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FROM TEXT TO SOUND TO PERCEPTION: MODES AND RELATIONSHIPS OF MEANING IN
THE RECITED QUR'AN

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BY

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to my teachers

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My interest in Qur'an recitation began as an undergraduate at Lawrence University, when, in a class on the Qur'an Kathryn Kueny played a short excerpt of recitation from a CD accompanying a new book—*Approaching the Qur'an* by Michael Sells. I was studying both music performance and religion at the time, and hearing that excerpt of recitation was the spark where my whole dissertation began. During my undergraduate years, Professor Kueny nurtured my love for the topic of the taboo in religious studies. It was through that initial encounter with Michael Sells' work that my interest in recitation began, and I am immensely

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Abstract

This dissertation is about the layers of meaning across the text, sound, and experience of the recited Qur'an. In my research, I draw on hermeneutic methods, interviews with reciters and appreciators of recitation, and the tools and literatures of several disciplines—Islamic studies and the academic study of religion more generally, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and history. My approach combines tools and points of view from several disciplines in order to gain the fullest possible understanding to every way in which we may understand meaning as being enacted or communicated via the recited Qur'an.

In chapter one, I situate my argument within the context of preceding academic literature on the recited Qur'an. There is on one hand a wealth of literature on the meanings of the words of the Qur'an as a scripture and a piece of literature, and on the other, a growing body of research about the aesthetics of the recited Qur'an, or recitation as a religious practice that is an expression of long-term development of personal piety. I seek to bring these varied perspectives into conversation with one another, and in doing so, argue that, while all realms of meaning in the recited Qur'an may coexist in any given moment, there is a wide variety of ways in which they may or may not directly interact with one another. In chapter 2, I examine the recited Qur'an as religious ritual that may be understood as performance, broadly construed and with an emphasis on process. Chapter 3 addresses the aesthetics of the Qur'an in terms of its construction of meaning in a literary sense, with a focus on the way in which recitation is understood within the text itself. In chapter 4 I turn to the sound patterns of the words of the recited Qur'an, focusing on rhyme and rhythm. And in chapter 5, I examine the role of pitch and melody, via the *maqāmāt*, the modal system of Arabic music.

Transliteration Notes

In transliterating Arabic verses (and passages from secondary works in Arabic) in this dissertation, I have tried to remain as faithful to the sounds of the recited text as possible, while maintaining clarity and consistency. The system I use here is based somewhat loosely on that developed by Thomas Hoffmann in his monograph, *The Poetic Qur'an: Studies on Qur'anic Poeticity*.¹ I have made certain modifications in order to best represent the quranic text as it is pronounced according to the rules of *tajwīd*. The details are as follows:

- Consonants marked by the *damma* are rendered as doubled.
- Short vowels are *a*, *i*, and *u*; long vowels are *ā*, *ī*, and *ū*. *Hamza* is ʾ; *ʿayn* is ʿ. *Hamza* is not indicated when it appears as the word letter of a word, e.g., *alif* rather than *ʾalif*.
- The definite article (*al*) is treated as it is pronounced in recited or spoken Arabic rather than as it is written. First, the initial *a* is omitted when the end of a preceding word elides into the definite article, e.g., *aqraʿu l-kitāb* rather than *aqraʿu al-kitāb* or *aqraʿ al-kitāb*. Secondly, when followed by a sun letter (*t, th, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ḏ, l, n*), the definite article is transliterated as it sounds in recited or spoken Arabic, rather than as it appears in written Arabic, e.g., *ash-shams* not *al-shams*.
- Words appearing in isolation or at the ends of verses are written as they are pronounced, and in order to clearly show oral pronunciation and rhyme.
- Inseparable prepositions, conjunctions, and prefixes (*bi-*, *fa-*, *wa-*, *li-*) are written with a hyphen directly followed by the word to which they are attached, and any following elision is also indicated as it is pronounced rather than as it is written, e.g., *bi-smi l-lāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*.
- Rules of *tajwīd* that apply to pronunciation are rendered as they are heard in *ḥafṣ ʿan ʿāsim* (the school of recitation most frequently heard) as opposed to the way the text is written. Some of these rules include the following. The softly nasalized *n* of the *ikhfā*² is indicated as *ṇ*. The extra vowel of the *qalqala*³ is included as *a*. Other *tajwīd* rules that smooth elisions between words (that are typically marked above the quranic text with either a *shadda* or a superscript letter such as the small *mīm* shown to indicate that a *nūn* followed directly by a *bāʾ* should be pronounced as a *mīm*) are spelled out in transliterations.
- In the cases of Arabic words that have accepted English spellings that appear in the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the accepted English spelling is followed rather than a strict transliteration, unless these terms are embedded in a quotation the appears in transliterated Arabic, in which case they are transliterated directly in order to maintain consistency with the words surrounding them. Qurʾan is the exception to this rule,

1 Thomas Hoffmann, *The Poetic Qur'an: Studies on Qur'anic Poeticity*, Diskurse Der Arabistik, Bd. 12 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), XIV–XV.

2 In the rules of *tajwīd*, when a *nūn sākina* (be it spelled as a *nūn* with *sukkūn* or the *nūn* of *tanwīn*) is followed by any of the following letters, it is pronounced as a soft or incomplete nasalization: *tāʾ, thāʾ, jīm, dāl, dhāl, zayn, sīn, shīn, ṣād, ḍād, ṭāʾ, ḏāʾ, fāʾ, qāf, and kāf*.

3 When the following letters have a *sukkūn* and are followed by another consonant they are "bounced" by pronouncing a short vowel: *bāʾ, jīm, dāl, ṭāʾ, and qāf*.

however, and it is written with the *hamza* indicated as opposed to using an apostrophe but does not indicate the long *ā*. The English adjectival form of Qur'an is quranic (following the English language norm of Bible/biblical), as opposed to Qur'anic. Sura is written with diacritics when given as part of the Arabic title of a specific sura, eg., *Sūratu l-Fātiḥa*. When used as a general term for that unit of text in the Qur'an, or given with a number (eg., Sura 1) sura is spelled without diacritics, as it appears in the Merriam Webster Dictionary.

- Titles of books and articles as well as names of authors appearing in the text of the dissertation, in citations, and in the bibliography will be transliterated according to the standard of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, a clear standard for representing written Arabic rather than recited or spoken Arabic.⁴ Only the first word of the title (excluding *al-* in the cases of those beginning with the definite article) and proper nouns are capitalized. For example: *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī al-Qur'ān*.

Unless specifically noted otherwise, all translations from languages other than English are my own.

Figure 1: Table of transliterations

a	ا			t	ط
b	ب			ẓ	ظ
t	ت			ʿ	ع
th	ث			gh	غ
j	ج			f	ف
h	ح			q	ق
kh	خ			k	ك
d	د			l	ل
dh	ذ			m	م
r	ر			n	ن
z	ز			h	ه
s	س			w	و
sh	ش			y	ي
ṣ	ص			ā	آ
ḍ	ض			ʾ	hamza

4 International Journal of Middle East Studies, "IJMES Translation and Transliteration Guide," accessed May 25, 2014, <http://ijmes.ws.gc.cuny.edu/authorresources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide/>.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Hypothesis and Argument of the Dissertation

The idea of the Qur'an as a primarily oral scripture is one that is central to the text's own self-presentation and its role in the lives of believers, yet scholarly literature on the Qur'an has overlooked, historically speaking. The vast majority of Muslims cultivate an experience of the Qur'an that is based less in the text as a written object than in the sound and practice of its recitation. Native and non-native speakers of Arabic devote considerable time and energy to learning to recite and appreciate recitation of the Qur'an. Learning to recite the Qur'an is the foundation of Islamic education worldwide, making the sound and experience of reciting the first point of contact with the sacred text for most believers. Popular reciters have also attained worldwide fame, as their recordings have circulated on nearly every form of audio media, and now a simple search online returns innumerable sites for discussing recitation and circulating audio files. Yet despite the significant role played by the sound and practice of Qur'an recitation, the scholarly vocabulary for understanding the aesthetics and practices involved in Qur'an recitation is still in its early stages of development. Until recent years, American and European scholarship on the Qur'an focused on the text as a written object; since the late 1970s, however, there have been a handful of works on its recitation that have shaped the discipline of quranic studies away from textual meaning and toward oral and aural modes of understanding, emphasizing areas of experience and interpretation that had previously been neglected.

While works on the written text focus on the discursive meaning of the scripture as a fixed object, leaving aside the oral and/or aural dimensions of the Qur'an, writings on the

experience of the recited Qur'an by and large focus on its aesthetic qualities or its role in long-term educational processes or development of personal piety. By bringing these two realms of scholarly literature together, we may then seek to address the relationships that may exist between the discursive and non-discursive modes of meaning in the case of the recited text. For example, while aesthetic experience of ritual and language has value in and of itself, the spoken words (recited scripture in this case) still bear their discursive meanings. Spoken language is characterized by both the meanings of words and their sounds. Analysis that focuses solely on the sound, experience, or performative or educational contexts leaves aside this mode of understanding and interpretation. By combining analysis of the spectrum of meaning, from most discursive to most non-discursive, we may gain an understanding of the recited quranic text that reflects its dynamic role in performance and piety, more fully capturing the possibilities for interaction (or lack thereof) of these different realms of meanings.

In this dissertation, I propose that the sound of the Qur'an may be described according to the following scheme: the meaning of the words and literary features of the text, in terms of vocabulary, subject matter, modes of perspective and address, or literary form on the level of units of verses or suras. Secondly, the sounds of these words are often characterized by systematic rhyme and rhythm. Sometimes this is in conversation with or resembles the tradition of *saj'* (rhymed prose) literature, but the Qur'an also presents its own sound patterns that exist independent of the Arabic prosodic tradition. The sounds of the words themselves as they are pronounced generate certain affective charges through plays on repetition and assonance; these possibilities are diversified even further when we consider the role of the reciter in shaping the sound of the text through pacing and pausing. Third, the sound of the

text is shaped by pitch and melody, often characterized by the modal system of Arabic music—the *maqām*. The melodic aspect of reciting is a skill that individuals working toward professionalization study specifically, and reciters participating in competitions are judged in this aspect of their performance. Finally, the experience of the listener may be characterized by affective or emotional states that may or may not be directly tied to their discursive understanding of the text, or these other aspects of its sound that I have brought up. Alternatively, recitation may be shaped by external contextual factors such as occasion, performance practice, and changing aesthetics of listening cultures.

Given this descriptive framework, I seek to bring these modes of meaning into conversation with one another. With reference to specific recordings, performances, and data collected through fieldwork, I address when I hear any particular aspect of the sound either corresponding with the meaning of the text (or other aspects of the sound, or perceived meaning on the part of the listener) or when these things seem to be simply coexisting. I am in no way suggesting that there are static relationships between the realms of meaning I have described. A listener's understanding of the recited text may not prioritize the actual meanings of the words; correspondingly, they may not have an academic understanding *maqām*, *saj'* literature, or any other of the factors shaping the sound and performance of the text. Similarly, a reciter may mark key structural moments in the literary form of a particular sura with modulation, or changes in register or timbre of the voice, but they may not always do this. And they may not represent the meaning of the words directly with the melody. In fact, the melody may be dictated by its own demands of performance practice and the ideal of spontaneity in such a way that does not directly represent or correspond to the meanings of the words.

History of the Relevant Literature

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I outline the story of scholarship on the recited Qur'an from the fields of religious studies and ethnomusicology. Previous works on the subject, while having taken contrasting approaches and even defined the subject matter differently, have often begun with a call to scholars to turn our attention to the recited Qur'an. This has been done in the face of a field that has historically been dominated by attention to the written word, driven by the ocularcentrism of the post-Enlightenment west¹ at the expense of proportionate attention being given to the extremely significant role of the sound and practice of recitation in the lives of Muslims and the popularity of recitation and recordings thereof worldwide.

The majority of works on the recited Qur'an preface their arguments by stating that the subfield of quranic studies has been dominated by attention to the written word, treating the Qur'an as a physical holy book that is read from one cover to the other, or studied silently by oneself. As a result of this focus on the written Qur'an, its recitation has been sorely neglected. Several of the scholars I examine in this chapter state this fact, using it as the basis for a call for attention to the Qur'an's orality. The earliest significant forays into the topic of recitation were by William Graham, Frederick Denny, and Kristina Nelson, all of whom were writing in the 1970s and 80s. The broad argument of Graham's *Beyond the Written Word* in some ways serves as a logical premise for the more detailed studies. In *Beyond the Written Word*, Graham's discussion of the Qur'an revolves around a point that pertains to the broader field of religious studies rather than one that is specific to Islam.

Graham uses his analysis of the recited Qur'an as the basis for his inquiry into the

1 Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Western scholarly and cultural idea of scripture: “the facts of the Islamic treatment of scripture should at least cause us to question whether our easy dichotomization of oral word and written word is at all adequate as a way of talking about religious texts, let alone about stages of religious development.”² The oft-cited example of a 19th century French traveler’s account about happening upon a Malay Qur’an class in Singapore³ clearly demonstrates Graham’s point that meaning or understanding of the Qur’an is by no means limited to literal comprehension.⁴ Here Graham recounts the anecdote, which attests to the value of a non-discursive experience of the Qur’an. The traveler, Melchior Yvan, found an old man sitting with a number of children who were practicing a recitation. Melchior asked the old man about the lesson, who then explained that they were reciting the Qur’an in Arabic, a language that he (the old man) admittedly did not understand. When Melchior asked why they would recite in a language they did not know, the old man explained:

The sons of the Prophet ought to have this word in their memory so that they can repeat it often. These words are endowed with a special virtue...In translating [them] we might alter the meaning, and that would be a sacrilege.⁵

According to Graham, the oral/aural encounter with the Qur’an conveys its own level of meaning, experience, and understanding beyond the literal meanings of words. Graham puts it quite eloquently when he says, “the meaning of the divine ‘Recitation’, the Qur’ān, is often not simply either discursive or esoteric ... It is also visceral and sensual, which is to say, nondiscursive, poetic, symbolic, or even aesthetic in nature.”⁶

Noting the diversity of genres, histories, and roles of sacred texts worldwide, Graham

2 William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 111.

3 *Ibid.*, 103–104.

4 *Ibid.*, 111.

5 Melchior Yvan, *Voyages et récits*, translated by and quoted in *ibid.*, 104.

6 *Ibid.*, 113.

tells us that the oral/aural omnipresence of the Qur'an "far surpasses that of Judaic or Christian usage,"⁷ and thus serves as the best counterexample for the understanding of scripture as the written word. Graham connects this orality of the text to its authority, noting that "the authoritativeness of the Qur'anic text is only realized in its fullness and perfection when it is correctly recited aloud."⁸ The term "scripture," in the sense that it was originally used in reference to the Jewish or Christian Bible, does not capture the intrinsic orality of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is instead primarily experienced as a recitation, and furthermore, it is at its most authoritative in this form or experience. The treatment of the Qur'an as scripture by analogy to the Jewish or Christian Bible overlooks the oral and aural elements of the sacred text.⁹ The bias toward written texts as authoritative has been reflected in scholarship on the Qur'an, which in an attempt to understand it as an authoritative religious text in the mold of biblical scholarship and the development of Christian communities, has focused on its written form as it has served as the authority for "Islamic institutions and ideas."¹⁰ *Beyond the Written Word* is then a call for a reevaluation of the category of scripture as works such as the Qur'an have "ongoing [functions] ... as oral phenomena."¹¹

While Graham argues for a reevaluation of the category of scripture in Western scholarship and culture, particularly in light of the oral/aural nature of the Qur'an, in *Beyond the Written Word* he does not go into detail about the specific technical factors that shape the sound of the Qur'an, such as the rules of *tajwīd* (regulating pronunciation and pauses), the melodic aspect of recitation, typically understood as following the expectations of the *maqām*

7 Ibid., 79.

8 Ibid., 80.

9 Ibid., 1.

10 Ibid., 95.

11 Ibid., 7.

system, or the Arabic poetic tradition, instead pointing the reader to the works of Kristina Nelson and Frederick Denny.¹² Rather than providing a detailed analysis of quranic recitation, Graham seeks to elevate the status of the oral text in our conception of the Qur'an and its role as a holy text, but by no means to diminish the importance of the content of its message. Significantly, in arguing that the oral and the written exist alongside one another, he asserts that this is the case, but does not address how this relationship might work, or possibilities for interaction between the written and the oral.

The earliest western scholarly contributions on the topic of the recited Qur'an are from Frederick Denny¹³ and Kristina Nelson,¹⁴ both of whom began publishing on the topic in the early 1980s, seven years prior to Graham's *Beyond the Written Word*. Denny's article, "Qur'an Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission," is very much in the same vein of Graham's slightly later work, functioning as a call for attention to the Qur'an's orality: despite the fact that recitation has largely been neglected in western scholarship on the Qur'an, its importance in the lives of believers suggests that it is a worthy subject for study. Following from this observation, Denny raises a number of specific points, opening up possibilities for

¹² Ibid., 108.

¹³ Frederick M. Denny, "The Adab of Qur'an Recitation: Text and Context," in *International Congress for the Study of the Qur'an: Australian National University, Canberra, 8-13 May 1980*, ed. Anthony H. Johns (Canberra City: South Asia Centre, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1981), 143-60; Frederick M. Denny, "Qur'an Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission," *Oral Tradition* 4, no. 1-2 (1989): 5-26; Frederick M. Denny, "Exegesis and Recitation: Their Development as Classical Forms of Qur'anic Piety," in *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions: Essays in Honor of Joseph M. Kitagawa*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Theodore M. Ludwig, Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to Numen) 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 91-123; Frederick M. Denny, "Islamic Ritual: Perspectives and Theories," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 71-75; Frederick M. Denny, "The Great Indonesian Qur'an Chanting Tournament," *The World & I*, June 1986; Frederick M. Denny, "Nawawi: Etiquette in Recitation," in *Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and Religious Life*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 55-57.

¹⁴ Kristina Nelson, "The Art of Reciting the Qur'an" (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 1980); Kristina Nelson, "Reciter and Listener: Some Factors Shaping the Mujawwad Style of Qur'anic Reciting," *Ethnomusicology* 26, no. 1, 25th Anniversary Issue (January 1982): 41-47, doi:10.2307/851400; Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Kristina Nelson, "The Sound of the Divine in Daily Life," in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early, Indiana Series in Arab and Islamic Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 327.

deeper investigations in the future. The articles “Qur’ān Recitation” and “The Adab of Qur’an Recitation,” and to some extent in “Exegesis and Recitation” all call for further scholarship on recitation, opening up various possibilities for future investigations. Other topics covered in these works include: recitation and commands to recite within the quranic text, focusing on the opening of *Sūrat al-‘Alaq*; the verse 73:4, “*wa rattil al-qur’āna tartīlan*,” which Denny translates as “and repeat the recitation in an unhurried, distinct manner”¹⁵; and quranic use of the root T-L-W; recitation within the hadith, largely pertaining to the merit of reciting the Qur’an, thus reinforcing the call for attention to be devoted to this previously neglected subject, given its status as a meritorious activity for believers; *‘ilm al-qirā’a*, referring to “the science of variant readings”¹⁶ and mastering the seven *qirā’āt*; and the musical aspects of recitation. With regard to the musical aspects Denny also describes melodic practice through the use of *maqām* and the practice of *nagham* (setting text to melody).

In addition to pointing out the lack of western scholarship on the recited Qur’an and outlining a number of issues and possible avenues for future studies, Denny discusses Qur’an recitation as it has been treated in the texts of the Islamic tradition. “Qur’an Recitation” contains a brief discussion of *tajwīd* manuals. Pointing out that these manuals are impossible to understand without the help of a teacher¹⁷ (this mirrors his claim in “The Adab of Qur’an Recitation” that recitation must be studied in the field “with the master”¹⁸), he goes on to break down the general content and organization of works of this genre, including a sample table of contents from one manual with his own explanations.¹⁹ This discussion revolves around

15 Denny, “Qur’ān Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission,” 7.

16 Ibid., 9.

17 Ibid., 16.

18 Denny, “The Adab of Qur’an Recitation: Text and Context,” 2.

19 Denny, “Qur’ān Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission,” 18.

analysis of the manuals themselves, in addition to Denny's experiences studying recitation in both Egypt and Indonesia. In this way, the method of research is combining work on the tradition's texts on recitation with ethnographic accounts. The articles provide a general overview of the textual tradition while filling in the gaps in this material with the ethnographic accounts from Egypt and Indonesia. Denny's treatment of *tajwīd* manuals in particular was pioneering, and continues to be part of the very small number of works of this kind in English.

In "Qur'an Recitation," "The Adab of Qur'an Recitation," and "Exegesis and Recitation" Denny discusses other types of texts on recitation, including a *qaṣīda* (ode) attributed to Ibn Khaqan (d. 325/937-8), the section pertaining to recitation in Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'ulum al-din* (which "incorporates recitation and the reciter into his grand scheme of the religious life, placing great emphasis on the text's meaning and its power to save those who follow it as a kind of *ṭarīqa*"²⁰), Ibn al-Jazari's (d. 833/1429) treatise on *tajwīd* (which, Denny notes, constitutes the highest level of systematization of *'ilm al-qirā'āt* and *tajwīd* treatises²¹), and Imam al-Nawawi's (d. 676/1277) *adab* manual, *al-Tibyan fi adab ḥamilat al-Qur'an*. Denny provides a useful description of the work in "The Adab of Qur'an Recitation."²² After that description the article moves to "thick descriptive" accounts of two cases of recitation sessions in Cairo and notes that the treatise "provides an occasional glimpse" into modern practice.²³

Written around approximately the same time as Denny's works, Kristina Nelson's dissertation and subsequent monograph constitute the first in-depth analysis in the English language (and Western scholarship in general) of the practice of Qur'an recitation and the issues surrounding the Islamic tradition's perception and development of that practice. Nelson

20 Denny, "The Adab of Qur'an Recitation: Text and Context," 145.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 146-149.

23 Ibid., 158.

opens up her study with a discussion of the oral nature of the Qur'an similar to that found in the works of Graham and Denny; as Nelson puts it, "the Qur'an is not the Qur'an unless it is heard."²⁴ In this way she points out that despite the Qur'an's assertion of its orality, and the prevalence of the recited Qur'an in the lives of Muslims, the practice has been sorely overlooked by scholarship. The primary question guiding the work then is, "given that recitation is the product of both divine and human ordering [as being understood as the word of God on one hand,²⁵ and also something that is shaped through the use of pitch and melody²⁶], how does this juxtaposition work in the mind of the performer and in the expectations of the listeners to shape the recitation of the Qur'an in Egypt today?"²⁷ Her inquiry is framed within the context of the tradition's historical understanding of the divine nature of the quranic text, but is ultimately centered in human activity and perception. Rather than "how is this done" or "how does this work," she asks, "how do you see this working?" Nelson's method is primarily ethnographic, but the work is also supplemented by textual studies. Her particular method of field work consisted of participating and immersing oneself in the practice that is the subject of the study, a style that was developing in the moment when she completed her research.²⁸ Her implementation of the "study by performing" style of field research allowed her to produce an extremely detailed depiction of orally transmitted practices that had never before been described (to that degree of detail) in the English language.

Although she describes different types of recitation (and their varying contexts/uses), the majority of the work is dedicated to the performative, melodic variety, *mujawwad*, most

24 Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 1985, xiv.

25 Ibid., 1-3.

26 Ibid., xvi-xvii.

27 Ibid., xvi.

28 Steven Caton, "Review of *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, by Kristina Nelson," *American Ethnologist* 14, no. 3 (1987): 569-70.

specifically the style of those reciters from 1950s-1970s Egypt who continue to be extremely popular. This type of recitation, she tells us, is reserved exclusively for public performance.²⁹ The pertinent contexts for this type of performance include those that are “liturgical, rites of passage, ceremonial, media, and nonoccasional.”³⁰ Her approach can thus be understood as one that classifies quranic recitation as performance; as we will see, this is very different from Anna Gade’s understanding and depiction of recitation as being a long-term process of learning and cultivation of piety.³¹

To some extent, Nelson’s and Gade’s understandings of the subject matter each reflect the contexts (geographical, cultural, historical) in which each author completed their work. The melodic style of recitation was extremely popular (particularly by Egyptian performers, who were/are very prolific in commercial recordings, public performances, and on the radio) and continues to be very influential in the Islamicate world. As Nelson explains, the fact that *mujawwad* style recitation is reserved exclusively for public performance also reflects (and is due to) its particular balance of fixity and freedom: “the ideal in the *mujawwad* style is that a spontaneously crafted melody be executed on the fixed text in the context of public performance, and that, at the same time, personal choice be executed whenever possible in order that the recitation be most responsive to the meaning, the particular occasion, and the emotions of the listeners.”³² She further notes that performers of the *mujawwad* style avoid reciting in this style in private (i.e., they only recite *mujawwad* in the context of public

29 Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*, 1985, xxiv–xxv, 110–111.

30 Ibid., xxiv–xxv.

31 Gade explicitly rejects methods of ritual as performance as they have been developed with particular attention to initiation rites and liturgical purposes, which are exactly the situations that Nelson is examining (in addition to recordings, radio broadcasts, etc). This approach, as described by Gade, does not address processes of learning and emotion that take place through acquisition of a skill, instead understanding the ritual as a “one-time affair.” Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur’an in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 122–123.

32 Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*, 1985, 110–111.

performance) so as to avoid fixing the text to a particular melody; in order to gain expertise in using melodies the reciter must practice with texts other than the Qur'an.³³ It would be fair to say then, that Nelson is dealing with events that are "one time affairs," to consider the type of event Nelson describes in terminology defined by Anna Gade, and that the methodological differences between these two authors are appropriate to each understanding of the nature of their own subject matter.

Chapters 4 and 5 of *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* constitute the analytical results of Nelson's fieldwork, wherein she relates and synthesizes the knowledge she acquired in a year's worth of studies of music and *tajwīd*, and interviews with shaykhs and professional reciters. Chapter 4 is called "The Ideal Recitation of the Qur'an," again indicating her performance-based approach. She is discussing an ideal: a goal that is attainable through performance and is shaped by different systems, such as the quranic text, rules on its pronunciation and rhythm (*tajwīd*, which she breaks down very clearly in chapter 2), and the Arab system of modes and melodies (*maqām*).

Nelson discusses the process of learning to memorize and recite the Qur'an through oral transmission, noting that it is not possible to learn how to recite the Qur'an on one's own.³⁴ The issues transmitted in this process are codes guiding effective performing and listening to the recited Qur'an, called *ādāb al-tilāwa* or *ādāb al-qāri'* (the code of behavior for reciting), and *ādāb al-mustami'* (the code of behavior for listening). The codes demonstrate "a concern for the accurate preservation and transmission of the Qur'an and, equally, for its

33 Ibid., 111; Anne Rasmussen reports Maria Ulfah as saying something very similar, that reciters will avoid repeating one piece of text so as to avoid fixing it to a single tune. Anne K. Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010)88.

34 Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 1985, 54.

meaningful and effective recitation.”³⁵ Effective *mujawwad* recitation is shaped not just by rules of etiquette for performance, but also the rules of *tajwīd*, which ensure correct and clear delivery of the text, and the *maqām*.³⁶

The *maqāmāt* can be used to more subtly convey the meaning of the text, and “*taṣwīr al-ma‘nā* (picturing the meaning) [in this way]...is considered an essential element of the ideal recitation.”³⁷ Effective use of this skill is expected not only implicitly by listeners³⁸ but is affirmed institutionally, as melodic technique is one criteria according to which candidates for public performance are judged.³⁹ Although Nelson states in the introduction that she learned the *maqāmāt* through weekly ‘ūd (lute of Arabic music) lessons, and that her teacher taught reciters “the melodic parameters of the art,” these passages do not focus on how professional reciters normally come to learn the *maqām*.⁴⁰

As far as her treatment of examples of recitation, Nelson provides a number of musical transcriptions along with text scansions. (These are mostly found in chapter 5.) On pages 118-119, she provides two transliterated scansions and translations from performances, the first being a single verse: 24:35. She indicates that the reciter pauses after “*allāh*,” then restarting from “*allāh*” again so the word is heard twice. She points out the impact of this pause on the meaning of the text: “since ‘*Allāh* is also an exclamation of wonder and delight, it not only emphasizes that God is the light of the heavens and earth, but acts as a commentary on that

35 Ibid., 57.

36 Ibid., 63.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 67.

39 Ibid., 71–72, chapter 6.

40 One can infer that, since she notes that her ‘ūd teacher also taught reciters the modal system, this was done through singing, although the methods and texts used are not discussed. She does mention *tawāshih* and secular singing on page 159, but does not indicate that they are an educational tool for reciters to learn *maqām* theory. Her remarks raise the question of the role of singing *tawāshih* in relation to Qur’an recitation, providing another opportunity for further study. Ibid., xxv.

statement, as well as the whole section of text which the reciter now repeats.”⁴¹ The analysis of this example clearly demonstrates the impact of the reciter’s choice in this case; in this case, pausing and repeating “*allāh*” shapes the meaning of the text.

Generally speaking, the examples are organized within the frame of her discussion, which is a description of the sound of recitation and how it is shaped and conveys meaning in performance. Given that she is addressing performance aesthetics in terms of the ideal moment and sound, there is little contextual information on any of these transcriptions. Furthermore, the transcriptions are each very short, consisting only of a couple verses at a time, rendered in a few lines of written music. For example, on page 124 Nelson includes a transcribed example of a few verses recited by Shaykh Muhammad Siddiq al-Minshawi (she has previously discussed the rules and expectations about “jumping” within the text, and al-Minshawi “jumps” in this example). In any case, the example is included in a discussion on vocal register, and Nelson states the following points: “It is conventional in *mujawwad* recitation (and in the improvisatory style in general) to begin the performance in the lower register, gradually ascending to the upper register as the voice warms up, then, after exploring both registers, to return to the lower pitches to end the recitation.”⁴² The transcribed example, being fairly short, does not demonstrate this phenomenon, although the reader can gather that she has heard enough performances to be able to glean this principle of their typical shape. She goes on to say, “characteristic of the *mujawwad* style, however, are the sudden shifts in register from phrase to phrase... The reciter drops down to the lower register both to relax the tension and to rest his voice. As in the music tradition, the higher register is used for conveying tension,

41 Ibid., 117–119.

42 Ibid., 123.

excitement, and textual climax.”⁴³ These brief transcriptions provide a glimpse into the aesthetics of the *mujawwad* style performance, raising a number of questions about the sounds and context more broadly surrounding those moments. How has tension built up to this point? How far into the performance is this moment and what shape has it taken thus far? Has the audience been playing an active role?

Nelson’s work is pioneering in its extremely thorough consideration of the rules and ideals of Qur’an recitation; it raises many questions as potential avenues for future interrogation, some of which I take up in this dissertation. Regarding the musical transcriptions in general, Nelson’s work resides between disciplines; *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an* is an ethnomusicological work that also has a broader appeal, and not all readers will be able to follow her analysis regarding the points about music. Without the help of a recording or more verbal analysis the reader must know how to read music and have paid a great deal of attention to Nelson’s discussion of the characteristics and techniques shaping the sound of recitation in order to make sense of all her markings on the transcriptions (regarding timbre and other vocal elaborations). Although she points out that “the reciter who has mastered the *maqām* principle is more likely to be melodically responsive to the meaning,”⁴⁴ the analysis leaves aside the specifics of textual meaning for the most part. She asserts that melodic clarity is expected,⁴⁵ which would seem to indicate that those expectations come from the musical tradition, but what do they do for the discursive meaning?

Following Frederick Denny, Kristina Nelson, and William Graham, there have been more recent works on the topic of quranic recitation that are worth discussing here as well in

43 Ibid., 123–124.

44 Ibid., 126.

45 Ibid.

approaching my own understanding of and questions about the subject matter. With the exception of the introductory and concluding chapters, Anna Gade's *Perfection Makes Practice* is organized around "Qur'ānic practical abilities": memorizing, reading, expressing, and competing;⁴⁶ the work takes the Indonesian context as its purview, most specifically the system of education and training for the national recitation contest. The first three abilities (memorizing, reading, and expressing) are particularly interrelated, demonstrating broad claims that Gade makes across the work as a whole. Memorizing, reading, and competing reflect the three different directions that an Indonesian student of Qur'an recitation might take after mastering the rules of *tajwīd*: 1. comprehending the meaning of the text; 2. undertaking the project of memorizing the text; or 3. improving the aesthetics of recitation by studying the melodic modes associated with the practice (called *lagu* in Indonesian, meaning specifically the 7 *maqāmāt* used in competition, although Gade notes that she never heard the modes referred to by the Arabic term).⁴⁷

Gade takes a methodologically combined approach to her subject matter, through psychology, anthropology of emotion, and certain theories of ritual as process. This outlook leads to an emphasis on process and engagement with the text and one's abilities to recite it over long periods of time, indicating that Gade does not view quranic recitation through the lens of performance, which has shaped traditional studies of ritual. Citing the works of Catherine Bell and Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. in particular, she claims that traditional theories of ritual have been shaped by the focus on initiation rites, which understand ritual to be "a one-time affair," thereby overlooking those that may be viewed as processes taking place over longer periods of time, involving development and repetition. This type of traditional approach

⁴⁶ Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*, 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

to ritual “[downplays] the possibilities of religious enactments to effect change,” and excludes discussion of ritual as repeated practice taking place throughout time.⁴⁸

In *Perfection Makes Practice*, recitation is primarily an expression of ongoing piety, especially “in terms of developmental religious processes and projects of learning and feeling among Muslim groups and individuals” sustained over some period of time.⁴⁹ For most Indonesian Muslims, the most common experience of Qur’an recitation is not through appreciation of virtuosic recordings or live performances, but as it arises multiple times a day in salat. Traditional theorizations of ritual as performance are not appropriate in this case: “Qur’an recitation always occurs within a context, and to describe the recited Qur’an in modern Indonesia in terms of overly idealized performances dislocates it from realities of lived, historical systems and may distort the experience and everyday activities of lived practice.”⁵⁰

The work is interdisciplinary in its theoretical underpinnings, drawing on three main areas of research, all of which are outlined in its introductory chapter and recur throughout the analytical portions of the book (and Gade argues particular claims related to each one of these disciplines): anthropological theories of emotions, psychological learning studies, and studies of ritual, particularly Clifford Geertz’s work on “moods and motivations.”⁵¹ Gade emphasizes overall “how affect [is] deployed in direct engagement with the Qur’an and in understandings of self with respect to processes of Qur’anic learning, rehearsal, and repetition.”⁵² First, with respect to the anthropological theories of emotions, Gade notes that the field of religion in the human sciences does not have an adequate theoretical apparatus for explaining individual

48 Ibid., 122–123.

49 Ibid., 1.

50 Ibid., 10.

51 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*, 51.

52 Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*, 6.

motivation and development in “long-term, voluntary projects in the practice of religious piety such as the memorization and improved reading and recitation of the Qur’ān.”⁵³ Affect is understood as part of the category of emotion, which is “operative on both the levels of private experience and social structures,” and is separate from categories of cognition and embodiment.⁵⁴ Gade’s main sources in this discussion are Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey White, both anthropologists. In describing what this type of perspective means for her subject matter, Gade states: “When feeling is described as religious or even distinctively ‘Qur’ānic’, these are meant to be descriptors of an encompassing system rather than assertions of the essential character of particular feeling-states.”⁵⁵ To say that she sees these emotions as being an “encompassing system” and not “particular feeling-states,” meaning “emotion” as a state involving both private experience and social structures, thereby avoiding taxonomies and discussions of “categorizing” or “types” of emotions.

Secondly, Gade ties contemporary anthropological theories of emotions to the work of Clifford Geertz, particularly drawing on his famous definition of “‘religion’ as a symbolic ‘cultural system’ in terms of enduring ‘moods and motivations’.”⁵⁶ Gade singles out Geertz, along with Victor Turner as being influential scholars in theorizing “meaning” in religious practice. She is reconsidering Geertz’s approach not as for how being religious may impact an individual’s non-religious activity, but how affect may “be a dimension of religious lifeworlds that interacts with modes of action and thought as a semiautonomous third term.”⁵⁷

Finally, Gade turns to the field of psychology, more specifically the work of Jean Lave,

53 Ibid., 48.

54 Ibid., 50.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 51.

57 Ibid., 53.

who for her “[represents] a rapprochement between the fields of psychology and anthropology.”⁵⁸ Focusing on learning in this way allows Gade to discuss not only individual instances of performance but also process and ongoing engagement, particularly through education. As Gade tells us, Lave’s main claim is that “all action is essentially some form of developmental learning, and [that] people change over time with respect to repeated activity.”⁵⁹ For Gade’s purposes, this means particularly that people will change over time not only with respect to the message of the quranic text, but also in terms of their ability to read it.

The approach to quranic recitation as process (rather than performance) is particularly germane to the context of Indonesia in the mid-1990s, when Gade completed her research, which was a moment of resurgence in religious practice (which she points out is connected to “a transnational phenomenon of ‘Islamic awakening’”⁶⁰), featuring the Qur’an in particular as “a key focus of Islamist, nationalist, and developmentalist programs.”⁶¹ The Muslims of this movement sought the ability to correctly and beautifully recite the Qur’an, and this project constitutes an ongoing process of learning and maintenance of knowledge, also “widely understood to be a program for further religious inspiration.”⁶² Qur’an recitation in 1990s Indonesia was seen as a project of *da‘wa* (call) meant to cultivate continued piety, and as such it is not a practice for isolated performance. Gade ultimately concludes that the understanding of quranic recitation competitions as *da‘wa* is what has prevented most criticism of the practice.⁶³

As Gade notes, she completed her research in the midst of a moment of dramatic

58 Ibid., 54.

59 Ibid., 55.

60 Ibid., 1.

61 Ibid., 1–2.

62 Ibid., 3.

63 Ibid., 241.

change in Indonesian Qur'an recitation, bringing her analysis into conversation with change in understandings and modes of religion over the course of Indonesian history: "With the adaption of previous patterns of feeling and practice, a new affective system of Qur'anic learning and performance was taking hold, evident in the stated evaluations of the performance styles." The older style featured slow recitation and an aesthetic of sadness or weeping (*huzn*) and was particularly associated with women. As Gade's subjects in a women's recitation circle described to her, the older style was associated with their memories of their mothers and grandmothers reciting the Qur'an and weeping. But as they also put it, "times have changed" and the older style was receding into the past as a newer style became more popular.⁶⁴

The newer style corresponded to the aesthetics and demands of the rapidly developing contest system; it is associated with "self-evaluation and alert, energetic engagement that inspires the self just as it may also inspire others."⁶⁵ The ideal of alertness translates to the sonic level as a faster tempo and energy that would particularly help the recitation grab the attention of others, tying to the idea of *da'wa*. In contrast, the old style was seen as boring and disaffected, indicating a low level of engagement with the text. The new sound of the recited Qur'an was linked to a new affect or system of emotion.

Gade correspondingly describes two types of Qur'an pedagogy that were present at the time of her research, corresponding to the aforementioned styles of recitation, being "traditional" (also referred to as "Baghdadi") and "modern."⁶⁶ The "traditional" or Baghdadi style of education begins with teaching students the Arabic alphabet and making them spell

64 Ibid., 35.

65 Ibid., 36.

66 "Traditional" and "modern" are the Indonesian terms for these styles of learning, not descriptors applied by Gade; she places the words in scare quotes. Ibid., 114.

out individual words. The “modern” style also starts with the alphabet, but skips the spelling out of terms.⁶⁷ The affective distinction between the two systems is based on ideas of speed versus depth. The “modern” style teaches children more rapidly, and proponents of that system see the “traditional”/Baghdadi mode as being slow and boring. Proponents of the “traditional”/Baghdadi style, on the other hand, see their method as imparting deeper knowledge of the text.⁶⁸

The chronology of this change does not necessarily appear in a clear linear trajectory in Gade’s work, particularly as it concerns the prevalence and influence of Egyptian cassette recordings. This lack of a clear chronology may be a result of the fact that the work is dealing with processes taking place in human culture that, although they were occurring rapidly, still took place over time, and furthermore, that she conducted her research in a variety of locations and institutions in Indonesia. For example, on page 102 she mentions that cassette recordings were not typically featured as tools for memorization, not because teachers disapproved, but rather because most students did not have access to them. (She makes a similar statement on page 191.) A few pages later, however, she notes that “a sound-centered perspective...explains how Indonesians themselves actually teach and learn *tajwīd*, whether for the beginner or at advanced levels, in which instruction often takes the form of referencing the (recorded) recitations of others, usually Egyptian *qārī*s.”⁶⁹ This apparent contradiction may be the result of Gade describing a moment of rapid change in the affect (and correspondingly, the sound) of the recited Qur’an, as in the 1990s this change was taking place through “acceptance of melody types heard in performances of the recited Qur’an in Egypt.”⁷⁰ These models were coming to

67 Ibid., 115.

68 Ibid., 117.

69 Ibid., 126.

70 Ibid., 164.

represent an orthopraxy, as she claims, or what Indonesians thought was the right way to perform and practice the recited Qur'an.

One remaining question that arises (but is not addressed) in *Perfection Makes Practice* is that of the discursive meaning of the quranic text: meanings and even sounds of words. The chapter on memorization touches on this issue, through discussion of the nature of the quranic text and particular aspects of it that make memorization extremely difficult. In discussing the poetics and poetic treatment of the text, Gade directs the reader to the works of Roman Jakobson and Michael Sells, particularly as Sells defines—citing Jakobson—“‘sound figures’ in the Qur’ān as ‘extended acoustical patterns that take on semantic, emotive associations of ‘charges’”.”⁷¹ She goes on to point out that Sells’ work demonstrates that “each section of a *surah* has its own mood and affective style, determined by both semantics and syntax...The Qur’ān complements lexical content with its expressive syntax, such as in the phrasing of *āyahs* and their length and rhythm, especially in the ‘early revelations’ of Mecca.”⁷² She brings up several examples of mood or affect in the early suras, in each case defining those affects not only in terms of the sounds of the words but also their discursive meanings. This would seem to imply that the Qur’an generates its own affective charges partially through its sound and also through the discursive meaning (achieved through poetics, syntax, etc). As always, the role of the recited text in the lives of believers who do not speak Arabic poses a particular challenge to the importance of the discursive content of the text,⁷³ but I would argue that this point is only part of the equation. Even as it is recited, the text is still shaped by language that necessarily has meaning on a discursive level in addition to the other levels or registers of

71 Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, 2nd ed (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2007); Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*, 92.

72 Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*, 92–93.

73 *Ibid.*, 116.

experience Gade describes.

The most recent monograph on Qur'an recitation at this point is from Anne Rasmussen, an ethnomusicologist; in this work she focuses on recitation in Indonesia, similarly to Gade.⁷⁴ As an ethnomusicologist, she is concerned with situating the sound, production, and experience of Qur'an recitation within the context of religious sound (music most specifically, but also the soundscape of modern Indonesia) on the archipelago more generally. Sound provides her with an angle from which she can address the ongoing Islamization of Indonesia, as this process both reflects and reproduces the "indigenization of the religion in the region."⁷⁵ She asserts that those women who are trained in the skills of recitation or music-making and subsequently participate in the production of the religious soundscape of Indonesia are thereby associated with the country's learned elite.

Music was initially Rasmussen's entrée to scenes and individuals associated with Qur'an recitation, but these practices also led her to discover genres of religiously inflected music that are often performed at the same events and by the same individuals who recite the Qur'an. This genre of the Islamic musical arts is known in Malay (and throughout Rasmussen's study) as *seni musik Islam*, which Rasmussen describes as a diverse combination of musical styles, genres, and aesthetics, all characterized by fusion, drawing on both indigenous and foreign (from various regions, including the Arab world, India, Turkey, and other locations) instruments and modal systems.⁷⁶ Her analysis maps the institutional contexts and practices in Indonesia that foster and produce not only recitation and reciters, but also *seni musik Islam* more generally. Rasmussen's focus on Qur'an recitation demonstrates the diverse and tolerant

74 Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*.

75 *Ibid.*, 5.

76 *Ibid.*, 14–15.

character of the soundscape of Islam in Indonesia, demonstrating that the taboo about music and religion that is often associated with the Arab world does not translate to the Indonesian case. She argues that the place and culture of Arab lands are domesticated and represented via the diverse medium of *seni musik Islam*. Through this process, the Arab or Middle Eastern aesthetic denotes “the homeland of Islam and, as such, a site of uncontested religious authenticity” in such a way that also reflects distinctly Indonesian concerns. Rasmussen understands this process as one of ongoing pastiche or bricolage.⁷⁷ With regard to women in particular, she asserts that their participation in musical expressive culture is rooted in Indonesian tradition, rather than imported with foreign (i.e., western) modes of feminism.⁷⁸ Their religious and musical practices are on one hand “modern,” while also local and traditional, as the particular case of her ethnography reveals.

In this work, Rasmussen takes a variety of points of view with regard to Qur’an recitation. In chapter 2 (“Hearing Islam in the Atmosphere”), she focuses on the sound of the Qur’an and other aural/oral religious practices that make up the public soundscape of Indonesia, highlighting the sensory experience. Although she states that both the affect and meaning of oral texts are important, in this chapter she minimizes the role of the literal meanings, saying about the *takbīr* (“the repeated reciting or singing of the laudation ‘God is greater’”⁷⁹, “*Allāhu akbar*”) in particular:

Obviously, as a text-based performance, there is a language of, in Sells’s words, “great lyricism and beauty.” But as is the case for all language we hear in the comings and goings of our day, our perception may not always prioritize the meaning of the text. Rhythm, cadence, range, timbre, breath, silence, melody, and intensity are some of the other elements involved in the hearing process because experiencing the performance of religious language entails far more

77 Ibid., 197.

78 Ibid., 169–170.

79 Ibid., 40.

than simply digesting text.⁸⁰

In the discussion that follows, Rasmussen continues to focus on the experience of hearing religious texts and music and how it can “[activate] kinesthetic memories” recalling prayer or, more generally, the rhythms of ritual life.⁸¹ In this way, the experience of hearing recalls the body’s gestures normally associated with that sound, such as the motions of prayer.

The sound of the Qur’an (and other oral religious practices such as the call to prayer, *takbīr*, *dhikr*, etc.) is a welcome part of the Indonesian soundscape thanks to the cultural value of *ramai*, or “busy noisiness.”⁸² The sound of noisy human commotion and activity is valued in Indonesian daily life. Particularly Islamic shapes of this noisy soundscape encourage communal piety and participation of those who may not otherwise be able to attend communal events and *dakwa* (bringing new people to the faith, or those who have fallen away—the Indonesian translation of *da‘wa*).⁸³ Citing the 2004 work edited by Veit Erlmann, *Hearing Cultures*,⁸⁴ Rasmussen claims that as these sounds are heard time and time again throughout the life cycle, they absolutely have a biography.⁸⁵

In chapter 3 (“Learning Recitation: The Institutionalization of the Recited Qur’an”) Rasmussen turns to the production of reciters and their performances and how these practices relate to Indonesian culture more generally. Rasmussen describes the processes and ideas behind learning to recite in such a way that many of the details echo those of 1970s-1980s Egypt, as described by Kristina Nelson.⁸⁶ Of course, the Egyptian recordings are internationally

80 Ibid., 41.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., 44–45.

83 Ibid., 50–51.

84 Veit Erlmann, ed., *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

85 Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 52.

86 Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*, 1985.

well known, and as Rasmussen mentions, many of her subjects have studied in Arab countries, particularly Egypt and Syria, and several famous Egyptian reciters have visited Indonesia to teach and perform. What is new and unique to Rasmussen's work among the handful on Qur'an recitation is that she draws on a variety of contexts for discussing the education and experience of recitation, including more private events such as the ritual called *khatam al-Qur'an* (where thirty women recite the entire Qur'an simultaneously), *hafla al-Qur'an* (an event where the Qur'an is performed among friends and family who are connoisseurs), and institutional sites such as an Islamic boarding school (Pondok Pesantren al-Qur'an al-Falah in West Java), Institut Ilmu al-Qur'an (in Jakarta, where Dra. Haja Maria Ulfah is a lecturer and administrator), and the Training Center for professional reciters preparing for competitions.⁸⁷

Rasmussen pays a great deal of attention to the use of melody vis-à-vis the *maqāmāt*, which in all cases mentioned in her work shape the expectations for the use of pitch in recitation. The conceptualization of the *maqāmāt* in these cases very much resembles that of their use in improvised musical performances: they are not conceived of as scales or intervals, but rather how they tend to appear as specific motives and melodies. On one hand, the rules of *tajwīd* regulate the correct and consistently fixed nature of the text. On the other, melodic practices are much less clearly articulated, as the melody is created by the performer "in the course of performance."⁸⁸ Spontaneity is the melodic ideal that is intimately connected to the divine nature of the text: "to practice a verse of the Qur'an over and over with precisely the same melodic phrase leans toward fixing the text with a tune. Should these musical lines come

⁸⁷ Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 74–75.

⁸⁸ Here she notes that in using the phrase "in the course of performance," she refers to the following well known volume on improvisation: Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell, eds., *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 79 and 88.

out the same way repeatedly in performance, it might be difficult to believe in the divinity of their source.”⁸⁹ Here she mirrors Kristina Nelson’s assertion that the melody of quranic recitation must always be spontaneously generated.⁹⁰

In order to learn the *maqām* system, however, reciters will first “practice predictable models”: *tawāshīḥ* (plural of *tawshīḥ*, synonymous with *muwashshah*: a strophic post-classical genre of poetry and corresponding songs). By emulating fixed performances, reciters internalize the workings of the *maqāmāt*, ultimately learning to embrace the ideal of “nonfixity” in performance. Rasmussen relates this idea of nonfixity to Ali Jihad Racy’s description in his work on Arab music of *maqāmāt* as being “compositionally neutral,” meaning that the modes are not bound to any particular melody.⁹¹ Racy claims (when speaking specifically about the Qur’an) that “tuneless music allows the sacred words themselves to structure the performance as well as to accommodate the desirable melodic embellishments of the talented reciter.”⁹² The improvisatory nature of the melody protects the performance of the sacred text from being fixed to a particular human composition.

As for the specific musical ideas of *mujawwad* style performance, most of what Rasmussen relates was taught to her by the well-known Indonesian reciter and teacher, Dra. Maria Ulfah. The details generally correspond to those related by Kristina Nelson with regard to the Egyptian tradition. Rasmussen points out that, according to Ulfah, while performances must begin and end in *maqām bayyātī*, and although many never stray from that initial mode, there does need to be a melodic sense of “going somewhere” and “doing something” in order

89 Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 88.

90 Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*, 1985, 168–169.

91 Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Ṭarab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 97; Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 88–89.

92 Cited in Rasmussen, 89; Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World*, 97, n. 26.

for *bayyātī* to be *bayyātī*.⁹³ Included with the description of the *maqām* and its use is a list of its characteristic phrases and movements, emphasizing different pitches and tetrachords within the mode.⁹⁴ Rasmussen provides her readers with the text of the *tawshīh* through which she learned *maqām bayyātī*, in both transliterated Arabic and translated into English.⁹⁵ She does not describe how this text might be used as a pedagogical tool in learning the characteristics of *maqām bayyātī*, however. It is a short poem of only 11 lines, and there are a number of questions about the study of *tawāshīh* that Rasmussen leaves open; is a reciter meant to make it through all 6 melodic motives described on only these 11 lines of text? Would a student practice one motive throughout the 11 lines the poem? She notes that melodies of *tawāshīh* are fixed, and yet that they also are good pedagogical tools for learning recitation because they are not bound to the rules of *tajwīd*, thereby allowing more free elaboration and “textual stretching.”⁹⁶ How many melodic motives of a particular *maqām* might be taught through one poem?

Following the discussion of *tawāshīh*, Rasmussen describes how her studies moved on to focus on verses of the Qur’an. The first step is to “apply” the melodies of the *tawāshīh* to a few short verses, repeating this application for all the main *maqāmat*. Here Rasmussen notes that her teachers said that the shorter suras, which are known as those most commonly memorized and recited by amateurs, are not the best choices for *mujawwad* recitation since the lines are too short to allow for extended melodic development.⁹⁷ After the student learns the application of *maqāmat* and their characteristic phrases (“where they go and what they should

93 Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 95–96.

94 *Ibid.*, 96–97.

95 *Ibid.*, 98–99.

96 *Ibid.*, 99.

97 *Ibid.*, 101.

do”), they typically learn a longer set of verses that allow them to traverse through several *maqāmat*.⁹⁸ For Rasmussen these verses consisted of *Sūrat al-Furqān* 63-77, a single recitation of which lasts 10 minutes, she notes. She provides an 8-page transcription of Maria Ulfah’s “model recitation” that she recorded in their classes, which includes, in addition to a complete musical transcription of pitch and rhythm, text written below the staves, notes on *maqām* and sub-*maqām* (i.e., which part of the *maqām* was being emphasized with its characteristic melodic motives), and occasional comments from Ulfah. This transcription shows pitch and melody (in western notation), approximate rhythm (although the precise tempo is a bit unclear. Rasmussen notes that the full recitation of *al-Furqān* verses 63-77—the verses transcribed in her work—takes over ten minutes, but the precise duration of the notes or even time spent on single verses is not indicated.), and words and verses (as in where one verse ends and another begins). There are points where Dra. Ulfah pauses to comment on some aspect of the performance, such as saying she is going to change *maqām*, announcing which *maqām* she is in, or describing the shape of the melodic line; these comments are included and translated. Although she notes breaks in the performance with breath marks above the staves, the lengths of pauses are not noted.

There is no analysis of the transcription outside of the information that appears on it. This fact partially reflects the more general critiques and arguments Rasmussen is making in the book, which I have outlined above. For this work, quranic recitation is significant as it produced and reproduces—along with genres of religious music—Islamic practices in Indonesia and the ongoing Islamization of the archipelago. As a result of this approach, Rasmussen’s analysis of quranic recitation (both in the transcription and the book more generally) does not

98 Ibid., 102.

deal with the meaning of the text. This is also a result of the critique of the western focus on written learning and the “prestige of literacy” (which she mentions on page 72 and I discussed above). On one hand, the recent shift in Western Islamic Studies scholarship away from textual meaning and modes of understanding does emphasize an area of experience (understanding, and mode of authority) that is had previously neglected, as the scholarship focused solely on fixed texts, an emphasis or mode of understanding that may not necessarily be present in the tradition itself.

The most recent work available on Qur’an recitation is from Michael Frishkopf,⁹⁹ an ethnomusicologist whose main research interests focus on Sufism, music and performance. His 1999 dissertation, *Sufism, Ritual, and Modernity in Egypt: Language Performance as an Adaptive Strategy* is based on over five years spent conducting fieldwork in Egypt.¹⁰⁰ “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt” is his only published work that focuses specifically on Qur’an recitation; the rest of his research is on various issues Sufism and music, with a focus on “the sounds of Islam.” This chapter on Qur’an recitation thus demonstrates in-depth knowledge of issues in modern Egyptian life acquired over the five years he spent in Egypt. Perhaps as result of the long period of research, many of the points about Egyptian ideology and perceptions of Qur’an recitation are presented as composites or general facts, rather than through specific anecdotes or pieces of evidence; in terms of presentation, in this way the work is very similar to that of Kristina Nelson. His knowledge of the history and development of Qur’an recitation in Egypt comes for the most part from

99 Michael Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 75–114.

100 Michael Frishkopf, “Sufism, Ritual, and Modernity in Egypt: Language Performance as an Adaptive Strategy” (Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 1999).

Nelson's work. *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* then provides historical background for Frishkopf's main claim, which is that since 1985 a new style of Qur'an recitation has developed in Egypt, which not only represents new modes of piety and religious authority, but also the participation of Qur'an recitation in the ongoing struggle to define Islam.

The main sources cited in the chapter (besides Nelson's work) include traditional ones—both of a historical nature (including hadith collections and legal treatises) and contemporary (written discourse, both in print and online, on the Qur'an and its recitation in modern Egypt, including Egyptian reformers from the 19th century on), semiotic theory (Saussure), and personal conversations with the former head of the Censor for Artistic Works Dr. Ali Abu Shadi, and state documents related to SonoCairo, the official producer of sound media in Egypt. The main question guiding the work is, “print, recorded and broadcast media facilitate an ongoing ideological debate about Islam—its nature and its normative social role—featuring a wide variety of discursive positions. What is the role of Qur'anic recitation...within this debate?”¹⁰¹ Frishkopf is therefore primarily concerned with relating Qur'an recitation to larger processes of social and religious change in contemporary Egypt rather than describing the details of its aesthetics or performance practice. He connects this inquiry to ideas of fixity and fluidity within the recited text, noting that the fact that the text itself is fixed might suggest that it cannot participate in the aforementioned debate. However, because “*tilawa* allows significant scope for variation and stylistic variety,” it has a fluid dimension that opens up the possibility of participation in discourse.¹⁰² Finally, Frishkopf is dealing with Qur'an recitation particularly on cassettes, which means he is treating it as performance, a one-time event,

101 Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” 75.

102 Frishkopf uses the term *tilāwa* throughout the chapter to refer to Egyptian quranic recitation, as is done in Egypt, he notes. Ibid.

rather than a process of development of personal piety through education as we saw with Anna Gade. He does examine the performances within the larger context of their own history and the social and religious change that has taken place in Egypt in the latter half of the 20th century. This understanding of objects of recitation as performance is partially due to his reliance on Nelson’s work on the history of recitation in Egypt, but also because of the prevalence of recitation on cassette as a type of public performance in modern Egypt, particularly as it is produced and subsequently reproduces larger ideologies. Cassette technology, according to Frishkopf, is tied to the history and circulation of Qur’an recitation in Egypt, enabling the “new ideological distinction between ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Saudi’ *tilawa* styles,” with the Saudi-style recitation in turn both producing and participating in the new style of “reformist-revivalist Islamic ideology.”¹⁰³

In his analysis of recitation itself, Frishkopf isolates specific variables that he isolates across recordings of the Qur’an that distinguish one performance from another. These variables are divided into three realms: sonic (timbral, tonal, temporal, and dynamic), textual (setting, text pacing, text selection, phonetics), pragmatic (context, status—particularly of the reciter himself—, presentation, and audience), and recorded media variables (medium, sound effects, cover graphics, production, distribution, and use).¹⁰⁴ Within this scheme of fixed and fluid variables a distinctively “Saudi” style (Frishkopf always makes this designation with scare quotes) of recitation emerges, and “by accumulating a distinctive set of meanings within the symbolic system of *tilawa* styles, becomes ideologically activated, powerfully promoting a set of discursive positions collectively comprising a reformist-revivalist Islamic ideology prevalent

103 Ibid., 76.

104 Ibid., 78–79.

in Egyptian society today.”¹⁰⁵ That is to say that through manipulation of these fixed and fluid variables a relatively consistent sound and style has emerged, and that aesthetic is linked to a reformist-revivalist ideology.

Frishkopf describes the new Saudi style as being characterized by less melodic elaboration and *tarab*-like repetition than the Egyptian *mujawwad* recitation. The tempo is faster but the vocal elaboration does tend to be more melismatic. It is perceived as being more direct and plaintive.¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting that these are very similar terms to those that Anna Gade uses to describe the new style of recitation popular in Indonesia, which would seem to suggest that as recordings of recitation proliferate across the globe, that global availability has led to a unification of aesthetics or style rather than a diversification. According to Frishkopf, one distinctive marking of Saudi-style recitation is the sound of reverberation of the voice within a large space (whether this effect is authentic or added in the studio), whereby “the reciter’s voice becomes an index of the [large Saudi] mosques themselves, sounding sacred space ... as well as the Saudi Arabian linguistic accent.”¹⁰⁷ He points out that these features of Saudi style “express a direct relation to God— affectively coloured with fear, awe, sorrow, repentance and hope of forgiveness—and are strongly linked to Arabia. Through them, Saudi style points to the New Islam with its literalist, anti-intercessionist, Arabia-centric and eschatological emphases.”¹⁰⁸ He goes on to say, however, that there are other sonic contrasts between the two styles (Saudi and Egyptian) that do not necessarily map onto ideology, such as

105 Ibid., 86.

106 Ibid., 100.

107 It is worth noting, however, that the use of reverb effect is extraordinarily common in recordings of all genres being produced in the Middle East right now, and this effect may simply reflect the recording aesthetic that currently dominates the region, rather than more specifically evoking Saudi spaces, as Frishkopf claims. Ibid., 101.

108 Ibid.

the Saudi preference for “a higher tessitura and a preference for *maqam Rast* (rather than *Bayyati*).”¹⁰⁹ These features are the results of local traditions that do not develop out of relations to ideology, but come to represent them through repeated usage over time.

The development and influence of Saudi-style recitation in Egypt, as it came to be associated with new ideological meanings, in turn forced a new set of meanings onto the older *mujawwad* style recitation. Frishkopf’s definitions and descriptions of these new meanings evidences the use of semiotic theory in his analysis. He describes Saudi style recitation through adjectives in charts, and establishes an opposing set of descriptors that correspondingly apply to *mujawwad* recitation. While the Saudi style is characterized by a plaintive mode of expression, and nasal vocal timbre in the intermediate vocal range with relatively little melodic elaboration and modulation, and older Egyptian *mujawwad* style can be described in opposition to this as being characterized by *huzn* and *ṭarab*, with a wide vocal range featuring heavy melodic elaboration and modulation (the chart on pages 104-105 of Frishkopf’s chapter opposes descriptors of each style in every variable area of performance). In this way, the type of changes in both modes of piety and aesthetics of sound bear great resemblance to those described by Anna Gade.¹¹⁰ In terms of meanings generated and associated with both types, these are also described and opposed in a chart,¹¹¹ wherein the Saudi style is anti-musical, associated with the Saudi country and economy, and the Qur’an-centered new Islamism; the Egyptian *mujawwad* style is therefore musical, associated with the Egyptian country and economy, and is performer-centered. A third column in the chart isolates the differences between the two ideologies and associations, including the issue of shari‘a and the “beauty of

109 Ibid.

110 Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice*.

111 Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” 106.

pure Islam” (wherein music is considered to be forbidden), the holy sites of Mecca and Medina (signifying the differences between the two countries in terms of both geography and prominence in Islamic history and ritual), oil wealth (the difference between their economies), the transcendence of the Qur’an (as the difference between Qur’an-centered and performer-centered recordings), and so on.

The charts of descriptors and differences are helpful in isolating and discussing individual variables that distinguish Saudi and Egyptian recitation, and what these differences have come to signify in the struggle to define Islam in contemporary Egypt; the analysis of melody and mode is very brief. Frishkopf chooses to present transcriptions on musical staves, but rather than using noteheads, indicates durations and pitches with horizontal lines, with time indicated below each staff. The transcriptions do not include accidentals or variations in pitch; instead he introduces each example by stating what *maqām* it is in, assuming the reader is able to understand how this shapes the pitches presented on the staff. This style of transcription presents pitch and duration without forcing the transcriber to estimate duration within a musical framework, possibly imposing a musical rhythm or meter. The meanings of the words are not necessarily part of the argument in this chapter. Rather, Frishkopf’s goal is to relate the aesthetics and sound of recitation to changes in modes of piety, a point that does not rely on the discursive meaning of the quranic text.

Conclusion

In the last 35 years, new approaches to and visibility of the study of quranic recitation have developed in the ways in which I have described above. Beginning with calls to attention to a previously neglected area of study (from Frederick Denny and William Graham), the

works that followed can roughly be classified by the authors' approaches to and understanding of their subject matter: performance-based approaches (such as the works Kristina Nelson and Michael Frishkopf, focusing on the case of Egypt in particular) are primarily concerned with recitation as a one time affair, demonstrating a high level of expertise and always aspiring to a certain aesthetic ideal. Scholars such as Anna Gade and Anne Rasmussen, both focusing on recitation in the Indonesian context, understand their subject matter in light of long term processes, placed within the context of Indonesian history and the Islamization of the archipelago, but also on a personal level, as development of pious practices, and on an institutional level through education and training leading up to the national recitation contest.

At the same time, this same period of scholarship has witnessed a turn to attention to the Qur'an as a literary object, focusing on the text's form, structures, and aesthetics in shaping its presentation of its meanings to readers and listeners. The relationship between these two lines of inquiry—between the recited Qur'an and the literary Qur'an—has yet to be explored. In this dissertation, I ask what the ways are in which listeners may understand the relationships between the sound, experience, and words of the recited Qur'an. Through a combination of ethnographic and hermeneutic methods, I explore the complex web of possibilities for relationships between these different understandings and experiences of the Qur'an. In doing so, I put aside any questions of the truth-value of the Qur'an's claims, or any individual's claims about the divine nature of the quranic text. Instead, my aim is to explore the ways in which human beings experience and understand the relationships between sound and the words of a sacred text.

Chapter 2: Nondiscursive Meaning and Context in the Performance and Experience of the Recited Qur'an

The recent decades have witnessed a turn to the sensual in the literature of several academic disciplines—particularly anthropology, ethnomusicology, and history. This recent and growing body of literature highlights, in the words of Veit Erlmann (in discussing the works of Michael Taussig¹ and Paul Stoller² most specifically, but in the way of introducing his 2004 edited volume, *Hearing Cultures* more generally):

One gains a clearer sense of the limitations and problems of the 'textual' paradigm and of the ways in which the senses might not only yield new and richer kinds of ethnographic data but, perhaps, more importantly, also force us to rethink a broad range of theoretical and methodological issues.³

In much of this recent literature, there is a recurring motif of signaling the particularly modern notion of the dominance of sight over all other realms of sense experience.⁴ The “ocularcentrism” of the modern west is pervasive; it has invaded life and thought to the extent that we are often unaware of our own assumptions and role in reproducing the dominance of sight over all other senses. Authors often note that vision, and the understanding of knowledge as acquired through this sense, has nearly come to eclipse our understanding of other realms of embodied experience; this assumption has been reproduced in much scholarly literature, and those authors most recently describing this phenomenon often call for development of sense-specific hermeneutics, in order to more carefully consider sense experience. Further in his

1 Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

2 Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*, Contemporary Ethnography Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

3 Veit Erlmann, “But What of the Ethnographic Ear? Anthropology, Sound, and the Senses,” in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 2.

4 Leigh Eric Schmidt argues that the currently dominant conceptualization of vision is something that has been constructed, and this is clearly shown through the historical processes associated with the American Enlightenment. Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

introduction to *Hearing Cultures*, Erlmann notes: “the rejection of a simplistic dichotomy between the eye as the quintessential modern sensory organ and hearing as some kind of pre- or antimodern mode of perception must be replaced by a more nuanced approach.”⁵ As Erlmann points out, acknowledging the dominance of vision over hearing is not sufficient; hearing requires its own specific type of approach, which cannot be taken for granted.

It is possible to argue that scholarship on the Qur’an in English and European languages has been driven by attention to the written word, the static, fixed text written on a page, in part because of the western idea of vision and reading as being the modern, rational way in which a scripture should be studied. In this scheme, western scholarship on the Qur’an is constructed and conducted according to the model of biblical scholarship. Even further, the visual bias of western scholarship on the Qur’an can be seen as symptomatic of a deeply embedded Eurocentrism. Although I draw here on the example of textual studies of the Qur’an, this Eurocentric prioritization of vision in relation to knowledge may be seen as closely linked to the development of the field of anthropology, and more generally, about the ways in which European or western scholars have thought about cultures other than their own. In his monograph, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*, Paul Stoller draws on his work with the Songhay people of Niger, in arguing that, although anthropology has developed as a visually-oriented discipline (until 1989, at least, the time of his writing), that in order to properly understand non-visually oriented practices and cultures, anthropologists must take a “sensual turn”⁶:

Like all human beings, anthropologists engage in the act of seeing. What differentiates anthropological seeing from other forms of seeing is that our ‘gaze’ is directed toward an ethnographic other. We talk to ethnographic others

5 Erlmann, “But What of the Ethnographic Ear? Anthropology, Sound, and the Senses,” 5.

6 Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, 38.

during fieldwork and attempt to make sense of what they say and do. Due to the centrality of fieldwork to the ethnographic enterprise, most anthropologists give their eyes and minds to the world of the other. Although anthropologists, like painters, lend their bodies to the world, we tend to allow our senses to penetrate the other's world rather than letting our senses be penetrated by the world of the other. The result of this tendency is that we represent the other's world in a generally turgid discourse which often bears little resemblance to the world we are attempting to describe.⁷

Although Stoller speaks most specifically of anthropology here, the point could be made of textual studies as well, given the extent to which reliance on vision has pervaded our culture; and it could be made particularly of studies of texts of the cultures of others. As he notes, "we are buried under the sediment of centuries of cultural empiricism."⁸ In the case of the development of quranic studies, one might argue that it has developed analogously to what Stoller describes, favoring the gaze upon the written text of the scripture over the experience of reciting or listening to it.

However, the traditional Islamic scholarship on the Qur'an has also devoted very little attention to the recited text. The centuries-long *tafsīr* tradition focuses almost entirely on line-by-line commentaries on the meaning of the text, using bodies of traditional historical knowledge and Arabic language to clarify the meanings of the words. The tradition of *tajwīd* obviously pays much more attention to the recitation of the text than does the realm of *tafsīr*, but is understood as a separate realm of study, and one that is conducted primarily in the oral domain. We cannot claim that the relegation of the Qur'an to the status of written text to be experienced visually is exclusive to western scholarship. *Tajwīd* has been less extensively addressed in the western scholarly tradition in part because of the implicit devaluing of the oral and aural; the written word can be seen and interpreted, and is implicitly associated with

7 Ibid., 39.

8 Ibid., 38.

the rational. The oral/aural on the other hand, is thereby implicitly devalued. Additionally, it is likely that *tajwīd* has not been extensively discussed in western scholarship as a result of a problem of access. Books of *tafsīr* can be read on one's own; a scholar cannot read independently and silently on *tajwīd*. *Tajwīd* manuals are available, but they do not provide all the necessary information for understanding the practice. In general they are meant to be used as an aid to learning with a teacher.

In light of the issues I describe above, in this chapter of the dissertation, I ask how we may examine the recited Qur'an as sensory experience, and in doing so, I argue that although it is on one level recitation of text, it may also be understood through the lens of nondiscursive meaning, as embodied experience (on the part of both the reciter and/or the listener). Understanding Qur'an recitation in this way helps us clarify the aspects of performance, hearing or listening, or experience more generally, that might otherwise be overshadowed by attention on the text itself. How we may understand the recited Qur'an in a way that can identify the wide range of contextual factors that may contribute to both its production and its reception? By defining Qur'an recitation as performance through process, we may better understand the networks of relationships between all layers and levels of context and background that may contribute to the moment of recitation (no matter the occasion, be it one-time or repeated occurrences taking place over long periods of time). And finally, in understanding the recited Qur'an in this way, I seek to account for the role of the listener as both a contributor to the performance of the recitation itself, but also to understand listening and listeners within their historically and culturally specific frames.

Qur'an Recitation as Performance

As I have noted in the introduction to this chapter, a number of recent ethnographers have noted that sensory experience must be studied and understood via specific hermeneutic tools, rather than simply labeling practices involving sound, smell, and so forth, as yet another text to be seen and studied silently. If we simply call the sound another kind of text, we neglect not only long-term processes and motivations on the part of students of recitation (as Anna Gade points out,⁹ and as I discuss in chapter 1 of this dissertation), but we also neglect aspects of Qur'an recitation beyond just its sound—occasion, trends in performance practice or aesthetics, choices and preferences on the parts of reciters and listeners, and the role of the listener, which is often key. If we define Qur'an recitation as ritual action, we gain a more holistic point of view, including both the performer and the listener, but also aspects of context, affect, and spontaneity that might not otherwise be addressed. But as Gade points out, we must proceed with caution in our conceptualization of ritual, in the case of the recited Qur'an. Given that she defines the subject of her study in *Perfection Makes Practice* quite broadly, temporally speaking—as the entire process of long-term education and development of piety—as she points out, theories of ritual that focus particularly on initiatory rituals do not suffice.¹⁰ Rather, for Gade, in addressing the motivations and transformations that undergird an individual's long-term devotion to a process of education and development of personal piety, the literatures of psychology and anthropology of emotion are ultimately more germane to her subject matter.

Gade directs us, in thinking about Qur'an recitation, to the importance of process in our conceptualization of religious ritual. Traditional theories of ritual, as she points out, have often

⁹ Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 122–123.

¹⁰ Ibid.

been developed with particular attention to rites of initiation, wherein the ritual serves as “a model of and for something other than itself”¹¹ She points out that this type of understanding brackets the learning as a separate process that builds up to and ends with the performance of the ritual; so what about long-term processes that don’t necessarily culminate in a single event—wherein the ritual may be take place repeatedly, as an integral part of an individual’s development in terms of learning, emotion, and religious life? And even further, how may we understand an event or practice that is not entirely pre-determined, but rather is necessarily spontaneous in some way? Qur’an recitation is a highly structured activity, but built into that structure is an imperative of spontaneity, with regard to certain aspects of the recitation, on the part of the individual. If we turn to recent theories of performance, there are many theories available that may provide us with a conceptual entree. As I mentioned in chapter 1 of this dissertation, a distinction that has arisen amongst existing English-language scholarship on Qur’an recitation is to what degree it is appropriate to think about recitation as performance. What might we mean when we refer to Qur’an recitation as performance—where does this vocabulary help us, and where are its limitations?

Since the 1970s, ethnographers from various disciplines have been developing a concept of performance as both an event and a process; examining some of these contributions can help us consider more broadly the concept of performance with respect to the recited Qur’an. To what extent is a theory of performance useful, particularly in helping us think about the role of nondiscursive meaning in the recited Qur’an? Some of the definitions of performance that have been proposed come from Milton Singer (who specializes in South Asian religion and ritual), Roger Abrahams and Richard Bauman (folklorists who emphasize the social aspects of

11 With these words in particular Gade is referring to Clifford Geertz. Ibid., 122.

performance), and Norma McLeod and Marcia Herndon (ethnomusicologists). The theories of these authors help illuminate multiple layers of context, performance as process, and cultural specificity raise many important questions and angles from which I may evaluate the recited Qur'an as performance.

In his 1955 essay, "The Cultural Pattern of Indian Civilization: A Preliminary Report of a Methodological Field Study," Milton Singer coins the term "cultural performance," which "include[s] what we in the West usually call by that name—for example, plays, music concerts and lectures. But [it] also include[s] prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals and all those things which we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the 'cultural' or artistic."¹² The cultural performances he describes are from the Hindu tradition and include sacred epics, plays, and concerts including devotional songs. These events simultaneously serve purposes of religious ritual and entertainment; so while they fit the more normative understanding of "performance" as an event conducted for spectators to view, likely for entertainment, they also bear religious significance, beyond that of entertainment alone. Singer views the performances as "encapsulating" Hindu culture for its participants and observers.¹³ The events he describes all feature "a definitely limited time span or, at least, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience and a place and occasion of performance."¹⁴

In describing these cultural performances, Singer asks how they are "interrelated so as to constitute 'a culture'?" and whether there are patterns in terms of structure of organization

12 Milton Singer, "The Cultural Pattern of Indian Civilization: A Preliminary Report of a Methodological Field Study," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (November 1955): 27.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

or occasions for the events.¹⁵ He reviews various levels of context related to the cultural performances: placement and use of music within the performance, patterns of occasion and purpose, location of the performance (i.e., in a temple, home, etc.), who is in the audience, asking how these contextual factors may be related to one another. For instance, he observes that performances of a more popular nature tend to take place in public halls with a diverse audience, versus performances of a strictly religious nature may be performed and attended only by priests, take place at temples, and serve a specific purpose for devotion to a particular god, or blessing.¹⁶

In their work, *Music as Culture*, ethnomusicologists Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod address Singer's concept of cultural performance and of what use it may be in an ethnographic study: "when a cultural performance takes place, elements of culture are presented to the carriers of that culture in highly symbolized forms, supposedly to demonstrate basic ideals and principles upon which society operates."¹⁷ Herndon argues that Singer's definition of cultural performance is problematic in its rigid distinction between performer and audience, requirement of clear stop and start times, and that he considers a performance to be a "conscious exhibition of an encapsulation of culture."¹⁸ Indeed, cultures are not sufficiently monolithic that they may be contained in their entirety in a single event, and furthermore, the perception of foreign cultures as exhibition encapsulating a truth and being rendered up for view is dangerously similar to the process of colonialism beginning in the nineteenth century, as described by Timothy Mitchell in his seminal *Colonising Egypt*.¹⁹ However, McLeod and

15 Ibid., 28.

16 Ibid., 28–29.

17 Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod, *Music as Culture*, 2nd ed (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1981), 43.

18 Marcia Herndon, "The Cherokee Ballgame Cycle: An Ethnomusicologist's View," *Ethnomusicology* 15, no. 3 (September 1971): 340.

19 Mitchell describes this process in general in the introduction to *Colonising Egypt*, and then demonstrates the

Herndon also point out that “Singer’s view is important in that it implies that highly formalized human behavior is a cultural focus and that it is probably symbolic and meaningful on several levels.”²⁰

Roger Abrahams and Richard Bauman both study verbal art as performance, focusing on social interaction of the participants.²¹ In this way performance is a “mode of expression and communication.”²² For Abrahams the audience plays a very important role as a part of the performance occasion.²³ He coins the term “pure performance,” referring to an “‘intensified (or stylized behavioral system,’ including ‘an occasion, a time, places, codes, and patterns of expectations’.”²⁴ Abrahams’ focus on the social nature of performance necessarily implies that more than one person must be involved, (in the words of Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod, describing Abrahams’ approach) “either in terms of two or more performers, or one performer with an audience.”²⁵ The logical conclusion of this is that rituals and acts of piety may only be called performances if they take place in some kind of a group setting. A personal act of piety or ritual performed by one person alone, for him or her self, cannot be called a performance, at

particular shape these ideas took in the construction of new political and social order in the Egyptian case. In the case of nineteenth century museums and exhibitions Mitchell describes this recreation of the orient as, “‘representation’: everything collected and arranged to stand for something, to represent progress and history, human industry and empire; everything set up, and the whole set-up always evoking somehow some larger truth.” (6) This fascination with the orient as museum continued as Europeans traveled to the Middle East, expecting to find this same organized reality, but what they discovered did not live up to this. My point in bringing in Mitchell is that Singer’s view of the oriental rite as it displays the cultural order is problematic in that it will always disappoint. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge Middle East Library (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

20 Herndon and McLeod, *Music as Culture*, 43.

21 Richard Bauman, “Verbal Art as Performance,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 77, no. 2 (June 1975): 290–311; Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (October 1990): 59–88; Richard Bauman, “The Theoretical Boundaries of Performance,” in *Proceedings of a Symposium on Form in Performance: Hard-Core Ethnography*, ed. Marcia Herndon and Roger Brunyate (Austin: Office of the College of Fine Arts, University of Texas, 1975), 28–44.

22 Gerard Béhague, “Introduction,” in *Performance Practice: Ethnomusicological Perspectives*, ed. Gerard Béhague, Contributions in Intercultural and Comparative Studies 12 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 4.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 4–5.

25 Herndon and McLeod, *Music as Culture*, 43–44.

least not in Abrahams' use of the term.

For Richard Bauman, the term performance is useful in the study of folklore as verbal art in that it "convey[s] a dual sense of artistic *action*—the doing of folklore—and artistic *event*—the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting—both of which are central to the developing performance approach to folklore."²⁶ This dual meaning encompasses the conventional understanding of the word performance (the artistic event), and also the new view of folklore as performance that is also communication. Bauman's approach to oral literature as performance is in part a reaction to prior focus on only the text of this literature as it may be of linguistic interest, at the expense of the aesthetic effect of the utterance. A performance-centered approach to oral literature will generate an accurate collection of texts in such a way that will distinguish this body of literature from other types of speech or communication.²⁷ Bauman singles out communication between performer and audience as the characteristic that defines performance: "Performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence... Thus conceived, performance is a mode of language use, a way of speaking."²⁸

In a later study on language and social life written with Charles L. Briggs, Bauman and Briggs point out that:

Performance...provides a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes. A given performance is tied to a number of speech events that precede and succeed it (past performances, readings of texts, negotiations, rehearsals, gossip, reports, critiques, challenges, subsequent performances, and the like). An adequate analysis of a single performance thus requires sensitive ethnographic study of how its form and meaning index a broad range of discourse types, some of which are not

26 Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," June 1975, 290.

27 Ibid., 291.

28 Ibid., 293.

framed as performance.²⁹

Here, Bauman and Briggs list a number of “speech events” that may precede or follow a performance; not all of these are germane to the case of the recited Qur’an as performance speech event, however, and highlighting these differences can help us better understand what we may mean when we call the recited Qur’an performance. While considering gossip as a performative speech event may be endemic to some contexts or situations, such as a study of lead opera singers, for example, the etiquette protocols or Qur’an recitation make this type of performance context an unlikely possibility. By this I am referring not only to the quranic injunctions against back-biting, but also the rules of *adab*—etiquette or proper behavior concerning Qur’an recitation. The traditional understanding of the status of the quranic text would make gossip preceding or succeeding its performance extremely unlikely.

However, the possibilities of past or subsequent performances, or even rehearsals, do offer possibilities for defining the performance of Qur’an recitation a bit more broadly than only the moment at which a reciter is producing sound, for example; we may define related speech events as “paraperformance.” To coin a term, paraperformance may be understood as being analogous to paratext, the word typically used to refer to materials or texts that precede or accompany a text (an introduction, dedication, front matter, and so on) and shape its reception and interpretation, and may end up being considered as part of the text itself, when broadly construed. The elements that may be considered paraperformance to a particular Qur’an recitation event would differ, depending on the type of recitation event under consideration. If we consider the type of recitation event with which Kristina Nelson is concerned in *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*—that is, a well-known reciter performing on a

29 Bauman and Briggs, “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life,” 2–3.

stage before an audience—paraperformative elements may include previous performances by that reciter, or previous instances of the reciter practicing the passages of text or the *maqāmāt* used in that particular performance, for example. But if we consider different types of recitation events, these elements may change. Take for example the idea of an individual reciting in prayer; we may understand the particular moment of recitation in relation to all previous and subsequent instances of individual recitation in prayer, and related thought or study. In opening up this type of recitation as a type of performance in this way, we may begin considering more long-term processes as related or contributing to any particular moment of recitation. The focus broadens from only the moment of actual recitation to include more external factors that, although not necessarily at the fore as the devotee is reciting, are integral to the event.

Looking beyond paraperformative speech events, we may return to Bauman’s ideas for help in thinking about context of performance events more generally. Bauman situates performance as formalized behavior within a context (here McLeod and Herndon quote passages from his work and comment on them):

I view...the act of performance as situated behavior, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts. Context is another way that performance is patterned in communities. Contexts may be identified as a variety of levels—in terms of settings, for example, the culturally-defined places where performance occurs. Institutions too (religion, education and politics) may be viewed from the perspective in which they do or do not represent context for performance within communities. Most important as an organizing principle in the ethnography of performance is the event (or scene or occasion) within which performance occurs.³⁰

As Bauman points out here, performance is always situated within a context, or multiple layers or types of context. These contexts, furthermore, contribute to the performance itself, and must

30 Bauman, “The Theoretical Boundaries of Performance,” 35.

be seen as such by the ethnographer, and it must also be understood that what constitutes context, and how it contributes to the performance event, is culturally-specific. McLeod and Herndon use Bauman's idea of context (with respect to music in particular), in making the point that music varies extensively from one society to another: "The realization that music is *not* a universal language, but that it differs markedly from one society to another is a first step. The secondary understanding, that the meaning of music differs radically from one society to another, is not far behind."³¹ Although their work focuses on musical occasions, their performance-based approach could be generalized and adapted for other types of performance events, particularly those involving sound, pitch, melody, and rhythm such as the recitation of the Qur'an.

In light of their declaration of cultural and social particularity of music and performance, Herndon and McLeod argue for an expanded understanding of context:

The concept of context is particularly helpful in the study of music, since the tendency, historically, is to emphasize only certain aspects of context. Viewed in the larger sense of the interweaving of parts within a whole, out of which a researcher may choose to investigate any sets of integumental relationships, the concept of context proves exceedingly valuable. Past tendency was to define parts of a culture's music in such terms as drunk songs, gambling songs, war songs, funeral songs, et cetera. This approach, while somewhat useful, breaks down immediately if one begins to study the ways in which a particular society classifies its own music.³²

It follows that if each culture has its own understandings of performance, ritual, or music, that what may be considered appropriate context also varies and it is best to cast the net wide, so to speak.

As Béhague points out, "the ethnography of musical performance should bring to light the ways non-musical elements in a performance occasion or event influence the musical

³¹ Herndon and McLeod, *Music as Culture*, 20–21.

³² *Ibid.*, 25.

outcome of a performance.”³³ It is not possible to isolate the sound of a performance as an entire “performance practice,” as there are many social and cultural contexts that have contributed to the process of the performance. Context is a broad concept, and it seems that McLeod and Herndon left it that way intentionally, because they continue into a section called “Levels of Context,” arguing that context can be defined in a number of ways, including physical context (where is the music performed?), social contexts (what is the immediate social context of the performance? But also what are the more long-term social issues tied up with this genre of music, its development, or its performers?), linguistic context (what is the language of this performance? What is the register of that language?), the occasion, and the individual. The questions about context bring up the relationship of the performance to its social arena: “the musical occasion, then, may be regarded as an encapsulated expression of the shared cognitive forms and values of a society, which includes not only the music itself but also the totality of associated behavior and underlying concepts. It is usually a named event, with a beginning and an end, varying degrees of organization of activity, audience/performances, and location.”³⁴

The theories I discuss above have been useful in considering religious practices similar to that of Qur’an recitation, as Mark Kligman has drawn on this literature in his work on the use of the *maqāmāt* in the liturgy of Syrian (Aleppan) Jews in Brooklyn.³⁵ Kligman describes his approach as having been shaped by recent (since the 1980s) developments in ethnomusicology that have turned attention to performance as process, rather than single

33 Gerard Béhague, ed., “Introduction,” in *Performance Practice: Ethnomusicological Perspectives*, Contributions in Intercultural and Comparative Studies, no. 12 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984), 7.

34 Herndon, “The Cherokee Ballgame Cycle,” 340.

35 Mark L. Kligman, *Maqām and Liturgy: Ritual, Music, and Aesthetics of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009).

event:

My approach is informed by recent ethnographic investigations that emphasize the 'process', the manner of performance, of a cultural event rather than just text or music. Seminal studies following this approach include the investigation of ritual by anthropologists...and the treatment of verbal performance by linguistic anthropologists... These studies focus on the nature of the performance of an event, the 'how', to derive a process. Ethnomusicologists closely follow this performative approach to uncover a musical process; these studies use the term 'ethnography of musical performance'... As Bruno Nettl explains, 'If ethnomusicological research of the 1980s is distinct from what went before, it is distinguished chiefly by an increased interest in the study of processes, and of music as process rather than simply as product. Perhaps one can say that there is now more interest in how things happen than in how things are'... The musical performance of an event, the process, rather than the music itself, becomes the focus of study. An emphasis on 'how things happen' allows not only for an inquiry of the various elements that constitute performance of the music but also an understanding of the creation and structure of music and ritual.³⁶

In many ways, Kligman's understanding of performance in a ritual context shares many elements in common with that of the recited Qur'an. As he points out early in his work, he conducted his research through a long-term process of participant-observation (supplemented by interviews and lessons), attending regularly occurring Sabbath services.³⁷ Much of the analysis that follows in *Maqām and Liturgy* represents a model of a typical Sabbath morning service, or the possibilities for different types of Sabbath morning services, based on extensive observation and participation in many services. In this way, Kligman's subject matter is similar to that of the recited Qur'an, not only in that it is a religious ritual that draws on the *maqām* system, but also in that it is a ritual that occurs regularly (as does Qur'an recitation, in many ways, as I will explain), rather than as a "one time occurrence," and that through a holistic point of view and understanding of the event itself as or within process, we may broaden our understanding of what exactly comprises the event itself.

When we begin comparing quranic recitation in light of the issues I have described

36 Ibid., 13-14.

37 Ibid., 6-8.

above, we are immediately confronted with the diverse range of possibilities in terms of the type of practice. To some extent this has already been made apparent in chapter 1 of this dissertation, as I have discussed the differences between how Kristina Nelson and Anna Gade understand their subject matter, and how this understanding relates to the method of the research in each case. Nelson's idea of Qur'an recitation as performance is appropriate in her case, given that she is studying a variety of recitation that is often presented in a format or context that very much resembles an event that we may describe as being a performance: eg., a play or a concert, wherein a performer is before an audience, presenting some sort of material or actions or sounds for that audience to behold and to hear. While she does address the process through which one might become a reciter at the level of those found in mid-late-twentieth century Egypt, Nelson's work is very much driven by description of Qur'an recitation as an ideal—as a single, attainable thing.³⁸ Anna Gade, on the other hand, is concerned with a much more broad subject matter in a number of ways. While she is concerned with an ideal of recitation, in that she addresses the system of education in Indonesia that drives the national Qur'an recitation competition, the event of the competition is not her primary subject matter. Rather, it is the motivations and processes described by individuals who are engaged in long-term processes of devotion. Further consideration of Qur'an recitation brings to mind even more possibilities for context, and corresponding definition of the subject matter. With whom are we concerned—a reciter, a listener, or a consumer? Certainly many individuals move between these spheres on a regular basis. Someone who may recite regularly in prayer may also, at other points, be a listener when they play a favorite cassette of recitation, or search online.

38 Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 52–100.

Turning back to the theories of performance discussed above, how may we use these to consider the range of possibilities for understanding Qur'an recitation as performance process? Milton Singer's definition of the "cultural performance" is useful in that it broadens the potential subject of a performance-based ethnographic approach to include religious ritual. Although his definition does include events of a religious nature, it is developed especially with respect to those that also serve the purpose of entertainment (a sacred play, for example); this is not always the case with the recited Qur'an, as the types of situational examples I have mentioned above demonstrate.

If we recall Singer's description of what defines a performance—"a definitely limited time span or, at least, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience and a place and occasion of performance"³⁹—we can discuss the features of quranic recitation that may or may not apply. Obviously, a particular recitation is not necessarily limited in terms of total amount of time—some of the more florid *mujawwad*-style reciters may take a surprisingly long time to get through a small amount of text, with long silences, elaborations, and repetitions. However, one recitation does have a clearly defined beginning and end. Given that reciting is a ritual activity and the reciter is required to be in a state of ritual purity, the time of reciting is distinguished from normal time—certain circumstances must be met, and then the ritual (or performance) may begin. This is also marked by the reciter saying the *ta'awwudh* and *bismillah* ("*a'ūdhu bi-llāhi mina sh-shayṭāni r-rajīm bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*") before beginning, and likewise the formula at the end, "*ṣadaqa llāhu l-ʿaẓīm.*" When we consider the act of recitation in this way, the event itself is clearly demarcated in time. Listening is a bit more complex when we consider the possibility of

39 Singer, "The Cultural Pattern of Indian Civilization," 25.

recordings. While playing a recording of Qur'an recitation does take place within defined temporal parameters (either it is on or it is off, there is no in-between), that does not necessarily mean that an individual's listening is taking place in the same way throughout that time, or that the listening is the only thing taking place. Take for example the possibility of a bookstore employee playing a recording of Qur'an recitation in the shop. The listening is not the only thing taking place at that time; nor is it necessarily taking place in the same way the whole time during which the recording is playing. If we broaden the possibilities of occasion, however, we find that many contextual factors outside of the actual moment of reciting are important to consider as well.

Further, to think about Qur'an recitation in terms of communication can raise separate issues either in communication between reciter and listener, communication and enactment of culture, and communication of the divine revelation. In the case of communicating the divine revelation, we might ask, who is communicating what, and to whom? Take, for instance, a passage of text with multiple layers of narration such as 3:47 (in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*): Maryam asks God how she is to have a child when she has not been with any man, and the text reads, "God said, 'God creates as He pleases. When He decrees a matter He says to it, "be!" and it is.'" Here we see the divine command ("be!") occurring within third person narration ("He says") said by God ("God said")—and it is being recited by a person. On one level, God is creating through a command, or communication ("be!"). He is also telling us that this is how this is done ("He says to it"). He is telling us that this is how it has happened ("God said"). And finally, the reciter is communicating this message to the listener, and what in one sense happened in the past is happening again in the present moment through this communication.

Finally, McLeod and Herndon's discussion of layers of context situates much of my

analysis of the recitation event/performance. In terms of the immediate context or occasion of the performance we could describe where it is taking place, who is present, what text is recited, or if it is a particular occasion. In considering recordings we may ask different questions—when was it recorded, was it done in a studio, was it recorded live, or is it a commercial recording. More broadly speaking, information about any background shaping the recitation can be considered context. To conceive of performance as a process brings these layers of context into the analysis in a meaningful way. They are part of the performance in that they are all being enacted in that space and time.

Where Is the Context?

Theories of performance that emphasize process are helpful not only in considering the wide range of possibilities for how quranic recitation may occur, but also in their broad conceptualizations of multiple layers of context, and most importantly, by bringing in the role of the listener and listening cultures. As Roger Abrahams points out,

Folklore and traditional performance is not simply the parading out of items in any kind of rule-regulated environment so much as an emergent phenomenon whereby the energies of the community may be brought into focus by the presence and the participation of a performer or a set of performers in collaboration with an audience that has a capacity to understand and to go along with and to enter into what the performers themselves are doing.⁴⁰

Hence, the audience is an important component of any performance.

The discussion of performance and context thus far has raised a question that needs very careful consideration in the case of the recited Qur'an: what exactly constitutes the context of recitation? What is the occasion? Who is the listener (if there is one)? What are the contextual factors that may contribute to the actual act or moment of reciting? These may be

⁴⁰ Roger Abrahams, "The Theoretical Boundaries of Performance," in *Proceedings of a Symposium on Form in Performance: Hard-Core Ethnography*, ed. Marcia Herndon and Roger Brunyate (Austin: Office of the College of Fine Arts, University of Texas, 1975), 18.

identified as long-term processes of education and development of personal piety, as Anna Gade has done. Alternatively, we may look to changing attitudes and discourse surrounding the understanding of the recited Qur'an—for example, as I address in chapter 5 of this dissertation with respect to attitudes about the use of the *maqāmāt* in relation to stylistic trends. We may also consider the occasion of Qur'an recitation, and the contextual factors relevant to that type of occasion. For example, are we concerned with a single individual reciting in prayer? Are we thinking about a group of students attending recitations classes at their community mosque? Or is a reciter being asked to recite a passage before a varied audience at an interfaith event or conference, as part of an effort to educate non-Muslims about the Qur'an—its content and its sound, for example? Or finally, what about the role of recordings? What about the shopkeeper who plays a CD of recitation within the shop, or what about an individual who finds recordings online?

With the questions above, I raise a number of possibilities for how we may consider recitation—in terms of context, occasion, media, and so on. While these questions by no means indicate every possible way in which someone may recite or listen to recitation, they do in fact illustrate that the possibilities are extremely diverse, and correspondingly, the context that we may identify as contributing to each listening or recitation situation is diverse as well. As Richard Bauman notes in “Verbal Art As Performance,” performance must be understood as “situated behavior,” and the contexts within which we may situate a particular performative practice differ widely on a variety of levels depending on cultural or occasional factors, among others.⁴¹

Preferences or choices about passage or sura to recite or listen to provide glimpses into

41 Bauman, “Verbal Art as Performance,” June 1975, 298.

the layers of context that may influence the recitation itself. In interviews, I typically ask reciters and listeners of Qur'an recitation whether they have passages or suras that they prefer to either recite or listen to, and the reasoning offered in responses varies quite widely. While the discursive content of passages is often a factor (for example, *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is often mentioned as a favorite, citing its content as being inspirational), it may interact with other contextual factors that are under consideration. For example, Fatima Albar, a reciter from Saudi Arabia currently residing in the US, recites for a variety of types of occasions. In identifying her preferred sura to recite, she cites different factors that drive her preferences. One of these is content; the message of mercy in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is one factor that she mentions. There are also issues of the style of the sura in relation to the act of reciting—for example, she expresses a preference for shorter verses as well.

She also cites *Sūrat al-Mu'minūn* as a sura with shorter verses that she enjoys to recite, expanding a bit to explain:

When the suras comes with the short verses it's easier to recite. You recite one verse, take a break and take a breath and recite the next verse; it's just easier to recite... Usually people who can hold their breath for longer time, like Husary or Minshawi, they can recite the whole verse—even if it's 2 or 3 lines—without a break, which is really hard.

But alongside this more technical consideration, she also cites the content of the sura as being a determining factor:

Al-Mu'minūn, The Believers, it starts with the description of the believers, then it goes to the story of Noah, and the story of Moses and then it challenges them—the disbelievers—to think, and to go and look at the sky, and to think about the creator of the universe. It's kind of like, go and think about your beliefs, first by describing the characteristics of believers, and then it goes to the stories [of prophets]... and starts to ask questions and challenge people—the disbelievers—to go back and think and revise their thinking, about how this whole universe can be created without a God.

Here she isolates two factors in her preference for reciting these suras: one of these is content-

related. In the case of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, the content is inspirational; in the case of *al-Mu'minūn*, it is the variety of topics, or narrative shifts. But alongside the attraction of the subject matter, she also expresses a preference that is related specifically to the experience of reciting the text. Longer verses require greater breath control, which is related to vocal skill, and also that a reciter make decisions about pausing mid-verse.

Abdullah, another reciter in North America, describes a number of factors that may impact choice of passage or sura for performance, and these factors often depend on relations between discursive content of the text and occasion or context, and the audience likely to be in attendance at that occasion.

There are some passages in the Qur'an that are very legal—sections that are dealing with inheritance laws and stuff like that. You'll rarely find that at a public performance a *qarī'* is reciting that. And even if you go to the mosque for prayer, it's rare that somebody recites a bit like that, whereas if somebody reads from *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, it resonates with people; it calms people down after a long day of work.

Here, Abdullah identifies the more legalistic passages of the Qur'an (for example, sections on inheritance law) as being unlikely choices for recitation in a public context—even in a worship context wherein the audience is assumed to be made up of Muslims, such as in a mosque for prayers. And again, *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is identified as a likely choice, but here not in contrast with another choice of sura, but with a contrasting type of subject matter.

Later in the interview, he states this point a bit differently, more clearly identifying that the subject matter of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is what makes it a likely choice for recitation:

If a reciter's picking something to recite, they're not going to pick a random section from *Sūrat an-Nisā'* dealing with inheritance laws, they're going to pick a section like the end of *Furqān* that has general inspirational guidance, or a section from *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* that celebrates the mercy and the bounties of God—things like that.

In these quotations, Abdullah frames the reciter's choice of subject matter in relation to

audience in terms of preference for a certain type of theme or topic in the text; he also points to the opposite—material from which a reciter might shy away, particularly in relation to occasion and implied audience. Here he begins by describing a type of event typical of the North American context, where a reciter may be asked to perform before an audience primarily of non-Muslims—an interfaith event, or one driven by public outreach by a mosque or Muslim community, to non-Muslims: “there are sections in the Qur’an that a lay person might find problematic without additional context, or information or so on, and especially in reciting to a non-Muslim audience you’re a little more aware of that.” Essentially, it would be unlikely for a reciter to choose a passage that may offend a non-Muslim audience, or that they may find problematic. And contrastingly, a passage on God’s punishment of unbelievers, for example, would be an audience comprised of Muslims: “so if there’s a whole chapter dealing with punishment for unbelievers, it’s unlikely that in a Qur’an recitation gathering, that that’s going to be recited...It’s not of utmost relevance to that context.” As Abdullah and Fatima highlight quite clearly with these examples, a reciter’s choice of passage is influenced a great deal by their understanding of the context and occasion for which they are reciting, and the type of audience who is most likely to be in attendance at that event.

Additionally, Abdullah points to larger social conventions and the role of listening cultures (which I explain more fully below) in impacting individuals’ choices for both recitation and listening. These factors work alongside expectations and preferences regarding subject matter, but are not always directly in conversation with the words of the text themselves. For example, he mentions that there are verses from *Sūrat al-Rūm* that are often recited at weddings; these verses are a common choice because they mention that God created spouses (*azwāj*) from among humanity as a sign (*min ayātihi*):

wa min ayātihi an khalaqa lakum min aṅfusikum azwājal li-taskunū ilayhā wa-ja'ala baynakum mawaddataw wa-raḥmatan inna fī dhālika la-ayātil li-qawmiy yatafakkarūn

And among his signs is that he created spouses from among you so that you may reside in it, and he put love and mercy between you. [There are] signs in that for people who consider [it].⁴²

But as Abdullah indicates, although this verse, when taken alone or within the context of the few surrounding verses, is appropriate material for a wedding, when read within the context of *Sūrat ar-Rūm*, it may seem to be less so. In general, the sura is understood as addressing the rise and fall of empires (such as the Persian defeat of the Byzantines, which the second verse of the sura is usually understood as referring to when it says, Rome was defeated—“*ghulibati r-rūm*”) within the context of human history in relation to God’s ordering of time and the universe⁴³—hardly inspirational material for the occasion of a wedding. But nevertheless, the verses referencing God’s creation of spouses (*azwāj*) from among human beings, is commonly read at weddings—first, because those verses on their own are understood to be about appropriate subject matter. But secondly, the custom of reciting those verses at weddings also gains momentum through its repetition. Because it is commonly recited at weddings, verse 30:21 comes to be recited at weddings more and more.

The issue of habits and preferences in recitation and listening is complex, and the way in which the preferences of listeners comes up in interviews bears consideration in light of the conceptions of performance discussed above, and more recent research on listening cultures. For example, when asked about her favorite reciters, Fatima expresses a preference for older Egyptian reciters:

FATIMA: I listen to Husary, I think he passed away, but his recitation is fantastic.

42 Q 30:21.

43 `Abdullah Yūsuf `Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 10th ed. (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2001), 1006–1007.

And Minshawi—he is also Egyptian. His recitation is also clear. They repeat a lot. Their recitations are really strong and clear. There are a few others, a lot of them recite like Alafasy. He recites in a good way, he has good recitation, but I prefer the old school better than the new ones.

LAUREN: I see. Why is that?

FATIMA: They recite slowly. Their pronunciation of the letters is more clear; they don't make any mistakes. The new ones, lots of them recite fast, or they have their own records, which, for me, disturbs the real roots. I prefer the classic ones.

LAUREN: So they're slower, they're more clear, how else would you describe them? Why else do you like it, besides clarity?

FATIMA: Of course the voice. Their voice tones are nice. You know in reciting the Qur'an, it's not just the rules, it's also how beautiful is the voice. And when people recite with a nice voice, and that nice voice is kind of...it's personal, you know? Some people prefer something else over others? The same thing for some reciters.

Here Fatima cites a number of reasons driving her preferences as a listener. First, she places high emphasis on clarity of repetition, particularly through repetition.⁴⁴ She also expresses a view that the high degree of commercialization typical of Alafasy and some other more modern reciters is at odds with what she views as the authenticity (“the real roots,” as she puts it) of the recited Qur'an.⁴⁵ She also mentions beauty of the voice, but goes on to add that preferences regarding beauty are personal.

While preferences regarding beauty and vocal quality are in part personal, it is worth noting that the reciters that she prefers—Husary and Minshawi—are not exactly uncommon choices. Partially this does attest to the quality of their voices and recitations, but there are other social and historical factors at play that are worth addressing here. First, how may we think about the role of the listener in relation to Qur'an recitation?

In considering Qur'an recitation, Richard Bauman's conceptualization of performance is useful in that includes the listener, signaling a very important point: there is not a

44 Clarity of pronunciation and repetition of phrases is typical of the older Egyptian reciters in the *murattal* style, such as Husary; Minshawi also performed in the *murattal* style, but is also known for particularly melodically florid *mujawwad*-style recitation.

45 I address Alafasy's style, and to some degree the extent of the commodification of his recitations and overall brand, in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

straightforward dichotomy between performer and audience/listener, or sender and recipient. Performance, when understood broadly and in the way that Bauman proposes, does not always consist of actions performed before passive spectators or listeners. Indeed, the ways in which people listen, and shape and understand the material to which they listen, are historically and culturally contingent. To some degree this point emerges through interviews with reciters and listeners. As I noted above, while Fatima does cite as a driving factor for her own listening, her personal preferences in terms of quality of a reciter's voice, the reciters and suras that she mentions are common choices at the present moment. To some degree, an individual's listening preferences may also be shaped by their own personal history in terms of which reciters they may have been exposed to, as Abdullah states in response to a question about favorite passages or reciters for listening:

When I was small, I used to listen to a cassette of this certain section and I always like it now. Sometimes there's not that much thought put into it, but it's just, you heard a good recitation of it a long time ago. Like *Sūra Yūsuf* for example—for a long time I had a CD of Shaykh Mutawalli reciting *Sūra Yūsuf*, and I just like it because of that. It's just there with me that I used to listen to it a lot. *Sūrat al-Ḥujarāt*, for example—that's a favorite for me in terms of its meaning, but also when I was a kid we had a cassette and it was a nice recitation.

One point that emerges from the examples discussed in this chapter is that there is of course not one way in which people engage with the recited Qur'an, neither as reciters nor as listeners. The quotations from interviews have highlighted a number of possibilities for reciting or listening—a small Qur'an recitation group, at a mosque in prayers, at a community event such as a wedding, at a public event that may involve individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds (eg., an interfaith event or a community outreach event meant to present the Islamic tradition and community to those who are outside of it), or via recordings on a variety of media—cassettes, CDs, or online. Within this range of possible encounters with the

recited Qur'an, there is a complex network of interrelated factors at work in determining what the performance may sound and look like. Ultimately, an understanding of this network of factors as such (meaning, the ways in which each factor may be related to any other factor), and how they may determine the shape of recitation gives us a fuller picture of the possibilities for contextual impact on the moment of recitation.

So while recitation itself is in some ways a highly structured religious ritual, with precise rules dictating how the text must be pronounced, and expectations for purity and etiquette on the parts of both reciters and listeners, many of these factors are more historically and socially contingent than is often recognized. A detailed consideration of listeners and listening cultures of the recited Qur'an quickly reveals that there is not a single archetype of the listener of the Qur'an. Rather, individuals listen from and with reference to their particular circumstances—both personal circumstances and more broadly cultural or historical, and specifics such as occasion of listening as well. Listening is an active practice, as opposed to hearing, which is understood merely as perception of sound. By understanding the recited Qur'an as a performance that takes place through process, broadly understanding context on a variety of levels, we may include the listener and listening cultures in our understanding of the practice.

In *Gott ist schön: Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran*, Navid Kermani draws on a range of traditional sources in arguing for the importance of the aesthetic power of the Qur'an to its audience in the immediate milieu of its revelation.⁴⁶ Much of the evidence he harnesses in this regard attests to the importance of listening and listening cultures in mid-7th century Arabia. For Kermani, the (oftentimes dramatic) accounts of reactions to the sound of the Qur'an in and

⁴⁶ Navid Kermani, *Gott ist schön : das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999), 15–93, “Die ersten Hörer.”

around the early community attest to the aesthetic power of the text, on literary and aural levels. These examples also point to the specific ways in which those early listeners encountered and listened to the Qur'an—what it meant to listen, and what it meant for them to listen to the Qur'an in particular. These examples include countless accounts of the contemporaries of Muhammad hearing the Qur'an and crying, screaming, falling into states of rapture, fainting, dying, or converting.⁴⁷ Even the reactions of the Prophet's opponents attest to the power of listening to the Qur'an; in a section called "The Powerlessness of the Opponent," Kermani cites a number of reports of opponents of the Prophet reacting negatively to the recitation, this even further attesting to the aesthetic power of the revelation.⁴⁸ For Kermani, this evidence (consisting of both positive and negative reactions to the sound of the Qur'an in the historical milieu of its revelation) attest to the fact that the aesthetic dimension of the text has always been inextricable from the content.⁴⁹ They also speak to the specific ways in which the Qur'an was heard and perceived, which can be contrasted with the number of possibilities that are available in other historical and cultural contexts, many of which I have raised for consideration in this chapter.

As I note at the beginning of this chapter, a number of recent studies have attempted to uncover the soundscapes of the past, in an attempt to highlight the ways in which perception and understanding of sound (and other sense data, such as smell, taste, and so on) are tied to historically and culturally contingent processes.⁵⁰ Just as soundscapes change, so do the ways

47 Ibid., 15–16.

48 Ibid., 54–67.

49 Ibid., 82.

50 Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Veit Erlmann, ed., *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590-1640*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge:

in which humans understand them and interact with them. Arnold Hunt notes in his study on pre-modern English preaching:

If we want to know what the past looked like, then we can refer to paintings, drawings and engravings; but if we want to know what the past *sounded* like, then—at least for the era before sound recordings—we have to fall back on our own imagination. Of course we have songs, plays and sermons, all designed to be sung or spoken; we have personal letters, which can give us the sense (or the illusion) of eavesdropping on a conversation; and we have the transcripts of oral testimony in the law courts; but all these have come down to us in written form, and it requires an effort of imagination or interpretation to ‘hear’ them spoken aloud.⁵¹

The early accounts cited by Kermani cannot tell us what the recited Qur’an originally sounded like (as he points out with particular attention to Jan Assmann’s idea of cultural memory⁵²), but they can tell us the ways in which the practices of listening and understanding of not only the value of listening, but how in particular it should be conducted, have and have not changed through the development of the Islamic tradition. While, as many authors I cite in this dissertation have noted, the importance of the recited Qur’an has been clear since the moment of its revelation, but that does not mean that there is one way in which it has or should be listened to. In fact, the role of the listener is one of many interrelated factors that can contribute to the performance of recitation, when it is defined broadly as performance through process, in the way in which I propose in this chapter.

Cambridge University Press, 2010); Schmidt, *Hearing Things*; Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Constance Classen, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Constance Classen, *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender, and the Aesthetic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

51 Hunt, *The Art of Hearing*, 60.

52 Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, 17.

Chapter 3: The Recitation on Recitation: Discursive Meaning within the Qur'an Aesthetics of the Qur'an

The Qur'an tells us that it is a clear message, presented in Arabic so that we, as readers and listeners, may understand.¹ It even boasts of its own elegance, the beauty of its own aesthetics, challenging its readers and listeners to produce anything like it.² How does it use language to such self-proclaimed success? What kind of language is it and how does it work? Style and the use of language are remarkable in the Qur'an, and an integral part of the text's own self-presentation; some have gone so far as to claim that the medium is the message, in this case.³ While much has been made in traditional commentaries on the meanings of the words, there has been comparatively little said about the ways in which they present their meanings. Further still, how does the issue of style and use of language fit with regard to the oral text? This chapter focuses on the discourse of the Qur'an with particular attention to aesthetics and orality. While on one hand it is possible to speak of the text of the Qur'an as a unified composition, the means of presentation change dramatically over the course of the text, in terms of vocabulary, themes, literary genres, and styles, and they do so particularly following the chronology of the text's revelation. These changes in genre and style reveal the Qur'an to be a work that reflects process, and also conversation with its interlocutors. Drawing on recently developed models of the study of Qur'an as a literary text, one can trace the treatment of particular themes or ideas through the revelation in order to reveal the range of modes of discussion, literary motifs, rhetorical techniques used within the text as a whole. The

1 Q 26:195, or similarly, 12:2.

2 Q 2:23, 17:88, 10:38, 11:13, and 52:33-34 are all cited as "challenge verses."

3 Angelika Neuwirth, "The Qur'an as a Late Antique Text," in *In the Shadow of Arabic: The Centrality of Language to Arabic Culture*, ed. Bilal Orfali (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 495-509; Navid Kermani, *Gott ist schön : das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999).

Qur'an's discussion of its own recitation may be treated as one such example.

Contemporary scholars who have written on the aesthetics of literary qualities of the quranic text have taken diverse approaches to the revelation, these approaches existing in a complex network of perspectives shaped to greater and lesser degrees, by literary and historical perspectives. The relationship between literary and historical claims with regard to the Qur'an's discourse is complex, and always intertwined. Countless essays and books in recent years have noted that scholarship on the Qur'an as literature remains an under-studied topic in the field, and it is a topic that is by definition quite broad. Indeed, the text draws on a wide range of structures, genres, devices, and different types of imagery and symbolism, to name a few of its literary qualities. In the opening to his essay on the use of irony in the quranic Joseph story, Mustansir Mir notes that, seemingly regrettably, the issue of the Qur'an as literature has become theologized through the association of the Qur'an's challenge to unbelievers to produce anything like with the theological doctrine of *ijāz*. This theologization subsequently (and unfortunately) relegates anyone investigating the literary aspects of the Qur'an to the status of unbeliever, according to Mir, and in addition, shifted the discussion to demonstrating that the Qur'an is in fact inimitable rather than investigating its literary beauty on its own terms.⁴ The question then remains, how is one to approach the issue of quranic discourse, avoiding the pitfall of the theologization of method and mode of inquiry?

The answer, to some extent, may necessitate a shift in emphasis of study away from strict attention to content, and toward means of expression, or aesthetics; the mode of delivery of the message, in the case of the Qur'an, is at least important as, and perhaps in some ways more important than, the actual message itself. German scholar Angelika Neuwirth puts this

⁴ Mustansir Mir, "Irony in the Qur'an: A Study of the Story of Joseph," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata, Curzon Studies in the Qur'an (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 173.

point succinctly and provocatively in a 2013 interview:

If one reads and interprets the Koran as a kind of information medium—as many contemporary Koranic researchers do—one does not do justice to it. The Koran is heavily poetic and contains a whole range of messages that it imparts at a semantic level—not at all explicitly, not at all unambiguously; it gets these messages across through poetic structures; if it didn't, it wouldn't be as vivid as it is. What makes the Koran unique is its complexity, its multiple layers, the fact that it speaks at different levels. On the one hand, of course, that is the huge aesthetic attraction. However, it is also, if you like, hugely attractive in rhetorical terms or in terms of its power of conviction.⁵

Here Neuwirth clearly states that any study prioritizing the content of the quranic message over its aesthetics or modes of discourse, for lack of a better way of putting it, misses the point. The Qur'an is uniquely poetic, and the power of the Qur'an's conviction and message can only fully be considered in light of this poeticity. She continues:

While it might be possible to sum up the mere information in the Koran in a short newspaper article, the effect would not have been the same. It really is about enchantment through language. Language itself is also praised in the Koran as the highest gift that humankind received from God. Naturally, this is related to knowledge. Language is the medium of knowledge. This is why one should never on top of everything else accuse the Islamic culture of being averse to knowledge. The entire Koran is basically a paean to knowledge, the knowledge that is articulated through speech.⁶

If the scholar prioritizes content over style, the Qur'an seems an inefficient document. But the content of the message itself points to the importance of language—it is, to paraphrase Neuwirth, knowledge articulated through speech. At times the Qur'an does communicate its message through direct style; at others, there are devices present that tend to delay information rather than directly express it. On the other hand, the text is presenting itself as oral discourse, as seen through its repeated calls to recite or relay information orally.⁷ This combination of

5 Angelika Neuwirth, Anna Alvi, and Alia Hübsch, *Islam as a Culture of Knowledge*, trans. Aingel Flanagan, 2013, accessed January 28, 2014, <http://en.qantara.de/content/interview-with-angelika-neuwirth-islam-as-a-culture-of-knowledge>.

6 Ibid.

7 Angelika Neuwirth, "Rhetoric and the Qur'an," ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*

factors raises the question of how the Qur'an's audience is meant to encounter the text. How can we understand the relationships between the text's complex styles and aesthetics on one hand, and its repeated calls to perform it orally?

Navid Kermani and Sayyid Qutb: The Emotional Resonance of Quranic Aesthetics

The works of two modern scholars are particularly of note in considering this line of questioning: those of German author and scholar Navid Kermani and Sayyid Qutb, the controversial Egyptian thinker who is typically viewed through either of two mutually exclusive lenses—as the ideological father of modern Islamism on one hand, or as a particularly sensitive and literary-minded modern commentator on the Qur'an. In my own consideration of quranic aesthetics, these individuals are two of my primary interlocutors. While many individuals have noted that style is paramount in the Qur'an, claiming that it is as important as the content of its message, or even that in this case the medium (i.e., its aesthetic presentation) is the message, this point has been sadly neglected in scholarship. In his 1999 monograph, *Gott ist schön: Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran*, Navid Kermani argues that the Qur'an's aesthetics have, since the moment of the revelation, been inextricable from the content of the text.⁸ This point has been lost in western scholarship on the scripture, in part because of the under-treatment of recitation, but also as a consequence of the focus on debates about history and the validity of the traditional accounts of the early tradition. According to Kermani, western authors have tended to attribute the success of Muhammad's prophetic mission and the early Islamic state to ideological, political, psychological, or military causes (or some combination of these). As a result, these authors have overlooked the persuasive power of the aesthetics of the

(Washington DC: Brill Online, 2012),

http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/rhetoric-and-the-quran-COM_00176.

8 Kermani, *Gott ist schön*.

Qur'an, particularly the ways in which its aesthetic beauty may have appealed to its contemporaries.⁹ To put Kermani's claim into the terms described at the beginning of this chapter, the early reception of the Qur'an has often been described in purely historical terms, overlooking the aesthetic dimension (which of course has its own historical dimension as well, as I will go on to explain).

Kermani's monograph is among the most significant recent works on the aesthetics of the Qur'an. Therein he makes a variety of related claims about quranic aesthetics, all ultimately indicating the significance of the text as sound or recitation. He first addresses the issue as it pertains to the history of the text's reception, primarily on the part of the contemporaries of the Prophet. In this regard he draws on a variety of sources about the early tradition in order to demonstrate that the aesthetic qualities of the revelation (its eloquence, but also the beauty of its sound in particular) were among the most significant layers of impact of the text on its early listeners. Kermani describes a range of early accounts of the Prophet's contemporaries hearing the Qur'an and crying, screaming, falling into states of rapture, fainting, dying, or converting.¹⁰ These accounts signify, for Kermani, the aesthetic power of the Qur'an over its immediate audience, and also the significance of quranic aesthetics in spreading its message early on in the tradition's history.¹¹

He points out that, in assessing the early spread of Islam, western authors have overwhelmingly attributed the success of the Prophet's early missions to ideological, political, psychological, or military factors. Muslim authors, on the other hand, have also considered the role of the literary quality of the Qur'an alongside these.¹² With regard to the latter, he cites

9 Ibid., 15–17.

10 Ibid., 15–93.

11 Ibid., 68.

12 Ibid., 16.

Sayyid Qutb's *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qur'an*, which I discuss in the following section of this chapter. In support of this point, Kermani examines a range of types of accounts of early listeners encountering the Qur'an: conversions of human beings and *jinn*,¹³ the Prophet's own experience of hearing recitation,¹⁴ and even those who heard its recitation and were not won over to its message (primarily consisting of adversaries of the Prophet among the Quraysh).¹⁵ These examples all serve to lead Kermani to the point that, in light of this evidence (which is important in so far as it is part of the cultural memory of foundational Islam), Islamic Studies has not sufficiently considered the impact of the aesthetic power of the Qur'an in the early tradition.¹⁶ In addition to arguing for specific historical significance of the Qur'an's aesthetic power, Kermani goes even further, however, in suggesting that the aesthetic dimension of the text is crucial—even inextricable from its content. The root of the conflict between the Prophet and the Quraysh, according to Kermani, had to do with the aesthetic quality of the Qur'an, rather than the combination of points that are more frequently cited in depicting this conflict, such as the ways in which the core messages of the early revelations presented an affront to the tribal status quo. Correspondingly, in Kermani's reading, this aesthetic power also became of the Prophet's most valuable weapons against his opponents.

While some recent scholarship has called into question the historicity of the early accounts such as those cited by Kermani, this issue is not entirely relevant to Kermani's points, which he demonstrates by drawing on Jan Assmann's theory of collective cultural memory. It is not the historical truth value of these accounts that matters for Kermani, but the extent to which they have come to form a collective cultural memory, thereby contributing to the

13 Ibid., 43.

14 Ibid., 46–47.

15 Ibid., 54, 67.

16 Ibid., 68.

cultural inheritance of the tradition, and constituting another kind of truth apart from historical fact. Kermani's interest in the early accounts concerning quranic aesthetics is not one of uncovering "what really happened back then."¹⁷ Rather, citing Assmann, Kermani argues that although his claim is in part historical, it places the history of the early days of Islam on the level of cultural memory and remembered history, in so far as it has shaped the construction of the self-image and discourse of Islamic culture.¹⁸ While we cannot be certain of the historicity of the original early accounts, their impact on the tradition since that time is very much real, and it is this level of historical validity that counts for Kermani's claim. He points out that while the original remembered history may in fact be a construct, this does not necessarily suggest that it came about through chance.¹⁹

Recitation is paramount in *Gott ist schön*, as it is only through hearing or reciting the text that the Qur'an's aesthetic qualities become realized. Its aesthetics only exist through its performance, according to Kermani. Does this mean that recitation can be defined or primarily understood as the means by which the text's literary qualities are fully realized? This point at once elevates the status of recitation—it is only through recitation that the text exhibits qualities that Kermani claims are paramount—but it also ties recitation extremely closely to the realm of literary meaning at the extent of other possibilities, or more non-discursive modes of understanding or experience. The book as a whole makes an argument about the importance of Qur'an recitation, and it does this from a number of different angles (eg., historical, literary), although it does so in service of a larger point about the importance of the aesthetics of the text, which is understood specifically as the power of the Qur'an as an oral-literary object.

17 Ibid., 17.

18 Ibid., 18.

19 Ibid., 24–25.

In the second chapter, Kermani's analysis of the Qur'an's aesthetics revolves around the question: "Is the Qur'an poetry?" While acknowledging that from the Muslim theological point of view the answer to this question is clearly no, Kermani rests with the implications of this question and how we may understand it, and the relationship between Qur'an and poetry more broadly. He points out that when assessed against the criteria of classical Arabic literary theory, the Qur'an certainly contains poetic elements, even if it does not belong to the genre of *shi'r* (poetry). Rather than answering the question, "is the Qur'an poetry," Kermani provides the tools and context one would need to understand this question and why it cannot truly be answered.

Kermani also examines the literary aesthetics of the text from a slightly different angle in this chapter: that of communication²⁰, asking if we are to understand the Qur'an as a kind of communication, how might we understand what kind of communication it may be? Here he turns to the idea of the four basic functions of human speech, drawing on Karl Buhler, Jan Mukařovský, and Roman Jakobson.²¹ Purely communicative speech is characterized by "representative, expressive, and appellative functions," but the poetic utterance has a fourth facet: the poetic.²² The first three qualities or functions of speech—the representative, the expressive, and the appellative—are practical in nature. As Kermani explains it, "the linguistic sign is devoted to an extra-linguistic denotatum."²³ While all four functions of speech can be seen in the Qur'an, the poetic or aesthetic has a different type of function from the other three. Kermani claims that "most verses of the Qur'an are those with more appellative or

20 Ibid., 98 and following.

21 I discuss these functions of speech in chapter 4, with regard to the sound of the words of the Qur'an.

22 In the German here there is a contrast between the first poetic as *dicheterischen* and the second as *poetische*. Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, 98.

23 Ibid.

performative function, such as threats, promises and exhortations, narrative, descriptive, or contemplative sections.”²⁴ He points out that, in its linguistic order the Qur’an is completely oriented to the addressee.²⁵ The fourth function, the poetic, is of special importance in the Qur’an, as it is in literary works and also other revealed scriptures, so much so that Kermani claims that the Qur’an is “a poetically structured text.”²⁶

In this chapter (chapter 2: “The Text”), Kermani makes an extremely significant point about the Qur’an’s relationship to contemporaneous literature and speech and exactly how it develops such a powerful aesthetic appeal. In his review of the work in the *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, Stefan Sperl restates Kermani’s point concisely, in saying that the Qur’an “fulfills, supersedes, disappoints and contradicts the expectation” of the listener.²⁷ In order to appeal to a contemporaneous audience, a text must draw upon the norms with which that audience is familiar, but also provide something new. A vital work cannot just be new and different from the norm, and therefore stirring for its audience because of its difference and unfamiliarity—its aesthetic effectiveness would not stand the test of time, Kermani claims.²⁸ He then turns to the issue of chronology, drawing on the work of Angelika Neuwirth, pointing out that in the beginning, the revelation very much drew on the force of unfamiliar, but as it went on it came to form its own standard or norm.

In discussing recitation more specifically (which is done primarily in the third chapter, “The Sound”), Kermani does so with both reference to the early tradition once again, and also

24 Ibid., 101.

25 In noting this point he cites Egyptian scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Ibid.

26 Ibid., 103.

27 Stefan Sperl, review of *Gott ist schön : Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran*, by Navid Kermani, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 82–83, citing Kermani page 111, although this point is also made across the whole of chapter 2.

28 Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, 113.

twentieth century reciters (primarily the Egyptians of the 1960s; Shaykh Mahmud Khalil al-Husary is mentioned in the opening pages of the chapter, and later ‘Abd al-Basit ‘Abd al-Samad, and Muhammad Rif‘at) and recitation practices. For Kermani, the fact that the Prophet would receive the revelation and then recite it (he makes this point with specific reference to “*iqra*” as the first word of the revelation, but also speaking more generally about the mode of revelation) indicates that hearing is the Qur’an’s presumed mode of reception.²⁹ Drawing on a point made earlier in his text, that the written Qur’an can be seen as a secondary object, or a memory-jogger, he reminds us that this means that humans are meant to hear the words of God rather than read them from a page. He then turns to examine the ways in which the Qur’an discusses its recitation and its reception, or reciting and listening. The Qur’an draws a strict distinction between recitation of verses and hearing of verses. The discussion of this distinction is brief but evocative³⁰; there is much more to be said in this regard, which I begin to address in the second half of this chapter.

In his discussion of the Qur’an’s recitation and reception, Kermani draws on the works of William Graham and Kristina Nelson, both of whose works are discussed extensively in the first chapter of this dissertation. Kermani makes similar points to those of Graham and Nelson (citing them both frequently), in attesting to the strong orality of the text given the details of the revelation’s original milieu and the traditional narrative of the redaction and codification of the text. In discussing modern practices of *tajwīd*, he draws on the work of Nelson in pointing out that the development of *‘ilm al-tajwīd* took place primarily in the 9th century, and also noting that *tajwīd* rules do not specific melodic presentation. These points are in service of a larger claim he makes related to the overall aesthetics of the text: the perception and

29 Ibid., 172–173.

30 Ibid.

experience of Qur'an recitation (on the part of the listener especially, it seems) are shaped not only by the rules of *tajwīd*, but by something even deeper as well—by the aural communication of the text itself: “the Qur'an controls the reception of its listeners both by its language properties in the strict sense...as well as its pure acoustic.”³¹ He connects this aesthetic reception to an extended discussion of the role of sound patterns in the Qur'an, drawing on Michael Sells' articles on this topic.³² In this regard his historical discussion of the development of *ilm al-tajwīd* takes on a new role. We should understand the text as existing prior to these rules, not only historically, but in terms of importance as well.

Growing out of this discussion on the sound of the Qur'an, and the various degrees to which it is pre-determined or left up to the discretion of the performer, Kermani makes the point that the text of the Qur'an can be seen as analogous to a musical score. He notes that Paul Valéry has made a similar point with regard to poetry.³³ Even a score, Kermani points out, which can be read silently or quietly hummed, is meant to be experienced by listening, or as a performance event. The same principle applies to the Qur'an, he claims. In this regard we can understand the text of the Qur'an as being similar to scores of particular modern composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen or Pierre Boulez, where the score is meant to be relatively freely interpreted by the performer, who exercises a significant amount of choice in shaping the performance.³⁴ Stockhausen and Boulez are but two examples of modern composers of music who have integrated spontaneity or chance into their works in different ways, leaving more aspects of the actual performance of the work open to possibilities that exist outside of the written score.

31 Ibid., 182.

32 Ibid., 187–188.

33 Ibid., 197.

34 Ibid., 202.

When describing Muslim scholarship, Kermani does not typically cite the traditional *tafsīr* literature, but instead draws on earlier historical accounts, but also substantially on the work of Sayyid Qutb, most particularly his *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qurʿan*. This work is not a *tafsīr* (Qutb did write a complete quranic commentary, however, called *Fi Zilal al-Qurʿan*³⁵), but rather a personal narrative that develops into a discussion focused on the aesthetics of the Qurʿan, and most specifically the ways in which it uses imagery to communicate its message. He opens the work with a short personal account employing the same type of imagery that inspires him in its quranic usage; as a child he would hear the Qurʿan recited in the village, especially throughout the month of Ramadan, and although he didn't understand its meaning, "his soul would drink in its music."³⁶ The opening image is one of an idyllic childhood memory, speaking to a moment in the past that can never be reclaimed or experienced again, and also one that is highly aesthetic and sensuous, even non-discursive, in that he immediately notes that he did not understand the meaning of the recited text. This early aesthetic or experiential understanding of the Qurʿan was supplemented with "simple images" (*ṣuwar sādhiya*) that would materialize before him through the Qurʿan's expression.³⁷ He juxtaposes this personal account of beauty in the aesthetic experience of the Qurʿan with his encounter in school with traditional commentaries, wherein he did not find the beautiful, delightful Qurʿan he had heard. Rather, "all of the signs of beauty were obliterated" in the Qurʿan of the *tafsīr*, leading Qutb to suggest that perhaps there are two Qurʿans—that of the sweet memories of his child (characterized by beauty of sound and little understanding of the meanings of words, or little emphasis) and the "fragmented, complicated, and difficult" Qurʿan of young manhood.³⁸ Qutb

35 Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qurʿan*, al-Tabʿa al-Sharʿiya (al-Qahira: Dar al-Shuruq, 2004).

36 Sayyid Qutb, *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qurʿan*, al-Tabʿah al-Sharʿiya 17 (al-Qahira: Dar al-Shuruq, 2004), 5.

37 Ibid., 7.

38 Ibid.; John Calvert, "Qurʿanic Aesthetics in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb," *Religious Studies and Theology* 15, no.

then immediately situates the work that follows in contradistinction to the commentary tradition.

While Qutb describes the initial impetus for *al-Taswir al-Fanni* as deriving from the sound of the Qur'an, the work as a whole is very literary in its approach. Rather than progressing through the text line by line, in the model of the traditional commentaries, he singles out particular verse clusters that contain parables, or typically narrative examples or images, especially those that occur in proximity to the text stating a point. These images and stories illustrate the point made in that section of the text—showing rather than telling. While the focus of the analysis is not as directly focused on sound (especially in comparison to Kermani's musical score analogy), it is very literary-aesthetic in nature, and demonstrates the ways in which the Qur'an communicates its meanings in ways other than directly stating points, for example by performing the meaning, or evoking an image in the mind of the reader or listener. Rather, Qutb focuses on how the literary-poetic structures of the Qur'an create certain emotional resonances within readers and listeners.

In the opening personal narrative, a chapter called "I Found the Qur'an" ("*La-qad Wajadtu al-Qur'an*"), Qutb relates some of the motivation and early thinking behind the rest of the work, noting that the Qur'an's use of images in its expression created these early and lasting impressions in him, and the explanation and examination of this phenomenon motivated the work found in the rest of *al-Taswir al-Fanni*. This chapter comprises a later addition to the text, as he notes on page 8 that he published portions of the work in 1939; in his article, "Sayyid Qutb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'an," Issa Boullata tracks the chronology of the different installments of the work.³⁹ Given that it was pieced together in

2-3 (December 1, 1996): 66.

39 Qutb, *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qur'an*, 8; Issa J. Boullata, "Sayyid Qutb's Literary Appreciation of the Qur'an," in

installments over a period of several years, the chapters in *al-Taswir al-Fanni* each stand more or less on their own.

In “I Found the Qur’an,” following his description of his early childhood experiences with the Qur’an that provide the initial motivation behind the work, Qutb describes the approach he took in the research presented therein. Firstly, given the way in which he describes his early relationships to previous quranic scholarship and the *tafsīr* tradition, it follows that *tafsīr* play almost no role whatsoever in the work. His approach consists primarily of reading Qur’an through Qur’an, focusing on the text’s use of images in illustrating its points.⁴⁰ His primarily line of inquiries focuses on how the Qur’an expresses its message, rather than what that message may be (which, in the most general terms, is the approach of the classical commentators). Through this examination, Qutb arrives at the conclusion the Qur’an’s use of images is the basis of its discourse, saying,

The images in the Qur’an are not one part of it, separate from the rest. Depiction (*al-taṣwīr*) is the basis of expression in this beautiful book. The fundamental basis is followed in all of the goals—except for the purpose of legislation, of course. The research then isn’t about images being brought together and organized, but rather is on the basis of revealing (*takshaf*) and highlighting.⁴¹

In Qutb’s view, his research into the Qur’an’s use of imagery (“artistic depiction”) has as its goal uncovering a particular layer of quranic discourse that has not been previously discussed in the traditional literature.

While the sound of the Qur’an provides the initial impetus behind Qutb’s *al-Taswir al-Fanni*, the analysis found therein is primarily concerned with the rhetoric and imagery, and how the text draws upon those techniques, shaping the emotional resonance and experience

Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’ān, ed. Issa J. Boullata, Curzon Studies in the Qur’ān (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 355.

40 Qutb, *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qur’an*, 9.

41 Ibid.

on the part of the reader or hearer. The style of analysis in *al-Taswir al-Fanni* is much more literary in approach than traditional commentaries and more in line with scholarship in English and European languages that takes a similarly literary-minded approach. Qutb's analysis explicates specific parables or images found in verse-clusters throughout the text in order to reveal the Qur'an's techniques of showing meaning rather than just stating it. This examination of verse-clusters puts aside the line-by-line approach; rather than progressing through the text sequentially, he brings together verses that are disparate in location but common in terms of mode of expression.

Kermani and Qutb both describe what they see as being a very powerful dimension of the quranic text; it contains an aesthetic dimension, separate from the three other types of spoken communication. This aesthetic dimension is described as existing on an emotional, pre-cognitive level, as evidenced particularly by the accounts in the early tradition of reactions of the first listeners; it is a level of non-discursive meaning, in that sense. This aesthetic dimension is completely dependent on the recitation of the Qur'an; although the text exists in written form, it is only truly realized when it exists as sound (particularly for Kermani; recitation plays a much more explicit role in his work, as I have shown here). This conceptualization of the Qur'an's aesthetic impression—this particular realm of non-discursive meaning—is still very much dependent on proper comprehension of the words on some level, however. Presumably the initial listeners in the traditional accounts understood the language. It would not be fair to speak of the aesthetic resonance of the Qur'an in terms of poeticity, when speaking of a context in which the listeners could not at all understand the meanings of the words.

So how then, may we understand how the text of the Qur'an creates the type of

aesthetic impression described by Kermani and Qutb? To some degree the answer may lay in some combination of all of the parts that make up the complete whole of the aesthetic impression. In his introduction to the 2000 volume *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, Issa Boullata describes this seemingly ineffable whole as follows:

Literary structures have many elements to them including diction, phonology, morphology, syntax, rhythm, rhetoric, composition, style, in addition to matters related to tone, voice, orality, imagery, symbolism, allegory, genre, point of view, intertextuality, intratextual resonance, and other literary aspects—all of which are set within a historic epistemology and cultural ambiance. These elements combine with one another in the Qur'an in different, multifunctional ways to produce the total meaning which it contains and which many generations have tried to comprehend.⁴² The whole is it once made up of all the parts described, but the diverse ways in which they come together in the case of the Qur'an does not make for a whole that is as simple as their total sum. In any case, the frequency with which orality—in terms of experience of listeners, but also the Qur'an's own emphasis on its oral performance—comes up in these discussions of aesthetics indicates that it cannot be ignored.

Angelika Neuwirth describes the Qur'an as being “uniquely speech-centered,” going on to say:

The entire Qur'an is direct address. This address, moreover, often entails a meta-discourse, being speech about speech, be it a comment on the quranic message itself or on earlier traditions...Similar to the Biblical Sages, the quranic speaker continuously refers to the earlier scriptures, while adapting them to the epistemic horizons of his audience. And yet, the overall shape of the quranic expression is presented as spontaneous prophetic speech.⁴³

Neuwirth has followed this line of reasoning particularly in a historical direction, tracking the

42 Issa J. Boullata, “Introduction,” in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata, Curzon Studies in the Qur'an (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), x.

43 Neuwirth, “The Qur'an as a Late Antique Text,” 496.

role of orality in the process of the Qur'an's revelation, asking if we understand the Qur'an as a primarily oral text, how can we understand orality across the text's development, process of revelation, or process of canonization.

***Iqra'*: How the Qur'an Demands and Shapes Its Own Realization in Sound**

In the rest of this chapter, I draw on the points made by Kermani and Qutb in order to focus on one key stylistic feature of the Qur'an and its self-presentation—the meta-discourse, particularly regarding the ways in which the text directs and even demands its own recitation. Both of these authors (Kermani and Qutb) place orality at the core of the Qur'an's aesthetics. Drawing on this point, we may then ask how the Qur'an understands its own orality? Within the text, the Qur'an frequently directs its audience to speak in response to dialogue or even critique (for example passages where it commands, “say...,” “*qul...*”), but it can also be understood as dictating its own recitation—oral performance that may take place either within the world of the text, or in the world outside of the text (as envisioned within the Qur'an). While the first of these is a layer of discourse taking place and being commanded within the text itself, the latter speaks to the text's understanding of its own orality. In exploring this issue, I examine the vocabulary with which the Qur'an discusses recitation, with particular attention to the semantic fields of the three verbs that are used for recitation (recitation of scripture in particular), of the roots Q-R-ʾ, R-T-L, and T-L-W. The issue of the chronology of revelation is underpinning much of the analysis here, and its organization. While I acknowledge that chronology continues to be heartily debated within the field, for the purpose of this analysis I accept and rely upon the Nöldeke chronology.⁴⁴

44 Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, ed. Friedrich Schwally, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1909); Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'an*, trans. Wolfgang H. Behn, Texts and Studies on the Qur'an 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, scholars who have written on the aesthetics of the Qur'an (including and especially Kermani and Qutb), the ways in which the text presents its meanings to readers and listeners, have often suggested not only that style is paramount (even more so than meaning, according to some), but also that this style is strongly characterized by distinctive layers of meaning shaped by the text's appeals to non-discursive modes of understanding. These modes involve strong sensory imagery, appealing to the imagination and sense experience—not only orality and aurality, but often with a strong visual component as well. While scholars who have worked on the recitation of the Qur'an have cited a number of pieces of evidence that strongly suggest that the Qur'an is a primarily oral or aural text, a relatively under-studied area in this regard is the way in which the Qur'an dictates and even demands its own recitation, and its aural receipt.

While the sciences of *tajwīd* and *qira'āt* were canonized in the 4th/10th century,⁴⁵ they are typically understood as preserving the sound of the Qur'an as the Prophet had recited it⁴⁶. In her seminal study on the Qur'an's recitation, Kristina Nelson presents the interpretation that to recite according to the rules of *tajwīd* is seen as fulfilling a divine command. Cited in support of this point is the second half of verse 4 of *Sūrat al-Muzzammil*, "*wa-rattili l-qur'āna tartīlā*," commonly interpreted as meaning "recite the Qur'an according to the rules of *tajwīd*."⁴⁷ Subsequently, there is much in the hadith literature about the virtues or merits of reciting the Qur'an, the etiquette of doing so, the existence of variant readings, and some information on how the Prophet would recite, in terms of how he valued the practice, his preferences

45 Frederick M. Denny, "The Adab of Qur'an Recitation: Text and Context," in *International Congress for the Study of the Qur'an: Australian National University, Canberra, 8-13 May 1980*, ed. Anthony H. Johns (Canberra City: South Asia Centre, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1981), 145.

46 Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 14–15.

47 Ibid.

regarding recitation, or the quality of his voice.⁴⁸ This is, of course, a separate matter from the Qur'an's own understanding of the importance of its recitation and the meaning of the scripture's oral form. An examination of the Qur'an's use of vocabulary of reading or reciting, especially in relation to itself or revelation more generally, reveals a rich field of possibilities for how the text may understand or even dictate its own recitation. Within the Meccan suras, the text typically evokes or commands its own recitation within a rich network of sensory allusion, especially combining the oral/aural and the visual. As the chronology of the text progresses, in the later Meccan and Medinan suras, the object of recitation broadens, referring not only to the revelation of the Qur'an, but other revelations, or stories about prophets and the signs that they were given, particularly within the context of disputation.

The verbs used most frequently in the Qur'an for discussing reading or reciting, and thus those examined in this chapter, are of the roots Q-R-ʾ, T-L-W, and R-T-L. Q-R-ʾ and T-L-W occur in verbal forms far more frequently than R-T-L; the latter only occurs in two verses (73:4 and 25:32), in approximately the same construction in both places, as seen in the previous paragraph and typically understood as meaning to recite according to the rules of *tajwīd*: “*rattil...tartilā*.” Interestingly, although R-T-L appears far less frequently than Q-R-ʾ or T-L-W when the Qur'an mentions recitation, it is the verb in those verses that are most often cited as dictating the imperative to recite, or in support of traditional norms of recitation. While Q-R-ʾ is used almost exclusively in the early Meccan revelations, T-L-W begins to take over in the middle Meccan period, and almost immediately comes to dominate. Q-R-ʾ and T-L-W are used in distinct ways, with Q-R-ʾ in the early Meccan suras almost exclusively referring to recitation of Qur'an only, evoking recitation within the context of the creative powers of the divine, and

48 Frederick M. Denny, “Qur'an Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission,” *Oral Tradition* 4, no. 1-2 (1989): 8-11.

alongside the aforementioned strongly visual component. T-L-W may refer to recitation of Qur'an, but comes to be used for recitation for a wide variety of material, and recitation understood in this way typically shows reactions on the parts of those who hear it, connecting to the idea of understanding on the part of the listener.

The two suras where R-T-L appears are *Sūrat al-Muzzammil* and *Sūrat al-Furqān*, and as I mentioned previously, the wording in which the verb is used is nearly identical. In both suras the basic phrasing is “*rattil...tartilā*”; the verb appears in a *tamyīz* construction (accusative of specification—where a second form verb is followed by its corresponding verbal noun in adverbial form, both indicating how the action is performed and emphasizing the action itself), so the root is heard twice in succession. The use of R-T-L (and Q-R-ʾ in the Medinan addition) is particularly of note here because this is an early sura that addresses ongoing religious practice, and through the Medinan “appendix” in the final verse, offers a bit of a clarification and a broadened address.

Sūrat al-Muzzammil is considered to be an early Meccan sura with one Medinan verse added on at the end. Q-R-ʾ also occurs twice in the final (Medinan) verse. In interpreting *Sūrat al-Muzzammil*, if we isolate the first 19 verses—the Meccan portion of the sura—we see a very evocative picture of religious practice of a singular addressee, typically understood by exegetes to be the Prophet, and the place of reciting (R-T-L) therein. Verse 20, the Medinan verse, broadens the address to a group, and describes certain conditions under which religious obligations may be relaxed, referring to recitation with Q-R-ʾ.

Sūrat al-Muzzammil opens similarly to many other early Meccan suras, including *al-ʿAlaq* and *al-Aʿlā*, in that it addresses and directs a singular individual. In this case, the word from which the title of the sura was later taken—*al-muzzammil*—is a true quranic *hapax*; the

root does not appear anywhere else in the Qur'an. Exegetes have typically defined it as meaning, "the one who is wrapped up," adding that it is being used here as an epithet to refer to the Prophet, who was at the time of revelation wrapped in his mantle and either asleep or in prayer.⁴⁹ The root more generally refers to running while veering to one side, limping, carrying a heavy load⁵⁰; while Lane and others cite numerous poetic sources where this meaning can be found, given that the root appears nowhere else in the Qur'an itself, its meaning within the text is not entirely clear. The explanation of limping or bearing a heavy load do seem to anticipate the verses that follow in this sura, however, in which the quranic speaker says to this addressee, "we will cast heavy speech upon you" (*innā sanuqliy 'alayka qawlaṅ thaqīlā*).⁵¹ The interceding verses—between the initial address (*yā ayyuhā l-muzzammil*) and the mention of heavy speech—direct this person to stay up at night, "except for a little, half of it, or a little less, or a little more."⁵² The fourth verse then instructs, "recite (*rattil*) the Qur'an distinctly (*tartilā*)" (*rattili l-qur'āna tartilā*). Quranic commentators have typically defined the use of R-T-L in the Qur'an with particular reference to practices of recitation; this mode of interpretation—defining the use of a particular root in the Qur'an with respect to practices that developed after the moment of revelation—raises the question of how the meaning then would have been understood at the precise moment of revelation, or even prior to revelation. In the pre-Islamic poetry, the root R-T-L refers to arranging something evenly, in good order, and more specifically may refer to teeth being evenly spaced and white, wherein it becomes associated

49 John Penrice, *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Ko-Ran, with Copious Grammatical References and Explanations of the Text* (London: Curzon Press, 1976), 63.

50 Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon: Derived from the Best and the Most Copious Eastern Sources*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1968), 1252.

51 Q 73:5

52 Q 73:2-4

with the production of speech.⁵³ The assumption would seem to be on the means of production of speech, that if a person's mouth contains evenly spaced teeth they are likely producing clear, even speech; if we accept that meaning, the command here becomes one to arrange the Qur'an in a clear and even manner. Through the association of R-T-L with speech, and the fact that the revelation until this point has primarily established itself as a recitation rather than a visual written document, the interpretation of this verse is typically that the individual being addressed here is told to recite the Qur'an in a clear, even fashion. The opening verses suggest a solitary, calm mode of religious practice; arranging or putting forth (as sound) the Qur'an in a clear and even manner is a key component of this. Verses later in the sura clarify the purpose behind this night practice; verses 6-8 describe a life when days are occupied by other obligations, but night can afford quiet and clarity in which one can turn all devotion to God.

Immediately following the opening address and instructions, there is a shift of perspective—an interjection of the divine “we”: “We will cast heavy speech upon you” (*innā sanuqliy ‘alayka qawlaṅ thaqīlā*).⁵⁴ The verse also exhibits a common feature of quranic style or rhetoric, a shift in narrative perspective and address, termed *iltifāt*. In his article on the topic, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem observes that this particular mode of *iltifāt*—shifting from third to first person perspective—tends to involve the speech of God, and particularly emphasizes God's power through direct divine intervention as speaker.⁵⁵ The opening verses direct a solitary, contemplative night practice, and the shift of perspective in the fifth verse broadens the perspective to the grand divine scale. The text does not specify exactly what this speech is that

53 Muhammad Ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzur et al., *Lisan al-‘Arab*, Tab‘a Jadida Muhaqqqaqa wa-Mashkula Shaklan Kamilan wa-Mudhayyala bi-Faharis Mufassala (al-Qahira: Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1981), 1578.

54 Q 73:5.

55 M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, “Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: ‘Iltifāt’ and Related Features in the Qur’ān,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 55, no. 3 (January 1, 1992): 412–413.

will be cast upon this individual. It is only described as heavy or weighty—*thaqīl*. This word occurs in only one other verse of the Qur’an, in *Sūrat al-Insān*, in a section that contains much of the same vocabulary, imagery, and even grammatical structure as these opening verses of *Sūrat al-Muzzammil*. That verse—76:23—reads, “Truly we have sent the Qur’an down (*nazzalnā taḥzīlā*) to you” (*innā nahnu nazzalnā ‘alayka l-qur’āna taḥzīlā*). Here the accusative of specification—*tamyīz*—appears again (similarly to the wording *rattil...tartīlā*), indicating how and emphasizing the action of God (speaking in the divine “we”) sending down the Qur’an. The following verses direct the addressee (again, a singular individual typically understood by exegetes to be the Prophet) to be patient, and to mention or remember (*udhkur*) the name of the lord (*isma rabbika*) in the morning and evening (*bukrataw wa-aṣīlā*).⁵⁶ Verse 26 then continues this thought, prescribing night religious practice: “and part of the night. Prostrate yourself to him, and glorify him for a long night” (*wa-mina l-layli fa-sjud lahu wa-sabbihhu laylan ṭawīlā*). The following verse then turns to mention a group of people who “love that which is quick at hand (*al-‘ājila*) and leave behind them a heavy day (*yawman ṭhaqīlā*).”⁵⁷ Both of these suras—*al-Insān* and *al-Muzzammil*—are from the early Meccan era, and contain similarly worded prescriptions for night religious practice. *Al-Muzzammil* calls for the Qur’an to be recited (*rattili l-qur’āna tartīlā*) in this particular context. And both passages contain attestations of divine power—shift to the use of the divine “we”—, and emphasis on the weighty nature of divine acts in the world, either sending speech (*qawl*, in the case of *al-Muzzammil*) or the promise of an end day (*yawm ṭhaqīl*).

The other occurrence of R-T-L in verb form is in *Sūrat al-Furqān*, which is from the middle Meccan period. In this case it is used from the perspective of the divine “we.” In this

⁵⁶ Q 76:24-25.

⁵⁷ Q 76:27.

case it occurs in the context of long passage of dialog and polemics against those who deny the revelation. The deniers ask, “why is the Qur’an not sent down to him all as a single entity (*jumlataw wāhida*)?”; the response shifts to the first person plural perspective and replies, “we will strengthen your heart (*fu’ādaka*) with it. He have recited it (or arranged or put forth—*rattalnāhu*) clearly (*tartīlā*).”⁵⁸ In this case, as the divine voice is responding directly to the question asking why the Qur’an has not all been revealed at once, in a single entity, the *rattalnāhu tartīlā* construction may also be understood as emphasizing the distinct clarity of the revelation, but also the mode of revelation as process itself.

Turning to the other verbs used for recitation—Q-R-’ and T-L-W—we see that the use of Q-R-’ as a verb occurs far more frequently in the earlier portion of the revelation. As I have previously noted, the verses that are thought to be the first revealed (in both the Egyptian and Nöldeke chronologies) begin with the command to recite, addressed to a singular individual: “Recite! [*iqra*] In the name of your lord who created, created the human from a clot.”⁵⁹ This use of the verb form of Q-R-’ is a command, addressed to a singular individual (typically understood by exegetes to be the Prophet Muhammad), with no grammatical object. In *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image*, Daniel Madigan provides readers with a brief catalog of the use of these verbs: Q-R-’ as a verb form occurs 16 times in the Qur’an (T-L-W occurs far more frequently as a verb); in 7 of these cases, Qur’an is the object.⁶⁰ *Kitāb* is the object only once.⁶¹ In 26:199 and 75:18 the object is a pronoun without a clear referent. This pattern of usage is what leads Madigan to describe the verbal use of Q-R-’ as “self-contained.”⁶² The verb form occurs only

58 Q 25:32.

59 Q 96:1.

60 Q 7:204, 16:98, 17:45, 17:106, twice in 73:20, and 84:21.

61 Q 10:94.

62 Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 138–139.

twice with no object whatsoever, both of these occurrences being at the opening of Sura 96, *al-‘Alaq*.⁶³ In his discussion of the different usages of Q-R-’ and T-L-W, Madigan observes that these verbs are used quite differently, both in terms of frequency of occurrence and in relation to the objects to which they typically refer.⁶⁴ The use of Q-R-’ at what is commonly understood as the earliest moment of the revelation is notable. It occurs twice in rapid succession, in command form with no object. Nowhere else in the Qur’an is it used in this way. Taken on its own, however, the usage of “*iqra*” without object in *Sūrat al-‘Alaq* would seem to imply that the object—what is to be recited—is self-explanatory, or known.⁶⁵ If we accept the view that this is the initial moment of the unfolding of the quranic text, this command can be seen as framing the many interlocking layers of discourse found therein.

The second earliest usage of Q-R-’ as a verb in the Qur’an occurs in verse 6 of *Sūrat al-A‘lā*, Sura 87, or the 19th sura revealed according to the Nöldeke chronology: “We will make you recite, and you will not forget” (*sanuqri’uka falā taṣṣā*).⁶⁶ This usage resembles that of the command believed to have begun the revelation (96:1) in that there is no clear indication of what is to be read or recited. Thematically, the openings of Suras 96 and 87 are closely related, both attesting to God’s creation and teaching of humankind. Both suras also exhibit what Carl Ernst describes as “a tightly structured organization,”⁶⁷ the tripartite ring structure that is developed and heavily drawn upon in the early and middle Meccan era suras. Both open with imperatives addressed to a single individual, with hymnic introductions. *Al-‘Alaq* opens with

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Madigan reminds us that the tradition has offered its own explanation, being that the Angel Gabriel was holding a cloth embroidered with the beginning of the revelation. Ibid., 139n41.

66 Q 87:6.

67 Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 76.

the command to recite, and to do so “in the name of your lord who created”;⁶⁸ *al-A‘lā* commands the listener, “glorify the name of your lord most high.”⁶⁹ In both cases the command directs the listener and immediately calls on the name of “your lord.” Both then move to discuss God creating (both drawing on the verb *khalaqa*). *Al-‘Alaq* speaks directly to God’s creation of humankind; the term from which the title was later taken—*al-‘alaq*—denotes the substance of this creation, something that is alternately translated as either a clot of blood or an embryo—something that clings, emphasizing dependence. The first five verses of *al-‘Alaq* depict God creating the human in this form, teaching him “by means of the pen” (*bi-l-qalam*), teaching him “that which he did not know” (*mā lam ya‘lam*). The opening verses of *Sūrat al-‘Alaq* are typically understood as highlighting man’s dependence on the divine, with regard to existence, and particularly knowledge. The sections that follow (described by Angelika Neuwirth in *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* as rebuke, polemic, and concluding thoughts, respectively⁷⁰) highlight the problem with humanity’s assumed self-sufficiency⁷¹ in spite of the sura’s opening assertions that God created humanity and taught what we otherwise would not know. Following typical ring structure form, the sura closes mirroring the material of the beginning, addressing a singular individual, calling him to worship (*usjud*) and to come close (*wa-qtarib*).⁷² In this way, the command to recite frames the quranic text, highlighting a key aspect of the divine-human relationship.

As I have previously mentioned, *Sūrat al-A‘lā* (Sura 87) contains a similar use of the Q-

68 Q 96:1.

69 Q 87:1.

70 Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren : die literarische Form des Koran - ein Zeugnis seiner Historizität?*, 2nd ed., Studien Zur Geschichte Und Kultur Des Islamischen Orients, Bd. 10 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 231.

71 Q 96:6-7.

72 Q 96:19.

R-ʾ verb in that it has no explicit object, also in an early Meccan period sura featuring a tripartite structure, and in a similar thematic context typical of the early Meccan period—that featuring an imperative and hymnic opening, a “call for exhortation” drawing on the features of the divine described in the first section, and a third section that directly turns back to the audience.⁷³ In the case of *Sūrat al-Aʿlā* the use of Q-R-ʾ is also in the first section, but in verse 6. The imperative opening this sura is to “glorify the name of your lord most high” (*sabbiḥ isma rabbika l-aʿlā*);⁷⁴ the opening verb is different from that of *Sūrat al-ʿAlaq*, but it draws on the same vocabulary in supporting this command—that of “the name of your lord.” The sixth and seventh verses of *Sūrat al-Aʿlā* give a similarly worded but fuller account of divine creation and ordering thereof, the sixth and seventh verses containing what Neuwirth describes as a “mediation”⁷⁵: “We will make you recite (*sanuqriʿuka*) so you will not forget, except as God wills. He knows what is apparent (*al-jahr*) and what is hidden (*wa-mā yakhfā*).” Just as is the case in *Sūrat al-ʿAlaq*, recitation is tied to knowledge: God knows, but humans may forget. That information or knowledge that humans will not forget is not directly specified here, but the nature of this knowledge foreshadows the rich sensory imagery that begins appearing in proximity to Q-R-ʾ as the revelation progresses. The word I have translated here as “apparent”—*al-jahr*—connotes not just what is made apparent to one’s sight—made visible—but also that which is made apparent to one’s hearing—said out loud. That which is hidden—*mā yakhfā*—is the opposite: it is something that is covered up so it cannot be seen. It is not perceptible to the senses.

In the case of *Sūrat al-Aʿlā* the form of the verb Q-R-ʾ differs; rather than an imperative

73 Neuwirth breaks down the structure of the sura as follows: first section verses 1-8, second verses 9-15, and third verses 16-19 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 225.

74 Q 87:1.

75 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 225.

first form verb, here it appears in the fourth form, indicating that the divine will make or compel the addressee recite. In his article on *iltifāt*, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem highlights 87:6 as exhibiting two types of narrative shift: a shift from third to first person (this being the most common variety found in the Qur'an), and also a shift from first to third (the second most common variety).⁷⁶ There are multiple layers of perspective and address within just the first section of *Sūrat al-A'ālā*. The initial command is addressed to a singular individual ("Glorify!", *sabbih*); the following verses go on to describe God's creation and ordering of existence from a third person perspective: "your lord most high, who created, who... who..." In verse 6, the perspective changes to a first person plural, again addressing a singular individual: "we will make you recite" (*sanuqri'uka*). In describing this type of *iltifāt* (the shift from third to first person), Abdel Haleem notes that not only is it extremely common in quranic discourse, it is also typical that God is involved in some way. This type of shift is powerful in two ways, he says, in that God is present as speaker, but also through the use of plurality ("we"), the divine power is highlighted even further.⁷⁷ In the case of verse 87:6, the content and grammatical structure emphasize this power as well. The fourth form verb is used; God will compel the addressee to recite. Following this verse, the perspective again shifts back to the third person (this is the second type of *iltifāt* described by Abdel Haleem): "except as God wills. He knows what is apparent and what is hidden."⁷⁸ God is no longer directly narrating. Asking why the Qur'an would speak about God in the third person, Abdel Haleem connects this type of narration to declarations related to God's unity. In these cases, he claims, no other name besides Allah will be as clear; the text emphasizes its indication of *the* God, in contrast to any other possibilities. This is particularly

⁷⁶ Abdel Haleem, "Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes," 412–413.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 413.

⁷⁸ Q 87:7.

related to knowledge, he points out: “Knowledge of the unseen, creation and judgement are the prerogative of Allāh in the religion of *tawhīd* and as such frequently accompany His name which is considered in Arabic grammar *a‘raf al-ma‘ārif* (the most definite of all definite pro/nouns).”⁷⁹ This would certainly seem to be true in the case of verse 87:7; the text returns to third person narration, speaking about God (using the name Allah), and emphasizing God’s control of knowledge of what is apparent (seen or heard) and what is hidden.

Sūrat al-Qiyāma (Sura 75), also an early Meccan sura, brings the use of Q-R-’ more fully into the field of multi-sensory imagery and knowledge that began developing in *Sūrat al-‘Alaq*. The sura opens with a six verse sequence of oaths attesting to God’s ability to create and arrange and the ability to correspondingly undo those acts, particularly affirming the truth of the day of resurrection (*yawmu l-qiyaama*). These opening verses are followed by a sequence of verses that evoke visual images for the reading, and also drawing on vocabulary alluding to sight and vision. Verses 7-10 describe the events of that day in extremely visual terms: “when sight (*baṣar*) is dazzled (*bariqa*), and the moon disappears (*khasafa*), and when the sun and the moon are joined together, on that day man will say, where is the resting place?” The root illustrating the dazzling of man’s sight (*bariqa*) is the same used for a flash of light or lightning, and can indicate bright light overwhelming the eye, making it difficult or impossible to see. Contrastingly, the moon will be eclipsed or hidden from vision. In the face of this visual overload, man will be looking for a place to which he can flee (*mafarr*).

The theme of sight or vision is picked up in the sura as it turns to the ideas of witnessing and evidence. Verse 14 states, “rather, man will be proof (*baṣīra*) against himself.” The word for proof here—*baṣīra*—is of the same root as that used for the sense of sight earlier

79 Abdel Haleem, “Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes,” 416.

in the sura—*baṣar*, and it is through the use of this root that the Qur’an begins to bring the ideas of sensory experience and knowledge more closely into conversation. The implication of the use of proof here in verse 14 is that it has a particularly visual component; because it can be seen, it can be known.

Shortly thereafter, however, the text turns to the role of reciting and hearing, saying, “do not move your tongue about it, to bring it about. It is for us to bring it together, and to recite (*qur’ānahu*). When we have recited it (*qara’nāhu*), follow its recitation (*qur’ānahu*). Then it is for us to make it clear (*bayānahu*).”⁸⁰ Interestingly, the referent of the initial “it” (*hu*) in this passage is not specified. The meaning of the verses would seem to imply that it is about the revelation, however. The divine “we” is speaking, and describing something that figure will bring together and recite, and that the addressee is to follow upon hearing it. The root Q-R-ʿ appears three times in rapid succession in these verses, attesting to the orality of the object under discussion. It is also of note that this passage is delivered from the first person plural perspective, but is placed between larger sections of third person narration. The use of the narrative “we” here is again a significant shift in the delivery of the text’s message.

Following this attestation to orality, the sura returns to focus on visual imagery (and third person perspective) with more discussion of the day of resurrection and the hereafter. Verses 22-25 describe existence on that day: “on that day, [some] faces will gleam (*nāḍira*), looking to their lord.”⁸¹ The gleaming of faces is indicated with the word *nāḍira*, referring to something that is bright and beautiful, and can be used for gold or silver. The image is that of shining beauty, reflecting light. And going on, the following verses provide a glimpse of the opposite fate: “and on that day, [some] faces will frown (*bāsira*), thinking that a back-breaking

80 Q 75:16-19.

81 Q 75:22-23.

calamity (*fāqira*) is going to happen to them.⁸² Although less visual (the root used for frowning—*B-S-R*—is not the same as that used earlier for sight and proof—*B-Ṣ-R*), the image of the fates of the less fortunate is very physical; the root *F-Q-R* typically refers to something or someone who is to be pitied, living a difficult existence, but also particularly to breaking or misalignment of the back, evoking the idea of physical pain.

Besides *Q-R-ʾ*, *T-L-W* is the verb used most frequently in the Qur'an for reciting. It is multivalent in its meanings, however, and can be used for reciting but also to follow—to come after, or to follow in a path behind someone or something—and these two meanings come together to imply a relationship between reciting and understanding, the latter of which may be shown by proper action in response to the recitation. There is almost always a reaction shown within the text in response to recitation as *T-L-W*; within the text, those who hear recitation denoted by this verb either react positively (eg., crying, prostrating), or negatively (eg., denying, turning one's back)—a reaction of some kind is almost always specified.

Although *T-L-W* is used as a verb throughout the Qur'an (there are 61 verses listed in the 'Abd al-Baqi concordance under the various verb forms,⁸³ as opposed to *Q-R-ʾ*'s 17⁸⁴), its usage is distinct from that of *Q-R-ʾ* in terms of its placement within the chronology of the revelation, and also its grammatical objects and the context in which it typically appears.

Whereas *Q-R-ʾ* is used as a verb primarily in the Meccan revelations, *T-L-W* begins appearing as a verb in the early revelations, but its usage becomes more and more concentrated over the course of the chronology of the revelation, occurring most frequently in the later Meccan and Medinan suras. In terms of grammatical object, *T-L-W* overwhelmingly refers to recitation of

82 Q 75:24-25.

83 Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li-Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Bayrut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1960), 213–214.

84 *Ibid.*, 696.

God's signs—*āyāt*. Typically these *āyāt* are recited to people who either subsequently believe properly (sometimes demonstrating proper belief with behavior such as prostrating or crying), or deny (typically shown by arguing). As for the precise identification of these *āyāt*, in most instances it is in no way clear that they are understood as referring exclusively to verses of the Qur'an. Rather, they seem indicate signs or messages of God in a much more general sense. T-L-W is also used to refer to reciting a book or scripture, *kitāb*, and it does so when the *kitāb* may mean God's revelations (as *kitāb*) in a general sense—not just Qur'an. At one point the *kitāb* to be recited is specified as Torah.⁸⁵ Qur'an is the object three times; two of these instances are somewhat indirect, however.⁸⁶ Finally, it is also used to refer to stories or reports—*naba'*—stories or lore of different prophets and occasionally groups of people or other types of figures.⁸⁷ For example, in *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'* (Sura 26), the text relates a number of stories about pre-quranic prophets, including long passages on Musa and Ibrahim. Verse 26:69 introduces one of the Ibrahim passages as follows: “recite for them (*wa-tlu 'alayhim*) the story of Ibrahim (*naba'a ibrahīm*).” The material that follows relates one of the main quranic accounts about Ibrahim. When used in this way, T-L-W can be understood not only as introducing or signaling the beginning of the quranic account that follows about that particular figure, but it may also include extra-quranic lore about those figures (in keeping with the general style in which the Qur'an frames stories about prophet, often implying that

85 Q 3:93: “All food was lawful for the children of Israel, except that which Israel made unlawful for itself before the Torah was sent down. Say, bring the Torah and recite it (*fa-tlūhā*) if you are truthful.”

86 It is also used in a sense that is not entirely relevant to the present study, when humans are commanded to recite or read from the *kitāb* (referring to the record rather than scripture per se) on the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-dīn*). Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image*, 73–74.

87 The examples of lore about prophets—quranic, biblical, and those not mentioned in either scriptural canon—are plentiful. The contrasting example of another type of figure whose story is introduced in this way (involving use of T-L-W) is *Dhū l-Qarnayn*. This reference is in *Sūrat al-Kahf*, 18:83: “They ask you about *Dhū l-Qarnayn*. Say, I will recite for you (*sa'atlū 'alaykum*) a remembrance (*dhikr*) of him.” Interestingly, this verse represents the only place where the material recited is a remembrance—*dhikr*—rather than a story—*naba'*—about a person.

the reader is familiar with some unspecified background information, or the general idea of the story already).

The usage of T-L-W as described above can be contrasted with the use of Q-R-ʾ as a verb, which occurs far less frequently overall, and is more heavily weighted toward the early revelations. The earliest occurrences do not stipulate objects, but Q-R-ʾ as a verb tends to refer much more clearly to recitation of Qurʾan specifically. It does so in a way that evokes a multi-sensory experience of reciting and hearing the Qurʾan, with a strongly visual component. When used in a context referring to the Qurʾan rather than other possibilities noted above (*āyāt, kitāb, Torah, nabaʾ*), T-L-W tends to be a kind of recitation that results in (or at least should result in) correct belief (occasionally reflected in actions and replies). This is exhibited through dialog and polemic.

The chronologically earliest usage of T-L-W is the single instance in which the verb indicates following (as in following in a path behind), exclusive of reciting. *Sūrat al-Shams* (91) opens with a series of oaths sworn on natural cosmic phenomena, a typical motif in early Meccan suras (this is the sixteenth revealed, according to the Nöldeke chronology⁸⁸), in this case in paired verses. T-L-W appears in the meaning of following in the very first lines: “By the sun and her clear brightness; by the moon as he follows her” (*wa-sh-shamsi wa-ḍuḥāhā wa-l-qamari idhā talāhā*).⁸⁹ The opening verses swear on the regular cycling between sun and moon, and the following oaths continue playing with the semi-personification of these cosmic bodies, also speaking to the contrast between lightness and darkness, and division and creation of order within the world. T-L-W here is used to show the regularity with which the moon follows the sun. The sura as a whole is typically understood of consisting of two main sections;

88 Ernst, *How to Read the Qurʾan*, 44.

89 Q 91:1-2.

the first ten verses consist of oaths organized into couplets. Verses 11-15, interestingly for our purposes, turn to the idea of denial, here depicted by referring to the people of Thamud.⁹⁰ The implication is that, given the ordering and regularity of the cosmos and other divine creations such as the earth (*al-arḍ*) and the soul (*nafs*), the people of Thamud have no reason to deny; they are described in verse 11 as denying or rejecting—*kadhhabat*—but the verb does not have an object specifying what it is that they reject. The first ten verses of the sura suggest several possibilities; it could be all of those features of the creation that are described, it could be any one of them, or it could be something else entirely.

The only other early Meccan uses of T-L-W as a verb are in verses 68:15 (*Sūrat al-Qalam*) and 83:13 (*Sūrat al-Mutaffifīn*), consisting of the exact same wording in both cases: “when our signs are recited for him (*tutlā ‘alayhi*), he says, tales of the ancients” (*idhā tutlā ‘alayhi āyātunā qāla asāṭīru l-awwalīn*). In both cases, the context is a polemical discussion of those who deny, and the consequences for this denial. The verb is in passive form here, so the thing being recited—“our signs” (*āyātunā*)—is grammatically the subject of the verb. In neither case is the precise content of this recitation (the signs) made explicit. These could be texts or words, but could also refer to signs in the more general sense as they frequently occur in the early Meccan revelations, as features of the natural world or cosmos.

Sūrat al-Isrā’ or *Banī Isrā’īl*—one of the few suras in the Qur’an that is referred to by two names—is one sura in which Q-R-’ and T-L-W both appear in verbal forms. It is from the middle Meccan period. R-T-L is used in only two verses in the entire Qur’an—one early Meccan and one middle Meccan—; this means that with the exception of its one use in the early period (in *Sūrat al-Muzzammil*), Q-R-’ is used in all references to reciting found early in the

⁹⁰ Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 228–229.

chronology of revelation. Use of Q-R-ʾ and T-L-W overlap in the mid to late Meccan suras, and following that overlap, all later references to reciting use the verb T-L-W. Just as the vocabulary used for discussing or commanding recitation changes, so does its usage, object, and semantic field. The earliest references to reciting use Q-R-ʾ with no clear object; over the course of the early revelations, the Qurʾan as object becomes more and more clearly specified. In the later revelations, recitation is primarily discussed using T-L-W, but the objects of the verb and the contexts in which it appears also differ from the earlier uses of Q-R-ʾ.

Despite being a mid-Meccan revelation (for the most part; some commentators suggest that certain passages could be Medinan additions⁹¹), *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* is quite long, made up of 111 verses. It evokes recitation on three occasions: the first uses Q-R-ʾ to denote the reciting,⁹² the second, in a verse that calls for the establishment of regular prayers, uses the Q-R-ʾ in connection to this ritual practice,⁹³ and the third uses both Q-R-ʾ and T-L-W⁹⁴. The sura as a whole is, although long, typical mid-Meccan material in terms of its themes and subject matter. There is a great deal of polemic related to references to Godʾs signs (*āyāt*), particularly referring to examples of past communities who denied in spite of Godʾs signs, and the theme of scripture is prevalent throughout. The combination of polemic (alternately reporting opponentsʾ demands for signs with references to signs given in the past), references to scripture and prophecy, and the calls to religious practice lead Carl Ernst to describe *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* as reflecting the emergence of a believing community in the Meccan context.⁹⁵

The first reference to recitation appears nearly halfway through the sura, beginning in

91 Alan Jones, trans., *The Qurʾān* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007), 261.

92 Q 17:45.

93 Q 17:78.

94 Q 17:106-107.

95 Ernst, *How to Read the Qurʾān*, 139-140.

verse 45. The sura begins with a single verse typically taken as a reference to the Prophet's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, up to heaven, and back. Following this verse, verses 2-21 discuss disbelief or errors on the part of past communities, focusing initially on Musa and the children of Israel,⁹⁶ then broadening to a discussion of signs⁹⁷ (referencing the Qur'an as providing guidance—*inna hādhā l-qur'āna yahdiy*⁹⁸) and punishment⁹⁹ more generally.

Beginning with verse 22 the text relates a series of commandments to its audience (here, a singular addressee) including being kind to one's aging parents,¹⁰⁰ and forbidding infanticide,¹⁰¹ adultery,¹⁰² and murder,¹⁰³ among other things. The entire passage alternates between direct address to a singular individual with occasional interjections in the first person plural, but also interjections where "your lord" is referenced in the third person. Verse 41 returns to the first person plural and the theme of the Qur'an, declaring "we turned (*ṣarrafnā*—this verb is often translated as "explained") in this Qur'an so they would remember, but they are still hurry away." The text then directs its addressee to tell them of the oneness of God, and declares how all in creation glorifies God, ending with the type of emphatic declarative statement about God that typically marks the end of a section of quranic text, stating the qualities of God that were highlighted in the previous passage: "he is forbearing and forgiving" (*innahu kāna ḥalīman ghaḥfūrā*).¹⁰⁴

This declaration offsets the following material, although the text does continue to address a singular individual, stating "when you recite the Qur'an (*qara'ta l-qur'āna*) we make

96 Q 17:2-8.

97 Q 17:9-14.

98 Q 17:9.

99 Q 17:15-21.

100 Q 17:23-24.

101 Q 17:31.

102 Q 17:32.

103 Q 17:33.

104 Q 17:44.

an invisible veil (*ḥijābam mastūran*) between you and between those who do not believe in the hereafter.”¹⁰⁵ When the addressee recites, there is something that will conceal him (a *ḥijāb*) from the gaze of those who do not believe in the hereafter. This *ḥijāb*, however, is itself something that is hidden from view (*mastūr*). This double-concealment is perplexing, and the following verses do not entirely clarify what is meant in this verse, but they do offer more information about what type of covering is taking place here. The next three verses bring the sensory information and deprivation into focus:

And we make a cover (*akinnatan*) over their hearts lest they understand it (*ay yafqahūhu*) and deafness (*waqran*) into their ears. When you mention (*dhakarta*) your lord alone in the Qur’an, they turn their backs, hurrying away. We know with what (*bimā*) they listen when they listen to you, and when they steal away, the wrongdoers say, indeed you are following a mere man bewitched (*rajulam mashūran*). Look how they make such comparisons to you; they stray but cannot [find] the way.¹⁰⁶

While these verses do not solve the puzzle of the double veiling described in 17:45, they do continue the themes of seeing and hearing, and bring in that of knowledge. The Qur’an turns to the first person plural narration, and the speaker describes how they cover the hearts of those who were described in the previous verse as not believing in the hereafter. While the addressee is doubly concealed with the invisible veil, this concealment is taken even further here by covering the hearts of those who are not meant to see. The combination of concealment from vision with the reference to the heart suggests that the Qur’an is alluding to sight and seeing in a broader sense. The eyes are not the only organ of sight; in this case it is the heart as well. The quranic narration then renders these individuals deaf as well, so while they cannot see the addressee reciting, they also cannot hear. The following sentence describes them running away when the addressee mentions the lord in the Qur’an; whether they are still

105 Q 17:45.

106 Q 17:46-47.

blind and deaf here is not made clear. The section closes by alluding to their failure to find the path; the allusions to blindness earlier in the passage evokes the idea they cannot see the way—neither with eyes, nor hearts. The theme of knowledge is also highly present in this passage.

The initial description of the blinding and deafening is done in order to ensure that those individuals do not understand—*ay yafqahūha*—or acquire knowledge from what they might hear of the recitation. Contrastingly, the passage also notes that the “we” speaker knows with what means (*bimā*) those people listen when they do listen to the recitation. This would seem to suggest that they are able to hear—either on other occasions or through some other means—but even despite this, they still sneak away and call the reciter a man bewitched.

The sura continues with the polemic and reminding of examples of signs and past instances of denial, including one of the quranic versions of the Iblis story,¹⁰⁷ eventually turning to a discussion of the day of reckoning and the role of prophets therein.¹⁰⁸ In the final verses of what Angelika Neuwirth understands to be the central third of the sura,¹⁰⁹ the text commands regular prayers, including the Qur’an. Although neither Q-R-’ nor T-L-W appear as verbs here, the verses do refer twice to Qur’an without the definite article: “stand in prayer for sunset (*dulūki sh-shamsi*¹¹⁰) to the dark of night, and *qur’ān* of dawn. *Qur’ān* of dawn is witnessed (*mash’hūdā*).”¹¹¹ The use of *qur’ān* here would seem to suggest an event, given that it is described as taking place at particular times, rather than the name of a text, suggesting that

107 Q 17:61-65.

108 Q 17:71-78.

109 Neuwirth breaks down the structure of *Sūrat al-Isrā’* into three large sections, consisting of verses 1-21 (introduction, revelation to Musa, and inconsistency of humans and individual responsibility), 22-81 (commandments and polemic), and 82-111 (confirmation of revelation and polemic on the theme of revelation) Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 266–267.

110 *Dulūk* is a quranic hapax; the root only appears in this verse. In addition to the Qur’an, Lane cites poetic sources in support of defining it as referring to sunset. In other early Arabic sources it refers to rubbing, such as rubbing one’s eyes, and Lane suggests that the connection to sunset would be because one who looks into the setting sun rubs his eyes. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 3: 906.

111 Q 17:78.

it is referring to the recitation of that text, rather than its message as a whole, or its name as one of the examples of scripture. It is worth noting that the connection between reciting and sight appears here as well, for the verse ends by stating that *qur'ān* (reciting) at dawn is always seen or witnessed—*mash'hūd*—but the seer or witness is not specified.

The final verses of the sura contain the earliest use (in the Nöldeke chronology) of T-L-W as a verb indicating reciting; interestingly, it appears alongside one of the latest uses of Q-R-' as referring to recitation of Qur'an. The sura ends with an extended strong affirmation of the revelation, including one of the several “challenge verses,”¹¹² and brings back the discussion of Musa and the children of Israel, mirroring the opening section of the sura. Following the discussion of Musa and Fir'awn, the closing verses of the sura serve as a final affirmation of the Qur'an, bringing in recitation (T-L-W) alongside what is presented as an example of a proper reaction to the recitation. The final section begins with verse 105, “in truth (*bi-l-ḥaqqi*) we have sent it down, and in truth it came down. We sent you, only as a bringer of good news and a warning, and a Qur'an that we divided for you to recite it (*li-taqra'ahu*) to people unhurriedly (*'alā mukthin*). We sent it down in pieces (*nazzalnāhu taṣzīlā*).”¹¹³ Similarly to the quranic use of R-T-L, these verses affirm the role of the Qur'an within the context of warning, and describe its revelation with the same grammatical structure—*tamyīz*—that appeared in that context as well. While 25:32 and 73:4 contain similar *rattal...tartīlā* wording, the same structure is used here to describe the manner in which the Qur'an has been sent down: *nazzalnāha taṣzīlā*—meaning “we sent it down sending down,” (emphasizing the sending down) typically explained by commentators and translators as meaning “we sent it down in parts.” Recitation is the

112 Q 17:88: “Say, if humankind and jinn came together to bring a likeness of the Qur'an, they could not bring like it, even if they were helping one another.”

113 Q 17:105-1.

purpose of the sending down, in this case, and the recipient is directed to recite it for people “*‘alā mukthin*.” The root M-K-Th refers to staying in one place, slowness, or patience. The form of *mukth* appears in this verse only in the Qur’an, but other forms are used referring to staying in one place or waiting, and in light of this use, commentators have typically understood “*‘alā mukthin*” in this context as dictating that the recitation should be performed slowly, or at intervals.

The final verses of *Sūrat al-Isrā’* refer to recitation yet again, however, and mark the beginning of the Qur’an’s use of T-L-W as recitation that evokes particular reactions from listeners. Verses 107-109 state, “say, whether you believe or not, those who were previously given knowledge (*al-‘ilm*), when it is recited before them (*yutlā ‘alayhim*), fall on their chins in prostration (*sujjadan*), saying glory to our lord (*subhāna rabbina*), the promise of our lord has truly been fulfilled. They fall on their chins crying, and it increases them in humility.” Here the verses very clearly indicate the proper reaction to hearing recitation (as denoted now by T-L-W; it is worth noting that Qur’an is the object of the verb only directly, although the preceding context heavily implies that it is still the object of recitation here). The depiction here can be contrasted with that found earlier in the sura, where the potential hearers were described as not believing in judgment day, and they were deprived of seeing and hearing the recitation (denoted there by Q-R-³) lest they understand it (*yafqahūhu*). The listeners at the end of the sura are described as having previously been given knowledge—*al-‘ilm*—, which would seem to facilitate the subsequent reaction of prostration and crying.

In contrast to the use in early suras of Q-R-³ as reciting Qur’an specifically, with a strong visual component, and connected to nighttime prayer, the use of T-L-W emerges in the mid-Meccan period and comes to be used for recitation that is connected to knowledge or

understanding on the part of the listener, as evidenced by the reactions described within the text. Eventually its usage broadens to include recitation of a wide range of materials beyond the Qur'an as well, and appears particularly in passages featuring disputation (taking place both within and outside of the text, as it directs its readers, "say...") and relating material or stories about past historical figures (prophetic and otherwise), presumably including extra-quranic lore.

In the late Meccan period T-L-W comes to be used frequently with objects other than Qur'an; signs (*āyāt*) are frequently recited, and it is this object that comes to dominate the use of T-L-W in the Medinan period as well. The exact nature of these signs is often left unspecified. Signs as verses of the Qur'an is one possibility, but it is clearly used in a much broader sense as well, especially in contexts when the text is referring to previous communities, or disputation with those who have rejected messages from the divine. *Sūra Yūnus*, a late Meccan sura, contains several examples of how T-L-W is used in such a way that includes Qur'an as a possible object, but the reference is often indirect, or it exists merely as one possibility among a field that is becoming increasingly broad as the chronology of the revelation progresses. The broadening of the object of revelation hinges in part on the ambiguity of the quranic use of "sign" (*āyāt*); in *Sūra Yūnus* this ambiguity of referent is brought into the context of recitation in particular. Carl Ernst describes concisely the ambiguity of what exactly counts as signs in the quranic context:

There is a certain slippage and ambiguity about the relationship between miracle and revelation, both in the outrageous list of wonders in the pagans' demands and in the Qur'an's own view of the revelatory process. That is, the very term used to denote a Qur'anic verse, *aya*, also means a sign of divine power, whether in the ordinary phenomena of nature or in extraordinary events decreed by God. Time and again, the opponents of the Qur'an call for a sign—or

are they asking for a verse of revelation?¹¹⁴

The appearance of recitation alongside references to signs (*āyāt*) in *Sūra Yūnus* serves as an excellent example of this ambiguity, which directly informs the changing quranic conception of recitation as a result.

Recitation is brought up three times in *Sūra Yūnus*, amidst alternating sections of scriptural affirmation, polemic, and eschatological narrative. The first instance is in verses 15 and 16, in a section of text that alternates between polemic against unnamed opponents and, relatedly, narrative of eschatology detailing the fate of those opponents. Following one such eschatological narrative, the text turns to place recitation within this context:

When our signs (*āyātunā*) are recited (*tutlā*) before them in clarification, those who do not hope to meet us say, bring us another *qur'ān*, or change it. Say, it is not for me to change it of my own volition. I only follow what is revealed (*yūhā*) to me. I fear, were I to disobey my lord, the punishment of a great day. If God had willed, I would not have recited it (*mā tatlawtuhu*) before you, nor would he have made it known to you (*adrākum bihī*). I have lingered among you for a whole lifetime before this. Will you not understand? (*a fa-lā ta'qilūna*)¹¹⁵

In these verses, signs (*āyāt*) are the grammatical subject of recitation (*tutlā*); here the signs are lines that can be recited, rather than a miracle or marvel of nature, for example. The passage is worded in a general sense, providing an example that does not seem to be connected to a specific moment in history when a particular community or type of person may have been disputing or denying. Given as much, the use of *qur'ān* in the opponents' response is ambiguous; it could be indicating the Qur'an, but nothing here indicates that we should limit our understanding to that text specifically. In any case, the opponents are requesting some different material to be recited for them; the reason for this, and what specific differences they might be demanding, is left unspecified. The text then turns to address the individual involved

114 Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, 140.

115 Q 10:15-16.

in this dispute, directing them to respond emphasizing the possibility of punishment, the likes of which are made clear from surrounding material in the sura. The response connects the recitation to a divine imperative, bringing together the possibilities of opponents hearing the recitation (“I would not have recited it before you”) with the possibility of this material being made known or comprehensible to them (“nor would he have made it known to you”), further reinforcing the connection between recitation denoted with T-L-W and understanding or knowledge. Interestingly, the directed response affirms the atemporal quality of the narrative itself, as it seems that the addressee has been present for quite some time.

The second reference to recitation in *Sūra Yūnus* is in verse 61, a moment that Angelika Neuwirth signals as marking the beginning of the second large section of the sura, which she describes as “encouragement to the Prophet.”¹¹⁶ Here at the beginning of the central third of the sura, the text turns to a singular addressee (which Neuwirth understands to be the Prophet), and offers the following words:

No matter what your[s] situation, and no matter what you[s] recite from it from a *qur’ān* (*wa-mā tatlū minhu miṣ qur’ānin*), whatever you[p] are doing, we are witnesses (*shuhūdan*) to you[p] when you[p] are absorbed in it (referring to “whatever you[p] are doing”). Not even the weight of a grain in the earth or heaven is concealed (*ya’zubu*—made distant from, or concealed) from your lord, nor the smallest of this, nor the greatest, except [what] are in a clear *kitāb*.¹¹⁷

The first portion of this verse is addressing a singular individual; this person is the one doing the reciting (the action of which is denoted with T-L-W). What is being recited is ambiguous, however. The verb is initially followed by “from it” (*minhu*); this pronoun has no obvious

¹¹⁶ Neuwirth breaks down the sura as follows: verses 1-60 comprise the first of three large sections. These verses are divided into three subsections as well: 1-6 consist of “confirmation of revelation and hymn”, 7-36 consist of “eschatology and polemic”, and 37-60 are “confirmation of revelation, encouragement, and eschatology.” The second of the three large sections is made up of verses 61-93; this portion consists of two subsections, with verses 61-70 consisting of “encouragement to the Prophet” and verses 71-93 relating “prophet legends.” The final large section consists of verses 94-109; she describes this portion as “confirmation of revelation, lessons from history.” Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 294–295.

¹¹⁷ Q 10:61.

antecedent. This is followed by “from a *qur’ān*” (*miṅ qur’ānin*). *Qur’ān* is indefinite. One possibility is that “from it from a *qur’ān*” could simply mean “part of the Qur’an.” This is how M.A.S. Abdel Haleem has rendered this wording in his translation: “whatever part of the Qur’an you are reciting.”¹¹⁸ The wording does not indicate this as the only possibility, however. Given that *qur’ān* is indefinite, it could be used to mean recitation in a more general sense. Following these words, however, the text turns mid-thought to address a plural audience (which I have marked with [p] in my translation above). Abdel Haleem describes this type of shift (*iltifāt*) in the quranic text as the third most common variety, comprising a change of addressee, and he provides a variety of examples of exactly this specific type of change of addressee, where the text shifts from addressing a singular individual to a plural group, particularly mid-thought. He claims, “*iltifāt* in such verses has the original lexical meaning of actually turning from one direction/person to another. In these examples we normally find the first addressee addressed again with others when there is a request that applies to them all.”¹¹⁹ That is to say, when the addressee shifts from singular to plural in this way, the original addressee is typically understood as being among the group that is then being addressed; here we can understand the reciter being addressed at the beginning of 10:61 as being included in the group that is being directed in the second half of the verse. The rhetorical effect here is that the speaker of these verses insists on being a witness not only in the initial instance of recitation mentioned at the outset, but of all individuals who fall under the depiction of what is described in the second half of the verse. The meaning in this case is clear here: no matter what anyone is doing at any time, not even the smallest portion of that can be concealed from

118 M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, ed., *The Qur’an: A New Translation*, Oxford World’s Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 133.

119 Abdel Haleem, “Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes,” 420.

“your lord.”

The final appearance of recitation in *Sūra Yūnus*¹²⁰ serves as an example for how it broadens (in terms of what is being recited) in the Qur’an from this point forward (chronologically speaking). It appears in verse 94, which, in Angelika Neuwirth’s structural analysis of the sura, serves as the initial verse of the third and final section of text.¹²¹ Recall that 10:61, the previous verse examined, this reference to recitation also marked a key structural moment in Neuwirth’s reading. The previous verses return to the theme of Musa and the children of Israel (who were evoked in the beginning of the sura as well), and the end of the section is marked with the type of declarative statement that typically marks the close of a section of narrative: “Your lord will judge between them as to their difference on the day of resurrection (*yawma l-qiyāma*).”¹²²

Verse 94 then marks the beginning of the final section, and brings back the idea of recitation: “If you were in doubt about what we have sent down to you, then ask those who have been reciting (*yaqra’ūna*) the *kitāb* before you. The truth has certainly come to you from lord, so [absolutely] do not be one of those who oppose.”¹²³ Interestingly, Q-R-³ is used for this final reference to recitation. Given that the object is *kitāb*, it is possible that the verb here could mean reading rather than reciting. However, given the way this verb is used within the Qur’an prior to this moment (as I have thoroughly examined here), it has been thoroughly associated with the oral thus far. Here the object—*kitāb*—is directly referenced as something that has been

120 It is worth noting here that it is used one other time in the sura in the manner of introducing a story about a past prophet—a usage I have previously discussed. Verse 10:71 begins, “recite the story of Nuh for them” (*watlū ‘alayhim naba’i nūh*). The material that follows relates a brief version of the Nuh story.

121 See note 116 in this chapter for a discussion of her structural analysis of this sura overall. She describes the final third—verses 94-109—as “confirmation of revelation, [and] lessons from history.” Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 295.

122 Q 10:93.

123 Q 10:94.

recited before, suggesting that other scriptures besides Qur'an are being referenced here.

From *Sūrat Yūnus* forward through the chronology of revelation, T-L-W is used to denote recitation; neither Q-R-ʾ nor R-T-L reappear. Similarly, the object of recitation broadens to include not only Qur'an, but scriptures, stories, and signs—all pertaining to information from or relating to God, but not necessarily limited to quranic verses or religious practice *per se*. What, then, can we conclude about the Qur'an's own understanding of recitation—recitation of itself in particular? The meaning and expectations surrounding recitation shift and come into focus gradually over the course of the revelation; the earliest references typically using Q-R-ʾ as a verb, and strongly tying together the experience of reciting with a visual component—seeing or witnessing. In the mid-Meccan revelations T-L-W comes to be used to denote recitation, and beyond the synonymy in meaning, this verb exists in a semantic field that is distinct from that of Q-R-ʾ. While Q-R-ʾ is tied to vision and witnessing, the semantic field of T-L-W is more this-world in its focus, with ties to knowledge, correspondingly reflected in proper or improper reactions on the parts of listeners. It is worth noting that the field of T-L-W is associated with reactions on the parts of listeners, which raises the question of the Qur'an's understandings of hearing and listening, most specifically within the context of recitation of Qur'an. And while Q-R-ʾ is used almost exclusively in reference to Qur'an, and almost exclusively in the early to middle Meccan revelations, T-L-W emerges in the middle Meccan period, and while initially refers primarily to recitation of Qur'an, gradually widens the possibilities until in the Medinan revelations it comes to refer to a much greater field of material, including scripture (*kitāb* or Torah), stories (*nabaʾ*)—extra-quranic lore.

Chapter 4: Poetics and Sound of the Text of the Qur'an

In chapter 3 of this dissertation, I discuss Navid Kermani's work on quranic aesthetics, specifically noting the central place of orality therein. In that chapter, I take a literary approach to the Qur'an, examining its own discourse on recitation in light of the ideas of Kermani and others, primarily Sayyid Qutb. In this chapter, I return to some of those points in order to examine the sounds of the words of the Qur'an as it is recited—its rhymes, rhythms, its sound patterns—the sounds of the words, in short. In doing so, I leave aside the issues of melody and the use of the *maqām* system, which I treat separately in chapter 5 of the dissertation.

As Kermani argues, the Qur'an's aesthetic potential is only realized in sound, not in silently reading the written word on a page.¹ When we begin to consider the sound of the Qur'an in the way I have put forward, we are immediately confronted by a diverse set of possibilities—we have the vast range of sound patterns in the Qur'an on one hand, and on the other, the numerous approaches we might take in order to better understand the issue. To what extent can a knowledge of *saj'*, or the rules of *tajwīd* (governing pronunciation and pauses), or analysis of end rhyme, to name a few possibilities, help us understand the Qur'an's use (variety of uses) of rhyme and rhythm? Can these bodies of knowledge function as tools to help us understand the patterns on a completely nondiscursive level—not knowing what the words are or what they mean, but not even knowing where boundaries between words exist?

An understanding of Arabic prosody or knowledge of *saj'* can ground the sounds of the Qur'an in the context of its immediate literary-poetic milieu, and can help us think about the ways in which it works with and against or beyond oral literary models in use at the moment of its revelation. This type of approach has yielded fruitful results as seen in the recent

1 Navid Kermani, *Gott ist schön : das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999), 82.

research of Devin Stewart and Andrew Bannister, among others.² The question still remains, however, of the possibilities for understanding the sounds of the words through a lens other than the literary. Even when considering the sounds of the Qur'an in light of traditional Arabic prosody, there always remains the potential counter-example of the reciter or listener who knows not a single word of Arabic, and yet appreciates the rhythms of the Qur'an, and even recites with great nuance while being completely unaware of the discursive meaning of the text. Can analysis of the Qur'an's prosody address a case such as this? The rules of *tajwīd* may offer one potential point of entry; while the Qur'an presents its own patterns of rhyme and rhythm, and pronunciation and pausing is to some extent dictated by the rules of *tajwīd*, this set of parameters by no means dictates a fixed final product; rather, there are many possibilities for how the text may be rendered in sound. The ways in which the text is broken up and shaped in recitation impacts the sound of the rhyme patterns presented by the quranic text.

In exploring this issue, I draw in part on the ideas of fixity and free variables in the recited Qur'an, as proposed by Michael Frishkopf,³ in order to entertain the diverse possibilities for the ways in which the sound of the Qur'an might be rendered. In doing so, I argue that the sounds of the words of the Qur'an as best understood with specific reference to the recited text, be it performed in person or via a recording, rather than through analysis of the fixed text

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- 2 Devin J. Stewart, "Saj' in the Qur'an: Prosody and Structure," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, no. 2 (September 1990): 101; Devin J. Stewart, "Poetic License in the Qur'an: Ibn Al-Ṣā'igh Al-Ḥanafī's *Iḥkām Al-Rāy Fī Aḥkām Al-Āy*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 1–56; Devin J. Stewart, "Rhymed Prose," ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Washington DC: Brill Online, 2012), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/rhymed-prose-SIM_00359; Devin J. Stewart, "Divine Epithets and the Dibacchius: Clausulae and Qur'anic Rhythm," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 22–64; Andrew G. Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Quran* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014); David A. Cassels, "Near-Rhyme and Its Occurrence in the Qur'an," *Journal of Semitic Studies* XXVIII, no. 2 (1983): 303–10, doi:10.1093/jss/XXVIII.2.303.
- 3 Michael Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 75–114.

—words on a page. While scholars have a variety of tools available that we may employ in thinking about the Qur'an's modes of rhyme and rhythm, the reality is that we are not discussing one fixed final product. In the sense of rhyme, rhythm, assonance, and so forth, the Qur'an exists as a diverse set of possibilities—all closely related, to be sure, but existing as a range of possibilities within set parameters.

Oral-Literary Approaches to the Qur'an

The Qur'an is often described as being characterized by distinctive rhyme patterns; however, the English word "rhyme" fails to capture the range of patterns and resonances created by the sounds of the words. The quranic text exhibits a wide range of styles, not only developing considerably over the course of its chronology, but also the patterns of sound resonance may differ from one sura to the next. While many of the early Meccan suras follow the structure and patterns of *saj'*, they do not necessarily draw on this system in the same way from one to the next. Similarly, we have diverse tools with which we may consider the sounds of the words of the Qur'an. A range of scholarly approaches have shed light on the issue of quranic orality from a variety of angles.

In his 2014 monograph, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an*,⁴ Andrew G. Bannister takes the unique approach of reading the Qur'an in light of the field of oral literary theory and oral-formulaic analysis developed from the 1930s onward, beginning with the works of Milman Parry and Albert Lord. Growing out of debates about the writings of Homer such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, oral literary theory reconciled, for thinkers such as Parry and Lord, the longstanding debates over the coherence of Homer's compositions, or lack thereof, and the

4 Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Quran*.

implications for considering potential authorship of works like those attributed to Homer.⁵ In doing so, Milman, Parry, and others, pointed to the role of oral literature as important context in understanding works composed in such a milieu, signaling particularly that oral poetic language is likely to be different from written poetic language, the role of performance in composition of oral works of literature, and a range of other contextual factors. Rather than presenting a coherent narrative comparable to written poetic literature, or an incoherent, disorganized, and repetitive composition not up to the standards of written literature, works composed and performed in an oral milieu must be understood particularly in that light, as they are governed by different uses of language and different expectations for form, coherence, and so on.⁶

Turning then to Arabic language and poetics in particular, Bannister moves closer to the literary-poetic milieu of the Qur'an. The relevant context then consists of pre-Islamic poetry, which, as Bannister notes, has already been explored in this way by a number of scholars.⁷ Bannister assesses the varying results of these individuals, noting the yields and limitations of the slightly differing approaches to pre-Islamic poetry through the lens of oral literary theory. He notes that an oral literary investigation into the language of pre-Islamic poetry reveals that the poetry is indeed as oral as is always said, and this orality is evidenced by a variety of its features, most notably including the presence of "formulaic language" typical of literature that is composed orally.⁸ Turning then to the Qur'an (and other oral literary genres of early Islam, such as the hadith and *quṣṣāṣ*), Bannister treats a small sample of quranic text in his analysis, focusing particularly on the quranic narrative of Adam and Iblis, which appears in

5 Ibid., 66–67.

6 Ibid., 66–97.

7 Ibid., 107.

8 Ibid., 121.

seven different locations in the quranic text. He notes that although each of the versions of this story is “worked into the texture of the sura in which it is found,” they can also be considered as a group, without necessarily completely removing them from their separate contexts.⁹ In doing so, Bannister is able to consider the stories in relation to biblical sources, but avoids the problematic mode of interpretation in which the Qur’an is read through the Hebrew Bible and biblical scholarship with the implicit assumption that the quranic narrative is dependent on biblical sources in some way, or is a failed or incomplete attempt at a retelling.¹⁰ Bannister’s claim here is that there is a common core to all of the Adam-Iblis stories in the Qur’an, with some degree of flexibility surrounding this core.¹¹ For Bannister, this particular understanding of the relationship between the Adam-Iblis accounts in the Qur’an evidences the oral milieu and origins of the text, and as such, it is best understood through the lens of oral literary theory.

Bannister’s study provides a new way to consider the Qur’an as literature in relation to other types of literature—both its most immediate literary-poetic milieu, but also those Islamic literatures that follow it in the Arabic and Islamic traditions. In considering the Qur’an in this way, the text is then seen as a product of a highly oral milieu, and this relationship can be shown through evidence within the quranic text itself. In this type of study, the Qur’an functions as a fixed literary product that bears the traces of its context and origins.

Performance of the text in sound is then important as far as it contributed to composition and expectations surrounding the text at the moment of its genesis, rather than practice or aesthetics moving from that point forward. Bannister points to the issue of orality, signaling

9 Ibid., 2–3.

10 Ibid., 2, here citing Walid Saleh; Walid Saleh, “In Search of a Comprehensible Qur’an: A Survey of Some Recent Scholarly Works,” *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 5, no. 2 (September 2003): 143–62.

11 Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Quran*, 28–29.

how it has haunted much of the scholarship on the Qur'an¹²; for him, however, "oral" refers particularly to oral literature. The question of the sounds of the recited Qur'an is, thereby, a separate issue.

If we follow the portion of Bannister's work that addresses the Qur'an in its literary or prosodic milieu, we quickly arrive at the tradition of *saj'* literature (*saj'* is most simply defined as "rhymed rhythmic prose," but as I will discuss, it is much more complex than that definition suggests). While the use of *saj'* in Arabic writings began early (it is evidenced in the works of pre-Islamic soothsayers), it was not systematized via written rules until the medieval era, when it was treated in a handful of handbooks of rhetoric.¹³ As Devin Stewart blithely notes, "much ink has been spilled over the question of whether or not the Qur'ān contains *saj'*."¹⁴ At stake in this debate is the issue of the status of the Qur'an vis-à-vis the theological issue of inimitability—if we maintain that the Qur'an is God's speech, "to call the Qur'ān *saj'* would be to impute a mundane attribute to God."¹⁵ In other words, it is not appropriate, in the context of this debate, to attribute a human-made literary system and aesthetic to the eternal speech of God. The debate in this sense resembles that of the Qur'an's status with respect to music. On the other hand, some commentators have acknowledged that the Qur'an was revealed in a language familiar to its most immediate recipients, and as such, obviously is would resemble the speech of the 7th century Arabs in certain ways.¹⁶ The connection of the sound of quranic prosody rather unfortunately became theologized through this debate.

The issue of the rhyme and rhythm of the Qur'an has received scant treatment in

12 Ibid., 29.

13 Stewart, "Saj' in the Qur'ān: Prosody and Structure," 101.

14 Ibid., 102.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 102–108.

scholarship—in English, European languages, and Arabic. The primary technical treatments of quranic rhyme available are those by Devin Stewart and Angelika Neuwirth.¹⁷ Both authors note that the term “rhyme” (English “rhyme,” or German “Reim,” in Neuwirth’s case) does not sufficiently capture the complex range of sound patterns heard in the quranic text.¹⁸ In her seminal *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, Neuwirth provides an extremely thorough cataloging of the rhyme patterns used throughout the Meccan suras—with attention not only to end-rhyme, but also sound patterns that occur more broadly across whole verses or suras.¹⁹ This investigation serves the broader purpose of her work, which is an analysis of structure in Meccan suras. Neuwirth’s investigation is literary and historical, and within this area one important factor is the Qur’an’s use of rhyme, particularly as it is often part of a larger structure shaping the sura as a literary unit.

In his article, “Saj‘ in the Qur’an,” Stewart discusses the debates concerning the existence of *saj‘* in the Qur’an, then turns the medieval works of Arabic rhetoric (primarily those of Diya’ al-Din Ibn al-Athir²⁰) wherein the science of *saj‘* reached its highest level of specification. He then turns to the Qur’an, asking to what degree the Qur’an uses *saj‘*, and in what ways it may do so.

In short, for Ibn al-Athir, *saj‘* is an accent-based quantitative system of meter and rhyme. While there are differences between the systems described by the medieval rhetoricians (for example, Stewart points out that there is disagreement over whether certain particles or

17 Stewart, “Saj‘ in the Qur’an: Prosody and Structure”; Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren : die literarische Form des Koran - ein Zeugnis seiner Historizität?*, 2nd ed., Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients, Bd. 10 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007).

18 Stewart, “Saj‘ in the Qur’an: Prosody and Structure,” 108–111; Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 65.

19 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 65–115; and following these pages, there are tables detailing the rhyme patterns and breakdown by verse in all of the Meccan suras.

20 Diya al-Din Nasr Allah ibn Muhammad Ibn al-Athir, *al-Mathal al-Sa’ir fi Adab al-Katib wa-al-Sha’ir* (Misr: Maktabat Nahdat Misr, 1959).

prepositions—attached, such as *bi-* or *li-*, or unattached, such as *hal*, *min*, and so on—count as separate words or not).²¹ In most cases, however, the word is the basic building block of the meter, as opposed to the syllable.²² The number of words then determines the length of the basic unit. As Stewart demonstrates, Ibn al-Athir determines the length of the clause or phrase (the *sajʿa*) by the number of words that make up the phrase. Short *sajʿas* consist of two to ten words; there is no limit to the length of long *sajʿas*.²³

As Stewart shows, while the medieval rhetoricians such as Ibn al-Athir tend to draw on quranic examples in explaining the technicalities of *sajʿ* (alongside examples from Arabic prosody more generally), the Qurʾan’s use of rhymed rhythmic prose does not always follow the same patterns or rules as *sajʿ* literature; it often exceeds them, in fact. While Stewart concludes that mono-rhyme is a possibility in *sajʿ* literature, but it is not required, the Qurʾan frequently draws on mono-rhyme—and even further, the Qurʾan tends to draw very frequently on a small set of possibilities for mono-rhyme, while *sajʿ* entertains a wide variety of possibilities.²⁴

As such, the Qurʾan’s use of sound patterns can only be partially addressed through the lens of *sajʿ*. Examining the Qurʾan through the medieval rhetoric works on *sajʿ* grounds the Qurʾan’s use of sound within the context of Arabic prosody more generally—particularly in that it shows that the Qurʾan tends to be much less diverse in rhyme patterns used (when compared to other works of Arabic prosody, that is), and may feature extremely lengthy *sajʿas*, for example. At the root of this style of analysis is a conversation between the Qurʾan and literature with which it shares a common language (Arabic), and to some degree a similar

21 Stewart, “Sajʿ in the Qurʾān: Prosody and Structure,” 113–115.

22 Ibid., 113–114.

23 Ibid., 118–119.

24 Ibid., 133.

method for forming patterns of rhyme and rhythm. As I noted previously, the basic metrical unit in *sajʿ* is the word, rather than the syllable. So while an understanding of *sajʿ* can help us ground the text of the Qurʾan within its linguistic milieu, the words as units continue to be important.

While these approaches (which represent unique perspectives, but all of which I loosely classify here as “oral-literary”) illuminate the sound of the Qurʾan with particular attention to its literary milieu, and technical genres of prosody, the question of how we might consider the sounds of the words apart from their discursive meanings entirely. The possible exception of a reciter or listener who knows not even a single word of Arabic, and yet recites with great nuance, or hears or recites with the patterns of rhyme, rhythm, and assonance. This example attests to the possibility of meaning in the sounds that can be perceived and/or understood apart from the realm of the literary or discursive.

The Qurʾan as Poetic Speech

In his monograph on quranic aesthetics, *Gott ist schön*, Navid Kermani draws an analogy from the Qurʾan to a musical score (as I have discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation as well).²⁵ Putting aside the complex issue of the recited Qurʾan’s relationship to music (as Kristina Nelson calls it, “the *samāʿ* polemic”²⁶), this analogy demonstrates a helpful point in thinking about the orality of the Qurʾan. Kermani points out, “even scores can be read by individuals at home or hummed softly, though they were created to be heard in concert halls. The same is true of the Qurʾan.”²⁷ While it is possible to read a musical score quietly to oneself,

25 Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, 197–205.

26 Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qurʾan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 32–51.

27 “Auch eine Partitur kann der einzelne zu Hause für sich lesen oder leise summen, doch ist die Form der Rezeption, für die sie geschaffen wurde, die des Hörens im Konzertsaal. Entsprechendes gilt für den Koran.” Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, 197.

its ostensible purpose is to guide performance, or to dictate production of sound. While it may be used in multiple ways, it is “for” only one thing. Kermani argues that the Qur’an may be similarly understood: of course one can sit quietly and read the words silently off the page, but this is not what it is “for.” Reading the text silently is not the same experience as realizing the words in sound. Further, the patterns of sound resonance—rhyme, rhythm, assonance—are only produced and experienced in sound. Even when reciting alone in prayer, this is done out loud.

Kermani, and others such as Michael Sells, have drawn on the linguistic theories of Roman Jakobson (and in the case of Kermani, he considers the thought of Jan Mukařovský as well) in arguing that the Qur’an is best classified as a form of poetic speech.²⁸ Jakobson, a linguist and literary theorist, has been remembered primarily as shaping the field of phonology, the branch of linguistics and deals with sound and speech—not the mechanisms of sound production or aural perception (that is the realm of phonetics), but rather the issue of how the sounds of spoken language might relate to abstract structures such as meanings of words or grammatical structures. He opens the first of his *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* with a reference to Edgar Allen Poe’s repeated use of “nevermore” in his poem, “The Raven,” explaining as follows:

This expression’s value is not entirely accounted for in terms of its purely semantic value, narrowly defined, i.e., its general meaning plus its contingent, contextual meanings. Poe himself tells us that it was the potential onomatopoeic quality of the sounds of the word *nevermore* which suggested to him its association with the croaking of a raven, and which was even the inspiration for the whole poem. Also, although the poet has no wish to weaken the sameness, the monotony, of the refrain, and while he repeatedly introduces it in the same

28 Kermani, *Gott ist schön*; Michael Sells, “Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat Al-Qadr,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 2 (June 1991): 239–59; Michael Sells, “Sound and Meaning in ‘Sūrat Al-Qāri’a,’” *Arabica* 40, no. 3 (November 1993): 403–30; Michael Sells, “A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Sūras of the Qur’an: Spirit, Gender, and Aural Intertextuality,” in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata, Curzon Studies in the Qur’an (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 3–25; Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, 2nd ed (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2007).

way ('Quoth the raven, "Nevermore"') it is nevertheless certain that variation of its phonic qualities, such as modulation of tone, stress and cadence, the detailed articulation of the sounds and of the groups of sounds, that such variations allow the emotive value of the word to be quantitatively and qualitatively varied in all kinds of ways.²⁹

The example of Poe and his use of "nevermore" is well-chosen, given that, as Jakobson notes, Poe himself has attested to sound being a large portion of what inspired him to choose the word, and write the poem. But Jakobson goes on to point out, much more broadly, that we may think of a spoken word as a sign with two sides—the sound and the meaning. He points out that although this relationship is clear, its structure (how abstract meanings are communicated by the sounds of spoken language) has yet to be fully understood.³⁰ Of course missing from this equation is the written word; when conceived in this way, spoken language no longer relies on the written.

Just as I noted in chapter 1 of this dissertation, as many scholars writing on the recited Qur'an have argued for the primacy of the recited text over the written, Jakobson may be seen as urging for more thorough consideration of the recited text as well, from the angle of spoken language. As he points out, spoken language conveys meaning even without the aid of the written word: "a sequence of sounds can function as the vehicle for the meaning, but how exactly do the sounds perform this function? What exactly is the relation between sound and meaning within a word, or within language generally?"³¹

Given that the sounds of spoken language communicate meaning, turning then to the recited Qur'an we may ask several questions. First, what kind of spoken language is it? Second, how exactly do these sounds communicate meaning? And third, what kind or kinds of

29 Roman Jakobson, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 2.

30 *Ibid.*, 3.

31 *Ibid.*

meaning do they communicate? Jakobson, along with Jan Mukařovský (as cited by Navid Kermani), help us address the first question through their discussions of the different types or functions of spoken languages. In *Gott ist schön*, Kermani clearly and concisely argues that the Qur'an is best understood, in the schema of Jakobson and Mukařovský, as a form of poetic speech. Kermani first notes that Mukařovský identifies four basic functions of human speech, based in part on Karl Buhler's theory of language on the Organon model:

While a purely communicative utterance is dominated by the representative, expressive, and appellative functions, a poetic [*dicheterischen*] utterance gains a fourth function of great importance: the poetic [*poetische*]. In this model, the first three refer to extra-linguistic entities and objectives: the representation of reality, the locution of the speaker, and appealing to the recipient. Thus, they are of practical communication value or practical significance. In all cases, the linguistic sign is devoted to an extra-linguistic denotatum. For the speaker, the form of the message does not matter, only the content.³²

Poetic speech then, is not only concerned with content, or functioning as a sign pointing to something or someone else other than itself; it is speech for its own sake. As Kermani goes on to argue, all four functions of language can be seen in the Qur'an.³³ While it communicates in the three modes of communicative speech, it contains an additional layer, or function that can be identified as poetic speech—those which are concerned with the form of the message, but not necessarily its content.

Fixed and Free Variables in Qur'an Recitation

One key aspect of the recited Qur'an, when understood as poetic speech, is its fundamental existence as sound. When we bracket the issue of written words, as in the case of a physical Qur'an, we may address the Qur'an as spoken language encompassing all four functions described by Kermani (citing of course Mukařovský and Jakobson), one of which is

³² Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, 99.

³³ *Ibid.*, 100.

speech for its own speech—speech as speech concerned with its form, but not necessarily its content. One point that immediately arises in considering the Qur’an as sound, or as poetic speech, is that its sounds are not entirely pre-determined. That is to say, one passage of Qur’an recited once rarely sounds exactly like a previous recitation of that same passage (barring the obvious counter-example of a recording played repeatedly).

In his chapter “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” Canadian ethnomusicologist Michael Frishkopf (who I also discussed previously in chapter 1 of this dissertation) demonstrates the ways in which Qur’an recitation is able to participate in debates around modern attempts to define and regulate Islam in the Middle East. He points out that, given the fact that the text of the Qur’an is fixed (i.e., the words cannot be changed; it is a closed canon), one would not expect recitation of a fixed text to be able to participate in modern debates necessarily.³⁴ However, Frishkopf isolates a number of areas in which recitation is not, in fact, fixed. He uses these categories in order to contrast not only *mujawwad* and *murattal* styles of recitation, but also what he terms the newer, “Saudi” style recitation in contrast to the older, “Egyptian” style.³⁵

As Frishkopf points out, recitation (which he refers to using the term *tilawa*, as this is the word used in the contemporary Egyptian context), is fixed in terms of “the written text (*mushaf*), its phonological ‘readings’ (*qira’at*) and its rules of recitation (*ahkam al-tajwid*).”³⁶

34 Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” 75.

35 Kristina Nelson provides an extremely clear breakdown of the differences between the *mujawwad* and *murattal* styles in the introduction of *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*. Additionally, I take up this issue with respect to more recent styles of recitation in chapter 5 of this dissertation. In brief, *mujawwad* is the style of public performance, and as Frishkopf points out, has become associated particularly with the famed Egyptian reciters of the 1950s-70s, on whom Nelson’s research focuses. *Mujawwad* is highly emotive and melodic. *Murattal*, by contrast, is more measured in terms of rhythm, melody, and emotional affect, and as a result is more typically heard in the contexts of private practice, education, or memorization. Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*, 1985, xxii–xviii.

36 Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” 77.

The presentation of the linguistic meaning of any given passage of the Qur'an is ostensibly the same no matter how any non-fixed variable may be altered.³⁷ Frishkopf points out that the "free variables" (aspects of recitation that he identifies as being "fluid," or not strictly regulated or fixed) communicate the paralinguistic meanings of the recited Qur'an.³⁸ He isolates the "free variables" of recitation in order to contrast both *mujawwad* and *murattal* styles of recitation, in addition to what he describes as the newer "Saudi" style versus the older "Egyptian" style (be it *mujawwad* or *murattal*). These potentially variable elements of recitation include (as distributed over charts in two different sections of the chapter): timbre, expression (meaning degree to which the recitation is expressive), ambitus (pitch range of the melody; in the context of music, this term refers to the range of all pitches found in a particular piece of music), tessitura (also a technical term in music, literally meaning "texture," but referring to the average range of pitches within a given piece in relation to the range of the instrument or voice for which the piece is written³⁹), mode preference, modulation (meaning frequency of modulation from one *maqām* to another), melodicity (the degree to which the recitation could be described as melodic, and what type of shape the melodies take), pause, tone rate (the rate at which a reciter moves between pitches), dynamic level, dynamic range, accent, melisma (multiple pitches on a single syllable), word painting, repetition, syllable duration, syllable duration variation, textual passage (as in, choice of textual passage to recite), textual boundaries (what types of units a reciter may select—*mujawwad* and *murattal* seem to prefer

37 Certain interpretive decisions may render the meaning of the text slightly differently. This point should not be overstated however; the differences do not consist of large changes in meaning per se, so much as shifts in emphasis or sentence structure that result in slightly different meanings. *Ibid.*, 78.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Michael Kennedy, ed., "Tessitura," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, Oxford Music Online (Oxford University Press), accessed June 23, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e10195>.

sura units; Saudi style prefers either juz' or sura⁴⁰), *du'ā'* (inclusion of recited or sung extra-quranic supplicatory texts), regional accent, occasion, social position (of the reciter), personal image (of the reciter), attendance (how many people are present listening and what type of group they constitute), listener behavior, medium, reverb, cover text, cover fonts, cover images, cover art, producer name, producer specialization, and retail location.⁴¹

While Frishkopf's attention to extra-sonic factors (such as the image of the reciter, the type of production or publishing company producing the recordings, cover art, and so on), serves well his argument about the participation of Qur'an recitation in modern debates about religious piety and practice, the non-fixed elements of sound that he discusses are much more directly of interest in this discussion. And more specifically, his identification of the possibilities of repetition and pausing are particularly of interest in a close examination of the Qur'an's sound patterns. While the textual version of those sound patterns is fixed, the rules of *tajwīd* offer a wide range of options available to a reciter in rendering the text out loud. And even further, a reciter may stop in places where an explicit *tajwīd* marking is not provided (so long as they do not stop where it is explicitly forbidden to do so), especially if they need to breathe; stopping and starting will necessarily happen, and it will reshape the rhymes and sound patterns provided by the fixed text. The reciter also determines the pace or tempo of the recitation; and while this choice is not entirely open, but is guided by norms of performance practice and the requirement to present the text clearly, variation is possible here as well.

The "free variables" of pauses and choice of pace largely impact time in recitation, and reshape the sound patterns presented by the quranic text. We may consider even further that the rules of *tajwīd* dictate norms of pronunciation, especially in terms of elision and ensuring

40 Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt," 104.

41 Ibid., 86–87, 104–105.

smooth flow between pairs of letters than may be awkward to pronounce or hear in combination; this system of pronunciation dictates reading of the Qur'an only. And while it by and large enforces what may be considered beautiful sounding Arabic pronunciation, it does mean that the sound of the text differs from its written form in several ways. For instance, in some cases a particular rule of pronunciation will require that the last letter of the word be pronounced differently from what is written.

In any case, it is in performance⁴² of the recited Qur'an that the diversity of "free variables" appear, as the text occurs as sound in time. The rhyme and the sound patterns of the Qur'an are then shaped in the moment of recitation, rather than appearing as static words on a page. The relation of rhyme and sound patterns within the Qur'an to the content or discursive meaning of the text is a complex issue, and a range of possibilities exists in this regard. Both the linguistic understanding of poetic speech, and the distinctive sound patterns of the quranic text (its use of rhyme in the broad sense of the term), suggest that these qualities are best understood with reference to the recited Qur'an as it is realized in practice and performance with respect to the choices made by the reciter. When it is performed—either in prayer, in public (as performance or in the mosque, for example), or in recordings—this is when variation from one performance to another may occur. While Qur'an recitation is highly regulated or even fixed in most areas, there is a wide range of possibilities for interpretive decisions on the part of the reciter, and these decisions obviously result in distinguishing one

42 In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discuss what is meant by "performance" in the case of the recited Qur'an. In brief, my use of this term is in no way meant to imply that I am necessarily treating recitation as a performance event on a stage with an audience (although that is certainly one possibility, particularly in the cases of Egyptian recitation in the 1950s-70s), but rather that it is a kind of cultural performance, which must be viewed as an event or practice taking place within a specifically delineated time, but as being shaped by context in a very broad sense, extending well beyond the actual moment of reciting and the individual doing the reciting.

performance from another.

Understanding Quranic Rhyme and Rhythm Through Interviews and Recorded Examples

In interviews with reciters and teachers of recitation, when asked about favorite suras or passages to recite (for any reason), *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is cited consistently, with specific reference to its subject matter, but also its distinctive sound. While reciters name a variety of reasons why they may prefer to recite particular passages or suras (I take up this issue more extensively in Chapter 2 of the dissertation), it is worth noting that *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* features a particularly persistent rhyme pattern; all 78 verses of the sura feature end rhyme on *ān/ām*. In this case we may define rhyme more broadly as well, as the sura also includes an entire sentence that functions as a refrain: “Which of your lord’s favors will you deny?” (*fa-bi-ayyi ālā’i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*). Even further, the sura draws on a feature of quranic Arabic that evades elegant translation into English, by using the grammatical dual in order to address a pair of individuals. Pronouns and verbs are declined accordingly, typically involving an ending of either *-ān* or *ā*, extending the *ā* sound throughout each verse; the use of rhyme and consistency of sound patterns extends far beyond end rhyme.⁴³

Reciters who have cited *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* as being one of their favorite selections occasionally address the pervasive sound patterns (of *ā*, *ām*, *ān*) in relation to the discursive meaning of the text. The content of the sura revolves around God’s mercy and favors, as is highlighted by the refrain, and contains some of the Qur’an’s more evocative images of God’s rewards. One reciter, Fatima, cites *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* as one of her favorite portions of the Qur’an to hear, mentioning the features I have described here: “It has small verses, and the

⁴³ For a full translation and discussion of the resonance between sound and meaning in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, refer to “The Sura of the Compassionate,” in the second edition of Michael Sells’ *Approaching the Qur’an*. Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, 145–157.

same verse repeated... I enjoy it. If you read the meaning of it, you would get that... It's a mercy sura. It's about the mercy of God and paradise." Abdullah, a teacher of recitation, points to *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* as being a favorite for reciting and listening for many people, citing particularly the nature of the subject matter in relation to a calming emotional effect: "If you go to the mosque for prayer,... if somebody reads from *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, it resonates with people, it calms people down after a long day of work." Going on, Abdullah elaborates on the common preference for reciting *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, attributing this at least initially to the subject matter:

If a reciter's picking something to recite, they're not going to pick a random section from *Sūrat al-Nisā'* dealing with inheritance laws. They're going to pick a section like the end of *Furqān* that has general inspirational guidance, or a section from *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* that celebrates the mercy and the bounties of God —things like that. So those sections tend to stick with you for the reason of the meaning, and also you're exposed to those through listening to *mujawwad* recitations a lot.

Abdullah points out that rarely, if ever, will a reciter choose to recite a section of the Qur'an with subject matter such as inheritance laws, for example.⁴⁴ The themes of mercy and favors of God in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* make that portion of text a much more common choice. However, he goes on to say that while initially the choice may be driven by preference for the subject matter, it eventually becomes about familiarity as well. If a certain passage is commonly heard or recited, chances are it will be heard and recited even more. While the sound and subject may initially have resonated, these aspects become tied to a sense of familiarity in hearing and reciting that passage.

Not only is *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* celebrating God's mercy and his bounties upon us, but the sound itself is something that people would find more peace in. Whereas you'll find that some other sections, like verses that deal with rules of

⁴⁴ I entertain this remark and similar sentiments at greater length in chapter 2 of the dissertation.

engagement, jihad, and stuff like that, a lot of those are actually hard on the tongue.

Going on, Abdullah identifies a quality that he refers to here as words being “hard on the tongue” with particular types of sounds (particularly certain letters he describes as being “guttural,” and also the rule of the *qalqala*, which I explain below), but also connects these sounds to particular types of subject matter. He first cites verse 5:3, which dictates foods that are prohibited for believers:

[Reciting] *hurrimat ‘alaykumu l-maytatu wa-d-damu wa-lahmu l-khiṣīri wa-mā uhillā lighayri l-llāhi bihī* [“unlawful to you are carrion, blood, meat of swine, and that which has been offered in a name other than God’s...”] and then it’s listing the things [reciting] *wa-l-munkhaniqatu wa-l-mawqūdhātu wa-l-mutaraddiyatu wa-n-natiha...* So it’s saying those things that are killed by strangling, or a blow to the head...can you hear that?...It’s describing the things that are prohibited to eat, and just saying those words is a challenge. It doesn’t flow as easily; it just doesn’t come off the tongue as easily; it doesn’t sound as pleasant itself. I’ve heard another scholar mention something regarding a verse about a fight...[long pause]

I’m looking at *Sūra Muḥammad*, sura 47 verse 4. It’s saying, when you meet those who disbelieve in battle, strike their necks. It’s a serious rules of engagement verse. And if you listen to it, [reciting] *fa-idhā laqītumu l-ladhīna kafarū fadarba r-raqābi ḥattā idhā athkhantumūhum fashaddū...*In the other verse that I just mentioned to you from *Sūrat al-Mā’ida*, you’ll find a lot of these guttural letters, like the *khā’*, the *qāf*, and so on. You get these sorts of letters that have these very, kind of hard, cutting edge kind of sound, which is different from *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, [where] you’re not going to find as much of that.

Here Abdullah draws a direct correlation between certain kinds of subject matter found in the Qur’an—rules about eating and rules concerning warfare—and the sounds of the words, or the ease with which they can be recited. The sounds he pinpoints include certain “guttural” consonants and the rule of the *qalqala*. The consonants he identifies specifically are *khā’* and *qāf*, both of which are produced in the throat.⁴⁵

45 A common diagram used in beginning Arabic or *tajwīd* classes is of a vertical cross-section of the human head and throat. Within the mouth, nose, and throat, the diagram indicates the location for articulation of each Arabic letter when properly pronounced.

The rule of the *qalqala*, on the other hand, states that when one of five specific consonants⁴⁶ is followed by *sukkūn*, then another consonant, the first consonant must be “bounced,” by pronouncing a short vowel between the two consonants. In short, the rule is concerned with instances where there are consonants followed directly by other consonants, the combination of which would be difficult to pronounce each clearly (typically two consonants articulated in different regions of the mouth or throat) without separating them with a short vowel sound. For example, in the word *taqdīr*, the *qāf* is followed directly with another consonant, the *dāl*, so it must be pronounced *taqadīr*.

Abdullah has created a dichotomy of types of sounds and subject matter: on one end of the spectrum are guttural consonants or words and passages containing sequences of consonants that are awkward to pronounce clearly—he points out that these types of sounds (that are unpleasant or difficult to pronounce) may correspond to subject matter that is difficult or unpleasant in a conceptual sense, such as naming animals that should not be consumed or the practice of warfare. On the other end, him and many others have identified *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* as being a favorite passage to recite or listen to—a sura that contains a distinctive pattern of sound and rhyme that is pervasive and carried through on several levels. Even further, the types of rhymes used in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* create incredibly “open” sounds, with frequent occurrence of the long *ā* vowel, requiring an open mouth and throat, and typically held for at least two “beats” or counts in recitation. Additionally, *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* contrasts clearly with the other examples in terms of subject matter. It is a popular choice for recitation or listening in part because it highlights God’s mercy, illustrated through evocative and lush imagery.

⁴⁶ These are *bāʾ*, *jīm*, *dāl*, *ṭāʾ*, and *qāf*.

At first glance, this split between different types of subject matter (inspirational guidance or the mercy of God on one hand, versus difficult or “harsh” topics such as eating prohibitions or warfare on the other) may seem to correspond to the chronology of the quranic revelation. Topics such as rules for a community, particularly ones that pertain to drawing boundaries between believers and non-believers such as food prohibitions and warfare, almost exclusively appear in Medinan suras. Abdullah does identify one early Meccan sura as containing both “harsh” subject matter and “harsh” sounds, however—*Sūrat al-Burūj*, sura 85.

I remember I explained it to my students in my *tajwīd* course, that if you look at a sura like *Sūrat al-Burūj*, that deals with the bad side of things if you want to put it that way—it’s very heavy... The whole sura is just a series of *qalqalas*, like this, [*reciting the first 3 verses quickly*]. It’s discussing the disbelievers and discussing the punishment and so on, and it has that contained in the sound. So it’s a mix of this and that. Sometimes it’s subconscious that, because of the meaning it might have a very light sound that lends itself to recitation. And you know, context matters as well, so if there’s a whole chapter dealing with punishment for unbelievers, it’s unlikely that in a Qur’an recitation gathering, that that’s going to be recited. It’s kind of not really relevant. Not that it’s not relevant, I shouldn’t say that, but it’s not of utmost relevance to that context.

Abdullah attests to a number of different issues here related to choice of sura for reciting or listening. While context, in terms of occasion (reciting in public performance, recitation in a group, recitation at prayers in a mosque, listening to a recording—there are obviously a wide range of possibilities), there are certain types of occasions where certain types of content —“difficult topics”—are unlikely to be chosen. He is also making the point that “difficult topics” are characterized by certain types of “difficult sounds”—sounds that are “hard on the tongue.”

While this is to some extent true, as Abdullah demonstrates in these cases, this is not a general rule in the case of the quranic text. To be sure, he has not presented it as a general rule and it would be disingenuous of me to treat his point as such. We can consider it further, however, in interrogating the Qur’an’s use of sound patterns, and to what extent this may be

brought into conversation with the discursive meanings of the text. Presumably for the purposes of clearly demonstrating a point, Abdullah has honed in on two suras that may constitute the extremes at either end of the spectrum of possibilities for the Qur'an's use of sound, at least within the context of early Meccan revelations (which they both are, according to the Nöldeke chronology). *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is beloved among many reciters and listeners in part because its sound patterns are so distinctive and resonant. *Sūrat al-Burūj* is similar in that its use of sound is quite consistent, but the frequency of letters articulated in the throat, as opposed to *al-Raḥmān*'s frequent use of the long *ā* vowel, give it a comparatively "closed" sound. Despite the differences in types of sounds used, the suras are similar in a number of ways. They both rhyme consistently—and they tend to use sound patterns consistently across the whole of the textual unit. They are both of the same period of quranic revelation—the early Meccan period, and as such they are similar stylistically. They even contain some of the same images of reward and punishment, which is not entirely surprising when we consider that certain themes and images show up frequently in early Meccan suras, often to illustrate the ideas of the day of judgment and an afterlife. While Abdullah and Fatima and others cite the content on mercy in attesting to the comforting or inspirational quality of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, a great number of the verses detail punishment of those who disbelieve, in striking detail.

If we turn to a sura that was revealed slightly later we can see that these consistent patterns of sounds corresponding to certain types of content do not correspond consistently across the text as a whole. While it is true that some instances of harsh or difficult subject matter may be "hard on the tongue," as Abdullah describes it, this principle does not describe the range of possibilities for the Qur'an's use of sound patterns. Take for example, *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf* (Sura 46). This sura is thought to be one of the last revealed during the Meccan period

(according to the Nöldeke chronology, it is number 88 of the 90 total Meccan suras).⁴⁷ It is technically considered a monorhyme sura, as it consistently presents one endrhyme throughout (with the exception of the first verse, as often is the case in the Qur'an's use of endrhyme).⁴⁸ In terms of structure and subject matter, the material is typical of a late Meccan sura. Thematically, it features section of polemic against its detractors in contrast to depiction of lush rewards awaiting believers (verses 4-14), directions to its listeners—the believers—for how they should respond to the criticisms of the deniers (verses 8-10), and the themes of God's signs (verses 7 and 26-27) and scripture (as sent down—verse 2; as an Arabic *kitāb* in the lineage of a *kitāb* previously sent to Musa—verse 12; as a recitation—verse 29, again as a *kitāb* like that which Mūsā received—verse 30) appear throughout.⁴⁹

In contrast to the examples of *Sūrat al-Burūj* and *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, the sounds of the words are neither especially “closed” (involving close concentration of letters articulated in the throat, or *qalqalas*), nor is there a rhyme pattern as complex and persistent and “open” sounding as that found in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*. The subject matter shares common themes, however. Much of what is described in the sura is “harsh” in the same sense as how Abdullah used in reference to *Sūrat al-Burūj*. There is much in the text concerning punishment of those who deny. The message about punishment is solidified by the centrally located (in verses 21-26) story of “the brother of ‘Ad” (typically understood by commentators here as referring to an individual of the tribe of ‘Ad, Hūd), who brings a message to his people in *al-Aḥqāf*—the sand dunes. He warns his people; the text also notes that there have been warners before him and

47 Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 44.

48 Stewart, “Saj' in the Qur'an: Prosody and Structure,” 136; Neuwirth, *SStudien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 2.3.2 Table 2.

49 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 313.

after him.⁵⁰ Verse 21 ends by noting, in the first person perspective, “I fear for you the punishment of a mighty day” (*akhāfu ‘alaykum ‘adhāba yawmin ‘azīm*). The deniers then ask for proof of this punishment (in verse 22); verses 23-24 then show the response:

When they saw it approaching their wadis as a collection of clouds, they said, this is a cloud bringing us rain. No, it is that which you want to hasten. A wind, in it there is a painful punishment.

qāla innamā l-‘ilmu ‘iṇḍa l-llāhi wa-uballighukum mā ursiltu bihī wa-lākinnī arākum qawmaṇ tajahalūn

Destroying everything by the command of its lord. And they became so that nothing could be seen of their dwellings. And thus we reward the criminal folk.

fa-lammā ra’awhu ‘arīḍam mustaqabila awdiyatihim qālū hādḥā ‘arīḍum mumṭirunā bal huwa mā -sta’jaltum bihī riḥuṇ fiḥā ‘adhābun alīmun

The theme of punishment is so prevalent at this central narrative of the sura that the word used for it—*‘adhāb*—appears three times in short succession, in verses 20, 21, and 24. The final occurrence in verse 24 even specifies that it will be a painful punishment—*‘adhāb alīm*. Verse 26 completes the portrait of the destroyed people as their bodies and means of perception fail them in every way, as a direct result of their denial:

We strengthened them in that in which we strengthened you, and we made hearing and sight and hearts for them. Neither their hearing, nor their sight, nor their hearts availed them from anything since they were denying God’s signs. That which they were mocking enveloped them.

wa-la-qada makkannāhum fīmā im makkannākum fiḥi wa-ja‘alnā lahum sam‘aw wa-abaṣāraw wa-afidataṇ fa-mā aghnā ‘anhum sam‘uhum wa-lā abaṣāruhum wa-lā afidatuhum miṇ shay’in idh kānū yajāḥadūna bi-āyāti l-llāhi wa-ḥāqa bihim mā kānū bihī yastahzi’ūn

As I have noted, however, the sounds of these verses are not especially similar to those of *Sūrat al-Burūj*, for example. There is not an unusually high concentration of consonants. The word

50 Q 46:21.

for punishment—‘*adhāb*—is heard three times in quick succession, but beyond that repetition the sound is not especially charged.

Moreover, the verses of *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf* are quite long, and correspondingly, contain a number of indicated locations of pauses. Unless a reciter is reading at an especially quick pace, he or she would likely have to pause in many if not most of the verses in the sura. As I noted earlier, the sura features mono-rhyme; it is composed entirely in one end-rhyme. But when it is recited, this rhyme pattern is spread out, and even broken up by pauses after words that do not fit the rhyme pattern. While in terms of Arabic prosody, the sura features consistent use of end-rhyme on the *-ūn/-īn* ending, when a reciter pauses several times in a single verse, these pauses are not always preceded by a word ending in *-ūn* or *-īn*. The only way in which a listener would be aware of this consistent use of end-rhyme is by referring to a written copy of the text, or by having it memorized. The listener’s experience, when we put aside the awareness of where verse endings are location as opposed to other pauses in the recitation, does not necessarily prioritize this rhyme pattern.

In order to demonstrate how this is done in one particular example, I have provided two transliterations of *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf*—one that represents the sura as it is to be pronounced according to the rules of *tajwīd*, but does not include stops mid-verse, and one that represents a recorded *murattal*-style performance of this sura by Mahmud Khalil al-Husary, including line breaks when he pauses mid-verse.⁵¹ Comparing the two transliterations side-by-side will show that the rhyme pattern of *-ūn/-īn* is not nearly as prevalent in the recited version of the text as it would appear from the written version. Even further, most notated stops in the Qur’an indicated suggested or optional locations where a reciter could pause. As such, stops or pauses

51 Appendixes 1 and 2.

are a free variable—the choice of pause is largely determined by the reciter in the moment he or she is reciting, likely depending on a number of factors such as pace and breath control, but also to the reciter’s overall affect in the performance. While the fixed elements of the quranic text may be, in this case, identified as the overall sequence and frequency of letters or certain norms of pronunciation such as the *qalqala*, these fixed aspects of the sound do not seem to consistently correspond to the discursive meaning of the text. While there are examples in which they would seem to (such as *Sūrat al-Burūj* or *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*), an equal if not far greater of suras, such as the brief example I entertain here, *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf*, does not show this same correlation between types of sounds and subject matter. Moreover, while the Qur’an at times presents very intricate rhyme patterns on a variety of levels—*Sūrat al-Raḥmān* comprises a dramatic example of the possibilities for rhyme—the way in which these rhyme patterns are rendered in sound depend to some extent on the decisions of the reciter. In the case of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, while a reciter may choose to pause mid-verse, the rhyme pattern is so persistent that the listener would likely still perceive it. In a less dramatically rhyming example such as *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf*, however, featuring endrhyme between long verses, stops chosen by the reciter may interrupt the pattern.

Chapter 5: Pitch and Melody in the Recited Qur'an

The sound of Qur'an recitation has changed considerably over the last sixty years, particularly in terms of its use of pitch and melody via the *maqām* system (modal system of Arabic music). In the case of recitation in Egypt in the latter half of the twentieth century (primarily in the 1960s and 70s), the distinction between *mujawwad* and *murattal*-style recitation was quite marked in terms of the use of the *maqām*. While the style of recitation that is most commonly produced and circulation in the 2010s is most accurately described as being *murattal* (in terms of pace, clarity of presentation of the text, and general affect, even including the accompanying art on packaging and type of production company releasing the recording¹), the use of pitch does still draw on the *maqāmat* (as do the older Egyptian *murattal* recordings).

On initial observation, one might conclude that the older style may have been more subservient to musical performance practices, or that the words and performance as a whole was more driven by the melody and the use of the *maqām* than clearly conveying the text, especially when compared with the style of recitation that is popular today, in the 2010s. On some level this is true; use of melody is much more elaborate in the older *mujawwad* performances, and the newer style of recitation does more clearly convey the words. This change has taken place as part of a much wider series of shifts within a complex network of performance practices and changing aesthetics on a variety of levels, however. In order to address the role of the *maqām* within this shift in aesthetics, in this chapter I focus on a single sura—*Sūrat al-Furqān*—as heard in several different recordings. The examples range from Egyptian *mujawwad*-style, to a number of examples of current reciters in the Gulf region,

1 Michael Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 75–114.

including several Saudi reciters, and eventually focusing on the use of the *maqām* by a single Gulf reciter, Mishary Rashid Alafasy. In discussing these recordings, I address how the use of the *maqām* contrasts between the older *mujawwad* style and the newer *murattal* style, but also the range of possibilities of use in the new style.

Mujawwad Versus Murattal Style Recitation in Mid- to Late-Twentieth Century Egypt

Kristina Nelson's *The Art of Approaching the Qur'an* is the seminal work on the Egyptian *mujawwad* style of recitation that was recorded and circulated most extensively during the 1950s-1970s.² As I point out in chapter 1 of this dissertation, Nelson's work was the first extensive examination of Qur'an recitation in English, and as such its applicability is two-fold: it speaks to the rules and practices of Qur'an recitation in general, but it also offers a valuable perspective into the particular styles of recitation that were being recorded and circulated at the historical moment of her research (1970s Cairo). She introduces the distinction between the *mujawwad* and *murattal* styles of recitation, particularly with respect to the context of 1970s Egypt, describing the differences in terms of sound, context of performance or listening, and purpose; while perhaps the most audible distinction is the use of melody, each style has an assigned set of listening practices and expectations as well.³

The Egyptian *murattal* style is much less melodically elaborate than the *mujawwad*. While it is fair to say that the system of pitch organization is the same, a typical Egyptian *murattal* recitation contains little variation in pitch—typically only 2-4 pitches may be used in a single recitation. This melodic practice is tied to the context, purpose, and listening expectations of the style; it is most frequently heard in contexts in which clarity of the text is

² Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

³ *Ibid.*, xxiv–xxv, 110–111.

paramount—education, most often. Egyptian *mujawwad* style, on the other hand, is melodically elaborate, involving a much more wide range of pitches in a single performance, and demonstrating a reciter’s mastery of the *maqām* system through spontaneous generation of melody within an implied system of expectations (the *maqām*), including modulation between *maqāmat* as well. Related to the value of spontaneity, the pace is typically much slower in the *mujawwad* style. The overall slow pace is related to the typical affect of a *mujawwad* recitation, the melodic practices of improvisation in the *maqām* system, and the expectations for listening practices and listener involvement. Reciters may draw out a single syllable over several pitches; correspondingly, pauses are much longer in the *mujawwad* style. And related to the slow pace and vocal demands of extensive improvisation in the *maqām*, the reciters tend to pause more mid-verse, and often end up repeating a few words that they may have recited before pausing, or even entire verses. The overall affect is that of intense sadness—*huzn*. The typical mood of a *mujawwad* recitation is one of lament; reciters also tend to draw on vocal techniques that evoke the sound of a sob. In *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*, Nelson describes *huzn* as both an affective aesthetic (an abstract quality of the Qur’an having been “sent down with *huzn*”), but also a vocal technique. Not only is a particular emotional state attributed to the Qur’an’s revelation, but the reciter should reflect this state in terms of personal affect and also with the voice, either weeping or feigning weeping with vocal quality.⁴

The *mujawwad* style of recitation is inextricable from its performance context and listener expectations. As Nelson points out, this style of recitation is reserved for public occasions. Reciters do not practice in the *mujawwad* style, for to do so would risk fixing the text to a particular melody, sacrificing the improvisatory quality of the performance and

4 Ibid., 89–100.

bringing the recitation into the human realm of music.⁵ *Mujawwad*-style recitation is always performed publicly,⁶ and correspondingly, it shapes and is shaped by the expectations and reactions of its listeners. In the context of live *mujawwad*-style performance, it is common practice for listeners to react and emote, as a form of feedback or even participation in the performance.

In one recorded example of Shaykh Mustafa Isma‘il, an Egyptian reciter known particularly for *mujawwad* style performances, from the 1940s until his death in 1978,⁷ he concludes a recitation of *Sūrat al-Furqān* with extensive melodic elaboration and repetition, all to constant lively and ecstatic feedback from the audience.⁸ He repeats the first half of the last verse four times, each time developing the melody (which is in *maqām nahāwand*) slightly further, before giving a complete rendition of the whole verse at a much greater degree of melodic elaboration, and in the highest register yet. He extends the anticipation of the audience through the repetition with only slight elaboration each time, all the while staying in the bottom tetrachord of the *maqām*. The fifth time he begins verse 77 he finally recites the full verse, giving the audience what they have been anticipating; additionally, he highlights the verse with extensive melodic elaboration, jumps in register (at one point a full octave), and by building gradually into the top tetrachord of the *maqām*, reaching a higher register in terms of both pitch and volume. The verse concludes and the melodic tension is resolved as Isma‘il returns to the base of the bottom tetrachord of the *maqām*, notated in figure 2 as a C. The

5 Ibid., 168–169.

6 In making this point I am excluding the circulation of *mujawwad* recordings, which I will address later in this chapter.

7 Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*, 1985, 170.

8 Mustafa Isma‘il, *Sura Furqan 1959 (nahawand)* by Sheikh Mustafa Ismail (Alexandria), 2012, YouTube video, 3:58, posted by “Maturidi333,” accessed August 17, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz6HwnBdJrQ&feature=youtu.be_gdata_player.

audience response is an explosion of sound; while I can transcribe Isma‘il’s portion of the performance here, the recording really must be heard in order to realize the extent of the audience reaction and participation.

Figure 2: Transcription of Q 25:77 as recited by Mustafa Isma‘il

0:05 0:10

qul mā ya‘ - ba - ‘u bi - kum rab - bī law lā du - ‘ā -

(0:11-0:17 some audience reaction)

- ‘u - kum

0:20 0:25

qul mā ya‘ - ba - ‘u bi - kum rab - bī law lā

(0:28-0:31 some audience sound overlaps with Ismail)

du - ‘ā - ‘u kum

0:35 0:40

qul mā ya‘ - ba - ‘u bi - kum rab -

0:45

bī law lā du - ‘ā - - - -

(figure 2 continued on next page)

Figure 2, continued

(0:46–0:52 stronger audience reaction, again he cuts in)

0:55 1:00

qul mā ya^c - ba - 'u bi - kum rab - bī law lā

1:05

du - 'ā - - - - - 'u -

(1:05–1:09 audience reaction)

kum

1:10 1:15 1:20 1:25

qul mā ya^c-ba - 'u bi - kum rab - bī law lā du - 'ā - 'u -

1:30

kum fa - qad kadh - - dhab - tum

1:35

fa - saw - fa ya - kū - nu li -

(1:37–2:01 extended, impassioned, loud audience reaction)

zā - mā

Following this elaboration however, he continues by doubling back to verse 74, and reciting the last few verses of the sura once more in a relatively straightforward fashion. The building melodic elaboration is not shaped by Isma‘il alone. Not only is this recording in a style that is reserved for public performance (thereby implying presence of an audience), but Isma‘il builds tension incrementally, drawing out the anticipation of the audience, by repeating the first half of the verse several times, each time only a bit different. They respond, and he repeats; the recitation is as much a back and forth or a conversation as it is a performance. The performance can be said to be taking place between Isma‘il and the audience, rather than something Isma‘il produces before a passive, quiet crowd that does not participate. The use of the *maqām* and the role of melodic line in generating anticipation is inextricable from the sense of dialog between performer and audience. The pauses and repetition are part of the rapport between Isma‘il and the audience; they also serve to generate and resolve melodic tension, according to the expectations of *maqām* performance.

As I have noted, this example is an excerpt from Mustafa Isma‘il performing *Sūrat al-Furqān* live before an audience; he ends the performance in *maqām nahāwand*.⁹ We may consider other examples of *mujawwad* performances of *Sūrat al-Furqān* in order to contrast with Egyptian *murattal* performance, and the *murattal* recordings of the 2010s. Two Egyptian *mujawwad* style recordings of *Sūrat al-Furqān* exhibit the style nicely. Recordings of the full sura are available from both ‘Abd al-Basit ‘Abd al-Samad and Muhammad Siddiq al-Minshawi.¹⁰ Both men are considered masters of *tajwīd* from mid-late-twentieth century Egypt.

9 If a recording is available of the complete sura from which this short excerpt was taken, I have been unable to locate it. I cannot therefore speak to his use of *maqām* throughout the entire sura, but obviously can observe that he is in *nahāwand* at the end.

10 Recordings from the older Egyptian reciters proliferate online; often a single recording can be found on numerous websites. The specific examples I discuss in this chapter can be found on the sites linked here and in the bibliography, but they are by no means limited to these locations, nor does proper copyright belong to

‘Abd al-Basit continues to be quite popular; re-releases of his recordings are widely available in Gulf bookstores, and nearly every individual I interviewed, when asked to name some of their favorite reciters, included ‘Abd al-Basit. The releases typically seen in stores now, however, are his *murattal*-style recordings. He did regularly record and perform in the *mujawwad* style as well, however.

Each of the *mujawwad* recitations of *Sūrat al-Furqān*—one from ‘Abd al-Basit and one from Minshawi—is approximately 40 minutes long, reflecting the slower pace and longer pauses typical of the style. ‘Abd al-Basit’s track is 41 minutes and 20 seconds long;¹¹ Minshawi’s is 39 minutes and 14 seconds. Neither of the recordings is of a live performance, so they are missing the audience feedback element that is such a determining factor in the excerpt from Isma‘il. They do, however, demonstrate the typical pace of a *mujawwad* performance, and the range of possibilities for using the *maqām* over the course of an entire sura. Because of the slower pace, both men tend to pause frequently; not only are the pauses related to the overall affect of the recordings, but they are functional, in that the slower reciting requires more frequent pausing for breaths. Both men occasionally pause at places that are not specifically marked with *tajwīd* markings; this type of pause sometimes necessitates that the reciter repeat the last few words a second time. In neither case, however, does either reciter repeat a verse several times, or double back over several verses, as Isma‘il does in the short excerpt discussed above.

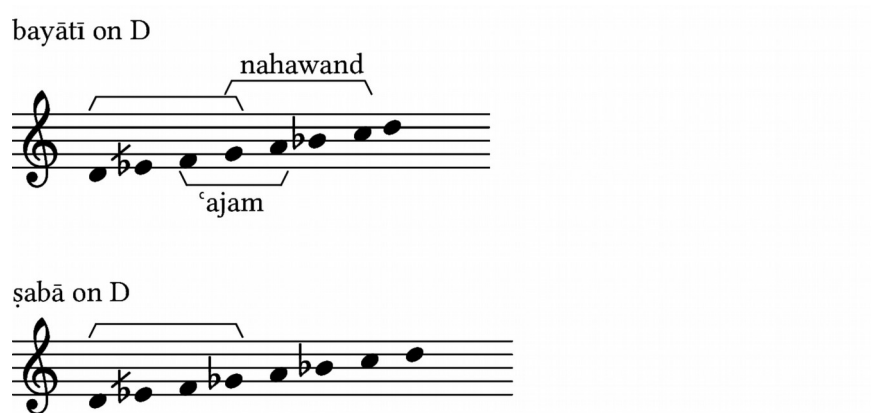
The recordings from ‘Abd al-Basit and Minshawi also show the trajectory of a longer

these sites, or apply at all in these cases. Muhammad Siddiq al-Minshawi, *Muhammad Siddiq Al-Minshawi [Mujawwad] Quran Downloads - QuranicAudio.com*, MP3 audio file, 39:15, accessed August 17, 2014, http://download.quranicaudio.com/quran/minshawi_mujawwad/025.mp3; ‘Abd al-Basit ‘Abd al-Samad, *AbdulBaset AbdulSamad [Mujawwad] Quran Downloads - QuranicAudio.com*, MP3 audio file, 41:22, accessed August 17, 2014, http://download.quranicaudio.com/quran/abdulbaset_mujawwad/025.mp3.

11 The length of the audio file can vary by a few seconds, depending on the site where one finds it, however.

mujawwad recitation, both with regard how the *maqām* may be used and other vocal performance qualities, such as range of pitch, affect, and so on. ‘Abd al-Basit begins in *maqām bayātī*, but spends much of the sura moving between *bayātī* and *ṣabā*, a closely related *maqām*; modulation is typically smooth as the *maqāms* share a common base pitch and have only one pitch different (notated in figure 3 as a G in *bayātī* and a G-flat in *ṣabā*):

Figure 3: *Maqāms Bayātī and Ṣabā*



Minshawi begins in *maqām bayātī* as well, moves at a similar pace (the first 4 verses take about 3 minutes), but begins modulating quite quickly. Similarly, his modulations are to *maqāmāt* closely related to *bayātī*. The first verse is clearly in *maqām bayātī*, but he immediately begins moving up in register and shifting to related *maqāmāt*, first by highlighting the ‘*ajam* trichord in verse 2 (this trichord—set of three pitches—is marked in the example *maqām* diagram above; it is integrated into *maqām bayātī* already, so is a common modulation). In verse 3 he moves further up and modulates into *maqām nahāwand* on G, also a common modulation from *bayātī*. The following verse moves into a *hijāz* tetrachord by widening the interval between the A and the B-flat to A-flat to B. While he is moving from one *maqām* tetrachord to another in

virtually verse, the movement is quite smooth, given the close relationships and high number of pitches held in common between adjacent *maqāms*.

Figure 4: Transcription of Q 25:1-3 as recited by Muhammad Siddiq al-Minshawi

1. bayāti on D 0:10 0:15
 Ta - bā - ra - ka l - la - dhī naz - za - la l - fur - qā - na 'a - lā 'a -

ba - dī - hī li - ya - kū - na li-l - 'ā -

0:25
 la - mī - na na - dhī - rā

2. moving from bayāti to 'ajam 0:30 0:35
 Al - la - dhī la - hū mul - ku s - sa - mā - wā - ti

0:40 0:45
 wa-l - ar - ḍi wa-lam yat - ta-khidh wa - la - daw wa - lam ya -

0:50
 kul la - hū sha - rī - kuṇ fi l - mulk

0:55 'ajam on F 1:00 1:05
 wa - lam ya - kul la - hū sha - rī - kuṇ fi l - mul - ki

(figure 4 continued on next page)

Figure 4, continued

wa - kha - la - qa kul - la shay - 'in fa - qad - 1:10

da - ra - hū ta - qa - dī - rā 1:15

3. nahawand on G 1:20 Wa-t - ta - kha - dhū miṇ dū - ni - hī ā - li - 1:25

ha - tal lā yakh - lu - qū - - na 1:30

shay - 'aw wa - hum yukh - la - qū - 1:35

- na wa - lā yam - li - kūn 1:40

ḥijāz on G 1:45 wa - lā yam - li - kū - na li - aṇ - fu - si - 1:50

him ḍar - raw wa - lā naf - 'aw wa - lā yam - li - 1:55 2:00

(figure 4 continued on next page)

Figure 4, continued

2:05
through bayātī on D
on the way to nahawand on G 2:10

kū - na maw - taw wa - lā yam - li - kū - na

2:15

maw - taw wa - lā ḥa - yā -

2:20

taw wa - lā nu - shū - rā

The range of ‘Abd al-Basit’s performance is also impressive, and typical of a *mujawwad* style recording; while the first four verses take him a little over 3 minutes to recite, and by this time he has covered an entire octave. Both Kristina Nelson and Michael Frishkopf have noted that Egyptian reciters show some preference for *maqām bayātī*¹²; in this chapter I do not examine a sufficiently large sample of recitations to confirm this per se, but the examples included here do demonstrate that there are numerous possibilities for *maqām* choice, and that modulation is typical in a performance of this length.

The Egyptian *mujawwad* recitations can be contrasted with contemporaneous *murattal* style recitations in terms of pace, affect, use of the *maqām*, and the position of an audience. One particular *murattal* style recitation of *Sūrat al-Furqān* by ‘Abd al-Basit is approximately 17 minutes long—less than half the length of his *mujawwad* recording previously discussed.¹³ The

12 Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” 101.

13 ‘Abd al-Basit ‘Abd al-Samad, *Al-Mus’haf Al-Murattal - Sūrat Al-Furqān (The Criterion) - Abdul Baset Abdul Samad*, MP3 audio file, 16:55, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://en.islamway.net/recitation/4026/surat-al-furqan-the-criterion>.

affect is even and straightforward; no contemplative pauses nor vocal elaborations evoking sobs (*huzn*) take place. For the entire sura he stays in *maqām sabā*, and within the first pitches of that tetrachord only (refer to figure 3 to see the lowest 4 pitches of *maqām sabā*). While the organization of pitch clearly communicates use of the *maqām* system, the recitation is as a whole much less melodic. The implied audience also differs. As Kristina Nelson notes, *murattal* is the style of recitation typically reserved for education or memorization, rather than public performance.¹⁴

***Murattal*-style Recitation in the 2010s**

Nelson's particular description of the *murattal* style is of course constructed with particular respect to the Egyptian context; the *murattal*-style recitation of the 2010s is similar in many ways, but does also represent changes in aesthetics that have taken place over the intermediary years. What was once popular (*mujawwad* in Egypt of the 1960s and 70s) has become coded as high art, at best, requiring certain kinds of knowledge or acculturation on the parts of both the reciter and listener, or at worst, as potentially inappropriate or dangerous. In interviews, I have found it rare to encounter a reciter who has studied the *maqāmāt* and recites *mujawwad*-style; responses to questions about the *maqām* vary drastically. The rarity of a reciter who has studied the *maqāmāt* or recites *mujawwad*-style now can partially be explained by the sheer amount of knowledge and skill required to do so. Particularly in a context where many of the world's Muslims are not Arabic speakers, learning to properly pronounce the Qur'an and abide the rules of *tajwīd*, in addition to partial or full memorization of the text, is an incredibly time-consuming undertaking. For example, in a class on recitation that I observed at a mosque in the US, none of the students were native Arabic speakers, and the class focused

¹⁴ Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 1985, xxiv–xxv.

entirely on the rules of *tajwīd*, including pronunciation, elisions, pauses, and so forth; at no point was pitch or melody addressed, nor quality of voice or vocal techniques. In an interview following this class, I asked the teacher, Amin, about his views on the *maqāmāt*. Overall, he stressed caution in studying the *maqāmāt* and bringing this knowledge to the recitation of the Qur'an, citing that some people “get carried away.” Here he expressed the danger in terms of an improper treatment of the Qur'an in relation to the voice:

When the *maqāmāt* are used well, it's like the Qur'an is beautifying the voice, not the voice beautifying the Qur'an... When the *maqāmāt* are used in a way that is too much, this is a problem because people will just pay attention to the beauty of the voice instead of the Qur'an.

Here Amin indicates a potential problem on two levels. First, if the reciter uses *maqāmāt* improperly (meaning, “getting carried away,” as he had previously described it), there can be an imbalance in the relationship between the voice and the Qur'an, wherein the Qur'an may be serving the voice or the sound, rather than the other way around. This imbalance is not just a problem for the reciter, however, as those listening to the recitation may be led to pay attention to the voice, rather than hearing the Qur'an per se.

Another teacher of recitation in North America, Abdullah, teaches students of a wide range of levels, including beginners up to those who recite fluently with proper *tajwīd* and wish to move into reciting with the *maqāmāt*. Some of his students come to him already having mastered and acquired an *ijāza* in one *qirā'a* (typically *ḥafs 'an 'aṣim*) and wish to learn the remaining *qirā'āt*. He too suggests that there is a certain danger in studying the *maqāmāt*, in that there is a potential for over involvement or over refinement:

Some people get a little obsessed with *maqāmāt*... [They] just get so drawn into the art that all of a sudden they become a connoisseur, like somebody who can only eat fine foods, and regular olive oil just doesn't cut it. Regular cheese doesn't cut it, it's only fancy imported cheese. So you get that when it comes to

the arts, you'll always have people that push themselves to a higher level... With recitation this happens as well as it develops into an art form of its own, you'll get people who are like, "how can people listen to this, it has no style," whereas scholars always try to advise people toward balance, and to remember that we're dealing with God's word here, so if you're so preoccupied with the voice that you can't benefit from a simpler recitation of God's word, then that's a spiritual problem with you.

Abdullah speaks to a perception that use of the *maqāmāt* in recitation is on one hand considered to be high art, but also as something potentially dangerous, that can draw in the reciter to an extent that he or she may start to overlook not only the possibility of simplicity, but also the implied proper understanding of the nature of the Qur'an. Both teachers caution that excessive concern with the voice and vocal techniques related to musicality may lead to or be related to an improper understanding of the status of the Qur'an. This concern is not new, however. Although the Egyptian *mujawwad* reciters of the twentieth century were typically trained in the *maqāmāt* tradition, and employed extensive melodic elaboration in their recitations, the debate about the proper relationship between music and religious life in Islam is long-standing, and extensively documented by Kristina Nelson in "The *Samā'* Polemic," the third chapter of *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*.¹⁵

In discussing the role of the *maqāmāt* and perceptions of its use, particularly in *mujawwad*-style recitation, Abdullah goes on to attribute the current perception of *mujawwad* recitation to a change in tastes and lack of familiarity on the part of the audience. In part, the context for listening, and listening practices have changed. While the Egyptian masters recited publicly in a format including a substantial audience who has gathered together to see a famed reciter, audience expectation and participation, recitation is now more typically confined to community events or in congregation. Recordings available from Gulf reciters typically

15 Ibid., 32-51.

circulate online in various formats, and as CDs sold in bookstores. A look at the recordings and videos of the new Gulf reciters available online shows that the overwhelming majority of the recordings available are either produced in studios or videos recorded during prayers in a mosque. The live recitation concert format has virtually disappeared, and as Abdullah suggests, a number of signs of the Egyptian *mujawwad* reciters have fallen out of favor:

Some people look at reciters like Shaykh Muhammad Rif'at and Shaykh Mustafa Isma'il and they say, that's too extreme. They don't like the whole package. First of all, they're reciting in a way that seems like there's a heavy emphasis on the musicality, rather than on the text. And then they see as well the audience reaction to that—it looks like a concert, it feels like a concert, it sounds kind of rowdy, so they feel that's not really the reaction that's supposed to be brought about through an interaction with the Qur'an... You look at the Egyptian *mujawwad* reciters and you find that a lot of them don't have beards... Within the community somebody would say, "look at this guy, he doesn't have a beard, the people are going crazy," so overall they see an entire package that seems like cultural Islam. And then they see the Saudi reciters, reciting in a very simple way, if you have an audio clip sometimes of prayers you'll see they're crying, and the audience is crying...They have this outward religious appearance, in terms of their beard and so on, and the whole package becomes the model for recitation, even though the person hasn't individually navigated issues of *maqāmāt* or *tajwīd*.

As Abdullah points out, often certain signifiers in recitation (context of performance, audience behavior, appearance of the reciter, and so on) become attached to other layers of meaning, such as the use of *maqāmāt*, or degree of melodic elaboration in recitation. And it may be beside the point whether or not a listener has studied *maqāmāt* or *tajwīd* or thought in any extensive way about recitation; the judgment of the individual may leave aside technical considerations in favor of more accessible modes of signification, such as a reciter's self-presentation or the context for a certain type of performance. In comparing current perceptions of recitation to that of listeners to the Egyptian *mujawwad* reciters, Abdullah also attributes this difference in perception to the skill of listening, or of listeners' cultural import

or education:

In Egypt 30 years ago, you have experts of *maqāmāt* and of recitation, but also that [expertise] trickles down to the population, in terms of their general knowledge of aesthetics. Going back to what I said about connoisseurs and people drinking expensive coffee...the opposite is also true...If somebody just eats Chicken McNuggets every day, if you give them a nice steak sandwich they might not get it. In the same way, if you have a culture of higher aesthetics, or a higher appreciation for the art, then all of a sudden you've collectively raised the bar.

Just as Abdullah has pointed out, the popular recitation produced and circulated now tends to *murattal* style, but the overall aesthetic is quite different, and the use of the *maqām* therein is tied to this shift. *Murattal* style recordings from some of the older Egyptian masters are still widely available in bookstores in the Gulf region; most subjects that I have interviewed have named 'Abd al-Basit as being one of their favorite reciters. The older masters haven't completely fallen out of fashion, but there is a certain degree of selection involved in terms of style and presentation. The newer *murattal*-style recordings show that the *maqām* is still the driving force behind organization of pitch, and in fact, focusing on a handful of recordings shows that a range of possibilities does exist for use of the *maqām*, even within the realm of the newer aesthetic.

As Michael Frishkopf has argued, while Egypt was the center for recitation in the twentieth century, the current aesthetic tends to the Gulf region countries. According to Frishkopf, this shift in the geographic center of Qur'an recitation is tied to overall changes in modes of piety, and a number of qualities of recitation recordings, both sonic and extra-sonic, serve as signs pointing to this shift in the understanding of Islam as the proper mode of piety for Muslims.¹⁶ Use of the *maqāmāt* plays a large role in this shift. Not only have tastes shifted

16 Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt."

to *murattal*-style recitations, thereby implying less melodic elaboration or development, but this is tied to a number of shifts in areas such as what is perceived as proper listening practices and the context for hearing recitation, and the overall affect of the recitation. Examination of a number of recordings of Gulf-based reciters reveals that even within this newer style, there exists a range of possibilities for how extensively the *maqāmāt* may be used.

Most Gulf *murattal* recitations tend to be quite fast compared to the older Egyptian *mujawwad*-style recordings. While the *mujawwad* recordings of ‘Abd al-Basit ‘Abd al-Samad and Mustafa Isma‘il were approximately 40 minutes long, *murattal*-style recordings are typically half as long or even less. The personal website of Saudi reciter Ahmad al-‘Ajmi includes a *murattal* recitation of *Sūrat al-Furqān* that is 17 minutes long¹⁷; Yasir al-Dosry (also Saudi) completes the sura in 17:22¹⁸; Mahir al-Mu‘ayqly (also Saudi, and one of the imams of the *Masjid al-Haram* in Mecca) completes the sura in a mere 14 minutes.¹⁹ The official *Haramain* website posts numerous recordings of recitations performed at prayers in their space, including one complete track of *Sūrat al-Furqān* comprised of openings verses recited by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sudais, then there is a cut in the recording and the sura is completed by Shaykh Sa‘ud al-Shuraim (both men are imams at the *Masjid al-Haram*); the recording is 13 minutes 45 seconds long.²⁰

All of these performances are incredibly melodically minimal. The pace of the recitations is quite quick, as evidenced by the short length of the recordings; there is little to no

17 Ahmad al-‘Ajmi, *download.quran.islamway.com/quran3/21/025.mp3*, MP3 audio file, 17:08, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://download.quran.islamway.com/quran3/21/025.mp3>.

18 Yasir bin Rashid al-Dosri, *Surat Al-Furqan - Mawqa‘ Al-Shaykh Yasir Bin Rashid Al-Dosri*, MP3 audio file, 17:23, accessed July 17, 2014, <http://www.aldosry.net/play-70.html>.

19 Mahir al-Mu‘ayqli, *Al-Qur‘an Al-Karim Bi-Sawt Al-Shaykh Mahir Al-Mu‘ayqli*, audio CD (al-Sham Fruit Juices, ND).

20 *Surat Al-Furqan, Sudays Wa Shuraym*, Bawaba Al-Haramayn Al-Sharifayn, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://www.alharamain.gov.sa/index.cfm?do=cms.surah&audiotype=quran&browseby=surah&surahid=33824>.

melodic elaboration, and melodic motion is almost always stepwise (this may be contrasted with some of the large jumps in register heard in the *mujawwad*-style recordings, particularly the example discussed above from Mustafa Isma‘il). The recordings may also be contrasted with the *mujawwad*-style performances in terms of vocal timbre and overall affect. While the slow pace of the *mujawwad* performances often lends itself to an expansive, open vocal sound, the new *murattal* recitations tend to feature an even nasal timbre.

In terms of use of the *maqāmāt*, while the new *murattal* performances are melodically minimal, this does not mean that they do not draw on the system of the *maqāmāt*. In fact, they are quite consistent. The Saudi reciters mentioned above almost never modulate from one *maqām* to another, and typically one performance uses only 3-4 pitches. As Michael Frishkopf has noted, the Saudi reciters frequently recite in *maqām rast*. Of course, given that the sound of their recitations tends to be incredibly consistent in every way—in pitch, timbre, and pace—the use of the *maqāmāt* does not typically align with the meaning of the text.

Mishary Rashid Alafasy: A Counterexample in the New *Murattal*

Kuwaiti Shaykh Mishary Rashid Alafasy, an imam of the Grand Mosque in Kuwait City and extremely popular reciter of the Qur’an today, represents a key example showing the range of possibilities for use of the *maqāmāt* in the new *murattal* style. His presentation and range of performances contrasts with the contemporaneous Saudi reciters in several ways. His personal website provides not only basic information about his life and career, but also a wealth of media material: photographs, videos, and sound material ranging from *anāshīd* (religious songs), to short clips from services at the Grand Mosque, to several complete recorded versions of the Qur’an.²¹ The site links to his presence as a public figure on the web elsewhere, including

²¹ “Alafasy Official WebSite,” accessed August 19, 2014, <http://alafasy.me/>.

personal pages on YouTube, SoundCloud, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, and so on. He has his own mobile app to deliver the latest clips straight to your phone, and his own television network, al-ʿAfasy TV, which broadcasts throughout the Middle East. The extent of his online branding contrasts starkly with that of the aforementioned Saudi reciters, who, in the cases where they do maintain personal websites, those are quite minimal: Maher al-Muaiqly's personal site, for example, features only a small no-frills picture of the shaykh reciting into a microphone, biographical information mostly focused on his education, links to his Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts, and mp3s of Qur'an recitation.²² Alafasy's online presence is nothing short of a media empire, and as such it is incredibly consistently branded, with high quality portraits of the shaykh on every page and high-production value videos, both of live recitations in Kuwait's Grand Mosque, but also music videos of *anāshīd*.

Alafasy is among the most well-known reciters on the Arabian Peninsula so far in the 2010s, both through his mobile media and television network, but also with numerous CD releases on the shelves of every bookstore in the Gulf region. This perceived popularity goes hand in hand with the high degree of commodification and commercialization of Alafasy as a religious media personality. In an article on the mediation of Islam through contemporary Arab television, Riadh Ferjani remarks that the Alafasy TV network is possibly the clearest example of what he argues is a new brand of commercialized Islam, citing the constant ads on the network for other Alafasy branded products (recordings, etc.), and commentary running through premium SMS services.²³ The degrees of popularity and accessibility of these recordings are in large part what led me to focus on these pieces.

²² "Mawqaʿ al-Shaykh Mahir al-Muʿayqli," accessed July 8, 2014, <http://almuaiqly.com/arabic/>.

²³ Riadh Ferjani, "Religion and Television in the Arab World: Towards a Communication Studies Approach," *Middle East Journal of Culture & Communication* 3, no. 1 (January 2010): 87, doi:10.1163/187398609X12584657078367.

The Text of *Sūrat al-Furqān*

Alafasy's personal website features several complete recitations of *Sūrat al-Furqān* that may serve as counterpoint to those performances already discussed, both from the Egyptian *mujawwad* reciters and the Saudi *murattal* reciters. Alafasy's performances, in contrast with those of the Saudi reciters, demonstrate the breadth of possibilities for use of the *maqām* within the new *murattal*-style recitation, particularly in relation to other types of meaning in the text.

As for the choice of text, *Sūrat al-Furqān* is a mid-length sura, made up of 77 verses of varying length, but none shorter than a handful of words, nor longer than two or three sentences. The length of the sura and of its individual verses provide enough material for analysis of its recitation. The sura itself is long enough to provide enough time and opportunity for development and modulation of *maqām*, while the verses are each long enough to allow for melodic development on the micro-level as well (as opposed to the verses in early Meccan suras, sometimes consisting of just one or two words, which, while quite evocative, have fewer syllables and therefore offer fewer options for melodic development). The verses are also long enough that there are occasional markings for stops (*awqāf*) that are obligatory or optional, or places where stops are prohibited. Alternatively, the verses are long enough that depending on the speed of recitation, a reciter may have to stop and breathe at some point, and if this does not happen at a marked stop (*waqf*) he will have to repeat the words that occurred immediately before the breath. The sura as a whole is also short enough that a recording of its recitation is a manageable length for listening in one sitting, even for detailed study; both of the recordings under consideration in this paper are approximately 20 minutes long. In her study on women and the recited Qur'an in Indonesia, Anne Rasmussen notes that renowned

reciter Hajja Maria Ulfah chooses *al-Furqān* for practice of more extensive recitation for these very reasons, pointing out that the earlier suras, overall shorter and made up of shorter verses, “do not contain enough words or syllables to use up the long melodic phrases that characterize the modal melodic development that recitation students try to produce.”²⁴ It stands to reason that a text that affords greater opportunities for melodic and modal development, as well as choices of pauses, would have the potential for greater diversity of recordings.

Before addressing the sound patterns of the sura and Alafasy’s recordings in particular, I will address the text as text, in terms of its literary motifs and structures. In the text of *Sūrat al-Furqān* there is a recurring motif of pairs, both and in terms of polarity or opposition and synonymy. This happens on a conceptual level in terms of imagery or themes that appear in the sura—sun and shadow, pious believers and deniers, and the two seas mentioned in the final verses. The word taken as the title of the sura, *furqān*, implies duality in its meaning, as it refers to a tool or criterion used to distinguish two things—in the quranic text it refers on several occasions to scripture as a means of distinguishing right and wrong.²⁵ This sense of pairing or opposition shows up on a linguistic or grammatical level as well. Pairs of adjectives are frequently used to describe a single referent, and these adjectives are typically unrelated to one another (different roots), but are synonymous in terms of meaning. Similarly, there are numerous verses wherein a single root appears at least twice.

The text of *Sūrat al-Furqān* is fluid in terms of narrative perspective and address. Throughout much of the sura the perspective changes with almost every verse, sometimes

24 Anne K. Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 101.

25 Anthony H. Johns, “Reflections on the Dynamics and Spirituality of *Sūrat Al-Furqān*,” in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata, Curzon Studies in the Qur’an (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 192.

even within a verse. Several different individuals or groups are evoked, addressed, discussed, or criticized, and this is done from a variety of perspectives, which are oftentimes nested within one another, reporting the speech of others, or directing someone to say something.

Sūrat al-Furqān is considered to be the forty-second sura revealed according to the Egyptian chronology, whereas Nöldeke's chronology places it slightly later, fifty-fifth, in the middle Meccan period.²⁶ The longer verse length and style, lacking the strong oaths of the earliest suras, supports the understanding of the sura as middle Meccan. Structurally, the sura clearly fits the tripartite division that some have argued is a hallmark of the middle Meccan period.²⁷ The first nine verses serve as an introduction to the individuals and issues involved. Verses 1 and 2 introduce the divine and the messenger and their key qualities and roles in the context of this sura: the one who sent down the *furqān* (a criterion for judgment or discernment) and the one who received it in order for either him or it to be a warning (*nadhīr*).

tabāraka l-ladhī nazzala l-furqāna 'alā 'abadihī li-yakūna li-l-'ālimīna nadhīrā

Blessed is the one who sent down the *furqān* to his servant, in order for it/him to be a warning/warner to the ones who know,

al-ladhī lahū mulku s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi wa-lam yattakhidh waladaw wa-lam yakul lahū sharīkuḥ fi al-mulki wa-khalaqa kulla shay'īn faqaddarahū taqadīrā

the one who has dominion of the heavens and the earth; he has no son, nor partner in dominion. He created all things, determining for them a measure.²⁸

There is some ambiguity about the subject of “to be” (*yakūn*); the verse is stating either that the servant is a warner or that the *furqān* is a warning. In any case, these two potential subjects (servant and *furqān*, warner and warning) are closely linked here.

26 Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 39, 219.

27 Ibid., 106.

28 Q 25:1-2.

The opening supplication begins with a wording that is repeated many times in the sura: “*tabāraka l-ladhī*” (“blessed is the one who...”). The one being praised is the one who sent down the *furqān*; he has not begotten, has no partner in dominion, created all things, and ordered them. After this statement, the text immediately moves into description of the group of people that is criticized recurrently throughout the sura. This critique is originally described in the correspondingly opposite terms from the description of God that appeared in the first two verses, mirroring that depiction:

*wa-ttakhadhū miṅ dūnihī ālihatal lā yakhlūqūna shayʿaw wa-hum yukhlaqūna
wa-lā yamlikūna li-aṅfusihim ḍarraw wa-lā nafʿaw wa-lā yamlikūna mawtaw
wa-lā ḥayātaw wa-lā nushūrā*

They have taken other gods besides him; these create nothing, but are created, having no control over their own harm nor benefit. They do not control life, nor death, nor resurrection.²⁹

Following these introductory verses, verse ten then returns to the wording of the beginning, “*tabāraka l-ladhī*,” (“blessed is the one who”) but rather than reiterating the same points over again, it moves in a different direction with a lush description of the *jannāt* (gardens) that is reminiscent of that found in other sections of the Qur’an, particularly the earlier Meccan suras.

*tabāraka l-ladhī iṅ shāʿa jaʿala laka khayram miṅ dhālika jannātiṅ tajrī miṅ
taḥtiḥā l-anhāru wa-yajʿal laka quṣūrā*

Blessed is the one who, if he wished, would give you better than those—gardens beneath which rivers flow—and would give castles to you.³⁰

This is contrasted immediately with the statement, “*bal kadhdhabū bi-s-sāʿa*” (“[emphatically], they deny the hour”). The fate of the deniers is a raging fire, wherein they are packed together tightly pleading for their own destruction. This fate is contrasted with that of the believers as featuring an eternal garden (in verse 15, “*jannatu l-khuld*”), but in the latter case the text is

²⁹ Q 25:3.

³⁰ Q 25:10.

addressing a singular individual (typically understood to be the Prophet) and directing him to say that this garden is a reward and a goal. Throughout this extended critique that contrasts the deniers and the believers, the text is constant shifting between modes of perspective and address. The text describes the fate of the deniers from a third person perspective, also referring to God in the third person. The text occasionally turns to address a singular individual (again, the Prophet), directing responses to the deniers. Finally, the perspective occasionally turns to the quranic “we” narration. This pattern continues until verse 35: the text is constantly shifting between reported speech, responses dictated to a single individual, description of God’s ordering of the Day of Judgment, and third person plural narration, all focusing on the consequences for denying the message. In verse 35 the text turns to recall specific communities that have been destroyed for denying: Ad, Thamud, Rass, and Nuh’s people. These examples are cited in quick succession (verses 35-38) and the text provides an even quicker synopsis in verse 39:

wa-kullā ʔarabanā lahu l-amthāla wa-kullā tabbarnā tatabīrā

We gave examples to all of them, and all of them we completely destroyed.³¹

The wording describing the destruction is emphatic, and it is one example of the pattern of repeating a single root (T-B-R in this case) twice in one verse: *tabbarnā tatabīran*, “we destroyed to the point of complete destruction,” or more literally, “we destroyed destroyingly.” This root appears in only three other places in the Qur’an, and two of these appearances are together in the same phrasing seen here. This example is in 17:7, in *Sūrat al-Isrā’* or *Sūra Banī Isrā’īl*. In this case, the sura opens by recalling the journey of God’s servant from the sacred mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) to the farthest mosque (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*) in order to show him

31 Q 25:39.

some of the signs (some of our signs—*min āyātinā*). The text then turns to recall messages given to previous prophets, with specific focus on *banī isrāʿīl*—the book (*kitāb*) was given to Musa as a guide (*hudan*) (17:2); Nuh is briefly mentioned (17:3); and the text states from God’s “we” perspective that he decreed (*qaḍaynā*) to *banī isrāʿīl* in the book (*kitāb*) that they would become corrupted or cause mischief (*li-tafsidunna*) on the earth and would become arrogant. (17:4) The subsequent verses describe this process, and the consequences arrive in verse 7:

in aḥṣaṇtum aḥṣaṇtum li-anfusikum wa in asaʿtum falahā fa-idhā jāʿa waʿdu l-ākhirati li-yasūʿu wujūhakum wa-li-yadkholū l-masjida kamā dakhalūhu awwala marratiw wa-li-yutabbirū mā ʿalaw tatabīrā

If you had done well, you would have done well for yourselves; if you had done evil, it was against yourselves. So when the promise of the hereafter (*waʿdu l-ākhirā*) came, to disfigure your faces and enter the *masjid*, just as they had entered it once, and to destroy completely what they had conquered (*li-yutabbirū mā ʿalaw tatabīran*).³²

In this verse the same wording (“destroy destroyingly,” *tabbara tatabīran*) appears in connection to total destruction wrought by God (in this instance, accomplished through human agents) upon communities who had denied. In both cases Musa (described in both suras as having received a *kitāb*) and Nuh are mentioned in the verses leading up to the destruction. In the case of *Sūrat al-Furqān*, the examples of the previous destruction of deniers are located at the center of the sura, and this structurally prominent placement highlights these examples as a section of narrative from which the reader or listener may extract a core message from the sura.

Verse 61 of *Sūrat al-Furqān* marks a return of the vocabulary from the opening and the structural moment at the beginning of verse 10: “*tabāraka l-ladhī*” (“blessed is the one who”).

The return of these words mark a key structural moment yet again, as the text moves to the concluding verses. After this reiteration of supplication and description of divine ordering

³² Q 17:7.

of the universe, in verse 63 the discussion then turns to the servants of God, beginning “*wa ‘ibādu r-raḥmāni l-ladhīna*” (“the servants of the merciful are the ones who”), and the following sequences of verses offer different ways to complete this sentence and idea. Verse 63 in full reads, “and the servants of the merciful are the ones who walk humbly on the earth. And when the ignorant ones address them, they say peace.” Just as the opening section of the sura drew our attention to one servant—the one who received the *furqān*—this closing section mirrors that vocabulary in referring to plural servants—*‘ibād*, extending the praise and description of God found in the opening verses and generalizing it to an external audience, stating what proper servants of God do and what they believe.

This opening clause (“*wa ‘ibādu r-raḥmāni l-ladhīna*,” “the servants of the merciful are the ones who”) is extended over the next several verses subsequently beginning “*wa l-ladhīna*,”; so for example verse 64 states, “those who spend the night in prostration to their lord, standing,” where the “*wa-l-ladhīna*” (those who) refers back to “*wa ‘ibādu r-raḥmān*” at the beginning of the previous verse. Just as the text has returned to the vocabulary of the beginning and is thus a return on the large scale, sequential verses here are each a return on the small scale as we approach the end of the sura.

Following a short interjection discussing the fates of the ignorant ones (*al-jāhilūn*), the “*wa-l-ladhīna*” becomes so far removed from its semantic beginnings in verses 63 and 64 that it is no longer functioning as the second half of a sentence or idea. Rather, it feels like a new beginning and the reader feels an increasing sense of expectation. So while we were initially hearing “those who” we were understanding it as referring back to “and the servants of God are those who.” But after “those who” is repeated so many times and we become further removed from “the servants of God are” we start hearing “those who” as beginning a new

thought that is never quite completed. This sequence is finally resolved in verses 74-75 as verse 74 begins the final appearance of the “*wa-l-ladhīna*” beginning structure, and verse 75 answers or completes this idea with “*ulā’ika*,” stating “those ones will be rewarded with the highest place in paradise for having been patient. They will be met there with salutations and peace.”

In terms of poetics and the sounds of the words, *Surat al-Furqān* is a monorhyme sura, meaning that every verse is part of a rhyming pattern. The entire sura is not composed on a single rhyme, however; in fact there are two sections of rhyme. It is also “near rhyme,” meaning verses end in consonants that sound similar and thus “count” as rhyming with one another. In terms of structure, the rhyme of *Surat al-Furqān* divides the sura in to two parts, with the break between the first and second corresponding to a key moment in the literary structure of the sura. The first 62 verses 1-62 rhyme on *ilā’irā* and *ūlā’ūrā*, beginning the pattern with the final word of the first verse—*nadhīr* (warner or warning). As each verse recalls this sound through the entire first 62 verses of the sura, a pattern of sound meaning is generated,³³ all linking back to this original word and idea, constantly recalling the role of the Prophet as a warner, and the revelation as a criterion, *furqān*, bringing the content of the warning and the means for judgment between right and wrong.

Verse 63 to the end is also unified in terms of rhyme, but on *āmā/ānā*. These are both rhymes that are common throughout the Qur’an.³⁴ In this case what is of note in terms of rhyme is first, that the sura as a whole is cohesive in terms of the consistently rhyming verse endings. Although verse lengths vary so that in both recordings Alafasy sometimes will pause within a verse, almost every verse ending for the entire sura will rhyme with those of the

33 Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, 2nd ed (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2007), 165–166.

34 Devin J. Stewart, “Saj’ in the Qur’an: Prosody and Structure,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, no. 2 (September 1990): 109.

surrounding verses. Secondly, given the high degree of unification in terms of rhyme, the moment when the rhyme pattern changes, at verse 63, is quite noticeable.

Alafasy's Recordings of *Sūrat al-Furqān*

In terms of the use of pitch and melody in these two recordings from Alafasy, both can be described in terms of the *maqām*, the modal system of Arab music. In the case of recording A, Alafasy begins and ends the sura in *maqām kurd*.³⁵ In many ways this performance directly correlates to the literary structure that I've already outlined.

The first nine verses of recording A form a small melodic arc. They begin in the mid-vocal register at the bottom of *maqām kurd* (in the lowest tetrachord), and the first few verses each begin with the same melodic gesture, always returning to the initial pitch at the end of each verse. Verses 5 and 6 begin to move up to the second tetrachord, a bit higher and building up a small amount of tension, which is resolved in verses 8 and 9 as the melody returns to the bottom tetrachord, ending verse 9 on the bottom pitch.

Figure 5: Transcription of Q 25:1-9 as recited by Mishary Rashid Alafasy

0:05
bis mil lā hi raḥ-mān ir - ra - ḥīm

0:10
1. Ta - bā - ra - ka l - la - dhī naz - za - la l - fur - qā - na

(figure 5 continued on next page)

35 This recording is available for streaming or download through Alafasy's personal webpage, via his SoundCloud site. It was recorded in California in 2008. Mishary Rashid Alafasy, *25-Al-Furqan by Alafasy on SoundCloud - Hear the World's Sounds*, MP3 audio file, 19:52, accessed September 25, 2013, <https://soundcloud.com/alafasy/25-al-Furqan>.

Figure 5, continued

Figure 5, continued, showing musical notation and Arabic lyrics. The score is divided into several systems, each with a time marker indicating the start of a phrase.

System 1:
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: 'a - lā 'a - ba - di - hī li - ya - kū - na li-l - 'ā -

System 2:
Time marker: 0:15
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: la - mī - na na - dhī - rā

System 3:
Time marker: 0:20
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: 2. Al-la-dhī la-hū mulku s-sa - mā - wā - ti wa-l - ar - ḍi wa lam yat - takhidh

System 4:
Time marker: 0:25
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: wa-la - daw wa-lam ya-kul la-hū sha-rī - kuṇ fī l-mul-ki wa-kha-la -

System 5:
Time markers: 0:30 and 0:35
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: qa kul - la shay - 'iṇ fa - qad - da - ra - hū ta - qa -

System 6:
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: dī - rā

System 7:
Time marker: 0:40
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: 3. Wa-t-ta-kha-dhū miṇ dū - ni - hī ā - li - ha - tal lā yakh-lu - qū -

System 8:
Time markers: 0:45 and 0:50
Musical notation: Treble clef, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.
Lyrics: na shay - 'aw wa-hum yukh-la - qū - na wa - lā yam - li - kūn

(figure 5 continued on next page)

Figure 5, continued

0:55
wa - lā yam-li - kū - na li - aṅ - fu - si - him ḍar - raw wa - lā

1:00
naf - 'aw wa - lā yam - li - kūn

1:05
wa - lā yam-li - kū - na maw-taw wa - lā ḥa - yā - taw

1:10
wa - lā nu - shū - rā

1:15
4. Wa-qā-la l-la-dhī-na ka-fa-rū in hā-dhā il - lā if - ku-ni f-ta -

1:20
rā - hu wa - a - 'ā - na - hū 'a - lay - hi qaw - mun ā - kha - rūn

1:25
fā - qa - da jā - - 'ū zul - maw wa - zī - rā

1:35
5. Wa - qā - lū a - sā - ṭī - ru l - aw - wa - lī - na k - ta - ta - ba -

(figure 5 continued on next page)

Figure 5, continued

hā fa - hi - ya tum - lā 'a - lay - hi buk - ra - taw wa - 1:40

a - šī - lā

6. Qul aṇ - - za - la - hu l - la - dhī ya' - la - mu s - 1:45

sir - ra fī s - sa - mā - wā - ti wa-l - arḍ 1:50

in - - - na - hū kā - na gha - fū - ra r - ra - hī - 1:55

mā

7. Wa - qā - lū mā - li hā-dhā r-ra - sū - li ya' - ku - lu ṭ - ṭa - 'ā - 2:00

ma wa-yam-shī fī l - as - wā - qi law lā un - zi - la i - lay - 2:05

(figure 5 continued on next page)

Figure 5, continued

2:10
 hi ma - la - kun fa - ya - kū - na ma - 'a - hū na - dhī - rā

2:15
 8. Aw yul - qā i - lay - hi kaṇ - zun aw ta - kū - nu la -

2:20
 hū jan - na - tuy ya' - ku - li min - hā

2:25
 wa - qā - la ḡ - zā - li - mū - na iṇ tat - ta - bi - 'ū - na

2:30
 il - lā ra - ju - lam mas - ḡū - rā

2:35
 9. Uṇ - ḡur kay - fa ḡa - ra - bū la - ka l - am - thā - la fa - ḡal - lū

2:40

2:45
slowing - - - -
 fa - ḡal - lū fa - lā yas - ta - ṡī - 'ū - na sa - bī - lā

In verse 10, the pace suddenly slows. This allows for much more melodic elaboration; Alafasy holds syllables longer; single syllables last for several pitches. Over the next few verses the pace gradually quickens again, but the difference between verses 9 and 10 is quite marked.

This elongation of verse 10 correlates with the moment I've pointed out in the literary structure of the sura, but it also highlights a verse that contains an evocative description of the gardens beneath which rivers flow, and palaces.

Figure 6: Transcription of Q 25:9-10 as recited by Mishary Rashid Alafasy

9. Uṇ - zur kay - fa ḍa - ra - bū la - ka l - am -

thā - - - la fa - ḍal - - lū

fa - ḍal - lū fa - lā yas - ta - ṭī - 'ū - na sa - bī - lā

10. Ta - bā - ra - ka l - la - dhī iṇ

shā - 'a ja - 'a - la la - ka khay - ram

miṇ dhā - li - ka jan - - - nāt

The musical transcription consists of six staves of music in a single system. Each staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. Time markers in minutes and seconds are placed above the staves: 2:36, 2:38, 2:40, 2:42, 2:44, 2:46, 2:48, 2:50, 2:52, 2:54, 2:56, 2:58, and 3:00. The lyrics are: 9. Uṇ - zur kay - fa ḍa - ra - bū la - ka l - am - thā - - - la fa - ḍal - - lū fa - ḍal - lū fa - lā yas - ta - ṭī - 'ū - na sa - bī - lā 10. Ta - bā - ra - ka l - la - dhī iṇ shā - 'a ja - 'a - la la - ka khay - ram miṇ dhā - li - ka jan - - - nāt

(figure 6 continued on next page)

Figure 6, continued

The modulations from one *maqām* to another are possibly the most striking feature of recording A. The performance stays firmly in *kurd* through the first 34 verses, and with the exception of the shift in pace that I noted at verse 10, the performance is even in terms of both pacing and degree of melodic elaboration (and in vocal register) through the first 34 verses. But at the beginning of verse 35, Alafasy is abruptly in a new mode: *maqām 'ajam*.

Figure 7: Transcription of Q 25:34-35 as recited by Mishary Rashid Alafasy

(figure 7 continued on next page)

Figure 7, continued

9:25
 35. 9:30
 9:35

dal - lu sa - bī - lā
 Wa - la - qad ā - tay - nā mū - sā l - ki - tā - ba wa - ja -
 al - nā ma - 'a - hū a - khā - hu hā - rū - na wa - zī - rā

A more typical way to modulate would be to use pitches common to both *maqām* involved, and focus on those pitches as a way of transitioning from one *maqām* to the other. Instead what happens here is that Alafasy ends one verse in *maqām kurd*, and begins the next in *'ajam*, which makes for a pronounced moment. The modulation takes place in such a way that there are no common pitches held between the two *maqāms*, which leads to the feeling of remoteness between them. On the textual level, this is the verse where the discussion moves from a conceptual critique of those who disbelieve into specific examples of communities from the past. The modulation is occurring abruptly at what is also a conceptual shift within the literary structure of the sura. From here on he stays in *'ajam* until verse 63 when he is suddenly back in *kurd*. Verse 63 begins the prolonged point about the qualities or acts of the servants of God and the reward that awaits them.

Alafasy's second recording under consideration here, although it is a recitation of the

same sura, and by the same reciter, contrasts in several respects.³⁶ The mood is more somber, in part because of the choice and use of *maqām*, but also because of the pace of the recitation. Although recording B is only 30 seconds longer than A in terms of total time, Alafasy pauses much more frequently in B—both mid-verse (occasionally not at a pause designated by the *tajwīd* markings, so when he resumes he repeats the last few words that came before the pause), and the pauses between verses are also occasionally more pronounced. The pauses lend a more contemplative mood to the recording compared to the comparatively quick-paced Saudi *murattal* recordings.

The overall mood of this recording is also determined in large part to both the overall choice of *maqām* and its use throughout the approximately 20 minute performance. The sura begins in *maqām nawā athar*. This is another one of the 12 most commonly used *maqāmāt*; it has a distinctive mood and sound due to the presence of two augmented second intervals, one in the lower portion of the *maqām* and one in the upper.

Whereas recording A features marked moments of modulation from one *maqām* to another, and melodies that clearly convey which *maqām* they are in, recording B works in the opposite manner. While the sura begins in *maqām nawā athar*, after only a handful of verses Alafasy begins moving between *nawā athar* and *maqām nahāwand*. The two *maqāms* differ only by one note, and he takes advantage of this close relationship by shifting back and forth between the two; although the two *maqāms* are closely related in terms of the number of pitches that they share, the frequent shifting of a single pitch leaves the listener wondering which *maqām* Alafasy is in at a given moment. In fact, the *maqām* is almost constantly shifting

³⁶ This recording was available on an older version of Alafasy's personal site; at the time of writing it appears to no longer be accessible, but the original access information is provided here. Mishary Rashid Alafasy, *3-furqan.mp3* (audio/mpeg Object), MP3 audio file, 20:34, accessed October 18, 2013, <http://alafasy.me/alafasy2/1423/Noor-fourqan/3-furqan.mp3>.

throughout the 20-minute long recording; the moments of clear structural demarcation of recording A are in no way emphasized in this example.

The two recordings from Alafasy show two slightly different approaches to the relationship between expression through *maqāmāt* and other sonic features of recitation (such as pace, vocal quality, and so on) to the literary meaning of the quranic text. On the macro level, in terms of structure, Alafasy's recitation in recording A does mark moments that are significant in the text, in terms of its meanings and its rhyme pattern. He does this with changes in pace, melodic elaboration, shifts in vocal register, and modulation. While his performance in this case corresponds to larger structural moments in the sura, there are many details of the text that are not represented in the sound. For instance, I mentioned earlier that the perspective and point of address is constantly shifting in the text; this is all delivered in a tone that is quite continuous. Furthermore, as the text turns to describe the fates of the pious versus deniers, this is all done in the same tone of voice, register, and pace. While the text is describing the deniers packed tightly together in *jahannam*, calling out for their own destruction, this section does not sound any different from what surrounds it. In fact, with the exception of the slowing on verse 10, the first 35 verses of the sura are consistent in terms of pace, melody, and vocal quality (both affect and tone). There is melodic progression as his voice moves up through the *maqām*, but the overall affect and melodic register of the performance is continuous. Rather than representing specific ideas evoked with the words of the text, much of the recording is shaped by performance practice of the recited Qur'an, such as the choice of beginning and ending in *maqām kurd* and melodic progression up through the *maqām*, eventually ending at the same point as where the performance began.

The shape of recording B, however, suggests that there are other possibilities. In this

case the melodies correspond neither to the themes of the text, nor its structural features. While in the case of recording A, marked modulations broke up an otherwise stable performance of *maqām*, in recording B the melody is constantly shifting between multiple *maqāmāt*. The sura does not even end in the same *maqām* in which it begins. The differences between these two cases suggest that while the sound of a sura may reflect the literary structure to some degree, it is also possible that these pieces may coexist, not directly corresponding to one another, with the sound being determined by performance practices that exist alongside, but not in conversation with, the text itself.

Stepping back further, we may compare Alafasy's recordings to those of the Saudi reciters discussed earlier, all of whom are minimal in their use of melody. While the organization of pitch in the Saudi recordings is determined by the *maqām*, they are not melodically expressive. Rather, the use of *maqām* would seem to be driven by performance practice or custom; as more reciters tend to recite in this way (meaning the way depicted by Shaykh Sudais—frequently using *maqām rast* and keeping melodic expression to a minimum), this sound thereby becomes a model. To say that the use of *maqām* is driven by performance practice or custom, however, does not limit the possibilities for the existence of contrasting styles. As we have seen through the different ways in which contemporary reciters, all of whom are from the Gulf region, use the *maqāmāt*, multiple norms or models are available.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I examine the recited Qur'an from a number of different angles, in order to identify the ways in which we may describe the recited Qur'an as having or conveying meaning. In chapter 2, I address the ways in which we may understand the meaning of Qur'an recitation as ritual or event—nondiscursive meaning. In so doing, I consider how the practice of recitation may be defined or understood most broadly, in a way that may include multiple realms or layers of nondiscursive meaning that may contribute to, be enacted through, or be communicated via the recitation in some way. By drawing on literature that has shaped modern ethnomusicological investigations into similar types of practices and events, I argue that by understanding recitation as performance through process, we can identify realms of experience or thought, and the ongoing practice of recitations by individuals or performers, in order to conceptualize the different ways in which recitation may be defined. Furthermore, through this line of reasoning, I show that there are a myriad of ways in which the recited Qur'an can be heard, experienced, or perceived; there is no one archetype of a listener. Rather, listening (as opposed to hearing) is a culturally and historically bounded act. And moreover, the ways in which individuals may experience the recited Qur'an now are diverse and varied.

In chapter 3, I turn to the Qur'an as a literary object, focusing on the aesthetics of the text, asking how it presents its discursive meanings. In doing so, I focus on its own discourse on recitation and orality. Certain verses are often cited as attesting to the Qur'an's prioritization of its own orality, and even further, occasionally as directing the way in which the text should be recited. With regard to the latter point, I bracket the common interpretation of the final words of verse 25:32, "*wa rattalnāhu tartīlā*" as meaning, "recite [the Qur'an] in

slow, measured fashion,” meaning, according to the rules of *tajwīd*. Instead, I focus on the three roots that are used in relation to reading or reciting in relation to revelation or scripture—Q-R-ʾ, R-T-L, and T-L-W—, arguing that an examination of these verbs throughout the text reveals a shift in usage and semantic field. While Q-R-ʾ occurs most frequently in the early suras, often with an object that is not made explicitly, T-L-W comes to be used more frequently over the course of the chronology of the text, and likewise, the object becomes specified and broadens to include many possibilities beyond the text of the Qurʾan, including stories (*nabaʾ*), signs (*āyāt*), and other scriptures (Torah), for example.

The final two chapters of the dissertation (chapters 4 and 5) address the sound of the recited Qurʾan in two ways: the sounds of the words, including rhymes, rhythms, and sound patterns more broadly, and the use of pitch and melody via the *maqāmāt*, the modes of Arabic music, in relation to changing preferences and popularity of styles of recitation. I consider the sounds of the words of the Qurʾan through several lenses—that of the text’s resemblance to the Arabic tradition of *sajʿ* literature, the understanding of certain spoken language as poetic speech, and the rules of *tajwīd*. Through this investigation, I argue that the Qurʾan draws on a diverse range of sound patterns, and while these sound patterns may at times correspond to certain types of subject matter within the text, this is by no means a general rule. And furthermore, the patterns of sounds of the Qurʾan’s words are necessarily shaped in the moment of reciting; the way in which reciters shape the text in time—in terms of pacing of recitation, the use of pauses, and extending syllables—is a key contributing factor to the realization of the sounds indicated on the fixed page. In the final chapter, I examine the use of pitch and melody via the *maqāmāt* in discussing changes in aesthetics of popular styles in recordings of the Qurʾan, beginning with the *mujawwad* and *murattal* recordings of the reciters

of mid to late twentieth century Egypt, and then turning to more recent recordings from the Gulf region, in *murattal* style. In the final section, I focus on different possibilities for use of the *maqāmāt* in the new *murattal* recordings, contrasting recordings by performers who tend to be extremely restrictive in their use of pitch and melody (for example, Shaykh Sudais, who tends to recite with very little melodic elaboration, and always in *maqām rast*), with performers who draw more extensively on the possibilities for using the *maqāmāt*, such as Shaykh Alafasy. Similarly to my point about the Qur'an's use of sound patterns in relation to the meanings of the words, I show that the use of *maqāmāt* is not only varied from one recording to another, but that it may come into contact or correspondence with the discursive meaning of the text in different ways. So while a performer may reflect certain details of the discursive meaning of the text via the *maqāmāt*, the use of pitch and melody is tied to a range of other contributing factors as well, such as changes in discourse surrounding the practice of recitation more generally.

In light of the specific arguments made in the individual chapters of this dissertation, what conclusions may I draw about the possibilities for relationships among these different realms of meaning across the sound of the recited text? First, while it is possible to claim that the sound of recitation may be tied to the discursive meaning of the text at particular moments, this by no means constitutes a general rule. In fact, each realm of meaning, and even the practice of recitation more generally, is tied to a number of contributing factors on a variety of levels that may not be related to the discursive meaning of the text itself. This is not to say, however, that the discursive meaning of the text is unimportant, or ever irrelevant to the practice of its recitation. In many cases, non-discursive factors may exist in the foreground of recitation, and not be directly interacting with the discursive meaning, but this does not mean

that the discursive meaning is not present, so to speak. Rather, it may be present in a variety of ways either for reciters or listeners.

The arguments made in this dissertation by and large suggest that the notion of individual interaction with the recited Qur'an—as reciter or as listener—is quite complex. While many of the elements discussed here relate to large-scale trends in performance practices or listening cultures, individuals' practices and choices are often closely related to those practices, but not necessarily entirely. So for example, while experience of Qur'an recitation is at once tied to individual emotion or affect, the degree to which those experiences may be understood as entirely inner experience, or shaped by processes interior to each single individual, is not as unrelated to factors that may be understood as external to the individual.

Appendix 1: *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf* (Sura 46), Transliterated as it is pronounced

- 1 ḥā mīm
- 2 taṅzīlu l-kitābi mina l-llāhi l-‘azīzi l-ḥakīm
- 3 mā khalaqanā s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa wa-mā baynahumā illā bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-ajalim musammaw wa-l-ladhīna kafarū ‘ammā uṇḍhirū mu‘riḍūn
- 4 qul a ra’aytum mā tuda‘ūna miṅ dūni l-llāhi arūnī mādhā khalaqū mina l-arḍi am lahum shirkun fi s-samāwāti -’tūnī bi-kitābim miṅ qabali hādhā aw athāratim min ‘ilmin in kuṇtum ṣādiqīn
- 5 wa-man aḍallu mimmay yad‘ū miṅ dūni l-llāhi mal lā yastajību lahū ilā yawmi l-qiyāmati wa-hum ‘aṇ du‘ā’ihim ghāfilūn
- 6 wa-idhā ḥushira n-nāsu kānū lahum a‘dā’aw wa-kānū bi-‘ibādatihim kāfirīn
- 7 wa-idhā tutlā ‘alayhim āyātunā bayyinātiṅ qāla l-ladhīna kafarū li-l-ḥaqqi lammā jā’ahum hādhā siḥrum mubīn
- 8 am yaqūlūna -ftarāhu qul ini -ftaraytuhū fa-lā tamlīkūna lī mina l-llāhi shay’an huwa a‘lamu bi-mā tufiḍūna fihi kafā bi-hī shahīdam baynī wa-baynakum wa-huwa l-ghafūru r-raḥīm
- 9 qul mā kuṇtu bida‘am mina r-rusuli wa-mā adarī mā yaf’alu bī wa-lā bi-kum in attabi‘u illā mā yuḥā ilayya wa-mā anā illā nadhīrum mubīn
- 10 qul a ra’aytum in kāna min ‘iṇḍi l-llāhi wa-kafartum bihī wa-shahida shāhidum mim banī isrā’īla ‘alā mithlihī fa-amana wa-stakbartum inna l-llāha lā yahdī l-qawma ḡ-ḡālimīn
- 11 wa-qāla l-ladhīna kafarū li-l-ladhīna amanū law kāna khayram mā sabaqūnā ilayhi wa-idh lam yahtadū bihī fa-sayaqūlūna hādhā ifkuṅ qadīm
- 12 wa-miṅ qabalihī kitābu mūsā imāmaw wa-raḥmataw wa-hādhā kitābum muṣaddiqul lisānan ‘arabiyyal li-yuṇḍhira l-ladhīna ḡalamū wa-bushrā li-l-muḥsinīn
- 13 inna l-ladhīna qālū rabbunā l-llāhu thumma -staqāmū fa-lā khawfun ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yaḡzanūn
- 14 ulā’ika aṣḡābu l-jannati khālidīna fiḡā jazā’am bi-mā kānū ya‘malūn
- 15 wa-waṣṣaynā l-iṅsāna bi-wālidayhi iḡsānan ḡamalathu ummuhū kurhaw wa-

waḍa'athu kurhaw wa-ḥamluhū wa-fiṣāluhū thalāthūna shahran ḥattā idhā balagha ashuddahū wa-balagha arba'īna sanataḥ qāla rabbi awzi'nī an ashkura ni'mataka l-latī an'amta 'alayya wa-'alā wālidayya wa-an a'mala ṣāliḥaḥ tarḍāhu wa-aṣliḥ lī fī dhurriyyatī innī tubtu ilayka wa-innī mina l-muslimīn

16 ulā'ika l-ladhīna nataqabbalu 'anhum aḥsana mā 'amilū wa-natajāwazu 'aḥṣayyi'ātihim fī aṣḥābi l-jannati wa'da ṣ-ṣidqi l-ladhī kānū yu'adūn

17 wa-l-ladhī qāla li-wālidayhi uffil lakumā ata'idāninī an ukhraja wa-qada khalati l-qurūnu miḥ qablī wa-humā yastaghīthāni l-llāha waylaka amin inna wa'da l-llāhi ḥaqquḥ fayaqūlu mā hādhā illā asāṭīru l-awwalīn

18 ulā'ika l-ladhīna ḥaqqa 'alayhimu l-qawlu fī umamiḥ qada khalat miḥ qabalihim mina l-jinni wa-l-insi innahum kānū khāsirīn

19 wa-li-kulliḥ darajātum mim mā 'amilū wa-li-yuwaffiyahum a'mālahum wa-hum lā yuzlamūn

20 wa-yawma yu'raḍu l-ladhīna kafarū 'alā n-nāri adhhabatum ṭayyibātikum fī ḥayātikum d-dunyā wa-stamta'tum bihā fa-l-yawma tujazawna 'adhāba l-hūni bi-mā kuṭtum tastakbirūna fī l-arḍi bi-ghayri l-ḥaqqi wa-bi-mā kuṭtum tafsuqūn

21 wa-dhkur akhā 'ādin idh aḥdhara qawmahū bi-l-aḥqāfi wa-qada khalat n-nudhuru mim bayni yadayhi wa-min khalfihī allā ta'budū illā l-llāha innī akhāfu 'alaykum 'adhāba yawmin 'azīm

22 qālū aji'tanā li-ta'fikanā 'an ālihatinā fa-'tinā bi-mā ta'idunā iḥ kuṭta mina ṣ-ṣādiqīn

23 qāla innamā l-'ilmu 'iṇda l-llāhi wa-uballighukum mā ursiltu bihī wa-lākinnī arākum qawmaḥ tajahalūn

24 fa-lammā ra'awhu 'āriḍam mustaqabila awdiyatihim qālū hādhā 'āriḍum mumṭirunā bal huwa mā -sta'jaltum bihī riḥuḥ fihā 'adhābun alīmun

25 tudammiru kulla shay'im bi-amri rabbihā fa-aṣbaḥū lā yurā illā masākinuhum kadhālika najazī l-qawma l-mujarimīn

26 wa-la-qada makkannāhum fīmā im makkannākum fīhi wa-ja'alnā lahum sam'aw wa-abaṣāraw wa-afidataḥ fa-mā aghnā 'anhum sam'uhum wa-lā abaṣāruhum wa-lā afidatuhum miḥ shay'in idh kānū yajaḥadūna bi-āyāti l-llāhi wa-ḥāqa bihim mā kānū bihī yastahzi'ūn

27 wa-la-qada ahlaknā mā ḥawlakum mina l-qurā wa-ṣarrafnā l-āyāti la'allahum yarji'ūn

28 fa-law lā naşarahumu l-ladhīna -ttakhadhū miñ dūni l-llāhi qurbānan ālihatam
bal ḍallū ‘anhum wa-dhālika ifkuhum wa-mā kānū yaftarūn

29 wa-idh şarafnā ilayka nafaram mina l-jinni yastami‘ūna l-qur’āna fa-lammā
ḥaḍarūhu qālū aņşitū fa-lammā quḍiya wallaw ilā qawmihim mundhirīn

30 qālū yā qawmanā innā sami‘nā kitāban uņzila mim ba‘di mūsā muşaddiqal limā
bayna yadayhi yahdī ilā l-ḥaqqi wa-ilā ŧarīqim mustaqīm

31 yā qawmanā aĵibū dā‘iya l-llāhi wa-āminū bihī yaġfir lakum miñ dhunūbikum
wa-yujirkum min ‘adhābin alīm

32 wa-mal lā yujiba dā‘iya l-llāhi fa-laysa bi-mu‘jiziñ fi l-arḍi wa-laysa lahū miñ
dūnihī awliyā’u ulā’ika fi ḍalālim mubīn

33 a-wa-lam yaraw anna l-llāha l-ladhī khalaqa s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa wa-lam ya‘ya
bi-khalqihinna bi-qādirin ‘alā ay yuḥyiya l-mawtā balā innahū ‘alā kulli shay’iñ qadīr

34 wa-yawma yu‘raḍu l-ladhīna kafarū ‘alā n-nāri a-laysa hādhā bi-l-ḥaqqi qālū
balā wa-rabbīnā qāla fadhūqū l-‘adhāba bimā kuņtum takfurūn

35 fa-şbir kamā şabara ulū l-‘azmi mina r-rusūli wa-lā tasta‘jil lahum ka-annahum
yawma yarawna mā yu‘adūna lam yalbathū illā sā‘atam min nahārim balāġhuñ fa-hal yuhlaku
illā l-qawmu l-fāsiqūn

Appendix 2: *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf* (Sura 46), Transliterated as it is pronounced, including stops from a recorded *murattal* performance by Mahmud Khalil al-Husary⁵

- 1 *ḥā mīm*
- 2 *taṅzilu l-kitābi mina l-llāhi l-‘azīzi l-ḥakīm*
- 3 *mā khalaqanā s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa wa-mā baynahumā illā bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-ajalim*
musammā
wa-l-ladhīna kafarū ‘ammā uṅḍhirū mu‘riḍūn
- 4 *qul a ra’aytum mā tuda‘ūna miṅ dūni l-llāhi arūnī mādhā khalaqū mina l-arḍi*
am lahum shirkun fī s-samāwāt
ītūnī bi-kitābim miṅ qabali hādhā aw athāratim min ‘ilmin iṅ kunṭum ṣādiqīn
- 5 *wa-man aḍallu mimmay yad‘ū miṅ dūni l-llāhi mal lā yastajību lahū ilā yawmi l-*
qiyāmati wa-hum ‘aṅ du‘ā’ihim ghāfilūn
- 6 *wa-idhā ḥushira n-nāsu kānū lahum a‘dā’aw wa-kānū bi-‘ibādatihim kāfirīn*
- 7 *wa-idhā tutlā ‘alayhim āyātunā bayyinātiṅ qāla l-ladhīna kafarū li-l-ḥaqqi*
lammā jā’ahum hādhā siḥrum mubīn
- 8 *am yaqūlūna -ftarāh*
qul ini -ftaraytuhū fa-lā tamlikūna lī mina l-llāhi shay’ā
huwa a‘lamu bi-mā tufīḍūna fih
kafā bi-hī shahīdam baynī wa-baynakum
wa-huwa l-ghafūru r-rahīm
- 9 *qul mā kunṭu bida‘am mina r-rusuli wa-mā adarī mā yaf’alu bī wa-lā bi-kum*
in attabi‘u illā mā yuḥā ilayya wa-mā anā illā nadhīrum mubīn

5 Mahmud Khalil al-Husary, “http://download.quranicaudio.com/quran/mahmood_khaleel_al-husaree/025.mp3,” MP3 audio file, 29:19, accessed October 7, 2014, http://download.quranicaudio.com/quran/mahmood_khaleel_al-husaree/025.mp3.

10 *qul a ra'aytum in kāna min 'inḍi l-llāhi wa-kafartum bihī wa-shahida shāhidum mim banī isrā'īla 'alā mithlihī fa-amana wa-stakbartum*

inna l-llāha lā yahdī l-qawma z-zālimīn

11 *wa-qāla l-ladhīna kafarū li-l-ladhīna amanū law kāna khayram mā sabaqūnā ilayh*

wa-idh lam yahtadū bihī fa-sayaqūlūna hādhā ifkuṇ qadīm

12 *wa-miṇ qabalihī kitābu mūsā imāmaw wa-raḥma*

wa-hādhā kitābum muṣaddiqul lisānan 'arabiyyal li-yuṇdhira l-ladhīna ḡalamū wa-bushrā li-l-muḥsinīn

13 *inna l-ladhīna qālū rabbunā l-llāhu thumma -staqāmū fa-lā khawfun 'alayhim wa-lā hum yaḡzanūn*

14 *ulā'ika aṣḡābu l-jannati khālidīna fihā jazā'am bi-mā kānū ya'malūn*

15 *wa-waṣṣaynā l-iṣnāna bi-wālidayhi iḡsānā*

ḡamalathu ummuhū kurhaw wa-waḡa'athu kurhā

wa-ḡamluhū wa-fiṣāluhū thalāthūna shahrā

ḡattā idhā balagha ashuddahū wa-balagha arba'īna sanataṇ qāla rabbi awzi'nī

qāla rabbi awzi'nī an ashkura ni'mataka l-latī an'amta 'alayya wa-'alā wālidayya wa-an a'mala ṣāliḡaṇ tarḡāhu wa-aṣliḡ lī fī dhurriyyatī

innī tubtu ilayka wa-innī mina l-muslimīn

16 *ulā'ika l-ladhīna nataqabbalu 'anhum aḡsana mā 'amilū wa-natajāwazu 'aṇ sayyi'ātihim fī aṣḡābi l-jannā*

wa'da ṣ-ṣidqi l-ladhī kānū yu'adūn

17 *wa-l-ladhī qāla li-wālidayhi uffil lakumā ata'idāninī an ukhraja wa-qada khalati l-qurūnu miṇ qablī wa-humā yastaghīthāni l-llāha waylaka amin inna wa'da l-llāhi ḡaqq*

inna wa'da l-llāhi ḡaqquṇ fayaqūlu mā hādhā illā asāṡīru l-awwalīn

18 *ulā'ika l-ladhīna ḡaqqā 'alayhimu l-qawlu fī umamiṇ qada khalat miṇ qabalihim mina l-jinni wa-l-ins*

innahum k̄anū kh̄āsirīn

19 *wa-li-kullīn darajātum mim mā ‘amilū wa-li-yuwaffiyahum a‘mālahum wa-hum lā yuzlamūn*

20 *wa-yawma yu‘raḍu l-ladhīna kafarū ‘alā n-nāri adhhabatum ṭayyibātikum fī ḥayātikumu d-dunyā wa-stamta‘tum bihā fa-l-yawma tujazawna ‘adhāba l-hūn*

fa-l-yawma tujazawna ‘adhāba l-hūni bi-mā kuṭtum tastakbirūna fī l-arḍi bi-ghayri l-ḥaqqi wa-bi-mā kuṭtum tafsuqūn

21 *wa-dhkur akhā ‘ādin idh aṇdhara qawmahū bi-l-aḥqāfi wa-qada khalati n-nudhuru mim bayni yadayhi wa-min khalfihī allā ta‘budū illā l-llāh*

innī akhāfu ‘alaykum ‘adhāba yawmin ‘aẓīm

22 *qālū aji‘tanā li-ta‘fikanā ‘an ālihatinā fa-‘tinā bi-mā ta‘idunā iṇ kuṭta mina ṣ-ṣādiqīn*

23 *qāla innamā l-‘ilmu ‘iṇḍa l-llāhi wa-uballighukum mā ursiltu bihī wa-lākinnī arākum qawmaṇ tajahalūn*

24 *fa-lammā ra‘awhu ‘arīḍam mustaqabila awdiyatihim qālū hādhā ‘arīḍum mumṭirunā*

bal huwa mā -sta‘jaltum bih

rīḥun fihā ‘adhābun alīm

25 *tudammiru kulla shay‘im bi-amri rabbihā fa-aṣbaḥū lā yurā illā masākinuhum*

kadhālika najazī l-qawma l-mujarimīn

26 *wa-la-qada makkannāhum fīmā im makkannākum fihī wa-ja‘alnā lahum sam‘aw wa-abaṣāraw wa-afīda*

wa-ja‘alnā lahum sam‘aw wa-abaṣāraw wa-afīdataṇ fa-mā aghnā ‘anhum sam‘uhum wa-lā abaṣāruhum wa-lā afīdatuhum miṇ shay‘in idh k̄anū

idh k̄anū yajaḥadūna bi-āyāti l-llāhi wa-ḥāqa bihim mā k̄anū bihī yastahzi‘ūn

27 *wa-la-qada a[g]hlaknā mā ḥawlakum mina l-qurā wa-ṣarrafnā l-āyāti la‘allahum yarji‘ūn*

- 28 *fa-law lā naṣarahumu l-ladhīna -ttakhadhū miṇ dūni l-llāhi qurbānan āliha
bal ḍallū ‘anhum
wa-dhālika ifkuhum wa-mā kānū yaftarūn*
- 29 *wa-idh ṣarafnā ilayka nafaram mina l-jinni yastami‘ūna l-qur‘ān
fa-lammā ḥaḍarūhu qālū aṣṣitū
fa-lammā quḍiya wallaw ilā qawmihim mundhirīn*
- 30 *qālū yā qawmanā innā sami‘nā kitāban uḥzila mim ba‘di mūsā muṣaddiqal limā
bayna yadayhi
muṣaddiqal limā bayna yadayhi yahdī ilā l-ḥaqqi wa-ilā ṭarīqim mustaqīm*
- 31 *yā qawmanā aḡībū dā‘iya l-llāhi wa-āminū bihī yaḡfir lakum miṇ dhunūbikum
wa-yujirkum min ‘adhābin alīm*
- 32 *wa-mal lā yujiba dā‘iya l-llāhi fa-laysa bi-mu‘jiziḡ fī l-arḡi wa-laysa lahū miṇ
dūnihī awliyā’
ulā’ika fī ḍalālim mubīn*
- 33 *a-wa-lam yaraw anna l-llāha l-ladhī khalaqa s-samāwāti wa-l-arḡa wa-lam ya‘ya
bi-khalqihinna bi-qādirin ‘alā ay yuḡyiya l-mawtā
balā
innahū ‘alā kulli shay’iḡ qadīr*
- 34 *wa-yawma yu‘raḡu l-ladhīna kafarū ‘alā n-nāri a-laysa hādhā bi-l-ḥaqq
qālū balā wa-rabbīnā
qāla fadhūqū l-‘adhāba bimā kuṇtum takfurūn*
- 35 *fa-ṣbir kamā ṣabara ulū l-‘azmi mina r-rusūli wa-lā tasta‘jil lahum
ka-annahum yawma yarawna mā yu‘adūna lam yalbathū illā sā‘atam min nahār
balāḡh
fa-hal yuhlaku illā l-qawmu l-fāsiqūn*

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