes might have displayed in the minutiae of Qur'anic textual structure.³⁸

The identification of chronological layers within existing surahs continues to be another focus of academic attention.³⁹ Indeed, if one accepts the traditional hypothesis that certain surahs were not revealed as unities at all but, rather, underwent revision and expansion over a number of months or even years, the profound stylistic differences between the early and the late Meccan surahs, on the one hand, and between Meccan surahs and so-called Medinan insertions, on the other, must be taken into account. It seems unlikely that structural features that took priority when the text was circulating in one form would have been overwritten by new structural features when fresh logia were slotted into their final resting place. A given piece of Qur'anic prose could plausibly, therefore, exhibit historic structural markers whose function has been superseded by the addition of a new piece of text, extending the borders of a structural unit beyond

its erstwhile limits and blurring its boundaries. Richard Bell's 1930s hypothesis that the juxtaposition of earlier and later passages within the text of the Qur'an as we have it might in any way be haphazard has long been rejected as untenable,⁴⁰ and the fashion for enhancing the Qur'an's accessibility by rearranging its surahs in chronological rather than *muṣḥaf* order waned more than half a century ago,⁴¹ but the idea that certain surahs might profitably be divided into sections in accordance with their chronological layers persists.

The Iranian scholar Mehdi Bazargan, for example, went through the entire Qur'an in the 1960s and, on the basis of a mathematical formula centered around mean verse length,⁴² posited a full diachronic reordering of the Qur'an. In Bazargan's analysis, while many surahs gave no indication of having stemmed from different periods within the Qur'an's development, many others could be divided into thematically coherent clusters to which Bazargan then applied his mathematical formula. Where Bazargan's formula indicated that neighboring clusters should be kept together, Bazargan included them in the same chronological block, but where there was a disparity in mean verse length, Bazargan kept them apart. A surah like Yūsuf (Q 12), accordingly, was treated by Bazargan as a chronological unicum, while Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2) was initially separated by Bazargan into 27 plausible thematic clusters, a number that was then condensed first into 20 thematic clusters, then into 4 mathematically defined stylistic blocks.⁴³ I made an attempt to explore the implications of Bazargan's chronology for our understanding of surah structure in 2017.⁴⁴ Significant work on rationalizing the evolution of chronologically composite surahs has also been undertaken by Nicolai Sinai.⁴⁵ The idea that certain aspects of the Qur'an's structure might be the result of oral methods of composition, while others might reflect scribal compositional techniques, has likewise garnered scholarly interest in recent years.⁴⁶

Structural Dividers in the Qur'an

Every attempt has been made to include in the present volume a wide variety of methodological stances and theoretical approaches to the rules that might plausibly be viewed as governing Qur'anic verse, section, and surah structure. Care has been taken, moreover, to ensure that a full range of Qur'anic materials, from the early Meccan through to the late Medinan and from the structurally concise through to the rhetorically opaque, have been addressed. To assist the reader, the volume has been arranged into three parts. Part I, "Competing Structures: Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, Sūrat al-'Alaq, and Sūrat Maryam," features the essays of Nevin Reda, Holger Zellentin, and Mathias Zahniser, all demonstrating the presence of more than one structure in one and the same stretch of Qur'anic discourse. Thus Reda analyzes the presence of verbatim repetitions and thematic patterns in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (Q 3), Zellentin investigates the shifts in rhyme patterns and the various overlapping repetitions that suggest a structure within Sūrat al-'Alaq (Q 96), while Zahniser identifies the "members," "segments," "pieces," "parts," "passages," "subsequences," and "sequences" that make up vv. 1–33 of Sūrat Maryam (Q 19).

Part II, "Small-Scale Structural Markers and Connectives," focuses on three discrete aspects of the text. Nora K. Schmid's essay explores the structural and epistemic functions of oaths across four chronologically defined strata of the Qur'an. Her analysis builds on a number of specific passages from eight of the earliest Meccan surahs, four later early Meccan surahs, nine mid-Meccan surahs, and sixteen surahs from the late Meccan or Medinan periods of Muḥammad's ministry. My own essay looks at how shifting rhythmical patterns combine with rhyme alternations and morphological parallelisms in order to produce texture and cohesion across the Qur'anic corpus, concentrating on a series of short, rhythmically defined pericopes within al-Baqarah (Q 2), Āl 'Imrān (Q 3), al-Anfāl (Q 8), al-Tawbah (Q 9), Hūd (Q 11), al-Nahl (Q 16), Maryam (Q 19), Tāhā (Q 20), al-Furqān (Q 25), al-Aḥzāb (Q 33), Qāf (Q 50), al-Najm (Q 53), al-Qamar (Q 54), al-Wāqī'ah (Q 56), al-Hāqqah (Q 69), al-Muddaththir (Q 74), al-Mursalāt (Q 77), al-Ḍuḥā (Q 93), and al-'Ādiyāt (Q 100). Salwa El-Awa then considers the use of connectives and other discourse markers—defined as expressions like "and," "but," "however," "on the contrary," etc., that commonly occur in surah, verse, or sentence initial position—in Sūrat Tāhā (Q 20).

Part III, "The Question of Composite Surahs," consists of essays written by Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Abdel Haleem, and Nicolai Sinai. Stewart examines the case for editorial seams in the eight Qur'anic surahs—al-Dhāriyāt (Q 51), al-Wāqī'ah (Q 56), al-Hāqqah (Q 69), al-Ma'ārij (Q 70), al-Muddaththir (Q 74), al-Takwīr (Q 81), al-Inshiqāq (Q 84), and al-Tāriq (Q 86)—where oracular oaths occur outside of surah-initial position. Abdel Haleem defends the Qur'an against suggestions of disjointedness in twenty specific cases where a switch in subject matter or a departure from standard compositional patterns might have led the likes of Theodor Nöldeke or Richard Bell to posit a structural seam, looking at passages in al-Baqarah (Q 2), al-Nisā' (Q 4), al-Mā'idah (Q 5), al-Anfāl (Q 8), Maryam (Q 19), Tāhā (Q 20), al-Mu'minūn (Q 23), al-Nūr (Q 24), al-Aḥzāb (Q 33), Yā Sīn (Q 36), al-Shūrā (Q 42), al-Fath (Q 48), al-Raḥmān (Q 55), al-Muddaththir (Q 74), and al-Qiyāmah (Q 75). Sinai, meanwhile, investigates possible areas of diachronic expansion in Sūrat al-Nisā' (Q 4) and Sūrat al-Mā'idah (Q 5), basing his understanding of where the Qur'an might display evidence of later textual insertions on a hypothesis of "appendicular growth," whereby additional sections accrue at the end of existing textual units.

This volume is not in any way an attempt to argue for the validity of one potential scheme for the division of a surah into a series of constituent segments over another. It is to be hoped, rather, that the discerning reader will take note of where there is overlap and where there is dissonance between the nine methodologies espoused below, thereby forming a sense of the intricacies of the Qur'an's structure and how these might profitably be navigated. There are both similarities and differences, for instance, between the approaches illustrated by the three contributors to Part I. Reda's analysis of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (Q 3) is based upon an initial observation that this surah consists of three thematically defined and sequentially arranged compositional units whose borders are reinforced by the presence of verbatim repetitions (envelope structures or *inclusios*) that act as

a frame, but the surah can also be divided into nine pairs of thematic bands, arranged concentrically around a center point. Reda distinguishes between the “organizational boundaries” created by the *inclusios* of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān and the more cohering function of the surah’s ring structures (p. 48). She argues that such envelope structures serve to provide emphasis and delineate borders, while concentrically organized ring structures “arrange the text within these broad units into smoothly flowing pieces” (p. 48). Zellentin’s study of Sūrat al-‘Alaq (Q 96), meanwhile, posits a scheme for the prioritization of certain markers over others. Focusing on small-scale structural markers such as rhyme, alliteration, and the close repetition of terms and concepts, Zellentin divides the surah’s structural features into primary (exclusively verse-initial or verse-final) and secondary (mostly verse-medial) structural devices. Primary structural devices are then argued to divide the text, while secondary structural devices serve to unify the text. Returning to Āl ‘Imrān, one might speculate that Zellentin would, therefore, categorize Reda’s *inclusios* as primary structural devices, while viewing the ring structures identified by Reda as secondary (unifying) structural devices.

The third essay of this volume, that of Mathias Zahniser, adopts a different methodological stance. Zahniser seeks to demonstrate, with regard to Sūrat Maryam (Q 19), how the methods developed by scholars such as Lund, Meynet, and Cuypers allow for competing structures to be at play in any one stretch of Qur’anic discourse at any one time. Like both Zellentin and Reda, Zahniser would appear to distinguish between “the relations that elements of the discourse have with each other” and “discerning borders between units of the discourse” (p. 93). Strict terminological *inclusios*, however, play little part in discerning the structure of Sūrat Maryam, and the *inclusio*-marked structural units hypothesized by Reda (with regard to Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān) or by Zellentin (with regard to Sūrat al-‘Alaq) are not dominant in Zahniser’s reading of Sūrat Maryam. Indeed, verbatim repetition seems to serve a different purpose in Sūrat Maryam, with its parallels showing a tendency toward theological juxtaposition rather than structural *inclusio*. Nonetheless, just as Reda’s *inclusio*-marked units contain more than one ring structure and Zellentin’s primary structures contain more than one secondary structure, Zahniser’s “passages” contain more than one “part,” and his “parts” contain more than one “piece.” All three of the contributors to Part I of this volume, in their own way, look to systematize and rationalize the complexities of the surahs upon which they focus.

Part II, “Small-Scale Structural Markers and Connectives,” directs the reader’s attention to three specific structural devices that occur throughout the Qur’an. Nora K. Schmid provides an exposition of the shifting function of oaths within the texture of a number of surahs, arguing that the authoritative force of early Qur’anic oaths that function as incipits of Prophetic speech or of metalinguistic commentaries (statements about inspired speech) is superseded in later surahs by oaths used for pragmatic purposes to give emphasis to human speech. These oaths no longer occur in surah-initial, or section-initial position, Schmid observes, and she therefore concludes that oaths as a structural divider are an

early and mid-Meccan phenomenon, and that the drift to surah-medial and then to section-medial oaths reflects a corresponding development in the Qur'an's rhetorical strategies.

My own study looks at the Qur'an's manipulation of rhyme and rhythm, with a view to establishing the truth of ʿIyā' al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr's (d. 637/1239) assertion that the Qur'an was written almost entirely in *saj'* (rhymed and rhythmic prose). From a starting position that structural units are created where end-rhyme is maintained across rhythmically and/or grammatically parallel runs of Qur'anic verses, a number of expansions, extensions, and variations from this general rule are observed. Although rhyme is arguably the most apparent of all of the Qur'an's structural features, the equally pervasive sense of rhythm generated in any recitation of the text should not thereby be discounted, especially if that sense of rhythm is reinforced by grammatical parallelism. Zellentin's argument that verse-initial (or, as I would have it, colon-initial) repetition possesses additional structural weight seems pertinent in this respect.

The concluding essay of Part II is Salwa El-Awa's study of discourse markers in Sūrat Ṭāhā (Q 20), primarily its sentence-initial *wa*-s and *fa*-s, but also its surah-initial *ṭāhā* and the *qul* that introduces its final verse. El-Awa concludes that the surah as a whole favors a sense of loose continuity over one of explicit textual connection, with its seven thematically defined sections maintaining an element of "semantic and syntactic independence" (p. 253). Indeed, while all the section divisions proposed in Part I of this volume occurred in verse-initial position,⁴⁷ El-Awa argues that the division between Sections Two and Three of Sūrat Ṭāhā occurs at the discourse marker *wa-qad* which separates the two statements *ka-dhālika naquṣṣu 'alayka min anbā' i mā qad sabaqa* ("Thus We tell you some of the tidings of what has gone before") and *wa-qad ātaynāka min ladunnā dhikrā* ("We have given you a reminder from Us") in v. 99. With an eye to my own essay, it might be worth noting that El-Awa's proposed segmentation of v. 99 occurs at a point at which rhyme might be hypothesized (... *mā qad sabaqa* protruding from the texture of the surah no less, after all, than the verse-final *fa-naṣiya* of Q 20:88). It seems equally remarkable, however, that Angelika Neuwirth, in both her 1981 and her 2017 study of the surah's structure, places a firm structural border between Q 20:99 and Q 20:100, thereby separating the *dhikr* ("reminder") of v. 99 from the *'anhu* ("from it") of v. 100 that would seem to refer back to it ("Those who turn away from it will bear a burden on the Day of Resurrection"; *man a'raḍa 'anhu fa-innahu yaḥmilu yawma l-qiyāmati wizrā*).⁴⁸ A fully systematic analysis of the structure of Sūrat Ṭāhā remains to be undertaken, and El-Awa's argument that a division between major thematic sections might, in this instance, occur mid-verse certainly creates food for thought.

Part III of this volume, "The question of composite surahs," juxtaposes the contrasting attitudes to the discernment of diachronic seams demonstrated in the essays by Devin J. Stewart, Muhammad Abdel Haleem, and Nicolai Sinai. Devin Stewart opens Part III with an investigation of the eight Qur'anic instances of surah-medial oath clusters. Oath clusters traditionally occur, as Nora K. Schmid demonstrated in her contribution to Part II, at the outset of authoritative speech

and, accordingly, the large majority of the Qur'an's oath clusters are placed at the beginnings of surahs. Earlier scholars such as Nöldeke, Bell, and Blachère proposed the eight occasions where oath clusters are found outside of this surah-initial location as evidence that once disparate pieces of the Qur'anic recitation had been conjoined into uncomfortably unified wholes. Schmid, in some contrast to this historical position, considered the presence of a limited number of surah-medial oath clusters as evidence of a process of disengagement, whereby the Qur'an gradually distanced itself from pre-Islamic practices of oath-taking before dispensing with this custom entirely.

Like Schmid, Stewart rejects the assessment of conjunction in a number of cases. The supporting evidence in favor of composition from several separate pieces in three surahs, however, Stewart considers to be substantial. The emphatic statement of Q 69:30–32 (*khudhūhu fa-ghullūh ...*), for instance, following on from the declaration to the believers in v. 24 (*kulū wa-shrabū hanī'an ...*), suggests closure to Stewart in a way that is comparable to the emphatic statement made by Jesus in v. 33 of Sūrat Maryam (*wa-l-salāmu 'alayya ...*), following on from the declaration about John in v. 15 (*wa-salāmun 'alayhi ...*). Indeed, Zahniser, in his study of the precise parallelisms and contrasts between the Sūrat Maryam John and Jesus pericopes in Part I of the volume, does identify the declaration about John in v. 15 (*wa-salāmun 'alayhi ...*) as closing a passage (vv. 12–15) and a subsequence (vv. 2–15) of Sūrat Maryam. Jesus' statement in v. 33, meanwhile, *wa-l-salāmu 'alayya ...*, is portrayed by Zahniser as closing a passage (vv. 23–33), a subsequence (vv. 16–33), and a sequence (vv. 2–33). Reda, also writing in Part I, similarly includes reference to section-closing *quls* at Q 3:98–99, the border of her second panel. In Part II of the present volume, meanwhile, El-Awa describes the final statement of Sūrat Tāhā (*qul: kullun mutarabbiṣun ...*) as embodying closing remarks that pertain to the entire preceding surah. There would appear to be something of a consensus on the identification of emphatic statements as indicators of closure in Qur'anic units.

Areas of scholarly consensus notwithstanding, an impassioned plea for caution in the identification of structural borders is made by Abdel Haleem in his contribution to Part III: "Structural Coherence in the Qur'an: How to See the Connections." Abdel Haleem argues that a tendency to view the Qur'an through the lens of its hypothetical Urtext, the series of diachronically spaced revelations described to us by the tradition, is in fact unhelpful. He proposes that the focus of academic research should not be on whether a verse or part of a verse was originally Meccan or Medinan, but on "the text of the Qur'an, as recited by the Prophet and read by Muslims ever since" (p. 358). Taking a step back from surface considerations of the Qur'an's form, Abdel Haleem instead accepts interruptions and disjunctures as Qur'anic fact, and investigates the hypothetical emotional impact of the Qur'an's shifts in topic or style on its listeners and readers.

Abdel Haleem proposes a catalogue of five rhetorical strategies utilized by the Qur'an, for each of which he coins an Arabic term. The first of these, which he labels *istikhdām* ("employment"), occurs where "one topic is employed for

the service of another” (p. 359). This is a phenomenon that was also alluded to by Reda in her study of *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*. Reda observes, with reference to Q 3:130–36, that “the instructions to the Muslim community are not necessarily war related: they include avoidance of usury and restraint in anger, which seem to be especially important in times of war” (p. 43). The interjection directed to the Prophet Muḥammad in Q 3:44, meanwhile, serves to reaffirm his prophethood. Abdel Haleem, in contrast, cites the example of prayer being utilized in the middle of a discussion of divorce in order to “urge the believers to stop, in the middle of bitterness” (p. 342), arguing that “prayer is an enabler that facilitates obedience to God’s instructions” (p. 343). Another such enabler is the reference to the perfection of God’s religion and completion of His blessing in Q 5:3, in the middle of a long verse detailing dietary restrictions. Abdel Haleem suggests that this interjection “reinforces the prohibition of unlawful food in the strongest way” (p. 344).

Others of Abdel Haleem’s proposed rhetorical strategies also exhibit overlaps with preceding essays in this volume. Abdel Haleem attributes the lack of explicit connections within sections of the Qur’an, for instance, to a deliberate policy; a similar lack of explicit connections was notable in the results of El-Awa’s study of discourse markers in *Sūrat Tāhā* (Q 20). Meanwhile, Abdel Haleem’s plea to the researcher to cease his or her search for “the cohesive formal devices used in writing modern expository prose” and to attempt to “capture the connectivity and interdependence of the teachings of the Qur’an at a deeper level” (p. 360) can be seen as comparable to Zellentin’s declaration that “any certitude regarding formal analysis is defied by the text’s complexity, with which scholars have to reckon” (p. 76). Indeed, Stewart’s petition for an understanding of the Qur’an, not as a text modeled on the likes of the Gospels or the Hebrew Bible, but as “an anthology of sermons, prayers, and other religious texts” (p. 271), speaks to a similar theme. The sense that mistakes will be made if one misclassifies the Qur’an as, in any way, a modern, simple, or conventional text is pervasive throughout the volume. Nicolai Sinai’s essay, therefore, which argues from an opening stance that acknowledges the text’s “complexity” and the urgent need for “far more detailed scholarly attention,” which presents “a tentative typology” and talks of refinement and hypotheses over and above any reference to certainty or simplicity (pp. 365–66), seemed an appropriate postscript and closing note.

The basic premise of Sinai’s proposed “Redactional History of the Medinan Qur’an” is an exploration of Neuwirth’s 2010 conjecture that the long Medinan surahs (*al-Baqarah*, *Āl ‘Imrān*, *al-Nisā’*, *al-Mā’idah*, and *al-Tawbah*) are “secondary compilations” of pre-circulating material (p. 365); as Stewart observed (p. 269), this is a postulate the implications of which both Sinai and I have recently been considering in some depth. In his essay for the present volume, Sinai investigates the plausibility of repetition occurring in the Qur’an, not as an indicator of thematic borders (*vide* Reda, Zellentin, Klar) nor of theological contrast (thus Zahniser), but rather as evidence of a textual procedure that was identified with reference to the Hebrew Bible in 1952 by Curt Kuhl, and highlighted

with reference to the Qur'an in 2012 by Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann. The hypothesis that surah- (or section-) encompassing *inclusios* might occasionally be evidence not of synchronic coherence but of diachronic modification substantially muddies the waters of our certainty.

Concluding Remarks

The frequent layering of a number of possible structural markers in any given Qur'anic surah means that, in every instance of a proposed Qur'anic structure, a considered judgment must be made whereby one set of structural indicators—a change in speaker/addressee, rhyme pattern, or verse shape; the presence of anti-thetically opposed pairs, grammatical or morphological parallelisms, or formulaic opening/closing phrases; the suggestion of an envelope structure (*inclusio*), a chiastically arranged scheme, or chronological layers—is given priority over other, possibly equally valid, sets of structural indicators. The nine contributors to this volume collectively demonstrate that competing *inclusios* and multiple, contrasting ring structures, *saj'*-inspired rhythmical, phonetic, and grammatical units, the “pieces,” “parts,” and “passages” of Semitic rhetorical analysis, can all coexist in one and the same stretch of Qur'anic discourse. Protrusions in rhyme or rhythm can indicate the presence of a new structural unit, introduce a grammatical aside, flag up an insertion, or create a sense of closure. Connectives can be taken as evidence of topic shifts, textual cohesion, or a lack of textual cohesion; they can similarly be used to argue for the addition of an insertion. Vivid terminological *inclusios* can produce separation, cohesion, or theological contrast, in addition to suggesting the presence of later accretions to pre-existing expanses of text.

It must nonetheless be emphasized that it would be erroneous to conclude from this that either the Qur'an, or the methods of its students, are somehow haphazard or incorrect. As Zellentin explains, “structural analysis can seem subjective because it can be subjective, yet it can also seem so because there *are* many overlaying structures within a text” (p. 79). Wrongfully conflating textual complexity with haphazardness simply impedes scholarly progress, and the nine essays of this volume, taken together, establish that an acknowledgement of the Qur'an's textual complexities in no way undermines its cohesion or its originality. An investigation of the ways in which each stretch of text is both *muḥkam* (“precise”) and *mutashābih* (“unspecific”; Q 3:7) at one and the same time can only serve to strengthen our understanding of the Islamic scripture. The embedding of additional angles into existing arguments, the combination of originally independent verse groups, and the self-conscious manipulation of literary form for rhetorical or strategic effect are part of the very warp and weft of the Qur'an, and it is only by means of a careful delineation of the Qur'an's many literary forms that we can begin to understand what this effect was meant to be. It is hoped that the nine essays of this volume will serve as an important stepping stone in the creation of a functional toolkit, the use of which will enable any student of the Qur'an to weigh up which of several textual markers at play in a

particular stretch of Qur'anic material might best be argued to serve as a structural divider in any individual case. The categorization of what the Qur'an's structural and compositional patterns are remains an ongoing task.

Notes

- * This introduction was written and researched in the framework of the project *Qur'anic Commentary: An Integrative Paradigm*, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 771047). The essay reflects only the author's views, and the ERC is not responsible for any of the claims expressed in it or for any use that may be made of the information it contains. Qur'an translations are based on the text provided by Alan Jones in *The Qur'an* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007).
- 1 See www.soas.ac.uk/islamicstudies/events/03jun2016-structural-dividers-in-quranic-material-a-synthesis-of-approaches.html.
- 2 Marianna Klar, "Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara," Parts One and Two, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2017), and no. 2 (2017).
- 3 Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (2nd edn. London: SCM Press, 2003 [first published 1996]).
- 4 A.H. Mathias Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: al-Baqara and al-Nisā'," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Richmond: Curzon, 2000).
- 5 Nevin Reda El-Tahry, "Textual Integrity and Coherence in the Qur'an" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), since published as *The al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qur'an's Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).
- 6 Raymond Farrin, "Sūrat al-Baqara: A Structural Analysis," *Muslim World* 100, no. 1 (2010).
- 7 Mehdi Bazargan, *Sayr-i taḥawwul-i Qur'ān*, 2 vols. in 1 (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmi-i Intishār, 1386/2007). For a detailed discussion of Bazargan's work, see Behnam Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qur'ān: A Stylometric Research Program," *Arabica* 58 (2011).
- 8 For a similar plea for methodological collaboration, see Anthony Johns, commenting on the Qur'an exegeses of Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Farāhī (d. 1930), Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī (d. 1997), 'Izzat Darwazah (d. 1984), and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), and on select scholarly publications by Salwa El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) and Michel Cuypers, *Le festin: une lecture de la sourate al-Mā'ida* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2007): "All these approaches are susceptible of further development, they may cross-fertilise each other or suggest new perspectives for the appreciation of already established ideas. At all events, they should be regarded as complementary rather than exclusive." A.H. Johns, "A Humanistic Approach to *i'jāz* in the Qur'an: The Transfiguration of Language," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011), 82–83.
- 9 For various understandings of the history of the concept of a surah as a discrete literary unit, see Ayaz Afsar and Malik Naseer Hussain, "Coherence and Cohesion in 'Yusuf/Joseph' Narrative with Reference to Arberry's English Translation of the Qur'an," *Kashmir Journal of Language Research* 16, no. 2 (2013); Zainab Alwani, "Al-Waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān: A Methodology for Understanding the Qur'ān in the Modern Day," *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* 1, no. 1 (2018); Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*, trans. Patricia Kelly (Miami: Convivium Press, 2009), 493–502; Salwa El-Awa, "Linguistic Structure," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford:

- Blackwell, 2007), 56–58; Israr Ahmad Khan, “Coherence in the Qur’ān: Principles and Applications,” *Intellectual Discourse* 10, no. 1 (2002); Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur’an: A Study of Islāhī’s Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i Qur’ān* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986); idem, “The Sura as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Qur’an Exegesis,” in *Approaches to the Qur’an*, ed. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993); idem, “Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur’ān: A Brief Review of the Idea of *Nazm* in *Tafsīr* Literature,” *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur’an and Hadith Studies* 11, no. 2 (2013); Nicolai Sinai, “Reading Sūrat al-An’ām with Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966),” in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, ed. Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Kate Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 142–44. For a discussion of the potential shortfalls in this general approach to the Qur’an, see Karim Samji, *The Qur’ān: A Form-Critical History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 17–23, and Alford T. Welch, art. “Sūra,” *EP*.
- 10 See the references in n. 9 above.
- 11 For an excellent introduction to the sophistication of the medieval *tafsīr* tradition, see Walid A. Saleh, “Reading al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) through al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944): New Light on the Third Century Hījri,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016). See also my “Ibn Kaṣīr’s (d. 774/1373) Treatment of the David and Uriah Narrative: The Issue of *Isrā’īliyyāt* and the Syrian School of Exegesis,” in *Warrior, Poet, Prophet and King: The Character of David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Marzena Zawadowska (forthcoming, 2020). For monograph-length studies of individual exegetes, see, e.g., Bruce Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics: al-Ṭabrisī and the Craft of Commentary* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur’an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006); Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar: Abū’l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* (London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012); Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qur’an Commentary of al-Tha’labī (d. 427/1035)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). For the suggestion that reading the Qur’an as a unity might be a further such hermeneutical stratagem, see, *inter alia*, Zainab Alwani, who writes: “I argue that this method [*al-waḥdah al-binā’iyyah*, “structural unity”] provides an important hermeneutic resolution to critical debates surrounding Islam’s moral and ethical framework, specifically in areas of Islamic law dealing with difficult issues such as apostasy, family matters, marriage and divorce.” Alwani, “*Al-Waḥdah al-binā’iyyah li-l-Qur’ān*,” 7.
- 12 The history of the terms *nazm* and *munāsabah* is treated in some depth in Reda, “Holistic Approaches to the Qur’an: A Historical Background,” *Religion Compass* 4, no. 8 (2010), 496–501. Reda’s article, moreover, contains useful references to the recent discussion of this issue in Arabic-language secondary literature (see esp. pp. 496–97). For medieval exponents of *munāsabah*, see also Mustansir Mir, “The Sura as a Unity,” 212, 221–22; idem, “Continuity, Context, and Coherence in the Qur’ān,” 21–23; idem, *Coherence in the Qur’an*, 17–19. Sinai, “Reading Sūrat al-An’ām,” is of interest for the fact that Sinai contrasts the traditional approaches of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Biqā’ī, and al-Ālūsī with the modernist commentaries of Rashīd Riḍā and Sayyid Quṭb. Khan, meanwhile (see Khan, “Coherence in the Qur’ān”), compares al-Biqā’ī’s understanding of coherence with the writings of ‘Abd al-Ḥamid al-Fārāhī (d. 1930) and Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī (d. 1997), while El-Awa (*Textual Relations in the Qur’an*, 9–25) places al-Rāzī, al-Biqā’ī, and Islāhī in a trajectory that ends with Neal Robinson. The connection between Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) and the understanding of surah coherence put forward by the modern writer

- Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Drāz (d. 1958) is highlighted by Zebiri (*Maḥmūd Shaltūt*, 142–45).
- 13 In addition to the references in n. 9 above, see the analysis of this cultural shift in Stefan Wild, "Unity and Coherence in the Qur'an," in *Exegetical Crossroads: Understanding Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Pre-Modern Orient*, ed. Georges Tamer et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt*, 128–46.
- 14 See his thirty-volume work of exegesis, *Fī ḡilāl al-Qur'an* ("In the Shade of the Qur'an"), first published in 1952. For descriptions of this work, see, e.g., Issa J. Boulata, "Sayyid Quṭb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'an," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning of the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boulata (Richmond: Curzon, 2000); A.H. Johns, "A Humanistic Approach to *i'jāz* in the Qur'an," 83–84; Badmas 'Lanre Yusuf, *Sayyid Quṭb: A Study of his Tafsir* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2018), 103–55. Stefan Wild is critical of the insights proffered by Quṭb's exegesis of Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2), the results of which he describes as "a pseudo-discovery: that a sūra exhorts mankind to belief in God, the Prophets, and the scriptures is hardly a specific 'line' that could characterize a sūra." See Wild, "Unity and Coherence in the Qur'an," 311–12. Nicolai Sinai provides an analysis of Quṭb's treatment of Sūrat al-An'ām in Sinai, "Reading Sūrat al-An'ām," 146–50. Quṭb's discussion of Q 3:33–62, moreover, is very briefly referred to in A.H. Mathias Zahniser, "The Word of God and the Apostleship of 'Īsā: A Narrative Analysis of Āl 'Imrān (3):33–62," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 37, no. 1 (1991), 81.
- 15 For a detailed analysis of the principles underpinning the Fārāhīan school of exegesis, see Abdul Rahim Afaki, "Fārāhī's Objectivist-Canonical Qur'ānic Hermeneutics and its Thematic Relevance with Classical Western Hermeneutics," *Transcendent Philosophy* 10 (2009); idem, "The Qur'an—A Coherent Structure or an Atomistic Collection of Verses: Critical Analysis of Wahīduddīn Khan's Remarks on *naẓm al-Qur'an*," published January 5, 2012 on the website of the *London Academy of Iranian Studies*, retrieved from iranianstudies.org/articles/the-quran-a-coherent-structure-or-an-atomistic-collection-of-verses-critical-analysis-of-wah%EF%80%A8iduddin-khans-remarks-on-nazm-al-quran-292; idem, "Interpreting the Divine Word and Appropriating a Text: The Fārāhī-Ricoeur Thematic Affinity," in *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology in Dialogue: The Logos of Life and Cultural Interlacing*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014); Kamran Bashir, "Revisiting Modern *Naẓm* Approaches to the Qur'an: Iṣlāhī's Interpretation of Q. 107 and Q. 108 in his *Tadabbur-i Qur'an*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17, no. 2 (2015); and Zahniser, "Major Transitions." See also the references listed in n. 9 above, especially Mīr, *Coherence in the Qur'an*. For a study that places al-Fārāhī, Iṣlāhī, and Javed Ahmed Ghamidi (born 1951) on an equal footing as the founders of a new school of exegesis, one based on the principles of Shibli Numani (d. 1914), see Husnul Amin, "From Islamism to Post-Islamism: A Study of a New Intellectual Discourse on Islam and Modernity in Pakistan" (PhD diss., University of Rotterdam, 2010).
- 16 First published as Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: An Interpretation in English, with Arabic Text in Parallel Columns, a Running Commentary in English and Full Explanatory Notes* (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1934–1937). For analyses of this work, see, e.g., Abdallah El-Khatib, "'Abd Allāh Yūsuf 'Alī mutarjim al-Qur'an ilā l-inklīziyyah: dirāsah fī ḥayātihi wa-tarjamatihi," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2010), esp. 192–69; Muzaffar Iqbal, "Abdullah Yūsuf Alī and Muhammad Asad: Two Approaches to the English Translation of the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000); Aizul Maula, "A Metaphor Translation of the Qur'an: A Comparative Analytical Study between Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 1, no. 2 (2016). Detailed biographies of Yusuf Ali are provided in Khurshed Kamal Aziz, *A Biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali: A Life Forlorn* (Lahore:

Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2010); and in M.A. Sherif, *Searching for Solace: A Biography of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Interpreter of the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1994).

Yusuf Ali explains that (emphasis added):

Sometimes whole Sūras were revealed, and sometimes portions, which were arranged together *according to subject-matter* under the Apostle's directions. Some Sūras are long, and some are short, but a logical thread runs through them all.

See Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, 13, n. 15. In the preface to his work, printed at the very end of the 1946 edition, Yusuf Ali writes: "[a] division of the Sūra into Sections is shown in all Arabic Texts. These are logical divisions according to meaning." See Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, xx. The shorter surahs are, accordingly, left as structural wholes while, in his introductory remarks to each of the divided surahs, Yusuf Ali will often provide a brief description of the thematic content of the individual sections that combine in order to make up the longer surahs. That Yusuf Ali's surah divisions were inspired by thematic rather than perceived diachronic shifts is made apparent in, for example, his description of the mono-part Q 57 as stemming from two different periods of revelation. See Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, 1,795–96. Yusuf Ali also shows no apparent interest in the alleged Medinan provenance of Q 74:30. See Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, 1,639–44.

- 17 First published as Abdul Majid Daryabadi, *The Holy Qur'an; Translated from the Original Arabic with Lexical, Grammatical, Historical, Geographical and Eschatological Comments and Explanations, and Sidelights on Comparative Religion* (Lahore: The Taj Company, 1941–1957). For a discussion of this work, see Abdur Raheem Kidwai, "Maulana Daryabadi's Contribution to Quranic and Islamic Studies," in *Journey of Faith: Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi*, ed. Akhtarul Wasy and Abdur Raheem Kidwai (Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2016).

- 18 See Abdul Majid Daryabadi, *Tafsir-ul-Qur'an. Vol. 1. Translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur'an* (Karachi: Darul-Ishaat, 1991), vi. It is interesting to note that Daryabadi also, at the same juncture, acknowledges the work of Richard Bell and the Urdu commentary of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi. The reference to "every Sūrah" in the passage cited in n. 19 below notwithstanding, Daryabadi would appear, at first glance, to follow Yusuf Ali in his division of certain surahs into sections. Both translators, for example, divide each of surahs 60–79 into two parts, with surahs 80–114 being left undivided.

- 19 Although he provides no explanation for the location of these divisions, Daryabadi does state in his footnotes that:

A Sūrah is a chapter. There are 114 chapters in the Book, each chapter having been named and assigned its proper place by the Holy Prophet himself ... Another structural division of every Sūrah is into "sections" of various lengths.

See Daryabadi, *Tafsir-ul-Qur'an. Vol. 1*, 2 n. 2 and 7 n. 27. It remains to be ascertained whether the precise location of Daryabadi's divisions match those of Yusuf Ali.

- 20 Régis Blachère, *Le Coran* (Paris: Librairie Orientale et Americaine, 1957 [first published 1947]).
- 21 Arthur J. Droge, *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013). Both Blachère's and Droge's divisions of the text would appear to be thematically defined. It should be noted that Drāz (see n. 12 above) also divides al-Baqarah into sections. See Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Drāz, *Al-Naba' al-'aẓīm: naẓarāt jadīdah fī l-Qur'ān al-karīm*, ed. Aḥmad Muṣṭafā Faḍlīyah (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2008), 196–284. This volume is available in English translation as *The Qur'an: An Eternal Challenge*, trans. and ed. Adil Salahi (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2001).

- 22 See David Heinrich Müller, *Die Propheten in ihrer ursprünglichen Form: Die Grundgesetze der ursemitischen Poesie erschlossen und nachgewiesen in Bibel, Keilinschriften und Koran und in ihren Wirkungen erkannt in den Chören der griechischen Tragödie* (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1896), 20–60. The surahs divided by Müller are Q 15 (al-Hijr), 19 (Maryam), 26 (al-Shu‘arā’), 28 (al-Qaṣaṣ), 44 (al-Dukhān), 56 (al-Wāqī‘ah), 75 (al-Qiyāmah), 80 (‘Abasa), 82 (al-Infītār), 90 (al-Balad), and 92 (al-Layl). Müller also provides strophic analyses of discrete passages within Q 7 (al-A‘rāf), 11 (Hūd), 51 (al-Dhāriyāt), and 69 (al-Hāqqah). In addition to Neuwirth, see Pierre Crapon de Caprona, *Le Coran: aux sources de la parole oraculaire. Structures rythmiques des sourates mecquoises* (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, 1981).
- 23 Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (2nd edn. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 75: “die Wirksamkeit einer kompositorischen Absicht klar erkennbar zu machen.”
- 24 These structures are in the process of being reproduced and systematically updated in the various volumes of Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011–), of which two out of an anticipated total of five volumes have already been published (2011 and 2017). For a (partially critical) analysis of Neuwirth’s approach to surah structure in the *Studien*, see both Andrew Rippin, “Review of *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, by Angelika Neuwirth,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45, no. 1 (1982) and Alford T. Welch, “Review of *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, by Angelika Neuwirth,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 4 (1983). The potential shortcomings to Neuwirth’s methodology are also briefly touched upon in Travis Zadeh, “Qur’anic Studies and the Literary Turn,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135, no. 2 (2015), 333–34. For a discussion of Neuwirth’s structural division of Q 18 (al-Kahf), see Marianna Klar, “Re-examining Textual Boundaries: Towards a Form-Critical Sūrat al-Kahf,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. Majid Daneshgar and Walid Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2016). Protests against the particulars of Neuwirth’s analysis notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the *Studien* is an extremely valuable resource (see Rippin, “Review,” esp. 150; Welch, “Review,” esp. 764 and 767).
- 25 See Neuwirth, *Studien*, 176. The sheer quantity of data included in Neuwirth’s 1981 breakdown of the Meccan surahs can render the logic behind her structural decisions rather opaque, and a number of Neuwirth’s structures are clarified in Carl Ernst’s 2011 volume, *How to Read the Qur’an*. See in particular Ernst’s description of the structure of the early Meccan surahs and his Appendix A (Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an*, 72–77 and 177–85). Neuwirth’s understanding of surah structure is also brought heavily to bear on Neal Robinson’s 1996 *Discovering the Qur’an*. See the following note.
- 26 Robinson, *Discovering*, 2. See also Robinson, *Discovering*, 99. It is worth noting that, like Rippin and Welch, Robinson questions the validity of some of Neuwirth’s conclusions and decisions without in any way calling into doubt the overall value of the *Studien* volume. See Robinson, *Discovering*, 152, 185, 311 n. 15, and 317 n. 15 (and see n. 24 above).
- 27 For Robinson’s various studies on surah structure, see the bibliography. For Robinson’s employment of the work of Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, see Robinson, *Discovering*, especially his treatment of Sūrat al-Baqarah (Robinson, *Discovering*, 201–23), which takes as its starting point Iṣlāḥī’s divisions of the surah (Robinson, *Discovering*, 319 n. 8), and ch. 13, “The Order of the Surahs: Iṣlāḥī’s Explanation” (Robinson, *Discovering*, 271–83). For Robinson’s utilization of George Howard Guthrie, see Neal Robinson, “Hands Outstretched: Towards a Re-reading of Sūrat al-Mā’ida,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001), 6–8. For Guthrie himself, see “The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological

Seminary, 1991), published as *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994). In addition to Guthrie's illustration of "hooked key-words" and "parallel introductions," utilized in Robinson's analysis of *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*, Guthrie's description of what he terms "cohesion shifts" seems relevant here. Guthrie singles out the following as generating "cohesion fields": "genre, topic, spatial indicator, temporal indicator, actor, subject, verb tense, mood, person, and number, reference, and lexical items." See Guthrie, "The Structure of Hebrews," 87. Guthrie's declaration that "[t]he problems caused by the complex structure of Hebrews are not easily answered and may never be answered with a consensus by the guild of New Testament scholarship ... Perhaps part of the difficulty of depicting Hebrews in outline form lies in the fact that Hebrews was originally delivered for its effect on the hearers. The discourse was not crafted to fit our neat, thematically progressing outlines. It was meant to have an impact on listeners" (Guthrie, "The Structure of Hebrews," 217) is also reminiscent of scholarly statements about the complexity of the Qur'an.

- 28 For Zahniser's various studies on surah structure, see the bibliography.
- 29 For Zahniser's utilization of Neuwirth's *Studien*, see, e.g., Zahniser, "The Word of God," 83, "The kind of analysis which Neuwirth has pioneered, with passages laid out structurally according to verses and their cola, provides the basis for my analysis of *Āl 'Imrān* 33–62," and his description of Neuwirth's methodology in 81–82 and passim. Neuwirth is also referenced throughout Zahniser, "Sūra as Guidance and Exhortation: The Composition of *Sūrat al-Nisā'*," in *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East*, ed. Asma Afsaruddin and A.H. Mathias Zahniser (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997).
- 30 See H. van Dyke Parunak, "Transitional Techniques in the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 4 (1983), referenced throughout Zahniser, "Major Transitions," and H. van Dyke Parunak, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure," *Biblica* 62, no. 2 (1981), referenced throughout both Zahniser, "Major Transitions" and Zahniser, "Sūra as Guidance." It should be noted that Parunak was an important source for Guthrie (see, e.g., Guthrie, "The Structure of Hebrews," 152) while Parunak, in turn, was influenced by the work of David Heinrich Müller (see, e.g., Parunak, "Oral Typesetting," 158).
- 31 For Zahniser's utilization of the work of *Islāhī* as presented by Mustansir Mir, see Zahniser, "Major Transitions," and Zahniser, "Sūra as Guidance."
- 32 For Zahniser's engagement with the writings of Robinson, see Zahniser, "Sūra as Guidance."
- 33 In addition to the essays printed below, see the further publications of Salwa El-Awa, Marianna Klar, Nevin Reda, and Nicolai Sinai, as listed in the bibliography.
- 34 For Roland Meynet, see, e.g., Roland Meynet, *Treatise on Biblical Rhetoric*, trans. Leo Arnold (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For the works of Michel Cuypers and Raymond Farrin, see the references provided in the bibliography.
- 35 For a description of the four figures as the "founders of rhetorical analysis," see, e.g., Meynet, *Treatise*, 279. For Meynet's discussion of Lund's seven laws of chiasmic structures, see Meynet, *Treatise*, 42. For a thorough discussion of the works of Meynet and Lund, see Zahniser, Chapter 4, this volume ("The Miraculous Birth Stories in the Interpretation of *Sūrat Maryam* (Q 19): An Exercise in a Discourse Grammar of the Qur'an"). An example of one of Lund's laws is the suggestion that the center is always the turning point; also that identical terms sometimes occur at the center and at the extremes of a rhetorical unit.
- 36 See Meynet, *Treatise*, 239–52 and 279–310.
- 37 Meynet, *Treatise*, 287.
- 38 Accordingly, perhaps, neither Cuypers nor Farrin dwell on the possibilities raised by exploring this developmental trajectory. Farrin does, however, briefly engage with the surah divisions proposed by *Islāhī* in Raymond Farrin, "Surat al-Baqara: A Structural

- Analysis," *Muslim World* 100, no. 1 (2010), 17–18; idem, "Sūrat al-Nisā' and the Centrality of Justice," *Al-Bayān: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016), 7. Cuypers too makes reference, in passing, to the work of Iṣlāhī (see, e.g., Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 500–1; idem, *A Qur'anic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūrahs of the Qur'an*, trans. Jerry Ryan (Atlanta: Lockwood, 2018), 70; idem, "Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the *naẓm* of the Qur'anic Text," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011), 2).
- 39 It has long been posited that traces of the structural seams occasioned by the Qur'an's original process of revelation "in stages" (see, e.g., Q 17:106) remain visible within the bound version of the *muṣḥaf* as we have it. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) reports the opinions of a number of authorities on surahs of mixed Meccan and Medinan origin. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2008), 33–34 and 38–47. Al-Suyūṭī also discusses criteria for the identification of Meccan and Medinan passages within discrete surahs. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 47–49. For Q 17:106, and the matter of the Qur'an's being revealed *seriatim*, see Walid A. Saleh, "A Piecemeal Qur'ān: *Furqān* and its Meaning in Classical Islam and in Modern Qur'anic Studies," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 42 (2015). For Iṣlāhī's approach to surahs reported to stem from more than one chronological period, see, e.g., Bashir, "Revisiting Modern *Naẓm* Approaches," 63–64; Mir, *Coherence*, 90–92.
- 40 See, *inter alia*, Robinson, *Discovering*, 83–96 and 162–95. As Robinson puts it (p. 96), "Bell's suggestion that the editors sometimes placed groups of *āyahs* in the wrong surahs is very implausible and has been almost universally rejected." Andrew Rippin provides an informative elucidation of the intellectual context, the reception history, and the scholarly content of Bell's academic output in Andrew Rippin, "Reading the Qur'ān with Richard Bell," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112, no. 4 (1992).
- 41 For historic examples of chronologically rearranged translations of the Qur'ans, see the work produced in 1860 by John Medows Rodwell (d. 1900), the 1947 translation of Régis Blachère (d. 1973), and the 1956 edition of *The Koran: A New Translation* by Nessim Joseph Dawood (d. 2014). A recent example of a chronologically rearranged translation is available in the 2017 publication by the retired US soldier, Malone Fellow in Arab and Islamic Studies, interfaith leader, and author Jason Criss Howk, *The Qur'an: A Chronological Modern English Interpretation*. On the history of chronological surah lists, see Emmanuelle Stefanidis, "The Qur'an Made Linear: A Study of the *Geschichte des Qorāns'* Chronological Reordering," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008). For the different approaches to the chronology of the Qur'an evidenced in Muslim and in Orientalist scholarship, see Morteza Karimi-Nia, "The Historiography of the Qur'an in the Muslim World: The Influence of Theodor Nöldeke," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15, no. 1 (2013).
- 42 Bazargan calculated mean verse length by dividing the total number of words in a passage by its number of verses. For the precise mathematical formula used by Bazargan, see Sadeghi, "Chronology," 231.
- 43 See Bazargan, *Sayr-i tahawwul*, and the detailed exposition of Bazargan's work in Sadeghi, "Chronology." Bazargan's contribution to Qur'anic studies is also discussed in Karimi-Nia, "The Historiography of the Qur'an," 54–55.
- 44 Klar, "Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in Sūrat al-Baqara," Part Two, 65–88.
- 45 See Nicolai Sinai, "Processes of Literary Growth and Editorial Expansion in Two Medinan Surahs," in *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an*, ed. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); idem, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), esp. 92–110 and 126–37; idem, "Two Types of Inner-Qur'anic Interpretation," in *Exegetical Crossroads: Understanding Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and*

- Islam in the Pre-Modern Orient*, ed. Georges Tamer et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); and idem, Chapter 10, this volume.
- 46 See Andrew G. Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014) and my review of this work, "Review Article: *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an*. By Andrew G. Bannister. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 1 (2017). A thorough dose of skepticism regarding the applicability of oral-formulaic theory to Biblical texts is provided in Robert D. Miller II, *Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011), 1–39. For a tentative exploration and criticism of the implications of Bannister's hypotheses, see the chapters by Gabriel Said Reynolds and Cecilia Palombo in *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, ed. Nicolai Sinai (forthcoming).
- 47 While, in Zahniser's evaluation of the discourse structure of Sūrat Maryam, "members," "segments," and "pieces" might begin mid-verse, all of Zahniser's proposed "parts," "passages," "subsequences," and "sequences" respect the textual boundaries suggested by the surah's verses themselves.
- 48 See Neuwirth, *Studien*, 270; idem, *Der Koran. Band 2/1*, 327 and 349.

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Part I

Competing Structures

Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān, Sūrat al-‘Alaq, and
Sūrat Maryam



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2 The Poetics of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān’s Narrative Structure (Q 3)*

Nevin Reda

Introduction

The structure of long Medinan surahs has long puzzled scholars, their seemingly haphazard composition often perceived as the result of the Qur’an’s piecemeal development over time. Accordingly, some have suggested the pericope as the Qur’an’s basic unit of composition, approaching these long surahs as collections of such isolated passages that do not necessarily cohere.¹ However, Angelika Neuwirth among others has proposed the surah as the basic unit of composition, thereby focusing attention on surahs as whole units and asking questions of surah genre and style.² In keeping with this trend, recent studies have uncovered certain structuring devices that indicate a compositional schema and underlying rationale for the odd organization of some of these surahs, particularly Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2), the longest of the Medinan surahs and the first to follow after the short opening prayer, al-Fātiḥah (Q 1).³ Such studies affirm the surah as a compositional unit and examine a variety of questions related to the Qur’an’s history, chronology, aesthetics, and hermeneutics.

This essay is located within these new approaches, examining the poetics of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān’s (Q 3) narrative structure by means of certain devices that give substance to the surah’s compositional schema. It focuses on two such poetic figures: *inclusio* (verbatim repetition of words, phrases, or whole sentences that act as a frame for the enclosed unit) and ring composition (thematic repetitions in an inverted order that fan out from a central element to cover an entire unit of text), illustrating how they work together to provide structure, pinpoint a common theme, and imbue the surah with an internal dynamic. After a brief introduction to major scholarly contributions and structuring devices, the following is organized into two sections: the first analyzes Āl ‘Imrān’s *inclusios* and the second its ring compositions. The conclusion demonstrates how these figures work together to point to a theme of integrity of belief in God and God alone, a call that is issued to all and sundry and that demands an adherence to God’s prophets and the messages they communicate. They warn that ignoring this call can lead to communal fragmentation, as exemplified in early Christian and Muslim history.

Three scholars have put forward a compositional schema for Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān: Mathias Zahniser, Neal Robinson, and Raymond Farrin.⁴ Whereas Zahniser and

Robinson approach the surah in a linear fashion, examining its flow of ideas one after the other, the third scholar mentioned here, Raymond Farrin, conceptualizes the surah’s structure in the form of concentric rings that fan out from a central point.⁵ His analysis is therefore better discussed in connection with ring composition below.

Zahniser uses inductive and literary analysis in his study of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān, examining cola, word preponderance, and themes in a largely synchronic analysis of the surah’s structure.⁶ Robinson brings in a diachronic dimension, connecting the surah’s themes with the Muslim community’s historical experience in ancient Arabia.⁷ While employing different analytic techniques, both Zahniser and Robinson have identified very similar compositional units for the surah (see Table 2.1), making not only a very convincing argument for the surah’s layout, but also underlining the need to approach it as a whole unit. Zahniser identifies an introduction and three compositional units in the surah, whereas Robinson adduces the self-same introduction and compositional units, but sets apart, in the last unit, a section that he distinguishes as an ending. Zahniser’s and Robinson’s thematic borders are therefore very similar, differing only in the small detail of the categorization of the surah’s final verses.

In some respects, the present essay builds upon this existing work, showing how *inclusios* serve to accentuate the same thematic borders identified by Zahniser and Robinson. The current study differs, however, inasmuch as *inclusios* are argued to outline only three thematic subunits, combining both the introduction and ending into their respective adjacent sections (again, see Table 2.1). *Inclusios*, moreover, delineate these borders rhetorically rather than thematically. Nevertheless, the convergence of thematic borders as outlined by Zahniser and

Table 2.1 Three contrasting outlines for Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (Q 3)

<i>Verses</i>	<i>Robinson’s outline</i> ⁸	<i>Zahniser’s outline</i> ⁹	<i>Reda’s outline</i>
1–32	Preliminary matter	Introduction	Panel 1 (framed by <i>Inclusio</i> 1)
33–63	Central core (vv. 33–189) • Part 1: The status of previous prophets, vv. 33–99 (a) Jesus and his entourage, vv. 33–63	Family of ‘Imrān	
64–99	(b) The religion of Abraham	Section in which the phrase “People of the Book” is prominent	Panel 2 (framed by <i>Inclusio</i> 2)
100–89	• Part 2: The Muslim experience of death and defeat	Section with primary reference to the believers	Panel 3 (framed by <i>Inclusio</i> 3)
190–200	Ending		

Robinson and the rhetorical borders elaborated below suggests that the poetic devices identified here are not haphazard. Rather, they signal distinct compositional subunits and therefore have a clear organizational function.

Structuring Devices

In the realm of Biblical studies, H. Van Dyke Parunak has described *inclusios*, alternations, and chiasms—three of the Bible’s main structuring devices—in great detail.¹⁰ All these figures are composed of repetitions that follow special patterns. Some are made up of lexical repetitions of the exact same words, such as *inclusios*. Others comprise thematic repetitions that come in distinct patterns, although such figures may also contain a verbatim repetition or two. Of this second category of structuring device, ring compositions are some of the best known. Ring composition, which has received significant scholarly attention (notably in the work of Mary Douglas),¹¹ is a special kind of chiasm.

In Qur’anic studies, meanwhile, it has been demonstrated that a surah can sometimes have layers of organization, with multiple organizational figures at work at the same time.¹² Some surahs have a linear dynamic, propelling the main thrust of the surah forward. Others may be circular, providing for an internal symmetry and an in-built balance. Michel Cuypers has argued that the Qur’an generally follows non-linear, symmetrical rhetorical structures, alongside other ancient Semitic texts, in contra-distinction to the more familiar linear structures of Greek rhetoric.¹³

As will be shown below, the findings of the present essay support the existence of both a linear and a non-linear dynamic to Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān. It is noteworthy that all of the organizational figures discussed here in relation to Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān also occur in Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2), where they help pinpoint its structure.¹⁴ It is, therefore, no surprise to find them in Āl ‘Imrān. These findings, rather, affirm the importance of these poetic devices in understanding surah structure.

Part 1: *Inclusios*

Inclusios are lexical repetitions located close to the beginning and end of an expanse of text, thereby bracketing a distinct unit.¹⁵ They are usually composed of repeated phrases, but they can be as long as a sentence or two, or as short as one distinctive repeated word. Indeed, sometimes these repetitions are not even exact matches of the word but different grammatical forms that derive from it, such as singulars and plurals, or verbs and participles. *Inclusios* organize text when they enclose certain portions of it, thereby indicating a thematic subunit. From an aesthetic and rhetorical perspective, they signal closure and cyclic completion.

As I have demonstrated at length in an earlier publication,¹⁶ *inclusios* in the Qur’an are not necessarily composed of two brackets but often feature a third bracket within the text of the unit, thereby adding emphasis. Sometimes these

tripartite figures are more heavily weighted toward the end, by adding a further repeated element to the second and third bracket. When this augmentation occurs, emphasis also rises, since by increasing the length of the repetition the level of emphasis automatically increases. These tripartite figures can also be more heavily weighted toward the beginning of the enclosed unit, thereby creating a mood of decreasing emphasis. This feature allows for a movement of rising and falling emphasis that, as I have argued elsewhere, resembles the dynamics of rising and falling volume in musical compositions. Tripartite *inclusios* can therefore add interest to a surah by changing the emphatic intensities within the text. Units framed by these devices are often sections or subsections in the surah's general structure. One should note that *inclusios* can also contribute to the internal dynamics of a surah in a second way by decreasing or increasing the amount of text they enclose, since emphasis also varies in accordance with space: the longer a unit of text devoted to a topic the more it is emphasized, and vice versa. *Inclusios* can also, however, encompass a surah in its entirety, signaling to the reader or listener that the surah has come to an end. It should be noted that, in addition to their segmenting function, *inclusios* serve to unify text. They are composed of lexical repetition and therefore function as cohesive elements.¹⁷

In Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, *inclusios* organize the surah into three distinct panels, each with its own sub-theme. The first panel (vv. 1–63) contains the story of the family of 'Imrān, which incidentally has given the surah its name. 'Imrān is identified as Mary's father and Jesus' grandfather, the panel depicting founding narratives of Christianity, from a distinct Islamic perspective, and showcasing the nativities of Mary, John, and Jesus. Although these narratives illustrate Christian origins, they coincidentally also depict communal fragmentation within the Children of Israel, with one group subsequently developing into Christianity and the other into Judaism. The panel also contains an introduction, which highlights the crux of the narratives and the main theme of the panel: God's oneness and the importance of following prophets in the worship of God alone.

The second of Āl 'Imrān's panels (vv. 64–99) is addressed to the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) in the present moment, also arguing for God's oneness, but bringing in nuances of authority and invoking the example of Abraham in the distant past. It suggests that true monotheists do not take up other human beings or even angels as figures of authority alongside God. This panel seems to be in conversation with the Christian notion of Jesus' divinity, as well as Christian and Jewish practices of religious leadership. It also provides balance to the surah's imperative of following prophets, limiting their religious authority to the communication of divine messages and to the preaching of monotheism.

The third panel (vv. 100–200) is the longest in the surah, covering about half of it. It is addressed to the Muslim community and contains another lengthy narrative set in the past—that of the first Muslim battles under the leadership of Muḥammad: Badr (2/624) and Uḥud (3/625). The third panel, thus, also recounts events, and interspaces them with lengthy commentary and guidance for believers, underlining the importance of following the Prophet. Here, too, lack

of adherence to the Prophet’s instructions leads to communal fragmentation, in this case to the emergence of the historical group commonly referred to as “the hypocrites” (*al-munāfiqūn*). Furthermore, the third panel ends in a conclusion that resembles the surah’s introduction, affirming God’s oneness and the importance of obeying prophets.

As will be shown below, the *inclusios* framing Āl ‘Imrān’s three panels serve to segment the surah into three thematic subunits. Āl ‘Imrān, moreover, contains—in addition to these three *inclusios*—an overarching *inclusio* that brackets the surah in its entirety, and sets it apart from its neighboring surahs.

The Inclusio Framing Āl ‘Imrān’s First Panel (Q 3:1–63)

The *inclusio* framing Āl ‘Imrān’s first panel is composed of three brackets with four repeated elements. They are: *lā ilāha illā huwa* (“there is no god but He”), *ḥaqq* (“truth”), *al-‘azīz* (“the mighty”), and *al-ḥakīm* (“the wise”). Due to the multiplicity of the repeated elements, one could hypothetically consider these to be four separate *inclusios*; however, here they are treated as one rather complex figure, since they all frame the same panel. Their occurrence in vv. 2–6 forms the first bracket; the second bracket is made up of vv. 18 and 20; and the third bracket falls in vv. 60 and 62 (see Table 2.2). As was already noted by Zahner,¹⁸ the phrase *lā ilāha illā huwa* is doubled in the first and second brackets (vv. 2, 4, 18, and 18), and occurs with a slightly more emphatic variation in the form of *mā min ilāhin illā llāhu* in the last bracket (v. 62). The doubling of this distinctive phrase, its length, and its location right at the beginning of the surah make this phrase particularly noteworthy. Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān also has a relatively high number of occurrences of this phrase compared to, say, Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2), which, despite the fact that al-Baqarah is a much longer surah, has only two (vv. 163 and 255). This preponderance affirms the importance of this phrase in Āl ‘Imrān.¹⁹ The term *‘azīz* is also doubled in the first bracket (Q 3:4 and 6).²⁰

In the first panel (vv. 1–63), incrementation occurs, with the augmentation of the second and third repetitions of the featured *inclusio* via the addition of other elements. Accordingly, the middle bracket is incremented with the word *islām* and derivatives thereof (vv. 19–20), which occur again toward the end of the panel (v. 52). This increase adds to the bracketing effect and the sense of closure that is already occasioned by the augmentation of *lā ilāha illā huwa* (vv. 2, 4, 18, and 18) in the panel’s final *mā min ilāhin illā llāh* (v. 62). The *s-l-m* occurrences in the middle bracket are of particular interest, since four such derivatives are in evidence: *al-islām*, *aslamtū*, *a-aslamtum*, and *aslamū* (vv. 19–20). In the entirety of the surah, derivatives of *islām* occur twelve times. This number is relatively high compared to al-Baqarah (Q 2), for example, in which this term and its derivatives occur only eight times.²¹ Moreover, all of the Āl ‘Imrān occurrences fall near the end, beginning, or middle of a panel. The Form IV *s-l-m* root would therefore seem to have structural significance in Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān.²² One should also mention the phrase *ḥājjūka* (“they disputed/argued with you”) near the middle of the first panel in v. 20, of which derivatives occur six times in this